

The Cleft Construction in Irish

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1. Introduction

This paper investigates the properties of the cleft construction in Irish, and points out (i) that CPs and adjective phrases (APs) can be clefted in Irish, unlike English or Japanese, and (ii) that while NP clefting allows six chain patterns with one embedded clause, CP/AP clefting only allows two chain patterns, just like the comparative formation in Irish. Based on these findings, we claim (i) that the COMP of the clefted CP does not need to be raised to V in Irish, while it must in English and Japanese, and (ii) that the chain patterns allowed in the cleft and the comparative constructions suggest the nature of the operators to be moved in the constructions.

2. Data

First, Irish allows NPs, PPs, Adjunct Clauses, CPs, and APs to be clefted. For space reasons, only the last two examples are shown below.

- (1) (Is é) [gur cheannaigh Seán carr]₁ Op₁ a chreideann Máire *t*₁. (CP Clefting)
COP it [that bought John car] aL believe Mary
'*It is [that John bought a car] that Mary believes *t*₁.'
- (2) Róchliste₁ Op₁ atá Seán *t*₁. (AP Clefting)
too.clever aL+be.PRES John
'*It is too clever that John is.'

Second, while NP clefting allows six chain patterns with one embedded clause, CP/AP clefting only allows two chain patterns, as shown in (3)-(10). (Note that AP clefting data are not provided here due to space limitations.)

NP Clefting

- (3) Is í [an carr seo]₁ Op₁ a chreideann tú a cheannaigh Seán *t*₁.
COP.PRES it the car this aL believe you aL bought John
'It is this car that you believe that John bought.' (aL, aL, *t*)
- (4) Is í [an carr seo]₁ Op₁ a gcreideann tú gur cheannaigh Seán *t*₁.
COP.PRES it the car this aN believe you that bought John it (aN, go, it)
- (5) Is í [an carr seo]₁ Op₁ a gcreideann tú ar cheannaigh Seán *t*₁.
COP.PRES it the car this aN believe you aN bought John it (aN, aN, it)
- (6) Is í [an carr seo]₁ Op₁ a chreideann tú ar cheannaigh Seán *t*₁.
COP.PRES it the car this aL believe you aN bought John it (aL, aN, it)
- (7) Is í [an carr seo]₁ Op₁ a raibh súil agam a cheannófá *t*₁.
COP.PRES it the car this aN was hope at.me aL buy.COND.2.SG
'It is this car that I hoped that you would buy.' (aN, aL, *t*)

- (8) Is í [an carr seo]₁ Op₁ a mheasann Seán gur cheart dúinn í a cheannach.
 COP.PRES it the car this aL think John that right for.us it to buy
 ‘It is this car that John thinks that we ought to buy it.’ (aL, go, it)

CP Clefting

- (9) Is é [gur cheannaigh Seán an carr seo]₁ Op₁ a chreideann Máire a dúirt
 COP.PRES it that bought John the car this aL believe Mary aL said
 siad *t*₁.
 they
 ‘It is [that John bought a car]₁ that Mary believes that they said *t*₁.’ (aL, aL, *t*)
- (10) Is é [gur cheannaigh Seán an carr seo]₁ Op₁ a raibh súil agam a
 COP.PRES it that bought John the car this aN was hope at.me aL
 déarfá *t*₁.
 say.COND.2.SING
 ‘It is [that John bought this car]₁ that I hoped that you would say *t*₁.’ (aN, aL, *t*)

3. Discussion

Let us now consider what the observed facts might suggest. **First**, the fact that CPs can be clefted in Irish, but not in English or Japanese, seems to arise from the difference in word order between Irish (VSO) on the one hand, and English (SVO) and Japanese (SOV) on the other. In English and Japanese, O (complement) is adjacent to V, while in Irish, it is not, as it is separated from V by S. We take this to suggest that there is a close relationship between O and V in English and Japanese, while no such relation holds in Irish. In English and Japanese, (the relevant feature of) COMP will adjoin to V possibly in LF, while this operation does not take place in Irish. In the cleft structure under Chomsky’s (1977) hypothesis, the clefted part is base-generated in the pre-CP position. Then, in English and Japanese, (the relevant feature of) COMP cannot adjoin to V without lowering, which will cause a violation of the Proper Binding Condition. On the other hand, this movement does not take place in Irish, and thus, (4) is correctly predicted to be grammatical.

Second, the chain patterns allowed for CP/AP clefting, not NP clefting, are exactly like the ones for comparative formation in Irish in the sense that the chains are terminated with a trace, not a resumptive **pronoun**, which indicates that the traces in these examples are not **nominal** in nature. This in turn suggests that what is moved in comparatives is not nominal in nature, either.