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An analysis of it-clefts within a Role and Reference Grammar framework

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Role and Reference Grammar framework[1]

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The it-cleft construction (1) is generally accepted to be a marked syntactic bi-clausal option which expresses a simple semantic proposition; in terms of information structure, the construction places an element in focus position, within a copular matrix clause. This element receives an exhaustive interpretation; that is, in the case of (1), it is Bill, and only Bill, that was seen.

   (1) It was Bill that I saw.

These clefts lack a straightforward mapping between their syntactic, semantic and pragmatic structures and as a result are a prime construction to illustrate the advantages of Role and Reference Grammar which is able to bring these aspects together in a coherent analysis.

This paper begins with a brief overview of the literature on it-clefts. Following this, an approach to the study of it-clefts in English from a Role and Reference Grammar theory perspective (following Van Valin and LaPolla 1997, Van Valin 2003) is presented and several key issues highlighted. The analysis also draws from work by Lambrecht (2001) and Davidse (2000). It is demonstrated that a comprehensive account of it-cleft constructions needs to take into account both the way that clefts exploit the copular verb and their relationship to their non-cleft counterpart sentences.

1. Introduction

The *it*-cleft construction is generally accepted to be a marked syntactic bi-clausal option which expresses a simple semantic proposition; in terms of information structure, the construction places an element in focus position, within a copular matrix clause. This element receives an exhaustive interpretation; that is, in the case of (1), it is understood that it is Bill, and only Bill, that was seen.

(1) It   was   Bill   that I saw.
   cleft pronoun   copula   clefted constituent   cleft clause

Clefts lack a straightforward mapping between their syntactic, semantic and pragmatic structures and as a result are a prime construction to illustrate the advantages of Role and Reference Grammar which is able to bring these aspects together in a coherent analysis. However, the structure does also pose interesting challenges for just such an interlinked analysis.

This paper will begin with a brief overview of the literature on *it*-clefts, using the terms as in (1). Following this, an analysis of *it*-clefts in English from a Role and Reference Grammar perspective (following Van Valin & LaPolla (1997) and Van Valin (2003)) will be offered, highlighting several key issues.

Role and Reference Grammar theory (Van Valin & LaPolla 1997, Van Valin 2003) allows for the interaction of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic factors, all of which are shown to be relevant for the structures discussed in this paper. This is diagrammed in Figure 1.

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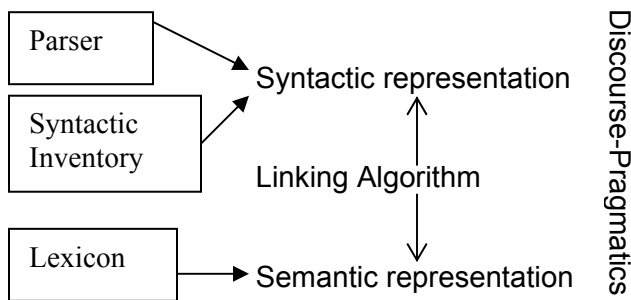
Figure 1: Organization of Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin 2002:1)

Role and Reference Grammar also makes use of the term 'nucleus' to refer to the predicating element in a sentence, whether that be a verb, a noun phrase, an adjective or another type of element. This aspect of the theory highlights the distinction in clefts between the (copular) verb and the predicating element.

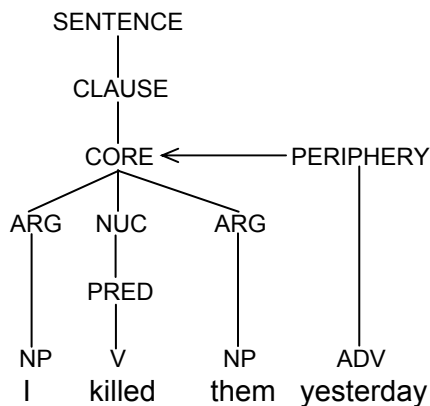The elements of a simple sentence are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Example sentence showing formal representation of the layered structure of the clause (adapted from Van Valin & LaPolla 1997:34)

2. Brief literature review

Studies of *it*-clefts in the literature, particularly formal rather than functional studies, tend to fall into two broad approaches. These focus on one of the two main relationships in the cleft construction as primary: the copular nature of clefts, focussing on the matrix clause, or the relation between clefts and their un-clefted counterparts, focussing on the proposition in the cleft clause.

EXTRAPOSITIONAL accounts focus on the copular nature of cleft constructions, and treat the postponed cleft clause as being related to, or modifying, the cleft pronoun. Together these form a semantic unit and the clefted constituent is identified, or equated with this unit, through the use of the copula. This can be roughly diagrammed as in (2).

(2) It was John that I saw → [It + that I saw] was John

This emphasis on the copular nature of *it*-clefts was used by some generative grammarians who treated them as extraposed variants of pseudoclefts[2] (Akmajian 1970a, Emonds 1976, Gundel 1977, Wirth 1978). So, Gundel (1977) for example, derives *it*-clefts from right-dislocated pseudoclefts, moving from (a) to (b) to (c) in example (3) below.

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[2] Also known as WH-clefts, pseudoclefts can be defined as a "marked construction in which the non-focused constituents are extracted from their *logical positions* and preceded by a WH-item, this sequence being connected by a copula to the focused constituent, which comes last" (Trask 1993:223).

         (3) (a) What you heard was an explosion. (pseudocleft)

             (b) It was an explosion, what you heard. (right-dislocated pseudocleft)

             (c) It was an explosion that you heard. (*it*-cleft) (1977:543).

There are clearly familial similarities between types of pseudoclefts and *it*-clefts, as both are copular constructions. However, an analysis to **derive** *it*-clefts from pseudoclefts seems to use an equally, if not more complex construction as the basis from which to derive one for *it*-clefts. Gundel is forced to specify rules that apply only to the right-dislocated NPs of identificational sentences, a rather ad hoc rule which she acknowledges has "no independent motivation in English" (Gundel 1977:557).

For these extrapositional accounts of *it*-clefts, there is also the issue of the difference in form and meaning between the first NP in a pseudocleft (*What you heard* in (3a)) which is a referential NP with a head noun, and the cleft clause (*that you heard*) in a cleft, which has no head noun, is semantically incomplete, and is therefore not referential in the same sense. An *it*-cleft cannot be said to equate or identify two noun phrases in exactly the same way as a pseudocleft or other copular sentence with two definite noun phrases.

Another potential problem with extrapositional analyses is that they sideline, or ignore, any relationship between the clefted constituent and the cleft clause. This causes a problem firstly in how to account for sentences where only part of the clefted constituent is focused (*e.g.* "a scarf" in (4)), and the rest seems to function with the cleft clause as being part of the 'given' description, part of the presupposition: *e.g.*

        (4) It was a hat and <u>a SCARF</u> that she wore.

The second consequence is difficulty in accounting for verb agreement in number between the predicate in the cleft clause and the clefted constituent.

The other type of approach to *it*-clefts is called EXPLETIVE. Under these analyses, (*e.g.* Heggie (1988), Kiss (1998), Huddleston (1984), Lambrecht (2001)), the cleft pronoun (and generally also the copula) are relegated to being expletive, dummy, semantically inert elements, while the cleft clause bears a semantic relation to the clefted constituent. This is diagrammed roughly as below in (5).

        (5) It was [John + that I saw]

So, rather than focussing on clefts as copular constructions, this type of analysis connects cleft sentences more closely with their non-clefted counterpart sentences (*I saw John*, in the case of (5)). The matrix structure may remain an object of study (*e.g.* Lambrecht (2001)), usually assigned a pragmatic focus-marking function.

Kiss (1998) is an example of a transformational account based on an 'expletive' analysis of cleft constructions. Kiss states that identificational focus, which expresses exhaustive identification, "occupies the specifier of a functional projection [focus phrase]" (1998:245), serving to "mark the sentence part following it…as the scope of exhaustive identification" (1998:253). The PP *Clinton* in the example in Figure 3 below "has been moved from under the embedded VP into spec-FP through spec-CP" (1998:258–9).
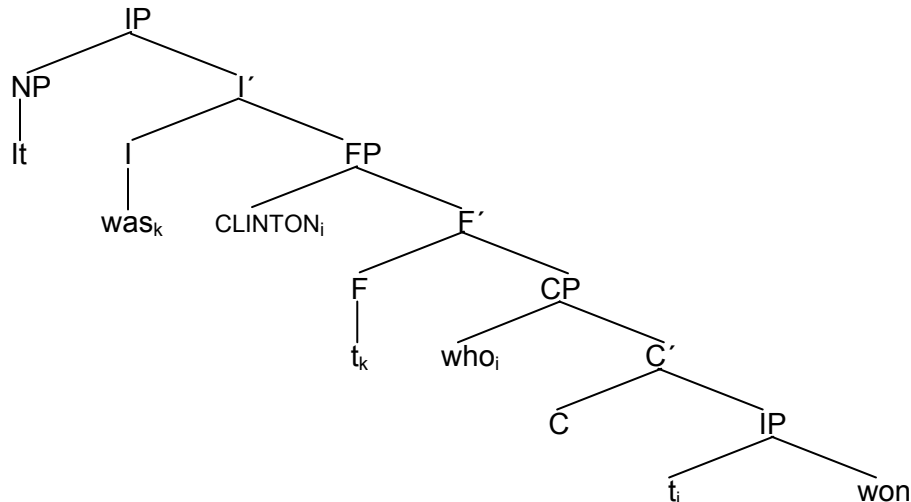
```
                      IP
             /                 \
          NP                    I′
          |              /            \
          It           I                 FP
                       |           /            \
                     wasₖ      CLINTONᵢ              F′
                                          /                \
                                        F                    CP
                                        |             /             \
                                       tₖ          whoᵢ                 C′
                                                               /              \
                                                             C                  IP
                                                             |            /           \
                                                            tᵢ          tᵢ            won
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Figure 3: Kiss (1998) structure for "It was Clinton who won" (Hedberg 2000:911)

Lambrecht (2001) also offers a generally expletive analysis but from a functional perspective, proposing a pragmatic, focus-assigning function for the cleft pronoun and copula in its relation to the clefted constituent. Lambrecht treats the clefted constituent as what he terms the 'pragmatic predicate', a role which is connected to the focus or asserted part of the sentence. Thus, for example, in the intonationally-marked narrow focus structure in (6), the 'pragmatic predicate' is '(is) the speaker's car'.

(6)   Sentence: *My CAR broke down.*
      Presupposition: "speaker's x broke down"
      Assertion: "x = car"
      Focus: "car"
      Focus domain: NP
      Pragmatic predicate: *(is) the speaker's car* (Lambrecht 1994:231)

He adds that this pragmatic predicate serves to identify rather than (semantically) predicate. This concept will prove useful in discussing the status of the clefted constituent.

What many of the expletive accounts face is the fact that although the cleft clause may formally resembles a relative clause, there are differences between the head-modifier relationship in a restrictive relative clause and what is often referred to as the VALUE-VARIABLE relationship between the clefted constituent and the cleft clause. I'll return to this issue later.

Davidse (2000) takes a constructional approach to clefts and interprets them as a combination of two coded relationships which are part of the constructions themselves.

Firstly, she argues that the relationship between the cleft clause and its antecedent, the clefted constituent, constitutes a 'value-variable' relation, rather than head-modifier or restrictive (as in restrictive relative clauses).[3] This different interpretation of the function of the relative clause, Davidse argues, stems

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[3] Davidse takes the variable (in an *it*-cleft) to be "the entity involved in the situation designated by the relative clause" (2000:1125).The 'value-variable' concept is used elsewhere in the literature, (*e.g.* Akmajian (1970b), Higgins (1979), Declerck (1988)) sometimes with slightly different, or underspecified interpretations of the terms. Declerck (1988) states that "a specificational sentence [(a)] is one whose semantic function is to specify a value for a variable…[(a)] specifies a value (Fred) for a variable 'the X who stole the money'.

(a) The one who stole the money is Fred.

from the differing antecedents in noun phrases and clefts. Following Langacker (1991) Davidse states that in NPs containing restrictive relative clauses, the antecedent of the relative clause is the head minus the determiner (2000:1109) whereas in *it*-clefts the antecedent is the head plus determiner, or the "grounded instance designated by the full NP" (2000:1112). In other words, the antecedent in *it*-clefts is a fully referential noun phrase. Thus in (7) the antecedent of the relative clause is the nominal head *man* whereas in (8) it is the NP *the man*. This difference is reflected in the proposed RRG structure and will be discussed later.

> (7) I didn't like the [man]$_N$ who spoke first.
> (8) It was [the man]$_{NP}$ who spoke first. (Davidse 2000:1111)

Davidse also proposes that there is a second 'identifying' semantic relation within the copular matrix clause. The cleft pronoun, in other words, is not expletive, but performs a quantificational role; in the case of *it*-clefts the pronoun "quantifies exhaustively" and is equated via the copula with the clefted constituent. Davidse contrasts *it*-clefts such as (8) with *there*-clefts, illustrated by (9), which she calls "enumerative existentials" since they provide a potentially incomplete list of instances (2000:1126); in other words, they are not exhaustive.

> (9) There's Jim who makes the coffee. (Davidse 2000:1120).

Therefore, according to Davidse, in *it*-clefts the clefted constituent is exhaustively quantified and **then** serves as antecedent for the following relative clause. Davidse repeats several times that the ordering, or scope, of the two semantic relationships she posits is significant but she does not explain this ordering.

In taking a constructional approach, Davidse's analysis begins to bear similarities to the way Role and Reference Grammar could interpret the constructions.

In summary, a comprehensive account of *it*-cleft constructions needs to take into account both the way that clefts exploit the copular verb **and** the relationship between clefts and their uncleft counterpart sentences, otherwise many aspects of the construction are necessarily interpreted not only as unique but also as "ad hoc" (Huddleston 1984:462).

Some studies (*e.g.* Hedberg 2000) have sought to combine elements from both approaches. Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) is able to provide a framework within which to understand and illustrate the integration of all these factors involved in the selection and use of the *it*-cleft construction in English. This analysis also draws observations from Lambrecht (2001) and Davidse (2000).

3. Role and Reference Grammar analysis

As the brief literature review has illustrated, there is no straightforward mirroring between the syntactic and semantic structures of *it*-clefts.[4] There are (at least) two interrelated syntactic and semantic

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Hedberg (2000), who doesn't use the terms 'value' and 'variable', concentrates on the cognitive status of the whole "propositional content of [the] cleft clause" (2000:898) rather than the entity or 'x' argument within the cleft clause.

[4] It is worth noting that there are several interesting sub-types of *it*-clefts which possess slightly varying properties. The first, illustrated below by (a), was first distinguished by Prince (1978) who labelled them INFORMATIVE PRESUPPOSITION clefts. In these the content of the cleft clause is not assumed by the speaker to be in the mind of the hearer, i.e. it is not 'active' or 'given' in that sense, as is generally the case with other *it*-clefts. Prince noted that these types of clefts often have the particular discourse-pragmatic function of indicating that the cleft clause information is a "known fact, unknown only to the readership" (Prince 1978:898). The second sub-type of cleft, illustrated by (b), is called a PREDICATIVE *IT*-CLEFT by Declerck (1988), since the value is a predicational element. Although significant, for reasons of space these types of clefts will not be discussed in great detail here, but examples are presented below alongside a 'standard' cleft with an NP clefted constituent and a cleft clause that is 'given' (c):

relationships to be accounted for: the **first** is between the clefted constituent and the cleft clause and the **second** is within the copular matrix clause. Other studies have highlighted a third possible relationship between the cleft pronoun and the cleft clause.

3.1 Clefted constituent and cleft clause—similarities to restrictive relative clauses

In studying the structures proposed below in Figure 4, the first relationship to be accounted for is between the clefted constituent and the cleft clause. There are syntactic, semantic and pragmatic similarities between restrictive relative clauses and *it*-clefts constructions which bear upon the analysis.

SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE
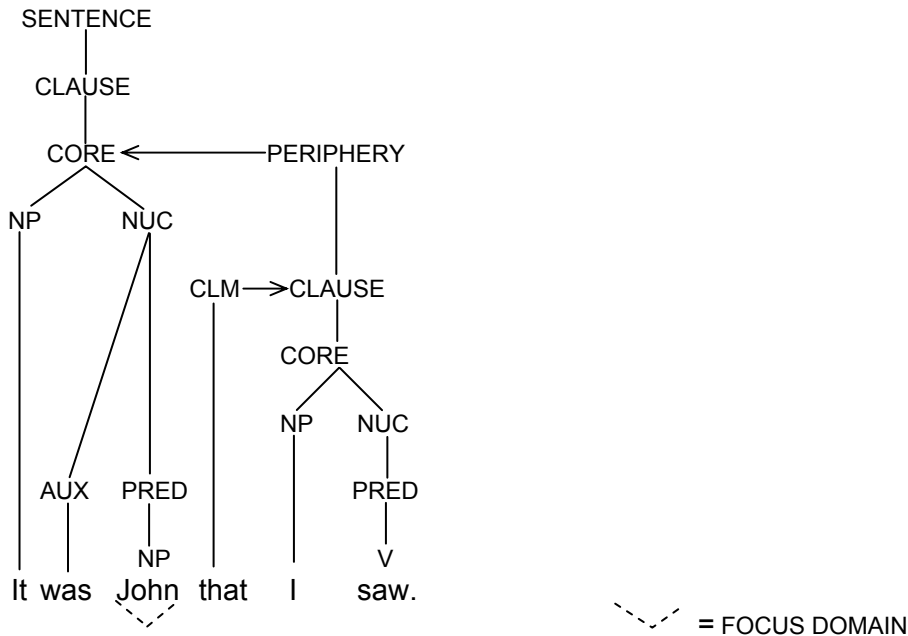
SEMANTIC STRUCTURE

It was John that I saw.

be´ (John$_i$, [**see´** (I, x$_i$)])

Figure 4: Proposed structure for it-clefts

In terms of syntactic structure, the cleft construction given in Figure 4 leans toward an expletive approach in the way it indicates a relationship between the cleft clause and the clefted constituent; the cleft clause is similar to a restrictive relative clause, in internal form and in its peripheral relation to the rest of the sentence (see Figure 5(b) below for comparison). The cleft clause is peripheral to the matrix clause, however, rather than just the clefted constituent. This differentiates the structure of *it*-clefts from the structure of *that*-clauses such as *John decided that he would go to the party*, where the *that*-clause is within the potential focus domain and is a direct daughter of the main clause node. In *it*-clefts, the *that*-clause is outside of the potential focus domain and this is reflected by the fact that it is not a direct daughter of the main clause node (see Van Valin & LaPolla (1997), section 8.5, p484 for further discussion).

(a) It was just about 50 years ago that Henry Ford gave us the weekend. (cited in Prince 1978)
(b) It was a green car that I saw in front of the house. (Declerck 1988:159)
(c) It was John that I saw.

In terms of semantics, the logical structure proposed here also bears a resemblance to the structure for restrictive relative clauses. The difference is that in NPs containing restrictive relative clauses, the relative clause logical structure is within a noun phrase, whereas for clefts, the **be** predicate structure forms the main predication of the sentence. A restrictive relative clause NP logical structure is given in (10) for comparison (adapted from Van Valin & LaPolla 1997:597). In NPs containing restrictive relative clauses, as in *it*-clefts, the logical structure for the relative clause forms the second argument of the **be** predicate.

(10) the cars which were destroyed (noun phrase)

be´ (cars$_i$, [**do´** (Ø, Ø)] CAUSE [BECOME **destroyed´** (which$_i$)])

Thus, as well as some syntactic similarities (patterns of verb agreement for example), there is also a sense in which the semantic function of *it*-clefts is similar to relative clauses; this is in terms of the exhaustiveness or exclusiveness which holds on the head noun and clefted constituent. In relative clauses, the referent of the head noun is restricted to only being one—to the exclusion of others—that fits with the modifying description given by the predicate phrase in the relative clause. This is similar to the situation in clefts where the identity of the referent of the clefted constituent is restricted to one which can (exclusively) fill the missing argument in the predicate phrase set up by the cleft clause.

3.2 Clefts as specificational, copular constructions.

Some of the differences between restrictive relative clauses and *it*-clefts are a result of the bi-clausal nature of clefts which involve an additional syntactic copular structure within the matrix clause. *It*-clefts thus bear similarities to other copular structures as described below.

As previously mentioned, Davidse (2000) suggests that the antecedent in *it*-clefts is the clefted constituent as universally (exhaustively) quantified by the cleft pronoun *it* whereas the antecedent in restrictive relative clauses is only the head noun. In other words, the relationship between cleft clause and clefted constituent is not as modifier of a nominal head but as a clause containing a variable for which the referential clefted constituent provides the value. This difference is related to the scope of the NP-level locality or grounding operator of definiteness—the clefted constituent is a referential unit before it is modified by the relative clause. The proposed structure thus reflects this important difference between clefts and restrictive relative clauses: in clefts the determiner operates on the clefted constituent noun and this forms the unit that the peripheral cleft clause modifies. For NPs, the situation is reversed. The examples below in Figure 5 highlight this difference and include the NP operator projection.
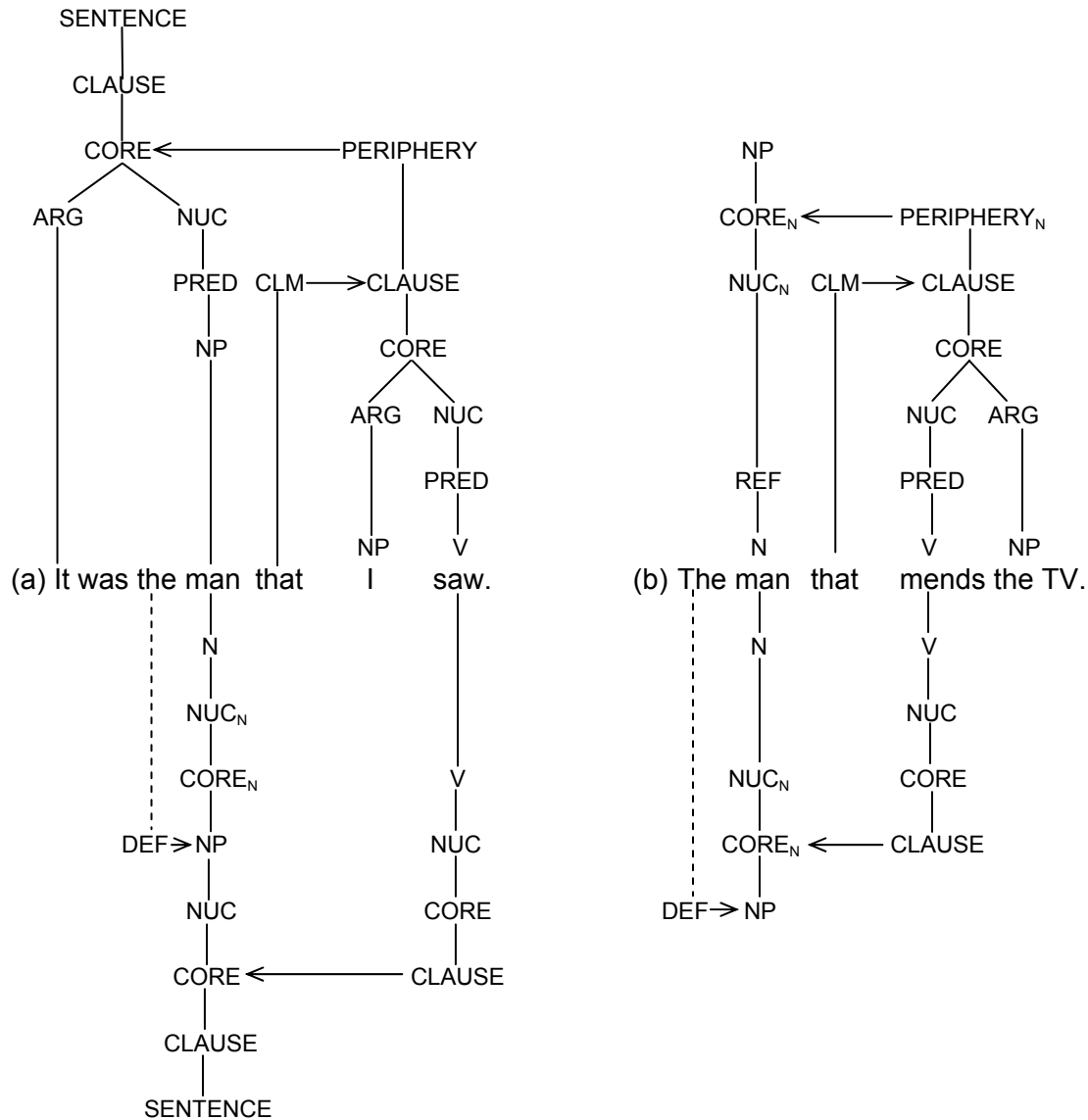
Figure 5: Structure for (a) it-clefts and (b) relative clauses showing operator scope.

Another way this difference is realised is in terms of the presuppositions attached to restrictive relative clause and to *it*-clefts. A sentence such as (11) (a), containing a restrictive relative clause, has (amongst others[5]) the presupposition given in (11) (b) where the referent of *man that mends the TV* is within the presupposition of existence that the definite determiner assumes. The main presupposition for the *it*-cleft in (12) (a), on the other hand, excludes the referent of the clefted constituent *the TV man* and merely presupposes that 'someone' exists that was seen by the speaker.

(11) (a) I saw the man that mends the TV.

(b) Presupposition: There exists (in the world of discourse) one man that mends the TV.

(12) (a) It was the TV man that I saw.

(b) Presupposition: There exists someone that was seen by the speaker.

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[5] Of course, there are other elements to the pragmatic presupposition associated with these sentences—the existence and hearer-familiarity with the referent of John for example.

This is to do with the scope of the definite determiner which has existential conditions that licence its use. As Figure 5 shows, in NPs the head *man* as well as the modifier (the relative clause *that mends the TV*) is within the scope of the determiner and its existential conditions. In clefts, however, only the clefted constituent noun *TV man* is within the scope of that NP determiner—this constituent is the asserted part of the sentence (or the 'value'), and therefore by definition not part of the presupposition (the 'variable').[6] In other words, the relative-type clause is not within the scope of the determiner in the clefted constituent, whereas it is within the scope of the determiner in NPs with restrictive relative clauses. This is thus reflected well by the Role and Reference Grammar structure.[7]

There are arguments in the literature (*e.g.* Hedberg (2000)) for the referential status of the cleft clause or elements within it, based on assumptions about the significance of similarities with other types of specificational sentences which contain two referential units. It is true that *it*-clefts do create a pragmatic presupposition which includes the existence (within the discourse) of a referent, as (13) below illustrates, for which the assertion provides the identity of the referent.

Semantically, the cleft clause creates an open proposition ('I saw x' in the case of (13)) leaving a semantic 'hole' for the clefted constituent to fill. This hole is only referential in the sense that it is then required for something to appear in the sentence to fill that semantic hole.

Pragmatically, on the other hand, the cleft sentence contains the presupposition 'I saw someone'. The content of this presupposition is not to be found solely in the semantic content of the cleft clause without reference to the clefted constituent (as the personhood of *someone* illustrates). This latter type of pragmatic presupposition seems to correspond more closely to what is referred to as the 'variable'. The identity of the referent of the 'looser' pragmatic presupposition 'I saw someone' is given by the content of the clefted constituent (or part of it).

This clarification is often not made in the literature, where pragmatic presuppositions are taken to stand for the semantic content of the cleft clause, and thus stand as evidence for linking the cleft clause with the cleft pronoun.

(13)   Sentence: It was John that I saw.
        LS: $[\mathbf{be}'(\text{John}_i, [\mathbf{see}'(\text{I}, x_i)])]$
        Creates open proposition: 'I saw x'
        Assertion: x = John.
        Pragmatic presupposition: The speaker saw someone. (i.e. such a person exists)
        Pragmatic assertion: 'the someone is John'.

With the primacy of the **be** predicate, the logical structure in Figure 4 highlights the work of the copular verb within this matrix clause (in common with extrapositional accounts). *It*-cleft sentences are thus assigned a **logical structure** similar to the identificational/attributive template given in Van Valin

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[6] This accounts for the fact that proper nouns which are "already defined" (Collins 1991:51) are permitted as antecedents in clefts, but not in restrictive relative clauses.

[7] The situation is more complex with indefinite clefted constituents as these will tend to be interpreted as predicate clefts. In (a), for example, the understanding is that what is being highlighted is the fact that it was a man and not a woman that was seen.

    (a) It was a man that I saw.

Indefinite determiners do not carry the same presupposition of existence as definite determiners. However, in clefts, the cleft clause pragmatically presupposes the existence of something to fit the missing argument (the existence of someone that was seen, in the case of (a)). That presupposition of existence is carried over to the clefted constituent which serves to add information about the referent. This explains why the clefted constituent is already interpreted as existing, and why the indefinite NP is therefore interpreted predicatively.

and LaPolla (1997:115): [**be´** (x, y)]; the cleft clause forms the second argument and the clefted constituent fills the first argument. The semantically-coindexed argument within the cleft clause is represented as 'x' if lexically-unfilled, or as a WH-word if one is used. This reflects the familial similarities mentioned before between *it*-clefts and others which also specify a value for a variable. Declerck (1988) calls these specificational sentences[8]. Such sentences include those such as (13), (14), and (15) which are examples of, respectively, pseudoclefts, reverse pseudoclefts, and 'NP *is* NP' sentences. All these sentences have the function of specifying, or identifying a value for a variable.

> (13) What I want is a Mercedes.
> (14) A Mercedes is what I want.
> (15) The real criminal is Mr. Shrub.

The 'value-variable' approach gives a more accurate picture of the function of the cleft construction. In characterising clefts purely as types of identificational/specificational/copular sentences in the literature (extrapositional analyses), the relationship between the cleft clause and the clefted constituent is often overlooked; however, the function of a cleft construction is a **combination** of the relative clause relationship **and** the information structure properties of the copular matrix clause. The function is not necessarily to highlight or place into focus a particular clefted element, but to highlight, or assert, an exhaustive relationship between the clefted constituent and the cleft clause.[9]

3.3 Cleft pronoun

Several studies in the literature including Davidse (2000) and Hedberg (2000), propose a determiner role for the cleft pronoun, but these two studies in particular diverge in terms of the function of that determiner. Davidse compares *it*-clefts to *there*-clefts and *have*-clefts such as (16) and (17) and suggests the cleft pronoun determiner operates on the clefted constituent as outlined above. Hedberg (2000), on the other hand, compares *it*-clefts with *this*-clefts and *that*-clefts (such as (18) and (19)) and seeks to show the link between the cleft pronoun as determiner and the cognitive status of the cleft clause. The position of the cleft pronoun in the sentence is clearly able to be exploited for different pragmatic, discourse and possibly semantic purposes while it operates as a syntactic dummy argument—participating in question formation and verb agreement with the copula. However, with limited space and such differing opinions in the literature, nothing more will be discussed about the nature of the cleft pronoun in this paper.

> (16) There's John who's causing us trouble.
> (17) We have John who's causing us trouble. (Both from Davidse 2000:1101).
> (18) This was John that I saw.
> (19) That was John that I saw. (Both from Hedberg 2000:892).

3.4 Clefted constituent

A final ingredient of *it*-clefts to be discussed is the clefted constituent. Along with the cleft clause and cleft pronoun, the clefted constituent is the source of differing interpretations and analyses. This element, as the logical structure and the syntactic structure in Figure 4 show, appears to function simultaneously as a semantic, referential argument and syntactic predicate forming the nucleus of the copular matrix clause. It has been argued in some of the literature that in specificational sentences containing two NPs (such as (13)–(15)) which serve to specify or identify a referent, rather than attribute a property to a referent, the copular verb is the predicate of the sentence, taking two arguments (*e.g.* Higgins 1973, Rapoport 1987, Zaring 1996, Carnie 1997, Higginbotham 1987). Van Valin (2003) also adopts this approach, positing the predicate **equate´** for specificational sentences containing two referential NPs (ch2, p15). Gundel (1977) "roughly represents" this distinction as follows:

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[8] They are also variously referred to as identificational and equational or equative.

[9] This is emphasized (using French data) by Rialland, Doetjes & Rebuschi (2002).

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                 S                                    S
        ┌────────┼────────┐                  ┌────────┴────────┐
       NP        │        NP                NP                 VP
                 │                                         ┌────┴────┐
                be                                        be        NP

       (1) Identificational                    (2) Attributive
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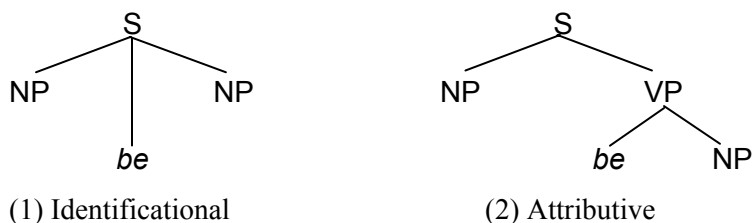
Figure 6: Identificational vs. attributive copular structures (Gundel 1977:546).

On the other hand, some studies such as Heggie (1988), Moro (1997) and Williams (1994) contest that this type of approach "predicts a symmetry which goes against our intuitions about these sentences, and which is called into question by some more subtle properties of copular sentences" (Heycock & Kroch 2002:144). The alternative analysis argues that "where two DPs appear in copular sentences, one of them is semantically and syntactically the predicate, while the other is referential…*the doctor* is the predicate in both [(20) (a) and (b)]" (Adger and Ramchand 2001:2):

       (20) (a) Jenny is the doctor.

           (b) The doctor is Jenny.

There is a large amount of literature on both sides of the issue but, in a sense, neither of these approaches offers a clear answer regarding the status of the clefted constituent in *it*-clefts. Even if one can successfully argue that sentences such as those in (20), as well as (13)–(15), involve equating two NPs, and that the copula verb represents the syntactic and semantic predicate, this argument is inevitably less successful for clefts. In the *it*-cleft construction, as has been shown, there are not two definite referential elements to serve in a simple equational construction—to come somewhere close, the cleft pronoun would have to be coreferential with the cleft clause, an analysis which has problems attached to it, as has been shown.

The opposing view is that the variable NP (or that containing the variable) functions as the semantic and syntactic predicate. The difficulty in applying this to the *it*-cleft construction given in Figure 4 is that here it is the value element, rather than the variable, that is represented as the syntactic predicate.

One possible way of drawing a connection between the seemingly incongruous syntactic and semantic characteristics of the clefted constituent comes from Lambrecht's (1994) concept of pragmatic predicate. As outlined earlier and illustrated in (21) Lambrecht states that in a sentence with argument focus (or, in RRG terms, narrow focus), the "focus is in fact construed as a predicate, …the designatum of…[this element]…is construed simultaneously as an argument on the level of semantics and as a predicate on the level of information structure" (Lambrecht 1994:231).

       (21) Sentence: *It was JOHN that I saw.*

           Presupposition: "I saw x"

           Assertion: "x = John"

           Focus: "John"

           Focus domain: NP

           Pragmatic predicate: *(is) John*

Unlike a narrow focus construction marked by intonation (*e.g. My CAR broke down*), in an *it*-cleft construction the 'is' within the pragmatic predicate appears as the copula verb in the syntactic form of the sentence. The 'aux' label on the copular verb, making it a daughter of the NUC node, reflects its contribution to the interpretation of the clefted constituent as a type of predicate. Thus, in *it*-clefts, which are after all used for pragmatic reasons, as specificational constructions that express narrow focus, the clefted constituent is represented as the syntactic nucleus of the matrix clause in clefts; it is a predicate on the level of information structure though not on the semantic level, a pragmatic rather than a semantic predicate.

4. Conclusion

This paper has introduced some of the issues connected with the study of the *it*-cleft construction. It has highlighted the need for an account that considers the characteristics of both the matrix and the cleft clause as well as the way the two interact. In brief terms, the work of giving a propositional context for the clefted constituent is done in terms of a relative clause-type construction and the role of giving the hearer more information about the variable within the cleft clause is done in terms of a exhaustive, specificational, copular clause.

The structure, meaning and function of *it*-clefts is particularly complex since there is no straightforwardly isomorphic linking between the various elements at the syntactic, semantic and the pragmatic level. It is precisely because of this interrelated complexity that Role and Reference Grammar offers a suitable framework in which to study the construction.

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