

FOCUS IN CYPRIOT GREEK

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In this paper, I will only deal with **subject** and **object** focus.

MG = Modern Greek

CG = Cypriot Greek

1. THE PUZZLE

Speakers in Cypriot Greek (CG) employ three different strategies (though not to the same extent) to exemplify Focus:

❖ Clefts

(1) “**En esena pu** agapo”
is you-acc that love-1s
“it is you that I love”

❖ Focus in-situ

(2) Agapo **esena**
love-1s you-acc
“I love you”

❖ Focus-movement

(3) **ESENA** agapo
you-acc love-1s
“You I love”

Hypothesis 1:

The three strategies co-exist as part of the GC’s Focus System.

Hypothesis 2:

In C.G only clefts and focus in-situ are employed. The use of movement focusing is an MG strategy.

2. CONTRASTIVE VS. INFORMATION FOCUS:

A few words (from Georgiafentis 2003; see also Ambar 1999, Brunetti 2003):

Information Focus: the focused constituent simply introduces new, non-presupposed information without contrasting it with any other type of information, either old or new

Contrastive Focus: new information is viewed in contrast with other specific old or new information and the clause actually contradicts what is asserted in the previous clause

Contrastive vs. Information Focus in relation to **Syntax!**

Brody (1990)

- Hungarian Focus is syntactically marked
- focus position in the left periphery of the clause
- *V moves* to Foc to assign a feature to the XP in [Spec, FocP]

Agouraki (1990)

- Focus creates its own maximal projection in Greek
- Feature assigned by the verb
- When the *V* itself is focused, the feature is absorbed by *V*
- When there is phonological focus-marking the focused phrase moves to [Spec, FocP] only at LF

Tsimpli (1990, 1995)

- Greek focus phrases *can* be raised overtly, but *must* be raised at LF

Tsimpli (1998)

- Investigate the possibility of in-situ focusing as being distinct from focus-raising
- Information focus is a discourse phenomenon with no syntactic correlate whereas contrastive focus is syntactically instantiated
- In-situ focus is ambiguous between a presentational and a contrastive reading whereas a preposed focus phrase cannot construe as presentational

Lekakou (2000)

- Movement of the focus phrase is used when the context permits it to guide the interpretation process
- Movement marks the material across which the movement took place as presupposed, i.e. discourse given
- Thus, in a preposed focus phrase what follows is discourse given and marked as such and in an in-situ focus phrase and what precedes it can be either presupposed or not
- No syntactic feature that needs to be checked!

3. CLEFTS:

3.1 Clefting in CG is mainly contrastive

(4) **En ego pu enna pao sto party**
It is I-nom that will-1sg go to the party

(5) **En ti Maria pu aghapa o Petros. (, oi tin Eleni)**
It is Maria-acc that love-3sg Peter-nom. not Eleni-acc

(6) **En to vivlio pu mu arese (, oi l tenia)**
it is the book-acc that I like-3past (not the movie-acc)

Under a contrastive reading:
26% acceptable enough
67% very acceptable

However there are cases where clefting constructions are employed in non-contrastive setting, as an answer to a wh-question:

→(7) **Pia agapa o petros?**
Who love-3-sg the-Peter-nom?
Who does Peter love?

→(8) **Nomizo en ti Maria pu agapa.**
think-1sg is the-Maria-acc that love-3-sg.
I think it is Maria that he loves

Or in the case when you knock the door of a friend unexpectedly:

→(9) Pios?
Who?

→(10) En ego pu ime
re.

26% ungrammatical
16% little acceptable
26% so so
16% acceptable enough
14% very acceptable.
Although it seems that this answer is not the most preferable there were a considerable number of people who would use it!

3.2 A note on clefts

CG focusing is possible with quantifiers (cf. Brunetti 2003: 101, pace Benincà et al. 1988)

(11) **En ulli/ulla pu mu ften**
It is everybody/everything that I think responsible of.

(12) **Enen kanenas pu ftei.**
It is nobody that is responsible for

(13) **Enen kati/tipote pu me anisixi**
It is not something that worries me

In examples (12) and (13) the negative operator “en” (from the MG equivalent “den”) is attached to the copula part of the cleft.

<p>(14) TIPOTE en me anisixi Nothing not me worries “Nothing worries me”</p>	<p>(15) En me anisixi tipote Not me worries nothing “Nothing worries me”</p>
<p>(16) KATI me anisixi Something me worries “Something worries me”</p>	<p>(17) Anisixi me kati Worries me something “Something worries me”</p>

In (13) the speaker talks about something specific. For example, Peter has exams tomorrow and you ask him if he is stressed out. He replies:

(18) Oi, **enen kati/tipote** pu me anisixi.
"No, it is not something that worries me"

Here **kati/tipote** refers to the exam. In the other examples *kati* means 'something', *tipote* means 'nothing'.

4. MOVEMENT IN CG

4.1 Movement as usual

A first assumption would be that CG doesn't utilize movement so much since focus movement is an MG strategy, and so it has clefts instead.

However, the results of my questionnaire seem to suggest otherwise:

Movement of a subject in a contrastive scenario (1):

(19) **EGO** enna pao sto party.
I-nom will go to the party-acc
"I will go to the party"

Only 4% unacceptable,
34% acceptable enough
51% very acceptable!

Movement of a subject in a non-contrastive scenario:

(20) **EGO** ime.
I-nom be-1sg

2% unacceptable
24% acceptable enough
54% very acceptable!

Movement of an object in a contrastive scenario:

(21) **ESENA** agapo
You-acc love-1sg
"You I love"

9% unacceptable,
21% acceptable enough
56% very acceptable.

(22) Ti **MARIA** agapa o Petros
the-acc Maria-acc love-3sg the-nom Petros-nom
"It is Maria that Peter loves"

This example sounds strange to me although there are Cypriots who use it. However, it sounds more like MG than CG.

This sentence is ungrammatical due to the Adjacency condition which states that when the focus phrase moves overtly the verb must immediately follow; moving to the head of FP.

(23) *Ti MARIA o Petros agapa
The-acc Maria-acc the-nom Petros-nom love-3sg

It is crystal-clear that movement in CG is very acceptable, although there are cases like (22) when it does not sound so good. The results of the questionnaire speak for themselves. Moreover, movement is used mainly for a contrastive reading but it can also be interpreted informationally, too.

Although Tsimpli (1998) believes that a preposed element in MG can not be construed as presentational, experimental evidence from Georgiafentis and Sfakianaki (2002-2004) suggests that preposed focus with information reading does exist in MG. Georgiafentis' (2003) examples:

→(24) Pjos djavazi to vivlio?
Who-nom read-3sg the book-acc
"Who is reading the book?"

→ (25) o Janis djavazi to vivlio.
the-nom Janis-nom read-3sg the book-acc
"John is reading the book"

If we adopt Hypothesis 2, movement is an MG strategy which has both information and contrastive readings. But even if we do not adopt Hypothesis 2 and accept the not-so-economical scenario in which CG employs the movement strategy proper, then I would claim that a moved focus element has both information and contrastive readings.

Consider example (20) which was an answer to (9). According to 54% of the Greek Cypriots questioned, this is a very acceptable answer.

4.2 An unusual movement

When two languages interact, a mixture of the two becomes inevitable. In CG a movement construction is utilized whose *existence can not be denied*, even though many speakers might not like it as much.

(26) **H KOKINOMALA** en pu mu areski
The red-hair-nom is that me-acc like-3sg
"The red-hair I like"

(27) **ESENA** en pu **θelo**
You-acc is that want-1sg
"You I want"

(28) **ESI** en pu thelis giatro
You is that want-2sg doctor
"You want a doctor"

As an answer to a wh-question, in scenario 2:
21% unacceptable
12% little acceptable,
32% so so
27% acceptable enough,
6% very acceptable

According to Grohmann, Panagiotidis and Tsimplakou (2005) this is a type of cleft construction which disallows movement of the focused expression and is thus ungrammatical. Their example (my capitals):

(29) * O XAMBIS en pu efie
The-nom Hambis-nom is that left-3sg

In my analysis, this as a movement strategy adopted from MG to CG. The question

(30) Pjos en pu efie?
Who-nom is that left-3sg

is perfectly acceptable in CG. Since a question with *en pu* is grammatically correct, why not a focus movement with the *en pu*?

An assumption is that this form of movement will be more acceptable as time goes by. Also the existence of this kind of movement can reinforce Hypothesis 2, which states that movement is an MG strategy. If it wasn't, then why would CG have two different ways of forming focus movement?

5. IN-SITU FOCUS:

(31) O Petros agapa ti **Maria**
The-nom Petros-nom love-3sg the-acc Maria-acc
"Peter loves Maria"

(32) Agapo **esena**
Love-1sg you-acc
"I love you"

(33) Sto party enna pao **ego**
At the party will go-1sh me-acc
"I will go to the party"

In MG, in-situ focus is ambiguous between a presentational and a contrastive reading (Tsimpli 1995) contrary to what E. Kiss (1998) argues (see Lekakou 2000 for discussion). This is the case for Italian as well (Rizzi 1997).

The same goes for CG. (31) can have either a presentational reading where Maria is not contrasted to anyone, or a contrastive reading where Maria may be contrasted with Eleni:

(34) O Petros agapa ti **Maria**, oi tin Eleni
The-nom Petros-nom love-3sg the-acc Maria-acc, not the-acc Eleni-acc

Also, as Lekakou (2000) suggests, if we add *mono* 'only', which forces an exhaustive contrastive reading on the constituent next to which it appears, then a focalized element *in situ* can also have a contrastive reading.

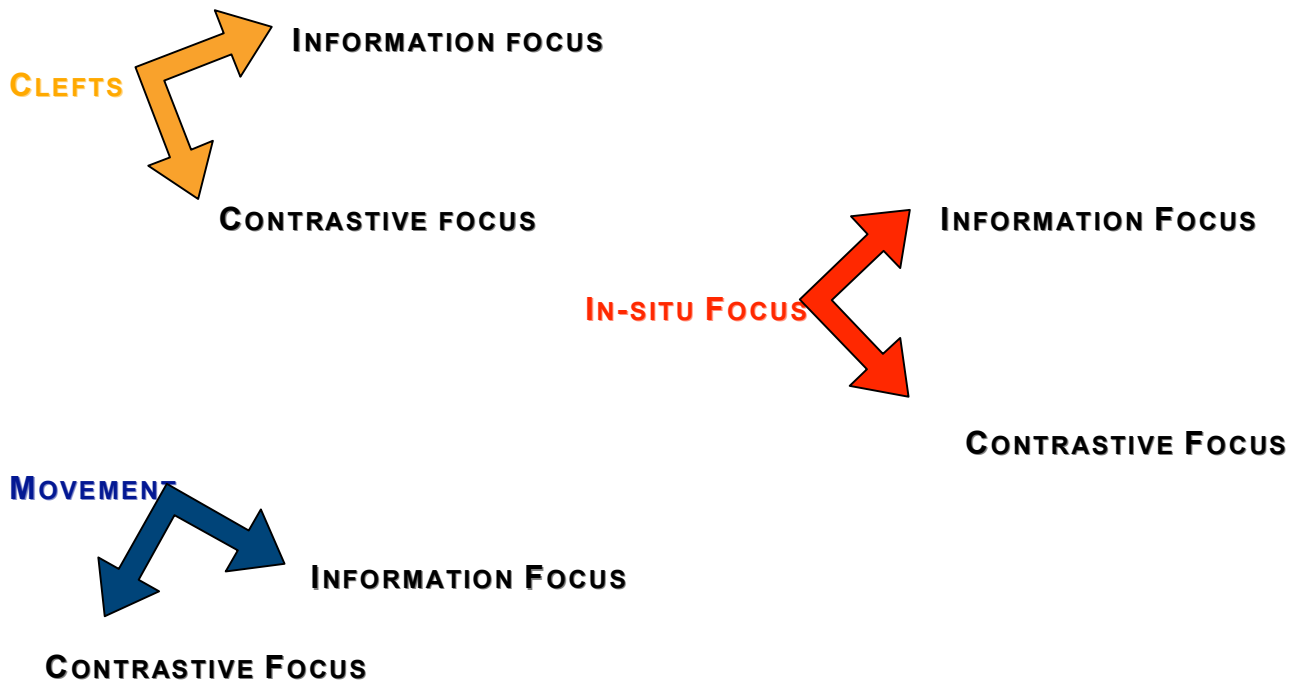
(35) O Petros agapa mono ti **Maria**
The-nom Petros-nom love-3sg only the-acc Maria-acc

(36) Sto party enna pao **ego**
At the party will go-1sh me-acc

As an answer to scenario 1 (contrastive setting):
Only 6% unacceptable
14% little acceptable
24% so so, 30% acceptable enough
26% very acceptable
Although it was not the most preferable choice in Scenario 1 no one can doubt that speakers use it, to some extent, under a contrastive reading.

6. THE PROBLEM:

This is the picture so far for CG:



If the three strategies co-exist, and this is what Hypothesis 1 claims, the focus system is not very economical.

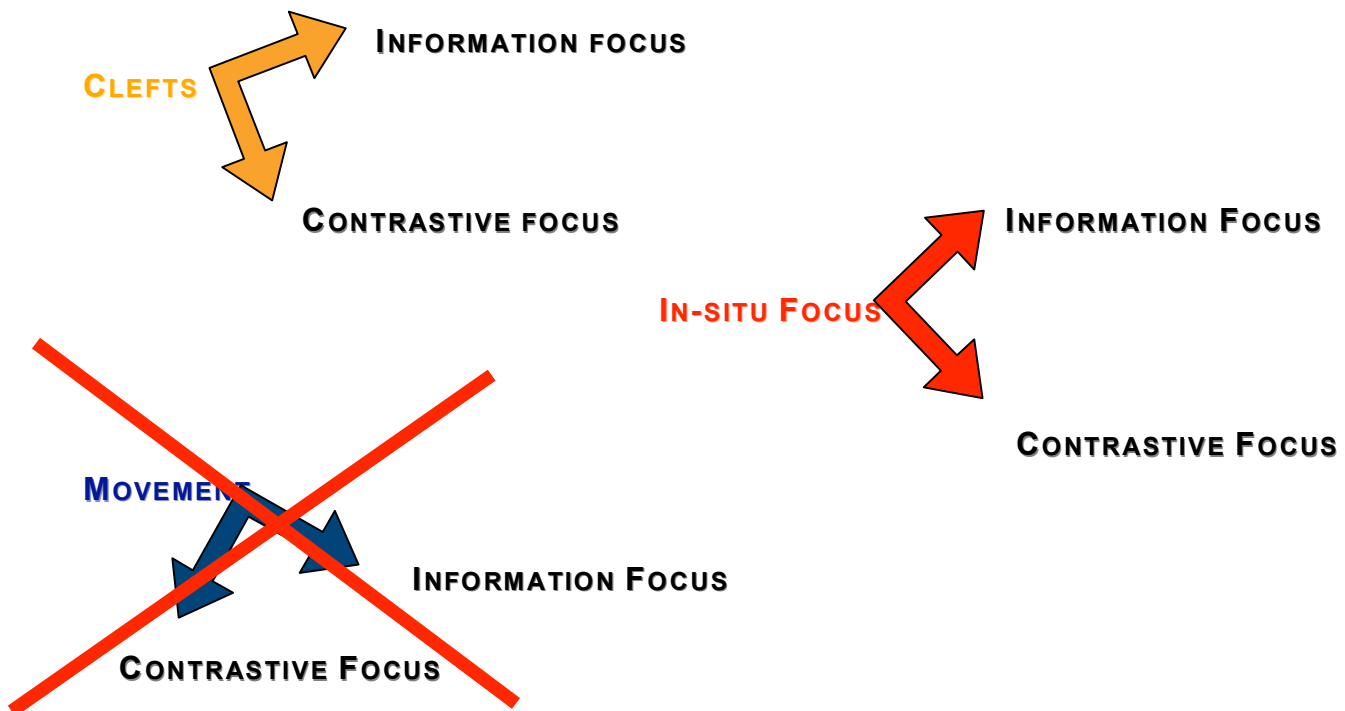
There is no reason to support the hypothesis that CG has three different strategies instead of two (like Italian, MG etc. do). Consider the fact that there are languages like Hungarian which exemplify only one strategy, movement in this case (Brody 1990).

Why is there Focus-movement in CG?

CG is mainly a spoken language. For some it is not a language at all, it is just a dialect of MG. People in Cyprus learn to read and write in MG. News, magazines, newspapers, speeches and formal events are also in MG. The influence from MG is INEVITABLE.

That is why Focus-movement occurs in CG. It is an MG focus-strategy imported to CG.

THEREFORE WE ADOPT HYPOTHESIS 2:



A problem remains! Why can both clefts and in-situ focus used for both information and contrastive focus?

It seems that the system is still uneconomical. In order to solve this puzzle, I will provide my own suggestions:

MY SUGGESTION:

→ Focus is always contrastive!

(Incidentally, my suggestion is supported by Brunetti (2003), who cites personal communication with Irene Heim and Rita Manzini. Her claim is that Focus is always contrastive. Brunetti concludes that contrast is not a matter of Focus but the result of the discourse context in which focus occurs.)

(37) Enna pio **coca-cola**
Will-1sg drink coca-cola
I will drink coca-cola

Here I focus the coca-cola and contrast it with every other possible drinkable object I could choose from and drink.

(38) Agapo ton **Petro**
Love-1sg the Peter-nom
I love Peter

Similarly, here I focus and contrast Petro with every other man, (or even a woman depending on my sexual preferences) that there is to love.

The above are instances of focus in-situ, for which I showed earlier that they can either be “information” or “contrastive” focus.

When a cleft is employed, which *usually* expresses “contrastive” focus, like...

(39) En ti MARIA pu aghapa o Petros(, oi tin Eleni)

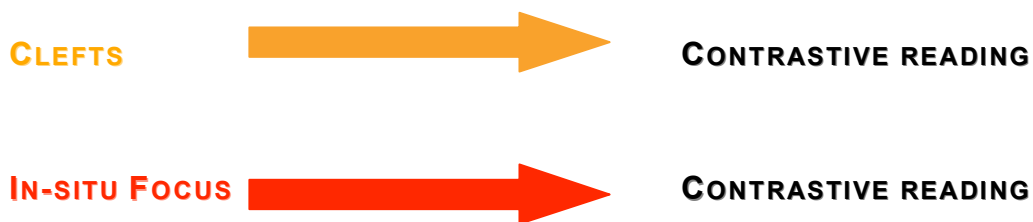
... MARIA is contrasted with Eleni. The difference in this case is that the focused phrase is contrasted with something specific; known in the discourse context within the utterance is spoken! In this case the contrast is highlighted since it is evident to the hearer of the utterance.

E. Kiss (1998) assumes that there is a contrastive feature and Focus is [+contrastive] “if it operates on a closed set of entities whose members are known to the participants of the discourse” (p, 267).

→ I suggest that focus **always** operates on a set of entities whose members **are sometimes known and sometimes unknown** to the participants of the discourse.

→ Do we have a “+contrastive feature” under this analysis? If the contrast is not a matter of focus itself, and if, as a result of the discourse context, focus is always contrastive, then a “+contrastive feature” is not necessary or economical in any way.

If focus is always contrastive, why have two strategies instead of one?



Note also that the movement of the focused item in cleft constructions is a costly operation.

Through the examples given in this presentation it seems that clefts were *mainly* used for “contrastive” reading, while in-situ focusing *mainly* for “informational” reading. Therefore a difference between the two must hold.

→ Under my analysis, clefts are *mainly* used when focus operates on a set of entities whose members are known to the participants of the discourse while in-situ focusing *mainly* when they are not known.

Question 1: Why is that?

An assumption is that when the members of the set of entities are known then the contrast is much stronger/ emphatic than in the case in which they are not. In order to demonstrate this strength/emphasis clefts are employed, which require a movement of the focused element. In the latter case there is no need of the costly operation of movement therefore the focused element remains in situ.

Question 2: What does “*mainly*” mean...?

There is no clear answer for that. A second assumption would be that, inconsequentially of the familiarity with the members that the focused element is contrasted, every speaker chooses the strategy which he/she employs depending on how *much* focus he/she wants. If the assumption in the previous question is valid, then clefts demonstrate an emphasis of the focused element which is not demonstrated in an in-situ focusing.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper explored the mechanisms of focus used in CG. The main assumption is that focus-movement is an MG focus-strategy imported to CG due to the constant interaction between the two languages. The labels “contrastive” and “information” focus used through this paper have been dropped at the end, since focus is claimed to be always be contrastive. Finally, two assumptions are provided in effort to answer to the existence of two mechanism for one type of focus.

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APPENDIX

Scenarios in the questionnaire:

Scenario one:

In a situation where you are 15 years old and you ask your mum if you can go to a party. The day of the party you ask her if it is go to go, and she says: "Isn't it your sister who is going to that party?"

Scenario two:

You go to a party and your best friend asks you: "Who do you like best in here?"

Scenario three:

You go to a friend's house unexpectedly, knock at the door and your friend asks: "Who's that?"

Scenario four:

Your bf/gf doubts your love. He/she thinks you love someone else. What do you say to convince him/her that this is not the case?