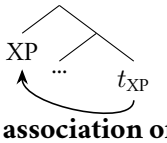
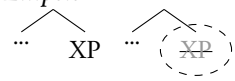
Diagnosing multidominance by focus association of 'only'

There are several pathways for syntactic structures to be "silent" in the course of derivation: (1a) Copy Deletion, licensed by movement chain formation (Nunes 1995); (1b) ellipsis, licensed by LF/syntactic parallelism with a linguistic antecedent (Merchant 2001); and, sometimes less discussed, (1c) shared/multidominant nodes licensed by structural relations created by Parallel Merge (Wilder 1999; Citko 2005; Gračanin-Yuksek 2007). This study offers a ***novel*** diagnostic for (1c), namely, **focus association of exclusive particles 'only'**, which requires a c-command relation that (1a-b) fail to create. We draw cross-linguistic evidence from English (confirmed by 8 spkrs.) and Cantonese (3 spkrs.) on ***multidominance*** in Right Node Raising and Right Dislocation.

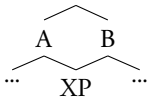
(1) a. *Movement*



b. *Ellipsis*



c. ***Multidominance***



Focus association of 'only'. English adverb *only* and Cantonese *zinghai* 'only' have a rigid c-command requirement on focus associates as in (2) (*cf.* Tancredi 1990's Principle of Lexical Association). When the associate is apparently "silent", neither ① Copy Deletion nor ② ellipsis delivers the correct structural configuration for (2).

(2) The command requirement of focus association of English adverbial *only* and Cantonese *zinghai* 'only':
Exclusive particles 'only' must *c-command* the **pronounced** copy of their focus associate.

① **Focus association fails with traces.** As long observed for English, focus cannot move out of the scope of 'only' as in (3) (Jackendoff 1972; Tancredi 1990; Erlewine 2014 *i.a.*), which also is true for Cantonese in (4). Put differently, the associate cannot be "reconstructed" back. Apart from topicalization below, the same goes for other movement types, including *wh*-movement/relativization (A'), focus movement ([CC], A'), raising (A), passivization (A), though many of them allow for vanilla reconstruction (e.g., for binding).

(3) a. John **only** met MARY$_F$ at the party. b.# MARY$_F$, John **only** met _ at the party. (meaning≠a)

(4) a. Aaming **zinghai** m-zungji NI ZEK GAU$_F$ aa3.
Ming only not-like this CL dog SFP
'Ming only doesn't like *this dog*.'

b.# NI ZEK GAU$_F$, Aaming **zinghai** m-zungji _ aa3.
this CL dog Ming only not-like _ SFP
Int.: 'Ming only doesn't like *this dog*.' [Cantonese, CC]

② **Focus association fails with ellipsis.** As reported by various authors, 'only' cannot associate into elliptical sites (Beaver and Clark 2008; Bassi et al. 2022; [CC] Cheung 2009:213), as in (5)-(6). The same patterns hold for other elliptical constructions, including sluicing, fragment questions, and fragment answers.

(5) *Kim **only** SALUTES$_F$ because Sandy **only** does ~~<SALUTES$_F$>~~. (Beaver and Clark 2008:177)

(6) Aaming **zinghai** wui maai SIUSYUT$_F$. *Aafan dou **zinghai** wui ~~[$_{VP}$ maai SIUSYUT$_F$]~~ [CC]
Ming only will buy novel Fan also only will Int.: 'Ming will only buy novels. Fan as well.'

Right Node Raising (RNR) as multidominance. In RNR, the first conjunct has an object gap. Importantly, 'only' may be placed in the first conjunct with object focus association in (7)-(8). To satisfy (2), the first (and second) 'only' must ***c-command*** the ***overt*** object pronounced at the clause-final position, configured in (9).

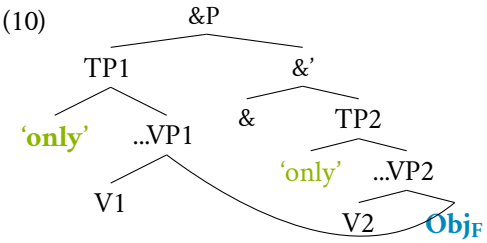
(7) a. John likes _, and Mary also likes, this book. b. John **only** likes _, and Mary also (only) likes, THIS BOOK$_F$.

(8) [Aaming **zinghai** zungji _] ji [Aafan (zinghai) toujim GOBUN SYU$_F$] (9) [... **'only'** ...] & [... 'only' ... **Obj$_F$**]
Ming only like but Fan only hate that book
'Ming only likes, but Fan (only) hates, *that book*.' [CC]

c-command *c-command*

Only multidominance like (10) can create the structural configuration in (9), where the verbs in both conjuncts merge with the same object node (i.e., Parallel Merged/shared) (Wilder 1999; Grosz 2015; Belk et al. 2023, *i.a.*).

(10)



(11) a. Sharing: α is shared by X and Y iff (i) neither of X and Y dominates the other, and (ii) both X and Y dominate α.
b. Full dominance: X fully dominates α iff X dominates α and X does not share α.
c. C-command: X c-commands α iff (i) X $\neq \alpha$, (ii) X does not *fully* dominate α, (iii) α does not dominate X, and (iv) all categories that dominate X dominate α.

'Only' in the first conjunct, according to Wilder (1999, ex.18-21)'s definition in (11), ***c-commands*** the object node shared by both verbs. Gaps created by ATB object movement or object ellipsis cannot license 'only' due to the c-command requirement in (2). Focus association thus offers direct support for a multidominant account to RNR. Below, we discuss how focus association strengthens independent multidominant diagnostics of RNR.

❶ Multidominance: Internal reading. One diagnostic is the internal reading of *same/different* in the shared object, scoping over subjects in both conjuncts in RNR. Belk et al. (2023) argues that it cannot be derived by pure ATB-movement without multidominance or by ellipsis. Crucially, focus association is possible with internal readings in (12), where the sets of books liked and disliked are the *same* and *exhaustive* among John and Mary.

(12) [There are 4 books: *1984*, *Animal Farm*, *Lord Of The Rings*, *Harry Potter*. John only likes fantasy books: *LOTR* and *HP*. Mary, on the other hand, only dislikes fantasy books: *LOTR* and *HP*. So, you report:]

a. John **only** likes, and Mary **only** dislikes, THE SAME BOOKS$_F$.

b. [John **zinghai** zungji] tungmaai [Mary **zinghai** m-zungji JATJOENG-GE SYU$_F$]
John only like and Mary only dislike same-GE book
'John only likes, and Mary only dislikes, *the same books*.' [CC]

❷ Multidominance: Cumulative plurals. Another multidominant diagnostic is cumulative plural agreement like (13) with *have* agreeing with both embedded subjects in the two conjuncts in RNR (Grosz 2015; Belk et al. 2023), albeit subject to speaker variations. Importantly, for speakers who accept (13), focus association is also possible in (14). Focus association thus corroborates the multidominant structure diagnosed by ❶-❷.

(13) [Several people have stolen backdoor keys, and we know who some of them are.] (Belk et al. 2023:693)
%Mary discovered that Ryo$_{\{j\}}$, and Carla discovered that John$_{\{r\}}$, **have**$_{\{j,r\}}$ stolen backdoor keys.

(14) Mary **only** discovered that Ryo, and Carla **only** discovered that John, **have** stolen BACKDOOR KEYS$_F$.

❸ Ellipsis: vehicle change and morphological mismatches. As argued by Barros and Vicente (2011) and Belk et al. (2023), RNR has an alternative non-multidominant derivation with ellipsis in the first conjunct. This is detectable by vehicle change effects like (15), where Principle C effects do not arise in the first conjunct, and morphological mismatches as in (16), where the gerund form *studying* mismatches with infinitival *to* in the first conjunct. Focus association is predicted to be impossible in both cases as in (17), which is borne out below.

(15) Habib is (*?**only**) going **to**, and Ava will soon (only) be **studying** OCEANIC LANGUAGES$_F$.

(16) **She**$_i$ is (*?**only**) going to, and I will soon, show **MARY**$_i$'s TEACHER$_F$ a paper.

(17) *[... 'only' ... ~~<... Obj$_F$ ...>~~] & [... 'only' ... Obj$_F$ ...] *RNR by ellipsis fails to satisfy (2) for focus association*

Extension: Right Dislocation (RD) as multidominance. Focus association is a powerful diagnostic for multidominance beyond RNR and extends to other constructions. In Cantonese, 'only' may RD to the end of sentences, associating leftward with focus in main clauses (=18). By (2), 'only' needs to c-command the focus (=19).

(18) [Aaming _ zungji NIBUN SYU$_F$ zaa3] **zinghai**.
Ming like this book SFP only
'Ming only likes *this book*.' (Obj focus) [CC]

(19) [$_{main}$ ... XP$_F$ ...] SFP [$_{RD}$ 'only']
c-command

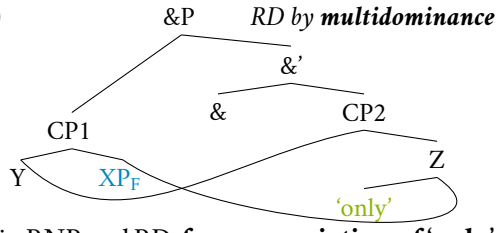
Focus association in RD challenges existing analyses with movement or ellipsis, including (i) a monoclausal structure with leftward movement in (20) (Cheung 2009; Lee 2017); and (ii) a biclausal structure with sluicing in CP2 in (21) (Cheung 2015; Yip 2024). Both approaches generate an *illicit* configuration (22) for focus association. A multidominant analysis with non-bulk sharing (*cf.* Gračanin-Yuksek 2007) in (23), in contrast, creates the required c-command relation in (19), enabling focus association in RD.

(20) [$_{CP}$ Δ SFP [Δ... [$_{TP}$ 'only'...focus]]]] *RD by movement*

(21) [$_{CP1}$ ...focus...SFP][$_{CP2}$ Δ ~~[~~ 'only'~~...XP$_F$]~~] *RD by sluicing*

(22) *[$_{main}$ ... XP$_F$ ...] SFP [$_{RD}$ ... 'only' ... ~~<XP$_F$>~~ ...]
***no** c-command* *c-command*

(23)



Conclusion. We uncovered a ***novel*** diagnostic for ***multidomaince*** in RNR and RD, **focus association of 'only'**, which requires a c-command relation that is directly generated by Parallel Merge but not movement or ellipsis.

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