Exceptive phrases and the “negative” condition  P. Nadathur & D. Lassiter, Stanford University

Since Keenan & Stavi (1986), exceptive phrases (EPs; see 1) have been treated as operators that modify quantifiers by subtracting their complements from the quantifier domain:

(1)  
   a. Everyone [except the linguists] went home.  \(\vdash\) All non-linguists went home.
   b. No one [except the linguists] went home.  \(\vdash\) No non-linguists went home.

EPs are usually taken to be parallel to negatively restricted relative (RR) clauses (\(Q\)-many \(C\)s that are not \(M\) are \(P\)), but subject to additional semantic constraints (von Fintel 1993, Moltmann 1995). The most significant of these is known as the “negative” constraint:

(2)  
   **Negative constraint** (Moltmann 1995). Applying the predicate of [an excepted] quantifier to the exceptions yields the opposite truth value than applying the predicate to the non-exceptions.

Where the quantifier is universal, this is a biconditionality requirement: (1a) holds that no linguists went home, and (1b) that they all did. This requirement is meant to distinguish “true” or “connected” EPs such as except \(M\) from “free” EPs like other than \(M\) (von Fintel, Moltmann).

We report on the results of an experiment challenging the validity of (2) as a semantic component of EPs. Via Mechanical Turk, we presented 176 native English-speakers with a variety of test sentences as in (3). Participants were asked to judge the sentences true or false with respect to a display of red and blue marbles. Conditions were set so that the domain subtraction condition (\(Q\)-many red marbles had dots) was always met, but (2) was not: the fraction of blue marbles with dots was varied by fifths from 0-1.

(3)  
   a. Every/no marble that is not blue has a dot. [Negative RR]
   b. Every/no marble except/but/other than the blue ones has a dot. [High-pos EP]
   Every/no marble has a dot except/but/other than the blue ones. [Low-pos EP]

![Figure 1: Acceptance rates for EPs by proportion of dotted target marbles](image)

While true EPs are categorically rejected where the exceptions have the same predicate-value as the non-exceptions (across-the-board conditions), and categorically accepted where (2) holds, a biconditional semantics is not supported in intermediate cases. Moreover, we find that there is a sharp distinction between the relevance of a negative condition for EPs modifying the no vs those modifying every: the latter seems to support a biconditional implicature (Hoeksema 1990), but the former are only distinguished from negative RRs in the case where all marbles have dots, regardless of colour. This pattern mimics that found for unless in earlier work (Authors 2014), and suggests that there is a deep connection between quantifier polarity and homogeneity inferences. Finally, we suggest that true EPs are not distinguished from free EPs via (2), but rather with respect to a condition which precludes across-the-board contexts for e.g. except (see also Garcia-Alvarez 2008), but only results in pragmatic oddness for other than. Based on our data, we propose an account of EPs in which the parameters of variation between the different EP types (and between EPs and negative RRs) are pragmatic, not semantic.
References.