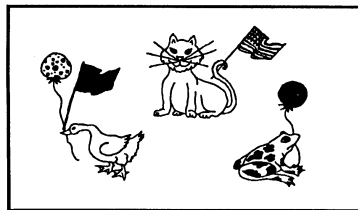


Focus and minimality*

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Introduction

Crain, Philip, Drozd, Roeper, and Matsuoka (1992); Crain, Ni, and Conway (1994):



- (1) a. **Only** the cat is holding a flag.
 Adults: false; children: **true** for many 3–6 year olds;
 b. The cat is **only** holding a flag.
 Adults: true; children: true

Subsequent work has shown the same effect in child Mandarin (Yang, 2002; Zhou and Crain, 2009, 2010; Notley, Zhou, Crain, and Thornton, 2009).

- (2) **Zhǐyǒu** mǎo xiānsheng chī-le húluóbo.
 ONLY cat mister eat-PRF carrot
 a. ✓ Only [Mr. Cat]_F ate the carrot.
 b. * Mr. Cat only ate [the carrot]_F.

...but most children 4;5–4;10 have the (b) interpretation.

Today

In both English and Mandarin, pre-subject ONLY cannot associate with the VP or VP-internal material.

- I investigate the nature of this restriction in (adult) Mandarin Chinese and Vietnamese.
- I argue that Mandarin *zhǐ(yǒu)* (and *shǐ*) and Vietnamese *chỉ* are **all uniformly sentential modifiers**.
 - Sentential focus particles must be **as low as possible** while being interpretable, **within their phase**.
 - This requirement is a strict syntactic constraint.
 - This constraint forms a **new argument for cyclic structure-building** by phase (Chomsky, 2000, 2001).

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1 Background

Operators such as *only*, *even*, and *also* are “**focus-sensitive**,” as their interpretation depends on the placement of focus elsewhere in the utterance.

- (3) Based on Beaver and Clark (2008):
 a. David will **only** wear a bow tie when TEACHING.
 b. David will **only** wear a BOW TIE when teaching.

Focus triggers the computation of **alternatives** which vary in the focused position and focus-sensitive operators quantify over these alternatives (Rooth, 1985, 1992).

☞ The semantics of focus requires that the focused constituent—the “**associate**”—be c-commanded by the operator (Jackendoff, 1972; Tancredi, 1990; Aoun and Li, 1993; Erlewine, 2014).¹

- (4) * DAVID will **only** wear a bow tie when teaching.
 Intended: ‘Only [David]_F will wear a bow tie when teaching.’

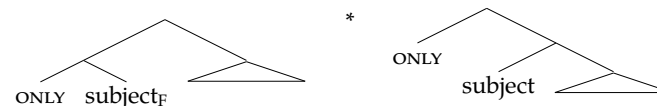
I will refer to this as **the c-command requirement**.

- (5) **Two types of focus particles in English:**
 a. The cat is **only** holding [a flag]_F. *sentential only*
 b. The cat is holding **only** [a flag]_F. *constituent only*

If presubject *only* is unambiguously a constituent *only*, this naturally explains the unavailability of VP association:

- (6) a. [**Only** [the cat]_F] is holding a flag.
 b. * [**Only** the cat] is holding [a flag]_F. *violates the c-command requirement!*

Zhou and Crain (2009, 2010) propose that adult English and Mandarin presubject ONLY are necessarily constituent ONLYS; there is no presubject sentential ONLY.



If the latter structure were available, the c-command requirement alone would predict that ONLY can associate with any constituent in the sentence, contrary to fact (for adults). But children begin by analyzing all ONLY as sentential modifiers. (I do not make a claim regarding the status of English presubject *only*.)

¹Semantically, what is motivated is a requirement for the focus to be in the scope of the operator. But I follow the literature on constituent focus particles here and assume that strict c-command (alternatives generated within the first argument of the focus particle) is necessary.

2 Mandarin Chinese

In Mandarin, I will look at two focus-sensitive operators: *zhǐ* 只 and *shì* 是.

(7) *zhǐ* 只:

- semantics of *only* (Tsai, 2004); glossed here as ONLY
- In some positions, appears as *zhǐyǒu* 只有.

(8) *shì* 是:

- “focus marker” (Teng, 1979, a.o.): indicates narrow/contrastive focus, often translated as a cleft—see Erlewine (2015b) for its semantics;
- glossed here as SHI;
- homophonous/homographous with the copular verb

NB: Here I do not discuss the *shì...de* construction.

☞ I argue that *zhǐ* / *zhǐyǒu* and *shì* are always **sentential particles**, not constituent-adjoined.

2.1 *Zhǐyǒu* vs *zhǐ*

ONLY appears in some positions as *zhǐyǒu* instead of *zhǐ*, most notably in pre-subject position.

We might imagine that *zhǐyǒu* is a constituent ONLY, unlike *zhǐ* which is a sentential ONLY. But if that is the case, *zhǐyǒu* is very restricted:

(9) *Zhǐyǒu* is not constituent-marking:

- *Zhāngsān hē **zhǐyǒu** [hóngjiǔ]_F.
Zhangsan drinks ZHIYOU wine
Intended: ‘Zhangsan drinks only [wine]_F.’
- *Zhāngsān duì **zhǐyǒu** [Lìsì]_F rēng-le qiú.
Zhangsan to ZHIYOU Lisi throw-PERF ball
Intended: ‘Zhangsan threw a ball at only [Lisi]_F.’

☞ Instead, I analyze *zhǐyǒu* as an allomorph of *zhǐ*.²

A couple arguments for this position:

- The choice of *zhǐyǒu* vs *zhǐ* is determined by the presence or absence of an adjacent functional head.

(10) ...{[✓]zhǐ, ??zhǐyǒu} zài jiālǐ...
ONLY at home

(11) ...{[?]zhǐ, [✓]zhǐyǒu} zúotiān...
ONLY yesterday

- In pre-subject position, *only* generally must be realized as *zhǐyǒu*. However, when the *only* is preceded by negation, it is realized as *bù-zhǐ* ‘NEG-ONLY,’ and the extra *yǒu* is not necessary and in fact impossible.

(12) {*Zhǐ, [✓]zhǐyǒu} [Zhāngsān]_F lái-le.
ONLY Zhangsan come-PERF
‘Only [Zhangsan]_F came.’

(13) {[✓]Bù-zhǐ, *bù-zhǐyǒu} [Zhāngsān]_F lái-le.
NEG-ONLY Zhangsan come-PERF
‘Not only [Zhangsan]_F came.’

(14) **Contextual allomorphy of *zhǐ* vs *zhǐyǒu*:**

ONLY ↔ $\begin{cases} zhǐ & \text{if linearly adjacent to a verb,} \\ & \text{preposition, or functional morpheme;} \\ zhǐyǒu & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$

(15) **Allomorphy can be sensitive to adjacent syntactic category:**

- Lively* is an adjective:
*more lively, *livelier
- Slowly* is an adverb:
[✓]more slowly, *slowlier

(16) **...but only within the same syntactic domain:**

{*Zhǐ, [✓]Zhǐyǒu} [_{DP} [dài yǎnjìng]_F de rén] lái-le.
ONLY wear glasses DE person come-PERF
‘Only people who [wear glasses]_F came.’

²Although, as noted by Lü (1980), there are also clear cases of *zhǐyǒu* that are an adverb *zhǐ* modifying the main verb *yǒu*. The discussion here is on cases of *zhǐyǒu* where *yǒu* is clearly not the main verb of the clause.

2.2 Zhǐ and shì are sentential focus particles

(17) Zhǐ and shì cannot be postverbal:

Zhāngsān ✓zhǐ/shì [_{vP} hē *zhǐ/shì [hóngjiǔ]_F].
Zhangsan ONLY/SHI drinks *ONLY/SHI wine

'Zhangsan *only* drinks [wine]_F.'

(18) Zhǐ and shì cannot be inside PPs:

Zhāngsān ✓zhǐ/shì [_{PP} duì *zhǐ/shì [Lǐsì]_F] rēng-le qiú.
Zhangsan ONLY/SHI to *ONLY/SHI Lisi throw-PERF ball

'Zhangsan (*only*) threw a ball at [Lisi]_F.'

English sentential *only* can associate with multiple foci, but constituent *only* cannot:

- (19) a. ✓ I **only** saw [the children]_F ask [the adults]_F to be quiet.
b. * I saw **only** [the children]_F ask [the adults]_F to be quiet.
c. * **Only** [the children]_F asked [the adults]_F to be quiet.

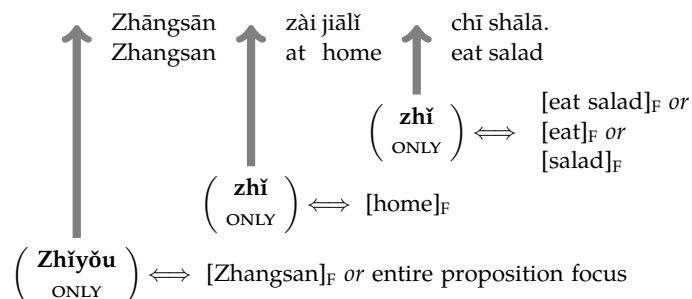
Mandarin *zhǐ* and *shì* can associate with multiple foci:

(20) Multiple focus with shì (Cheng, 2008):

Shì [érzi]_F jiào [dàrén]_F bié chǎo, bú shì [dàrén]_F jiào [érzi]_F bié chǎo.
SHI son ask adult not noisy NEG SHI adult ask son not noisy
'The son asked the adult not to make noise, not the other way around.'

2.3 The position of zhǐ/shì

(21) A simplex clause:



(22) Generalization (first):

Sentential focus particles must be in *the lowest position possible* while taking their associate in their scope.

☞ *Zhǐ/shì* can also associate down from a higher clause, long-distance.

(23) Zhǐ (and shì) can associate long-distance:

- a. ✓ Lǐsì zhǐ shuō [_{CP} Zhāngsān hē [chá]_F].
Lisi ONLY say Zhangsan drink tea
'Lisi *only* said that Zhangsan drinks [tea]_F.' only > say
- b. ✓ Lǐsì shuō [_{CP} Zhāngsān zhǐ hē [chá]_F].
Lisi say Zhangsan ONLY drink tea
'Lisi said that Zhangsan *only* drinks [tea]_F.' say > only

For long-distance association, *shì/zhǐ* must be at the *vP* edge: (cf 23a)

- (24) a. * Zhǐyǒu Lǐsì shuō [_{CP} Zhāngsān hē [chá]_F].
ONLY Lisi say Zhangsan drink tea
- b. * Lǐsì zhǐ(yǒu) zuótiān shuō-guò [_{CP} Zhāngsān hē [chá]_F].
Lisi ONLY yesterday say-PAST Zhangsan drink tea
(ungrammatical with the intended association)

(25) Generalization (revised):

Sentential focus particles must be in the lowest position possible while taking their associate in their scope, *within a given clause* (CP).

Finally, evidence from verbs with nonfinite embeddings shows that domain over which the 'as low as possible' condition holds must be smaller than CP.³

(26) Zhǐ before and after the control verb xiǎng 'want':

- a. ✓ Zhāngsān zhǐ [_{vP} xiǎng [_{vP} chī [shūcài]_F]].
Zhangsan only want eat vegetables.
'Zhangsan *only* wants to eat [vegetables]_F.' only > want
- b. ✓ Zhāngsān [_{vP} xiǎng zhǐ [_{vP} chī [shūcài]_F]].
Zhangsan want only eat vegetables.
'Zhangsan wants to *only* eat [vegetables]_F.' want > only

Both positions are possible because they are lowest *within their respective phases*.

(27) Generalization (final):

Sentential focus particles must be in the lowest position possible while taking their associate in their scope, *relative to a particular phase*.

This behavior parallels the behavior of German, as described by Jacobs (1983, 1986) and Büring and Hartmann (2001), although their characterization has been controversial (see e.g. Reis, 2005). (See Appendix.)

³See Grano (2012) for evidence that the complement of control verbs such as *xiǎng* is not a full CP but rather a *vP*.

3 Vietnamese (Erlewine, to appear)

3.1 *Chi* is a sentential focus particle

- (28) **Two *only*s in Vietnamese:**⁴ Hole (2013) argues:
 a. *chi* is a sentential *only*:⁵ (glossed here as ONLY_{sent})
 b. *mỗi* is a constituent *only*. (glossed here as ONLY_{cons})
- (29) Nam (**chi**) mua (**mỗi**) [cuốn sách]_F.
 Nam ONLY_{sent} buy ONLY_{cons} CL book
 ‘Nam bought *only* [the book]_F.’
- (30) ***Chi* vs *mỗi* associating into a preverbal PP:**
 a. Tôi **chi** [[PP ở [trường]_F] học tiếng anh].
 I ONLY_{sent} at school study English
 b. *Tôi [PP ở **chi** [trường]_F] học tiếng anh.
 I at ONLY_{sent} school study English
 c. Tôi [PP ở **mỗi** [trường]_F] học tiếng anh.
 I at ONLY_{const} school study English
 ‘I only study English at [school]_F.’ (a = c)

With preverbal foci, *chi*, *mỗi*, or both can occur, but only in *chi-mỗi* order.

- (31) **Stacking the two *only*s on the subject:**
 a. ✓ **Mỗi** [Nam]_F mua cuốn sách. b. ✓ **Chi** [Nam]_F...
 ONLY_{cons} Nam bought CL book ONLY_{sent} Nam
 ‘Only [Nam]_F bought the book.’
 c. ✓ **Chi** **mỗi** [Nam]_F... d. * **Mỗi** **chi** [Nam]_F...
 ONLY_{sent} ONLY_{cons} Nam ONLY_{cons} ONLY_{sent} Nam

This is what is predicted by Hole and Löbel’s (2013) analysis of *chi* as sentential ONLY and *mỗi* as constituent ONLY: the sentential modifier is necessarily linearly outside of the constituent ONLY.

(32) The structure of (31c):

[TP **Chi** [TP [DP **mỗi** [DP Nam]_F] mua cuốn sách]]
 ONLY_{sent} ONLY_{cons} Nam buy CL book

⁴Some examples will also have a preverbal *mới* (not to be confused with ONLY_{cons}, which is *mỗi*) and clause-final *thôi*, which I gloss as PRT here. For *mới*, see Nguyen (2013); Hole (2013). For *thôi*, see Hole (2014).

⁵*Chi* is Sino-Vietnamese, written 只 in Chữ Nôm, the Chinese script no longer actively used for Vietnamese. None of my non-linguist Vietnamese consultants speak any Mandarin Chinese or knew that this cognate exists in Chinese.

3.2 The position of *chi*

Here I use sentences with a temporal adjunct. (Note that the unmarked, base order is different than in Mandarin.)

- (33) Hôm qua Nam mua cuốn sách (thôi).
 yesterday Nam bought CL book (PRT)
- (**Chi**) ⇔ [yesterday]_F or entire proposition focus
 (ONLY_{sent})
- (**chi**) ⇔ [bought book]_F or [bought]_F or [book]_F
 (ONLY_{sent})
- (**chi**) ⇔ [Nam]_F
 (ONLY_{sent})

Chi can associate long-distance, into a lower clause, but when it does, it must be in immediately preverbal position:

- (34) (***Chi**) Tôi ✓ **chi** nói [CP là Nam thích [Ngân]_F] (thôi).
 ONLY_{sent} I ONLY_{sent} say that Nam like Ngan (PRT)
 ‘I *only* said Nam likes [Ngân]_F.’
- (35) Tôi nói [CP là (***chi**) Nam ✓ **chi** thích [Ngân]_F] (thôi).
 I say that ONLY_{sent} Nam ONLY_{sent} like Ngan (PRT)
 ‘I said Nam *only* likes [Ngân]_F.’

Chi can be above or below the negator *không*, which is formally a verb embedding a *v*/VP (or a reduced clause) (Trinh, 2005).

- (36) Tôi **chi** [vP không [vP đọc cuốn sách [này]_F].
 I ONLY_{sent} NEG read CL book this
 ‘I *only* didn’t read [this]_F book.’ ⇒ I read all other books.
- (37) Tôi [vP không **chi** [vP đọc cuốn sách [này]_F].
 I NEG ONLY_{sent} read CL book this
 ‘I didn’t *only* read [this]_F book.’ ⇒ I read (some) other books too.

The “as low as possible” requirement is again relative to each phase.

☞ Vietnamese shows us a case where we can clearly distinguish between sentential and constituent ONLYs, and we see that ONLY_{sent} follows the generalization in (27), repeated:

- (38) **Generalization: (=27)**
 Sentential focus particles must be in the lowest position possible while taking their associate in their scope, relative to a particular phase.

4 A semantically-sensitive hypothesis

We might imagine that *shì/zhǐ/chǐ* must be as low as possible (within a particular domain) *unless it being in a higher position introduces a truth-conditional difference*. Similar semantically-sensitive constraints have been proposed previously:

(39) **Scope Economy** (Fox, 2000, p. 3):

Scope-shifting operations cannot be semantically vacuous.

☞ The “as low as possible” behavior is not semantically-sensitive in this way.

(40) **Subject quantifier baseline:**

Měi-ge kèrén dōu zhǐ [_{VP} hē [chá]_F].

Every-CL guest all ONLY drink tea

✓ ‘Every guest is such that they only drink [tea]_F.’ every > only

* ‘Tea is the only thing that every guest drinks.’ *only > every

What if *zhǐ* moves in front of the subject but keeps associating with “tea”?

(41) **Zhǐ cannot be higher, even if it would lead to a different reading:**

* Zhǐ(yǒu) měi-ge kèrén dōu hē [chá]_F.

ONLY every-CL guest all drink tea

Intended: ‘Only [tea]_F is such that_i every guest drinks it_i.’

This reading can of course be expressed, but it requires fronting the associate:

(42) **Fronting can be used to force zhǐ to scope higher, above every:**

✓ Zhǐyǒu [chá]_F měi-ge kèrén dōu hē ____.

ONLY tea every guest all drink

‘Only [tea]_F is such that_i every guest drinks it_i.’ only > every

The argument against this purely semantic hypothesis also applies to Vietnamese:

(43) **Chǐ can’t be higher, even if it changes the meaning:**

a. Ai cũng chǐ mua [cuốn sách]_F.

who also ONLY buy CL book

‘Everyone *only*_{sent} bought [the book]_F.’ ✓every > only, *only > every

b. * Chǐ ai cũng mua [cuốn sách]_F.

ONLY_{sent} who also buy CL book

Int: ‘Only [the book]_F is such that_i everyone bought it_i.’ only > every

c. ✓ Chǐ (mǒi) [cuốn sách]_F ai cũng (mǒi) mua ____.

ONLY_{sent} (ONLY_{cons}) CL book who also (PRT) buy

‘Only [the book]_F is such that_i everyone bought it_i.’ only > every

☞ The “as low as possible” behavior cannot be the result of a semantically-sensitive condition à la Scope Economy (39).

There must be *syntactic constraints*, not just semantic interface requirements, governing the position of sentential modifiers (cf Ernst 2002).

5 Proposal

The requirement to take the associate in its scope in (27) follows from the semantics of focus (Rooth, 1985). **However, the requirement to be as low as possible, within a particular domain, is not explained by the semantics alone.**

☞ The “as low as possible” requirement is due to the **syntax** of sentential-modifier placement.

I propose that this behavior reflects a general principle governing **local derivational choices**. (See Erlewine 2015a for alternatives.)

A famous example of this form is **Merge over Move**. See (44) from Chomsky (2000):

(44) Based on Chomsky (2000, p. 104):⁶

a. There is likely ____ to be [a proof] discovered ____.

b. * There is likely [a proof] to be ____ discovered ____.

Roughly: if the expletive *there* is going to be used, it must be Merged in as soon as it can, blocking movement of the subject.

At the same time, Merge over Move does not hold over the entire structure:

(45) Based on Chomsky (2000, p. 103):

There is a possibility [_{CP} that [a proof] will be ____ discovered ____].

Chomsky proposes that, while building the embedded CP, we do not yet “know” that the expletive *there* will be chosen for use in the matrix clause. **These “chunks” of structure-building are called *phases***, traditionally CP and *vP* (here simply VP).

These same architectural assumptions allow us to straightforwardly model the “as low as possible” behavior here:

(46) **Adjoin As Soon As Possible:**

Adjuncts should be adjoined as soon as they will be interpretable.⁷

...or, in top-down/left-to-right structure-building, *Adjoin As Late As Possible*.⁸

⁶The fact that the passive VP surfaces in (44b) as a *proof discovered*, rather than *discovered a proof* with a *proof* in its base position, is attributed to a separate, language-specific process, dubbed the “themmatization/extraction rule” in Chomsky (2001, p. 20). This is the source of the first/lowest movement step of a *proof* in structures in (44).

⁷In the case of focus particles, “being interpretable” here translates into the c-command requirement on focus particles: focus particles must c-command their intended focus associate. Here is one way this could be formalized. The “intended associate” can be checked by adopting the view that F-marked constituents bear a *focus index F_i* (Kratzer, 1991; Wold, 1996; Erlewine, 2014). If the complement of the focus particle is a constant function across different assignments for the relevant focus-index, we know immediately that the focus particle’s semantics will be unsatisfied.

⁸Radek Šimik (p.c.) notes that Hagstrom (1998, p. 185) entertains a principle, dubbed “Avoid Flexible Functional Application,” which similarly encourages focus-sensitive operators to merge low, specifically in the domain of *wh*-question interpretation.

(47) **Derivation of a VP phase with object focus:**

- a. $LA_1 = \{buy, [DP\ CL\ book]_F\}$
- b. $[VP\ buy\ DP]$

(48) **Derivation of the CP phase, following (47):**

- a. $LA_2 = \{C, T, VP\ (47), ONLY_{sent}, [DP\ Nam]_F\}$
- b.
 - i. Adjoin $ONLY_{sent}$ to VP $[VP\ ONLY_{sent}\ VP]$
 - ii. Merge T and (i) $[T\ [VP\ ONLY_{sent}\ VP]]$
 - iii. Merge subject with (ii) $[TP\ DP\ [T\ [VP\ ONLY_{sent}\ VP]]]$
 - iv. Merge C with (iii) $[CP\ C\ [TP\ DP\ [T\ [VP\ ONLY_{sent}\ VP]]]]$ \Rightarrow “Nam ONLY bought [CL book]_F” (33)

(49) **Derivation of a VP phase with no focus:**

- a. $LA_1 = \{buy, [DP\ CL\ book]\}$
- b. $[VP\ buy\ DP]$

(50) **Derivation of the CP phase with subject focus:**

- a. $LA_2 = \{C, T, VP\ (49), ONLY_{sent}, [DP\ Nam]_F\}$
- b.
 - i. Merge T and VP $[T\ VP]$
 - ii. Merge subject with (i) $[TP\ DP\ [T\ VP]]$
 - iii. Adjoin $ONLY_{sent}$ to TP (ii) $[TP\ ONLY_{sent}\ [TP\ DP\ [T\ VP]]]$
 - iv. Merge C with (iii) $[CP\ C\ [TP\ ONLY_{sent}\ [TP\ DP\ [T\ VP]]]]$ \Rightarrow “ONLY [Nam]_F bought CL book” (33)

(Ask me about VP-internal subjects.)

The higher and lower adjunction positions in (48/50) “block” each other, because ONLY is introduced in the same phase in these derivations.

- ☞ **This “blocking” of higher positions by lower positions will only apply within the same phase.** The introduction of ONLY in a higher phase is not blocked by a lower phase ONLY.

This accounts for the possibility of optionality in ONLY placement in examples with clausal embeddings and embedded foci:

(51) **Matrix and embedded positions for *chi*, given embedded focus, repeated from (34–35):**

- a. $[CP_1\ T\ \chi\ [VP_1\ n\ \text{say}\ [CP_2\ \text{that}\ Nam\ [VP_2\ \text{like}\ [Ng\ \text{like}\ Ng]]]]_F$
I ONLY_{sent} say that Nam like Ngan
'I only said Nam likes [Ngan]_F.'
- b. $[CP_1\ T\ [VP_1\ n\ \text{say}\ [CP_2\ \text{that}\ Nam\ \chi\ [VP_2\ \text{like}\ [Ng\ \text{like}\ Ng]]]]_F$
I say that Nam ONLY_{sent} like Ngan
'I said Nam only likes [Ngan]_F.'

6 Conclusion

Today I discussed the distribution and syntax of (exhaustive) focus particles in Mandarin Chinese and Vietnamese.

- I argue that Mandarin *zhǐ(yǒu)* and *shì* and Vietnamese *chỉ* are **always sentential focus particles**, adjoining to the clausal spine, and not constituent focus particles.
 - This is tricky to see in Mandarin, but particularly clear in Vietnamese, where there is a separate, constituent ONLY: *m\ \text{only}*.
- This requires a new explanation for the inability of presubject particles to associate with or into the VP.
 - ☞ **Sentential focus particles must adjoin as low as possible in their phase**, while associating with their intended associate.
 - The fact that this “blocking”/“competition” behavior is only observed within each phase is a new type of evidence for phase-based, cyclic conception of structure-building (Chomsky, 2000, 2001).

Back to the acquisition of focus particle behavior in Mandarin Chinese (Yang, 2002; Zhou and Crain, 2009, 2010; Notley et al., 2009):

- Recall the proposal that (preverbal) *zhǐ(yǒu)* is a constituent ONLY in the adult grammar of Mandarin, which children misparse as a sentential modifier.
- **This cannot be the difference between child and adult Mandarin.**
- Instead, such children are not yet aware of or not correctly utilizing the “as low as possible” constraint to identify the correct focus associate, at least in comprehension.

Papers at <http://mitcho.com/projects/focus-particles/>

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Appendix: The German Closeness debate

In some cases, it is hard to distinguish between an adverb or constituent-marking.

(52) **Two hypotheses for German focus operators:** (Büring and Hartmann, 2001)

Ich habe **nur** [einen ROMAN]_F gelesen.

I have ONLY a novel read

a. Nur as adverb:

Ich habe [VP **nur** [VP [DP einen Roman]_F gelesen]]

b. Nur as constituent-marking:

Ich habe [VP [DP **nur** [DP einen Roman]_F] gelesen]

Jacobs (1983, 1986); Büring and Hartmann (2001): German focus particles are always adverbs. The lack of constituent-marking focus operators explains the ungrammaticality of certain focus operator placement:

(53) * [PP mit [**nur** [DP Hans]_F]
with ONLY Hans

(54) * [DP der Bruder [**nur** [DP des Grafen]_F]
the brother ONLY the-GEN COUNT-GEN

In many (but not all) cases, focus operators must be *adjacent* to their associate:

(55) a. ✓ Gestern hat Rufus **sogar** dem [mädchen]_F Blumen geschenkt.
yesterday has Rufus EVEN the.DAT girl flowers given

b. * Gestern hat **sogar** Rufus dem [mädchen]_F Blumen geschenkt.
yesterday has EVEN Rufus the.DAT girl flowers given

(56) **Closeness (informal):** (Büring and Hartmann 2001; following Jacobs 1983, 1986)
Focus particles are as close to the focus as possible.⁹

However, the Closeness constraint has been criticized as “spurious” and “more than doubtful” (Reis, 2005).¹⁰

☞ The behavior of Mandarin Chinese and Vietnamese presented here shows that Closeness-type behavior is attested in other, unrelated languages.

⁹In the formal version, the “closeness” only applies between different adjunction sites on the same extended (verbal) projection, making Büring and Hartmann (2001). Many of Reis’s (2005) criticisms are moot given B&H’s formal version.

¹⁰In addition to conceptual and minor distributional questions, a major question is the structure of German clauses with *nur* preceding a constituent in the prefield, which apparently violates V2. I will not discuss this here.