Is ‘only’ special?

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‘Only’

(1) Only John went to the party.

    ▼ John went to the party.
    ▼ Nobody else went to the party.

(2) Not only John went to the party.

    ▼ John went to the party.
    ▼ Someone else went to the party.

Does ‘only ϕ’ presuppose that ϕ (i.e., the prejacent)?
The prejacent does not always project:

(3) If John stopped smoking, Mary will be relieved.
    ~\(\rightarrow\) John used to smoke.

(4) If only John went to the party, Mary will be disappointed.
    ~\(\sim\) John went to the party.
Is ‘only’ special in this respect?

(5) If John managed to open the jar, Mary will be happy.

\[ \sim \text{John tried to open the jar.} \]

(6) If John finds out that Mary has been playing games, he will be furious.

\[ \sim \text{Mary has been playing games.} \]
Questions

Questions cannot be answered by presupposed information:

(7) A: How is the weather?
    B: # Mary realized that it is raining.

(8) A: Who went to the party?
    B: Only John went to the party.

But...

(9) A: Who passed the exam?
    B: I found out that John passed the exam.
Questions cannot be answered by presupposed information:

(7) A: How is the weather?
    B: # Mary realized that it is raining.

(8) A: Who went to the party?
    B: Only John went to the party.

But…

(9) A: Who passed the exam?
    B: I found out that John passed the exam.
Sometimes the prejacent is clearly not presupposed:

(10) This isn’t only a “shoot ’em up” pointless movie.

\(\neg\) This is a “shoot ’em up” pointless movie.

These examples have a metalinguistic flavor:

(11) A: This is only a “shoot ’em up” pointless movie.

B: This isn’t ‘only a “shoot ’em up” pointless movie.’

\(\neg\) This is a “shoot ’em up” pointless movie.
Sometimes the prejacent is clearly not presupposed:

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    B: This isn’t ‘only a “shoot ’em up” pointless movie.’
    \(\not\rightarrow\) This is a “shoot ’em up” pointless movie.
Experimental evidence

Beaver and Clark (2008):

- If ‘\(\varphi\)’ presupposes that \(\psi\), then individuals that are not in \([\psi]\) are not in \([\varphi]\) either.
- So if ‘only \(\varphi\)’ presupposes that \(\varphi\), then individuals that are not in \([\varphi]\) are not in \([\text{only } \varphi]\) either.
Tequila test: Only

Scenario:
One year, there were 90 students in Arroyo.

30 drank Tequila and nothing else.
30 drank EANABs and nothing else.
30 drank everything, no matter what.

How many Arroyans didn’t drink only Tequila?

a. 30
b. 60
c. Don’t know. (If possible please explain.)
d. Maybe a Tequila would help me figure this out.
Tequila test: Only

Scenario:
One year, there were 90 students in Arroyo.

- 30 drank Tequila and nothing else.
- 30 drank EANABs and nothing else.
- 30 drank everything, no matter what.

How many Arroyans didn’t drink only Tequila?

a. 30
b. 60
c. Don’t know. (If possible please explain.)
d. Maybe a Tequila would help me figure this out.
Scenario: After the party in (3), 30 students who were found in possession of alcohol were threatened with Minor in Possession charges. Although all charges were dropped, and although everyone else left the party happy, these 30 students came to regret having been drinking Margaritas.

How many students didn’t regret drinking Margaritas?

a. 30
b. 60
c. Don’t know. (If possible please explain.)
Scenario: After the party in (3), 30 students who were found in possession of alcohol were threatened with Minor in Possession charges. Although all charges were dropped, and although everyone else left the party happy, these 30 students came to regret having been drinking Margaritas.

How many students didn’t regret drinking Margaritas?

a. 30
b. 60
c. Don’t know. (If possible please explain.)
Results:

- For ‘only’, a majority of the participants (76%) opted for ‘60’.
- For ‘stop’ (23%), ‘realize’ (0%), ‘their’ (23%) and ‘regret’ (31%) these rates are much lower.
- The prejacent does not project out of negation.

Conclusion: ‘Only ϕ’ does not presuppose that ϕ.
Concerns:

- Are these results robust crosslinguistically?
- The selection of other presupposition triggers was limited.
- There were methodological differences between the experiment for ‘only’ and other presupposition triggers.
- The experiments involved few participants.
- Numbers are difficult to process.

Do B&C’s results survive a more stringent experimental setting?
Improvements:

- An investigation into Dutch, English and French.
- A wide variety of presupposition triggers was included.
- The experimental design was the same for all triggers.
- Significantly more participants were involved.
- The stories involved names instead of numbers.
Design

Participants

31 Dutch participants
30 French participants
25 English participants

Material

Targets involving...

Focus particles (e.g., ‘only’, ‘also’)
Factivs (e.g., ‘know’, ‘regret’)
Implicatives (e.g., ‘manage’, ‘succeed’)
Aspectuals (e.g., ‘stop’, ‘start’)
Definites (e.g., ‘the’, ‘all’)

Fillers involving quantifiers.

Pseudo-randomization into at least 20 lists.

Procedure

Participants had to indicate whether someone who falsifies the presupposition is included in the complement of the trigger.

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Is ‘only’ special?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Factive</th>
<th>Definite</th>
<th>Aspectual</th>
<th>Implicative</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dutch</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>English</strong></td>
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<td>only</td>
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<tr>
<td>de nouveau</td>
<td>regretter</td>
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Example: Only

Scenario:
Three people were in the cafeteria
   A drank orange juice and nothing else
   B drank coffee and nothing else
   C drank orange juice and coffee

Who didn’t drink only orange juice?
   a. C
   b. C and B
   c. Don’t know
Scenario:
Three people were asked a question
   A thought she gave the right answer but didn’t
   B didn’t give an answer
   C thought she gave the right answer but found out it was wrong

Who didn’t realize she gave the wrong answer?

a. C
b. C and B
c. Don’t know
Results: English

Is ‘only’ special?

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Results: Dutch

Is ‘only’ special? 18 / 37
Results: French

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<th>Percentage</th>
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Is ‘only’ special?
Results: Categories by language

Dutch

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French

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- C
- C and B
- I don’t know
Clustering for Dutch

Dutch w.r.t. ONE (pvclust)

Is ‘only’ special?
Clustering for French

French w.r.t. ONE (pvclust)

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Is ‘only’ special?
Clustering for English

English w.r.t. ONE (pvclust)

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Is ‘only’ special?
Main results: English

- Proportion of ‘only C’ answers as a function of categories.
- Post-hoc contrasts on a mixed logistic regression.
  - factives $\neq$ aspectuals, definites, implicatives, only.
  - focus $\neq$ aspectuals, definites, implicatives, only.
  - implicatives $\neq$ definites.
Main results: English

- The results for English ‘only’ (68% ‘C and B’ answers) mirror those found by B&C (76%).
- So the methodological changes do not affect the results.
- ‘Only’ does not behave significantly different from aspectuals, definites or implicatives.

**Conclusion**: If the frequency of ‘C and B’ answers implies that ‘only ϕ’ does not presuppose that ϕ, then it follows that aspectuals, definites and implicative do not have their standardly assumed presuppositions either.
Main results: Dutch and French

- The results for ‘alleen’ and ‘seulement’ (13% ‘C and B’ answers) differ significantly from those found by B&C.
- Post-hoc contrasts on logistic regression (proportion of ‘only C’ by language): Dutch and French not different, both are different from English.
- ‘Alleen’ and ‘seulement’ do not behave differently from other focus particles.
- ‘C and B’ answers are much more frequent for other presupposition triggers (see previous barcharts).
A linguistic confound?

**Hypothesis:** The frequency of ‘C and B’ answers is somehow related to the phrasing of the answers.

**Pictorial task:**
- 25 English participants.
- 1 target item involving ‘only’.
- 5 target items involving quantifiers and connectives.
- Pseudo-randomization into 19 lists.
- Participants had to answer a question by ticking any combination of boxes.
Who does not have only an apple?
Results:

- Again, ‘C and B’ was chosen most frequently (72%).
- The results are not influenced by...
  - the selection of possible answers.
  - the linguistic form of possible answers.

**Conclusion:** The results of the experiment are robust across methodological variation.
Beaver & Clark:

*In other words, if the presupposition for exclusives is weaker than that for standard presupposition triggers, we should expect more respondents in the survey to give the answer 60 for the questions involving exclusives than for those involving standard presupposition triggers. And this is exactly what we find. It seems plausible then that the pragmatic presupposition of the prejacent affects how the exclusive sentence is to be slotted coherently into a wider discourse, but need not have a strong effect on deciding who to count.*

The results of the experiment provide no evidence for a scalar account.
Is the Tequila test in principle a good method to test for presuppositionhood?

- How are the results to be interpreted? ‘φ’ presupposes that ψ if...
  - ‘C’ answers are more frequent than ‘C and B’ answers?
  - The rate of ‘C’ answers is higher than some cut-off point?
- Is there a gradual notion of presupposition strength?

As it stands, it is unclear what exactly the Tequila test tells us.
Different triggers lead to different results.

- Are items that falsify the presupposition included in the complement of the trigger?
  - No (‘anymore’, ‘again’)
  - Ambivalence (‘stop’, ‘the’)
  - Yes (‘succeed’, ‘manage’)

- What governs these differences?
What is the question under discussion?

(12) Who did not go to Australia again?
    ↠ Who went once but did not return?
    ↠ Who did not go to Australia?

(13) Who did not stop smoking?
    ↠ Who is in the habit of smoking?
    ↠ Who did not attempt to quit smoking?

(14) Who did not manage to pass the exam?
    ↠ Who tried to pass the exam but did not succeed?
    ↠ Who did not pass the exam?

How plausible are these as QUDs?
Why does ‘only’ behave different from ‘alleen’ and ‘seulement’?

- There is an overall preference for ‘C and B’ answers in the English experiment compared to Dutch and French.
- ‘Alleen’ and ‘seulement’ group with other focus particles. ‘Only’ does not.
- Scalarity is not the explanation: ‘Seulement’ and ‘only’ are scalar, ‘alleen’ is not.
Conclusions:

- B&C’s Tequila Test does not demonstrate that ‘only $\varphi$’ does not presuppose that $\varphi$.
  - ‘Only’ patterns with other triggers like ‘manage’ and ‘the’.
  - ‘Seulement’ and ‘alleen’ do pattern with other focus particles.

- Does the remaining evidence against the prejacent theory stand up to closer experimental scrutiny?

- Can different explanations of ‘only’ be tested more directly?
Thank you
Results: triggers by language

Dutch

French

English

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C
C and B
I don’t know