

# The Relation between Focus and Theticity in the Tuu family<sup>1</sup>

Tom Güldemann  
University of Zurich and  
Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology Leipzig

The paper presents first results of the documentation of Tuu languages regarding information structure, based on the analysis of coherent texts, partly supplemented by elicited utterances. Unmarked clauses display a fairly strict verb-medial structure; the clause-initial subject can be characterized as a conflation of topic function and agent role-complex and the material after it contains the assertive focus. Pragmatically more marked clauses display an initial nominal which is morphosyntactically set off from the rest of the sentence. These cleft-like constructions are typical for utterances involving contrastively focused items as well as constituent question words. At least in some languages, these structures are also associated with another pragmatic function, namely the expression of so-called entity-central thetic statements in the sense of Sasse (1987). This polyfunctionality of cleft-like sentences is motivated, because both of these functions need to expose a nominal: while it must be more salient than the predicate in the case of term focus, it must be “up-graded” from the status of topical predication base in the case of thetic utterances.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Tuu family

Tuu is a hardly known and very poorly documented language family of southern Africa. It is claimed by Greenberg (1963) to be a member of a genealogical language group Khoisan (hence its earlier name “Southern Khoisan”)<sup>2</sup>. However, it has not been shown to belong to a higher order group by standard comparative methodology so that for the time being it should be considered to be genealogically isolated.

Tuu languages were formerly distributed all over South Africa and the southern

parts of Namibia and Botswana. The majority of these languages are extinct today, particularly in South Africa. More extensive linguistic data on Tuu languages which have been or still are being documented are only now becoming available. These are from the following three dialect clusters:

- (1) Taa in the southwestern Kalahari of Botswana and adjacent areas of eastern Namibia (overall still healthy, but endangered)
- (2) N|ng in the southern Kalahari of South Africa (moribund)
- (3) |Xam in the Karoo of South Africa (extinct)

The present paper will deal with data from Strandberg |Xam (|Xam), N|uu (N|ng), West !Xoon, 'N|oha, and East !Xoon (all Taa); all but the first are subject to ongoing field work.<sup>3</sup>

In Figure 1, I give a preliminary internal classification of the family; the varieties on which data are presented below are highlighted in bold.

Taa-Lower Nossob

Taa (DC)      **West !Xoon**, N|u||'en†; \***N|oha**, **East !Xoon**, Kakia†, ...  
 Lower Nossob (?DC)    !'Auni†, |Haasi†, ...  
 !Ui            N|ng, **N|uu** (DC); |**Xam**† (DC); †Ungkuet†; |Xegwit†

Figure 1: Preliminary classification of Tuu<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 The present framework for information structure

The present approach to information structure follows functional frameworks. Regarding focus, Dik's (1997) definition serves as a useful starting point:

The focal information in a linguistic expression is that information which is relatively the most important or salient in the given communicative setting, and considered by S[peaker] to be the most essential for A[ddressee] to integrate into his pragmatic information.

The focal information will thus concern the changes that S[peaker] wishes to bring about in the pragmatic information of A[ddressee]. Such changes may take different forms: S[peaker] may wish to ADD pieces of information to A[ddressee]'s pragmatic information, or he may wish to REPLACE some piece of information X which he assumes A[ddressee] possesses by some piece of information Y which he possesses himself. (ibid.: 326)

Another important element of Dik's approach for the following discussion is the identification of two basic focus parameters which help to define its major subcategories. The first is the "scope of focus." Figure 2 gives the options relevant for the following discussion and example (1) exemplifies them.

The focus is over a:

- (a) term (participant, adverbial, etc.)      > TERM FOCUS
- (b) verb lexeme                                > VERB FOCUS
- (c) predication operator                    > depending on operator type

Figure 2: Basic focus types according to "scope of focus"

- (1) a. Term focus  
They will eat the salad.                    e.g., after: What will they eat?
- b. Verb focus  
They will eat the salad.                    e.g., after: They will treat the salad!?
- c. Truth focus  
They will eat the salad.                    e.g., after: Why don't they eat the salad?

The second important parameter is called by Dik "communicative point of focus" which is represented in simplified form in Figure 3 and exemplified in (2).

The focus is a:

- (a) information gap                            > ASSERTIVE FOCUS (Dik's term is "completive")
- (b) contrastive information                    > CONTRASTIVE FOCUS

Figure 3: Basic focus types according to "communicative point of focus"

- (2) a. Assertive focus  
They will bring a salad.                    e.g., after: What will they bring along?
- b. Contrastive focus  
No, it's a salad they will bring. e.g., after: Will they bring the dessert, then?

While I consider it possible that a language organizes focus (and topic) according to a more elaborate salience hierarchy and not in terms of binary distinctions, the bipartite opposition between assertive and contrastive focus suffices for the purpose of the present paper.

A final important point of my present framework, not explicit in the above information, is that I require "focus" to concern a salience configuration WITHIN the sentence, which implies that such a sentence also has "background" elements. Salience relations on higher discourse levels, for example, across sentences, paragraphs, etc. are not subsumed under "information structure" in the narrow grammatical sense. As a result, utterances where the entire proposition is used as a focal figure against the immediate discourse background are not discussed here under the focus domain. Hence, what Lambrecht (1987, 1994) calls "sentence focus" is viewed here alternatively as a separate expression type called "thetic statement" (see Sasse (1987) and §4 below). This is opposed to an unmarked "categorical statement" where a focus-background

structure holds at least between a predication and a predication base, normally the subject. Thus, athetic statement can be conceptualized as an utterance where the sentence-internal information structure induced by the default interpretation of a particular morpho-syntactic structure is cancelled.

The present paper will concentrate on certain morpho-syntactic structures in Tuu languages and their use for the expression of information structure. These can be conveniently called “cleft constructions” in the sense that a nominal constituent is singled out and placed at the beginning of a sentence, and a kind of pivotal marker separates it from the rest of the clause. As can be expected from a large amount of relevant cross-linguistic data, this bisected construction type expresses primarily contrastive term focus. This will be demonstrated in §2 for Tuu languages. A more interesting phenomenon to be dealt with in §3 is that the same construction is at least in some Tuu varieties also used in contexts where a focus interpretation is ruled out according to the above definition. The final §4 will discuss these non-focal uses of clefts in terms of their pragmatic function, characterizing them as “entity-central thetic statements” in the sense of Sasse (1987). Clefts in Tuu will thus be argued to represent further instances of the previously observed relation between contrastive term focus constructions and structures expressing theticity. Before clefts and their polyfunctional character in Tuu can be treated, however, a few remarks on the general typological profile of this family and the expression of other focus types, in particular non-contrastive focus, are in order.

### 1.3 The unmarked clause in Tuu

Although the Tuu family seems to be of considerable age, the attested member languages display a remarkably homogeneous structural profile. In addition to their complex phoneme systems (clicks, other rare consonants, vowel colorings, tone), they all share an overall similar morpho-syntactic profile (Güldemann 2005). Since they have relatively little morphology, constituent order, particles, and analytical constructions are of great importance. Most languages can be shown to possess a nominal gender system, which in the Taa-Lower Nossob branch involves extensive agreement phenomena. Number marking is characterized by a basic singular-plural distinction but is morphologically complex and irregular in both nominal and predicative expressions, including stem suppletion. An inclusive-exclusive distinction can be reconstructed for the pronominal system. The noun phrase has a generally head-initial syntax except for a head-final genitive construction.

The basic word order of the clause is characterized according to the general typological approach as S-V-O, but this conveys certain features which are cross-linguistically unusual. The following schema gives a basic linear template of simple clauses (subscript n marks possible multiple occurrences of a constituent):

[SUBJECT - PREDICATION.OPERATOR<sub>n</sub> - ADVERB - VERB<sub>n</sub> -  
OBJECT - PREPOSITION+ADJUNCT<sub>n</sub>]

The clause-initial subject nominal is rather unremarkable in that it can be characterized, like in many other languages, as a conflation of the semantic agent role complex (i.e. agent, experiencer, force, and the like) and the pragmatic topic function. Typologically less usual is the grammatical relation between verb(s) and postverbal participants which is related to the fact that virtually all transitive verbs have a maximal valence of one non-subject constituent. This is partially compensated by productive verb serialization which is mostly of the root or nuclear serialization type (for this concept see, e.g., Foley and Van Valin 1984). Another device to integrate a second non-subject participant is a special type of relational gram. It functions as a default preposition, called here “multipurpose oblique (MPO)” marker, that takes care of most postverbal participants outside the valence of the verb. It is functionally very versatile in that it can encode virtually all semantic roles except those typically expressed by the subject, that is, patients as well as all kinds of oblique and adverbial constituents. In terms of information structure, this basic clause expresses assertive focus on the entire verb phrase or on a narrower non-subject constituent. This will be exemplified briefly at the beginning of §2.

## 2. Cleft constructions and contrastive term focus

### 2.1 N|uu (N|ing, !Uj)

In this section, I will demonstrate that across the family there is another major clause structure besides the basic type discussed previously. This can be characterized as a “bisected” construction because a constituent occurs at the very beginning of a clause and is set off from the rest of the clause by a grammatical element. To the extent that these bisected structures display certain structural affinities to copulative, identificational and/or relative constructions, they come more or less close to cleft constructions in other languages.

The bisected construction will be first exemplified by N|uu from the !Uj branch of Tuu. Compare in this respect the question-answer pair in (3). The interrogative ‘what’ referring to the instrument is fronted and followed by a generic question marker *xae* while the comitative-instrumental preposition remains in its normal postverbal position. This structure is copied in the answer except that the assertively focused noun ‘horse’ is now followed by *ke* which can be characterized as a term focus marker.

- (3) a. *tyui xae |aeki g!abi n|a*  
 what Q woman ride INSTR  
 ‘What does the woman ride with?’
- b. *haasi ke ku g!abi n|a*  
 horse TF 3S ride INSTR  
 ‘She rides on a horse.’

While (3)b shows a marked position for a non-subject role constituent that is clearly correlated with term focus, the question-answer pair in (4) demonstrates that this is not the only option. The instrument question in (4)a is structurally fully identical to (3)a. The answer (4)b, however, has the focused noun ‘axe’ not in clause-initial position<sup>5</sup>, but in its normal location after the comitative-instrumental preposition (note that both (3) and (4) were elicited from the same informant in the same session).

- (4) a. *tyui xae* *ʔoo* *ʔkx'oo* *n|a*  
 what Q man chop INSTR  
 ‘What does the man chop (the tree) with?’  
 b. *ʔoo ke* *ʔkx'oo* *n|a* *'oo*  
 man DECL chop INSTR axe  
 ‘The man chops with an axe.’

The above examples thus attest for two possible positions for term focus on non-subject roles, namely in a normal “in-situ” position after the sentence-initial subject, as in (4)b, and in a marked “fronted” position at the beginning of the clause, as in (3)b. In this bisected construction the non-subject role participant occurs outside its expected semanto-syntactic locus, for example, detached from its controlling preposition. The difference in formal markedness corresponds to a difference in pragmatic markedness in that there is a robust correlation between a bisected clause structure and contrastive term focus vs. an unmarked clause structure and assertive term focus.

Regarding assertive in-situ term focus, it should, however, be recognized that there is no fixed syntactic position for this function; the only generalization is that the relevant constituent occurs after the subject. Besides the postverbal adjunct position which is marked by a preposition, shown with the comitative-instrumental adverbs after *n/a* in (4)b above and the locative adverb after the MPO *ng* in (5)b, there are two other positions for this pragmatic function. Focused terms can also show up in the unmarked, immediately postverbal position reserved for constituents inside the verb’s valence, as the locative in (6)b, or in the immediately preverbal position reserved for adverbials, as the time adverb in (7)b.

- (5) a. *kidya xae* *kinn* *siinsimm*  
 where Q 3P work  
 ‘Where do they work?’  
 b. *kinn ke* *siinsimm* *ng* *m/ng* *||a'e*  
 3P DECL work MPO house inside  
 ‘They work in the house.’  
 (6) a. *kidya xae* *ku* *g'labi* *||'aa*  
 where Q 3S ride go  
 ‘Where does she ride?’

- b. *ku-a* *g'labi* *||'aa* *kamaku*  
 3S-PS<sup>6</sup> ride go veld  
 ‘She rides into the veld.’  
 (7) a. *kamachya xae* *Petrus* *si* *kha'u*  
 when Q PROP IRR return VE.GAP  
 ‘When will Petrus return?’  
 b. *Petrus* *ke* *si* *'axaika* *kha'u*  
 PROP DECLIRR morning return  
 ‘Petrus will return in the morning.’

As shown in (3) above, even the marked bisected structure with the focus in sentence-initial position can occasionally be used to encode assertive focus. While for question words this is even cross-linguistically a frequent phenomenon, I assume that the initial assertive focus in the answer (3)b is the effect of priming by the corresponding syntax of the preceding question. Nevertheless, naturally produced discourse data reveal that the clause-initial position is generally used for marked contrastive focus. In the context of (8), for example, the blesbok doe refuses to marry brown hyena; as the reason, she merely identifies her own personal will.

- (8) *tya gau* *ke* *ng* *||u* *si* *ku* *kinn-ya* *'n||aa*  
 that thing TF IS NEG IRR NEG lie-? VE.GAP  
 ‘THAT is why I shall not lie down.’  
*na* *ng* *!qui* *n|aa*  
 IS:PS be ashes head  
 ‘I am ash head (= epithet for blesbok doe)!’  
*tya* *ke* *ng* *!'ama* *na* *|aqra*  
 that TF be reason IS:PS refuse  
 ‘THAT is the reason, I refuse.’

The bisected term focus construction has several affinities with identificational and relative clauses and is thus close to a canonical cleft. First, if the fronted element is a valence-external participant, the background clause contains the element *n/||aa* just like relativized adjuncts, as in (7)a and (8). Also, it is possible that the marker *xae* in content questions is from a historical perspective bimorphemic in consisting of a generic question marker *xa* and the singular relative marker *ke*. Finally, the very element setting of the focused constituent from the background clause is identical in shape with the identificational marker *ke*, as shown in (9).

- (9) *||haik* *ke*  
 milk ID  
 ‘it is milk’

Example (10) shows that a focused predicate nominal occurs in an equational clause in the initial position followed by *ke*, which is here functionally ambiguous between an identificational and a mere term focus marker. The sentence is extracted from the same text as (8), uttered by the brown hyena while bullying the blesbok doe who keeps refusing.

- (10) #oo *ke* ng njng  
man TF be IS.STRONG  
'I am a MAN.'

### 2.2 East !Xoon (Taa)

A cleft-like construction is also employed for expressing contrastive focus in the Taa language complex. This will be exemplified first for East !Xoon spoken at the easternmost end of the dialect continuum.

The initial focus is separated from the rest of the clause by a marker *kV*. Its vowel changes in the great majority of cases according to the noun class of the immediately following nominal<sup>7</sup> which is either the subject of the background clause or its possessor the first case of which applies in example (11).

- (11) hàktrí /nǎǎ kǎí gǎǎkx'óe [ǎí]  
'isn't it' hare.1 TF:<1PRO carry:3PRO STAT  
'You see, it's hare carrying it.'  
(Traill in prep.)

While (11) is a bisected construction which targets the subject of the background clause, (12) shows that the focus can also be a non-subject role like an instrument.

- (12) g'qhúu k[e sǎí bá ||'ábe !úm 'ée ǒáa 'ée]  
flywhisk.1 TF:3PRO come IPFV take:3> eland.3 3DEF child.3 3DEF  
'... it's the flywhisk with which he comes fetching Eland's child.'  
(Traill in prep.)

The element *kV* setting off the focus from the extra-focal part of the clause displays a formal relation to the equational copula. Compare in this respect (13) where the initial subject is followed by *kV* which in turn cross-references the final predicate nominal.

- (13) èh té'è n kǎí g'xá'u  
3PRO DEL:<3 ? COP:1> south.wind.1  
'This one is the south wind.'  
(Traill 1994: 87)

Example (14) shows that the copula *kV* itself occurs in a context where it arguably follows an element in focus, namely the negator in an equational negative clause. Since this construction lacks a clause-initial subject, an interpretation in terms of a canonical categorical sentence is not possible and its closest affinity is with the above bisected clause type. It can thus be viewed as a context of *kV* that builds a bridge between its purely equational function and its focusing function.

- (14) //qhúa kè bihi sà bólo  
NEG COP:3> PROP.3  
'It is not Bihisabolo.'  
(Traill in prep.)

While the bisected clause has, at least historically, an affinity to a canonical cleft, it cannot be identified with it. This is because the background clause of the focus construction is not identical with a relative clause. It can be seen in (15) that a relative clause displays an initial *V* which cross-references the relative subject nominal and a final *kV* which cross-references the relative antecedent. Both elements are not found in this form in the bisected focus construction.<sup>8</sup>

- (15) 'ée nàa kòo tá [tháni à  
yes time.3 REL:2> things.2 PST  
qǎa kù tùu tá] ke  
long.ago COP:4> people.4 ? REL:<3  
'Yes, the time when things long ago used to be people.'  
(Traill in prep.)

## 3. Polyfunctional cleft constructions

### 3.1 Strandberg !Xam (!Xam, !Uj)

After outlining the basic function of bisected clause structures in !Uj and Taa, I will try to show on the basis of natural discourse data that this construction is often polyfunctional in the sense that a number of tokens in the available data cannot be analyzed as encoding marked term focus. Crucially for the following argument, this applies exclusively to constituents which would in unmarked sentences be the subject. This finding can be made in all three Tuu varieties for which I dispose of more extensive text material.

The first language for which this will be shown is the !Xam dialect cluster in South Africa which is extinct, but for which we possess an enormous body of transcribed and translated texts recorded in the second half of the 19th century.

In order to outline the more complex bisected clause structure, it is first necessary to understand the template of the basic clause which is given below (ST = sentence type, PO = predication operator, n multiple occurrence):

[SUBJECT - ST - PO<sub>n</sub> - VERB<sub>n</sub> - OBJECT - MPO+ADJUNCT]<sub>n</sub>

Another important fact about |Xam is that it possesses a gender system which is established by two agreement classes. These are indexed by different types of pronominal elements which are presented in Table 1.

	Class 1	Class 2
Independent pronoun	ha(n)	hi(n)
Independent pronoun + declarative	hang	hing
Pronoun as oblique object	aan	iin
Deictic~relative pronoun	ha	he
Focus~relative pronoun	aa	ee

Table 1: Agreement classes and pronouns in |Xam

The bisected construction used for focus on an initial term constituent involves the “focus~relative” pronouns in Table 1, agreeing with the preceding focus constituent - *aa* for class 1 and *ee* for class 2 (they are called “relative”, because they also mark one type of relative clause). In the focus construction, the pronoun is used as a kind of syntactic pivot between the focus and the extrafocal part of the clause. The entire bisected structure is schematized below (ST = sentence type, PO = predication operator, n multiple occurrence, the pronoun pivot is given in bold).

[FOCUS<sub>1,2</sub> - ST - PO<sub>n</sub> - **aa**<sub>1</sub>/**ee**<sub>2</sub> - (SUBJECT) - PO<sub>n</sub> - VERB<sub>n</sub> - OBJECT - MPO+ADJUNCT]<sub>n</sub>

Note the unusual position of the focus pronoun in between the chain of particles referring to sentence type and predication operators. This has a likely historical explanation: *aa*<sub>1</sub>/*ee*<sub>2</sub> presumably are the result of contraction of the equational copula *e* and the deictic~relative pronouns *ha*<sub>1</sub>/*he*<sub>2</sub>, so that the markers occurring between the focused nominal and the focus pronoun can be argued to pertain from a diachronic perspective to the earlier copula clause based on *e*.

As in the Tuu languages discussed in §2, the bisected construction in |Xam is associated with initial content-question words, as in (16), as well as with contrastive contexts, as in (17). This second example involves in fact a double contrast - on the one hand between two parallel agents and on the other hand between two parallel quotes -, and can be characterized as a contrastive topic-focus pair.

- (16) *!ude xa aa n|aa !utau*  
 who.1 Q see Sirius  
 ‘Who saw Sirius?’ (Bleek and Lloyd 1968: 338-9)

- (17) *!Xam ka !ee-kenn ee ta “g|ui !un”*  
 PROP GEN people.2-DECL <2TF QUOT g|ui !un [= go astray]  
*au /huun ee n|e ta “verdwaal”*  
 and white.person.2 <2TF IPFV QUOT verdwaal [= go astray]  
 ‘The |XAM say “G|UI !UN” and the WHITE MAN says “VERDWAAL.”’  
 (Bleek and Lloyd 1968: 382-3)

In both (16) and (17) agents are focused and a subject nominal coreferential with the focus is not repeated in the canonical position before the verb complex in the rest of the clause. When non-subject roles are made salient, as in (18), the out-of-focus clause must contain a subject constituent.

- (18) *hi-ng lu hi au n|ang ka ||khou-||khou*  
 2<sub>x</sub>-DECL put 2<sub>y</sub> MPO house GEN P-hut.stick.2<sub>z</sub>  
*hi-ng ee hi |ji !’ee hi iin*  
 2<sub>x</sub>-DECL <2<sub>x</sub>TF 2<sub>x</sub> take enter 2<sub>y</sub> ?  
 ‘They<sub>x</sub> put them (bones)<sub>y</sub> between the sticks<sub>z</sub> of the hut. THAT<sub>z</sub> is where they<sub>x</sub> put them, in.’ (Bleek and Lloyd 1968: 280-1)

Up to this point, the situation seems to be similar to the one in N|uu and East !Xoon. The following examples will, however, demonstrate that the cleft construction also shows up in discourse environments where a term focus interpretation is excluded. One typical context in this respect is the start of a narrative where the main characters are presented and the setting for the story is provided. Example (19) illustrates this clearly: the “would-be” subjects of all three sentences are highlighted by means of clause bisection (since the pronoun pivot is no longer viewed here as a term focus marker, it is glossed by a question mark).

- (19) *!xoe-n|aa-ss !oo !ee lu ee sing maq’i hi-ng n|aa !’aun*  
 early people.2 PST <2? HAB do.first 2-DECL stay ground  
 ‘The ancient people first inhabited the land.’  
*he ti hing ee !hin ta !aukenn lu ee n|e taqba ||o’ing*  
 therefore 2 GEN children.2 PST <2? IPFV make sun  
 ‘Therefore their children made the Sun.’  
*he ti hing ee !ee ee n|e n|aa hinhin ta !xoe*  
 therefore people.2 <2REL IPFV stay 2EMPH GEN country  
 ‘Therefore the people who [now] inhabit their country,  
*hi-ng ee n|e #akenn ti ee ...*  
 2-DECL <2? IPFV speak COMP  
 they say that...’  
 (Bleek and Lloyd 1968: 54-5)

Another such discourse context is exclamations and utterances of surprise, where all pieces of information are unexpected and equally salient so that it is hard to conceive a focus-background configuration. The available narrative texts display such a pattern first of all in direct reported discourse. The background of example (20) is that the trickster had a group of children cut him up as a dead hartebeest and the girl carrying his head is scared when she realizes that the head is talking to her.

- (20) /k'waa aa ha n|aa kang doq'a #akenn  
 hartebeest.1 <1? <|PRO head ? ABL speak  
 'The hartebeest's head is able to speak!'  
 (Bleek and Lloyd 1968: 6-7)

Finally, bisected constructions without a plausible term focus interpretation are found in clauses which provide explanations, descriptions, and background information for the main story line. Often the relevant clauses are syntactically dependent, with or without a conjunction. Compare in this respect the examples (21), (22), and (23).

- (21) au hang ta ti ee /aukenn n|e ee data ha  
 because children.2 IPFV <2? deceive:? I  
 'So he shines for the whole earth,) because the children deceive  
 him.' (Bleek and Lloyd 1968: 44-5)
- (22) i ss'aa-ng loan taa /khwaa ee u'i  
 IP come-and move as water.2 <2? rise  
 'We moved because the water was gone.'  
 (Bleek and Lloyd 1968: 382-3)
- (23) /xae-n/aa-ss'oo /ee ee g|ui-a  
 early people.2 <2? disappear-STAT  
 soa ka /ee-tern n|e n|ae.n|ae hin ta l'aun  
 plain GEN people.2-DECL IPFV settle 2 GEN ground  
 'After the ancient people have disappeared, the Soa people inhabit their  
 place.' (Bleek and Lloyd 1968: 56-7)

### 3.2 West !Xoon and 'N|oha (Taa)

The situation that the bisected cleft-like construction is polyfunctional in that it encodes besides marked term focus also another function yet to be characterized in more detail also holds for at least some Taa varieties. This will be illustrated by data from West !Xoon in Namibia, which is the westernmost dialect and, with the present state of knowledge, also the most distinct one in the entire cluster.

The grammatical structure of bisected clauses in West !Xoon is overall identical to that of East !Xoon outlined in §2.2; it even comes closer to a canonical cleft in that the copula, the initial relative marker, and the term focus marker do not differ segmentally

in being for most speakers *kV* (there are, however, tonal differences).

An equational clause with copulative *kV* is given in (24), and (25) exemplifies a relative construction with clause-initial and clause-final *kV*.

- (24) a qaqan ke Oqaqe  
 2S still COP:3i> child.3i  
 'You are still a child.'
- (25) n|am k|nna #uuka tuu ka ki|  
 side.1 REL:1S:PERF first lie.S ? MPO:<1 REL:<1  
 'the side on which I have lied the first time'

Parallel to East !Xoon (cf. (14) in §2.2), the negator in an equational copulative clause appears in initial position and is analyzed here as the focused element. As I have proposed above, this is a likely bridging context between the equational and the focusing function of *kV* (the form *tV* in (26) is a sub-dialectal variant).

- (26) //qhoa ti tuu tu n # gaaku ku  
 NEG COP:4> people.4 REL:<4 IS not.know:<4 REL:<4  
 'It is not people who I # don't know.'

The bisected construction with the term focus marker *kV* is found with fronted interrogative items, as in (27) (in-situ questions also exist), and with marked term focus, as the emphatic pronoun in (28).

- (27) n|/ahe haan te k|a si n|ae|  
 house.3i which:<3i TF:2S IPFV see:<3i  
 'Which house do you see?'
- (28) #xam |i # i'i k|u si buru ke ka ki|  
 gemsbok GEN:1 IEMPH TF:4 IPFV decorate MPO:3ii ? MPO:<1  
 'The one (= facial decoration) of a gemsbok. # This is what they decorate  
 her with.'

As in East !Xoon, a final relative marker *kV* is lacking in the focus construction. This can be discerned from a comparison between (28) and (25). The focus sentence in (28) ends in *ka ki*, the last element *ki* being the clause-internal resumptive form of the head noun; the relative clause in (25), however, has *ka ki ki*, i.e. the resumptive *ki* followed by the final relative *ki*.<sup>9</sup>

Example (29) is a first example in which the cleft-like construction is ambiguous in its reading. It can be analyzed as a term focus sentence, contrasting the 1st person with others who could have come first. However, it can also be interpreted as an exclamative outburst of joy in which the predicate 'come first' is not the background against 'I', but rather information which is just as salient as this syntactically prominent

pronoun (the element *kʷ* is glossed again by a question mark).

- (29) *nʷn* *kʷɪnn* *ki* *ʰuuka* *sii*  
 1S.EMPH ?:1S then first come  
 ‘I am first!’ (like after a race)

Another ambiguous case is presented in (30). The syntactically exposed time adverb ‘today’ might be conceived of as being contrasted against previous occasions where the speaker should have killed the treacherous jackal. It is also possible, however, that we are simply confronted with an exclamation which lacks any identificational contrast of ‘today’ against some other day.

- (30) *tsʰee* *kaiki* *kʷɪnn* *si* *qaya* *ka* *ki*  
 day.1 DEI:<1 ?:1S FUT kill:2S ? MPO:<1  
 ‘Today I’ll kill you!’

A similar situation is also found in (31). In principle, it is possible that the speaker had suspected for some time that someone was stealing his crops and now simply identifies the culprits. However, the flow of the story suggests that the theft had not been clear to the speaker before he found unequivocal evidence to this effect and then uttered the sentence in (31). Under this analysis, the cleft-like structure would rather encode an expression of surprise, an ‘all-new-sentence’, for which it would be odd to speak of a contrast between ‘these two guys’ and other potential suspects.

- (31) *tuu* *nʰum* *kauku* *u* *kʷu* *si*  
 people.4 two DEI:<4 4PRO ?:<4 IPFV  
*tsʰaan* *ka* *aansa* *kaanka*  
 steal MPO:2ii> food.2ii DEI:<2ii  
 ‘These two guys, they are stealing these crops here!’

The discourse context for (32) excludes even more clearly a canonical term focus reading for the relevant third sentence. The whole passage is the very beginning of a narrative in which the major participants are introduced and put into a certain relationship. The bisected structure in the third clause which grammatically exposes the noun ‘jackal’ does not invoke an alternative candidate for a secret relation with lion’s wife. It rather posits a state of affairs in which both the event and the participants are equally salient - in other words, there is no topical nominal in spite of the fact that the noun ‘jackal’ has already been activated.

- (32) *tsʰee* *llqhai* *qaqi* *kang* *lii*  
 day.1 certain:<1 PST here stay  
 ‘On a certain day it happened here.’

- gʷoo* *qxʷuu* *tu* *nʷobi* *xam* *qaqi* *lii*  
 jackal.3 and:1> lion.1 PST stay  
 ‘There were jackal and lion.’  
*gʷoo* *qxʷuu* *e* *ʔ[e* *qhoma* *si* *tsʰaan* *ti*  
 jackal.3 <3DEF ?:<3 HS ? have.relation MPO:1>

- xam* *te* *si* *laqnn*  
 lion.1 GEN:3i> woman.3i  
 ‘The jackal had a relation with lion’s wife.’ ...

Finally, (33) gives an example where a bisected clause merely gives an explanatory background information within a procedural text without involving any saliency of ‘people’, or even a contrast between this generic noun and another entity.

- (33) *tuu* *kʷu* *si* *quye*  
 people.4 ?:<4 IPFV dance.initiation:3i  
 ‘The people (women) dance for her the initiation dance.’

For the record, a similar functional ambiguity of clause bisection can also be identified in ‘N|oha, which is the immediate neighbor of West !Xoon just discussed, but which is overall more closely related to East !Xoon treated in §2.2. This indicates that even East !Xoon might recruit the cleft-like construction for more than just term focus; the little textual data I have at my disposal for this variety cannot show this clearly. The following ‘N|oha examples show a relatively straightforward term focus use in (34), an ambiguous context in (35) (either a focus on the large amount of gum or an ‘all-new’ exclamation), and a kind of background description in (36) for which I consider a contrastive focus reading to be unlikely.

- (34) *aʷa* *kʷa* *ɲɪnn* *se* *ba* *ʰann* *sa* *lhuun* *gʷlaqi*  
 2S.EMPH TF:<2S maybe IPFV want:2> Boer.2 woman  
 ‘Maybe, it’s you who wants the Boer woman?’

- (35) *qaan* *ʔaxaan* *kʷa* *kʰama* *ʰhabi* *tshuu*  
 gum.2 big:<2 ?:<2 DEI:<2 sit.on.top sit  
 ‘There is a lot of gum on it.’

- (36) (...) *e* *kʰae* *llʰaa* *kʷe* *tshuu*  
 3 DEI:<3 just ?:<3 sit

‘(Jackal looks, and off he jumps, and runs away.) Just this one (wolf) sits (there).’

#### 4. Cleft constructions and entity-central theticity

##### 4.1 Thetic vs. categorial statements

In the previous sections I have assembled data from several Tuu languages showing that a cleft-like construction is functionally versatile: on the one hand it expresses contrastive term focus and on the other hand it occurs in contexts with syntactically exposed "would-be" subjects which are not compatible with such a characterization.

In the following, I will argue that this phenomenon can be associated with cross-linguistic data that has been discussed extensively by Sasse (1987). The aim of that paper was to establish a basic discourse-pragmatic distinction between two types of statement, that is, languages regularly display

... a fundamental difference between utterances which are logically analyzed into two successive mutually related judgements, one naming an individual and one naming an event (categorial statements), and utterances in which the logical relations between various parts of the communicated state of affairs remain unanalyzed (thetic statements). (ibid.: 554)

The author further characterizes the opposition as follows:

The thetic statement forms a unit with respect to what it contributes to the discourse at a given point. It expresses a pragmatically unanalyzed state of affairs and presents it as a piece of complex information. ... Thetic statements are thus uttered at those points of the discourse when compact information is required. This is not the case with the categorial statement. It presents a state of affairs as something analyzed, dissected into different information units. It selects one of the participants of the state of affairs in order to present it as a predication base and arranges the rest in such a way that it forms the predication about the selected predication base. We thus utter categorial statements at those points of the discourse when information is built up in successive bits. (ibid.: 558)

While Sasse is explicit about not tying his thetic-categorial distinction directly to different configurations of information structure, I would argue that an unmarked "categorial statement" can be conceived of in terms of a sentence-internal focus-background configuration, namely a subject-topic vs. an assertive focus which can be a predicate, a predicate + non-subject terms, or just a non-subject term. Under this analysis, a marked "thetic statement" neutralizes this very constellation, in line with Sasse's idea of a compact information unit. Hence, I view a thetic statement as a grammatical device to CANCEL a sentence-internal information structure that is induced by the morphosyntax of an unmarked sentence. That is, the relevant grammatical structure indicates to the hearer that the individual pieces of information

in the sentence are not to be analyzed in terms of foreground vs. background, salient vs. not salient, etc.

Therefore, I do not follow Lambrecht's (1987, 1994) treatment of thetic sentences as "sentence focus" and concur with Sasse (1987) who writes:

Many authors dealing with thetic structures in various languages have speculated that these structures might be interpreted as representing instances of focus on the entire utterance ... Of ... importance is the question of how focus can be defined in relation to its opposite 'nonfocus' if thetic utterances are to be included. Traditionally focus is conceived of as a member of a notional pair, the second member being the background against which the focus stands out as a figure ('gestalt'); some call it 'presupposition' as we did above, others 'given/old information' or 'less information value', etc. The common element in all these characterizations is a conception of focus as an information peak. One cannot speak of a peak, though, if there is no valley; otherwise the 'up hill and down dale' concept of the traditional notion of focus would be reduced to vacuity: given the lack of a contour, a concept of 'entire statement focus' is as good or bad as no focus at all. (ibid.: 572-3)

When reserving the grammatical notion of focus for configurations of information within sentences, a thetic structure would be neutral to focus. In other words, thetic sentences are compact figures which can be variably manipulated with respect to other sentences, or more general, on the higher organizational level of the text. They can be salient against the rest of the discourse, e.g., as 'all-new' sentences, but they can also be used as the background against other sentences of the context.<sup>10</sup>

The versatility of thetic sentences regarding salience relations in texts can also be discerned from the list of their typical contexts, as given by Sasse (1987) and repeated in Figure 3. It shows that some of the functions of thetic sentences are almost opposites of each other when viewed on the level of discourse, e.g., "surprising or unexpected event" vs. "background description".

1. EXISTENTIAL STATEMENTS (in a wider sense; presence, appearance, continuation, etc., positively and negatively)
2. EXPLANATIONS (with or without preceding questions such as 'what happened?', 'why did it happen?', etc.)
3. SURPRISING OR UNEXPECTED EVENTS
4. GENERAL STATEMENTS (aphorisms, etc.)
5. BACKGROUND DESCRIPTIONS (local, temporal, etc., setting)
6. WEATHER EXPRESSIONS
7. STATEMENTS RELATING TO BODY PARTS

Figure 4: *Diagnostic contexts for thetic statements (Sasse 1987: 566-7)*

With respect to the present topic, the list reveals that the cleft-like structures in Tuu languages which cannot be satisfactorily analyzed as marking contrastive term focus turn out to be functionally largely parallel tothetic sentences. I have identified in §3 three basic functions, (a) exclamations and utterances of surprise, (b) presentation of entities and setting at the beginning of narratives, and (c) background information for the main storyline. They all show up in Sasse's list in Figure 3 so that I propose to view these expressions as instances ofthetic sentences.

Furthermore, Sasse (1987) makes a distinction between two types oftheticity:

As a terminological prerequisite we will introduce the distinction between entity-central and event-central thetic expressions. Both share the property of 'positing' something ..., but they differ crucially as to what is posited: an entity-central thetic statement is a type of utterance stating the existence of an entity, while an event-central thetic statement is one which states the existence of an event. (ibid.: 526)

Applying this opposition to the above cleft-like constructions, which revolve in grammatical and pragmatic terms around a term constituent with a subject role, it is clear that they belong to the first type of "entity-central thetic expressions". In other words, the split structures in the relevant Tuu languages are polyfunctional in that they serve to encode contrastive term focus as well as entity-central theticity.

#### 4.2 Entity-central theticity and split sentence structure

The situation just established for Tuu languages is by no means a family-specific idiosyncrasy, but merely a variant of a universal theme. Sasse (1987) himself discusses the possible structural parallelism between term focus and entity-central theticity by way of a number of typological precedents. Below I repeat examples for this phenomenon from familiar European languages, involving three different grammatical strategies which are associated with pragmatic prominence of the "would-be" subject on the one hand and, as illustrated below, with thetic utterances on the other hand, namely subject accentuation in English (37), subject inversion in Italian (38), and subject-oriented split sentence structure in French (39).

(37) My *SISter* died. (Sasse 1987: 520)

(38) E bruciata la torta  
is burnt the pastry  
'The pastry's burnt!'  
(Sasse 1987: 532)

(39) Qu'est-ce qu'il y a? - C'est maman qui me bat.  
What's the matter? - Mum's hitting me. (Sasse 1987: 538)

If one and the same construction is used for two quite different functions, the question arises as to how this phenomenon can arise. In other words, what is the common denominator of constructions suitable for contrastive term focus as well as theticity. If one considers the above three strategies, they have in common that prosodic or syntactic devices expose, and thus make prominent, a constituent which in the default case is inherently topical - the subject. That is, they break up the usual relation between a subject and a predicate. That this effect is directly relevant for marked focus on a subject role will be intuitively clear. However, this mechanism is equally effective for thetic statements. Regarding cleft-like structures in particular Sasse puts this as follows:

[Split structures] disrupt the direct connection of the entity and the event by first introducing the entity by an existential or copular clause and then, quasi appositionally, making a statement about it. This 'making a statement about', however, differs radically from the normal theme-rheme or topic-comment structure. The assertion of the event is subordinated pragmatically, semantically, and syntactically to the existential expression. Though syntactically predicative in character, ..., it is not a main predication but rather a predication of the type found in a dependent clause: a predication without illocutive force. (ibid.: 542)

To the extent that a morphosyntactically unmarked sentence in a language instantiates mostly a pragmatically unmarked categorical statement with focus on the predicate and/or a non-subject term, a split structure can achieve at least two things. First, it disrupts the canonical syntactic subject-predicate relation which is associated with the topic-comment configuration of categorical statements. Second, it cancels the assertivity of the predicate as the central expression of the state-of-affairs. That is, the grammatical properties of a split sentence structure are just as suitable for encoding theticity as they are for increasing the pragmatic salience of a term constituent. It is usually the semantic role of a given nominal and the discourse context, in particular the constituent's activation state, which disambiguates whether its syntactic exposure serves to genuinely emphasize it - as in marked term focus - or to merely pragmatically "down-grade" predicates and/or non-subjects as the default foci - as in a thetic statement.

#### 4.3 A further development of entity-central thetic statements?

I have briefly pointed out in §2.1 that N|uu displays a segmental isomorphism between marked cleft-like sentences with clause-initial contrastive term focus on the one hand and apparently less marked sentences with assertive verb-phrase and/or non-subject focus on the other hand.<sup>11</sup> Compare again the following pair of examples.

- (40) *tyu xae n#uum ng ku-a ng ke ng ka*  
 who Q ? thus say-? IS TF thus say  
 ‘Who says so?’
- (41) *g!ain ke xa #xoa n!a ng # ng ke !auka*  
 hyena DECL PST speak COM IS IS DECL afraid:STAT  
 ‘Brown hyena has spoken with me. # I am afraid.’

In (40) the agent is salient and set off from the rest of the clause by the respective sentence type marker, in the initial question *tyu* ‘who’ by means of *xae* and in the following answer *ng* ‘I’ by means of *ke*. As opposed to this, the second sentence in (41) is declarative with an initial topical pronoun *ng* ‘I’ and an assertively focused intransitive predicate; here *ke* has been analyzed as a declarative marker after the subject-topic. These examples show in particular that a focalized subject role cannot be distinguished from all topical subjects, because in both cases a noun occurs at the beginning of the clause and is followed by *ke*, which accordingly turns out to be polyfunctional.

In equational clauses the ambiguity regarding the pragmatic status of the nominal before *ke* is even greater, as shown in (42) and (43).

- (42) *gau /xii ke ng gla*  
 thing strange TF COP 2S  
 ‘You are a STRANGE THING!’
- (43) *ng ke ng lui n!aa*  
 IS DECL COP ash head  
 ‘I am ASH HEAD (epithet for blesbok).’

Equational sentences have two nominals which refer to the same entity and both occur in positions which potentially can contain a focus constituent. What is topic and what is focus becomes clear first of all through the discourse context, potentially accompanied by a different intrinsic referential status of a certain class of nominals; here, a personal pronoun is more likely a topic than a noun. That is, in (42) the predicate nominal is in initial focus position while in (43) it is located in-situ after the initial subject *ng*, the marker *ke*, and the equational copula *ng*. The positional “flip-flop” between focus and topic in the above sentence pair appears to arise from a peculiarity of the predicate involved. All verbs with an obligatory non-subject participant would, under focalization of this term, have a canonical subject but display a gap in the usual place of the postverbal argument, as in (3) in §2.1 above. The equational copula *ng*, however, is not a canonical transitive verb: as soon as the predicate nominal is contrastively focused, it requires the predication base aka subject to follow it, as in (42). This is why one doesn’t see any overt evidence for the presence of a cleft-like sentence and for the analysis of *ke* as a term focus marker.

For the other use of *ke* in the non-focus context, it is important to take the area

and genealogical context of N|uu into account. First, languages of the geographically close Khoekhoe branch of Khoe, an unrelated language family, possess a formally and functionally similar element *k(p)e* in clause-second position. In North Khoekhoe varieties like Nama it is generally analyzed as a declarative marker, but it follows, like in N|uu, both initial subjects and constituents focalized in clause-initial position (Hagman 1977).<sup>12</sup> Second, |Xam, the closest relative of N|uu, displays an element *kenn*, a likely cognate of *ke*, which is not attested in focus constructions; hence its preliminary analysis as a declarative marker (Güldemann forthcoming, cf. examples in §3.1 above). This is the background for my parallel declarative analysis of non-focus *ke* in N|uu.

Although the marker *ke* in N|uu is functionally ambiguous, it occurs in both contexts after an initial nominal and can thus be said to have the same syntactic distribution. This suggests that the two *ke*-constructions are historically related. Before this language-internal background and the comparative context sketched above, my historical hypothesis is that the identity of the two *ke*’s in N|uu is the result of a development from an original focus function to another non-focus function. The crucial problem in this respect is a more precise characterization of the latter.

One possibility which has not yet been investigated systematically is that the non-focus use of *ke* is not so different from the constructions in other Tuu languages which I have identified above as entity-centralthetic sentences. In this case, N|uu would turn out to repeat a pattern already attested in the family in using one and the same construction with clause-second *ke* for marking term focus and theticity.

The other possibility is that non-focus *ke* is indeed a declarative marker, or at least on the threshold of becoming one. But what would be the mechanism of the implied change from an entity-centralthetic sentence of the cleft-type to a plain declarative sentence? Sasse (1987) entertains in this connection the idea that a categorical interpretation is generally preferred as soon as a sentence contains an expression of an entity as well as one of an event related to the respective referent:

When an event, part of which is an entity, is stated, the problem arises that the entity is a possible candidate for a predication base, and the event is a possible candidate for a predicate. This problem is due to the fact that if a linguistic expression denoting an event and a linguistic expression denoting an entity are combined in a sentence, the most normal reading is that the relation between the two is a [categorically] predicative one. (ibid.: 560)

The potential reinterpretation of an entity-centralthetic statement as a categorical statement is especially suggestive for a split sentence of the type discussed here, as soon as it is the subject role which is exposed in the clause-initial position. The two sentence types can be schematized as follows (syntactically identical positions are aligned):

(I) Categorical sentence:

I

[SUBJECT TOPIC - PREDICATE - ...]

(II) Thetic sentence:

I

[SUBJECT ROLE FOCUS - *ke* - [(GAP) - PREDICATE - ...]]

While the syntactic structure of the two sentence types is quite distinct, the differences on the surface are minimal, because the subject-oriented cleft in (II) has a gap in the subject position of the background clause. The different pragmatic configurations aside, the only overt difference of (II) vis-à-vis (I) is the marker *ke* between the subject role constituent and the predicate. However, the pattern in (II), just like (I), displays this nominal BEFORE the predicate and thus invites its interpretation as the predication base. I therefore assume that the *ke*-construction in N|uu also was (or still is) polyfunctional in expressing both contrastive term focus and entity-central theticity. In the course of time, the thetic function can become lost in sentences with exposed “would-be” subjects, so that the salient subject role constituent is reinterpreted as a real subject-topic. Such a process might well be triggered by an overuse of the thetic structure whereby its pragmatic markedness is likely to decrease. Its final result would be the full reanalysis of a subject-central thetic statement as a normal categorical statement.

### Abbreviations

ABL	ability	NEG	negation
COM	comitative	P	plural
COMP	complementizer	PERF	perfect
COP	copula(tive)	PRO	pronoun
DECL	declarative	PROP	proper name
DEF	definite	PS	pronoun suffix
DEI	deictic	PST	past
EMPH	emphatic	Q	question
FUT	future	QUOT	quotative
GEN	genitive	REL	relative
HAB	habitual	S	singular
HS	hearsay	STAT	stative
ID	identification	TF	term focus
IPFV	imperfective	VE.GAP	valence-external gap
IRR	irrealis		
MPO	multipurpose oblique		

Arabic numerals indicate agreement classes or, if immediately followed by S or P, person categories. Agreement will in addition be indicated by the arrows < or >, according to whether the trigger occurs before or after the target, respectively.

Elements relevant for the discussion are highlighted by means of italics. If no source is given, the data come from my own field work. All examples from Tuu languages are given in a practically oriented orthography, except for East !Xoon, where I maintain Traill’s transcription. The most important principle of this orthography which is phonologically not apparent is the representation of suprasegmental vowel features by means of non-diacritic symbols after the respective vowel; these are ˘ for glottalization, q for pharyngealization, h for breathiness, and n for nasalization. Double nn is used to distinguish a final alveolar nasal from vowel nasalization.

### Notes

1. The paper was presented previously at the International Conference “Focus in African Languages”, Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft (ZAS) Berlin (07/10/2005); at the “Work in Progress” Series, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology (MPI-EVA) Leipzig (07/02/2006); at the “Deutscher Afrikanistentag 2006”, Universität München (13/02/2006); at the Faculdade de Letras, Universidade Classica de Lisboa (26/06/2006); and at the joint “Annual conference of the Linguistic Society of Southern Africa (LSSA) and the Southern African Applied Linguistics Association (SAALA)”, University of KwaZulu-Natal (07/07/2006). The notation of examples is explained above under “Abbreviations”.
2. This should not be confused with “South African Khoisan” which comprises all non-Bantu click languages of southern Africa. See Güldemann (2005) for the term “Tuu” used here.
3. The field work on West !Xoon and N|ohla is carried out together with G. Boden, R. Kießling, and C. Naumann, within the DOBES project “Documentation of Western !Xoon” funded by the VW-Stiftung. Thanks are due to both my colleagues and this funding institution.
4. DC = dialect cluster, † = extinct
5. Note that the subject in (4)b occurs in its normal clause-initial position followed by the declarative marker *ke* which is according to the available information identical in form with the term focus marker *ke*. The possible historical relation between these two elements will be discussed in more detail in §4.3.
6. Subject pronouns can occur with a suffix *-a* which is in complementary distribution with the declarative marker *ke*. Since its function is not yet clear, I gloss the element neutrally as “pronoun suffix”.
7. Because of this segmental sandhi, I indicate the background clause with square brackets.
8. Note, however, that pseudo-cleft sentences based on the final identificational marker *inà* do recruit a fully-grown relative clause as the background part (see Traill (1994: 87) for an example).
9. The other shared element *ka* does not have a gloss, because its exact function is not yet clear. Roughly speaking, it separates in relative clauses an MPO marker cum

- pronoun referring to a non-argument from preceding material of the narrow verb phrase.
10. Cf. Güldemann (1996, chapter 4.4, especially pp. 215–25) regarding relevant phenomena in several Bantu languages.
11. While Tuu languages generally have distinctive tone, the suprasegmental structure of N|uu has not yet been researched. The currently available information does not indicate that tone serves to disambiguate the two structures at issue. Moreover, the language is close to extinction and the remnant speakers show signs of reduced competence. It is thus uncertain whether more research in the future will conclusively show whether prosodic devices are or in the past were relevant to distinguish these two clause types.
12. See Güldemann (2006: 119–22) for an account of Khoekhoe *k(y)le* in terms of substrate interference from indigenous Tuu languages.

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