

# Semantics and Functions of the *It is that*-Construction and the Japanese *No da*-Construction\*

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This paper points to various meanings of the *it is that*-construction hitherto neglected, and clarifies its semantic and pragmatic characteristics. It is argued that the *it is that*-construction serves to identify previous information deductively on the basis of the speaker's prior knowledge. The semantic and functional characteristics of the *it is that*-construction can be cross-linguistically borne out by comparison with the *no da*-construction in Japanese.

## 1. Introduction

The *it is that*-construction as in (1) has the structure of a subject *it* + a copula *be* + a complement *that*-clause.<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. Nobody has invited me to dance. *It is that* I'm not pretty enough.  
(Declerck 1992)
- b. He was shot in his house. *It is that* he knew too much. (ibid.)
- c. They like their white heroes. I didn't mean it as a racist thing. *It's just that* Kevin and Larry were drawing most of our fans.  
(*The Boston Globe*, Sept. 5, 2001)
- d. But why after seeing Skip did you not want to help him? Especially in light of what's been uncovered about Dr. Smith." "*It's not that* I didn't want to help him, Mrs. Rearden. *It's that* I can't help him."  
(M. H. Clark, *Let Me Call You Sweetheart*)

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<sup>1</sup> The complementizer (sentential nominalizer) *that* is sometimes omitted especially after *just*, as in (i).

- (i) When the panel retire, she says tearily: "*It's just* it's so boring at our work."  
(*The Guardian*, Feb. 16, 2000)

The *it is that*-construction has not, to the best of my knowledge, received much attention in previous studies, except in Bolinger (1972), Hurford (1977), Delahunty (1990) and Declerck (1992). This paper points to various meanings of the *it is that*-construction hitherto neglected, and clarifies its semantic and pragmatic characteristics. It is argued that the *it is that*-construction serves to identify previous information deductively on the basis of the speaker's knowledge. Then, the *it is that*-construction is compared with the *no da*-construction in Japanese, which is syntactically similar to the *it is that*-construction, as in (2).<sup>2</sup>

- (2) Daremo watashi-o dansu ni sasotte kure nakatta.  
 nobody me-AM dance to invited (give) not have  
 (Lit.) 'Nobody has invited me to dance'.  
 Watashi-wa amari kawaiku nai **no da** wa.  
 I - TM enough be pretty not C be Prt (female SP M)  
 (Lit.) 'It is that I'm not pretty enough'.

*No da* is a sentence final form consisting of a sentential nominalizer *no* and a copula verb *da*. Parallel to their structural similarities, the *it is that*-construction corresponds well with the *no da*-construction semantically. The *no da*-construction has so far been translated into the *it is that*-construction literally (cf. Kuno 1973; Kuroda 1973; Ikegami 1981; Tanomura 1990; Lombardi Vallauri 1995; Tsubomoto 2000). The semantic and functional characteristics of the *it is that*-construction can be cross-linguistically borne out by comparison with the *no da*-construction in Japanese. The *it is that*-construction will be semantically distinguished from the *it is* small clause-construction shown in (3), which also has the function of identifying previous information, and which corresponds to the Japanese *no da*-construction like (4).<sup>3</sup>

- (3) A: What is that noise?  
 B: *It is* a steam locomotive running.
- (4) A: Ano oto-wa nan deshoo?  
 that noise-TM what will be  
 (Lit.) 'What is that noise?'  
 B: Are-wa jyouki kikansha-ga hashitte iru **n desu**.  
 it-TM steam locomotive-NM is running C be  
 (Lit.) 'It is a steam locomotive running'.

## 2. Semantic Properties of the *It is that*-Construction

Characteristically, the *it is that*-construction cannot be used discourse-initially. (5) illustrates that the *it is that*-construction cannot be uttered out of the blue or in response to previous information provided non-linguistically.

<sup>2</sup> The sentence-final form *no da* has its variants such as *no desu* (polite), *no de aru* (formal writing), and its shortened forms such as *n desu* (colloquial) and *n da* (informal colloquial).

<sup>3</sup> Declerck (1981) calls a small clause like (3) a pseudo-modifier.

- (5) a. Oh! {I have / \**It is that* I have} no money.  
b. Hi! {I'm / \**It's that* I'm} back.  
c. [The speaker finds many horsetails in the field.]  
{Spring has come. / \**It is that* spring has come.}

As we will observe in (6)-(9), most of the previous studies have paid attention to only the 'causal' meaning of the *it is that*-construction. For example, Curme (1931) paraphrases the subject *it* in (6) as 'the cause of her trouble-making'.

- (6) The queer part of it was that Miss Waters didn't seem to be really mean. *It is just that* she couldn't mind her own business. (Curme 1931)

Bolinger (1972) refers to the example (7) as a kind of cleft sentence and tries to paraphrase the *that*-clause with a *because*-clause.

- (7) Why didn't he take the plunge? *Was it that* (= because) he didn't have the money (that he didn't take the plunge)? (Bolinger 1972)

Declerck (1992) claims that the *it is that*-construction conveys the meaning of 'cause, reason or explanation'. Consider the examples in (8a-b).

- (8) a. "I wonder why he did it." "Perhaps *it's that* he needs money."  
(Declerck 1992)  
b. "Are you hungry?" "No." "*It's that* there's plenty of food in the fridge, if you should feel hungry." (ibid.)

Declerck points out that the *it is that*-construction can be used to specify the reason for a preceding statement as in (8a) or to offer an explanation of a speech act as in (8b). By the same token, Carlson (1983) argues that the *it is that*-construction 'identifies reasons or explanations'.

- (9) I am afraid that we have to let you go. *It is not that* we do not like you. *It is just that* we can no more use you. (Carlson 1983)

We should, however, note that 'cause' or 'reason' is only one of the specific meanings of the *it is that*-construction, as we will observe below. Furthermore, a semantic distinction should be made between 'cause, reason' and 'explanation', because 'cause' or 'reason' is regarded as a specific meaning but 'explanation' as a general meaning: 'explanation' is a comprehensive term which may include causal and other semantic relationships. A closer look at the naturally occurring data reveals that the *it is that*-construction is used to convey other specific meanings in a discourse. Observe that the *it is that*-constructions in (10) are introduced by discourse markers of 'consequence' or 'conclusion' like *then* and *thus*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The *it is that*-construction in (10a) is an example of an interrogative used with *is it that*. We consider that the interrogative formation does not alter its semantic and functional properties of the *it is that*-construction.

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- (10) a. *Is it, ~~then~~, that* Rykiel believes that to succeed as a designer there must be the merest hint of madness involved?  
(*The Times Magazine*, May 14, 1994)
- b. With batteries of lawyers employing every possible delaying tactic, that day could be many years distant. *Thus it is that* many people believe the only realistic way to recover the money is to strike a deal with Madame Marcos.  
(*The Sunday Times Magazine*, March 13, 1994)

As is obvious from the connectives such as *then* and *thus* in (10), the speaker of the *it is that*-construction draws a possible conclusion or consequence from the preceding linguistic context. Although the causal meaning has often been pointed out, such a specific meaning as ‘conclusion’ or ‘consequence’ has not so far been paid attention to. Whereas we recognize the frequency of the causal meaning of the *it is that*-construction in actual discourse, it is not reasonable to ignore its meaning of ‘conclusion’ or ‘consequence’.

Declerck and others assume that the *it is that*-construction has the function of giving an explanation for the previous information. However, the commonly used term ‘explanation’ is too vague to define the basic meaning of the *it is that*-construction. Let’s compare the *it is that*-construction with the *that is*-construction as shown in (11) and (12).

- (11) a. Nobody has invited me to dance. {*It is that* / \**That is*,} I’m not pretty enough.  
b. I’ve got a bit of a problem. {*It is that* / ?*That is*,} all the banks are closed.
- (12) a. They completely clammed up. {*That is*, / \**It is that* } they refused to speak.  
b. He worked for more than seventeen hours a day. {*That is*, / \**It is that* } he slept for less than seven hours.

Both the *it is that*-construction and the *that is*-construction give further information about the preceding context.<sup>5</sup> But it should be noted that they have a complementary distribution as shown in (11)-(12). In fact, the *that is*-construction expresses ‘paraphrase’, and the *it is that*-construction conveys ‘interpretation’; the *that is*-construction gives an explanation for the previous information on the basis of shared knowledge, whereas the *it is that*-construction offers an explanation of the previous information on the basis of information that the speaker already has.

The semantic difference between the *it is that*-construction and the *that is*-construction can be explained by the different referentiality of the subjects *it* and *that*.<sup>6</sup> The *it* subject of the *it is that*-construction has previously been assumed

<sup>5</sup> The *that is*-construction in (12a) is cited from Blakemore (1996). According to Blakemore (1996), the use of *that* in *that is* simply communicates the information that something referred to by the demonstrative *that* is identical with something else; the hearer has to identify the referent of *that* and the complement of *is* on the basis of context.

<sup>6</sup> Unlike the *it is that*-construction, the *that is*-construction does not occur with the complementizer

to be a PRO-form for the *that*-clause (Hurford 1972; Quirk *et al.* 1985), simply a subject placeholder (Halliday 1985) or an expletive, non-referential element devoid of semantic import (Delahunty 1990; Declerck 1992). However, I assume that *it* is here analyzed to be a referential pronoun that has a clausal antecedent in the previous discourse. The referential pronoun *it + be + that-CP* is used to communicate that information referred to by *it* is identified with information in the *that*-clause. Let us briefly survey the choice between *it* and *that* on a discourse level. A recent study by Kamio and Thomas (1999) gives an insightful comment on the distinction between *that* and *it* from a functional perspective. Let's note (13).

- (13) *That* can serve to indicate what is from speaker's point of view novel or newly learned information, whereas *it* refers to information which has already undergone some degree of integration into the speaker's store of knowledge. (Kamio and Thomas 1999)

According to Kamio and Thomas (1999), in (14), either B1 or B2's reply would be possible after the speaker A's statement, but they should be distinguished from pragmatic perspectives. That is, B1 may be an out-of town visitor who is unfamiliar with parking regulations in Brookline, for whom A's comment constitutes novel information. B2 may be a Brookline resident to whom this city ordinance is well known.

- (14) A: Overnight parking on the street is prohibited in Brookline.  
B1: *That's* absurd.  
B2: *It's* absurd. (Kamio and Thomas 1999)

In (15), both *it* and *that* refer to the death of the person whose funeral is being held.

- (15) [Speaker A is attending a funeral, and approaches family members of the deceased to express his or her condolences.]  
A: {*It's* / \**That's*} tragic! (Kamio and Thomas 1999)

In (15), *It's tragic* is a normal expression of sympathy. The use of *it* communicates the speaker's prior knowledge of death of the person in question and furthermore conveys that the speaker has integrated that information into his or her store of knowledge. Based on the observation above, we can postulate the basic meaning of the *it is that*-construction as in (16).

- (16) The basic meaning of the *it is that*-construction is to communicate that the information that has already been incorporated in the speaker's store of knowledge is identical with the information in the *that*-clause.

Given that the function of the *it is that*-construction is to identify the previous linguistic information deductively on the basis of the speaker's prior knowledge,

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(sentential nominalizer) *that* but with the comma. We assume that the occurrence of the complementizer *that* in the *it is that*-construction and the comma in the *that is*-construction is assumed to be semantically motivated, and they have a structure 'the referential pronoun *it/that + be + CP*'. See Otake (1999) for detailed discussions.

the *it is that*-construction is semantically similar to the *means that*-construction in that it gives an interpretation to the preceding context. In fact, (17) shows that the *it is that*-construction and the *means that*-construction can be in juxtaposition in the same discourse.

- (17) a. There are hardly any women working out, though that may be for entirely different reasons. *It means that* men probably are trying to lose weight just as frantically as we are. *It is just that* they are not very good at it. (*The Sunday Times Magazine – Style*, March 5, 1995)
- b. Ayooob is skeptical. Studies do show that children who eat breakfast do better in school, he concedes. “But *that doesn’t mean that* any one food will make you smart,” he says. *It’s just that* an empty belly can drain your brain. (*Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 2001)
- c. *This doesn’t mean* hotel reservation clerks are lying. *It’s just that* many hotels prefer to put an appealing price in large print, then add the extras with a footnote below in smaller print. (*Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 2001)

Now, let us get back to why it is that the *it is that*-construction has a meaning as specific as ‘cause’ and ‘conclusion’ in a discourse. Unlike expressions with explicit logical markers like the *it is because*-clause construction, the *it is that*-construction does not convey any explicit logical relationship. The *it is that*-construction simply identifies the preceding information referred to by *it*. As we have observed above, the referential pronoun *it* of the *it is that*-construction marks the preceding information as already incorporated into the speaker’s store of knowledge. This also implies that the speaker assumes that the preceding information is not well known to the hearer. Since the *it is that*-construction is used to identify the previous proposition on the basis of the speaker’s knowledge, it inevitably carries a proposition that is deduced from the previously incorporated proposition.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the *it is that*-construction conveys information that the speaker deduces based on his or her knowledge. It should be assumed that, unlike explicit logical expressions like the *it is because*-clause construction, the *it is that*-construction simply indicates that a proposition in the *that*-clause is deduced or interpreted based on the speaker’s prior knowledge. The semantic properties of the *it is that*-construction can be clarified by examining the possibilities of co-occurrence with epistemic modals. Let’s compare the acceptability of the modal auxiliaries in (18) and the unacceptability of those in (19).

- (18) Nobody has invited me to dance. It {*must / may / might / could*} be that I’m not pretty enough.

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<sup>7</sup> Declerck (1992) calls the construction we have discussed ‘inferential’ *it is that*-constructions. Declerck claims that the inferential *it is that*-construction expresses a notion whose content can be lexicalized as nouns that can appear in the copular structure ‘NP *is that* ...’ According to Declerck (1992), nouns like *reason, cause, explanation, interpretation* are of this type. However, Declerck’s analysis is insufficient in that he ignores the fact that nouns like *conclusion, consequence, thing, fact, truth* can also appear in the NP slot of the ‘NP *is that* ...’

- (19) Nobody has invited me to dance. It {*\*will / \*would / \*can / \*should / \*ought to*} be that I'm not pretty enough.

The acceptability of the modals in (18) suggests that the identification of the preceding information is made through a deduction, which is based on direct or indirect evidence (=must) or a factual possibility (=may/might/could). On the other hand, (19) suggests that the interpretation of the preceding information cannot be made based on a prediction (=will/would), a theoretical possibility (=can) or the possibility that the speaker is explicitly denying or doubting the truth of the conclusion that him/herself has arrived at on the basis of the shared information (=should/ought to).

We now turn to comparing the *it is that*-construction with the *it is* small clause-construction as in (3) in section 1. As is pointed out by Bolinger and others, the *that*-clause and the small clause should be chosen distinctively in terms of 'concept' and 'percept'. For example, as indicated in (20), perceptual verbs like *see* and *feel* take *that*-clauses or small clauses.

- (20) a. I {see / feel, etc.} [ that NP VP] (Concept)  
 b. I {see / feel, etc.} [<sub>sc</sub> NP V-ing] (Percept)

Consider the examples in (21)-(22). The verbs *see* and *feel* in (21a)-(22a) followed by the *that*-clause are interpreted as 'understand, realize', while those in (21b)-(22b) followed by the small clause are interpreted as 'perceive with eyes', 'perceive through the sense of touch'.

- (21) a. I saw *that he crossed the street*.  
 b. I saw *him crossing the street*.  
 (22) a. I felt *that she was trembling*.  
 b. I felt *her trembling*.

Interestingly, as the translations of (23)-(24) show, the Japanese sentential nominalizer *no* leads its interpretation as a cognitive and perceptive process.<sup>8</sup>

- (23) a. Watashi-wa kare-ga toori-o watatta **no** - ga wakatta.  
 I - TM he-NM street-AM crossed C - NM realized  
 (Lit.) 'I saw that he crossed the street'.  
 b. Watashi-wa kanojo-ga furuete iru **no** - ga wakatta.  
 I - TM she-NM be trembling C - NM realized  
 (Lit.) 'I felt that she was trembling'.  
 (24) a. Watashi-wa kare-ga toori-o watatte iru **no** - o mita.  
 I - TM he-NM street-AM be crossing C - AM saw  
 (Lit.) 'I saw him crossing the street'.  
 b. Watashi-wa kanojo-ga furuete iru **no** - o kanjita.  
 I - TM she-NM be trembling C - AM felt  
 (Lit.) 'I felt her trembling'.

<sup>8</sup> See Akatsuka (1978) for semantic properties of the Japanese nominalizer *no*.

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We claim that the *it is that*-construction and the *it is* small-clause construction indicated in (25)-(26) are qualitatively different.

(25) It be [ that NP VP]

(26) It be [<sub>SC</sub> NP V-ing]

With the *it is that*-construction, the speaker identifies the previous information that has been cognitively processed. On the other hand, the speaker of the *it is* small-clause construction identifies the spontaneously occurring event that he or she has just physically perceived. For example, the *it is* small-clause constructions in (27) identifies a directly perceived and simultaneously occurring event.

- (27) a. Suddenly he was aware that she was crying. “Elizabeth?” “Never mind. *It’s just me being stupid again.*” (H. Stein, *The Magic Bullet*)  
b. A sudden movement out of the corner of Kim’s eye brought a stifled scream to her lips, and her heart leaped in her chest. She raised her arms by reflex to protect herself, but then quickly lowered them. *It was only Sheba leaping onto the game table.*  
(R. Cook, *Acceptable Risk*)

We should note that words such as *suddenly* and *sudden* in (27) indicate that the event has been perceived directly and that the identification of the event was instantaneous. We can characterize each construction as in the following.

- (28) The *it is that*-construction identifies already processed information, whereas the *it is* small clause-construction identifies a directly perceived and simultaneously occurring event.

Thus, the *it is that*-construction is unacceptable in discourse where the identification of the perceived event is demanded, as in (29).

- (29) A: “What’s that sound?”  
B: “*It’s Little Jimmy playing the piano.* / \**It is that Little Jimmy is playing the piano.*”

In (30), the progressive aspect is used in the *that*-clause. But, the progressive act of *they’re dieting* is not a directly perceived event, so the *it is* small-clause construction cannot be chosen.

- (30) “People look at overweight people and say, ‘Oh, they’re lacking in will-power’ or, ‘She can’t control herself,’ Powter says. “That’s not true. *It’s just that they’re dieting,* and dieting makes you fatter and weaker.”  
(*The Times Magazine*, Feb. 26, 1994)

It should be noted that both the *it is* small-clause construction and the *it is that*-construction correspond to the Japanese *no da*-construction, as shown in (31) and (32).

- (31) A: Kao-ga akai. Keshou-o shiteiru you ne.  
 face-NM red. make up-AM be wearing look Prt (female SP M)  
 (Lit.) *'Too much color. You look painted.'*  
 B: Iie. Sekimenshiteiru dake na **n desu**.  
 No. (I-TM) flushed just be C be  
 (Lit.) *'No. It's just I'm flushed.'* [It is that-construction]
- (32)(=4) A: Ano oto-wa nan deshou?  
 that noise-TM what will be  
 (Lit.) *'What is that noise?'*  
 B: Are-wa jyouki kikannsha-ga hashitte iru **n desu**.  
 it-TM steam locomotive-NM is running C be  
 (Lit.) *'It is a steam locomotive running.'* [It is small clause-construction]

The observation above suggests that the *no da*-construction is used to identify not only cognitively processed information but also directly perceived and simultaneously occurring events.

### 3. Some Similarities and Differences between the *It is that*-Construction and the *No da*-Construction in Japanese

The following examples show that neither the *no da*-construction nor the *it is that*-construction can be uttered discourse-initially.<sup>9</sup>

- (33) a. Are! Saifu-ga {nai / \*nai **n da**}.  
 Oh no, wallet-NM {not / not C be}  
 (Lit.) *'Oh no! I've forgotten my wallet.'*  
 b. Shimatta! Kasa-o wasurete {kita / \*kita **n da**}.  
 Oh dear, umbrella-AM left {have-come / have-come C be}  
 (Lit.) *'Oh dear, I've left my umbrella.'* (Tanomura 1990)

Recall that the *it is that*-construction cannot be uttered discourse-initially either, as shown in (5a-b) in section 2. Both the *it is that*-construction and the *no da*-construction require the presence of an antecedent event or situation which the constructions interpret. It is worth noting that they are different in that the English *it is that*-construction requires a linguistically overt antecedent, while the Japanese *no da*-construction can take either a linguistic or a nonlinguistic antecedent. Consider the following examples.

- (34) [The speaker finds many horsetails in the field.]  
 a. Mou haru na **n da** naa.  
 already spring be C be Prt (exclam)  
 (Lit.) *'Spring has come.'*  
 b. Spring has come. / \**It is that* spring has come.

<sup>9</sup> (33a) and (33b) are cited from Tanomura (1990). Although they have a question mark in Tanomura (1990), they are marked here with an asterisk indicating unacceptability in my judgment.

- (35) [The speaker scratches his leg.]  
 a. Ka ni sasareta n desu.  
 mosquito by was bitten C be  
 (Lit.) 'I was bitten by a mosquito'.  
 b. I was bitten by a mosquito. / \*It is that I was bitten by a mosquito.

In (34)-(35), the *no da*-constructions are triggered by the preceding nonlinguistic information, unlike those in (33a-b). (34)-(35) show that the *no da*-construction can give certain information to the nonlinguistic antecedent but the *it is that*-construction cannot.

It should be noted that the *no da*-construction is hardly ever preceded by the adverbial *sunawachi*, which means 'that is' and introduces a paraphrase.

- (36) Kokkai-wa niin kara naru. Sunawachi,  
 Diet - TM two chambers of consist That is,  
 (Lit.) 'The Diet consists of two chambers. That is, the House of Representatives  
 shuugiin to sangiin {de aru/ \*na no de aru}.  
 the House of Representatives and Councilors {be / be C be }  
 and Councilors'.

(36) illustrates that neither the *no da*-construction nor the *it is that*-construction can carry information that simply paraphrases the preceding context. The adverbials occurring in the *no da*-construction that identifies cognitively processed information can be classified into two types:

- (37) Adverbials that precede the *no da*-construction:  
 (A) adverbials expressing the logical consequence or gist of the previous information, e.g., {*tsumari / kekkyoku / shosen*} *wa* (=the conclusion is), *you wa* (=the gist of it is, the long and the short of it is)  
 (B) adverbials expressing the truth of the matter, e.g., {*jitsu / jissai / hontou*} *wa* (=the fact of it is, the thing is)

(37A-B) are exemplified in (38a-b), respectively.

- (38) a. Sono shouhin-wa yoku ureteiru. {**Tsumari / Kekkyoku**}-**wa**  
 that product-TM well sells {conclusion / gist of it}-TM  
 (Lit.) 'That product sells well. The {conclusion/gist of it} is that  
 shouhisha no niizu-ni atteiru **no da**.  
 consumers POSS needs-DM meet C be  
 it meets the needs of consumers'.  
 b. Kanojo-wa boku no tegami-ni henji-o kure nakatta.  
 she-TM my POSS letter-DM reply-AM give did not  
 (Lit.) 'She didn't answer my letter.  
 {**Jitsu / Jissai**}-**wa** kanojo-wa sore-o yomi sae shinakatta **no da**.  
 {fact/thing of it}-TM she-TM it-AM read even did not C be  
 The {fact/thing} (of it) is that she didn't even read it'.

The observation above shows that the *no da*-construction can express the logical

consequence or gist of the previous information or the truth of the matter, but cannot convey information that just paraphrases the preceding context.

As for the *it is that*-construction, the referential expression *it*, a main clause subject, refers to the preceding linguistic information. On the other hand, the main clause subject is seldom expressed overtly in the *no da*-construction.<sup>10</sup> The structural representation of the *no da*-construction is assumed to be the following.<sup>11</sup>

- (39) [(NP<sub>1</sub>-wa) [NP<sub>2</sub>-wa/ga VP **no**] **da**]  
 (NP<sub>1</sub>-TM) NP<sub>2</sub>-TM/NM VP C be

The main clause subject NP<sub>1</sub> does not always appear overtly. Interestingly, in the *it is that*-construction, the main clause subject *it* and the copula *be* can also be demoted and omitted.<sup>12</sup> Consider the constructions beginning with *not that*, *just that*, or *rather that* in (40).

- (40) a. She was in her private office, meeting with two associates, when she was told her doctor had been waiting some time to see her. *It wasn't exactly that she'd forgotten he was due; just that she'd been so determined to carry on business as usual.*  
 (H. Stein, *The Magic Bullet*)  
 b. Still wiping lipstick off my cheek on the train home, I marvelled at the strength of my reaction. *It wasn't that I construed the gesture as sexual. Rather that I felt outraged by the assumption that any kind of intimacy was appropriate after so short an acquaintance.*  
 (The Guardian, May 25, 2000)  
 c. 'Ah well, yes, in life, I just think I will let life happen. *Not that you lose control or don't care. Just that you don't panic.*'  
 (The Observer, Jan. 23, 2000)

In (40), the sequence *it is* is omitted before a *not that*, *just that* or *rather that* clause. This grammatical phenomenon is similar to the omission of the main clause topic and topic marker 'NP<sub>1</sub> wa' in the Japanese *no da*-construction.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Tanomura (1990) argues that the *no da*-construction is assumed to have a *subject-predicate* structure, i.e., *A wa B da* (= *A is B*), although it is often the case that the subject does not appear overtly.

<sup>11</sup> The alternation between *wa* and *ga* following by NP<sub>2</sub> depends on whether NP<sub>2</sub> carries old information or new information. 'NP<sub>2</sub> *ga*' is almost always chosen in the *no da*-construction that identifies a directly perceived and simultaneously occurring event.

<sup>12</sup> The omission of the sequence *it is* can also be observed in the *it is* small-clause construction. In the following example, the *it is* is assumed to be omitted before *Rum-looking customer stopping at the Coach and Horses*.

(i) Hall very sociably pulled up. "What's that?" he asked. "*Rum-looking customer stopping at the Coach and Horses*," said Teddy. (H.G.Wells, *The Invisible Man*)

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the complementizer *that* must be expressed when *it is* is deleted, although it is often omitted after *it is just*.

#### 4. Pragmatic Effects of the *It is that*-Construction

The *it is that*-construction expresses the fact that the preceding information has already been incorporated into the speaker's store of knowledge, and identifies it with information in the *that*-clause deductively. Thus, the use of the *it is that*-construction often entails the implication that it is hard for a hearer to identify the previous information.

Kamio (1997) observes that information which is difficult to access should be expressed in the indirect form both in Japanese and in English. For example, information which is difficult to imagine or predict cannot be naturally expressed in an ordinary declarative form, as seen in (41) and (42).

(41) <sup>2</sup>Hanako-wa sabisii.  
Hanako-TM lonely  
(Lit.) 'Hanako feels lonely'.

(42) Hanako feels lonely.

Such information should be expressed in the Japanese *no da*-construction as in (43) or the English indirect form as in (44).

(43) Hanako-wa sabisii **n da**.  
Hanako-TM lonely C be  
(Lit.) 'It is that Hanako feels lonely'.

(44) Hanako seems to feel lonely.

As Kamio (1997) argues, it is important to note that English is fairly permissive of psychological utterances while Japanese is much less so. The psychological utterance in the direct form with the third person subject is not allowed in Japanese as in (41). In contrast, although English direct forms like (42) are considered intrusive or impolite, they are natural when the speaker is close to the referent of the subject, for example, the speaker's mother. Kamio (1997) gives a translation of the *it is that*-construction to the *no da*-construction as in (43), but does not mention any properties of the *it is that*-construction. Based on our analysis, the *it is that*-construction is more limited than the *no da*-construction in that it requires a preceding linguistic context which it identifies, cf. (34)-(35) in section 3.

Let us therefore consider some pragmatic aspects of the *it is that*-construction. First, the speaker of the *it is that*-construction interprets the previous information based on his or her knowledge. This means that the speaker takes responsibility for his or her interpretation. Thus, the *it is that*-construction is often used in a situation where the speaker wants to assure the hearer. It is worth noting that, in the examples of (45a-b), the *it is that*-construction is uttered after *he assured me*.

(45) a. "Nothing's any different than it was a minute ago." "I know that,"  
he assured me. "It's just that this time I've lowered my standards."  
(Reader's Digest, July 1992)

- b. “What’s the matter?” I asked. “Don’t I dance well enough?” “Oh, yes,” he assured me. “*It’s just that* - well, I thought you said, “May I have your stamps, please!” (Reader’s Digest, May 1990)

Second, the *it is that*-construction is used to reveal the true state of affairs or to make an excuse. In (46a-b), the speaker uses the *it is that*-construction to show the true state of affairs or make an excuse.

- (46) a. T: Too much color, girl. You look painted.  
P: Oh, no. *It’s just* I-I’m flushed.  
T: Well, you don’t smell respectable drenched in scent.  
(K. Sullivan, *Ann of Green Gables-The Sequel*)  
b. “.... I’m sorry to bother you with all this. *It’s just* we’re trying to reconstruct how it all happened, because later it’s only going to get harder to remember.” (P. Cornwell, *The Last Precinct*)

Thirdly, a stutter or stammer before or after the *that*-clause of the *it is that*-construction is often observed in naturally occurring data.

- (47) a. “What is it, sailor?” Donald demanded in a no-nonsense voice. “Make it on the double. We’ve got an interesting talk ahead of us that I don’t want to miss.” “Well, *it’s just that* ...” Richard began, but then he stumbled over his words, unsure of how to begin.  
(R. Cook, *Abduction*)  
b. “*Is it*,” she stammered, “*is it that* you don’t want me?”  
(D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*)  
c. She looked over at Martin, who looked suddenly unhappy. “This music annoys you, doesn’t it?” Martin squirmed. “*It’s just* - why can’t he sing any one song all the way through?”  
(L. Moor, *Terrific Mother*)

This independence suggests that the *it’s just* or *it is that* has come to be a kind of adverbial expression like *the fact is* or *the truth is*.

Finally, let’s consider why *just* is so often used in the *it is that*-construction. As we have surveyed so far, the *it is that*-construction conveys information that is hard for the hearer to access. The *it is that*-construction therefore sometimes sounds dogmatic, arrogant, assured and preachy. But *just* has a function of toning down and softening the speaker’s assertion. We claim that the reason *just* occurs so often before the *that*-clause is that the speaker intends to avoid the appearance of showing off his or her knowledge, or of focusing on the hearer’s lack of knowledge.

Let us turn to the *no da*-construction in Japanese. The *no da*-construction also conveys information that has previously been established and is hard for a hearer to access. Compare (48) and (49).

## Otake

- (48) A: Anata-wa nani gata desu ka?  
you-TM what (blood) type be Prt(interrog)  
(Lit.) 'What is your blood type?'  
B: Watashi-wa {bi gata desu / bi gata na n desu}.  
I-TM {B type be / B type be C be }  
(Lit.) 'I have type B blood'.
- (49) A: Kyou-wa nan youbi desu ka?  
today-TM what day be Prt(interrog)  
(Lit.) 'What day is it today?'  
B: Kyou-wa getsuyoubi {desu / ??na n desu}.  
today-TM Monday {be / be C be }.  
(Lit.) 'Today is Monday'.

As shown in (48), it is not easy for a hearer to ascertain the speaker's blood type, so the *no da*-construction can be used. On the other hand, information about what day it is is common knowledge and not difficult to access. So, the *no da*-construction cannot be used in (49).

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have shown that the *it is that*-construction is used to convey various meanings in a discourse, such as cause, reason, conclusion or consequence. We have also seen that the *it is that*-construction serves to identify previous information deductively on the basis of the speaker's prior knowledge. We have furthermore observed that the *it is that*-construction identifies already processed information, whereas the *it is* small clause-construction identifies a directly perceived and simultaneously occurring event. Moreover, we have clarified some semantic and pragmatic properties of the *it is that*-construction by comparison with the *no da*-construction in Japanese, which is syntactically similar to the *it is that*-construction. In order to communicate, we need to select appropriate forms and give the appropriate information relevant to the previous discourse and context. Linguistic knowledge should be the linchpin to exchanging information. Our detailed analysis of the *it is that*-construction and the *no da*-construction has revealed a definite association between the two structures and their meaning cross-linguistically, in English and Japanese.

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