

# It-clefts are IT\* Constructions

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*\*inquiry terminating*

## Analyzing clefts and exclusives

### A unified semantics

It was JOHN that laughed and only JOHN laughed have the same two entailments:

- The prejacent: laughed(John)
- An exhaustive implication: MAX<sub>s</sub>(laughed(John))

This gives a unified semantics for the two expressions:

$$\text{CLEFT}(p) = \text{ONLY}(p) = p \ \& \ \text{MAX}_\sigma(p)$$

Here we define MAX<sub>s</sub> following Beaver and Clark 2008:

$$\text{MAX}_\sigma(p) = \lambda w \forall q \in \text{CQ}_\sigma [q <_\sigma p \rightarrow \sim q(w)]$$

Where  $\sigma$  is the current context,  $\text{CQ}_\sigma$  is the current question under discussion, and  $(<_\sigma)$  is a salient ranking among alternatives.

## The issue of at-issueness

The clear differences between clefts and “only” sentences (e.g. those in Horn ????) can be explained by a difference in *at-issueness* between them:

- With “only,” the exhaustive component MAX<sub>σ</sub>(p) is at-issue.
- With a cleft, the prejacent p is at-issue.

For clefts, this explains why exhaustivity must be informative, and why it projects.

(Specifically, we believe exhaustivity is a *not-at-issue entailment*. Ask us why!)

## Focus-sensitivity

On our account, the exhaustive meaning of a cleft (like that of *only*) is *focus-sensitive*. The meaning of MAX<sub>s</sub> depends on the current Question Under Discussion, which is itself constrained by focus (Beaver & Clark 2008).

This helps us explain examples like (11), and also some previously sticky facts about the existential part of a cleft's meaning (see Büring 2008).

## The basic similarity...

- (1) **Clefts are exhaustive in meaning**  
#It's Sarah who laughed, and John laughed too..
- (2) **Exclusives are similarly exhaustive**  
#Only Sarah laughed, and John laughed too.

## ...and more data on clefts

- (2) **Clefts aren't stronger than their prejacent**
  - a. Mary ate pizza, and in fact, she only ate pizza.
  - b. # Mary ate pizza, and in fact, it was pizza that she ate.
- (3) **Defined correctly, exhaustivity projects (see Büring 2008)**  
It wasn't Sarah who laughed...
  - a. ...it was Fred. [“Only Sarah laughed” doesn't project]
  - b. ...it was the students. [“Only 1 person laughed” doesn't project]
  - c. ?? ...it was Sarah *and* Fred. [“If Sarah laughed, then nobody else did” seems to project]
- (4) **The cleft prejacent clearly doesn't project**  
#It wasn't calamari that Jane ate, though she did eat calamari.
- (5) **Exhaustivity isn't cancellable**  
#It's John that Mary loves. And he's not the only one.
- (6) **Exhaustivity has a local effect (Tonhauser et al. 2011)**
  - a. # John thinks it was an apple Mary ate, and he thinks she ate a pear.
  - b. John thinks it was an apple Mary ate, and Fred thinks she ate a pear.
  - c. John thinks it was an apple Mary ate, but I know she ate a pear.
- (7) **Exhaustivity isn't a strong presupposition**

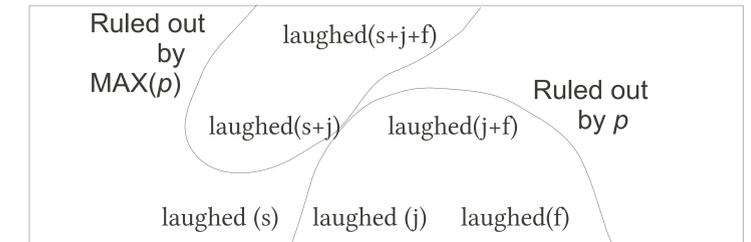
A: Did Sarah bring the wine? Or Fred? Or maybe Sarah *and* Fred?  
B: It was Sarah who brought the wine.
- (8) **New material in the cleft complement**  
It was ten years ago this month that young Irwin Vamplew was bopped on the head with a nightstick while smashing windows in Berkeley in order to end the war in Vietnam. [Prince]
- (9) **Focused material in the cleft complement**
  - a. It was JOHN who called MARY. [Büring]
  - b. **Alice:** What has John done around the house lately?  
**Bob:** It was John who [cleaned the BATHROOM last week]F
- (10) **Given, unfocused material in the pivot**  
It was John's ELDEST daughter who went to the party.
- (11) **Focus, not syntax, determines what's exhaustified**  
It was John's ELDEST daughter who went to the party. When she arrived, there were over 200 people there.

## Some worked examples

### Exhaustivity in simple clauses

Following Coppock and Beaver (2011, 2012) we assume that scalar operators can specify a *type* of scale that they prefer to associate with. We claim the cleft construct requires an *entailment scale*.

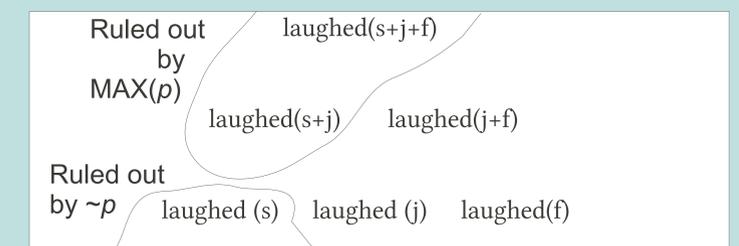
In a positive, unembedded clause, p & MAX<sub>s</sub>(p) is an exhaustified version of p.



The only worlds satisfying both conjuncts are the ones where only Sarah, and nobody else, laughed.

## What projects?

We assume (following Roberts et al. 2011) that *not-at-issue content projects*. In our case, that means that MAX<sub>s</sub>(p) projects, and p does not.



MAX<sub>s</sub>(p) alone amounts to the claim that no alternatives *strictly stronger than laughed(s)* are true. In other words,

- (i) Sarah may have laughed, or
- (ii) some other person or group may have laughed, but
- (iii) no larger group *which includes* Sarah laughed.

And this is what the data shows.

## The existential component?

Based on (12), Büring argues that there's no existential component to cleft meaning, because (12) does not imply *someone called Mary*.

But (12) *does* imply *someone called someone* And we can generate this. The current QUD in (12) gives these alternatives:

called(j, m) & called(m, j)

called(j, m)    called(m, j)

In every one of them, it is the case that *someone called someone*.

Similarly, in the examples above based on (3), it is the case in all alternatives that *someone laughed*.