

## Existential clauses and clefts in English. Grammatical description and theory

Kristin Davidse (University of Leuven, Functional and Cognitive Linguistics)

The bulk of this talk will be devoted to outlining a functional-structural analysis of English *there*-clefts, referring to the non-mainstream description of English existential clauses proposed in Davidse (1999a, also 1999b, 2000). *There* clefts have received little attention in the English grammar tradition and their very existence is debated. Halliday (1967: 238) briefly discussed them as the indefinite counterpart without exhaustiveness implicature of *it*-clefts. Whereas Huddleston (1984: 469) recognized example (1) as "a kind of cleft construction... descriptive of an event that took place", Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 1396) call the case for making such structural distinctions weak.

(1) There was one man (that) kept interrupting. (Huddleston 1984: 469)

Against this, I will present functional-structural and semantic arguments for recognizing *there*-clefts as constructions in their own right. I will distinguish cardinal (2) and enumerative *there*-clefts (3), which feature some of the crucial distinctions between cardinal and enumerative existential clauses, as well as a variant in which the focus - presupposition structure of the former two subtypes is "levelled" (Lehmann 2008: 210ff), as in (4).

(2) Look at the shape of it. There's only one thing that's that shape. (Leuven Drama Corpus)

(3) A: ... there's other people that you think are doing kind of creative corpus lexicography.

B: Well, there's MX [male proper name] who's just building a new one (COBUILD)

(4) A: which ^on the 'whole are a g'ood 'thing#

B: ^y\es#

C: I'm ^sure there's a 'lot :could be 'done# (London Lund Corpus)

Cardinal and enumerative *there*-clefts have a specificational value-variable structure. Cardinal *there*-clefts (2) have a cardinality restriction (Milsark 1977) on the focal constituent, thereby indicating the cardinality of the instance (*one thing*) corresponding as value to the variable in the relative clause (*that's that shape*). Enumerative *there*-clefts (3) have one or more definite NPs or proper names in focal position which are enumerated as instances corresponding to the variable in the relative clause. Levelled *there*-clefts (4) are not specificational, but introduce a new proposition and are, in this sense, descriptive of a whole event.

The talk will conclude with some reflections on grammatical description and theory, cautioning against risks of one-sidedness in certain types of current construction grammar. Constructions are sometimes reduced to a string with 'slots' whose 'fillers' may be grammatical classes and/or specific lexical elements and whose 'surface properties' are focused on. Against this, it will be argued that constructions crucially involve meaningful syntagmatic relations such as modification, predication and complementation (Croft and Cruse 2004) and hierarchical structural assembly (Langacker 1987). The grammatical class of, and selection restrictions on, elements realizing functions in structure are "derivative from the constructions that define them" (Croft 2001: 85).

## References

- Croft, W. 2001. *Radical Construction Grammar*. Oxford: OUP.
- Croft, W. & D.A. Cruse. 2004. *Cognitive Linguistics*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Davidse, K. 1999a. The semantics of cardinal versus enumerative existential constructions. *Cognitive Linguistics* 10 (3): 203-250.
- Davidse, K. 1999b. Are there sentences that can be analyzed as there-clefts? In G. Tops, B. Devriendt, and S. Geukens (eds.) *Thinking English grammar: To honour Xavier Dekeyser, professor emeritus* (Orbis Supplementa 12). Leuven: Peeters. 177-193.
- Davidse, K. 2000. A constructional approach to clefts. *Linguistics* 38: 1101-1131.
- Halliday, M.A.K. 1967. Notes on transitivity and theme in English 2. *Journal of Linguistics* 3.2. 199-244.
- Huddleston, R. 1884. *Introduction to the Grammar of English*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Huddleston, R. & G. Pullum. 2002. *The Cambridge grammar of the English language*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Langacker, R. 1987. *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*. Vol. 1, *Theoretical Prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Lehmann, E. 2008. Information structure and grammaticalization. In E. Seoane & M. J. López-Couso (eds) *Theoretical Issues in Grammaticalization*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 207-229.
- Milsark, G. 1977. Toward an explanation of certain peculiarities of the existential construction in English. *Linguistic Analysis* 3: 1-29.