In Situ Focus in Caribbean Spanish: Towards a Unified Account of Focus

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Introduction

Languages use a variety of strategies to signal non-presupposed, focused information. Some languages attach a morpheme to the focused constituent, others mark focus prosodically. A third, widely available way of focusing a constituent, involves clefting with a copular verb. Spanish displays the latter two strategies, which, at first site, do not share much in common: clefting involves two clauses connected through Comp, one of them with a copular verb adjacent to the focused constituent, typically located in the left periphery. Default focus, on the other hand, involves alignment of the focused constituent with the intonational peak of a clause (also known as nuclear stress) and there is no copular verb, no Comp, and the focused constituent appears at the right edge. The fact that both strategies signal focus raises the question of why they seem to be completely unrelated. In this paper, I present the missing link between them: I analyze a clefting construction in Caribbean varieties of Spanish (henceforth FCS, present in Dominican, Venezuelan and Colombian Spanish), which shares some properties of clefts and some properties of default focus: like clefts, it involves a copular verb, but no Comp and no left-edge location; like default focus, the focused constituent is aligned with the intonational peak of the clause at the right edge. I will argue that FCS is, in fact, a subtype of default focus, not a true cleft, and that its properties follow from the fact that it applies to the lower strong phase (VP). Finally, I suggest more generally, that the different properties of focusing strategies in Spanish may be derived from the unit to which focus applies: if it applies to a a lower strong phase (VP-focus), the result will be default focus marking, if it applies to the higher strong phase (CP-focus), the result will be clefts.

1. Focusing strategies in Spanish

Spanish has two basic focusing strategies, illustrated in (1) (in the examples below, { } indicates focus scope, italics, clausal stress). The first three are different varieties of clefts (a true cleft, a pseudo-cleft and an inverted pseudo-cleft, respectively), the last one involves focusing through prosodic prominence: the focused constituent is aligned with the intonational peak of the sentence.[1]

(1)   a. Fue {Marta} la que trajo   los regalos.
          was Marta   that   brought the gifts
          'It was Marta that brought the gifts.'

      b. Quien trajo   los regalos fue {Marta}
          who   brought the gifts   was Marta
          'The one who brought the gifts was Marta.'

      c. Marta fue quien trajo   los regalos.
          Marta was who   brought the gifts
          'It was Marta who brought the gifts.'

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[1]The different types of clefts have different syntactic properties, and there is a large body of literature on them, which I will not be able to review here.

d. Los trajo   {*Marta*}
   CL   brought   Marta

   '{Marta} brought gifts.'

All clefts share three properties: they involve two clauses, one of them headed by a copular verb; they join those two clauses through Comp, and the copular clause is peripheral with respect to the main clause. Typically, clefts and inverted pseudo-clefts , such as (1a, c) place the focused constituent at the the right edge of the main clause, whereas pseudo-clefts, such as (1b) locate at the right edge. In (1d), focus is signaled through nuclear peak alignment and most of the properties of clefts do not hold: there is only one clause, hence there is no copular verb and no Comp, and, like pseudo-clefts, the focused constituent is at the right edge. One obvious question one can ask is why there are such apparently divergent strategies for focus. In order to begin to answer this question, I will look at a fifth kind of focus construction, found in the Caribbean region (henceforth FCS), which resembles clefts because it has a copular verb, but lacks Comp and is necessarily right-edge aligned.

FCS marks identificational focus (i.e., focus in which the speaker exhaustively identifies an alternative to a given item in an preceding clause or in the discourse) by placing a copular verb in front of the focused constituent, as illustrated in (2) (cf. Sedano 1988a, b, 1990, Toribio 1992, 2002, Bosque 1999). Different types of constituents can be focused: a postverbal subject (cf. (2a)), an indirect object PP (cf. (2b)), a direct object (cf. (2c)), a predicate adjective (cf. (2d)), an adverb (cf. (2e)), and even DP-internal constituents such as NPs, as in (2f).

(2) a. Compró los libros fue   {Pedro}.
        bought the books was   Pedro

        'It was Pedro who bought the books.'

     b. El gobierno   le cedió   terrenos fue   a   {las multinacionales}.
        the government CL granted land   was   to the transnationals

        'It was transnational corporations that the government granted land to.'

     c. Los bomberos   rescataron fue   a   {la   abuela}.
        the firefighters rescued   was   to the grandmother

        'It was the grandmother the firefighters rescued.'

     d. Mi hermano estaba era   {triste}.
        my brother was   was   sad

        'It was sad that my brother was.'

     e. Llegamos fue   {ayer}.
        arrived   was   yesterday

        'It was yesterday that we arrived.'

     f. El presidente de esa época tuvo una fue   {parálisis}.
        the president of that time had   a   was   paralysis

        'It was a paralysis the president at that time had.'

The copular verb cannot modify preverbal subjects (cf. (3)). In general, it cannot modify any category higher than vP (cf. Bosque 1999). This can be seen in the following examples: if we assume that in Spanish, inflected verbs are in I, as indicated in (4a), the copular verb cannot modify an inflected verb (cf. (4b)), or any other category in I: *no* in (5b) or a modal in (6b). However, it may modify infinitival verbs, which can be assumed to be lower than I (cf. (7)).[2] This distribution is summarized in the generalization in (8).

(3) a. Compró papas   fue   {Juan}.
        bought potatoes was   Juan

        'It was Juan who bought potatoes.'

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[2]Node labels are simply indicative of the generalization proposed, the actual structure of the FCS will be discussed below.

b. *Fue   {Juan}   compró   papas.
   was   Juan   bought   potatoes

(4)   a. [$_{IP}$Marta [$_{I'}$compró [$_{vP}$papas]]]
       Marta   bought   potatoes
      'Marta bought potatoes.'

    b. *[$_{IP}$Marta fue [$_{I'}$compró [$_{vP}$papas]]]
        Marta was   bought   potatoes

(5)   a. [$_{NegP}$Marta [$_{Neg'}$no [$_{IP}$compró [$_{vP}$papas]]]]
         Marta   not   bought   potatoes
      'Marta did not buy potatoes.'

    b. *[$_{NegP}$Marta fue [$_{Neg'}$no [$_{IP}$compró [$_{vP}$papas]]]]
          Marta was   not   bought   potatoes

(6)   a. [$_{IP/ModP}$Marta [$_{I'/Mod'}$pudo [$_{vP}$comprar papas]]]
          Marta   could   buy   potatoes
      'Marta could buy potatoes.'

    b. *[$_{IP/ModP}$Marta fue [$_{I'/Mod'}$pudo [$_{vP}$comprar papas]]]
          Marta was   could   buy   potatoes

(7)   a. [$_{IP/ModP}$Marta [$_{I'/Mod'}$pudo fue [$_{vP}$comprar papas]]]
          Marta   could was   buy   potatoes
      'It was buying potatoes that Marta could do.'

    b. [$_{IP}$Marta [$_{I'}$prometió fue [$_{vP}$comprar papas]]]
       Marta   promised was   buy   potatoes
      'It was promising to buy potatoes that Marta could do.'

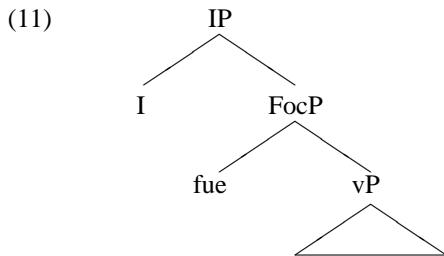(8)   In FCS, the copular verb only takes vP-internal constituents in its scope.

Consistent with this generalization, only vP-internal adverbs can be focused in FCS. Thus, *francamente* 'frankly' which is ambiguous between a speech-oriented and a VP-internal interpretation, only receives the vP-internal, manner interpretation in (9), not the speech-oriented one.

(9)   Marta no   debería hablar es francamente.
      Marta not   should   talk   is frankly
      'It is frankly that Marta should not talk.'

Finally, FCS cannot appear with Comp, as seen in (10), a fact that also falls within the generalization in (8): if Comp is a category projected above IP, it follows that it should not appear in the scope of the copular verb in FCS.

(10) *Marta trajo   fue que un libro.
      Marta brought was that a   book

Partially based on the distribution just described, Bosque (1999) proposes the structure in (11): the focus projection, headed by the copular verb, appears between IP and vP (VP in his terminology). If we assume this structure, the properties described above follow: the only categories within the scope of the copular verb should be vP-internal ones: internal arguments, vP-adverbs, postverbal subjects, but not I-related categories (an inflected verb, modals, negation), or preverbal subjects (assuming they are higher than vP).

(11)

```
              IP
            /    \
          I       FocP
                 /    \
               fue     vP
                      /  \
                     /____\
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Toribio (1992, 2002) proposes an alternative analysis based on the idea that FCS is a version of a pseudo-cleft, but with a null wh-operator, as in (12). Bosque, however, points out that Toribio's (1992) version of the analysis predicts that subjects should not be possible with FCS, because the trace of the null operator is not properly identified. However, in Sedano's corpus and in other dialects, postverbal subjects are, indeed possible (cf. (2a) above). There seems to be a source of dialectal variation at stake in this particular aspect, since postverbal subjects are dispreferred in general in Dominican Spanish (Toribio, p.c.), hence (1d) would be deviant in this dialect (as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer), which would account for why subjects are not possible in general with FCS in that dialect; but clearly, extending her analysis to other dialects where FCS is possible with postverbal subjects is problematic.

(12)   a. *Pseudo-cleft*: [A quien$_{wh}$ yo vi t$_{wh}$] fue a Marta

         b. *FCS*: [Op$_{wh}$ yo vi t$_{wh}$] fue a Marta

There are other areas in which FCS does not pattern like pseudo-clefts, as Bosque points out, suggesting that they have different structures. For example, superlative constructions can be pseudo-clefted, but are not possible with FCS, as shown in (13)-(14).

(13)   a. Lo que le   gusta   es bailar salsa.
            what   CL pleases is dance salsa
            'What s/he likes is to dance salsa.'

         b. Le gusta   es bailar salsa.
            CL pleases is dance salsa
            'It's dancing salsa that he likes.'

(14)   a. Lo que más le   gusta   es bailar salsa.
            what   most CL pleases is dance salsa
            'What s/he likes most is to dance salsa.'

         b. *Más le   gusta   es bailar salsa.
            most CL pleases is dance salsa

Additionally, wh-extraction out of a pseudo-cleft is possible, but not out of FCS, as shown below. This is unexpected if they involve the same type of structure, and particularly striking, since as Toribio points out, wh-extraction from clefts is a very productive structure in Dominican Spanish, as seen in (16) (Toribio's example (7c)).

(15)   a. ¿Qué era lo que Juan leía?
            what was what   Juan read
            'What was it that Juan read?'

         b. *¿Qué Juan leía era?
            what   Juan read was

(16)   ¿Qué$_i$ es t$_i$ lo que ese muchacho me trae?
        what   is   that   that boy   CL brings
        'What is it that that boy is bringing me?'

In order to sustain Toribio's approach one would have to argue that the overt and null operators in (12) have very different syntactic properties. However, it is not clear what kind of difference that could be traced to the overt or null nature of the operator would account for the contrasts we have just reviewed (as well as others Bosque points out).

Given the preceding discussion, I will assume Bosque's conclusion that FCS is structurally different from pseudo-clefts. I will also assume that it focuses only constituents inside vP, and I will take this as indication that the copular verb only merges with vP- internal constituents, although I will argue that Bosque's structure in (11) above cannot be exactly right.

2. More on the structure of FCS

Recall that in Bosque's proposal in (11) above, the copular verb selects for a vP. However, there is some independent evidence that this cannot be the right structure. Regular arguments of a verb can be freely extracted from their base position (cf. (17a)), but extraction of the focused constituent in FCS is impossible (cf. (17b)).[3]

(17)   a. ¿Qué$_i$ se   comieron los pájaros t$_i$?
            what CL ate   the birds
        'What did the birds eat?

        b. *¿Qué$_i$ se   comieron los pájaros fue t$_i$?
             what CL ate   the birds   was

This contrast can be explained in two ways. One would trace it to the presence of the copular verb, arguing that it blocks extraction from the focus position, but it is not generally the case that extraction from copular constructions, or even extraction from within clefts is ungrammatical, as seen in (18)-(19). Alternatively, one can propose that (17)a and b have structurally different representations. In this analysis, the trace of the extracted constituent in (17b) is not the argument of the verb, but rather an adjunct. As is well-known, extraction from adjuncts is ungrammatical, as opposed to extraction from argument clauses, as seen in (20)-(21). If the copular structure is adjoined, the ungrammaticality of (17b) follows from whatever principle restricts extraction from adjuncts (what used to be the Empty Category Principle).

(18)   a. Eso   es un ratón.
            those is a   mouse
        'That is a mouse'

        b. ¿Qué$_i$ es eso t$_i$?
            what is that
        'What is that?'

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[3]Toribio's alternative correctly predicts that extraction from FCS should pattern with extraction from pseudo-clefts, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (i). Toribio's analysis still faces the other challenges presented earlier. Note that the version in (ii) is possible, but it is not clear whether the relevant source for it is a pseudo-cleft, or a true cleft. In any event, note that the parallel to (ii) with FCS is ungrammatical. Thanks to Eugenia Casielles for pointing this out.
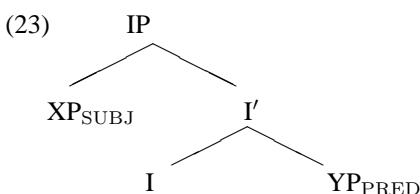
i. *¿Qué lo que se comieron los pájaros fue t$_i$?

   what what CL ate   the birds   was

ii. ¿Qué   fue lo que se   comieron los pájaros?

   what was what CL ate   the birds

iii. *¿Qué fue se comieron los pájaros?
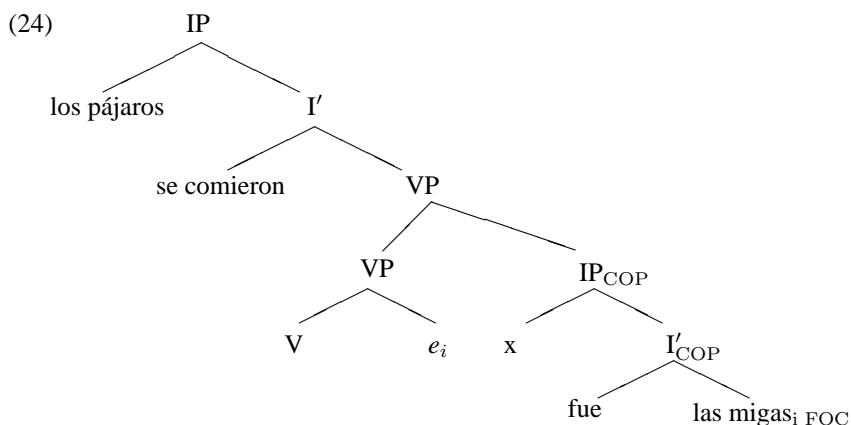
   what was CL ate   the birds

(19) a. Fue/fueron las migas lo que los pájaros se comieron.
       was/were the crumbs that the birds CL ate

       'It was the crumbs that the birds ate.'

    b. ¿Qué$_i$ t$_i$ fue lo que se comieron los pájaros.
       what was that CL ate the birds

       'What was it that the birds ate?'

(20) a. Mirta fue a París antes de conocer a Paula.
       Mirta went to Paris before of knowing to Paula

       'Mirta went to Paris before of meeting Paula'

    b. ¿*A quién fue Mirta a París antes de conocer t$_i$?
       to whom went Mirta to Paris before of knowing

(21) a. Mirta le pidió que llamara a Paula.
       Mirta CL asked that call to Paula

       'Mirta asked him/her to call Paula'

    b. ¿A quién le pidió Mirta que llamara t$_i$?
       to whom CL asked Mirta that called

       'Who did Mirta ask him/her to call?

Further evidence that the focused constituent is not in an argumental position comes from (22a), where the overt object *las migas* 'the crumbs' can appear inside an island. If we assume that arguments must be assigned theta roles under sisterhood, (22a) suggests that *las migas* 'the crumbs' cannot be the argument of *comió* 'ate', because it is not its sister. Rather, I will propose the alternative structure in (22b), with a null category in argument position coindexed with the predicate of the copular verb. However, there is no movement relation between the overt *las migas* 'the crumbs' and the null category in the main clause. Note that the corresponding pseudo-cleft is ungrammatical (cf. (22c)), suggesting, once again, that FCS is not a pseudo-cleft (thanks to Eugenia Casielles for this observation).

(22) a. El pájaro se comió me sorprende el hecho de que fuera/fueran las migas.
       the birds CL ate CL surprises the fact of that was/were the crumbs

       'The birds ate, I am surprised about the fact that it was the crumbs.'

    b. El pájaro se comió e_i [me sorprende el hecho de que fuera/fueran las migas$_i$]

    c. *Lo que se comieron los pájaros me sorprende el hecho de que fueran las
       what CL ate the birds CL surprises the fact of that were the

       migas.
       crumbs

To present a more detailed structure of FCS, I assume that the copular verb in FCS has the same minimal structural and argumental properties as other copular verbs: a subject and a predicate, and the structure in (23). In the FCS, the copular structure is an adjunct to VP, as in (24). Here, the CopP is an equative structure, whose subject is null and whose predicate is the focused DP. The argument of the main verb is null, and it is coindexed with the null subject of the copular verb.

(23)
       IP

  XP$_{SUBJ}$ I′

        I   YP$_{PRED}$

(24)

```
                    IP
            ┌────────┴────────┐
        los pájaros          I′
                      ┌───────┴───────┐
                  se comieron        VP
                            ┌─────────┴─────────┐
                           VP                 IP_COP
                      ┌─────┴─────┐        ┌─────┴─────┐
                      V          e_i       x         I′_COP
                                                 ┌─────┴─────┐
                                                fue      las migas_i FOC
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In this analysis, FCS crucially differs from pseudo-clefts and inverted pseudo-clefts in that the latter two involve a CP, but the former does not, as seen by comparing (24) with (25) below. Hence, FCS does not require (and cannot have) a complementizer, whereas pseudo-clefts and inverted pseudo-clefts must have a complementizer: the corresponding sentences to (25a-b) without *lo que* are ungrammatical (as pointed out by Eugenia Casielles, p.c.)

(25) a. Fue las migas [$_{CP}$ lo que se comieron los pájaros]

 b. Las migas fue [$_{CP}$ lo que se comieron los pájaros]

This structure directly maps to the LF proposed for focus by Zubizarreta (1998), following Chomsky (1971, 1976) and Jackendoff (1972). In this proposal, a clause containing a focused constituent such as (26a) has the assertion structure in (26b). The first part of this assertion structure is presupposed, and contains a variable in place of the focused constituent; the second part identifies that variable through an equative clause. As suggested, the assertion structure in (26b) maps directly to the syntactic structure proposed in (24): the higher part of the tree denotes the presupposed clause *los pájaros se comieron x* 'birds ate x', and the adjoined structure provides the equative part *x = migas* 'x = crumbs'.

(26) a. John bought *potatoes*

 b. John bought *x* & the *x* that John bought = potatoes

This proposed syntactic structure makes the following prediction: when the focused constituent (the predicate of the copular verb) is a quantifier, it should not take scope over any argument in the main clause, since it is not only structurally lower, but also inside an adjoined constituent. As expected, (27a) only allows for a narrow scope interpretation of the universal quantifier *cada* with respect to the indefinite subject, cf. (28b). This contrasts with similar examples without the copular verb, where both scope relations are possible, as seen in (cf. (28)).

(27) a. Un niño se comió fue cada manzana.
        a   boy CL ate   was each apple
    'it was each apple that a boy ate'

 b. A single boy ate each of the apples (narrow scope ∀)

(28) a. Un niño se comió cada manzana.
        a   boy CL ate   each apple
    'A boy ate each apple'

 b. For each apple there was a different boy that ate (wide scope ∀)

 c. A single boy ate each of the apples (narrow scope ∀)

3. The single-constituent requirement for FCS

The syntactic structure and semantic analysis just proposed can also explain another property of FCS that does not readily follow from Bosque's proposal: the fact that there can only be a single constituent after the copular verb, as seen in (29a). If there is more than one to the right of the copular verb, the result is ungrammatical regardless of which constituent is focused, as seen in (29b-d). The relevant generalization for these examples is given in (30).[4]

(29)   a. Marta le   compró pan   fue [VP a {su   abuela}]
            Marta CL bought   bread was   to her grandmother
        'It was her grandmother that Marta bought bread for.'

        b. *Marta le   compró fue [VP {pan} a   su   abuela]
            Marta CL bought   was   bread to her grandmother

        c. *Marta le   compró fue [VP pan   a   {su   abuela}]
            Marta CL bought   was   bread to her grandmother

        d. *Marta le   compró fue [VP {pan   a   su   abuela}]   (no galletas a   su
            Marta CL bought   was   bread to her grandmother not cookies   to her
        hermana)
        sister

(30)   FCS affects a single, domain-final constituent in the relevant domain (typically the clause).

   This restriction can be accounted for as follows: any constituent that appears to the right of the copular verb must be interpreted as part of the identificational predicate of that verb, hence its argument position must be a variable, as in (31), the representation for (29d) above. However, the null subject of the equative clause (x) must identify both of the variables in argument position, and, at the same time, be identified through the predicate of the copular verb. Since the antecedents (e_c e_m) do not form a single constituent, presumably, the null subject of the copular verb cannot identify the arguments of the main verb.

(31)   Marta le   compró e_c e_m [IP−cop x fue pan   a   su   abuela]
        Marta CL bought   was bread to her grandmother

   It is an independent property of copulative clauses that they cannot involve two independent constituents as predicates, unless they are non-conjoined (in which case, they can be argued to be a single constituent) as seen in (32).[5]

(32)   a. Ellos son el   hermano y   la   hermana.
            they are the brother and the sister
        'They are the brother and the sister.'

        b. *Ellos son el   hermano para/de la   hermana.
            they are the brother for/of   the sister

        c. Eso es para/de la   hermana.
            that is for/of   the sister
        'That is for/of the sister.'

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[4]Since FCS can appear DP-internally (cf. ex. (2f) above), (30) is formulated as generally as possible, for our present purposes, the copular verb takes the last constituent in the clause.

[5]As Eugenia Casielles has pointed out to me, the restrictions in (29) also apply to other types of clefts, and I believe the analysis proposed can be extended to them, all clefts share in common the presence of a copular verb.

# 4. Nuclear peak-aligned focus. P-movement

One final question to be addressed is why the focused constituent must be domain final (the second part of (30)). Several authors (Contreras 1976, Fant 1984, Zubizarreta 1998, Face 2002) have argued that focus is aligned with the prosodic peak of the clause, which in Spanish, is the lowest c-commanded argument in it, typically the one on right edge (cf. Zubizarreta 1998). Zubizarreta formalizes this observation in the *Focus-Prosody Correspondence Principle* in (33).

(33) *Focus-Prosody Correspondence Principle (FPCP)*
      The focused constituent (or F-marked constituent) of a phrase must contain the intonational nucleus of that phrase.

According to Zubizarreta, if a focused constituent is in a position where nuclear stress is not assigned (i.e. it is not final), a p(rosodically)-motivated movement realigns constituents so that focus and nuclear stress are mapped to the same constituent. For example, if the context requires narrow focus on the subject, the constituents to the right of the subject will move, yielding the order VOS, as in (34)-(35), where the lower VP adjoins to the higher VP, according to Zubizarreta.

(34) Perdió un anillo {*Miguel*}
      lost   a   ring   Miguel

      '{Miguel} lost a ring'

(35)
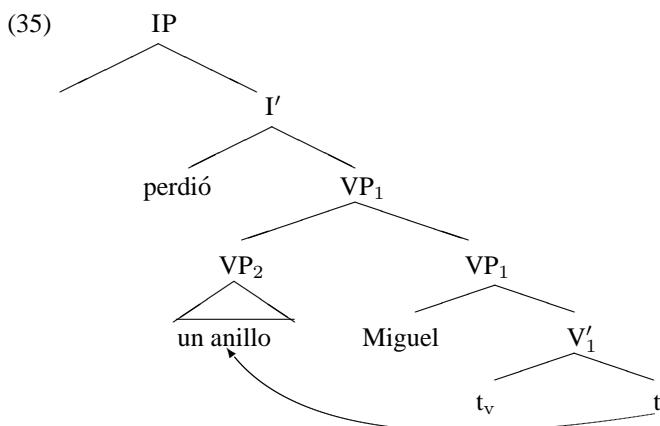
In the case of FCS, the focused constituent must also receive the intonational peak of the clause. If focus and intonational peak are not aligned, the result is ungrammatical, as seen in (36), where focus is on *camiseta* 'T-shirt' and stress on *Marta*. This suggests that FCS is also subject to the FPCP in (33) above.

(36) *Le regalaron fue una {camiseta} a   *Marta*.
       CL gave   was a   T-shirt   to Marta

The main difference between (exclusively) peak-aligned focus and FCS is that the former involves presentational focus, whereas the latter denotes exhaustive focus, as the following tests, proposed by Kiss (1998), suggest. The first test rests on the following idea: if a sentence with a conjoined, focused DP is contradicted by the same sentence with only one of the focused conjuncts, then focus is exhaustive, because the first clause exhausts the set of alternatives, and the second contradicts the exhaustive choice of alternatives offered by the first clause.

If we apply this test to FCS, (37b) is contradictory with respect to (37a), as expected if FCS exhausts the set of alternatives. The second test involves denying the content of the focused constituent in one sentence, as in (38). If the second clause is a possible continuation to the first one, the first one involves

exhaustive focus, because it denies the exhaustive nature of the set of alternatives. If focus is presentational, the set is not exhaustive, hence a continuation that denies such exhaustivity is not felicitous. As (38) shows, FCS patterns with exhaustive focus in this test, as do other clefts, whereas peak-aligned focus is presentational.

(37) a. Compraron un carro híbrido fueron {*Marta y Miguel*}
         bought   a   car   hybrid   was   Marta and Miguel
         'It was Marta and Miguel who bought a hybrid car.'

      b. Compró un carro híbrido fue {*Marta*}
         bought a   car   hybrid   was   Marta
         It was Marta who bought a hybrid car.'

(38) a. Miguel perdió fue un {*anillo*}
         Miguel lost   was a   ring
         'It was ring that Miguel lost.'

      b. No, Miguel también perdió un arete
         no, Miguel also   lost   an earring
         'No, Miguel also lost an earring.'

These facts suggest a division of labor in which focus marking in FCS is done through nuclear stress alignment, whereas exhaustivity is added by the copular verb. The fact that FCS is subject to FPCP explains why the constituent associated with the copular verb must be clause-final: it must receive the intonational peak of the clause, hence the ungrammaticality of (36), where the focused constituent does not receive it.

5.   One focus, two locations

To summarize the analysis, I have argued that FCS involves assigning focus to a constituent by aligning it with the clausal stress position (as in the case of a pseudo-cleft). Syntactically, FCS involves two clauses, one with a variable (corresponding to the constituent that is focused) and interpreted as a presupposition; and a second clause adjoined to VP, headed by a copular verb, that takes a null resumptive pronoun (coindexed with the variable), and the focused constituent as its predicate. By virtue of being a copular structure, the null resumptive pronoun is equated with the predicate, and, in turn, identifies the variable in argument position.

We can now return to the general typology of focus constructions presented at the beginning of this paper. Most traditional clefts are not aligned with intonational peak of the main clause, since they are to the left of that clause. Additionally, they are attached to the higher projections of that clause, rather than the vP projections, as FCS has been argued to be. Focus structures are given in (39).

(39) **Clefts (CP-focus)**   **FCS (VP-focus)**   **Nuclear stress-assigned focus (VP-focus)**
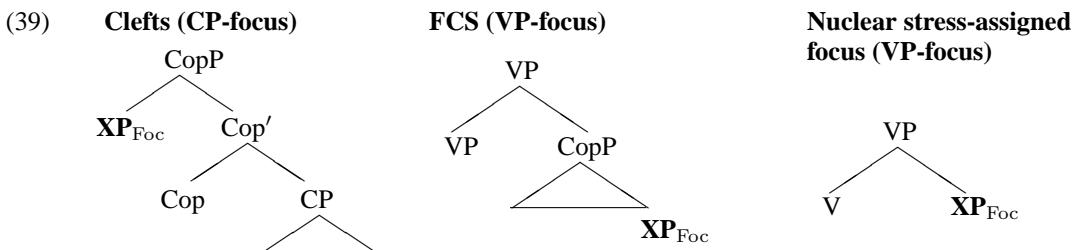
In the first structure, the copular phrase is merged with a CP, in FCS, the copular phrase is merged with VP, and its predicated must align with the clausal stress position, in the third one, the focused constituent is also aligned with the clausal stress position. Thus, the scope domain for focus is CP or VP, what Chomsky (2000, 2001) has called a **strong phase.** We can conclude that the domain of focus is a strong phase, as expected if strong phases are the minimal interface units, and focus is an interface category.

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