Semantics of *it*-Clefts I:
Existence, Exhaustiveness, and the Syntax-Semantics Interface
(Rooth 1996, Percus 1997)

1. Existence presupposition

it-clefts seem to introduce a presupposition to the effect that there exists an individual that satisfies the backgrounded predicate denoted by the cleft clause.

- *Evidence*

i. No simple negative quantifiers in *it*-clefts.

(1)   Q: Who saw John?   [Percus 1997: 339]

A1:   NObody$_F$ saw John.

A2:   *It is **NObody$_F$** that/who saw John.

Q1: Why do *it*-clefts allow for complex negative quantifiers with focused sub-constituents?

(2)   A3:   It is [nobody that **I$_{FOC}$** know] that/who saw John.

(3)   a. It is **not** [somebody that **I$_{FOC}$** know] that/who saw John.

b. It is [somebody that **I$_{FOC}$** know] that/who saw John.

ii. Simple existential quantifiers are uninformative in *it*-clefts (but they share this fate with their ordinary focus-accented counterparts):

(4)   Q: Who saw John?

A1:   #SOMebody$_{FOC}$ saw John.

A2:   #It is **SOMebody$_{FOC}$** that/who saw John.

iii. *A more telling test: Rooth' football pool (1996):*

Context: A football pool is held every week. participants place bets by predicting the score of games. The contest is set up so that **at most one person can win in a given week**. If nobody makes a correct prediction, nobody wins, and the jackpot stays.

(5)   A: Did anyone win the football pool this week?

B: I doubt it, because it's unlikely [*that **Mary$_F$** won it*] and *I know that nobody else did*.

➤   Presuppositions project out of the complement of *likely* (Karttunen & Peters 1979, see §2.1), but still (5B) is felicitous: ordinary accent focus does not introduce existence presupposition: *Mary didn't win it & nobody else won it*.

(6)   A: Did anyone win the football pool this week?

B: #I doubt it, because it's unlikely [*that **it is Mary$_F$** who won it*] and *I know that nobody else did*.

➤   Existence presupposition of *it*-cleft clashes with negative matrix predicate and negation in the second conjunct:

it-cleft: Somebody won it   vs.   Speaker doubts that anybody won it
                                              Mary didn't win & nobody else won

2. Diagnostics for Presuppositions

Other standard tests for presuppositions support the conclusion that the existence effect with *it*-clefts is a presupposition.

2.1 *Projection behaviour (Karttunen & Peters 1979).*

Presuppositions remain constant under negation (= projection out of the scope of negation) and in the antecedent of conditional *it*-clefts (= projection out of conditionals)

(7) *factive predicates* & NEG

    a. Obama regrets the fact that he was elected last year. $\Rightarrow$ Obama was elected.

    b. Obama doesn't regret the fact that he was elected last year. $\Rightarrow$ Obama was elected.

(8) *additive particle & conditional*

    a. Obama has **also** invited Angela. She is delighted $\Rightarrow$ Obama invited s.b. else.

    b. If Obama had also invited Angela, she would be delighted $\Rightarrow$ Obama invited sb else.

- Applying the tests to *it*-clefts:

(9) a. Somebody won the contest, but **it is not Mary who/that won it**.   ✓

    b. *#It is not Mary who/that won the contest* because nobody won it.   ✓

$\Rightarrow$ Presuppositions cannot (easily) be cancelled.

BUT: Es kann gar nicht Maria sein, die gewonnen hat, weil niemand gewonnen hat.

(10) a. If **Mary** had won the contest, she would be celebrating in the pub, but unfortunately nobody won at all.   ✓

    b. #If **it were Mary that won the contest**, she would be celebrating in the pub, but unfortunately nobody won at all.   ✓

$\Rightarrow$ Existence effect survives the classic test environments for presuppositions.

2.2 *'Hey, wait a minute'-Test (von Fintel 2004, von Fintel & Matthewson 2008)*

- *The test:*

A presupposition which is not in the common ground at the time of utterance can be challenged by 'Hey, wait a minute!' (or other similar responses). In contrast, an assertion which is not in the common ground cannot be challenged in this way. This is shown in [11], from von Fintel (2004: 271), for the existence presupposition of *the*:

(11) A: **The mathematician who proved Goldbach's Conjecture** is a woman.

       $\exists$-presupposition: Somebody proved Goldbach's Conjecture.

    B: Hey, wait a minute. I had no idea that someone proved Goldbach's Conjecture.

    B': # Hey, wait a minute. I had no idea that that was a woman.

$\Rightarrow$ 'Hey, wait a minute!'-test a reliable way to test for presups in a fieldwork context.

- *Applying the test to it-clefts*

(12)   A: It is a woman that proved Goldbach's Conjecture.

   B: Hey, wait a minute. I had no idea that someone proved Goldbach's Conjecture.

   B':   #Hey, wait a minute. I had no idea that that was a woman.

$\Rightarrow$ Existence effect can be targeted by 'Hey, wait a minute!': PRESUPPOSITION

$\Rightarrow$ Existence effect not part of the asserted (truth-functional) meaning component.

BUT: The test is really a negative test and only shows reliably that a certain part of the utterance is not asserted, but not whether the semantic effect is a presupposition, or a conventional or generalized conversational implicature (or something else).

3.   Exhaustiveness / Uniqueness / Identification focus effects ?

- A naïve intuitive take on the issue [Krifka 2008]

(13)   It's John and Bill that stole a cookie.

   Krifka (2008): "This example [13] says that nobody else but John and Bill stole a cookie. Consequently, exhaustive focus is not compatible with additive particles, like *too*."

- Percus (1997): No association of cleft-foci with additive focus particles (*also, even*) [judgements from Percus]

(14)   a. It was **even** the case that $\textbf{John}_{\textbf{FOC}}$ saw Mary.

   b. It was **also** the case that $\textbf{John}_{\textbf{FOC}}$ saw Mary.

   c. It was **only** the case $\textbf{John}_{\textbf{FOC}}$ saw Mary.

(15)   a. ??It was **even** the case that **it was $\textbf{John}_{\textbf{FOC}}$ that** saw Mary.

   b. ??It was **also** the case that **it was $\textbf{John}_{\textbf{FOC}}$ that** saw Mary.

   c. ?It was **only** the case that **it was $\textbf{John}_{\textbf{FOC}}$ that** saw Mary.

$\Rightarrow$ Percus' account for infelicity of (15b):

   i. cleft-structure triggers a presupposition: $\forall x$ [x saw Mary]: x = John

   ii. additive focus particle triggers a conflicting presupposition:

$$\exists z \ [z \neq john]: z \text{ saw Mary}$$

BUT: Additive particles can sometimes associate with clefted foci and clefted foci need not be exhaustive (Prince 1978, Horn 1981, Dufter 2008, Zimmermann 2009: ESSLLI-notes):

(16)   Perhaps **it was Hitler's granite will and determination** and certainly **it was the fortitude of the German soldier** that saved the armies of the Third Reich from a complete debacle. [Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*] (Horn 1981:131, quoting Ellen Prince).

(17)   Moreover, **it is also out of respect for your electorate that**, as President-in-Office of the Council, **I do not wish to set myself up as judge**. [EUROPARL] (Dufter 2009).

(18) **Es ist auch ihr politischer Standort**, *der* Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger in kritische Situationen bringt. (German, *Frankfurter Rundschau*)

⇒ É. Kiss (1999): additive particles are licensed with clefted foci in special discourse environments:

(19) A: Bill danced with Mary.

B: No, it was Sam that danced with Mary.

C: It was **also John** that danced with her.

Q2: What does Percus' (1997) account predict for (19C) ?

• É. Kiss (1998, 1999): Clefted foci are identification foci and cannot associate with additive particles, nor can they be expressions that do not establish a proper (exclusive) subset-relation, such as, e.g., universal quantifiers:(19) *It was everybody / also Mary / even Mary that John invited.   [É. Kiss 1999: 227]

É. Kiss (1998: 245): An **identificational focus** represents a **subset** of the set of contextually or situationally given elements for which the predicate phrase can potentially hold; it is identified as the exhaustive subset of this set for which the predicate phrase actually holds.

(20) In this case, **it is everyone who is being discriminated against.** (Dufter 2009)

⇒ see homework assignment on google-search for 'it is everybody'-clefts !

• Szabolsci's (1981) exhaustiveness tests applied to clefts (É. Kiss 1998, Hedberg 2000: 906):

(21) a. Mary picked a hat and a coat for herself.

⇒ Mary picked a hat for herself.

b. It was a hat and a coat that Mary picked for herself.
// ⇒ // It was a hat that Mary picked for herself.   [É. Kiss' judgment !]

BUT: 'It was **also a hat** that Mary picked for herself.'

• *Interim Conclusion:*

Exhaustiveness/Uniqueness effects with *it*-clefts do not seem as robust as existence presuppositions.

⇒ Is the exhaustiveness/uniqueness effect coded in the structure of *it*-clefts?

4.   Syntax-Semantics Interface: On the source of the interpretive effects

• Percus (1997):

Existence and uniqueness effect are triggered by the presence of a covert definite determiner: structural source of the semantic effects can be clearly identified.

⇒ Existence and uniqueness effects should be equally robust.

• É. Kiss (1998, 1999):

i.   Identification focus (exclusiveness/subset effect) is triggered by the FOC-head.

ii.   No prediction for existence effect: Could be located in FOC or Comp

⇒   Existence and uniqueness/identification effects need not be equally robust.

BUT: uniqueness/identification effects are weaker than the existence effects, somewhat thwarting the original motivation for introducing the Foc-head.

5.   Homework Assignment

i.   Apply the exhaustiveness tests for Hungarian focus in Szabolcsi (1981) to German *es*-clefts.

ii.   Try to apply the 'Hey, wait a minute!'-test to the exhaustiveness/uniqueness component of *it*-clefts.

iii.   Do a simple GOOGLE-search for *it*-clefts with the universal quantifier 'everbody' or 'everything' as cleft constituent, i.e. for strings, such as 'it is everybody that'

       What do you find?

Additional Literature

Dufter, A. (2009). Clefting and discourse organization: Comparing Germanic and Romance. In A. Dufter & D. Jacob (eds.), *Focus and Background in Romance Languages* (Studies in Language Companion Series 112). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.