[REVIEW]

*The English It-Cleft: A Constructional Account
and a Diachronic Investigation*

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1. Introduction

In this book, a revised version of her dissertation, Patten investigates the structural and functional properties of the English *it*-cleft within the framework of usage-based construction grammar (Goldberg (2006)). This book consists of two main parts. The first part (Chapters 2–5) gives a synchronic account of the *it*-cleft and argues for treating it as a subtype of specificational inversion construction. The second part (Chapters 6–8) deals with the diachronic development of the *it*-cleft construction to explain its idiosyncratic properties based on data from four historical English corpora. Patten defends a discontinuous constituent analysis of the *it*-cleft, in which the sentence-final clause is an extraposed restrictive relative and modifies the initial *it* to form a discontinuous definite description. This analysis captures the relationship between the *it*-cleft and other related constructions in the family of specificational inversion and non-inversion constructions. Patten takes the view that specification is the inverse of predication. Assuming nominal predication not only for predication sentences but also for specificational sentences, Patten attempts to explain differences and similarities in the se-

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mantic functions of these types of sentences in a unified way. Extensive data on the historical development of the *it*-cleft is provided to explain the construction's idiosyncratic properties and to give support to her discontinuous constituent analysis. I will briefly summarize each chapter below.

2. Overview

In Chapter 1, Patten outlines her work, pointing out several properties of the *it*-cleft that need to be explained and discussing previous literature on cleft sentences. She addresses the following questions: how the *it*-cleft's syntactic configuration should be interpreted; whether "focusing" is the *it*-cleft's primary function; where the exhaustiveness effects of the *it*-cleft originate from; how *it*-clefts relate to simple subject-predicate sentences or specificational copular sentences; whether it is possible to analyze *it*-clefts with non-nominal foci in the same way as ones with nominal foci; whether *it*-clefts with new information in the cleft clause and ones with given information in the clause should be distinguished as two separate types; what the relationship between proverbial *it*-clefts and specificational *it*-clefts is; and whether *it*-clefts and extraposed sentences share more than similarity of form. To answer these questions, Patten provides an analysis of the *it*-cleft in the framework of construction grammar. Construction grammar views constructions, pairings of form and meaning, as basic units of language. It does not consider constructions as "epiphenomenal byproducts of a combination of componential meaning and highly general rules" (p. 4). Since constructions may encode non-compositional meanings, she posits that the constructional approach is suited for dealing with those properties of the *it*-cleft which are not predicted from general grammatical rules. Patten poses questions concerning the diachronic development of the *it*-cleft as well. These are about the origin of the *it*-cleft, its historical change, and the emergence of different varieties of the construction. She claims that these aspects are also amenable to a constructional approach.

Of the two main approaches to the *it*-cleft's structure proposed in past literature, namely, the expletive approach and the extraposition approach, Patten opts for the latter. In the expletive approach, the pronoun *it* and the copular verb *be* are viewed as semantically empty elements. The postcopular element bears a predication relationship to the information in the sentence-final clause. The primary function of *it*-clefts is to mark the postcopular element syntactically as focus, and *it*-clefts are regarded as "information structure variants" of simple subject-predicate sentences. In the extraposition approach, on the other hand, the sentence-final clause is not

related to the postcopular element but to the initial *it*. *It*-clefts are regarded as specificational copular sentences, and their relationship to *wh*-clefts, *th*-clefts, and non-cleft specificational sentences is considered (p. 7).

- (1) It's grape soda that I like best. [*it*-cleft]
- (2) What I like best is grape soda. [*wh*-cleft]
- (3) The thing that I like best is grape soda. [*th*-cleft]
- (4) My favorite drink is grape soda. [noncleft NP *be* NP]

Patten views the sentence-final clause as a restrictive relative clause, which modifies the initial *it*. This analysis will have significance later in connection with her claim that definiteness is crucial for the creation of specificational meaning. By treating the *it*-cleft as a member of the family of inverse specificational constructions, this approach allows the explanation of aspects of the *it*-cleft's properties in terms of inheritance from the more basic inverse specificational construction.

Chapter 2 surveys key concepts of construction grammar and cognitive grammar that Patten employs in her analysis of the *it*-cleft (Langacker (1987), Goldberg (2006)). The main ideas behind usage-based construction grammars are that "all of language (and not just the periphery) is learned inductively from the input, or rather, from the speaker's linguistic experience" and that "the entire language system is made up of constructions (form-meaning pairs)" (p. 18). These constructions form a hierarchical network in which lower-level (more specialized and substantive) constructions inherit properties from higher-level (more general and schematic) constructions. To account for inheritance relations, usage-based construction grammars adopt the default inheritance model, which contrasts with the complete inheritance model. In the complete inheritance model, a lower-level construction inherits all the properties of a higher-level construction; it cannot contain properties that conflict with those present in the higher-level construction. In the default inheritance model, on the other hand, a lower-level construction inherits all the properties of a higher-level construction "unless there is conflict"; it may therefore contain information that conflicts with the information specified in the higher-level construction. One merit of the default inheritance model is that it easily explains *mismatch* phenomena. Another merit is that inheritance relationships are captured in this model, as information is stored redundantly at all levels in the hierarchy. The more properties a construction inherits from other constructions, the more "motivated, or supported, by the language system" (pp. 20–21) it is. This allows some constructions to fit the constructional category better than others, making them *prototypical* members of the category.

Within usage-based construction grammars, language change is viewed in relation to the effects of frequency in language use. Token frequency (frequency of an individual instance) leads to the entrenchment of more substantive, lower-level constructions, and type frequency (frequency of different types of instance), the entrenchment of more abstract, higher-level constructions. The former accounts for *fossilization*, a process in which an entrenched individual instance retains inherited properties after the over-arching schema is lost. The latter accounts for *schematization*, a process in which different types of instances are generalized to form a more abstract schema containing only the properties shared by all the types of instances. At the end of the chapter, Patten adds that she takes a monostratal view of language and rejects syntactic derivation, in spite of her use of such terms as *clefted*, *extraposed*, *reverse* and *inverse* in later chapters.

In Chapter 3, Patten presents an analysis which treats specificational copular sentences as inverted predication copular sentences. She first compares two competing approaches. In the equative approach, both NPs in the construction NP₁ *be* NP₂ are taken to be referring expressions. Specificational sentences in (5) are treated in the same way as identity statements in (6) (pp. 27–28).

- (5) a. The thoracic surgeon is John McIntyre.
- b. John McIntyre is the thoracic surgeon.
- (6) a. Trapper John is John McIntyre.
- b. John McIntyre is Trapper John.

This approach captures the similarities between these two sentence types; they are both reversible and seem to share the identifying function. The other approach, the inverse approach, assumes that predication sentences and specificational sentences are derived from the same underlying structure. In this account, sentence (5a), with a raised predicative NP, is viewed as specificational, while (5b) and (7), each with a referential element in the subject position, are viewed as predication (p. 27).

- (7) John McIntyre is a surgeon.

This approach recognizes an asymmetry between the precopular NP and the postcopular NP in specificational sentences.

Although Patten basically follows the inverse approach, she points out several shortcomings of the approach. It still needs to be explained why sentences containing postcopular indefinite NPs are not reversible, as in (8) (p. 28).

- (8) #A surgeon is John McIntyre.

Moreover, how specificational meaning is created is not clear, as the sen-

tence in B's utterance in (9) has a specificational function in spite of its word order, *contra* Mikkelsen (2005).

(9) A: Who is the winner?—B: JOHN is the winner.

(Mikkelsen (2005: 177))

Instead of assuming syntactic derivation, Patten attempts to characterize specification and predication in terms of "class-membership relations." Her characterization of these two types of sentences is summarized below (p. 62):

(10) Predicational: X is a member of the set Y

Specificational: X makes up the complete membership of the set Y

In (11), *John* is classified as a member of the set *surgeons* (p. 34).

(11) John is a surgeon. [predicational]

As to (12), Patten states, "by classifying *John* as a member of this set, we are saying something about *John* (describing him as being *the best surgeon*) and we are listing the complete membership of the set *best surgeon*" (p. 35). The latter, specificational interpretation, is generated if "the referent (or membership) is focused" (p. 35), as in (13).

(12) John is the best surgeon. [predicational]

(13) JOHN is the best surgeon. [specificational]

She claims that (14) cannot be interpreted specificationally as the set is unrestricted and *John* does not constitute the complete membership.

(14) JOHN is a surgeon. [predicational]

For Patten, properties associated with definiteness (the existence of a shared set; existential entailments; and inclusiveness (uniqueness)) are the factors that contribute to specificational readings. However, she mentions that indefinite NPs can be the subjects of specificational inversion sentences if they contain modifiers that make uniqueness interpretation possible, as in (15) (p. 54).

(15) There are several psychologists at St. Eligius. An especially talented psychologist is Dr. Hugh Beale.

Patten then goes on to discuss reasons as to why the inversion construction is often used to express specificational meaning. First, the inverted word order meets the information-structural requirement that old information should be presented before new information. Second, the NP inversion syntactically marks the distinction between specification and predication. While the specificational inversion construction is a subtype of the *be* inversion construction, the specificational non-inversion construction is a subtype of the predicate nominal construction. As the similarity between the specificational inversion construction and the predicate nominal construc-

tion is recognized by speakers, an overarching category, “predicate nominal semantics,” is formed.

In Chapter 4, Patten gives structural consideration to the *it*-cleft. Her discontinuous constituent analysis, in which the initial *it* and the sentence-final clause form a discontinuous definite NP, is a way of capturing the relationship between the *it*-cleft and specificational copular constructions. Based on the correspondence between the cleft clause in (16) and the relative clause in (17), Patten suggests that the cleft clause is a restrictive relative clause in an extraposed position (p. 72).

(16) It was Frank *that complained*.

(17) The one *that complained* was Frank.

In her view, a discontinuous NP functions as a predicate in *it*-clefts in the same way as a definite NP does in specificational sentences. The *it*-cleft’s specifying function and definiteness of the discontinuous NP explain pragmatic properties of the *it*-cleft; focus marking is a consequence of the specification of the membership of a set, and presupposition, exhaustiveness and contrast follow from existential entailments and inclusiveness associated with definiteness. Patten claims that the discontinuous constituent account is supported by evidence from person agreement. According to Akmajian (1970), not the pattern in (18) but the one in (19), with the verb in the cleft clause being third person, is the most common pattern.

(18) It is I who am responsible. (Akmajian (1970: 153))

(19) It is me who is responsible. (Akmajian (1970: 150))

Number agreement, however, poses a problem. In (20), the verb in the cleft clause agrees in number with the clefted constituent (p. 99).

(20) It’s John and Margaret who are responsible.

Patten’s explanation for this is that the verb in the matrix clause agrees with the “singular set” while the verb in the cleft clause agrees with the “plural members of the set.” Noting that the pattern in (21) is also acceptable, Patten considers the cleft *it* to be a “morphosyntactically singular, but conceptually underspecified pronoun” (p. 101).

(21) It’s John and Margaret that’s responsible.

Chapter 5 discusses three varieties of *it*-clefts that share fewer properties with specificational inversion constructions. First, the relationship between specificational *it*-clefts and predicational/proverbial *it*-clefts exemplified by (22) and (23) is explored (pp. 123–124).

(22) It is a long road that has no turning. [proverbial *it*-cleft]

(23) It is a beautiful image which is presented here.

[predicational *it*-cleft]

Predicational/proverbial *it*-clefts show contrast with specificational *it*-clefts in that the discontinuous constituent functions as a referring expression while the postcopular element functions as a predicative NP. Patten argues that an inverse analysis of specificational sentences and a discontinuous constituent analysis of *it*-clefts allow for treating specificational *it*-clefts and predicational/proverbial *it*-clefts as related constructions. Next, *it*-clefts with non-nominal foci are examined. Patten claims that a discontinuous constituent analysis readily handles the correspondence between (24) and (25) (p. 136).

(24) *It was with a knife that I cut it.* (Fowler and Fowler (1908))

(25) *The way/How I cut it was with a knife.*

She later gives historical consideration to the fact that the *it*-cleft allows more types of constituents to occur in the focal position than other specificational constructions do. Finally, informative-presupposition (IP) *it*-clefts are considered. The IP *it*-cleft does not share the information-structural requirements with other specificational constructions. As the contrast between (26) and (27) shows, the cleft clause in IP *it*-clefts does not contain given information but rather, brand-new information that is presented as “established fact” (p. 145).

(26) (Start of lecture) It was Cicero who once said, “Laws are silent at times of war.”

(27) (Start of lecture) #The one who once said, “Laws are silent at times of war” was Cicero.

In a later chapter, Patten suggests a diachronic explanation for this idiosyncratic property, which cannot be explained in terms of inheritance from higher-level constructions.

The second part of the book begins with Chapter 6. In this chapter, Patten brings forward historical evidence to explain idiosyncratic properties of the *it*-cleft construction and seeks support for her discontinuous constituent analysis. She argues that it is not the proverbial *it*-cleft alone (cf. Declerck (1988)) but the overarching *it*-cleft schema itself that is a remnant of earlier stages of English. Several aspects of the discontinuous constituent analysis that need further explanation are considered here.

Although restrictively modified pronouns are unusual in present-day English, they do appear in formulaic expressions (e.g. *He who laughs last laughs longest* (p. 153)). Patten notes the similarity between these expressions and *it*-clefts, and relates the *it*-cleft construction to the *determinative pronoun construction*. In Old English, the pronoun *it* (*hit*) is used to refer to human entities as well, and *hit*-clefts allow both human and non-human

foci. These facts explain why the discontinuous constituent of *it*-clefts can describe or refer to human entities. As for the obligatory extraposition of the cleft clause, Patten shows that in Old English, relative clauses regularly occur in the sentence-final position, and that extraposition is the preferred option. Unextraposed relatives become more frequent in Middle English, but the *it*-cleft retains this old pattern. Another problem which arises for Patten's analysis is the unusual pattern of number agreement. The verb in the cleft clause does not show agreement with its antecedent, the singular pronoun *it* (e.g. *It's John and Margaret who are responsible* (p. 162)). The fact that the pronoun *it* can refer to both singular and plural entities in Old and Early Middle English is crucial for her explanation. In Old English, the verb in the cleft clause agrees not only with the clefted constituent but also with the matrix copula and the cleft *it*. It is argued that when the verb in the cleft clause is plural, it is in agreement with the cleft *it* with plural reference. However, as the pronoun *it* has come to denote only non-human, singular entities, the cleft *it* is also taken to be a singular pronoun. This development has resulted in the complicated number agreement pattern in the present-day *it*-cleft. Patten claims that the historical data on gender agreement also favors a discontinuous constituent analysis. In OE *it*-clefts, the relative pronoun (neuter singular *þæt*) agrees in gender not with the clefted constituent but with the cleft pronoun (neuter *hit*). The now idiosyncratic properties of the *it*-cleft construction discussed above are explained in terms of fossilization of once productive patterns.

Chapter 7 follows the historical development of the *it*-cleft, noting increasing frequency of the *it*-cleft and the expansion of its function. On the basis of four historical English corpora, Patten notices that the frequency of the specificational *it*-cleft increases steadily over time from Old English to Modern British English, while that of the predicational *it*-cleft remains low. The increase in the occurrence of specificational *it*-clefts is accompanied by two changes: the expansion of the range of possible foci to include PPs, clauses, AdvPs, etc., and the development of the IP *it*-cleft, which presents new information in the cleft clause. Patten looks at the first change, the change in the range of focal elements, from a semantic point of view. In the OE period, the *it*-cleft focuses only on NPs that refer to concrete objects; later, the *it*-cleft occurs with NP foci that denote abstract entities, and also with nominal and non-nominal foci that express relations. Patten points out that in Early Modern English, less discrete foci frequently occur in lists or with focusing adverbs. She views these as techniques to "individualize" less discrete concepts to fit into "the referential

focus position" (p. 201). The second change, the change in the information status of the cleft clause, leads to the development of more extensive uses of *it*-clefts. The cleft structure is further "manipulated" and used as a way for the speaker to distance himself from the face-threatening speech act marked as presupposed ("performative" *it*-clefts), or a way for the speaker to present his own opinion as an unchallengeable fact.

In Chapter 8, Patten offers a theoretical explanation for the two changes discussed in Chapter 7 in terms of schematization, that is, the entrenchment of more abstract and schematic constructions. The expansion of the range of foci is viewed as an extension from the prototype, i.e. the category of NPs referring to discrete entities. Patten argues that this view is corroborated by "coercion" effects: referential characteristics are imposed on non-NP foci of *it*-clefts. The change in the information status of the cleft clause is also interpreted as involving coercion. This change is governed by the presuppositional nature of the discontinuous definite NP. Patten agrees with Lambrecht (1994) that when an expression which requires a presupposition is used to present non-shared information, it imposes the presupposition on the hearer. Instances of *it*-clefts with new information in the cleft clause are abstracted over and a new IP *it*-cleft sub-construction is formed. With these changes, the overarching *it*-cleft category becomes more schematic to accommodate new lower-level constructions. Patten then considers and refutes three alternative accounts: one assumes that the *it*-impersonal goes through a partial merger with the *it*-cleft in Late Middle English to produce the AdvP/PP focus IP *it*-cleft; another emphasizes the influence of Celtic languages on the development of the *it*-cleft; the third suggests that the loss of verb second in English has influenced the *it*-cleft's development. Finally, Patten contrasts the *it*-cleft with the *wh*-cleft to find the reasons as to why the *it*-cleft alone has undergone the changes discussed above. The reason Patten gives for the first change is that the cleft pronoun *it* is semantically underspecified, being compatible with a wide range of foci that cannot be categorized by other nouns. *What* of *wh*-clefts, on the other hand, is specified as "near synonymous with *the thing*" (p. 226). To explain the second change, Patten appeals to the often cited difference in information structure (Prince (1978)): *it*-clefts are associated with "discourse-old" information while *wh*-clefts are associated with "inferable" information. She adds that as the *wh*-cleft emphasizes the role of the speaker, it has acquired a presentational function instead.

In Chapter 9, Patten summarizes the discussion in each chapter and presents the conclusion of the entire work. Suggestions for further research

topics are also given.

3. Discussion and Evaluation

As Reeve (2013) mentions, the diachronic part of this book is a major contribution to the study of the *it*-cleft construction. It contains a vast amount of data that convincingly supports Patten's discussion on the historical development of the construction. Since most of the investigations carried out so far have concentrated on the synchronic aspects of cleft sentences and copular sentences, this book is a valuable addition to the literature.

However, I would like to focus on the synchronic aspects and point out some basic problems in Patten's analysis. Since she is concerned with inheritance relations between constructions in the network of predicate nominal semantics, she pays more attention to generalizations than to differentiations, and misses important differences between predication and specification. I am not convinced that "inclusiveness" is essential for the production of specificational meaning. In (28), the sentences used in B's and C's utterances are both specificational sentences, even though the predicative is indefinite and does not imply inclusiveness.

(28) A: Who is a company president in this group?

B: FREDERICK is.

C: ANNE is, too.

Patten might argue that the "set" is restricted because the indefinite NP is followed by a PP, but neither *Frederick* nor *Anne* makes up or represents the membership of the set. If specification has to be related to the listing of the complete membership, the specificational interpretation of these utterances is inexplicable. I also wonder if the class-membership relation is the appropriate device for explaining specificational function. Do we need to assume that *September 8* is classified as a member of the set *Mary's birthday* and that it is listed as the complete membership of the set, in order to understand the specificational meaning of (29)?

(29) Mary's birthday is September 8.

I consider that the concept which defines specificational function more properly is the notion of "NPIV" (noun phrase involving a variable) proposed by Nishiyama (2013). An NPIV is a non-referential noun phrase that denotes a propositional function [...x...]. NPIVs are distinct from property NPs, which describe properties of referents. I take the view that the semantic function of specificational sentences is to specify a value for a variable (cf. Higgins (1979), Declerck (1988), Nishiyama (2013)). The

NP that represents the variable in a specificational sentence is characterized as an NPIV by Nishiyama (2013). As is shown in (31) and (32), (30) has (at least) two different readings (cf. Higgins (1979)). (30) can be inverted to (33) when it is interpreted specificationally, but not when it is interpreted predicationally.

- (30) John might have been the president.
 (31) John might have been the president. John might have been something else. [predicational]
 (32) John might have been the president. Someone else might have been the president. [specificational]
 (33) The president might have been John.

In (31), change of property is in question, while in (32), change of value is at issue. This crucial difference is accounted for only if we distinguish NPIVs from property NPs. In Patten's theory, however, these two types of NPs are subsumed under the category of "NPs denoting a set." She suggests that focusing on the members (the referents) is necessary for "predicational NP *be* NP sentences" (p. 37) to be interpreted specificationally, but where the difference between the function of "describing" and that of "listing" originates from is not entirely made clear.

Still another problem with Patten's analysis is that it cannot distinguish specificational sentences with indefinite subjects from inverted predication sentences (cf. Heycock (2012), Kumamoto (2014)). While the sentence uttered by B in (34) is taken to be specificational, the second sentence of (35) is not interpreted specificationally.

- (34) A: Can you give me an example of what we call a superpower?
 B: An example of a superpower is the Soviet Union.
 (Declerck (1988: 21))
 (35) She is a nice woman, isn't she? Also a nice woman is our next guest.
 (Birner (1996: 43))

In neither case, does the indefinite NP seem to denote a restricted set. This might suggest that the felicity of inversion does not depend on the existence of a "restricted set." The relationship between invertibility and specificational meaning requires further clarification.

Finally, I would like to add my observation that the focal element of *it*-clefts need not have referential characteristics. When interpreted as a concealed question, the focus of (36) is an NPIV and non-referential.

- (36) It is *Smith's murderer* that I want to find out. (=who murdered Smith)

Perhaps Patten would argue that the focal NP is an NP that refers to an in-

dividual, but this remains to be seen. Much as her contribution to the field is appreciated, we might conclude that Patten's analysis should be further reviewed, paying more careful attention to what semantic functions NPs perform in the sentences under consideration.

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