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

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Clivées non prototypiques Leuven 15-16 décembre 2016
Outline

• Introduction

• WH- clause + BE + X: clefts and non-clefts

• Corpus study: 3 constructions close to pseudo-clefts

• Conclusion
Introduction
Pseudo-clefs and similar structures in English

• Pseudo-clefs: 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-clefs: 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 »

• 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
  • 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 ⇒ 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*
WHY 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
  
  \( I \text{ like champagne } \Rightarrow What I \text{ like is champagne } \)

  - *Champagne* as shared argument between main clause & subordinate clause.
  - RC: semantic (theta) role to shared argument / main clause = pragmatic role (focus)
    \( \Rightarrow \) 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)
WHY 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
WHY 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):
    \textit{What he suggested is that we should go immediately} = \textit{He suggested that we should go immediately}

• Non-cleft:
  • If other type of complement: no clefting:
    \textit{What he suggested is a good idea} \neq \textit{He suggested a good idea}
  • \textit{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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Declefting</th>
<th>Information structure</th>
<th>Co-indexation</th>
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</table>
| = I like champagne | *Champagne = focus*  
I like x  
x = champagne | Between the variable in the open proposition *I like x* and the denotatum in the focus phrase *champagne* |
| ≠ She suggested an excellent idea | Predicate focus  
She suggested x  
x was an excellent idea | Between the variable in the WH clause *She suggested x* and the variable in the main clause *x was an excellent idea* |
| What I like is champagne  
(*ce que j’aime, c’est le champagne*) | What she suggested was an excellent idea  
(*ce qu’elle a suggéré est une excellente idée*) |  |
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<th></th>
<th>What I like is champagne</th>
<th>What she suggested was an excellent idea</th>
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| **BE**               | • Identification between *Champagne* and RC (*what I like*).  
|                      | • BE as empty predicator                      | • Predication of a property (*an excellent idea*) about the referent  
|                      |                                              | of the WH clause                                                  |
|                      |                                              | • BE as full predicator                                      |
| Reflected in reversibility | *Champagne is what I like*                    | *an excellent idea is what she suggested*                     |
### WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semantic structure</th>
<th>Theta role of champagne inside I like x</th>
<th>Theta role of what she suggested inside x was an excellent idea</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflected in questions</td>
<td>What do you like? What I like is champagne <strong>But not</strong> What is champagne? What I like is champagne</td>
<td>What was an excellent idea? What she suggested was an excellent idea. <strong>But not</strong> What did she suggest? What she suggested was an excellent idea.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**WHY BE X: clefts and non-clefts**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Referentiality</th>
<th>What I like is champagne</th>
<th>What she suggested was an excellent idea</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>What</em> is not referential</td>
<td><em>What</em> is referential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>What she suggested = Her suggestion</em></td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Exhaustiveness (Collins 1985)</th>
<th>What I like is champagne (and nothing else)</th>
<th>?? What she suggested was an excellent idea (and nothing else)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>?<em>What I like is champagne, amongst other things</em></td>
<td><em>What she suggested was an excellent idea, amongst other things.</em></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## WH Y BE X: clefts and non-clefts

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

• Ambiguousness = 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
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 trek 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
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.*
    \[ \Rightarrow \text{reversible (moss peat is the one normally available peat)} \]

• 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* \[ \Rightarrow x (x \text{ will be interesting}) = \text{the chatty ones} \]
  • *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 BE WH Y: = mainly clefts
  • The thing Y 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 BE The thing Y : mainly interpreted as non-cleft: X = starting point of predication; pp has to be stronger to have a cleft meaning