A new intervention effect with 'only' –
additional evidence for a distributed syntax-and-semantics of scalar 'only'

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Main claims: The first claim of this talk concerns an hitherto undescribed intervention effect in the domain of 'only' operators which leads to the categorical blocking of scalar 'only' readings. The second claim is that at least three distinct syntactic positions contribute to establishing scalar 'only' meanings in a clause. Vietnamese and, to a lesser extent, Dutch and German provide overt evidence for the different positions involved. The observed intervention effect is hypothesized to belong to the larger class of Beck effects (in the sense of Beck 1996), or to be a new subtype of negative weak islands, if Beck effects are treated as a special case of weak islands (Szabolcsi 2002). **Theoretical implications:** (i) The intervention effect under scrutiny cannot be reduced to non-syntactic factors, thereby weakening proposals that aim at a semantic/pragmatic reduction of all intervention effects. (ii) The proposed distributed syntax and semantics of scalar 'only' and the newly described intervention effect shed new light on the typology of focus-sensitive operators. **The new intervention effect:** Clause-mate sentential negation leads to the blocking of scalar 'only' readings in German (as in English); cf. (1). (1a) easily evokes a scalar reading which has it that becoming fourth is little. This reading is categorically blocked in (1b) (corrective stress on *nicht* or *nur* makes it reappear, similar to other instances of negative intervention phenomena; Williams 1974). The biclausal (1c), which is predicted to have at least one reading which is truth-functionally equivalent to that of (1b), does not filter out scalarity. Given this truth-functional identity, the contrast between (1b) and (1c) demonstrates that purely semantic or pragmatic reasons cannot be held responsible for the absence of the scalar reading in (1b). (1d) shows that narrow constituent negation off the main projection spine, as opposed to the broad negation of (1b), does not lead to the intervention effect; a scalar reading is easily available. **The scope of the exclusion of alternatives and of scalarity:** The effects in (2)-(4) serve to show that it is necessary to assume different scoping positions for scalarity and complement exclusion with 'only'. The foci in (2) project up to the I/T-level in accordance with theories predicting the interactions of contexts, sentence accents and focus. Surprisingly, the focus associating with 'only' in (3) may not project beyond I/T; the variation in tense in (3), which was innocuous without 'only' in (2), leads to infelicity. A parallel effect with modals is found in (4a). (4b) serves to show that the modal category in (4a) may topicalize, and may therefore be assumed to be *nur*'s sister in (4a), too. At the same time, speakers converge on the intuition that the scalar presupposition of (4) may include the modal (i.e., the 'allowance to drink tea', and not just 'drinking tea' alone, may be considered little). To account for these patterns I hypothesize that the scalar operator with 'only', if present, scopes above I/T, while the exclusion of alternatives scopes below I/T. **Particle proliferation in Vietnamese:** Vietnamese allows for up to four 'only' words per clause with a single focus. In (5), each of the four 'only' particles alone suffices to express a full-fledged scalar 'only' meaning in a suitable context, but any combination of the four particles likewise leads to grammatical and interpretable sentences. Sentence-final *thôi* is in the typical position of speech-act operators found in (South) East Asian languages; it scopes over the rest of the clause. I identify it with Krifka's (1995: 224) scalar assertion operator. It presupposes an informational ordering over propositional alternatives and excludes more informative ones (by implicature). *Chỉ* is in a typical adverbial 'only' position and entails the falsity of alternatives (Büring & Hartmann 2001). In accordance with the scope facts relative to I/T categories described for (3), it must follow, and hence be in the scope of, the Vietnamese anteriority and posteriority markers *đã/sẽ* (6). *Mỗi* in (5) is an ad-focus (phrase) particle. (I don't discuss *mới*, the fourth pertinent particle, in this talk; I assume it is a background marking device.) **The intervention effect as blocked LF movement:** Focus phrases that are to be interpreted as scalar must (LF-)move to the specifier of Krifka's Scalar Assertion operator spelt out by Vietnamese *thôi*. Clause-level negation

between the adverbial 'only' position and the position of the Scalar Assertion operator with its scalarity presupposition blocks this movement. A prediction for Vietnamese made by this analysis is that scalar *thôi* should be incompatible with clause-level negation, because the focus phrase should be blocked from LF-moving across negation to the specifier of the scalar assertion operator. This prediction is borne out (7). **'Only' doubling in Dutch and German:** Dutch *maar* 'only' may occur twice per clause if a numeral is in focus (8) (Barbiers 2010). I interpret this generalization as describing a configuration which gets interpreted with a scalar presupposition: the preposed focus phrase is overtly moved past the (ultimately stranded) adverbial 'only' to the specifier of the unpronounced scalar assertion operator. I.e., movement to the illocutionary operator level may be overt in Dutch. In German, focus particle doubling typically leads to (parser-unfriendly) double-'only' meanings (9). Following the contrastive positive polarity particle *DOCH* 'it IS the case that…', however, 'only' doubling is possible, and attested even in carefully edited texts (10)/(11). Speakers of German and of Vietnamese converge on the intuition that, in sequences of adverbial 'only' and ad-focus 'only' as in (7) or (10)/(11), it is the ad-focus 'only' which contributes the scalar component of meaning. This fits in with the hypothesized (LF-)movement of the focus phrase including the ad-focus particle to the illocutionary operator position: in one of its guises, ad-focus 'only' has a scalar feature that must be interpreted at the level of illocutionary force. To sum up, there is both indirect intervention evidence and morphological evidence for a distributed syntax and semantics of scalar 'only'. The intervention effect involved has an irreducible syntactic residue.

(1) a. *Er ist **nur** Vierter$_F$ geworden.* 'He **only** became fourth$_F$.'

b. *Er ist **nicht nur** Vierter$_F$ geworden.* 'He did**n't only** become fourth.'

c. *Es ist **nicht** so, dass er **nur** Vierter$_F$ geworden ist.* 'It's **not** the case that he **only** became fourth$_F$.'

d. *Er ist **nicht** gestern$_F$ **nur** Vierter$_F$ geworden.* 'It was**n't** yesterday$_F$ that he **only** became fourth$_F$.'

(2) *…dass sie [TEE trank]$_F$ und [jetzt SCHWEIN isst]$_F$.* '…that she [ate PORK]$_F$, and [is now drinking TEA]$_F$.'

(3) *Ich weiß, dass sie **nur** TEE trank(, $^\#$und demzufolge nicht jetzt SCHWEIN isst).*
'I know that she only had TEA ($^\#$and is thus not eating PORK now).'

(4) a. *Er hat **nur** TEE trinken dürfen, nicht aber BREI essen dürfen/$^\#$müssen.*
'He was only allowed to drink TEA, but {wasn't allowed to/$^\#$didn't have to} eat PAP.'

b. *[TEE trinken dürfen]$_i$ hat er **nur** t$_i$, nicht aber [BREI essen dürfen/$^\#$müssen.]*
'He was only allowed to drink TEA, but {wasn't allowed to/$^\#$didn't have to} eat PAP.'

(5) *[[**Chỉ** [**mỗi** Nam$_F$] **mới** ăn thịt bò] **thôi**].* 'Only NAM$_F$ eats beef.'
only only Nam only eat meat beef only

(6) *Nam (***chỉ**) đã/sẽ (**chỉ**) ăn thịt bò.* 'Nam only ate beef.'/'Nam will only eat beef.'
Nam only ANT/POST only eat meat beef

(7) *[Nam [không [**chỉ** ăn [**mỗi** [thịt bò]$_F$]]] (*thôi)].* 'Nam didn't only eat beef$_F$.' (non-scalar)
Nam not only eat only meat beef only

(8) ***Maar** één boek ken ik (**maar**).* 'I only know one$_F$ book.'

(9) **Nur**$_{F1}$ *EIN$_{F1}$ Buch KENne$_{F2}$ ich nur$_{F2}$.* 'Only$_{F1}$ [one$_{F1}$ book]$_i$ is such that I only$_{F2}$ know$_{F2}$ it$_i$.'

(10) *Das unvordenkliche Existiren ist ein (…) nothwendiges, aber doch **nur nur** zufällig$_F$-nothwendiges, d. h. ein blindes.* (von Schelling, F. W. J. (1858), 347) 'The unfathomable existence is a … necessary one, but only a randomly$_F$-necessary one, i.e. a blind one.'

(11) *Ihr (…) Erklärungsgrund (…) würde uns (…) doch **nur nur** halb$_F$ befriedigen können.* (Fichte, J./F. Niethammer (1798), 329) 'Its reason would still only be able to satisfy us only half$_F$-way.'

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