FOCUS MOVEMENT AND ASSOCIATION WITH only IN RUSSIAN AND CHINESE

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Under scrutiny are the syntactic properties of Russian (Rus) and Chinese (Chn) only and the strategies involved in associating only with a focus-marked constituent. There are two main arguments defended in this paper. First, Rus to!ko and Chn zhiyou are adverbal, not adnominal (in contrast to English, in which only evinces properties of both, see Taglicht 1984). Further, to!ko and zhiyou are generated on the edge of the verbal domain. Second, both languages require syntactic focus movement of the F-marked associate to only. The resulting zhiyou+XPf complex is strictly preverbal in Chn; in Rus to!ko+XPf is eligible to either precede or follow the verb.

 Unlike English (1), where only can be associated with either argument in the predicate, yielding distinct truth conditional interpretations (Rooth 1985), Rus to!ko and Chn zhiyou impose an adjacency requirement, as demonstrated by ungrammatical (2) and (3). In order to render (2) and (3) acceptable, to!ko and zhiyou must surface next to their F-marked associates, as in (4a/b) for Rus and (5a) for Chn. The two languages depart from each other in the surface ordering of the only-complex and the verb: in Rus, both orders, i.e [only+XPf]V in (4a) and V[only+XPf] in (4b), are fine; Chn tolerates [only+XPf]-complex strictly in preverbal positions (cf.: (5a) and (5b)).

(1) a. I only introduced [BILL]F to Sue.
   b. I only introduced Bill [TO SUE]F.

(2) a. *Andrey to!ko ispek [PIROG]F dlja sestry. [Rus]
   Andrey only baked pie for sister
   Intended: ‘Andrey only baked [A PIE]F for his sister.’
   b. *Andrey to!ko ispek pirog [DLJA SESTRY]F.

(3) a. *Zhangsan zhiyou qinzi kao [DANGAO]F gei jiejie. [Chn]
   Zhiyou only personally bake cake for sister
   Intended: ‘ZS only backed [A CAKE]F for his sister himself’
   b. *Zhangsan zhiyou qinzi kao dangao [GEI JIEJIE]F.

(4) a. Andrej to!ko [PIROG]F ispek dlja sestry. [Rus]
   Andrej only ispek [TOLKO]F dlja sestry.

(5) a. Zhiyou [DANGAO]F qinzi kao gei jiejie. [Chn]
   Zhiyou only ispek [DANGAO]F for sister

Though it is tempting to conclude on the basis of the dataset above that only in Rus and Chn is adnominal, there are three arguments that militate against such an approach. First, only cannot be wedged in between a preposition and an NP, as demonstrated by contrasts in (6) and (7) (see Büring and Hartmann 2001 for German). This follows from the proposal: since to!ko and zhiyou are adverbs with a designated base position in the verbal domain, they cannot be merged with the NP. This is further confirmed by Rus Left-Branch Extraction (LBE) facts in (8): (8a) shows that LBE of adverbial modifiers out of a noun phrase is in principle acceptable (but see Tali! 2015; (8b), on the other hand, with the attempted movement of to!ko, is infelicitous, which we take to indicate that only originates outside of the NP. Finally, consider the issues of interpretation in (9) and (10) (Taglicht 1984): the adnominal (NP-adjacent) only in (9) is ambiguous. The adverbal one in (10), however, is not: it is interpreted in the clause, in which it appears. Now consider Chn in (11): despite the adjacency of only to its NP-associate, the matrix predicate obligatorily scopes over only, hence replicating the interpretation effects of (10a) rather than (9). Russian likewise shows the lack of ambiguity with [only+XPf] in embedded contexts like (10).

(6) a. … to!ko dlja sestry [Rus] (7) a. … zhiyou gei jiejie [Chn]
   only for sister
   b. dlja to!ko sestry
   only for sister
   b. * dlja to!ko sestry

   ‘Did he read a very interesting book’ only books brought
   ‘Did he only bring books?’

(9) I knew that he had learnt only Spanish. [adnominal]
   a. knew > only: I knew he hadn’t learnt any other language.
   b. only > knew: I didn’t know he had learnt any other language.
The proposed derivation is provided in (12a) for Rus (4a) and Chn (5a): only is generated on the edge of vP; its F-marked associate moves to right-adjoin to it, driven by the syntactic focus feature. Since the verb in Chn is confined to the VP-shell (Huang 1991), we obtain the obligatory preverbal placement of the only-complex (hence ruling out (5b)). An additional position is available for only in Rus (but not Chn) – on the edge of VP, as in (12b). While Russian too, is argued to lack movement to T, the language is shown to raise the verb out of its base position (Bailyn 1995, Gribanova 2013). If so, the configuration in (12b) results in a string-vacuous focus arrangement (after V-to-V raising), exemplified by (4b). Evidence for the latter claim is provided by the interpretation facts in (13). In unambiguous (13a) and (13c) only belongs in the relevant clause (matrix in (13a) and embed in (13c)). But there are two possibilities for (13)(b): either only is generated on the edge of the matrix VP, in which case its associate moves to adjoin to it (this gives rise to the wide scope interpretation of only), as schematized in (14i), or the only-complex belongs in the lower clause, which then yields a narrow scope reading, as in (14ii).

Finally, we consider some cases of apparent violations of the adjacency requirement. One such context is in (15): the nominal head is the F-marked element here. In the presence of modifiers, however, the noun cannot be adjacent to only. Since the heads are not subject to A’-movement, this focalized N-head cannot be extracted, so the entire phrase must be pied-piped to only.

Based on (15) and a number of additional contexts of felicitous non-adjacency to only, we show that the intervener and the focalized element must be dominated by the same XP. Furthermore, this XP ought to be the minimal element, dominating the focalized element that can move (see Bošković 2004, Chomsky 1995, Stateva 2002 for arguments on minimal pied-piping). This approach allows us to rule in a constrained set of instances where [XP] is not adjacent to only, while still ruling out examples like (16) with the attempted association inside an island (cf. English translation in (16)).

We also discuss the behavior of only in contexts with multiple foci (e.g., in the presence of Y/N question marker li in Rus) as well as some properties of the “second” Chn only ‘zhi’.