

***Only* an adverb?**

**On the syntax and interpretation of restrictive
focus adverbial particles in English and Romanian**

NICOLETA SAVA

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This book is dedicated to my mother,
whose love and support have kept me going

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Preface

The present work lies at the syntax/ semantics interface, being one of the rare studies that address both fields, to get a better understanding of a linguistic problem. In this case, the problem is the restrictive focus particles in English and Romanian, namely the English *only* and its equivalents *numai* and *doar*.

The topic addressed is of interest since, although there exist in the literature studies on these particles, they are rarely analysed as a class, due to the difficulties they arise both at the syntactic and at the semantic level. Semantically, one must distinguish between the *inherent contribution of the particle* and that of the focused constituent. Syntactically, the same problem of determining the relation with the focused constituent arises.

The work has a multiple contribution: a) of putting forth for English a complete and unitary syntactic account, that may be extended to Romanian as well; b) of proposing the first analysis of these particles in Romanian; c) of presenting a detailed and unitary semantic analysis (restrictive particles are adverbial quantifiers).

Undoubtedly, during the past decades, the studies on the concept of Focus have exploded, the literature containing research from complementary approaches, as the author points out. There are syntactic theories, which address the syntactic effects of focus deriving from the presence of a focus feature. There are semantic theories, which analyse focus as a quantificational element, investigating its scope, the alternatives introduced, and its effect on the truth conditions, or its interaction with other quantifiers. There are also phonological theories which highlight the prosodic properties of the focused constituent and derive the syntactic effects from prosodic constraints, and there are pragmatic theories that regard information structure as a separate level of analysis where focus plays an essential part in ensuring the coherence, by its property of answering the current question.

The approach of the book is *syntactic and semantic*, the two components having to correlate and control each other. Syntactically, a *focus feature* is used, present at Numeration, licensed by integration into a wider domain (informational focus), or by movement to a focus projection in the left periphery of that domain. Semantically, focus is a quantificational operator that introduces alternatives belonging to a certain class of entities.

Restrictive focus particles (*only*, *doar*, *numai*) bear on *contrastive focus*, marked prosodically. This type of interaction between a given constituent, and another one, prosodically marked, has been labelled *association with focus*. The constituents dependent on focus are described as *focus sensitive*. Focus particles all share the property of association with focus, but they distinguish themselves by their specific lexical contribution.

An essential observation for the analysis presented in the next chapters is that, although association with focus is dependent on the prosodic marking of focus, the association of the particle with a specific constituent survives even in *echoic contexts*, where the main prosodic stress is shifted to another constituent, (the previous focus continuing to have some degree of phonological prominence though).

The introduction also contains a brief, but very clear, presentation of the Minimalist Program model implemented. The MP description is accurate and it proves that the author has intimate knowledge of the program. The phase theory is adopted. The analysis put forward is, indirectly, an argument for the advantages of the **copy theory of movement**. In this model, both LF and PF can access either the head or the tail of a chain, and the two components can process the same copy or different copies, as Bobaljik (1995, 2002) convincingly argues.

An important idea is that post-syntactic operations (such as Reconstruction, Quantifier Raising (=QR)) are constrained by *principles of economy*. Reconstruction, Quantifier Raising are allowed only if they produce effects at the interfaces. Generally, the generation of alternative configurations with the same semantic interpretation is banned.

Chapter 2, **The syntax of restrictive particles in English**, sets out to specify the categorial status of *only*, to determine the distribution of this particle and to integrate the description into a broader theory of focus. The three structures analysed are the constructions *only-XP*, *only-VP* and *left periphery-only*.

(John invited only MARY. // John only invited MARY. // Only MARY did John invite).

The author first reviews some important analyses syntactically or semantically oriented: Kayne (1998), Drubig (2000), Buring and Harman (2001), Herburger (2000). The semantic-syntactic analyses have in common the fact that they identify, in different ways, the quantificational properties of the restrictive focus particles and underline the common semantic effects of *only* phrases.

Moving on to her own analysis, the author provides a detailed description of the distribution of the particle in order to determine its categorization. Determining the category of the particle is a difficult task since *only* attaches to any type of phrase: NP/DP/AP/ PP/VP/CP (but not IP!). The more problematic cases are discussed: *only* appears rarely after prepositions, even in languages with preposition stranding (English or Dutch). The author points out that functional prepositions are more permissive. This restriction is clearly due to the fact that PPs are islands.

A semantic restriction is the fact that *only* cannot co-occur with universal quantifiers, unless they are modified: The Board will interview only everyone who presented an application on MONDAY.

The aims of the syntactic analysis are related to: (i) specifying the merge configuration; (ii) the distribution in the three positions, *only-DP*, *only VP*, *LP-only*; (iii) the contrast between the syntactic mobility of *only* phrases and their relatively stable semantic interpretation.

The categorization of this particle raises two problems to solve: a) if *only* is a head or an adjunct; b) which lexical category does it belong to. Given that the sentences resulting from reordering the constituents (*only-XP*, *XP-only*) are synonymous, the author assumes that *only* is a head which projects its associate as *complement*, which can in turn be reprojected in the specifier position. But the movement of a complement to a specifier position is a case of *anti-locality*. In principle, the movement takes place to value an uninterpretable feature of the head. But in the case under consideration, valuation could also take place at merge, in the head-complement structure. Given the perfect synonymy of the two orders, the author proposes that anti-locality applies to syntax, but not to post-syntactic PF movements.

Therefore, *only* is an acategorial head with two features, [iQ], which introduces its quantificational properties and [uF] which solves the problem of its function as a selecting head. The constituent bearing a [uF] feature searches for a match, that is a constituent with an [iF] feature, which is precisely the focused constituent, from which it borrows a light categorial feature. The merge position thus ensures the association with focus (the head complement relation) and the quantificational feature which requires its movement to the clausal peripheries. Finally, the phrase-internal PF movement of the associate accounts for the order *associate + only*.

The next question is whether the *only* phrase is ever interpreted in the base position. The answer is negative, because the in situ position also creates intervention effects. It is important that the intervention effect is in fact created by focus, and it appears in the absence of *only* too: *He didn't disclose his PLANS to anybody.

In conclusion, the constructions where *only* is apparently in situ are based on movement, the in situ effect resulting from the reading of the lower copy of the chain, a position which favours the *prosodic marking*.

The characteristic construction for English is the *only-VP* configuration. In the author's analysis, this is a derived configuration, not a base configuration as proposed by Kayne. Two options must be considered: a) *Only* moves as a head, to a position where it values the quantificational feature of a functional head (the Q-Raising option); b) *Only* moves together with its associate to the specifier of a quantificational projection with a focus feature. Adopting the general theory of syntactic phases, each phase has a level dedicated to checking P features, operational features. The existence of a verb phrase periphery, apart from the clause periphery (CP-periphery) is a generally accepted fact, among the first systematic discussions being those in Beletti (2004). The relevant position for *only* or

only-VP is a v* projection to the left of the external argument. The focused phrase moves with *only*, as shown by the intervention effects. The two configurations *only-DP* and *only VP* differ minimally: both require the movement of the *only-DP* phrase to the vP periphery position; both must meet the adjacency condition of the direct object and the verb, a morpho-syntactic or PF constraint specific to English. In the *only-DP* structure the lower copy is entirely spelled out. In the *only-VP* structure *only* is spelled out in the periphery position and DP in the base position. These variations highlight the advantages of the copy theory of movement.

The least problematic structure is the one where the *only-DP* constituent appears in the left periphery of the clause. An important observation is that if in the lower periphery the quantificational feature plays only a free rider part along the focus feature of *only*, in the left periphery, focus, and particularly the [+restrictive] focus, and the quantificational feature behave differently. A contrastively focused constituent does not trigger inversion: Compare: *CHEESE you should buy. Only CHEESE should you buy.* The operator feature lies in C, which accounts for the fact that *only-DP* appears only in the periphery of root clauses. Another important remark is that a focused constituent does not covertly rise from the vP periphery to the CP periphery, as shown by the interference with negation.

Chapter 3, **The Syntax of Restrictive Particles in Romanian**, analyses the syntax of restrictive focus particles *numai* and *doar*, starting from the investigation of a very large corpus of examples, analysed diachronically as well. The author considers 5000 occurrences of the particle *numai* and 3000 occurrences of the particle *doar*, extracted from the electronic corpus of the Academy Institute of Linguistics.

The first section discusses at length and with excellent illustrations the selectional properties of *numai* and *doar*. It includes examples of selection for the following categories: a) DP (it stands out the preference of *doar* for scalar effects); QP, frequently *numai/doar* + cardinals; AP (rarely), [an important remark, which should be stressed, is that focusing the adjective is possible only in predicative position (that is in post-nominal and post-copular position)]; PP, AdvP (time and place adverbs are more frequent), VP (rarely), CPs (non-root clauses).

The only restrictions that *numai* and *doar* exhibit are: (i) the associate is contrastively focused (prosodically marked); (ii) restrictive particles do not attach to arguments of prepositions and nominal modifiers.

The causes of these restrictions are very different. Regarding the impossibility of the restrictive particle to appear inside the prepositional phrase, unlike English, the author relates this contrast to another well-known difference between English and Romanian. English allows movement from inside subcategorised prepositional phrases, both for A

movement (passives), and for A' movement (questions, etc.). In Romanian, prepositional phrases are strict islands. The position of the particle inside the PP would prevent the movement to the operator position of the restrictive. This analysis is confirmed by the fact that if particle takes scope inside the PP (for example, it introduces **scalar** alternatives inside the PP), *numai/doar* may appear PP internally.

The projection configurations of the particles *numai/doar*. The projection of these particles relies on the same assumptions considered for *only*, starting from Aboh's hypothesis, according to whom "a numeration N pre-determines the Information Structure of a linguistic expression."

The chapter is organized similarly to the previous one, discussing, in turn, the two positions of the *numai/doar* phrases. Unlike the English constructions, the *numai/doar* DP phrases are not in situ at any level, occupying, both at LF, and at PF, peripheral positions in the verb phrase periphery or the higher periphery. Interestingly, the *only-VP* order which illustrated in fact the discrepancy between the LF position (vP periphery) and the PF position (post-verbal order), in Romanian, where the verb rises to T/M (leaving behind, so to say, the vP periphery), is impossible. This striking difference between the two languages is thus independently motivated.

The freer word order in Romanian brings about innovative contrastive remarks regarding post-verbal phrases with *only*. One interesting contrastive remark is that, in Romanian, post-verbal restrictive particles may associate not only with objects, but with the subject too, given the possibility of the VSO order in the language. Romanian offers additional arguments that *numai/doar-DP* phrases occupy A-bar periphery positions. An overt distributional argument which suggests that the *numai/doar DP* phrase occupies a focus position is the final clause position irrespective of the syntactic function of the DP, other constituents, defocused, being displaced to the left by Scrambling. There are also cases where the focused constituent is not in final position, which is possible in Romanian, where post-focus constituents may be *unaccented*, as shown by Zubizarreta (1998). Occupying peripheral positions, *numai/doar* phrases have A' properties, giving rise to *weak cross-over* phenomena and licensing parasitic gaps.

Finally, just like in English, there appear intervention effects with polarity items. The author subtly remarks the possibility of some examples such as: Nu am vazut inca [doar COPIII], where the restrictive focus occupies a focus position in the T domain, and the rest of the clause has been topicalised, appearing to the left of focus. In such situations, the model of analysis proposed proves very reliable.

The next sections discuss the structure of the left periphery in Romance languages and in Romanian, to establish the distinctive properties of focus in Romanian. The periphery of Romanian is similar to that of

Spanish and Catalan, where the only operator position available is Spec T/M, a head containing the [Q]/[wh],[Foc] features.

Moving on to the analysis of *numai/doar* phrases in the left periphery the author points out some properties which prove that the phrase occupies an A' position, adjacent verb. The fact that the restrictive is in an A' position is again confirmed by weak cross-over phenomena and the licensing of parasitic gaps.

Chapter 4, *The semantics of restrictive particles*, proposes a semantic analysis of constructions containing restrictive particles, starting from the existing descriptions of restrictive particles and focus. In selecting a semantic theory the author has considered the existence of a structural syntax/ semantics isomorphism, such that the logical form generated in the syntactic component may be interpreted as directly as possible, or at least explicitly translatable. The three theories considered (Alternative Semantics (Rooth), Structured Meanings (von Stechow, 1991) and Focal Mapping Theory (Herburger, 2000) are descriptively equivalent and generally answer satisfactorily the interface problems considered in the semantics literature, such as multiple foci, association with focus, island sensitivity. Among these theories, the only one that is isomorphic to the syntax adopted by the author is Structured Meanings. It proposes in fact the same focus-background partition that the Minimalist syntax creates through Focus Movement. The restrictively focused constituent is the one defining a set of entities (the alternatives), while the Background appears as a *property* (a lambda operator), defined by the rest of the clause. Unlike, for example, the better known Alternative Semantics, no double denotations are assigned (of the asserted proposition and the alternatives), and the alternatives represent a set of entities and not a set of propositions. Furthermore, Structured Meanings, similarly to the syntactic analysis proposed, defines focus by *structural conditions*, which shows that association with focus is *conventional*, a fact congruent with the typology proposed by Beaver and Clark (2008).

Descriptively, the semantic analysis brings evidence that restrictive particles are *adverbial quantifiers* and not D-type quantifiers, as it has been claimed about at least some uses of *only*. Given the unitary semantic effect produced by *only* in all the sentences in which it appears, it is not desirable to postulate the existence of two quantifiers, an A-type and a distinct D-type one. For this reason the author supports the hypothesis that *only* is an A-type quantifier, in all its occurrences. More precisely, *only* is a binary adverbial quantifier, except for broad focus sentences. The Op/R/N structure is also the result of the Focus Movement rule.

This hypothesis is confirmed by various empirical facts. It is thus relevant the remark that *only* and *always* interfere: in some *only-VP* constructions,

always and *only* do not co-occur is both quantify over the same variable, because they target the same periphery position. (**Our parents always only invite ADULTS to their parties*). The restriction disappears if *always* modifies the event. (*Our parents always only INVITE adults to their parties*). Consequently, *only* is a different type of adverbial quantifier than *always*, having a different type quantification domain. In agreement with the structure created by Focus Movement, *only* quantifies over *event properties* resulting from the Focus/Background partition and not over the event, and it takes values in the domain of *individuals targeted by focus*.

As regards scope properties, *only* also behaves as an adverbial quantifier. Sentences with *only* are ambiguous only if the associated focus is itself ambiguous.

If *only* is an A quantifier, then it will not interfere with D quantifiers, but it will be sensitive to other propositional operators. The same problems are discussed with reference to *numai* and *doar*.

I believe that the book is a remarkable achievement, firstly for the high level of difficulty of the subject, and secondly for the various original solutions proposed.

The syntactic analysis proposed has many original points for English as well: categorization, *only* XP, XP *only* order, *only* VP structure. Needless to say, it is the first study on restrictive particles in Romanian. At the syntactic level, the analysis is economical and perfectly unitary, the distributional differences between *numai/doar* and *only* deriving, as desirable, from other known properties of the two languages.

What is particularly remarkable, I believe, is the thorough knowledge of the empirical field and the perfect assimilation of the Minimalist model and some important semantic areas. These qualities have enabled the author to make various subtle remarks, but also an extremely convincing demonstration of the fact that *only/numai* phrases always occupy A' positions. I believe that this is a tour de force.

The book argues directly for some important ideas in the Minimalist theory: copy movement and the isomorphism of syntactic phases.

The work is interesting from the perspective of building an integrated linguistic model yielding ultimately referential interpretations (in line with Russell or Montague) of natural language propositions. Through its entire endeavour, the book illustrates the manner in which natural language syntax can offer a manner of selecting from among the multitude of formalization alternatives, often with equivalent descriptive power, proposed by logicians. In other words, the persistent study of the syntax/semantics relation strengthens the position of natural language syntax as a metalinguistic filter, but, equally important, it must contribute to