

**There is a Cost to External Merge**  
*Juvénal Ndayiragije (U of T)*

This talk examines the syntax of existential *there* constructions of the English type in (1a-b).

- (1) a. There were beautiful flowers on the table.  
b. There arrived/appeared/loomed a strange car.

Within the Minimalist Program, two main approaches have been taken: the widely adopted Expletive Insertion (EI) analysis (Chomsky 1995, a.o) and the Predicate Inversion (PI) account (Hoekstra & Mulder 1990, Moro 1997, Belvin & Dikken 1997, a.o.).

Bjorkman & Cowper (2015), hereafter B&C, showed quite convincingly that the two approaches are not well-equipped to account for a range of facts, including the ungrammaticality of transitive and unergative expletive constructions like (2a-b) and the well-formedness of corresponding progressive constructions in (3a-b):

- (2) a. \* There read people the handout/\*there people read the handout.  
b. \* There laughed children/\*there children laughed.

- (3) a. There were people reading the handout.  
b. There were children laughing.

B&C also showed that EI and PI overlooked the stage- vs. individual-level predicate contrast in (4), and the unaccusative restriction split in (5):

- (4) a. There are taxis available.  
b. There are taxis yellow.

- (5) a. There grew an usual tree in that forest.  
b. \* There fell a tree in that forest.

B&C offer an novel account according to which *there* is not semantically vacuous and its insertion is sensitive to both the argument structure and the temporal/event structure of its complement.

This talk shows that despite its merits, B&C's analysis calls for reconsideration as it undergenerates. We show that *there* insertion freely occurs with transitive and unergative verbs in Bantu, as illustrated in (5) from Kirundi:

- (6) a. ha-á-guze            ibitabo    abârimú.  
    There-pst-buy        books      teachers  
    [Litt: \*There bought books teachers]  
    "Teachers bought books".
- b. ha-á-twenze        abârimú  
    There-pst-laugh    teachers.  
    [Litt: \*There laughed teachers]  
    "Teachers laughed".

Following Ndayiragije (1999), I argue that Kirundi TEC (6a-b) derive from Subj A'-movement to the Spec of a Focus Phrase located in between T and vP, the absence thereof accounts for the unergative/transitive restriction on there-insertion in English. If this analysis is correct, then Chomsky's *Merge over Move* assumption should be dispensed with. *External Merge* is costlier than *Internal Merge* within a single phase.

## References

Bjorkman, Bronwyn & Elizabeth Cowper. 2015. Where There is, and Why. In *Proceedings of the 2015 annual conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association*.

Ndayiragije, Juvénal. 1999. Checking Economy. *Linguistic Inquiry* 30:3, 399-445. MIT Press, MIT.