Making the case for defining clefts broadly as secondary specification structures: Prosody and information structure

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In this presentation we argue that English cleft constructions may have as matrix *it be* + NP (1), *there be* + NP (2), or *I/you/we have (got)* + NP (3) (Davidse 2000, Lambrecht 2001). They all specify values for the variable designated by the relative marker (which may be zero) in the cleft relative clause, e.g. the value *garden space* for the variable 'x that is so precious for kids' in (1). The value typically has prosodic prominence, signalling information focus.

(1) and it's **g\arden** space // that is {**s\o**} **pr\ecious** {for **k\ids**//}//not **h\ouse** space// (quoted Collins 2006: 1708)

(2) [in reaction to question if there are any known academics in the department] A: well ^f\/irst of 'all//there's a ^man called ''!**H\ocking**//who ^has I 'think :taken his **de:gr\ee**//^in this **de!p\artment**//and is ^**kn\own**//[@] who ^**s\eemed** [@:m]//to ^be [s @] !**f\/airly** 'strong//^and there is ''!**H\erman**//who is ^**\also** 'known// (LLC)

(3) D: ^well . !their de'partment of 'edu:c\/ation# - [@:] - . ^joined to'gether with the 'paraplegic 'home study :c\ouncil# - the com^{m\/ittee} that :I was 'on with 'Julius !**W\/ilton#** . ^got some !m\/oney# ^from [dhi] 'Larkish 'state b\ank# . from ^their 'Staat'banken 'Jubi!l\eums 'fund# ^[dhi] - !state 'bank :j\ubilee 'fund# *- ((1 syll))*
A: *^good G/\od# ^th\/at* 'is 'what is# fi^nancing 'Hamar`s pr\oject#
D: ^yes well they they !have ^that **f\/und# ^**is is a !very **!r\/ich -** 'one# (LLC)

Crucial to the grammatical argumentation for this generalization is the systematic contrast with clauses with identifying *be* (4), existential *be* (5) and *have* (6) with complements containing NP-internal restrictive relative clauses (RRCs), which define subtypes of the head nouns (Davidse & Kimps 2016). Prosodically RRCs tend to be integrated into the postverbal NP as part of the tone contour on which the whole clause is uttered (Halliday 1994).

(4) ^y=es// ^this is the one I could most **l\ive** 'with // (LLC: 1.8)

(5) A: ((there are)) ^some 'people who :like to 'come :once a 'week just to **s\/ing** //
?A: ^y\es //
D: **\/al**most // to an ^**\evening** 'class // - *((and))*
A: **.*^**y\es //* ^y\eah // ((but there are)) ^those who 'like to 'come [t] to a !few re'hearsals be:fore a :**c\oncert** //
A: ^[=m] // **^y\es //**
D: and we ^have !both 'sorts of :**p\eople** // (LLC)

(6) <1 7 A> ***^**in the . ^in the !**\/amplifier#****   I`ve ^got 'one of these *'things that goes !**s\ideways#** (LLC)

In this paper we will closely investigate the prosody and information structure of clefts with two main aims. Firstly, we want to strengthen the – presently contentious – case that constructions with the three types of matrices in (1), (2) and (3) really do form one general type of cleft constructions. Secondly, in light of this broad definition of clefts, we will re-consider what is generally seen as *the* central question about clefts, viz. whether they are focus-marking structures (e.g. Lambrecht 2001) or topic/theme-marking structures (e.g. Halliday 1967), coming down on the position that they are neither. We argue that they are not purely information structure marking devices – in which view some form-meaning mismatch has to be posited, be it viewing the matrix as lexically empty (Lambrecht 2001) or the relative clause as extraposed from the matrix's subject which it is claimed to form a unit with (Halliday 1967). Rather, they are complex sentence constructions in which meaning matches form with the following properties:

(i)   They have a matrix whose predicate assigns a semantic role to its complement, such as identifier of identifying *be* in (1), existent of the existential predicate in (2), and patient of *have* in (3).

(ii)   The whole complement NP is the head being modified by (and the antecedent of) the cleft relative clause: it designates determined instances, *garden space* in (1), *Hocking* and *Herman* in (2), *that fund* in (3).

(iii)   The 'secondary' modification of the postverbal complement is similar to that in some secondary predication constructions (Nichols 1978, McGregor 1997, König & Lambrecht 1998), but, because of its specificational semantics, constitutes a 'secondary specification' construction.

The proposed analysis tallies with the fact that focus placement in attested examples is more variable than either of the two information structure analyses of clefts predicts. As secondary specification constructions, they can convey a plurality of mappings between ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings.

References

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