

## F-constructions in Yucatec Maya

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Yucatec Maya, like many other Mayan languages, features a set of constructions, including relative clauses, content questions and focus constructions, that is uniquely characterized by the occurrence of the so-called Agent Focus verb form. The challenge posed by these constructions is to account for why a special verb form occurs only in these constructions. I argue that this is the case because these constructions (which I refer to as F-constructions) share particular structural and semantic properties.

Yucatec Maya (YM), like many other Mayan languages, features a set of constructions that is uniquely characterized by the occurrence of a special verb form, the so-called Agent Focus verb form: this set of constructions (which I refer to as F-constructions) consists of focus constructions, content questions and relative clauses (cf. Bricker 1979, Bohmeyer 1998 for YM; other Mayan languages: Jakaltek (Craig 1979), Tzotzil (Aissen 1999), Ixil (Ayres 1983), Tz'utujil (Dayley 1985), Mam (England 1983:209ff), K'iche' (Mondloch 1981, Larsen 1987)). Yucatec Mayan F-constructions are illustrated in the examples in (1): in (1a) *bu'ul* 'beans' is focused, in (1b) the word *ba'ax* 'thing' receives an interrogative interpretation and in (1c) the nominal *maak* 'person' is relativized. (In (1), the nominal predicates are underlined and the verbal predicates appear in bold face). Roughly speaking, the Agent Focus verb, which occurs only in F-constructions, is realized when the agent of a transitive predicate is focused, questioned or relativized. In (1a), the patient argument *bu'ul* 'beans' is the focused argument. Therefore, the verbal predicate *jant* 'eat' is realized in the regular transitive form which cross-references both arguments on the verbal predicate: the agent is cross-referenced by the preverbal clitic *u* '3sg' and the patient argument is cross-referenced by the suffix *-Ø* '3sg' (cf. section 1 for the details of Yucatec Mayan morphosyntax and argument realization). In (1b), the agent argument *ba'ax* 'thing' of the transitive predicate *jant* 'eat' in (1b) is questioned and hence the predicate is realized in the Agent Focus form (which is identified in YM by the omission of the agent cross-reference marker). Finally, in (1c), *maak* 'person' is the relativized agent argument of the intransitive verbal predicate *ok'ot* 'dance'.

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- (1) a. **Bu'ul** k- u **jant** -ik -Ø -eh!  
 beans IMPF- 3sg eat.TA -INC -3sg -TERM  
 'Beans is what he eats!'  
 b. **Ba'ax** **jant** -Ø -Ø -eh?  
 Thing eat.AF -SBJ -3sg -TERM  
 'What ate him?'  
 c. Le **máak** k- u **ok'ot** -Ø -o' polok -Ø.  
 DEF person IMPF- 3sg dance -INC -D2 fat -B3sg  
 'The man (over there) who dances is fat.'

Note that the preverbal nominals *bu'ul* 'beans' and *ba'ax* 'thing' in (1a) and (1b) realize the agent and the patient argument of the respective transitive predication. Thus, the grammatical function of nominal arguments that are realized in preverbal position is not configurationally determined. Also, since YM, like all Mayan languages, is a head-marking language, the arguments of a predication are cross-referenced on the predicate but there is no marking on a nominal argument itself that would indicate its semantic relation relative to the verbal predicate. The important way in which the predications in (1a) and (1b) differ, and by which the semantic role of the preverbal element is determined, is the form in which the verbal predicate is realized, i.e., the regular transitive form in (1a) and the Agent Focus form in (1b). Since the Agent Focus verb form is obligatorily used when the agent of a transitive predication is focused, questioned or relativized, it is apparent that this verb serves to disambiguate transitive predications. The intriguing puzzle behind these constructions and the Agent Focus verb, however, is to explain why only F-constructions realize an additional verb form, while other types of clauses can do without. The aim of this paper is to identify the property of F-constructions that motivates the realization of the Agent Focus verb in this particular set of constructions.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 1 provides a brief introduction to relevant aspects of Yucatec Mayan morphosyntax and the discourse constraints on argument realization. In section 2, I discuss the structural and semantic/pragmatic properties of F-constructions in YM and I propose that F-constructions in YM are cleft constructions in the sense that they consist of two predications. Section 3 is concerned with the interpretation of F-constructions. I demonstrate how the distinct interpretations of focus constructions, content questions and relative clauses can arise from the same basic cleft-like structure. Finally, the section summarizes the motivation behind the Agent Focus verb. (The full analysis is presented in Tonhauser (to appear,a).) In section 4, I discuss an alternative account, which assumes that F-constructions are structurally and semantically heterogeneous. Section 5 concludes the paper.

### 1 Relevant aspects of Yucatec Mayan morphosyntax and argument realization

As mentioned above, YM is a head-marking language: in transitive clauses, the transitive A is cross-referenced on the verbal predicate with a preverbal clitic and the transitive O is cross-referenced by a suffix. (I use 'S' for the single argument of an intransitive predicate and 'A' and 'O' for the two arguments of transitive predicates, cf. e.g., Dixon 1994.) In (2), the preverbal clitic *in* '1sg' cross-references the A-argument of the transitive predicate *chuk* 'catch' and the suffix *-ech* '2sg' cross-references the O-argument. The clause in (2) is furthermore constituted by an aspect-mood marker, which precedes the preverbal clitic

that cross-references the transitive A (*t-* 'perfective', in (2)) and by a status inflectional suffix (cf. Kaufmann 1990:71) which is *-ah* 'completive' in (2). Following Bohnemeyer 1998, I refer to a clause like (2) that consists of a verbal predication preceded by an aspect/mood marker as a 'verbal clause'.

- (2) T- in chuk -ah -ech. [verbal clause]  
 PERF- 1sg catch -CMP -2sg  
 'I caught you.'<sup>1</sup>

Following the tradition among Mayanists, the two sets of cross-reference markers that identify the A- and O-argument in transitive predications are referred to as 'set A' and 'set B', respectively (e.g., the first person singular set A marker is glossed as 'A1sg').

set A	sg	pl	set B	sg	pl
1	in(w)	k (...-o'n)	1	-en	-o'n
2	a(w)	a(w)...-e'x	2	-ech	-e'x
3	u(y)	u(y)...-o'b	3	-Ø	-o'b

Table 1: cross-reference markers in Yucatec Maya

The cross-reference markers cannot be associated with a particular grammatical function because both sets of cross-reference markers are used to cross-reference the single S-argument of intransitive predicates. YM is one of the few languages which exhibit a fluid-S system that is conditioned by overt aspect (Bohnemeyer, to appear): the S-argument of intransitive predicates is cross-referenced by a set A marker when the predicate is marked with incompletive status and it is cross-referenced by a set B marker when the predicate is marked by completive or subjunctive status. For example, the intransitive verbal predicate in (3a) is marked for incompletive status (which is phonetically empty for intransitive active verbs), and therefore cross-references the S-argument by a set A marker (*in* 'A1sg'). In (3b), where the verb is marked by completive status *-nah*, the S-argument is cross-referenced by a set B marker (*-en* 'B1sg').

- (3) a. K- in suut -Ø.  
 IMPF- A1sg return -INC  
 'I return/am returning.'  
 b. H- suut -nah -en.  
 PERF- return -CMP -B1sg  
 'I returned.'

<sup>1</sup> The data in this paper was collected during my fieldwork unless otherwise indicated (B: Bohnemeyer 1998, AM1/2: Andrade and Máas 1999/2000). The following glosses are used besides those explained in the text: AF=Agent Focus verb; ALT=alternative suffix; ANTIP=antipassive; ASS=assurative aspect/mood marker; CAUSE=causal marker; CON=consequential particle; CL=classifier; CMP=completive status; D1/2/3/4=deictic markers; DEF=definite; IMPF=imperfective aspect marker; INC=incompletive status; IRR=irrealis marker; LOC=locative preposition; PERF=perfective aspect marker; PL=plural; PRED=predictive aspect/mood marker; PREP=preposition; PROG=progressive aspect marker; PSV=passive voice; REL=relational suffix; RES=resultative; SO=subordinator; SBJ=subjunctive status; TA=transitive active; TERM=terminative marker; TOP=topic.

The verbal clauses in (2) and (3) identify the event participants by cross-reference markers. In Yucatec Mayan discourse, the realization of an event participant depends on the discourse function of the event participant in two ways.<sup>2</sup> First, whether an event participant is referred to with an overt nominal or just with a cross-reference marker depends on the discourse function of the event participant. Second, the position in which the overt nominal is realized relative to the verbal clause also correlates with the discourse function of the event participant. For instance, a new discourse participant is always referred to with an overt nominal while the current discourse topic, i.e., the discourse participant that the (particular part of the) narrative is about, is only referred to with a cross-reference marker. This is illustrated in the following beginning of a narrative where the *milpero*, a Yucatec Mayan farmer, is introduced to the discourse with a post-verbal indefinite nominal in (4a), namely *jun-túul jkolnáal* 'a milpero'. (A 'milpa' is a Yucatec Mayan corn field, based on slash-and-burn agriculture.) The milpero is the discourse topic and is consequently only referred to by the (bold faced) cross-reference markers throughout the narrative in (4).

- (4) a. Yanhi' jun -túul jkolnáal -e'  
 exist one -CL milpero -D3  
 'There (once) was a milpero.'
- b. jo'ob u beet -ik -Ø u kool.  
 start A3 do -INC -B3sg A3 milpa  
 'He started doing his milpa.'
- c. Le ka'aj ts'o'ok u kol -ik -Ø le k'áax -o'  
 when TERM A3 clear -INC -B3sg DEF forest -D2  
 'When he had finished clearing the forest'
- d. ka t- u toók -ah -Ø, t- u pak' -ah -Ø  
 SO PERF- A3 burn -CMP -B3sg PERF- A3 plant -CMP -B3sg  
 'he burnt it, he planted it.'
- e. jach báaj ma'alob yanchajik u nalil.  
 very good exist A3 green.corn.season  
 'he had a very good crop of corn.' [AM1:27]

The nominal phrase *le k'áax-o'* 'the forest' is realized in post-verbal position in (4c), too. Although it hasn't been mentioned previously, it is marked with the definite-marker *le* since it identifies an expected entity in this particular narrative context. The post-verbal realization of this definite nominal is indicative of its non-discourse topical status: typically, definite nominals that are realized in postverbal position are not salient enough to be referred to with a cross-reference marker only. Its postverbal realization indicates that the current discourse topic is retained since the realization of a definite nominal in a pre-verbal position indicates a topic-switch. This is illustrated in the next excerpt from a narrative where a young man is the discourse topic throughout (5a) to (5c): the (bold-faced) cross-reference markers in this part of the narrative refer to him. The preverbal definite nominal *le iits'intsiiil-e'* 'the little.sister-TOP' indicates a topic-switch: from this point on, the (bold-faced) cross-reference markers refer to the little sister.

<sup>2</sup> The characterization of argument realization in Yucatec Maya that is sketched here is far from being complete. Argument realization also interacts with voice, as discussed in Tonhauser (to appear,a).

- (5) a. ka t- u sut -ah -Ø uy ich  
 SO PERF- A3 return -CMP -B3sg A3 eye  
 '(and) he turned around' (lit: turned his eye)
- b. utia'al y il -ik -Ø máax poch' -ik -Ø -e'  
 in.order A3 see -INC -B3sg person insult -INC -B3sg-TERM  
 'to see who had insulted him'
- c. nàapulak u p'áat -al tùnich -Ø -ih.  
 directly A3 stay -INC stone -B3sg -TERM  
 '(and) he turned into stone.'
- d. Le iits'intsiiil -e' ma' ki'imakuy óol -i',  
 DEF little.sister -TOP NEG happy A3 soul -D4  
 'The little sister wasn't happy.'
- e. táan uy ok' -ol tumen chéen t- u hùunal p'atal -Ø -i'  
 PROG A3 cry -INC CAUSE only PREP- A3 one stay -B3sg-D4  
 'she was crying because she was the only one left' [AM2:152]

This brief discussion of argument realization in Yucatec Mayan discourse serves to clarify the importance of the position relative to the verbal clause in which a nominal phrase is realized. Finally, note that the interpretation of a third person cross-reference marker is contextually determined unless a suitable overt nominal phrase is realized in the predication. For instance, in (5e), the third person agent marker *uy* of the intransitive predicate *ok'* 'cry' is not accompanied by an overt nominal but is interpreted as the discourse topic. In (5c), on the other hand, the (phonologically empty) third person patient marker *-Ø* 'B3sg' of the transitive predicate *kol* 'clear' is interpreted as cross-referencing the post-verbal definite nominal *le k'áax-o'* 'the forest'.

## 2 F-constructions in Yucatec Maya

F-constructions are extensionally defined as those constructions in which the Agent Focus verb is realized, i.e., focus constructions, content questions and relative clauses. The aim of this section is to identify the structural properties that uniquely characterize these constructions. As discussed in section 1, the discourse function of an event participant plays a central role in determining the position in which the event participant is realized. Thus, an important observation in this context regarding F-constructions is that they obligatorily realize an element in preverbal position. For instance, in the F-constructions in (1), repeated in (6) for convenience, the (underlined) bare singular nominals precede the (bold faced) verbal predicate.

- (6) a. Bu'ul k- u **jant** -ik -Ø -eh!  
 beans IMPF- 3sg eat.TA -INC -3sg -TERM  
 'Beans is what he eats!'
- b. Ba'ax **jant** -Ø -Ø -eh?  
 thing eat.AF -SBJ -3sg -TERM  
 'What ate him?'
- c. Le máak k- u **ok'ot** -Ø -o' polok -Ø.  
 DEF person IMPF- 3sg dance -INC -D2 fat -B3sg  
 'The man (over there) who dances is fat.'

The Agent Focus verb is ungrammatical if no element is realized in the immediately preverbal position, as illustrated in (7a). The regular transitive predicate does not require the preverbal realization of an element, but in this case the construction does not receive a focus interpretation, as illustrated in (7b).

- (7) a. \***jant** -ik -Ø bu'ul.  
eat.AF -INC -B3sg beans  
b. K- in **jant** -ik -Ø bu'ul.  
IMPF- A1sg eat -INC -B3sg beans  
'I eat beans.'

Thus, a structural property shared by F-constructions is that they realize an element in preverbal position. In the following sections, I argue that the three kinds of F-constructions illustrated in (6) realize the preverbal element in the same position, i.e., F-constructions instantiate the same structure. The next two sections introduce in more detail the three kinds of F-constructions.

### 2.1 Focus constructions and content questions

The underlined elements in the F-constructions in (6) are bare singular nominals. Content questions are formed with a sortally distinguished closed subset of these bare singular nominals, namely *máax* 'person', *ba'ax* 'thing', *tu'ux* 'place', *buka'an* 'quantity' and *bix* 'manner'.<sup>3</sup> These bare singular nominals, which I refer to as 'general' bare singular nominals, are not inherently interrogative: 'general' bare singular nominals only receive an interrogative interpretation if realized in the immediately preverbal position and if they are not in the scope of a semantic operator. The examples in (8) illustrate how the 'general' bare nominals *máax* 'person' and *tu'ux* 'place' receive an interrogative interpretation in the preverbal position.

- (8) a. Máax il -ik -ech?  
person see -INC -B2sg  
'Who sees you?'  
b. Tu'ux k- a bin?  
place IMPF- A2 go  
'Where are you going?'

The 'general' bare singular nominal *máak* 'person' in (6c), on the other hand, does not receive an interrogative interpretation because it appears in the semantic scope of the definite marker *le* (relative clauses are further discussed in section 2.2). Also, a 'general' bare singular that is realized postverbally does not receive an interrogative interpretation. This is illustrated for *ba'al* 'thing' which receives an existential interpretation in (9).

- (9) Jlu'um kaab xan -e' t- u k'áat -aj -Ø ba'al u jant-ej-l.  
man of earth also -D3 PERF- A3 wish -CMP -B3sg thing A3 eat  
'The man of earth also, he asked for (some)thing to eat.' [AMI:36]

<sup>3</sup> Some of these bare singulars have alternative realizations, e.g., *ba'ax/ba'al/baan* 'thing' or *máax/máak* 'person' (see Tonhauser (to appear,b) for a discussion of bare singular nominals and content questions in YM).

Finally, in (10), the 'general' bare singular nominal *ba'ax* 'thing' also does not receive an interrogative interpretation. I argue that this is due to the fact that the phrase that contains the 'general' bare singular nominal is identified as a topic by the suffix *-e'*.

- (10) [After all of this, I won't do my field anymore.]  
Ba'ax ken in meent -Ø bejela' -e'  
thing IRR A1sg do -SBJ now -TOP  
bin in ka'aj jook'ol ts'oon saansamal.  
PRED A1sg do dedicate hunt daily  
'What I will do from today on is dedicate myself to hunting.' [AMI:75]

Topic-marked nominals, I argue are crucially different from the preverbal elements in F-constructions. For instance, topic-marked nominals in YM precede the question word of a content question, as illustrated in (11a) where *Maria-e'* is a topic. Thus, 'general' bare singular nominals only receive an interrogative interpretation in the position that follows topics. At the same time, no element may intervene between the question word and the verbal clause, as illustrated by the ungrammatical example in (11b). Hence, the position in which 'general' bare singular nominals receive an interrogative interpretation is characterized as the position that immediately precedes the verbal clause.

- (11) a. Maria -e' ba'ax k- u **jant** -ik -Ø?  
Maria -TOP thing IMPF- A3 eat -INC -B3sg  
'Maria, what does she eat?'  
b. \*Ba'ax Maria k- u **jant** -ik -Ø?  
thing Maria IMPF- A3 eat -INC -B3sg

While content questions are formed with this closed set of 'general' bare singular nominals, a non-'general' bare singular nominal that is realized in this preverbal position receives a focus interpretation. For instance, the bare singular nominal *bu'ul* 'beans' in (6a) is not a 'general' bare singular nominal, and the construction results in a focus interpretation. Parallel to the bare singular nominal of content questions, the bare singular nominal of a focus construction is also realized in the position that immediately precedes the verbal clause, as illustrated by the data in (12). Again, *Maria* can be realized postverbally as in (12a) or as a preverbal topic as in (12b). However, the example in (12c), where *Maria* is realized between the focused bare singular nominal *bu'ul* 'beans' and the verbal clause, is ungrammatical.

- (12) a. Bu'ul k- u **jant** -ik -Ø Maria.  
beans IMPF- A3 eat -INC -B3sg Maria  
'Beans is what Maria eats.'  
b. Maria -e' bu'ul k- u **jant** -ik -Ø.  
Maria -TOP beans IMPF- A3 eat -INC -B3sg  
'As for Maria, beans is what he eats.'  
c. \*Bu'ul Maria k- u **jant** -ik -Ø.  
beans Maria IMPF- A3 eat -INC -B3sg

Thus, content questions and focus constructions both require the realization of an element in the position that immediately precedes the verbal clause. The two constructions differ

in terms of the type of bare singular nominal that is realized preverbally: a 'general' bare singular gives rise to an interrogative interpretation while all other bare singular nominals receive a focus interpretation. Consequently, content questions in YM can be regarded as a particular type of focus constructions (cf. Bohnemeyer 1998:192 for a similar conclusion).

Further support for the assumption that Yucatec Mayan content questions and focus constructions instantiate the same structure comes from the fact that a single predication cannot realize both a questioned and a focused bare singular nominal. For instance, consider a context in which Kim and Maria are eating something and we have just asked what it is that they are eating. We have been told that Kim is eating tortillas but not what Maria is eating. Thus, our next question, *What does MARIA eat?*, focuses on Maria and contrasts her with Kim. In YM, focused nominals are realized in preverbal position, as well as question words. However, both (13a) and (13b), where *Maria* as well as the question word are realized preverbally, are ungrammatical in YM.<sup>4</sup> As illustrated in (11a), *Maria* can be realized preverbally in addition to the question word, but only as a topic, in which case *Maria* does not receive a focus interpretation.

- (13) a. \*Ba'ax Maria k- u jant -ik -Ø?  
 thing Maria IMPF- A3 eat -INC -B3sg  
 (int: What does MARIA eat?)  
 b. \*Maria ba'ax k- u jant -ik -Ø?  
 Maria thing IMPF- A3 eat -INC -B3sg  
 (int: What does Maria eat?)

Summarizing, I assume that there is a unique preverbal position in which focused and questioned elements are realized.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2 Relative clauses

The example in (6c) illustrates a definite nominal phrase with a relative clause. The relative clause construction consists of the definite marker *le* and a focus construction, i.e., a bare singular nominal that precedes the verbal clause. The bare singular nominal in relative clauses is realized in the position that immediately precedes the verbal clause, just like with focus constructions (and content questions) above. Thus, the second argument of the verbal clause in (14a) may be realized postverbally, but (14b), where *Juan* is realized between the nominal head of the relative clause and the verbal clause, is ungrammatical.

- (14) a. Le máak t- uy il -ah -Ø Juan -o' otsi ka'ach.  
 DEF person PERF- A3 see.TA-CMP -B3sg Juan -D2 poor formerly  
 'The man who Juan saw was poor.'  
 b. \*Le máak Juan t- uy il -ah -Ø -o' otsi ka'ach.  
 DEF person Juan PERF- A3 see.TA-CMP -Ø -D2 poor formerly

<sup>4</sup> A focus and a question can be realized together in complex focus constructions (section 3.2).

<sup>5</sup> This is also supported by the fact that Yucatec Maya does not have multiple content questions (cf. Aissen 1996 for a similar claim about Tzotzil).

Thus, focus constructions and relative clauses realize the Agent Focus verb and also share the requirement that an element is realized in the position that immediately precedes the verbal clause. The next examples illustrate two more kinds of relative clauses: (15a) presents an indefinite relative clause with *jun-túul* 'one' and the example in (15b) features a relative clause with the quantificational adjective *tuláakal* 'all'.

- (15) a. Taan in kaxt -ik -Ø  
 PROG A1sg search -INC -B3sg  
**jun -tuul** máak kanaant -ik -Ø in chiib -o'ob.  
 one -CL.anim person take.care -INC -B3sg A1sg goat -PL  
 'I am searching a person who takes care of my goats.' [AM1:107]  
 b. Le ka'aj eem **tuláakal** ba'ax t- u k'áat -ah -o', [...]  
 when lowered all+DEF thing PERF- A3 want -CMP -D2  
 'When he<sub>i</sub> had lowered everything that he<sub>k</sub> had asked for [...]' [AM1:33]

A final set of relative clauses are positive and negative existential relative clauses: in (16a) and (16b), the relative clauses are embedded by the positive existential predicate *yan* and the negative existential predicate *mix*, respectively. In contrast to the examples in (15), these constructions are not so easily identified as relative clauses (Bricker 1979, for instance, seems to regard *mixmáak* as a pronoun).

- (16) a. **Yaan** -Ø ba'ax t- u beet -ah -Ø.  
 exist -B3sg thing PERF- A3 do.TA -CMP.TA -B3sg  
 'There's something (bad) he did.' [AM1:37]  
 b. **Mix** -Ø máak il -ik -Ø u bin mix u suut.  
 not.exist -B3sg person see.AF-INC -B3sg A3 leave nor A3 return  
 'Nobody saw her leave nor come back.' [AM1:119]

I argue that *yaanba'ax* and *mixmáak* are not indefinite pronouns but rather that they consist of the stative predicates *yan* and *mix*, as indicated in the glosses in (16). Under this analysis then, the two types of intransitive predicates cross-reference an S-argument with the phonologically empty third person set B marker. The analysis is supported by the following two arguments. First, both *yan* and *mix* exist as independent predicates: *yan* 'exist' was illustrated as part of the narrative in (4a) above; another example is given in (17a) together with an example of *mix* 'not.exist' as an independent predicate in (17b).

- (17) a. **Yan** -chaj -Ø jun-tuul máak -e' jach ma'alob jts'oon.  
 exist -formerly -B3sg a-CL person -D3 very good hunter  
 'There once was a man who was a very good hunter.' [AM1:47]  
 b. **Mix** -Ø jant -a'ab -Ø ulak máak.  
 not.exist -B3sg eat -PSV -B3sg other person  
 'Nobody else was eaten.'

The second argument relates to the question/focus marker *wáah*. Following Bohnemeyer 1998:182, I assume that the question/focus marker *wáah* cliticizes to the predicate of a construction to form a polar question. This is illustrated with the polar questions in (18): in (18a), *wáah* cliticizes to the stative predicate *k'ah-a'n* 'recall-RES' and in (18b), *wáah* cliticizes to the verbal predicate *liub* 'fall'.

- (18) a. K'ah -a'n -Ø **wáah** tèech ba'x àanyo -i'?'  
 recall -RES -B3sg ALT pron.2sg what year -D4  
 'Do you recall what year it was?' [B:182, E93a]  
 b. H lúub -Ø **wáah** túun le nuxib lòobo -o'?'  
 PERF fall -B3sg ALT CON DEF old:male wolfe -D2  
 'So, did the old wolf fall?' [B:182, E93b]

In the following examples, *wáah* cliticizes to *mix* and *yan* respectively, thus illustrating their predicative function in these constructions. The bare singular nominal in a positive or negative existential predication is relativized by the verbal clause and semantically in the scope of the negative or positive predicate.

- (19) a. Mix -Ø -**wáah** máak jant -eh -Ø le k'een -o'?'  
 not.exist -B3sg -ALT person eat.AF -SBJ -B3sg DEF pig -D2  
 'Did nobody eat the pig?'  
 b. Yaan -Ø -**wáah** máak il -Ø -ech?  
 exist -B3sg -ALT person see.AF -SBJ -B2sg  
 'Did somebody see you?'

Summarizing, relative clauses are argued to be a type of focus construction, because they consist of an overt operator and a focus construction.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.3 The structure of F-constructions in Yucatec Maya

Having established that F-constructions consist of a nominal predicate that immediately precedes the verbal clause, I argue in this section that the nominal predicate is in fact the main predicate of the construction. This analysis is based on the fact that bare singular nominals in YM are part of the class of stative predicates, which also includes adjectival predicates, numerals, prepositions and proper stative predicates (cf. Bohnemeyer 1998:231f). Unlike verbal predicates, stative predicates do not combine with status markers and preverbal aspect/mood markers to form verbal clauses. Rather, stative predicates combine with a set B cross-reference marker to form stative predications; the set B marker cross-references the S-argument of the stative predication. The examples in (20) illustrate predications headed by an adjective (20a), a numeral (20b), a nominal (20c), and a preposition (20d).

- (20) a. Chan áak, **óotsil** -ech!  
 little turtle poor -B2sg  
 'Little turtle, you are a poor one!' [B:182, E92c]  
 b. **Siinko** -o'n.  
 five -B1pl  
 'There are five of us.' [B:182, E92d]

- c. **Maestro** -en.  
 teacher -B1sg  
 'I am (the) teacher.'  
 d. Ts'o'ok -Ø **ti'** -o'ob bey -o'.  
 finish -B3sg PREP -B3pl so -D2  
 'That's how they ended their days.'  
 (lit: It finished for them like that.) [AM1:131]

In the examples in (20), the S-argument of the stative predicates is a non-3rd person argument and hence overtly realized. In focus constructions, I argue, the S-argument is a verbal clause, i.e., a third person argument, which is cross-referenced by the phonologically empty B3sg marker. Two arguments support this analysis. The first comes from verb-focus constructions where a focused verbal predicate is realized in the preverbal position of the dummy verb *meet/beet* 'do'. This is illustrated in the following verb-focus constructions with the intransitive verbal predicate *bin* 'leave' and the antipassivized predicate *háats* 'hit'.

- (21) a. Bin -Ø t- u **beet** -ah -Ø le otsi chan máas -o'.  
 leave -B3sg PERF- A3sg do -CMP -B3sg DEF poor little cricket -D2  
 'Leave is what he did, the poor little cricket.'  
 b. Háats -Ø t- in **mèet** -ah -Ø ti' hit.  
 beat.ANTIP -B3sg PERF- A1sg do -CMP -B3sg PREP hit  
 'Batting is what I did to hits.' [B:199, E111]

There is no intransitive verbal predicate in YM that would not cross-reference an S-argument. Hence, the focused verbal predicates in (21) cross-reference their S-argument with the third person set B cross-reference marker. As argued in section 1, a third person argument is contextually determined unless a suitable phrase is realized in the same clause as the verbal predicate. The verbal clauses in (21) are suitable S-arguments (e.g., for perception verbs, cf. Bohnemeyer 1998:164f). Thus, in verb-focus constructions the verbal clause is the S-argument of the predicate. Since bare singular nominals are predicates, too, I assume their role in focus constructions is parallel to that of verbal predicates, i.e., they constitute the predicate of the construction.

The question/focus marker *wáah* provides a second argument in favor of this analysis. As mentioned in section 2.2, *wáah* cliticizes to predicates (cf. Bohnemeyer 1998:182f). In focus constructions, *wáah* cliticizes to the preverbal bare singular nominal and thus identifies it as the main predicate of the construction. This is illustrated in the example (22) where *wáah* cliticizes to the bare singular nominal *bu'ul* 'beans'.

- (22) Bu'ul **wáah** k- a jant -ik -Ø?  
 beans ALT IMPF- A2 eat.TA -INC -B3sg  
 'Beans is what you ate?'

<sup>6</sup> Hence, the 'F' in F-constructions stands for 'focus' and the term 'F-constructions' descriptively unifies the constructions that realize the Agent Focus verb. Yet, structurally, both content questions and relative clauses are a type of focus construction.

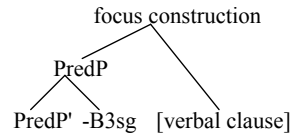


Figure 1: Focus constructions in Yucatec Maya

Summarizing, focus constructions in YM are headed by a predicative phrase. The verbal clause is the S-argument of the predicative phrase (cf. Figure 1).<sup>7</sup> In relative clauses, the overt operator embeds the focus construction.

I present three points in support of this analysis. First, recall the descriptive generalization that the bare singular nominal must occur in a position that immediately precedes the verbal clause. For instance, in (12), *Maria* may follow the verbal clause (12a) but may not intervene between the bare singular nominal and the verbal clause (12c). This word order requirement is a consequence of the analysis that I propose here: recall that the S-argument of a predicate is contextually determined unless the clause realizes an overt argument. Both proper names like *Maria* and verbal clauses are possible S-arguments of a stative predicate. However, if *Maria* is realized between the predicative phrase and the verbal clause, neither choice is fruitful: interpreting *Maria* as the S-argument of *bu'ul* 'beans' results in semantic nonsense, and, on the other choice, we get a structural conflict since the verbal clause cannot first combine with the predicative phrase and then take *Maria* as its A-argument.

The next two points in favor for this analysis of focus constructions relate to relative clauses. The analysis accounts for the fact that positive and negative existentials (like *mixmáak* 'nobody') can only be realized in preverbal position. Consider the data in (23): in (23a), the negative existential *mixmáak* realizes the recipient, i.e., an oblique argument, of the transitive predication *e's* 'show'. As illustrated in (23b), the oblique argument cannot be realized in postverbal position, despite the fact that oblique arguments headed by the preposition *ti* generally can be realized in postverbal position (e.g., the oblique argument *t-u beelil* 'in its way' in (23c)). Similarly, in (23c), *mixba'al* realizes the theme argument of the transitive predicate *beet* 'do'. Again, (23d) demonstrates that *mixba'al* cannot be realized in postverbal position.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Since complex predicative phrases can also head focus constructions (cf. section 3.2), the head of focus constructions is identified as PredP' in Figure 2 with the bare singular nominal as the Pred.

<sup>8</sup> *mixba'al* 'nothing' and *mixmáak* 'nobody' can occur in postverbal position if the verbal clause is embedded by a negation marker, like *ma'* as in (i).

(i) Ten -e' ma' in k'aat -Ø in beet mix-ba'al -i'.  
 pron.1sg -TOP NEG A1sg wish -B3sg A1sg do not.exist-thing -TERM  
 'I don't want to do (you) any harm.' [AM1:207]

- (23) a. Ti mix -Ø máak ken inw e's -Ø -Ø in libro.  
 PREP not.exist -B3sg person IRR A1sg show -SBJ -B3sg A1sg book  
 'I won't show my book to anybody.'  
 b. \*Ken inw e's -Ø -Ø in libro ti mix -Ø máak.  
 IRR A1sg show -SBJ -B3sg A1sg book PREP not.exist -B3sg person  
 c. Mix -Ø ba'al k- a beet -ik -Ø t- u beelil.  
 not.exist -B3sg thing IMPF- A2 do -INC -B3sg PREP A3 way  
 'You don't do anything right.' (lit: nothing you do in its way) [AM1:37]  
 d. \*K- a beet -ik -Ø mix -Ø ba'al t- u beelil.  
 IMPF- A2 do -INC -B3sg not.exist -B3sg thing PREP A3 way

These positional restrictions would be unexpected if *mixmáak* and *mixba'al* in (23a) and (23c) were pronouns (as proposed in Bricker 1979). However, under the analysis that I proposed above, the predicate *mix* and a bare singular do not form a constituent to the exclusion of the verbal clause. Hence, the realization of, e.g., *mixmáak* in a postverbal position is not possible because they do not form a constituent in this particular construction. Rather, according to Figure 1 and the discussion in section 2.2, the S-argument of the predicate *mix* is constituted by the focus construction that consists of the nominal predicate and the verbal clause.

Relative clauses with the definite marker *le* provide a second point in favor of my analysis of focus constructions. The definite marker *le* co-occurs with one of three deictic markers *-a'*, *-o'* or *-e'* which mark the right edge of the definite phrase. For instance, in (5d), the nominal predicate *iints'intsil* 'little.sister' is embedded, and in (24), a verbal clause is embedded. (24) also identifies the nominalizing function of the construction consisting of *le* and a deictic marker.

- (24) Ba'ax -Ø **le** k- u bin -o'?'  
 what -B3sg DEF IMPF- A3 come -D2  
 'What is coming?' (lit: What is the it-comes?)

Assuming that only phrases are embedded by *le* and a deictic marker, this type of relative clause provides further evidence for the assumption that the nominal predicate and the verbal clause form a focus constructions as given in Figure 1: in examples like (6c) and (14a), then, the phrase that is embedded by *le* and a deictic marker is a focus construction. Summarizing, I argue that F-constructions consist of a predicative phrase whose S-argument is a verbal clause. Before I turn to the interpretation of F-constructions in the next section, I would like to point out two more distinctions between predicative phrases and definite-marked phrases (besides the fact that definite-marked/topical phrases must precede predicative phrases (cf. Example (11a)).

First, the Agent Focus verb is only realized in focus constructions, i.e., phrases that are headed by a predicative phrase, as illustrated in the example in (25): the Agent Focus verb is grammatical in the relative clause in (25b), but not in (25b') where the verbal clause is not an argument of the predicative bare nominal.

- (25) a. Je'e in bin in kins -Ø  
 ASS A1sg go A1sg kill -B3sg  
 'I will kill...'  
 b. ...**le** máak -o'ob p'ekmahil -ech -o'.  
 DEF person -PL hate.AF -B2sg -D2.  
 'the persons who hate you.'  
 b'. \*...**le** máak -o'ob -o' p'ekmahil -ech.  
 DEF person -PL -D2 hate.AF -B2sg

The second difference concerns the interpretation of the question/focus marker *wáah*. In the examples in (18) and (19), *wáah* gives rise to a polar question. However, in (26), where *wáah* follows a definite-marked nominal, the result is a conditional interpretation.

- (26) Le waah -o'ob -o' **wáah** mix- máak jant -eh -Ø  
 DEF tortilla -PL -D2 ALT not.exist- person eat -SBJ -B3sg  
 h- u beit u síij -bil -eh  
 PERF- A3 can A3 give.as.present-GER -TERM  
 'The tortillas, if nobody ate them, one can give them away.'

### 3 The interpretation of F-constructions

Consider the negative existential relative clause in (27a). I assume that the meaning of (27a) can be represented as given in (27b), where 'sp' identifies the speaker.

- (27) a. Mix -Ø máak -Ø t- inw il -ah -Ø -eh.  
 not.exist -B3sg person -B3sg PERF- A1sg see.TA -CMP -B3sg -TERM  
 'I didn't see anybody.'  
 b.  $\neg \square x$ .(person(x) & see(sp,x))

The relative clause construction in (27a) consists of three meaning components that are of interest here. First, the bare singular nominal *máak* 'person': I assume a Kamp/Heim analysis of indefinites for bare singular nominals, i.e., they introduce a variable that is existentially bound, unless there is an overt operator present (Kamp 1981, Heim 1982). Thus, the bare singular nominal *máak* 'person' in (27a) introduces a predicate and a variable, as given in (28a). Second, for the verbal clause I assume that the first person singular agent marker identifies the speaker 'sp' and that the third person patient is contextually identified. This is represented in (28b). The meaning of the focus construction is a function that conjoins the two component properties, as in (28c).<sup>9</sup>

- (28) a. *máak*:  $\square x$ .person(x)  
 b. verbal clause:  $\square x$ .see(sp,x)  
 c. focus construction:  $\square x$ .[person(x) & see(sp,x)]

<sup>9</sup> On this account, the fact that verb-focus constructions are restricted to intransitive predicates (cf. Bohnemeyer 1998:199) finds a semantic explanation: in order for the focused element and the verbal clause to combine to a focus construction with one free variable that can be bound (by an overt operator or existentially by the context), both arguments have to denote a property.

The nominal predicate in a focus construction identifies a set of entities that is restricted by the entities that are denoted by the verbal clause. In (27a), for instance, the entities denoted by *máak* 'person' are restricted to those that the speaker saw. The semantic operator that is realized in a particular relative clause construction further constrains the nature of the set of entities. For instance, the negative existential predicate *mix* in (27a) specifies that the set of entities is empty: its meaning can be represented as  $\square P. \neg \square x$ .(P(x)) which, combined with (28c) results in the meaning for (27a) given in (27b). The positive existential predicate *yan*, on the other hand, is used to express that the set is non-empty. As a final example, the definite marker *le* requires the set to contain a unique element that is familiar in the discourse (Heim 1982).

In focus constructions (including content questions) there is no operator that embeds the construction. Thus, a focus construction like (29a) that is headed by the bare singular nominal *bu'ul* 'beans' consists of the same meaning components as the construction in (29b) where *bu'ul* 'beans' is realized in postverbal position. However, their interpretation in context is different, as demonstrated below.

- (29) a. Bu'ul -Ø k- in **jant** -ik -Ø.  
 beans -B3sg IMPF- A1sg eat -INC -B3sg  
 'Beans is what I eat.'  
 b. T- in **jant** -ik -Ø bu'ul  
 PROG- A1sg eat -INC -B3sg beans  
 'I eat beans.'

The important difference is that the nominal predicate *bu'ul* 'beans' is the main predicate in (29a), while the verbal predicate *jant* 'eat' is the main predicate in (29b). Consequently, (29a) is a predication about 'beans' while (29b) is a predication about 'eating'. This difference is observable once we take into account the contexts in which (29a) and (29b) are used. Regarding the question in (30a), the focus construction in (29a) constitutes an appropriate answer but consultants reject (29b) as an answer. The question in (30b), on the other hand, can be appropriately answered by (29b) but not by (29a).

- (30) a. Ba'ax k- a **jant** -ik -Ø?  
 thing IMPF- A2 eat.TA -INC -B3sg  
 'What are you eating?'  
 b. Ba'ax k- a **beet** -ik -Ø?  
 thing IMPF- A2 do.TA -INC -B3sg  
 'What are you doing?'

The two questions in (30) crucially differ in terms of what is given in the context in which the respective question is uttered. A speaker who utters (30a) knows that the hearer is eating something and her request is for the hearer to identify what is being eaten. The utterer of the question in (30b), on the other hand, does not presuppose that the hearer is eating something. Rather, in a context in which (30b) is felicitously uttered, it is unknown what the hearer is doing. The respective information-structural properties of the two questions determine the compatibility of the answers in (29). There exist quite a number of different terminologies to identify the relevant information-structural properties of such constructions. In this paper, I use the term 'given' to identify that part of a

proposition that links the proposition to its context, and the term 'focus' is used to identify the part that contains that the information that "cannot be taken for granted at the time of speech. It is the UNPREDICTABLE [...] element in an utterance" (Lambrecht 1994:213). The appropriateness of the answers in (29) with respect to the two questions depends on whether the given information of the answer appropriately matches the given information of the question. For the focus construction in (29a), I assume that the nominal predicate *bu'ul* 'beans' constitutes the focus of the proposition while the information provided by the verbal clause is given information. These information-structural properties make (29a) an appropriate answer for the question in (30a). In (29b), on the other hand, the verbal clause also constitutes part of the focus and hence is appropriate for the question in (30b). Thus, in both constructions in (29), it is the main predicate that is focused, but this is the bare singular nominal in (29a) and the verbal clause in (29b). The observation that the question/focus marker *wáah* cliticizes to main predicates also correlates with the analysis that the nominal predicate in (29a) and the verbal predicate in (29b) are the main predicates of the respective constructions.

I assume that focus constructions are used in contexts where the material in the verbal clause is given. For instance, the focus construction in (29a) is appropriate in a context in which the question (30a) is under discussion, no matter whether this question is overtly asked or just implicit in the context. The verbal clause then, as the given information, corresponds to the (implicit or explicit) question under discussion. Hence, for any focus construction, the question under discussion that determines the context in which the focus construction is appropriately interpreted can be derived from the verbal clause of the focus construction. If we conceptualize the contextual condition on a particular focus construction as a question that is answered by the focus construction, we can derive the question under discussion from the verbal clause. For instance, by questioning the third person argument of the focus construction in (29a), which corresponds to the focused element, i.e., the patient argument, we arrive at the question *What are you eating?*, or, more formally, *?x.eat(sp,x)*. A focus construction answers the question under discussion, e.g., in (29a), the focused element *bu'ul* 'beans' identifies what the speaker is eating.

Content questions are a type of focus construction and hence have the same structural division between focus and given information. However, while focus constructions answer a question under discussion, content questions make explicit the question under discussion. This is because the 'general' bare singular nominal that content questions are formed with are too general to answer the question under discussion. Rather, the 'general' bare singular nominals are ideally suited to make the question under discussion explicit in the discourse context. Thus, (30a) is essentially a focus construction that is appropriate in contexts in which the speaker wishes to make explicit that the material in the verbal clause, i.e., *?x.(eat(sp,x))*, is under discussion. In contrast to a bare singular nominal like *bu'ul* 'beans', a general bare singular like *ba'ax* 'thing' in (30a) does not provide an informative answer to the question under discussion and hence can be employed to make the question explicit in the discourse context.

Concluding, focus constructions differ from constructions like (29b) in that they realize a (nominal or verbal) predicative phrase that constitutes 'unpredictable' information. This semantic/pragmatic property characterizes focus constructions (and hence relative clauses and content questions) and plays a central role in the explanation for why F-constructions

realize an additional verb form, the Agent Focus verb (see section 3.2). Note that 'unpredictable' discourse participants differ from topical and new discourse participants that were characterized in section 1. Unlike topical discourse participants, 'unpredictable' and new discourse participants are not salient and continuous in a narrative and need to be overtly realized. At the same time, 'unpredictable' discourse participants differ from new discourse participants in that the former can be discourse-new but they need not be. For instance, if asked whether it is beans or rice that you are eating, the focus construction in (29a) is a suitable answer, too, but beans in this context are not discourse-new. Also, contrastive discourse-new participants are also realized in a focus construction. Thus, YM encodes purely discourse-new participants differently from contrastive (and possibly discourse-new) participants (cf. also King 1994 for Russian, and Kiss 1987 for Hungarian).

### 3.1 Complex focus constructions

As indicated in Figure 1, focus constructions are headed by predicative phrases. Thus, not only simple nominal or verbal predicates can head focus constructions, as in the examples above, but also complex predicative phrases. Examples of such constructions are given in (31). The focus construction in (31a) features the possessive phrase *u moots che'* 'roots of tree'. The example in (31b) illustrates a content question with the possessive phrase *máax kiik-il* 'whose sister'.

- (31) a. Chéen túun u moots che' k- u **jant** -ik -Ø.  
 only so A3 roots tree IMPF- A3 eat.TA -INC -B3sg  
 'Only roots is what he eats.'[AM1:106]  
 b. Máax kiik -il t- aw **il** -ah?  
 person sister -REL PERF- A2 see -CMP  
 'Whose sister did you see?'

As illustrated in example (25c), definite marked nominal phrases like *le máak-o'* 'the person' cannot be realized with the Agent Focus verb, i.e., cannot be focused in the way that a predicative nominal like *bu'ul* 'beans' can. I assume that definite marked phrases cannot be realized predicatively and therefore cannot head a focus construction. Unsurprisingly, however, YM has means by which referents that would otherwise be referred to by a definite-marked nominal are focused, namely by a complex focus construction. For instance, the example in (32) occurs in the context of a story where a little boy wants to catch a frog but catches his dog instead. All of the discourse participants are discourse-old at this point, i.e., they have been introduced before and are furthermore highly salient. Note how the dog is contrastively focused in (32): the complex nominal predication *chan peek'* 'little dog' is realized as the head of a definite relative clause. The focus construction embedded in the relative clause denotes a set of little dogs that have been caught by the discourse topic, the little boy. The definite marker specifies that the set consists of a unique entity that is familiar in the discourse. The relative clause itself is the argument of the third person pronoun *leti'* that refers to the little dog. The relative clause constitutes the S-argument of the pronoun.

- (32) Leti' -Ø le chan peek' t- u chuk' -ah -o'.  
 pron.3s -B3sg DEF little dog PERF- A3 catch -CMP -D2  
 'It was the little dog that he caught (not the frog).'

The example in (32) thus consists of two focus constructions: the one headed by the third person pronoun *leti* with the definite nominal phrase as its S-argument, and the one headed by *chan peek'* 'little dog' that takes the verbal clause as its S-argument. I assume that the independent pronoun *leti'* is a predicate that can head a focus construction, because *leti'* consists of the preposition *ti'* which was argued in section 2.3 to be part of the class of stative predicates. As indicated in Table 2, independent pronouns in YM historically consist of the preposition *ti'* and a set B cross-reference marker, thus further supporting this analysis.

	Singular	plural
1st person	tèen < *ti'-en (LOC-B1sg)	to'n < *ti'-o'n (LOC-B1pl)
2nd person	tèech < *ti'-ech (LOC-B2sg)	te'x < *ti'-e'x (LOC-B2pl)
3rd person	leti' < *le ti'-Ø (DEF LOC-B3sg)	leti'o'b < *le ti'-o'b (DEF LOC-B3sg)

Table 2: Independent Pronouns (from Bohnemeyer 1998:162)

The independent pronouns besides *leti'* also consist of the preposition *ti'* and a set B cross-reference marker. However, in contrast to *leti'*, the S-argument of the first and second person pronouns is phonologically realized. The examples in (33) illustrate focus constructions with the second person pronoun. In (33a), the focus/question marker *wáah* cliticizes to the second person pronoun *tèech*, thus identifying it as the main predicate of the construction. Note that the transitive verbal predicate *ja'ak'es* 'scare' that is embedded by the definite marker *le* and the deictic suffix *-o'* is realized in the Agent Focus form. (33a) is a definite relative clause: it relativizes the (understood) agent argument of the transitive predication. In (33b), the focused pronoun co-occurs with a verbal clause.

- (33) a. *Teech* wá le ja'ak'es -Ø -Ø inw óol -o'?  
 LOC-B2sg ALT DEF scare.AF -SBJ-B3sg A1sg soul -D2  
 'Are you the one who scared me?' [AMI:29]  
 b. *Teech* t- inw il -ah -Ø -eh!  
 LOC-B2sg PERF- A1sg see.TA -CMP -B3sg -TERM  
 'It is you (not somebody else) that I saw!'

The relation between a first or second person pronoun and the verbal clause in focus constructions like (33) is unclear given the analysis that I propose since these particular pronouns cross-reference a non-third person S-argument. One hypothesis is that the relation is one of adjunction. This is supported by the observation that the O-argument of the verbal clause in (33b) is not overtly identified to be a second person argument but rather is a third person argument. This, together with the fact that the preposition *ti'* generally identifies oblique arguments, might point to an analysis in which the pronoun is an oblique argument of the predication and the relation of the two elements in the focus construction is one of adjunction rather than a predicate-argument relation.

Finally, I want to mention here that proper names can also be realized with the Agent Focus verb. This is illustrated in the example in (34) where *Juan* is focused and co-occurs with the transitive verbal predicate *il* 'see' that is realized in the Agent Focus verb.

- (34) Juan il -ik -ech.  
 Juan see.AF -INC -B2sg  
 'Juan (not somebody else) sees you.'

It is not clear at this point what the semantic and discourse-interpretative differences between proper names like *Juan* and definite-marked nominal phrases like *le peek'-o'* 'the dog' are, but only the former can be realized with the Agent Focus verb. One important difference between the two types of phrases is that proper names but not definite-marked phrases can be realized as stative predicates. For instance, the proper name *Maria* in *Maria-ech?* combines with a set B marker to form a polar question. Again, this matter is left for future research.

### 3.2 The Agent Focus verb

At the outset of this paper, F-constructions were characterized as those constructions in which the Agent Focus verb occurs. One of the intriguing questions behind F-constructions is to explain why these constructions realize an additional verb form; in particular, why the disambiguating function of the Agent Focus verb (as illustrated by the examples (1a) and (1b)) is necessary only in F-constructions. The crucial components of the analysis (presented in Tonhauser (to appear,a)) are the following. First, the Agent Focus verb in YM is a transitive voice. Thus, F-constructions realize two transitive voices, namely the regular transitive active voice (glossed as TA in the examples) and the Agent Focus (AF) voice. Second, using textual examples, I argue in Tonhauser (to appear, a) that a transitive predicate that is realized in the transitive active voice requires the current discourse topic to be the agent of the eventuality. Thus, transitive predications with a non-discourse topic agent cannot be realized in the transitive active voice. The passive voice is one strategy that is employed to avoid such constellations: the passive demotes the (non-discourse topic) agent and hence ensures the discourse-prominence of the discourse topic. However, certain eventualities do not allow the demotion of the (non-discourse topic) transitive agent: these eventualities are characterized by a transitive agent participant that, although not discourse-topic, is nevertheless central to the eventuality and emphatic in its information-structural contribution. This is the case of the 'unpredictable' event participant that is realized by F-constructions: a focused, questioned or relativized transitive agent cannot be realized by the transitive active voice, which requires the agent to be the current discourse topic. At the same time, since the 'unpredictable' transitive agent is central to the eventuality (e.g., *who* in *Who saw Juan?*), the agent cannot be demoted and realized as an oblique argument by the passive voice. The Agent Focus voice, as a transitive voice, realizes 'unpredictable' transitive agents without demoting them. At the same time, it is the marked transitive voice due to its restricted occurrence and because it marks eventualities as realizing a non-discourse topic agent.

This concludes the proposed analysis of F-constructions in YM. Before I conclude the paper in section 5, I briefly discuss an alternative account.

### 4 A structural account of F-constructions and the Agent Focus verb

In this section I briefly discuss an alternative type of account of the Agent Focus verb and F-constructions. My discussion is based only on Aissen's work (Aissen 1992, 1996, 1999), for reasons of space. Aissen's analysis of F-constructions is based on the

assumption these constructions are a structurally, and hence semantically, heterogeneous. For instance, in Aissen's 1996 analysis of Tzotzil, both question words and focused arguments are assumed to be extracted from their canonical postverbal position to a preverbal position, but question words are extracted to SpecCP while focused elements are extracted to SpecIP. The respective heads of the two  $\bar{A}$ -positions are associated with particular features which give rise to the distinct interpretations: the functional head C is associated with the feature [+WH] and hence gives rise to interrogative interpretations while focused elements receive their interpretation from the feature [+F] that is associated with the functional head I. The unifying property of F-constructions under this account is the requirement that an element is extracted to a preverbal  $\bar{A}$ -position, i.e., F-constructions are uniquely characterized by  $\bar{A}$ -movement. The motivation for the restriction of the Agent Focus verb to these particular constructions is also linked to this property. Roughly speaking, the assumption is that adjuncts, transitive objects or intransitive subjects can be extracted from the regular transitive or intransitive verb to a preverbal  $\bar{A}$ -position. The extraction of an agent of a transitive predicate, however, is marked by the Agent Focus verb.

An empirical problem for this type of account is topicalization. At least in some Mayan languages (including Tz'utujil (as demonstrated in Aissen 1992) and YM), topicalized nominals are realized in SpecCP, i.e., a clause-internal position. Hence, they can be argued to be extracted to a preverbal  $\bar{A}$ -position. Consequently, in languages like Tz'utujil and YM  $\bar{A}$ -movement is not a property unique to F-constructions. The restriction of the Agent Focus verb to these constructions hence cannot be linked to  $\bar{A}$ -movement, at least in these languages, unless an artificial distinction is made between the two kinds of  $\bar{A}$ -extraction (e.g., Klaiman 1991, who assumes that they differ in terms of the discourse function of the extracted element). Also, to the best of my knowledge, no account addresses the co-occurrence restrictions between the three kinds of F-constructions or the lexical restriction of content questions to 'general' bare nominals. Further discussion is left to future research.

### 5 Conclusions and Discussion

I have argued that cleft constructions consisting of a predicative phrase and a verbal clause constitute the basic structure of relative clauses, content questions and focus constructions in YM. The Agent Focus verb that occurs in these constructions is motivated by a particular semantic/pragmatic property that these constructions share as a consequence of their structural and semantic/pragmatic homogeneity. Besides the loose ends and topics of future research that are mentioned at the end of sections 3 and 4, an investigation of the extent to which my analysis applies to other Mayan languages is also left to future research.

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