

Focus, Predication and Specification: the Case of It-clefts

Jutta M. Hartmann
jmh@juttahartmann.de

Brussels Nov 28, 2011

1 Introduction

- (1) a. It was John that Mary saw.
b. It was a cake that Bill baked.
c. It was on the moon that Sue played golf.
(Reeve, 2011, 142)

- Main Claims

1. Starting point: *It*-cleft sentences are specificational copula constructions (see Jespersen 1927, Akmajian 1970, Gundel 1977, Huber 2002, den Dikken 2009, Paten 2010 among others).
2. The clefted constituent or subparts of it are contrastively focussed.
3. The analysis of focus presented also accounts for the existence of the so-called predicational clefts.
4. The interpretation of specification is a function of the focus structure.

- Data: data from English and German *it*-clefts provided in previous literature, further (small scale) judgement data and qualitative analysis of data from the British National Corpus (BNC).

- Structure of the talk

- Syntax of *it*-clefts
- Focus properties of *it*-clefts
- Including so-called ‘predicational *it*-clefts’

- Terminology

- (2) It was Peter [that claimed that].
EXPL COPULA CLEFTED CONSTITUENT CLEFT CLAUSE

2 It-cleft sentences as specificational copula structures

2.1 Similarities to specificational copula structures

- Meaning:

The specificational meaning has been characterized as ‘a semantic gap’ for which the post-copular phrase provides the value (Akmajian, 1979, 19) or the heading of a list for which the listed items are given in the postcopular position (Higgins, 1979, 154). Mikkelsen (2004, 1) paraphrases Akmajian (1979): ‘a specificational clause does not tell us something **about** the referent of the subject NP instead it says **who** or **what** the referent is’ [emphasis in original].

- (3) a. Mary’s husband is John.
b. What John bought is a hat and a coat.
c. It was John who bought a hat and a coat.

- Coordination

- (4) #Gabi’s Mann ist zwar Peter aber deswegen noch lange kein Glückspilz.
Gabi’s husband is PRT Peter but therefore PRT PRT no lucky devil
- (5) #It was the butler who murdered John, and a nice man.
(Huber, 2002, 17)

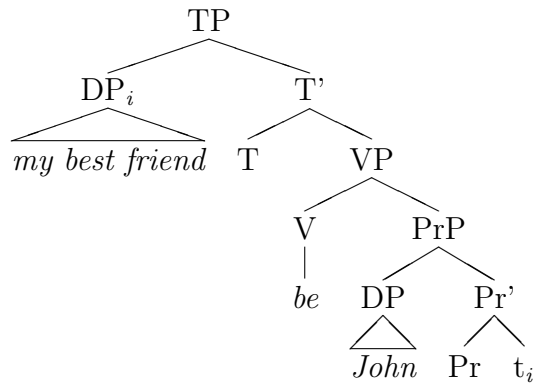
- Existential Presupposition

- (6) a. Der Mörder ist Peter.
the murderer is Peter
b. Der Mörder ist nicht Peter.
the murderer is not Peter
c. Ist der Mörder Peter?
Is the murderer Peter?
Pres.:There’s a murderer
(Huber, 2002, 17)
- (7) a. A pleasant feature of the boardroom is the open terrace, overlooking the
concourse, with its terracotta tiled floor. (BNC, APX, 1058)
b. A pleasant feature of the boardroom is not the open terrace.
Pres.:There is a pleasant feature of the boardroom.
- (8) a. It was the butler who murdered John.
b. It was not the butler who murdered John.
c. Was it the butler who murdered John?
Pres.:Someone murdered John
(Huber, 2002, 19)

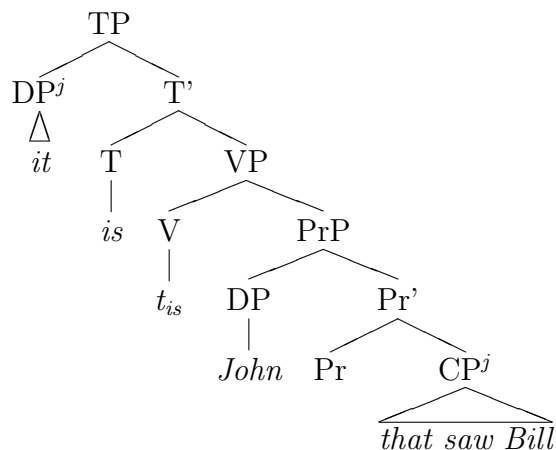
2.2 The syntax of it-clefts and Specificational Copula Constructions

- Specificational copula clauses are inverse sentences (see Williams 1983, Moro 1997, Heycock and Kroch 2002, Mikkelsen 2004, Den Dikken 2006 among others)

(9) My best friend is John.



(10) It is John that saw Bill.



- The cleft clause is not a regular relative clause modifying the clefted constituent
- Still, it has the form of a relative clause, not of a complementizer-clause;
- Relative clauses act as predicates in noun phrases, so semantically there seems no obvious reason why they should not be predicates in non-nominal contexts;

(11) a. *Do you know John that Mary saw?
 b. It was John that Mary saw.

- (12) a. All students who attended will receive a bonus point.
 b. It was all the passengers who had committed the murder.
 (Davidse, 2000, 1114)
- (13) a. *I gave the book [to her] [that he first went with his confession.]
 b. Raskolnikov turns to Sonya; it was to her , Sonya , that he first went with his confession (BNC, A18, 571)
- The cleft clause is not extraposed (from subject position)(see Reeve 2010)
- (14) Although it probably wasn't John who cooked the stew, it might have been.
- (15) It was believed to be JOHN that Mary saw by everybody.

2.3 Wh-extraction from cleft-clauses

2.3.1 The issue

- Extraction from post-copular noun phrase is impossible in specificational copula clauses
- (16) a. *[Which picture]_i do you think [the cause of the riot]_j was [_{SC} t_i t_j]?
 b. *[Which wall]_i do you think [the cause of the riot]_j was [_{SC} [a picture of t_i]
 t_j]
 (Moro, 1997, 45,49)
- (17) a. I think it is this book that every linguistics student should read.
 b. Which book do you think it is t that every linguistics student should read?
 (Den Dikken 2009, 7)
- Problem: Why is sub-extraction possible in cleft-sentences if these are predicate inversion structures?
 - Similarly: It-clefts are focus constructions: the constituent should be frozen.

2.3.2 Experiment Design: Rating study

- (18) Predicate Inversion Hypothesis
 It-clefts are predicate inversion structures. Wh-extraction from the post-copular noun phrase in it-clefts is considerably worse than extraction from noun phrases in argument position.
- (19) H₁ WH-extraction affects it-clefts and regular SVO sentences differently.
 H₀ WH-extraction affects it-clefts and regular SVO sentences in the same way.
- Factors:
 1. Construction: regular SVO sentence; it-cleft sentence
 2. WH-Extraction: base - subextraction

- Materials

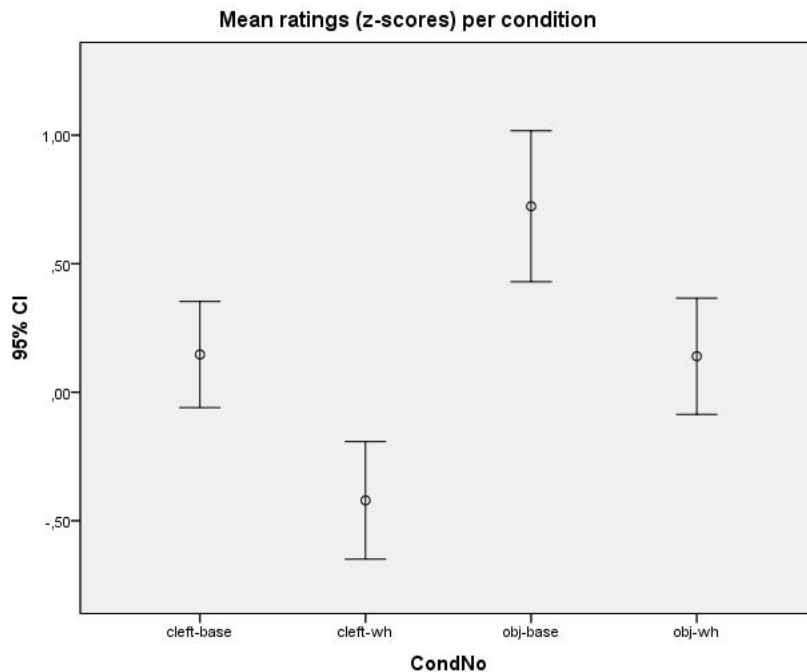
- 16 Items (all conditions tested four times, per participant), see (20), (21)
- 48 Filler sentences

- (20)
- [cleft-base] It was an increase of taxes that the parliament discussed.
 - [cleft-sub] What was it an increase of that the parliament discussed?
 - [reg-base] The parliament discussed an increase of taxes.
 - [reg-sub] What did the parliament discuss an increase of?
- (21)
- [cleft-base] It was a photograph of Brad Pitt that the designers admired.
 - [cleft-sub] Who was it a photograph of that the designers admired?
 - [reg-base] The designers admired a photograph of Brad Pitt.
 - [reg-sub] Who did the designers admire a photograph of?

- Procedure

- Thermometer Judgment (Featherston, 2008)
- Online questionnaire;
- Two training phases: lines and sentences;

2.3.3 Preliminary Results (10 participants)



- Two repeated measures ANOVAs with subjects and items as random effects

- Effect of construction significant (by subjects: $F1(1,9) = 6.010$, $p < .037$; by items: $F2(1,15) = 23.101$, $p < .000$)
- Effect of wh-extraction significant (by subjects: $F1(1,9) = 19.080$, $p < .002$; by items: $F2(1,15) = 21.099$, $p < .000$)
- No interaction (by subjects: $F1(1,9) = 0.004$, $p = .95$; by items: $F2(1,15) = 0.81$, $p = .78$)

2.3.4 Conclusion

- Subextraction from a clefted noun phrase seems indeed possible;
- Either cleft-sentences are not inversion structures,
or the reason for the restriction on (sub-)extraction is independent of the inversion,
or the reason for the restriction on (sub-)extraction is due to the nature of the pre-copular DP in SCC.

3 Focus structure of it-cleft sentences

3.1 Introduction

- Cleft sentences are focus constructions
- Halliday (1967), Rochemont (1986), É. Kiss (1998), Rochemont (2010), Drubig (2003) (among others) have argued for a distinction between new information focus and a marked/operator focus that is interpreted contrastively and/or exhaustively.
- The relevant notion in it-clefts is ‘contrast’, not new information focus
- The clefted constituent corresponds to the focus phrase (see Drubig 1994, Krifka 2006, Rochemont 2011 for the term)
- Predicational clefts (cf. Declerck 1988) are not a separate class of clefts, but their seemingly predicational nature derives from the fact that the accent falls on a predicative adjective.

3.2 The irrelevance of the given-new distinction

- The cleft clause can contain both given or new information
- The clefted constituent can contain both given or new information
- See Rochemont (2010) for an exhaustive list of examples showing that both cleft clause and clefted constituent can contain given and new material (see also Huber 2002 for a classification that includes these notions).

- NOTE: The important point is that cleft clauses do not serve the purpose of marking given vs. new information (at least in English).
- (22) a. Though it is never possible to be sure one is doing the right thing, he wrote. There are always moments of doubt. After the initial impetus has run out, he wrote, and before one has got in so far that it is easier to finish than to go back, *it is then that it becomes hard to be sure of your footing*, hard to know why you are doing what you are doing, hard to know if you are doing correctly what you are doing. (BNC, CB9, 1091)
- b. This need not necessarily be antipathetic to "pub values" as we recognise them. Indeed, Langford and Williams are currently developing family pub concepts for a major brewer which take as their starting point perceived elements of the vernacular pub: highly detailed joinery, "honest" and tactile finishes, and the bar counter as a focus. Just as important as establishing what to include is deciding what to exclude, and *it is here that the purists may find cause to tar and feather us.*(BNC, A0B, 437)
- (23) C.B.: 'So who's Barbara?'
- B.S.: 'Let me put it this way. When you last saw me with anyone, it was Barbara I was with.' (11/76) (Prince, 1978, 897)

3.3 The relevance of Contrast

- referential expressions
- (24) Rachel was as safe as a rock. Phoebe was different. Maggie could not depend on Phoebe and knew that she would not. *But it was Phoebe that she wanted.* (BNC, A6J, 1054)
- Disputed cases: Prince's informative-presupposition clefts (see (25))
 - These are ambiguous between two readings
 1. Contrastive reading
 2. Extraposed that-clause
- (25) It was just about 50 years ago that Henry Ford gave us the weekend. (Prince, 1978, 898)
- (26) a. The birth of my baby was just about a year ago.
b. That incident was a month ago.
- (27) [That H.F. gave us the weekend] was [just about 50 years ago]
→ it_i was [just about 50 years ago] [that H.F. gave us the weekend]
- (28) It was because of the rain that we arrived late. (É. Kiss, 1998, 268)
- (29) That I avoided such a course of action is because of my own understanding of what the institution would allow before it swung into action. (BNC, A0K, 667)

- Prediction: those clefted constituents that cannot (easily) have a predicative reading, are necessarily interpreted contrastively.
 - Proper names, see e.g. (24);
 - The ‘strength’ of the contrast depends on the overtness of the alternatives present in the context. Whereas the alternatives are explicitly given in the immediate context in (24), they might be established on the basis of the clefted constituent. In this case, the contrast is perceived to be weaker.
- (30) a. It’s with great honor and pleasure that I announce Hilary Putnam.’ (Prince, 1978, 902)
- b. However, I should add, it is with regret that we have to take such drastic intervention, (BNC, A2W, 217)

3.4 Krifka’s Hybrid Theory of Focus

- Structured Meanings: the focused element moves (at LF) to the focus operator (e.g. a focus-sensitive particle like *only*)
 - The focus exponent (the element on which the nuclear accent falls) introduces the possible alternatives
- (31) a. John only introduced [FocP the man that JILL admires] to Sue.
- b. LF: John only [FocP the man that JILL admires] [introduced t to Sue].
- c. {the man that Jill admires, that man that Mary admires, the man that Peter admires, ... }
- but-phrases
- (32) Mary didn’t invite [FocP the man in a BLACK suit] to the party.
- a. but she invited the man in a PURPLE suit.
- b. but the man in a PURPLE suit.
- c. *but in a PURPLE suit.
- d. *but a PURPLE suit.
- e. *but PURPLE
- Krifka (2006, 17)
- short answers
- (33) Context: Bill said that Mary spoke to the American president. What did John say?
- A. He said [FocP that she spoke to the FRENCH president].
- B. #FRENCH.
- C. #the FRENCH president.
- D. #spoke to the FRENCH president.
- E. (That) She spoke to the FRENCH president.

3.5 A hybrid theory applied to cleft sentences

3.5.1 The clefted constituent corresponds to the FocP

- *But*-phrases

- (34) It wasn't a picture of VANCOUVER that Peter gave to Sue, but
- it was a picture of San Francisco that Peter gave to Sue.
 - it was a picture of San Francisco
 - a picture of San Francisco
 - *of San Francisco
 - *San Francisco
- (35) It wasn't a PICTURE of Vancouver that Peter gave to Sue, but
- a PAINTING of Vancouver
 - #a PAINTING

- Association with *only*

- (36) It was only a PICTURE of Vancouver that Peter gave to Sue.
→ < a picture of Vancouver, a painting of Vancouver, an etching of Vancouver, a copper engraving of V., >
- (37) It was only a picture of VANCOUVER that Peter gave to Sue.
→ < a picture of VANCOUVER, a picture of SAN FRANCISCO, a picture of NEW YORK, ... >
→ < a picture of VANCOUVER, a painting by a local artist, a painting by Miro, ... >
≠ a picture of only Vancouver;

3.5.2 The alternatives are determined by the focus exponent

- (38) It was a PICTURE of Vancouver that Peter gave to Sue.
→ < a picture of Vancouver, a painting of Vancouver, an etching of Vancouver, a copper engraving of V., ... >
- (39) It was a picture of VANCOUVER that Peter gave to Sue.
→ < a picture of VANCOUVER, a picture of SAN FRANCISCO, a picture of NEW YORK, ... >
→ < a picture of VANCOUVER, a painting by a local artist, a painting by Miro, ... >

3.6 A Note on Exhaustivity

- É. Kiss (1998): Clefts express exhaustive identification with contrast optionally adding up to that.

- (40) a. It was a hat and a coat that Mary picked for herself.
 b. ≠>It was a hat that Mary picked for herself.
 (É. Kiss, 1998, 250)
- (41) Es war der Peter, den Paul ermordet hat. #Und
 It is the.NOM Peter PRN_{ACC.M.SG} Paul murdered has. And
 übrigens auch der Fritz.
 by-the-way also the_{NOM} also Fritz
 Huber (2002)

- HOWEVER: when a subconstituent is focused additional alternatives can be added overtly

- (42) It was an odd televised ceremony that I watched from my living room, and a touching one, marking the difficult transition the Carrs had made from couple to family, formally introducing a child into the world. [Goodman, p. 194] (Hedberg, 1990, Ch. 3)
- (43) a. It was an an odd and touching televised ceremony that I watched from my living room.
 b. →It was an odd televised ceremony that I watched from my living room.
- (44) a. It was an interesting and long meeting that Peter went to last night.
 b. →It was an interesting meeting that Peter went to last night.
- (45) a. Es war ein interessantes und langes Treffen das Peter gestern
 It was a interesting and long meeting that Peter yesterday
 besuchte.
 visited
 b. →Es war ein langes Treffen das Peter gestern besuchte.
 It was a long meeting that Peter yesterday visited.

- Exhaustivity seems to hold for FocP

- (46) a. Es war ein interessanter Vortrag und ein langweiliges Mittagessen,
 It was an interesting presentation and a boring lunch,
 wo Peter gestern hinging.
 where Peter yesterday to-went.
 → Es war ein langweiliges Mittagessen, wo Peter gestern hinging.
 It was a boring lunch, where Peter yesterday to-went

4 Focus structure and apparent Predicational it-clefts

4.1 Introduction

- (47) a. It was a tadpole that I bought.
 b. It's food for the dog that I don't eat.

- c. It was a piece of trash that I drew.
(Hedberg, 1990, Ch. 3)
- (48) It was an interesting meeting that he went to last night. (Declerck, 1988)
- Non-specific indefinite noun phrases as clefted constituents
 - Focus on a subpart of the clefted constituent
 - Declerck (1983, 1988) argues that these cleft sentences form a separate class;
 - HOWEVER:
 - Many properties derive from sub-focus on an adjectival predicate
 - Some cases the examples do not necessarily represent cleft sentences
 - In some cases the data is flawed
 - Terminology:
 - S-clefts: specificational cleft-sentences in Declerck’s sense
 - P-clefts: predicational cleft-sentences in Declercks’s sense

4.2 Special Focus structure in P-clefts

4.2.1 Answer to predicational questions

- Declerck (1988)’s P-clefts can be used as answers to predicational questions, cf. (49).
- (49) A: The car you saw in front of the house, was it a red one or a green one?
B: It was a GREEN car that I saw in front of the house.
(Declerck, 1988, 159)
- ‘What-kind-of’-questions
- (50) A: What kind of person is it that you are looking for?
B: It is a fat man that we’re looking for.

4.2.2 Specificity

- P-clefts require a non-specific NP
 - BUT: clash of focus marking and the meaning of *particular*
- (51) Was it a particular interesting/#INTERESTING meeting that you went to last night?
ALT1: { the meeting at 2o’clock, the meeting at 3 o’clock, ... }
ALT2: {an interesting meeting, a boring meeting, an exciting meeting, ... }

4.2.3 Negation and contrast

- Declerck (1983, 1988) P-clefts do not give rise to a contrast, cf. (52-b);
 - However: the contrast falls on a sub-part of the clefted constituent.
- (52) a. It's not John who murdered Smith [but someone else]
b. It was not an important decision that was made yesterday.
(Declerck, 1988, 166)
- (53) ...But we are thrown a hint that his triumph is hardly long-lived, for when he stands, alone, high above the still forms of the dead below, *it is not a look of satisfaction that he throws us, but one of puzzlement at his own work.* (BNC, ASC, 795)
- 'strength' of the contrast is context dependent.
- (54) a. It was John who killed Smith (not Bill or Ted).
b. It was an interesting thing that he told us.

4.2.4 Indefinite plurals

- Declerck claims that indefinite plurals are only possible in P-clefts
 - HOWEVER: it is difficult to find an appropriate context for contrasting *people* or *things*
- (55) a. *It wasn't things that he told me.
b. It wasn't INTERESTING things that he told me.
c. *It wasn't people that told me that.
d. It wasn't IMPORTANT people that told me that.
(Declerck, 1988, 167)
- (56) This type of 'topic' is unlikely to be identifiable as one part of a sentence. Accordingly, we agree with Morgan that "' *it is not sentences that have topics, but speakers* '" (Morgan, 1975 : 434). (BNC, F9V, 1214)
- (57) That it was established reflects both an enlightened commitment on the part of senior management and a recognition that the problem is pervasive in Northern Ireland. Although the unit has a male inspector , *it is policewomen who deal with both victims and offenders.* (BNC, A5Y, 651)
- (58) Often it does not occur to them that they can speak up, raise their voices in front of people. Personally I don't think *it is traditions which are weighing them down* but the fact that they have no support at home .(BNC, A6V, 1449)

4.2.5 Negation with ‘no’

- According to Declerck (1983, 1988) P-clefts allow for the negation with ‘no’, S-clefts do not;
- HOWEVER: ‘no X’ is not restricted to predicative noun phrases: The search for a verb followed by ‘no’ in the BNC resulted in 12610 hits. And even though this includes non-relevant cases, the pattern is not rare.
- The reason for the difference lies in the negation of the F-exponent or the full phrase;

- (59) a. It is not a teacher that we need.
b. *It is no teacher that we need.
(Declerck, 1983, 19)

- (60) It was no MEAN gathering of souls that Mrs Brockett’s dingy gas illuminated.
(Kruisinga 1932b:504, cited in Declerck, 1988, 160)

- (61) It was no interesting meeting that I went to (Declerck, 1988, 160)

- (62) I feel disadvantaged as a cook because I received no formal training and didn’t go to college.

4.3 Non-cleft examples

4.3.1 The ambiguity of it BE DP that-clause structures

- Extraposed subject clause
 - DP predicative
 - no gap in *that*-clause or, wh-relative clause (free relative clause)

- (63) Indeed , it is [a central assumption of deconstruction] [that the distinction between literature and philosophy is exaggerated , or arbitrary , or even meaningless]

- NP modified by a relative clause
 - referential ‘it’
 - restrictive *that*-relative clause

- (64) Kontext: Das Kind ist goldig. (The kid is cute)
Es ist ein kleiner Kobold, der ständig umherwuselt.
It is a small hobgoblin, PRN constantly around.bustles
‘It is a small hobgoblin that bustles around constantly.’
≠_i something bustles around.

4.3.2 Embedding under *consider*-type verbs

- Embedding under *consider*-type verbs

- (65) a. It seemed an interesting subject that he was working on. (Declerck, 1988, 162)
b. I consider it an interesting subject that they are discussing tonight. (Declerck, 1988, 171)
c. A couple of weeks ago it seemed clear which candidate deserved voting for, but now many people think that it has become a difficult choice they have to make. (Declerck, 1988, 163)

4.4 Other non-arguments

4.4.1 Modification with *no longer* or *anymore*

- Declerck claims that it is possible to modify the clefted constituent with *no longer* or *anymore* in P-clefts but not in S-clefts.
- HOWEVER: in (66-a) is that Smith can be murdered only once; The adverbial *no longer* is not possible with this state-of-affairs.¹

- (66) a. *It is no longer John who murdered Smith.
b. It is no longer an interesting subject that they are discussing. (Declerck, 1988, 163)
- (67) It is no longer John who is the president.
- (68) However, when we are prepared to be guided from within, *it is no longer emotional desire that drives us, but the purity and clarity of reason, dictated by the 'pure will' of our hearts.* (BNC, No = "17832337")

4.4.2 Coordination

- Declerck argues that P-clefts cannot be coordinated with S-clefts (similar to predicational and specificational copula clauses)
- HOWEVER: it is not clear whether the source of mismatch is the same in (69) and (70);
- Coordination needs 'a common integrator' (cf. Lang 1991)

¹(66-a) might be coerced in a context in which we describe the following situation of a crime story on TV: In the beginning it seemed that John is definitely the murderer. But after further investigations, the investigators find out, that John is not the murderer but Bill. One person watching the story might convey this matter of fact to someone else who missed part of the story on TV saying (66-a).

- Focus structure is relevant; if we control for that, coordination seems possible;²
- (69) a. ??It is an important meeting that I'm going to and John who is presiding at it.
 b. It is an important meeting that I'm going to and an interesting subject that is going to be discussed.
 c. ??It is JOHN who is going to lead the debate and an INTERESTING subject that is going to be discussed.
 d. It was a book that John gave me and a bike that Mary gave me.
 (Declerck, 1988, 161)
- (70) #Gabis Mann ist zwar Peter aber deswegen noch lange kein Glückspilz.
 Gabi's husband is PRT Peter but therefore yet long no lucky-devil
- (71) Es war ein KLEINER Abschnitt, den das Parlament geändert hat, und der GANZE EU Vertrag den das Parlament unterschrieben hat.
 It was a small section PRN the parliament changed has, and the whole EU treaty PRN the parliament signed has.

4.4.3 Tense interpretation

- In predicational sentences, the tense can vary as long as the predicate can be assigned to the subject at different times.
 - This is not possible in S-clefts, cf. (73).
- (72) a. The man who told you that is dangerous.
 b. The man who told you that was dangerous.
 c. The man who told you that has always been dangerous.
 (Declerck, 1988, 165)
- (73) a. *The one who murdered Smith has always been that man over there.
 b. *The one who murdered Smith will be that man over there.
 c. The one who murdered Smith is that man over there.
 (Declerck, 1988, 165)
- P-clefts seem to pattern with predicational structures
 - HOWEVER:
 - The predicate in the cleft clause matters;
 -
- (74) a. *It is/has always been/will be that man over there who murdered Smith.

²Note that the second conjunct cannot be a P-cleft in Declerck's sense: the focussed constituent cannot be a regular predicate: **Der EU Vertrag, den das Parlament unterschrieben hat ist ganz.* The sentence falls under the classification used here because a subconstituent of the pivot is focussed, even though this is not a predicate modifier but a measure phrase.

- b. It was/is an interesting subject that they were discussing.
- (75) It is/has always been/will be that man over there that they are discussing.
- (76) The murderer of Tom was/*used to be John.
- (77) a. It used to be a reliable man that worked for John.
- b. It used to be a really good painter who painted their portraits.
- (78) a. It used to be Bill that worked for John.
- b. It used to be Bill who painted their portraits.

- Declerck also argues that S-clefts allow for tense neutralization, P-clefts don't;
- HOWEVER: the comparative form decreases the acceptability, without it, the predicational cleft improves:³

- (79) a. Specificational:
It is/would be a book that John would give to me if he had his way.
- b. Predicational:
It would be/*is a more interesting subject that we would be discussing if John had his way.
(Declerck, 1988, 164)
- (80) It is an interesting subject that we would be discussing if John had his way.
- (81) Others questioned the fact that *it is unskilled jobs that are disappearing* and suggested that workers are , in general , being deskilled in manufacturing industry.(BNC)

5 Focus, specification and IST triggers

- Research question: Are specificational reading and focus marking in cleft-sentences related?
- Short answer: Yes! Long answer: work in progress.

5.1 Focus in specificational copula clauses

- The post-copular noun phrase in specificational copula clauses has to be accented (see Heggie 1988, Heycock and Kroch 2002, Mikkelsen 2004, Heycock 2006 among others);⁴

³Thanks to Johannes Heim for pointing this out.

⁴Note that the sentence in (82) is possible if 'Sam' is interpreted as a predicate, in a context like the following. This is not the relevant reading here.

- (i) a. I know that both the fire chief and the mayor are actors in this amateur theatre play. Who of the plays the character 'Sam'?
- b. The FIRE CHIEF is Sam.

- (82) a. Is the mayor Sam?
 b. *No, the FIRE CHIEF is Sam.
 (example and judgment from Williams, 1997)
- With predicational copula structures either the pre- or post-copular noun phrase can be accented.
- (83) A: Who was the culprit? (John or Bill?)
 B: JOHN was the culprit.
- (84) A: What do you know about John?
 B: John is the CULPRIT.
- (85) A: Who was the culprit? (John or Bill?)
 B: The culprit was JOHN.
 (Heycock and Kroch, 2002, 148)
- (86) A: What was John? (Was John the culprit or the victim?)
 B: *The CULPRIT was John.
 (Heycock and Kroch, 2002, 149)
- The restriction is that the post-copular noun phrase is in focus, not that the pre-copular noun phrase cannot be stressed. (Heycock and Kroch, 2002, 148)
- (87) The CULPRIT was JOHN, the VICTIM was JOAN.
- Birner (1996) and Mikkelsen (2004) argue that the division of given-new is relevant for specificational copula structures;
- (88) Discourse-condition on inversion
 The preposed element in an inversion must not be newer in the discourse than the postposed element. (Birner, 1996, 90)
- (89) Discourse condition (strong)
 The initial element of a DP-inversion must be at least as Discourse-old as the final element, and it cannot be entirely Discourse-new. (Mikkelsen, 2004, 225)
- HOWEVER: discourse status is not the decisive IS factor in the structure
 - Both pre-copular and post-copular constituent can contain both new and given information, cf. (90);
 - In (90), (91) the order seems to be ‘accessible (*goal*, culprit) > given (*map*, *slug*)’
- (90) An operation consists of mounting an expedition and then filling in a bit more of the map when it returns. *The goal is the completed map*(BNC, FNR, 336).

(91) Ever dug up a bed of apparently flourishing potatoes, only to find the tubers riddle[d] with holes where the slugs have been at them? *The major culprit is the keeled slug*, dark grey or black with a distinct ridge down its back, which lives mostly in the soil. Slugs turn to the potato crop in late summer, when other food sources are disappearing. (BNC, A0G, 1801)

- ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS: the pre-copular noun phrase restricts the alternatives for the post-copular noun phrase.⁵
- The generalization seems to be that when the predicate (complement of the Pr) is part of the restriction of the focus operator, the reading of specification arises;
- ‘a specificational clause does not tell us something **about** the referent of the subject NP instead it says **who** or **what** the referent is’ [emphasis in original] (taken from Mikkelsen (2004, 1) who paraphrases Akmajian (1979)).
- The commonality of *it*-clefts and specificational copula clauses is that the main predicate is part of the restrictor of the focus;
- Put differently: In specificational copula-constructions the focus on the subject of predication (the post-copular constituent) is forced through the inversion of the predicate to the initial position. In cleft-sentences the division of focused constituent as subject of predication and the cleft clause as predicate encodes the focus structure in the core predication, the PrP. In this sense, the meaning of specification and focus are intimately linked.

6 Conclusion

References

- Akmajian, A. 1970. “On deriving cleft sentences from pseudo-cleft sentences”. *Linguistic Inquiry* 1: 149–168.
- Akmajian, A. 1979. *Aspects of the Grammar of Focus in English*. New York: Garland.

⁵Additionally, the pre-copular constituent seems to serve as topic (see Heycock and Kroch 2002) in some sense. This can be illustrated with the example in (i). The discussion is about ‘common causes of accidents’ and a further example for this overall topic is introduced.

- (i) Flaps are described in detail for the many pilots who do not fully understand how to make the best use of them, and who may be nervous about their first flights in a flapped machine. *Another common cause of accidents is the inexperienced pilot who buys a glider which is not suited to his skill and experience*. There are notes for pilots considering becoming private owners and on the types of glass fibre gliders which are suitable for early solo pilots.(BNC, A0H, 1561)

Specificational copula clauses and *it*-clefts differ in this respect, but I leave the exact nature and predictions of this difference to future research.

- Birner, B. 1996. *The Discourse Function of Inversion in English* .. New York: Garland.
- BNC. 2001. “British National Corpus, version 2 (world edition)”.
- Davidse, K. 2000. “A constructional approach to clefts”. *Linguistics* 38 (6): 1101–1131.
- Declerck, R. 1983. “Predicational clefts”. *Lingua* 61: 9–45.
- Declerck, R. 1988. *Studies on Copular Sentences, Clefts and Pseudo-Clefts*. Leuven: Foris Publications.
- Dikken, M. d. 2006. *Relators and Linkers: The Syntax of Predication, Predicate Inversion and Copulas*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Dikken, M. d. 2009. “Predication and specification in the syntax of cleft sentences”. *Manuscript !**Manuscript*.
- Drubig, B. 1994. “Island constraints and the syntactic nature of focus and association with focus”. *Arbeitspapier des SFB 340* 51.
- Drubig, B. 2003. “Towards a typology of focus and focus constructions”. *Linguistics* 40: 1–50.
- É. Kiss, K. 1998. “Identificational Focus versus Information Focus”. *Language* 74: 245–273.
- Featherston, S. 2008. *Thermometer judgements as linguistic evidence*. Aachen: Shaker Verlag.
- Gundel, J. 1977. “Where do cleft sentences come from?” *Language* 53: 543–559.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 1967. “Notes on Transitivity and theme in English (part 2)”. *Journal of Linguistics* 3 (2): 199–244.
- Hedberg, N. 1990. *Discourse pragmatics and cleft sentences in English*. Phd thesis.
- Heggie, L. 1988. *The Syntax of Copular Constructions*. PhD thesis.
- Heycock, C. 2006. *Equatives, Focus and Agreement*. Leiden University.
- Heycock, C. and Kroch, A. 2002. *Topic, Focus, And Syntactic Representation*, 141–165. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.
- Higgins, F. R. 1979. *The Pseudo-Cleft Construction in English*. New York/London: Garland.
- Huber, S. 2002. *Es-Clefts und det-Clefts: Zur Syntax, Semantik und Informationsstruktur von Spaltsätzen im Deutschen und Schwedischen*. PhD thesis.

- Jespersen, O. 1927. *A modern English grammar on historical principles, Part 3.* Heidelberg: Winter.
- Krifka, M. 2006. *Association with Focus Phrases*, 105–135. Berlin/ New York: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Lang, E. 1991. *Koordinierende Konjunktionen*, 597–623. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter.
- Mikkelsen, L. 2004. *Specifying Who: On the Structure, Meaning and Use of Specificational Copula Constructions*. PhD thesis.
- Moro, A. 1997. *The Raising of Predicates: Predicative Noun Phrases and the Theory of Clause Structure*. Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Patten, A. 2010. *Cleft sentences, construction grammar and grammaticalization*. Doctoral thesis.
- Prince, E. F. 1978. “A Comparison of Wh-Clefts and it-Clefts in Discourse”. *Language* 54 (4): 883–906.
- Reeve, M. 2010. *Clefts*. Dissertation.
- Reeve, M. 2011. “The syntactic structure of English clefts”. *Lingua* 121 (2): 142–171.
- Rochemont, M. S. 1986. *Focus in Generative Grammar*. Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Rochemont, M. S. 2010. “Discourse New, Focus Projection, and IS Triggers”. *Manuscript* .
- Rochemont, M. S. 2011. “Question-Answer Congruence and Focus”. *Manuscript* .
- Williams, E. 1983. “Semantic vs. Syntactic Categories”. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 6: 423–446.
- Williams, E. 1997. “The asymmetry of predication”. *Texas Linguistic Forum* 38: 323–333.