

The breaking news cleft

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In online news media, there is a constant pressure on the journalist to write as short and concisely as possible, while highlighting the 'breaking' part of the story. At the same time, she must accurately convey and clarify which parts of the information are presupposed, which parts she herself guarantees to be true, and which parts are quoted from a source. This paper argues that for this purpose, a special type of cleft construction is used, 'the breaking news cleft', which has not been described before. The phenomenon includes clefts like, *Det var formentlig en cigaret, der var årsag til en brand i kvindes lejlighed i Tilst ved Aarhus* ('It was most likely a cigarette that caused a fire in a woman's apartment in Tilst near Aarhus'). As with prototypical clefts, a proposition is divided into two sentences and thus two information units. This allows the journalist, in a compressed way, to mark and highlight the news-carrying information – namely as the clefted constituent (*a cigarette*) – while taking an epistemic stance (*most likely*) for this particular information. At the same time, the other information unit (*that caused...*) is grammatically coded as presupposed and, by virtue of the genre, understood as fact.

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