Broadening Alternative Semantics: Exclusivity of Discourse *just*
Mia Wiegand

1 Synopsis. While alternative semantics literature closely ties alternative sets with (English) prosodic focus (Rooth 1985, 1992; Beaver & Clark 2008), I argue that some constructions give rise to alternative sets which do not correspond so neatly with overt focus marking. Here, I analyze a specific use of *just*, which I label 'unexplanatory' *just*, to highlight that the structure of alternative sets can be more complex. Specifically, unexplanatory *just* involves quantification over covert causation relationships.

2 Analysis of unexplanatory *just*. Unexplanatory *just* occurs when the speaker denies or distances herself from the explanation for the eventuality expressed by the prejacent proposition.

(1)   a. I was sitting there and the lamp just broke!
        (Implication: the lamp broke spontaneously/the speaker denies knowledge of how it broke)
      b. I walked into the store, saw the necklace, and just took it. I don't know what came over me.
      c. He just stopped texting me. Maybe it's because I made that quip about his mother.

Though quite distinct from the typical exclusive uses of *just*, e.g., *Bill just went to the party (and nowhere else)*, I argue that unexplanatory *just* deserves a similar quantificational semantics over salient alternatives. In particular, it quantifies over statements of causality between the prejacent and (context-restricted) potential causes. This necessitates allowing exclusives to quantify over elements in more complicated alternative sets, such as propositions involving discourse relations, e.g., explanations.

I assume a standard exclusive semantics for *just*, mirroring previous treatments of *only*. (I include here only the quantificational (negative) part of the meaning—see, e.g., (Roberts 2011) for discussion of the prejacent.)

(2) $[\![\text{just } \phi]\!]^{M,w} = \forall q[(q \in \text{ALT} \wedge w \in q) \to \phi \leq q]$,
      where $\leq$ is the salient ordering relation over the alternative set ALT, read as "is stronger than" (and is in many cases filled in as an entailment relation $\subseteq$)

In order to determine the set of alternatives for a given utterance, I appeal to the Question Under Discussion (QUD) framework (Roberts 2012; Simons *et al.* to appear), where the relevant question an utterance addresses determines the evaluated alternative set. For unexplanatory *just*, the alternatives are all of a form "α because β". This kind of application of *just* results in a quantificational assertion that for every non-minimal potential cause x for the eventuality e described by the prejacent, x is not the cause of e.

(3)   Utterance: The lamp just broke.
      e: the event of the lamp breaking
      QUD: What caused the lamp to break?
      $\text{ALT} = \{e \text{ because } x \mid x \text{ is a contextually salient potential cause for } e\}$
      $\phi = e$ because CAUSE_0, where CAUSE_0 is some "minimal cause"
      $[\![\text{just}(\phi)]\!]^{M,w} = \forall q(q \in \text{ALT} \wedge w \in q) \to \phi \leq q]$

      Resulting Quantificational Paraphrase: "For all explanations $q=$*The lamp broke because x* that are not entailed by $\phi=$*The lamp broke because* CAUSE_0, q is not true in w."

However, as exhibited by (1c), this quantification over explanations is not a flat denial of the existence of a cause, but rather a refusal to commit to a particular cause. Thus, I ultimately include an epistemic necessity modal in the structured alternatives, yielding a quantificational statement like, for all (stronger-than-minimal) alternatives q, q is not *necessarily* the causal relationship in question.

3 Theoretical implications. *Just* exhibits a variety of uses that have been described as 'polysemous' (Lee 1987); however, under this broader view of acceptable alternatives, these uses can be accounted for with a single lexical entry for *just* as an exclusive operator. The distributional differences among exclusive operators is attributed to differing restrictions on alternative sets and orderings. As a relatively free exclusive operator, *just* provides insight into the typology of restrictions on exclusives—see (Orenstein 2015) for a related account regarding Hebrew.

Additionally, this evidence from unexplanatory *just* further highlights the importance of including the QUD in any analysis of focus-sensitive operators. The availability of explanations as part of the alternative set is not predicted in a framework that looks solely at the compositional semantics absent a relevant question: by including the QUD framework, we get a general semantics for exclusive operators that accounts for a much wider array of data, including 'discourse' uses of exclusives.

Selected References
❋ Beaver & Clark 2008. *Sense and Sensitivity*. ❋ Lee 1987. The semantics of *just*. ❋ Orenstein 2015. A family of exclusives in Hebrew. ❋ Roberts 2011. Only: A case study in projective meaning. ❋ Roberts 2012. Information structure in discourse: Towards an integrated formal theory of pragmatics. ❋ Rooth 1985. *Association with focus*. ❋ Rooth 1992. A theory of focus interpretation. ❋ Simons, Beaver, Roberts, & Tonhauser (to appear). The best question: Explaining the projection behavior of factives.