

Questioning Clefts: The Story (and Struggle) of Revising Content Questions in Skerre

Doug Ball

Creator of Skerre; Truman State University

Language Creation Conference
March 6, 2021

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:
 - Strongly head-initial

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:
 - Strongly head-initial
 - For clauses: Verb-initial word order

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:
 - Strongly head-initial
 - For clauses: Verb-initial word order
(default order is V-S-O-Obl, but the order after the verb is flexible)

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:
 - Strongly head-initial
 - For clauses: Verb-initial word order
(default order is V-S-O-Obl, but the order after the verb is flexible)

Ex.

Yasin tsa Karak a ihosi ye Tsotar.
give.PFTV ERG (name) ABS NMLZ.eat ALL.PN (name)
'Karak gave the food to Tsotar.'

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:
 - Strongly head-initial
 - For clauses: Verb-initial word order
(default order is V-S-O-Obl, but the order after the verb is flexible)

Ex. **Verb**

Yasin tsa Karak a ihosi ye Tsotar.
give.PFTV ERG (name) ABS NMLZ.eat ALL.PN (name)
'Karak gave the food to Tsotar.'

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:
 - Strongly head-initial
 - For clauses: Verb-initial word order
(default order is V-S-O-Obl, but the order after the verb is flexible)

Ex. **Verb** **Subject**
Yasin *tsa* *Karak* *a* *ihosi* *ye* *Tsotar*.
give.PFTV ERG (name) ABS NMLZ.eat ALL.PN (name)
'Karak gave the food to Tsotar.'

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:
 - Strongly head-initial
 - For clauses: Verb-initial word order
(default order is V-S-O-Obl, but the order after the verb is flexible)

Ex. **Verb** **Subject** **Object**
Yasin *tsa* *Karak* *a* *ihosi* *ye* *Tsotar*.
give.PFTV ERG (name) ABS NMLZ.eat ALL.PN (name)
'Karak gave the food to Tsotar.'

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:
 - Strongly head-initial
 - For clauses: Verb-initial word order
(default order is V-S-O-Obl, but the order after the verb is flexible)

Ex. **Verb** **Subject** **Object** **Oblique**
Yasin *tsa* *Karak* *a* *ihosi* *ye* *Tsotar*.
give.PFTV ERG (name) ABS NMLZ.eat ALL.PN (name)
'Karak gave the food to Tsotar.'

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:
 - Strongly head-initial
 - For clauses: Verb-initial word order
(default order is V-S-O-Obl, but the order after the verb is flexible)

Ex. **Verb** **Subject** **Object** **Oblique**
Yasin *tsa* *Karak* *a* *ihosi* *ye* *Tsotar*.
give.PFTV ERG (name) ABS NMLZ.eat ALL.PN (name)
'Karak gave the food to Tsotar.'

- Syntactic role of full NPs is signaled by a word initial to the expression of the participant

Some Introductory Syntactic Properties of Skerre

- This talk → a deep dive into the syntax of my primary constructed language, Skerre
- Some basic morphosyntactic properties of Skerre:
 - Strongly head-initial
 - For clauses: Verb-initial word order
(default order is V-S-O-Obl, but the order after the verb is flexible)

Ex. **Verb** **Subject** **Object** **Oblique**
Yasin *tsa* *Karak* *a* *ihosi* *ye* *Tsotar*.
give.PFTV ERG (name) ABS NMLZ.eat ALL.PN (name)
'Karak gave the food to Tsotar.'

- Syntactic role of full NPs is signaled by a word initial to the expression of the participant – I call these words **prenominals**

Introduction to Content Questions

Introduction to Content Questions

- What are Content Questions?

Introduction to Content Questions

- What are Content Questions?
 - Questions with the “5 Ws” (and *How* and *Which*)

Introduction to Content Questions

- What are Content Questions?
 - Questions with the “5 Ws” (and *How* and *Which*) – questions about a subpart of the sentence

Introduction to Content Questions

- What are Content Questions?
 - Questions with the “5 Ws” (and *How* and *Which*) – questions about a subpart of the sentence
 - aka *Supplemental Questions*

Introduction to Content Questions

- What are Content Questions?
 - Questions with the “5 Ws” (and *How* and *Which*) – questions about a subpart of the sentence
 - aka *Supplemental Questions* aka *Wh-questions*

Introduction to Content Questions

- What are Content Questions?
 - Questions with the “5 Ws” (and *How* and *Which*) – questions about a subpart of the sentence
 - aka *Supplemental Questions* aka *Wh-questions*
- Content questions have interesting syntactic properties in a bunch of languages

Introduction to Content Questions

- What are Content Questions?
 - Questions with the “5 Ws” (and *How* and *Which*) – questions about a subpart of the sentence
 - aka *Supplemental Questions* aka *Wh-questions*
- Content questions have interesting syntactic properties in a bunch of languages, including English and Skerre

Roadmap

1 The Expression of Content Questions

- ① The Expression of Content Questions
- ② Cleft Constructions, in general and for Skerre

- ① The Expression of Content Questions
- ② Cleft Constructions, in general and for Skerre
- ③ Problems and Solutions for Skerre

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - 1 *In-Situ*

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - ① *In-Situ*
 - Stick the interrogative expression where it would otherwise go, given its syntactic role

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - ① *In-Situ*
 - Stick the interrogative expression where it would otherwise go, given its syntactic role
 - As in *You're talking about what?!*

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - 1 *In-Situ*
 - Stick the interrogative expression where it would otherwise go, given its syntactic role
 - As in *You're talking about what?!*
 - 2 Use "Dislocation"

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - ① *In-Situ*
 - Stick the interrogative expression where it would otherwise go, given its syntactic role
 - As in *You're talking about what?!*
 - ② Use "Dislocation"
 - Stick the interrogative expression first

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - 1 *In-Situ*
 - Stick the interrogative expression where it would otherwise go, given its syntactic role
 - As in *You're talking about what?!*
 - 2 Use "Dislocation"
 - Stick the interrogative expression first; then, have a normal sentence after

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - 1 *In-Situ*
 - Stick the interrogative expression where it would otherwise go, given its syntactic role
 - As in *You're talking about what?!*
 - 2 Use "Dislocation"
 - Stick the interrogative expression first; then, have a normal sentence after – but the normal sentence must have the interrogative expression "missing"

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - 1 *In-Situ*
 - Stick the interrogative expression where it would otherwise go, given its syntactic role
 - As in *You're talking about what?!*
 - 2 Use "Dislocation"
 - Stick the interrogative expression first; then, have a normal sentence after – but the normal sentence must have the interrogative expression "missing"
 - (Essentially) English's ("normal") strategy

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - 1 *In-Situ*
 - Stick the interrogative expression where it would otherwise go, given its syntactic role
 - As in *You're talking about what?!*
 - 2 Use "Dislocation"
 - Stick the interrogative expression first; then, have a normal sentence after – but the normal sentence must have the interrogative expression "missing"
 - (Essentially) English's ("normal") strategy → What are you talking about?

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - 1 *In-Situ*
 - Stick the interrogative expression where it would otherwise go, given its syntactic role
 - As in *You're talking about what?!*
 - 2 Use "Dislocation"
 - Stick the interrogative expression first; then, have a normal sentence after – but the normal sentence must have the interrogative expression "missing"
 - (Essentially) English's ("normal") strategy → What are you talking about?
 - 3 Use a Cleft Construction

Strategies for Making Content Questions in Cross-Linguistic Perspective

- There are several different ways to make content questions, including...
 - 1 *In-Situ*
 - Stick the interrogative expression where it would otherwise go, given its syntactic role
 - As in *You're talking about what?!*
 - 2 Use "Dislocation"
 - Stick the interrogative expression first; then, have a normal sentence after – but the normal sentence must have the interrogative expression "missing"
 - (Essentially) English's ("normal") strategy → What are you talking about?
 - 3 Use a Cleft Construction → least well-known

Clefts: An Introduction

- A cleft construction:

Clefts: An Introduction

- A cleft construction: a biclausal combination

Clefts: An Introduction

- A cleft construction: a biclausal combination with the main clause having an “equational” predication

Clefts: An Introduction

- A cleft construction: a biclausal combination with the main clause having an “equational” predication and otherwise involving some sort of subordinate or nominalized clause

Clefts: An Introduction

- A cleft construction: a biclausal combination with the main clause having an “equational” predication and otherwise involving some sort of subordinate or nominalized clause
 - The cleft expresses the same contentful meaning as the “normal sentence”

Clefts: An Introduction

- A cleft construction: a biclausal combination with the main clause having an “equational” predication and otherwise involving some sort of subordinate or nominalized clause
 - The cleft expresses the same contentful meaning as the “normal sentence”, though not the same contextual meaning

Clefts: An Introduction

- A cleft construction: a biclausal combination with the main clause having an “equational” predication and otherwise involving some sort of subordinate or nominalized clause
 - The cleft expresses the same contentful meaning as the “normal sentence”, though not the same contextual meaning
- English, in fact, has several subtypes of cleft constructions

Clefts: An Introduction

- A cleft construction: a biclausal combination with the main clause having an “equational” predication and otherwise involving some sort of subordinate or nominalized clause
 - The cleft expresses the same contentful meaning as the “normal sentence”, though not the same contextual meaning
- English, in fact, has several subtypes of cleft constructions, including:

Clefts: An Introduction

- A cleft construction: a biclausal combination with the main clause having an “equational” predication and otherwise involving some sort of subordinate or nominalized clause
 - The cleft expresses the same contentful meaning as the “normal sentence”, though not the same contextual meaning
- English, in fact, has several subtypes of cleft constructions, including:
 - **It-Clefts:** e.g. *It was cleft constructions that they were talking about.*

Clefts: An Introduction

- A cleft construction: a biclausal combination with the main clause having an “equational” predication and otherwise involving some sort of subordinate or nominalized clause
 - The cleft expresses the same contentful meaning as the “normal sentence”, though not the same contextual meaning
- English, in fact, has several subtypes of cleft constructions, including:
 - It-Clefts:** e.g. *It was cleft constructions that they were talking about.*
 - Wh-Clefts:** e.g. *What they were talking about was cleft constructions.*

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages, Salishan languages (most/all)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages, Salishan languages (most/all), Wakashan languages (at least some)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages, Salishan languages (most/all), Wakashan languages (at least some), and Chumashan languages (at least some)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages, Salishan languages (most/all), Wakashan languages (at least some), and Chumashan languages (at least some)
 - Mayan languages (at least some)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages, Salishan languages (most/all), Wakashan languages (at least some), and Chumashan languages (at least some)
 - Mayan languages (at least some)
 - some Celtic languages

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages, Salishan languages (most/all), Wakashan languages (at least some), and Chumashan languages (at least some)
 - Mayan languages (at least some)
 - some Celtic languages (maybe more historically than currently)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages, Salishan languages (most/all), Wakashan languages (at least some), and Chumashan languages (at least some)
 - Mayan languages (at least some)
 - some Celtic languages (maybe more historically than currently)
- And even in some other languages that aren't strongly verb-initial

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages, Salishan languages (most/all), Wakashan languages (at least some), and Chumashan languages (at least some)
 - Mayan languages (at least some)
 - some Celtic languages (maybe more historically than currently)
- And even in some other languages that aren't strongly verb-initial
 - Algonquian languages (some)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages, Salishan languages (most/all), Wakashan languages (at least some), and Chumashan languages (at least some)
 - Mayan languages (at least some)
 - some Celtic languages (maybe more historically than currently)
- And even in some other languages that aren't strongly verb-initial
 - Algonquian languages (some)
 - Bantu languages (some)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Peer Pressure (aka The Behavior of Other Languages with a Similar Typological Profile)

- Clefts for content questions seem to be quite common in verb-initial languages; they appear in
 - Austronesian languages (all/nearly all)
 - Many languages of the Pacific Coast of North America
 - Tsimshianic languages, Salishan languages (most/all), Wakashan languages (at least some), and Chumashan languages (at least some)
 - Mayan languages (at least some)
 - some Celtic languages (maybe more historically than currently)
- And even in some other languages that aren't strongly verb-initial
 - Algonquian languages (some)
 - Bantu languages (some)
- Why not have Skerre join them?

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

The Information Structure–Syntax Interface

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

The Information Structure–Syntax Interface

- Languages often use cleft constructions for “contrastive emphasis” (Harries, 1973)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

The Information Structure–Syntax Interface

- Languages often use cleft constructions for “contrastive emphasis” (Harries, 1973)
 - **Contrastive** This kind of construction takes a set of items under consideration and definitively picks one out

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

The Information Structure–Syntax Interface

- Languages often use cleft constructions for “contrastive emphasis” (Harries, 1973)
 - **Contrastive** This kind of construction takes a set of items under consideration and definitively picks one out
 - **Emphasis** Strongly highlights this one item

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

The Information Structure–Syntax Interface

- Languages often use cleft constructions for “contrastive emphasis” (Harries, 1973)
 - **Contrastive** This kind of construction takes a set of items under consideration and definitively picks one out
 - **Emphasis** Strongly highlights this one item
- In content questions, a large set of items are under consideration

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

The Information Structure–Syntax Interface

- Languages often use cleft constructions for “contrastive emphasis” (Harries, 1973)

Contrastive This kind of construction takes a set of items under consideration and definitively picks one out

Emphasis Strongly highlights this one item

- In content questions, a large set of items are under consideration (= the possible answers)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

The Information Structure–Syntax Interface

- Languages often use cleft constructions for “contrastive emphasis” (Harries, 1973)

Contrastive This kind of construction takes a set of items under consideration and definitively picks one out

Emphasis Strongly highlights this one item

- In content questions, a large set of items are under consideration (= the possible answers)
- Furthermore, the question-asker would like to ultimately know exactly which item to actually consider

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

The Information Structure–Syntax Interface

- Languages often use cleft constructions for “contrastive emphasis” (Harries, 1973)

Contrastive This kind of construction takes a set of items under consideration and definitively picks one out

Emphasis Strongly highlights this one item

- In content questions, a large set of items are under consideration (= the possible answers)
- Furthermore, the question-asker would like to ultimately know exactly which item to actually consider – that might be worth highlighting

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

The Information Structure–Syntax Interface

- Languages often use cleft constructions for “contrastive emphasis” (Harries, 1973)

Contrastive This kind of construction takes a set of items under consideration and definitively picks one out

Emphasis Strongly highlights this one item

- In content questions, a large set of items are under consideration (= the possible answers)
- Furthermore, the question-asker would like to ultimately know exactly which item to actually consider – that might be worth highlighting
- Bottom line: The information structure properties of cleft constructions fit well with information structure requirements of content questions

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 1

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 1

- Verb-initial languages overwhelmingly have the interrogative expression first in content questions (Potsdam, 2009)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 1

- Verb-initial languages overwhelmingly have the interrogative expression first in content questions (Potsdam, 2009)
- This tendency is also confirmed by the surveys from WALS

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 1

- Verb-initial languages overwhelmingly have the interrogative expression first in content questions (Potsdam, 2009)
- This tendency is also confirmed by the surveys from WALS
 - Crossing WALS Feature 82A (on Subject–Verb order) (Dryer, 2013a) with WALS Feature 93A (on Interrogative Phrase location) (Dryer, 2013b) ...

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 1

- Verb-initial languages overwhelmingly have the interrogative expression first in content questions (Potsdam, 2009)
- This tendency is also confirmed by the surveys from WALS
 - Crossing WALS Feature 82A (on Subject–Verb order) (Dryer, 2013a) with WALS Feature 93A (on Interrogative Phrase location) (Dryer, 2013b) ...
 - ~70% of VS languages surveyed (89/127) have their interrogative phrases obligatorily initial

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 1

- Verb-initial languages overwhelmingly have the interrogative expression first in content questions (Potsdam, 2009)
- This tendency is also confirmed by the surveys from WALS
 - Crossing WALS Feature 82A (on Subject–Verb order) (Dryer, 2013a) with WALS Feature 93A (on Interrogative Phrase location) (Dryer, 2013b) ...
 - ~70% of VS languages surveyed (89/127) have their interrogative phrases obligatorily initial
- My aim for Skerre:

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 1

- Verb-initial languages overwhelmingly have the interrogative expression first in content questions (Potsdam, 2009)
- This tendency is also confirmed by the surveys from WALS
 - Crossing WALS Feature 82A (on Subject–Verb order) (Dryer, 2013a) with WALS Feature 93A (on Interrogative Phrase location) (Dryer, 2013b) ...
 - ~70% of VS languages surveyed (89/127) have their interrogative phrases obligatorily initial
- My aim for Skerre: to be a fairly run-of-the-mill verb-initial language

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 1

- Verb-initial languages overwhelmingly have the interrogative expression first in content questions (Potsdam, 2009)
- This tendency is also confirmed by the surveys from WALS
 - Crossing WALS Feature 82A (on Subject–Verb order) (Dryer, 2013a) with WALS Feature 93A (on Interrogative Phrase location) (Dryer, 2013b) ...
 - ~70% of VS languages surveyed (89/127) have their interrogative phrases obligatorily initial
- My aim for Skerre: to be a fairly run-of-the-mill verb-initial language
→ interrogative-first content questions

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order
Here's how:

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order
Here's how:
 - In content question clefts, the interrogative expression is most commonly realized as a predicate nominal

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order
Here's how:
 - In content question clefts, the interrogative expression is most commonly realized as a predicate nominal
→ an absolute requirement in Skerre

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order
Here's how:
 - In content question clefts, the interrogative expression is most commonly realized as a predicate nominal
→ an absolute requirement in Skerre
 - In Skerre, predicate nominals are clause-initial (without a copular verb)

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order
Here's how:
 - In content question clefts, the interrogative expression is most commonly realized as a predicate nominal
→ an absolute requirement in Skerre
 - In Skerre, predicate nominals are clause-initial (without a copular verb), as in:

Ex.

Tsirahan *a* *Tsotar*.

AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)

'Tsotar is a hunter.'

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order
Here's how:
 - In content question clefts, the interrogative expression is most commonly realized as a predicate nominal
→ an absolute requirement in Skerre
 - In Skerre, predicate nominals are clause-initial (without a copular verb), as in:

Ex. **Predicate Nominal**

Tsirahan *a* *Tsotar.*

AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)

'Tsotar is a hunter.'

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order
Here's how:
 - In content question clefts, the interrogative expression is most commonly realized as a predicate nominal
→ an absolute requirement in Skerre
 - In Skerre, predicate nominals are clause-initial (without a copular verb), as in:

Ex. **Predicate Nominal** **Subject**
Tsirahan *a* *Tsotar*.
AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)
'Tsotar is a hunter.'

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order
Here's how:
 - In content question clefts, the interrogative expression is most commonly realized as a predicate nominal
→ an absolute requirement in Skerre
 - In Skerre, predicate nominals are clause-initial (without a copular verb), as in:

Ex. **Predicate Nominal** **Subject**
Tsirahan *a* *Tsotar*.
AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)
'Tsotar is a hunter.'

- Thus, a cleft version of “What did Karak give to Tsotar” would be ordered in Skerre like:

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order
Here's how:
 - In content question clefts, the interrogative expression is most commonly realized as a predicate nominal
→ an absolute requirement in Skerre
 - In Skerre, predicate nominals are clause-initial (without a copular verb), as in:

Ex. **Predicate Nominal** **Subject**
Tsirahan *a* *Tsotar*.
AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)
'Tsotar is a hunter.'

- Thus, a cleft version of “What did Karak give to Tsotar” would be ordered in Skerre like:
(Is) what that gave by Karak to Tsotar?

Why Go with Clefts in Skerre?

Interrogative Phrase Location in the Sentence, part 2

- Clefts for content questions can yield the interrogative-initial order
Here's how:
 - In content question clefts, the interrogative expression is most commonly realized as a predicate nominal
→ an absolute requirement in Skerre
 - In Skerre, predicate nominals are clause-initial (without a copular verb), as in:

Ex. **Predicate Nominal** **Subject**
Tsirahan *a* *Tsotar*.
AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)
'Tsotar is a hunter.'

- Thus, a cleft version of “What did Karak give to Tsotar” would be ordered in Skerre like:
(Is) what that gave by Karak to Tsotar?
- Interrogative-initial content questions: ✓

The Problems With Clefts

Basics

- Even while deciding to go with clefts for content questions in Skerre, there was still a lot to figure out

The Problems With Clefts

Basics

- Even while deciding to go with clefts for content questions in Skerre, there was still a lot to figure out
- One of the top questions: Given that there are multiple types of cleft construction

The Problems With Clefts

Basics

- Even while deciding to go with clefts for content questions in Skerre, there was still a lot to figure out
- One of the top questions: Given that there are multiple types of cleft construction, which style of cleft to use?

The Problems With Clefts

Basics

- Even while deciding to go with clefts for content questions in Skerre, there was still a lot to figure out
- One of the top questions: Given that there are multiple types of cleft construction, which style of cleft to use?
- Ideally, to answer this, I would know:

The Problems With Clefts

Basics

- Even while deciding to go with clefts for content questions in Skerre, there was still a lot to figure out
- One of the top questions: Given that there are multiple types of cleft construction, which style of cleft to use?
- Ideally, to answer this, I would know:
 - How many languages use something like an It-cleft?

The Problems With Clefts

Basics

- Even while deciding to go with clefts for content questions in Skerre, there was still a lot to figure out
- One of the top questions: Given that there are multiple types of cleft construction, which style of cleft to use?
- Ideally, to answer this, I would know:
 - How many languages use something like an It-cleft?
and
How many languages use something like a Wh-cleft?

The Problems With Clefts

Basics

- Even while deciding to go with clefts for content questions in Skerre, there was still a lot to figure out
- One of the top questions: Given that there are multiple types of cleft construction, which style of cleft to use?
- Ideally, to answer this, I would know:
 - How many languages use something like an It-cleft?
and
How many languages use something like a Wh-cleft?
 - The current answers to these questions from the linguistics literature seem to be ...

The Problems With Clefts

Basics

- Even while deciding to go with clefts for content questions in Skerre, there was still a lot to figure out
- One of the top questions: Given that there are multiple types of cleft construction, which style of cleft to use?
- Ideally, to answer this, I would know:
 - How many languages use something like an It-cleft?
and
How many languages use something like a Wh-cleft?
 - The current answers to these questions from the linguistics literature seem to be ... unknown

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the Wh-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the *Wh*-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English *Wh*-clefts, like,

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the *Wh*-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English *Wh*-clefts, like,
Ex. What they were talking about was cleft constructions.

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the *Wh*-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English *Wh*-clefts, like,
 Ex. What they were talking about was cleft constructions.
are made up of what is known as a *free relative clause*

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the Wh-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English Wh-clefts, like,
 - Ex. [Free Relative Clause What they were talking about] was cleft constructions.are made up of what is known as a *free relative clause*

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the Wh-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English Wh-clefts, like,
Ex. [Free Relative Clause What they were talking about] was cleft constructions.

are made up of what is known as a *free relative clause* and a *predicate nominal*

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the Wh-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English Wh-clefts, like,

Ex. [_{Free Relative Clause} What they were talking about] was [_{Predicate Nominal cleft constructions}].

are made up of what is known as a *free relative clause* and a *predicate nominal*

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the Wh-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English Wh-clefts, like,
 - Ex. [_{Free Relative Clause} What they were talking about] was [_{Predicate Nominal cleft constructions}].are made up of what is known as a *free relative clause* and a *predicate nominal*
- Yet, even the make-up of free relative clauses cross-linguistically is not well-understood

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the Wh-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English Wh-clefts, like,
 - Ex. [_{Free Relative Clause} What they were talking about] was [_{Predicate Nominal cleft constructions}].are made up of what is known as a *free relative clause* and a *predicate nominal*
- Yet, even the make-up of free relative clauses cross-linguistically is not well-understood
 - English uses Wh-words to start them

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the Wh-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English Wh-clefts, like,
 - Ex. [_{Free Relative Clause} What they were talking about] was [_{Predicate Nominal cleft constructions}].are made up of what is known as a *free relative clause* and a *predicate nominal*
- Yet, even the make-up of free relative clauses cross-linguistically is not well-understood
 - English uses Wh-words to start them: **What** they were talking about

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the Wh-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English Wh-clefts, like,
 - Ex. [_{Free Relative Clause} What they were talking about] was [_{Predicate Nominal cleft constructions}].are made up of what is known as a *free relative clause* and a *predicate nominal*
- Yet, even the make-up of free relative clauses cross-linguistically is not well-understood
 - English uses Wh-words to start them: **What** they were talking about
 - But, the use of Wh-words for free relatives did not seem like a good choice for Skerre, because:

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the Wh-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English Wh-clefts, like,
Ex. [Free Relative Clause What they were talking about] was [Predicate Nominal cleft constructions].
are made up of what is known as a *free relative clause* and a *predicate nominal*
- Yet, even the make-up of free relative clauses cross-linguistically is not well-understood
 - English uses Wh-words to start them: **What** they were talking about
 - But, the use of Wh-words for free relatives did not seem like a good choice for Skerre, because:
'What they were talking about was what?'

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 1

- Even picking a style – say, the Wh-cleft style – leads to further things to resolve
- Observe that English Wh-clefts, like,
Ex. [Free Relative Clause What they were talking about] was [Predicate Nominal cleft constructions].

are made up of what is known as a *free relative clause* and a *predicate nominal*

- Yet, even the make-up of free relative clauses cross-linguistically is not well-understood
 - English uses Wh-words to start them: **What** they were talking about
 - But, the use of Wh-words for free relatives did not seem like a good choice for Skerre, because:
~~'What they were talking about was what?'~~

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 2

- What do other languages do?

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 2

- What do other languages do?
 - French uses a demonstrative determiner + relativizer to start its free relative clauses:

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 2

- What do other languages do?
 - French uses a demonstrative determiner + relativizer to start its free relative clauses:

Ex. *Ce* *qu'ils* *disaient*

DEM.DET REL'3PL.SUBJ say.PST.IPFV

'What they were saying' (≈ 'that which they were saying')

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 2

- What do other languages do?
 - French uses a demonstrative determiner + relativizer to start its free relative clauses:

Ex. *Ce qu'ils disaient*
DEM.DET REL'3PL.SUBJ say.PST.IPFV
'What they were saying' (≈ 'that which they were saying')
 - Makassar uses a generic noun (and an otherwise normal relative clause) for its free relative clauses:

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 2

- What do other languages do?
 - French uses a demonstrative determiner + relativizer to start its free relative clauses:

Ex. *Ce qu'ils disaient*
DEM.DET REL'3PL.SUBJ say.PST.IPFV
'What they were saying' (≈ 'that which they were saying')
 - Makassar uses a generic noun (and an otherwise normal relative clause) for its free relative clauses:

Ex. *anu ku-kanre-a* ...
thing 1SG.ERG-eat-DET
'That which I ate ... '

(Jukes, 2005: 670)

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 2

- What do other languages do?
 - French uses a demonstrative determiner + relativizer to start its free relative clauses:
 - Ex. *Ce qu'ils disaient*
DEM.DET REL'3PL.SUBJ say.PST.IPFV
'What they were saying' (≈ 'that which they were saying')
 - Makassar uses a generic noun (and an otherwise normal relative clause) for its free relative clauses:
 - Ex. *anu ku-kanre-a* ...
thing 1SG.ERG-eat-DET
'That which I ate ...'
(Jukes, 2005: 670)
- But still

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 2

- What do other languages do?
 - French uses a demonstrative determiner + relativizer to start its free relative clauses:

Ex. *Ce qu'ils disaient*
DEM.DET REL'3PL.SUBJ say.PST.IPFV
'What they were saying' (≈ 'that which they were saying')
 - Makassar uses a generic noun (and an otherwise normal relative clause) for its free relative clauses:

Ex. *anu ku-kanre-a* ...
thing 1SG.ERG-eat-DET
'That which I ate ... ' (Jukes, 2005: 670)
- But still: What are the other possibilities?

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 2

- What do other languages do?
 - French uses a demonstrative determiner + relativizer to start its free relative clauses:

Ex. *Ce qu'ils disaient*
DEM.DET REL'3PL.SUBJ say.PST.IPFV
'What they were saying' (≈ 'that which they were saying')
 - Makassar uses a generic noun (and an otherwise normal relative clause) for its free relative clauses:

Ex. *anu ku-kanre-a* ...
thing 1SG.ERG-eat-DET
'That which I ate ...' (Jukes, 2005: 670)
- But still: What are the other possibilities? How common are the various types?

The Problems With Clefts

Free Relative Problems 2

- What do other languages do?
 - French uses a demonstrative determiner + relativizer to start its free relative clauses:

Ex. *Ce qu'ils disaient*
DEM.DET REL'3PL.SUBJ say.PST.IPFV
'What they were saying' (≈ 'that which they were saying')
 - Makassar uses a generic noun (and an otherwise normal relative clause) for its free relative clauses:

Ex. *anu ku-kanre-a* ...
thing 1SG.ERG-eat-DET
'That which I ate ...' (Jukes, 2005: 670)
- But still: What are the other possibilities? How common are the various types? This typological research remains to be done.

The Problems of Clefts

Skerre-internal Problems

- There are also questions about how certain Skerre-specific things should work, too

The Problems of Clefts

Skerre-internal Problems

- There are also questions about how certain Skerre-specific things should work, too
- Recall that there are prenominals like a , as in

The Problems of Clefts

Skerre-internal Problems

- There are also questions about how certain Skerre-specific things should work, too
- Recall that there are prenominals like *a*, as in

Ex. *Tsirahan* *a* *Tsotar*.

AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)

'Tsotar is a hunter.'

The Problems of Clefts

Skerre-internal Problems

- There are also questions about how certain Skerre-specific things should work, too
- Recall that there are prenominals like *a*, as in

Ex. *Tsirahan* *a* *Tsotar*.

AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)

'Tsotar is a hunter.'

Should prenominals like *a* appear or not in the Skerre clefts?

The Problems of Clefts

Skerre-internal Problems

- There are also questions about how certain Skerre-specific things should work, too
- Recall that there are prenominals like *a*, as in

Ex. *Tsirahan* *a* *Tsotar*.

AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)

'Tsotar is a hunter.'

Should prenominals like *a* appear or not in the Skerre clefts?

- In Skerre relative clauses, there can be a relativizer, *an*, as in:

The Problems of Clefts

Skerre-internal Problems

- There are also questions about how certain Skerre-specific things should work, too
- Recall that there are prenominals like *a*, as in

Ex. *Tsirahan* *a* *Tsotar*.

AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)

'Tsotar is a hunter.'

Should prenominals like *a* appear or not in the Skerre clefts?

- In Skerre relative clauses, there can be a relativizer, *an*, as in:

Ex. *a* *tsikwe* *an* *yetin* *a* *ihosi*

ABS deer REL find.PFTV ABS NMLZ.eat

'the deer that found the food.'

The Problems of Clefts

Skerre-internal Problems

- There are also questions about how certain Skerre-specific things should work, too
- Recall that there are prenominals like *a*, as in

Ex. *Tsirahan* *a* *Tsotar*.

AGT.NMLZ.hunt ABS (name)

'Tsotar is a hunter.'

Should prenominals like *a* appear or not in the Skerre clefts?

- In Skerre relative clauses, there can be a relativizer, *an*, as in:

Ex. *a* *tsikwe* *an* *yetin* *a* *ihosi*

ABS deer REL find.PFTV ABS NMLZ.eat

'the deer that found the food.'

Should the relativizer *an* appear or not in the Skerre clefts?

Towards a Solution

- What to do?

- What to do?
 - I continued to look for examples from some of my 'favorite' natural languages

- What to do?
 - I continued to look for examples from some of my 'favorite' natural languages
 - I continued to search for and read relevant literature:

- What to do?
 - I continued to look for examples from some of my 'favorite' natural languages
 - I continued to search for and read relevant literature: both older (Harries, 1973; Citko, 2004; Andrews, 2007; Dryer, 2007)

- What to do?
 - I continued to look for examples from some of my 'favorite' natural languages
 - I continued to search for and read relevant literature: both older (Harries, 1973; Citko, 2004; Andrews, 2007; Dryer, 2007) and newer (Kaufman, 2018; Caponigro, 2021)

- What to do?
 - I continued to look for examples from some of my 'favorite' natural languages
 - I continued to search for and read relevant literature: both older (Harries, 1973; Citko, 2004; Andrews, 2007; Dryer, 2007) and newer (Kaufman, 2018; Caponigro, 2021)
 - I sketched some ideas out

The Current Solution

So, I have adopted for Skerre ...

The Current Solution

So, I have adopted for Skerre ...

- The structure for all (relevant) clefts:

The Current Solution

So, I have adopted for Skerre ...

- The structure for all (relevant) clefts:
[Predicate Nominal + Free Relative Clause]

The Current Solution

So, I have adopted for Skerre ...

- The structure for all (relevant) clefts:
[Predicate Nominal + Free Relative Clause]
- Free Relative Clauses are then made up of

The Current Solution

So, I have adopted for Skerre ...

- The structure for all (relevant) clefts:
[Predicate Nominal + Free Relative Clause]
- Free Relative Clauses are then made up of
[*aan* 'FREL' + Remainder of the Clause]

The Current Solution

So, I have adopted for Skerre ...

- The structure for all (relevant) clefts:
[Predicate Nominal + Free Relative Clause]
- Free Relative Clauses are then made up of
[*aan* 'FREL' + Remainder of the Clause]
- *aan* = a fused form of *a* 'ABSOLUTIVE' + *an* 'RELATIVIZER'

The Current Solution

So, I have adopted for Skerre ...

- The structure for all (relevant) clefts:
[Predicate Nominal + Free Relative Clause]
- Free Relative Clauses are then made up of
[*aan* 'FREL' + Remainder of the Clause]
- *aan* = a fused form of *a* 'ABSOLUTIVE' + *an* 'RELATIVIZER'
- So, the actual Skerre rendition of "What did Karak give to Tsotar?"
would be:

The Current Solution

So, I have adopted for Skerre ...

- The structure for all (relevant) clefts:
[Predicate Nominal + Free Relative Clause]
- Free Relative Clauses are then made up of
[*aan* 'FREL' + Remainder of the Clause]
- *aan* = a fused form of *a* 'ABSOLUTIVE' + *an* 'RELATIVIZER'
- So, the actual Skerre rendition of "What did Karak give to Tsotar?" would be:

Ex *Tseyi aan yasin tsa Karak ye Tsotar?*
what FREL give.PFTV ERG (name) ALL.PN (name)
'What did Karak give to Tsotar?'

What I Learned

What I Learned

- There is a lot more cross-linguistic diversity than one might expect (even for just content questions)

What I Learned

- There is a lot more cross-linguistic diversity than one might expect (even for just content questions)
- There's a bunch that linguists still don't know about the nature of languages

What I Learned

- There is a lot more cross-linguistic diversity than one might expect (even for just content questions)
- There's a bunch that linguists still don't know about the nature of languages
- I still find clefts interesting

What I Learned

- There is a lot more cross-linguistic diversity than one might expect (even for just content questions)
- There's a bunch that linguists still don't know about the nature of languages
- I still find clefts interesting
- Sometimes, one needs to do a LCC talk to truly make a decision about something in their own conlang

References and Further Reading I

- Andrews, Avery D. 2007. Relative clauses. In Timothy Shopen (ed.), *Language typology and syntactic description: Complex constructions*, vol. 2, 206–236. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2nd edn.
- Caponigro, Ivano. 2021. Introducing headless relative clauses and the findings from Mesoamerican languages. In Ivano Caponigro, Harold Torrence & Roberto Zavala Maldonado (eds.), *Headless relative clauses in Mesoamerican languages*, 1–57. New York: Oxford University Press. (Also available online at https://idiom.ucsd.edu/~ivano/Papers/2020_Caponigro_HeadlessRelativeClauses_Ch1_20-10-23.pdf, accessed on 02-28-2021.
- Citko, Barbara. 2004. On headed, headless, and light-headed relatives. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 22(1). 95–126.
- Dryer, Matthew S. 2007. Noun phrase structure. In Timothy Shopen (ed.), *Language typology and syntactic description: Complex constructions*, vol. 2, 151–205. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2nd edn.

References and Further Reading II

- Dryer, Matthew S. 2013a. Order of subject and verb. In Matthew S. Dryer & Martin Haspelmath (eds.), *The world atlas of language structures online*, Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. (Available online at <https://wals.info/chapter/82>, Accessed on 2021-02-06).
- Dryer, Matthew S. 2013b. Position of interrogative phrases in content questions. In Matthew S. Dryer & Martin Haspelmath (eds.), *The world atlas of language structures online*, Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. (Available online at <http://wals.info/chapter/93>, Accessed on 2021-02-06.).
- Harries, Helga. 1973. Contrastive emphasis and cleft sentences. Tech. rep. Stanford University. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED096822>.
- Jukes, Anthony. 2005. Makassar. In Alexander Adelaar & Nikolaus P. Himmelmann (eds.), *The Austronesian languages of Asia and Madagascar*, 649–662. London: Routledge.

- Kaufman, Daniel. 2018. Austronesian predication and the emergence of biclausal clefts in Indonesian languages. In Sonja Riesberg, Asako Shiohara & Atsuko Utsumi (eds.), *Perspectives on information structure in Austronesian languages*, 207–245. Berlin: Language Science Press. doi:DOI:10.5281/zenodo.1402547.
- Potsdam, Eric. 2009. Austronesian verb-initial languages and *wh*-question strategies. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 27(4). 773–771.