

## 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**<sub>F</sub>.
- 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 [<sub>CP</sub>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.  
[[A man]<sub>i</sub> be+I<sup>0</sup> [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> t<sub>be</sub> [<sub>PP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> [in the garden]]]]

- *a man* is Merged as the Specifier of the PP.
- It moves up for Case to the [Spec,I<sup>0</sup>] position.
- We left it open last time whether *a man* needs to move through intermediate specifier positions. There is some evidence that it *can* move through intermediate specifier positions. This evidence comes from the distribution of **floating quantifiers**. See Sportiche (1988) for details.

- (15) a. All the men might be in the garden.  
 b. The men might **all** be in the garden.  
 c. The men might be **all** in the garden.

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.

- (17) [<sub>VP</sub> there [<sub>V'</sub> be [<sub>PP</sub> men [<sub>P'</sub> in the garden]]]]

Now the derivation proceeds like we might expect it to:

- (i) I<sup>0</sup>[+Prs] is Merged with the VP.  
 (ii) *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 be+I<sup>0</sup> agreeing with *men*?  
 (ii) How is *men* getting case? (after all I<sup>0</sup>[+Prs] has presumably already assigned Nom to *there*)

An older proposal: Expletive Replacement

According to this proposal, in non-overt syntax (LF, Logical Form), *men* moves to the position of *there* and replaces it. This way at LF, there are no uninterpretable elements. At this point, *men* is in the [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 *men*. In fact there is considerable evidence that such a movement does **not** take place.

- (18) a. \*There are most of the students in the garden.  
 b. Most of the students are in the garden.

A newer proposal: Like non-expletive *there*, expletive *there* is also an adverb. It does not need case. Expletive *there* checks the EPP feature of I<sup>0</sup>, while the unvalued  $\phi$  features of I<sup>0</sup> are valued by *men*. This process also leads to assignment of Case to *men*.

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

- (19) a. For there to be at least three guards in the room is necessary.  
 b. \*There to be at least three guards in the room is necessary.

*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 [Spec,head]. This way of case assignment is referred to as the operation **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- $\theta$  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  $\theta$ -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

- Milsark, G. (1977) "Toward an explanation of certain peculiarities of the existential construction in English," *Linguistic Analysis* 3:1, 1–29.
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