

Pronouns and their associates (II): Clausal prolepsis

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- the weak pronoun *it* is often used to ‘herald’ a subordinate clause
  - obligatorily when the clause serves as the subject of a matrix finite clause (1a,b)
  - often obligatorily when the clause serves as the subject of a non-root small clause (1c–e)
  - variably when the clause serves as an object of the matrix verb (2)
  - obligatorily when the clause serves as the object of a preposition, but only when this preposition is physically present (3)
- this pronominal ‘heralding’ of subordinate clauses is called **clausal prolepsis**
- (1)
  - a. *\*(it) {seems/appears} (to be) that he lied*
  - b. *\*(it) is {likely/possible/unthinkable/a scandal} (\*to be) that he lied*
  - c. *they find {(it) likely/?(it) possible/?\*(it) unthinkable/\*(it) a scandal} (\*to be) that he lied*
  - d. *they regard \*(it) as {likely/possible/unthinkable/a scandal} that he lied*
  - e. *they take \*(it) for {granted/a fact} that he lied*
- (2)
  - a. *they {assume/think/said} (\*it) that he lied*
  - b. *they {appreciate/like/just know/(just) accept} (it) that he lied*
  - c. *they {despise/hate} ?(it) that he lied*
  - d. *they gave \*(it) some serious thought that he lied*
  - e. *they take \*(it) that he lied*
- (3)
  - a. *they are convinced {about/of} \*(it) that he lied*
  - a'. *they are convinced (\*it) that he lied*
  - b. *they are curious about ??(it) whether he lied*
  - b'. *they are curious (\*it) whether he lied*
- in (1a,b), the obligatoriness of the pronoun is a reflex of the EPP  
 [note that while (1b) allows the *that*-clause to be placed in the structural subject position, such is impossible in (1a)]
- note *re*: (1c) that *Mad Magazine*-type root small clauses do not tolerate prolepsis: *\*(it) likely that he lied? no way!*
- in truncation contexts, it is ‘cheaper’ to confine the structure to just the projection of the predicate (with the clause in the complement position of *likely*) than to include a full small-clause structure with a pronominal subject
- cases of (near-)obligatory ‘object-*it*’, as in (2c–e), can be recast as cases of ‘subject-*it*’, on the hypothesis in these cases the verb takes a small-clause complement
  - for double object constructions (2d), a small-clause analysis is advocated in Kayne (1984), Den Dikken (1995)
  - for (2e), a link with (1e) suggests itself, with a silent predicate in the small clause
  - for (2d), a small clause with a silent predicate is not implausible in light of the paraphrase *they find \*(it) despicable/repulsive/odious that he lied*

- the proleptic *it* in (3a,b) can only be treated as a complement: Ps such as *about* do not take small clauses as complements (\**they are convinced about [him a liar]*); contrast this with *they are convinced about him being a liar*, so *it* cannot be treated as a subpart of P's small-clause complement
- the exact distribution of clausal prolepsis is a matter on which too little is known at this time
- in the discussion in this session, we will concentrate instead on the question of **how to relate the proleptic pronoun to the clause**
- one approach (popular in the literature since Chomsky 1981) is to treat the pronoun *it* as an **expletive** — a non-argumental ‘stop-gap’ element, present for purely formal reasons (the EPP, in particular)
  - such an approach can to some extent be applied to (1a) and the *likely* versions of (1b,c) — the poster-child expletive *there* can occur in these environments; but note the difference in distribution of *to be* between (1a–c) and (4a–c)
  - but the expletive approach runs into trouble for cases such as (1d,e), (2c–e) and (3a,b), where *it* serves a thematic role (object of the verb/preposition, subject of the small-clause predicate) and expletive *there* cannot occupy the position held by *it*

- (4)
- a. there {seems/appears} \*(to be) a problem with this analysis
  - b. there is {likely/\*possible/\*unthinkable/\*a scandal} \*(to be) a problem with this analysis
  - c. they find there {likely/\*possible/...} \*(to be) a problem with this analysis
  - d. \*they regard there as a problem with this analysis  
(cf. *they consider there to be a problem with this analysis* and *they regard there as being a problem with this analysis*)
  - e. \*they take there ⟨nothing⟩ for ⟨nothing⟩ {granted/a fact}
  - f. \*they gave there several options some serious thought
  - g. \*they are convinced about there a problem with this analysis  
(cf. *they are convinced about there being a problem with this analysis*)

- with the expletive approach off the table, four roads remain open — and all four have been explored (for different cases):
  - (i) *it* and the *that*-clause as constituents of a ‘big DP’, with the *that*-clause born in SpecDP
  - (ii) *it* as a subpart of the *that*-clause (subextracted from the clause in the ensuing derivation)
  - (iii) *it* as a θ-role bearer, with the *that*-clause specifying its content
  - (iv) *it* as a predicate, with the *that*-clause as its subject

re (i) proposed on the analogy of clitic doubling (Angelopoulos):  $[_{DP} CP [_{D'} D=it [pro]]]$

re (ii) proposed for Hungarian cases of object-clause prolepsis (Kenesei, Lipták) such as (5)

- (5)           azt           hiszik,                       hogy hazudott   (Hungarian)  
                 it.ACC   believe.3PL.DEF   that   lie.PAST.3SG  
                 ‘they think/believe that (s)he lied’

- (6) a. [<sub>CP</sub> *it* [<sub>C'</sub> *that* S]] ⇒ SUBEXTRACTION ⇒  
 b. [<sub>IP</sub> ... *it*<sub>i</sub> ... [<sub>CP</sub> *t*<sub>i</sub> [<sub>C'</sub> *that* S]]]

→ an approach along these lines accounts for the ban on  $\bar{A}$ -extraction from the subordinate clause with an appeal to the occupancy of SpecCP

- (7) \**miról*<sub>k</sub> *hiszik* *azt*, *hogy* *hazudott* *t*<sub>k</sub>?  
 what.about believe.3PL.DEF it.ACC that lie.PAST.3SG  
 intended: ‘what do they think/believe that (s)he lied about?’

→ but while (6) may be available for examples of the type in (1a,b), with an appeal to the hypothesis that the complex CP originates in the complement of the raising predicate, it does not carry over to proleptic *it* as the subject of unergative predicates

- (8) *az* *a* *baj/fontos*, *hogy* *hazudott*  
 it the problem/important that lie.PAST.3SG  
 ‘the problem/important thing is that (s)he lied’

→ at any rate, the ungrammaticality of (7) cannot be chalked up as a decisive advantage for (6) since it can also be made to fall out from other approaches

*re (iii)* for (8), and for clausal prolepsis under factive verbs (cf. (9)), an analysis along the lines of (10) is the most straightforward approach

- (9) *azt* *tudják*, *hogy* *hazudott*  
 it.ACC know.3PL.DEF that lie.PAST.3SG  
 ‘they know that (s)he lied’

- (10) [<sub>SC</sub> [<sub>Subject</sub> *it*]<sub>i</sub> [<sub>Predicate</sub> *the problem/FACT*]] [<sub>CP</sub> *that* S]<sub>i</sub>

• Bennis (1986) has demonstrated that the proleptic *it* associated with subordinate clauses can, under the right circumstances, control a PRO in an adjunct clause (for which it is known independently that it can only be controlled by arguments, not expletives or predicates)

- (11) a. it is important, without PRO being our top priority, that this problem is solved  
 b. it is likely, without PRO being certain, that this problem will be solved

→ note that *likely* can participate in this — this may indicate that when it does, *likely* is not a raising predicate

• the important question raised by (10) is what the nature of the syntactic relationship between *it* and the *that*-clause could be

→ a plausible approach is **specificational asyndetic coordination**  
 [I can elaborate on this in class if there is an interest in the syntax of asyndetic coordination]

*re (iv)* originally proposed for the *it* of (12B) (Moro) — an approach that naturally extends to *it*-clefts such as (13) (see Den Dikken 2013)

- (12) A: what’s your problem?  
 B: it’s that you smoke too much
- (13) a. it’s that you smoke too much that worries me  
 b. it’s your smoking/THIS that worries me

- for the placement of *it* in the structural subject position, Moro proposes an analysis starting out from a canonical predication and raising the predicate to subject via **predicate inversion**

- (14) a.  $[_{SC} [_{Subject} \textit{that S}] [_{Predicate} \textit{it}]] \Rightarrow \text{PREDICATE INVERSION} \Rightarrow$   
 b.  $[_{IP} \textit{it}_i \textit{is} [_{SC} [_{Subject} \textit{that S}] [_{Predicate} t_i]]]$

- an approach along these lines can be applied only to a small subset of the clausal prolepsis cases in (1) and (2) — basically, only to (1a,b)
- predicate inversion requires an overt copula; no copula is (or can be) present in any of the examples in (1c–e), (2) and (3)

- Den Dikken (2018) presents a different outlook on the predication relationship between pro-predicate *it* and the *that*-clause: **reverse predication** (the mirror image of (14a))

- (15)  $[_{SC} [_{Predicate} \textit{it}] [_{SubjectP} \textit{that S}]]$

- this forgoes predicate inversion, and allows the ‘*it* as pro-predicate’ approach to be applicable to (5) and its ilk

**NB** the logical hypothesis space for the analysis of clausal prolepsis can be widened if *that*-clauses can, under certain circumstances, be turned into predicates

- clauses automatically become predicates when they contain an operator–variable dependency (relative clauses, *tough*-infinitives); but there does not appear to be such a dependency inside the subordinate clause of clausal prolepsis constructions
- Kratzer and Mouton have proposed that so-called ‘noun-complement clauses’ (as in *the claim that he lied*) are lifted to predicate status — if adequately constrained, it may also be able to apply to the *that*-clause of clausal prolepsis constructions, which then opens up the possibility that the *that*-clause is the predicate and *it* is its subject

- (16)  $[_{SC} [_{Subject} \textit{it}] [_{Predicate} \textit{that S}]]$

- I will not consider this possibility because it is not a ‘syntactically autonomous’ approach: it depends on a semantic operation to render the structure interpretable