The starting point for this talk is a long-standing puzzle in the L1 acquisition of only, first reported in Crain et al 1994 and replicated since in a number of languages: children up to age 6 display surprising difficulties understanding sentences with “subject-only” such as (1a) while seemingly having no difficulty understanding sentences with “VP-only”, (1b). Moreover, when they misconstrue (1a) children understand it to mean what (1b) does. E.g. Kermit’s answer to the question What happened? in (1a) is judged to be true relative to the scene in (1c) and the justifications indicate that (1a) is assigned the meaning expressed by (1b).

(1) a. Only the cat is holding a flag.  
    b. The cat is only holding a flag.  
    c. [Image of animals] 

We aim to show that adults exhibit a parallel asymmetry during language comprehension (Experiment 1), and provide an explanation for this asymmetry based on the notion of “Easily Scalable Constituents” (ESCs). Furthermore, we aim to show that this explanation correctly predicts processing difficulty of both subject-only and VP-only in sentences that have inherently scalable expressions (Experiment 2), and in sentences that have conjoined NPs in both subject and object position (Experiment 3).