

Day 5: Theoretical and empirical approaches to cleft constructions

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Roadmap for day 5

- Let's review!
- Let's discuss!

Summary of Day 1

- Introduction to a cleft construction
 - 4 components
 - 2 general types of clefts
 - 4 kinds of relatives in English
- Cleft construction in other languages
- The meaning of a cleft construction and comparison to other focus constructions:
 - existential presupposition
 - canonical inference
 - exhaustive inference
- Debates on the level where the exhaustive inference is located
 - as a part of at-issue content
 - as a part of non-at-issue (e.g. presupposed) content
 - as a conversational implicature

Summary: Day 2

- Fundamental experimental methods testing the strength of exhaustivity among different types of focus constructions
- Conclusion: *it*-clefts are less exhaustive than exclusives such as introduced by *only* but more exhaustive than plain narrow focus.
 1. Pictorial stimuli paradigm (Onea and Beaver, 2011):
Pre-verbal focus exhibits an exhaustive effect that is **not** as weak as compared to the plain focus, yet not as strong when it is compared with explicitly marked exclusive.

Summary: Day 2 (Cont.)

2. Acceptability judgment tasks (De Vaugh-Geiss et al., 2015):

Clefts do not patterned with exclusives nor pseudoclefts, so the results does not support the semantic claims, henceforth more compatible with a pragmatic arguments.

3. Event-related potential (ERP) study (Drenhaus et al., 2011)

The N400 effect found on it-cleft sentences when exhaustivity is violated can be interpreted as a pragmatic integration process.

Summary: Day 3

- Destruel and Velleman (2014) distinguished **expectations about the world** and **expectations about the discourse**.
- They hypothesized that the cleft is more acceptable the more strongly those expectations are violated.
- Expectations about the world were translated into strength of belief of the speaker.
- Expectations about the discourse were translated into addressing (not)-at-issue content.
- **Result**
 - Acceptability of canonical focus sentence depends on at-issueness.
 - Acceptability of cleft only depends on the presence of an antecedent.
 - Strength of belief didn't play a role.

Summary: Day 4

- Theoretical assumption: Interlocutors have expectations about questions to be addressed next (question probability distribution)
- Different aspects can affect this distribution:
 - words like *secret*
 - temporal relations, e.g., marked by *then*
 - Distance between sentence raising Q and point where Q is addressed
- Hypothesis: German clefts address relative unexpected questions. (Tönnis 2021)
- Experiment 1 identified contexts making Q more or less expected.
- Experiment 2 measured preference between cleft and canonical in these contexts.
- Results supported hypothesis, but for very specific set of contexts.

Topics for discussion

What would you like to discuss?

1. Cross-linguistic differences? (slide 9)
2. Interpreting experimental results (slide 10)
3. All about discourse expectedness? (slide 11)
4. Link exhaustivity and discourse expectations? (slide 12)

1. Cross-linguistic differences

- What kind of contexts do we need for (Mandarin) clefts to be valid?
- How do wild clefts look like?
- What about French *C'est*-clefts?

2. Interpreting experimental results

- Why is the cleft often judged as in between exclusives and canonical focus? Why doesn't it pattern with one or the other?
- Isn't it a binary distinction for the exhaustivity inference: at-issue vs. not-at-issue, semantic vs. pragmatic?

3. All about discourse expectedness?

- Can all functions of clefts be traced back to expectedness in discourse?
- What about correction, establishing coherence, suspense, ...?

4. Link exhaustivity and discourse expectations?

- How can we relate felicity conditions for clefts in discourse to cleft exhaustivity?
- Are the discourse function and exhaustivity orthogonal to each other or does one follow from the other?

About Mandarin Clefts

How do they look like when they are in the wild?

(1) Two occurrence that I found on the internet...

a. Ju tongji, zai waishang touzi qiye de renminbi zhong,
according.to statistics LOC foreign.business invest firm REL RMB in
you yiban **shi** Zhongguoyinhang tigong **de**.

have half COP bank.of.China provide DE

'According to the statistics, among the RMBs that belong to foreign investment firms, half are provided by the Bank of China.'

b. ta **shi** zai yu pengyou liaotian shi liaojie dao jibing de
he COP LOC with friend chat time understand PRF disease REL
yanzhongxing, yinci...

seriousness henceforth

'It is when he was chatting with his friend that he noticed how serious the disease is. Therefore ...'

Are they the different from each other?

Jein. 'Yes and no.' \rightsquigarrow 'Maybe.'

(2) Q: Where does the professor normally have lunch?

A: Yiban jiaoshou shi zai shitang chi wufan.

normally professor COP LOC dining.hall eat lunch

'Normally, it is at the dining hall that the professor has his lunch.'

[bare-*shi* cleft]

A': Yiban jiaoshou shi zai shitang chifan de.

normally professor COP LOC dining.hall eat DE

'Normally, it is at the dining hall that the professor has his lunch.'

[*de*-cleft]

- Do they have the four basic components?
- Do they have two general types?

What about their exhaustivity?

Q: Where does the professor normally have lunch?

A: Pingshi jiaoshou shi zai shitang chi wufan (de).

usually professor COP LOC dining.hall eat lunch DE

'Usually, it is at the dining hall that the professor has his lunch.'

(3) '*Too*'-continuation

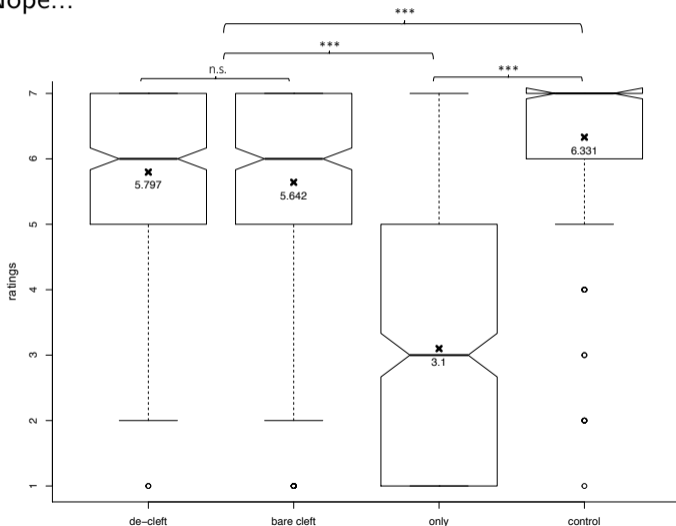
Jiaoshou ye [zai kafeidian]_{ALT} chifan.

professor too LOC café have.meal

'The professor has his meal at the café, too.'

What about their exhaustivity?

Nope...



Boxplot of acceptability judgment results across conditions: Black crosses represent mean, black horizontal solid lines represent median ('***': $p < 0.001$, 'n.s.': not significant)

(Chen, 2024)

Are they the same?

Jein.

- If we have two partial answers, depending on the belief states and the informativity of the partial answers, *de* is acceptable not.

(4) Q: Who should I find if I want to get reimbursement?

A: Youshihou shi cai laoshi fuze baoxiao (?? **de**).

sometimes COP Cai teacher in.charge reimbursement (DE)

'Sometimes, it's teacher Cai who is in charge of reimbursement.'

Youshihou, shi wang laoshi fuze baoxiao (**de**).

sometimes COP Wang teacher in.charge reimbursement (DE)

Sometimes, it's teacher Wang who is in charge of reimbursement.

(Chen and Papay, 2019)

Are they the same?

While the parallelism is known to hold in many cases, I did find instances where one cleft type is applied less felicitously even when the other is fully acceptable, as the following contrast illustrates.

- (5) a. ??Shi tongguo lianxi (lai) tigao xiezu.
COP through practice (come) improve writing
'It is via practice that writing is improved.'
- b. Shi tongguo lianxi (lai) tigao xiezu de.
COP through practice (come) improve writing DE
'It is via practice that writing is improved.'

(Chen, 2024)

Are they the same?

A *shi...de* cleft is very much preferred over a bare *shi* version in the case where the pivot is a *how*-adjunct.

As the structures in (5) are construed as a cleft answer to the prior *wh*-question in (6a), the contrast in acceptability in (5) may well be similarly accounted for.

- (6) a. Ta shi ruhe tigao xiezuo *(de)?
he COP how improve writing DE
'How does he improve his writing?'
- b. Nimen xuexiao shi zenme baoxiao *(de)?
you.PL school COP how reimbursement (DE)
'How does your school reimburse?'

'Prosody The bare-*shi* cleft and syntax the *shi...de* cleft are intimately related, as in roman, intimacy only happens between two separate entities' (modified by Sandler (2010)).

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