"IT'S ALTERED A LOT, HAS YORK": RIGHT DISLOCATION IN NORTHERN ENGLAND

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of right dislocation in a corpus of speech from York, England. A number of different right dislocation structures are considered, including one which is currently said to be restricted to Northern varieties of English ("He's a nice lad is Leon"). This variant is used alongside two variants found throughout the English-speaking world ("He's a nice lad Leon" and he's a nice lad Leon is). Results show that the supposedly Northern variant is used in York and, more importantly, that it is the most frequently selected form in all age groups and both genders. Tokens in which the dislocated subject is a pronoun (He's a nice lad, he is) are the only exceptions to this, in that they overwhelmingly favour the third variant. These findings highlight the importance of examining the three right dislocation forms together and also that the supralocal variants are not increasing in the youngest generation of speakers.

1. Introduction

Under certain circumstances, sentences such as example (1) can be modified in such a way that the subject NP is moved to the right of the clause and a coreferential pronoun is used in its place within the clause, as in (2). This type of structure is considered to be a right dislocation (RD) (Lambrecht, 2001; Ziv, 1994).

(1) Cows keep good time.
(2) They keep good time the cows. (087)

Right dislocation forms of the type found above are attested in a large proportion of the world's languages. Lambrecht (2001:1051), for example, noted that 'dislocation constructions can be identified in most, if not all, languages of the world, independently of language type and genetic affiliation.'

Alongside the 'canonical' right dislocation form above, most varieties of English have an expanded form, whereby the operator of the clause is also reiterated as in (3-4) (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik, 1985:1417).

(3) Oh he stayed with this other woman John did (003).
(4) They're the real country people they are. (054)

Some varieties of English have another expanded form, in which the operator of the clause is reiterated, but occurs before the NP in the right dislocation rather than after it, as in (5-6) (Quirk et al., 1985:1417).

(5) She was an Irish lady was my grandma. (048)
(6) We like our walking do me and Dave. (089)

In English, right dislocation forms are said to be 'restricted to informal spoken contexts where [they are] very common' (Quirk et al., 1985:1310). Research on the type of right dislocation presented in (5) and (6) suggests that, currently, it is restricted to Northern British dialects (Quirk et al., 1985:1417), particularly to Yorkshire and Lancashire (Hedevand, 1967; Melchers, 1983; Petyt, 1985; Sharrock, 1985; Wright, 1905), and that it is primarily used by older speakers. This is despite the fact that this variant is also abundantly found in the work of nineteenth century authors from areas outside of the North (e.g. Dickens, Eliot, etc.), as in (7-8).

(7) And yet he had a sense of injury upon him, too, had Bithorn. (Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 220)
(8) He speaks uncommonly well, does Cassubon (G. Eliot, Middlemarch, p. 62)

Having introduced the three variants, this paper will now provide a taxonomy which I have developed in order to be able to adequately distinguish the three forms. It will then present what is known of the historical origins of the forms, before turning to the York corpus (Tagliamonte, 1998) and focusing on the results obtained from its analysis. The paper will close by discussing the relevance of its findings and outlining what further research could be conducted on right dislocation.

2. Three forms

Although a number of researchers have focused on all three of the variants individually, the three variants have never been examined in terms of their distribution vis-à-vis one another. This may be due to the fact that the three forms are generally given the same name, sometimes right in part be due to the fact that the three forms are generally given the same name, sometimes right dislocation, but a multitude of other names as well (e.g. emphatic tags — in Petyt, 1985, amplificatory tags — in Quirk et al., 1985, subject repetition — in Wright, 1905 and Visser, 1963). Because the present research aims to analyze the overall use of the three right dislocation forms, it is crucial, however, to be able to clearly differentiate them. To this end, I developed a taxonomy of the forms, designating them as standard right dislocation (SRD), example (9), expanded right dislocation (ERD), example (10) and reverse right dislocation (RDR), example (11) respectively.

(9) I was a little angel me (025)
(10) He stayed with this other woman John did (003)
(11) She got a great bargain did her Mum (034)

Note that, while the three forms are rather different on the surface, this paper makes the assumption that their pragmatic functions are the same. Right dislocations serve to secure the assumption that their pragmatic functions are the same. Right dislocations serve to secure the argument, in the view of an addressee i.e. to maintain a given relation between a referent and a proposition (Lambrecht, 2001:1076). All three RD forms are only possible in clauses where the element to be dislocated is an 'already ratified topic of conversation, given its pragmatic salience in the discourse setting' (Lambrecht, 2001:1073).

Moreover, although right dislocation constructions have been considered by some to act at times as sentence repair constructions or afterthoughts (Melchers, 1983:62), this paper follows Lambrecht 2001 (p. 1076) and considers all three types of right dislocation to differ from
afterthoughts as they 'form a single intonation contour with the preceding clause: they are unaccented and not preceded by a pause'. Afterthoughts, on the other hand, 'constitute separate intonation units (Lambrecht, 2001:1076). This is why examples in this paper are not presented with a comma separating the main clause from the right dislocated NP, as it could have implied a pause in speech.

3. History of the variants

The first attested variant is the standard right dislocation form; Visser was able to trace its use back to Old English, as in (12).  

(12) He swereth Alexander (i.e. Alexander said in Visser, 1963:54).

This is the form which is the most closely linked to the right dislocation forms found in other languages (Lambrecht, 2001). Visser adds that in this type of sentence 'the two subjects are separated by a finite verb form' (1963:54). Moreover, he notes that 'in Pres(ent) D(ay) English the construction often has an emotional communication, especially when the second subject is preceded by that' (1963:54), example (13) from the York data.

(13) He's a strange bloke that man. (005)

The other two forms appear much later in English; Visser's (1963:54) first attestations date from 1837 in Dickens' Pickwick Papers. He notes that this type of 'repeated subject' differs from [the first form] by the additional repetition of the verbal form (mostly was or it; occasionally would, could, did and other auxiliaries)', as in (14-16).

(14) It's really so majestic is York Minster (042)

(15) She used to have a joke did my mother (062)

(16) He'll do anything for anybody will Rich. (035)

He makes no real distinction between the expanded and reversed forms, however, considering them under the same heading of 'repeated subject', merely noting that in the former the 'repeated verb is placed in final position' (1963:55). Poultama (1928:172) and Jespersen (1949:67) also find a number of cases of the full and reverse right dislocation forms in literature dating from the second half of the nineteenth century. Visser, Poultama and Jespersen, all three, present the reverse form as the main variant of the two forms with operators, noting that the expanded form is 'less common' Jespersen, 1949:67).

Visser, Poultama and Jespersen find examples of both the expanded and the reversed right dislocation form in Victorian authors not only from the North of England but also from the South. Most of these examples are found in the speech of the characters in novels, but there are some examples in narrative and poetry as well.

Recall that this is not the case today; as most commentators on the reverse right dislocation form present it as a Northern feature found particularly in Yorkshire and Lancashire (see for example, Melchers, 1983; Sherbrooks, 1985). Visser (1963:55) notes that the use of the expanded form 'is now dialectal or colloquial', and the association of the reverse right dislocation form with Northern varieties of English dates even earlier; in 1905, Wright (p. 270) noted that 'in Sc(otland) and northern dialects, the pronoun is often used to introduce a statement, the specific subject being added later, as it runs well does that horse.'

Furthermore, most of the Yorkshire dialect dictionaries and grammars from that period onwards (Cawley, 1915, Holdend, 1967; TilDHolm, 1979) also mention the reverse right dislocation form as a feature primarily idiosyncratic to the dialect being considered, suggesting that it was no longer seen to belong to mainstream English.

Some more recent discussion of the geographical distribution of right dislocation forms in British dialects (Edwards and Welles, 1985:19) finds that the 'repetition of subject and operator' (i.e. an expanded right dislocation) is Yorkshire and Cockney, while the 'repetition of subject and subject' (i.e. a reverse right dislocation) is Yorkshire and Lancashire and finally that the specific subject being added later, as it runs well does that horse.

Most examinations of reverse right dislocation forms are perfunctory and simply signal that the form is 'frequent in the dialect considered; Melchers (1983) and Sherbrooks (1985) look at the form in slightly more detail, however. In both, the various verbal collocations are discussed as well as some of its functions, but neither compares the distribution of this form with the other two forms.

It is clear that these dialect dictionaries and grammars are very useful in assessing the longevity and geographical distribution of the reverse right dislocation in Yorkshire, but they do not provide us with a clear manner of determining whether this form is selected more often than the other two variants and how frequently it is used. For this reason, it is important to consider all three variants together, in order to establish their relative distribution and whether the reverse right dislocation form is disappearing from Yorkshire varieties.

4. Data and examples

The tokens in this analysis come from a corpus of English collected by Sali Tagliamonte (Tagliamonte, 1998) in the city of York in 1996. This corpus consists of ninety-one interviews of York natives and is part of 'a sociolinguistic investigation of English spoken in York in Northern England' (Tagliamonte, 1998:158). The interviews were stratified by gender and by age as shown in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-69</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Speakers in York corpus

The data was tested for a number of possible conditioning factors. The distribution in terms of age and gender will enable us to examine whether these factors affect the selection of the variants. The literature discussed above tends to assume that the reverse right dislocation form is less prevalent, so it may be that its use is in decline across the sample. Furthermore, because it is
Right dislocation in Northern England

In order to be included in the extraction, the main clause had to provide either no new information or the same amount as the dislocated form. In (27), the main clause is more specific (George) than the repeated particle (he).

Note, however, that forms, in which the main clause and the dislocated elements provided the same amount of information, were included in the analysis. Most of these were cases where a pronoun was repeated, example (28) but there are also instances of that and NPs being repeated, examples (29-30). Unlike the constructions in (27), all three forms of right dislocation were possible with this type of repetition.

(28) I didn’t do any revision. (060)
(29) That was good. (060)
(30) Ken was the church-warden was Ken. (035)

5. Results

The extraction provided a total of 296 tokens. This might seem rather low considering that in the literature the right dislocation forms had all been mentioned to occur frequently and that the text consists of 91 hour long (or more) interviews (this represents more than 1.5 million words, Tagliamonte, 1998). However, given that few studies have examined right dislocations quantitatively, it is difficult to say whether this figure is lower than might have been expected. While in this paper it is feasible to examine the overall distribution of the three forms, it means that we cannot then compare it to other varieties and gauge whether they use right dislocation forms more or less.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper, it would be worthwhile to find a way to consider the relative frequency of right dislocation forms across speakers and dialects. It may be possible to achieve this counting the number of right dislocations by 1000 clauses or by 1000 words, but note that, given the pragmatic functions of right dislocation forms, this might be problematic as most sentences could not be right dislocated.

Table 2 below shows the distribution in terms of the three variants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of reverse RD</th>
<th>% of expanded RD</th>
<th>% of Standard RD</th>
<th>Total N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Overall distribution of right dislocation forms in York corpus

The reverse right dislocation variant is the one most frequently used in York and accounts for 61% of right dislocation forms. The dialect grammars were clearly accurate in claiming that the reverse right dislocation form was still used in Yorkshire. However, how is the data distributed in terms of gender and age?

Men and women in York do not significantly differ in their selection of the right dislocation forms (p ≥ 1). The reverse right dislocation form is the variant most frequently selected (at rates of 57% and 62% respectively), followed by the standard right dislocation form (33% and 27%). The expanded right dislocation form is least favoured and is used only 12% by men and 15% women (figure 1).
As well as showing a similar distribution in terms of variants, the results suggest that men and women use right dislocation forms at similar rates; the total number of tokens is evenly distributed with respect to the gender ratio (fifty-eight percent of the tokens come from women (171 out of 294) and women represent fifty-seven percent of the corpus).

In terms of age, the results are rather similar; the three age groups show no significant difference in distribution ($p \leq 2$). The reverse right dislocation is the most frequent form (50% for the 15-35 year olds, 69% for the 36-69 year olds, 58% for the over 70 year olds), followed by the standard right dislocation form (30%, 23% and 28% respectively) and then the expanded right dislocation form (26%, 8% and 14%) (see figure 2).

In terms of overall use of right dislocation, the results suggest that there are some differences between the groups; although the oldest speaker group represents 31% of the York sample (i.e. 28 out of 91 speakers), they contribute 41% of the tokens of right dislocation. This difference is statistically significant ($p \leq 0.01$). Although the distribution of the variants is not changing, right dislocation at such is used less by the two younger age groups.

The internal factors show greater differences in terms of the variants favoured; table 3 demonstrates that while the reverse right dislocation form is favoured with proper nouns, noun phrases and demonstratives, it is very rarely used with pronouns. With pronouns, the expanded right dislocation variant, which overall represents only 13% of right dislocation forms, is selected at a rate of 67%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of RRD</th>
<th>% of ERD</th>
<th>% of SRD</th>
<th>Total N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proper Noun</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun phrase</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrative</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Overall distribution of right dislocation forms by subject type

To understand this result, we need to consider that, for the most part, right dislocations with pronouns are somewhat different from those with other subjects, as the dislocated element does not tend to provide any additional information. Recall that in cases such as these, the pronoun of the main clause is repeated in the dislocated segment (example 31). This may be a factor in anomalous distribution of variants.

(31) He's weird he is. (061)

Tied to this is the fact that standard and reversed right dislocation forms are affected by pronouns in another way; standard and reverse right dislocations tend to be used in the oblique case with pronouns. 6 out of the 15 tokens of SRD and RRD with pronouns are clearly in the oblique (examples 32 and 33), two are of you where the oblique and nominative are not distinguished and finally five are conjoined noun phrases which tend to function rather differently than other subjects (examples 34-35) (Angermeyer and Singler, 2003).

(32) Oh aye he was right fool him. (071)
(33) They actually were double seats, was them in the ex-Grand. (001)
(34) But we had a great time, actually Mum and I. (062)
(35) We like our walking do me and Graham. (054)

The results suggest that the use of reverse right dislocation forms (and standard right dislocation forms) is limited with pronouns and that expanded right dislocations are used instead. Why might this be the case?

One reason may be the fact that, although prosodically different, reverse right dislocation forms could be confused with some types of tag questions, as their surface structure is very similar (examples 36-37).

(36) I think he was sat just sulking in his living room was he. (036)
(37) He was sat just sulking in his living room, was he?

Expanded right dislocation forms are overwhelmingly selected instead. Moreover, expanded right dislocation forms appear to be used almost exclusively with pronouns as 80% of
the tokens of ERD are with pronouns. ERD forms are used a mere 3% in other contexts, with RRD being used 69%.

Next, we will examine verb type. Recall that Visser (1963:54) had noted that most RRD and ERD forms occurred with be but were occasionally found with other auxiliaries as well. Table 4 examines whether his judgement was accurate for York and reveals that the verb to be accounts for 2/3 of the data. Moreover, the pattern whereby the reverse right dislocation form is the most favoured variant is found for all verb types but modal verbs, where the expanded right dislocation form is used 42%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of RRD</th>
<th>% of ERD</th>
<th>% of SRD</th>
<th>Total N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Be</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medial</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Distribution of right dislocation form by verb type

It is difficult to draw conclusions from the results for modal verb, however, as there are only twelve tokens of them with right dislocation forms in the corpus. Moreover 5 of these were with pronouns, which as we have seen before, are more likely to occur with ERD forms.

6. Conclusions and venues for further study

The results demonstrate that, as had been predicted by research on Yorkshire dialects, the reverse right dislocation form can be found in York. Further to that, a finding that was not predicted by previous research is the fact that it is the most frequently used form. This is the case for both genders and all age groups so it does not appear that the form is in decline as was initially hypothesised, nor is it particularly stigmatised.

We have also established that right dislocations, in which the pronoun is repeated rather than being replaced with a noun phrase or demonstrative pronoun, function rather differently than other right dislocation forms. First of all, they are more likely to occur with an oblique form with the RRD and SRD variants, but secondly, they are used predominantly with ERD variants. It may be that, for York speakers at least, when the reverse right dislocation form is not acceptable (i.e., with pronouns), then it is the expanded form that is used in its place.

Because right dislocation forms have not been studied in this way before, we do not, however, know how York compares to other varieties of English, either in terms of other varieties which have all three right dislocation forms or of varieties which only have two available. We cannot then determine whether York speakers use right dislocation forms more frequently than speakers of other varieties. Moreover, without studies of other varieties, we do not know whether the RRD form is being used in place of the ERD or the SRD dislocation, or whether it is in some ways being used in addition to them. Although, intuitively, it may be the case that right dislocation forms in general are more frequent in some dialects than in others, only a study of other dialects, both standard and non-standard, will be able to determine this conclusively.

A final venue for further research lies in the origins of the reverse right dislocation form; as discussed the first attestations of the reverse right dislocation form date from the nineteenth century and are found in Victorian literature. This has two related questions: where did the form originate and why is it now found in only Northern varieties of English if it was once more widespread? It is likely that its usage predates the first attestations and it may be that it was originally a Northern (mainly Yorkshire and Lancashire) feature that gained mainstream currency for a time before retreating to its original dialect areas, but it is possible, though somewhat more unlikely, that it is a nineteenth century innovation which was only adopted in Northern dialects. Understanding the history and spread of this feature may help us better understand wider processes of language change and diffusion.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Examples which provide a speaker number, (087) here, come from the York corpus (Tagliamonte, 1998). Sentences with no specific mention of corpus source were created for illustration.
2. Note however that Visser found no attestations of this form from 1450 until the end of the eighteenth century (Visser, 1963:54).
3. Note that other verbs had the operator do in the dislocated section of the clause.

References


