Clefts in English and French

An exhaustivity inference is triggered by clefts in English (Bolinger 1972) and French (Lambrecht 1994). An explicit exclusive (only; seulment) has a similar effect.

Claim: The exhaustivity of only/seulment is at-issue. The exhaustivity triggered by a cleft is not at-issue.

Test: How do speakers contradict the exhaustivity inference?

1) It was pizza that Mary ate. / Mary only ate pizza.
   a. “Yes, and she also had a salad.”
   b. “Yes, but she also had a salad.”
   c. “No, she also had a salad.”

2) It’s Bill that ate chocolate and Fred did too.
3) A: It’s Bill that ate chocolate
   B: Yes, but Fred did too.

Hungarian preverbal focus

Kiss (1996): Hungarian preverbal focus triggers a similar exhaustivity inference.

4) Péter szereti Marit.
   Péter loves Mary
   a. igen, és Misi is szereti Marit.
   yes and Misi also loves Mary
   b. igen, de Misi is szereti Marit.
   yes but Misi also loves Mary
   c. No, Misi is szereti Marit.
   No Misi also loves Mary

Onea and Beaver 2009: preverbal focus doesn’t pattern with czák “only.”

Current study: preverbal focus does pattern with English and French clefts.

For clefts, the preferred response is “yes, but....”

For only/seulment, the preferred response is “no...”

Though, note the asymmetry:

Next: Can we confirm this connection for more constructions, in more languages?

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The factive inference from wissen (“know”) and erfahren (“discover,” “find out”) behaves unexpectedly here.

Pilot data based on projection tests: many speakers treat the factive inference from wissen and erfahren as non-projective.

The German pilot data supports a connection between projection and at-issueness.

Next: Can we confirm this connection for more constructions, in more languages?

“Yes, but...” - Exhaustivity and at-issueness across languages.

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