

9.2 Positive and Negative Parts of Exclusive Meanings

Summary: *There are two primary components of the meaning of exclusives, one positive and one negative. While the negative component is generally agreed to be an entailment, the status of the positive component is controversial. We introduce the conjunction analysis of exclusives, which says that the meaning of an exclusive sentence is the conjunction of the positive and negative components.*

Let us begin by considering the primary two components entering into prior discussions of the meaning of exclusives, one positive and one negative. The positive component of *only Jane smokes* might be taken to be the proposition that Jane smokes – this is also termed the *prejacent*. But as we will see, some authors take the prejacent to be a secondary inference rather than a core component of the meaning of an exclusive, and some authors consider a weaker existential to be either part of the at-issue meaning² or part of the presupposed meaning of an exclusive, in this case the proposition that someone smokes.

The negative component – also known as the *exclusive* or, as we will term it, the *universal* – is the proposition that nobody else smokes. While there is some disagreement as to exactly what the negative component is, it is generally agreed to be a vanilla entailment, something that gets, e.g., asserted by an assertion, negated by a negation, and questioned by a question. In the case of the positive component things are not so simple. There is both disagreement about the exact content of the positive component, and disagreement about its semantic/pragmatic flavor.

In what follows we will discuss the various observations that have driven scholars to a wide range of positions. But to start with, observe that both the prejacent and the universal inference follow from what we will call the *base sentence* or *exclusive sentence*, a simple sentential clause with an occurrence of NP or VP *only*, and no other operators. This is shown by (9.1) and (9.2) for NP *only*, and in (9.3) and (9.4) for VP *only*.

(9.1) Basic Positive Inference (NP *only*)

- a. Only Mary smokes. \mapsto
- b. Mary smokes.

(9.2) Basic Negative Inference (NP *only*)

- a. Only Mary smokes. \mapsto
- b. Nobody other than Mary smokes.

(9.3) Basic Positive Inference (VP *only*)

- a. Mary only smokes [Luckies]_F. \mapsto
- b. Mary smokes Luckies.

² Potts (2005: 6) uses *at-issue entailments* “as a cover term for regular asserted content (‘what is said’, in Grice’s terms).”

(9.4) Basic Negative Inference (VP *only*)

- a. Mary only smokes [Luckies]_F. \mapsto
- b. Mary smokes no brands apart from Luckies.

The most obvious reaction to this data is simply to take the meaning of the base sentence to be the conjunction of the prejacent and the universal (or an equivalent proposition). This is the tack taken, as Atlas (1991) points out, by William of Sherwood in the early thirteenth century (Kretzmann 1968).³ More recent adherents include Taglicht (1984), and also (though in a slightly different form) Rooth (1992) and Herburger (2000).

Atlas himself advocates a variant of the conjunction analysis in which the positive conjunct for (9.1a) would be the proposition that exactly one person smokes rather than the proposition that Mary smokes (Atlas 1991, 1993, 1996). As Atlas is well aware, the conjunction of *exactly one person smokes and everybody who smokes is Mary* is classically equivalent to the conjunction *Mary smokes and everybody who smokes is Mary*, so his analysis is only a stone's throw from William of Sherwood's.

One difference is that Atlas represents the interpretation at a level of logical form which not only has truth-conditional interpretation, but also represents aspects of information structure. On Atlas' analysis, information structural differences in turn have both distributional and inferential effects. That is, Atlas takes the meaning of *Exactly one person smokes and everybody who smokes is Mary* to be distinct from *Mary smokes and everybody who smokes is Mary* in terms of information structure, so that it makes a difference to the expected distribution of exclusive sentences whether their meaning is represented in the form of the first version (Atlas' preference) or the second.

In the coming sections we consider why the conjunction analysis is not sufficient, and what prior scholars have suggested be done about it. After that we attempt to motivate and describe our own integrated model to account for both the meaning of exclusives and their focus sensitivity. Note that we give most of the basic data in the next two sections using NP *only*. For all cases, we have checked comparable examples for VP *only* too, in many cases we have also checked for other exclusives (*just, merely, exclusively*), and in some cases we will later have observations to make about the interpretational effects of syntactic position or the exclusive chosen.

9.3 The Prejacent Presupposition Theory

Summary: *Evidence from negation, order asymmetries, and reason clauses suggests that there is an asymmetry between the positive and negative inferences from*

³ Horn (1996) sees Peter of Spain (Mullally 1945) as the primary progenitor of the conjunction (or *symmetricalist*) account under which the positive and negative components of the meaning of *only* are simply conjoined. But Peter of Spain wrote later than William of Sherwood.

exclusive sentences. We introduce the prejacent presupposition theory of exclusives, which says that the positive component of the meaning of an exclusive sentence is a presupposition, whereas the negative component is an ordinary entailment.

So far we have established that both the prejacent and the exclusive follow from an utterance of a sentence involving an exclusive. Horn (1969) pointed out that there is an asymmetry between the two inferences. This asymmetry can be seen in a wide range of phenomena, the most striking of which is behavior under negation. While the prejacent is implied by the negation of the base sentence (9.5), the universal is not (9.6):

(9.5) Embedding under negation: positive component

- a. Not only Mary smokes. \mapsto
- b. Mary smokes.

(9.6) Embedding under negation: negative component

- a. Not only Mary smokes. \nrightarrow
- b. Nobody other than Mary smokes.

Survival of implications under negation is the best known test for presupposition. Thus the data in (9.5) and (9.6) provides evidence that while the universal is an ordinary entailment of the base sentence (and thus targeted by negation), the prejacent is a presupposition (and thus ignored by ordinary negation). This *prejacent presupposition* theory, as we will call it, is the position Horn (1969) adopted. A variant of it has recently been robustly defended by Roberts (2006), despite being very much against the tide of contemporary work on the issue.

Neither the presuppositions nor assertions of simple affirmative sentences can normally be directly canceled. Because of this, the fact that neither the prejacent nor the universal inference are cancelable in this way (as in 9.7) suggests that an implicature analysis of prejacent inferences may be wrong. However, it says nothing about whether the prejacent is a presupposition or a plain entailment.⁴

(9.7) Failure of simple cancellation

- a. ## Only Mary smokes, but Mary doesn't smoke.
- b. ## Only Mary smokes, but somebody else does (too).

However, there are at least two further types of evidence that the prejacent is presupposed while the universal is not. First, the base sentence can be used as a strengthening of a statement of the prejacent, but not as a strengthening of a statement of the universal (9.8).

⁴ Note that by “##” we mean pragmatically odd, and even more so than sentences marked by just a single hash.

(9.8) Order asymmetries

- a. Mary smokes, and indeed [only]_F Mary smokes.
- b. #Nobody but Mary smokes, and indeed only Mary smokes.

Second, when a sentence with *only* is given as the cause for something (9.9), or is the target of an emotive attitude (9.11), it is usually the universal which is understood as the cause or the target of the attitude, not the prejacent.

(9.9) Reason Clause

- a. And aides and allies were instructed not to characterize Thursday's vote as a victory or a defeat, even though many viewed it as a partial win because only 31 Democrats voted for Hyde's resolution.
(*Washington Post*, 10/10/98)
- b. \nrightarrow They were instructed not to characterize it that way (partly) because 31 Democrats voted for Hyde's resolution.

(9.10) Reason Clause

- a. Aides and allies were given certain instructions because only 31 Democrats voted. (Artificial variant of above)
- b. \nrightarrow They were given those instructions (partly) because 31 Democrats voted.

(9.11) Emotive Factive Clause

- a. I am disappointed that only \$3 billion dollars will be paid against the approximately \$480 billion dollar federal debt.
[web example]
- b. \nrightarrow I am disappointed partly by the fact that \$3 billion dollars will be paid.

Because the naturally occurring example in (9.9) is complex, a simplified variant is given in (9.10): the point being that (9.10b) is *not* an appropriate statement of the reason for instructions being given. The reason the instructions were given is that the number of Democrat voters was not higher than 31. Both the strengthening pattern and the reason-clause data are what would be expected if the prejacent is a presupposition.⁵

⁵ Compare, e.g., to the behavior of *the woman smiled* which presupposes the existence of a (unique) woman, and asserts that she smiled:

- (i) There is a woman and indeed the woman smiled.
- (ii) ## She_i smiled and indeed the woman_i smiled.
- (iii) I smiled because the woman smiled. \nrightarrow The existence of the woman was part of the reason I smiled.
- (iv) I'm disappointed that the woman smiled. \nrightarrow The existence of the woman is part of the reason I'm disappointed.