

9

IT AND THERE

- 1 Identify and correct any errors in the sentences below. Explain your corrections. (NB: not all the sentences contain errors!)
- a. ~~There~~ It is no mean feat to be 13 years of age and a world-class skier.
It is wrong to use the existential *there* here because existence is not an issue. The anticipatory *it* is correct because it functions as an anticipatory subject with a dependent clause as real subject (*to be 13 years and a world-class skier*). Since the real subject is a fairly long and heavy element (dependent clause), end position in the sentence is preferable.
 - b. There is broad political consensus that the hospital needs a new children's ward. (existential *there*)
 - c. It was high time she stopped procrastinating. (anticipatory *it*)
 - d. ~~It~~ There is light at the end of the tunnel.
The existential *there* is correct because light exists (metaphorically) at the end of the tunnel.
 - e. It is not the time between Christmas and New Year that makes you gain weight. (cleft *it*)
 - f. ~~It~~ There has not come more information about the accident.
The existential *there* is correct because no more information exists.
 - g. There are many races left this season. (existential *there*)
 - h. The higher we go, the more snow ~~it~~ there is.
The existential *there* is correct because more snow exists.

- 2 Fill in either *it* or *there* in the blanks in the text below. If you find that either alternative is acceptable in the context, explain any difference in meaning.

There are many kinds of changes that you can make in your home to make **it** the kind of home that you are looking for. Starting with your bedroom, we suggest you install sliding wardrobe doors to get instant and easy access to your clothing. **There** is a choice of everything from contemporary designer doors to the traditional-looking Japanese looking doors. When planning to install closet entryways, **it** is a good idea to think about what look you are going for. In addition, **it** is important to think about the function of the wardrobe bypass entry. Considering these things makes **it** possible for you to find the greatest solution **there** is. If **it/there** is a completely unique look that you are after, **there** are custom-fitted wardrobes in a range of materials from different suppliers.

In the one case where both *it* and *there* can be used, *there* creates an existential sentence (such a unique look exists, and “you” are looking for it), while *it* is part of a cleft sentence, giving extra focus to *unique look*, and possibly contrasting it with e.g. an ordinary look. (The original text had *it*.)

- 3 Translate the following sentences into English.

- a. Det er jo hundre år siden.
It/That was a hundred years ago, you know.
- b. Det er ikke rart at de er bekymret.
No wonder they are worried.
- c. Det er jeg helt sikker på.
I am quite sure of that.
- d. Det var et egyptisk flagg som vaiet fra flaggstangen.
There was an Egyptian flag flying from the flagstaff. (existential sentence)
OR: It was an Egyptian flag that was flying from the flagstaff. (cleft sentence)
- e. Det er klart det er dyrt.
Of course it is expensive.
- f. Det er bare det at bussen kommer fra den andre kanten.
It's only that the bus will arrive from the other direction.
- g. Det er derfor vi har droppet seniorklassene.
That is why we have dropped the senior classes.

4 Explain the difference in form and meaning between the members of each pair.

a. 1 There is time for dessert.

2 It is time for dessert.

The difference between these sentences is the use of *it* and *there*. The use of the existential *there* in sentence (a1) means that it is possible to have dessert because the schedule allows it. The use of the empty *it* in (a2) means that the time has come for dessert.

b. 1 He saw it as a great opportunity.

2 He saw there was a great opportunity.

In sentence (b1) the use of the reference *it* means that something concrete that has been mentioned previously or that is understood from the context is seen as a good opportunity. *It* functions as direct object in the sentence and as a *great opportunity* as circumstantial adverbial. In (b2) *there was a great opportunity* is a dependent clause which functions as direct object. In this dependent clause the existential *there* functions as anticipatory subject and signals the existence of a great opportunity.

c. 1 It was a good thing that the missionary was doing.

2 It was a good thing that the missionary was doing that work.

The difference between these sentences is two different *it*-constructions. In (c1) we have a cleft construction, which also includes the relative pronoun *that*. The purpose is to underline or emphasize that it was a good thing the missionary did, not a bad thing. In (c2) the use of an anticipatory *it* could be motivated by the long element that functions as the real subject, namely the *that*-clause, which is a dependent clause with the subordinating conjunction *that*. The dependent clause also contains the noun phrase *that work*, in which *that* functions as demonstrative determiner. Sentence (c2) praises the fact that the missionary did the work, not the work itself.

d. 1 There were some sandwiches that he wanted.

2 It was some sandwiches that he wanted.

The difference between these two sentences is the use of the existential *there* followed by the lexical verb *to be* in the plural (simple past verb form) in (d1) and a cleft-*it* in combination with the verb *to be* in the singular in (d2). Sentence (d1) means that he wanted some sandwiches that existed or were to be found somewhere. In (d2) the cleft construction is used to emphasize that it was sandwiches he wanted, not something else.

- e. 1 (The phone rang.) It was my boyfriend.
2 (The doorbell rang.) There was my boyfriend.

In (e1) the referential *it* is used because the sentence gives information about the phone call and *it* refers to the person who called. In (e2) the locative *there* is used, which means that the boyfriend was located right there at the door, perhaps somewhat unexpectedly. The syntactic function of *my boyfriend* is subject predicative in (e1) and subject in (e2).

5 Read the following text and answer the questions below:

As a long-time supporter of cricket *it* has been wonderful to see some great Test matches played in good spirit by up and coming young players and legends alike. However, I hope the snarling and bullying aggressiveness shown by James Pattinson is not a sign that the Australian team is going to return to the bad old days when *it* might have been the best team in the world but not very popular. At the conclusion of the game, *it* looked likely that the team was not going to shake hands with the two Indian batsmen remaining. *There* is no need for such displays. In the old days, *it* was the “best and fairest” that received the award rather than the “Man of the Match”. *It* might be a good idea to restore this tradition. Play the game hard, fast and aggressive but above all respect the opposition, respect the rules and respect the game itself. That’s what cricket and, indeed, life is all about. (From the *Sydney Morning Herald*, adapted.)

- a. Study all uses of *it* in the text and classify them according to their type.

As a long-time supporter of cricket *it* (anticipatory *it*) has been wonderful to see some great Test matches played in good spirit by up and coming young players and legends alike. However, I hope the snarling and bullying aggressiveness shown by James Pattinson is not a sign that the Australian team is going to return to the bad old days when it (referential *it*) might have been the best team in the world but not very popular. At the conclusion of the game, it (anticipatory *it*) looked likely that the team was not going to shake hands with the two Indian batsmen remaining. There is no need for such displays. In the old days, it (cleft-*it*) was the “best and fairest” that received the award rather than the “Man of the Match”. It (anticipatory *it*) might be a good idea to restore this tradition. Play the game hard, fast and aggressive but above all respect the opposition, respect the rules and respect the game itself. That’s what cricket and, indeed, life is all about.

- b. Analyse the sentence with *there* syntactically. Is *there* existential or locative? Could *it* have been used in the same sentence?

The clause structure is aS-V-S. *There* is existential. *It* would not work in this case.

- c. In the last sentence of the text, *that* would correspond to Norwegian *det*. Could *it* have been used instead of *that*? If so, would there be any difference in meaning or stylistic effect?

It could have been used with a very similar meaning. However, the referential *it* would refer back to the previous text in a neutral way, without special emphasis on *it*. The use of the demonstrative pronoun *that* underscores the statement more because it will naturally be pronounced with extra stress, thus making it a good way to end the text.

6 Findings from the British National Corpus at <http://corpus.byu.edu/>:

- a. Examples of *it* constructions found among the first 20 hits for *it is*.

Cleft *it*: *It is then that fame, honour, chastity and glory have no longer their due estimation.*

Referential *it*: *When love truly seizes the heart it is like a malignant fever...*

Anticipatory *it* with to-infinitive as real subject: *for it is not for me to hold an argument with your honour.*

Anticipatory *it* with *that*-clause as real subject: *and it is my opinion that he finds he can't and that vexes his proud heart. Yet it is impossible (∅) I should love him; for his vices all ugly him over.*

- b. Examples of *there* constructions among the first 20 hits for *there is*.

Existential *there*: *Now I begin to fear **there** is something in it. **There** isn't any wind.*

In a couple of instances, *there* and *is* do not belong to the same construction, and *there* is locative, for instance in *That great baby you see **there** is not yet out of his swaddling clouts...*

- c. Write *there's* in the search box (note the space before the apostrophe) and study the first 30 hits. Do any of the sentence have a real subject that is a plural noun phrase? NOTE: we clicked on the word "sample" to get hits from a variety of texts for this pattern.

There were sentences with *there's* + plural noun phrase, such as *there's three races worth five hundred pounds each; There's four eggs; Listen there's been developments.*

These hits were found either in spoken English or in dialogue parts of fiction.

- d. In Norwegian it is fairly common to use verbs other than *være* in existential constructions, for example *Det står et tre i gården*. Search for *there* [*stand*] and consider the following: Does *stand* seem to be frequent after *there*? Go through the examples of *there stood*. Are they all examples of the existential *there*?

Compared to *there is*, *there + stand* is very infrequent.

Among the examples of *there stood*, most seem to involve the locative *there*, for example *He opened it and there stood Santa in his doorway*. Here is one example of existential *there* with *stood* from the corpus: *Suddenly, there stood beside me a very tall figure...*