

The semantic and pragmatic restrictions on strong pronouns in Catalan: existential sentences

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Main goal

Studying a puzzling case of strong pronouns in Catalan locative existentials to reconsider the role of pragmatic factors underlying their distribution:

- (1) *Hi havia ella, a la reunio. [Rig88]
LOC had.3SG she at the.F meeting
'*There was her at the meeting.'
- (2) Hi era ella, a la reunio.
LOC was.3SG she at the.F meeting
'SHE was at the meeting.'
- (3) Hi havia la Maria, a la reunio. [Rig88]
LOC had.3SG the.F Maria at the.F meeting
'*There was Maria at the meeting.'

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- (2) Hi era ella, a la reunio.
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'SHE was at the meeting.'
- (3) Hi havia la Maria, a la reunio. [Rig88]
LOC had.3SG the.F Maria at the.F meeting
'*There was Maria at the meeting.'

Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Pragmatic basis of the DE
- 3 Contexts allowing pronominal pivots
- 4 The analysis
 - Strong pronouns in Catalan: A Gricean view of contrast
 - Focus particles
 - Lists
- 5 Conclusions

Why are pronouns bad pivots?

- (4)
- a. *There is **him/he** in the room. [Mil74, ex.64]
 - b. *Peu de gens ont reconnu qu'il avait eu eux à la fête. [DSB12, 111]
 - c. En la casa había ella.
in the.F house had she

They fall under the definiteness effect

- (5)
- a. #There is Mary at the front door.
 - b. *Il y avait la table dans le jardin. [DSB12, 100]
 - c. En el jardín hay el perro.
in the garden has.LOC the dog

They fall under the definiteness effect

Definiteness scale: [Ais03]; also [Cro88, 164]

Personal pronoun > Proper name > Definite NP < Indefinite specific NP > Non-specific NP

Definiteness Hierarchy: [Ram98, 43]

1, 2 > 3 > tots ('all') > proper noun > common definite animate noun > common definite inanimate noun > common indefinite animate noun > common indefinite inanimate noun > common indefinite animate noun with no determiner > common indefinite inanimate noun with no determiner > abstract noun with no determiner.

Controversial cases: Presentational sentences aka list readings

[BCCR16, Cru16, Rig94, DSB12, Leo16, Zim16]:

- (6)
- a. A. My God! How many people know about this?
B. **There's me and there's you.** That's all. [RN78, ex.37]
 - b. Il y a Jean, Marie et un ami. [DSB12]
 - c. Guarda: c'è tua sorella! [Cru16, 136]
look LOC-is your sister
 - d. Guarda: ndavi a Maria! (Agnana Calabria, RC: [Cru15])
look has ACC Mary
'Look: Mary is here!' (Italian: Guarda: c'è Maria!)

List reading with clear locative meaning

- (7) m'estava a casa la noia que vaig conèixer el
me-stayed at home the.F girl that PAST.1SG meet the
primer cap de setmana as Mercadal, per festes. **Hi**
first head of week at-the Mercadal by holidays LOC
havia ella i el company de pis. I jo que m'estava a
had she and the mate of flat and I that me-stayed at
la tercera habitació
the.F third.F room
- (8) a. There was just me, him and a double bed on a private jet.
(Natalie Portman)
b. Then there was just me and my sister in the house.

Controversial cases: Eventive existentials

[McN92, McN16, DSB12, VM13, Cru16, Leo08, Leo16]:

- (9) a. There is **John** waiting at the door for you. [Lyo99, 239]
b. Il y a **le facteur** qui arrive. [DSB12, 99]
c. C'è **Gianni** infuriato / nei guai. [Cru16, 138]
LOC-is Gianni furious in-the.PL trouble.PL

Why are pronouns worse pivots than definites *in Catalan*?

- (10) a. **Hi** havia *ella/el degà, a la reunió. [Rig88]
LOC had.3SG she/the dean at the.F meeting
b. *En aquella assemblea, **hi** havia ella, tu i jo.
at that meeting LOC had she you and I
[Ram98, ex.7b]
- (11) From Josep Pla *El quadern gris*
a. Al costat de l'església **hi** ha el cementiri.
at-the side of the-church LOC has the cemetery
b. Al costat d'aquests homes **hi** ha els jugadors
to-the side of-these men LOC has the.PL players
normals.
normal.PL

Which role do focus particles play?

- (12) Rafael Azcona representa la literatura cinematogràfica. A
Rafael Azcona represents the literature of.film.F in
Itàlia els millors escriptors escriuen per al cinema, però
Italy the.PL best.PL writers wrote for the cinema but
a Espanya, gairebé **només** hi ha ell.
in Spain almost only LOC has he
El Punt 23/12/11
- (13) A sa reunió **només** hi havia jo. (Menorcan Catalan,
at the.F meeting only LOC had.3SG I
Gemma Rigau (p.c.))

Basic ingredients

- pragmatic factor underlying DE
- focus particles and alternatives
- nature of strong pronouns in Catalan

The pivot must be hearer-new

[WB95, 728]:

“[a]ll existential there-sentences with definite postverbal NPs can be accounted for by a single pragmatic principle: that the postverbal NP of a there-sentence represents an entity that is not presumed by the speaker to constitute shared knowledge. That is, the speaker treats the postverbal NP in *there*-sentences as representing a HEARER-NEW entity (Prince 1992), where a hearer-new entity is one that the speaker does not assume to exist within the hearer’s knowledge store.”

[Pri92]:

- (14)
- There were the same people at both conferences.
 - There was the usual crowd at the beach.
 - There was the stupidest article on the reading list.

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Empirical challenges: old information treated as hearer-new

[WB95]:

Mr. Rummel: Well, didn’t the designer of the orbiter, the manufacturer, develop maintenance requirements and documentation as part of the design obligation? Mr. Collins: Yes, sir. And that is what we showed in the very first part, before the Pan Am study. **There were those other orbiter maintenance and requirement specifications**, which not only did processing of the vehicle, but in flow testing, pad testing, and what have you, but also accomplished or was in lieu of an inspection plan.

[Challenger Commission transcripts, 3/31/86]

Empirical challenges: old information unambiguously identifiable

[WB95]:

- (15) The child crowed. Small feet ran. **There was the sound of a smart slap**, and a wail, which subsided quickly. [E. Thane. 1943. Dawn's Early Light. New York:Duell. Sloan and Pearce. p. 35]
- (16) There was **the wedding picture of a young black couple** among his papers.

Empirical challenges: nonpersistent referents:

- (17) a. There was no fireman at the party.
b. *There is every firemen available.
- (18) Il n'y a pas de justice. [DSB12, 105]
- (19) a. Non c'è nessuna stella nel cielo. [Tov08]
not LOC-is none star in-the sky
b. Non ci sono stelle nel cielo not LOC are stars in-the sky

Empirical challenges: pronouns

- (20) a. A: lama halaxt le-MIT im at lo ohevet et
why go[2.f.s.pst] to-MIT if you[f] not like[f.s.prs] acc
xomsky? [Fra07, 111]
Chomsky?
'Why did you go to MIT if you don't like Chomsky?'
- b. B: lo yadati Se-yeS oto Sam.
neg know[1.s] that-EX him there
'I didn't know he was there.' (Lit: I didn't know there is him there.)
- (21) Keane o Arctic Monkeys tenen bones cançons, però
Keane or Arctic Monkeys have.PL good songs but
pel que fa a personalitats, **només hi ha ella**.
about.the that makes to personalities only LOC has she
El Periódico, 24/06/12

Adding a new ingredient: focus particles

[McN92, 198]:

- (22) a. There was only/%even Kent available.
b. Among those in the cage, there was only/%even the brown dog barking.
- (23) [[*only*]](α) [Roo85, 120]:
a. Assertion: $\forall p[C(p) \wedge p \rightarrow p = \alpha]$
b. Conventional Implicature: α is true
- (24) [[*even*]](α) [Roo85, 120]:
a. Assertion: α is true
b. Conventional Implicature:
 $\exists p[C(p) \wedge p \wedge [p \neq \alpha] \wedge \text{unlikely}(p)]$

Adding a new ingredient: focus particles

- [McN92, 195]:

“If an existential sentence is presupposed to be true in the context in which it is uttered, its (re-)introduction into the context is not accompanied by the instantiation of any discourse referent.”

- [McN92, 199]:

“definites are licensed in the existential in English iff the truth of the existential assertion is presupposed”

Adding a new ingredient: focus and topicality

[Fra07, 124] (see also [Fre92, Abb93, Abb97])

“the DE arises as a consequence of the fact that pivots are predicates and as such required to be focal. Thus, while in principle no NPs are blocked from occurring as pivots, highly topical NPs such as definites, proper names and pronouns are generally blocked by truth-conditionally equivalent copular constructions in which they function as topics. Such NPs occur as pivots only when they must, i.e. in contexts where no such construction is available.”

Adding a new ingredient: focus and topicality

- (25) a. There was my father to drive us from the airport.
 b. *My father was to drive us from the airport.
- (26) a. ??There was my father at the party last night.
 b. My father was at the party last night.

[Fra07, 118]:

- (27) [Who can pick us up from the airport?]
 a. There's my father.
 b. #My father is there.(?)

Adding a new ingredient: focus and topicality

Empirical problem:

- (28) [Who is there available?]
 a. #En Joan hi és./ Hi ha en Joan.
 the John LOC is LOC has the John
 b. #Ell hi és./ ??Hi ha ell.
 he LOC is LOC has he

Common problem of all approaches

- They propose a unified solution for definites, proper names and pronouns.
- They offer no clear answer to the relation between pronouns and focus particles in Catalan.
- They must stipulate that list readings are not prototypical existentials but a presentational type.

Focus particles

- (29) Rafael Azcona representa la literatura cinematogràfica. A Rafael Azcona represents the literature of.film.F in Itàlia els millors escriptors escrivien per al cinema, però Italy the.PL best.PL writers wrote for the cinema but a Espanya, **gairebé només** hi ha **ell**. (El Punt Avui, in Spain almost only LOC has he 23/12/11)
- (30) I **només** hi havia **ella** que el pogués aturar. (Sebastià and only LOC had she that him could stop Juan Arbó, Hores en blanc, p. 64)

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Emphatic particle *mateix* 'even'

- (31) enemics –entre els quals hi ha **ell mateix**–. (El enemies among the which.PL LOC has he himself Periódico. 9/07/2008)
- (32) uns quants, entre els quals hi havia **jo mateix**, [...] a.PL few.PL among the which.PL LOC had I myself (Revista de Cambrils. 07/1997)

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List reading

- (33) unes quantes dones, entre les quals hi a.F.PL some.F.PL women among the.F.PL which.F.PL LOC havia **ella i Victòria**. (Carme Rodríguez Virgili, had she and Victòria Benvinguda, Marta, p. 180)
- (34) No hi havia **el director**, no hi havies **tu**, no hi not LOC had the principal not LOC had.2SG you not LOC havia **ningú**. [Jan80] had.3SG nobody

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Crucial question

What do these three contexts have in common?

They introduce alternatives.

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Contrastive nature

[Rig88, MC10, May10]

- (35) Vaig veure un home sospitós.
PST.1SG see a man suspect
'I saw a suspect man.'
- (#Ei) era alt.
he was tall
'He was tall.'
 - Només ell era alt.
only he was tall
'Only he was tall.'

So, why are strong pronouns disfavored as pivots of existentials?

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Contrastive nature

Preference for null/weak pronouns: the avoid pronoun principle.

- (36) a. Menja (#tu)!
eat you
'You, eat!'
- b. A: Passa. B: No, passa #(tu).
pass not pass you
'A: Come in. B: No, YOU come in.'

Contrastive nature

- (37) Tothom_i diu que *pro*_i / ell_{*i} està molt content.
 everybody says that / he is very happy
 ‘Everybody says that he is very happy.’

[Luj86]:

- (38) Ana_i se enoja cada vez que *pro*_i / ella_{*i} / sólo ella_i
 Ana SELF upsets every time that / she / only she
 pierde.
 loses

Contrast as an implicature

[Kai11] analysis of weak/strong pronouns in Dutch (also [Hua00]):

- (39) a. [I know that Emma scratched Willemijn. But who did
 Marjolein scratch?]
 b. Zij/#Ze heeft Claartje gekrabd.
 she_{strong}/she_{weak} had Claartje scratched
 “She scratched Claartje”.
- (40) a. [I know that Emma tickled Willemijn. And what else?]
 b. #Zij/Ze heeft Claartje gekrabd.
 she_{strong}/she_{weak} had Claartje scratched
 “She scratched Claartje”.

Contrast as an implicature

- the choice of overt/null (Catalan) or strong/weak (Dutch) generates an implicature of contrast

- (41) Vaig veure un home sospitós. *pro*/#Ell era alt.
 PST.1SG see a man suspect he was tall
 ‘I saw a suspect man. He was tall.’

- (42) Vaig veure una parella. #*pro*/Ell era alt.
 PST.1SG see a couple he was tall
 ‘I saw a couple. He was tall.’

Contrast as an implicature

- where no option exists, no contrast implicature is generated

- (43) Vaig veure un home sospitós. Tothom es va
 PST.1SG see a man suspect everybody SELF PST.3SG
 girar cap a ell.
 turn toward to he
 ‘I saw a suspect man. Everybody turn his head toward him.’

What about existentials?

- (44) En aquella festa també hi havia la teva germana?
 in that.F party also LOC had the.F your.F sister
 *No, no la hi havia. [Ram02, 2004]
 not not her LOC had

Since we don't have strong/weak alternation, we predict that the strong pronoun in pivot position will not be contrastive, but anaphoric. But, as [Leo08, Leo16] remarks, anaphoric pivots are generally excluded.

The perfect storm



The perfect storm

- Strong and weak pronouns do not alternate in the pivot position.
- Hence, a strong pronoun will only be anaphoric, never contrastive.
- However, as we have seen, pivots cannot be anaphoric.
- So then, pronominal pivots are impossible, unless. . .

But...

Prediction: if we could add a contrastive value to the pronominal pivot, it would become grammatical.

- focal particle *només* 'only',
- emphatic particle *mateix* 'self' and
- the list reading.

The role of focus particles: *only*

[BC09, 71]: “exclusives are inherently downward oriented in the sense that they declare a strong answer to be false in favor of something weaker”

Meaning of exclusives

The lexical meaning of exclusives is exhaustively described by:

Discourse function: *To make a comment on the Current Question (CQ, as defined in Chapter 2), a comment which weakens a salient or natural expectation. To achieve this function, the prejacent must be weaker than the expected answer to the CQ on a salient scale.*

Presupposition: *The strongest true alternatives in the CQ are at least as strong as the prejacent.*

Descriptive Content: *The strongest true alternatives in the CQ are at most as strong as the prejacent.*

[BC09, 251]

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[BC09, 251]

The role of focus particles: *only*

(45) I expected a suite, but I only obtained an individual room with two beds. [expectation > prejacent]

(46) #I expected an individual room with two beds, but I only obtained a suite. [prejacent > expectation]

The role of focus particles: *only*

- (47) a. I **només hi havia ella** que el pogués aturar.
and only LOC had she that him could stop
(Sebastià Juan Arbó, Hores en blanc, p. 64)
- b. d'empleats **només hi havia ella i una auxiliar**.
of-employees only LOC had she and an.F assistant
(El Punt Avui, 10/11/2010)

Només 'only' builds a contrast between the referent of the pronoun and stronger alternative in our scale of expectations. As a consequence, the pivot becomes contrastive, and it can appear in pivot position.

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[BC09, 71]: “scalar additives are upward oriented, suggesting something stronger than what has been assumed or stated.”
Namely, **even** is the PRAGMATIC antonym of *only*. Hence, the prejacent must be stronger than the expected answer to the current question.

- (48) #I expected a suite, but I even obtained an individual room with two beds. [expectation > prejacent]
- (49) I expected an individual room with two beds, but I even obtained a suite. [prejacent > expectation]

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The role of focus particles: *even*

- (50) a. al president li han començat a créixer
to-the president to.him have.PL began to grow
enemics –entre els quals hi ha **ell mateix**–.
foes among the.PL which.PL LOC has he
(El Periódico. 9/07/2008)
even
- b. uns quants, entre els quals hi havia **jo mateix**,
a.PL few.PL among the.PL which.PL LOC had I
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List reading

Lists are the pure expression of alternatives, so we can expect them to allow pronouns to get a contrastive reading, and become, hence, possible.

- (51) pels funcionaris en vaga, entre els quals hi
by-the civil-servants on strike among the.PL which.PL LOC
havia **jo** i alguns dels que sou aquí. (Pasqual
had I and some.PL of-the.PL are.2SG here
Maragall. Solemne signatura de l’acord. . .)
- (52) unes quantes dones, entre les quals hi
a.F.PL some.F.PL women among the.F.PL which.F.PL LOC
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More contrastive cases

- (53) a. **D’una banda** hi havia **ella** i **de l’altra** la resta
of-one side loc had she and of the-other the rest
del món, . . .
of-the world
- b. Em semblà que a la meva esquerra no hi havia
to.me seemed that to the.F my.F left not loc had
ella **sinó** Alberta.
she but Alberta

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Beyond Catalan

- (54) a. there are no other gods, because there was **only he** at first (Howard Fast, Moses: The Epic Story of His Rebellion in the Court of Egypt)
- b. and now there was **only him**, alone on the road, [...] (Stephen King, The long walk)
- c. He was on her mind continually, invading her thoughts, pushing out everything insane until there was **only him**. (Christine Feehan, Dark prince)
- d. He was doing that at the expense of String Theory and Lego fun time. And there was **even him** tolerating harp music in the midst of it all.

Beyond Catalan

- (55) a. Agapita, que solo había **ella** con ese nombre, [...] (La Agapita that only had she with this name casa (II): La familia tradicional sanabresa.)
- b. entonces solo habíamos **nosotros**. (La verdad del amor, then only had.1PL we cap. 12)
- c. Solo habían **ellos** dos. (Hoja de Lagomar.July 2006.) only had.3PL they two
- d. Para el agua no hay sino **ella misma**; (Vasconcelos, for the water not has but she herself Estética)

Beyond Catalan



- (56) a. Icardi? Non c'è solo lui nell'Inter
Icardi not LOC-is only he in-the-Inter
- b. Quando in testa c'è solo lui.
when in head LOC-is only he
- c. Matteo Salvini: ormai a destra c'è solo lui
Matteo Salvini now at right LOC-is only he

Conclusions I

- 1 the proper treatment of the DE is pragmatic;
- 2 pronominal pivots cannot be given a uniform solution within current analyses of the DE;
- 3 the position of pivot doesn't allow pronouns to generate the required contrastive implicature;
- 4 pronominal pivots can only obtain the contrastive reading externally, with lexical mechanisms creating alternatives;
- 5 our present analysis explains the similar behavior of pronominal pivots in languages respecting and violating the DE;
- 6 our present analysis opens a path for reunifying DE in locative existential and presentational sentences.

Merci beaucoup!

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