

Specificational clauses and clefts

Line Mikkelsen, UC Berkeley

27. Jahrestagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Sprachwissenschaft.
Köln, February 23, 2005

Three kinds of copular clauses:

- (1) a. The one who broke the vase was Robert. [(Regular) specificational clause]
b. The culprit was Robert.
- (2) a. It was Robert. [Truncated cleft]
b. That was Robert.
- (3) a. It was Robert who broke the vase. [(Full) cleft]
b. That was Robert who broke the vase.

Hypothesis All three are specificational clauses in the sense that they involve a property-denoting subject and an entity-denoting post-copular element (Mikkelsen 2004). They differ in

1. the form of the subject:
non-pronominal (1) vs. pronominal (2-3), and
2. how the pronoun it resolved:
anaphoric to (non-)linguistic context (2) vs. cataphoric to cleft clause (3)

Inspiration Percus (1997), Büring (1998), Hedberg (2000), Geist (2003)¹

Note on data (1)–(3) vs. (4)–(6):

- (4) a. The one who broke the vase was from Holland/rather clumsy. [Predicational clause]
b. The culprit was from Holland/rather clumsy.
- (5) a. It was a shame. [Predicational clause w. pronominal subject]
b. That was a shame
- (6) It was a shame that the vase broke. [Predicational clause w. extraposition of CP “subject”]
(cf. That the vase broke was a shame.)

Structure of talk

1. Semantic composition of regular specificational clauses
2. Truncated clefts
3. Full clefts
4. Some potential advantages and some challenges

¹Also Poutsma (1916:732), Jespersen (1958:149), Prince (1978), Declerck (1983:223–240), Nølke (1984), Merchant (1998:§4.1), Ward et al. (2003), Bachrach (2003:chpt. 4).

1 Regular specificational clauses

1.1 Semantic composition

Standard view of predicational copular clauses Subject is referential, post-copular element is predicative:

$$(7) \quad \begin{array}{ccc} \textit{Robert} & \textit{is} & \textit{the culprit} \\ \downarrow & & \downarrow \\ r & & \lambda x.\textit{culprit}'(x) \end{array}$$

- copula lets predicative element apply to referential element (Partee 1986): $\lambda x.\textit{culprit}'(x)(r) = \textit{culprit}'(r)$

Controversial view of specification clauses Inverted predication, i.e. subject is predicative (possibly a nominalized property), post-copular element is referential:

$$(8) \quad \begin{array}{ccc} \textit{The culprit} & \textit{is} & \textit{Robert} \\ \downarrow & & \downarrow \\ \lambda x.\textit{culprit}'(x) & & r \end{array}$$

1.2 Evidence from pronominalization

Starting assumption pronominalization is sensitive to the semantic type of its antecedent.²

- *she* and *he* are used to pronominalize referential DPs:

$$(9) \quad \textbf{The translator} \text{ just walked in. } \textbf{She/He} \text{ looks tired.}$$

- *it* and *that* are used to pronominalize non-referential DPs, including predicative DPs:

$$(10) \quad \text{Sally is } \textbf{the director of the campaign. It} \text{ is a prestigious position.} \quad [\text{cf. Doron (1988:299)}]$$

$$(11) \quad \text{They say that your sister is } \textbf{a tough negotiator} \text{ and she is } \textbf{that.} \quad [\text{cf. Ross (1969:357)}]$$

Idea Use pronominalization to probe the semantic type of copular subjects.

- Three environments:
 - Tag questions
 - Left dislocation structures
 - Question–answer pairs

²See Doron (1988:282–286), Engdahl (2001:132–133), Heggie (1988:67–71), Jespersen (1927:123–124), Kuno (1972:355–363), Mikkelsen (2002, 2003, 2004: chapter 4), Moro (1997:71–75), Partee (1972), Schlenker (2003:169–173), and Zamparelli (2000:17–18) for data and discussion.

1.2.1 Tag questions

The form of the pronoun in a tag question is determined by the subject of the tagged clause.³

- (12) The lead actress in that movie lives in Belmont, do(es)n't {**she**/*he/*it/*they/*we}?

Predicational copular clause: *she* → referential subject.

- (13) The lead actress in that movie is Swedish, isn't **she**/*it?

Specificational clause: *it* → predicative subject:

- (14) The lead actress in that movie is Ingrid Bergman, isn't **it**?

1.2.2 Left dislocation

Left dislocation leaves resumptive pronoun inside CP:

- (15) My father, **he**'s lived here all his life. [cf. Ross (1967:235, ex. 6.136)]

Use subject left dislocation to probe semantic type of copular subjects (cf. Diderichsen (1968:178); Rullmann and Zwart (1996)):

Predicational copular clause: *she* → referential subject.

- (16) The lead actress in that movie, **she**/*it/*that is Swedish.

Specificational clause: *it, that* → predicative subject:

- (17) The lead actress in that movie, **it/that** is Ingrid Bergman.

1.2.3 Question–Answer Pairs

- (18) Q: What nationality is the lead actress in that movie?
A: **She**/*it/*that is Swedish. [Predicational]

- (19) Q: Who is the lead actress in that movie?
A: {**It/That**} is Ingrid Bergman. [Specificational]

Observation The specificational answer in (19) looks like a truncated cleft!

- (20) It's Ingrid Bergman ~~who is the lead actress in that movie~~.

³Bolinger (1957:17–22, 116–122; 1975:279); Bowers (1976:237); Bresnan (1994:97); Jespersen (1924:198, 302, 323); Kay (2002:§4); McCawley (1998:251); Quirk et al. (1985:§11.8).

2 Truncated clefts

Idea Truncated clefts are not clefts at all, but specificational clauses with a pronominal subject:

(21) It's Ingrid Bergman.

(22) It's Ingrid Bergman ~~who is the lead actress in that movie~~.

- subject is property-type pronoun requiring property-type antecedent

Antecedent provided by linguistic context

(23) Q: Who is the lead actress in that movie?
A: {**It/That**} is Ingrid Bergman.

- Salient property: being the lead actress in that movie

(24) Context: *Upon coming back to your hotel, you learn from the receptionist that one of your accomplices has had an accident down at the harbor. You are supposed to go to see him or her in the hospital, but in the hectic course of events the receptionist forgot to take down the name of your friend, and since there is a bunch of you, it is unclear which of your friends is the actual victim. You call your house mate to tell her what happened and you say:*

A friend of mine had an accident. **It might be Susan.** (Büring 1998:36–7)

- salient property: having an accident

Antecedent provided by non-linguistic antecedent:

- There is a knock on the door, and I say:

(25) That might be Susan. (cf. Büring (1998:37, ex. (6)))

- Salient property: knocking on the door

- Upon seeing the pieces of a vase lying on the floor, I might say:

(26) It was probably Robert/the cat.

- OR

(27) It wasn't me!

- Salient property: being responsible for breaking the vase

Note 1 Can the notion of a salient property can be seen as a special case of Prince's (1986) notion of a (salient) OPEN PROPOSITION?

Note 2 Hedberg (2000) argues that the use of *it* vs. *that* as the subject pronoun is determined by the givenness (or cognitive status) of the antecedent, with respect to the GIVENNESS HIERARCHY of Gundel et al. (1993).

2.1 Two obvious alternatives

1. subject of TC is expletive (Büring 1998)
2. subject of TC is referential (Hedberg (2000), Ward et al. (2003))

Expletive analysis accords with many analyses of full *it*-clefts,⁴ but ignores the fact that *that* cannot be an expletive in other contexts (Hedberg 2000:892):

- (28) ***That** seems to me that you are wrong. (Hedberg 2000:3a)
(29) ***That** is snowing. (Hedberg 2000:3b)

Referential analysis likens TCs to equatives:

- (30) She is Susan.
(31) That woman is Susan.
- BUT unlike *she* and *that woman*, *it* and *that* cannot normally refer to people:
- (32) a. ***It** voted.
b. ***That** voted.
- (33) a. **She** voted.
b. **That woman** voted.
- (34) a. *I gave the keys to **it**.
b. *I gave the keys to **that**.
- (35) a. I gave the keys to **her**.
b. I gave the keys to **that woman**.
- (36) **It** is from Sweden. ≠ **She** is from Sweden.
(37) **That** is from Sweden. ≠ **That woman** is from Sweden.

Moreover Equatives differ from TCs wrt.:

- Pronominalization (Higgins 1979:283):⁵
- (38) That is Susan, isn't {**it**/*she}?
(39) That woman is Susan, isn't {*it/**she**}?

- Non-restrictive modifiers:

- (40) *That, who everybody can see clearly, is Susan.
(41) That woman, who everybody can see clearly, is Susan.

⁴Including those of Chomsky (1977), Delin (1989), Heggie (1988), Kiss (1998), Rochemont (1986), and Williams (1980).

⁵While no speaker variation has been reported for the tag in (38), some speakers accept *it* in the tag in (39) (the '*' on *it* in (39) represents Higgins' judgement).

2.2 Anaphoric subject vs. Ellipsis

Anaphoric subject analysis

- What you hear is what there is:

(42) It's Ingrid Bergman.

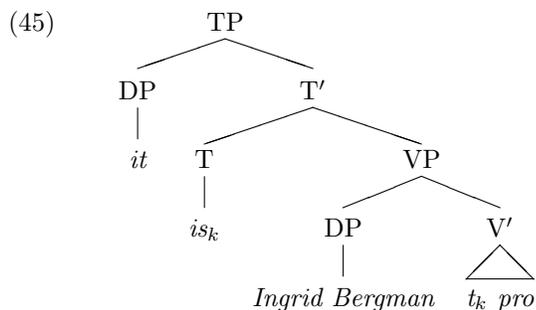
Ellipsis analyses: deletion or null pronominal

- Deletion: Full syntactic cleft structure, but *wh*-clause is not pronounced.

(43) It's Ingrid Bergman ~~who is the lead actress in that movie.~~

- Null pronominal: predicative null pronominal in place of *wh*-clause (Büring 1998:43ff)

(44) It's Ingrid Bergman $pro_{(e,t)}$



Question Can the three be teased apart?

- Hankamer and Sag (1976): deletion processes cannot be pragmatically controlled, they must have syntactic antecedent.

- (46) seems unproblematic for deletion account (granting *who*):

(46) A friend of mine had an accident. It could be my best friend ~~who had an accident~~

- But (47)–(49) argue against deletion:

– There is a knock on the door, and I say:

(47) That might be Susan. (cf. Büring (1998:37, ex. (6)))

– Salient property: knocking on the door

– Upon seeing the pieces of a vase lying on the floor, I might say:

(48) It was probably Robert/the cat.

– OR

(49) It wasn't me!

– Salient property: being responsible for breaking the vase

- Even if we set aside (47)–(49), the deletion hypothesis runs into trouble with examples like (50)

(50) Carla heard the car coming before it topped the little rise in the road that around here they call a hill. **It's her**, she thought. Mrs. Jamieson — Sylvia — home from her holiday in Greece.⁶

- there is no surface syntactic antecedent for the missing cleft clause.

Interim conclusion Truncated clefts do not involve deletion.

- Overt and null pronominals may both be pragmatically controlled (cf. the treatment of Null Complement Anaphora in H&S 76).
- Hence the facts above do not distinguish property-anaphoric subject (42) from expletive subject + VP-internal null property anaphor(44/(45))
- However, the null pronominal analysis has two drawbacks:
 1. posits new null element
 2. must account for why *that* can be an expletive only in the context of a (truncated) cleft.

Tentative conclusion The property-anaphoric subject analysis seems preferable to the expletive subject + VP-internal null property anaphor analysis.

A speculation It might be possible to distinguish the two analyses in terms of their predictions about the possible interpretation of (52) as an answer to (51), cf. the full cleft in (53):

(51) Who left first and who left second?

(52) It was Frank and Susan.

(53) It was Frank who left first and Susan who left second.

3 Full clefts

(54) It might be Susan who is knocking on the door.

(55) That might be Susan who is knocking on the door.

Idea Here too *it* and *that* are property-denoting, but cataphoric to the cleft clause.⁷

The outline of an analysis

- Cleft clause is semantically predicative (standard analysis of relative clauses)
- Cleft clause does not restrictively modify clefted element (which can be names or pronouns)
- Instead it instantiates the property variable introduced by the subject *it/that*.

Challenge How to do this compositionally!

- Percus (1997): cleft clauses derive from regular specificational clause structure by
 - extraposition of CP from complex subject: [TP [DP the 0 [CP OP_i ... t_i]] be DP]
 - spell out of [the 0] as *it*

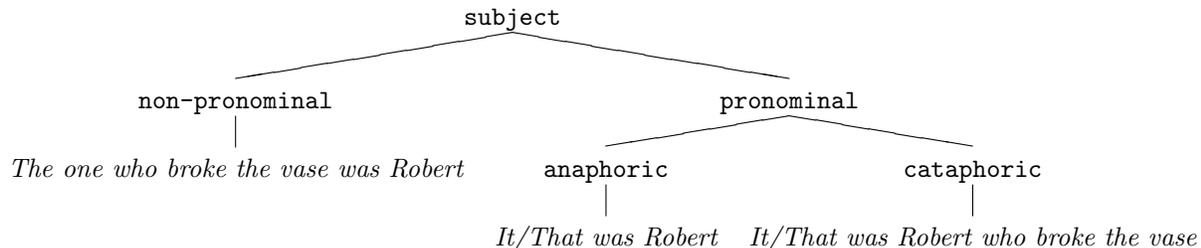
⁶Opening lines of Alice Munroe's "Runaway", published in *The New Yorker*, August 11, 2003, p. 63.

⁷This places my proposal in the class of 'extraposition' analyses of clefts, as opposed to the class of 'expletive' analyses (Hedberg 2000:907–912).

4 Advantages and challenges

Possible advantages

- Family of specificational clauses structured by subject properties:



- Analogous referential subject paradigm:

(56) **The new chancellor** didn't last long. [non-pronominal]

(57) **She** didn't last long. [pronominal, anaphoric]

(58) **She** didn't last long, the new chancellor [pronominal, cataphoric]

- Uniform focus distribution:

Cleft *That/It* BE DP_{focus} *wh-* ... (Kiss 1998)⁸

Truncated Cleft: *That/It* BE DP_{focus} (Hedberg 2000)

Specificational clause: DP BE DP_{focus} (Higgins 1979)

- More coherent assumptions about *that*:⁹

– *that can*:

- * denote inanimate entities
- * denote properties

– *that can not*

- * be an expletive
- * denote humans

Challenges

- Coordination in clefts:

(59) It was Robert who broke the vase and Frank who broke the plate.

- Is the inverted-predication analysis of specificational subjects too simplistic? (Cf. objections in Heycock and Kroch (1999) and suggestion in Geist (2003) that specificational subjects denote nominalized functions.)

However Even if the specific semantic analysis of specificational clauses assumed here cannot be maintained, it seems that the proposed unification with clefts (truncated and full) can be carried over, since the key observation linking them together is the use of *it* and *that* to both refer back to specificational subjects and as subjects of clefts. Thus the proposed unification of specificational clauses, truncated and full clefts still stands.

⁸But see Prince (1978) and Hedberg (2000) for important qualifications to this generalization.

⁹We also need to acknowledge propositional *that* cf. Asher (1993:225ff).

References

- Asher, N. (1993). *Reference to Abstract Objects in Discourse*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Bachrach, A. (2003). Demonstratives in Hebrew and French. Master's thesis, Paris 7.
- Bolinger, D. L. (1957). Interrogative structures of American English. *American Dialect Society* 28, 1–184.
- Bolinger, D. L. (1975). *Aspects of Language* (2nd ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Bowers, J. (1976). On surface structure grammatical relations and the structure preserving hypothesis. *Linguistic Analysis* 2, 225–242.
- Bresnan, J. (1994). Locative inversion and the architecture of universal grammar. *Language* 70(1), 72–131.
- Büring, D. (1998). Identity, modality and the candidate behind the wall. In D. Strohovitch and A. Lawson (Eds.), *Proceedings of SALT VIII*, pp. 36–54. Ithaca: Cornell University.
- Chomsky, N. (1977). On wh-movement. In P. Culicover, T. Wasow, and A. Akmajian (Eds.), *Formal Syntax*, pp. 71–133. New York: Academic Press.
- Declerck, R. (1983). 'It is Mr. Y' or 'He is Mr. Y'? *Lingua* 59, 209–246.
- Delin, J. (1989). *Cleft Constructions in Discourse*. Ph. D. thesis, University of Edinburgh.
- Diderichsen, P. (1968). *Elementær Dansk Grammatik* (3rd ed.). Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Doron, E. (1988). The semantics of predicate nominals. *Linguistics* 26, 281–301.
- Engdahl, E. (2001). Versatile parasitic gaps. In P. W. Culicover and P. M. Postal (Eds.), *Parasitic Gaps*, pp. 127–145. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Geist, L. (2003). Predication and equation in copular clauses: The syntax–semantics interface. Ms. ZAS, to appear in a Kluwer volume in the SLAP series, edited by Ileana Comorovski.
- Gundel, J., N. Hedberg, and R. Zacharski (1993). Cognitive status and the form of referring expressions in discourse. *Language* 69, 274–307.
- Hankamer, J. and I. A. Sag (1976). Deep and surface anaphora. *Linguistic Inquiry* 7(3), 391–428.
- Hedberg, N. (2000). The referential status of clefts. *Language* 76(4), 891–920.
- Heggie, L. (1988). *The Syntax of Copular Structures*. Ph. D. thesis, USC.
- Heycock, C. and A. Kroch (1999). Pseudocleft connectedness: Implications for the LF interface level. *Linguistic Inquiry* 30(3), 365–397.
- Higgins, R. F. (1979). *The Pseudo-cleft Construction in English*. New York: Garland.
- Jespersen, O. (1924). *The Philosophy of Grammar*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. [Reprinted in 1992].
- Jespersen, O. (1927). *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, Volume III (Syntax). København: Munksgaard. [Reprinted by Allen & Unwin 1954].
- Jespersen, O. (1958). *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, Volume VII. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Kay, P. (2002). English subjectless tagged sentences. *Language* 78(3), 453–581.
- Kiss, K. É. (1998). Identificational focus versus information focus. *Language* 74(2), 245–273.
- Kuno, S. (1972). Some properties of non-referential noun phrases. In R. Jakobson and S. Kawamoto (Eds.), *Studies in General and Oriental Linguistics. Presented to S. Hattori on Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, pp. 348–373. Tokyo: TEC.

- McCawley, J. D. (1998). *The Syntactic Phenomena of English* (2nd ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Merchant, J. (1998). ‘Pseudosluicing’: Elliptical clefts in Japanese and English. In A. Alexiadou, N. Fuhrhop, P. Law, and U. Kleinhenz (Eds.), *ZAS Working Papers in Linguistics 10*, pp. 88–112. Berlin: Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft.
- Mikkelsen, L. (2002). Two types of definite description subjects. In M. Nissim (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 7th ESSLLI student session*, Trento, Italy, pp. 141–153.
- Mikkelsen, L. (2003). En typeteoretisk analyse af kopulakonstruktioner. In P. J. Henrichsen and H. Prebensen (Eds.), *Sprogvidenskab og Matematik*, pp. 128–142. København: DJØF’s Forlag.
- Mikkelsen, L. (2004). *Specifying Who: On the Structure, Meaning, and Use of Specificational Copular Clauses*. Ph. D. thesis, University of California, Santa Cruz.
- Moro, A. (1997). *The Raising of Predicates: Predicative Noun Phrases and the Theory of Clause Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nølke, H. (1984). Clefting in Danish? *NYS (Nydanske Studier & Almen Kommunikationsteori) 14*, 72–111.
- Partee, B. (1986). Ambiguous pseudoclefts with unambiguous *be*. In S. Berman, J. Choe, and J. McDonough (Eds.), *Proceedings of NELS 16*, pp. 354–366. Amherst, MA: GLSA.
- Partee, B. H. (1972). Opacity, coreference and pronouns. In D. Davidson and G. Harman (Eds.), *Semantics of Natural Language*, pp. 415–441. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Percus, O. (1997). Prying open the cleft. In K. Kusumoto (Ed.), *Proceedings of NELS 27*, Amherst, MA, pp. 337–351. GLSA.
- Poutsma, H. (1916). *A Grammar of Late Modern English. Part II: The Parts of Speech. Section I, B: Pronouns and numerals*. Groningen: P. Noordhoff.
- Prince, E. (1978). A comparison of WH-clefts and *it*-clefts in discourse. *Language 54*(4), 883–906.
- Prince, E. (1986). On the syntactic marking of presupposed open propositions. In A. Farley, P. Farley, and K.-E. McCullough (Eds.), *Papers from the Parasession on Pragmatics and Grammatical Theory*, pp. 208–222. 22nd Regional Meeting, Chicago Linguistic Society.
- Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, and J. Svartvik (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.
- Rochemont, M. (1986). *Focus in Generative Grammar*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ross, J. R. (1967). *Constraints on Variables in Syntax*. Ph. D. thesis, MIT, Cambridge, MA. [Reproduced by the Indiana University Linguistics Club, 1968].
- Ross, J. R. (1969). Adjectives as noun phrases. In D. A. Reibel and S. A. Shane (Eds.), *Modern Studies in English. Readings in Transformational Grammar*, pp. 352–60. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Rullmann, H. and J.-W. Zwart (1996). On saying *Dat*. In R. Jonkers, E. Kaan, and A. Wiegel (Eds.), *Language and Cognition 5. Yearbook 1995 of the Research Group of Theoretical and Experimental Linguistics of the University of Groningen*, pp. 179–194. Groningen: University of Groningen.
- Schlenker, P. (2003). Clausal equations (a note on the connectivity problem). *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory 21*(1), 157–214.
- Ward, G., B. J. Birner, and J. P. Kaplan (2003). Epistemic *Would*, open propositions, and truncated clefts. Paper delivered at the Workshop on Conditional and Unconditional Modality at the 15th European Summer School in Logic, Language, and Information in Vienna, Austria, on August 29.

Williams, E. (1980). Predication. *Linguistic Inquiry* 11(1), 203–238.

Zamparelli, R. (2000). *Layers in the determiner phrase*. New York: Garland.

Line Mikkelsen

Department of Linguistics

University of California, Berkeley

1203 Dwinelle Hall, CA 94720-2650

mikkelsen@berkeley.edu

<http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~mikkelse/>