

What's special about specificational clauses

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Third annual SLUGS Symposium, UC Berkeley, November 14, 2004

Two kinds of copular clauses (Halliday (1967:§6); Higgins (1979); Akmajian (1979))

(1) PREDICATIONAL

- a. The recipient of this year's Nobel Peace Prize is from Kenya.
- b. The lead actress in that movie is terrible.

(2) SPECIFICATIONAL

- a. The recipient of this year's Nobel Peace Prize is Wangari Maathai.
- b. The lead actress in that movie is Ingrid Bergman.

Question What's the difference between (1) and (2)?

Some intuitions and analogies

1. Aboutness (Akmajian 1979:162–165)

- Like (3), (1a-b) tell us something **about** the referent of their subject:

(3) Chris ran a marathon in 3 hours and 8 minutes.

- (2a-b) don't tell us something about their subject, they tell us **who** it is.

2. Variables and values (Higgins 1979:153ff, 234ff)

- specificational subject introduces variable:

x such that x received this year's Nobel Peace Prize

- post copular expression provides value for variable:

Wangari Maathai

3. Filling out forms (conversation with B.H. Partee in late May 2002)

- (4)
- a. **Name:**
 - b. **Address:**
 - c. **Shoe size:**
 - d. **Height:**
 - e. **Marital status:**

- Conventional (specificational) response:

- (5)
- a. Name: *Bob McPhearson*
 - b. Address: *1 Easy Street*
 - c. Shoe size: *44*
 - d. Height: *2 meters*
 - e. Marital status: *single*

- Unconventional (predicational) response:

- (6)
- a. Name: *difficult to spell*
 - b. Address: *easy to remember*
 - c. Shoe size: *a problem*
 - d. Height: *my advantage*
 - e. Marital status: *irrelevant*

Previous accounts of specialness of specificational clauses

- 1. Special syntax (Heggie 1988)
- 2. Special case of predication (Rothstein 2001)
- 3. Special case of equation (Heycock and Kroch 1999)

New proposal Special alignment of semantic properties with syntactic position driven by information structure (Mikkelsen 2004b; Heycock and Kroch 2002)

(7)		topic/focus		topic/focus
	PREDICATIONAL CLAUSE	<i>The recipient</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>from Kenya</i>
		subject		predicate complement
	SEMANTIC INGREDIENTS	referential DP		predicative XP
		subject		predicate complement
	SPECIFICATIONAL CLAUSE	<i>The recipient</i>	<i>is</i>	<i>Wangari Maathai</i>
		topic		focus

Key claims about specificational clauses

- i. Standard syntax: initial DP is subject (Ask me later!)
- ii. Subject is non-referential (Section 1)
- iii. Subject is topic (Section 2)
- iv. ii. and iii. are connected (Section 3)

1 Specificational subject is non-referential

1.1 Evidence from pronominalization

Starting assumption pronominalization is sensitive to the semantic type of its antecedent.¹

- In the domain of humans:
 - *she* and *he* are used to pronominalize referential DPs,
 - *it* and *that* are used to pronominalize non-referential DPs, including predicative DPs.
- Use pronominalization to probe the semantic type of copular subjects.
- Three environments:
 - Tag questions
 - Left dislocation structures
 - Question–answer pairs

1.1.1 Tag questions

The form of the pronoun in a tag question is determined by the subject of the tagged clause.²

(8) The lead actress in that movie lives in Belmont, do(es)n't {**she**/*he/*it/*they/*we}?

Predicational copular clause: *she* → referential subject.

(9) The lead actress in that movie is Swedish, isn't **she**/*it?

Specificational clause: *it* → predicative subject:

(10) The lead actress in that movie is Ingrid Bergman, isn't **it**?

Danish: *hun* = Eng. *she*, *det* = Eng. *it/that*

(11) Den højeste spiller på holdet er ikke svensker, er {*det / **hun**}? [predicational]
the tallest player on team.DEF is not Swedish, is { it / she }?
'The tallest player on the team isn't Swedish, is { *it / she }?'

(12) Den højeste spiller på holdet er ikke Minna, er **det**? [specificational]
the tallest player on team.DEF is not M, is it?
'The tallest player on the team isn't Minna, is it?'

¹See Doron (1988:282–286), Engdahl (2001:132–133), Heggie (1988:67–71), Jespersen (1927:123–124), Kuno (1972:355–363), Mikkelsen (2002b, 2003, 2004b: chapter 4), Moro (1997:71–75), Partee (1972), Schlenker (2003:169–173), and Zamparelli (2000:17–18) for data and discussion.

²Bolinger (1957:17–22, 116–122; 1975:279); Bowers (1976:237); Bresnan (1994:97); Jespersen (1924:198, 302, 323); Kay (2002:§4); McCawley (1998:251); Quirk et al. (1985:§11.8).

1.1.2 Left dislocation

Left dislocation leaves resumptive pronoun inside CP:

- (13) My father, **he**'s lived here all his life. [cf. Ross (1967:235, ex. 6.136)]

Use subject left dislocation to probe semantic type of copular subjects:

Predicational copular clause: *she* → referential subject.

- (14) The lead actress in that movie, **she**/*it/*that is Swedish.

Specificational clause: *it, that* → predicative subject:

- (15) The lead actress in that movie, **it/that** is Ingrid Bergman.

Danish facts are parallel, and contrast extends into inanimate domain (grammatical gender: common vs. neuter):

- (16) **Den største by i Skotland**, {**den** / *det } er vist større end København. [Predicational]
the largest city in Scotland, it-COM / it-NEU is PTC bigger than Copenhagen
'The largest city in Scotland, (I believe) that/it is bigger than Copenhagen.'
- (17) **Den største by i Skotland**, {*den / **det** } er vist Glasgow. [Specificational]
the-COM largest city in Scotland, it-COM / it-NEU is PTC Glasgow
'The largest city in Scotland, (I believe) that/it is Glasgow.'

1.1.3 Question–Answer pairs

- (18) Q: What nationality is the lead actress in that movie?
A: **She**/*it/*that is Swedish. [Predicational]
- (19) Q: Who is the lead actress in that movie?
A: {**It/That**} is Ingrid Bergman. [Specificational]

Danish facts are parallel, and contrast extends into inanimate domain:

- (20) Q: Hvor stor er **den største by i Skotland**?
how big is the-COM largest city in Scotland
A: {**Den** / *Det } er vist større end København. [Predicational]
it-COM / it-NEU is PTC larger than Copenhagen
'I believe it's larger than Copenhagen.'
- (21) Q: Hvilken by er **den største (by) i Skotland**?
which-COM city is the largest (city) in Scotland
A: {*Den / **Det** } er vist Glasgow. [Specificational]
it-COM / it-NEU is PTC Glasgow
'I believe it's Glasgow.'

Upshot Subject of predicational clause is referential, subject of specificational clause is predicative.

A prediction Only DPs capable of being predicative (property-denoting) can occur as subject of specificational clauses.

1.2 Which DPs occur as specificational subjects?

Case 1: Definite descriptions, possessive DPs, partitive DPs, indefinite descriptions

Can be predicative (Partee 1987) → do occur as specificational subjects.

- Definite description:

(22) **The most successful such enterprise** is i-flex solutions Ltd., whose Flexcube is the world's bestselling banking software package.³

- Possessive DP:

(23) **Our next speaker** is Claudia Maienborn.⁴

- Partitive DP:

(24) **En af de danske skribenter, jeg altid har beundret næsten uden reservation**, er den som One of the Danish writers I always have admired almost without reservation is the as tennisspiller mere kendte Torben Ulrich.⁵
tennis-player more known Torben Ulrich
'**One of the Danish writers that I have always admired almost without reservation** is Torben Ulrich, who is in fact better known as a tennis player.'

- Indefinite description:

(25) **A philosopher who seems to share the Kiparskys' intuitions on some factive predicates** is Unger (1972), who argues that ...⁶

Case 2: Strongly quantificational DPs, (most) pronouns, and names

Can not be predicative (McNally 1992:6,87,93; Mikkelsen 2004a) → do not occur as specificational subjects.

- Strongly quantificational DP:

(26) ***Most actresses in that movie** are Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullmann.

- Most pronouns:

(27) ***She** is Ingrid Bergman, isn't it?

(28) ***They** are Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullmann, isn't it?

... except the predicate anaphors *it* and *that*, which do occur here:

(29) **That's** Ingrid Bergman, isn't it?

(30) **That's** Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullmann, isn't it?

(31) Carla heard the car coming before it topped the little rise in the road that around here they call a hill. **It's** her, she thought. Mrs. Jamieson — Sylvia — home from her holiday in Greece.⁷

(32) **It's** her, isn't it?

- Names:

(33) ***Susan** is Mrs. Robertson, isn't it?

³Shailaja Neelakantan "India's IT Firms: Beyond Outsourcing", *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, November 20, 2003, p. A9.

⁴Rainer Blutner, session chair at the workshop "Pragmatics in Optimality Theory" at the 14th ESSLLI in Trento, August 14 2002.

⁵Dan Turrel, quoted in Lars Bukdahl "Beatnik med boldøje" (Beatnik with an eye for the ball), *Weekendavisen Bøger*, May 9–14 2003, p. 2.

⁶Delacruz (1976:195, fn. 8).

⁷Opening paragraph of Alice Munroe's "Runaway", *The New Yorker*, August 11 2003, p. 63.

2 Specificational subject is topic

2.1 Evidence from Question–Answer pairs

- (34) **Question–Answer Congruence** (Halliday 1967)
The constituent in the answer that corresponds to the *wh*-phrase in the question is the focus.

Claim 1 Predicational clauses have a flexible focus structure.

- Complement focus:

- (35) Q: Who is John?
A: John is the mayor.

- Subject focus:

- (36) Q: Who is the mayor?
A: John is the mayor.

- Contrastive focus on complement or subject:

- (37) Q : Is Sam the mayor?
A1: No, Sam is the FIRE CHIEF.
A2: No, JOHN is the mayor

Claim 2 Specificational clauses have a fixed focus structure:⁸

- Complement focus is fine:

- (38) Q: Who is the mayor?
A: The mayor is John

- But subject focus is infelicitous:⁹

- (39) Q: Who/What is John?
A: #The mayor is John.

- also no contrastive focus on subject DP:¹⁰

- (40) Q: Is the mayor Sam?
A: #No, the FIRE CHIEF is Sam.
A: No, the mayor is JOHN

Upshot (Standard Wisdom) In a specificational clause

- complement is focus
- subject is topic

⁸See Higgins (1979:234–6), Partee (2000:199–200), Heycock and Kroch (2002:148–149), Mikkelsen (2002a:§4) and the works cited there.

⁹See Heycock and Kroch (2002) for detailed discussion and defense of this claim.

¹⁰Data from Partee (2000:200, ex. (46)), who credits Williams (1997).

2.2 Beyond Question–Answer pairs: Discourse-driven inversion

- Based on 1700+ attested examples, Birner (1994, 1996) argues that (41)–(43) involve DISCOURSE-DRIVEN INVERSION.
- Inversion allows the presentation of relatively familiar information (**bold**) before a comparatively unfamiliar logical subject (underlined).

(41) We have complimentary soft drinks, coffee, Sanka, tea, and milk. **Also complimentary** is red and white wine.
[Birner 1994: ex. 18b]

(42) She got married recently and **at the wedding** was the mother, the stepmother, and Debbie.
[Birner 1994: ex. 25c]

(43) In the Cabinet Room of the White House yesterday, Pres. Reagan played 8 minutes of taped conversations among three Soviet pilots that took place before a South Korean jetliner apparently was shot out of the sky in Soviet airspace early Thursday.

Listening to the pilots' excited voices were congressional leaders, Cabinet officials and foreign advisors.
[Birner 1996:ex. 16c]

- Hypothesis: specificational clauses are a special case of inversion:
 - serving the same information packaging function,
 - but different syntax (inversion to subject position, not to higher A-bar position, due to syntactic category of preposed element)

(44) The biggest reason people want to be Vice-President, though, is that it has become the royal road to the Presidency, even if one's boss remains in perfect health. After Adams and Thomas Jefferson, during the republic's first two centuries **the only person ever to win a Presidential election while serving as Vice-President** was Martin Van Buren, in 1836.¹¹

(45) [Towards the end of an article discussing various challenges posed by modernization for Gambell, an Eskimo village on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea]¹²

Perhaps **the Gambell resident most concerned about what the village is facing these days** is Edmond Apassingok, 41, president of the Indian Reorganization Act Council, which, along with the Gambell City Council, governs the village.

(46) [From an article about the current hip-hop scene in Israel, its political role, and its relationship with the media]¹³

A hip-hop scene has been developing in Israel since the mid-1990's, and it is becoming commercially and artistically stronger and stronger. . . . **The first Israeli hip-hop group** was Shabak Samech, which came out with its first album in 1995. . . . [Paragraph about Shabak Samech] . . . But Shabak Samech achieved platinum status with its second album and thus opened the door to a larger audience. Since then, Shabak Samech has ceased to appear together and its members are pursuing their own individual interests. **The most successful of them** is the rapper Mook E, who produced the album *Shma Israel* (Hear, Israel). . . . [Paragraph about Mook E leading into discussion of political lyrics] . . . **The MC who has most become a media icon** is Subliminal. . . . [Paragraph about Subliminal] . . .

¹¹Hendrik Hertzberg "Vice Squads", *The New Yorker*, March 22, 2004, pp. 31–34. The relevant paragraph is on p. 34. The cited paragraph actually contains two specificational clauses—the first with a CP predicate complement—but I will only discuss the second one, whose subject is in bold.

¹²Sarah Kershaw "For Native Alaskans, Tradition Is Yielding to Modern Customs", *The New York Times* August 21, 2004.

¹³"Hip-Hop Speaks to the reality of Israel", *World Press Review*, February 2004.

3 Bringing things together

An intuition

- the fact that the subject of a specificational clause is always topic is related to the fact that the subject DP is less referential than the post-copular DP

The idea in outline

- Other things being equal the most referential DP occupies the subject position. This is the case in predicational copular clauses.
- But the preference for the topic to be in subject position (Prince (1981), Beaver (2004)) may override this default alignment. The result is a specificational clause.
- The reason the subject of a specificational clause is always topic is that this is precondition for getting a specificational clause at all!

(47)

	topic/focus		topic/focus
PREDICATIONAL CLAUSE	<i>The recipient</i>	is	<i>from Kenya</i>
	subject		predicate complement
SEMANTIC INGREDIENTS	referential DP		predicative XP
	subject		predicate complement
SPECIFICATIONAL CLAUSE	<i>The recipient</i>	is	<i>Wangari Maathai</i>
	topic		focus

An analogy with voice alternations

(48)

ACTIVE CLAUSE	<i>My pig</i>	ate	<i>the peanuts</i>
	subject		object
SEMANTIC ROLES	agent ('eater')		patient ('eaten')
	subject		by-phrase
PASSIVE CLAUSE	<i>The peanuts</i>	were eaten	<i>by my pig</i>

(49)

	DEFAULT ALIGNMENT	MARKED ALIGNMENT
NON-COPULAR CLAUSE	active	passive
COPULAR CLAUSE	predicational	specificational

Why are specificational clauses not morpho-syntactically marked?

- The copula does not carry any theta roles—nobody is doing anything to anyone.
- Hence, syntax is relieved of its normal argument-structure-expressing duties, and free to express information structure without morpho-syntactic marking!

4 Conclusion

What's special about specificational clauses is

- **not** their syntax — they are ordinary subject-initial clauses
- **not** their semantics — they involve one referential element and one predicative element
- **but rather** the alignment of the predicative element with subject position.
- This unusual alignment is grounded in information structure, and ultimately principles of discourse-coherence, which in turn accounts for the fixed topic–focus structure exhibited by specificational clauses.

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