

On Nominal Extraposition: A Constructional Analysis

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On Nominal Extraposition: A Constructional Analysis

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For Chuck.

0. Introduction. In this paper, we will examine a type of extraposition construction which is widely attested in spoken English but which has received little attention in either generative or functionally oriented frameworks.¹ Some attested examples, mostly from spontaneous oral productions, are given in (1). Prosodic peaks are marked by small caps:

- (1) a. God, isn't it AMAZING the things MARRIAGES break UP over?
b. It's just AMAZING his lack of willingness to do ANYTHING for me.
c. A: Where's Butsy?
B: He's slipped in to see Senator What's-his-face.
A: It's AMAZING the ACCESS he's got! (Doonesbury 3/13/93)
d. Announcer: Hear what denture wearers all over America have to say.
Denture wearer: It's AMAZING the DIFFERENCE! (Fixodent commercial)
e. "The cops? Are they friends of yours?" "Hardly", I said, but I sat there smiling.
It was TERRIBLE, really, the JOY I took at the notion of skunking PIGEYES. I already had a few ideas. (S. Turow, *Pleading Guilty*)
f. It's ASTONISHING the age at which they become skilled LIARS. (Parent's comment on lie told by five-year-old child)
g. It's STAGGERING the number of BOOKS that can pile up.
h. Just walking in the street [is difficult]. I mean, it's UNBELIEVABLE the people who are verbally abusive to FAT people. (Obese interviewee, 'The Famine Within')

On superficial inspection the sentence type illustrated in these examples appears to be a type of RIGHT DISLOCATION (RD): that type which involves coreference between the postverbal NP and a pronominal subject. Like RD sentences of this type, the examples in (1) contain (i) a pronominal subject, (ii) a verb phrase carrying the focus accent, and (iii) a sentence-final definite NP which apparently corefers with the pronominal subject. We are going to argue, however, that the sentences in (1) instantiate a sentence type that must be distinguished from RD on syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic grounds. We will argue that this type has a number of unique properties, and that a satisfactory account of these properties must attribute them to a distinct grammatical construction. We will refer to this construction as NOMINAL EXTRAPOSITION (NE). Although our label suggests that the NE construction is a type of extraposition, we will argue that it can in fact not be subsumed under the ordinary extraposition construction, confirming its status as a separate construction in the grammar of English.

We will be employing the CONSTRUCTION GRAMMAR (CG) framework here, as laid out in Fillmore & Kay 1993. We think this framework is particularly well suited for describing the NE construction, because what defines this construction is an interaction of parochial constraints on form, meaning, and use. This unique constellation of facts can be given a unified treatment only in a monostratal framework like Construction

Grammar, which allows for simultaneous representation of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. What is new in our analysis is the attempt to encode in the Construction-Grammar formalism properties and relations of INFORMATION STRUCTURE—specifically the ACTIVATION and IDENTIFIABILITY properties of the denotata of sentence constituents and the TOPIC and FOCUS relations between these denotata and the propositions in which they occur. The theory of information structure we will be using is that presented in Lambrecht 1994. In what follows, we will look in turn at properties of STRUCTURE, MEANING, and USE.

1. Syntax: Nominal Extrapolation vs. Right Dislocation. The NE construction, unlike the relevant type of RD, does not involve COREFERENCE between the pronominal subject and the extraposed NP. This is shown most clearly in the fact that the extraposed NP and the subject pronoun do not AGREE in number. We see lack of number agreement in (1a) and (1h). In (1h), for example, the subject is the singular pronoun *it* while the postpredicate constituent is the plural NP *the people*. By contrast, notice the anomaly of the RD construct (2b) as against (2a):

- (2) a. They're red LEATHER, the shoes she's wearing.
 b. *It's red LEATHER, the shoes she's wearing.

The pronominal subject in NE sentences must be *it*. Notice the anomaly of (3), which is a variant of (1a):

- (3) *They're AMAZING the things MARRIAGES break UP over.

As (2a) shows, the RD construction is not so restricted.

In RD, the sentence minus the dislocated constituent is always syntactically and semantically well-formed and a POTENTIALLY COMPLETE SENTENCE. In NE this is not the case, although this is not always obvious from a merely structural point of view. Since the *it* in NE is nonreferential, a sentence like *It's amazing*, obtained by omitting an extraposed NP, is at least semantically ill-formed, since the predicator *amazing* requires a subject with a theta role. The fact that such sentences do not give the impression of being ungrammatical is a coincidence of English morphology. Evidence from French bears on this issue. Notice the contrasts in (4):

- (4) a. C'est EVIDENT, qu'elle a tort. 'It's obvious, that she's wrong.' (RD)
 b. C'est EVIDENT. 'It's obvious.'
 c. Il est EVIDENT qu'elle a TORT. 'It's obvious that she's wrong.' (EXTRAP)
 d. *Il est EVIDENT. 'It's obvious.'

In the version with *il*, the main predicate must be followed by a complement clause, as shown in the contrast between (c) and (d); the version with *ce*, on the other hand, does not have to contain such a clause. This is because *il* in this context is nonreferential, hence does not fulfill the valence requirement of the predicate *évident*, whereas *ce* denotes a discourse referent.² Likewise, when the sequence *it* + copula + AP is licensed by the NE construction, this sequence alone is ungrammatical, just like the sequence **It seems* or **It occurred to me*. We conclude that the subject pronoun in NE is nonreferential.

Features of PROSODY support our argument. In RD, the post-predicate NP has a low and "flat" intonation contour, the preceding accent indicating the end of the VP focus domain. In NE, on the other hand, this NP is necessarily accented. A referential constituent that lacks prosodic prominence is ipso facto topical, insofar as the role of its referent in the proposition is treated as recoverable (to the point that in many languages such constituents may be phonologically null). Therefore, in the case of RD sentences, the version without the dislocated NP is also a complete sentence. In the case of NE, this

argument cannot be made: the necessary presence of an accent on the rightward NP entails a focus relation of the NP denotatum to the proposition, i.e. non-recoverability on the discourse level and, as a corollary, intraclausal status of the NP (see Lambrecht 1994, Chapters 4 and 5). We will return to the issue of the pragmatic relation between the extraposed NP referent and the proposition in Section 3.

Another argument for the non-identity of NE and RD has to do with the types of DETERMINERS that may occur in the two constructions. Fillmore & Kay (1993:10.20) observe the following contrasts:

- (5) a. It's amazing the things children say. (NE)
- b. It's amazing what things children say. (NE)
- c. They're amazing, the things children say. (RD)
- d. *They're amazing, what things children say. (RD)
- e. *It's amazing, what things children say. (RD)

As (5b) shows, the determiner *what* may occur in NE sentences, the NP *what things* being semantically similar to the NP *the things* in (5a) (for reasons to be explained below). In RD, on the other hand, this determiner may not occur, as shown by (5d) and (5e). As a corollary, the interpretation of the NP *the things* in (c) must be different from that in (a), given that (b) is a grammatical paraphrase of (a), while (d) is not a grammatical paraphrase of (c). As we will show in the section on semantics, the determiner *what* is licensed in NE because of the particular kind of SPEECH ACT this type represents. The constraints on possible determiners in NE will be taken up again in the section on pragmatics.

In the case of NE, as against RD, there is a constraint requiring ADJACENCY of the main predicator and the following NP. Notice example (6):

- (6) A: Did you notice the difference when you were in Germany?
- B: It was AMAZING[+foc], in Germany[-foc], the difference[-foc] (RD)
- B': It was AMAZING[+foc], the difference[-foc], in Germany[-foc] (RD)

In the case of RD, as shown in (6), the topic constituents appear after the focal VP, and they may appear in either order. This is consistent with the nature of extra-clausal topic constituents (both left-dislocated and right-dislocated), as noticed e.g. in Lambrecht 1981 for French, Bresnan & Mchombo 1987 for Chicheŵa, and Lambrecht 1990 for English. By contrast, consider (7):

- (7) A: Apparently Grandma took her MEDICATION when she was in GERMANY.
- B: *It was AMAZING, in Germany, the DIFFERENCE. (NE)
- B': It was AMAZING the DIFFERENCE, in Germany. (NE)

This adjacency requirement of predicator and NP in NE suggests a relation between the verb and the subject analogous to that normally found between the verb and its (nominal) direct object. Notice the examples in (8) and (9):

- (8) *I noticed, in Germany, the DIFFERENCE.
- (9) ?? I could SEE, yesterday, the JOY she took in her work.

One way of stating the adjacency condition shown in (7) would be to say that in NE the rightward NP must lie within the VP focus domain, preventing any topical constituent from intervening between this NP and the main predicator. However, we have no evidence for the presence of a VERB PHRASE in the NE construction. In fact, anomalous coordinate structures like (10a) suggest that the main predicator and the postpredicate NP do not form a constituent:

- (10) a. ?? It's AMAZING the DIFFERENCE and REMARKABLE the PRICE.
 b. She's AMAZING in MATH and REMARKABLE in PHYSICS.

(10a) contrasts with the ordinary subject-predicate construction in (10b), where the predicate adjectives form single constituents with their complements. The constraints illustrated in (7) and (10) suggest that NE is a kind of subject-verb inversion construction, comparable *mutatis mutandis* to VS structures in languages like Italian. This would accord with the facts of focus structure which we will discuss in Section 3. However, the evidence provided above is insufficient to support a VS analysis and further arguments would have to be adduced to support it. (We are aware, in particular, that evidence from conjoined coordinate structures, as provided in (10), is notoriously unreliable.)

We then propose that the NE construction represents a FLAT STRUCTURE, in which the main predicator licenses two valence elements: the empty subject *it* and the definite NP, which is assigned the theta role 'content'. In the case of RD, we propose only the independently motivated subject-predicate syntax and semantics, augmented by the requirement of semantic unification between a referential pronominal element and a post-predicate, post-clausal definite NP or other constituent. (See the representation of the differences between NE and RD with respect to semantic unification in Figures 1 and 2 below.)

Another syntactic distinction between RD and NE concerns restrictions on EMBEDDING. NE, unlike RD, appears to be a MAIN-CLAUSE PHENOMENON. Notice the contrast in (11):

- (11) a. Since it was so AMAZING, that difference, he changed his mind. (RD)
 b. *Since it was so AMAZING the DIFFERENCE, he changed his mind. (NE)
 c. Since it was so OBVIOUS that there was a DIFFERENCE, he changed his mind. (EXTRAP)

This preference for NE to appear in main clauses, which it does not share with ordinary extraposition sentences (see (11c)), is in accord with the special type of speech act this construction represents (see the discussion in Section 2).

NE fits the traditional definition of extraposition insofar as it licenses the empty subject *it* without necessarily licensing a corresponding sentence containing the extraposed material in canonical subject position. So, in some sense, sentences (12a) and (12b) fail for the same reason:

- (12) a. *That Irving is here seems.
 b. *The things marriages break UP over is AMAZING.

However, the similarity between ordinary extraposition and NE ends here. Although extraposition is obligatory with raising predicates such as *seem*, most extraposition sentences do have a canonical subject-predicate counterpart (hence the term 'extraposition'). Moreover, this counterpart has always the same logical meaning (though not the same information structure) as the extraposed sentence. In NE, on the other hand, the lack of a synonymous canonical counterpart is systematic and constitutes a defining criterion of the construction.

In Figures 1 and 2, respectively, we give CG diagrams of the NE construct *It's AMAZING the DIFFERENCE* and the RD construct *It's AMAZING, the difference*. The representation of the internal syntax of the sequence *is amazing* is simplified. With Fillmore & Kay (1993), we assume that *be* is a raising predicate, i.e. that its subject instantiates the understood subject of the predicate which serves as its complement (here the predicate *amazing*). The valence description for the predicate *amazing* is also simplified in that we have ignored the EXPERIENCER argument of this predicate, which is

null-instantiated in the NE construction, but which is necessarily present at the conceptual level (for there to be amazement, there is necessarily someone experiencing it). The attribute *act* in the boxes for referential arguments stands for the ACTIVATION STATUS of the NP referent, i.e. for the assumed status of this referent in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance (Chafe 1987, Lambrecht 1994:Chapter 3). This activation attribute is to be distinguished from the PRAGMATIC ROLE attribute, whose value is [focus +] in the case of NE and [focus -] in the case of RD.

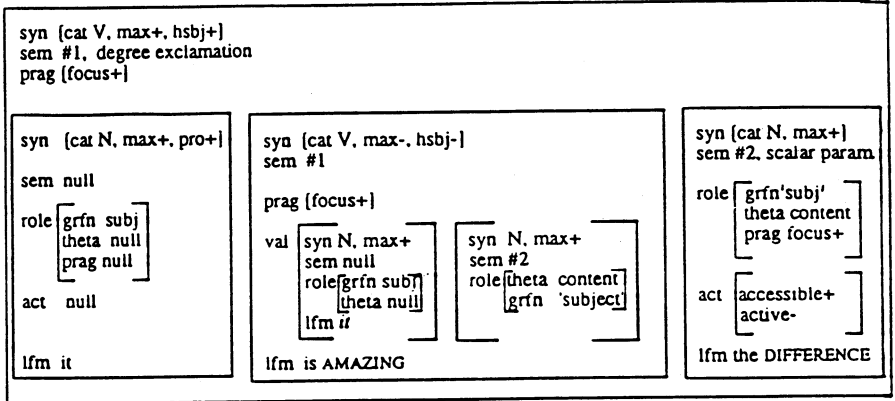


Figure 1: Nominal Extraposition

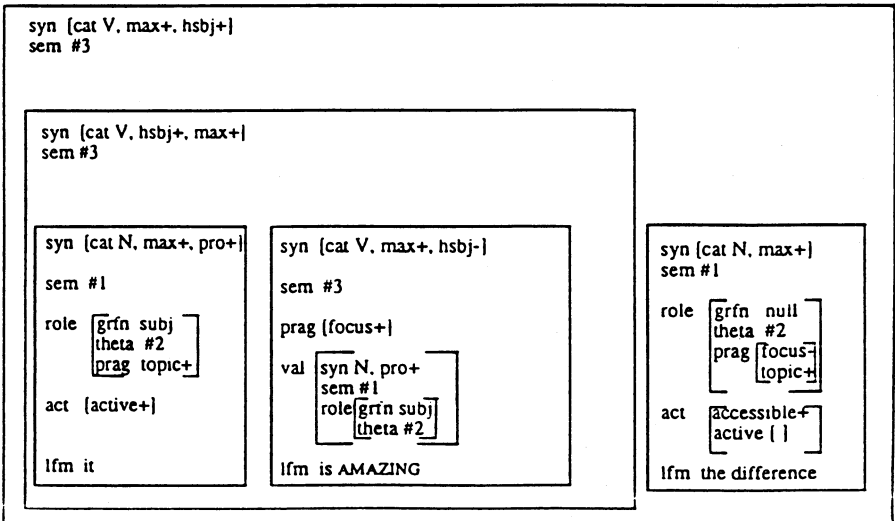


Figure 2: Right Dislocation

2. Semantics. The NE construction has an EXCLAMATIVE function, which explains its SCALAR properties. Let us define exclamative utterances as those in which the speaker places some entity or state of affairs at an advanced point on a property scale. Notice the semantic parallels among (13) through (15):

- (13) My SISTER knows so many odd PEOPLE!
 (14) It's AMAZING how many odd people my SISTER knows.
 (15) It's AMAZING the odd people my SISTER knows! (NE)

All three sentences assert that the set of odd people known by my sister ranks unexpectedly high on a numerical scale. Sentence (14) exemplifies what we will call (perhaps somewhat misleadingly) an INDIRECT-EXCLAMATIVE construction. As (16) shows, this construction must be distinguished from the INDIRECT-INTERROGATIVE construction illustrated in (16a):

- (16) a. How many people she saw is unknown to us.
 b. ?How many people she saw is amazing.
 c. *I believe where she went.
 d. I don't believe where she went!

The clause introduced by a *wh*-element can occupy subject position in (16a), an indirect interrogative sentence, but it cannot occupy that position in the exclamative sentence (16b). The contrast between (16) (c) and (d) shows us a further distinction between indirect exclamatives and indirect interrogatives. Sentence (16c) is anomalous because the verb *believe* does not license a clausal object representing an indirect question. Sentence (16d) contains a negated version of this main verb, which signals expectation contravention. In this negated form, the predicate is welcome in exclamative contexts and in particular licenses clausal objects representing indirect exclamatives. This is so because under the right circumstances the proposition 'I don't believe X' is interpretable in the same way as the proposition 'X is unbelievable', whose predicate can be scalar in the same way as that of the proposition 'X is amazing'.³

The exclamative nature of NE appears clearly in the class of ADJECTIVES that may occur as main predicators in NE constructs. A large proportion of our examples contain the adjective *amazing*. In general, the adjectives are scalar predicates indicating expectation contravention, like *astonishing*, *incredible*, and the above-mentioned *unbelievable*. Exclamative utterances indicate that a situation is noncanonical, insofar as some entity or state of affairs manifests a given property to a higher degree than the speaker and/or the hearer has generally been given to expect. The fact that NE requires scalar predicates accords then with the exclamative function of this construction.⁴

Let us look again at sentences (13) through (15). An important difference between what is conveyed by (13) and (14) and what is conveyed by (15) is the following: in (15), we must INFER the relevant scalar parameter, as well as the corresponding property scale. The scalar parameter relevant for the interpretation of (15) could in fact be the VARIETY rather than the NUMBER of strange acquaintances. Therefore, sentence (15) has either of two paraphrases, given in (17):

- (17) a. It's amazing the variety of odd people my sister knows!
 b. It's amazing the number of odd people my sister knows!

The rightward NP in the NE sentence type may underdetermine what property scale the interpreter will invoke. This follows from a metonymic principle of reference that we will describe later on.

The denotatum of the rightward NP represents thus a SCALEABLE PARAMETER: one locatable on a property scale. And this scaleable parameter involved in the interpretation

of an NE construct does not have to be directly denoted by the rightward nominal. When it is not, it must be reconstructed by the interpreter. For example, notice (1f), which we repeat here for convenience:

(1f) It's **ASTONISHING** the age at which they become skilled **LIARS**.

In (1f), it is not the case that the property of being astonishing is attributed to the particular life stage invoked, which in this case is the age of five. Instead, what is astonishing is the early eventuation of this life stage. The point of eventuation of this stage ranks high on a scale of prematurity in child development. A similar situation obtains in (1h):

(1h) Just walking in the street [is difficult]. I mean, it's **UNBELIEVABLE** the people who are verbally **ABUSIVE** to **FAT** people.

In the case of (1h), we can say that the NP *the people who are verbally abusive to fat people* 'stands for' the high number of such people. In accordance with Fillmore & Kay (1993), who make a similar observation, we can note that it is not these people per se who are amazing, but the cardinality of the set to which they belong. Likewise, the definite NP *the difference* in the relevant part of (1d)

(1d) Announcer: Hear what denture wearers all over America have to say.

Denture wearer: It's **AMAZING** the **DIFFERENCE!**

can be said to 'stand for' the high degree of difference between two states.

It is important to observe that this inferred scalar meaning of the extraposed NP referent is normally absent in the corresponding canonical versions of such sentences, in which the subject NP appears in initial position and triggers number agreement on the verb. Compare:

(15') The odd people my sister knows are amazing.

(1h') The people who are verbally abusive to fat people are unbelievable.

(1f') The age at which they become skilled liars is amazing.

(1d') The difference is amazing.

In (15') the property of being amazing is predicated of the set of odd people known by my sister, not of the variety or number of such people, as in (13), (14), (15), and (17). In (1h') it is the people who are verbally abusive to obese people that are characterized as being 'unbelievable', not the high number of such people. The situation is perhaps less clear in examples (1f') and (1d'). Sentence (1f') is difficult to interpret as non-scalar because one does not ordinarily characterize a life stage (e.g. age 5) as being amazing in itself. The interpreter of (1f') is therefore likely to resort to a scalar interpretation by default. And (1d') is ambiguous between a scalar and a non-scalar reading because the noun *difference* is normally (but not necessarily) interpreted as scalar independently of the construction in which it occurs. What (15') through (1d') above have in common is that they are topic-comment sentences rather than degree exclamations. This difference between NE sentences and their non-extraposed counterparts confirms our analysis of NE as a construction in its own right, which differs not only from RD but also from the ordinary extraposition construction.⁵

3. Pragmatics. RD and NE share an important discourse-pragmatic property: both are appropriately used only when the referent of the rightward NP is not only identifiable (justifying use of the definite article) but also somehow **RECOVERABLE** from context. In the case of RD, pragmatic recoverability of the referent is a corollary of its status as a topic, topic referents being recoverable by definition (see Lambrecht 1994:Chapter 4). In this construction (as opposed to left-dislocation) the topic referent is also relatively high

on the accessibility scale--often to the point of being discourse-active.

In the case of NE, the extraposed NP denotes a previously INACTIVE and yet pragmatically ACCESSIBLE discourse referent. The difference between NE and RD with respect to the activation status of the NP referent is demonstrated in the following minimal pair, a variant of (1d):

(18) Announcer: Hear what denture wearers all over America have to say about
the difference Fixodent has made in their lives.

Denture wearer: a. It's AMAZING, the difference. (RD)

b. #It's AMAZING the DIFFERENCE. (NE)

At first glance, the inappropriateness of (18b) seems puzzling, since the NP referent cannot be less active in (b) than in (a), given the identity of discourse context. This inappropriateness is explained by the semantics of the NP as discussed in Section 2. In NE, unlike RD, the NP denotatum is not merely a specific topical referent (e.g. in (18) the difference between two states), but the value of this referent on a property scale. This scalar value has not been previously activated in the context, hence the necessary presence of an activation accent falling at some point within the definite NP.

Though not discourse-active, the NP referent in NE must be pragmatically accessible. Accessible referents are those identifiable referents which are not currently under discussion but which are recoverable from the linguistic or extralinguistic context (Chafe 1987, Lambrecht 1994:Chapter 3). Notice examples (19) through (23) (some of which were used earlier):

(19) A: Where's Butsy?

B: He's slipped in to see Senator What's-His-Face.

A: It's AMAZING the ACCESS he's got!

(20) A: With saffron, a little goes a long way, right?

B: It's AMAZING the power of the YELLOW.

(21) Just walking in the street [is difficult]. I mean, it's UNBELIEVABLE the people who are verbally abusive to FAT people.

(22) Announcer: Hear what denture wearers all over America have to say.

Denture wearer: It's AMAZING the DIFFERENCE!

(23) Garbo could turn almost every sentence into a joke on the one before. It was FASCINATING the way she wove her verbal TAPESTRY. (Vanity Fair 2/94)

The pragmatic accessibility of each of these referents follows from the fact that it represents an aspect of the superordinate discourse topic (Van Oosten 1984). Thus, for example, meeting with senators involves access to those senators (19). A salient property of saffron is its yellow color (20). For an obese person, walking in public may involve encountering various hostile people (21). An improvement involves a difference between a previous state of affairs and a subsequent one (22). Finally, the action of weaving a tapestry is a readily available metaphorical envisionment of Garbo's verbal dexterity, to which the reader has previously been introduced (23).

The discourse status of the extraposed NP referent in NE is directly reflected in the constraints on the DETERMINER. Notice the contrasts in (24):

(24) a. It's AMAZING, {*a/the/that} difference. (RD)

b. It's AMAZING {*a/the/*that} DIFFERENCE. (NE)

c. There's {an/*the/*that} amazing DIFFERENCE. (PRESENT)

(The presentational sentence (24c) is to be taken in the existential rather than the deictic reading.) In some sense, NE represents a compromise between RD and the existential

assertion of (24c). (24b) differs from (24a) and resembles (24c) in that the referent of the NP is non-active (see (18b) above). Unlike (24a), (24b) cannot contain anaphoric reference to some recently introduced discourse entity, nor deictic reference to some entity in the text-external world. This explains the inappropriateness of the determiner *that* in (b). But (b) resembles (a), and differs from (c), in that the post-predicate NP referent cannot be inactive, let alone unidentifiable, as it is in (c); hence the inappropriateness of the indefinite article in (a) and (b). As we mentioned before, in NE the post-predicate NP must refer to an aspect of the current superordinate discourse topic.

The definiteness constraint on the postpredicate NP in NE and RD illustrated in (24a) and (24b) is motivated by similar factors. Grammatical definiteness normally reflects the cognitive status 'identifiable'.⁶ Identifiable referents are those for which a shared representation exists in the minds of speaker and hearer (Lambrecht 1994:Chapter 3). In the case of RD, the identifiability requirement stems from the topic function of the dislocated NP. As argued in Lambrecht 1994 (Chapter 4), topic referents must be identifiable because of a basic cognitive constraint on property attribution: the entity to which a property is attributed must be familiar to the interlocutors. Note the peculiarity of the sentences in (25):

- (25) a. *A car is a MAZDA.
b. ??What a nice PERSON someone is.

In the case of NE, the definiteness constraint is based on a similar cognitive principle. One cannot communicate to an interlocutor one's amazement at something unless the interlocutor has prior knowledge of that thing. If no such prior knowledge obtains, use of a presentational construction is required (see (24c) above).

In another respect, however, RD and NE are not comparable pragmatically. The PRAGMATIC RELATION between the NP referent and the proposition is that of a TOPIC in the former, but of a FOCUS in the latter. RD is akin to ordinary predication types, and the dislocated NP has the straightforward referential properties of a discourse topic. The relation between the NP referent and the proposition is treated as pragmatically recoverable, and the proposition is interpreted as conveying information ABOUT this referent. NE is a degree exclamation. Accordingly, it is not the cognitive status of the postpredicate NP referent as a potential topic that is exploited in NE but the ability of this NP to invoke a position on a property scale. This position on a scale is treated as unpredictable, hence the NP referent has a focus relation to the proposition. In RD, the predicate alone is in focus. In NE, both the predicate and the argument are focal. We claim that it is this focus role of the NP referent within the proposition that motivates the non-canonical ('inverted') position of the subject argument in the sentence (see the discussion of (15') etc. above).

The appropriateness conditions for the postpredicate NP in NE are captured by the principle in (26):

- (26) INTERPRETIVE PRINCIPLE FOR NOMINAL EXTRAPOSITION: The postpredicate definite NP either (a) directly encodes or (b) metonymically refers to a scaleable feature representing an aspect of the superordinate discourse topic.

We claim that NE can be appropriately used only in contexts in which the interpretive principle in (26) applies.

We said earlier that NE is synonymous with INDIRECT EXCLAMATIVES. That is, there are paraphrase relations like that in (27):

- (27) a. It's UNBELIEVABLE how little she CARES. (IND. EXCL.)
b. It's UNBELIEVABLE her lack of CONCERN. (NE)

One pragmatic distinction between the two constructions in (27) had to do with the need to recover a scaleable parameter in the case of NE. Recall, for example, the contrast between (14) and (15), which we repeat here for convenience:

(14) It's AMAZING how many odd people my SISTER knows!

(15) It's AMAZING the odd people my SISTER knows!

Another pragmatic distinction between NE and indirect exclamationives involves the POTENTIAL FOR NARROW-FOCUS INTERPRETATION of the postpredicate constituent. Note the contrast in (28):

(28) a. A: Is there something remarkable about this case?

B: Well, it's remarkable [how many PEOPLE were IMPLICATED].

B': ??Well, it's remarkable [the number of PEOPLE who were IMPLICATED].

In (28), A's question sets up a narrow-focus context. The constituent in brackets in the reply 'fills in' the variable in the propositional function *X is remarkable*. Speakers report that the second response in (28) is less felicitous than the first. It seems, then, that NE does not license a postpredicate NP representing a narrow-focus argument. The explanation for the oddity of the second response in (28) follows from the focus structure we have postulated for NE: the predicate *is remarkable* is part of a presupposed proposition in (28), but, as argued above, the NE construction requires that the main predicator be in focus.

In (29), we give a representation of the information structure of an NE construct, using sentence (1c) as an example. The format chosen for (29) is that adopted in Lambrecht 1994:

(29) Sentence: *It's AMAZING the ACCESS he's got!*

Presupposition:

(i) of knowledge: 'Butsy has x amount of access (in Washington)'

(ii) of consciousness:

a. 'presupposition (i) is accessible at time of utterance'

b. 'referent Butsy is active at time of utterance'

(iii) of relevance: 'referent Butsy is topical in the discourse'

Assertion: 'speaker is amazed at the high value of x'

Focus: 'value of x is amazingly high'

Focus domain: S

In NE, the focus spans the entire proposition, therefore the syntactic focus domain is the entire sentence. The NE construction represents thus a special instantiation of what is referred to in Lambrecht 1994 as the 'sentence-focus construction'.

By their nature, NE constructs provide a rhetorical effect unavailable in the case of RD. An NE sentence elaborates some aspect of a superordinate discourse topic. By contrast, RD simply resumes a basic-level discourse topic. Note the NE example in (30):

(30) The mere sight of Henry...lifted her spirits. It was FRIGHTENING the way her adoration seemed to flow OUT of her like ink into water, staining everything, hiding everything. (J. Smiley, *Duplicate Keys*)

The first sentence establishes as a superordinate topic the protagonist's strong affection for Henry. The NE construct following this sentence directs the reader to regard this affection as a particularly intense profusion of feelings. By grammatical convention, the postpredicate NP represents an accessible referent. Thus, a metaphorical reenvisionment of the superordinate topic can be packaged as the righthand NP. This accords with the generally observable fact that postverbal position is conducive to further development, while preverbal position is constrained to already available material.⁷

4. Conclusion. It seems that a satisfactory account of the structure, meaning, and use of sentences like those in (1) requires recourse to construction-particular semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic properties and constraints. In our analysis, we have emphasized the necessity to integrate the categories of INFORMATION STRUCTURE into the grammatical description, as the discourse-pragmatic properties of the NE construction are inextricably intertwined with its semantic, syntactic, and intonational properties. Following the assumptions of CG, we take the features listed in the information-structure description in (29) to be inherent properties of our construction. We have presented an attempt to encode these information-structure features in the CG formalism. We conclude that the data validate the Construction-Grammar approach, in which the grammar includes as minimal symbolic units syntactically complex forms having idiosyncratic meanings and highly specialized communicative functions.

Notes

1. Jespersen (1933/1964, pp. 154ff) mentions an instance of this construction among a number of examples involving what he calls a "preparatory *it*" and a group of words in "extraposition". A preliminary analysis of our construction is offered in Fillmore & Kay 1993 (Chapter 10).

2. Example (4d) is not strictly speaking ungrammatical, since *il* could in principle also be referential, e.g. it could stand for *son courage* 'her courage' (see *Son courage est évident* 'Her courage is obvious').

3. In future work, we plan to extend our analysis to a semantically and pragmatically related exclamative sentence type, in which the postverbal NP is a direct object:

- (i) Dade County - you wouldn't believe the rise in crime! (Dade County sheriff)
- (ii) I can't believe the things she did!

Both (i) and (ii) contain negated sentences, which, like (16d), lend themselves to an exclamative interpretation. And as in (16c), the corresponding declarative sentences (*you believe the rise in crime, I can believe the things she did*) would be ill-formed.

4. There are some bothersome exceptions to this semantic generalization. One of the coauthors of the present paper spontaneously uttered the following NE sentences, in which no scalar interpretation seems possible. Sentence (i) was uttered in reference to the presence of twelve jurors' chairs next to the speaker's table in the BLS conference room, and (ii) referred to the greyish-whitish matter covering the window sill outside a classroom:

- (i) It's weird the set-up of that room!
- (ii) It's gross all those pigeons out there!

What links these examples to those in (1) is that they involve the speaker's belief that the situation denoted (e.g., the presence of some number of pigeons) is NONCANONICAL. Judgements of noncanonicity also play a role in the examples in (1), since the scalar degree attained also represents a remarkable or unexpected situation. See Slobin and Aksu 1982 and Michaelis 1994 for further discussion of the manner in which degree exclamations are related to the general function of flagging a situation as surprising.

5. The need to recover a scaleable feature is perhaps not unique to the NE construction, but characteristic of other exclamative sentence types. Notice (i):

- (i) What a question!

In (i), the nominal is unaccompanied by a modifier encoding the property scale upon which this question token is supposed to be placed. Therefore, the interpreter of (i) must adduce the relevant scale, i.e., whether the question at issue is particularly smart or dumb or inappropriate.

6. The information-structure representation in Figures 1 and 2 contains no indication of the identifiability value of the NP referent since identifiability (hence, generally, definiteness of the NP) is entailed by activeness and accessibility (Lambrecht 1994, Chapter 3).

7. For the purpose of the argument we are treating (30) as an instance of NE. It would perhaps be more appropriate to categorize (30) as an indirect exclamative, given the possible use of *the way* as a subordinator in modern English. Certain NE examples containing the postpredicate NP *the way* bring up the same problem as that mentioned in footnote 4. Many of these examples do not represent degree exclamations, but instead comments on the remarkable nature of some situation. Note the following example (from the Wall Street Journal corpus):

- (i) Meanwhile, Larry Thornton, Iowa's deputy treasurer, said he thought it was "kind of cute the way investment banks will always try to be the first to do something".

Here, the quoted speaker signals that certain proclivities of investment banks are exceptional in their capacity to merit his bemusement.

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