

## 6. Syntax of Focus-Sensitive Particles

### 6.1 Types of Focus-Sensitive Operators

Focus-sensitive operators like *only* can be adjoined to the VP, or form a constituent with their focus phrase:

- (1) a. John only introduced [Bill<sub>F</sub>'s mother]<sub>FP</sub> to Sue.  
 b. John introduced [only [Bill<sub>F</sub>'s mother]<sub>FP</sub>] to Sue.

Semantic requirements for focus-sensitive operators: identification of their **scope** and of their **focus phrase**. Cf. our representation of *only* (where we abstract away over details, like the subject argument of VP-*only*):

- (2)  $[[only]](FP, S) = S([FP]_o) \quad y \quad [FP]_A[S(y) \quad y = [FP]_o]$

The syntax of focus-sensitive operators accommodates these requirements:

- In (a), the position of *only* marks the **scope** of the operator (the VP). The focus phrase can be identified by the focus contained in it.
- In (b), the position of *only* marks the **focus phrase** (*only* forms with the focus phrase a **focus operator phrase**). The scope of a focus operator phrase is the predicate of which it is an argument.

Re (a): Observe that we have to distinguish between FP ambiguities and scope ambiguities for operators like *only*:

- (3) John only drinks whiskey.  
 (i) John only [drinks [whiskey]<sub>FP</sub>]  
 'the only thing John drinks is whiskey'.  
 (ii) John only [drinks whiskey]<sub>FP</sub>.  
 'the only thing John does is drinking whiskey.'
- (4) John only drinks whiskey<sub>FP</sub> every Friday.  
 (i) John only [drinks whiskey<sub>FP</sub>] every Friday.  
 'Every Friday, John drinks only whiskey'.  
 (ii) John only [drinks whiskey<sub>FP</sub> every Friday]  
 'The only thing that John drinks every Friday is whiskey'.

In the case of (a), the focus operator works like a scope marker, a phenomenon known from other types of operators, like *was* as scope marker for questions in German, and *non* as scope marker for negative indefinites in Italian:

- (5) a. Was glaubst du wen ich gesehen habe?  
 what think you who I seen have  
 'Which x is such that you think I saw x?'

- b. Non pretendo che tu dica niente.  
 not I.require that you say nothing  
 'For no x, I require that you say x.'

There are some advantages and tradeoffs with the strategies (a) and (b):

- In (a): The scope is marked by the position of the particle (VP in English, other verbal projections in German). The focus phrase is marked only indirectly and in an ambiguous way, by accent.
- In (b): The FP is marked by the position of the particle. The scope must be derived from independent principles of scope assignment.

Notice that the need to identify two constituents (FP, scope) makes it impossible to just take syntactic position as a scope marker for focus-sensitive particles.

This is similar as with **quantifiers**. Quantifiers have to identify a restrictor and a nuclear scope. With nominal quantifiers, we find that they identify the restrictor explicitly by c-command, and leave the scope determination to other principles.

- (6) A flag stood in front of every house with a garden.  
 EVERY([house with a garden], [ t[a flag stood in front of t]])

### 6.2 FOPs and quantified NPs

We assume that focus operators in FOP's mark their focus phrases directly, by c-command. Consequently, the issue arises how they mark their scope.

Essentially, FOPs seem to behave like quantified NPs. This explains the following observation by Taglicht (1984):

- (7) a. They were only advised to learn [Spánish]<sub>FP</sub>.  
 'The only language they were advised to learn was Spanish'  
 b. They were advised to learn [only Spánish].  
 (i) 'What they were advised was: To learn Spanish and no other languages'  
 (ii) 'The only language they were advised to learn was Spanish'

Ambiguity of (b) can be explained by assuming that *only Spanish* acts like a quantificational NP that can have scope over the sentence or the infinitive construction:

- (8) They were advised to learn most Romance languages.

### 6.3 FOPs within Syntactic Islands?

Can we assume then that FOPs are, at least for reasons of scope taking, quantified NPs? Yes, with one important exception: FOPs cannot have wide scope from within a NP, in contrast to quantified NPs, which allow for cases of so-called "inverse linking":

- (9) a. John introduced a representative of every company to Sue.  
 'For every company x, John introduced a representative of x to Sue'

- b. \*John introduced a representative of only Xerox to Sue.  
 c. John only introduced [a representative of Xerox]<sub>F</sub> to Sue.

We may see this as evidence for focus phrases: If *only* should end up as having VP scope or sentence scope, it will be the case that the phrase *a representative of Xerox* is the focus phrase, and not the NP *Xerox*, which is embedded in a syntactic island. The general restriction for the interpretation of a focusing construction, regardless how we arrived at it (by VP focus or FOP) is as follows:

(10) ONLY(FP, t[... t ...]): t cannot be within a syntactic island in [... t ...]

Do quantified noun phrases violate this restriction, as in (9.a)? No, when we follow the analysis of Keenan & Faltz (1985), in which *every company* has just scope over the quantifier *a representative of* \_, resulting in a complex quantifier that in turn has scope over the sentence:

(11) *a representative of every company*:

P x[COMPANY(x) y[REPRESENTATIVE OF(x,y) P(y)]]

But then the question arises, why is this not possible for a FOP like *only Xerox* if FOPs in general behave like quantifiers? Perhaps FOPs must have scope over a predicate, and cannot have scope over something of the type of a quantifier?

#### 6.4 FOPs in PPs

Focus operator phrases can occur in PP's:

(12) She talked to only John about it.

But it seems that this is possible only if the preposition can be reconstructed as a part of a complex predicate. This is similar as with extractions from prepositions (so-called preposition stranding).

(13) a. Who<sub>i</sub> did she [talk to] t<sub>i</sub>?      b. She [talked to] [only Jóhn].

(14) a. \*When did she come [on t<sub>i</sub>]?      b. \*She came on [only Saterdag].

In German, postpositional constructions can be reanalyzed in the same way (cf. Bayer 1996 for discussion). Observe the following contrast between postpositional and prepositional *entlang*: (cf. *entlang des Flusses* 'along the river [GEN]' and *den Fluß entlang* 'along the river [ACC]'). Complex predicate formation is possible only under adjacency.

(15) a. [Welchen Fluß]<sub>i</sub> ist sie [t<sub>i</sub> entlang geritten]?

b. Sie ist [[die Móldau] nur] [entlang geritten].

(16) a. \*[Welchen Flusses]<sub>i</sub> ist sie [entlang t<sub>i</sub> geritten]?

b. \*Sie ist [[der Móldau] nur] [entlang t<sub>i</sub> geritten].GEN

Hence, FOPs in PPs do not change our general assumptions. The wide scope of FOPs from PPs is only apparent, because it involves integration of the preposition with the verb into a complex verbal predicate.

#### 6.5 Focus operators with subclausal scope

Focus operators can have narrow scope within the argument of a predicate:

- (17) a. Mary could solve her problems only with one hundred dollars.  
 'The only x such that Mary could solve her problems with x is x = \$100'  
 (implies that \$100 is a lot)  
 b. Mary could solve her problems with only one hundred dollars.  
 'There is an x such that Mary could solve her problems with x,  
 and x is only \$100, i.e. the only amount y that x is is y = \$100'  
 (implies that \$100 is little).

Explanation: the nominal predicate P of the NP is applied to an index x, which satisfies the argument position of a PP. This implies a predication relation P(x). The focus operator can affect this predication relation, as indicated in the paraphrase of (b).

In (17) we have non-ambiguous sentences because, in (a), *only* cannot affect the indefinite *one hundred dollars* from outside the PP, and in (b), *only* cannot escape the scope of the preposition *with*. We find ambiguity with indefinite nouns that are arguments of verbal predicates:

- (18) Only one hundred dollars would solve John's problems.  
 (i) The only amount x such that x would solve John's problems is x = \$100.  
 (ii) There is an amount x that would solve John's problems, and x is only \$100.

This type of narrow scope is impossible if the NP does not contain a predicate:

(19) Only Mary would solve John's problems.

#### 6.6 Wide scope focus operators

Some focus operators, like *even*, are peculiar because they allow for wide scope in unexpected positions when they form a FOP.

- (20) The presence of [even [the Dalai Lama]] is required in this ceremony.  
 Even the presence of [the Dalai Láma]<sub>F</sub> is required in this ceremony.

Also, *even* allows for association with a focus phrase in unusual positions when it occurs as a VP operator:

(21) [Jóhn]<sub>F</sub> will even give Mary a present.

Explanation: *even* is a particle that marks emphatic assertion. The focus phrase is associated with this illocutionary operator, which has always widest scope over the sentence. Thus, *even* is free to be adjoined to the focus phrase even if this is deeply embedded.