

Chapter 2

Discourse-Pragmatic Preliminaries

In this chapter, I introduce the discourse-pragmatic notions which are important for the analysis of clefts. The lack of a unified terminology in the field makes explicit discussion of definitions and assumptions especially important. The empirical claims of competing approaches must be teased out and compared directly.

2.1 Topic and comment.

2.1.1 DEFINITIONS

The discourse-pragmatic distinction most central to the discussion of clefts is the distinction between topic and comment. I follow Gundel (1985, 1988) in defining ‘topic’ and ‘comment’ as shown in (1) and (2):

- (1) **Topic** [Gundel 1988]
An entity, E, is the topic of a sentence, S, iff, in using S, the speaker intends to increase the addressee’s knowledge about, request information about or otherwise get the addressee to act with respect to E.

- (2) **Comment** [Gundel 1988]
A predication, P, is the comment of a sentence, S, iff, in using S the speaker intends P to be assessed relative to the topic of S.

There are two senses in which the topic-comment relation is relevant to semantics. First, the topic is defined here not as a linguistic expression, but as semantic ‘entity.’¹ Secondly, the semantic evaluation of sentences in context is assumed to depend in part on their topic-comment structure.²

¹A couple of clarifications concerning the term ‘entity’ are in order. First, topics are not entities ‘out in the world,’ but rather representations in the speech participants’ mental models of the world. Second, the term ‘entity’ is intended only to indicate the semantic nature of topics, not to indicate restrictions on this semantic nature. I would argue that a semantic entity of any logical type which is mentally representable and may be referred to by a pro-form is a potential topic (i.e. not necessarily entities only of ‘type e’). For precedents of the notion of entity=discourse referent=discourse entity=file card, see Karttunen (1974), Webber (1978), and, for explicit discussion of terminology, Heim (1982: 283-285). For type theory, see, e.g. Chierchia 1984.

²This second assumption is perhaps brought out more clearly in the alternative definition of topic as ‘the domain within which the predication holds’ (Chafe 1976, Haiman 1978). For arguments that topic-comment structure (or, equivalently, presupposition-focus structure) affects the determination of truth conditions, see e.g. Strawson 1963, Sgall, Hajičová and Benešová 1973, Dretske 1972, and Rooth 1985.

Precedents for the topic-comment distinction can be traced through various grammatical traditions back at least to the nineteenth century. Forerunners include the Hungarian grammarian, Brassai (1860, 1863-65), who distinguished between *Inchoativum* and *Bulke* (cf. Kiss 1987), and the French grammarian, Henri Weil 1878. German grammarians³ developed the notion of ‘psychological subject’ of the sentence, which was defined in von der Gabelenz 1891 as ‘the idea which appears first in the consciousness of the speaker...what makes him think and what he wants the hearer to think of,’ and in Paul 1909 as ‘the idea or group of ideas that is first present in the mind of the speaker.’ Lipps 1893 defined the complementary ‘logical predicate’ of a sentence as the element which bears the highest stress and which expresses something new. Paul 1909 defined the ‘psychological predicate’ as ‘the most important member of the sentence, that which it is the aim of the sentence to communicate and which therefore carries the highest stress.’

The Prague School grammarian Mathesius (1929, 1939) distinguished the ‘starting point of the utterance’ (*vychodiste*), ‘that which is known or at least obvious in the given situation and from which the speaker proceeds,’ from the ‘core of the utterance’ (*jádro*), ‘what the speaker states about, or in regard to, the starting point of the utterance.’⁴ Of various developments within the Prague School, the approach of Sgall, Hajič ova and Beneš ová 1973 most clearly overlaps with the approach taken here. Sgall et. al distinguish between the ‘topic’ (or ‘contextually-bound segment’) and the ‘focus’ (or ‘contextually-unbound segment’).

I would like to claim that there are three criterial characteristics of the topic-comment notion. Equivalent variants all involve some correlate of the connection of the topic to the discourse context, of the prosodic prominence of the comment, and of the assessment relation between topic and comment. Any of the three characteristics may form the basis of a particular formulation of the definition. Aboutness definitions (Sgall, Hajič ova and Beneš ová 1973, Gundel 1974, Reinhart 1982) emphasize the contextual connection; focus-based definitions (Chomsky 1971) emphasize the prosodic prominence characteristic, and domain-restriction definitions (Dahl 1974, Haiman 1978, Partee 1989) emphasize the assessment characteristic.

2.1.2 TOPIC TESTS.

Contrary to what has often been assumed, neither syntactic subjecthood nor sentence initial position is necessary for topic status. While the topic of a sentence is frequently expressed as the syntactic subject⁵ (and the subject is perhaps the ‘unmarked’ topic), this is not always the case. In

³These citations are from Chapter 1 of Gundel 1974.

⁴Daneš 1974 notes that Mathesius 1942 employed the terms *základ* (‘foundation’) and *téma* (‘theme’), defined as that which ‘is being spoken about in the sentence.’ Gundel 1974 notes that Mathesius 1928 employed the English terms, *theme* and *enunciation*. She attributes the first employment of the terms *topic* and *comment* to Hockett 1958.

⁵i.e. the argument with which the verb agrees.

(3b), for example, it is the direct object rather than the subject which refers to what the utterance is intuitively about—the Cuban emigrés.

- (3) JM: a. In 1980, 125,000 Cubans emigrated to the US in what is known as the Mariel boat-lift.
 b. And Jimmy Carter emBRACed **them**.
 c. A number of the emigrés are so-called ‘undesirables’ whom Castro unloaded from his prisons and mental hospitals on boats to Florida...
 [The McLaughlin Group, 11/27/87]

Example (3b) also shows that topics need not appear in sentence-initial position. This characteristic of the notion of ‘topic’ clearly distinguishes it from Halliday’s (1967, 1985) notion of ‘theme,’ defined as ‘that element which comes first in the clause’.⁶

The claim that what a sentence is ‘about’ somehow corresponds to the question which elicits the sentence as its answer has a long history. For example, according to Lipps 1893, ‘we recognize the subject and predicate in the sentence when we ask the question to which the sentence gives an answer. That which is given in the question is the subject; that which the question demands an answer to is the predicate.’⁷

Stout 1902 expressed similar views on the nature of subject and predicate:⁸

The subject is that product of previous thinking which forms the immediate basis and starting-point of further development. The further development is the predicate. Sentences are in the process of thinking what steps are in the process of walking. The foot on which the weight of the body rests corresponds to the subject. The foot which is moved forward in order to occupy new ground corresponds to the predicate.... All answers to questions are, as such, predicates, and all predicates may be regarded as answers to possible questions. If the statement ‘I am hungry’ be a reply to the question, ‘Who is hungry?’ then ‘I’ is the predicate. If it be an answer to the question, ‘Is there anything amiss with you?’ then ‘hungry’ is the predicate. If the question is, ‘Are you really hungry?’ then ‘am’ is the predicate. Every fresh step in a train of thought may be regarded as an answer to a question. The subject is, so to speak, the formulation of the question; the predication is the answer.

This characteristic of topics has been exploited for use as a criterion for determining the topic of a given utterance in a given context in the ‘question test,’ explicitly formulated in Sgall, Hajič ova and Beneš ová 1973; Gundel 1974; Reinhart 1982: To determine the topic of a given utterance, one need simply determine the question that the utterance is used to answer in the context—the topical

⁶See Firbas 1964 for criticism of the views of Travnicek 1961 who, like Halliday, defines ‘theme’ in terms of sentence-initial position. Note that Halliday’s (e.g. 1985: 39) position is that the theme in English may be structurally identified as the element in initial position, but is defined in functional terms as ‘the element which serves as the point of departure of the message.’

⁷Cited in Gundel (1974: 21).

⁸Cited in Jespersen (1921: 146), and Gundel (1974: 14-15).

elements are those elements of the utterance which are also contained in the question.⁹ For example, the question-answer sequence in (4) supports the analysis of the Cuban emigrés as the topic of (3b):

- (4) Q: What happened with the Cuban emigrés?
 A: Jimmy Carter embraced them.

The connection between sentence comment and locus of prosodic prominence has been noted at least since Lipps 1893 and Paul 1909. It is generally agreed that primary sentence stress (accent, prominence) falls somewhere on the part of the sentence expressing the comment. The location of primary prosodic prominence may thus be used as a positive test for comment status, although application of this test is complicated in practice by the potential for secondary prosodic peaks to occur on both topic elements and comment elements, and also for multiple primary prosodic peaks to occur on comment elements (for further discussion, see §2.5 below).

Although there is no single position within the simple sentence which is reserved exclusively for topics, the adjunct positions to the left and right of the simple sentence have been characterized in Gundel 1985 as 'syntactic topic' positions which ARE reserved for topics:¹⁰

- (5) **Syntactic Topic:** A constituent, C, is the syntactic topic of some sentence, S₁, iff C is immediately dominated by S₁ and C is adjoined to the left or right of some sentence S₂ which is also immediately dominated by S₁. [Gundel 1985]

Syntactic tests for topichood have been proposed by various authors. Thus, Kuno 1972 and Gundel 1974 propose the 'speaking of' and 'as for' tests to identify the sentence topic, and Reinhart 1982 proposes the related 'said-about' test. The aptness of (6a)-(6c) as paraphrases of (3b), for example, shows that all three tests support the analysis of the Cuban emigrés as the topic of (3b):

- (6) a. Speaking of the Cuban emigrés, Jimmy Carter embraced them.
 b. As for the Cuban emigrés, Jimmy Carter embraced them.
 c. He said about the Cuban emigrés that Jimmy Carter embraced them.

Since these tests have occasionally been misunderstood as substitution tests (e.g. by Ward 1985 and Smith 1985), it must be emphasized that syntactic paraphrases with identical topic-comment structures may still have different conditions of use.

2.2 Cognitive Status

⁹The notion of 'natural response' plays the role of the eliciting question in the presupposition-focus of Chomsky 1971.

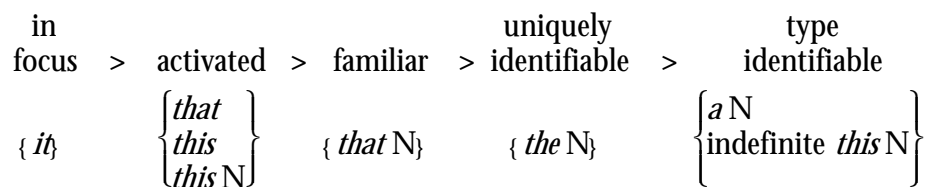
¹⁰Note that Gundel does not intend her definition to include cases in which the 'preposed' constituent bears primary accent. That is, she intends to characterize left dislocations, right dislocations, 'double-subjects', and topic-topicalizations, but not focus-topicalizations as topic+comment constructions (cf. Gundel 1974, 1985, 1988).

Though it is generally agreed that the topic of a sentence is in some sense ‘given’ or ‘presupposed’ with respect to the comment, attempts both to define ‘givenness’ and to define the relationship between givenness and topicality have proved controversial. To avoid confusion, a clear distinction must be made between two basic senses of ‘givenness.’ It is a definitional characteristic of the topic-comment relation that the topic of a sentence is ‘given’ relative to the comment. This ‘relational’ sense of ‘givenness’ has sometimes been confused with a second, ‘referential’, sense of ‘givenness’ whereby speakers expect their addressees to be familiar to a greater or lesser extent with the different elements entering into the compositional meaning of the utterance.¹¹

Before turning to a discussion of how the two senses of givenness are related, I will briefly elaborate on the second, ‘referential’ sense of givenness. In the past two decades, it has come to be recognized that ‘givenness’ in the referential sense is itself a nonunitary concept, and that there are a number of equally legitimate senses in which linguistic expressions may be referentially ‘given.’ These different senses are intuitively definable in terms of assumptions speakers make concerning the cognitive status of the intended referents for their addressees — i.e. assumptions about the extent to which the addressee is currently thinking about the referent, and about the particular component of memory that the addressee will need to search to successfully gain access to a representation of the referent.¹²

Building on previous work by Gundel (1978a,b; 1985), Gundel, Hedberg and Zacharski propose that there are five linguistically-significant cognitive statuses, which are implicationaly related as shown in the Givenness Hierarchy in (7):

(7) **Givenness Hierarchy** [Gundel, Hedberg and Zacharski 1988, 1989, 1990]



¹¹See Gundel (1978, 1985, 1988) for more discussion of these two basic senses of givenness, and note that Kuno 1972, Sgall, Hajičová and Benešová 1973, and Lambrecht 1985 explicitly emphasize this same point.

¹²The notion of ‘cognitive state’ or ‘status’ may be traced back to Chafe (1976: 27-28): ‘Not only do people’s minds contain a large store of knowledge, they are also at any one moment in certain temporary states with relation to the knowledge. For example, a person may be ‘thinking of’ a certain small part of it. Language functions effectively only if the speaker takes account of such states in the mind of the person he is talking to. It is only, for example, when the speaker adjusts what he says to what he assumes the addressee is thinking of at the moment that his message will be readily assimilated by the addressee.’

The Givenness Hierarchy encodes the claim that the five statuses are systematically correlated with appropriate choice of different forms of referring expression in English.¹³ Each particular cognitive status constitutes a necessary condition for felicitous use of the form associated with it on the hierarchy and also of any form to its left, and a sufficient condition for use of the form associated with it on the hierarchy and of any form to its right.¹⁴

Consider for example, the conditions under which the sentences in (9) may be appropriately used in the linguistic context of (8):

- (8) I couldn't sleep last night.
- (9) a. **A/this dog** (next door) kept me awake.
 b. **The dog** next door kept me awake.
 c. **That dog** (next door) kept me awake.
 d. **This dog/this/that** kept me awake again.
 e. **It** kept me awake.

Felicitous use of the indefinite article or indefinite determiner *this* as in (9a) requires only that the addressee know the meaning of the word *dog*, i.e. that the addressee be able to identify the type (i.e. class, kind) of entity to which the intended referent belongs. Use of the definite article, as in (9b), requires in addition that the speaker is justified in assuming the addressee to be able to uniquely identify the particular referent concerned, perhaps through inference. The distal demonstrative determiner in (9c) is even more restrictive, in that it may be appropriately used only when the speaker can assume the addressee to have some prior familiarity with the particular dog under discussion, if only to know from prior conversation that the speaker's neighbor has a dog. Use of the proximal demonstrative determiner or one of the demonstrative pronouns, as in (9d), requires

¹³It was argued in Gundel, Hedberg and Zacharski 1990 that the Givenness Hierarchy has cross-linguistic significance as the basis for an insightful characterization of the use of different forms of referring expression (including zero pronominals and zero determiners) in Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, and Spanish.

¹⁴Many researchers have recognized the existence of multiple degrees or types of givenness. See especially, Kuno 1972, 1973 ('temporary' versus 'permanent registry of discourse'); Sgall, Hajičová and Benešová 1973 ('stock of shared knowledge' with an 'activated subset'), Chafe 1974, 1976 ('given' versus 'new'); Allerton 1978 ('given', 'semi-given', 'semi-new', and 'new'), Prince 1981 ('evoked', 'unused', 'inferable', 'brand-new'); Brown and Yule 1983 ('current given' versus 'displaced given'); Heim 1982 ('prominent' versus 'familiar'); Culicover and Rochemont 1983 and Rochemont 1986 ('contextually-construable'); Lambrecht 1985 ('active', 'semi-active' or 'accessible', 'inactive', 'unidentifiable'). Gundel, Hedberg and Zacharski 1989 criticize previous approaches for failing to recognize an adequate number of distinctions (e.g. Prince's notion of 'evoked' covers both 'in focus' and 'activated'; Rochemont's notion of c-construable covers at least 'in focus', 'activated' and 'familiar'), for failing to adequately recognize the implication relation holding between the statuses (e.g. Prince's notion of 'evoked' does not imply 'unused', and for conflating givenness and inferability (i.e. we argue that 'inferable' is not so much a separate cognitive status, as a means for an entity to acquire a cognitive status).

further that the dog is activated in the immediate discourse context (i.e. available in or easily accessible to the addressee's awareness), either linguistically, by virtue of recent discussion, or extralinguistically, by virtue of physical presence in the speech situation. Finally, use of an unaccented pronoun, as in (9e), is maximally restricted in English in requiring not only that the dog is activated, but that it is in focus, i.e. the addressee's attention is already fixed on the dog in question.¹⁵

In the present work, I will assume that the linguistic relevance of the five cognitive statuses has been adequately demonstrated¹⁶, and will concentrate on extending the account to show that distinctions in cognitive status are relevant for clausal as well as noun phrase reference, in particular for the type of clausal reference involved in the use of cleft sentences. Thus, I assume that speakers are sensitive to the accessibility for the addressee of the propositions denoted by sentences and the predicates denoted by relative clauses as well as the accessibility of noun phrase referents.

2.3 The topic familiarity condition.

Returning now to the sense in which the topic of a sentence is 'given', I adopt the 'topic familiarity condition' proposed in Gundel (1985, 1988) and given in (10) below:

- (10) TOPIC-FAMILIARITY CONDITION
An entity, E, can successfully serve as a topic, T, iff, both speaker and addressee have previous knowledge of or familiarity with E.

This principle accounts for the judgments in (11), according to which definite and generic indefinite but not specific indefinite expressions may appear as syntactic topics:

¹⁵At issue in the distinction between activated and in-focus is the distinction between accented and unaccented pronouns, whether demonstrative or nondemonstrative. As discussed in Gundel, Hedberg and Zacharski 1990, in-focus referents may also be encoded via zero anaphora to the extent allowed in the particular language. See Gundel 1980 and Kamayama 1985 for more discussion of cross-linguistic parallels between zero and unaccented pronouns.

¹⁶In the articles cited above and in ongoing work, we develop a more elaborate account of how the entailment relationship between these five statuses is pragmatically exploited in conjunction with the two parts of Grice's (1967) maxim of quantity to constrain selection in cases where necessary conditions for use of more than one form are met. The first part, 'be as informative as necessary,' pressures speakers to use the highest possible (i.e. leftmost) form on the hierarchy, while the second part, 'be no more informative than necessary,' pressures speakers to use the lowest possible (i.e. rightmost) form. Clashes between these conflicting tendencies result in the generation of conversational implicatures and special effects (e.g. the focus shift implicature associated with stressed pronouns and demonstratives, the novelty implicature associated with indefinite articles, the signal to search long-term memory associated with 'reminder' *that*, and the emotional overtones of certain demonstrative expressions).

- (11) a. The/that printer we looked at, I decided to buy it.
 b. A printer, I decided to buy one.
 c. #A printer, I decided to buy it.

The Topic Familiarity Condition lies behind the observation made for a large number of languages that topic expressions must be either definite or generic. Kuno 1973 makes this claim for morphologically marked topics in Japanese, cf. (12), and Li and Thompson 1981 make it for syntactic topics in Mandarin Chinese, cf. (13):

- (12) a. John wa watakusi no tomodati desu.
 TOP I GEN friend is
 ‘Speaking of John, he is my friend.’
 b. Kuzirawa honyuu-doobutu desu.
 whale TOP mammal is
 ‘Speaking of whales, they are mammals.’
 c. *Dareka wa byookidesu.
 somebody TOP sick is
 ‘Speaking of somebody, he is sick.’
- (13) a. nei zhi gouwo yijing kanguole
 that CL dog I already see EXPCRS
 ‘That dog I have already seen’
 b. gou woyijing kanguo le
 dog I already see EXP CRS
 ‘The dog I have already seen/Dogs (generic) I have already seen’
 c. *yi zhi gou wo yijing kanguole
 one CL dog I already see EXPCRS
 ‘A dog I have already seen.’

Gundel claims, crucially, that even though familiarity is necessary for topicality, it is not sufficient.¹⁷ It is perfectly possible for a comment to contain information which is not only familiar but also activated or even in-focus. The latter occurs routinely in the answers to alternative questions, as in example (14).¹⁸

¹⁷Thus Fries’s 1983 criticism that Gundel 1974 represents a ‘combining approach’ to Mathesius’s definition of theme-rheme structure by identifying the notions of topic and given information in contrast to the ‘separating’ approach of Halliday, which he advocates, is unfounded.

¹⁸This example is taken from Kuno 1972, who employs the term ‘old information’ (‘predictable’) for what I am calling the ‘relational’ (topic-comment) sense of givenness, and the term ‘anaphoric’ (already present in the ‘registry of discourse’) for the ‘referential’ (cognitive status) sense.

In making essentially the same point as Kuno and Gundel, Reinhart 1982 cites example (i), arguing that the ‘newness’ of comments cannot be defined purely on the basis of the referents denoted.

(14) Q: Among John, Mary, and Tom, who is the oldest?

A: Tó m is the oldest.

Reinhart 1982 diverges from Gundel in arguing that givenness is not even necessary for topic status. She cites example (15a), which contains a specific indefinite subject expressing, in her view, what the sentence is intuitively ‘about’, as verified by the ‘said about’ paraphrase in (15b):

(15) a. When she was five years old, a child of my acquaintance announced a theory that she was inhabited by rabbits.

[The New York Times, cited in Carden 1982]

b. He told us about a child of his acquaintance that when she was five years old, she announced a theory that she was inhabited by rabbits.

Reinhart concludes that only ‘pragmatic referentiality’ is necessary for topichood, rather than any sense of ‘old-information’ status.¹⁹

Prince 1984, 1985, Ward 1985, and Ward & Prince 1986 also give examples of left-dislocated and topicalized specific indefinite phrases, such as those in (16):²⁰

(i) Q: Who did Felix praise?

A: Felix praised HIMSELF

Selkirk 1984 discusses another class of examples demonstrating that referential givenness is not sufficient for topic status. She concludes on the basis of question-answer sequences such as those illustrated in (15) that ‘focused’ phrases — i.e. the VP here — may contain ‘old information’ — i.e. the direct object in (ii-b) and the indirect object in (iii-b).

(ii) a. What did Jane do next?

b. She sent her book to MARY.

(iii) a. What did Jane do next?

b. She sent her SKETCHES to the publisher

In (ii-b) and (iii-b), the entire verb phrase is used to express the comment, and thus is ‘new’ in the relational sense, but the verb phrase contains elements which are assumed by the speaker to be ‘activated’ and which are thus ‘given’ in the referential sense. For an explicit suggestion that Selkirk’s ‘old information’ is related to referential ‘familiarity’ in the sense of Heim 1982 (i.e. ‘activation’), see Rooth (1985: 18-25). Rooth suggests that a non-embedded focus expresses newness in a ‘pragmatic’ (i.e., relational) sense, while an embedded focus expresses newness in a ‘semantic’ (i.e., referential) sense.

¹⁹As noted by Gundel 1985, however, a simple referentiality condition is too weak since it fails to account for the unacceptability of (11c) above, even when the indefinite expression is ‘referential’ in the sense of Fodor and Sag 1982 — i.e. when the speaker has a ‘particular entity in mind.’

²⁰Reinhart argues that example (15a) fails Gundel’s ‘as for’ test due to special conditions which prohibit left-dislocation of both specific and non-specific indefinites. If the sentence is rephrased to be appropriate in a more colloquial register, however, dislocation of the specific indefinite subject is perfectly appropriate:

(i) This kid I know, when she was five years old, she thought there were rabbits living in her body.

- (16) a. An old preacher down there, they augured under the grave where his father was buried. [Terkel 1974: 44; cited in Prince 1984: 216]
- b. Once when we went to Big Bear and we caught a lot of fish and Suzie Kathy and Betty went to a park and me, my mom and dad went fishing. And this guy his fishing pole fell down in the water and he had to go down and get it.
[Carterette & Jones 1974:134; cited in Prince 1984: 222]
- c. Several of these questions I will try to answer — but, let me emphasize, from a personal rather than a general viewpoint.
[Nixon 1972, cited in Ward and Prince 1986]

It is worth noting that specific indefinite syntactic topics are not limited to English. As shown in (17) and (18), specific indefinite expressions in Korean and Hmong may be morphologically marked as topics:²¹

- (17) Korean (Lee 1987: 18-19)
 ∂ ce ne-ka manna-n salam-in mikuk -e
 yesterday I-NOM met-ATTR person-TOP America-LOC
 o-n ci sam ny∂ ntø -s' -ninte
 come-ATTR since three year became-PAST -CIRCUM
 acikto unc∂ n -il mos ha-n -te
 yet driving-ACC not do-NPST QUOT
 ‘A man I met yesterday (TOP) has been in America for three years, but (he said) he cannot drive yet.’
- (18) Hmong (Fuller 1988: 57)
 Ib co neeg tuaj tshiab (mas) kuvxav
 one GRP person come new TOP I want
 tau ib co pab kuv.
 get oneGRP help me
 ‘[From] a group of people [who] just arrived (TOP), I want to get some people to help me.’

While recognizing the existence of such counterexamples to the topic familiarity principle, Gundel 1985 argues that they can be treated as motivated suspensions of the principle for particular rhetorical effects, noting in support of this claim that such indefinite topics are necessarily anchored in a familiar element, that they don’t occur felicitously in questions and imperatives, and that their distribution is restricted to particular discourse genres.²² It may be the case that suspension of the

²¹Gundel (1985: 90, note 1) mentions that examples like Reinhart’s, involving the initial sentence of a newspaper story (and where the expression at issue appears in subject position in English), may also receive the morphological topic marker *wa* in Japanese.

²²Gundel presents and discusses but then provisionally rejects, the weaker ‘topic identifiability’ condition shown in (i):

topic familiarity principle is permitted only if the speaker presents sufficient information for the addressee to construct a representation specific enough to support evaluation of the overall proposition and storage of it in memory.

2.4 All comment sentences.

Since topics for Gundel are cognitive-pragmatic entities rather than linguistic expressions, she is able to assume that sentences can have topics which are not linguistically expressed. This assumption is advantageous because it makes possible the general claim that every sentence has a topic, even existential or presentational statements like those in (19):

- (19) a. Q: What's wrong?
 A: There's a fly in my soup.
- b. A: What happened?
 B: Iraq invaded Kuwait.

Since it is possible to semantically evaluate such sentences (i.e. to assign them truth values on particular occasions of utterance), they too should be viewed as having topics. Gundel 1974 suggests that 'all comment' utterances should be viewed as making assertions about what is or is not the case at a particular location in space and time — and hence as responsive to questions of the form '(then) what happened (there)?'²³ I would like to present here an additional argument in favor of Gundel's (1974, 1985) analysis of the topic of an 'all comment' sentences as a spatial-temporal index.²⁴

Kuno (1972, 1973) presents a well-known discussion of the uses of the Japanese topic marker *wa* and nominative marker *ga* which are illustrated in (20):

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- (i) TOPIC IDENTIFIABILITY CONDITION
 An expression, E, can successfully refer to a topic, T, iff E is of a form that allows the addressee to uniquely identify T.

Note, however, that even the status 'uniquely identifiable' won't cover the examples pointed out by Reinhart and Prince, which are indefinite and thus not 'uniquely identifiable' in the sense of the Givenness Hierarchy.

²³Existential and presentational sentences have received a number of labels in the discourse-pragmatic and syntactic literature: e.g. 'thetic' (Kuroda 1972, Babby 1980, Sasse 1987, Lambrecht 1987), 'neutral description' (Kuno 1972, 1973), 'focus-only' (e.g. Chomsky 1971, Wilson and Sperber 1979), 'news' (Schmerling 1976), 'topicless' (Reinhart 1982), 'presentational' (Hetzron 1977, Rochemont 1978, 1986, Gueron 1980, Safir 1985), and 'event-reporting' (Lambrecht 1986).

²⁴Such a topic could be viewed as expressed by the finite tense operator.

- (20) a. **thematic**
 John **wa** gakusei desu
 student is
 ‘Speaking of John, he is a student.’
- b. **contrastive**
 Amewa**hutte** imasu ga...
 rain falling is but
 ‘It is raining, but...’
- c. **neutral description**
 A**me**ga hutte imasu
 rain falling is
 ‘It is raining.’
- d. **exhaustive listing**
 John **ga** gakusei desu
 student is
 ‘(Of all the people under discussion) John (and only John) is a student.’
 ‘It is John that is a student.’

Kuroda 1965, 1972 had previously observed that the readings referred to by Kuno as ‘neutral description’ readings are not available for stative sentences. Thus the *ga*-marked subject of (21b) has only an ‘exhaustive listing’ reading:²⁵

- (21) a. Hito wa doobuto de aru.
 ‘Man is an animal.’
- b. Hito ga doobuto de aru.
 ‘It is man that is an animal.’

I would like to argue here that this effect may be derived pragmatically, given the assumptions in (22):

- (22) a. The spatio-temporal index of an event-reporting sentence can serve as its topic.
 b. Sentences containing stative predicates denote states-of-affairs rather than events, and thus cannot be ‘about’ the spatio-temporal index of an event.
 c. *ga*-marking in Japanese signals non-topicality.
 d. Every sentence has a topic.

Note that (21a) is simply a generic sentence whose topic is ‘man.’ That is (21a) is interpreted predictably as a predication ‘about’ the denotation of its *wa*-marked subject. The topic of (21b), on the other hand, cannot be interpreted as a predication ‘about’ the denotation of its subject since the

²⁵This effect is labeled the ‘obligatory focus’ effect in Ogihara 1987.

subject is marked with *ga*. (21b) also cannot be ‘about’ its spatiotemporal index since *doobuto de aru* is a stative predicate, and stative predicates cannot be used to report events. Thus (21b) cannot be construed either as a topic-comment sentence (answering the question ‘what is man?’), or as an all-comment sentence (answering the question ‘what happened?’). But (21b), like every sentence, must have a topic. The sole remaining alternative is for (21b) to be construed as a comment-topic sentence (i.e. as answering the question ‘which species is an animal?’). But this is just the ‘exhaustive-listing’ reading.

Since the syntactic subject of a sentence will be assumed by the addressee to express the topic in the absence of contextual evidence to indicate the contrary, we might hypothesize that the function of *ga*-marking in Japanese is to signal precisely that a syntactic subject does NOT express the topic of the sentence. I will argue later that the function of clefting in English is likewise to signal the non-topical status of the clefted constituent..

2.5 Prosodic prominence.

2.5.1 PITCH ACCENT.

Recall that one consequence of the topic-comment notion assumed here is that the prosodic center of the sentence is always contained in the comment. I will assume the approach to the assignment of primary and secondary sentence accent which was first formulated in Gundel 1978.²⁶ Primary sentence accent — or ‘comment accent’ — always falls somewhere within the comment of the sentence, typically on the last NP if there is an NP in the comment, as per Gundel’s rule shown in (23):

- (23) Assign comment accent to the final NP in the comment if there is one; otherwise, to the final element.

Notice that this rule correctly predicts that comment accent will fall on the preverbal NP subject of an all-comment intransitive sentence instead of on the verb.²⁷

²⁶See Gundel 1985 for more discussion. I use the term ‘accent’ instead of the term ‘stress’ for prosodic prominence at the sentential level, as has become standard in recent years (e.g. Selkirk 1984; Rochemont 1986; Bolinger 1986, 1989). For consistency I have replaced Gundel’s term ‘stress’ with ‘accent’ in the definitions given below in (23) and (26).

²⁷The only exception I am aware of to the rule that primary accent always falls on some element within the comment is in constituent questions, where it is possible for the prosodic peak to fall on the final element in the body of a question even when the initial question word clearly functions as the sole non-activated element in the sentence, as in the example in (i) from Rochemont 1986:

- (i) A: I finally gave into my desire to splurge and went out and bought something new today.
B: Oh, really? What did you BUY?

- (24) A: What's going on in here?
 B: A shipment of BOOKS has arrived.

When relevant, I will indicate the characteristic prominence and falling pitch contour associated with comment accent by large capital letters, as in the question-answer example in (25):

- (25) Q: What about the cheese, who bought it?
 A: MARY bought the cheese.

Sentence prosody is also sensitive to the cognitive status of the sentence topic. While it is often the case that topics are completely unaccented, especially in cases of topic continuation, speakers also have the option of placing a secondary accent on the topic in cases of topic shift, contrast, and emphasis. Adopting Gundel's rule shown in (26), I will refer to the secondary prominence and rising intonation pattern associated with unactivated and contrastive topics as 'topic accent':

- (26) Assign topic accent to unactivated and contrastive topics²⁸

When relevant, I will indicate topic accent by small capital letters, as in (27), where the cheese is (part of) the topic, but in answering the question, the speaker chooses to contrast two different types of cheese:

While I accept Rochemont's explanation that the inherently focused nature of question words allows speakers to forego prominently accenting them, I would analyze the accents that occur in the body of such questions as topic accents, and claim that a comment accent still falls on the *wh*-word, albeit only a weak one. Note that Bolinger (1986: 96) analyzes Culicover and Rochemont's (1983) version of this example as containing two accents: an accent of information on *what* and an accent of interest on *buy*. Culicover and Rochemont (1983: 139-140) analyze it as containing secondary accent on *what*, and provide some discussion of the pragmatic effects associated with accenting only *what*, as well as with accenting *what* and *buy* equally.

However, contrary to the predictions of both Culicover and Rochemont 1983 and Rochemont 1986, I find it more natural to accent the main verb when this does not coincide with the final lexical element. Thus, while Rochemont (p. 26) prefers the accent pattern in (B2) over that in (B1), I have the opposite judgment.

- (ii) A: John went to England to buy something for Mary.
 B1: What did John BUY for Mary?
 B2: What did John buy for MARY?

See Zacharski 1990 for more discussion of pragmatic constraints on accent assignment in English.

²⁸There may also be syntactic reasons for accenting a topic — e.g. if it comes at the end of a prefinal clause or major phrase, as shown by the discussion of Rochemont 1986. Thus, though it seems natural to leave an activated VP unaccented in a simple sentence as in (ii), it seems natural to accent it if the comment subject is extraposed as in (iii):

- (i) Who appeared at her doorstep?
 (ii) A man she had not seen in YEARS appeared at her doorstep.
 (iii) There appeared at her DOORSTEP, a man she had not seen in YEARS.

- (27) Q: What about the cheese, who bought it?
 A: MARY bought the BLUE, but SUSAN bought the BRIE.

Gundel cites Jackendoff (1972: 261-262) as the primary precedent for her distinction between comment accent and topic accent. Jackendoff distinguishes two sentence accents, which he terms A-accent and B-accent²⁹, and which he explicitly relates to question-answer pairs. Jackendoff's examples in (20) show that an item receiving a B-accent is repeated from the question, while the item receiving the A-accent answers the question. Notice that the questions which Jackendoff selects are explicitly 'aboutness' questions:

- (28) a. A: Well, what about FRED? What did HE eat?
 B: FRED ate the BEANS.
 B A
- b. A: Well, what about the BEANS? Who ate THEM?
 B: FRED ate the BEANS.
 A B

Indeed, in the following passage, Jackendoff explicitly relates the distinction between B-accent and A-accent to the distinction between topic and comment

This interpretation of pitch accents bears on the traditional notions of topic and comment. In many simple sentences, the stress and intonation contours divide the sentence exhaustively into two foci, the subject and the predicate, with a B pitch accent on the former, and an A accent on the latter.

Jackendoff also points out that sentence-initial adjuncts such as those in (29) typically receive B-accent, which is of course consistent with their analysis as topics:³⁰

- (29) a. BAGELS, I don't like to EAT.³¹
 B A
- b. At six O'CLOCK, FRED walked in
 B A

²⁹Jackendoff selected these terms in apparent analogy with the notions of A-accent and B-accent introduced by Bolinger. However, as Pierrehumbert (1980) points out, and will be seen below, the two sets of notions do not correspond.

³⁰Jackendoff also discusses cases of questions containing single B-accent, and analyzes them as double focus constructions.

³¹Note that the inverse accent pattern is also possible on this same string of words (cf. Gundel's 1974 notion of focus topicalization, and Prince's 1985 notion of focus preposing):

- Q: Which pastries don't you like to eat?
 A: Well, BAGELS I don't like to EAT.
 A B

Finally, Bolinger (e.g. 1958, 1986, 1988) has emphasized more than anyone else the complexity and multiplicity of constraints on intonation patterns. Using still another system of notation, Bolinger (1986: 436. n. 3) states that ‘AC profiles are quite regularly associated with themes, in whichever order.’ One of the functions of the AC profile identified by Bolinger (1986: 182) is ‘theme particularization’ as in (32):

- | | | | | |
|------|----|----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| (32) | a. | What happened? | | What happened to my brother? |
| | | Your bróther broke his lég | Your bróther broke his lég. | |
| | | AC | A | AC |
| | | | | A |
| | b. | Why do you use a hammer? | Why do you use a hammer? | |
| | | With a hámmer it’s éasy | It’s éasy with a hámmer. | |
| | | AC A | AC | A |

Further discussion of the phonetic interpretation of primary and secondary accent is beyond the scope of this thesis. I rely on my own intuitions of primary and secondary prominence, and assume that these intuitions will prove to be grounded in phonetic reality.³² I will reiterate here simply that the comment always receives an accent, and the topic receives an accent if there is some reason to draw attention to it, but the topic accent is always a secondary accent.

2.5.2 FOCUS-PRESUPPOSITION.

We saw in example (3) above that the topic of a sentence is not always expressed by the syntactic subject. Kuroda 1972 points out additionally that the topic of a sentence is not always expressed as a single, continuous syntactic constituent. The answer in (33), for example, is ‘about’ both John and Bill.

- (33) Q: What happened then with John and Bill?
 A: John persuaded Bill to be examined by the doctor.

Interactions of topic-comment structure with syntactic structure have been extensively explored in recent years by generative grammarians who have built on Chomsky’s (1971) distinction between ‘focus’ and ‘presupposition.’ Chomsky defines the ‘focus’ (i.e. comment) of an utterance as one of the constituents which contains the intonational center. The ‘presupposition’ (i.e. topic) is derived

³²To summarize how Gundel’s 1978 distinction between comment stress and topic stress maps onto other prosodic distinctions which have recently been proposed, I will simply note the corresponding terms: Bolinger 1986, 1989 (profile A versus profile AC); Halliday 1967, 1985 (Tone 1 versus Tone 4); Jackendoff 1972 (A-accent versus B-accent); Bing 1979 (A versus A-rise contour); Ladd 1980 (fall versus fall-rise accent); Pierrehumbert 1980 (H*L-L% versus H*L-H% tune); Gussenhoven 1983 (addition versus selection).

by replacing the focus with a variable. In order for one utterance to constitute a ‘natural response’ to another utterance, the presuppositions of the two utterances must match.³³

Jackendoff 1972 uses the question-answer pair in (34) to illustrate Chomsky’s point that focus and presupposition must be determined at surface structure. The underlined focused constituent in the surface-structure question in (34a) fails to form a constituent both in the assumed deep structure shown in (35a), and in the extraposed input to the ‘*tough*-movement’ transformation shown in (35b):

- (34) a. Q: Is twelve-tone music easy to play on a KRUMMHORN?
 b. A: No, twelve-tone music isn’t even easy to SING.
- (35) a. [[Δ play twelve-tone music on a krummhorn] is easy]
 b. [it is easy [Δ play twelve-tone music on a krummhorn]]

However, Jackendoff overlooks the fact that *tough*-movement is an optional transformation, and that a natural question-answer pair can be constructed with the same focus-presupposition structure as in the above pair, but in which *tough*-movement has NOT applied:

- (36) a. Q: Is it easy to play twelve-tone music on a KRUMMHORN?
 b. A: No, it isn’t even easy to SING twelve-tone music.

In (36a), the focused elements fail to form a constituent at surface structure as well as at deep structure.

As Gundel 1974 points out, the account of focus and presupposition developed in Chomsky 1971 and Jackendoff 1972 crucially relies on the unfounded assumption that the focus of a sentence always constitutes a syntactically continuous constituent (or set of constituents in the case of multiple foci). Consider, for example, the question-answer pair in (37a-b). (37b) contains the discontinuous comment shown in bold-face in (37c), and has the syntactic structure represented roughly in (37d):

- (37) a. What did John do with the PICTURE I gave him?
 b. He hung it on the WALL.
 c. He **hung it on the WALL**.
 d. [S he [+past] [VP hung it [PP on [NP the [N WALL]]]]]

³³I assume, with Gundel (e.g. 1974, 1985), that Chomsky’s presupposition-focus distinction and Gundel’s topic-comment distinction are intended as definitions of the same phenomena, though from somewhat different perspectives.

The traditional account (e.g. Chomsky 1971, Jackendoff 1972, Wilson and Sperber 1979, Sperber and Wilson 1986) would predict that any of the constituents dominating the accented word can be selected as focus, and thus that (37b) can have any of the presuppositions shown in (38):

- (38) a. N focus He hung it on the something.
 b. NP focus He hung it on something
 c. PP focus He hung it somewhere.
 d. VP focus He did something.
 e. S focus Something happened.

The traditional account would thus predict that (37b) can function as a natural response to any of the questions shown in (39):

- (39) a. He hung it on the WHAT?
 b. On what did John hang the PICTURE I gave him?
 c. Where did John hang the PICTURE I gave him?
 d. What did John do THEN?
 e. What happened THEN?

Notice that question (37a), which actually elicits (37b) as its answer, does not appear in the list in (39). Proponents of the traditional account might perhaps claim that (38d) defines the presupposition shared by the question and answer in (37) — i.e. that the entire VP constitutes the focus in (37b). Note, however, that question (37a) does not presuppose simply that ‘John did something.’ If it did, the responses in (40) would be felicitous, but they aren’t: the direct object NP cannot be excluded from the presupposition.

- (40) a. He jumped out the WINDOW
 b. He sent flowers to his MOTHER.
 c. He wrote a letter to the MAYOR.
 d. He CHUCKLED randomly.
 e. He burst into FLAME.

Note also that the statements in (41) are also natural responses to (37a), i.e. that naturalness is preserved when V and PP are varied. The V and the PP must thus be included in the focus and not in the presupposition:

- (41) a. He dropped it out the WINDOW.
 b. He threw it in the RIVER.

- c. He flushed it down the TOILET.
- d. He fed it to his DOG.
- e. He sent it to his MOTHER.

The conclusion seems inescapable that the traditional generative account cannot account for these data.

More recent generative accounts of focus-assignment can possibly avoid this criticism. Both Selkirk 1984 and Rochemont 1986 propose more elaborate rules of focus propagation, which allow focused phrases to contain unfocused elements when such elements constitute 'old information' (Selkirk) or are 'c-construable' (Rochemont). Thus, (42b) and (42c) are predicted to be natural responses to question (42a) even when the indirect object in (42b) or the direct object in (42c) is left unfocused.

- (42) a. What did Jane do next?
 b. She sent her SKETCHES to the publisher.
 c. She sent her book to MARY.

Both Selkirk and Rochemont allow phrasal nodes to inherit focus from complements of their heads, but only Rochemont allows heads to inherit focus from their arguments. For the sentence in (37b), Selkirk's rules³⁴ permit focus to be propagated to all the bold faced nodes shown in (43):

- (43) [IP he [I' [I +past] [VP [V hung] [NP it] [PP [P on] [NP the [N WALL]]]]]]]

Selkirk thus predicts that the entire VP will be assigned focus, though this focused VP will contain an 'old information' direct object. Though this solution correctly allows (37b) to be generated in response to (37a), it still does not adequately constrain the notion of 'natural response', since it predicts incorrectly that the responses in (40) are also natural responses to (37a).

Rochemont's rules, on the other hand, permit the head V in (37b) to inherit focus from the PP and *not* transmit focus to the VP, as shown in (44):³⁵

³⁴Selkirk's phrasal focus rule: A constituent may be a focus if (i) or (ii) (or both) is true:

- (i) The constituent that is its head is a focus.
- (ii) A constituent contained within it that is an argument of the head is a focus.

³⁵Rochemont's optional rules of focus assignment:

- (i) If α is [+focus] and α is X^0 , then X^n is [+focus]
- (ii) If α is [+focus] and α is an argument of X^0 contained in X^n , then X^0 is [+focus]
- (iii) If X^0 is [+focus] and α is an adjunct of X^0 , then α is [+focus]

(44) [IP he [I [I +*past*] [VP [V hung] [NP it] [PP [P on] [NP the [N WALL]]]]]]]

Since Rochemont permits the assignment of a genuinely discontinuous focus, he thus solves the discontinuous focus problem.

2.6. Word order principles

I will adopt Gundel's (1985, 1988) proposal that a pair of independent but sometimes conflicting principles universally regulates the order in which a syntactic topic with a particular cognitive status is expressed relative to its associated comment:

(45) **Given Before New Principle**
State what is given before what is new in relation to it.³⁶

First Things First Principle
Provide the most important information first.

The often-alluded to cross-linguistic tendency for the topic (theme, old information) to precede the comment (rheme, new information) follows from the Given Before New Principle since, by definition, the topic is 'given' in relation to the comment. Bolinger's (1954) illustration of this principle for Spanish is shown in (46), and Lambrecht's (1987) illustration of it for Italian is shown in (47):³⁷

- | | | | |
|------|----|---|--|
| (46) | a. | Quien canta?
Canta JUÁN. | 'Who's singing?'
'JUAN'S singing.' |
| | b. | Qué hace Juán?
Juán CANTA. | 'What is Juan doing?'
'Juan's SINGING.' |
| (47) | a. | What happened?
Mi si è rotta la MACCINA. | 'My CAR broke down.' |
| | b. | What happened to your car? | |

³⁶Notice that Gundel is using the term 'given' in the topic-comment (relational) rather than the cognitive status (referential) sense here. For precedents see, e.g., Mathesius, 1928; Bolinger 1954; Li and Thompson 1976.

³⁷It has been sometimes claimed, however, that the topic of a sentence regularly follows the comment in some languages, as in example (ib) from Nandi (Creider and Creider 1979):

- | | | |
|-----|----|--|
| (i) | a. | Where is Kibet going? |
| | b. | wē:nti: ká:psápɪt kipe:t
going Kapsabet Kibet
'Kibet is going to Kapsabet' |

I suspect, however, that this pattern is typical only for activated topics, i.e. it is consistent with the First Things First Principle.

La macchina si è ROTTA. 'My car broke DOWN.'

However, it follows from Gundel's First Things First Principle that the topic can felicitously follow the comment if the topic is less 'important' than the comment. If we make the further assumptions, (i) that an already activated topic is relatively less important than the associated comment and (ii) that an unactivated topic is equally or more important than the associated comment, it follows that a topic can only be expressed in sentence-final position if it is activated.³⁸ This 'activation constraint' on right-adjoined topics follows from the interaction of the two principles. That is, it is only when a topic is ALREADY under discussion that it is less important than the comment and can therefore follow it. Put in processing terms, comprehension is not impeded by delayed expression of the topic in such cases, since there is no need for the speaker to draw the addressee's attention towards the topic. The preceding argument is summarized in the table in (48):³⁹

(48)	GIVEN-NEW t, T < C	FIRST-FIRST T, C < t	ADDITIVE INTERACTION	PREDICTED OCCURRENCE
tC	+	-	o	yes
TC	+	o	+	yes
Ct	-	+	o	yes
CT	-	o	-	no

Gundel's word order principles are supported by the cognitive status of left-dislocated as opposed to right-dislocated topics, and non-inverted as opposed to inverted pseudocleft clauses. Thus, it is generally recognized (cf. Gundel 1985, Barnes 1985, Lambrecht 1986) that left-dislocation is typically used to introduce a topic which is not currently activated in the discourse context, as in (49a), or to re-introduce a topic whose activation-status has faded, as in (49b):

- (49) a. JM: During the debate, Dole said that, if elected, he would freeze all government spending. Haig said that he would take steps to cut waste in defense spending. Robertson and duPont said again that they would not support the INF treaty. Kemp said that tax breaks for the oil industry were a good idea. And Bush called upon all his GOP rivals to make public their income tax returns for the last 10 years. **As for the key Iran-contra issue on which the debate had been expected to pivot**, did George Bush effectively put the Iran question to rest with his performance on Friday night?

[McLaughlin Group, 1/9/88]

³⁸See also Givon's (1989: 222-225) argument in favor of replacing the traditional assumptions that 'topics precede comments,' 'theme precedes rheme,' 'old information precedes new information' and 'the subject more naturally precedes the verb' in favor of the principle: 'Attend first to the most urgent task'— 'A communicative task in discourse is more urgent if the speaker deems it to be either less predictable ('less accessible') to the hearer, or more important.'

³⁹In the chart, 't' denotes activated topic, 'T' denotes unactivated topic, C denotes comment; '+' means the particular principle is satisfied, '-' means it is violated, 'o' means it is trivially satisfied.

- b. JG: **That poll in the Boston Herald that you took so seriously**, I don't suspect it's taken very seriously by the James Bakers and Lee Atwaters of this world. I think Dukakis will carry Massachusetts by an easy 10 points.
[McLaughlin Group, 9/2/88]

A right-dislocated topic, on the other hand, is always activated, as in example (50):

- (50) PB: I'll tell you, but they have a point, **the Likud Party**, and they believe if they give it up, what you're going to have is Yasser Arafat, in effect, as governor of the West Bank. And so they have an argument in that sense. I think it's valid they're concerned.
[McLaughlin Group, 12/26/87]

In Hedberg (1988, 1989) I argued that a sentence-initial, pseudocleft clause always expresses the sentence topic.⁴⁰ Pseudoclefts are typically used to open a relevant new sub-topic, as in (51), or to return to a still-relevant topic after a digression or turn-switch, as in (52):

- (51) JM: Well, let's get to the question of the snub, why Dukakis did not tell Jackson before. We've discussed this before. Do you have any insights into that?
BB: Yes, I think it was just an oversight. I—those things happen.
JM: I'm talking about the Bentsen notification.
BB: Yes, exactly. Mike Dukakis doesn't play the political game naturally. And it was not at the top of his list. Now, **what's really interesting is the way he handled Jackson after that**. He was biding his time, and Jackson finally had to come to him on Tuesday...
[McLaughlin Group, 7/22/88]
- (52) JM: What must George Bush accomplish at the convention?
EC: ... Michael Dukakis received the opening kickoff, and he scored a touchdown at his convention. Now **what George Bush has to do, now that it's his turn with the ball, is put some points on the scoreboard**. And if I can deliver that football metaphor, he can speak to the common man. He's got to emerge from Reagan's shadow and draw the differences between himself and Dukakis in the sharpest possible terms. And he's got to, you know, criticize Dukakis. **THAT'S what he's got to do**.
[McLaughlin Group, 8/12/88]

⁴⁰In further support of this claim, note that a pseudocleft clause in Japanese (see Ogihara 1987) is marked with the topic-marker *wa*, as in (i), and that a pseudocleft clause in French (see Barnes 1988) is left-dislocated, as in (ii):

- (i) Kitigai-na no wa John-da
crazy NOM TOP -is
'the one who is crazy is John.'
- (ii) ce qui marche très bien en hiver, c'est le couscous
that which marches very well in winter, it's the couscous
'What works very well in winter is couscous.'

On the other hand, a sentence-final, ‘inverted’ pseudocleft clause is typically used to express the comment rather than the topic of the sentence, as in example (53) below:

- (53) [talking about Dukakis and anti-abortion hecklers]
 MK: Yeah, at some point, if they keep that heckling stuff up, there will a be a sympathy reaction, as there was in the case of Geraldine Ferraro.
 FB: No, no— not on that issue.
 MK: Oh, no, yes, there was. uh-uh—wait a minute. Now look—look, if they start disrupting speeches all the time, it will cease to be the story, and the crowds will—
 JG: **That’s what happened with Jimmy CARTer in ‘76.** In ‘76 it got so bad that there was a backlash.
 [McLaughlin Group, 9/9/88]

An inverted pseudo-cleft clause may also be used to express a sentence topic, but only if the topic is already activated.⁴¹ Thus, an inverted pseudocleft may be used to re-express an already activated topic of a current discourse segment, as in the final sentence of (52) above and in example (54) below.⁴²

- (54) Just a minute. Let me talk to you. It’s a protectionist bill. There are terrible things in this bill. **The stuff that the administration has embraced is what’s miserable.** And if—I think what they’re going to do is there’s going to be a second bill passed without the plant closing provision...
 [RN, McLaughlin Group 4/29/88]

2.7 Discourse topic

In discussing the relation of an utterance to its surrounding context, some authors (e.g. Reinhart 1982, Barnes 1985) develop a second notion of ‘discourse topic.’ Rather than making a categorical distinction between ‘sentence topic’ and ‘discourse topic,’ however, I view them as intrinsically related: by virtue of encoding what the sentence is about, the topic also encodes what the discourse is about at the point the sentence is uttered. Because answering a question sometimes involves asking and answering one or more subordinate questions, topical questions may be embedded inside each other. It is possible, then, for a discourse as a whole to end up structured into multiple levels of hierachically organized topics and subtopics. It seems useful to identify the notion

⁴¹More specifically, 87 out of 114 inverted pseudo-clefts in my newspaper column corpus (76%), and 103 out of 153 of inverted pseudo-clefts in my television discussion corpus (67%), functioned as topic+comment rather than as comment + (activated) topic constructions.

⁴²Note that the cleft clause of a topic+comment inverted pseudocleft bears primary, comment accent, while the cleft clause of a comment+topic inverted pseudocleft either bears secondary, topic accent, or is left unaccented.

of ‘discourse topic’ with the superordinate questions, or, in other words, to simply view the ‘sentence topic’ as the lowest level of ‘discourse topic.’⁴³

The main issue raised in the dialogue in (55), for example, is the impact of the week’s events on the presidential race. But in order to address this topic, speaker JG has to address two sub-issues, ‘the INF thing’ and ‘the Iran-Contra thing,’ each of which he introduces as a left-adjoined syntactic topic:

- (55) JM: With Ronald Reagan at his side, Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole this week announced his support for the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty.
[videotape]
Even more heat was turned up on Bush later this week when a memo was released by the Iran-contra investigators—remember them?—which showed that Bush supported the arms for hostages initiative earlier.
[videotape] What impact will this week’s events have on the two-man race—I think it’s fair to say that, Jack—between Bush and Dole?
- JG: Well, the events of this week in particular, probably not very much. **The INF thing, the fact that Dole gets to stand with the President**, it’s a big deal here, and it’s not going to make a big deal—
- JM: A non-starter.
- JG: It’s not going to be a big thing in Iowa.
- JM: A non-starter.
- JG: I wouldn’t say a non-starter, but not a big deal.
- JM: Okay.
- JG: **The other thing, the Iran-Contra thing**, I think we have to wait and see. The Vice President is having a fundamental problem with the Iran-Contra issue. He is trying to have it both ways. He’s saying, on the one hand, he is on the President’s side; he’s involved with everything. He’s saying, on the other hand, ‘I was off that day.’ You know, that’s what he’s saying essentially about the Iran-Contra thing. He’s going to have to reconcile that, and reconcile it in a way that is convincing, because otherwise the other candidates, like Al Haig, will pick him to pieces on it. [McLaughlin Group, 12/18/87]

⁴³For compatible approaches to sentence topic and discourse topic, see Keenan and Schieffelin 1976, Carlson 1983, Van Oosten 1987. For approaches to discourse topic that don’t incorporate a clearly compatible approach to sentence topic, see van Dijk 1977, Givon 1983.