The (Information) Structure of Marked Copular Constructions:
a multi-layered interface approach to it- and there-sentences*
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1. Introduction
• This paper aims to contribute to the study of copular sentences by proposing an interface
analysis of two types of information-structurally (IS) marked copular constructions:
(1) It is a book that I read [cleft]
(2) There is a man in the garden [existential]

➢ these two constructions present a number of common properties (not only concerning word
order but also, for instance, specific TAM restrictions; cf. Den Dikken et al. 2000); nevertheless, they are generally analyzed independently from one another

➢ the present paper proposes a unified explanation, as the relevant structures will be shown to
present a number of common properties, but also crucial asymmetries, thus yielding specific
IS interpretations
  o multi-layered interface approach ➔ morphosyntactic, semantic, discourse and prosodic
properties

2. Background
2.1. Copular constructions
(3) XP – copula – YP

➢ Various types of copular constructions (different phrasal categories in the positions
indicated in (3) as XP and YP; cf. Den Dikken 2006a)
  o considering 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:
(4) [XP His supper] is [YP food for the dog]
  • ’his supper serves as food for the dog’
  ➔ YP is not referential and predicates something about XP (predicative copular
sentence)

➢ ’he has food for the dog for supper’
  ➔ the denotation of YP identifies or specifies the value for the referent denoted
by XP (identifying/specificational copular sentence)

2.2. IS-marked structures
• Since Rizzi (1997), discourse features are assumed to be encoded in the left periphery of the
clause (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 IS-feature
(5) Structural account: Small Clause (cf. Stowell 1981, Cardinaletti & Guasti, eds. 1995, Moro
1997, Den Dikken 2006b)

2.3. (Pseudo)cleft sentences
• Frascarelli & Ramaglia (henceforth, F&R) (2013, 2014): (pseudo)clefts as IS-marked copular
structures

  ➢ SC analysis, in which the two copular constituents are connected to specific left-peripheral
positions depending on their discourse properties
  ➢ besides focalization of the post-copular DP (pseudo)clefts also implement a Topic-Comment
structure ➔ the free relative DP (that/what I gave John in the examples below) qualifies as a
Topic in both constructions:
(7) 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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How to account for the interpretive asymmetries existing between existential and locative constructions?

• Zamparelli (2000): existentials and locatives have opposite configurations:
  ➢ the configuration in (13a) constitutes the underlying structure of locative constructions: this sentence is about a man (the subject) and asserts that it occupies a location referred to as there (the predicate)
  ➢ the subject of an existential sentence is there, and the post-copular DP (a man) is the predicate:
    (14) a. be [sc [zw there] [zw a man]]
    b. [zw there], is [sc t [zw a man]]
  ➢ 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)
  ➢ following Moro’s (1997) suggestion (cf. (12)), the locative PP is right-adjointed

3. Existential *there*-sentences

Extending Frascarelli & Ramaglia’s (2013, 2014) analysis of clefts to existential sentences

3.1. Background

• Milsark (1974), Stowell (1978):
  (10) [sc [zw a man] [zw in the garden]]

• Chomsky (1986, 1991): there as an expletive pronoun associated with the post-copular DP (11a), which is subject to covert (LF) movement to substitute (or else adjoin) to it (11b):
  (11) a. there, … is … [sc [zw a man] [zw in the garden]]
    b. [zw a man], … is … [sc t [zw in the garden]]

• Moro (1997): 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:
  (12) a. be [sc [zw a man] [zw there]] ... [zw in the garden]
    b. [zw there], is [sc [zw a man] t] ... [zw in the garden] (existential; Moro 1997)

Locative constructions have the same underlying configuration, the two structures differing in their derivation:
  (13) a. be [sc [zw a man] [zw there]]
    b. [zw a man], is [sc t [zw there]] (locative; Moro 1997)

3.2. Existentials as IS-marked copular structures

Working hypothesis: existential structures can be analyzed as clefts:
  (15) a. be [sc [zw it] [zw a book]] ... [zw that I gave John]. (cleft)
    b. be [sc [zw there], [zw a man]] ... [zw in the garden]. (existential sentence)

3.2.1. Semantic analysis

  (16) be [sc [zw there], [numb a man]] ... [zw in the garden]. (revised version of (15b))

Locative constructions in the post-copular noun phrase of existentials lacks the functional projections dedicated to features such as referentiality, definiteness and specificity, which typically characterize arguments (rather than predicates) ➢ referential/definite/specific elements (which are full DPs) are excluded from the post-copular position of existential sentences (cf. the Definiteness Effect in § 3.3)

• Cleft sentences qualify as specificational copular constructions (cf. Den Dikken 2006a, F&R 2013, 2014) ➢ the clefted nominal specifies the value for its subject.
  (17) a. *It was John that Mary kissed* (F&R 2013)
    b. Mary kissed someone
    c. ιx (x = John) (ιx kissed’ (Mary, x))
this determines specific restrictions imposed on the post-copular constituent, e.g. the fact
that some phrases such as NPIs, non-referential QPs and certain types of AdvPs cannot be
clefted (as they cannot denote individuals):

(18) a. *It is nobody that will come
b. *It is someone that I met

c. *It is always that he is late

3.2.2. Syntactic evidence

• Extraction effects support the hypothesis that the post-copular noun phrase is a predicate in both
cleft and existential sentences:

(19) It is the photograph [of the wall] [that I gave [John]]

a. [What do you think [what I gave [John]] is the photograph of t?]

b. [*Who do you think [what I gave to t] is the photograph of [the wall]?]

(20) ci sono [tre pagine [di esercizi]] nel libro [di inglese] (existential; Italian)

There are three pages of exercises in the book of English

‘There are three pages of exercises in the English book.’

a. [Di quale lingua, pensi che ci siano [tre pagine di] nel libro di inglese?]

Of what language think.2G that there be.3Pl. three pages of exercises in the book of English

b. [*Di quale lingua, pensi che ci siano [tre pagine [di esercizi]]

of which language think.2G that there be.3Pl. three pages of exercises

in the book t?]

• Merge structure of clefts and existentials (cf. (15)):

(21) a. be [sc [or it] [or the photograph of the wall]] … [or that I gave John]

b. be [sc [or there] [numb three pages of exercises]] … [or in the English book]

3.2.3. Discourse properties

• Parallelism between clefts and existentials:

  - Merge configuration (cf. (21))
  - Discourse role of constituents:

(22) a. It is a book (that I gave John) (cleft)

SUBJECT COPULA PREDICATE RIGHT-DISLOCATED DP

b. There is a man (in the garden) (existential)

SUBJECT COPULA PREDICATE RIGHT-DISLOCATED PP

3.2.4. Intonational realization

• Cleft constructions:

(25) A: e poi lei mi guardava

B: ma ti guardava nel senso che rispondeva ai tuoi sguardi o proprio era lei che ti
guardava? [Figure 1]

C: si! onesto!

A: potete anche essere io che rispondete ai tuoi sguardi? [Figure 2]

C: che bugiarda! [incontro-01]

‘A: and then she was looking at me B: but she was looking at you in the sense that she
responded to your looks, or was it really HER who was looking at you? C: be honest! A:
it might have also been ME who was responding to her looks C: what a liar!’

Derivation of clefts (= (9)):

(23) a. [FamP [or that I gave John], [Fam [or it], is [sc t, [sc a book]]] ]

b. [FamP [or a book], [Fam [or that I gave John], [Fam [or it], is [sc t, [sc a]]] ]

c. [FamP [or it], is [sc t, [sc a]]] [FamP [or a book], [Fam [or that I gave John], [tp] ]]

Derivation of existentials:

(24) a. [FamP [or in the garden], [Fam [or there], is [sc t, [sc a man]]] ]

b. [FamP [sc a man], [Fam [or in the garden], [Fam [or there], is [sc t, [sc a]]] ]

c. [FamP [or there], is [sc t, [sc a]]] [FamP [sc a man], [Fam [or in the garden], [tp] ]]

much like the initial it-pronoun of clefts, in existential sentences there is not an
expletive but a referential pronoun, coreferent with the dislocated PP (with which it
shares a locative interpretation)

Further syntactic evidence for this account comes from Case marking and antiagreement effects (cf. Frascarelli &
Ramaglia 2013 for details).

The intonational analysis put forth in this work is based on a corpus of naturalistic data of the Roman variety (for
Existential constructions:

(26) *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’

(27) *(addiritta) c’ erano delle scenografie*

even there be. pst.3pl. some scenes

‘There were (even) some scenes’
- the right-most constituent (the that-clause of clefts and the locative PP of existentials) is realized as an independent intonational phrase and is totally destressed, thus qualifying as a right-hand Topic
- the realization of the post-copular phrase (namely, the predicate) is different in Figures 1 and 3 vs. 2 and 4: in the former it shows the typical downgrading contour of Broad Focus sentences, consistent with its non-contrastive interpretation; on the other hand, the Foci illustrated in Figures 2 and 4 are realized with a H* tone (as expected, given their contrastive nature)

### 3.3. The Definiteness Effect (DE)

- **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
- in the case of existentials, DE "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):

(28) 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

- Existentials are predicative copular constructions (cf. § 3.2.1), in which the post-copular noun phrase (the predicate) is not a full DP but a NumP:

(29) be [sc [or there], [NumP a man]] ... [w in the garden], (= (16))

→ a definite/specific/referential DP is excluded

- in some languages, the DE seems to be somehow "relaxed".3

(30) a. C’ è un uomo in giardino (Italian)
   There is a man in garden
   "There is a man in the garden"
   b. C’ è Gianni in giardino
   There is John in garden
   "There is John in the garden"

→ Examples like (30b) (with a definite post-copular noun phrase) are not existentials
→ A distinction is needed across there-sentences

3 A further "exception" to the pattern illustrated in (28) is constituted by the possibility for a definite DP to appear in the post-copular position of existentials in the so-called "list interpretation" cases:

(i) A. Who can we invite?
   (from Kayne 2016)
   B. Well, there’s John

Similar cases can be explained following Kayne’s (2016) proposal that the apparently definite noun phrases realized in post-copular position “are actually embedded within hidden indefinites” (Kayne 2016: § 9):

(ii) A. Well, there’s SOMEBODY WE CAN INVITE, (NAMELY) John (cf. (iB))

- the interpretation of there-sentences with definite and indefinite post-copular noun phrases (in languages that allow both constructions) is not exactly the same
- Moro (1997): while a sentence like (30a) has an existential meaning and 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 latter sentence is therefore analogous to a locative structure like Gianni è in giardino ‘John is in the garden’

   ➢ these two sentences should receive a different structural account (cf. Moro 1997, La Fauci & Loporcaro 1997, Cruschina 2012, 2015):
   - (30a) qualifies as an existential construction proper (cf. the analysis illustrated above);
   - (30b) is a presentational construction

### 3.3.1. The analysis of presentational there-sentences

- Presentational there-sentences have different formal properties with respect to existential structures proper at various levels of analysis:

  ➢ Semantics: locative vs. existential interpretation (cf. above)

  ➢ Discourse and intonational analysis: while in existential constructions the post-copular noun phrase qualifies as a Focus and the following PP is a right-hand Topic (cf. § 3.2.3-3.2.4), there-sentences can also function as presentational structures, with a Topic-Comment IS-articulation4

(31) i video li trovo piuttosto noiosi tanto più che ci sono

the videos DO3PL CL find.1SG rather boring all the more that there be.3PL, quelle schede da completare che sono lungheissime pro non finiscono mai those forms to complete that be.3PL, long SUP 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’

4 According to Ramaglia & Frascarelli (in press), the Italian particle ci ‘there’ followed by a copula can be used as an illocutionary marker (originally connected with the story-telling formula c’era una volta ‘once upon a time’, lit. ‘there was a time’) introducing presentational constructions with a Topic-Comment articulation. For further details on the grammaticalization of the relevant formula, as well as on its structural analysis, cf. Ramaglia & Frascarelli (in press).
Morphosyntax: some languages show different formal (morphosyntactic) properties distinguishing existential and presentational *there*-sentences

(33) a. *B a (*sos) ppastorez in dmo the shepherds in house
    'There are shepherds at home'
b. Bi sun *(sos) ppastorez in dmo there be.3pl. the shepherds in house
    Lit.: 'There are the shepherds at home'

- copula selection is dependent on the existential vs. presentational nature of *there*-sentences in Logudorese Sardinian, as it is realized either as *'have'* or *'be'* depending on the (in)definiteness of the following nominal (cf. La Faucci & Loporcaro 1997):

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{existentials} & \quad \text{are IS-marked copular constructions of the predicative type, in which the post-copular nominal is focused and the locative PP is a right-hand Topic;} \\
\text{existentials} & \quad \text{have been shown to share some crucial properties with other copular structures: specifically, a correlation has been indicated with clefts, and a single derivation has been proposed for both constructions;} \\
\text{existentials} & \quad \text{however, show a crucial distinction at the semantic component, as they qualify as predicative and specificational copular sentences, respectively; this determines their asymmetries and can account for the specific restrictions they present (i.e., some phrases such as NPIs, non-referential QPs and certain types of AdvPs cannot be clefted; definite DPs are excluded from the post-copular position of existentials, a restrictions known as the Definiteness Effect);} \\
\text{the investigation on the DE reveals that it is a universal, semantically-based, restriction on existential sentences; apparent counterexamples should therefore receive a comprehensive explanation; in this respect, a distinction has been proposed across *there*-sentences, as existential and presentational constructions show different properties at various levels of analysis;} \\
\text{importance of a multi-layered interface account in order to explore micro-variation in IS-marked copular constructions: the present analysis shows that the comparison between it- and *there*-sentences can be carried out at different levels of analysis, each of which can shed light on different aspects of the two types of constructions; this approach has revealed to be crucial to explain both the similarities and the asymmetries that the relevant structures present.}
\end{align*} \]

Figure 5 - Presentational *there*-sentence introducing an A-Topic

(32) in quello dell' investigatore c' è la signora elegante che pro parla
    in that of the detective there be.3sg. the woman elegant that speak.3sg
    in un determinato modo [Figure 6a].
    c' è la cameriera che pro parla proprio in tutt' altro modo [Figure 6b]
    in a certain way there be.3sg. the waitress that speak.3sg just in quite different way

\[ \text{In the detective's one [video] the elegant woman speaks in a certain way, while the waitress speaks in quite a different way.} \]

Figure 6a Figure 6b

Presentational *there*-sentences introducing C-Topics

- the post-copular DP in (31) and Figure 5 is marked with a L*+H tone and is used to implement a Topic shift with respect to the current Topic i video ("the videos", left-dislocated at the beginning of the extract)
- the two post-copular DPs in (32) and Figures 6 are opposed with respect to different Comments; hence, they qualify as C-Topics (cf. Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010) and, as such, they are marked with a H* tone (Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl 2007); the following linguistic material presents a downgrading contour, showing that it constitutes the Comment
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