

EMPHASIS AND INFORMATION FOCUS IN ENGLISH CLEFT CONSTRUCTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Cleft constructions in English are syntactic structures in which a specific element of a sentence is extracted from its canonical position and placed within a separate clause in order to achieve greater emphasis. Commonly referred to as cleft sentences or cleft clauses, these constructions form complex sentences whose meanings could otherwise be conveyed by simpler structures. Their primary function is to bring a particular constituent into focus. In spoken discourse, this focusing effect is frequently reinforced by distinctive intonation patterns. Cleft sentences are widely used in English discourse to organize information by linking what is already known to the listener with newly introduced or highlighted content. Through the use of cleft constructions, speakers are able to direct attention to the most communicatively significant part of the message.

INTRODUCTION

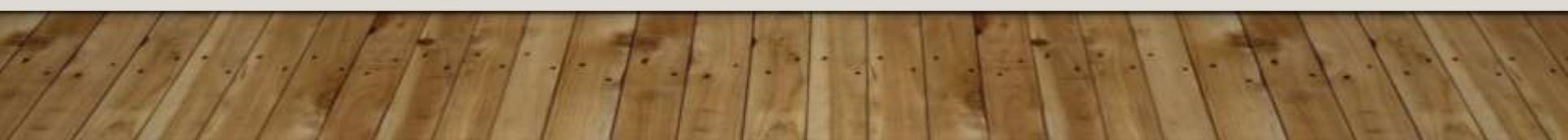
- Highlight specific elements of a message.
- Reorganize sentence structure for emphasis.
- Introduced by 'It' or 'What' clauses.
- Manage information structure.

Cleft sentences are a distinctive grammatical construction in English used to highlight specific elements of a message by separating them into a distinct clause. Jovanovska, Talevska, and Tashkoska (2024) argue that the phenomenon of reorganizing sentence structure, cleft constructions allow speakers and writers to foreground particular constituents, thereby shaping information focus and emphasis. These constructions play an important role in discourse, especially in spoken English, where they are often accompanied by marked intonation and serve to link given information with new or salient content. As such, cleft sentences function as effective tools for managing information structure and guiding the listener's or reader's attention within communication.

WHAT IS A CLEFT SENTENCE?

- 'Cleft' means divided or split.
- Sentence divided into two parts.
- Moves element for emphasis.

Example: It was John who called.

- Cleft constructions in English can be classified into several major types, each serving distinct structural and discourse functions. The most common type is the it-cleft, typically formed with the introductory it followed by a form of the verb be and the focused element (e.g., It was John who called). This structure highlights a specific constituent and places it in focal position.
 - Another frequent type is the wh-cleft (also known as a pseudo-cleft), which begins with a wh-clause (e.g., What I need is a break). In this construction, the wh-clause usually contains given information, while the complement introduces new or emphasized information.
 - A related structure is the reverse wh-cleft, in which the focused element precedes the wh-clause (e.g., A break is what I need). This variation further intensifies focus on the initial constituent.
 - Finally, all-clefts and other less common variants (e.g., All I want is peace) also function to foreground specific elements and organize information within discourse.
 - Although these constructions differ syntactically, they share a common communicative purpose: the management of information structure through emphasis and focus.
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MAIN TYPES OF CLEFT CONSTRUCTIONS

- 1. It-cleft
- 2. Wh-cleft (Pseudo-cleft)
- 3. Reversed wh-cleft
- 4. All-cleft
- 5. Inferential cleft
- 6. There-cleft
- 7. If-because cleft

IT-CLEFT

- Structure: It + be + focused element + clause
- Example: It was John who called.
- Emphasizes subject, object, or adverbial.

WH-CLEFT (PSEUDO-CLEFT)

- Structure: What-clause + be + focused element
- Example: What I need is a break.
- Often presents new information.

REVERSED WH-CLEFT

- Structure: Focused element + be + wh-clause
- Example: A break is what I need.
- Strong initial emphasis.

ALL-CLEFT

- Structure: All + subject + verb + be + complement
- Example: All he wanted was peace.
- Highlights totality.

INFERENTIAL CLEFT

- Structure: It's not that... It's that...
- Example: It's not that I'm mean. It's that I spend wisely.
- Clarifies misunderstandings.

THERE-CLEFT

- Structure: There + be + noun phrase + clause
- Example: There's a movie that I want to watch.
- Emphasizes object.

IF-BECAUSE CLEFT

- Structure: If + clause, it's because + reason
- Example: If he left, it's because he needed independence.
- Expresses reason.

INFORMATION STRUCTURE

- NEW information
- GIVEN information
- INFERRABLE information

Clefts organize these elements.

- Clefts have been described as "equative" (Halliday 1976), "stative" (Delin and Oberlander 1995) and as "variable-value pairs", where the cleft constituent gives a variable expressed by the cleft clause (Herriman 2004, Declerck 1994, Halliday 1994). A major area of interest with regard to cleft constructions involves their information structure. The concept of "information structure" relates to the type of information encoded in a particular utterance, that can be one of these three:
- NEW information: things that the speaker/writer expects their hearer/reader might not already know
- GIVEN information: information that the speaker/writer expects the hearer/reader may be familiar with
- INFERRABLE information: information that the speaker/writer may expect the hearer/reader to be able to infer either from world knowledge, or from previous discourse

KEY FEATURES

- Focus on specific element
 - Emphasis and clarity
 - Avoid ambiguity
 - Versatile in spoken and written English
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- Examples:
 1. It was the beautiful sunset that caught my attention.
 2. What she needs is a reliable car.
 3. It's your dedication that makes you stand out.
 4. The reason he left early was to avoid the traffic.
 - In summary, cleft constructions serve as valuable tools in linguistic expression, allowing speakers and writers to strategically emphasize and focus on specific elements within a sentence. Their usage enhances communication by providing emphasis, clarity, and a means to convey nuanced meanings.

CONCLUSION

- Powerful syntactic tools.
- Structure information and manage focus.
- Enhance clarity and discourse flow.