A compositional morphosemantic analysis of exclusivity in Ch’ol

We argue that novel empirical generalizations on exclusive operators in Ch’ol (Mayan) provide strong evidence for a morphological decompositionality of exclusivity into a core semantic entry and focus sensitivity. There is a robust literature on exclusivity and the distributions of scalar particles in various languages (Beaver & Clark 2003, 2008; Orenstein & Greenberg 2010; Coppock & Beaver 2011a,b). Coppock & Beaver (2011a) argue that mere operates in a different domain (properties) than only (propositions). Recent work on focus constructions in Mayan languages include Yasavu (2013) for K’iche’ and AnderBois (2012) for Yucatec Maya. However, little work has been done on the variation among exclusives in morphologically rich languages like Ch’ol. Original data from fieldwork indicate that exclusivity can occur independently of focus marking, and when divorced from focus, the exclusive morpheme has a wider distribution and range of meanings.

The morphemes of interest are a focus particle jiñ, an exclusive clitic =jach, and a bimorphemic exclusive jiñ=jach. Focus structures can be marked with the focus particle jiñ (1); exclusivity is marked with either the second position clitic =jach (glossed as EXCL (2)), or the bimorphemic jiñ=jach, analyzed as FOC=EXCL (3).

(1) jiñ x-ch’ok ts’a’ jul-i-Ø.
    FOC NC-girl PRF arrive-1V-B3
    ‘[FOC] The girl arrived.’

(2) X-ch’ok =jach ts’a’ jul-i-Ø.
    NC-girl-CL=EXCL PRF arrive-1V-B3
    ‘Just a girl arrived.’

(3) Jiñ=jach x-ch’ok ts’a’ jul-i-Ø.
    FOC=EXCL NC-girl PRF arrive-1V-B3
    ‘Only the girl arrived.’

Vázquez Álvar (2011) reports that the particle jiñ is restricted to elements containing definiteness, resulting in restriction to focused nominals. However, =jach shows no such distributional restriction. =jach is licensed as an exclusive over numerals (4a) and PPs (4b), while jiñ is not (5). The bimorphemic jiñ=jach ‘only’, though synonymous with =jach, is restricted in the same way as jiñ, i.e., not licensed over numerals (6a) or PPs (6b).

(4) a. Juñ-k’ej =jach k-om-Ø waį.
    one-CL=EXCL A1-want-B3 tortilla.
    ‘I want only one tortilla.’

b. Tyi Palenque= jach ts’a’ k’oty-i-Ø.
    PREP Palenque=EXCL PRF arrive-1V-B3
    ‘He arrived just to Palenque.’

(5) a. *Jiñ juñ-k’ej k-om-Ø waį.
    FOC one-CL A1-want-B3 tortilla.
    Intended: ‘I want [FOC one ] tortilla.’

b. *Jiñ tyi Palenque ts’a’ k’oty-i-Ø.
    FOC PREP Palenque PRF arrive-1V-B3
    Intended: ‘He arrived [FOC to Palenque].’

(6) a. *Jiñ=jach juñ-k’ej k-om-Ø waį.
    FOC=EXCL one-CL A1-want-B3 tortilla
    Intended: ‘I want only one tortilla.’

b. *Jiñ=jach tyi Palenque ts’a’ k’oty-i-Ø.
    FOC=EXCL PREP Palenque PRF arrive-1V-B3
    Intended: ‘He arrived only to Palenque.’

This pattern indicates that for jiñ=jach, the semantic content of exclusivity is provided by the morpheme =jach, but selectional requirements come from jiñ. We argue that this parallels the distribution of English only and just, where only is more restricted and always requires focus, while just exhibits a wider range of uses, some not tied to focus. Wiegand (2017) captures this in a framework analyzing only as morphologically more complex than just as in (7), accounting for the wider range of uses of just. We adopt and modify this account for the Ch’ol data.

(7) a. [EXCL] = λC.λp.λw.∀q[(q ∈ C ∧ w ∈ q) → p ≤ q]  (semantics for justl=jach)
   b. [FOC] = λC.λp.λq[F(K)(q) ∧ ∂(K ⊆ [q]C)]  (focus restriction on only/partial semantics for jiñ)
   c. [EXCL+FOC] = λC.λp.λw.∀q[(q ∈ C ∧ w ∈ q) → p ≤ q ∧ ∂(C ⊆ [p]F)]  (semantics for only/jiñ=jach)
   (∂ used for selectional requirement presupposition; ≤ a variable over orderings on C)

For Ch’ol, we need more than the restriction to subset of focus alternatives, as jiñ=jach is restricted by definiteness. However, since the focus particle jiñ is also restricted, this restriction must be part of the semantics jiñ, rather than exclusivity. Further evidence for analyzing (7a) as the semantics of just and =jach comes from the additional parallels between these operators. In some contexts both can serve as an intensifier (8/9a), and also serve some broader functions (8/9b-c).

    nice=EXCL A2-house
    ‘Your house is so nice.’

b. Che’=jach ts’a’ jul-i-Ø.
    PART=EXCL PRF arrive-1V-B3
    ‘Just like that he arrived.’

c. alas-ty’añ= jach
    game-word=EXCL
    ‘just kidding’

(9) a. Your house is just gorgeous!
   b. The man just appeared!
   c. I was just wondering…

This is strong evidence that exclusives when dissociated from focus can result in a variety of discourse effects beyond basic exclusivity, including intensification and mitigation of social implications. Overall, these original data constitute compelling crosslinguistic support for decomposing the meaning attributed to exclusive operators like only into smaller components, each of which contribute a portion of exclusive semantics in general.