

A constructional account of right-dislocation in English

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The so-called Right Dislocation (RD) in English (e.g., *They're excellent company, the Smiths*) consists of a sentence-final noun phrase (NP₂) which is coreferential with a pronominal expression (NP₁) in the preceding matrix clause (Huddleston and Pullum 2002). In this paper, we, together with attested corpus-examples, offer a Construction Grammar (CxG) based account of the RD in which all levels of description (including morpheme, word, phrase, and clause) are understood to involve pairings of form with semantic or discourse functions (Goldberg 2006).

The NP₁'s grammatical functions can vary (object, prepositional object, or predicative complement) as attested from the COCA (Contemporary Corpus of American English):

- (1) a. ... I wanted to comfort **him**, the poor man.
- b. No one has to take responsibility on this job except for **me**, the structural engineer.
- c. ... I guessed his name before I took in his long body and knew it was **him**, the golden boy.

The NP₁, often called 'resumptive pronoun', can be even an indefinite one as seen from the COCA examples:

- (2) a. Then **something** at the back of his mind nagged him, an unscratched itch.
- b. He says the police had misread **something else**, those online searches.

The corpus search yields examples where the NP₁ antecedent is repeated or even split:

- (3) a. They take **it**, they accept **it**, this un-American status.
- b. ... **she** laughed, and **he** laughed with her, these two, these motherless children.

The typical NP₂ is definite and cannot involve a *wh*-expression. However, observe in the following corpus examples in which even a free-relative functions as the NP₂ (cf. Leonarduzzi and Herment 2013):

- (4) a. We were talking about it, **what she was doing wrong**.
- b. His elbow was red, with a skin bubble on it, **where he'd burned himself**.

The semantic relation between the two NPs are traditionally to be taken anaphoric (Quirk et al. 1995), but we suggest that the relation is a 'copula-relation' which can be interpreted as equative, predicational, or specificational, respectively (cf. Ziv and Grosz 1994):

- (5) a. I like **him**, John.
- b. ... began to noisily clean his clothes and he was sure that whoever had entered would hear it and find **him**, a naked burglar.
- c. Then **something** at the back of his mind nagged him, an unscratched itch.

In the equative relation (5a), the pronominal NP *him* in (5a) equates the referent of the NP₂ *John*. In (5b), the NP₂ *a naked burglar* is rather predicated of the pronoun *him*. In the specificational relation example (5c), the NP₂ *an unscratched itch* can be interpreted as the value for the variable that the indefinite NP *something* sets up. In terms of pragmatic function, the

RD expression is taken to identify and reintroduce an evoked entity to make it discourse-salient (Ziv and Grosz 1994, Huddleston and Pullum 2002). Note that these semantic and pragmatic properties are not compositional – no linguistic expression involved in the construction can mark the ‘copula-relation’ or the ‘reinforce’ or clarification function. This also means that the RD surely contributes to the final at-issue meaning of the whole sentence. In this sense, the regularities as well as idiosyncrasies of the construction can be expected once we suppose there is an independent RD construction linked to its constructional meaning. This constructional-view can be expanded to cover variants of the RD construction as in the following COCA examples in which the NP2 is followed by a copula verb like (Quirk et al. 1985):

- (6) a. ... death was more real to a person after he turned forty. Any forty-year-old would confirm this. It was more present, **death was**.
b. He held his position for a moment, testing the wind. It was in his face, **praise be**.

The data then imply that there are two different types of RD in English with the different syntax. These two subconstructions share the semantic and discourse functions but differ in syntax. This way of describing English syntax, armed with the network system of constructions with inheritance, offer us a comprehensive grammar of English including core as well as peripheral constructions alike.

Selected References

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