

# What does Left Dislocation Syntactically Comprise? Evidence from Late Modern English

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## Abstract

As part of a major project on left dislocation in the recent history of the English language, this paper aims at defining the Left Dislocation phenomenon taking data from a late Modern English corpus as a point of departure. Given that the label LD has not been uniformly applied to the same periphery phenomena across the board in the specialized literature, it is crucial to make clear what I understand and label as LD in order to continue on with functional and pragmatic analyses in my future research. Furthermore, the aim of this paper is to point out several grammatical features (both syntactic and semantic) which have an effect on the conception of the examples retrieved as more or less prototypical examples of LD, or as non-LD. I base this investigation on data taken from two electronic collections containing literary texts from the Britain of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After a previous selection of texts, a corpus of over six hundred thousand words was gathered for each century, adding up to an overall corpus of more than one million two hundred words. All LD tokens here presented have been retrieved through manual search.

## 1. Introduction

The linguistic phenomenon of Left Dislocation (henceforth LD) was initially characterized by Ross (1967: 253) as the fronting of a NP from a clause into the left-most or sentence-initial position, external to a proposition which contains a pronominal copy anaphorically referring back to the fronted NP. Take (1) as an example, where the proform *him* refers back to the constituent *this here boy* which has been dislocated or moved from the object position.

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- (1) My name is Tom Bowling, — and *this here boy*, you look as if you did not know **him** neither, — 'tis like you mayn't. (T.G. Smollett, *Roderick Random*, 15)

According to Van Riemsdijk (1997: 1), Ross's (1967) line of research "was mainly concerned with the 'major' syntactic operations of *wh*-movement, passive, raising, reflexivization etc." For Ross (1973: 553),

[T]he rule of Topicalization [is] a process which is formally almost identical to Left Dislocation, with the exception that while [...] [Left Dislocation] leaves behind a pronoun to mark the position in the sentence that the fronted NP used to occupy, the rule of Topicalization does not.

This paper explores the effect an association between the rule of Topicalisation (henceforth T) and English LD (as defined in Ross 1967) may have on an updated definition of prototypical LD. In addition, this paper tackles several grammatical features associated to the construction in the relevant literature (such as the category of the left-dislocate or illocutionary force) in order to establish their status regarding a prototype of LD.

First of all, I must define LD in order to study its prototypical features and evaluate more or less prototypical instances of the construction. I contend that the term 'left-dislocate' includes any left-field constituent which, within one speaker-turn<sup>1</sup>, deploys a syntactic (referential index) or semantic link with a proform or anaphoric phrase

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<sup>1</sup> The unit 'speaker-turn' is here imported (and adapted for written language) from Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). According to Ford, Fox and Thompson (2003), turns are built through recurrent grammatical and prosodic constructions which the speakers use as a convention. According to Duranti and Ochs (1979: 405), LDs "may be used not only to gain access to the speaking floor but also to block or to reduce the access of others participating in the social interaction". In fact, for Gelyukens (1992), such floor-taking function would be the origin of LD as a construction. From his point of view (1992: 45) "rather than being word order variations, LDs operate on another level altogether: they are a process whereby a speaker starts off with a REF, *without any commitment to what comes later*, and waits for a cue from the hearer in order to add on a PROP" [my emphasis]. From my point of view, when producing an English LD, a speaker self-selects turn and may or not have a clear mind about how to continue.

in the core of the clause to which it is attached, except vocatives, self-correction items and the *as-for* construction. As I see it, vocatives and self-correction items do not contribute to the establishment of cohesive topicality, in the sense of Givón (1983); that is, their main objective is not to endorse a referent in order to prop up its topicality or, in Lambrecht's (1994: 181) words, to "promote the representation of a referent from non-active to active state in the addressee's mind and thus to allow a speaker to code the referent as a preferred topic expression". In the case of the *as-for* construction, the fact that it may appear without the most essential element in LD, namely the resumptive or copy, would be sufficient to set it apart from LD.

First, vocatives are left out of the left-dislocate label on the basis that they refer to directly accessible elements from the interactional context. In Lambrecht's (1996: 277) words, "in the case of vocatives, but not topics, the accessible referent and the addressee are necessarily the same individual". On the other hand, a left-dislocate would be a first- and third-person<sup>2</sup> item which contributes to clause interpretation and whose referent may be observed to persist in discourse after its utterance. According to Biber et al. (1999: 140), "[v]ocatives [such as (2)] are used to single out the addressee of a message", while LDs [such as (3)] would single out a referent in order to ease the interpretation of the coming predication.

- (2) Come, *Dorothy!* **a maid of ten** has got nothing to do with lovers (Besant, *Dorothy Foster*, 25-26)
- (3) *Unhappy woman!* I can only regard **her** as an object of pity! (F. Burney, *Evelina*, 5)

Second, self-correction items such as (4) are not considered instances of LD, since a speaker usually seems to self-select turn and

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<sup>2</sup> Third-person reference favours proper LD effects (referent introduction or foregrounding). However, first person reference would have similar discursive effects in examples such as (i):

- (i) "Papa---and *me*? Have you done nothing for **me**?"  
 "You!"  
 He had not thought of his child.  
 "Papa! Do you think that I have gained naught from you?" (S. Baring-Gould, *In the roar of the sea*, 12)

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have a clear mind on how to continue when he/she produces LD (5). However, in (5) the speaker reformulates the whole sentence and the coreference between *his character* and *he* is accidental. Nevertheless, if the copula *was* were not uttered in (4), LD would take place.

- (4) *His character* was, — **he** loved a jest in his heart — and as he saw himself in the true point of ridicule, [...] (L. Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, 39)
- (5) "*The oar!* We have forgotten **the oar.**" (R.M. Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, 33)

Third, prepositional phrases headed by *as for* have been excluded from the notion of LD given that they are integrated in the following clause as adjuncts and, therefore, they may occur without a proform (see Larsson, 1979: 42), as in (6), which is an essential component of LD. In addition, they may be possible within a construction which Dik (1997: 391) terms 'parenthetical position'. The instances in (7) suggest that the *as-for* construction (7a) behaves similarly to an adjunct (7b), which is also acceptable under such parenthetical environment. However, LD is not possible in this environment (7c).

- (6) *As for the piety of my people*, much might be said and much confessed or allowed. (W. Besant, *Dorothy Foster*, 3)
- (7) a. He doesn't have a clue, as for History, who Hitler and Mao are.  
b. He doesn't have a clue, unfortunately, who Hitler and Mao are.  
c. \*He doesn't have a clue, History, who Hitler and Mao are.

Last, as shown in (8), two different LD processes, namely a semantic relation of metonymy (*his honour - he*) and one of total identity (*your brother - he*), result in ungrammaticality within a sentence. However, the *as-for* construction licenses such a structure as proved in (9) from the corpus.

- (8) \*His honour, *your brother*, **he** will doubtless in some way achieve greatness, as his grandfather before.

- (9) As for his honour, *your brother*, **he** will doubtless in some way achieve greatness, as his grandfather before [...] (W. Besant, *Dorothy Foster*, 32)

## 2. Grammatical aspects which suggest gradiency inside the LD tag

### 2.1. Syntactic function of copy

If LD were conceived as a product of *wh*-movement, just like T, only elements that can be fronted or extracted from the IP would be able to enter a LD construction. In generative analysis, objects may move to the periphery of the CP, while subjects may only move from inside the VP to the Spec IP position (see Haegeman, 2006: 262). Therefore, the fact that the proform occupies an object slot in the core (10), rather than the subject position (11), would suggest that an instance of LD is more prototypical. Conversely, in 61.5% of the examples retrieved from the corpus, the left-detached element shows a clear coreferential relationship with a proform fulfilling the subject position in the following core clause. These data are in line with those calculated by Gregory and Michaelis (2004: 9), who “find that in 167 LDs, from a total of 187, the resumptive pronoun which corefers with the preclausal NP has the grammatical function of subject”. From their point of view, this finding suggests that LDs “ensure that only discourse-active referents appear in the subject role” (2004: 9). Let us take this case in point as one illustration of the several differences between Ross’s (1967) initial conception of the construction in syntactic terms and the one proposed here, which does include cases such as (12):

- (10) *This state of things*; I have thought **it** necessary to premise for the information of the general reader, [...] (S.W. Scott, *Ivanhoe*, 6-7)
- (11) “*Casaubon*, my dear: **he** will be here to dinner; he didn't wait to write more--didn't wait, you know.” (G. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 31)
- (12) He waited to see if the girl herself were affected as she had affected him; but Coquette turned round and said, lightly, “It is a good air, but *your church people* **they** do not sing it. They groan,

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groan, groan all the same air---no counter singing, no music.”  
(W. Black, *A Daughter of Heth*, 79).

### 2.2. Replacement

Although the left-dislocate must be a hanging or non-syntactic element, “in the sense that it does not take part in the predicate-argument structure of the clause” (Gregory and Michaelis, 2004: 3), in the most prototypical instances of LD, i.e. those involving a fronted Object or Subject, the left-dislocate may be expected to more easily replace the proform in the core, as in (10) and (11). Table 1 illustrates a high percentage of replaceable resumptives in the instances retrieved from the corpus. However, replacement is not possible in every case, and thus LD cannot be equalled to T where the fronted element is, in fact, insertable within the clause (*Left-dislocated items I have analysed*).

Table 1: Possibility of direct replacement of resumptive by left-dislocate

Replacement	Yes		No		TOTAL
18th century	69	72.6%	26	27.3%	95
19th century	94	55.9%	74	44%	168
Total	163	61.9%	100	38%	263

### 2.3. Category of dislocate

Since English LD has been often conceived (cf. Ross 1967, Cinque 1990) as the fronting of a NP within clause periphery, instances such as (13) or (14) where a CP and an *if*-clause, respectively, trigger LD may be perceived less prototypical than, for example, (10) or (11).

- (13) Why to be sure, said Cleanthe, *the Man has something of a Notion at Dress*, I confess **it** [...] (F. Coventry, *Pompey the Little*: 26)
- (14) This is too bad of you, McMurdo! he said. *If I guarantee them, that* is enough for you. (A.C. Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, 73)

So that they can be treated as examples of LD, the anaphorical relation between an *if*-clause and the proform in the ensuing clause must imply full identity, as in (14). In other words, the proform must refer to the whole *if*-clause and not only to a component of it. In (15), for instance, the proform only refers to the nominal constituent *her acquaintance* inside the *if*-clause and, in consequence, the construction does not qualify as LD. By contrast, in (16) the proform resumes the whole *if*-clause and the speaker predicates on the whole CP, consequently producing a LD:

- (15) “If *her acquaintance* is so ruinous,” said Cecilia, “I think I had better avoid **it**.” (F. Burney, *Cecilia*, 46)
- (16) “If *my children are silly* I must hope to be always sensible of **it**.” (J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 62)

#### 2.4. Illocutionary force

Since in T the fronted element and the subsequent clause share the same illocutionary force, mood turns out to be another feature that influences the conception of a left-dislocate as more or less integrated into the ensuing clause. Thus, a left-dislocate which shares the illocutionary force of the ensuing clause may be perceived as a more prototypical instance than another left-dislocate which does not. In the data retrieved from the corpus, 50.1% of the instances converge with an ensuing statement pattern ((S)+S). However, the rest of the left-dislocates are either separated by exclamation (E) or question signs (I), i.e. they do not share the same illocutionary features of the subsequent clause:

- (17) *Poor Heathcliff!* Hindley calls **him** a vagabond, and wont let him sit with us, [...] (E. Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, 45)
- (18) “*Dorian Gray?* Is **that** his name?” (O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 5)
- (19) “*Dry-goods!* What are **American dry-goods?**” asked the Duchess, raising her large hands in wonder, and accentuating the verb. (O. Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 56)

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Examples (17) to (19) may be perceived as less prototypical than (10) or (12) above due to punctuation marks which show a different illocutionary force for the detached element. However, as illustrated by examples (20) and (21), in written language punctuation marks do not seem the most reliable indicators for illocutionary force. In fact since, in both (22) and (23) a different reading might be envisioned for the left-detached element in contrast with the core clause.

- (20) “*Poor Cockie,*” said Mr. Berners; “**he** has asked me to dine with him at the Clarendon on Saturday.” (B. Disraeli, *Sybil*, 6)
- (21) Ever drifting down the stream---  
Lingering in the golden gleam---  
*Life*, what is **it** but a dream? (L. Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*, 224)

The different illocutionary patterns observed in (17) to (19), which have not prevented the inclusion of those examples as LD, are the result of various contextual and pragmatic motivations under which LD may take place. In fact, although LD plays the general role of (re)introducing a referent in discourse in order to ease processing, it also plays several other specific discourse functions that may be defined by taking contextual, attitudinal and semantic features into account (see Tizón-Couto 2008, forthcoming).

### 2.5. *Semantics of dislocate-copy*

My concept of LD includes three different types of links between the left-dislocate and the copy in the core clause. This approach is inspired by general textual conceptions such as Halliday and Hasan’s (1976) ‘textual cohesion’, as well as by other definitions for LD, such as Huddleston and Pullum’s (2002: 1408): “[a] dislocated clause has a constituent, usually a NP, located to the left or right of the nucleus of the clause, with an anaphorically linked pronoun *or comparable form* within the nucleus itself” [emphasis mine]. First, a total identity relationship is possible, where the element in the core is a resumptive pronoun or a mere cohesive repetition of the dislocated element:



- (22) *A mere ceremony of marriage*; what more does **it** mean nowadays than that we two agree to live together on the ordinary terms of civilised society? (G. Allen, *The woman who did*, 40)

Second, a metonymy link may trigger LD when the element in the core (usually a full NP with a possessive pronoun as a determiner) expresses a part, quality, ingredient or branch of the left-dislocate:

- (23) Tis eve. *The sun his ardent axle* cools  
In ocean. Dripping geese shake off the pools. (E.S. Barrett, *The Heroine*, 146)

Third, a partial identity may also license an instance of LD, where the element in the core is a full NP or a pronoun that does not share the exact same semantic features:<sup>3</sup>

- (24) *An egg---a bantam's egg*. I am hatching **a very rare sort**. I carry it about everywhere with me, and it will get hatched in less than three weeks. (T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 63)

In a nutshell, left-dislocates which exhibit a total identity relationship with the following proform or anaphoric phrase are liable to be conceived as more suitable elements in a construction such as LD, according to conventional syntactic notions, than those which reveal a metonymic or partial identity relationship. However, as argued by Geluykens (1992: 26), “a syntactic account, which might work for the prototype cases, does not allow us to make sufficient generalizations over syntactically unrelated instances [of LD]”.

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<sup>3</sup> This type of LD would include what Lambrecht (1996: 282) terms ‘unlinked topic construction’ and where, from his point of view, “the TOP position is occupied by a NP which is not anaphorically linked to any argument”:

- (i) La mer<sub>s</sub>, tu vois de le’eau. (François corpus)  
‘The ocean, you see water’. [(27a) in Lambrecht (1996: 282)]

Purposely overlooking strict anaphorical linking, there is a semantic/cohesive relation between *la mer* and *le’eau* that leads us to consider such examples as LD with a partial identity relation.

### 3. Concluding remarks

This paper revisits the concept of LD in English, and relies on functional premises such as cognitive principles or textual cohesion in order to determine the scope of the notion. Several grammatical features associated with the construction in the relevant literature have been discussed – its similarity with Topicalisation, the substitution criterion, the category of the left-dislocate, illocutionary force or the semantics of the relationship between the dislocate and the proposition, among others. The resulting proposal relies on the existence of a prototypical notion of LD which does not reject the inclusion of other less prototypical constructions in the concept. In the vein of Geluykens (1992: 19), I believe this paper has proven, to an extent, that “a formal –in the sense of purely syntactic– description will not suffice, and that LD can only be adequately characterized on a semantic level”.

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