

It-clefts: Syntax, evolution, typology

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Clefts are intricate objects which, starting with Jespersen (1937), have motivated much work in formal linguistics. Nonetheless, almost a century later their exact internal structure is still widely debated, which is why we believe that a multidisciplinary workshop on this theoretically complex structure is greatly needed. To date, most scholars agree that clefts involve a biclausal syntax to express a single proposition. The monoclausal sentence and its clefted counterpart, although not interchangeable in all discourse contexts, have been argued to share the same truth-values (Lambrecht 1988, Karssenbergh & Lahousse 2018). Moreover, clefts come in many shapes and sizes but, according to the existing literature, all of them constitute a form of focalisation.

The scope of this workshop will be restricted to the investigation of so-called *it*-clefts. These are widely understood to be biclausal and to consist of a quasi-argumental pronoun, a copula, a focused element (higher clause) and a relative-like part (lower clause), along the lines of (1). Note that these can be both declarative, as in (1a), or interrogative, as in (1b):

- (1) a. C'est [_{focus} Jean] qui me l'a raconté. (Spoken French)
Ce=is Jean who to.me= it=has told
'(It's) Jean (who) told me it.'
- b. C'est [_{focus} qui] qui te l'a raconté?
Ce=is who that to.you= it=has told
'Who (is it that) told you it?'

Surprisingly, some languages such as Portuguese, spoken French and Trevisano (Veneto) also display 'inverse' clefts of the type in (2), where the copula exceptionally follows the focused element (Kato & Ribeiro 2009, Mathieu 2009, Kato 2014, Miotto & Lobo 2016, Bonan 2017, a.o.), in some cases only in declaratives or interrogatives, but in other cases in both types of structure.

- (2) [_{focus} Qui] c'est qui te l'a raconté]? (Spoken French)
who ce=is that to.you= it=has told
'Who (is it that) told you it?'

Despite being less frequent than their regular counterparts, inverse clefts deserve greater consideration, not only to establish the reasons behind their unavailability in some languages, but also to better understand the exact status of clefts in languages in which the quasi-argumental pronoun is silent: is the availability of inverse clefts somehow related to the availability of *pro*, or could there be different patterns of verb movement involved in the derivation? Are there languages in which inverse clefts come with a pronounced quasi-argumental pronoun?

Regardless of the relative order between the copula and the quasi-argumental pronoun, the relative part of the cleft systematically contains a syntactic gap that is co-indexed with the focalised

element. Therefore, scholars agree that at least one long-distance dependency is established within clefts, as illustrated in (3):

- (3) C'est [mon père]_i qui ____i est allé à la messe (Spoken French)
C=is my father that is gone to the mass
'It's my father that attended mass'

From a strictly syntactic point of view, in recent generative work on clefts, Haegeman et al. (2009) have claimed that 'embedded' cartographic analyses of clefts à la Belletti (2009; 2015) are to be preferred to 'matrix' accounts à la Meinunger (1997) and Frascarelli & Ramaglia (2013). The main difference between the two analyses is that, while the latter take clefts to be monoclausal, in 'embedded' analyses clefts are biclausal throughout the derivation.

For Belletti's (2015) proposed derivation of clefts to work, the use of both clause-external peripheries à la Rizzi (1997 and much subsequent work) and of a clause-internal periphery à la Belletti (2004) are required, and also the postulation of silent nominal categories à la Kayne & Pollock (2009), which are used to circumvent the intervention problems caused by raising of the quasi-argumental subject to the canonical subject position. These basic assumptions are not endorsed by all, therefore an alternative, more universally-received explanation of the fine structure of clefts would seem desirable. Indeed, supposing that Haegeman et al. (2009) are right, one of the first questions that needs answering is whether complex biclausal models à la Belletti are defensible from the point of view of learnability, and whether the proposed derivations could be simplified using theories of locality such as chain formation à la Krapova & Cinque (2008) or Featural Relativized Minimality (Friedman et al. 2009).

Another interesting phenomenon that deserves attention is the systematic correlation between the availability of informational focus fronting and the non-availability of clefting (Lambrecht 2001). Indeed, it is widely known that some Romance languages such as Romanian and southern Italian dialects do not have clefts, but they all have focus fronting and, by contrast, modern French and most northern Italian dialects do not have informational focus fronting, but they do have clefts (Zafiu 2013, Cruschina 2015, Ledgeway in press). This correlation should be tested not only within and beyond Romance but also be diachronically: all documented medieval Romance varieties allow focus fronting as a part of their V2 syntax, but an open question is whether they also allowed clefting. It is also important to establish whether declarative and interrogative clefts always go hand-in-hand in all languages, not only synchronically but also diachronically. Are there languages in which only declarative clefts are possible, or vice-versa? If so, what does this say about the architecture of focal projections? If not, which sentence type is acquired or lost first? It is also not yet clear to what extent the 'quasi-argumental subject + copula' part of clefts is grammaticalized cross-linguistically, and how the rise of clefts and their subsequent grammaticalization proceed, when relevant.

Three other facts that we believe worth investigating are the morphosyntax of interrogative clefts, the diachronic relationship between these structures and the phenomenon of subject-clitic inversion in the languages that either have it, or have lost it. Indeed, despite being by far the most natural question formation strategy in varieties like the dialects of northern Italy (Poletto & Vannelli 1997, Munaro 1999, Poletto 2000, a.o.), clefts are still remarkably understudied. We know that the diachronic interaction between loss of subject-verb inversion and the rise of clefts in many Gallo-Romance varieties (including western and central dialects of northern Italy) makes most

eastern Venetan dialects, which still retain compulsory subject-verb inversion and have clefts, unique. Understanding the interaction between the two phenomena before subject-inversion is lost appears crucial, which is why the study of *it*-clefts is particularly urgent.

To conclude, even a cursory examination of the broad cross-linguistic variation in the availability, form and distribution of clefts as reviewed above raises numerous theoretical questions. Our belief is that the synchrony of clefts will only be appropriately understood once diachronic, typological, historical, experimental and dialectological aspects are all brought together.

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