

*There is a flower on the table*¹

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ABSTRACT

The apparent simplicity of the sentence in the title may reveal properties of language which are assumed but rarely questioned. My interest in this sentence lies in the role played by *there*, *is*, *a*, and the positioning of the preposition phrase, a list which obviously constitute the whole sentence. All the above elements help provide a scene or a frame to the situation. That is, they help locate the situation in space. In other words, none of them appears without a purpose. First, it is shown that *there* is not an expletive as it induces topic-like meaning and has a “place” morpheme; thus LF-adjunction of the associate (*a flower*) to lend interpretive content to the otherwise free-standing *there* is not required. In studying the contribution of the copula, it is suggested that the copula is the topic head of expletive predicative sentences. Next, the roles played by the (in)definiteness of the associate *is/ are* are examined and the placement of the PP is shown to situate the scene in the real world. Finally, using a Question-Answer model of discourse (Roberts 1996), it is shown why Bangla does not “need” an expletive like *there*.

1 Introduction

The title of the paper as a single exemplar sentence is to draw attention to the fact that one really doesn’t need any more data than this in the study of syntax. Simply plucking a sentence out of the thin air displays all the wonderment of language that is there to see. Take any simple sentence and see how linguistic theories and ideas come crowding in. And once that has happened, one is driven towards the conclusion that nothing exists without a reason. One goal of this paper therefore is to demonstrate that nothing in this sentence is extraneous.

The structure of this paper thus is as follows, including three theory-neutral observations interspersed in between: *A Picture*, *There, Is, On the Table*, *A Flower*, and *A Dialogue*.

2 A Picture

The first theory neutral observation that I would like to draw attention to is that the exemplar sentence gives a very strong and clear image. The moment I utter this sentence, all you see,

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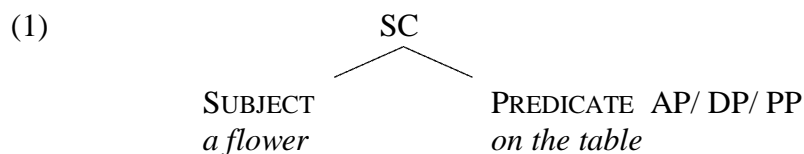
immediately, is a flower which is placed on a table. (Take note of the order in which I mentioned this two entities; I will revisit this ordering later in the paper)

To come back to the sentence, note that, I can write a novel, paint a picture or make a film with this title. Similar structures which may or may not give such a clear image are the following underlined parts:

Jonaki considers the doll a dog
The police ordered the marchers off the stage

Technically these are called *Small Clauses* (SC), small because they don't contain any verb or tense -- they are somehow "clipped". Clipped though their wings may be, they let your imaginations fly. That is, chipping away certain functional "joints" which make a sentence a finished product, somehow seems to have the effect of making the image stronger. Although this is for the cognitive scientist to ponder upon, if one were to hazard a guess, it seems that an effort proportionate to the "chipping away" is demanded of our creative imagination. I guess this must be part of the chemistry of Haiku. I shall not dwell upon this any further but would encourage students of stylistics who are also trained in linguistics methodology to explore this further.

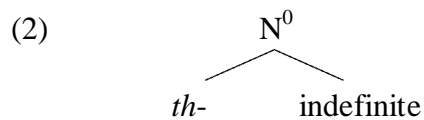
From this theory neutral observation, I will make the claim that *there* expletive sentences in fact make use of an underlying small clause structures. The structure of an SC is typically as follows:



There are a lot of theories about SCs in at least the following: Cardinaletti and Guisti 1995, Grimshaw 1991, Safir 1983, Stowell 1981, Williams 1980, etc.; an extensive bibliography is provided at the end to assist in further exploring topics that form the background of this paper.

3 There

It is not implausible to think of *There* as consisting of *th* and an indefinite [PLACE] morpheme. This observation actually goes back to Klima (1964), Chomsky (1964) and Katz and Postal (1964) where *who* and *what* are analysed as [WH + someone] and [WH + something], respectively. In Chomsky (1975:434) *who* is taken to be [WH + (s)he] and *what* as [WH + it]. Tsai (1999) essentially reiterates these points about *th-* and *Wh*. He also gives a sub-zero level structure of such words as follows:



The specifier (to the right) of this structure has been omitted. I would now like to make the claim that the ‘place’ meaning in the locative PP (in the exemplar sentence) is not entirely lost in the expletive version. However, the quantificational nature of the expletive *there* is realized only at an operator position in English. This explains its appearance at the sentence-initial position. This observation is not without its problems. As Tsai (1999) pointed out, in English, *Wh* and *Th* expressions are different in the sense that only the former exhibits a full operator binding within the word.

The fact that the expletive *there* is perhaps derived from the locational *there* becomes more feasible if we compare the following:

- (3) a. He is there
 b. There he is!

It is clear that the “!” mark at the end of (3b) indicates some special property of the expression in terms of the intonation that this expression demands. Furthermore, emphasis on *there* and a mild

pause after it in (3b) are also unmissable. The pause is not as clear as in the clearly topicalised structures like *Apples, I like* but is nonetheless detectable.

These observations lead us to believe that the expletive *there* has topic-like properties.

This becomes even clearer if we compare the following:

- (4) a. There!
 b. oi/ ei je/ to! (Bangla)
 that/ this COMP (FOCUS)/ TOPIC

The “discovery interpretation” associated with these examples indicates that we are dealing with a potential topic element (discovery, and therefore old information/ topic). The use of *to* or *je* for the Bangla discovery expression clinches the issue somewhat in favour of identifying *there* being in the topic domain. (see Bhattacharya 2000b,c, 2001b,c, 2002a,b,c,d for extensive theorisation on *je* as a topic marker in Bangla). That claim of *to* as a topic marker has been uncontroversial.

Both the observations in this section that *-ere* in *there* retains its indefinite “place” meaning and that *there* has topic properties argue against the expletive character of *there*. By implication, these facts present evidence against the view that the expletive *there* is a “free-standing LF object” which requires the movement of the associate (*a flower*) at LF to license it – the dominant view in the current literature (Chomsky 1986, 1995, Lasnik 1995, Safir 1987, among many others).

In fact, the finding here conforms to the definiteness restriction that *there* induces on the associate (Belletti 1988):

- (5) There is *a man*/ **the man*

Therefore, we conclude that the so-called expletive is *not* an expletive at all.

4 Is

However, with regards to the “!” mark in (3b), some explanation is called for. Note in this connection that the copula cannot be contracted (which is otherwise allowed if it is in the post-subject position).

- (6) a.* There he’s
 b. There he [is_F]

I will read this fact as indicating focus on the copula. Such focus at the end of the sentence reminds us of *Predicate Inversion* (PI) cases. The focus in PI shifts to the post-copular element:

- (7) a. John is the best candidate
 b. The best candidate is [John_F]

The most popular view on this matter is that PI structures (as in (9b)) are derived from the following underlying structure (den Dikken 1994, Moro 1995):

- (8) is [_{XP} John the best candidate] ⇒
 (9) a. John is [_{XP} t_{John} the best candidate] (= (7a))
 b. [the best candidate]_x is [John t_x] (= (7b))

That is, both the subject *John* and the predicate *the best candidate* target the same position [Spec, IP] (therefore, it is considered to be an A-movement in den Dikken 1995). Notice in this connection that the XP in (8) is our old friend SC. Thus we already see a couple of similarities between the two constructions, emphasis and an underlying SC.

I would still like to point out that the derivation in (9b) does not still capture the fact that there is focus on *John* in (7b), (9b):

- (10) The best candidate is [John_F]

My suggestion is that *John* ends up in the focus domain which is outside the sentence proper (that is, outside the CP level). The derivation therefore is as follows:

- (11) [_{TopP} The best candidate is [_{FocP} John F⁰]

This implies that the copula is the TOP head which enables the predicate to end up at the specifier of the topic phrase.

Going back to (6b) now, it seems that it represents merely an intermediate stage in the derivation (11) where the copula remains at the F^0 head and marks agreement with the subject (at [Spec, FocP]) by Spec-Head. Clearly, the copula must agree with the subject:

(12)* There he are

Let us now consider the status of PI in Bangla. Surprisingly, PI in Bangla displays the same topic-focus tension within the clause:

(13) SObce bhalo chatro hocche/ holo [jonaki_F]
 all.from good student is (become) Jonaki
 ‘The best student is Jonaki’

That is, the post-copular NP (*Jonaki* here) must carry focus emphasis otherwise the sentence is unacceptable. Notice also that the copula is in between the inverted predicate and the focalised post-verbal subject. Additionally, *be* has *become* by this head movement to TOP in Bangla. (Note also the SVO order in such sentences). There is a lot to explore in this connection but I will not say much except directing interested researchers towards the possibility that the existential copula may perhaps be thought of as *not* projecting an external position in its local domain and therefore must move up whereby it can license a specifier position. In other words, the derivation of the Bangla PI case proceeds as follows:

(14) [_{TOPP} Sobce bhalo chatro [_{TOP'} hocche/ holo [_{FocP} Jonaki F^0
 all.from good student is (become) J
 ‘The best student of them all is, Jonaki.’

Note that both PI and (6b) make use of an underlying SC structure.

One can therefore conclude the following:

- After comparison with PI cases, expletive sentences seem to involve an (inverted) TOPIC part and a FOCUS pivot
- These structures are derived from an underlying SC structure selected by the copula
- The predicate material is not shy to move to the front of the sentence

Armed with these conclusions let us look at the exemplar sentence. Especially the last point in the conclusions above leads us to look at the possibility of PI within the expletive sentence:

- (15) a. There is a flower on the table
 b. [On the table]_x is a flower t_x

It is immediately clear that PI here is obtained by some kind of *there*-replacement. Note that an expletive PP here (*there*) is replaced by a real locational PP (*on the table*). Although not shown explicitly in (15b), the post-copular NP *a flower* carries the obligatory focus information. That is, the same Topic-Focus tension is displayed in the PI version of the expletive sentence. Movement of the PP to the front to the topic domain leaves the NP to end up in the focus domain.

Similarly, PI of the Bangla equivalent of (15a) involves movement of the PP to the front:

- (16) [Tebiler upore_{PP}] ache [EkTa phul_F]
 Table's top.on is one.CLA flower
 'On the table is a flower'

Derivation of this structure proceeds as in the PI case in (14). Note that if the post-copular NP is *not* in focus, then we obtain the expletive sentence:

- (17) Tebilier upore EkTa phul ache

I therefore conclude that the expletive sentences are non-PI versions of the PI sentences. In other words, I claim that expletive sentences too involve a (non-overt) Topic-Focus pivot. It is only in the PI cases that these tensions are overtly exploited and displayed. However, the question arises

as to the position of the fronted PP *Tebil-er upore*: is it, like its English counterpart, not shy to move to the front of the sentence? Let us explore this in the next section.

5 On the Table

At this point I would like to recall discussions Probal Dasgupta and I had in the early 90s about the role of the functional clause structure (which partly went into Bhattacharya 1995). In this model every sentence is viewed as a Spectacle and (with a slight modification of the original idea) the C-domain of the clause can be thought of setting the scene for this spectacle. Note that what we have concluded about the structures discussed above do indeed point towards the dramatic nature of a sentence in terms of the Topic-Focus pivot. This reminds us of one once famous tradition in linguistics which is still vigorously pursued in the eastern European tradition of viewing the clause as an interplay of information structure. The present paper is somewhat of a return to this aspect of the Prague school tradition.

Let us therefore make another theory neutral observation which has a direct relevance to the scene setting potential of the clause. Notice that the PP metaphorically and in this very picturesque exemplar sentence, literally, provides the space for the object of interest to be embedded. The sentence is really about a flower (object of interest) and the table provides a space for the flower to appear. The PP therefore sets the scene for the embedding of the object which forms the central interest of the sentence (spectacle).

In short, PP is the scene-setter and the NP is the “special” object. But how special is the NP? I turn to this question next.

6 A Flower

I take the discussion in the previous section to mean that PP is in the C-domain and the NP, although indefinite has “special” properties. The second point brings to mind the *Mapping Hypothesis* of Deising (1992), which following Heim (1982) (and earlier work), treats specific indefinites as quantificational in need of binding a variable within the clause from the edge of the clause. That is, the special property of the NP *a flower* can be realised if it ends up at the edge of the clause – at the edge of the IP. With this mind, I propose that the Bangla expletive sentence is derived as in the following:

(18) [CP *Tebiler upore* [C' C⁰ [IP *EkTa phul* [VP *ache* [SC t_{NP} t_{PP}]]]]]

That is, the PP *Tebil-er upore* being the scene-setter and therefore C-material, ends up in the [Spec, CP] position and the “special” NP *EkTa phul* finds itself at [Spec,IP] – the edge of the clause.

Note in this connection that the [Spec,IP] position is reserved normally for the subject of a clause, it is the quintessential subject position. Considering the exemplar sentence, it can be noticed that the central object of interest, that is, *EkTa phul*, the flower, is not the subject but the Theme of the sentence. These sentences therefore seem to be without a subject. This brings us closer to the affirmation of what was mentioned at the beginning: everything in a clause is there for a purpose, nothing is extraneous. The fact that these sentences are subject-less is due to a structural reason. The subject position is simply *not available* because it is to be used by the SC subject (which is a Theme argument) in deriving the expletive sentence.

The pair below (in (19)) provides surprising evidence in favour of this analysis. Note in this connection that clear judgements often don't reveal most of the interesting properties of a language. One must thus consider the following pair carefully before dismissing it merely as a

syntactician’s imagination. It is quite possible to utter the sentence in (19a) and judge it as grammatical but it is not felicitous. That is, (19b) would be the most “natural” way of expressing the thought that a specific flower is on the table.

- (19) a.# Tebiler upore phul-Ta ache
 table.GEN on.LOC flower-CLA is
 b. phul-Ta Tebiler upore ache

Note that a simple minded approach to the Mapping Hypothesis (MH) will not work because MH does not apply to definites. I suggest that a plausible account will have to assume that Bangla scopal properties are displayed overtly to a large extent (see the DP literature by Bhattacharya 1998 et seq, on this matter). Like Hungarian, we may therefore assume that Bangla wears its scopal properties on its sleeve to a large extent. That is, the LF scopal properties (that the “group” variable introduced by a **Group denoting Quantifier Phrase** – a GQP -- is bound by an existential operator) of a definite object (or a GQP) like *phul-Ta* is satisfied overtly in Bangla.

Consider in this connection the Landing Site Theory (LST) of Beghelli (1995) where GQPs move to the domain of a *Referential projection* above the CP by LF to be licensed by an existential operator in its head to achieve existential closure. Since we have just indicated that in Bangla many such LF properties are displayed in the narrow syntax, the specific NP *phul-Ta* would simply find itself in the referential domain in the overt syntax:

- (20) $[_{\text{RefP}} \text{phul-Ta } [_{\text{Ref}} \exists^0 [_{\text{CP}} \text{Tebiler upore } \dots [_{\text{VP}} \text{ache } [_{\text{SC}} \text{t}_{\text{NP}} \text{t}_{\text{PP}}]]]]]]$

I may be pointed out that Bangla seems to prefer definite subjects – that is, subjects in Bangla are preferably definite rather than indefinite. The *Wh*-movement account for Bangla, traditionally thought of as a *Wh* in-situ language, proposed in Simpson and Bhattacharya (2003) thus no longer seem to be a strange suggestion anymore.

7 A Dialogue

Finally, having accounted for all the parts of the picture that the sentence generates, the present account has some broader goals in situating the sentence within a system of dialogues. If we were to take seriously the notion that syntax is not really a study of a sentence in isolation, then viewing a sentence as part of a dialogue makes immense sense. Notice that this is not in contradiction to what I said right at the beginning, that the ideal syntactic data is a sentence at most, you don't really need more. What is about to be explored simply sets the sentence in a more realistic environment by viewing this isolated sentence as a part of something bigger. The notion to be explored in this connection is the view that every assertion has an underlying/preceding question. This is where I appeal for the third and the last theory neutral observation. When I look at the exemplar sentence, not only do I see a picture (section 2) but also the shadow of a question. That is, the situation is somewhat like the following:

- (21) Q₁: *Tebiler upore ki ache?*
 Table.GEN on.LOC what is
 'What's there on the table?'
 A₁: *Tebiler upore EkTa phul/ phul ache*
 Table.GEN on.LOC one.CLA flower/ flower is
 'On the table is (a) flower.'

That is, Q₁ is presupposed in A₁. Note that other plausible questions are out:

- (22) #Q₂: *phul(-Ta)/ EkTa phul kothay ache?*
 flower(-CLA) one.CLA flower where is
 'Where is (one) flower?'
 #Q₃: *Tebiler upore ki phul(-Ta)/ EkTa phul ache (ki)?*
 Table.GEN on.LOC y/n flower(-CLA)/ one.CLA flower is (y/n)
 'Is there (a) flower on the table?'

Such a view of a sentence is obtained from the Question-Answer model of discourse which is a theory proposed by Roberts (1996) where a sentence is viewed as a part of a strategy of

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