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## SYNTACTIC CONSTRUCTION, INFORMATION STRUCTURE AND TEXTUAL ROLE: AN INTERFACE VIEW OF THE CLEFT SENTENCE

### Abstract

The paper addresses the FSP structure of the cleft sentence from the viewpoint of its role in the text build-up. This point is studied in two sorts of text, academic prose and fiction, in regard to the role of *it*-clefts at different stages in the development of textual themes. The stylistic aspect of the paper focuses on the different subtypes of the cleft construction with the aim of ascertaining whether their distribution and textual roles in the two texts under study may operate as style markers. The paper attempts to contribute to the study of these questions by expounding the syntax – FSP – text interface.

### Key words

Cleft sentence; FSP structure; context in/dependence; textual role; academic prose; fiction

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### 1. Introduction

The present paper elaborates an outcome of a previous study (Dušková 2010), which examined thematic progressions with constant theme in two sorts of text, academic prose and fiction. The study suggested, among other things, differences between the two text sorts in the type of the cleft sentence on the one hand, and in the function of the cleft sentence in the text build-up on the other. While in fiction the cleft sentence appeared to serve as a stylistic device of achieving narrative tension by presenting the informative part of the proposition in the subordinate clause and by focusing an anaphoric locative or temporal element which sets the

scene of the event, academic prose displayed the cleft construction in what is usually regarded as its primary function: the focused element constituted the most important informational item, cf. examples (1) and (2), respectively:

- (1) a. It was here, according to Mrs Crealey, that she would find the entrance. (James 7)  
 b. It was then that she had her first glimpse of the river, a narrow glitter of shivering water under the lightening sky. (James 8)
- (2) a. What is it about its way of life that has made it unique? (Morris 13)  
 b. What was it in the environment that made possible their isolation as a new form of life? (Morris 13)

## 2. FSP structure and textual functions of the cleft sentence

The present discussion is based on 54 examples drawn almost equally from fiction (James) and academic prose (Matthews, see *Sources*). The number of examples was determined by excerpts obtained from equally long samples of each text, with the lower limit of 25 instances in whichever of the two texts they might have been found. In this way equally long samples of academic prose and fiction (112 and 124 pages)<sup>1</sup> supplied, respectively, 25<sup>2</sup> and 29 instances of the cleft sentence. The inconclusive difference in the quantitative data disproves any assumptions about this aspect, and calls for seeking distinctions elsewhere, viz. in the FSP structure of the construction, and its distribution and role in the text build-up.

### 2.1. Context in/dependence of the constituent clauses

As a first step the examples were examined from the viewpoint of context dependence/independence of the content expressed by the two constitutive clauses, the *it*-clause and the subordinate clause.<sup>3</sup> This involved the basic distinction, in Prince's terms (1978), between stressed-focus *it*-clefts, i.e. cleft sentences with context-dependent information in the subordinate clause which is hence weakly stressed; and informative-presupposition *it*-clefts, whose subordinate clauses are context-independent and stressed accordingly. The same distinction is made by Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1424) in terms of discourse-old and discourse new-presupposition. Compare (3) and (4):

- (3) Inexperienced dancers often have difficulty in ending the Natural Turn in the correct alignment ... It is usually the man who is at fault. (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 1424)

- (4) The Indians were helpful in many ways. It was they who taught the settlers how to plant and harvest crops successfully in the New World. (Huddleston and Pullum, 2002: 1424)

While in (3) having difficulty implies the possibility of being at fault, and hence is derivable from the preceding context, the content of the subordinate clause in (4) is irretrievable. The type illustrated by example (3) is largely regarded as prototypical. The examples listed under (1) represent informative presupposition clefts, while those listed under (2) contain predominantly context-independent information in both clauses.

In the case of informative presupposition *it*-clefts Quirk et al. (1985: 1384, Note b.) draw attention to a use illustrated in (5):

- (5) It was late last night that a group of terrorists attacked an army post.  
 (5)' Late last night a group of terrorists attacked an army post.

Instances of this kind (met with especially in BrE radio and television news, and sometimes objected to) are commented upon as “using the cleft sentence structure with an item that might be less obtrusive with simple fronting”, viz. (5)'. The cleft sentence “conveys unwarrantably the impression that the fact of the attack was known to the hearer, but not the time at which it had taken place. The habit can be defended in that an adjunct (especially of time or place) is a fitting scene-setting and that it is this function that the cleft structure emphasizes” (Quirk et al. 1985: 1384, Note b.). It is to be noted that here the focused element conveys irretrievable information so that the cleft construction presents context-independent content in both clauses.<sup>4</sup>

Since context dependence/independence is a crucial point in assigning cleft sentences to one or the other type, and context itself is a phenomenon of a graded nature (cf. Firbas, 1992: 32–35; 1994), a significant role is played by the factors through which a given element becomes disengaged from context dependence. According to Firbas (1995: 22), these factors involve (a) selection, (b) contrast, (c) identification, (d) purposeful repetition and (e) the summarizing effect. Considering that context is inherently a textual feature, all these factors play a textual role. This is most prominent in the last, the summarizing effect, in that it is related to a longer stretch of text whereas the other factors mostly involve a single element referred to in the closely preceding shorter context. With respect to the cleft sentence, in the texts under study all these factors except purposeful repetition were found to be operative. In other approaches to the textual function of the cleft sentence (Hasselgård, 2004) two more functions have been added, viz. topic linking and topic launching, the term topic being used in the sense of textual theme.

## 2.2. Textual positions of cleft constructions

Textual functions related to longer stretches of text, viz. summarization, topic launching and topic linking, involve textual units higher than the sentence, in particular paragraphs. Accordingly, in addition to the aspects discussed so far, attention was also paid to the position of cleft sentences in paragraphs. In this respect, three groups were distinguished, paragraph initial, paragraph internal, and paragraph final on the assumption of potential connection between the position in the paragraph build-up and textual function, viz. that the three paragraph positions may correlate with topic launching, topic linking and the summarizing function, respectively.

## 3. Distribution of *it*-clefts according to context in/dependence and textual role

Classification of the examples according to context dependence/independence of the content of the two clauses showed a prominent prevalence of informative presupposition clefts, i.e. cleft sentences with context-independent information in the subordinate clause. This rather disproves the largely held view of stressed focus *it*-clefts as the prototypical type. The prominence of context-independent subordinate clauses was even more marked in the academic text, viz. 20 instances out of 25, i.e. 80%. In fiction this ratio was 18 out of 29, i.e. 62%. As for the type of context independence/dependence of the two clauses and the textual position of the cleft sentence, the analysis brought the following findings.

### 3.1. Interrelations between context in/dependence and position in paragraphs in academic prose

3.1.1. In academic prose informative presupposition clefts most frequently displayed an anaphoric, given item, not disengaged from context dependence, in the *it*-clause and new information in the subordinate clause (11 instances, i.e. 45%), cf. the examples listed under (6).

- (6) a. Is it not possible to start from a more comprehensive view, in which the whole stick, at both ends, is grasped at once? On my reading of Bloomfield's *Language*, that is precisely what he did, and it is from that that the complexity of his treatment, which has struck most serious readers and commentators, largely springs.  
(Matthews 52, end of paragraph and end of section)
- b. We do not trace linguistic usage act by act, but assume that, once individuals have 'acquired the habit of using a certain linguistic form', they will continue to utter it in similar circumstances. But, for psychology itself, the hypothesis implies the postulates of behaviorism.

It is against this background that Bloomfield reshaped the theory of grammar, first in his ‘Set of postulates’ of the previous year (1926) and then in *Language*.

(Matthews 64, end of first and beginning of second paragraph, opening a new topic)

In (6) a. the cleft sentence occurs at the end of a paragraph, and at the same time closes a section, thus serving the summarizing function in the paragraph build-up and closing function on the higher level of sections. On the other hand in (6) b. the cleft sentence occurs paragraph initially and opens a new topic. Both instances show agreement between paragraph position and textual function. Of these two positions the final position, correlating with the summarizing and/or concluding function, largely prevails. Within the configuration of anaphoric given, not disengaged items in the *it*-clause and new information in the subordinate clause (11 instances) final or near-final position of the cleft sentence was found in 5 instances, i.e. 20%, whereas the initial position only once (4%). In the total of 25 instances drawn from academic prose, the final position was the most frequent, viz. 12 instances (48%), while the initial position with three occurrences ranked lowest (12%), see Table 2.

3.1.2. To this group may be added 3 examples in which the focusing by the *it*-cleft of an anaphoric item not disengaged from context dependence is reinforced by a focalizer, cf. (7).

- (7) The rules of morphology then generate a ‘dictionary’ which will have to contain, among other things, the word *write*. But we are later told that it is only in this dictionary that we will find ‘such crucial information as’, for example, ‘that *arrive* is a verb’. This is not wholly clear. Does *arrive* not also include a root *arrive*? If so, we can surely say ...  
(Matthews 103–104, paragraph internal)

All three examples represent informative presupposition clefts, i.e. they contain context-independent information in the subordinate clause.

The group of examples with a focalizer in the *it*-clause included three other examples in which the focused element was a context independent or context disengaged item, cf. (8) a. and b.

- (8) a. In Harris’s own words, his critique is directed ‘against the present treatment of morphemes’ ... He does not say ‘the present treatment of morphology’. For it is only if we assume that all forms which are grammatically equivalent must be a single unit at the level of the morpheme that the ‘contradiction’ which he finds in Bloomfield’s criterion can arise. Why was this assumed? The reasons lie deep and it is not easy ...  
(Matthews 79–80, paragraph final)

- b. But in principle, and above all in the techniques of describing formal structure, the fields are as distinct as they are in the other works which stand in the nineteenth-century German tradition. It is only in the 1920s that what many scholars might see as the implication of such remarks began to be thought through.  
(Matthews 62, end of paragraph and end of section)

Example (8) a. is the only one of those discussed so far that represents the stressed-focus *it*-cleft, i.e. a cleft sentence with context independent information in the *it*-clause and context-dependent in the subordinate clause. The other two instances contain predominantly context-independent information in the subordinate clause, cf. (8) b.

In the case of cleft sentences with a focalizer in the *it*-clause only two positions were registered: paragraph final or near final (in 4 instances, cf. (8) a. and b.) and paragraph internal (2 instances, cf. (7)). In the final position the cleft sentences of this group again have the summarizing or concluding function, whereas in paragraph internal position they serve to elaborate an argument or further explicate a point.

A notable feature about paragraph final *it*-clefts appears in (8) a., for here the cleft sentence not only concludes an argument, but also opens a new topic constituted by the context-independent focused part of the *it*-clause. In addition to the concluding function it thus at the same time forms a link to a new topic. This dual function was also noted in the group of cleft sentences with anaphoric items in the *it*-clause without context-disengaging factors or focalizers, cf. (9).

- (9) Each solution now has its proponents, as we will see in part §2.5. But such a critique of Bloomfield's *Language*, whether fair or not, is clearly only similar in part to the critique which underlies the work of his immediate successors, in what is widely known as the 'Bloomfieldian' school. Their solution was also radically different, and it is this that we must explore now.  
(Matthews 75, paragraph final, end of section)

3.1.3 Focused items disengaged from context dependence by contrast, identification or selection alone, i.e. without a focalizer, were found in 4 examples. It is in this group that three of the five stressed-focus *it*-clefts were found. Compare examples (10) a., b. and (12) with (11), which is the only one in this group with new information in the subordinate clause.

- (10) a. It is therefore a remarkable tribute to the inertia of ideas that, when these scholars together addressed the phonology of English, it was the other, morpheme-based solution that they adopted.  
(Matthews 92-93, near-initial paragraph position)

- b. ...in the 1920s and 1930s ... the inherited 'Word and Paradigm' model was supplanted, especially in America, by models based on the morpheme. ... But three generations later what were at that time innovations are among the elementary things that students of linguistics are first taught. It is the advocate of a word-based model who now has to argue against an inherited tradition. The most obvious influence is in and through textbooks. (Matthews 98, end of paragraph)
- (11) We have seen in chapter 2 how Bloomfield's concept of the morpheme was transformed by his immediate successors. But we have yet to consider contemporary developments in syntax. ... From the late 1940s syntax had basically two tasks, one to establish the hierarchical structure of sentences and the other to sort out the units of this hierarchy into classes with equal distribution. For the same period also saw the firm adoption of distributional criteria. Not merely did the study of language start from form rather than from meaning; but the investigation of form was separated strictly from that of meaning, and necessarily preceded it. It was in syntax that this programme was particularly attractive and met with the fewest doubts and criticisms. (Matthews 111, end of paragraph and section)

The last example of this group occurs in paragraph-internal position, cf. (12).

- (12) If such an approach had also been pursued in inflectional morphology, it would have led ... to the form of word-based treatment that is now advocated by Anderson (1992). But in the work directly inspired by Halle's article, it was in fact the other solution that tended to prevail. It does not follow again that morphemes must be minimal signs. But a feature like plural ... (Matthews 105, paragraph internal)

Neither the group of *it*-clefts containing in the *it*-clause a focalizer or an item disengaged from context dependence by contrast or another context-disengaging factor shows any correlation with the textual function. It is the position in paragraphs that appears to be relevant in this respect. While paragraph-final clefts serve the concluding or summarizing function, sometimes connected with linking the point being concluded with a new one, paragraph internal clefts serve elaboration of an argument or further explication of a point, just as was the case in the previous groups.

3.1.4 The last group of informative presupposition clefts contains predominantly context independent information in both clauses, without focalizers or context-disengaging factors in the *it*-clause (3 instances). As in the previous group, this configuration of content does not show any correlation with the textual func-

tion, each cleft sentence appearing in a different paragraph position, cf. (13) a., b. and c.

- (13) a. It was not until well after the war that *Language* ceased to be a major vehicle for philological papers.  
(Matthews 11, paragraph near-final)
- b. Of the alternants in *duke* and *duchess*, [djuwk] was basic because ‘it has a much wider range than the other’. It is presumably for that reason that Chomsky and Halle took [d] as a basic form for ‘past’.  
(Matthews 94, paragraph internal)
- c. This chain of argument has been set out without direct quotations, both because the individual points are well known and because we will return to Chomsky’s work in later chapters. But it was in these radical reversals of priorities that its impact was first felt.  
(Matthews 32–33, paragraph near-initial)

3.1.5 As regards the group of cleft sentences with context-dependent information in the subordinate clause (5 instances), most of them have been noted in the previous sections, cf. (8) a., (10) a., (10) b. and (12).

The last example of this group contains context dependent items in the *it*-clause (in this respect it is similar to instances with an anaphoric item, treated in 3.1.1) which are disengaged from context dependence by being brought into a new relationship. This feature in turn groups them with focused items disengaged from context dependence, i.e. with instances treated in 3.1.3. Compare (14):

- (14) The second phase is ‘semantics’, and grammar, as Bloomfield saw it, was only one of two parts into which semantics was ‘ordinarily divided’. The other was the lexicon. It was then between grammar and lexicon, as we have seen, that Bloomfield’s parallels had been drawn.  
(Matthews, 82, paragraph near-final)

3.1.6 The main findings from academic prose show lack of correlation between the type of context dependence/independence of the content expressed by the two clauses and the textual functions involving larger stretches of text; and correlation of textual functions of these types with the position in paragraphs.

The quantitative data are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

| <b>Focused element in <i>it</i>-clause</b>                    | <b>Context independent information in subordinate clause</b> | <b>Context dependent information in subordinate clause</b> | <b>Number of cleft sentences</b> |
|---|--|--|----------------------------------|
| Anaphoric item  | 11   | 1  | 12 (48%)                         |
| Reinforcement by focalizer                                    | 5  | 1  | 6 (24%)                          |
| Disengaged from context dependence                            | 1  | 3  | 4 (16%)                          |
| Predominantly context-independent information in both clauses | 3  |  | 3 (12%)                          |
| Total   | 20   | 5  | 25 (100%)                        |

**Table 1.** Focused element: academic prose

| <b>Position in paragraph</b> | <b>Number of occurrences</b> |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Final                        | 12 (48%)                     |
| Internal                     | 10 (40%)                     |
| Initial                      | 3 (12%)                      |
| Total                        | 25 (100%)                    |

**Table 2.** Position in paragraph: academic prose

### ***3.2. Interrelations between context in/dependence and position in paragraphs in fiction***

An analogous analysis of the fiction sample brought the following findings. As noted in 3.1.1, classification of the examples according to the context dependence/independence of the content expressed by the two clauses showed a prominent prevalence of the informative presupposition clefts, i.e. cleft sentences with context-independent information in the subordinate clause. However, in fiction this prominence was less marked than in the academic sample, viz. 18 instances out of 29, i.e. 62% as against 20 instances out of 25, i.e. 80%, respectively.

3.2.1 The most frequent configuration of the context dependent/independent information in the *it*-clause and the subordinate clause was a given item disengaged from context dependence by being contrastive, or serving identification or selection in the *it*-clause (15 instances) and retrievable or irretrievable information in the subordinate clause (10 and 5 instances respectively, see Table 3), illustrated in (15) a. and b., and (16), respectively:

- (15) a. George Copeland ... heard the clatter of the feet on the cobbles with relief. ... Lord Stilgoe halted his angry pacing and they both turned to the door. Mr de Witt gave one look at George's worried face and asked quickly: 'What's wrong, George?'

It was Lord Stilgoe who answered. Without greeting de Witt he said grimly:  
(James 110, paragraph initial)

- b. Miss Etienne seemed to Mandy expensive, ... But the physical closeness of her companion and her heightened senses ... told her something more; that Miss Etienne wasn't at ease. It was she, Mandy, who should have been nervous. Instead she was aware that the air of the claustrophobic lift, jerking upwards with such maddening slowness, was quivering with tension.

(James 12, end of paragraph)

- (16) Miss Blackett ... for the past nineteen years ... had lived with her older widowed cousin, Joan Willoughby. ... Early in these nineteen years of shared life a routine had established itself ... which satisfied them both. It was Joan who managed the house and was responsible for the garden, Blackie, who on Sundays cooked the main meal of the day which was always eaten promptly at one o'clock, ...

(James 45, paragraph internal)

In this point the two text sorts under study considerably differ: whereas in fiction this is the prevalent type, found in 51.7% of all instances (15 out of 29), in academic prose it accounts for 4 (out of 25) instances, i.e. 16%, see Tables 1 and 3. The prevalence of this type, as shown by (16), is presumably connected with the character of fiction in that the narrated events often involve several participants that alternate as the event/description develops, and hence need to be identified, selected or contrasted.

This is evident from the underlying syntactic functions of the focused elements. In academic prose a large majority of the underlying elements brought into focus are adverbials, whereas underlying subjects and objects occur in 2 and 3 instances, respectively. On the other hand in fiction the focused elements prevalently involve underlying subjects (19 instances), adverbials being focused in 7 instances and objects in 3 (as in the academic text), see Table 5.

As regards the position in paragraphs, most cleft sentences of this type occurred paragraph internally, as in example (16) (9 instances), the other two positions being each found in 3 instances (see (15) a. and b.). These positions again correspond with the three textual functions connected with larger stretches of text: the clefts in initial position launch new topics, in final position serve the concluding/summative function, and in internal position shift the narrative to a different participant in the evolvement of the story. This differs from the textual function of paragraph-internal clefts in academic prose in that here they served to elaborate an argument or further explicate a point.

The only other instance with context-dependent subordinate clause has context independent information in the *it*-clause in the absence of a focalizer or factor disengaging it from context dependence, see (20) a. in 3.2.4.

3.2.2 The configuration of the context dependent/independent information in the *it*-clause and the subordinate clause that ranked second in the frequency of occurrence displayed an anaphoric item in the *it*-clause, focused by the cleft alone (7 instances, i.e. 24.1%). As shown in Table 3, all instances display context independent information in the subordinate clause, cf. (17):

- (17) a. She referred to her room as the ‘cosy’, and Mandy was one of the few girls who was admitted to its privacies.

It was probably the cosy that kept Mandy faithful to the agency, ...  
(James 3–4, paragraph initial)

- b. She switched off the engine, dismounted, and wheeled the bike over the cobbles, looking for the most unobtrusive place in which to park. It was then that she had her first glimpse of the river, a narrow glitter of shivering water under the lightening sky. Parking the Yamaha, she took off her crash helmet, rummaged for her hat in the side pannier and put it on, and then, with the helmet under her arm, and carrying her tote bag, she walked towards the water as if physically drawn by the strong tug of the tide, the faint evocative sea smell.

(James 7–8, paragraph internal)

As regards the position in paragraphs, 5 instances were found in the initial position, cf. (17) a., and 2 in the internal position, cf. (17) b. While the clefts in initial position launch a new topic, as in all the other instances discussed so far, the two clefts in internal position introduce a deviation whereupon the narrative resumes the previous topic which is the main paragraph topic. In (17) b. the topic introduced by the deviation appears to be relevant in that it reappears in interaction with the main paragraph topic. However, as shown by (18), the cleft presenting a deviation may have other functions. In (18) it serves as a link to reintroduce the main paragraph topic.

- (18) He got up from the table and moved over to the window. As he watched a cruise ship suddenly and silently blocked his view, so close that for a moment he could look into a lighted porthole and see, in the half-circle of brightness, the head of a woman, delicate as a cameo, pale arms raised, running her fingers through an aureole of hair, and could imagine that their eyes met in a surprised and fleeting intimacy. He wondered briefly, and with no real curiosity, who it was who shared her cabin – husband, lover, friend – and what plans they had for the evening. He had none. By established habit he worked late on Thursday night. He wouldn’t see Lucinda until Friday ...

(James 85, paragraph internal)

3.2.3 The only other configuration of the context in/dependent information in the *it*-clause and the subordinate clause registered with more than one occurrence is represented by instances containing more or less predominant context-independent information in both clauses (5 instances, see Table 3).

- (19) a. They left together in silence. It wasn't until Kate was double-locking the front door after them that he spoke again. He said: 'Shall I see you again before I leave next Wednesday?'  
(James 123, paragraph internal: the example forms the whole paragraph)
- b. It's said that Sir Francis went mad with remorse in his old age and used to go out alone at night trying to get rid of that tell-tale spot. It's his ghost that people claim to see, still scrubbing away at the stain.  
(James 32, paragraph near-final)

Example (19) a. was included in this group on account of containing the adverbial *again*, which operates as a context disengaging factor. It carries the second intonation centre in speech. In example (19) b. a similar role is played by *still* in the subordinate clause, while the *it*-clause contains the irretrievable element *ghost*. Admittedly, the context dependence/independence of the clauses constituting the clefts of this group is hard to classify, which leaves ground for assigning them to other types. Since they did not show any patterning relevant for the present discussion, they were left for possible future consideration.

3.2.4 The remaining configurations occurred only once: context-independent information (in the absence of a focalizer or a factor disengaging given items from context-dependence) in the *it*-clause in combination with context-dependent subordinate clause, cf. (20) a., and a focused item reinforced by a focalizer with a context-independent subordinate clause, cf. (20) b.:

- (20) a. The advertised star of the evening was Gabriel Dauntsey. He had asked to go on early but most of the poets before him had overstepped their limits, the amateurs in particular being unsusceptible to Colin's muttered hints, and it was nearly 9.30 before Dauntsey made his slow progress to the rostrum. He was listened to in a respectful silence and loudly applauded ...  
(James 106, paragraph internal)
- b. They had moved to number 12 in 1983 when the firm was expanding ... Her father had accepted the need to move philosophically, had indeed seemed almost to welcome it, and she suspected that it was only after she joined him in 1985 on leaving Oxford that he began to find the flat restrictive, almost claustrophobic.  
(James 70–71, paragraph final)

In these instances the focused elements are not only new but also contrastive, especially in (20) b., where the temporal adjunct sets the scene for a contrasting situation.

The different types of configuration of the context dependent/independent information in the *it*-clause and the subordinate clause are summarized in Table 3. The positions in paragraphs are given in Table 4.

| Focused element in <i>it</i> -clause                          | Context independent information in subordinate clause | Context dependent information in subordinate clause | Number of cleft sentences |
|---|---|---|---------------------------|
| Anaphoric item  | 7   | -   | 7 (24.14%)                |
| Reinforcement by focalizer                                    | 1   | -   | 1 (3.45%)                 |
| Disengaged from context dependence                            | 5   | 10  | 15 (51.72%)               |
| New information   | -   | 1   | 1 (3.45%)                 |
| Predominantly context-independent information in both clauses | 5   |   | 5 (17.24%)                |
| Total   | 18  | 11  | 29 (100%)                 |

**Table 3.** Focused element: fiction

| Position in paragraph | Number of occurrences |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Final                 | 9 (31%)               |
| Internal              | 13 (45%)              |
| Initial               | 7 (24%)               |
| Total                 | 29 (100%)             |

**Table 4.** Position in paragraph: fiction

| Syntactic function | Academic prose | Fiction     |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Subject            | 2 (8%)         | 19 (65.5%)  |
| Object             | 3 (12%)        | 3 (10.3%)   |
| Adverbial          | 20 (80%)       | 7 (24.2%)   |
| Total              | 25 (100%)      | 29 (100.0%) |

**Table 5.** Underlying syntactic functions of focused elements

3.2.5 Comparing the two text samples under study with respect to the paragraph positions in which the clefts occur, we find differences in all three positions. The initial position, though showing agreement in ranking lowest in both samples, is

twice as frequent in academic prose as in fiction, cf., respectively, 7 instances out of 29, i.e. 24%, against 3 instances out of 25, i.e. 12%. Another prominent difference was found in the representation of the final position: academic prose 12 out of 25, i.e. 48% against 9 out of 29, i.e. 31% in fiction; the internal position was represented near-equally in the two samples: 10 out of 25, i.e. 40% in academic prose, against 13 out of 29, i.e. 45% in fiction. As regards paragraphs as such, it should be noted that fiction contained a much larger number of them than academic prose. The paragraphs in fiction varied in length, most of them being short, while the paragraphs in the academic sample were in general very long. However, the different representation of paragraphs in the two texts is not supposed to be relevant to the obtained findings since the present concern is not the frequency of occurrence of cleft sentences measured by the number of paragraphs.

As regards differentiation of the two samples with respect to the textual functions of clefts in the three positions, agreement was essentially found in the function of clefts in paragraph final and paragraph initial positions. In both text samples cleft sentences in these positions serve, respectively, the summarizing/concluding and topic launching function. A minor difference was found here in the function of clefts in the final position insofar as the summarizing or concluding function was more frequently connected with the linking function in academic prose than in fiction.

Prominent functional differentiation was displayed by clefts in the paragraph internal position. Here clefts in academic prose served to elaborate an argument or further explicate a point, whereas in fiction they shifted the narrative to a different participant in the event/situation being described, or introduced a deviation, relevant for further involvement of the story, or self-contained.

#### 4. Conclusion

The assumption of differences in the textual functions of *it*-clefts according to the type of text, which motivated the present study, has been confirmed, but on the basis of aspects other than those displayed by the examples that served as a starting point. According to these examples fiction appeared to favour clefts with an anaphoric scene-setting adverbial in the *it*-clause and new content in the subordinate clause, whereas academic prose displayed context-independent information in both clauses. None of these examples could be classed with one of the two principal types of clefts described in the literature, the prototypical stressed focus *it*-cleft and the informative presupposition *it*-cleft. Consequently, the first criterion of classification was sought in the representation of these two types.

Since context dependence/independence is a crucial point in assigning cleft sentences to one or the other type, and context itself is a phenomenon of a graded nature, a further classification criterion was found in the factors through which a given element becomes disengaged from context dependence: (a) selection, (b) contrast (c) identification, and (d) the summarizing effect. The textual role

of these factors is most prominent in the case of the summarizing effect in that it is related to a longer stretch of text, whereas the other factors mostly involve a single element referred to in a shorter, closely preceding context. The textual approach called for the inclusion of other textual functions involving larger stretches of text, topic linking and topic launching. Concern with longer stretches of text then led to the inclusion of a third classification criterion, the position of clefts in paragraphs.

Classification of the examples according to the context dependence/independence of the content of the two clauses constituting cleft sentences showed a prominent prevalence of the informative presupposition clefts, i.e. cleft sentences with context-independent information in the subordinate clause. This rather disproves the largely held view of stressed focus *it*-clefts as the prototypical type.

An analysis of the texts with respect to the factors disengaging a given item from context dependence did not show any correlation with the textual functions involving larger stretches of text. These functions were found to correlate with the position of clefts in paragraphs.

Particular differences between the academic and the fiction sample were found in the following points.

Clefts with context-independent information prevailed in both text sorts, but the prevalence was more prominent in academic prose (80% and 62%, respectively). Another difference was found in the character of the focused element in the *it*-clause. While in fiction the most frequently focused element was a given item disengaged from context dependence by contrast, identification or selection (51%), in academic prose this type accounts for only 16%. The prevalence of this type in fiction is presumably connected with the character of this genre in that the narrated events often involve several participants that alternate as the event/description develops, and hence need to be identified, selected or contrasted. This is evident from the underlying syntactic functions of the focused elements. Whereas in academic prose a large majority of the underlying elements brought into focus are adverbials (80%), in fiction the focused elements prevalently involve underlying subjects (65%).

Other differences were found in the case of focused items reinforced by a focalizer which were considerably more frequent in academic prose than in fiction (24% and 3.45%, respectively), and in the case of focused anaphoric/given items which prevailed in academic prose (48% as against 24%).

The textual functions involving longer stretches of text largely correlate with the position of clefts in paragraphs in both text sorts: clefts in initial position serve the topic launching function. In final position they correlate with the summarizing/concluding function, sometimes displaying a dual function: in addition to concluding a point they operate as a bridge to another topic. This dual function was more frequent in academic prose. As regards clefts occupying the paragraph internal position, in academic prose they serve to elaborate an argument or further explicate a point, whereas in fiction they achieve a shift in the narrative to a different participant in the event/situation being described, or introduce

a deviation which may be relevant for further evolvement of the story, or self-contained.

The findings of the present study are to be regarded as a mere probe of limited validity. They are based on small samples, and moreover represent only one type of text in the respective text sort, the chosen text sorts as such being internally further differentiated. Nevertheless it may suggest some points worth further study.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The difference in the number of pages between the two samples is due to the fact that the fiction sample contains half-full pages and pages with only a few lines, whereas in the academic text nearly all pages contain a full number of lines, i.e. pages without vacant space.
- <sup>2</sup> The academic text in fact contained 26 cleft sentences, but the last cleft sentence on page 112 is an example illustrating Bloomfield's concept of emotional relations: "Bloomfield added ... 'emotional relations', in which one element, like the pronoun *me* in *It's me they beat* is 'dominant'." This example was excluded insofar as it occurs in a specific context outside the types of context relevant for the present study.
- <sup>3</sup> The term relative clause is avoided because the subordinate clause in the cleft sentence differs in several relevant formal, syntactico-semantic and functional features (cf. Dušková 1993 and 2005).
- <sup>4</sup> Stylistic clichés like *It was a very troubled wife that greeted Henry on his return that night* (Quirk et al. 1985: 1384, Note b) and the proverbial type, e.g. *It is an ill bird that fouls its nest*, were not registered in the texts under study (for their status with respect to cleft structure, see Dušková 1993).

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