

## **Proposed project**

What does the word *only* mean? Several answers to this question have been given. We experimentally investigate and evaluate these answers. This investigation sheds light on the semantics of *only* but also on the relationship between assertion and presupposition.

## **Aim of the meeting**

We have conducted several experiments, where we presented participants with items like the following:

One year there were 90 students in Arroyo:

30 drank Tequila and nothing else.

30 drank EANABS and nothing else.

30 drank everything, no matter what.

How many students did not drink only Tequila?

The critical question was whether participants answer “60”, thus including the 30 students who drank EANABS and nothing else. In this respect we found large differences between languages (Dutch and French on the one hand and English on the other) and between presupposition triggers (factives versus aspectuals versus implicatives). These differences cast doubt on the assumption that presupposition is a homogenous phenomenon. Our aim is to make theoretical sense of these surprising differences. This will help us to distinguish between different theories about the meaning of *only*. We will also consider follow-up experiments to this end.

## **Work carried out**

We discussed various explanations for the results of our amended Tequila test but eventually decided to focus on the meaning of “only”. In order to strengthen our hypothesis that the inclusion of individual that do not satisfy the prejacent in the denotation of “only,” we carried out two experiment. First, we investigated the developmental trajectory of understanding “only” in children between 5 and 11 years old. Second, we investigated the effect of including or excluding a contrastive item (i.e., the 30 students that drank only Tequila in the story above) in the experiment. Results from both of these manipulations suggest that including an individual that does not satisfy the prejacent is in fact a marked phenomenon that is perhaps due to participants interpreting “not” as a kind of echoic negation that also targets the presupposition. In sum, our findings strengthen our hypothesis that “only” does presuppose its prejacent.

## **Future work**

In our future work, we would like to compare the developmental trajectory of “only” with that of other presupposition triggers. Is the trajectory always of the form: (i) ignore presupposition trigger, (ii) exclude individuals that do not satisfy the presupposition, (iii) include such individuals? However, since we have adduced a large pool of data to support the claim that “only” presupposes its prejacent, our primary goal is now to write up our findings and send them to a suitable journal.

## **Projected publications**

Our main findings can be summarized as follows: (i) “only” is not special in participants’ tendency to include individuals that do not satisfy its presupposition, (ii) presuppositions are not homogenous with respect to their behavior in case of presupposition failure, (iii) the marked status of the tendency mentioned in (i) can be shown by looking at children’s developmental understanding of “only” and by manipulating methodological parameters. We believe that this is sufficient material for one or more publications. In the future, we want to discuss precisely how to present these conclusions in a coherent way. We believe that these conclusion pertain to the relationship between presupposition and assertion, and more particularly to the methods of teasing these two apart experimentally.