

## Chapter 5

### Topic-Clause Clefts

In the next two chapters, the discussion shifts from the structure of clefts to their function. The claim will be defended that two pragmatic subtypes of clefts can be distinguished: a ‘topic-clause’ cleft, as in (1), in which the cleft clause expresses the topic, and a comment-clause cleft, as in (2), in which the cleft clause expresses part of the comment.

- (1) JM: I want to ask this question: Why is this agreement so bad? I ask you.  
JG: Because our whole intention was to bring some form of democracy there; our intention was to make the Sandinistas cry uncle. **It is the contras who have cried uncle.** [McLaughlin Group-3/25/88]
- (2) ‘Just so. And of course, we’ve only got his version of the niece and the nurse—and he obviously had what the Scotch call ta’en a scunner at the nurse. We mustn’t lose sight of her, by the way. She was the last person to be with the old lady before her death, and **it was she who administered that injection.**’  
‘Yes, yes—but the injection had nothing to do with it. If anything’s clear, that is.’ [Sayers, 1927, *Unnatural Death*, p. 17]

Thus, (1) is intuitively ‘about’ the information expressed in the cleft clause—who it was who cried uncle, while (2) is intuitively about the referent of the clefted constituent—the nurse.

The most obvious structural difference between the two types of cleft is that primary accent falls on the clefted constituent in topic-clause clefts, but on the cleft clause in comment-clause clefts. The intonation contour of the topic-clause cleft in (1) is shown in (3). The primary falling accent on the first syllable of *contras* is followed by a gradual descent in pitch to the end of the sentence:

- (3) it is the CONtras who have cried uncle

A likely intonation contour for the comment-clause cleft in (2) is shown in (4). A secondary fall-rise accent on *she* is followed by low-pitch up to the primary falling accent on *injection*.<sup>1</sup>

- (4) it was SHE who administered that inJECTION

One important discourse-pragmatic issue concerns the topic-comment structure of clefts. Some researchers have viewed the cleft clause as expressing the topic of the cleft, while others have viewed the clefted constituent as expressing the topic. My answer here, supported by topic tests as

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<sup>1</sup>We will see in Chapter 6 that the clefted constituent of a comment-clause cleft sometimes lacks an accent altogether, and sometimes receives a second falling accent. The difference between topic-clause and comment-clause clefts is most consistently signalled by the prosodic-marking on the cleft clause. Comment-clauses always receive a primary falling accent, while topic-clauses receive a secondary accent, usually a fall-rise, or are left unaccented.

well as the data I have collected, will be that both views are correct, though for different types of clefts. In §5.1, I argue that the unaccented or secondarily-accented clauses of clefts such as that in (1) express the sentence topic. In Chapter 6, I argue that the clefted constituent in clefts with primary accent on the cleft clause, such as (2), sometimes express the sentence topic.

A second important discourse-pragmatic issue concerns the cognitive status of the cleft clause. I address the cognitive status of topic cleft-clauses in §5.1, again postponing discussion of comment cleft-clauses until Chapter 6. In §5.2, I examine some pragmatic characteristics of the clefted constituent in topic-clause clefts, focusing on the claim that the clefted constituent is necessarily contrastive. In §5.3, I examine some pragmatic characteristics of two special of topic-clause clefts: negative clefts and sentential focus clefts.

The analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6 is based on a corpus of 700 natural tokens drawn from several genres of discourse, both spoken and written. The spoken sources included transcripts of casual conversations, transcripts and videotapes of a televised public affairs discussion program (*The McLaughlin Group*, PBS), and Studs Terkel's *Working*. The written sources included primarily syndicated newspaper columns, mystery novels, and historical narratives. A more detailed, though still brief, description of the corpus is presented in Appendix 2.

## 5.1 Discourse-pragmatic characteristics of the cleft clause

The hypothesis that the cleft clause in (1) expresses the sentence topic is supported by the observation that it passes the question test for topic status, as shown in (5).<sup>2</sup>

- (5) Q: But who actually has cried uncle?  
A: It is the CONtras who have cried uncle.

That the cleft clause also passes Gundel's 'as for' test and Reinhart's 'said about' test is shown, respectively, in (6a) and (6b):

- (6) a. Our intention was to make the Sandinistas cry uncle. As for who has in fact cried uncle, it is the CONtras.  
b. Germond said about who has in fact cried uncle that it is the CONtras.

Gundel 1974 invokes the topic tests to show that the accented clefted constituent in (7a) is *not* the topic. The judgments in (7b) and (7c) show that it fails both the question test and the 'as for' test:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Topic tests were introduced in §2.1.2

<sup>3</sup>It is crucial, of course, that primary accent is placed on the clefted constituent in Gundel's examples. The same point can be made about the cleft in (1):

(i) Our intention was to make the Sandinistas cry uncle. #As for the kontras, it is THEY who have cried uncle.

- (7) a. It was ARCHie who rejected the proposal  
 b. Q: What about Archie?  
 A: \*It was ARCHie who rejected the proposal.  
 c. \*About Archie, it was HE who rejected the proposal.

It can thus be concluded that the topic of (1) is expressed by the cleft clause, while the comment is expressed by the clefted constituent (and copula).

It was argued in Chapter 2, following Gundel 1988, that the two general principles in (8) universally regulate the relationship between cognitive status and word order:

- (8) a. **Given Before New Principle**  
 State what is given before what is new in relation to it.  
 b. **First Things First Principle**  
 Provide the most important information first.

Since the topic of a sentence is by definition ‘given’ in relation to the comment, topic-clause clefts necessarily violate the Given Before New Principle and are thus predicted to be appropriately used only when sanctioned by the First Things First Principle. The topic can be less important than the comment, Gundel argues, only if the topic has ‘already been established in previous discourse’, or, in other words, if it is activated.

While the topic-clause may be directly activated as in (1), where it repeats the immediately preceding predicate, it is frequently the case that the clause is related only indirectly to the preceding context, through reformulation or through inference. The conditions under which speakers consider a clausal topic to be directly or indirectly activated are investigated in detail in §5.1.2 and §5.1.3. I turn first to a review of previous analyses of the cognitive status of the topic cleft-clause.

### 5.1.1 PREVIOUS APPROACHES

Early accounts pointed out the status of (unaccented) cleft clauses as presupposed and/or given, with no finer distinctions made as to the particular type of givenness involved. The focus was on accounting for differences between clefts (and pseudoclefts) and ordinary sentences. More recent analyses (e.g., Prince 1978, Gundel 1985) attempt to determine the particular type of givenness, observing that clefts and pseudoclefts are not always interchangeable in discourse contexts. The recent focus has thus been on uncovering differences between clefts and pseudoclefts. However, these accounts make conflicting claims and predictions, which need to empirically investigated. In §5.1.2 and §5.1.3, I argue that my data support Gundel’s claim that the clause in topic-clause clefts is activated, though I develop a more finely tuned analysis concerning subtypes of givenness, e.g., ‘in focus’ as opposed to ‘directly activated’ and ‘indirectly activated.’

#### 5.1.1.1 Functional approaches

While it is generally agreed that the information expressed in a cleft clause is in some sense ‘given,’ there has been a lack of consensus concerning the type of givenness involved. Halliday 1967 views the cleft clause as ‘given’ in the sense of ‘treated as recoverable.’ He assigns this status to any expression in a ‘tone unit’ which follows the accented word.<sup>4</sup> An expression that is ‘given’ in Halliday’s sense would seem, thus, to always be ‘activated’ in Gundel’s sense.

The ‘given’ status of the cleft clause is associated with the use of clefts to express contrast in Quirk & Greenbaum 1972 and Chafe 1976. Chafe suggests that to appropriately use the ‘contrastive’ sentences in (9), the ‘background knowledge’ that someone made the hamburgers has to be at least ‘quasi-given’—i.e. there must be ‘at least a pretense on the speaker’s part that givenness applies.’

- (9) a. It was RONALD who made the hamburgers.  
 b. The one who made the hamburgers was RONALD.  
 c. RONALD made the hamburgers.

Chafe adopts an ‘activation’ sense of ‘given information,’ defining it as ‘knowledge which the speaker assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of utterance.’

Clark and Haviland 1977 characterize the information expressed in a cleft clause as information which ‘the speaker believes the listener already knows and accepts as true.’ Since knowledge and belief are not dependent on the immediate discourse context, this characterization captures the weaker notion of ‘familiar’—as opposed to ‘activated’—information.<sup>5</sup>

### 5.1.1.2 Prince’s Approach

Prince 1978 distinguishes two ways in which the information expressed in the cleft-clause of a cleft or pseudocleft can relate to the discourse context. Information is ‘given’ (i.e. activated) which ‘the cooperative speaker may assume to be appropriately in the hearer’s consciousness,’ while information is ‘known’ (i.e. identifiable) which ‘the speaker represents as being factual and as already known to certain persons (often not including the hearer).’ Prince claims that pseudoclefts and ‘stressed-focus’<sup>6</sup> clefts are subject to different appropriateness conditions. While the information in a

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<sup>4</sup>Note that for Halliday, the ‘thematic’ system governing the selection of theme and rheme, constitutes an independent component of grammar from the ‘information’ system governing the distribution of ‘given’ and ‘new’ information and the placement of ‘focus’ (and thus, accent) within the latter. He evokes relations of ‘markedness’ both to regulate the choice of alternatives within particular subsystems and to regulate the interaction between different subsystems. While it is ‘unmarked’ in non-cleft sentences for focus to fall on the rheme, it is unmarked in clefts for focus to fall on the ‘theme’ (Halliday 1985: 280-281).

<sup>5</sup>Cf. the distinction made in Prince 1985 between ‘Chafe-given shared knowledge’ (i.e. ‘activated’) and ‘Clark-given shared knowledge’ (i.e. ‘familiar’).

<sup>6</sup>Prince distinguishes ‘stressed-focus’ clefts, with primary accent on the clefted constituent (i.e. topic-clause clefts) from ‘informative-presupposition’ clefts, with primary accent on the cleft clause (i.e. comment-clause clefts).

pseudocleft clause must be ‘given,’ the information in an unaccented cleft clause need only be ‘known.’ Prince thus associates a strong, activation condition with pseudoclefts but not with clefts, precisely the inverse of the claim that I’m advancing.

Prince offers the discourse segments in (10) as evidence that the information expressed in a ‘stressed-focus’ cleft clause need not be ‘assumed to be in the hearer’s mind’:

- (10) a. ‘I’ve been bit once already by a German shepherd. It was really scary. **It was an outside meter the woman had.** I read the gas meter and was walking back out ...’ [Meter reader in Terkel, 366; Prince’s 33b]
- b. ‘So I learned to sew books. They’re really good books. **It’s just the covers that are rotten.**’ [Bookbindeyr in Terkel, 409; Prince’s 38a]

Prince claims that a pseudocleft would be inappropriate in (10) because it would imply ‘with no justification’ that the addressee was thinking about the information expressed in the cleft clause:<sup>7</sup>

- (11) a. I’ve been bit once already by a German shepherd. It was really scary. **#What the woman had was an outside meter.** I read it and was walking back out.
- b. So I learned to sew books. They’re really good books. **#What’s rotten is just the covers.**

Prince claims, in addition, that the inappropriateness of discourse-initial pseudoclefts, as in (12), is due to violation of the ‘givenness’ constraint on pseudoclefts:<sup>8,9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>If (10a) is a predicational cleft meaning roughly, ‘the woman’s meter was an outside one,’ as suggested in Chapter 3, the pseudocleft in (11a) may not really be a paraphrase. (11b) actually seems fine to me. Prince’s other examples of non-‘given’ cleft clauses seem irrelevant to the point she is trying to make: that is, (i) seems most appropriately pronounced with primary accent on the cleft clause and hence is an ‘informative-presupposition’ cleft, while (ii) is either not a cleft at all, or else is predicational (cf. §3.3):

- (i) Mmm. — Aren’t those good? It was only sheer will power that kept me from eating twelve every night.  
[Prince 1978, 33c]
- (ii) If I see a train crossing, I keep going. It’s a game you’re playing. Watch the stoplight.  
[Prince 1978, 33a; Terkel, Utility Man]

<sup>8</sup>‘##’ denotes a discourse-initial context; ‘#’ denotes inappropriateness.

<sup>9</sup>Except in settings where the addressee can be predicted to be already thinking about the information in the cleft clause, as in (i):

- (i) ##What we have set as our goal is the grammatical capacity of children — a part of their linguistic competence.  
[Klima & Bellugi-Klima 1969, Prince 1978, ex. 14]

It is not so clear, however, that the contents of the cleft clause of the discourse-initial pseudocleft in (ii) can be analyzed as ‘appropriately in the hearer’s consciousness’:

- (ii) ##What is new and notable in New York City’s unprecedented building boom is that all previous legal, moral and esthetic restraints have been thrown to the winds, or more accurately, to the developers, in grateful consideration of contributions to the tax base and the political purse.  
[Architecture Review, The New York Times, 3/22/87, p. 1H]

- (12) ??## Hi! What I've heard about is your work.

It has been pointed out, however, that the cleft-counterpart of the pseudocleft in (13) is also inappropriate:<sup>10</sup>

- (13) ??## Hi! It's your work that I've heard about.

This observation deflects the force of Prince's claim that stressed-focus clefts are more weakly constrained than pseudoclefts. Evidence advanced by Gundel in support of the inverse claim will be discussed immediately below.<sup>11</sup>

### 5.1.1.3 Gundel's approach

Gundel 1974, 1977 claims that clefts have the same topic-comment organization as right-dislocated sentences in that both constructions are used to express the sentence topic in clause-final position. She proposes that clefts should be transformationally derived as reduced, right-dislocated pseudoclefts, so that (14c) is derived from the structure underlying (11a), via the intermediate stage underlying (14b):<sup>12</sup>

- (14) a. Where we spent our vacation was San Francisco.  
 b. It was San Francisco, where we spent our vacation.  
 c. It was San Francisco where/that we spent our vacation.

She notes that the topic in both constructions can be omitted when it is 'easily predicted from the context,' as in (15):

- (15) a. I guess you're leaving for New York soon. Yes, it's on Saturday (that I'm leaving).  
 b. I guess Bill's sister will be here. Yes, she's coming on Saturday (Bill's sister).

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The example in (iii) shows that even an inverted pseudocleft can be used (albeit awkwardly) to open a discourse:

- (iii) ##Things that glow in the night was what was frightening the members of the Tompkins County Board of Representatives Tuesday Night.  
 [Radio-active', The Ithaca Times, 7/12/90, p. 5]

<sup>10</sup>E.g. Rochemont 1986, DeClerck 1988.

<sup>11</sup>Note that it isn't clear that Prince continues to support her 1978 claim that pseudocleft clauses are more restricted than 'stressed focus' cleft clauses. Prince 1985 seems to claim that the information expressed in both stressed focus cleft and pseudocleft clauses is 'Chafe-given shared knowledge' ('taken by the speaker to be currently in the hearer's consciousness') as opposed to 'Clark-given shared knowledge' ('taken by the speaker to be part of the hearer's general knowledge-store'). Similarly, Prince 1986 characterizes the information expressed in both pseudocleft and stressed-focus cleft clauses as 'salient shared knowledge,' as opposed to the information in 'informative presupposition' clefts. The point of the latter type of cleft is 'precisely to inform the reader of the 'presupposed' information.'

<sup>12</sup>Givon 1979 suggests that clefts evolve diachronically from right-dislocated, 'afterthought' constructions, though he presents no evidence of such development having taken place.

Gundel 1985 notes the universal correlation of new, not yet established topics with sentence-initial position, and old, already activated topics with sentence-final position. This correlation is shown in Gundel 1988 to derive from the word-order principles given in (8) above. She thus predicts that the discourse distribution of pseudoclefts is more weakly constrained than that of topic-clause clefts, since the sentence-initial pseudocleft clause need not be activated.<sup>13</sup>

As noted above, this prediction directly contradicts Prince's (1978) claim that (stressed-focus) clefts are more weakly constrained than pseudoclefts. Gundel's (1985) examples in (16) and (17) support her position over that of Prince:

- (16) a. [BEGINNING OF A LECTURE] What I would like to talk about today is conversational implicature.  
 b. [BEGINNING OF A LECTURE] #It's conversational implicature that I would like to talk about today.
- (17) a. How can I get this spot out the rug?  
 b. What my mother always uses is VINEGAR.  
 c. #It's VINEGAR that my mother always uses.

However, the content of the clause in topic-clause clefts is not always directly activated by the immediate discourse context. This raises the issue of precisely which types of departures from immediate context are permitted in topic-clause clefts. Specifically, what distinguishes the inference needed to interpret the appropriate (10b), from the one needed to interpret the inappropriate (17c)? I will return to this issue of 'indirect activation' in §5.1.3 below.

#### 5.1.1.4 Presuppositional approaches

The cleft construction is a paradigmatic 'presupposition-inducing' construction. It is generally assumed that the 'existential' implication derived by replacing the variable of the cleft clause with a general term (e.g. 'something,' 'someone') is pragmatic in nature, since it can be suspended or defeated in contexts such as those in (18):

- (18) a. You believe that Mary kissed somebody in this room. But **it wasn't Joe that she kissed**, and it wasn't Rita, and clearly it wasn't Bill, and there hasn't been anybody else here. Therefore, Mary didn't kiss anybody in this room.  
 [Halvorsen 1978; variants in Keenan 1971, Gazdar 1979, Levinson 1983]

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<sup>13</sup>Gundel's word-order principles were introduced in §2.6. Gundel 1985 distinguishes clefts, such as (i), with primary accent on the clefted constituent, from clefts, such as (ii), with primary accent on the cleft clause. She assumes the cleft clause to express the topic only in the former case.

- (i) Was it my mother who called?  
 (ii) Wasn't it just yesterday that he said the troops would be out in a few days?

- b. **It wasn't Mirabelle who swallowed your hand-grenade**, because I have it right here in my hand. [Wilson 1975]
- c. **It wasn't Oakland OR San Francisco that won**—the game was called OFF because of the EARTHquake.
- d. **It isn't JOHN that shot MARY**. It's MARY that shot JOHN.  
[Ball and Prince 1978]
- e. **If it wasn't an apple that John ate**, then John ate nothing.  
[Delahunty 1981]
- f. **It'll either be JOHN who gets a raise** or NOBODY will.

The class of contexts permitting the existential implication to be suspended is apparently identical to the class of contexts permitting suspension of other standard types of 'presupposition,' e.g. factive complements. Thus, the cleft clause in (18a) is semantically subordinate to the intensional 'belief' operator of the preceding sentence; the clefts in (18b)-(18d) can be analyzed as instances of 'metalinguistic negation' (c.f. Horn 1989); and (18e) and (18f) are variants of the conditional and disjunctive presupposition 'filters' of Karttunen 1974.<sup>14</sup>

The systematic nature of the contexts which trigger suspension supports the analysis of the 'existential condition' as a 'conventional implicature' (Karttunen and Peters 1979; Halvorsen 1978), a 'potential presupposition' (Gazdar 1979), a 'first background entailment' (Wilson and Sperber 1979), or a 'generalized conversational implicature.' Since detailed evaluation of these alternatives is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I will simply note here, following Gundel 1985, that the presuppositional character of topic cleft-clauses follows directly from the familiarity condition on topics (c.f. §2.3).<sup>15</sup>

A presuppositional approach to clefts is also developed in Chomsky's (1971) analysis of the cleft clause as sharing the 'presupposition' of the utterance to which the cleft is a 'natural response.' I claimed in §2.5.2 that Chomsky's notion of 'presupposition' is essentially equivalent to Gundel's notion of 'topic.' In the absence of a more elaborated analysis of the relation between presupposition and discourse context, however, Chomsky's notion fails to encode the distinction between activated and unactivated topics.

Rochemont 1986 develops an elaboration of Chomsky's notion of presupposition and applies it explicitly to clefts. Rochemont's 'cleft focus principle' shown in (19) encodes the claim

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<sup>14</sup>See also in relation to (18a), the related notion of 'modal subordination' developed in discourse-representation theory by Roberts 1987; and also Gazdar 1979. For (18b), cf. the presupposition 'plugs' of Karttunen 1974. Note that (18e) is a contrapositive variant of Karttunen's conditional filter, and (18f) fits only the symmetric variant of the disjunction filter. Cf. Karttunen 1974, Karttunen and Peters 1979 for discussion. The presuppositional status of clefts will be discussed again below in §5.3 and §6.1.2 and §6.2.2.

<sup>15</sup>To the extent that unfamiliar comment-clauses (c.f. §6.1.1) are also presuppositional, however, an independent conventional association of some sort will need to be assumed.



that a clefted constituent (or one of its subparts<sup>16</sup>) functions as a ‘contrastive focus,’ as defined as in (20):

- (19) A cleft focus must receive a contrastive focus interpretation.
- (20) An expression **P** is a contrastive focus in a discourse D,  $D = \{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$ , if, and only if,
- i. **P** is an expression in  $P_i$ , and
  - ii. If  $\mathbf{P}/P_i$  is the result of extracting **P** from  $P_i$ , then  $\mathbf{P}/P_i$  is directly c-construable, and  $P_i$  is not directly c-construable.

It follows from (19) and (20) that the cleft clause will always be directly c-construable, and that the cleft as a whole will never be directly c-construable. The formal definition of ‘directly c-construable’ is shown in (21):

- (21) An expression **P** is directly c-construable in a discourse D if, and only if:
- i. **P** has a semantic antecedent **P'** in D, or
  - ii. the intended antecedent of **P** in D has been brought to the attention of the participants in D .

A string **P** has a semantic antecedent in a discourse D,  $D = \{P_1, \dots, P_n\}$  if, and only if, there is a prior and readily available string **P'** in D, such that the uttering of **P'** either formally or informally entails<sup>17</sup> the mention of **P**.

A string that is prior and readily available in a discourse is one which has been recently uttered in the current and ongoing discourse, or one uttered in a separate discourse event that has taken place at some point in the relatively recent past and is being recalled to the audience’s attention by the speaker, who begins the current discourse as a continuation of this prior discourse event.

Notice that Rochemont’s definition is broad enough to allow speakers to resume the topic of a previous discussion in an unaccented cleft-clause. This seems correct, as does his analysis of the success of such utterances as depending on conversational implicature. The cleft in (22), for example, succeeded in reactivating a question that had been left unresolved a month earlier.

<sup>16</sup>That is, the clefted constituent contains at least the cleft focus, but may also contain presupposed material.

<sup>17</sup>Rochemont’s notion of ‘informal entailment’ seems to be equivalent to the notion ‘indirectly activated.’ (c.f. §5.3 below).

- (22) Hi. I'm just back from my lunch with Jeanette. Guess what? **It was Greg Ward who invited her to tour Bell Labs.**  
[E-mail message, RZ to NH, 7/9/90]

While it is perhaps doubtful that the cleft clause in (22) would have lacked accent altogether had it been spoken aloud, it easily might have if the previous discussion had taken place more recently than a month prior to speech time.

Rochemont's definition also correctly predicts that the information expressed in the cleft clause may be extralinguistically activated, as in (23):

- (23) [The telephone rings. The speaker leaves to answer it, and calls from the next room] **It's Gary calling.** [Frederickson tapes]

Rochemont thus appears to be in agreement with the position assumed here, also argued for by Gundel, that topic cleft-clauses are directly or indirectly activated.<sup>18</sup>

### 5.1.2 DIRECT ACTIVATION

In this section, I discuss clefts with clausal content which is directly activated in the discourse context. Different degrees of activation can be distinguished—the clausal content may be 'in focus' as well as 'activated,' and the clausal content may be displaced instead of immediately activated.

#### 5.1.2.1 Immediate activation

It is occasionally the case that the content of a cleft clause is directly activated in the immediately prior discourse, as in (24)-(25) from spoken television discussions, (26) from a casual conversation, (27) from a spoken narrative, (28)-(29) from written newspaper columns, (30) from an academic text; and (31)-(32) from conversations in mystery novels:

- (24) JM: I want to ask this question: Why is this agreement so bad? I ask you.  
JG: Because our whole intention was to bring some form of democracy there; our intention was to make the Sandinistas cry uncle. **It is the contras who have cried uncle.**  
[McLaughlin Group, 3/25/88]
- (25) BB: Wait a minute. Mike Dukakis did not mention the name 'George Bush' once. **It's the others who are doing it.**  
[McLaughlin Group, 7/88]
- (26) A: Somebody had said no.  
B: Not yet.

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<sup>18</sup>It is not clear, however, whether Rochemont assumes that all cleft clauses are activated (c-construable). He suggests in a footnote that Prince's 'informative-presupposition' clefts should be analyzed as containing two contrastive foci. I will return to this suggestion in chapter 6.

- A: He didn't say who it was.
- C: The one who—
- A: There was one firm which said no too.
- C: **It was Gulbenkian who said no.**  
[Geluykens 1983, C25]
- (27) Now it's permissible for nice women to wear wigs, eyelashes, and false fingernails.  
Before **it was the harder looking women that wore them.**  
[Terkel, p. 76, airline stewardess]
- (28) I was right. The next question was a clue: 'Is it true that men often ask for the divorce?'  
'Well, yes,' I answered. 'Sometimes husbands ask for a divorce and sometimes wives do. It seems to go both ways. Isn't that true in Japan as well?'  
The reply came immediately and virtually in unison. 'Oh, no,' they said. '**Here it's always the woman who asks for a divorce.** And the man is always shocked.'  
[S. Engram, 'Japanese women less content with the traditional wifely role,' Minneapolis Star and Tribune.]
- (29) As far as I can tell, not one of the new breed of midlife beauties is going to make their peers feel good about themselves. **It's Rosemary Clooney in a muumuu who makes them feel good.** What Loren, Fonda, Welch, etc., have done is to raise the threshold of self-hate faster than the age span  
[Goodman, p. 168]
- (30) I will argue in chapter 11 that ADs differ from one another in their syntactic and semantic properties. In particular, for some ADs, deep and not surface constituent structure is relevant, while for others **it is surface and not deep structure that is relevant.**  
[McCawley, 1988, The Syntactic Phenomena of English, p. 62]
- (31) Then, when I had done all they asked, and he had come to depend on me — as might have been expected — they decided that this would never do, either. Or rather **it was Ursula who decided**, and she talked Jim into it.  
[Fitt, Death and the Pleasant Voices, p. 60]
- (32) As centres of ceremonial activity, houses had ritual significance and were given sacred names. **It was really the house site rather than the building that was sacred**, and so buildings could be extended, rebuilt, or enlarged into complexes containing several separate structure, which would all be known by the same house name.  
[People of the Totem, p. 30]

The examples in (24)-(32) can all be pronounced with a complete absence of prosodic prominence on the cleft clause.

### 5.1.2.2 Truncated clefts

If the content of a cleft clause is not only within reach of the addressee's awareness (i.e. activated), but at the center of attention (i.e. in focus), the cleft-clause may be omitted. Examples from the data of such 'truncated clefts' are shown in (33)-(41):<sup>19</sup>

- (33) N: I'm groggy, too.  
 a. You have various reasons to be groggy, Neil.  
 b. Yeah. (yawning) Well, **it's the medicine.**  
 [Frederickson tapes, 1988]
- (34) A: You mean, in other words, in the business of the staff-student relations, it's not the staff who are making a very poor business.  
 a. No no, **it's the students** by and large.  
 [Geluykens 1983, C50]
- (35) A: Oh, I've read that.  
 a. It's lovely, isn't it?  
 b. Must have been yours that I read, I think, unless **it was John's.**  
 [Geluykens 1983, C34]
- (36) What we do you can never learn out of a book. You could never learn to run a hoist or a tower crane by reading. **It's experience and common sense.**  
 [Terkel, p. 50, heavy equipment operator]
- (37) As far as standin' there, I'm not tired. **It's when I'm roaming around tryin' to catch a shoplifter.**  
 [Terkel, p. 376, supermarket checker]
- (38) Oh, every muscle aches in my body. **It's my legs and feet, ankles and so forth.**  
 [Terkel, p. 269, cabdriver]
- (39) Haven't you been wondering who the dickens put them in that watermelon? Of course you have; but you might have known **it was Janet**, because no one else would have done it.  
 [Stout, The Hand in the Glove, p. 271]
- (40) After the preliminaries were completed, and the Coroner had explained to the jury what they were there for and how serious a matter it was, he proceeded to call witnesses. My heart beat fast, for I had thought that as the discoverer of the body I would be the first to be called; but to my surprise, **it was Marcel.** He stepped forward, neat, dark, debonair...  
 [Fitt, Death and the Pleasant Voices, p. 156]
- (41) A couple of generations ago, wealth was measured in material like indoor plumbing or a matching set of silverware. When I was a kid, **it was a television set or a single-family home.**  
 [Goodman, p. 40]

<sup>19</sup>Some of the understood predicates in these examples are 'indirectly' rather than 'directly' in focus: e.g. (33) and (36). C.f. the claim made in Gundel, Hedberg, and Zacharski 1989 that 'inferrability' is not a separate cognitive status, but a means whereby an entity can acquire a cognitive status.

The set of options open to the answerer of a constituent question, of course, exceeds the simple option of responding with a full cleft or with a truncated cleft. The answer can also be expressed with a simple sentence, or with just a sentence fragment, as shown in (42). The latter three options are all exemplified in example (43):

(42) Who called?

- a. It was JOHN who called.
- b. It was JOHN.
- c. JOHN called.
- d. John.

(43) JM: We've got to get out. The exit question is this: Going into Super Tuesday, who is going to be the frontrunner in the Republican party's presidential candidates?  
Pat.

PB: **It'll be either Bush or Bush and somebody else.**

RN: On Super Tuesday, as you go into that, **Robert J. Dole will be the frontrunner.**

JM: Jack.

JG: I agree with that.

JM: Dole? Mort.

MK: **Bob Dole.**

JM: Pat's right. **It's Bush.** We'll be right back.

[McLaughlin Group, 11/20/87]

Sometimes the content of the cleft clause is syntactically too deeply embedded in an immediately preceding sentence to be recoverable from a truncated cleft. That is, the content of the clause is activated, but not in focus, and therefore cannot be omitted, as seems to be case in (44)-(46):<sup>20</sup>

(44) Presently I found my practice dropping away from me, and discovered I was getting known as 'the man who practically accused that charming Miss So-and-so of murder.' **Sometimes it was the niece I was supposed to be accusing. Sometimes it was 'that nice Nurse — not the flighty one who was dismissed, the other one, you know.'** Another version was, that I had tried to get the nurse into trouble because I resented the dismissal of my fiancée.

[Sayers, *Unnatural Death*, p. 14]

<sup>20</sup>Note the analogy here with the interpretation of noun-phrases such as Gundel, et al's (1989) example in (i):

(i) Sears delivered new siding to my neighbors with the Bull Mastiff. That/#it's the dog that bit Mary Ben.'

As in the cleft case, the intended referent is activated (which is why it can be accessed with a pronominal demonstrative) but is too deeply embedded in the preceding sentence to be in focus (which is why it can't be accessed with the unstressed pronoun *it*). See §2.2 above for discussion of these different statuses.

- (45) ‘...I wonder whether the constableness just happened to be vacant, or whether it was a French appointment because Henry wanted him out of England.’  
 ‘I bet it was the other way around and **it was Tyrell who wanted to get out of England**. If I were being ruled by Henry VII, I’d sure prefer to be ruled by remote control.’ [Tey, *The Daughter of Time*, p. 184]
- (46) A: It can’t be limited by the time factor (...)  
 B: Well, **it’s money you know that limits you**.  
 [Geluykens 1983, C9]

### 5.1.2.3 Reactivation

It is sometimes necessary or useful for a speaker to repeat the content of the cleft clause in order to reactivate it, to refocus the addressee’s attention on it after the distraction of one or more intervening propositions. Omission of the cleft clause in (47)-(52) would presumably disrupt processing:

- (47) At Millington Bridge, for example, he asked all sorts of questions about the Burtells — how long they stayed and whether they saw much of each other and so on. **It was the maid he asked**, not the landlady.  
 [Knox, *the Footsteps at the Lock*, p. 136]
- (48) Greenfield told her we were going to need her assistance, and she came to life like a parched petunia that’s finally been watered.  
 ‘I’m ready,’ she said, ‘but if it involves climbing a tree, I’ll need help.’ God knows what she thought we were planning.  
**‘It’s your voice we need**. And your intelligence.’ he said.  
 [Kallen, *the Piano Bird*, p. 143]
- (49) Vinald brought all this out very glibly but he couldn’t conceal a terrible underlying nervousness. He was afraid of something, and his fear was mounting. Wexford and Burden saw him at home, not in the shop, and Pandora came into the room while they were talking. **Was it for her that he was afraid?**  
 [Rendall, *Speaker of Mandarin*, p. 151]
- (50) A: What is it about literature that you find so attractive?  
 B: Because literature is in some cases the product of the imagination isn’t it and of men’s minds, and it is the imagination and the mind of man that I’m interested in. I think one must know the mind of man... [5 intonation units]... Yes but it’s not just imagination, **it’s the character of men and the actions of men that I’m interested in**.  
 [Geluykens 1983, C45]
- (51) I wasn’t on duty that day, my lord. I was kindly given permission to attend the ceremony at the Cenotaph. Very grand sight, it was, too, my lord. Mrs. Rogers was greatly moved.’  
 ‘Oh, of course, Rogers — I was forgetting. Naturally, you would be there. So you didn’t see the General to say goodbye, as it were. Still, it wouldn’t have done to miss the Cenotaph. Matthews took your duty over, I suppose.’

'No, my lord. Matthews is laid up with 'flu, I am sorry to say. **It was Weston was at the door all morning, my lord.**'

'Weston? Who's he?'

'He's new, my lord. [Sayers, Murder at the Bellona Club, p. 24]

- (52) Yet the Dorset are not the direct ancestors of the Inuit...[9 sentences] The Thule adapted, they broke into smaller groups and became more nomadic. **It is these people who are called the Inuit.**

[Insight Guide to Canada, p. 91]

When a reactivated cleft clause contrasts with an intervening proposition, it is likely to carry a fall-rise topic accent when spoken aloud, as in (53)-(55):

- (53) JM: Some people think that Reagan's administration is at its lowest ebb, its nadir. Do you agree, Eleanor?

EC: Absolutely not. The Reagan-Baker Administration is in fine shape. **It's the BuCHANan Administration that's having PROBLEMS.** The moderates took a few rounds in the chest, but now they have staggered back to gain control of the battlefield. [McLaughlin Group, 11/13/87]

- (54) So Grant was established behind the little tower of cheap editions at the end of the counter, and found the morning passing not so slowly as he had feared. Humanity, even after all his years in the force, still had a lively interest in Grant's eyes — except in moments of depression — and interest proved plentiful. **It was Williams, watching a very ordinary small town street, who was bored.** He welcomed the half-hour of conversation behind the books when Grant went to lunch, and went back reluctantly to the frowsy room above the saloon...

[Tey, A Shilling for Candles, p. 199]

- (55) In the final analysis, though, condoms are used by men. Even when women are persuaded to or frightened into buying them, **it's men who wear condoms.**

[Goodman, Minneapolis Star and Tribune, 3/9/87]

#### 5.1.2.4 Implied activation

Finally, speakers sometimes seem to exploit the opportunity to summarize or reformulate activated information, or to make explicit an implicit assumption, as in (56)-(58):

- (56) '...The President lied to the American people when he stated that congressional inaction prevented the enactment of this... legislation.' Waxman said. **It was the President who obstructed the passage of this crucial bill...**

[Philadelphia Bulletin, 10/8/76, p. 2; Prince 1978, ex. 36a.]

- (57) 'The woman's got no more sense than a hen. No — don't you go, Sheila — I won't have you carrying coal.'

'Nonsense,' said his wife, rather acidly. 'What a hypocrite you are, George. **It's only because there's somebody here that you're so chivalrous all at once.**'

[Sayers, Murder at the Bellona Club, 50]

- (58) JM: Did any — did you take note that Hart was immediately sued by XEROX for \$10,000? But I thought **it was BIDEN who used Xerox** (laughter).  
[McLaughlin Group-12/31/87]

### 5.1.3 INDIRECT ACTIVATION

While it is now widely recognized that information can be treated as activated which is not actually present in, or entailed by, the immediate linguistic context, the study of inferencing in natural discourse has in general concentrated on the interpretation of noun phrases rather than clauses.<sup>21</sup> As far as I know, no previous attempt has been made to classify the inferences associated with unaccented cleft-clauses in actual discourse. Clark 1977, however, identifies four types of clause-level natural ‘bridging inferences’ — ‘reasons for, causes of, consequents to, or concurrences of previously mentioned events or states’ — and uses clefts to exemplify the first two types:

- (59) a. John had a suit on. It was Jane who told him to wear it.  
b. John had a suit on. It was Jane he hoped to impress.

In particular, as mentioned above, it remains a puzzle as to what distinguishes the acceptable cleft clause in (60) from the unacceptable cleft clause in (61):

- (60) So I learned to sew books. They’re really good books. **It’s just the COVERS that are rotten.**  
[Bookbinder in Terkel, 409; Prince’s 38a]
- (61) A: How can I get this spot out the rug?  
B: **#It’s VINEGAR that my mother always uses.**  
[from Gundel 1985]

In attempting to classify the indirectly-activated cleft-clauses in my corpus on the basis of the type of bridging inference required, I have provisionally identified three subclasses. I have labeled these subclasses, ‘causal antecedent,’ ‘causal consequent,’ and ‘superlative,’ and now present them each in turn.

#### 5.1.3.1 Causal antecedent

As suggested by Clark, topic-clause clefts are frequently used to present a motivational or causal antecedent of an activated event or state-of-affairs. It seems likely that the cleft clauses in (62)-(70), for example, would be unaccented or only secondarily accented when spoken aloud:

- (62) JM: Is there any credit that accrues to either political party? Clearly, according to this group, **it’s the United States Congress and Jim Wright, and and Bob uh the-**

<sup>21</sup>See, for example, Clark and Haviland 1974, Prince 1981, Erku and Gundel 1987. See Ward 1985 for a classification of natural inferences related to preposed constituents., and Prince 1978, Brown and Yule 1983 for pseudocleft clauses.



**the Majority —Bob Byrd, the Majority Leader in the House— in the—in the Senate, who are responsible for this agreement.**

[McLaughlin Group, 3/25/88]

- (63) They don't have to be animals. **It's the whole system that makes 'em animals.** Everybody goes on strike, they want more money...  
[Terkel, p. 308, car salesman]
- (64) When prices go up, people come in the store and they throw the items on the counter and they blame us. Eggs go up ten cents a dozen and they act like **it's us that raised them.** Actually, we make two cents on a gallon of milk. You can't tell them that...  
[Terkel, p. 548, neighborhood merchant]
- (65) The body of Hugo Ullstone—the real Hugo—was found lying in the shrubbery next morning.  
**It was I who found him.** After a restless night...  
[Fitt, Death and the Pleasant Voices, p. 78]
- (66) What my son signed was his will...I had gone there to remonstrate with him, to make sure that he knew about the child, knew whether it was his, to ask what he intended. **It was the presence of the tramp that gave me the idea.** You see I had the necessary two witnesses.  
[James, A Taste for Death, p. 451]
- (67) 'I never should have taken the job to begin with. I don't like witnesses. I've never had them before.' He spoke with difficulty and had to stop frequently. **It was his damned money that convinced me.** I didn't like the job from the start...'  
[St. James, April Thirtieth, p. 207]
- (68) Was the first gentleman still moving in his bedroom when the second gentleman came upstairs? Ah she'd have to ask the girl that, **it was Lizzy took the second gentleman upstairs.**  
[The Footsteps at the Lock, p. 111]
- (69) 'I know this man! It's Mao Yuan, the Carpenter! Last week he came to my house to repair a table!'  
'Where did he live?' the judge asked quickly.  
'That I don't know, Your Honour,' Wang replied, 'but I'll ask my house steward, **it was he who called him.**'  
[Van Gulik, the Chinese Lake Murders, p. 87]
- (70) A couple of days later, I was called in the office and they said I was holding a conversation with a passenger. **It was one of the passengers wrote this in.** Passengers can write you up.  
[Terkel, Working, p. 278, busdriver]

### 5.1.3.2 Causal consequent

Topic-clause clefts are also frequently used to present a causal consequent to an activated event or state-of-affairs, as in (71) and (72):

- (71) At nine o'clock, I was thinking of calling up the household at Lady Dormer's to ask when he was to be expected home, when the 'phone rang.'  
 'At nine exactly?'  
 'About nine. I might have been a little later, but not more than a quarter-past at latest. **It was a gentleman spoke to me.** He said: 'Is that General Fentiman's flat?' I said, 'Yes, who is it, please?...'  
 [Murder at the Bellona Club, p. 38]
- (72) 'His inheritance? Was he the eldest son, then?'  
 'No. Barnabas was the eldest, but he was killed at Waterloo and left no family. then there was a second son, Roger, but he died of smallpox as a child. Simon was the third son.'  
**'Then it was the fourth son who took the estate?'**  
 'Yes, Frederick. He was Henry's Dawson's father. They tried, of course, to find out what became of Simon, but in those days it was very difficult, you understand, to get information from foreign places, and Simon had quite disappeared. So they had to pass him over.'  
 [Sayers, Unnatural Death, p. 127]

It is particularly common in mystery novels for clefts to be used to highlight the role of an unexpected participant in an expected event. In (73), for example, the expectation that a knock at a door will be answered is fulfilled; but the expectation that the apartment's inhabitant will answer the knock is violated:

- (73) Beginning at the top of the list, I went along the landing and tapped at Ruskin's door. **When it was opened, it was Webber who stood there.** We stared at each other for a moment, both of us taken aback.  
 [Lucille Kallen, The Piano Bird, p. 95]
- (74) Barbara Berowne had tears brimming her eyes, a frustrated child. She cried:  
 'Why did he do it? How did you make him?'  
 But **it was to Dalglish that Lady Ursula turned** as if it were he who was owed the answer. She said...  
 [James, A Taste for Death, p. 451]
- (75) 'Newspaper persons,' said Lady Isobel, as one might say 'burglars.' 'Frightful people! One of them actually tried to creep into my house.'  
 'But you're going to admit the press on Sunday,' Thomas objected. 'What's all the fuss about?'  
**It was Kent who answered,** with his barking laugh...  
 [Peters, The Murders of Richard III, p. 37]

### 5.1.3.3 Superlative implicature

Finally, it is frequently the case, as in (76)- (80), that the information expressed in a topic cleft-clause constitutes a superlative restriction on a directly activated proposition. Note the typical presence of the word 'most' or 'best':

- (76) M: This is brandy. I want to make some brandy balls.  
 G: Well, you might as well just keep it, I don't really want it.  
 M: I thought it was something that you LIKed, better than m-, other things?  
 G: That?  
 M: Oh, **it's cognac you like the best.**  
 G: Cognac? Well, I haven't had that for a long long time.  
 [Frederickson tapes, 1988]
- (77) Illumination was flooding over him in great waves. Each point of light touched off a myriad others. Now a date was lit up, and now a sentence. The relief in his mind would have been overwhelming, had it not been for that nagging central uncertainty. **It was the portrait that worried him most.** Painted as a record, painted to recall beloved features — thrust face to the wall and covered with dust. [Sayers, *Murder at the Bellona Club*, 162]
- (78) *Stormy Monday* is more than its neo-film-noir plot, Janet Maslin said in the *The Times*. Though the film tells its story very well, she said, 'it isn't the plot for which this film will be remembered. **It's the haunting, deeply evocative mood that's most impressive.**' The waterfront setting, she said, 'could easily have grown claustrophobic if it had not been filmed with so much feeling and skill. [Video review, Sunday New York Times, 1/8/89]
- (79) The people here who would have the most to gain by fulfillment of the Central American peace plan are not very optimistic. Of course, Nicaraguans in general would gain. **But it is the opposition leaders and human-rights advocates who are going to be the key players.** Most are less openly cynical than Dr. Emilio Alvarez Montalban, a widely respected, elderly ophthalmologist who is a conservative leader. [Flora Lewis, *Minneapolis Star & Tribune*, 2/13/88]
- (80) Despite this terrestrial abundance, **it was the plentiful supply of fish and shellfish available along the coasts and in the rivers that drew the most attention**, and these are the areas in which Aboriginal settlements were concentrated. [Times Atlas, p. 48]

I have adopted the label 'superlative implicature' for the inference required to understand clefts of this type because they seem to fit the characteristics associated with generalized conversational implicatures which rely on Grice's second Maxim of Quantity ('don't give more information than necessary'), such as the inference from 'if' to 'if and only if.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>C.f. Levinson 1983, Horn 1989, for Quantity implicatures, and Ward 1985, Hirschberg 1985, Prince 1985, for discussion of pragmatically salient scales.

### 5.1.3.4 Clefts versus pseudoclefts

Recall from §5.1. the disagreement between Prince 1978 and Gundel 1985 concerning differences between the cognitive status required for felicitous use of pseudoclefts as compared to topic-clause clefts. As additional support for Gundel's position that topic-clause clefts are contextually more constrained than pseudoclefts, note that the indirectly activated clefts in this section always seem to be replaceable with pseudoclefts, as shown in (81)-(86):<sup>23</sup>

- (81) I stuck to dinosaurs. **What grabbed my attention was their size and fate**, I suppose. Children tend to equate the huge with the powerful.
- (82) What my son signed was his will...I had gone there to remonstrate with him, to make sure that he knew about the child, knew whether it was his, to ask what he intended. **What gave me the idea was the presence of the tramp**. You see I had the necessary two witnesses
- (83) I never should have taken the job to begin with. I don't like witnesses. I've never had them before. **What convinced me was his damned money**. I didn't like the job from the start.
- (84) 'But you're going to admit the press on Sunday,' Thomas objected. 'What's all the fuss about?'  
**The one who answered was Kent**, with his barking laugh...
- (85) The relief in his mind would have been overwhelming had it not been for that nagging central uncertainty. **What worried him most was the portrait**.
- (86) It isn't the plot for which this film will be remembered. **What's most impressive is the haunting, deeply evocative mood**.

The pseudocleft substitutes are sometimes slightly awkward, however, as if the use of a pseudocleft suggests that the speaker is shifting the topic. As suggested in §2.6., (noninverted) pseudoclefts are 'topic-marking' constructions—they introduce a topic and then comment upon it. Clefts, on the other hand, are 'focus-marking' constructions—they provide a comment on an already-activated

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<sup>23</sup>Of course other pragmatic conditions on the use of pseudoclefts must be met, such as the requirement that a pseudocleft containing an activated clefted constituent must be inverted (cf. DeClerck 1988):

- (i) Ah she'd have to ask the girl that. Lizzy was the one who took the second gentleman upstairs.  
(ii) #Ah she'd have to ask the girl that. The one who took the gentleman upstairs was Lizzy.

As Prince 1978 points out, agreement difficulties arise in the pseudocleft counterparts of certain clefts, e.g. (iii):

- (iii) Eggs go up ten cents a dozen and they act like the ?ones/?one who raised them ?were/?was us.

Sometimes a predicational reading can be avoided by using a cleft instead of a pseudocleft:

- (iv) The one who spoke to me was a gentleman.

There are doubtless other factors as well. See Declerck 1988 for some discussion.

topic. In other words, while a pseudocleft is used both to ask and answer a question,<sup>24</sup> a cleft is used simply to answer one.

## 5.2 Discourse-pragmatic characteristics of the clefted constituent

In this section I turn to a discussion of some pragmatic characteristics of the clefted constituent in topic-clause clefts. In §5.2.1, I briefly discuss the topic-comment status of the clefted constituent, and in §5.2.2 address the issue of the extent to which the clefted constituent can be said to express ‘contrast.’

### 5.2.1 CLEFTED CONSTITUENT AS COMMENT

The topic tests were evoked in §5.1 to establish that unaccented or weakly accented cleft clause expresses the topic of the cleft as a whole, and that the clefted constituent in such clefts (along with the copula) expresses the comment. It has sometimes been assumed, however, that the clefted constituent rather than the cleft clause expresses what the cleft is ‘about’ in all clefts, even clefts bearing primary accent on the clefted constituent. The most prominent advocate of this position is Halliday 1967, who holds that the clefted-constituent expresses the ‘theme’ (‘what is being talked about, the point of departure for the clause as a message’, p. 212) in virtue of its role as ‘initial clause-level participant’. As Gundel (1974, 1977) points out, however, strict association of topic with initial position leads to ‘some highly implausible conclusions’ involving sentence-initial modal adverbs, imperatives, question-words and quantified subjects, as well as clefts. (See Sgall 1987:179 for a similar criticism.)

DeClerck (1983:9) cites eleven other linguists as having ‘pointed out’ that ‘the focal item of a cleft is generally the ‘theme’ of the sentence’ (i.e. what the sentence is about). However, this characterization is quite misleading. Thus, though Chomsky (1965: 221) does suggest in a footnote that the ‘topic of the sentence’ might be structurally defined as the ‘leftmost NP that is immediately dominated by S in the surface structure and that is, furthermore, a major category,’ and adds that this will make the clefted constituent the topic in a cleft sentence, he offers no functional definition of ‘topic.’ Others (e.g. Grimes 1976 and Allerton 1978) simply adopt Halliday’s notion of ‘theme.’ Quirk and Greenbaum (1972, 1973) characterize the cleft as ‘a special construction which gives both thematic and focal prominence to a particular element of the clause.’ Givon 1979 mentions his earlier view that the clefted constituent is simultaneously ‘thematic’ and ‘assertive.’

Kuno (1976:443, n. 10) does say ‘Since island constraints also apply to focus transformations (Yiddish Movement, Wh-Q Movement, and It-Clefting), it is necessary to generalize the Thematic Constraint for Relative Clauses to cover these cases as well. It seems that syntactically marked focus

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<sup>24</sup>Cf. Carlson’s 1983 remark that a pseudocleft is a question-answer dialogue condensed into a single sentence.

also requires that the rest of the sentence be a meaningful predication about it.’ Kuno seems to be using ‘aboutness’ in a semantic sense here: i.e. the predicate denoted by the cleft clause must be semantically compatible with the argument denoted by the clefted constituent.

### 5.2.2 CONTRAST

Clefts have long been associated with the notion of ‘contrast’. An emphatic, attention-drawing, or contrast-marking function of the clefted constituent was frequently noted even by traditional grammarians, as shown by the quotes in (87).

- (87) a. When we try to define the effect of the introductory phrase, the best way to distinguish it from simple front-position of a sentence-element is to consider it as serving to identify as well as emphasize. This identifying function of *it is* is sometimes very apparent; it also explains why the construction can be conveniently used when a **contrast** must be expressed.  
[Kruisinga 1911]
- b. A cleaving of a sentence by means of *it is* ...serves to single out one particular element of the sentence and very often, by directing attention to it and bringing it, as it were, into focus, to mark a **contrast**.  
[Jespersen, 1949]

Grammarians of various theoretical persuasions continue to espouse such views:

- (88) a. The cleft sentence unambiguously marks the focus of information in written English, where intonation is absent. The highlighted element has the full implication of **contrastive focus**.  
[Quirk and Greenbaum 1972]
- b. An additional way that **contrastiveness** may be expressed is with the use of a so-called cleft sentence.  
[Chafe 1976]
- c. A cleft focus must receive a **contrastive focus** interpretation.  
[Rochemont 1986]

Because the notion of ‘contrast’ is notoriously resistant to precise characterization, I will lay out some of the more prominent issues in §5.2.2.1 before turning to the use of clefts to express contrast in §5.2.2.2.

#### 5.2.2.1 The nature of contrast

There has been disagreement in the literature on the issue of whether ‘contrast’ is phonetically definable. Chafe 1976 suggests that the ‘heightened emotional commitment’ typical of contrastive contexts results in more intense and higher pitched accents. Bolinger (e.g. 1961, 1986, 1989) argues convincingly that heightened intensity and pitch in emotional is equally typical of accents which are not interpreted contrastively: ‘it is the same as other highlighting by means of pitch accent, though it

leans to the extremes of the scale.’ He illustrates by showing that one and the same sentence can be used to induce either a contrastive a non-contrastive interpretation, depending on the context:

- (89) a. I suppose your back aches. —You’re wrong. My héad aches.  
 b. You’re looking depressed. What’s the matter? —My héad aches.<sup>25</sup>

Chafe and Bolinger also disagree on the more fundamental question of whether contrastive utterances can be non-arbitrarily distinguished from noncontrastive ones. Chafe 1976 claims that in using the contrastive sentences of (90), the speaker assumes both an awareness by the addressee of the ‘background knowledge’ that someone made the hamburgers, and that a ‘limited number of candidates is available in the addressee’s mind’ to fill the role of hamburger-maker:

- (90) a. RONALD made the hamburgers  
 b. It was RONALD who made the hamburgers  
 c. The one who made the hamburgers was RONALD.

Chafe suggests further that the exclusion of alternative candidates can always be made explicit by the insertion of a phrase such as *rather than, instead of, not X*<sup>26</sup>

Bolinger 1961 takes the position that the distinction between contrastive and merely new information is gradient rather than qualitative:<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Note that Chafe actually claims that phrase-final falling pitch obliterates the distinctiveness of contrastive accent but a double-focus utterance will exhibit the distinction on the first focused syllable, e.g. on *Alice* in (ic) as opposed to (ib):

- (i) a. What happened at the meeting?  
 b. They elected ALice PRESident.  
 c. They elected HENry TREASurer, and the elected ALice PRESident.

Bolinger(1986:91-95) counters that the optionality of such accents makes it ‘hard to claim that there is any special requirement of making them stand out accentually.’

<sup>26</sup>Compare Quirk and Greenbaum’s 1972 tripartite characterization of ‘contrast’: ‘The rest of the clause is taken as given, and a contrast is inferred with other items which might have filled the focal position in the sentence. ...An implied negative can be made explicit.’

<sup>27</sup>Lambrecht 1985 supports Bolinger’s position: ‘This gradient approach to contrastiveness has the advantage of allowing for clear and for less clear instances of contrastiveness, and it accounts for our intuition that the clearest instances are those in which a contrastive focus explicitly contradicts a stated or predicted alternative.’ Rochemont 1986 implicitly adopts Chafe’s ‘background knowledge’ criterion in the c-construability (i.e. activation) condition on which his definition of ‘contrastive focus’ is based. That Rochemont would likely reject Chafe’s ‘limited set’ component, however, is clear from his explicit denial of any significant correlation between ‘contrastive focus’ (in his sense) and ‘disputational’ use

In a broad sense every semantic peak is contrastive. Clearly in *Let's have a picnic*, coming as a suggestion out of the blue, there is no specific contrast with dinner party, but there is a contrast between picnicking and anything else the group might do. As the alternatives are narrowed down, we get closer to what we think of as contrastive accent.

To illustrate, he offers the question-answer pairs in (91)-(93) as falling along a gradient from relatively non-contrastive to relatively contrastive:

- (91) a. Where'll we have it?  
 b. Let's have it in the PARK.
- (92) a. Can we all go?  
 b. No, JOHN can't.
- (93) a. Bring some wieners.  
 b. I don't LIKE wieners. I want HAMburgers.

Despite the persuasiveness of Bolinger's arguments, it does seem worthwhile to explore the issue of the extent to which cleft focus is strongly contrastive in Chafe's sense of selection from a limited as opposed to unlimited set of alternatives, especially given the frequency with which linguists have attributed an explicitly contrastive function to clefts. It is also noteworthy that Kuno 1982 has independently claimed that a seemingly identical distinction between 'multiple choice focus' and 'fill-in-the blanks focus' is syntactically significant in Japanese.<sup>28</sup>

One final issue concerns the possibility for topics as well as comments to be 'contrastive.' Recall that Gundel 1978 claims that topics are accented when they are new or contrastive—thus she does not view topicality as incompatible with contrastiveness. On the other hand, Dik et al. 1981 view 'contrast' as implying 'assertive focus' and thus analyzes all four terms in a double contrast sequence like (94) as 'assertive foci'.

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<sup>28</sup>Specifically, Kuno (1982) claims that in Japanese, 'multiple-choice' but not 'fill-in-the blanks' foci can escape the requirement that a focus immediately precede the question or negative morpheme that has it in its scope. Question (i) is thus less acceptable than (ii) because it is less plausibly construed as a 'multiple-choice question':

- (i) ??Kimi wa 1960-nen ni umareta ka?  
 you TOP year in be-born Q  
 'Were you born in 1960?'
- (ii) Kimi wa kyoo gakkoo ni kuruma de kita ka?  
 you TOP today school to car by came Q  
 'Did you come to school today by car?'

Carlson 1983 makes a similar distinction between the 'rhematic rheme' of a statement which answers a 'search' question, and the 'thematic rheme' of a statement which answers an 'alternative' question.



- (94) a. What did John and Mary buy?  
 b. JOHN bought a BIKE, but MARY bought a MOPED.

Hannay 1983 disagrees, concluding instead that the subjects in (94b), which are indeed ‘given’ in the question, should be viewed as ‘contrastive topics.’ Lambrecht 1981 similarly concludes that ‘topic status and contrastive status do not exclude each other’ in that syntactically-marked, left-dislocated topics in French can be contrastive, as in (95b):<sup>29</sup>

- (95) a. Qu’est-ce que tu-vas donner à Pierre et à Marie?  
 What.is-it that you-are going to.give to Pierre and to Marie?  
 ‘What are you going to give to Pierre and Marie?’  
 b. **À Pierre**, j-ui-donnerai un livre;  
 To Pierre, I-to.him-will.give a book;  
**à Marie** j-ui-offrirai des fleurs  
 to Marie I-to.her-will offer some flowers  
 ‘To Pierre, I’ll give a book, and to Marie I’ll offer flowers.’

Finally, Shibatani (1990:264-265) argues that Kuno’s 1973 distinction between the ‘thematic *wa*’ of (96a) and the ‘contrastive *wa*’ of (96b) in Japanese should be collapsed.

- (96) a. **John wa** gakusei desu  
 TOP student is  
 ‘John is a student.’  
 b. **Ame wa** hutteiru ga **yuki wa** hutteinai  
 rain TOP raining but snow TOP raining-NEG  
 ‘Rain is falling, but snow isn’t falling.’

He concludes instead that ‘*wa* separates an entity from the rest of things and has the effect of making an emphatic judgment’ and that ‘one and the same *wa* has the effect of emphasizing the contrast when the discourse environment provides a background for contrast.’

Of interest also is Carlson’s 1983 treatment of preposed topics as ‘rhematic themes’ and preposed foci as ‘thematic rhemes’, and his suggestion that ‘contrastiveness’ be identified with such ‘functional bivalence.’ He apparently considers preposed foci to be ‘thematic’ in that they represent

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<sup>29</sup>The glosses and free translations in (95) are my own (—NAH). I believe that the ‘topicalized’ English translations are pragmatically equivalent to the (case-marked) ‘left-dislocated’ French originals, though I don’t have the space to argue explicitly for this conclusion here. Note that Barnes 1985 takes Lambrecht’s conclusion still further: ‘...I would like to emphasize here...the close relation that exists between the functions of contrast and topic-shift. In fact, contrastive LDs could be seen as simply a special case of topic-shift. To underline the relatedness of these two functions, I prefer to use the term *comparative*...Many LDs which introduce a new topic can be described as comparative in function due to the nature of topic development in free conversation. That is, the new topic is usually related in some way to the previous topic...’ Thus, it seems that a contrastiveness gradient can be defined for topics as well as foci.

the selection of an answer to an already-established choice question—the alternatives are thus already present in the discourse context. It is not clear, however, that preposed foci are necessarily strongly contrastive. For example, no such limited set of alternatives would seem to be available in the common use of focus preposing to mention the name of a person being discussed, as in (97):<sup>30</sup>

- (97) I'd never seen the bloke before—**Claydon his name is**, a seedy sort of customer.'  
[E.C.R. Lorac, *Murder by Matchlight*, p. 45]

### 5.2.2.2 The contrastive nature of clefts

We have seen that cleft clauses in topic-clause clefts are indeed activated, as predicted by Gundel's word order principles. This activation constraint guarantees that Chafe's 'quasi-given' background component of contrastiveness (and Rochemont's 'cleft focus principle') will be met. To evaluate the contrastiveness claim, it remains to determine the extent to which the entity denoted by clefted constituent is selected from a limited set of alternatives.

Bolinger 1986 maintains his previous position, using clefts to illustrate the continuum between relatively-limited and relatively-unlimited sets of alternatives:<sup>31</sup>

- (98) If cleft sentences are to be the proof of contrastivity, then every sentence that answers an interrogative-word question is contrastive, because all can be converted to cleft. While given an appropriate context, any one of [99a-c] could imply a choice within a limited set, none does so necessarily. In an example like [99d], the 'set' is an infinity: the hearer has no way of predicting what range of activities the answer may refer to....Accent does very often, perhaps most of the time, zero in or focus on something, but it is only incidental whether the item is part of a limited or an unlimited set.
- (99) a. Why did you slap her? —(It was) because I felt like it (that I did it).  
b. What are you going to use the whip for? —(It is) to beat my chimpanzee (that I am going to use it).  
c. Where does Jennie live? —(It's) in Baskerville (that she lives).  
d. What are you going to do? —(It's) write a letter (that I'm going to do).

Borkin (1984:126-127) offers the examples in (100)-(103) as illustration of a contrast gradient for clefts: 'the less limited the set of alternatives, and the less attention directed by the

<sup>30</sup>Carlson's view that all preposed constituents are more or less thematic, is similar to Ward's 1985 claim that all preposed constituents, whether foci or not, function as 'backward-looking-centers'. However, Ward avoids the problem posed by (97) for Carlson, since for Ward, the name represents the 'value' of a salient (i.e. inferrable) 'attribute' (i.e. the 'name') of an evoked entity (cf. Ward 1985: 137-138).

<sup>31</sup>Note, however, that accessibility of an eliciting question does not automatically guarantee the appropriateness of clefting the answer (though clefted answers may be more typical in a language like Sinhala that marks focus morphologically—Lelwala Sumangala, personal communication). Bolinger no doubt intends the locution 'given the appropriate context' to have empirical content, and would probably agree that a speaker would not select the cleft option without pragmatic motivation.

author/speaker to the uniqueness of the proffered completer, or to the nature and limits of the range of alternatives, the less contrastive is the effect of cleft structure.'

- (100) Andre Fontaine states...that the British shelled Damascus in 1975 in an attempt to drive French troops out of the city. This is simply not true. **It was the French who shelled the city...**  
 [Manchester -Guardian Weekly 119:15, 10/8/78, p. 2; Borkin's 11]
- (101) Among the butterworts some enzymes...are secreted by the stalked glands whose sticky exudate captures the insect prey, but **it the stalkless glands at the surface that furnish the main outflow of digestive fluid.**  
 [Scientific American, 2/78, p. 112; Borkin's 12]
- (102) Finally the membrane is plunged into another solvent, such as water, that rapidly precipitates all of the remaining polymer. **It is this quenching that forms the pores in the membrane,** as the rapid precipitation leads to the clumping or coagulation of the polymer.  
 [Scientific American, 7/78, p. 112; Borkin's 13]
- (103) This type of decision-making is difficult to reproduce in a computer program because it relies heavily on human judgment. **It is this difficulty, however, that makes the programming of poker an attractive problem to computer scientists.**  
 [Scientific American, 7/78, p. 144; Borkin's 14]

Note that the cleft clause becomes progressively less activated and progressively more likely to receive an accent as the set of alternatives to the clefted constituent becomes less limited. Thus, in (100) the cleft clause is directly activated and preferably unaccented; in (101) and (102) the cleft clause is indirectly activated (respectively, of the 'superlative' and 'consequence' types) and preferably receives a secondary accent; while in (103) the cleft-clause is truly 'informative' and preferably receives a primary accent.

A similar gradient can be constructed from my mystery novel corpus. The clefted constituent of (104)-(106) constitutes a choice among a set of only two alternatives:

- (104) And **it was he**, not Miss Wharton, **who would be waiting on the towpath.**  
 [James, A Taste for Death, p. 413]
- (105) Texture's the easy part; **it's applying the oil smoothly that I find tricky.**  
 [James, A Taste for Death, p. 354 ]
- (106) It had, he guessed, been difficult for her to decide what should suitably be offered, alcohol or tea. She had decided on tea and she was right; as far as he was concerned, **it was tea they needed.**  
 [James, A Taste for Death, p. 493]

Examples (107) and (108) present a selection of an unexpected participant from a larger set, consisting of three members in (107) and five members in (108):

- (107) He turned to Lady Ursula, 'I should like to speak to Miss Matlock, too, please.'  
**It was Sarah Berowne who went across to the fireplace and tugged at the bell.**  
 [James, *A Taste for Death*, p. 443]
- (108) Barbara Berowne had tears brimming her eyes, a frustrated child. She cried:  
 'Why did he do it? How did you make him?'  
**But it was to Dalglish that Lady Ursula turned** as if it were he who was owed  
 the answer... [James, *A Taste for Death*, p. 451]

Examples (109)-(111) represent a choice among a progressively less specifiable but still limited set of alternatives. Thus, (109) represents a seemingly arbitrary selection from a set of five just-listed guests at a reception; (110), a selection from an unactivated set of household members; and (111), a selection from a large unactivated set of the character's acquaintances.

- (109) **It was Alan Skully who was the first to leave.**  
 [James, *A Taste for Death*, p. 493]
- (110) **It was Sarah Berowne who let them in.**  
 [James, *A Taste for Death*, p. 442]
- (111) **It was Barbara of course who had told him.**  
 [James, *A Taste for Death*, p. 59]

I conclude that the primary indicator of intuitively 'contrastive' status is the activation status of the cleft clause rather than the size of the set of alternatives to the clefted constituent.

### 5.3 Special subtypes

I now turn to a discussion of the pragmatic properties of special subclasses of topic-clause clefts: negative clefts and 'sentential-focus' clefts.

#### 5.3.1 NEGATIVE CLEFTS

In this section I briefly address some issues pertaining to negative clefts in particular. First I argue that cleft matrix negation can be of the 'metalinguistic' rather than the 'descriptive' type (Horn 1989), and then discuss the distribution of different 'rectification' types in the corpus of natural examples.

##### 5.3.1.1 Metalinguistic negation

Halvorsen 1978 concludes that affirmative clefts entail the sentence obtained by replacing the gap in the cleft clause with the clefted constituent, so that (112a) entails (112b):<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Halvorsen actually takes the stronger position that (112a) and (112b) are mutually entailing, i.e. express the same proposition.

- (112) a. It was John that Mary kissed.  
 b. Mary kissed John.

Halvorsen also analyzes negative clefts as entailing the negation of the sentence obtained by the same procedure, so that (113a) entails (113b).

- (113) a. It wasn't John that Mary kissed.  
 b. Mary didn't kiss John.

He concludes that a negative cleft which also contains a negative cleft clause should entail the affirmative counterpart of the negative sentence obtained by inserting the clefted constituent into the cleft clause. He claims, thus, that (114a) entails (114b).

- (114) a. It wasn't John who Mary didn't kiss.  
 b. Mary kissed John.

Halvorsen admits to feeling some doubt as to whether this latter prediction is correct since the relevant intuitions are difficult to grasp. The natural discourse examples in (115) and (116) suggest, however, that the prediction is incorrect, and that cleft negation has (or at least, can have) the character of 'metalinguistic negation' in the sense of Horn (1989):

- (115) ...Even with respect to risk, Californians cover the spectrum. A law passed by popular ballot in 1986 requires warning labels on any food whose ingredients have a 1-in-100,000 chance of causing cancer. Yet, as Tuesday's tremor hammered home, tens of thousands could be killed in the truly major earthquake that might strike at any time.  
 [4 paragraphs of examples of Californians' inconsistent responses to risk]  
 It's **not California** but all society that weighs risks unequally. Radiation from nuclear power plant accidents is feared too much. Radon seeping into basements is probably feared too little....

[The New York Times, 10/22/89]

- (116) I had so many doubts about my work. I'd think, Oh God, the doctor doesn't see what I'm doing as important. I finally learned it didn't matter what he thought... Now I find it exciting, more important than the other matters. I see it as a kind of thing missing in a lot of people's lives. **It wasn't the people higher up who didn't recognize the importance of our work.** It was *I* who didn't recognize it.

[Terkel, Occupational Therapist, p. 645]

Thus, the editorialist in (115) had already established that Californians 'weigh risks unevenly,' and therefore cannot be taken to endorse the proposition that California does not weigh risks unevenly. In fact, under a 'descriptive negation' interpretation, the cleft in (115) would entail a contradiction, since California is part of society. Similarly, it is unlikely that the speaker of the cleft in (116) would endorse the proposition that her superiors do recognize the importance of her work.

### 5.3.1.2 Rectification

A second interesting property of the negative clefts in my corpus is that explicit ‘rectification’ (c.f. Horn 1989) virtually always takes place. (See Table 3 in Appendix 2 for the distribution). Explicit rectification is sometimes made by means of a ‘but’ phrase conjoined either to the clefted constituent or to the cleft as a whole, as in (117)-(121):

- (117) He says **it’s PROBABLY not just HIM** but a LOT of people have been messed up. [Geluykens 1983, C27]
- (118) But this week, Jim and Tammy Bakker said through their lawyer that **it was not a sex and blackmail scandal that led them to their resignation,** but the threat of a hostile takeover of PTL, a quote-unquote diabolical plot by another TV evangelist, Jimmy Swaggart. [McLaughlin Group, 3/27/89]
- (119) **But it is not Griese I am really after,** but the person who hired him. [B. St. James, April Thirtieth, p. 177]
- (120) **It was not the merits of the issues in the hearings that hurt Bork,** they say, but the expensive advertising by his opponents. [A. Lewis, Was Bork a threat to liberty?, 10/9/87]
- (121) **It was not the bell that trapped the Inuit** but the unscrupulous intentions of the bell ringer. [Insight Guide to Canada, p. 96]

Rectification is most often made with a truncated cleft, as in (122)-(126):

- (122) MK: But it’s not the contras that are making it dire shape.  
JM: Right.  
MK: It’s their own regime. [McLaughlin Group]
- (123) When the plant first opened, **it wasn’t young people they drew from.** It was people who had been in the community, who gave up jobs to come to GM because it was new. [Terkel, Local Union President, p. 258]
- (124) **It’s not Lady Ursula who’s dead,** Father. It’s her son. [James, A Taste for Death, p. 183]
- (125) **So it wasn’t the predictable public noises that struck me.** It was the undertone. [Goodman, Keeping door open for women, 4/3/87]
- (126) **But it isn’t volcanoes that have made a name for the Northwest.** Mostly it’s the rain. [Insight Guide to Pacific Northwest, p. 17]

Rectification is sometimes made with an entire clause, as in examples (127)-(132):

- (127) Jobs are not big enough for people. **It’s not just the assembly line worker whose job is too small for his spirit,** you know? A job like mine, if you really put your spirit into it, you would sabotage it immediately. [Terkel, Editor, p. 675]

- (128) But in fact **it's not for that reason that I dislike him.** He did his very utmost to treat me as if I were dirt.  
[St. James, April Thirtieth, p. 56]
- (129) **It was not only on the Upper River, or in the neighbourhood of Oxford, that the search went on.** Photography has made it possible for us all, wherever we are, to join in the criminal hunt...  
[The Footsteps at the Lock, p. 95]
- (130) But **it's not only men who are affected by the macho image.** Many women do not cry.  
[Self magazine, 7/89]
- (131) 'But **it wasn't just Swaggart's flock that asked 'Why? Why?' as they found out the details**—the motel strip he cruised regularly, the \$13-an-hour motel room where he is said to have paid a prostitute to perform pornographic acts, all in the shadow of a billboard that reads, 'Your Eternity is at Stake.' The most cynical and secular people I know seemed somewhat bewildered.  
[Goodman, Minneapolis Star and Tribune]
- (132) But **it wasn't only people from Tuskaloosa and Detroit who were swept away by this image of the Pacific Northwest.** Northwesterners, themselves, revelled in the romantic picture of their land and promoted the region as an exclusive place for only for a chosen few.  
[Insight Guide to the Pacific Northwest, p. 46]

Finally, rectification need not be explicit. Examples such as (133) -(135), in which the expected rectification is clearly recognized by the addressee, suggest that rectification is strongly implicated even when it is not explicit:

- (133) '...Philip Rohan as Lord Hastings — yes, but he could play any part. He's a gifted actor. He has a beautiful voice.'  
**'It wasn't his voice you were admiring,'** said Thomas.  
[Peters, The Murders of Richard III, p. 43]
- (134) 'Aren't you being a little sudden in your scepticism?'  
'Oh **it wasn't this that shook me.**'  
'What then?'  
'A little affair called the Boston Massacre....'  
[Tey, The Daughter of Time, p. 100]
- (135) 'Don't trouble yourself.'  
**'It's not you that's makin' me busy.'**  
'Yes, the Inspector did rather complicate things, coming so early and needing to talk to all of us.'  
Millie gestured with her knife for emphasis. 'It's a wonder a Yard man hasn't learned his manners...'  
[Hawkes & Manso, The Shadow of the Moth, p. 171]

Implicated rectification is sometimes used as a rhetorical device, to dramatically close a discourse as in (136)-(138):

- (136) **It is not only in Berlin that ugly walls and once impassable barriers are tumbling down in a world bright with change.**  
[Time, 'Breakthrough in Virginia,' 11/20/89]
- (137) **And it isn't just one congregation in Louisiana that speaks in tongues that sound strange to outsiders.**  
[Goodman, 3/1/88]
- (138) **But watching her performance in these three years, it occurred to that it isn't just presidents who can grow in office.**  
[Goodman, p. 61]

The only apparent exception to the generalization that negative clefts are always contextually rectified is the class of 'not until' temporal clefts. Such clefts are typically used to mark a transition across a discontinuous interval of time, to express an unexpectedly non-immediate occurrence of an expected event, as in (139)-(143):

- (139) I would read all these things in the papers about Cesar Chavez and I would denounce him... The grape boycott didn't affect me much because I was in lettuce. **It wasn't until Chavez came to Salinas, where I was working in the fields, that I saw what a beautiful man he was.** I went to this rally....  
[Terkel, Farm Worker, p. 37]
- (140) All my life I planned to be a teacher. **It wasn't until late in college, my senior year, that I realized what the public school system was like.** A little town in the mountains is one thing...  
[Terkel, Editor, p. 676]

(141)<sup>33</sup>

This Bridge  
Was Designed in 1830  
By ISAMBARD KINGDOM BRUNEL  
(1806)-(1859)  
Construction began in 1836 but was  
Interrupted in 1843 Through Lack of  
Funds. **It was not until 1854 five years  
after Brunel's death that the Bridge  
was completed as a Monument to  
his fame,** the chains used being those  
from the Hungerford Bridge designed  
and erected by him in 1843

- (142) Workers wanted a fairer share than they thought they'd been getting from their bosses. They believed unionization could help restore the foundations of U.S. industry after the Depression. **But it wasn't until the United States entered World War II that industry again felt really secure.**

<sup>33</sup>Plaque on Clifton Suspension Bridge, Bristol, England. I am grateful to Karen Frederickson for bringing this plaque to my attention.



[Insight Guide to the Pacific Northwest , p. 44]

- (143) The Hudson's Bay Company established a post at Bella Coola in 1869, but **it wasn't until 1894 and the arrival of a Norwegian reverend and his people** that settlement of Bella Coola Valley began in earnest.

[British Columbia Handbook, p. 290]

This class can perhaps be analyzed as another class of implicated rectification. A cleft is used to explicitly deny the assumption, consistent with (or even suggested by) the preceding context, that the denoted event never did occur. Use of the cleft generates the implicature (if not entailment) that the event denoted in the cleft clause did indeed occur during the interval denoted by the clefted constituent, just as in (144):<sup>34</sup>

- (144) The man who was the cause of all this day's insanity was sitting on his cot in his cell, his head buried in his hands. He didn't even look up when his door was unlocked and the chief inspector entered. **It was only when he heard Blanc's voice that he jerked bolt upright.**

[St. James, April Thirtieth, p. 111]

### 5.3.2 SENTENTIAL-FOCUS CLEFTS

I turn now to a discussion of an interesting construction consisting minimally of an *it*-subject, a copula and a sentential complement, as in (145):

- (145) **It's not that it's unstable. It's just that it's warped.**

[Store owner to employee pointing out a problem with display beam, 10/89]

This class of sentence shares several structural and functional properties with ordinary truncated clefts like the one in (146), suggesting that these too should be analyzed as clefts.

- (146) M: I LOVE winter. You know why I love winter?  
K: We get to see birdins—I mean squirrel tracks.

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<sup>34</sup>I am assuming that the (a) sentences in (i)-(iii) entail the corresponding (b) sentences, and conventionally implicate (presuppose) the (c) sentences, but may entail them as well.

- (i) a. Only John left.
- b. Nobody other than John left.
- c. John left.
- (ii) a. Not only John left
- b. Somebody other than John left
- c. John left.
- (iii) a. Not until August did she finish her dissertation
- b. She didn't finish her dissertation before August.
- c. She finished her dissertation during August.

- M: [We don't have to cut grass. And grass and grass and grass!  
 K: [Oh. There's that, yeah.  
 M: And **it isn't just ME cutting grass. HE doesn't have to cut grass.** HE doesn't have to cut grass, HE doesn't have to cut grass.  
 [Frederickson tapes]

Delahunty 1981 analyzes sentences of this type as sentential-focus clefts, partly on the grounds that the cleft clause is sometimes expressed, as in (147):<sup>35,36</sup>

- (147) I wonder if **it was that they hadn't room enough for them up in the house that they put them out here in the woods?**  
 [Somerville and Ross, 1894 p. 272]

Horn 1989 also analyzes these sentences as sentential-focus clefts. He concludes from the examples in (148) that the negation in such sentences is (or at least can be) of the metalinguistic type (i.e. 'whether or not a proposition is true is irrelevant to its negation'):<sup>37</sup>

- (148) a. It's not that she's rich and beautiful— although, as heiresses go, she is quite lovely/in fact she's just a plain country girl)—it's that her heart is pure.  
 b. It's not that I don't want to go—{although I don't/in fact I'd love to/I hadn't really made up my mind one way or the other}—it's just that I've made plans to clean my bathtub.

Further examples from my own data are shown in (149)-(152):

- (149) **It isn't that the average working guy is dumb.** He's tired, that's all.  
 [Terkel, p. 5, steelworker]  
 (150) **It's not that I want to be persecuted. It's simply that I know I'm vegetating and being paid to do exactly that.**  
 [Terkel, p. 677, editor]  
 (151) I think most guys who hold up cabdrivers are junkies. They can't control themselves. **It's not that they're malicious people, it's just that they've got**

<sup>35</sup>Delahunty 1981 generates the clefted constituent and cleft clause as sisters under the VP, predicting in general that only combinations generated by the VP rule of Jackendoff 1977 will be allowed. Since the VP rule never allows more than one subcategorized-for sentential complement, he predicts accurately that sentential-focus clefts will exist only when the (optionally expressed) cleft clause is an adverbial adjunct clause.

<sup>36</sup>Halliday 1967 says of this class of clefts, that 'the predication is itself the theme, as in *it isn't that I don't want to, it must be that he's out of town*; here the theme is simply 'positive' or 'negative' together with whatever mood, tense and modality may be incorporated in it.'

<sup>37</sup>See also an earlier discussion by Kempson (1986: 86), who characterizes the negative morpheme not as a 'falsity operator' but rather as a 'pragmatic operator' that is 'indifferent to the truth value of its complementizer.'

- (i) It's not that Mark ate three biscuits — {though he did /in fact he didn't}. It's that I'm too tired to cook breakfast.

**this habit and they're desperate.** It's fear. It's fear that results in a lot of cabdrivers passing up black people. This includes black drivers.

[Terkel, p. 272, cabdriver]

- (152) He came to the surface an hour later, vaguely puzzled and ill at ease. **It was not that the matter surprised him**; the facts were very much what he had expected them to be. **It was that this was not how he had expected Sir Thomas to write.**

[Tey, Daughter of Time, p. 67]

Sometimes the sentential complement opens with a *because* instead of a *that*-complementizer:

- (153) I don't think they want to be doctors or lawyers. **It's not because they don't know. It's that they have no expectations.**

[Terkel, p. 638, alternative school teacher]

- (154) If I don't sell X amount of cars today, I've gotta look for another job. **It's not because they're bad people, but they're in business.** If you got a bad egg, you get rid of it.

[Terkel, p. 307, car salesman]

- (155) Oh come on. Dole is off the hook on the INF issue. He's behind the treaty now, and I think he's helped himself. Bush did not help himself. **It wasn't that Bush was just UNHAPPY about the President appearing with Dole. He was APOPLECTIC about it,** and it brought out that pity streak in Bush that you know so well, John.

[Fred Barnes, McLaughlin Group, 12/18/87]

The occasional explicit coreferentiality of the pronoun with a preceding definite description, as in (156)-(158), lends further support to the hypothesis of Chapter 4 that cleft pronouns are referential.<sup>38</sup>

- (156) You don't understand what that means, John. **The problem is not that it's a complicated ISSue. It's how does he perform in the opinion of PEOple?** Does he come over as strong?...

[Robert Novak, McLaughlin Group, 1/9/88]

- (157) JM: Many Americans think that the media have gone too far in their coverage of the private lives of public figures. ...68 percent of those polled think that the press was overly intrusive in reporting Gary Hart's extramarital affair.... Have the media overstepped their boundaries? R.

RN: No, **I don't believe that's the problem at all,** John. I think **it's just that the ordinary people hate the media.** They hate big, rich people like you who lord it over them, who are arrogant, who are domineering (laughter).

[McLaughlin Group, 11/20/87]

- (158) Some years it was seriously suggested that Tennessee Williams's talents as a playwright had been compromised by the necessity, forced on him by society, to

<sup>38</sup>Heggie (1988:227) views the *it* in sentences such as those in (i) as a referential subject referring to 'the problem' or 'the fact,' and thus unlike the cleft pronoun, which she views as a non-referential expletive:

- (i) a. It's that there is seldom any reason for doing it.  
b. It's that time is a-wasting and I don't know the answer!

translate his essentially homosexual view of the world into heterosexual terms acceptable to Broadway audiences.

**The point wasn't that Williams's female characters were disguised men. It was that his plays would have been finer, more universal, if his view of the relations between men and women had not been limited by his own biases.**

Williams was certainly biased...

[The New York Times, 6/24/90, H19]

To summarize, all of the clefts discussed in this chapter are pronounced with a single primary accent on the clefted constituent. The cleft clause is either entirely unaccented—when immediately activated; secondarily accented—when less immediately activated; or omitted altogether—when in focus. Activation in all three cases may be indirect as well as direct. In the next chapter, I turn to an examination of clefts bearing primary accent on the cleft.