

EXPLETIVE CONSTRUCTIONS ARE
NOT “LOWER RIGHT CORNER”
MOVEMENT CONSTRUCTIONS

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Bobaljik (2002) proposes that covert and overt A-movement may be distinguished at the PF interface rather than in the syntax. In his proposal, movement takes place uniformly in the syntax, leaving a full copy in the moved-from position. In “overt” movement, PF privileges the higher copy (i.e., this copy is pronounced), and in “covert” movement, PF privileges the lower one. LF may also independently privilege a higher or lower copy (though a principle called Minimize Mismatch (Bobaljik 2002:251, Diesing 1997) exerts pressure toward PF and LF privileging the same copy). This results in four logically possible combinations: PF and LF both privileging the higher copy (overt movement with no reconstruction effects); PF privileging the higher copy, and LF the lower copy (overt movement with reconstruction effects); LF privileging the higher copy, and PF the lower copy (covert/LF movement); and both PF and LF privileging the lower copy (LF movement with reconstruction effects).

Examples of the first three types are widely recognized. Bobaljik argues (2002:246ff.) that the fourth possibility, which he labels Lower Right Corner (LRC) constructions, are exemplified by expletive constructions (ECs) with *there*. In this squib, I will offer evidence that movement of the sort that Bobaljik proposes does not take place in ECs, and hence that ECs do not exemplify LRC movement constructions. This result does not cast doubt on his general analysis or conclusions, but only on the status of ECs as movement constructions. In fact, economy considerations offer reasons to think that LRCs may exist in theory but not in reality, preserving the full underlying logic of Bobaljik’s analysis.

1 The Case for Expletive Constructions as Lower Right Corner Movement Constructions

There is some evidence from agreement suggesting that ECs may be movement constructions. For example, in standard English, sentences like (1) show agreement forms of the verb coinciding with the number feature of the associate DP.¹

- (1) a. There is/*are a frog in the pond.
b. There are/*is frogs in the pond.

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on an earlier version of this squib. Any errors are my own.

¹ In fact, singular agreement does occur in structures such as (1b), even on the part of speakers producing otherwise standard English. Examples from BBC broadcasts include the following:

- (i) “There is still many issues to be resolved.” (24/5/02)
(ii) “There is a lot of question marks going into the game . . .” (7/6/02)

Despite such examples, which are not difficult to find, I will proceed with the assumption that the data in (1b) are correct.

If normal subject-verb agreement is specifier-head agreement involving I^0 or Agr^0 , and if the agreement patterns in (1) are to be explained as normal subject-verb agreement, then such data suggest covert movement of the associate DP to the requisite specifier position.

Other data, however, suggest that movement has not taken place (under earlier interpretations of such facts), or that the lower position is privileged (in Bobaljik's terms). Thus, in ECs, it is the lower (surface-positioned) DP that is significant for binding purposes, as in (2) (from Den Dikken 1995:348–349).

- (2) a. Some applicants_i seem to each other_i to be eligible for the job.
 b. *There seem to each other_i to be some applicants_i eligible for the job.

Here, then, we appear to have an example of an LRC movement construction, one where the associate DP has raised for the purpose of agreement, but where both PF and LF privilege the lower copy. To account for the presence of *there* in such constructions, Bobaljik claims that it is inserted in PF, much as *do* is inserted in the PF process of *do*-support.

2 Other Crucial Expletive Construction Agreement Data

However, a problem for Bobaljik's proposal is that agreement phenomena in ECs are not nearly as clear as set forth in (1). One significant set of EC agreement facts involves coordinated DPs. As I will show, these facts cast serious doubt on whether agreement in (1) is an indicator of movement.

2.1 Coordinated Associates versus Coordinated Subjects

Elsewhere (Sobin 1997), I have offered empirical evidence showing that when the associate in an EC is a coordination of DPs (NPs in that work), plural agreement on the verb is strongly triggered by the coordinate DP that is adjacent to (to the immediate right of) the agreeing verb, as indicated in table 1.² That the associate itself is a coordination has little effect. The same is not true with a coordinated subject. The coordination itself strongly induces a plural verb form (though this effect does seem to be reinforced by plural coordinated constituents), as shown in table 2.

What is crucial about these agreement facts is that they are completely out of sync with movement facts. It is widely recognized (Ross

² In these tables, *nps* refers to a plural NP/DP, and *np* to a singular one. The remaining wording is reasonably transparent. Items in the tables are numbered as in Sobin 1997.

Table 1

Agreement in expletive constructions with a conjoined associate. Judgments on a naturalness scale of 0–5, with 0 = ‘‘impossible’’ and 5 = ‘‘completely natural.’’ (From Sobin 1997:326.)

Construction type	Average acceptability (0–5)
27. <i>there are np and np . . .</i>	0.81
33. <i>there are np and nps . . .</i>	0.61
30. <i>there are nps and np . . .</i>	3.81
36. <i>there are nps and nps . . .</i>	4.00
25. <i>there is np and np . . .</i>	3.58
31. <i>there is np and nps . . .</i>	2.86
28. <i>there is nps and np . . .</i>	1.67
34. <i>there is nps and nps . . .</i>	1.69

Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks (one-tailed) test results

33 vs. 30 $\alpha < .005, N = 11$

31 vs. 28 $\alpha = .025, N = 10$

Table 2

Agreement in lexical-subject constructions with a conjoined subject. Judgments on a naturalness scale of 0–5, with 0 = ‘‘impossible’’ and 5 = ‘‘completely natural.’’ (From Sobin 1997:325.)

Construction type	Average acceptability (0–5)
9. <i>np and np are . . .</i>	3.31
12. <i>nps and np are . . .</i>	3.56
15. <i>np and nps are . . .</i>	3.83
18. <i>nps and nps are . . .</i>	4.31
7. <i>np and np is . . .</i>	2.22
10. <i>nps and np is . . .</i>	1.78
13. <i>np and nps is . . .</i>	0.81
16. <i>nps and nps is . . .</i>	0.69

Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks (one-tailed) test results

10 vs. 13 $\alpha = .025, N = 7$

12 vs. 15 not significant

1967) that a constituent cannot be raised out of a coordination, as indicated by the ungrammaticality of (3b).

- (3) a. There is/*are a frog and some fish in the pond.
 b. *A frog_i is [t_i and some fish] in the pond.
 c. Some frogs and a fish are/*is in the pond.

Yet it is essentially the movement in (3b) that would appear to be required to explain the preferred pattern of plural agreement found in

ECs with a coordinated associate. Thus, a movement theory is in fact hard pressed to explain such patterns of agreement.³

2.2 *Expletive Construction Agreement as “Standard” Rather Than “Dialect/Idiolect”*

It is important here to emphasize that the pattern of agreement for ECs shown in table 1 and in (3a) is not “dialectal” or “idiolectal.” It is a pervasive pattern of agreement in English ECs, so much so that even standard grammar texts, which are normally not inhibited from dictating formal patterns that are not natural as spoken patterns, sanction this sort of adjacency-based agreement in ECs. Thus, Fowler (1983:191) says, ‘In this construction, *there is* may be used before a compound subject [= associate] when the first element in the subject is singular.’

3 A Different Solution

It appears, then, that a simple movement theory of ECs like the one Bobaljik advocates does not correctly project crucial basic agreement facts for ECs. Other theories have been advanced that account for such agreement facts more comprehensively, including those proposed in Sobin 1997, Deevy 1998, Schütze 1999, Munn 1993, 1999, and Aoun, Benmamoun, and Sportiche 1994, 1999. In Sobin 1997, I assign plural agreement in ECs to the type of extragrammatical rule that explains other non- or quasi-productive prestige constructions. Deevy analyzes agreement in English verb-subject orders as a sentence-processing effect driven by the surface positioning of these elements. Schütze argues that verb-subject agreement in English involves two distinct expletive constructions/agreement patterns, both relying on elements in surface position. Munn takes the position that what is termed partial agreement or first conjunct agreement in Arabic verb-subject constructions (much along the lines of agreement in English ECs) is due to agreement under government and to the asymmetrical structure of coordinated phrases.

³ However, as one reviewer points out, Johnson (1996) argues for the possibility of movement out of the first conjunct of a coordinate structure, as in (i).

(i) Liz made Mason_i out [_{IP} t_i to be intelligent] and [_{IP} Sarah to be kind].

On the other hand, the unacceptability of (ii) still indicates strong limitations on such a possibility.

(ii) *The shoes_i were put [t_i and the socks] on the table.

Further, the particular movement that would be required to explain the singular agreement possibility seen in (3a)—namely, (3b)—is also not available.

Here, agreement involves only the superior member of a coordination.⁴ Aoun, Benmamoun, and Sportiche argue that such agreement is instead due to a coordinate subject's having coordinated clauses as its source. Here, the clause introducing the second coordinate phrase is severely reduced, leaving only its subject as the remnant coordinated element. These analyses are very diverse, and the many issues they raise are far from resolved. However, it is noteworthy that none of them entail covert movement of associate to subject as a crucial step in determining agreement. In fact, the agreement data presented in the works cited generally do not support a movement analysis of ECs. Even the data given in (1) do not provide clear support for a movement analysis. In sum, there is no compelling evidence that ECs involve such movement, and hence that they exemplify the LRC movement construction.

Thus, there appears at present to be a gap in the evidence for the four-way typology of movement constructions, one that may be accidental or significant. If the gap is accidental, then there should exist a construction that shows, for example, completely "normal" ("subject"-like) agreement between a verb and a postverbal subject, and that shows reconstruction effects. If the gap is significant, then no such construction should exist.

Such a gap, if significant, may indicate that the four-way typology of movement constructions is not correct. However, it is also possible that even if no such LRC constructions exist, the typology is correct in principle, and the predicted LRC constructions are never actually realized for reasons of economy. Taking ECs as "potential" LRC movement constructions, it may be that in a theory that demands a strong motivation for movement, there is simply insufficient motivation for movement here. Movement in such a construction would accomplish little or nothing. Thus, the fourth type of movement, "covert" movement with reconstruction effects, is theoretically possible but not realizable: being unnecessary movement, it is banned on grounds of economy. Then, the four-way typology is correct in principle, though it cannot be fully instantiated given the crosscutting dictates of economy.

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⁴ The data in table 2, however, show that there is some degree of pressure toward singular agreement from a singular right conjunct in a coordinated subject. This is compatible with the claim that coordination is "flat," but not compatible with the claim that coordination is asymmetric. In fact, if coordination were asymmetric, and if agreement could involve only one member of the coordination, then it should be the left (superior but nonadjacent) member that exerts pressure toward singular agreement. Clearly, this is not the case.

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MAKING SENSE OF THE SENSE

UNIT CONDITION

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1 Introduction

Traditionally, it has been assumed that listener preferences for intonational boundary placement fall under the domain of linguistic competence. Under this view, native speakers of a language possess specific linguistic knowledge that determines permissible intonational phrasings for a given utterance. Although a number of theories of this type have been proposed (see, e.g., Nespor and Vogel 1986, Hirst 1993),

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