

# ‘Presupposition can be a bluff’: How abstract nouns can be used as presupposition triggers<sup>☆</sup>

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Received 1 October 2000; revised version 23 March 2001

“Communication is somehow like  
sitting down at the card table:  
presupposition can be a bluff”  
(Caffi, 1993: 3323)

## Abstract

This study is concerned with expressions of the type *the thing is that ...* or *the problem was that...*, which are seen as constructions in the Construction Grammar sense of the term and referred to as ‘N-be-that-constructions’. The material discussed is derived from the 225-million word British section of COBUILD’s Bank of English corpus. It is shown that depending on the types of nouns that they use, speakers can exploit the N-be-that-construction in the service of an array of presuppositions, among them existential and factive semantic ones as well as pragmatic ones. Special attention is devoted to two pragmatic presuppositions: first, the expectation that more specific information about the unspecific discourse entity introduced by the abstract nouns is to come in the *that*-clause; and second, the impression, created by the information distribution of the N-be-that-construction and its focusing function, that the initial noun phrase represents given information which is known to all discourse participants. It is argued that the latter type of pragmatic presupposition can be exploited for bluffs insofar as it allows speakers to purport information as given which is in fact new. Bluffs of this type are often combined with evidential downtoning (*my feeling is that...*) or upgrading (*the truth is that ...*), and with the objectivization of the proposition expressed in the *that*-clause by backgrounding the speaker role (*the hope is that ...* rather than *my hope is that*). © 2001 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

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<sup>☆</sup> I would like to thank Claudia Caffi and Richard W. Janney for their interest in my work, and for their invaluable comments on an earlier version of this paper, which have helped me to reformulate a number of previously rather nebulous pragmatic aspects in much more precise and illuminating terms.

*Keywords:* English abstract nouns; corpus method; Construction Grammar; presupposition; topicalization; evidentiality

## 1. Introduction

Expressions of the type *the thing/point/fact/truth/problem is/was that...* are legion not only in English but also in many other languages such as German, French, Italian, Hebrew and Hungarian, to name just a few. In a 225-million word corpus of English,<sup>1</sup> this pattern was identified more than 30,000 times by an automatic pattern-matching query. Since such queries cannot find slight variations as e.g. in *the problem is in fact that...* or *the thing is is that...*, a common expression in spoken American English (cf. Tuggy, 1996), one can assume that the real number of instances of the pattern is much higher.

As will be seen in the course of this paper, the meanings and pragmatic functions of uses of this pattern are usually not simply derivable from their form, and therefore I feel justified in treating the pattern as a *construction* in the Construction Grammar sense of this term (cf. Fillmore et al., 1988; Goldberg, 1995, 1996). According to Goldberg,

"a construction is defined to be a pairing of form with meaning/use such that some aspects of the form or some aspect of the meaning/use is not strictly predictable from the component parts or from other constructions already established to exist in the language. On this view, phrasal patterns [...] are given theoretical status." (Goldberg, 1996: 68)

In traditional syntactic terms, the construction in question consists of an initial noun phrase headed by an abstract noun which functions as subject, a form of the copula *be* and a *that*-clause that functions syntactically as subject complement. This construction will be called 'N-*be-that*-construction' in this paper.

The nouns that can occur in the N-*be-that*-construction make up a limited set, though one with fuzzy edges. In a large-scale corpus study on abstract nouns (Schmid, 2000) using the 225-million word corpus mentioned earlier, 368 types were found to occur in the construction at least once. The ten nouns that were found to occur most frequently in the construction are *problem, thing, truth, fact, trouble, point, result, view, reason, and idea*.

From a semantic point of view, the nouns can be classified as shown in Table 1. The classes and subclasses given in Table 1, and the terms used for their description,

<sup>1</sup> The corpus is the British section of the so-called *Bank of English*, collected by and stored at the COBUILD project in Birmingham. In February 1997, when the data for this research was retrieved, the corpus had the following composition: transcribed recordings of spoken conversation (20.18 million words; henceforth referred to as SPOKEN), junk mail, brochures, leaflets, newsletters etc. (4.72m words; EPHEM), transcripts from BBC broadcasts (18.52m words; BBC), fictional and non-fictional British books (42.13m words; BOOKS), issues of *Today, The Times, The Guardian, The Independent* (91.07m words; PAPERS), issues of general and special interest magazines (30.14m words; MAGS), issues of *The Economist* (12.13m words; ECON), issues of *The New Scientists* (6.09m words; NEWSCI).

are all taken from Schmid (2000), where they are discussed in detail. In that study, the nouns are referred to as *shell nouns* in order to capture the idea that they create conceptual shells for complex pieces of information expressed by clauses or even longer passages somewhere else in a text or discourse. For the purposes of the present paper, it is not necessary to go deeper into this idea; it will suffice here to briefly outline what lies behind the terms for the classes and subclasses in Table 1.

The term *factual* denotes, in a deliberately vague sense, nouns that refer to states-of-affairs; *factivity* in the much more restricted sense, as, for example, used by the Kiparskys (1971), applies to many but not all of these uses (see Section 3.6 below). *General factual* nouns are semantically highly unspecific. *Relational factual* nouns capture links between states-of-affairs or ideas (i.e. Lyons' 1977: 442-445 'third-order entities') or, more rarely, events ('second-order entities'). *Attitudinal factual* nouns allow speakers to refer to state-of-affairs while at the time expressing their attitudes towards them. *Linguistic nouns* allow speakers to create shells which label propositions as locutions (in the case of *propositional nouns*) or highlight their illocutionary force (in the case of *illocutionary nouns*). The class of *mental nouns* consists of nouns that encapsulate propositions as mental states or activities. *General mental nouns* refer to the propositional content of mental states and background the human conceptualizer; *ideas* and *theories*, for example, seem to have an autonomous existence independently of the mind that conceives them. *Creditive mental nouns*, on the other hand, represent ideas as objects of mental activity carried out by individuals. The difference between *general mental nouns* and *creditive mental nouns* is thus analogous to that between *propositional* and *illocutionary linguistic nouns*. *Emotive mental nouns* allow speakers to include a description of the emotional state of the conceptualizer of an idea. Finally, in the field of *modal nouns* we are only concerned with epistemic modality.<sup>2</sup> Nouns encapsulating three degrees of epistemic certainty are distinguished, viz. epistemic possibility, epistemic probability, and epistemic certainty.

It must be emphasized at this point that speakers do not simply put facts, ideas, states-of-affairs, events or situations into nominal shells when they use certain shell nouns. In fact, they do much more than that, because shell nouns allow them to characterize (Schmid, 2000: 15-16), or 'label', as Francis (1994) calls it, the propositions with which they are linked up. The ontological, or better, conceptual, status of these propositions is not determined by the proposition expressed in the *that*-clause but by the noun in the matrix clause. In the utterance *the fact is that too many people are unemployed*, the *that*-clause is encoded by the speaker as representing a state-of-affairs, while in *the idea is that too many people are unemployed*, the same clause is encoded as representing a mental entity. This shows that not only the linguistic nouns - where this is very obtrusive - have a meta-communicative function, but all other types of nouns listed in Table 1, too.<sup>3</sup> The nouns instruct readers/hearers to understand, or process, the information given in the *that*-clause as is indicated

<sup>2</sup> Of course, there are also shell nouns expressing deontic modality like *task*, *job*, *permission* or *obligation*. These, however, are not found in the N-be-that-construction, but occur in the pattern N+be+to-infinitive, as in *my job is to ...* (cf. Schmid, 2000: 244-250).

Table 1  
Classes of nouns in the N-*be-that*-construction (after Schmid 2000)

Classes	Subclasses	Examples
Factual	General	<i>thing, point</i>
	Relational	<i>result, reason, difference</i>
	Attitudinal	<i>problem, trouble, irony</i>
Linguistic	Propositional	<i>news, argument, story</i>
	Illocutionary	<i>answer, suggestion</i>
Mental	General	<i>idea, theory, position</i>
	Creditive	<i>view, feeling, impression</i>
	Emotive	<i>hope, fear, worry, concern</i>
Modal	Epistemic possibility	<i>possibility, danger, risk</i>
	Epistemic probability	<i>probability, likelihood</i>
	Epistemic certainty	<i>truth, fact, reality</i>

by the meaning of the noun. In a way, then, these nouns straddle the boundary between message and metamessage, or *content* and *relation* in Watzlawick et al.'s (1967) terminology, insofar as they are clearly part of the message itself and its propositional content and provide meta-communicative clues at the same time.

From a pragmatic point of view, the frequency of the N-*be-that*-construction naturally raises the question why speakers and writers of English (and other languages) seem to find it so useful. What can they do with it and what do they gain by using it? While, to the best of my knowledge, this particular question has not yet been dealt with extensively (see, however, the remarks by Tuggy, 1996: 724–726, from a Cognitive Grammar perspective), related phenomena have received considerable attention in pragmatics, for example, in Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1995: 202ff.), in Dik's and Givon's Functional Syntax theories (Dik, 1980: 215ff., 1989: 263ff.; Givon, 1990: 699ff., 739ff.) and in anaphora, referent accessibility and information status and flow theories (cf. Chafe, 1976, 1994; Prince, 1978, 1981; DuBois, 1980; Givon, 1985, 1987; Gundel, 1988; Ariel, 1990; Gundel et al., 1993; Lambrecht, 1994) under such labels as *topicality/topicalization*, *focus/focus constructions*, *foregrounding* and *backgrounding*, *activation* and, of course, *presupposition*. I myself have addressed questions concerning the general utility of abstract nouns elsewhere (Schmid, 1999, 2000). In this paper, I will focus on their functions in the N-*be-that*-construction and, in particular, on their potential to trigger different kinds of presuppositions. I use the terms *function* and *functional* in a fairly wide, everyday sense, as referring roughly to the "purpose of the use of something" (cf.

<sup>3</sup> Conte (1996) captures something highly similar to my notion of shell nouns in her short but illuminating paper on *anaphoric encapsulation*. Like Francis (1986, 1994), Conte also makes the point that nouns that can be used for this purpose have a meta-communicative function, but both authors focus on their use in anaphoric references of the type *this answer* or *that problem*.

Summers, 1995, s.v. *function*). It goes without saying that neither the nouns nor the constructions themselves have functions in this sense. Rather, when I say things like "the function of the nouns is X Y", this is just shorthand for "speakers/writers invest the nouns with the function of XY by using them in certain ways and with certain purposes".

## 2. Corpus data

First, however, I want to look at the linguistic evidence. This is mandatory not only because functions depend on uses and must therefore be gleaned from them, but also because a solid empirical foundation for functional-pragmatic considerations allows the researcher to base his or her functional claims on prototypical manifestations of a linguistic phenomenon rather than on untypical or even idiosyncratic ones. When the corpus method is used, prototypicality essentially boils down to frequency. For the present study, this means that I will focus my attention on those nouns that are found to occur most frequently in the *N-be-that*-construction.

Objective and straightforward as the criterion of frequency may seem, it is, however, not sufficient to simply produce a list of the numbers of occurrences of certain nouns and rank them according to their frequency. The snag with this approach is that it does not take the overall frequency of a word in the corpus into account, which clearly has an influence on its frequency of occurrence in any kind of construction. For example, the noun *snag* - which I have just used in the previous sentence in the *N-be-that*-construction - is a fairly rare noun. It occurs no more than 784 times in the 225-million word corpus. Even simple-minded statistical considerations suggest that this word is much less likely to be found in any kind of linguistic environment whatsoever than, for example, the noun *problem*, which occurs no less than 59,600 times in the same corpus.

The easiest way to take the overall frequency of a noun in the corpus into account is to divide its frequency in the construction by its overall frequency. This is shown in Fig. 1.

$$reliance = \frac{\text{frequency of a noun in the construction} \times 100\%}{\text{total frequency of the noun in the corpus}}$$

Fig. 1. Calculating *reliance*.

I call this simple statistical measure *reliance* to express the idea that it reflects the degree to which a certain noun relies on the construction for its occurrence. *Reliance* portrays the relation between noun and construction from the noun's perspective. The complementary perspective is that of *attraction*, which captures the degree to which the construction attracts certain nouns. How this even simpler measure is calculated is shown in Fig. 2. Since the denominator of this division is the

same for all nouns, *attraction* scores are in direct proportionality to the frequencies of the nouns.

$$\text{attraction} = \frac{\text{frequency of a noun in the construction} \times 100\%}{\text{total frequency of the pattern in the corpus}}$$

Fig. 2. Calculating *attraction*.

If these two notions of reliance and attraction evoke the image of some kind of symbiosis between the nouns and the constructions, this is not altogether unintended. The need for such a symbiosis arises primarily from the fact that the nouns either have highly unspecific meanings (e.g. *thing*, *point*, *idea*), or have one or more specific gaps in their semantic structure. The noun *upshot*, for example, just indicates that one state-of-affairs is the result of another state-of-affairs, but like *result*, it gives no indication as to the precise states-of-affairs involved (cf. Schmid, 2000: 73–80). In combination with the abstractness of the nouns, this unspecificity has the consequence that the nouns themselves cannot convey much meaning, but depend much more on the context for their realization than specific concrete nouns like *baby*, *duck* or *ball*. Metaphorically speaking, they need a special type of habitat to thrive in, whose main requirement is that the nouns have to be linked to more specific pieces of information. One such environment is the N-be-that-construction, where the copula equates the noun with a *that*-clause which conveys the semantic details. The same pattern also occurs with *to*-infinitives (e.g. *the aim is to the idea is to ...*). In a second typical pattern, *that*-clause or *to*-infinitives are attached to the nouns as complements (*the problem that the fact that the idea to ...* etc.). Yet another possibility of linking the nouns with more specific pieces of information are anaphoric references such as *this problem* or *this was a good answer* (cf. Schmid, 2000: 21–31 for more details on these patterns).

To illustrate the two measures and the way they are calculated, Fig. 3 provides the divisions for the nouns *snag* and *problem*.

*Snag* occurs 784 times in the whole corpus and 250 times in the N-be-that-construction, and *problem* occurs 59,600 times in the corpus and 2,672 times in the construction. The juxtaposition of the scores for these two nouns shows that *problem* plays a much more important role in the linguistic implementation of the N-be-that-construction than *snag*. In more than 8% of the occurrences of the construction, the noun *problem* is used, while *snag* accounts for less than 1%. From the complementary perspective, on the other hand, the scores also reveal that the construction is much more important for the use of *snag* than for *problem*. Almost every third use of *snag* in the corpus occurs in the construction in question, but less than every twentieth use of *problem*.

Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix A list the 40 most frequent nouns from the two perspectives, which are therefore considered the most prototypical instantiators of the construction. As the bottom line in Table A1 indicates, the listed nouns account for

	<i>snag:</i>		<i>problem:</i>	
reliance:	$\frac{250 \times 100\%}{784}$	= 31.89%	$\frac{2,672 \times 100\%}{59,600}$	= 4.48%
attraction:	$\frac{250 \times 100\%}{30,992}$	= 0.81%	$\frac{2,672 \times 100\%}{30,992}$	= 8.62%

Fig. 3: *Reliance* and *attraction* illustrated with two examples

almost three fourths (71.65%) of all 30,992 identified tokens of the construction. Table A2 is dominated by fairly rare nouns which seem to specialize in occurring in the *N-be-that*-construction, while in Table A 1, high-frequency nouns prevail that occur in many other patterns as well. These lists will serve as a basis for the pragmatic questions to be considered now.

### 3. What can speakers/writers do with the construction?

#### 3.1. Focusing and topicalizing

The most familiar function of all nouns in the *N-be-that*-construction is to direct the hearers'/readers' attention to the information given in the *that*-clause. This is particularly marked in cases where the main clause containing the abstract noun is redundant from a propositional point of view because the meaning of the noun is semantically not just highly unspecific, but more or less empty. This is the case in example (1).

- (1) ... you're 61 now and it's time you settled down. **"The thing is that he needs a lot of loving."** (SPOKEN)

With regard to the propositional information conveyed, (1) is identical to (1)', in which the initial four words *the thing is that* are omitted.

- (1)' ... "He needs a lot of loving."

That these four words do not make a contribution to the propositional content suggests that they must have a different function, and the usual explanation is that they are introduced to highlight the second part of the sentence. On the meta-communicative level, example (1) has an additional ring of "I am telling you this because it is particularly important to me, so pay attention to it", which is missing in (1)'. The *N-be-that*-construction is thus one of several types of "focus formulas" (Tuggy, 1996: 724-726) or "focus constructions" (cf. Dik, 1980: 215-229), which mark

certain parts of the sentence for special attention, an effect which is also known as *focalization* (Sornicola, 1994: 4638). Further support for this claim can be provided by paraphrasing example (1) with a w/i-cleft sentence, which is clearly among the best examples of focus constructions (cf. Dik, 1980: 210-229):

(1) ... "What is important is that he needs a lot of loving."

The cleft-paraphrase with the adjective *important* seems to capture both the propositional content and the meta-communicative impact of example (1) fairly well and this shows that the two constructions share the focusing function. Both utterances, (1) and (1)", provide the other discourse participant(s) with a piece of information and instruct them how to cognitively process it, namely with an extraordinarily high degree of attention.

There are different kinds of motivations for why speakers/writers may wish to emphasize a piece of information. First, focalization can of course be an end in its own right, a deliberate strategy chosen to highlight information. Second, rather than simply being used to achieve such an "emphatic focus", the construction can be used to introduce a "contrastive focus" (cf. Hannay, 1983: 217; Givón, 1990: 699ff.), i.e., to underscore that what is going to be said is at odds with what was said before or with what is expected to be said next. Example (2) is a fairly clear case of such a contrastive focus, not least because the previous sentence is negative with regard to polarity:

(2) Mrs Thatcher stated her position, which is well known. We stated ours. But we have points of agreement on which we concentrated. We do not attach so much importance to our differences. **The point is that we have started a process of consultation ...** (BBC)

And third, especially in view of the fact that many speakers at least of English seem to use the construction habitually, one should mention that it has the additional advantage of being useful as a hesitation device. You can always start a sentence with something like *the thing is* while you are still making up your mind what to say in the first place. This does not just give you extra time for planning, but it will - as we have seen - also add extra weight to what you are going to say. In spoken conversation, as in example (1), the construction is comparable to the discourse marker *well*. Both occur frequently as prefaces to dispreferred second parts of adjacency pairs like unwelcome or unexpected answers to questions, disagreements in response to statements, and so forth (cf. Schiffrin, 1987: 105ff.)

The claim that there is a special focus on the *that*-clause does not necessarily imply that the rest of the sentence is totally backgrounded. It is important to emphasize this. Quirk et al. (1985), for example, would argue that the adjective *important* in (1)" functions as an "anticipatory focus" (1985: 1388), and the same can be said of the nouns *thing* in (1) and *point* in (2). These constructions thus not only have the function of highlighting the second part of the sentence, but they also introduce a marked, non-canonical topic at the beginning. They serve a topicalizing function

comparable to phenomena like fronting (called *left-dislocation* in Transformational Grammar, cf. Radford, 1988: 530-533), as in expressions like *our new linguistics professor, he's a strange guy*.

Since the term *topic* is used in a variety of ways in the literature, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by it. It is, for example, used as a relation pertaining to sentences in opposition both to *comment* (mainly by American linguists, e.g. Hockett, 1958: 201-203, or Bolinger, 1977: 32-38) and *focus* (e.g. by Sgall et al., 1986: 175-265; Dik, 1989: 263-287; Lambrecht, 1994). And it is used to mean *discourse topic* rather than *sentence topic*, in which case it has, for example, been defined with recourse to the rather vague but useful notion of "aboutness" (cf. Brown and Yule, 1983: 71-106). My own understanding of the term can be approached most conveniently via Chomsky's (1965: 221) well-known conception, according to which it refers to the left-most noun phrase dominated by S in the surface structure. This understanding is highly reminiscent of the way Halliday conceives of the notion of *theme* (1994: 37), though Halliday remarks that the *theme* does not necessarily have to be realized by a noun phrase and can occur elsewhere in the sentence in other languages. For him, the crucial point is that it makes up the starting-point of the message. Just like Chomsky's conceptions of *topic* and Halliday's of *theme*, my own notion of *topic* includes no implications as to the attentional status of topics, and therefore it is perfectly possible that the topic of a sentence will also carry a secondary or even primary focus. Neither is it always the case that the topic conveys given information, even though there is naturally a strong tendency for this to happen: given information makes a more convenient starting point than new information. The difference between the notions of *topic* and *given information* is that the former is sentence-related and the latter text- or context-related.

Based on this view of *topic*, *N-be-that*-construction can be credited with a topicalizing function, in addition to the focusing one. The noun phrases introduced as topics in these constructions can and do have a certain degree of informational and intonational prominence and therefore carry a secondary focus. However, as Quirk et al.'s term *anticipatory* nicely suggests, their main function is a cataphoric one, viz. to prepare the hearer/reader for the 'really' important pieces of information to come, and this is how the topicalizing and the focusing functions are linked together.

It should not be forgotten that the topical noun phrase and the focal sentence-final clause must be syntactically connected to each other. This is done by the copula-verb, which 'equates' the two parts of the sentence (cf. Langacker, 1987a: 77), and by the complementizer *that*. Interestingly, Cheshire (1996), in an attempt to unveil a common interactional function underlying uses of the form *that* as a deictic element, an anaphoric reference item, a complementizer, and a relative pronoun, claims that the function of the complementizer *that* is "to coordinate the attention of speaker and addressee" (1996: 384). For the use of *that* as relative pronoun, she argues that

"... it also has a 'signalling function', alerting the addressee to the need to keep in mind the immediately preceding stretch of discourse in order to relate it to the discourse that is forthcoming." (Cheshire, 1996: 385)

A similar function of marking structural connections and giving instructions for a joined processing of clauses - Cheshire (1996: 387) also resorts to the metaphor of a *discourse bridge* in this connection - can also be detected in the uses of *that* in the N-*be-that*-construction

### 3.2. Triggering semantic and pragmatic presuppositions

As I have shown, N-*be-that*-constructions and *wh*-clefts have highly similar focusing and topicalizing functions. However, there is yet another parallel between the two constructions which is, in fact, even more important in the present context: the beginnings of both *wh*-clefts (cf. Prince, 1978: 884, 887–888)<sup>4</sup> and N-*be-that*-constructions contain presupposed information. Examples (1)" and (1), for instance, give rise to the presuppositions given in (3) and (4):

- (3) ... "What is important is that he needs a lot of loving." (= (1)"  
 ➤ Something is important.  
 (4) ... "The thing is that he needs a lot of loving." (= (1))  
 ➤ There is a thing.

Since the topic makes up the starting-point of a sentence, it is not surprising at all that it tends to convey presupposed information, i.e. information which the speaker/writer assumes is known to the hearer/reader. As a result, there tends to be a close match in N-*be-that*-constructions between topicalized and presupposed information. We will see later, however, that the presupposed information is not always in fact 'given' in the sense that it is inferrable from the preceding context or the situational context and therefore shared by all discourse participants.

The presupposition sketched for example (4) is a manifestation of the so-called existential presupposition, which is attributed to definite descriptions in general (cf. Strawson, 1950; Lyons, 1977: 183; Levinson, 1983: 181). However, example (4) differs from classic examples like *the king of France is bald* in an important way. As in all instances of the N-*be-that*-construction, the definite description in example (4) includes two further communicative elements that are closely related to the presupposition of the existence of an entity, namely the anticipation that there is more information about this entity to come in the *that*-clause, and the instruction how to process it. While semantically specific definite descriptions like *the king of France* conjure up fairly fully-fledged representations in language processors' minds, unspecific noun phrases of the type *the thing* or *the point* do not; they simply tell readers/hearers to watch out for what is going to follow. Native speakers' experience with the construction and the nouns that typically occur in it makes them interpret the initial definite description as a kind of cataphoric signpost pointing to the complementing *that*-clause and giving meta-communicative information about it.

<sup>4</sup> Note that Prince (1978) explicitly excluded what she calls *wh*-clefts whose subjects clauses have lexical heads from consideration; the parallels that I am describing here did thus not escape her attention.

The presuppositions in (3) and (4) meet the strict requirements of semantic theories of presupposition (cf. Gazdar, 1979: 90-103; Mey, 1993: 200-201). If in (4), for example, the main clause *the thing is that...* is negated to yield *the thing is not that* the presupposition remains the same; the constructions thus pass the most important test of presuppositions (cf. Levinson, 1983: 178ff.). However, the *N-be-that*-construction is not only interesting from this truth-oriented perspective on presuppositions but also from a more pragmatic one (cf. Stalnaker, 1977; Gazdar, 1979: 103-108; Levinson, 1983: 204-225; Caffi, 1993; Mey, 1993: 201-206). According to Caffi, pragmatic presuppositions

"... do not consist in knowledge, in something which is already known, but in something that is *given as such* by the speaker, in something that is *assumed as such* and is therefore *considered irrefutable*." (Caffi, 1993: 3321; original emphasis)

And:

"Pragmatic presuppositions [...] concern expectations, desires, interests, claims, attitudes toward the world, fears, etc." (Caffi, 1993: 3324)

What I would like to claim is that the *N-be-that*-construction as such, independently of the particular nouns that are used, allows speakers/writers to suggest certain beliefs and expectations which may lie outside the domains of knowledge and truth. These expectations are triggered by the specific information-distribution of *N-be-that*-constructions and influenced by the particular stages of mental processing required by the construction and its focusing function. One of these expectations that I have already outlined is that there is more information to come which is closely linked to the initial noun phrase. The presupposition for (4) can thus be rewritten as proposed in (4)', where the pragmatic presupposition is given in brackets to keep it distinguishable from the semantic one:

- (4)' ... "The thing is that he needs a lot of loving." (= (1))  
 > There is a thing (and I am going to tell you what it is).

But there is much more than that involved. Because of capacity limitations, focusing one's attention on one thing usually implies that one can concentrate less well on other things, and something similar is also involved in the processing of the *N-be-that*-construction and other focusing constructions. When speakers/writers tell their hearers/readers to get ready and pay particular attention to what is said in the *that*-clause, this has the side-effect that the hearers/readers will pay less attention to the topic, which, precisely because of its anticipatory, cataphoric function, is not prominent anyway. As a result, the use of the construction creates the impression that the abstract noun functioning as topic does not involve a lot of new and noteworthy information - something that is true of the unspecific factual nouns *thing* and *point* but not of all nouns that can be used in the construction. The construction triggers the expectation that the topic is highly accessible and represents information which is shared by the discourse participants.

In sum, the *N-be-that-construction* has the potential to create presuppositions that are interesting from both a semantic and a pragmatic point of view. Every single instance of the construction includes a specific semantic presupposition which depends on the meaning of the noun used. And in addition, all uses - and therefore one can say it is the construction as such that is responsible for this - trigger the pragmatic presuppositions that there is more information to follow, and that the information expressed by the noun is shared. In what follows, I will show how such presuppositions can be exploited by speakers for different kinds of purposes. Which kinds of presuppositions are triggered by the construction depends mainly on two factors: on the meanings of the nouns that are used and on the degree to which the nouns bring in expectable or new information.

### 3.3. *Presupposing and topicalizing expectable pieces of information*

There are several groups of nouns that tend to be used to presuppose and topicalize pieces of information that are indeed highly expectable. Example (5) is a case in point.

- (5) ILR has made things a lot more exciting and, as the record industry has evolved, so too have we. Like any radio station with any size of audience, Radio One will always be worth pursuing. Of course, **the fundamental difference is that it's a public service broadcaster.** (MAGS)  
 ➤ There is a fundamental difference (and I am going to tell you what it is).

The comparative meaning component of the noun *difference* is highly expectable after the comparison introduced by *like* in the preceding sentence. The sentence topic thus consists mainly of accessible or at least inferrable information (cf. Prince, 1981 ; Ariel, 1990), only the modifier *fundamental* is new and will carry the main stress of the NP.

The nouns that occur in a way similar to *difference* in (3) can be grouped on a semantic basis. First, there are other nouns of the *difference* type which I call 'relational nouns' (see Table 1 above), since they create various kinds of relations between states-of-affairs. Examples from Table A1 in Appendix A are *result*, *reason*, *difference*, *implication*, and *evidence*, and from Table A2 *upshot*, *implication*, *inference*, *corollary*, *proviso*, and *premise*. A second group is made up by linguistic nouns. Examples in Table A1 are *news*, *answer*, *argument*, *message*, *story*, and *suggestion*, and in Table A2 *gripe*, *boast*, *caveat*, *explanation*, *retort*, and *objection*. And a third group consists of general mental nouns such as *idea*, *theory*, and *position* (Table A1). Examples of the latter two groups are given in (6) and (7).

- (6) But the lawyers say that defining what is a major matter will give rise to serious problems. Anthony Scrivener QC, for Channel 4, says: **"The plain answer is that the new wording does not make any improvement at all."** (PAPERS)  
 ➤ There is a plain answer (and I am going to tell you what it is).

- (7) The project involves a team headed by David Broome, with Geoff Billington and myself as his partners. **The idea is that the three of us will help young riders coming into the sport.** (MAGS)  
 ➤ There is an idea (and I am going to tell you what it is).

Even though the words *the plain answer is that...* in (6) are taken from a quotation they link up with the context because *serious problems* are mentioned, and this creates the expectation that answers or solutions will also be given in due course. And in (7), the mental noun *idea* is fairly well-prepared by the previous reference to a *project* whose precise aims and contents have not yet been clarified. The likely expectations of readers and the presuppositions topicalized by writers more or less coincide in these examples. This is not always the case, however. I am now going to discuss types of uses of the N-*be-that*-construction where less expectable pieces of information are presupposed and topicalized, starting with two variants of what could still be called an 'honest' type (Section 3.4) and then moving on to more subtle and cunning ones, where the idea that some sort of bluff is at work does not seem to be out of place at all (Sections 3.5 and 3.6).

#### 3.4. Presupposing and topicalizing the subjectivity/tentativeness of propositions

The first type of usage is typical of spoken conversation. It is used with emphatic and contrastive foci. Examples (8) and (9) will serve to illustrate it:

- (8) Speaker 1: But on the other hand I think over the long haul the atmosphere tends to want to restore equilibrium to itself.  
 Speaker 2: Yeah.  
 Speaker 1: And so in fact some of the [inaudible]. And I think **my feeling is that I mean I I'm not god I don't know what the true answer is** [inaudible] (SPOKEN)  
 ➤ I have a feeling (and I am going to tell you what it is).
- (9) Speaker 1: ... whether people are going to erm renew their interests and ethical funds are going to  
 Speaker 2: Yes. Yes.  
 Speaker 1: to **My my guess would be that er people are going to renew their interests and er we will see erm a serious pressure from that particular source ...** (SPOKEN)  
 ➤ I am making a guess (and I am going to tell you what it is).

Why are these N-*be-that*-constructions used? Hesitation and sentence-planning aloud, as mentioned in Section 3.1, are certainly to be considered among the possible motivations here. The inaudible passages and fragmented syntax in (8) and the *er/m* fillers in (9) clearly point in this direction. The speakers thus appear to be struggling with casting what they want to convey in a linguistic form. In addition, the passages leave the impression that the speakers are not particularly sure of the contents of their messages. They seem to be uncertain as to whether what they are going to

say is convincing, and therefore try to reduce their responsibility and commitment by using weak creditive nouns expressing subjectivity and/or tentativeness. In the framework proposed by Caffi and Janney (1994) for a pragmatics of emotive communication, *N-be-that-uses* of this type fall under the category of *evidentiality devices*, which include "all choices that regulate the inferrable reliability, correctness, authority, validity, or truth value of what is expressed" (1994: 357). The construction is comparable to uses of evidential modal verbs like *may* or *might*, subjective epistemic verbs like *believe*, modal adverbs (*obviously*, *possibly*), and many other linguistic and non-linguistic (e.g. shoulder shrugs) hedging strategies. The common function underlying all these devices is to reduce commitment to a proposition, in the case of the *N-be-that*-construction to the one encoded in the *that*-clause. Other nouns of this type - besides *feeling* and *guess* - are *view*, *idea*, *theory*, *assumption*, *impression*, and *opinion* in Table A1, and *hunch*, *assumption*, *surmise*, *thesis*, and *presumption* in Table A2, all of which convey this particular mixture of attitudes.

When one looks at concordances of these nouns in the construction it is striking that especially the frequent weak ones - *assumption*, *feeling*, *guess*, and *impression* - tend to occur with first-person determiners, most frequently the possessive *my*. This is also the case in examples (8) and (9), and it is reflected in the presuppositions in the use of the pronoun *I* as subject. Whether examples of this type topicalize subjectivity or tentativeness ultimately depends on the stress distribution in the initial noun phrase. When the possessive determiner is stressed, there is more emphasis on the subjective nature of what is to come. On the other hand, when the noun itself is stressed, it is the tentativeness of the utterance that is slightly foregrounded. Unfortunately, the transcriptions in the *Bank of English* are not marked for stress, but my own feeling with regard to these two examples is that in (8) the noun will have more prominence than the determiner and in (9) the other way round. (8) would thus be motivated by the wish to emphasize tentativeness, and (9) by the wish to emphasize subjectivity.

There is a related type of usage in which tentativeness manifests itself in a complete backgrounding of the speaker. In this type, which is fairly formal and found more often in written than spoken language, emotive nouns are used in the *N-be-that*-construction. Examples are *hope*, *fear*, *concern* and *worry* in Table A1 and *worry*, *regret* and *consolation* in Table A2. These nouns occur with first-person determiners with an effect similar to the weak creditive ones mentioned above. But they are also used with definite articles as determiners, and this clearly is the more interesting variant here. This type of usage is illustrated in example (10):

- (10) I have been inundated with enquiries about Ron's health and offers of help have been endless. These have all been passed on to Ron and his wife. All our thoughts are with them and **the hope is that he will make a speedy recovery.**  
(MAGS)

The presuppositions involved in these cases have the effect that the emotional state described by the noun seems to be attributed to people in general; it seems to be

somehow out there or even prevalent in a certain group or society, rather than a personal emotion of the speaker/writer. After a sequence of first person pronouns in example (10), even within the same sentence (*all our thoughts ...*), the impersonal expression *the hope is that ...* does convey a slightly more detached stance, but it also creates the impression that many more people than those included in the reference to *our thoughts* share the hope for a speedy recovery.

Somewhat paradoxically, then, emotional states, which are decidedly personal experiences after all, are represented in a factual tone and thus marked as being inescapable. The evidential hedging achieved by these nouns, like that realized by the weak creditive nouns, is supplemented here by what Caffi (1999) calls a "shield" or, to be more precise, an "objectivization shield" (1999: 896). In Caffi's approach to mitigation, *hedges* are mitigating devices that affect the illocutionary force of utterances, for example by downgrading a statement to a hypothesis, as in (9) above. *Shields*, on the other hand, affect the deictic origin of utterances, the I-here-now' (Bühler, 1982: 107). The parameter concerned in objectivization shields is the source of an utterance, the speaker, which can be backgrounded, de-focalized, or even deleted. N-*be-that*-constructions with emotive nouns and determiners other than first-person ones are cases of objectivization of the latter type: i.e., objectivization by deletion of the speaker's role in discourse. This is illustrated in example (10) above, and also in (11) below, which is particularly interesting because the shield erected by the N-*be-that*-construction is embedded in another objectivization strategy: the attribution of the author's opinion to what "critics say". To mimic the objectivization in the gloss of the presupposition, I am using the passive voice to describe the cataphoric element.

- (11) Critics say the consequences will be dire. They fear that within a few years, thousands of lecturers in the universities that lose out in these changes will find themselves effectively barred from research. But **the greatest fear is that the new arrangement will deplete the numbers of Britain's researchers severely and permanently.** (NEWSCI)
- There are fears.
  - One fear is the greatest of them (and you are going to be told what it is).

Not only the semantic presuppositions given in (11) - there are two of them because of the comparison entailed in the superlative form of the adjective - but also the more general pragmatic one triggered by the N-*be-that*-construction are clearly involved here. It is a fairly safe guess that by the time the reader has reached the end of the weighty *that*-clause, only rudimentary processing traces of the main clause will have survived. That the writer is saying something about a fear will have sunken in, but not have attracted much attention; also, that what is being said is *the greatest fear* is simply accepted and not questioned.

### 3.5. Presupposing, topicalizing and manipulating the epistemic status of propositions

The representation of information as being factual can be taken further than described in the last section - much further in fact. To start with, this is possible by using nouns expressing epistemic possibility, likelihood, or even epistemic certainty (cf. Palmer, 1990: 5-9, 50ff. for these terms). Examples of the first type are *danger*, *possibility*, *risk* and *likelihood* from Table 1, and *likelihood* from Table A2. The usage is illustrated in example (12):

- (12) ... the redesign team hopes to simplify the station's ghastly management structure, which has different contractors working with different NASA centres all over the place. But would such cuts stay cut? **The risk is that such a redesigned station, while it may prove palatable to Congress, would not actually succeed in its role as a space station.** (PAPERS)  
 > There is a risk (and you are going to be told what it is).

Semantically, these uses correspond to something like *I believe that this could happen*. However, they involve a lot more from a pragmatic point of view. While this paraphrase captures the evidential downtoning involved in (12), it neglects the objectivization accomplished by the deletion of the utterance-source. By hiding this objectivization shield in the topical part of the utterance, the speakers of utterances of this type manage to background their own role. The result is that they can present personal beliefs as pieces of factual information.

This effect is even stronger when nouns topicalizing the epistemic certainty of propositions are used. This small group consists of the nouns *fact*, *reality*, *truth*, and, much less frequently, *certainty*. These nouns are found in the N-*be-that*-construction in both written and spoken English. Typical examples are given in (13) and (14):

- (13) ... with these injections of western capital they could have converted their economies into much more effective units that could actually compete in the world [coughs] markets. Now **the plain fact is that they couldn't even with these injections of capital they weren't really competitive in world markets.** (SPOKEN)  
 > There is a plain fact (and you are going to be told what it is).
- (14) At one time, East Germany was thought to have a strong industrial base and a well trained workforce, but **the truth is that many factories are so antiquated they are not worth saving and they are staffed by workers whom the West Germans judge to be lazy and lacking any sort of drive.** (BBC)  
 > There is a truth (and you are going to be told what it is).

These examples have the same ring of factuality as examples (10), (11) and (12) above, an effect again created by the N-*be-that*-construction. In addition to that, however, these nouns are markers of much stronger epistemic claims. The speakers

convey full confidence in what they are stating in the *that*-clauses; so this is evidential upgrading rather than downtoning. Yet even here we would expect something similar to happen as with the nouns discussed in Section 3.4, because these nouns are also affected by the pragmatic presupposition that what they anticipate was to be expected anyway. Hearers/readers are prone to take in something like 'watch out: this is the truth', but will not hesitate to question this, because what follows has been presented as factual information, and because they are busy processing what seems to be really noteworthy. What they will overlook in this endeavor is that what is represented as *the truth* or *fact* is not objectively true at all but ultimately no more than the speakers'/writers' own opinion. Evidential upgrading is combined with objectivization and the pragmatic presupposition of shared knowledge. This is the point where presupposition indeed begins to be a bluff.

What speakers gain from using the nouns in this construction is in fact quite a lot, then. They manage to sell their own personal views and opinions as objective truths and facts. And what is more, by exploiting the pragmatic presuppositions of the *N-be-that*-construction, they are able to create the impression that their views-disguised-as-truths represent given knowledge apparently shared by all discourse participants anyway. Prince calls this type of information KNOWN (as opposed to GIVEN) INFORMATION and defines it as "information which the speaker represents as factual and as already known to certain persons (often not including the hearer)" (1978: 903). The *N-be-that*-construction thus allows speakers to manipulate the epistemic status of propositions that they themselves introduce into the universe-of-discourse in such a way that they purport to be objectively given and shared truths.

Some readers may find that this locution of a 'manipulative' potential of the *N-be-that*-construction sounds much too negative. And it is, of course, true that whether 'manipulations' of this kind are deliberate linguistic gambits or just handy ways of expressing one's views convincingly remains an open question. In view of the speed with which speakers produce the construction, it is highly unlikely that considerations of the type "now let me see how I can trick this guy into believing that ..." will ever reach the speakers' awareness. This does not rule out, however, that on a subconscious level, a speaker may recognize the usefulness of the construction for his or her conversational aims and therefore decide to use it. This is the point where the Construction Grammar conception of constructions proves to be particularly useful. Constructions are conceived of as cognitive routines which can be activated in a more direct way than novel cognitive events, i.e., as deeply "entrenched" patterns or structures, to use Langacker's Cognitive Grammar terminology (cf. Langacker, 1987b: 57-58). Partly as a result of this kind of automatization, constructions tend to acquire new aspects of meaning and/or use which, and this is the point, speakers need not be, and usually are not, fully aware of. In this light, it is possible that speakers may be familiar with the manipulative potential of the *N-be-that*-construction, and thus be able to exploit it, without actually being aware of it.

Interestingly, Prince (1978: 898-903) also attributes a similar mixture of presuppositions and manipulative possibilities to *it*-clefts of a special type, which she refers to as "informative-presupposition *it*-clefts" (1978: 898). In these sentences,

the *that*-clauses containing presupposed information, in fact, inform the hearer of that very information. An example of this type taken from Prince is given in (15):

- (15) ## 'IT WAS JUST ABOUT 50 YEARS AGO THAT HENRY FORD GAVE US THE WEEK-END. On September 25, 1926, in a somewhat shocking move for that time, he decided to establish a 40-hour work week, giving his employees two days off instead of one.' (Prince, 1978: 898)

The two hatches at the beginning of the example indicate that this is the beginning of a text. The passage in small capitals can therefore not be given information. Just like in the cases under discussion here, then, "what is presupposed logico-semantically in the informative-presupposition it-cleft is NEW information on the discourse level" (Prince, 1978: 898; original emphasis). As for the motives behind such uses, Prince argues that "their function [...] is TO MARK A PIECE OF INFORMATION AS FACT" (1978: 899, original emphasis). Somewhat surprisingly, Prince sees a functional similarity here to hedges like *it seems that* or *sort of*, and claims that like these, informative-presupposition it-clefts "have the effect of reducing the speaker's responsibility [...] by strengthening the statement, by presenting it as an already known fact" (1978: 900). Applied to our N-*be-that*-constructions, this would mean that not only the nouns expressing tentativeness and subjectivity (*feeling, guess, hope, fear*, etc.), but also, and perhaps even to a greater extent than those, the nouns expressing epistemic likelihood (*risk, danger*, etc.) and certainty (*truth, fact, reality, certainty*) have a responsibility-reducing function and can function as objectivization shields. While this seems to be at odds with my account of the nouns as marking the epistemic status of propositions at first sight, it is in fact not: by using sentence beginnings like *the truth is that* or *the fact is that*, speakers/writers present a piece of information as an "inescapable, external fact", as Prince (1978: 903) puts it. This is completely in line with how I have described their effects in this section; but on the other hand, it also helps them to hide, as it were, behind big words, and this is precisely what the bluff is all about.

### 3.6. Triggering two semantic presuppositions plus the pragmatic ones

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the peak of the presuppositional and also manipulative potential of the N-*be-that*-construction is not reached with strong epistemic nouns but rather with a number of much more innocuous nouns with attitudinal meanings. Examples from Table A1 are *problem, trouble, irony, snag, advantage, difficulty*, and from Table A2 *snag, drawback, irony, downside, complication, disadvantage, paradox, peculiarity, problem, trouble, and oddity*. As the long list from Table A2 shows, many of these nouns are, to a certain extent, geared towards occurring in the N-*be-that*-construction - a finding that we should certainly keep in mind.

These nouns include evaluative semantic elements and allow speakers to express their opinions about and attitudes towards the states-of-affairs encoded in the *that*-clauses. They are particularly interesting from the presuppositional point of view,

because they can trigger not just one but two types of semantic presuppositions, in addition to the general pragmatic ones. First, like the nouns discussed before, they trigger an existential presupposition related to the meaning of the noun, which mainly consists of the attitudinal component here. And second, when attitudinal nouns are used, the *N-be-that*-construction triggers the presupposition that what is stated in the *that-clauses* is necessarily true. Example (16) can serve to illustrate this:

- (16) The concentration of pollen in the atmosphere may be of considerable interest to the hay fever sufferer, so much so that the figure is usually published in the newspapers along with the weather reports. **The trouble is that it is not a forecast and only records the average level reached the day before**, but it may explain why you felt so bad. (BOOKS)

The first semantic presupposition triggered by the noun *trouble* in this particular construction, the existential one, is that something is wrong with something. This is given in (17):

- (17) ... The trouble is that it is not a forecast ... (= 16)  
 > There is trouble/there is something wrong (and you are going to be told what it is).

In addition to this, there is a second presupposition that what is said in the *that-clause* is a fact and therefore necessarily true. This can be shown by comparing (16) to its negated counterpart, as is done in (18) and (19).

- (18) The trouble is that it is not a forecast ... (= 16)  
 > It is not a forecast.  
 (19) The trouble is not that it is not a forecast ...  
 > It is not a forecast.

Both versions trigger the same presupposition. What this comes down to, then, is that when attitudinal nouns occur as subjects in the *N-be-that*-construction, this creates some kind of factive predicate comparable to factive verbs (Kiparsky and Kiparsky, 1971) or verbs of judging like *accuse* or *criticize* (Fillmore, 1971), which also give rise to presuppositions (but cf. Levinson, 1983: 182).

Innocuous-looking as this example may be, its writer manages to accomplish three quite remarkable feats: first, to assert a proposition, which is no more than his or her personal and subjective opinion, in such way that it is purported to be an irrefutable objective fact; second, to express his or her own personal attitude as presupposed information again not open to discussion; and third, to hide this second semantic presupposition by exploiting the pragmatic presupposition of the *N-be-that-construction* which helps to divert the reader's attention from it. Considering the strong manipulative potential of the nouns in this construction, it is not surprising any more that a number of nouns of this type have quite high reliance scores which,

as said, reflects their tendency to occur in the construction (see Table A2 in Appendix A).

Which of the two semantic presuppositions is stronger, the existential one or the factive one? Pointless as this question may seem at first, it is still worthwhile pursuing because it leads us to the possible uptakes of such examples as (16). Assuming example (16) had been uttered in spontaneous discourse and the presuppositions had been noticed by the hearers, which of the two presuppositions is more likely to be refuted by them? Although I have no systematic data on this question, I have a strong feeling that the more likely reaction would be directed against the truth of the *that*-clause. Thus a probable challenge to (16) could be something like (20):

(20) No, that's not true. It does allow some sort of prediction of what the situation will be like on the following day.

Much less likely will be attempts to cancel the other presupposition. Two possible responses of this type, which could in fact occur in combination, are proposed in (21):<sup>5</sup>

(21) Why should this be a problem?  
I don't think that this is problematic at all.

In short, people are more likely to object to the propositional content of the *that*-clause that is represented as necessarily true than to the attitudinal meaning of the noun. This suggests that the attitudinal existential presupposition may be stronger, or at least more difficult to detect, and thus better hidden, than the factive one. And of course this finding does not come as a surprise; it can be traced back to the focusing function and the pragmatic presupposition of the *N-be-that*-construction. After all, the construction has the effect that the communicative impact of the noun tends to go unnoticed, while attention is directed towards the *that*-clause. As noted above, it is this pragmatic presupposition of the *N-be-that*-construction that hides the attitudinal meaning of the noun, in a way, then, becoming the least refutable one of the three involved. This is exactly what Caffi's description of pragmatic presuppositions quoted in 3.2 predicts.

#### 4. Conclusion

Apparently, presupposition can indeed be a bluff. By using the *N-be-that*-construction, speakers can - whether consciously or not - trick their hearers into the unfounded belief that certain pieces of information do not require particular attention or even reflection, since they represent mutually shared, familiar ground anyway.

<sup>5</sup> Note that when nouns expressing epistemic necessity are used (*fact*, *truth*, see Section 3.5), the two challenges separated here, (19) and (20), collapse into one, because the objection *no, that's not true* (cf. 19) is directed against both the propositional content of the *that*-clause and the meaning of the noun.

Depending on the kinds of nouns that are used and on the linguistic context, the information conveyed through the nouns and the information conveyed in the *that*-clause can be purported to be shared. Of course, the construction can also be used in an ‘honest’ way, as it were, to background presupposed pieces of information while highlighting new ones (see Sections 3.3 and 3.4). These ‘honest’ uses of the construction are, in fact, a prerequisite for its bluffing potential. Nobody will be taken in by the bluffs of a player whose cards are never good.

## Appendix A

Table A1  
Frequency of nouns in the construction from the attraction perspective

Noun	Frequency in the construction	Attraction
<i>problem</i>	2,672	8.62%
<i>thing</i>	1,532	4.94%
<i>truth</i>	1,235	3.98%
<i>fact</i>	1,218	3.93%
<i>trouble</i>	1,034	3.34%
<i>point</i>	1,020	3.29%
<i>result</i>	977	3.15%
<i>view</i>	933	3.01%
<i>reason</i>	897	2.89%
<i>idea</i>	790	2.55%
<i>news</i>	749	2.42%
<i>difference</i>	642	2.07%
<i>answer</i>	633	2.04%
<i>theory</i>	561	1.81%
<i>reality</i>	509	1.64%
<i>hope</i>	482	1.56%
<i>fear</i>	437	1.41%
<i>argument</i>	430	1.39%
<i>danger</i>	395	1.27%
<i>irony</i>	395	1.27%
<i>feeling</i>	376	1.21%
<i>explanation</i>	323	1.04%
<i>message</i>	278	0.90%
<i>implication</i>	274	0.88%
<i>concern</i>	268	0.86%
<i>guess</i>	266	0.86%
<i>worry</i>	253	0.82%
<i>snag</i>	250	0.81%
<i>conclusion</i>	249	0.80%
<i>assumption</i>	229	0.74%
<i>possibility</i>	227	0.73%
<i>advantage</i>	221	0.71%
<i>impression</i>	197	0.64%
<i>evidence</i>	196	0.63%
<i>story</i>	191	0.62%

<i>position</i>	190	0.61%
<i>difficulty</i>	188	0.61%
<i>suggestion</i>	188	0.61%
<i>consensus</i>	162	0.52%
<i>opinion</i>	145	0.47%

$\Sigma = 71.65\%$

Table A2

Frequency of nouns in the construction from the reliance perspective

Noun	Frequency in the construction	Frequency in the corpus	Reliance
<i>upshot</i>	105	313	33.55%
<i>snag</i>	250	784	31.89%
<i>drawback</i>	140	735	19.05%
<i>implication</i>	274	1,514	18.10%
<i>guess</i>	266	1,620	16.42%
<i>irony</i>	395	3,085	12.80%
<i>downside</i>	51	512	9.96%
<i>inference</i>	37	375	9.87%
<i>corollary</i>	19	198	9.60%
<i>hunch</i>	43	451	9.53%
<i>gripe</i>	17	186	9.14%
<i>stipulation</i>	12	145	8.28%
<i>worry</i>	253	3,119	8.11%
<i>assumption</i>	229	3,151	7.27%
<i>truth</i>	1,235	17,421	7.09%
<i>complication</i>	34	484	7.02%
<i>likelihood</i>	125	1,857	6.73%
<i>disadvantage</i>	101	1,556	6.49%
<i>regret</i>	99	1,754	5.64%
<i>paradox</i>	63	1,149	5.48%
<i>finding</i>	32	586	5.46%
<i>surmise</i>	3	55	5.45%
<i>boast</i>	20	377	5.31%
<i>proviso</i>	13	250	5.20%
<i>consolation</i>	85	1,699	5.00%
<i>caveat</i>	10	200	5.00%
<i>explanation</i>	323	6,557	4.93%
<i>thesis</i>	71	1,467	4.84%
<i>presumption</i>	19	408	4.66%
<i>peculiarity</i>	5	109	4.59%
<i>problem</i>	2,672	59,600	4.48%
<i>trouble</i>	1,034	23,592	4.38%
<i>retort</i>	9	208	4.33%
<i>premise</i>	33	765	4.31%
<i>consensus</i>	162	3,773	4.29%
<i>objection</i>	52	1,220	4.26%
<i>oddity</i>	13	321	4.05%
<i>conclusion</i>	249	6,170	4.04%
<i>betting</i>	46	1,251	3.68%
<i>reality</i>	509	13,863	3.67%

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