Exhaustivity in Exclusives: An Analysis of the Malayalam Exclusive Particles -e and ma:tRam

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Abstract

This paper deals with the meaning of the two exclusive particles in Malayalam *-e* and *ma:tRam*. Though they are treated as exclusives with the English Focus particle 'only', the paper claims their semantic is not identical. The paper focuses on a significant aspect of the meaning of exclusives: the source and content of the prejacent and the universal (the exhaustive) meaning component. It is demonstrated here with conventional semantic tests for assertion, presupposition and implicature that both the former and latter meaning components are asserted in sentences with *ma:tRam*. However, *-e* differs in that the prejacent is presupposed while the universal is asserted. Identifying whether an inference is part of the sentence's assertion/presupposition/ implication is substantial, as this impacts these particle's distribution and discourse functions. This study would contribute to a unified theory of exclusives.

Keywords: Malayalam, Exclusive particles, *-e, ma:tRam*, Prejacent; Exhaustivity, Only.

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the interpretational differences induced by the Malayalam exclusive particle *–e* and *ma:tRam,* which roughly correspond to English 'only' as seen in (1).

(1) a. *Ravi-kku ma:tRam hcu-il admission kitti*
         ravi -dat EXC hcu-Loc admission took
         'Only Ravi got admission in HCU.'
    b. *ravi-kk-e hcu-il admission kittiy-ullu*
         Ravi-dat-EXC hcu-Loc admission got-ullu
         'Only Ravi got admission in HCU.'

As Beaver and Clark (2008) suggests, the meaning of exclusives is effectively captured only when approached from three dimensions viz. discourse effect, treatment of scalarity and the status of the prejacent and the universal. However, a study of Malayalam exclusive particles covering these three areas is beyond the scope of this paper. The discussion of this paper is limited to the third aspect - the status of the prejacent and the universal meaning component. The central claim of this

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paper is that, though they are treated as exclusives with English 'only', their interpretative functions are not identical. Like 'only', 'just', etc., *-e* is used to weaken expectations in the common ground. Its specific effects are to suggest the truth of its prejacent and to assert that it is placed in a low position of a totally ordered set of alternatives. On the other hand, the particle ma:tRam, exhaustively asserts the truth of the prejacent and the universal reading.

The paper is structured as follows. The analysis starts with a demonstration of why *–e* and *ma:tRam* are treated as exclusives like 'only', 'just', 'mere' etc. This is followed by a discussion on the semantic literature that attempts to diagnose the source of the prejacent and the universal interpretations induced by English' only'. The following section applies four semantic tests on *ma:tRam* and *–e* viz. the cancellation test, the negation test, the reinforcement test and the question test. The paper is then concluded with a discussion on the results of these tests and its implications in the theory of exclusive particles.

2. ma:tRam and –e as Exclusives

A sentence like (2a) with the exclusive 'only' is generally taken to have two meaning components (2b) and (2c).

(2) a. *Only Manu sings*
  b. *Manu sings*
  c. *nobody else sings*

Sentence (2b), which is the result of removing the exclusive from the sentence (2a) is termed as the positive component or the prejacent**,** and the sentence (2c) is the negative component or the universal (Beaver and Clark 2008). The two particles under discussion, *ma:tRam* and –e, also express both the prejacent and the universal propositions as shown below.

(3) *Ragu-e paaTukay-uLLu*
  Ragu-EXC sing.PRS –uLLu
  'Only Raghu sings.'
  → (a*) Raghu sings*
  → (b) *No one other than Raghu sings*.

(4) *ragu ma:tRam paaTum*
   Raghu EXC   sings
   'Only Raghu sings.'
   →(a) *Raghu sings.*
   → (b) *No one other than John sings.*

In both the sentences (3) and (4)*,* all the people who are not Raghu are excluded as suggested in (3b) and (4b). That is the sentences (3) and (4) are false in a context where someone besides Raghu sings.

This is the essence of exclusivity that *–e* and *matram* shares with English' only'.

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3. The Prejacent and the Universal Interpretations Associated with 'only'

The universal is generally agreed to be a part of the ordinary at-issue context, i.e., something that gets, e.g., asserted by an assertion, negated by a negation, and questioned by a question (see Horn 1969, Atlas 1993, Konig, 1991etc.). However, there is some disagreement as to what the source and content of the prejacent is. The semantic literature offers numerous positions on the semantics or pragmatic nature of the prejacent in English' only' sentences, from assertion to conversational implicature. The precursor of such theories is prejacent presupposition theory of exclusives advocated by Horn (1969) and adopted in Rooth (1985, 1992) and many subsequent works. This theory treats the positive component of the meaning of an exclusive sentence as presupposition and the negative component as an ordinary entailment. Contra this position, Horn (1996) suggests that exclusives might not presuppose their prejacent but instead carry a weaker existential presupposition (Existential presupposition theory). According to this analysis, the base sentence 'Only Raghu sings' presupposes that somebody sings (the existential proposition). In this analysis, the prejacent is not given any clear independent status as part of the meaning of the base sentence. Instead, it is an inference that arises when both the presupposition and the assertion hold, since, e.g. 'somebody sings' and 'everybody who sings is Raghu' together classically entail 'Raghu sings.' Giving up on the presupposition altogether, Horn (2006) argues that both the positive and the negative components are part of the entailed meaning of 'only'. An entailment analysis of 'only' is also defended in Atlas (1993,1996). However, Horn's account differs from this in that the prejacent proposition is treated as 'assertorically inert', that is, it is entailed but not asserted. For example, inert entailments may not be the main target of an assertion or a negation. Ippolito (2008) proposed the implicational presupposition view which suggests that the base sentence presupposes neither the prejacent nor the existential, but rather an implication: existential→prejacent. Thus *'Only Raghu sings'* would presuppose that if anyone sings, then Raghu does. Van Rooij and Schulz's (2003, 2007) advocates for the conversational implicature account of exclusives, which says that the prejacent inferences associated with exclusive sentences are examples of conversational implicatures. The literature on exclusives employs several tests to determine the source of the prejacent and the universal. These include S-family tests (embedding under negation, cancellability etc.), backgrounding test, etc. In the following section we apply these tests on the Malayalam exclusive particles.

4. Identifying the Source of the Prejacent and the Universal Associated with *–e* and *ma:tRam*

Test 1: Cancellation Test

This test is used to determine whether the meaning component is part of the conventional meaning of the sentence (semantics) or is a mere conversational implicature (pragmatic). Conventional/semantic inferences cannot be cancelled whereas conversational/pragmatic inferences can be cancelled (Karttunen, 1973). In English, both the exhaustive reading (universal) and the prejacent inference in 'Only' sentences cannot usually be directly cancelled. This is explicated with (5).

> (5) a. #*Only Manu sings, but Manu doesn't sing*. (prejacent)
> b. # *Only Manu sings, but somebody else does* (too). (universal)

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If the prejacent is cancellable, then adding to a clause with these particles another clause that negates the prejacent reading would be possible. In (5a), a clause with 'only' is extended with the negation of the prejacent. But, this has resulted in infelicity. In the same way, if the exhaustive interpretation triggered by these particles is cancellable, then it would be possible to add to a clause with these particles another clause with an additive particle which differs from the first clause in the NP denotation but not in the VP denotation. The example (5b) demonstrates this. However, this also leads to infelicity. This serves as proof of the claim that the prejacent and the universal inference in 'only' sentences are part of its conventional meaning. The Malayalam exclusives *-e* and *ma:tRam* also seem to yield the same result.

(6) a. #*manuv-e paaT-ukay-uLLu, pakshe manu paT-illa*
        Manu-EXC sing-PRS-uLLU, but Manu sing-NEG
        'Only Manu sings, but Manu doesn't sing.'
     b. # *manuv-e paaT-ukay-ullu, pakshe mattaaro koodi paaTum*
           Manu-Exc sing-PRS-uLLu, but somebody else also sings
           'Only Manu sings, but somebody else does (too).'

(7) a. #*manu ma:tRam paaT-um,pakshe manu paaT-illa*
       Manu EXC sing-PRS but Manu sing-NEG
       'Only Manu sings, but Manu doesn't sing.'
    b.#*manu ma:tRam paaTum. pakshe mattaaro koodi paaTum*
        Manu Exc sing-PRS, but somebody else also sings
        'Only Manu sings, but somebody else does (too).'

These examples demonstrate that the prejacent and the universal inference cannot be cancelled in the types of Malayalam constructions under discussion. The data confirms that the exhaustivity inference and the prejacent are not mere conversational implicature in these sentences. This leaves the possibility of these two inferences being either assertion or presupposition. Embedding under negation test helps to determine whether a meaning component is asserted or presupposed.

Test 2: Negation Test
The survival of an inference under negation is a typical feature of a presupposition (Karttunen 1973). Horn (1969) has used this test to advocate for prejacent presupposition theory of exclusives. In (8), the prejacent inference survives, but the universal inference does not. Horn accounted for this fact by claiming that 'only' is a presupposition trigger and the prejacent in question is a presupposition. The universal inference is not preserved in (8) and it is identified as an ordinary entailment of the base sentence (and thus targeted by negation).

(8) *Not only Raghu sings*
      → *Raghu sings*
      ↛ *nobody other than Raghu sings*

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Negation test presents a very curious case in Malayalam. The language has two types of negative auxiliaries *illa* and *alla*, and a negative verbal affix *–aat*. Sentence (9a) can be negated in three ways as shown in (9b) – (9d):

(9) a. *ragu valikkum*
    Raghu smoke-PRS
    'Raghu smokes'

  b. *ragu valicilla* (¬S)
    'Raghu did not smoke.'

    c. *ragu alla valiccatu* (¬Raghu)
      it is not Raghu who smoked

    d. *ragu valikkaathirunnu* (¬predicate)
      Raghu did not smoke
      Lit: 'John remained without smoking.'

illa is an existential negation particle and do not commit to the existence of the entity the subject refers to. Here the scope of the negation is the whole sentence. *alla* is a constituent negation particle and commits to the truth of the proposition' something happened'; here 'somebody smoked'. Note that this sentence (9c) with the constituent negation particle *alla* is cleft. *–aat* is a predicate negation particle and is always attached to the verbal element of. The scope of the negation when this particle is suffixed to the verb is just the predicate. The exclusive particle *–e* is compatible only with the predicate negation particle as shown in (10).

(10) a. *manuv-e veLLam kudicc-uLLu*
      Manu-EXC water drank-uLLU
      'Only Manu drank water.'
    b. **manuv-e veLLam kudicc-illa*   (sentence negation)
      Manu-EXC water drank-NEG
    c. * *manuv-e alla veLLam kudiccu* (constituent negation)
      Manu-EXC NEG water drank
    d. *manuv-e veLLam kudik-aat-irunn-uLLu*
      Manu-EXC water drink-NEG-PST-uLLU
      'only john did not smoke.' (≠ Not only John smoke)

However, in the grammatical sentence (10d), the negation has scope only over the predicate; the exclusive particle *–e* does not come under its scope. To the best of my knowledge, Malayalam does not have a construction where *–e* (the exclusive particle) comes under the scope of the negation. Hence, it seems impossible to test whether the prejacent is presupposed in *–e* sentences by employing the embedding under negation test.

Now, consider *ma:tRam* sentences. They are compatible with *–illa*, and *aat*, but not *alla*.

(11) a. *manu ma:tRam weLLam kuTiccu*
    Manu EXC water drank

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'Only Manu drank water.'

    b.   *manu ma:tRam weLLam kuTicc-illa*   (¬11a)

      Manu Exc water drank-NEG

      'Only Manu did not drink water.' (≠ Not only Manu drank water)

    c.   *manu ma:tRam weLLam kuTik-aat-irunnu*

      Manu EXC water drink-Neg-PST

      'Only Manu did not drink water.' (≠ Not only Manu drank water)

    d.*manu ma:tRam alla weLLam kuTiccu*

      Manu EXC NEG water drank

In (11b), though (11a) is negated with the external negation particle illa, *John+ma:tRam* is out of the scope of the negation. It is impossible to come up with a Malayalam construction equivalent to 'not only john smokes' in the case of *ma:tRam* sentences too. The exclusivity induced by *–e* and *ma:tRam* cannot be negated with any of the sentences provided in (10) and (11) respectively. However, this does not mean that *–e* and *ma:tRam* do not entail exhaustivity. There is an alternative way to test this. A short context description followed by a negated target sentence is presented from (12) – (14). The negation is induced by a construction similar to English 'it is not the case that'.

(12)   a. *Meera innale marketil poyirunnu*

       'Meera went to the market, yesterday.'

    b. *pakshe, avaL kappay-e meTiccch-uLLu ennu paRanjat tett-aaNu*

      but, she tapioca-EXC bought-uLLu that said-NMLZ wrong-copula

      'But it is not true that she bought only tapioca.'

      →*Meera bought tapioca.*

      ↛ *Meera bought tapioca and nothing else.*

    c. *pakshe avaL kappa ma:tRam meTiccu ennu paRanjat tett-aNu*

      but, she tapioca EXC bought that said-NMLZ wrong-copula

      'But it is not true that she bought only tapioca.'

      ↛ *Meera bought tapioca*

      ↛ *meera bought tapioca and nothing else*

In (12b), the sentences with *–e,* the universal reading is negated and the prejacent inference survives. This indicates that sentences with *–e* presupposes the prejacent and asserts the exhaustive reading. However, in (12c), the phrase 'it is not the case that' can target both the prejacent inference 'Meera bought tapioca' and the universal inference 'Meera bought tapioca and nothing else'. That prejacent has the same status as of the universal in *ma:tRam* sentences becomes more evident in a context like (13).

(13)   A: *Manu ma:tRam thesis veccu*

       Manu EXC thesis submitted

       'Only Manu submitted the thesis.'

   a.   B: Illa.

         Neg

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In (13a), the negation particle *illa* clearly negates the proposition 'John submitted the thesis' and thus can be followed and the negation of the prejacent sentence as shown in (14).

(14) *illa, manu thesis vecc-illa*
     Neg,, Manu thesis submit-Neg
     'No, Manu did not submit the thesis.'

Test 3: Questions

Questions target the asserted meaning component (see Beaver and Clark (2008) for a detailed discussion on this). The interrogative sentence (15) with the exclusive particle –e questions the universal or the exhaustive inference, i.e. it questions whether no one other than Binu failed. The prejacent is implied in the question as shown below.

(15) *binu-e tottupoy-uLL-o?*
     Binu-EXC failed-uLL-QP
     'Did only Binu fail?'
     → Binu failed
     ↛ no one other than Binu failed

However, this is not true for ma:tRam. The sentence (16) is an interrogative sentence with ma:tRam and this can be interpreted as questioning both the prejacent and the universal inference, i.e. 'Did Binu fail?' and 'Did no one other than Binu fail?'

(16)   *binu ma:tRam tottupoy-o?* (*Ellavarum jayikkum ennu njaan prethikshichatha*).
        Binu EXC failed-QP
        'Did Binu fail?' (I expected that everyone would clear the test)
        ↛ Binu failed
        ↛ no one other than Binu failed

The same is illustrated with (17). The speaker holds the information that the addressee has solved the first problem and the only information that the speakers seek for is whether the addressee has solved any problems other than the first problem. Questioning the known information is not appropriate. It is shown here that the interrogative sentence (17a) with the exclusive –e is felicitous in this context. This suggests that the prejacent is presupposed and the universal is asserted in –*e* sentences. On the other hand, (17b) with *ma:tRam* is no felicitous in the context as it questions the known information given in the context. This suggests that both the prejacent and the universal is asserted in *ma:tRam* sentences.

(17) A: *Enikkariyam ni aadyathe problem cheythunnu.*
         'I know that you have solved the first problem.'
     a.   *ath-e cheyth-uLL-o*?
            That-EXC did-uLL-QP

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'Did you do only that?'

    b.   # *athu ma:tRam cheyth-o*?

        That EXC   did-QP

Test 4: Reinforcement Test

The base sentence (sentence with the exclusive particle) can be used to strengthen the presupposition inference, where as it cannot be used to strengthen an assertion since the information will become redundant. This test has been used to show that the prejacent is presupposed while the universal is asserted in English exclusive sentences (see 18).

(18)   a. Manu sings, and indeed only Manu sings.

        b. #Nobody but Manu sings, and indeed only Manu sings.

In (18a), the prejacent constitutes the first clause. When followed by the exclusive sentence, the prejacent is reinforced. This does not result in redundancy as it is not part of the asserted meaning of the exclusive. In (18b), the universal precedes the exclusive sentence and it leads to anomaly as the asserted meaning of the first clause is again asserted in the exclusive sentence. This serves as a proof to claim that the prejacent is presupposed while the universal is asserted in English exclusive sentences. This test is applied to Malayalam exclusives in the following sentences.

(19) a. *manu valiccu, sathyathil manuv-e valicc-uLLu.*

        Manu smoked, indeed Manu-EXC smoked-uLLu

        'Manu smoked and indeed only Manu smoked.'

    b. #*manu allaathe maattaarum valicc-illa, sathyathil manuv-e valiccullu*

        Manu except anybody-else smoked-Neg, indeed Manu-EXC smoked-uLLU

        'No one other than Manu smoked and indeed only Manu smoked.'

(20)   a.# *manu valiccu, sathyathil manu ma:tRam valiccu.*

        Manu smoked, indeed Manu EXC smoked

        'Manu smoked and indeed only Manu smoked.'

    b.##*manu allaathe maattaarum valicc-illa,sathyathil manu ma:tRam valiccu*

        Manu except anybody-else smoked-Neg, indeed Manu EXC smoked

        'No one other than Manu smoked and indeed only Manu smoked.'

The example (19) suggests that in *–e* sentences, the prejacent is presupposed and the exhaustive inference is asserted. *ma:tRam* exhibits a different behaviour as attested in (20).

5. Summary and Conclusion

The first test -- cancellation test -- proves that the prejacent and the universal inferences are part of the semantics of *–e* and *ma:tRam*, and are not mere conversational implicatures. The second and the third tests illustrate that the sentences with the exclusive *–e* behave like English 'only'; when embedded under negation, and in questions the prejacent inference projects and the universal inference does not. The cancellation test also yields the same result. It can be concluded from these results that the prejacent inference is presupposed, and the universal inference is asserted in

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sentences with *–e* and 'only'. However, this does not confirm that *–e* and 'only' have the same semantics as they can differ in other aspects of the meaning of exclusives, such as in discourse function and scalarity effect. The results are very deviant when it comes to the exclusive ma:tRam. It is shown with the tests (2-4) that both the prejacent and the universal inferences associated with *ma:tRam* are asserted. This study is just an initial step towards understanding the semantic complexity of Malayalam exclusive particles and by no means a comprehensive account of them.

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