

The effect of experimentally proffered alternatives on the presupposition of 'only'

Maho Takahashi (UCSD) | David Barner (UCSD) | Aaron Cousins (Cardiff)
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Background

- The presupposition of 'only' as a prejacent (e.g., Horn 1969)

~~Only~~ *John can speak French.*
└──────────────────┘
prejacent

Presupposition: (At least) John can speak French.

Assertion: No one other than John can speak French.

Background

- A counterexample

Last year, Mary invited Susan and Paul. This year, she did not invite only Susan and Paul, but preferred to invite their six cousins.

Background

- Alternative analysis

Mary did not invite only Susan and Paul.

Mary invited Susan and Jim.

Mary invited Susan.

Mary invited Susan and Paul's cousins.

entailment-based alternatives

Mary invited two people.

Mary invited one person.

Mary invited six people.

cardinality-based alternatives

Background

- Alternative analysis

Presupposition: *Mary invited Susan and Paul.* (prejacent)

Mary did not invite only Susan and Paul, but preferred to invite their six cousins.

Presupposition: *Mary invited 2 people.*

✗ *Mary invited Susan and Jim.*

✗ *Mary invited Susan.*

✗ *Mary invited Susan and Paul's cousins.*

entailment-based alternatives

✗ *Mary invited two people.*

✗ *Mary invited one person.*

✓ *Mary invited six people.*

cardinality-based alternatives

Background

- Experimental evidence (Jayez & van Tiel 2012, n=25)

<i>Only</i>
Three people were in the cafeteria A drank orange juice and nothing else B drank coffee and nothing else C drank orange juice and coffee
Who didn't drink only orange juice?
<input type="checkbox"/> C
<input type="checkbox"/> C and B
<input type="checkbox"/> I don't know

Presupposition (as the prejacent): The person drank (at least) orange juice.
Assertion: The person drank something other than orange juice.

72% of the participants chose "C and B"

Research Questions

- How much does a particular experimental design contribute to the fragility of the presupposition of 'only' as the prejacent?
 - Preferring alternatives in form of response options (Experiment 1)
 - Presenting a negative sentence with 'only' without contexts (Experiment 2)

<i>Only</i>
Three people were in the cafeteria A drank orange juice and nothing else B drank coffee and nothing else C drank orange juice and coffee
Who didn't drink only orange juice? <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> C and B <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know

Experiment 1

n=108 (recruited on Prolific)
4 items + 8 fillers, 3 lists

- Manipulated factor: Proffering alternatives in form of response options

Introduction and question

Three people were in a cafeteria that serves orange juice, tea, and coffee. One person didn't drink only orange juice. What could they have drunk?

Fixed response

A. Orange juice and coffee

B. Coffee

C. Either A or B

D. I don't know

Free response

Tea

↔

Coffee

Possibility 1

Orange Juice

Orange Juice
Coffee
Tea

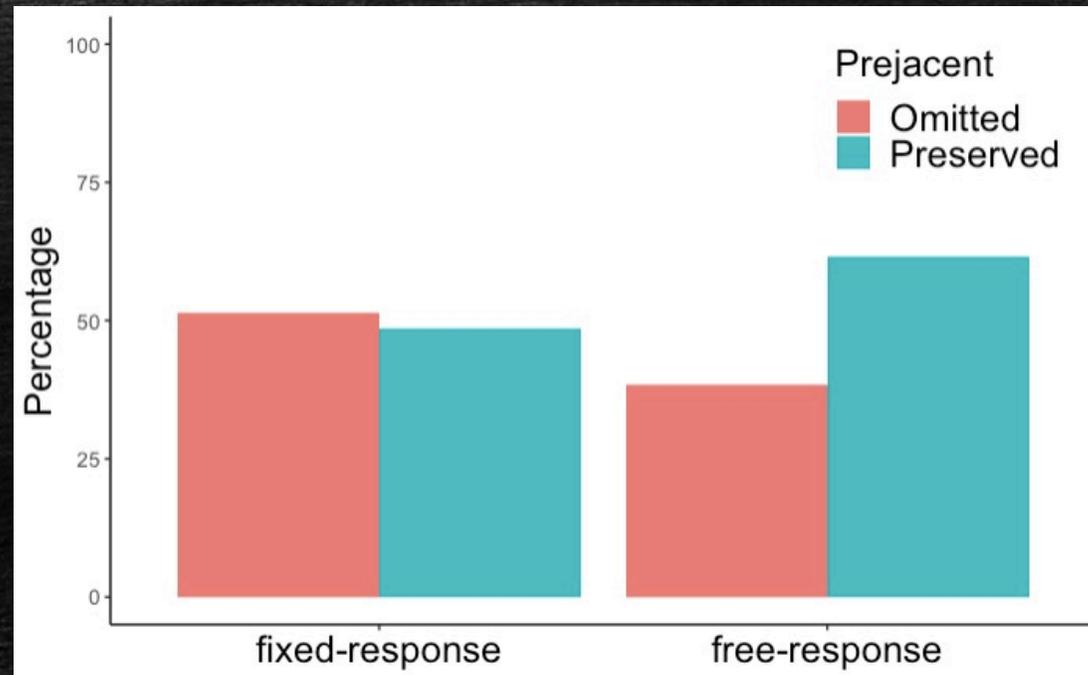
↔

Possibility 2

Experiment 1

n=108 (recruited on Prolific)
4 items + 8 fillers, 3 lists

- Result: A generalized linear model revealed a significant effect of response method ($p = 0.004$)



Experiment 2

n=108 (recruited on Prolific)
4 items + 8 fillers, 3 lists

- Manipulated factor: Response methods with affirmative context to facilitate the comprehension of a negative sentence (Prado & Noveck 2007; Musolino & Gualmini 2004; Musolino & Lidz 2003)

Introduction and question

Three people were in a cafeteria that serves orange juice, tea, and coffee. **Two of the people drank orange juice, but** one person didn't drink only orange juice. What could they have drunk?

Fixed response

A. Orange juice and coffee

B. Coffee

C. Either A or B

D. I don't know

Free response

Tea

↔

Coffee

↔

Possibility 1

Orange Juice

Orange Juice
Coffee
Tea

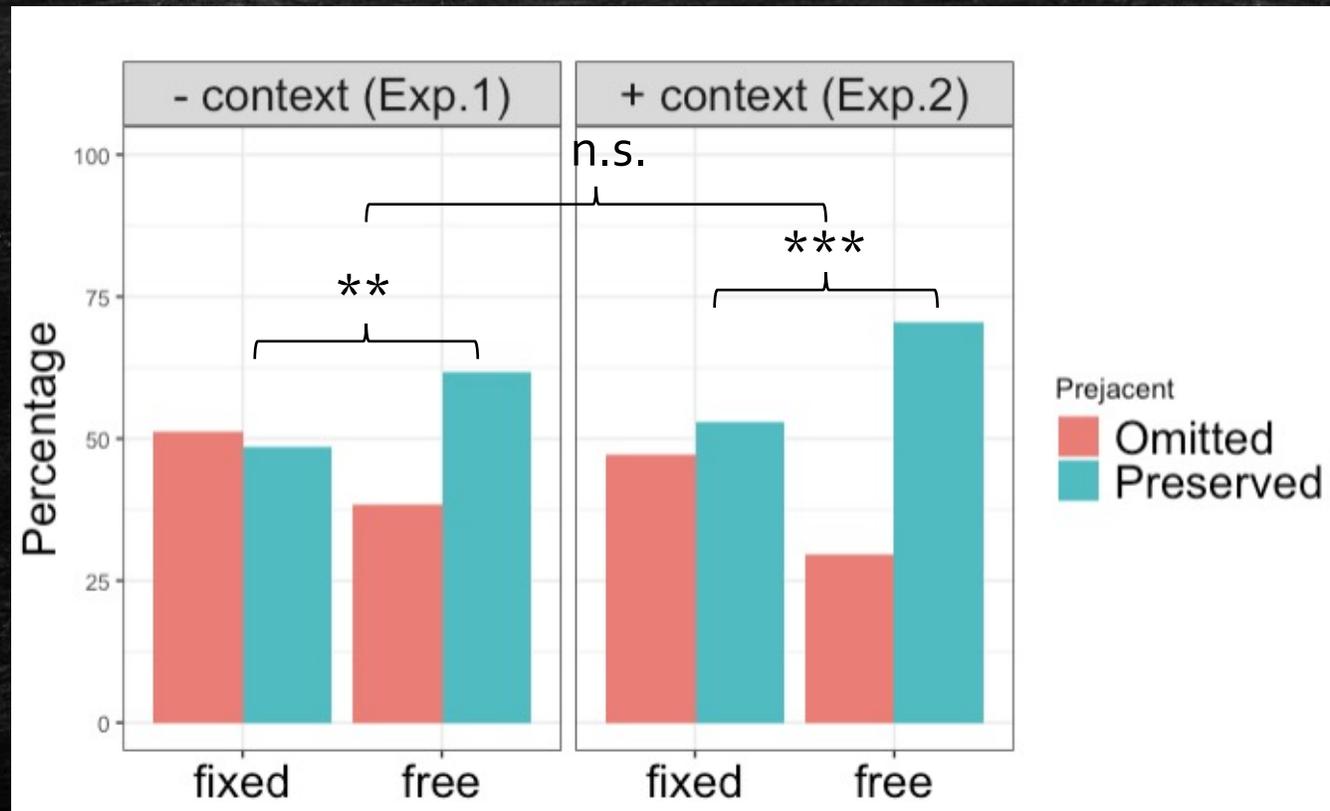
↔

Possibility 2

Experiment 2

n=108 (recruited on Prolific)
4 items + 8 fillers, 3 lists

- Result: A generalized linear model did not reveal a significant effect of introducing affirmative contexts ($p = 0.054$)



Summary & conclusion

- How much does a particular experimental design contribute to the fragility of the presupposition of 'only' as the prejacent?
 - Preferring alternatives in form of response options (Experiment 1)
 - Participants preferred to preserve the prejacent when they had to generate spontaneous interpretations of utterances
 - Presenting a negative sentence with 'only' without contexts (Experiment 2)
 - Difficulty with processing a negative sentence does not seem to affect the presuppositional component of 'only'

The tendency for the prejacent of 'only' to be ignored is exaggerated in part by the previous studies' experimental design.

References & acknowledgements

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contact: mtakahas@ucsd.edu