The grammar of exceptional scope

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Indefinites, *wh*-in-situ, and focus all display a characteristic insensitivity to islands. But a unified formal treatment of this island-insensitivity has proved elusive, and the extant piecemeal accounts (e.g., choice functions and alternative semantics) tend to both over- and under- generate, even with respect to their more narrowly construed empirical domains.

This talk argues that a new variety of alternative semantics offers a unified and empirically robust reckoning with the data. I'll demonstrate that this can be accomplished by decomposing LIFT (e.g., Partee 1987) into two freely applying type-shifters. These type-shifters, which correspond to the category-theoretic/computer-science notion of a 'monad', turn out to be implicit in the post-Karttunen literature on questions, but they haven't been factored out in precisely the way I'll argue for here. I'll show that the resulting theory offers a satisfying account of binding (including both in-scope and dynamic varieties), as well as selectivity (e.g., multiple indefinites on a single island taking scope in different ways outside the island, Baker-ambiguities of embedded multiple-wh questions, and multiple association with focus). In addition, the perspective has far-reaching consequences for the organization of the lexicon, allowing things that introduce alternatives to interact in a modular fashion with things that don't, without any need for lexical generalizations to the worst case.