

**Faqaṭ ‘only’ in
Classic Arabic and Al-Ahsa Dialect: Semantic Overview**

by

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I. Introduction:

Only in English and perhaps in other languages has been a subject of intense debate and extensive investigations for many researchers. Several studies have discussed whether or not *only* licenses a negative polarity item in its focus and have attempted to determine its scope; other studies, on the other hand, have focused on its presuppositions, entailments or implicatures and whether or not its implication can be cancelled. See, among others, Roberts (2006) and Beaver (2004), Wagner (2005) and Clark & Beaver (2003). However, to the best of my knowledge, none of the previous studies has focused on the Arabic *only*. The Arabic *only* exhibits fascinating properties that have never been exposed, some of which are similar to that of *only* in English; others, however, vary somewhat in terms of syntactic distribution.

In this project, the classic Arabic *faqat* ‘only’ as well as *bas* ‘only’ in Al-Ahsa dialect are discussed within the semantic framework. The semantic properties of each are analyzed in terms of interpretation, implication, and implication cancellation. In addition, relevant semantic logic and pragmatic presuppositions and entailments are presented and analyzed.

This paper is organized as follows. The first section is dedicated to a brief background of the English *only*. The second section is a brief presentation of the syntactic properties of Arabic *only*. The third is the investigation section which consists of two sub-sections. The first one deals with the set of data which is attached in **appendix A**. The second one deals with the analysis and discussion of the data presented. Further notes relevant to the discussion are available in **appendix B and C**.

II. Background:

The properties of *only* in literature have been investigated broadly. Relevant here are three aspects: implicature, negative polarity item licensing and implication cancellation. Those properties are discussed briefly.

In terms of implicature, some studies, namely, Roberts' (2006), Beaver's (2004), have shown that *only* can implicate a number of sentences. Roberts, in particular, highlights three types of implicatures: prejacent implication, exclusive implication and existential implication. These types can be explicated in (1-3):

- (1) Only Ali visited Nora last week.
- (2) Ali visited Nora last week.
- (3) No one other than Ali visited Nora last week.
- (4) Some one visited Nora last week.

(1) implies (2), (3) and (4). According to Roberts' discussion, (2) exhibits a **Prejacent implication**. (3) and (4) are **Exclusive implication** and **Existential implication**, respectively. Roberts also cites McCawley (1981:226-7) asserting that the prejacent implication is derived from the exclusive implication.

Another property of *only* prominent in literature is the negative polarity item licensing. Several researchers have argued that *only* does not license a negative polarity item (NPI) such as *any* and *ever*. Beaver, for instance, argues against *only* to be a license for the presence of a polarity item in (5). (5) is adopted from Beaver's (2004) study.

(5) "Only the students who had ever read anything about polarity passed."

Instead, he highlights that its presence is licensed by the restrictive noun clause *the students who*. Roberts, on the other hand, focuses on NPI in other types of sentences such as (6) and points out

that the NPI is applicable in the background but is not in the focus of *only*. (6) structure is based on Roberts' (2006).

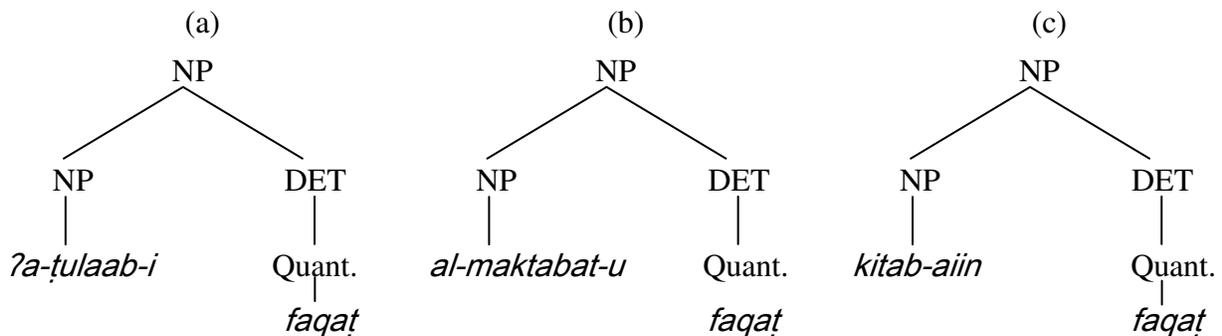
(6) Only Mohammed has any money left.

The last aspect of *only* to be discussed is the implication cancellation. An interesting fact about *only* is the fact that its prejacent implication can not be cancelled. Roberts explains this in a fascinating example as the one in (7).

(7) "Only Lucy can pass the test. In fact, even Lucy can't."

III. The Syntactic Properties of Arabic *only*:

Unlike English, *faqat* 'only' follows the noun phrase it modifies. Thus, in Classic Arabic the noun phrase that precedes *faqat* is taken to be its focus and restricted by *only*. If *faqat* precedes a sentence, whatever follows is taken to be the focus of its scope. Let us see some examples from the data presented in **appendix A**. In (1.a), *?a-ṭulaab-i* is the focus of *faqat*. In (2.a), *al-maktabat-u* is the focus of *only*. In (3), *kitab-aiin* is taken to be the noun restricted by *only* and taken to be the focus. These can be manifested in diagrams (a), (b) and (c) respectively.



IV. Investigation:

a. Data:

The set of data in the appendix is divided up into two parts: classical Arabic and Al-Ahsa dialect. Each section contains a list of sentences written by the author. The first list has the formal *faqāṭ* ‘only’ in well-formed sentences within the traditional classic Arabic grammar. The second list consists of sentences having the informal *bas* ‘only’ – a word used in a dialect spoken in Al-Ahsa, in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia - and may not be well-formed sentences within the traditional classic Arabic grammar. For the list of sentences, see *appendix A*.

b. Data Analysis & Discussion

Sentences (1) and (2) in the data section seem quite unusual in that they do not contain overt verbs. So, it is quite useful to touch upon their syntactic structure very briefly. The first and the second sentences (1) and (2), respectively, are nominal sentences¹. They each begin with a subject and a predicate, both of which are assigned a nominative case. Notice that the copula *be* in the present tense is implicit in these sentences. For further investigation in regard to the nominal structure in Arabic, the reader is referred to Homeidi (2000), Homeidi (1998) and Touchie (1985). In sentence (1), for instance, the first word *al-maktabat* ‘the library’ is assigned a nominative case by the phoneme *-u*. The second word *mutaḥḥat* ‘available’, on the other hand, is assigned a nominative case by the phoneme *-un*. This type of sentences is quite acceptable in almost all varieties of Arabic: classical Arabic (hereafter CA), modern standard Arabic and Al-Ahsa dialect (hereafter AD). After this brief description of this type of sentences, let us start investigating each sentence in the appendix extensively.

In (1.a), *faqat* ‘only’ is positioned at the far end of the sentence, right after *ʔa-ṭulaab* which is marked with *-i* for the genitive case. Arabic nouns that come right after prepositions receive a genitive case. For further details regarding case marking and assignment, the reader is referred to Homeidi (2000), Homeidi (1998), Obeidat (1984) and Touchie (1985). *faqat* modifies the noun it follows. In our case, *ʔa-ṭulaab-i* is modified and restricted by *faqat* in that it has the following entailments. These are presented in (1.b) and (1.c). (For morpheme glosses, see the appendix).

(1.b) The library is available for the students.

For (1.b), let us assume the following:

a= ʔal-maktabat-u ‘the library’, M= mutaḥat-un ‘available’, t= ʔa-ṭulaab-l ‘the students’

It can be paraphrased logically as follows: M (a, t). This is true, iff the library is in fact available for the students. The library must not be closed or under renovation, therefore, not available. This is considered to be a prejacent implication. However, it can also overtly express the exclusive implication as in (1.c).

(1.c) The library is available for no one else other than the students.

For (1.c), let us assume the following:

a= ʔal-maktabat-u ‘the library’, M= mutaḥat-un ‘available’, t= ʔa-ṭulaab-l ‘the students’

In this regard, it is just like English, it entails that it is available for students and not available for anyone else. In other words, no one else other than students is allowed to use the library. It can be symbolized as: $\sim \forall x M(a, x) \ \& \ x \neq t$, ‘It is not the case that *ʔal-maktaba* ‘the library’ is

available for x and x is not *ʔa-ṭulaab-i* ‘the students’. In other words, it is understood as only the students are allowed to use the library. That is to say, no one other than the students can use the library. It can also be represented logically by the existential quantifier \exists as the following:

$\exists x M(a, x) \ \& \ x = t$, ‘It holds that there exists *ʔal-maktaba* ‘the library’ which is *mutaḥat-un* ‘available’ for x and x = t. It can also be represented using “implication” as $(\forall x M(a, x) \rightarrow x = t)$, ‘if for all x, *ʔal-maktaba* ‘the library’ is *mutaḥat-un* ‘available’ for x, then x equals t (x is a student). The truth values of (1.c) are as follows. (1.c) is true, if and only if no other than the students can use the library. If there exists an individual who is not a student and can use the library, then this sentence is false. Interestingly, like in English, the exclusive implication expressed in (1.c) is lost and does not hold by negating (1.c) as (1.d) shows. However, the prejacent implication expressed in (1.b) holds, remains the same and does not change.

Unlike (1.a), *faqat* ‘only’ in (2.a) is placed right after *ʔal-maktaba* ‘the library’. In this case, it has the following entailments: (2.b), (2.c). (2.b) has the same entailment as the one presented in (1.b) and is considered as a prejacent implication. The exclusive implication is presented in (2.c) and it is also similar to the English *only* in this interpretation.

(2.c) No other room (place) but the library is available for the students.

That is to say, there is no room other than the library that is available for the students. In other words, the students can use only the library and no other room. Using the same abbreviations presented above, it can be represented logically as: $\sim \exists x M(x, t) \ \& \ x \neq a$, ‘It does not hold that that

there exists x which is *mutaḥat-un* ‘available’ for *ʔa-ṭulaab-i* ‘the students’ and x is not the library’. Likewise, it can be represented logically using the “implication” as follows:

$(\forall x M(x, t) \rightarrow x = a)$, ‘if for all x , x is *mutaḥat-un* ‘available’ for t , then x equals a (x is the library). This sentence holds the following truth conditions: it is true; iff there is no room other than the library that is available for the students’ use. If there exists another place which the students can use other than the library, then this sentence is false. This sentence can also imply the existential implication; that is, there exists a place which is available for someone. It is similar to English in this regard, too. Also, the exclusive implication can not be cancelled even with the addition of a modal. Thus, (2.d) is highly unaccepted in CA. Once *faqaṭ* is used, it can not be cancelled. It is not accepted in CA to cancel its implication. This is also true in English.

In (3), let us assume the following:

Q = qaraʔ ‘read’, k = kitaba-iin ‘two books’², the segment *-t* in *qaraʔt* ‘read’ stands for the first person singular ‘I’. Hence, let us assume $t = i$. It is clear that the verb in this sentence has two arguments: a subject, t ‘I’ and an object, *kitaba-iin* ‘two books’. The verb *qaraʔ* ‘read’ is assigned a nominative case by the morpheme *-u*. *faqaṭ* is placed right after the object, *kitaba-iin* in which it has the following interpretation.

➤ In January, I read no more than two books.

In other words, throughout the whole month of January I read two books and no more; my entire reading in the month of January involved only two books and no more. This sentence is true if

and only if the reading of two books only happened. If there are more than two books read, then this sentence is false. It can be represented logically as follows:

$\forall x Q(i, x) \rightarrow x = k$, 'If for all x, such that x = books I read, then x = *kitaba-iin* 'two books''

Unlike (3), *faqat* in (4) is the very first word in the sentence and therefore it precedes the verb and its object. In this order, it not only has the meaning interpreted in (3), but it also expresses idea that I did not write a book, I did not buy...etc. More specifically, (4) entails that no other actions were carried out other than the readings of the two books.

Next, a set of sentences from Al-Ahsa dialect is presented. This dialect has the word *bas* 'only' and it is used very informally. As it can be seen in (5) - (6), no case marking is employed. For (5) and (6), let us assume the following:

A = ?akal 'ate', m = Mohammed, f = al-fatira

(5.a) and (5.b) differ in the surface structure in that they have a different word order. The deep structure is essentially the same. For further information in regard to the word order, the reader is referred to Homeidi (1998) and Homeidi (2000).

(5) entails the following:

- No one other than Mohammed ate the pie.

This sentence is false if there is at least one individual other than Mohammed who ate the pie. Its logical structure is: $\sim \exists x A(x, f) \ \& \ x \neq m$, 'it is not the case that there exists an x such that x ate *al-fatira* 'the pie' and x is not Mohammed'

Or alternatively, $\forall x \sim A(x, f) \ \& \ x \neq m$, 'For all x, it holds that x did not eat the pie and x is not Mohammed'

This sentence is true, iff all individuals other than Mohammed did not eat the pie. If there is at least one individual who ate the pie, then this sentence is false.

Alternatively, we can imagine that Mohammed belongs to a set (let us call it S) that consists of one individual and that is Mohammed. Hence,

Set $S = \{\text{Mohammed}\}$, Mohammed = m; therefore, $m \in S$, 'Mohammed is a member of S'

Taking Set S into account, the following logical structure can be constructed:

$\forall x A(x, f) \ \& \ x \in S$, 'For all x, it holds that x ate the pie and x is a member of S'

(6) entails the following sentence:

➤ Mohammed ate nothing other than the pie

This sentence is false if there is at least one thing other than the pie that Mohammed ate. The sentence is true, iff Mohammed ate the pie and ate nothing else. Using the same abbreviations presented for (5) above, its logical structure is: $\sim \exists y A(m, x) \ \& \ x \neq f$, 'it does not hold that Mohammed ate x and x is not the pie'

Or alternatively, $\forall y \sim A(m, x) \ \& \ x \neq f$, 'For all x, it holds that Mohammed did not eat x and x does not equal the pie'

Alternatively, we can imagine that Mohammed belongs to a set (let us call it S) that consists of one individual and that is Mohammed. Also, we can imagine that the pie belongs to set (let us call it R) that consists of one member which is the pie. Hence,

Set $S = \{\text{Mohammed}\}$, Mohammed = m; therefore, $m \in S$, 'Mohammed is a member of S'

Set $R = \{\text{pie}\}$, $\text{pie} = f$, $f \in R$, 'the pie is a member of R'

Taking Set S and R into account, the following logical structure can be constructed:

$\forall xy A(x, y) \ \& \ x \in S, \ \& \ y \in R$ 'For all x and y, it holds that x ate y'

To conclude, the CA *faqaṭ* 'only' as well as *bas* 'only' in AD have been discussed here within the semantic framework. The semantic properties of each have been analyzed in terms of interpretation, implication, and implication cancellation. In addition, relevant semantic logic and pragmatic presuppositions and entailments have been presented and analyzed. It has been shown that while the syntactic distribution of the Arabic *only* differs from that of English, *faqaṭ* and *bas* exhibit exactly the same semantic properties of English *only*. More specifically, it has been shown that the Arabic *only* entails a set of sentences just like the English *only*, namely, prejacent implication and exclusive implication. It has also been shown that negation of *only* cancels the exclusive implication just like English. However, the issue of whether or not *only* in Arabic licenses a NPI in its scope has not been tackled and further investigation is needed.

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Appendix

A. Data:

Classical Arabic

1.

a)

[ʔal-maktabat-u mutaħat-un lii ʔa-ṭulaab-i faqaṭ]
def. art.-library-nom available-nom for def. art.-students-gen only
'The library is available for the students only.'

b)

[ʔal-maktabat-u mutaħat-un lii ʔa-ṭulaab-i]
def. art.-library-nom available-nom for def. art.-students-gen
'The library is available for the students'

c)

[ʔal-maktabat-u mutaħat-un lii ʔa-ṭulaab-i wa-lais-a lii-ṣijr-i]
def. art.-library-nom available-nom for def. art.-students-gen and-no one for-else-acc
ʔa-ṭulaab-i]
def. art.-students-gen
'The library is available for no one other than the students'

d)

[ʔal-maktabat-u mutaħat-un lajs-a lii ʔa-ṭulaab-i faqaṭ]
def. art.-library-nom available-nom not-acc for def. art.-students-gen only
'The library is available not only for the students.'

2.

a)

[al-maktabat-u faqaṭ mutaħat-un lii ʔa-ṭulaab-i]
def. art.-library-nom only available-nom for def. art.-students-gen
'Only the library is available for the students.'

b)

[al-maktabat-u mutaħat-un lii ʔa-ṭulaab-i]
def. art.-library-nom available-nom for def. art.-students-gen
'The library is available for the students.'

c)

[al-maktabat-u faqaṭ wa-lais-a ʔaj ɣurfat-iin ʔuxr-a mutaḥat-un
def. art.-library-nom only and- not-acc any room-gen other-acc available-nom

lii ʔa-ṭulaab-i]

for def. art.-students-gen

‘No other room but the library is available for the students.’

d)

[al-maktabat-u faqaṭ mutaḥat-an lii ʔa-ṭulaab-i
def. art.-library-nom only available-acc for def. art.-students-gen

wa-rubama qad t-akuun-u ɣajr-a mutaḥat-in]
and-perhaps may 3rd sg-be-nom not-acc available-gen

‘Only the library is available for the students, and, perhaps it can not be.’

3.

[qaraʔt-u kitab-aiin faqaṭ fii ʔahr-i janajir]
read-past-1st sg.- nom. two books-acc only in month-gen January

‘I read only two books in January.’

4.

[faqaṭ qaraʔt-u kitab-aiin fii ʔahr-i janajir]
Only read-past-1st sg.- nom. two books-acc in month-gen January

‘I only read two books in the month of January/I only read two books in January.’

Al-Ahsa Dialect (colloquial Arabic)

5. a

[bas Moḥammed ʔakal al-ḩaṭira]

Only Mohammed ate def. art.-pie

‘Only Mohammed ate the pie’

5. b

[Moḥammed bas ʔakal al-ḩaṭira]

Mohammed only ate def. art.-pie

‘Only Mohammed ate the pie’

6.a

[Moḥammed ʔakal bas al-ḩaṭira]

Mohammed ate only def. art.-pie

‘Mohammed ate only the pie’

6.b

[Moḥammed ʔakal al-ḩaṭira bas]

Mohammed ate def. art.-pie only

‘Mohammed ate only the pie’

B. Abbreviation:

Abbreviations	Explanation
nom	nominative
acc	accusative case
1 st sg	first person singular pronoun
def. art.	definite article
past	past tense
gen	genitive case

C: Notes:

1. Arabic Nominal Sentences: A nominal sentence in Arabic consists of two parts: an inchoative subject and a predicate. The inchoative subject can be a definite noun, a pronoun, a demonstrative pronoun, or a particle plus an infinitive. The predicate can be a noun, another nominal sentence, a verbal sentence or a phrase. Some argue, however, that even a predicative adjective can fill the slot of this predicate and functions as a predicate and, thus, is assigned a nominative case because of its distribution. Note that both the subject and the predicate *must* receive a nominative case or the sentence is wrong in classic Arabic.

ʔal-kitab-u mumazaq-un
the-book-nom dog-eared-nom
'The book is dog-eared'

For further information, please see the sources attached above. More information can also be found at <http://www.mesiti.it/arabic/wiki/wiki.asp?db=WikiAsp&o=TheNominalSentence>

2. In classic Arabic, a *regular* dual noun receives the morpheme *-an* when it is assigned a nominative case but receives the morpheme *-aiin* when it is assigned an accusative case. This can be illustrated in the following table:

Noun - singular	Dual - Nom	Dual - Acc	Gloss
kitab	kitab-an	kitab-aiin	'book'
talib	talib-an	talib-aiin	'student'

This can be explicated in the following sentences:

a.

qaraʔt-u kitab-aiin
read-past-1st sg.- nom. two books-acc
'I read two books'

b.

hað-an ?al-kitab-an
These – nom the- book – dual/nom
'These two books are expensive'

χali-an
expensive-nom