

Severing focus meanings and focus forms in Standard and Colloquial Singapore English



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1. Overview

- The meanings of focus-sensitive operators are conveyed by forms like *only*, *even* (“**focus forms**”).

- Puzzle:** focus forms exhibit variability in where they attach.

- a. John only learned SPANISH. (*‘only’* adjoined to VP)
- b. John learned only SPANISH. (*‘only’* adjoined to DP)

- Q: what are the syntactic, semantic, and phonological mechanisms which derive the broad surface distribution of focus forms and allow semantic composition across cases?**

- Common approach:** focus forms directly encode the meanings of focus-sensitive operators and their semantics is flexible enough to compose with different constituents. E.g.:

Rooth (1985): *only* is a propositional operator, but can type-shift to compose with other constituents, including quantificational DPs (*Spanish* can shift to quantifier type, Partee 1987).

- Basic entry:* $[[\text{only}]](C) = \lambda p_{st} . \lambda w . \forall p' \in C [p'(w) \rightarrow (p \Rightarrow p')]$
($\langle \langle \text{st}, \text{st} \rangle \rangle$) *Presupposition:* $p(w)$

- E.g. shifted type:* $[[\text{only}]](C) = \lambda F_{\langle \text{est}, \text{st} \rangle} . \lambda f_{\text{est}} . \lambda w . \forall p' \in C [p'(w) \rightarrow (F(f) \Rightarrow p')]$
($\langle \langle \langle \text{est}, \text{st} \rangle, \langle \text{est}, \text{st} \rangle \rangle \rangle$) *Presupposition:* $F(f)(w)$

Wagner (2006), Drubig (1994), i.a.: *only* is a two-place operator with a flexible type; long distance associates of any type covertly move to form a constituent with *only*.

- Entry:* $[[\text{only}]](C) = \lambda x_a . \lambda f_{\langle \alpha, \text{st} \rangle} . \lambda w . \forall a \in C [f(a)(w) \rightarrow (f(x) \Rightarrow f(a))]$
($\langle \alpha, \langle \text{ast}, \text{st} \rangle \rangle$) *Presupposition:* $f(x)(w)$

- We argue that the relationship between the semantics and phonology is less direct.**

- Empirical:** evidence that overt focus forms do not directly encode the meanings of focus-sensitive operators.

- Proposal:** focus constructions involve two heads (Horvath 2000/7, Cable 2008/13): the meaning is always computed at the *higher* head, which is on the clausal spine; focus forms *vary* in which head they realize.

- Focus-sensitive operators are uniformly interpreted as propositional operators.
- In some cases, the semantics and phonology distribute between separate heads.

- Application** to a puzzle in Colloquial Singapore English.

2. DP-*only* is not interpreted

VP-ellipsis (test inspired by Crnič 2014; Crnič 2016 on *but*-exceptions)

Fact: a VP with *only* adjoined to the object DP can serve as antecedent to license ellipsis of another VP which does not contain *only*, i.e. *V only DP* can serve as antecedent for $\forall DP$.

- $\Delta = \textit{learn (at least) one language} \neq \textit{learn only one language}$

- This university is really cushy. Students are required to learn only one language. Of course, John did so Δ , so he'll graduate. In fact, he learned two languages!

- $\Delta = \textit{publish (at least) three articles} \neq \textit{publish only three articles}$

- To be considered for tenure, you have to publish only three articles. This year, everyone did so Δ . Unfortunately, only the professor who published ten articles actually got tenure.

Ellipsis licensing is predicted if the semantic contribution of “only” is remote from *only*:

- Licensing condition for VP-ellipsis (Fox & Takahashi 2005, after Rooth 1992)*
VP_e can elide if VP_e is reflexively dominated by a constituent PD (= *parallelism domain*), and the linguistic context provides an AC (= *antecedent constituent*) for PD which is semantically identical to PD, modulo focus marked constituents..

- How ellipsis could be licensed in (10) (AC blue; PD green)

- a. [ONLY [students are required [PRO₁ to [VP [XP *only one language*]₂ [VP t₁ learn t₂]]]]
b. [John_{1,F} t_{1,F} [DP *one language*]₂ [VP t₁ learn t₂]] did so]

-- if *only* is not interpreted, the AC is identical to the PD modulo focus.

If *only* is itself interpreted, ellipsis licensing is not predicted:

- If *only one language* is internal to the VP, the antecedent VP = *learned ONLY one language*
- If *only one language* QRs out of the VP, the antecedent VP = *learned t*.

-- Neither is an appropriate antecedent for *learned (at least) one language*.

Conclusion: focus constructions involve (at least) three players: interpreted ONLY, pronounced *only*, and the focused constituent.

3. Proposal

A bi-partite structure for focus constructions (following Horvath 2000, 2007, Cable 2008, 2013)

- Cable (2008, 2013):** *wh*-questions involve three players: interrogative C, a Q head more local to the *wh*, and the *wh*.

- Anatomy of a focus construction:**

- [... Foc [... [QP Q ... [XP]_F ...] ...] ...]

-- two heads: Foc (on clausal spine)
Q (more local to the focus).

--- Building on Horvath, Cable unifies focus fronting constructions with questions.

- Proposal:** *all* focus constructions involve a structure similar to Cable's interrogative structure.

Key claim: Foc is the locus of interpretation; focus forms may realize Foc or Q.
→ the semantics and phonology may distribute between different heads.

Dividing labor between heads

- We envision focus operators as focus features, which we call **operator features** (e.g. [Op:ONLY], [Op,EVEN], ...).

- Division of labor between heads:

[... Foc_[iOp:] [... [QP Q_[uOp:ONLY] ... [XP]_F ...] ...] ...]
→ Agree

[... Foc_[iOp:ONLY] [... [QP Q_[uOp:ONLY] ... [XP]_F ...] ...] ...]

- Q has a valued uninterpretable Op: [uOp:ONLY].
- Foc has an unvalued interpretable Op: [iOp:]. (interpretable probe after Pesetsky & Torrego 2007)
- Foc inherits the feature value of Q via Agree: (after Lee 1999 on Korean *man* 'only', Bayer 2016)

Deriving the key claim (the semantics and phonology interact differently with Op features)

Semantics

- Assumption:** uOp at Q must delete to avoid a crash at the interfaces (both LF and PF).

- Result:** the semantics can only see iOp. E.g. [iOp:ONLY] is interpreted at Foc as propositional [[only]], (2).

(We assume here that Q is semantically inert.)

Phonology

- Assumptions:** late insertion (DM); uOp can delete in the narrow syntax, or separately at PF and LF, and can delete after VI at PF.

- Result:** iOp and uOp may both be visible at VI, and e.g. *only* can realize any [Op:ONLY].

- Constraints:** (i) at least one of Foc/Q should be realized if possible, and (ii) a focus form able to realize any [Op:α] must realize [Op:α] only once.

Accounting for the data seen so far

- Ex. (1a) vs. (1b) can have the same structure, with variation in whether *only* realizes Foc or Q:

- Str for (1a) and (1b):* [John₁ [Foc_[iOp:] [t₁ learned [QP Q_[uOp:ONLY] Spanish]_F]]] (*‘only’* = Foc in (1a), Q in (1b))

- Ex. (5) with split scope derives straightforwardly (parallel LF in (10) predicts ellipsis licensing):

- LF for (5a):* [Foc_[uOp:only] [John is required [QP Q_[uOp:ONLY] one language]₁ [PRO to learn t₁]]] (*‘only’* = Q at PF)

4. Scope and VP-*only*

Fact: VP-*only* sometimes marks the position of interpreted ONLY, but not always.

- Scope: require > only, *only > require*
John is required to only learn [SPANISH]_F. (Taglicht 1989)

- Scope: require > only, only > require*
This class required to only [SHOW UP]_F. (Crnič 2014)

- Scope of *only* vs. *require* depends on which constituent in the VP is focused.

The proposal can account for the contrast, provided that the position of Q varies with the size of the focus.

- Locality assumption:** Q must be local to the focus such that Q must attach to the DP *Spanish* in (17), and the VP *show up* in (18).

(Related observation in the literature: focus-sensitive adverbs are as close to the focus as possible; Jacobs 1983/1986, Buring & Hartmann 2001, Erlewine 2013.)

5. Colloquial Singapore English (and Vietnamese)

Colloquial Singapore English

Facts: In CSE, certain focus meanings (at least “even”, “also”) can be conveyed with fronting of the focused constituent to a pre-subject or pre-verbal position.

- [Even this integral] also my little sister got solve.
'My little sister even/*also solved this integral.'

-- the fronted constituent is followed by *also*.
-- *even* may co-occur to convey an “even” meaning.

- Even* can be omitted and an “even” meaning still conveyed; ambiguity arises:

- [This integral] also my little sister got solve.
'My little sister even/also solved this integral.'

-- an example bringing out the *even* reading:

- The moment I snap, I [boss also] dare scold.
'The moment I snap, I even dare to scold the boss.'

- The observed *also* seem special to fronting (though judgments without fronting are sometimes difficult to tease apart from SE):

-- without fronting, *also* cannot productively co-occur with *even*:

- ?*My little sister also solve even this integral.

-- without fronting, *also* can only convey plain additivity:

- My little sister also solve this integral. (“also”, “*even”)

- In (17):** if Q attaches directly to the focused DP, VP-*only* must spell-out Foc. The site of overt *only*, then, indicates the site of Foc and thus the scope of interpreted ONLY.

- Structure for (17) ('only' realizes Foc)*
[John is required [PRO₁ to [Foc_[iOp:] [VP t₁ learn [QP Q_[uOp:ONLY] [DP Spanish]_F]]]]]

- In (18):** with the entire VP focused, Q attaches to the VP, so VP-*only* may be a realization of Q. Foc can, then, scope independently above *require*.

- Available structure for (18) ('only' realizes Q)*
[Foc_[iOp:] [this class requires [you to [Q_[uOp:ONLY] [VP show up]_F]]]]]

- So:** the size of the focus affects the position of Q — which affects whether the sentence may be parsed with *only* realizing Foc vs. Q — which, in turn, affects scope.

- Other theories have no provision for the size of VP-*only*'s associate to affect scope. (but cf. Crnič 2014 for a prosodic account)

CSE supports the idea that overt focus forms do not directly encode focus meanings (“even” meaning conveyed without overt *even*).

Co-occurrence of two focus forms supports bi-partite structure (potentially - ask!).

Possible analysis of (21) and *even* reading of (22):

- Base str:* [Foc_[EPP, iOp:] [my little sister got solve [QP Q_[uOp:EVEN] this integral]_F]]]

-- *Also* is a special invariant realization of Foc for EPP+Op features.
-- In (21), *even* realizes Q (allowed as *also/only* realize different features).
-- In (22), Q is left unrealized (allowed since Foc is realized) (cf. Yeo 2013).

- Note: omitting *even* in CSE (b) is possible when clearly not in SE (a):

- John climbed many mountains.
a. John climbed #(even) Everest. (SE) b. [Everest] also John climb! (CSE)

-- predicted: *even* should not be omitted when Foc is not realized.

Vietnamese

Fact: *only* constructions in Vietnamese may involve two separate morphemes:

- a. Nam chi mua moi [cuon sách]. (Höle 2013, Erlewine 2013)
Nam only, buy only₂ CL book.
'Nam only bought one book.'
- b. Nam ehí mua moi [cuon sách].
c. Nam chi mua moi [cuon sách].

Provides further support for a bi-partite structure (Foc and Q overt at once).