

ONLY IN LITHUANIAN: AT THE MORPHOLOGY-SYNTAX-SEMANTICS INTERFACE

In Lithuanian, the ‘restrictive’ (in terms of König 1991) meaning similar to English *only* can be expressed in two ways: by the particle *tik* immediately preceding the focused constituent it takes scope over, ex. (1a,b), and by the verbal prefix *te-*, ex. (2).

- (1) a. ***Tik*** *Jon-as* *myl-i* *Aldon-q.* b. *Jon-as* *myl-i* ***tik*** *Aldon-q.*
 only J.-NOM love-PRS A.-ACC J.-NOM love-PRS only A.-ACC
 ‘Only Jonas loves Aldona.’ ‘Jonas loves only Aldona.’
- (2) *J-is* ***te-parod-ė*** *j-ai* *savo* *meil-ę.* (LKT)
 he-NOM only-show-PST she-DAT his.own love-ACC
 ‘He only showed her his love.’

In my paper I will focus on the prefix *te-*, which is peculiar from several perspectives and has not been subject to linguistic analysis (the extant grammars of Lithuanian, e.g. Schleicher 1856: 139; Kurschat 1876: 130; Otrębski 1965: 368–369; Mathiassen 1996: 172; Chicouene, Skūpas 2003: 126–127 give it just a few lines, while Ambrazas (ed.) 1997, the most authoritative grammar written in English, does not mention it at all). The data comes both from the corpora and from the native speakers’ judgments.

1. Morphology. Always appearing at the left edge of the verb, *te-* can be suspected to be just a particle which happened to be written together with the verb. However, like other Lithuanian prefixes, *te-* triggers the ‘reflexive displacement’, cf. *džiaugti-s* ‘to rejoice’ ~ *ap-si-džiaugti* ‘start rejoicing’, *ne-si-džiaugė* ‘did not rejoice’, *te-si-džiaugė* only + ‘rejoice’. This formal property makes Lithuanian ‘only’ a typological peculiarity, since genuine affixal expressions of this meaning are quite rare cross-linguistically (see König 1991: 20).

Another peculiarity follows from the fact that *te-* itself is a polyfunctional marker used in the TAM-domain as a component of the continuative marker *te-be-* (*te-be-gyvena* ‘still lives there’) and as a marker of the ‘permissive’ mood (*te-myli* ‘let him love’). In all these heterogeneous uses *te-* shows identical morphological behaviour, so a possibility of homonymy arises, which is avoided by narrowing down the range of interpretations of *te-*-forms. Notably, since the permissive is restricted to 3rd person present and future, *te-* usually does not have the restrictive meaning when combined with such forms (cf. past *te-vaikščiojo* ‘he only strolled’ vs. present 3rd pers.: *te-vaikščioja* ‘let him stroll’ vs. 1st pers.: *te-vaikščioju* ‘I only stroll’).

2. Syntax and semantics. Turning to the scopal properties of *te-*, we see that it is in many respects similar to the well-known preverbal uses of English *only* (Dryer 1994), but is even less restricted in its scope possibilities. Depending on word order, intonation, and probably some other factors (native speakers and corpus data vary considerably in this respect), *te-* may take scope over the subject (intransitive as well as transitive), cf. (3a,b), direct and indirect objects (4a,b), and over various kinds of adverbials (5).

- (3) a. ***Te-atėj-o*** *Jon-as.* b. *Vos* *5* *žmon-ės* ***te-paraš-ė*** *komentar-us.*
 only-come-PST J.-NOM barely people-NOM.PL only-write-PST comment-ACC.PL
 ‘Only Jonas came.’ ‘Just barely 5 people wrote comments.’ (Google)
- (4) *Kaz-ys* *mergait-ėms* ***te-dovanoj-o*** *knyg-as.*
 K.-NOM girl-DAT.PL only-give-PST book-ACC.PL
 a. ‘Kazys gave books only to girls’ (if stress on *mergaitėms*)
 b. ‘Kazys gave only books to girls’ (if stress on *knygas*)
- (5) *Šit-a* *knyg-a* *10* *lit-ų* ***te-kainav-o*** *mūsų* *knygyn-e.*
 this-NOM book-NOM litas-GEN.PL only-cost-PST our bookstore-LOC
 ‘This book cost 10 litas only in our bookstore.’

Even more surprisingly, *te-* can take scope over constituents embedded into argument NPs (6), infinitival and participial clauses (7), (8) and even finite subordinate clauses (9).

- (6) *Te-skait-a-u* [*Maironi-o eilėrašči-us*], *kit-ų poet-ų ne-mėg-st-u*.
 only-read-PRS-1SG M.-GEN poetry-ACC.PL other-GEN.PL poet-GEN.PL not-like-PRS-1SG
 ‘I read only poetry by Maironis, I don’t like other poets.’
- (7) *Kaz-ys te-galėj-o* [*atsaky-ti į 2 klausim-us*].
 K.-NOM only-can-PST answer-INF in question-ACC.PL
 ‘Kazys only could answer to two questions.’
- (8) *Birut-ė te-sak-ė* [*5 valand-as pamiegoj-us-i*].
 B.-NOM only-say-PST hour-ACC.PL sleep-PST.PA-NOM.F
 ‘Birute said having slept only 5 hours.’ (also: ‘Only Birutė said having slept 5 hours.’)
- (9) *Jon-as te-norėj-o*, [*kad atei-tų Aldon-a*].
 J.-NOM only-want-PST that come-SBJ A.-NOM
 ‘Jonas wanted only Aldona to come.’

Since *te-* cannot scope out of the embedded clause, cf. (10) vs. (8), it is a valuable diagnostic for determining clause boundaries, which is not always clear-cut in Lithuanian.

- (10) *Birut-ė sak-ė* [*te-pamiegoj-us-i 5 valand-as*].
 B.-NOM say-PST only-sleep-PST.PA-NOM.F hour-ACC.PL
 ‘Birute said having slept only 5 hours’, *‘Only Birute said having slept five hours.’

The prefix *te-* can co-occur with the particle *tik*, which serves for unambiguous determination of the scope of restriction (11); however, as the available data shows, such use of *tik* is largely optional; the factors relevant for the choice are subject to further study.

- (11) ...*man te-raš-e-i tik raminam-as, bendras fraz-es*. (LKT)
 I:DAT only-write-PST-2SG only consolatory-ACC.PL.F general-ACC.PL.F sentence-ACC.PL
 ‘... you wrote to me only general consolatory sentences.’

3. Conclusions. The morphological behaviour and scope properties of Lithuanian *te-* ‘only’ make it quite an exotic feature, paralleled (and to a significant extent!) only by a verbal prefix *-djal-* in Bininj-Gun-wok (a.k.a. Mayali, Australia, Evans 1995). From a theoretical standpoint, the existence of purely verbal restrictive markers with non-selective scope strongly supports the event-based account of *only* proposed by Bonomi & Casalegno (1993).

Abbreviations: ACC – accusative, DAT – dative, F – feminine, GEN – genitive, INF – infinitive, LOC – locative, NOM – nominative, PA – active participle, PL – plural, PRS – present, PST – past, SBJ – subjunctive, SG – singular

References

- Ambrazas V. (ed.) (1997). *Lithuanian Grammar*. Vilnius: Baltos Lankos.
- Bonomi A. & P. Casalegno (1993). *Only*: Association with focus in event semantics. *Natural Language Semantics* 2, 1–45
- Chicouene M. & L.-A. Skūpas (2003). *Parlons lituanien, une langue balte*. 2ème éd. Paris: L’Harmattan.
- Dryer M. (1994). The pragmatics of focus-association with *only*. Paper presented at LSA.
- Evans N. (1995). A-quantifiers and scope in Mayali. In E. Bach et al. (eds.), *Quantification in Natural Languages*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 207–270.
- König E. (1991). *The Meaning of Focus Particles. A Comparative Perspective*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Kurschat Fr. (1876). *Grammatik der Littauischen Sprache*. Halle: Waisenhaus.
- LKT – Corpora of Lithuanian Language <http://donelaitis.vdu.lt/>
- Mathiassen T. (1996). *A Short Grammar of Lithuanian*. Columbus, OH: Slavica.
- Otrębski J. (1965). *Gramatyka języka litewskiego*. T. 3. Warszawa: Wyd. Naukowe.
- Schleicher A. (1856). *Handbuch der litauischen Sprache*. Bd. I. Grammatik. Prag: Calve.