

Title: “Just,” “only,” and the two differences that keep them from being the same

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On cursory inspection, the English exclusives *just* and *only* appear interchangeable in their parallel non-scalar and scalar usages. Many researchers (such as Beaver & Clark 2008) have considered them to be the same in form and function due to this interchangeability in many contexts; however, I argue that they differ, drawing upon data from NPIs and modals.

The two main differences that I have identified between *only* and *just* are their ability to license Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) and their interaction with modals. Consider the following examples (capital letters indicate prosodic prominence):

- (1) John **only** ever [DISLIKED Sally]
only NPI Verb Phrase

Interpretation: At any time in the past, it was not the case that John had any stronger negative feelings for Sally than dislike (e.g. hate)

- (2) #John **just** ever [DISLIKED Sally]
just NPI Verb Phrase

Interpretation: ???

- (3) a. James can **only** eat BREAD

Interpretation 1: The one thing John can eat is bread

Interpretation 2: John is allowed to eat bread and nothing else if he wants to.

- b. James can **just** eat BREAD

Interpretation : John is allowed to eat bread and nothing else if he wants to.

Blocked interpretation: The one thing John can eat is bread

Examples (1) – (3) demonstrate strong differences of interpretation between parallel sentences containing *only* and *just*. If they truly have the same structure and semantics as much of the prior literature has assumed, their behavior should reflect that. I’ve observed, however, that *only*’s behavior is more similar to negation in these two areas. I propose (following Jacobs 1980 and von Stechow & Iatridou 2007) that *only* is a case of “negative split” while *just* is a single semantic unit.

My proposed structure and semantics for *just* are in line with the structure and semantics commonly attributed to *only* under a classic Horn (1969) and Rooth (1985, 1992) account:

- (4) $\llbracket \text{just}_c S \rrbracket^w$ is defined only if (i.e. presupposes that) $\llbracket S \rrbracket^w = 1$.
If defined, $\llbracket \text{just}_c S \rrbracket^w = 1$ iff $\forall S' (S' \in C) \ \& \ S \neq S' \rightarrow \llbracket S' \rrbracket^w = 0$

My proposed semantics and structure for *only*, however, deviates substantially from this classic view. It is similar to the one proposed by von Stechow & Iatridou: *only* is composed of negation and a special exceptive (known as QUE, from the *ne...que* construction found in French). The main difference from their theory is that a different final scope of the NEG and QUE is proposed:

- (5) $\llbracket \text{QUE}_D \rrbracket^w(x)(P)$ is defined only if (i.e. presupposes that) $P(x) = 0$ in w .
If defined, $\llbracket \text{QUE}_D \rrbracket^w(x)(P) = 1$ iff $\forall y (y \in D \ \& \ y \neq x \rightarrow P(y) = 1$ in w)
 D = the set of alternatives to the focus associate

$\llbracket \text{QUE}_D \rrbracket$ takes two arguments (x and P). In a world (as designated by the superscript w), $\llbracket \text{QUE}_D \rrbracket(x)(P)$ is defined only if $P(x)$ is false. If defined in that world, $\llbracket \text{QUE}_D \rrbracket(x)(P)$ is true if and only if for all y , if y is in the set of alternatives to the focus associate (D) and y is not the same as x , then $P(y)$ is true in that world. This semantic entry requires that the QUE-phrase undergo quantifier raising (QR) to be interpretable. In (5), [QUE Beth] is of type $\langle\langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$ (the type of a

generalized quantifier). Since generalized quantifiers are only interpretable at clausal nodes, it must raise. This results in the following structure, which deviates from von Fintel & Iatridou, since QUE now scopes above NEG.:

(6) $[[\text{QUE}_D \text{ Beth}][\lambda x. \text{John} [\text{NEG likes } x]]]$

One crucial difference between my proposed semantics for *just* and *only* is that there is no negation in the structure of *just*. This lack of negation is the key to the divergence of the two exclusives regarding NPI-licensing and scope relations when interacting with modals (see below). Strawson Downward Entailment (von Fintel 1999) has been utilized in the past to account for *only*'s ability to license NPIs, but *just* also fulfills the requirements for SDE, which would anticipate (2) to be acceptable. With negation as part of *only*'s composition, we can go back to standard Downward Entailment as an NPI licensing environment, which would avoid this problem. If negation is a core part of *only*, then its negation-like interaction with modals is expected (e.g. the modals *may* and *can* both allow negation/*only* to scope above or below them), in contrast to how *just* interacts with the same modals (e.g. the modals *may* and *can* most saliently scope above *just*):

(7) Negation (NOT)

- a. James may not eat bread. negation > modal OR modal > negation
- b. James can not eat bread. negation > modal OR modal > negation

(8) Exclusive ONLY

- a. James may only eat [bread]_F. only > modal OR modal > only
- b. James can only eat [bread]_F. only > modal OR modal > only

(9) Exclusive JUST

- a. James may just eat [bread]_F. modal > just (?? just > modal)
- b. James can just eat [bread]_F. modal > just (?? just > modal)

My current research takes this theory and seeks to gain more supportive evidence from original experimental data. Such experimental work may prove extremely enlightening, since much of the work on exclusives has been purely theoretical. The experiment will gather acceptability judgments from online participants on sentences containing negation, *only*, and *just*. All experimental sentences will have both an NPI and a non-NPI version. I hypothesize that overall the sentences containing *only* + NPI will be found more acceptable than the sentences containing *just* + NPI. The results I gain from my experiment will further linguistic understanding of the NPI-licensing abilities of *only* and *just* in English.

References:

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