Properties of *It*-Cleft Presupposition *

Judy Delin

School of Cognitive and Computing Sciences

University of Sussex

Email: judy@cogs.susx.ac.uk

Abstract

It is generally accepted that *it*-clefts convey logical presuppositions. In this paper, I examine the properties of those presupposition with a view to shedding some light on what function they serve in discourse. First of all, an examination of naturally-occurring data shows that presuppositions of *it*-clefts are not normally composed of information that is already entailed by the context: they are frequently used to communicate wholly or partly New information. In the main part of the paper, I present an explanation of the function of *it*-cleft presupposition that is applicable to all clefts regardless of their information structure. The account appeals to the current notion of presuppositions as anaphoric environments, motivating this view further with empirical evidence for anaphoricity. I turn first of all to Prince's [1978] observation that *it*-cleft presuppositions mark information as KNOWN FACT in the discourse. This observation, while useful, is not itself an explanation, since further factors can be shown to underlie the effect. First, I demonstrate that *it*-cleft presuppositions mark information as ANAPHORIC. Such marking is independent of information structure, and has observable linguistic effects. The empirical evidence for the anaphoricity of cleft presupposition is of three types:

1. Elements that are ambiguous between an anaphoric and an emphatic use take on their anaphoric reading when placed within an *it*-cleft presupposition;

2. *It*-cleft presuppositions enable the anaphoric relation upon which contrast depends to be established, in contexts where information that is simply Given does not have the same effect; and

3. Information placed within an *it*-cleft presupposition appears to *remind* rather than *inform*, regardless of its objective status in the discourse.

Arising out of this anaphoricity is a second factor: 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. Participants in a discourse are, with each utterance, placing propositions 'on the table' for acceptance or rejection by interlocutors. If a proposition is placed on the table along with a marking to say that this is not the proposition's original appearance the speaker is indicating that the time for any negotiation—or, more specifically, any rejection—is past. This gives rise to the 'known fact' effect observed by Prince.

1

1 Introduction

Any exploration into the border country between semantics and pragmatics is bound to make at least a brief stop at the *it*-cleft. As a sentential syntactic construction which displays obvious textuality, it suggests itself for examination by those interested in the building of coherent discourses. As a presuppositional construction, it attracts the attention of those interested in the semantics of presupposition and its projection in various contexts. What appears to be lacking, however, is a synthesis of precisely how its discourse-pragmatic properties and its semantic properties interrelate, and how far the one is affected by the other. This paper represents some steps towards such a synthesis, in two particular ways. Firstly, by exposing the heterogeneity of the *it*-clefts data in a forum readily accessible to semanticists, I hope to make available some insights from the descriptive linguistics literature on clefts, as well as some new observations, that may inform semantic analyses of cleft presupposition. Secondly, I will point out some discourse effects that appear to be firmly based on the presence of presupposition, thereby highlighting some facts central to an appreciation of why presupposing constructions are chosen by speakers in the first place—that is, what presupposition, at least of this kind, is for.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In section 1.1, I define some terms used in the discussion, and introduce the *it*-cleft as a presuppositional construction in a fairly conventional sense. In section 2, I will examine some naturally-occurring data from a variety of sources[1] for the purposes of showing the heterogeneous nature of the information content of the *it*-cleft presupposition. It is often supposed that the presuppositions of *it*-clefts are normally composed of information that is already entailed by the context. In fact, *it*-cleft presupposition is frequently used to communicate wholly or partly New information (cf. Prince [1978], Delin [1989], Hedberg [1990]), a point that must inform our understanding of precisely what presupposition is for. Therefore, I will give some examples of the data that demonstrate that this is so, and make some suggestions as to why the assumption that *it*-cleft presuppositions *are* entailed by the context has been so enduring, even in the face of the knowledge that other types of presupposition are not similarly constrained. In section 3, I turn to the discussion of other discourse properties of the *it*-cleft presupposition, beginning with Prince's [1978] observation that *it*-cleft presuppositions appear to signal the presupposed information to be a KNOWN FACT in the discourse. In what follows, I look more closely at the source and nature of this 'known fact' effect. I suggest that this effect can be distilled down into two component parts, the second dependent on the first:

1. *It*-cleft presuppositions, independently of the Given or New status of their content, appear to display characteristics typical of anaphoric environments. This lends empirical support to the treatment of presupposition as a species of anaphora (cf. van der Sandt [1987] and following); and

2. *It*-cleft presuppositions contain information that is treated by speaker and hearer alike as NON-NEGOTIABLE at the time of utterance.

---

[1] The data for this study were taken from the Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen (LOB) corpus of written English, the Survey of English Usage (SEU) spoken corpus, and my own corpus of casually-collected examples. Data taken directly from other sources is cited individually.

Section 4 sets out the relationship between these two factors, and shows how they relate to 'Known Fact'. In section 5, I present some conclusions, including suggestions as to how the phenomena noted for *it*-cleft presupposition are relevant to presupposition in general.

1.1 Preliminaries

Syntactic Labelling

Following Hedberg [1990], I will employ the following terms to describe the various syntactic parts of the *it*-cleft. In an *it*-cleft like *It was John who left*, we call *John* the CLEFTED CONSTITUENT, and *who left* the CLEFT CLAUSE:

$$
(1) \quad \begin{array}{ccc} \textit{It was} & \underbrace{\textit{John}} & \underbrace{\textit{who left}} \\ & \textbf{Cleftedconstituent} & \textbf{Cleftclause} \end{array}
$$

These terms are preferred to labels such as FOCUS and PRESUPPOSITION, because the means of applying such labels is determined on the basis of information structure, something I wish to consider separately. In examples where I wish to indicate the location of prosodic nuclei, I will use small capitals. Italics are used to pick out some examples from the surrounding text.

It-Clefts as Presuppositional Constructions

It is generally accepted that *it*-clefts convey logical presuppositions, and that these can be computed on the basis of the syntactic structure of the cleft by subsituting the relativiser with an existentially-quantified phrase (cf. Gazdar [1979:128], Zeevat [1991]). The truth of the resulting proposition is a condition for the carrier sentence to have a truth value.

On this basis, both (2a) and (2b) convey a presupposition (2c), by virtue of replacing the relativiser *who* with the existentially-quantified *someone*:

(2) a   It was my friend who was caught.

  b   It wasn't my friend who was caught.

  c   Someone was caught.

Having established these points, we can now turn to the main content of the discussion.

2 Cleft Presuppositions and Information Status

2.1 *It*-Cleft Presupposition and Context

It is not now a new observation that the content of a cleft presupposition does not have to consist of Given information. That is, the hearer is not expected to be familiar with, or to be able to retrieve, the presupposed information at the time of hearing or reading it. A large body of data now exists which reveals a presence, and even a preponderance, of *it*-clefts that presuppose information that is either inferrably related to previous context or completely new. For example, Declerck [1988:210] cites an early observation of this type of cleft by Erades [1962], a case in which, Declerck writes, 'the *that*-clause does not contain old information'. Erades' example, which he concluded was not in fact an *it*-cleft proper, appears in (3):

> (3) It was in 1886 that ... Lewin published the first systematic study of the cactus.

It was Ellen Prince who brought these cases to the fore in a later paper (Prince [1978]), where she set out two distinct classes of *it*-cleft. The first, which she termed the STRESSED-FOCUS [2] cleft, was of the information structure which the uninitiated might expect from a cleft: it had primary stress on the clefted constituent, and a cleft clause that was weakly accented and that bore information that was already familiar to the hearer, as in (4):

> (4) C.B: So who's Barbara?
> B.S: Let me put it this way. When you last saw me with anyone, *it was Barbara I was with.*

Prince's second class of clefts had different properties, however. The INFORMATIVE-PRESUPPOSITION clefts, as she terms them, have primary stress appearing in the cleft clause, and they appear to presuppose information that is at least partially New to the hearer—i.e., information that is not currently shared knowledge. It is clear that examples such as (5) [LOB G29 95] contain such information in the presupposed portion:

> (5) In complete self-effacement, sweeping all pity aside, she gave herself to Helen, working tirelessly to open lines of communications between the imprisoned child and the world of people and nature around her. *It was the day after Anne Sullivan's arrival that Helen learned the finger language for the word 'doll'.* Anne spelt it into her hand very slowly and deliberately, and got Helen to imitate.

A spoken example is as follows:

---

[2]Declerck [1988] describes a similar class of   clefts, while Hedberg [1990] outlines a group of   clefts with apparently similar properties.

(6) A: Joe Wright you mean
   B: Yes yes
   A: I thought it was Joe Wright who'd walked in at FIRST.

This type of cleft is now well attested in the literature: Geluykens [1984:38] records a small but similar group of examples he terms THEME-FOCUS clefts; and more significant proportions of the corpora of Declerck [1988], Delin [1989] and Hedberg [1990] are composed of similar cases. A small sample of 50 randomly-selected *it*-clefts from Delin's [1989] corpus revealed a total of 38 clefts of this type.

As a final example, consider the content of the presupposition in (7). In cases such as these, it is hard to see how the presuppositional content could fail to be informative[3]:

(7) Yet it is Mr. Coward ... who offers himself as the man to lead the poor, stumbling audiences out of the theatrical dark and into the bright, brave noonday where it is always perfect anyone-for-tennis weather, and where nothing as vulgar and squalid as a stove is ever mentioned, but where lots of nice, jolly, fun-giving adultery to the immense, brittle amusement of the master is.

The observations of the descriptive linguists have, however, taken some time to filter into the general consciousness of what the information structure of an *it*-cleft is, or should be, like. Rochemont [1986:32], for example, claims that *it*-cleft complements must be 'directly c-construable in virtue of prior discourse'. He describes the notion of direct c-construability [1986:62] as follows:

Direct C-Construability : A phrase P is directly c-construable if:

1. P has a discourse antecedent; or
2. the attention of the participants has been directed towards the intended referent of P in the physical environment.

In the recent semantics literature, Soames [1989:605] also sees *it*-clefts as typically, if not invariably, containing information that is shared between speakers. While he acknowledges that a cleft such as *it was Mary who broke the typewriter* could appear in a conversation where the assumption *someone broke the typewriter* is not present, he suggests that they represent an aberrant use of the construction:

...there is something a bit odd about such a case–a kind of pretense that the (or a) topic of conversation prior to the remark was that of determining who broke the typewriter. For a speaker to utter [this example] in a conversation in which this is not at issue is for him to reveal that his conception of the conversational plan differs from that of the other conversational participants. This suggests that [this example] pragmatically requires the (or a) topic of

---

[3]LOB corpus, line number A19 56 and following.

conversation prior to the utterance will be that of determining who broke the typewriter. A conversation satisfying this requirement will be one in which [the presupposition] is entailed by the common background.

[Soames 1989:605]

The reason that cleft presuppositions are so frequently assumed to specify information that is mutually known perhaps lies in the fact that much of the discussion of *it*-clefts has centred around decontextualised examples. The prosody normally given to these examples when they are read aloud has had important effects on general assumptions about the information structure of the *it*-cleft, which is unsurprising in the light of the fact that factors such as the appearance of prosodic nuclei can fairly uncontroversially be taken to indicate the presence of New information nearby.

Citation forms such as (8) are conventionally articulated with a pitch accent upon the clefted constituent (in this case, *John*), while the cleft complement (*who ate the beans*) is usually devoid of pitch accents, and pronounced with falling intonation[4]:

(8)   It was JOHN who ate the beans.

This intonation lends itself to the interpretation of the content of the cleft clause as 'Given', although, as noted above, several corpora reveal this information structure in less than half of the cleft tokens.

It is important to note that if the *it*-cleft *were* to presuppose only shared information, it would almost certainly be unique among presuppositional constructions. Stalnaker [1974:191] and Kartunnen [1974:202], for example, observe that presupposed information may frequently appear in contexts where the presupposed information is not currently satisfied. Schmerling [1976:77] noted examples of factives such as *realise* bearing accented constituents in their complements. For example: *I didn't realise Mary was* BALD*!* We are all familiar, too, with cases where the presuppositional complement of *regret* is used to inform us of previously unknown, non-shared information, as follows:

(9)   a   The management regrets that no responsibility can be taken for coats
          and other possessions left in this cloakroom.

It is also known that definite referring expressions, which like cleft constructions are generally thought of as presupposing, are often used in ways that fail to correlate with existing mutual knowledge, although their use has been assumed in the literature on anaphor resolution to reflect particular existing focus levels (cf. for example Reichman [1985]). Clark and Marshall [1981:45] improve upon Hawkins' [1978] model of definite reference by allowing shared knowledge to be acquired *subsequently* to the act of refer-

---

[4]Chomsky [1971:70] presents a discussion of the division of the cleft sentence into 'focus' and 'presupposition' on the basis of the position of the prosodic nucleus. Unfortunately, the examples he gives are all of the form of (7), leading many to the conclusion that this was the 'default' or 'normal' type of prosodic pattern for the *it*-cleft. In fact, Chomsky himself points out in a footnote that other accent placements are possible, and it is this point that does not seem to have been widely taken up.

ence, thereby capturing the many cases in which definite referring expressions are used to refer to entities that are not yet in mutual knowledge.

So if *it*-cleft presupposition does not mark information structure, what is its function? In the next section, I set out some properties due to the presuppositional nature of the *it*-cleft that are central to determining its function in discourse.

3 Discourse Properties of *It*-Cleft Presupposition

In this section, I want to examine the the particular discourse effects arising from *it*-cleft presuppositions. We look first of all at Prince's [1978] observation that *it*-cleft presuppositions mark information as KNOWN FACT in the discourse. I go on to show that this observation, while useful, is not itself an explanation, since further factors can be shown to underlie the effect. First, I wish to show that *it*-cleft presuppositions mark information as ANAPHORIC. Such marking is independent of information structure, and has observable linguistic effects. Arising out of this anaphoricity is a second factor: 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.

3.1 'Known Facts'

Prince [1978] suggests that for *it*-clefts of all kinds the general function of the presupposition is to reflect the speaker or writer's judgement that the presupposed information has the status of a KNOWN FACT. Known information is characterised by Prince [1978:903] as follows:

Known information : Information which the speaker represents as being factual and as already known to certain persons (often not including the hearer).

Prince [1978:900] also notes that the presupposition appears to convey the impression of 'Don't argue with me—I didn't invent this—and I'm aware that I didn't invent this.' In other words, speakers using *it*-cleft presuppositions are stating that they are not responsible for the presupposed information. Prince notes that overt marking of this feature is possible in several exotic languages, Hopi being notable among them, and suggests that *it*-cleft presuppositions are one way of achieving this marking in English.

3.2 Anaphoricity

In current theories of presupposition, beginning with van der Sandt [1987], it is now commonplace to treat presupposition as a species of propositional anaphora. That is, the presupposed proposition is seen as requiring an ANTECEDENT in the discourse context in order to be felicitous, in much the same way as anaphors such as definite descriptions do. In many cases, there will be no antecedent to the presupposition at the time of utterance, and one will have to be constructed (or *accommodated*, in the sense of Lewis [1979]) in the context before the presupposing sentence can be interpreted. Constraints on presupposing can therefore be couched in terms of constraints on what are acceptable extensions to discourse contexts at the current point in processing.

While this notion of presupposition as anaphora has been useful in constructing representations of presupposition, particularly within the framework of Discourse Representation Theory (cf. Kamp [1981]), there is also empirical evidence that presuppositions act anaphorically in discourse. The evidence for the anaphoricity of cleft presupposition is of three types:

1. Elements that are ambiguous between an anaphoric and an emphatic use take on their anaphoric reading when placed within an *it*-cleft presupposition;

2. *It*-cleft presuppositions enable the anaphoric relation upon which contrast depends to be established, in contexts where information that is simply Given does not have the same effect; and

3. Information placed within an *it*-cleft presupposition appears to *remind* rather than *inform*, regardless of its objective status in the discourse.

First of all, there exist elements that are ambiguous between an anaphoric use and an emphatic use, such as *so, such* and *as* (cf. Halliday and Hasan [1976:79] for a discussion of the two different functions of these elements). When these elements appear within a presupposition, their anaphoric reading is preferred. This effect persists even when the presupposition contains New information. The following example is taken from the written Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen corpus[5][LOB D05 159]:

(10) Then there was the Test Act which insisted that all civil and military officers should take the oath of supremacy and allegiance and receive the Holy Communion according to the Church of England rite. *It was such legalistic hamfistedness which was to make the life of the Church of England such an artificial observance for so many in the following century.*

Compare the effect of the anaphoric expressions *such an artificial observance* and *so many* when they appear in a de-clefted version of the sentence. The reading changes from anaphoric to emphatic:

---

[5]Note that the first occurrence of *such* in this example has an anaphoric function independently of the presupposition, since it occurs outside the presupposed portion of the content of the sentence. The function of this item, as would be expected, does not change across the presupposed/non-presupposed versions of the example.

(11)   Such legalistic hamfistedness was to make the life of the Church of Eng-
        land <u>such an artificial observance</u> for <u>so many</u> in the following century.

In the non-presuppositional case in (11), it appears that, when no antecedent is obviously
available for phrases such as *such an artificial observance* and *so many*, the reader will
interpret the underlined phrases as emphatic. However, in the presuppositional case in
(9), even though an antecedent is still not available, the anaphoric reading is retained.
This suggests that the presupposition itself plays a role in indicating that the information
it bears has some antecedent—even though none is available to the hearer or reader at
the time of processing the presupposition.

This effect is not confined to *it*-clefts. We can see it operating in other presuppositional
environments, such as *regret* contexts, as well. In the non-presupposing (12a) and (12b),
the emphatic readings of *such* and *so* are preserved; in (12b), the anaphoric reading
emerges:

(12)   a   The Test Act was to make the life of the Church of England such an
             artificial observance for so many.

        b   Clergy believed that the Test Act was to make the life of the Church
             of England such an artificial observance for so many.

        c   Clergy regretted that the Test Act was to make the life of the Church
             of England such an artificial observance for so many.

A second anaphoric feature of *it*-cleft presuppositions is their ability to establish con-
trastive relationships with preceding discourse[6]. Contrast (cf. Lyons [1977], Werth
[1984] for a discussion) can be described as relationship of opposition or comparison
between two discourse elements that operates on the basis of some predicate. It is
recognised that contrast is itself a form of coherence (Werth [1984] terms it *negative
coherence*) since it relies on a link being established between two or more elements for
the purposes of the comparison. For example, in the following case [LOB D07 69] a
contrast holds between the cleft head element *the angel* and a preceding element, *Boaz*,
with respect to the predicate *use this form of greeting*:

(13)   To this the reply is given that from the verse dealing with Boaz there is
        no proof of divine approval, only that Boaz used this form of greeting.
        But in the second verse *it is the angel that uses this form of greeting* and
        hence there is evidence of divine approval.

In the case of contrast, the cleft presupposition serves the anaphoric function of 'pulling
out' a proposition in order to establish it as the basis for achieving a contrastive op-
eration. It is clear, however, that this anaphoric effect isn't unique to clefts: 'Given'
information of any kind, in as far as a coherent relation can be observed to hold be-
tween it and the preceding discourse, can achieve similar effects. In (14), while a cleft
is possible, a non-cleft such as (14b) can be used to achieve a contrastive effect:

---

[6]This effect is examined more fully in Delin and Oberlander [1991, 1992], in which the *it*-cleft is
shown to have the effect of subordinating the presupposed information in the structure of the ongoing
discourse.

(14) A: John ate the beans.
    a B: No, it was Bill who ate the beans.
    b B: No, Bill ate the beans.

In the previous examples, the contrastive link is established between the sentence under discussion in each case and some highly salient, immediately accessible antecedent. What is interesting about the case of *it*-clefts is that the contrastive relationship can be established on the basis of the presupposition even when the presupposed information isn't as clearly 'Given'. Although clefts *can* be used for the easy cases such as the contrast in (12), cases where the contrastive antecedent is more obscure than the two previous examples seem to actively require a cleft. Such obscurity may arise from one or more of the following factors:

- The antecedent may be inferentially related;

- the presupposition may refer to the antecedent attributively or in very different terms; or

- the antecedent may be a segment of discourse of arbitrary size.

For example, the following naturally-occurring cleft contains the complex discourse element *the new fixtures and fittings*, which stands in a contrastive relationship with an event-type element, *doubling the selling space to 700 square feet* [LOB E30 72]. The relationship between the cleft presupposition *something would be costly* and its antecedent, *was not to be the greatest expense* is an indirect, inferential one. Note, however, that only the cleft in (15a) succeeds in establishing the relationship necessary for the contrast, while the non-cleft in (15b) fails:

(15) a Doubling the selling space to 700 square feet was not to be the greatest expense. It was the new fixtures and fittings to fill this space that would be costly.

      b ?Doubling the selling space to 700 square feet was not to be the greatest expense. The new fixtures and fittings to fill this space would be costly.

A similar example appears in (16), in which a contrast takes place between the cleft head element *the lady who obliges* and the antecedent *a nice old-fashioned housemaid* in the following advice to visitors to grand homes [LOB E26 87, context simplified for clarity]:

(16) Quite a few of you have asked about tipping, and these days problems can arise. A nice old-fashioned housemaid, labelled by cap and apron, is easy enough; when you leave you will give her your little present as a thankyou for looking after you. *It is the 'lady who obliges' that can confound you*; on that point, the simplest way is to quietly consult your hostess.

The contrast here operates on the basis of the predicate *easy enough* and *can confound you*. The inferrable predicate for the contrast is therefore something like *ease of tipping*, and the actual predicates that appear serve to range the two elements—the *housemaid* and the *lady who obliges*- -at opposite ends of the scale of ease and difficulty:

(17) Quite a few of you have asked about tipping, and these days problems can arise. A nice old-fashioned housemaid, labelled by cap and apron, is easy enough; when you leave you will give her your little present as a thankyou for looking after you. *The 'lady who obliges' can confound you*; on that point, the simplest way is to quietly consult your hostess.

On the basis of such examples, it seems plausible to suggest that cleft presuppositions are able to establish coherence relations, such as anaphoricity and contrast, that are not clear when non-clefts are used.

A third indication of anaphoricity in presupposition can be couched as a simple distinction between utterances that *remind* and utterances that *inform*. In some cases, notably those in which a hearer could have had prior access to the presupposed information but is unlikely to be thinking about it at the time of utterance, the effect of the cleft presupposition seems mark the information unambiguously as a 'reminder'. In this way, the cleft in (18a), simplified from [SEU s2.1.180], acts as a reminder, while the de-clefted version in (18b) bears much more clearly the stamp of 'first mention', characteristic of an ordinary assertion:

(18) a B: To be frank, I've heard from a number of sources that when you were interviewed for a job here that you think that you didn't get the job because of me
A: Oh no, I never said that ...I went to great pains to tell people that you were the one supporting me. In fact, it was VERY shortly AFTER that INTERVIEW that I sent my circular letter AROUND to various scholars and I sent YOU a copy

b In fact, VERY shortly AFTER that INTERVIEW I sent my circular letter AROUND to various scholars and I sent YOU a copy

There are therefore three separate kinds of evidence that presuppositions indicate the existence of some prior invocation of the same, or closely related, information: the behaviour of ambiguous anaphoric/emphatic elements, the establishment of difficult contrastive relationships, and the distinction between presuppositional *reminding* and assertive *informing* in identical contexts.

3.3 Non-Negotiability

One of the most striking properties of presuppositions, and indeed one of its defining characteristics, is that the presupposed proposition is presented as a non-negotiable FACT at the time of utterance. Tests for presupposition are frequently constructed on the basis of this, as presuppositions are immune to operators such as negation and

possibility. For example, in (19), the presupposed proposition (19c) falls outside the scope of the negation in (19a) and the possibility operator in (19b):

(19)   a   It wasn't John who ate beans.

          b   It's possible that it was John who ate beans.

          c   Someone ate beans.

Outside presuppositional contexts, the varying scope of operators such as negation and possibility (which take their scope from something akin to sentence focus) makes the sentences that carry such operators notoriously ambiguous. The non-presuppositional versions of (19a) and (19b) therefore admit a variety of interpretations:

(20)   a   John didn't eat beans.

          b   John possibly ate beans.

We might conclude from either example that someone else ate beans, that John did something to some beans rather than eat them, or that John ate something else. Such ambiguity is not present in the presuppositional cases.

It seems likely, then, that the fact presuppositions are a barrier to the scope of operators appearing in the same sentence is a real factor in people's choices to use presuppositional constructions such as clefts. For example, in (21) [LOB E23 147], it is important that the writer clearly limits the scope of the negation to *what* fascinates him or her, rather than allowing the fact that something fascinates him or her to be called into question:

(21)   Another Spring flower, the Iris, is sometimes called 'the Poor Man's Orchid'. *It is not the colour nor the texture of the iris petals that fascinate me, but the fine detail of their exquisite shape.*

The use of certain adverbials provides other evidence that presuppositions are not open for negotiation or comment at the time of utterance, even by the speaker or writer. For example, Quirk *et al* [1985:620] identify a group of CONTENT DISJUNCTS such as *clearly* and *definitely* that serve to 'present a comment on the truth value of what is said'. While in non-presuppositional constructions speakers are able to use these at will to add weight to their assertion of the truth of utterances (cf. (22a)), it seems that, in presuppositional environments such as the *regret* case in (22b), such disjuncts are inappropriate:

(22)   a   John clearly/definitely insulted her.

          b   ??John regrets that he clearly/definitely insulted her.

In *it*-clefts, the judgements are more marginal, because it is easy to interpret the subjunct in the presupposing constituent as having scope outside that constituent and being rather sloppily placed. But compare the 'correct' placement of the subjunct in (23a) with the less acceptable placement in (23b): in the (b) case, the subjunct seems inappropriate when interpreted with the narrower, presupposition-internal scope:

(23) a It was clearly/definitely John who insulted her.

 b ?It was John who clearly/definitely insulted her.

Statements about the speaker's *current* judgement about the truth of a proposition therefore appear to be out of place when that proposition is presented presuppositionally[7].

In the next section, we will examine the relationships between the three features of Known Fact, anaphoricity, and non-negotiability.

4   Known Fact, Anaphoricity, and Non-Negotiability

The non-negotiable nature of presuppositions in general, then, seems to be at the root of the perception that *it*-cleft presuppositions contain information that the speaker or writer is presenting as factual. But how is 'factual' information distinct from information presented normally, if we assume that, in most cases, people believe what they say? The anaphoric factor offers an explanation. It seems that the crucial factor underpinning the presententation of information as fact is that the information does not ORIGINATE at the time of utterance. Prince approaches this conclusion with her suggestion that *it*-cleft presuppositions effect a marking of 'I didn't invent this' on the presupposed information. However, it seems that, in using a presupposition, a speaker is saying more than this: he or she is saying 'I didn't invent this *now*'. We know that the 'I didn't invent this' characterisation cannot be completely general, since presuppositions are felicitous in cases where the presupposition's antecedent is originated by the same speaker earlier on in the same discourse, as in the following:

(24)   A: John's finished all the coffee.
    B: Well, why don't you make some more?
    A: Because it's him who finished it, and I don't see why I should make
    it all the time.

In order to capture the cases such as this one, where the presupposed information is simply 'Given' in the discourse, we can say that the speaker is merely *referring* to information that has had a PRIOR EXISTENCE, either in the present discourse or in some other. No claim is made with respect to who originated it, or when.

We can relate the idea of 'prior existence' back to the issue of anaphoricity of information if we adopt a view of discourse in which the participants are, with each utterance, placing propositions 'on the table' for acceptance or rejection by interlocutors. (Of course, for written texts, the default assumption is that the propositions will be accepted.) If a proposition is placed on the table along with a marking to say that this is not

---

[7]Rob van der Sandt has pointed out to me that such disjuncts are also infelicitous when placed in opaque contexts such as in the complement of *believe*, as in *?John believes that he clearly/definitely insulted her.* It seems to me that a similar point can be made for these contexts as for the presuppositional ones: the proposition conveyed by the *belief* complement is in a similar sense not originated by the speaker, but by the holder of the belief. The content of such complements is therefore not open to comment by the current speaker.

the proposition's original appearance (either because it is straightforwardly Given, or because it is presupposed, or both), the speaker is indicating that the time for any negotiation—or, more specifically, any rejection—is past.

Marking information as having had a prior existence is not to be specific about the whereabouts of this information. We have seen that the information *can* have been invented by the speaker, but it need not have been. In addition, it seems that the information need not have been available or known to anyone else prior to the point of speech: in the case of presupposed performatives, for example, it seems to be sufficient that the information is conventionally expected. In (25), it does not make sense to say that the presupposed (25b) is previously known by anyone, since it is simply not a knowable fact:

(25)   a   It is with great pleasure that I pronounce you husband and wife.

b   I pronounce you husband and wife in some way.

It-cleft presuppositions, then, are non-negotiable by virtue of the fact that they are marked as 'unoriginal'—that is, they refer anaphorically to some prior incarnation of the same information, whether available to anyone other than the speaker, or not.

5   Conclusions

While this paper represents only a preliminary look at the data, the effects of presupposing in discourse are interesting to note. First of all, we have seen that presupposition in general marks information as being *non-negotiable* in the discourse at the time at which it appears. The source of this non-negotiability appears to be that the presupposed information is marked as not having originated at the point of speech. This could be due to it having been originated by another speaker, or by the same speaker at a different time. Whichever the case, the implication is that the origin of the information is necessarily *prior* to the current invocation of the information—it has to be, otherwise the current speaker or writer could not be reporting it. Whatever the previous status of the information, however, the important point is that the presupposition refers anaphorically to it. In section 3, linguistic indicators were given that bear out this analysis.

The anaphoric nature of the presupposition gives rise to the clear implication that, somewhere or other, this information has an antecedent. If the presupposition is *also* marked as Given information—for example, by the use of a falling intonation contour, or by pronominal anaphora, or both—then it is clear to the hearer or reader that the antecedent is retrievable from the current discourse. If no Given marking is available, the antecedent is implied to be non-retrievable to the hearer or reader, but no more specific indication of its whereabouts is supplied—it could be anywhere from just out of focus in the current discourse to completely invented by the speaker or writer.

Of course, further research is required in order to establish whether these effects are particular to *it*-cleft presuppositions, or are more widely significant. But at least some

14

of the data above, notably the non-negotiability data and the behaviour of *so, such* and *as* described in section 3, suggest that the effects attributed by Prince to the 'known fact' nature of *it*-clefts is in fact due to presupposition in general, Further evidence of this is available from Prince's [1978a] research on existential presuppositions in discourse. She notes that the use of some presupposition-inducing expressions such as definite referring expressions or proper names correspond to STATED ASSUMPTIONS about the existence of something or someone that always have to be attributed to a speaker–not necessarily the current speaker. In fact, it is possible for speaker B in (26) to 'quote' a stated assumption such as (26a), arising out of the definite referring expression *the neighbours* in (26b), without it being attributed to oneself (cf. Prince [1978a:368]:

(26) a   There are some neighbours.

      b   A: Did the neighbours break the window?
          B: No, it wasn't the fault of the neighbours—we haven't got any neighbours.

Prince suggests that, as a default, what is said is attributed by hearers to the current speaker. Presupposition, however, can act as a marker to divert that default strategy. It seems in the *it*-cleft cases at least that the use of presupposition serves to divert hearers away from their default of attributing a fact to a speaker, but, in many cases, gives them no more information than this. In many of the examples above, therefore, the presupposition remains unattributed, simply marking 'not me' on the presupposed information.

References

Chomsky, N. [1971] Deep structure, surface structure, and semantic interpretation. In Steinberg, D. D. and Jakobovits, L. A. (eds.) *Semantics: An interdisciplinary reader in philosophy, linguistics and psychology*, pp183–216. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Clark, H. H. and Haviland, S. E. [1977] Comprehension and the given-new contract. In Freedle, R. O. (ed.) *Discourse Production and Comprehension*, Volume 1, pp1–40. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.

Declerck, R. [1988] *Studies on Copular Sentences, Clefts, and Pseudo-Clefts*. Volume 5, Series C Linguistica, Leuven University Press/Foris Publications.

Delin, J. L. [1989] Cleft Constructions in Discourse. PhD Thesis No. 34, Centre for Cognitive Science, University of Edinburgh.

Delin, J. L and Oberlander, J. R. [1991] Clefts, Aspectual Class, and the Structure of Discourse. In: *Working Notes: Discourse Structure in Natural Language Understanding and Generation*. AAAI Fall Symposium Series, Monterey, CA, November 15-17 1991.

Delin, J. L. and Oberlander, J. R. [1992] Aspect Switching and Subordination: the role of *it*-clefts in discourse. In: Coling '92: Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Computational Linguistics. Nantes, France, July 23-28 1992.

Erades, P. A. [1962] Points of Modern English Syntax XLIII. *English Studies*, **43**, 136-141.

Gazdar, G. [1979] *Pragmatics, Implicature, Presupposition, and Logical Form*. New York: Academic Press.

Geluykens, R. [1984] Focus Phenomena in English: an Empirical Investigation into Cleft and Pseudo-Cleft Sentences. Technical Report No. 36, Departement Germaanse, Universitaire Instelling Antwerpen, Antwerp, 1984.

Halliday, M. A. K. and Hasan, R [1976] *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.

Hawkins, J. A. [1978] *Definiteness and Indefiniteness*. London, Croom Helm.

Hedberg, Nancy Ann [1990] *Discourse Pragmatics and Cleft Sentences in English*. PhD Thesis, University of Minnesota, UMI order number 9109340.

Kamp, H. (1981), A Theory of Truth and Semantic Representation. In J. A. G. Groenendijk, T. M. V. Jansen and M. B. J. Stokhof (eds.) *Formal Methods in the Study of Language*, Foris, Dordrecht, pp. 277-322.

Karttunen, L. [1974] Presuppositions and linguistic context. *Theoretical Linguistics*, **1**, 181–194.

Keenan, E. [1971] Two kinds of presupposition in natural language. In Fillmore, C. J. and Langendoen, D. T. (eds.) *Studies in Linguistic Semantics*, pp45–54. New York: Holt.

Lewis, D. [1979] Score-keeping in a language game. *Journal of Philosophical Logic*, **8**. 339-59.

Lyons, J. [1977] *Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Prince, E. [1978] A comparison of WH-clefts and it-clefts in discourse. *Language*, **54**, 883–906.

Prince, E. [1978a] On the function of existential presupposition in discourse. *Papers from the Fourteenth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, University of Chicago, ed. D. Farkas, *et al*, 362-376.

Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G. and Svartvik, J. [1985] *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.

Reichman, R. [1985] *Getting Computers to Talk Like You and Me*. Cambridge, Mass.:

MIT Press.

Rochemont, M [1986] *Focus in Generative Grammar.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

van der Sandt R. A. [1987] Presupposition and discourse structure. In: Proceedings of the Sixth Amsterdam Colloquium. Reprinted in: R. Bartsch, J. van Benthem and P. van Emde Boas (eds.) *Semantics and Contextual Expression.* Dordrecht: Foris. 1989.

van der Sandt, R. [1988] *Context and Presupposition.* London: Croom Helm.

Schmerling, Susan F. [1976] *Aspects of English Sentence Stress.* Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press.

Soames, S. [1989] Presupposition. In: D. Gabbay and F. Guenthner, (eds.) *Handbook of Philosophical Logic*, 4, pp553-616. D. Reidel.

Stalnaker, R. C. [1974] Pragmatic presuppositions. In Munitz, M. K. and Unger, P. K. (eds.) *Semantics and Philosophy*, pp197–213. New York: New York University Press.

Werth, P. [1984] *Focus, Coherence, and Emphasis.* Croom Helm.

Zeevat, H. W. [1991] *Aspects of Discourse Semantics and Unification Grammar.* PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam.