Squib
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Given two be*'s, how do they Agree?*

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1. INTRODUCTION

This squib contributes to the literature on intrusive-*be* constructions in English, examples of which appear in (1). Notably, there are two main sub-types, commonly referred to as double-*be* (1a) and single-*be* (1b) constructions, which together have been termed intrusive-*be* constructions (Massam 2013).[1] In this squib, we focus on double-*be* constructions, in which two instances of *be* (be_1 and be_2) appear adjacent to each other as in (1a), and we examine the tense and agreement forms that *be* can take in such constructions.[2]

(1)   a. The second thing *is is* that at least some of these characteristics are passed on
            genetically.   (MICASE)

      b. Our kids are great on vacations, but when they come back *is*, they need to play.
                                                                         (Massam 1999:345)

In both of the constructions, it is not clear what the function is of the (extra or only) *be*. These constructions are discussed in a small but growing body of literature, overviewed in particular by Zwicky (2003, 2007) and McConvell and Zwicky (2006) but little attention has been paid to agreement and tense patterns in these constructions. This is the focus of this squib.

[1] These constructions, or subsets of them, have been given various names in the literature, such as the reduplicative copula (Curzan 2012), extris, or ISIS (Zwicky 2003, 2007), double-*be* and free-*be* (McConvell 2004). For overviews and references, see McConvell and Zwicky (2006), Zwicky (2007), and Massam (2013).

[2] Most data in this squib is from two corpora, MICASE (Simpson et al. 2002) and COCA (Davies 2008), discussed in section 3. Sources are provided after each example, unless the example is constructed by the authors. Punctuation in written data varies for these constructions and we do not regularize it here. Andersen (2002) argues that the use of commas between the two instances of *be* does not necessarily indicate a pause.

2. PREVIOUS ANALYSES

In many general discussions of these constructions, they are treated as ungrammatical (e.g., Cochrane 2004, discussed by Zwicky 2007). However, most linguists consider either that intrusive-*be* is marginal and undergoing change (Shapiro 1993, Tuggy 1996) or that it is a fully legitimate construction (McConvell 1988, 2004; Andersen 2002; Coppock et al. 2006), possibly rooted in a performance phenomenon.[3] In particular, many scholars consider the constructions to be conflations, blends, or amalgams of two constructions (e.g., Lambrecht 1988, Andersen 2002, Ross-Hagebaum 2004, Brenier and Michaelis 2005, Calude 2008, Curzan 2012, among others). For example, (1a) might be analyzed as a blend of a pseudo-cleft construction, as in (2a), and a regular specificational copular construction, as in (2b).

(2)   a.   What the second thing is, is that . . .

      b.   The second thing is that . . .

Some scholars take the view that the structure is fully grammatically viable, that is, in terms of theoretical syntax, there is a single legitimate derivation for the sentence. For example, Massam (1999) analyzes double-*be* constructions as reduced pseudo-clefts (see Jehn 1979, Bolinger 1987, Sihler 2000, Calude 2008) roughly as illustrated in (3). Massam's (1999) analysis is critiqued by Brenier and Michaelis (2005) and by Dickerman (2009).

(3)   [~~What~~ᵢ the problem is *vbl*ᵢ] *is* that I like you.

A second syntactic analysis, discussed by Tuggy (1996) and Curzan (2012), considers be_1 to be part of the first constituent, as illustrated in (4).

(4)   [$_{DP}$ The problem is] is that I like you.

Another syntactic idea (Bolinger 1987, Koontz-Garboden 2001, Shapiro and Haley 2002, Zwicky 2003) involves a complex complementizer, as exemplified in (5). Relatedly, McConvell (1988), Massam (1999), Coppock and Staum (2004) and Dickerman (2009) consider an analysis where be_2 is a separate focus particle (i.e., a head in the left periphery of CP).

(5)   The problem is [$_{CP}$ is that [I like you]]

A different syntactic analysis is given by Massam (2013), who collapses several subtypes, and presents a syntactic analysis in which be_2 is the head of an appositive phrase, with the subject of this phrase moving to become subject of an unaccusative verb (be_1 in double-*be* constructions), with the remaining constituent as the complement of the apposition (App) head.[4]

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[3]There is also interesting discussion of the prosody of these constructions (e.g., Andersen 2002, McConvell 2004, Brenier and Michaelis 2005, Coppock et al. 2006). Of particular interest, Coppock et al. (2006) observe that there are very few examples with pauses before or after be_2. Further study of the prosody of these constructions might allow us to better differentiate speech errors from legitimate double *be* constructions.

[4]This analysis is revised and developed further in Massam (2014). O'Neill (2013) also presents a new syntactic analysis of double *be* constructions, arguing that they are specificational copular amalgams.

(6) The problem is [~~the problem~~ [$_{App}$0 *is*] [that I like you]]

Although several authors point out that intrusive *be* can appear with different forms than the third person singular present tense form *is* (e.g., Jehn 1979, McConvell 1988, Shapiro and Haley 2002, Ross-Hagebaum 2004, Zwicky 2007, Massam, 2013), as in (7) with *are is*, no one has systematically studied the patterning of these forms.

(7) The cruel facts of life *are, is* that not every person who teaches Art is a good artist
      himself.   (McConvell 1988:290)

We undertake such a study here. In section 3, we present the findings of our corpus study, concluding that each *be* in the double-*be* constructions constitutes a separate verbal element and in section 4, we consider the implications of these findings for the analyses presented above.

3. THE FORMS OF *be*$_1$ AND *be*$_2$

As Bolinger (1987) notes, double-*be* is primarily a spontaneous construction, for which speakers do not always have clear intuitions. For this reason, it lends itself to a corpus study rather than to elicitation and grammaticality judgments (see Andersen 2002, Curzan 2012). We extracted data in two phases, first from MICASE (Simpson et al. 2002) then from the COCA (Davies 2008), two freely available online corpora. MICASE comprises almost 1.8 million words of speech transcribed from recordings made on the University of Michigan campus at Ann Arbor; the COCA amounts to 400 million words, of which one-fifth is transcribed speech from unscripted radio and television programs. We did not differentiate between spoken and written examples.

In the first phase of corpus extraction, we searched the MICASE database for utterances containing two adjacent forms of *be*. From here, we examined the data to determine which examples were relevant to our analysis.

We included examples meeting the basic descriptive properties of the construction noted by other authors working on this topic as cited in this squib, as follows. The construction is specificational or identificational in that the subject nominal is a superscriptional (Higgins 1978) or shell nominal (Schmid 1999, 2000; Aijmer 2007) such as *thing*, *claim*, *idea*, etc., which delimits a domain and allows easily for further specification by a phrase that provides a value for the domain.[5] The phrase after *be*$_2$ thus either specifies or identifies the value of this superscriptional or shell subject nominal. The construction also has important information structural properties in that it presents the superscriptional shell nominal as a topic and it focuses the material after *be*$_2$. We excluded constructions that do not meet these core requirements. First, we excluded those in which the function of each *be* is clearly and uncontroversially grammatical (i.e., where the two forms of *be* occur in non-declarative contexts

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[5] Higgins (1978) was among the earliest generative scholars to separate copular sentences into specificational, identificational, predicative, etc. There is a vast literature on this topic. For recent discussion, see, for example, den Dikken (2005), Mikkelsen (2005), Heycock (2012), and references therein.

Table 1: Discarded instances of adjacent forms of *be*
(all from MICASE)

Context	Example
– embedded question	"... the question *is is* this one dependent on that one?"
– interrogative clause	"... we can tell what numbers *are are* primitive roots ..."
– multiple auxiliary construction	"... to some degree he mattered at the ball when he *was being* introduced to all these important people."
– *be* to + INF construction	"... human consciousness *is to be* volitional"; "... food *is to be* ingested ..."
– *wh*-cleft	"What this *is, is* it's telling you what the dominant sediment type is."
– relative clause	"... pretty much all religions have creation myths that *are are* meant to explain how things came about ..."
– cliticised copula	"... development of the population concept, and it's *was* an insight that Darwin had that others had not."
– false starts	"[W]ell it *is is* it a special intransitive verb?"
– be_1-DP agreement error	"The first trials *was, were* with tobacco ..."

such as embedded questions and interrogative clauses, licensed multiple auxiliary and *be to* + infinitive constructions, and *wh*-clefts where be_1 functions as the verb of the dependent clause) and we also excluded instances where double-*be* occurs in a relative clause, since these do not meet the topic–focus information-structure requirements. We also excluded instances where be_1 is cliticized, as the prosody of the double-*be* construction requires that the forms of *be* remain uncontracted (Zwicky 2003). Lastly, we eliminated instances of false starts as well as occurrences with agreement error of be_1 with a preverbal DP, on the assumption that they are speech errors. Examples of eliminated data are given in table 1.

After the filtering of irrelevant instances as detailed above, the data that remained consisted of combinations of the set *are, is, was,* and *were* (i.e., third person forms).[6] This is not surprising, since intrusive-*be* is used exclusively (or at least primarily, see footnote 7) in the context of superscriptional or shell nouns such as *thing, claim, problem,* etc., as noted by many (e.g., McConvell 1988, Tuggy 1996, Andersen 2002, Massam 2013). For this reason, when we later extracted data from the COCA corpus, we restricted the set of search strings to pairs made up of the third person forms *is, are, was,* and *were*.

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[6]There were exceptions to this rule, where the be_1 has the form *being*, which will be discussed below.

Having collected this data, we made a further distinction between the classes of specificational and predicative uses of double-*be* (Higgins 1979). As Coppock et al. (2006) note, grammatical examples of predicative double-*be* are not attested in the literature, suggesting that double-*be* is not licensed in such contexts.[7] In addition, we excluded instances where the double *be* is a duplication of an auxiliary or existential *be*, on the assumption that these are errors. Excluded examples of these types appear in (8).

(8)   a.   ... the level of fear and menace *is is* exceptionally stronger in Metropolis.
                                                              (MICASE; predicative *be*)

      b.   ... they undermine the probability that influence or control *is is* gonna succeed.
                                                              (MICASE: auxiliary *be*)

      c.   I'm saying with our clients there *is is* no evidence against them that justifies their
           detention.   (COCA; existential *be*)

The resultant distribution of occurrences in both corpora is given in table 2. We note that the number of occurrences of the double-*be* construction is greater in COCA; however, the relative frequency of the construction is greater in MICASE, since MICASE comprises just under 2 million words while COCA comprises close to 400 million words. We do not speculate here about the factors that make the construction more prevalent in MICASE.

Now, having reduced our data set to the canonical type described above, let us consider the agreement patterns.[8] First, we divide the occurrences on the basis of number agreement into four categories. The first category comprises the instances in which both be_1 and be_2 are singular. This form of the construction, with *is is*, as shown in (9), is the one most noted in the literature and as expected, the number of occurrences for this type (565 instances) is far greater than all other types. The two next most common constructions consist of *was is* (49 instances) and *was was* (36 instances), as exemplified in (10) and (11), respectively.[9]

(9)   [O]ne of the reasons [why pilgrimage is so significant in Catholicism and is not signif-
      icant in Protestantism], uh *is is* <u>because of that distance</u>.   (MICASE)

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[7]Our intuitions too dictate that a distinction should be made between predicational examples and specificational examples. However, given the relatively large number of examples of iterated *be* which occur in these contexts, we suggest that further research be done to develop a clearer means of distinguishing speech error from an emergent construction (see McConvell 2004, Coppock et al. 2006), as the dividing line is not always clear for these constructions. In particular, further prosodic study would aid us here, as noted in footnote 3. Following Ross-Hagebaum (2005), Calude (2008), and Massam (2013), we included cases with pre-be_1 demonstratives such as *this*, as in (19), and we also included identificational examples (e.g., (13b)).

[8]An anonymous reviewer notes that it would be interesting to compare these results with agreement patterns in regular cleft constructions with two instances of *be*, but such a study is beyond the scope of this squib.

[9]In the next set of examples, double-*be* is in italics and the core agreement-relevant parts of the preceding and following phrases are underlined. Note that (9) is not an example of a *wh*-cleft, as the *wh*-word forms part of a modifying relative clause in this sentence, as indicated by square brackets in (9).

Table 2: Extracted instances of third-person forms

	MICASE	COCA	Combined
is is	94	471	565
is are	1	1	2
is was	0	17	17
is were	0	0	0
are is	1	5	6
are are	6	3	9
are was	0	0	0
are were	0	0	0
was is	7	42	49
was are	0	0	0
was was	12	14	36
was were	0	0	0
were is	0	0	0
were are	0	1	1
were was	0	0	0
were were	1	1	2

(10) ... the idea *was is* that [I] was giving examples of all of it ...   (MICASE)

(11) ... [I] know one of the the issues that was uh, uh sort of floating around in my mind at the time *was was* the question of, sort of historical context chronology ... (MICASE)

Thus, the most common types of double-*be* constructions involve third person singular forms with variation for tense, to be discussed below. A further less common construction of this type, not mentioned in the previous literature, is the form *is was* (17 instances), as in (12).

(12) ... the interesting thing *is was*, you mentioned erogenous zones, there was one that Foley hit that he avoided.   (COCA)

We now turn to why be_1 and be_2 in these forms have singular number agreement features. In order to determine with which phrase or phrases these forms of *be* are in agreement, we examine the head noun of the preceding and following phrases, underlined, along with modifying material, in the examples above. In all cases, the double-*be* is preceded by a singular DP, and followed by either a singular DP or a CP. The verbs can thus be understood as agreeing with the preceding superscriptional or shell noun (*thing, problem, claim, this,* etc.) and/or the following DP or CP (if CPs are considered to be third person singular, which we assume here), but they might also be considered to be default forms. This is particularly relevant for be_2, which, on the surface, has no clear subject, at least not in the expected position, immediately to its left.

The three further subtypes involve constructions where the number agreement feature of either or both instances of *be* is not singular. For the second type, when be_1 is plural and be_2 is singular, the set of possible forms consists of *are is* (6 instances),

are were (0 instances), *were is* (0 instances), and *were was* (0 instances). Examples of *are is* are given in (13). As indicated by the numbers above, we were unable to find any instances of the other pairings of this type.

(13) a. ... but the hard facts *are is* that somebody's gonna pay for the treatment that's rendered ... (COCA)

b. ... and those types of bags are fairly long-lived and that some of the forms of plastic that find their way in the oceans *are is* the very plastic that is contained in grocery bags. (COCA)

It is notable that in all licit occurrences of *are is*, be_1 is preceded by a plural DP, and be_2 is followed by a singular DP or a CP. This indicates that be_1 agrees with the preceding DP, i.e., the subject. It also indicates that the form of be_2 is not simply a copy of the form of be_2. Rather, be_2 can be seen either to agree with the following CP or DP, or to be a default singular form.

The third subtype presents itself as a plural be_2 in the context of a plural be_1. This occurs in the forms *are are* (9 instances), *are were* (0 instances), *were are* (1 instance), and *were were* (2 instances).[10] Two examples of the form are given in (14).

(14) a. ... then, basically it all looked like, it virtually all looked like adult behavior, the narrower terms *are are*, child abuse, uh driving while intoxicated, sexual abuse, terrorism there are a- a lot of others ... (MICASE)

b. ... the only, competitive e- equilibrium prices that exist *are, are*, the efficient prices. (MICASE)

In all but one occurrence of this type, both the preceding and following DP have plural number features, as in the examples above.[11] Taken together with forms such as those in (13), this suggests that be_1 is agreeing with the subject, while be_2 is not always a default form, but rather is agreeing with the post be_2 constituent.

The fourth and last subtype occurs when be_2 is plural in the context of a singular be_1, in which case the possible forms are as follows: *is are* (1 instance), *is were* (0 instances), *was are* (0 instances), and *was were* (0 instances).[12] The example of this type, for *is are*, is given in (15).

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[10] When the material after be_2 is a DP, as in (13b) and (14), we have moved slightly away from the canonical double-*be* construction, in which the post-be_2 material is a CP. Coppock and Staum (2004) state that DP examples are ungrammatical, but there are many such examples that we find grammatical. As noted above, it is hard to determine, at times, the borderline between predicational, equative, definitional, and specificational examples. In our examples, we excluded ones that were clearly predicational, but we retained some that might be considered more definitional or equative than fully specificational, such as (13b) and (14b).

[11] The exception is given below, with a plural DP preceding be_1, but a sentence following be_2, which is not plural.

(i) In my mind the measures of progress *are are* you train the Iraqi to take control of the situation. (MICASE)

This case involves a plural be_2, which leaves the door open that some cases of double-*be* actually do involve a simple repetition of be_1 (Zwicky 2007).

[12] There was one instance of *was were* in COCA, given in (i):

(15) ... what's happening today around us *is are* changes which might be about as big and as important as the changes we talked about, last week.   (MICASE)

In the one example with be_1-singular and be_2-plural, the preceding DP is singular and the following phrase is a plural DP. This supports the claim formulated above that be_1 generally agrees with the subject while *be* agrees with the following constituent.[13] We thus arrive at the following claims.

(16) *Agreement of* be_1 *and* be_2 *in double-*be *constructions*:

   a. be_1 agrees with the subject (i.e., the superscriptional or shell DP)

   b. be_2 is not a default form of *be* nor is it a copy of be_1

   c. be_2 bears independent agreement features, which agree not with the apparent subject of the sentence but with the following DP or CP

These claims are consistent with the corpora examined for this squib. Overall, there are no examples with person variations and very few examples with number variations, which is to be expected, given that the canonical forms of the construction necessarily involve third person singular arguments: nouns such as *claim*, *thing*, *problem*, etc. on the one hand and a CP on the other. The examples we do find with plural forms, however, uphold the claims in (16).

There is one other form of double-*be* construction still remaining to be discussed, namely the *being–be* construction. An example is given in (17).

(17) ... and the reason *being is* that they would draw different nutrients from the soil.
                                                                                    (MICASE)

Zwicky (2007) notes that this construction began as an adverbial subordinate construction and has become quite common as a main clause. In our data (we examined only MICASE for this combination), all such examples involve a be_2 with the form *is* and a following CP. Thus, setting aside the mystery of why *being* can serve as a main verb, which exists independently of double-*be* constructions, these examples conform to the claims in (16).

Remaining to be discussed is tense. As the data above demonstrate, Present–Present is by far the most common tense array for double-*be* constructions, as in (1) (582 instances), however, we also find Past–Present (50 instances), Past–Past (38 instances), and Present–Past (17 instances), as in (10), (11), and (12), respectively. Since tense is generally not determined grammatically, unlike agreement, but rather

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(i) The tax revenues under Bush *was were* $4 billion more or a trillion dollars ...

However, this was discarded on the basis of the agreement error with the preceding DP.

[13] We might also include the following where be_2 is (erroneously) agreeing with the adjacent plural DP *those veterans*. We set this one aside though, as an agreement error.

(i) What we have asked for *is are* those veterans who are fully able-bodied, who are working, to pay a modest enrollment fee to be in the system, and a modest co-payment for their pharmaceutical drugs.   (COCA)

is determined by speaker intention and truth conditions, we cannot discern any grammatically determined patterning. However, some conclusions can be drawn.

Many scholars have noted that the double-*be* construction consists of two parts: first, it declares that there is a problem, point, etc. and second, it provides the speaker with the content of this problem, point, etc. (e.g., Zwicky 2007). It seems, then, that the preference for present tense might be explained as being due to the introductory and highly current functional nature of the construction. Nonetheless, either or both of the parts can be placed in the past tense. Cases where be_2, but not be_1, is past are mostly cases where the CP after be_2 contains a past tense verb, as in (12), but there are also examples where be_2 does not accord with a following verb, as in (18) and (19), so agreement does not seem to be wholly responsible for the tenses of *be*, clearly not between the two forms of *be* nor between be_2 and a following verb form.

(18) The problem *was is* that in Detroit, all schools <u>were</u> good.   (COCA)

(19) This *is was* the view, I think <u>we're</u> pulling it up?   (COCA[14])

In summary, based on the uses of tense in the corpora examined, we conclude the following regarding tense forms in double-*be* constructions.

(20) *Tense forms of* be$_1$ *and* be$_2$ *in double-*be *constructions*:

    a. There is an overall strong preference for present tense in the double-*be* construction, especially for be_2.

    b. The two forms of *be* each have independent tense features and the tense choices made are contextual and semantic and are not due to strict accord.

Our overall conclusion, based on (16) and (20), is thus as given in (21).

(21) *The forms of* be *in double-*be *constructions*:

    Each *be* in the double-*be* construction constitutes an independent verb form with a full set of phi (person and number) and tense features.

Note that we also assume that each *be* has person features even though all cases of double-*be* are third person: since the use of third person is due to the nature of the construction, there is no reason to assume an impoverished set of phi features for person.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Let us now briefly consider the implications of our findings in (16), (20), and (21) for the various analyses that have been proposed for double-*be* constructions. If, as argued above, each form of *be* has its own tense and agreement features, all analyses that consider be_2 to be less than a full verbal form are problematic. This includes several analyses in the literature as presented in section 1, such as the view that be_2 is some kind of "suffix" on the preceding nominal, the view that it is a left peripheral element, such as a "prefix" on the complementizer or an independent left peripheral focus marker, and the idea that be_2 is a simple appositive head. Remaining

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[14]In a radio show; waiting for a listener's letter to be made available for discussion.

as options are the family of blend/amalgam analyses and an analysis in some way based on the pseudo-cleft construction, as these analyses potentially can consider each form of *be* to be a full verbal form. Thus the true syntactic nature of these interesting constructions, as well as the details of the agreement mechanisms they involve, remain open for further exploration.

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