

On the derivation of strong presuppositions of *only* and exceptives via sub-domain alternatives

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Crnić 2024, 2026 provides a uniform derivation of positive presuppositions of *only*, as in (1-a), and of the exceptive presuppositions of exceptives, as in (1-b), in a distributed framework.

- (1) a. Only Adi_F arrived. Presupposition: Adi arrived
- b. No one but Adi_F arrived. Presupposition: Adi arrived

In this framework, the semantic contributions of *only* and exceptives – which are argued to belong to the same species of constructions (cf. von Stechow & Iatridou 2007) – are distributed between two separate morphemes: an exhaustification morpheme and a subtraction morpheme (cf. Bassi et al. 2021 on *exh*). A schematic structure of the sentences is provided in (2).

- (2) [*exh* [... [*Neg/Q* ... Subtraction XP_F ...] ...]]

Strong presuppositions require further alternatives. It is crucial that the two inferences in (1), are indeed wholly derived as strong presuppositions, as is represented in (1) – namely, they project as such. In other words, the distributed framework, or any other framework for that matter, should not derive a weaker meaning that subsequently combines with non-presupposed inferences to yield a strong inference. For illustration, assume that only singular proper names are alternatives to the focused proper name in (1-a), and that, for simplicity, there are only two such alternatives (*Bea*, *Charlie*). Now, consider the negated sentence in (3), which presupposes that I talked to Adi.

- (3) a. Not only Adi_F arrived.
- b. [S' neg [S *exh* [only [Adi_F arrived]]]]

On the above assumptions, we derive the ∂ -prefixed conjunction in (4) as the presupposition of the embedded clause S in (3): as both alternatives to the sister of *exh* are excludable, they can both be excluded (the exclusions of *exh* are presuppositional, following Bassi et al. 2021). The exhaustified clause S , thus, clearly entails that Adi arrived – but it presupposes something weaker: that Adi or Bea arrived and that Adi or Charlie arrived. (Crnić 2024 shows that (3-b) is the only licit parse of (3-a), as scoping *exh* above negation results in an illicit vacuity of *exh*.)

- (4) $\text{exh}(\text{only Adi arrived}) = (\text{no one distinct from Adi arrived}) \wedge$
 $\partial(\neg(\text{no one distinct from Bea arrived}) \wedge \neg(\text{no one distinct from Charlie arrived}))$
 $= \neg(\text{Bea arrived} \vee \text{Charlie arrived}) \wedge$
 $\partial((\text{Adi arrived} \vee \text{Bea arrived}) \wedge (\text{Adi arrived} \vee \text{Charlie arrived}))$

Accordingly, the sentence in (3) as a whole has the same presupposition that we computed in (4). The meaning of the sentence we derived is, thus, the one provided in (5):

- (5) a. Not only Adi arrived.
 b. Assertion: (Bea arrived $\vee$ Charlie arrived)
 c. Presupposition: (Adi arrived $\vee$ Charlie arrived) $\wedge$ (Adi arrived $\vee$ Bea arrived)

A sentence with the meaning in (5) should be assertable in a context in which, say, it is both possible that Bea and Charlie (and no one else) arrived and that Adi alone arrived – in particular, the presupposition in (5-c) is satisfied in such a context. After the update with the meaning in (5), it would then hold that Bea and Charlie arrived and that maybe Adi arrived as well. The sentence does not have such a weak meaning. (In fact, the unavailability of this meaning, in contrast to the simple positive variant of the sentence, is a prediction discussed extensively in Crnić 2024.)

All in all, we conclude that a stronger inference must be generated by *exh*. This can be achieved, e.g., by not limiting *exh* to range over just the singular proper name alternatives to its sister.

Further alternatives. In Crnić 2024, 2026, the derivation of strong positive presuppositions relied on the assumption that proper names are full DPs that, accordingly, have (plural) definite descriptions as alternatives. This was motivated partly by the desire to derive strong presuppositions and partly because the assumption follows from the extant theories of alternatives and proper names. However, although the assumption may be well-supported, it is neither necessary nor does it naturally generalize to cases in which the focus associates of *only* are predicates (such as VPs, adjectives, etc). For example, parallel strong inferences obtain with other such foci:

- (6) a. Adi only bought_F a book. Presupposition: Adi bought a book
 b. Adi did nothing but buy_F a book. Presupposition: Adi bought a book

In what follows, we show how all these target readings can be derived (without assuming that plural DPs constitute alternatives to singular DPs or making any analogous assumptions). A crucial role is played by the fact that, just like other quantificational expressions, *only_C* induces sub-domain alternatives *only_{C'}*, where $\llbracket C' \rrbracket \subseteq \llbracket C \rrbracket$. Consider the simple, schematic LF in (7-a), where the associate of *only* is the phrase *P* in sentence *S*, which has, without loss of generality, just two relevant focus alternatives, *Q* and *R* (the structure *S(X)* is exactly like *S(P)* except that the focused occurrence of *P* is replaced by *X*).

- (7) a. $[\text{exh}_{C'} [\text{only}_C S(P_F)]]$
 b. $C \cap F(S(P_F)) = \{S(P_F), S(Q_F), S(R_F)\}$

As always, the alternatives in the domain of *exh* are determined by the structure of its sister, especially by which elements are focused. Accordingly, they will include the alternatives in (8-a). More generally, however, they will also include the sub-domain alternatives in (8-b) – that is, alternatives in which the domain of *only*, *C*, is replaced by its sub-domains. (Further domain alternatives are generated as well, but we can safely ignore them here.)

- (8) a. $\{[\text{only}_C [S(Q_F)]], [\text{only}_C [S(R_F)]]\} \subseteq \text{ALT}([\text{only}_C [S(P_F)]])$
 b. $\{[\text{only}_{C*} [S(Q_F)]], [\text{only}_{C*} [S(R_F)]] \mid \llbracket C^* \rrbracket \subseteq \llbracket C \rrbracket\} \subseteq \text{ALT}([\text{only}_C [S(P_F)]])$

The meanings of the alternatives to the *only*-sentence thus include all those available prior to considering the sub-domain alternatives, provided in (9-a): for example, $\neg(\llbracket S(P) \rrbracket \vee \llbracket S(R) \rrbracket)$ is the meaning of $[\text{only}_C S(Q_F)]$. In addition, the meanings of the alternatives to the *only*-sentence now also include the meanings of the sub-domain alternatives, provided in (9-b). One example is $\neg\llbracket S(P) \rrbracket$, which corresponds to both $\llbracket [\text{only}_{C*} [S(Q_F)]] \rrbracket$ and $\llbracket [\text{only}_{C*} [S(R_F)]] \rrbracket$ on the assumption

that $\llbracket C^* \rrbracket \cap F(S(P_F)) = \{S(P)\}$, or to $\llbracket \text{only}_{C^*} [S(Q_F)] \rrbracket$ on the assumption that $\llbracket C^* \rrbracket \cap F(S(P_F)) = \{S(Q), S(P)\}$, etc. Thus, we obtain altogether three new alternatives.

- (9) a. $\neg(\llbracket S(P) \rrbracket \vee \llbracket S(R) \rrbracket), \neg(\llbracket S(P) \rrbracket \vee \llbracket S(Q) \rrbracket), \neg(\llbracket S(Q) \rrbracket \vee \llbracket S(R) \rrbracket)$
b. $\neg\llbracket S(P) \rrbracket, \neg\llbracket S(Q) \rrbracket, \neg\llbracket S(R) \rrbracket$

The excludable alternatives to $\llbracket \text{only}_C [S(P_F)] \rrbracket$ have the meanings provided in (10). The meaning of the sentence, on the assumption that no pruning applies, is provided in (11) – the presupposition is equivalent to the meaning of $S(P)$, the strong positive presupposition, as desired.

- (10) $\neg(\llbracket S(P) \rrbracket \vee \llbracket S(R) \rrbracket), \neg(\llbracket S(P) \rrbracket \vee \llbracket S(Q) \rrbracket), \neg\llbracket S(P) \rrbracket$

- (11) a. Assertion of (7-a): $\neg(\llbracket S(Q) \rrbracket \vee \llbracket S(R) \rrbracket)$
b. Presupposition of (7-a): $(\llbracket S(P) \rrbracket \vee \llbracket S(R) \rrbracket) \wedge (\llbracket S(P) \rrbracket \vee \llbracket S(Q) \rrbracket) \wedge \llbracket S(P) \rrbracket$
 $\Leftrightarrow \llbracket S(P) \rrbracket$

To sum up, strong positive presuppositions of *only* can be derived simply by taking into account the sub-domain alternatives to *only*. In the case of exceptives, the pertinent sub-domain alternatives correspond to the sub-domain alternatives of the quantifier phrase hosting the exceptive.

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