English Expletive Constructions Are Not Infected

Carson T. Schütze

Sobin (1997) proposes an analysis of several ''prestige'' constructions of English under which they result from *grammatical viruses.* Counter to his claim, I argue that plural agreement in expletive constructions introduced by *there* results not from a virus but from the grammar of English, because it lacks signature properties of viruses. I show that the flat agreement seen in expletive constructions with conjoined associates can be explained as a processing effect. I then argue that singular agreement with plural associates represents a second alternative allowed within the grammar.

Keywords: expletive constructions, agreement, locative inversion, grammatical virus, processing effects, English pronouns

Sobin (1997) proposes an analysis of several ''prestige'' constructions of English under which they result from *grammatical viruses,* processes that operate ''out of conformity with the principles that govern the proper devices of a grammar'' (p. 319). The constructions he discusses fall into two classes: those involving nominative pronouns, and those involving plural agreement in expletive constructions (ECs) introduced by *there*. I am in agreement with Sobin's claim (following Emonds 1985, 1986) that grammatical viruses exist and that they are at work in the constructions involving nominative pronouns.[1] However, I argue that plural agreement in ECs does not pattern with the relevant pronoun facts and is not the result of a virus. Rather, the behavior of ECs results from a combination of independently motivated features of the grammar and the language-processing system. Thus, contra Sobin, I argue that sentences like *There <u>are</u> people in the room* are generated by the grammar proper. Furthermore, I argue (contra, e.g., Chomsky 1995) that *singular* agreement with plural associates in ECs conforms to the grammar as well and is not the result of a virus. The upshot of these two claims is that the syntax of English ECs must allow for a wider range of possible realizations than is generally assumed, but that they are not infected by a grammatical virus.

1 Plural Associate Agreement Lacks Signature Properties of a Virus

In this section I argue that plural *associate agreement*, that is, agreement with the postverbal NP in an EC, should not be analyzed as the result of a virus, because it lacks three properties that Sobin identifies as criterial properties of viruses. I use only nonconjoined associates to show this. In section 2 I show how certain peculiarities of ECs with conjoined associates, which initially

seem to be viruslike, can be accounted for by general properties of the human sentence-processing mechanism, so that no special statement about ECs is required.

1.1 Adjacency

Sobin argues that viruses are restricted to applying under adjacency in ways that real grammatical principles are not. For example, he notes contrasts such as (1a) versus (1b) in arguing that the possibility of a postcopular nominative pronoun arises only by virtue of a virus.

(1) a. It is I.
     b. It is just/only/merely me/*I.

The bare pronoun following comparative *than* is also subject to a nominative virus, according to Sobin; it behaves similarly (2), though he does not demonstrate this explicitly.

(2) a. Mary is richer than I.
     b. Mary is richer than even me/??I.

In (1) and (2) it is clear that *linear* adjacency is the relevant requirement.[2] However, in the discussion of ECs, a different notion of adjacency must be appealed to, as Sobin notes. He claims that plural agreement in ECs ''is found almost exclusively when the nearest lexically projected NP to the right of the finite verb . . . is plural'' (p. 333). This relativized notion of adjacency is required because plural associate agreement can arise in the absence of linear adjacency between the agreeing verb and the associate.

(3) There have always been cookies on the table.

Equally problematic for the virushood of this construction, material can intervene between *there* and the plural verb.

(4) There often are too many people in this room.

In these respects, the alleged ''*there are . . .*'' virus is behaving unlike other viruses and just like genuine grammatical agreement processes. One might find a way of restating the adjacency property of viruses to unite the cases in (1) and (2) with those in (3) and (4), but there is a more serious empirical problem: associate agreement sounds perfectly natural in contexts where it could *not* arise by a mechanism looking for the nearest NP to the right of the finite verb.

1.2 Directionality

In particular, associate agreement arises in environments where the triggering NP is to the *left* of the verb.

(5) How many cookies are/*?is there on the table?

---

[2] Although it is true that linear adjacency appears to play a role in the grammar of English for abstract Case assignment to objects of verbs, the particular intervening words in (1) and (2) do not block object Case (e.g., *John visited only me*).

In (5) the "*there are* . . ." virus cannot apply, since there is no plural NP to the right of the finite verb, but agreement seems to be more strongly preferred here than in (6), where the virus *can* apply.

(6) There is/'s/are lots of cookies on the table.

Conversely, there is at least one environment where a plural NP *is* the closest NP linearly to the right of the finite verb, but it does not trigger the virus, as in (7a); however, an NP further to the right does more readily trigger plural agreement, as in (7b). (Although both of these examples are somewhat stilted, the contrasts are still in the opposite direction from what the virus would predict.)

(7) a. There ?strikes/*strike many people as being a problem with welfare.
    b. There ?strike/?*strikes me as being many problems with welfare.

We cannot rectify the problem illustrated in (5) and (7) by stating the agreement requirement of the virus at some level other than S-Structure, because Sobin points out that effects of linearity in agreement with conjoined NPs need to be stated at S-Structure. Those effects (see section 2) are the major motivation for his claim that "*there are* . . ." is a virus in the first place.

With respect to directionality, the EC facts again contrast with the pronoun uses that Sobin also classes as viruses, where linear order is crucial. The examples in (8) and (9) illustrate the effect of linear order for the two nominative viruses introduced above; (10) makes the same point for a third construction treated as a nominative virus by Sobin, conjoined subject pronouns.

(8) a. It is/was I.
    b. ??Was/Is it I?

(9) a. Mary is richer than I.
    b. ?*How much richer than I is Mary?

(10) a. She and him are . . .
     b. ??Him and she are . . .
     c. You and I are . . .
     d. ??I and you are . . .

1.3 Lexical Specificity

A third respect in which the "*there are* . . ." virus does not fit Sobin's criteria for viruses is that it is not lexically specific. As Sobin notes, it is not restricted to forms of the verb *be*, or even to "light" verbs or auxiliaries in general.

(11) a. There appear/?appears to be cookies on the table.
     b. There tend/?tends to be cookies on the table when Johnnie comes home.

Again, this is different from the situation with pronouns, where the goodness of nominative use varies greatly depending on the particular pronoun chosen.

(12) a.   It is she.
     b. ?*It is we.
     c. ?*It is they.

(13) a.   He and I are . . .
     b. ?*We and they are . . .

(14) a.   My wife is richer than I.
     b. ??The Doles are richer than we.
     c. ?*The Rockefellers are richer than they.

The possibility of agreement with an NP that is not overtly in subject position is not even restricted to clauses containing the word *there*; for example, it obtains also in locative inversion.

(15) On the table are many cookies.

Thus, there are no lexical items common to the range of constructions where a nonsubject triggers plural agreement. Strikingly, it seems that such agreement arises generally when subject position contains an element that itself fails to trigger agreement (see Bresnan 1994; and see section 3 for further discussion). Unless it can be shown that agreement in ECs and locative inversion works differently, the two constructions should be given a unified treatment, which is not possible under a virus approach.

To summarize this section, in most respects plural associate agreement in ECs does not seem to fit Sobin's characterization of a virus, differing crucially from the relevant pronoun uses. I turn now to one respect in which EC agreement does initially seem to behave like a virus and not like a grammatical process.

2 A Different Account of "Flat Agreement"

2.1 Sobin's Treatment

Sobin provides questionnaire data showing that when the associate in an EC is a conjoined NP, speakers prefer sentences in which *be* agrees with the number of the *first* conjunct NP, as indicated by the ratings for (16a–c). This is irrespective of the fact that the conjoined associate as a whole is always grammatically plural, as evidenced by speaker preferences with the same elements in subject position (17). Sobin refers to the pattern in (16) as *flat agreement*; this pattern was noted by Morgan (1972), Milsark (1974), and Gazdar and Pullum (1980).

(16) a. There's/is/are a book and a pen on the desk.   **4.36**/3.58/0.81[3]
     b. There's/is/are a pen and some books on the desk.   **3.67**/2.86/0.61
     c. There's/is/are some books and a pen on the desk.   2.78/1.67/**3.81**

(17) A book and a pen's/is/are on the desk.   2.69/2.22/**3.31**

---

[3] Ratings were on a scale from 0 (completely unnatural) to 5 (completely natural).

Sobin attributes the singular preference in (16a–b) to the hypothesis that the ''*there are . . .*'' virus cannot ''see'' the higher coordinate NP (because it is not a projection of an overt head, in his view), but is sensitive only to the linearly closest NP with an overt head (i.e., the first conjunct). Thus, the virus can apply only in (16c). Sobin claims that in ECs there is ''no evidence that the hierarchic NP (the proper associate NP) is taken into account'' (pp. 325–327).

There are two points to be distinguished here: the claim that the first conjunct affects agreement preferences in ECs, and the claim that the hierarchic NP does *not* do so. I wish to show first that the latter, stronger claim is not justified by Sobin's data. His results show that the plurality of the entire (conjoined) NP does influence speakers' ratings over and above the plurality of the most local NP (the left conjunct). The mean ratings from Sobin's survey for the crucial conditions are reproduced in (18) and (19).

(18) a. there is np 4.03
b. there is np and nps 2.86

(19) a. there's np 4.64
b. there's np and nps 3.67

Since the first postverbal NP is singular in all instances in (18) and (19), the proposed virus cannot apply here at all. Thus, the only available agreement option should be the singular, which is the grammatical version, according to Sobin. But a singular verb is consistently judged worse when the associate is conjoined and the second NP is plural ((18b), (19b)), as opposed to a simple singular ((18a), (19a)); this shows that something other than the linearly closest NP is affecting these judgments. Nick Sobin (personal communication) suggests that the contrasting ratings in (18) and (19) arise because the ''*there are . . .*'' virus can ''stretch'' to look beyond the immediately adjacent NP and be triggered by the plurality of the second conjunct. (To the extent that the virus could apply in (18b) and (19b), it would make the plural sound better, and hence the singular alternative would sound worse.) But this weakens the account, and the need for such ''stretching'' is not motivated by any of the pronoun data. I therefore contend that these facts do not result from a virus and hence do not provide support for the existence of the ''*there are . . .*'' virus.

2.2 Flat Agreement Is More General

A second relevant observation is that the pattern of preferences seen in (16) is not restricted to constructions involving *there*. For example, Lisenbey's (1995) questionnaire study finds the same general pattern for *where's* and *where is* as opposed to *where are* in sentences such as (20).

(20) Where's/is/are a cup and a bowl?

More significantly, Deevy (1998) shows that flat agreement effects are found in both subject-auxiliary inversion and locative inversion;[4] examples of her questionnaire materials are given in (21) and (22).

---

[4] Deevy labels this condition ''stylistic inversion,'' but from the discussion it appears that her items all contained a locative PP and the verb *be*.

(21) Was/Were a hamburger and two sandwiches ordered by table five?

(22) In the driveway was/were a fire truck and two police cars.

In the EC and locative inversion conditions, agreement with the closest conjunct was always preferred; in the subject-auxiliary inversion condition, plural agreement was always preferred, but the number of the first conjunct affected the size of this preference.

Thus, we must either posit additional viruses to capture agreement in the two inversion constructions and the *where* construction, or pursue the idea that something more general is affecting those three as well as ECs. What they all have in common is of course that the coordinate NP that ''should'' trigger plural agreement appears after the finite verb. The virus approach, however, cannot capture this generalization.

2.3 A Processing Account

If plural agreement in ECs with coordinate NP associates is really part of the grammar of English, why is it being overridden in these environments? I argue that the preferences for (16), (20), (21), and (22) are a result of sequential processing, rather than some aspect of linguistic knowledge (be it viral or healthy), a suggestion made independently by Deevy (1998).[5] This claim is supported by the existence of extragrammatical local agreement effects in other contexts, documented in the parsing literature.[6] Work by Bock and her colleagues (e.g., Bock and Miller 1991, Bock and Eberhard 1993) on production, and by Nicol, Forster, and Veres (1997) and Pearlmutter, Garnsey, and Bock (1997) on comprehension, shows that the human sentence processor has a tendency to produce and accept agreement between a verb and the linearly closest NP even when that NP is not its subject, as in (23). (In these cases there is no doubt that speakers of Standard English know that this is ungrammatical.)[7]

---

[5] It is possible that Universal Grammar (UG) itself embodies some mechanism for generating first conjunct agreement, as argued, for example, by Aoun, Benmamoun, and Sportiche (1994) for Arabic and by Johannessen (1996) for other languages, with a different analysis; see also Munn 1993. If so, this would in no way invalidate my argument, since this too would be consistent with the claim that first conjunct agreement effects do not argue in favor of a virus treatment of English ECs. However, as Johannessen observes, it is not always the conjunct closest to the verb that triggers agreement on it; the more distant conjunct triggers agreement in Slovene, for example. Furthermore, Johannessen argues that the choice of which conjunct triggers agreement is determined by the headedness of the language in general and thus does not vary regardless of the position of the conjoined NP relative to the verb. In contrast, Sobin's data on preverbal conjoined subjects suggest that in English either the right or the left conjunct can be the agreement trigger, whichever is closer to the verb. This is certainly not a knockdown argument against a grammar-based treatment of the English facts, but since we have independent evidence for processing effects of linear closeness, I will continue to pursue a processing account.

[6] Deevy (1998) independently notes this connection as well.

[7] A reviewer suggests that (23) is reminiscent of English dialects described by Kimball and Aissen (1971). The similarity lies in the fact that agreement is being determined by the ''wrong'' NP. In fact, Kimball and Aissen describe two different dialects. One of these allows both options in (i) and other A-fronting constructions.

(i) Mark knows the people who Clark think/thinks are in the garden.

Observe that this is *not* an example of agreement being triggered by a closer NP, since *Clark* is the closest NP to the

(23) The author of the speeches are here.

In fact, Sobin's own data on the naturalness of singular verbs with coordinate *pre*verbal subjects show a tendency toward this linear adjacency effect too, as he observes.

Thus, there is already good reason to believe that pressure toward agreement between an inflected verb and the linearly closest NP is attested in the human language-processing mechanism. Of course, speakers would generally not judge sentences like *A dog and a cat is in the yard* as acceptable, so why should they judge *There's a dog and a cat in the yard* as natural? (As Sobin points out, flat agreement manifests itself much more strongly postverbally.) I suggest that this is due to a combination of the general tendency toward local agreement plus the temporary ambiguity induced by having the verb precede the relevant NP. In particular, at the point of encountering the verb in (17), the parser is guaranteed to have heard/read the entire subject. In contrast, in (16a) there is a point at which all one has heard/read is *There is/are a book,* and similarly in (20), (21), and (22). This temporary ambiguity makes plural agreement with a singular first conjunct sound initially bad, and singular agreement sound correct; apparently, our judgment system never fully recovers from this preliminary impression.[8] An advantage to this way of viewing the data, pointed out by Deevy (1998), is that left/right asymmetries have clear motivation in on-line parsing, whereas the directionality of the virus is merely stipulated by Sobin.[9]

To summarize the first half of the article, we have seen that associate agreement in ECs fails to conform to most of Sobin's proposed virus properties, and where it does conform, a plausible and more general alternative account is available. One might then ask whether Sobin's remaining

---

relevant verb. Therefore, this does not appear to be the same phenomenon. In the second dialect that Kimball and Aissen describe, explicitly distinct from the one just discussed, both variants of sentences like (ii) are said to be grammatical.

(ii) One of the men shoot/shoots craps.

Interestingly, (ii) is of the form of the processing errors studied by Bock. Unfortunately, Kimball and Aissen provide much less data from this second dialect. In the absence of access to speakers, it is hard to assess what the range of possibilities for wrong agreement is in this dialect, and whether this is genuinely part of their grammar, as opposed to a (perhaps conventionalized) processing error.

[8] The idea that ''illusory'' judgments can result from temporary misparses was suggested by Fodor (1979) in connection with certain apparent parasitic gap sentences. The fact that parsing effects in general can induce reactions at odds with the grammar is well known. For instance, Frazier (1985, observation attributed to Janet Fodor) notes that naive speakers find sentences like (ia) more acceptable than (ib), although grammatically, the reverse must be true.

(i) a. The patient that the nurse the clinic had hired met Jack.
    b. The patient that the nurse the clinic had hired admitted met Jack.

This observation is confirmed in controlled studies by Christiansen (1997) and Gibson and Thomas (in press).

In the present instance, however, this is probably not the whole story. In section 3 I will argue that singular verbs are actually grammatical with plural postverbal NPs in ECs and locative inversion. If this is correct, the findings in two of Deevy's three conditions actually reflect the parser's preference between two alternative grammatical structures—the plural variant leads to a garden path whereas the singular does not. This would jibe with the fact that subject-auxiliary inversion, where the grammar does not provide a nonagreement option, did not show the preference for a singular verb when the first conjunct was singular. That is, singular was rated better than plural in (ii) and (22), but not in (21).

(ii) There was/were a girl and three boys standing by the door.

For further discussion of grammar-parser interactions and their implications for interpreting linguistic data, see Schütze 1996 and works cited in the text.

[9] Deevy (1998) proposes a different processing account of postverbal first conjunct agreement.

proposed viruses, involving nominative pronouns, still stand as convincing, or whether they can be similarly explained away. At the least, it seems to me that they cannot be handled by the same means as the EC facts, as due to processing influences. It is difficult to make this a watertight argument, since there are no comprehensive theories of language processing. However, to my knowledge there is no independent evidence that parsing or production embodies interactions between choice of morphological case (nominative versus accusative) and adjacency, directionality, or choice of person/number form, nor is there any sense in which the split between nominative and accusative in the virus environments correlates with presence versus absence of a potential garden path. Rather, the nominative viruses simply seem to be fixed strings that are stored as units.

3 The Status of Singular Verbs with Plural Associates

The previous two sections have been devoted to arguing that plural associate agreement is not the result of a virus, but is a part of the grammars of English speakers. But it is undeniable that under a certain range of conditions, a singular verb sounds quite good with a plural associate, even when processing ambiguities are not at stake.

(24) There's two things I want you to consider.

What, then, is the status of this failure to agree with the associate?

3.1 Nonagreement Is Not a Virus

One idea would be that *nonagreement* in ECs, rather than agreement, is the result of a virus. This is essentially the position adopted by Chomsky, using the same sorts of arguments that Sobin proposes for diagnosing a virus.

> As is well known, agreement with the associate is sometimes overridden, as for example in *there's three books on the table, there's a dog and cat in the room* (vs. *a dog and cat is in the room*). The phenomenon, however, seems superficial: thus, it does not carry over to *is there three books . . .*, *there isn't any books . . .*, and so on. The form *there's* simply seems to be a frozen option, not relevant here. (Chomsky 1995:384)

Another environment where nonagreement is strongly dispreferred is the following, cited from Noam Chomsky (personal communication) by Sobin:

(25) There are/*is, I think, some strange people here.

Thus, there appear to be environments where nonagreement sounds good and environments where it sounds bad, and the linear positioning of *there*, the verb, and the associate seems relevant in distinguishing these two classes. This might seem to point toward a ''*there's . . .*'' virus. However, I will argue against this approach.

On closer consideration, nonagreement in ECs fails to meet Sobin's criteria for virus status, for some of the same reasons that agreement failed to do so. In particular: (a) It seems not to depend on strict adjacency between the verb and the associate.

(26) There's often problems at the South Precinct.

(b) It seems not to be completely restricted to rightward application ((27a–b) do require a casual speech style).

(27) a. How many calories 's there ([ɪzɛr]) in a Tic Tac?
     b. 'S there ([zɛr]) any cookies in the cupboard?

(c) It is not lexically restricted to sentences containing *there*. This can be seen in several ways. As has often been noted in the literature, many speakers accept sentences such as (28a–b).

(28) a. Here's the books you ordered.   (Sparks 1984)
     b. Where's your books?   (cf. DeWolf 1992)

Some speakers also allow nonagreement with *wh*-words other than *where* (data from Sparks 1984).[10]

(29) a. How's the horses?
     b. When's the races?
     c. What's these?

Furthermore, Nathan (1981) observes that this use is limited to copular *be* and is blocked with auxiliary *be* (30). (I have added (30c) to show that contracted auxiliary *have* patterns with auxiliary *be*.)

(30) a. *What's the soldiers doing?
     b. *Which people's expected by the organizers?
     c. *What's the rascals done now?

The contrast between (29) and (30) further suggests that we are not dealing with a purely ''surfacey'' phenomenon.

Nonagreement is (for many speakers) also not restricted to frozen forms containing contracted *'s*. For example, an unaccented reading of *was* with a reduced vowel sounds passable in contexts like (31).

(31) There [wUz] 50 people at the party last night.

This possibility has been attested on the basis of production data, by counting the proportion of ECs with plural associates and singular versus plural verbs, as a function of tense. Meechan and Foley (1994) report a rate of 58% singular past tense with plural NPs, in contrast to 92% with present tense (*'s*), in interview transcripts of Canadian English speakers. Elicited production data were collected by Smallwood (1997, 1998). She used a picture description task to elicit sentences with existential *there* or locative inversion. Smallwood (1997) reports a rate of 43% nonagreement

---

[10] Sparks (1984) points out that many speakers accept sentences like *Where the hell's the lions?*, where *'s* is not cliticized to the *wh*-word, so analyzing *where's* as another frozen form will not suffice.

in past tense plural ECs (12 out of 28 utterances), in contrast to 41% nonagreement with present tense ECs (107 out of 258).[11] Thus, sentences like (31) are well attested. Smallwood's data also show that nonagreeing ECs occurred without contraction in her sample (9 utterances, as compared to 98 with contraction). She provides the following example:

(32) On the top line there is three stick people.

A further argument against lexical specificity for nonagreement comes from locative inversion, where Smallwood found nonagreement in 41% of present tense utterances (11 out of 27). Two of the examples are (33a–b).[12]

(33) a. On the centre of the page is two houses.
      b. In the bottom is three stars.

Thus, as was the case for agreement, nonagreement does not depend on the presence of any particular lexical item.[13]

Given the observations up to this point, I propose that nonagreement is not the result of a virus, but a genuine part of the grammar of English. In particular, I argue for an analysis similar to one Sobin suggests, namely, one in which (singular) I(nfl) can apparently agree directly with *there* itself. As is known from other languages, singular agreement with a singular expletive and a plural postverbal NP is possible.[14]

(34) *French*
      a. Il y a/*ont   deux hommes dans l'auto.
          it CL has/*have two   men   in   the-car
          'There are two men in the car.'
      b. Il est/*sont arrivé   deux hommes.
          it is/*are   arrived two   men
          'There arrived two men.'

I claim that English is similar to German in having two expletive constructions, one uniformly singular, the other taking associate agreement (cf. discussion in Green 1984).[15]

---

[11] Additional data collected from a subset of these speakers confirm that both agreement and nonagreement with plural associates are used by the same person, in different tasks intended to induce different degrees of formality.

[12] The possibility of a singular verb in this environment is also noted in Bresnan 1994.

[13] An anonymous reviewer reports different judgments, finding that contracted 's is crucial for nonagreement: *is* and *are* are possible only when they agree with the postverbal NP. See footnote 25 for a potential way of unifying the two patterns.

[14] A reviewer notes that the same point might be made with English *it*, which demands singular agreement even when its associate would normally trigger plural, as noted by McCloskey (1991).

   (i) a. That the president will be reelected and that he will be impeached are equally likely at this point.
        b. It seems/*seem equally likely at this point that the president will be reelected and that he will be impeached.

[15] The exact structure of the examples in (35) might not be the same as that of their English counterparts, but this is not intended as more than a rough analogy. In particular, *es* in (35a) versus (35b) seems to have a different status, since the former but not the latter must be omitted in a verb-initial yes/no question, suggesting that the former is not a genuine subject. English existential *there* sentences do not appear to show this contrast.

(35) *German*
    a. Es sind/*ist zwei Männer im   Auto.
       it are/*is   two men   in-the car
       'There are two men in the car.'
    b. Es gibt/*geben zwei Männer im   Auto.
       it gives/*give two men   in-the car
       'There are two men in the car.'

Note that in German both agreement patterns are completely secure: there is no tendency for the starred versions of (35) to be accepted.

    More precisely, I propose that speakers of English have at their disposal two grammatical ways of dealing with non-NP syntactic subjects (*there*, PPs, etc.): these noncanonical subjects may disallow agreement and therefore ''deflect'' agreement to an NP lower in the sentence, or they may trigger 3sg agreement. Specifically, in the first scenario the subject position is invisible to I for purposes of checking ϕ-features: I will then agree with the closest relevant NP below it, which will be the associate.[16] In the second scenario, nonagreement, the crucial requirement is that the presence of *there* (or a PP) in subject position can force agreement to be 3sg. This could happen because I is actually agreeing with *there*, but I pursue the alternative view that I cannot enter any agreement relationship at all in the presence of such subjects and therefore shows up as a default form, as suggested also by Smallwood (1997).[17]

3.2 Agreement Options in UG

The availability in UG of these two ways of treating otherwise identical clauses with noncanonical subjects is illustrated by the different treatment of certain quirky subject sentences in Icelandic versus Faroese, languages whose syntax is otherwise very similar. In both of these languages, when the subject is nominative, it triggers agreement on the verb, as in (36a) and (37a). However, when the subject is dative, its ϕ-features cannot trigger agreement,[18] and the two scenarios arise. In Icelandic the verb agrees with the direct object, which appears in the nominative (36b).[19] In contrast, in Faroese such sentences do *not* show agreement with the object, which surfaces in the accusative; rather, they show uniform 3sg marking (37b).

---

[16] I assume that associate agreement versus the lack thereof in ECs is independent of the possibility of ''expletive adjunction'' or ''expletive replacement'' at LF. Thus, the presumed absence of these LF operations in locative inversion is not problematic for a unified treatment. See Schütze 1997 for discussion of how to implement agreement between I and a nonsubject in the framework of Chomsky 1995. The core idea is that unchecked agreement features in I after Spell-Out will attract the formal features of the lower NP. Since this is not category movement, the overt presence of another element in the specifier of I does not block it. Given this possibility, it is not clear that any independent motivation for expletive adjunction/replacement remains.

[17] See Meechan and Foley 1994 for other treatments of nonagreement.

[18] Crucially, plural dative subjects never trigger plural agreement on the verb. Thus, dative NPs in these languages are opaque with respect to their ϕ-features, perhaps because they are in a KP (Kase Phrase) shell.

[19] Both languages also have verbs whose object is quirky, not relevant here.

(36) *Icelandic*

    a. ViL   Øurftum   vinnu.
       we(NOM) needed(1PL) a-job(ACC)

    b. Mér   höfLu   leiLst fyrirlestrarnir.
       me(DAT) had(3PL) bored the-lectures(NOM)
       'I had found the lectures boring.'   (SigurLsson 1992)

(37) *Faroese*

    a. Vit   komu.
       we(NOM) came(PL)   (Barnes 1992)

    b. Honum nýtist   fleiri bókahillar   heima hjá s+r.
       him(DAT) needs(3SG) more bookshelves(ACC) at-home with self
       'He needs more bookshelves in his home.'   (Barnes 1986)

I am claiming, then, that English allows both the Icelandic pattern (agreement with a nonsubject) and the Faroese pattern (uniform 3sg) for sentences with *there* and other noncanonical subjects.[20] There is some independent evidence that drawing this parallel is on the right track, based on Sparks's (1984) observation that agreement and nonagreement are not always both possible in English: as shown in (38), when the subject exhibits morphological nominative marking, failure to agree with it becomes impossible. (Judgments in (38) are from Sparks 1984.)

(38) a.   Where are they?
      b. *Where's they?
      c.   How are they?
      d. *How's they?
      e.   When are they?
      f. *When's they?

This contingency with case marking supports my claim that nonagreement in ECs and elsewhere is a bona fide syntactic phenomenon.[21]

---

[20] For my purposes it is immaterial whether the agreeing and nonagreeing variants of ECs represent options within a single grammar or two distinct grammars, perhaps sociolectal variants associated with different degrees of formality. (The same issue arises for Kimball and Aissen's (1971) data; cf. Henry 1995 for agreement alternations in Belfast English.)

    Examination of the raw data in Sobin's appendix for the conditions involving *there's* followed linearly by a plural NP shows that responses in these conditions were bimodally distributed. Specifically, a large subset of subjects rated these sentences 0, and another large subset rated them 5. This might suggest that only some speakers have the grammatical option of nonagreement available, but it could also mean that only some subjects were willing to report nonstandard forms as natural.

[21] Interestingly, alternatives to (38b), (38d), and (38f) with *them* are also impossible, except perhaps on a deictic use. I do not propose an account for this restriction here, but it is suggestive that Belfast English (Henry 1995) also shows a restriction against simple pronouns as subjects of ''singular concord'' sentences (Alison Henry, personal communication).

  (i) a. *We/*Us goes.
     b. Us and them goes.
     c. These cars goes very fast.

3.3 Restrictions on Nonagreement

Let us recapitulate the analysis. When the subject is an NP, I obligatorily agrees with it. When the subject is *there,* a locative PP,[22] and so on, agreement with the subject is not possible,[23] and one of two things can happen: I agrees with a nonsubject NP, or I is 3sg by default. What now remains to be explained under this proposal is why nonagreement is unavailable in some ECs. These fall into two classes. First, there are the environments in (39a) (Chomsky 1995:384) and (39b) (noted by Chomsky in the personal communication cited above), to which I have added (39c).

(39) a. *?There isn't any dogs in the yard.
     b. *There is, I think, some dogs in the yard.
     c. *?There often is too many dogs in the yard.

Second, and not previously observed to my knowledge, nonagreement is impossible in presentational, as opposed to existential, *there* constructions.

(40) a. There's four or five masked men fighting outside the corral.
     b. Every week on *The Wild West Show*, there ensue/*ensues outside the corral two or three gunfights between the good guys and the bad guys.

(41) a. There appear/?appears to be two newspapers on my doorstep.
     b. There appear/*appears on my doorstep each morning two newspapers that endorse diametrically opposed viewpoints.[24]

(42) a. There's two portraits of the old man hanging over the fireplace.
     b. At the old Winthorpe mansion, there hang/*hangs over the fireplace two portraits of the man who founded this great company.

Let us consider each of these restrictions in turn.

The ban on (39), I claim, is related to the fact that *be* is not contractible in these environments, even when the associate is singular.[25]

(43) a. *There'sn't any dogs/dirt in the yard.
     b. *There's, I think, some dogs/dirt in the yard.
     c. *There often's lots of dogs/dirt in the yard.

---

[22] My analysis rests crucially on the claim that in locative inversion it is the chain of the locative PP, not the theme, that passes through the subject position. For extensive arguments to this effect, see Bresnan 1994, Jang 1996, and sources cited in those works.

[23] I assume agreement is blocked in the same way in both cases, because *there* is essentially a pro-PP.

[24] Note that the goodness of the plural form in (41b) is another kind of counterexample to the claim that plural associate agreement arises only via the ''*there are . . .*'' virus: the singular NP *each morning* is linearly closer to the verb than the plural trigger *two newspapers* is.

[25] As observed by Sobin (1997) for (43b).

The alternative judgments reported in footnote 13 could be captured under the same approach via a difference in the lexicon. For the reviewer, only *'s* (and not deaccented *is, was,* etc.) is a default form; all others demand 3sg agreement specification.

Thus, (39a) is considerably improved if the locus of contraction is changed.

(44) There's not many dogs in the yard.

Importantly, my proposal is not equivalent to Chomsky's claim that nonagreement is restricted to a frozen form *there's*. As noted earlier, *is* and *was* allow nonagreement when they occur in environments where contraction is allowed. Now observe that nonagreeing *was* shows the same sensitivity to contraction environments as *is*, even though it cannot itself be contracted to *'s*: compare (45) and (46) with (39) and (44).

(45) a.   *?There wasn't many dogs in the yard.
      b.   *There was, I think, many dogs in the yard.
      c.   *There often was too many dogs in the yard.

(46) There [wUz] not many dogs in the yard.

Rounding out the picture, we saw already that the subject-auxiliary inversion environments that allow nonagreement allow contraction (27), as confirmed by the fact that *'s* can be interpreted as *has* in those positions.

(47) a.   How many people's he been inviting?
      b.   'S he ([zi]) been to the doctor yet?

Thus, the restriction exemplified in (39) operates in a natural class of environments that is independently required for characterizing contraction. Therefore, this restriction is no challenge to the claim that nonagreement is a genuine syntactic option; in fact, it supports that claim. Although a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this reply, a direction to pursue would follow up on the suggestion above that nonagreement is really *absence* of agreement. This would differentiate default 3sg environments from true 3sg agreement environments for the purposes of lexical insertion. The facts could then be captured if only the deaccented/reduced and contracted allomorphs of *be* are default forms; since they cannot be inserted in the environments in (39) because of prosodic restrictions, these sentences are out. The full/accented singular forms also cannot be inserted, because the 3sg agreement features that would trigger their insertion are absent.[26]

It is worth noting that Sobin's (1997) virus-based account of the impossible nonagreeing forms seems less promising than the direction I have suggested. Sobin (fn. 15) hypothesizes that (39b) is out essentially because of register clash: the interposition of *I think* is claimed to be quite formal, and formality triggers viruses. It does not appear that the same could be said for (39a) and (39c), however, so a generalization is being missed. Furthermore, all three environments in (39) involve elements breaking up adjacency among the pieces of the ''*there are* . . . '' virus, so it is paradoxical that precisely here, the plural is obligatory.

Let us turn now to the impossibility of nonagreement in presentational *there* contexts, (40)–(42). I explain this restriction in terms of a fundamental structural difference between the

---

[26] Of course, the deaccented forms can also be used to express true 3sg agreement with an NP subject. What is crucial is that they are also default forms, whereas the full forms are compatible only with real 3sg agreement.

two *there* constructions, namely, the fact that the associate NP is in an A-position in the existential but an Ā-position in the presentational. Before showing how this derives the agreement facts, I briefly review the evidence for this analysis.

It has long been noted that existential and presentational *there* sentences differ in numerous syntactic and semantic ways (e.g., Milsark 1974, Aissen 1975, Safir 1985, Lumsden 1988). Among these differences are the following:

- Existentials exhibit the (in)definiteness effect; presentationals do not.

(48) a.   There walked into the room the one man she had no desire to see.
     b. *There was the one man she had no desire to see in the room.

- Presentationals allow a much larger set of verbs than existentials do.

(49) a. *There walked a unicorn into the room.
     b.   There walked into the room a fierce-looking unicorn.

- Presentationals have a heaviness requirement on the associate; existentials do not.

(50) a.   There was a man in the room.
     b. ?*There ran into the room a man.
     c.   There ran into the room a man who turned out to be the nation's most wanted criminal.

- Presentationals require that the associate be focused, and existentials do not, as illustrated by the following question-answer pairs:

(51) Q: Where did his favorite brother stand?
     A: *There stood beside him his favorite brother.

(52) Q: Where did you hear a lot of noise?
     A: There was a lot of noise in the kitchen.

- Extraction from a presentational *there* IP is blocked, but from an existential it is possible.

(53) a.   What did he say there was on his desk?
     b. *What did he say there stands on his desk?

On the basis of some of these observations, coupled with their own extensive argumentation including constituency tests, Rochemont and Culicover (1990:126) arrive at the following conclusion: ''P[resentational]-*there* supplants an A-bar bound trace, while E[xistential]-*there* does not supplant a trace at all, but rather a pleonastic pronominal empty category which heads an unbalanced chain at S-structure, adapting the analysis of Safir (1985).'' They argue that the associate in presentational *there*-insertion is right-adjoined to IP, giving it many of the same properties as a heavy-shifted NP. Safir (1985) himself suggests right-adjunction to VP, as does Lumsden (1988).

Abstracting away from the precise adjunction site, what is relevant here is the claim that the presentational associate is in an Ā-position and hence cannot get Case on its own in situ. In contrast, Lasnik (1995) argues that the NP that follows the verb *be* in an existential is assigned

Case by *be* (and similarly for other unaccusatives);[27] under standard assumptions, it must be in an A-position. Essentially following the authors cited above, I analyze the presentational associate as the Ā-head of a chain whose Case position is the subject position occupied by *there*; *there* is the spell-out of a trace, its presence being forced by the need for overt material in subject position in English. In contrast, on my analysis the relationship between existential *there* and its associate is not that of members of a syntactic chain in the relevant sense. In particular, each of the two receives Case independently in situ, and as Lasnik (1995) also concludes, there is no ''Case transmission'' in existential *there* sentences. Thus, the crucial point is that in presentationals, but not existentials, the associate is forced to be in a chain with subject position in order to satisfy the Case Filter.

This analysis accounts immediately for the unavailability of nonagreement in presentational sentences. Since the subject position effectively contains the ϕ-features of the associate, agreement with those features is forced by whatever generally forces agreement with NP subjects. On the other hand, in existentials only the features of the non-NP *there* itself are in subject position, so agreement with the associate can arise only as *nonsubject* agreement, which I have argued is not obligatory, as a consequence of the two grammatical options for dealing with noncanonical subjects.[28]

4 Conclusion

Plural associate agreement in English ECs is clearly not the result of a virus. Singular agreement in many of the same environments, I have argued, is not grammar-contrary either. The simplest way of incorporating both of these facts into the grammar of English is to allow that subject *there* can either block agreement altogether, or fail to participate in agreement at all, leaving I free to agree with some other element. Since the need for both types of structures within UG is well motivated, we should not have qualms about making this move, particularly since we thereby gain greater empirical coverage than we get by maintaining that either of these constructions is extragrammatical.

References

Aissen, Judith. 1975. Presentational-*there* insertion: A cyclic root transformation. In *Papers from the Eleventh Regional Meeting, Chicago Linguistic Society*, 1–14. Chicago Linguistic Society, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.

Aoun, Joseph, Elabbas Benmamoun, and Dominique Sportiche. 1994. Agreement, word order, and conjunction in some varieties of Arabic. *Linguistic Inquiry* 25:195–220.

---

[27] I am suppressing numerous details of Lasnik's proposal that are not relevant here, while adopting the key claim that the main verb of an EC is necessarily involved in licensing the Case of the associate.

[28] If it is correct to assimilate nonagreement with fronted *wh*-phrases to nonagreement with *there*, then the contrast between subject and nonsubject agreement would drive us to the conclusion that the subject position in a nonagreement question like *Where's the boys?* is occupied by (perhaps a trace of) *where*, rather than *the boys*. Although the implications of this idea go beyond the scope of this article, it gains some plausibility from the observation that copular *be* often allows either of two constituents to raise to subject position (cf. Moro 1997 and work cited there), whereas auxiliary *be* generally does not. This could explain why nonagreement with *wh*-fronting is restricted to copular *be*, (29) versus (30).

Barnes, Michael P. 1986. Subject, nominative and oblique case in Faroese. *Scripta Islandica* 37:13–46.

Barnes, Michael P. 1992. Faroese syntax: Achievements, goals and problems. In *The Nordic languages and modern linguistics 7*, ed. Jonna Louis-Jensen and Jóhan Hendrik W. Poulson, 17–27. Tórshavn: Føroya FróLskaparfelag.

Bock, Kathryn, and Kathleen M. Eberhard. 1993. Meaning, sound and syntax in English number agreement. *Language and Cognitive Processes* 8:57–99.

Bock, Kathryn, and Carol A. Miller. 1991. Broken agreement. *Cognitive Psychology* 23:45–93.

Bresnan, Joan. 1994. Locative inversion and the architecture of Universal Grammar. *Language* 70:72–131.

Chomsky, Noam. 1995. *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Christiansen, Morten H. 1997. The (un)grammaticality of doubly center-embedded sentences: A connectionist perspective. Poster presented at the 10th CUNY Sentence Processing Conference, Santa Monica, Calif.

Deevy, Patricia. 1998. A processing account of partial agreement effects. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, New York City.

DeWolf, Gaelan Dodds. 1992. *Social and regional factors in Canadian English*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press.

Emonds, Joseph E. 1985. *A unified theory of syntactic categories*. Dordrecht: Foris.

Emonds, Joseph E. 1986. Grammatically deviant prestige constructions. In *A festschrift for Sol Saporta,* ed. Michael Brame, Heles Contreras, and Frederick Newmeyer, 93–129. Seattle, Wash.: Noit Amrofer.

Fodor, Janet Dean. 1979. Superstrategy. In *Sentence processing: Psycholinguistic studies presented to Merrill Garrett*, ed. William E. Cooper and Edward C. T. Walker, 249–279. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Frazier, Lyn. 1985. Syntactic complexity. In *Natural language processing: Psychological, computational, and theoretical perspectives*, ed. David D. Dowty, Lauri Karttunen, and Arnold M. Zwicky, 129–189. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gazdar, Gerald, and Geoffrey K. Pullum. 1980. *There* is there. In *York Papers in Linguistics 8*. Department of Linguistics, University of York.

Gibson, Edward, and James Thomas. In press. Memory limitations and structural forgetting: The perception of complex ungrammatical sentences as grammatical. *Language and Cognitive Processes*.

Green, Georgia M. 1984. Why agreement must be stipulated for *there*-insertion. In *ESCOL '84: Proceedings of the First Eastern States Conference on Linguistics,* 27–34. Department of Linguistics, The Ohio State University, Columbus. [Distributed by CLC Publications, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.]

Henry, Alison. 1995. *Belfast English and Standard English: Dialect variation and parameter setting*. New York: Oxford.

Jang, Youngjun. 1996. Locative inversion and the EPP. In *ESCOL '96: Proceedings of the Thirteenth Eastern States Conference on Linguistics,* 138–147. CLC Publications, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

Johannessen, Janne Bondi. 1996. Partial agreement and coordination. *Linguistic Inquiry* 27:661–676.

Kimball, John, and Judith Aissen. 1971. I think, you think, he think. *Linguistic Inquiry* 2:241–246.

Lasnik, Howard. 1995. Case and expletives revisited: On Greed and other human failings. *Linguistic Inquiry* 26:615–633.

Lisenbey, Jennifer. 1995. Subject/verb agreement in interrogative constructions with ''where.'' Donaghey Scholars Program final project, University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Lumsden, Michael. 1988. *Existential sentences: Their structure and meaning*. London: Croom Helm.

McCloskey, James. 1991. *There, it,* and agreement. *Linguistic Inquiry* 22:563–567.

Meechan, Marjory, and Michele Foley. 1994. On resolving disagreement: Linguistic theory and variation—*There's bridges. Language Variation and Change* 6:63–85.

Milsark, Gary Lee. 1974. Existential sentences in English. Doctoral dissertation, MIT, Cambridge, Mass.

Morgan, J. L. 1972. Verb agreement as a rule of English. In *Papers from the Eighth Regional Meeting, Chicago Linguistic Society,* 278–286. Chicago Linguistic Society, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.

Moro, Andrea. 1997. *The raising of predicates: Predicative noun phrases and the theory of clause structure.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Munn, Alan. 1993. Topics in the syntax and semantics of coordinate structure. Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park.

Nathan, Geoffrey S. 1981. What's these facts about? *Linguistic Inquiry* 12:151–153.

Nicol, J. L., K. I. Forster, and C. Veres. 1997. Subject-verb agreement processes in comprehension. *Journal of Memory and Language* 36:569–587.

Pearlmutter, Neal J., Susan M. Garnsey, and Kathryn Bock. 1997. Agreement processes in sentence comprehension. Ms., Northeastern University, Boston, Mass., and University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Rochemont, Michael S., and Peter W. Culicover. 1990. *English focus constructions and the theory of grammar.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Safir, Kenneth J. 1985. *Syntactic chains.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schütze, Carson T. 1996. *The empirical base of linguistics: Grammaticality judgments and linguistic methodology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schütze, Carson T. 1997. INFL in child and adult language: Agreement, case and licensing. Doctoral dissertation, MIT, Cambridge, Mass.

SigurLsson, Halldór Ármann. 1992. The case of quirky subjects. *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 49:1–26.

Smallwood, Carolyn. 1997. Dis-agreement in Canadian English existentials. In *Proceedings of the 1997 Annual Conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association,* 227–238. Calgary Working Papers in Linguistics, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alta.

Smallwood, Carolyn. 1998. Agreement in existential and other locative clauses. Ms., University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont.

Sobin, Nicholas. 1997. Agreement, default rules, and grammatical viruses. *Linguistic Inquiry* 28:318–343.

Sparks, Randall B. 1984. Here's a few more facts. *Linguistic Inquiry* 15:179–183.

Department of Linguistics
UCLA
Box 951543
Los Angeles, California 90095-1543

cschutze@ucla.edu