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Case Assignment in *There*-Constructions\*

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## 1. Introduction

Arguing against the Case transmission approach to there-constructions,<sup>1</sup> Belletti (1988) and Lasnik (1992) claim that be and unaccusative verbs directly assign Case to the postverbal NP (henceforth, PVNP) in there-constructions.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I will critically review their argument and argue that their proposal runs into serious problems.

## 2. Against Belletti (1988)

By analogy with the Finnish partitive Case, which "always selects an indefinite meaning for the NP that carries it," Belletti (1988) proposes that there exists an inherent partitive Case in English, since the Definiteness Effect (henceforth, DE)<sup>3</sup> holds in there-constructions. Furthermore, she states that the exceptions to the DE are existential there-constructions either with a list reading<sup>4</sup> or with a uniqueness interpretation,<sup>5</sup> which is "a particular instance of the list reading." This implies that there are no exceptions to the DE in either existential there-constructions with existential reading or there-constructions with unaccusative verbs. However, the facts are not that simple.

Holmback (1984: 200) points out that there are many existential there-constructions with definite NPs in the PVNP positions that can be construed neither with a list reading nor with a deictic reading as shown in (1):

(1) a. There is the perfect man for Mary in my 210 class.

- b. There is the right proportion of men to women in this bar.
- c. There is the man of my dreams in the garden.

Observe also the contrast between the examples in (1) and (2) with the definite NPs in the PVNP positions:

(2) \*There is the man in the room. (Belletti 1988: 3)

According to Belletti's account, all the examples in (1) and (2) should be equally unacceptable. However the sentences in (1) are completely acceptable. Therefore, Belletti's partitive Case approach cannot distinguish between the acceptable and unacceptable examples.

Moreover, Hannay (1985: 111) provides existential there-sentences that can occur in situations where neither indefinite interpretation nor list reading is available:<sup>6</sup>

- (3) a. It was five o'clock and there was still most of the shopping to do.
- b. Whenever I try to park my car in the garage there's that damn boat of yours completely blocking the driveway.
- c. I had intended going to the match but there was my uncle from Australia here so I couldn't go.

If the observation relating to (3) is correct, it is difficult to see how the partitive Case assignment approach accounts for the definite description in existential there-constructions, since Belletti assumes that partitive Case is assigned only to indefinite NPs. Even though the examples in (1) and (3) should have both existential and list readings, the condition on partitive Case assignment still remains unclear.

Let us now proceed to consider there-constructions with unaccusative verbs. Breivik (1983: 364) provides counterexamples to the DE in the construction at issue:

- (4) a. There follow the first bars of 'Land of Hope and Glory', an unintended tribute to the British Embassy in Santiago, which welcomed the coup with undisguised approval...
- b. There has long existed the suspicion that cancer may be a viral disease.

Similar examples are found in computer-based corpora. Some examples follow:

- (5) a. There followed the historic appropriations and budget fight, in which the General Assembly decided to tackle executive powers.  
(Brown Corpus B01 0060)
- b. Again in Tosca there arises the problem of where Tosca is to stand when the firing squad is assembling to shoot Cavaradossi.  
(Lob Corpus G43 135)

Let us now consider the contrast in (4), (5) and (6):

- (6) \*There arose the storm here. (Belletti 1988: 4)

Belletti's approach rules out (6) but it would wrongly rule out acceptable sentences in (4) and (5), thereby failing to account for the contrast between (4)-(5) and (6). Here again, it is unclear what condition should be imposed on partitive Case assignment. To my knowledge, no one has claimed that the list reading is available to there-constructions with unaccusative verbs. In order to account for the sentences in (4) and (5), Belletti must somehow relax the condition on partitive Case assignment, or assign to them another kind of reading. The preceding discussion indicates that the DE does not provide reliable evidence for partitive Case assignment in there-constructions, thereby implying that English may not have an inherent partitive Case.

### 3. Problems with Lasnik's (1992) Approach

### 3.1 Small Clause and Expletive There

As a piece of evidence for the proposal that be is a Case assigner, Lasnik (1992: 384) presents examples like (7) and (8):

(7) a. We consider [there to be a man in the room].

b. \*We consider [there a man in the room].

(8) a. I want [there to be someone here at 6:00].

b. \*I want [there someone here at 6:00].

(Cf. I want [someone (to be) here at 6:00].)

He observes that though there in (7b) and (8b) is in the Case-marked position, the examples are ill-formed. Moreover, Lasnik notes that no general ban exists against there as the (surface) subject of a small clause. Objecting to the Case transmission approach, he states that under a Case transmission account, the deviance of (7b) and (8b) is "mysterious" because Case must be transmitted from there to the argument NP. To account for the contrast in (7) and (8), Lasnik (1992: 384) suggests the following:

(9) Case is assigned only under government by a Case assigner.

According to this suggestion, a man in (7b) and someone in (8b) are assigned no Case because they are not governed by the Case assigner be.

An immediate question arises with respect to Lasnik's account. Observe the following sentences:

(10) a. I consider Nomo to be a good pitcher.

b. I consider Nomo a good pitcher.

As Nakajima (1991: 53, Note 4) points out, if the second NP in a small clause were to be Case-marked, example (10b) requires be as a Case assigner. The grammaticality of (10b) indicates that the NP a good pitcher, being a predicate nominal, can be Caseless, as suggested by Chomsky (1986: 95).<sup>7</sup> Similar remarks apply to a man in (7b) and someone

in (8b). If this is correct, the ungrammaticality of (7b) and (8b) has nothing to do with the proposal that be is a Case assigner.

### 3.2 An Alternative Account

To account for the contrast in (7) and (8), it is important to capture the distribution of the expletive there. In English there is a class of expressions that can occur only in subject. Radford (1988: 319) refers to them as Subject Expressions,<sup>8</sup> which include expletive there and subject idiom chunks such as those in the following:<sup>9</sup>

- (11) a. Mum's the word.
- b. The jig is up.
- c. There is a man in the room.

To confirm the behavior of subject expressions, observe the following contrast in (12)-(14):<sup>10</sup>

- (12) a. Mum<sub>i</sub> seems [<sub>IP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> to be the word].
- b. \*Mum<sub>i</sub> seems [<sub>SC</sub> t<sub>i</sub> the word].

- (13) a. The jig<sub>i</sub> seems [<sub>IP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> to be up].
- b. \*The jig<sub>i</sub> seems [<sub>SC</sub> t<sub>i</sub> up].

- (14) a. There<sub>i</sub> seems [<sub>IP</sub> t<sub>i</sub> to be a man in the room].
  - b. \*There<sub>i</sub> seems [<sub>SC</sub> t<sub>i</sub> a man in the room].
- (Cf. John<sub>i</sub> seems [<sub>SC</sub> t<sub>i</sub> happy].)

The (a) structures in (12)-(14) are well-formed, since subject expressions originate in the subject position of the lower IP, and raise up to the subject position of the higher clause, receiving nominative Case. On the other hand, the (b) structures in (12)-(14) are ill-formed even though the subject expressions move from the small clause subject position to the Case-marked subject position. Therefore, I assume that the contrast in (12)-(14) largely depends upon whether overt INFL to licences subject expressions in the D-structure subject position and

that the Case requirement may not be the crucial factor in the grammatical status of subject expressions. On the basis of this observation, I would like to suggest the following constraint:

- (15) At D-structure, subject expressions must be in the specifier position of the overt INFL which licences the subject position.<sup>11</sup>

This constraint implies that the lack of licenser may have a grave effect on the grammatical status of the small clauses with subject expressions.<sup>12</sup> With (15) in mind, observe the contrast in (16)-(18):

- (16) a. I want mum to be the word.  
b. \*I want mum the word. (Napoli 1988: 337)
- (17) a. I didn't expect the jig to be up so soon.  
b. \*I didn't expect the jig up so soon. (Napoli 1988: 337)
- (18) a. I believe there to be a man in the room.  
b. \*I believe there a man in the room.

Though be must co-occur with to in the (a) sentences of (16)-(18), I assume that overt INFL to is more responsible for the grammatical status of the subject expressions since the absence of be in (10) does not render this example ungrammatical. Then the contrast in (16)-(18) is attributable to the constraint on subject expressions suggested above.<sup>13</sup> The same is also true for the contrast in (7) and (8), thereby allowing us to dispense with the counterintuitive proposal that be is a Case assigner.

#### 4. Conclusion

To summarize, I have argued against the proposal by Belletti (1988) and Lasnik (1992) that be and unaccusatives are Case assigners. Specifically, Belletti's partitive Case approach fails to account for the full range of the DE in there-constructions, indicating that there may not exist an inherent partitive Case in English. The constraint in

(15) accounts for subject expressions in small clauses without recourse to the proposal that be is a Case assigner.

#### Notes

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1. (i) There<sub>i</sub> is a man<sub>i</sub> in the room.

Under the Case transmission approach, nominative Case is assigned to there, since INFL governs the subject position occupied by there. It is then assumed that the postverbal NP in a non-Case-marked position can receive Case by coindexation with the subject position. The same mechanism is also applied to there-constructions with unaccusative verbs. For further details, see Safir (1985: 28-29) and Chomsky (1986: 131-137).

2. Shlonsky (1987), Chomsky (1989), and Kurafuji (1990) are also main advocates of this position. Lasnik (1993, 1995) continues to assume his approach.

3. For the original analysis of there-constructions and the DE, see Milsark (1974, 1977) and Safir (1985). For the pragmatic treatment of the DE, see Hannay (1985), and Birner and Ward (1993).

4. According to Rando and Napoli (1978: 300-301), list reading is classified into partial list reading in (i) and complete list reading in (ii):

(i) Q. How could we get there?

A. Well, there's the trolley...



(ii) Q. Who all has been in this room since closing time?

A. There's only the night-watchman.

5. Under the uniqueness interpretation, Belletti (1988: 16, Note 35) judges (i) below as acceptable, given the context that the PVNP the newspaper refers to "today's newspaper," i.e., today's newspaper is regarded as "a unique object." On the other hand, such interpretation cannot be given to the book in (ii), since the DE shows up:

(i) There is the newspaper on the table.

(ii) \*?There is the book on the table.

But one of our informants comments that (ii) is acceptable when the speaker and hearer share the common knowledge about the book.

6. Though our informants wavered in judgements of sentences in (3), at least (3b) was unanimously judged grammatical.

7. For the argument that predicate nominal can be Caseless, see also Safir (1985: 76-77).

8. I am grateful to Kunihiro Iwakura for drawing my attention to Radford (1988).

9. Though Radford (1988: 319) regards expletive it as one member of the subject expressions, I exclude expletive it from the group, since expletive it can appear in object position:

(i) I blame it on you that we can't go. (Iwakura 1991: 98)

10. I leave open the categorial status of small clause. There may be another explanation of (14b) that the there seem construction cannot take 'concrete' NP but can take 'abstract' NP in the PVNP position:

(i) \*There seems a man in the room.

(ii) There seems a good reason for that.

This is suggested to me by Carol Rinnert (personal communication).

11. Bresnan (1982: 79-80) explains the contrast as in (7) and (8), claiming that an idiomatic relationship holds between expletive there and be.

12. In Lasnik (1995: 624-625, Note 14), a reviewer points out the similarity between there-constructions and sentence idioms such as The jig is up. But Lasnik does not examine the possible account based on the behavior of subject expressions.

13. The following examples cited from Napoli (1988) are problematic for the constraint:

(i) a. I never expected the cat out of the bag so soon.

b. With mum the word, we can count on silence.

c. With the jig up, John left town.

The subject expression in (i a) can appear in small clause. Idioms may differ in degree of "frozenness." Mum the word and the jig up are ungrammatical in small clauses, whereas they are fully grammatical in absolute phrases. Only expletive there is consistently ungrammatical in both small clause and absolute phrase:

(ii) \*With there another problem, their divorce is assured. (Napoli 1988: 342)

I leave these problems for future research.

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