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**DEFINITENESS EFFECTS AND THE ROLE OF THE CODA IN  
EXISTENTIAL CONSTRUCTIONS**

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## ABSTRACT

The Definiteness Effect (DE) in existential contexts appears as a robust constraint in some languages (Spanish) while it seems to be absent in others (Italian, Catalan). However, a closer inspection of Italian and Catalan data shows that the DE has some presence in those languages as well, when the coda of the existential is explicit and occurs inside the VP. This paper investigates the effects produced by the coda on definiteness, and connects such effects to other constraints on the licensing of postverbal subjects, all ultimately tied to information structure. I suggest that a clash between definiteness and Focus structure is at the origin of the DE, when definite expressions resist insertion into purethetic or Broad Focus sentences.

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## 1. Introduction

The so-called “Definiteness Effect” (from now on, DE) in existential contexts is usually considered one of the basic diagnostics for definiteness. In fact, checking the possibility of inserting a nominal expression after *there be* (or its equivalents in different languages) is the most direct way to assess whether that expression behaves as a definite. It is uncontroversial that making some progress in our knowledge of the DE also means making some contribution to our knowledge of the semantic property of *definiteness* and, more indirectly, to our understanding of how *determination* works in natural languages. Thus, in this paper I intend to make a (modest and mostly descriptive) contribution to our knowledge of the semantics and pragmatics of definiteness by examining certain factors involved in the crosslinguistic distribution of the DE. My main concern is the relationship between definiteness and information structure.

My immediate goal will be that of accounting for a cluster of data, mainly from Romance languages, which may throw some light on the nature of the DE. In doing this I hope to provide evidence for a number of claims: (a) a classification of the different subtypes of existential constructions is needed, because only some of them should be associated with the DE; (b) some manifestation of the DE seems to emerge even in languages that apparently do not show such a constraint, like Italian and Catalan; (c) the DE is essentially a semantic and pragmatic phenomenon, but syntax obviously plays a decisive role, particularly in the encoding of information structure; (d) all general constraints having to do with definiteness or specificity are ultimately related to information structure. Hopefully the discussion will provide some ideas for the evaluation of current approaches to the DE.

I intend to limit my observations to the behaviour of definite articles, thus excluding demonstratives as well as universal or strong quantifiers<sup>1</sup>. I will consider only existential and unaccusative constructions as the main contexts for the DE, without extending the analysis to other grammatical phenomena such as Extraposition of relative clauses or modifiers in English, or constructions with *have* in different languages.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 is a brief presentation of the DE in general terms. The original problem that attracted my interest, the apparent lack of DE in Italian and Catalan, is introduced in section 3, and the main facts concerning the role of the coda in existential contexts are treated in section 4, with some crosslinguistic evidence for what I will call the Coda Constraint: in section 4 it is argued that, under closer scrutiny, the DE is not absent in Italian and Catalan existentials. Section 5 is devoted to a constraint on definite postverbal subjects that is clearly related to the effects of the coda on definiteness. An informal proposal is advanced in section 6 concerning the connection between definiteness and Focus structure that is at the basis of the DE: at this point all the data presented in the preceding sections are brought together under a unified account. Finally, section 7 develops one of the issues that are directly involved in the discussion of the counterexamples to the DE: the existence of different kinds of “existential constructions”, of which only one is associated with the DE. Given the resulting typology of existentials, the three classical proposals for a syntactic analysis of *there be* clauses in English happen to be correct in some sense. Section 8 contains a summary and some concluding remarks, together with some speculations on definiteness / specificity constraints in grammar.

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<sup>1</sup> Following McNally (1992, 1998), I assume that a unified account of the DE covering both definites and universal quantifiers is not necessarily an optimal solution.

## 2. The Definiteness Effect

The examples in (1) and (2) present the well known basic facts of the DE in English and Spanish: *there be* and *haber* constructions are compatible with indefinite DPs and bare nouns, but incompatible with definite DPs.

- (1) a. There are {some / two / many / few / no / Ø} dogs.  
b. \*There is {it / the dog / that dog / Fido}.
- (2) a. Hay {algunos / dos / muchos / pocos / Ø} perros.  
Have {some / two / many / few / Ø} dogs  
b. \*Hay {él / el perro / ese perro / Fido}.  
Have {it / the dog / that dog / Fido}

There are basically two lines of thought in current accounts of the DE: one is based on the presuppositional nature of definite / strong determiners and the clash between this presupposition and the felicity conditions for existential contexts (Lumsden 1988, Zucchi 1995); the other is based on the predicative, non-referential, property-denoting or incorporated nature of weak determiners, as a way to obey the licensing conditions imposed by existentials (Milsark 1977, McNally 1992 and 1998, Zamparelli 1996, Van Geenhoven 1998, Bende-Farkas and Kamp 2001, Landman 2004). Most current accounts rely on a Novelty Condition associated with existential sentences: the referent of the internal DP must be hearer-new (McNally 1992, Ward and Birner 1995). It is an open issue whether the Novelty Condition can be derived from some basic property of the existential construction. It is also an open issue whether some construction-specific condition has to be included for a full account, or, on the contrary, an explanation can be obtained on the basis of the interaction of general principles only. I do not intend to fully work out the theoretical consequences of the data under consideration for current hypotheses concerning the nature of the DE (see section 6 and section 8 for some remarks).

In a naive and informal way, the DE in existential sentences boils down to a requirement that the referential or denotational properties of the internal DP are provided by the existential predicate, and cannot be independently obtained by the DP itself; this may be translated into different formal devices, such as binding of the discourse referent by the predicate and semantic incorporation, or property denotation. It is usually accepted that only indefinites may be licensed by such devices. Definites, on the contrary, are referentially independent, because of the instruction encoded in definite determiners to search a uniquely identifiable referent. Definiteness is thus, in principle, incompatible with a syntactic position that constrains nominal expressions to be bound by the predicate. Nevertheless, as the literature on the topic had begun to make it clear that several definite expressions are in fact not incompatible at all with existential contexts, it appeared to be necessary, on the one hand, to investigate under what conditions definites were acceptable in certain kinds of existentials, and on the other hand, to distinguish ‘strong’ definites from ‘weak’ definites, the latter being characterized as definites whose use is not strictly associated with a uniqueness condition (in fact weak definites may appear in existentials, as in *There is [the outline of a human face] hidden in this puzzle*). Both topics have been studied in depth, at least for

English, and I will rely on current research on them in what follows (see Lyons 1999:239 for a brief overview).

The two basic ingredients one needs to be able to deal with the DE are thus a theory of definiteness, and some assumption concerning the conditions that an existential context imposes on the postverbal DP. As for definiteness, I assume that it consists of a uniqueness presupposition (see Abbott 1999 for a uniqueness approach to definiteness), and that such content acts as an instruction that has to be contextually satisfied. To build the second ingredient into a grammatical theory, Focus structure has to be considered. There is ample consensus about the inherentlythetic nature of existential contexts<sup>2</sup>: this means that they are Broad Focus or Sentence Focus. Such a property will reveal itself as crucial for a discussion of the facts (see section 6). Unfortunately, it is not possible to derive the DE straightforwardly from theticity, and I will show that certain lexical properties have to be included among the necessary notions. It goes without saying that operating with a minimum of theoretical notions is the desirable option, but at the moment there are still many things about theticity that we do not understand.

### 3. The apparent lack of DE in Italian and Catalan

#### 3.1 Italian

It is usual to assume that the DE is not present in languages like Italian<sup>3</sup> and standard Catalan (Moro 1997, Rigau 1994 and 1997, Brucart 2002). The relevant constructions are characterized by the use of the copula *essere* with the locative clitic *ci*, in Italian, and the verb *haver* 'have' with the locative clitic *hi*, in Catalan. The examples in (3) and (4) illustrate the apparent lack of DE in such languages (notice that definite DPs and proper names are perfectly grammatical in the postverbal position); none of them includes a locative coda, for reasons that will become clear later.

- (3) a. C'è un cane. / C'è il cane. / C'è Gianni.  
Cl-is a dog / Cl-is the dog / Cl-is John

- (4) a. Hi ha un gos. / Hi ha el gos. / Hi ha en Joan.  
Cl has a dog / Cl has the dog / Cl has the John

This is nonetheless a surprising fact, given that related languages such as Spanish and French, as well as the Germanic languages, show relatively robust manifestations of the constraint. An obvious way to capture the difference between the two groups of languages is treating the DE as a grammatical constraint subject to parametric variation. This is the position defended in Moro (1997), as part of a suggestive analysis of English and Italian existential sentences as inverted copular structures. Moro (1997: 133) traces the crosslinguistic difference between Italian and English back to an independent syntactic parameter, the *pro*-drop parameter. Moreover, he tries to derive the difference without relying on any specific semantic notion.

I am not going to dwell on a detailed criticism of the proposal, which is quite technical, but at least a couple of remarks are in order here. The first one has to do with

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<sup>2</sup> See Rosengren (1997) and Kuroda (1995) for an overview of the *thetic* / *categorical* distinction.

<sup>3</sup> A manifestation of the DE in Italian unaccusative constructions is analysed in Belletti (1988), but the problem of existential structures is not directly addressed in this paper. See section 6 for a unified approach to both cases.

data, and with the simplistic assumption underlying Moro's approach that the DE is to be seen as a steady grammatical constraint in English. As I already mentioned, a huge amount of research done on the distribution of definite DPs in English, from Milsark (1977) and Napoli and Rando (1978) to the most recent contributions<sup>4</sup>, offers now solid evidence against such an assumption: several *prima facie* violations of the alleged constraint are in fact acceptable strings in English, once properly contextualized, and even the basic contrast between English *\*There is John* and Italian *C'è Gianni*, which is the starting point for Moro's account, dissolves as soon as we consider the so-called 'list' reading, or the 'reminder' reading, of the English sentence. Not only the 'counterexamples' to the constraint have to be properly accommodated into the theory, instead of being excluded from the discussion; as we will see in section 7, the very notion of *existential construction* has also been used too rigidly and is in need of refinement.

The second remark has to do with theories, and is simply a consequence of the aforementioned situation. As a number of semantic and pragmatic factors are involved in the licensing of certain definites in existential contexts, purely syntactic approaches like the ones proposed until now (Safir 1985, Belletti 1988, Moro 1997, Basilico 1997) run into serious difficulties when confronted with a representative set of data. I believe that these approaches have essentially failed to specify the role of the semantic notion of *definiteness* in its interaction with the existential context, sometimes discarding it as a source of explanation, and sometimes implicitly relying on it, but without exploring its nature. A widely accepted position in recent research is the idea that semantic definiteness, and not formal definiteness, is the central notion for an account of the DE. Lyons (1999: 246) concludes his presentation of the topic stating that the DE, whatever it is, "is more likely to be a semantic or pragmatic constraint than a syntactic one". Thus, it seems that the distribution of definite and indefinite DPs in existentials cannot be explained by means of a single syntactic principle (i.e. in terms of conditions on chains, or case assignment), and has to be related to the semantic constraints imposed on definiteness by the construction<sup>5</sup>.

This leaves us with a need to find an alternative solution for the contrast between English and Italian, which is surely not as clear-cut as has often been thought, covering the case of Catalan as well, if possible. A crucial issue that is in need of clarification is the status of the Italian construction *C'è Gianni* in (3). According to Moro (1997: 154), (3) is grammatical simply because Italian is a Null Subject language that allows subjects to occur in postverbal position (a position that is not the internal DP or pivot position of existential sentences, independently of one's favourite analysis for Italian inverted subjects): in a nutshell, *C'è Gianni* would be a construction that escapes the constraint on definiteness because it is no longer an existential, at least in the canonical sense, its subject DP being located in a higher position than the VP-internal one typically associated with the DE<sup>6</sup>. As the possibility of Subject Inversion is traditionally considered a property of Null Subject languages, this is how the absence of the DE is indirectly derived from one of the values for the *pro*-drop parameter. Sentences like (3) are then characterized as locative sentences (Moro 1997:138): Italian would differ from

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<sup>4</sup> See Lumsden (1988), McNally (1992), Abbott (1993), Ward and Birner (1995), Cann (forthcoming), among many others.

<sup>5</sup> For some criticism of syntactic approaches to the DE, see for instance Abbott (1993) and Lyons (1999).

<sup>6</sup> As Moro (1997:155) puts it, "The crucial difference is that Italian provides an escape hatch for the "offending" class of DPs" (i.e. definites). His analysis is in line with an idea that is clearly stated in Rizzi (1986), Belletti (1988) and Vangsnes (1994), among many others: only VP-internal DP positions are subject to the DE, VP-adjoined (or higher) positions being excluded from the range of the constraint.

English in the systematic reanalysis of every case of *‘esserci + definite DP’* as a locative (non-existential) construction<sup>7</sup>.

I partially agree with Moro’s statement about the special status of sentences like *C’è Gianni*, but not with his claim that such a status is related to the absence of the DE in Italian. In fact, what I intend to demonstrate is that the DE is present in Italian too. Let me address first the characterization of our alleged locative sentences with *esserci*. On the one hand, an analysis of (3) as a locative construction is not totally convincing, because (a) the sentence still has a presentative meaning and conforms to the existentials’ grammatical pattern; (b) its counterparts in Catalan and Spanish are not locative predications, as one can see in (5); (c) the DP is in focus, as in existentials, and (d) it is *essere*, and not *esserci*, the verb that Italian resorts to for real locative constructions, as in (6).

- (5) a. Catalan: *Hi ha en Joan.* (Cf. *En Joan hi es –locative predication-*)  
b. Spanish: *(Ahí) está Juan.* (Cf. *Juan está –locative predication-*)
- (6) *Gianni è in giardino.*  
‘John is in the garden’

On the other hand, there is one fact, as far as I know first pointed out in Moro (1997:280, fn. 29), which supports the claim that (3) does not have the properties of an existential context: it is the possibility of assigning wide scope to the indefinite DP in examples like the one in (7).

- (7) *Non c’erano molte ragazze.*  
Not Cl-were many girls

(7) is ambiguous: it can be paraphrased with the sentences in both (8) and (9) in English. In the first case, the indefinite expression has narrow scope with respect to negation, as expected in truly existential contexts; this is, in fact, the only possible reading of the English sentence in (8) and its equivalents in Spanish and several other languages. In the second case, the indefinite escapes the well-known restriction against wide scope of the postverbal DP in existentials.

- (8) *There weren’t many girls.*
- (9) *Many girls weren’t there.*

This shows that the Italian sentence in (7) may be assigned a straightforward existential interpretation as well as another reading that we might well call ‘locative’. A non-existential analysis of *C’è Gianni* is then justified. Following Zamparelli (1996:200), it could be designated as a “pseudo-existential locative construction”. Zamparelli (1996) correctly points out that the reason why *esserci* constructions in Italian do not obey the DE is that they conflate two different structures, locative

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<sup>7</sup> Following Freeze (1992) and Zamparelli (1996: ch. 5), I am assuming that existentials are the opposite of locative predications: while in existentials the location may be interpreted as a topic, even when it is implicit (cf. the notion of *stage topic* in Erteschik-Shir 1997) and the entity is in focus, in locatives we find the opposite pattern. See also Borschev and Partee (2002) for a similar statement in terms of Perspectival Structure.



predications and existence statements<sup>8</sup>. As locative predications are exempt from the DE, any apparent counterexample to the DE in *esserci* constructions is likely to be considered a case of locative or “pseudo-existential locative” predication, being no longer neither exceptional nor unexpected.

A simple way to look at the general problem of counterexamples to the DE is to suppose that when a definite (or strong) DP appears in an existential sentence, either the sentence is not actually existential, or the definite is not behaving like a prototypical definite (i.e. it is a “weak definite”, or a “new mention definite”, or it has a “kind reading”). Most counterexamples to the DE in English are instances of the second possibility, as shown in McNally (1992), Abbott (1993), Vangsnes (1994), Ward and Birner (1995) and Zamparelli (1996). For Italian, on the contrary, one should consider the first possibility too, i.e. that *C'è Gianni* should not be considered a proper existential construction. This situation somehow blurs the original issue of the presence or absence of the DE in Italian: is this language exempt from the restriction because of the conflation of existential and “pseudo-existential locative” constructions, or is there still some evidence for the DE in Italian existentials, given that it seems to emerge in other contexts (cf. the unaccusative constructions studied in Belletti (1988))? Before offering an answer in section 4, it is worth introducing the Catalan data into the picture.

### 3.2 Catalan

As pointed out by Brucart (2002), the DE appears in Catalan in examples like those in (10):

- (10) a. Hi ha {una / \*la} solució al problema.  
 CI has {a / \*the} solution to the problem  
 b. Hi ha {un noi / \*ell} al pati.  
 CI has {a boy / \*he} in the courtyard

While (10a) is not representative of a systematic constraint (see the data in (11)) and is maybe amenable to a pragmatic explanation, (10b) illustrates a strong restriction against personal pronouns in *haver-hi* constructions, which is something one can expect, if it is assumed that pronouns are the highest elements in a definiteness scale and thus the least prone to be inserted in an existential context<sup>9</sup>. But leaving aside the special case of personal pronouns, which I will not discuss, the examples in (11), again from Brucart (2002), show that definite DPs are in fact acceptable in *haver-hi* constructions, contrary to what occurs in English or Spanish, but similar to what occurs in Italian:

- (11) a. Al pati                    hi ha el noi i la noia<sup>10</sup>.  
 In the courtyard      CI has the boy and the girl  
 b. Hi ha                        la policia al pati<sup>11</sup>.  
 CI has the police    in the courtyard

<sup>8</sup> See Ziv (1982) for a similar argument regarding Colloquial Modern Hebrew.

<sup>9</sup> Unexpectedly, clitic pronouns are acceptable in existentials in a language with as strong a DE as Spanish: cf. *Los hay* lit. ‘Them CI+has’. See Longa, Lorenzo and Rigau (1998) for an account of this fact in terms of “clitic recycling”.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. English \**There are the boy and the girl in the courtyard* and Spanish \**En el patio hay el chico y la chica*

<sup>11</sup> Cf. English \**There is the police in the courtyard* and Spanish \**Hay la policia en el patio*.

We are thus confronted with another language that seems to lack a DE, or at least shows only a minimal trace of it. The same problem arises as with Italian *C'è Gianni*: what is the status of sentences like *Hi ha en Joan* 'There is the John' in (4) or the ones in (11)? Are they true existentials? Although the Catalan construction with *haver-hi* does not exhibit the marked scope properties observed in the equivalent Italian construction<sup>12</sup>, its use and interpretation are very close to it. The main factor in determining the possible combinations of *haver-hi* with definites and indefinites seems to be the existence of a clearly locative construction with the verb *esser-hi* 'be + locative'. The contrast between *haver-hi* and *esser-hi* is the formal way of encoding the *existential* / *locative* distinction in Catalan (I will come back to such a paradigmatic contrast in section 4). If this is correct, then Catalan provides a genuine counterexample to the DE.

One way to account for the Italian and Catalan facts is by resorting to parametric variation in the syntax, in the sense of Moro (1997). I think it is beyond discussion that the crosslinguistic distribution of the DE is ultimately tied to parametric syntactic variation, but it is so only indirectly, in its dependence on the encoding of information structure. Taking into account the principles of information structure in each language is essential for our understanding of the link between syntactic positions and definiteness. This seems to me the only way to obtain an explanation that relates the DE to the semantics of definiteness. Moreover, such a perspective is compatible with the search for some stable manifestation of the DE beyond superficial variation among languages, i.e. with keeping the DE as a general semantic/pragmatic constraint, although it may surface in different ways. To show why such a path is worth following, I will present some facts that have not received much attention in the literature and have not played any role in recent theoretical discussions in the field, as far as I know.

#### 4. The Coda Constraint

##### 4.1 Codas and definites

The data I want to focus on involve the behaviour of the postverbal locative XP in existential contexts in Italian and Catalan. I assume that such a constituent, which I will refer to as the *Coda*, following common use, has to be analysed as a VP adjunct, and not as an NP adjunct or as a predicate in a small clause (see McNally 1992, Abbott 1993, Zucchi 1995, Moro 1997 for detailed argumentation). This is crucial for an appropriate understanding of available interpretations. However, I do not exclude a small clause analysis of the DP-XP sequence in certain cases, as the following discussion will make clear. The basic syntactic structure of an existential is then something like (12):

$$(12) \quad [IP \dots [VP \ V \ [DP] \ [XP]]]$$

As argued by Zucchi (1995:56), Bende-Farkas and Kamp (2001) and Keenan (2003:194), the semantic role of the coda is to provide the contextual domain for the interpretation of the postverbal DP. This means that *there*-sentences incorporate the coda property into the denotation of the postverbal DP (Zucchi's Coda condition): in *There is a dog in the garden*, the intersection of the coda and the NP denotation (the

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<sup>12</sup> This was pointed out to me by Vicky Escandell-Vidal.

denotation of *dog in the garden*) is the set that plays a central role in assessing the truth value of the proposition expressed and the compatibility between the determiner and the felicity conditions of the construction. There are different ways of implementing the basic intuition of Zucchi's analysis. Later on (in section 6) I will suggest a syntactic motivation for the Coda condition. For the purposes of this paper, I am just interested in the idea that the coda plays a relevant role in obtaining the denotation of the postverbal DP and deriving the DE.

With such ideas in mind, it is possible now to introduce the facts on which I wish to concentrate. They are illustrated in the contrasts in (13) and (14), in Italian and Catalan:

- (13) a. C' è la statua di Michelangelo, in Piazza della Signoria.  
 b. ??C' è la statua di Michelangelo in Piazza della Signoria<sup>13</sup>.  
 'There is the statue by Michelangelo(,) in Piazza della Signoria'
- (14) a. Hi havia el degà, a la reunió<sup>14</sup>.  
 b. ??Hi havia el degà a la reunió.  
 'There was the dean(,) at the meeting'

The contrasts show that dislocation of the coda is obligatory when a definite DP occurs in existentials. This is unexpected, because Italian and Catalan easily accept definites in such constructions, as we already saw in section 3. The option of leaving the locative inside the VP while keeping the definite is ungrammatical. The appearance of definites is also acceptable if the locative is implicit, as in (15):

- (15) a. C' è la statua di Michelangelo.  
 b. Hi havia el degà.

Crucially, the contrast disappears when the internal DP is indefinite:

- (16) a. C' è {una / qualche} statua di Michelangelo in Piazza della Signoria.  
 b. C' è {una / qualche} statua di Michelangelo, in Piazza della Signoria.
- (17) a. Hi havia un estudiant a la reunió.  
 b. Hi havia un estudiant, a la reunió.

Thus, indefinites are compatible with the presence of the locative coda, be it dislocated or not. Definites, on the other hand, are not compatible with a coda inside the same VP. The contrasts in (13)-(14) are quite subtle and have gone largely unnoticed. They are strongly dependent on intonation patterns, as well as on heaviness factors that I will not investigate here, but I believe that they cannot be discarded as marginal or non-systematic facts. It may be worth including some additional data in order to get a

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<sup>13</sup> This sentence would be acceptable in case *la statua di Michelangelo in Piazza della Signoria* is taken as a DP (or even, marginally, as an eventive small clause), i.e. in case the PP *in Piazza della Signoria* is not interpreted as a VP adjunct.

<sup>14</sup> The Catalan examples are from Rigau (1994) and (1997). She already noticed that in *haver-hi* constructions there is no DE, but the locative XP has to be a topic, be it left or right-dislocated:

- (i) A la reunió hi havia el degà.  
 (ii) Hi havia el degà, a la reunió.

more accurate description: so (18)-(19) confirm the phenomenon observed in the previous examples, and at the same time introduce a new problem.

- (18) a. ?C'è Chomsky al MIT.  
 b. C'è Chomsky, al MIT. / Al MIT c'è Chomsky.  
 Cl-is Chomsky at MIT
- (19) a. ?Hi ha en Chomsky a MIT.  
 b. Hi ha en Chomsky, a MIT. / A MIT, hi ha en Chomsky.  
 Cl has the Chomsky at MIT

The pattern is again the same found in (13)-(14): in Italian and Catalan, if the usual existential reading is tested, the definite DP, in this case a name, is incompatible with the coda when the coda is inside the VP. But it is important to notice that there is a possible reading for (18a) and (19a) that does not make them deviant: it is the possibility of taking the sequence corresponding to *Chomsky at MIT* as the description of an event, of something that is happening at some moment, for instance on a screen where some activity of Chomsky at MIT is being shown. This kind of eventive reading appears quite naturally too in the following examples, where the exclusion effect of the coda on the definite DP is not perceived:

- (20) C'è Gianni {in giardino / al telefono / che aspetta}  
 Cl-is John {in garden / at the phone / that waits}  
 'There is John {in the garden / on the phone / waiting}'
- (21) Hi ha la Maria {molt enfadada / al telèfon / que espera}  
 Cl has the Mary {very angry / at the phone / that waits}  
 'There is Mary {very angry / on the phone / waiting}'

A plausible analysis for such sentences involves positing a small clause as the complement of *esserci* and *haver-hi*, because a small clause is the syntactic structure that naturally fits the sequence formed by a name and an XP predicate. Moreover, the XP predicate has to be a stage-level one (cf. \**C'è Gianni genovese* 'There is John Genoese'; \**Hi ha la Maria profesora* 'There is Mary a teacher'), thus conforming to a well known restriction operating in many languages against individual-level predicates as secondary predicates in existential sentences<sup>15</sup>; this is also in accordance with a small clause analysis of the postverbal string. Then, as already announced, the initial assumption about the adjunct status of the coda in existentials has to be slightly revised: the default analysis of the coda in an existential construction is to treat it as a VP adjunct, but in some cases, when the coda behaves like a non-verbal secondary predicate, it seems natural to consider it as a predicate in a small clause<sup>16</sup>. At least, such an analysis is able to capture the essential intuition in the interpretation of sentences like (20) and (21), i.e. that the postverbal string denotes an event, a state of affairs that can be located in time. Moreover, a crosslinguistic survey of the appearances of definite

<sup>15</sup> See Milsark (1977), McNally (1992), Basilico (1997) for different accounts of this constraint.

<sup>16</sup> A small clause analysis seems plausible for the following English examples too, which Lyons (1999:239) presents as perfectly good for many speakers:

- (i) There is John waiting at the door for you.  
 (ii) There is that man on the phone again.  
 (iii) There is the postman coming up the drive.

DPs inside existentials will reveal (see section 4.2) that considering the small clause analysis as one of the options is crucial for an adequate understanding of the facts.

In any case, putting aside the cases where the existential verb selects an eventive small clause, the generalization that emerges from the data in (13) to (18) can be formulated as the Coda Constraint:

## (22) Coda Constraint

The presence of the locative coda inside the VP blocks the insertion of definite DPs: these are excluded unless the locative coda is itself (right / left-) dislocated (or removed).

The first interesting consequence we can draw from (22) is an answer to the question of whether Italian and Catalan are really exempt from the constraint on definiteness: the answer is obviously negative. As soon as some attention is paid to intonation and information structure, and the restrictions imposed by the locative coda are taken into account, the good old DE shows up again in Italian and Catalan as well, i.e. in languages where it was believed to be missing. In a sense, this is good news for a semantic approach to the DE, although it is an indication that such an approach must take detailed phonological and syntactic considerations into account.

Once this has been established, further questions arise. On the one hand, the nature of the Coda Constraint has to be explicitly addressed: is it a universal principle, or just a generalization that holds for some languages? On the other hand, one must pose the question of whether the Coda Constraint could be considered an epiphenomenon, and ultimately derived from the interaction of general principles. In fact, as it is in (22), the constraint states that there exists an incompatibility between definites and codas in the VP, but it does not offer any clue about why that incompatibility should arise. In sum, the constraint in (22) immediately calls for some principled explanation. I will defer the discussion of this second question and its implications until section 6, and I will proceed now to address the first question concerning the empirical support for (22).

## 4.2 Some crosslinguistic evidence

### 4.2.1 English

The insertion of definite DPs in existentials is much more constrained in English than in Italian or Catalan. However, it is possible to find evidence that the Coda Constraint has some presence in English too. There is an interesting asymmetry, already mentioned in Lumsden (1988: 216-219), Abbott (1993: 43-44) and Vangsnes (1994: 116), that reminds us of the interplay between definiteness and the presence of the coda: the two examples in (23) show a minimal contrast superficially, but a deeper difference in their constituent structure.

- (23) a. There's a unicorn in the garden.  
b. There's the unicorn in the garden.

In (23a) the locative PP *in the garden* is interpreted as a separate constituent—a VP adjunct—but in (23b) it has to be taken as a part of the focussed DP *the unicorn in the garden*. This seems to be a general condition in so-called “list” or “enumerative” readings for definites in existentials: if a postnominal constituent appears, it must be parsed as a nominal modifier, i.e. it is not a real coda (as noticed by Rando and Napoli

(1978: 304), “List sentences do not freely allow material outside the focused NP”). Abbott takes this to be the most salient difference between “non-contextualized existentials” —the standard ones, with indefinites in postverbal position and a coda usually following them— and “contextualized existentials” —the cases with a definite in the Focus position which have no codas and require special contextualization. The following are two of her examples of contextualized existentials:

- (24) A: Is there anything to eat?  
B: Well, there’s the leftover chicken from last night.
- (25) A: I guess we’ve called everybody.  
B: No, there’s still Mary and John.

Abbott (1993:44) suggests an explanation for the difference:

“With proper names and anaphoric definites, the predicational slot (the coda, ML) must be fixed before they are introduced. Since the referents for such NPs are, by definition, part of the discourse context, it is only appropriate to include them in an existential which has the kind of reminding function noted above. But this presupposes some purpose or issue for which the entity in question might be suitable.”

Her remarks are in line with the Coda Constraint. Abbott (1993: 47) points out that the impossibility of interpreting the PP *in the room* as a part of the postverbal DP is the reason why (26) sounds deviant (which means that as a real coda it is incompatible with a definite like *my sister*):

- (26) ?There is my sister in the room.

Abbott (1993: 44-45) supports a pragmatic view of the counterexamples to the DE, by which any definite DP which can be interpreted as introducing a new entity into the discourse should be possible in a non-contextualized existential (see also Ward and Birner 1995), while names and anaphoric definites are only possible with marked interpretations: “On the pragmatic view the effect of (some) definite NPs in focus position in an existential sentence is a sentence which requires special contextualization” (1993:47). I am sympathetic to her overall approach, although in my opinion something more specific has to be said about the role and the effects of the coda. I expect to offer some ideas in section 6. Here the relevant point is that the Coda Constraint seems to be in force in English too.

It is worth recalling that, according to Abbott (1993: 44), the condition on the coda does not hold for cataphoric definites —the ones that do not introduce familiar referents into the discourse—, as one can check in classical examples like (27a, b, c):

- (27) a. There was the usual crowd at the beach last Sunday  
b. There was the smell of pot all over the apartment  
c. There weren’t the funds necessary for the project we had in mind.

In English, cataphoric and weak definites do not obey the condition on the coda, while strong definites (for instance, anaphoric ones) have to comply with it, thus being incompatible with a locative VP adjunct and forcing the interpretation of the DP-XP

string as a single constituent, whenever possible<sup>17</sup>. This divergent behaviour is confirmed by data from other languages, like Spanish (see section 4.2.3). I will return to this issue later on, in section 6.

#### 4.2.2 French

Additional evidence for the systematic nature of the facts under analysis comes from French. Beyssade (2004), elaborating on a proposal in Lambrecht (2002), demonstrates that three different types of existential constructions have to be distinguished, each of them subjected to a particular semantic constraint, and, moreover, that the presence of the coda plays a central role in the licensing of definites.

The basic *il y a + DP + XP* construction in French (“*la construction proprement existentielle*”) is described, following McNally (1992, 1998), as an instantiation predicate that selects a property-denoting argument (i.e. an argument of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ ). It is the predicate that introduces existential quantification, as in Milsark (1977) and McNally (1992). Here the coda is optional (although some implicit location is always inferred when the coda is not explicit), and the DE appears regularly:

- (28) a. Il y a un questionnaire que je n’ai pas.  
 CI Cl-has a questionnaire that I don’t have
- b. \*Il y a le questionnaire que je n’ai pas.  
 CI Cl-has the questionnaire that I don’t have

A second type of construction is the eventive existential (“*la construction événementielle*”). It introduces a new event into the discourse, instead of a new entity, and the new event is presented as focal information<sup>18</sup>. Here are some examples from Beyssade (2004:69):

- (29) a. Il y a le téléphone qui sonne.  
 CI Cl-has the phone that sounds
- b. Il y a le chat qui meurt de froid dehors.  
 CI Cl-has the cat that dies of cold outside

In eventive existentials the coda is obligatory, as shown in (30). This, together with the eventive interpretation, makes it clear that they are to be identified with the cases where a small clause based on a stage-level predicate is selected by the predicate (Beyssade 2004:70; Côté 1999 for Quebecois French).

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<sup>17</sup> Abbott (1993:43) notices some apparent exceptions to the generalization on anaphoric definites:

(i) There are the dishes to wash, and the laundry to bring in.

I think there are reasons to analyse the coordinated constituents in (i) as small clauses, conforming to the pattern in (20) and (21). If that is correct, (i) would not be a counterexample to the condition anymore.

<sup>18</sup> Most of the examples of the eventive subtype correspond to the *Presentational Relative Construction* in Lambrecht (2002), exemplified in (i), where the coda is represented by a predicative relative clause following the postverbal DP:

(i) Il y avait une jeune fille qui fumait.  
 CI Cl-had a young girl who smoked  
 ‘There was a young girl smoking’

- (30) a. ?Il y a le téléphone.  
 b. ?Il y a le chat.

Eventive constructions allow both definites and indefinites as subjects of the embedded small clause, hence no DE is expected in them. Some interesting evidence supporting the notion of ‘eventive existential’ can be found in Rando and Napoli (1978), where it was pointed out that (31) is actually ambiguous between an eventive reading and a purely existential reading, and that two different intonational contours correspond to the two readings.

- (31) There is a woman in the house.

The third type of existential construction is termed *enumerative* by Beyssade, and is the counterpart of the well known “list contexts” and “reminders” in the literature about English. In fact a representative example like (32) is simply the translation of the English sentences in (25).

- (32) Je crois qu’on a appelé tout le monde. Non, il y a encore Marie et Jean.

Enumerative existentials don’t pose any restriction on the semantic type of the postverbal DP, hence there is no DE. The coda is optional: it is usually absent or implicit, and when it appears it is not pragmatically asserted (i.e., it is not in Focus, as in the proper existential subtype) but presupposed, thus showing the pragmatic role of Topic, while the internal DP is in Focus. It is precisely this feature of the enumerative construction that reminds us of the Coda Constraint: if a definite is inserted, the coda must be dislocated or topicalized (or be implicit). It is exactly the same condition that holds for list *there*-constructions in English and, *mutatis mutandis*, for equivalent cases in Catalan and Italian. The same connection between definiteness and locative codas shows up in all these languages. From now on I will adopt Beyssade’s classification and the terms *proper existential*, *eventive existential* and *enumerative existential*. The typology of existentials will be taken up again in section 6.

#### 4.2.3 Spanish

Interestingly, Spanish does not offer contrasts as clear as those found in Italian, French and Catalan in the interaction of definiteness and the structure of existentials. This is mainly due to the fact that the DE is quite robust in Spanish. Names are absolutely excluded from *haber* constructions, and only certain kinds of definites (superlatives, complex DPs) are allowed, as shown in (33)<sup>19</sup>:

- (33) a. No hay el menor indicio de culpabilidad.  
 Not has the slightest sign of guilt
- b. Incluso hay la perspectiva de que el viaje se pueda retrasar.  
 Even has the perspective of that the trip CI may be delayed
- c. Había el problema de los recursos hidrológicos  
 Had the problem of the resources hydrological

<sup>19</sup> The examples are from Leonetti (1999). The classical reference for definiteness in *haber* sentences is Suñer (1982).



As for the DE, Spanish is without doubt the most restrictive of all the languages under consideration. Different factors interact to give rise to this situation:

(a) the “division of labour” between the verbs *haber* and *estar* is the following: *haber* is strictly used in proper existentials, but the interpretations corresponding to eventive and enumerative existentials in other languages are always rendered by means of *estar*. For instance, *There is John* should be translated as *(Aquí) está Juan*, and *There is John at the phone* as *Está Juan al teléfono*. Since *estar* can be used inthetic utterances with a definite subject, this severely limits the possibility of having definites with *haber*: such a combination would in most cases be outranked by some optimal construction with *estar*. I consider the competition with *estar* as the main factor limiting the use of *haber* with definites.

(b) *haber* seems to exclude the selection of embedded small clauses, contrary to what has been observed for Catalan *haver-hi*, Italian *esserci*, English *there be*, French *avoir* and Chinese *you*. As a consequence, one of the main contexts responsible for DE violations is excluded.

(c) last but not least, Spanish syntax is not as transparent with respect to information structure as the syntax of Italian or Catalan, and the grammatical mechanisms for Topic and Focus marking are certainly not the same. This leads to different possibilities for word order patterns (see section 6 for some comparative remarks).

However, I believe that certain subtle “coda effects” can be found in some cases with definites after the verb *haber*:

- (34) a. [Había unos vinos muy caros en la tienda] / [Había unos vinos muy caros], en la tienda  
Had some wines very expensive in the shop  
'There were some very expensive wines in the shop'
- b. ?[Había sólo los vinos más caros en la tienda] / [Había sólo los vinos más caros], en la tienda  
Had only the wines most expensive in the shop  
'There were only the most expensive wines in the shop'

Several native speakers of Spanish have expressed doubts on the contrasts in (34), hence I prefer not to rely on those examples as solid supporting evidence for the Coda Constraint. For some reason the presence of the coda inside the construction seems almost irrelevant for definiteness in Spanish. I will suggest an explanation for this difference in section 6. The data collected from other languages constitute, in any case, an acceptable starting point for theoretical discussion<sup>20</sup>.

## 5. Inverted subjects

All the previous facts concerning the effects of the coda on definiteness are still waiting for a global explanation, but they could not be properly understood if yet another cluster of data was not introduced. The rationale for enlarging our set of basic phenomena a bit more is quite simple: there are further manifestations of the DE outside

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<sup>20</sup> Chinese provides additional evidence supporting the Coda Constraint: see Huang (1987), Li (1996) and Chang (2004) for discussion.

the restricted area of existential sentences, and they are not unrelated to those already mentioned<sup>21</sup>. In fact, they will provide important clues for a global account.

In Romance linguistics, in the case of French and Italian in particular, the oddness of definite postverbal subjects in certain constructions has often been pointed out. I will take some representative Italian examples from Benincà, Salvi and Frison (1988), Rizzi (1986) and Belletti (1988) as the basis of my argumentation. In (35) there is evidence for a contrast between definite and indefinite postverbal subjects in unaccusative and passive sentences:

- (35) a. È entrato un ladro dalla finestra  
Is entered a thief through the window  
'A thief has entered through the window'
- b. ?È entrato il ladro dalla finestra.  
Is entered the thief through the window
- (36) a. È affondata una nave alle cinque.  
Is sunk a ship at five  
'A ship has sunk at five'
- b. ?È affondata la nave alle cinque.  
Is sunk the ship at five
- (37) a. È stato messo un libro sul tavolo.  
Is been put a book on the table  
'There was put a book on the table.'
- b. ?È stato messo il libro sul tavolo. (Cf. Il libro è stato messo sul tavolo.)  
Is been put the book on the table (The book has been put on the table.)

The crucial fact that relates this kind of DE to the “coda effects” is that definite postverbal subjects are odd when the constituent order is VSX, as in (35)-(37), but they do not produce any anomaly in simple VS constructions, as shown in (38)<sup>22</sup>:

- (38) a. È entrato il ladro.  
b. È affondata la nave.

Rizzi (1986) and Belletti (1988) already noticed that as soon as the last constituent is dislocated, topicalised, destressed or marginalized, and correspondingly an intonational break is placed after the postverbal subject, the definite DPs become fully acceptable, with a narrow focus reading, and the DE disappears. The following examples prove that the deviance vanishes in such conditions:

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<sup>21</sup> Another fact that is worth analyzing as an extension of the Coda Constraint is the ban on topicalization of the DP in existential contexts, due to the presence of the coda: internal DPs cannot be topicalized unless the coda is itself dislocated (or removed) —at least in Romance languages. The same “coda effects” reappear when the DP position is relativized, in non restrictive relatives. Unfortunately, space limitations do not allow me to include a discussion of such correlation of topicalization and definiteness (see Leonetti (2005) for a survey of the data).

<sup>22</sup> I omit the sentence corresponding to (37) because it is ungrammatical due to independent reasons: the locative complement *sul tavolo* ‘on the table’ is an argument of *mettere* and cannot be removed.

- (39) a. È entrato il ladro, dalla finestra. / Dalla finestra, é entrato il ladro.  
 b. È affondata la nave, alle cinque. / Alle cinque, é affondata la nave.  
 c. È stato messo il libro, sul tavolo. / Sul tavolo, é stato messo il libro.

It is quite clear that the acceptability pattern is the same as that which emerges in existential constructions: with respect to definiteness, the final constituent plays the role that the coda plays in existentials. As Italian and Catalan are so similar to each other as far as the DE in existentials is concerned, it is expected that they are similar too in unaccusative constructions, and in fact this expectation is borne out:

- (40) a. Ha nascut una nena dins un taxi.  
 Has born a girl inside a taxi  
 ‘A girl was born inside a taxi.’  
 b. ?Ha nascut la nena dins un taxi. (Cf. La nena ha nascut dins un taxi.)  
 Has born the girl inside a taxi  
 c. Dins un taxi, ha nascut la nena.
- (41) a. Ha arribat un estudiant al periòdic.  
 Has arrived a student to the newspaper  
 ‘A student has arrived to the newspaper’  
 b. ?Ha arribat el estudiant al periòdic.  
 Has arrived the student to the newspaper  
 c. Ha arribat el estudiant, al periòdic.
- (42) a. Es va enfonsar una nau a les cinc.  
 Cl sunk a ship at five  
 ‘A ship sank at five’  
 b. ?Es va enfonsar la nau a les cinc.  
 Cl sunk the ship at five  
 c. Es va enfonsar la nau, a les cinc.

What Italian and Catalan share is a ban against VSX order when the subject is definite. We are not dealing with existential sentences anymore in (35)-(42), but still we havethetic structures that typically introduce new referents into the discourse, with passive and unaccusative verbs. The DE reappears, though maybe in a weaker fashion. As attested in Kampers-Mahne et al. (2004:572-574), subject inversion in French confirms the systematic nature of this pattern, both in subjunctive clauses –(43)- and in indicative unaccusative clauses –(44)-: inverted definite subjects may not be followed by any constituent, while the restriction does not hold for indefinite ones.

- (43) a. \*Je veux que parte Paul {immédiatement / aux Etats-Unis}.  
 ‘I want that Paul leaves immediately / for the United States’  
 b. Je veux que partent trois étudiants {immédiatement / aux Etats-Unis}.

'I want that three students leave immediately / for the United States'

(44) a. \*Ce jour-là fut assassiné César sans pitié.

'That day Ceasar was assassinated without pity'

b. Aussitôt entrèrent dix policiers avant même qu'on les ait annoncés.

'Immediately ten policemen came in even before they had been announced'

Kampers-Mahne et al. (2004) suggest that the contrasts in (43) and (44) are related to the fact that definites are less naturally focused than indefinites. In fact a basic condition for subject inversion to be felicitous is that the subject is in Focus. For the moment, it is worth recalling that some cases of inverted definite subjects followed by another constituent are judged to be grammatical in French, and they are always non-anaphoric definites, as in the examples in (45):

(45) a. Je veux que soit convoqué le tribunal avant demain.

'I want that the tribunal is convoked before tomorrow'

b. Je regrette qu'ait été impliquée la classe politique dans cette affaire.

'I regret that the political class has been implicated in this case'

Thus, "it is only strong definite subject DPs that cannot be inverted when not in sentence-final position, the default focus position" (Kampers-Mahne 2004:574)<sup>23</sup>. It seems clear that the constraints operating on definites are essentially the same as in Italian and Catalan and, more importantly, the same as in existential sentences<sup>24</sup>.

Interestingly, there is no DE in inverted subject constructions in other Romance languages, such as Spanish and Romanian, where sentences like those in (46) and (47) are judged to be acceptable<sup>25</sup>.

(46) a. Ha entrado el ladrón por la ventana.

Has entered the thief through the window

b. Se ha hundido el barco a las cinco.

Has sunk the boat at five

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<sup>23</sup> In my opinion non-anaphoric or non-referential definites are acceptable as inverted subjects in VSX sequences in Italian too (for instance, in *È entrata la speranza nel suo cuore* 'Hope has entered his / her heart' or *Sul più bello è arrivato il marito in casa* '... her husband got home'). No reference to this particular fact can be found in the literature, as far as I know. It simply strengthens the parallelism between inverted subject constructions and existential constructions.

<sup>24</sup> Although Brazilian Portuguese shows no systematic DE in existential contexts, certain subtle contrasts can be found in sentences with inverted definite subjects. The relative position of the subject DP and the locative PP seems to be relevant for acceptability in (i)-(iii): the first sentence, with VSX order, is slightly degraded in comparison with (ii), where there is no locative complement, and (iii), where the order is VXS (thanks to Helena Guerra and Aroldo Leal de Andrade for their judgements).

(i) ?Chegou o homem na sala.

Arrived the man to the room

(ii) Chegou o homem.

(iii) Chegou na sala o homem.

As already observed for other Romance languages, this is a form of the DE: inverted definite subjects are odd when another constituent prevents them from being in an unmarked Focus position (typically at the end of the sentence).

<sup>25</sup> The Romanian examples in (47) are from Alboiu (2002: ch. 3).

- (47) a. A cumpArat Ion {inelul / un inel}  
 Has bought John the ring / a ring
- b. A cumpArat {inelul / un inel} Ion

Moreover, as already stated in section 4.2.3, the effects triggered by the presence of the coda in existential sentences do not seem as clear in Spanish as in other languages. Some factor interacting with the DE must be responsible for the contrast between Spanish (and Romanian) on one hand and Italian, Catalan and French on the other.

This raises at least two questions. The first one is how to capture the role of the coda / final constituent in its interaction with definiteness in Italian and Catalan. The second one is why the central facts are present in certain languages but absent in others.

Let me first address the question concerning the motivation for the “coda effects”, in order to face the problem of crosslinguistic distribution later on a more solid basis (cf. section 6). The classical way to deal with the data in (35)-(37) is by means of Case Theory<sup>26</sup>. Belletti (1988) claims that, if it is assumed that unaccusative verbs may assign partitive case to their internal argument, the DE follows automatically from a semantic clash between partitive and definiteness. This explains the deviance of (35b) or (36b). When the final constituent is dislocated or removed, the DE disappears and definiteness is licensed in the subject DP; Belletti (1988) and Rizzi (1986) argue that in these cases the final complement has been extracted from the VP and the subject DP is in a VP-adjoined position where it receives nominative case, and not partitive. As nominative case is perfectly compatible with definiteness, the examples where the subject occupies the final position –presumably a position external to the VP- are exempt from the DE. All the examples in (35)-(42) fit the analysis, which correctly predicts that only those postverbal subjects occurring in an object position will be constrained by the DE. In fact the postverbal definites in (48) are acceptable, with a narrow focus interpretation<sup>27</sup>:

- (48) a. È entrato dalla finestra il ladro.  
 b. È arrivato al giornale lo studente.

In spite of its simplicity and elegance, such an account of the DE in terms of partitive case assignment does not seem totally convincing to me. On the one hand, there is no compelling evidence for partitive case at least in Romance languages, and the formal mechanism is related to the semantics of definiteness only by stipulation. On the other hand, if every instance of the DE is reduced to a clash between case and definiteness, it is hard to understand why Spanish has a strong manifestation of the DE in existentials, where it is plausible to assume that partitive is assigned, but not with inverted subjects of unaccusative constructions (cf. (46))<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> See Brassil (2004) for a recent reappraisal of this approach to the DE in Spanish.

<sup>27</sup> As reported in Frascarelli (2000:108), Cardinaletti (2001) and Belletti (2001:78), among others, VSX sentences with definite subjects in Italian are deviant when pronounced with unmarked intonation, but perfect when pronounced with narrow focus on the subject. The dislocation of the final complement automatically projects narrow focus on the inverted subject.

<sup>28</sup> I do not intend to deny the relevance of the well attested interactions between case and definiteness. I refer the reader to Leonetti (2004) for some speculations on accusative and specificity in Spanish.

Instead of trying to further elaborate the Partitive Hypothesis, I prefer to explore a different approach to the distribution of the DE, drawing on focus structure.

## 6. Focus and definiteness

My starting point is an uncontroversial observation concerning word order and focus assignment in Italian. While VOS / VXS is an acceptable pattern with Narrow Focus on the inverted subject, VSO / VSX is possible only with a marked intonation, more precisely with the final constituent dislocated or marginalized, and Narrow Focus on the subject. French and Catalan show similar tendencies, while other Romance languages, like Spanish and Romanian, allow both VXS and VSX quite naturally (Zubizarreta 1998, Alboiu 2002). The characteristic feature of Italian and Catalan information structure, as stated in Frascarelli (2000) and Vallduví (1995), is an extraposition / dislocation process that takes place in Narrow Focus sentences: any constituent that is not focal is extraposed, so that the sentence is partitioned into a single constituent containing the verb and the Focus, and a number of emarginated constituents on either side. What Italian and Catalan encode by means of syntactic extraposition is marked in other languages by other defocusing mechanisms, such as scrambling, special case morphology or intonational contour.

With this in mind, it is possible to perceive a striking correlation between information structure and definiteness in Italian and Catalan. Briefly, the DE manifests itself when a postverbal definite subject does not receive a Narrow Focus interpretation, in particular in constructions where the unmarked interpretation is one of Broad Focus (Sentence Focus) or where another constituent following the subject is assigned Narrow Focus. Two of the preceding examples are repeated here in order to illustrate the generalization:

- (13) ?C'è la statua di Michelangelo in Piazza della Signoria.
- (35) ?È entrato il ladro dalla finestra.

Let's review the case of (13) first. Being an existential construction, hence a prototypical instance ofthetic construction, (13) requires the assignment of a Broad Focus interpretation. Being definite, the postverbal DP gives rise to an anomaly, unless it is assigned Narrow Focus, forcing the dislocation of the coda, as predicted by the Coda Constraint. As for (35), it should be compatible both with Broad Focus and with Narrow Focus on the last constituent, but again the postverbal DP is incompatible with those readings, and the sentence has to be interpreted with Narrow Focus on the subject and the concomitant dislocation of the locative PP. The generalization, then, is valid for the two DE contexts in Italian (and Catalan). Anyway, the basic question still needs an answer: why are only definites, and not indefinites, constrained by Focus assignment?

Frascarelli (2000:182, fn. 32) offers a valuable clue when she states that in presentative structures a definite “cannot be part of ‘all new’ information. So, narrow focalization is needed to exclude its interpretation as a Topic. In other words, we can either say “È affondata LA NAVE alle cinque” or “È affondata # la nave # alle cinque” (in which ‘la nave’ is an internal Topic).” So, according to Frascarelli’s remark, in certain constructions definites must be Topic or Narrow Focus, but they resist their incorporation into Broad Focus. In case they get interpreted as Topics, the resulting construction may be locative; when they are interpreted as Narrow Focus, not necessarily contrastive, the result is a “pseudo-existential locative construction”, a “list”

or “reminder” reading, or simply a presentative construction (in the languages that permit this option). So maybe the basic question must be reformulated as in (49):

(49) Why do definites need to escape from Broad Focus in certain constructions?

This truly seems to be the basic question because it points to the heart of the DE problem. Let’s concentrate on proper existentials, leaving eventive and enumerative constructions aside until next section. First of all, notice that the need to be interpreted as a part of Broad Focus only affects postverbal subjects followed by some other constituent; in other syntactic positions the subject is assigned a Topic reading or a Narrow Focus reading. Intuitively, definites (at least names and anaphoric definites) are too “prominent”, in a sense that is to be further specified, to be “pressed” into a thetic construction. There seems to be a clash between definiteness and the need to compute an appropriate thetic reading of the sentence. This suggests that a valuable theoretical option would be trying to derive the DE from theticity, but serious difficulties arise with thetic contexts that allow definites, for instance sentences like *Llega el tren* or *Arriva il treno* ‘The train arrives’ in Spanish and Italian. So maybe the most adequate strategy is to make Broad Focus / theticity interact with some other property. Here I see no way to avoid resorting to some construction-specific condition, lexically associated with the verb or the construction. After all, this is what most theories do when they derive the DE from some Novelty Condition, or some felicity condition regarding the denotation of the postverbal DP.

Assuming that the lexical requirements of the verbs that characterize existential constructions have to be taken into account (and I will devote the next section to this issue), the central property of existentials is that they have to be interpreted as Broad Focus sentences, in the unmarked case. This is not incompatible with the hypothesis that there is some kind of implicit spatio-temporal topic (a stage topic)<sup>29</sup>. Both the coda and the DP must be inside the Broad Focus. This triggers a sort of integration of the two constituents into each other; definites are excluded from such an integration process when their reference obtains from contextual information outside the construction. I take this integration to be the grammatical counterpart of Zucchi’s (1995) so-called Coda Condition. As already mentioned in section 4, Zucchi (1995) suggests that the role of the coda is to act as the contextual domain for the interpretation of the postverbal DP. In fact some assumption about the interaction between the coda and the DP seems to be necessary for an account of the DE. On the one hand, the felicity conditions of *there*-sentences require that the common ground be neutral about the (non)emptiness of the intersection of the set denoted by the DP constituent with the set denoted by the coda; on the other hand, the semantics of definite and strong determiners demand that the common ground entail that the denotation of DP should not be empty (this is the presuppositional basis of Zucchi’s analysis). An interpretive conflict arises when the coda provides a part of the denotation of the definite DP: in a few words, the intersection of the DP set with the XP set is subject to contradictory requirements by the existential predicate and the strong determiner, i.e. the construction requires that the (non)emptiness of the intersection should not be previously established in the context, but definiteness demands the DP denotation to be contextually established. This works as a derivation of the DE only if the coda is given an interpretive role along the lines of Zucchi’s proposal. Presenting the coda as a pragmatically presupposed constituent or a dislocated Topic prevents the occurrence of interpretive conflicts with definites.

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<sup>29</sup> See Basilico (1997) for a similar proposal about *there*.

Zucchi's analysis has been criticized on different grounds, and I am not sure that his theory works adequately for weak / cataphoric definites, but it certainly offers some interesting ideas on the role of codas. Moreover, it is in accordance with all the previous considerations on the interpretation of existentials, since the reason why the denotation of the coda plays such a crucial role in his account (according to the Coda Condition) is to be found in the particular information structure of existential sentences and the requirement on Broad Focus as a default interpretation. Otherwise, one wonders why the coda should intervene in the licensing of (in)definiteness in the construction.

In any case, my observations concerning the role of the coda are also compatible, as far as I can see, with an account of the DE in terms of the property-denoting condition on postverbal DPs or semantic incorporation, as in McNally (1992, 1998) and Bende-Farkas and Kamp (2001). Suppose that the characteristic property of existential sentences is a constraint on the semantic type of the internal DP: it has to be of type  $\langle e, t \rangle$ . At least a part of the classical facts covered by the DE are predicted in this way. The motivation for the constraint could be the necessity of "compacting" the DP and the coda into a focal constituent, as if the presence of the coda should force semantic incorporation of the nominal in order to obtain athetic utterance (recall that semantic incorporation is not supposed to affect definites, or at least strong / anaphoric definites). As the semantic analysis, whatever version we choose, is entirely to be worked out and cannot be developed here, I do not intend to present a complete account of the DE, but just to specify some features of its dependence on information structure. My claim is simply that DE contexts are Broad Focus structures where the internal DP must be in focus and, at least in a number of languages, it cannot be definite unless it is the only constituent in focus, apart from the verb (these are the cases where the DE reduces to the clash between definiteness and the coda or final constituent). All DE contexts involve focal DP positions, which suggests that Topic-Focus articulation always plays a role in (in)definiteness constraints.

As for the "coda effects", the major underlying problem we face here is that we still don't know how informationally complex athetic structure can be, nor even how to pose such a question in a precise way<sup>30</sup>. On the one hand, if athetic utterance is an all-new utterance, it must be within some limits in its complexity, since an increase in complexity will produce some Topic / Focus partition. On the other hand, languages differ in the extent to which they allow such an increase without introducing informational partitions. In particular, what is relevant for the DE is the fact that some languages prohibit the insertion of definites in internal positions in presentational sentences (Italian, Catalan, French) while others allow such an operation (Spanish, possibly Romanian). This is surely related to general features of the syntax of Topic and Focus in the two groups of languages, as I have tried to show in the previous sections. The first group is transparent and highly restrictive in the marking of information structure, the second one is more opaque and quite permissive, so that in certain cases a constituent that has to be obligatorily emarginated / dislocated in a language of the first group can be easily integrated into Broad Focus in a language of the second group. Not only is this difference crucial for predicting the distribution of the DE, it should be taken as one of the basic parameters of information structure from a comparative point of view.

## 7. A typology of existentials

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<sup>30</sup> Lambrecht and Polinsky (1997) provide a list of basic properties that characterizethetic sentences.



The claim that there are different kinds of “existential constructions”, each of them associated with different conditions on the internal DP, is not new. It has been presented in one version or other in works like Huang (1987), Abbott (1993), Li (1996), Lambrecht (2002), Paducheva (2003) and Beyssade (2004). It is undeniable that whatever classification of existentials we choose, it will be relevant for an analysis of the DE. But it also seems clear that such a classification is only a descriptive tool that in turn raises new questions and new problems (for instance, why are the subtypes just these ones? Is it possible to decompose the typology into a combination of basic features?). In this section I intend to clarify the place that a typology of existentials occupies in a discussion of the DE.

Suppose there are three basic types of existentials, as assumed until now: the proper existential, the eventive and the enumerative. Pure existential sentences are the prototypical instance ofthetic / rhematic structures, they typically include a locative adjunct (although it is not obligatory), and the internal DP lacks autonomous reference. This means that its interpretation has to be solved without accessing contextual information from outside the construction; it is within the limits of the existential construction that the referential properties of the DP are to be established, which is in line with the Novelty Condition –moreover, I would claim that the Novelty Condition actually is a result of this requirement, since it bans access to given information and thus to anaphoric readings. The requirement of non-autonomous reference is dependent on the presence of the coda. It can be satisfied by expressions that do not encode any referential procedure, like indefinites —they only encode information about quantities and their interpretation can be determined by the surrounding elements (the verb, negation, quantificational adverbs)—, and, in some cases, by expressions that do encode some kind of referential procedure, like definites —they encode a uniqueness condition, but such a condition is not necessarily checked on contextual information. When definite expressions rely on contextual information for their interpretation, thus being assigned a deictic or an anaphoric reading, they are typically excluded from proper existentials (for instance, pronouns); in case they satisfy the uniqueness condition by means of linguistic information that is accessible in the sentence, in principle they should not be excluded from existentials (it is the case of “weak” definites and “cataphoric” definites, where definiteness is solved inside the DP).

The second basic type is the eventive existential. I believe that the only thing that changes here, with respect to proper existentials, is that the postverbal expression is propositional and of the Stage-Level kind. The syntactic format of the propositional content is a small clause with its own Topic / Focus articulation. Inside the small clause the DP acts like an internal topic, thus eliminating any motivation for the DE: we noticed that names and definite DPs are possible in these contexts. The only additional assumption that is needed to deal with eventive existentials is this: in some languages the existential verb is able to select a small clause as its argument (Catalan, Italian, French, English) and in others it is not (Spanish).

Finally, the third type is the enumerative one, with the classical “list” or “reminder” reading. Here the coda is implicit or absent, and definite DPs are allowed: the presupposed or implicit nature of the coda poses no constraint on the referential status of the postverbal DP, so that there is no DE. As a result, only pure existentials with codas are affected by the DE. If enumeratives are just a third type of structural pattern for existential sentences, we could say that the three classical analyses that were proposed in the literature on existentials, namely the NP-analysis, the adjunct-analysis and the small clause-analysis, are adequate. Each one of them is adequate for one of the

three patterns described. In some sense, all of them are correct, although I consider the adjunction analysis to be the default one.

Some additional comment on enumerative existential sentences is in order. In English, they seem to be just an exceptional and marked use of the proper existential construction, instead of being an independent construction. The main motivations for viewing them as a special use are their marked status and the strong contextual restrictions that govern their appearance in discourse —recall that they are characterized as “contextualized existentials” in Abbott (1993). As pointed out in Abbott (1993) and Lumsden (1988:214-223), so-called “list” and “reminder” interpretations are pragmatically inferred assumptions, triggered by the exceptional insertion of a definite DP in postverbal position; such readings may be seen as “last resort” inferential strategies involved in the interpretive process of an otherwise ill-formed construction. There is no semantic distinction between existential and enumerative interpretations, and the relevant examples seem to retain a literal existential interpretation along with an enumerative one. I refer to Lumsden (1988), Abbott (1993) and Cann (forthcoming) for some more details on the pragmatic approach to sentences like *There is John*. Now the question that an approach like this may raise is why *There is John* forces its enumerative reinterpretation and happens to be finally acceptable —though as a marked and strongly contextualized use— while other ill-formed strings remain odd, and no inferential mechanism is there to rescue them. I think that two factors conspire to license enumerative existentials in English: one is the already mentioned absence of the coda, which changes the conditions for inserting a definite, since without the coda the definite is not constrained to be a part of Broad Focus; the other one is crucial and has to do with the absence of lexical alternative ways to convey an enumerative reading in English. In a few words, there are no competitors that might be better solutions than a *there be* construction. This opens the possibility for a contextual reinterpretation of the marked string. The same happens in French with enumerative uses of *il y a DP*. Spanish, on the contrary, absolutely excludes sentences like *\*Hay Juan*, mainly because it can resort to the use of *estar* (*Está Juan* is perfect, though pragmatically constrained too). Thus, *haber* is used only in strictly existential sentences, and correspondingly the DE shows up in a strong version in Spanish.

Catalan and Italian present different situations. Catalan allows sentences like *Hi ha en Joan*, though they are not limited to enumerative interpretations. As already pointed out, *haver-hi* is in competition with *esser-hi*, but *esser-hi* is limited to locative uses: this implies that the range of possible presentational uses with postverbal DPs that cannot be expressed by means of *esser-hi* is covered by *haver-hi*. With no competing lexical alternatives, *haver-hi* admits a number of contextual reinterpretations when followed by definite DPs.

Italian allows any kind of definites in the postverbal position with *esserci*. This is due to the conflation of existential and quasi-locative constructions into a single pattern, as observed by Zamparelli (1996). Purely locative sentences are based on the verb *essere*, but the remaining possibilities are covered by *esserci*. Being not limited to existential use, *esserci* does not give rise to the habitual DE unless the coda is inside the VP. Sentences like *C'è Gianni* are not exceptional, marked, uses of an existential pattern, like its counterparts in English.

Much more work is still to be done on the lexical means that languages rely on for the expression of the different kinds of existentials, but for my purposes it is enough to point to the central role of this factor in the distribution of the DE. As for enumerative uses, then, they are marked reinterpretations of existential sentences, as a

result of last resort inferential strategies (the case of English or French), or otherwise they are possible readings of non purely existential constructions (the case of Italian).

Summarizing, there are two basic patterns that syntax generates:

- (a) the verb is followed by DP + optional XP coda
- (b) the verb is followed by an eventive small clause

Some languages only use the first one, some languages use both. Only in the first one is some variant of the DE expected. In addition, the presence and distribution of the DE is dependent on (a) the way each language lexicalizes the expression of existential and related interpretations; and b) the extent to which it allows for complex structures and referentially independent DPs inside Broad Focus sentences. Therefore, the possible types of existential constructions are only one of the ingredients of the complex cluster of notions needed for a crosslinguistic approach to the DE.

## 8. Concluding remarks

Many questions still lack an adequate answer for a global view of the DE, but I hope that this discussion has highlighted at least a number of partial results that could contribute to a better understanding of (in)definiteness marking. Among them are the following ones:

1. The DE is usually presented as a diagnostic for definiteness and as a defining general property of existentials, but a look at different types of existential constructions shows that only pure existentials exhibit the DE as a core property. This may lead a grammarian into error if (s)he fails to pay attention to the relevant set of data or ignores the distinction between proper and eventive existentials.
2. There are grounds to believe that the DE manifests itself in some way in most, if not all, languages, though its presence may be obscured by a combination of factors, partly lexical, partly syntactic. The fact that it is such a widespread phenomenon supports the accepted view that it is a semantic / pragmatic constraint “involving something broader than grammatical definiteness” (Lyons 1999:246).
3. Just identifying some condition associated with the sequence *there be* as the origin of the DE (for instance, the Novelty Condition) is not enough. The presence of the coda must be taken into account and given a central role, possibly assuming that the coda requires some kind of semantic incorporation of the internal DP into the predicate in order to obtain athetic reading of the construction. The basic factors involved in the DE that I have tried to highlight are (a) the role of the internal composition of the existential construction, and in particular the presence of the coda in final position; (b) the effects of different lexical predicates competing for the expression of existential / presentative meanings (*haber* and *estar* in Spanish, *esserci* and *essere* in Italian, *haver-hi* and *esser-hi* in Catalan); (c) the possibility that the existential verb selects an eventive small clause, thus cancelling the conditions for the DE, and finally (d) the crosslinguistic variation in Focus structure and information packaging as a source of contrasts linked to the DE both in existential sentences and in inverted subject constructions. Much work is still needed to tie all these factors together in a fully developed theory.
4. The variety of discourse values that existentials show (pure existence, location, enumeration, presentation...) is the result of the interpretive mechanisms triggered by the combination of the existential predicate with different kinds of DPs and codas. Some violations of the DE in languages like English are only acceptable as contextual reinterpretations of marked constructions (the ‘list’ / ‘reminder’ cases).

5. The DE is one of the constraints affecting the syntactic distribution of definites and indefinites. While it favours indefinites over definites in certain contexts, other constraints favour definites or specific DPs in other contexts (typically, in subject position). As argued in Lyons (1999: ch.6), they are crosslinguistic general tendencies, stricter in some languages than in others. I believe that we have enough evidence to consider all of them as ultimately derived from the principles of information structure, since definiteness / specificity requirements are always favoured by Topic positions, and indefiniteness / non-specificity requirements are favoured by Focus positions. It is information structure that mediates between (in)definiteness and syntactic structure. In this sense the DE is only a small part of a broader mechanism connecting reference and grammar.

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