1 Expletives

English has two expletive pronouns: there and it.

(1) a. There is a Norwegian in the garden.
   b. It is true that the Dutch are very tall.

there and it also have non-expletive usages.

(2) a. I saw him standing there.
   b. It is cute.

One way to distinguish between the non-expletive usages is to use stress. Expletive it/there cannot be stressed while the it/there in (2) can be.

(3) a. I saw him standing there
   b. *There are three pigs in the garden.

Expletives have associates.

(4) there has nominal associates:
   a. There is a man in the garden.
   b. *It is a cat in the garden.
   c. There is a rumor about Bill in the newspaper.
   d. *There is [CP that Bill is a parvenu] in the newspaper.

(5) it has clausal CP associates:
   a. It worries Bill [that Mary is late].
   b. It is true [that Haldwani is rather dull].
   c. It would be good [for Bill to leave].

(6) it does not allow for nominal associates:
   a. An announcement about the epidemic worried Paul.
   b. That an announcement about the epidemic had been made worried Paul.
   c. *It worried Paul an announcement about the epidemic.
   d. It worried Paul that an announcement had been made about the epidemic.

Expletive there/it need case.

(7) a. To dance is fun.
   b. *(For) there to be at least two guards in each room is necessary.
   c. It is necessary *[for it to be the case that we win].
2 There

Expletive *there* can only appear in non-\(\theta\) positions i.e. in positions where no \(\theta\)-role is assigned.

(8) a. There is a cat in the garden.
   b. *I saw there.

The way semantic composition takes place all object positions are \(\theta\)-positions. As a result, expletive *there* can never appear in an object position.

In addition to the no-\(\theta\)-role requirement, the distribution of expletives is severely constrained by the nature of the associate and the predicate that appears with *there* (see Milsark (1977)).

- The associate must be indefinite.

(9) a. There is a/no/*the man in the garden.
   b. There are two/many/few men in the garden.
   c. *There are the/most/every men in the garden.
   d. *There is John in the garden.

- The predicate (e.g. *in the garden*) cannot be a ‘permanent’ property.

(10) a. There are several boys sick.
    b. #There are several boys tall.

The restrictions in (9) and (10) are amenable to semantic explanations. There is, however, another constraint on the presence of *there* which is not easy to explain in terms of semantics: *there* cannot appear with transitive verbs.

(11) a. There is a man in the garden.
    b. There arrived three men from Venice.
    c. There arose a fearful storm.
    d. *There saw two children a pig.
    e. *There gave a girl John a book.

For now we will stick with *there* with the verb *be*.

(12) Assumption: Expletive *there* can only be merged as a Specifier of *be* (and a small set of verbs like *arrive, appear, vanish, arise* etc.).

An important fact about sentences involving expletive *there* is that the verb agrees not with the expletive itself but with the associate of the expletive.

(13) a. There is a man in the garden.
    b. There are two men in the garden.

Some analysis:
First let us see how we analyze (14).

(14) A man is in the garden.
    \[[\text{A man}_i \text{ be}^{\Pi} [V_P \text{ t}_i \text{ t}_{\pi e} [P_P \text{ t}_i [\text{in the garden}]]]]\]
• a man is Merged as the Specifier of the PP.
• It moves up for Case to the \([\text{Spec,}P]\) position.
• We left it open last time whether a man needs to move through intermediate specifier positions.

There is some evidence that it \textit{can} move through intermediate specifier positions. This evidence comes from the distribution of \textit{floating quantifiers}. See Sportiche (1988) for details.

\begin{enumerate}
  \item All the men might be in the garden.
  \item The men might \textbf{all} be in the garden.
  \item The men might be \textbf{all} in the garden.
\end{enumerate}

Next let us see how we analyze (16).

(16) There is a man in the garden.
There are men in the garden.

Given the assumptions we have made earlier, we start off with the following.

\[
\text{\(\exists \, \text{there} \, \exists \, \text{be} \, \exists \, \text{men} \, \exists \, \text{in the garden}\)}\]

Now the derivation proceeds like we might expect it to:

(i) \(\text{I}^{0}\{+[\text{Prs}]\} \) is Merged with the VP.
(ii) \textit{there} moves and is Merged as the Specifier of the IP.

This is enough to give us the surface word order.

But two problems remain.
(i) Why is \textit{be}+\(\text{I}^{0}\) agreeing with \textit{men}?
(ii) How is \textit{men} getting case? (after all \(\text{I}^{0}\{+[\text{Prs}]\} \) has presumably already assigned Nom to \textit{there}?)

An older proposal: Expletive Replacement

According to this proposal, in non-overt syntax (LF, Logical Form), \textit{men} moves to the position \textit{of there} and replaces it. This way at LF, there are no uninterpretable elements. At this point, \textit{men} is in the \([\text{Spec,IP}]\) and can receive case and agree with the verb. There are several problems with this proposal. For one there is no evidence for the covert movement of \textit{men}. In fact there is considerable evidence that such a movement does not take place.

\begin{enumerate}
  \item *There are most of the students in the garden.
  \item Most of the students are in the garden.
\end{enumerate}

A newer proposal: Like non-expletive \textit{there}, expletive \textit{there} is also an adverb. It does not need case. Expletive \textit{there} checks the EPP feature of \(P\), while the unvalued \(\phi\) features of \(P\) are valuated by \textit{men}. This process also leads to assignment of Case to \textit{men}.

We had argued earlier that \textit{there} needs case. But within the system proposed here, \textit{there} does not actually need case. So why does it seem as if it does?

\begin{enumerate}
  \item For there to be at least three guards in the room is necessary.
  \item *There to be at least three guards in the room is necessary.
\end{enumerate}

\textit{There}'s need for case is only apparent - it is actually the associate that needs case.

Consequences of the new proposal:

• The subject requirement (EPP) and the case/agreement can be decoupled.
• Case/Agreement can take place in configurations other than \([\text{Spec,head}]\). This way of case assignment is referred to as the operation \textbf{Agree}. The general idea is that overt movement takes place only when forced by a specific EPP-like feature.
3 It

Is it really true that expletive *it* can only appear in non-θ positions?

Not quite. Expletive *it* can appear anywhere a CP can appear in subject position.

(20) a. It worries Paul that Kevin has left.
    b. It is sad that Wynonna feels that way.
    c. It is out of the question that Frank should be reinstated.
    d. I find it odd that Mary left so soon.
    e. It would be good [for Bill to leave].
    f. It’s no use [complaining about it now].
    g. *It ate pizza that Bill was hungry.

(21) a. That Kevin has left worries Paul.
    b. That Wynonna feels that way is sad.
    c. That Frank should be reinstated is out of the question.
    d. I find that Mary left so soon odd.
    e. For Bill to leave would be good.
    f. Complaining about it now is no use.
    g. *That Bill was hungry ate pizza.

The distribution of expletive *it* seems more closely tied to the possibility of extraposition for CP’s rather than to θ-roles.

All the above instances have involved expletive *it* in subject positions. However, expletive *it* also seems to be possible in certain object positions.

(22) a. I mentioned it to Mary [that Bill was leaving].
    b. I can’t stand it [that the trains are so often late in Portugal].
    c. I blame it on you [that we can’t go].
    d. John will see to it [that you have a reservation].

We will not get into the details of an analysis of expletive *it* here. For details see Williams (1980), and Postal and Pullum (1988).

An outline of Postal and Pullum (1988): expletive *it* is associated with the extraposition of a CP. The *it* appears for various syntactic reasons. For purposes of interpretation, it is only the CP that is relevant.

References