

The nonequivalence of (1a) to (1b), and (2a) to (2b), surprising in light of the possible equivalence of (3a) to (3b), is unnoticed and unaccounted for in existing work on *only*. Why can *only* associate with a focused numeral (or scalar term more generally) into certain PPs, yielding a reading equivalent to its counterpart with *only* appearing PP internally, but not others? The contrast between the (a) and (b) examples in (1) and (2), and lack thereof in (3), is shown to follow from a proper understanding of ‘scalar’ uses of *only* – those involving exclusion of a subset of the focus alternatives along a non-logical dimension (4ai), as opposed to ‘standard’ uses (4aai) – in conjunction with an independent observation about constructional constraints on the distribution of scalar implicatures.

Building on and refining Jacobs (1983) and van Rooy (2002), a unified lexical entry for scalar and ‘standard uses’ (4aai) of *only* is proposed, taking the latter use as a sub-case of the former: *only* uniformly operates on scales. *Only* is a flexible type operator (Büring and Hartmann, 2001), which combines with the denotation of an expression a of type $\langle \alpha, t \rangle$ and a scale S – an ordered (possibly partially) set of relevant focus alternatives to a (meanings of type $\langle \alpha, t \rangle$). By default the ordering relation for S is the subset relation, which amounts to entailment in case a is of type $\langle s, t \rangle$: the truth conditional contribution (where several definedness conditions are met) is exclusion of higher ranked alternatives to a on S , i.e. the logically stronger alternatives (in the case of (4aai), that additional card are held). The subset default can be overridden where a non-logical scale is contextually salient (e.g. (4ai)), in which case exclusion of higher ranked alternatives amounts to exclusion of states of affairs which are better with respect to the rules of the game (e.g. in which I have an ace).

The proposed lexical entry provides the basis for an account of the data in (1-3) which makes further subtle predictions about the effect of context on the observed judgments. The starting point for accounting for the contrast between (1b) (or (2b)) and (3b) is that for the former, but not the latter, a subset (entailment) ordering is unavailable. This follows from an observation that an ‘exactly’ interpretation is forced on numerals in the ‘payment’ but not the ‘durational’ *for* construction, as established, for example, by the difference in possible interpretations between (5a) and (6a). Given that the alternatives in the case of (1b) must thus be propositions of the form *I bought this car for =n dollars*, none entails any other, and S cannot be an entailment scale.

The second half of the explanation follows from the claim that, contra what is implicitly assumed in existing accounts of ‘scalar’ uses of *only*, the class of possible ordering relations for *only* scales is highly constrained, as established by the striking lack of contrast in the paradigm (7a)-(7b), structurally parallel to (1a)-(1b). (The lack of contrast in the former also rules out a syntactic account of the contrast in the latter). These facts are argued to show that possible ordering relations are constrained to (i) the subset relation, or (ii) a qualitative relation roughly equivalent to ‘better than’. A question arises of whether this is a lexical primitive, or a fact to be further derived, but in any case it completes an explanation for the oddness of (1b): exclusion of states of affairs in which a higher (exact) price was paid *as better ones* is the only available option (the default entailment scale being unavailable), but amounts to the speaker lamenting that he didn’t pay more – conflicting with normal assumptions about buyers. The acceptability of (7b) follows since no such conflict arises (quite the opposite).

The basic account can be extended to (2b), though a possible alternative is considered. Finally, the acceptability of (1a) (contrasting with (1b)) is derived from the natural assumption that *only* combines directly with $[500]_F$ dollars, sufficiently locally that an ‘exactly’ interpretation is not forced on the numeral, allowing interpretation via a subset scale so that the considerations which

rule out (1b) (in a normal context) don't apply. Interesting questions arise regarding the source of the strengthened meanings for numerals in the relevant constructions, and the distribution of 'scalar' readings of *only*.

- (1) a. I bought this car for only [500]_F dollars
 b. #I only bought this car for [500]_F dollars
 (i) ok if there were multiple buyings; no reading equivalent to (a)
- (2) a. He wrote the novel in only [3]_F hours
 b. #He only wrote the novel in [3]_F hours
- (3) a. He only worked for [3]_F hours
 b. He worked for only [3]_F hours
 (i) can be equivalent to (a)
- (4) a. I only have a [six]_F
 (i) uttered by a player in a game in which the highest card wins, the assertion is not that no other, but rather that no *better* card is held (a 'scalar' use (from van Rooy (2002)))
 (ii) uttered by a someone looking for a lost deck, the assertion *is* that no other card is had ('standard'/'non-scalar' use)
- (5) a. Tara didn't buy this car for 500 dollars
 b. Tara didn't pay 500 dollars for this car
 (i) 500 in (b), but not (a), can have an *at least* reading: (b), but not (a) can be understood as asserting that Tara spent *less than* 500 dollars on the car
- (6) a. Ryan didn't work for 12 hours today
 (i) *at least* reading available: can be understood as asserting that Ryan worked *less than* 12 hours
- (7) a. That (idiot) salesman sold this car for only [500]_F dollars
 b. That (idiot) salesman only sold this car for [500]_F dollars [said by used car lot manager]

References

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