

## Contrastive Topic and Focus, and Question/Answer Congruence In Nsyílxcən

Nsyílxcən (a.k.a. Okanagan) is a Southern Interior Salish language spoken by approximately 130 people fluently in southern British Columbia and northern Washington State. There are currently intensive efforts underway to revitalize the language at the Syilx Language House in Penticton BC, and the Salish School in Spokane WA and Inchelium WA.

Lyon (2013) discusses Nsyílxcən clefts, which involve the focus (Rooth, 1992) of an initial argument (1b) or adjunct (2b). There is an implicature of exhaustivity associated with the focus, which renders a fronted subject (1c) or in-situ focus structure (2c) infelicitous in contexts which require exhaustivity. Argument cleft residues are preceded by *iʔ*, and adjunct clefts by *kiʔ*.

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| <p>(1) a. Q: swit iʔ ckicx?<br/>               who DET came<br/>               Who's the one that came?</p> <p>b. A: [<b>John</b><sub>focus</sub>] iʔ ckicx.<br/>               John DET came<br/>               John's the one that came.</p> <p>c. A': #[<b>John</b><sub>focus</sub>] ckicx.<br/>               John came.</p> | <p>(2) a. Q: tlaʔkín kiʔ k<sup>w</sup> ckicx?<br/>               from.where CLF 2SG.ABS come<br/>               Where did you come from?</p> <p>b. A: [<b>tl Vancouver</b><sub>focus</sub>] kiʔ kn ckicx.<br/>               from Vancouver CLF 1SG.ABS come<br/>               I come from Vancouver.</p> <p>c. A: #kn ckicx [<b>tl Vancouver</b><sub>focus</sub>].<br/>               I come from Vancouver.</p> |
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Interestingly, more than one constituent can occur to the left of the clefting particle. In (4), a subject *ixiʔ iʔ sqəłtmíx<sup>w</sup>* 'that man' may topicalize to a position preceding the focus. There are discourse constraints on sentences like (4), however, which is only felicitous in answer to (3b).

- (3) a. stim iʔ sqəłtmíx<sup>w</sup> iʔ wík-(nt)-s?  
       what DET man DET see-DIR-3ERG  
       What did the man see?
- b. ha wík-(nt)-s iʔ sqəłtmíx<sup>w</sup> iʔ swaʔ.  
       YNQ see-DIR-3ERG DET man DET cougar  
       Did the man see a cougar?
- (4) [*ixiʔ iʔ sqəłtmíx<sup>w</sup>*<sub>topic</sub>] [*iʔ skəmxíst*<sub>focus</sub>] iʔ wík-(nt)-s.  
       DEM DET man DET bear DET see-DIR-3ERG  
       That man saw **a bear**. **(#3a,3b)**

This pattern of felicity indicates that the second DP in (4) *iʔ skəmxíst* 'a bear' must be a contrastive focus (answer to 3b) and not simply a new information focus (answer to 3a).

(6) below shows however that contrastive topics, *Jerry* and *Harvey*, can each precede either a contrastive focus (in answer to 5a) or a new information focus (in answer to 5b).

- (5) a. ha Jerry naʔ Harvey x<sup>w</sup>úy-ləx kl Merritt?  
       YNQ Jerry and Harvey go-3PL to Merritt  
       Did Jerry and Harvey go to Merritt?

b. káʔkín ki? xʷúy-ləx Jerry naʔʰ Harvey?  
 to.where CLF go-3PL Jerry and Harvey  
 Where did Jerry and Harvey go to?

(6) [Jerry<sub>topic</sub>] [kɪ spáx̣mən<sub>focus</sub>] ki? xʷuy uʔ [Harvey<sub>topic</sub>] [kɪ tɪkʷt<sub>focus</sub>] ki? xʷuy.  
 Jerry to Douglas.Lake CLF go and Harvey to lake CLF go  
 Jerry went to Douglas lake, and Harvey went to the lake.

Indeed, data suggest that the pattern [...<sub>topic</sub>] [...<sub>focus</sub>] CLF/DET shown in (4,6) is not felicitous if neither the topic nor the focus is contrastive (8a). (A topical subject may however *follow* the focus (8b), in which case neither expression need be contrastive.)

(7) Q: tlaʔkín ixí? ki? ckicx i? ylmíxʷəm?  
 from.where DEM CLF come DET chief  
 Where did the chief come?

(8) a. A: ?/#[i? ylmíxʷəm<sub>topic</sub>] [tɪ nʰq̣iməl̥x<sub>focus</sub>] ki? scxʷuyx.  
 DET chief from Quilchena CLF come  
 The chief comes from Quilchena.

b. A': [tɪ nʰq̣iməl̥x<sub>focus</sub>] [i? ylmíxʷəm<sub>topic</sub>] ki? ckicx.  
 The chief comes from Quilchena.

**Towards an Analysis:** In sum, a topicalized subject can precede a focus in an Nsyílxcən cleft structure only if **(I)** the focus is contrastive, and/or **(II)** the topicalized subject is contrastive. Question/answer congruence is thus sensitive to contrastivity in Nsyílxcən. Case **(II)** may be analyzed following Büring's (2003, 2016) analysis of contrastive topics as involving alternative sets of questions. For Nsyílxcən (6) to be felicitous, there must be at least one alternative question of the form *Did y go to Merritt?* (or *Where did y go?* in answer to 5b) which is pertinent, identifiable, and logically independent of the semantic value of (6): *Jerry<sub>CT</sub> went to Merritt<sub>F</sub>*. This is appropriately satisfied by the question *Did Harvey go to Merritt?* For case **(I)** involving non-contrastive topics as in (4), the requirement that there be some question of the form *Did the man see x?* which is pertinent, identifiable, and logically independent of *The man<sub>T</sub> saw a bear<sub>F</sub>* still appears to hold in Nsyílxcən: This is satisfied by (3b) *Did the man see a cougar?* but not by (3a) *What did the man see?* (i.e. *Did the man see x?*) (see Ward 1985 for discussion of similarly shared contextual requirements on English topicalization and focus preposing). I suggest that left-most topicalization in Okanagan clefts is contextually licensed by an appropriately contrastive question alternative, but that it is unspecified whether that alternative contrasts with respect to the topic (case **II**) or the focus (case **I**), so long as there is *some* pertinent, identifiable and independent question alternative. I examine the distribution of topics and other information structural categories in Nsyílxcən, and compare theoretical approaches in weighing the tenability of this hypothesis.

**Abbreviated References.** Büring, D. (2003). On D-trees, beans, and B-accent. Büring, D. (2016). (Contrastive) Topic. Lyon, J. (2013). Predication and Equation in Okanagan Salish. Rooth, M. (1992). A theory of focus interpretation. Ward, G. (1985). The Semantics and Pragmatics of Preposing (Topicalization).