

Data from 17 speakers on English agreement in raising constructions with there.

Lite version. If you want the long version, ask me.

Koopman, October 2004.

Well-known problem: There are two agreement patterns in English:
the “standard” (1-2), where the verb agrees in number with the “associate”, and
the “colloquial” one in (3) which is simply third person: (there *seems* to be 3 men in the room)

Questions (among others)

- when is the colloquial form available and when is it not
- what effects do different types of “interveners” (intervening experiencers) have.

The judgments show all kinds of interesting patterns, (ask me for the heavy version)
and allow describing differences between individual speaker’s judgments:

In a nutshell, and pretheoretically:

Individual grammars show sensitivity along the following hierarchy of interveners
sg indefinite > sg DP > 1st sg > no experiencer

Plural indef experiencers facilitate plural agreement greatly (with plural associate)

Some speakers (maybe the youngest ones in this sample?) allow singular forms throughout.

Singular agreement becomes “dominant” when plural agreement is blocked, leading to reversals in judgments.

One speaker shows the Dutch/Romance pattern and just doesn’t allow raising of this kind.

Some speakers never allow the singular form with a plural associate;

I googled for numbers/distribution examples (more results in the “heavy version)

Here are some numbers: (i have not found any plural cases with a 3rd DP intervener)

1,080,000 for "[there seems to be](#)". 274,000 for "[there seem to be](#)".

5,660 for "[there seems to me to](#)" 857 for "[there seem to me to](#)".

354 for "[there seems to us to](#)". 117 for "[there seem to us to](#)".

34 for "[there seems to them](#)". vs 1 for "[there seem to them](#)".

50 for "[there seem to * to](#)" -[me](#) -[you](#) -[her](#) -[him](#) -[us](#) -[them](#). (0.60 seconds: all pretty irrelevant, just a couple of examples with experiencer DPs.(company name)

These numbers are different from Dutch, which has robust plural agreement

Roughly Dutch has twice as many singulars as plurals in er schijnen (there seem) constructions: (this is only a small sample: other orders are hard to search for unambiguously). (I guess the English effect is therefore not just a consequence of the distribution of plurals and singulars.

Dutch:

4,970 for "**er schijnen**" vs **8,850** for "**er schijnt**" **7,520** for "**er blijken**" **16,400** for "**er blijkt**"

DATA:

This was a little “pilot” study: it would be interesting to do this more seriously.

The data are summarized in the following table. (17 speakers: THANK YOU!)

(OK=5, ?=4, ??=3, ?*=2 *=1, no answer is 0)

Speakers were at each stage given a pair of sentences that contrast only in agreement, and were asked to judge all examples on a scale for 1-5.

Darker shade indicate singular agreement form is preferred over plural form,

lighter shade is used for same scores (*=1 not included)

no shade is used for the rest.

Individual speaker judgments show clear patterns, and the overall directions of the judgments is clear as well. (see Table 1.) and comments immediately following it.

Table 2. shows the trend even more clearly (table 2 omits the data from -plural interveners (which do not seem to intervene for plural agreement (15) vs (14)) :

The “reversals” in judgments in individual speakers are quite pretty (and systematic), from a preference for standard forms over “non – standard “ forms, depending on the intervener, with some equal scores in the intermediate stage. Individual speakers reversal of judgments happens at different stages.

It would be interesting to do this on a bigger scale, controlling for age, socio-economic factors and education

.(look down the columns for the patterns of each speaker)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
(1) there Vsg to be SG.		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
(2) there Vpl be PL		4	5	5	5	5	5	2	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
(3) There Vsg to be PL		2	4	4	4	4	4	5	1	2	3	3	1	5	1	2	2
(4) There Vsg to1SG to.. SG		5	5	4	4	5	5	5	1	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5
(5) there Vpl to1SG to be PL		2	5	3	4	5	5	4	1	5	4	4	3	1	1	3	4
(6) there Vsg to1 to be PL		2	3	4	2	4	3	5	1	4	2	4	1	5	5	4	3
(7) there seems to us to be a man in the room		5	5	3	3	5	5	5	1	5	4	4	1	4	5	5	5
(8) there seem to us to be 3 men in the room		2	2	4	3	5	5	4	1	5	3	3	4	1	5	3	3
(9) there seems to us to be 3 men in the room		2	3	3	2	2	1	5	1	4	1	4	1	5	5	3	4
(10)there seem to Bill to be 3 men in the room		3	4	2	3	5	5	4	1	4	4	1	2	1	1	3	2
(11)there seems to Bill to be 3 men in the room		5	4	3	4	1	1	5	1	4	1	4	1	5	5	4	4
(12) there seem to some child to be 3 men in the room		0	1	1	0	4	1	4	1	1	3	1	1	2	1	2	1
(13) there seems to some child to be 3 men in the room		0	2	1	0	2	5	5	1	2	1	4	1	5	5	4	3
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(15) there seem to some children to be 3 men in the room		3	5	2	4	4	5	4	1	5	1	4	2	5	5	3	4
14) there seems to some children to be 3 men in the room		5	2	2	3	2	2	5	1	1	1	2	1	1	5	4	2

Table 2. Same data without intervening plurals.. quite neat!

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
(1) there Vsg to be SG.	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
(2) there Vpl be PL	4	5	5	5	5	5	2	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
(3) There Vsg to be PL	2	4	4	4	4	4	5	1	2	3	3	1	5	1	2	2	3
(4) There Vsg to1SG to.. SG	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	1	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
(5) there Vpl to1SG to be PL	2	5	3	4	5	5	4	1	5	4	4	3	1	1	3	4	4
(6) there Vsg to1 to be PL	2	3	4	2	4	3	5	1	4	2	4	1	5	5	4	3	2
(10)there seem to Bill to be 3 men in the room	3	4	2	3	5	5	4	1	4	4	1	2	1	1	3	2	4
(11)there seems to Bill to be 3 men in the room	5	4	3	4	1	1	5	1	4	1	4	1	5	5	4	4	1
(12) there seem to some child to be 3 men in the room	0	1	1	0	4	1	4	1	1	3	1	1	2	1	2	1	4
(13) there seems to some child to be 3 men in the room	0	2	1	0	2	5	5	1	2	1	4	1	5	5	4	3	2

Table 3. Table 2 rearranged:

	7	13	14	3	15	1	11	4	16	2	9	6	12	10	17	5	8
(1) there Vsg to be SG.	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
(2) there Vpl be PL	2	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
(3) There Vsg to be PL	5	5	1	4	2	2	3	4	2	4	2	4	1	3	3	4	1
(4) There Vsg to1SG to.. SG	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	1
(5) there Vpl to1SG to be PL	4	1	1	3	3	2	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	4	4	5	1
(6) there Vsg to1 to be PL	5	5	5	4	4	2	4	2	3	3	4	3	1	2	2	4	1
(10)there seem to Bill to be 3 men in the room	4	1	1	2	3	3	1	3	2	4	4	5	2	4	4	5	1
(11)there seems to Bill to be 3 men in the room	5	5	5	3	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	1	1	1	1	1	1
(12) there seem to some child to be 3 men in the room	4	2	1	1	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	4
(13) there seems to some child to be 3 men in the room	5	5	5	1	4	0	4	0	3	2	2	5	1	1	2	2	1

From this tiny pilot study, the following “trends” emerge

- This methodology looks useful in teasing apart individual grammars and general theoretical issues (such as how intervention effects should be captured)), and provides insight in grammars of individual speakers;
- Individual grammars show sensitivity for plural agreement along the following “hierarchy of” interveners”, with individual speakers showing different cut-off points.

sg indefinite > sg DP > 1st sg > no experiencer

- Speaker (8) shows the Dutch/Romance pattern and just doesn’t allow raising of *there* over an experiencer regardless of agreement/ (this speaker does allow raising of a regular DP over an experiencer though).
- Some speakers show a tiny intervention effect with 1st person interveners (4s in (4), 3s and 4s in (5) and (6))
- The intervention effect with names gets stronger, with 6 more speakers preferring singular agreement (11) vs (6)), mimicking perhaps the behavior of many Romance languages (raising over a pronominal clitic is OK); relative score gets closer
- Indefinite singular DPs(names) are strong interveners for plural agreement (scores widen across the board)
- Some speakers (maybe the youngest ones in this sample?) allow singular forms throughout.

Singular agreement becomes “dominant” when plural agreement is blocked, leading to reversals in judgments.

- But: plural indef experiencers facilitate plural agreement greatly (with plural associate) See table 4 for a closer look
- Quite a few speakers don’t allow the singular agreement form with a plural associate and a plural intervener; (there does not seem to be a similar effect for singular except for one speaker).

Table 4: singular and plural indefinites again, in different combinations (12/13 vs 15/14)

	7	13	14	3	15	1	11	4	16	2	9	6	12	10	17	5	8
(12) there seem to some child to be 3 men in the room	4	2	1	1	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	3	4	4	1
(13) there seems to some child to be 3 men in the room	5	5	5	1	4	0	4	0	3	2	2	5	1	1	2	2	1
(15) there seem to some children to be 3 men in the room	4	5	5	2	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	2	1	2	4	1
14) there seems to some children to be 3 men in the room	5	1	5	2	4	5	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1

12/15 vs 13/14

(12) there seem to some child to be 3 men in the room	4	2	1	1	2	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	3	4	4	1
(15) there seem to some children to be 3 men in the room	4	5	5	2	3	3	4	4	4	5	5	5	2	1	2	4	1
vs.																	
(13) there seems to some child to be 3 men in the room	5	5	5	1	4	0	4	0	3	2	2	5	1	1	2	2	1
(14) there seems to some children to be 3 men in the room	5	1	5	2	4	5	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1

(12) overall scores quite low; 9 x1, 2x2, 1x3, 3x4 (out of 15) (no 5s)

vs

(15) overall score higher 2x1, 2x2, 1x3, 5x4, 5x5 (out of 17) with 1s switching to (5)

(14) 2x1, 3x2,

(13) 3x1, 2x4, 1x3, 2x4, 4x5 (out of 15)