

English functional and corpus based analysis english language essay

[Linguistics](#), [English](#)



Every language in the world has its own structure. Nowadays, grammar is rather descriptive than prescriptive. It is the reason why we label sentences as "grammatical/ungrammatical" or "well-formed/ill-formed". We don't use prescriptive terminology such as "correct/incorrect". (Radford, 1988: 8)

Language, as a living organism is constantly changing. The reason of this never-ending change is use of language. When one speaks, he may follow formal prescriptions however what often happens are mistakes. As prescriptive grammar is no longer useful in a sense of saying how the 'grammar' per se should look like, the best thing to consider is to describe languages as they are and look upon the nature of changes. As each organism is different, so language is. A different organ plays similar functions in different living creatures. In this study, we will consider one of the aspects of English grammar: cleft-sentences. In some languages the function of English cleft-sentences is performed by grammatical devices which are absent in modern English. In French, a language without the capacity for stressed words based merely on pitch or volume of articulation, structures of this kind are required in order to stress a certain element;

F. "C'est Jean qui je cherche" (It's Jean who I'm looking for)' F. "C'est à Paris que j'habite" (It's in Paris where I live) or in German where English translation to German means de-clefting a sentence G. "Das ist genau was ich dachte" (That is exactly what I thought.)' G. "Spanien ist nicht wo ich gehen wollte" (Spain is not where I wanted to go.) Present-day English is a language with fixed word order: Subject-verb-object (SVO) (Gass & Schachter, 1989). A change on the word order normally indicates a change in the function and focus on a specific piece of information in the utterance. In English, there are

several ways to put stress on new information. We may achieve it by "fronting", use of headers and tails and other structural options as changing the place of indirect object and direct object; passive voice versus active voice or cleft sentences. This study is focused on cleft sentences. To cleave means to cut or split into two parts, and this type of sentences takes its name from the fact that the single clause of the basic sentence pattern is split into two clauses. We recognize clauses by a subject and a verb presence. Typical cleft sentence may be: 0. It was John who ate fish and chips(compare: John ate fish and chips)

This short study of cleft sentences is of a corpus-based approach nature and with the functional perspective on the issue. In the following discussion, I will first analyse these examples from the perspective of systemic functional syntax, which will be followed by the discussion. In the following discussion, I will first analyse these examples from the perspective of systemic functional syntax, which will be followed by the discussion of these two types of sentences. For example, cleft sentences have similar characteristics and functions in Catalan to those in English. (Wheeler, Yates, & Dols, 1999: 591)This is very important for students to understand how this structure functions in a language. It may help us to communicate more efficiently in way that is more complex: not using simple sentence structures. English makes considerable use of cleft sentences for purposes of emphasis. We will focus more on this aspect later in this paper. This is also very good stylistic device. The main problem in this kind of sentences is use of nominative or accusative pronouns alongside with wrong type of verb in one of the clauses. We will discuss this in greater details later in this paper.

Global discussion

There are a number of ways to add emphasis to your sentences in English. Use these forms to emphasize your statements when you are expressing your opinions, disagreeing, making strong suggestions, expressing annoyance, etc. The first step in my paper is to introduce the construction that we are going to deal with. What follows is short comparison of a "simple" (non-cleft) (1a) sentence with two main types of "cleft sentences" (1a/c):

1. a. John ate fish and chips.
- b. It was fish and chips that John ate.
- c. What John did was eat fish and chips. BNC F9W 1319 [1]

Now I shall discuss structures of sentences (b) and (c)

Cleft Sentences: It-clauses

Sentences introduced by 'It is' or 'It was' are often used to emphasize a specific subject or object. The introductory clause is then followed by a relative pronoun.

is/It (be) [X] that/who/which/∅ [Y]was

fig. 1

To put it into kind of a formula we would describe it as shown in the fig. 1. It-clefts consists of the pronoun it = grammatical subject followed by a form of the verb to be (that agrees in number with pronoun) and optionally accompanied by the negator not or an adverb such as only (see example 3 below) [X] it-clause followed by some constituent X- the specially focused element, which may be: a noun phrase, a prepositional phrase, an adverb phrase, an adverbial clause, a subordinate clause

introduced by that, who/which or zero relative (which is not used when the focus part is the subject of the rest of the cleft sentence (Greenbaum, 1996: 176)) which is the subsequent wh-clausefig 2. The subordinate clause is not in fact a typical relative clause. The main difference is that it prefers that as the relative item. Secondly, what differs these structures is the range of elements that occurs as antecedent. Let me now illustrate various grammatical roles in the dependent clauses to show how broad the usage of this type of structures is. The it-cleft can have various types of phrases and clauses as its focus, as it will be shown below.

IT-cleft = IT + BE + clefted constituent [NP, PP, AdvP, Finite clause] + cleft clausefig. 3

In this case, I quote terms used by Gundel (2002) and Delin (1992),

Similarly, if we now take other constituencies of the structure into consideration, we may conclude with following pattern:

It + be + focus + clausefig. 4Let me start the investigation of types of phrases by looking at following examples. 2. His eyes were clear and brown and filled with an appropriate country

3. It was only for the carrot that they put up with his abominable parties.

4. What caused that stain on the carpet? It was a sherry that Tom offered Sue. (reason)

This seems appropriate to mention that the focused element in an it-cleft is not infrequently a pronoun or some other form, which expresses given information:

5. I believe it was your mother who said, Wouldn't it be the best thing? (conv)
6. It was then that I realized that he was going to leave me on my own. (BNC HEM 76; interv)

In a typical it-cleft structure, the focus is on the final element of the it-clause and represents new, often contrastive, information (e. g. Biber et al 1999: 959)., and subsequent wh-clause typically conveys or previously known information presupposed information (e. g. Prince 1978: 896). In the following examples, it-clause is in bold with wh-clause being in italics:

7. [talking about changes in rural England and how it is perceived by citizens]Someone must plough the fields or milk the cows, but much of this endeavour takes place hidden from public view and when a tractor is glimpsed across a field it is often assumed that it is a farmer who is in the cab. The farm worker, in the meantime, receives little attention from those who profess an interest in the changing conditions of rural England. BNC FPR 7(focus is on a farmer who in fact is doing that hard work, and says that it is done by some specific person)

8. [Talking about marriage of their friends]A: Anna and John met in April 1913. They really got on with each other. You know. Great relationship and then they got married, just a year afterB: So, it was in 1914 that they met and married. (TMC 1964/08/21 [2])A: Yes, indeed.(previously

known information in context is placed at the end of the clause. The focus is drawn on the date: in 1914 and adjunct)

9. They are still trying to persuade you that Palatine really needs Anglo-Welsh, and they are evidently prepared to spend vast amounts of their shareholders' money on national advertising to impress you. The fact is, however, that it is Anglo-Welsh which needs Palatine, to improve its position in the on-trade sector. BNC CDF 2015-1016

10. Who must register for VAT? It's the person, not the business, who is registered for VAT. BNC FAU 761-762

Above examples, show it-cleft structures with relative clauses introduced by different pronouns.

The main function of the it-clause is to mark contrastive focus. The contrast is very often implicit: as in (8)- it was in 1914 they got married not in 1913; (7) a farmer, not a boy or a woman; or explicit as shown in the last example. In such examples, it is a dummy element with no other function but to provide a subject for the verb be. (Downing & Locke, 2006: 250).

I shall now confine my discussion to types of adjunct in cleft position. Cleft focus may be introduced by different adverbials. It is clearly shown in examples 3, 7. The types of labels that are traditionally applied to different kinds of adjuncts are generally semantic. They are presented in the Table 1 (Types of Adjuncts)

| TYPE | EXAMPLE |
|-----------|-----------------------------|
| Time | at 7'oclock |
| Frequency | every weekend |
| Place | on the corner |
| Purpose | in the order to see clearly |
| Reason | because she had no friends |
| Condition | if you drive |
| Manner | quiet brutally |
| Degree | totally |

Table 1 Types of adjuncts (adapted from (Collins & Hollo, 2000))

N

%

Manner713. 7Place1529. 4Time2345. 1Cause/reason59. 8Condition12.

0Total51100

Table 2: Adjuncts in cleft position in the ICE-GB

The analysis of the ICE-GB (International Corpus of English- Great Britain) [3] conducted by Hilde Hasselgård give us following results (see Table 2 above), which in fact are not surprising as the time and place adjuncts are the most often used types of adjuncts (cf. Biber et al (1999: 783 f.) and Table 1. above in this volume)

These adjuncts have a parenthetical character and shall be called peripheral dependents (they are set off the clause (by intonation or comma in writing). There is a grammatical test, which is often useful in distinguishing peripheral dependences: they cannot be highlighted in cleft sentences. For example, in the clause (by Collins & Hollo, 2000): 11. Surprisingly, they were finished by midnight. The peripheral dependent surprisingly cannot be cleft-highlighted. 11 a *It was surprisingly that they were finished by midnight.

However, the time-adjunct by midnight can be: 11b it was by midnight that they were finished.

Here appears first problem for students of English grammar. Very often, they tend to cleft a sentence with a peripheral dependents put in the focus. Other

restrictions in " clefting" are also common hurdle for students. Frequently found mistakes are ones of focalizing negative expressions. Such expressions like nobody, nothing, nowhere, in no way and never cannot be focalized, as this would lead to a contradiction or ambiguity of the positive presupposition contained in the clause. For example, 12. *It is nobody that/who loves me is not a possible clefting of 12 a Nobody loves me. simply because it contradicts the presupposition that somebody loves me and simply because the first sentence does not make sense: how someone or something that does not exist may " love" the other person? Of course it is normal to focus on an empty set, but not by means of cleft structures. Similarly, students tend to do the same with expressions like somebody, somewhere, anyone or anywhere. In this example, the constraint is due to the fact that somebody, somewhere, etc. does not provide any identification because no option is eliminated. Let us see what happens. The example 13 is very often seen in students written texts.

13. *It is somebody who loves me. They want to convey a message that shall be stated by the following sentence: 13a. Somebody loves me. It is important to indicate that while e. g. 14. It was somewhere between these two factions that Madness and the 2-Tone bands appeared BNC ARP 282 is acceptable the 14a is not acceptable: 14a. *It was somewhere that Madness and the 2-Tone bands appeared. It is said that somewhere is postmodified restrictively by a preposition group which provides the necessary identification and contrast with e. g. out there. (cf. Lock 1996)

It-clefts can be analysed by means of Halliday's (1994) Predicated Theme perspective. In fact, he was the first grammarian to study the "it-clefts" from the systematic functional perspective. His analysis involves assuming that the pronoun "it" and "that-clause" form the Subject of the whole clause. Be and the element that follows are the Predicator and Complement respectively. Let's me take a sentence form British National Corpus into consideration. 15. It was Bob who took me out. BNC FBL 1793

As we have seen so far, by use of it-cleft structure speaker can focus on getting across the most important part of a sentence. And this is why it is not possible to cleft a sentence which has no identifier. Halliday proposes a two-level thematic analysis for the predicated-theme construction, as illustrated by the following table: Table 3.(2) It was Bob who took me out (i) Theme Rheme Theme Rheme (ii) Theme Rheme

What we find in the second row (i) is a local analysis, in which both Themes are unmarked, whereas that in (ii) is a global analysis, in which the Theme is represented by a clause. The theme extends from the beginning of the clause up to (and including) the first element that has a function in transitivity. This element is called the 'topical Theme'; so we can say that the Theme of the clause consists of the topical Theme together with anything else that comes before it. (Halliday 1994: 53)

This construction is used to focus or place special emphasis on, a constituent that conveys new information, one that comes first: 16. Dialog A: I heard that John kissed Anna in the disco on Saturday. B: No! It was Tom that kissed her in the disco on Saturday. A': Was it?

This simple conversation shows us the most common use of cleft sentences in conversation. Speaker B could have said: Tom kissed Anna that day instead. However, Cleft sentences allow us to pick out a single element and give it emphatic status. Some grammarians call this kind of productivity "derivational" (Fowler and Fowler 1931: 113; Poutsma (1916: 100) or more recent Richards et al 1985: 40). The following sentences are all derived from the sentence 16B (and non-cleft variant is: (16. 0) Tom kissed Anna in the disco on Saturday): a. It was Anna that Tom kissed in the disco on Saturday. b. It was in the disco that Tom kissed Anna on Saturday. c. It was on Saturday that Tom kissed Anna in the disco.

While there seems to be no problems with variants of sentence 16 one may find it difficult or not clear when it comes to use of first person singular in similar sentences. Let us now focus on pronoun choice after forms of be. Most of the personal pronouns preserve a distinction between a nominative and an accusative case form: I-me, he-him, she-her, we-us, they-them. The distribution of the forms is generally straightforward: the nominative is used in subject position, while the accusative is used in object position and as the complement of prepositions. (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999: 335)

Huddleston and Pullum, however, write that after forms of be both nominative and accusative forms are found, especially if the pronoun is predicative complement. Nevertheless, the nominative is "largely restricted to constructions of the form it + be + pronoun" as they showed it in following example: 17. It was they [nominative] / them [accusative] who

complained. In prescriptive grammar note (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005: 106) we find that only nominative, so only they in the above example, is claimed to be grammatically correct. As the paper is rather descriptive and corpus based we now shall briefly analyse results from BNC. Queries searched:

1. It was I/me who... 2. it was he/him who 3. it was we/us 4. it was they/them who

Table 4. Corpus analysis on the distribution of use of nominative vs. accusative among personal pronouns [4]

ContextCase(nominative vs. accusative)General

numberSPOKENFICTIONNEWSACADMISCI vs. mePer mil

0. 00. 42. 41. 10. 00. 10. 10. 00. 10. 2freq45 | 32043818011069he vs.

himPer mil

0. 10. 24. 40. 10. 90. 00. 90. 12. 10. 0freq188 | 61270290141941she vs.

herPer mil

0. 10. 04. 00. 00. 30. 10. 00. 00. 40. 0freq85 | 3106403100172we vs. usPer

mil

-

0. 1

-

1. 1

-

0. 1

-

0. 0

-

0. 0freq

- | **33**

-

1

-

1

-

1

-

0

-

0they vs. themPer mil

0. 00. 10. 60. 00. 10. 00. 80. 00. 80. 0freq59 | 10110010120360

This brief analysis of BNC showed that in fact, cleft constructions in fiction, news and other written publications (MISC) generally have nominative form before who. In spoken English accusative is preferred in case of cleft structures. Interestingly, BNC show no result for " It was we who..." construction. Despite a traditional prescription based on the rules of Latin

grammar, accusative forms are predominant in all registers where the relevant forms are found. are nearly universal. Even where cleft constructions occur in conversation, we usually find an accusative form, together with that or a zero connective. In fiction and news, accusative forms are also the norm for subject predicatives following the copula be. However, cleft constructions generally have nominative forms followed by who. The nominative forms are presumably felt to be more correct, as they are typically co referential with the subject of the following subordinate clause. It is also significant that in these registers who is often chosen to introduce the subordinate clause rather than that or zero connective, which are typical of casual speech. In conversation, where indeed we might expect to find a change most advanced, they Akmajian (1970: 150-153) points out that when the focus is a nominative singular pronoun, the verb may also exhibit person agreement with the focus: 18. It is I who am wrong, not you. BNC HGE 3576 The connection between nominative case and verb agreement could lead speakers, according to Akmajian, to favour the 1 singular objective form me when a present tense verb fails to exhibit person agreement, as in:

Cleft Sentences: Wh-clefts

Another type of clefting is illustrated by the following examples, all of which contain a wh-word: who, where, why, when, what, that. The structure of wh-cleft is following: wh a clause introduced by a wh-word, with its own point of focus typically at its end be usually it is what wh a form of the verb be NP the specially focused element: a NP, an infinitive clause, or a finite nominal clause. wh Note that, as Leech & Svartvik (2002) write, the non finite verb may be a bare infinitive, a to-infinitive, an -ed participle, or an ing-

participle (p. 218) wh-cleft= wh-clause + be + emphasised clause fig. 5. This type of clefts can be used to focus a Subject, an Object or an Adjunct. Wh-clefts with what clause as subject are far more frequent than these structures introduced by why, where, how, etc. It is expected to be so, because the meaning of wh-words is often expressed by the nouns such as the person, the place, the way. 20. No, the way I see it is that if you enter a competition you get at least two clear runs with no-one snaking you. BNC ARM 417 preferred to: How I see it is that if you enter a competition you get at least... Even short analysis of BNC shows that there are many more entries with " The way I see it..." than " How I see it..." Also if the wh-word is and adverbs listed above, the wh-cleft sounds better when wh-clause it is worth noticing that wh-type sentences using: who, whom, whose is usually awkward or impossible (Leech & Svartvik, 2002). Examples given by Leech and Svartvik are as follows: 21. On this very spot is where I first met my wife. This, however sound more poetic than useful in everyday conversation. Such construction may also become problematic for students. They tend to completely avoid clefts or to overuse them (cf. Swan & Smith, 2001: 27). Coming back to the gist of the topic, it is necessary to realize that wh-type of cleft sentence is more flexible. As we discussed it in the previous part, it-type normally cannot focus on the complement of the clause. Here, there is possibility to cleave a sentence: 22. a. So, she is a school teacher at the moment to: b. So at the mo at the moment what Joyce is a school teacher. BNC G59 438 However, clefting with the use of it-structure is not correct: c. *It is a school teacher that she is. What makes wh-clefting more common is also the fact that wh-type can focus on verb, by using the

substitute verb do. 23. a. What he has done is describe certain linguistic features ... BNC H8V 651as derived from b. He has described certain linguistic features but clefting like one that follows cannot be accepted: c. *It's describe certain linguistic features that he has done. Here appears another frequent mistake. What students often do is using wh-cleft structures with a stative verb. It is grammatically and logically incorrect.

Sentences 24. will picture this problem: 24. a. *What she did was know this theory. b. *What she did was be very cold Sentences, although, structurally correct, contain stative verb (know, be). However, as shown by Miller (2002) there are some acceptable clauses as e. g.: 25. What she did was e-mail all her friends. In spoken language, it seems that connecting copular verb is often omitted. This claim is also supported by the BNC. I found out that there is higher frequency of query "What I did I..." in spoken register (8) and within fiction (1) while newspapers and academic writings have no examples of this kind of structure. It was mentioned before that it-clefts are more common in academic prose. On the other hand, wh-clefts are being more often used in conversations. It is easier and more common for a speaker to start an utterance with phrase like "what I think..., what I want to say, what I need, what this means". However, the most common type of cleft found in spoken language are th-clefts, called also Demonstrative clefts. This kind of clefts contains a demonstrative pronoun (usually that) followed by a form of be plus a dependent clause introduced by a wh-word: 26. That is what happens when you are afraid of nobody all the time. BNC A2J 29027. That is how I feel. BNC BMM 228228. Yes, that's why I said it was a bit worrying before. BNC J1F

36329. This is what it means to say that Dostoevsky brushes against Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov as he reaches back towards the underground man. BNC A18 926 We see that the structure of demonstrative cleft structures is: det + be + what + wh + dependent clause fig. 6. Learners of English very often make a mistake with demonstrative clefts. The most common error is reversing structure. We can hear: 30. *What I thought was that she will give me another chance 31. *How I spent my summer holidays was that I went to Italy. This mistake is usually made while speaking. The fact is that these structures are not normally reversible. However, in English there is structure that is called "reversed wh-cleft". Normally, it is not possible to reverse the structure. To proceed further in our final conclusion, it is necessary to briefly introduce yet another type of wh-clefts: reversed wh-clefts. Here I follow Biber, et al (1999). Reversed wh-clefts characteristics are that they are sentences with the nominal relative clause at the end, i. e. in subject predicative position. To illustrate we use examples from BNC: 32. She hardly took in what he said. BNC FRC 306933. Marie snapped back to reality and to the horror of what she had done. BNC ACB 3498 Reversed wh-clefts have the properties of fronted elements and are infrequent, like fronted elements in general. The informational/thematic properties of reversed pseudo-clefts explain their popularity in speech (particularly in informal conversation between friends). The internal-referencing function of the construction, along with its generally low informativity, is well suited to the dynamic organization of spoken language. The typical realization of theme as a text-referential demonstrative enables a stretch of prior discourse (whose extent is likely to

be larger with interlocutors whose acquaintance enables them to share a pool of common knowledge) to be identified with low-communicatively-dynamic information in the rheme/relative clause. To conclude my paper, when it comes to corpora, let me cite corpus findings from Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999): Firstly, it is found out that it-clefts are relatively common in all registers but most frequent in academic prose. In conversation ordinary wh-cleft are more common. The last structure wh-cleft that we dealt with in the previous paragraph, i. e. reversed wh-cleft are infrequent in all registers. In conversation, the demonstrative wh-clefts are particularly common with the patterns that is/was/etc. what/why... (occurring around 500 and 200 times per million words respectively. The " wh-cleft" is treated as " thematic equative" in Systemic Functional Grammar. The reason for giving this term to the construction is that the Theme-Rheme structure is expressed in the form " Theme = Rheme", with the "=" expressed by the Finite/Predicator " be". As Halliday (1994) points out, in terms of Transitivity, the thematic equative is an identifying relational process, with the wh-clause as the Identified and Value, as in Table 5 (H97 1767):

Table 5.(5)What I

| wantisevolutionExperiential | Identified | Process | Identifier | Interpersonal | Mood | Residue |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------|------------|---------------|-------------------|------------|
| Textual | Theme | Rheme | Syntax | Subject | Finite/Predicator | Complement |

[Theme] /rheme/ pattern is similar identical to pattern in it-clefts. The relative clause at the beginning is presented as background information and the cleft element is presented as New in the usual position in ' rheme'.

However, thanks to the cleft construction the division between given and New information is highlighted, and as a result the listener is encouraged to pay attention to the 'new' elements, which receive additional focus. Now we can proceed to the brief presentation of application of cleft structures. It shows how clefts are productive, and how easily we can focus on different parts of an utterance to get across the message usefully. The following examples are taken from <http://myenglishclasses.com/MATERIAL/AK%20Language/solution%20relative%20clauses.pdf>. How could you make a cleft sentence out of this sentence focusing on different areas? 34.

Special agent 007 sent his report to Ms Moneypenny yesterday. a. focus on James Bond: It was special agent 007 who sent his report to Ms Moneypenny yesterday. b. focus on what he sent: It was his report that special agent 007 sent to Ms Moneypenny yesterday. c. focus on Ms Moneypenny: It was Ms Moneypenny that special agent 007 sent his report to yesterday. d. focus on the time: It was yesterday that special agent 007 sent his report to Ms Moneypenny.

CONCLUSION

As the conclusion let me focus on the uses of cleft structures (Cowan, 2008). I decided to put this aspect in the final part of the paper because of the nature of the work, which is functional, and to help students to learn grammar of English language. Starting with wh-clefts, in which new information is generally in the focus element, are used especially in conversation to, first of all, resume a topic temporarily relegated to the background:

35. A: Well, they served us some kind of white beverage in these interesting-looking bottles. B: What kind of bottles? A: They were all covered with beautiful colours and designs. Well, what I didn't realize at the time was that the beverage was alcoholic. Secondly, this structure is being used to present the gist of preceding conversation: 36. A: what're you after?

B: You can always seek financial help from the Executive because they can give money out campaigns selective. Well, no, you can ask them. A: But what you are saying is you're not going to give it for free? B: That's correct.

(BNC J92 1020-1023)37. A: When people reach retirement age, they

usually slow down and become less interested in things like physical appearance and lifestyle. B: Actually, what often happens is that older people become more interested in regaining some of their youthful appearance and lifestyle. Example above (37) presents another use of clefts: contradict something that has been said and possibly present an alternative explanation. One can also clarify a possible misunderstanding or an impact of understanding, as in (38)38. A: I know, that's why I bought the

refill for, that's what I'm saying I don't know what the other one is, B: Well, so that will fit it then, that's a fibre refill. A: No, what I meant was I meant to buy it, I wanted to buy a refill for it, but I ended up not buying...Finally, very useful linguistic device: expression of the speaker's stance, or attitude, regarding something in the conversation: 39. A: So I guess you'll be

happy to start drawing your Social Security check. You've looked into it, I suppose? B: Yeah. What surprises me is that the amount you get actually goes up every year. Considering it-clefts, we can draw similar list of uses depending on the distribution of old and new information in the sentence to,

firstly, contradict (with the focused element containing new information; the that/who clause, old information): 40. A: Bob must have

recommended him as department chairman. B: Actually, it was Betty who recommended him. Not surprisingly, analysis of BNC shows that " that" is favoured if the next item is unanimated or is verb, and who with person. Last but one use of it-clefts is arguing a point in persuasive discourse (with the focus element containing old information; the that clause, new information) as in: 41. It is the shape of the hip bones, rather than other

anatomical differences, that are used to classify dinosaurs. (BNC C9A 850) Finally, point in our discussion is use of it-clefts to establish a topic that is going to be elaborated (with the entire sentence containing new information). 42. A decade of change for the Princess of Wales It

was ten years ago that the Prince and Princess of Wales began their courtship. To a few of us it may seem like only... (BNC G2E 3-5).

The adoption of a corpus-based approach to the study of cleft and pseudo-cleft constructions has proved to have a number of advantages. Such an approach has enabled distributional tendencies to be investigated empirically across a broad range of genres. The figures thus derived are, it has been demonstrated, reliable to grammatical and informational/thematic features. Furthermore, study of the functions and distribution of clefts across a variety of spoken and written registers provides a potential source of hypotheses about the textual organization of discourse. Another advantage is that the ' total-accountability' principle that is fundamental to the corpus-based approach provides a safeguard against the idiolectal biases, accidental omissions and distortions which are an ever-

present danger in an introspective approach. For example, one characteristic of clefts that the present study has confirmed is thematic flexibility in the choice of highlighted element. And this property has been shown to relate integrally to structural attributes of the cleft construction.