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Corsican Equivalents of IT-cleft Sentences in English: an Overview

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► **To cite this version:**

Pierre-Don Giancarli. Corsican Equivalents of IT-cleft Sentences in English: an Overview. *Lenguas, lenguaje y lingüística. Contribuciones desde la Lingüística General*, May 2014, Pampelune, Spain. pp.187-201. hal-02536223

HAL Id: hal-02536223

<https://hal.science/hal-02536223>

Submitted on 8 Apr 2020

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“Corsican Equivalents of *IT*-cleft Sentences in English: an Overview”, in *Lenguas, lenguaje y lingüística. Contribuciones desde la Lingüística General*, Gordejuela Senosiáin, A., Izquierdo Alegría, D., Jiménez Berrio, F., De Lucas Vicente, A. y M. Casado Velarde (eds.), 2015, Pamplona, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, España, 187-201
ISBN : 978-84-8081-478-2

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This brief paper aims at providing a comparison between *it*-cleft sentences in English, or clefts for short, and their equivalents in Corsican, a Romance language with a pre-Romance substratum spoken in Corsica and northern Sardinia whose grammar has received relatively little attention, *a fortiori* in contrastive linguistics¹. This article is structured as follows: in section 1 the corpus is introduced, Section 2 presents the syntactic pattern of a cleft in English and the additional necessary conditions to be met, Section 3 is devoted to the two major translation devices implemented in Corsican and the division of labour between them, including their respective subtypes.

A cleft sentence consists in the rephrasing of a single relation² with a view to partitioning the information content³ between comment and topic, or topic and comment, and makes this organization visible through syntax⁴. The first part of a cleft or predicative phrase contains at least the copula BE⁵ and the postcopular clefted element, the remaining part is a clause-like element introduced by a subordinator, which can either be a relative pronoun or a complementizer (see 2. below), including the instantiation of the place with a zero subordinator in English.

1. The corpus

There is an obvious scarcity of data available in both English and in Corsican, and to the best of my knowledge there are no original English texts that were directly translated into Corsican⁶ and the Corsican translations available were all made from French texts. Yet with either French or English being the source language, we have French fiction texts with both an English version and a Corsican version at our disposal, which amounts to 365.000 words. The texts I drew upon and the abbreviations thereof are presented in the Corpus section after the References.

I discarded the few passages where the English versions but not the French ones displayed a cleft (this is a minority situation as French makes greater use of its clefts than English does, cf. Volsik 1991: 83, 86-90, Katz 2000: 254, Carter-Thomas 2002: 2, Gledhill 2003) and only considered the English instances of clefts that were rendered by clefts in the French corresponding versions so that the Corsican translators facing clefts in the French versions would have been in the same position if they had faced the English version as far as clefts are concerned. In other words I only retained the

1 For further research in that field the interested reader may be referred to Giancarli 2006, 2011 and 2015.

2 See Jespersen 1927: 88 ff: « When we say “it is the wife that decides” [...] what we mean is really “the wife is the deciding person” », so that a cleft can be declefted and grammatically replaced with a non-cleft counterpart that is truth-conditionally equivalent. An instance of (often substandard) zero complementizer in English makes the parallel with a canonical monoclausal sentence all the more obvious: *it is the wife that decides / it is the wife decides / the wife decides*.

3 See for example Collins 1991: 2, Gomez-Gonzalez & Gonzalves-Garcia 2003: 174, Lambrecht 2001: 489.

4 The topic is what the speaker is talking about and considers to be known by his/her interlocutor, and is consequently the least informative part of the utterance. The comment is the information the speaker intends to convey relative to the topic, the most relevant part of the utterance information-wise.

5 My spelling in upper case letters (BE) is meant to abstractly cover all the forms that English copular *be* can take cross-linguistically, such as *être* in French or *esse* in Corsican, written in lower case letters.

6 Apart from a few translations by Anghjulamaria Carbuccia of editorials of Rinatu Coti's monthly newspaper *U Taravu*, and a few newspaper articles translated by myself on the Internet website <http://matinalatina.org>.

occurrences in which the French and English versions made totally identical choices. Keeping that in mind, my corpus amounted to 50 occurrences of cleft sentences tagged *e* for English and *c* for Corsican in the extracts below.

2. The syntactic pattern of a cleft in English

Cleft sentences in English follow the pattern: pronoun *it* + copula *be* + clefted element + a subordinator which is either a relative pronoun when it has an argumental antecedent or a complementizer when it is preceded by an adjunct, whether an adverbial or a prepositional phrase. Yet this pattern is a necessary but not sufficient condition for an interpretation as a cleft. Other criteria have to be met: there must be emphasis, a heavy stress and a rising intonation curve on the comment part of the structure, and the *it* pronoun is a non-referential dummy that acts as a syntactic filler of the subject slot. Consequently an extract such as 1e) below, in which Dr Knock pretends to be impressed by the chemist's clean and well-organized office while in fact all he wants is to increase his personal benefits, must be interpreted differently and excluded from the analysis, though it is superficially similar:

1e) *It is something I've set my heart on. To my way of thinking, the doctor who cannot depend on a pharmacist of the first order is a general who goes into battle without artillery.*

1c) *Hè un puntu di fundalizia. À contu meiu, senza l'affollu d'un spiziali di prima trinca, u medicu saria cum'è unginirali chì muvissi in battaglia senza artigliaria. (K)*

It is something I've set my heart on is not an instance of a cleft sentence but a presentational sentence that does not fit the defining features of a cleft in many respects: there is no emphasis and no constituent is prosodically prominent. It includes a real restrictive relative clause⁷. The sentence's presentational value is prevailing, and the *it* pronoun is referential: it could be replaced by the deictic pronoun *this*, and here refers to the fact of taking hygiene into account. The gloss could be *this is something I've set my heart on*, or *working hand in hand with a pharmacist is something I've set my heart on*. Because it is not a cleft, there is no way it can be declefted: if *it is the wife that decides* corresponds to *the wife decides*, but *It is something I've set my heart on* cannot be rephrased as just *??something I've set my heart on*. The Corsican equivalent of 1e is not a cleft either but an assertive sentence that logically does not resorts to any particular marking device.

A cleft in English makes it possible to have variation on the syntactic category and grammatical function of the clefted element, as well as on the subordinator (*wh*-⁸, *that*, or a zero subordinator), depending mainly 1) on whether the clefted element is an adjunct or an argument, and 2) on the nature of the relationship between the subordinator and the previous phrase:

1) The subordinator is a relative pronoun when it has an argumental antecedent, and a complementizer when it is preceded by an adjunct.

2) *Wh*- terms are real pronouns. They establish a loose relationship between the antecedent and the relative clause and mark a lack of determination, in line with their origin as interrogatives. *That* for its part is just a relator and it marks a higher level of determination. The relation between the clefted item and the remaining part is tighter, and even more so when zero is chosen (no preposition allowed, unlike *wh*- pronouns).

⁷ If the clefted item had been a pronoun or a proper name, it could not have been modified by a restrictive relative clause. It follows that the construction would not have allowed a presentational reading and would have unambiguously been a cleft from the start.

⁸ *Who* with an animate human antecedent, but the other *wh*- pronouns are rare.

3. The two major translation devices in Corsican and the division of labour between them

A different picture emerges in Corsican. My corpus study shows that two main patterns are used to convey the emphasis of an English cleft sentence, each of them consisting of several sub-patterns: the first is a formally similar syntactic (or prosodico-syntactic) means (constructions 1a and 1b), the second is a prosodic (or syntactico-prosodic) means (constructions 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b).

3.1. First major translation device

3.1.1. First subtype

Construction 1a is a formally similar prosodico-syntactic means consisting of copula *esse* + clefted element + a subordinate finite clause with compulsory *ch-* subordinator. One could directly say *chì*, since in Corsican there is only one relative pronoun and complementizer, whatever the grammatical function (unlike the *who/whom* distinction in English) and irrespective of whether the antecedent is animate or inanimate unlike the *who/which* distinction in English. This construction is illustrated by examples 2) and 3) below:

2e) [The patient] *Oh, I shall not lack patience! But **it is you**, Doctor, **who** will not want to concern yourself with me as much as will be necessary.*

2c) *Oh ! Eiu a pacenzia l'avaraghju. Ma **sareti voi**, o sgiò duttò, **chì** ùn mi vurreti dà capu à bona via. (K)*

3e) *In five minutes the whole sea, as far as Vurrgh, was lashed into ungovernable fury; but **it was between Moskoe and the coast that** the main uproar held its sway.*

3c) *In cinque minuti tutt'u mare finu a Werugh, fu staffilatu da una furia indumata. Ma **era tra Moskoe e a costa chì** u rimore supranava. (DM)*

This construction is common with arguments, but in Corsican it is specialized in the accommodation of adjuncts into clefted position, i.e. peripheral terms that are not actants and do not belong to the verb's valency but confine themselves to localizing the process in particular in time and space. In other words the construction *esse* + *chì* is available both for arguments, such as *voi* in 2, and adjuncts such as the prepositional phrase *tra Moskoe è a costa* in 3, but it is the only possibility for adjuncts.

In English, on the other hand, no means of emphasis is specialized in the clefting of adjuncts. However special treatment is granted to adjuncts within the syntactic clefting through the choice of the subordinator: when an adjunct has to be clefted English will give up *wh-* and zero and resort only to *that*, so that with an adjunct English will follow the pattern *be* + clefted element + compulsory choice of complementizer *that*, while Corsican will follow *esse* + clefted element + choice of invariable subordinator *chì*.

In examples 2 and 3 the clefted element, whether an argument or an adjunct, was also the element emphasized. The clefted term was the comment. It was presented as new information, while the rest of the sentence was taken as given and not at issue, information shared by both speaker and interlocutor. A cleft sentence, for example *It was between Moskoe and the coast that the main uproar held its sway* or *Era tra Moskoe e a costa chì u rimore supranava*, can be assimilated to the answer *between Moskoe and the coast / tra Moskoe e a costa* that would be preceded by the question *Where did the main uproar hold its sway?* The salient information, at the same time not previously

mentioned and contrastive, is provided by that answer. As if in the cleft sentence the speaker implicitly asked such a question and also supplied the missing variable. The clefted term, marked as comment, is emphasized, foregrounded, and the speaker contrasts it with other possible terms within the relationship.

The subordinate clause, as for example in example 3 the segment *that the main uproar held its sway / chì u rimore supranava*, is taken as topic and backgrounded: one already knows that *the main uproar held its sway somewhere*, this relation is accessible to the reader and its existence has been established prior to the cleft sentence. Then, as a second step, it is invalidated for anything other than *between Moskoe and the coast / tra Moskoe e a costa* and validated for these very elements.

The negation of the other items (which might have filled the post-copular position) can be explicit or implicit. For instance in 3 the zone between Moskoe and the coast stands in contrast with other zones in particular starting from Vurrgh, and in 2 *But it is you, Doctor, who will not want to concern yourself with me as much as will be necessary / Ma sareti voi o sgiò duttò chì ùn mi vurreti dà capu à bona via* one understands that the Doctor's patient puts herself in opposition to the Doctor.

At this point two observations are in order concerning the agreement:

It is of note that in Corsican the verb of the subordinate clause agrees with the clefted subject. This is clear in 2 where *vurreti* is due to the second person plural pronoun *voi*. English for its part can either do likewise (*it was you who were...*, *it is only the results that count*) or have the verb of the subordinate clause agree with the *it* neuter pronoun (*it was you who was...*), an option Corsican obviously cannot select since it is a null-subject language (I shall come back to this issue in section 3.2.).

Moreover, concerning the copula, Corsican often selects the tense of the copula in accordance with the tense of the subordinate clause (in example 2 the future on the copula *sareti* is due to the future in the subordinate clause *vurreti*) but the copula also agrees in number and person with the clefted item, in this context the second person plural pronoun *voi*. In English however the copula is in the present (its leeway is usually limited to simple present and simple past, other temporal references are marginal at best) and it agrees in number with the *it* neuter pronoun, not with the clefted item (*you were... / *it were you who... / it was you who...*) and is consequently always in the 3rd person singular (*is, was*) even if the clefted item is in the plural: *it is them who...*

However the previous comment-topic examples, in which the comment material was located in the predicative phrase and the topic material in the remainder of the cleft, are just one realization of the partitioning of the information content, in other words the item standing in cleft position need not contain comment material. It may receive not a comment but a topic reading, while the remaining part will be the comment in charge of making the narration progress⁹. This is illustrated by extract n°4 with a circumstantial adjunct, which is a typical realization (Prince 1978) but a passage with an argument could be accounted for in a parallel fashion:

4e) *I reserve to myself the lower room, a small white-washed room, low and vaulted like a convent refectory. It is from there that I write to you, with the door wide open to the good sun.*

4c) *In quantu à me, mi riserbu a pezza suttana, una pizzatella allattata, bassa e à volta cume un rifittòriu di cumbentu. Hè da culà ch'e' vi scrivu, à porta spalàncata, in ochju à u scioru di u sole.* (LDM)

⁹ See for example Prince 1978, Declerck 1984, Collins 1991. Yet I follow Delin & Oberlander (2005: 7) and consider that a cleft, unlike a declarative sentence, may not carry only all new information, *pace* Declerck 1984: 267 ff. and Doetjes & al. 2004: 534.

This time the clefted constituent *from there / da culà* is no new information. It is short, in keeping with Prince's criteria (1978) and anaphoric of the locator *the lower room, a small white-washed room / a pezza suttana, una pizzatella allattata* easily recoverable since mentioned at a very short distance from it in the immediately preceding sentence¹⁰. Consequently it cannot be the segment *there/culà* (nor *from there/da culà*) that can bear new information or help the narration progress, but the predicate following it, i.e. *that I write to you with the door wide open to the good sun / ch'e' vi scrivu à porta spalancata in ochju à u scioru di u sole*. Note in that respect in the English version the revealing presence of the *th-* morpheme in the adverb *there*, indicative of an operation of identification between the occurrence of the place referred to and another one previously mentioned. The clefted element consequently conveys topic information.

Orally, when the clefting concerns the comment, the latter is heavily stressed, in English and in Corsican as well. But when the topic is clefted, there is no particular stress.

In writing, however, where the voice stress option does not exist, there is no visible difference: the syntactic structures *it + be + clefted element + subordinator* and *esse + clefted element + compulsory chì* by themselves do not give the reader any clue as to the nature (topic or comment) of the clefted element.

3.1.2. Second subtype

The second Corsican construction (called 1b) is a particular alternative construction made up of *esse + clefted element + a subordinate non-finite clause in the form of an infinitive*. Consider the following example with an emphasized argument, in which a doctor addresses a retiring colleague from whom he is taking over:

5e) - *To be accommodating, I can propose the following arrangement. In lieu of paying you, God knows when, in money, I will pay you in kind. That is to say, I will take you on for eight days with me and initiate you in my procedures.*

- (Annoyed) *You are joking, my dear colleague. **It is perhaps you who** will write to me eight days hence to ask my counsel.*

5c) - *Vi ni possu fà una : invece di pagà in solda, ùn la sò quandu, vi pagu in travaddu. Vi piddu ottu ghjorna cù mecu è v'indiziu à i me mineri di travaddà.*

- (ammusciatu) *Soga vi ne vulete ride ? **Ate da esse voi, à scrivemi**, da quì à pochi ghjorni, par chedemi cunsigli ! (K)*

Literally it means *you have to be you to write to me / you are going to be you to write to me*, with the copula *esse* constructed on the periphrasis *avè da* expressing a mixture of root modality and prospective validation. Stripped of its periphrasis to make it simpler, the formulation would be *seti voi à scrivemi*, corresponding to *you are you to write to me* or *it is up to you to write to me*.

Interestingly an interpretation as an extraposed subject infinitive can be ruled out, were it only because *seti voi à scrivemi* has the property of being convertible into *voi seti a parsona à scrivemi / you are the one to write to me*. It is a genuine cleft sentence, but instead of being followed by a finite subordinate clause starting with *ch-*, comparable to English *It is you who will write to me*, it is followed by a non-finite subordinate clause, which I interpret as an infinitival relative clause.

Its null-instantiated subject (the agent corresponding to the writing person) is coreferential with the clefted term (*voi*) while the other argument of the verb *scrive* (the person written to) is made explicit (*mi*). But the process of writing is suspended, waiting to be carried out by an agent subject to

¹⁰ In other examples the referent of the clefted term can be situationally present and exophorically referred to.

the deontic requirement of performing it, as signaled by the preposition *à* before the infinitive. The choice of this alternative kind of cleft made it particularly suitable for a persuasive string of discourse and helped reinforce the root modality already present in the periphrasis.

Because the clefted constituent (*voi*) represents comment and not topic material, the item here emphasized via syntactic reordering is, in the oral form, also emphasized by prosodic cues. But prosody can on its own suffice to emphasize a constituent, and this is the second means of rendering cleft sentences in Corsican to which we will now turn.

3.2. Second major translation device and its two subtypes

It consists in a syntactico-prosodic means specialized in the highlighting of arguments (since all the adjuncts in my corpus are emphasized through syntax: *esse* + clefted adjunct + a subordinate clause with *ch-* subordinator) made up of an emphatic stress on a lexical segment. Let us focus on constructions 2a, 3a, 2b and 3b, in which the segment under stress is a grammatical subject. In 2a and 3a the segment stressed is a lexical element, in 2b and 3b it is a pronominal overt element. A language-specific preliminary issue to be addressed is the situation of subject arguments in Corsican:

Unlike English, for which a subject has to be present and usually in a rather fixed position, Corsican is a null-subject language, in the form of a pro-drop language since the subject can most of the time be retrieved morphologically with the assistance of verb endings. At least in main and independent clauses, since Corsican is not a null-subject language in its subordinate clauses, which makes Corsican different from the other contemporary romance languages and makes its subordinate clauses different from all the others. In subordinate clauses the subject is not only compulsory in the form of an overt subject pronoun but also compulsorily pre-verbal, another specificity of subordinate clauses. This subject used to introduce subordinate clauses belongs to a particular series (*o/e, tu/t', ellu, ella, no/n', vo/v', elli, elle*) distinct from the series of tonic overt subject pronouns (*eo/eiu, tu, ellu, ella, noi/no, voi/vo, elli, elle*).

Consequently if example 3 (*it was between Moskoe and the coast that the main uproar held its sway*) were slightly modified to say *If it was between Moskoe and the coast that [...]* a pronominal subject would surface and the Corsican version would be *Si ellu era tra Moskoe e a costa chì [...]*, with the addition of a third person pronoun which makes the Corsican cleft look like the pattern of an English cleft: 3rd person singular pronoun + BE + clefted element + subordinator.

This is however just an illusion. If example 2 (*it is you, Doctor, who will not want to concern yourself with me as much as will be necessary*) were modified in the same way to say *If it is you, Doctor, who [...]*, the Corsican translation would be neither **Si sareti voi chì [...]* nor **Si ellu sareti voi [...]* but *Si vo sareti voi chì [...]*. One can conclude 1) that the possible presence of a pre-copular pronoun in Corsican clefts is not due to the cleft itself but to the use of the cleft within a subordinate construction, and 2) that this pre-copular pronoun is not a frozen 3rd person singular pronoun as in English but a variable pronoun chosen in accordance with the gender and person of the clefted term.

Moreover, unlike English whose compulsory subject often occupies a fixed position, the Corsican subject (when it is present) is very mobile, and not only with intransitive unaccusative verbs, all kinds of verbs are concerned (Giacomo-Marcellesi 1997: 37-38). The subject can be assigned to initial position (construction 2a with a lexical subject exemplified in 6c below, and construction 2b with a pronominal subject exemplified in 7c) or to final position (construction 3a with a pronominal subject exemplified in 8c and 9c, and construction 3b with a lexical subject exemplified in 10c):

6e) *How my elder brother escaped destruction I cannot say, for I never had an opportunity of ascertaining. For my part, as soon as I had let the foresail run, I threw myself flat on deck, with my feet against the narrow gunwale of the bow, and with my hands grasping a ring-bolt near the foot of the fore-mast. It was mere instinct that prompted me to do this - which was undoubtedly the very best*

thing I could have done - for I was too much flurried to think.

6c) *Cume u miò fratellu maiò ha sfughitu a a morte, ùn la possu spjgà. In quantu a mè, a pena cappiai u miò trinchettu - - mi sdraiai nantu u ponte i pedi contru l'avanti e e mani arrampicate a u bullà, - a u pede di u maghiu di trinchettu. **L'istintu** m'avìa fatt' aggì di sa manera - e ghiera ciò ch'avìa di megliu a fà - perchè era troppu imbarazzatu per riflette a nunda. (DM)*

7e) *Since **it is she who** is my rose.*

7c) *Chì **ella** hè a me rosula. (PP)*

[The Dr and his wife are in a car with Knock, driven by the Dr's chauffeur. The old car breaks down. The Dr asks the chauffeur to push the car, while, surprisingly enough the Dr takes the wheel]

8c) *(Returns to others) Well, all aboard, my dear colleague, all aboard. **It is I who** will drive.*

8c) *(Volta à via di l'altri) Aiò, à cogliesi, o cari amichi, à cogliesi ! A vittura a portu **uiu**. (K)*

9e) *Vladimir: How is your brother?*

Boy: *He's sick, Sir.*

Vladimir: *Perhaps **it was he** came yesterday.*

Boy: *I don't know, Sir.*

9c) *Dimiriu - To fratellu cumu hè ?*

Zitellu - *Hè bellu faticatu, hè.*

Dimiriu - *Arrimane pò ancu esse vinutu **ellu**.*

Zitellu - *Ùn la sò, o quell'omu. (EAG)*

[2 pairs of characters: beggars Estragon and Vladimir, master Pozzo and his slave Lucky]

10e) *Vladimir: You didn't notice anything out of the ordinary?*

Estragon: *Alas!*

V: *And Pozzo? And Lucky? E: Pozzo?*

V: *The bones. E: They were like fishbones...*

V: ***It was Pozzo** gave them to you. E: I don't know.*

V: *And the kick. E: That's right, someone gave me a kick.*

V: ***It was Lucky** gave it to you.*

10c) *Dimiriu - Ùn' ai fattu casu micca ch'ellu ci fussi nulla for' di l'abitudine ?*

Stargone - *Oh disgrazia.*

D - *Pozzu ? Lucca ? S - Pozzu ?*

D - *L'osse. S - Parianu lische.*

D - *Dà e ti dede **Pozzu**. S - Chì ne sò.*

D - *E' quellu calciu ? S - U calciu ? Mì, chì mi anu pigliatu à calci.*

D - *Sunà i ti sunede **Lucca**. (EAG)*

This prosodic means, very common in Corsican and to a slightly lesser extent in English, differs from syntactic clefting in that syntactic clefting implies that the relation is validated for one and a single value, the one the clefted item stands for. By default i.e. unless otherwise explicitly stated, the value that is assigned to the term to which the predicate applies is not only correct but also exhaustive¹¹.

11 See Declerck 1984: 284, Nowakowska 2002: 5, Velleman & al. 2012: 442, 452.

That is why the clefted constituent can also be defined as the focus, because due to the exhaustive reading the syntagmatic opposition between comment and topic is more often than not complemented by a paradigmatic one between the value actually selected and the ones that could have been chosen in the same position to satisfy the relation. When this opposition is made explicit i.e. the negated term is embodied syntagmatically, the cleft's corrective function is activated since the clefted term stands in direct opposition to it.

By contrast, prosodic marking lacks the feature of exclusive identification: it can imply either that the relation is validated for one and a single value or that it is validated by the clefted item among others.

For example in 8 the relation is validated by *eiu* i.e. the Doctor who will drive his car himself, but it could have been (it should have been) normally validated by a term other than *eiu* since the Doctor has an appointed chauffeur (*Sgian*) whose function this is. A two-element class is constructed, so that the actual agent is just one among several. The English version describes what is happening for real, the Corsican one adds that what is happening should not be the case.

In 9 the Corsican version *Arrimane pò ancu esse vinutu ellu* highlights the fact that the relation may have been validated by someone other than *ellu*. This is substantiated by the epistemic modal *pudè* (*may*, cf. *perhaps* in the English version) and the adverb *ancu* (*also*, absent in the English version): *ancu* opens a paradigm of possible agents on top of *ellu*. The modal *Pò* shows that the speaker puts a value forward but without dismissing the others. Some doubt remains (comforted in the answer *Ùn la sò / I don't know*) that prevents one from making the choice either of validation or of a non-validation and leaves open other ways, leading in particular to other potential emissaries, since the one mentioned is sick.

In 10 the Corsican version provides some names (*Pozzu* and *Lucca*) but because a purely prosodic means of emphasis was selected it is suggested that the relation between the act and its accomplishment by such or such character is not really relevant. Accordingly there is nothing distinctive in their presentation when they are introduced in the question, they are simply juxtaposed without any qualification to set them apart (*Pozzu ? Lucca ?*). And this is in perfect harmony with the general philosophy of the play: to the great annoyance and disapproval of the two beggars, *Pozzo* is usually the torturer who ill-treats *Lucky*, but this time it is the torturer who gave bones to *Estragon*, and *Lucky* the slave who behaves like a torturer when he beats *Estragon*, but soon afterwards it is *Estragon* and his companion who will become torturers for *Lucky*. In other words through this choice the Corsican version took the general context of the play into account.

Examples 8, 9 and 10 all had their subject in final position. But in Corsican we saw that the subject can either occupy the initial position (construction 2a with a lexical subject exemplified in 6c, and 2b with a pronominal subject exemplified in 7c) or the final position (construction 3a with a pronominal subject exemplified in 8c and 9c, and construction 3b with a lexical subject exemplified in 10c). Is there a difference between pre-posing and post-posing?

Yes there is, and the difference is that, when pre-posed, the argument is topical, in the position of known information, and the function of expressing the new important information is taken on by the predicate. And when the argument is post-posed, the information conveyed by the predicate is taken for granted.

For example in 6 the fronted position of the subject *ella* in *ella hè a me rosula* (*it is she who is my rose*) enables the speaker to encode the topicality of this argument, because this segment comes after a long accumulation of cleft sentences: *Of course, an ordinary passer-by would think my rose looked just like you. But in herself she matters more than all of you together, since it is she that I watered; since it is she that I placed under the glass dome; since it is she that I sheltered with the screen; since it is she whose caterpillars I killed (except the two or three we saved up to become butterflies). Since it is she that I listened to, when she complained, or boasted, or when she was simply being*

silent. After this passage devoted to the rose, the speaker concludes in saying *Since it is she who is my rose* in English and *Chì ella hè a me rosula* in Corsican. In English the choice of *who* instead of *that* (also possible in subject position) in only the last cleft of the series gives it a special status and reveals the intention of the speaker to liken the object to an animate human antecedent. In Corsican, for this topic subject and with a piece of relevant information consisting in saying the predicate about it, the pre-posed position is logically selected. The last cleft takes into account all the passage that preceded it and enables the speaker to close off his speech with the most important assertion, explanatory of all the previous ones.

Examples 8, 9 and 10 on the other hand are comment clefts:

In 8 it is particularly unusual for the Doctor to drive instead of his chauffeur, and this is the new information, the most informative segment under the circumstances. We know there will be someone to drive the car and the chauffeur is the best candidate for this job. The surprise and important element is mentioned at the end of the sentence by the post-posed subject (*A vittura a portu eiu*), which refers to the Doctor instead of the appointed chauffeur. In English the choice of a personal pronoun in the nominative rather than the accusative (*It is I / me who...*) may suggest 1) a formal kind of discourse on the part of the Doctor and 2) a greater degree of agentivity on the part of the subject taking the lead. But the comment status of the argument is not coded in the English version, and could not be so by a syntactic cleft in the written form.

In 9 *Arrimane pò ancu esse vinutu ellu* the maximally relevant information is the fact that it may be him (*ellu*) in particular, the boy's brother, who came the day before as Godot's emissary to tell the two beggars that Godot would turn up late for his appointment. Because paradoxically his state of health would have been a reason for him not to be chosen as emissary since he is sick very sick even (*bellu faticatu*) in the Corsican version. The comment argument is consequently post-posed. In English, here again, the English formulation as a cleft in itself gives the reader no clue as to the partitioning of the information.

In 10, which for the sake of convenience is reproduced below, the lexical items are first presented in an elliptical way (*Pozzu ? Lucca ? [...] L'osse. [...] E' quellu calciu ?*) before they are integrated into a sentence that gives each argument its function and puts in the position of comment the animate human argument:

10e) Vladimir: *You didn't notice anything out of the ordinary?*

Estragon: *Alas!*

V: *And Pozzo? And Lucky? E: Pozzo?*

V: *The bones. E: They were like fishbones...*

V: ***It was Pozzo** gave them to you. E: I don't know.*

V: *And the kick. E: That's right, someone gave me a kick.*

V: ***It was Lucky** gave it to you.*

10c) Dimiriu - *Ùn' ai fattu casu micca ch'ellu ci fussi nulla for' di l'abitudine ?*

Stargone - *Oh disgrazia.*

D - *Pozzu ? Lucca ? S - Pozzu ?*

D - *L'osse. S - Parianu lische.*

D - *Dà e ti dede **Pozzu**. S - Chì ne sò.*

D - *E' quellu calciu ? S - U calciu ? Mì, chì mi anu pigliatu à calci.*

D - *Sunà i ti sunede **Lucca**. (EAG)*

But this was also a necessity considering the structure chosen in the Corsican version: this example conforms to an “echo” structure, with two parts for each sentence (*Dà e ti dede Pozzu* and *Sunà i ti sunede Lucca*), or rather three since there is a third part integrated into the second one. The

two main parts are usually separated by a comma in written form and a pause in the oral (here a pause is necessary after the verb *sunà* and the verb *dà*), and the right part takes up the constituents present on the left, either literally if the verb/auxiliary to the left is finite¹² or, as is the case here, the right part takes up in a finite form the elements present on the left in a non-finite (infinitive) form. Literally *Dà e ti dede Pozzu* means *Give he gave them to you Pozzu*, and *Sunà i ti sunede Lucca* means *Give noisy blows he gave them to you Lucca*.

This structure enables the speaker to split the topic on the left from the comment on the right. And because the subject is in a post-posed position, at the end of the comment segment, the terms are embedded in each other along increasing degrees of comment: the subjects at the end (*Pozzu* and *Lucca*) are the most “comment” within a group (*e ti dede Pozzu et i ti sunede Lucca*) that is already more comment than the one preceding it (*Dà* and *Sunà*).

Conclusion

I have shown that a cleft sentence fulfils precise prosodic and syntactic criteria shared by the two languages under consideration, and at the same time admits of certain variations that are language specific:

A cleft in English makes it possible to have variation on the syntactic category and grammatical function of the clefted element as well as on the subordinator according to the animate/inanimate category of the antecedent and to the grammatical function. It involves a neutral dummy subject with which the verb of the subordinate clause often agrees and with which the number of the copula always agrees.

A cleft in Corsican admits a non-finite clause (a prepositional infinitival relative clause) or a finite clause. In the latter case it does not discriminate between relative pronoun and complementizer among several subordinators. It has no dummy subject¹³, so that the verb of the subordinate clause and the number and person of the copula agree with the clefted item, and it tends to select the tense of the copula in accordance with the variable tense of the subordinate clause.

In Corsican this clefting device is common with arguments but it is specialized in the clefting of adjuncts, in which case a *that* complementizer will be resorted to in English¹⁴.

In both languages the clefted element is often the comment, presented as newsworthy information provided it is heavily stressed, while the remainder of the sentence is “not at issue” information shared by both speaker and interlocutor. But it can also be the other way round, with the clefted element as topic material and the remainder of the sentence that is salient information, foregrounded and bearing a heavier stress. In writing, where the voice stress option does not exist, a cleft's pattern by itself does not supply the reader with any clue as to the information status of the clefted element. This is supportive of the claim that the position of the comment component is unpredictable and not syntactically determined by the structure of a cleft.

The second device implemented by Corsican to render English clefts is specialized in the highlighting of arguments and consists in an emphatic stress on a lexical constituent. It lacks the

12 For example in 9 *Hè bellu faticatu*, *hè* literally means *He is very tired, he is*.

13 If a pronominal subject surfaces it will be either a referential tonic overt subject pronoun, or due to the introduction of a subordinate clause. In the latter case it can be referential or non-referential like the English *it*, but even then it will have nothing to do with the setting up of a cleft.

14 Concerning arguments, for reasons of space limitation and also because in English (Collins 1991) and Corsican they are the predominant clefted constituents, I restricted myself to adjuncts and subject arguments, and left out direct object and indirect object functions. When an object is clefted the situation is made more difficult in Corsican by two supplementary options at the speaker's disposal: the object can be (and often is) dislocated, to the left or to the right, and when the object is a direct one a prepositional accusative (Differential Object Marking) can be substituted for certain objects, and sometimes has to be distinguished from an indirect object in the dative taking the same preposition (for elaboration on this issue the reader is referred to Giancarli 2014).

feature of exhaustiveness and does not exclude the possibility for the relation to be validated beyond the sole clefted item. If English makes less use of its clefts than French does (cf. Volsik 1991, Katz 2000, Carter-Thomas 2002, Gledhill 2003), Corsican makes even less use of them than English does.

Corsican displays a relatively free positioning of its phrases, with the object easily fronted or the subject commonly moved to final position. A constituent will be topical when fronted, and comment material when moved to the end of the sentence. English on the other hand is more limited in both respects: its arguments often occupy fixed positions, and the recourse to a prosodic device is more restricted, for example in Corsican a stressed subject pronoun can be placed in final position while English disallows such marking. This device enables Corsican to enjoy a very clear distribution of comment and topic according to the cohesion constructed with the context, making the clefting strategy really useful either in writing, or when adjuncts are concerned, or if the feature of exhaustiveness has to be activated. The occurrence of a cleft construction seems to correlate with the degree of positional freedom of the constituents and their degree of stressability irrespective of their position.

Even though additional data are required before more conclusive claims can be made, and further research conducted concerning object arguments before any definite contrastive conclusion can be drawn, the present findings seem to substantiate Jespersen's cross-linguistic generalization:

“[...] This construction [the cleft] may be considered one of the means by which the disadvantages of having a relatively rigid grammatical word-order (SVO) can be obviated. This explains why it is that similar constructions are not found, or are not used extensively, in languages in which the word order is considerably less rigid than in English [...]” (Jespersen 1937: 85).

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Corpus

The English and Corsican corpora are composed of the following texts¹⁵:

BECKETT, S. [1948] (1988): *En Attendant Godot*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit. [Theatre play].
English translation by BECKETT, S. (1955)

at http://samuel-beckett.net/Waiting_for_Godot_Part1.html
and http://samuel-beckett.net/Waiting_for_Godot_Part2.html

Corsican translation by GERONIMI, D. (1985): *Intantu*, in Rìgìru 23. Ajaccio: Éditions Cynos et Méditerranée.
(EAG)

DAUDET, A. [1873] (2001): *Contes du lundi*, in *Œuvres*. Paris: Gallimard. [Collection of tales].
English translation by McINTYRE, M. (1900): *Monday Tales*, in *The Works of Alphonse Daudet*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company.

Corsican translation by CECCALDI, M. (1980): *Fole di u luni*. Paris: Klincksieck.
(CDL)

DAUDET, A. [1869] (2001): *Lettres de mon moulin*, in *Oeuvres*. Paris: Gallimard. [Collection of tales].

English translation by PRESCOTT WORMELEY, K. (1900): *Letters from my Mill*, in *The Works of Alphonse Daudet*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company.

Corsican translation by CECCALDI, M. (1980): *Lettare da u me mulinu*. Paris: Klincksieck.
(LDM)

POE, E. A. (1839): *A Descent into the Maelström* [short story], in *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Volume 2 of the Raven Edition, The Project Gutenberg Etext www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext00/poe2v10.txt.

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(PP)

STEINBECK, J. [1938] (2005): *The Murder*, in *The Long Valley*, Penguin Books. [short story].

French translation by DUHAMEL, M. and MORISE, M. (1946): *Le meurtre*, in *La grande vallée*.

¹⁵ The corresponding abbreviations are given in brackets at the end of each reference.

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