Contradicting (Not-)At-Issueness In Exclusives And Clefts: An Empirical Study

INTRODUCTION – This paper presents an empirical study on exclusives and *it*-clefts in German in which the **at-issue** and **not-at-issue** inferences were teased apart systematically. At-issue information, that which directly addresses the question under discussion (QUD) (Roberts 1996), is a crucial factor that has not been properly controlled for in prior experimental work on exhaustivity. The results here shed new light on the semantic-pragmatic debate on *it*-clefts: exhaustiveness in clefts—a not-at-issue inference—patterned differently from all other semantic components, including its not-at-issue counterpart in exclusives, the prejacent (Beaver & Clark 2008). These findings pose an experimental challenge to semantic accounts of exhaustivity in clefts, but are in line with pragmatic accounts (Horn forthcoming).

BACKGROUND – Although exhaustivity (EXH) in exclusives is often used as a baseline comparison for clefts, it is debatable if they are directly comparable. Exhaustivity in exclusives (1a) is generally claimed to be semantic and **at-issue** (i.e., conventionally coded in the exclusive and addressing the QUD), whereas the prejacent (PREJ) of exclusives (1b) is argued to be semantic but **not-at-issue** (Beaver & Clark 2008). Similar to the prejacent, exhaustivity in clefts (2b) is typically taken to be a **not-at-issue** inference, although there remains an ongoing debate whether cleft exhaustivity is semantic (i.e., conventionally coded in the structure; see Percus 1997, Velleman et al. 2012, Büring & Križ 2013) or pragmatic (i.e., a conversational implicature; see Horn 1981, forthcoming). Compare the following:

(1) Nur Phillip hat die Katze gefüttert.   **EXCLUSIVE**
   only Phillip has the cat   fed

   a. (**EXH**) Nobody other than P. has fed the cat.   ***at-issue**, semantic*
   b. (**PREJ**) P. has fed the cat.   ***not-at-issue**, semantic*

(2) Es ist Phillip, der die Katze gefüttert hat.   **CLEFT**
   it is Phillip who the cat   fed   has

   a. P. has fed the cat.   ***at-issue**, semantic*
   b. (**EXH**) Nobody other than P. has fed the cat.   ***not-at-issue**, ?*

Prior experiments, however, have failed to control for at-issueness, posing a potential confound to empirical research on exhaustivity that is orthogonal to the semantic and pragmatic debate. Drenhaus et al. (2011), Destruel (2012), and Destruel et al. (2013) model their claims about exhaustiveness in clefts analogous to the behavior of exclusives. Moreover, Destruel et al. (2013) claim that the *Yes, but* method used by Onea & Beaver (2009) was sensitive to at-issue information only, while Washburn et al. (2013) test clefts in contexts in which at-issueness may be a critical factor. Mayol & Castroviejo (2013) and Horn (forthcoming), however, have demonstrated that not-at-issue information behaves differently from at-issue inferences in many diagnostics (e.g., cancellation, projection, NPIs, etc.), and thus conclusive results when comparing clefts to exclusives will require careful controls for at-issueness.

DESIGN – In order to tease at-issueness apart, a 2 x 2 factorial design was used: SENTENCE TYPE (two levels: *exclusive, cleft*) and CONTRADICTION TYPE (two levels: *at-issue* (AI), *not-at-issue* (NAI)). The four conditions, shown below, employed a felicity-judgment task with a variation on cancellation, namely, acceptability under contradiction (compare Onea & Beaver (2009) and Destruel et al. (2013) for exhaustiveness contradictions with the *Yes, but* methodology; see also Mayol & Castroviejo (2013) for more standard cancellation tasks). Thirty-two German native-speakers judged on a scale of 1 (unacceptable) to 7 (acceptable)

the felicity of two conjoined sentences in which the second conjunct contradicted the meaning components in (1)–(2), illustrated here for English. (NB All items were tested in German.)

2x2 Factorial Design

	AI	NAI
EXCLUSIVE	**A**	**B**
CLEFT	**C**	**D**

- Condition A: Exclusive, At-Issue (AI)
  Only Phillip fed the cat and Lars fed the cat.

- Condition B: Exclusive, Not-At-Issue (NAI)
  Only Phillip fed the cat and he didn't feed the cat.

- Condition C: Cleft, At-Issue (AI)
  It is Phillip who fed the cat and he didn't feed the cat.

- Condition D: Cleft, Not-At-Issue (NAI)
  It is Phillip who fed the cat and Lars fed the cat.

Results – There was a significant interaction of sentence type and contradiction type, with the not-at-issue exhaustivity contradictions in clefts showing a statistically significant increase in mean acceptability, thus failing to pattern with all other semantic inferences.
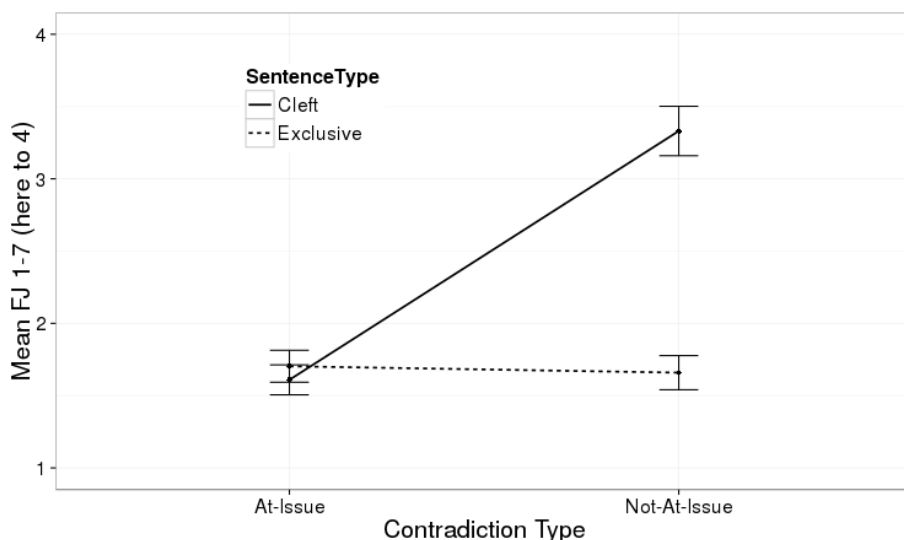
Conclusion – Not-at-issue exhaustiveness in clefts did not pattern with other semantic inferences, including its not-at-issue counterpart in exclusives, the prejacent. This poses a new experimental challenge to semantic theories of cleft exhaustivity: if semantic theories of clefts are correct, *It is x that P and y P* should be judged just as unacceptable as other contradictions of semantic content. This must be accounted for by semantic theories if they should be further defended. On the contrary, a pragmatic account in which exhaustivity in clefts comes about as an implicature could capture these results under the assumption that the exhaustivity violation in clefts does not pattern with the other three inferences simply because it is not semantic at all.

Selected References • Büring, D. & Križ, M. (2013). *It's that, and that's it! Exhaustivity and homogeneity presupposition in clefts (and definites).* Semantics & Pragmatics. • Destruel, E., Velleman, D. B., Onea, E., Bumford, D., Xue, J. & Beaver, D. (2013). *A Cross-Linguistic Study of the Non-at-issueness of Exhaustive Inferences.* • Horn, L. (2013). *Information structure and the landscape of (non-)at-issue meaning.* OUP Handbook of Information Structure (Forthcoming). • Velleman, D. B., Beaver, D., Destruel, E., Bumford, D., Onea, E., & Coppock, E. (2012). It-*clefts are IT (inquiry terminating) constructions.* SALT Proceedings.