

<Reports on the Sixteenth annual Meeting of
the Tsukuba English Linguistic Society> On
Expletive It

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journal or publication title	Tsukuba English Studies
volume	15
page range	265
year	1996-09-10
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2241/7697

On Expletive it

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In this study, I presented some pieces of evidence that show the differences among the types of expletive it, namely, ambient it (Amb-it), extraposition it (Ext-it), and the it which goes with Raising verbs (RsV-it), and discussed their properties and related issues.

The first section deals with the question of how these types of it are distinguished. In view of several syntactic tests, I arrived at the conclusion that both Amb-it and Ext-it should be regarded as arguments, while RsV-it should be a non-argument (a "genuine" expletive). I argued that, contrary to what has been assumed in the generative grammar tradition, the construction in which Ext-it appears cannot be taken as identical to the one in which RsV-it appears, and that a certain mechanism for associating Ext-it with the extraposed clause must be introduced.

Section 2 is devoted to seeking for such a mechanism. First, I argued against the view that the extraposition construction has a parallel behavior to the construction with a Depictive Secondary Predicate, and pointed out that the mutual-c-command condition (which plays a crucial role in licensing Depictive Secondary Predicates) is not sufficient to license the extraposition construction. Then, taking structural factors into consideration, I suggested that besides the mutual-c-command condition, there are some locality conditions imposed on the extraposition construction.

Finally, in section 3, I returned to the question concerning the argument/non-argument status of expletive it. Here, I sought to figure out the degree of "argumenthood" in which the three types of it are graded, in the hope that they might be treated in a certain uniform way.

Some of the consequences of this study have been explored in my Master's thesis entitled "On the English Expletive it", submitted to University of Tsukuba, 1995. I would refer the interested reader to the thesis.