IT, THERE, AND FIRST CONJUNCTS

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McCloskey (1991) makes the claim that while pleonastic "there" is syntactically linked with its postverbal argument, expletive "it" never is, even when plural agreement seems to be appropriate. To illustrate this point, he provides the following two examples (18 and 19 in McCloskey 1991):

1. *It seem at this point equally possible that he'll resign and that he'll stay in office.

2. It seems at this point equally possible that he'll resign and that he'll stay in office.

Superficially, the ungrammaticality of (1) would indicate that pleonastic "it" can never take plural agreement, even in the presence of conjoined propositions. However, following the argumentation of Boskovic (1997), McCloskey fails to notice that "even in expletive 'there' constructions the verb does not agree with the conjoined associate NPs."
Consider the following:

3. There is a dog and two cats in the house.

4. *There are a dog and two cats in the house.

5. There are two cats and a dog in the house.

Clearly in (3), "there" is syntactically linked only to the first conjunct "a dog" as exhibited in the singular agreement. Moreover, this interpretation holds in (5) with "there" taking plural agreement with "two cats" as the first conjunct, which in turn accounts for the ungrammaticality of (4). If this is indeed the case, then it can be argued that the pleonastic "it" in (2) is in agreement only with its first conjunct as well (Boskovic, 1997). Therefore, expletive "it" and "there" cannot be differentiated on the basis of agreement and deserve equal status syntactically as semantically empty subjects.

REFERENCES

Boskovic, Z. 1997. The Syntax of Nonfinite Complementation: An Economy Approach. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
McCloskey, J. 1991. "There", "It" and Agreement. *Linguistic Inquiry* 22: 563-567.