Presupposition and Shared Knowledge in *it*-Clefts
Judy Delin

1 Introduction

-Delin presents a view of the relative roles of logical presupposition and shared knowledge in *it*-cleft construction.
-Re-analysis three claims that have appeared in the literature in relation to presupposition, prosody, and shared knowledge in *it*-clefts.

1.1 Presuppositions and Shared Knowledge

Presupposition

-Some presuppositions are systematically associated with the syntactic structure of the cleft. A positive *it*-cleft (1a) and its negative counterpart in (1b) would create a presupposition such as (1c).

1a. It was John who left
b. It wasn’t John who left.
c. ∃x leave(x)

-Presupposed proposition such as (1c) has a particular status in relation to the shared knowledge of interlocutor. Those are:

- Either it would be entailed by ‘common ground’ of the conversation at the point of speaking
- Or would be already assumed by interlocutors, such as a pre-existing belief.

The presupposed propositions should be viewed as a condition for the carrier sentence to have a truth-value, in which a positive sentence such as (1a) would presuppose and entail a proposition such as (1c) while a negative sentence (1b) would only presuppose it.

Shared Knowledge

-Delin defines shared knowledge as one of those beliefs that conversational participants come to believe to be shared among them as the directed result of the conversational interaction.

The distinction between presupposition and shared knowledge:

-Shared Knowledge indicates a speaker’s ASSUMPTIONS about the state of the hearer’s knowledge and model of the discourse.
-Presupposition indicates a speaker’s REQUIREMENTS as to what information should be present in the hearer’s knowledge.
2 Some Assumptions About It-Clefts

There are 3 assumptions that construct it-clefts. These are:

- The presupposed information borne by it-cleft is mutually known in the discourse.
- Cleft syntax performs the same function as accent placement.
- The presence of nuclear or other accents in cleft complements affects the presuppositional nature of the cleft.

The first point explains the relationship between cleft presupposition and shared knowledge. It assumes the presupposition for the clefts does not need to invoke mutual knowledge. The second and third points discuss analysis of the relationship between cleft syntax and prosody.

2.1 Are Cleft Presuppositions Mutually Known?

The content of it-cleft presupposition is information that is expected to be already within shared knowledge.
Rochemont [1986] claims that it-cleft complements must be ‘directly c-construable in virtue of prior discourse’.

**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 toward the intended referent of P in the physical environment.

According to Soames [1989] it-clefts contains information that is shared between speakers also acknowledges that a cleft such as *it was Mary who broke the typewriter* appear in conversation where the assumption *someone broke the typewriter* is not present.


- According to Delin the reason that cleft presuppositions specify information lies in the fact that much of the discussion of it-clefts has centered around decontextualised examples.

-Decontextualised examples (5) are conventionally articulated with prosody that suggests that the presupposed information does indeed belong to share knowledge.

(5) It was JOHN who ate the beans.

- Decontextualised examples in the it-clefts have given rise to the perception that examples with this articulation, are the ‘default’ or ‘normal’ type of it-cleft.
- Chomsky [1971] observed that the ‘default’ articulation was not the only one for it-clefts, in some cases ‘deviation’ occurs, which assign the ‘default’ intonation contour.
‘deviant’ cases are those in which one or more prosodic nuclei appear in the cleft complement.

* Is it JOHN who writes POETRY?

- Prince [1978] pointed out that this second accent pattern was an information structure that was distinct from the ‘default’ cases. Prince terms this second type of cleft as INFORMATIVE-PRESUPPOSITION or IP cleft, which has nuclear accents appearing in its complement clause.

> A: Joe Wright you mean
> B: Yes yes
> C: I thought it was Joe Wright who’d walked in at FIRST.

- According to Prince’s observation the key point in those cleft types are that they appear to presuppose information that is least partially. New to hearer for example, information that is not currently shared knowledge.

- Two kind of evidences support this conclusion:
  - Stalnaker[1974] and Kartunnen [1974] observed that presupposed information may frequently appear in contexts where the presupposed information is not currently satisfied.
  - *It*-clefts can convey information that is not currently shared; in some cases it is unlikely that the hearer has any idea about the content of the presupposition.
    - For example, if we consider examples (3c) and (4d) it would be counterintuitive to say that this information is salient between speakers.

> 3 c. [at some stage] the helpless insect is in great danger.
> 4 d  [someone] can’t type.

2.2 The Interaction Between Accent and Syntax

Delin proposed two assumptions concerning the interrelationship between the position of pitch accents and the presupposition derived from the cleft.

- Firstly, it is assumed that what is signaled is the same as what is indicated by the presence of prosodic nuclei in particular locations. For example:

> 12 a. It was JOHN who left.
> b. JOHN left.
> c. $\exists x \text{ leave}(x)$
Secondly, similar discrepancies in interpretation arise in the case of ordinary, non-presentational cleft and non-cleft sentences with the same accent pattern. For example:

16 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.

-In this example cleft appears with several nuclei in the complement clause, indicating the presence of new information. Although it contains information new to discourse, appears to remind speaker B of the content of the presupposition.

-Next, Delin shows that logical presupposition can persist when stresses appear in cleft complements and explains this by talking about the four tests for logical presupposition listed by van der Sandt [1988]. These four tests are:

- Embedding under negation
- Embedding under modality
- The antecedent test
- The test for constancy under illocutionary force

**Negation Test**

- Shows that the proposition conveyed by the cleft complement or wh-clause is preserved under negation. In example 19, the positive and negative sentences (a) and (b) both preserve the truth of (c), showing that, even with New information in the presupposed proposition, logical presupposition is preserved

(19) a. It was John that ate BEANS.
   b. It wasn’t John that ate BEANS.
   c. Someone ate beans.

**Modality Test**

- Similar to negation test, except it uses a possibility operator rather than negation. This test involves the creation of a context in which a modal operator such as possibly has scope over the potentially presupposing sentence. - The (20a) implies the truth of the (20b):

  20 a It is possible that it was John that ate BEANS.
   b Someone ate beans.
**Antecedent Test**

-Involves making the sentence under analysis into the antecedent of a conditional. An example of this appears in van der Sandt [1988], using sentences with *manage to* and *be glad that*. *Manage* is an example of an implicative verb, which entails its complement. *Be glad that* presupposes its complement. On this test the truth of the complement of *manage to* be cancelled or suspended in the conditional, while the proposition carried by the complement of *be glad that* is preserved.

Van der Sandt’s examples show this to be the case: (21) does not require that (23) be true, while (22) does:

21. If Charles managed to leave the country, he will never come back.
22. If Charles was glad that he left the country, he will never come back.
23. Charles left the country.

**Constancy Test**

-This test is used if a proposition is conveyed by a particular sentence regardless of whether that sentence is used as a question or any kind of speech act, then that proposition is an elementary presupposition of the carrier sentence.

-The following examples demonstrate that a clefts appearing in the form of a question with New information in (25a) preserves the truth of the (25b)

25 a. Was it John that ate BEANS?  
   b. Someone ate beans.

**3 Marking Requirements and Marking Assumptions**

-How the notions of shared knowledge and logical presupposition interact?
  -Delin explains this as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status of Information</th>
<th>Linguistic Indicator</th>
<th>Speaker is marking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared knowledge</td>
<td>Prosody</td>
<td>Assumptions about hearer’s current discourse model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical presupposition</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Requirements for next state of discourse model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3.1 Logical Presupposition in Discourse: Marking Requirements**

-Stalkner [1974] indicated that the logical presuppositions need not contain information that is already entailed by the context.
- Prince [1984] and Delin [1989] discussed information types that can appear in the presuppositions of cleft constructions of various kinds—presupposed information can stand in more or less any relationship with preceding discourse.

- Therefore, logical presuppositions such as *it*-clefts are not produced obligatorily on the basis of factors of knowledge and belief. And in this respect clefts operate in relation to the goals of the speaker to achieve certain effects.

3.2 Prosody in Discourse: Marking Assumptions

- While presupposition is about marking *requirements* about how information is to be processed, prosody is about marking *assumptions* about what is currently the state of shared knowledge.

- Distinction between the requirements that are marked by presupposition and assumptions marked by prosody:

  - Presupposition can be used in order to persuade a hearer to accommodate previously-unknown information into the discourse context
  - Because the presupposition does not distinguish between shared and non-shared information, prosody has to be correct for the current state of shared knowledge. If prosody fails inappropriate discourse results and prosody cannot be used creatively to effect changes in the hearer’s discourse model.