Presupposition-denying uses of *even*
Naomi Francis (MIT)

I. Puzzle: *Even* can be used in declarative sentences that deny presuppositions, but only when it appears below negation, as shown in (1).

1. A: Did Kenji's wife go to the party?　　　(Presupposes: Kenji has a wife, i.e., is married)
   B: He isn't **even** married!
   B′: #He's **even** unmarried/a bachelor!

Even is truth-conditionally vacuous but introduces two presuppositions: a scalar presupposition that the prejacent (the sentence hosting *even*) is less likely than the other salient focus alternatives, and an additive presupposition that an alternative besides the prejacent is true (Karttunen & Peters 1979 et seq.). The contrast in (1) is mysterious because, on any theory of *even*, (1B) and (1B′) should be both truth-conditionally and presuppositionally equivalent. It is not reducible to independent properties of *even* or presupposition denial; it is a property of sentences with both of these features. **II. Proposal:** I propose that the contrast in (1) reflects a failure of the additive presupposition of *even* in the positive but not the negative sentences. I argue that the salient focus alternatives for *even* in dialogues like (1) carry the trigger for the presupposition that the prejacent denies; for example, the alternatives in (1) will involve the propositions made salient by Speaker A's question: {*Kenji's wife went to the party, Kenji's wife didn't go to the party*}. These alternatives will be presupposition failures if the prejacent *He isn't married/He is unmarried* is true, meaning that the additive presupposition of *even* cannot be satisfied (2,3).

2. He isn't even married!
   a. LF: even$_C$ [NEG [he is married]$_F$]
   b. C = {NEG [he is married], NEG [his wife went to the party], NEG [his wife didn't go to the party]}
      = {*He isn't married, #His wife didn't go to the party, #His wife went to the party*}
3. #He's even unmarried!
   a. LF: even$_C$ [he is unmarried]$_F$
   b. C = {he is unmarried, his wife went to the party, his wife didn't go to the party}
      = {*He is unmarried, #His wife went to the party, #His wife didn't go to the party*}

I argue that the difference between the positive and negative cases is that the latter license a parse where the presupposition is negated within the alternatives. This is implemented via a meta-assertion operator *A* (Bochvar 1939), which is independently argued to be present in presupposition denials (Beaver & Krahmer 2001); this operator maps presupposition failures to false, as if the presupposition had been asserted (cf. Heim's 1983 local accommodation). When placed under negation, it allows presuppositions triggered below it to be negated instead of projected. In negative cases like (1B), having an *A* operator below negation (4a) allows the presuppositions triggered in the alternatives to be negated; this yields propositions that will be true whenever the prejacent is true (4b), thus satisfying the additive presupposition of *even*.

4. He isn't even married!
   a. LF: even$_C$ [NEG [A [he is married]$_F$]]
   b. C = {NEG [A [he is married]], NEG [A [his wife went to the party]], NEG [A [his wife didn't go to the party]]}
      = {*It's not true that he is married,* $^{True!}$*It's not true that he has a wife and she went to the party,* $^{True!}$*It's not true that he has a wife and she didn't go to the party*}

In positive cases like (1B′), the *A* operator is not under negation (5a). This results in the problematic presuppositions being asserted, not negated, yielding alternatives that are false when the prejacent is true (5b); this leaves the additive presupposition of *even* unsatisfied.

5. #He's even unmarried!
   a. LF: even$_C$ [A [he is unmarried]$_F$]]
   b. C = {A [he is unmarried], A [his wife went to the party], A [his wife didn't go to the party]}
      = {*It's true that he is unmarried,* $^{False!}$*It's true that he has a wife and she went to the party,* $^{False!}$*It's true that he has a wife and she didn't go to the party*}

This analysis derives the contrast in (1) from the interaction of presupposition denial with the semantics of *even*: the additive presupposition is introduced by *even*, and it is only in presupposition-denying contexts that i) the salient alternatives contain triggers for a presupposition that the prejacent denies, and ii) a parse including an A operator is licensed.

III. Possible objections: This analysis relies on a failure of *even*'s additive presupposition when the alternatives are mutually exclusive. However, this presupposition has been claimed to not be active when the alternatives are mutually exclusive (von Stechow 1991, Rullmann 1997, Crnič 2011, a.o.), as in (6); if John only drank water, he did not drink anything else.

6. [At yesterday's party, people stayed with their first choice of drink. Bill only drank WINE, Sue only drank BEER, and]
   John even$_1$ only$_2$ drank [WATER]$_{F1,F2}$ (Krifka 1992: 22)

I show that sentences like (6) are only acceptable to the extent that the context and prosody license an interpretation where the alternatives are not in fact mutually exclusive. In (6), the context makes salient the non-mutually exclusive set of alternatives {*John only drank water, Bill only drank wine, Sue only drank beer*}, consistent with a second focus on the subject, rather than the mutually exclusive {*John only drank water, John only drank wine, John only drank beer*}, with focus only on the object (Wilkinson 1996). When the context and prosody rule out this interpretation (7), the result is infelicity.

7. [At the party, John stayed with his first choice of drink. You'll never guess what he chose.]
   #He even$_1$ only$_2$ drank [WATER]$_{F1,F2}$

This is exactly what we should expect if the additive presupposition of *even* is active.

IV. Crosslinguistic extensions: The puzzle is not restricted to English; it is reproduced for particles in Greek (*kan*), German (*überhaupt*), and Russian (*daže*, and for some speakers *voobšče*), all of which involve an *even*-like component (cf. Iatridou & Tatevosov 2016). The analysis above predicts that if a language has an expression with the scalar but not the additive component of *even*, it will be acceptable in both positive and negative presupposition denials. I argue that Hebrew *bixlal* is such an item; it is compatible with mutually exclusive alternatives (8), suggesting that it lacks an additive component, and it does not exhibit our contrast (9).

8. [B is a journalist doing a feature on bronze medallists; A is suggesting people for B to interview.]
   A: Mary won a bronze medal.
   B: Lo! Hi **bixlal** zaxta be-medaljat [KESEF]$_F$
      NEG she BIXLAL won in-medal   silver
      'No! She *bixlal* won a silver medal.'

9. A: Did Kenji's wife go to the party?
   B: Hu **bixlal** lo   nasuj.
      he BIXLAL NEG married
      'He isn't *bixlal* married!'
   B′: Hu **bixlal** ravak.
      he BIXLAL bachelor
      'He's *bixlal* a bachelor!'

V. Conclusions: This talk claims that the contrast in (1) results from *even*'s additive presupposition being satisfied in negative but not positive presupposition denials, in part because the alternatives contain the trigger for the presupposition that the prejacent denies. This means that a presupposition triggered in a focus alternative can affect the acceptability of a sentence that does not itself contain the trigger for that presupposition. This raises questions about the status of focus alternatives and presuppositions generated therein, to be taken up in future work.

References

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