

# On *there*-sentences

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## Abstract

This paper argues that in principle, the structures given in (1) and (2) are both available for *there*-sentences. (SC stands for a small clause.)

- (1) There be [<sub>sc</sub>NP Predicate] (Milsark 1974, Lasnik 1992, 1993)
- (2) There be [<sub>NP</sub>NP Predicate] (Jenkins 1972, Williams 1984)

Specifically, I propose that Milsark's (1974) ontological existential should be available in some of the *there*-sentences which appear to have the small clause structure.

However, due to the restrictions on stage-level/individual-level distinction of predicates and on postnominal modification, both of these structures are not always permitted. It is shown that this dual-structural analysis provides a principled account for phenomena regarding extraction and coordination. It also allows us to present an argument against Belvin and den Dikken 1997 for the availability of the contracted form in *there*-sentences.

This approach to the structure of the existential construction nicely fits with the minimalist program (Chomsky 1993, 1994, 1995). In constructing the phrase structure in a bottom-up fashion, a post-copula NP and a predicate are 'merged', and which of the nodes is projected to the next node depends on the two restrictions above. As long as these restrictions are not violated, either one of the nodes can be projected.

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## 0 Introduction

Milsark (1974), Stowell (1978), Lasnik (1992, 1993), among others, argue that in *there*-sentences, the post-copula NP and a predicate following it form a small clause (SC hypothesis). On the other hand, along the line pursued in Jenkins 1972, Williams (1984) proposes that they create a NP (NP hypothesis); in other words, for Williams, a predicate following the post-copula NP is a modifier within NP. For instance, (2a,b) are the structures proposed for (1) by these two opponents:

- (1) There is a fireman hungry.

- (2) There is [SC a fireman hungry] (SC Hypothesis)  
 a.  
 (2) There is [NP a fireman hungry] (NP Hypothesis)  
 b.

This paper argues that although (1) must have the SC structure given in (2a), both of the hypotheses are necessary to properly account for phenomena concerning extraction and coordination, and provides an account for the proper borderline between these two hypotheses. Building upon the evidence from the stage-level/individual-level distinction of predicates, it will be argued that Milsark's (1974) ontological existential should be available in some of the *there*-sentences which appear to have the SC structure. Based on this conclusion, we proceed to examine two hypotheses, namely, Slobin 1997/Chomsky 1995/Schutze 1997 and Belvin and den Dikken 1997, for the availability of the contracted form's in *there*-sentences.

## 1. The Stage/Individual-Level Distinction of Predicates

### 1.1. Milsark 1974

It is observed in Milsark 1974 that the existential construction allows a stage-level predicate, but not an individual-level predicate.<sup>1</sup> Thus, (1), which contains the stage-level predicate *hungry*, is grammatical, but (3), in which the individual-level predicate *intelligent* is involved, is ungrammatical:

- (3) \*There is a fireman intelligent.

Milsark also observes that the stage-level/individual-level distinction of predicates shows up in simple sentences, as can be seen in the contrast between (4a) and (4b):

- (4) A fireman is hungry.  
 a.  
 (4) \*A fireman is intelligent.  
 b.

He divides determiners into two categories: strong or weak. One distinction between these types of determiners is that strong determiners carry the presupposition that entities they are applying to exist, while weak ones lack this presupposition. Determiners like *every* and *most* are strong, whereas ones like an indefinite determiner and a *few* are weak. Then, based on this strong/weak distinction of determiners, he proposes (5) to account for the ungrammaticality of (3) and (4b):<sup>2</sup>

- (5) Individual-level predicates may only be predicated of strong NPs.

An NP accompanied by an indefinite article is a weak NP. Thus, (5) prohibits weak NPs like a *fireman* from occupying the subject position in examples like (4b). In the same manner, given that the structures of (1) and (3) are as in (6a,b), namely small clauses (SCs), later argued for in Milsark 1974, Stowell 1978 and Lasnik 1992, 1993, among others, (5) prevents weak NPs from appearing in the subject position of SCs containing an individual-level predicate. Thus, (3) is correctly predicted to be ungrammatical.

- (6) There is [<sub>sc</sub> a fireman hungry]  
 a.  
 (6) There is [<sub>sc</sub> a fireman intelligent]  
 b.

### 1.2. Diesing 1992

Diesing (1992) provides an explanation as to why (5) holds. Adopts Kratzer's (1989) idea that the

subject of a stage-level predicate appears inside the predicate and that of an individual-level predicate outside the predicate, Diesing hypothesizes that indefinites or their traces are interpreted as existential if they occupy a position within VP, while those outside VP are interpreted as generic. Following Tsai 1994, I assume that what Diesing means by VP is a predicative phrase and that indefinites or their traces are necessarily interpreted as existential if they occupy a position within "a predicate".

Given this hypothesis, let us consider (4a,b). (7a,b) represent the structures of these examples: [3](#)

- (7) a. [<sub>IP</sub> a fireman<sub>1</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> is [<sub>AP</sub> t<sub>1</sub> hungry]]]  
 (7) b. [<sub>IP</sub> a fireman [<sub>VP</sub> is [<sub>AP</sub> PRO intelligent]]]

Given these structures, the lack of the interpretation in which the indefinite is interpreted existentially in (4b) results from the absence of the trace of the indefinite within the predicate in (7b).

Given that *there*-sentences require an existential interpretation and that the postverbal NP and the AP form a SC, this hypothesis also provides an account for the contrast between (1) and (3). The structures of these examples are informally as follows:

- (8) a. [<sub>IP</sub> There [<sub>VP</sub> is [<sub>AP</sub> a fireman hungry]]]  
 (8) b. [<sub>IP</sub> There [<sub>VP</sub> is a fireman [<sub>AP</sub> PRO intelligent]]]

In (8b), the NP *a fireman* cannot be generated within the predicate since it is the subject of the individual-level predicate *intelligent*. Thus, under Diesing's hypothesis, this NP cannot be interpreted existentially. However, *there*-sentences require the existential interpretation. Hence, the conflict between the interpretation required by *there*-sentences and the one forced by the individual-level predicate results in the ungrammaticality of this example. In (8a), on the other hand, since *hungry* is stage-level, its subject is generated within the predicate, and thus, it allows the existential interpretation. Unlike the previous example, no conflict results.

### 1.3. The Prenominal/Postnominal Modifiers

Notice that the above accounts are based on the hypothesis that the postverbal NP and the embedded predicate form a SC (Milsark 1974, Stowell 1978, Lasnik 1992, 1993, among others). Another evidence supporting the SC hypothesis can be given, based on the stage-level/individual-level distinction of predicates. Notice that when a NP is accompanied by a prenominal modifier, the above-mentioned distinction between stage-level and individual-level predicates disappears, as shown in (9a,b):

- (9) a. There is a hungry fireman.  
 (9) b. There is an intelligent fireman.

If the embedded predicates in (1) and (3) were postnominal modifiers, a distinction between a prenominal modifier and a postnominal modifier would have to be made in order to account for the stage-level/individual-level distinction of predicates observed in (1) and (3). I believe that it is difficult, if not impossible, to make such a distinction in a principled manner. Thus, the grammaticality of (9a,b) further supports SC hypothesis.

## 2. The SC/NP Hypothesis

Given that the above evidence from the stage-level/individual-level distinction of predicates, as well as the evidence, provided by Milsark 1974, Stowell 1978 and Lasnik 1992, 1993, among others,

For the SC hypothesis is conclusive, the question to be addressed is whether the NP hypothesis, proposed in Jenkins 1972 and later argued for by Williams (1984), should be totally rejected.

In order to provide an answer to this question, let us first point out that there is a grammatical contrast between (10a,b) and (11a,b):

- (10) a. There is someone hungry.
- (10) b. There is someone intelligent.
  
- (11) a. There is a fireman hungry.
- (11) b. \*There is a fireman intelligent.

If it were correct that (10b) has the same SC structure as that of (11b), the above contrast would not be expected. The grammaticality of the former thus indicates that this example has a different structure. We have already observed in (9) that the contrast between stage-level and individual-level predicates is absent when a predicate appears within NP. Thus, since there is no such predicate distinction in (10), it seems natural to hypothesize that the AP in (10b) can be a postnominal modifier. In this regard, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik 1985 mention that most nouns cannot be modified by a bare adjective located in the post head position and phrases like *someone* and *something* are exceptions to this restriction. Therefore, in a typical case, the contrast, exemplified in (12), results:

- (12) a. A hungry/intelligent man came to the party.
- (12) b. \*A man hungry/intelligent came to the party.

Given this restriction, nothing seems to prevent the APs of both (10a,b) from being postnominal modifiers. This is the structure proposed in Williams 1984. The structures of these examples are, therefore, as follows:

(13) There is [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> someone] [<sub>AP</sub> hungry/intelligent]]

Following examples support this proposal (i.e., Williams 1984):

- (14) a. Someone hungry/intelligent came to the party.
- (14) b. Mary met someone hungry/intelligent.

Since the positions that the *someone hungry/intelligent* occupies in these examples are the positions where an animate NP is required, the grammaticality of these examples indicates that the structure given in (13) is correct.

The following table summarizes the discussion so far:

Table 1: Availability of NP- and SC-Structure

	(10a)	(10b)	(11a)	(11b)
NP Structure	OK	OK	*	*
SC Structure	OK	*	OK	*

Let us start with (10a,b). Since (10b) contains the individual-level predicate, the NP and the (individual-level) predicate cannot form a SC, due to the Milsark-Diesing account. Thus, the NP

structure, namely (13), is the only structure for this example. On the other hand, since the stage-level predicate is used in (10a), the NP and the (stage-level) predicate can form a SC also. Therefore, both the NP structure and the SC structure are available in this example. In contrast to (10a,b), (11a,b) do not allow the NP structure since postnominal modification is not allowed in general, as shown in (12). Therefore, these examples must contain a SC. However, in (11b), this possibility is also ruled out by the Milsark-Diesing account. Thus, only (11a) is grammatical, having only the SC structure.

Notice that the restriction on postnominal modification is not operative if a postnominal modifier is "heavy". This is why (15a,b) are grammatical, unlike (12b):

- (15) A fireman hungry enough to eat two pieces of huge steak came to  
a. the party.
- (15) A fireman intelligent enough to enter Harvard Law School came to  
b. the party.

Then, we predict that (11b) becomes grammatical if the postnominal modifier with the individual-level predicate is "heavy". This prediction is borne out. Witness the contrast between (11b) and (16) adopted from Milsark 1974:

- (16) There is a fireman intelligent enough to enter  
Harvard Law School.

The grammaticality of (16), then, provides further support for the hypothesis that NP-modification is also necessary for there-sentences. In the following section, this dual-structural analysis is shown to make correct predictions regarding two phenomena for there-sentences.

### 3. Predictions

#### 3.1. *Extraction*

Safir (1989) observes that (17a,b) are grammatical and suggests that a post-copula NP and a predicate following it form a SC:

- (17) What<sub>*t*</sub> was there a man happy about *t*?  
a.
- (17) What<sub>*t*</sub> was there someone happy about *t*?  
b.

If the post-copula NP and the predicate following it formed a NP in (17a,b), the WH-phrase *what* would be extracted out of the NP-modifier and should result in an island violation. Thus, the grammaticality of these examples indicates that the post-copula NP and the predicate following it do not create a NP. Accordingly, the SC hypothesis is supported.

Williams (1984), on the other hand, provides (18a,b) to show that a copula NP and a predicate following it do not form a SC:

- (18) How happy<sub>*t*</sub> do you consider Bill *t*?  
a.
- (18) \*How happy<sub>*t*</sub> was there someone *t*?  
b.

Williams states that small clauses in general allow extraction of the predicate, as shown in (18a). If *someone* and *how happy* form a constituent in (18b), the extraction of this predicate should also be permitted, parallel to (18a). This prediction is not borne out. Therefore, (based also on other pieces of evidence) Williams concludes that a copula NP and a predicate following it do not

constitute a SC in *there*-sentences.

We, therefore, appear to have evidence for both SC- and NP-hypotheses. In the rest of this subsection, we first deal with (17a,b), based on the discussion on Section 3, and then, turn to comment on (18a,b).

The present analysis readily provides a reason why examples like (17a,b) are grammatical. Notice first that since extraction of modifiers out of NPs is prohibited, as exemplified in (19):

- (19) \*Why<sub>i</sub> does Jane regret [DPBob's dismissal of her t<sub>i</sub>]?  
(Stowell 1989)

Under Abney's (1987) DP hypothesis, Stowell (1989) claims that extraction of an element out of DP is prohibited due to the referential barrierhood of the DP. Given this, in *there*-sentences, when a post-copula NP and the predicate following it form a NP structure, the predicate phrase cannot be extraposed out of the NP.<sup>4</sup> Then, we can rule out the possibility that a WH-phrase is extracted out of the AP after being extraposed out of the NP. (See Lasnik and Saito (1992) that phrases in an A'-position do not constitute a barrier.)

Given Stowell's analysis, the present analysis predicts that extraction of elements in examples like (16), which allow only the NP structure, should be degraded.<sup>5</sup> This prediction is borne out:

- (20) a. ??Which school<sub>i</sub> is there a fireman intelligent enough to  
enter t<sub>i</sub>?  
(20) b. ??Which school<sub>i</sub> is there someone intelligent enough to  
enter t<sub>i</sub>?

The grammatical contrast between (19) and (20a,b) results from the hypothesis that the former example violates the Empty Category Principle in addition to Subjacency whereas the latter examples cause mere Subjacency violations.

Witness further the contrast between (20a,b) and (21):

- (21) Which school<sub>i</sub> is John intelligent enough to enter  
t<sub>i</sub>?

In (21), the NP *John* and the predicate do not form a NP-structure, and thus, they do not create an island. Thus, extraction of the WH-phrase out of the predicate is possible.

The ungrammaticality of (20a,b) also contrasts with (17a,b), repeated here as (22a,b):

- (22) a. What<sub>i</sub> was there a man happy about t<sub>i</sub>?  
(22) b. What<sub>i</sub> was there someone happy about t<sub>i</sub>?

These examples contain the stage-level predicate *happy*, and therefore, the SC structure is available, as can be seen from [Table 1](#). This means that there need not be any barrier which the WH-phrase crosses, parallel to (21). Therefore, these examples are correctly predicted to be grammatical.

The same point can be replicated with relative clauses, as shown in (23a,b). The former example is adopted from Milsark 1974:

- (23) a. a problem which there are many people interested in

- (23) ??a school which there are many people intelligent  
 b. enough to enter

Only in (23a), the NP and the predicate can form a SC, and thus, this example is grammatical.

Now we return to Williams' (1984) argument for the NP hypothesis based on the contrast between (18a) and (18b). According to our analysis, *someone* and (*how*) *happy* form either SC structure or NP structure in (18b). If the NP structure is chosen, this predicate cannot be extracted out of the NP for the reason just discussed above (see our discussion on [19]). Alternatively, if the SC structure is selected, on the assumption that *someone*, being the subject of the SC, is in SPEC AP (Stowell 1983) and that only maximal projections are subject to XP-movement, the movement illustrated in (18b) is not permitted since (*how*) *happy* alone is not a maximal projection. Then, the remaining question is why (18a) is grammatical. If Williams 1983 is correct in stating that *consider* takes two internal arguments, *Bill* and (*how*) *happy* do not necessarily form a SC. Then, the grammaticality of (18a) does not necessarily lead us to the conclusion that extraction out of a SC is permitted in general. In short, Williams' argument for the NP-hypothesis based on the grammatical contrast between (18a) and (18b) involves some intervening factors, and does not clearly support his claim. Accordingly, the ungrammaticality of (18b) is not necessarily problematic for our proposal, either.

In this sub-section, we have shown that under the present analysis, (un)grammaticality of *there*-sentences which involve extraction of an element out of the predicate following the post-copula NP is accounted for in the principled manner. This, in turn, can be taken as further support for our analysis.

### 3.2. Coordination

Another prediction that the present analysis makes can be seen in coordination. Suppose that XP1 and XP2 were both either SCs or NPs in (24):

- (24) \*There is [XP1 a man happy] and [XP2 someone intelligent].

Then, it would not be clear why these two phrases cannot be coordinated. Under the present proposal, XP1 must be a SC because of the restriction on postnominal modification that most nouns cannot be modified by a bare adjective located in post head position. In contrast, XP2 must be a NP due to the restriction on the stage-level/individual-level distinction of predicates. Given that some sort of parallelism is required for coordination (see Sag, Gazdar, Wasow and Weisler 1985, Goddall 1987 and Bowers 1993, among others), and the fact that these two XPs have a different categorial status, it is natural that they cannot be coordinated.

In contrast to (24), the following examples are all grammatical:

- (25)  
 a. There is [XP1 someone happy] and [XP2 someone intelligent].  
 (25)  
 b. There is [XP1 a man happy about the news] and [XP2 someone intelligent].  
 (25)  
 c. There is [XP1 a man intelligent enough to enter Harvard Law School] and [XP2 someone intelligent].  
 (25)  
 d. There is [XP1 a man hungry] and [XP2 a man happy about the news].

XP<sub>1</sub> and XP<sub>2</sub> of (25a-c) can be a NP since the restriction on postnominal modification is not violated. Thus, these two XPs can be coordinated, and thus, these examples are grammatical. On the other hand, in (25d), XP<sub>1</sub> must be a SC, and XP<sub>2</sub> can be either a SC or a NP. Thus, these XPs can also be coordinated.

In sum, the (un)grammaticality of examples like (24) and (25a-d) further constitutes evidence for the dual-structural analysis of *there*-sentences proposed in this paper.

#### 4. *There's*

In this section, we will seek an implication of the present analysis for the contracted form *there's*.

Harris and Vincent (1980) make an interesting observation regarding the agreement properties of *there*-sentences. Consider the following examples:

- (26)  
a. There are three books on the shelf.  
b. (26) There's three books on the shelf.
- (27)  
a. There are lots of people waiting to see you.  
b. (27) There's lots of people waiting to see you.

In spite of the fact that the post-copular NPs are plural in the examples in (26) and (27), (26a, 27a) show normal plural agreement while there is singular agreement in (26b, 27b). The grammaticality of the former comes as no surprise. However, the grammaticality of the latter examples calls for an explanation.

Slobin (1997) and Chomsky (1995) suggest an account for the grammaticality of examples like (26b, 27b), based on virus. For example, Chomsky (1995) suggests that *there's* is a frozen form neutral with respect to agreement properties, and this form can be used no matter whether the NP is singular or plural. Accordingly, these examples are grammatical.

However, Schutze (1999) argues against the virus theory and proposes, instead, that *there's* is the result of a grammatical phenomenon. On the assumption that *there* is singular, it is argued that agreement between *there* and *be* always gives us a singular agreement. Accordingly, the contracted form is correctly predicted to be available as well.

We do not intend to compare these two types of proposals here. Rather, the crucial point to note for our purpose is that according to these proposals, the contracted form is always available.

On the other hand, Belvin and den Dikken (1997) explain the grammaticality of (26b, 27b) under the assumption that in *there*-sentences, the 'associate' of *there* must be Case-checked, and there are two candidates for this associate- either (I) the entire propositional small clause, such as *three books on the shelf* of (26a,b); or (II) only the subject of the small clause, such as *lots of people* of (27a,b). Belvin and den Dikken suggest that in the (I)-case, there will be singular agreement whereas plural agreement results in the (II)-case.

This much said, let's examine (28a,b):

- (28) a. There's three students intelligent enough to enter Harvard Law School.  
b. There's lots of people fat enough to become a sumo wrestler.

Since these examples contain the individual-level predicates, namely *intelligent* and *fat*, the post-copula NP and the individual-level predicate following it cannot form a SC, due to the Milsark-Diesing account, discussed in Section 2. Then, the NP and the predicate must form a NP under the



analysis presented in Section 3. Then, even if the entire complex of the NP and the predicate is raised to AGRO P SPEC, plural agreement should result. If so, the grammaticality of (28a,b) is surprising for Belvin and den Dikken 1997. Therefore, the present analysis leads us to conclude that Belvin and den Dikken's suggestion on how agreement obtains with *there's*-sentences is not tenable. Of course, we still need to choose one of the two remaining proposals: *there's* being a simple frozen form, as suggested by Slobin and Chomsky, or a result of agreement between *there*, assumed to be singular, and *be*, as proposed by Schutze. Here we have to leave this issue for future research. [6](#)

## 5. Concluding Remarks

This paper has shown that in principle, there are two possible structures for *there*-sentences, namely the SC structure argued for in Stowell 1978, Safir 1989, and Stowell 1992, 1993, and Milsark's (1974) ontological existential. This picture was shown to become complex due to the constraint on the stage-level/individual-level predicates and the restriction on postnominal modification. This approach to the structure of *there*-sentences nicely fits with the minimalist program (Chomsky 1994). In constructing the phrase structure in a bottom-up fashion, a post-copula NP and a predicate are "merged", and which of the nodes is projected to the next node depends on the restrictions on postnominal modifiers and the stage-level/individual-level distinction of predicates. As long as these two restrictions are not violated, either one of the nodes can be projected.

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## Notes

1 For much discussion on the stage-level/individual-level distinction of predicates, see Carlson 1977, Kratzer 1989, and Diesing 1992.

2 Milsark 1974 did not use the term "individual-level" predicates. I changed the wording in order for (5) to be in accordance with the present assumptions.

3 In order to avoid an unnecessary complication, I do not illustrate V-movement.

4 What I mean by NP here is DP, but I continue to use "NP" for expository purposes.

5 See, for instance, Stowell (1989), who argues that the Empty Category Principle prohibits extraction of adjuncts/modifiers out of DPs.

6 The reader is referred to Schutze 1999 for arguments against Slobin 1997 and Chomsky 1995.

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