

Eventive existentials in Catalan and the topic-focus articulation¹

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Abstract

The role of codas in existential sentences has been a matter of debate since the early 70's, but under this label a quite heterogeneous set of material has been included, leading to much misplaced discussion. One particular outstanding case is that of eventive existential sentences: *Yesterday, there was a live pig roasted*. In this existential construction the intuition is reported that we assert the existence of a situation involving the pivot (*a live pig*) and the coda (*roasted*) rather than just the existence of the individual denoted by the pivot. In this article I will revisit the construction on the light of partially unattested data from Catalan, a Romance language well-known for showing systematic violation of the Definiteness Effect in existentials. We will concentrate on extraction facts, and information structure to show that recent analysis favouring a small clause analysis of eventive existentials in Catalan (Leonetti 2008) are weak on syntactic grounds and inconsistent on semantic and informational grounds. Given this evidence, I will defend a VP-adjunct analysis of codas in eventive existentials, where both the pivot and the coda form part of the assertion and a null stage topic optionally restricted by an overt locative counts as the topic of the sentence.

Keywords: existential sentences; definiteness effect; topic-focus articulation

1 Introduction: eventive existentials

1.1 The theoretical problem

The role of codas in existential sentences has been a matter of debate since the early 70's, particularly regarding the role played by their aspectual properties, as the stage-level vs. individual-level predicate contrast in the following examples by Milsark (1974: ex. 108):

- (1) a. There was a man sick/*tall.
- b. There are people sick/*tall.

Yet, under the coda label a quite heterogeneous set of material has been included, leading to much misplaced discussion (see Francez 2007: ch. 2 for illuminating methodological insights). One particular outstanding case is that of eventive existential sentences, like the following provided by McNally (1992):

- (2) a. There has just been a man shot. [her ex. 310]
- b. Yesterday, there was a live pig roasted. [her ex. 293]

In this existential construction the coda is typically a past participle (or a gerund), and the intuition is reported that we assert the existence of a situation involving the pivot (*a live pig*) and the coda (*roasted*) rather than just the existence of the individual denoted by the pivot. Moreover, the eventive nature of the coda is supported by the natural occurrence of event modifiers like *just* or *yesterday*.²

Two basic proposals have been raised for dealing with eventive existentials, differing on the level at and means by which the eventive reading is obtained: a syntactic one, proposing a small clause (SC) where the pivot is a subject and the coda is a predicate (Stowell 1978; Chomsky 1981; Safir 1985; Freeze 1992; Moro 1997; Leonetti 2008), and a semantic one, where, as in other existential constructions, the pivot is the complement of the existential verb and the coda is either a VP adjunct (McNally 1992; Francez 2007, 2009) or a complement of the existential verb *be* (Keenan 1987; Pollard & Sag 1994).³ Here I will consider again the exact articulation of eventive codas on the light of the observations raised by Leonetti (2008), regarding the connection between DE and the coda. Particularly, Leonetti shows that Catalan existentials, which are commonly held to violate the DE, do respect this restriction in certain circumstances. He observes that when a prototypical

locative coda is present, definite NPs are fine if the coda is dislocated (3a-b), but odd if the coda is in canonical position (3c):

- (3) a. Hi havia el degà, a la reunió.
LOChad the dean at the.F meeting
'The DEAN was at the meeting.'
- b. A la reunió, hi havia el degà.
at the.F meeting LOChad the dean
- c. ??Hi havia el degà a la reunió.
LOChad the dean at the.F meeting

Notwithstanding, when an eventive coda is present *forming a SC with the pivot*, definite DPs and even proper names are fine (Leonetti 2008: ex. 21):

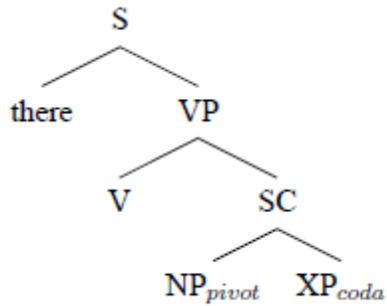
- (4) Hi ha la Maria molt enfadada/al telèfon/queespera.
LOC has the Maria very angry/to-the phone/that waits
'Mary was very angry/at the phone/waiting.'

In this article, I will concentrate on this eventive existential subtype, which Leonetti (2008: 24) characterizes as follows (see Cruschina 2012 for similar insights and a fine-grained typology of Italian existential sentences):⁴

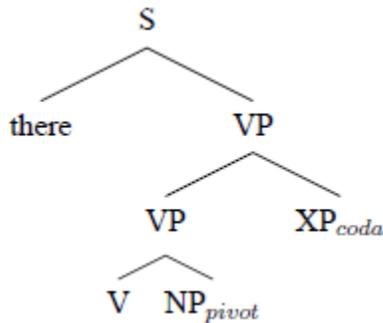
The second basic type is the eventive existential. I believe that the only thing that changes here, with respect to proper existentials, is that the post-verbal expression is propositional and of the Stage-Level kind. The syntactic format of the propositional content is a small clause with its own Topic/Focus 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 [i.e. (4); XV].

My goal will be testing the predictions of Leonetti's hypothesis against the formal and informational properties of Romance SC on the one hand and of pivots and codas on the other. We will consider formal tests in section 2, and the topic-focus articulation of eventive existentials in section 3. From the inspection of these factors, and the comparison with uncontroversial subject-predicate structures, we will be able to discard a SC analysis of eventive existential (5a), in favour of a VP-adjunct approach along the lines suggested by McNally (1992), and Francez (2007, 2009), among others (5b):

(5) a.



b.



However, I will depart from Francez (2007, 2009) in taking both the pivot and the coda as part of the assertion, as suggested by their articulation as part of the scope of adverbial quantifiers:

(6) Habitualmente, als col·legis hi ha un director
usually at.the.PL schools LOChas a principal
criticant els pares.
criticizing the parents

‘Usually, at schools there is a principal criticizing the parents.’

- a. “Usually, if there is somebody at schools, it is a principal criticizing the parents.”
- b. #“Usually, if there is somebody criticizing the parents at schools, it is a principal.”

Yet, before entering into details, we shall delimit the exact nature of our object of study: what counts as an eventive existential?

1.2 The empirical domain

There is not a widely accepted answer to the question of what counts as an eventive existential. For instance, McNally (1992: 4.4) restricts its scope to past participles (7), leaving aside relative clauses. On the basis of examples like (8), she claims that “DPs with full relative clauses do not give rise to “eventive” existentials” McNally (1992: 185):

- (7) a. #There has just been a man who was shot.
 - b. #Yesterday there was a man who was shot.
 - c. #Yesterday, there was a live pig that was roasted.
-
- (8) a. There has just been a man shot. [her ex. 310]

- b. Yesterday, there was a live pig roasted. [her ex. 293]

Here we can appreciate that the eventive value of the existential is linked to the presence of temporal delimiters like yesterday or an aspectual adverb like just, which favours the punctual reading of the perfect tense (on *just* see also the comments by Milsark 1974: 78ff). Other scholars (e.g. Beyssade 2004: 69ff, Leonetti 2008 or Cruschina 2012) take a broader stand and include relative clauses (9) or even locative PP codas (10):

- (9) a. Il y a le telephone qui sonne. [French]

it LOC has the phone that sounds

- b. Il y a le chat qui meurt de froid dehors.

it LOC has the cat that dies of cold outside

- (10) a. C'è Gianni in giardino/al telefono/che aspetta. [Italian]

LOC-is John in garden/at-the phone/that waits

- b. Hi ha la Maria molt enfadada/al telèfon/que espera. [Catalan]

LOC has the Mary very angry/at-the phone/that waits

One can easily appreciate that the inclusion of locative PPs is a major source of ambiguity, for it makes really hard to distinguish eventive from purely locative existentials. Moreover, as Leonetti (2008) correctly points out, there is a lot of cross-linguistic variation here, as the Spanish case demonstrates: Spanish does not accept any of the options in (9) or (10). All this calls for a clear-cut battery of tests individuating eventive existentials, which I cannot attempt here, due to space restrictions. Henceforth, to be on the safe side, in this paper I will restrict myself to participial and gerund codas, which naturally possess eventive properties, giving preference to the latter, for one practical reason: gerunds in Catalan cannot be noun modifiers, unlike in English, which allows us to remove from the picture the analysis of codas as modifiers of the pivot defended by Williams (1984).

Hence, existentials like the following will serve us running examples thorough the paper:

- (11) a. Hi ha la Maria esperant-se fa estona.
 LOChas the.F Mary waiting-REFL makes while
 ‘Mary is waiting for long.’
- b. Hi ha la Maria adormida des d’ahir.
 LOChas the.F Mary slept fromof-yesterday

‘Mary is sleeping since yesterday.’

Here the pivot is a proper name, which in Catalan is typically preceded by a definite article, and the coda is a verbal gerund (11a) or past participle (11b) (the presence of a temporal adverbial clearly suggests we are dealing with verbal forms, not adjective ones; see also 2.1). Nonetheless, as one anonymous reviewer pointed out, participles in general and some gerunds in particular may be reanalysed as adjective modifiers. For instance, *vigilant* ‘watching’ can be both a verbal gerundive form and an adjectival one:

- (12) a. El vaig enxampar vigilant les veïnes.
him PST.1SG catch watching the.F.PL neighbour.F.PL
‘I caught him watching the neighbours.’
- b. una persona vigilant
a.F person vigilant
‘a vigilant person’

To avoid the latter reading, I will thorough use transitive gerundive forms with direct object and without adjective use. As for participle codas, I will combine

them with proper name pivots, avoiding thus a restrictive modification interpretation.

2 *Formal tests of the eventive reading*

Even though the SC analysis of existential sentences has a long-run tradition, stemming from Stowell (1978) (see e.g. Chomsky 1981, Safir 1982, 1985, Freeze 1992, Moro 1997), their defenders do not offer much solid empirical support for their analyses, besides the availability of ‘propositional’ paraphrases. One notable exception is Safir (1983), who argues for the SC analysis on the basis of pairs like the following:

- (13) a. There are [workers angry about the pay].
b. [Workers angry about the pay] is exactly the kind of situation we are trying to avoid.

He claims that the constituent between brackets is a SC and not a NP, as the agreement pattern in (13b) suggests. Yet, as Contreras (1987) and Baltin (1998) point out, Safir’s argument is deviant for several reasons. On the one hand, they note that agreement facts have nothing to do with syntactic

structure, but rather with the possibility of interpreting the expression in subject position as a situation, as the following examples make clear (the first one is Baltin's 1998, the other are Francez's 2007):

- (14) a. [Several angry workers] is just the sort of situation that the ad campaign was designed to avoid.
- b. [No students] means you won't be nervous (when you give the talk).
- c. [Few cars] means we'll get there faster.
- d. [Many guests] means many presents.

On the other hand, Safir's (1983) SC analysis begs one crucial question: what forces plural agreement in the existential in (13a)? If the existential verb selected a SC, the verb should surface in singular (**There is workers angry about the pay*), just as happens in (13b).

In this paper, I will explore a more formal approach to the issue checking the SC hypothesis for eventive existentials against three standard tests regarding constituency:

- extraction,
- scope assignment, and

- NPI licensing.

Moreover, in order to tune up the tests, I will compare the results of the eventive existential with those of perception SCs like the following:⁵

- (15) a. Vaig veure [la Maria espiant els veïns].
 PST.1SG see the.F Mary spying the neighbours
 ‘I saw Mary spying the neighbours.’
- b. Vaig veure [la Maria asseguda a una cadira].
 PST.1SG see the.F Mary sited to a.F chair
 ‘I saw Mary sitting in a chair.’

Obviously, as Josep M. Brucart and one anonymous reviewer point out, one should be cautious on the conclusions regarding the comparison between eventive existentials and perception SCs, for we could be dealing with different subtypes of SCs with a big deal of internal variation (see for instance the approaches in Moro 1997, Rothstein 2001 or den Dikken 2006). Yet, beyond these relevant differences, the basis of the comparison remains unchallenged as long as we focus on constituency beyond other factors. The SC analysis, whatever the flavour it comes with, makes clear testable

predictions concerning the structural relations between the pivot and the coda, and their respective behaviour regarding extraction or scope. Moreover, these predictions are sharply different from the ones made by the VP-adjunct analysis. Henceforth, even though tentative, the evidence in this section will help us testing the respective values of each hypotheses, pending a more complete comparative study involving different kinds of SC structures.

2.1 Extraction

2.1.1 Extraction of pivot and coda as a constituent

When it comes to extraction, the most obvious test we can conduct is displacement of both the pivot and the coda as a constituent. Yet, the facts are contradictory. On the one hand, extraction is bad altogether when the pivot is definite, but it improves when the pivot is indefinite:⁶

- (16) a. Hi havia [el/un policia espia els sospitosos].
 LOhad the/a policeman spying the suspects
- b. Era [*el/?un policia espia els sospitosos]
 was the/a policeman spying the suspects
 el que hi havia.

the that LOC had

- c. El que hi havia era [*el/?un policia espiaant els
the that LOC had was the/a policeman spying the.PL
sospitosos].
suspects

This state of affairs is not reproduced with SCs of perception verbs, which do allow extraction of both the subject and the predicate as a unit regardless of the definiteness of the former:

- (17) a. Vaig veure [el/un policia espiaant els sospitosos].
PST.1SG see the/a policeman spying the suspects
- b. Era [el/un policia espiaant els sospitosos]
was the/a policeman spying the suspects
el que vaig veure.
the that PST.1SG see
- c. El que vaig veure era [el/un policia espiaant
the that PST.1SG see was the/a policeman spying
els sospitosos].
the.PL suspects

If we consider a verb like *imagine*, the results are similar:

- (18) a. M'imaginava [el/un policia espiaant els sospitosos].
to.me-imagine the/a policeman spying the suspects
- b. Era [el/un policia espiaant els sospitosos]
was the/a policeman spying the suspects
el que m'imaginava.
the that to.me-imagine
- c. El que m'imaginava era [el/un policia espiaant
the that to.me-imagine was the/a policeman spying
els sospitosos].
the.PL suspects

Yet, one must note that SCs depending on verbs of judgment cannot be extracted:

- (19) a. Considerava [el/*un policia corrupte].
considered the/a policeman corrupt
- b. *Era [el/un policia corrupte] el que considerava.

was the/a policeman corrupt the that seemed

c. *El que considerava era [el/un policia corrupte]

the what seemed was the/a policeman corrupte

On the other hand, as Manuel Leonetti pointed out to me, in Spanish, the following clefts are fine with the neuter article:

(20) a. Era un policía durmiendo lo que había.

was a policeman sleeping the.NEUT what had

b. Lo que había era un policía durmiendo.

the.NEUT what had was a policeman sleeping

Yet, this observation cannot be interpreted as evidence for his proposal for Catalan, for one thing: as he himself argues (Leonetti 2008: 24) the existential verb cannot select a SC as its argument in Spanish. Hence, in (19) we are confronted with the awkward situation that the test suggesting a SC analysis works fine in a language where the SC is predicted not to exist. In any event, the main conclusion from the evidence provided so far is that the cleft test is inconclusive regarding the presumed SC formed by the pivot and the coda.

Focus fronting does not fare better, for the same unexpected asymmetry is found regarding definiteness, which does not appear in perception SCs:

- (21) a. No t'ho creuràs: [*el/??un policia
 not to.you-it believe.FUT.2SG the/a policeman
 perseguint-los a tots dos] hi havia.
 pursuing-them to all.PL two LOC had
- b. No t'ho creuràs: [el/un policia
 not to.you-it believe.FUT.2SG the/a policeman
 perseguint-los a tots dos] vaig veure.
 pursuing-them to all.PL two PST.1SG see
- c. No t'ho creuràs: [el/un policia
 not to.you-it believe.FUT.2SG the/a policeman
 perseguint-los a tots dos] es va imaginar.
 pursuing-them to all.PL two SELF PST.3SG imagine

2.1.2 *Extraction from within the coda*

Another piece of evidence comes from the fact, well attested in the literature that, whereas extraction of a complement of the coda is more or less fine in

existentials, extraction of an adjunct is out (examples from McNally 1992: 68; see also Hartmann 2008: 173):

- (22) a. To whom has there just been a celebrity introduced?
b. *How badly has there been a man shot?

Hartmann (2008: 172) notes that this argument/adjunct extraction asymmetry is exactly what happens with non-tensed adjuncts generally:

- (23) a. Which topic_i did you leave [without talking about t_i]?
b. *How_i did you leave [without behaving t_i]?

If we apply these extraction tests to Catalan eventive existentials, we find out that extraction from the coda is even more restricted than in English, for neither arguments (24a) nor adjuncts (24b) yield a good result:

- (24) a. *En què_i hi havia la Maria interessada t_i ?
in what LOC had the.F Maria interested.F
b. *Com_i hi havia la Maria d'interessada t_i ?
how LOC had the.F Maria of-interested.F

Yet, this is not the case with past participle perception SCs, which allow extraction of both arguments and adjuncts:

- (25) a. En què_i vas veure la Maria interessada t_i?
in what PST.2SG see the.F Maria interested.F
- b. Com_i vas veure la Maria d'interessada t_i?
how PST.2SG see the.F Maria of-interested.F

Nevertheless, with gerunds, extraction seems less straightforward, regardless of the argumental status of the extracted constituent (note also the obligatory inversion of the subject of the gerundive phrase):

- (26) a. *Què_i hi havia comprant t_i el policia?
what LOC had buying the policeman
- b. *Com_i hi havia comprant el diari t_i el policia?
how LOC had buying the newspaper the policeman

- (27) a. *Què_i vas veure comprant t_i el policia?
what PST.1SG see buying the policeman

- b. *Com_i vas veure comprant el diari t_i el policia?
 how PST.1SG see buying the newspaper the policeman

To sum up, even though clefting and focus fronting are inconclusive regarding the SC analysis, when wh-extraction from the coda is considered, one can safely conclude that eventive codas are islands, unlike predicates of perception clauses. Obviously, this fact runs against the SC analysis of eventive existentials.

2.2 *Scope*

Scope relations within existential sentences have played a major role in supporting particular details of several semantic proposals, as in the case of McNally (1992: 3.2.2-3.4.2) analysis of pivots as property-denoting elements or Francez (2007, 2009) analysis of codas as modifiers. Here, I will consider what scope relations between the pivot and the coda may tell us regarding their syntactic placement and constituent structure. First, one must note that, as discussed at length by Francez (2007: ch. 5; 2009), building from original insights by Kuno (1971) and Heim (1987), the coda must scope over the pivot:

(28) Hi ha un policia perseguint cada lladre.

LOC has a policeman pursuing every thief

- a. ‘For every thief there is a policeman pursuing him.’
- b. #‘There is a policeman who is pursuing every thief.’

This situation is quite uncommon in Catalan, which generally disallows inverse scope with distributives, as in the following secondary predicates structures:

- (29) ??He descobert un policia molt enfadat amb cada lladre.
 have.1SG found a policeman very angry with every thief
- a. #‘For every thief I have found a policeman who is angry at him.’
 - b. ‘There is a policeman who I have found that he is angry at every thief.’

Here, the distributive reading is impossible to get (29a), which leaves us with the awkward non-distributive reading of *cada* ‘every’ (29b), which is well-known to have always wide scope in Catalan. This description seems accurate when we consider the alternative sentence with non-distributive universal quantifier *tot el N* ‘every N’ (lit. ‘all the’):

- (30) He descobert un policia molt enfadat amb tots
 have.1SG found a policeman very angry with all.PL
 els lladres.
 the.PL thieves
- a. #‘For every thief I have found a policeman who is angry at him.’
 b. ‘There is a policeman who I have found that he is angry at every
 thief.’

In this case the position of the quantifier correlates with its preferred non-distributive reading in (30b).

In any event, the evidence reviewed regarding scope relations clearly indicates that the coda occupies a privileged scope position with respect to the pivot, which seems scopally inert, as suggested in the literature. Leaving aside the details of the denotation of the pivot and the coda, one can conclude that from a purely structural point of view, scope facts nicely follow from an analysis that places the coda in a higher VP position from where it c-commands the pivot, and can hardly be accounted for a SC analysis.

2.3 *NPI licensing*

Another structural test that helps us ascertain the structural relations of the pivot and the coda in eventive existentials is the licensing of negative polarity items (NPI), which must be in the scope of a downward entailing operator (see the ‘classic’ analysis in Ladusaw 1980, 1996 and a good critical review of the subject in Penka & Zeijlstra 2010). When we consider a NPI in pivot position, licensing is fine by means of negation (NPIs are italicised for the ease of reference):⁷

(31) a. En aquesta ciutat no hi ha *gaires* policies perseguint
in this.F town not LOChas any.PL policemen pursuing
crims.

crimes

‘In this town, there are few police officers pursuing crimes.’

b. En aquesta ciutat no hi ha *ningú/cap* policia
in this.F town not LOChas nobody/no policeman
perseguint crims.

pursuing crimes

‘In this town, nobody/no police officer is pursuing crimes.’

One can safely conclude that the pivot is under the scope of negation.

Compare, now, what happens when the NPI is in the coda:

- (32) a. ??Enaquesta ciutat no hi ha policies
in this.F town not LOC has policemen
perseguint *cap* crim.
pursuing no crime
'In this town, there are no police officers pursuing any crime.'
- b. ??Ara no hi ha policies perseguint *gaires* crims.
now not LOC has policemen pursuing any.PL crimes
'Nowadays, there are no police officers pursuing any crime.'

The impossibility of licensing NPIs in the coda strongly suggests that the coda is out of the scope of negation in eventive existentials, which is in accordance with the VP-adjunct analysis, but seems unexpected under the SC analysis.

Now, compare with the behaviour of perception SCs:

- (33) a. En aquesta ciutat no he vist policies
in this.F town not have.1SGseen policemen
perseguint *cap* crim.

pursuing no crime

‘In this town, I have not seen police officers pursuing any crime.’

b. Ara no veus policies perseguint *gaires* crims.

now not see.2SG policemen pursuing any.PL crimes

‘Nowadays, you do not see police officers pursuing any crime.’

c. No m’imagino un policia perseguint *cap* crims.

not to.me-imagine a policeman pursuing no.PLcrimes

‘I can’t imagine a police officer pursuing any crime.’

Here, licensing within the complement of the gerund is fine. Just as in the case of quantifier scope, if we take the standard assumption that negation scope must involve c-command, the NPI licensing data leads us to conclude that the eventive coda is too high in the structure to form a SC with the pivot, unlike the case of perception eventive SCs.

3 *Informational status of the pivot and the coda*

In section 1, we briefly commented Leonetti’s (2008) characterization of eventive existentials in terms of the topic/focus articulation. He crucially argued that “[i]nside the small clause the DP acts like an internal topic” (p.

24). Unfortunately, Leonetti is not very specific about the content and properties of this ‘internal topic’. My impression (shared by an anonymous reviewer) is that we can interpret Leonetti’s internal topic in terms of Erteschik-Shir’s (1997, 2007) concept of *subordinate topic*, but this merits a brief discussion of Erteschik-Shir’s system (see Lambrecht 1994 for similar insights, and Nikolaeva 2001 and Basilico 2003 for refinements), which I will provide in the next subsection. Then I will provide three pieces of evidence for analyzing the pivot as part of the assertion of the sentence: (i) the interaction with adverbs of quantification (3.2), the nature of the pivot (3.3), and focus oriented adverbs (3.4).

3.1 *Primary and secondary topics*

Let us begin with the concept of stage topic by Erteschik-Shir’s (1997: 26):

Spatio-temporal arguments (a` la Kratzer) may play the role of a topic. [...] A card which signifies the ‘‘here and now’’ of the discourse situation is always located on top of the file. It follows that spatiotemporal arguments may play the role of topic and that the truth value of sentences with such topics is determined by examining a card with a spatiotemporal heading. Such topics I call Stage topics.

Interestingly, she presents existential sentences as a prototypical case of a construction involving a stage-topic and focusing the pivot —informational focus—, together with clefts —contrastive focus— (Erteschik-Shir 2007: 81):

- (34) a. There is a FLY in my soup.
b. It was a MOSQUITO that bit me.
c. What I saw was A BIG WASP.

So, for her, pivots of existentials are unmistakable foci.

Let us now consider subordinate topics. Erteschik-Shir (1997, 2007), as Lambrecht (1994), argues that the topic-focus articulation is recursive under certain conditions. Hence besides the stage topic, sentences allow subordinate (or secondary) topics, as in the following example:

- (35) Q: Tell me about your brothers John and Bill.
A: JOHN is the smart one.

Here, Erteschik-Shir argues for the following focus-structure (2007: 48):

- (36) [{{John_{foc}, Bill}_{top}}]_{top} [is the smart one]_{foc}

The main topic is the contextually salient set {John, Bill}, from where the focus *John* is obtained. The other element of the set, *Bill*, becomes then the subordinate topic, which can be dropped (35) or be pronounced:

(37) JOHN, not Bill, is the smart one.

Notably, in Erteschik-Shir's system, the subordinate topic is a proper subset ({Bill}) of the main topic ({John, Bill}).

Consider a second case from Lambrecht (1994: 148):

- (38) a. Whatever became of John?
b. He married Rosa,
c. but he didn't really love her.

While *John* is the (main) topic in both (38b) and (38c), the informational status of *Rosa* changes: it is a focus in (38b), but becomes topical in (38c), and it is realized as pronoun. Since the latter sentence is still about John, Lambrecht suggests that *her* (= *Rosa*) is a secondary topic (a subordinate topic in Erteschik-Shir's 1997, 2007 terms), namely one less salient than the main

topic (e.g. *John*). The function of secondary topic is typically realized in English by object pronouns, but is conventionally realized by means of scrambling in Dutch or German, and by object shift in Scandinavian (see Erteschik-Shir 2007: section 3.4).

When we compare the role and content of secondary/subordinate topics with the behavior of pivots in eventive existential sentences, the conclusion one obtains is very clear: pivots are not secondary/subordinate. On the one hand, if we want to maintain, as Erteschik-Shir, that the main topic of existential is a null stage topic (optionally restricted by a locative PP), then no obvious relation can be established between the main and the subordinate topic. It comes without surprise then that Erteschik-Shir (1997, 2007) takes existential sentences as prototypical examples of all focus predications. On the other hand, as a quick comparison makes clear with the above mentioned cases of subordinate topics, pivots cannot be dropped, nor be realized as pronoun nor be dislocated in any event:

- (39) a. Hi ha *(la Maria) passejant-se pel jardí.
 LOC has the.F Mary walking-SELF by-the garden
- b. Hi ha ellapassejant-se pel jardí.
 LOC has she walking-SELF by-the garden

- c. Hi ha passejant-se pel jardí, la Maria.
 LOC has walking-SELF by-the garden the.F Mary

Hence, there is every reason to discard that pivots of eventive existential form a natural class with clear-cut topical elements like weak pronouns in English, scrambled DPs in German and Dutch, shifted objects in Icelandic or right-dislocates in Romance.

All in all, the evidence clearly suggests that we are not dealing with a secondary/subordinate topic as defined by Lambrecht (1994) or Erteschik-Shir (1997, 2007).

3.2 Interaction with adverbs of quantification

There exists a big deal of work (see, among others, Hajicová et al. 1998, Partee 1999 and Herburger 2000) on the interaction between quantification and information structure. Among their findings, it has been firmly established that topics and background material map into the restriction of adverbs of quantification, whereas focus maps into the scope, sometimes with detectable truth-conditional effects. Moreover, it has been noted in the literature (Francez 2009: 39) that the pivot is projected into the scope of adverbs of quantification, whereas the coda is projected into the restriction. Hence, a

sentence like (40a) gets the interpretation that most zoos have a zoo-keeper (40b) (from Francez 2009: 38):⁸

- (40) a. There is usually a zoo-keeper in a zoo.
 b. USUALLY_x[zoo(x)][a(∀y[zoo-keeper(y)],<x)]

Francez observation fits nicely with the original intuition by Rigau (1988, 1994) that in existential sentences the topic is the locative, be it overt (i.e. the locative PP coda) or null (i.e. a stage topic in Erteschik-Shir's 1997 terms).

Yet, when it comes to eventive existentials, where the coda is not a locative, things are different: both the pivot and the coda project into the scope of the quantifier:

- (41) Als col·legis sempre hi ha un director rondinant.
 at-the.PL schools always LOC has a principal grumbling
 a. [_{operator} always], [_{restriction} at schools], [_{scope} there is a principal grumbling]
 b. #[_{operator} always], [_{restriction} grumbling at schools], [_{scope} there is a principal]

c. #[operator always], [restriction a principal at schools], [scope there is one grumbling]

(42) A les reunions de col·legi habitualment hi ha un pare
 at the.PL meetings of school usually LOChas a father
 queixant-se dels horaris.
 complaining-SELF of-the.PL timetables

a. [operator usually], [restriction at school meetings], [scope there is a father complaining about timetables]

b. #[operator usually], [restriction complaining about timetables at school meetings], [scope there is a father]

c. #[operator always], [restriction a father at schools meetings], [scope he is there complaining about timetables]

The fact that both the pivot and the coda project into the scope of the quantifier in (41) and (42) strongly suggests that they are both part of the assertion, unlike what happens with locative codas of non-eventive existentials (e.g. Francez's 2009 example in (40)), and the locative adjuncts in (41)-(42).⁹ This nicely fits in with Rigau's (1988, 1994) insight that the topic of the existential sentence is the locative phrase or with the hypothesis by Erteschik-

Shir (1997) that the topic is a null stage-topic, sometimes restricted by means of a locative PP (as suggested by an anonymous reviewer).

In any event, the behaviour of Catalan existential with respect to adverbs of quantification runs against Leonetti's claim that "[i]nside the small clause the DP acts like an internal topic" (Leonetti, 2008: 24), for his hypothesis wrongly predicts that the pivot should project on the restriction of the quantifier. Again, even though evidence is subtle, the odds are clearly against the SC analysis offering a straightforward answer to the facts reported.

3.3 The nature of the pivot

We have just seen that both the pivot and the coda project into the restriction of adverbial quantifiers, which is at odds with Leonetti's suggestion that the pivot is the topic of the SC selected by the existential verb. Another piece of evidence comes from the kind of nominals we find as pivots, which are by no means the ones that one would standardly consider typical candidates for topichood. Without entering into details (see Villalba 2009: ch. 2) for extensive discussion), only quantifiers allowing a partitive reading are easily found as clitic left-dislocates. So, consider, for instance the contrast between monotone increasing quantifiers on one hand (43), which allow a partitive

reading, and monotone decreasing (44) or excess quantifiers (45) on the other, which do not:

(43) Alguns/Molts (dels) llibres, els vam trobar al calaix.
some/many of-the.PL books themPST.1PL find at-the draw
'Some/Many (of the) books, we found at the draw.'

(44) *Menys de quatre/*Pocs (dels) llibres, els vam trobar
less of four/few of-the.PL books them PST.1PL find
al calaix.
at-the draw
'*Less than four/Few (of the) books, we found at the draw.'

(45) *Massa/*Excessius (dels) llibres, els vam trobar
too.many/excessive.PL of-the.PL books them PST.1PL find
al calaix.
at-the draw
'Too many (of the) books, we found at the draw.'

In conclusion, only quantifiers that can be interpreted partitively make good topics in Catalan. Now, let us come back to eventive existentials.

Given the evidence just reviewed, if pivots of eventive existentials were topics, as argued for by Leonetti (2008), the prediction could be made that only monotone increasing quantifiers will be fine in this position. Yet, this prediction is not confirmed at all:

- (46) a. Hi ha alguns (dels) policies perseguint
LOCha some of-the policemen pursuing
els lladres. [monotone increasing]
the.PL thieves
- b. Hi ha pocs (*dels) policies perseguint
LOCha few of-the policemen pursuing
els lladres. [monotone decreasing]
the.PL thieves
- c. Hi ha massa (*dels) policies perseguint
LOCha too.many of-the policemen pursuing
els lladres. [excess]
the.PL thieves

Note that the argument can be easily discarded that the problem has to do with clitic left-dislocation, for this state of affairs extends to other Romance non-verbal subject-predication structures like the *N-of-an-N construction* or non-verbal exclamatives, where it is well-established that the inverted predicate-subject structure parallels a comment-topic structure (see Villalba & Bartra-Kaufmann 2010 for details and references):

(47) a. els idiotes d'alguns (dels) alcaldes [monotone increasing]
 the.PL idiots of-some of-the.PL mayors
 ‘those idiots of some mayors’

b. *els idiotes depocs (dels) alcaldes [monotone decreasing]
 the.PL idiots of few of-the.PL mayors

c. *els idiotes demassa (dels) alcaldes [excess]
 the.PL idiots of too.many of-the.PL mayors

(37) a. Magnífics, alguns (dels) llibres! [monotone increasing]
 terrific.PL some of-the.PL books
 ‘Terrific, some books’

b. *Magnífics, pocs (dels) llibres! [monotone decreasing]
 terrific.PL few (of-the) books

- c. *Magnífics, massa (dels) llibres! [excess]
 terrific.PL too.many (of-the) books

To be fair, we should note that perception SCs do not show a contrast with existentials regarding this feature:

- (48) Vaig veure pocs/massa nens esperant-se
 PST.1SG see few/too.many children waiting
 al passadís.
 at-the corridor
 ‘I saw few/too many children waiting at the corridor.’

A second piece of evidence against analysing pivots as topics comes from the interpretation we obtain with bare nouns. As Basilico (2003: 4) notes, while bare plurals in bare verbal SC are interpreted as existentials (as expected from athetic —i.e. all focus— context), bare plurals in adjective SCs receive a generic interpretation (as expected from a categorical —i.e. topic-focus— context):

- (49) a. The guard saw prisoners leave.

- b. The guard considers prisoners intelligent.

This contrast is expected from the different informational structure of the SC involved. While bare verbal SCs as (49a) involve a categorical predication involving an explicit topic and a focus, adjective SCs as (49b) involve athetic predication, involving an implicit stage topic, so that the bare plural subject forms part of the focus.

Interestingly, Catalan does not allow bare plurals (which cannot be interpreted generically; see Espinal 2011, and references therein) as subjects of SCs (see Ramos 2002: 2018 for Catalan and Demonte & Masullo 1999: 2502 for Spanish):

(50) a. ??/*Vaig veure presoners escapant per la finestra.

PST.1SG see prisoners escaping by the.F window

‘I saw prisoners escaping through the window.’

b. *Considero presoners intel·ligents.

consider.1SG prisoners intelligent.PL

‘I consider prisoners intelligent.’

c. *Sembren presoners intel·ligents.

seem.3PL prisoners intelligent.PL

‘Prisoners seem intelligent.’

When we move to existentials, we are confronted with the well-known fact that bare plurals are perfect and only get the existential interpretation:

- (51) Hi havia nens jugant al jardí.
LOC had children playing at-the garden
‘There were children playing in the garden.’

Since Leonetti’s SC analysis crucially assumes the bare plural in (51) to be the topic of the SC, and bare plurals cannot be topics as long as they cannot get a generic interpretation in Catalan (see Espinal 2011), he incorrectly predicts (51) to be totally impossible, against fact.

Taken at face value, the evidence reviewed in this section seriously calls in doubt Leonetti’s claim that pivots of eventive existentials are topics.

3.4 (In)compatibility with focus particles

We have seen in the preceding subsections that pivots of eventive existentials do not behave as topics in any clear sense. In this subsection we will consider the behaviour of the pivot and the coda regarding focus particles, like *només*

‘only’. On the one hand, under a SC analysis, one could expect that the focus operator *només* ‘only’ would scope over both the pivot and the coda. Yet, it is far from clear that we have such a reading:¹⁰

- (52) A l’habitació,hi ha només en Pere dormint...
- at the-room LOC has only the Peter sleeping
- a. #i no pas la Maria estudiant.
and not NEG the.F Maria studying
- b. i no pas la Maria.
and not NEG the.F Maria
- c. #i no pas estudiant.
and not NEG studying

This impossibility seems even clearer when we make sure that the whole existential sentence is focus, as in the following dialogue:

- (53) What’s going on here?
- a. Res. Només hi ha en Pere dormint.
nothing only LOC has the Peter sleeping
‘Nothing. It’s just Pere sleeping’

- b. Res. #Hi ha només en Pere dormint.
 nothing LOC has only the Peter sleeping
 ‘Nothing. It’s just Pere sleeping’

In (52a) it is the whole sentence that gets under the scope of *només* ‘only’. Yet, the presumed SC formed by the pivot and the coda, which according to Leonetti should be granted propositional status, cannot, as shown in (52b).

On the other hand, as far as the coda is concerned, both the SC and the VP-adjunct analyses predict association with focus particles like *només* ‘only’. Even though in a previous version of the paper, I suggested that the prediction was possibly wrong, as Yurena Gutiérrez and other colleagues pointed out to me in a presentation at the CLT Seminar (UAB, October 5th, 2012), association seems acceptable:

- (54) A l’habitació,hi ha en Pere només dormint
 at the-room LOC has the Peter only sleeping
 i no pas estudiant.
 andnot NEG studying

Again, even though subtle, the data concerning focus particles do not wholly confirm the predictions by Leonetti's (2008) with respect to the information structure of eventive existentials. Particularly, adverbs like *només* 'only' can associate not only with the coda, as expected, but with the pivot as well, making a crucial difference in terms of empirical coverage between the SC and the VP-adjunct analysis.

4 Conclusions

In this article we have reviewed Leonetti's (2008) proposal that eventive existentials in languages like Catalan, French or Italian select a SC, where the pivot is an internal topic and the eventive coda a predicate. We have confronted this hypothesis against two sorts of evidence: tests regarding the structural relation between the pivot and the coda (section 2), and tests concerning the informational status of the pivot and the coda (section 3). As for structural tests, we have discovered that, as far as extraction, scope, and NPI licensing facts are considered, the SC analysis is unwarranted, and the VP-adjunct analysis of the coda is clearly favoured. As for informational status tests, neither the interaction of pivots and codas with quantifiers and focus particles nor the kind of nominals found in pivot position support

Leonetti's claim that the pivot is an internal topic of a selected SC. Rather, a quite different conclusion seems to be correct, namely that both the pivot and the coda are part of the assertion, and a null stage topic is the topic of the existential sentence.

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Thorough the text I follow Leipzig Glosses Rules, and the correspondence of the abbreviations is the following: F=feminine, LOC=locative, NEUT=neuter, PL=plural, PST=past, REFL=reflexive, SG=singular.

² Note, for the sake of clarity, that the presence of an eventive coda is incompatible with a locative coda *in situ*. Hence, in examples where both an eventive coda and a locative final PP are present, either the PP modifies the eventive coda (ia) or it is a right-dislocated locative adjunct of the whole existential sentence (ib):

- (i) a. Hi ha la Maria esperant-se al jardí.
LOC has the.F Mary waiting-REFL to-the garden
- b. Hi ha la Maria esperant-se, al jardí.
LOC has the.F Mary waiting-REFL to-the garden

³ I will not consider E. Williams' (1984) proposal that the eventive coda is a modifier of the pivot for reasons to be discussed below.

⁴ As Manuel Leonetti (p.c.) correctly points out, a source of misunderstanding might arise here concerning the extension of the pivot and coda constituents. While I will follow common practice, and I will consider the DP following the existential verb the pivot, and the post-pivot constituent(s) the coda(s), one should take into account the possibility that the pivot is the SC, including the DP and the eventive phrase, and the coda is an external locative PP. In any event, the terminological issue does not affect the empirical and theoretical core of the paper, which disputes the very possibility that eventive existentials select a SC.

⁵ Cinque (1995) offers interesting tests for pseudo-relatives after perception verbs, which are only partially relevant to our discussion, as Cruschina (2012: fn. 21) acutely notes when considering Italian existentials. Basilico (2003) is also a good source of

comparison between verbal and adjectival SCs in English and Italian. I thank one anonymous reviewer for pointing out to me the relevance of Cinque's and Cruschina's work.

⁶ As one anonymous reviewer points out, this definite/indefinite asymmetry might suggest the existence of two subtypes of the eventive existential construction. The question certainly merits further research within the fine-grained typology of existential constructions developed by Cruschina (2012).

⁷ As one anonymous reviewer points out to me, Cruschina (2012:15) claims that presentational *ci*-sentences, which according to him, include eventive existentials as a subtype, cannot be negated in Italian:

- (i) * Non c'è Gianni infuriato.
not LOC-is John angry

Yet, as far as I can tell, the problem has to do with the definite pivot, for examples like (i) are equally bad in Catalan, and examples with NPIs are good in Italian (the Italian example is picked up from a Google search for “non c'è nessuno aperto”, which obtained 165 results):

- (ii) a. ??No hi ha en Joan perseguint els lladres.
not LOC has the John pursuing the.PL thieves

b.	ma	qui	di	domenica	non	c'è	<i>nessuno</i>
	but	here	of	Sunday	not	LOC-is	no.one
	aperto!						
	open						

⁸ The quantifier ‘a’ is Francez’s abbreviation of the standard Davidsonian ‘ $\exists e$ ’.

⁹ Josep M. Brucart suggests me that this behaviour gives (indirect) support to the SC analysis, for one could argue that the pivot and the coda are projected *as a constituent* (i.e. a SC) in the scope of the quantifier. Yet, the conclusion is unwarranted for we have no way to ascertain whether they are projected as a constituent or as independent constituents (together, for instance, with the locative PP). Hence, this particular datum tells us nothing about constituency, but about information status.

¹⁰ I have not included the version with pre-verbal *només* ‘only’, for it would introduce an unwanted ambiguity with a VP ellipsis contrast:

- (i) Només hi ha en Pere dormint i no (hi ha)
 only LOC has the Pere sleeping and not LOC has
 pas la Maria estudiant.
 NEG the.F Mary studying