On the Syntax of the *It*-Cleft Construction:
A Construction-based Perspective*

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Kim, Jong-Bok. 2012. On the Syntax of the *It*-Cleft Construction: A Construction-based Perspective. *Linguistic Research* 29(1), 45-68. The English *it*-cleft construction displays ambivalent structural properties: restrictive relative clause and non-relative clause properties. This paper reviews its main grammatical properties and then sketches a uniform analysis for different types of the construction. This direction departs from the traditional ternary analysis in which the copula takes two complements, focus and cleft clause. In this paper, we suggest that the copula be in the cleft, as in other canonical environments, projects a binary structure, forming a cleft construction. This way of viewing the *it*-cleft construction as forming an independent grammatical entity brings us several welcoming consequences. **(Kyung Hee University)**

Keywords   extraposition, expletive, presupposition, focus, cleft construction, construction grammar

1. Introduction

Examples like (1b) represent a canonical type of English *it*-cleft construction, semantically linked to the canonical one in (1a):

(1) a. The students bought the introductory textbook.
    b. It's the introductory textbook that the students bought.

Both of these two sentences denote the same proposition, but the cleft sentence (1b) is taken to have a different information structure from (1a) as given in (2) (see, among others, Collins 1991, Davidse 2000, Lambrecht 2001):

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(2) a. Presupposition (Background): The students bought X.

    b. Highlighted (Foreground or focus): the introductory textbook

    c. Assertion: X is the introductory textbook.

This kind of presupposition holds even in negative cleft sentences like *It isn't the introductory textbook that the students bought*. In terms of the syntactic structure, the *it*-cleft sentence consists of the pronoun it, the copula, the highlighted (or focused) expression, and a relative clause-like cleft clause:

(3) Components of the it-left construction

    It   is   the introductory textbook$_i$ that the students bought [_$_i$].
Pronoun Copular   Focus   Cleft clause

As represented here, the cleft clause canonically contains a syntactic gap which is coindexed with the highlighted focus expression. There thus seems to be a long distance dependency relationship between the two.

    In this paper, we review the basic properties of the *it*-cleft construction, and tries to provide a construction-based analysis, departing from the traditional ternary analysis in which the copular *be* selects two complements: focus and cleft clause. In so doing, we briefly discuss the main properties of the construction and critically review two traditional views. We then suggest that the copula in the cleft is similar to the copula in other environments in selecting just one argument. While inheriting general properties from related constructions, the construction also displays its own peculiar properties. Interacting with the lexical properties of the copula, the constructional properties characterize the cleft-construction.

2. Basic Properties of the *It*-Cleft Construction

As noted, the English *it*-cleft construction consists of the pronoun it as the subject of the matrix verb *be*, the focus phrase XP, and a remaining cleft clause. Let us consider some of the basic properties each component has.

    The pronoun it in the it cleft seems to function as a place holder, though it is similar in form to the referential pronoun it. For example, it is hard to claim that the

pronoun it in the following dialogue has any referential property (cf. Declerck 1984, Delahunty 1984, Delin 1995):

   (4) A: I share your view but I just wonder why you think that's good.
       B: Well I suppose <u>it</u>'s the writer that gets you so involved.

Even though the pronoun it in the cleft is often taken to be an expletive expression as in Gazdar et al. (1985) and Pollard and Sag (1994), there are cases questioning this position. For example, as noted by Hedberg (2000) and Han and Hedberg (2008), the pronoun it can be replaced by *this* or *that* depending on the context. Observe the following:

   (5) a. I wasn't surprised by the massacre in China. [pause] #It/This is not
         Iowa we are talking about. This is a different society.
      b. To my surprise, it was Marchel. He stepped forward, neat, dark...
         It/??This was Marcel who was called.

As seen from the contrast here, the replacement of the pronoun it by the demonstrative this is possible when the focused expression refers to an individual close to the speaker: Marcel''s presence is not close to the speaker unlike the place Iowa. Given this pragmatic constraint holds, we cannot take the pronoun it in the cleft to have no semantic content.

    In addition, it is fine to elide the whole cleft clause in proper context (cf. Declerck 1984):

   (6) A: Did you say it was John who met Mary last night?
       B: No, it was Bill.

The elided answer needs to have a function that intuitively links the pronoun it to the person who met Mary. If the pronoun it is just a place holder, it is hard to reconstruct the elided clause.

    In terms of the semantics, as noted earlier, the cleft clause also induces the effect of 'existential presupposition' telling us that the property denoted by the cleft clause is true of some individual (cf. Gundel 1977, Prince 1978, Heycock and Kroch 1999,

Huddleston and Pullum 2002):

(7) It is John that Mary met last night.

This simple cleft sentence presupposes that Mary met at least someone last night. In
addition, the construction has the 'exhaustivity' effect. That is, (7) presupposes that
John is the only contextually relevant individual that Mary met. Such an exhaustivity
effect renders the following ungrammatical (cf. Sornicola 1988, Nelson 1997):

(8) a. *It was even the advanced textbook that the students read.
     b. *It was everything that the students read.

The ungrammaticality of these two comes from the fact that expressions like *even*
are inherently incompatible with an exhaustive focus. The universal quantifier
everything also does not license to exclude any members of the set to induce an
exhaustive reading.

As for the type of highlighted XP or focus XP, literature has noted that only
certain types of phrase can be used (Prince 1978, Collins 1991, Huddleston and
Pullum 2002, Kim 2007):

(9) a. It was [$_{NP}$ the man] that bought the articles from him.
     b. It was [$_{AdvP}$ then] that he felt a sharp pain.
     c. It was [$_{PP}$ to the student] that the teacher gave the best advice.
     d. It was [$_{S}$ because it rained] that we came home.

Phrases such as an infinitival VP, AP, or CP cannot in general function as the XP:[1]

(10)   a. *It was [$_{VP}$ to finish the homework] that John tried.
       b. *It is [$_{AP}$ fond of Bill] that John seems to be.
       c. *It is [$_{CP}$ that Bill is honest] that John believes.

As for the expression introducing the cleft clause, in addition to *that*, we can

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[1] If we treat because as a preposition, we can differentiate examples like (10c) from (9d): only PPs
can be focused in an *it*-cleft.

have *wh*-words like *who* and *which*:

(11)   a. It's the second Monday [that] we get back from Easter holiday.
       b. It was the girl [who] kicked the ball.
       c. It's mainly his attitude [which] convinced the teacher.

These examples, with the canonical relative pronouns *that*, *who* and *which*, may indicate that the cleft clause behaves like a restrictive relative clause. Like canonical relative clauses, we also observe a long distance relationship between the gap element in the cleft and the focus expression:

(12)   a. It was the girl that Mimi met __.
       b. It was the girl that we believed Mimi met __.
       c. It was the girl that we believed Jane assumed Mimi met __.

The syntactic gap can be in a deeply embedded structure, implying that there is a long distance dependency relationship.

However, there is also one property that departs from the restrictive relative clause: the pronoun or proper noun can also be in the focus phrase, making it hard to serve as the antecedent of the relative clause:

(13)   a. It is John that we are looking for.
       b. *John that we are looking for showed up.

We can notice here in (13b) that a canonical restrictive relative clause does not allow a pronoun to function as the antecedent of the relative clause. This hints that the focus element and the following relative clause do not form a unit as a restrictive relative clause.

Intriguing properties also come from the extraction possibilities (cf. Knowles 1986, Nelson 1997, Huddleston and Pullum 2002):

(14)   a. Was it Mimi that bought the textbook?
       b. Who was it __ that bought the textbook with discount?
(15)   a. ?*Which book was it Mimi that bought __?

b. *How was it Mimi that bought the book?

As seen in the contrast here, it is possible to *wh*-question the focused expression, but not the one in the cleft clause: no element in the cleft clause can undergo a movement operation. That is, the cleft clause acts like an island not licensing any element to undergo a syntactic operation.

As we have seen so far, the cleft construction displays quite ambivalent properties. It seems to behave like a restrictive relative clause, but not always. In due course, we will see how we capture these peculiar properties.

3. Two Previous Views: Extraposition and Expletive

There have been two main directions in dealing with English *it*-cleft constructions: an extraposition analysis and an expletive analysis. However, none of these is satisfactory enough to capture the basic properties of the construction we have just sketched.

The extraposition analysis assumes a direct syntactic or semantic relation between the cleft pronoun *it* and the cleft clause through extraposition (Gundel 1977, Geluykens 1988, Hedberg 1988).

(16) a. [What you heard] was an explosion. (*wh*-cleft)
      b. It was an explosion, [what you heard]. (right-dislocated)
      c. It was an explosion [that you heard]. (*it*-cleft)

For example, in Gundel (1977), the *wh*-cleft clause in (16a) is first right dislocated as in (16b) which then can generate the *it*-cleft (16c) with the replacement of *what* into *that*. Analyses of this view basically take the cleft clause to be extraposed to the end of the sentence.

Meanwhile, the expletive analysis (É. Kiss 1999, Lambrecht 2001) takes the pronoun *it* to be an expletive expression generated in place, while the cleft clause is semantically linked to the clefted constituent by a 'predication' relation as illustrated in the following:

(17) It was [PRED John + who heard an explosion].

An elaborated analysis within this view has been proposed by É. Kiss (1999). É. Kiss introduces the functional phrase FP (Focus Phrase) with movement operations:

(18)
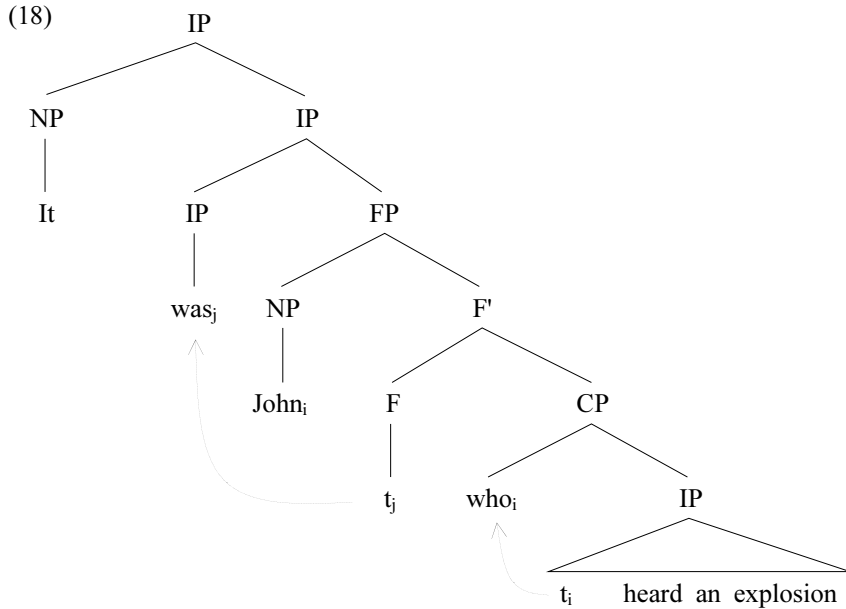
As shown here, the clefted phrase *John*, functioning as focus, is assumed to occupy the specifier of the FP while the copula is the head of the FP and the cleft clause is the complement of F. The highlighted focus phrase *John* and the cleft clause are thus in a predication relation.

Both the extraposition and expletive analysis with movement operations are appealing in the sense that they can capture systematic relationships between canonical sentences and cleft sentences. However, they is enough evidence indicating that we cannot derive the *it*-cleft construction from the other types of cleft constructions or from movement operations. For example, even though the *wh*-cleft and *it*-cleft are identical in presenting 'salient' discourse information for emphasis, they have different syntactic properties which make it hard to derive one from the other (cf. Pavey 2004). It is because there are many cases where we can observe

clear differences among the three types of clefts. For example, one noticeable difference lies in the fact that only *wh*-clefts allow a base VP as the highlighted XP phrase:

(19) a. What you should do is [VP order one first].
      b. *It is [VP order one first] that you should do first.
      c. *[VP Order one first] is what you should do.

The three are different as well with respect to the occurrence of an adverbial subordinate clause:

(20) a. It was not until I was perhaps twenty-five or thirty that I read them and enjoyed them.
      b. *When I read them and enjoyed them was not until I was perhaps twenty-five.
      c. *Not until I was perhaps twenty-five was when I read them and enjoyed them.

As seen here, the *not until* adverbial clause appears only in *it*-clefts.

The extraposition view also runs into problems, considering imperfect relationships between the *it*-cleft and the assumed source. For example, within the extraposition view, the source sentence of (21a) may be something like (21b), which is ungrammatical:

(21) a. It's the writer [that gets you so involved].
      b. *[That gets you so involved] is the writer.

In addition, the head of the cleft clause in the *it*-cleft can be a PP as in (22):

(22) It was this matter [[on which] I consulted with the chairman of the Select Committee].

It is hard to assume any source sentence for such a cleft example. The facts we have seen here suggest that the it cleft construction displays its own constructional

constraints even though it has many similarities with the other two types of cleft construction and has even nontrivial relationships with the presumed simple sentences.

4. Capturing the Structural Ambiguities

There is an issue of dealing with the syntactic structure of the *it*-cleft construction. The cleft clause behaves like a relative clause in several respects. For example, as noted, the cleft clause can be introduced by relative pronouns like *which*, *whom*, *who*, or *when*:[2]

(23)   a. It was the introductory textbook [which John bought __].
         b. It was Monday [when John bought the textbook __].

This then indicates that the relative pronoun here may function as the filler for the gap in the relative-like cleft clause. This is true in examples like the following:

(24)   a. It is the book [which/that [John relies on __]].
         b. It is Bill [on whom [John relies __]].

In (24a) the gap is an NP and the pronoun *which* or *that* will function as its filler. Similarly, in (24b) the gap is also a PP and discharged by the *wh*-phrase *on whom*. However, observe the following contrast:

(25)   a. It is on Bill [that [John relies [$_{PP}$ __]]].
         b. *It is on Bill [whom [John relies [$_{PP}$ __]]].
         c. It is Bill [on whom [John relies [$_{PP}$ __]]].
         d. *It is Bill [whom [John relies [$_{PP}$ __]]].

In (25a), the cleft clause contains a PP gap. The expression that here, whether we take it to be a relativizer or complementizer, cannot be its filler. In a similar reason, the examples (25b) and (25d) are not acceptable since the filler does not match with

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2 To some speakers, the *wh*-word is not natural in cleft.

the PP gap. Unlike these two, (25c) is well-formed, as noted, since there is no mismatch between the *wh*-phrase *on whom* and the PP gap. The remaining question is thus why (25a) is fine. Let us compare (25a) and (25c) within a ternary view (Gazdar et al. 1985):

(26)

```
                          S
              ┌───────────┴───────────┐
             NP                       VP
              │          ┌────────────┼──────────────┐
             It          V          PPᵢ               CP
                         │        [FOCUS +]      [GAP <②PPᵢ>]
                         │           △          ┌──────┴──────────┐
                         is       on Bill       C                 S
                                                │            [GAP <②PPᵢ>]
                                                │                 △
                                              that          John relies __ᵢ
```

(27)

```
                          S
              ┌───────────┴───────────┐
             NP                       VP
              │          ┌────────────┼──────────────┐
             It          V      NP[FOCUS +]           S
                         │                        [GAP <   >]
                         │            │         ┌──────┴──────────┐
                         is          Bill     ⑤PP               S
                                               △           [GAP <⑤PP>]
                                            on whom             △
                                                          John relies __ᵢ
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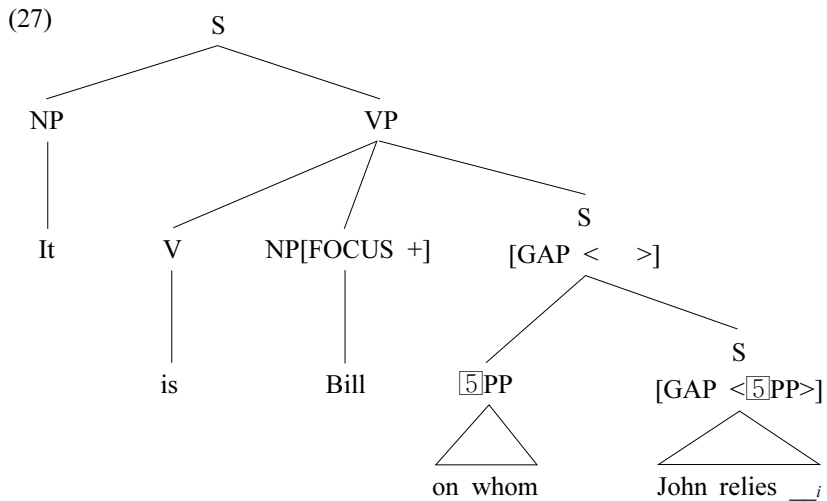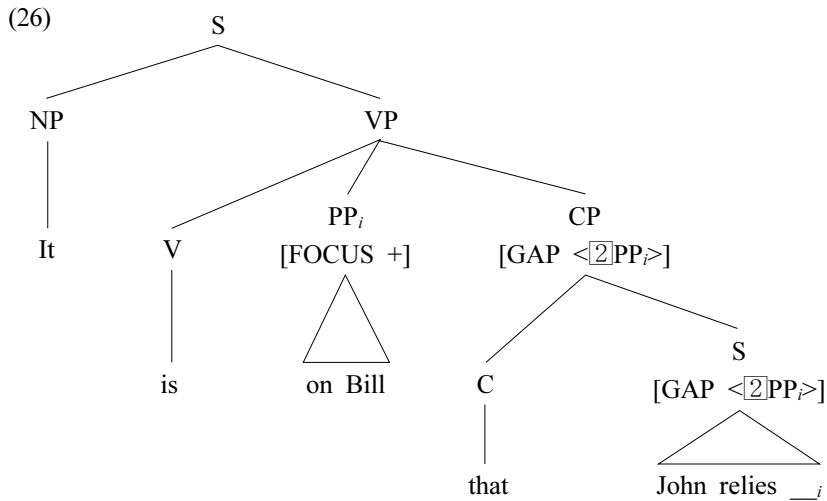
As noted here, the difference is in the cleft clause. In (27) the cleft clause is an S with no syntactic gap while in (26) the cleft clause is a CP with the PP syntactic

gap. Allowing these two structures, Gazdar et al. (1985) introduced two PS rules while Pollard and Sag (1994) introduced two lexical entries for *be*, reflecting these two structures.

One claimed advantage of this type of ternary structure with two different structures is capturing the difference from restrictive relative clauses, as we have seen earlier:

(28)   a. It is John that we are looking for.
      b. *John that we are looking for showed up.

The ternary analysis does not assume a constituent for John and the following clause.

However, note that this does not give us the full right to reject the idea of relative-clause like properties of the cleft. One immediate issue that comes from the ternary structure is the extraction possibility:

(29)   a. Whom did John tell us [that Mary gave a book to __]?
      b. *Whom is it the book [that Mary gave to __]?

As noted earlier, the element in the cleft clause cannot undergo an extraction process unlike the one in the canonical sentential complement as in (29a). This weakens the idea of treating the cleft clause as a complement.

In addition, as also seen earlier, most wh-phrases can freely occur in the *it*-cleft, such as *who*, *whose*, or no *wh*-word if *that* is present:

(30)   a. It was the peasant girl [who] got it.
      b. It was in 1997 [when] the INS introduced the alien registration
         receipt card.
      c. It is uncle John [whose address] I lost.

If we take a ternary analysis, we may miss this kind of similarity.

In addition, as noted by Delahunty (1984), Hedberg (2000), Han and Hedberg (2008), and others, there is evidence indicating that the focus phrase forms a syntactic constituent with the following cleft clause:
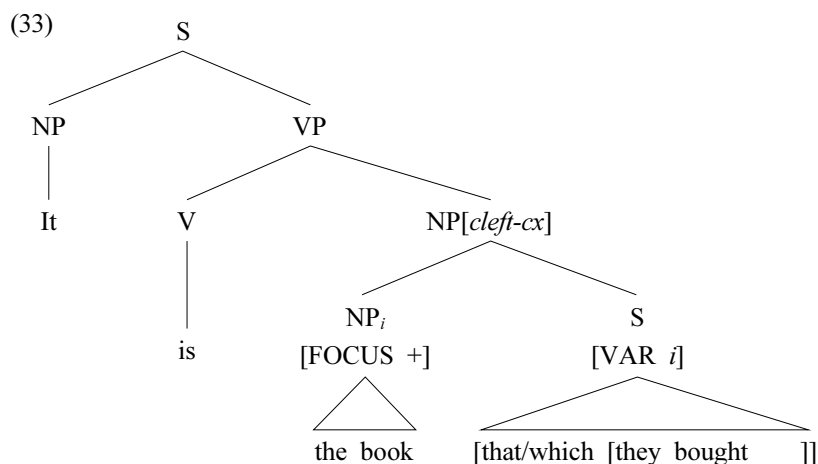
(31) a. I said it should have been [Bill who negotiated the new contract],
         and it should have been __.
      b. It must have been [Fred that kissed Mary] but [Bill that left with
         her].

As in (31a), the highlighted phrase and the cleft clause can be elided together while in (31b) they can be coordinated together. There are also other environments showing the constituent of the two (cf. Hedberg 2000):

(32) a. It could have been – and it should have been – Bill who
         negotiated the new contract.
      b. It must have been, in my opinion, the cyanide that did it.
      c. It must have been Fred that kissed Mary but Bill that left with her.

The right-node raising in (32a), parenthetical formation in (32b), and conjunction in (32c) here all seem to indicate that the two form a constituent.

Given these distributional properties, we assume that it is better to assign the following structure for the *it*-cleft:

(33)

```
                        S
               _____|_____
              NP                  VP
              |           _____|_____
              It         V              NP[cleft-cx]
              |          |          _____|_____
             is                   NP_i                 S
                              [FOCUS +]             [VAR i]
                                 /\                   /\
                            the book      [that/which [they bought __ ]]
```

As seen earlier, there is a tight syntactic and semantic relation between the focused expression and the syntactic gap in the cleft clause (or the variable whose value is

unidentified). This relation is captured by the coindexation relation between the FOCUS expression and the value of the VAR (variable).[3] That is, the meaning of the cleft clause will be something like this:

(34) $\lambda x[\text{buy}(j,x)]$

We assume that when there is a variable whose value is not saturated, the construction introduces the feature VAR. The value of the variable 'x' is linked to the focused expression *the book* in both cases.

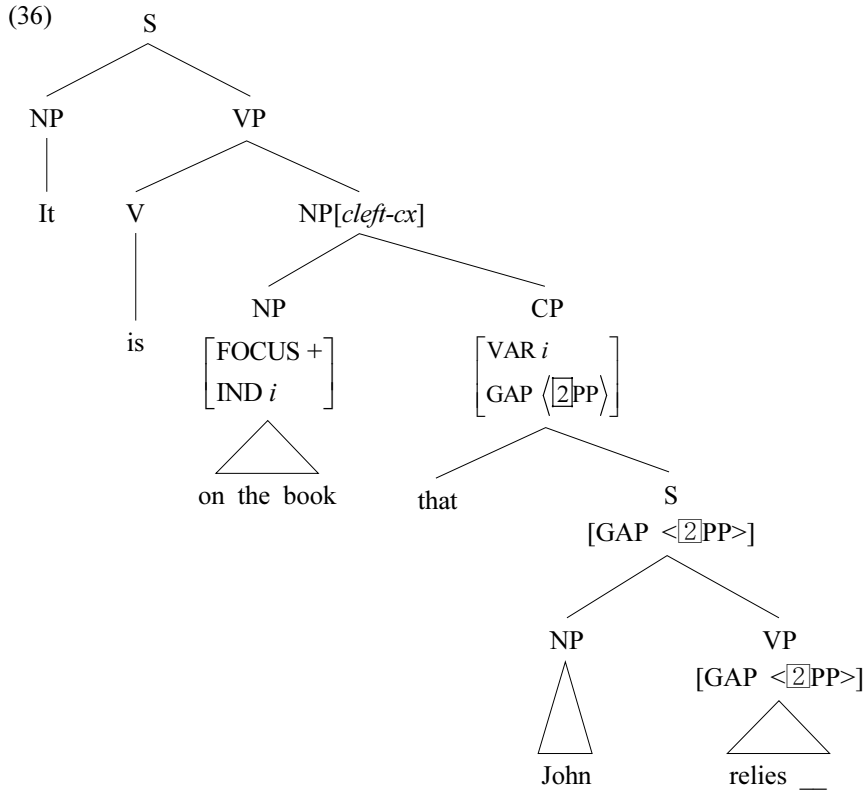Now consider another case where the cleft clause forms a relative clause:

(35)
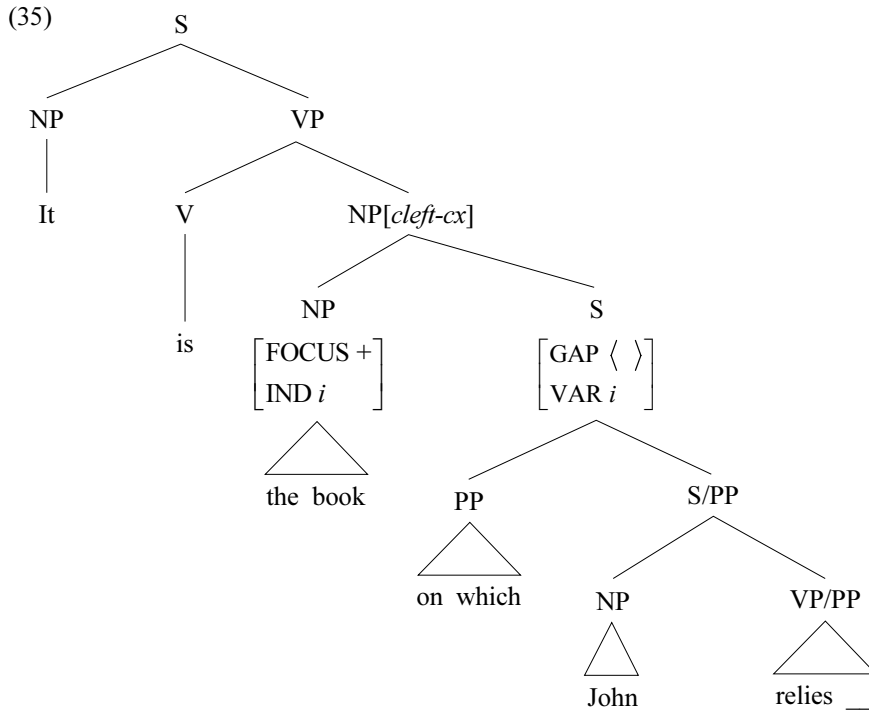
As noted here, the difference from (33) is that the cleft clause is not a sentence but

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a relative clause where the filler *on which* and the head *John relies* combine. That is, the cleft clause here is syntactically a complete sentence while the one in (34) is still missing one syntactic element.

Now, consider the following structure:

(36)

```
                              S
                   ┌──────────┴──────────┐
                  NP                     VP
                   │            ┌─────────┴─────────┐
                  It            V              NP[cleft-cx]
                               │          ┌─────────┴─────────┐
                              is         NP                   CP
                                    ┌ FOCUS + ┐          ┌ VAR i        ┐
                                    └ IND i   ┘          │ GAP ⟨[2]PP⟩  │
                                        △               └              ┘
                                   on the book      ┌────────┴────────┐
                                                   that               S
                                                              [GAP <[2]PP>]
                                                            ┌────────┴────────┐
                                                           NP                VP
                                                                       [GAP <[2]PP>]
                                                            △                 △
                                                          John            relies __
```

The cleft clause *that John relies* includes a PP gap. In terms of the semantics, the PP complement of *relies* still remains as a variable (VAR). This variable value is identified with the head focus expression, *on the book*. That is, the variable''s value will be satisfied when the two expressions are combined, forming a cleft-construction. Once again we can notice the difference between (35) and (36). The cleft clause in the former is a complete sentence while the one in the latter still requires a filler. However, note that these cleft clauses CP[VAR *i*] in (36) and

S[VAR i] with a gap value are the same in terms of the fact that the cleft clause still has its variable (VAR) unsaturated. This way we can achieve a uniform analysis.

5. Interactions between the Lexicon and Constructions

The present analysis brings us several welcoming consequences. The syntactic structure we have sketched will capture the data where the focused expression and the cleft clause form a unit (Reeve 2011):

(37) a. Although it probably wasn't John who cooked the stew, it might
          have been __.
      b. It may be [Tom that kissed Mimi], but [Bill that left with her].

In addition, we do not need to assume two different copula verbs *be* in the cleft. In both cases, the following one lexical entry for *be* will be enough:[4]

(38) Lexical entry for the cleft *be*:

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{FORM } \langle \text{be} \rangle \\ \text{SPR } \langle \text{NP}[it] \rangle \\ \\ \text{COMPS } \left\langle \text{YP}\begin{bmatrix} \text{IND } i \\ \text{FOCUS} + \\ \text{SEL}\langle \text{S}[\text{VAR } i] \rangle \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle \end{bmatrix}$$

This simple lexical entry for the copula *be* in the cleft requires any focused expression as its complement with the subject *it*. Since the subject value is specified as *it*, the general agreement constraint will rule out examples like the following:

(39) *It were the students that relied on the book.

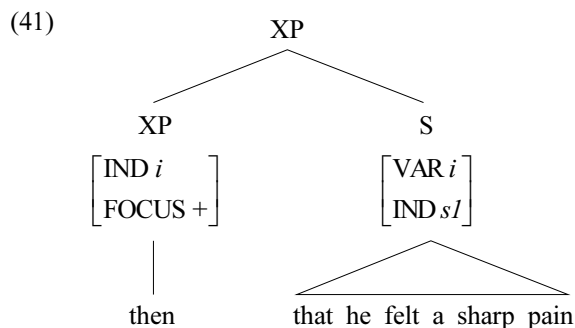The present analysis will be thus simpler than the one with two lexical entries for

_____

4 We also assume that the pronoun *it* is linked to the selected S cleft clause.

the *be* in the cleft or two rules (cf. Gazdar et al. 1985, Pollard and Sag 1994).

The focused expression is not restricted only to the NP category. As long as it is not verbal, it is acceptable. Even we allow a non-argumental expression in the focus phrase (Declerck 1984, Hasselgard 2002):

(40) a. It was [on the moon] [that Mimi played golf].
　　　b. It was [Sunday morning] [that Mimi bought the drink].
　　　c. It was [then] [that he felt a sharp pain].
　　　d. It was [only gradually] [that I came to realize how stupid I was].

We can assume that the cleft clause, though each is a complete sentence, includes a variable for place and time. This variable is linked to the index value of the highlighted focus phrase, as illustrated in the following:[5]

(41)

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{XP} \\
\diagdown \\
\text{XP} \qquad\qquad \text{S} \\
\begin{bmatrix} \text{IND } i \\ \text{FOCUS} + \end{bmatrix} \qquad \begin{bmatrix} \text{VAR } i \\ \text{IND } s1 \end{bmatrix} \\
\mid \qquad\qquad \diagup\diagdown \\
\text{then} \qquad \text{that he felt a sharp pain}
\end{array}
$$

What this means is that as long as there is a coindexation relation between the focused expression and the unfilled variable value in the cleft clause, we have a legitimate cleft construction.

The question then remains how to generate the cleft-construction. We attribute this to the constructional constraint given in Figure 1 (cf. Davidse 2000).

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5 What we assume here is that a sentence can introduce a variable representing time or location. That is, we take that the adjunct value is introduced at the sentence level as a type of constructional constraint. This direction is similar to the assumption that an adjunct can participate in a long-distance dependency. See Kim and Sells (2008) for a discussion of adjunct extraction.
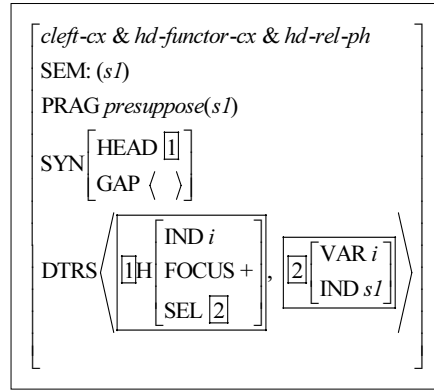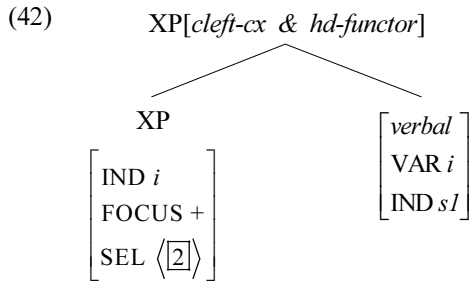
$$\begin{bmatrix} \textit{cleft-cx} \text{ \& } \textit{hd-functor-cx} \text{ \& } \textit{hd-rel-ph} \\ \text{SEM: } (s1) \\ \text{PRAG } \textit{presuppose}(s1) \\ \text{SYN}\begin{bmatrix} \text{HEAD } \boxed{1} \\ \text{GAP } \langle \ \rangle \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{DTRS}\left\langle \boxed{1}\text{H}\begin{bmatrix} \text{IND } i \\ \text{FOCUS } + \\ \text{SEL } \boxed{2} \end{bmatrix}, \boxed{2}\begin{bmatrix} \text{VAR } i \\ \text{IND } s1 \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle \end{bmatrix}$$

Figure 1. Cleft Construction in English

Note that this constructional constraint tells us that the focused expression forms a head-functor expression with a cleft sentence (S or CP).[6] That is, the focus expression functions as a head selecting the cleft clause. At the same time, the phrase is a subtype of head-relative phrase in which the focus phrase functions as the head. The proposition denoted by the cleft clause has a pragmatic constraint on the presupposition too. In addition, the construction specifies that the index value of the head focus is identical with the variable value in the cleft clause. This constructional constraint can be re-represented in the following format:

(42)　　　　XP[*cleft-cx* & *hd-functor*]

XP
$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{IND } i \\ \text{FOCUS } + \\ \text{SEL } \langle \boxed{2} \rangle \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\begin{bmatrix} \textit{verbal} \\ \text{VAR } i \\ \text{IND } s1 \end{bmatrix}$$

Since there is no restriction on the focus element other than the coindexation relation with the variable value in the following S or CP and further that the GAP value is constructional discharged, this will licenses the structure like the following:

6　See Kim and Sells (2011) and references therein for the properties of head-functor phrases.

(43) a. It is [John [that Mary met last night]].

  b. *It is [John [that Mary met Bill last night]].

  c. *It is [then [that Mary met Bill last night]].

The structure is a resemblance to a restrictive relative clause, but is different in that there is no definiteness constraint on the focused expression.

A point of interest concerns examples like the following:

(44) It's [his Mum] [falls in love with him] <S1A-006 #128:1:A>

This example is abstracted from the ICE-GB. Given our constructional analysis this can be a head functor with two subcomponents: the head NP and the functor S with the subject as the gap (cf. Kim and Sells 2008).

Within the present system where the missing element in the cleft clause is taken to be a GAP element, we also expect to see an unbounded dependency relation:

(45) a. It was the director that she wants to meet __.

  b. It was the director that she said she wants to meet __.

  c. It was the director that I think she said she wants to meet __.

Now note examples like the following where a parenthetical expression intervenes between the highlighted focus and the clause:

(46) a. It was the boy, I believe, who brought the letter.

  b. It was in the church, presumably, where he married her.

The present analysis can offer an account for such, given that the cleft clause is in fact extraposed to the sentence final position as represented in the following:[7]

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[7] We assume that English employs a head-extra rule that combines a head expression with the extraposed expression. See Kim and Sag 2005.

(47)
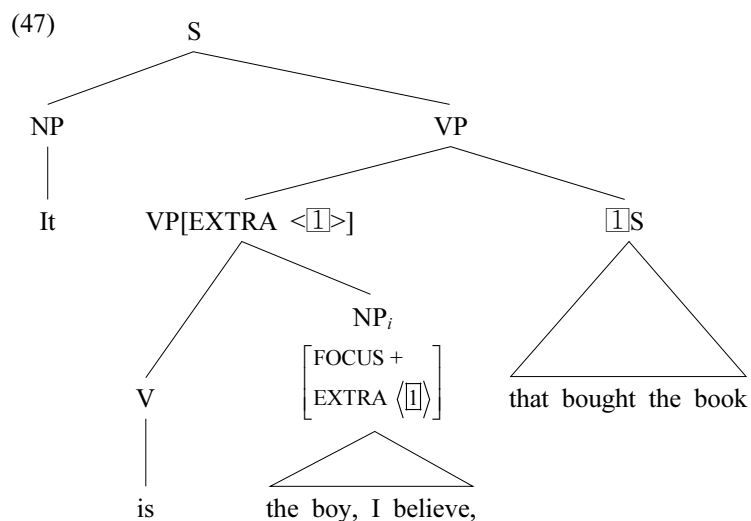
This kind of analysis also can explain cases like the following:

(48)   a. I wonder who it was __ who saw you.
       b. I wonder who it was __ you saw __.
       c. I wonder in which pocket it was __ that Kim had hidden the
          jewels.

Let us look at the structure of (48a), as our system generates it:

(49)
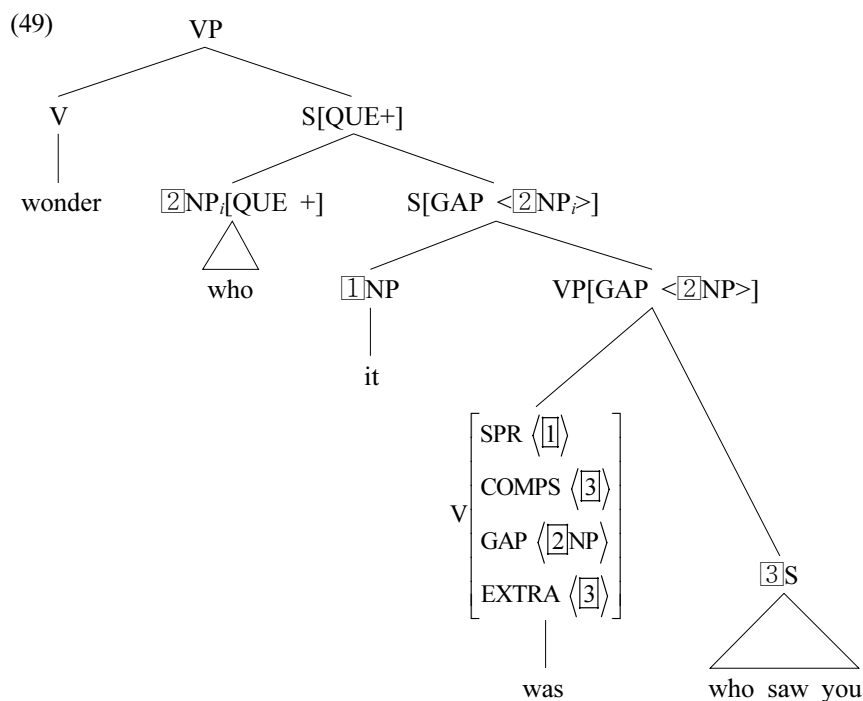
As shown here, the first COMPS value of the cleft copula *be* is realized as a GAP element. This GAP value is passed up to the point where it is discharged by the *wh*-element *who*. This induces an interrogative meaning to the complement clause of the verb *wonder*.[8]

Even though the present system allows the focus phrase (complement of the copula) to be indirectly gapped, a GAP value originating in the cleft clause cannot pass up further:

(50)   a. Who do you think it is __ that Mary met __ ?
       b. *To whom do you think it is the book that Mary gave __ __ ?

In our system, the cleft clause is not an argument but a functor selected by the head focus expression. This is why no element in the clause is syntactically linked to the outside of the cleft clause.

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8   The cleft clause *who saw you* here, taken to be extraposed, can thus adjoin to any sentence level.

6. On the Connectivity

One important property in the *it* cleft we often observe is the so-called connectedness. The first connectivity we find concerns anaphoric relations. That is, the reflexive *himself* in (51a) and the pronoun *him* in (51b) behave like they are inside the cleft clause:

(51)   a. It was himself$_i$ who John$_i$ nominated.
        b. *It was him$_i$ who John$_i$ nominated.

Note that this is also expected, given that the binding principle is sensitive to the argument-structure. Consider the argument-structure of the predicate *nominated* in each case:

(52)   a. nominated: ARG-ST in (51a): <NP, NP[ANA +]>
        b. nominated in (51b): ARG-ST <NP, NP[ANA –]>

The index value of the focused element *himself* and *him* here are basically linked to the object of the verb. The Principle A, stating that the anaphoric expression needs to be A-bound in its argument structure, explains the first element in the ARG-ST binds the anaphoric expression.[9]

The second connectivity comes from agreement facts. Consider the following:

(53)   a. It is John and Mary [that like Peter].
        b. *It is John and Mary [that likes Peter].
        c. *It are John and Mary [that like Peter].

In these examples where the cleft clause with a subject gap, the verb in the cleft clause agrees with the highlighted constituent with respect to number and person. In such examples, the expression *that* functions as a relativizer. In the present analysis, this relative clause includes a variable linking to the subject of the verb *like*. This means that the variable value is a plural individual. The situation is similar to a

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[9]   An expression is A-bound (argument-bound) if a preceding expression in the argument-structure is coindexed with it. See Sag et al. (2003) for details.

relative phrase example like *the students that like Peter* vs. **the student that like Peter*. This is why only (53a) is acceptable.

Note an interesting contrast in the following:

(54)   a. It is me that is to blame.
        b. It is I that am to blame.
        c. It is he that is/*am to blame.

The example (54b) is what we can expect, but how about (54a)? The only association here is the variable between the cleft clause and the focus expression. The cleft clause *that is to blame* has its variable unfilled. The value can be a singular expression as in *the student who is/*are to blame*. The relative pronoun *who* or *that* here is a singular due to the copular verb *is*. However, when the copular verb is *am*, the relative pronoun is specified to be the nominative first person singular pronoun, licensing the focus expression *I* in the place.

7. Conclusion

We have seen that the English *it*-cleft construction has unique properties which are hard to be driven from putative source sentences. It has its own syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties. In terms of syntax, it also has ambivalent properties. For example, the focus expression and the cleft clause seems to behave like a restrictive relative clause, but at the same time it is different from canonical relative clause in that the focus expression can be a proper or pronoun. The cleft clause also seems to be not the complement of the copula *be* in many respects.

This paper follows the idea that the focus and the cleft clause is a syntactic unit, a special constructional form linked with its own unique grammatical properties. This direction makes it unnecessary to assume a complete different copula *be* selecting two complements: it allows us to provide a uniform analysis for the copula *be*, selecting one subject and one predicative style complement. This way of viewing the cleft clause can further predict many syntactic behaviors like the possibility of eliding the expression after *be* or coordinating it with another expression. Given the tight interactions with the copula *be* and constructional constraints, we then expect

other syntactic behavior we observe in the construction.

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