

# Approaching Clefts: Syntax, Semantics, Pragmatics

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1

## Outline

- Introduction:
  - My work on clefts
  - Syntactic terminology
- Syntax:
  - Extraposition, subject, predicate complement
- Semantics:
  - Equation and predication
- Pragmatics
  - Information structure
- Conclusion

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2

## Introduction: My work on clefts

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3

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4

## Introduction: Syntactic terminology

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5

## Clefts and their Syntactic Parts

- (1) The economy is what people will be voting on.
- (2) a. It-cleft:  
**It's the economy that people will be voting on.**  
cleft pronoun + copula + clefted constituent + cleft clause.
- b. Wh-cleft:  
**What people will be voting on is the economy.**  
cleft clause + copula + clefted constituent
- c. Reverse wh-cleft:  
**The economy is what people will be voting on.**  
Clefted constituent + copula + cleft clause

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6

## Syntax: Extraposition, subject, predicate complement

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7

## Surface positions (1)

- **It-cleft:**
  - Cleft pronoun as subject: Spec-IP
  - Clefted constituent as complement of the copula.
  - Cleft clause as discontinuous modifier of cleft pronoun: extraposed and adjoined to clefted constituent.
- **Wh-cleft (Type B):**
  - Cleft clause as subject, Spec-IP
  - Clefted constituent as complement of the copula.
- **Reverse wh-cleft:**
  - Clefted constituent as subject: Spec-IP
  - Cleft clause as complement of the copula.

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8

## Familiar and Uniquely Identifiable Cleft Pronoun + Cleft Clause

- (3) N: That's the reason I don't want to go to Miami.  
B Yeah. **Wasn't that somewhere in Southern Florida where they thought those people got AIDS from bug bites**--getting bit a hundred times a night or something, because the place was so roach infested? (breakfast conversation, 2/89)
- (4) [Beginning of a newspaper article] **It was just about 50 years ago that Henry Ford gave us the weekend.** On September 25, 1926, in a somewhat shocking move for that time, he decided to establish a 40-hour work week, giving his employees two days off instead of one. (*Philadelphia Bulletin*, cited in Prince 1978)

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9

## Extraposition Analysis

- Jespersen 1927, Akmajian 1970, Hedberg 1990, 2000; Percus 1997; Han & Hedberg 2008, etc.
- Cleft clause forms a discontinuous definite description with cleft pronoun, with DP headed by *it* instead of *the* when CP is extraposed
  - It was Obama who won.
  - The one who won was Obama.
- Accounts for existence presupposition and exhaustiveness implicature by deriving them from the definite description.

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10

## Clefted constituent and cleft clause as a constituent (Delahunty 1981)

- (5) a. I said it should have been [Bill who negotiated the new contract], and it should have been.  
b. It must have been [Fred that kissed Mary] but [Bill that left with her].

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11

## Connectivity

- Allows connectivity effects in it-clefts to be reduced to connectivity effects in wh-clefts with definite description subject, or rather th-clefts (Collins 1991).
  - Han & Hedberg 2008: Reflexives as clefted constituents are focus anaphors (Reinhart & Reuland 1993)

(6) a. It was himself who John nominated.  
b. The one who John nominated was himself.

(7) Percus 1997:  
a. \*It was anything I might recognize that John didn't see.  
b. \*The thing John didn't see was anything I might recognize.  
c. What John didn't see was anything I might recognize.

(8) den Dikken, Meinunger & Wilder (2000) (Type A wh-cleft):  
What John didn't see was (he didn't see) anything I might recognize.

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12

## Predicational It-Clefts

- Taking copula as main verb connecting discontinuous subject and predicate allows for predicational as well as equative readings:
  - (9) a. It was an odd televised ceremony that I watched from my living room, and a touching one . . . [Ellen Goodman, *Keeping in Touch*, p. 194]
  - b. The televised ceremony that I watched from living room was an odd one.
- An approach such as that of Heggie 1988 that takes the it-cleft clause rigidly as predicate can't accommodate such predicational it-clefts that take the clefted constituent as predicate.

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13

## Cleft pronouns in plural equative vs. predicational clefts

- (10) a. **It's** the contras who have cried 'uncle'. (McLaughlin Group, 3/25/88)
  - b. **This** is Ford and Kissinger we're dealing with, not two boy scouts. (Ball 1978)
  - c. To the worried motel owner, I said, 'I know the girl. From the sound of it, **that** was her mother and her aunt who came after her'. (Nancy Pickard, *Bum Steer*, p. 117).
- (11) a. **They're** just fanatics who are holding him. (McLaughlin Group, 3/27/87)
  - b. **These** are not just notes that you're playing--they're phrases. (Jack Nicholson character, *The Witches of Eastwick*).
  - c. Seeing is believing! **Those** are real eyeglasses that Micky is wearing. (Ball 1978).

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14

## Surface Positions (2)

- It-cleft:
  - Cleft pronoun as subject: Spec-IP
  - Clefted constituent as complement of the copula.
  - Cleft clause as discontinuous modifier of cleft pronoun: extraposed and adjoined to clefted constituent.
- Wh-cleft (Type B):
  - Cleft clause as subject, Spec-IP
  - Clefted constituent as complement of the copula.
- Reverse wh-cleft:
  - Clefted constituent as subject: Spec-IP
  - Cleft clause as complement of the copula.

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15

## Wh-clefts (Type B)

- Hedberg 1993
  - Copula is in I<sup>0</sup>, not in C<sup>0</sup> as in Heggie 1988
  - Cleft clause in Spec-IP, not Spec-CP as in Heggie 1988; or as derived from 'inversion around be' rule as in Williams 1983.
  - Clefted constituent is complement of the copula, not in Spec-IP as in Heggie 1988.
- Subject-auxiliary inversion:
  - (12) a. Is what you're writing on clefts or pseudoclefts?
  - b. Isn't where he's going San Francisco?
- Raising:
  - (13) a. What he's after seems to be her money.
  - b. What he's asking appears to be whether there will be any beer. [Gundel 1977]
  - c. What John is seems to be proud of himself. [Culicover 1977]
  - d. What John wants seems to be never to be left alone. [Halvorsen 1978]

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16

- Tag Questions:
  - (14) The one they really want to hire is Tom, isn't it/'he?
- Multiple auxiliary verbs:
  - (15) a. But what really may be at issue when this comes to term will be deployment of SDI. [McLaughlin Group, 11/27/87]
  - b. What Soviets will gain from reading *Dr. Zhivago* will be a somewhat better understanding of their recent history [Minneapolis Tribune, 1/30/87]
- Gapping:
  - (16) Q: So, what DOES Jane want, and what DOES Bill want?  
A: What Jane wants is never to go out, and what Bill wants, never to stay home.
- Prince 1988: Remnants of gapping must instantiate variables in "an open proposition taken to be shared knowledge."

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17

## Wh-clefts (Type A)

- den Dikken, Meinunger and Wilder 2000; den Dikken 2005:
  - Wh-clefts of the type that can be expressed with an IP as clefted constituent should be given a deletion analysis.
    - (17) What nobody bought was (nobody bought ) any wine.
      - The wh-clause sits in a pre-matrix IP topic position.
      - The wh-clause is an indirect question rather than a free relative.
- This analysis seems right since such wh-clefts can even accept a which-clause in my dialect:
  - (18) Which book he bought was he bought *War & Peace*.
  - (19) As for which book he bought, he bought *War & Peace*.
    - "As for" clause is traditionally taken to fill a pre-IP topic position (Gundel 1974).

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18

## Surface Positions (3)

- **It-cleft:**
  - Cleft pronoun as subject: Spec-IP
  - Clefted constituent as complement of the copula.
  - Cleft clause as discontinuous modifier of cleft pronoun: extraposed and adjoined to clefted constituent.
- **Wh-cleft (Type B):**
  - Cleft clause as subject, Spec-IP
  - Clefted constituent as complement of the copula.
- **Reverse wh-cleft:**
  - **Clefted constituent as subject: Spec-IP**
  - **Cleft clause as complement of the copula.**

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19

## Semantics: Equation and Predication

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20

## Specificational vs. Predicational Wh-clefts

(Higgins 1973, den Dikken et al. 2000, etc.)

- (20) **Specificational:**
- What John<sub>i</sub> is important to himself<sub>i</sub>.
  - Important to himself<sub>i</sub> is what John<sub>i</sub> is.
- (21) **Predicational:**
- What John<sub>i</sub> is important to him<sub>i</sub>.
  - \*Important to him<sub>i</sub> is what John<sub>i</sub> is.

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21

## How many copulas?

- **One copula approach**
  - Inverse analysis: either subject or predicate of small clause complement of copula raises to precopular position.
    - Williams 1983, Partee 1985, Heggie 1988, Moro 1997, Mikkelsen 2005, den Dikken 2006
- **Two copula approach:**
  - Equative and predicational
    - Heycock & Kroch 1999; Hedberg 1990, 1993, 2000; Han & Hedberg 2008

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22

## Reverse wh-clefts can have either interpretation

- (22) a. Baby food is what I like to eat.  
b. Baby food is what babies eat.
- "Superscriptional" phrase can be interpreted as attributive definite description (<<e,t>,t>), regularly associated with referential sense (e) through type-shifting. [Higgins 1973, Donnellan 1966, Partee 1987]
- (23) a. Cicero is Tully.  
b. Tully is Cicero.  
c. What John is important to himself.  
d. Important to himself is what John is.
- (24) a. John is the teacher.  
b. John is the TEACHER.  
c. JOHN is the teacher.

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23

## Kuno & Wongkhamthong 1981

- At least one language appears to have two morphologically distinct forms of such copulas: Thai
    - *Pen* is used for characterizational sentences, while *khí:* is used for identificational sentences.
    - K&W explicitly relate *pen* to Akmajian/Higgins predicational sentences, and *khí:* to their specificational/identificational sentences.
- (25) a. yí:pùn **pen/khí:** prá:hè:d ù:dsá:hàkám.  
Japan is country industry  
'Japan is an industrial country.'  
b. khon thí: chán rág **\*pen/khí:** cɔ:n  
person that I love is John  
'The person that I love is John.'

'[25b] is a sentence that identifies the person that the speaker likes best with John. It cannot be interpreted as a sentence which presents as one of the characteristics of the person that the speaker likes best the fact that he is John. Hence, the sentence is exclusively identificational...'

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24



## Focus as Kontrast

- Vallduvi & Viikuna 1998
  - “The second category denoted by the term focus is often found in research of a more formal semantic nature. From this perspective, focus is generally defined as an operator-like element.”
  - “If an expression **a** is kontrastive, a **membership set M = {...,a,...}** is generated and becomes available to semantic computation as some sort of quantificational domain. We are roughly adopting the basic semantic import of “focus” in alternative semantics (Rooth 1985, 1992): a set of alternatives for the focused constituent is generated as an additional denotation.”

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31

- “Kontrastiveness as defined here is orthogonal to informational rhematicity and thematicity”:
  - A kontrast may be coextensive with a substring of the rheme:  
(31) A: Why are you so excited?  
B: [<sub>R</sub> There's only **a month** till CHRISTMAS now].
  - A kontrast may be thematic:  
(32) **The first 100 meters** she ran [<sub>R</sub> in a record TIME].

- **Hedberg: The clefted constituent in clefts of all types constitutes a Kontrast.**

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32

## Presupposition

- Delin 1992
  - “It is generally accepted that it-clefts convey logical presuppositions, and that these can be computed on the basis of the syntactic structure of the cleft by substituting the relativizer with an existentially quantified phrase....The truth of the resulting proposition is a condition for the carrier sentence to have a truth value.”
  - “Presupposition in general marks information as being *non-negotiable* in the discourse at the time at which it appears.”
- **Hedberg: Kontrast/Presupposition is a referential givenness notion.**

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33

## Claims

- All clefts divide a proposition up into a kontrast and a presupposition.
- It-clefts and reverse wh-clefts can have a focus-topic or topic-focus organization.
  - The clefted constituent can express either the topic or the focus.
- Wh-clefts can only have a topic-focus organization.
  - The clefted constituent always expresses the focus.

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34

## Evidence

- Placement of nuclear stress.
- *Also* and *even* clefts.
- Vice-versa clefts.
- Anti-reconstruction effects

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35

## Placement of Nuclear Stress

- (33) Mr. Barone: ... So I think that would be okay. I don't think a country should go expelling its own citizens...
- Mr. Blankley: It is repugnant. However, it may be the wave of the future—not just in Israel, but perhaps in Europe, as well. As long as the West fears Islamist terrorism, there will be advocates for removing every possible suspect, the innocent along with the guilty. Whether it will ever become government policy, I don't know, but it will be argued more and more by people who are more and more fearful.
- Ms. Clift: It's what we did to the JAPANESE.  
[McLaughlin Group, 5/24/02]

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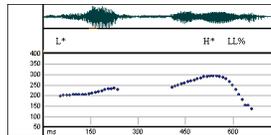
36

## Topic-Focus Reverse Wh-cleft

(34) Mr. Lowry: You can't rule it out. And a two is still a big threat, and we have to take the precautions.

Mr. McLaughlin: **That's what I'm SAYING.** [11/9/01]  
L\* H\*LL%

(35)



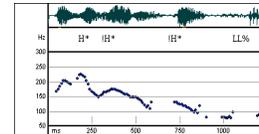
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37

## Focus-Topic Reverse Wh-cleft

(36) Mr. McLaughlin: **This is what he's talking about.** He's  
H\* !H\* !H\*LL%  
talking about bringing homeland security  
abroad. [5/24/02]

(37)



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38

## Also- and even-clefts

– Horn 1969:

- (38) a. It's only Muriel who voted for Hubert.  
b. \*It's also Muriel who voted for Hubert.  
c. \*It's even Muriel who voted for Hubert.

– “Clefting, like *only*, specifies uniqueness, while *even* and *also* presuppose non-uniqueness and thus cannot be clefted.”

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39

## Also clefts

– É. Kiss 1998:

- (39) A: Bill danced with Mary.  
B: No, it was Sam that danced with Mary.  
C: **It was also John that danced with her.**

• “A cleft *also*-phrase appears to be acceptable precisely in a context where it can be understood to identify a member of a relevant set in addition to one or more members identified previously as such for which the predicate holds, with the rest of the set still excluded.

– Note that this is a **focus-topic cleft**.

- (40) As far as who danced with her is concerned, that was also John.

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40

## Also clefts

(41) It was the President, in a rare departure from the diplomacy of caution, who initiated the successful Panama invasion. **It was also Bush who came up with the ideas of having an early, informal Malta summit with Gorbachev and a second round of troop cuts in Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall.** But it was Baker who subtly turned the Malta summit from the informal, ‘putting our fee up’ chat initially envisaged by the President into a platform for the United States to demonstrate through a 16-point initiative that it was prepared to help Gorbachev. [M. Dowd and T.L. Friedman, ‘The Fabulous Bush and Baker Boys’, The New York Times Magazine, 5/6/90, p. 64].

– My claim: This is a **topic-focus cleft**.

- (42) Speaking of Bush, it was also Bush who came up with the ideas of having an early, informal Malta summit with Gorbachev...

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41

## Also clefts

(43) Why do you think John is the murderer?

- a. It-cleft  
It was John who had the motive. It was John who had the opportunity. **It was also John who found the BODY.**
- b. Reverse wh-cleft  
John was the one who had the motive. John was the one who had the opportunity. **John was also the one who found the BODY.**
- c. Wh-cleft  
The one who had the motive was John. The one who had the opportunity was John. **??The one who found the BODY was also John.**

- **JOHN also left.**  
• **John also LEFT.**

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42

## Even clefts

(44) Why do you think John is the murderer?

- a. It-cleft:  
It was John who had the motive. It was John who had the opportunity. **It was even John who found the BODY.**
- b. Reverse wh-cleft:  
John was the one who had the motive. John was the one who had the opportunity. **John was even the one who found the BODY.**
- c. Wh-cleft:  
The one who had the motive was John. The one who had the opportunity was John. **\*The one who found the BODY was even John.**

- **JOHN even left.**
- **John even LEFT.**

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43

## Even clefts

(45) Wexford and Mr. Sung looked through the wooden grille at the great deep rectangular bural shaft and Mr. Sung quoted almost verbatim a considerable chunk from *Fodor's Guide to the People's Republic of China*. He had a retentive memory and seemed to believe that Wexford, because he couldn't decipher ideographs, was unable to read his own language. **It was even Wexford's Fodor's he was quoting from**, artlessly borrowed the night before. Wexford didn't listen. [Ruth Rendall, *Speaker of Mandarin*, p. 4]

- Topic = Wexford.

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44

## Also- and even-clefts

- Topical clefted constituent still expresses a Kontrast:

- (46) a. It was only John who had the motive. It was only John who had the opportunity. **It was also only John who found the body.**
- b. It was only John who had the motive. It was only John who had the opportunity. **It was even only John who found the body.**

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45

## Vice-versa clefts

- Ball & Prince 1978

(47) It's not John that shot Mary. It's Mary that shot John.

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46

## Vice-versa clefts

– It-cleft

(48) Anna: So, what's the case you're working on?  
Robert: Nothing I need bother you with now. It's *you* who called ME, remember? [General Hospital, ABC, 6/21/89]

- Robert assumes that Anna is taking it for granted that he called her.
- Not presupposed:  $\exists x[x \text{ called Robert}]$
- Presupposed:  $\exists x\exists y[x \text{ called } y]$

– Reverse wh-cleft

(49) Elizabeth II: Don't get ahead of yourself, Prime Minister.  
Remember, *I'm* the one who is supposed to be advising YOU.  
[Last line of The Queen]

- The Queen assumes that Tony Blair is taking it for granted that he has the right to be advising her.
- Not presupposed:  $\exists x[x \text{ is supposed to be advising Tony Blair}]$
- Presupposed:  $\exists x\exists y[x \text{ is supposed to be advising } y]$

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47

## Vice-versa clefts

– Ball & Prince 1978:

(50) #The one who shot Mary wasn't John. The one who shot John was Mary.

– Wh-cleft

(51) a. Anna: So, what's the case you're working on?  
Robert: Nothing I need bother you with now.  
**#The one who called me is you, not vice versa, remember?**

b. Elizabeth II: Don't get ahead of yourself, Prime Minister. Remember, **#the one who is supposed to be advising you is me, not vice versa.**

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48

## Vice-versa Clefts

- Suggestion:
  - The clefted constituent expresses a kontrastive topic and the nuclear stressed element in the cleft clause expresses a kontrastive focus.
  - These are topic-marking clefts.

## Anti-Reconstruction Effects

- Heycock & Kroch 2002
  - Condition C effect:
    - (52) a. He<sub>i,j</sub> really missed John<sub>i</sub>'s dog.
    - b. He<sub>i,j</sub> had always claimed that John<sub>i</sub> was innocent.
  - Wh-cleft shows reconstruction:
    - (53) a. What he<sub>i,j</sub> really missed was John<sub>i</sub>'s dog.
    - b. What he<sub>i,j</sub> had always claimed was that John<sub>i</sub> was innocent.
  - Reverse wh-cleft shows anti-reconstruction:
    - (54) a. John<sub>i</sub>'s dog was what he<sub>i,j</sub> really missed.
    - b. That John<sub>i</sub> was innocent was what he<sub>i,j</sub> had always claimed.

## Anti-Reconstruction Effects

- Topicalization shows anti-reconstruction effect, but effect disappears under focus-preposing reading.
- (55) a. John<sub>i</sub>'s DOG, he<sub>i,j</sub> really MISSED.
- b. John<sub>i</sub>'s DOG, he<sub>i,j</sub> really missed.
- c. That John<sub>i</sub> was INNOCENT, he<sub>i,j</sub> had always CLAIMED.
- Heycock and Kroch identify anti-reconstruction r-expressions as topics.
  - Hence, these are topic-marking reverse wh-clefts.
- They claim that topic-marking reverse wh-clefts are more common than focus-marking reverse wh-clefts.

- Two small corpus studies (McLaughlin Group) show that topic-marking reverse wh-clefts are indeed more common:

(56)	1988	2007
topic-focus:	99	44
focus-topic:	50	11

- Hedberg & Fadden 2007
  - It-cleft also shows anti-reconstruction effect:
    - (57) a. It was John<sub>i</sub>'s dog that he<sub>i,j</sub> really missed.
    - b. It was (the fact) that John<sub>i</sub> was innocent that he<sub>i,j</sub> had always claimed.
  - These are topic-marking clefts.

## Conclusion

- Syntax:
  - Type B wh-clefts and Reverse wh-clefts have the structure that they appear to have on surface:
    - First constituent is in Spec-IP, copula is main verb, second constituent is complement of copula.
  - It-cleft clause is extraposed from a position modifying cleft pronoun.
- Semantics:
  - All three kinds of clefts can have either equative or predicational interpretation.
    - There are two copulas: equative, predicational
- Pragmatics:
  - Reverse wh-clefts and it-clefts can have either topic-focus or focus-topic organization.
  - Wh-clefts can only have topic-focus organization.

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55

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ZAS: Workshop on Clefts

56

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57

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ZAS: Workshop on Clefts

58