Th-clefts in English: Form and Function

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the so-called *th*-cleft construction illustrated by sentences such as *The thing that he loved most of all in the whole world was the sea*. Following Collins (1991), such constructions are considered a type of pseudo-cleft construction because of their formal and functional similarity with the 'canonical' pseudo-cleft with a fused relative clause introduced by a *wh*-interrogative. The main aim of this study is to examine *th*-cleft constructions in Modern English, focusing on *the thing(s)-* and *the one(s)*-clefts, both basic and reversed, and to look at their formal features and main informative and communicative functions in discourse.

As the evidence presented from the BNC and LLC corpora suggests, *th*-clefts are a recognisable type of construction in English, although clearly associated with other types of pseudo-clefts. One of the main motivations that the speaker has for selecting a *th*-cleft rather than a *wh*-cleft is that the former, but not the latter, allows for expansion of the same kind as is found in other NPs occurring in other kinds of clauses, making the *th*-cleft a very versatile construction.

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

This paper investigates constructions of the type shown in (1):

(1)   a.   The thing that he loved most of all in the whole world was the sea. (BNC: F72, S-classroom)[2]
      b.   But I think *the ones who suffer most are the children*. (BNC: CEK, W-news)

Following Collins (1991), the constructions in (1) are considered a type of pseudo-cleft construction because of their formal and functional similarity with the 'canonical' pseudo-cleft with a fused relative clause introduced by a *wh*-interrogative such as *what*. In the constructions in (1)*,* the *wh*-item is replaced by the definite article *the* followed by a pro-form equivalent of the English interrogatives (here *thing* and *one*), acting as the lexical head of the relative clause that follows. Since the more basic type of cleft headed by a *wh*-item has been often called *wh*-cleft, Collins (1991), by analogy, refers to those with a relative clause introduced by *the* as *th*-clefts.[3] My main aim in this paper is to examine *th*-cleft constructions in Modern English in terms of their form and function in discourse.

2. THE DATABASE

The database upon which this study is based has been extracted from the British National Corpus (BNC) and a section of the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC) consisting of ten selected texts amounting to 60,000 words approximately. The BNC is a 100 million word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of current British English. The texts selected from the LLC are face-to-face conversations, surreptitiously recorded, where markers of phonological transcription –not present in the BNC data— have been omitted (for a printed version, see Svartvik and Quirk 1980).

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[1] It is a pleasure for me to write this paper for a volume in honour of Professor Asunción Alba, who was my first English-language teacher at University (University of Alicante). I would like to thank the editors of this *festschrift* volume for their comments on an earlier version of the text.

[2] In the examples, indication is given of the corpus used –BNC and LLC— and the text code. S stands for Spoken and W for written, and within each of these two, reference is made in the BNC to the text type: conversation (*conv*), speech, lecture (*lect*), news, academic (*acad*), fiction (*fict*), etc. In longer examples the *th*-cleft construction is distinguished in italics.

[3] The term seems to have been used for the first time by Catherine N. Ball, who presented a paper at the 1977 University of Pennsylvania Linguistics Colloquium, entitled '*Th*-clefts' (see Prince 1978).

The BNC spoken and written texts comprise various subtypes such as conversation, meetings, classroom interaction, news, fiction, academic discourse and other types, which are indicated in the coding of the examples.

The corpus analysis from the ten texts of the LLC derives from an earlier study on the expression of focus in English and Spanish (Martínez Caro 1999). For searching the BNC, the concordance programme VIEW was used where strings such as *the thing/things that* or *the one/ones + [pnp]* (= personal pronoun) were searched for in the different registers.[4]

3. DEFINING THE CLASS OF *TH*-CLEFTS

A cleft sentence is a construction which makes it possible to put special emphasis on a particular constituent. This is done by dividing up the sentence into two sections. Thus, what is a single unit (cf. 2a) is divided up into two distinct parts in (2b-c). Hence the use of the term 'cleft' (from the verb 'to cleave'):

(2) a. He loved the sea most of all in the whole world.
      b. What he loved most of all in the whole world was the sea.
      c. The thing that he loved most of all in the whole world was the sea. (BNC: F72, S-classroom) = (1a)

In both (2b) and (2c) we give prominence to the element following the copula –*the sea* in this case. Huddleston (1984) and Collins (1991) refer to this element informally as 'the highlighted element' and this is also how I will be referring to it; other expressions such as the 'focus' or 'the focused element' are also used in the literature.

There is no agreement as to the domain of the term 'pseudo-cleft' in the literature: some authors restrict it to *wh*-clefts (e.g. Prince 1978); others include superficially similar constructions which include other non-*wh*-words. Collins (1991) in particular, argues that the class of pseudo-clefts comprises three subclasses: '*wh*-clefts' as in (2b), '*th*-clefts', as in (2c) and '*all*-clefts' (as in *All he needs is a passport*). Apart from these three subclasses, and considering the reversibility of pseudo-clefts (see below), Huddleston (1984) recognises two main types of pseudo-clefts: basic pseudo-clefts and reversed clefts. In this study I will be dealing with *th*-clefts, both basic and reversed.

Th-cleft constructions typically consist of a NP subject followed by some form of the verb *to be* functioning as the copula and the highlighted element. The NP is

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[4] VIEW stands for Variation in English Words and Phrases and it is a database interface for the BNC, developed by Mark Davies at Brigham Young University.

introduced by the definite article *the* in conjunction with the pro-form equivalents of the English interrogatives (*thing, one, place, time, reason, way*) and an optional relative introducing the relative clause restricting the NP head.[5] For example, from (2b) above we may get (2c) with *The thing that…* or other *th*-cleft equivalents such as *The thing which he loved most of all in the whole world was the sea,* or simply *The thing he loved most of all in the whole world was the sea*. In order to restrict my scope of research, in this study only *th*-clefts lexically headed by *thing* and *one* have been considered, both basic and reversed.

The items *thing* and *one* are part of the class of items called 'pro-nouns' by Halliday and Hasan (1976: 102-104) and should be distinguished from the class of 'general words' such as *thing, person, man, place, kind* and so on, which function as anaphoric reference items (Mahlberg 2005). We will restrict *th*-clefts to constructions with a relative clause headed by a pro-noun (or pro-form) and not a general word. Thus, alternative items to the pro-forms *thing* and *one* like *point, idea, problem* in the case of the former, and others such as *person, man, woman* and so on (cf. 3), in the case of the latter, have been excluded from my database of *th*-clefts (see Collins 1991: 29-30):

(3)   A: I mean I I . *the very first*
       c: *[m]*
       (A: *person I met before lunch was [dhi əm] history don* who was just sweet
       (LLC: T1.3, 959-63)

Like other types of pseudo-clefts, *th*-clefts are identifying constructions, expressing a relationship of identity between the highlighted element and the lexically-headed NP. In (2c), for instance, the sea is identified as the thing which satisfies the definition provided in the subordinate relative clause: *that he loved most of all in the whole world*.

As identifying constructions, *th*-clefts need to be distinguished from superficially similar attributive constructions. Whereas identifying constructions are typically reversible and involve the identification of two entities, or participants, attributive constructions are not reversible and the identity is established between an entity and some attribute ascribed to it (Collins 1991: 2). Thus, compare the *th*-cleft in (4b) with the attributive construction in (4a):

[5] In the case of *th*-clefts introduced by *the one…*, this is the only alternative cleft, since basic *who*-clefts are ungrammatical in present-day English.

(4) a. The thing that's flying towards me is *multicoloured* (BNC: BMS, W-fict)
     b. The thing that's flying towards me is *my child's new toy*.

Whereas (4b) is reversible, the construction in (4a) is not.

Basic and reversed *th*-clefts are exemplified in (5):

(5) a. BASIC *TH*-CLEFT: The only thing I don't like about it is *the noise*. (BNC: KBF, S-conv)
     b. REVERSED *TH*-CLEFT: Apparently *state of pavements* is the thing that people complain about most to local councils. (BNC: KBK, S-conv)

Whereas the highlighted element (in italics in [5]) is found after the copula in basic *th*-clefts, coinciding with the predicative complement function, in reversed *th*-clefts the highlighted element occupies the preverbal position and functions as the subject of the sentence.

Particularly common among reversed *th*-clefts in English is the construction with a demonstrative as subject (usually *that*) followed by the copula and the highlighted element. Following Biber *et al.* (1999: 961) who use the term 'demonstrative *wh*-cleft,' I will call this construction the *demonstrative th*-cleft. (6) exemplifies this construction:

(6) What's that then? plate, oh I don't Oh *that's the thing that you put behind it*. (BNC: KC9, Sp-conv)

4. FORMAL PROPERTIES OF *TH*-CLEFTS

In order to reach a better understanding of *th*-clefts, it is useful to examine several formal properties displayed by these constructions against the evidence suggested by the corpus analysis.

One significant formal feature of *th*-clefts has to do with the range of syntactic classes and functions represented by the highlighted element. In *the thing(s)* and *the one(s)* clefts, the highlighted element represents either the object or prepositional object (cf. 7a-b) or the subject (7c-d) of the relative clause headed by the lexical word:

(7) a. The only thing I don't like about it is the noise. (BNC: KBF, S-) = (5a)
     b. That's the one I'm thinking of. (BNC: FXR, S-meeting)
     c. But I think *the ones who suffer most are the children*. (BNC: CEK, W-news) = (1b)
     d. The thing that upset me most is the verbal abuse. (BNC: CEK, W-news)

Both *one* and *thing*, as pro-forms, have a plural as well as a singular form. An example with plural of *one* is (7c). (8) exemplifies the plural use of *thing*:

(8)   And postage stamps are not the only things that have gone up in price. (BNC: C88, W-news)

In *the thing*-clefts, the highlighted element is typically a non-human (indefinite) noun (see Halliday and Hasan 1976: 103), but examples where the referent is human and definite do also occur in the corpus:

(9)   and *the thing that annoys me is that young fellow who came to the club* had a got, we got a special went to the special trouble of getting a for him and I can not get it off him (BNC: J3N, S-meeting)

One can both refer to a human (as in 7c above) or non-human noun (see 10):

(10) The pink one's a dish cloth. *The blue one's the one I wipe up small stains off the floor*. (BNC: KB8, S-conv)

Like the *wh*-cleft construction (but unlike the cleft), *th*-clefts can easily highlight finite clauses like *that*-clauses (as we can see in 11a) or *wh*-clauses (11b), and non-finite clauses like infinitive clauses or *ing*-clauses (see 11c-d). This use of *th*-clefts with a clausal highlighted element is limited to *the thing*-clefts:

(11) a. The thing that I object to is that many old people and the disabled relied on taxis to get them into that area, (BNC: K55, W-news)
      b. Now the thing that seems to be the most interesting on the er face value of it, is er how it's going to affect fuel consumption and transport, (BNC: KRT, S-brdcast-news)
      c. but the fact that if you are still drinking at half past four in the morning, *the last thing you should do at nine o'clock in the morning is get in the car and drive the damn thing.* (BNC: JSN, S-unclassified)
      d. you become insular and we become introverted and *the only thing that matters is me having a good time*, my world centres around me and me enjoying myself (BNC: FLU, S-sermon)

The fact that the post-verbal constituent in this type of *th*-clefts is a clause often results in constructions with fairly heavy and complex identified elements, which following the end-weight principle naturally come at the end, like (12) where the highlighted element has been italicised:

(12) The thing that is really appealing about In England Now is *that self-important, overbearing medical people are still aghast at the idea of a major journal of international repute devoting space to humour.* (BNC: AAG, W-news)

This type of examples contrasts sharply with reversed *th*-clefts where the highlighted element consists of a single demonstrative pronoun or personal pronoun, two very common realisations of the NP subject in reversed *th*-clefts:

(13) a. And we're on an H P Laserjet Two D for some reason. Well *that's the one I've got at work* you see. (BNC: G4K, S-classroom)
   b. Anyway, *she was the one who did the talking.* (BNC: A08, W-fict)
   c. Can I just ask about the evaluation. Are you saying that that's in this next workshop? Yeah. *Is that the thing that's in the next workshop?* (BNC: G4X, S-meeting)

After having looked at the range of syntactic classes and functions of the highlighted element, it is useful to consider the structure of the NP headed by the pro-forms *thing* and *one*. The relative clause following the pro-form may be introduced by the conjunction *that, who* —with lexical head *one*— and *which* —with lexical head *thing*— (cf. 14a-c), or may simply omit the relevant conjunction provided this is not functioning as subject in which case the omission is not allowed in English (cf. 14d):

(14) a. The thing that he loved most of all in the whole world was the sea. (BNC: Sp-F72) = (2c)
   b. But I think *the ones who suffer most are the children.* (BNC: CEK, W-news) = (1b, 7c)
   c. But *the thing which must have been nearest to her heart,* because she returned to it so often, *was how as a child she had walked to church along the sands.* (BNC: AC7, W-fict)
   d. The only thing I don't like about it is the noise. (BNC: Sp-KBF) = (5a, 7a)

I take the standpoint that the lexical head in *th*-clefts should be necessarily restricted by a relative clause. Superficially similar examples of *th*-clefts where the lexical head is followed/complemented by a non-finite *to*-infinitive clause (as in the frequent combination *The thing to do + BE…*), for instance, have been excluded from the database on the basis that there is no *wh*-cleft counterpart readily available, as is the case with the rest of *th*-clefts considered (as in *The thing to do is obviously to swing the PhD subject round to something nearer what I'm being paid to do* [LLC: T2.4b, 1065-66]). Likewise, constructions containing sequences such as *the (adjective) thing is/was,* that is where the head is not postmodified but immediately followed by the copula, have

been excluded (as in *The thing is that The Smiths are the only human band in England*. [BNC: ART, W-biography]).

However, examples where one can think that the relative clause following the lexical head has been reduced but where the elliptical information can still be easily retrieved have indeed been included in the corpus. A case in point is the sequence 'worth + V-ing' seen as a reduced (relative) clause, as in the following examples:

(15) a. It seemed to her that *the only thing worth doing was to walk deep into those glades*, far away from everything; (BNC: F99, W-fict)
 b. But the only things worth having are the things you've worked hard for, (BNC: EFJ, W-fict)

Even a single adjective placed after the noun head can act as a postmodifier of the lexical head in a *th*-cleft:

(16) Witnesses gave only a vague description of the driver, concentrating on his clothes, for *the only thing **visible** inside the car was a blue, fur-edged anorak*, the hood pulled up tight. (BNC: G15, W-fict)

Notice that in both cases one can easily retrieve the relative pronoun and the form of the verb (*be* in this case) to form a 'complete relative clause': *the only thing **that is** worth doing…* (15') or *the only thing **that was** visible inside the car…* (16').

Turning now to the material premodifying the head in the NP subject (or complement in the case of reversed *th*-clefts), we find items such as adjectives or ordinal number determiners as common premodifying elements:

(17) So at one extreme you've got the explorer who simply goes off into the unknown. The, *the **last** thing the explorer wants on holiday is to meet people from their own country*. (BNC: F88, S-lect)

One of the most important motivations for using *th*-clefts rather than the 'canonical' (and more discussed) *wh*-cleft is that the former structure allows for expansion of the same kind as is found with NPs occurring in other kinds of clause whereas the latter does not (Ward, Birner and Huddleston 2002: 1423). See for instance:

(18) well I think we're onto a good thing with this cassette because *the only other commercially available Old English thing I know is that record* (LLC: T3.2c, 1028-30)

In this example the NP head *thing* is premodified by the phrase *only other commercially available Old English* following the definite article *the*.

4.1. Less prototypical *th*-clefts

The *th*-cleft construction can be defined by a set of prototypical properties that have been mentioned in the previous sections. However, not all examples of *th*-clefts in the corpus share all of these properties. Less prototypical *th*-clefts have also resulted from the corpus analysis in which "factors such as language planning and processing, speaker-interactive variables and other situational and discourse phenomena" have to be taken into account (Collins 1991: 44).

Among these untypical *th*-cleft constructions there are examples with omission of the copula that typically relates the identifier and identified elements (cf. 19a), constructions with a comma (i.e. a pause) between the subject and the predicate or after the copula (cf. 19a and 19b), and *th*-clefts with intervening material between the NP and the identified element (e.g. 19c):

(19) a. I think *the thing that worries me more than anything else about them, that a lot of'em have aspirations erm greater than their finances.* If you actually look at what we've paid for some of the players say over the last two (BNC: KN2, S-brdcast)

b. Mm. fact if you don't inhale at all you're doing yourself a big favour, but you nearly always get some down ion to the system and really the o *the only thing I could ethically recommend as a doctor, is stopping.* (BNC: G5T, S-consult)

c. I [ə] I think they're all right but I wouldn't guarantee them he said as a matter of fact *the only ones I can guarantee* and I can guarantee those absolutely if they're used according to direction *are those that I've got here* (LLC: T1.1, 478-83)

4.2. Some semantic properties

One way to classify *th*-clefts is by looking at the semantic domains the verbs occurring in the relative clause following the pro-noun belong to. A great number of the *th*-clefts found had a verb associated with a mental process[6], denoting the speaker's (or writer's) internal state. Particularly frequent in this group are verbs of affectivity such as *like, worry, annoy, puzzle, strike, concern* and *get* (with the meaning of 'annoy',

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[6] The semantic categories I will be using here are based on the semantic classification of processes presented in Downing & Locke (2006). Cf. also the categorisation of predicate types in *wh*-clefts in conversation in Kim (1995: 251-52).

associated with the spoken register). These verbs occur in quite a few of the examples presented so far: cf. e.g. (1a), (5a), (7d), (9) and (19a).

Also from this group of mental processes are verbs of cognition found in the corpus (*think* mainly, but also *know, remember* and *consider*; see examples (7b) and (18), for instance) and those expressing desiderative processes (mainly *want*: e.g. 17). Finally, there is also a considerable use of dynamic verbs of 'doing' (like *do* or others such as *keep, use* or *get*, as in examples 6, 10 and 11c) and verbal processes of 'saying' (particularly *say* but also *mention* and *ask*, for instance), as in (20):

(20) *The only thing I might say is I wish we had heard it earlier* cos it was excellent to hear. (BNC: HDR, S-speech)

A complete account of the choice of verbs occurring in the relative clause of *th*-clefts should consider factors such as register variation, the distinction between basic and reversed *th*-clefts, the kind of premodification that the lexical head shows and the syntactic functions of the argument participants in the relative clause. For example, there seems to be a correlation in the database between instances where the verb denotes a mental process and the fact that the lexical head of the *the thing/the one*-NP is functioning as the subject in the relevant relative clause. Indeed, a full consideration of such factors lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

As with *wh*-clefts and also clefts, *th*-clefts introduce an implication of *uniqueness* or *exclusiveness* which is absent, or not necessarily present, in the non-cleft form (see, for example, Huddleston 1984: 466; Halliday 1985: 43; Collins 1991: 69; Hannay and Mackenzie 2002: 145). Thus, compare:

(21) a. And I would like to make another quote if I may, *he was the one that talked about Scotland being the land of cakes*, and brother Scots, where the women made the cakes (BNC: FLL, S-brdcast)
      b. And … he talked about Scotland being the land of cakes

(21a), but not necessarily (21b), implies that he was the only one that referred to Scotland in those terms. The *th*-cleft thus provides an implicit rejection of other possibilities.

5. INFORMATIONAL PROPERTIES OF *TH*-CLEFTS

As stated above, the primary function of *th*-clefts (like the rest of the pseudo-clefts) is to group the elements of the sentence into two parts. In terms of given and new information, the *th*-cleft typically shows a basic distribution of the information, with the given information typically coming at the beginning and the more important or focus information towards the end of the sentence, thus conforming to the general tendency of end-focus principle, by which communicatively more important information tends to come later.[7]

Regarding the informational properties of pseudo-clefts in general, one point which has been discussed in the literature is the status of the relative clause. In *th*-clefts, the relative clause may be given, as in the following example (with the initial NP in bold):

(22) finally just before we leave second messenger gated channels, I'd like to consider two more which have been worked on er extensively and one of which we'll er deal with er next week. ***The one we'll deal with next week*** *is the case of cyclic A M P activated chloride channels*, these are found in secretory epithelia. (BNC: J8K, S-lect)

but it does not necessarily have to, although this does not mean that it is then presented as the main focus either. According to Huddleston (1984), in basic *th*-clefts the content of the relative clause is presented as something not being *at issue*.

In reversed *th*-clefts, the so-called highlighted element (placed initially) may indeed be presented as the main focus but it is also common to find the focal information at the end, coinciding with the NP containing the relative clause.[8] This is related to the nature of this highlighted element, which often coincides with a demonstrative pronoun such as *this* or *that*, as we have seen. In reversed *th*-clefts the relative clause may contain more significant material than in the basic *th*-cleft.

(23) But he said it would be quite wrong to say that the country's history had been one long mistake since the revolution. His was the party's explanation: that *Stalin was the one who distorted everything*, and that Leninist ideals of socialism should be reinstated. That, too, has been the message of this Revolution Day --; back to Lenin and 1917, to a "radical renewal of socialism" as one (BNC: A7V, W-news)

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[7] In terms of intonation, this is reflected by the fact that *th*-clefts typically consist of two, or more, tone units and one of them usually coincides with the NP containing the relative clause which will naturally contain some kind of new information; the other tone unit contains the highlighted element which also receives the natural end focus (Collins 1991: 118ff).

[8] This again is reflected in the intonational pattern of this construction, typically realised as a single tone unit with placement of the nuclear stress in the relative clause.

In (23), where the general topic is the Soviet Union's history, the main function of the *th*-cleft is to say something informative and relevant to the present discourse topic about Stalin, which can be easily inferred from this discourse topic.

As an example of *th*-cleft with main focus on the construction initial element (in bold), see:

(24) I actually dissuaded er What's the proportion of females on that floor? Er, good question! Actually noticed, with an inkling of as well. So er ***she was the one who pointed that fact to me***. I wouldn't have worked it out, so erm Stop digging will you! There haven't been any other erm any other areas er, of complaint with er Mm. i er in (BNC: FLS, S-meeting)

This use of reversed *th*-clefts with a focal initial element is more frequently associated in the corpus with non-demonstrative *th*-clefts, that is, *th*-clefts where the highlighted element is a full NP or a personal pronoun.

In many demonstrative *th*-clefts, and definitely among the ones where the demonstrative does not convey focal information, the unit formed by the demonstrative and the copula –typically *that's*— constitutes a grammaticalised unit whose main function is to anticipate the contents of what follows in the utterance, that is, the contents of the NP containing the relative clause and which seems to have lost part of its lexical meaning. As Halliday (1985: 43) notes, these constructions have evolved in English as a 'thematic resource' (see also Collins 1991: 135).

6. DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF *TH*-CLEFTS

One parameter within which *th*-clefts may be described in discourse terms is that of contrast. Thus, for instance, Givón (1993: 177-78) characterises pseudo-clefts as 'potential' contrastive constructions ("when associated with stress-focus"). In the taxonomy of focus set up by Dik (1997) and applied to English and Spanish in Martínez Caro (1999), this parameter of contrast is categorised into two types, referred to as *parallel contrast* (involving an explicit contrast between two pieces of information) and *counter-presuppositional contrast* (involving an assumption of the hearer's contrary belief). *Th*-clefts may indeed express parallel contrast (see, for example, 25a) and although counter-presuppositional contrast is more directly related to *it*-clefts (e.g. Givón 1993: 179), examples of *th*-clefts with this function may be also found (for instance, 25b), sometimes as a device for correcting a previous statement.

(25) a. B: I told them *the only thing we're concerned with is communication*
A: [m] -
B: [dhi] report on English examining as you know talked about [dhi] best writing of different kinds *but the only thing they can think of ((as)) the best writing of different kinds is to extend the number of*
A: ((that's so))
(B: *literary authors* (LLC: T1.1, 869-79)

b. It is a case of believing on Jesus Christ. There's a whole load more that follows after that, but the, but the follows doesn't get us saved! *The thing that gets us saved, the thing that makes us a new creation in Christ, the thing that makes us a Christian is putting our trust in Jesus Christ, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.* (BNC: KJU, S-sermon)

In (25b) the implication of exclusiveness involved in the complex *th*-cleft construction helps the speaker to express an obvious opposition with the kind of presupposition implied by the previous statement (and more generally, the idea that it is only Jesus Christ that can save us and nothing else we may think of).

Rather than expressing a contrast with the hearer's presuppositions, examples of *th*-clefts have been found in the database that have a reinforcing function where the speaker seems to agree or confirm information which has been presented by the hearer (see Martínez Caro 1999: 193ff), as in:

(26) how am I going to suddenly be better at it. How's it going to be different. So I said well a lot of it's an attitude. Exactly *that's the only thing you can really change.* Also I mean Doesn't it make you feel funny to have Erm therefore it doesn't really. I mean therefore she doesn't pass. So there is some judgement and skill involved. (BNC: KBK, S-conv)[9]

The discourse functions of *Th*-clefts are also involved with the parameter of topicality. When *th*-clefts are not used contrastively, they may serve to introduce a new topic into the discourse and identify it explicitly. See for instance (with the expressions referring to the new introduced entity in bold):

(27) a. Witnesses gave only a vague description of the driver, concentrating on his clothes, for *the only thing visible inside the car was **a blue, fur-edged anorak***, the hood pulled up tight. The local police sounded surprised by Nowak's apparent lack of cooperation. He grunted, they said, and weaved and ducked like a ... (BNC: G15, W-fict)

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[9] Notice that in the BNC examples no indication is given to pieces of discourse spoken by the different participants intervening in the interaction. In this example, particularly, it seems clear that more than one participant is involved in the interaction.

b. So we welcome you Bill. We've received a number of apologies for absence. And *the ones I've had so far are **these, Emma, Peggy, Will, Jan and Martin, Stan, Terry, Richard, Peter and Jim***. Quite a substantial list. Are there any others? Any others? (BNC: FYB, S-interview)

or (28), which may be more generally associated with the expression of 'new focus' (cf. Dik 1997). The expression in bold denotes information that is simply intended to fill a gap in the pragmatic information of the addressee, and not specifically a new entity:

(28) and [j] when you finished you went away and there was no formality [əm] *the ghastly thing was **[dhi:] senior common-room conversation** . that one had to conduct* which was just frightful – (T1.3, 530-36)

Finally, a further discourse function typical of *th*-clefts, in particular of reversed *th*-clefts, is that of providing a link with the preceding discourse, a specific link that is at issue at that particular moment in the discourse (cf. Hannay and Mackenzie 2002: 145). This cohesive effect is particularly found when the highlighted element has been mentioned earlier in the discourse, linking up with what has come previously in the discourse. This has a similar effect to the one achieved by thematic fronting (cf. Huddleston 1984: 465) and may result in the theme-rheme discourse sequencing referred to by Daneš as 'simple linear thematic progression', by which the rheme of a particular utterance becomes the theme of the next one (cf. Daneš 1974: 118). See the following examples, where *they* in each case acts as a cohesive element connecting the previous discourse where the full referent of this element is presented (*the hazelnut ones* and *the kids*):

(29) a. 'd have known you were going I'd have got you to get me the nut ones. I can't never get them from Lynn. Oh they had the hazelnut ones. Yeah *they're the ones I like*. Tut oh! Do you like hazelnut? Yeah, love it. Oh I don't. Oh! Oh! I found this book in your drawer Junie. (BNC: KCT, S-conv)

b. She said electrical sockets had been ripped out of walls. Suffering "There was no way I could move into those houses, especially with the kids. *They are the ones who are really suffering*," she said. She also claims she has collected more than 3,000 signatures in support of her protest. (BNC: K2N, W-news)

This effect can also be achieved by basic *th*-clefts when their relative clause contains information which is recoverable from previous discourse or reversed *th*-clefts with an

anaphoric element in first position (Huddleston 1984: 465-66; see also Ward, Birner and Huddleston 2002: 1424-27).

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have investigated the so called *th*-cleft construction, focusing on *the thing(s)-* and *the one(s)*-clefts, both basic and reversed, by looking at its formal features and main communicative functions in discourse. As the evidence presented from the BNC and LLC corpora suggests, *th*-clefts are a recognisable type of construction in English, although clearly associated with other types of pseudo-clefts. One of the main motivations that the speaker has for selecting a *th*-cleft rather than a *wh*-cleft is that the former, but not the latter, allows for expansion of the same kind that is found in other NPs occurring in other kinds of clause, making the *th*-cleft a very versatile construction.

As *wh*-clefts, *th*-clefts are constructions that the speaker may choose in order to naturally emphasise the thing that is being talked about. Although very common in conversation (especially the reversed type in some combinations *–the one…* e.g.), they are particularly convenient in writing, since they provide unequivocal indication of the emphasised element without the aid of prosodic stress.

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