

Dummy Subjects in English: A Grammatical Analysis

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Abstract

In fact, any sentence in the language that has a subject is the one who does the action. The verb, the doer of a language, tells us who has already done the action that was described by the action as the initial element that begins a sentence grammatically. There are two types of subjects in the English language, which is the language in question: actual subject, which performs the action, and dummy subject, which fills the position of the real subject and has a grammatical function but no semantic significance.

The study focuses on the syntactic analysis of dummy, expletive, or empty subjects that lack the qualities of real people. Dummy subjects are also known as the sentence's doer, and they are just one of several issues that weaken the phrase by making it unclear or opaque. The study starts with a look at the concept of the subject in general, then moves on to dummy subjects, which are subjects that just fill the subject's position to provide a grammatical purpose without any semantic function. The study looks at the two dummy subjects "it" and "there" in an English sentence and how they may appear with different verbs. The incorrect usage of the dummy subject "there" with the singular verb "be" is criticized in the study.

Keywords: Dummy, Subjects, English, Grammatical, Analysis

1. Introduction

The subject of a sentence is considered as the person or thing that is actually doing something. The predicate and sentence subject are the two basic components of a sentence. We know

about the doer through the predicate, which tells us what the doer did or how the doer is described. There is a subject in each sentence, and each action is performed by a subject.

1.1 The Study Question

The current study examines a number of issues, including the design of the dummy subjects, their distribution, their location, and the difference between 'it' and 'there'. In this study, we'll discuss a common misinterpretation of the two English dummy subjects and the difference between 'there' as a dummy subject and 'there' as an adverb. Another issue with the dummy 'there' is the verb agreement.

1.2 The Study's Objectives

With the goal of providing a syntactic analysis of dummy subjects in English, this study looks at how they differ from regular subjects like "it" and the dummy "it," as well as the verbs they appear with. Adverbs and dummy subjects are compared in the study, which is attempting to elucidate the distinction between the two. Using examples, the study aims to demonstrate proper usage of the dummy 'there' and proper usage of the dummy 'it' in relation to verb-agreement.

1.3 Hypotheses

It is supposed to be:

- Dummy subject is an element of a sentence that serves as a placeholder for the subject;
- Dummy subject is a syntactic feature and has no semantic function.
- A noun phrase following the verb in a sentence, influences the dummy 'there', but the dummy 'it' affects the verb that precedes it directly.
- Adverb 'there' and dummy 'there' are not the same thing.

1.4 Procedures

The definitions of the two dummy subjects will be presented in the study, with examples illustrating the likelihood of their occurrence in specific circumstances and differentiating them syntactically.

1.5 Limits of the Study

Only the syntactic analysis of English dummy subjects is the focus of this investigation.

1.6 The Study's Significance

Students of English linguistics, particularly those with an interest in the syntax of the language, can benefit much from this study. It is very useful that this study sheds light on the grammatical features of dummy subjects 'there' and 'it'.

2. A Concise Summary of a Sentence's Subject

According to Coghill and Magedanz (2010:154), every English sentence must have a subject. A subject is something that governs a verb's activity.

(1) The lion roared at the tourists.

(2) The moon lights up the sky at night.

(3) Iraq's oil production is greater than that of the surrounding countries

The statement includes two parts, according to Hopper et al (2000: 34). The subject is the sentence's topic. The predicate is what is said about the topic. The subject usually, but not always, identifies the action's agent; that is, it informs us who or what is doing something.

Subject	Predicate
(4) The journalists	attended the evening conference.
(5) Basra	is the economic capital of Iraq.
(6) Liverpool, a city in England	has produced many brilliant professional players.
(7) Ukraine	did not surrender to Russia

[The sentence's topic is Ukraine, although Ukraine did nothing.] Unidentified individuals did something to Ukraine. In this sentence, the agency isn't mentioned.]

The topic of a sentence, according to Hult (2015:59), is who or what the statement is about. Nouns, pronouns, and noun phrases can all be used as subjects.
In most cases, the subject comes before the verb.

Sapir and Hoek (2015: 179) propose another definition of the subject as the noun with which the verb agrees. The subject of an active-voice sentence is the person who is doing something.

It's worth noting that English has several different types of subjects:

- The straightforward subject:

According to Pennington (2009:14), the simple subject is the common noun, proper noun, or pronoun on which the verb acts. It specifies who or what is the subject of the sentence.

(8) *A veterinarian* treated a poor injured dog

- The entire subject is made up of the basic subject as well as all modifiers.

(9) Every protester in the square had the opportunity to speak freely

- A compound subject is a doer who combines two or more subjects into a single main predicate.

(10) Rafael Nadal and Tiger Justine Henin might be the losers tonight.

(11) Orange, apple, mango, and banana can be classified as fruits.

According to Aarts, Chalker, and Weiner (2014:395), the subject is frequently characterized as the "doer" or "agent" of the verbal action, although this definition frequently fails. Thus, we have a meaningless dummy subject in the first example below, whereas the subject in the second (*passive) sentence has a non-agentive semantic role:

(12) *It* is so dark in the cave.

(13) The game has been called off.

As a result, the syntactic definition of the term has become the standard.

3. The Concept of a Dummy Subject

According to Faarlund (1990:191), the introduction of an expletive subject also necessitates the presence of a structurally defined subject and a subject position that must be filled. However, part of the reason for the shift is functional, not just formal. A particular sentence (excluding imperative sentences) must have a lexical subject, which became so common that it was assumed to be the sole allowable pattern.

Culicover (2009: 199-200) points out that some languages allow for the possibility of a syntactic subject without a conceptual structural argument to go along with it. In English, for example, a finite clause must have an overt grammatical subject. The Subject function is realized by dummy or expletive subject when this criterion meets the absence of a conceptual structure input that may correspond to Subject.

A dummy or expletive subject is the initial word in a phrase that begins it but has no meaning. If the writer wants to move the stress of a sentence away from the topic, a dummy subject could be useful.

Brunt & Bryanne (2012:119) point out that there are two types of subjects in many sentences: The provisional or "dummy" subject is the first (*it* or *there*), whereas the true subject is the second.

A dummy subject is an element of a sentence that fills the role of the subject but has no discernible meaning of its own. The dummy subject has no meaning and cannot be used to refer to a topic. (Huddleston, 59, 1984)

According to Svenonius (2002:5), expletive, pleonastic, or dummy subjects have played a key role in syntactic argumentation. Their lack of semantic substance distinguishes them, and their steadfastly grammatical nature makes them a great probe into the boundary between syntax and semantics. They're important for determining if a syntactic position is thematic or nonthematic, for example.

When the subject of a sentence appears to have no semantic role and acts as a kind of empty place holder, this indicates that the subject is merely fulfilling the grammatical requirement. Burridge and Borjars (2013) define the dummy subject as a subject that contributes nothing meaningfully to the clause.

According to Grau and Reeves (1995:94), "Dummy subjects or expletives are subject phrases like *it*" and *there*." They were originally proposed to merely regularize the syntactic pattern. It's worth noting that elevating the other key element of the sentence " their predicate " is achievable with so-called dummy subjects, because predicates with such subjects don't attain any semantic role with their subjects. Another key feature of dummy subjects is that they are lexically constrained; that is, certain verbs occur with it, while others do not, and there are verbs that do not occur with dummy subjects at all. Existence and becoming verbs, as well as weather verbs, are archetypal verbs that appear with dummy subjects. Actually, semantics cannot anticipate whether or not dummy subjects will be accepted. This should be noted in the appropriate verbs' lexical entries. A word like *rain*, for example, can occur with dummy *it*, although the verb *fall* cannot. The expletive *there* can be used with the word *arrive*, but not with the verb *return*.

Here are several examples:

(14) *It's* raining mice and cats outside.

It appears that it is raining mice and cats.

**It's* falling leaves.

**It* looks to be falling leaves.

(15) *There* arrived a snippet from the back row.

There took place to arrive a snippet from the back row.

**There* returned a snippet from the back row.

**There* took place to return a snippet from the back row.

Now, there will be a clear description of what dummy subjects are and where they belong.

3.1 As a Dummy Subject, *it* and *there*

According to Lass (2000:248), the question of how to convey the (syntactic) subject in English, particularly in the early stages of the language, is a hard matter that is tightly linked to the semantics of the verb on a theoretical level. To put it another way, certain predicate verbs formerly did not require any noun phrases to be associated with them (for example, 'weather verbs' in Modern English created with dummy subject *it*). The majority of predicates, on the other hand, need the existence of either the subject (which can be the dummy subject *it*) or at least one non-subject noun phrase in the case of impersonal verbs.

Borsley (2014:86) explores the syntactic truth that some predicates require or allow a dummy subject (or expletive, or pleonastic) subject, a subject that serves no semantic purpose. The following examples demonstrate:

(16) It had been raining all day.

(17) *Hobbs had been raining all day.

(18) It was simple to deceive Rhodes.

(19) *Hobbs was simple to deceive Rhodes.

There are two predicates in this case that require a dummy *it*. The fact that there is no way to inquire about its reference, as there is with a normal pronoun, demonstrates that it is a dummy.

(20) *what had been raining all day.

(21) *what was simple to deceive Rhodes."

Givon (1993: 101) clarifies that "*it*" does not refer to any specific entity in clauses containing dummy-subject verbs. As a result, *it* serves as a fake subject of clause, filling a syntactic gap but having little or no semantic impact. In dummy subject clauses, the verb phrase can be adjectival (coding a state) or verbal (coding an event), as shown in the following example:

• Dummy-subject adjectives:

(22) *It* is quite hot (in here)

(23) *It* was a frigid day (last summer)

(24) *It's* wonderful (here)

(25) *It* was a disaster (there)

• Dummy-subject verbs:

(26) *It* had been raining (across the country)

(27) *It* froze (last week)

(28) *It* was snowing (real hard)

Weather verbs such as *rain*, *snow*, and *thunder*, according to Culicover (2009: 200), lack conceptual structural argument. The dummy subject *it* appears in a sentence in which such a verb is the main verb.

Weather verbs are verbs that portray weather phenomena in phrases (it is raining, it snowed last week, it has been thundering in the west) and have a subject that does not signify anything (it is raining, it snowed last week, it has been thundering in the west). In a statement with weather verbs like *rain*, *snow*, or *thunder*, such "dummy" subjects are required by English grammar (Kreidler, 2013:48).

According to Keizer (2015: 180), the (obligatory) Subject position can be filled with a fake element., weather verbs such as *rain*, *snow*, and *hail* do not have any counter-arguments (are zero-place predicates). The dummy element *it* is placed in the subject position when there is no argument to act as the subject. *It* is common to employ the possibility of owning a Dummy subject to signal that the predicate does not theta-mark its subject:

(29) *It* seems John has consumed all of the bread.

(30) John seems to have consumed all of the bread.

A noun phrase, as well as a string consisting of a moved noun phrase and its trace(s), must have one and only one theta-role, according to Chomsky (1981), in the sense that it must have one of the so-called roles agent, topic, recipient, etc., and possessing even a couple of them is not enough. Actually, the expletive or dummy subject does not require a theta-role, as its name suggests. The word *seem* does not impart a theta-role to its subject, as seen in Example 29. As a result, it's assumed that in example number (30), the subject John has migrated from the infinitive clause subject to the matrix subject position (Fischer, Kemenade & Koopman, 2000:260)

In the same way that the infinitive requires a dummy subject, the rising verb or *be* does as well. For example,

(31)a. *It* seems to be simple to annoy Rhodes.

b. *Hobbs seems to be easy to annoy Rhodes.

(32)a. *It* will most likely be easy to annoy Rhodes.

b *Hobbs is likely to irritate Rhodes easily.

Compare and contrast the following:

(33)a. *It's* easy to irritate Rhodes.

b. *Hobbs is easy to irritate Rhodes.

Fasano (2014: 284) distinguishes between the many uses of the word *there*, stating that its use as a location adverb should be distinguished from its use as an expletive:

(34) *There* is an armed thief (adverb)

(35) *There* is an armed thief in the premises. (adjective)

There is a place adverb in the first sentence. It is an expletive in the second, a term used to leave the subject position devoid of substance; when used in this manner, *there* is an empty "slot-filler."

Although the expletive "*there*" normally comes first in the sentence, the adverb "*there*" might alternatively come first, according to Vitto (2006:185). When the adverb "*there*" does appear at the start of a sentence, it is used with the definite article "the" rather than the indefinite ("a" or "an") when the noun in question is singular... when "*there*" is used as an adverb, *there* is a variation in emphasis:

(36) *There* was a ghost in the house. (expletive)

(37) *There* was *the* ghost in the house. (adverb)

In two circumstances, "*there*" is regarded an adverb according to the two previous attitudes:

- Even if it occurs with indefinite articles, *there* is an adverb of place if its sentence isn't supported by an adverb of place, as in sentence (34).
- Even if its phrase is supported by an adverb of place, *there* operates as an adverb of place if it appears with the definite article "the" (37)

When "*there*" appears with indefinite articles and the sentence is supported by an adverb of location, as in examples (35) and (36), it is considered a dummy or expletive subject.

The expletive *there* subject is introduced in certain English constructions to satisfy the Extended Project Principle, which requires that every sentence have a subject, according to Zanuttini & Horn (2014: 247).

As a result, the expletive *there* serves a solely grammatical purpose. Theta-role is not given to profanity because it is not a valid (semantically contentful) argument. Raising predicates do not assign an external theta-role, whereas control predicates do. As a result, a Control predicate is a matrix verb with an embedded clause complement that does not allow an expletive *there* as a subject. With Raising predicates, expletive subjects will be grammatical. With *seem*, a canonical Raising verb, and *try*, a canonical Control verb, the grammatical difference for expletive *there* subject may be noticed.

Here are several examples:

(38) a. *There seemed / *tried* to be someone living there.

b. *There seemed/*tried* to be no milk left in the refrigerator.

c. *There seemed/ *tried* to be little hope of finding them alive.

(Radford et al., 1997, p. 337)

(39) a. *There seemed* to be a lot of debate regarding the issue. (RAISING)

b. *There *tried* to be a lot of debate regarding the issue. (CONTROL)

As a result, the pro-forms *it* and *there* are allowed to be "dummy" subjects with predicate verbs in English. This means that such pro-forms are permitted in the subject position and possess the subject relation property despite the fact that they serve no semantic function. In other words, the dummy subject does not have an antecedent, and the verb does not assign any semantic role to the pro-form in issue (Kroeger , 2004 : 120).

It's worth noting that, unlike Equi Predicates, Raising Predicates allow expletive subjects to be in the subject position:

(40) a. *It* seems to be raining.

b. *There* will most likely be a lot of accidents if we receive a snowstorm.

c. *It's* getting dark in the valley by mid-afternoon.

d. *There* began to appear fair in the patient's behavior.

- (41) a. * *It* tries to rain.
b. * *There* will be a lot of accidents if we receive a snowstorm.,
c. * *It* tends to be dark in the valley by mid-afternoon.,
d. * *There* refused to appear fair in the patient's behavior.

The subject-verb agreement is another issue that can be noticed in the use of the dummy *there*. The majority of speakers in spoken English prefer to employ the singular verb *to be* in contracted form:

- (42) a. *There* is a wound in my leg.
b. *There* has been a mishap.

Speakers automatically employ the singular even when the noun phrase complement is plural because this form is often encountered; the plural is required:

- (43) a* *There* is eight months to study hard.
b.* *There* is a man and a woman at the top of the mountain.

When a sentence begins with the dummy *there*, it is important to remember that the verb comes before the subject. Though it is acceptable to use the singular verb *to be* in speech, in a formal written setting, the speaker must ensure that the verb and the subject it precedes are in accord. It's critical to avoid the problem by rephrasing the sentence. A sentence that begins with the word "*there*" is automatically weak; rephrasing the sentence strengthens it:

- (44) a. * *There* is eight months to study hard. INCORRECT
b. *There* are eight months to study hard. CORRECT
c. Eight months to study hard *are*..... BETTER
- (45) a.* *There* is a man and a woman at the top of the mountain. INCORRECT
c. *There* are a man and a woman at the top of the mountain. CORRECT
b. A man and a woman *are* at the top of the mountain. BETTER

4. Final Thoughts

1. The "subject" of a sentence is anything that directs the verb's action.
2. A provisional, dummy, or expletive subject is one that takes the place of the subject in a phrase but has no semantic significance.
3. The dummy subjects "*it*" and "*there*" simply fulfil the grammatical requirement. There is a syntactic function for each of them. They share the trait of having a subject relationship.
4. Dummy subjects have a limited lexicon, and only certain verbs can be used with them. Some verbs can be used with dummy subjects, while others cannot.

5. Dummy subjects can be created by elevating the predicates of the other important parts of the sentence.

6. In dummy subject clauses, the verb phrase might be adjectival or verbal.

7. When a verb like rain, snow, thunder, or hail is the main verb in a phrase, the dummy subject should be used.

It's a Control predicate if a matrix verb with an embedded clause complement doesn't allow an expletive their subject. With Raising predicates, expletive subjects will be grammatical.

9. When it comes to the verb agreement, it's important to remember that the verb comes after the subject. It's important to remember that the verb comes before the subject in the case of the expletive.

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