Only-concord in Vietnamese: Support for a bipartite analysis and Undermerge

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BACKGROUND. Quek & Hirsch (2017) (based on previous work including Cable 2010; Lee 2005) propose a bipartite analysis of association with focus constructions. Under their analysis (Q&H), a focus construction ‘only’ involves two heads: one on the clausal spine (Foc), and one more local to the focused constituent (Q). English can either realize the Foc head with the sentential/adverbial ‘only’ (onlyS) or realize the Q head with the constituent/adnominal ‘only’ (onlyC), as in (1); yet only the clausal head is interpreted at LF, contributing the standard Rooth’s semantics of ‘only’, as reproduced in (2).

(1) [TP John [Foc [VP tì  eats  [Q  beef]]]]    Either one of the heads can be realized in English:
   a. John onlyS eats beefS. (onlyS realizes Foc)
   b. John eats onlyC beefS. (onlyC realizes Q)

(2) The semantics of Foc (based on Rooth 1985): [[only]](C) = λp₆λw::p(w). ∇p ∈ C[p'(w)→p⊆p]

Q&H briefly mentions Vietnamese data (originally reported in Hole 2013) provides direct support for the bipartite structure in (1); since this language not only allows the overt realization of either Foc head or Q head with adverbial chi or adnominal mõi as in (3a, b) just like English, but also allows the realization of both heads (‘only’)-concord: (3c) has a single focus reading just like (3a, b).

(3) a. Nam chí ăn THỊTBÒ  b. Nam ăn mõi THỊTBÒ  c. Nam chi ăn mõi THỊTBÒ
   ‘Nam onlyS eat  beef  Nam eat onlyC beef  Nam onlyS  eat onlyC beef
   ‘Nam only eats beefS’   ‘Nam eats only beefS’   ‘Nam only eats beefS’

MAIN CLAIMS. This paper first presents novel scope data in Vietnamese that supports the bipartite analysis and then shows that the optional focus movement of adnominal mõi can be captured by utilizing the syntactic operation ‘Undermerge’ (Pesetsky 2013, Yuan 2017) in the bipartite analysis.

I. SUPPORT FOR BIPARTITE ANALYSIS. When there is another scope-taking predicate like a modal verb in the sentence, adverbial chi always exhibits surface scope (4) while adnominal mõi exhibits scope ambiguity (5); when the two co-occur, the sentence is not ambiguous and the scope site of ‘only’ is determined by the position of adverbial chi, as in (6).

(4) a. Nam chí cóthê ăn THỊTBÒ  b. Nam cóthê chí ăn THỊTBÒ
   Nam onlyS can  eat  beef  Nam can onlyS eat  beef
   ‘Nam is only allowed to eat beefS’ (onlyS)  ‘Nam is allowed to only eat beefS’ (◇>only)

(5) Nam cóthê ăn mõi THỊTBÒ
   Nam can  eat onlyC  beef
   ‘Nam is only allowed to eat beefS’ or ‘Nam is allowed to only eat beefS’ (onlyC)  (◇>only)

(6) a. Nam chí cóthê ăn mõi THỊTBÒ  b. Nam cóthê chí ăn mõi THỊTBÒ
   Nam onlyS can  eat onlyC  beef  Nam can onlyS eat onlyC  beef
   ‘Nam is only allowed to eat beefS’ (onlyC)  ‘Nam is allowed to only eat beefS’ (◇>only)

Following Q&H, the Foc head bears an interpretable but unvalued operator feature [iONLY()] and the Q head bears an uninterpretable but valued feature [uONLY(+)]. The Foc head agrees with Q to get its feature valued as shown in (7). Since only the adverbial chi realizes the semantically contentful Foc head and Q head is semantically vacuous, we expect both the cases in which chi occurs alone as in (4) and the cases in which chi co-occurs with adnominal mõi as in (6) to have the semantic scope of ‘only’ to be determined by the surface position of adverbial chi. For the sentence in which mõi occurs alone as in (5), the scope ambiguity is expected since the covert Foc head can be either above the modal verb or below it.

(7) Foc Agrees with Q:

II. FOCUS MOVEMENT. In Vietnamese adnominal mõi can also undergo optional focus movement (together with its DP host) to either the post-subject or clause-initial position, as shown in (8a, b). Although the particle mõi is preferred in most cases, it is not required for the subject-focus examples. This is one of the reasons that I do not follow Hole (2017) in analyzing the fronting in (8) as movement into a projection headed by mõi (With more space I’ll provide another argument against the Spec-Head analysis
for a mōí-phase and the particle mōí, which is based on the difficulty of deriving the clause-intial position of a mōí-phase due to Freezing effect).

(8) a. Nam [mōí THÎTBÔ]1 mōí ān t1 Nam onlyC beef PRT eat
    ‘Only beef does Nam eat’
   b. [mōí THÎTBÔ]1 Nam mōí ān t1 onlyC beef Nam PRT eat
    ‘Only beef does Nam eat’

Interestingly, the fronted adnominal mōí exhibits surface scope as in (9) even though the in-situ adnominal mōí gives rise to scope ambiguity as shown in (5).

(9) a. Nam [mōí THÎTBÔ]1 mōí cóthē ān t1 Nam onlyC beef PRT can eat ‘Nam is only allowed to eat beef’ (only>◇)
   b. [mōí THÎTBÔ]1 Nam mōí cóthē ān t1 onlyC beef Nam PRT can eat ‘Nam is only allowed to eat beef’ (◇>only)

Under Q&H, such movement can be captured by an optional [EPP] feature on the Foc head (see their discussion about the ‘even’-construction in Singapore English) as in (10). FocP can occur either above VP or above TP; the fronted position of adnominal mōí thus indirectly indicates the position of the covert Foc head, which in turn constrains the scope of ‘only’ in (9). For (9a, b) the scope of ‘only’ must be above that of the modal while in (9c) the scope of ‘only’ must be below that of the modal.

(10) [FocP [Q [ONLY(+)] beef]]1 [Foc ‘Foc’ [ONLY(+),EPP] [TP/VP Nam mōí ān t1 ] ] ] (For (8a, b))

What’s unexpected is when adverbial chí co-occurs with fronted adnominal mōí, the two are indeed adjacent but they actually occur in the adverbial-adnominal order as in (11). No other word order is possible if a single focus reading is intended even if the positions of adverbial chí and the fronted adnominal mōí as in (12) are independently possible when they do not co-occur as in (6a) and (9c).

(11) a. Nam chí [mōí THÎTBÔ]1 mōí cóthē ān t1 (only>◇)
   b. chí [mōí THÎTBÔ]1 Nam mōí cóthē ān t1 (only>◇)
   c. Nam cóthē chí [mōí THÎTBÔ]1 mōí ān t1 (◇>only)
(12) *Nam chí cóthē [mōí THÎTBÔ]1 mōí ān t1 Nam onlyS can onlyC beef PRT eat Int: ‘Nam is only allowed to eat beef’

**UNDERMERE.** Whereas the adverbial-adnominal order resulted by the focus movement cannot be captured by the standard movement-to-specifier operation, I argue it can be captured by the operation ‘Undermerge’: (i) the Foc head bears an optional [↑EPP] feature; (ii) the [↑EPP] feature on Foc head has to checked by movement of QP to its complement position (i.e. ‘Undermerge’), as shown in (13). Note ‘Undermerge’ has been independently used in Yuan (2017) to address a focus-related construction in Kikuyu after the original proposal by Pesetsky (2013).

**CONCLUSIONS AND REMAINS.** This paper presents novel data of the scope phenomena and focus movement of Vietnamese ‘only’, which not only provides cross-linguistic support for the bipartite analysis of focus constructions, but also identifies another instantiation of the operation ‘Undermerge’ in which a phrase moves into a complement position. With more space, I will compare the current analysis to previous accounts of Vietnamese mōí (Hole 2017; Erlewine 2017) and show that their proposal cannot be directly extended to account for the data.