

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND ITS USE

Focus uses II

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FOCUS USES

- Question–answer congruence (discourse coherence and organization); pragmatic use
- Contribution to semantic meaning via so-called focus-sensitive particles or constructions.
 - quantificational adverbs and modals
 - exclusive (*only*)
 - additive (*also*)
 - scalar (*even*)

ADDITIVE ALSO

(1) Jane **also** gave a **BOOK** to Sue.

a. Jane gave a book to Sue.

ENTAILMENT

b. Jane gave something else to Sue.

ENTAILMENT/PRESUPPOSITION

(2) Jane **also** gave a book to **SUE**.

a. Jane gave a book to Sue.

ENTAILMENT

b. Jane gave a book to somebody else.

ENTAILMENT/PRESUPPOSITION

ADDITIVE ALSO: FACTORING IN ALTERNATIVES

Deriving the additive presupposition from the alternatives:

(3) Jane **also** gave a **BOOK** to Sue.

a. Jane gave a book to Sue.

ENTAILMENT

b. {Jane gave a **book** to Sue, Jane gave a **necklace** to Sue, Jane gave a **car** to Sue, ...}

ALTERNATIVES

c. Jane gave a book to Sue and
Jane gave a necklace to Sue **or**
Jane gave a car to Sue **or** ...

ENTAILMENT/PRESUPPOSITION

→ Also gives rise to the presupposition that at least one of the alternatives (at least = *or*) other than the asserted one is true.

ADDITIVE ALSO: FACTORING IN ALTERNATIVES

Deriving the additive presupposition from the alternatives:

(4) Jane **also** gave a book to SUE.

a. Jane gave a book to Sue.

ENTAILMENT

b. {Jane gave a book to Sue, Jane gave a book to Mary, Jane gave a book to Lisa, ...}

ALTERNATIVES

c. Jane gave a book to Sue and
Jane gave a book to Mary **or**
Jane gave a book to Lisa **or** ...

ENTAILMENT/PRESUPPOSITION

→ Also gives rise to the presupposition that at least one of the alternatives (at least = *or*) other than the asserted one is true.

→ Again, the position of prosodic prominence changes the focus alternatives and consequently it affects the semantic meaning of the sentence.

SCALAR EVEN

Consider the following examples. Which ones are easier to find a context for? Why?

- (5) a. Jane **even** speaks **MACEDONIAN**.
b. Jane **even** speaks **ENGLISH**.
- (6) a. **Even** **JANE** speaks Macedonian.
b. **Even** **JANE** speaks English.

SCALAR EVEN

- (7) a. Jane **even** speaks **MACEDONIAN**.
- (i) Jane speaks Macedonian. ENTAILMENT
 - (ii) It is unlikely for Jane/somebody to speak Macedonian. PRESUPPOSITION
- b. Jane **even** speaks **ENGLISH**.
- (i) Jane speaks English. ENTAILMENT
 - (ii) It is unlikely for Jane/somebody to speak English. PRESUPPOSITION

What are the entailments and likelihood presuppositions/implicatures for (8)?

- (8) a. **Even JANE** speaks Macedonian.
- b. **Even JANE** speaks English.

Wilkinson 1996; Greenberg 2018

SCALAR EVEN: FACTORING IN ALTERNATIVES AND SCALES

- (9) a. Jane **even** speaks **MACEDONIAN**.
- (i) {Jane speaks **Bulgarian**, Jane speaks **English**, Jane speaks **German**, Jane speaks **Macedonian**, ...} ALTERNATIVES
- (ii) Jane speaks Macedonian < Jane speaks Bulgarian < Jane speaks German < Jane speaks English LIKELIHOOD
- b. #Jane **even** speaks **ENGLISH**.
- (i) {Jane speaks **Bulgarian**, Jane speaks **English**, Jane speaks **German**, Jane speaks **Macedonian**, ...} ALTERNATIVES
- (ii) #Jane speaks English < Jane speaks Macedonian < Jane speaks German < Jane speaks Bulgarian LIKELIHOOD

- *Even* imposes a likelihood scale on the focus alternatives: in (9a) Macedonian is **the least likely** language for Jane to speak (among the relevant competitors).
- (9b) sounds odd because it is hard to find a context where English is an unlikely language for Jane (or, in fact anybody) to speak.

SCALAR EVEN: FACTORING IN ALTERNATIVES AND SCALES

(10) a. **Even** JANE speaks Macedonian.

(i) {Dave speaks Macedonian, Jane speaks Macedonian, Lisa speaks Macedonian, ...} ALTERNATIVES

(ii) Jane speaks Macedonian < Dave speaks Macedonian < Lisa speaks Macedonian LIKELIHOOD

b. **Even** JANE speaks English.

(i) {Dave speaks English, Jane speaks English, Lisa speaks English, ...} ALTERNATIVES

(ii) Jane speaks English < Dave speaks English < Lisa speaks English LIKELIHOOD

→ *Even* imposes a likelihood scale on the focus alternatives: Jane is **the least likely** person (among the relevant competitors) to speak Macedonian/English.

→ (10a) sounds a bit odd because it raises the expectation (implicature) that there are people for whom it is likely to speak Macedonian.

SCALAR EVEN VS. SCALAR ONLY

Also *only* can exhibit scalar behavior, though it implies that the asserted alternative is at the other extreme of the scale, as compared to *even*:

(11) Jane is **even** {a professor / #a student}.

being a professor < being a student

LOW LIKELIHOOD

(12) Jane is **only** {#a professor / a student}.

being a student > being a professor

HIGH LIKELIHOOD

→ *Even* implies that the asserted alternative is the least likely one among the relevant alternatives.

→ *Scalar only* implies that the asserted alternative is the most likely one among the relevant alternatives.

INTERIM SUMMARY

- Focus is sometimes used for “semantic” purposes; i.e., it can affect the truth-conditions and semantic presuppositions of sentences.
- This happens in tandem with so-called focus-sensitive particles, such as *only*, *also*, or *even*.
- Typically, these particles leave the semantics of the sentence intact, but add additional meanings, which are – crucially – computed based on the focus alternatives (which are in turn encoded by prosodic focus).

READING TIPS

- Krifka, Manfred. 1998. Additive particles under stress. In Devon Strolovitch and Aaron Lawson (eds.), *SALT 8: Proceedings from the 8th Conference on Semantics and Linguistic Theory*, 111–128. Ithaca, NY: CLC Publications. <https://doi.org/10.3765/salt.v8io.2799>
- Greenberg, Yael. 2018. A revised, gradability-based semantics for *even*. *Natural Language Semantics* 26(1), 51–83. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11050-017-9140-0>

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- Wilkinson, Karina. 1996. The scope of *even*. *Natural Language Semantics* 4(3). 193–215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00372819>.