Chapter 7 Nonreferential *It* and *There* (TGE)

**Introduction**

- Two functions of *it* and *there*:
  - referential pronoun: referring to some object or some other element in the discourse
  - non-referential: functioning as filling in subject position.

**NONREFERENTIAL *IT***

- Referential *it*:
  1. He picked up a flat stone and skipped *it* across the surface of the water.

- Non-referential *it*:
  2. *It's* raining pretty hard.

*it* in (2) is subject;

3. a. Is it raining? SAI
   b. It was raining earlier, wasn't it? Tag Q
   c. It's been raining all day. Contracted with *has* (only pronoun subjects)
   d. It's a rainy day. Contracted with *be*
   e. *It are raining.* subject-verb agreement

**Uses of Sentences with Nonreferential *It***

(4)  
- a. It's sunny today. *weather*
- b. It's raining. *weather*
- c. It's 20 degrees below zero out there. *temperature*
- d. What time is it? *time*
- e. It's 4:30. *time*
- f. I'm not even sure what day of the week it is. *days*
- g. It's Tuesday, October 29. *dates*
- h. It's Halloween. *holidays*
- i. It's only 2 weeks until we go on vacation. *elapsed time*
- j. It's a good 250 miles from there to Washington, D.C. *distances*
- k. It's so noisy in this restaurant that I can hardly hear myself think. *environment*
- l. Can you open a window? It's hot in here. *environment*

=> *it* fills in subject position.

**Special Constructions with Nonreferential *It***

i) Cleft Sentences (as subject):
(5) It's my brother who got married, not me.
(6) It was 6 months ago that he got this promotion.

ii) Extraposed Subject Clauses (as subject)
(7) a. It is interesting [that you believe that].
    b. It's unusual [to find such wisdom in someone so young.]
       - remarkable, unusual
(8) a. It annoys me [that he is always late].
    b. It upsets her [to see her daughter behave that way.]
       - astound, depress, disturb

Pseudo-cleft constructions
(9) a. What is interesting is that you believe that. (cf. 7a)
    b. What annoys me is that he is always late. (cf. 8a)
    c. What I have to do is study hard.

Exercise 7.1
Identify the use of it in each sentence as referential or nonreferential.
Example: It's been snowing all day.
Answer: nonreferential
1. It was so smoky in the room that my eyes were watering.
2. The lost and found department called. They think they found your watch, but you will have to go and identify it.
3. Speaker A: Are you going out?
   Speaker B: Are you kidding? It's freezing out there.
4. He is so disorganized that he doesn't even know what day it is.
5. He found a good solid stock and invested all his money in it.
6. It's so great to be here with you.
7. It's strange that this door would be open.

Nonreferential THERE
- Referential there:
  (10) a. I was in Paris in 1926. It was there that I met Ernest Hemingway and Ford Maddox Ford.
    b. Put the boxes over there.

- Non-referential/existential there: there refers to nothing.
  (11) There is a unicorn in the garden. (A unicorn is in the garden.)

- there fills in subject position:
(12) a. Are there any cookies left? SAI
   b. There was another road, wasn't there? Tag Q
   c. There's something we need to talk about. contracted with be

Contractions and Their Occurrences
• Contracted with are;
(13) a. There's a hole in my tire.
   b. There're lots of deer out in the field.

• Uncontracted forms in a short answer:
(14) a. Is there any milk left in the fridge? Yes, there is.
   *Yes, there's.
   b. Are there any apples left? Yes, there are.
   *Yes, there're.

• Contracted with not:
(15) A: Are there any good beaches on this side of the island?
    B: No, there aren't.
    No, there are not.

• With modal verbs:
(16) a. There must be another solution to this problem.
    b. There would be at least three other people who could tell you.
    c. There might be more than one solution.

• Contracted with auxiliaries:
(17) a. There'll be over 3,000 people at the concert. will
    b. There'd be at least three other people who could tell you would
    c. There's been some criticism of his book. has
    d. There've been several objections to that plan. have
    e. There'd been a lot of talk about his resignation. had

Subject-Verb Agreement
• In there constructions, the verb (be) agrees in number with the following NP:

18) a. There are two beds in my room.
    b. *There is two beds in my room.

(19) He served a number of delicious dishes. There was king prawns cooked in chili, salt, and pepper, which is a big favorite of mine.
     (the part in italic is considered a meal)
(20) a. There was 20 pounds of cocaine hidden in the trunk of the car.
    b. There's 30 dollars in his wallet.
c. There's only five minutes left.
d. There were a number of issues that he wanted to discuss.
e. *There was a number of issues that he wanted to discuss.

• Exceptions or violations of agreement
Cartoon: It seems like every summer there's more and more of these things around.
Correct form:
(21) It seems that every summer, there are more of these things around.

♣ These days people tend to use there's even before plural NPs.
  There’s a boy and two girls in the cafe.
  It seems that the agreement rule in the there construction is changing.

Summary (p. 135)

Exercise 7.2
Identify the use of there in each sentence as referential or nonreferential.

Example: He climbed to the top of the hill. From he could see the entire valley.
Answer: referential (There refers to the top of the hill.)
  1. I don't think there are any more ties like that one.
  2. When he arrived in San Diego, he went straight to the hotel. There he met his brother.
  3. Are you telling me that there are only three cookies left?
  4. There was a time when we couldn't afford a new car.
  5. You're going to the Caspian Sea? Well, you certainly won't see any whales there. But you might catch a few sturgeon.

Exercise 7.3
Indicate whether each sentence is grammatical. If it is ungrammatical, explain what is wrong with it.

Example: There's quite a lot of students who want to see the chancellor about the new tuition increase.
Answer: ungrammatical (the verb is doesn't agree in number with students)
  1. Is there any gas in that can over there? No, there isn't.
  2. There's quite a lot of really strange looking characters hanging around in the supermarket parking lot.
  3. There's a number of ways to do that!
  4. My guess is that there was over 40 pounds of powdered sugar in the bag.
  5. She told me that here was a dozen place mats in that drawer.
Nonreferential *There* in Discourse

- The basic function of non-referential *there* is to present information.

**Introducing New Information**

(22) *There* was a young lady from Niger  
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger;  
They returned from the ride  
With the lady inside,  
And the smile on the face of the tiger.

(23) *There's* a new sheriff in town.  
He used to work in Dodge City.

♣ *There* as Filler of the subject position:

The information theory puts **new information** at the end of a sentence and thus the subject position is likely to be empty. One of functions of non-referential *there* is a **filler** of the subject position.

**Responding to Questions**

- *There* constructions are used to provide the **new** information that was requested.

(24) A: I'm looking for a video store. D'ya know where I can find one?  
B: Yeah. Go down the street to the first stoplight. Turn left and go down that street about four... no, three blocks, and you'll see a mall. *There's* a video store on the far side of that mall.

**Shifting the Focus of a Discussion**

- *There* constructions are used to shift the focus of a discussion to a **new** but **related** topic.

(25) The general has embarked on what amounts to a one-candidate election campaign, since both of his main opponents are in exile and have been banned from voting. Public skepticism about the election next week is evident, and the turnout at political rallies has been low, consisting largely of civil servants and soldiers in civilian clothes, all loyal to the general.

*There are no reliable polls to suggest how the vote may go,* but few doubt that the general will prevail. Officials of the Human Rights Commission note that the computing apparatus for vote counting is in the hands of the current government.
Calling Something to Mind

The speaker uses *there* with the definite article *the* or demonstrative determiner *that* to remind a listener of something known to both of them.

(26) A: Well, you're taking your final classes this semester. You'll graduate in June and be off to your cushy job overseas. I'll bet you haven't got a care in the world.

B: Actually, I am not all that carefree yet. *There's still the* comprehensive exam. I've got to pass that before I graduate.

Typically, *there* is used with indefinite NPs (*a, some, two, ...*), not with the definite NPs.

Summary (p. 138)

Exercise 7.4

Indicate how nonreferential *there* is being used in the discourses below *(shift focus, introduce new information, respond to question regarding the existence of something, call something to mind).*

**Example:** *There's trouble on the other side of the chain-link fences surrounding the state government's Foothills Wildlife Research Facility.* The dusty pastures are ground zero for a deer-killing plague that is frighteningly similar to mad cow disease.

**Answer:** to introduce new information

1. The workers have expressed a desire to negotiate a new five-year contract with management. They believe that they hold most of the cards in such a negotiation, since the company recently signed a contract to produce a jet fighter for the government. The workers reason that the company will not be able to produce the fighter on time unless the company acquiesces to most of their demands.

   *At present, there is no indication of whether the management of the company is disposed to negotiate with the workers.* All attempts to discover what management thoughts are regarding negotiation have come up with nothing.
   
   [fs]

2. A: So why don't you buy that car? You have enough money to meet the price that the dealer is asking.

   B: *Well, there's still the sales tax and the luxury tax.* I don't think I can afford it when those extra costs are added on.
   
   [msc]

3. A: Can you tell me where the nearest post office is?

   B: Yeah. *There's one on 17th Street.*
   
   [qtr]
4. *There is a lot evidence that heredity is an important factor in health.* People who have a family history of diseases like cancer, diabetes, and Alzheimer's are much more likely to contract these conditions than people whose family history shows no record of them.

**ADDITIONAL FACTS ABOUT NONREFERENTIAL *THERE***

*Nonreferential* *There* *Sentences and Their Counterparts*

- *There* be an indefinite NP $\iff$ An indefinite NP be ---

$\implies$ (a) and (b) sentences are similar in meaning.

(27) a. There is a man standing under that tree.
   b. A man is standing under that tree.

(28) a. There are some very expensive cars in front of your house.
   b. Some very expensive cars are in front of your house.

- Only a *there* construction is allowed,
  - i) *When it describes an event, or*
  - ii) *When the indefinite NP is modified by a relative clause.*

(29) a. There was an accident on the freeway last night.
   b. *An accident was on the freeway last night.

(30) a. There are [[several possibilities] [that we haven't considered]]/
   b. *Several possibilities are that we haven't considered.*

**Nonreferential *There* with Verbs Other Than *Be***

- Verbs that allow *there* constructions
  1) verbs describing existence or position: dwell, exist, live, remain, stand
  2) verbs of motion or direction: approach, come, fly, gallop, go, run, walk
  3) verbs of happening or materializing: appear, arise, begin, develop, emerge, ensue, happen, occur, seem

   b. Deep within his breast *there smoldered* an unquenchable desire.
   c. *There comes* a time in everyone's life when you need to take a stand.

- The verbs tend to sound much better *when there is preceded by some phrase/clause,*
  and they sound better in written English than spoken English.

(32) a. There appeared a strange face in the window.
b. Just as she lit the old candle, there appeared a strange face in the window.

(33) a. There dwelled an ancient woodsman on the far side of the forest.
b. On the far side of the forest, there dwelled an ancient woodsman.
(34) Once upon a time, there lived an ancient mariner.

• In an academic writing, there remain ..
(35) There remain only two more issues to be dealt with.

• Raising verbs (seem, appear, be likely, tend, ...) when they are followed by be.
(36) There {seem, appear} to be several possible solutions to the problem.

• Not with ergative (unaccusative) verbs - they describe an event:
(37) a. *Over the past 10 years, there have died a number of famous authors.
b. *Soon afterward, there broke a large stained glass window in the cathedral.
c. *One day there disappeared a workman in the stockyard.

Idioms with Nonreferential There
(38) There's no telling what he will do. (= One cannot do ---)
(39) There's no getting out of it.
(40) There's no sidestepping the central issue of this campaign.

PROOBLEMS THAT ESL/EFL STUDENTS HAVE WITH NONREFERENTIAL IT AND THERE

The Absence of Nonreferential It (Chinese, Spanish, Italian)
(41) a. *Today very hot.
b. It's very hot today.

Korean: 오늘 날씨가 덥다.
today weather-Nom hot (No verb is used in Korean)
‘Today is hot/It is hot today’

Spanish/Italian speakers (beginning level, esp. those without formal instruction)
*Is very hot today.
Missing Relative Pronouns in Nonreferential *There Is/Are* Sentences (Chinese)

• Chinese speakers often omit a relative pronoun. (TGE, p. 441)
  - It occurs with high frequency in the written English of Hong Kong ESL students.

(42) a. *There are many varieties of cancer exist.*
   b. *There was a tire hanging from the roof served as their playground.*

(43) a. There are many varieties of cancer *that* exist.
   b. There was a tire hanging from the roof *that* served as a playground.

- It is a persistent error for Chinese speakers that needs to be addressed in teaching.

Incorrect Use of Polarity Items with Nonreferential *There* (Korean)

• *There's no ...* error with Korean speakers, especially in written English.

(44) a. *There's no any questions which check students' reading comprehension.*
   b. *There's no particular difficulties in understanding cultural background.*
   c. *Nevertheless, there is no any vocabulary or idioms lists. and no any grammatical explanation or exercises.*

(45) chayk eynun dane list ka eps-sup-ni-ta
    book in word list (nom.) (neg.) exist

(46) a. There aren't any word lists in the book.
   b. There are no word lists in the book.

• TGE: due to L1, supni- matching to *there’s*. (TG: Not clear!)

  TG: Korean structure:
  --- 어떤 것/책/ 사람은 없다. (우리에게는 어떤 차도 없었다.)
  any (어떤) --- NP(것/책/ 사람-things/books/people) *there's no* (없다)
  ‘없다’ (not exist) - lexical negative of ‘있다’(exist)

SUGGESTOPMS FOR TEACHING NONREFERENTIAL *IT* AND *THERE*

Nonreferential *It*

Activity 1: Weather Report (Beginning)

• role play

• to recommend to use a board with cut outs of the symbols for rain, snow, clouds,
sunny weather.

(47) a. It's raining in the northern part of the state.
    b. Tomorrow it's going to be sunny any cold.
    c. It's been a cold winter.

Nonreferential *There*

**Activity 2: Map Work (Beginning Through Low Intermediate)**
- Map activity:
  - In pairs, one student asks the other who has the same map.
  - Q: ‘What is across from the movie theater?’
    A: ‘There’s a school across from the movie theater.’
  - Students take turns asking and answering.

**Activity 3: Information Gap (Low Intermediate)**
- Use two pictures that differ slightly, let students discover similarities and differences.
- The teacher asks the students to answer the questions:
  *Is there a lamp in the room? No, there isn’t.*
  *Are there any pictures on the walls? No, there aren’t pictures on the wall.*
  *No, there are no pictures on the wall.*
- In pairs, one student asks the other to answer, and they take turns.

**Activity 4: Asking About a Familiar Environment (Intermediate)**
- It reflects the conversations that frequently occur when people meet for the first time.
- Pair work. One student asks the other about his/her hometown.
  *Is there a river/department store, a college? Yes, there is a department store.*
  *Are there high schools? How many are there? Yes, there is a high school.*
  *Is there a factory? ...*

**Activity 5: Writing Follow-Up (Beginning Through Low Intermediate)**
- Have students listen to or read a short passage about a city in another country.
- Have them list some of the good and bad points regarding the city and compare these with their own city or town.
- Have them write a series of pros and cons about their own city, which will involve non-referential *there* sentences.
- Have them write a short composition about their hometown.

**Activity 6: Analyzing the Use of Nonreferential *There* in Discourse (High Intermediate Through Low Advanced)**
- Have students collect examples from texts (in newspapers or magazines).
- Let them find functions of nonreferential *there*:
two major functions:  i) introducing new information  
ii) shifting the focus of a discussion

• Compare the *there* sentence in (45) and the ones without in (49).

(48) *There is a lot of evidence that heredity is an important factor in health.* People who have a family history of disease such as cancer, diabetes, and Alzheimer's are much more like to contract these conditions than people whose family history shows no record of them.

(49) a. We know that heredity is an important factor in health because we have a lot of evidence of this.

b. That heredity is an important factor in health is supported by a lot of evidence.

• Show them how *there* sentences can be used to shift focus.

(50) Fenton's rivals in the field were not other photographers ... they were the illustrators and artists, and it is clear from Fenton's letters that he was alive to their shortcomings, as rivals are. The artists had the advantage over the photographer: they could do what they liked with their images, but he could in no way manipulate his. He was at the mercy of his lens, and of the long exposure time required for each shot.

*There were several different kinds of artists and illustrators around.* A painting by J. D. Luard called *The Welcome Arrived* gives us a kind of genre scene missing from Fenton's photographs.