

## Re-thinking specificational *there*-clefts and *it*-clefts

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Allying myself with the *functional-cognitive* tradition of construction grammar (e.g. Langacker 1987, 1991, Halliday 1994, McGregor 1997, Croft 2000, Fried 2010, Boye & Harder 2012), I will revisit *it*-clefts in this paper by relating them to the neglected *there*-clefts.

The literature on clefts generally ascribes specificational **semantics** to the crosslinguistically occurring '**IT-cleft**' type, i.e. cleft constructions with matrices such as *it is* in English and *c'est* in French (Lambrecht 2001:468-9, 500). They are analysed as specifying a Value for the pragmatically presupposed Variable designated by the cleft relative clause (e.g. Higgins 1976, Declerck 1988, Patten 2012). Thus, in (1), the focal NP (bolded), *me*, is put forth as the Value which **exhaustively** satisfies the Variable 'x they do not want to see', which recaps information given in the preceding text (underlined).

(1) Anna asked her father. 'Why don't they want to see us?' 'It is [**me**] [*they do not want to see*], not you, darling,' Fred said. (WB)

By contrast, in the mainstream literature there is little recognition of specificational ***there*-clefts**.

The existence of one particular type of specificational *there*-cleft has been pointed out in a minority tradition (e.g. Halliday 1967, Hannay 1985, Lambrecht 2001), viz. *there*-clefts which are "**nonexhaustive** specificational clefts" with a "'**listing**' ... function", "denoting **members** of a presupposed open set" (Lambrecht 2001:504), e.g.

(2) A: but there's other people that you think are doing kind of creative corpus lexicography. –  
B: Well, there's [**McCarthy**] [*who's just building a new one*]. (WB)

A second type of specificational *there*-cleft was posited in Davidse (2000, 2014), viz. **quantifying** *there*-clefts, which assess the **quantity of the instantiation** corresponding to the Variable, as in (3) and (4), which assert that *only one thing* and *nothing* satisfy the respective presupposed Variables.

(3) Look at the shape of it. There's [only **one** thing] [*that's that shape*] (LDC)

(4) Nothing has crashed. Don't worry. There's [**nothing**] [*that's not working*]. (WB)

(5) Now the group is in a tizzy over who starts and who plays more minutes. The reserves ... look at it like there are [**two players**][*that should be out there*] (Allen and Rashard Lewis). (WB)

Quantifying *there*-clefts shed new light on *it*-clefts, as they also subsume a – largely overlooked - subtype that quantifies the instantiation by 'type-specified' instances of the Variable, as in (6). This requires us to re-think the overall typology of clefts and the types of specification they can express.

(6) Diane Vigilante: Merry Christmas was, is and always will be a part of the Catholic greetings for Christmas. – Cheri Cordes: It's not just Catholics, it's [**all Christians**] [*who say Merry Christmas*] ([www.facebook.com/BreakingObama/posts/595039043877229](http://www.facebook.com/BreakingObama/posts/595039043877229))showthread.php?t=4596239)

On the **formal** side, I will argue that there is compelling step-by-step **parallelism** at the morphosyntactic and prosodic level between specificational *it*- and *there*-clefts. Against the long functional and formal tradition that has viewed the cleft relative clause as an extraposed modifier of subject *it* in (1), e.g. Halliday (1967), Akmaijan (1970), Bolinger (1972), Percus (1997), Patten (2012), I subscribe to Reeve's (2011) arguments for viewing the cleft relative clause as syntactically modifying the complement NP. However, whereas Reeve ultimately posits a syntax-semantics mismatch, I will argue that the forms of *it*- and *there*-clefts code their meanings congruently. *It*- and *there*-clefts hence do not form a case against the general tenet of a **syntax-semantics match**.

## Corpora:

WordbanksOnline (WB)  
Leuven Drama Corpus (LDC)

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