

Modeling Information Structure as an Interface Phenomenon: the Case of Clefts

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In this talk, I address the question of how syntax and information structure (=InfS) interact in the derivation of it-clefts, see (1).

- (1) It was Pound who had been thinking of it. (BNC, A1B, 377)

ICs constitute a specific construction that expresses focus on the pivot (POUND in (1)), while the relative clause corresponds to the background. It-clefts exhibit a range of peculiar syntactic properties (non-expletive *it*; copula *be*; a relative clause that exhibits properties of restrictive, non-restrictive and partially free relative clauses) see Hartmann and Veenstra (2013) for an overview. These are combined with focus semantic properties such as contrast, exhaustivity, existential presupposition on the cleft clause (see Halvorsen 1978, Percus 1997, É. Kiss 1998, Büring and Križ 2013). I will argue that these properties result from two related facts. (i) ICs are copular clauses in which the clefted constituent is the subject of a small clause and the cleft clause headed by *it* is the syntactic predicate. (ii) The pivot remains in-situ while *it* inverts to the initial position. I claim that this inversion is triggered by focus-background marking in the small clause. I will implement this inversion in a specific model in which InfS and syntax interact during the derivation, which is sketched in (2-a) to (2-d). The crucial step is the mapping of focus onto the small clause subject and background on the complement of Pr. In this mapping, the InfS feature background is bundled with a syntactic feature (EF) that drives movement of this constituent to the edge. As the cleft clause is a relative clause predicate, it is different from other types of relative clauses. The focus semantic contribution is an additional proposition derived by applying the background to one element in the focus alternatives. This proposition is accommodated to have the opposite truth value of the asserted proposition.

- (2) a. Step 1 (syntax): Merger of pivot and cleft clause as predication structure
[_{PrP} [_{DP} Pound] [_{Pr'} Pr [_{DP} it [_{CP} who had been thinking of it]]]]
b. Step 2 (InfS): Assignment of focus background mapping
[_{PrP} [_{DP} Pound]_{FOC} [_{Pr'} Pr [_{DP} it [_{CP} who had been thinking of it]]_{BACKGROUND+EF}]]
c. Step 3 (syntax): Inversion and extraposition of the cleft clause
[_{VP} [_{DP} it *t*_{CP}] [_{VP} [_{VP} [_v was] [_{PrP} [_{DP} Pound]_{FOC} [_{Pr'} Pr *t*_{DP}]]] [_{CP} who had been thinking of it]_{BACKGROUND}]]
d. Final structure
[_{TP} [_{DP} it *t*_{CP}] [_{T'} [_T was] [_{VP} *t*_{DP} [_{VP} [_v was] [_{PrP} [_{DP} Pound]_{FOC} [_{Pr'} Pr *t*_{DP}]]] [_{CP} who had been thinking of it]_{BACKGROUND}]]]]

References

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