

English grammatical devices for highlighting particular constituents restrictively in task-related dialogues and formal written English

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1. Introduction

Discourse, even if sometimes it looks messy with a multitude of information that runs parallel or even overlaps, is highly structured by various language devices that contribute to structuring discourse; it is structured by devices that play roles in introducing information in adequate/effective ways, in putting an emphasis on particular information that is central in a given setting and in helping the listeners or readers achieve an understanding of all the links between the pieces of information. A speaker or writer chooses a certain device among the available options to convey some information to his/her listener or reader. A speaker's or writer's use of a device with a particular role in discourse organisation, then, enables the listener or reader to infer the relationship between the information represented by the utterance and other relevant information in the discourse and to relate that particular chunk of interpreted text to the rest of the discourse. If a speaker or writer chooses some wrong device, the utterance is infelicitous. Thus, detailed investigation into the usage of devices playing roles in controlling the information flow in discourse is indispensable to the study of discourse organisation.

There are (at least) two controversial points regarding the usage of the restrictive focusing particle *only* – one grammatical device for highlighting particular constituents restrictively. One point is the unmarked position of *only* in written English, i.e. its most frequently used position in written English. This has been one of the grammatical points paid special attention in school class-rooms and in grammar books for learners and teachers of English, and it still controversial. To take an example, some grammar books allow the pre-verbal position (i.e. the position where *only* is detached from the highlighted item and is placed either immediately before the verb or after the first auxiliary verb) in written English (see, for example, Chalker 1984; Quirk et al. 1985; Sinclair et al. 1990). However, this position of *only* has been the topic of letters of complaints to newspapers, and in fact, some grammar books still regard the pre-adjacent position (i.e. the position where *only* is placed immediately before the item which it highlights, as in *John visited only Italy*) as the best position in written English (see, Leech and Svartvik 1975; Greenbaum 1991). The other point is related to what Chafe and Danielewicz (1987:92) call 'level of vocabulary'. That is, there exists a claim that *only* tends to be used in literary English texts and its synonymous word *just* is used typically in colloquial English (see, for example, Chambers English Dictionary 1998). This claim derives support from the results of the study of the distribution of *only* in some types of texts (Nevalainen 1986, 1991). This paper will concentrate on the latter point.

So far the study of the choice and distribution of English grammatical devices for highlighting particular constituents restrictively has two weaknesses. One is that this type of studies has been superficial; it has merely suggested that *just* is in general preferred to *only* in spontaneous spoken English and *only* is preferred to *just* in written English (see, for example, Tottie 1986; Biber et al. 1999). The other weakness is that the results of the previous studies should be treated cautiously, since the data investigated is not very satisfactory. To justify the claim mentioned above, the study of the distribution of these words would need to investigate data exemplifying two

extremes of “spokenness” and “writtenness” clearly. However, the previous studies have a problem in this point. To put it more concretely, Tottie (1986) uses face-to-face conversation data, which are extracts from the London-Lund Corpus, produced only by middle-class, university-educated male academics and whose spoken English (even spontaneous spoken English), according to Biber (1988) and Miller and Weinert (1998), is certainly affected by formal written English. Her written English data consisting of editorials, popular lore and belles lettres could not be regarded as being representative of “writtenness”. (For discussion, see Biber 1988.) Biber et al.’s (1999) conversation data, which is derived from spoken corpus in the British National Corpus, has the same problem as Tottie’s (1986).

This paper explores the distribution of English grammatical devices for highlighting particular constituents restrictively, and factors controlling the choice of one grammatical device over others, as exemplified in two extremes of “spokenness” and “writtenness” – a body of task-related dialogues produced by people just at the beginning of their higher education and formal written English. The grammatical devices investigated are two restrictive focusing particles, *only* and *just*, and their alternative constructions such as ALL cleft constructions (e.g. *All he needs is (to) go to hospital immediately*) and *nothing but* constructions (e.g. *His mother thought of nothing but John’s coming home*). By including the alternative constructions of *only* and *just*, I expect to have a wider and more detailed picture of English Grammatical devices for highlighting particular constituents restrictively. This paper reveals that the distribution of the grammatical devices suggested by the previous studies is supported by the results of formal written English, but that it does not affect every type of restrictively highlighted item in task-related dialogues. It demonstrates that the distribution of the grammatical devices in both text types is controlled by discourse structure, semantic properties of highlighted items and syntax of them. Salient is the existence of a number of cases controlled by discourse structure. This confirms that this type of the grammatical devices play important roles in discourse organisation. This is particularly so in task-related dialogues.

2. The data

2.1. *A body of task-related dialogues*

This paper examines the Map Task dialogues, as exemplified in one text type of spontaneous spoken English. The Map Task dialogues are obtained from the Map Task experiments described in detail in Anderson et al. (1991). The subjects are speakers of Scottish English. The total number of the dialogues is 128. Half of them are produced in condition allowing the subjects to have eye-contact, and half in circumstances excluding eye-contact.

The Map Task involves two participants, one in the role of instruction giver, and the other in the role of instruction follower. In the tasks, both of them have slightly different versions of a map marked with various landmarks. Some landmarks are shared, others are unique to one or the other map, and some shared landmarks have different names. One participant who plays the role of instruction giver has a route marked on his/her map, and instructs the other, who does not have a route on his/her map, how to draw that route.

2.2. *Formal written English*

I examine some written informative prose, which contains approximately 266,000 words, in the British National Corpus (BNC) collected in the 1990s as formal

written English. (Henceforth, for the sake of convenience, these written informative prose will be called the sample of written informative prose in BNC.) For this reason, all the representations of spoken English such as interviews and monologues occurred in my sample of written informative prose are not concerned.

3. The results

3.1. Distribution of the grammatical devices

Table 1 presents the number and distribution of *only*, *just* and their alternative constructions in the Map Task dialogues.

Table 1. *Distribution of 'only', 'just', and alternative constructions in the Map Task dialogues*

Highlighted items	<i>only</i>	<i>just</i>	Alternative constructions	Examples
Adverbs/adverbials	1	50		
Noun-modifiers	6	30		(5)
Verb phrases/clauses	0	103	9	(1)
Objects	8	10	4	(2)
Subjects in existential constructions	3	1	2	(3)
Subject complements	10	13		(4)
Prepositional phrases	5	1		
Others	3	2		
TOTAL	37 (14.12%)	210 (80.15%)	15 (5.73%)	

The typical examples which correspond to the example number shown in the table are the following (Note: “G” denotes the instruction giver and “F” denotes the instruction follower. Utterance function coding completed by Human Communication Research Centre (HCRC), Edinburgh, is in bold. The utterances of interest are italicised.):

- (1a) G1: (**instruct**) er ... and then you ... you cut down about ... er ... southeast ... across the
page
F1: (**query-y**) to where ... lion country?
G2: (**reply-y**) Down to ... er, no.
(**query-yn**) Have you got vallen cairn?
F2: (**reply-y**) Year.
G3: (**instruct**) Now you ...
(**explain**) Which is about a third ... no,
F3: (**acknowledge**) Year.
G4: (**explain**) it's about almost halfway down the page.
(**instruct**) And, well you cut down to below it, you curve right cut down to it, and go
below it,
F4: (**acknowledge**) Right.
G5: (**instruct**) So you're going southeast.
F5: (**query-yn**) So you're going ... So that's just to the east of where I went beyond the
quarry?

- two that's where the spaceship is.
 G4: **(check)** On the left of the chestnut tree?
 F5: **(reply-y)** Yeah
 (2d) G: **(query-w)** Have you anything like to the left of the burnt forest?
 F: **(reply-w)** I've got a burnt forest and then straight below it I've got a carpenter's cottage then a ravine. *That's all I've got.*
- (3a) there's *only* another ...
 (3b) *there's nothing below you, er, apart from safari truck*
 (3c) G1: **(query-yn)** Is that huge, big, and there's *nothing* at all in that space?
 F1: **(clarify)** Uh-huh, *except*
 G2: **(query-yn)** About halfway up the page?
 F2: **(reply-w)** *a vast meadow*
- (4a) it's *only* about one and a half centimetres
 (4b) So it's *just* a shallow
- (5a) You *only* have one fenced meadow?
 (5b) *just* a wee angle

Similarly, Table 2 presents the results of the sample of written informative prose in BNC.

Table 2. *Distribution of 'only', 'just' and their alternative constructions in the sample of written informative prose in BNC*

Highlighted items	<i>only</i>	<i>just</i>	Alternative constructions	Examples
Subject in existential constructions	5		2	(8)
Objects	29	4	6	(7)
Verb phrases/clauses	15		5	(6)
Subjects	33	2	2	
Prepositional phrases	69	2	10	
Adverbs/adverbials	15	1	1	
Adverbial clauses	19	1	1	
Subject complements	31	2	1	
Complements of a preposition	20	1	3	
Noun-modifiers	21	4	2	
Highlighted items are in a non-finite construction	8		4	
Conjunctions	9			
Extrapositions	1			
?	10	3	1	
TOTAL	285 (83.09%)	20 (5.83%)	38 (11.08%)	

The typical examples corresponding to the example number are as follows (Note: The written informative prose has been broken down into sentence level in BNC, and this study follows it. The sentences of interest are italicised):

- (6a) The bishops also argued that any so-called restricted form of divorce was impossible to maintain in practice and that divorce might solve the partners' problems but *only created them for the children*.
- (6b) #234 Is a covenant complicated?
#235 Not really.
#236 A Deed of Covenant is a legal document which needs to be correctly drawn up and signed.
#237 The law related to covenants is quite complex but basically a covenant is a legally-binding document by which you transfer some of your income to a charity for a stated period.
#238 ACET is a charity, registered with the Charity Commission under Registration Number 299293.
#239 As far as you are concerned, a covenant can be exceedingly simple.
#240 There is a simple covenant form attached to this leaflet which is quite sufficient.
#241 *All you have to do is to fill in the details, including your name and address and the amount you wish to give, and sign and date the document in front of a witness.*
#242 You will also be asked to sign a certificate of Deduction of Tax once a year confirming that you are a UK taxpayer.
- (7a) An older book, that is one published before around 1900, will *only* have black and white plates, which are unlikely to be photographs.
- (7b) The last of these was the excavation at Alexandrov led by Academician Boris Pybakov, which unearthed *nothing but* ancient foundations.
- (8a) there is really *only* one group
- (8b) All the actors interviewed seemed to feel, and state quite naturally and simply that there was *nothing else* for them to do *but* act.
- (8c) # 0704 A person who accepted love was like a passenger.
0705 Maybe on a boat, at night, on some vast lake.
0706 Whichever way you looked there was *nothing but* clam black water.
0707 It was true that the water might rise and swamp you.
0708 But to love someone meant to fly, to rise above the earth yourself.
0709 So high that you could see everything.

The important points emerging from these tables are:

- (a) The distribution of the grammatical devices suggested by previous studies does not affect every type of highlighted item in the Map task dialogues. That is, although the total number of occurrences of *just* is overwhelming, there are cases where *only* (and/or some alternative syntactic constructions) is preferred to *just*. See particularly the cases where the highlighted item is either an object or a subject in existential constructions or a subject complement. On the other hand, the results of the sample of written informative prose are consistent with the previous studies.
- (b) Types of items highlighted frequently vary between the Map Task dialogues and written informative prose. In the former case, a verb phrase/a clause is the item highlighted most frequently. On the other hand, this kind of item is not highlighted frequently in written informative prose, where a prepositional phrase is the item highlighted most frequently. This situation gives rise to the question as to whether this is because written informative prose contains prepositional phrases

far more than any other types of items or not. As the table below indicates, the answer is no: the frequency of occurrences of prepositional phrases is not extremely high, compared with the frequency of occurrences of other types of items.

Table 3. *Number of occurrences of several types of entities in the sentences containing one thousand words elicited randomly from some written informative prose*

Types of entities	Number of occurrences
Subject	52
Object	32
Subject/object complement	26
Verb phrase/clause	47
Prepositional phrase	49
Adverb	6

Note: The case where *only* has no possible entity to highlight is excluded. For this reason, for example, the case in which a verb phrase is a copula verb is not included in the number of verb phrase/clause, and prepositional phrases that have the preposition *of* as the head of the phrase and that cannot be highlighted by *only* (e.g. the room *of my brother* and a man *of ability*) are not counted.

This situation would mean one of two things: either prepositional phrases in formal written English have a tendency to be restrictively highlighted, or grammatical devices for highlighting particular constituents restrictively in formal written English have a strong tendency to highlight prepositional phrases restrictively. At present, it is difficult to assess which one is more likely.

(c) Despite their rather complex constructions, alternative syntactic constructions such as ALL cleft constructions are more preferred in task-related dialogues than in formal written English. (The total number of their occurrences is 15 in the dialogues and is 11 in formal written English.)

(b) and (c) are important in that they reflect differences between these two text types with respect to discourse organisation, as will be described in 3.3.

3.2. *Factors controlling the distribution of ‘only’, ‘just’ and their alternative constructions*

The previous sub-section has revealed that the distribution of *only* in the Map task dialogues is not necessarily explained in terms of level of vocabulary. That is, an argument that *only* tends to be used in formal written English and not in spontaneous spoken English does not always explain the distribution presented in Table 1. In addition, in both the Map Task dialogues and in the sample of written informative prose, there are cases where some alternative constructions are chosen. These give rise to the question as to what factors control the distribution of *only*, *just* and their alternative constructions. The answer is presented in Table 4, which indicates that the distribution of the grammatical devices in both text types is controlled by discourse structure, semantic properties of restrictively highlighted items and syntax of them.

Table 4. *Factors controlling the distribution*

Highlighted item	The Map Task dialogues	The sample of written informative prose
Verb phrases/clauses	Roles of grammatical devices in the structure of discourse ... <i>just</i> VS. alternative constructions	Roles of grammatical devices in the structure of discourse ... <i>only</i> VS. alternative constructions Semantic level differences between grammatical devices, and degree of formality of discourse ... <i>only</i> VS. <i>merely</i>
Objects	Context where the devices are used ... <i>just</i> VS. <i>only</i> Roles of grammatical devices in the structure of discourse ... particles VS. Reverse ALL clefts Characteristics of highlighted items ... particles VS. ALL clefts Forms of the preceding utterance ... particles VS. <i>nothing but</i> constructions	Roles of grammatical devices in the structure of discourse ... particles VS. ALL clefts, Reverse ALL clefts Direction of the writer's attention ... particles VS. <i>nothing but</i> constructions
Subjects in existential construction	Syntactic functions of highlighted items ... <i>just</i> VS. <i>only</i> Tendency for focal items to come toward the end of the clause ... particles VS. <i>nothing but</i> constructions Form of the preceding utterance ... particles VS. <i>nothing but</i> constructions	Referential properties of highlighted items ... <i>just</i> VS. <i>only</i> Tendency for focal items to come toward the end of the clause ... particles VS. <i>nothing but</i> constructions Relationship between two discourse segments ... particles VS. <i>nothing but</i> constructions
Subject complements	Semantic properties of highlighted items ... <i>just</i> VS. <i>only</i>	Syntactic functions of highlighted items ... <i>only</i> VS. others
Adverbs/adverbials	Word class ... <i>just</i> VS. others	Word class ... <i>only</i> VS. others
Noun-modifiers	Degree of formality of highlighted items ... <i>just</i> VS. <i>only</i>	Syntactic functions of highlighted items ... <i>only</i> VS. others
PPs	Word class ... <i>only</i> VS. others	Word class ... <i>only</i> VS. others
Conjunctions		Word class ... <i>only</i> VS. others
Complements of P		Syntactic functions of highlighted items ... <i>only</i> VS. others
Subjects		Syntactic functions of highlighted items ... <i>only</i> VS. others
Adverbial clauses		Syntactic functions of highlighted items ... <i>only</i> VS. others
Highlighted items are in a non-finite construction		Syntactic functions of highlighted items ... <i>only</i> VS. others

Note: The cases controlled by discourse structure are highlighted.

Salient is the existence of a number of cases controlled by discourse structure. Let us have a close look at such cases. (As space is limited, we will concentrate on two cases in the Map Task dialogues.)

3.2.1. Factors controlling the choice of *just* over others when the highlighted item is verb phrase/clause

The Map Task dialogues have 103 instances of *just* when a highlighted item is either a verb phrase or a clause. The distribution of 103 instances of *just* highlighting restrictively a verb phrase /a clause is illustrated in the following table.

Table 5. *Distribution of 103 instances of 'just' highlighting a verb phrase/a clause*

Eye-contact dialogues		No eye-contact dialogues	
speaker		speaker	
giver	follower	giver	follower
7	15	32	49

Note: This paper does not include the case of imperative clauses on the ground that *just* in imperative clauses is not syntactically equivalent to its alternative constructions such as ALL cleft constructions. ALL cleft constructions do not occur in imperative clauses.

Here we consider the case where the speaker is the instruction giver. Typical examples in the data are:

- (9) G1: **(query-yn)** Do you have an adventure playground?
 F1: **(reply-y)** Yeah.
 G2: **(ready)** Right,
(instruct) you go up ... you go south, I mean you go north, up past it on the ...
 on its right ... its left-hand side.
 F2: **(query-yn)** So I'm just going to be going past the site of the forest fire?
 G3: **(reply-w)** Just about. Just below it, just below
 F3: **(check)** Until just below?
 G4: **(instruct)** it on my map.
(instruct) So you just go past the adventure playground on the ... its left-hand side.
 F4: **(check)** And no more. Aye?
 G5: **(reply-y)** And no more.

- (10=1a) G1: **(instruct)** And, well you cut down to below it, you curve right cut down to it,
 and go below it,
 F1: **(acknowledge)** Right.
 G2: **(instruct)** So you're going southeast.
 F2: **(query-yn)** So you're going ... So that's just to the east of where I went beyond
 the quarry?
 G3: **(reply-y)** Yeah.
 F3: **(acknowledge)** Yeah.
 G4: **(explain)** It's just about ... Fallen cairn is above the quarry and to the right.
 F4: **(acknowledge)** Yeah.
 G5: **(acknowledge)** Yeah.
(instruct) You just cut down to that, then go down the ... round the bottom of it.
 F5: **(check)** So I'm below the fallen cairn?
 G6: **(reply-y)** Year.

What should be noticed here is that almost all the utterances with *just* in my data (i.e. 37 cases of the total of 39 examples):

- (i) occur after some information/questions given by the instruction follower with relation to an instruction newly introduced by the instruction giver
- (ii) express the previous instruction either in the same way or in a different way

In short, what *just* does is to repeat/modify the instruction which is already introduced and is not accomplished yet. In this sense, *just* has a discourse function of engaging the giver and the follower in the instruction currently under discussion. We can represent the structure of discourse segment with *just* schematically as follows.

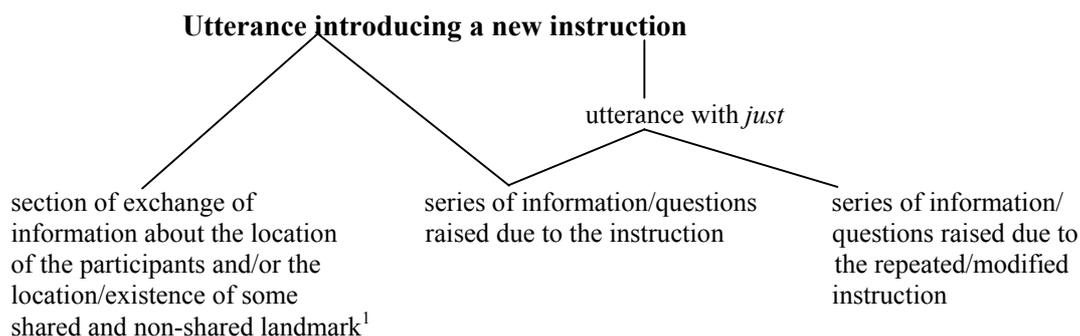


Figure 1. Structure of discourse segment containing utterances with *just* in a context of giving instructions

That is, the utterance introducing a new instruction (G2 in (9) and G1 in (10)) lies in the crucial and central position, and a series of information/questions raised due to the new instruction is subordinate to it². Following this, the utterance with *just* is attached to the utterance introducing the new instruction as its subordination, since it repeats/modifies the instruction; nevertheless, it is located in the higher level than utterances about information/questions in that what it expresses is not some information ancillary to the instruction. Another series of information/questions raised due to this repeated/modified instruction, then, follows it.

3.2.2. Factors controlling the choice of *nothing but* constructions over particles

when the highlighted item is a subject in existential construction

The Map Task dialogues have two instances where *nothing but* constructions (or the similar constructions) are chosen. They are:

- (11=3b) *there's nothing below you, er, apart from safari truck*
- (12=3c) G1: **(query-yn)** Is that huge, big, and there's *nothing* at all in that space?
 F1: **(clarify)** Uh-huh, *except*
 G2: **(query-yn)** About halfway up the page?
 F2: **(reply-w)** *a vast meadow*

Considering the fact that they are chosen despite their complex syntax, it is assumed that there might be some strong factors of their occurrences. It is possible to build up two factors here. One factor is related to a tendency for focal constituents to come towards the end of the clause. This applies to the case of (11). Here notice that in (11), the *nothing apart from* construction is separated into two by the insertion of some words, and that the entities highlighted restrictively come towards the end of the

clause. This type of separation is caused by a strong tendency for more complex constituents to be placed towards the end of the clause. (For a discussion of the subject, see for example, Quirk et al. 1985:1326; Miller and Weinert 1998:137.) This is supported by the comparison of (11) with the following where the *nothing apart from* construction is not separated.

(11') There's nothing apart from safari truck below you.

It would be clear that (11) is a much more satisfactory clause in that the more complex constituents are placed to the end of the clause.

The discussion that the tendency for focal constituents to come towards the end of the clause functions as one factor controlling the choice of some alternative constructions over focusing particles is further supported by the following point. The following example (11''), where *only* is used to highlight *safari truck* restrictively and the highlighted item is in the end of the clause, is not the equivalent to example (11).

(11'') Below you there is only safari truck.

Notice that in (11), there is a pause produced by the filler *er* after *there's nothing below you*. This means that in this example, the phrase *below you* attaches itself (at least) to *there's nothing*. On the other hand, (11'') contains the marked word order, and therefore, this phrase is detached from the rest of the clause.

The other factor controlling the choice of *nothing but* constructions over the focusing particles is related to a form of the utterance which precedes the construction. This applies to the case of (12). In this example, the *nothing except* construction is derived from the word *nothing* in the preceding utterance (i.e. G1), and this makes it natural for the following utterance to start with the word *except* (or with other similar words such as *but*) instead of using some focusing particles.

3.3. The roles of the devices in the structure of discourse

The cases controlled by discourse structure cover a wide range of discourse structural level - levels from a single clause level where the tendency for focal constituents to come towards the end of the clause is the factor controlling the distribution (see 3.2.2), through a short discourse segments level where the factor is form of the preceding utterance (see 3.2.2), to a longer stretches level where the factor is discourse functions of devices (see 3.2.1). This means that the grammatical devices under discussion play important roles in structuring discourse. Noteworthy is that they do not play the same extended role between task-related dialogues and formal written English: as the points (b) and (c) in 3.1 suggest, the grammatical devices are related to the process of structuring discourse more deeply and significantly in task-related dialogues.

4. Conclusions

This paper has explored the distribution of English grammatical devices for highlighting particular constituents restrictively, and factors controlling the choice of one grammatical device over others, as exemplified in two extremes of "spokenness" and "writtenness". The results are the following.

- (i) The distribution of the grammatical devices suggested by previous studies is supported by the results of the written

- informative prose, whereas it does not affect every type of highlighted item in the Map Task dialogues.
- (ii) The distribution of the devices in both text types is controlled by discourse structure, semantic properties of highlighted items and syntax of them.
 - (iii) The grammatical devices under discussion play important roles in structuring discourse and this is particularly so in task-related dialogues.

These results show a complicated picture regarding the usage of the grammatical devices discussed in this paper.

NOTE

¹ In the Map Task dialogues, the majority of unclefted constructions introduce a new instruction without exchanging information about the location/existence of landmarks. For this reason, this part is optional in Figure 1.

² Considering the characteristics of the Map Task dialogues, it can be said that in a discourse segment, an utterance giving an instruction is crucial and central and that other types of utterances are subordinate to it.

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