

DON'T GET STRESSED! NON-STRESS FOCUS STRATEGIES IN N̄EʔKEPMXCIN (THOMPSON RIVER SALISH)*

Karsten A. Koch
University of British Columbia

1. Introduction

In this paper, I present new data from fieldwork on the marking of *focus* in N̄eʔkepmxcin (Thompson River Salish) discourse. A basic diagnostic of the focus of a discourse is the constituent that answers a wh-question (Jackendoff 1972, Selkirk 1985, Büring 1997, etc.), which is typically new information. The fieldwork presented here is itself novel in that it records everyday conversations rather than single speakers telling stories, the typical format for previous research in Thompson (i.e. Egedal 1984, Thompson and Thompson 1992) and many other Amerindian languages.

I illustrate two main findings of typological and theoretical importance. Though N̄eʔkepmxcin seems to be a “typical” stress language, narrow focus is marked structurally in the form of clefts (*It was [Monique]_{FOC} that I saw*), and not prosodically. I’ll refer to this as a “cleft-focus” system. The relationship between focus and clefting has been previously documented (Kroeger 1997, 1999). The first novel claim that I make is that this structural focus does not bear the primary stress of the clause, thus offering a counterexample to the common “stress-focus” account on the marking of focus in languages like English, Dutch, German or Hungarian (Selkirk 1995, Reinhart 1995, Vaissière 1995, Schwarzschild 1999, Szendrői 2003, Féry and Samek-Lodovici 2006, etc.). For the purposes of this paper, I will concentrate on narrow object focus.

The second portion of the paper shows that, though focus is structural, object focus questions are sometimes not answered using clefts. Instead, focused objects sometimes surface in the standard, non-clefted, clause-final VSO order. I present results from a series of tasks showing that the “cleft-focus” generalization can be overridden for other non-stress reasons. Additional discourse marking constraints may override “cleft-focus:” contrastive topics are preferably marked over focused objects, while given objects resist clefting. Transitivity can also play a role: when verbs change transitivity between question and answer, objects avoid clefts. Finally, “cleft-focus” may be avoided for prosodic reasons, since “heavy” objects tend to resist clefting.

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2. Background

2.1 Thompson syntax

Ntəʔkepmxcin (Thompson River Salish) belongs to the Northern Interior branch of the Salish language family. The data in the present study come from the author's corpus of conversational recordings with two female speakers of the *ʔqəmcín*, or Lytton, dialect. Both speakers are fluent bilinguals in English.

Ntəʔkepmxcin is a predicate-initial language, with a basic transitive word order of verb-subject-object (VSO – (1)) (Koch 2006b).¹ Auxiliaries, or light verbs, like *ʔex* in (2), often precede the main verb. Second-position clitics, including evidentials, the yes/no question marker, clause-typing morphology, and discourse level deictics (such as the ubiquitous demonstrative *xeʔ* in (1) and (2)), immediately follow the first prosodic word. Nuclear (or primary) stress appears rightmost, typically on the object in a basic transitive sentence, or the subject in intransitive cases. I show this by underlining it in (1) and (2).²

- (1) V [2nd position clitic] S
 kən-t-Ø-és xeʔ [e skíxzeʔ-kt]
 help-TRANS-3O-3TS DEM [DET mother-1PL.PS]

O
 [e sínciʔ-kt]
 [DET younger.brother-1PL.POSS]

“Our mother helped our brother.” / (*“Our brother helped our mother.”)

- (2) Aux [2nd pos. clitic] V S
 ʔéx xeʔ čax-t-Ø-és [† n-sxáywi]
 PROG DEM clean-TR-3O-3TS [DET 1SG.PS-husband]

O
 [e swúx^wt].
 [det snow]

“My husband was cleaning up the snow.”

¹ Data are presented in the orthography developed in Thompson and Thompson (1992, 1996), Kroeber (1997) and Jimmie (2002, 2003). The phonemic key to the *orthography* is as follows: *c* = [tʃ] or [č], *ç* = [ts], *č* = [tsʰ], *e* = [e, æ, a, ε, ə], *ə* = [ʌ], *i* = [i, ei, ai], *o* = [o, ɔ], *s* = [ʃ] or [š], *š* = [s], *u* = [u, o, ɔ], *y* = [y, i]. See Thompson and Thompson (1992) in particular for the phonetic realizations of phonemic vowels across contexts.

Abbreviations used in the gloss are: ‘-’ = affix or clitic, ACC = accusative, AUG = augmentative reduplicant, CAUS = causative, CLEFT = cleft predicate, COMP = complementizer, DAT = dative, DEM = demonstrative, DET = determiner, EMPH = emphatic, FUT = future, IRL = irrealis, MDL = middle, NOM = nominalizer, O = object, OBL = oblique, PL = plural, POSS/PS = possessive, PROG = progressive, REL = relational transitivizer, SG = singular, STAT = stative prefix, TRANS/TR = control transitivizer, TS = transitive subject.

² I will refer to the basic verb-initial word order as VSO, though VSO should be understood as covering intransitive cases as well, or cases with oblique objects. Subjects or objects are often null when discourse salient. Thus, VSO is shorthand for V(S)(O).

2.2 Thompson prosody

At first glance, Ntɛʔkepmxcin is a classic stress system. In their grammar of the language, Thompson and Thompson remark that stress “seems to manifest itself as a complex of loudness, force, and pitch differences, rather similar in type to the phonetic reality of English stress” (1992:21).

Egedal in his dissertation also identifies Ntɛʔkepmxcin as a “stress-timed language” (1984:109). In his study of the stylized use of speech in Ntɛʔkepmxcin narratives, Egedal found that classic correlates of stress (duration, pitch and amplitude) were among the suprasegmental features manipulated by storytellers as “rhetorical or performative devices” (1984:6). Indeed, “rhythmic or assonant stylized speech” is employed to “convey salient information toward advancing the narrative, occurring at crucial or exciting points” (Egedal 1984:102). It is perhaps all the more surprising, then, that stress is not employed to mark discourse salience, but this is precisely what I will demonstrate in this paper (see also Davis 2005:ft. 18 on Stʔatʔimcets).

As for the nuclear (or primary) stress in the Ntɛʔkepmxcin clause, Thompson and Thompson in their grammar (1992:148) describe the final position in the Ntɛʔkepmxcin clause as having “emphatic force,” or being “mildly emphatic.” In this paper, I explicitly formalize this observation as a case of rightmost nuclear stress (Chomsky and Halle 1968 on English). Given the surface verb-object order, this is not surprising: we expect main stress to fall on the object, since cross-linguistically stress falls on arguments (the object) rather than heads (the verb) (Schwarzschild 1999:127 ‘HEADARG’ constraint, and references therein; Kahnemuyipour 2004; Selkirk and Kratzer 2007).

2.3 Focus theory: the “stress-focus” correspondence

In this section, I give a brief typology of possible focus strategies in stress languages. For the purposes of this paper, I will adopt the fairly common diagnostic that a focus is the answer to the wh-word in a question (i.e. Jackendoff 1972, Selkirk 1995, Büring 1997, etc.). The idea that focus is universally marked by pitch accent in stress languages (Vaissère 1995) is reflected in the discourse-phonological constraints proposed in theories of focus. They have in common the link between stress and focus. Some examples are given below.

- (3) Proposals on the marking of focus
 - a. Basic Focus Rule: An accented word is F(ocus)-marked. (Selkirk 1995:555)
 - b. Stress-Focus Correspondence Principle: The focus of a clause is a(ny) constituent containing the main stress of the intonational phrase, as determined by the stress rule. (Reinhart 1995:62)
 - c. FOCUS: A Focus-marked phrase contains an accent. (Schwarzschild 1999:173)

- d. STRESS-FOCUS: a focused phrase has the highest prosodic prominence in its focus domain.

(Féry & Samek-Lodovici 2006:135-6)

Cross-linguistically, there are several ways that this relationship between primary stress and focus can be realized. In English, the nuclear stress (underlined) surfaces on the focused constituent, without any change in surface word order. Subscript ‘FOC’ indicates the focused constituent.

- (4) a. A: Who tore the shirt?
 B: [Deb]_{FOC} tore the shirt. [Subject focus]
- b. A: What did Deb do to the shirt?
 B: Deb [tore]_{FOC} the shirt. [Verb focus]
- c. A: What did Deb tear?
 B: Deb tore the [shirt]_{FOC}. [Object focus]

Whereas English marks focus *in situ*, Hungarian uses movement to get the focus into the nuclear stress position. In Hungarian, default stress is leftmost,³ on the verb (5) (i.e. Szendroi 2003). Narrow focus phrases move into a focus projection at the left edge of the clause (*Marinak* in (6)). This has been conceived of as syntactically driven movement (Bródy 1995) to satisfy a [+Focus] feature, or as phonologically driven movement (Szendrői 2003). Under either account, the grammar conspires to produce a focused constituent in the position that receives main stress.

- (5) A: *What happened?*⁴
 B: [Tegnap este bemutattam Petert *Marinak*]_{FOC}
 yesterday evening PRT-introduce-I Peter Mary
 “[Yesterday, I introduced Peter to Mary]_{FOC}.”
 (Szendroi 2003:71, ex. 55)
- (6) A: *Who did you introduce Peter to?*
 B: Tegnap este [Marinak_m]_{FOC} mutattam be Petert *t_m*.
 yesterday evening Mary introduce-I PRT Peter *t_m*
 “Yesterday evening, I introduced Peter to [Mary]_{FOC}.”
 (Szendroi 2003:65, ex. 45)

In German, non-focus constituents scramble out of the way so that the focus can be in the nuclear stress position (Krifka 1998). The nuclear stress falls, ideally, immediately before the final verb (*vorgelesen* in (7-8)). Focused constituents, too, ideally surface in this position. In (7), the focused accusative *den Roman* is already in this position. In (8), however, the dative *der Maria* is

³ Left adjuncts like *Tegnap este* ‘yesterday evening’ can precede the verb/nuclear stress constituent.

⁴ For reasons of space, I will often give questions in examples only in their English translation, throughout this paper.

the focus, so the accusative *den Roman* has scrambled out of the preverbal nuclear stress position so that the focus *Maria* may surface there.

- (7) A: *What did Hans read to Maria?*
 B: Hans hat der Maria [den Roman]_{FOC} vorgelesen.
 Hans has the.DAT Maria [the.ACC novel] read
 “Hans read Maria [the novel]_{FOC}.” (Krifka 1998:88, ex. 33)
- (8) A: *Who did Hans read the novel to?*
 B: Hans hat [den Roman]_k [der Maria]_{FOC} t_k vorgelesen.
 Hans has [the.ACC novel]_k [the.DAT Maria] t_k read
 “Hans read the novel to [Maria]_{FOC}.” (Krifka 1998:88, ex. 34)

2.4 Predictions for object focus in Thompson

In English, Hungarian and German, the nuclear or primary sentential stress coincides with the focus. Recall that the basic word order in Nte?kepmxcin is VSO, with nuclear stress rightmost. Under any “stress-focus” account, for object focus cases, we expect no change in basic word order, since objects already receive the nuclear stress by default in Nte?kepmxcin’s basic VSO order. Thus, object focus is predicted to be in VSO order.

3. Object focus in Thompson

Contrary to the predictions of “stress-focus” accounts, objects are not produced in the basic VSO order when focused. Rather, focused objects are clefted at the left edge of the clause (Kroeber 1997, 1999).

There are two types of clefts: ‘bare’ clefts, and ‘introduced’ clefts (terms borrowed from Kroeber 1999). In ‘bare’ clefts, a bare noun or adjective acts both as the matrix predicate and as the focus (the cleft head). The focus is followed by a cleft clause (or ‘residue clause’). Like a headless relative clause, the cleft clause is typically introduced by a determiner/complementizer⁵ and carries subordinating morphology (Kroeber 1997, Koch 2006a on relative clauses). Cleft clauses serve as syntactic subjects; thus, clefts are truly biclausal, with the focus base generated and not moved from within the cleft clause (see Kroeber 1997, 1999 for detailed argumentation; also Davis et al. 2004). In example (9B), the bare noun *pinš* is both the predicate and the object focus; the subordinated verb *fa?xans* ‘eat’ is introduced by a complementizer *e* and prefixed with nominalizing morphology *n-s-*.⁶ Nuclear stress remains rightmost

⁵ Determiners in Nte?kepmxcin also serve as complementizers. See Kroeber 1997, 1999, and Koch 2006a for further discussion. I will gloss these as COMP ‘complementizer’ in Nte?kepmxcin clefts, for easier comparison with English clefts, but bear in mind that we could gloss these cases as determiners also; indeed, since these clauses appear to be syntactic subjects of cleft predicates, ‘determiner’ is probably more accurate (Kroeber 1997).

⁶ The position of the future marker *x^wúy* is also somewhat anomalous in (9B), coming before the complementizer of the clause whose verb it modifies; but Kroeber (1997, 1999:390) has noted that cleft residues with future markers are sometimes not introduced

(Koch 2007a). Thus we see a divergence of the nuclear stress (rightmost) from the focus (leftmost), surprising under any “stress-focus” theory.⁷

- (9) A: Sté? x^wúy̓ k s-ʔaʔxáns-əp tk ʂáap.
 what FUT COMP NOM-eat-2PL.POSS OBL.IRL evening
 “What are you people going to eat this evening?”
 B: [píns]_{FOC} nce? x^wúy̓ e n-s-ʔaʔxáns.
 beans 1SG.EMPH FUT COMP 1SG.POSS-NOM-eat.
 “I’m gonna’ eat [beans]_{FOC}.”
 (literally “It’s [beans]_{FOC} that I’m gonna’ eat.”)

The second type of cleft is an ‘introduced’ cleft. ‘Introduced’ clefts consist of a cleft predicate *cé* or *?e* which ‘introduces’ the focused DP (the head of the cleft). Since DPs cannot be predicates, they require a functional cleft predicate at the left edge of the clause when focused (recall that Nʔeʔkepmxcin is a predicate-initial language, so DPs may not be clause-initial). In (10B), the DP *e Monique* is the object focus, and follows the cleft predicate *cé* and the second position clitic *xe?*. In the residue clause, the verb *wíkne* ‘I saw’ is preceded by a complementizer *e*. Again, there is a divorce of the primary stress (rightmost) from the focus (the leftmost lexical element).

- (10) A: swét xe? k wík-t-Ø-x^w.
 who DEM COMP see-TR-3O-2SG.TS
 “Who did you see?”
 B: cé xe? [e Monique]_{FOC} e wík-t-Ø-ne.
 CLEFT DEM DET Monique COMP see-TR-3O-1SG.TS
 “I saw [Monique]_{FOC}.”
 (literally “It was [Monique]_{FOC} that I saw.”)

In a corpus analysis, I coded 338 focus cases with the syntactic structure of their clause (either default VSO order, or a cleft structure):

Table 1: Focus type and syntactic realization in Nʔeʔkepmxcin - a corpus study

	Focus Constituent					
	Object	Subject	QP	CP	VP	Verb
V(S)(O)	11 (20.4%)	4 (7.1%)	1 (1.5%)	58 (90.6%)	76 (98.7%)	19 (100%)
Cleft	43 (79.6%)	52 (92.9%)	67 (98.5%)	6 (9.4%)	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)

by a determiner at all, or sometimes only erratically, with the consultants he has worked with. I concur with this finding, adding that sometimes consultants will have the future marker preceding the complementizer, as in example (9B). Similarly, my consultants sometimes omit the complementizer introducing residue clauses beginning with another auxiliary, ‘progressive’ (*w*)*?ex*.

⁷ Though not the topic of this paper, it should also be noted that the semantics of Salish clefts differ from those of English clefts (Davis et al. 2004, Koch 2007b).

Results confirm that left edge clefts are the dominant form employed for marking narrow focus (except for narrow verb focus, since verbs are already in the leftmost focus position when in basic VSO order). The corpus consists of conversations and conversational data collected during fieldwork with two female speakers, and the survey comprises 338 focus cases. Narrow focus on objects, subjects and quantifiers generally results in a cleft construction with the cleft head corresponding to the focus. Wide (CP) focus, VP focus and verb focus overwhelmingly retains the basic verb-initial order.

Given the “cleft-focus” generalization made so far, it is perhaps surprising that over 20% of focused object DPs were actually produced clause-finally in basic VSO word order sentences. In section 4, I describe a series of tasks that reveal additional constraints that can force an “override” of the “cleft-focus” generalization.

3.1 Implications for theories of focus marking

In the previous section, we saw that, although it is a stress language, Ntɛʔkepmxcin employs structural and not prosodic focus. Focused objects are clefted at the left edge, while the nuclear stress position is rightmost. As a result, theories of focus marking that rely on a “stress-focus” correspondence are too narrow in their empirical coverage.

However, we do not need to abandon the idea that focus is marked prosodically. Even though Ntɛʔkepmxcin speakers use a structural tool (clefts) for marking narrow focus, we can conceive of it as being prosodically motivated (like structural focus in Hungarian - Szendrői 2003). To begin with, let us decompose the “stress-focus” correspondence. I will concentrate on a particular instance of the stress-focus idea, namely the optimality theoretic discourse constraint proposed by Féry and Samek-Lodovici (2006:135-6):

- (11) STRESS-FOCUS: a focused phrase has the highest prosodic prominence in its focus domain.

What does “stress” mean here? Since stress is the manifestation of a particular prosodic category, namely prosodic heads, it is profitable to recast the constraint in (11) in terms of Generalized Alignment (McCarthy and Prince 1993). The intuition is that, when we say “stress-focus,” what we mean is “align the focus (a syntactic category) with a prosodic head (a phonological category)” (see Truckenbrodt 1999:248, who mentions a similar alignment constraint for Chichewa, a tone language). In English, focus attracts both the phonological phrase head, and the intonational phrase head. Thus, I propose the two constraints in (13), to subsume STRESS-FOCUS in (11).

- (12) *Generalized Alignment* (McCarthy and Prince 1993)
 Where Cat_1, Cat_2 are prosodic, morphological, or syntactic categories and $Edge_1, Edge_2 \in \{\text{Right}, \text{Left}\}$:
 $\text{ALIGN}(Cat_1, Edge_1; Cat_2, Edge_2) \Leftrightarrow$ For each Cat_1 there is a Cat_2
 such that $Edge_1$ of Cat_1 and $Edge_2$ of Cat_2 coincide.

- (13) a. English: ALIGN(Foc, R; Phead, R)
 “Align the right edge of the focus with the right edge of a prosodic phrase head.”
- b. English: ALIGN(Foc, R; Ihead, R)
 “Align the right edge of the focus with the right edge of an intonational phrase head.”

Given the Generalized Alignment schema in (12), we now expect Focus to align with prosodic categories other than prosodic heads. In Ntɛʔkepmxcin, the focus aligns with the left edge of the clause – the left edge of the intonational phrase (14). This is particularly noticeable in the case of bare clefts (9B), where the focus *pinʂ* is the initial element in the sentence. Even in introduced clefts (10B), however, the focus *Monique* is the leftmost lexical element; a syntactic prohibition against DPs being predicates (recall that Ntɛʔkepmxcin is a predicate initial language) forces the use of the functional cleft predicate *čé* in the left edge predicate position. Thus, it is more important to have a predicate at the left edge than the focus at the left edge; a syntactic constraint trumps a prosodic one here, but the focus is still “as left as possible” (see Krifka 1998 on the syntactic constraint VERB-RIGHT dominating the discourse constraint FOCUS-RIGHT in German).

While focus aligns with the left edge of an intonational phrase in Ntɛʔkepmxcin, the prosodic *head* of this intonational phrase is elsewhere, namely at the right edge of the clause. Such language variation is expected when we recast STRESS-FOCUS in terms of Generalized Alignment.

- (14) Ntɛʔkepmxcin : ALIGN(Foc, L; I, L)
 “Align the left edge of the focused constituent with the left edge of an intonational phrase.”

This leads us to the surprising conclusion that, although focus in Ntɛʔkepmxcin is structural, its motivation may still be prosodic (see Szendrői 2003 on prosodic considerations driving Hungarian focus movement). Moreover, the account presented here preserves the insight of the stress-focus accounts that focus is marked prosodically, but it alters the type of prosodic category that can play a role from prosodic heads to prosodic edges.

4. Overriding object focus

In this section, I describe a series of tasks designed to explore the reasons that the “cleft-focus” generalization of section 3 was violated in 20% of object focus cases in the corpus study reported in table 1.

4.1 Task: Eliciting dialogue with storyboards (Burton 2005)

To gather data on focused objects violating the “cleft-focus” generalization, I used storyboarding tasks (Burton 2005 on using storyboarding for storytelling tasks). Consultants were presented with simple stories (a woman and her cat trying to move a cow into a barn; people interacting with their pets; Peter and

Alice cleaning up by the side of the road; etc.) drawn on a series of index cards. These picture cards were used to elicit conversations. Consultants described the depictions by responding to questions by either the elicitor or a second consultant.

The method allowed for control of various crucial elements: whether focused objects were new to the discourse, or given (old) information; whether topics were changed; whether objects were prosodically “heavy” (more than one foot). All of these factors resulted in resistance to clefting focused objects.

4.2 Given objects

Focus is often synonymous with “new” information in discourse. We have seen that in languages like English, new information is prosodically prominent. Given (or “old”) information, on the other hand, is typically deaccented. However, given constituents can of course also be focused. In (15), *John* is made part of the discourse, hence given, by speaker A’s question. By answering speaker A’s question using *him* (i.e. *John*), speaker B also makes *John* the focus. Subscript ‘G’ indicates ‘given’ and subscript FOC indicates the ‘focus.’

- (15) A: Who did John’s mother praise?
 B: She praised [him]_{G, FOC}. (Schwarzschild 1999)

In English, as Schwarzschild notes in the brief discourse above, given objects still retain the primary sentential stress when focused, and are not deaccented.

In Ntɛʔkepmxcin, however, objects that are already prominent in the discourse tend to resist clefting, surfacing instead in the default VSO order. That is, while “stress-focus” is obeyed for given objects in English, “cleft-focus” is violated for given objects in Ntɛʔkepmxcin. In (16), speaker A introduces *the cow* into the discourse, so it is given. Since *e moʃmoʃ* ‘the cow’ also answers the question, it is also the focus in B’s reply. In this case, the basic AuxVSO word order is used instead of a cleft, even though focused objects are typically clefted (section 3).

- (16) A: *The cat is sitting on the cow. And what is the cat looking at?*
 B: ʔéx xeʔ neʔ ʔes-kʷéŋ-s-t-Ø-c
 PROG DEM there STAT-look-CAUS-TR-3O-3S
 e púʃ [e móʃmoʃ]_{G, FOC}.
 DET cat DET cow
 “The cat is watching [the cow]_{G, FOC}.”

Moreover, (16) reveals another non-stress-related strategy of discourse marking in Ntɛʔkepmxcin. While given items are deaccented in English, given objects in Ntɛʔkepmxcin sometimes stay in the rightmost nuclear stress position (since they can surface in default VSO order). Under “destress-given” accounts, we might expect given objects to avoid the rightmost nuclear stress position when focused, especially since they have the option to be clefted at the left edge. However, this is not what we find – in the storyboarding tasks presented here, given objects actually “sought out” the nuclear stress position. This fact would be surprising under a “stress-focus” or “destress-given” account.

4.3 Changes in transitivity or verb lexicality

An unexpected finding in the data collected in the storyboarding tasks was that objects tended to be produced in default VSO order when there was a change in the verb between question and answer. The change had one of two forms. In the first type, the transitivity of the verb changed. In these cases, focused objects resisted clefting, again surfacing rightmost in the default VSO order. In (17), speaker A uses an intransitive ‘middle’ form of the verb *wikm* ‘see’ in the question, while speaker B responds with a transitive form *wikts*. Apparently it is more important to mark the change of transitivity at the left edge than the focused object at the left edge. Once again though, if this is a case of “focusing” on the transitivity changes in the verb, there is a divergence of stress and focus: while nuclear stress is rightmost (on the focused object in this case), the verb is leftmost. The focused object, on the other hand, has inadvertently surfaced in the nuclear stress position here.

- (17) A: ʔe stéʔ meʔ xeʔ e s-wík-m-s e Péter.
and what indeed DEM COMP NOM-see-MDL-3.PS DET Peter
“And what did Peter see?”
- B: wík-t-Ø-s xeʔ e Péter [e síʔcuʔ]_{FOC},
see-tr-3O-3S DEM DET Peter DET shoe,
we sq^wút-s e xwéʔ.
to.DET side-3POSS DET road
“Peter saw a [shoe]_{FOC}, by the side of the road.”

In the second type of question-answer mismatch, the lexical verb root changed between question and answer. In (18), speaker A uses the root *wik-* ‘to see’ in her question, but speaker B responds with the root *pun-* ‘to find.’ The focused object is not clefted; default VSO word order is used.

- (18) A: ʔe stéʔ meʔ xeʔ neʔ x^wúyceʔ
and what indeed DEM there again
e s-wík-m-s e, e Alice.
COMP NOM-see.MDL-3PS DET, DET Alice
“And next what did Alice see?”
- B: Pún-m-Ø-s xeʔ e ʔes... [ʔes-grín te nʔpíceʔ]_{FOC}.
find-REL-3O-3TS DEM DET STAT... STAT-green OBL shirt
“She found a [green shirt]_{FOC}.”

In this case speaker B is focusing on the verb root change by leaving the verb at the left edge rather than the focused object.⁸ If so, this “focus” on the verb change is again not marked through main stress, but rather through alignment with the left edge.

However, these cases strike me as different than comparable ones in English. In all the Nʔeʔkepmxcin cases, there was a fairly close semantic relationship between the two verb roots used (seeing and finding; buying and

⁸ Thanks to Rose-Marie Déchaine for raising and discussing this point of view.

getting; eating for dinner and making for dinner, etc.), so it was not the case that speaker B was stressing that speaker A had fundamentally misdescribed the action. Moreover, in a system like Schwarzschild's (1999) account of Givenness, the given status of a constituent is calculated based on entailments between question and answer. It is not entirely clear how entailments should be calculated between semantically similar verbs like in the present case: does "seeing" entail "finding?" If so, the verb should be given, and remain unstressed (in English), or away from the left edge (in Ntɛʔkepmxcin). This prediction does hold in English: in a comparable dialogue, primary stress would typically remain on the focused object. To be sure, a picky speaker B may also put a secondary prosodic focus on *found*, but such pedantic behaviour is not typical. Even when it does occur, the object focus *shirt* continues to carry the main sentential stress.

- (19) A: Alice and Peter were cleaning up by the side of the road.
What did Alice see there?
B: She found a [green shirt]_{FOC}.

In Ntɛʔkepmxcin, however, lexical changes in verbs do seem to be marked by retaining default VSO order even when objects are focused. Unlike the English case, this seems to satisfy the intuition that even if there are entailment relations between different lexical items, the different lexical item itself is still new information at some level and deserves to be marked somehow. I leave this issue for future exploration.

4.4 Contrastive topics

In numerous instances during the storyboarding task, focused objects were not clefted when there was also a change in the discourse topic. In (20), speaker A asks an object focus question (*what*), but also switches the topic from *the eagle* to *the bear*. Speaker B responds using a left-edge contrastive topic (Koch 2006b, Gardiner 1998 on Shuswap) in its own intonational phrase, followed by the default verb-initial order. The focused object is not clefted. Thus, it is more important to mark a contrastive topic at the left edge than it is to mark a focused object at the left edge. I will also mark contrastive topics as focused.

- (20) A: *The eagle was chasing the trout. What was the bear chasing?*
B: [e spéʔec]_{FOC}, ʔex xeʔ key-kéy-Ø-Ø-es [e smíyc]_{FOC}.
DET bear, PROG DEM AUG-chase-TR-3O-3S DET deer
“[The bear]_{FOC} was chasing [the deer]_{FOC}.”
(literally “As for [the bear]_{FOC}, it was chasing [the deer]_{FOC}.”)

This example illustrates the importance of considering a wider discourse context than is usually shown in typical theoretical examples. Even the Schwarzschild example in (15), which shows a question and answer, is misleadingly simple. It is hard to imagine the question in (15A) occurring without previous discourse. One such discourse context may contrast who different mothers are praising (15'). If so, *John's mother* may also be a

contrastive topic, and (15'c) seems the most natural conclusion to the conversation, and not (15'b) as suggested by Schwarzschild's example in (15).

- (15') a. B: Jody's mother praised Sue.
 A: Who did John's mother praise?
 b. B: She praised [him]_{G, FOC}.
 c. B': [She]_{FOC} praised [John]_{G, FOC}.

Whether the prosodic marking of object focus actually varies under these conditions in English is a matter for empirical research; in Nteʔkepmxcin, contrastive topic marking clearly has an effect.

4.5 Heavy objects

In the storyboarding tasks, focused objects were sometimes prosodically "heavy," consisting of more than a single bisyllabic foot. In these cases, focused objects again sometimes resisted clefting, and instead surfaced in the rightmost nuclear stress position in default VSO order.

- (21) A: *What is the woman chasing?*
 B: ʔéx xeʔ key-kéy-Ø-Ø-es e smúʔec
 PROG DEM AUG-chase-TR-3O-3S DET woman
 [e púʂ ʔeʔ e mósmos]_{FOC}.
 DET cat and DET cow.
 "The woman is chasing [the cat and the cow]_{FOC}."

In (21), the focused object is the conjoined DP *the cat and the cow*, and it is not clefted. Previous research by Davis (2005) on a neighbouring VSO system (Lower St'at'imcets) suggests that objects are prosodically positioned in the default VSO order. Antilla (2007) also argues that prosodic constraints determine changes in word order more universally. If objects in VSO order are prosodically positioned, then it is perhaps not unexpected that prosodic considerations (heaviness) should drive focused objects back to the prosodically prominent rightmost position, overriding the "cleft-focus" generalization.

4.6 Task results: Summary

In this section, I have presented data from storyboarding tasks which looked at the effects of givenness, verb changes, topic changes and prosodic heaviness on the focus marking of objects in Thompson. Whenever focused objects were not clefted in the storyboarding tasks, one or more of these factors was at play.

Table 2: Word order for object focus sentences (storyboarding tasks)

Word order	Count (%)
VSO	16 (42%)
Topic, VSO	11 (29%)
Bare cleft	11 (29%)
Introduced cleft	0 (0%)

As expected, the percentage of clefts employed in the storyboarding tasks for focused objects was much lower than the 80% found in the general corpus count (Table 1). Now only 29% of focused objects were clefted (and none of these in overt clefts). Simple default VSO order accounted for 42% of the cases, while a further 29% had preposed contrastive topics as well.

The findings show that, when the “cleft-focus” generalization was overridden for focused objects, one of several competing constraints took priority over “cleft-focus.” In summary, it is often less important to mark a focused object than to:

- (i) mark an object’s givenness by avoiding clefting
- (ii) mark changes in verb transitivity/lexicality at the left edge
- (iii) mark a contrastive topic, or
- (iv) position heavy objects rightmost.

The results are instructive for the examination of focus marking in languages like English as well. Several of the above factors concern the relation of the entire utterance containing the focused object to the rest of the discourse. Givenness, contrastive topics, and perhaps small changes in functional markers (transitivity) or lexicality can all affect how discourse status is marked in a particular utterance.

In fact, Terken and Hirschberg (1994) examined the claim that given entities are deaccented in English. They judged the level of stress accent on given and focused items in collected discourses describing the changing positions of various shapes. They found that given items sometimes carried as much accent as focused items if their grammatical role or surface syntactic position changed between utterances. In (22) and (23), for example, the second instance of *the ball* is given, yet still may carry the dominant pitch accent.

(22) *The cone touches the ball...*
 The ball_G touches the star. [The ball given but new as subject]

(23) *The cross touches the ball...*
 The box pushes the star against the ball_G.
 [the ball given but new as indirect object]

These findings and those in the present paper highlight the importance of looking at wider discourse contexts when considering what conditions the marking of a discourse item such as the focus.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have claimed that, though it is a stress language, Ntɛʔkepmxcin fails to show the “stress-focus” correspondence upon which leading accounts of the marking of focus are based. Instead, narrow focus is structural, marked by either bare or introduced clefts. However, this structural focus can still be motivated prosodically: the focus aligns with the left edge of the intonational phrase in Ntɛʔkepmxcin, which is achieved via “cleft-focus.” This account preserves that insight that in languages like English, focus aligns with another

prosodic category, namely prosodic heads. I have thus suggested that it is best to recast “Stress-focus” constraints in terms of Generalized Alignment of focus with prosodic categories. Which categories count is a matter for future research.

The discourse prosodic constraints that give rise to the “cleft-focus” strategy can be overridden. Other discourse constraints play a role: given objects resist clefting, and it is more important to mark contrastive topics at the left edge than to cleft a focus there. Changes in verb transitivity or lexicality between question and answer also can result in default VSO order being used rather than object clefts, even though the object may be focused. Finally, other prosodic constraints can override “cleft-focus”: heavy objects tend to seek the nuclear stress position at the right edge in default VSO order, and resist clefting.

The “stress-focus” correspondence has been proposed primarily based on languages in the European realm. The present results suggest that “stress-focus” not only fails to be universal, but possibly fails to count as the dominant system of focus-marking cross-linguistically. Once we look into other language families, the dissociation of stress and focus in favour of broader prosodic phrasing considerations may be more typical (Rialland and Robert 2001 on Wolof, Lindström and Remijsen 2005 on Kuot, Downing 2003 on Chichewa and Xhosa, Ladd 1996:195-196). We can add Ntɛʔkepmxcin to these more typical focus-marking systems.

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