The syntax and semantics of the Coptic cleft constructions

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ABSTRACT: Cleft constructions are very common in the syntactic patterns of Coptic Egyptian used to indicate the focal status of nominal arguments. Clefts sentences are complex sentences structures that express a single proposition by means of a biclausal syntax. In Coptic, cleft constructions represent a special type of tripartite nominal sentences in which a noun phrase (or its equivalent) is equated with a restrictive relative clause. Nominal clefts encode different semantic types of focus, ranging from presentational (new information) focus to explicit contrast.

1. Introduction

Cleft sentences like (1a-b) below have been described as sentence patterns that overtly embody their discourse function. As the terminology suggests, cleft constructions are formed by dividing a more elementary clause into two parts, namely an initial focus constituent and a backgrounded proposition, which is subordinated by being placed in a relative construction (see, recently, Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1414ff, Lambrecht 2001).

(1) a. It was a red wool sweater that I bought
   b. It was the wording of the question that confused me.

Although the biclausal format of the cleft construction seems to be clear enough, languages show a considerable amount of variation in the way they encode the equivalent of English it-clefts. Parameters of typological variation concern:

(2) Parameters of typological variation in cleft constructions
   (i) The type of copula device that is employed (verbal vs. pronominal copulas)
   (ii) The form of the predicative relative clause
   (iii) The constituents that can undergo clefting.

I will present a descriptive analysis of the Coptic cleft construction.† As will be shown in section 2, nominal clefts involve minimally involve two clauses: the

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† Coptic is the vernacular of late-antique and early medieval Christian Egypt. The modern term Coptic is derived from Arabic qubji, itself a corruption of the Greek word (α)γυπτικός “Egyptian”. Unlike its predecessors, Coptic is written in a Greek-based alphabet with seven additional letters for the expression of native Egyptian sounds. Due to extensive lexical and grammatical borrowing, Coptic may be classified as a bilingual Greek-Egyptian language variety (Reintges 2001a). Coptic Egyptian is actually a dialect cluster, consisting of at least six regional varieties, two of which gained supra-regional importance: Sahidic, the language of Upper Egypt and Bohairic, the language of Lower Egypt, the latter of which presently functions as the liturgical language of the Coptic
matrix clause is a tripartite nominal sentence that includes a restrictive relative clause. Taken together, the matrix clauses and the embedded relative clause express a single proposition. The meaning and function of Coptic cleft sentences will be dealt with in section 3. Nominal clefts are focusing constructions used to mark as focal an argument that may otherwise be construed as non-focal, or to mark as non-focal a predicate that might otherwise be in focus. Section 4 summarises the main results of this paper.

2. The equational nature of Coptic clefts

2.1 Information-packaging constructions

Coptic may be described as a discourse-configurational language where topic or focus prominence involves a departure from the canonical S-V-O order, which is exemplified in (3a).2 (3b) is an example of left-dislocation, where the topicalised constituent is cross-referenced by a resumptive pronoun in the associated comment clause. Subject-verb inversion is illustrated in (3c). Notice that the postverbal subject NP is morphologically marked by the particle nk3i, while the preverbal subject position contains a coreferential pronoun. I take this cataphorical subject pronoun to be a placeholder for the inverted subject. In other words, the postverbal placement of nominal subject is an instance of rightward movement.3

(3) a. a p-tfeis p-nute p-pantokrator tfi n-u-kah
   PERF def:sm-lord def:sm-god def:sm-almighty take DO-indef:s-earth
   eβol hm p-kah
   PCL from def:sm-earth
   “The Lord, God Almighty, took earth out of earth.” (Sh. ad. Or. 401)

Orthodox Church. The language material in this paper is exclusively drawn from Sahidic Coptic.

2 Despite the pragmatic underpinning of Coptic clause structure, the sequence (I)-S-V-O(-X) can nevertheless be identified as the basic word order from which other word order patterns are derived (cf. Reintges 2001b, 2003).

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b. n-fere n-ni-aion se-tfi hime
   def:p-son of-this:p-world (PRES)-3p-take woman
   “The sons of worlds, they take a wife.” (Sh. ad Or. 429 [Luke 20:34])

c. awɔ a-f-tfi eow nk'i p-ran m-pe.n-tfoeis
   and PERF-3sm-take glory PCL def:sm-name of-def:sm.1p-lord
   jesos pe-khristos
   Jesus def:sm-Christ
   “And the name of our Lord Jesus Christ was glorified.” (Eud. 40:27-28)

The focused argument or adjuncts of the verb do not necessarily undergo syntactic reordering to indicate their informational status. As we can see from the question-answer pair in (4) below, Coptic permits focus constituents to remain in-situ, i.e. to stay in exactly the same syntactic position that they would occupy in pragmatically neutral sentences. When this happens, the tense-aspect inflection assumes a special form. The special inflectional marker of focus-in-situ constructions is a relativising morpheme.4

(4) Q:  e-tetn-tfi m-pej-rome e-tɔn
   REL (-PRES)-2p-bring DO-this:sm-man to-where
A:  e-n-tfi mmo-f e-p-topos n-apa mena
   REL (-PRES)-1p- bring DO-3sm to-def:sm-shrine of-Apa Mena
   “Where do you bring this (sick) man to? - We bring him to the shrine of Apa Mêna” (Mena, Mirc., 24b:1-6)

Cleft sentences represent yet another type of focusing constructions. Coptic clefts occur in the declarative as well as the interrogative mood, as shown by the contrast between (5a) and (5b).

(5) a. efɔl tfe p-rro pe [nt-a-f-tamio-f na-s ]
   PCL C def:sm-king COP:sm REL-PERF-3sm-furnish-3sm for-3sf
   “Because (it was) the King who had furnished it (the chamber) for her.”
   (Eud. 50:8-9)

b. e nim m-monahkose pe [nt-a-f-βɔk faro-f]
   or who of-monk COP:sm REL-PERF-3sm-come to-3sm
   etβe p-utfai n-te.f-psikhe ]
   for def:sm-salvation of def:sf-3sm-soul
   “Or which monk (was it) who came to him for the salvation of his soul?” (KHML II 11: 9-11)

2.2 The biclausal structure of Coptic cleft sentences

The element that keeps recurring in both declarative and interrogative clefts is the deictic copula pe, which is the same element as the agreement clitic of non-verbal sentences in Semitic (Doron 1983, 1986). The additional pronoun of tripartite nominal sentences and cleft constructions has no anaphoric role, but

4 See Reintges 2002 for detailed discussion on the syntactic conditions on special inflection.
fulfils a purely syntactic function in forcing a sentential interpretation of the structure, thus preventing a potential ambiguity with a phrasal interpretation. Thus compare the declarative and interrogative equational sentences in (6a) and (7a) with the corresponding cleft constructions in (6b) and (7b).

(6) a. **anok pe p-fere m-p-nute**
   I COP:sm def:sm-son of-def:sm-god
   “I (am) the son of God.” (Abbatôn 240:13)

   b. **anok ha pe [nt-a-i-r noše ero-k**
   I self-1s COP:sm REL-PERF-1s-do sin against-2sm
   n-u-sop n-wot ]
   DO-indef:s-time of-single
   “(It is) me, however, who sinned against you just once!” (Ac. A&P 200:87)

(7) a. **nim ne n-baampe awo nim ne n-esow**
   who COP:p def:p-goat and who COP:p def:p-sheep
   “Who (are) the goats and who (are) the sheep?” (AP Chaîne no. 140, 31:14)

   b. **nim tenu p- [et _ sorm m-p-meefe ]**
   who now COP:sm C(-PRES) misguid DO-marker-def:sm-crowd
   “Who (is it) now who is misleading the crowd?” (Ac. A&P 212:231)

Two types of analysis may be envisaged to account for the front position of the clefted pronoun or question word in the b-examples of (6) to (7) above. On one type of analysis, one could assimilate Coptic cleft sentences to focus fronting constructions in Hausa along the lines of Green (1997, 2000). On this analysis, Coptic nominal clefts would instantiate mono-clausal structures, where the clefted NP has undergone focus fronting to the left periphery of the clause. The deictic copula pe to its right would function as a fully grammaticalised focus marker.

In the remainder of this section, I will provide three arguments for a biclausal analysis of Coptic nominal clefts. The first argument concerns the structural analogy between cleft sentences and relative clauses. Thus compare.

(8) a. **p-joeis gar p- [et _ o m-metre n-ta-senedis ]**
   def:sm-lord pcl COP:sm C(-PRES) be as-witness to-def:sm:1s-conscience
   “For (it is) the Lord who is witness to my conscience.” (V. Pach. 89:1-2)

   b. **p-angelos [et _ diakonei e-pe.k-jot aβraham ]**
   def:sm-angel C serve to-def:sm:2sm-father Abraham
   “The angel who serves your father Abraham” (Test.Is. 229:19-20)

The relative complementiser et- can be used in a single context only, namely when the subject is relativised or clefted. Moreover, the embedded subject position must be governed by the complementiser et-, meaning that there can be
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no intervening pre-subject tense-aspect-mood marker (including the negative scope definer n-). In a configuration of government, the embedded subject position must be occupied by an invisible placeholder or relative gap (indicated as ‘__’) (see Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1036ff. for the relevant discussion).5

If, on the other hand, the direct object argument undergoes relativisation or focus clefting or a tense-aspect-mood marker disrupt the syntactic continuity between the relative complementiser and the embedded subject, an alternating relative marker must be selected. Moreover, resumptive pronouns are inserted into the structure to indicate the antecedent’s internal grammatical role, as shown in (9a-b). Resumptive direct object pronouns are underlined, indexes indicate co-referentiality.

(9) a. t-irincē m-pa-tfoejs [nt-a-f-taa-ṣi na-i ]
   def:sm-peace of-def:sm:ls-lord REL-PERF-3sm-give-3sf to-1s
   “The peace of my lord which he has given me” (Test. Is. 230:10-11),
   b. u-hōpjēi gar e-nanu-f pe
   indef:sm-thing PCL REL(-PRES)-be.beautiful COP:SM
   [nt-a-f-aa-f  ]
   REL-PERF-3sm-make-3sm
   “(It is) a beautiful thing that he did.” (AP Chaîne no. 17, 3:26)

Not only does the same relative complementisers show up in relative clauses and subject and direct object clefts, both constructions types also employ the same type of placeholders (relative gaps and resumptive pronoun) to recover the internal role of their antecedent, viz. the nominal head of the relative clause and the clefted NP.

Further evidence for the biclausal format of Coptic cleft constructions comes from the distribution of tense and negation markers (compare Lumsden 1990). Coptic clefts mark only two tense-distinctions, the present and the past. Present tense reference is not morphologically marked, but past reference is encoded by means of the Preterit marker ne-, which is a BE-type copular verb. The same tense restriction applies to nominal sentence patterns.

(10) a. ne ntof mawaa-f pe [ e-f-anakhorej
   PRET HE alone-3sm COP:sm REL(-PRES)-3sm-retreat
   hm p-ma etmmau ]
   in def:sm-place that
   “(It) was him alone who was living as a hermit in that place.” (AP Chaîne no. 181, 43:21-22)

The obligatory presence of a gap in subject relatives has come to be known as the “Highest Subject Restriction” (HSR) in the generative research tradition. The HSR is attested in a variety of genetically and typologically unrelated languages, for instance, in Semitic and in Celtic (McCloskey 1990, Shlonksy 1992). See Reintges 1998 for a more detailed discussion of the HSR Subject Restriction” in the Coptic relativisation paradigm.
b. $\text{p-hagios de apa mena ne u-remn-keme pe}$
def:sm-holy PCL Apa Mēna PRET indef:s-nom-Egypt he
$kata pe.f-genos$
according.to def:sm.3sm-origin
“(As for) the holy Apa Mena, he was an Egyptian by origin.” (Mena, Martyrd. 6a:5-8).

The predicative part of cleft sentences is not so constrained and combines with
the whole range of tense-aspect-mood markers. A biclausal analysis can
accommodate rather straightforwardly the presence of tense restrictions in
the cleft part and the absence thereof in predicative part.
As we can see from the contrast between (11a) and (11b), negation can appear
in two different places. If negation is in the relative clause it is part of the
presupposition, but if it is in the matrix nominal sentence it isn’t (cf. Huddleston
& Pullum 2002:1419). The different scope reading vis-à-vis the syntactic
position of the negative marker follows directly from the biclausal analysis.

(11) a. $\text{nim p-[ et-n-f-na-pisteue an e-ne-k’om}$
who COP:sm C(-FUT)-NEG-3sm-GO-believe NOT in-def:p-deeds
$m-p-nute }$
of-def:sm-God
“Who (is it) that will not believe in the mighty deeds of God?” (KMHL
II 37:12-13).

b. $\text{m-p-rome an p- [et ___ tfi kβa nhet-s}$
NEG-def:sm-man NOT COP:sm C(-PRES) take vengeance by-3sf
$h\text{n u-k’ont }$
in indef:sm-wrath
“(It is) not man who takes vengeance by it (the sword) wrathfully.”
(Sh. IV 12:12)

Ouhalla (1997) argues for a mono-clausal analysis of cleft sentences in Standard
Arabic, which bear close resemblance to the nominal cleft constructions
of Coptic Egyptian considered so far.

(12) $\text{zaynab-u hiyya [lla-tii ?allaf-at l-riwaayat-a ]}$
Zaynab-NOM COP:sf REL-the-3sm write-PERF:3sf the-novel-ACC
“It was Zaynab who wrote the novel.” (Adapted from Ouhalla 1997:7,
ex. 6a)

The main argument for a mono-clausal NP-COPULA-NP analysis is the nominal
character of the relative clause following the deictic copula $\text{lla-tii}$, which Ouhalla
takes to be a free relative clause in predicative function. Due to the phonological
reduction of the deictic copula, nominal cleft sentences look superficially like
bipartite nominal sentences where the subject term is an NP or its equivalent
and the predicate nominal a headless relative clause. The problem is that such
structures do not exist in the language. When the subject term is equated with a
free relative, the presence of a deictic copula is mandatory, as seen in (13).

(13) \[ NP \text{ne-nt-a-u-diakonei} \quad \text{de} \quad \text{kalas} \quad \text{ne} \]
\[ \text{def:p-REL-PERF-3p-serve} \quad \text{PCL} \quad \text{well} \quad \text{COP:p} \]
\[ NP \text{ne-nt-a-u-ah} \quad \text{e-rat-u} \quad \text{hm} \quad \text{p-fi} \]
\[ \text{def:p-REL-PERF-3p-stand} \quad \text{on-foot-3p in} \quad \text{def:sm-height} \]
\[ \text{n-ne-graphe} \]
\[ \text{of:df:p-scritp} \]

“The ones who served well (are) those who stand within the confines of the Scriptures.” (Praec. et institut. Pach. 33:30-31)

Moreover, the deictic copula may be deleted from the surface structure of the clause, when the clefted NP is a contrastively stressed pronoun, as shown in (14). Copula deletion is systematically absent in tripartite nominal sentences where two lexical NPs are equated.

(14) \[ ntok \quad \text{et}_\_ \quad \text{na-ti} \quad \text{logos} \quad \text{m-p-nute} \quad \text{ha ta-psykhe} \]
\[ \text{YOU} \quad \text{C(-FUT)} \quad \text{GO-give} \quad \text{account} \quad \text{to:df:sm-god} \quad \text{for} \quad \text{df:sm-f1s-soul} \]

“(It is) you who will account to God for my soul.” (Hil. 5:28)

Coptic cleft constructions have a form that is identical to that of tripartite nominal sentences. They minimally involve two clauses, one of which is the matrix nominal clause and the other the subordinate relative clause. Since the matrix clause is a copular construction, clefting is only applicable to the nominal arguments of the clause. Clauses, verb phrases and other predicates cannot be clefted, because they denote relations rather than individuals, which serve as the primary domain of identification (see Heggi 1993 for a detailed discussion on thematic restrictions on cleftability).

3. Semantic types of focus

Coptic nominal clefts encode a range of different semantic types of focus. The interpretation of focus is based on the interaction of several discourse-related factors, such as the identifiability of the referent of the clefted constituent and the informational predictability of the embedded relative clause. Yet, the different focus readings of nominal clefts fall within the spectrum of exhaustive listing focus in the sense of Kiss (1998): exhaustive listing specifies an exhaustive set of discourse entities for which a given proposition holds true and excludes other possibilities.

3.1. Presentational focus

The initial focus of nominal clefts may express information that is not construable from the previous discourse, meaning that the constituent in question has no semantic antecedent and has not therefore been brought to the addressee’s attention in the previous discourse. Presentational focus is exemplified by those
cases where the cleft constituent is an indefinite noun phrase, as in (15), or an interrogative pronoun, as in (16) below. Such cleft structures imply the uniqueness of the referent of the focus constituent and are therefore simultaneously exhaustive and presentational.

(15) a. u-pneuma e-f-waaβ nte p-nute p-
    indef:s-spirit REL-(PRES)-3sm-be.pure of def:sm-god COP:sm
    [ et __ fatfe nhet-f ]
    C (-PRES) speak in-3sm
    “(It is) a pure spirit of God which speaks through him.” (Test. Is. 232:4-5)

b. u-hαβ ntep-nute p- [et __ fatfe nmme-tn etβet-f ]
    indef:s of def:sm-god COP:sm C(-PRES) speak with-2p about-3sm
    “(It is) a divine matter that I am speaking to you about.” (Eud. 60:24-25)

c. u-mnt-at-noβe t- [et -u-fine nsɔ-s n-oot-n ]
    indef:s-NOM-NEG.PFX-sin COP:sm C(-PRES)-3p-seek for-3sf from-hand-1p
    “(It is) a sinless (life) which is requested (lit. which they request) from us.” (Test. Is. 233:21)

(16) a. nim p- [et-k-fatfe nmma-f ntok ]
    who COP:sm C(-PRES)-2sm-speak with-3sm YOU
    “Who (is it) that you are talking to?” (V. Pach. 1:5-6)

b. eye u p- [ et __ na-fope hɔm p-et-fufu ]
    Q what COP:sm C(-FUT) GO-happen in def:sm-C-dry
    “What (is) it that will happen to the dried out one (the tree)?” (Luke 23:31)

As we can see from (17) below, the notion of exhaustivity may be specified overtly either by restrictive focus particles like eneh ‘ever’, emate ‘only’, and wot ‘single’.

(17) a. nim n-rome eneh pe [ nt-a-f-ei e-rat-f ]
    who of-man ever COP REL-PERF-3sm-come to-foot-3sm
    m-pe.n-jot e-fmokh n-het
    as-def:sm.1p-father REL-(PRES)-3sm-be.sad of-heart
    e-me-f-βok e-f-rafe ]
    REL-NEG:HAB-go REL-(PRES)-3sm-rejoice
    “Which man ever (is there) that had gone to our father (Matthew)
    disheartened and did not go away rejoicing!” (KHML II 11:8-9)

b. plen eftfe hen-kuwi emate n- [ e-tn-na-tfoo-u ]
    PCL if indef:p-small only COP REL(-FUT)-1p-GO-say-3p
    hn ne.f-katrthma ]
    from def:p.3sm-achievement
    “Yet even though (it is) only a few (things) that we are going to say of
    his achievements” (Zen. 201:13)
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Exhaustive listing may also be overtly specified by clefted noun phrases that contain a non-presupposed numeral.

(18) a. **eis** *t-meh-so* *n-rompe* **tfīn** *nt-a-n-ei*
    *look def:s-**NUM-six** of-year since REL-PERF-1p-come*

    **e-peï-ma** *ftow* **n-oïk** *n-
    to-this:sm-place four of-bread COP:p*

    [ et __ tef **na-n** mmēene ]
    *C(-PRES)be.portioned for-1p daily*

    “Look (for) six years since we arrived to this place, (it is) four (loaves) of bread that are portioned) to us daily” (Onnophr. 218:23-25)

b. **alla rōme** snau ne m-magos [ **e-u-wē**
    *but man two COP:p of-magican REL(-PRES)-3p-want*
    **n-se-ëi** ehun **n-se-pōme** m-p-nomos n-ten-polis ]
    *CONJ-3p-go inside CONJ-3p-overthrow DO-def:sm-law of-def:sm-1p-city*

    “But (there are) two magicians who intend to come inside and overthrow the law of our city.” (Ac. A&P 209:186-187).

Notice that although the syntactic form of the last example is that of a cleft sentence, its semantic interpretation is that of an existential sentence, as already noted by Layton (2000:373 §465, 376 §471). Comparable examples are shown in (19).

(19) a. **u-rōme** **ān-ram-maö pe [ nt-a-f-tōkë** an-umā
    *indef:sm-man of-nom-rich COP:sm REL-PERF-plant DO-indef:sm-place*
    **ān-eloole ]
    *of-grapes*

    “(There was once) a rich man who planted a vineyard.” (Matthew 21:33)

b. **u-rōme pe [ e-f-kōt** n-u-topos
    *indef:sm-man COP:sm REL(-PRES)-3sm-build DO-indef:sm-place*
    **e-tef-khría ]
    *for-def:sm-3sm-use*

    “(There was once) a (certain) man who was constructing a place for his own use.” (Sh. III 27:9)

Another example for the simultaneous expression of exhaustive and presentational focus is the salutation formula (used at the beginning of letters or in a private audience with the king). In performative statements of this kind, the identity of the writer represents the most salient part of information, while the restrictive relative clause comprises situationally given information.
(20) a. **anok kɔstantinos p-rro n-ne-hrɔmaiɔs p-**
I Constantine def:sm-king of:def:p-Roman COP:sm
[ et __ shai e đồ hŋ te.ŋ-mnt-ero ter-s ]
C(-PRES) write PCL from def:sf.3sm-nom-king entire-3sf
“(It is), Constantine, King of the Romans who is writing (to the
people) in his entire kingdom.” (Eud. 40:3-4)

b. **te.k-hmhul eudɔksiɔ t-** [ et __ wɔf e-ei ehun
def:sf.2sm-servant Eudoxia COP:sf C(-PRES) want to-go PCL
e-pe.k-aspasmos ]
to-def:sm.2sm-greeting
“(It is) your maid servant Eudoxia who wishes to enter to greet you.”
(Eud. 56:1-2)

3.2. **Thematic prominence**

Nominal clefs are commonly used to highlight the thematic importance of a
referent for the subsequent discourse. The clefted noun phrase refers to an
already known or easily identifiable discourse entity, while the embedded
relative clause describes a situation that is the matter of current concern, as
shown in (21).

(21) a. **p-joejς gɔr p-** [ et __ ɔ m-metre n-ta-senedis ]
def:sm-lord PCL COP:sm C(-PRES) be as-witness to-def:sm:1s-conscience
“For (it is) the Lord who is witness to my conscience.” (V. Pach. 89:1-2)

c. **areu p-hagjɔς apɔ mɛnɔ pe** [ nt-a-f-kɔnt
perhaps def:sm-holy Apa Mêna COP:sm REL-PERF-3sm-be.wrathful
ero-i etbe p-ɛret [ nt-a-i-ɛret mmo-f na-f ]]
about-1s because.of def:sm-vow REL-PERF-1s-vow DO-3sf for-3sm
“Perhaps (it is) the holy Apa Mêna who has become wrathful about me
because of the vow that I made to him.” (Mena, Mir. 11b:25-29)

In entailing the uniqueness of some discourse participant, highlighting focus is
exhaustive, but not contrastive, i.e. it does not evoke a set of alternative
candidates for whom the situation at hands would equally hold true.

3.3. **Contrastive focus**

Cleft sentences are typically used for contrastive emphasis with various degree
of strength. Contrastive focus operates on a domain of discourse entities that are
either known to the speech participants or readily identifiable from the context.
The contrastively specified focus expression exhaustively specifies a subset of
the given set of discourse entities for which the backgrounded proposition holds
true. But unlike presentational and highlighting focus, contrastive focus implies a
set of alternatives, namely a complementary set of discourse entities besides
those specified by the focus for which that proposition could equally hold true.
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The set of alternatives brought into play by contrastive focus may be overtly given, as in (22a), or may be deduced from the preceding context, as in (22b). In the latter example, the emphatic reflexive ἑαυτός ‘self’ strengthens the contrast habitual and one-time sinners that is described. See Rooth (1992) and much subsequent research for the alternative semantics of contrastive focus.

(22) a. οὔςτος Κωνσταντῖνος πρῶτο οἵδικαὶς περ
Augustus Constantine def:sm-king of-righteous COP:sm
 [ nt-a p-illiseconds pe.n-nute tunos-f na-n n-rry
REL-PERF def:sm-lord def:sm.lp-god raise-3sm for-1p as-king
e-p-ma m-p-anomos n-at-fipe diokletianos
at-def:sm-place of-def:sm-criminal of-NEG.PFX.shame Diocletian
p-rry m-p-{f-[i-n-k'ons ]
def:sm-king of-def:sm-take-DO-injustice
“(It is) Augustus Constantine, the righteous king that the Lord, Our God, has raised for us as a king instead of the shameless criminal Diocletian, the king of injustice.” (Eud. 38:1-3)

b. ἀνὸς ἡ ἑν [ nt-a-i-r nope ero-k
I self-1s COP:sm REL-PERF-1s-do sin against-2sm
n-u-sop n-wat
DO-indef:s-time of-single
“(It is) me, however, who sinned against you just once!” (Ac. A&P 200:87)

Contrastive focus is a gradual notion, including counter-assertive, counter-expectational and restrictive focus. The strongest form of contrast is corrective focus or counter-assertive used in contexts where the speaker contradicts a previous utterance. Counter-assertive focus is exemplified by pairs of negative and affirmative clefts, where the contrasted focus expression specify different values for same proposition.

(23) m-p-rame an p- [ et __ kto mmo-s e-p-ma
NEG-def:sm-man NOT COP:sm C(-PRES) turn DO-3sf at-def:sm-place
 [ et-f-waf e-kons nhet-f ]] C(-PRES)-3sm-want to-wound in-3sm
ntos ntoi p- [ et __ kto m-p-rame e-p-ma
IT PCL COP:sm C(-PRES) turn DO-def:sm-man at-def:sm-place
[et-s-waf e-kons mmau ]] C(-PRES)-3sf-want to-wound there
“(It is) not man who turns it (the sword) to the place where he wants to wound; rather (it is) it (the sword) that turns the man to the place where it wants to wound.” (Sh. IV 12:9-11)

A weaker form of contrast is counterexpectancy, which involves the speaker’s assessment of what the addressee’s expectations are in a particular context. Rather than substituting information contained in a previous utterance, counter-
expectational focus corresponds to information that challenges the addressee’s normative expectations or his contrary beliefs about the topic under consideration.

\[(24)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{er-waf} & \quad \text{e-jeene} & \quad \text{pu-tsaj} & \quad \text{nsa u} \\
\text{REL-2sm-want to-give.away} & \quad \text{def:sm:2sf-boat} & \quad \text{for what} \\
\text{ntof [ et __ saanf] mmo } & \\
\text{IT} & \quad \text{C(-PRES) keep.alive DO-2sf}
\end{align*}
\]
“For what (purpose) do you (woman) wish to give away your boat? (It is) it (the boat) that keeps you alive!” (KHML II 17:1-3)

The restrictive focus particle mawaa- ‘alone, only’ imposes an exclusive interpretation on the clefted noun or pronoun that it modifies. It is asserted that none of the alternatives brought into play by contrastive focus clefting itself could provide a possible value for the open predication contained in the restrictive relative clause (cf. König 1991).

\[(25)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ne ntof mawaa-f pe [ e-f-anakhrej} & \\
\text{PRET HE alone-3sm COP:sm REL(-PRES)-3sm-retreat} \\
\text{hm p-ma etmmau} & \\
\text{in def:sm-place that}
\end{align*}
\]
“(It) was him alone who was living as a hermit in that place.” (AP Chaine no. 181, 43:21-22)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ anon de mawaa-n p- [ et __ foop m-pei-ma] } & \\
\text{WE PCL alone-1p COP:sm C(-PRES) live in-this:sm-place}
\end{align*}
\]
“(It is) us alone who reside here.” (Onnophr. 221:2-3)

3.4. Informative-presupposition clefts

The appositional relative clause of focus clefts need not be entirely uninformative, but may contain information that is not construable from the preceding discourse or situationally given. Such informative-presupposition clefts are stylistically marked, since they present novel information as an established fact that is known to some people, but not yet known to the addressee. They are typically used in epistemic contexts, indicating the high degree of confidence that the speaker has about the verifiability and immediate relevance of his contribution. Prince 1978:898 convincingly argues that:

\[(26)\]
\[
\text{“The fact that it-clefts may present information as known without making any claims that the hearer is thinking about it (or, in fact, even knows it) presents the speaker with a strong rhetorical temptation: what is to prevent him/her from putting new information into the that-clause? Note that such action on the part of the speaker would be totally in line with the general convention of putting new information last. It turns out that nothing prevents such a use of it-clefts; we may distinguish a whole class of sentences in which this occurs, which I shall call INFORMATIVE-PRESUPPOSITION it-clefts. With these sentences, not only is the speaker not}
\]
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expected to be thinking about the information in the *that*-clause, buts/he is not expected to even KNOW it. In fact, the whole point of these sentences is to INFORM the hearer of that very information.”

In Coptic, informative-presupposition clefts typically indicate the high degree of confidence that the speaker has about the verifiability and the immediate relevance of his or her contribution. The informative-presupposition cleft in (27) has a proverbial flavour, which is unlikely to be challenged by the addressee or some other party.

(27) a. *p-kɔht p-* [ *et * na-rɔkh n-t-hyle* ]

   def:sm-fire COP:sm  C(- FUT) GO-burn  DO:def:sf-matter

   “(It is) the fire that will burn the matter.” (Test. Is. 232:26)

Informative-presupposition clefts are commonly used in persuasive discourse, where the speaker intends to convince the addressee to engage in or refrain from a particular action. As shown in (28a-c), such informative-presupposition clefts have a strong inferential character and assert that one state-of-affairs is closely tied to another with the implication of a cause-effect relationship.

(28) a. *e-kfəntoʃ-t eβol ntok [ *et * na-ti logos* ]

   REL-2sm-COND-throw-1s  PCL YOU  C(-FUT)  GO-give account

   m-p-nute ha ta-psykhe]

   to-def:sm-god for def:sf:1s-soul

   “If you throw me out. (then) (it is) you who will account to God for my soul.” (Hil. 5:27-28)

b. *hareh e-pe.k-sɔma e-f-waaβ*

   guard(-IMP)  at-def:sm.2sm-body REL(-PRES)-3sm-be.pure

   tfie p-rpe m-p-nute p-* [ *et * weh hraʃ nhet-f* ]

   C  def:sm-temple of-def:sm-god COP:sm  C(-PRES)  lie  PCL  in-3sm

   “Keep your body pure, because (it is) the temple of God that lies in it (the body).” (Test. Is. 232:11-12)

c. *alla tatʃro nte-k’mk’om*

   but be.strong(- IMP)  CONJ:2sf-be.brave

   anok gar p-* [ *et * nuhm mmɔ-tn hn thlipsis nim* ]

   PCL  COP:sm  C(-PRES)  save  DO-2p  from trial  every

   “But be strong (woman) and be brave; for (it is) me who saves you from every trial.” (Eud. 50:22-23)

The same argumentative orientation can be observed in informative-presupposition clefts containing the additive focus particle on ‘also, likewise, moreover’ that expresses the notion of simple inclusion. More specifically, the focus particle on introduces another argument into the discourse besides the one given in the preceding sentences, which lends itself for the same conclusion.
4. Concluding remarks

We have seen that Coptic cleft sentences involve minimally two clauses, one of which is an embedded relative clause and the other a tripartite nominal sentence pattern with a deictic copula device. On a biclausal analysis, the distributional behaviour of tense-aspect-mood markers and negative elements receives a natural explanation. In Coptic cleft sentences, exhaustive focus may be presentational when it introduces new referents into the discourse, but may also highlight the theme of discourse or involve explicit contrast.

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