

# A partial solution to the theoretical paradox posed by Smith Island weak expletive *it*<sup>1</sup>

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## 1 Introduction

Smith Island, MD is an island community located in the Chesapeake Bay, near the VA border. Accessible only by boat, Smith Island has remained isolated from the mainland since its settlement in the 1600s. As a result of this isolation, Smith Island has developed a unique dialect of English (Schilling-Estes 2000; Schilling-Estes & Wolfram 1999). One distinctive feature of Smith Island English (SIE) is the variable use of *it* as a weak expletive, where other English varieties use only *there*. Weak expletive *it* (WEIT) is illustrated in (1):

- (1) ...it's a dance tonight. (4/29/2000)  
"There's a dance tonight."

WEIT has the distributional properties of weak expletive *there*, appearing as the subject of copular constructions, raising predicates, unaccusative verbs, and passives. Surprisingly, WEIT has the agreement properties of expletive *it*. Verbal agreement in WEIT constructions is invariantly singular, and in fact plural agreement is impossible in a WEIT construction:

- (2) a. Is it any funny things you remember...? (1983)  
b. \*Are it any funny things you remember?

WEIT poses a real paradox for the standard minimalist analysis of expletives and agreement (Chomsky 1998; Chomsky 1999), according to which WEIT's distributional and agreement properties are inherently contradictory. This paper proposes a solution to the WEIT problem within the alternative account of expletive and agreement offered by Castillo, Drury, & Grohmann (1999). Their typology of expletives includes expletives like *it*, which have valued agreement features, and weak expletives like *there*, which have agreement features that are not valued. On this alternative analysis, the function of weak expletives is to mediate an indirect exchange of agreement features and case between T(ense) and an associate NP. It will be argued here that WEIT is an instance of an additional type in the typology of expletives. The third type is called a partial expletive, and only a subset of its features are valued. This allows it to perform the mediating function of a weak expletive, while at the same time assigning an invariant agreement value to T, like expletive *it*. The partial expletive provides a principled theoretical

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account of the apparently contradictory agreement and distributional properties of WEIT in SIE.

The paper proceeds as follows. Smith Island's history and social situation are briefly recounted in Section 2. Section 3 describes the grammatical properties of expletives in English, and then describes the properties of WEIT in SIE. The conclusions drawn are supported by quantitative data. Section 4 sketches Chomsky's standard analysis of expletives, and points out the paradox posed by WEIT. The alternative account of (Castillo et al. 1999) is reviewed in Section 5, and a presentation of the partial expletive analysis of WEIT in SIE concludes the section and the paper.

## **2 Smith Island<sup>2,3</sup>**

One in name and spirit, Smith Island (SI) is actually a group of islands located in the Chesapeake Bay of Maryland, near the Virginia border. Although many of the Chesapeake bay islands were once inhabited, only SI and nearby Tangier Island, VA are currently populated. Smith Island is separated from nearby Crisfield, MD on the mainland by a forty minute boat ride. (And the ride might be impossible during the winter, when the Bay can freeze up.) There is no automobile access, and no airport. There are three small towns on SI: Ewell, Rhodes Point, and Tylerton. Ewell and Rhodes Point are connected by a road; Tylerton, the most isolated of the three communities, can be reached only by boat.

English, Cornish, and Welsh settlers<sup>4</sup> first established a community on Smith Island in 1657, and SI has been continuously populated since then. In the beginning, the population consisted of a mere "handful of farmers;" it grew to 19 families by 1808, and was reduced to 300 by the end of civil war. Smith Islanders were a rowdy bunch of pirates and Tory sympathizers during the revolutionary war. Piracy continued during the civil war, as well as guerilla warfare based in SI and other Chesapeake islands. Eventually this roguish reputation had an adverse effect on the islanders, who could no longer travel to the mainland without fear of prosecution. Perhaps for this reason, Methodism caught on in SI around the turn of the century, and caught on big. From that time until the current day, the islanders became devout and fervent Methodists. The church became the most powerful institution on the island, and is the locus of social and political life on SI to this day. In fact, SI lacks a police force or a jail, and some have referred to the island as a theocracy.

In recent decades, SI's population remained steady at about 650-800, but in the early 90's it had about 500 residents, and this number will certainly continue to decline. The island's only industry is small scale crabbing and oystering, and this trade has become threatened due to environmental and political factors beyond the control of the islanders. For this reason, young people tend to leave SI after high school, just so that they can find work. Moreover, erosion has been eating away at the island, and it is not clear whether SI will even be habitable in 100 years.

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<sup>2</sup> Note to Natalie: This section is partially cannibalized from my community report, from Field Methods class (Spring 2000). I hope that's okay.

<sup>3</sup> The historical and social information in this section comes from Dize (1990), Horton (1987), Horton (1996), Sheenan (1994), and Wennersten (1992).

<sup>4</sup> Even today, most of the islanders have one of four family names: Tyler, Evans, Bradshaw, or Marshall.

Because of SI's geographical isolation, contact with the mainland has been sporadic and limited in nature. Mainlanders are regarded as “foreigners,” although they do visit the island. A modern innovation is tourism, which draws increasing numbers of mainlanders to SI. Unlike Tangier Island or North Carolina's Outer Banks, however, SI has never catered to tourism. There is only one hotel on the island, and no other tourist facilities to speak of. Few mainlanders move to the island, and fewer stay for long periods of time. Perhaps the most significant contact between SI and the mainland is through the children, who attend high school in Crisfield and have friends there. But island kids retain a strong and proud SI identity, and report that they stick together at school.

### 3 Smith Island weak expletive *it*

This section gives a grammatical and quantitative overview of the SI weak expletive *it* (WEIT). The section begins with a brief sketch of the grammatical properties of expletives in English, and proceeds to a description of weak expletive *it* (WEIT) in SIE. Finally, the striking agreement properties of WEIT are detailed, setting the stage for the theoretical analyses discussed in Section 4. The SI data reported here come from sociolinguistic interviews conducted during 1983, 1999, and 2000, and also from informant grammaticality judgements elicited during 2000.

#### 3.1 Expletives in English

An expletive is a grammatical subject with no semantic content. Expletive subjects don't *mean* anything--they just act as a kind of placeholder, presumably because English sentences require a subject.<sup>5</sup> There are least two types of expletives in English. Each is described below, followed by a review of the standard analysis of the difference between them.

##### 3.1.1 Expletive *it*

(3-4) are examples of the English expletive *it*. This expletive can be the subject of weather constructions; it can also serve as the subject of raising predicates<sup>6</sup> with finite complement clauses.

##### (3) **Weather**

- a. It is smoggy today.
- b. It is hazy outside.

##### (4) **Raising predicates w/finite complement clauses**

- a. It seems that the crabs are big this year.

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<sup>5</sup> The standard syntactic analysis holds that a universal principle of grammar, referred to as the EPP, requires sentences to have subjects. Some languages, including Spanish and Italian, satisfy the EPP with an unpronounced subject pronoun called *pro*. English, German, French and other languages do not license *pro* and must have pronounced subjects in every finite clause.

<sup>6</sup> Raising predicates include verbs (*seem, appear*) and adjectives (*likely*). They license raising of the lower clause subject to the matrix subject:

- i. It seems that the monster crab is angry.
- ii. The monster crab<sub>i</sub> seems *t<sub>i</sub>* to be angry.
- iii. The monster crab<sub>i</sub> is likely *t<sub>i</sub>* to seem *t<sub>i</sub>* to be angry.

- b. It is likely that we will catch a lot of big crabs this year.

Verbal agreement in expletive *it* constructions is always third singular (3s):

- (5) a. \*It are/am smoggy today.
- b. \*It seem that the crabs are big this year.

Expletive *it* cannot be the subject of a copular construction<sup>7</sup>; it cannot be the subject of a raising predicate with a non finite clause complement:

- (6) **Copular**
  - a. \*It is a big crab in that pot.
  - b. \*It seems to be a lot of big crabs this year.

### 3.1.2 Weak expletive *there*

(7-10) are examples of English expletive *there*, the so called "weak" expletive. *There* can be the subject of a copula construction; the subject of a raising predicate with a non finite complement clause; the subject of an unaccusative verb<sup>8</sup>; and the subject of a passive<sup>9</sup>:

- (7) **Copular**  
There is a big crab in that pot today.
- (8) **Raising predicates**
  - a. There seems to be a big crab in that pot today.
  - b. There is likely to be a big crab in that pot today.
- (9) **Unaccusatives**  
Every weekend, there arrives at the inn a loud group of drunken researchers.
- (10) **Passives**  
There was a monster crab caught in the Chesapeake Bay this year.

*There's* "weakness" is that, unlike *it*, it does not induce uniform 3s verbal agreement. Rather, the verb in a *there* expletive construction always agrees in number with the associate NP lower in the structure:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A central property of expletive copula constructions is their alternation with non expletive copula constructions:

- i. There is a monster crab in that pot.
- ii. A monster crab is in that pot.

<sup>8</sup> Unaccusative verbs are intransitive verbs with an underlyingly post verbal subject. Evidence for unaccusatives comes from Italian clitic phenomena (for introduction and references see [Haegemann]), and also from the expletive alternation:

- i. There arrived at the inn a drunken group of researchers.
- ii. A drunken group of researchers arrived at the inn.

<sup>9</sup> Again, note the alternation:

- i. There was a monster crab caught in the Chesapeake Bay this year.
- ii. A monster crab was caught in the Chesapeake Bay this year.

<sup>10</sup> As has been widely observed (e.g. Chomsky 1995) clitic *'s* seems to be exceptional:

- i. There's a big crab in that pot.
- ii. There's a lot of big crabs in that pot.

- (11) a. There is/\*are a big crab in that pot.  
 b. There \*is/are a lot of big crabs in that pot.
- (12) a. There seems/\*seem to be a big crab in that pot.  
 b. There \*seems/seem to be a lot of big crabs in that pot.
- (13) a. Every weekend, there arrives/\*arrive at the inn a solitary drunken researcher.  
 b. Every weekend, there \*arrives/arrive at the inn a loud group of drunken researchers.
- (14) a. There was/\*were a monster crab caught in the Chesapeake Bay this year.  
 b. There was/\*were several monster crabs caught in the Chesapeake Bay this year.

Notice that the definiteness restriction (a.k.a. the Definiteness Effect (DE)) on definite NPs in expletive constructions means that in English it is impossible to see whether there is also person agreement in these constructions. This point will assume more importance at the end of Section 4. The DE is illustrated in (15-18):

- (15) **Copular**  
 \*There is the big crab in that pot today.
- (16) **Raising predicates**  
 a. \*There seems to be the big crab in that pot today.  
 b. \*There is likely to be the big crab in that pot today.
- (17) **Unaccusatives**  
 \*Every weekend, there arrives at the inn the loud group of drunken researchers.
- (18) **Passives**  
 \*There was the monster crab caught in the Chesapeake Bay this year.

Pronouns are inherently definite and so are independently ruled out by the DE, regardless of agreement:

- (19) a. \*There am I at the inn.  
 b. \*There are you at the inn.  
 c. \*There is she at the inn.

*There* cannot be the subject of a weather predicate or a raising predicate with a finite clause complement:

- (20) a. \*There is smoggy today.  
 b. \*There seems that the crabs are big this year.

### 3.2 WEIT and Expletive variation in Smith Island English

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It is not clear what to make of this, and I will offer no analysis. However, note that the phenomena is strictly limited to -'s, and does not license any extensions:

- iii. \*Is there a lot of big crabs in that pot?

Thus we can and will distinguish this case from the *it* verbal agreement phenomena discussed below.

Smith Island English (SIE) differs from other English varieties in its variable use of *it* as a weak expletive (WEIT). This is illustrated in (21-22):<sup>11</sup>

- (21) ...it's a dance tonight. (4/29/2000)  
 "There's a dance tonight."  
 (22) There's a house...down the road from here.... (4/29/2000)

That WEIT is in fact a weak expletive is confirmed by its distribution in SIE. WEIT can be used in all of the weak expletive structures discussed above:

- (23) **Copular**  
 ...it's a dance tonight. (4/29/2000)  
 (24) **Raising predicates**  
 It just happened to be a EMT on this part of the island.... (1983)  
 (25) **Unaccusatives**  
 ...it's gonna...come a time when...they're gonna get law here.... (1983)  
 (26) **Passives**  
 It was a lot of politicians elected by Smith Islanders in those days.

As shown in (21-22) above, WEIT varies with *there* in SIE. More than half of all weak expletives in SIE seem to be realized as WEIT. For this study, a total of 254 weak expletive tokens were extracted from interviews with 12 speakers. Only weak expletives were counted: expletive *it*, pronominal *it*, and locative *there* were excluded. Tokens which were ambiguous in any way were coded for verification, but were not counted. Out of 254 tokens, 154 or 61% were WEIT; 100 or 39% were *there*, as illustrated in Figure (1):

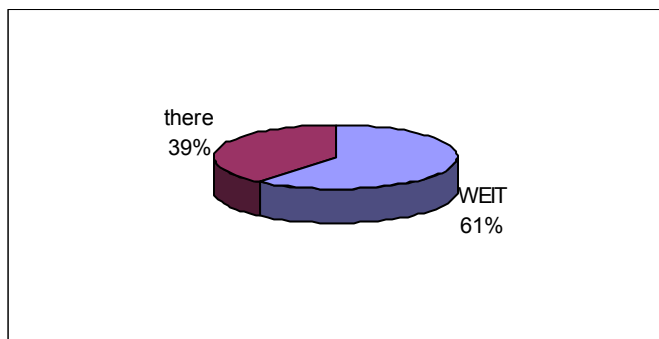


Figure (1): Percent WEIT/there

### 3.3 WEIT and verbal agreement in SIE

WEIT's agreement properties are perhaps its most striking feature. As discussed in Section 3.1.2, associate agreement is a distinguishing characteristic of weak expletives. Verbal agreement in weak expletive constructions is always with the associate NP lower

<sup>11</sup> Where data are attested, the interview date is given in parentheses. Other data are fabricated; judgements come from SI informants.

in the structure. However, verbal agreement in WEIT constructions is exclusively singular. In fact, plural agreement in a WEIT construction is impossible. Notice that this is not limited to cliticized negation (see fn.10):

- (27) a. It's no...separate burial plots on Tylerton. (1983)  
 b. \*It're no separate burial plots on Tylerton.
- (28) a. Is it any funny things you remember...? (1983)  
 b. \*Are it any funny things you remember?

Independently of WEIT, verbal agreement in SIE is variable, and seems to be leveling toward invariant singular agreement.<sup>12</sup> Examples are given below, and a detailed quantitative analysis of agreement on the past copula *was* can be found in Schilling-Estes (2000):

- (29) a. When the crabs comes to the bank. (1983)  
 b. The ones that did it was the people that I knew. (1983)  
 c. Buckrams is on the order of soft crabs but thicker shells. (1983)  
 d. Ain't many people does that. (1983)  
 e. A lot of places I used to know has washed away. (1983)

At first glance, it might seem that agreement leveling with WEIT is just an instance of a more general agreement leveling pattern. Indeed, leveled singular agreement can be found with *there* as well as with WEIT:

- (30) I believe there's spirits though. (4/29/2000)

However, even if WEIT agreement leveling is related to general agreement leveling in SIE, something remains to be explained. Leveling with WEIT is categorical, and plural agreement with WEIT is impossible. In contrast, plural agreement in SIE is variable in every other environment, including with *there*; plural agreement can and does occur:

- (31) There are two older than me and one younger. (1983)

This conclusion is supported quantitatively. For this study, 46 instances of potential agreement in weak expletive constructions were extracted from 12 interviews. A token was counted as an instance of potential agreement only if it had a plural associate NP and no clitic negation<sup>13</sup>; tokens with clitic negation or singular associate NPs were recorded for verification but not counted. For each relevant instance, singular agreement was considered leveled and plural agreement was considered unleveled. Out of 46 tokens, 42 were leveled and 4 unleveled. Of the leveled tokens, half were with *there* and half

<sup>12</sup> The auxiliary *was* with clitic negation is losing agreement altogether. A single negated auxiliary *weren't* is variably used for all persons and numbers; *weren't* is near categorical for the youngest generation on Smith Island (Schilling-Estes 2000). This is presumably analogous to the pattern seen with *ain't* and *don't*; it is not clear what agreement properties *haven't/hasn't* has in SIE. These question require further research.

<sup>13</sup> See previous note.

were with WEIT. Of the unlevelled tokens, all 4 were with *there*. This is shown in Figure (2):

	Plural Agreement	Leveled
w/ WEIT	0	21
w/ <i>there</i>	4	21

Figure (2): Agreement leveling and weak expletives

This study also analyzed the past copula *was/were* data from Schilling-Estes (2000), which were taken from interviews with 24 speakers. Potential instances of agreement were determined as above: only past copulas with plural associate NPs and no clitic negation were counted. An instance of *was* was counted as leveled, and an instance of *were* was counted as unlevelled. A total of 60 tokens were extracted. Of these, 50 were leveled and 10 were unlevelled. All ten unlevelled tokens were with *there*. This is shown in Figure (3):

	Plural Agreement	Leveled
w/ WEIT	0	28
w/ <i>there</i>	10	22

Figure (3): Past copula *was* agreement leveling and weak expletives

In all of the data that have been analyzed to date, there is not one single instance of plural agreement in a construction with WEIT. Although much more data need to be examined<sup>14</sup>, these preliminary results certainly support the conclusion that that verbal agreement is categorically singular with WEIT in SIE. The implications of this fact for a theoretical analysis of expletives and agreement are significant.

#### 4 WEIT and the theory of expletives

As discussed in Section 3, verbal agreement is categorically singular with WEIT. Because agreement is variable in all other environments, this seems to be a real fact about WEIT and not a fact about agreement in SIE. It is one that needs explaining, since it does not accord with the standard minimalist account of expletives and agreement. This section will outline the necessary theoretical background and review the analysis of Chomsky (1998; 1999). After pointing out the problem posed by WEIT, I will review an alternative analysis for expletives and agreement proposed by Castillo, Drury & Grohmann (1999). With the addition of a partial expletive to their typology of expletives, this analysis can account quite naturally for WEIT in SIE.

##### 4.1 Some background on recent developments in feature checking

In the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995), syntactic operations are driven by the need to check uninterpretable grammatical features. Uninterpretable features are just those features of lexical or functional items that are illegible at one of the two interface

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<sup>14</sup> And will be!

levels, either PF or LF. Uninterpretable features must be erased from the computation before they reach an interface level, or else the derivation crashes. The process of erasing uninterpretable features is called checking, and the mechanism for feature checking is called Agree (Chomsky 1998; Chomsky 1999). The operation Agree consists in the uninterpretable feature set of some lexical item "probing" its c-command domain for an identical set of features on some other lexical item, the "goal." Finding such an identical set, the uninterpretable features of the probe are deleted. Only a full set of  $\phi$  features on the goal can induce checking of features on the probe--Agree is an all or nothing operation. In Chomsky's system, uninterpretable features have "attributes"<sup>15</sup>--such as [Person] or [Number]--but not "values"--such as [3<sup>rd</sup>] or [Singular]. Uninterpretable features are assigned the value of matching features in the goal they probe. Thus Agree serves two functions: it checks uninterpretable features, and assigns them a value.

The role of Case in this system is to make the interpretable features of a goal "visible" for a probe: Case is an uninterpretable feature of the goal, checked upon being probed. Therefore in this system, neither Case nor agreement drive movement operations. Movement is claimed to be the result of an additional feature EPP, checked by Merge of a nominal element. The feature is, of course, a stipulation: it follows from nothing else in the theory. With respect to the matters under consideration here, the EPP feature is a technical mechanism for expressing the fact that sentences need subjects (see fn. 5). According to the VP internal subject hypothesis, subject NPs are Merged in the specifier of VP and only later displaced to their overt position.

To give a concrete example illustrating Chomsky's system, consider (32), with relevant structure in (33). We will not discuss the direct object or the internal workings of the VP system here, since these are irrelevant to expletives and (subject-verb) agreement.:

(32) The monster crab eats mainlanders.

(33) [ $T_{\phi, EPP}$  ... [ $VP$  [ $NP_{\phi, Case}$ ] ... ]]

At the derivational stage shown in (33), the subject NP [the monster crab] is in its Merged position at the specifier of VP. At a later stage it will be moved to the specifier of T (its overt position) in order to check T's EPP feature. Tense (T) has a set of uninterpretable agreement features ( $\phi$  features) consisting of, among others, a Person (Pers) feature and a Number (Num) feature. T's  $\phi$  features are not valued. The NP [the monster crab] has an identical set of interpretable features, all of which are valued: its [Pers] feature has the value 3<sup>rd</sup> (3) and its [Num] feature has the value Singular (Sing). NP's Case feature is unvalued because it is uninterpretable. T's uninterpretable features probe, finding the identical feature set of NP. T's  $\phi$  features, matching the set in NP, are valued [3Sing] and then checked; NP's Case feature, probed by finite T, is valued [Nominative] and checked. The structure converges at the interface with all uninterpretable features checked.

What is relevant about this feature checking system is the way it explains verbal agreement. The uninterpretable features of T are valued by probing the interpretable features of the subject NP, reflecting the intuition that verbs agree with their subjects, and not vice versa.

<sup>15</sup> This is Castillo et al.'s (1999) term; Uriagereka (p.c.) calls these "dimensions."

## 4.2 The standard analysis of expletives

The standard analysis of weak expletives (Chomsky 1998; Chomsky 1999) accounts for associate NP agreement in the same way. An example and relevant structure are given in (34-35):

(34) There is a monster crab in that pot.

(35)  $[T_{\phi,EPP} \dots [VP \text{EXPL}_{[Pers]} \dots [[NP_{\phi,Case}] \dots ]]]$

At the derivational stage in (35), EXPL is in its Merged position at the specifier of VP. EXPL has a single uninterpretable person [Pers] feature. The uninterpretable  $\phi$  features of T probe and find EXPL. But T's features cannot be checked, since EXPL does not have a full set of  $\phi$  features. Now EXPL Moves to T in order to check T's uninterpretable EPP feature. The associate subject NP [a monster crab] remains in situ lower in the structure:

(36)  $\text{EXPL}_{[Pers]} [T_{\phi,EPP} \dots [VP t \dots [[NP_{\phi,Case}] \dots ]]]$

The uninterpretable [Pers] feature of EXPL probes T, finds a complete set of features to match with, and is checked. T, still having an uninterpretable  $\phi$  set, probes the lower associate NP. This checks T's uninterpretable  $\phi$  set as well as NP's uninterpretable Case feature. Crucially, T's features are valued by the associate NP, in this case [3Sing].

In contrast to weak EXPL with its single uninterpretable [Pers] feature, expletive *it* (IT) has a full set of interpretable  $\phi$  features, valued [3Sing]. An example and relevant structure are given in (37-38):

(37) It seems that a monster crab ate the mainlander.

(38)  $[T_{\phi,EPP} \dots [VP \text{IT}_{\phi} \dots [T_{\phi,EPP} \dots [VP [NP_{\phi,Case}] \dots ]]]]$

At the derivational stage (38), IT is Merged in the specifier of matrix VP. The uninterpretable features in the embedded clause have all been checked independently of the matrix clause. IT's complete  $\phi$  set is probed by matrix T, valuing T's  $\phi$  features [3Sing] and checking them. Now the structure can converge at the interface with all uninterpretable features checked. This explains why verbal agreement in *it* expletive constructions is uniformly [3Sing]: T's features are valued by IT, whose  $\phi$  features are [3Sing].

This analysis gives a clear account of the distributional differences between expletive *it* and expletive *there*. Consider what happens if expletive *it* is Merged into a copular construction:

(39) \*It is a monster crab in that pot.

(40)  $[T_{\phi,EPP} \dots [VP \text{IT}_{\phi} \dots [[NP_{\phi,Case}] \dots ]]]$

T probes IT, valuing and checking T's uninterpretable  $\phi$  set. But now there is nothing to probe NP, and its uninterpretable Case feature remains unchecked at the interface. The structure crashes. The same fate will befall all other relevant weak expletive structures. In each case, T's  $\phi$  set is checked by probing *it*, and so an uninterpretable Case feature of some lower NP remains unchecked at the interface. Now consider what happens if expletive *there* is Merged to a structure with a finite complement clause:

(41) \*There seems that a monster crab ate the mainlander.

(42)  $[T_{\phi, EPP} \dots [VP \text{EXPL}_{[Pers]} \dots [T_{\phi, EPP} \dots [VP [NP_{\phi, Case} \dots]]]]]$

Here, uninterpretable  $\phi$  and Case features in the embedded clause have been independently checked. In the matrix clause, T probes EXPL. But EXPL's single [Pers] feature cannot check the complete  $\phi$  set of T. EXPL raises, and probes T to delete its own [Pers] feature. T still lacks a goal, so T's uninterpretable  $\phi$  set is never checked. The structure crashes.

To summarize, the standard analysis accounts for the agreement and distributional properties of expletives in English. Weak expletive *there* has a single uninterpretable [Pers] feature which cannot check the features of T. T's  $\phi$  features are valued and checked when T probes associate NP, resulting in NP associate agreement. This allows *there* to occur with copular and other non finite complement clauses, since NP's [Case] feature is checked by T. In contrast, expletive *it* has its own complete set of interpretable [3Sing]  $\phi$  features that can check and value the  $\phi$  features of T. The result is invariant [3Sing] agreement. *It* can occur with finite complement clauses because there are no lower NPs whose Case features are left unchecked without the probe of T.

### 4.3 The WEIT paradox

WEIT in SIE poses a clear problem for this analysis. WEIT has the distributional properties of weak expletive *there*, but the agreement properties of expletive *it*. But these two properties are contradictory on the standard analysis. If WEIT's invariant singular agreement is to be explained by assuming that WEIT has [3Sing] interpretable  $\phi$  features, then WEIT's weak expletive distribution is not predicted. T's  $\phi$  features should be checked by probing WEIT, leaving associate NP with an unchecked Case feature. If WEIT's weak expletive distribution is to be explained by assuming that WEIT has only a single uninterpretable [Pers] feature, then there is no obvious explanation for the fact that agreement with WEIT is invariantly singular in SIE, while agreement with all other subjects (including *there*) is variable. On the standard analysis of expletives, WEIT is a real and apparently insurmountable paradox.

### 4.4 An alternative analysis of expletives

Castillo, Drury & Grohmann (1999) (hereafter CDG) significantly reformulate Chomsky's (1998; 1999) Agree mechanism for feature checking, with consequences throughout the system. We focus here on agreement and expletives. On Chomsky's analysis, T's  $\phi$  features have attributes but not values. CDG propose that T's  $\phi$  features are even more radically underspecified, lacking both values and attributes. Contra

Chomsky, the  $\phi$  set of T cannot probe, because features that probe must have (at least) attributes. T has an "empty" feature set and cannot be a probe, but it must be a possible goal: for convergence, T's  $\phi$  features need to be "filled in"--assigned valued attributes--by the probe of some nominal element with valued  $\phi$  features. Thus verbs agree with subjects for essentially the same reason as in Chomsky's system: T's  $\phi$  features receive the value of NP's  $\phi$  features.

CDG view structural Case as a reflex of this feature fill-in, although they are vague about the technical mechanism. That is, T will license (either check or assign) Nominative Case on the nominal that probes and values T's empty  $\phi$  set. A major consequence of this is that CDG are able to eliminate the stipulative EPP feature by reconnecting agreement, Case, and the subject position. A nominal needs the Case licensing of T, and T needs the  $\phi$  feature attributes and values of a nominal. Because T cannot probe, the needs of both elements can be met only when the nominal is in a position to probe T--in other words, only when the nominal is in subject position. CDG also propose to dispense with the VP internal subject hypothesis, Merging (non-unaccusative) subjects directly to T. As we will see, this will include expletives.

To give a concrete example illustrating CDG's system, consider (43), with relevant structure in (44). Again, we will not discuss the direct object or the internal workings of the VP system here, since these are irrelevant to expletives and (subject-verb) agreement.

(43) The monster crab eats mainlanders.

(44)  $[NP_{\phi=val}] [T_{\phi=\emptyset} \dots [VP \dots ]]$

NP [the monster crab] is Merged directly in its overt subject position at the specifier of T. NP has a [3Sing] valued  $\phi$  set ( $\phi=val$ ), while T has an empty  $\phi$  set ( $\phi=\emptyset$ ). NP probes T, filling in T's empty  $\phi$  set with NP's  $\phi$  feature attributes and values ([Person=3; Num=Sing]). As a reflex, Nominative Case is licensed on NP (either assigned or checked). With all features valued, the structure converges. Verb agreement is 3<sup>rd</sup> singular.

Now we proceed to the analysis of expletives. CDG propose that a weak expletive like *there* (EXPL) has feature attributes, but not values ( $\phi=attr$ ). (Note that this is what Chomsky claims for T.) When EXPL is Merged to T, the subject NP remains in situ below T. This is illustrated in (45-46):

(45) There is a monster crab in that pot.

(46)  $EXPL_{\phi=attr} [T_{\phi=\emptyset} \dots [VP \dots [[NP_{\phi=val}] \dots ]]]$

In this configuration, because the  $\phi=\emptyset$  features of T cannot probe, Case is not licensed on NP, and T's features cannot be valued. CDG therefore claim that EXPL's function is to "mediate the exchange" of Case and agreement features between T and associate NP, a traditional intuition. EXPL first probes the associate NP. EXPL's feature attributes are assigned the value of NP's features, in this case [3Sing]. Now, EXPL probes T, filling in T's empty  $\phi$  set with attributes and values, in this case [Pers=3; Num=Sing].

As a reflex, T licenses Nominative Case on both the associate NP and EXPL (again, leaving technical mechanisms vague).

On CDG's analysis, like Chomsky's, expletive *it* has fully valued  $\phi$  features. It can fill in T's empty set on its own, and does not need the values of an associate NP. Thus, the agreement and distributional properties of expletive *there* and expletive *it* follow in much the same way in CDG's system as they do in Chomsky's system. Verbal agreement is 3<sup>rd</sup> singular with *it* because T's  $\phi$  features receive their values directly from *it*, whose features are inherently valued [3Sing]. If *it* is Merged to a copular or other weak expletive structure, an associate NP lower in the structure does not probe T, and does not receive Case licensing. Verbal agreement with *there* matches the associate NP because T's  $\phi$  features receive their values indirectly from the associate NP, mediated by *there*. *There* cannot be Merged to an expletive *it* structure with a finite complement clause, because T cannot be valued: *there's*  $\phi$  features have attributes but not values.

As it is, CDG's analysis cannot account for WEIT for the same reasons that Chomsky's analysis cannot. But a crucial difference between the two analyses--the indirect relation between T and the associate--allows for a modification that solves the problem.

## 5 WEIT: a partial expletive

CDG's analysis, again like Chomsky's, gives us only two kinds of expletives. The first type, weak expletives like *there*, have  $\phi$  features with attributes and not values ( $\phi$ =attr). The second type, expletives like *it*, have fully valued  $\phi$  features ( $\phi$ =val), just like regular nominals. WEIT suggests the addition of a third type, the partial expletive. Only a subset of its features are valued, the rest having only attributes ( $\phi$ =part). In the case of WEIT, the valued attribute is [Number= Singular]. This expanded typology of expletives is shown in (47):

(47)	<i>it</i>	<i>there</i>	WEIT
	$\phi$ :	$\phi$ :	$\phi$ :
	[Pers=3]	[Pers]	[Pers]
	[Num=Sing]	[Num]	[Num=Sing]
	etc.	etc.	etc.

To see how WEIT works in CDG's system, consider a sentence with WEIT, relevant structure shown in (49):

(48) It's no separate burial plots on Tylerton.

(49) WEIT <sub>$\phi$ =part</sub> [T <sub>$\phi$ = $\emptyset$</sub>  ... [VP ... [[NP <sub>$\phi$ =val</sub>] ... ]]]

WEIT probes the associate NP [no separate burial plots], valuing WEIT's unvalued  $\phi$  features. Crucially, the value of WEIT's valued feature, [Num=Sing] is not changed by the plural NP. Now WEIT has the  $\phi$  feature values [Per=3; Num=Sing]. It probes T, filling in T's  $\phi$  features with these values--one from the associate and one from the expletive. Case is licensed on NP and WEIT.

This approach allows for an account of the apparently paradoxical properties of WEIT. Verbal agreement is invariantly singular with WEIT because WEIT is a partial expletive. One of its  $\phi$  features is inherently valued, in WEIT's case [Num=Sing], so T in a WEIT construction will always have a singular number feature. WEIT's distribution is the same as weak expletive *there* because not all of WEIT's features are valued and therefore it must probe an NP before it probes T. This means that WEIT can appear in copular and other weak expletive constructions where an associate NP must be Case licensed.

Within the CDG theory of expletives and agreement, the partial expletive is an elegant and natural solution to the problem of WEIT. But the motivation for having a partial expletive at all is mostly theory internal. We might wonder if there is any independent, empirical evidence for partial expletives. What we would like to see, in the case of WEIT, is an instance where verbal agreement is singular (WEIT's valued feature) and non-3<sup>rd</sup> person (the feature valued by associate NP). This would distinguish WEIT from *it*, which is claimed to have inherently [3Sing] valued  $\phi$  features. Unfortunately, this evidence will be hard to come by in English because of the Definiteness Effect (DE). As noted above in Section 3.1.2, the DE independently rules out pronouns in expletive constructions, and pronouns are the only testing case for non- non-3<sup>rd</sup> person agreement in English. But the partial expletive hypothesis makes testable predictions nonetheless. If it exists, then there is predicted to exist a language where verbs agree with an associate NP in one feature attribute, but have another attribute that invariantly agrees with an expletive. Future cross-linguistic research on expletives and agreement might resolve this question without too much difficulty, assuming the relevant phenomena can be found. In the meantime, the theoretical paradox posed by WEIT in SIE can be considered at least temporarily resolved.

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