

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

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Overview. Although forms like *only*, *even*, and *also* (henceforth, *focus forms*) appear to denote focus-sensitive operators, this paper argues that they do not contribute these meanings themselves. We motivate a bi-partite structure where the semantic contribution and overt realization of focus operators distribute between separate heads (cf. Lee 2005). More concretely, we propose that the semantics and phonology both arise from F(ocus) features (e.g. [F:ONLY], [F:EVEN]). The meaning is contributed by an *interpretable* instance of the feature, and the focus form is the realization of an *uninterpretable* instance of the same feature. [iF:] is localized at a *higher* head, [uF:] at a *lower* head, and the two heads relate via Agree. We introduce the model with scope data from Standard English ('SE'), and then provide further arguments from Colloquial Singapore English ('CSE'), where *both* heads are overtly detectable.

Focus forms are not interpreted. Taglicht (1984) observed that (1) is ambiguous. *Only* can scope below *require* ('The requirement of John is that he learn Spanish and no other language.'), or above *require* ('The only requirement of John is that he learn Spanish (he can learn other languages too).').

(1) John is required to learn only Spanish.

In theories where *only* is interpreted, *only* is assigned a meaning which allows it to compose with *Spanish* to yield a quantifier (e.g. Rooth 1985). That quantifier can then take scope via QR, and ambiguity arises from whether *only Spanish* QRs above or below *required*. If *only DP* is a quantifier and QRs as a constituent, a quantificational DP should take the same scope relative to *require* that *only* takes. Example (2a) shows that this is not correct: (2a) has a "split scope" reading, paraphrased (2b), with *only* above *require* (John may learn more than one language if he wants) and *one language* below *require* (*one language* is interpreted de dicto).

(2) a. John is required to learn only one language.

b. *Critical reading*: 'The only requirement of John is that he learn any one language.'

To allow an operator to scope between the interpreted focus operator and a DP forming a constituent with *only*, we propose that the meaning typically associated with *only* is not contributed by *only* itself, but rather at a higher head that is covert in Standard English. This logic is modeled on analyses of Negative Concord (e.g. Zeijlstra 2008, 2011), where scope splits are similarly observed.

Proposal. After Horvath (2000, 2007) and Cable (2007:360ff), we propose that focus constructions involve two heads, a Foc head on the clausal spine and lower head more local to the focus. The lower head is a variant of the Q head Cable posits in *wh*-constructions, (3). We take Foc to be the locus of interpretation, and Q to be the site where *only* is realized. We take *only* to be a realization of Q, rather than the F-mark itself, since *only* may precede an XP even if that XP is not itself F-marked, but rather properly contains the F-marked constituent, e.g. (4).

(3) [_{FocP} Foc [_{TP} ... [_{QP} Q ... [_{XP}]_F ...]]] (4) John won [only [_{DP} the BRONZE_F medal]].

To link overt *only* to interpreted Foc, we propose that the two heads relate via Agree. The interpretation and overt realization both arise due to an F feature. The Foc head comes specified with an [iF:] probe and Q comes with a valued [uF:ONLY] feature. After Pesetsky & Torrego (2007), the *probe* is interpretable, and the *goal* uninterpretable. Foc Agrees with Q, which thus transmits the [ONLY] value from Q to Foc. While *only* realizes [uF:ONLY] on Q, [iF:ONLY] is ultimately interpreted at Foc.

Critical claim. We have proposed a division of labor in focus constructions where the source of F's value is Q and a focus form associated with that value realizes Q, but the meaning is contributed at Foc, valued via Agree with Q. The semantics and overt focus form localize at separate heads.

Where Foc and Q are both overt. We have inferred the presence of Foc separate from overt *only* on the basis of scope evidence. If our analysis is correct, we predict there to be languages where Foc and Q are both overtly realized. This prediction is, in fact, borne out in Colloquial Singapore English. In CSE, a constituent containing a focus optionally fronts to a left peripheral position (sometimes with topicalization of the subject across it to derive a pre-verbal word order; fronting displays properties of A'-movement, including reconstruction for Condition C). The fronted constituent is obligatorily followed by overt *also*.

Critically, an additional focus form may co-occur with *also* and that focus form indicates the meaning. In (5), *even* co-occurs and an ‘even’ meaning is conveyed (examples can also be constructed where a second *also* occurs to convey an additive ‘also’ meaning).

- (5) [Even this integral] also my little sister got solve. (CSE)
 ‘My little sister {*also/✓even} solved this integral.’

The overt co-occurrence of *also* and *even* provides direct evidence for a bi-partite structure and fronting supports an Agree relation between the higher and lower heads. We propose that (5) derives from (6). In CSE, Foc can bear an EPP feature to trigger fronting. *Also* is a realization of Foc (i.e. EPP+F features, regardless of the value of F), and *even* is a realization of [uF:EVERN] on Q, as in SE.

- (6) Base structure for (5): [_{FocP} Foc_{[iF:_,][EPP]} [_{TP} my little sister got solve [_{QP} Q_[uF:EVERN] [_{DP} this integral]_F]]]

Further evidence from CSE. CSE fronting constructions argue for our proposal in another way, as well. In these constructions, *also* is always realized, but the co-occurring focus form may be unrealized. Then, a range of interpretations is available. CSE (7a) is ambiguous between a reading like SE-*even* and SE-*also*. An *even*-like meaning is brought out more clearly in (7b).

- (7) a. [This integral] also my little sister got solve. b. The moment I snap, I [boss also] dare scold one.
 ‘My sister {✓also/✓even} solved this integral.’ ‘When I snap, I even dare to scold the boss!’

Example (8) shows that a “plain” focus meaning is also available. (As additivity is incompatible with a universal assertion, (8) makes very clear that *also* is not contributing an additive meaning.)

- (8) My little sister [EVERY integral] also got solve.
 ‘My little sister solved EVERY integral (... not just some integrals).’

Since the meanings associated with different focus forms may be conveyed even when those focus forms are not present, we must again conclude that focus-sensitive meanings are separate from overt focus forms. We propose that (7)-(8) have the same bi-partite structure that (5) wears on its sleeve. Illustrating with the ‘even’ reading of (7a), the structure is (6) above. In (7a), unlike in (5), Q is left unrealized. We assume that [uF:EVERN] on Q, being uninterpretable, must delete to avoid a crash (Chomsky 1993). Crucially, this deletion may precede or follow spell-out, and overt forms are inserted post-syntactically via Vocabulary Insertion at PF (Halle & Marantz 1993). In (5), [uF:EVERN] is deleted after Vocabulary Insertion, so *even* is inserted. In (7a), [uF:EVERN] is deleted prior to Vocabulary Insertion so is unpronounced. Because [uF:] on Q is unrealized in (7)-(8) and *also* realizing Foc is invariant, (7)-(8) have no signal in the overt string as to the value of F, and ambiguity results. To clarify with (7a), the structure for the ‘also’ reading would be (9), where Q is specified [uF:ALSO]. The [ALSO] value transmits to Foc via Agree, leading to an ‘also’ interpretation. If [uF:ALSO] deletes prior to VI, (9) maps to the overt string in (7a), just as (6) did with [uF:EVERN] deleted prior to VI.

- (9) [_{FocP} Foc_{[iF:_,][EPP]} [_{TP} my little sister got solve [_{QP} Q_[uF:ALSO] [_{DP} this integral]_F]]]

This proposal for CSE raises the question of whether realizing Q is optional also in SE. An ‘even’ meaning can perhaps be conveyed without overt *even* in (10), but the pressure to realize Q seems stronger in SE, e.g. SE (11a) favors overt *even*, while CSE (11b) is felicitous without overt *even* realizing Q. We suggest that pressure to realize Q is greater when fronting and overt Foc do not already signal focus.

- (10) I met everyone. I met Bill and Fred and (even) Obama.
 (11) John climbed some mountains in the Adirondacks.
 a. He #(even) climbed Everest. b. He [Everest] also climb liao! (*liao* = aspectual marker)

Outlook. We have argued for a bi-partite structure where focus-sensitive meanings are encoded in features; the value comes from the lower head (where the feature may be realized) and is transmitted via Agree to the higher head (where it is interpreted). In the paper, we will show how our proposal extends to further SE scope data with pre-VP *only* (cf. Crnic 2014), as well as additional cross-linguistic data (e.g. *only* in Vietnamese, which can be expressed with two overt morphemes, each of which is optional when the other is present, Hole 2013, Erlewine 2015).

Selected references. Cable, Seth. 2010. *The Grammar of Q: Q-Particles, Wh-Movement, and Pied Piping*. OUP. ■ Horvath, Julia. 2007. Separating ‘Focus Movement’ from Focus. In *Phrasal and Clausal Architecture*. ■ Rooth, Mats. 1985. Association with focus. ■ Taglicht, Josef. 1984. *Message and Emphasis: On Focus and Scope in English*. Longman.