

# Focus Marking in Lone Contrastive Topic Constructions: A puzzle from Vietnamese

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It is agreed by both the formal and functional analyses (primarily based on English data) of contrastive topics that contrastive topic marking, namely marking a constituent as a contrastive topic via the B-accent/the rising intonation contour) requires the co-occurrence of focus marking via the A-accent/the falling intonation contour (Sturgeon 2006, and references therein). Hence, a canonical utterance that involves a contrastive topic should be realized by the B-accent and the A-accent as illustrated by (1), in which, in Constant's (2014) notation, the constituent realized by the B-accent is marked with the subscripted CT, and the one realized by the A-accent with the subscripted Exh.

## (1) CT + Exh

- A: What about Persephone and Antonio?  
What did *they* bring?
- B: [Persephone]<sub>CT</sub> ... brought [the gazpacho]<sub>Exh</sub>. (Constant 2014:20)  
L+H\* L-H% H\* L-L%

However, Constant (2014) specifies cases where an utterance surfaces with only the B-accent. An utterance of this type is referred to as a lone-CT construction. The example in (2) from Constant (2014), where only *Persephone* bears the rising contour/the B-accent, is illustrative.

## (2) Lone CT

- A: Did Persephone and Antonio bring vegetarian dishes?
- B: [Persephone]<sub>CT</sub> brought one... (Constant 2014:23)  
L+H\* L-H%

Furthermore, there are cases where the contrastive topic is the entire clause; namely, it is the clause that bears the rising intonation or the B-accent. Constant (2014) refers to such cases as Sentential CT constructions, and proposes that Sentential CT is a subtype of Lone CT.

## (3) Sentential CT

- A: Why are you so happy? Did Fred come over?
- B: [Fred came over]<sub>CT</sub> ... but that's not why I'm so happy... (Constant 2014:46)  
L+H\* L-H%

Is it possible to detect utterances with lone CT in languages that realize information structure categories via syntactic means? The following data in Vietnamese provides a negative answer.

## (4) Did Nam and Hoa bring cookies to the class?

- a. [Hoa]<sub>CT</sub> thì [có]<sub>F</sub>  
Hoa TOP VR  
'Hoa did.'

- b. [Hoa]<sub>CT</sub> mang bánh đến thì [có]<sub>F</sub>.  
 Hoa bring cake arrive TOP VR .  
 ‘Hoa did bring cookies.’

Either (4a) or (4b) is felicitous as an answer to the context question. The short form in (4a) is more natural where the given material is deleted. The expected continuation of (4a) or (4b) is a contrastive clause: ‘but Nam did not’. I propose that in this construction the focus is a verum focus. That the element *có* is a verum focus marker as supported by the fact that *có* is obligatory in the verum focus context (5).

- (5) Nam didn’t help Mai.  
 That’s not true. Nam # (có) giúp Mai.  
 Nam VR help Mai  
 ‘Nam did help Mai.’

I assume that the sentence in (4b) is base generated as in (6a): The verum focus marker *có* adjoins to the TP, forming a constituent that is selected by the topic head *thì*. The TopP requires its Spec to be filled by a phrase with [+Top] feature, for which *Hoa* is qualified. The sentence in (4b) surfaces as it is due to topicalization, namely the pied-piping of the contrastive topic *Hoa* and the remaining clause to Spec, TopP (6b).

- (6) a. [<sub>TopP</sub> thì [<sub>TP</sub> có [<sub>TP</sub> Hoa mang bánh đến]]]  
 TOP VR Hoa bring cookies arrive  
 b. [<sub>TopP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> Hoa mang bánh đến] thì [<sub>TP</sub> có [<sub>TP</sub> [~~Hoa~~ CT ~~mang bánh đến~~]]]  
 Hoa bring cookies arrive TOP VR

The contrastive topic value  $[[.]]^{ct}$ , in the spirit of Büring (2003), is the set of yes-no questions, namely a set of sets of the propositions of the form  $\{\{p, \text{not } p'\}, \{p, \text{not } p''\}\dots\}$ , where  $p'$ ,  $p''$  are the propositions in which the contrastive topic marked element are replaced with alternatives to it. Vietnamese also makes available sentential CT constructions, namely constructions where the entire clause functions as a contrastive topic. And these constructions also involve verum focus marking as illustrated in (7), where the first clause ‘the workers work’ contrasts with the second clause ‘(the workers) eat’.

- (7) What caused the strike yesterday?  
 Vì [công nhân làm] CT thì [có]<sub>F</sub> (mà ăn thì không).  
 because worker work TOP VR (but eat TOP not  
 ‘Because the workers work, but are unable to survive.’

The generalization that contrastive topic marking requires the co-occurrence of focus marking is valid across languages, and the focus marking in the Lone CT cases is the verum focus.

**Selected references** Büring, D., 2003. On D-trees, beans, and B-accents. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 26:511-545.

Constant, N., 2014. Contrastive Topic: Meanings and Realizations. Ph.D. thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst