



From the *th*-cleft to the *the-N-is* construction:
towards a discursive, prosodic, and dialogical reading

Studies on written English analyse the pseudo-cleft construction in view of the cleft construction. As such, it is studied as a focus marker and a syntactic restructuring device. Spontaneous spoken English, on the contrary, encourages us to investigate the pseudo-cleft alongside markers ranging from the *th*-cleft (Collins, 1991) to markers such as *the thing is*, or other variants around the pattern *the-N-is*. Despite their differences in terms of lexicogrammatical pattern, these markers exhibit a similar global syntactic structure. However, they can achieve various discourse functions.

The aim of this thesis is to explore what brings together into one paradigm syntactic structures ranging from the *th*-cleft to the *the-N-is* construction. Its purpose will also be to study the linguistic and contextual parameters that trigger variations in their discourse functions. Basing our analysis on a corpus of spoken British English, we intend to provide a discursive, prosodic and dialogical analysis of these linguistic markers.

The first part will provide the methodological and theoretical background for this research. Chapter 1 details the choices regarding the corpus used for this research. This research is based upon a corpus of spoken British English that was compiled using radio podcasts, scientific communications as well as one parliamentary debate. Chapter 2 offers an overview of the properties of specificational copular sentences, which are associated to the pseudo-cleft construction and, to a lesser extent, to the *the-N-is* construction. The aim is to account for the syntactic and pragmatic requirements for a copular sentence to be specificational. Chapter 3 focuses on functional approaches to these markers and tackles the central notions of *theme* and *rheme* as well as *focalization* and *thematization*. The purpose of this chapter is to see how these notions are applied to the pseudo-cleft and the *the-N-is* construction. Finally, chapter 4 is concerned with interactional approaches, which analyse these markers as *projector phrases*. It offers an account of the concept of *projection* and explores its links with the concept of *dialogism* as developed by Bres et al. (2019).

The second part of the thesis compares these three approaches in light of the occurrences from our corpus. Chapter 5 focuses on the projective nature of the markers, which is studied at the syntactic, semantico-pragmatic and prosodic levels. It investigates the way in which these levels are connected. Chapter 6 examines these different layers of analysis in regard to the specificational nature of the structures. Syntax and semantics on their own do not enable us to evaluate the specificational nature of the markers. A prosodic analysis however shows that prototypical specificational copular sentences exhibit a recurring prosodic pattern. Chapter 7 studies these different layers of analysis in regard to the focalising nature of the markers. By doing so, it also assesses the role of prosody in marking focalisation. Studying the occurrences from the corpus through the lens of prosodic focalisation does not yield any recurring pattern on the focused segment. The focus markers themselves may display signs of prosodic saliency.

The third part of the thesis provides a discursive perspective on the markers. Chapter 8 looks into the ways in which the markers are linked to the preceding discourse. Following



Halliday's concept of *multiple theme* (1994), we show that these markers may occupy different thematic meta-functions. Some markers achieve textual functions and therefore signal a discourse relation rather than an informational one. Chapter 9 looks at the prosodic regularities at the discourse level. A prosodic analysis shows that markers behaving as discourse-structuring devices exhibit a particular prosodic contour.

The fourth and final part of the thesis widens the perspective and offers a dialogical analysis on the markers. Chapter 10 investigates the lexico-grammatical variations through the prism of stance-taking. These variations can be used to signal a modal stance or to explicitly attribute the stance to the speaker or to a third person. Following Dubois (2008), these stances display a dialogical dimension. In context, they stand in contrast with stances taken by other speakers on the same object of discourse. Chapter 11 looks at how the projection unfolds in real time. Using the concepts of *co-locution* as well as *coénonciation* as developed by Morel and Danon-Boileau (1998), which is here associated to Bres et al.'s *anticipative intralocutive dialogism* (2019), this research shows that these markers can be used to manage the interaction. First, they allow the speaker to take or keep the floor. The speaker can also use the markers to open a projection span which they can modulate, taking into account what they assume the hearer knows. The hearer therefore implicitly influences the projection or even sometimes takes part in the construction of the projection alongside the speaker.