From exclusive particles to adversative connectives[*]

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1. Overview

This paper is concerned with words, like English *only*, that can function both as an exclusive particle, as seen in (1a), and as an adversative sentence connector, as seen in (1b).

(1) a. Quinton *only* has a master's degree.   *Exclusive*
     b. Quinton is really nice, *only* they're a little socially awkward.   *Adversative*

The pattern in which an exclusive particle has an additional use as an adversative marker, or has an adversative connective that is morphologically related to exclusion, is widely attested cross-linguistically. The following are some examples of which the authors are aware: French *seulement*, English *only* (Halliday and Hasan 1976), German *nur, allein* (Rudolph 1996), Romanian *numai că*, *doar că* (Gabriela Bîlbîie, p.c.), Czech *je (nom) že* (Langova 2011), Spanish, Italian, Portuguese *solamente/só que* (Rudolph 1996), Hebrew *raq* (Jonathan Ginzburg, p.c.), Cantonese *bat1gwo3*, Mandarin *bu4guo4*, Japanese *tada*.
    The questions we address in this paper are:

 (i) What is the meaning of *only* and its cross-linguistic kin in examples like (1b)?

 (ii) How does this meaning connect to the exclusive use in (1a)?

In answer to these questions, we will argue that (i) *only* in (1b) marks an opposition in the *argumentative orientation* (Anscombre and Ducrot 1983) of the two sentences it connects, and (ii) that this adversative meaning derives diachronically from the exclusive meaning by a process of *pragmaticalization* (Traugott and Dasher 2002, Davis and Gutzmann 2015). In section 2 we give an overview of the theory of argumentation within language and how it ties in with the semantic and pragmatic analyses of exclusive particles and adversative

connectives. Section 3 spells out how synchronically ambiguous examples of *only* provide a plausible diachronic bridge linking the exclusive and adversative readings of *only*. Section 4 concludes with a critical discussion of the account of von Fintel and Iatridou (2019), in which we conclude that a synchronically unified account of the exclusive and adversative readings of *only* is not tenable.

2. The two meanings and their argumentative profiles

Our analysis uses the framework of *argumentation within language* (AwL, Anscombre and Ducrot (1983), Winterstein (2012b)). The central tenet of the theory is that the interpretation of natural language utterances is made relative to an argumentative goal, such that accepting the at-issue content of the utterance will increase the belief in that goal. We refer to this relation between an utterance and the goal by saying that the utterance is *oriented* towards the goal. Any given sentence is potentially oriented towards multiple goals, and part of the work in interpreting an utterance is determining which goal the speaker has in mind at the time of utterance. At the heart of AwL is the idea that the relation of orientation is mediated not just by the content of an utterance, but also by the linguistic code. Thus, two sentences with comparable semantic content may be used for potentially opposite goals.

In this paper, we consider two linguistic elements that affect the orientation of a sentence. The first is information structuring, i.e. the division of the conveyed content into different layers of information (at-issue content, presupposition, conventional implicature, etc.) The claim is that the set of goals that an utterance can be used to argue for is determined on the sole basis of the at-issue content of the utterance (Ducrot 1972, Jayez and Tovena 2008). Argumentative operators, such as discourse markers, can then operate on the argumentative profile of their host utterance, for example by marking the relationship between the at-issue content and argumentative goals, or by relating the argumentative profile of the utterance to that of other discourse segments.

2.1 The exclusive meaning

The exclusive meaning of *only* has been the topic of a sizeable portion of the literature in semantics and pragmatics. Modern treatments usually take their root in a proposal by Horn (1969) which rests on the idea that the semantics of *only* uses a set of alternatives that it excludes. In an example like (1a), the alternatives in question are other (higher) diplomas that Quinton could hold, and the sentence conveys as its at-issue content that Quinton does not possesses any of them. The information that Quinton does possess a master's degree is not part of the at-issue content, but is conveyed as a kind of ancillary meaning, such as a presupposition.

Works dealing with *only* have focused on various aspects of its semantics, such as the exact nature of the information conveyed by *only*'s prejacent (presupposition, conventional implicature, or something else; see Coppock and Beaver (2014) for a recent overview of proposals), whether the alternatives are ranked, and the associative properties of *only*, i.e. how to determine the set of alternatives used to compute its exclusive meaning. The details of these semantic properties are orthogonal to what we show in this paper; it suf-

fices to assume that (i) the at-issue content of sentences with exclusive *only* conveys the negation of the relevant focus-sensitive alternatives, and (ii) the entailment of the prejacent is conveyed by a conventional non-at-issue meaning component, such as a presupposition or conventional implicature.

Ducrot (1973) observes that exclusive operators such as *only* have a characteristic argumentative effect, specifically the *reversal* of the orientation of its prejacent. In a sentence like (1a), this reversal entails that if G is a goal that is supported by (2), the prejacent of (1a), then (1a) will argue against G, i.e. (1a) will be oriented towards $\neg G$.

(2)   Quinton has a master's degree.

While Ducrot postulates that this reversal effect is part of the lexical meaning of exclusives, Winterstein (2012a) shows how this effect can instead be derived from a standard exclusive semantics coupled with general principles of AwL. The idea is that the alternatives that are negated by the at-issue content of *only* are all co-oriented with the prejacent of *only*. For example, in (1a) the alternatives are (in typical circumstances) higher diplomas that Quinton may hold, and most conclusions that can be supported by having a master's degree can also be supported by having a higher diploma.

Negation itself has a reversal effect: (3) also argues in a way that is opposite to (2).

(3)   Quinton does not have a master's degree.

Therefore, since (i) the at-issue content of a sentence with *only* is the negation of elements that are co-oriented with the prejacent of *only*, (ii) negating elements co-oriented with the prejacent reverses their orientation, and (iii) the overall orientation of an utterance is evaluated only relative to its at-issue content, it follows that the orientation of an example like (1a) is the opposite of that of its prejacent: *only* has a reversal effect.

2.2   The adversative meaning

In its adversative usage, the meaning of *only* resembles that of a connective like English *but*: (1b) and (4) are close synonyms.

(4)   Quinton is really nice, but they're a little socially awkward.

From an argumentative point of view, adversatives are analyzed as marking an *argumentative opposition* between two discourse segments (e.g. the two conjuncts of a connective). Two segments A and B are in argumentative opposition if there is an argumentative goal G such that A is an argument for G, and B is an argument against it, i.e. B argues for $\neg G$ (Anscombre and Ducrot 1977, Winterstein 2012b). We call such an argumentative goal the *pivot* of the adversative.

In line with Grice's original assumptions, and with much of the literature on the topic (pace Potts (2005)), we take this constraint on argumentative opposition to be conveyed by a conventional implicature carried by the adversative connective. As explained above,

this CI content bears on the argumentative orientation of the segments connected by the adversative, determined in turn by the at-issue content of the segments themselves. The CI content puts constrains on what argumentative orientations are possible in the context of utterance. Specifically, it limits the possible goals to those that can satisfy the opposition marked by the adversative.

One can distinguish different types of adversative markings. Here, we focus on two sub-types of the *denial of expectation* reading of adversatives (Lakoff 1971): direct and indirect opposition cases.[1] Direct opposition cases (also called concessive uses), as in (5), are characterized by the fact that the goal G targeted by the first segment is understood to be the negation of the second segment. In (5), the first conjunct is understood to argue for $G = Quinton\ is\ unhealthy$, grounded in the background understanding that smoking is associated with poor health. The second conjunct negates this conclusion directly, as it entails $\neg G = Quinton\ is\ not\ unhealthy$.

(5)   Quinton smokes, (but / ? only) they're in good health.

As indicated in (5), English *but* can be used to mark direct opposition, while adversative *only* is much less natural here. Both *but* and *only* can, however, be used to mark indirect opposition, as seen in (1b)/(4). These cases are ones in which the goal G argued for by the first segment does not correspond to the negation of the second segment. Instead, the first conjunct, A, is oriented toward some goal G, while the second segment B is oriented toward $\neg G$, with $\neg G$ distinct from the proposition encoded by B. Consider (1b) uttered in a context where we are trying to decide who to invite to a house party. In such a context the first conjunct is readily interpreted as oriented toward the goal $G = Invite\ Quinton$, while the second conjunct is oriented in the opposite direction $\neg G = Don't\ invite\ Quinton$.

Since *only* is incompatible with a direct opposition reading, its use as an adversative in (5) forces an indirect reading that differs from the most natural interpretation of *but* in that example. The interpreter is forced instead to construct an indirect opposition; for example, perhaps we are considering possible recruits for our dragon boat team. In such a context, the first conjunct would argue for leaving Quinton off the team, given that smoking is associated with poor athletic performance, while the second conjunct would argue for including Quinton, since good health has positive correlations with the ability to row well.

On the basis of the above discussion, we propose the following denotation for adversative *only*:

(6) $[\![only_{\text{ADVERSATIVE}}]\!] = \lambda Q.\ \{$
        At-issue: Q
        Non-at-issue (CI): $\exists G \neq \neg Q : P \underset{arg}{\leadsto} G\ \&\ Q \underset{arg}{\leadsto} \neg G\ \}$

According to this denotation, adversative *only* returns its argument Q as at-issue content. Its semantic contribution takes place in a non-at-issue meaning dimension, where it re-

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[1]We do not cover formal contrast cases, which would take us too far astray. For an argumentative analysis of such cases, see Winterstein (2012b).

lies on an anaphoric discourse segment P which it opposes to Q in their orientation to some argumentative goal G. The requirement that this opposition be indirect is encoded by $G \neq \neg Q$. The antecedent segment P is treated as an anaphor rather than as a semantic argument, since sentences beginning with adversative *only* can stand alone as long as they have an appropriate discourse antecedent to which P can be resolved, as seen in the following dialog:

(7)   A: Should we invite Quinton to the party?
        B: Why not? They're super nice.
        A: Yeah, that's true, only they're a little socially awkward don't you think?

The semantics in (6) is not linked in any obvious way with a standard exclusive semantics of *only*: there is no negation of alternatives, and the prejacent is at-issue. Synchronically speaking, there is little to link the semantics of the two kinds of *only*. In the next section, we show how the adversative semantics in (6) might be derived diachronically from a standard exclusive semantics by a process of semantic bleaching and the pragmaticalization of exclusive *only*'s argumentative effects.

3.   Bridging exclusivity and adversativity

Examples like that in (8) are ambiguous between the exclusive and adversative reading, and in turn have opposing argumentative orientations:

(8)   *Context: we are discussing whether to hire Quinton.*
        Quinton's diplomas are genuine, only their driver's license is fake.

The second sentence counts in Quinton's favor if *only* is construed as an exclusive, while it counts against Quinton if *only* is construed as an adversative. In both cases, we have a discourse consisting of two segments, which we label Segment 1 and Segment 2. Segment 1 corresponds in both interpretations to the sentence *Quinton's diplomas are genuine*. When interpreted as an exclusive, *only* is part of Segment 2, whose at-issue content entails that no salient alternatives to Quinton's drivers license (i.e. none of their other documents) are fake. The context here makes it clear that we are deciding whether or not to hire Quinton, abbreviated as H (= *Hire Quinton*) or $\neg H$ (= *Do not hire Quinton*). In the exclusive interpretation, both segments are understood as arguing for H. This follows from the fact that both sentences have at-issue content entailing the genuine status of Quinton's documents, coupled with the background fact that genuine documents are generally understood as points in favor of a job candidate. Moreover, the fact that both sentences are co-oriented follows from the general principle that when adjacent discourse segments are in argumentative opposition, this opposition has to be marked (see a.o. Blakemore and Carston (2005)). In other words, in the absence of marking, segments are assumed to be co-oriented. When *only* is interpreted as an exclusive, there is no discourse connective linking the two segments, and hence the default principle of co-orientation is in effect. This structure is summarized as follows:

(9)   Exclusive *only*:

> •Discourse structure: SEGMENT 1 $\emptyset$ SEGMENT 2
>
> •SEGMENT 1: *Quinton's diplomas are genuine* $\underset{arg}{\rightsquigarrow} H$
>
> •SEGMENT 2: *only their driver's license is fake* $\underset{arg}{\rightsquigarrow} H$
>
> $\Rightarrow$ the two segments are *co-oriented* (a *default* in discourse)

Since the prejacent of the exclusive sentence (i.e. the fact that Quinton's drivers license is fake) is shunted to a non-at-issue meaning dimension, it plays no role in determining the argumentative orientation of the sentence. The at-issue content of Segment 2 is an assertion of the negation of focus alternatives; here, something like "no other relevant documents of Quinton's are fake". This constitutes an argument *in favor* of hiring Quinton, despite the fact that the non-at-issue entailment, "Quinton's driver's license is fake", would, if it were at-issue, be construed as an argument *against* hiring Quinton.

What then of the other reading? We argue that in this reading, the particle is no longer an exclusive, and is no longer focus sensitive. Syntactically and semantically, it functions instead as a discourse connective linking the two segments. This means that the erstwhile prejacent of exclusive *only* is now the at-issue asserted content of the second segment. This content has, as discussed above, the opposite argumentative orientation from the first segment. Since this violates the default of co-orientation of adjacent discourse segments, the contrast needs to be marked. This marking is done by adversative *only*. This structure is summarized as follows:

(10)   Adversative *only*

> •Discourse structure: SEGMENT 1 *only* SEGMENT 2
>
> •SEGMENT 1: *Quinton's diplomas are genuine* $\underset{arg}{\rightsquigarrow} H$
>
> •SEGMENT 2: *Their driver's license is fake* $\underset{arg}{\rightsquigarrow} \neg H$
>
> $\Rightarrow$ the two discourse segments are in *argumentative opposition*, which licenses (or even requires) the use of an *adversative* marker; in the case at hand, the adversative meaning is carried by adversative *only*.

The ambiguity in (8) is both lexical and syntactic. The syntactic difference is made clear by the fact that the adversative reading is only possible when *only* occurs on the left edge of a discourse segment. The semantic difference is made clear from the above discussion, along with the fact that adversative *only* requires an anaphoric antecedent on whose content the contrast is anchored; out of the blue utterances with *only* (utterances without any available discourse antecedent) can only receive the exclusive interpretation.

The meaning components of the two interpretations of (8) are spelled out in (11).

(11)   a. $[\![P \text{ only}_{\text{EXCLUSIVE}} Q]\!] = \{$

        At-issue entailments: $P; \forall Q' \in \text{ALT}(Q) : \neg Q'$

        Non-at-issue entailments: Q (prejacent) $\}$

        Arg. orientations: $P \underset{arg}{\rightsquigarrow} H; \; only \, Q \underset{arg}{\rightsquigarrow} H$

        i.e.: $P \underset{arg}{\rightsquigarrow} H; \quad Q \underset{arg}{\rightsquigarrow} \neg H$

    b. $[\![P \text{ only}_{\text{ADVERSATIVE}} Q]\!] = \{$

        At-issue entailments: $P; Q$

        Non-at-issue entailments: $\exists H : P \underset{arg}{\rightsquigarrow} H \;\&\; Q \underset{arg}{\rightsquigarrow} \neg H \;\}$

We posit the following diachronic bridge linking these two readings: The argumentative orientation of the segment *only Q* in (11a) is aligned with that of *P*. As we argued above, this is not due to any direct meaning component encoding argumentative orientation, but rather follows from general principles of AwL coupled with a standard exclusive semantics of *only*. Crucially, these principles entail that, while *only Q* will be co-oriented with *P* towards *H*, the prejacent *Q* will have the oppositive orientation, towards ¬*H*. As discussed above, the non-at-issue status of the prejacent blocks this latent argumentative orientation from figuring into the argumentative orientation of the utterance as a whole. This latent opposing orientation, we suggest, is the source of the adversative reading of *only*, which we suggest developed from a semantic reanalysis of sentences like the one in (8).

There are two steps involved in this reanalysis. First, the contrasting argumentative orientation of *only*'s prejacent becomes conventionalized. This is a species of pragmaticalization, which following Davis and Gutzmann (2015) is formalized as an encoding of an originally non-conventional meaning component (here, inferences about argumentative orientation) as a non-at-issue entailment. Then the original exclusive semantics of *only* is bleached, so that alternatives are no longer negated and the prejacent is promoted to an at-issue entailment. This bleaching and promotion results in the at-issue semantics in (11b). The semantic bleaching of *only*'s exclusive semantics would, without the attendant pragmaticalization discussed just above, leave *only* without any semantic content, and would in turn result in a sequence of discourse segments with opposing argumentative orientations. This would in turn violate the default principle of co-orientation; such violations require explicit marking by an adversative connective. This function is assigned to *only*, so that *only* is assigned both a new syntactic status (as a discourse connective) and a new semantics (entailing an argumentative contrast between the segment to which it attaches and to some anaphoric segment, here the immediately preceding discourse segment). We assume this possibility is tied to the fact that in bridge cases like (8), *only* appears in a syntactic position that is compatible with its reanalysis as a connective.

To summarize, we think synchronically ambiguous sentences like that in (8) are a diachronic bridge linking exclusive *only* with adversative *only*. Since exclusive *only* has a prejacent whose orientation is in opposition to that of its at-issue content, and since consecutive discourse segments are required by default to be co-oriented, it follows that the prejacent of *only* will have the opposite orientation from that of the first discourse segment. Exclusive *only* in such sentences can appear at the left edge of the second discourse seg-

ment, which is also the place where adversative connectives appear to mark non-co-aligned (contrasting) discourse segments. These two facts, one semantic/pragmatic, the other syntactic, feed the reanalysis detailed above, leading to a new lexical item that marks a contrast in the orientation of two discourse segments. We think that similar routes leading from exclusivity to adversativity are regularly traversed, leading to the cross-linguistic tendency for exclusives to be used as adversative connectives.

The proposed analysis also accounts for the observation that adversative *only* is only compatible with indirect opposition readings (cf. section 2.2). Direct opposition characterizes discourses of the form "*A* CONN *B*" where CONN is an adversative connective and *A* argues towards ¬*B*. Under the proposed analysis, a functional bridge case would mean that a segment of the form "*only B*" argues against *B* itself, e.g. *only his driving license is fake* should be an argument in favor of *his driving license is not fake*. But given that the exclusive reading presupposes its prejacent there is an informational clash: an utterance cannot argue against a proposition it entails. Bridge cases are thus not compatible with direct opposition, which explains why adversative *only* can only mark indirect oppositions.

4.   Conclusion

We conclude with a brief comparison between the account of adversative *only* sketched above with an alternative proposal by von Fintel and Iatridou (2019), who give the following example and paraphrase giving the gist of their account:

(12)   He's a very nice man, only he talks too much.
        ↝ The only limitation/exception to his niceness is that he talks too much.

The core idea in their account is that adversative *only* operates on propositions or possibly speech acts, and "states that its prejacent is the only limitation/exception/relevant rejoinder to the first "conjunct"". Under this account, the basic function of exclusive *only*, which is to negate alternatives to the prejacent, is preserved in its use as an adversative connective. As von Fintel and Iatridou themselves note, this account leaves unexplained the fact that adversative *only* seems not to be focus sensitive, and that the prejacent seems to be an at-issue entailment, unlike in its standard uses as an exclusive.

The at-issue status of the prejacent for adversative *only* is, in our account, a key component in explaining the contrast in argumentative orientation between adversative and exclusive *only*, as explained in detail above. But under our account, adversative *only* does not involve the negation of any alternatives to its prejacent. This contrasts with the account of von Fintel and Iatridou, under which adversative *only* entails its prejacent and also entails that this is the only relevant "exception". This raises two issues. First, it is unclear in von Fintel and Iatridou's account what the predicted argumentative orientation of adversative *only* should be, given that it entails both the prejacent and relevant alternatives to the prejacent as part of its at-issue content. Moreover, the following contrast seems to show that adversative *only* is not semantically exclusive in the way that exclusive *only* is:

(13)   a.   Exclusive *only*:
         Ai's research output is very narrow; she only writes about Sartre (#, not to mention de Beauvoir).
   b.   Adversative *only*:
         I would say that Bert is a typical analytic philosopher, only he seems to have a soft spot for Sartre (, not to mention de Beauvoir).

As seen in (13a), exclusive *only* is incompatible with additional exceptions introduced by a *not to mention* phrase. In the example at hand, *only* is associated with *Sartre*, entailing the negation of relevant alternatives. Since *de Beauvoir* is readily understood as a relevant alternative, the *not to mention* phrase results in a contradiction, and hence infelicity.

Adversative *only* is, as shown in (13b), much more liberal in this respect. Here, following von Fintel and Iatridou, the second sentence should mean something like "the only relevant exception to Bert's exhibiting the typical characteristics of an analytic philosopher is his fondness for Sartre". But if fondness for Sartre is taken as atypical for an analytic philosopher, then a fondness for de Beauvoir surely does as well. And yet the *not to mention* phrase can be used felicitously. The contrast in (13) falls out immediately under our account, since adversative *only* involves no exclusive semantics at all. The contrast is unexpected under the the account of von Fintel and Iatridou.

An additional problem for von Fintel and Iatridou's account is the fact that adversative *only* is anaphoric in a way that exclusive *only* is not. In our account, this is due to a non-at-issue lexical semantics that contrasts the prejacent proposition (or discourse segment) with an anaphoric one – the result is infelicity in cases where no appropriate anaphor can be resolved. Exclusive *only* has no such anaphoric component, and indeed no conventional meaning component expressing contrast at all.

One upshot of the comparison of these accounts is in how the two accounts seek to unify the two uses of *only*. The account of von Fintel and Iatridou seems aimed at reducing the adversative to a sub-type of exclusive, presumably in such a way that they can be seen as synchronically linked via a core exclusive semantics. Our own account links the two items diachronically, but gives them each a very different synchronic semantics. The above considerations are, we think, evidence in favor of the diachronic account.

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