A CASE STUDY IN SYNTAX-SEMANTICS ISOMORPHY: SOME THOUGHTS ON EXISTENTIAL BARE PLURAL 'SUBJECTS'[*]

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1. Introduction

There appears to be some consensus in the literature that semantically, existentially interpreted bare plural noun phrases are predicates, that is, of type <e,t> (see, e.g., Dobrovie-Sorin and Laca 1996, van Geenhoven 1998, McNally 1998). Likewise, it has been suggested that existential bare plurals are (part of the) focus domain (cf. Diesing 1992, É. Kiss 1998, and Cohen and Erteschik-Shir 2002 as well as Kallulli 1999, 2006). These two claims constitute in fact two sides of the same phenomenon, since being a predicate and being (part of) focus are two ways of talking about one and the same thing, namely assertion, and not identification or presupposition.[1] But in spite of these properties, it is generally *a priori* assumed that syntactically, existential bare plurals can be arguments and as such they can also occur as subjects. Indeed it seems obvious that in a sentence such as 'Dogs are barking out there' the bare plural in what appears to be the syntactic subject position is indeed interpreted existentially. There is then a certain mismatch between the semantic and the syntactic status of existential bare plurals; on the one hand they are predicates (semantically), and on the other hand they can be arguments (syntactically). Within a framework that assumes a systematic mapping between syntax and semantics this state of affairs is not ideal.

In this paper, we develop an analysis of existential bare plurals that allows precisely for a more transparent mapping between syntactic and semantic representations. Capitalizing on the idea that focus is to be analyzed as predicate also syntactically, we contend that what at first sight appear to be existential bare plural 'subjects' are in fact also syntactically predicates displaced to clause-initial position. While this idea has already been argued for in Kallulli (2006), who also claims that constructions with apparent existential bare plural subjects are bi-clausal, in this paper we provide a more detailed discussion of the structure of these constructions.

[1] This idea can be traced back to Paul (1880) who argued that what he called the "psychological predicate" receives the main accent.

This paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we sum up the arguments for the [+focus] status of existentially interpreted bare plural 'subjects'. In section 3 we address the question why focus elicits an existential interpretation. Finally in section 4 we put forward a syntactic analysis to account for the semantic properties discussed in the previous sections. Section 5 briefly concludes.

2. Generic vs. Existential Bare Plurals: The Role of Focus

As is well-known, bare plurals in Germanic may be interpreted either generically or existentially, as in (2) and (3) for the sentence in (1), respectively.

(1)   Firemen are available.   (Diesing 1992: 17)

(2)   a. $\text{Gen}_{x,t}$ [x is a fireman $\wedge$ t is a time] x is available at t
        b. Gen_{t} [t is a time] $\exists_x x$ is a fireman $\wedge$ x is a available at t

(3) $\exists_x x$ is a fireman $\wedge$ x is a available

While Diesing (1992) acknowledges in passing the role of focus on the interpretation of the bare plural in (1), according to her theory, the bare plural subject of a stage-level predicate can be either existential or generic, whereas the bare plural subject of an individual level predicate is always generic. However, as É. Kiss (1998) points out, several facts contradict this. For instance, individual-level predicates do allow an existentially interpreted VP-internal subject if it is contrastively focused as in the examples in (4). (The contrastive focus reading is elicited by a superlative in (4a), and by an *only* associated with the bare plural in (4b).)

(4)   a.   GIRLS know mathematics the best in my school.
        b.   In this village, only WOMEN have blue eyes.

While in both examples the (capitalized) bare plurals may be interpreted generically (referring to the kind 'girls' and the kind 'women', respectively), crucially, they may also refer to an unidentified subset of girls and women (i.e., be interpreted existentially). Under the latter, existential reading, (4a) is true also in a situation in which there are only two girls (out of many others attending the same school) who know mathematics better than any of the boys of the school. Likewise, under this reading, (4b) is true also in a situation in which only a minority of women, but none of the men, have blue eyes in the village talked about.

É. Kiss also claims that there are stage-level predicates — typically, adjectival predicates — that do not allow a non-contrastive existentially interpreted bare

plural subject. According to her, the bare plurals in the examples in (5) cannot be interpreted existentially unless they are contrastively focused, even though their predicates express temporary, stage-level properties.

(5)   a.   Children are noisy in the street.
         b.   Dishes were dirty.

While we disagree with É. Kiss on the necessarily contrastive nature of the focus involved here, we agree that the bare plurals in the examples in (5) cannot be existentially interpreted if they are not contained within the focus domain. This supposition is strongly suggested by the felicity of these examples as out-of-the-blue statements, or as answers to questions in contexts such as the ones in (6), where the focus domain consists of the whole proposition.

(6)   a.   A: What's happening out there? – B: Children are noisy in the street.
         b.   A: What's up? – B: Children are noisy in the street.
         c.   A: What's going on up there? – B: Dishes are dirty, food is stale, …

In fact, as É. Kiss herself notes, the verbal predicate corresponding to *noisy* allows the existential reading of its bare plural subject also in case it is not contrastively focused:

(7)   Children are making noise in the yard.

Indeed, as Mara Frascarelli (p.c.) points out to us, existentially interpreted bare plurals are invariably accompanied by focus markers in languages that have such.

To generalize over the data presented so far, focus on the bare plural, whether contrastive or not, seems to be a necessary condition for it to be interpreted existentially. Note, however, that *focus* here should not be identified with narrow focus only (that is, focus on the bare plural); it is sufficient that the bare plural is part of the focus domain (and as such not topical or [–focus]).

In this vein, É. Kiss' third argument against Diesing's characterization that there are individual-level predicates that can also take a (non-contrastive) existentially interpreted bare plural subject, as in the examples in (8), is captured by the same generalization, since the sentences in (8) are also felicitous in out-of-the-blue contexts.

(8)   a.   Volcanoes line both sides of the river.   (É. Kiss 1998: 149)
         b.   Ancient figures are carved on the walls of this cave.
         c.   In this area, hot springs exist.
         d.   Fish abound in the lake.

Finally note that, as Reinhart (1995: 85) remarks, "[there] is one context all studies agree upon: the NP in *there*-sentences can never be topic." For this reason, the (necessarily) existential bare plural in (9) is also (part of) focus.[2]

(9)   There came dogs into the room.

We contend that focus is not only a necessary, but also a sufficient condition for a bare plural to be interpreted existentially. This can be witnessed by the fact that a sentence with a contrastively focused bare plural is truth-conditionally equivalent to a cleft construction.[3] The relevant pair is provided in (10):

(10)   a.   DOGS came into the room.
        b.   It is dogs that came into the room.

In sum, we have now solidly reached the following generalization:

(11)   Existential bare plural subjects must be (part of) focus (and thus can't be topical).

But why should focus license existential interpretations? Following Kallulli (2006), we argue that this is so because focus is a predicate, and predicates in turn assert existence.[4] This is precisely the aspect in which they differ from subjects, which presuppose existence.

3. Subjects, Topics, and Predication

In the philosophical linguistic literature, the assessment that subjects are presuppositional has been perhaps most outspokenly articulated by Peter Strawson. Subjects, Strawson (1971) argues, perform the function of identifying the object of the speaker's assertion. Identification of reference presupposes existence of the object about which something is asserted or predicated. As Strawson (1971: 79) puts it: "Identifying knowledge is knowledge of the existence of a particular item distinguished, in one or another sense, by the audience from any other." The asserting part, on the other hand, is the predicate. Strawson argues that it is enough that the predicate applies to the object; it does not also have to identify it. Consider the following sentences:

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[2] That the generalization in (9) holds for existential bare plurals generally (i.e., also in object position) can be shown with the same question-answer tests employed above. Due to space restrictions, we will not engage into a detailed discussion of existential bare plural objects though.

[3] For the relevance of this fact, see section 4 (and fn. 4 below).

[4] See also Frascarelli (2005) for the idea that focus is a predicate. On a related note (which we will pick up in section 4 below), Grohmann et al. (2004) argue for relevant predicative properties that derive cleft structures.

(12) a.   That is the man who swam the channel twice on one day.
      b.   That man swam the channel twice on one day.

(13) a.   Napoleon was the man who ordered the execution of the Duke d'Enghien.
      b.   Napoleon ordered the execution of the Duke d'Enghien.

In Strawson's words, "the differences between sentences in the (a) group and sentences in the (b) group [in (12) and (13)] can best be understood by considering the differences between the circumstances in which you would say ([12/13]a) and the circumstances in which you would say ([12/13]b). You would say ([12]a) instead of ([12]b) if you knew or believed that your hearer knew or believed that someone had swum the channel twice in one day […] you say ([12]a) to a man whom you take to know certain things that you take to be unknown to the man to whom you say ([11]b)" (Strawson 1971: 26).

Further, Strawson argues that "one thing that is absolutely clear is that it can be no part of the speaker's intention in the case of such utterances [as (12b) and (13b)] to inform the audience of the existence of a particular item bearing the name or answering to the description and distinguished by that fact plus something else known to the audience, from any other. On the contrary, the very task of identifying reference, can be undertaken only by a speaker who knows or presumes his audience to be already in possession of such knowledge of existence and uniqueness as this" (Strawson 1971: 80).

Strawson says that the identificatory task of the subject is to bring it about that the audience of a certain utterance knows which object a predicate is being applied to of all the objects within its scope of knowledge (or presuppositions). More specifically, the phrases *that man* and *Napoleon* in (12b) and (13b), respectively, are subjects of these sentences if and only if they are uttered in a context whereby the audience is antecedently equipped with the knowledge that the objects to which *that man* and *Napoleon* refer exist and are identifiable as unique entities. In other words, it is precisely presupposition of existence of spatio-temporal particulars that enables predication on them.

Of course, it is possible to utter the sentences in (12b) and (13b) in a context whereby the audience is not antecedently equipped with such existence knowledge. In this case, however, the phrases *that man* and *Napoleon* will not be subjects, but predicates. What the sentences in (12b) and (13b) would then say, Strawson argues, could be paraphrased as in (14a) and (14b), respectively, which comes very close to how we tend to understand the sentences in (12a) and (13a).

(14) a.   There is a man that swam the channel twice on one day; that was that man.
      b.   There is someone that ordered the execution of the Duke d'Enghien; that was Napoleon.

As for (12a) and (13a), these sentences tend to be interpreted in the way paraphrased in (14a) and (14b), respectively. When so interpreted, the phrases *that man* and *Napoleon* in (12a) and (13a) do not identify knowledge already available; *they only assert*, that is, *predicate* on the phrases that identify knowledge. The phrases that identify knowledge in (12a) and (13a) when these are uttered to convey the information given in (14a) and (14b) are *the man who swam the channel twice on one day* and *the man who ordered the execution of the Duke d'Enghien*, respectively.

As observed in Kallulli (2006), Rizzi's (2006: 122) recent definition of topics and subjects is very close to Strawson's:

(15)   a.   Top: [+aboutness]
                    [+D-linking]
       b.   Subj: [+aboutness]
                    [–D-linking]

If the bare plurals from the examples in section 2 were subjects under their existential interpretation, this would be at odds with Rizzi's definition in (15b), since, as was shown earlier, such bare plurals are necessarily non-topical (i.e., *not* [+aboutness] in Rizzi's terms).

Several more facts converge in showing that existential bare plurals are indeed predicates also syntactically. For instance, in verb-initial languages, existential bare plurals may occur clause-initially (e.g., Massam et al., in press).

As noted in Kallulli (2006), a second piece of evidence for the purported non-subjecthood of existential bare plurals involves non-agreement patterns in English expletive constructions with a contracted copula:

(16)   a.   There's dogs in the room.
       b.   *   There is dogs in the room.

In both cases, *there* — and not the bare plural — must be the subject (see also Williams 1994 and Hazout 2004, among others).

Thirdly, as also noted in Kallulli (2006), the fact that there are relatively free word-order languages such as Dutch that do not allow existential bare plurals in clause-initial position (shown below) remains mysterious if the bare plurals in them were subjects. Crucially, cases like (18c) only allow a generic interpretation.

(17)   a. ?*   Honden   kwamen   de   kamer   binnen. (van Geenhoven 1998: 177)
                dogs   came   the   room   in
       b.   Er   kwamen   honden de   kammer   binnen.
                there   came   dogs   the   room   in
                'Dogs entered the room.'

(18)   a.   *   Fred   denkt   dat   koeien   op   het   dak   liggen.
              F   thinks   that   cows   on   the   roof   lie
       b.   Fred   denkt   dat   er   koeien op het   dak   liggen.
              F   thinks   that   there   cows   on the   roof   lie
              'Fred thinks that there are cows lying on the roof.'
       c.   Fred   denkt   dat   koeien   lui   zijn.
              F   thinks   that   cows   lazy   are
              'Fred thinks that cows are lazy.'   (Reuland 1988)

In sum, we have claimed up to this point that there are no existential bare plural subjects. But then we might ask: What is the subject of sentences with existential bare plurals and no overt expletive? Kallulli (1999, 2006) suggests, following Kratzer (1995), that two of the possible structures for such sentences have the event argument as the true external argument. That is, in a sentence like (7), repeated here for convenience,
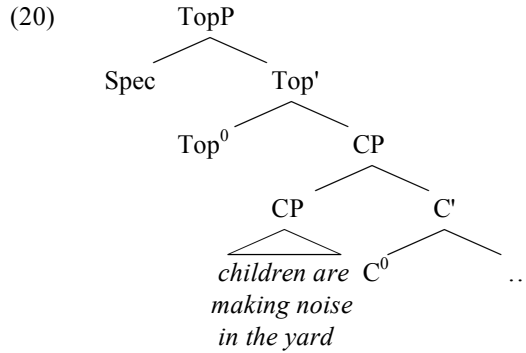
(7)   Children are making noise in the yard.

the presupposition can be either that there is a noise-making event in the yard, or that there is something or other happening at the time of the utterance. In the former case, the assertion is that children are the performers of the making-noise-in-the-yard event. In the latter case, the assertion coincides with the whole CP, namely that what was happening was that children were making noise in the yard.

In other words, under the interpretations just stated, the underlying structure of sentences such as (7) is either something along the lines depicted in (19) or some structure as illustrated in (20).[5]

(19)

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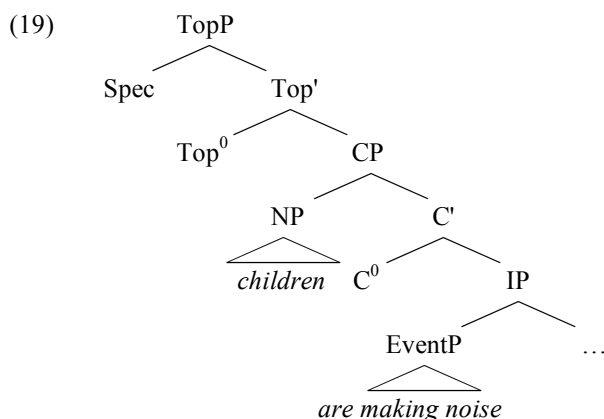
[5] Note that (20) very much resembles a pseudo-cleft structure, a property that consequences of our approach laid out in section 4 below might be related to (which we cannot go into in this work).

(20)

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              TopP
           ┌───┴────┐
         Spec      Top'
               ┌────┴────┐
             Top⁰        CP
                     ┌────┴────┐
                    CP        C'
                  ┌──┴──┐   ┌──┴──┐
          children are   C⁰    …
          making noise
          in the yard
```

In (19), the (existentially interpreted bare plural) NP *children* is a fronted predicate nominal in [Spec,CP]. The topic projection TopP is the root projection of this expression, yielding the desired interpretation of the sentence. Furthermore, TopP hosts an EPP feature (É. Kiss 2002), which means that a subject needs to fill its specifier either overtly or covertly.[6]

According to the structure in (20), on the other hand, sentences like the one in (7) are non-root clauses. That is, under these conditions, they do not have overt subjects. The layers in the root CP are (phonetically) empty. Since the whole non-root CP is focused (receiving wide focus), the non-root CP is in [Spec,CP:root], a canonical position for focus phrases (cf. Horvath 1986, Rochemont 1986).

As evidence for the non-root status in the structure in (20), Kallulli takes the fact that root transformations (in the sense of Emonds 1970) are disallowed, as shown in (21). Note that on its own (21b) is fine, of course.

(21) What's up?
    a.   Children are making noise in the yard.
    b. #   In the street are children making noise.

4. A Complex Syntax

Our main claim so far has been that existential bare plural subjects don't exist. Rather, the event argument is the true external argument (in the sense of Kratzer 1995), and semantic considerations as sketched above might lead to one of the syntactic implementations suggested in (19) and (20).

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[6] See Kallulli (2006) for the idea that the *there*-construction is one overt manifestation of (19):

(i)   There were children making noise in the yard.

In English, [Spec,TopP] may thus be filled overtly by the expletive.

Alternatively, an existing syntactically motivated account could possibly be adopted *en bloc* (such as an extension of Hazout's 2004 approach to existential constructions). However, we would like to appeal to independently advanced proposals in the recent syntactic literature and provide a novel spin on the structures under consideration. Our rationale is that it is quite possible that much more is at stake. Arguably, there will remain some gaps to be filled in our proposal — but if on the right track, the approach we are going to present next would not only fit in nicely with current views on a syntactic approach to complex predication (the umbrella term of bare plural subjects, as we claim below), it would also widen the range of phenomena to be considered and compared.

In short, in this section we will develop a more complex syntactic account of the intuition that bare plurals aren't subjects but predicates (and the observation that they can't appear in roots). The syntax-semantics isomorphy we will begin to work out here is more complex than a straightforward syntactic implementations of the semantic considerations presented above might take. In particular, we will first suggest that complex predication is involved in the constructions under investigation. We will then integrate bare plurals into an independently motivated minimalist syntax of complex predication, namely one in terms of sideward movement, and propose a considerably close enough syntax of bare plurals, which in turn can (and in our eyes, should) be extended to *it*-clefts, for example.

In a nutshell (cf. Grohmann 2003: 309ff.), Hornstein's (2001) approach to so-called "rules of construal" from a minimalist perspective is that, all things being equal, complex predication should be derived syntactically rather than base-generated. Arguing from the perspective of (methodological) economy, a related goal is to eliminate null operators and reduce the syntactic machinery to existing operations. The operation that achieves this goal for him is sideward movement.

Sideward movement (Nunes 2001, 2004) denotes a type of displacement that, although made up of Copy and Merge, does not conform to Move in obvious ways. The most blatant violation is that the landing site of the operation does not c-command its launching position. On the other hand, sideward movement does allow for a reduction of theoretical constructs whose only purpose is to create a dependency that conforms to all other ingredients of the theory of grammar we pursue. For this purpose, notions like PRO, chains, null operators, and the like have been introduced and reached a status of "real objects" — which they possibly shouldn't (see Hornstein 2001 for a critical survey and further background).

Nunes' starting point is the assumption that within a copy theory of movement, Move is not a primitive operation, but the result of the combination of independently needed operations, Copy and Merge. Nunes provides a derivational analysis for the parasitic gap construction, which has robustly resisted one for many reasons that cannot be reviewed here. One of the most salient properties of PG-constructions, such as (22a), is that a matrix A'-moved element is thematically marked by both the matrix verb and a predicate inside an adjunct.

(22)   a.   Which book did you review *t* before they published *pg*?
       b.   *Who will *t* review this book before they asked *pg*?

Move cannot apply to relate the parasitic gap *pg* and the "real" trace/copy *t*, since the matrix θ-position does not c-command any position within the adjunct, as in (22a). This follows if we assume, quite reasonably, that these adjunct clauses are attached higher than the matrix internal argument position (though lower than the external one). This assumption predicts, among other things, that external arguments make poor participants in PG-structures, as in (22b).

The sideward movement analysis proceeds as follows (irrelevant details aside). First, the material that is later to become the adjunct clause is assembled from the numeration or (lexical) array. The *wh*-phrase is assembled and merged with *published*, forming VP, and the structure is derived as usual up to the point of CP (the adjunct clause headed by *before*), into whose specifiers *which book* moves. Next, *which book* is copied and put into the derivational workspace until needed. Selecting *review* requires an object to merge. As there is no appropriate element left in the numeration, *which book* is merged from the workspace. Once VP is created, CP may be merged as the adjunct, again taken from the derivational workspace we need anyway. The remainder of the derivation is business as usual: the numeration is exhausted and the derivation converges, with the only relevant step that follows being movement of *which book* to matrix [Spec,CP].

Sideward movement is the operation that copies a syntactic element (present in the derivation), puts in the derivational workspace (needed anyway; cf. any complex "left branch"), and merges it at the next possible time step in the derivation (as postulated by economy consideration). The wider generalization that transpires is that sidewards moved elements enter a thematic position in some (typically matrix) clause after having A'-moved to the edge of another (adjunct) clause. This movement does not conform to the usual c-command requirement and thus proceeds sidewards or interarboreal — from a non-checking A'-position into a thematic position. (For further details, see the works cited above.)

Hornstein (2001) applies the same line of analysis to instances of complex predication that have previously been analyzed as being the result of some "rules of construal" — in particular, relative clauses (targeting the relativized noun), purposives (where the purpose moves sidewards), *tough*-constructions (deriving the subject of the complex adjectival predication), and more. The relevant step in the derivation is sketched for the three phenomena mentioned below in boldface:

(23)   a.   the girl that John kissed
       b.   [$_{DP}$ the [$_{NP}$ [$_{NP}$ **girl$_i$**] [$_{CP}$ ***wh*-t$_i$** that-C [$_{TP}$ John kissed *wh*-t$_i$]]]]

(24)   a.   John brought *Moby Dick* for Mary to read.
       b.   [$_{TP}$ John T [$_{VP}$ [$_{VP}$ brought ***Moby Dick$_i$***] [$_{CP}$ **t$_i$** for [$_{TP}$ Mary to read t$_i$]]]]

(25)   a.   Mary is easy to kiss.
       b. $[_{TP} [_{TP}$ Mary$_i$ is-T $[_{AP}$ **t$_i$** easy $]$ $]$ $[_{CP}$ **t$_i$** C $[_{TP}$ *pro* to-T kiss t$_i$]]]]

All instances of purported sideward movement involved so-called "null operator" constructions (where the null operator is eliminated from the grammar). More generally — and more relevant for our purposes — this line of analysis applies to instances of complex predication, something we will pick up and implement into the phenomenon of bare plural "subjects" in the remainder.

In this context, consider the relevance of (10) from above, here repeated as (26) with minor amendments for presentational purposes, where truth-semantically the existential bare plural "subject" is identical to a clefted constituent (namely, they are both focused).

(26)   a.   Dogs came into the room.
       b.   It was dogs that came into the room.

The short remainder of this paper will address the relevance of (26a), our existential bare plural nominal in apparent subject position, and (26b), where the existential bare plural nominal appears in an *it*-cleft. Recall the major results of our investigation so far: the existential bare plural *dogs* is semantically interpreted as a predicate, not a subject — as such, it is arguably a (possibly derived) predicate nominal. In addition, and (26b) expresses this point nicely, the existential bare plural is obligatorily (part of) focus. Lastly, a particular subjecthood of the bare plural cannot be denied, since whatever its predicative properties, it also denotes the entity engaged in a activity expressed by the matrix predicate — in this case, the entities that engaged in the event of coming into the room.

Grohmann et al. (2004) investigate what look like *wh*-clefts in Cypriot Greek, which happens to be the standard strategy for *wh*-question formation in this variety of Modern Greek. For a typical question such as (27), for example, they propose the derivation sketched in (28), where TP refers to the embedded clause *[iδes t$_i$]*.

(27)   Pcon   embu   iδes?
       who   is.that   saw.2SG
       'Who did you see?'
       lit. 'Who is (it) that you saw?'

(28) $[_{FocP} [_{CP}$ *pcon$_i$* $[_{C'}$ C^0 $[_{TP}$ *en*-T^0 $[_{SC}$ t$_i$ $[_{DP}$ Ø]]]]] $[_{Foc'}$ Foc^0 $[_{CP}$ t$_i$ $[_{C'}$ *pu*-C^0 $[$ TP]]]]]

For graphical improvement, let's now look at an adoption of this analysis for English *it*-clefts that expresses the basic insights of Grohmann et al.'s analysis:[7]

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[7] Note that Grohmann et al. (2004) do not discuss the details of this analysis, but simply refer to a (still) unfinished manuscript by the first author.

(29)

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                          FocP
                    ┌───────┴───────┐
                   CP              Foc'
                 ┌──┴──┐        ┌───┴───┐
                     C'      Foc⁰      CP
                  ┌───┴───┐        ┌────┴────┐
                CQ⁰     TP        tᵢ        C'
                      ┌──┴──┐    [θ,θ]   ┌───┴───┐
                     it    T'          C₋Q⁰     TP
                        ┌──┴──┐        that    ╱▔╲
                       T⁰    SC              I saw … tᵢ …
                       is  ┌──┴──┐             [θ,θ]
                        Johnᵢ    DP
                        [θ,θ]    △
                                  Ø
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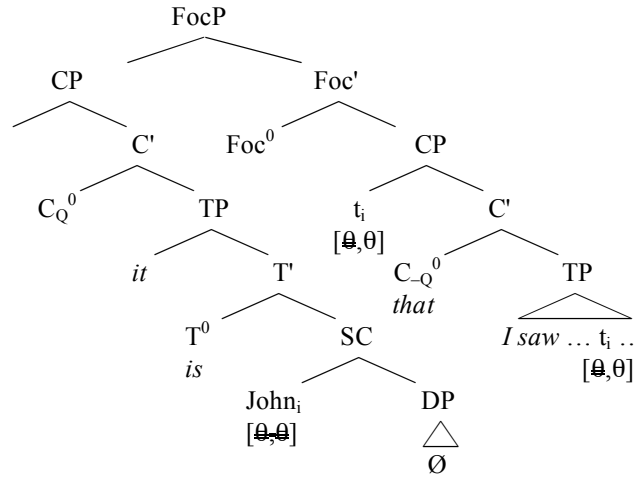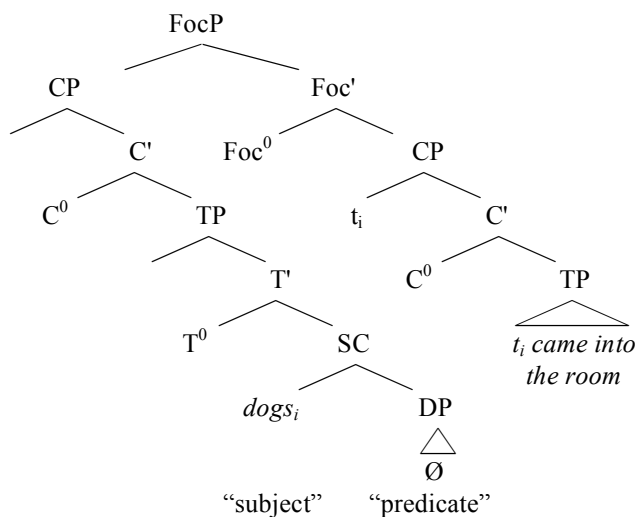
(30)   It is John that I saw.

The intuition we would like to pursue (at least in its initial stage, as presented here) is that *it*-clefts constitute another instance of complex predication — and thus another instance of the application of sideward movement. In (29), the *it*-cleft is analyzed as a complex left branch, somewhere and somehow attached to the rest of the clause. Here it is understood (in a provisionary manner at this time) to sit in the specifier of a focus projection, which in turn takes the rest as a complement clause (CP).[8] Pending proper treatment of many issues that arise from Grohmann et al.'s remarks (cf. also fn. 8), let us assume that this approach in general has some merits, the primary being that the clefted constituent enters the cleft proper as a sidewards moved syntactic object for reasons of predication.

With an eye to the topic of existential bare plural nominals in apparent subject position, we want to adopt the general approach illustrated above, but with a twist. A first step would be to adopt the full structure for a sentence like *Dogs came into the room* (cf. (26a)):
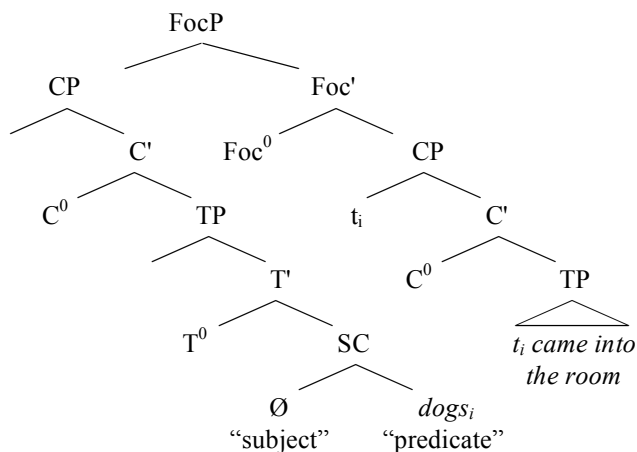
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[8] Note that this need not be correct: What looks like the matrix here (the "rest"), is commonly taken to be a relative clause (cf. Birner et al. 2002). What is relevant at this stage of our investigation is to rationalize the relevance of *it*-clefts, coupled with a derivational approach to complex predication, to existential bare plurals in apparent subject position. The relative clause analysis of *it*-clefts, for example, has provided Percus (1997) with an interesting analysis adopting null operators. If null operators can be dispensed with in favour of a derivational analysis involving sideward movement, his approach will have to be revised anyway. Arguably, the semantics of *it*-clefts Percus reviews and proposes, where clefts are taken to be definite descriptions, cannot be taken on in this paper for lack of space.

(31)

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                        FocP
                ┌────────┴────────┐
               CP                Foc'
            ┌───┴──┐         ┌────┴────┐
                  C'       Foc⁰        CP
              ┌───┴───┐            ┌────┴───┐
             C⁰       TP          tᵢ        C'
                   ┌──┴──┐              ┌───┴───┐
                        T'            C⁰        TP
                     ┌──┴──┐                     △
                    T⁰     SC               tᵢ came into
                        ┌──┴──┐                the room
                      dogsᵢ    DP
                               △
                               Ø
                   "subject"  "predicate"
```

This we will not do for the different reasons outlined so far. Instead, we will work out an analysis with a twist, where the bare plural "subject" is in fact a derived predicate nominal (cf. the discussion around (19) above) — derived in the course of the derivation (qua sideward movement, from an "underlying" thematic subject position of *came into the room* to a derived predicate position in focus):

(32)

```
                        FocP
                ┌────────┴────────┐
               CP                Foc'
            ┌───┴──┐         ┌────┴────┐
                  C'       Foc⁰        CP
              ┌───┴───┐            ┌────┴───┐
             C⁰       TP          tᵢ        C'
                   ┌──┴──┐              ┌───┴───┐
                        T'            C⁰        TP
                     ┌──┴──┐                     △
                    T⁰     SC               tᵢ came into
                        ┌──┴──┐                the room
                        Ø     dogsᵢ
                   "subject"  "predicate"
```

If the bare plural "subject" is in fact a predicate nominal (cf. section 3), let's code it as such: It is the bare plural that sidewards moves into the hidden cleft structure — and becomes the (hidden cleft) predicate. Moreover, our structure also derives the focus-generalization presented in (11) without further assumptions.

5. Conclusion

Our major agenda was to argue that, on the one hand, there are no existential bare plural subjects and that, on the other, apparent existential bare plural "subjects" are in fact "predicates" — and to account for this conclusion not only semantically, but also syntactically.

The larger project that unfolds takes this agenda (at least) one step further. First, we identified constructions containing bare plurals as instances of complex predication, and then we applied a syntactically derived analysis of these in line with much recent minimalist research. Under the assumption that a derivational approach to complex predication such as the one we adopt (Hornstein 2001), involving sideward movement (Nunes 2004), is not totally off the mark, we explicitly propose a more complex structure involving a bare plural nominal in apparent subject position. We (tentatively) identified this structure as a hidden *it*-cleft, which, if correct, would require a reanalysis of cleft syntax. Space does not permit either such a reanalysis nor a satisfying justification beyond our intuition as spelled out here.

To end on a more positive note, if the ideas collected and presented here are on the right track, exciting new research on the main topic (existential bare plural "subjects") will undoubtedly lead to exciting new ideas (with complex predication, cleft structures, and possibly even more at stake) — and we will tackle this next.

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