

Discourse Pragmatics and Cleft Sentences in English

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

Nancy Ann Hedberg

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

October 1990

© Nancy Ann Hedberg 1990

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	i
Chapter 1 Overview.....	1
Chapter 2 Discourse-Pragmatic Preliminaries	9
2.1 Topic and comment.	9
2.1.1 Definitions	9
2.1.2 Topic tests.	10
2.2 Cognitive Status.....	13
2.3 The topic familiarity condition.	15
2.4 All comment sentences.	19
2.5 Prosodic prominence.....	21
2.5.1 Pitch accent.	21
2.5.2 Focus-presupposition.	25
2.6. Word order principles.....	29
2.7 Discourse topic	32
Chapter 3 The Cleft Copula and Clefted Constituent	35
3.1 Two approaches to the structure of clefts.....	35
3.1.1 The extraposition approach.	36
3.1.2 The expletive approach.....	38
3.2 The specificational-predicational distinction.	41
3.2.1 The copula.	42
3.2.2 Predicational-specificational ambiguities.	44
3.2.3 Syntactic correlates.....	46
3.2.4 Characterizing the distinction.....	47
3.2.4.1 The attributive/referential distinction.	48
3.2.4.2 The de dicto/de re distinction.	49
3.2.4.3 The predicative/referential distinction.	51
3.3 Predicational Clefts.....	53
3.3.1 Plausible Candidates.....	54
3.3.2 Tests for predicational status.....	56
3.3.3 Proverbial clefts and idioms.....	58

3.4	The quantifier constraint	60
3.4.1	A type-shifting solution.....	61
3.4.2	Pseudoclefts.....	62
3.5	The predicate constraint.....	65
3.5.1	A semantic solution.....	66
3.5.2	A syntactic solution.....	68
3.5.3	Secondary predicates.....	71
3.5.4	Pseudoclefts.....	72
Chapter 4	The Cleft Pronoun and Cleft Clause	75
4.1	The cleft pronoun.....	75
4.1.1	<i>Th</i> -clefts	76
4.1.2	<i>Th</i> -clefts and cognitive status	78
4.1.3	A pragmatic co-occurrence constraint.....	80
4.1.4	Specificational and predicational <i>th</i> -clefts.....	82
4.1.5	Expletive pronouns more generally.....	84
4.2	The cleft clause	86
4.2.1	Similarities between cleft and relative clauses	86
4.2.2	Jespersen's arguments.....	89
4.2.3	Generativists' arguments.....	90
4.3	The relation between the cleft pronoun and cleft clause.....	93
4.4	The relation between the clefted constituent and cleft clause	98
4.5	The syntactic structure of clefts	100
Chapter 5	Topic-Clause Clefts	103
5.1	Discourse-pragmatic characteristics of the cleft clause.....	104
5.1.1	Previous approaches	105
5.1.1.1	Functional approaches	106
5.1.1.2	Prince's Approach	106
5.1.1.3	Gundel's approach.....	108
5.1.1.4	Presuppositional approaches.....	109
5.1.2	Direct activation.....	112
5.1.2.1	Immediate activation	112
5.1.2.2	Truncated clefts	114
5.1.2.3	Reactivation	116
5.1.2.4	Implied activation.....	117
5.1.3	Indirect activation	118
5.1.3.1	Causal antecedent.....	118
5.1.3.2	Causal consequent.....	119

	5.1.3.3 Superlative implicature	120
	5.1.3.4 Clefts versus pseudoclefts	122
5.2	Discourse-pragmatic characteristics of the clefted constituent	123
	5.2.1 Clefted constituent as comment	123
	5.2.2 Contrast	124
	5.2.2.1 The nature of contrast.....	124
	5.2.2.2 The contrastive nature of clefts	128
5.3	Special subtypes.....	130
	5.3.1 Negative Clefts	130
	5.3.1.1 Metalinguistic negation.....	130
	5.3.1.2 Rectification	132
	5.3.2 Sentential-focus clefts.....	135
Chapter 6	Comment-Clause Clefts	139
6.1	Discourse-pragmatic properties of the cleft clause	140
	6.1.1 Cognitive status.....	140
	6.1.2 Vice versa clefts.....	146
6.2	Discourse-Pragmatic Properties of the Clefted Constituent.....	149
	6.2.1 Clefted constituents as topics.....	149
	6.2.2 Metalinguistic operators: <i>also</i> and <i>even</i>	152
	6.2.3 Emphatic repetition clefts.....	155
6.3	The rhetorical function of clefts	159
	6.3.1. Discourse-initial clefts	159
	6.3.2 Discourse-segment linking.....	164
	6.3.3 Discourse-final clefts	166
6.4	Concluding remarks	169
Appendix 1	Type Shifting	173
Appendix 2	Description of the Corpus	175
Part I	Sources	175
	A. Spoken sources.	175
	B. Mystery novels.....	176
	C. Newspaper columns.....	176
	D. Historical narratives.	177
Part II.	Distribution.	177

References 181

Acknowledgements

It is, of course, Jeanette Gundel to whom I owe the greatest debt for inspiring and supporting this dissertation. I would also like to thank the other final and former members of my committee—Michael Kac, Jerry Sanders, Betsy Barnes, Randy Fletcher, Larry Hutchinson, and Jim Morgan—for stimulating questions and useful comments on my prospectus and on the version of the thesis that I defended. Kathleen Houlihan, Nancy Stenson, and Joe Stemberger weren't on any of my committees that actually met, but were nevertheless influential.

I would like to express special thank-yous to Jeanette Gundel and Ron Zacharski, my fellow 'B-team members,' who couldn't co-author this dissertation, but could at least edit, format, and print it for me and thereby enable me to finish it; to Karen Frederickson for warm friendship, travel, history, the big mailbox, and those transcripts; and to Jill Landers for her wonderful house and neighbours that last summer in Minnesota. Cathy Ball also deserves special mention for stimulating conversations about clefts at various conferences, and her inspiring papers on *th*-clefts.

I will always miss the gossip and good times with the Minnesota linguistics students (especially my Stammtisch, cardinal-sign *real* friends)—Tom Rindflesch, Pat Schneider, Cynthia Scott, Liz Henly, Suellen Rundquist, Mike Bouldin, Jennifer Reeves, Robbin Clamons, Kari Swingle, Silas Oliveira, Karen Schaeffer, and everybody. Outside of linguistics, I very much enjoyed the company of my housemates—Einar Molver, Brent Peterson, Laura Castor, Jane Braaten and Barbara Block; and neighbours—Joe Bessie and Rebecca Mulvey.

I would like to acknowledge the Mellon Foundation and the Cornell linguistics community for a pleasant and valuable post-doctoral year (which I spent illicitly working on revisions)—especially Sally McConnell-Ginet for her friendly sponsorship; Ginnie Brennan, Vicky Carstens, Ngampit Jagacinski, Fred Landman, Lelwala Sumangala, Leslie Porterfield, and Veneeta Srivastav for friendship, discussions and dinners; Jim Huang and Fred Landman for

permitting me to sit in on their classes; and Maher Bahloul, John Bailyn, and Sumangala for consenting to sit in on mine. In previous years I received financial assistance from a predoctoral traineeship at the Center for Research in Learning, Perception and Cognition, and later from a Graduate School Dissertation Fellowship.

Last but not least, I will always be grateful for the love and support of my parents—Marlin and Opal Hedberg; my sisters—Lisa and Teri Hedberg; and all the preceding generations of grandmas.