

Pseudo-clefting is a process that transforms a simple sentence by taking out a phrase, turning the rest of the sentence into a kind of relative clause and putting the two pieces back together with the verb *be* in between. For example, the simple sentence in (1) can be pseudo-clefted to yield the complex sentence in (2):

- (1) Sally bought a teapot.  
 (2) [What Sally bought] was [a tea pot].

(2) is a pseudo-cleft formed on the direct object of (1), *a tea pot*. Note that *a tea pot* occurs after the past tense form of *be*, namely *was*, and before *was* we find something that looks like a relative clause that contains the rest of (1): *What Sally bought*.

By assumption, pseudo-clefting can only target constituents, specifically phrasal constituents (NP, PP, VP, S). Hence we can use pseudo-clefting to test for phrasal constituents. If, for instance, we are interested in determining the constituent structure of (3)

- (3) The cat drank the milk.

we can use pseudo-clefting to do so as follows:

To test whether *the milk* is a constituent, we perform pseudo-clefting on *the milk* (just like we did on *a tea pot* in (2) above). The result is (4):

- (4) [What the cat drank] was [the milk].

The sentence in (4) is grammatical, showing that in (3) *the milk* is a constituent. Likewise we can test for whether *the cat* is a constituent with the pseudo-cleft in (5). Notice that when the NP being pseudo-clefted refers to an animate being, we use the *wh*-word *who* rather than *what* (just as we would if we were asking a question) and some speakers also prefer to include *the one* in front of the relative clause when pseudo-clefting on an animate NP.

- (5) [(The one) who drank milk] was [the cat].

Since (5) is grammatical, we have evidence that *the cat* is a constituent of (3). Pseudo-clefting can also be used to test for constituents that are not NPs, including a VP. When testing for a VP, the relative clause is formed with *what* and a finite form of the verb *do* shows up inside the relative clause:

- (6) [What the cat did] was [drink the milk].

Also note that *drink* shows up in its bare form, without any tense morphology. From the grammaticality of (6) we infer that in (3) *drank the milk* is a constituent. Let us finally look at some examples where the test yields a negative outcome, i.e. we perform pseudo-clefting on some subpart of (3), but the resulting sentence is ungrammatical.

Suppose we want to test whether *cat drink the milk* is a constituent. We would then put *cat drink the milk* after a finite form of *be* and form a relative clause out of the rest of (3) and put that before *was*. This yields either (7), with *did* in the relative clause, or (8), without *did* in the relative clause:

- (7) \*[What the did] was [cat drink the milk].  
 (8) \*[What the] was [cat drink the milk].

The fact that (7) and (8) are ungrammatical, is evidence that *cat drink the milk* is not a constituent. Similarly, we can test whether in (3) *the cat drink* is a constituent with the pseudo-cleft in (9):

- (9) \*[What did the milk] was [the cat drink]

The ungrammaticality of (9) indicates that *the cat drink* is not a phrasal constituent of (3).