

The *only* connectives

Kai von Fintel and Sabine Iatridou

<http://kvf.me/only>

Introduction

Our *only*

(1) He's a very nice man, **only** he talks too much.

Jespersen 1949

Compare canonical contrastive connectives

- (2) a. He's a very nice man, **but** he talks too much.
- b. He's a very nice man, **although** he talks too much.
- c. He's a very nice man, **yet** he talks too much.

Our *except*

(3) He's a very nice man, **except (that)** he talks too much.

One more variant

- (4) He's a very nice man, **it's just (that)** he talks too much.

Another example of our *only*

- (5) The flowers are lovely; **only**, they have no scent.

OED, cited by Brinton 1997

NB: **except** also works

Uncharted territory

We know a lot about contrastive **but**,
but very little about this connective **only** or **except**.

A few exceptions

- Laurel Brinton. 1997. “The flowers are lovely; only, they have no scent”: The evolution of a pragmatic marker. Anglistentag 1997 Giessen Proceedings.
- Grégoire Winterstein. 2016. From exclusion to adversativity: The case of French *seulement* and Cantonese *ze1*. Handout of a talk at a workshop on “Researching pragmatic particles in communication cognitive, argumentative and social dimensions”, Trondheim.

and ...

SIDS
13.1

Eva Breindl, Anna Volodina, Ulrich Hermann Waßner
HANDBUCH DER DEUTSCHEN KONNEKTOREN 2

DE / G

SIDS
13.2

Eva Breindl, Anna Volodina, Ulrich Hermann Waßner
HANDBUCH DER DEUTSCHEN KONNEKTOREN 2

DE / G



HDWID

*Eva Breindl, Anna Volodina,
Ulrich Hermann Waßner*

HANDBUCH DER DEUTSCHEN KONNEKTOREN 2

SEMANTIK DER DEUTSCHEN SATZVERBÜDGE

TEILBAND 1

SCHRIFTEN DES INSTITUTS FÜR DEUTSCHEN
LINGUISTIK UND SPRACHLEHRE

DE / G

DE / G

Sweeping under the rug

“This **only** is not an exclusive, however, but rather an exceptive (evidence: it can be paraphrased by **except**).”

Coppock & Beaver 2014:403

Looking under the rug

- How do **only** and **except** fit into the landscape of contrastive connectives?
- How do their meanings as connectives relate to their “ordinary” meanings?
- How come the distinction between exclusives and exceptives is apparently neutralized in these uses?

More family resemblances

The contrastive connective par excellence **but** has exclusive and exceptive pedigree as well:

(6) Taylor saw **but** one solution. (= only one)

(7) Taylor saw nobody **but** Greta. (= nobody except Greta)

This is well-known but the adversative and exceptive literatures haven't come together.

The plan

- Introduction
- Some more languages
- Contrastive connectives
- Exclusives and exceptives
- Our *only* and our *except*
- Open issues

Some more languages

Greek

(8) *ine kalos anthropos*

is good person

a. *ala milai poli*

but talks much

b. *mono (pu) milai poli*

only factive C talks much

Greek

(8) *ine kalos anthropos*
is good person

c. *ektos tu oti milai poli*
except the.GEN.(NEUT) C talks much

d. *ektos apo to oti milai poli*
except from the.ACC C talks much

German

(9) *Er ist sehr nett,*

he is very nice

a. *nur/bloß: er redet zuviel*

only he talks too-much

b. *nur/bloß daß er zuviel redet*

c. *nur/bloß redet er zuviel*

d. *er redet nur/bloß zuviel*

German

(9) *Er ist sehr nett,*
he is very nice

e. *außer daß er zuviel redet*
except that he too-much talks

- (10)
- a. C'est un homme très gentil, mais il parle trop.
 - b. C'est un homme très gentil, seulement il parle trop.
 - c. C'est un homme très gentil, c'est juste qu'il parle trop.
 - d. C'est un homme très gentil, sauf qu'il parle trop.
 - e. C'est un homme très gentil, pourtant il parle trop.

Contrastive connectives

How contrastives work

Lakoff, Anscombre & Ducrot, Foolen, Winter & Rimon, Sæbø,
Umbach, Jasinskaja & Zeevat, Winterstein, Toosarvandani,
..., ...

Becker 1842

“Zwei Gedanken stehen miteinander in einem adversativen Verhältnis, wenn der eine Gedanke nicht den anderen Gedanken selbst, sondern eine aus anderen Gedanken gezogene Folgerung aufhebt, in dem der Grund nur ein partieller, und die aus ihm gezogene Folgerung daher nicht eine notwendige sondern nur eine mögliche ist.”

Becker 1842, Ausführliche deutsche Grammatik, p. 294

Frege 1918

“Das Wort *aber* unterscheidet sich von *und* dadurch, dass man mit ihm andeutet, das Folgende stehe zu dem, was nach dem Vorhergehenden zu erwarten war, in einem Gegensatz.”

Frege 1918, Der Gedanke: Eine logische Untersuchung, p.63

Direct contrast

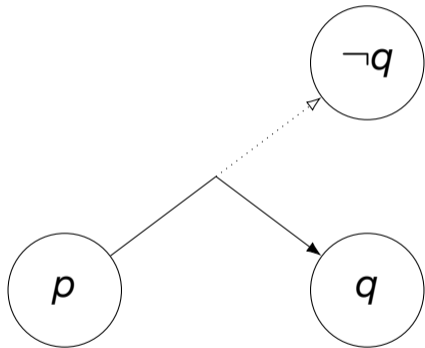
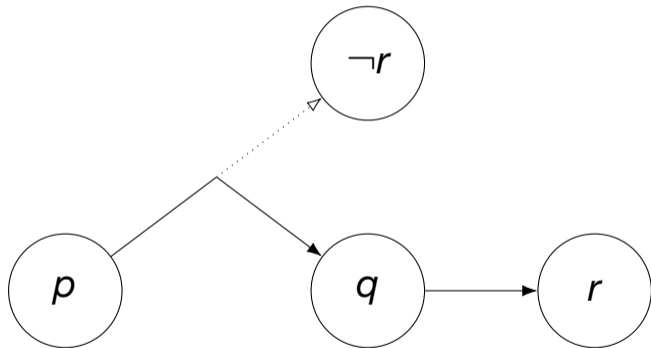


Diagram from Rudolph 1996

Direct contrast

(11) He runs every day **but/yet** he's quite overweight.

Indirect contrast



Indirect contrast

- (12) It's raining **but/#yet** I'm taking an umbrella. So, I won't get
wet. (Winter & Rimon)

Common core of p con q

There exists a statement r s.t. in the context of utterance:
 p implies $\neg r$ and q implies r .

Winter & Rimon 1994

Direct contrast (*yet* but also *but* etc.)

$$r = q$$

Indirect contrast (*but* and not *yet*)

$$r \neq q$$

(In)direct contrast

Direct

(13) He runs every day **but/yes** he's quite overweight.

Indirect

(14) It's raining **but/#yes** I'm taking an umbrella.

Exclusives and exceptives

Only

- (15) Ousmane introduced only BILL to Sue.
- (16) Ousmane only introduced BILL to Sue.
- (17) I only said that Ousmane introduced BILL to Sue.

The essence of *only*

- cross-categorial operator
- “negates” alternatives to its prejacent
- alternatives are calculated based on focus
- prejacent is not-at-issue (presupposed?)
- evaluativity (smallness)

Except

- (18) Every/no player except Olga finished the game.
- (19) Every/no player finished the game, except Olga.
- (20) Bryshon gets up early, except on Sundays.

The essence of *except*

- attaches to a generalization
- identifies an exception to that generalization

See García-Álvarez's 2008 Stanford thesis

The big question

How is the contrastive connective reading related to the ordinary exclusive/exceptive meaning of *only/except*?

only and *except*, sitting in a tree ...

(21) Filip saw **only** Wayde.

(22) Filip saw **no one except** Wayde.

\Rightarrow *only* \neq *except*

Our *only* and our *except*

An idea to pursue

Our *only* and our *except* are still tied to quantification/generalization.

Starting point

(23) I saw every player, **except** I didn't see Olga.

(24) I saw every player, **only** I didn't see Olga.

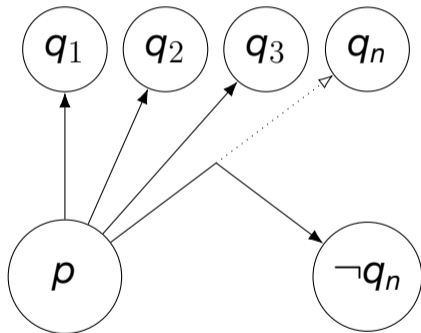
The core idea

- canonical contrastives (**but/yet**) target a single salient proposition
- our **only/except** target a set of salient propositions
- they single out their prejacent as a limitation or exception

What our *except* does

- the target sentence makes a general claim
- there's a set of implied instantiations
- our *except* asserts its prejacent as an exception
- one of the instantiations (or, a subset of them) is false
- \approx “the exception is that”

The picture



Understanding our *except*

- (25) I saw every player, **except** I didn't see Olga.
- (26) He's a very nice man, **except** he talks too much.

An alternative

Vostrikova, Ekaterina. 2019. [Conditional analysis of clausal exceptives](#).
ms. UMass Amherst.

- argues that clausal exceptives are conditionals
- ϕ , *except* $\psi \approx$ if ψ hadn't been true, ϕ would have been true
- hard to constrain the conditional to actually supply an exceptive meaning

What about our *only*?

(27) I saw every player, **only** I didn't see Olga.

⇒ The only exception is that ...

(28) He's a very nice man, **only** he talks too much.

⇒ The only limitation/problem is that ...

Another layer of complexity

- again, the target sentence makes a general claim
- there's a set of implied instantiations
- each of those implications, if false, would be an exception
- our *only* says that none of the possible exceptions is true except its prejaacent
- \approx “the only exception/limitation/problem is that”

Applying and extending the analysis

- non-generalizations don't feed our connectives
- Jespersen's example
- modal intervention
- mysterious examples

Our *only/except* can't do everything *but* can do

- (29) #He runs every day **only/except** he's quite overweight.
- (30) #It's raining **only/except** I'm taking an umbrella.

Jespersen's example

(31) He's a very nice man, **only/except** he talks too much.

not talking too much is an aspect of being nice

Why does *yet* also work?

- (32) He's a very nice man, **yet/only/except** he talks too much.

Contextual underdetermination

very nice man – talks too much

- **yet:** too much talking is unexpected from a nice man
- **only/except:** too much talking is a limitation on the niceness

Modal intervention

- (33) a. I would have come to the meeting.
b. I wanted to come to the meeting.
c. I almost came to the meeting.

... **but/only/except** I had a doctor's appointment.

Rarely recognized as a separable use of adversatives,
but see Brinton 1997, Longacre 2007.

Implicit modal intervention

- (34) We were hungry
... **but/only/except** the restaurants were closed.

Death in Paradise

(35) I was just wondering if there'd been any developments.
Only, I'm leaving in a day.

Death in Paradise, Season 6, Episode 7

Further issues

Things we'd like to understand better

- lack of presuppositional asymmetry
- lack of focus-sensitivity
- occurrence with non-declaratives
- embeddability
- possible differences between *only* and *except*
- and much more

Lack of presuppositional asymmetry

- Our *only* doesn't presuppose its prejacent
- Instead, the truth of the prejacent seems the main point of assertion
- How come the asymmetry can disappear?

Disappearing presupposition

(36) Who did you see? I saw only Greta.

Lack of focus-sensitivity

- (37) The party was a raging success. We only had to revive BILL.
- (38) The party was a raging success, only we had to revive BILL.

Why not focus-sensitive?

- The propositions denied by *only* are identified by the target sentence.
- Syntactic constraint?
- connected to non-asymmetry?

Other illocutionary forces

- (39) Fine, I'll go to Oleana with you, **but/only/except** where is it?
- (40) I hope you can relax this weekend, **but/only/except** don't forget to fix the drain!

Not something well-explored in the adversative literature

Embeddability

- (41) If you find a car you like **but/only/except** it's a bit expensive, give me a call! We might be able to help you.

German shows an unbalanced coordination:

Falls Du ein schönes Auto findest, aber/nur es ist zu teuer, ruf mich bitte an!

Asymmetries

Sassoon 2013:

- (42) a. Dan is healthy, except for high blood pressure.
b. #Dan is not healthy, except for normal blood pressure

Sassoon's explanation

- *healthy* is a generalization across multiple dimensions/aspects
- one is *not healthy* if there's **some** dimension/aspect where health is bad
- so, exceptives cannot apply to (implicitly or explicitly) negative multi-dimensional propositions

Clausal variants

- (43) a. Dan is healthy, except he has high blood pressure.
- b. #Dan is not healthy, except he has normal blood pressure.

Clausal variants

- (43) a. Dan is healthy, except he has high blood pressure.
b. #Dan is not healthy, except he has normal blood pressure.

Same with *only*?

Asymmetries with indirect *only*?

- (44) a. The house is in a nice location, **but/only** it's very dilapidated.
- b. The house is very dilapidated, **but/#only** it's in a nice location.

A difference between *only* and *except*

Except sometimes doesn't seem to like indirect cases:

(45) The house is in a very nice location, **only/#except** it's rather dilapidated.

We should buy this house.

Conclusion

Where we are

- our *only* and our *except* express something like quantificational adversity
- there are many open questions

The end