The *only* connectives

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http://kvf.me/only
Introduction
(1) He's a very nice man, **only** he talks too much.

Jespersen 1949
Another example of our *only*

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

OED, cited by Brinton 1997
Our except

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

(4) The flowers are lovely; except (that) they have no scent.
Question

Formal semantics has decent off-the-shelf analyses of exclusives and exceptives as quantificational operators, but their use as sentential connectives is underexplored.

How do the sentential connective uses relate to the “ordinary” uses?
(5) Lindsey \textbf{only} introduced $[\text{JODIE}]_F$ to the audience.
Exclusive *only*

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

Exclusive *only* vs connective *only*

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

- what is being negated?
- the prejacent seems at-issue
- no obvious association with focus
Exceptives

\[
(7) \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l}
\text{Every} \\
\text{No}
\end{array} \right\} \text{ player except Megan sang the anthem.}
\]
Exceptives

• attach to universal quantifiers
• state that their associate is an exception to the claim
• if and only if associate is subtracted from domain, claim is true
Quantificational *except* vs connective *except*

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

- no obvious universal quantification
- no domain to subtract from
- associate is a proposition, not an object in a domain of quantification
Normally, *only* ≠ *except*

(9) Carli saw *only* Lea.

(10) #Carli saw *except* Lea.

(11) Carli saw *no one except* Lea.

But in our cases, *only* and *except* appear interchangeable.
Another angle

In our examples, so-called “adversative connectives” would also seem to be very much at home:

(12) He’s a very nice man, \( \{ \text{but, yet, although} \} \) he talks too much.

Can we learn from their analysis?
Uncharted territory

We know a lot about contrastive but, but very little about connective only or except.
A few exceptions


and …
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 the meanings of connective *only* and *except* relate to their “ordinary” meanings?
• How do they fit into the landscape of contrastive connectives?
• How come the distinction between exclusives and exceptives is apparently neutralized in our cases?
Even *but* shows the pattern

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

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

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

This is well-known but the adversative and exceptive literatures haven’t come together.
Our goals today

• Point out a fascinating, underrecognized data set
• Explore initial ideas for an analysis
The plan

- Introduction
- Some more examples
- Some more languages
- Contrastive connectives
- Our *except*
- Our *only*
- Further issues
Some more examples
Modal intervention

(15)  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.
The *only* speech acts

(16) Fine, I’ll go to Oleana with you, *but/only/except* where is it?

(17) 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
An example given to us by David Beaver:

(18) It’s raining, **only** don’t use that as an excuse to skip class!
Only, this seems related

(19) I was just wondering if there’d been any developments. Only, I’m leaving in a day.
And this

(20) She gave me one of those withering looks that Italian and French people reserve for tourists who come on vacation largely unaware of the fine cultures of those two countries. Only I was not totally ignorant.

From: Keith Devlin, Finding Fibonacci
Some more languages
Greek

(21)  *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

(22)  

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

e. außer daß er zuviel redet
except that he too-much talks
(23)  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

A very substantive literature:

Lakoff, Anscombe & Ducrot, Foolen, Winter & Rimon, Sæbø, Umbach, Jasinskaja & Zeevat, Winterstein, Toosarvandani, etc.
The core consensus

An adversative connection signals that the first proposition makes one expect something that the second proposition then denies.
Direct contrast

Diagram from Rudolph 1996
Direct contrast

(24) He runs every day but/yet he gets out of breath on stairs.
Indirect contrast

$p \quad q \quad r$

$\neg r$
Indirect contrast

(25) It’s raining **but/yet** I’m taking an umbrella.

So, I won’t get wet.

(26) We were hungry, **but/yet** the restaurants were closed.

So, we didn’t get to eat.

Winter & Rimon 1994
Common core of adversative connectives

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

Direct contrast (yet but also but etc.)

$r = q$

Indirect contrast (but and not yet)

$r \neq q$
(In)direct contrast

Direct
(27) He runs every day but/yet he gets out of breath on stairs.

Indirect
(28) It’s raining but/#yet I’m taking an umbrella.
Our except
Clausal analyses of exceptives

Recent work (among others: Potsdam & Polinsky 2019, Vostrikova 2019) has argued that at least some exceptives are actually clausal and involve ellipsis:

(29) I saw every player except Olga.

(30) I saw every player except I didn’t see Olga.
Vostrikova’s conditional analysis

\( \phi \) except \( \psi \)

= \( \phi \) is false but if \( \psi \) had not been the case, \( \phi \) would have been true

Or: The fact that \( \psi \) is true is the only thing that stands in the way of \( \phi \) being true in the actual world.
(31) Every player sang except Megan didn’t.

(32) Not every player sang but if Megan had sung, every player would have sung.
Problem: This is just not an equivalence!

“Except” true but “if” false: Some players always do the opposite of what Megan does. If she had sung, at least some of the others wouldn’t have.

“Except” false but “if” true: Several other players joined Megan in not singing, but they would have joined if Megan had decided to sing.
If clausal exceptives are conditionals, they are a very special kind and we need to figure out how they work.

Vostrikova makes a proposal that is very much tied to (i) ellipsis/focus structure and (ii) the presence of a quantificational target with a domain expression (every player).
Conditional analysis of our *except*?

(33) Every player sang, *except* Megan stayed silent.

(34) Every player would have sung, *except* Megan stayed silent.

A difference in what altered scenarios we’re considering.
(35) If Nixon had pressed the button, there would have been a nuclear holocaust.

Lewis: from the point of departure, we prefer to look at worlds that match our world in matters of “law” rather than particular fact.
Two kinds of exceptive conditionals

A Lewis-style conditional:

(36) Every player would have sung, except Megan stayed silent.
A particular fact conditional:

(37) Every player sang, except Megan stayed silent.

Consider a world where Megan didn’t stay silent but keep all the other particular facts about players and singing the same (ignoring the possibility that whether other players are singing may depend on what Megan does).
Possible implementations

• similarity ordering that only cares about matters of particular fact
• a premise semantics (Kratzer, Veltman) that takes only atomic sentences as premises
Our only
Propositional *only*

Rooth 1985 posited a propositional *only* as the base case of his cross-categorial semantics. He thought it was a “phantom operator”.

Previously, the only plausible cases of propositional *only* were:

(38) a. The judge **only** sent you to prison; your wife didn’t leave you too. (McCawley 1970: p.296, ex.(13))

b. The barbecue went fairly well. It **only** rained. It wasn’t windy, there are enough beer, and there weren’t any mosquitoes. (attributed to Irene Heim in von Fintel 1997)
Our *only* is a propositional *only*

But what are the propositions it negates, since they are not provided by focus?

Task: for each instance of our *only*, figure out what propositions are excluded.
Some examples

(39) He’s a very nice man, only he talks too much.

\[\text{\(\sim\)} \text{ The only limitation/exception to his niceness is that he talks too much.}\]
She gave me one of those withering looks that Italian and French people reserve for tourists who come on vacation largely unaware of the fine cultures of those two countries. Only I was not totally ignorant.

The only problem with her attitude was that I was not totally ignorant.
(41) I was just wondering if there’d been any developments. Only, I’m leaving in a day.

\[\text{رسم} \] The only reason I ask is that I’m leaving in a day.
Interim conclusion
Interim conclusion

It may be possible to explain our connectives as having meanings that are “lifted” from their ordinary meanings to the propositional or even speech act level.

Our except states that its prejacent is the exception to the first “conjunct”.

Our only states that its prejacent is the only limitation/exception/relevant rejoinder to the first “conjunct”.
Relation to classic adversatives

Our connectives play in the same arena but they do have subtly different meanings.

(42) He runs every day but/yet/#only/#except (that) he gets out of breath on stairs.

(43) It’s raining but/#yet/#only/#except I’m taking an umbrella.
Why do they all work in Jespersen’s example?

(44) He’s a very nice man, but/yet/only/except he talks too much.
very nice man – talks too much

- **but/yet**: too much talking is unexpected from a nice man
- **only/except**: too much talking is a limitation/exception to the niceness
Further issues
Modal intervention

How do such cases fit in?

(45) 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.
*Except:* if I hadn’t had a doctor’s appointment, I would have come.

*Only:* the only reason the prejacent of the modal is not true is that I had a doctor’s appointment.
Indirectness

Recall:

(46) We were hungry, **but/yet** the restaurants were closed.

So, we didn’t get to eat.

This works with our connectives, too:

(47) We were hungry, **only/except** the restaurants were closed.
Indirect modal intervention?

(48) We were hungry, only/except the restaurants were closed.

The target of our connectives is something like We wanted to eat.
Difference between *except* and *except that*

(49) We were hungry, *except/#except that* the restaurants were closed.

It seems that *except that* doesn’t tolerate indirect cases.
Asymmetries

Sassoon 2013:

(50)  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

(51) 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*?

(52) 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.

Noted in HDK
A useful heuristic

As pointed out to us by Lingzi Zhuang, we can find the true target of our connectives via a test with otherwise:

(53) He talks too much, otherwise he’s a very nice man.
(54) We were hungry, otherwise we would have eaten.
(55) The house is very dilapidated, otherwise we should buy eat.
One of the more recalcitrant cases

(56) I was just wondering if there’d been any developments. Only, I’m leaving in a day. ≈ I’m leaving in a day, otherwise I wouldn’t ask.
The hardest cases

(57) Fine, I’ll go to Oleana with you, **only** where is it?
≈ (I’m asking) where is Oleana, otherwise …

(58) It’s raining, **only** don’t use that as an excuse to skip class!
≈ … otherwise …
More open problems with our *only*

- lack of presuppositional asymmetry
- lack of focus-sensitivity
Conclusion
Where we are

- our *only* and our *except* express something like quantificational adversity
- formal implementations to come
- there are open questions
The End