The interaction of Focus and Predication in Specificational Copular Clauses and Clefts
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The issue. A number of cross-linguistic observations suggest that there is a close relation between focus and predication. First, some languages exhibit a lexical overlap of focus markers and copular verbs (see e.g. Zoque reported in Faarlund 2007). Second, copulas tend to develop into focus markers, see Hartmann & Veenstra (2013, 7) citing Heine & Reh (1984), Hopper & Traugott (1993), Givon (1990). Third, many languages use copular structures in order to express focus, a fact which is most visible in clefts, see (1). Fourth, specificational copular constructions (=SCCs) have been reported to exhibit a fixed focus structure (Heggie 1988, Heycock 1994, Williams 1997), see (2) (taken from Heycock & Kroch 2002, 148f, focus indicated by small caps): the post-copular DP is necessary focused and focus cannot be shifted to the pre-copular DP. This talk addresses the relationship of focus and predication from the perspective of clefts and SCCs and proposes that the syntactic structure of predication is mapped onto an information-structural (=InfS) division. In clefts and SCCs more generally, this mapping is a focus-background mapping and leads to the specific interpretation of clefts: contrast, exhaustivity, existential presupposition on the cleft clause (see Halvorsen 1978, Percus 1997, É. Kiss 1998, Büring & Križ 2013). This study supports both a syntactic configuration of predication (either PrP as in Bowers 1993 and adopted here, or a headless small clause as in Moro 1997, 2000), as well as its asymmetry in the sense that one element is a function (the predicate) that is applied to the second element (the subject).

(1) It was Pound who had been thinking of it. (BNC, A1B, 377)

(2) A: Who was the culprit? (John or Bill?)  A: What was John? (the culprit or victim?)  
B': The culprit was JOHN.  B":*The CULPRIT was John.

Syntax of Clefts. Following Huber (2006), den Dikken (2013), Patten (2010), I take clefts to be a sub-class of SCCs. SCCs are inversion structures (see Blom & Daalder 1977, Williams 1983, Heggie 1988, Moro 1997, Mikkelsen 2004, den Dikken 2006 among others), i.e. the underlying complement of PrP, the culprit in (2), ends up as the subject of the clause: [the culprit], was [PrP John Pr t]. This inversion analysis can be applied to clefts, as in (3):

(3) It was [PrP Pound Pr t, t]C P who had been thinking of it.

It inverts to Spec,TP (see den Dikken 2013), while the cleft clause extraposes and the pivot remains in-situ. The cleft clause does not modify the pivot (see also Davide 2000, contra e.g. den Dikken 2013, Reeves 2011, 2012 among others). Pivot and cleft clause cannot form a constituent, as the cleft clause does not correspond to a restrictive (=RRC) or non-restrictive (=NRC) relative clause, neither syntactically nor semantically: RRC are not necessarily extraposed (in OV languages such as German), cleft clauses are; quantified pivots are not restricted by the cleft clause, while they are by RRCs, see (4); RRCs cannot modify proper names, but proper names occur in clefts; RRCs can stack, cleft clauses cannot.

(4) a. All students who attended will receive a bonus point.  
b. It was all the passengers who had committed the murder.  
(Davide 2000, 1114)

Instead, it and the cleft clause form a constituent underlyingly, a light-headed relative clause (LHRC), a type of RC described in Citko (2004). LHRC show restrictions on the range of wh-operators, as they do in clefts, see (5). LHRC have less strict matching requirements as free relatives, see (6).

(5) a. They want to go to the place [where they went last year ]  
b. It’s upstairs *where/that she keeps her records. (Davide 2000, 1116)

(6) a. *We should interview with whom he goes out [*NP-PP] (van van Riemsdijk 2006, 343)  
b. It’s John to whom I spoke [NP-PP]

Inversion in (3) and more generally in SCCs is triggered by a focus-background marking in the PrP. This inversion is implemented in a specific model to be described in detail in which an information-structural module and the syntactic module interact during the derivation as sketched in (7). The crucial step is the
mapping of focus-background onto subject-predicate in PrP (Step 2). This mapping comes with a feature bundle that is assigned to the syntactic constituents. These bundles contain features that are readable to syntax, LF or PF. In this mapping, the InfS feature BACKGROUND is bundled with a syntactic edge feature EF (at least in Germanic languages) that drives movement of this constituent to a higher projection (via the edge of the phase in a phase-based approach).

(7) a. Step 1 (syntax): Merger of pivot and cleft clause as predication structure
\[ [\text{vP} \ [\text{DP} \ \text{Pound} \ ] \ [\text{Pr} \ [\text{DP} \ \text{it} \ [\text{CP} \ \text{who \ had \ been \ thinking \ of \ it} \ ]]]] \]

b. Step 2 (InfS): Assignment of focus background mapping
\[ [\text{vP} \ [\text{DP} \ \text{Pound} \ ] \ [\text{Pr} \ [\text{DP} \ \text{it} \ [\text{CP} \ \text{who \ had \ been \ thinking \ of \ it} \ ]]]_{\text{BACKGROUND} + \text{EF}} ] \]

c. Step 3 (syntax): Inversion and extraposition of the cleft clause
\[ [\text{vP} \ [\text{it} \ [\text{CP} \ \text{who \ had \ been \ thinking \ of \ it}]_{\text{BACKGROUND}} ]] \]

Focus, Syntactic Predication and Symmetry The mapping of focus-background onto the syntactic predication structure models the main similarity between the two domains: predication can be understood as functional application along the lines of Frege (1891) and functional application has been developed for the focus-background division (see Krifka 1992, 2006). The research presented here adopts Bowers (1993), but it is also compatible with a headless small clause as presented in Moro (1997, 2000). In Moro’s analysis, the small clause consists of two DPs and movement is necessary for symmetry breaking. In contrast to Moro, in the approach presented here, inversion is not necessary for symmetry breaking, but it is the result of the InfS mapping of the focus-background division. The concept of symmetry breaking is relevant on a different level: in SCCs two non-properties (a definite DP and a proper name in (2)) have to be interpreted in a syntactic configuration of predication. The focus-background mapping allows for an interpretation of functional application and thus, ‘breaks’ the symmetry between the two concepts. Additionally, the mapping analysis allows for an explanation of the facts introduced above. The peculiar focus properties of SCCs are a result of linking inversion and focus marking. With the tight relationship of focus-background mapping on PrP, it is possible to reinterpret the copula as focus marker. Finally, the overlap of copula and focus marker can be understood as a marker for functional application in the non-verbal domain.