

Are expletives in existential sentences really expletives?

Abstract

In this paper we draw attention to empirical data conforming to a consistent crosslanguage pattern in existential constructions [ECs], with special focus on the grammatical role of the mandatory preverbal particle [PLP]. Particularly, we suggest that hypothesis built on expletive insertion and raising may not be empirically suitable when Romance languages engaged in this pattern are considered. Apart from the questions raised in terms of representation and derivational economy, the main argument behind our proposal is provided by the (grammatically instantiated) semantic underpinning of the PLP, which proves to be morphologically, syntactically and even pragmatically relevant in a fashion not predicted by transformational derivations or repair operations (expletive insertion). We will claim that expletive/raising approaches do not account for formal differences between ECs and alternative (copular) counterparts, specially as such contrasts touch on: (i)syntactic structure (ergative vs. copular predicate), (ii)meaning (existence vs. spatial situation), (iii)semantically-driven constraints on the DP (*Definiteness Effect*), (iv)oversaturation effects triggered by co-occurrence of the locative morpheme and the spatial PP and (v)optionality and syntactic status of the latter; all these facts conforming to the (vi)semantic and syntactic consequences of the absence of the PLM in minimal pairs.

Key words: EXPLETIVE INSERTION, RAISING, SYNTACTICALLY-RELEVANT SEMANTIC CONTENT, COMPLEX (PHRASAL) PREDICATE, SELECTIONAL PATTERNS

1. Introduction

Existential constructions [ECs] have long been a subject of interest and study for linguists over the decades. As it would be logical to expect, they made a classic case study in Generative Grammar (e.g. Chomsky, 1995; Burzio, 1986 *i.a.*). Within the vast amount of theoretical proposals, semantic, pragmatic and syntactic approaches have been developed to explain the fact that ECs feature a very interesting cross-language pattern, related to the mandatory presence of a specific particle (*there, ci, hi, y*) in preverbal position. However, it is clear from ongoing discussion that consensus has not been reached about the status of this morpheme or the facts that make its presence mandatory; in particular, a noteworthy challenge is posited by the fact that this pattern engages languages with diverse syntactic requirements, including English, Italian, Catalan and French, among many others, and, yet, the presence of this constituent is equally crucial.

- (1) a. *(There) is a flower at a roadside.
b. *(Ci) è un fiore accanto una strada.
LOC is a flower by/next a road
c. *(Hi) ha una flor a la vora d'un camí.
LOC have a flower at the border of-a road
d. Il *(y) a une fleur au bord d'une route.
P3ps LOC have a flower at-a border of-a road
'There's a flower at a roadside'

Simplifying greatly, it could be said that this requirement led generative grammarians to argue, as we will see in greater detail below, that the presence of the preverbal particle is essentially due to syntactic requirements, mostly related to the need to license the *in situ* subject —thus satisfying EPP (Expletive Replacement Hypothesis [ERH] Chomsky, 1981, 1995; Burzio, 1986) and case assignment issues (Belletti, 1988, 2002; Boskovic, 1997; Lasnik, 1992 *i.a.*). Anyhow, the preverbal particle is seen as an expletive —i.e., a semantically dummy *placeholder* for the subject position— which is inserted at a later stage of the derivation in order to save the construction from crashing (mainly, due to uninterpretable feature checking/valuation issues).

However, from our point of view, the most prominent syntactic facts are, actually, posed by Romance languages, which conform to this pattern even when no expletive insertion is needed. Specifically, we refer to the fact that this requirement also holds for the satisfactory formation of ECs in NS languages such as Italian and Catalan (i.e., languages that do not require expletive insertion in order to legitimate internal subjects), and even in non-NS languages like French, in which the internal subject is already licensed by an expletive (a third person pronoun *il*). On the other hand, there is the semantic aspect of the question: in this respect, the main objection we want to entertain is that the definition of *expletive* does not match the meaning shift triggered by the insertion of this element in contrast to the semantic properties of the base verb¹; and, moreover, that this shift is consistent with the semantic properties of the preverbal locative particle [PLP]².

Even when these hypothesis can be questioned in light of different theoretical problems (cf. Hartmann, 2008); nonetheless, our aim is to focus on the fact that crosslinguistic evidence to be introduced along the present paper drawn from languages like Italian, English, Catalan, French and Spanish³ provide strong arguments to assume that these proposals may not be completely suitable in several respects.

Let us introduce some examples in advance. For instance, notice that no other occurrence of the same verb, i.e., none of the alternatives in (2), bears the existential meaning rendered in (1); rather, these constructions feature locative, attributive, or identity relations depending on the categorial nature of the lexical head projecting the copular predicate (ADvP/AP/PP/DP) in both Italian ((2)b) and English ((2)b); whereas the omission of the PLP in French ((2)c) —also in Catalan— renders a possessive construction⁴. Besides, (2) suggests another remarkable fact —to be seen in detail later in (17)—, considering that the absence of these particles does not render an illicit construction in Romance, but rather a semantically and syntactically different one (more specifically, one matching the original lexical features of the base verb).

- (2) a. Are red flowers there/edible/berries?
 b. *Quei fiori rossi sono li/edibili/fragole?*
 those flowers red are there/edible/srtawberries
 ‘Are those flowers there/edible/strawberries?’
 c. *Il a un rôle récurrent dans l'histoire* [cf. *Il y a un rôle récurrent dans l'histoire*]
 3.sg has a role recurrent in the-story [3.sg LOC has a role recurrent in the-story]
 ‘He has a recurrent role in the story’ [‘There is a recurrent role in the story’]

This contrasts conform to the semantic difference noticed between the EC and the alleged ‘alternate’ (LCC). What is more noteworthy, English shows that not even the same lexical item (*there*) itself succeeds in yielding an EC when operating as copular predicate ((2)a); thus leading us to, among other facts, entertain the suggestion that transformational operations like *raising* and inversion —proposed by alternative generative approaches aiming to grant the PLP with predicative relevance— would not suffice to explain ECs

¹ Even when the insertion of a semantically null item does not always imply a semantically trivial operation in certain respects, as we will see, the insertion of the PLP in ECs differs radically from other instances of expletive insertion; especially with regard to the semantic import of the PLP and the (syntactically and conceptually relevant) semantic increase noticed in ECs.

² As we will see later, we are not unaware of the fact that, within the GG framework, an alternative line of analysis posed a rather different scenario by granting these particles with predicative relevance. Specifically, this alternative approach (Moro, 1997; Williams, 1994, *i.a.*) attempts to explain the mandatory presence of these particles departing from the hypothesis that they constitute part of the core predication structure. Anyhow, they are still rooted in the idea that these clauses are instances of *displacement* phenomena (in the sense of Chomsky, 1998:35), only that in this case the *displaced* element (i.e., the PLP) is the copular predicate (Moro) or expletive (Williams), which is (allegedly) subject to raising phenomena (raised to preverbal position) or inversion (Hoekstra & Mulder, 1990) and, as data will show, ECs feature several distinct characteristics that are not predicted by these approaches.

³ Regarding the presence of the locative form *-y* in the present tense (*hay*) which makes it different from the verb *haber* in the 3rd person singular (*ha*). For more details on Spanish and the diachronical development of the EC *hay*, cf. Hernández Díaz, 2006.

⁴ Notice that *cata* from Catalan and French does not accommodate to a strict pairing (*Són les flors vermelles allà / comestibles / baies?*) since the verbal base for the EC is not a copula, but a possessive verb; still, the absence of the PLP in these cases also correlates in lack of existential meaning (rather, the possessive meaning arises). This issue will be specifically addressed later.

either⁵. One of the most evident examples of such differences (which are not predicted by these approaches) is posed by the largely known semantic restriction referred to as *definiteness effect*⁶. This phenomenon sets a significant dissimilarity between ECs and locative copular constructions [LCC] regarding selectional restrictions on the DP (4) that (i) is not satisfactorily explained by the proposed syntactic (expletive insertion or raising) theories (cf. Hartmann, 2008 and Mangialavori, 2011) and, what is more noteworthy, (ii) follows naturally from the difference in meaning that can be noticed in pairings like (6) (i.e., existence vs. topographic location).

Besides, the LCC/EC pairing (i.a., between the EC and its alleged ‘alternate’) also reveals different patterns with regard to constituents like the locative PP, which is mandatory in one case (3) but optional in the other (acknowledged since Moro, 1997); thus adding up variations in syntactic and semantic status of certain constituents that do not follow from inversion of expletive insertion either. Moreover, these differences in syntactic structure conform to the claim that EC has been mostly proven to feature an ergative layout rather than a copulative one (displayed, in turn, by the LCC)⁷. Additionally, as we will also see below, the different (syntactic) status of the PLP in ECs is made overt by the fact that they can co-occur with a locative PP/AdvP, which can be realized through [what we will claim to be] the same lexical item, without establishing coindexation or redundancy effect (5). In fact, coindexation will be a rather relevant issue arguing against the expletive hypothesis in different respects and in favor of significant locative content in the PLP.

- (3) a. A rare yellow orchid is *(at the roadside).
b. There is a rare yellow orchid (at the roadside).
- (4) a. The flower is at the roadside
b. *A flower is at the roadside
- (5) There is something there
- (6) a. There have been several Chinese teachers (in this town). [there-be / EC]
b. Several Chinese teachers have been *(in this town). [be-there / LCC]

In this sense, we think it would be fair to say that lines of study exclusively built on syntactic operations (in the narrow sense) like raising and expletive insertion overlook relevant evidence. Specifically, we will rely on empirical data in order to claim that the postulation of a semantically trivial item (expletive) fails to capture several grammatically instantiated facts indicating that (i) the (constituent we address here as) PLP is semantically relevant in ECs, (ii) its spatial content conforms to the semantic increase noticed, and that (iii) syntactic requirements like feature valuation do not suffice to explain the formal differences between the EC (6)a and its alleged ‘alternate’ (6)b. On top of this, we will put forward the idea that (iv) the semantic characteristics of the predication in (6)a, and the contrast drawn with (6)b, can be interpreted as an indication that the PLP is part of a complex predication independently listed in the lexicon (i.e., featuring semantic structural and conceptual properties in which phenomena other than a-movement and feature valuation seem to be involved, and demanding lexical storage of those properties that cannot be predicted on the basis of its constituents)⁸. Negation and interrogation phenomena will confirm this postulation.

Finally, and following these lines —and in consonance with the claim that ‘there-constructions have syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties that are markedly different from the corresponding simple

⁵ As we will see later, these differences involve structural, conceptual and syntactic differences that are not successfully captured by rising, even if it were understood as an operation granting two diverse LF structures.

⁶ As a cover term for the cross-linguistically found fact that there-sentences do not normally allow strong quantifiers (*There was {everyone/each person} in the room, *There were all viewpoints considered) or definite noun phrases (*There is the wolf at the door, *There were John and Mary, *There was Frank's article), as initially pointed out by Milsark, 1977. We will resume this topic later.

⁷ Considering classic tests (not free of controversy) like auxiliary selection and compatibility with *ne*.

⁸ Even when our goal is to remain as neutral as possible regarding the differences between strictly syntactic analyses, we will try to show that significant results can be attained on the basis of (syntactically relevant) semantic properties alone, without making additional structural assumptions. Concisely, what seems no longer debatable according to data is that the PLP is neither semantically trivial, nor a regular copular predicate.

sentences' (since Lakoff 1987:473 *i.a.*)— we will deliver the idea that, although implying lexically-related phenomena, connected with the conformation of a distinct composite lexical unit, the instantiation of the EC (PLP+semantically depleted verb phrase) is consistent with semantic and cognitive tenets regarding the relation between location and existence⁹. This correspondence is backed by the unanimous involvement of a locative constituent in the different languages considered (especially in those that do not involve expletive insertion requirements).

In view that the vast amount of literature on the matter would preclude a detailed account, we will only entertain those aspects of classical syntactic approaches to ECs in which empirically motivated considerations about the semantic incidence of the PLP have direct stakes. Methodologically speaking, we will see that semantically-related empirical facts become a powerful argument against the proposals to be reviewed next and one which is relatively independent of particular theoretical frameworks. In any case, the main belief behind the present paper is that a promising strategy for choosing among competing explanations as well as for establishing the foundations of new ones will necessarily have to contemplate cross-linguistic, factual evidence indicating that ECs comprise distinct formal features.¹⁰

The paper is structured as follows: as a way to set the stage for our proposal, section 2 will introduce the main tenets of the two mainstream approaches on ECs mentioned above (*there'-insertion* approaches and *'there'-as-part-of-predication* approaches) in GG, along with some challenging questions raised by empirical crosslanguage data. Following this disposition, section 3 will address the main empirical claims against expletive and raising hypothesis, mostly based on the conceptual/structural changes triggered by the PLP and its syntactic and semantic behavior both in the EC and in other contexts. Section 4 will focus on the relevance of non-EC occurrences of the PLP with a view to defining its meaning and relevance for the semantic properties of ECs; in particular, attention will be drawn to coindexation phenomena indicating that the PLP is not coindexed in ECs, neither with the internal NP in a LF chain, neither with the spatial PP as its semantics could suggest (and therefore, leading us to assume lexical storage). Accordingly, a potential hypothesis for the conformation of ECs is offered in section 5, followed by a summary of the main points raised by the data gathered and a brief discussion.

2. A brief survey

Broadly speaking, as we anticipated in the introduction, it could be said that generative studies on ECs¹¹ are essentially split between two different lines, usually referred to as *'there'-insertion* approaches and *'there'-as-part-of-predication* approaches (cf. Kalluli 2008, Hartmann 2008, *i.a.*). Though they are not easy to describe in a few words —indeed, the considerable volume and variety of work makes it impossible to make a detailed review of each proposal offered so far—, in general terms, these perspectives part ways with respect to (i) whether ECs (7) should be considered as alternative (derived) realizations of a same predicate (DP-V-PP or *X-be-there* counterpart featured in (8)); and (ii) whether *there* should be considered a semantically null element or *expletive*.

In this section, we will offer empirical evidence challenging these approaches.

- (7) a. There is a man in the room
- b. C'è un uomo nella stanza
- (8) a. A man is in the room

⁹ Taking into account, for instance, the classical claim about the close relation between existence and location (since Lyons 1979, Langaker 1987:147 *i.m.a.*) and the empirically motivated considerations that follow from this in relation to the presence of a locative constituent in ECs in the languages under consideration (cf. HernandezDiaz 2006:1130, Mangialavori 2008).

¹⁰ In sum, we believe that the question can only be settled as long as syntax is seen in interaction with the lexical side of the question, and that syntax and lexical codification not necessarily imply a theoretical tension. That is, if considered from the point of view of syntactic theories which do not accord syntax a privileged status and which seek to view grammar in terms of the complex interplay of syntax, semantics and pragmatics (cf. Van Valin 2003) in the formal characterization of the different components of ECs.

¹¹ That is, leaving aside pragmatically-based and cognitive (not because of that less influential) lines of research, such as the one developed by Lakoff 1987 (just to name an example).

b. Un uomo è nella stanza

2.1. There-insertion

With few exceptions (e.g. Moro, 1997), this constituent has been denied predicative (or even semantic) relevance in most works on the matter, especially those developed within the Generative framework. Briefly stated, this constituent has traditionally been regarded as a semantically null *placeholder*, and its mandatory insertion has been related to the need to satisfy (uninterpretable) feature valuation requirements.

The classic view within mainstream GG —posed by *there-insertion* approaches like the ERH and its subsequent reformulations (Chomsky, 1986, 1991, 1995, 2000)— is that one in which sentences like (7) are seen as mere *transformational variants*¹² of sentences like (8); or, rather, that sentences like (8) represent an “alternate” yielded by the overt rising of the NP (Chomsky, 1995:155); alternatively, these clauses are seen as another case of locative inversion structure, as seen in several ergative verbs (e.g., Hoekstra & Mulder, 1990). According to Chomsky (1991:441) and further adjustments of the hypothesis, ECs are defined as expletive instances precisely by having a “*counterpart without there*”, exemplified by instances like (8).

These approaches involve two different but not disconnected assumptions anticipated above. In the first place, here the insertion of the PLP is understood as a repair operation. Specifically, *there* is taken to be a semantically trivial element (i.e., a genuine expletive, if by that we understand a syntactic object devoid of meaning, according to Chomsky, 1995:287) whose function is to act as a *placeholder* for the subject position (as LF affixes, defined as containing only categorial features). Rather, the ERH hypothesis is essentially drawn from the need to satisfy syntactic constraints related to the Extended Projection Principle and subject licensing —thus assuming a semantic coindexation (chain relation) between the PLP and the subject, respectively addressed as ‘expletive’ and ‘associate’ (Burzio, 1986, Chomsky, 1995, Lasnik, 1992, 1995 *i.a.*)— or Case assignment issues (Belletti, 1988, 1999, 2002). In the second place, as the PLP is assumed to be semantically vacuous, and, therefore, it is not expected by any means to contribute compositionally to the semantics of the predicate (Hartmann, 2008). As a consequence, no difference in (syntactically relevant) semantic features, argumental structure or conceptual content should be expected between (7) and (8).

By this, we want to emphasize that even when the displacement hypothesis is not as elemental as presented here —and also in spite of the fact that there are many ways of articulating the *there-insertion* idea—, if ECs were to be seen not as primitive structures, but as the outcome of certain *displacement* with respect to the LCC¹³, it would not be clear either in which step of a derivation by movement the characteristic (existential) semantic content is introduced¹⁴ and why such contrasts would follow from the proposed syntax only in this case (and not in, for instance, (10)-(14)).

However, as we anticipated in the introduction in regard to (3)-(4), grammatically instantiated facts like (i) the optionality of the spatial PP in ECs and (ii) the largely studied *definiteness effect* outlined by the restriction on strong subjects in ECs (9), are not predicted by displacement, nor by Case or EPP-related phenomena (typically exemplified through pairings like (10). Interestingly enough, it is not hard to notice that in these instances the contrasts seen in (9) do not arise. In this sense, ECs (15) pose an interesting contrast with respect to subject licensing phenomena (expletive insertion) and locative inversion, if by this we assume a fairly frequent alternative for ergative verbs in languages like English, implying no conceptual nor structural

¹² In the words of Lakoff 1978, though referring to a derivation with no semantic implications.

¹³ For instance, even when the default assumption may not be that the two constructions are equivalent (although certain analyses like Keenan 1987 suggest so, indicating a common logical form for both of them), it can also be noticed that such accounts do not comprise a detailed consideration of the evidence indicating the semantic relevance of the PLP and the structural and conceptual semantic features in ECs that cannot be directly read off its constituents.

¹⁴ Regarding the alternative proposal claiming *there* to be merged in this position, even though the idea might seem possible (e.g., Kalluli 2008 argues for this view claiming that there is a genuine subject merged in the clausal subject positions where it identifies a [Davidsonian] event argument, while within the minimalist program it is also accepted that there is inserted in SpecTP via “external” merge), it is also important to emphasize that such approaches, as developed so far (i.e., claiming a strictly syntactic operation) would not suffice to account for the semantic differences discussed in the present paper. Cf. Hartmann 2008 for more details.

semantic differences between the expletive-licensed alternative (a) and the original array (b), as the sentences paired in (11)–(14) illustrate (shaped following examples posed by Hale & Keyser 2002).¹⁵

- (9) a. There is {*?this student /?every student/?John} (at the door).
b. {This student /every student/John} is *(at the door).
- (10) a. There appeared {this student /every student/John} (at the door).
b. {This student /every student/John} appeared (at the door).
- (11) a. There arose a problem (in the research design).
b. A problem arose (in the research design).
- (12) a. There appeared a blemish (on the surface of the vase).
b. A blemish ppeared (on the surface of the vase).
- (13) a. There occurred a riot (on the streets of Laredo
b. A riot occurred (on the streets of Laredo).
- (14) a. There grew a rose (out of her grave).
b. A rose grew (out of her grave)
- (15) a. There has been a riot (on the streets of Laredo
b. *A riot has been (on the streets of Laredo).

Beyond these contrasts, there is also the question raised by *economy* of derivation and representation. Particularly, we want to emphasize that an expletive insertion hypothesis would not be consistent with general principles of derivational economy (Chomsky, 1995), since the presence of an expletive in Null-Subject [NS] languages ((16)b–c) would entail an unnecessary —not to say, unwelcome— extra derivational step. Something similar can be observed with regard to French ((16)d), in which the requirement of an overt realization of the (syntactic) subject is satisfied by a third-person pronoun *il*, and yet, the PLP is equally critical to render an EC instead of a possessive predication (the default one), as (17)c illustrates.

- (16) a. There is rare yellow orchid
b. Ci é una rara orchidea gialla
c. Hi ha una orquídia groga rara
d. Il y ha un rare orchidée jaune
- (17) a. *Is rare yellow orchid (at the roadside).
b. È una rara orchidea gialla accanto la strada
'[it] is a rare yellow orchid'
c. [Ell] Ha una orquídia groga rara
d. Il ha un rare orchidée jaune
'He has a rare yellow orchid'

On the other hand, the EPP determines that TP (IP) must have an overtly realized specifier (that is, the subject of predication should be explicitated in the FF level as well). On this account, the expletive hypothesis faces further problems when considering the widely known fact that the syntactic flexibility of (almost all)

¹⁵ Moreover, there is another example which furthers our hypothesis about the semantic relevance of *there* in (15). Notice that this constituent also appears with another ergative verb, this time featuring existential meaning itself (1), and that in that case the contrast against the EC is as radical as in other kind of clauses, considering that the insertion triggers no noticeable semantic increase or selectional contrasts. In addition, data from Italian (2) conforms to this proposal since (i) the PLP *ci* is not only not necessary but marginal in combination with a verb that can render an EC by itself; and (ii) it may only be tolerated if interpreted as a sheer locative referential particle, linking to a spatial adjunct (PP), as (2)a sketchily illustrates. Moreover, the alternative in (b) is not completely natural since the NP is expected to occur in postverbal position (ergative verb) and this, once more, implies no expletive insertion.

- (1) a. There exists some neural network in the brain
b. Some neural network exists (in the brain)
- (2) a. *(Ciⁱ) esiste una rete neurale (nel cervello)ⁱ
b. ?Una rete neurale esiste nel cervello

Romance languages allows post-verbal subjects as default layout with ergative verbs (18) —and as an acceptable alternative layout for unergatives (19)— without having to recur to an expletive insertion (nor admitting it (21)). In fact, its occurrence in contexts like (21) could be tolerated only as long as the pronoun is interpreted as a substitution of a locative complement, in full agreement with what we will suggest with regard to (23) next.

- (18) Arrivarono molti bambini
Arrived many kids
'Many kids arrived'
- (19) Parlarono molti bambini
Spoke many kids
'Many kids spoke'
- (20) Dio c'è¹⁶
God there is
'God exists'
- (21) (*ci) {parlarono/arrivarono} molti bambiniⁱ

Interestingly, Romance data like (20) also indicates that originally internal DP subjects can also occur in preverbal position even in ECs in Italian, and the PLP is just as mandatory in this case to yield an existential utterance as in (16)b (indeed, in its absence the clause features the locative meaning corresponding to the LCC). Along similar lines, we could also notice that the mandatory insertion does not respond to the “natural temptation to appeal to Case theory” (Hale&Keyser, 2002:190) either. In this sense, key principles of the minimalist Program such as Shortest Derivation (Chomsky 1995) raise a very good point, since the insertion of the PLP affects languages that require neither the EPP to be satisfied with an overt pronominal, nor the syntactically instantiated licensing of an *in situ* subject, thus contradicting the most basic tenets of derivational economy (cf. Lasnik, 2002:432).

According to this, data like (17) are introduced to show that the absence of the PLP in contexts like (16) does not actually trigger a subject-licensing problem, as it might be expected according to this approach, but a rather different predicative relation. Specifically, our main claim (to be discussed in detail later) will stem from the observation that in languages in which no further subject legitimation is required, such as Italian and Catalan (17)b-c —and even French (16)d, which already features an expletive—, the absence of the PLP renders a relatively acceptable construction, only that with a different meaning and lexical structure, corresponding either to a regular [identity] construction, or a possessive one, according to the semantic properties of the verbal base¹⁷. Therefore, if PLPs were needed to satisfy a purely syntactic requirement (e.g. EPP), then this claim should overlook a syntactically relevant shift in meaning. In view of this, we insist that considering a repair operation to be the only difference between minimal pairs like (6) seems, at least, problematical.

Therefore, based on the data presented so far, we will limit ourselves to claim that an approach exclusively built on strictly syntactic operations will eventually fail to account for the cross-linguistic distribution of PLPs in ECs, not to say for their incidence at (syntactically relevant) semantic levels. Moreover, we believe that ECs allow the discrimination of two very different grammatical phenomena: (i) those cases in which these particles are actually involved in displacement instances, like (11)-(14), and (ii) those instances in which this constituent is visibly relevant to the structural and conceptual semantics of the predicate (which is what we will take to happen in ECs).

¹⁶ The semantic incidence of proper nouns and definite DPs (also considered by Moro 1997) is dealt with in a proposal very close to ours in Mangialavori 2011. Some connected considerations on Catalan are offered by Bonet 1991 *i.a.*

¹⁷ In the same line, although English does not allow an equivalent variant ((17)a), it is worth noticing that the meaning of the non-PLP construction is essentially locative rather than existential, as the contrasts in (15)a-b also suggests.

2.2. ‘There’-as-part-of-predication

Of course, the idea that PLPs can have predicative relevance is not new. In fact, works like Moro (1997, 2005), Williams (1994), Hazout (2004) and Hoekstra & Mulder (1990) *i.a.* posed convincing arguments supporting the hypothesis that the PLP has predicative status — which leads us to the other scenario, posited by ‘there’-as-part-of-predication approach mentioned before—. However, the raising of the predicate to a preverbal position, suggested in some of these proposals as main argument in order to account for the syntactic layout of ECs¹⁸, not only makes wrong predictions (cf. Hartmann, 2008), but would not suffice either to capture fact that the predicate rendered by the (allegedly) raised predicate (Moro, Hoekstra & Mulder) or expletive (Williams, Hazout) features grammatically visible conceptual and structural differences with respect to the predicate yielded by the same lexical head in post-verbal position (be-there), which do not necessarily (nor even possibly) follow from the proposed syntax. Moreover, these differences become grammatically significant, as pairings like (9) illustrate. In point of fact, even Moro (1997:137) himself admits this issue to be a sharp question, which is, however, left unanswered¹⁹.

Interestingly enough, other syntactic approaches acknowledging ECs to feature formal properties which make them radically different from the be-there (LCC) predication — trying to explain ECs by claiming the PLP to be the subject of either a Relator Projection (Hartmann, 2008) or of the post-copular noun phrase (Williams 1994, Hazout 2004)— fail to account for cross language evidence, since neither Italian, French or Catalan would fit the syntactic layout suggested (in fact, Hartmann’s thesis is explicitly limited to two non-NS languages: English and German). In the same line, these models would not handle data like the one provided by Hungarian (cf. Maleczki, 2010:28) and Sardinian (Bentley, 2010) either.

In view of this, in the following section we will review several facts which would indicate that there is some kind of lexicalization process involved in ECs; specifically, that the PLP takes part in the derivation of a composite, distinct, lexical unit and that it is not just a regular copular predicate in a dependency relation with the verb, and, given the semantic correspondence between the semantic increase noticed in the EC and the semantic properties of the PLP, it cannot be addressed as an expletive either.²⁰

3. The traditional approach: some controversial points

Data from Romance languages will also suggest that two essential premises on which the classic *there-insertion* approach lays on — connected with the (alleged) chain linking the PLP and the NP on the one hand; and with the assumed structural analogy (base structure) between the EC and the LCC on the other— seem not free of controversy.

3.1. Expletives and (co)indexation²¹

¹⁸ With one main disagreement regarding the nature of the PLP (an NP for Moro, a PP for Hoekstra & Mulder).

¹⁹ Right after positing this question, the discussion shifts to a potential polysemy of the clitic (featuring a brief discussion about the lexicalist solution proposing one entry for the existential *there* and one for a locative *there*) and the achievement of locative meaning as consequence of the nature of the DP realizing the syntactic subject (which does not capture the difference between sentences initially presented as evidence, cf. Moro 1997:137(7a)-b). Besides, Moro (1997:136) himself admits that the copular constructions would not allow a cross-language generalization since “even a rather cursory survey across languages would immediately tell us that existential sentences are not copular sentences in all languages, including those languages which do not lack a copula. For example, in German we have *es gibt* (lit. ‘it gives’), in Spanish *hay* (have-there), etc.”. On the other hand, the elevated position of *we* assume to be a semantically relevant constituent in languages like Catalan or Italian is easily explained on morphological grounds: given that *ci* and *hi* are actually clitics, the preverbal position is not only logical but default in combination with inflected verbs, while with infinitives and gerunds the pronoun appears in post-verbal position (namely, *esserci* and *essendoci* respectively).

²⁰ Perhaps it could be objected that the case of English may need further insight on phenomena such as Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990, Baker & Hale 1990) in order to account for the rules of conformation of ECs. However, this not only exceeds the aims of the present study but also pertains to a framework in which our proposal is not built on.

²¹ Even when we would feel inclined to refer to the semantic anchorage or linking relation in which the PLP is (allegedly) engaged in terms of “referential relation” (as we in fact did in former versions of this study), it could be objected that coreference would invalidate principle C of the binding theory (R-expressions [referring NP] have to be free); and, therefore, this indexing should be different from the indexing that is relevant for Binding (co-superscription, instead of co-subscription), if we were to follow Chomsky 1981:218.

In general terms, the expletive-insertion approach takes the PLP to be in a chain relation with the internal NP (subject); thus, the former is described as an LF affix (located in a case-assigned position), with its associate (i.e., the NP in θ -position) adjoining to it at LF (Chomsky 1995:155)²², as sketchily illustrated in (22).

- (22) a. Thereⁱ is a flowerⁱ at the roadside
 b. Ciⁱ è un fioreⁱ accanto la strada
 c. Hiⁱ ha una florⁱ a la vora d'un camí

Apart from the fact that there is no convincing empirical evidence supporting a coindexation between the PLP and the DP in these occurrences²³, it should be also considered that there has been little discussion — except for works like Lakoff 1978, as far as our knowledge goes — about the fact that the particle in question can be recognized as (or, at least, can be acknowledged to be strikingly similar to) a referential locative pronoun/adverb in each and every language engaged in this pattern; what is more, this element is involved in repair operations in other contexts, though of a very different nature, as we will show in this section.

In fact, the occurrence of these constituents (*there*, *ci*, *hi*, *y*) is usually associated to the realization of mandatory constituents, given the lexical and/or structural characteristics of certain verbs. Specifically, the insertion of these particles saves otherwise ungrammatical constructions from crashing by replacing a locative complement, as illustrated by prototypical examples in (23) and (24). In fact, this is actually the main point in the default description of their grammatical behavior. Notice that in all these cases, the phenomenon exposed by Italian *ci*, Catalan *hi* and French *y* can be said to resemble in several respects the situation of *there*, if we take into consideration the gloss.

- (23) a. [A Romaⁱ] ci ho rimasto cinque giorni.
 a'. [A Romaⁱ] (M')hi he estat cinc dies.
 a''. [A Romeⁱ] J' yⁱ suis resté cinq jours
 At Rome LOC I have remained five days
 'I have stayed there [at Rome] for five days'

Taking these data in consideration, then the expletive hypothesis would be somehow correct in claiming that these particles all are involved in saving sentences which would be otherwise ruled out; yet, we cannot avoid noticing that this relation does not link them to the subject of the clause, or to (uninterpretable) feature valuation requirements, but to spatial complements, as the examples in (24) demonstrate. In other words, Romance data conforms to the claim that the particles involved in ECs do legitimate otherwise ungrammatical constructions, however, this is done by substituting a mandatory (locative) constituent²⁴.

- (24) a. Come *(ci) vado?
 b. Com *(hi) vaig?
 c. Comment puis-je *(y) arriver?

²² Anyhow, this idea is reformulated later on in the same work, and the expletive replacement is not claimed to adjoin the associate to the expletive at LF but the features of the associate to INFL (Chomsky 1995:273).

²³ Even when clitics like Italian *ci* are known for being able to substitute non-locative constituents, it should also be borne in mind that these elements (a) essentially involve relational categories (PP/AdvP/AP) and not NPs (Mangialavori 2011); and that (ii) they correspond to a spatial complement, expressing the function of either an (abstract) GOAL (e.g., the dative; cf. Baker 2003, Blasco Ferrer 1990, Manzini & Savoia 2002, Mangialavori 2013 *i.a.*) or GROUND argument. On the other hand, as to the co-indexation with locative constituents, it must also be mentioned that Kayne (2008:185) argues that the expletives in question are rather deictic than locative ("non-locative" [sic]), since in other instances these lexical items can refer to non-spatial items ("it does not modify PLACE"). However, it has also been suggested that an abstract reading of location would account for these facts (cf. Baker 2003, Manzini & Savoia 2002, Mangialavori 2011).

²⁴ Even when it could be argued that the only differences between NS-Ls and non-NS ones would be that in the former there would be a null expletive instead of an explicit one, it must be observed also that, this is not relevant to the claim that the PLP is itself an expletive (if it might be called so). For specific details on this issue, cf. the empirical data surveyed in works like Mangialavori 2008, 2011.

- d. How do I get *(there)?
- (25) a. *Ciò è un fiore*ⁱ
 It is a flower
 'It is a flower'

How is this relevant? Simply, because a locative pronoun would not be a default choice for subject licensing in Romance languages at least. In other words, if the chain relation approach were to be pursued —even when this implicates the aforementioned violation to derivational economy, given the NS nature of Italian and Catalan—, it would still be logical to expect a different (non-spatial) kind of pronoun binding the NP (subject) in these languages. By this we refer to the fact that Romance languages feature particles which seem semantically and morphologically more suitable to the task, like, for instance, *ciò* (or, even, its English equivalent *it*²⁵), not to mention once more the case of *il*. Instead, and quite interestingly, these alternatives do succeed in rendering a legitimate internal subject construction, as (25) indicates; however —and line with what we suggested with regard to (17) above— it is equally important to note that the predication yielded in this case is neither semantically nor syntactically similar to the EC. In sum, empirical data like (25) furthers the idea that the PLP is not required on a mere syntactic basis, but that it rather has great part in the lexical and conceptual conformation of the existential predicate.

3.2. Semantics: Definiteness effect and interpretative variations

As we anticipated in the introduction, another challenging question for those lines assuming a semantically (structural and/or conceptual) trivial derivation between the sentences paired in (26) is raised by the widely known Definiteness Effect shown by strong subjects being rejected in ECs when they represent a natural choice for the 'alternate' (i.e., the LCC).

As it might be known, there are semantic, pragmatic as well as syntactic approaches to explain the restriction. Anyhow, —and abstracting away from syntactic hypothesis (e.g., Diesing, 1992, Belletti, 1988)— the fact that not every DP occurring in the 'original' DP-V-there construction (26)a is admitted in the 'alternate' (26)b appears as an empirical instantiation of the semantic contrast suggested becoming (morpho)syntactically relevant. To our understanding, neither an expletive insertion nor other displacement phenomena such as raising of the predicate or locative inversion would account for the fact that LCCs show little or no lexical affinity with bare nouns or with DPs headed by indefinite determiners and quantifiers (26), which, in turn, represent the 'normal' choice for ECs; whereas proper names (27) and definite DPs (28) are lexically compatible with the LCC but not with the EC. Interestingly, data also shows that these observations apply to the other languages under consideration in a rather consistent pattern —especially considering that this phenomenon is not only rooted in semantics, but represents a case in which semantic features determine morphosyntactic combinations and pragmatic implications, and, what is more, C-I systems are also involved (especially regarding the relation between existence and genericity/specificity).

- (26) a. {?A/The} man is in the room
 b. There's {a/*the} man in the room
- (27) a. *There is John in the room
 b. *C'è Giorgio nella stanza
 c. *Hi ha Joan a la sala
- (28) Il fiore {è / *c'è} accanto una strada

²⁵ Though it is a main concern for our presentation, we are not unaware of the fact that Chomsky (1995) distinguishes two types of expletive-associate pairs (there/associate; it/clausal argument) as to explain the choice of *there*. However, and especially considering the case of Italian and French, a non-spatial pronoun could be a better choice as far as D-feature checking is concerned (taking into account the ϕ -features of the associate that should be expected to move up covertly to be checked), in comparison with the locative *y* or *ci*. Moreover, the French pronoun *ce* would mirror exactly our observation about the English and Italian identity constructions (*C'est une fleur/It is a flower/ É un fiore*) achieved in absence of the PLP in contrast to the EC, only that the parallel is constrained by the fact that the verb involved in French ECs is different (*avoir*).

- The flower is/there is next to a road
 'The flower is at the roadside'
- (29) Molti fiori (ci) sono accanto una strada
 Many flowers (there) are next a street
 'There are many flowers are at a roadside' / 'Many of the flowers are at the roadside'
- (30) Molti fiori gialli (*ci) sono accanto una strada [e no nel parco]
 many flowers yellow (there) are next a road not in-the park
 'Many yellow flowers are at a roadside [and not in the park]'

In any case (and in view of these kind of data), the only evident conclusion to be drawn is that a displacement hypothesis would only work for a corpus restricted to clauses featuring indefinite DPs like the archetypical 'a man' case.

Moreover, the contrast triggered by the insertion of the PLP touches on further levels, like the interpretive domain. Namely, contexts like (29) shows a semantically, pragmatically and syntactically significant alternative between the indefinite flavor regularly associated with ECs —rendering, among other things, a generic/unspecified interpretation of 'many flowers'— and the contrastive (therefore, partitive) interpretation of the DP in the LCC, which brings it semantically closer to an expression like 'many [of the] flowers. Indeed, this observation is in full agreement with largely studied semantic implications of ECs (cf. Milsark, 1974 *i.a.*)²⁶. Analogously, it is interesting to notice that the LCC also allows a contrastive reading of the locative PP, which is not implied by the EC (30)²⁷. From this perspective, the *Definiteness Effect* appears not as an inherent and invariant property of the verb in question (*to be, essere*), but actually as a complex phenomenon resting on the lexical properties of the existential predicate in which the PLP has much to say.

3.3. Further contrasts pointing towards the lexical level

Moreover, there is additional data (already pointed out in previous works) indicating that there are differences as to the syntactic status of the locative PP in LCCs and ECs²⁸. As it would be logical to expect, LCCs do not tolerate the omission of this constituent, since it features the lexical head projecting the spatial Small Clause or coda; however, this omission is not as problematic in ECs, as (3) —and many other examples— show. In fact, contexts initially allowing free alternation between the existential and the locative predicate become suitable only for the former as soon as the locative PP is omitted.

- (31) *(Ci) sono molti fiori gialli [nel parco]

Anyhow, what we aim to stress is that the contrast between the LCC and the EC features visible consequences as far as syntactic layout is concerned. Although a detailed analysis would exceed the limits of the current presentation, we cannot avoid mentioning that, aside from the anticipated difference between the position (pre/post verbal subject) and morphosemantic properties (\pm definiteness) of the DP, it has also been shown that both the there-insertion and the raise of the predicate approaches make the wrong predictions with respect to phenomena like *wh*-movement²⁹ —which is usually pointed out as the main diagnostic for predicate inversion, which is what Moro's approach postulates (cf. Hartmann, 2008)— and

²⁶ For an alternative strategy accounting for the aspectual contrast grounded on topicality, see Dowty 1989:75. Regarding further semantic implications of this effect in ECs, cf. Leonetti 2008.

²⁷ Thus, the absence of the PLP in contexts like (30) renders a sentence conveying transitory or temporally limited spatial situation with an implied contrast with other —former or latter— potential locations of the subject, an entailment that is no lexically compatible with the EC, as the sheer rejection of *ci* indicates.

²⁸ Even if we will not proceed any further, we are not unaware of the fact that the existing literature proposes several competing interpretations as to the status of this locative PP —i.e., an adjunct (Treviño 2003) or a NP modifier (Hazout 2004) or even a locative argument that occupies subject position (Fernandez Soriano 1999)—.

²⁹ Williams 1984 and Hartmann 2008 show that whereas it is possible to extract the predicative adjective from SC complements of *consider*, the same extraction fails with the EC (e.g.: How happy do you consider Bill?/ *How happy was there someone?; Williams 1984, 133f)

Heavy-NP shift (impossible in ECs), besides overlooking the fact that copular constructions allow postnominal AP modification while ECs do not (Williams, 1984; Leu, 2005, Hartmann, 2008, McNally, 1997).

Moreover, as we already pointed out, words like *ci*, *there*, *hi* are anaphoric pronouns and, as such, they can license a sentence by reintroducing a mandatory argument matching its semantic (spatial) features; a factual proof of this is suggested by the oddity of those clauses featuring both items (32). On this account, if *ci/there* were actually regular copular predicates, then the PLP could be expected to establish a similar (chain) relation with the spatial complement, and, thus, trigger the same oversaturation issues. Unsurprisingly, this is not the case. In fact, there is no oversaturation nor redundancy emerging from the cooccurrence of the PLP and the spatial PP. Rather, the locative is expected to appear as a lexically-selected, though optional, constituent of the existential predicate; on the other hand, and interestingly enough, data also indicates that the semantic properties of the EC, along with the selectional restrictions that follow from them, cannot be understood by the semantic analysis of its parts (cf. Langacker, 1987 i.a.); especially in view of the fact that a semantically transparent combination of these lexical items does not render the same results³⁰. To our understanding, this issue is one of the main arguments leading us to suggest that PLPs are part of the predication, though not regular copular complements; rather, we believe that ECs involve lexical issues connected with the conformation of a complex (phrasal) predicate prior to overt syntax.

- (32) a. *? I live thereⁱ at Romeⁱ.
 b. *? Ciⁱ abito a Romaⁱ

In other words, the PLP in ECs does not seem to be syntactically and semantically dependent of the V, in the sense given in works on verb-particle constructions like Lohse et al 2004. By the we mean to emphasize that the parsing of *there* in the EC would not require access to the verb for the assignment of syntactic or semantic properties (with respect to which *there* is zero-specified or ambiguously or polysemously specified) as it seems to be the case in LCCs, in which the parser needs access to the terminal *be* (and its associated semantic and syntactic properties) to interpret it as a copular (locative) predicate, just as happens with APs, PPs, AdvPs and NPs in cases like (2).

3.4. Negation and interrogation

One of the main arguments advocating in favor of a (complex) predicate unit is negation. As it is widely known, in regular copular clauses negation applies only to the embedded lexical projection —as (33)b-c briefly illustrates—; however, it is also known that in ECs behave quite differently in this respect. In fact, the negation of the locative particle has a semantic effect that corresponds to a regular LCC (locative interpretation rather than existential). This poses a considerable difference with the result of negation having scope on (what we take to be) a complex predicate instantiated as a predicative unit, and independently listed in the lexicon as such. Moreover, interrogation seems to point in the same direction (34).

³⁰ In this sense, it is important to notice that an essential (theoretical) question underlies the discussion of all of the above-mentioned issues; specifically, we refer to the question about which approach to meaning composition best accounts for the facts under consideration, considering that they range from syntactically and pragmatically relevant aspects of meaning to argument realization. In other words, as this debate involves the relative role of the lexicon versus syntax, it might be seen as necessarily engaged in the tension between lexicon-driven versus construction/syntax-driven approaches. According to this, we would find ourselves compelled to think that there is a lexical entry featuring syntactically relevant information —and that this information triggers the projection of distinct syntactic phenomena—; or, rather, that there is lexically encoded information which gives rise to the application of specific lexical-syntactic operations (e.g., incorporation, conflation) that apply at the level of a lexical-relational syntax prior to overt syntax (Hale and Kayser 1993, 2000; Mateu 2002; Harley 2005). In any case, we essentially lean towards considering that if the selection of constituents is [pre]specified in the lexical entry of the verbal base, and the subcategorization for "default" constituents will be prespecified by general constraints associating a given verb to semantic and pragmatic requirements, and, moreover, we take the PLP to be semantically trivial, there is no possible way to account for those facets of ECs that radically differ from those associated to the base verb.

Anyhow, this topic is dealt with in a paper currently in preparation. Still, if we were to provide a syntactic account of ECs, we would feel inclined to claim that the lexical properties of the predicate can have a correlation in its syntactic construction (i.e., the phrase can be subject to a minimal syntactic decomposition) without that implying a contradiction with a lexically-oriented proposal.

- (33) a. There is a silly student smoking behind the woodshed.
 b. #No, he is not [silly].
 c. #No, he is not [there].
 d. No, there is not.
- (34) a. Are there Spanish teachers?
 b. Are [the] Spanish teachers there?
- (35) a. (There/*here) is a man in the room.
 b. (Ci/*li/*qui) è un uomo nella stanza
 c. (Hi/*allà/*aquí/*allí) ha un home a l'habitació
 d. Il (y/*ici/*il) a un homme dans la salle
- (36) a. There are some red flowers [in the kitchen]
 b. Some red flowers are thereⁱ, [in the kitchen]ⁱ

More importantly, this observation seems to be independent of the higher or lower flexibility on word order showed by the different languages observed.

Summing up, on the basis of the evidence introduced so far, we feel inclined to consider spatial underspecified pronominal forms like *ci*, *there*, *y*, *hi* as syntactic and semantically relevant constituents, with lexical function in the predicate —that is, lexically determining the projection of an existential predicate that cannot be attained otherwise and which does not amount to a regular copular constructions (even rendered by the same constituents)—. Besides, by taking a lexically-oriented approach, we avoid having to recur to extragrammatical instances to account for the aforementioned phenomena.³¹

4. Coindexation instances are relevant in order to understand ECs

Finally, the idea that PLPs are not semantically irrelevant must be articulated with the fact that the data drawn by the different languages analyzed here shows (suggestively) consistent characteristics, starting with the unanimous involvement of a locative particle. In this sense, further arguments in support of the introduction of semantic content by the PLP —against the expletive hypothesis— are (i) the fact that there is no idiosyncrasy in the way this contrast between existential and locative predicates is reproduced in other languages, even in NS languages; and (ii) the close connection between locative relations and existence anticipated in the introduction. As Fillmore, 1968; Thorne, 1973; Kuno, 1971 and Lyons, 1971 observed “it is no accident that the same *word-there*—occurs in both constructions” (Lakoff, 1987:470). To our understanding, this correlation suggests that spatial semantic features of PLPs are not only relevant to, but consistent with, the semantic properties of ECs; in full agreement with widely known claims raised by semantically-oriented and cognitive studies on ECs stating that that “things that exist, exist in locations. To be is to be located” (Lakoff, 1987: 518). In short, as cross-linguistic data shows, existential sentences frequently involve locative particles, even when there is no requirement of a subject-licensing insertion.

Additionally, and from a methodological perspective, the fact that this model is not idiosyncratic to one or two closely related languages, but it actually it fits the pattern followed by a fair number of languages with contrasting syntactic requirements, become crucial in that they eventually allows us to avoid considering arbitrary grammaticalization processes or metaphoric and/or idiomatic phenomena (e.g. Russi, 2008).

On this account, even though the referential use of these particles does not concern us directly, bringing them into consideration appears as a way of presenting further arguments in favor of the presence of certain semantic features in the PLPs relevant to the conformation of ECs and which are, interestingly enough, consistent with the semantic underpinnings of the EC. By this we suggest that the peculiar semantic content

³¹ For instance, syntactically-oriented approaches acknowledging that ECs feature peculiar semantic and syntactic properties end up suggesting that “restriction on questioning and negation seems to be a pragmatic restriction” (Hartmann 2008:182). In other proposals, the generic reference of existential predicates –or discourse novelty, in the terms of McNally (1998)–, or reference to ‘nonparticulars’, has been linked to the concept of attributes (Farkas and Kamp, 2001:99).

of the particles in question, essential to license chain relations with a spatial argument, might be somehow related to the meaning increase noticed against the semantic properties of the verbal head. On the other hand, this does not necessarily imply that a bound variable reading for the locative particle is active in every construction featuring them. In fact, data presented above show that there is no empirical proof of a referential relation between the PLP and the spatial PP —nor with the subject, as assumed in several expletive-insertion proposals— in ECs. Specifically, evidence seems to indicate that locative particles in ECs like *ci* or *there* do not stand for an argumental complements, and they are not linked to them either; in practical terms, the relation illustrated in (37)a cannot be reproduced in (37)b

- (37) a. In the classroomⁱ? Some teachers are thereⁱ
 b. In the classroomⁱ? Thereⁱ are some teachers

Then, why is locative content relevant for the analysis of the PLP if there is no referential relation instantiated in ECs? From our perspective, some part of the answer is given by two different observations. In the first place, it is important to emphasize that the lack of referentiality (also attested in Hartmann, 2008) does not imply that the element is meaningless or that it does not contribute compositionally to the meaning of the clause. Rather, it can be taken (following Masini 2009) as proof of its lexicalization. On the other hand, and following from this, we find reasons to posit that the same semantic features (potentially) licensing an anaphoric relation in the prototypical occurrence of these particles (cf. (23)-(24) above) actually conform to the semantic increase noticed in ECs (especially in view of the contrast enabled by Romance data, like (17)). In particular, it could be argued that these particles can denote an abstract locative (therefore, stative³²) relation *per se*, as part of its lexical properties, which would eventually correlated with those semantic properties codified as part of the meaning of the existential phrase. Specifically, we suggest that the unbound locative particle projects its own lexical (though minimal) content, which (i) would suffice to account for the semantic difference between the lexicalized phrase (EC) and the base verb itself (*be/essere/avoir/haver/haber*), and that (ii) cannot be achieved otherwise (e.g., by the insertion of other pronouns/adverbs). This would amount to suggest that in LCCs the underspecified locative particle displays full spatial content since its reference is bounded to a concrete spatial location —either deictically or referentially—, thus yielding a locative utterance; which in fact contrasts with the lack of an overt spatial content in ECs. On the other hand, the idea that when PLPs take part in the constitution of a lexical phrasal unit (EC) they do not act referentially/deictically, conforms to the claim that when phrasal units function as lexical units may have implications for their formal properties (cf. Masini, 2009). In other words, according to the hypothesis of the lexically listed phrasal predicate (in which lexical codification is crucial in order to account for the slight opacity pointed out in the introduction) it is still possible to assume —and therefore, leaving open the possibility to articulate the idea with a constructionist approach— that the PLP contributes compositionally to the existential predication (hence, a phrasal predicate), and its distinct semantic content is part of the constructional meaning of the compound construction. In this sense, we could even recur to Sinclair's notion of 'extended unit of meaning' —which aims to highlight distinct collocation, semantic preferences, semantic prosody, etc. in a complex unit— departing from the idea that "the underlying unit of composition is an integrated sense-structure complex" (Sinclair, 1996:105).

In other words, to our understanding, the existential meaning corresponds to a complex predicate with grammatical properties implying a certain construction with distinct lexical properties; at the same time, data points out the need to consent that its meaning is, to a certain extent, a compositional function of the meaning of its constituents (cf. Goldberg, 2006:5) —since ECs feature a certain (semantically relevant) syntactic pattern (construction) which becomes evident from a crosslinguistic perspective (locative+semantically depleted verb)—. In this sense, the constructionist view would also be compatible with

³² According to the frameworks supporting the analysis of states in terms of abstract locations, developed since Anderson 1971, Gruber 1979, among others. According to Mangialavori 2013, this can be linked with the claim that spatial adverbs and prepositions are generally considered relational elements (e.g. Mateu 2002), that is, elements with predicative function.

our hypothesis with regard to the idea that the there-be phrase (and its equivalents in the other languages considered) is withdrawn from syntactic access at some point in the derivation and listed as a complex predicate with distinct conceptual and structural semantic features. In particular, we agree that storage of complex words is necessary, one reason being that we have to specify their distinct (syntactically and pragmatically relevant) semantic properties³³. On this account, ECs seem to indicate that certain complex lexical items can be seen as syntactic constructions, and that syntax provides schemas that are relevant to the lexicalized phrase. Interestingly enough, by relating the semantic features featured by ECs to the lexical content of the (underspecified, unbound) PLP, then there would be no further need to appeal to discourse-based theories in order to account for the peculiar characteristics of ECs (e.g. Lakoff, 1987, *i.a.*).³⁴

In sum, although the following proposal will probably lead to further research on the matter, it could be suggested that ECs emerge as the result of the combination of a semantically underspecified verb and an locative particle which remains semantically underspecified as its spatial reference is not bounded — although, at the same time, those (minimal) locative features are essential to the conformation of an EC. Last, but not least, ECs entail a cross-language pattern based on the combination of a semantically depleted verb and an underspecified (unbounded) PLP. This array represents a generalized grammatical phenomenon, yielding an existential expression with strikingly similar semantic and syntactic properties, instantiated at selectional and interpretational levels. Specifically, the coincidence in meaning, syntactic distribution, lexical selection and definiteness effects observed in languages with different syntactic requirements on subject realization clearly indicates a grammatical phenomenon which seems relevant to a wider perspective of study than feature valuation requirements and post-lexical transformations.

5. Results and discussion

So, are locative expletives in existential sentences actually expletives?

According to the facts presented in this paper, cross language evidence provides several reasons to think otherwise. In the first place, derivational economy advocates against the assumption of an expletive especially in view of Romance languages engaged in this pattern: Italian and Catalan need no further insertion to legitimate an internal subject (NS languages), whereas non-NS languages like French already have this requisite satisfied by an expletive (*il*), and, yet, the PLP is equally crucial to achieve an EC. Secondly, Romance languages engaged in this pattern show that the absence of the PLP does not involve either a violation to EPP or subject licensing problems; rather, the non-PLP construction is quite legitimate, though it features a significantly different meaning and structure. In fact (thirdly), empirical data unanimously show that these particles are not mere (semantically null) placeholders; rather, their semantic underpinnings are consistent (even at a cognitive level) with pragmatically, morphologically and syntactically-relevant semantic content corresponding to an existential construction, which is not yielded by the same verb otherwise. In fact (third), data indicates that other (non-locative) particles which may seem more suitable to the task (e.g., *ciò*, *il*, *ce*) do not make a successful replacement of the PLP. Furthermore, the EC contrasts with its alleged ‘alternate’ (LCC) in a way that displacement phenomena and repair operations do not necessarily capture or predict; among other facts, it involves a semantic increase which is syntactically and morphologically relevant in direct ways, regarding both (i) selection of constituents and syntactic status of them —which becomes visible in the optionality of the spatial PP that would otherwise instantiate the copular predicate, and should, therefore, be mandatorily realized— and (ii) selectional restrictions—

³³ Namely, following Pietrosky 2012, plausible answers allow us to entertain the hypothesis that phrasal meanings are quite generally instructions for how to build conjunctive monadic concepts. Anyhow, the hypothesis of the lexical complex unit has the advantage of being consistent with even the most elemental scrutiny on dictionaries and second-language acquisition materials reveals that this compound is independently listed in the lexicon.

³⁴ In this sense, the essential idea is compatible with other frameworks assuming that in some form or another constructions can have meaning assigned to them (construction grammar, but also HPSC, LFG, etc.); however, these alternatives are not easy to conciliate with a syntactic (de)composition, which seems essential given the consistent properties of the constituents yielding ECs, at least in the languages under consideration here.

somehow sensitive even to the CI systems— like the *Definiteness Effect*, and other semantic properties relevant at interpretative and pragmatically-sensitive levels (e.g., partitive reading of subject/location). Moreover, differences in (lexical) aspect add up to this observations.

Concisely, and in consonance with syntactically-based proposals (e.g., Hartmann, 2008), we found that ECs feature a distinctive (semantic and) syntactic structure, radically different to the one yielded by the alleged ‘alternate’ and that this difference does not necessarily follow from the syntax proposed by expletive, raising and dislocation approaches. In other words, empirical data presented here lead us to claim that the postulation of post-lexical syntactic operations (expletive insertion, raising) does not account for formal differences found between ECs and the alternative (copulative) counterpart, especially considering that such contrasts touch on: (i) syntactic structure (ergative vs. copular predicate), (ii) meaning (existence vs. spatial situation), (iii) aspectual features and selectional constraints on the DP, (iv) oversaturation effects (co-occurrence of the PLP and the spatial PP) and (v) optionality and syntactic status of the latter; which eventually conform to the (vi) semantic and syntactic consequences of the absence of the PLM in analogous contexts posited by Romance data. In this respect, Romance languages show that the PLP is not an expletive (i.e., an element which is not expected to contribute compositionally to the meaning of the predicate) and that its insertion is not related to feature valuation problems (repair operation); but, rather, to the conformation of a distinct predicate which cannot be achieved on the basis of the same verb otherwise.

Taken together, these facts show that ECs posit a clear difference with respect to (what we claim to be) genuine cases of expletive insertion. From our perspective, to show that such differences do exist amounts to provide empirical evidence advocating for the idea that the problem involves the instantiation of a distinct predicate, in which lexical issues have much to say.

Instead, data from Italian, Catalan, French, English, Spanish and Sardinian show that ECs pose a paradigm whose members seem to accommodate to a consistent pattern yielded by the combination of a locative particle and a semantically depleted verb³⁵. In this sense, an approach choosing a unified schematization of the PLP to underlie different instantiations appears as a more general and economical solution than selecting constraints introducing idiosyncratic or specific arrangements accounting for only one member of the cross language paradigm (e.g., expletive proposals which only apply to English and German, like Hartmann 2008 and Hazout, 2004 *i.a.*). Besides, the selection of a locative particle seems neither accidental nor trivial even at a cognitive level, especially if it is assumed that grammatical constructions are “not independent of meaning; rather they are motivated, and in many cases even predicted, on the basis of meaning” (Lakoff, 1987:463). Although in our case this claim is held from a lexical point of view, our hypothesis is based on the fact that the semantic properties of the PLP are not only consistent with but also essential to the semantic implications of the existential/presentational predicate (only) yielded by the combination of this (locative) particle with a semantically depleted verb —i.e., a copula or an equivalent of *have*. On the other hand, crosslinguistic data presented here challenge even more refined syntactic postulations (e.g. Hartmann, 2008) which agree with us on the differentiation of two radically different scenarios, with evidence showing that the existential predicate involves something more than structural slots stipulated ad-hoc. On this account, storage of complex words is necessary, one reason being that we have to specify their distinct (syntactically and pragmatically relevant) semantic properties which cannot be predicted on a syntactic³⁶ basis.

³⁵ In this sense, Italian poses a very interesting set of independently listed predicates formed by *ci* insertion; however, among them, only the existential *esserci* matches a cross-language pattern, implying that this phenomenon is not idiosyncratic to Italian as might be the other (compound) *ci*-verbs. In this respect, a somehow similar phenomenon is featured by the Italian verb *correre*, which alternates between a motion verb (‘to run’) with preverbal subject and an existential predicate (listed as *correre ci* in dictionaries) with internal subject and an optional locative (ground) complement. Moreover, the locative particle doesn’t seem to bear argumental status in the latter, as it does in the former.

³⁶ Understood as post-lexical syntax, and not in the sense of lexical or first-phase syntax (this issues are dealt with in an upcoming paper)

Methodologically speaking, the adoption of a lexically-sensitive perspective —rather than a strictly syntactic one—allows us to bring into consideration the interaction of semantic content and morphosyntactic restrictions without having to appeal to extra-grammatical systems or functional projections —such as the Focus or Force systems (as those developed by Belletti, 2002, 2005; Rizzi, 1997 *i.a.*)—, or approaches based on Cognitive Grammar (v.g. Lakoff, 1987) or Role and Reference Grammar (e.g., Bentley, 2010), to name the most salient cases³⁷. On the other hand, the semantic underpinnings of the PLP in ECs (as compound predicate) indicate that the grammatical status of this particle exceeds syntax proper (i.e., the difference between the EC and the LCC exceeds post-lexical syntactic operations like raising and merge/move triggered by case assignment and feature valuation). On this account, empirical facts would eventually favor syntactic theories which do not accord syntax a privileged status, and which seek to view grammar in terms of the complex interplay of syntax, semantics and pragmatics (Van Valin, 2003) in a general way as the formal characterization or representation (in whatever terms) of the different components of ECs. The consequence of this analysis is once more is that there is not always an exclusive boundary between syntax and lexicon. Instead, both at the level of the word (PLP) and the level of the phrase (EC), syntax provides schemas that reveal a lexicalized complex unit (phrase) which, in turn, involves properties that are morphologically and syntactically relevant. Hence, the ‘lexicon’ becomes visible from a syntactic perspective, and, on the other hand, the boundary between lexicon and syntax can be straddled.

6. Conclusion

Summing up, in this presentation we limited ourselves to introduce empirical facts advocating in favor of the hypothesis that the PLP in ECs is relevant for the conceptual and structural semantic layout of the existential predicate and that expletive insertion and displacement phenomena do not suffice to account for a semantic increase impacting on other grammatical (and even extragrammatical) domains. Thus, by empirically examining the syntactic and semantic differences between ECs and (i)copular constructions (LCCs), (ii)constructions lacking the PLP (possible in Romance, delivering either copulative or possessive predicates, though not existential ones), and (iii)legitimate expletive insertion instances (in which the expletive is semantically irrelevant to the conformation of the predicate), we aim to cast some light on the grammatical relevance of those constituents traditionally seen either as semantically dummy items whose presence is merely required on syntactic grounds (e.g., uninterpretable feature valuation). In this sense, we hope that the facts outlined in the present paper could be taken as a step forward in the comprehension and settlement of this classical topic.

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³⁷ Once more, we want to emphasize that our view on the specific way in which this lexical item (PLP) is inserted and the EC is construed, along with the corresponding considerations, is dealt in a further paper currently under review.

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