5-Information Structure & Discourse Structure of *it*-Clefts  
(Delin & Oberlander 1995)

1. Temporal discourse-semantic effects (Delin & Oberlander 1995)

(1)a. Mr Butler, the Home Secretary, decided to meet the challenge of the demonstrators head-on.
b. Police leave was cancelled and secret plans were prepared.
c. **Mr Butler authorized action which ended in 32 members of the Committee of 100 being imprisoned.**
d. The Committee’s president and his wife were each jailed for a week.

⇒ **NON-CLEFT**: Successive narrative sequence of events by continuous updating of the reference times of the subsequent events through simple (non-progressive, non-stative) event expressions. [Delin & Oberlander 1995, Partee 1984, Kamp & Rohrer 1983]

(2) \[ \text{authorized_action}' (\text{Mr B, e}) \& \tau(e) = t_{\text{REF}}^{n+1} \& \text{just_after} (t_{\text{REF}}^{n}, t_{\text{REF}}^{n-1}) \]

(3)a. Mr Butler, the Home Secretary, decided to meet the challenge of the demonstrators head-on.
b. Police leave was cancelled and secret plans were prepared.
c. **It was Mr Butler who authorized action which ended in 32 members of the Committee of 100 being imprisoned.**
d. The Committee’s president and his wife were each jailed for a week.

⇒ “The effect of the cleft is to cause the ‘background’ information about the authorization of action to be interpreted prior to the events introduced in [(3a) and (3b)], the decision, the cancellation of leave, and the preparation of secret plans.” [Delin & Oberlander 1995: 473]

⇒ A central grammatically coded function of clefts is to stativize the main event described by the remnant cleft-clause, such that there are two eventualities (each with their own reference time):
the main event of the cleft clause & the state of the cleft structure as a whole

⇒ States do not update the reference time, but their reference time overlaps with a previously established reference time.

⇒ **the reference time of the cleft state overlaps with that of the presupposed main eventuality denoted by the cleft clause**

2. Different IS-types of clefts: focus-background vs. topic-comment

• **focus-background clefts**
In English, mainly used in answers and corrective statements – contrast on clefted constituent:
(4) Q: Who drank most at the party?  
   A: It was **Balthasar** that drank most.  
   B: No, it was **Vincent** that drank most.

- **topic-comment clefts**
  - Clefted constituent mostly old/activated/accessible
  - non-clefted information in cleft-clause new to the hearer, main stress in non-clefted part

(5) It was **in 1886** that . . . Lewin published the first systematic study of the CACtus.

⇒ see 3.2 for more data

- All-new or thetic clefts, e.g. in French and Swedish (Lambrecht 1994, 2001, Huber 2006)

(6) Q: What happened?  
   A: C'est **ma mère** qui est venue.       [French]

- **Typological observation:**
  Clefts are frequently attested in languages with rigid word order (English, French, Norwegian):
  ⇒ Compensatory grammatical mechanism for making left-peripheral positions available for discourse semantic reasons. (Jespersen 1937, Lambrecht 2001)

Q1: What is the discourse-semantic motivation for clefting?
Q2: Is there a unified analysis for different kinds of clefts?

3. **A Unified Analysis of clefts?**

3.1 **Delin & Oberlander (1995)**

- **Central discourse-semantic functions of clefting:**
  - **TEMPORAL EFFECTS** through stativizing (see above); clefts cannot be employed in narrative discourse sequences (Delin & Oberlander 1995)
  - **THE KNOWN-FACT EFFECT:**
    The information contained in the cleft-clause is presented as if it were old or familiar to the addressee (even if it is in fact new as in topic-comment clefts)

(7) “presupposed information is in general NON-NEGOTIABLE. I suggest that non-negotiability arises from anaphoricity because anaphora implies the existence of prior references to the same information. Using such a device, a speaker can persuade a hearer *that the time for negotiation of the information is past*, since it has been conversationally 'on the table' at some prior time” (Delin 1992: 295)

⇒ Presenting the non-clefted information as given or known to the hearer
- coaxes the hearer to accommodate the relevant information in case the information is in fact new to her.
- Precludes the possibility for the hearer to reject that part of the information.

(8) A: **Dr Jonson** went to Mary's party.
    B: No, Mary's party is only next week, so he couldn't have gone there.

(9) A: It's **Dr Jonson** that went to Mary's party.
    B: #No, Mary's party is only next week, so he couldn't have gone there.

**BUT:** This does not seem to hold for all-new/thetic clefts …

iii. easier discourse-integration:
- Bi-partition of the cleft makes it easier to identify topical (old, given) information with which the new information can be linked.

- focus-background: topical/given information provided by the cleft clause, new information = value for the focus variable

(10) A: So who broke this?
    B: It's John that broke this.

\[
\text{broke}_\text{this}(x) \text{ broke}_\text{this}(\text{john})
\]

(11) broke_this(x)

(12) It was Mr Butler who authorized action which ended in 32 members of the Committee of 100 being imprisoned.

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(13) properties of Mr B

\[
\text{decided}(\text{Mr B}) \quad \text{authorized-action}(\text{Mr B})
\]

| cancelled-leave

3.2 An alternative account in terms of topic-focus structure ??

**Q:** What are appropriate contexts for topic-comment clefts (with additive particles)?

(14) It was the President, in a rare departure from the diplomacy of caution, who initiated the successful Panama invasion. **It was also Bush who came up with the ideas of having an early, informal Malta summit with Gorbachev and a second round of troop cuts in Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall.** [Hedberg & Fadden 2007]

(15) It was Peter that showed me how to dance, and it was also Peter/him that showed me how to sing.
Hypothesis (last session):
The additive particle in (14) and (15) indicates that the clefted topic constituent satisfies an additional relevant property next to the property expressed by the remnant cleft-clause.

Observation:
The occurrence of topic-comment clefts with also is more restricted than that:

(16) Q:  What did Marcel do?
   A1:  Marcel painted the shack and he also mowed the lawn.
   A2:  #It was Marcel that painted the shack and it was also Marcel that mowed the lawn.
   A3:  #Marcel painted the shack and it was also Marcel that mowed the lawn.

⇒ The clefted constituent must be an (aboutness/contrastive) topic.

(17) A:  Tell me something about Marcel.  (Reinhart 1981, aboutness topic)
   B:  It was Marcel that showed me how to skate.  ✓

(18) Q:  Who did what?
   A1: /Peter cleaned up the KITCHEN, Marcel painted the SHACK/ and it was also Marcel that mowed the LAWN/. ✓
   A2:  It was Peter that cleaned up the kitchen, it was Marcel that painted the shack, and it was also Marcel that mowed the lawn.  ✓
   A3:  It was Marcel that cleaned up the kitchen, it was also Marcel that painted the shack, and it was even Marcel that mowed the lawn.

Q:  Do topic-comment clefts involve two layers of alternative projection in the sense of Büring (1997)?

⇒ This would predict that the clefted constituent in topic-comment clefts is invariably a contrastive topic (with the relevant intonational marking)

BUT: How about the licitness of the non-contrastive aboutness topic in (17)

(19) Q:  Peter cleaned up the kitchen, but how about Marcel, what did he do?
   A:  #It was Marcel that mowed the lawn.

⇒ Area for future research: Corpus-based study of licensing contexts for topic-comment clefts
4. Discourse-Semantic Motivation for Clefting

Clefting of a topic or focus constituent increases the saliency of the discourse referent denoted by the cleft constituent, which can be exploited to various discourse-semantic ends:

i. Easier retrieval and **anaphoric back-reference in subsequent discourse** (Vasishth et al., project C6): *a possible explanation for all-new/thetic clefts?*

ii. The establishment of a **contrastive relation** between the topic/focus referent and contextually relevant alternatives.
   
   = Vorfeldbesetzung in German

iii. The **marking of unexpectedness or relative unlikelihood** of the cleft denotation in the discourse context. (Zimmermann 2008, Skopeteas & Fanselow 2009; but see also Gundel 1988, Givon 1988, Ward & Birner, in press)

   Q: What did the fisherman catch?

   A1: *Einen Fisch* hat er geangelt. [German]
   
   a         fish    has he caught
   
   ‘A fish, he caught.’ *expected: # A2: Einen Schuh* hat er geangelt! [German]
   
   a       Schuh has he caught
   
   ‘A shoe, he caught!’ *unexpected: ✓*

5. Conclusion

The marked grammatical strategy clefting can be exploited for various discourse-semantic effects (saliency, anaphoric reference, contrast, surprise) without any of these functions being encoded in the structure of the construction itself.