

Tracing the sources of “focus” particles in two T-B/TH languages

Pavel Ozerov

Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Martin Buber Society of Fellows

pavel.ozerov@mail.huji.ac.il

Outline

- Background
 - from Information Structure to interactional management of information
 - “Focus particles”
 - Languages discussed
- Case studies:
 1. ‘only’ in Anal
 2. ‘only’ Burmese
- Conclusions

Outline

- Background
 - from Information Structure to interactional structuring of information
 - “Focus particles”
 - Languages discussed
- Case studies:
 1. ‘only’ in Anal
 2. ‘only’ Burmese
- Conclusions

Theoretical background: Classical view of Information Structure

- Common Ground (=information shared by interlocutors).
- Information update
 - Ultimate goal of communication
- Top-down categories of Information Structure
 - Topic, Presupposition, Focus
 - role of information in this process (e.g. presupposed, updating...)
 - High-Level cognitive categories
 - Instantiated/expressed in different languages

Theoretical background

- Communication: **inter**-personal **inter**-action.
- Utterances have *many* goals
 - update, stance-sharing, attention-drawing, influencing the addressee...

Theoretical background

- Different devices combine to indicate the contribution of message
 - status of information, e.g. authority (e.g. evidential and egophoricity markers)
 - counter-expectation
 - stance, involvement
 - diverse means of engagement
- Bottom-up categories of information management
- Low-level instructions of discourse organisation, information processing, access to information, expectation management, stance alignment etc.
- Top-down Information Structural categories?
 - gloss over the actual categories employed
 - Interpretational by-products of the bottom-up categories

(Hopper and Thompson 2008, Wedgwood 2009, Matic and Wedgwood 2013, Ozerov 2015, under review, Grzech 2017)

Outline

- Background
 - from Information Structure to interactional structuring of information
 - “Focus particles”
 - Languages discussed
- Case studies:
 1. ‘only’ in Anal
 2. ‘only’ Burmese
- Conclusions

Exclusive focus particles ('only')

Classical view

- Horn 1969; Rooth 1985, 1992; Beaver and Clark 2003, 2008; Roberts 2011...
- Exclude contextually relevant alternatives to the focal element.

John only invited [Mary]_F

- Focus particles/operators (Beaver & Clark 2008)
- Scalar
 - weakens salient stronger expectations, “mirative” (surprise) (Zeevat 2009, Beaver and Clark 2008:252)

Exclusive focus particles ('only')

Classical view

- Assuming focus-related semantics – elicitation in other languages
(Renans et al. 2011, Hole 2008, van der Wal 2016)
- Top-down approach: focus particles cross-linguistically

Tracing the semantics of ‘focus’ particles

Bottom-up

- The effect of ‘only’: constellation of peculiar functions
 - “focus” (contrast, update, importance)
 - edge-interpretations
 - surprise
- Which devices can trigger these effects?
- Elicitation identifies a particle Z...

Tracing the semantics of 'exclusive' particles

Bottom-up



- Primary function/meaning of Z?
 - Examine Z across its different naturally attested occurrences
 - Identify the stable meaning/function across the data
- Source of 'focus'-like interpretations (contrast, importance...)
- Source of the exclusive reading?

Outline

- Background
 - from Information Structure to interactional structuring of information
 - “Focus particles”
 - Languages discussed
- Case studies:
 1. ‘only’ in Anal
 2. ‘only’ Burmese
- Conclusions

Two Tibeto-Burman/Trans-Himalayan languages

- Anal
 - 20,000 speakers; Manipur, North-East India
 - Kuki-Chin (South-Central) branch, North-Western group
 - Data: natural conversations and narratives (own fieldwork since 2015)
- Burmese
 - Corpus of written colloquial language
 - Radio and TV interviews

Two case studies

- Anal *pán* ‘only’
 - ‘*exactly, precisely*’
 - not focal, no alternatives
 - potential exclusive-focal reading
 - pragmatics
 - para-linguistic
- Burmese *pè* ‘only’
 - interactional device: ‘*think deeper!*’
 - exclusiveness – ambiguous

Outline

- Background
 - from Information Structure to interactional structuring of information
 - “Focus particles”
 - Languages discussed
- **Case studies:**
 1. ‘only’ in Anal
 2. ‘only’ Burmese
- Conclusions

‘only’(?) in Anal

‘only’ – *pán*



*va-nù = rǔ: = **pán*** *he* *i-ám-tçà-và-jè-ràmo*
3-mother = with = **PRT** this NMLZ-be-POL-COP-PL-DUB
‘He probably lived **only** with his mother.’
(anm_20160227_Thumhring_Thangwar_2 4)

pán – ‘precisely, exactly’



kà-ínpú *unsá?* *kà-nà-lò-tún* = *pán*

1-husband love 1-DIR-feel.love-way = **PRT**

kà-pədùn-dó:-tçè-màn

1-think-away-HAB-PROG

‘I think it is **exactly** the way I love my husband.’ (anm_20151123_Solhring_PO_Mithun)

pán – focal?

‘If the wind blew, the lump of mud covered the fallen leaf.’

atà = *pán* = *tú* *k^hú rá-nǐ* = *tè...*

like.that = **PRT** = **TOP** rain rain.V-3.COND = if

‘And **similarly** (lit: **and exactly like that**) if it rained... (the leaf covered the lump of mud).’ (anm_20160221_Pethun_1_Folk story 15)

Meaning of *pán*

- ‘Exactly, precisely, as much as’
 - *not* necessarily focal
 - *not* related to sets of alternatives
 - *not* scalar, *not* mirative
- ‘Exactly’ – pragmatically non-trivial

Iconic prosody

- Common in North-East Indian languages
- Expressions of stance, Interjections...
- Expressions of excessive ('all') or surprisingly small amount
- Engaging, calling for stance alignment
- **Very high pitch**, length



na-nù *mî-t^hùm = páŋ* *nà-:-má-hín-nù*
INCL-mother person-three = **PRT** INCL-NON.AG-leave-PL-PAST
'Our mother left behind **only the three of us.**'
(anm_20160220_Thumri_PO_1 12'17")

Tracing the semantics of 'exclusive' particles

Bottom-up



- Primary function/meaning of Z?
 - Identify the stable meaning/function across the data
 - ✓ *precisely, exactly*
- Source of 'focus'-like interpretations (contrast, importance...)
 - ✓ Pragmatics
 - ✓ Non-triviality of information
 - ✓ Stance (Para-linguistic prosody)
- Source of the exclusive reading?
 - ✓ The lexical meaning

Outline

- Background
 - from Information Structure to interactional structuring of information
 - “Focus particles”
 - Languages discussed
- Case studies:
 1. ‘only’ in Anal
 2. ‘only’ Burmese
- Conclusions

Burmese *pɛ̀* ‘only (?)’

- Exclusive

nĩ-ḳa = *pɛ̀* *pjə̀-ne-tɛ̀*

2-SBJ = **EMPH** say-CONT-R

Elicited from Engl. ‘**Only YOU** are speaking.’ (cf. Zimmermann & Hole 2011)

- “just, only” (Okell and Allott 2001:121)

NLD-ḳo = *pɛ̀* *mè-pè-tɕĩ-tɛ̀*

NLD-OBJ = EMPH vote-give-want-R

‘They want to vote **only for NLD.**’ (UTO 234)

- but also “special emphasis, even...”

Burmese *pɛ̀* ‘only (?)’

- Contrast, narrow focus

di.ṃa = *pɛ̀* *tʰãi-ne-mɛ*

here = **EMPH** sit-PROG-IRR

‘I’ll be sitting HERE.’ (Sa Oo).

- Best candidate for *identificational* focus (cleft-like, contrastive-exhaustive interpretation)?

Burmese *pè*

I think to myself:

θe-θwà = jĩ

die-go = when

bε-lo

what-like

p^hjiʔ-m̄a = l̄è

be-IRR.NMLZ = Q

‘When I die, what will become of me?’

θajè

ghost

p^hjiʔ-m̄a = là

be-IRR = Y.N.Q

‘Will I become a Thaye ghost?’

tase

ghost

p^hjiʔ-m̄a = là

be-IRR = Y.N.Q

Will I become a Tase ghost?’

pjetta = *pè*

ghost = **EMPH**

p^hjiʔ-m̄a = là

be-IRR = Y.N.Q

‘Will I become a *Preta* ghost?’ (Blog 3)

- Preta – “the hungry ghost” – the worst fate in the Buddhist reincarnation cycle.

Burmese *pɛ̀*

- Consider:
 - What you know about the *pɛ̀*-marked item
 - Its role in communicated message
- *It is **this** one!*
- “*Think deeper!*”
 - Extra-effort → extra-benefit

There is a fox, a fox in the garden

“The hearer... is being encouraged to dig deeper into his encyclopaedic entry for ‘fox’, with a guarantee that extra-processing effort will be outweighed by a gain in contextual effect” (Sperber and Wilson 1996:219)

Burmese *pɛ̀*

- “Emphatic” identification – *this particular ...* (König 1991:Ch.6.1)

di-lɛʔ-kāi-p^hõu-twe-ko = *pɛ̀*

this-hand-hold-phone-PL-OBJ = **EMPH**

nɛ-tāi

day-each

s^hɛʔ.θwɛ-ne-jɑ-ta

call-CONT-NVL-R.NMLZ

‘Every day they use *mobile phones* for communication.’ (Blog 1)

- **Not exclusive!** No contrast
- Cultural exceptionality

Tracing the semantics of ‘exclusive’ particles

Bottom-up



- Primary function/meaning of Z?
 - Examine Z across its different naturally attested occurrences
 - ✓ *Think deeper!*
- Source of ‘focus’-like interpretations (contrast, importance...)
 - ✓ The interactional function is related epiphenomenally
- Source of the exclusive reading?
 - ✓ Ambiguous; inferred from “emphatic identification”

Outline

- Background
 - from Information Structure to interactional structuring of information
 - “Focus particles”
 - Languages discussed
- Case studies:
 1. ‘only’ in Anal
 2. ‘only’ Burmese
 3. ‘even’ in Burmese
- Conclusions

Reminder

- Different devices combine to indicate the contribution of message
 - status of information, e.g. authority (e.g. evidential and egophoricity markers)
 - counter-expectation
 - stance, involvement
 - diverse means of engagement (e.g. paralinguistic devices)
- Bottom-up categories
- Top-down categories?
 - Interpretive by-products

Conclusions

- Focus markers?
- Scale, alternatives?
- Elicitation of focus-semantics (Renans et al. 2011)?
- Focus-diagnosing tests (van der Wal 2016)?

Conclusions

- Case-studies of information managing devices
 - and their mini-typology
 - Sources of “exclusive” reading
 - Sources of scalar/edge reading
 - Sources for “focal” effects, “mirativity” (surprise)...

Conclusions: Anal ‘only’

- Exclusiveness – lexical meaning: *precisely*
 - unrelated to focus
 - unrelated to interaction/mirativity
- Focus-like contribution:
 - contextual, other devices (constituent order, prosody...)
 - paralinguistic marking – stance alignment

Conclusions: Burmese 'only'

- Intersubjective marker; interactional communication management
 - *Think deeper!*
- Related to focus, but...
 - specific, different category
 - interactional
- Exclusiveness – ambiguous effect

Conclusions

- Bottom-up approach:
 - Multifaceted information management by interplay of heterogeneous categories
 - Do not map on pre-empirical categories such as 'exclusive' or 'focus'.
 - IS-categories are roughly delineable pragmatic outcomes of the actual categories used.

References

- Ariel, Mira. 2008. *Pragmatics and Grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beaver, David, and Brady Z. Clark. 2008. *Sense and Sensitivity: How Focus Determines Meaning*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hole, Daniel. 2008. "EVEN, ALSO and ONLY in Vietnamese." In , edited by Shinichiro Ishihara, Svetlana Petrova, and Anne Schwarz, 1–54. Working Papers of the SFB632 8. Potsdam: Universität Potsdam. <http://opus.kobv.de/ubp/volltexte/2008/2217/>.
- Hole, Daniel, and Malte Zimmermann. 2013. "Cleft Partitionings in Japanese, Burmese and Chinese." In *Cleft Structures*, edited by Katharina Hartmann and Tonjes Veenstra, 285–318. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Horn, L. R. 1969. 'A presuppositional analysis of only and even'. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society* 5: 97–108.
- König, Ekkehard. 1991. *The Meaning of Focus Particles: A Comparative Perspective*. Theoretical Linguistics. London: Routledge.
- Renans, Agata, Malte Zimmermann, and Markus Greif. 2011. *Questionnaire on Focus Semantics*. 2nd ed. Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam.
- Roberts, Craige (2011) "only: A Case Study In Projective Meaning," *Baltic International Yearbook of Cognition, Logic and Communication*: Vol. 6
- Rooth, Mats. 1985. "Association with Focus." PhD Thesis, Amherst: University of Massachusetts.
- . 1992. "A Theory of Focus Interpretation." *Natural Language Semantics* 1 (1): 75–116. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02342617>.
- Sperber, Dan, and Deirdre Wilson. 1996. *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. 2nd. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- van der Wal, Jenneke. 2016. "Diagnosing Focus." *Studies in Language. International Journal Sponsored by the Foundation "Foundations of Language"* 40 (2): 259–301
- Zeevat, Henk. 2009. "'Only' as a Mirative Particle." In *Focus at the Syntax-Semantics Interface*, edited by Arndt Riester and Edgar Onea, 3:121–40. Working Working Papers of the SFB 732. Stuttgart: University of Stuttgart.



Ahman pā kaning!

ကျေးဇူး တင်ပါတယ်။