

FOCUS CONSTRUCTIONS — CLEFT SENTENCES IN ENGLISH AND THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN POLISH¹

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The communicative function of language presupposes a certain organization of the message in a sentence or in a discourse. The situational context and the speaker's attitude towards the listener or the subject of the discourse result in the assignment of different communicative values to individual elements in a sentence.

The major devices involved in the organization of the information conveyed by the sentence are stress and intonation, word order, syntactic and lexical devices, illustrated by the following sentences:

- (1) a. John hit *Mary* (not Ann)
 b. Jan uderzył *Marię* (nie Annę)
- (2) a. *Mary* John hit
 b. *Marię* Jan uderzył
- (3) It was *Mary* that John hit
- (4) To *Marię* Jan uderzył

In (1) a - b the element *Mary/Maria* is brought into the 'foreground' due to the contrastive stress that falls on it. In these sentences the focus word is put in the sentence final position, where the regular sentence stress applies. The contrastive stress, however, can fall on any element in any sentence position. (2) a - b are examples of topicalized constructions, i.e., *Mary*, the non-subject constituent which is the topic of the sentence has been shifted to the sentence initial position and stressed. In English, sentences like (3)a are

¹ I would like to thank George Horn for his comments.

focally bound independently of stress, as their word order differs from the regular S—V—O order. In Polish, the initial sentence position is usually taken up by lexical items with coreferential interpretation (previously mentioned in the text), and the occurrence of a non-subject constituent in that position does not mark it for focus. It is, therefore, a combination of position and stress that makes the word *Maria* prominent. (3) illustrates the use of a special syntactic construction in which *Mary*, the focus element, is placed in post-copular position and is modified by the out-of-focus relative clause. Sentence (4) involves the insertion of emphatic *to* in front of the topicalized element *Maria*.

In this paper we will concentrate on the types of structures shown in (3) and (4), i.e., cleft sentences in English and their Polish counterparts with the initial *to*. The analysis we are going to use, however, will enable us to grasp the relation between all the above-listed sentences. We will compare semantic representations of the English cleft sentences and their Polish counterparts, discuss transformations involved in their derivation, restrictions that these sentences impose on the elements that can occur in the focus position, and briefly talk about their relation to other sentences in the text.

We claim that cleft sentences in English and sentences with the initial emphatic *to* in Polish, have the same semantic representations containing constituents PRSP and FOC — presupposition and focus. We assume after Muraki (1970 : 390; 1974 : 15) that the presupposition is a two-place predicate PRESUPPOSE (or *is presupposed for*) which relates two sentences as in [Prsp S₁ S₂], meaning that S₁ is presupposed for S₂. The semantic representation of (3), for instance, will be:

(5) Prsp [hit John *A*] [hit John Mary]

A represents a 'dummy' position or unfilled position in the presupposition, that can be read 'someone', so example (3) presupposes that John hit someone and asserts that it was Mary.

The presence of PRSP as a primitive predicate² in the deep structure of sentences makes it possible to distinguish between their assertions and presuppositions, which in turn, will help us capture the relation between such pairs of sentences as (1) - (4). All these sentences have the same presupposition (John hit someone) and the assertion (John hit Mary), hence they have the same meaning. The main difference between them lies in the transformations that have applied to them resulting in three different surface structures.

According to the framework we have adopted in the present paper (cf. Muraki 1970 : 1974) the semantic structure of (1) will be something like:

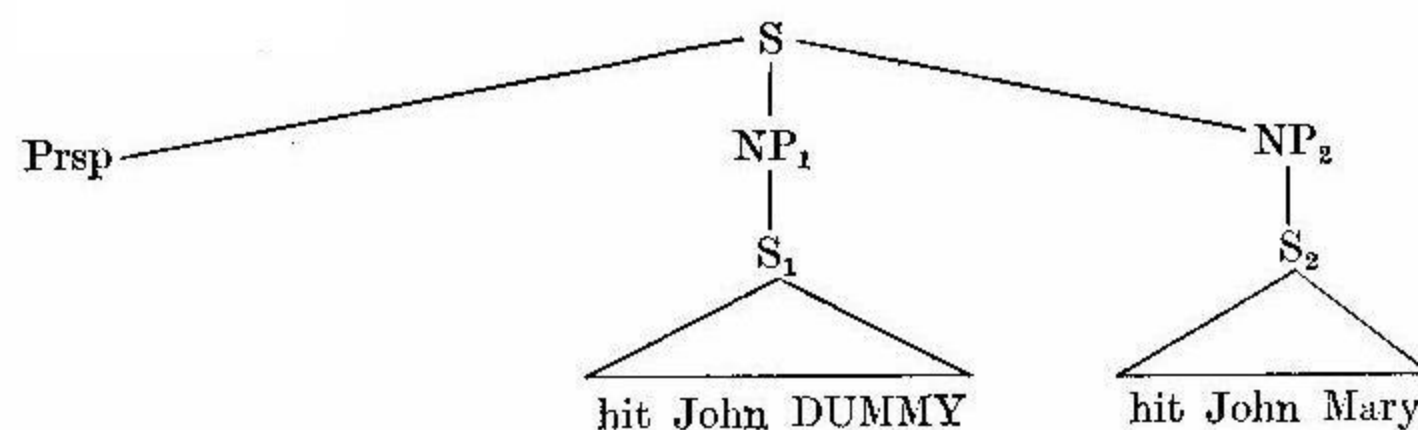


Fig. 1

Contrastive stress is assigned by a rule like the following (Muraki 1970 : 394) which applies to structure like Fig. 2:

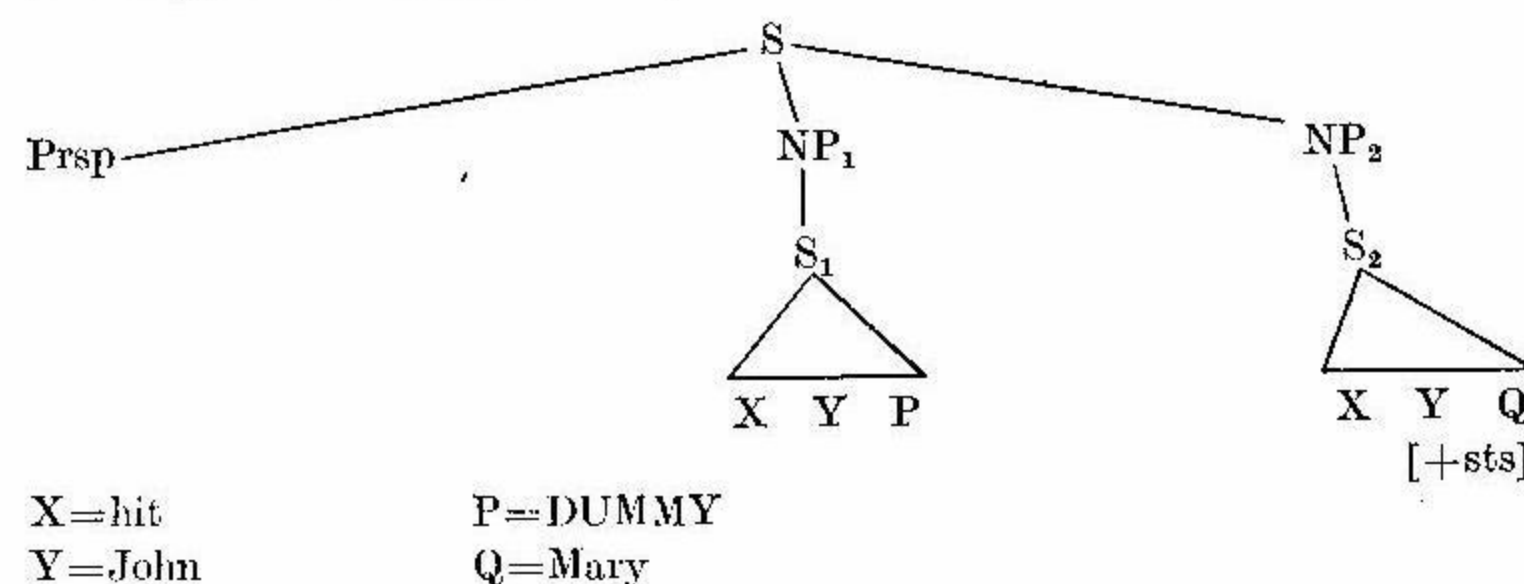


Fig. 2

The structural description of the rule is:

1. $s[Prsp S_1 S_2]$
2. For every constituent in S₁, there is a corresponding constituent in S₂.
3. Every S₁ constituent is either a dummy or identical to the corresponding S₂ constituent.

Its structural change is:

1. For every S node which satisfies the SD, specify each focus as [+sts]. (If a constituent in S₂ is not a dummy but corresponds to a dummy in S₁, it is called a 'focus').
2. If a non-terminal node is [-sts], all its constituents are also specified as [-sts].
3. Every constituent of the P-marker which is not specified as [+sts] will be [-sts].

For example, in Fig. 2 P=dummy and Q=Mary, therefore *Mary* is assigned

² i.e., "not to be defined by other predicates" (Muraki 1970:390).

contrastive stress; PRSP and NP₁ are deleted and the resulting surface form will be:

(1) John hit *Mary*

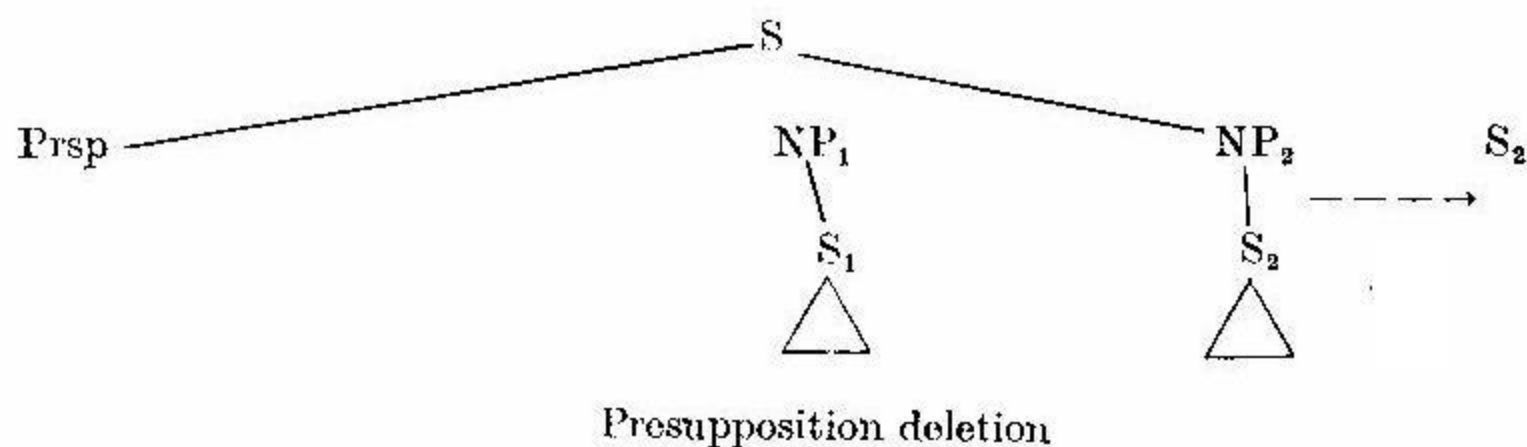


Fig. 3

Sentences like (2)a require a topicalization transformation that moves the stressed object-NP to the sentence initial position, after the rules of stress assignment and PRSP deletion have applied.

Polish sentences of the type (1)b have the same semantic structure as their English counterparts:

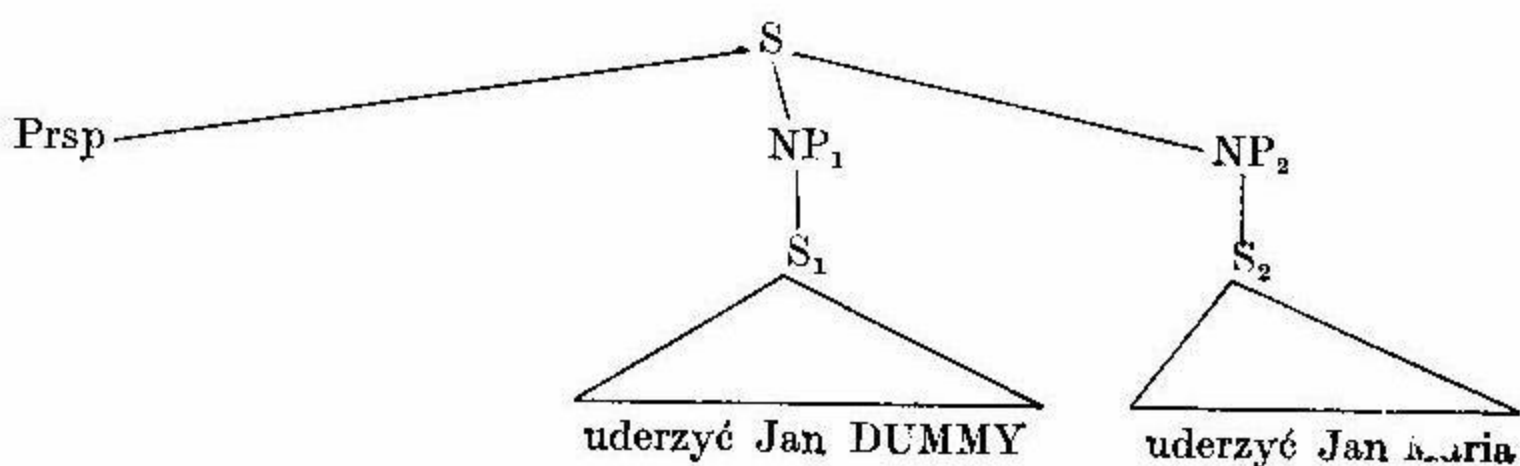


Fig. 4

They also undergo the obligatory and precyclic stress placement rule, and in case of (2)b the rule that moves the stressed item to the sentence initial position after the deletion of presupposition.

The semantic structure of (3) and (4) will look like the one shown above. After stress specification, however, the syntactic transformations apply in English. Let us analyse (3) first.

(3) It was *Mary* that John hit

The following is the structure after stress assignment:

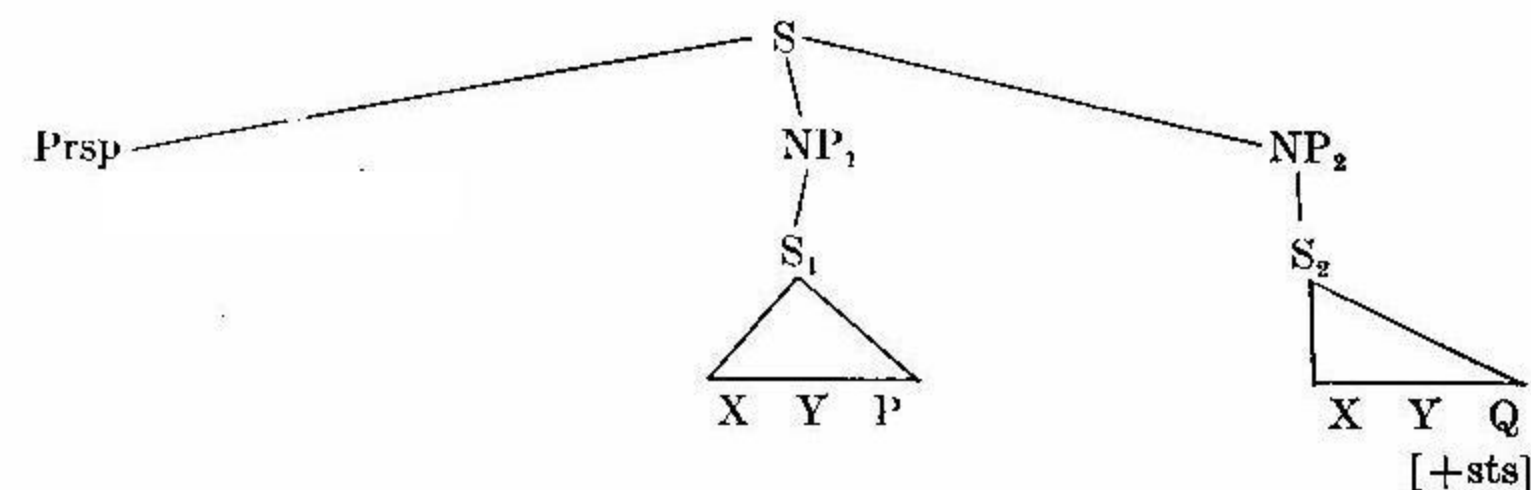


Fig. 5

The rule of cleft formation, which has the following SD now applies (Muraki 1970 : 393):

1. $s[\text{Prsp } S_1 \text{ } S_2]$
2. Q is a constituent in S_2 and includes a focus (i.e. *Mary*)
3. There is no focus outside of Q
4. is the S_1 constituent which corresponds to Q (dummy)

The processes involved in clefting include:

1. Chomsky-adjointing of *that/who*³ to S_1
2. Chomsky-adjointing of *it* to the left of the NP_1
3. Deletion of S_2 except Q
4. Deletion of P
5. Presupposition-copula substitution⁴
6. Subject preposing
7. Extraposition

The heavy (emphatic) stress and the post-copular position of *Mary* make it the focus of (3). This however, does not mean that in general, the clefted constituent is equivalent to the focus.

The structural description of cleft formation specifies that Q be a constituent in S_2 and INCLUDE a focus. If we take a NP like *an ex-convict with a red shirt* (Jackendoff 1972 : 233) we can distinguish four different elements that could become a focus in the cleft sentence, namely,

³ *That/who* are not the only forms that can occur in cleft sentences. *Whose, where,* or 'zero' are also possible. According to Quirk (1972 : 953) "*whom* and *which* are only marginally possible and it is virtually impossible to use *whom* and *which* preceded by a preposition". The sentence *It was the dog to which I gave the water* is not a cleft sentence.

⁴ Other forms of *be* are also possible, though less usual (cf. Quirk 1972 : 952), e.g.,
 (1) It must have been at night that the two cars collided.
 (2) It may have been Henry who hit Mary
 (3) It might be his brother that you saw

1. (an) ex-convict with a red shirt
2. with a red shirt
3. a red shirt
4. shirt

Since it is impossible to single any element out of a complex NP (Ross 1967), cleft sentences like (6) and (7) are unacceptable:

- (6) *It is *with a red shirt* that I saw an ex-convict
- (7) *It is *shirt* that I saw an ex-convict with a red

The third process involved in clefting was "delete S_2 except Q (=focus)". If, however, the focus is included in a complex NP, the deletion of the remainder of S_2 except for the stressed constituent will produce an unacceptable sentence:

- (8) *It was RED that I saw an ex-convict with a shirt

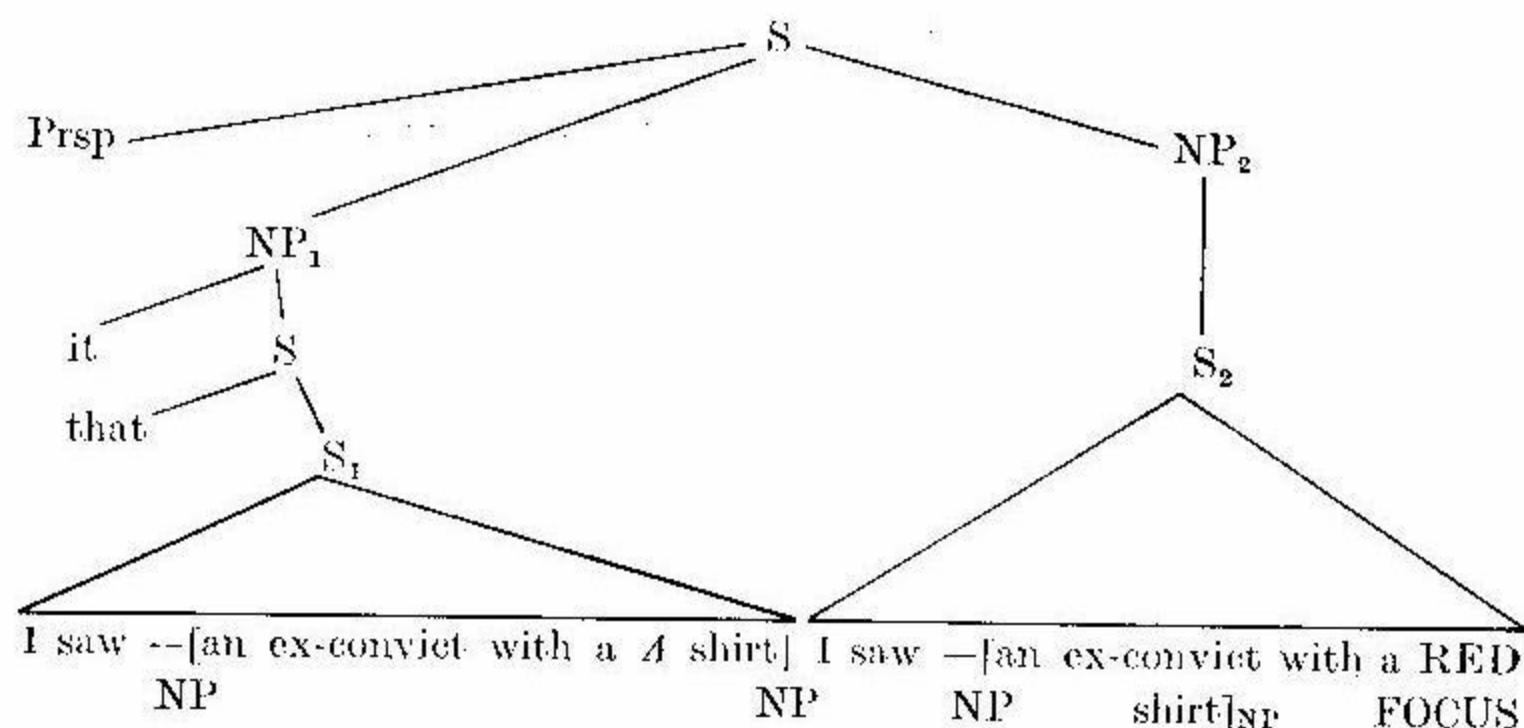


Fig.6

Thus process 3 as well as process 4 must be subject to the Ross constraints, i.e., in S_2 (NP_2) the entire NP containing the focus must remain in S_2 , and only the remainder of S_2 outside this NP must be deleted; and in S_1 (NP_1) the whole NP, not only the element corresponding to the focus in NP_2 , must be deleted.

The following example is ungrammatical because these processes of cleft formation violated another island constraint: the prohibition of movement of an element from a 'because' subordinate clause.

- (9) It was that decided to return because was ill.

This contrasts with (10), which involves no such violation: (10) It was because he was ill that we decided to return (Quirk 1972 : 953)

Additional examples are not difficult to construct.

The Polish sentence *To Marię Jan uderzył* has the same semantic representation as the one postulated for the English cleft sentence *It was Mary that*

John hit (cf. Fig. 4). If, however, we used the same derivational procedure as in case of the cleft sentence (3), at some stage of the derivation we would get an ungrammatical structure:

- (11) *To jest Maria, którą Jan uderzył

This structure could be more acceptable if we replaced *Maria* with a noun like *dziewczyna*

- (12) To jest dziewczyna, którą Jan uderzył

(12) however, is clearly a relative sentence, and not a sentence like (4), in which we identify a person who John hit with Mary. We could try to delete the copula, as it does not occur in (4). After all it does not always appear in the surface structure of other constructions either, e.g.

- (13) Połowa nowych książek to pamiętniki

- (14) A to niespodzianka!

- (15) To mój brat

In these examples, however, the copula is recoverable. It is used in the past and future (*to była niespodzianka!*), so in the present it is simply optional. In sentences like *To Marię Jan uderzył*, it never occurs, though, e.g.,

- (16) To dlatego chodzę czarno ubrana jak wrona

- a. *To jest dlatego chodzę czarno ubrana jak wrona

- (17) Przecież to właśnie dzięki tobie zawarliśmy pakt z Gustawem Szwedzkim (Sz. 1977 : 7)

- a. *Przecież to właśnie było dzięki tobie zawarliśmy...

Besides, even if the copula was present in the underlying structure and was later obligatorily deleted, how shall we explain the fact that NPs that occur after *to* can have various case forms depending on the sentence VP? The copula would impose the nominative case on them. Therefore, the presence of *to* without the copula cannot be attributed to the reduction of the *to jest* expression.

Now that we have rejected the possibility of the copula deletion, we will have to explain the presence of *to* in the analysed sentences. Doroszewski (1967) gives many examples for the use of *to*. *To* is defined as an "uninflected word of expressive character, enhancing or emphasizing words that it accompanies, parts of the sentence, or sentences in which it is used" (Doroszewski 1967 : 164; translation mine).

- (18) To się człowiek strachu najadł (164)

- (19) Ci dyplomaci to nie masz pojęcia ile to oni rzeczy wiedzą (164)

- (20) Zginę to zginę (165)

- (21) Jedyna przyjemność Wikty to stanąć pod bramą i patrzeć na świat (166)

- (23) Jej to dał jabłko a mnie nie

The above examples show that *to* can appear in various sentence positions and in front of various of its elements. We could, then, say that *to* in sentences

like (4) is the same type of emphatic pronoun that appears in the contiguity of the focus element in topicalized sentences.

The next thing to explain is the absence of relative pronoun in Polish sentences like (4). In English the relative pronoun *that* or *who* is necessary, as it joins two sentences *It was Mary* and *John hit Mary*. Again, we could delete that pronoun from the structure (11) — if, of course, we tried to adopt the same derivation as in case of the English cleft sentences. In English, for instance, *that* can be deleted when the focus element is an object NP, e.g.,

(24) It was Mary John hit

In Russian, the use of both the copula verb and relative pronoun is optional. Thus the sentence

(25) To Iwan dzwonił

may have the form

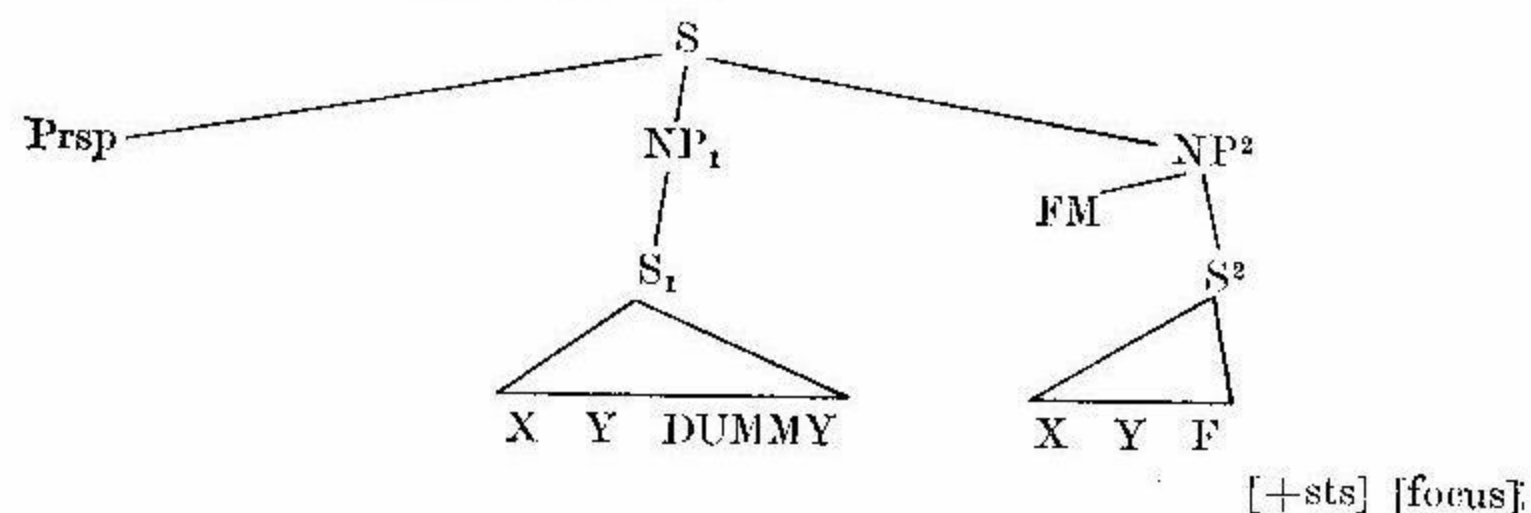
(25)a. Eto Iwan zvonil

or

(25)b. Eto byl Iwan kotoryj zvonil (Gundel 1976 : 6)

In Polish sentences with the initial *to* relative pronoun does not appear under any circumstances. Thus the obligatory deletion would be very weakly motivated. The absence of the relative pronoun in the Polish sentences would point to another derivational difference between the latter and the English clefts. In Polish the final product of the derivation is a simple sentence (*To Marię Jan uderzył*) whereas in English it is a complex one (*It was Mary that John hit*).

Summing up, we cannot use the same procedure in deriving Polish counterparts of English cleft sentences. The semantic structure of both is identical, and this enables us to consider them semantic equivalents. However, the transformations that apply to derive (3) and (4) are different. In case of the Polish sentences like (4) we use the following rules: first we assign stress to one of the elements (*Maria*), thus making it the focus of the sentence; then, we join the uninflected emphatic word *to*, which we will call the focus marker, to the left of focus element.



FM=focus marker

Fig. 7

Next all the elements of S_2 , except for the focus, are deleted. From S_1 we delete the empty element that semantically corresponds to the focus in S_2 . After the presupposition deletion, the focus together with the preceding *to* is shifted to the sentence initial position.

It should be emphasized that *to* in the analysed sentences can occur only at the beginning of the sentence.⁵

(26) To pieniądz był moim władcą, a nie pan (Sh 135) (it was money that used to be my master - 122)

(27) To tutaj zostanie zbudowany nowy uniwersytet
(it's here that a new university will be built)

In Polish focus sentences very often the focus element is accompanied by such words as *właśnie*, *dopiero*, *tylko*, *przecież* which are referred to as 'modulatory' (Jodłowski 1976 : 21). These words (and negation) undergo the so-called association with focus,⁶ e.g.,

(28) Właśnie te namiętności, co do których się mylimy tym bezwzględnie nas tyranizują (W22)

(29) To właśnie tutaj

(30) Pojechaliśmy tam dopiero w sobotę

The above-mentioned words, however, cannot be considered to be pure focus markers, since apart from specifying the focus they also carry some additional information about it. *To* on the other hand, has only an emphatic function. It points to the only possible element brought into the foreground of a given utterance.

Both English and Polish impose restrictions (in addition to the above-mentioned) on the constituents that can occur in the post-copular position of cleft sentences and in the focus position of the *to* — constructions. English cleft sentences can cleave out NPs, nominals, PPs and adverbials of time and place.

(31) It was *Bill* that John saw the other day (NP)

(32) It was *yesterday* that I talked to Jan (Adv)

(33) It was *in the garage* that Bill was murdered (PP)

(34) It is *writing books* that he likes most (nom)

The constituent that cannot appear in the focus position of cleft sentences include predicate nominatives and predicate adjectives (Emonds 1970 : 127), e.g.

(35) *It is *quite happy* that Bill is

(36) *It was *impudent* that Mary seemed

(37) *It was *sick* that children became

(38) *It was *tired* that he grew

⁵ *To* precedes focus element. It can only follow pronouns, e.g., On *to* właśnie kupił tę posiadłość.

⁶ Unlike *to*, they can occur in any sentence position.

- (39) *It's a *genius* that he is
 (40) *It's a *lecturer* that I am now (Quirk 1972 : 952)
 (41) ??It's *dark green* that we've painted the kitchen (marginally acceptable — Obj. Comp. cf. Quirk (1972 : 952))

Verb and participles do not lend themselves to clefting either:

- (42) *It's *blow up some buildings* that you should do
 (43) *It's *to buy a new house* that I wanted
 (44) *It's *playing for time* that they are doing
 (45) *It would be *for her to be late* that would upset me now (Emonds 1970 : 127)

Quirk (1972 : 952) suggests that "one could circumvent the restriction on V as focus by rendering the verb in a non-finite form either as an infinitive or as a participle:

It's *teach(ing)* that he does for a living"
 in which case "the verb DO comes into use". Even so, the above sentence sounds unacceptable to a number of native speakers of English.

There is also a restriction on cleaving out sentences.

- (46) *It was *that Mary came home early* that John was happy (about)
 (47) *It was *that they all leave early* that the teacher required.

In the Polish focus constructions, the elements that can be preceded by the initial emphatic *to* include NPs, nominals, PPs, time and place adverbials and PRO-forms, e.g.,

- (48) *To Jan* przyjechał (it's John who has arrived)
 (49) *To właśnie pisanie listów* nie znosił
 (it was writing letters that he could not stand)
 (50) *To właśnie w tym ogrodzie* zamordowano Billa
 (it was in this garden that Bill was murdered)
 (51) *To w ten sposób* trzeba wychowywać dzieci
 (it is this way that one should raise children)
 (52) *To ona* nauczyła ich tańczyć
 (it was she who taught them dancing)

Verbs, headless relative clauses, predicate nominatives and predicate adjectives cannot appear in the focus position marked by *to*, e.g.

- (53) **To uderzył* Marię Jan
 (54) **To geniuszem* Jan jest⁷
 (55) **To (właśnie) wysoki* Jan jest

Many of these restrictions may be syntactic rather than semantic in both languages. We will not discuss them in this paper.

Polish word order allows for more manipulation than English and fairly often what is cleaved out in English can be rendered in Polish not only by

⁷ We can say *Jan to geniusz*, where *geniusz* will be the focus. This sentence, however, is not the kind we are analysing.

means of lexical emphasis (*to*) but by changes in the word order (this being determined by stylistic considerations). In many cases, for instance, the sentence final position is chosen for the focus constituent, which occurs after the initial *it is* in English cleft sentences:

- (56) *Najsobtelniejsze poprawki do historii* nasuwały mu się *w gorączce zwi-rzeń* (H 125)
 (It was *in the heat of talk* that his finest emendations of history occurred to him — 133)

- (57) *Wszystko było winą* portretu (W 251)
 (It was the portrait that had done everything — 283)

- (58) *Musi teraz myśleć o sobie, o swojej przyszłości* (W 251)
 (It was of himself, and of his own future that he had to think — 283)

The focused constituent can sometimes appear at the beginning of a sentence and is marked for emphasis by means of word order changes, e.g.,

- (59) *Gracja pierwsza* dotrzymała słowa (vs *Gracja* dotrzymała słowa *pierwsza*) (H 83)

(It was Grace who first kept her promise (78))

- (60) *Piękność jego* pchnęła go do zguby, *piękność jego i młodość* (W 280)
 (It was his beauty that ruined him, his youth and beauty — 288)

Neither English cleft sentences nor the Polish focus constructions under discussion can begin a discourse. They require a preceding context of some kind, be it a sequence of sentences, situation or the context provided by the general knowledge of the speaker and the addressee. That requirement is not sufficient though, as the constructions in questions cannot be used in an arbitrarily chosen point of the discourse, c.f.:

- (61) John, Mary and Tom went to Spain last summer
 a. *It was *by train* that they got to Spain
 b. *It was *with difficulty* that they got there
 c. *It was *Philip* that they didn't take with them
 d. It was *there* that they found good jobs
 e. It was *then* that they got to know each other better
 d. It was *Tom* who suggested the whole trip

Similarly in Polish:

- (62) *Wieś, w której* mieszkała księgowa zostanie zalana
 a. **To właśnie* zbiornik, o którym mi mówiono w Warszawie powstanie tutaj
 b. *To właśnie* tutaj powstanie zbiornik, o którym mówiono mi w Warszawie (the village in which the book-keeper lives will be flooded. It's here that the reservoir I've been told about in Warsaw will be built)

In (66a - c) neither of the clefted phrases has an antecedent in the preceding sentence, nor is it the case with the focused constituents in the Polish sentence (67)a, whereas *there*, *then*, *Tom* (66d - f) and *tutaj* (67b) have their referents

n the sentence (66) and (67), respectively. What should be taken into account, then, is the notion of coreferentiality.

According to Lakoff (1971 : 261) "the semantic content of the focus is the assertion of coreferentiality". In his example *the TALL girl left* "it is presupposed that some girl left and it is presupposed that some girl is tall. The new information is that some girl who has left is coreferential with the girl who was presupposed to be tall". In the example like (68)

(68) It was *Mary* (that) John took out to dinner

we have the similar type of coreferentiality, i.e., it is presupposed that John took someone to dinner (Dummy in our semantic representation) and it is presupposed that Mary is "someone"; what is not presupposed is the identity of Mary with the person that John took out to dinner.

We think a similar relation of coreferentiality must exist between the focus constructions in question and the sentences with which they can form sequences. Notice that many focus sentences contain a pro-form in the focus position, which presupposes the presence of an antecedent in the preceding context. This illustrated by (66d - e), (67b) and the following:

(69) The year I left, we took separate holidays, and it was *then* that I decided that our marriage was over.

(70) ... but a great deal of intonational and phonetic preparations has been taking place for some three months previously, and it is *this* we wish to reflect...

(71) ... Herbert uśmiechał się w ten sam sposób — nagłym uśmiechem pełnym dobrodusznej życzliwości. *Ten* uśmiech właśnie uniemożliwił, przynajmniej w moim wypadku, potraktowanie go z należytą bezwzględnością (H 38).

It would not be correct, however, to say that focus constructions can form a coherent sequence only with sentences that contain a constituent that corresponds to the focused element. The "intersentential coreference" in the following sentences, for instance does not involve lexical items repeated in the focus position of S_{loc} either in their original form or as their pro-forms:

(72) Still, it was her business and in no way mine. If she felt that she could be happy with Rodney, well, then, poor idiot! let her be happy. And so on. It was *with reflections like these* that I solaced myself (H 81)

(73) He would come to my house for dinner. I'll never forget the flurry of these preparations — putting flowers in vases, changing sheets, thumping knots out of pillows, trying to cook, putting on make-up and keeping my brush near by in case he arrived early. The agony of it! It was *with difficulty* I answered the doorbell, when it finally rang (O 14)

(74) The famous experiments of Pavlov (...) showed how dogs can be conditioned to salivate to the signal of a bell. But it is not only animals that can be 'brainwashed' in this way (S. T.)

Let us look at the general principle governing the coherence of the discourse. The main prerequisite of a coherent sequence of sentences is that some logical connection obtain between them. Such a connection can be, for instance provided by a distinctive common topic (Ruhl 1973) the sentences share. In the sequences we have quoted, the topic is made explicit by selecting one of the few mentioned individuals from the preceding context and repeating it either in the form of a definite noun, or a pro-form, or some semantically related phrase. The selected (identified) element is assigned heavy stress and function of comment (focus) (cf. Dijk 1972). Thus the relation between focus constructions and the preceding text involves a coreference between the presupposition of S_n (focus construction) and the presupposition of the preceding sentence(s). The focused constituent, then, must be 'semantically coreferential' with some constituent or constituents in the preceding context.

Lakoff (1971 : 70) says that "an anaphoric expression may have as its antecedent an expression which is not in the sentence itself, nor in the presuppositions of the sentence but in some line of deduction based on those presuppositions". This, in a very general way, could account for the well-formedness of the sequences quoted above. These principles, however, are as yet ill-defined and are not statable in any more precise way. Further research is necessary to arrive at any sort of solution to this problem.

SUMMARY

The relation holding between English cleft sentences and Polish sentences with the initial focus marker *to* is that of semantic equivalence, i.e., they have the same semantic representations. The diversification begins at the level of transformations which bring about a change of the syntactic structure in case of English and insert lexical exponents of focus in Polish. Both English and Polish focus constructions impose similar restrictions on the elements permissible in their focus position. Their distribution in the text is similar, i.e., they can follow sentences whose presuppositions are coreferential with the presuppositions they contain.

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