Syntax and Semantics of Temporal 'Only'

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Abstract: *Among the scalar usages of only, there is one that has a temporal dimension. In Caroline only understood the problem on Monday, for instance, Monday is considered late for understanding the problem. In this paper, we explore the syntax and semantics of temporal only. We mainly look at its Dutch counterpart, pas, which is formally distinct from both exclusive and non- temporal scalar only. We concentrate on two core issues.*

Keywords: *temporal syntaxemes, language, method, issue, model.*

The first originates in the observation that temporal *only* systematically supports two modes of interpretation, a purely temporal one and a lack-of-progress reading. The latter is found in an example like *Billy has only read three books* (*so far*), which implies that three is a low number of books for Billy to have read at the reference time. The second issue concerns 'Barbiers's Generalization', the requirement that temporal *only* immediately c-command the category it interacts with. We propose a semantic analysis that captures the full set of data, building on previous work by König (1979, 1981) and Klinedinst (2004), among others.

The focus particle *only* permits at least three readings. Perhaps the most common one is the exclusive reading (see Horn 1969, Rooth 1985, König 1991, among others). On this reading, (1a) means that Susan invited Mary and no one else. *Only* can also have a scalar reading, as discussed in detail in Klinedinst 2004 (see also Coppock and Beaver 2014 and Hole 2015). The scalar reading of the example in (1b) expresses that alternative propositions in which *Cal State* is replaced by a 'stronger' alternative are false. Finally, *only* can have a temporal reading, which is the focus of this article. The example in (1c) implies that the time at which Carla understood the problem is late according to some contextual criterion.

1. a. Susan only invited MARY.

    b. John only got his degree from CAL STATE.

    c. Carla only understood the problem on SUNDAY.

The temporal reading of *only* bears a striking resemblance to the scalar reading, and one might therefore be inclined to reduce one interpretation to the other. However, an initial indication that this would be misguided comes from Dutch, where the particle *pas* specializes for the temporal reading. Thus, (2a) is ungrammatical on an exclusive reading (which is triggered when *alleen* replaces *pas*) and (2b) is ungrammatical on a scalar reading (which is triggered by *slechts*). By contrast, the example in (2c) is fully acceptable.

2. a. *Suzanna heeft pas MARIE uitgenodigd.

    Susan has   PAS Mary invited

    b   *Jan heeft pas een doctoraat van CAL STATE.

John has PAS a degree from Cal State

    c Carla begreep het probleem pas op ZONDAG.

Carla understood the problem PAS on Sunday

Given that Dutch avoids some of the ambiguities present in English, we will develop a syntax and semantics for temporal focus particles on the basis of the distribution of Dutch *pas*.

The problems presented by temporal focus particles are complex. To begin with, as discussed by König 1979, 1981, they can also appear in the context of numerals, in which case they give rise to a 'low quantity' reading. König demonstrates this for German *erst*, but the same is true for Dutch *pas* (see Barbiers 1995). In (3a), for example, three is lower than the number of books that Paula is supposed to have read at the reference time. Temporal focus particles can also interact with locative PPs. For example, if Jeanette is a heavy smoker and we are driving from Groningen to Amsterdam, we may utter (3b) to indicate that Utrecht is late in the journey for Jeanette to light her first cigarette. Finally, example (3c) shows that temporal focus particles can interact with argument DPs. The example presupposes that various people had tried to solve the riddle prior to Poirot's successful attempt. This interpretation is similar to the temporal reading in (2c) and (3b). However, as shown in (3d), a low quantity interpretation is possible in the same syntactic configuration. The example is felicitous in a situation where in some restaurant John and Mary are the only ones in a large group of people who have been served.

3.   a. Paula heeft pas DRIE boeken gelezen.

       Paula has PAS three books   read

       'Paula has only read three books (so far).'

    b. Jeanette heeft pas in UTRECHT een sigaret opgestoken.

       Jeanette has PAS in Utrecht a cigarette lit

       'Jeanette has only lit a cigarette in Amsterdam.'

    c. Pas POIROT heeft het raadsel opgelost.

       PAS Poirot has   the riddle   solved

       'Poirot's was the first person to solve the riddle.'

    d. Pas JAN EN   MARIE zijn bediend.

       PAS John and Mary are served

       'Only John and Mary have been served (so far).'

In sum, as observed by both König and Barbiers, temporal focus particles allow both a delay and a paucity reading and can be associated with a range of constituents. (König and Barbiers come to different conclusions regarding the availability of argument-related temporal readings; we agree with König that examples like (3c) are unobjectionable.)

In addition to the above semantic observations, there is a critical syntactic property of *pas* that must also be accounted for: as first demonstrated by Barbiers, temporal focus particles must immediately c-command their 'semantic argument'. (The semantic argument is the temporal expression, the NP containing the numeral, etc.; see section 3 for more discussion.) This is true across the range of usages in (3). Thus, examples like (4b) and (5b) are ungrammatical, in sharp contrast to examples in which *pas* is adjacent to its semantic argument (see (4d) and (5d)) and to examples with *alleen* (exclusive *only*), which does not require immediate c-command (see (4a) and (5a)). We will refer to this restriction as *Barbiers's Generalization*.

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