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Abstract

This study investigates two types of clausal structures in American Sign Language (ASL), “rhetorical” *wh*-questions and doubling constructions. Following work by Petronio (1993), I assume the stance that rhetorical *wh*-questions are pseudoclefts (*wh*-clefts). Unlike languages that use focus particles or relative clause-like structures, here ASL achieves the semantic properties of a cleft by moving the counterweight “answer” of the rhetorical question structure to [Spec,FP], and topicalizing the “question” *wh*-XP. This is similar to Abner's analysis of the *it*-clefting semantics of the rightward *wh*-R construction in ASL (2011). Both pseudoclefts and doubles have been identified as potential sites for focus; doubles are commonly assumed to have emphatic/prosodic focus (Wilbur 1994, Nunes and Quadros 2006) and it has been previously argued that pseudoclefts have information focus (Lillo-Martin and Quadros 2004). However, as it stands current work under-specifies the exact nature of the differences in information structure, particularly in terms of the nature of the predicational pseudocleft (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006), which has been variously referred to as emphatic, prosodic, and information focus; or simply just “focus.” From this viewpoint I analyze the differences in information structure between the two clausal types as based on the diagnostics of Kiss (1998). I argue that based on Kiss's analysis of the distinguishing syntactic and pragmatic features between identificational and information focus, the pseudoclefting construction constitutes identificational focus, and the doubling construction constitutes emphatic information focus.

Focus Constructions in ASL: Evidence from Pseudoclefting and Doubling

Elise Stickles*

1 Introduction

Like other languages, information packaging in American Sign Language consists of two types of foregrounding: topicalization and focus. ASL is a topic-prominent language and, as such, allows for up to two topic slots Chomsky-adjoined at the head of an utterance (Liddell 1980 and Aarons 1994, in Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006). While topicalization is used to foreground old information already established in discourse, focusing stresses information new to the discourse world. As demonstrated by Wilbur (1994), ASL has fixed stress, with the prosodic stress occurring at the end of the utterance (technically an Intonational Phrase). It may be followed by some elements, such as tag questions, but those are analyzed as adjoined and not under the scope of the main utterance. As it has been argued that focused elements must receive primary stress, Wilbur (1994) concludes that ASL obligatorily must have focus at the end of utterances.¹

The current literature on information structuring in ASL generally concurs with this conclusion. However, there exists some confusion as to the type of focus itself; Sandler and Lillo-Martin's (2006) review, for example, occasionally but not systematically refers to it as information focus, sometimes in comparison with contrastive focus. They also note that doubled constructions, as argued by Petronio (1993), in which a sign is repeated at the end of a sentence, constitute "emphatic focus" as there is prosodic stress on the doubled element; this reflects the analysis of doubles in Nunes and Quadros (2006). However, Sandler and Lillo-Martin (2006) acknowledge that this is not entirely equivalent to information focus, as it may not serve to introduce new information but rather emphasize a given point. Hence, they refer to it as "prosodic" or "emphatic" focus. Petronio analyzes doubles as having [+Focus] (i.e., primary focus) and [+F] features, arguing that the left double is focused and undergoes focus movement (1993).

Following Kiss (1998), this paper will seek to analyze two basic types of focus constructions, pseudoclefting (also referred to as *wh*-clefting), and doubling, in order to clarify the distinctions hinted at in Sandler and Lillo-Martin (2006). Lillo-Martin and Quadros (2004) conclude that the pseudocleft constitutes information focus on the basis it provides new information. However, I hypothesize that pseudoclefting constructions constitute identificational focus, whereas doubled constructions constitute information focus. I will demonstrate that the choice of pseudoclefting or doubling by a speaker is motivated by the information structure to be conveyed. This will clarify claims in the current literature as to the type of focus entailed in each construction: Petronio's (1993) "prosodic emphasis" will be aligned with Wilbur's (1994) utterance-final focus prominence to reveal the information focus nature of doubles, and Wilbur's (1996) treatment of focus in pseudoclefts will be refined to specify identificational focus.

2 Pseudoclefting: Identificational Focus Diagnostics

Wilbur (1996) addresses a common discursive construction in ASL, "rhetorical" questions. These are used to provide explanation or as illustrative narrative devices. For example:²

*I would like to thank my main consultant, Savio Chan, for his grammaticality judgments and helpful comments; I-Hsuan Chen and Line Mikkelsen for their immensely useful suggestions and comments; and the PLC 36 attendees for interesting commentary and discussion. Any errors are my own.

¹See, for example, Büring and Gutierrez-Bravo (2001) for a discussion of focus prominence and similar utterance-final claims in Spanish.

²Following convention, ASL glosses consist of a main glossing line, the English translation below, and a line above delineating the spread of any non-manual marker. The non-manual markers in this paper are as follows: br – eyebrow raise; whq – raised eyebrows, associated with *wh*-questions; n – headshake, indicating negation; hn – head nod. PRO indicates pronominals. Some examples have been edited to due to inconsistent glosses between sources.

4. ID focus involves movement; info does not.
5. ID focus must involve a maximally projected XP.

2.1 Exhaustivity

One function of ID focus is exhaustive identification;⁴ it supplies the complete answer to the open proposition. For example (using modified English translations of Hungarian data):

- (3) Where did Mary go in the summer? (11 in Kiss 1998:249–250)
- a. Mary went to Italy [among other places].
 - b. It was Italy where Mary went.

(3a) demonstrates information focus, as it is not exhaustive in its answer to the question. In contrast, (3b) provides a complete answer to the question; Italy is the only place traveled to in the summer. It would be infelicitous to follow up (3a) with:

- c. %No, Mary went to Spain, too.

However, it is felicitous to respond to (3b) with (3c), as the exhaustivity of (3b) is being negated. This exhaustivity test can be applied to ASL pseudoclefts, as in (4):⁵

- (4) a. _____ br
MARY BUY WHAT, JACKET
'What Mary bought is a jacket.'

Here, "a jacket" answers the open proposition, "What did Mary buy?" It is felicitous to follow (4a) with (4b), as it negates the exhaustivity of (4a):

- b. n
NO, MARY BUY BACKPACK TOO
'No, Mary also bought a backpack.'

In contrast, this exchange is infelicitous, because (5a) is not exhaustive:

- (5) a. MARY BUY JACKET
b. % n
NO, MARY BUY BACKPACK TOO
'No, Mary also bought a backpack.'

This test indicates that the pseudocleft as shown in (4a) is exhaustive while the regular construction of (5a) is not exhaustive. Thus, we have our first support for ID focus.

2.2 Movement

In Kiss's analysis (Figure 1) of English *it*-clefts, the focused element moves to [Spec,FP]; this movement is a crucial aspect of ID focus. Whereas ID focus involves movement to a specifier position, info focus does not. Compare Kiss's analysis to that in Wilbur (1996), which provides an analysis of pseudoclefting in which the *wh*-clause moves leftward, in line with the leftward *wh*-movement analysis of Petronio (1993).

- (6) _____ br (103 in Wilbur 1996:246)
PRO_i DISLIKE WHAT, JOHN POSS TIE
'What I dislike is that John has a tie'

⁴Depending on the language, ID focus can be exhaustive, contrastive, or both (Kiss 1998:245).

⁵All examples without citations are data I elicited from a native ASL signer.

Wilbur analyzes (6) as consisting of a leftward movement of the *wh*-XP, PRO_i DISLIKE WHAT, to [Spec,CP]:

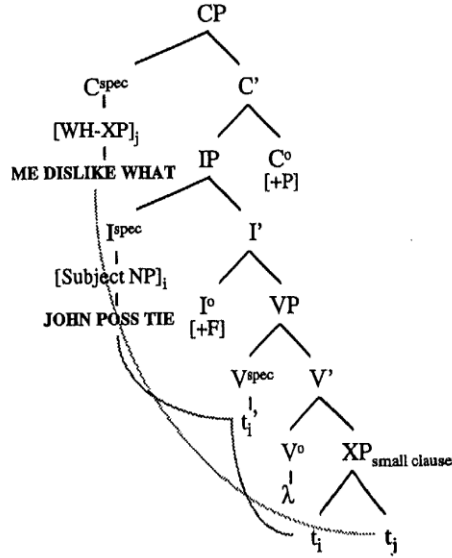


Figure 2: Wilbur's analysis of (6) (Figure 7.4, Wilbur 1996:247).

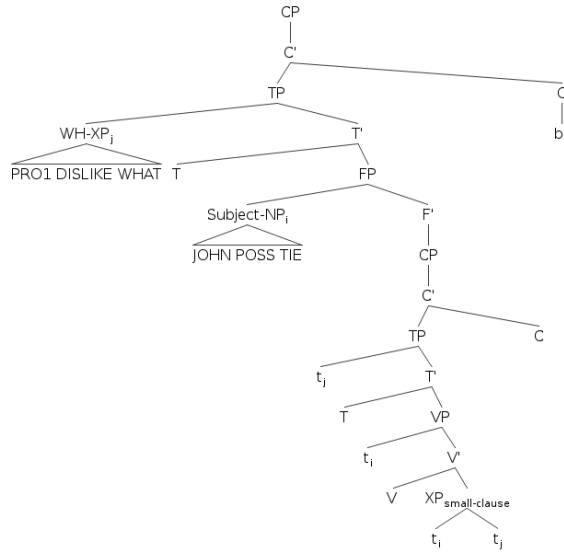


Figure 3: Re-analysis of (6) with a rightward CP.

In this structure we see that the *wh*-XP is clefted by moving leftward to a specifier position.

Wh-phrases are traditionally analyzed as moving to [Spec,CP] in ASL, as shown here. Although Kiss places focused elements in a [Spec,FP] position, the movement of the subject-NP posited here by Wilbur is analogous, and it would be straightforward to alter her analysis to include a focus projection. Following the analysis of rightward *wh*-movement developed by the ASL Linguistic Research Project at Boston University (Neidle et al. 2000), I take [CP,Spec] to be on the right and analyze (6) as above.

Note in particular that the *wh*-phrase PRO_i DISLIKE WHAT is generated *in-situ* at [Spec,TP], and a non-manual *br* marker appears at a C. This aligns with my prior analysis of *wh*-phrases (Stickles 2010); leftward *wh*-phrases do not undergo movement but rather are base-generated and have +*br* agreement with the non-manual marker. Notably, the +*br* spread only appears over the *wh*-phrase and not the counterweight JOHN POSS TIE; this is due to the fact that obligatory +*br* spread only occurs within the CP and thus does not spread down to the second CP, where the subject NP originates.

Both Wilbur's (1996) analysis and my own analysis of the pseudoclefting construction make it apparent that the focused element must undergo some form of movement. For Wilbur, the XP moves to [Spec,IP]; in my version, it moves to [Spec,FP], following Kiss. Regardless of the analysis favored, in both cases we find that the focused element moves to a specifier position; in my analysis it moves to [Spec,FP], and the head of the FP has CP as its complement. This aligns with Kiss's analysis of ID focus-associated movement.

Here the focused phrase, JOHN POSS TIE, is moved out of the lower CP into the focused position at [Spec,FP], aligning with Kiss's analysis. In this approach, the *wh*-phrase moves to [Spec,TP] and agrees with the non-manual marker +*br* appearing at C. This explains the obligatory +*br* spread across the *wh*-phrase but not the "answer" phrase: the non-manual marker only spreads within the CP and not down to the second CP, where the subject-NP originates.

2.2.1 Evidence for FP

Notably, this analysis also provides evidence for existence of FP. English can be analyzed as having FP, or without, in which case focus is merely a feature located on C⁰ as in (7).

(7) What I hate is asparagus.

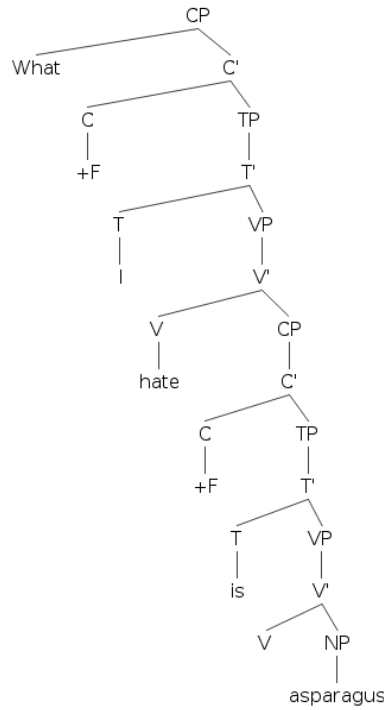
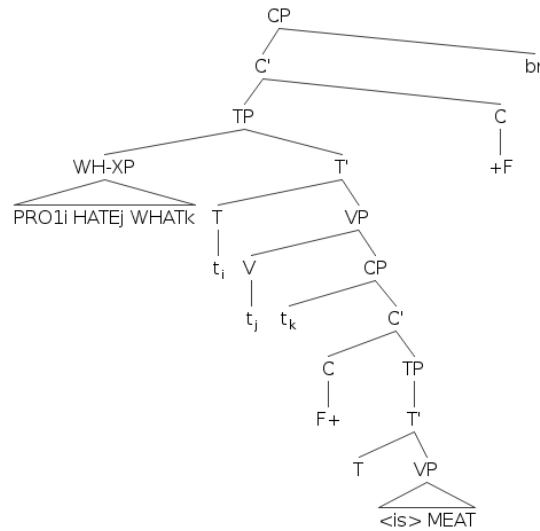


Figure 4: Analysis of (7) without FP.

If we attempt to apply this analysis to the same construction in ASL, we produce the following analysis of (8):

(8) br
 PRO₁ HATE_J WHAT_k, MEAT.
 'What I hate is meat.'



(14) *What Mary bought was also a jacket.

(15) * $\frac{\quad}{\quad} \text{br}$
 MARY BUY WHAT, ALSO JACKET
 ‘What Mary bought was also a jacket.’

Hence, while universal quantification is not applicable, we can still apply the *also*-phrase diagnostic, as it would violate the exhaustive nature of ID focus, and provide another line of support for ID focus.

2.5 Maximal Projection

The analysis in Section 2.2. also provides evidence for Kiss’s projection diagnostic. Because Kiss places ID focus into [Spec,FP], it must be an XP, a maximally projected head. As seen previously, the focused element of JOHN POSS TIE in Figure 3 is analyzed as a subject-NP moving to a specifier position. Thus we conclude that the focused element is an XP.

2.6 Interim Conclusion

I have thus far established that pseudoclefting in ASL fulfills all of Kiss’s requirements for ID focus. Thus at this point we can support the first of our claims, that pseudoclefting constructions involve identificational focus on their counterweight, “answer” phrase. Now we can move on to the second portion of our claims: that doubled constructions constitute information focus.

3 Doubling: Information Focus Diagnostics

Doubled constructions can occur in a variety of formats, including *wh*-words, modals, verbs, quantifiers, and negatives (Petronio 1993). They are characterized by a variety of properties, including the fact that the double is an X^0 , not an XP (Petronio, 1993).

Petronio’s analysis of the double as an X^0 , not an XP, provides our first clue that doubled constructions do not have ID focus, and therefore should have info focus. Recall that ID focus is limited to appearing only in XPs. Petronio’s study does not distinguish between different types of focus, but she does claim that the leftward double undergoes focus-movement, which similar to *wh*-movement; this would suggest that the doubles are potential targets for ID focus, since movement to an XP is a feature of ID focus. However, I will show that the doubles do not undergo movement; this supports my claim that they involve info focus. Furthermore, I will claim that it is the rightward double which receives primary focus, in line with Wilbur’s (1994) argument that utterance-final words receive primary focus. The diagnostics for info focus essentially entail applying, and failing, the ID focus diagnostics.

3.1 Exhaustivity

Whereas ID focused utterances should pass the exhaustivity diagnostic, info focus is not exhaustive. Consider (16):

(16) $\frac{\quad}{\quad} \text{hn}$ (16d in Lillo-Martin and Quadros 2004:168)
 BABY CRY BABY
 ‘The BABY is crying.’

This can be treated as answering the question, “Who is crying?”; however, it doesn’t exhaustively delineate all the potential criers, as reflected by the infelicity of a similar English exchange:

- (17) Who is crying?
 a. The BABY is crying.
 b. %No, the toddler is crying, too.

The fact that (17b) is an infelicitous response to (17a), which is analogous to (16), demonstrates that the focus *BABY* is not exhaustive. Hence, we have our first line of support for the claim that doubled constructions have info focus.

3.2 Movement

Petronio (1993) treats the left double as the primary of the two, receiving [+Focus], and its twin as having an additional [+F] feature. However, given as stated in Wilbur (1994) that utterance-final elements receive primary focus, I argue that the rightward twin is actually the primary focused element. Indeed, the second double often has greater prosodic emphasis (more exaggerated facial expression, larger range of motion in the sign's motion parameter) than the leftward double. This suggests the sentence-final double is, in fact, primary, and thus retains focal prominence. The importance of the distinction between left and right foci will become clear in considering Kiss's movement diagnostic.

According to Petronio (1993), the leftward double must receive focus because it undergoes focus movement, similar to *wh*-movement:

- (18) $\frac{\text{whq}}{\text{WHO WANT READ WHO}}$ (Petronio 1993:149)
 'Who wants to read?'

In Figure 6, the focus *WHO* moves leftward to [Spec,CP]. Petronio claims this shows that it is focused. However, according to Kiss, elements receiving information focus are *not* associated with focus movement. If instead we consider the rightward double as the site for primary focus, we find that under Petronio's analysis the doubled *WHO* does not undergo movement.

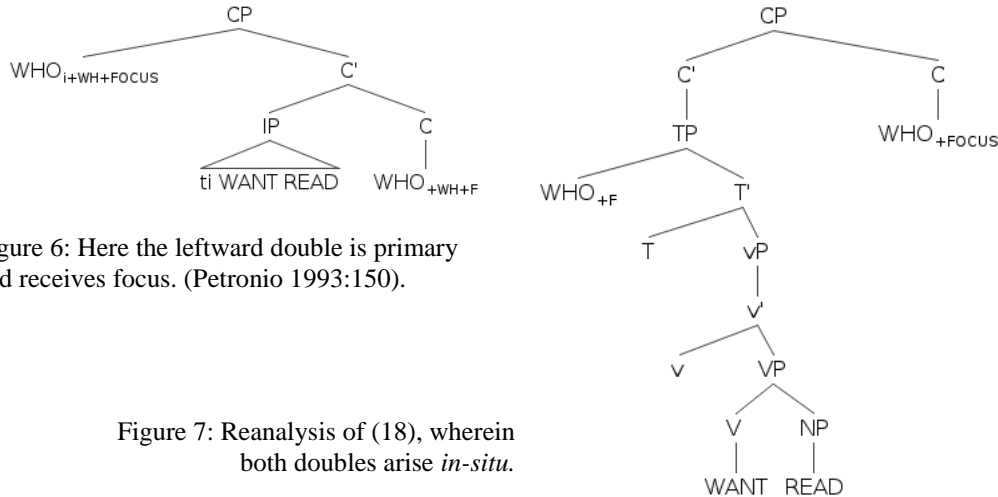


Figure 6: Here the leftward double is primary and receives focus. (Petronio 1993:150).

Figure 7: Reanalysis of (18), wherein both doubles arise *in-situ*.

This contrasts with claims by Neidle et al. (2000), who analyze the rightward double as moving rightward to [Spec,CP]. In my own analysis (2010), neither the leftward nor rightward doubles undergo movement. The left is base-generated *in-situ* at [Spec,TP] and the rightward is base-generated in C, as is illustrated in Figure 7 (above).

Under this analysis, regardless of whether we consider the left or rightward double *WHO*, the focused element does not move. Thus, they cannot have ID focus, since ID focus is associated with focus-movement.

3.3 Scope

Unlike with identificational focus, the scope of an info-focused element is independent of its status as info focus. For example, the only possible interpretation of (19) is "one in which the universal

quantifier takes scope over the whole sentence” (Kiss 1998:254).

- (19) Every boy wanted to dance with the beauty queen. (24b in Kiss 1998:254)

(19) is not exhaustive, as it could be that although the boys all wanted to dance with the beauty queen, they also wanted to dance with perhaps the first and second runners-up. Thus, the focused element *the beauty queen* is not ID focus. Similarly, in (20), the universal quantifier EVERY takes scope over the whole sentence:

- (20) What does Ann want to read?
 EVERY BOOK ANN WANT READ $\overline{\text{hn}}$ WANT
 ‘Ann wants to read EVERY book.’

As in (19), the universal quantifier takes scope over the entire utterance; similarly, (20) is not exhaustive, as it does not delineate everything Ann possibly wants to read (newspapers, magazines, etc). Hence, since EVERY is taking scope over the focused element WANT, WANT cannot be ID focus. Instead we conclude it has info focus.

3.4 Universal Quantifiers and *Also*-phrases

Because the types of words allowed to appear in doubled constructions are already restricted for separate reasons, it is difficult to evaluate them using this diagnostic. *Also*-phrases are not permitted as doubles. However, we can apply the diagnostic to the universal quantifier EVERY:

- (21) $\overline{\text{hn}}$
 PRO_i EAT EVERY COOKIE EVERY
 ‘I ate EVERY cookie.’

The fact that EVERY is permissible as a double is not entirely remarkable on its own, as we previously noted that EVERY is also permissible in the pseudoclefting construction. However, when we consider both that *also*-phrases are ungrammatical in the pseudoclefting construction and the universal quantifier is grammatical in the doubling, we can conclude that, to the extent we can apply the diagnostic, pseudoclefting passes the ID focus test and doubling fails it. Since universal quantifiers can have info focus, this suggests the double EVERY here has info focus.

3.5 Maximal Projection

According to both my and Petronio’s analyses in Figures 6 and 7, the rightward double is base-generated in C⁰. This conflicts with that of Neidle et al. (2000), who place it in a rightward [Spec,CP]. Thus the analyses by Petronio and myself both support the claim that the rightward double receives information focus and not ID focus, as ID focus must appear at the XP and thus cannot appear in a head C⁰.

4 Conclusions

As we have seen based on the application of the diagnostics laid out in Kiss (1998), the counterweight of pseudoclefting constructions in ASL receives identificational focus. Conversely, the rightward double in doubled constructions receives information focus. While both these constructions have been the subjects of considerable analysis in the past, neither has been previously identified as targets for specific types of focus. This presents a unified account that resolves contradictions in the existing literature, including Petronio’s (1993) leftward-moving doubles; Neidle et al.’s (2000) doubled rightward focus in [Spec,CP]; and Lillo-Martin and Quadro’s (2004) leftward-moving information-focused pseudocleft.

Thus, I have clarified the distinguishing features between the two constructions, and provided a motivation – information packaging – for use of one over the other. Use of the pseudocleft in

ASL is generally taken to be a function of discourse, and use of the double is regarded as simply providing extra prosodic emphasis. However, it is now apparent that not only do both receive focus – as claimed in the prior literature – but they are particular targets for different types of foci. Additional work remains to be done in terms of investigating other clefting structures in ASL; for example, previously rightward *wh*-constructions such as (22) have been treated as structurally similar to doubles with the assumption that the leftward double is simply unrealized:

- (22) *whq*
 NAME WHAT
 ‘What is your name?’

However, Abner (2011) argues that they function as clefting constructions similar to English *it*-clefts, and identifies them as another potential focus site; thus it remains to be seen what syntactic and information structural differences lie between the different clefting types of ASL.

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