

## Chapter 6

### Comment-Clause Clefts

In this chapter, I examine the discourse-pragmatic characteristics of clefts with primary accent on the cleft clause. One question to be explored is whether both the clefted constituent and the cleft clause function to express part of the comment in these constructions, or whether the clefted constituent expresses the topic. Since activated status is consistent with topic status, the referents of activated clefted constituents of comment-clause clefts are eligible for analysis as topics, though they could also be included in the comment. The clefts in (1) and (2) below are convincing candidates for topic+comment status:

- (1) a. And of course, we've only got his version of the niece and the nurse  
b. —and he obviously had what the Scotch call ta'en a scunner at the nurse.  
c. We mustn't lose sight of her, by the way.  
d. She was the last person to be with the old lady before her death,  
e. and **it was she who administered that injection.**'  
f. 'Yes, yes — but the injection had nothing to do with it .  
g. If anything's clear, that is.'

[Sayers, 1927, *Unnatural Death*, p. 17]

The referent of the clefted constituent in (1e), the nurse, is introduced into the conversation in (1a), retained in (1b), pronominalized in (1c), and appears well-established as a topic in (1d). The cleft in (1e) continues to be intuitively 'about' the nurse.

In (2), the cleft is again uttered as the second member of a two-member sequence, and is again intuitively 'about' the referent of the clefted constituent.

- (2) The nice child had sent over for the patient in the course of the morning a dozen fresh eggs taken from the Steynes nests that very hour. Grant thought how typical it was of her to send fresh eggs, and not the conventional flowers or fruit. 'I hope she didn't get into any trouble for giving me food that time?' Tisdall asked. He always talked as if the occurrences of the last week were many years away; the days in the attic had been a lifetime to him.  
'On the contrary. She saved your neck and my reputation. **It was she who found your overcoat.** No, I can't tell you about it now. You're supposed not to talk or be talked to.'

[Tey, 1936, *A Shilling for Candles*, p. 224]

In §6.1, I examine the cognitive status of comment-clauses, and argue that Prince's (1978) characterization of accented cleft clauses as 'informative' fails to account for cases in which the

content is assumed to be familiar to the addressee. I adopt instead the view of Gundel 1985 that the content of an accented cleft clause is ‘interpreted as part of the comment.’ I also examine the class of ‘vice-versa’ clefts. In §6.2, I verify that the clefted constituents in (1) and (2) satisfy the tests for topic status introduced in Chapter 2, explore the use of clefted sentence topics for ‘emphatic repetition,’ and the use of the focus operators *also* and *even* in comment-clause clefts. Finally, in §6.3, I explore the use of comment-clause clefts to mark transitions between higher-order segments of discourse. I close by considering a general analysis of comment-clause clefts as providing answers to multiple questions.

## 6.1 Discourse-pragmatic properties of the cleft clause

In this section I give an overview of competing approaches to the pragmatic characterization of clefts with primary accent on the cleft clause. I argue that Gundel’s characterization of accented cleft clauses as expressing part of the comment is preferable to Prince’s characterization of them as ‘informative’ since it is newness in the relational (i.e. comment) sense rather than newness in the referential (i.e. unfamiliar) sense (c.f. §2.2) which is relevant here. I then turn to the ‘vice-versa’ subclass of comment-clause clefts, and analyze them as double focus constructions.

### 6.1.1 COGNITIVE STATUS

The best known and still one of the most extensive discussions of clefts with primary accent on the cleft clause is that of Prince 1978.<sup>1</sup> Recall from the previous chapter that Prince distinguishes two types of clefts: ‘stressed-focus’ clefts which contain primary accent on the clefted constituent, and

---

<sup>1</sup>For subsequent discussion, see especially Geluykens 1983, Borkin 1984, Van Oosten 1986, and DeClerck 1983, 1988. DeClerck cites an early mention of comment-clause clefts in Erades 1962. Erades notes an exceptional lack of ‘extra-strong stress and extra-high intonation’ on the clefted constituent of the discourse-initial cleft in (i), and the non-omissibility of *that*:

- (i) It was in 1886 that Lewin published the first systematic study of the cactus.

Since, furthermore, ‘the assertion is not stoutly maintained against an opposed school of thought, nor does it link up the sentence with anything preceding,’ Erades concludes that ‘this is a different type of sentence. *Was* is not a copula here, but a notional verb meaning ‘happened’, ‘occurred’, ‘took place’.

Kantor 1976 mentions (ii) as a ‘funny cleft’, with ‘old information’ in the clefted constituent and ‘new information’ in the cleft clause, and suggests that it is used to shift the ‘topic’ from ‘January’ to ‘the girls at school.’

- (ii) But the weekends January spent with her father in New York, she only saw a handsome man who lived to please her. It was because of these weekends that January discouraged all attempts at any ‘buddy-buddy’ relationships with the girls at school. Having a buddy-buddy meant holiday dinners...

'informative-presupposition' clefts which contain primary accent on the cleft clause. She notes that only subject-NP's and sentence adverbials appear as clefted constituents in the 'informative presupposition' clefts of her data, that the cleft clause complementizer is not deletable, and also that the clefted constituent is typically 'short and anaphoric.'<sup>2</sup>

Prince 1978 characterizes 'informative-presupposition' clefts as 'mark[ing] a piece of information as fact, known to some people although not yet known to the intended hearer'.<sup>3</sup> Prince 1986 maintains her earlier distinction between two types of clefts, stating that 'informative presupposition' clefts 'cannot be said to mark an OP [open proposition] as shared knowledge in the discourse; their point, in fact, is precisely to inform the reader of the 'presupposed' information.' In the following subsection I will evaluate Prince's description of clefts with primary accent on the cleft clause as 'informative' in light of my own data.

Although Prince characterizes the primary-accented clauses of her data as 'informative,' my data indicate that clefts whose clauses carry primary accent can also contain information which is familiar. Speakers sometimes use comment-clause clefts to signal that the information expressed in the cleft clause is familiar, but not activated, and thus that the addressee should retrieve it from long-term memory. In other words, such clefts have a reminder function analogous to that of distal demonstrative phrases (c.f. §2.2).

Occasionally the proposition expressed by the cleft construction as a whole is familiar to the addressee (not just the information expressed in the cleft clause).<sup>4</sup> This is so in example (1) above, and in (3)-(5) below:

- (3) [p. 78]...It was under one of the rhododendron's that I found him, beside and just off the main path...
- [p. 173] ...'I mean,' I ran on cheerfully, 'since that first evening when you arrived, and you both went off together towards the rhododendrons.' **It struck me that it was a rhododendron bush under which Hugo's body had been found**, and that the word would always have a sinister sound in my ears...
- [Death and the Pleasant Voices]

---

<sup>2</sup>DeClerck 1988 divides Prince's 'informative presupposition' clefts into two subclasses, depending on the activation status of the clefted constituent, thus distinguishing 'unaccented- anaphoric-focus' clefts in which the clefted constituent is activated and 'weakly' accented, from 'discontinuous' clefts in which the clefted constituent is unactivated and 'normally' accented. Besides the obvious consequence that only a 'discontinuous' cleft can be used to open a discourse, he suggests, but doesn't explicitly argue, that the clefted constituent (and possibly cleft-clause) of 'discontinuous' clefts is more likely to continue to be discussed, and that the cleft clause information is 'new' in both types, but is 'represented as old' in 'unaccented-anaphoric-focus' clefts.

<sup>3</sup>Prince presumably intends the class of knowers to properly include the speaker, but to exclude the addressee.

<sup>4</sup>Note that it is not clear from Prince's 1978 discussion whether she intends that the proposition expressed by the cleft as a whole is 'known,' or just the proposition obtained by replacing the 'gap' in the cleft clause with a general term.

- (4) **Wasn't it just yesterday that he said the troops would be out in a few days?**

[Gundel 1985, conversation overheard, October 26, 1983]

- (5) [BEGINNING A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE]

**It was 30 years ago that Richard Nixon melted under the glare of the hot lights and turned television debates into an integral part of North American election campaigns.**

Ever since Nixon blew the presidency to John Kennedy on that sweltering summer night, underdogs have seen debates as a means of exposing the favorite and...

[Mike Trickey, 'TV debate likely to turn election heat up in Ontario,' The Vancouver Sun, 8/18/90, B3]

The point here is to remind the addressee of relevant information which the addressee already knows; the clause is accented because it is not activated. The referent of the clefted constituent is often activated in such cases—e.g. (3)—but isn't necessarily so—e.g. (4) and (5). When the clefted constituent is activated, it is likely to express the topic of the sentence, as in (3), which is indeed intuitively about rhododendrons. When it is unactivated, as in (4) and (5), it more likely expresses part of the comment. The topic of (4) could thus be the referent of the pronoun in the cleft clause (i.e. Reagan), and (5) could be analyzed as an all-comment sentence.<sup>5</sup>

It is more frequently the case, however, that a speaker assumes only the information expressed in the cleft clause to be familiar to the addressee. The writer of the clefts in (6) and (7) probably expects the reader to remember the historic flight from Saigon in 1975 and to be familiar with the fact that well-known German leaders built ships, but not to know all the details, such as the embassy from which the flight took place or the port in which the ships were constructed:

- (6) ...When the Americans built a new embassy in Saigon, Lansdale had the opening postponed because his acquaintances among the capital's astrologers had warned him the planned day was inauspicious. The advice didn't help. **It was from this embassy that the U.S. helicopters ignominiously fled in 1975.**

But Lansdale was the sort of man to appreciate that fate, in Vietnam, was simply against him.##

[Mark Frankland, Predecessor makes North look like an amateur operator, 3/5/87]

---

<sup>5</sup>Though if we assume the topic of an 'all-comment' sentence to be a spatio-temporal index as suggested in §2. 4, the topics of (4) and (5) could be analyzed as the familiar but unactivated temporal index denoted by the clefted constituent.

- (7) They've been building ships in Gdansk for over 400 years. **It was in this Baltic port that the Kaiser constructed his cruisers and Hitler built his U-boats.** But since 1970, when 28 workers were killed during food riots nearby, the Lenin shipyard...has also been something of a shrine...  
 [D. Margolick, 'Lech's American Angel,' The New York Times Magazine, 10/8/89, p. 30]

Finally, the general proposition associated with the presumably accented cleft clause in (8) is again unactivated in the discourse context—though the speaker seems to expect the addressee to be familiar with it. (Note the apparent attempt by the President to deny the familiarity implicature; and the decision of the columnist to report this attempt.)

- (8) Question: 'Mr. President, I don't think it's still clear just what Israel's role was in all this...We do understand that the Israelis sent a shipment in 1985 and there's also reports that **it was the Israeli**s that contacted your administration and **suggested that you make contact with Iran.** Could you explain what the Israeli role was here?'

Reagan: 'No, because we, as I say, have nothing to do with other countries or their shipment of arms or doing what they're doing...'

[Stephen E. Winn, 'What Reagan says he said']

Recognizing that the information denoted in a comment cleft clause may have a variety of cognitive statuses helps clarify the status of certain examples in the literature whose existing classification is problematic. Declerck 1984 includes the cleft in (9) in his class of 'contrastive' clefts, presumably because the information in the cleft clause does not fit his description ('new but represented as old') of the information status of the cleft clause of his 'unstressed anaphoric-focus' class, without recognizing that it more closely fits the prosodic characteristics of the latter class:

- (9) I asked her what was the matter with John and she answered that **it was he who had been the victim of the robbery.**

Similarly, Prince 1978 includes the cleft in (10) in her class of 'inferable' stressed-focus clefts, without recognizing that primary accent most likely falls on the word *twelve* in the cleft clause:

- (10) Mmm [eating a piece of fudge] —Aren't those good? **It was only sheer will power that kept me eating twelve every night.**<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Note that the conclusion of Gundel, Hedberg and Zacharski 1989 that 'inferability' is not so much a separate cognitive status, as a means by which an entity can attain a cognitive status, seems to hold for propositions as well as noun phrase referents—the inferable proposition associated with the accented cleft clause in (10) seems to have the status 'uniquely identifiable' rather than 'activated'.

There are some clefts containing familiar cleft clauses which seem to fall on the borderline between comment-clause and topic-clause clefts. The point of using a cleft in certain circumstances is to reactivate a previous topic which had been left unsettled in order to settle it, sometimes after a considerable intervening period of time. For example, the cleft in (11) was used to answer a question which had been raised and abandoned a month earlier (about an event which had taken place three years before that):

- (11) Hi! I'm back from my lunch with Jeanette. Guess what? **It was Greg Ward who invited her to tour Bell Labs.** She drove out with Greg, and Julia Hirschberg met them and gave her the tour.

[E-mail message, RZ to NH, 7/9/90]

It seems to me that a speaker could accent both the clefted constituent and the cleft clause in uttering (11), which would indicate that it should be analyzed as a comment-clause cleft. It is perhaps more likely, however, that the speaker would accent only the clefted constituent, which would indicate that it should be analyzed as a topic-clause cleft. The existence of such borderline cases is to be expected, given the general fuzzy character of the border between activated and familiar information, i.e. speakers can choose whether to treat particular items of information as activated or as merely familiar to the addressee.

The clefts from a mystery novel in (12) serve a similar function. The author, narrating from the detective's point of view, uses a cleft in (12a) to express the detective's realization that an activated piece of information provides the resolution to an important puzzle. The author also uses a cleft in (12b) to express, this time through direct dialogue, confirmation of the same realization by one of the characters:

- (12) a. '...Discrediting members of the present administration is probably more a matter of occasional duty than enjoyment. I imagine Garrod chose Paul Berowne for personal rather than political reasons. Sarah dislikes more than her papa's party.' **So it had been Garrod who had sent the poison pen message to Ackroyd and the gossip writers of the nationals.** Well, he had always been Dalglish's most likely suspect for that particular mischief.

[P.D. James, *A Taste for Death*, p. 343]

- b. ... She thought: I need to know, I need to know everything. I have to face the truth. She said:

'And **it was you who sent that poison pen note to Daddy and to *The Paternoster Review*?** Doesn't it seem rather petty even to you, the people's revolutionary...'

[P.D. James, *A Taste for Death*, p. 382]

Again, though it seems that a speaker could place primary accent on the cleft clause, it is also possible that the clefted constituent could receive an accent. Note, however, that the conclusion that the

information in the cleft clauses of (11) and (12) is familiar instead of activated is supported by the possibility of felicitously replacing the direct-dialogue cleft pronouns with distal, but not with proximal, demonstratives:<sup>7</sup>

- (13) a. It/#this/that was Greg Ward who invited her to tour Bell Labs.  
 b. So it/#this/that was you who sent the poison pen note to Daddy and to *The Paternoster Review*.

Note that the unclefted counterpart of (11) might wrongly suggest that a new invitation had been issued (given the absence of prosodic information):

- (14) I'm back from lunch with Jeanette. Guess what? Greg Ward invited Jeanette to tour Bell Labs.

In another interesting class of borderline cases, a syntactic topic, adjoined to the left of a cleft construction, activates a familiar entity sufficiently to permit familiar associated information to be expressed in an unaccented cleft clause:

- (15) About Gorbachev—at least you know that **it's HIM that's BRILLiant**, and NOT his adVISors.'  
 [Kari Swingle, conversation, 12/31/90]
- (16) a. That girl now, the nurse, the one who killed herself. **If it was Berowne's child she had aborted**, that couldn't have been easy for him to live with.  
 [James, *A Taste for Death*, p. 277]
- b. 'What is this?' Grafman lit a cigarillo impatiently. 'You said it was about Thea. What do you know about Thea? Who are you anyway? You're no investor, right? What then, some kind of detective? I thought there was something phony about you. **And that business with Persky's suitcase, was it you who got hold of that stuff?** What's your—'  
 [Kallen, *The Piano Bird*]

In sum, despite the existence of borderline cases, I conclude that clefts which are accented on the cleft clause can be used to 'remind' as well as to 'inform.' The characterization of such constructions as 'comment-clause' clefts is thus more appropriate than Prince's characterization of them as 'informative-presupposition' clefts.

---

<sup>7</sup>See § 4.1 for discussion of *th*-clefts.

### 6.1.2 VICE VERSA CLEFTS

An interesting subclass of comment-clause clefts was introduced into the literature in Ball and Prince 1978, who discuss the example in (17):

(17) It's not John that shot Mary. It's Mary that shot John.

Ball and Prince point out that clefts such as the first cleft in (17) constitute exceptions to the general requirement that the cleft clause is presupposed, since the speaker is not committed to the truth of the proposition derived by replacing the variable in the cleft clause with a general term, i.e. that someone shot Mary. Note, however, that the speaker does believe the *addressee* to be committed to this proposition.<sup>8</sup>

Carlson 1983 notes the 'intriguing example' (from Shakespeare) in (18), and characterizes it as 'a double question with a unique pair presupposition', 'who has lost (and) what?.'

(18) It is not I who who have lost the Athenians. It is the Athenians who have lost me.

This description aptly characterizes the examples in (19)-(27) from my own data:

(19) MA: You all owe me money.  
 NH: Oh. I told everyone that they owed DUANE money.  
 MA: **It's Duane who owes ME money.**  
 [conversation, 11/86]

---

<sup>8</sup>Prince and Ball point out that the presupposition associated with a pseudocleft clause cannot be suspended in the manner of (17):

(i) #The one who shot Mary wasn't John. The one who shot John was Mary.

Note that this difference cannot be due simply to the differing relative order of clefted constituent and cleft clause in clefts and pseudoclefts, since the presupposition also cannot be suspended when the pseudocleft is inverted :

(ii) A: So do you think John will be arrested for shooting Mary?  
 B: You've got it all wrong. #John wasn't the one who shot Mary.  
 Mary was the one who shot John.

I suggest that this difference lends further support to a syntactic analysis of clefts, like that proposed in Chapter 4, in which the negation-operator *c*-commands the cleft clause.



- (20) Wimsey: Mr. Borne. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting.  
How can I help you?
- Borne: I think **it's I who can help you.**  
[Strong Poison, PBS series, 6/22/89]
- (21) You cast another bewildered look at the books around you (or, rather: **it was the books that looked at you**, with the bewildered gaze of dogs who, from their cages in the city pound, see a former companion go off on the leash of his master, come to rescue him), and out you went.  
[Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler*, p. 1979]
- (22) 'He didn't go down to the river alone that night, did he?' In fact, Lauren had every reason to suppose that Russell had gone down to the river with Sandy Grayson.  
'No I don't think he did,' said Tracy.  
'And someone else was following?' Laura suggested.  
'Yes, perhaps,' said Tracy noncommittally.  
Was it Tracy who followed Russell and Sandy? **Or was it Sandy who followed Russell and Tracy?** And how did Dora Carpenter fit in?  
[Death of a Harvard Freshman: 97-99]
- (23) 'Your pardon, brother!' said a respectful voice at Cadfael's back. 'No one told me there was a messenger here from Shrewsbury.'  
Cadfael turned, startled, to take a look at the abbey's steward here; a layman, a lawman, young enough to be deferential to his employers, mature enough to be in command of his own province.  
'**It's I who should ask your pardon,**' said Cadfael, 'for walking in upon you without ceremony. Truth to tell, I have no errand here, but being in the neighbourhood I was curious to see our new manor.'  
[Peters, *Monks' Hood*, p. 166]
- (24) The photon gives up part of its energy to the electron, and the transaction is observed as a slight decrease in the frequency (or increase in the wavelength) of the radiation. Inverse Compton scattering is observed when a photon encounters a high-energy electron. Then **it is the electron that loses energy to the photon.**  
[Scientific American, 8/77:38; Borkin's 19]
- (25) '...I must fly. I'm late as it is. I've been lunching at the Blague, and so many people came up to talk that I couldn't get away as early as I meant to.'  
'I hope your host was impressed,' Grant said, with a glance at the hat.  
'Oh, yes. She knows about hats. She took one look and said, 'Jacques Tous, I take it.'  
'She!' said Grant surprised.  
'Yes. Madeleine March. And **it was I who was giving her luncheon.** Don't look so astonished: it isn't tactful...'  
[Tey, *The Daughter of Time*, p. 23]

(26) C: And it's much better in mathematics than it is in grammar I think

A: but **it's us that lifted it from them**, not vice versa.

[Geluykens 1983, C26 ]

(27) Anna: So, what's the case you're working on?

Robert: Nothing I need bother you with now. **It's you who called me**,  
remember? [General Hospital, ABC, 6/21/89]

The clefts in (19)-(22) respectively answer the activated double questions shown in (28); those in (23)-(25) answer the reactivated questions in (29); and (26)-(27) answer the indirectly activated questions in (30):

(28) a. Who owes whom money?

b. Who can help whom?

c. Who looked at whom?

d. Who followed Russell and whom?

(29) a. Who should ask whose pardon?

b. What loses energy to what?

c. Who was giving whom luncheon?

(30) a. Who called whom?

b. Who lifted it from whom?

The analysis of 'vice-versa' clefts<sup>9</sup> as answering double questions raises the issue of the extent to which vice-versa clefts share structural characteristics with multiple questions. It is generally agreed, for example, that multiple questions are subject to the 'Superiority Condition' (Chomsky 1973),<sup>10</sup> illustrated by the oddity of the multiple questions in (31):

(31) a. ??who does who owe money?

b. ??Who did who call?

The oddity of the corresponding vice-versa clefts in (32) suggests that vice-versa clefts are constrained by the same condition:

---

<sup>9</sup>I owe the term 'vice versa cleft' to Cathy Ball.

<sup>10</sup>The Superiority Condition is formulated by Lasnik and Uriagereka 1988 as follows: 'If a construction has two sources of *Wh*-movement, and one is superior to the other (in the sense of 'higher' in the tree), then *Wh*-movement must pick the superior one.'

- (32) a. A: You all owe me money.  
 B: Oh. I told everyone that they owed Duane money.  
 A: ??It's to ME that DUANE owes money.
- b. A: So, what's the case you're working on?  
 B: Nothing I need bother you with now. ??It was ME who YOU called, remember?

I will suggest in §6.4 below that it might be possible to extend this conclusion to all comment-clause clefts.

## 6.2 Discourse-Pragmatic Properties of the Clefted Constituent

I turn now to some discourse pragmatic properties of the clefted constituent in comment-clause clefts. Gundel 1985 leaves open the question of whether clefts with primary accent on the cleft clause are all-comment sentences (c.f. §2.4), or whether the clefted constituent can express the topic of the sentence. I present tentative evidence in this section that the clefted constituent in some comment-clause clefts does indeed express the topic, though I will reconsider this conclusion in §6.4. After examining the extent to which the relevant clefted constituents satisfy necessary conditions for topic status, I discuss two subtypes of comment-clause clefts that contain clefted constituents which are good candidates for topic status: emphatic repetition clefts and clefts restricted by the focus adverbials *also* and *even*.

### 6.2.1 CLEFTED CONSTITUENTS AS TOPICS

In this section, I verify that the clefted constituents in the clefts in (1) and (2) above satisfy the tests for topic status that were introduced in Chapter 2. Note that the clefts in (1) and (2) above satisfy prosodic conditions (c.f. §2.5) for topic-comment sequences since they are most appropriately pronounced in their given contexts with a fall-rise secondary accent on the clefted constituent and a falling primary accent on the cleft clause:

- (33) a. It was SHE who administered that inJEction.  
 b. It was SHE who found your OVercoat.

This intonation pattern is actually attested and transcribed in examples from Geluykens' 1983 cleft corpus:<sup>11</sup>

- (34) Well she must have known about it # and . it was “||SHE<sub>FR</sub> who at‘tempted to ‘burn the BOOKS<sub>F</sub> #and de||stroy the EVIDENCE<sub>F</sub>”  
[Geluykens 1983, C19]
- (35) It was “JOHNNY<sub>FR</sub> that ‘stole her MONEY<sub>F</sub> while we were away in France, I think, wasn’t it?  
[Geluykens 1983, C41]
- (36) because literature is in some cases the product of imagination, isn’t it, and of men’s minds, and it is the im‘agination and the “MIND<sub>RF</sub> of MAN<sub>R</sub> that I’m “INTERESTED<sub>F</sub> ‘in.  
[Geluykens 1983, C45]

Other examples from Geluykens' corpus exhibit falling pitch on the prosodic nucleus of the cleft clause and an unaccented clefted constituent:

- (37) ...though Sir Garnet was marvellous that he’d done it all you see. So this was a mysterious phrase which I knew perfectly well what it meant, it meant that everything was tidy you see # but it was || he who EXPLAINED<sub>F</sub> #what it “MEANT<sub>F</sub>#.  
[Geluykens 1938, C12]
- (38) a: Did you meet Fuller?  
b: Yes, # it was || he who INVITED<sub>F</sub> me #- and it was a very pleasant day.  
[Geluykens 1983, C22]
- (39) James, it was no good, you didn’t tell me to sell out # it was || I who said I WANTED<sub>RF</sub> to ‘sell ‘out#.  
[Geluykens 1983, 20]

It has not gone unnoticed in the literature that the prosodic center of a cleft sentence sometimes falls on the cleft clause instead of on the clefted constituent.<sup>12</sup> For example, Halliday

<sup>11</sup>For typographical purposes, I have replaced the pitch contour arrows in Geluykens' examples with subscripts: F, for 'falling,' RF for 'rise-fall,' and FR for 'fall-rise,' etc., and have capitalized the accented words identified by Geluykens.

<sup>12</sup>A couple of brief mentions have also appeared in footnotes. Chomsky 1971 notes the clefts in (i) as illustrating the superimposition by 'special grammatical processes of a poorly understood sort' of 'contrastive' or 'expressive' prosodic features on 'normal' intonation contours.

(i) Is it John who writes POETRY?/Is it John who WRITES poetry?/It ISN'T John who writes poetry.

Schmerling 1971 (cited in Prince 1978) notes the clefts in (ii) and (iii) as counterexamples to her claim that cleft clauses are destressed and presupposed, characterizing them as 'used for rhetorical effect':

(iii) Was it John who broke the window? — No, but it was John who paid for it.

1967 offers the cleft in (40) to illustrate the ‘marked’ pattern of ‘given’ clefted constituent and ‘new’ cleft clause:

- (40) What utter confusion! —Yeah. but I’m not going to complain to anyone. —I should hope not. **It’s you who were to blame.**

More recently, Bolinger 1986 remarks that ‘clefting is basically independent of accent.’ Though he views clefting as a syntactic focusing device which ‘attracts the accent as a rule,’ he notes that the ‘syntactic focus’ is regularly deaccented in contexts of ‘repetition’ such as (41), where ‘the only new and interesting item in the reply is the fact of writing’:

- (41) What does John have to do with the affair of the letter? — **It was John who wróte the letter.**

The analysis of the clefted constituents of (1) and (2) above as sentence topics is supported by the observation that they contain information repeated from the questions which elicit their containing clefts as answers:

- (42) a. A: Why must we not lose sight of the nurse?  
 B: She was the last person to be with the old lady before her death, and it was she who administered that inJEction.
- b. A: How did Erica save my neck and your reputation?  
 B: It was she who found your OVercoat.

The clefted constituents thus pass the ‘question test’ for topicality.<sup>13</sup> The paraphrases in (43) and (44) show that they also pass Gundel’s ‘as for’ test and Reinhart’s ‘said about’ test:

- (43) a. As for why we mustn’t lose sight of the nurse, she was the last person to be with the old lady before her death, and it was she who administered that inJEction.  
 b. As for how Erica saved your neck and my reputation, it was she who found your OVercoat.
- (44) a. Wimsey said about why he and Parker shouldn’t lose sight of the nurse, that she had been the last person to be with the old lady before her death, and that it was she who had administered the inJEction.  
 b. Grant said about how Erica had saved Tisdall’s neck and his own reputation, that it was she who found Tisdall’s OVercoat.

---

(iv) The lack of patriotism I see today is appalling. It was Stephen Decatur who said, ‘Our country, right or wrong.’

<sup>13</sup>See Chapter 1 for discussion.

An early forerunner of the question-test was used by Fowler and Fowler 1919 in distinguishing a subtype of the 'it...that' construction, exemplified in (45a-b), which they characterize as an 'artificial perversion' of the prescriptively correct usage of the clefted constituent to answer a question echoed by the cleft clause in the passage quoted in (46):

- (45) a. It was in this spring, too, that the plague broke out.  
 b. Accordingly, it was with much concern that I presently received a note informing me of his departure.
- (46) In [45a] the true question and answer in the circumstances would be, not, as the sentence falsely implies, 'When did the plague break out?' 'That too happened in this spring', but 'Were there any other notable events in this spring?' 'Yes: the plague broke out'. Impressiveness is given to the announcement by the fiction that the reader is waiting for whatever may turn up in the history of this spring. In [45b] we go still further: the implied question 'What were your feelings on receiving a (not *the*) note...?' could not possibly be asked; the information that alone could prompt it is only given in the *that* clause.

More recently Hannay 1983 also comes to the conclusion that a clefted constituent sometimes expresses the 'topic' rather than the 'focus' of a cleft sentence, as in (47) and (48):

- (47) a. What happened in London?  
 b. It was there that I met my first wife
- (48) a. 1963 will surely go down in the history books.  
 b. It was in that year that Kennedy was assassinated, for instance.

In sum, both prosodic considerations and the topic tests support the conclusion that the clefted constituent of a comment-clause can express the sentence topic.

### 6.2.2 METALINGUISTIC OPERATORS: *ALSO* AND *EVEN*

It is interesting to note that comment-clause clefts provide a systematic class of counterexamples to the claim made in Horn 1969 that 'clefting, like *only*, specifies uniqueness, while *even* and *also* presuppose non-uniqueness and thus cannot be clefted.'

- (49) a. It's only Muriel who voted for Hubert.  
 b. \*It's even Muriel who voted for Hubert.  
 c. \*It's also Muriel who voted for Hubert

Attested counterexamples to Horn's constraint against restricting the clefted constituent with *also* are actually quite frequent. It can surely be no coincidence that all such examples are independently analyzable as comment-clause clefts with activated clefted constituents, as in (50)-(56):

- (50) The rate of fatal heart attacks among middle-aged men increased steadily until the late 1960's, at which point it leveled off and soon began to decline. Not coincidentally, it was about that time that large numbers of men wised up to the harmfulness of cigarettes. **It was also in the late 60's that more healthful foods—specifically, foods low in cholesterol and saturated fat—began to invade American kitchens.** Since then, the average cholesterol level of adult males has fallen... [Jane E. Brody, 'America's Health: An Assessment,' *The New York Times Magazine*, 10/8/89, p. 42]
- (51) It was the President, in a rare departure from the diplomacy of caution, who initiated the successful Panama invasion. **It was also Bush who came up with the ideas of having an early, informal Malta summit with Gorbachev and a second round of troop cuts in Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall.** But it was Baker who subtly turned the Malta summit from the informal, 'putting our feet up' chat initially envisaged by the President into a platform for the United States to demonstrate through a 16-point initiative that it was prepared to help Gorbachev. [M. Dowd and T.L. Friedman, 'The Fabulous Bush and Baker Boys,' *The New York Times Magazine*, 5/6/90, p. 64]
- (52) Rough location work is nothing new for Sheen. When he was young, the family traveled to location with his father, actor Martin Sheen. They spent 16 months in the Philippines... Ten years later, Charlie Sheen found himself back in the Phillipines... as the star of... *Platoon*. The terrain and environmental elements... are very similar to Vietnam, including 120 degree heat by 8 a.m., blood-thirsty bugs and an impenetrable jungle. And to make matters worse, the Marcos government had just been toppled three days before the filming party arrived...  
**It was also location work that gave Sheen his first acting break.** He was nine and his dad was filming *The Execution of Private Slovik*... [Jane Ammeson, 'Intensity fuels Charlie Sheen's On-screen Presence,' *COMPASS Readings*, Northwest Airlines Magazine, July 1990, p. 69]
- (53) These amusements were more common in the winter when inclement weather kept people indoors, and served to while away the long evenings between other social engagements. **It was at this time of year also that the major villages were continuously occupied and ceremonies took place.** As centres of ceremonial activity houses had ritual significance and were given sacred names... [People of the Totem]
- (54) Ironically, if it was the United States that appeared to be stalling the negotiations by making last-minute demands, **it was also Lee Thomas, the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, who took the lead in the talks a year ago** when he called for a 95 percent phase-out of the man-made chemicals. [Minneapolis Star & Tribune, 9/26/87]
- (55) **It was in this spring, too, that the plague broke out.**

[Fowler and Fowler 1919, p. 104, ex. 15]

- (56) **It was also during these centuries that a vast internal migration (mostly by the Galla) from the south northwards took place**, a process no less momentous than the Amhara expansion southwards during the last part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.  
[Challenge, p. 39, Prince 1978, ex. 41c]

Clefts in which the clefted constituent is restricted by *even* are also felicitous in appropriately contextualized comment-clause clefts with emphatically repeated clefted constituents, as in the constructed example shown in (57):

- (57) A: Why do you think John is the murderer?  
B: Because it's John who the victim was blackmailing. It's John who was heard to threaten him. It's John who lacks an alibi. It's John whose fingerprints were on the murder weapon. And **it's even John who inherits the money!**

The only example in my corpus of a clefted constituent restricted by *even* is the topic-clause cleft shown in (58) from a mystery novel. It may be significant that this example is a predicational cleft (cf. §3.3).

- (58) Wexford and Mr. Sung looked through the wooden grille at the great deep rectangular burial shaft and Mr. Sung quoted almost verbatim a considerable chunk from *Fodor's Guide to the People's Republic of China*. He had a retentive memory and seemed to believe that Wexford, because he couldn't decipher ideographs, was unable to read his own language. **It was even Wexford's *Fodor's* he was quoting from**, artlessly borrowed the night before. Wexford didn't listen. [Rendall, Speaker of Mandarin, p. 4]

Note that *even* has scope over both the clefted constituent and the cleft clause in (58) (i.e. = 'It was even the case that it was Wexford's *Fodor's* he was quoting from').

In sum, felicitous restriction of the clefted constituent with *even* or *also* is diagnostic of clefts of the comment-clause type, and supports not only the distinction between comment-clause and topic-clause clefts, but the analysis of the clefted constituent as sometimes expressing the topic of the cleft sentence.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Gundel 1974 reports that 'focus' adverbials in Russian are also sensitive to the distinction between topic and comment. On the basis of examples such as those in (i) and (ii), Gundel concludes, '*Takže* is used if the constituent within the scope of 'also' is the comment. *Tože* is used if the constituent within the scope of 'also' is the topic.'

- (i) Ja vzjal v biblioteke zurnal. Ja vzjal tam ta<sub>k</sub>že knigu.  
I took in library magazine. I took there also book.  
'I took a magazine out of the library. I also took out a book



It may also be possible to conclude more generally, that the exhaustiveness implication associated with clefts (cf. Halvorsen 1978, Atlas and Levinson 1981, Horn 1982 for discussion), can be cancelled in comment-clause clefts like (59) and (60), but not in topic-clause clefts.

- (59) It was in that article, among other places, that Bork expressed his support for California's anti-open-housing referendum and his belief that it was only 'political speech' which deserved First Amendment protection.  
[David S. Broder, 'The need to be sure on Bork', 9/20/87]
- (60) It was Lansdale as much as anyone who established Diem in power.  
[Mark Frankland, Predecessor makes North look like an amateur operator, 3/5/87]

Note, however, that Horn 1981 cites examples provided by Ellen Prince of apparently cancelled exhaustiveness implications which appear to be analyzable as topic-clause clefts:

- (61) He was just a burned-out little man with tired eyes and a drained smile, who had a gift that was too big for his soul, and it was the gift that killed him, as much as anything. [Silverberg, Stochastic Man]
- (62) Do you know, it was me that caused the trouble, mostly, though two of them most bravely backed me up.  
[Sayers, Strong Poison]
- (63) It's the ideas that count, not just the way we write them.  
[Richard Smaby, lecture]<sup>15</sup>

### 6.2.3 EMPHATIC REPETITION CLEFTS

It will be demonstrated in this section that comment-clause clefts are also used to maintain the addressee's attention on the referent of an already activated clefted constituent, as a means of emphasizing its importance as a discourse topic, as, for example, in (64):

- (64) 'The Member for Hertfordshire North East, despite his fascist tendencies, is a notable liberal when it comes to women's rights. But perhaps women should beware; proximity to this elegant baronet can be lethal. His first wife was killed in a car accident; he was driving. Theresa Nolan, who nursed his mother and slept in his house, killed herself after an abortion. **It was he who knew where to**

- 
- (ii) Ja vzjal v biblioteke zurnal. Anna tože vzjela zurnal.  
I took in library magazine. Anna also took magazine.  
'I took a magazine out of the library. Anna also took out a magazine.

<sup>15</sup>It should be noted that Horn refrains from committing himself to the position that (61)-(63) are instances of implicature cancellation, though this position is consistent with his analysis of the exhaustiveness condition as a generalized conversational implicature, as opposed to an entailment (Atlas and Levinson 1981), or conventional implicature (Halvorsen 1978).

**find the body.** The naked body of Diana Travers, his domestic servant, was found drowned at his wife's Thames-side birthday party, a party at which he was expected to be present. Once is private tragedy, twice is bad luck, three times looks like carelessness.'

[P.D. James, *A Taste for Death*, p. 21]

In clefts of this type, there is a very strong tendency for the cleft pronoun and copula to be dropped in the non-initial clefts of the sequence, as in (65)-(69) below.

- (65) At a podium or on the House floor, her searing wit can vaporize an opponent in the 15 seconds suitable for a sound bite: **it was she who labeled Reagan 'the Teflon President,' she who called defense contractors 'the welfare queens of the 80's'** Behind the scenes she does a surprising amount of homework and displays a shrewd, even lethal political savvy. Over the years she has helped bump not one, but two, chairmen of the House Armed Services Committee.

[Ferraro, 'The Prime of Pat Schroeder', the *New York Times Magazine*, 7/1/90, p. 14]

- (66) The little woman in the blue trouser suit came into the restaurant car and hesitated for a moment before making for the table where the two married couples sat. The barrister jumped up and pulled out a chair for her. And then Wexford understood **it was she he had seen. It was she who had been coming down the corridor when he turned away from the window, she who, while his eyes were closed, had vanished into her own compartment.** She too was a small slight creature, she too was dressed in a dark-coloured pair of trousers and a jacket, and though her feet had certainly never been subjected to binding, they were not much bigger than a child's and they too were encased in the black Chinese slippers on sale everywhere....

[Rendall, *Speaker of Mandarin*]

Perhaps the elision in (67) can be analyzed as simply a case of verb phrase coordination.<sup>16</sup> In any case, it is not surprising that only material which the speaker/writer assumes to be already in the focus of the addressee's attention can be elided since Kuno 1975 has proposed that precisely this condition regulates the felicity of Gapping:<sup>17</sup>

- (67) 'And yet,' he went on doggedly, 'with a cross section of the entire national population available for the purpose, **It was you who had to be the last known person to see the murdered woman alive. And you who had to discover the body.** He was briefly silent, contemplating my talent for prevailing against the odds. 'How did you manage to overlook being apprehended with the murder weapon in your hand?

[Kallen, 1984, *The Piano Bird*]

<sup>16</sup>Assuming, for example, a syntactic analysis like the one suggested in Chapter 3, which treats the clefted constituent and cleft clause as subconstituents of a verb phrase out of which the copula has been raised.

<sup>17</sup>See Prince 1985, 1988 for further discussion.

Unlike (65)-(67), the information expressed in the cleft clause of (68) is most likely assumed by the writer to be unfamiliar to the reader, while the contents of the cleft clause in (69) could be either informative or familiar:

- (68) Moreover, though a widow and childless, Mrs. Coolman was a mother by adoption. Her young protégé, Edward Farris, had been orphaned in infancy; **it was she who had given him a home and provided for his education; she who had secured him an excellent commercial post; she who, soon afterwards, had insisted upon his resigning that post in order to live at Brimley House as her secretary and dance attendance upon her declining years.** It was assumed as a matter of course by her friends, and perhaps by Farris himself, that her adopted son would also be her adopted heir.

[Knox, *The Footsteps at the Lock*, p.145]

- (69) Just what is Canada?  
It is a question that each traveler brings to this nation, and it is a question that has no single answer. Canada is a delightful labyrinth of cultures and customs, of peaceful coexistence and political squabbles....  
**It is here where the hearty French established a settlement along the frothy St. Lawrence River and survived the first relentless winter. It is here that the first bewildered European immigrants wondered how they would ever be able to thrive in such an unruly land; here where the British Loyalists fled from American revolutionaries; here where provinces separated by great distances and differences joined to form one nation.**  
There is much to discover in this vastness. Canada's immensity is daunting but not uninviting....

[Insight Guide to Canada, p. 15]

Full noun phrases as well as pronouns can occur as emphatically repeated clefted constituents of comment-clause clefts:

- (70) But one cannot help wondering—as Mr. Rusk must have done a hundred times—what Marshall would have done in a similar situation. We don't have to look very far to find out, for as Mr. Rusk himself indicates, **it was Marshall who rushed to get World War II over with before it destroyed the institutions of American democracy; it was Marshall who concluded that the United States should not fight to try to save the biggest domino of all, Chiang Kaishek's China.**

[Gaddis, 'Dean Rusk's Personal Truce,' *The New York Times Book Review*, 7/1/90, p. 3]

- (71) 'At least I've discovered where the reverend and sainted Sir Thomas More got his account of Richard.'  
'Yes? Where?'  
'From one John Morton.' ...  
'So that was the horse's mouth!' she said.

‘That was the horse’s mouth. **And it is on that account of Richard that all the later ones were built. It is on that story that Holinshed fashioned his history, and on that story that Shakespeare fashioned his character.**’

‘So it is the version of someone who hated Richard...’

[Tey, *Daughter of Time*, 93]

- (72) She had always been a little afraid of her grandmother ... **It was her father who had always come first with her, in her childhood and afterwards. It was her father who had been the more supportive when she had left Cambridge at the end of her first year and had gone to a London polytechnic to study photography.** How much had she really cared about her mother’s anguish when the infatuation with Barbara became obvious?

[Rendall, *A Taste for Death*, p. 247]

- (73) **So it was Bredon alone who went over to Oxford, Bredon alone, though armed with a note from Leyland, who went into Mr. Wickstead’s well-known boot-shop,** and demanded whether Mr. Nigel Burtell was a customer; whether, if so, they had any record of his size.

[Knox, *The Footsteps at the Lock*, p. 219]

Examples (74) and (75) show that the topic expressed in the clefted constituent can be ‘comparative’ as well as ‘continuing’.<sup>18</sup>

- (74) The words confirmed what Dalgliesh had suspected, **that it was Musgrave whose family had always voted Tory and who would find any other allegiance unthinkable, the general who had come to his political philosophy by a process of thought and intellectual commitment.**

[Rendall, *A Taste for Death*]

- (75) The women who went were almost all married. But it was **husbands** who were captured by the glowing descriptions of the West, **wives** who were skeptical. **Husbands** who thought of what could be gained; **wives** who thought of what would be lost. [Goodman, ‘The uprooted II,’ p. 231]

Examples (76)-(78) are rhetorically the most complex of my examples, exhibiting a combination of continuation and comparison, in a rhetorically dramatic triple assertion:<sup>19</sup>

- (76) Virginia has always been in the forefront of racial change. **It was at Jamestown in 1619 that the first shipload of captive Africans later destined for slavery disembarked. It was at Appomattox in 1865 that the Confederacy surrendered. It was in Virginia in the 1950s that men who fancied themselves learned penned some of the last erudite-sounding but morally bankrupt justifications for segregation. And it will be in Richmond on Jan.**

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Keenan and Schieffelin 1976 for the notion of ‘continuing’ topic, and Lambrecht 1981 and Barnes 1986 for the notion of ‘comparative’ topic.

<sup>19</sup>Note that many of the examples from this section are from syndicated columns by Ellen Goodman. See Scott and Klumpp 1984 for an interesting discussion of the centrality of comparison in Goodman’s rhetorical strategy.

**13 that there will be a black hand on the Bible when Lawrence Douglas Wilder is sworn in as Virginia's 73rd Governor.** It is not only in Berlin that ugly walls and once impassable barriers are tumbling down in a world bright with change.## [Laurence I. Barrett and Don Winbush, 'Breakthrough in Virginia,' Time, 11/20/89]

- (77) Not every community, courtroom, or jury today accepts this simple standard of justice. But ten years ago, five years ago, even three years ago, these women might not have even dared press charges.
- It was the change of climate which enabled, even encouraged, the women to come forward. It was the change of attitude which framed the arguments in the courtroom. It was the change of consciousness that infiltrated the jury chambers.** [Goodman, 'If she says no', p. 326]
- (78) The second was the power of her own conscience. **It was her sense of duty that sent Eleanor Roosevelt to the mining communities and pockets of Depression poverty. It was her sense of righteousness that forced Eleanor Roosevelt to place her seat between the black and white aisles of a segregated southern conference in 1939. It was her sense of justice that pushed a Declaration of Human rights through the United Nations in 1948.** She couldn't see a problem without asking: 'Can't something be done?' [Goodman, 'A battered little girl named Eleanor Roosevelt,' p. 57]

### 6.3 The rhetorical function of clefts

In this section, I turn to the use of clefts to mark transitions between rhetorically-significant segments of discourse.<sup>20</sup>

#### 6.3.1. DISCOURSE-INITIAL CLEFTS

Van Oosten 1986 notes that three of the four discourse-initial clefts discussed by Prince involve a time reference, and concludes from this that, at least when dealing with historical events, they function 'to link the reader with the material. The writer takes one aspect of where he or she imagines the reader to be and links that with the following material—the passage. One obvious way to do this is to link the material up with the reader's present location in time.' This is often the case in my data as well, as in (79)-(82):<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Van Oosten 1986 makes a basic distinction between 'unique-referent' clefts, which 'emphasize the identity of the referent, about which there was some question, either rhetorically or in fact', and 'topic-regulating' clefts, which 'pick out the focus of attention at points where it might get lost.' She distinguishes five subtypes of 'topic-regulating' clefts, based on whether they are used to 'introduce a passage', to 'launch from the introduction of an article into the main body', to 'return from a tangent', to 'give the relevance of tangential information in the presupposition', or to 'give the next step in the discussion.'

<sup>21</sup>Carlson 1983 states that it is not required 'that the question [expressed by the cleft clause] itself be familiar to the audience. To the contrary, a cleft sentence can actually be used to suggest it as a topic worthy of attention. In fact, clefts

- (79) [BEGINNING A RADIO NEWS STORY]  
**It was less than a week ago that U.S. troops in Panama surrounded the Vatican embassy.** Shades of déjà vu — U.S. troops are again surrounding a Latin American embassy — this time in Peru.  
 [Public radio announcer, WSKG, 1/8/90]
- (80) [BEGINNING AN INTRODUCTION TO A RADIO VARIETY SHOW ACT]  
**It was thirty-one years ago, on Sunday, that HANK WILLIAMS died...**  
 [Garrison Keillor, The American Radio Company  
 of the Air, National Public Radio, 1/6/90]
- (81) [BEGINNING A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE]  
**It was on 42nd Street yesterday that Brian Wilkerson stumbled upon the first 1990 Census form he had ever seen.** Ignoring the sign above the Census Bureau's table that said he could 'Be Counted Here in 3 Minutes,' he plopped down on the sidewalk to examine it for nearly half an hour...  
 [Mireya Navarro, 'Census Takes to the Streets to Seek the Uncounted,'  
 The New York Times, 7/1/90, p. 24]
- (82) [BEGINNING A NEWS MAGAZINE ARTICLE]  
**Was it only last year that financier Henry Kravis and his partners borrowed a whopping \$28 billion to buy RJR Nabisco in the biggest leveraged buyout in history?** It seems like an age—namely, the age of excessive debt. Now, only 17 months later, the landscape is littered with casualties of overborrowing...  
 [Newsweek, 7/2/90, p. 38]

Comment-clause clefts can be used to link the material of the discourse up with something that the addressee is familiar with, such as a famous person, as in (83) and (84), national group as in (85), novel as in (86), or even a well-known aphorism as in (87):

- (83) [BEGINNING A LINGUISTICS BOOK]  
**It was Sapir, the great American linguist, who said: 'It must be obvious to anyone who has thought about the question at all, or who has felt something of the spirit of a foreign language, that there is such a thing as a basic plan, a certain cut, to each language.'** This is undoubtedly true, but it is quite another matter to draw out the basic plan, and describe the cut of a language to those who are ignorant of it.  
 [David Greene, The Irish Language, p. 5, 1966]

---

have an important function as rhetorical openings of literary texts.' Lambrecht 1985 treats discourse-initial clefts as cases of 'pragmatic accommodation' in the sense of Lewis 1979: 'By the very act of using the sentence which required the said presupposition, the speaker in fact created this presupposition and made it available as a background for his assertion. The reason the speaker exploited a lacking presupposition in this way is rhetorical...it is obviously more elegant.' DeClerck 1988 states that 'discontinuous clefts are often used to emphasize rather than identify.'

- (84) [BEGINNING AN INTRODUCTION TO A MUSICAL NUMBER]  
**It was Johannes Brahms who suggested to his friend Anton Dvorak that he compose a piece on...** Dvorak wrote Slavonic Dances...  
 [Public radio announcer, WSKG, 7/12/90]
- (85) [BEGINNING A STORY ON BACK OF RESTAURANT WINE LIST]  
**It was the Greeks who first made wine, around 1500 BC.** They then took this unique art to all the corners of the ancient world, including Italy, Spain, Russia, and, in about 600 BC, France...  
 [liquor menu from 'It's Greek to Me' restaurant, Minneapolis]
- (86) [BEGINNING A BOOK REVIEW]  
**I suppose it was *The World According to Garp*, back in the late 1970s, that kicked off the run of ballyhooed narratives purporting to represent us aging baby-boomers as savvy, tasteful folks who once, long ago, entertained—well, you know—certain 'opinions,' maybe even got involved in (you know) a cause or two, but who have not learned to settle down with self-deprecatory humor to the complex, mature work of living out and up our personal lives...**<sup>22</sup> [Fred Pfeil, review of 'Local Deities', by Agnes Bushell, *The Nation*, p. 210, 2/12/90]
- (87) [BEGINNING A NEWSPAPER OP-ED COLUMN]  
**It's not only the generals who are a war behind.** Officials, politicians and policy makers just as often are trying to win some battle long ago lost. Exactly this lay behind the Iran-contra affair...  
 [William Pfaff, Present policy, bygone battles, 7/18/87]

As Prince 1978 observes, the information expressed in discourse-initial clefts often serves as background material, which is 'subordinate in importance (in terms of what the discourse is about) to what follows.' The cleft is used essentially as a transition device. It is also natural to anchor the description of a thing or situation to its historical point of origin, as in (88)-(91):

- (88) [BEGINNING A BACKGROUND STORY FOR A TV NEWS SPECIAL REPORT]  
**It was the death of a Chinese leader five weeks ago that gave birth to the student movement.** ...Hu Yaobang...  
 [John Lawrence, '23 days,' ABC news special, 'Worlds in Turmoil', 6/4/89]
- (89) [BEGINNING THE PREFACE TO A LINGUISTICS FESTSCHRIFT]

---

<sup>22</sup>The cleft clause in (86) contains sixty-five words (including the complementizer). Prince 1978 notes the greater average length of the cleft clause in clefts as compared to pseudoclefts (she gives an example of a cleft clause containing forty-five words). The extreme length supports the analysis of such clauses as informative or unfamiliar, since, as Prince points out, Grice's submaxim of Manner ('Be brief—avoid unnecessary prolixity') enjoins an utterer to use as few words as possible in referring to familiar things.

The ironic tone of the cleft in (86) is characteristic of discourse-initial clefts. Writers seem to be self-conscious about initiating their text with a cleft.

**It was in the course of 1980 that it dawned upon several friends and colleagues of Manfred Bierwisch that a half century had passed since his birth in 1930.** Manfred's youthful appearance had prevented a timely appreciation of this fact, and these friends and colleagues are, therefore, not at all embarrassed to be presenting him, almost a year late, with a Festschrift which will leave a trace of this noteworthy occasion in the archives of linguistics.

[Crossing the Boundaries in Linguistics, Klein and Levelt, eds. 1981.]

(90) [BEGINNING A MYSTERY NOVEL]

**It was in the month of Boedromion in the waning of the third full moon after the summer solstice that the terrible deed was done that was to have so long and arduous a consequence.** The day before it happened I had troubles enough—not that one would say such a thing lest the gods hear and laugh. But so it was... [Margaret Doody, Aristotle Detective]

(91) [BEGINNING AN ORCHID DISPLAY INFORMATION SHEET]

**It was the suggestion of the Ithaca Garden Club and the encouragement of the Society for the Humanities that led Cornell Plantations, the botanical garden of the University, to propose to the Class of 1952 this project of restoration to celebrate their 35th reunion.** An additional generous contribution of many beautiful plants in flower this June came from orchid grower Bill Starke, Class of 1932, to honor the Class of 1952.

['The Class of 1952 Orchid Collection, A.D. White House, Cornell University]

Sometimes the discourse-initial cleft is the first sentence of a dramatic triple-sequence, as in (92) and (93):

(92) [BEGINNING A NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL]

**It was Col. Mike Snell who first told the press that his boys had found fifty pounds of cocaine hidden in a freezer in Manuel Noriega's house.** Gen. Maxwell Thurman later upgraded the haul to fifty kilos. Now, buried on the inside pages of the papers comes an admission by the Pentagon that the substance in question was not cocaine at all, but tamales wrapped in banana leaves.

['Not so Hot Tamales,' The Nation, p. 1, 2/12/90]

(93) [BEGINNING A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE]

**It was a doctor who advised Wandalee Basore to start smoking back in the 1940s.** He thought it would help her relax and aid digestion. Another doctor suggested she stop smoking in the 1950s, because it could possibly harm the baby she was carrying. Now every doctor in America says she should quit.

['Hard-core smokers still think they can dodge the bullet,' The Ithaca Journal, 4/14/90]

The cleft in (94) also dramatically draws attention to the information in the cleft clause:



(94) [BEGINNING A NEWSPAPER ART REVIEW]

**It is not every artist who is allowed to go into the most important museum of modern art in the world, select the art in it that defines his modern artistic heritage and his esthetic beliefs, install it in one of the museum's galleries, and set one of his own paintings in the center so that it seems to conduct all the other works, or hover over them like a bird, or stand over them with raised hands like a priest.**

This is what the abstract painter Ellsworth Kelly has done in 'Ellsworth Kelly: Fragmentation and the Single Form,' the second Artist's Choice exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art...

[Michael Brenson, 'Ellsworth Kelly Loads the Dice at the Modern,' The New York Times, 6/24/90, H33]

The clefts in (95)-(97) are used as a rhetorical device to open a mystery novel 'in media res':

(95) [BEGINNING A MYSTERY NOVEL]

**It was jealousy that kept David from sleeping, drove him from a touseled bed out of the dark and silent boardinghouse to walk the streets.** He had so long lived with his jealousy, however, that the usual images and words, with their direct and obvious impact on the heart, no longer came to the surface of his mind. It was now just the Situation.

[Patricia Highsmith, *This Sweet Sickness*]

(96) [BEGINNING A MYSTERY NOVEL]

**It was the silence that woke her, the absolute stillness of the late night that pulled her from a dreary sleep.** There had been steps, soft and furtive. But now there was nothing. That's what she heard. Quiet. A lock of gray hair hanging in her face, she blinked, her aged eyes sucking in the faint glow of the nightlight. It was the middle of the night and she understood. Someone was in her bedroom.

[R.D. Zimmerman, *Mind-Scream*]

(97) [BEGINNING A MYSTERY NOVEL]

**It wasn't until she realized someone was following her that Hana Shaner thought her idea might be dangerous.** She paused, listening. There it was again. Soft, furtive footsteps echoing against the restored buildings of center city...

[Roma Greth, *...Now You Don't*]

The *that*-clefts in (98) and (99) are used with a similar effect as the opening sentences of newspaper articles:

- (98) [BEGINNING OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLE]  
**That wasn't his newspaper Frank Reginek heard rustling as he ate breakfast in his St. Paul home. It was rats in his pipes.**

'I'd sit there reading the paper and then I'd hear them. It was like they were trying to scratch right through,' said Reginek, of 1631 E. Hoyt Ave. 'There's been quite a bit of scratching over the last couple months.'

[‘Work on St. Paul sewers drives rats to the surface,’ Star Tribune of the Twin Cities, 1/89]

- (99) [BEGINNING OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLE]  
 Make no mistake, **that was not a grudge that Nancy Reagan was holding as she chatted about Donald T. Regan in a recent radio interview.** Mrs. Reagan, who was discussing her book, ‘My Turn: The Memoirs of Nancy Reagan,’ which is to be published this month, said she ‘tried very hard not to be vindictive’ when writing about certain top Presidential aides with whom she was not particularly friendly.

[‘Still Miffed?’, New York Times, 10/22/89, E7]

### 6.3.2 DISCOURSE-SEGMENT LINKING

Comment-clause clefts are also used to mark a transition from one segment of discourse to the next. By formulating the proposition in the form of a cleft, the attention of the addressee is drawn to the proposition or to one of its components, implicating its importance. In (100) and (101), the clefted constituent reiterates the topic of the preceding segment, while the cleft clause introduces an informative succeeding topic of non-obvious relevance. Such clefts are thus used as devices for generating relevance implicatures, signalling that the preceding segment is subordinate to the succeeding segment at a higher level of discourse organization:

- (100) A friend of mine, prone to misplacing her keys and the names of colleagues, marks this weakness with some offhand remark about it being a symptom of early Alzheimer's... The woman has seen this disease rob others in her circle of their memory, and then their ability to reason and then their lives. If each of us focuses on some future dread, hers comes with a name.

Not surprisingly, **it was this friend who pointed out the article.** A biochemist has announced a new blood test that may diagnose Alzheimer's in its early stages, that may be used in the future to identify healthy people who are at risk. Would you, she asks, want to know?...

[Ellen Goodman, ‘If science knows fate, must we?]

- (101) The federal government is dealing with AIDS as if the virus was a problem that didn't travel along interstate highways and was none of its business. **It's this lethal national inertia in the face of the most devastating epidemic of the late 20th century that finally prompted one congressman to strike out on his own.**

Gerry Studds, D-Mass., has begun to treat his constituents like foreigners — in the best way. The 268,000 households in his congressional district are about to receive the first mass mailing of the 'Surgeon General's Report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.'

[Ellen Goodman, 'Using the frank to counteract lethal national infigting on AIDS,' 5/25/87]

The referents of the indefinite (or indefinitely modified) clefted constituents in (102)-(104) are not only unactivated, but unfamiliar:

- (102) The Indians of the coast have always lived quietly and harmoniously here, even after they were 'discovered' by the famous Captain Cook in 1793. **It was a Scotsman, Simon Fraser, who having adopted Canada as his home, dedicated his life to exploring and developing the richness of British Columbia.** Fraser traveled up the smaller of the region's two important rivers, named it the Fraser River, and established it as a major fur-trading route.
- [Insight Guide to Canada, p. 227]
- (103) For some time the English had been transporting convicts to the American colonies. This was no longer possible since America was fighting for her independence from England. British jails and rotten hulks were crammed to the point of suffocation with men, women, and children. **It was Sir Joseph Banks, an English scientist, who suggested that the good climate and rich vegetation of Botany Bay could provide a settlement for the convicts without costing the English too much money.** The First Fleet arrived in Botany Bay on January 1788 with convict passengers. Between 1788 and 1868 almost 160,000 convicts were sent from England.
- [Aussie History, story from menu of 'The Pub Down Under', Minneapolis]
- (104) **It was either an Irish mystic or poet, and it's usually one or the other, who said that a friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and plays back the words when you forget how they go.** This weekend, with St. Valentine reminding loved ones to love, some homage is due for friends who befriend....

[Colman McCarthy, For a friend who is a woman, 2/14/87]

Clefted adverbials are also frequently used to mark discourse-segment transitions, as in (105)-(108).<sup>23</sup> Again the clefted constituent expresses the sole activated element of the proposition:

---

<sup>23</sup>Note the similarities between this class of clefts and sentences which look like clefts but contain adverbial complementizers:

- (105) **It was then that the telephone began ringing.** Barbara Berowne gave a gasp and glanced from the instrument to Dalglish with something very like fear.  
[James, *A Taste for Death*, p. 453]
- (106) **It was at this point that their conversation was interrupted by Mr. Quirk.** How long he might have been listening to them was not apparent; he moved softly over the grass...  
[*The Footsteps at the Lock*, p. 107]
- (107) ...Wexford fought his way out of the dream and awoke with a cry... He drank some water and put out the light.  
**It was on the following day that he first saw the woman with the bound feet.**  
[Ruth Rendall, *Speaker of Mandarin*, last sentence, ch. 1]
- (108) The electroweak theory successfully predicts the scattering pattern when electrons interact with protons, with W bosons, and with particles called neutrinos. The theory runs into trouble, however, when it tries to predict the interaction of W bosons with one another...  
**It is here that the Higgs Boson enters as a saviour.** The Higgs boson couples with the W bosons in such a way that the probability of scattering falls within allowable limits: a certain fixed value between 0 and 1....  
[Veltman, *Scientific American*, July 1989]

### 6.3.3 DISCOURSE-FINAL CLEFTS

It is fairly common to find clefts appearing at the ends of sections and chapters in expository written texts to present what Borkin (1984: 130) refers to as 'forward-looking metacommentary' in the cleft clause. The clefts in (109) and (110), for example, simultaneously mark the closure of the discourse segments in which they appear, and direct attention to the subsequent discourse segment:

- 
- (i) It was Thursday 5 September and he was about to leave his office to drive to Bramshill Police College to begin a series of lectures to the Senior Command Course when the call came through from the private office.  
[P.D. James, *A Taste for Death*, first sentence, ch. 3]
- (ii) It was nearing mid-December before the dour manservant Aelfric came again to the herb-gardens for kitchens herbs for his mistress. By that time, he was a figure familiar enough to fade into the daily pattern...  
[Ellis Peters, *Monks Hood*, first sentence, ch. 2]

Whether some or all such sentences should be analyzed as clefts is not immediately clear. See §4.2.3 above for some discussion.

- (109) We will be content to leave this analysis in its present form, providing a revised and more complete representation...in Chapter 3, where we take into account certain observations and arguments of Selkirk... First we turn to a fuller account of the interpretation of focus... **It is this topic which occupies our attention in Chapter 2.** [Rochemont 1986, *Focus and Generative Grammar*, p. 36, end of chapter 1]
- (110) The deductive device is also at the centre of spontaneous nondemonstrative inference: it is a major source of assumptions, and its processes affect the strength of both the initial and final theses of the deductions it performs. **It is to these aspects of inference that we now turn.**  
[Sperber & Wilson 1986, *Relevance*, p. 108, end of section 6, chapter 2]

Prince 1978 reports this type of cleft to be very frequent in her data, occurring in spoken as well as written discourse, e.g. (111):

- (111) **It's with great honor and pleasure that I announce Hilary Putnam.**  
[graduate student, University of Pennsylvania, 4/1/77; Prince's 49b]

Prince suggests that such clefts function to indicate deference or politeness in that 'the authors remove themselves as subject (and potential theme); at the same time, they seem to present their act of turning as an inescapable, external fact—not as their own choice,' and 'we again find the speaker playing down his own role in the event, subordinating it and himself in the situation as in the syntactic structure.'

In (109)-(111), the material expressed in the cleft clause is pure metalinguistic commentary, but it is also possible for discourse-final cleft clauses to contain substantive information, as in (112), where the author closes an article by pointing out suggestions for further research:

- (112) With this, then, we have covered all the properties of NP sentence-topics which were discussed in the previous sections... Nevertheless, these are, obviously, not the only conditions, and applied to the actual discourse, they will not always identify the topic correctly. **It is within the area of specifying the conditions on the selection function that much empirical work is still needed.**  
[Reinhart, 1981, final sentence]

In (113)-(115) the element denoted by clefted constituent is immediately activated and the cleft clause is used to state its importance for the overall discourse:

- (113) ...The one final point I wish to stress is the importance of studying these and all other sentence constructions in discourse, since **it is only there that their communicative functions can be observed.**  
[Prince 1978, final sentence]

- (114) Nearly all the extant artifacts date from the nineteenth century. Earlier examples have decayed...From the 1800s we also have the first-hand account of native customs made by observers before white influences caused many changes. **It is this period which accordingly gives us the best picture of the culture and society of the northwest coast Indians.**

[People of the Totem, p. 23, end of chapter 1]

- (115) ...The main thesis of this book is that an act of ostension carries a guarantee of relevance, and that this fact—which will call the principle of relevance—makes manifest the intention behind the ostension. We believe that **it is this principle of relevance that is needed to make the inferential model of communication explanatory.**

[Sperber & Wilson, Relevance, p. 50, end of section 9, chapter 1: Relevance and Ostension]

In (116), the clefted constituent is contrastively related to the immediately preceding topic—a return is made to the previous topic ‘world religions’ after discussion of its counterpart, ‘tribal religions.’

- (116) In addition, there are the tribal religions which never lasted as world religions. The Greek pantheon... Celts... Egyptian Goddess Isis... In the end all these died out, although they have sometimes influenced the religions which superseded them, and their cult-practices sometimes survive today in other religions. **It was the world religions which in the end provided the bonds that linked together areas of the world previously separate.##**

[The Times Atlas of World History, ‘The religious bonds of Eurasia to AD 500,’ p. 73, end of chapter]

In the cleft in (117), it is again the clefted constituent rather than the cleft clause which reactivates the topic of the article as a whole (i.e. ‘grammatical implications’). The cleft clause follows directly from the immediately preceding sentence.

- (117) ...It was argued, however, that many of the nonlinguistic beliefs and intentions of speakers must be dealt with in grammatical study...The beliefs themselves must not be, or else perspicuous grammars become impossible to construct, but the links between beliefs and message forms constitute part of the subject matter of grammar in even the narrowest sense. **It is grammatical implications that provide the linkage.##**

[Larry Hutchinson, ‘Nonlinguistic beliefs in linguistics,’ p. 135, end of article]

To summarize, in (112)-(117), the cleft functions rhetorically to tie the loose strands of the discourse into a tidy knot—an effective closing device.

## 6.4 Concluding remarks

In section 6.1.2, I argued that ‘vice-versa’ clefts can be insightfully analyzed as providing answers to multiple constituent questions, so that (118a), for example, is analyzed as answering the question in (118b):

- (118) a. It’s YOU who called ME  
 b. Who called who?

I observed further that vice-versa clefts, like multiple questions seem to obey the Superiority Condition of Chomsky 1973. Thus, both the vice-versa cleft in (119a) and the multiple question in (119b) are relatively less acceptable than their counterparts in (118):

- (119) a. ??It’s ME who YOU called.  
 b. ??Who did who call?

The comment-clause clefts in my data confirm the intriguing observation made in Prince 1978 that only subjects and sentence-adverbials appear as clefted constituents in comment-clause (Prince’s ‘informative-presupposition’) clefts. It is tempting to extend the analysis of vice-versa clefts as answering multiple questions to all comment-clause clefts, and derive Prince’s observation from the Superiority Condition.

Earlier in this chapter I raised the issue of the extent to which clefted constituents in comment-clause clefts like (120) function to express the topic of the sentence.

- (120) 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]

I concluded there that the clefted constituents in the cleft in (120) does indeed pass tests for topic status. In particular, it passes the question-test, as shown in (121):

- (121) A: Why must we not lose sight of the nurse?  
 B: She was the last person to be with the old lady before her death, and it was SHE who administered that inJECTION.

I adopted the view in §2.7 that topical questions can be hierarchically embedded inside each other. This suggests the possibility that the referent of the clefted constituent in (120) is functioning not as

a sentence-topic but as a discourse topic, so that a more fine-grained question-test would reveal a dialogue-structure similar to (122):

- (122) A: Why do you say we must not lose sight of the nurse?  
 B: Well, who was the last person to be with the old lady before her death?  
 A: The nurse.  
 B: And who administered that injection?  
 A: She did.

The speaker of the cleft in (120) might be seen to have in mind, then, at a higher level, the multiple question shown in (123):

- (123) Who did what?

Hierarchical rhetorical structuring is more transparently characteristic of the highly-planned discourses which employ emphatic continuation clefts, as in (124):

- (124) a. If Quebec business has a cardinal, it's Claude Castonguay, who has enrolled his distinguished presence, social conscience and political smarts in the mainstream causes of French Canada's evolution for the past three decades...  
**It was Castonguay, now 61, who provided much of the intellectual fodder for Jean Lesage's Quiet Revolution and the social reforms that led Pierre Trudeau into federal politics. It was Castonguay who persuaded Bourassa to reject the Victoria Charter in 1971, arguing that Canada's Constitution should not be patriated unless Quebec was granted full powers over social policy. It was Castonguay who six months ago formed the Association in Favour of Meech Lake, which mobilized more than a thousand of the province's business leaders into a last-ditch effort to help bring Quebec into the Constitution. And it will be Castonguay who will play a pivotal role in the coming negotiations between Canada and Quebec....**

[Peter C. Newman, 'A new, confident spirit of independence', Maclean's, 8/13/90, p. 43]

- b. Who provided intellectual fodder...? — Castonguay!  
 Who persuaded Bourassa to ...? — Castonguay!!  
 Who formed the Association...? — Castonguay!!!  
 Who will play a pivotal role...? — Castonguay!!!!
- c. Who did what?

Even discourse-initial clefts can be seen as providing answers to multiple questions, so that (125a), for example, answers the question in (125b):



- (125) a. [BEGINNING OF NEWSPAPER ARTICLE] **It was 30 years ago that Richard Nixon melted under the glare of the hot lights and turned television debates into an integral part of North American election campaigns.**
- b. What happened and when?

Note finally that subjects and sentence-adverbials, especially when activated, are highly likely to function as sentence topics. An important function of comment-clause clefting may then be to mark an activated subject or sentence-adverbial as a non-topic. In sum, if comment-clause clefts provide answers to multiple questions and topic-clause clefts provide answers to single questions, the overall function of clefts in general is simply to highlight the answer to a relevant question.