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The (information) structure of existentials

1 Introduction

1.1 Aim of the study

This paper proposes an interface analysis of a specific type of existential sentence (illustrated in [1]) which – according to the present approach – constitutes a marked copular construction:

(1)   *There is* [*a man*] [*in the garden*]

A sentence of this type is used to assert the existence of the referent denoted by the post-copular phrase (*a man* in our example) in the location connected with the (optional) final PP (*in the garden*), or else – if the latter is missing – in a location given in the universe of discourse.

The paper is organized as follows. The introductory section is dedicated to an overview of the literature concerned with copular constructions and information-structurally marked structures. Section 2 deals with existential sentences, presenting first some of the most influential works dedicated to this topic, so as to propose an interface analysis which takes into account the formal, semantic and discourse properties of the relevant constructions. Section 3 is concerned with a well-known phenomenon associated to existential sentences in many languages, namely the Definiteness Effect (henceforth, DE). Comparing data from languages showing DE (like English) with languages which apparently do not (like Italian), the present approach reveals that *there*-sentences with a definite post-copular phrase do not qualify as existential constructions

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proper, as they are characterized by different interpretive and formal properties. Results are summarized in section 4.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Copular constructions

The term "copular construction" is generally used in the literature to indicate a structure in which two phrases of any category are linked by means of a copula:[1]

(2)   XP – copula – YP

This structure is related to various types of copular constructions, which allow for different phrasal categories in the positions indicated in (2) as XP and YP (cf. Den Dikken 2006a). Limiting our attention to structures featuring two (major) nominal constituents, at least two types of copular constructions can be distinguished on the basis of their semantic and syntactic properties. In particular, many scholars have proposed a typology of these structures based on the referential quality of the post-copular phrase (i.e., YP in [2]).[2] In order to illustrate this two-fold classification, consider the following example (taken from Den Dikken 2006a):

(3)   [$_{XP}$ *His supper*] *is* [$_{YP}$ *food for the dog*]

This sentence is ambiguous because the post-copular constituent can be interpreted as either referential or not.[3] In the latter case, it is interpreted as 'his supper serves as food for the dog', whereas in the former the sentence can be
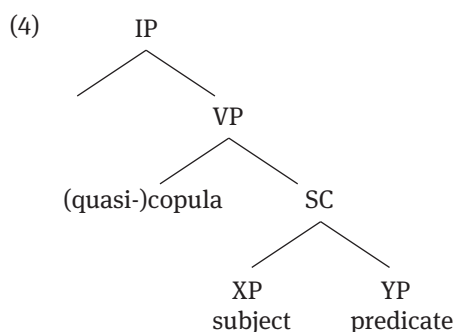
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1 Notice that the same term is also used to indicate similar structures in which the copular element is not (necessarily) overtly realized and the three elements in (2) may appear in a different linear order.

2 For an overview, cf. Den Dikken (2006a: § 1.2) and the references cited therein. As the author discusses in § 1.3, a more fine-grained typology of copular constructions can also be put forward, which is not limited to the referentiality of the post-copular constituent but include additional properties (e.g., discourse function, syntax and intonation) of both copular phrases; see, for instance, Higgins (1979) and Declerck (1988).

3 It should be noticed that there is no general agreement as to whether this distinction depends on the referentiality of the post-copular constituent or to specific properties of the copula itself. As a matter of fact, it has been proposed that copulas have two different lexical

rephrased as 'he has food for the dog for supper'. Given that the post-copular YP *predicates something* about XP in the former reading, while its denotation *identifies* or *specifies the value for* the referent denoted by XP in the latter, the two relevant copular constructions are usually referred to as *predicative* and *identifying/specificational*, respectively. As will become clearer in the remainder of this work, these two structures are correlated with different types of marked copular constructions (i.e., existential/locative sentences and (pseudo)clefts, respectively).

As far as their syntactic analysis is concerned, since Stowell's (1981) influential work copular constructions are usually treated as Small Clauses (SCs; cf., among many others, Cardinaletti and Guasti, eds. 1995; Moro 1997; Den Dikken 2006b):

(4)

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            IP
           /  \
              VP
             /  \
(quasi-)copula   SC
                /  \
              XP    YP
            subject  predicate
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In this configuration (from Moro 1997), a subject and a predicate are linked by means of a Merge operation. Specifically, this predicative structure is selected by a copula (or, alternatively, by "quasi-copular" verbs such as *seem*, *become*, etc.) and, in languages like English, it is derived through the raising of either the subject or the predicate (depending on their specific properties) to Spec, IP, where Case and φ-features can be checked (cf. Moro 1997; Den Dikken 2006b).

1.2.2 Marked structures

Since Rizzi's (1997) seminal work, syntactic research in the generative framework has been paying special attention to information-structurally marked

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entries – one with an identifying function and the other with a predicative nature (cf., for instance, Safir 1985). Nevertheless, in the generative literature there is a prevalent tendency to attribute the semantic and syntactic properties of the two constructions to the nature of the two major constituents.

constructions, in which the discourse interpretation of constituents is connected with formal features. In particular, discourse features are assumed to be encoded in the left periphery of the sentence (i.e., the C-domain), which is constituted by an array of rigidly ordered functional projections, each of which is dedicated to the interpretation of a specific information-structural feature. Following Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007) (henceforth, F&H 2007) and Frascarelli (2007), we assume the following articulation:

(5)   [ForceP [ShiftP [GP [ContrP [FocP [FamP [FinP [IP . . ..]]]]]]]]]

The projections indicated as ShiftP, ContrP and FamP represent the functional projections in which Aboutness-Shift (A-)Topics, Contrastive (C-)Topics and Familiar/Given (G-)Topics are realized, respectively. Notice that this hierarchy refers to the array of Topics in root/root-like clauses, since not all types of Topics can be realized in any clausal type. As is argued in Bianchi and Frascarelli (2010), different types of Topics have different requirements with respect to conversational dynamics; specifically, A-Topics qualify as root phenomena (i.e., they require sentences with context update potential), C-Topics must be realized in (no less than) a proposition, while only G-Topics can be found in any clausal type (and can be recursive).[4] Finally, the Ground Phrase projection (GP) is drawn from Poletto and Pollock (2004) and assumed as the target of (remnant) IP movement in the case of right-hand Topics.

  Assuming this structural array for copular sentences, Frascarelli and Ramaglia (2013) (henceforth, F&R 2013) argue for a SC analysis of clefts and pseudoclefts, in which the two copular constituents are connected to specific left-peripheral positions depending on their discourse properties. In particular, it is proposed that (pseudo)clefts – besides focalization of the post-copular DP – also implement a Topic-Comment structure. This is supported by the interface analysis of naturalistic data, showing that the free relative DP (*that*/*what I gave John* in the examples below) qualify as a Topic in both constructions:[5]

(6)   a.   *It is A BOOK* [*that I gave John*]_Topic   (cleft)
      b.   [*What I gave John*]_Topic *is a book*   (pseudocleft)

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4 Also notice that, according to F&H's (2007) analysis, C-Topics and Contrastive Foci never co-occur in the same clause and are both characterized by a H* prosodic contour. This suggests that ContrP is endowed with a [+contrast] feature that can be associated to both types of constituents, realized in the same syntactic position (i.e., Spec,ContrP).

5 Specifically, the right-hand Topic of clefts (cf. [6a]) is a G-Topic, while the (matrix) left-hand Topic of pseudoclefts (cf. [6b]) can instantiate any type of Topic, depending on the context.

The authors thus propose that in the basic SC structure of both constructions the (pseudo)clefted phrase constitutes the predicate (consistent with cross-linguistic analysis of Focus; cf. Frascarelli 2010), whereas the free relative DP is connected with the subject position. In particular, in pseudoclefts the free relative DP is merged in the subject position of the SC and is raised to the Specifier of a Topic projection (depending on discourse requirements). This is illustrated in (7) for English, assuming an A-Topic discourse function for the relative DP:

(7)   Pseudoclefts:
      $[_{ShiftP} [_{DP}$ *what I gave John*$]_i [_{IP}$ t'$_i$ *is* $[_{SC}$ t$_i [_{DP}$ *a book*$]]]]$

As far as clefts are concerned, F&R (2013) propose the derivation indicated in (8), which shows right-hand Topics to be derived through IP-inversion to Spec,GP (cf. also Cardinaletti 2002; Frascarelli 2004; Samek-Lodovici 2006; F&H 2007):

(8)   Clefts:
      a. $[_{FamP} [_{DP}$ *that I gave John*$]_i [_{IP} [_{DP}$ *it*$]_i$ *is* $[_{SC}$ t$_i [_{DP}$ *a book*$]]]] \rightarrow$
      b. $[_{FocP} [_{DP}$ *A BOOK*$]_k [_{FamP} [_{DP}$ *that I gave John*$]_i [_{IP} [_{DP}$ *it*$]_i$ *is* $[_{SC}$ t$_i$ t$_k]]]] \rightarrow$
      c. $[_{GP} [_{IP} [_{DP}$ *it*$]_i$ *is* $[_{SC}$ t$_i$ t$_k]] [_{FocP} [_{DP}$ *A BOOK*$]_k [_{FamP} [_{DP}$ *that I gave John*$]_i$ t$_{IP}]]]$

As is widely discussed in F&R (2013), syntactic evidence for this analysis comes from extraction, Case marking and antiagreement effects, and is supported by intonational analysis. Finally notice that, as shown by indices in (8), the initial *it*-pronoun of clefts is *not* an expletive but is coreferent with the right-dislocated free relative DP.

2 Existential sentences

A major working hypothesis that the present study aims to explore is the possibility to extend F&R's (2013) analysis of (pseudo)clefts illustrated in § 1.2.2 to other types of marked copular constructions, that is to say, existential (9) and locative sentences (10):[6]

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6 This work is only concerned with existential constructions of the copular type (cf. [9] in the text), whereas other types of *there*-sentences showing an existential meaning (e.g., *There worked many men in the harbor, There arrived many men*) are beyond the limits of the present paper and may constitute the topic of future research. In particular, since the alternative types of *there*-sentences seem to share crucial properties with the copular ones (including the

(9) *There is a man in the garden*

(10) *A man is in the garden*

Our hypothesis is that existentials like (9) can be treated on a par with clefts, whereas locative sentences like (10) pattern with pseudoclefts. Before illustrating our proposal, a brief overview on previous analyses of existential and locative sentences is proposed in § 2.1.[7]

2.1 Former analyses: An overview

The early studies on existential constructions in the generative tradition date back to the '70s. In this period, some scholars (Milsark 1974; Stowell 1978) propose a structural analysis in which the post-copular DP (i.e., *a man* in [9]) is the subject and the locative PP (*in the garden*) is the predicate in a SC configuration (11a). Following this type of approach, it has been proposed that *there* is as an expletive pronoun associated with the post-copular DP (11b), which is subject to covert (LF) movement to substitute (or else adjoin) to it (11c) (Chomsky 1986, 1991):

(11) a. $[_{SC} [_{DP} $ *a man*$] [_{PP} $ *in the garden*$]] \rightarrow$ insertion of the expletive *there*
   b. *there*$_i$ . . . *is*. . . $[_{SC} [_{DP} $ *a man*$]_i [_{PP} $ *in the garden*$]] \rightarrow$
                                   LF-raising of the post-copular DP
   c. $[_{DP} $ *a man*$]_i$ . . . *is* . . . $[_{SC} $ t$_i [_{PP} $ *in the garden*$]]$

A different approach is proposed in Moro (1997), where existential sentences are derived from a basic SC structure which differs from (11) above in that the post-copular DP is the subject, *there* is the predicate (which is raised to Spec, IP), and the locative PP (when present) is a right-adjunct:

Definiteness Effect; cf. § 3), the possibility should be explored to extend the present analysis to non-copular existential constructions. In this case, a feasible hypothesis might be to analyze the relevant verb (*work, arrive* in the examples cited above) as a sort of light verb, so as to capture its structural parallel with the copula. We thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to these structures.

7 As is clear, this overview cannot do justice to the vast debate on existential and locative constructions. For the purposes of the present paper, we will just mention some of the most influential studies, so as to show the different approaches assumed for the relevant structures.

(12) a. *be* [$_{SC}$ [$_{DP}$ *a man*] [$_{DP}$ *there*]] ... [$_{PP}$ *in the garden*]
    b. [$_{DP}$ *there*]$_i$ *is* [$_{SC}$ [$_{DP}$ *a man*] t$_i$] ... [$_{PP}$ *in the garden*]

According to this analysis, existential constructions and the corresponding locative sentences (cf. [9–10] above) share the same "deep" structure (i.e., [12a]) and are differentiated by derivation; the copular constituent attracted to Spec, IP is *there* in existentials (cf. [12b]), while it is the DP merged as the subject of the SC (*a man*) in locative structures:

(13) a. *be* [$_{SC}$ [$_{DP}$ *a man*] [$_{DP}$ *there*]]
    b. [$_{DP}$ *a man*]$_i$ *is* [$_{SC}$ t$_i$ [$_{DP}$ *there*]]

However, the interpretive asymmetries existing between existential and locative constructions led other scholars to propose alternative analyses. For instance, Zamparelli (2000) argues that the two structures under examination have opposite configurations. Specifically, a locative sentence like (10) is about [*a man*] (which is therefore analyzed as the subject) and asserts that it occupies a location referred to as *there* (the predicate); Moro's derivation in (13) can be thus maintained for locative constructions. On the other hand, the subject of an existential sentence is *there*, and the post-copular DP (*a man*) is the predicate:[8]

(14) a. *be* [$_{SC}$ [$_{DP}$ *there*] [$_{DP}$ *a man*]]
    b. [$_{DP}$ *there*]$_i$ *is* [$_{SC}$ t$_i$ [$_{DP}$ *a man*]]

In this approach, a sentence like (14) is *about* a location in space and asserts "the property that that space "is" or [...] "contains" a man". Accordingly, the relevant sentence is true when "a man is in existence, or "instantiated", in the sense of McNally [(1997)]" (from Zamparelli 2000: § 5.2.4). As for the locative PP, Zamparelli (2000) follows Moro's (1997) suggestion (cf. [12]) and considers this element as right-adjoined.

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8 For the sake of simplicity, the two copular constituents in (14) are labelled as DPs, thus differing from Zamparelli's (2000) account in which nominal phrases are associated to different types of functional layers in the extended projection of the NP. As we will propose in § 2.2.1, the present analysis also takes predicative noun phrases to have a reduced functional structure (as opposed to nominal arguments); hence the "DP" label used so far to indicate both copular constituents must be considered as a temporary solution.

2.2 Existentials as marked copular constructions

The present study draws from Zamparelli's (2000) proposal and, as mentioned above, it is aimed at providing evidence that existential structures can be analyzed as clefts (cf. [15]), whereas locative sentences pattern with pseudoclefts (cf. [16]).

(15) a. *be* [$_{SC}$ [$_{DP}$ *it*]$_i$ [$_{DP}$ *a book*]] . . . [$_{DP}$ *that I gave John*]$_i$ (cleft)
    b. *be* [$_{SC}$ [$_{DP}$ *there*]$_i$ [$_{DP}$ *a man*]] . . . [$_{PP}$ *in the garden*]$_i$ (existential sentence)

(16) a. *be* [$_{SC}$ [$_{DP}$ *what I gave John*] [$_{DP}$ *a book*]] (pseudocleft)
    b. *be* [$_{SC}$ [$_{DP}$ *a man*] [$_{PP}$ *in the garden*]] (locative sentence)

While the analysis of locative sentences illustrated in (16b) can find strong support in the literature, the structural hypothesis on existential constructions (15b) might sound more controversial. The remainder of this section is dedicated to an illustration of semantic (§ 2.2.1), syntactic (§ 2.2.2) and prosodic arguments (§ 2.2.3) supporting this proposal.

2.2.1 Semantic analysis

In his multi-layered analysis of DPs, Zamparelli (2000) observes that the functional structure constituting the extended projection of a noun phrase is dependent on its semantic and syntactic role. More generally, it is commonly acknowledged that predicative (as opposed to argumental) noun phrases have a "reduced" functional structure and should not be analyzed as full DPs (cf., among others, Szabolcsi 1987, 1989, 1994; Stowell 1989; Longobardi 1994, 2001, 2005; Bernstein 2001; Ramaglia 2011). In particular, it has been argued that predicative noun phrases lack the functional projections dedicated to features such as referentiality, definiteness and specificity, which typically characterize arguments (rather than predicates). Furthermore, it has been proposed that the presence of the D° head is required for theta-role assignment; accordingly, D° contributes to making nominal elements able to serve as arguments; this means that noun phrases can appear as arguments if and only if they are dominated by the DP-layer. In this kind of syntax-semantics approach, argumental noun phrases are DPs, whereas nominal predicates are NPs.

However, since Abney's (1987) proposal that NPs are dominated by the DP functional layer, all noun phrases are generally assumed to have some kind of (more or less complex) extended projection (cf., among others, Szabolcsi 1987,

1989, 1994; Giorgi and Longobardi 1991; Grimshaw 1990; Ritter 1991; Valois 1991; Cinque 1994, ed. 2002, 2010; Zamparelli 2000; Bernstein 2001; Longobardi 2001; Scott 2002; Laenzlinger 2005; Giusti 2006; Alexiadou, Haegeman, and Stavrou 2007; Svenonius 2008; Ramaglia 2011, 2013); as a consequence, the hypothesis that predicative noun phrases lack the DP layer does not necessarily mean that they are to be analyzed as bare NPs. Following the analysis put forth in Ramaglia (2011: 178), we take nominal arguments to be full DPs (endowed with an array of functional projections constituting the left periphery of the DP), while predicative noun phrases are not limited to bare NPs and include functional projections for inflectional features, which will be indicated as NumP (on this phrasal category, see also Ritter 1991).

Assuming that existential sentences are copular constructions of the predicative type (cf. Zamparelli's 2000 proposal in § 2.1), it follows that the post-copular DP, which is merged as the predicate of the SC, should be analyzed as a NumP (rather than a full DP):

(17) *be* [$_{SC}$ [$_{DP}$ *there*]$_i$ [$_{NumP}$ *a man*]] ... [$_{PP}$ *in the garden*]$_i$

It is important to notice that this modification is not a mere descriptive issue concerning the label to be assigned to the nominal predicate; on the contrary, the assumption of a reduced functional structure for the predicate in (17) has crucial consequences on the types of constituents that can be merged in this position. As a matter of fact, referential/definite/specific elements (which are full DPs) are excluded from the post-copular position of existential sentences, and this can account for an important property of existential constructions in a number of languages, namely the DE (to be discussed in § 3.1).

2.2.2 Syntactic evidence

In the present section, syntactic diagnostics will be used to support the structural analysis put forth in this study for existential and locative sentences.

Based on Zamparelli's (2000) considerations, we have proposed that in existential constructions *there* is merged as the subject and the post-copular noun phrase as the predicate of a SC (cf. [17]). Syntactic evidence for this approach comes from extraction, as illustrated below by means of Italian examples:

(18) *ci   sono   [tre   pagine [di esercizi]] [nel   libro [di inglese]]*
      there be.3PL three pages   of exercises in.the book of English
      'There are three pages of exercises in the English book.'

a. [*Di cosa*]ᵢ *pensi* *che ci* *siano* [*tre pagine* tᵢ]
of what think.2SG that there be.SUBJ.3PL three pages
[*nel libro* [*di inglese*]]*?*
in.the book of English
'[Of what]ᵢ do you think there are [three pages *t*ᵢ] in the English book?'

b. *[*Di quale lingua*]ᵢ *pensi* *che ci* *siano* [*tre pagine*
of which language think.2SG that there be.SUBJ.3PL three pages
[*di esercizi*]] [*nel libro* tᵢ]*?*
of exercises in.the book

As is commonly acknowledged in the literature, extraction is not allowed from subject DPs, while no restriction is imposed on the movement of predicate-internal material (cf. Moro 1997; Heycock and Kroch 1999; Den Dikken 2006b). The contrast in (18) thus provides syntactic evidence for the predicative nature of the post-copular element *tre pagine di esercizi* ('three pages of exercises'): as is illustrated in (18a), extraction from this constituent is fully accepted. On the other hand, the ungrammaticality of (18b) excludes the analysis illustrated in (11) above, which takes the locative PP *nel libro di inglese* ('in the English book') to be a predicate.⁹

If we now consider extraction effects in locative constructions, the present proposal predicts that extraction should be excluded from the subject DP *tre pagine di esercizi* ('three pages of exercises'), and allowed from the locative PP (as it is the predicate). The following data from Italian show that this prediction is (partially) borne out:

(19) [*tre pagine* [*di esercizi*]] *sono* [*nel libro* [*di inglese*]]
three pages of exercises be.3PL in.the book of English
'Three pages of exercises are in the English book.'

a. *[*Di cosa*]ᵢ *pensi* *che* [*tre pagine* tᵢ] *siano* [*nel libro*
of what think.2SG that three pages be.SUBJ.3PL in.the book
[*di inglese*]]*?*
of English

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9 We acknowledge that the ungrammaticality of (18b) might be ascribed to a (general) restriction operating on the extraction out of a complex PP. However, the grammaticality of (18a) unambiguously proves the predicative function of the post-copular DP *tre pagine di esercizi* ('three pages of exercises'). This excludes a predicate merge for the locative PP *nel libro di inglese* ('in the English book').

b. *[*Di quale lingua*]_i *pensi* *che* [*tre pagine* [*di esercizi*]]
of which language think.2SG that three pages of exercises
siano [*nel libro* t_i]?
be.SUBJ.3PL in.the book

As can be observed, both sentences in (19a–b) are ungrammatical. The ungrammaticality of (19a) is consistent with our expectations, whereas the ungrammaticality of (19b) might be considered a counterexample. On the contrary, we argue that it is due to the fact that the predicate is a complex PP, from which extraction is banned for independent reasons (i.e., it is a "syntactic island").

The data presented in this section thus provide sound evidence in favor of the present structural account for both existential and locative constructions and also show that an analysis that derives both constructions from one and the same underlying structure cannot be maintained.

2.2.3 Discourse properties and prosodic realization

The parallelism between clefts and existentials, on the one hand, and between pseudoclefts and locative sentences on the other (cf. [15–16]) is not limited to a common underlying structure, but also concerns the discourse role of constituents. As already mentioned, our analysis of existential sentences, much like F&R's (2013) approach to clefts, takes the post-copular noun phrase to be a Narrow Focus, whereas the locative PP is a right-hand G-Topic. Extending the structure of clefts illustrated in (8) above to existential sentences, the latter thus have a derivation in which, after raising of the post-copular DP to Spec,FocP (20b), IP-inversion to Spec,GP takes place (20c):

(20) Existential sentences:
   a. [_{FamP} [_{PP} *in the garden*]_i [_{IP} [_{DP} *there*]_i *is* [_{SC} t_i [_{NumP} *a man*]]]] →
   b. [_{FocP} [_{NumP} *A MAN*]_k [_{FamP} [_{PP} *in the garden*]_i [_{IP} [_{DP} *there*]_i *is* [_{SC} t_i t_k]]]] →
   c. [_{GP} [_{IP} [_{DP} *there*]_i *is* [_{SC} t_i t_k]] [_{FocP} [_{NumP} *A MAN*]_k [_{FamP} [_{PP} *in the garden*]_i t_{IP}]]]

It is also important to notice that the locative PP is coindexed with *there* in (20): following F&R's (2013) analysis of the initial *it*-pronoun of clefts (cf. [8] and the relevant discussion), we propose that in existential sentences *there* is not an

expletive but is coreferent with the dislocated PP (with which it shares a locative interpretation).[10]

In the remainder of this section, prosodic evidence will be provided to support both the predicative (and focal) nature of the post-copular noun phrase and the right-dislocation of the locative PP in the structure under examination. Consider the following data, drawn from an Italian corpus of naturalistic data (cf. Pietrandrea 2004):

(21) *ci   sono   diversi   dialetti – credo –   nelle   cassette*
      there be.3PL different dialects believe.1SG in.the tapes
      'There are different dialects – I think – in the tapes.'

As is shown in Figure 1, the post-copular phrase *diversi dialetti* ('different dialects') presents the typical downgrading contour of Broad Focus sentences (cf. Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg 1990; Selkirk 1995; Frascarelli 2004), while the locative PP is totally destressed in the right periphery and separated from the post-copular noun phrase by a break. Also notice the presence of the parenthetical *credo* ('I think'), which further supports the dislocated nature of the subsequent material.

In the following sentence, on the other hand, the post-copular noun phrase shows the prosodic contour of a Contrastive Focus (i.e., a H* tone; cf. Figure 2), which is consistent with its discourse role (cf. the contrastive operator *addirittura* 'even'):

(22) *(addirittura) c'   erano   delle scenografie*
      even   there be.PST.3PL some   scenes
      'There were (even) some scenes.'

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10 It is worth noting that *there* can only be coindexed with a locative element, which qualifies as a dislocated constituent in the present account. Other types of phrases predicating something about the post-copular element should be thus attributed a different analysis. This is for instance the case of the bracketed item in the following examples:
(i)   *After the seafood dinner there were several guests [sick] and had to be taken to the hospital*
(ii) *There are two rooms [available]*
In these cases *sick* and *available* are not to be taken as dislocated phrases coindexed with *there*; rather, they constitute a secondary predication about *several guests* and *two rooms*, respectively, and as such, they should be analyzed as predicates internal to the post-copular noun phrases. This means that the relevant sentences lack a locative PP, which is confirmed by the possibility for the latter to be overtly realized: cf. *There were several guests [sick] [at the party], There are two rooms [available] [in this hotel].*
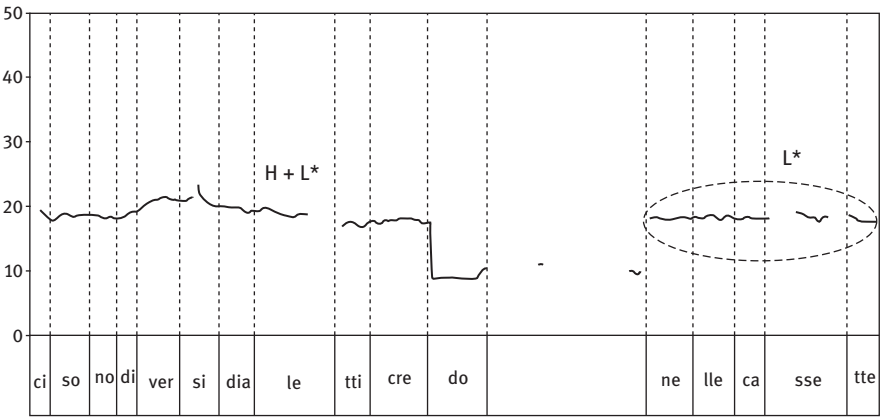
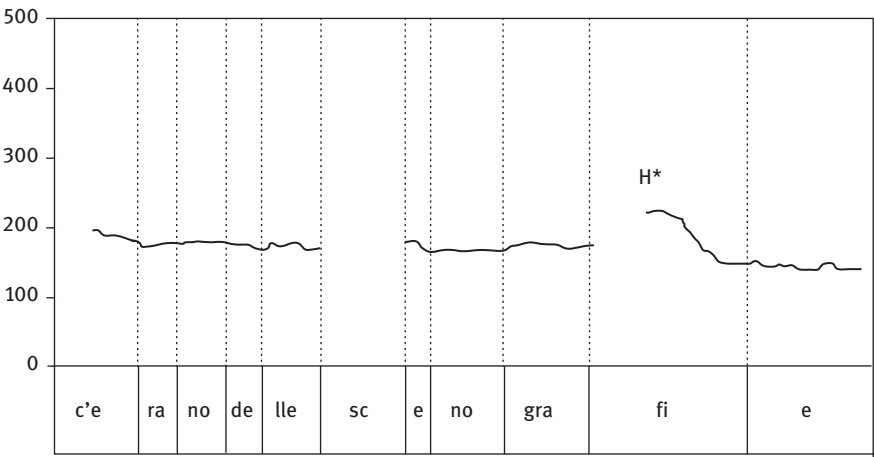**Figure 1:** Non-contrastive existential sentence.

Figure 2: Contrastive existential sentence.

3 The Definiteness Effect (DE)

The DE is a phenomenon associated with a number of constructions in many languages, showing that the realization of definite DPs is excluded in certain

syntactic positions.[11] In the case of existential sentences, "the definiteness restriction amounts to a restriction on the acceptability of definite, demonstrative, and necessarily quantificational noun phrases, including proper names and personal pronouns, in the [post-copular position]" (McNally 2011: 1832–1833), as is illustrated by the cited author in the following examples:

(23) a. ??*There is each/every first-year student present*
 b. ??*There are most first-year students in that class*
 c. ??*There is the neighbor's dog barking*
 d. ??*There is that carpet under the table*
 e. ??*There are them / Anna and Bob waiting outside*

Different analyses have been put forth in the literature to account for this phenomenon and, in the most influential works, DE has been attributed to either semantic and/or pragmatic properties of existential constructions (cf., among many others, Milsark 1974; Heim 1987; Abbott 1992; Ward and Birner 1995; Zucchi 1995; McNally 1997; Francez 2007; see McNally 2011: § 3 for an overview). These accounts, however, are rather controversial, as is the generalization that definite DPs are always excluded from the post-copular position of existentials. Indeed, despite the strong marginality of sentences like (23), definite DPs can be realized in post-copular position in specific cases, as in the so-called "list interpretation":[12]

(24) A. *What should we read?*
 B. *Well, there's the book on the table*

(25) A. *Who can we invite?*
 B. *Well, there's John*

In the next section evidence will be provided that the present analysis of existential constructions can easily account for DE, also suggesting an explanation for apparent counterexamples like the sentences in (24B) and (25B).

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11 According to some scholars, the relevant restriction is not (only) connected to definiteness but (also) to specificity. Accordingly, the relevant effect is sometimes re-analyzed in terms of "specificity effect" (cf. Enç 1991). In this study, however, we use the DE term for simplicity, following the traditional terminology.
12 The examples in (24–25) are taken from Kayne (2016).

3.1 Explaining the Definiteness Effect

The impossibility for definite DPs to appear in post-copular position is predicted by the present analysis: since existential sentences are copular constructions of the predicative type (§ 2.2.1), the relevant noun phrase (merged as the predicate of a SC, cf. §§ 2.2.2–2.2.3) is not dominated by a DP-layer (it rather qualifies as a NumP, cf. [17]). Hence, definite noun phrases cannot appear in the post-copular position of existential constructions. The picture in (23) is thus expected.

Nevertheless, what appears to be problematic is (i) the possibility for definite DPs to be realized in the post-copular position of existentials in some contexts (e.g., [24–25]), and (ii) the existence of languages in which DE seems to be generally "relaxed" (as in Italian). As for the former, an explanation can be drawn from Kayne's (2016) analysis. Dealing with sentences like (24–25), the author proposes that the apparently definite noun phrases realized in post-copular position "are actually embedded within hidden indefinites" (Kayne 2016: § 9). Accordingly, a sentence like (25B) is to be understood as follows (caps are used to indicate silent – namely unpronounced – elements):

(26) *There's SOMEBODY WE CAN INVITE, (NAMELY) John*

Beside the cases of "list interpretation" like (24–25), Kayne's approach provides an explanation for other apparent counterexamples to DE in a language like English, assuming that the post-copular noun phrase should be analyzed as embedded in a more complex constituent including null elements. Some of the relevant examples (a), together with Kayne's analysis (b), are illustrated below; for further details, the reader is referred to Kayne (2016).

(27) a. *There is the most beautiful house for sale in the next block*
     b. *. . . [the most beautiful KIND] house . . .*[13]

(28) a. *Where did there used to be the most syntacticians?*
     b. *. . . [the most NUMBER] syntacticians*

(29) a. *There is every reason to be suspicious*
     b. *. . . [every KIND] reason . . .*

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13 Cf. *There is a house of the most beautiful kind for sale in the next block.*

The general absence of DE in languages like Italian will be approached from a different perspective in the following sections.

3.2 Exploring the absence of the Definiteness Effect in some languages

As mentioned in § 3.1, while we have strong evidence for DE in languages like English, definite noun phrases seem to be perfectly allowed in the post-copular position of *there*-sentences in other languages. Consider the following examples from Italian:

(30) a. *C'   è   un uomo in giardino*
          there be.3SG a   man in garden
          'There is a man in the garden.'
     b. *C'   è   Gianni in giardino*
          there be.3SG Gianni in garden
          '*There is Gianni in the garden.'

As these examples show, existential constructions in Italian differ from the corresponding structures in English in that a definite description like *Gianni* is acceptable in post-copular position.

Assuming a cross-linguistic validity for the analysis proposed in this paper, the acceptability of sentences like (30b), against its ungrammaticality in languages like English, should receive a comprehensive explanation. As a matter of fact, if DE is predicted by the present analysis of existentials (cf. § 3.1), the grammaticality of (30b) seems to represent a challenge to it.

As a preliminary consideration, it should be noticed that the interpretation of *there*-sentences with definite and indefinite post-copular noun phrases (in languages that allow both constructions) is not exactly the same. As is discussed in Moro (1997), while a sentence like (30a) has an existential meaning, as it asserts the existence of an individual (*un uomo*, 'a man') in a certain location (*in giardino*, 'in the garden'), (30b) has a *locative* interpretation: rather than asserting the *existence* of an individual named *Gianni*, it asserts that it lies in a specific location. From a semantic perspective, the relevant sentence is therefore analogous to a locative sentence like *Gianni è in giardino* 'Gianni is in the garden'.

Based on similar considerations, a number of authors have proposed that the apparent counterexamples to DE represented by sentences like (30b) do not constitute existential sentences proper but should receive a different structural

account (cf., for instance, Moro 1997; La Fauci and Loporcaro 1997; Cruschina 2012, 2015). In this paper, we follow this line of analysis and propose that DE is a *universal*, semantically-based, restriction on existential sentences and that apparent counterexamples like (30b) represent a different type of *there*-sentence, the analysis of which will be developed in the next section.

3.3 Appearances can be deceptive: Presentational constructions "in disguise"

Recent interface investigations focused on the use and interpretation of null subjects brought crucial evidence to light that what appears to be an existential clause (formally realized as a *there*-sentence) is in fact a *presentational construction*, introducing "what the sentence is about" (i.e., a Topic). To provide a comprehensive picture of such findings, some background reference is in order.[14]

3.3.1 A-Topics and Topic chains

In her interface investigations on the interpretation of null subjects, Frascarelli (2007, 2018) provides strong evidence that in (consistent and partial) null subject languages the interpretation of a referential *pro* depends on a matching relation (Agree) with a specific type of Topic. In a cartographic approach to discourse functions, this is identified with the A-Topic (cf. § 1.2.2) that is located in the high C-domain (cf. the hierarchy in [5]), is characterized by a L*+H tone (i.e., an intonational rise that is aligned with the tonic vowel in its full extension) and is endowed with a [+aboutness] edge feature (proposed as an "extended EPP" feature).

A Topic Criterion is thus proposed that correlates core grammar with discourse requirements and accounts for the syntactic identification of a referential *pro*. According to this Criterion, every predicational sentence contains

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14 In this line of analysis, it is important to underline that a sentence like *Gianni è mio padre* ('Gianni is my father') does not pattern like (and cannot be analyzed on a par with) a sentence like (30b). Indeed, *Gianni è mio padre* is an *identificational* copular sentence and, as such, it does not implement a predicational, but an *identity statement* (Higgins, 1979: 263; cf. also Den Dikken 2006b). Consequently, a Topic-Comment discourse structure is excluded and a locative adverb like *ci* ('there') would have no role in that type of copular construction (**C'è Gianni mio padre*).

a position endowed with the [+aboutness] feature in the C-domain and, when it is kept continuous on the same referent across sentences, it can be silent and "maintained" by means of null (or low-toned) pronouns. From a discourse perspective, it is therefore assumed that predication can imply a *multiclausal domain*, in which *chains of clauses* are combined and refer to the same A-Topic. Crucially, A-Topics can only start a Topic chain (and interrupt the current chain to shift to a new one).

3.3.2 Introducing a Topic in post-copular position: Evidence from naturalistic data

The existence of Topic chains and their key role in the discourse has also been attested in recent acquisitional studies (Frascarelli 2015). Specifically, the interface analysis of short stories narrated by children shows that they correctly produce Topic chains at the age of four, linking null subjects to the DP produced with a L*+H tone.[15] Consider the Topic chain in the passage below:[16]

(31) <u>*Lea e   Bea c'hanno molti amici*</u>,[17]
      Lea and Bea have.3PL   many friends
      pro *fanno colazione con i biscotti e il latte, dopo* pro *vanno a scuola e leggono un libro, quando suona la campana* pro *escono dalla scuola – Lea si compra un gelato e* [. . .] pro *vanno a casa felici e contenti*
      'Lea and Bea have many friends, (they) have breakfast with biscuits and milk, then (they) go to school and read a book, when the school bell rings (they) go out the school – Lea buys an ice-cream and . . . (they) go home happily ever after.'

15 The stimulus was provided by pictures showing the story of two rabbits ("Lea and Bea") on a powerpoint presentation originally created by Barbara Cerri (RCCS *Stella Maris Foundation*, Pisa, Italy) for different scientific purposes. This investigation is part of the Prin-2012 Project "Theory, Experimentation, Applications: Long distance dependencies in forms of linguistics diversity", funded by MIUR.
16 Notice that the Topic chain is not interrupted by *Lea* (in *Lea si compra un gelato* 'Lea buys an ice-cream'), because it is a C-Topic (the picture provided to children shows Lea with an ice-cream and Bea with a lolly-pop; since the child could not remember Bea's name, after a pause she decided to conclude the narration).
17 For space limitation, glosses are only provided for the (underlined) sentences to be illustrated in the subsequent Figures.
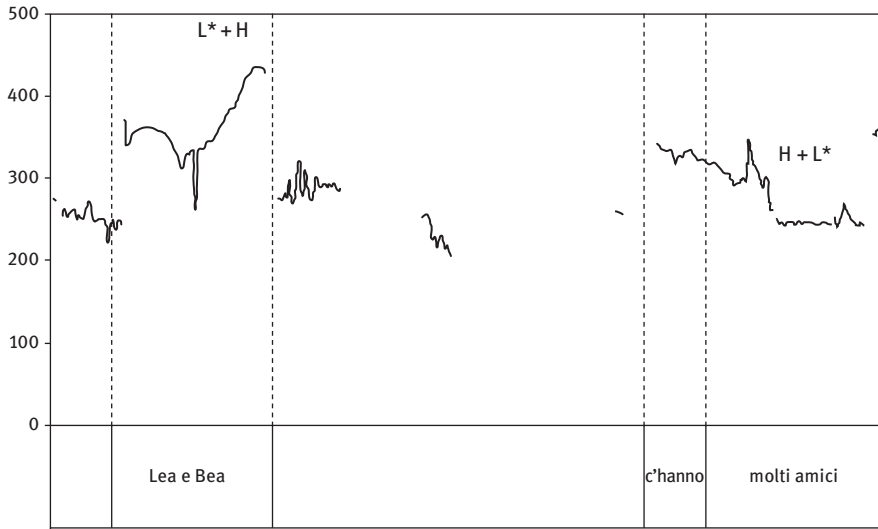
Figure 3: A-Topic starting a Topic chain.

As is shown, the DP *Lea e Bea* forms an independent prosodic domain, followed by a very long pause, as is expected for Topic constituents. Since Topics are located in the C-domain, a null subject must be assumed in the relevant sentence:

(31') [*Lea e Bea*]$_{\text{A-Top}}$ pro *c'hanno molti amici*

Given this competence in producing Topic chains, consistently attested across children, it is interesting to notice that when the fairy-tale incipit *c'era una volta* 'once upon a time' (lit. 'there was a time') is used to introduce the two protagonists, in most cases an A-Topic is produced in post-copular position. This means that the relevant DP is characterized by a L*+H tone, while the rest of the sentence shows the typical downgrading contour (H+L*) of Broad Focus sentences. A Topic-Comment structure is thus realized by means of a *there*-construction and a Topic chain is created. Consider (32) and the relevant Figure 4:[18]

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18 The presence of a *pro* in the *that*-clause following [*Lea e Bea*] in (32) will be clarified later in the paper (§ 3.3.3).

(32) *C' era una volta Lea e Bea che* pro *andavano*
there be.PST.3SG a time Lea and Bea that go.PST.3PL
a casa,
to home
poi pro *prendevano i fiori e v enivano mamma e papà,* pro *c'avevano l'amici*
'Once upon a time, Lea and Bea were going home, then (they) took flowers
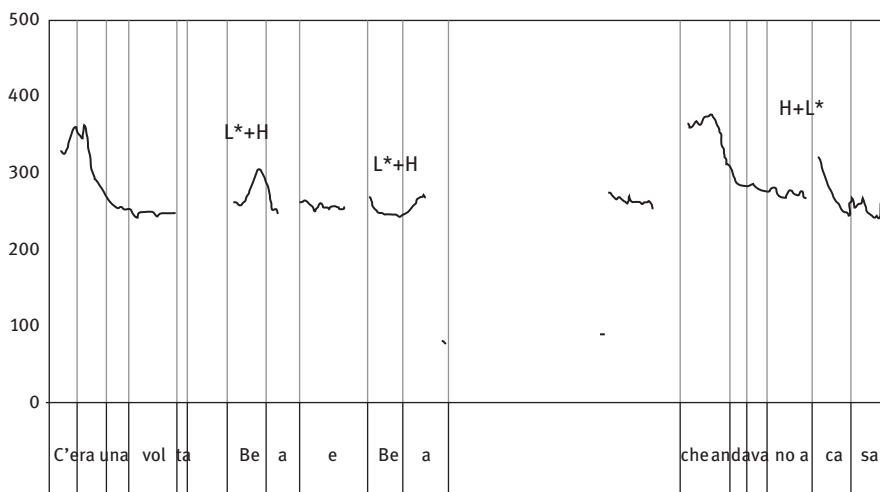and mummy and daddy arrived, (they) had friends.'[19]

Figure 4: "*C'era una volta*" construction with a Topic-Comment structure.

On the other hand, when the post-copular DP is not realized with a L*+H con-
tour, the Topic chain is not created and the use of null subjects is only started
after the repetition of the DP *Lea e Bea* (or the realization of its pronominal
counterpart) as an A-Topic.[20] Consider for instance the following passage, in

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19 Incidentally notice that the postverbal subject *mamma e papà* 'mummy and daddy' does
not interrupt the Topic chain, that is to say, it is not interpreted as the subject of the following
sentence, though plural agreement makes this option theoretically available. This is predicted
by the Topic Criterion: only A-Topics can interrupt a Topic chain and start a new one.
20 An anonymous reviewer observes that the existence of Topic chains and the discourse de-
vice of Topic maintenance are not necessarily connected with (hence, they are independent of)
the presence of null subjects and s/he objects that analogous chains can be realized in a non-
pro-drop language like English, by means of overt pronouns (e.g., *There were once (upon
a time) Lea and Bea. They went home. They took flowers* ...). This observation is correct and
beyond question: both pro-drop and non-pro-drop languages realize Topic chains in the

which a child uses a *there*-construction and provides a Focus interpretation for the post-copular DP *Lea e Bea* (marking the second conjunct with a H* tone, cf. Figure 5). As is shown in (33), the Topic chain only starts after the realization of the pronoun *loro* 'them', which qualifies as an A-Topic (cf. Figure 6). Also notice that this chain is not interrupted by the postverbal subject *la campanella* 'school bell', as expected (cf. fn. 19).[21]

(33) *C'*   *era*   *una* *volta* *Lea* *e*   *Bea* *con* *la*   *mamma*
      there be.PST.3SG a   time   Lea and   Bea with the   mummy
      e   *con* *papà* *e*   *loro* *hanno*   *tanti* *amici*
      and   with daddy and   they have.3PL many   friends
      pro *vanno a scuola,* pro *leggono un libretto, quando suona la campanella*
      pro *vanno via da scuola*
      'Once upon a time, Lea and Bea were with mummy and daddy, and they have many friends, (they) go to school, (they) read a little book, when the school bell rings, (they) go out from school.'

Based on these findings, we investigated the *ArCoDip* corpus (Pietrandrea 2004) in this respect, and found supporting evidence in adults' production as well. We can therefore conclude that the discourse strategy presented so far is not a "story-telling formula" used by children: *there*-constructions can function as presentational sentences, used to introduce either A-Topics (cf. [34]) or C-Topics (as is shown in [35] below and the relevant Figures):

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discourse. The crucial point of the present argumentation is that the creation and licensing of such chains has been proved (Frascarelli 2007, 2017, 2018) to be dependent on their being *headed by an A-Topic* (i.e., by a DP that is *formally* characterized as such; cf. § 3.3.1 above). Assuming this theory, the observation that the DP following *c'era una volta* 'once upon a time' can function as the antecedent of null subjects pushed the hypothesis that this DP was not the predicate of a copular construction, but an A-Topic. This hypothesis has been confirmed by interface analysis, opening the way for the present innovative proposal. The expectation is therefore that in English as well the DP following *once (upon a time)* is realized with a raising tone and that coindexed overt pronouns are *low-toned*, consistent with Frascarelli's (2007) claim that low-toned pronouns share important discourse functions with null subjects (i.e., they can be part of a Topic chain as D-linked constituents). This expectation is the subject of current research.

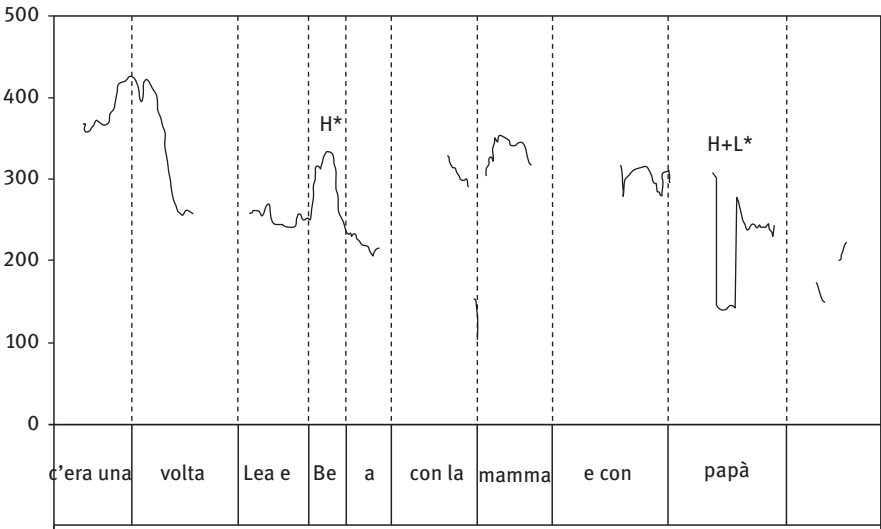21 We will resume the analysis of non-topical [+def] post-copular DPs in § 3.3.4.

Figure 5: "*C'era una volta*" construction with a focused post-copular phrase.
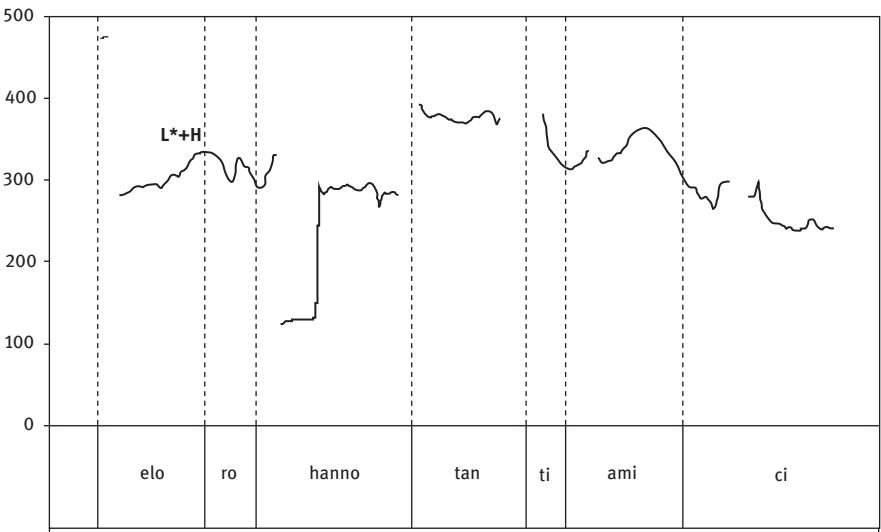

Figure 6: A-Topic starting a Topic chain.

(34) *i   video   li   trovo   piuttosto noiosi <u>tanto più</u>   <u>che</u>*
     the videos DO3PL.CL find.1SG rather   boring all the more that
     <u>*ci*</u>   <u>*sono*</u> <u>*quelle*</u> <u>*schede*</u> <u>*da*</u> <u>*completare*</u>   <u>*che*</u> <u>*sono*</u>   <u>*lunghissime*</u>
     there be.3PL those forms to complete.INF that be.3PL long.SUP
     pro *non finiscono mai*
        NEG finish.3PL never
     'I find videos rather boring, all the more so because those forms to be filled are super-long, (they) are never-ending.'
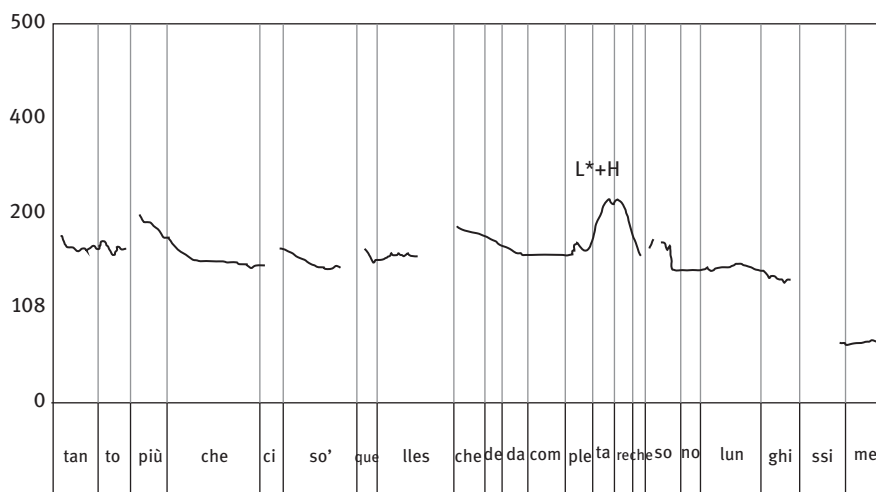

Figure 7: *There*-construction introducing an A-Topic.

(35) *in quello dell'   investigatore <u>c'</u>   <u>è</u>   <u>la</u>   <u>signora</u> <u>elegante</u>*
     in that   of.the detective   there be.3SG the woman   elegant
     <u>*che*</u> pro *<u>parla</u>*   *<u>in</u> <u>un</u> <u>determinato</u> <u>modo</u>,*
     that   speak.3SG in a   certain   way
     <u>*c'*</u>   <u>*è*</u>   <u>*la*</u>   <u>*cameriera*</u> <u>*che*</u> pro *<u>parla</u>*   *<u>proprio</u>*
     there be.3SG the waitress   that   speak.3SG just
     <u>in</u> <u>tutt'</u>   <u>altro</u>   <u>modo</u>
     in quite different way
     'In the detective's one [video] the elegant woman speaks in a certain way, while the waitress speaks in quite a different way.'

As is shown, the post-copular DP in (34) is marked with a L*+H tone, it implements a Topic shift with respect to the current Topic *i video* ('the videos',
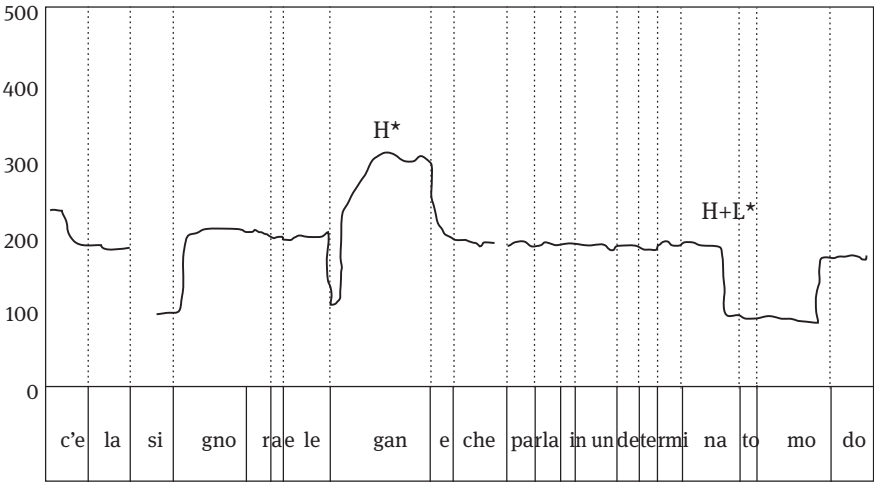
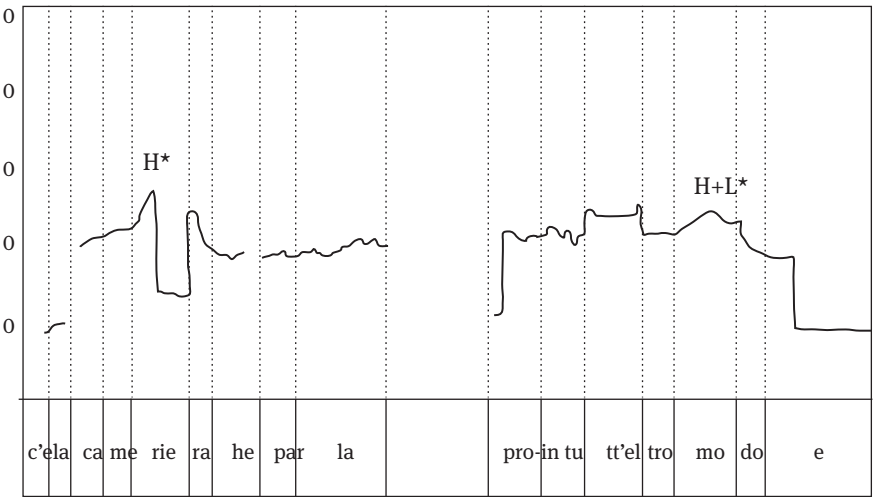**Figure 8a:** *There*-construction introducing a C-Topic.

Figure 8b: *There*-construction introducing a C-Topic.

left-dislocated at the beginning of the extract) and is the antecedent of a following *pro* (the null subject of *non finiscono mai* '(they) are never-ending'). On the other hand, the two post-copular DPs in (35) are opposed with respect to different Comments. Hence, they qualify as C-Topics (cf. Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010) and, as such, they are marked with a H* tone (F&H 2007).

Notice that if a locative PP is realized in a *there*-construction, it can be either an element of the background (i.e., a G-Topic) or a *frame-setter*, that is to say, an element which has the function to *limit the truth-conditional validity* of the sentence it is associated with within some particular domain (Krifka 2007). Frame-setters in the left periphery are typically marked with a H* tone (Carella 2015; Frascarelli 2017), as is the case of the PP *in quello dell'investigatore* 'in the detective's one [video]' in (35) above (cf. Figure 9 below):
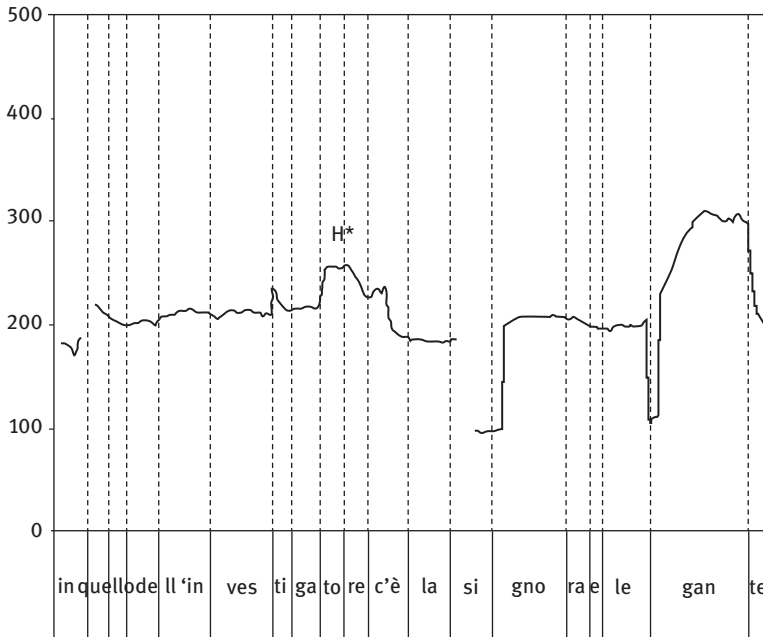
Figure 9: Frame-setter introducing a *there*-sentence.

To conclude, interface analysis shows the existence of different types of *ci*-sentences in Italian:

i) *existential sentences proper*: structures of the type illustrated in § 2 above, in which the post-copular noun phrase is the predicate (Focus) and the locative PP (when present) is a right-hand G-Topic;

ii) *presentational* ci-*sentences*: structures used to propose a Topic shift or a contrast between two (or more) propositions; in these constructions, the

post-copular DP is a left-hand Topic and the following material is the Comment (cf.§ 3.3.3);[22]

iii) "*c'era una volta*" ci-*sentences*: structures in which the story-telling formula *c'era una volta* ('once upon a time') is used. It will be argued (cf. § 3.3.4) that some of these constructions are presentational *ci*-sentences (cf. [ii] above), as they introduce a Topic-Comment (information) structure, while others must be provided a different analysis since the relevant formula is followed by a non-topical element (cf., for instance, [33] and the Figure 5).

In the following section syntactic evidence is discussed, providing further support to this proposal.

3.3.3 Presentational *ci*-sentences: Syntactic properties and derivation

When extraction operations are considered, presentational *ci*-sentences immediately show different properties with respect to existential sentences (cf. § 2.2.2). Specifically, the post-copular DP in a *ci*-sentence like (36) disallows extraction, exactly like the subject DP of a predicative sentence (37) and differently from the post-copular noun phrase in an existential clause like (18) above:

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22 It is important to notice that the existence of presentational *there*-sentences has been already attested in previous works, but from different perspectives and providing different explanations to the relevant construction. Specifically, Lambrecht (1994) clarifies that presentational sentences are different from other types of "sentence-focus" structures in that they do not introduce a new event, but a new referent in the discourse [. . .] often, but not always with the purpose of making it available for predication in subsequent discourse (Lambrecht 1994: 142–144). The author, however, does not provide an interface analysis for the relevant Topics and considers the "subsequent" proposition as a pseudo-relative clause (cf. also Lambrecht 2002) – a solution that suffers from different drawbacks, as is argued in § 3.3.3 below (cf. fn. 24). Lambrecht's analysis is then resumed in Cruschina's (2012, 2015) works. However, the author considers the referent introduced by *c'è/c'era* 'there is/was' to be a focal element and, consequently, argues for a sentence-focus analysis of the relevant structure. Specifically it is claimed that "the introduced referent is new in relation to the discourse, while the predicative constituent is new in relation to the newly introduced referent. Presentational sentences are therefore formed by two independent information units, that are both simultaneously focal" (Cruschina 2015: 94). We believe that this proposal cannot be maintained as well, given the discourse-prosody evidence provided in this paper (clearly supporting a Topic-Comment analysis) and the creation of Topic chains.

(36) *[*di cosa*]$_i$ *c'*   *era*   (*una volta*) [*un pescatore* t$_i$]
     of   what there be.PST.3SG a   time a   fisherman
     che era   molto povero?
     that be.PST.3SG very   poor
     Intended: '(Once upon a time), [a fisherman who fished for what] was
     very poor?'

(37) *[*di cosa*]$_i$ [*un pescatore* t$_i$] *era   molto povero?*
     of   what a   fisherman   be.PST.3SG very   poor
     Intended: '[A fisherman who fished for what] was very poor?'

This parallel (as well as the contrast with existential sentences) strongly supports
the existence of presentational sentences "disguised as existentials" and requires
further insight on the structure and derivation of the relevant constructions.

As a matter of fact, assuming that the post-copular DP is a Topic implies
that what follows is a proposition – *not* a DP-modifier (i.e., a relative clause) –
despite the presence of the introducing element *che* ('that'). In this respect, im-
mediate evidence against a relative clause analysis comes from the observation
that the post-copular DP in a presentational *ci*-sentence can be coordinated
with a [+def] DP disallowing a sloppy reading (cf. [38]). On the contrary,
a sloppy interpretation is available for an existential sentence like (39), in
which the *that*-clause can be either a restrictive or an appositive relative clause:

(38) *Negli show degli anni '70 c'   era   sempre la   Carrà*
     in.the show of.the years 70 there be.PST.3SG always the Carrà
     che ballava.   E   anche Mina
     that dance.PST.3SG and also   Mina
     'In the 70's shows Mrs. Carrà was always present, dancing. And Mina
     (was always present/*was dancing) as well.'   (STRICT / *SLOPPY)

(39) *In quello show c'   era   una bimba che ballava.*
     in that   show there be.PST.3SG a   child.F that dance.PST.3SG
     E   anche una scimmietta
     and also   a   monkey.DIMIN
     'In that show there was a young girl dancing. And a little monkey (was
     there/was dancing) as well.'   (STRICT / SLOPPY)

Furthermore, it should be noticed that the *that*-clause found in presentational
ci-sentences does not qualify as a relative clause from an intonational view-
point. As is known, a relative clause shows a pitch both on the relative head

and on the rightmost element of the modifier clause (a scope-marking device, consistent with cross-linguistic analysis, cf. Frascarelli and Ramaglia 2014), while the clause under examination here shows the typical downgrading contour of a Broad Focus sentence (cf. Figures 4 and 8 above).

Based on this evidence, we argue that presentational *ci*-sentences qualify as *Topic-Comment constructions*. Accordingly, we propose that – differently from existential sentences – the [*ci* + copula] form in presentational *ci*-sentences is a complex *functional head* with a specific *discourse role*. In particular, we argue that it is an illocutionary marker and, as such, a grammaticalized form merged in a functional projection in the high C-domain (possibly, Force°) (see § 3.3.4 for further details concerning the relevant grammaticalization process).

As for the complementizer *che* ('that') preceding the Comment, we propose *a Focus marking function* for this element, specifically associated with propositional focalization. As a matter of fact, the "multi-functional" role of *che* is a well-attested phenomenon in Italian (Berruto 1998) and the present proposal is perfectly in line with the analysis provided in Manzini and Savoia (2011) for the complementizer *che* introducing matrix yes-no questions in some Romance varieties (as in Florentine and Roman; cf. [40] below):

(40) *Che esci   stasera?*
    INT go.out.2SG tonight
    'Are you going out tonight?'

Specifically, the authors surmise that the insertion of *che* in yes-no questions "corresponds to the presence of a focalization expressed on the main verb" (Manzini and Savoia 2011: 36). This is exactly in the spirit of the present proposal.

Additionally consider that presentational *ci*-sentences can lack an initial Topic and serve exclusively as propositional Focus constructions. Indeed, given a question like *che c'è?* ('what's the matter (with you)?'), answers like (41a–b) are very common in Italian, in which a focal stress is intended on the main predicate and, importantly, the presence of the introducing *che* is compelling:

(41) a. *C'   è   *(che) sono   stufo*
        there be.3SG that   be.1SG fed up
        '(The point is that) I am fed up!'
   b. *C'   è   *(che) mi   sono   innamorato di te*
        there be.3SG that   REFL be.1SG in.love   of you
        '(The point is that) I am in love with you.'

We thus propose an analysis of the relevant *che* as a Focus marker and, consequently, its insertion in the head position of the Focus phrase projection in the C-domain. A sentence like *c'era la Carrà che ballava* 'Mrs. Carrà was present, dancing' (cf. [38] above) thus corresponds to the following (information) structural analysis:[23]

(42) [ForceP [Force' *c'era* [ShiftP [DP *la Carrà*]k [FocP [Foc' *che* [FinP [IP pro k
     ballava]]]]]]]

As is shown, the Comment is contained within an IP-structure having a *pro* in subject position that is matched with the A-Topic for referential interpretation (cf. Frascarelli 2007).[24]

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23 It is important not to confuse presentational sentences like (42), in which the DP *la Carrà* is a Topic, with cleft constructions (e.g., *è la Carrà che balla* 'it's Mrs. Carrà who is dancing'), in which *la Carrà* is a Focus. This difference is immediately supported by evidence showing that a cleft can be used as an answer to a cleft wh-question (like [i] below), while this is not the case for a presentational sentence:

(i) Q: *Chi è   che balla?*
         who be.3SG that dance.3SG
         'Who is it that is dancing?'

     A: *È   la Carrà che balla*   (cleft)
         be.3SG the Carrà that dance.3SG

     A': **C'   è   la Carrà che balla*   (presentational)
          there be.3SG the Carrà that dance.3SG

Furthermore, the post-copular DP in a cleft is typically associated to a corrective reading, while this interpretation is excluded for post-copular DPs in presentational sentences:

(ii) Q: *In TV sta   ballando Lorella Cuccarini*
          In TV stay.3SG dance.GER Lorella Cuccarini
          'On TV you can see Lorella Cuccarini dancing.'

      A: *No, è la Carrà che balla*   (cleft)
      A': **No, c'è la Carrà che balla*   (presentational)

Hence, in (42) *la Carrà* is not a Focus but a Topic, whereas the Focus is the following proposition (as in [41]).

24 The present proposal clearly excludes a pseudo-relative (PR) analysis for presentational *ci*-sentences (*contra* Cruschina 2015). As is known, PR is a type of finite construction found in many Romance languages that superficially looks like a relative clause but describes events giving rise to direct perception reports (cf., among others, Guasti 1988; Cinque 1992; Scarano 2002; Moulton and Grillo 2014). Though the presentational *che*-clause might "look like" a PR, Grillo and Moulton's (G&M) (2016) investigation on PRs immediately shows that this analysis is not tenable. Indeed, the authors convincingly show that PRs denote *event kinds* and that the DP heading a PR is part of the event itself. Consequently, a Topic-Comment structure cannot be associated to a PR since Topics typically denote individuals (*not* event kinds). Consider, for instance, spatial and temporal modifiers: G&M (2016) show that these are banned with Present

A final consideration concerning agreement is now in order for a comprehensive account of the relevant structure. Consider the presentational *ci*-sentence in (43), in which a plural Topic is realized, and the relevant structure in (44):

(43) *Ci   sono   i   miei fratelli   che*   pro *vivono   in   America*
     there   be.3PL   the   my   brothers   that   live.3PL   in   America
     'My brothers live in the States.'

(44) [$_{ForceP}$ [$_{Force'}$ *ci sono* [$_{ShiftP}$ [$_{DP}$ *i miei fratelli*]$_k$ [$_{FocP}$ [$_{Foc'}$ *che* [$_{FinP}$ [$_{IP}$ pro$_k$ *vivono in America*]]]]]]]]

As can be noticed, plural agreement applies "downstairs" (i.e., within IP) and "upstairs" (i.e., with the "copula"). Since we argue that the relevant functional head is an illocutionary marker in Force°, the presence of agreement is not trivial an issue.

We propose to analyze this phenomenon as a case of "Agreement in COMP" (Rizzi 1990), revised from a Minimalist perspective. Assuming that grammatical agreement starts out at C ("φ-features and tense appear to be derivative [from C that is the phase head]", cf. Chomsky 2008: 143), we draw from Miyagawa (2012) the suggestion that in languages such as English and Italian, agreement lowers to T (i.e., I, in the traditional terminology used in this work) (via a mechanism of *feature-inheritance*), while it stays in C in others.

We therefore propose that in presentational *ci*-sentences, being Topic-Comment structures, the matrix *pro* is interpreted under long-distance Agree
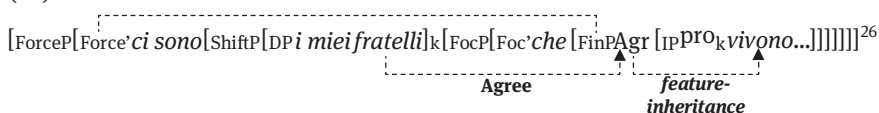

PRs, as with other types of event kinds. This is not the case of presentational *ci*-sentences. Compare (i) and (ii) below:

(i)   **Ho   visto Maria che balla   al   parco giovedì   scorso*
       have.1SG   seen   Maria   that   dances.3SG   at.the   park   Thursday   last
       'I saw Maria dancing at the park last Thursday.'   (PR, from G&M 2016)

(ii)   *C'   è   la   Carrà che balla   in   TV giovedì   prossimo / stasera*
       there   be.3SG   the   Carrà   that   dances.3SG   in   TV   Thursday   next   tonight
       'Mrs. Carrà is dancing on television next Thursday/tonight.'

with the Shift° head through a "matching chain" between the subject *pro*, the Fin° head and the A-Topic (cf. Frascarelli 2007). Specifically it is proposed, in the respect of cyclicity, that after Merge of the subject *pro*, Agr is merged in Fin° and matches abstractly with *pro* (i.e., with a "variable matching"); subsequently the A-Topic is merged, matching (and valuating) Fin°. Agreement features are thus lowered to I and spelt out as the typical subject-verb agreement. Additionally, φ-features and tense features are transmitted to Force°, determining agreement between the "copula" and the Topic:[25]

(45)

$$[_{ForceP}[_{Force'}\textit{ci sono}[_{ShiftP}[_{DP}\textit{i miei fratelli}]_k[_{FocP}[_{Foc'}\textit{che}[_{FinP}Agr[_{IP}pro_k \textit{vivono}...]]]]]]]^{26}$$

Agree   ***feature-***
                 inheritance

3.3.4 Explaining antiagreement effects and the lack of DE in (some) *there*-sentences

Given the present analysis, it is possible to provide a comprehensive explanation for the (apparent) antiagreement effects emerging on the "copula" in some presentational *ci*-sentences. As a matter of fact, browsing corpora and storytelling on internet blogs, it can be easily seen that the formula *c'era una volta*

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25 This is consistent with Rizzi's (1997) suggestion that Force and Fin are "two sides of the same coin", as they constitute the two boundaries of the C-domain, dedicated to illocutionary force and finiteness, respectively. Even though Italian has no "Agr in C" phenomenon, the claim that Fin° is the career of Agr features can be maintained on empirical grounds insofar as Fin° is the projection related to finiteness in Italian as well. As a matter of fact, in Italian its overt realization (in the form of prepositional COMPs) is triggered by infinitive clauses. Hence, it might be argued that agreement morphology in C is parametrical (i.e., connected with either finite or infinitive Agreement).

26 Though we concentrated the analysis on presentational *ci*-sentences in which the postcopular DP is followed by a *that*-clause, it is important to underline that the relevant Topic can also be followed by a PP, usually having a locative function (e.g., *c'è tuo fratello alla porta* 'your brother is at the door', *c'è Gianni in giardino* 'Gianni is in the garden', cf. [30b]). We surmise that in this case an elliptical Comment is realized. In particular we propose that the relevant Topic is followed by the Comment (realized in IP), which only contains the predicative PP.

('once upon a time') is often followed by a coordinated DP, despite the 3SG person form of the "copula", as in:

(46) *C'era*$_{3SG}$ *una volta un re e una regina (che desideravano tanto. . .)*
       'Once upon a time a king and a queen (wanted so much. . .)'

                                                    (4950 Google occurrences)

It should be noticed, however, that such antiagreement effects do not appear either with plural (non-coordinated) DPs (47a-b) or when the first member of the coordination is plural (47c):

(47) a. **C'era*$_{3SG}$ *una volta* [*i sette nani*]. . .
             'Once upon a time the seven dwarfs. . .'
       b. **C'era*$_{3SG}$ *una volta* [*i cittadini poveri di un regno*]
             'Once upon a time the poor servants of a kingdom. . .'
       c. **C'era*$_{3SG}$ *una volta* [*due sorellastre e una regina molto cattiva*]. . .
             'Once upon a time two step-sisters and a very bad queen. . .'

We propose that the 3SG marking shown in (46) is not a case of antiagreement, and that it can be immediately explained through a bi-clausal structural analysis. Specifically, we argue that the formula *c'era una volta* constitutes an independent *existential* sentence, in which the post-copular NumP [*una volta*] has a predicate function, while the clitic pronoun *ci* is the subject (cf. § 2.2). The latter is coindexed with the Topic DP in the following (juxtaposed) presentational sentence (implementing a Topic-Comment structure). In other words, the presentational sentence represents the "logical complement" of the existential clause (like in a sort of direct speech narration):

(48) [$_{GP}$ [$_{IP}$ [$_{DP}$ *c'*]$_i$ *era* [$_{SC}$ t$_i$ t$_k$]] [$_{FocP}$ [$_{NumP}$ *una volta*]$_k$ t$_{IP}$]]
       [$_{ForceP}$ [$_{ShiftP}$ [$_{DP}$ *un re e una regina*]$_k$ [$_{FocP}$ [$_{Foc'}$ *che* [$_{FinP}$ [$_{IP}$ pro$_k$ *desideravano tanto*. . .]]]]]]]

Hence, when "antiagreement effects" are found in presentational *ci*-sentences, we are dealing in fact with two separate sentences (as in [48]), in which copular agreement depends on the predicate NumP of the former; on the other hand, when the "copula" (i.e., the illocutionary marker) and the main verb both agree with the post-copular DP, a unique Topic-Comment structure must be assumed (as in [45]).

      It is now important to observe that the bi-clausal construction in (48) can be taken as the source structure for the grammaticalization process deriving the

complex illocutionary head *c'è/c'era* ('there is/was'), which is merged in Force°
in presentational *ci*-sentences. Our hypothesis is that, starting from the struc-
ture in (48), the existential sentence *c'era una volta* has been re-analyzed as
a formula (typically used to introduce fairy-tales). Then, with the loss of the
temporal NumP [*una volta*], the relevant structure has reduced to *c'era*, which
has finally lost its structural articulation and completed its grammaticalization
process to become a functional head.

The bi-clausal structure proposed in (48) can also provide an explanation
for *there*-sentences like (33) above (repeated below as [49]), in which the for-
mula *c'era una volta* is followed by a non-topical DP (cf. Figure 5 and the rele-
vant discussion):

(49) *C'era una volta* [*Lea e Bea*] *con la mamma e con papà*
     'Once upon a time, Lea and Bea were with mummy and daddy.'

Given the present analysis of *ci*-sentences, the structure in (49) cannot be ana-
lyzed as an existential construction, which excludes definite DPs in post-
copular position (cf. § 3.1). Nor can the relevant sentence be considered
a presentational *ci*-construction of the type illustrated in § 3.3.3, as the latter
introduces a Topic-Comment structure. Since [*Lea e Bea*] in (49) is a definite
non-topical DP, we propose a bi-clausal analysis for it (like [48]). Accordingly,
it is formed by an existential construction (i.e., *c'era una volta*) followed by
a second sentence including a SC, in which the PP is the predicate and the sub-
ject DP [*Lea e Bea*] is a fronted Focus:

(50) $[_{GP} [_{IP} [_{DP} c']_i \, era \, [_{SC} t_i \, t_k]] \, [_{FocP} [_{NumP} una \, volta]_k \, t_{IP}]]$
     $[_{ForceP} [_{FocP} [_{DP} LEA \, E \, BEA]_k \, [_{SC} t_k \, [_{PP} con \, la \, mamma \, e \, con \, papà]]]]$

Finally, the syntactic analysis proposed for presentational *ci*-sentences also al-
lows for an independent and comprehensive explanation for the absence of DE
effects observed in languages like Italian (in which [+def] DPs are not excluded
from the post-copular position; cf. § 3.2). It should be now clear that this possi-
bility is connected to the existence of presentational *ci*-constructions (or else of
bi-clausal structures like [48]), in which the post-copular DP cannot show DE
effects because it is not a predicate with a reduced functional structure (§ 2.2.1)
but a Topic and, as such, specific (and referential) by definition (Frascarelli
2007).

If this analysis is on the right track, the prediction is that DE can only be
found in languages in which presentational or bi-clausal *there*-sentences are not
(or only marginally) available, due to independent core grammar restrictions

(concerning, for instance, the realization of dislocated constituents in the C-domain). This interesting issue will be addressed in future investigations.

4 Conclusions

In this paper different types of copular constructions have been analyzed, providing syntactic, semantic and interface (discourse-prosody) evidence for three major claims.

First of all, it is argued that existential sentences are marked copular constructions in which the post-copular NumP is a Narrow Focus, whereas the locative PP is a right-hand G-Topic. Existential sentences thus require the raising of the relevant NumP to Spec,FocP and IP-inversion to Spec,GP. This derivation can account for a number of specific syntactic and intonational properties.

Secondly, presentational *ci*-sentences have been approached and, differently from recent proposals, a Topic-Comment structure has been proposed to account for their derivation. In particular, it is argued that in this type of copular constructions the post-copular DP is a left-hand A- or C-Topic, while the following material is the Comment. Discourse and intonational evidence has been discussed, from children's and adults' naturalistic data, clearly showing a Topic contour for the relevant post-copular DP and the creation of a Topic chain after its production. In this picture, the *c'è/c'era* 'there is/was' form is no longer a copula but a complex functional head, that is to say an illocutionary marker, merged in Force°. Its origins have been indicated in the *c'era una volta* ('once upon a time') formula introducing fairy-tales: a predicative copular structure which has been grammaticalized after the loss of the predicative NumP *una volta*.

Finally, a bi-clausal analysis has been proposed for structures in which an existential construction seems to "overlap" with the Topic-Comment articulation that is typical of presentational *ci*-sentences. This explanation can also account for those *ci*-sentences in which a non-topical definite DP follows the *c'era (una volta)* form.

To conclude, the present analysis provides an interface-based, comprehensive explanation for a number of morpho-syntactic properties and prosodic phenomena connected with existential sentences (and for important asymmetries with respect to other copular constructions). Furthermore, it allows to maintain, with Moro (1997), that DE is a *universal property* of existential sentences: when it is apparently violated, we are in fact dealing with presentational *ci*-sentences, which are parametrically available in different languages, possibly depending on independent information-structural restrictions concerning the realization of Topics.

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