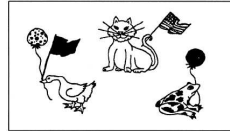


## ***Only*: Acquisition and Processing**

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In this talk, which is based on ongoing joint work with Ayaka Sugawara, Erin Olson, and Ken Wexler, I will suggest an approach to understand a curious phenomenon concerning the acquisition of *only*. As Crain et al. (1992, 1994) showed, children up to at least age six display a surprisingly robust rate of assigning non-adult interpretations to sentences with subject *only*. For instance, children may judge Kermit's answer in (1a) to the question *Kermit, can you tell me what happened?* as true relative to a scene where a cat is holding a flag, a goose is holding a flag and a balloon, and a frog is holding a balloon. Moreover, when asked why they think Kermit was correct, they offer justifications indicating that they assigned (1a) an interpretation as in (1b).

- (1) What happened?
  - a. Only the cat is holding a flag.
  - b. The cat is only holding a flag.



Crain et al.'s results have been replicated since for a number of languages including German, Japanese, and Mandarin suggesting that at least some the factors at play operate on properties of sentences with *only* that are invariant across languages. I will argue, based on results from a series of experiments with children and adults, for three such factors – A. Question-Answer Congruence, B. the scalar presupposition of *only*, and C. the nature of the set of alternatives, ALT(S), relevant for the interpretation of *only* – and propose a simple comprehension model for sentences with *only* that offers a principled characterization of when sentences with *only* are relatively easy or relatively difficult to comprehend.