

**HEAD-INTERNAL CLEFTS IN (SOUTH) EAST ASIAN:
A CROSS-LINGUISTIC COMPARISON OF BURMESE, JAPANESE AND CHINESE**

The talk discusses cleft constructions in the (South) East Asian languages Burmese, Japanese, and Chinese. The three languages form clefts by means of a nominalizing morpheme that follows the V or the VP of the main clause. The main function of the induced relative-like structure is that of backgrounding. We show that Japanese and Burmese exhibit – apart from genuine (inverse) clefts – a peculiar cleft construction in which the focus is contained INSIDE the relativized background part. The existence of such *head-internal clefts (HIC)*, which are analogous to head-internal relative clauses, contradicts the claim that clefts must involve an overt focus-background partition. Chinese *shi...de*-clefts, though superficially similar to the Burmese/Japanese clefts DO involve a focus-background partition in that only left-peripheral material in the complement of the copula *shi* can be focused. The paper provides an analysis of the structural and interpretational differences between the two groups of languages.

Both JAPANESE AND BURMESE have inverse clefts, where the focus is separated from a backgrounded relative structure that is headed by a nominalizer *no/ta*:

- (J1) [Boku ga kon'yaku shi-ta]_{BG} **no** wa [Hanako]_F da.
I NOM engage do-ADN NLS TOP Hanako COP
'Who I got engaged to was Hanako.' (Schaffar 2003)
- (B1) [pyin_txi'hin: che']_{BG} **ta_** (ha_) [maun_maun_]_F^pa_ (cf. Schaffar 2007)
French.dish cook NLS TOP Maung Maung POLITE
'Who cooked the French dishes was Maung Maung.'

The inverse clefts receive an analysis as right-headed identificational copula clauses with inversion of the topicalized predicate NP:

- (S1) [[_{CP} Op_x ...pro_x ...] –no/ta]_I wa/(ha) [_{NP} FOCUS_x] t₁ COP

In addition, both languages have a focus structure without overt partition: The focus constituent is contained within the background of the utterance, which is again indicated by the nominalizer. In spite of the difference in overt syntax, (J2) can be used in the same contexts as (J1), where it is infelicitous without the nominalizer.

- (J2) [Boku wa [Hanako]_F to kon'yaku shi-ta]_{BG} **no** da.
I TOP Hanako with engage do-ADN NLS COP
'It was Yumiko that I got engaged to.' (Schaffar 2007)
- (B2) [[ahkãñ-h̀tè-hma-kou]_F htaiñ-nei]_{BG} **-ta_**.
room-inside-at-PRT sit-ASP -NLS
'It was actually inside the room that (she) was sitting.' (not outside) (Okell 1969: 426)

Based on this semantic identity and the obligatory presence of the nominalizer with narrow focus, we propose that (J2/B2) constitute the head-internal counterparts of the overt clefts in (J1/B1), as in (S2). For semantic reasons, the focus moves out of the background at LF:

- (S2) [[_{CP} Op_x ...FOCUS_x ...] –no/ta] COP _{LF}⇒ FOCUS_x [[_{CP} Op_x ...t_x ...] –no/ta] COP

CHINESE *shi ... de*-clefts are superficially similar to the head-internal construction in Japanese and Burmese. The nominalizer *de* follows V or VP, and the focus is located between the focus operator/copula *shi* and *de* together with background material (see previous analyses by Chiu 1993, Simpson and Wu 2002, Paul and Whitman 2007)

- (C1) Ta **shi** [[[zai Beijing]_F xue yuyanxue] **de**],
s/he COP at Beijing study linguistics DE
'It was in Beijing that s/he studied linguistics.' (cf. Paul and Whitman 2007)

Closer inspection shows an interpretive difference between *shi...de*-clefts and HICs in Burmese/Japanese: In Japanese and Burmese, any subconstituent of the nominalized constituent, including the object, can be focused, whereas the focus possibilities in Chinese are restricted to narrow focus on the leftmost element inside the *shi...de*-bracket, i.e. to adjuncts (C1) or subjects (C2).

(C2) **shi** [[[ta jiejie]_F kai men] **de**]
 COP his/her elder.sister open door DE
 ‘It was her elder sister who opened the door.’

Narrow focus on the direct object, or wide focus, is impossible with (C1/C2), not even in the presence of prosodic cues. In fact, focus prominence on the object leads to a presupposition failure. This is different from what we find with cases of free association of the bare operator *shi* with focus (and no *de*), where potential focus ambiguities ARE prosodically resolved (C3).

(C3) Ta **shi** zai Beijing xue [yuyanxue]_F
 3SG be at Beijing learn linguistics
 ‘It was linguistics that she studied in Beijing.’

The insensitivity to prosody in (C1/C2) suggests that focus resolution is subject to a structural locality condition. We propose that the focus operator *shi* in *shi...de*-clefts can only associate with material in the left-periphery of the CP(-phase), which is headed by the nominalizer *de* (S3). The locality hypothesis receives support from the fact that bare *shi* can only associate with the subject (or the CP) when it adjoins to the CP in pre-subject position (C4).

(S3) ... shi [[CP [XP]_F ...]-de]

(C4) **Shi** [CP [Akiu]_F he-le hongjiu].
 COP Akiu drink-ASP red.wine
 ‘It was Akiu who drank red wine

The possibility of CP-focus (not shown) in (C4), unlike in (C1/C2), follows from the fact that the CP following *shi* is not background-marked by the nominalizer *de*. This allows for an alternative account of the leftness condition with *shi...de*-clefts: The nominalizer *de* is a background marker that attaches to a verbal projection (Chiu 1991) and marks anything dominated by the extended VP as background. If subjects and left-peripheral adjuncts are located outside the extended VP, the restriction of focus on these constituents will follow.

Either way, Chinese *shi...de*-clefts differ from HICs in Japanese/Burmese in that (i.) the placement of focus inside the nominalized background is not free (locality constraint), or that (ii.) there is a partition between a left-peripheral focus and the *de*-marked background. Thus, even though nominalized cleft-structures exhibit no clear surface partition into focus and background both in Burmese/Japanese and in Chinese, they differ in structure and interpretational possibilities. The talk concludes with some remarks on the historical origin of the cleft-marking nominalizers and the grammaticalization cycle in Japanese.

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