For an information structure typology: Cleft sentences in a Gallo-Italian dialect

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Outline

1. Introduction: Cleft sentences in Bergamasco
2. Corpus description and research questions
3. Results of the analysis
4. Conclusion: Discussion of findings
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Cleft sentence

It is the wife that decides

It is \([\text{the wife}]_i \text{ that}_i \text{ decides}\)

«a complex sentence structure consisting of a matrix clause headed by a copula and a relative or a relative-like clause whose relativized argument is coindexed with the argument of the copula»

(Lambrecht 2001: 467)
“The two-clause sequence of a cleft expresses a logically simple proposition: the sentence *it is the wife that decides* is semantically equivalent to the canonical noncopular sentences *The wife decides*”
its function is that of specifying the value of a variable in a presupposed open proposition.

In *It is the wife that decides* the relative clause conveys the presupposition ‘x decides’; the variable x of the open clause is specified by the clefted phrase (therefore $x = \text{the wife}$).
Bergamasco

• a non official variety, at the boundaries of the local language repertoire

• belonging to Eastern Lombard (or Transabduan ‘beyond Adda river’; origo: Milan), together with dialects of Brescia, Cremona and Mantova

Bergamasco < Eastern Lombard < Lombard < Gallo-Italian < Northern dialects... < Romance...
Why this study?

- a first step in filling a descriptive gap in the grammar of Bergamasco;
- a contribution to a typology of structure information:
  
  Non standard varieties offer a privileged position to observe linguistic features considered undesirable in standard varieties.
1. Introduction: Cleft sentences in Bergamasco

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the corpus (Anesa/Rondi 1981)

a collection of 54 fairy tales told orally by 26 native speakers and transcribed (phonemic-based transcription system; see RID 1977-1981)
Lombardy > Province of Bergamo > valleys of Bergamo
The corpus

a collection of 54 fairy tales told orally by 26 native speakers and transcribed:

estimated corpus size: 109,000 words

textual genre: narrative discourse

Fairy tales orally delivered to customary audience
Research questions

1. Are there clefts in Bergamasco?
2. What are their structural properties?
3. What is their function as far as information structure is concerned both at the utterance and at the discourse level?
Outline

1. Introduction: Cleft sentences in Bergamasco ✓

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3. Results of the analysis

4. Conclusion: Discussion of findings
1. Are there clefts in Bergamasco?

49 occurrences (\(+2\) in Italian)
Clefts are well-distributed among speakers (present in the speech of 18 speakers = 69%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus</th>
<th>frequency</th>
<th>Normalized freq. per 10,000 words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Bergamasque Fairy Tales</em> (109,000 words)</td>
<td>49 +2*</td>
<td>4,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIP = spoken Italian (Roggia 2009) (490,000 words)</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>3,7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘I realized that it was not him that had killed the seven headed dragon’
Example (2)

[– yes, but why are you carrying the door?]

Te=sé pò stàt té e dìm
2SG=AUX.PRS.2SG then be.PP 2SG to tell.INF=me

«tìres dré la pórtå» e mé é-e capìt de pull.REFL behind the door and 1SG had understood of
tö=lå hō!
take.INF=it on

– it was you that told me: «take the door» and I thought I had to carry it
Subject clefts:
- copula and verb of subordinate clause show agreement (in person and number) with clefted NP;
Agreement on COP and subordinate verb

\[
l’=érå \quad \text{miå} \quad \text{lü} \quad \text{che} \quad l’=éå \quad \text{cup-àt} \quad \text{ol}
\]
\[
3\text{SG}=\text{COP.PST.IPFV} \quad \text{NEG} \quad 3\text{M.SG}\ \text{COMP} \quad 3\text{SG}=\text{had} \quad \text{kill-PP} \quad \text{the}
\]
\[
\text{drago-dèle-sètte-tèste!}
\]
\[
\text{dragon-of.the-seven-heads}
\]
‘it was not him that had killed the seven headed dragon’

\[
am=sé \quad \text{nòtre} \quad \text{che} \quad ’m=ciàpa \quad \text{la curuna!}
\]
\[
1\text{PL}=\text{COP.PRS.1PL} \quad 1\text{PL.F}\ \text{COMP} \quad 1\text{PL}=\text{take.PRS.1PL} \quad \text{the Crown}
\]
‘it will be us that will take [= inherit] the Crown’
2) structural properties

Subject clefts:
- copula and verb of subordinate clause show agreement (in person and number) with clefted NP;
- verb of subordinate clause can be in the infinitive (half of the occurrences)

Te sé  po stàt té e dìm  «tìres
2SG=AUX.PRS.2SG then be.pp 2SG to tell.INF=me pull.REFL
dré la pórtå» – it was you that told me .......
behind the door
2) Structural properties of temporal clefts

- temporal adverbial:
  usually an NP (‘the whole day’, ‘two days’, ‘100 years’) with a duration meaning;

  2 cases of PrepP (‘ever since time$_x$’);

- copula does not agree with NP, diverging from Italian, where the copula does agree in number with NP (sg vs. pl.)
2) Structural properties of temporal clefts

“‘m gh’avrèh amò öna ròba de domandaga / he ’l gh’èh vergót de mangià perché l’è töt ol dé che ’m camìna / m’à amò d’mangià / e ’m gh’à fàm”

‘we would have something else to ask, if you have something to eat because we have been walking all day long, we haven’t eaten yet and we are hungry’

l’=è töt ol dé che ’m camìna

3SG=COP.PRS whole the day COMP we walk
Since-clefts: ‘since time$_x$’

’ndóe sarà=ì chèl vìl suldàt / che só ché ’ssè
where be.FUT-3.SG.M that cowardly soldier COMP be.1SG here so

famàdå / cå l’=è finà de gér sérå che mange
hungry COMP 3SG=is ever since last night that eat.1SG

piö?
anymore

‘where will that cowardly soldier be? I am so hungry because I have not been eating since last night
2) Structural properties of temporal clefts

\( l' = è \) dois nòc che só che a spetà /
3SG=be.PRS.3SG two nights COMP be.1SG here to wait-INF

e 'l=vé nigü
and 3SG=comes nobody

‘I have been waiting for two nights and nobody is coming’
**Clefted phrase: Syntactic role**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic role of clefted phrase in subordinate clause</th>
<th>frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time duration adverbial</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct object and other adverbials</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOT.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clefted Phrase: Syntactic roles

- Time duration adverbial: 70%
- Subject: 23%
- Direct object and other adverbials: 8%
At the utterance level all clefts can be split up in focus and presupposition, as shown by the negation test and by the question test

\[ l' = \text{è stàc un ministro dè-la córte de-l rè } \]
\[ 3SG=AUX COP.PP a minister of-the court of-the king \]

\[ \text{che à ferìt ol sò gàl } \]
\[ \text{that has wounded the your rooster} \]

‘It was a minister of the king who wounded your rooster’
At the discourse level the first group of clefts (i.e. non temporal clefts) typically express corrective or contrastive focus.
3) inform. structure: discourse level

– am sè nótre che ’m ciàpa la curuna! –

`it will be us that will take [= inherit] the Crown’
3) inform. structure: discourse level

gh’=ó     ché ö  falì d’polènta / làc / e ö  falì de halàm / I have got here a bit of polenta, milk and a bit of salami

che    l’=è    mìa tàt  ca  m’=à  copàt ol sunì COMP 3SG=COP NEG long COMP 1PL=we have killed the pork

‘I have got here a bit of polenta, milk and salami, because we have just killed the pork’
1. Introduction: Cleft sentences in Bergamasco ✓
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4. Conclusion: Discussion of findings
   a. Why are time clefts so frequent in our corpus?
   b. Do they have a specific discourse function?
a) high frequency of time clefts: Why?

- strong correlation between the high incidence of time clefts and narrative texts
- under certain conditions temporal clefts seem to be the unique (or preferred) structure to provide a duration meaning (at a more advanced grammaticalization stage than that suggested for Italian by Scarano 2003).
“gh’ó ché ò falì d’ polènta / làc / e ò falì de halâm / che l’è mìa tàt ca m’à copàt ol sunì”

‘I have got here a bit of polenta, milk and salami, because we have just killed the pork (lit: it not long since we killed the pork)’

\[ l’=è \quad mìa \quad tàt \quad ca \quad m’=à \quad copàt \quad ol \quad sunì \]
\[ 3SG=COP \quad NEG \quad long \quad COMP \quad 1PL=we.\text{have} \quad killed \quad the \quad pork \]

Quando \( l’è \) ön’ùra / che l’è ’ndàc chèl lé / ’l ne ’é ön óter

‘as that guy had left since an hour ago, another guy arrived’
a specific discourse function?

Ah pòvera mè! / l’è tace àgn ca só ché / e ga só mài ri-àda a ciapà ü ca l’è bù / lèsc e da scrìf!

l’=è tace àgn ca só ché
3SG=COP many years COMP be.1SG here

‘oh, dear me! I have been here for many years and I could never find someone that could write and read!
Temporal cleft provides a temporal frame to following clause. The following clause provides the more significant meaning, a kind of textual climax

“the information in the *it*-clefts, though discourse-initial, is background material – subordinate in importance (in terms of what the discourse is about) to what follows “(Prince 1978).

Quando *l’è ön’ùra / che l’è ’ndàc chèl lé / ’l ne ’é ön óter ‘as that guy had left since an hour ago, another guy arrived’
IT WAS JUST A YEAR AGO THAT THE CITY'S MAJOR BANKS LAUNCHED ... THE PHILADELPHIA MORTGAGE PLAN ... TO FOSTER INVESTMENT IN OLDER NEIGHBORHOODS.

Today, PMP is still in business and going strong. The thirteen ... banks ... have 1,037 mortgages in force for a total of $10.7 million.

(ex. 46 in Prince 1978: 901).
“The *it*-clefts in 46 have the (sub-)function of bringing the reader up to date so that s/he can appreciate the actual ‘news’, in both cases set off as the second (and final) paragraph). […] Note that, in 46 […], the information in the *it*-clefts, though discourse-initial, is background material – subordinate in importance (in terms of what the discourse is about) to what follows” (Prince 1978: 902).
Conclusions: towards a typology of cleft sentences

two different kinds of information structure expressed by clefts:

a) Contrastive focus, i.e. the clefted element (typically a subject NP) carries a counter-presupposition meaning;

b) Completive, non contrastive focus; typically with the clefted element as a time duration adverbial in the form of a NP; more advanced stage of grammaticalization in comparison to Italian
AILA, One world, many languages
Brisbane, 10-15 August 2014

Thank you!
Grazie per l’attenzione!

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