

Only in Ktunaxa: *ɕin* and association with focus

Tags: *semantics, syntax, focus, information structure, Ktunaxa*

General background: association with focus. For several decades now, linguists have explored the question of focus. The framework of Alternative Semantics (Rooth 1992, i.a.) gives a productive lens through which linguists may describe the contrast between (1a) and (1b) below.

(1) Context: At a party, Violet is discussing how the various attendees of the party know each other. She says:

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- a. I **only** introduced [ALEXANDER]_F to Martina.
(... I didn't introduce Jessica to her, but I did introduce him to Bob.)
- b. I **only** introduced Alexander to [MARTINA]_F.
(... I didn't introduce him to Jessica, but I did introduce Bob to her.)

The process through which a focused unit of language (indicated in English by small caps showing a prosodic accent) combines semantically with a focus-sensitive particle (*only*) is *focus association*, illustrated in (1) as an arrow.

Specific background: *ɕin* and Ktunaxa. The particle *ɕin* is the equivalent of *only* in Ktunaxa, an isolate language spoken in British Columbia, Alberta, Idaho, and Montana. This particle is like English *only* in that it serves to exclude alternatives to foci (marked here with square brackets and a subscript F). It is also like *only* in that it may associate with bound morphemes as in (2), or with words of different syntactic categories and grammatical roles as in (3).

- (2) a. She can **only** ride a [TRI]_F cycle, not a [BI]_F cycle.
b. **ɕin** hu [qałsa]_F-qałt-i. (source: KCC dictionary, p. 46)
only 1.SUBJ three-have.children-IND
'I have only three children.' (... not more)
- (3) a. **Only** [YOU]_F can prevent forest fires (... nobody else can do it).
b. You can **only** [PREVENT]_F forest fires (... you can't extinguish them)
c. You can prevent **only** [FOREST]_F fires (... not house fires).
d. **ɕin** [Piyatł]_F sak-ił i·kuł-ni ka·pi-s.
only Peter PROG-ADV drink-IND coffee-OBV
'Only Peter is drinking coffee.' (... everyone else has water.)
e. **ɕin** ?at hu [mitx-ni]_F ?iniɕka. (source: KCC dictionary, p. 46)
only HAB 1.SUBJ shoot-IND gopher
'I only shoot gophers.' (... I don't trap them.)

f. **Çin** [qwuçatıŋqa]_F niçtahaŋ xma çukat-i.
 only tall boy MOD take-IND
 ‘Only a tall boy could/would take them.’ (... not the short boys.)

However, *çin* differs from *only* in that it has a narrow syntactic distribution: it generally occurs at the left edge of the clause, as exemplified in (2b) and (3d-f) above and (4) below, while *only* can occur in multiple syntactic positions, as in (3a-c).

(4) M-u qakŋ-is-ni **çin** ?at ki-?ik Piyaŋ [ʔaqŋas]_F.
 PAST-1.SUBJ say-2.OBJ-IND only HAB COMP-eat Peter indoor-OBV
 ‘I told you that Peter only eats indoors.’ (... he wouldn’t go to a picnic)

The present work seeks to establish **how *çin* and its associate combine semantically**, and **what syntactic position *çin* occupies**, bringing data from original research on Ktunaxa to bear on this question. We propose that *çin* takes scope over the proposition from the specifier of a functional projection (potentially a Polarity Phrase, as in Drubig 1994), and that focus association happens through movement at the logical form. The difference in syntactic distribution between *only* and *çin* therefore has its origins in where the two focus-sensitive particles are generated. English *only* may be base-generated directly adjoined to its associate or in an adverbial position adjoined to VP (cf. Anderson, 1972), while *çin* is generated as the specifier to a higher functional projection.

References

- Anderson, S. 1972. “How to get even,” *Language* 48, pp. 893-906.
- Drubig, H. B. 1994. “Island constraints and the syntactic nature of focus and association with focus.” Arbeitsbericht Nr. 51 des Sonderforschungsbereichs 340, Universität Tübingen.
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- Rooth, M. 1992. *A theory of focus interpretation*. *Natural Language Semantics* 1:75-116. <ftp://ftp.ims.uni-stuttgart.de/pub/papers/mats/focus-interpretation.ps.gz>