(Some) parentheses are focus-sensitive operators

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The term *parenthetical* encompasses a range of constructions, including appositives, speaker-oriented adverbials, and speech report tags. Despite lending their name to the category, parenthesized parentheticals have been little discussed: Kaltenböck 2007 lists 17 kinds of parentheticals in English, but none involve parentheses. This paper focuses on an actually parenthesized parenthetical (1a) that gives rise to an implication not shared by its paraphrase (1b).

1. (a) Sarah drinks (herbal) tea before bed, # or sometimes black tea.
   (b) Sarah drinks herbal tea before bed, or sometimes black tea.

This paper explores the semantics of this construction, which we dub a **restrictive parenthesized parenthetical (RPP)**. We propose that RPPs are focus-sensitive constructions with two components: (1) an assertion equivalent to the non-parenthesized paraphrase and (2) a not-at-issue component that negates a set of contextually relevant alternatives to the parenthesized content.

Parenthesized, but unlike (other) parentheticals   A commonly discussed trait of parentheticals is independence: traditional parentheticals do not affect the syntax or semantics of their hosts (McCawley 1982; Potts 2005; Dehé and Kavalova 2007). But RPPs are not independent: removing the RPP in (2) results in ungrammaticality. Moreover, VP-ellipsis is sensitive to the RPP's content.

2. John ate (some) of his dinner and Bill did too. → Bill ate some of his dinner.

Focus-sensitive, but not focus   One hypothesis is that the RPP construction is merely an orthographic representation of focus, since the implication pattern in (1) holds for focus:

3. Sarah drinks HERBAL$_F$ tea before bed, # or sometimes black tea.

However, operators that obligatorily associate with focus, like *only*, are unable to associate with the content of an RPP, suggesting that the parentheses do not merely mark focus.

4. How much green space is there around the house?
   (a) It only has a SMALL$_F$ front yard. But it has a large backyard.
   (b) It only has a (small) front yard. #But it has a large backyard.

The meaning of the RPP construction We decompose the contribution of an RPP into two components. First, an RPP contributes the same meaning as its non-parenthesized paraphrase: (1a) entails *Sarah drinks herbal tea before bed*. Second, it negates a set of alternatives to its parenthesized content: in (1a), kinds of tea. We observe the following semantic properties of RPPs:

Property 1: the parenthesized content is at-issue   We claim that the contents of the parenthetical is at-issue. This may be surprising, given the canonical independence of parentheticals and their hosts. However, if the RPP construction in (5) asserted *Sally does not drink tea*, rather than *Sally does not drink black tea*, then the entailment shown below should be valid.

5. Sally does not drink (black) tea. ↛ Sally does not drink tea.

The entailment failure suggests that the parenthesized component is part of the at-issue content. Our paper presents further arguments from relation to the Question Under Discussion.

Property 2: the second component is not-at-issue   Projection data shows that only the first component of an RPP is at-issue: the second (unlike the first) projects out of negation (6), attitude reports (7), and possibility modals, as we expect for not-at-issue content (Simons et al. 2010).

6. Sally wasn't (politely) rejecting Sarah.
   (a) In fact, Sally had lost her phone. (6 → Sally wasn't rejecting Sarah.)

    (b) # In fact, Sally was deliberately rude. (6 $\nrightarrow$ Sally's rejection wasn't polite.)

7. Sarah believed Sally was (politely) rejecting her.
    (a) But in fact, Sally wasn't rejecting her. (7 $\nrightarrow$ Sally was rejecting Sarah.)
    (b) # But in fact, Sally was deliberately rude. (7 $\rightarrow$ Sally's rejection was polite.)

Property 3: the second component cannot be cancelled or reinforced The ability to project is compatible with a range of not-at-issue content, including implicature and presupposition. Although (2) resembles a scalar implicature, the second component of an RPP cannot be reinforced (8) or cancelled (9), unlike conversational implicatures (Potts 2005; Rett 2020).

8. (a) Jane bought some of the tuna but not all of it.
   (b) Jane bought (some) of the tuna #or/#and/#but not all of it.
9. (a) Calvin ate some of the tuna. In fact, he ate all of it.
   (b) Calvin ate (some of) the tuna. # In fact, he ate all of it.

As RPPs lack the independence that Potts 2005 ascribes to conventional implicature, we treat the second component as a presupposition; our analysis is also consistent with the kind of not-at-issue content Roberts 2011 posits for *only*, depending on the view of not-at-issue content adopted.

A semantics for the RPP construction We propose that the parentheses in RPPs act as like focus-sensitive operators on their parenthesized content. An RPP asserts its non-parenthesized paraphrase and presupposes the negation of a set of contextually stronger alternatives (10).

10. **Semantics of the RPP construction**: $[[(\beta)]]^C =$
    (a) Asserts: β
    (b) Presupposes: $\forall \delta \in \text{ALT}_C(\beta).\delta >_C \beta \rightarrow \neg\delta$ where ALT_C returns a set of relevant alternatives to β in context C and $>_C$ is an alternative strength relation in C.

We analyze the meaning of (1a) as shown in (11):

11. Sally drinks (herbal) tea before bed.
    (a) Asserts: Sally drinks herbal tea before bed.
    (b) Presupposes: $\neg$ Sally drinks {white, oolong, green } tea before bed.

Our analysis of the RPP therefore resembles the standard analysis of *only*, but with the at-issue and not-at-issue components flipped: while *only* presupposes its associate and asserts the negation of its alternatives (Rooth 1985; Beaver and Clark 2008), the RPP asserts its associate and presupposes the negation of its alternatives. We discuss how this flip predicts differences in NPI licensing.

Summary We explore a parenthesized construction that behaves unlike previously studied parentheticals. We show that it differs from appositives and orthographic representations of focus, and propose an analysis akin to focus-sensitive operators like *only*. In addition to laying out the semantic properties sketched above, our paper contributes new data to three issues in the study of focus-sensitive operators: alternative selection and ordering (Greenberg 2018); relation to the Question Under Discussion (Roberts 2011; Rett 2020), and negative polarity licensing (Klima 1964; Beaver and Clark 2008).

[1] D. I. Beaver and B. Clark. *Sense and Sensitivity*. 2008. **[2]** N. Dehé and Y. Kavalova. *Parentheticals*. 2007. **[3]** Y. Greenberg. *NLS* (2018). **[4]** G. Kaltenböck. *Parentheticals*. 2007. **[5]** E. Klima. *The Structure of Language*. 1964. **[6]** J. D. McCawley. *LI* (1982). **[7]** C. Potts. *The Logic of Conventional Implicatures*. 2005. **[8]** J. Rett. *IRP* (2020). **[9]** C. Roberts. *Formal Semantics and Pragmatics*. 2011. **[10]** M. Rooth. Dissertation. 1985. **[11]** M. Simons et al. *SALT*. 2010.