

# (Un)headed Relative Clauses Associated with BE: Clefts or Non-Clefts?

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# Outline

- Introduction
- WH- clause + BE + X: clefts and non-clefts
- Corpus study: 3 constructions close to pseudo-clefts
- Conclusion

# Introduction

# Pseudo-clefts and similar structures in English

- Pseudo-clefts: **WHAT Y BE X**

*What I need is a personal intro* = I need a personal intro

- Pragmatics: Highlighting of X (*a personal intro*): contrastive here (not a phone number); Y = presupposition
- Syntax: *What I need* = headless relative clause (*what = the thing that*)

⇒ hence the term « pseudo-cleft »

- Reverse pseudo-clefts: **X BE WHAT Y**

*A personal intro is what I need* = I need a personal intro

- *What I need* = headless relative clause

# Pseudo-clefts and similar structures in English

- Headed Relative Clauses (HRC): **The thing Y BE X**

*What I need is a personal intro ⇒ The thing (that) I need is a personal intro*

- « Reversed » Headed Relative Clauses: **X BE The thing Y**

*A personal intro is what I need ⇒ A personal intro is the thing (that) I need*

# The question

- In this study we consider both unheaded relative clauses (WH) and Headed Relative Clauses (HRCs) in combination with BE and a NP or a clause:
    - X BE WH: Debenhams is what I meant to say (the “reverse pseudo-cleft” proper)
    - HRC BE X: *The person [who is] receiving the massage is a girl*
    - X BE HRC: They are the ones who own most of the animals
- ⇒ How far are these cases of pseudo-clefts?

# Overview of previous work

- Unheaded RCs + BE (WH Y BE X):

*What I like is CHAMPAGNE*: « pseudo-clefts »

- Delin & Oberlander 1996, Biber *et al.* 1999, Hudleston & Pullum 2002, Herriman 2004

- If BE + Unheaded RC (X BE WH Y):

*CHAMPAGNE is what I like*: « reverse pseudo-cleft »

- Lambrecht 2001: 3 types of clefts, one of which is: X is WH Y

# Overview of previous work

- Headed RC BE X (**The thing Y BE X**): clefts
  - Chafe 1976, Prince 1978, Hedberg 1988, Collins 1991, Lambrecht 2001, Hedberg & Fadden 2007
  - Collins 1985: *the thing, the time, the place, the reason, the one* (unmodified) = Clefts
  - Headed RCs with *the person who* = compensates for the lack of pseudo-clefts highlighting a constituent with the feature [+ human]
    - \*Who came was John  $\Rightarrow$  The person who came was John
- X BE Headed RC (**X BE The thing Y**): reverse clefts:
  - Lambrecht 2001: *SHE was the one who wanted to keep Reagan from appearing in PUBLIC*



WH Y BE X:

the limits between clefts and non-clefts

# WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

- WH clause + BE + AdjP: non-cleft

- *He put his hand into the vase and what he touched was flabby and sticky*  
(uncleaving impossible: \* *He touched flabby and sticky*)

- WH- clause + BE + NP:

- *He put his hand into the vase and what he touched was some kind of flabby, sticky thing*: uncleaving possible (*He touched some kind of...*): cleft? Why could not this be interpreted as a non-cleft as well?

⇒ What is the difference between a « normal » WH clause being the subject of BE, and a WH clause being the subject of BE in a pseudo-cleft sentence?

# WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

## Lambrecht, 2001: DEFINITION OF CLEFTS

- Logically single proposition / biclausal syntax

*I like champagne* ⇒ *What I like is champagne*

- *Champagne* as shared argument between main clause & subordinate clause.
- RC: semantic (theta) role to shared argument / main clause = pragmatic role (focus)  
⇒ The copula (+ what) does not change the semantic structure but only the info structure
- Relating a pragmatic presupposition (*I like x*) to a focus (*champagne*) via a pragmatic assertion (*x = champagne*)
- Co-indexation of WH (*what*) and X (focus phrase)

# WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

## Lambrecht, 2001: CLEFTS vs. NON-CLEFTS

- Declefting
- Information structure and presupposition
- Identification vs. predication
- Referentiality:
  - Clefts: *What* is non-referential (semantically empty)
  - Non-clefts: *Where I'm standing now was under water yesterday*
- Prosody

# WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

- Cleft:

- With verbs of saying: cleft possible if object of V expresses the content of the saying (*THAT* clause):

*What he suggested is that we should go immediately = He suggested that we should go immediately*

- Non-cleft:

- If other type of complement: no clefting:

*What he suggested is a good idea ≠ He suggested a good idea*

- *Was what Mr Scott Cooper was putting to you his view that cosmetic treatment is not repair (WHAT referential)*

# WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

	<i>What I like is champagne</i> ( <i>ce que j'aime, c'est le champagne</i> )	<i>What she suggested was an excellent idea</i> ( <i>ce qu'elle a suggéré est une excellente idée</i> )
<b>Declefting</b>	= <i>I like champagne</i> Single clause	≠ <i>She suggested an excellent idea</i>
<b>Information structure</b>	<i>Champagne</i> = focus <i>I like x</i> <i>x = champagne</i>	Predicate focus <i>She suggested x</i> <i>x was an excellent idea</i>
<b>Co-indexation</b>	Between the variable in the open proposition <i>I like x</i> and the denotatum in the focus phrase <i>champagne</i>	Between the variable in the WH clause <i>She suggested x</i> and the variable in the main clause <i>x was an excellent idea</i>

# WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

	<i>What I like is champagne</i>	<i>What she suggested was an excellent idea</i>
<b>BE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identification between <i>Champagne</i> and RC (<i>what I like</i>).</li><li>• BE as empty predicator</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Predication of a property (<i>an excellent idea</i>) about the referent of the WH clause</li><li>• BE as full predicator</li></ul>
Reflected in reversibility	<i>Champagne is what I like</i>	<i>*an excellent idea is what she suggested</i>

# WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

	<i>What I like is champagne</i>	<i>What she suggested was an excellent idea</i>
<b>Semantic structure</b>	Theta role of <i>champagne</i> inside <i>I like x</i>	Theta role of <i>what she suggested</i> inside <i>x was an excellent idea</i>
Reflected in questions	<i>What do you like? What I like is champagne</i> <b>But not</b> <i>What is champagne? What I like is champagne</i>	<i>What was an excellent idea? What she suggested was an excellent idea.</i> <b>But not</b> <i>What did she suggest? What she suggested was an excellent idea.</i>



# WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

	<i>What I like is champagne</i>	<i>What she suggested was an excellent idea</i>
<b>Referentiality</b>	<i>What is not referential</i>	<i>What is referential</i> <i>What she suggested = Her suggestion</i>
<b>Exhaustiveness</b> (Collins 1985)	<i>What I like is champagne (and nothing else)</i> <i>?What I like is champagne, amongst other things</i>	<i>?? What she suggested was an excellent idea (and nothing else)</i> <i>*What she suggested was an excellent idea, amongst other things.</i>

# WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

	<i>What I like is champagne</i>	<i>What she suggested was an excellent idea</i>
<b>Prosody: same pattern</b>	Accent on focus phrase <i>champagne</i> (+ on RC if not salient enough)	Accent by default on last informative element <i>idea</i>
<b>Pragmatic presupposition: same</b>	<i>What I like is not champagne</i> <i>Is what I like champagne?</i> → <i>I like x</i>	<i>What she suggested was not an excellent idea.</i> <i>Was what she suggested an excellent idea?</i> → <i>She suggested x</i>
Kind of pp (Prince 1976)	Has to be present in the mind of co-speaker; answers a Q°	

# WH Y BE X: Ambiguity

- Ambiguity = 2 distinct interpretations; can't know without context
- *What we are concerned about is what the concerns were back in 1929*
  - either cleft: *we are concerned about x* and *x = what the concerns were* (= we wonder what the concerns were)
  - OR non-cleft: equivalence between two referential NPs (we have the same concerns as in 1929)
  - The context disambiguates: second interpretation (equivalence)

# Corpus study

The corpus

# The corpus

- Corpora searched:
  - ICE-GB (oral + written)
  - Question Time (political debate; L. Rouveyrol)
  - IViE (spontaneous spoken English)

# The corpus

- Collins 1985: excludes complex heads from clefts (not uncleavable) + examples with *one of the things* (no exhaustiveness). Includes only examples with restrictive sense: (exhaustiveness criterion applies: *the one thing*)
- Lambrecht 2001: accepts examples without exhaustiveness (non-exhaustive specificational clefts):

*There's the use of clefts I want to explain*

Serves to specify the variable of a presupposed open proposition.

# The corpus

- We agree with Lambrecht:
  - *The thing that struck one of the things that struck me about this*: truncated cleft announcing what follows. If we consider *the thing that struck me* as cleft, no reason not to consider *one of the things that struck me* as cleft too. Specifies one of the variables in *x, y, z struck me*.
  - *one of the things that a playwright needs to do is not only to give you a sense of danger and excitement and dramatic climax but also to give you some sort of shape of things to come*

# The corpus

- We looked at:
  - Simple heads (*the thing, the one, the ones, the person, the guy*)
  - Also slightly modified: *one of the things that; the one thing* (restrictive or emphatic/intensive)
- Number of tokens:
  - X BE WH Y: 22
  - X BE The thing Y: 48
  - The thing Y BE X: 37



# Corpus study

Reverse unheaded clefts:

X BE WH Y

# X BE WH Y

- Non-clefts:
  - Giving a definition: *Selling is what you do to persuade people to buy*
  - Referential WH clause: *The truth is what I have said today in evidence*
  - Special meanings of BE (*represent*): *the next card is what crosses you* (topic + new comment)
- Clefts:
  - Meaningless/unimportant WH-clause (→ unaccented): *Grass shop is what it is*
  - Recapitulatory: *This back-breaking regime is what an unsupported treck is about* (strong pp)
  - With clauses as foci: *we're all against it is what they say / give us peace is what we want*

# X BE WHY

## TRANSLATION INTO FRENCH

- Non-clefts: *X est ce que* ou *X, c'est ce que*
  - *He conceded that the statement was what he had said to the insurance company = il a avoué que cette déclaration ést ce qu'il a dit*
  - *The truth is what I have said today = la vérité, c'est ce que j'ai dit aujourd'hui (≠ c'est ça que j'ai dit)*
- Clefts: *C'est X que* ou *X, c'est ça (c'est ce que)*
  - *If white melamine is what you're after = si c'est de la mélamine blanche que tu cherches*
  - *This backbreaking regime is what an unsupported trek is about = ce régime qui casse le dos, c'est ça un treck sans aide (définition)*
  - *Debenhams is what I meant to say = Debenhams, c'est ce que je voulais dire*
  - *Ceasefire is what we need from the IRA = le/un cessez-le-feu, c'est ça qu'on demande à/que nous attendons de l'IRA*

# X BE WHY

## PROSODY

Lambrecht 2001: main stress on focus phrase

- Non-clefts:

- 1 TU, Nucleus on second part:

*Selling is what you do to persuade people to buy (F)*



- 2 TUs; boundary after *is*:

*but the truth is (HF) / what I have said today in evidence (F)*



- Clefts:

- 1 TU, Nucleus on focus, WH- clause unaccented (if unimportant): *Grass shop is what it is (F)*



- 2 TU; boundary before *is*:

*This back-breaking regime (F) / is what an unsupported trek is about (F)*



# Corpus study

headed clefts:

The thing Y BE X

# The thing Y BE X

- Non-clefts:

- *The best, and the one normally available, is moss ( rather than sedge ) peat.*
- *The people in the cleft of the mountain who are hesitating about whether it 's a really good idea to do this <,> are the janissaries (referential NP)*

- Clefts:

- *The ones that the ones that 'll be interesting will be will be the chatty ones (non-referential)*

# The thing Y BE X

## IDENTIFICATION

- Non-clefts: identification between two referentially autonomous entities (identifier + identified)
  - *The best, and the one normally available, is moss ( rather than sedge ) peat.*  
⇒ reversible (*moss peat is the one normally available peat*)
- Clefts: identification between a variable (in an open proposition) and a denotatum (referential) (focus phrase)
  - *the ones that 'll be interesting will be the chatty ones* ⇒ x (*x will be interesting*) = *the chatty ones*
  - *The person that's affected is me basically*

# The thing Y BE X

## PRESUPPOSITION

- Non-clefts: the starting point of the predication is a NP (containing a pp)
- Clefts: pp as the starting point (locus of predication)

⇒ **The thing Y BE X** tends to be interpreted as cleft because sentence starts with a presupposed proposition (not strong pp)

- *The thing BE X*: all our tokens can (unequivocally) be analysed as clefts
- *The one(s) BE X* (human or non-human): varied (clefts & non-clefts)



# Corpus study

Reverse headed clefts:

X BE The thing Y

# X BE The thing Y

- Non-clefts:

- *he is the manipulator , the one who makes the decisions*
- *Is her mother the one that had the stroke :*

Identification between two referential entities

Translation into French: *Sa mère, c'est celle qui... ≠ Is it her mother who had the stroke? (C'est sa mère qui...)*

- Clefts:

- *The impact 's first the thing that springs to mind first*

X BE The thing Y

## PRESUPPOSITION

⇒ X BE The thing: tends to be interpreted as non-cleft (the pp is at the end of the sentence) → presupposition has to be stronger  
(Consciousness-presupposition) (*The impact 's first the thing that springs to mind first*)

# X BE The thing Y

PROSODY: Pro BE The one

- Nucleus on the pronoun (2 exs; 2 TUs): contrast: cleft

*If you live alone of course / you are the one (F) / who completes the form (F)*

- Head on  pronoun: cleft or not; if cleft: emphasis

- Cleft: *HE was the one who decided that Wilson was the owner (F)*

- Non-cleft: *THEY 're the ones who own most of the animals (F)*

- Unaccented pronoun: non-cleft: 

*They 're NOT the ones that cause them / they 're the ONES that try and change them (F)*



# X BE The thing Y

## PROSODY & PRESUPPOSITION

- Lambrecht: considers *SHE is the one who wanted to keep Reagan from appearing anywhere in PUBLIC* as cleft mainly because different from *SHE wanted to keep... PUBLIC* (topic-comment) and because it contains a presupposition
- YET: pp present in all RCs and not all RCs are clefts
- *THEY 're the ones who own most of the animals (F)*  
*≠ THEY own most of the animals.*

*The ones who serves to create a category of people (opposed to the category that does not have the property *own the animals*). *THEY* emphatic*

# Conclusion

- Identification: both for clefts and non-clefts (reversible in both cases), but not same identification
- Presupposition: starting point of the predication in clefts / a NP or a clause with non-clefts
- Notion of referentiality seems to be the one most apt to distinguish the two structures

# Conclusion

- We can find examples of clefts and non-clefts in all categories, but tendencies are different according to the type of structure:
  - $X \text{ BE } WH \ Y$ : = mainly clefts
  - $The \text{ thing } Y \text{ BE } X$  : can easily be interpreted as cleft: the sentence starts with a pp (which is likely to be the point of departure of the predication)
  - $X \text{ BE } The \text{ thing } Y$  : mainly interpreted as non-cleft:  $X$  = starting point of predication; pp has to be stronger to have a cleft meaning