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Author(s)	Shiratani, Atsuhiko
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Osaka University

RESTRICTED USE OF CLEFTS IN DISCOURSE*

Atsuhiko Shiratani

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the restriction on English clefts in discourse. Clefts are *IT*-clefts, WH-clefts and inverted WH-clefts, which are shown below respectively.

- (1) a. It is a diamond that she bought. [IT-cleft]
b. A diamond is what she bought. [inverted WH-cleft]
c. What she bought is a diamond. [WH-cleft]

Prince (1978) pointed out the limited use of WH-clefts and explained it in terms of 'discourse condition on WH-clefts.' Declerck (1984) applied the condition to both *IT*-clefts and inverted WH-clefts, judging that it does not cover all clefts. Their discussions have two defects. One is that they did not notice the difference of the restriction in each kind of cleft, and the other is that the condition is wrong. My previous paper, Shiratani (1989) denied the condition, showing counter-examples. However, the unacceptable examples which Prince and Declerck explained on the condition were left unexamined. This thesis takes into consideration inverted WH-clefts which were not treated of in Shiratani (1989), and makes clear the restriction in each kind of cleft.

The three kinds of cleft in (1) are the same in meaning that the thing that she bought equals a diamond, that is, they identify the information in the presupposition part (she bought) with that in the focus part (a diamond).¹⁾ This means that the essential function of clefts is to identify the information in two clauses. The

following discussion is based on this function. In section 2, the difference between *IT*-clefts and inverted *WH*-clefts is discussed. In section 3, the connection between clefts and context is investigated. In section 4, after unacceptable examples are explained, a slight limitation on every kind of cleft is shown, and section 5 presents the conclusion.

2. The Difference Between *IT*-clefts and Inverted *WH*-clefts

Since clefts have two clauses, they can represent information variously. They can combine old and new information in the focus and the presupposition part. Declerck claims that both *IT*-clefts and inverted *WH*-clefts have three subtypes as (2) illustrates and that they are interchangeable.²⁾

(2) a. Contrastive clefts

It is (NEW) that (OLD) .
 (NEW) is what (OLD) .

b. Unstressed-anaphoric-focus clefts

It is (OLD) that (NEW) .
 (OLD) is what (NEW) .

c. Discontinuous clefts

It is (NEW) that (NEW) .
 (NEW) is what (NEW) .

The clefts of (2-a) contain new information in the focus part and old information in the presupposition part. The clefts of (2-b) convey old information in the focus part and new information in the presupposition part. The clefts of (2-c) have new information in both the focus and the presupposition part. The examples of *IT*-clefts are shown in (3), (4) and (5), which correspond to (2-a), (2-b) and (2-c). ## shows the opening of discourse.

- (3) Nobody knows who killed the old man. The police seem to believe that it was a tramp who did it.

(Declerck 1984 : 264)

- (4) It was also during these centuries that a vast internal migration (mostly by the Galla) from the south northwards took place, a process no less momentous than the Amhara expansion southwards during the last part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

(Declerck 1984 : 266)

- (5) ## It was just about 50 years ago that Henry Ford gave us the weekend. On September 25, 1926, in a somewhat shocking move for that time, he decided to establish a 40-hour work week, giving his employees two days off instead of one.

(Declerck 1984 : 267)

The examples of inverted WH-clefts are (6) and (7), which exemplify (2-a) and (2-b). Declerck does not give us any example of (2-c).

- (6) A : Who broke that window?
B : John was the one who did it.

(Declerck 1984 : 265)

- (7) A : Why do you like Paris so much?
B : Because that's where I met my future wife.

(Declerck 1984 : 266)

Declerck's assertion can be supported that *IT*-clefts have three subtypes. However, (2-c) type of inverted WH-clefts cannot be found in any kind of English literature. The absence of (2-c) type of inverted WH-clefts weakens the basis of Declerck's claim that *IT*-clefts and inverted WH-clefts have the same use.

Now (2-a) type of clefts is examined. See the following example.

- (8) ... There is strength in scorn, as there was in the martial fury by which men became insensible to wounds.”

“It is well said, Romola. It is a Promethean word thou hast uttered,” answered Bardo, after a little interval in which he had begun to lean on his stick again, and to walk on.

(underline mine. George Eliot, *Romola*. pp. 102-3)

Are inverted WH-clefts and *IT*-clefts precisely interchangeable, as Declerck claims?

- (9) ?... There is strength in scorn, as there was in the martial fury by which men became insensible to wounds.”

“It is well said, Romola. A Promethean word is what thou hast uttered,” answered Bardo ...

The *IT*-cleft in the original text (8) cannot be changed into the inverted WH-cleft as in (9). The presupposition part *thou hast uttered* evidently refers to the previous discourse *It is well said* in the *IT*-cleft version, but not in the inverted WH-cleft version. The latter only means that *A Promethean word* equals *what thou hast uttered*. The information in the presupposition stays within the sentence, and does not refer to the prior discourse. This also can be true of the following discourse.

- (10) There is a luxury in self-reproach. When we blame ourselves we feel that no one else has a right to blame us. It is the confession, not the priest, that gives us absolution.

(underline mine. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. p. 125)

- (11) ?There is a luxury in self-reproach. When we blame ourselves we feel that no one else has a right to blame us. The confession, not the priest, is what gives us absolution.

The *IT*-cleft in (10) cannot be changed into the inverted *WH*-cleft, which only indentifies *The confession* with *what gives us absolution* and does not refer to the prior discourse. As a result, it loses the connection with the previous discourse. The above discussion makes us conclude that the use of inverted *WH*-clefts of (2-a) type is strictly restricted. They can be used only when the information in the presupposition part has the constituent which explicitly refers to the previous discourse as in (6), where *did it* in the presupposition part obviously refers to *broke the window* in the preceding discourse. But, inverted *WH*-clefts of (2-b) type can freely arise, because the information in the focus part is old, and the sentence never loses the connection with the previous discourse.

3. The Use of Clefts and Context

The discussion in section 2 made it clear that *IT*-clefts are different from inverted *WH*-clefts in their subtypes and their use. This section examines the relation between the use of clefts and the previous discourse.

As (5), (12) and (13) show, the use of *IT*-clefts of (2-c) type which appear at the beginning of discourse is restricted. They cannot have noun phrases in the focus part.³⁾

(12) ## It was 10 years ago this month that young Irwin Vamplew was bopped on the head by a nightstick while smashing windows in Berkeley in order to end the war in Vietnam. (Prince 1978 : 901)

(13) a. ##*Hi! It's Ellen that my name is.
 b. ##*Hi! It's your work that I've heard about.
 c. ##*Hi! It's go to school with your brother that you used to do. (Declerck 1984 : 257)

Such restriction does not apply to (2-a) and (2-b) type of *IT*-clefts ((14) and (15) show.), and to (2-c) type which arises in the middle

of discourse ((16) shows).

(14) A : At last thirty people were killed.

B : Oh no. It was only the pilot who died.

(Declerck 1984 : 284)

(15) But why is the topic so important? Apparently, it is the topic that enables the listener to compute the intended antecedents of each sentence in the paragraph.

(Prince 1978 : 902)

(16) I've been bit once already by a German shepherd.

It was really scary. It was an outside meter the woman had. I read the gas meter and was walking back out ...

(Prince 1978 : 894)

These *IT*-clefts have the previous discourse, therefore the context gives the hearer a clue to interpret the focused information which is identified with the presupposed information. On the contrary, (5), (12) and (13) is lacking in context, which makes it difficult for the hearer to construe what the focused noun phrases are about. They can only have, in the focus part, adverbial or prepositional phrases, whose meaning can easily be comprehended.

Inverted WH-clefts, which do not have (2-c) type, are never seen at the beginning of discourse.

(17) ##*Hi! John was the one that your brother spoke to Mary about. (Declerck 1984 : 260)

The reason is as follows. Inverted WH-clefts, which always have noun phrases in the focus part without exception, have to identify those phrases with WH-clauses. The identification of noun phrases with WH-clauses requires the preceding discourse, in order to convey the meaning at once and exactly. However, (2-c) type of inverted WH-clefts does not emerge in the middle of discourse. It can be explained as follows. As section 2 shows, even (2-a) type which has anaphoric presupposition often loses

the connection with the prior discourse. In (2-c) type, two pieces of new information conveyed in both parts cannot have the connection with the previous discourse at all, therefore this type can never be used.

Let us take a look at WH-clefts. They can be a discourse opener, and have no restriction.

- (18) ## What I have often asked myself is how other linguists manage to keep abreast with the rapid developments in the different fields of linguistics while still finding time to go on writing articles themselves. One colleague who has proved to be able to do this and who I have the honour to intruduce to you tonight is Mr. . . .

(Declerck 1984 : 257)

- (19) ## My dear friends, what we have always wanted to know, but what the government has never wanted to tell us, is what exactly happens at secret conferences like the one you have been reading about in the papers this week.
(ibid.)

This is due to the fact that WH-clefts, unlike *IT*-clefts or inverted WH-clefts, have the presupposition part before the focus part. In WH-clefts, the presupposed information in WH-clauses precedes the focused information, which enables the hearer to interpret WH-clefts without difficulty, even if WH-clefts arise at the beginning of discourse. And in the middle of discourse, WH-clefts, unlike inverted WH-clefts, never lose the necessary connection with the previous discourse.

4. Restriction on All Kinds of Cleft

In this section, unacceptable WH-clefts which Prince shows are explained first in terms of the concept, 'identificaion'.

(20) A : Is Sam here yet?

B : No, I don't believe he's arriving until Tuesday.

*No, what I don't believe is that he's arriving until
Tuesday. (Prince 1978 : 892)

(21) A : Hello, Operator. I'm trying to dial BU7-1151. Could you please check it for me?

B : I think the exchange is over loaded. Hold on while I check it.

*What I think is that the exchange is over loaded.
(ibid)

In (20) and (21), the cleft versions are unacceptable, and the non-cleft versions are natural. The difference between clefts and non-clefts is that, in the former, two pieces of information in two parts are identified with each other. In such a situation, one must have the same importance as the other. In the cleft version of (20), the WH-clause *What I can't believe* is not worth identifying. It is no use to identify the things that the speaker does not believe. The same is true of (21). In (21), there is no valuable information in the WH-clause saying that the speaker thinks.⁴⁾ Let us see the following examples.

(22) a. ## Hi! My name is Ellen.

b. ## Hi! I've heard about your work.

c. ## Hi! You used to go to school with my brother.

(Prince 1978 : 888)

(23) a. ##*Hi! What my name is is Ellen.

b. ##*Hi! What I've heard about is your work.

c. ##*Hi! What you used to do is go to school with my
brother. (ibid.)

The non-cleft (22-a) is natural when we introduce ourselves. In the WH-cleft version (23-a), the WH-clause *what my name is* is too exaggerated in the sense that the use of clefts requires the important contents of the two parts. My informant says that *what my*

name is is Ellen can be used in the situation where the hearer is wrongly spelling the speaker's name, *Ellen*.⁵⁾ In this situation, the WH-clause *What my name is* comes to be of importance and the cleft can be used in order to attract the hearer's attention. The same is true of (23-b) and (23-c).⁶⁾

The above discussion also applies to the other kind of cleft. Compare (24) with (25), and (24) with (26).

- (24) A : Is Sam here yet?
 B : I don't believe his arrival.
- (25) A : Is Sam here yet?
 B : *It is his arrival that I don't believe.
- (26) A : Is Sam here yet?
 B : *His arrival is what I don't believe.

These examples show that clefts cannot be used when there is no information worth identifying.

Lastly, the focus part of WH-clefts always has new information. The fact was pointed out, but the reason was not explained in my previous paper. This is caused by the fact that WH-clefts, unlike *IT*-clefts or inverted WH-clefts, have the presupposition part before the focus part. It is quite natural for the speaker to present a piece of information in the presupposition part and identify it with the other new piece of information in the focus part. However, it is unnatural for the speaker to identify the information which he has trouble to presuppose with old information. This is the reason why WH-clefts always convey new information in the focus part.

5. Conclusion

The restriction on the use of each kind and type of cleft in discourse is illustrated below.

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