

## The meaning and function of the Malayalam exclusives *-e:* and *ma:tRam*

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**Overview:** This paper concerns the semantic-pragmatic effects, and the focus sensitivity of the Malayalam exclusives *-e:* and *ma:tRam*. The goal of the paper is to account for the difference concerning the interpretation and distribution of these particles. The main claim of this paper is that *-e:* is a focus sensitive scalar exclusive, in the intuitive sense of Beaver & Clark (2008) whereas *ma:tRam* is a non-focus sensitive exclusive. The exhaustive inference associated with *-e:* is shown to be a function of its scalarity. A sentence with *-e:* presupposes that at least the prejacent is true and asserts that at most the prejacent is true. *Ma:tRam*, on the other hand asserts the truth of both the prejacent and the exhaustive proposition.

**Background:** *-e:* and *ma:tRam* like the English ‘only’ express both the prejacent (p) and the universal propositions associated with exclusives as shown below:

- (1) a. *ra:mu pLeite: kazhukiyuLLu*  
Ramu plate-EXCL washed-be-u  
‘Ramu washed only a plate.’  
b. Ramu washed a plate. (*prejacent*)  
c. Ramu washed nothing other than a plate. (*universal*)
- (2) a. *ra:mu pLeit ma:tRam kazhuki*  
Ramu plate EXCL washed  
‘Ramu washed only a plate.’  
b. Ramu washed a plate. (*prejacent*)  
c. Ramu washed nothing other than a plate. (*universal*)

The idea that *ma:tRam* and *-e:* have distinct semantics is presented in Mathew (2014, 2015) and Swenson et.al. (2015), though both haven’t proposed an analysis of this. Evidence in favor of this idea comes from the fact that both markers can simultaneously and nonredundantly be used to modify a single constituent in a given sentence.

- (3) a. *ra:mu pLeit ma:tRame: kazhukiyuLLu*  
Ramu plate EXCL-EXCL washed-be-u  
‘Ramu washed only a plate.’

In (3) both *ma:tRam* and *-e:* target the object, plate. As Swenson et.al (2015) observes if they encoded the same semantics, we would expect the sentence to have a redundant feel, yet it does not. A further evidence to support this claim is that *ma:tRam* sentences cannot be substituted with *-e:* sentences in all contexts, as we will see in the following section.

**Analysis:** Using B&C’s theory of exclusives, it is shown that the Malayalam exclusives *ma:tRam* and *-e:* can be differentiated along the following aspects.

(i) Mirativity: The paper claims that the primary function of *-e:* like ‘only’ is to mediate the flow of the discourse by resetting the expectations, allowing the speaker to strike a balance between what is interesting (i.e. relevant and strongly informative) and what is true. The particle *-e:* seems to reject expectations in the common ground that something stronger than the prejacent(p) holds, and it indicates that the strongest true alternative is p. The presence of a stronger expectation, which the use of *-e:* rejects, is reflected in the pair of sentences in (4a) and (4b):

- (4) a. *njaan suite aanu prethikshicatu, pakshe single room-e: kittiyullu*  
I suite copula expected-NMLZ, but single room-e got-ullu  
‘I expected a suite, but I only got a single room.’  
b. *#njaan single room prethikshicu, pakshe suite-e: kittiyullu*  
I single room copula expected, but suite-e got-ullu  
# ‘I expected a single room, but I only got a suite.’

*ma:tRam*, does not have this discourse function. In fact, *ma:tRam* is infelicitous in contexts where there is an expectation in the common ground as shown in (4b).

- (5) a. *njaan anuvin-ey-um raguvin-ey-um prethikshicc-u.*  
I Anu-Acc-and Raghu-Acc-and expect-pst  
‘I expected Anu and Raghu.’  
b. *#pakshe anu ma:tRam vann-u*  
but Anu EXCL came  
but Anu and no one else came.

(ii) Focus sensitivity: *-e:* needs to be attached to the focus of a sentence, as defined in Lambrecht (1996) “*focus is seen as the element of information whereby the presupposition and the assertion differ from each other...that portion of a proposition which cannot be taken for granted at the time of speech*” (p206). *ma:tRam* does not have this restriction; it can target a constituent which is a part of the presupposition too. The sentences in (6) exemplifies this; in (6b) *-e:* modifies the focus “one” and it is an appropriate response to the question in (a), where as in (5c) *-e:* quantifies a non-focus constituent in the sentence and results in an infelicitous response to (5a). In (5d) *ma:tRam* modifies a non-focus

constituent and still is felicitous. The sentence constituent which the exclusive *ma:tRam* quantifies here can be analysed as a Contrastive Topic (CT) in the sense of Buring (2014).

(6) a. Q: *ellavarum etRa pe:na veetam vaangi?*

You how many pen bought?

How many pens each did everyone buy?

b. A: *nja:n onn-e: vaangiyuLLu*

I one-EXCL bought-?

I bought only one.

c. A: *#nja:n-e: onnu vaanngiyuLLu*

I-EXCL one bought-?

Only I bought one pen

d. A: *Nja:n ma:tRam oreNNam vaangi*

I EXCL one bought

“Only I bought one.”

(iii) Scalarity: In previous works on exclusive, including B&C, the distinction entailment scale vs. rank-order scale is employed to explain the scalar and non-scalar reading associated with only. However, here we draw attention to another classification pre-order vs. totally ordered scales and argues that this has an effect on the compatibility of Malayalam exclusive (*-e:/ ma:tRam*) in various contexts. *ma:tRam* is incompatible with totally order scales and is preferred with posets. *-e* is compatible with a totally ordered scale and is less preferred with posets. The scale associates with (9) and (10) are given in (11) and (12) respectively.

(7) *nja:n avane nuLLiyathe: uLLu*

I he-Acc pinched-NMLZ-EXC ?

I only [pinched] him.

(8) *nja:n avane nuLLuka ma:tRam ceytu*

I he-Acc pinched-NMLZ-EXC ?

I only [pinched] him.

(iv) The source and content of the prejacent and the exhaustive inference: the section attempts to figure out whether the prejacent and the universal readings of the Malayalam exclusive sentences are part of the asserted/ presupposed/ implicated meaning using the classical test like cancellation test, negation test, embedding under question test and reinforcement test (Karttunen 1973, Horn 1969). It is shown with S-family tests for presuppositions (negation test, embedding under question test, reinforcement test etc.) that in *ma:tRam* sentences the prejacent meaning component is not presupposed whereas it is part of the presupposition in *-e:* sentences We propose that the prejacent of *ma:tRam* is a part of the asserted meaning of the sentence. The tests also suggests that the quantificational aspect (the universal reading) of ‘*ma:tRam*’ and ‘*-e*’ like other exclusive operators is part of the asserted content, as it is the part that is ‘asserted by an assertion, negated by a negation and questioned by a question’ (Beaver and Clark 2008:214). From the data discussed, the meaning of *-e* and *ma:tRam* can be summarised as (7) and (8), respectively.

(9) *ra:mu pLeite: kazhukiyuLLu*

Ramu plate-EXCL washed-be-u

‘Ramu washed only a plate.’

Presupposition: Ramu washed a plate (*prejacent*)

Assertion: Ramu washed nothing other than a plate. (*universal*)

(10) *ra:mu pLeit ma:tRam kazhuki*

Ramu plate EXCL washed

‘Ramu washed only a plate.’

Presupposition: null

Assertion: i. Ramu washed plate. (*prejacent*)

ii. Ramu washed nothing other than a plate. (*universal*)

However, sentences like (9) indicate that a prejacent presupposition approach to the meaning of *-e* is not on the right track. In (9) an *-e* sentence is embedded under a sentence whose predicate is ‘is wrong’. If the prejacent is presupposed in *-e:* sentences, then the reading that ‘he became a clerk’ should have survived here, but this is not the case as shown below.

(11) *avan oru kLeRke: a:yuLLu: enna vivaram tetta:Nu*

He one clerck-EXC became-be-u: that information wrong-be.PRS

‘The information that he became **only a clerk** is not true.

**Inference**: He got a job that is higher in grade than a clerk.

↗ He became a clerk (*prejacent*)

↗ He became nothing other than a clerk (*universal*)

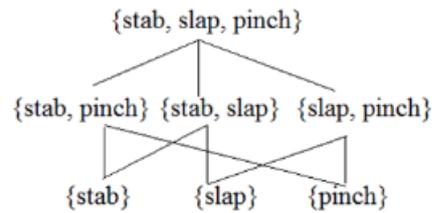
This puzzle can be tackled if we adopt B&C’s theory of exclusives, in which the scalarity of the exclusives is reflected in the content of the prejacent and the universal. Accordingly, the presupposition of (11) would be ‘He became atleast a clerk’ and the assertion would be ‘he became at most a clerk’.

**Summary and Conclusion**: *-e:* is an exclusive whose main function is to mediate the flow of discourse by slowly letting the expectation in the common ground down. *-e:* does not just perform exhaustive identification instead it introduces an **evaluative presupposition** into the meaning of the sentence and expresses that the elements of the set on which exhaustive identification is performed are ordered along a scale. The element identified as that for which the predicate exclusively holds represent a low value on this scale. *ma:tRam* lacks these discourse functions and it only asserts ‘the predicate holds true for the P and nothing else’.

(12) a.



b.



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