

## Focus on Clefts: A Perspective from Cypriot Greek

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**Abstract:** Cypriot Greek (CG) differs from Standard Modern Greek (SMG) in many interesting ways, even in the realm of grammar (morphosyntax). This paper investigates one such difference, namely the syntax of focus. It is argued that CG focus constructions exhibit an underlying clefting structure. This is put into perspective with both SMG (which lacks clefts altogether) and English (in particular, *it*-clefts). A novel analysis is proposed for the derivation of clefting structures — at least for English-like *it*-clefts and CG focus clefts: CG focused expressions are sideward moved into an underlying predicational cleft structure, analogously to English *it*-clefts as argued.

**Keywords:** clefting, focus, (Cypriot) Greek, predication, sideward movement

### 1. Introducing Focus

This paper deals with focus systems in grammar at large. On the basis of a discussion of the properties of the expression of focus in two closely related varieties of Greek — Standard Modern Greek (SMG) and Cypriot Greek (CG) — coupled with a comparison to English, I will offer some preliminary remarks on the focus system from a general, biolinguistic perspective. More narrowly, I will offer a novel analysis of cleft structures, first applied to basic English *it*-clefts, then extended to focus clefts in CG, and (at least, in principle) further adapted to *wh*-questions and more general predication structures.

In general, I suggest, languages express focus syntactically in three possible ways:

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| A. focus in situ  | [What did John read? – “He read the BOOK.”]            |
| B. focus movement | [What did John read? – “The BOOK he read.”]            |
| C. focus clefting | [What did John read? – “It is the BOOK that he read.”] |

As a narrow goal, I suggest that CG uses strategies A and C, while SMG employs A and B (Grohmann et al. 2006, in many ways the foundation of this paper). A more ambitious interpretation of the approach advanced, the more “general, biolinguistic perspective”, is that languages employ at most two of these three strategies (Grohmann, in press).

Section 2 briefly introduces the syntactic expression of focus in Greek, presenting the basic differences between CG and SMG; for the former variety, a clefting strategy is proposed. In section 3 I discuss the structure of clefts in general, also paying attention to a typical English-type *it*-cleft, and I sketch a novel approach, extended in section 4, that links the site of the clefted constituent to its purported site of origin derivationally. Section 5 then applies the approach to CG focus clefts in particular and addresses some of the issues identified earlier. In addition, I will say something about the following structure, which looks like “movement within the cleft” (cf. Gryllia & Lekakou 2006, but also Fotiou, in press). Section 6 concludes briefly with further outlooks of this work.

- (1) # O Xambis en pu efie.  
the.NOM Hambis.NOM is that left.3SG  
'It is Hambis that left.'

## 2. Focus in Greek

Both CG and SMG may mark focus *in situ*, that is, by not applying any transformational operations, as in (2), where the focussed constituent is capitalized.

- (2) Idha ton JANNI.  
saw.1SG the.ACC John.ACC  
'I saw JOHN.'

The interesting difference between the two varieties, however, concerns a syntactic focalization process. If the rough typology of syntactic focus-marking above is correct, this means that out of the three types A, B, and C, CG and SMG both employ Type A ('focus in situ') — and each variety makes use of one more. The basic Greek data, both CG and SMG, discussed in this contribution and the general analysis provided here come from Grohmann et al. (2006), unless noted otherwise, but new considerations brought up by Gryllia & Lekakou (2006), Agouraki (2007), and Fotiou (in press) will lead me to draw a possibly more far-reaching conclusion (see also Grohmann, in press).

As it turns out, SMG syntactically marks focus structures by simply moving the focussed constituent into the left periphery — Type B ('focus movement'). This kind of structure is illicit in CG, as indicated in brackets below (3b). CG, the main focus of this paper, syntactically marks a focused constituent by embedding it in a more complex structure, one that suspiciously looks like a cleft structure; this would be Type C ('focus clefting') and is illustrated in (3a), completely ungrammatical in SMG.

- (3a) En to JANNI pu idha. (3b) To JANNI idha.  
*is.3SG the John.ACC that saw.1SG* *the John.ACC saw.1SG*  
*lit. 'It is John that I saw.'* *lit. 'JOHN I saw.'*  
[√CG / \*SMG] [\*CG / √SMG]

The narrow goal of this paper can thus be summarized as in the following table:

Focusing strategy	CG	SMG
Type A 'focus in situ'	√	√
Type B 'focus movement'	*	√
Type C 'focus clefting'	√	*

Table 1: Focusing strategies in Greek

As Grohmann et al. (2006) remark further, this difference in focus-marking extends to other grammatical phenomena in which "focus at large" plays a role; for example, in *wh*-questions, which, to keep it light, serve the function of seeking new information and subsequently put the *wh*-phrase in focus. Aside from the *wh*-in situ strategy, which will not be discussed here, the same two types of strategies from above can be found — CG involves a copula-like element that seems to contain a complementizer (*embu*, here not discussed at all), which is completely out in SMG, while SMG employs regular *wh*-movement (which is also possible, to some extent, in CG, as indicated by '?√').

- (4a) Pjon/Pcon embu idhes? (4b) Pjon/Pcon idhes?  
*who.ACC is-that saw.2SG* *who.ACC saw.2SG*  
*lit. 'Who is it that you saw?'* *'Who did you see?'*  
[√CG / \*SMG] [?'√CG / √SMG]

The assumption that the strategy in CG called clefting here is indeed a *bona fide* cleft can be supported with the following data. The purported cleft that hosts the focussed phrase can be tense-modified (present/past, (5a)) and contain any syntactic constituent, even a non-argument (as the adjunct, (5b)).

- (5a) En/Itan o Xambis pu efie.  
is/was the.NOM Hambis.NOM that left.3SG  
'It is Hambis that left.'
- (5b) En epses pu idha ton Xambin.  
is.3SG last-night that saw.1SG the.ACC Hambis.ACC  
'It is last night that I saw Hambis.'

Having established that CG and SMG differ in their focusing strategies and that CG, but not SMG, exhibits clefting in its grammatical repertoire, I will now turn to the status of cleft constructions in the theory and a novel (if perhaps somewhat leftfield) analysis that derives the structure of clefts advocated here and in related work, namely, Grohmann et al. (2006), which concentrated on *wh*-strategies in CG and first advocated a structural take on clefts along the lines worked out here — though slightly revised in Tsipplakou et al. (2007) — and other works mentioned in passing below.

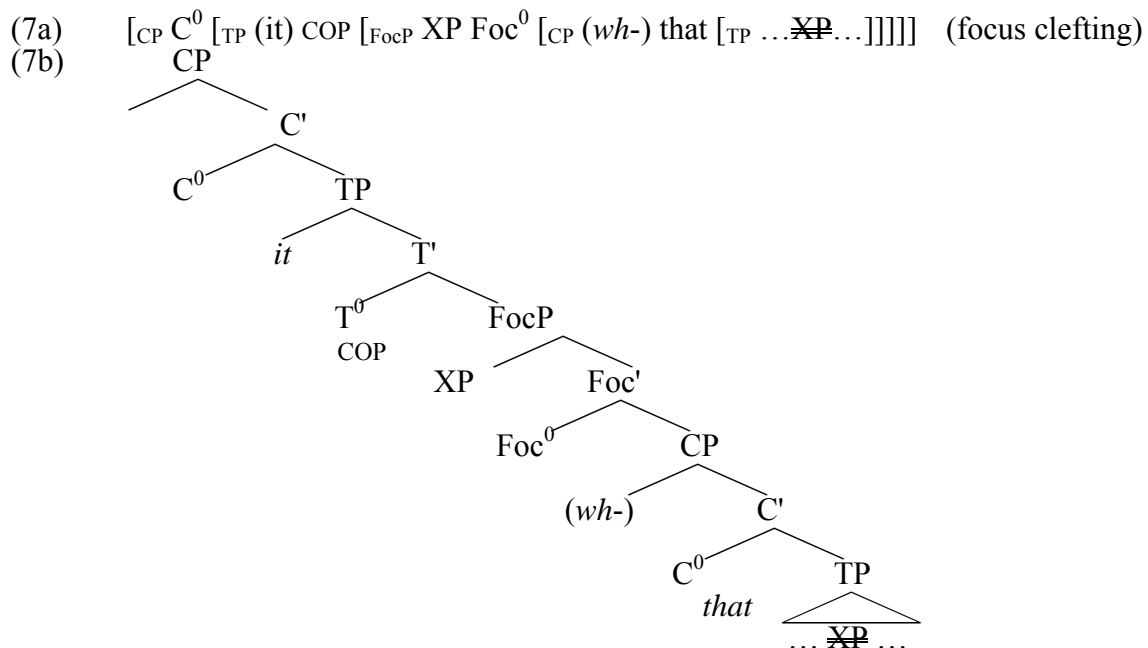
### 3. Clefting in Focus

The structural properties of cleft constructions have been discussed widely in generative work for decades (at least since Akmajian 1970, Higgins 1973, and Emonds 1976), and many types of cleft structures have been proposed for English and beyond, such as *it*-clefts, *there*-clefts, *th*-clefts, pseudo-clefts, etc. A sub-set relevant for the ensuing discussion are the three *it*-cleft variants listed under (6):

- |      |                        |                                |              |
|------|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| (6a) | It was John that LEFT. | <i>comment-clause it-cleft</i> | (Gerbl 2007) |
| (6b) | It was JOHN that left. | <i>topic-clause it-cleft</i>   |              |
| (6c) | Who was it that left?  | <i>wh-it-cleft question</i>    |              |

Nevertheless, I would like to argue that from a modern syntactic perspective — in particular, the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995 *et seq.*) — the very basic *it*-cleft construction has not received a satisfactory structural analysis (see also Kiss 1998: 257). I call it “very basic” since the *it*-cleft occurs frequently and the structural descriptive pattern is simple enough: “it COP XP that [<sub>IP</sub> ... (XP) ...]”. But *it*-clefts are also “very basic” in the sense that they are often employed in introductory syntax classes to illustrate the role of constituency in structure: only a constituent can be transformed in some way to be part of the copular *it*-cleft. This raises the next question, however — what this “transformation” would look like. And here basic decisions will have to be taken (which, to my knowledge, have not yet been adequately addressed, even in the context of those introductory syntax classes), such as whether the “it COP XP”-part and the main clause form a mono- or a biclausal structure, whether XP moves or is deleted under full interpretation, and so on. One aspect of the proposal unfolding next is to assign a particular “structuralization” of the syntactic players involved in clefts and develop a novel (and hopefully, at least partly, sane) derivation of the construction.

To start the discussion, let us consider a common, perhaps even “standard”, syntactic representation of *it*-clefts. It is given below as both a bracketed structure (7a) and a tree representation (7b), adopted from Kiss (1998: 258), which represents a biclausal take on clefts, where the cleft copula embeds a lower clause including the focus-clefted XP.



This approach is biclausal in that there are fundamentally two clauses involved, the higher CP clause and the lower one, which is embedded underneath the copula. The clefted constituent is understood as focus-moved into SpecFocP, the canonical landing site for focus movement. (Refinements of this approach assume the cleft clause to be a (relative clause-like) predicate and the clefted constituent to be the subject, and both together a small-clause CP (Browning 1987), an extension I will not consider here any further.)

This, in fact, is one of the problems with this approach. If clefting involves focus movement “as usual”, why then do languages differ with respect to the above described Types A and B? While SMG, for example, allows focus movement (presumably along the lines of (8)), CG does not; but it does allow, unlike SMG, focus clefting, of which focus movement would be a subset operation if (7) was correct.

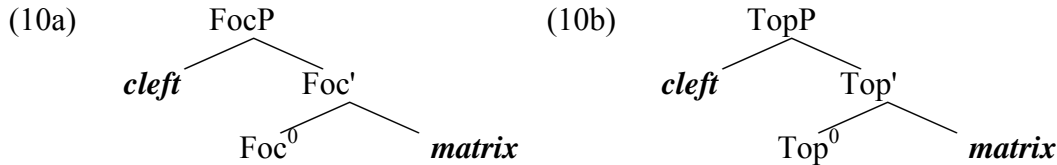
- (8a)  $[_{FocP} XP Foc^0 [_{CP} (wh-) that [_{TP} \dots \cancel{XP} \dots]]]$  (focus movement)
- (8b)  $[_{FocP} to JANNI Foc^0 [_{CP} Spec C^0 [_{TP} pro idha \dots \cancel{to JANNI} \dots]]]$  (= (3b))

Rather, I would like to propose an analysis of clefts that yields Type C of the three-way focus distinction as a strategy distinct from both Type A (in situ, without additional operations) and Type B (movement into a focus position, possibly as in (8)). Thus, three grammatical operations derive the three grammatical strategies.

Let me turn to terminology first and, by so doing, introduce the basic structure to be advanced here. I assume clefts to consist of two basic parts, the “(it) COP XP”-part (henceforth, *cleft*) and the main clause (henceforth, *matrix*). The latter is traditionally known as “cleft clause”, but my choice of terminology will become apparent presently. What I call the cleft is usually considered to consist of up to three elements: the cleft pronoun (in non-*pro*-drop languages), the copula (in languages that have one and employ it for cleft structures), and the clefted constituent itself (here indicated as XP throughout); see Gerbl (2007) for a recent review of the literature and an overview of the current state of the art. I further assume that cleft and matrix form a monoclausal structure, as in (9) — with a twist.

- (9)  $[_{CP} [cleft] [_{C'} C^0 matrix ]]$

The twist concerns what I suggest here — a more complex derivational history for clefting structures. Somewhat modifying our original proposal (Grohmann et al. 2006), a more accurate representation of the rough structure (9) would be (10), for both focus clefts (10a) and topic clefts (10b). The latter concerns “comment-clause *it*-clefts” such as (6a), where the root projection is to be TopP, but of course the relevance to the current issue is (10a), the proposed structure for “topic-clause *it*-clefts” such as (6b), and I will ignore (10b) in the remaining.



This analysis is monoclausal in the sense that the projection spine of the entire structure is a single clause, here understood as the focus projection FocP for *it*-clefts. This FocP indicates that the entire construction is a focus expression, just as focus movement also would have FocP at its root. But whereas focus movement targets the specifier of FocP, which is then interpreted as the focus of the whole expression, in focus clefting it is the entire cleft that occupies SpecFocP, I suggest here.

#### 4. An Analysis for Clefts

I want to propose a specific structure for clefts, under which cleft and matrix each form a *separate predication structure*, linked through one functional head, which relates the expression of focus, Foc<sup>0</sup> in (10a). In essence, *it*-clefts are monoclausal, then, as in (10): [<sub>FocP</sub> cleft [<sub>Foc<sup>0</sup></sub> matrix]. Under a rigorous derivational approach to syntactic structures, I will also adopt the view that, if movement can be employed as opposed to relate two “links” by some rule of construal, it should be (see especially Hornstein 2001). In order to move a constituent from one predication structure into another, I will adopt Nunes’ (1995, 2004) proposal of sideward movement.

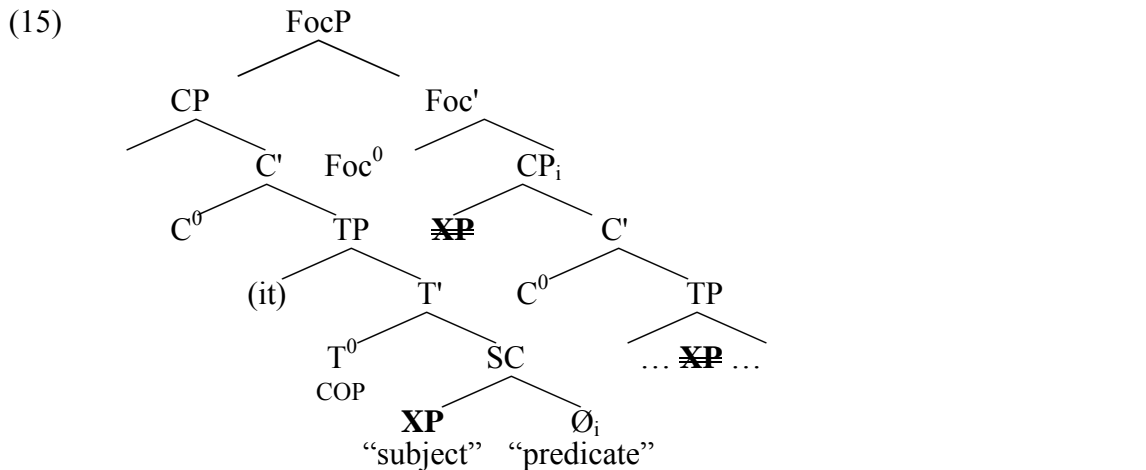
Sideward movement presumes the parallel assembly of several structures, which requires something like a derivational workspace. Note, however, that such a concept is independently needed, of course — namely, every time a complex left branch is formed (starting already with two-word subjects), it must be assembled outside the spine and then merged to it (to satisfy the Extension Condition on phrase structure). In addition, under a Greed-driven approach to economy in grammar, there is a merging requirement on sideward movement, arguably movement in general: “Merge as soon as possible”.

As a consequence of these conditions, it follows that re-merge as part of sideward movement can only (i) take place from an A'- and (ii) target a  $\theta$ -position (regardless of whether it is an “original” argument or adjunct); for reasons of space, I refer the reader to Hornstein (2001) or my brief summary elsewhere (Grohmann 2003: 303-306).

By way of illustration, let me also point out that one advantage of assuming sideward movement in the grammar is that null operators can be dispensed with, as especially Hornstein (2001) makes the case for: null operators are basically the intermediate copies in A'-position linking two thematic positions of one syntactic constituent. The rough derivation for a few typical null-operator constructions analyzed as sideward movement is provided for below. The examples provided here are parasitic gaps (11), purpose clauses (12), *tough*-constructions (13), and the perhaps most relevant relative clauses (14). In the b-representations, the diamond-studded lines connecting two shadow-faced elements indicate the point of sideward movement in the derivation (each time from an A'- into a  $\theta$ -position, of course):

- (11a) Which girl did John kiss without liking?  
 (11b) [<sub>CP</sub> **which girl<sub>i</sub>** did [<sub>TP</sub> John T<sup>0</sup> ... [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> kiss **t<sub>i</sub>**] [<sub>CP</sub> **t<sub>i</sub>** without liking **t<sub>i</sub>**] ]]]]
- (12a) John brought *Moby Dick* for Mary to read.  
 (12b) [<sub>TP</sub> John T<sup>0</sup> [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> brought **MD<sub>i</sub>**] [<sub>CP</sub> **t<sub>i</sub>** for [<sub>TP</sub> Mary to read **t<sub>i</sub>**] ]]]]
- (13a) Mary is easy to kiss.  
 (13b) [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> **Mary<sub>i</sub>** is [<sub>AP</sub> **t<sub>i</sub>** easy ] ] [<sub>CP</sub> **t<sub>i</sub>** C [<sub>TP</sub> *pro* to kiss **t<sub>i</sub>**] ]]]]
- (14a) the girl who John kissed  
 (14b) [<sub>DP</sub> the [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> **girl<sub>i</sub>**] [<sub>CP</sub> *wh-t<sub>i</sub>* C<sup>0</sup> [<sub>TP</sub> John kissed *wh-t<sub>i</sub>*] ]]]]

Analogously, then, I propose that the XP to be clefted first sideways moves from an A'-position within the matrix (SpecCP, moved from base-generated position, whether argument or adjunct) into a  $\theta$ -position within the cleft (as the small-clause subject of a null clefting predicate). This derivation is sketched in (15):



Apart from sideward movement, there are three cornerstones of this approach worth highlighting and elaborating, before I turn my attention back to focus clefting in CG:

① *monoclausal spine for biclausal analysis of clefts*

This was already mentioned in section 3. Notice, though, that this derivation readily allows for both a focus and a topic character of the entire expression based on the cleft-position — i.e. depending on which functional head is selected for the root. Ideally, this yields a unified analysis for all kinds of clefting structures. I leave the details for such a natural (and, I assume, desired) extension, also to pseudo-clefts, for future research.

② *hypothesized “null clefting predicate”*

Beyond the monoclausal spine, the analysis assumes two clauses, each projected around its own predicate. The lower one, our matrix, is straightforward. However, the structure postulates an additional predication relation which I place inside the cleft. In particular, I suggest that the clefting copula selects a small clause which consists of a “clefting predicate” for which the clefted constituent XP serves as the subject. The technical necessity of this predication relation was pointed out above — essentially, as a prerequisite for sideward movement.

From a more basic perspective, however, one might wonder what kind of predication this is. For the purposes of the present contribution, I would like to restrict myself to point to the exhaustivity interpretation of focus in clefting and suggest that it is derived as an identity function over XP types by the clefting predicate, itself unpronounced. It is thus a null predicate, possibly nominal in nature akin to predicative *pro* in inverse copula structures (Moro 1997: 65). The coindexation with the matrix CP in (15) relates the two, very much as observed in relative clauses, but without additional assumptions (as in the null-operator analysis of Browning 1987 or a more recent application to clefts by Percus 1997, for example). Additional work is needed to fully justify the concept of what I call clefting predicate (null or otherwise), an issue I have to leave open for now.

### ③ “movement within cleft” derivable

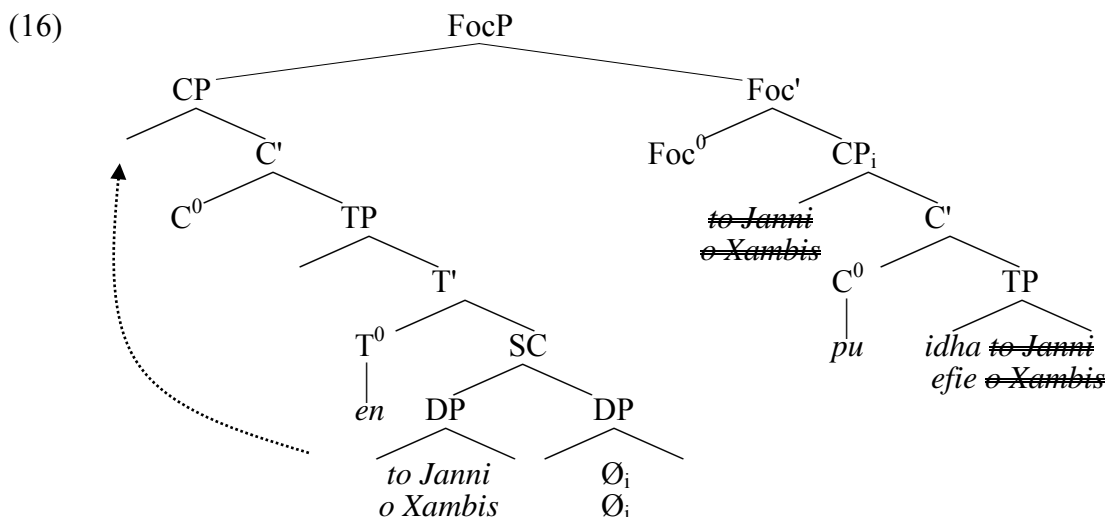
Just as the analysis easily accounts for the different information status of comment-clause *it*-clefts (6a) and topic-clause *it*-clefts (6b), namely in terms of a TopP/FocP root projection, it also nicely provides a straightforward integration of *wh-it*-cleft questions (6c). If the clefted XP is a *wh*-word then, in a language like English, this means that it is equipped with an additional *wh*-feature, or whatever one’s take on *wh*-movement, that triggers further movement to SpecCP.

Illustrating with (15), a clefted *wh*-phrase, such as *who* from (6c), would move from the cleft position (subject position of the cleft predicate marked XP in (15)) to SpecCP also triggering inversion (movement of the copula to C<sup>0</sup>). (This would be the movement step indicated by the dotted arrow for CG in (16) below: the DP subject of SC would be substituted by *who* from (6c), followed by inversion.) Thus “movement within the cleft” is entirely plausible, where *wh*-movement takes place in the complex structure I call the cleft, namely, the structure that sits in the specifier of the matrix FocP.

## 5. Cypriot Clefting

Finally, I want to back up my proposal for cleft structures with a brief cross-linguistic discussion of the expression of focus and the role of clefting, comparing the patterns observed in English and SMG vs. CG (Grohmann et al. 2006; see also Fotiou, in press). In unrelated work with Dalina Kallulli, we further extend this analysis to bare plural nominals in apparent subject position (Grohmann & Kallulli 2007).

Applying the proposal for English *it*-clefts developed above to CG focus clefting is now straightforward. The relevant derivations for an object focus cleft (3) and a subject focus cleft (5a), for example, both with the matrix verb in T<sup>0</sup>, are those in (16):



(16) is largely a straightforward application of the analysis developed. A possibly problematic part at this point, however, might concern the movement indicated by the dotted arrow. This is not contentious for (English) *wh*-clefts, as laid out in the previous section, but the question arises whether this applies to CG too — namely to structures like (1), which Gryllia & Lekakou (2006) refer to as “movement within the cleft”.

Another example of this category comes from Fotiou (in press):

- (17) #Esi en pu thelis jatrou.  
 you be-3SG that want-2SG doctor  
 ‘You want a doctor.’ (*lit.* ‘You it is that wants a doctor.’)

As the hash mark indicates, this structure is not accepted by every speaker. One might want to call this a second clefting strategy and assign different geographical areas for its use (as Gryllia & Lekakou do). And to bolster up their proposal, Gryllia & Lekakou argue for two different interpretations that go with each of the two purported strategies. Native speakers, cannot confirm their distinction, however (for details and arguments that all CG focusing is contrastive, see Fotiou, in press). Fotiou also points out that a big problem of the hypothesis — apart from the obvious one that CG “dialectal variation” is anything but clear (and does not even fit the pattern described by Gryllia & Lekakou) — lies in economy considerations: if clefting serves the function to express focus and if focus movement does the same, it would be rather uneconomical to assume that both operations may apply successively only (and in addition) to express the same function.

More can, and must be said on this issue, but space prohibits me from a more in-depth discussion. In the absence of a satisfactory treatment, I would thus like to counter both hypotheses (Gryllia & Lekakou’s “movement within the cleft”, which Fotiou calls “unusual movement”) with a provocative alternative suggestion: structures such as (1) and (17) derive from “language transfer” — they are instances of a marginalization that stem from the interplay of two different rules in the two grammars. Greek Cypriots only learn SMG after CG has been acquired, in primary school, through media, and so on. In addition, CG is not codified in any way: it is not officially recognized, standard media does not use it in any form, there is no agreed on CG orthography, and so on. These sociolinguistic aspects aside, Greek Cypriots are expected from an early age on to use SMG for all written purposes (school, work, media, etc.), and many oral ones too (news, teaching, speeches, and more) — without ever having been taught or instructed on the differences between the two varieties in any way. My language transfer hypothesis is thus that “movement within the cleft” appears when Greek Cypriots produce a focus clefting structure with interference from SMG normative rules. In this way, this is not a relevant phenomenon to study from a grammatical perspective; it is an aspect of E- rather than I-language. Still this hypothesis remains to be tested and developed properly.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

The major empirical point of this paper was to show that within Greek, variation can be observed in the syntactic expression of focus. Cypriot Greek employs a clefting strategy which is unknown to the standard (mainland) variety.

Theoretically, the proposal was advanced that languages differ in the strategies for the expression of focus available to them: of the three patterns found across languages, any language may make use of at most two. The reasons for this claim could not be presented here, but I suggest an underlying biolinguistic reasoning based on Chomsky’s (2005) three factors of language design — genetic endowment, experience leading to variation, and general principles — in particular, the third factor (Grohmann, in press).



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