

## Interpretational Consequences of Agreement Variations in the English Existential Construction

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Despite the extensive literature on the English Existential Construction (ExC), there has been no discussion of the syntax of differential agreement patterns and their implications for interpretation. That is, while many proposals exist which seek to explain why the postcopular NP agrees with the copula as though it were a subject, these proposals fail to account for the possibility of non-agreeing variants as in (1):

- (1) a. There seem to be five cops at the door (postcopular NP—copula agreement)  
b. There seems to be five cops at the door (non-agreement with postcopular NP)

Importantly, the variants are syntactically distinct, and their difference can be teased apart in the context of floated quantifiers (2), and in the context of embedded “Occasional Constructions” (3)(cf. Zimmerman 2003 a.o.).

- (2) a. There seem to be five cops all at the door  
b. \*There seems to be five cops all at the door  
(3) a. There seem to be the occasional girl scouts knocking on my door  
b. \*There seems to be the occasional girl scouts knocking on my door

Typical explanations of agreement in the ExC appeal to linking the EXPL and the NP by various means (LF-affixation (Chomsky 1986b, 1995); binding chains (Safir 1986); subcategorization frames of the copula (Stowell 1978), a.o.) with the understanding that it is the post-copular NP that triggers agreement. Among others, Basilico (1997) argues for a small clause (SC) with the EXPL and the NP in some configuration such that the EXPL absorbs the relevant NP features before it moves to [Spec, TP]. While this proposal accounts for (1a) as well as for other properties of ExC such as the Definiteness Effect and Individual-Level/Stage-Level restriction (Carlson 1977); like other similar suggestions of linking the EXPL and the NP, they focus on the agreement between them, and hence fail to account for (1b) or for the contrasts in (2)-(3). This paper, therefore, argues that the post-copular NP alone cannot account for the observed variability in agreement in (1)-(3). I adopt a SC analysis wherein the EXPL takes a PredP as its complement *to form* a SC. Pred<sup>0</sup> selects a predicative category (A, N, V, P and its extended projection) as its complement, then through Comp-to-Spec movement, the properties of [Spec, PredP] value the  $\phi$ -features and definiteness features of Pred<sup>0</sup>. EXPL is merged to form a SC and existentially binds the event variable introduced by Pred<sup>0</sup>. I argue that the unvalued features on T<sup>0</sup> each function as a probe in a probe-goal AGREE relationship (Chomsky 2000) where the EXPL goal values case and EPP, and Pred<sup>0</sup> is the goal that values  $\phi$ -features and definiteness features.<sup>1</sup> The proposal, therefore, offers a single structure that accounts for the patterns in (1)-(3) which arise as a result of the properties of the XP that values Pred<sup>0</sup>.

This proposal extends Roy’s (2005) analysis of a closely related family of structures—copular sentences—which argues that a single PredP structure can account for interpretational differences similar to those in (1) based on the mass/count properties of the complement of Pred<sup>0</sup>. Following Roy (2005) and Borer (2005), I argue that count structures are licensed by functional structure (e.g. NumP, CIP) that only selects NP. In (4a), NumP<sup>2</sup> starts as complement of Pred<sup>0</sup> then moves to [Spec PredP] which values Pred<sup>0</sup> as plural. The T<sup>0</sup>-Pred<sup>0</sup> AGREE relation results in the plural agreement and an interpretation that the denotation of the NumP—*five cops*—is what is salient.

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<sup>1</sup> EXPL is  $\phi$ -feature vacuous and thus cannot satisfy T<sup>0</sup> independently (Chomsky 1995)

<sup>2</sup> Crucially DP cannot be the complement of Pred<sup>0</sup> since DPs are arguments and not predicates (Roy 2005 a.o.)