

Specificational Copular Sentences: the Case of Hebrew Cleftoids

I. The Problem: Specificational copular sentences (Higgins 1973) are a topic of much debate in the literature. On the one hand, they are analyzed as inverse predicational (Heggie 1988, Williams 1983, 1984, Partee 1986, 1998, Moro 1990, 1997, Den Dikken 2006), while others assimilate them to equatives (Heycock and Kroch 1998, 1999, Sharvit 1999, Heller 2002). Roughly, these represent a syntactic vs. a semantic approach. The issue has repercussions for the nature of the copula in general; the semantic approach assumes *be* of predication distinct from *be* of equation (albeit with additional type shift operations), whereas the syntactic approach denies the ambiguity of the copula and only assumes *be* of predication. The goal of this paper is to present evidence from Hebrew Specificational Cleftoids (1) in favor of the syntactic approach, by showing that these are instances of predication, not equation, with some of them are ‘canonical’ (1a) and some ‘inverse’ (1b), i.e. undergone Predicate Inversion (2). This is not to say that the equation relation does not exist at all, but rather not in specificational cleftoids. Moreover, these will be argued to be different from Hebrew specificational pseudoclefts and to constitute an independent type of construction, previously not discussed in the literature.

II. Cleftoids are not clefts nor pseudoclefts: Despite apparent resemblance, it will be argued that cleftoids are different from clefts (3) and pseudoclefts (4) in several respects, e.g. in not showing the connectivity and predicational/specificational distinction found in pseudoclefts. Cleftoids are always specificational, irrespective of the PronZ/PronH copula (Doron 1983, Sichel 1997) available to them.

III. Cleftoids are not equatives: The evidence from Hebrew cleftoids supports Moro’s and Den Dikken’s findings with respect to asymmetries in A-bar extraction (5) vs (6), and additional asymmetries (embedding under *consider* type verbs, modification by NRRC, etc.).

IV. Support from Information structure: Finally, the suggested analysis is supported by information structure asymmetries. While canonical cleftoids show contrastive and exhaustive focus (7), inverse cleftoids exhibit new information focus (8), supporting the inversion analysis: in canonical cleftoids, the subject, being contrastive, checks its exhaustivity feature against Exhaustivity head in the left periphery by Agree (Horvath 2010) or moves there covertly from Spec IP. However, in inverted cleftoids, after predicate inversion took place, the subject remains frozen in place (Den Dikken 2006). As such, it cannot be moved or check its features against some functional head in the left periphery. Suddenly, inversion creates a new focus option, otherwise unavailable – information focus.

- (1) a. AVIV hu ze Se ohev lir’ot hisardut *canonical*
 Aviv PronH the-one that likes to-watch Survivor
 b. ze Se ohev lir’ot hisardut hu AVIV *inverse*
 the-one that likes to-watch Survivor PronH Aviv
- (2) [IP[ze Se ohev lir’ot hisardut]_i hu [RelP/SC [Aviv] Rel⁰ [t_i]]]
- (3) ze AVIV Se ohev lir’ot hisardut
 it Aviv that likes to-watch Survivor
- (4) a. mi Se ohev lir’ot hisardut hu/ze Aviv
 who that likes to-watch Survivor PronH/PronZ Aviv
 b. Aviv hu/ze mi Se ohev lir’ot hisardut
 Aviv PronH/PronZ who that likes to-watch Survivor

- (5) dina hayta zot Se lavSa et taxposet ha-xatul be purim
 Dina was the-one that wore acc. costume the-cat in Purim
- a. ?mi_i ata xoSev Se dina hayta t_i ? (-zot Se lavSa et taxposet ha-xatul)
 who you think that Dina was (the-one that wore acc. costume the-cat)
- b. mi_i ata xoSev Se t_i hayta zot Se lavSa et taxposet ha-xatul? (-dina)
 who you think that was the-one that wore acc. costume the-cat (Dina)
- (6) ha-de'a Seli al london hayta ha-de'a Selxa al pariz
 the-opinion my about London was the-opinion your about Paris
- a. *eyze de'a_i ata xoSev Se ha-de'a Seli al london hayta t_i?
 which opinion you think that the-opinion my about London was
- b. *eyze de'a_i ata xoSev Se t_i hayta ha-de'a Selxa al pariz?
 which opinion you think that was the-opinion your about Paris
- (7) a. #Aviv hu ze Se higi'a la-Si'ur, ve ulay gam Smulik
 Aviv PronH the-one that arrived to-the class, and maybe also Shmulik
- b. ze Se higi'a laSiur hu Aviv ve ulay gam Smulik
- (8) mi (hu) ze Se higi'a la-Siur?
 who (PronH) the-one that arrived to-the class?
- a. ze Se higi'a la-Si'ur hu Aviv
 the-one that arrived to-the class PronH Aviv
- b. #Aviv hu ze Se higi'a la-Si'ur

Selected References :

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