NOTES ON CLEFTS AND PSEUDO-CLEFTS

AND OTHER RELATED MATTERS

by

Georgia M. Green

Peters and Bach argue in their paper on pseudo-clefts
that "a noun phrase can be pseudo-clefted if changing the un-
clefted sentence by substituting something for that noun phrase
and making no other changes leaves us with a grammatical sentence"
(1968:5). They use this correlation as part of the justification
for deriving pseudo-cleft sentences like (1):

1. What John broke was his nose.

from structures containing a relative clause headed by the thing,
as in (2):

2.
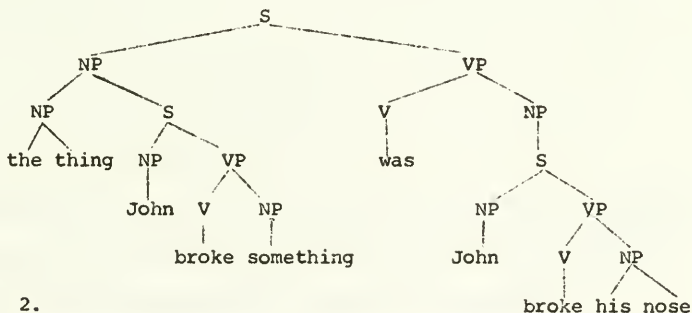
by means of a transformation on the order of (3) (I have simpli-
fied irrelevant details):

the thing $[_S$ that X Y $]$ be $[_S$ X' NP Y'$]$

        1   2 3 4   5 6 7

$\Rightarrow$ 1   2 3 4 $\emptyset$ 6 $\emptyset$

Condition: 2=5; 3=7

3.

which followed relative-clause formation. Their main reason for including an "unclefted version" of the pseudo-cleft sentence in the underlying structure (cf. (2)) was to guarantee the correct generation of pronominal and case forms which depend on items being clause-mates, without making ad hoc additions to the many rules involved. Although they do not mention it, this would also be necessary, from their point of view, to prevent the generation of such sentences as (4):

    4. *What John loves is Mary.

That is, although (5) and (6), and (7) are all well-formed sentences, (4) is not.

    5. John loves something.

    6. The thing John loves

    7. John loves Mary.

Peters and Bach would explain this by saying (1968:5-6) that love in (5) and (6) is a different verb from love in (7), since, for example, the two do not permit conjunction reduction:

    8. *John loves Mary and something I drew for him.

and therefore, the pseudo-clefting transformation will block because the condition that terms 2 and 5 be identical will not be met. Presumably, however, it would be possible to derive

a sentence like (9):

     9. The one John loves is Mary.

from a structure analogous to (2) where the <u>love</u>'s are identical.

    What this analysis fails to explain about pseudo-cleft·
sentences is how there come to be pseudo-cleft sentences such
as (10):

     10. What I like about John is his sense of humor.

when there is no "unclefted version":

     11a. *I like John's sense of humor about him.

     11b. *I like his sense of humor about John.

     11c. *I like about John his sense of humor.

The Peters-Bach analysis would have to somehow derive (10) but
not (12), unless the identity conditions are somehow revised.

     12a. *What I like about John is his sense of humor ﹍
         about him.

     12b. *What I like about John is about him his sense of
         humor.

     12c. *What I like about John is about John his sense
         of humor.

    Now this problem is not restricted to either <u>like</u> or
<u>about</u>. Sentence (10) represents an enormous class of sentences,
including:

     13a. What I showed about John was his resemblance to Harry.

     13b. What I showed about John was his tendency to lie.

     14a. What I broke of John's was his vase.

     14b.*What I broke of John was his vase.

15. What I want of John is for him to clean up.

16. What I want of John is that he clean up.

17. What's wrong with John is his attitude.

18. What's right for John is a stay in the pen.

as well as the better-known:

19. What Bill did to John was steal his book.

20. What Mary did with John was hide him in the closet.

21. What Mary did about her cold was to move to Florida.

Furthermore, the problem of deriving "topicalized" sentences which have no analogous untopicalized version is not restricted to pseudo-clefts. It reappears in cleft sentences, questions, and restrictive adjuncts to non-referential head nouns. Thus:

22. It was his grisly sense of humor that I noticed
    first about John.

23a. His sense of humor is what disturbs Mary about Sam.[1]

23b. Sam's sense of humor is what disturbs Mary about him.

24. What do you remember about John?

25. What did you do with John--put him in the closet?

26. What did you do to John--put him in the closet?

27. What did you do about John--put him in the closet?

28. What's wrong with John?

29. What's the trouble with John?

30. What's cute about Susy?

31. I know what I like about John--it's his eyes.

32. I like something about John, but I don't know what.

33. There's something about John I like.

34. Everything about John pleases me.

35. Nothing about John pleases me.

36. Do you remember anything about the car that hit you?

37. One thing I like about John is his eyes.

38. The only thing I like about John is his eyes.

39. The trouble with John is his tardiness.

40. The trouble with John is he's always late.

41. The only thing wrong with John is his tardiness.

42. The only thing wrong with John is he's always late.

43. The thing about John that annoys me is his tardiness.

44. The thing that annoys me about John is his tardiness.

45. The thing I like least about Sam is his temper.

Compare (22'-30):

22' *I noticed John's grisly sense of humor first about him.

23a'*His sense of humor disturbs Mary about Sam.

23b'*Sam's sense of humor disturbs Mary about him.

24a'*I remember about John his eyes.

24b'*I remember John's eyes about him.

25' *I put John$_i$ in the closet with him$_i$(self).

26' *I put John$_i$ in the closet to him$_i$(self).

27' *I put John$_i$ in the closet about him$_i$(self).

28' *John has the measles is wrong with him.

29' *He's paranoid is the trouble with John.

30a'*Susy's dimple is cute about her.

30b'*Her dimple is cute about Susy.

(31'-33', 37'-38'):

       *I like John's eyes about him.

       *I like about John his eyes.

(34'-35'):

       *His behavior about John pleases me.

       *John$_i$'s behavior about him$_i$(self) pleases me.

       *John's behavior pleases me about him.

       *His behavior pleases me about John.

       36' *I remember the color about the car.

       45'. ?I like Sam's temper least about him.

It is not clear what the untopicalized versions of (39-44) would be, but it is clear that the Peters-Bach analysis (which, as they point aout, was also independently proposed by Ross) is incapable of explaining these facts. It remains to be seen just what sort of grammatical theory will permit an analysis of pseudo-clefts and other topicalized forms which provides non-ad hoc accounts of

(I) the semantic differences between various topicalized and untopicalized versions:

       46a. What the lightning struck was the house.

       46b.≠What struck the house was lightning.

       46c.≠Lightning struck the house.

(II) the restrictions on the occurrence of animate noun phrases in pseudo-clefts illustrated by the difference between (4) and (47):

       4. *What John loves is Mary.

       47. What John saw was Mary.

This restriction apparently does not occur in cleft sentences:

      48. It is Mary that John loves.

(III) the occurrence of reflexive forms on the right of the copula which are not predictable from their surface structure position:

      49a. What John saw was himself.

      49b. What annoyed John was himself.

since they are not clause-mates to their antecedents--cf. (50):

      50a. *What John saw annoyed himself.

      50b.   What John$_i$ saw annoyed him$_i$.

      50c. *What John$_i$ saw was him$_i$.

      50d. *What annoyed John$_i$ was him$_i$.

(IV) the occurrence and position of restrictive modifiers to it, what, thing, -thing, trouble, wrong, etc. in clefts, pseudo-clefts, questions, and so on, which do not show up in untopicalized sentences (cf. examples (10-45)).

<div align="center">NOTE</div>

[1]N.b. the occurrence of the pronoun his in (23a) violates the condition on backwards pronominalization since it both precedes and commands its antecedent.

<div align="center">REFERENCE</div>

Peters, P. Stanley, and Emmon Bach. 1968. Pseudo-cleft sentences. Duplicated, Austin, Texas.