

Session 5 • *It*-clefts

- in the previous sessions, we developed syntactic structures and derivations for
 - specificational copular sentences with a predicate nominal (1a,b)
 - specificational pseudoclefts of two different types (PI SPCs (2a,b), and TC SPCs (3))
 - specificational copular amalgams (exemplified by (4))

(1) a. [TP [DP *that man*] [T=*is* [DP *my best friend*]]]
 b. [TP [DP *my best friend*] [T+RELATOR [RP [DP *that man*] [RELATOR [DP *my best friend*]]]]]

(2) a. [TP [DP *a watermelon*] [T=*is* [DP *what he ate*]]]
 b. [TP [DP *what he ate*] [T+RELATOR [RP [DP *a watermelon*] [RELATOR [DP *what he ate*]]]]]

(3) [RP [CP *what he ate ~~what~~*] [RELATOR=Top=*is* [TP (*he ate*) *a watermelon*]]]

(4) [RP [TP *that's what he ate*] [RELATOR=:=*is* [TP (*he ate*) *a watermelon*]]]

Q how to fit the *it*-cleft into this comprehensive picture?

(5) it is a watermelon that John ate

- like pseudoclefts, *it*-clefts come in two basic varieties: PREDICATIONAL and SPECIFICATIONAL

(6) it was an interesting meeting that I went to last night
 a. PREDICATIONAL — ‘the meeting I went to last night was interesting’
 b. SPECIFICATIONAL — ‘I went to the following last night: an interesting meeting’

- on the SPECIFICATIONAL reading the entire postcopular noun phrase *an interesting meeting* is the focus of the *it*-cleft and supplies new information
- on the PREDICATIONAL reading only the attributive adjective *interesting* seems to supply new information (and, concomitantly, only the adjective is focally stressed): *meeting* is discourse-old in (6a)

- Declerck (1988:158ff.) presents twenty characteristics that (6) on its predicational reading shares with predicational sentences (see also Patten 2008 for discussion of predicational clefts)
- the most structurally salient of these is the distribution of the copula in non-finite contexts (Declerck 1988:171)

(7) a. I consider it (to be) an INTERESTING subject that they are discussing tonight
 b. I consider it *(to be) JOHN who is his best friend

- the predicational *it*-cleft in (7a) does not force the presence of *to be*, which makes it behave on a par with canonical, non-inverted, predicational copular sentences — so *it* in (7a) is the *subject* of the predicate *an INTERESTING subject*
- but in (7b), *to be* is obligatory, just as it is in (10') and (11') of handout 1, repeated below — examples of specificational copular sentences involving Predicate Inversion

- (10) I consider that man (to be) my best friend
 (10') I consider my best friend *(to be) that man (* on a specificational reading)
- (11) I consider the children (to be) the biggest problem
 (11') I consider the biggest problem *(to be) the children

→ the syntax of SPECIFICATIONAL *it*-clefts involves Predicate Inversion — the inverting predicate is *it*
 → this already gives us an important ingredient of the syntax of English *it*-clefts: *it* is structurally represented as the PREDICATE of a small clause (cf. also Cheng & Downing 2008 on Zulu clefts), undergoing Predicate Inversion¹

- (8) a. $[_{RP} [_{\text{Subject}} \text{VALUE}] [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} [_{\text{Predicate}} \textit{it}]]]$
 b. $[_{TP} \textit{it} [_{T'} T+\text{RELATOR} [_{RP} [_{\text{Subject}} \text{VALUE}] [_{R'} \text{RELATOR} [_{\text{Predicate}} \#]]]]]$

- Declerck (1988): there are three different types of SPECIFICATIONAL *it*-clefts, on a par with the existence of three different types of SPECIFICATIONAL pseudoclefts [see Erades (1962), Prince (1978), Hedberg (2000), Huber (2002), Doetjes, Rebuschi & Rialland (2004)]

(9) *types of SPECIFICATIONAL pseudoclefts*

- a. CONTRASTIVE or STRESSED-FOCUS PSEUDOCLEFTS
 what broke the camel's back? — what broke the camel's back was a straw
 — a straw was what broke the camel's back
- b. CONTINUOUS-TOPIC PSEUDOCLEFTS
 do you know Mary's book? — yes, in fact Mary's book is what got me interested in clefts
- c. DISCONTINUOUS or ALL-NEW or BROAD-FOCUS PSEUDOCLEFTS
 those apples are good, aren't they? — so they are! what keeps me from eating all of them is that mother would be furious if I left none for the others

(10) *types of SPECIFICATIONAL it-clefts*

- a. CONTRASTIVE or STRESSED-FOCUS *IT*-CLEFTS
 what broke the camel's back? — it was a straw that broke the camel's back
- b. CONTINUOUS-TOPIC *IT*-CLEFTS
 do you know Mary's book? — yes, in fact it was Mary's book that got me interested in clefts
- c. DISCONTINUOUS or ALL-NEW or BROAD-FOCUS *IT*-CLEFTS
 those apples are good, aren't they? — so they are! it's the fact that mother would be furious if I left none for the others that keeps me from eating all of them

→ it is important to emphasise that all three subtypes of SPECIFICATIONAL *it*-clefts behave on a par with respect to copula distribution: just like *to be* is obligatory in (7b), a contrastive or stressed-focus *it*-cleft, it is also obligatory in (11) and (12)

¹ In English *it*-clefts, the pro-predicate *it* MUST invert with its subject (the value/focus): it cannot stay *in situ*. This is not a universal property of *it*-clefts, however: as Den Dikken (2013) demonstrates, *it*-clefts in other Germanic languages allow the equivalent of *it* to remain in its base position.

- (11) A: do you know Mary?
 B: yes, in fact I consider it *(to be) Mary who got me interested in clefts
- (12) A: those apples are good, aren't they?
 B: so they are! it seems *(to be) the fact that mother would be furious if I left none for the others that keeps me from eating all of them

→ as a family, therefore, SPECIFICATIONAL *it*-clefts behave like other specificational copular sentences; their derivation systematically involves Predicate Inversion, as in (8)

• of the three major constituents of the *it*-cleft, the one that is without a doubt the most elusive is the *that/wh*-clause

→ the *that/wh*-clause of *it*-clefts is a relative clause: there are a number of significant parallels between the *that/wh*-clause of *it*-clefts and restrictive relative clauses

(i) in many cases, the *that/wh*-clause of *it*-clefts can be introduced by either a *wh*-element or *that*, as is also the case in the typical (non-subject) restrictive relative clause

(ii) in Dutch and German *it*-clefts with the demonstrative pronoun (D *dat*, G *das* 'that') as the value, just as in restrictive relative clauses headed by *dat/das*, the operator in the relative clause is *wat/was* 'what' rather than *dat/das* 'd-pronoun' (*dass es DAS ist was/*das mir Spaß macht* 'that it that is what/d-pronoun me pleasure makes, i.e., that it is that which gives me pleasure' — Huber 2002:79; cf. *das was/*das mir Spaß macht* 'that which gives me pleasure'), whereas in *it*-clefts and headed relatives with other pronominal VALUES/heads the relative clause is always introduced by a d-pronoun
 [in this context, note also the Dutch proverbial *it*-clefts *het zijn niet allen koks die lange messen dragen* 'it isn't all cooks who(=d-pronoun) carry long knives' and *het is niet alles goud wat er blinkt* 'it isn't all gold what there glitters, i.e., all that glitters isn't gold']

(iii) in (Cypriot) Greek clefts (see Gryllia & Lekakou 2007), 'we get the same pattern of resumption in the *pu*-clause [of an *it*-cleft] as we do in [restrictive and free] relative clauses': impossible with accusative arguments, obligatory with non-arguments

→ yet besides these non-trivial parallels between garden-variety restrictive relatives and the *that/wh*-clause of *it*-clefts, there are a significant number of ways in which the two diverge quite strikingly

• integrating observations by many others before him, Declerck (1988:152, fn. 4) shows that the relative clause of a specificational *it*-cleft 'does not behave like a genuine restrictive relative clause in several respects'

→ he mentions six respects in which the relative clause of *it*-clefts differs from a garden-variety restrictive relative clause; I will focus on just one of these (for lack of time; see Den Dikken 2013 for further discussion): (13)

(13) the relative clause of an *it*-cleft must always be clause-final

- (14) a. dat het JAN <*die zojuist belde> was <✓die zojuist belde> (Dutch)
 that it Jan who just called was who just called
 b. dat JAN <*die zojuist belde> het <*die zojuist belde> was <✓die zojuist belde>
 that Jn who just called it who just called was who just called

→ by analysing the *that/wh*-clause as the complement of the copula (*à la* É. Kiss 1998), we could connect (14) to obligatory extraposition of complement clauses to V in Dutch — BUT in English the *that/wh*-clause of *it*-clefts must also extrapose (Reeve 2007), while V-complement clauses need not

Q are there any contexts of obligatory relative clause extraposition (outside the realm of *it*-clefts)?
→ RIGHT DISLOCATION

- (15) a. it was an explosion, what Bill heard
b. it's apples, what I have enough of
c. it was Alice, the one who just had the baby
d. it was a model train, what I bought
d'. it was a model train {that/which} I bought

- (16) a. dat het een explosie <*wat Bill gehoord heeft> was, <✓ wat Bill gehoord heeft> (Dutch)
b. dat het appels <*waar ik genoeg van heb> zijn, <✓ waar ik genoeg van heb>
c. dat het Alice <*degene die net een baby heeft gekregen> was, <✓ degene die net een baby heeft gekregen>
d. dat het een modeltrein <*wat ik gekocht heb> was, <✓ wat ik gekocht heb>
d'. dat het een modeltrein <*die ik gekocht heb> was <✓ die ik gekocht heb>

→ the examples in (15) are from Gundel (1977), who takes them to be the source for *it*-clefts; the examples in (16) are their Dutch renditions

→ Gundel's (1977) idea that the relative clause in *it*-clefts is in the same structural position as right-dislocated constituents, while at first contradicted by the absence in clefts of the prosody typical of right-dislocation, seems to be supported by the fact that the relative clause of clefts must indeed be radically final, like right-dislocated constituents

- Koster (2000) proposes an 'asyndetic specification' approach to rightward extraposition phenomena, with the right-peripheral constituent introduced as the complement of a null conjunction ': ' that heads a phrase whose specifier is the portion of the sentence that the right-peripheral constituent combines with

→ recall the discussion of *John built something beautiful, a golden igloo* in session 1 (ex. (39) there)
→ for relative clauses, extraposed as well as *in situ*, Koster proposes a parallel account

- (17) a. Jan heeft een vrouw die alles wist ontmoet (Dutch)
Jan has a woman who everything knows met
[:_P [_{DP} een vrouw] [: [die alles wist]]]
b. Jan heeft een vrouw ontmoet die alles wist
Jan has a woman met who everything knew
[:_P [_{AgpOP} een vrouw ontmoet] [: [die alles wist]]]
c. een vrouw heeft Jan ontmoet die alles wist
a woman has Jan met who everything knew
[:_P [_{CP} een vrouw heeft Jan ontmoet] [: [die alles wist]]]

→ recall from the discussion in session 1 that Koster's proposal allows the specifying coordination structure to be unbalanced: the two conjuncts in (17a–c) are of different sizes and categories
→ in session 1, we followed O'Neill (2013) in updating Koster's analysis by balancing the coordination (exploiting ellipsis)

