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► **To cite this version:**

Enrique L Palancar. Subjects and focus in clefts: The case of Tilapa Otomi. Information Structure in Lesser-described Languages: Studies in prosody and syntax, 2018. hal-02008976

HAL Id: hal-02008976

<https://hal.science/hal-02008976>

Submitted on 6 Feb 2019

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Subjects and focus in clefts: The case of Tilapa Otomi

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In Evangelia Adamou, Katharina Haude & Martine Vanhove (eds.). 2018. *Information Structure in Lesser-described Languages: Studies in prosody and syntax*, pp. 245-264. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Abstract

This paper is an exploration of the syntax-pragmatics interface in the pseudo-clefts of Tilapa Otomi, an Oto-Manguean language of Mexico. The goal of this paper is to show that the focus phrase in the clefts of Tilapa Otomi is the subject of the cleft construction, which is entirely based on the copular construction. This claim has a theoretical interest because the alignment of focus and subject has been tainted as problematic in certain approaches to clefts that want the subject to be the topic. The subject in clefts in Tilapa Otomi conveys contrastive focus, but clefts in Tilapa Otomi may also be used asthetic constructions to express broad focus, in which case it is the whole clause that is in focus.

Keywords: cleft, focus, subject, Otomi, Oto-Manguean

1. A brief introduction to clefts

In this paper, I study the syntactic status of the focus phrase in the clefts of Tilapa Otomi, a critically endangered Oto-Manguean language of Mexico. I claim that the focus phrase in a cleft in this language is the subject of the clause. This has consequences for our understanding of the mapping between syntactic function and pragmatics, because the received view is that subjects should be topical. In order to introduce the discussion, I start here with a brief introduction to clefts.

The simple clause in English like the one in (1) from Lambrecht (1994: 230) is about the syntactic subject phrase *my car*, which functions as the clausal topic. In the utterance, the predicate *broke down* is interpreted against a general background assumption that something happened to the car. The predicate specifies what it was that happened to it. In this way, the predicate serves as the value for the variable in the background (i.e., breaking down is what happened to the car). In other words, it is the focus of the clause.¹ Focus is further indicated in English by clausal stress. Depending on the context, in (1) the speaker may be simply asserting what happened to the car (informative focus), or s/he may be asserting that it broke down as opposed to getting stolen (contrastive focus).

(1) my car [broke DOWN]_{FOC}

¹ I follow Lambrecht's (1986, 1994) take on focus as a relational category. In Lambrecht (1986: 159), he defines focus as "a device used to indicate the scope of the assertion in a sentence, i.e. as a formal mechanism whereby speakers contrast the asserted portion of a sentence with the pragmatic presupposition required by the sentence, in particular with the topic, which is part of that presupposition." In (1994: 207, emphasis in source), focus is seen as "that portion of a proposition which cannot be taken for granted at the time of the speech. It is the UNPREDICTABLE or pragmatically NON-RECOVERABLE element in an utterance. The focus is what makes an utterance into an assertion."

In English, a shift of clausal stress to the subject phrase *my car* presents the subject in focus, as in (2). This means that in English, the same clausal syntax can be used for different pragmatic arrays. In (2), the predicate now encodes the background (i.e., that something broke down is now taken as the common ground knowledge for both speaker and addressee). What is under discussion (i.e., the variable) is what broke down. In (2), the speaker is asserting that the entity breaking down should be identified as his/her car. When this happens, having contrastive or corrective focus is the default interpretation (i.e., the car broke down and not something else). This is so to such an extent that (2b) feels like a more natural rendition in pragmatic terms for a subject in focus.

- (2) a. [my CAR]_{FOC} broke down
 b. no, [my CAR]_{FOC} broke down (i.e., not my bike, or not your car, or the bus, etc.)

For our present purposes, what is interesting about (2) is that the subject is in focus. This is a remarkable fact, because the received view about a canonical syntax-pragmatic interface from the works in Givón (1979, 1990, 1983a/b); Foley and Van Valin (1984); Gundel (1988a/b); Faarlund (1988); Shibatani (1991); etc., is that subjects are topical and not focus, and are thus part of the background, like in (1). This is not a negligible observation and it needs to be born in mind, especially because it has consequences for the way we understand the syntax of clefts.

This brings us to clefts. We can start with (3), which is an uncontroversial instance of a cleft in English.

- (3) it's [my car]_{FP} {that broke down}_{CC}

The definition of the construction in Jespersen (1949: 147f.) is particularly illustrative:

“A cleaving of a sentence by means of *it is* (often followed by a relative pronoun or connective)² serves to single out one particular element of the sentence and very often, by directing attention to it and bringing it, as it were, into focus, to mark a contrast.”

In (3), speaker and addressee share the background knowledge that something had broken down. This background is encoded in a relative clause that I will call the ‘clefted clause’ (henceforth, CC). In this paper, I also indicate the scope of a relative clause by curly brackets. The entity that broke down and whose identity is not known is the variable. The phrase that introduces the value for the variable is the focus phrase (henceforth, FP).

The cleft construction in (3) is referred to as an *it*-cleft, or more simply as a ‘cleft’. Lambrecht (2001) identifies the construction as an instance of a constructional type that he treats as an IT-cleft (with *it* in capitals) and that includes the clefts of French in (4).

- (4) c'est [ma voiture]_{FP} {qui est en panne}_{CC}

The literature on clefts has long identified other types of cleft structures as for example the so-called ‘pseudo-clefts’ in (5) and (6) (see den Dikken, 2005, for a thorough review on the issue). Pseudo-clefts are traditionally divided into two subtypes: (a) the direct or basic type like in the examples in the examples in (5), which have the FP after the copula in the natural position of

² The term ‘connective’ is equivalent to what we would nowadays call a complementizer, i.e. *that* in (3).

focal stress in a simple clause (like in example 1 above); and (b) the reverse or inverse type in (6), which have the same word order and the same stress pattern as (2).

- (5) a. {what broke down}_{CC} is [my CAR]_{FP}
 b. {what you need}_{CC} is [a good rest]_{FP}
 c. {where the accident took place}_{CC} is [here]_{FP}
- (6) a. [my CAR]_{FP} is {what broke down}_{CC}
 b. [a good rest]_{FP} is {what you need}_{CC}
 c. [here]_{FP} is {where the accident took place}_{CC}

According to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1387), pseudo-clefts are “essentially an SVC [Subject-Verb-Complement] sentence with a nominal relative clause as subject or as complement”. In other words, pseudo-clefts are taken to be built on an identificational copular construction of the type [X is Y]. The fact that they lack a specific syntax of their own, as opposed to IT-clefts, has motivated the use of the appellative “pseudo” in their characterization. Nevertheless, the received view (see for example Mikkelsen, 2005 or Patten, 2012, for reviews) is that both IT-clefts and pseudo-clefts are instances of clefts because they are constructions that express a simple proposition via biclausal syntax (Lambrecht, 2001: 466).³ This means that the semantic content of a cleft can always be alternatively constructed by way of a simple clause, i.e., for example both (3), (5a) and (6a) are semantic equivalents of (1) and (2). The functional difference between clefts and their simple-clause equivalents, apart from their syntax, lies on the observation that clefts are specialized focus constructions.⁴

The linguistic literature on clefts is vast. There are at least two main reasons for why this is so: (i) clefts have biclausal syntax and the mapping between the syntax and the pragmatics is not always straightforward (at least not in the same sense as in simple clauses). This makes clefts challenging for syntactic theories to give an account for, and for syntactic models to represent; and (ii), clefts display a rich array of structural diversity both cross-linguistically and sometimes language internally. For example, while English has a rich inventory of cleft constructions, French and Spanish have clefts that English does not have, etc. In this respect, Drubig and Schaffer (2001: 1091) -an excellent state of the art on focus constructions- claim that the grammatical structure of clefts constitute an unsolved problem. This is so to such an extent that Drubig and Schaffer can only go as far as to acknowledge that the only agreement about clefts is that they involve some sort of relative clause structure, like *that broke down* in (3), or *what broke down* in (5). Much less resolved is the question of what is subject in such constructions, at least for English, where the analysis of the syntactic status of the FP in examples like (5b) is far from clear.

In this connection, Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1387f) take a simple methodological position: if the relative clause occurs before the copula, like in (5), it is the subject of the clause; if it follows the copula, like in (6), it is the complement of the copula. This in turn would necessarily mean that *my car*, *a good rest* and *here* in (6) would be subjects in focus, very much in the same

³ Most authors in modern linguistic theory agree that the structures in (5) are instances of clefts like the one in (3), although of a different type. However, some would disagree. Those who disagree consider IT-clefts as the only true clefts. This is for example the position taken by Christian Lehmann, an author who has contributed significantly to our understanding of the typology of relative clauses (http://www.christianlehmann.eu/ling/lg_system/grammar/nexion/complex_index.php?open=clefting).

⁴ Drubig and Schaffer (2001: 1079) take a focus construction to be a construction that “(...) denotes a type of sentence that serves to promote a specified constituent, its focus, to a position of particular prominence by setting it off from the rest of the sentence in one way or another.”

fashion as the subject in (2) above. However, on this precise point not everybody agrees. For example, in his definition of a cleft in (7), Lambrecht (2001: 467) treats what would be the equivalent of *my car*, *a good rest* and *here* in (6) as the ‘predicative argument’ of the copula and not as the subject:

- (7) “A cleft construction is a complex sentence structure consisting of a matrix clause headed by a copula and a relative or relative-like clause whose relativized argument is co-indexed with the predicative argument of the copula. (...) The term ‘predicative argument’ (instead of the more straightforward ‘object’ or ‘non-subject’ argument) is a hedge used in order to account for sentences like *CHAMPAGNE is what I like best*, in which the co-indexed argument occurs in preverbal position.”

Lambrecht (2001: 467, emphasis mine) further justifies using the label ‘predicative argument’ because he wants to avoid addressing “the VEXING question of whether the focal constituent in such sentences is a subject or not.” Lambrecht’s characterization of this question as ‘vexing’ appears to rely on the conviction that the mapping between syntax and pragmatics should be a coherent one that should work every time: focus should be aligned with the predicate and the topic should be aligned with the subject, while acknowledging that in clefts it does not.

In this regard, it is true that the received view has it that the FP in canonical IT-clefts is NOT the subject (for example in the typology in Drubig and Schaffer, 2001; or in Drubig, 2003). The function of subject is taken up by the expletive. In those structures, the FP is better analyzed as the complement of the copula. The fact that it is not subject can be seen in that it commonly receives case from the predicate in the CC, as shown for example in the French examples in (8a), where the verb *penser* ‘think’ governs an object encoded with the preposition *à*, or in (8b) where the FP is the oblique comitative.

- (8) a. c’est [à toi]_{FP} que je pense
 b. c’est [avec Jean]_{FP} que je veux travailler

But one cannot extrapolate the analysis of the FP from IT-clefts to pseudo-clefts for the sake of coherence of having a unified account across all cleft types. Accordingly, Lambrecht’s question remains ‘vexing’ and thus unaddressed. The answer might end up being construction specific. Quirk *et al.*’s solution appears feasible as a methodological principle for English, which is a rigid SVO language practically in all contexts, but it may not work for other languages with more flexible word order. I get back to the issue of subjects in clefts in §4, where I claim that at least in Tilapa Otomi, the FP in a pseudo-cleft is the subject of the copular clause. This means that the FP *a Papa Boniphasio* ‘Pope Boniphace’ in (9) is subject while the CC *bi kha* ‘(who) did it’ should be regarded as the complement of the copula.

- (9) COP SUBJ COMPL of the COP
 keh=a [a Papa Boniphasio]_{FP} {bi=kha}_{CC}=’a_i
 COP.AS=CL[3] DEF.SG Pope Boniphace [3]CPL.R=do[3OBJ]=3SG_{PRO}
 ‘It was Pope Boniphace that did it.’ (Txt)
 (Lit. ‘Pope Boniphace was who did it.’)

To show this, the exposition in the paper is organized as follows. First, in the following section, I provide a brief overview of some relevant descriptive facts about the grammar of Tilapa Otomi that are useful to understand the basics behind the syntax of clefts in this language. Then, in §3 I develop an analysis of Tilapa Otomi clefts comparing them with the copular

construction. I discuss the subject status of the FP in §4 and how this is important for a better understanding of the syntax of pseudo-clefts in general. The paper concludes in §5, where I advance a brief overview of the pragmatic function of clefts in the discourse of Tilapa Otomi as specialized focus constructions.

2. Basics of Tilapa Otomi grammar

Otomi is a shallow language family from Mexico of the Oto-Manguean stock. It consists of six different languages, three of them being large dialectal continua. The language I study in this paper is Tilapa Otomi, which is morphologically the most conservative language in the family. As proposed in Palancar (2018), much in the characterization of the syntax of clefts in Tilapa Otomi can be transposable to the syntax of other Otomi languages, but there are substantial differences which still need to be addressed more comprehensively.

Verbs in Tilapa Otomi inflect for tense/aspect/mood (TAM) values, deixis and adverbial focalization by means of inflectional markers that always occur before the verbal stem. Such markers may be phonologically hosted on the stem, like in (10), or on preceding elements, like in (11). I treat such markers as clitics and refer to them as ‘inflectional formatives’. Inflectional formatives also encode person of the subject for transitive verbs and for active intransitive verbs. All examples in this paper come from natural texts collected from my own documentation activities in the language. Such textual examples are indicated as ‘Txt’.⁵

(10) porke **gú**=salba-gi
 because 2.CPL.R=save-1OBJ
 ‘Because you saved me.’ (Txt)

(11) ’ne hin=**gú** ^htsa
 and NEG=2.CPL.R feel[3OBJ]
 ‘And you didn’t feel it.’ (Txt)

Example (10) additionally shows that the person of the object is encoded by means of suffixes. Such suffixes show different degrees of morphophonological integration with the stem. Example (11) shows that there is zero anaphora for a third person object.

Number of subject, possessor, and object is encoded by means of number enclitics (which encode clusivity for the first person). This is shown in (12).

(12) gi=khüti=**wi** a perhuisio **gú**=kha=**wi**
 2.CPL.IRR=pay.AS=PL DEF.SG damage 2.CPL.R=do=PL
 ‘You (PL) are going to pay for the damage you made.’ (Txt)

⁵ **Orthography:** Deviations from the IPA. Consonants: C’ /Cʔ/ (ejective); ^hC (pre-aspirated); ’ /ʔ/; ñ /ɲ/; ch /tʃ/; tr [tʃ̥]; dʃ [tʃ̥]; ndy [ɲj]; r /r/; x /ʃ/; and y /j/. Vowels: a /a/ [ɒ]; e /e/; o /o/; i /i/; ê [ɛ̃]; ô [ɔ̃]; and “ nasal vowel. High tone is represented by an acute accent only in inflectional formatives. **Abbreviations:** ♀: female speaker; ♂: male speaker; ADV: adverbial inflection; AND: andative; AS: morphophonologically adjusted stem (also applied to affixes); CC: clefted clause; CISLOC: cislocative; CL: phrase-final clitic; CLF: nominal classifier; COMPL: complement; COP: copula; CPL: completive; DEF: definite; DEM: demonstrative; DIM: diminutive; DP: determiner phrase; DU: dual; EXCL: exclusive; FOC: focus; FP: focus phrase; HAB: habitual; IMPF: imperfect; INCPL: incompletive; IRR: irrealis; NEG: negative; OBJ: object; PL: plural; POSS: possessive; PRF: perfect; PRO: pronominal; PROX: proximal; PRTCL: particule; PURP: purposive; R: realis; SG: singular; S_o: S of patientive predicate; SS: secondary stem; ST: stative; SUBJ: subject; TRANSLOC: translocative.

Otomi languages also have a set of bound pronominal forms which I treat as enclitics. The paradigm is given in Table 1. The number of the first and the second person is encoded by means of the same number enclitics we find in verbs in (12). In the absence of such markers, singular is the default interpretation. There are dedicated forms for the third person singular and plural. Demonstratives are often used anaphorically as pronouns.

		Singular	Dual	Plural
1 st		=ga/ka	EXCL	=ga/ka='mbe
			INCL	=ga/ka=wi
2 nd		=k'e		=k'e=wi
3 rd		=a/'ä		=k'u
DEM	PROX	=na		=ya
	DISTAL I	=ni		=yü
	DISTAL II	(=k'a)		=k'i

Table 1. Pronominal enclitics in Tilapa Otomi

Pronominal enclitics cross-reference the person of the subject (or less commonly so, the object).⁶ They may occur associated with the verb, like in example (13), where they encode the emphatic nuances commonly associated with contrastive focus.⁷

- (13) pues gu=xox=**ka** porke rá='wahki=tho=gwa
 so 1.CPL.IRR=lift.AS[3OBJ]=1[SG]_{PRO} because INCPL.ST=be.in.the.open[3So]=DEL=here
 'Well, I'm going to put it up myself because it (the courtyard) is all in the open here.' (Txt)

As for word order, like a canonical Mesoamerican language (Campbell *et al.* 1986) Tilapa Otomi is a V-initial language. While it is extremely rare to find a transitive clause with two full NPs in natural discourse, when we find them the order is fixed as VOS if both referents could be seen as equally being able to play the role of agent or patient. This is shown in (14), which has the interpretation in (a) because of the fixed VOS order. The interpretation in (b) is not possible.

- (14) bwu=^htsi [a nana]_{OBJ} [mu ^hta]_{SUBJ}
 3.CPL.TRANSLOC=take.animate DEF.SG woman 1♂POSS father
 a. 'My dad went to fetch the woman.' (Txt)
 b. *'The woman went to fetch my dad.'

In configurational terms, this means that V and O form a unit in clausal structure (i.e., [VO]S). In reality, we find many instances of a topicalized subject before the verb or the predicate, while fronted objects in OV are very rare.

- (15) [a diphunto mu ^hta]_{SUBJ} bi=syongu=[mu nt'a nana]_{OBJ}
 DEF.SG late 1♂POSS father 3.CPL.R=SS/look.for.AS=other one woman
 'My late father looked for another woman.' (Txt)

⁶ There are also locative pronominals indicating deixis (e.g. =g/kwa 'here'; =ni 'there'; =k'u 'yonder').

⁷ In many other instances, however, it is more difficult to pinpoint the actual pragmatic nature of the emphatic force (see Zimmermann, 2008 for the relation between contrastive focus and emphasis). The context to interpret (10) is the following: The fence at the speaker's house had been damaged by a drunk driver who promised to show up the next day to raise it. Before (10), the speaker says: 'And we were waiting and waiting for him, and when does he show up? Nobody at all was showing up. It was already 10:30 am and there was nobody there, so my son says.'

Finally, a word about relative clause structure is in order because the CC in a cleft is a type of a headless relative clause. Headed relative clauses in Tilapa Otomi are postnominal. The most common type is a gap relative juxtaposed to the head noun (i.e., it is not introduced by an overt complementizer). This type of relative was shown in (12); another example is (16). I use curly brackets to indicate the scope of the relative clause.

- (16) *má=kha* [nt'a kwentò {*mádi mbehti-gi='mbe mi sku tö^htsu*}]
 [3]IMPF=exist one tale [3]IMPF.HAB SS/tell.DTR-1OBJ=PL.EXCL 1POSS♀ DIM old.woman
 'There was a tale that my grandmother used to tell us.' (Txt)

Example (17) shows that Tilapa Otomi can also have headless relatives that look structurally identical to the headed type in (16). This may be observed by the fact that they are not introduced by a relative pronoun or an interrogative pronoun. The CC in a cleft in Tilapa Otomi is only encoded by the type of headless relative clause in (17).

- (17) *ihole, xu mu=nkhani {bi='ën-gi a sku tö^hta}*
 ! PRTCL [3]HAB=be.true [3]CPL.R=say-1OBJ DEF.SG DIM old.man
 'Oh my gosh, it was true what the man said to me.' (Txt)

With these basics in mind, we can now turn to clefts in the following section. I propose that clefts in Tilapa Otomi are pseudo-clefts that are based on a copular construction that is identificational in function. To show the close structural relation between the copular construction and clefts, I first introduce the copular construction and then go step by step comparing it with examples of clefts.

3. The copular construction and the clefts of Tilapa Otomi

In this section, I show that clefts in Tilapa Otomi are based on the identificational copular construction of the language. This copular construction is only used in Tilapa Otomi to predicate the identification between two referents, i.e., it can be used for both specificational and equative semantic purposes, but not to encode ascription to a class, possession, existential or locative predication. An instantiation of the copular construction is given in (18), where I use brackets for the subject and parentheses for the complement of the copula.

- (18) *kəh=a* [ni mi t'yu]_{SUBJ} (a mbə^hkö)_{COMPL=ni}
 COP.AS=CL[3] DEM.SG 1♀POSS son DEF.SG priest=DEM.SGPRO
 'My son is the priest.'

All the constituting elements of the copular construction are instantiated in (18), namely:

- (i) A non-verbal copular element *kə*, which also occurs in initial position, which is the natural position for the predicate in a V-initial language.
- (ii) A subject DP *ni mi t'yu* 'my son', which in (15) follows the predicate.
- (iii) A subject DP is followed by the DP *a mbə^hkö* 'the priest' that serves as the complement of the copula. Which DP is subject and which is the complement of the copula is clear in Tilapa Otomi because the semantic reading of (18) is unambiguous, i.e., the sentence cannot mean 'the priest is my son' (see §4 for more arguments).
- (iv) A pronominal enclitic that cross-references the subject DP. Note that this enclitic (=ni in 18) is a copy of the head demonstrative of the subject DP (for more examples, see 21 and

22, further below). The cross-referencing is indicated by the subscript ‘*i*’. This pronominal enclitic occurs at the right edge of the clause, i.e., it is not an enclitic associated to the complement DP *a mbahkō* ‘the priest’ because Tilapa Otomi does not have phrase-final demonstrative enclitics in DPs.

The subject in the copular construction in (18) is a full DP, but it can also occur in pronominal form, as shown in (19). Note that in such a case, the pronominal enclitic is a copy of the pronoun.

- (19) $k\epsilon=a=[k'u_i]_{SUBJ}$ (i loka) $_{COMPL}=k'u_i$
 COP=CL=3PL_{PRO} PL mad.woman=3PL_{PRO}
 ‘They are the mad women.’⁸ (Txt)

Clefts in Tilapa Otomi are pseudo-clefts based on the copular construction.⁹ This was shown in example (9), repeated here as (20).

- (20) $k\epsilon h=a$ [a Papa Boniphasio] $_i$ FP {bi=kha} $_{CC}=a_i$
 COP.AS=CL[3] DEF.SG Pope Boniphace [3]CPL.R=do[3OBJ]=3SG_{PRO}
 ‘It was Pope Boniphace that did it.’ (Txt)
 (Lit. ‘Pope Boniphace was who did it.’)

The cleft in (20) is similar to the example of the copular construction in (15) in all respects. The cleft in (20) has a similar copula in V-initial position. The FP occurs in the same position as the subject DP in the copular construction and the CC encoding the background in the proposition occurs in the same position as the complement of the copula. Further note that (20) also involves a pronominal enclitic at the right edge of the matrix clause that cross-references the FP. Here the enclitic is the pronominal for third person singular = ‘*a*’, which is used as a default (in the elsewhere of default). Using this default is avoided whenever copying the head of the DP in the FP is a mechanism that appears to be more ready at hand. The following examples in (21) show different and clear cases of FP copying in clefts.

- (21) a. $k\epsilon=a=[k'u_i]_{FP}$ {giti gosa=wi} $_{CC}=k'u_i$
 COP=CL=3PL_{PRO} 2.CPL.IRR enjoy=PL=3PL_{PRO}
 ‘It’s those you (PL) are going to enjoy.’ (Txt)
 (Lit. ‘Those are the ones you (PL) are going to enjoy.’)
- b. $keh=a=[ni_i]_{FP}$ {bi=’ñën=ga} $_{CC}=ni_i$
 COP.AS=CL=DEM.SG_{PRO} 3.CPL.R=SS/say.AS=1[SG]=DEM.SG_{PRO}
 ‘It was her who told me.’ (Txt)
 (Lit. ‘She was the one who told me.’)

⁸ Example (19) designates a specific folk character on a float in a parade, not the property of being mad.

⁹ The vast majority of clefts in Tilapa Otomi are based on the copular construction, but there are other cleft types based on other existential verbs. One example is (i), which has a quantifier used as the main predicate.

- i. $ntero=[k'u_i]_{FP}$ {tá=^htyü=^hmbe} $_{CC}=k'u_i$
 be.all=3PL_{PRO} 1.AND=carry=PL.EXCL=3PL_{PRO}
 ‘It was all that that we were carrying along.’ (Txt)
 (Lit. ‘That was all what we carried along.’)

- c. $k\acute{e}h=a[=na_i]_{FP}$ {tátó hö=ga}=na_i
 COP.AS=CL=DEM.SG_{PRO} 1.CISLOC bring=1[SG]_{PRO}=DEM.SG_{PRO}
 ‘This is what I brought.’ (Txt)
- d. para $k\acute{e}h=a=[ya_i]_{FP}$ {giti hpendy}_{CC}=a=ya_i
 PURP COP.AS=CL=DEM.PL_{PRO} 2.CPL.IRR.ADV wash.AS[3OBJ]=CL=DEM.PL_{PRO}
 ‘So it’s with them that you wash it with.’ (Txt)
 (Lit. ‘So that they are what you wash it with.’)
- e. $k\acute{e}n=[gwa_i]_{FP}$ {gugu ’mbwuh}_{CC}=kwa_i
 COP.AS=here 3.CPL.IRR live.AS=here
 ‘It’s here where you’re going to live.’ (Txt)
 (Lit. ‘Here is where you’re going to live.’)

The use of the enclitics in both clefts and the copular construction are facultative whenever the copula is overt, but in natural usage using them is nonetheless far more common than not. Speakers tend to avoid them when the CC is a heavy constituent like in (22).¹⁰ However, when speakers are asked to reify them, using the wrong copied enclitic renders the utterance ungrammatical.

- (22) hi’na, $k\acute{e}h=a$ [na mi mimukha_i]_{FP}
 no COP.AS=CL DEM.SG 1♀POSS sister.in.law
 {xpi=^hpat’i na htsangü}_{CC}(=na/*ni)
 3.PRF=burn DEM.SG hut=DEM.SG_{PRO}
 ‘No, it was this sister in law of mine the one who burnt the hut.’ (Txt)
 (Lit. ‘This sister in law of mine was the one who burnt the hut.’)

Clefts share other aspects with the copular construction. For example, the copular construction may have a fronted subject DP. When this happens, the DP is often introduced by the particle *ñü*,¹¹ as shown in (23).¹² The same is found in clefts, as shown in (24). In (24b), the fronted FP is realized by a pronominal form based on *ñü*. Such proforms can only occur in preverbal position. I indicate with an underscore the *in situ* position of the moved FP.

- (23) [ñü na kha’ni]_{SUBJ} $k\acute{e}h=a$ _i (a mbahkö)_{COMPL}=na_i
 PRTCL DEM.SG man COP.AS=CL[3] DEF.SG priest=DEM.SG_{PRO}
 ‘This man is the priest.’
- (24) a. [ñü a rú ngopho_i]_{FP} $k\acute{e}h=a$ _i {bi... bi=kokhi}=’a_i
 PRTCL DEF.SG SG.3POSS brain COP.AS=CL[3] 3.CPL.R 3.CPL.R=bleed=3SG_{PRO}
 ‘It was her brains that...that bled’ (Txt)
 (Lit. ‘Her brains are what bled’)

¹⁰ When copying fails, speakers revert to using the default third person pronoun, as in example (34) further below.

¹¹ For a discussion about the different functions and distribution of this particle see Palancar (2018).

¹² As far as my knowledge goes, fronted DPs marked with *ñü* can remain internal to the clause. There are also instances of external ones. This can be seen in the prosody. External DPs commonly leave an enclitic pronoun as a resumptive in the clause. But this is not a property that can be seen in the copular construction, which abides by its own rules as for the syntactic distribution of enclitic pronouns.

- b. 'ne=a [ñü=a_i]_{FP} keh=a ____i {trá='a-k'u=wi}_{CC}='a_i
 and=CL PRTCL=3SG_{PRO} COP.AS=CL[3] 1.INCPL.R=ask.for.AS-2OBJ.AS=PL=3SG_{PRO}
 'And it's that what I'm asking you (PL).' (Txt)
 (Lit. 'And that is what I'm asking you (PL).')

With a fronted subject DP, the copula can be omitted in the copular construction. When this happens, the pronominal enclitics are obligatory, presumably because they are the only remaining token of the copular construction and are thus perceived as being indispensable. A textual example of such a possibility is (25). As expected, clefts can also lack an overt copula under similar circumstances. This is shown in the examples in (26). In both (25) and (26) we can pinpoint to the position of the omitted copula; indicated by 'Ø'. The fact that enclitic pronouns occurring at a high position in the clause attach to complementizers like in (25) suggests that the copula follows them. In (26), the sole presence of the particle *ñü* is enough to indicate that the FP is a fronted constituent like in (24) above.

- (25) 'ne =a[=ni_i]_{SUBJ} Ø ____i (a mba^hkö)_{COMPL}=ni_i
 and=CL=DEM.SG_{PRO} COP DEF.SG priest=DEM.SG_{PRO}
 'And he's the priest.' (Txt)

- (26) [ñü=gwai]_{FP} Ø ____i {ra=^hpo=ra tehe}_{CC}=gwa_i
 PRTCL=here COP [3]INCPL.R=spring.AS=SG water=here
 'It's here where the water springs.' (Txt)
 (Lit. 'Here is where the water springs.')

4. Discussion about the syntactic status of the FP in clefts

In the copular construction, which DP is subject or complement of the copula is structurally clear, mostly because the word order is fixed as either COP-SUBJ-COMPL (18) or SUBJ-COP-COMPL (23), but never *COP-COMPL-SUBJ. As I have pointed out, an example like (27) repeated from (18) above, cannot have the interpretation in (b).

- (27) keh=a [ni mi t'yü]_{SUBJ} (a mba^hkö)_{COMPL}=ni_i
 COP.AS=CL[3] DEM.SG 1♀POSS son DEF.SG priest=DEM.SG_{PRO}
 a. 'My son is the priest.'
 b. *'The priest is my son.'

To predicate a kinship status about a certain person, the grammar of Tilapa Otomi requires the use of a different construction (i.e., not the copular one). In such a construction, the possessed NP is converted into a nominal predicate. Such a nominal predicate is of the patientive type, i.e., one that encodes its subject with the same person indexes that are used to encode objects of transitive verbs. To illustrate this point, compare the person index in (28) with the one in (10) above. Furthermore, in order to show that the phrase *di t'ixu* 'your daughter' in (28) is the predicate more clearly, I have rendered the sentence in the irrealis mood, because the irrealis marker *ti* always occurs associated to the predicate. Note that in such constructions the subject is always fronted.

- (28) [ñü=ga_i]_{SUBJ} ti di t'ixu-gi=ga
 PRTCL=1[SG] IRR 2POSS daughter-1S_o=1[SG]
 'I'll be your daughter.'

This means that to express the reading in (27b), a speaker of Tilapa Otomi would resort to a structure like in (29a). The same construction is found in the textual example in (29b).

- (29) a. [ñü ni a mbahkö]_{SUBJ} mi t'yü=a=ni
 PRTCL DEM.SG DEF.SG priest 1♀POSS son[3So]=CL=DEM.SGPRO
 'The priest is my son.'
- b. i [ñü=ni]_{SUBJ} rú sobriñü=ni
 and PRTCL==DEM.SGPRO SG.3POSS nephew[3So]=DEM.SGPRO
 'And he's my nephew.' (Txt)

Note that both examples in (29) show that the pronominal enclitic cross-references the subject phrase. Furthermore, Tilapa Otomi grammar does not allow pronominals as clausal predicates or as complement of copulas. In other words, there is no structural equivalent in Tilapa Otomi to English sentences such as *the priest is him* or *the place is here*. The semantics of such propositions can only be rendered by the equivalents of *he is the priest* or *here is the place*. The same goes for pseudo-clefts. The language does not favour (direct) pseudo-clefts like the English examples in (5) above, but only the reverse type in (6), repeated here as (30).

- (30) a. [my CAR]_{FP} is {what broke down}_{CC}
 b. [a good rest]_{FP} is {what you need}_{CC}
 c. [here]_{FP} is {where the accident took place}_{CC}

I have pointed out in section 1 that the syntactic status of the FP in reverse pseudo-clefts is –to cite Lambrecht (2001: 467)– a “vexing” question for syntactic analyses of English that do not like a subject in focus. For Tilapa Otomi pseudo-clefts, we have two possible analyses: (a) the FP is subject or (b) the FP is the complement of the copula. In my view, the evidence in favor of analysis (a) is overwhelming, and I advocate for it. In this analysis, the FP is a subject, and a subject in focus when the construction is used for contrastive focus (see §5 for other situations). Such an analysis encompasses most of the descriptive facts I have presented so far in a coherent way. It would entail taking the structure of clefts in Tilapa Otomi as being based on the copular construction in all respects. In that scenario, the FP behaves exactly the same way as the subject DP of the copular construction, i.e., it has the same word order, it can be fronted and it triggers both the occurrence and the copying of the pronominal enclitics.

The only problem I see with analysis (a) is the only advantage I see of analysis (b). This concerns the treatment of the position of the FP after the copula in the order COP-FP-CC. In this respect, Tilapa Otomi being a V-initial language, the order COP-FP could be interpreted as reflecting that the FP is part of the predicate, and thus should be seen as the complement of the copula. This would leave the CC to be treated as the subject. Such an analysis would please someone who adheres to a coherent mapping between syntax and pragmatics. In other words, it would make Tilapa Otomi pseudo-clefts typologically coherent with that expectation.

Nevertheless, analysis (b) has two weaknesses, which in my opinion are not inconsequential. Firstly, it would be forced to account for the pronominal enclitics as being markers that cross-reference the predicate. But the existence of predicate agreement would make Tilapa Otomi cross-linguistically rather bizarre. Also, it would have to purposely ignore all the structural similarities that pseudo-clefts share with the copular construction as manifested by the similarities between the FP and the subject DP. This analysis would also need to appeal to an arbitrary switch in the pragmatic mapping from the copular construction to the use of the

subject DP in the copular construction, I have proposed that the FP in Tilapa Otomi clefts functions as the subject of the copula.

The fact that the FP is subject implies that the subject FP can be a subject in focus. However, this only happens when the CC encodes a genuine presupposition, so that the assertive force lies on the referent of the FP, producing a reading of contrastive focus. This is illustrated in (34). Example (34) was said about a married couple who has no children. The speaker assumed that the fact that the couple had no children went back to the decision of one of the partners not to have them. In (34), she asserts that that partner in question (i.e., the variable) is the wife, as opposed to the husband.

- (34) ntonse alamehor keh=a [ni nana]
 then perhaps COP.AS=CL[3] DEM.SG woman
- {him=bi nde bi='ñë=yú bahtsi}'=a¹⁵
 NEG=3.CPL.R want 3.CPL.R=have=PL.3POSS child=3SG_{PRO}
 'Then perhaps it is the woman who does not want to have children.' (Txt)
 (Lit. 'Then perhaps the woman is who does not want to have children.')

In other situations the subject FP may not be in focus. In this respect, the literature has long been cautious about keeping presupposition and background knowledge separate (Declerck, 1988, Delin 1995, Delin and Oberlander 1995, 2005, Oberlander and Delin 1996, etc.), because in many instances clefts are used as rhetorical tropes by speakers to present new information. In other words, they are used asthetic constructions. Clefts do so by presenting the new information as if it was old in order to capture the attention by the addressee. As Lambrecht (1994: 70 ff) points out, attention is obtained as an effect from having to exercise pragmatic accommodation required to understand them. Used in this way, clefts may produce an effect of emphasis, which is provided by their inherent contrastive frame. This analysis was first suggested in Sasse (1987) for French clefts, like in the example in (35), (Wehr (1984) *apud* Sasse 1987: 538-539). Note that in (35) the cleft is used for broad focus, i.e., the FP is not in focus because the cleft is not used to respond to a question such as 'who is it that's hitting you?'

- (35) Qu'est-ce qu'il y a? — C'est [maman]_{FP} {qui me bat}_{CC}
 'What's the matter? — Mum's hitting me.'
 (Lit. 'It's mum who's hitting me.')

The same phenomenon can be observed in the clefts of Tilapa Otomi. A clear example of it is found in (36b), repeated from (24a) above. The previous and the following strings of discourse surrounding (36b) are given in (36a) and (36c), respectively. The extract is from a story about a woman who died in an accident by falling of a ladder and breaking her skull. After the context in (36a), the cleft in (36b) is used to introduce the cause of death as due to internal bleeding. The proposition comes as a piece of new information that adds up to the preceding episode of breaking the skull. A contrastive focus interpretation based on the possibility that something else might have bled apart from her brains is out of the question. In such case, the cleft is used as athetic construction, and the subject FP is no longer in focus. Actually, the information in the cleft in (36b) is resumed in (36c) by a simple clause. This is a reminder that clefts are biclausal focus constructions that convey the same semantics of simple clauses.

¹⁵ In (34) the copying of the pronominal enclitic has failed; linked to the fact that the CC is a heavy constituent.

- (36) a. tiro'na; tiro ra ^htsa'ye; este...hinda ga syü, porke... este... rú...bi xohni rú gwale'na; 'ne este...
 'Badly, they say; she's badly ill; uhh...she's not going to get well, because...uhh... she broke her skull, they say; and uhh...' (Txt)
- b. [ñü a rú ngopho]_{FP} keh=a _i {bi... bi=kokhi}='a_i
 PRTCL DEF.SG SG.3POSS brain COP.AS=CL[3] 3.CPL.R 3.CPL.R=bleed=3SG_{PRO}
 'It was her brains that...that bled' (Txt)
 (Lit. 'Her brains are what bled')
- c. bi=kokhi a rú ngopho
 3.CPL.R=bleed DEF.SG SG.3POSS brain
 'Her brains bled.' (Txt)

While Tilapa Otomi does not have IT-clefts, I hope to have shown in this paper that the copulative syntax of pseudo-clefts is challenging and can shed new lights onto the mapping of syntax and pragmatics. I have dared to address Lambrecht's 'vexing' question about the syntactic status of the FP in pseudo-clefts. In this connection, based on the structural similarities with the copular construction, I have proposed that at least for Tilapa Otomi the best analysis for the syntactic function of the FP in a pseudo-cleft is that of subject. This subject is in focus when the cleft is used as a contrastive focus construction, but it is not in focus when the cleft is used as athetic construction.

Acknowledgements:

This paper was supported by the operation GD1 of the Labex EFL and by the CNRS International project for scientific collaboration (PICS) (2015-2017) "Mesoamerica and the syntax of the relative clause". I want to thank the editors of this volume (Evangelia Adamou, Katharina Haude and Martine Vanhove) for inviting me to participate in it, and to all the members of the operation GD1 at the Labex EFL for the fruitful discussions. I am indebted to the two anonymous referees, whose comments proved invaluable to improve the quality and clarity of the paper, as well as the suggestions made by the editors. My special thanks heartily go to Judith Aissen, who at times disagrees with me on how to interpret the data and on the conclusions we draw from them, but without her teachings I would have never been in a position to disentangle the intricacies of Otomi syntax in my own ways. Errors and deficiencies remain my responsibility.

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