

WH-Clefts in English Conversation : An Interactional Perspective

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This paper explores the functional characteristics of the WH-cleft construction (e.g., 'What I want is inexpensive lawyers.') in various conversational contexts within the framework of conversation analysis (cf. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974). It is shown that WH-clefts are used when the speaker goes back to a point made in the preceding context of talk, or deals with the preceding talk as a whole for the purpose of recalibrating his/her point to suit the current and following talk, such as marking the gist of talk, resuming a topic, showing disagreement, or initiating repair. The initial WH-clause of WH-clefts is shown to have an important interactional import in these contexts in terms of expressing the speaker's stance in shifting the course of talk, with pragmatic inference of contrastiveness serving as a contextual factor that provides coherence for the shift.

1. Introduction

This paper looks at functions of WH-clefts¹ in conversational English with special reference to their uses in interactional contexts. The purpose of the study is to examine ways in which speakers use WH-clefts in conversation by looking at particular contexts where they are used. It will be shown that the speaker uses WH-clefts in dealing with the whole preceding talk

¹ WH-clefts are defined as an equative construction with an initial headless relative clause. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) treat only WH-clefts as pseudo-clefts, even though equative constructions with a head noun such as "All I can do is give you \$10" or "The only thing that bothers me is his personality" are often regarded as pseudo-clefts (cf. Gundel, 1985 ; Halliday, 1985 ; Geluykens, 1988). The following is an example of WH-cleft: "What John bought was a red car".

or relating the current and following talk to a certain point found in some earlier context. The functions of WH-clefts are marking the gist of talk, marking topic resumption, or recalibrating the speaker's previous point for more elaboration or clarification in response to the interlocutor's turn. These uses of WH-clefts will be treated as the speaker's attempt to show that the current utterance framed in a WH-cleft is more relevant to the current topic or action being initiated than the preceding talk. It is proposed that this function of WH-clefts is significantly served by the initial WH-clause whose interactional import is viewed as deriving from the expression of the speaker's stance in shifting the course of talk in a contrastive context.

2. Data and Methodology

The major assumption of this study is that conversation is the primordial mode of language use which constitutes the basis of human social interaction and social organization. While there are some discourse-based empirical studies dealing with WH-clefts (Jones and Jones, 1985 ; Kim, 1988 ; Prince, 1978 ; Werth, 1984), there have been few studies which look at the interactional functions of WH-clefts in conversation.²

As some recent studies analyzing linguistic forms in conversational contexts show (e. g., Ford, 1988 ; Fox, 1984), however, conversational data provide contexts which are saliently distinguishable from monologue data, with the factor of interaction shaping functions of linguistic forms in a way that is not found in other genres lacking natural interaction.

In this respect, this paper focuses on examining how interaction shapes the use of WH-clefts within the framework of conversation analysis (cf. Sacks et al., 1974 ; Schegloff, 1979), with particular reference to what the speaker is doing in talk by using the construction. The data examined in this paper include natural conversation, including both face-to-face and telephone conversation, transcribed by students in Sociology 244A/244B, classes taught at UCLA by Professor E. Schegloff ("After the movie", "Ford", "Halloween Dinner", etc.), and some other transcripts professionally

² Gelyukens (1988) is an exception. However, even though he looks at WH-clefts and other cleft constructions found in conversation, he does not explicate their interactional functions.

transcribed by researchers in the field of conversation analysis including Brad Crandall Radio Talk Show Data (hereafter BC) and Group Therapy Session Data (hereafter GTS)³. The BC data are telephone conversations between callers and Mr. Brad Crandall, a radio talk show host, and the GTS data are conversations among teenagers who are participating in group therapy sessions.

3. Interactional Functions of WH-clefts

In the data examined, the contexts where WH-clefts are used can be globally categorized as (i) contexts where WH-clefts are used for marking an episode boundary⁴, and (ii) contexts where they are used for responding to a perceived problem in talk. The following shows the categorization of the interactional functions of WH-clefts found in each context. The figures in parentheses refer to the number of tokens of WH-clefts having each function⁵ :

- (i) Marking an episode boundary (46)
 - a. WH-clefts are used for marking the gist of the preceding talk.(15)
 - b. WH-clefts are used for topic shifting⁶ in extended talk.(31)
- (ii) Responding to a 'problem' in talk(22)
 - a. WH-clefts are used when the speaker makes a point in disagreement or when he/she reasserts his/her point after a dispreferred response from the interlocutor regarding the speaker's previous point.(18)

³ For the transcript notation used in this paper, see Sacks et al. (1974) and Atkinson and Heritage (1984).

⁴ Here an episode boundary is defined as a thematic break where a speaker proceeds to talk about a topic which is distinguished from but is relevant in various ways to the preceding talk.

⁵ In this paper, 68 instances of WH-clefts occurring in natural conversation were examined; 13 are from natural conversational data, 39 are from the BC data, and 16 are from the GTS data.

⁶ The term 'topic shift' will be used in this paper as a cover term for a function of WH-clefts initiating an utterance which leads to the next stage of talk, while being still on the same topic as the preceding talk. It is important to note, in this respect, that what I call the topic shift here is often a sub-topic shift within the same topical domain.

- b. WH-clefts are used in a repair turn where the speaker initiates a repair after noticing the interlocutor's displayed misunderstanding of the speaker's previous utterance.(4)

In the following sections, I will examine these interactional functions of WH-clefts case by case, and attempt to explicate the interactional basis shared by these functions of WH-clefts.

3.1. WH-clefts at Episode Boundaries

3.1.1. Marking the Gist of the Preceding Talk

By 'marking the gist of the previous talk', I mean 'summarizing' or 'wrapping up' the previous talk in a cogent manner. The following is a case in point, where the speaker cogently rephrases what the interlocutor said, and invites his confirmation or rejection regarding the correctness of the rephrasal. This conversation occurs in group therapy session where teenage participants and a therapist talk about a variety of topics of their concern :

(1) (GTS 3 : 61)

- 1 Ken : My-wait a minute. My father's-my father's forty five,
 2 my father's forty five, or forty-forty three I think
 3 (). Uh forty three, an' he'll go over to my
 4 grandmother's house, and instead a my grandmother
 5 offering him a drink, of beer, she'll say//Wouldju-
 6 Louise "Wanna glassa milk?" // hehhh
 7 Ken : NO "Wouldju like a little bitta he'ing?"
 8 Louise : heh//ha ha!
 9 Ken : "Wouldja like some crekles?"
 10 Louise : ehh ha ha ha ha
 11 Ken : "Wouldja like a peanut butter an' jelly samwich?"
 →12 Dan : So in a way, what you're saying is-is, "you'll never"
 13 get through that."
 14 Ken : heh
 15 Louise : ehhehh
 16 Ken : You know?
 17 Dan : N(hh)o ma(hh) tt(hh)er what!//hhh hehh

This type of WH-clefts is frequently found in the GTS data, where the participants often attempt to point out the gist of the preceding conversation where they weave through a variety of episodes about a certain topic. In this example, Dan, a therapist who is present among the teenage participants, marks the gist of what Ken talked about in the preceding episode⁷. We can notice that the WH-cleft is used in a context where Ken and Louise are jokingly exchanging assessments after Ken's story about how his grandmother treats his father as if he were still a young person. Here we find a context where a WH-cleft is used to direct the talk in a certain direction relevant to the preceding talk while the participants are engaged in telling various episodes and producing assessments.

Another instance of a WH-cleft used for marking the gist of the preceding talk is found in example (2), where A, a radio talk show host, produces extended talk in response to a question from a caller :

(2) (BC, Green, 35)

- 1 A: ...an' it cost' ten thousan'dollars per year per prisoner tuh
 2 do that. hhhh All of thi:s, -to, tuh 'spose of a problem thet
 → 3 a man could of done for on an eight cent basis. What that
 4 amounts is : thet they don't keep comparable books. When
 5 they're talking about the protection of lives an' property.

In this example, the gist of the preceding talk is marked by the WH-cleft at lines 3 and 4 in a way that the speaker marks a consequence following from his own talk. We can note here that the speaker marks the gist for the purpose of marking an argument in the course of producing an extended turn in response to the interlocutor's question.

What we can see in these two examples is that the gist is offered to indicate a particular way of understanding the preceding talk with a view to carrying out a certain action such as doing therapy as in example (1), or making an argument as in example (2). In either case, we can note that a WH-cleft is used to mark how the preceding discourse is relevant to the current action to which the speaker is orienting the hearer.

⁷ It is interesting, in this regard, that it is usually the therapist who uses a WH-cleft to mark the gist of what the other teenage participants have talked about.

3.1.2. Topic Shift in an Extended Talk

WH-clefts are frequently found in contexts where the speaker shifts topic in the middle of extended talk, as in marking an episode boundary in storytelling. What is interesting about these cases is that the shift of topic is often toward the current topic after some kind of digressive talk. Example (3) below is a case in point, where a WH-cleft is found at line 23. A portion of the preceding context of talk is also presented :

(3) (SBL : 3 : 1)

- 1 B : No well this little petty selling stuff isn't fit fer the birds.
- 2 A : Yeah, becuz I as' the // neighbors, they look at me-
- 3 B : I'm not a door ringer, and I, I just - can't
- 4 B : I don't know.
- 5 A : Well, I don't like tuh as' the people I know ei // ther.
- 6 B : No, because you, they sorta feel obligated.
- 7 A : Yeah,
- 8 A : I uh as' muh neighbor an'uh, she eh-first she said she would
- 9 c'z we had 'em marked down, so-hh she bought one last year, en'
- 10 so when I wen' 'n took i' down she didn't wan' it becuz it was
- 11 sliced. Wul it was sliced last year.
- 12 B : Mm hm?
- 13 A : But I mean it's jus' something y-you feel // like they-
- 14 B : You see, I didn't know it was sliced.
- 15 A : Huh?
- 16 B : I didn' even know it was sliced I was so shocked when I put the
- 17 knife in it 'n it just fell off?
- 18 A : Yeah.
- [[
- 19 B : Heh heh heh!
- 20 A : It's- thet's- they're all individually sli:ced.
- 21 B : Mm hm,
- 22 A : But uhm, I uhm,
- 23 A : Any way I'm ha-ah what I'm having tuh do, to people I know
- 24 is cut 'em up an' sell 'em, uh a pound an' a half for a dollar
- 25 sixty five.
- 26 B : Oh yer doing that?

- 27 A : Well, I'm doin it t'the few people I know, becuz ever time I say
 28 "Three twenty five" they look at me like- hh "You must be nuts
 29 woman," you know,

Up to line 13, A and B have been talking about the delicacy required to approach people they know with a sales pitch. At line 14, a digression occurs when B refers to the fact that he did not know the cakes being sold were sliced. It is at lines 22 and 23 that talk about the trouble with selling the cakes is resumed, where the WH-cleft is found. We can notice that the shift is made in a way that the speaker marks her stance with regard to what she does ("what I'm having tuh do..."), to which the following talk is directed. That a topic resumption is being made in this segment of talk is also shown explicitly by the presence of "Anyway"⁸, which marks the prior discourse as tangential to the main point (cf. Schiffrin, 1987).

Example (4) below is another instance where a WH-cleft is used in a storytelling context for topic shift after a digression. In this example, D talks about some experiences he had in a foreign country in response to H's question at line 114 as to what made him the sickest. A WH-cleft is found at line 148 :

- (4) (After the movie)
 114 W : Well what made you the si:ckest.
 115 (1.0)
 116 C : You could never i [dentify it.=
 117 D : [Mm:
 118 H : =You don't kno:w, ye:an=
 119 D : No I know. I('d be) pretty sure it was when
 →120 (0.8)
 121 D : I went to this thing
 122 (1.0)
 123 D : when a pe(r)-when an ol:d man reaches seventy seven they

⁸ It is noteworthy that the WH-cleft is preceded by a self-repair ("Anyway I'm ha-ah what I'm having tuh do..."), which is also observed in many other contexts where WH-clefts are used. While I do not attempt to deal with this phenomenon here, the account of this contextual feature would be important for further explicating the interactional function of WH-clefts because the self-repair can be viewed as being designed to replace other forms with WH-clefts.

- 124 have this big ceremony (i wu)'s like his re:bir:th or
 125 something and they do wha' they(.) carry him on 'iz ba:ck
 126 'n put 'im in a chariot n'(.) carry him around all the(.)
 127 ki:ds drag him around through th' village an' stuff(they
 128 do all this) the (n 'ey 'ave a) big fea:s' an' they drink they
 129 'ave these bi:g(.) jars full of this(.) mm-
 130 (1.0)
- 131 D : 'ts like fermen:ted wi(n) er-fermented ri:ce. 'ts like(.)
 132 they(.) y'know ri-
 133 W : Rice wine?
 134 (0.3)
- 135 D : It's not like wi-I mean it's it's not like wi:ne. It doesn't
 136 taste like wine but it's
 137 W : Fermented.=
 138 D : =White and milky but it's [fermented
 139 H : [Oh yeah?
 140 (0.3)
- 141 H : In bo:wls?
 142 W : O'that sounds disgusting
 [
- 143 D : Y-yeah well it's in these big
 144 (1.0)
- 145 D : va:ses, you know. Huge.
 [[[
- 146 W : Vats
 147 H : Yeah. Yeah.
- 148 D : But what I didn't realize at the time was I had always
 149 been thinking well a:ll anything alcoholic has been(.)
 150 distilled and is oka:y.
 151 (0.2)
- 152 D : But this isn't.
 153 (0.3)
- 154 D : It's just made from(.) I mean t'ey jus-
 [
- 155 J : Oh yea:h,
 156 D : It's just ferme:nted. It's not disti:lled.

shift to the next episode would have been too abrupt because the major story line would have been disrupted⁹.

3.2. Responding to Problem

3.2.1. Asserting a Point after Disagreement

WH-clefts are used in contexts where the speaker disagrees with the interlocutor and asserts his/her point in the course of presenting his/her argument in response to the interlocutor's point. What is interesting about these contexts is that WH-clefts are often used when the speaker deals with a dispreferred response from the interlocutor, e.g., when the speaker reasserts his/her point after the interlocutor did not quite agree with the speaker's previous point. Example (5) below is a case in point, which is from the BC data. In this example, Speaker A is Mr. Brad Candall, a radio show host, and speaker B is a caller.

(5) (BC, Green, 117)

- 1 A : The papers, I read.
 2 B : Ye:s/
 3 A : -have stateduh thet the::, current feelings would apply to those
 4 people in that special group we were talking about. Bli:nd, etcetra.
 5 B : Ye:s/
 6 A : Thet it-
 7 A : Those would not change.
 8 A : So you would still, be eligible.
 9 A : It w-wouldn't cha:nge, you:r eligibility.
 10 B : Well
 →11 B : What I know is that they gave me a ledder an' they never
 12 sent me my ca:rd, hh-my::Medicare ca:rd,

In the context preceding this example, A has rejected B's point that B would not be eligible for Medicare any more, and provides a piece of

⁹ In a sense, the way in which the speaker first presents the initial WH-clause before providing the background information seems to be based on a need to preempt a step-by-step presentation of an episode for the purpose of marking the import of the story earlier than it is supposed to be marked in the telling.

evidence supporting his position through lines 1 to 7 and makes a conclusive remark at lines 8 and 9 that she would still be eligible. In response to A's point, B produces "well" at line 10, a signal that projects a dispreferred response (cf. Pomerantz, 1984), and then uses a WH-cleft at line 11 to reject A's point and reassert her point.

One of the ways that we can make sense of this example is to assume that the speaker shows disagreement by presenting his/her point as the alternative to the interlocutor's point, with the presentation of the alternative being initiated by the expression of the speaker's stance, i.e., "What I know...". The presentation of the first-handedness of the speaker's experience framed in the thematic WH-clause seems to constitute the basis on which the speaker can implicitly reject the interlocutor's point without directly rejecting it.

The following example is another instance where the speaker presents an alternative account in response to the interlocutor's account without explicitly rejecting the interlocutor's point. In this example, the participants are mothers and their teen-age daughters, and they have been talking about what happened to one of the daughters' friends, whose mother did not like her daughter's boyfriend. In this talk, Nancy is the mother of Liz, who is one of the participants, and of Abbey, who is not present. Betsy is a friend of Nancy; and E.M., who is a friend of Liz, is a daughter of Betsy :

(6) (Halloween Dinner)

- 158 Betsy : Yeah you can't work it out, you can't negotiate,
 159 Nancy : It STA:Rted because Ann refused to accept the
 160 boyfriend.
 161 Liz : I can understand that.
 162 Nancy : Yeah. I can understand both sides. I've been both
 163 plac(he)es. I mean(.) when I really(.) didn't want
 164 Brian around(0.1) it was hell here.=
 165 E. M. : =Did Abbey leave?
 166 Liz : You didn't (show) Abbey's [side during the:n.
 167 Nancy : [no.
 →168 Nancy : I did fee-ah what I felt is I pushed Abbey to the

- 169 wa:l so that she was always unhappy.
 170 Betsy : Well was he obnoxious around here?
 171 Nancy : Well,
 172 Liz : Yes, exactl(he)y,
 173 Nancy : It wasn't(.) it [wasn't even so [much THAT(.) as I
 174 didn't appro:ve=
 175 () : [hhh

At lines 162 through 164 in this example, Nancy is talking about how she didn't like Abbey's boyfriend, after referring to a similar instance where one of her friends didn't like her daughter's boyfriend. In the course of telling the story, Liz offers an account¹ at line 166 regarding Nancy's attitude toward Abbey ("You didn't (show) Abbey's side during the:n."), and in responding to Liz, Nancy, at line 168, uses a WH-cleft for providing another version of account without directly rejecting Liz's account. In this respect, we can see that what Nancy is doing through the use of the WH-cleft is to show that her version of the account is what really matters according to her own emotional experience, and by doing so, implicitly rejects Liz's version of account which is treated as, though not totally irrelevant, one that does not really get to the heart of the issue. What is especially noteworthy here is that, while it may be the case that Nancy is specifically responding to Liz's turn, we get a sense in which Nancy's utterance, formatted with a WH-cleft, is initiating a sequence that deals with the preceding talk as a whole. It may be due to this sequential aspect of the talk that the disagreement is marked rather implicitly in Nancy's turn.

Example (7) below is another instance where a WH-cleft is used in the context of disagreement. This example is from the GTS data, where several teenagers talk about their problems. In this example, Louise is one of the teenage participants in the therapy session, and Dan is a counselor who is present during the session and often provides his advice to the participants :

(7) (GTS 3, 14)

- 1 Dan : Well it sounds pretty good, it sounds like you've got yourself(/)
 2 directed. Uh a little bit yourself. Y'know, I mean you know you
 3 wanna job, you wen' out and got yourself a job, or-through
 4 friends, or however you//got it-

- 5 Louise : Through me.
 6 (//)
 7 Dan : And uh(/) what? You're on a four-four plan at school, so
 8 you're still moving, in school,
 9 (//)
 10 Dan : I/()
 →11 Louise : What I was thinka doin is quitting school for a year,

In this example, a WH-cleft is found in the turn-initial position at line 11, where Louise announces that she is thinking of quitting school after Dan's confirming statement at lines 7 and 8 regarding Louise's status in school. We can note that the WH-cleft was used in disagreement in that Louise counters Dan's point. At lines 1 to 4 in the preceding context, Dan praised Louise for having "got herself directed" by looking for a job, and is on his way to further highlight the merit of Louise's doing so by pointing out that Louise is also doing O.K. at school, which is shown in his confirming statement at lines 7 and 8. Dan's confirming statement is not answered by Louise immediately, however, as is shown in the presence of pause at line 9. Then after the pause, Louise uses a WH-cleft to disconfirm Dan's utterance.

The consideration of the context of the talk suggests that the use of a WH-cleft, rather than a non-cleft utterance, has something to do with Louise's attempt to bring up a topic that rejects Dan's increasing praise for her. Actually, one way that we make sense out of the utterance formatted with a WH-cleft in this example is that, while the WH-cleft is responsive to Dan's preceding turns, it also contributes to explicitly setting up the information as a potential topic to be discussed in the following context. This ambivalent nature of the WH-cleft can be related to its sequential organizational function of initiating a sequence while drawing upon the preceding sequence. That is, we can note that the use of a WH-cleft conveys the sense that it is used to bring up a point that initiates a sequence. At the same time, we can infer contextually that it is actually intended to mark a disagreement with the preceding utterance. We can conjecture, in this regard, that, if Louise had used a non-cleft utterance, the resulting inference would have been that Louise's response and Dan's preceding question constitute a single sequence of disagreement, a sequence

of a question followed by a negative answer. On the other hand, the use of WH-clefts in this context seems to contribute to providing a sense that Louise's response marks a point where a sequence being initiated, thus consequently closing the preceding sequence where Dan's confirmation question belongs. It may be due to this sequential characteristic of WH-clefts that we have a sense that the speaker, by using a WH-cleft, is opposing the interlocutor's point not directly, but indirectly.

3.2.2. Third Position Repair

There are instances of WH-clefts found in repair contexts, particularly in what is called 'third position repair' (Schegloff, Sociology 244B lecture notes). Third position repair is defined as a repair where the repairer notices the interlocutor's displayed misunderstanding of his/her previous turn, and initiates repair. In such contexts, WH-clefts usually take the form of "What I mean is...".

While this context of talk is clearly different from the preceding cases where the speaker reasserts his/her point, it is similar to them in the sense that, in both cases, what the WH-clefts are used to deal with is the interlocutor's preceding utterance which shows that the interlocutor has a problem with the speaker's previous point, whether the problem is the interlocutor's disagreeing stance toward the speaker's previous point, or displayed misunderstanding thereof.

It is to be noted that, in the majority of cases of the third position repair, WH-clefts are not used, with the repair initiation being usually done in the form of "No, I mean". What is interesting, in this respect, is that there seems to be a difference in the nature of interaction between the typical third position repair on the one hand, and the particular third position repair initiated with WH-clefts on the other.

First, a typical case of third position repair is presented in example (8) :

(8) (C/H)

- 1 H : Let me tell ya, Everybody really had an evening last night.
- 2 C : Oh really. Where'd everybody go.
- 3 H : Well I mean everybody that went anywhere.
- 4 C : Oh.
- 5 H : Like...((list))

In this example, H initiates repair at line 3 in response to C's turn at line 2 which displays misunderstanding of the word "everybody"; at line 2, C displays that he understood "everybody" as a referential term referring to a specific group of people whom both H and C know, while the intended meaning of the word is general and non-referential one. After noticing C's displayed misunderstanding, H specifically goes back to his own trouble source turn, and initiates repair by specifying what he meant by 'everybody'.

In comparison with the typical example of third position repair like example (8), the third position repair contexts involving WH-clefts display characteristics different from such typical cases. For instance, the following example illustrates a context where a WH-cleft is used in the third position repair. The WH-cleft is found at line 23 in the repair turn :

(9) (BC, Gray, 74-75)

- 1 B : This is in reference to a call, that was made about a month
 2 ago.
 3 A : Yessir?
 4 B : A woman called, uh saying she uh signed a contract for huh
 5 son who is- who was minuh.
 6 A : Mm hm,
 7 B : And she claims inna contract, there were things given, and
 8 then taken away, in small writing.
 9 ((pause))
 10 A : Mm hm
 11 B : Uh, now meanwhile, about a month ehh no about two weeks
 12 before she made the call I read in, I read or either heard-
 13 uh I either read or hold onna television, where the judge,
 14 hadda case like this.
 15 A : Mhhm,
 16 B : And he got disgusted an'he says "I"-he's sick of these
 17 cases where they give things in big writing, an'take 'em,
 18 an' take 'em away in
 19 small writing.
 20 A : Mhnm,
 21 B : An' 'e claimed the contract void.
 22 A : Mhhm?
 →23 B : Uh what I mean is it c'd help this woman that called. You
 24 know uh, that's the reason I called.

In this instance, at line 23, B initiates the repair, after noting that A did not understand that B's story is over, which was shown by A's use of another continuer at line 22 ("Mhmm?") (cf. Schegloff, 1982).

Even though this can be regarded as an instance of third position repair in which the speaker initiates repair in response to the hearer's displayed misunderstanding, this instance is different from other typical types of third position repair in that B does not deal with the trouble source turn at line 21 in the repair. That is, even though the trouble source lies in the fact that A did not notice the story is over, B does not initiate repair by saying that his story is over, but by providing what could be viewed as the inference which B expected A to have made from his preceding talk.

The following is another example of a WH-cleft used in the third position repair where it is used in the past tense, with the form of "what I meant was...":

(10) (BB Gun, 2)

- 1 B : An' I was wondering if you'd let me your gun.
 2 (0.8)
 3 J : My gun?
 4 B : Yeah.
 5 (1.8)
 6 J : What gun.
 7 (0.5)
 8 B : Dontchu have a beebee gun?
 9 J : Yeah
 10 B : Oh it's
 11 [
 12 J : Oh I have a lot of guns. hehh
 13 B : Yuh do:?
 14 J : Yeah. What I meant was "which gun".

In this example, the source of B's misunderstanding lies in the ambiguity of J's turn at line 6 ("What gun.") in terms of constructive understanding vs. composite understanding (Schegloff, 1987). That is, while J intended his turn to be accorded constructive interpretation, B misunderstands it in terms of idiomatic composite understanding in the sense of 'What gun are you talking about? I don't have any gun'.

What can be noted in this regard is that there is a substantial distance

between the repair turn at line 14 and the hearer's turn at line 8 displaying misunderstanding that triggers the repair¹⁰, even though in the preceding examples, they are contiguous with each other; that is, B's turn displaying misunderstanding of J's prior turn ("Dontchu have...?") is not immediately dealt with by J, but is followed by another sequence interactively built to B's turn displaying misunderstanding. In this regard, it seems to be the case that, in the repair turn, J skips over the sequence which he and B collaboratively built, and goes back to deal with his trouble source turn.

What is also to be noted in this example is that the displayed misunderstanding of B is dealt with through the sequence before J specifically repairs the trouble source by using the WH-cleft; B is oriented to the fact that J actually has lots of guns before the repair turn. In this regard, the WH-cleft can be viewed as being used to provide more specific clarification following a sequence where the source of the misunderstanding is identified. The sequence initiated by the WH-cleft, then, can be viewed as a sequence that is reinitiated based on the correct understanding.

Therefore, if we compare example (9) and (10), where WH-clefts are used, with a typical instance of third position repair in example (8), we can see that there is a sense in the former that the speaker initiates repair by adding new, relevant information, which is triggered by the interlocutor's displayed misunderstanding, and goes beyond the clarification of the meaning of a term found in the latter. A primary difference between the two types of third position repair, then, can be noted with reference to the function of WH-clefts that deal with the whole preceding sequence and initiate another sequence, whose import is presented as imposing upon that of the preceding one.

While I have examined above two cases where WH-clefts are used in repair *per se*, there is also a case where a WH-cleft occurs in an utterance other than the repair itself, though it is still the repair turn :

(11) (BC, Beige, 8-9)

- 1 B : ...that will not, consume uh:: large amount of money that
 2 he c'n particpate()
 [
- 3 A : Oh::there are thou:zindz. You mentioned

¹⁰ The distance between the two turns may be a factor that is related to the use of the past tense in the WH-cleft in this example.

- 4 uh-hh uh, you have a telephone. Right?
- 5 B : What?
- 6 A : You have a telephone.
- 7 B : Yes.
- 8 A : And you have-uh ther're other people thit are known
9 within the community.
- 10 B : Right
 [
- 11 A : There are friends. Well 'f you c'n call me en spend en
12 hour 'n half getting the line, why can'tcha call a friend.
13 ((pause))
- 14 B : Uh:::Well it's not th-
 [
- 15 A : And isn't there a little thing called homework?
16 'r don' we do that any more.
 [
- 17 B : Oh no!
- 18 B : I'm not talking about- it's not my basic probl'm there are
→19 meny kids who-uh-My uh-what I do iz if I:: uh don' have
20 anything tuh do I jus'sit down with a book. But there
21 are meny kids who uh won' even be able a' understa:nd a
22 good book.

In this example, B initiates repair at line 18 after noticing A's displayed misunderstanding of his point; even though what B has been saying is directed to 'other kids' problem', A displays that he is treating it as B's own problem. In response to A's misunderstanding, B, at line 18, first identifies the source of B's misunderstanding ("I'm not talking about-it's not my basic probl'm"), and then goes on to do repair by referring to "meny kids who-". However, this utterance is not completed at line 19, and B returns to the talk about himself ("My uh-"). The following WH-cleft then elaborates what he himself does as opposed to what other kids do.

One important consideration to be given here is that there usually is a certain orderly progression of elements in the repair in the case of third position repair (Schegloff, Sociology 244B lecture notes). The progression of repair components in the repair turn typically consists of (a) particles signaling disagreement ('no', 'well', etc.), (b) a rejection component ('I'm

not talking about that'), and (c) repair proper ('I mean...').

According to this format, we can observe in example (11) that component (a) is "Oh no!" at line 17, and component (b) is "I'm not talking about-it's not my basic probl'm", with component (c) being "there are meny kids who-". In this regard, it can readily be noted that the progression of these components is disturbed when B resumes talking about his own situation at line 19, which belongs to component (b), after having already proceeded to component (c) in the preceding utterance, which is abandoned. The WH-cleft is used here where B attempts to get out of the progression of repair components and go back to further elaborate on what he does. It is noteworthy, in this light, that component (c) is uttered again after the WH-cleft at lines 20 and 21, now in a syntactically complete form, thus still observing the orderly format of repair components.

One reason why B does so seems to be that A's preceding question displaying misunderstanding of B's preceding turns unfairly lays the blame on B. Actually, it can be noted that the problem began as early as line 3, where A switches from B's talking about "he" at line 1 to A's talking about "you", which is B. The need to highlight what B does through the WH-cleft seems to be based on the need to reject A's point that equates B and other kids in terms of what they do. In this respect, the use of the WH-cleft seems to be motivated by B not wanting to simply deal with a one-shot misunderstanding but to address the misunderstanding based on the whole preceding sequence.

Moreover, we can also notice that the speaker introduces a new referent "book" through the WH-cleft, on the basis of which the speaker initiates repair in the context of differentiating what he does from what "other kids" do. In this sense, we can treat the WH-cleft here as a device whereby the speaker introduces a new referent to prepare a basis for the repair through the contrast, as the speaker cannot abruptly refer to "books" as an element of an account in the (c) component.

As a whole, we can note that the WH-clefts in the previous examples of third position repair were used not simply for dealing with the misunderstanding of a term occurring in the trouble source turn, but for further marking the relevance of the previous talk to the preceding sequence. In this respect, we can find the common ground shared by the WH-clefts used in the repair contexts as a whole in that they are used

when the speaker attempts to deal with the interlocutor's misunderstanding by moving the talk forward to the next stage such that something is added to deal with the preceding sequence.

4. Conclusions

The preceding discussion shows that WH-clefts in conversation are used in a variety of contexts such as when the speaker marks the gist of the preceding talk, shifts topic after a digression, or deals with perceived problems in talk such as disagreements or misunderstandings. It was proposed that what undergirds these interactional contexts is the speaker's attempt to show that the current utterance framed in a WH-cleft refers to the heart of the matter being talked about, i.e., to show the particular 'relevance' of the preceding talk to a topic or action being initiated by the speaker in the current talk.

In connection with this observation, we can point out that in many cases the initial WH-clause is not just a presupposition containing given information, but a device whereby the speaker adds the particular stance toward the following focused proposition in terms of the speaker's own actual experience. The speaker's stance framed in the thematic position in WH-clefts seems to play a significant interactional role of relating the following utterance(s) to the preceding context by placing them in a contrastive relationship. The pragmatic function of WH-clefts marking a contrast, in this respect, seems to contribute to achieving a coherent shift in the talk.

In another sense, the stance-marking function of WH-clefts can be viewed in terms of the metacommunicative function of the initial WH-clause whereby the speaker situates the focused proposition following the BE copula in the current interactional context by way of adding his/her stance to it. This observation is congruent with that of Kim (1988); this study points out that the initial WH-clause of WH-clefts marks the speaker's perspective and serves as an attention-getting device through which the speaker prepares the hearer for what follows. In this regard, we can note that the initial WH-clause in WH-clefts, which has been viewed traditionally as informationally impoverished (cf. Huddleston, 1984), has a

function that is highly attuned to the interaction between the speaker and the interlocutor in the context of discourse organization.¹¹

Finally, we can note that the findings of this study have implications for cross-linguistic studies dealing with linguistic phenomena related to the notion of 'topic-comment'. While the notion of 'topic' has been defined and used in a variety of different ways, often in terms of given or known information or what is being talked about, what has not been given much attention in the past is an important aspect of topic related to what the speaker does in initiating his/her point. For instance, some studies show that the topic in topic-prominent languages like Korean has something to do with what the speaker does in setting a certain referent or linguistic entity relevant to the preceding context as a starting point from which he/she initiates a new and unique predication about it, which is often in line with the speaker's discourse strategy of marking a thematic break or episode boundary in an extended discourse (cf. Lee, 1987 ; Kim, 1990). As we can see now, the interactional functions of WH-clefts share this functional characteristic of the topic in topic-prominent languages. This suggests that WH-clefts may be one of the constructions in English, a subject-prominent language, which is explicitly attuned to such interactional contexts. This is an area that awaits further extensive research, and one which will also shed light on the investigation of other English constructions having the characteristics of topic-comment structure.

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¹¹ In this respect, Heritage and Watson's (1979, 1980) notion of 'formulation' seems to be relevant here in the sense that the speakers, through formulation, turn the 'sense' of talk achieved at a certain state of a conversation into a topic in its own right.

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