Exception sentences such as (1a) and (1b) pose many challenges for a compositional semantic analysis within a general theory of natural language quantification:

(1)a. Every boy except John came.
b. No boy except John came.

In this paper, I develop a compositional semantic analysis of exception constructions within the theory of generalized quantifiers. This analysis meets three basic adequacy conditions on a semantic theory of those constructions:

1. It explains the basic semantic properties of exception constructions; in particular, it explains the restriction on the NPs with which an exception phrase may associate to (basically) those denoting universal and negative universal quantifiers.
2. It is general enough to apply to the full range of NPs with which an exception phrase may associate.
3. It accounts for the full range of complements that exception expressions such as except or but may take; in particular, it accounts for quantified and disjoined complements.

Besides providing a semantics of exception constructions, this paper presents results on natural language quantification that are of independent interest. Most importantly, it provides new evidence for polyadic quantification in natural language. In particular, it shows that several NPs in a clause may together denote a polyadic quantifier to which an exception phrase may then apply.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part contains the semantic

* The material discussed in this paper was in part presented already in a chapter of my dissertation (Moltmann 1992a). However, that chapter was rather descriptive in nature and no proper semantic analysis was developed.

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analysis of simple exception sentences (involving only monadic quantifiers). I will first introduce three basic semantic properties of exception constructions and show that prior analyses of exception sentences fail to account for some of those properties. I will present my own analysis of exception constructions first for the simplest case, in which the complement of except or but refers to a specific exception set, and then refine the analysis so that it can apply also to quantified NPs as the complement of except or but. Finally, I will show how the analysis can apply to certain clausal exception constructions.

The second part of this paper treats exception sentences involving polyadic quantification. I will first present exception constructions in which the exception is specified as an n-tuple (or a set of n-tuples) and show how the analysis developed in the first part can straightforwardly be extended to these constructions. As a second type of exception construction involving polyadic quantifiers, I will present sentences in which the constraint on the associate of the exception phrase is satisfied not by the NP the exception phrase seems to modify, but rather by the larger context in which this NP occurs. I then turn to the issue of the syntactic basis of the formation of polyadic quantifiers and give a speculative account. Finally, I will briefly present some further exception constructions involving polyadic quantification.

PART I. THE SEMANTICS OF SIMPLE EXCEPTION CONSTRUCTIONS

1. SOME BASIC DISTINCTIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

In this part, I will restrict myself to exception constructions in which only one quantifier occurs or is relevant, as in (1a), repeated here as (2):

(2) Every boy except John came.

I will call those exception sentences 'simple exception constructions'.

Let me at the outset introduce some basic distinctions and some terminology concerning exception constructions. I will use the abbreviation ‘EP’ for ‘exception phrase’. Furthermore, I will call the NP or the quantifier that an exception phrase syntactically and semantically associates with ‘the associate of the exception phrase’, for short ‘EP-associate’, and the complement of the exception expression, i.e. except, but, or except for, ‘the EP-complement’. Thus, in (2) the EP-associate is every boy and the EP-complement John.