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THE USE OF THE EXPLETIVE "IT" IN CONSTRUCTION WITH EXPRESSIONS OF PLACE AND TIME

For purposes of this paper the following theoretical linguistic framework is assumed. The three levels of systematic linguistic representation are those of semantic structure (which we shall also refer to as deep structure), surface syntactic structure, and phonetic structure. The first two levels are connected by transformational rules (or, simply, rules of grammar), and the latter two by phonological rules. Semantic representations have essentially the form of expressions in logic; in particular the primitive *categories* of the semantic component include only the elements sentence, predicate, argument, variable, and perhaps various connectors, quantifiers, and operators. Set theoretical operations are defined over the variables; in particular set theoretic union and the ability to form sets of sets. Missing from this inventory are many familiar syntactic categories, notably verb phrase (noun phrase is retained, but relabeled argument), the various parts of speech, and such minor categories as auxiliary and determiner. Arguments for various aspects of this theoretical framework are to be found in numerous recent papers, including Annear (1967), Bach (1968), Fillmore (1968), Lakoff (1968), Lakoff and Ross (1967), McCawley (1968), Ross (1967), Wierzbicka (1967), and in my book (Langendoen, 1969).

The rules of formation for semantic structures are extremely simple; they insure that each sentence has as its constituent a predicate and one or two arguments, and that each argument contains at least a variable. Lexical items contain their own semantic structures, and when they occur in sentences, they *contribute* their semantic structures to those sentences. It is important to realize that this conception of the role of the lexicon differs drastically from that found in Chomsky (1965), in which the elements of the lexicon, conceived of as bundles of feature specifications, are merely substituted for terminal slots in fully-developed branching structures. In my judgment, a strict separation of semantic constituent structure and lexicon cannot be maintained.

Let us now examine the properties of some sentence types that I have discussed elsewhere (Langendoen, 1966 a, b) in terms of the fra-

mework just discussed. First consider sentences containing predicates expressing perceived conditions, for example:

- (1) It's hot out.
- (2) It's crowded in the studio.
- (3) The studio is crowded.

Such predicates as *hot* and *crowded* may be taken to be one-place predicates whose single argument is one designating a location (see also Fillmore

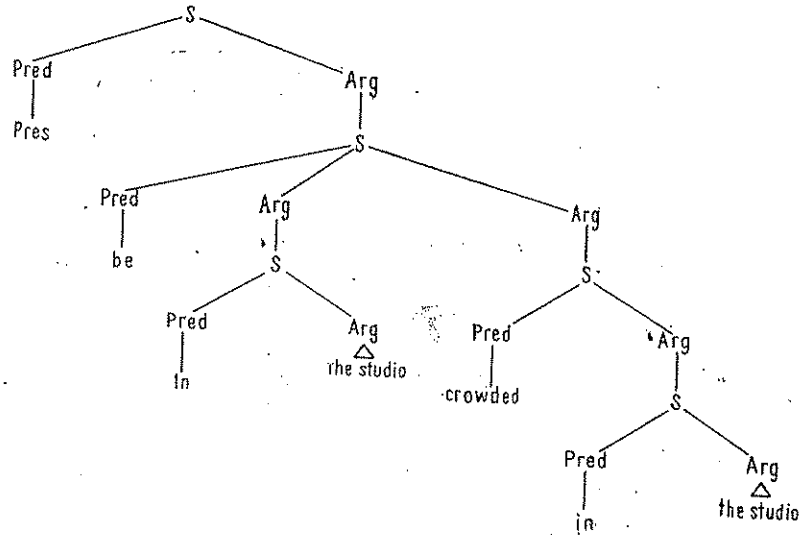


Fig. 1. — Deep structure for example (1).

(1967, example (78) and discussion)). True meteorological predicates notably *rain*, *snow*, *hail*, etc., take a specified argument referring to the outside world, (for example, the *out* of (1)) which in turn may be transformationally deleted. In the sentence:

- (4) It's raining in New York.

the expression *in New York* is introduced in a "higher sentence" (see Lakoff (1965, Appendix F) for discussion). The deep (semantic) structure for (1) is provided in Figure 1; the deep structure for (2)–(3) is provided in Figure 2.

There are a number of reasons for treating spatial prepositions such as *in* as predicates, but time will not permit a consideration of them here.

Finally, the *it* that appears as the surface structure in sentences such as (1) and (2) arises in the following way. A general subjectivization transformation converts *out* and *in the studio* into the subjects of *be* in those sentences. Then an extraposition transformation applies,

obligatorily in the case of (1), optionally in the case of (2), moving *out* and *in the studio* to the ends of their respective sentences, and leaving the expletive *it* in their place. In case extraposition is not applied to the deep structure of Figure 2, then an obligatory transformation deletes the preposition *in* (see Fillmore (1966)); the resulting sentence is (3).

This concludes our consideration of the use of the expletive *it* with predicates governing locative arguments. We turn now to what is in fact

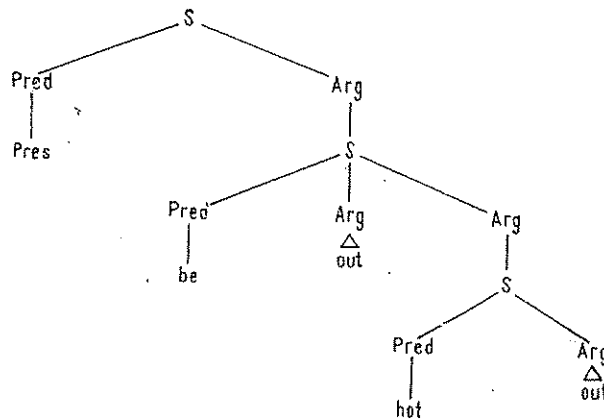


Fig. 2. — Deep structure for examples (2)–(3).

a somewhat more complex situation, the use of the expletive with predicates governing temporal arguments. Consider the following sentences :

- (5) It's early yet.
- (6) It's late already.
- (7) It isn't early any more.
- (8) It isn't late yet.
- (9) It's time to go already.
- (10) It'll be a while yet before everyone's ready.
- (11) It'll be Holy Week next week.
- (12) It's time now to start planting petunias.
- (13) It was a successful day yesterday.

These divide into two groups : (5)–(10) and (11)–(13). In the latter, the temporal predicates *Holy Week*, *time to start planting petunias*, and *a successful day* designate a point or extent of time, and the arguments *next week*, *now*, and *yesterday* have reference to time relative to *narrative time* (which in the unmarked case is the time of speech act). In all these cases, extraposition of the argument is optional; (11)–(13) are equivalent to :

- (14) Next week'll be Holy Week.

(15) Now's time to start planting petunias.

(16) Yesterday was a successful day.

and argument and predicate may be interchanged unless the predicate is indefinite, thus we have :

(17) Holy Week'll be next week.

(18) Time to start planting petunias is now.

The tense predicate, it will be noted, "agrees" in these sentences with the time reference of the argument with respect to narrative time. Thus *next week* and *now* occur with present tense, while *yesterday* goes with past tense. This same argument has often been noted in sentences in which temporal arguments such as *next week* and *yesterday* turn up in surface structures as adverbial expressions, as in :

(19) Igor is taking his vacation next week.

(20) Tom was drafted yesterday.

It has been thought by some grammarians that in such sentences the tense and the temporal adverb form a single discontinuous constituent ; but rather, these sentences should be assigned deep structures which look rather more like the surface structures of the sentences :

(21) Next week is when Igor is taking his vacation.

(22) Yesterday was when Tom was drafted.

That is, the temporal adverb and the sentence minus that adverb are both arguments of a higher predicate *be*, which is transformationally deleted. The tense of this predicate is the same as the tense of the main predicate in the sentence.

Examples (5)–(10) have to do with the use of the arguments *yet*, *already*, and *any more*. Their occurrence with the predicates *early* and *late* is indicated in (5)–(8) ; the expression *any more* (and also *any longer*) can be thought of as suppletive to *yet*, occurring in negative environments, and *yet* in turn as suppletive to *already*. A natural question to raise at this point is whether *yet* in (5) is the same lexical item as *yet* in (8). In Langendoen (1966), an affirmative answer to this question was suggested, on the grounds that the meaning of *yet* is the same in both cases, indicating a point in time prior to some reference point, and that *already* and *any more/any longer* indicate the time of or time after the reference point time. This answer is also supported by other evidence, not indicated in my earlier paper. Consider the sentences :

(23) The child is awake yet.

(24) The child isn't awake yet.

(25) The child is awake already.

(26) The child isn't awake any more/any longer.

In (23)–(24), *yet* is used to indicate that no change of state in the child's sleeping has been observed ; in (25)–(26), the use of *already* and *any more/any longer* indicate that a change of state in the child's sleeping has occurred. In (25), he has gone from sleep to wakefulness, and vice versa in (26). The point in time at which the change took place is, however,

the reference point which makes the use of *already* and *any more/any longer* appropriate in (25)—(26), whereas in (23)—(24), no past time reference point has been established.

Sentences such as the following, moreover, are not counter-examples to the above claims :

- (27) It's awfully early for birds to be singing already.
 (28) It's awfully late for birds to be singing yet.

The reason is that *already* in (27) and *yet* in (28) are not arguments of the predicates *awfully early* and *awfully late*, but rather of the infinitival clauses in their respective sentences. As such, they are interpreted in the manner of (23)—(26); in (27) *already* is used because a prior reference time has been established, namely the time at which the birds started to sing, while in (28) no prior reference time is indicated. Notice also that *yet* can be overtly expressed as an argument of *awfully early* in (27) and *already* of *awfully late* in (28) with no significant change in meaning :

- (29) It's awfully early yet for birds to be singing already.
 (30) It's awfully late already for birds to be singing yet.

Another piece of evidence is the fact that there are uses of *yet* in negative contexts in which it is not suppletive to *already*. Consider, for example, the sentences :

- (31) Cassius won't win the fight for another two rounds yet.
 (32) The fight can't end yet!

In these cases, the use of *yet* is appropriate because, although the reference point has been established (Cassius' winning the fight in (31) and the end of the fight in (32)), the reference point has not yet been reached. This use of *yet* can also be seen in affirmative sentences, for example :

- (33) Floyd will regain the heavyweight championship yet.

Here, the connotation of the sentence is belief on the part of the speaker that the event described will take place.

We note finally that examples (9) and (10) confirm the semantic analysis given above. In (9), the argument *already* is appropriate, since time to go establishes a reference point which is construed as present (soon to be past), while in (10) the use of the predicate *a while* subordinate to the "future tense" predicate *will* establishes a future reference time for which the use of argument *yet* is appropriate.

Now consider the interrogative sentences :

- (34) Has John seen the exhibition yet?
 (35) Has John seen the exhibition already?

The occurrence of *yet* in (34) may be thought of as suppletive to *already*, since the corresponding affirmative sentence is deviant :

- (36) John has seen the exhibition yet.

But notice that by virtue of the grammaticality of (35) *already* can occur in exactly the same environment as its supposed suppletive form. This leads us to inquire whether there is any semantic difference between

(34) and (35) which corresponds to the use of *yet* in (34) and *already* in (35).

To me, the answer is affirmative; (34) inquires whether or not the narrative time is prior to the reference time of John's having seen the exhibition, while (35) inquires whether the narrative time is after the reference time. It seems to me that (34) could naturally be followed by the comment:

(37) It's leaving town tomorrow.

but not (35), while (35) could be followed naturally by:

(38) It just came to town yesterday.

but not (34).

These observations suggest to me that "suppletion" is not the appropriate label for the selection of the arguments *yet*, *already*, *any more/any longer*. Their occurrence is governed by considerations of their meanings, which are relatively independent of one another, unlike the occurrence of true suppletive forms. These same observations hold, I think, for such lexical items as *some*, *any* and *no* and the compounds containing them.

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DISCUSSIONS

J. CARNOCHAN :

You have set up "negative" — and a second unnamed term — for the category along one axis of your diagram, and seem bothered by the different meaning of "yet" in your examples. Have you tried considering "not yet" as one unit, rather than working on just a word at a time?

R. WRIGHT :

If your research has also included *still*, how does it affect your rules? In particular, what is its relation to its partial synonym *yet*?

D. T. LANGENDOEN :

(*Carnochan*) No. Nor, upon trying it, do I think it to be correct. Notice, for example, that "not", in structures in which "yet" also occurs, may be incorporated into other constituents by the negative incorporation transformation discussed by E. S. Klima, *Negation in English*, in J. Fodor and J. J. Katz (eds.), *The Structure of Language*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, 1964. Consider, for example :

- (i) John hasn't seen anyone yet.
- (ii) John has seen no one yet.

If "not yet" were taken to be a single unanalyzable unit, the statement of the negative incorporation rule would be rendered more complex; roughly, it would have to say that both freely occurring "not" and the "not" of "not yet" may be incorporated.

(*Wright*) The meaning of *still*, as I understand it, is that the conditions of the time of reference are the same as those of narrative time (in present-tense sentences at least). Thus, *still* can be used in certain

constructions where any of the forms *yet*, *already*, and *any more* can be used, for example those provided by examples (5)—(8) in my paper. *Still* can also be used together in sentences with *yet* to reinforce the idea that the time of the reference point has not been reached; but where such reinforcement does not make sense, as in questions such as (34), the result of adding *still* is ungrammaticality:

(34') Has John still seen the exhibition yet?