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Notes on the English Cleft Sentences: the role of Ci elements

Takafumi UENO

1. Introduction

This paper examines and scrutinizes the elements which occur in the Ci¹⁾ position of cleft sentences in contemporary English. As is commonly known, the term of 'cleft' is first used by Jespersen (1937), by reason that a speaker selects an element for drawing his/her attention to the addressee and makes it move to the Ci position. Cleft sentences have been analyzed by many linguists from various linguistic theories. In particular, the subject of Ci and S-Ci has been discussed from the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic views. I will rearrange these studies on Ci in cleft sentences and explore the points at issue in this paper. I will begin in section 2 by researching the syntactic properties of occurring in the Ci position. In section 3, I summarize the recent linguistic literatures on cleft sentences from the generative transformational grammar. Information structure between Ci and S-Ci will be discussed in section 4.

2. Syntactic Classes and Functions

As an aid towards a better understanding of cleft sentences, it is useful to explore the range of syntactic classes and the functions represented by the elements of Ci. Six syntactic classes are represented in this section²⁾: noun phrase (NP), prepositional

phrase (PP), adjective phrase (AP), adverb phrase (Adv P), non-finite clause (NFC), and finite clause (FC). I will inquire into each class with their syntactic functions.

2.1. NP

Four syntactic functions are represented by the NP which occurs in Ci: subject (Subject), direct object (Od), adjunct (adjunct)³⁾, and complement of preposition (CP). Examples of these functions are given below: Subject (1), Od (2), adjunct (3), and CP (4):

- (1) You see, it was *I* who killed my husband. -Vicarage⁴⁾
- (2) It's *the murder of Marlene Tucker* that we're investigating. -Folly⁵⁾
- (3) It was *about this time* that the pigs suddenly moved into the farmhouse and took up their residence there. -Animal⁶⁾
- (4) It is a *beautiful creation* that you have on, Madame. -Folly

Although the NP which functions as CP can generally occur in Ci of cleft sentences, there is an exceptional case, where the PP is fixed⁷⁾:

- (5) a. *It was *dawn* that she left the village at.
- b. *It is *to a large extent fun* that he

studies archaeology for.
(Murata (1982 : 282))

These cleft sentences are not acceptable. The reason for this unacceptability may be that each PP forms an inseparable adjunct, and that if it is broken up, the function lowers. Thus, sentences like (5a) and (5b) are acceptable as (6a) and (6b), respectively:

- (6) a. It was *at dawn* that she left the village.
b. It is *to a large extent for fun* that he studies archaeology.

The NP serving as indirect object (Oi) and subject complement (SC) cannot be Ci of cleft sentences:

- (7) *It was *John* that he gave the book.
(8) *It's *a genius* that she is.

The noncleft sentence in (7) 'He gave John the book' is derived from the sentence 'He gave the book to John'. In this operation 'the book' moves to the sentence final position to be focus. After this operation it is impossible to replace 'John' on the focus (Ci) position of cleft sentence. The element which is in focus position of the noncleft sentence, therefore, can be Ci like (9):

- (9) a. It was *John* that he gave the book to.
b. It was *to John* that he gave the book.

2.2. PP

Two syntactic functions are represented by the PP which occurs in Ci: adjunct (10) and Oi (11):

- (10) It was *for these moments of unsought revelation* that the Assistant Commissioner lived. *-Battle⁸⁾*
(11) It is *to these 'customeres', the advisors of students, the creators of ambition*, that we have to sell a new picture of the system, as it will be, a system in which Oxbridge will have a special but not predominant place.
(Collins (1991 : 57))

2.3. AP

Although the AP generally serves as SC, object complement, and premodifying a noun, it cannot be Ci of cleft sentences:

- (12) a. *It was *pretty* that she seemed.
b. *It was *red* that he painted the boat.
c. *It was *black* that he drank his coffee.
(Bolinger (1972b : 113))

Some linguists, however, accept these AP-clefts:

- (13) a. It was *pea green* that he painted his boat.
(Pinkham and Hankamer (1975 : 433))
b. It isn't *looking like an ass* that an actor wants to lie there in front of an audience.
c. Is it *black* that you take it, or with cream and sugar?
(Bolinger (1972b : 113))

This inconsistent evidence shows that the cleft construction cannot be treated only from the syntax of the sentence level. I suggest that cleft sentences should be analyzed, not only from the sentence level, but also from the discourse including the context,

because they are greatly dependent on the context in which they occur.

2.4. Adv P

Although the Adv P serves as adjunct, the function of adjunct is nebulous and puzzling. In this paper I will adopt the grammatical functions of adverbials⁹⁾ proposed by Quirk et al. (1985). They classify them into four types: Adjunct¹⁰⁾, Subjunct¹¹⁾, Disjunct, and Conjunct. Of these only Adjuncts can be Ci of cleft sentences. Adjuncts are subcategorized into three semantic roles: Process Adjuncts, Adjuncts of space, and Adjuncts of time. I begin with the subcategory of Process Adjuncts. Process Adjuncts are divided further into four semantic types: manner, means, instrument, and agentive. Means, instrument and agentive can be realized by Ci of cleft sentences:

- (14) a. It was *intonationally* that these linguistic units were separated.
 b. It was *surgically* that he treated the patient.

(Quirk et al. (1985: 562))

Manner Adjuncts cannot be Ci of cleft sentences, by contraries:

- (15) *It was *categorically* that they were told that no more oil would come from the wreck.

(Quirk et al. (1985: 561))

But the acceptability is increased if they are modified by *so*, *very*, and *so forth*¹²⁾ or if the Ci-clause is interrogative or negative or if the Adv P has a negative prefix¹³⁾:

- (16) a. 'Was it *categorically* that they were told that no more oil would come

from the wreck?

- b. 'It was *so very violently* that they argued.

(Quirk et al. (1985: 562))

Adjuncts of space can be Ci of cleft sentences:

- (17) It was *here* that his blood had left him, and his essential seed.

-*Died*¹⁴⁾

Most Adjuncts of time can be Ci of cleft sentences¹⁵⁾:

- (18) It was *a fortnight later* that Inspector Bland had a long and unsatisfying interview with the Chief Constable of the County.

-*Folly*

Adjuncts of time which mean *High frequency*, if they are modified or if the Ci-clause is interrogative or negative, like manner Adjuncts, can be Ci of cleft sentences:

- (19) a. 'It's *very frequently* that he loses money.
 b. It's *not often* that I have a chance to speak to him.

(Quirk et al. (1985: 547))

On the other hand, Adjuncts of time expressing *low frequency* can occur in the Ci position of cleft sentences, even if they are not modified or the Ci-clause is not interrogative nor negative, by reason that they themselves implicate the negative meaning:

- (20) It is *so seldom* that Miss Marple is worse informed than we are that I had taken it for granted that she would know the latest developments.

-Vicarage

2.5. NFC

Infinitive clause cannot occur in the Ci position of cleft sentences, with the exception of infinitive clause expressing *purpose* (22):

- (21) *It was *for me to become a doctor* that my father wanted.
(Ootuka & Nakajima (1982: 978))
- (22) And it is *to assist you in arranging this* that you have sent for me?

-Folly

Gerund can be Ci of cleft sentences, if it serves as Subject (23) or Od (24) in the noncleft sentence:

- (23) It was *being a doctor*, she supposed, that made him understand.

-Cypress¹⁶⁾

- (24) It was *buying a new hat* that I enjoyed.

(Emonds (1970: 133))

Akmajian (1977) points out that the complement of perception verb can be Ci of cleft sentences:

- (25) For we know now - it is *all written down in the secret documents* that we have found - that in reality he was trying to lure us to our doom.

-Animal

An example of the complement of non-perception verb is indicated by Inada (1989: 60):

- (26) It was *Mr Crale alive* she'd wanted.

2.6. FC

It is the noun clause and the adverb clause of FC that occur in the Ci position of cleft sentences. I will start from the noun clause¹⁷⁾. It can occur in the Ci position if it functions as Subject or Od in the noncleft sentence:

- (27) a. It is *that Bill will ever be this late again* that is unlikely.
b. It was *that elephants have long memories* that Fred remembered.
(Delahunty (1984: 81-82))

However, that-clause serving as Subject in the noncleft sentence, if it is extraposed, cannot be Ci:

- (28) *It is *that Bill will ever be this late again* that it is unlikely.
(Delahunty (1984: 81))

In the case of the FC serving as Od, Delahunty (1984) has pointed out that it is possible to be Ci of cleft sentences only if the clause is factive complements. Thus, the non-factive complements cannot occur in the Ci position:

- (29) *It was *that elephants have long memories* that he thought.
(Delahunty (1984: 82))

The adverb clause¹⁸⁾ will be discussed on five expressions: reason, purpose, concessive, time, and result clause.

The adverb clause expressing *reason* can be Ci of cleft sentences if they are because-or since-clause, but as-clause cannot occur in the Ci position:

- (30) a. It was *not because you wanted your*

tea that you were so anxious to know if it was four o'clock.

-Folly

- b. It is *since she has quit drinking* that Jane has become quite unapproachable.
- c. *It was *as the child had not shown up* that I began to worry.

(Murata (1982 : 286))

As-clause is considered impossible because it has multiplicity of meaning¹⁹⁾.

While purpose-clause (31b) can be Ci of cleft sentences, result-clause (31a) cannot occur in the Ci position:

- (31) a. *It was *so that we reached safety by nightfall* that we travelled all day.
- b. It was *so that we might reach safety by nightfall* that we travelled all day.

(Imai & Nakajima (1978 : 449))

The fact that purpose-clause is acceptable is similar to the acceptability of infinitive clause expressing *purpose*.

While time-clause can be Ci of cleft sentences, concessive-clause cannot²⁰⁾:

- (32) a. It was *only when he was tired or depressed or felt his age* that he dreamed of an organisation which he could serve for higher reasons than pay, an organisation which would enlist his fidelity because of its inherent justice, its fair distribution of reward, its reasonableness.

-Battle

- b. *It's *although he wasn't there* that he knows about it.

(Murata (1982 : 285))

2.7. Syntactic Clauses and Ci

I will not attempt to argue the relationship between syntactic classes and the occurrence in Ci, but I would like to add some comments on the fact that most syntactic classes can occur in the Ci position of cleft sentences. Compare Table 1 which shows the relationship between syntactic classes and the functions where Ci occurs, and Table 2 which indicates the general relationship between the classes and functions.

As indicated in Table 1 and 2, most functions of syntactic classes can occur in the Ci position of cleft sentences. However, this possibility is not always available. It goes without saying that there are differences among the frequency of syntactic class-

Table 1 Syntactic classes and functions which can occur in the Ci position

Function Class	Subject	Od	Oi	adjunct	CP	SC
NP	o	o	x	o	o	x
PP	-	-	o	o	-	-
AP	-	-	-	-	-	?
Adv P	-	-	-	o	-	-
NFC	o	o	-	o	-	x
FC	o	o	-	o	-	-

Table 2 General relationship between classes and functions

Function Class	Subject	Od	Oi	adjunct	CP	SC
NP	o	o	o	o	o	o
PP	-	-	o	o	-	-
AP	-	-	-	-	-	o
Adv P	-	-	-	o	-	-
NFC	o	o	-	o	-	o
FC	o	o	-	o	-	-

es. I indicate it from my corpus with Collins (1991) in Table 3²¹⁾:

Table 3 The frequency of Ci in syntactic classes

Researcher		Collins	Ueno
Class			
NP		50.4%	66.8%
PP		21.5%	12.5%
FC		6.8%	7.1%
NFC		0.8%	1.7%
Adv P		5.9%	11.9%
AP		0.1%	0%

As indicated in Table 3, the most frequently occurring Ci in cleft sentences is the NP.

In this section I conclude that although most syntactic classes can be Ci of cleft sentences, in fact the NP-like expression has high possibility of being Ci. I also point out that the analysis of syntactic classes and functions has the limitation, and I insist that cleft constructions should be analyzed from the context including the sentence.

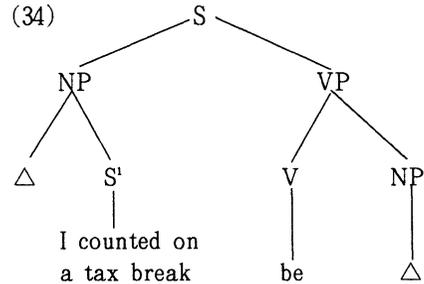
3. The Cleft Sentences from the Generative Transformational Grammar

I will observe the elements of Ci analyzed from the transformational grammar.

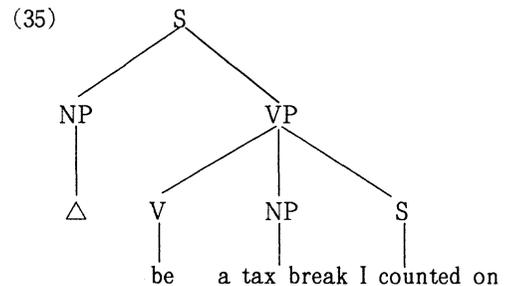
Emonds (1970) points out that in cleft sentences only NP and PP can appear in Ci position, but AP²²⁾, verb phrase (VP), infinitive, and that-clause are generally unacceptable. He explains that a transformational operation of cleft sentences is a structure-preserving transformation, and they are generated by *Focus Placement rule* and *Cleft Extrapolation rule*. According to his analysis, the example in (33) is derived

from the structure in (34):

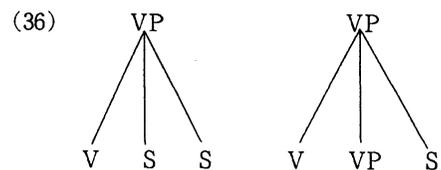
(33) It was a tax break I counted on.



(35) would be derived from (34) by *Focus Placement rule* that moves NP in S' to empty NP in VP and *Cleft Extrapolation rule* that moves S' to empty S in VP:



According to this proposal, the phrase structure rules like (36) are needed in order for clausal complement or VP to be Ci of cleft sentences. Emonds explains that they cannot occur in the Ci position because there is no such a rule in fact:



Furthermore, he adds that the ungrammatical cases where NP or AP functions as SC are evidence that S-Ci is the relative clause;

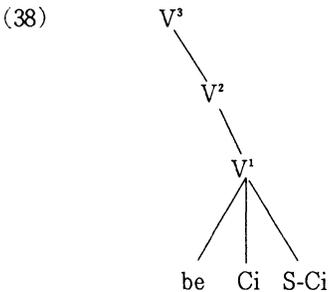
this ungrammaticality is similar to the impossibility of the relativization as in (37):

- (37) *I saw a German teacher that Harry was.
 (Emonds (1970: 141))

Examples incompatible with Emonds are found easily. We have observed that syntactic classes in the Ci position are not only NP and PP in section 2.

Pinkham & Hankamer (1975) argue that there are two separate constructions in cleft sentences; one is *it-relative* constructions which have NP in the Ci position, and the other is *it-cleft* constructions which generate cleft sentences occurring non-NP elements in the Ci position (PP, Adv P, AP, clause, and indirect interrogative) by a transformational cleaving process at a relatively shallow stage. While there must be a Clefting rule which extracts the focus constituent (Ci) for it-cleft, it-relative constructions have underlyingly Ci in the position and aren't operated by *Focus Placement rule*.

Delahunty (1984) claims that cleft sentences are base generated, and that both Ci and S-Ci are daughters of V¹ like (38):



He points out that there needs another phrase structure rules in order to suffice his analysis, and adopts the phrase structure

rules proposed by Jackendoff (1977) as in (39):

- (39)
- $$V^1 \rightarrow V(NP)(Prt) \left(\left\{ \begin{matrix} NP \\ AP \end{matrix} \right\} \right) \left(\left\{ \begin{matrix} Adv P \\ QP \end{matrix} \right\} \right) (PP) \left(\left\{ \begin{matrix} PP \\ S^1 \end{matrix} \right\} \right)$$

Rule (39), therefore, predicts that cleft sentences may have Ci of NP, PP, AP, Adv P, Prt (particle), and QP (quantifier phrase)²³.

4. The Information Structure of Ci

The term of the information structure has been used by many linguistic literatures. In this section I shall observe several studies on the information structure of cleft sentences through a primarily Halliday's approach. According to Halliday, discourse is organized into a linear succession of message units which are realized phonologically as 'tone units'. The internal organization of the tone units reflects the speaker's decision as to which constituent is 'new' (New) and which part is 'given' (Given). He defines Given and New information from the linguistic perspective of 'recoverability'; Given information is that which the speaker presents as recoverable from prior linguistic context or from the situation, and New information is that which is presented as not recoverable.

Traditionally, cleft sentences have been considered as the following information structure with stressed Ci:

- (40) It is/was [New] which/who(m)/that / ϕ [Given]

Erades (1962) points out that (41) differs from cleft sentences like (40) in that Ci is not New and S-Ci does not convey Given:

(41) IT WAS MISS LEMON, Poirot's efficient secretary, who took the telephone call. -Folly

- (42) a. It is/was [-New] which/who(m)/that²⁹⁾ [-Given]
 b. It is/was [Given] which/who(m)/that [New]

Prince (1978) classifies cleft sentences into two types: 'stressed-focus it-clefts' like (40) and 'informative-presupposition it-clefts' like (42). She points out that S-Ci in both cleft sentences are 'known' information²⁵⁾, but does not present whether it is recoverable or not. Furthermore, she interprets the concept slightly differently in the two types of clefts. In stressed-focus it-clefts S-Ci is said to represent information "which is often, though not always, known from the context" (p. 904) (which is Halliday's Given information) and Ci is contrastive. In informative-presupposition it-clefts S-Ci "contains the 'message'-but marked as a known fact, not as the speaker's assessment" (p. 904) (which is New information) and the category of an anaphoric (subject) NP or an adverbial occurs in the Ci position.

Declerck (1984), using theme/topic theory proposed by Givon (1983), labels cleft sentences like (40) as 'contrastive clefts' and (41) 'unstressed-anaphoric-focus clefts'.

Furthermore, he proposes 'discontinuous clefts' which has information structure like (43):

- (43) It is/was [New] which/who (m)/that [New]

Hedberg (1990), using topic/comment definition proposed by Gundel (1988), analyzes cleft sentences.

Huddleston (1984) and Collins (1991) also classify the cleft sentences into three types from the informativity.

I summarize the relationship between information structure and the terms of cleft sentences used by these literatures as in Table 4.

5. Summary

I have seen so far general considerations of Ci in cleft constructions. In section 2 and 3 the syntactic perspective has shown that the Ci in cleft sentences prefers NP-like expressions to other syntactic classes, as indicated by the frequency. Furthermore, it seems to me that the taxonomy suggested by several linguists is available. But attention should be drawn to other exceptional types of cleft sentences.

I'm only in the starting point, but would like to continue to explore this construction in various ways.

Table 4 Information structure and the term

Information Structure	Literature				
	Prince (1978)	Declerck (1984)	Huddleston (1984)	Hedberg (1990)	Collins (1991)
[New] [Given]	stressed-focus	contrastive	Use 1	topic-clause	Type 1
[Given] [New]	informative-presupposition	unstressed-anaphoric-focus	Use 2	comment-clause	Type 2
[New] [New]		discontinuous			Type 3

Notes

- 1) Cleft sentences are in this paper defined as sentences of the form *It is/was Ci which/who (m) /that/φ S-Ci* (S-Ci means that Sentence minus Constituent_i), which is the same definition as Prince (1978). Thus, I shall refer to the 'focus' as Ci and the 'presupposition' as S-Ci.
- 2) There are two more classes in the elements which occurs in the Ci position: φ and verb phrase. An Example of φ is like (a), but φ-clefts falls out of the concern of the present paper:

(a) If so, it must be that their God was more powerful than the Kikuyu's Ngai.

(Collins (1991 : 55))

The verb phrase generally does not occur in the Ci position. Quirk et al. explains the possibility as follows (1985 : 1385-1386): "Informally, we sometimes find a predication fronted in a cleft sentence, the V element made nonfinite and then subsequently replaced by *do* in the second clause; examples like the following are regarded, however, as stylistically awkward (again except in informal Irish English)":

(b) 'It was *teach English in a school* that he did at that time.

Furthermore, Bolinger refers to Verb-clefts as follows (1972a : 28): "Dialectally of course both adjectives and complete verb phrase are readily cleft, for emphasis.":

(c) It's *study* that he does, all day long.

- 3) I use the term of 'adjunct' as functioning supplementally in sentences, and also distinguish it from 'Adjuncts' which are one of adverbials used by Quirk et al. (1985).
- 4) Christie, Agatha. *The Murder at the Vicarage*.
- 5) Christie, Agatha. *Dead Man's Folly*.
- 6) Orwell, George. *Animal Farm*.
- 7) See Murata (1982) for the related arguments.
- 8) Greene, Graham. *It's a Battlefield*.
- 9) Adverbials of Quirk et al. (1985) contain Adv P and PP in this paper.
- 10) See notes 3.
- 11) Subjuncts of *downtoners* can occur in the Ci position of cleft sentences:

(a) It's *little* we care about our mothers till they're gone.

(Delahunty (1984 : 79))

Furthermore, subjuncts of *amplifiers* can be Ci, if they are modified or if the Ci-clause is interrogative or negative:

(b) 'Was it *completely* that he ignored your request?

(Quirk et al. (1985 : 597))

- 12) Amano (1976) refers to these words as non-omissible elements.
- 13) Amano (1976) explains that the Adv P, which is modified or has a negative prefix, has greater information value.
- 14) Lawrence, D. H. *The Man who Died*.
- 15) Amano (1976) points out that the Adv P like *usually, presently, already, always* cannot be Ci of cleft sentences.
- 16) Christie, Agatha. *Sad Cypress*.
- 17) Indirect question can be Ci of cleft sentences:

(a) It was *when they were due* that he was asking.

(Pinkham & Hankamer (1975 : 433))

- 18) There are two different functions in adverb clause:

(a) He's not coming to class *because he's sick*.

(b) He's not coming to class, *because he just called from San Diego*.

(Oota & Kajita (1974 : 622))

While because-clause of (a) indicates the reason for the main clause, because-clause of (b) states

the reason for uttering the main clause. Adverb clauses serving like (a) can be Ci of cleft sentences, but adverb clauses like (b) cannot be Ci:

(c) It's *because he's sick* that he's not coming to class.

(d) *It's *because he just called me from San Diego* that he's not coming to class.

(Oota & Kajita (1974: 623-624))

19) As-clause expressing *time* can occur in the Ci position of cleft sentences:

(a) It was *just as she came near to it* that Tupence became aware of a woman standing by the gate peering inside. -Christie, A. *N or M*.

20) Bolinger (1972b: 113) indicates examples of though-clause occurring in the Ci position:

(a) Was it *even though you told him not to* that he was determined to do it?

21) In Collins (1991) ϕ -clefts occupy 14.5%, but I exclude them.

22) AP of Emonds (1970) contains both Adv P and AP of this paper.

23) QP-clefts have been referred to a kind of Adv P-clefts in this paper. See notes 11 in detail.

24) *That* in this kind of sentence is not deletable.

25) 'Known' information is defined by Prince (1978: 903) as "information which the speaker represents as being factual and as already known to certain persons (often not including the hearer)".

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