

The distribution of quantifiers in clefts

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Abstract

This paper examines the distribution of quantifiers in clefts. It addresses the fact that quantifiers are not always banned as clefted constituents and discusses analyses which have been proposed in the literature in order to account for this phenomenon. The paper argues that quantifiers qualify for clefted constituents only when they bear a strong reading (Agouraki, 2010). Using Cypriot Greek data, it argues that clefts express identificational focus and shows that under this analysis, the distribution of quantifiers, which are sometimes allowed to occur in clefts and sometimes not, can be explained. Quantifiers which have a strong interpretation can express exhaustive identification, whereas quantifiers which bear a weak reading cannot, as they do not satisfy the existence presupposition induced by the cleft clause. The analysis can carry over to crosslinguistic data displaying similar constraints on the distribution of quantifiers in constructions which express identificational focus.

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1. Introduction

A prevalent approach to the distribution of quantifiers in clefts is that these are banned as clefted constituents due to the semantic interpretation they bear which is incompatible with the reading clefted constituents may bear, that is identificational focus (É. Kiss, 1998). On the basis of this assumption, it has been proposed that in languages in which quantifiers qualify for clefted constituents, clefts express a different meaning than the one expressed in languages like English (cf. Brunetti, 2004; Fotiou, 2009). In particular, it has been proposed that in these languages clefts do not bear an identificational focus interpretation. This paper argues that the distribution of quantifiers in these structures can in fact be accounted for under an *identificational focus* analysis of clefts.¹ Using Cypriot Greek data, the paper argues that quantifiers may qualify for clefted constituents or not, depending on the reading they bear. Only quantifiers bearing a strong reading are legitimate as clefted constituents (cf. Agouraki, 2010). The paper provides an account for this, showing that quantifiers which have a strong interpretation can express exhaustive identification (É. Kiss, 1998) over a set of alternatives, whereas weak quantifiers cannot. Under this analysis, the distribution of quantifiers, which are sometimes banned and sometimes allowed to occur in cleft pivots, can be explained.

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¹ Note that identificational focus is not the only type of focus that cleft structures are assumed to express cross-linguistically. Nevertheless, as far as the discussed data is concerned, I argue that this should be analyzed as expressing identificational focus.

2. Previous analyses of the distribution of quantifiers in clefts

2.1. *É. Kiss's (1998) analysis of the distributional restrictions in Hungarian preverbal foci and English clefts*

É. Kiss (1998:251–253) argues that Hungarian preverbal focalizing constructions and their English equivalent, clefts, display restrictions in the distribution of universal and existential quantifiers. Consider the examples in (1)–(2) which are quoted from *É. Kiss (1998:252)*.

- (1) *Mari *minden kalapot* nézett ki magának.
 Mary every hat.ACC picked out herself.DAT
 *It was *every hat* that Mary picked for herself.'
- (2) *Mari *valamit* nézett ki magának.
 Mary something.ACC picked out herself.DAT
 *It was *something* that Mary picked for herself.'

According to *É. Kiss (1998)*, the occurrence of the universal quantifiers *minden* and *every* and the existential quantifiers *valamit* and *something* as clefted constituents induces ungrammaticality in (1) and (2) respectively. On the basis of this data, *É. Kiss (1998)* argues that universal quantifiers and some-phrases are banned in clefts and Hungarian preverbal foci constructions. According to her, universal quantifiers and some-phrases are inherently incompatible with expressing exclusion; that is why they cannot occur in clefts. She considers the ban on universal and existential quantifiers in clefts and preverbal foci constructions as evidence that these constructions express identificational focus.

2.2. *Brunetti's (2004) analysis of the distribution of quantifiers in Italian clefts*

Brunetti (2004) claims that Italian clefts allow for universal, existential and negative quantifiers to be clefted. Adopting *É. Kiss's (1998)* analysis of the distribution of quantifiers in clefts, she considers that this suggests that Italian clefts do not express identificational focus. The idea is that if Italian clefts expressed identificational focus, these quantifiers would be banned as clefted constituents, as it is the case in English clefts and Hungarian preverbal foci (cf. *É. Kiss, 1998*).

It must be noted that *Benincà et al. (1988)* argue that quantifiers are not legitimate as clefted constituents in Italian (cf. the examples in (3)), whereas this is not the case with preverbal focalized quantifiers (cf. the examples in (4)). Consider the examples presented by *Benincà et al. (1988)* (quoted from *Brunetti, 2004:74–75*).

- (3) a. *E' *QUALCUNO* che sto aspettando.
 (it) is someone that (I) am waiting for
 b. *E' *TUTTO* che è caduto.
 (it) is everything that is fallen
 c. *E' *NESSUNO* che (non) ho incontrato.
 (it) is nobody that (I) (not) have met
 d. *E' *NIENTE* che (non) mi hanno dato da mangiare.
 (it) is nothing that (they) (not) to-me-CL have given to eat
- (4) a. *QUALCUNO* sto aspettando.
 somebody (I) am waiting for
 b. *TUTTO* è caduto.
 everything is fallen
 c. *NESSUNO* (*non) ho incontrato.
 nobody (I) (not) have met
 d. *NIENTE* (*non) mi hanno dato da mangiare.
 nothing (they) (not) to-me-CL have given to eat

The above data shows that the existential quantifier *qualcuno* 'somebody', the universal quantifier *tutto* 'everything' and the negative quantifiers *nessuno* 'nobody' and *niente* 'nothing' may occur in the preverbal stressed position. However, they are banned as clefted constituents. Commenting on the examples in (3) and (4), *Brunetti (2004)* argues contra *Benincà et al. (1988)* that existential quantifiers and universal quantifiers are in fact allowed to occur as clefted constituents in Italian, when the appropriate context is given.

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