

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БАЊОЈ ЛУЦИ
ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

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IT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

Abstract: *The aim of this article is to provide insight into various uses of the English pronoun it (which is actually not always a pro-noun, i.e. not always used instead of a noun) and to ascertain whether they have any meaning, semantic and/or pragmatic. A number of authors have been reviewed, a lot of examples adduced and, in a new approach, semantic definitions of four sememes of it have been produced. All of the four varieties of it have referential function, the emphatic it has no semantic meaning, the personal and phenomenon it have semantic meaning partly, while the ambient it has a general semantic meaning. The personal, phenomenon and emphatic it have a definable pragmatic use.*

Key words: *pronoun it, semantic definition, referring function, pragmatic use.*

Introduction

Being basic and very frequent, students of English encounter *it* very early. It has been traditionally classified as a functional or grammatical word, which implies that it has either no meaning or a rather general meaning.¹ Volumes have been written about this small word, and yet it still poses a number of stubborn theoretical problems. The answers to these questions also have effect on learners of English, at least on those who want to master English on a level beyond a twenty-day crash course. We shall embark on a search for the possible meanings of *it* by demarcating its sememes and by experimenting with its definitions.²

¹ The definite and the indefinite articles, another category of functional words, have the function of translating the notion of a noun lexeme from the language system (from the sphere of potential) to speech or text, as Gustave Guillaume found out. They also have a general meaning 'all' or 'the only' ('universal') and 'one of...' ('existential') respectively, in combination with reference to what has been/will be, mentioned in speech or text or to something implied by the situation. Even the with proper nouns denoting geographic spaces (*the Danube, the Sahara, the Atlantic Ocean* keeps traces of the meaning 'large', which is derived form 'all' (Hlebec 2011: 106).

² Sources of information on how to distinguish between different sememes of a lexical unit can be

It is usually treated in the realm of syntax because it has an important syntactic function of reference³ and has

tapped by experimenting with zeugma (cf. Cruse 1986: 12 ff.). Two items connected by a conjunction and a common argument or predicate cannot be conjoined in a well-formed predication if they belong to different sememes. This clash is called "zeugma", as in **Tom followed the road and the fox*. The unacceptability of this sentence proves that the verb *follow* has one distinct meaning in *Tom followed the road* and another in *Tom followed the fox*. However *His decision and his departure were hasty* points to a single meaning of *hasty* in this sentence.

Definitions of *it*, just as of any other lexical item, should be succinct paraphrases that can be employed as a substitute for the item. Definitions, as specifications of meaning, should include all data necessary and sufficient to use the word correctly (Alston 1964: 46). Defining is a highly specialized form of paraphrase based on the distinctive components of the particular meaning in question (Nida 1975: 65). A well-formed semantic definition can and should enable understanding and even anticipate semantic phenomena and problems which have been beyond explanation become easily resolved (Hlebec 2007: 18). Another affluent source is deviant sentences, marked by an asterisk. For other sources see Hlebec (2010: 16–23). Although the collocational method (Hlebec 2007: 175–177) is ideal for discovering semantic definitions of lexical words, when pronouns are in question, it is of little use.

³ Reference is a device indispensable to language, which helps the hearer identify the entity or phenomenon, at least vaguely mentioned by the

been traditionally considered to be devoid of meaning. According to TG, in some of its usages, *it* is a transformationally introduced particle, in others not, but in any case it is also considered to be without meaning.

After a survey of opinions on each separate use of this pronoun, supplemented by examples, our discussion will be presented with the help of semantic definitions. It is only necessary to substitute the definition for the particular *it* in the sentences above, and the readers can check for themselves whether the formulation of a definition is correct and acceptable. For instance, *it* in *It's threatening a storm* is defined as <state done by something indefinite>, which is in this case 'the weather'. This leads to an apt paraphrase: *The weather, which is a kind of state caused by an indefinite agent, is threatening a storm.*

All the examples have been taken from the sources mentioned in the list of references.

personal *it*₁

This is the personal pronoun *it*, which can be textual (*The flat is very nice but unfortunately it's too expensive*) or situational (*Isn't it rather nice?* said to somebody looking at a photograph. *What is this? – It is a book. Who was that? – It was her mother.* The first dialogist does not know what or who that was, but does know that there was something or somebody'. The *it* of the second dialogist refers to this indefinite 'something' or 'somebody'. *It* in *It's the boys, isn't it?* is used by the speaker on hearing approaching steps to refer to noise made by an indefinite number of persons.

Usually *it*₁ is anaphoric (referring back to what has been mentioned), but it can also be cataphoric, forward oriented, as in *It's quite interesting, that book.*

speaker, but it is meaningless if taken alone. It always parasitically "feeds" on invariant, semantic meaning (in the language system) and pragmatic meaning (in the speech or text).

Definition of *it*₁: <thing₁ of no - indefinite sex that | speaker_{a/b}⁴ has just mentioned/speaker_a will immediately mention/is known from situation> The first part of the definition (before the bar) has a constant, semantic meaning. The rest of the definition is realized only contextually and is without semantic meaning. It belongs in pragmatics rather than semantics. *It*₁ has a strong referential function, referring to palpable things indirectly (through context or situation).

Testing the definition by substituting it for *it*: *Who was that? – <The [living] thing of indefinite sex that you have just mentioned> was her mother.*

phenomenon *it*₂

This type of *it* refers to a phenomenon (an event or a state) rather than to a thing. It combines what was called the "introductory" *it*⁵, the "situation" *it* by Curme (1931: 41, 187) and the "expletive" *it* by Bolinger (1977: 67). As a unifying term for the latter two, "indefinite reference" *it* could be used; Klajn 1984–1985: 350).

The "introductory *it*" is exemplified by: *It is useless for you to say anything. It is easy to be wise after the event. It's clever of him to lock the door. It makes no difference what he said. It doesn't matter what they say. It was fun looking after the children. It is no use crying over spilt milk. It is no use your trying to deceive me. It would be a shame if they forgot their passports. It is*

⁴ The division line separates the common part of the definition from variable parts. The meaning of 'speaker_a' is 'speaker who used *it*', while 'speaker_b' is 'speaker that has provoked the use of *it*'. The hyphen is for alternative elements, in this case: = 'thing of no sex' or 'thing of indefinite sex'.

⁵ Also called "anticipatory *it*", "preparatory *it*", "provisional *it*" or "pro-form *it*". Kiparsky/Kiparsky (1970) call it "expletive" *it*. In TG this type of *it*₂ is derived from *it*-extraposition and therefore linguists also speak of "extrapositive" *it*. According to TG, *it*-extrapositions are derived from a clause by a transformation which postpones the clause and introduces *it* as a subject instead of the clause.

immaterial what names are assigned to them. *It* is certain that she will win.

This *it* is often considered to be a “dummy” meaningless element. *It* is always followed by *be* or some other linking verb, while the delayed subject is a “sentential subject”, i.e. a finite (*that*-clause, *if*-clause or *wh*-clause)⁶ or non-finite clause (*for you to say anything* in the first example) or any group of words that is the equivalent of a clause, as in *It's amazing the way she's so quick at picking up the music*. In *It's amazing, his determination* there is an afterthought called “right-dislocation”.

The overall syntactic and semantic status of introductory *it* is far from clear (Kaltenböck 1999: 49).

Sometimes *it* is obligatory when a connection with what has just been mentioned is to be established or when what follows in a complement clause is a true thought (factive) surfacing as the conjunction *that*. *What do you think of running him as a candidate?* – **To do that would be a good idea* (A link with the question is missing. (Bolinger 1977: 72) – *To run him as a candidate would be a good idea*. (The speaker treats the question as his own idea.) – *It would be a good idea to do that* (*it* referring back to the question; (Bolinger 1977: 72). *I would have no trouble at all; it would be easy to convince him* or *to convince him would be easy* (This is not a fact). **I had no trouble at all; to convince him was easy* (This is a fact). *I had no trouble at all; it was easy to convince him* (Bolinger 1977: 74). *Did it please you that John showed*

⁶ Kaltenböck states that a distinction should be made between *It is not clear when she disappeared*, where the answer to *What's not clear?* can be – (*It is not clear*) *When she disappeared*, and *It's easy when you try hard enough* (cf. *What's easy?* – **(It's easy) When you try hard enough*. In the latter example, *when*-clause is “an adverbial specification with no direct (co-referential) link to *it*” (Kaltenböck 1999: 60). *It* in the second example can be replaced by *things* [are]: *Things are easy when you try hard enough*, but not in the first.

up? **Did that John showed up please you?* (Zaenen/Pinkham 1976: 655).

Kaltenböck explains that introductory *it* can be omitted whenever it is in an anaphoric link (referring back to what has been said) and is clearly retrievable from the preceding context, as distinct from the more unusual cataphoric (forward oriented) introductory *it*. His examples are *He read three books in one day*. – *Ø Easy to do that*. or – *Ø Strange to do something like that* or – *Ø Strange that he did something like that*. But: *??Ø easy to play tennis*. *??Ø Strange John has to go to London* (1999: 68). According to Quirk et al (1985; 898, quoted in Kaltenböck 1999: 68), ellipsis is also possible if the complement clause is retrievable from the context: *Ø Good to see you*. *Ø No wonder she's late*. (1999: 69), *Ø Odd he won't help us*.

In cases with very general meaning *it*₂ can be replaced by *things*: *It's tough/Things are tough when you have to work all day*.

This meaning often combines with one of the meanings of *to*-infinitive, which is: <event₁ - state₁ makes sb₂ experience good - bad - (not) expected thought/emotion !concerning/because of! event₁ - state₁>. The indexed abbreviation sb₂ stands for ‘somebody indefinite, people in general’, but also vaguely includes ‘the speaker’. Exclamation marks flank the meaning proper of the *to*-infinitive.

As Bolinger demonstrated, *to*-infinitive with the help of *it* can refer to a fact, although this is not possible otherwise.

‘Event - state’ in both definitions is already known to the hearer, but the speaker adds some information about the event -state. The seme ‘immediately’ is necessary, as proven by **It, which is obvious, does not bother John that he is unpopular*, which becomes acceptable when the interpolated non-defining relative clause is omitted (cf. Mukattash 1979: 88). The meaning of *it*₂ often combines with the meaning of a *that*-clause, which is <sb's thought>. When using this type of *it*,

speakers implicitly support their own opinion with the opinion of nameless people in general, which is the meaning of sb_2 . This is obvious in *It was known that... It says in the guidebook that...* Sometimes the context shows that the idea of the speaker in sb_2 is stronger than that of indefinite people. For example, *It's good you gave me a helping hand. It would be inexcusable that they should do such a thing. ?It would be inexcusable that they should run away. It is certain/clear/a pity/annoying/astonishing/probable/strange/unjust that she left* (sb_2 thinks that that she left is certain/a pity').

The introductory it_2 occurs with "difficulty-type" adjectives (so characterized in Dixon 2005: 84), like *hard, heavy, easy, difficult, tough, simple, useless*, which do not accept *that*-clauses (**It is easy that...*) but agree with the *to*-infinitive. The introductory it_2 also agrees with "attitudinal" adjectives, such as *amazing, atrocious, certain, clear, good, lovely, lucky, odd, perfect*. They belong to the value and qualification type adjectives that Dixon mentions (2005: 84). They collocate with both *that*-clauses and *to*-infinitive clauses, and often serve as pertainyms for derived sentence adverbs called "disjuncts".

Bolinger (1977: 82) had no sensation of zeugma in *You mean they're making it unpleasant there? – Not unpleasant, exactly, just tough to get anything accomplished, with It's tough to get anything accomplished* underlying the last clause. *How is it in your room? – It's noisy, and hard to study there* (again no zeugma). Again, what unites them all is the idea of indefiniteness. It is the interpolation of at least a small word or a pause (comma) that eliminates zeugma: *How was it this afternoon? – It was hot, and impossible to get anything done. *It was hot and impossible to get anything done. It was hot and just about impossible to get anything done* (Bolinger 1977: 83, 88).

Expletive *it* occurs in *Would you believe it that she's/Jane's married!*, which is in contrast with *Do you believe that Jane's married? (Frankly, I don't)*. The former, exclamatory sentence with the *she* variant rests on the information about her marriage as a topic, the subject of her marriage having already been introduced in the conversation, as distinct from the latter sentence. In the first sentence, the topic of marriage is being introduced and Jane's marriage is taken as a fact. *He won't believe it that I am better than he is* by contrast with *? I won't believe it that he is better than I am* proves that *it* here refers to a state viewed by the speaker as a fact (Bolinger 1977: 67). *If I get home by eight o'clock, I call it good luck. He admitted (it) that he was at fault* (with *it* hearers familiar with his fault, without *it*, they are not). *She spoke very sharply to me. I shall not forget it soon* (*it* pointing backward to an independent proposition (Curme 1931: 100)).⁷

Examples of situation it_2 : *Stop it!* (*It* here refers to an identifiable situation in reality, i.e. 'Stop the thing that you are doing!'). *I am glad that I am out of it. Beat it!* ('Run away!'). *I am going to rough it. He tries to lord it over us*. Here *it* is "a convenient complement of transitive and intransitive verbs without definite reference, leaving it to the situation to make the thought clear" (Curme 1931: 99). "[T]o express cessation of an activity, *it* is often used as an object, referring to something being done by another or others, usually in a tone of disapproval: 'Cut it out!' 'Quit it!' 'Drop it!' (Curme 1931: 383).

⁷ It is customary to consider an anaphoric personal pronoun to refer to a nominal antecedent by definition, whether the latter is given verbatim in the context or is to be inferred from it (Declerck/Seki 1990: 31). However, it is a matter of convention whether anaphora should also include clauses in addition to nominals, as in *If a present was given at yesterday's meeting, it must have been to the chairman*, and we do not see any reason why this may not be done.

Klajn draws a distinction between two kinds of *it* in idioms: (a) one that has indefinite reference (*let's face it, hang it all, he's done it again*) and (b) with zero reference (*rough it*).⁸ This is based on the difference: “*Let's face it. Face what?*, but not “*We'll have to rough it. *Rough what?*” (1984–1985: 353). Another view is possible, that there is indefinite reference in both cases. *It* in *I'm going to rough it*, being vague and inseparably fused from the verb, is, together with its verb, recoverable owing to the familiarity with the situation. This distinction boils down to the difference between unilateral and bilateral idioms (cf. Hlebec 2010: 91).

Definition of *it*₂: <event - state that | speaker_{a/b} has just mentioned/speaker_a will immediately express (as speaker_a's {sb₂'s})⁹ true thought) concerning sth generally known to hearer (from situation)>. Our definition tallies with Bolinger's reasoning concerning *it*₂. It also covers Leech's example (1989: 226) where it replaces an adjective. *She was rich – and she looked it* ‘She was rich – and she looked like she was in the state I have just mentioned’.

Testing the definition: *Would you believe* <the state that I will immediately express as a true thought:> *that Jane's married! They doubt* <event that is known to hearer from situation:> *that you will go.* <The event I am going to mention right now concerning> *your trying to deceive me is no use.* <[The state I am going to mention right now as not only my opinion]>: *she's late, [is] no wonder.*

⁸ “English *let's face it, hang it all, he's done it again* though equally idiomatic, do not really belong here, for their n[on]euter pronoun may be interpreted as standing for “this thing”, “this situation”, “life” etc.” (Klajn 1984–1985: 353).

⁹ The braces stand for ‘typically’, which in this case means that most often the state or event that is done by something (including somebody) as an unknown agent is weather or time. In some languages a single noun (*vreme* in Serbian) is used to cover both ‘weather’ and ‘time’.

This type if *it* is obligatory when the hearer is familiar with the topic of the utterance and at the same time the preceding verb is factive¹⁰, i.e. contains the seme ‘true’ because ‘known’ from the definition, which implies ‘true’, combines with ‘true’. For non-factives (like *believe*), the speaker has a choice depending on the familiarity of the interlocutor with the proposition. *I wouldn't have believed it of you. He can't swallow it that you dislike him.* (The verb *swallow* is a factive metaphorically used verb, referring to the following *that*-clause; Bolinger 1977), *I just love it (= the fact) that you are moving in with us.* (Love is an emotional factive.) *I resent (factive) it (= the fact) that she did that. I was the one who guessed (non-factive) (it) that you would win. *I assume/suppose/presume/think (non-factive) it that...* (Whatever the speaker assumes/supposes/presumes, it must have been unknown to the hearer and cannot be identified by means of a situation. *Think* is also a non-factive verb, although the seme ‘thought’ need not be. Bolinger is closest to our definition when he said: “[The hearer] infers ‘the state of his health’ on hearing the response in *He looks like a ghost. – Yes, it's terrible, but there's no remedy for it.* Our mistake has been to confuse generality of meaning with lack of meaning” (Bolinger 1977: 85).

A special subtype of *it*₂ occurs with the impersonal verbs *seem/appear/happen/occur/turn out/is worth*. “These are special in that they represent highly grammaticalized matrix clauses with parenthetical function which always introduce a ‘new’ (irretrievable) complement clause and are therefore near the prop-*it* end of the scale” (Kaltenböck 1999: 64).

¹⁰ Unlike non-factives, factives are verbs that imply that the content of the following clause is true (Bolinger 1977). Kiparsky/Kiparsky (1970) use the term “factive” *it* as a synonym for the expletive *it* although *it* is used instead of *fact* only in some cases of the expletive *it*, as Mukattash (1979) has proved.

Semantic elements 'event' and 'state' contribute to *it*'s denotation, while the rest of the definition controls the pragmatic meaning and use. The introductory *it*₂ always refers cataphorically, but is often anaphoric at the same time. When the clause is independent of the previous text, *it*₂ is redundant.

The first part of the definition, with 'event - state', shows that *it*₂ has semantic meaning. The rest is contextually and situationally conditioned and has pragmatic meaning. *It*₂ has a referential function.

Serbian sentences corresponding to those in English that contain introductory *it* often contain the indefinite pronoun *to*: *Izгледа kao avet. – Da, to je strašno, ali tome nema leka.* Serbian employs impersonal constructions as equivalent to the pattern with *it*. Here speakers use the neuter forms of adjectives, which have the same form as adverbs; e.g. *Dobro je (to) što si došao.* 'It's good you've come' (short for 'It is a good event - state that you have come').

ambient *it*₃

This is an "ambient *it*"¹¹. Quite a lot of grammarians think of this *it* as meaningless and call it "empty" or "dummy". According to Leech (1991: 225), *it*₃ refers to "background conditions". In Bolinger's view, *it*₃ has a referent of an extremely general nature, i.e. typically the 'environment' that is central to the area (1977: 78–83). Examples: *It's nearly ten o'clock. It was cold yesterday. (*Yesterday was cold.) It grew slowly dark indoors. It's getting late. It's too noisy to sleep (*To sleep is too noisy.) It's dawn. (*Dawn is.) It's low tide. How far is it to New York? (distance); How is it going? (life in general); It took three men to lift him (the force of gravity). It's her graduation [day]. How's it down there? – It's fairly*

*calm. How's it up there? – It's practically ripping the trees out (Bolinger 1977 78). It*₃ typically goes with verbs of weather and environmental state (*hail, snow, rain, dawn, blow*), but it can agree with any other verb if the situation requires, e.g. with *rip out*, which demonstrates that *it*₃ has denotational meaning. *I can't walk. It's oozing oil all over here!*¹²

Definition of *it*₃ <{weather - time} state - event(s) done by sth indefinite>. The definition confirms Bolinger's claim that this kind of *it* has denotation, although of a rather vague nature. In *It's her graduation tomorrow* and *Tomorrow it's her graduation* (Bolinger 1977: 80, 81), the noun *graduation* is used for 'time event'. In *the Bible it says... that... It says in the Bible that... *In John's letter it says that... because "it is too general, letter too specific"* (Bolinger 1977: 81). **It says in the Bible and the Koran that...* (Bolinger explained this as the avoidance of *it* for plural locations (1977: 82), and here we see a more particular avoidance of the tautological '*sb indefinite + sb indefinite', because 'sb indefinite' alone covers a possible idea of plurality.

Testing the definition: *How's <state done by something indefinite> up there? – <The event done by something indefinite> is practically ripping the trees out.*

Since *it*₃ has the meaning of an environmental state or time event, which is a rather vague state or event with an indefinite agent, it is normal for clauses with *it*₂, which also refer to an indefinite thinker, to co-occur and produce no zeugma in some sentences, as Kaltenböck (1999: 57) proves: *It is difficult to continue and [it is] clearly too late for us to return.* However this conjoining is supported by the fact that in Kaltenböck's second clause *it* duplicates the pattern of *it*₂, as distinct from **It is difficult to continue and raining.* Mentioning

¹¹ The synonyms of *it*₃ are: empty/prop/dummy/expletive/pleonastic/impersonal/introductory/non-referring *it* (Kaltenböck 1999: 49).

¹² In this case the noun following the verb (which looks like an object but is not), can become the subject of a subordinate clause: *Oil is oozing all over here!*

it_3 in the first clause and it_2 in the following consecutive clause divided by a pause saves coordination, as in *It is snowing, and [it is] rather difficult to go on driving*. We subscribe to Bolinger's opinion that the introductory it_2 is a fairly independent lexical item (Bolinger 1977: 83) and we find the meanings of it_3 and it_2 no more and no less separate than the meanings of any average polysemous lexeme.

For Bolinger, and the semantic definition supports him, it_3 is a referential pronoun (1977: 66, 78), referring to the environment.

In Serbian, the corresponding construction is a subjectless sentence referring to environmental conditions (*Grmi. Piše u Bibliji da...*)

emphatic it_4

This is the emphatic it of "it-cleft". Examples are: *It is Ann that owns the cottage. Who is it that needs me?* (instead of *Who needs me?*) *It was reluctantly that he did it. It was no fool who wrote this. It is love that makes the world go round. It is a happy mother that has such children.* ((as) an answer to *What kind of mother is a mother that has such children?*) "[L]inguists do not agree about the grammatical status of the it that introduces an it -cleft. Most people assume that it is a dummy pronoun" (Declerck/Seki 1990: 29). Broughton (1990: 150) calls it "empty" it . "Many consider it -clefts to be derived from right dislocated structures" (Declerck/Seki 1990: 35). For Curme, emphatic it_4 is a subtype of introductory it_2 . It_2 (extraposition) and it_4 (it -cleft) "constructions are formally very similar. The only differences are (a) that the $that$ -clause of an extraposition construction is a noun clause, whereas the WH-clause of an it -cleft is not, and (b) that, unlike it -clefts, extraposition constructions are never specificational" (Declerck/Seki 1990: 30).

The function of it_4 is for the speaker to select one of several possibilities as true, and that is a specified, new piece of information (cf. Declerck/Seki 1990: 17). In paraphrases, the definite article or a demonstrative $that$ warranted by an established topic can always be used in company with a noun that has a general and broad meaning in order to narrow its meaning down: *The/That person that owns the cottage is Ann. The way he did it was reluctantly. The/That feeling that makes the world go round is love*. But first and foremost, as Bolinger argued, a topic has to be established as a base for activating it_4 . There has to be a common ground, a topic, old information. But this knowledge is not sufficient for the interlocutor and the speaker provides additional information to the notion that the interlocutor has been unfamiliar with. When a speaker asks: *Who is the bank robber?*, he or she knows that there has been a bank robbery (and therefore uses the definite article), but he/she does not know the robber's identity and expects the specification in the answer (e.g. *It is John*. Declerck/Seki 1990: 32). "The interchange [...] *When will we know? – It's tomorrow that we'll know* is normal because we are able to understand that the time of knowing has been previously established" (Bolinger 1977: 71), while what the questioner obviously does not know is the exact time. *It in A Who came? B It was John* "is possible because it can easily happen that A and B have the mutual understanding that the person of 'it' identity came. But in [A *Who else came?* B **It was Mary*], 'who else' is a new and unexpected reference" (Bolinger 1977: 72).

Declerck and Seki (1990) speak of "reduced it -cleft" sentences that occur when a WH-clause following an it -clause, is deleted, as in *Who said that? – It was Bill [who said that]*. When talking of " if -clefts" (i.e. reduced it -clefts with an if -clause as a subordinate clause), these authors have accepted Meier's (1988) differentiation be-

tween premodified reduced *it*-clefts with and without a pre-form.¹³ In *If anyone can help us, it's John* (variable: 'the *x* that can help us), *anyone* is the pre-form (Declerck and Seki 1990: 19). In *If she was twenty-six and still unmarried, it (= 'that state') was not from lack of suitors*, there is no pre-form, and *it* refers to the premodifying clause *she was still unmarried*. Klajn (1984–1985: 351) uses the term "pro-sentence" for *it* referring to clauses and uses the term "pro-phrase" to cover both pre-form and pro-sentence.

The close affinity between *it*-clefts and *if*-clefts can be shown by a parallel structure of *It was a book that they gave him* (*it*-cleft) and *It was a book that they gave him, if they gave him anything* or, with the usual word order and the elimination of redundancy: *If they gave him anything, it was a book* (*if*-cleft; cf. Declerck/Seki 1990: 22). This observation has also led Meier to claim that *it*-clefts are similar to *if*-clefts, but form a separate class, while Declerck and Seki think that *if*-clefts are a subtype of *it*-clefts.

Declerck and Seki also consider the possibility of analyzing *it* in reduced *it*-clefts simply as an anaphoric pronoun referring back to the contents of the preceding clause, like Halliday (1968), Huddleston (1971: 325) and Bolinger (1972: 31) did, but find this alternative approach unsatisfactory. One of Declerck and Seki's arguments is that since *he*, *she* and *they* cannot be used instead of *it* in reduced *it*-clefts, this *it* is not referring and not anaphoric (1990: 32). For these authors, *it* or *that person* in *if*-clefts are non-referring because the noun phrase pro-form is by definition non-referring (1990:33). However, a definite *it* cannot be used in the following sentence, either: *This murderer, it/*he is Tom!* (Declerck/Seki 1990: 34), although *this*

murderer is referring. Therefore it is more realistic to allow *it*₄ to refer to vague, indefinite and implicit entities and phenomena as well.

What is conspicuous in all examples with reduced *it*-clefts with a pre-form, but has not received due attention, is that the pre-form is always indefinite, usually in the form of an indefinite pronoun: *If there is one thing that he is not, it is intelligent*. *When we went somewhere, it was always to some small village or other*. *If they believe anybody, it/*that/*this is Tom*. (Declerck/Seki 1990: 18, 21). *As long as this faculty has had a dean, it has been a man*. *Since the murder was committed at five, it can't have been John* ('by an unknown murderer' is implied). *Supposing they send someone to help us, will it be John?* *If some customer complained, it must have been Mrs. Burns*. *If there is one object that he never uses, it is his bike*. Cf. **If your father will help you, it will be John*. **If some boy will help you, he will be Tim*.¹⁴ Cf. *If some boy will help you, that person will be Tim*. "Other European languages [...] also have to use (the equivalent of) *it* [...] and the same is even true of such a totally unrelated language as Japanese" (Declerck/Seki 1990: 34). When there is no pre-form, the verb is made sufficiently indefinite by appearing in a conditional clause, as in *If I eat fish, it's only for reasons of health [that I do so]*. Even non-reduced *it*-cleft can be paraphrased with 'indefinite': *Something /The thing that makes the world go round is love*. *Somebody/The person who owns that cottage is Ann*.

Definition of *it*₄ <sth_x that is new for hearer, which was sth_y indefinite for hearer>.

¹³ "The pre-form is an indefinite NP which presents the element *x* in the variable NP when the latter is formulated in the form of 'the *x* that...'" (Declerck/Seki 1990: 18).

¹⁴ The same is in Serbian equivalent of *if*-clause: *Ako će ti pomoći neki dečak, to/*on će biti Tim*. *To* is a demonstrative rather than a personal pronoun of neuter gender, and unlike *ovo* and *ono* primarily refers to something that is at some distance from the speaker.

Testing the definition: *Supposing they send someone to help us, will <someone new for me, who was an indefinite person for me> be John?* (In questions the hearer and the speaker switch their roles.)

The same definition applies to *it* in *it*-clefts and *if*-clefts. *It*₄ has no denotational meaning, has pragmatic meaning (thematic meaning or to be even more precise, emphasis; cf. Leech 1990: 19–20), and has reference in all its manifestations.

To express the same kind of emphasis, Serbian makes use of the pronouns *taj* and *to* or a special word order: *Ko je taj ko me treba? Kućicu poseduje Ana.*

Conclusion

It is functionally and semantically a highly complex word. Its primary function is reference (in the sense of establishing identity between units), to some extent reflected in the name “pro-noun”. But this does not leave it without meaning. On the contrary, it has its polysemy. Moreover, all *it*'s except *it*₄ have denotation, although of abstract nature (for all *it*'s except *it*₁, which is concrete) and indirect (owing to the fact that it is a pronoun). It has pragmatic meanings (*it*₃ being an exception) as part of its definitions. In order to capture what is constant in the pragmatic use of the grammar word *it*, we have allowed the information on this use to enter semantic definitions.

It can often serve more than one meaning at once. “There are no sharp borders between them, for very often two or three functions will occur simultaneously. Thus a dummy subject can also be a prophrase pronoun, as in [it is strange that nobody heard anything], or an impersonal one, as in ‘It was known that...’” (Klajn 1984–1985: 349).

It is sometimes difficult to decide which sememe of *it* is in question. Thus, although *it* in *Who is it? – It's only me* and *What's it like? – It's raining*, may seem to belong in the same class, as

Broughton (1990: 110) thinks, the first couple of *it*'s are *it*₂ because they refer to a person (kind of thing), while the second pair are *it*₃, referring to an environmental situation.

Bolinger maintains that the second *it* in *It seems to me that in the early sixties it was more fun*, which could be substituted for *things were*, is the same *it* as in *Stop it!*, i.e. ‘Stop the things you are doing’. “These are cases of *it* without anaphora, *ie* without any necessary previous mention, but having a deixis ad oculos, a reference to the immediate situation. *How goes it?* (*How are things?*) is both obvious and ambient” (Bolinger 1977: 80). *They're making it/things unpleasant for him* (Bolinger 1977: 84). In our analysis, *it* in *Stop it!* is *it*₂, whereas in *it was more fun*, it is *it*₃ (= ‘events done by sth indefinite’) The author is right in that a common feature of *it*₂ and *it*₃ is reference to a situation, and therefore the lack of anaphora, but other differences remain. *The thing*, less general than *it*, can replace some instances of *it*₁, *it*₂, and *it*₃.

Sepänen et al. analyze *it* in *They lost the game. – Yes, so I hear. Isn't it a shame?* as a dummy *it*₂, while Quirk et al. (1985: 349t) treat it “as ordinary *it*-extraposition [...] derived by ellipsis of the complement clause [*that they lost the game*], the antecedent of *it* therefore being derived not by the complement clause itself but by the preceding context” (Kaltenböck 1999: 64).

There is something Janus-faced in the nature of *it* in all its sememes. On the one hand it requires familiarity of the hearer with the topic (‘known to hearer’ in the definitions); on the other hand, it usually contains the seme ‘indefinite’: in *it*₁ it is ‘indefinite sex’, or it is a link to the questioner’s ‘indefinite thing’, in the situation *it*₂, *it* refers to an implicit state, in the idiomatic *it*₂ it is vague, in the ambient *it*₃, what is indefinite is the agent of the proposition. In *it*₂ generic sentences with *to*-infinitive to which it is attached, are indefinite, in *it*₂ ‘sb₂’ is an indefinite group of persons, in *it*₄

the hearer finds information insufficiently definite (or, to be more precise, not specific enough). Thus *it* very often serves as a link between the hearer's lack of knowledge and the new information.

Kaltenböck (1999: 62) tried to solve the problem of unclear cases when it is not visible which class *it* belongs in, by providing a scale of gradience. To do this is academically acceptable, but we prefer to treat such borderline cases as distinctly separated sememes with ambiguous cases, which can be disambiguated in context. Thus, Kaltenböck's example *It's hard once you try to do it well* has been classified as ambient (prop *it*) on the borderline of introductory (anticipatory) *it*₂. We prefer to treat this example as containing an introductory *it*, with the infinitive elided (because the hearer must know what activity is hard, e.g. *hard to write a story*), but since the infinitive has been omitted, the sentence is similar to *It's cold when you don't make a fire*. Some cases are ambiguous, as *It must be the postman*, which can be *it*₁ and also *it*₂ with an omitted and situationally recoverable relative clause (Kaltenböck 1999: 49).

The primary sememe of *it* is *it*₁. The "neither-male-nor-female" quality is spontaneously broadened to include anything that is neither a living being nor an object, nor even a *specific* abstract notion (Klajn 1984–1985: 349). Bolinger's (1977: 87) claim "that all the uses of *it* stem from a common semantic base" has been confirmed, as well as Klajn's (1984–1985: 349) finding that various uses of *it* are "partially different manifestations of [...] *indefinite reference*". Comparing our definitions, it can be concluded that the common core for various uses and meanings of *it* is the notion 'indefinite' in the sense 'not known to the hearer'. Although "it would be difficult to say how much of this indefiniteness is semantical in nature and how much is 'structural' or syntactical" (Klajn 1984–1985: 349), we hope to have proved that the separation of

the three spheres: semantic, pragmatic and syntactic, is feasible.

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IT КАКВО НИСМО ЗНАЛИ

Резиме

Уз ријетке изузетке, енглеску замјеницу *it* већина лингвиста сматра превасходно граматичком ријечју без значења. Захваљујући примјени семантичких дефиниција, које су за ову прилику проширене подацима о прагматичкој употреби (онда када је она стално везана за лексичко значење), у раду је установљено да ова замјеница има своја значења која се могу дефинисати и да постоје њене четири семеме (значањска типа) – замјеничко, појавно, амбијентално и емфатично *it*. Све оне имају референцијалну, упућивачку функцију, а све осим емфатичног *it* имају семантичко (стално, системско) значење, с тим што се на то значење у дефиницији надовезује информација о прагматичкој употреби. Једино за амбијентално *it* нема потребе да се дефиниција допуни таквом информацијом. Семантичке дефиниције су добијене изоловањем садржаја заједничког за *it* у разним јављањима и провјером да ли је *it* у већем броју примјера замјенљиво дефиницијом.

boris.jesensek@gmail.com