

1. Object language

- The dialect of English studied here is Standard American English, spoken as a first language by at least 210,000,000 speakers in the USA (Gordon 2005).
- The data were collected during December 2005 in the Boston and Chicago areas in the USA; recording usually took place in consultant's home, or in an office at Harvard University.
- The speakers were students in their 20s and were all speakers of educated East Coast Standard American English.



3. Empirical observations

3.1 Syntax

According to Lambrecht's (2001) classification of cleft sentences, the English **it-cleft** has the information structural property that the constituent in the matrix clause encodes exhaustively focused information (c.f. also Kiss 1998) and the constituent in the relative clause encodes the presupposition.

In contrast **there-clefts** may be:

- specificational (but not exhaustive), or
- presentational, (thus occurring in 'all new' contexts).

The QUIS data confirms these generalisations but also reveals more detail about the discourse conditions triggering cleft sentences in American English.

The QUIS experiment "Anima" elicits answers through different question types which induce different types of focus (new information focus, selective focus, and corrective focus, confirmation of the truth value).

American English speakers produced it-clefts almost exclusively in the corrective condition, the context most likely to elicit an exhaustive answer:

INSTRUCTOR: Is a woman pushing the car?
INFORMANT: No, **it's** a man that's pushing the car.

In contrast, there-clefts occurred in all question types:

INSTRUCTOR: Who is pushing the man?
INFORMANT: **There's** a man pushing another man.

There-clefts of the non-exhaustive specificational type, on the other hand, occur in all question types, as shown in the QUIS experiment "Changes". Here, four pictures are presented in a sequence manipulating the new/given partition of transitive and intransitive clauses. In this context, no it-clefts were produced, since the discourse condition does not motivate an exhaustive description.

There-clefts were distributed as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Occurrence of *there-clefts*

	one participant			two participants			
	all	arg.	action	all	agent	patient	action
<i>there-clefts</i>	7/30	8/45	1/42	8/45	3/45	2/45	0/44

Finally, all types of cleft show a clear subject/object asymmetry. Although both experiments include conditions in which the new or questioned information is the object, it was only in subject focus contexts that speakers chose to use cleft constructions.

2. Information Structure

The expression of information structure in English has been the subject of much research. These forms are known to be used:

prosody: distribution of pitch accents/de-accentuation (Selkirk 1984, 1995), use of special pitch accents or intonation contours (Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990), prosodic phrasing.

syntax: clefts (Kiss 1998, Lambrecht 2001), inversion, focus-fronting, passivisation, topicalisation (for a summary see Lambrecht 1994).

Why collect more information structure data in English?

Primary goal: to have parallel data for comparison with less well-studied languages;

Secondary goal: to learn the specific information structure contexts which license particular linguistic forms, and which forms speakers actually opt to use (rather than those which are possible).

This poster outlines two results obtained towards the secondary goal:

1. what information structure contexts license clefts in English?
2. what intonation contours are used on contrastive topics in English?

3.2 Prosody

Contrastive Topics have been argued to be identifiable in English through use of a fall-rise intonation contour or a particular pitch accent, dubbed the 'B Accent' (Jackendoff 1972), and analysed variously as:

- (L+) H* L-H%
 - L+H*
- Büring (2003), Kadmon (2001)
Steedman (2000), Selkirk (2002),
Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg (1990)

Authors also vary as to the licensing conditions of a 'B Accent':

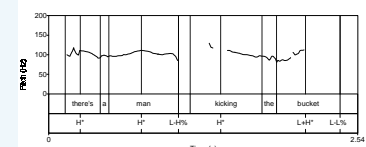
- only Contrastive Topics Büring (2003)
- on all topics Gundel & Fretheim (2006)

Our data include 4 instances of a 'B Accent'. What is the phonological form in these instances, and in what contexts do they occur?

'Events in places' ENGL-EM-2-36-10-A

Form: ✓ pitch accent + boundary tone combination

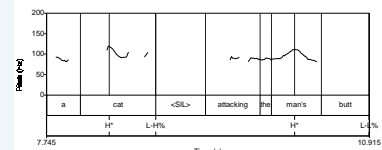
Context: ✓ Contrastive ('Events in places' elicits frame setting topic from among 4 possible scenes)



'Contrast' ENGL-EM-2-32-2

Form: ✓ pitch accent + boundary tone combination

Context: ✓ Contrastive BUT not on an obvious topic constituent.?
The dog/cat are new in this context.



4. Summary/Future Work

The QUIS questionnaire:

- permits confirmation of distributional claims made in the literature on the basis of competence data
- it successfully elicits semi-spontaneous exemplars of linguistic forms parallel to those cited in the literature on the basis of competence data.

This confirms that the primary goal of QUIS is realistic - the questionnaire successfully elicits information structure contexts.

- individual experiments can be expanded to explore particular linguistic forms with larger numbers of speakers &/or tokens in English just as for other languages