

On the meaning of Intensifiers

Harris Constantinou*

University College London, London, U.K.
h.constantinou@ucl.ac.uk

Abstract

The intensifier, or emphatic reflexive, is a stressed anaphorically dependent element, exemplified by *himself* in *John himself built this house*. Depending on its distribution, the intensifier may take up to three radically different interpretations: adnominal, exclusive and inclusive. I claim that the common denominator of the three readings is the centrality effect imposed on the antecedent. The analysis departs from Eckardt (2001) and suggests that while the adnominal interpretation denotes the identity function ID operating on the domain of individuals D_e (i.e. ID (x)), the inclusive and exclusive respectively constitute clausal and manner adverbial variations of ID (x), that is, ID (e, x).

1 Introduction

In many languages the intensifier (INT for short) may be found adjoined to its antecedent or at some distance from it, adjoined to some clausal projection. This is illustrated for English in (1) – (3).

- 1) (It wasn't the director's secretary who went to the meeting.) The director *herself* went. (adnominal)
- 2) (Apart from Bill,) John has *himself* built a house, even though he wasn't happy about it. (inclusive)
- 3) (John did not build this house with Bill's help). John built it *himself*. (exclusive)

Interpretively, the three distributional variants differ. When INT is adjoined to the antecedent, as in (1), it can be loosely paraphrased with 'in person'. When INT is found immediately after the auxiliary, as in (2), it has a meaning similar to additive focus particles (e.g. also). When INT is found post-verbally, as in (3), it may imply that the action denoted by the predicate is carried out 'without help'. In a different context, a post-verbal occurrence of INT may also take the additive reading. I adopt previous conventions (e.g. Siemund 2000, Gast 2006) in referring to the reading in (1) as the adnominal, the reading in (2) as the inclusive, and the reading in (3) as the exclusive.

Despite their different interpretation the three variants deserve to be considered related linguistic elements; they are morphologically the same (in many languages), they form a syntactic dependency with an (nominal) antecedent, they are adjuncts, and they are invariably stressed. This last feature is indicative of some kind of Information-Structural (IS) marking on INT that consistently induces alternatives. In all three cases, the alternatives generated contain an individual (e.g. the secretary in (1)) that is understood to be peripheral to the antecedent (e.g. the director in (1)). In opposite terms, the antecedent of INT is understood to be *central* against the alternative referent.

The notion of centrality has been characterized within the literature in terms of high status, prominence or importance of a referent (e.g. Siemund 2000, i.a., see Gast 2006 for criticism). In this paper, I adopt the following operational definition, based on König's (1991):

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4) An entity x is central against an entity y , if x ranks higher than y on some salient scale specified by the context.

The fact that centrality of x presupposes the existence of a value-scale proves particularly important for our purposes because it creates the expectation that in every case in which x is the antecedent of INT, we should be able to say with precision against which scale x qualifies as central against y .

The structure of the paper is as follows. In section 2 I suggest that the each INT centralizes its antecedent in a different manner. In section 3 I propose a new semantics for each INT to account for their interpretive characteristics. I then conclude by briefly discussing how the Elsewhere Principle (Kiparsky 1973) regulates the meaning of INTs.

2 Interpretation

2.1 Adnominal Intensifier

The meaning contribution of the adnominal INT can be described as follows: a) it evokes a set of alternative referents $\{y, z, \dots\}$ to its antecedent x ; b) it structures this set into a central element x and peripheral elements $\{y, z, \dots\}$ (Eckardt 2001 i.a.). (a) becomes evident from the infelicity of (1) when inserted in an out of the blue context; alternative referents must be readily available in prior discourse. Most proposals, including the present one, assume that this is due to the IS marking of INT. In relation to (b), an alternative referent y may be understood to be peripheral to INT's antecedent x via world knowledge, as in (4).

4) *Context: Peter is the director's secretary.*

It wasn't Peter who went to the meeting. The director *herself* went.

In this context, Peter is understood to be peripheral to the director on the basis of general world-knowledge about companies (i.e. directors are in a hierarchically higher position than their employees). We can make sure that the scale of comparison is indeed company hierarchy by removing the contextual assumption that Peter is the director's secretary in (4). Such a scenario makes the use of the adnominal INT impossible. Importantly, we can also confirm that the adnominal INT requires a central referent to interact with by keeping everything constant but exchanging the positions of Peter and the director; the result is infelicity because Peter is not a central referent in discourse.[†]

Example (4) implies the exclusion of the alternative peripheral entity. However this is not always the case. The exclusion of the director's secretary in (4) is a result of contrastive focus on INT in that example. Below is a case of INT IS-marked as a contrastive topic. Notice that the centrality effect is still there but not the exclusion of alternatives.

5) A: Tell me about the director's secretary. Did he have a good time in Paris?

B: Well, I don't know about the director's secretary, but the director [*herself*]_{CT} certainly did.

[†] The alternative referent y may also be understood as peripheral to the antecedent x , if y is identified via x . For instance if y is referred to as x 's *brother*. I do not discuss these cases here but see Constantinou (forthcoming) for details.

2.2 Exclusive Intensifier

Example (3) is an instance of the exclusive INT.[‡]

3) (John did not build this house with Bill's help). John built it *himself*.

The most obvious contribution of the exclusive INT in (3) is to negate an alternative version of the same event, in which the agent, John, receives Bill's help to build the house. Furthermore, the antecedent is understood to be somehow involved in the negated alternative description. Recall that this was not a requirement for the adnominal INT. Removing John from the picture in the alternative consistently results in an infelicitous exclusive INT.

6) (Mary did not build this house with Bill's help). #John built it *himself*.

More specifically, the role of the antecedent in the alternative must be that of the agent, and the one of the excluded referent that of the helper (a role that can be realized in a comitative PP). Reversing the two referents' roles, while keeping the antecedent constant, results in an infelicitous use of INT:

7) (Bill did not build this house with John's help). #John built it *himself*.

These data could be taken as supporting evidence for the centrality of the antecedent of the exclusive INT. The question though is *how* the antecedent is central. Considering that the antecedent must be involved in some way in the negated version of the event, the scale/criterion must be some sort of an event internal (or, loosely speaking, thematic) relation on the basis of which the antecedent is compared with, and ranks higher than, the alternative referent (see Ernst 2002 for details on event internal relations). We can hypothesize the following:

8) The exclusive INT centralizes its antecedent against other referents in an event-*internal* manner.

(8) presupposes a pretty specific state of affairs. In the first instance, compared referents must be holding the same event internal relation for them to be situated on the same scale. To elaborate on this, let's take a closer look at (3). The negated alternative description of (3) can presumably take the following linguistic realization: *John built this house with Bill*. Arguably, John and Bill, the compared referents, hold a similar role, that of a causer[§]. The two causers differ in one respect; the external referent is held accountable for the building of the house whereas the comitative referent is not (see Neeleman & Van de Koot 2012 for an explication of accountability). This indicates that the comparison is done on the basis of a scale of accountability for causing the building of the house. The external referent is situated higher than the comitative on such scale; thus the former is central against the latter. It is worth noting that the literature on intensification has never been concerned as to why a context like *John finished the race next to Bill* does not allow the subsequent use of the exclusive INT, but a context like *John finished the race with the help of Bill* does. This contrast follows naturally from (8) and, more specifically, from the requirement that alternative referents are compared on the basis of the same thematic relation. While in the latter both John and Bill are causers (of John finishing the race), in the former John is the agent while Bill is a locating point of reference.

[‡] Aside from the context in (3), the exclusive INT may occur in a context in which the antecedent is understood to benefit from the event at issue (e.g. Bill did not build this house for John, but John built it *himself*) or understood to be negatively affected by it (e.g. Bill did not ruin John's career, but John ruined it *himself*). See Constantinou (forthcoming) for details.

[§] I use 'causer' quite loosely in this paper. A referent *x* is a 'causer' if *x* is involved in a bringing about a result.

Additionally, (8) presupposes that a particular thematic relation can be held by a referent at different degrees. The accountability relation is one of them as is evident from the negated alternative of (3), in which both the external and comitative referents are causers of the event but the former is higher on the accountability scale than the latter. There are situations in which two referents hold the same thematic relation, as in (9), but the use of the exclusive INT is impossible.

- 9) A: John went to the cinema with Bill. (i.e. John is accompanied by Bill when going to the cinema)
B: # No, John went to the cinema himself.

(9) differs from (3) in terms of predicate type; (9) denotes an activity. In virtue of this, and given that both John and Bill participate in the event in the same manner, either of them may be classified as an agent. The infelicity of INT in (9B) lies in the fact that the two referents are found at the same point of the agent scale. John and Bill go to the cinema to the same extent. To put this more crudely, it is impossible for a referent to half-go somewhere. This implies that there cannot be central/peripheral referents in such context (with the intended reading in brackets).

Another important facet of the exclusive INT is the fact that all alternative propositions are understood as alternative descriptions of the same event and, as a result of this, they are all negated. This follows naturally from (8). A proposition with the exclusive INT may look as follows: *John built it himself*. The exclusive INT requires John to be central in an event internal manner, let's say, in terms of accountability. Suppose that the alternative, *John built the house with Bill*, denotes a different event. Then John would be event-internally central in this latter event but, crucially, *not* in the former simply because they are different events. Hence, the alternatives must denote the same event.

2.3 Inclusive Intensifier

Example (2) contains an inclusive INT and can be paraphrased with an additive focus particle (e.g. also) without a serious change in meaning.

- 2) (Apart from Bill,) John has *himself* built a house, even though he wasn't happy about it.

For the additive effect to be possible, it is a prerequisite that salient alternatives must be understood to be true. This is indeed how salient alternatives are interpreted in the inclusive case. In fact, previous authors (e.g. Gast 2006) suggest that the additive effect is delivered precisely for this reason. Thus, a theory of intensification ought to explain why all alternatives are understood to be true in order to derive the additive effect.

Aside from the additive effect, providing a principled explanation for the truth of all alternatives may also lead to an understanding of the subject orientation of the inclusive INT^{**}. In order to see why, consider again the (only type of) discourse that makes the inclusive INT possible.

- 10) A: Bill has raised three kids.
B: John has *himself* raised three kids, but he said that it was hard.

The key observation is that INT's antecedent is always interpreted as a switch topic. In (10), speaker A makes an utterance *about* Bill and speaker B responds by uttering something *about* some other

^{**} The adnominal and exclusive INTs may interact with any argument (for data from Dutch see Constantinou forthcoming).

topic, John. Given the tendency of topics to also be subjects in English, the subject-orientation of the inclusive INT comes as no surprise (see Gast 2006 for similar conclusions)^{††}.

A further characteristic of the inclusive INT, first observed by Siemund (2000), is the fact that the proposition p_1 that contains it is consistently interpreted as the premise/reason/explanation for some other salient proposition p_2 in discourse, corresponding to *he said that it was hard* in (10B). Once p_2 is removed from (10B), the inclusive INT in p_1 becomes impossible. Even more curiously, p_2 must be expressing something about INT's antecedent. For instance, the inclusive INT is impossible in (10B) if p_2 expresses something about the speaker (e.g. *but I think it is hard to raise three kids*), even though p_1 may still be interpreted as a premise. I take this to result from the existence of some specific relation between the antecedent and the event denoted in p_1 . This relation cannot be of the thematic/event internal type, as in the exclusive INT case, because the manner the event in p_1 (e.g. raising kids) takes place is not influenced by p_2 . On this basis, I advance the following hypothesis:

11) The inclusive INT centralizes its antecedent against other referents in an event-*external* manner.

In (10), the event external relation held between John and the event of raising three kids concerns the perceived difficulty of the event (i.e. how difficult John thinks it is to raise three kids). Of course, this relation is event external: the degree of perceived difficulty does not affect the event at issue. If (11) is correct, then, we expect the two alternative referents to be compared on the basis of the scale of the sort 'how hard a referent x thinks it is to raise three kids'; Since John is a good antecedent to the inclusive, it must be the case that John is understood to believe that it is harder to raise three kids compared to Bill; i.e. John ranks higher than Bill on the 'perceived difficulty in raising three kids' scale. The degradation of the following example, which explicitly expresses that John and Bill situate in the same point of this scale, supports (11):

12) A: Bill has raised three kids and he said that it was a hard thing to do.
 B: ? John has *himself* raised three kids and he found it equally hard.

3 Deriving the meaning of Intensifiers

In this section, I propose a semantic analysis for the three INTs that is inspired by Eckardt (2001). She suggests that the core-meaning contribution of the adnominal intensifier is the identity function ID on the domain of objects D_e .

13) ID: $D_e \rightarrow D_e$

ID (x) = x for all $x \in D_e$

According to this analysis, the adnominal intensifier is lexically specified with ID, which takes as its input value a nominal constituent x , the antecedent, and maps it onto the same output value. (14) exemplifies this operation for the DP *John himself*.

14) $[[\text{John}] \text{ himself}] = \text{ID} ([[\text{John}]]) = [[\text{John}]]$

The assumption that the adnominal INT denotes ID (x) equals to saying that its core meaning contribution to the sentence amounts to nil. For INT to give rise to a meaningful interpretive effect, it

^{††} Of course, this analysis raises another question, that is, why would the inclusive INT prefer a topical antecedent to begin with. I am not aware of an answer to this, and I cannot offer one either. But see Constantinou (forthcoming) for directions for a solution on the basis of Kirfka's (2000) analysis of German post-posed additive particles, which are also topic-oriented.

must evoke a meaningful alternative. This accounts for the fact that INT is always IS marked (see Eckardt 2001 for a related proposal). I therefore make the further assumption that the IS marking of the adnominal INT induces the family of peripherality functions $PER(x)$. Each $PER_i(x)$ maps the nominal constituent x to an entity peripheral to x . (15) illustrates the semantic characteristics of this function. (16) exemplifies the operation of $PER(x)$.

15) $PER_i: D_e \rightarrow D_e$

$PER_i(x) = x$ for all $x \in D_e$

16) $[[\text{John}] PER_i]] = PER_i([\text{John}]) = [\text{an entity peripheral to John}]$

The combination of (13) – (16) delivers the centrality effects on the adnominal INT's antecedent. It is crucial to note that for this to work, ID and PER_i must operate on the same referent x . This can be achieved by assuming that x is always given information, and thus present in all alternatives.

The intention is to use the semantics of the adnominal INT, and its alternative, as the basis for deriving the different types of centrality effect of the two adverbial cases. With minor changes, the analysis runs parallel to Ernst's (2002) analysis of predicational adverbs, such as the agent-oriented adverb *rudely*. Ernst suggests that *rudely* is a two-place predicate taking as arguments the agent and an event (of some type) and indicates that an event is such as to judge its agent as rude with respect to the event. *Rudely* may take two readings, a clausal and a manner, as exemplified below.

17) *Rudely*, Sue left. (clausal)

18) Sue left *rudely*. (manner)

The clausal reading can be paraphrased as 'Sue was rude to leave' (i.e. Sue is characterized as rude but the nature of her leaving need not be rude) whereas the manner reading reads as 'the nature of Sue's leaving was rude' (e.g. she banged the door on her way out). Notice how the event is utilized in each case. In the clausal case, the event is merely used as the basis for characterizing the agent as rude, whereas in the manner case the properties of the event of leaving are characterized. In light of these differences, clausal *rudely* is an event external modifier whereas manner *rudely* is an event internal modifier. Ernst suggests that these two readings may be distinguished in a more principled fashion on the basis of event comparison classes. In (17), Sue is judged rude because of her leaving, as opposed to other things she could have done, which crucially need not be other leaving events. In (18) Sue is judged rude on the basis of something about her leaving, which distinguishes this from other leaving events, and only leaving events. On Ernst's theory, the different event comparison classes for (17) and (18) result from the selection of a different type of event (i.e. Fact-Event Object, FEO for short); the manner interpretation results from selecting a Specified Event, hence the comparison class is more specific, and the clausal interpretation results from selecting a clausal FEO (i.e. Event or Proposition or Fact). One of the attractive elements of Ernst's approach is that there is no need to assume two lexical entries for *rudely*. Since the duality of interpretation of *rudely* is particularly productive in natural language, Ernst assumes the existence of a 'manner rule' that takes clausal *rudely* and turns it into a manner adverb. (19) contains the lexical specification of *rudely*, (20) the semantic representation of clausal *rudely* and (21) that of manner *rudely* (the representations in (20)-(21) contain minor changes for reasons discussed in Constantinou forthcoming).

19) Rudeness (e , Agt)

20) Clausal 'rudely' = e [_{REL} warrants positing] rudeness in Agent as opposed to the norm for events.

21) Manner 'rudely' = e [_{REL} manifests] rudeness in Agent as opposed to the norm for Specified events.

(20) and (21) differ in terms of the relation imposed between the two arguments. In the clausal case ‘warrant positing’ intends to capture the fact that the event as a whole forms the basis for or guarantees the attribution of rudeness to the agent. In the manner case ‘manifest’ captures the fact that manner adverbs describe some sort of external manifestation (e.g. Sue’s banging the door in (18)).

Following the above, I suggest that the inclusive and exclusive INT lexically differ from the adnominal in carrying an extra *e* variable in their entry. The alternative of the two adverbial INTs lexically differs from the adnominal’s in the same way. I represent these as follows:

22) ID (*e*, *x*)

23) PER (*e*, *x*)

The inclusive INT and its alternative constitute the clausal versions of (22) and (23), whereas the exclusive INT and its alternative constitute the manner versions of (22) and (23). These may be represented as follows:

24) Inclusive = *e* [_{REL} warrants positing] ID in *x* as opposed to the norm for events.

25) Inclusive Alternative = *e* [_{REL} warrants positing] PER in *x* as opposed to the norm for events.

26) Exclusive = *e* [_{REL} manifests] ID in *x* as opposed to the norm for Specified events.

27) Exclusive alternative = *e* [_{REL} manifests] PER in *x* as opposed to the norm for Specified events.

The combination of (24) and (25) delivers the interpretive effect of the inclusive, and the combination of (26) and (27) that of the exclusive. Starting from the exclusive, (27) expresses that there is a specified event that realizes a peripheral structure to the antecedent *x*. *x* denotes the same referent in ID (*e*, *x*) and PER (*e*, *x*). The events modified by ID (*e*, *x*) and PER (*e*, *x*) are spatiotemporally the same. Thus, if *x* is central in the event modified by PER (*e*, *x*), *x* is also central in the event modified by ID (*e*, *x*). Note that the centrality of *x* is motivated by the properties of the event itself, which implies that the centrality must be on the basis of an event related criterion (and not, let’s say, social hierarchy). It is also crucial to emphasize that the event’s FEO classification is one of a specified event. In the general case this implies event-internal modification (and a closed event comparison class, with the same predicate for all events). For the exclusive INT’s antecedent *x*, this implies that *x*’s centrality is such that it is evident *in* the event itself. That is, the event has certain properties that make *x* central. As elaborated in 2.2, centrality is indeed calculated on the basis of such event-internal properties, such as accountability of a referent for causing an event’s resultant state.

A similar rationale applies in the inclusive case. (25) expresses that there is an event *e* on the basis of which a peripheral structure to *x* is constructed. Again, *x* denotes the same referent in all alternatives. As opposed to the exclusive (and its alternative) case, the FEO classification of the event is clausal (and not specified event), something which implies event external modification (and an open event comparison class, with potentially different predicate for events). The immediate consequence of this is that in an event modified by (25) *x* is rendered central with respect to an event external criterion, and not some property of the event itself (as in the exclusive case). It is important to understand that the event is merely utilized as the basis, or as some sort of evidence, for the characterization of *x* as central. This means that the centrality is calculated on the basis of an event-related criterion, like in the exclusive case; however, the event participates in the calculation of centrality differently in each adverbial case. Going back to (25), its presence imposes centrality on *x* on the basis of the event it modifies. As discussed in 2.3 with reference to (10), the antecedent John may be judged central on the basis of the event-external criterion of him finding the event of raising three kids more difficult than Bill, who is the output of PER applied to *x*. Crucially, the ‘raising kids’ event that is utilized for characterizing John central against Bill is denoted by the alternative proposition (*p*₂) (i.e. (10A)), and not the event denoted by the proposition with the inclusive (*p*₁) (i.e. (10B)). The two events are of the same type though. Both of them talk about ‘raising three kids’. If

John is characterized as central on the basis of p_2 , then it must be the case that John is central on the basis of p_1 too. Thus, no issue arises with the inclusive INT's requirement to interact with a central antecedent. This perspective may also explain why the inclusive INT requires all the alternatives to be interpreted as true (and thus spatiotemporally different events). In (10B) the inclusive INT requires its antecedent John to be central against Bill with regard to a certain scale, that is, the 'perceived difficulty in raising three kids'. For John and Bill to be compared against this scale, it must be true that both of them have raised three kids. Now, suppose a scenario in which (10A) constitutes a false alternative description of (10B). This would mean that Bill has *not* raised three kids. It follows from this that Bill cannot fall on the scale of 'perceived difficulty in raising three kids'. Consequently, John cannot compare with Bill and deemed central as required. We may conclude that the use of the inclusive INT requires true alternatives because only in this way its antecedent may be central. As indicated in 2.3, the additive effect and the subject-orientation of this INT naturally follow from this.

4 Final remarks

As it stands, the overall account is unable to make the correct predictions. The adnominal INT's semantics is general enough to suggest that it should be able to associate with an antecedent that is qualified for any type of centrality, including the event internal/external types. What is needed, then, is a way to prevent the adnominal INT from associating with an adverbial interpretation. In order to achieve this, we could consider it to be the general, unmarked, case in competition with the two specific, marked, adverbial cases. Such a move is supported by the fact that the adnominal INT is universal, but not the adverbial variants. We could then invoke the Elsewhere Principle (Kiparsky 1973) to regulate the interpretation of the three INTs. If a language has one or both of the more highly specified adverbial cases, then the adnominal INT will not be used to centralize its antecedent in an event internal or external manner (depending on the INTs present in the language), because there are specific linguistic elements for this purpose. This would capture the inability of the adnominal INT to associate with an interpretation licensed by its adverbial counterparts in English. It would also capture the ability of the adnominal INT to associate with an adverbial interpretation in languages (e.g. Greek, Italian) in which not all three INTs are grammaticalized (for data see Constantinou forthcoming).

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