A Corpus-based Study of the Pragmatic and Syntactic Functions of Cleft Constructions in Newspaper Editorials

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Abstract: The aim of this corpus-based study is to analyze the frequency in the use of three types of cleft constructions (*it-clefts, wh-clefts*, and *reversed wh-clefts*) in newspaper editorials of three English dailies in the United Arab Emirates. More specifically, the paper is concerned with the syntactic distribution of clefts in this journalistic corpus and the extent to which this distribution might have a bearing on the pragmatic functions of clefts in editorial discourse. These cleft constructions are not only different in giving prominence to different elements, they also differ in the way they organize information and in the kind of prominence they give to the highlighted elements. The choice of one rather than another of these three clefts is determined by various syntactic and pragmatic factors. The results obtained from the analysis show that the relatively high frequency of *it*-clefts in this journalistic corpus can be keyed to two factors. First, *it*-clefts create persuasive discourse, a typical feature of newspaper editorials. Second, since stress-marking is absent in written discourse, writers use *it*-clefts to direct the reader into a particular reading of the information structure. Reversed *wh*-clefts including those introduced by a demonstrative have a low distribution in this journalistic corpus. This is not unduly surprising since both clefts are more popular in spoken English.

1. Introduction

The term "cleft" has traditionally been used in grammar to refer to a sentence which has been divided into two parts, whereby the clefted constituent expresses a focus and the relative clause expresses a pragmatic presupposition (Prince 1978).[1] This type of construction constitutes one of the main focusing devices available in many languages. According to Givón (2001: 247), contrastive focus is usually coded in language by three coding means, namely intonation (stress or tone), word order, and morphology. Cross-linguistically, intonation is probably the most common coding device in language, and is always present regardless of the simultaneous use of word-order or morphology.[2] Speakers focus on constituents to highlight the information they carry, to contrast one piece of information with another, to introduce new information, to reintroduce information that has already been mentioned but dropped, to shift the listener's attention to another entity or topic of conversation, or to emphasize a piece of information. Clefting, one of the syntactic mechanisms of focus marking, has to do with highlighting constituents, making them stand out from the surrounding constituents in a clause or sentence. In English (a rigid word order language), cleft constructions provide the maximal combination of the three coding elements of focus (Givón 2001: 247). Conversely, since intonation is absent in

the written language, morphology and word order are utilized in order to produce contrastive focus. Before turning to the analysis of the cleft sentences in this journalistic corpus, I will briefly introduce the theoretical background essential to an explanatory account of their discourse functions.

Syntactically, clefting involves the splitting of a sentence into two clauses, thereby focusing a certain sentence constituent, the clefted element. The most common types are the cleft sentence and the pseudo-cleft sentence.[3] Both types differ in focus assignment and allow different constituents to be highlighted. In *it*-clefts, subject and object NPs, PPs, as well as adverb phrases occur most frequently (Biber *et al*. 1999: 959); Collins 1991: 56; Quirk et al. 1985: 1385-1386; Ward, Birner and Huddleston 2002: 1418), while VP focusing or highlighting is ungrammatical.[4] The following are examples of cleft constructions:

1. a. It was John who broke the vase on the table
    b. What John broke was the vase on the table
    c. The vase on the table was what John broke

The sentences in (1) illustrate the two main types of cleft constructions: (1a) is called '*it*-cleft', and (1b) and (1c) are *wh*-clefts (also called 'pseudo-cleft'), in their basic and reversed version, respectively. *It*-Cleft and *wh*-cleft sentences may be connected to a simpler, undivided sentence (2):

2. John broke the vase on the table.

The cleft pronoun is an anticipatory *it*, which does not carry any information, but only signals that the content of the real subject will be expressed later in the same sentence (Quirk et al. 1985: 89).[5] The anticipatory *it* is followed by the copula *be* sometimes accompanied by the negative adverb *not*. Quirk et al. (1985: 1386) also claim that even modal verbs are possible instead of the verb *be*. The anticipatory *it* is always followed by a singular verb, even when the focused constituent is plural (Akmajian 1970: 156; Heycock and Kroch 2002:147).[6]

The clefted noun phrase in (1a), the focused element, represents the most important piece of information. Thus, cleft sentences are a means for indicating focus.[7] The focused constituent has been given several labels in the literature. For example, Huddleston (1984) and Collins (1991) use the term 'highlighted element' while Hedberg (1990), Lambrecht (2001) and Pavey (2004) employ the term 'clefted constituent'.

The focused element is separated from the rest of its clause by a "relative-like dependent clause introduced by *that, who/which,* or *zero*." (Biber et al. 1999: 959) However, *wh*-pronouns have been claimed to be highly restricted and rare when compared to *that* and *zero* (Quirk et al. 1985: 1386). As we are going to see later, the results obtained from this journalistic corpus confirm that the pronoun *that* is more common than *wh*-pronouns.

The cleft clause may be omitted when the content is already in focus. Hedberg (2000) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1417) call it a "truncated *it*-cleft". Consider the following example from Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1417)

3.   A: Who finished off the biscuits?
       B: I don't know; it certainly wasn't me.

The truncated clause (*it certainly wasn't me*) may be analyzed as the *it*-cleft (*It certainly wasn´t me that finished off the biscuits*) from which the *that*-clause has been omitted. In this particular example the *that*-clause is omitted because the information is recoverable from the context.

The other structure that lays emphasis on particular elements in a sentence is the *wh*-cleft (both basic and reversed) structure (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1420), as in:

4.   What John wanted was a hot bath.
5.   A hot bath was what John wanted.

While the example in (4) represents the typical form of a basic *wh*-cleft construction, (5) shows the use of a reversed *wh*-cleft. Basically, the *wh*-cleft starts with the *wh*-element, which occurs as the subject and which is followed by a form of the verb *be*. The focused element is put in the final position after the verb *be* and thus occurs as the subject complement. The reversed *wh*-cleft starts with the focused element in the position of the subject, which is followed by the copular verb and the *wh*-clause, which occurs as the subject complement. However, the noun phrase *a hot bath*, which represents the focus of the cleft construction, functions as the object as the original non-cleft structure is *John wanted a hot bath*.

Wh-clefts also have NPs appearing in focus position, but more typically serve to highlight VPs (bare and marked with *to*) and finite content clauses (Collins 1991: 58; Ward, Birner and Huddleston 2002: 1418ff.). The so-called reversed *wh*-cleft, in which the order of the *wh*- and cleft-clause is simply reversed, is limited as to the type of focused constituent that can occur. The vast majority of reversed *wh*-clefts have the deictic demonstratives *that* or *this* as initial elements (Collins 1991: 139; Weinert and Miller 1996: 177; Oberlander and Delin 1996: 189).[8] They typically occur with an additional *wh*-element, such as *what, where, when, why*, and *how* (Collins 1991: 28).

From a pragmatic point of view, cleft constructions consist of two parts, the "foregrounded" part, which contains the highlighted information, and the "backgrounded" part (Huddleston, Pullum 2002: 1414; Collins 2006: 1707).[9] In other words, clefts are considered to be structures consisting of a 'focus', which represents new, and a *wh/that-clause* which represents 'presupposed' or 'old' information. For example, if we apply these concepts to

6.   These illegal operators act beyond the scope of the law, using chemicals of dubious origin and with fatal consequence if used without proper care and attention. And <u>it is innocent neighbours who bear the toll for their unscrupulous actions</u>. Municipalities across the UAE have tried to enforce mandatory licencing to force pesticide operators to use products that are property regulated.
       *Gulf News_* Use of illegal pesticides a scourage_ July 5, 2013.

We would say that 'some people bear the toll for their unscrupulous actions' is presupposed and that the copula exhaustively identifies the bearers of the

unscrupulous actions 'innocent people' (i.e. the focused element/new information). Being exhaustive, the identifying relation of the copula excludes any other possible explanation of who would bear the toll for the unscrupulous actions (cf. Prince 1978; Declerck 1988; Delin 1995 among others). As for *wh*-clefts and reversed *wh*-clefts, consider the following:

7. What condemns this scenario more darkly is the continuing spate of rapes.
    *Gulf News_* Crimes against women in India need to be immediately checked_ June 7, 2013.
8. The continuing spate of rapes is what condemns this scenario more darkly.

One of the functions of *wh*-clefts is to mark the information in the *wh*-clause as given. This information is often given in the preceding linguistic context, and the hearer has to infer it from the context. The *wh*-clause in the above example expresses the presupposed proposition (e.g. 'something condemns this scenario'), and the focus phrase provides a value for the variable in the presupposed proposition (e.g., 'the continuing spate of rapes').[10]

The complexity of these constructions is evident in each of the levels, as well as in the intricate relationships holding between them. As a consequence, they have received continued attention from grammarians, who are interested in accounting for their syntactic anomalies, and from pragmaticians, who focus more on their informative functions. On the other hand, clefts are sensitive to differences in registers: in colloquial English, for example *wh*-clefts (especially reversed) are very popular while *it*-clefts are more common in written discourse or what Collins (1991: 214) calls 'rhetorical genres'.

In this corpus study, I will try to prove that the structural meaning of a cleft sentence is precisely to express these two components: the focused constituent inherently expresses a particular type of focus, namely an 'exhaustive' focus, and the cleft clause inherently expresses a pragmatic presupposition.

1.1. Objectives of the study

The aim of this paper is not to explore the hidden strategies involved in conveying ideological messages to the editorials' readers but to investigate some syntactic and pragmatic aspects of the language that the writers of these editorials use. More specifically, the paper is concerned with the syntactic distribution of clefts in this journalistic corpus and the extent to which this distribution might have a bearing on the pragmatic functions of clefts in editorial discourse. The paper also aims at investigating whether frequency information from this journalistic register can be applied to teaching.

1.2. Significance of the study

The significance of this study stems from the significance of corpus-based studies of English grammar which have become a valuable

pedagogical resource, giving rise to a new approach to the creation of teaching materials. One of the strengths of this corpus study lies in its empirical nature, which makes linguistic analysis more objective. The second advantage of this corpus study is the frequency information which can help with decisions about what to teach and when to teach it. For example, the use of grammatical structures in textbooks for teaching English grammar differs considerably from the use of these structures in native speakers' English. Consequently, learners often find it difficult to communicate successfully with native speakers. However, with the availability of the frequency information that can be obtained from corpus analyses, it is now possible to ensure coverage of the most common usage patterns.

2. Method
2.1. Data collection
I began this study to find out whether cleft sentences occurred at all in newspaper editorials and, if so, what conclusions could be drawn about their function in this specific register. The term 'register' is used to refer to 'a variety of language defined according to its use in social situations, e.g. a register of scientific, religious, formal English' (Crystal 2008: 409). The small corpus (90 editorials) used for analysis in this study was compiled using the online edition of three newspapers: The *Gulf News* (http://gulfnews.com), *Khaleej Times* (http://www.khaleejtimes.com), and *The National* (http://www.thenational.ae). These three papers were selected because they are the major serious daily newspapers in the United Arab Emirates. The sample editorials were randomly collected during the months of June and July, 2013. These editorials were downloaded, printed, and then subjected to the careful analysis of the cleft structures. In addition, a database was created so that all the examples found in the corpus were carefully analyzed taking into consideration the following parameters: clause type, non-cleft variant of each example (whenever possible), form and function of the highlighted element, element introducing the relative clause, and information structure. The editorials were also converted to Microsoft Word documents to do the word count. Although I do not claim to have uncovered all the cleft sentences in this corpus, I have read through all the editorials and am confident that I have a representative inventory. The corpus contains about 30,000 words: 8,305 from *Gulf News*, 10, 309 from *Khaleej Times*, and 10, 980 from *The National*.

2.2 Corpus Findings
Once collected, the cleft samples were sorted into one of three categories: *it*-cleft, *wh*-cleft, and reversed *wh*-cleft. Table 2. provides the frequency of the three clefts in the corpus.

Table 1. Number of words in each newspaper editorial corpus

Newspaper	Number of editorials	Number of words
Gulf News	30	8, 305
Khaleej Times	30	10, 309
The National	30	10, 980
Total	90	29, 594

Table 2. Frequency of cleft constructions in the corpus

Type of cleft	Gulf News	Khaleej Times	The National	Total
It-clefts	10	14	7	31
Wh-clefts	5	9	11	25
Reversed wh-clefts	3	3	1	7
Total	18	26	19	63

The figures in the table above show that the use of the three types of clefts is relatively similar in this type of register. However, the number of examples of each kind of cleft in each newspaper is not the same. Both *it*-clefts (7 examples) and reversed *wh*-clefts (1 example) are not common in *The National*. *It*-clefts and *wh*-clefts seem to be more common in *Khaleej Times* (23 examples) than in the other two newspapers. Apart from being the least common type in this corpus, reversed *wh*-clefts are evenly used in both *Gulf News* (3 examples) and *Khaleej Times* (3 examples).

2. 3. Distribution of it-Clefts

Even though all of the cleft types are used to give prominence to the specific piece of information, they are not identical. Some important differences are not only in the form in which clefts are realized, but also in the types of elements on which emphasis can be placed, or where the focused element is placed. Thus the *it*-cleft and *wh*-cleft constructions found in the editorials will be described and compared and their form, function and syntactic and communicative aspects will be presented.

According to Prince (1978: 884) and Quirk et al. (1985: 1386ff), the categories that can be focused in an *it*-cleft are NPs, ADVs and PPs. The findings of this study indicate that the form of the focused element in the editorials belongs to four different grammatical categories as shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Form of the focused element in *it*-clefts

Type of XP	NP	PP	AdvP	Adjunct Clause
Frequency	28	1	1	1

Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1418) and Collins (1991: 56) argue that noun phrases are the most common constituents that occupy the highlighted position in *it*-clefts. This argument is borne out by the number of NPs occupying the focused positions in the editorials analyzed. No examples of APs or VPs occupying focused positions were found in the corpus.

1. It is <u>an initiative</u> that deserves recognition — and implementation by other health providers across the UAE.
   *Gulf News_* Abu Dhabi shows the way with free vaccinations_ June 17, 2013.

2. Interestingly, it's not <u>her eccentric style of playing</u> that is attracting the criticism, it's her physical appearance.
   Khaleej Times_ The game of sexism_ 12 July 2013

3. More recently it has been <u>the dictatorial style of the Prime Minister</u>, Nouri Al Maliki, that has crippled Iraq's progress.
   *The National_* End sanctions that stifle Iraq's recovery_ Jun 24, 2013.

Adverb and prepositional phrases are not particularly common (only 2 examples) in this corpus.

4. It was <u>for those offences</u> that she was sent to prison, not for being a victim of rape.
   The National_ Rape case offers lessons both in the UAE and abroad_ 23 July, 2013.

5. The teenage icon from Pakistan has made a strong point. Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by the Taleban and is now a leading campaigner for children's right to education, proudly told the United Nations on Friday that books and pens scare the extremists, and, it is <u>here</u> that the world needs to invest.
   *Khaleej Times_* Hear Malala out_ 14 July 2013.

Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1418) claim that declarative content clauses (i.e. subordinate *that*-clauses) cannot generally be placed in focus position in *it*-clefts. However, the focused clause is possible when it is an adjunct time subordinate clause, as illustrated in this example:

6. It is <u>only when the Lebanese tire of this militia in their midst</u> that Hizbollah, having proved its allegiance to foreign powers, having brought brief glory but much misery to Lebanon, will be stripped of its weapons.
   *The National_* EU's decision on Hizbollah militia is a heavy blow_ 24 July, 2013.

Quirk et al. (1985: 18.27) emphasize the flexibility of *it*-cleft sentences as regards the syntactic function of the focused element, which may assume the function of subject, direct object, adverbial of time and position and, marginally, the function of indirect object and object complement. The elements in focus

position in the instances found in this corpus fulfill three main syntactic functions: subject, object, and adjunct, as Table 4 illustrates.

Table 4. Function of the focused element in *it*-clefts

Function	Gulf News	Khaleej Times	The National	Total
Subject	9	12	4	25
Object	1	1	1	3
Adjunct	0	1	2	3
Total	10	14	7	31

The most frequent function realized by the focused element is that of subject (25 out of 31); this is not surprising, because – as shown above – the most frequent form of the focused element is that of noun phrase, which typically performs the subject function.

7. It is <u>the courage and steadfast determination of these girls</u> that [Subject]_____ will make education for women a reality.
    *Gulf News_* Malala symbolizes the will to fight extremism_ July 13, 2013

Noun phrases also function as direct objects in *it-clefts*; however, they are not so common (3/31).

8. If it is <u>democracy</u> that the Egyptians want [Object]_____, they need to stop thinking of it as a panacea that will cure all of Egypt's problems in a matter of days.
    *Khaleej Times_* People power in Egypt_ 5 July 2013

Adjuncts, which are realized either by prepositional phrases (1 example), adverb phrases (1 example) in or finite subordinate clauses (1 example), are rare in this corpus.

9. It was <u>for those offences</u> that she was sent to prison, not for being a victim of rape.
    *The National_* Rape case offers lessons both in the UAE and abroad_ 23 July, 2013.

10. The teenage icon from Pakistan has made a strong point. Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by the Taleban and is now a leading campaigner for children's right to education, proudly told the United Nations on Friday that books and pens scare the extremists, and, it is <u>here</u> that the world needs to invest.
    *Khaleej Times_* Hear Malala out_ 14 July 2013

11. It is only <u>when the Lebanese tire of this militia in their midst</u> that Hizbollah, having proved its allegiance to foreign powers, having brought brief glory but much misery to Lebanon, will be stripped of its weapons.

> *The National_* EU's decision on Hizbollah militia is a heavy blow_ 24 July, 2013.

According to Quirk et al (1985: 1386-7), the relative clause in *it*-celft sentences is normally introduced by *that*; the *wh*-forms are rare in comparison with *that*. This is confirmed by the data from this journalistic corpus in which the most common word that introduces the subordinate relative clause is *that*.

Table 5. Elements introducing the subordinate clause in it-clefts

Word	Gulf News	Khaleej Times	The National	Total
THAT	7	12	6	25
WHO	3	1	0	4
WHICH	0	1	0	1
ZERO	0	0	1	1
Total	10	14	7	31

The table shows that the word *that* is preferred to *wh*-relatives. *That* appears after any type of antecedent in these constructions, whatever their category may be.

12. The reality is that <u>it is the National Front **that** is akin to the principles of the Nazi party</u> — instead of targeting Jews, it targets Muslims.
    *Gulf News_* Removing immunity for Le Pen just the right step_ July 3, 2013

13. Of course, spying was a flourishing trade even back when "hacking" more usually involved swords. <u>It is humans, not gadgets, **that** can't keep secrets</u>.
    *The National_* The NSA can't bug this_ July 14, 2013

14. The fight, persistence and toil of world-class athletes leaves us awe-inspired because <u>it's these qualities **that** define the human spirit and its resilience</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* The sportsman spirit_ 13 July 2013

The high frequency of *that* can be attributed to its semantic 'flexibility'. While the antecedent of *that* can be both human (3 instances) and non-human (20 instances), *who* requires a human antecedent.

The word *who* appears 4 times in this corpus. In all these occurrences the antecedent of the word *who* refers to humans:

15. It is the paying public <u>who</u> contributes to the BCCI's vast revenues.
    *Gulf News_*BCCI chief makes a mockery of his office_ June 3, 2013.

16. …using chemicals of dubious origin and with fatal consequence if
    used without proper care and attention. And it is innocent
    neighbours <u>who</u> bear the toll for their unscrupulous actions.
    *Gulf News*_ Use of illegal pesticides a scourage_ July 5, 2013

17. The common response is the refusal to face up to individual
    responsibility — in most cases it is men <u>who</u> argue against facts,
    primary among which is the observation that male infertility is
    […]
    Gulf News _Free infertility treatment brings hope to many _ 25
    Juy, 2013.

18. It's not only the Bolivian government officials <u>who</u> are incensed
    by the incident, even the public in the Latin American country is
    indignant vis-à-vis the West.
    *Khaleej Times*_ The messy manhunt_ 10 July 2013

Since the pronoun *who* is usually used in restrictive and non-restrictive
relative clauses after a human antecedent, it seems that the writers of these
editorials try to apply the same rule in *it-clefts*.

I also found two examples: one introduced by the word *which* and another
with no *wh*-word (or zero-relative) introducing the relative clause:

19. It's not only autocracies <u>which</u> have struggled to contain the
    deluge of angry protesters, democratic regimes too have been
    challenged by mass rallies.
    *Khaleej Times*_ Brazil's conciliatory approach_11 July 2013

20. In theory these would be welcome changes. <u>It's the practice [Ø]</u>
    <u>we wonder about</u>.
    *The National*_End sanctions that stifle Iraq's recovery_ Jun 24,
    2013

The zero-relative is possible here because the relativized element
functions as the direct object of 'wonder about'.[11] Examples of this kind are
more common in the spoken language, as this use of the zero relative is
restricted to informal and non-standard speech in the case of restrictive relative
clauses.

2. 4. Distribution of Wh-clefts
As regards *wh*-cleft syntactic constructions, there are several aspects that had to
be considered: the form of the focused element, its syntactic function and the
wh-form that introduces the relative clause. The elements that *Wh*-clefts choose
to place in the focus position differ from those selected by *it*-clefts.

Table 6. Form of the focused element in *wh*-clefts

Form	NP	Finite Clause		Bare Infinitive	*to*-Infinitive	AdjP
		that	wh-			
Frequency	15	5	2	1	1	1

In the editorials analyzed here, six categories of elements are focused. Unsurprisingly, noun phrases are the most typical ones:

21. What condemns this scenario more darkly is <u>the continuing spate of rapes</u>.
    *Gulf News_* Crimes against women in India need to be immediately checked_ June 7, 2013.

22. What is required at this point of time is <u>a conciliatory tone and efforts to patch-up with divergent schools of political thought</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* Killings in Cairo_ 9 July 2013

23. What is needed is <u>a new political direction</u> and while the new leadership in Cairo makes these difficult decisions, it will need financial support.
    *The National_*UAE aid to Cairo shows bond of long friendship_ Jul 11, 2013

Finite clauses are also common in this corpus:

24. What is significant is <u>that the European Parliament decided to remove the immunity clause</u>.
    *Gulf News_* Removing immunity for Le Pen just the right step_ July 3, 2013

25. Amid such crossfire of accusations what is happening is <u>that social security is being compromised, and instability is gathering momentum</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* Killings in Cairo_ 9 July 2013

26. What is instructive is <u>how the leaders of the two countries have dealt with the challenge</u>.
    *The National_* A tale of two countries_Jun 24, 2013

27. But what is not obvious is <u>whether this would translate directly to the UAE</u>.
    *The National_* Local research key to diabetes remedy_ Jul 14, 2013

There is only one instance of each of the following categories: an adjective phrase, a bare infinitive, and a to-infinitive:

28. *What happens next in either country is* <u>unknowable</u>, but Ms Rousseff's approach of listening to the people is definitely more constructive than Mr Erdogan's ham-fisted fuelling of the flames of discontent.
    *The National_*A tale of two countries_Jun 24, 2013

29. There are various theories as to what was going on, including that those who go to McDonald's are a self-selecting group; they know it is harmful but they simply do not care. Or perhaps it's that too many of us believe, to our peril, that a little bit more of *what we fancy will always* <u>do us good</u>.
    *The National_* Food for thought_ 26 July, 2013.

30. But *what he can't do and shouldn't do at all is* <u>to devastate the public sector by making it nonfictional</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* Greece boils_17 July, 2013.

As is the case with *it*-clefts, noun phrases, typically functioning as subjects and objects, are the most common focused elements in *wh*-clefts. However, while *it*-clefts serve to focus shorter subject/object NPs, the focused part in *wh*-clefts is significantly longer than in *it*-clefts because *wh*-clefts are the preferred option for focusing heavy NPs (cf. Prince 1978: 880ff).[12] Consider the following examples:

31. What is required at this point of time is <u>a conciliatory tone and efforts to patch-up with divergent schools of political thought</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* Killings in Cairo_ 9 July 2013

32. What Egypt needs now is <u>leaders who can put aside their political differences, overcome real and perceived injustices and work for the good of the whole country</u>.
    *Gulf News_* Egypt cannot be run from the streets_ July 12, 2013

33. What Iraq needs at this point of time is <u>good governance with a stringent check on unscrupulous elements</u>.
    Khaleej Times _ Iraq's jailbreak shock_ 25 July, 2013.

34. And yet, well into the third year of the Syrian conflict, there are no good options, no certainties. What the West, and especially the United States, needs to weigh are <u>the consequences of not arming the rebels</u>.
    *The National_* No good options as Syria's war hits stalemate_ July 22, 2013.

Let us consider the non-cleft counterparts of (31-34). In these instances, the focused element functions as subject and object:

35. <u>A conciliatory tone and efforts to patch-up with divergent schools of political thought</u> is required at this point of time.

36. <u>The continuing spate of rapes</u> condemns this scenario more darkly.

37. At this point of time, Iraq needs <u>good governance with a stringent check on unscrupulous elements</u>.

38. The West, and especially the United States, needs to weigh <u>the consequences of not arming the rebels</u>.

Finite noun clauses also appear in typical syntactic positions (subject):

39. But what is not obvious is <u>whether this would translate directly to the UAE</u>.
    *The National_*Local research key to diabetes remedy_ Jul 14, 2013

40. What is more troubling is <u>that the opposition has so far failed to condemn the attack</u>, <u>saying the victims were armed fighters who had attacked rebel groups to help the regime retake a vital checkpoint</u>.
    *The National_*Support Syria's moderates to stop sectarians_ 14 June, 2013.

41. What is significant is <u>that the European Parliament decided to remove the immunity clause</u>.
    *Gulf News_* Removing immunity for Le Pen just the right step_July 3, 2013

The non-cleft counterparts of the above examples are:

42. Whether this would translate directly to the UAE is not obvious.

43. That the opposition has so far failed to condemn the attack, saying the victims were armed fighters who had attacked rebel groups to help the regime retake a vital checkpoint is more troubling.

44. That the European Parliament decided to remove the immunity clause is significant.

There is one example of object complement realized by a noun phrase:

45. What Sheikh Hazza in Cairo called the tradition of the UAE supporting the Egyptian people is <u>a bond of friendship between two Arab peoples</u>.
    *The National_*UAE aid to Cairo shows bond of long friendship_ July 11, 2013

The non-cleft counterpart of this example is as follows:

46. Sheikh Hazza in Cairo called [Direct Object the tradition of the UAE supporting the Egyptian people] [Object Complement a bond of friendship between two Arab peoples].

   Prince (1978: 885) pointed out that *wh*-clefts differ from *it*-clefts as regards the kind of noun phrase that can be focused. She claims that *wh*-clefts can focus only inanimate NPs whereas the *it*-clefts can focus both animate and inanimate NPs. In our corpus, however, the findings present a challenge to Prince's claim since we found *wh*-clefts focusing NPs that are inanimate (4 examples out of 25).

2. 5. Distribution of Reversed wh-clefts

The difference between *wh*-clefts and reversed *wh*-clefts is that the headless relative appears in subject position in the former and in predicate position in the latter. As regards this corpus, two types of reversed *wh*-clefts are found: those

that are not introduced by a demonstrative (3 examples) and those that are introduced by a demonstrative (4 examples):[13]

47. <u>The difficulty of the task is what draws people to it</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* Pinnacle of achievement_ 1 July 2013

48. The new anti-rape law has more muscle and includes a wider range of offences, <u>but its implementation across the country is what will determine if India can actually flex this muscle</u>.
    *Gulf News_*Crimes against women in India need to be immediately checked_ June 7, 2013.

49. If <u>democracy is what the Egyptians want</u>, then perpetual protests on the streets are not what will get them a representative government.
    *Khaleej Times_* Egypt's perpetual crisis_ 27 July, 2013.

50. Hezbollah's political and international affairs wing had been a success in making a point because they, unlike many of their likes elsewhere, adhered to the call of reason, especially from Western countries, Asia and Africa. <u>That is why the government of Lebanon had officially time and again requested the EU good offices to desist from moving against Hezbollah</u>, as the party held direct stakes in peace.
    Khaleej Times _ EU's Hizbollah verdict_ 23 July, 2013.

51. The opposition are frightened that they have lost the initiative for the moment, but are holding on to large swathes of territory. Neither side sees any point in talking. <u>This is why the Friends of Syria were right to offer urgent military support to the opposition</u>, in order to maintain a balance of power on the ground in Syria and stem a counter offensive by Al Assad's forces, as well as to reduce the growing influence of the jihadist fighters.
    Gulf News _ Restore balance of power in Syria_ 23 June, 2013.

52. Demand for mortgages can be an indication that the property market is strengthening, while an increase in demand for consumer financing might be good news for retailers and others in services industries. <u>This is why the good second-quarter results released by Emirates NBD are an indication of the strength of the UAE economy</u> — although analysts correctly warn against reading too much into it, for now.
    *Gulf News_* Bank results good news for UAE_ 23 July, 2013.

53. If documented statistics are to be believed, it cost the American purse more than $5 trillion. <u>That is why creating a no-fly zone or creating a buffer zone will cost is an economically unfeasible option</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* A case against intervention _ 24 July, 2013.

In examples (47) and (48), the focused element is a noun phrase functioning as the subject while in example (49) it is also a noun phrase functioning as direct object of the verb 'want'. It seems that reversed *wh*-clefts

in this corpus favor NPs as the focused elements at the expense of other types of phrases. This is borne out by the fact that the nominal demonstratives *this* and *that* are regularly selected.

The discussion of the distribution of cleft constructions shows that there are important differences between *it*-cleft and *wh*-cleft constructions in the syntactic classes of highlighted elements chosen by each. *It*-clefts strongly favor noun phrases (28/31) as focused elements whereas *wh*-clefts have 15/25 NPs. Furthermore, there is a tendency for the focus position of *it*-clefts to be short (e.g. It is *an initiative* that deserves recognition — and implementation by other health providers across the UAE), whereas the focus position in *wh*-clefts tends to be long (i.e. occupied by heavy NPs (e.g. What is required at this point of time is *a conciliatory tone and efforts to patch-up with divergent schools of political thought*).

These structural differences between the two main types of clefts have also been shown to be evident in quantitative aspects. Prince (1978: 886) found that the highlighted element in *it*-clefts comprises only around 33% of the lexical material of the whole sentence, while the presupposed relative clause takes up 66%. By contrast, the focused part in *wh*-clefts constitutes an average of 75%, and the presupposed part only 25% of the whole sentence.

3. Pragmatic and informational characteristics of Clefts

We have seen that the three different types of cleft sentences place emphasis on different elements in the sentence. Nevertheless, these cleft constructions are not only different in giving prominence to different elements, they also differ in the way they organize information and in the kind of prominence they give to the highlighted elements.

The focused element in an *it*-cleft may contain old information or new information. Firstly, *it*-clefts usually place new information at the beginning, thus violating the information principle (End-Focus Principle) by which new information should be placed at the end of the sentence (Quirk et al. 1985: 1361; Hedberg 1990; Hedberg and Fadden 2007; Gundel 1985, 1988). The focus tends to come towards the end of the information unit. This old-before-new principle makes sense since the preceding recoverable (i.e. old or given) information facilitates the processing of the irrecoverable (i.e. new) information which follows. The End-Focus Principle is closely related to the Principle of END-WEIGHT (Quirk et al 1985: 1362), which stipulates that longer, 'heavier' structures tend to come in sentence final position. This is hardly surprising since the new information (which usually comes at the end) often needs to be stated more fully than the given. Examples of *it*-clefts like these below break the End-Focus Principle:

54. The reality is <u>that it is the National Front that is akin to the principles of the Nazi party</u> — instead of targeting Jews, it targets Muslims.
    *Gulf News_* Removing immunity for Le Pen just the right step_July 3, 2013

55. When Egypt got its first democratically elected government, everyone thought that <u>it was the persistence of the protesters that proved fruitful</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* Where is Egypt going?_ 13 July 2013

56. <u>It is the Muslim Brotherhood's framed Islamist-oriented constitution that had been in the eye of storm for long</u>, and which led to the dismissal of president Mohammed Mursi's government.
    *Khaleej Times_* Egypt's new task_22 July, 2013.

The *it*-cleft in (54), for example, presupposes the old (given) information 'some organization is akin to the principles of the Nazi party' and brings into focus 'the National Front' from 'some organization is the National Front'.

However, we find examples in the corpus in which old information is placed in the focus position. Consider the following example:

57. This is a brave step, and a necessary one. What Sheikh Hazza in Cairo called the tradition of the UAE supporting the Egyptian people is <u>a bond of friendship</u> between two Arab peoples. It is <u>a bond</u> that is daily strengthened by the interactions between businessmen and –women in Cairo, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and between friends and families.
    *The National_*UAE aid to Cairo shows bond of long friendship_ Jul 11,
2013

58. Movies on sporting legends definitely draw crowds to the cinemas. But what is it about great athletes that inspires human beings? Perhaps, we feel that there is something noble and sacred about physical discipline and determination. The <u>fight, persistence and toil of world-class athletes</u> leaves us awe-inspired because *it's* <u>these qualities</u> that define the human spirit and its resilience.
    Khaleej Times _The sportsman spirit _ 13 July, 2013.

In the above examples, the focused noun phrases 'a bond' and 'these qualities' stand for 'a bond of friendship' and 'fight, persistence, and toil of world-class athletes', respectively, so it is actually old information which can be easily obtained from the preceding linguistic context. In other words, the position of the focused element makes it suitable for expressing a connection with the preceding text. The new information is conveyed in the relative clause, although it is presented as shared or known information as it is placed in this part of the *it*-cleft.

Secondly, an *it*-cleft sentence may serve to establish the writer's topic, for example, as a lead-in sentence in an article, as in:

59. <u>It is a landmark judgement that promises to bring to an end India's long</u>, agonising wait to see criminality in its politics being brought to book.

*Gulf News_* A chance to cleanse Indian politics_ July 13, 2013

In fact, this is the only example in the corpus where the writer chose to begin the editorial with an *it*-cleft without providing any background context. After this introductory sentence, the writer goes on to elaborate the topic in the following sentence and the rest of the paragraph:

60. It is a landmark judgement that promises to bring to an end India's long, agonising wait to see criminality in its politics being brought to book. Last week, the Supreme Court of India ruled that, henceforth, politicians convicted for criminal offenses will be immediately disqualified from their posts in the parliament and state assemblies. The ruling is rightly being seen as a welcome purge for the Indian polity….

A third function of *it*-clefts is to express contrastive focus (Biber et al. 1999: 962), as in:

61. Of course, spying was a flourishing trade even back when "hacking" more usually involved swords. It is humans, not gadgets, that can't keep secrets.
    *The National_* The NSA can't bug this_Jul 14, 2013

62. In Egypt, it's angry mobs, armed with Molotov cocktails and stones, that are determining the direction of politics, not elected representatives.
    *Khaleej Times_* Where is Egypt going?_ 13 July 2013

63. Interestingly, it's not her eccentric style of playing that is attracting the criticism, it's her physical appearance.
    *Khaleej Times_* The game of sexism_ 12 July 2013

64. This time it's not the resignation of an iron-fisted dictator that has triggered the boisterous merry-making in Cairo — it's actually the ouster of a democratically elected president.
    *Khaleej Times_* People power in Egypt_ 5 July 2013

65. It's not only autocracies which have struggled to contain the deluge of angry protesters, democratic regimes too have been challenged by mass rallies.
    *Khaleej Times_* Brazil's conciliatory approach_11 July 2013

Contrast is a relationship of comparison or opposition between two or more discourse elements that operates on the basis of some predicate (Delin and Oberlander 1992: 285). As it is shown in (61) contrast is explicit and holds between 'humans' and 'gadgets' with respect to the predicate 'can't keep secrets'.

On the contrary, in *wh*-clefts the clause beginning with *what* is old information, and the focused element is new information. Usually, the old information is given in the preceding linguistic context, and the hearer is supposed to infer it from the surrounding linguistic context:

66. In a recent report, a group of young Arab students argued that 'we don't need Arabic to get on in life. <u>What we really need is English, French</u>, etc'.
    Gulf News _Let's speak more Arabic in the UAE: it's the language of the land_ June 2, 2013.

67. Amid such crossfire of accusations <u>what is happening is that social security is being compromised, and instability is gathering momentum</u>.
    *Khaleej Times*_ Killings in Cairo_ 9 July 2013

68. And yet, well into the third year of the Syrian conflict, there are no good options, no certainties. <u>What the West, and especially the United States, needs to weigh are the consequences of not arming the rebels.</u>
    *The National*_ No good options as Syria's war hits stalemate_ July 22, 2013.

In (66), for example, it is implied that since the Arab students do not need Arabic to get on in life, they might need other languages. When the cleft sentence is uttered, we know that the students need English or French.

Unlike *it*-clefts, *wh*-clefts can appear in discourse-initial position since they do not need to have a preceding context to refer to. They can be understood, according to Biber et al. (1999: 963) as a "springboard in starting an utterance", as in:

69. <u>What Egypt needs now is leaders who can put aside their political differences</u>, overcome real and perceived injustices and work for the good of the whole country.
    *Gulf News*_ Egypt cannot be run from the streets_ July 12, 2013

70. <u>What is instructive is how the leaders of the two countries have dealt with the challenge</u>. Mr Erdogan has spoken of conspiracy and called the protesters "villains". Brazil's president, Dilma Rousseff, has been conciliatory; she has met protesters' representatives and even said the size of the demonstrations "prove the energy of our democracy".
    *The National*_A tale of two countries_Jun 24, 2013

71. <u>What Malala said before the world body or had done in the last couple of months to promote the need for investing in education</u> — as she recovered from her near-fatal injury — <u>is not an easy task</u>.
    *Khaleej Times*_ Hear Malala out_ 14 July 2013

The above examples occur either at the beginning of the editorial (69) or the beginning of a new paragraph (70-71). This suggests that the writer adds the

initial *wh*-clause before the presentation of a major point in the focused element. The focused part of the *wh*-cleft is delayed for specific discourse reasons.

As far as reversed *wh*-clefts are concerned, we found two kinds in the corpus: the ones introduced by a demonstrative and those which are not. The former cannot usually be reversed (73) while the latter can (75):

72. If documented statistics are to be believed, it cost the American purse more than $5 trillion. <u>That is why creating a no-fly zone or creating a buffer zone will cost is an economically unfeasible option</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* A case against intervention _ 24 July, 2013.
73. *….why creating a no-fly zone or creating a buffer zone will cost is an economically unfeasible option is that.
74. <u>The difficulty of the task is what draws people to it</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* Pinnacle of achievement_ 1 July, 2013.
75. What draws people to it is the difficulty of the task.

Concerning the information structure of reversed *wh*-clefts, the new information is exemplified by the highlighted element which occurs at the beginning of the construction, so it could be pragmatically associated with a typical *it*-cleft:

76. The new anti-rape law has more muscle and includes a wider range of offences, but <u>its implementation across the country is what will determine if India can actually flex this muscle.</u>
    *Gulf News_*Crimes against women in India need to be immediately checked_ June 7, 2013.
77. <u>The difficulty of the task is what draws people to it</u>.
    *Khaleej Times_* Pinnacle of achievement_ 1 July, 2013.

Reversed *wh*-clefts which are introduced by a demonstrative bear new information in the *wh*- relative. The main function of demonstrative *wh*-clefts is 'to underline or sum up what has been said or written in the preceding text' (Biber et al. 1999: 962) since the demonstrative does not have a single referent, but refers to what has been said in the previous discourse:

78. The opposition are frightened that they have lost the initiative for the moment, but are holding on to large swathes of territory. Neither side sees any point in talking. <u>This is why the Friends of Syria were right to offer urgent military support to the opposition</u>, in order to maintain a balance of power on the ground in Syria and stem a counter offensive by Al Assad's forces, as well as to reduce the growing influence of the jihadist fighters.
    Gulf News _ Restore balance of power in Syria_ 23 June, 2013.
79. This is smart advice for the decision makers in the US military establishment. Such pragmatism was lacking with the regime of former president George W. After Bush invaded Iraq and Afghanistan on a flimsy pretext, the entire world had to suffer. If documented statistics are to be believed, it cost the American purse more than $5 trillion. <u>That</u>

is why creating a no-fly zone or creating a buffer zone will cost is an economically unfeasible option.
Khaleej Times _ A case against intervention _ 24 July, 2013.

In these examples, the demonstratives *this* and *that* refer to the whole previous sentence, and what appears in the *wh*-clause is new information which has not been mentioned before in the text. According to Biber et al. (1999: 963); Weinert 1995: 343; Weinert and Miller 1996), reversed *wh*-clefts introduced by *that* are typically used to sum up previous discourse or to make reference to what has been mentioned before while those introduced by *this* are used as an attention marker (Weinert 1995).

4. Pedagogical Applications and Recommendations

The frequency and register information culled from this corpus study gives rise to two kinds of pedagogical applications. First, ESL/EFL teachers have always considered newspapers as valuable sources for authentic language activities. An editorial in a newspaper gives the opinion of the editor or publisher on a topic or item of news. In everyday-life situations, we use persuasive language to express opinions and try to convince others. Learning about how opinions are expressed and about the language to express them in editorials enables students to express their opinion and be critical users of English language. Connor (1996: 144) emphasizes the pedagogical potential of editorials:

> Research on editorials cross-culturally is significant even if ESL students do not become editorial writers for, in most cases, they are readers of editorials. Good editorials are considered some of the best examples of persuasive writing in all countries; they set standards for written persuasion.

Therefore, the use of English newspaper editorials in writing classes might encourage and motivate students and help them achieve better coherence in their persuasive writing.mSecond, corpus-based studies of English grammar have proven to be especially useful for descriptions of language use. That is, they help us understand what speakers and writers actually do with the linguistic resources available in English. The simplest kind of information available from corpus analysis is frequency: identifying the grammatical features that are especially common or rare. Frequency information from corpus studies can help materials writers decide what structures to use as they give examples and write exercises for grammatical structures. With regard to the use of clefts, students can discover the patterns of clefts in authentic text when examining the newspaper editorial. It could be more convincing to learners when they are shown how accomplished writers use clefts, and how their own usage of clefts differs from standard academic writing.

In terms of practice, a very practical implication of the results of the present study is that it would be helpful if the future development of teaching materials included recognition of the effectiveness of using cleft sentences in persuasive writing. For this reason, we strongly recommend that teachers introduce this aspect in their advanced writing classes and investigate the different methods to teach it for maximum benefits.

5. Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to illustrate the syntactic distribution of clefts in this journalistic corpus and to investigate the extent to which this distribution might have a bearing on the pragmatic functions of clefts in editorial discourse. The findings of the analysis of the major syntactic characteristics of *cleft* constructions provided in this journalistic corpus clearly support some of the ideas already expressed in the literature. However, some of the findings have questioned some of the results stated in that same literature.

One of the main conclusions is that cleft constructions seem to be fairly frequent in this journalistic register (there are only 63 examples in a corpus containing less than 30,000 words). The findings in this corpus do not differ from those obtained by Collins (1991: 178). He notes that *it*-clefts are more common in written texts than speech, in particular texts such as informational texts where some sort of opinion is being offered. There are 31 examples of *it*-clefts in the corpus; therefore, it is possible to say that sample found in this corpus is quite representative of what actually happens with cleft constructions in journalistic register. The relatively high frequency of *it*-clefts in this journalistic corpus can be keyed to two factors. First, *it*-clefts create persuasive discourse (Collins 1991: 188), a typical feature of newspaper editorials. Second, since stress-marking is absent in written discourse, writers use *it*-clefts to direct the reader into a particular reading of the information structure.

As regards the syntax of these constructions, it can be observed that both *it*-clefts and *wh*-clefts are similar in placing emphasis on noun phrases. All other constituents that can be focused are different. It can also be concluded that noun phrases functioning as subject are the preferred focused elements both in *it*-clefts and in *wh*-clefts, mainly because they are the least likely to be given prominence in non-clefted sentences.

Reversed *wh*-clefts including those introduced by a demonstrative have a very low distribution in this journalistic corpus. This is not unduly surprising since reversed *wh*-clefts are more popular in spoken English. Biber et al. (1999: 961) state that the distribution of reversed *wh*-clefts is 'sharply stratified by register: common in conversation and rare in academic prose'. These findings are further supported by Geluykens (2000) who observes that reversed *wh*- and basic *wh*-clefts clearly predominate in conversation.

Despite the common features between *it*-clefts and *wh*-clefts, both types differ in the way they organize information. *It*-clefts normally place the new information in the focus position. However, we found some examples in which old information is placed after the verb *to be*, i.e. in the subordinate clause.

Wh-clefts, in contrast, move from old information to new information. One of the major distinctive features of *wh*-clefts is that they can be placed as discourse openers in many cases. This cannot normally be done with *it*-clefts as they need a preceding linguistic context to be meaningful.

Furthermore, reversed *wh*-clefts which are introduced by a demonstrative have a summative function as the demonstrative does not have a single referent,

but refers to what has been said in the previous discourse. Besides, the new information in reversed *wh*-clefts appears in the relative clause.

The last word is that these results should not be regarded as exhaustive, as it will be necessary to carry out an investigation on a larger scale, including the other cleft types which have been completely neglected here. Moreover, it seems worthwhile for future studies to look at the stylistic functions of cleft constructions in journalistic register.

Endnotes

[1] The syntactic study of cleft structures is widely assumed to have originated in Jespersen's study of English. Jespersen (1949: 147-48) defines cleft sentences in the following way: "A cleaving of a sentence by means of *it is* (often followed by a relative pronoun or connective) serves to single out one particular element of the sentence and very often, by directing attention to it and bringing it, as it were, into focus, to mark a contrast." Visser (1963-73: 49) presents the structure as follows: "This periphrastic construction is used to bring a part of a syntactical unit into prominence; it is especially employed when contrast has to be expressed: *It is father (not mother) who did it*." In a similar way, Quirk et al. (1985: 1383) define this structure as: "Way of giving prominence to an item by more elaborate grammatical means, involving the division of the sentence into two clauses, each with its own verb."

[2] The claim that there is a strong affinity between intonation and information structure is by no means new and has been made by Chomsky (1972); Bolinger (1989); Jackendoff (1972); Selkirk (1984, 1995), among others.

[3] From now on I will be using the term '*it*-cleft' for what is traditionally called 'cleft sentence' and '*wh*-cleft' for what is often referred to as 'pseudo-cleft'.

[4] Collins (1991: 54-67) claims that, in addition to the dominant subject, object, and adjunct functions, the highlighted element can represent different classes: finite clauses, non-finite clauses, adjective phrases, and what he calls "zero class". The results that Collins obtained come from his investigation of the cleft examples in two different corpora: the Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen (LOB) and the London-Lund Corpus (LL). The first corpus includes 1,000,000 words selected from writing from 1961 while the second contains 500,000 words from speech covering the period between 1953 and 1987.

[5] Even though the pronoun *it* in the cleft clause is often taken to be an expletive expression, Hedberg (2000) and Han and Hedberg (2008), argue that the pronoun *it* can be replaced by *this* or *that* depending on the context.

[6] DeClerck (1988: 79-80) notes some interesting cases of basic *wh*-clefts and reverse *wh*-clefts where the verb agrees with the focus clefted constituent.

[7] This goes back to Jespersen (1949: 147) who claims that *clefts* serve "to single out one particular element of the sentence and very often, by directing attention to it and bringing it, as it were, into focus, to mark a contrast".

[8] Biber et al. (1999: 961) call them 'demonstrative *wh*-clefts' because of the presence of the demonstrative as initial element.

[9] Prince (1978) uses the terms 'focus' and 'presupposition' to identify these two parts of a cleft sentence.

[10] For examples supporting the thesis that the information expressed by the cleft clause is pragmatically presupposed, see Dryer (1996).

[11] Davidse (2000:1106), Sornicola (1988:357), and Huddleston (1984: 460) claim that even where the missing element is the subject, there is the possibility of omitting the relative pronoun, at least in informal English, as in 'It was John Ø did it.'

[12] This is not always the case as there are examples of *it*-clefts in which the focused NP is long and heavy, as in:
1. This time it's not the resignation of an iron-fisted dictator that has triggered the boisterous merry-making in Cairo — it's actually the ouster of a democratically elected president.
   Khaleej Times_ People power in Egypt_ 5 July 2013
2. It is the Muslim Brotherhood's framed Islamist-oriented constitution that had been in the eye of storm for long, and which led to the dismissal of president Mohammed Mursi's government.
   Khaleej Times_ Egypt's new task_22 July, 2013.
3. But the political impact of the decision is far greater: it is the first initiative taken by the EU that targets the illegal settlements that many see as an impediement to achieving peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians.
   The National_ Small statement marks big shot in EU-Israel relations_ July 18, 2013

[13] Calude (2008) calls them 'double clefts', which consist of a demonstrative pronoun as cleft constituent, followed by the copula be, a *wh*-clause (serving as cleft clause), a second copula and a further cleft constituent (co-indexed with the demonstrative pronoun).

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