

Assessor Sensitivity and the Modality of *Even*

Carlos Balhana

Department of Linguistics, and Imaging Sciences and Information Systems (ISIS) Center

Georgetown University

✉ balhana@isis.georgetown.edu

Traditional accounts of the focus operator *EVEN* propose that the existential additive and scalar meanings are the result of implicatures, and scalar implicature has been analyzed in different proposals in terms of likelihood, informativeness, or noteworthiness. Karttunen and Peters (1979) and Herburger (2000) have suggested, however, that an implicature-based analysis is too weak, and that the existential and scalar meanings are actually part of the truth-conditional meaning of *EVEN*. I propose that if we are to interpret focus and likelihood (or whatever other category we choose for the scale) as a contextually-determined, ranked set of alternatives, then one might expect the phenomena to be reconcilable within a theory of graded modality such that the scalar meaning is represented by an ordering source semantics.

In the present analysis, I provide some contexts which suggest that we cannot consistently evaluate the meaning of *EVEN* based on objective probabilities, nor can we define notions of likelihood, informativeness or noteworthiness (Rooth 1985; Kay 1990; Herburger 2000) without accounting for faultless disagreements between conversational participants. I propose that the alternatives follow from sets of beliefs represented as doxastic worlds. I also argue that the modal operator exhibits assessor sensitivity, such that alternatives are evaluated relative to individuals in addition to worlds and times and are ranked by an antistereotypical ordering source, thus engendering the subjectivity and “goodness of fit” intuition previously attributed to a scalar implicature. I also maintain that the observed faultless disagreements are part of larger phenomena which have been similarly addressed within the recent literature on predicates of personal taste (PPTs) and epistemic modals (Egan, Hawthorne, and Weatherson 2004; Lasersohn 2005; Stephenson 2007).

Finally, I address another puzzle regarding the evaluation of *EVEN* under the scope of a factive predicate. Herburger (2000) observes that previous scope and NPI analyses provide conflicting predictions regarding the actuality of the existential additive in sentences like *I regret even opening that book*, when in fact either option is available; that is, the proposition is compatible with either contexts where I did something else to the book or contexts where all I did was open it. Herburger argues that the existential implicature can be neutralized after computing the factivity of regret, but if we are to adopt a truth-conditional analysis of *EVEN*, then we cannot rule out the actuality of the additive meaning in the same way, nor can we account for the scalar ordering of expectations, which is still readily interpreted. As a proposed solution to this problem, I argue that the modal meaning of *EVEN* compositionally interacts with the alternative semantics of factive predicates, allowing for the interpretation of either of the above two readings.

Egan, A., J. Hawthorne, & B. Weatherson. 2004. Epistemic modals in context. In *Contextualism in Philosophy*, ed. by G. Preyer & G. Peter, 131-168. Oxford: OUP

Herburger, E. 2000. *What Counts: Focus and Quantification*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Lasersohn, P. 2005. Context Dependence, Disagreement, and Predicates of Personal Taste. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 28(6). 643-686.

Karttunen, L., & S. Peters. 1979. Conventional Implicature. In *Syntax and Semantics 11: Implicatures*, ed. by Oh, C.K. & D.A. Dinneen, 1-55. New York: Academic Press.

Kay, P. 1990. Even. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 13(5). 9-111.

Rooth, M. 1985. *Association With Focus*. University of Massachusetts at Amherst dissertation.

Stephenson, T. 2007. Judge Dependence, Epistemic Modals, and Predicates of Personal Taste. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 30(4), 487-525.