Chapter 11, Problem 1: *There* and Agreement

A. At least two distinct patterns seem to be common. In one, the form of *be* immediately following existential *there* agrees in number with the NP following it. That is, we get the following pattern:

(i) There is a monster in Loch Ness.

(ii) *There are a monster in Loch Ness.

(iii) *There is monsters in Loch Ness.

(iv) There are monsters in Loch Ness.

The second pattern allows a singular verb form even if the following NP is plural, but requires a plural noun form if the verb exhibits plural agreement morphology. That is, this dialect differs from the first one in allowing (iii). (Some speakers appear to exhibit this second pattern if the verb is contracted, but the first pattern for uncontracted *is*).

B. There are two fairly straightforward analyses of the first dialect; Chapter 12, Problem 6 asks students to construct an argument to choose between them.

The first analysis simply stipulates the NUM value of the following NP (that is, the first element of COMPS) in the lexical entries for *is*, *are*, *was*, and *were* taking *there* as subject. One disadvantage of this analysis is it assumes that all of these forms are independently entered into the lexicon, rather than being the outputs of the lexical rules responsible for producing finite forms of other verbs (but see Chapter 8, footnote 30, for a discussion of the applicability of inflectional rules to *be*). On the other hand, this analysis has the advantage that it works just as well for the second dialect, requiring only an additional entry for *is*/*was*.

The second analysis assigns a NUM value to *there* and stipulates in the entry for *be* that the NUM values for its SPR (namely, *there*) and its first complement, as in the following:

$$\left\langle \text{be} , \left[\begin{array}{ll} \textit{exist-be-lxm} & \\ \text{ARG-ST} & \left\langle \left[\begin{array}{ll} \text{FORM} & \text{there} \\ \text{NUM} & \boxed{1} \end{array} \right]_{\text{NP}}, \boxed{2}, \left[\begin{array}{ll} \text{NUM} & \boxed{1} \end{array} \right]_{\text{NP}_i} \right\rangle \\ \text{SEM} & \left[\begin{array}{ll} \text{INDEX} & \boxed{4} \\ \text{RESTR} & \langle\,\rangle \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \right\rangle$$

$$\left[\begin{array}{ll} \text{SYN} & \left[\begin{array}{ll} \text{HEAD} & \left[\text{PRED} + \right] \\ \text{VAL} & \left[\begin{array}{ll} \text{SPR} & \langle \boxed{2} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} & \langle\,\rangle \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \\ \text{SEM} & \left[\text{INDEX} \ \boxed{4} \right] \end{array} \right]$$

This entry undergoes the usual inflectional lexical rules that produce the finite forms of *be*. These lexical rules are what enforce the agreement between the subject and the verb. Since the NP after *be* has the same number as the subject (*there*), the verb will also agree with that NP.

Notice, incidentally, that on this analysis, we can account for the choice of verb form in the old song (from the musical *The Music Man*), "Until there was you". The two NPs *there* and *you* agree only in number, not person. If *you* were the subject, the verb would have to be *were*, even if *you* was singular (*You were/*was enjoying yourself*). But since the verb is agreeing with *there*, which is third person singular, the proper form of the verb is *was*. This provides one small argument in favor of the second analysis.

Finally, the second analysis can be adapted to the second dialect relatively straightforwardly. For speakers who permit existential *is* (and *was*) with a following plural NP, we add an additional lexical entry for *be* along the following lines:

$$\left\langle \text{be} , \begin{bmatrix} \textit{exist-be-lxm} & \\ \text{SYN} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{HEAD} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{AGR} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{NUM sg} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{FORM} & \text{fin} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{ARG-ST} & \left\langle \begin{bmatrix} \text{NP} \\ \text{FORM} \quad \text{there} \end{bmatrix}, \boxed{2}\text{NP}_i , \begin{bmatrix} \text{SYN} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{HEAD} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} + \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{VAL} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} & \langle \boxed{2} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} & \langle\ \rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{SEM} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{INDEX} & \boxed{1} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle \\ \text{SEM} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{INDEX} & \boxed{1} \\ \text{RESTR} & \langle\ \rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle$$

This version of *be* requires *there* as its subject, but puts no restrictions on the number of the following NP. On the other hand, its own AGR is [NUM sg]. In combination with the SHAC and the ARP, this means it can only undergo inflectional rules that produce third-person singular forms (i.e., *is* and *was*, again, see footnote 30 of Chapter 8). The specification [FORM fin] makes this entry incompatible with the INPUT value of the lexical rules that don't add agreement information (those that produce the base and participial forms) so that we don't get spurious ambiguity for sentences with existential *be* in nonfinite forms.