There's more to (non-)agreement

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Virtually all work in the Principles & Parameters framework takes subject-verb agreement to be the fundamental diagnostic for a (syntactic) subject. However, while the grammaticality of (1a) and (1c) can be explained under the (widely accepted) assumption that the element *there* is phi-feature impoverished, and while the grammaticality of (1a) and (1c) could in fact serve as evidence for subjecthood of *there* (Williams 1994, 2004, Hazout 2004), the grammaticality contrast between (1b) and (1c) is obviously in need of explanation.

(1)   a. There are students in the room.
       b. *There is students in the room.
       c. There's students in the room.

One way of accounting for the contrast between (1b) and (1c) would be by considering that *'s* in (1c) is a clitic form of *has*, and not of *is* (i.e., *be*). As is well-kown, many languages such as Albanian, Bulgarian, French, Greek, Spanish, to mention a few, (may) use the verb *have* in existential constructions of the type in (1). Moreover, this phenomenon is also attested in Germanic, as in (2) from Vorarlberg German (Czinglar 1997) and (3) from Swiss German.

(2) *Es hat lutr Gänseblüemli im Garte*.
    there has many daisies in garden
    'There are many daisies in the garden.'

(3) *Es hätt füüf geografischi Rüüm, wo o vom Wätter här sehr underschidläch chöi si:*
    there has five geographic areas where even of weather from very different can be
    'There are five geographic areas, which even weather-wise can be very different'

If *'s* in (1c) is a clitic form of *has* synchronically, we would expect the full form to occur at least in certain contexts and/or other tenses, but while some speakers will accept *there was* (i.e., past tense) in the given construction, *there had* or *there'd* seem to be unattested yet, except in Transitive Expletive Constructions (TECs) in (adult) contemporary Belfast English (Henry 2004). We suggest that the connection is diachronic, and that *there's* < *there has* has been reanalysed as a separate item *there's* different from *there is*, corresponding to e.g. French *il y a* or Spanish *hay*. Yet, it remains doubtful that existentials with *there* and (full-form) *have* are found at any stage of the history of English, but if such come to be attested, they would constitute strong evidence for the view that *'s* in (1c) is a clitic form of *has* and not of *is*. However, while we have found no occurrences of *have* as a copula in the context of *there*, we find attested occurrences of *have* in TEC in the context of expletive *it*, as shown in (4) below from Fischer et al. (2000).

(4)   Hit hafaD eac þis land sealtseaþas, and hit hafaD hat wπter   (Bede1.0.26.12)
       it has also this land salt-springs and it has hot water

Interestingly, Henry (2004) argues for basically the same idea but the opposite directionality in analysing *there*-TECs in Belfast English, as illustrated in her examples in (5) and (6):

(5) There's one student missed every class   (Henry 2004:1)
= There is some student who missed every class
reanalysed as:
(6) There has some student handed in the work

Further, though we did not find attestations of the forms *there has, there have*, or *there had* at the period when contracted auxiliaries are coming into use (early 17th century), our search in

Early Middle English texts in the Penn-Helsinki corpus revealed, however, that at this stage there are relatively many examples of what, for lack of a better term, we call formal/default singular agreement between *there* and a postcopular DP in the plural, as shown in the examples (7) through (9). (Note that even in those varieties of German that use *haben* 'have' in existential constructions, no form other than *hat* is attested.)

(7) There is 3 shillings
(8) There is but 12 score heringes
(9) There is but 3 or 4 good houses

The facts illustrated in (7) through (9) may be taken to show that the current *there's* pattern is diachronically derived from the construction type depicted in (7) through (9), most likely through cliticisation of *is*, with a consequent loss of the full *there is* in non-agreeing contexts. Corroborating evidence for this view comes from the co-existence of the contracted form, as in (10) through (12). Secondly, the data in (7)-(12) may be interpreted as supporting the idea that expletive *there* started being used in contexts where previously the expletive *it* was used.

(10) There's three of four (..) hanging up in the...
(11) There's things making...
(12) There's trickes enough to rid thy hand...

Also quite often, there is default (i.e., singular) agreement when the associate DP is preposed, as in (13), a structure that was lost (but see Ingham 2001 for its distribution). Following Williams (2000), Ingham proposes that the expletive sits in SpecIP, while the associate QP adjoins to SpecIP through quantifier raising, as these commonly occur with quantified DPs. The latter scenario, however, cannot explain the variation in agreement found with this pattern, as one would expect Q-raising to trigger agreement.

(13) ... know how many pounds there is thereof

The central claim that we would like to put forward is that in late Middle English and Early Modern English there are two *there*-s, both expletive, and required by EPP. One is generated in SpecIP (the standard analysis of *there* in the history of English), and one which is German- and/or Scandinavian-like and inserted directly in SpecCP, the latter being the formal default singular agreement one (cf. also Breivik 1991, Falk 1993, Holmberg & Platzack 1995, Vikner 1995). Our analysis is very much in line with the nature of C and I as functional heads in the history of English (van Kemenade 1997).

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