

## ON THERE-PASSIVE PARTICIPLE CONSTRUCTIONS

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The main purpose of this paper is to criticise an analysis of (eventive) *there*-passive participle constructions (*There were three people arrested*) as regular passives, that is as constructions with an original [Prt<sub>pass</sub>P-DP] order, where DP occupies the so-called Thematization/Extraction position. I use evidence as based on (a) interpretive properties, (b) constituent extraction, and (c) the syntax of auxiliaries in order to show that *there*-passive participle constructions are existential constructions where DP occupies a more central position than the participle. More specifically, following the approach to expletive constructions provided in Hazout (2004), I argue that the DP is the core predicate of a small clause construct, and that Prt<sub>pass</sub>P occupies the position of adjunct predicate to the small clause. Eventive *there*-passive participle constructions are distinguished both syntactically and from an interpretive perspective not only from sentential passives, but also from non-eventive *there*-passive participle constructions.

Keywords: *there*-passive participle construction; eventive interpretation; non-eventive interpretation; standard passives; existential constructions

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### EN TORNO A LAS CONSTRUCCIONES CON THERE EXPLETIVO Y PARTICIPIO PASIVO DE LA LENGUA INGLESA

*El objetivo principal de este artículo consiste en rechazar el análisis de las construcciones there-participio pasivo con interpretación eventiva (There were three people arrested) como construcciones pasivas, es decir como construcciones con un orden original [SintagmaParticipio<sub>pasivo</sub>-SintagmaDeterminante], donde el Sintagma Determinante ocupa el nódulo que se conoce como posición de Tematización/Extracción. Se defiende que las construcciones there-participio pasivo son estructuras existenciales en las que el Sintagma Determinante ocupa una posición más central que el participio, y para ello se apela a (a) propiedades semánticas o interpretativas, (b) hechos de extracción de constituyentes, y (c) propiedades sintácticas de los verbos auxiliares. Tomando como referencia Hazout (2004), se plantea la propuesta de que el Sintagma Determinante sea el núcleo principal de una estructura de cláusula menor, donde el Sintagma Participio ocupe una posición de predicado adjunto. Las construcciones eventivas there-participio pasivo son contrastadas tanto formal como semánticamente no sólo con las pasivas estándares o regulares, sino asimismo con las correspondientes construcciones con participio pasivo pero con interpretación no eventiva.*

*Palabras clave: construcción there-participio pasivo; interpretación eventiva; interpretación no eventiva; pasiva estándar; construcción existencial*

## 1. Introduction

A structure like (1) has been frequently referred to in recent minimalist literature as an expletive *passive*, a characterisation that responds to an analysis where the DP *three people* is a direct object argument of the participle, as in (2): specifically, [DP-Prt<sub>pass</sub>] is argued to derive from [Prt<sub>pass</sub>-DP] by means of a process of DP-raising that is triggered either in core syntax through an EPP-property of Prt<sub>pass</sub>P (Lasnik 1995, 1999; Holmberg 2001; Rezac 2006), or otherwise in the phonological component, in a manner independent of the computational system (Chomsky 2000, 2001) – as is well known, the latter operation is labelled *Thematization/Extraction* in Chomsky (2001). Still another possibility is offered by Caponigro and Schütze (2003), where [DP-Prt<sub>pass</sub>] is also a derived order but one that, according to the authors, results from the failure of (English) passive participles to raise to a position higher than the position that objects must arguably raise to.

- (1) There were three people arrested  
 (2) [...] [be [<sub>Th/Ex</sub>three people [<sub>PrtP</sub>arrested t]]]

All cited approaches thus agree that (1) and the regular or standard passive (3) share a parallel derivation, which differs only in the presence of the expletive in the initial numeration for (1). Nonetheless, they also acknowledge the possibility that (1) be analysed as an existential structure proper, where the material to the left of *be* is a DP containing a reduced relative, as in (4). A crucial interpretive difference between the two would relate to the stative nature of the existential sentence as opposed to the dynamic or eventive status of the so-called expletive passive.

- (3) a. Three people were arrested  
 b. [three people [be [<sub>VP</sub>arrested t]]]  
 (4) [...] [be <sub>DP</sub>three people [<sub>RL</sub>Op arrested t]]]

In the present paper I aim to refute an analysis of eventive *there*-passive participle constructions like (1) along the lines of (2), and argue instead that they must be treated as existential structures, though ones displaying a different configuration than the stative or non-eventive reading of (1) (see 4, above). More specifically, in section 2 I aim to counteract significant argumentation in the recent literature against an existential analysis of (1) basing my own argument on evidence from (a) interpretive properties, (b) extraction phenomena, and (c) the syntax of auxiliaries. Afterwards, in section 3, I propose a syntactic analysis of *there*-passive participle constructions that is directly based on the approach to expletive structures in Hazout (2004). I attempt to justify the relevant proposal by attending to differences of interpretation and to contrasts on constituent extraction existing between eventive *there*-passive participle constructions on the one hand, non-eventive constructions and regular or standard passives on the other. Due to space limitations, the sentence-type under analysis in this paper is exclusively the one showing the order in (1): the construction that is referred to in Chomsky (2001: 25) as *the rightward variant of Th/Ex* (*There are expected to be caught*

*many fish, There was elected a new candidate*) belongs to work in progress, though it can be advanced here that this is expected to be analysed as the result of an extraposition process applying to a configuration like (1) above.

It must be observed that there exist works in the recent literature that argue against a passive analysis for *there*-passive participle constructions, as is the case with McNally (1997), Law (1999)<sup>1</sup> or Radford (2000): these are used occasionally throughout the paper in order to support the present approach. With regard to terminology, I would like to note that the sentence-type under analysis, which is here called (eventive) *there*-passive participle construction, is variously referred to in the literature as *PEC* or *passive expletive construction* (Rezac 2006), or *NP-Participle-passive* (Holmberg 2001). Further, a label like *Th/Ex (participle) construction* is clearly currently associated with Chomsky's (2001) approach.

Since Chomsky's (2001) above-mentioned Th/Ex approach constitutes a fundamental background for any work dealing with existential constructions and with participle structures generally speaking, I will dedicate the remainder of this section to a brief description of the motivation behind it and to the criticism that it has evoked.

Chomsky (2000, 2001) can be considered to represent a major step in the much-debated issue of existential constructions by succeeding in unifying the account of a sequence like (5a) and that of (5b) by means of a minimal set of operations: both (5a) and (5b) are argued to derive from a configuration like (5c) without resort to any mechanism of case-transmission (Safir 1987) or of partitive case assignment (Belletti 1988; Lasnik 1995). The material in brackets in (5c) is standardly identified as a small clause where the DP [*a spy*] is arguably a subject and the locative PP [*on the corner*] acts as a predicate (Hoekstra and Mulder 1990; Lasnik 1995, 1999; Chomsky 2000).

- (5) a. There was a spy on the corner
- b. A spy was on the corner
- c. T be [a spy on the corner]

A widely-known potential difficulty for the assimilation between structures with and without the expletive *there* is represented by sequences featuring a passive participle:

- (6) [ \_\_ were arrested three people]
- (7) Three people were arrested (former 3)
- (8) There were three people arrested (former 1)
- (9) \*There were arrested three people

As entailed by the operation Agree, the movement of the DP *three people* in (8) is unnecessary, and therefore arguably ungrammatical; on the other hand, the status of (9) is likewise unexpected, though for the opposite reason since, despite it being a

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, Law (1999) does not distinguish in a clear way between eventive and non-eventive *there*-passive participle constructions, and it is the case that most of his paper's argumentation hinges upon a comparison between standard passives and non-eventive *there*-constructions.

configuration where no unnecessary move seems to take place, the relevant construction is ill-formed.

Chomsky (2001) provides a solution to the puzzle by positing the existence of a preparticipial position, the so-called Th/Ex (thematization/extraction) position, which can arguably be likened to the [Spec,Prt] position that is postulated in Lasnik's (1995) analysis: see (2) above, repeated here with the same numeration.

(2) [...] [be<sub>[Th/Ex]</sub>three people [PrtP<sub>arrested</sub> t]]

There exists a relevant contrast between both approaches, nonetheless, since the attraction of the DP theme into [Spec,Prt] as triggered by feature-strength of English participles applies within core syntax, whereas Th/Ex is a phonological operation. As a matter of fact, several contributions to the literature in the field have criticised the phonological nature of Chomsky's Th/Ex: one of these is Holmberg (2001), who, following Lasnik (1995), argues in favour of the movement of the DP into preparticipial position as a process taking place in narrow syntax. Within such a framework, the DP is argued to be attracted by a (syntactic) EPP-feature of the participle. Holmberg (2001) criticises the phonological stance of Th/Ex principally by appealing to the semantic impact that the presence of the expletive has on the lexical DP (the so-called Definiteness Effect). The phonological nature of Th/Ex is also argued against in Radford (2000), where the author claims that it is a threat to a model of syntax as based on one-level representations.

Aside from the controversy about the syntactic or otherwise phonological status of Th/Ex, what matters for the present discussion is that an extensive part of the literature – which includes works like Caponigro and Schütze (2003) or Rezac (2006) – shares the premise that *there*-passive participle constructions respond to the original configuration of a true or standard passive, where the lexical DP merges as the object of the participle and is later moved to [Spec,Prt]. If, on the other hand, the lexical DP targets [Spec,T], then the result is a standard or regular passive – see (7), or (3) above.

## 2. In defence of an existential configuration for *there*-passive participle constructions

In 2.1.1 and 2.2 below I try to question the validity of arguments that works such as Caponigro and Schütze (2003) or Rezac (2006) assume from the preceding literature against an analysis of *there*-passive participle constructions as existential constructions.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, in 2.1.2, 2.3, and likewise in 2.2 I highlight properties of relevant sequences that oppose these to sentential passives.

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, Caponigro and Schütze (2003) base their analysis on a comparison between *there*-passive participle constructions on the one hand and *there*-active participle constructions on the other, whereas Rezac (2006) deals with the issue of locative inversion structures.

### 2.1. Interpretive properties

The first set of arguments for an existential analysis or [DP-Prt<sub>pass</sub>P] analysis of *there*-passive participle constructions relates to their interpretive force, which is claimed here to differ both from standard or regular passives and from non-eventive *there*-passive participle constructions.

#### 2.1.1. Eventive meaning

Milsark (1979) is arguably one of the first to oppose the view developed in Jenkins (1975) that all *there*-sequences generally speaking are existential structures, a view that the present paper adheres to. Milsark (1979) emphasises the fact that sequences like (1) compare to regular passives, an idea that the author bases on the fact that they both describe an *event*. Milsark's hypothesis is assumed by Caponigro and Schütze (2003: 303) and likewise by Rezac (2006: 686), who endorse the claim that for time adverbials like *just* or *just now* to be possible in (11) must be taken to mean that the relevant sequences are not headed by a DP but are instead true verbal structures headed by Prt<sub>pass</sub>; by contrast with (11), the adverbial elements are not allowed in the existential sentences in (10), whose core is arguably a DP. The reason why such adverbials should be so closely associated with eventive meaning would lie in their capacity to highlight telicity, that is, boundedness in time of a given situation.<sup>3</sup>

(10) \*There's just been a frog / \*There was a frog just now

(11) a. There've just been some men arrested

b. There were some men arrested just now

c. There have just been several fish (\*which were) caught

However, for both (11a, b) and the relative clause within (11c) to be ill-formed does not mean that all DP's on a general basis lack the ability to denote eventive meaning: the existence of eventive nouns as in (12) is widely acknowledged in the literature, and even if it should be claimed that *be* of (12) is an eventive verb proper rather than an instance of existential *be*, that would be no argument against the availability of eventive DP's.

(12) There has just been an accident / There was a massacre just now

The status of (10) confirms that not all DP's can serve the eventive function in a given existential construction, which means that an approach that defends the existential nature of a sequence like (1) – the model structure under analysis in this paper – must necessarily explain how the relevant DP gets its eventive interpretation. It is not difficult

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<sup>3</sup> Along with time adverbials like *just* or *just now*, the use of certain tenses also contributes to the telic interpretation of a given predication. Such is the case with the present perfect – see (i) below – or with the simple past vs. the imperfect in a language like Spanish (see 2.1.3 below).

(i) There have been three people arrested. (typically eventive)

to guess the massive role that  $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}$  must play in this, though the precise mechanism will be specified in section 3 of the paper. As implied above, such a mechanism must be different from that applying in a relative construction, despite that fact that the latter also features a  $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}$ .

- (1) There were three people arrested

### 2.1.2. Agentive meaning

The purpose of this section is to argue that a class of subject-oriented adverbs, specifically agentive adverbs, gives evidence of a relevant contrast existing between *there*-passive participle constructions on the one hand, and regular passives on the other: see (13) and (14) below.<sup>4</sup>

- (13) (Willingly), a volunteer (willingly) was (willingly) arrested (willingly) by the soldiers

- (14) (\*Willingly), there (\*willingly) was (\*willingly) a volunteer (willingly) arrested (willingly) by the soldiers.

Assuming the view that adverbs are base-generated as adjuncts to constituents that act as their arguments from a logical point of view, the occurrence of *willingly* to the immediate left or right of the form *arrested* in both (13) and (14) is a clear indication that the adverb is a logical predicate of the event denoted by the participle. However, whereas the standard passive in (13) allows for the adverb to be moved to higher positions within the clause, and even to the periphery of the latter, the *there*-construction in (14) does not, which is here taken to mean that the verb *be* is a different element in each sequence. Effectively, (standard) passives are agentive structures, which is corroborated by the fact that only verbs taking an external argument allow for a passive counterpart: *be* in (13) can therefore incorporate the agentive adverb as an adjunct, or act as a platform for the adverb to get raised to a position in CP (the above-mentioned peripheral position). By contrast, the inability of the adverb *willingly* to appear in any of the relevant positions to the left of the DP *a volunteer* in (14) indicates that *be* in (14) is not the passive auxiliary. In the present approach, *be* of (14) is existential *be*, and the ungrammatical sequences therein are explained because neither existential *be* nor the functional projection that is argued in section 3 below to act as its complement match the agentive interpretation of the adverb. No further details of the syntax of adverbs in the constructions under analysis are nevertheless provided in this paper for reasons of space.

### 2.1.3. The existential-eventive interpretation of *there*-passive participle constructions

It has been argued in 2.1.2 that the restrictions affecting the position of agentive adverbs in *there*-passive participle constructions suggest that these are not able to express

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<sup>4</sup> My thanks to an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments about the nature of adverb placement generally speaking.

agentive meaning, as opposed to regular passives. Only regular or standard passives like (3), and not expletive constructions like (1), appear therefore to be agentive sequences. In addition to the latter contrast, (1) differs from (3) in the present approach in a major way since (1) is considered an existential construction proper, which means that the core of its interpretive force is to denote the existence of an individual.

(1) There were three people arrested

(3) Three people were arrested

Before offering in 3 below the configuration that is proposed in this paper for *there*-passive participle constructions, it is convenient to describe what it can arguably mean for an existential structure to be additionally an eventive construction. I would like to claim that the eventive meaning of (1) comes about in the following manner: the individual whose existence is denoted or asserted in *there*-passive participle constructions is additionally the target of some action or activity, as expressed by the passive participle. In this way, regular or standard passives like (3) express the taking place of an action or activity in a direct way, whereas passive participle constructions like (1) do so indirectly, through asserting the existence of an individual (*three people* in the case in hand) that is affected by the action or activity: (1) could thus be paraphrased as ‘There were three people such that they were arrested by somebody’. The syntactic analysis of *there*-passive participle constructions proposed in 3 below will entail a slight revision of the property or value of existence for relevant constructions, although one that does not affect the discussion at this stage.

The aspect of the present approach to eventive sequences like (1) that I would like to highlight is that, despite the close synonymy existing between these and standard passives such as (3), the former are existential constructions proper that feature existential *be* and that respond to the properties of existential constructions generally speaking. I would like to suggest that a very close parallel can be found within the existential domain in a language like Spanish. Thus, (15a) below is near-synonymous with the standard passive (15b), though it must still be analysed as an existential construction proper. The reason that the use of the simple past in (15a) almost precludes a stative or non-eventive reading, which is the one that corresponds to (16) in a natural way, is that the simple past is typically a telic tense, as opposed to the imperfect.

(15) a. *Hubo tres personas arrestadas* (typically eventive)  
 there-were<sub>past</sub> three people arrested

b. *Tres personas fueron arrestadas*  
 three people were arrested

(16) *Había tres personas arrestadas* (typically non-eventive)  
 there-were<sub>imperfect</sub> three people arrested

The approach to *there*-passive participle constructions as existential constructions that is proposed in this paper renders the cross-linguistic paradigm established in Caponigro and Schütze (2003) as an inappropriate one, since the Italian sequences that the authors

provide as counterparts to sequences like English (1) do not appear to be comparable to the latter.

(17) There've been some men arrested / \*There've been arrested some men

(18) \**Sono stati alcuni uomini arrestati* / *Sono stati arrestati alcuni uomini*

are been some men arrested are been arrested some men

'Some men have been arrested' (the author's translation)

(Caponigro and Schütze 2003: 293)

In effect, on the present analysis, (17) are existential constructions (of the eventive type) whereas (18) are identified as regular passives. Caponigro and Schütze (2003: 304) observe that Italian completely forbids the expletive *ci* 'there' in standard or regular passives (\**Ci sono stati arrestati alcuni uomini*, lit. 'there are been arrested some men'). However, from this fact it cannot be concluded that English (17) – or similarly (1) – are sentential passives: in other words, for Italian not to accept expletive passives does not entail that (18) is the counterpart of (17), even though they both share an eventive interpretation (see above in this section).

In the remainder of this section I focus briefly on non-eventive *there*-passive participle constructions, that is on the non-eventive reading that is available for a sequence like (1). As observed in the Introduction, there is general consensus in the literature that these are existential constructions acting as a superordinate structure to a relative clause configuration (4), a perspective that is assumed here. In the present approach, then, both eventive and non-eventive *there*-passive participle constructions assert the existence of an individual, as all *there*-constructions do on a general basis (Jenkins 1975): the difference between the two lies in that the above-mentioned individual is identified in eventive expletives as the target of an action (see above in this section), whereas the individual in the non-eventive type is described as holding a certain state that is the result of previous action. That this is so can be shown by the use of the perfective auxiliary in the paraphrase of non-eventive sequences: the non-eventive reading of (1) would thus correspond roughly with 'There were three people such that they were in the state of *having been* arrested' or similarly 'There were three people such that they *had been* arrested'.

## 2.2. Extraction phenomena

Extraction phenomena involving *there*-passive participle constructions can be used as arguments against a sentential passive analysis or [Prt<sub>pass</sub>P-DP] analysis of corresponding sequences.

Both Caponigro and Schütze (2003: 303) and Rezac (2006: 686), citing relevant literature (Lasnik 1995, 1999; Chomsky 2001), consider the marginal status of extraction from Prt<sub>pass</sub>P of eventive expletive constructions as in (19) as a proof that these do not entertain the same configuration as non-eventive constructions. For the latter to feature a relative clause structure would explain, as is currently assumed in the literature, the full ungrammaticality of the A'-movement process.

(19) ??How were there some volunteers arrested? (eventive structure)



- (20) a. There are two meetings postponed nonsensically on the agenda (non-eventive st.)  
 b. There are [<sub>DP</sub>two meetings [<sub>RelCl</sub>Op postponed t nonsensically on the agenda]]  
 c. \*How are there [two meetings [Op postponed t t on the agenda?]]

While adhering to the relative clause analysis for non-eventive *there*-passive participle constructions, I would like to suggest that there is one significant paradigm that must additionally be accounted for, where eventive *there*-passive participle constructions are contrasted with regular or standard passives. Thus, though (19) is not completely ruled out as a possible sequence in English, it is actually more restricted or limited than (21), a circumstance that must surely entail for  $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}$  of standard passives to enjoy a different status than  $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}$  of *there*-participle constructions.

- (19) ??How were there some volunteers arrested?  
 (21) How were some volunteers arrested?

A similar situation arises with regard to  $A'$ -extraction from DP, which again casts serious doubts on a regular passive analysis of *there*-passive participle constructions. It must be emphasised, nonetheless, that deciding over the grammatical or ungrammatical status of (22) is a real conundrum for the theory, and that lack of consensus among linguist speakers is quite high.

- (22) \*/?How many people were there arrested? (eventive *there*-structure)  
 (23) How many people were arrested?

I would like to note that, of the two proposals currently available in the literature on the contrast between (22) and (23), both of which assume an original [ $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}$ P-DP] order and a Th/Ex operation (or an EPP-property of  $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}$ ), neither can be said to be fully satisfactory. On the one hand, Chomsky (2001) argues that Th/Ex is a process applying exclusively in the phonological component, which means that the DP is left without any phonological features at Spell-Out. The process of attraction into C (omplementiser)P(hrase) demanded by a sequence like (22) is therefore not a viable one, due to the inability of the DP to move in narrow syntax. Now, aside from the criticism that the phonological status of Th/Ex has received on various fronts (see 1 above), the relevant proposal does not seem to explain the  $A'$ -movement restriction illustrated in (19) or the one that is discussed in 3.3 below. Furthermore, it is interesting to observe that, while Rezac (2006) acknowledges the capacity of non-iterable Th/Ex to explain (22), he criticises its lack of efficiency to tackle certain restrictions affecting locative inversion sequences (Rezac 2006: 692).

One other proposal that can be found in the literature with regard to the impossibility of (22) is Holmberg (2001), which assumes a Th/Ex (or EPP) position for the DP of *there*-passive participle constructions, but one that belongs to core or narrow syntax (see 1 above). Basing on Th/Ex as an operation of the computational system, Holmberg (2001) justifies (22) by appealing to the concept or notion of *phase*, a well-known mark of recent minimalist syntax. As is currently assumed, a phase is a kind of syntactic domain acting as a barrier for movement processes – specifically, Chomsky (2001) regards propositional  $vP$  and CP as typical phases, to which he later adds DP. By

invoking the status of phase for English participle phrases (that is, for  $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}$ ), Holmberg (2001) is able to disallow *Wh*-movement of DP from  $[\text{Spec}, \text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}]$  over the expletive *there* since the merge of the latter means for  $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}$  to be conformed already, and therefore to be impenetrable to further operations in the syntax.

Nevertheless, Holmberg's analysis appears to complicate the current notion of phase, since English participles lack phi-features, or otherwise P-features. In effect phases appear to be the locus of features, which are at the base of movement processes: above-mentioned  $\nu\text{P}$  and DP contain phi-features, whereas CP is associated with P-features or features of the peripheral system. On Holmberg's account, therefore,  $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}$  (or *V-en*) is a different kind of phase from  $\nu\text{P}$  (or, for that matter, DP or CP), which appears to go against economy considerations, and against the explanatory power that syntactic theory must attain.

The proposal that will be sketched in section 3 of the present paper aims to explain the contrast between (19) and (21), and also that between (22) and (23), through resort to the concept of phase, though the task is to avoid modifying or adding to the existing notion of phase, an aspect which appears to be a weakness in Holmberg's discussion (2001).

### 2.3. Chains of auxiliaries

After using certain interpretive properties of *there*-passive participle constructions (2.1) and restrictions on constituent extraction (2.2) as evidence against a regular passive account (or  $[\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}\text{P-DP}]$  account), my focus in the current section is on the sequential order of auxiliaries, specifically on the combinatorial possibilities exhibited by progressive *be* and passive *be*.

- (24) a. There are three people arrested every day now  
 b. There were three people arrested  
 c. There have been three people arrested  
 d. There will be three people arrested  
 e. There are three people being arrested at this moment  
 f. \*There are being three people arrested at this moment
- (25) Three people are being arrested at this moment

If a standard passive analysis is implemented on the above paradigm, with  $[\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}\text{P-DP}]$  as the original base order, then the only instance of *be* occurring in each of the examples (24a-d) is one of passive *be*: an EPP-feature of the participle (or a Th/Ex mechanism), whether syntactic or phonological, would trigger the movement of the DP *three people* to  $[\text{Spec}, \text{Prt}]$  in all above-mentioned sequences. By contrast with (24a-d), (24e) features two instances of *be* which, according to the cited pattern, must correspond to passive *be* (in the progressive form *being*) and progressive *be* (in the finite form *are*). In a similar fashion to (24e), the full or regular passive (25) contains both progressive *be* and passive *be*. The relevant aspect to highlight about the occurrence of progressive *be* in paradigm

(24) is that (24e) is grammatical, but not (24f), despite the lexical DP occupying the same position as in well-formed (24a-d). Rezac (2006) tries to solve this apparent contradiction by postulating an iteration process that gets the DP attracted to [Spec,Pr<sub>t</sub><sub>pass</sub>] and then to [Spec,Pr<sub>t</sub><sub>prog</sub>], thereby opposing the Th/Ex phonological mechanism of Chomsky (2001), which cannot recur (see section 2.2 above).

I would like to make the point that Rezac's account of (24e) does not appear to be on the right track, since the EPP-property of the present participle in the relevant structure is not shared by present participles generally speaking: note the ungrammaticality of (26b).

- (26) a. They are sinking a boat  
 b. \*They are a boat sinking

If, by contrast with the current trend in minimalist literature, *there*-passive participle constructions are analysed as existential constructions, then it is possible to account for the ungrammaticality of (24f) in a fairly straightforward way. In such an approach, which is the one followed here, the only occurrence of passive *be* in paradigm (24) is the progressive form in (24e), all other instances of *be* in (24a-d) being arguably identified as existential *be*. The ungrammatical status of (24f) is therefore not due to a failure of raising of DP, but to the aspectual oddity of the sequence [*are being*], where existential *be* occurs in the progressive.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. On the configuration of existential constructions

The main goal of the paper has been to propose a critique of the analysis of *there*-passive participle constructions as passive constructions, that is as constructions that feature an original [Pr<sub>t</sub><sub>pass</sub>P-DP] order, and to propose instead that these are existential constructions proper where DP is actually not the direct object argument of Pr<sub>t</sub><sub>pass</sub>. In 2.1.1–2.1.2 and 2.2, respectively, it has been argued that *there*-passive participle structures differ from true sentential passives in their inability to denote agentive meaning and likewise in the restrictions affecting constituent extraction (an issue that must still be accounted for), and in 2.3 the view that *be* of *there*-passive participle structures is existential *be*, which had previously been suggested by the constraints on agentive adverbs (above-mentioned 2.1.2), has been supported by an analysis of sequences featuring the progressive auxiliary.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The use of existential *be* in the progressive is nevertheless not impossible: (i) below is an illustration taken from Radford (2000: 43), where the occurrence of an adverb like *continually* appears to be crucial.

(i) There *are continually being* new treatments developed for cancer.

<sup>6</sup> The argumentation provided in 2 against a passive analysis for *there*-passive participle constructions can be completed with reference to passive sentence-types for which there is no *there*-counterpart. The reader is referred to McNally (1997: 176–77) and Radford (2000: 11), where passives incorporating a relative clause and *get*-passives are discussed, respectively. On the other hand, the evidence in favour of the above-mentioned passive analysis as based on object

The purpose of 3–3.2 is to suggest a plausible syntactic configuration for *there*-passive participle constructions which can be useful in solving questions or problems raised in previous sections: I must insist that the aim is to sketch out a plausible analysis for relevant sequences, and that further refinements on the proposal belong to ongoing investigation.

Now, the present paper adopts Hazout's (2004) approach to existential constructions as a model analysis for a study of *there*-passive participle constructions, and it does so based on a core aspect of the relevant approach, namely the status of *predicate* that is adjudicated to the lexical DP, which is actually inseparable from the issue of the site of merge of expletive *there* (see below in this section). The above-mentioned treatment of the DP as a predicate is argued in this part of the paper to be an adequate tool to explain the extraction constraints holding on *there*-passive participle constructions and the interpretive differences existing both between these and standard or regular passives, and between *there*-passive participle constructions of the eventive type and those of the non-eventive type. It must be noted that Hazout (2004) does not deal in any detail with the structural type under analysis in this paper (that is, *there*-passive participle constructions), but with English (and Hebrew) expletive *there* and *it* structures: however, as just mentioned, the author's perspective appears to fit the view on passive participle constructions taken in the present discussion.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Hazout's approach is not without antecedents in the theory (see Government-Binding works like Williams 1984, or Safir 1987 for previous treatment of existential DP's as predicates): nevertheless, as is well known, the common trend in the literature is to regard the relevant DP as a subject: see the simplified tree-diagram in figure 1 below, which corresponds to (5) in section 1 above.

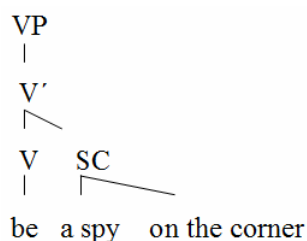


Figure 1. Standard configuration for existential constructions

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idiom chunks (Chomsky 2001) is neutralised by structures cited in Radford (2000: 14) from an alternative source.

<sup>7</sup> Actually, Hazout (2004: 423) happens to entertain on one occasion a configuration for *there*-passive participle constructions that does not fully correspond with the analysis provided in 3.1 and 3.2 below. However, it must be emphasised that *there*-passive participle constructions are not the main thrust of his analysis, and that the author does not even aim at a distinction between eventive *there*-constructions on the one hand and non-eventive *there*-constructions on the other.

After considering the syntax of predicate nominals and the availability of existential sentences featuring just one thematic constituent, the structure that is proposed in Hazout (2004) for a (simple) existential like (27) is the one in figure 2 below.

(27) There are difficulties

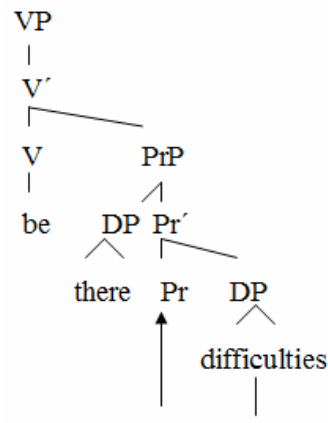


Figure 2. Configuration for existential constructions as based on Hazout (2004)

Hazout's analysis of existential constructions draws heavily on Bowers (1993, 2002) in positing *PrP* (*Predicative Phrase*), whose head is liable to be the locus of both verbal and non-verbal elements, as the core projection. The lexical DP originally occupies the position of complement of the head Pr and later has its phi-features percolate up from this site onto the intermediate P'-level, where a (purely formal) subject-predicate relation is established between sister constituents, namely Pr' on the one hand, and the position occupied by the expletive on the other. PrP actually has a structure very similar to that of a typical little *v* projection, although, as mentioned above, it can be the site of both verbal and non-verbal elements alike: in 3.1 and 3.2 I will try to explain the massive significance of the licensing of DP as the predicate of PrP for the view on *there*-passive participle constructions taken in this paper.

I would like to end this brief description of Hazout's proposal by stressing the importance that the treatment of expletive *there* as the original subject of Pr has for the analysis of the DP as a predicate (instead of an argument), an approach that can also be found in Bowers (2002). For *there* to merge in [Spec,Pr] – or, the same, [Spec,*v*] – instead of [Spec,T] is a massive issue for the analysis of the structures in Hazout's paper itself, and also for expletive unaccusative constructions like *There have arrived some guests this morning*, a structural type that is indirectly related to the discussion in the present paper. Despite the full significance of this issue for the theory of clause structure, limitations of time and space prevent me from dealing with it on this occasion.

### 3.1. A proposal for *there*-passive participle constructions

In this section I suggest that the configuration proposed for expletive constructions in Hazout (2004) appears to be adequate in order to explain or justify both the interpretive properties of *there*-passive participle constructions that have been discussed in section 2.1 above, and the extraction restrictions described in section 2.2. Extraction phenomena are actually dealt with in 3.2 below.

Both Caponigro and Schütze (2003) and Rezac (2006) – and also the influential works by Lasnik and Chomsky that these are based on (see 1 and 2 above) – posit a structure for (1) where the latter is a base-generated passive sentence featuring the order [Prt<sub>pass</sub>P-DP]. The corresponding tree-diagram would thus be something like figure 3.

(1) There were three people arrested

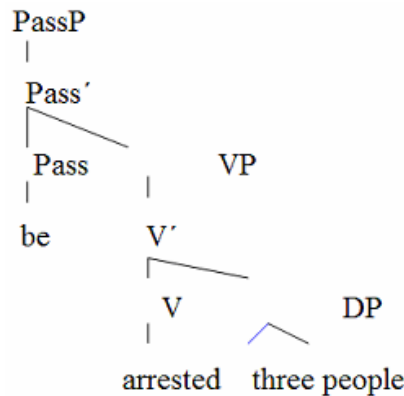


Figure 3. Standard configuration for passive constructions

By contrast with this approach, it is argued in this paper that (1) must have a hierarchical structure comparable to figure 2 above, where the DP *three people* figures as the predicate of PrP. This means that the DP is an element denoting not an entity or an individual (since it is not an argument), but a *property* that consists in the *existence of an entity or an individual*. Before showing the precise configuration proposed in this paper for a(n eventive) *there*-passive participle construction like (1), which trivially entails specifying the exact position of the participle or Prt<sub>pass</sub>P, it might be helpful to consider further the non-eventive reading of (1). As observed previously in the paper, the present discussion agrees with general assumptions in the literature about the status of relative clause of the constituent to the right of DP in non-eventive constructions. On the present account, a non-eventive *there*-passive participle construction would look like figure 4 below, where Prt<sub>pass</sub>P is the verbal element of the above-mentioned relative clause.

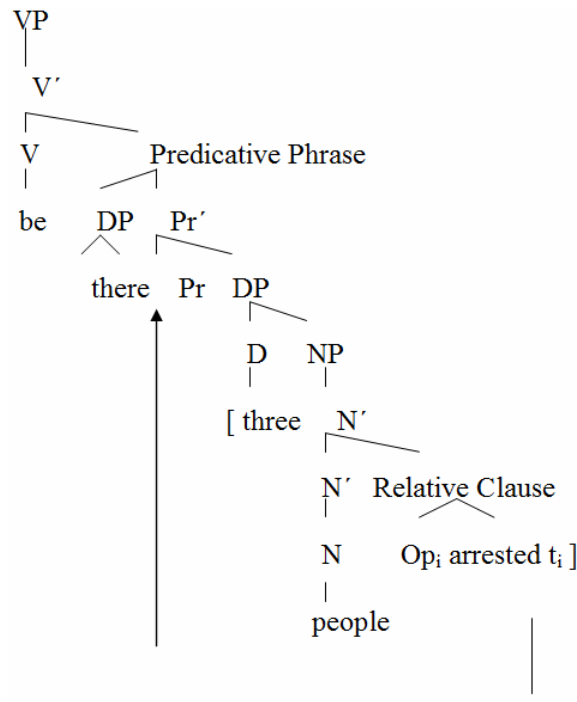


Figure 4. Proposed configuration for non-eventive there-passive participle constructions

Now, the adoption of Hazout’s (2004) configuration makes it possible for  $Pr_{t_{pass}P}$  of eventive *there*-passive participle constructions to occupy a place that is not an adjunct of D, as in non-eventive constructions, while at the same time figuring within PrP. The relevant position is adjunct to Pr, and the reason that it seems to be an adequate position is that it appears to correlate with interpretive properties previously discussed about (eventive) *there*-passive participle constructions. Figure 5 below is thus the configuration proposed in the present paper for an eventive *there*-passive participle construction.

As will be recalled from 2.1.1, the constructions in question (eventive *there*-passive participle constructions) were argued to be sentences denoting the existence of an entity that happens to be the target of some action or activity. The identification of the postverbal DP as a predicate (instead of an argument) entails, as mentioned above, that it denotes an existential property; as for the participle ( $Pr_{t_{pass}P}$ ), it would name the very action or activity affecting the entity whose existence is predicated. Eventive *there*-passive participle constructions could therefore be plausibly constituted by a *primary predicate* denoting existence on the one hand, and a *secondary predicate* describing the actual taking place of an action, and thus contributing the relevant eventive interpretation. Eventive *there*-passive participle constructions differ from regular or standard passives in that these are not about the existence of any entity whatsoever, but

describe an action from the point of view of the affected entity: though both sentence-types are eventive, only regular passives are additionally agentive structures.

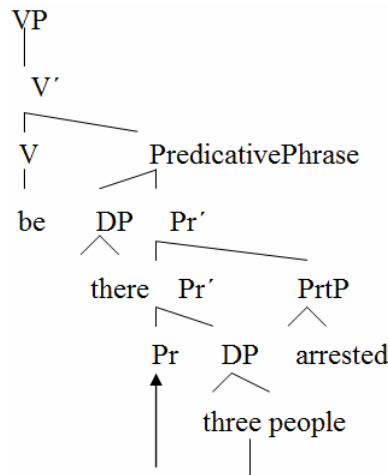


Figure 5. Proposed configuration for eventive *there*-passive participle constructions

The interpretive contrast existing between eventive *there*-passive participle constructions on the one hand, and non-eventive constructions on the other must arguably correlate not only with the categorial status of  $\text{Pr}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}$  for the former vs. the status of reduced relative clause for the latter but also, and possibly in a more relevant way, with the distinct position that  $\text{Pr}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}$  and the relative clause each occupy with respect to DP: as argued above, the instantiation of the functional projection  $\text{Pr}(\text{edicative})\text{P}(\text{hrase})$  makes it possible for  $\text{Pr}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}$  not to be an adjunct of D strictly speaking, but one of Pr, which would seem to correlate with  $\text{Pr}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}$  being itself a predicate, on a par with DP. In this respect, it is interesting to mention an approach like McNally (1997), where *there*-passive participle constructions are also argued to be existential constructions proper. By contrast with the present account, however, McNally (1997) provides a configuration consisting of simply an ordinary VP, that is a VP with no small clause construct within, the only positions available being the typical DP object position and further the adjoined positions to either V or the DP itself. While the author attributes a different categorial status to the participle in non-eventive constructions (a relative clause) vs. eventive constructions (an A[djective]P[hrase]), she locates both constituents as adjuncts of the lexical DP. As argued above, a structural type where  $\text{Pr}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}$  of eventive constructions holds a position more independent from DP than the relative clause adjunct would seem to correlate much more appropriately with the interpretive properties of the construction. Further, the distinct behaviour of eventive vs. non-eventive *there*-sequences with regard to *Wh*-movement appears to demand a different location for  $\text{Pr}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}$  in each case: see section immediately below.

One other issue that needs to be considered in this section is why a (reduced) relative clause is not liable to express the eventive meaning that is naturally associated



with eventive *there*-passive participle constructions. Now, the fact that the participle of eventive *there*-passive participle constructions heads its own projection ( $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}$ ) without the assistance of any Comp position would seem to ensure that it is a predicate that is transparent to the temporal interpretation of the matrix verb (that is, existential *be*), a circumstance that would contribute to the close synonymy existing between *there*-passive participle constructions and regular passives: the time of the activity that affects an entity is shown to coincide with the time of the situation during which the property of the existence of that entity holds.

By contrast with eventive *there*-passive participle constructions, the participle of non-eventive sequences is embedded under Comp, which would mean that it is a predicate with temporal properties of its own, though these are necessarily understood relative to the time of the main predicate, which is existential *be* in the main clause: in the specific case with non-eventive passive participle constructions, the participle describes a state of affairs that is located prior in time to the state of affairs denoted by the main verb.<sup>8</sup> Let us recall, in this last respect, possible paraphrases for the non-eventive reading of a sentence like (1) *There were three people arrested*: namely, ‘There were three people in the state of having been arrested’, or also ‘There were three people that had been arrested’.

### 3.2. An explanation of extraction phenomena

In this last section I use the configuration postulated in figure 5 above in order to explain the constraints on constituent extraction that appear to affect *there*-passive participle constructions but not regular or standard passive constructions, a contrast that is argued in this paper to justify a different syntactic treatment for each structural type. See (22) and (19) in 2.2 above, repeated here with the same numeration.

(22) \*/?How many people were there arrested?

(19) ?? How were there some volunteers arrested?

As will be recalled, reference was made in 2.2 to the criticism that the phonological status of Th/Ex in Chomsky (2001) has received on various fronts, which appears to invalidate the above-mentioned application of Th/Ex in the phonological component as an explanation for the marginal status of (22). In fact, one argument against the relevant account is its incapacity to explain the marginality of (19).

An alternative explanation for (22) discussed in 2.2 was Holmberg (2001), where (English)  $\text{Prt}_{\text{pass}}\text{P}$  is postulated as a phase despite its lack of phi-features, with the subsequent undesirable modification of common assumptions about phases. Now, the

<sup>8</sup> Law (1999: 203) suggests that the reason why a relative clause is unable to express eventive meaning lies in the finite auxiliary *be* preventing *V-en* from being bound by matrix T. Though the author himself acknowledges that this is not a fully worked out account, I would like to observe that the relevant approach would seem not to be on the right track for two reasons: on the one hand, it does not explain why finite subordinate T lacks the ability to bind the necessary event variable; on the other hand, the analysis does not carry over to reduced relative clauses, which happen to share the relevant inability with full relatives.

tentative analysis of (22) and (19) that I would like to propose in this paper is also a phase-based analysis but one that, as expectedly, does not entail adapting the concept of phase to the specific case with participle projections. In effect, in a configuration like figure 5, where DP is the head of Pr(edicative)P(hrased), postulating that Pr(edicative)P(hrased) is actually a phase does not entail the creation of a construct distinct from  $\nu$ P or DP (typical phase projections containing phi-features) since the above-mentioned DP is trivially associated with phi-features.

Thus, whereas the focus in section 2 of the paper was on a critique of a [Prt<sub>pass</sub>P-DP] analysis of *there*-passive participle constructions and on the postulation of a [DP-Prt<sub>pass</sub>P] analysis, the status of predicate adjudicated to DP in the above-mentioned [DP-Prt<sub>pass</sub>P] analysis is claimed in the present section to be necessary in order to tackle *there*-passive participle constructions in an adequate way. This does not mean, however, that a full answer for the phenomena in (22) and (19) is provided in this paper – see immediately below.

In effect, on Holmberg's (2001) account, (22) is justified because Prt<sub>pass</sub>P is a phase and consequently the lexical DP cannot move over the expletive *there*, which belongs within a higher phase, despite the fact that the above-mentioned lexical DP occupies the Spec position of Prt<sub>pass</sub>. The merge of expletive *there* is not an obstacle for the present approach, since the expletive is argued to occupy Spec of Pr(edicative)P(hrased) initially in the derivation. The marginal status of (22) and (19) must therefore be argued to be the result of the impossibility of extracting material out of the domain of a head. The relevant mechanism would be as follows. As currently assumed in the literature, the head and edge (or Spec) of a phase are accessible to later syntactic operations, but the domain is not. This means that the status of (19) *How were there some people arrested?* is accounted for in a straightforward way, since Prt<sub>pass</sub>P belongs to the domain of Pr(edicative)P(hrased).

However, what is apparently not so clear is why the extraction from the head of a phase should result in a marginal sequence. That is, on the present phase-based approach to existential sequences, where the lexical DP is the head of the functional projection and *there* is merged in the Spec of the functional projection (that is, [Spec,Pr]), the marginal character of (22) *How many people were there arrested* is unexpected. I can only suggest here that a possible explanation for (22) might perhaps lie in the oddity of detaching the core predicate that is DP from the secondary predicate that is Prt<sub>pass</sub>P. Some indication that this hypothesis might be on the right track is the grammaticality of *there*-passive participle constructions with a non-eventive interpretation, that is *there*-passive participle constructions where Prt<sub>pass</sub>P is the verb of a relative clause inside the DP itself, an account that is currently assumed in the literature and that has been endorsed in this paper (see figure 4). Thus, both the eventive existential (22) and the stative existentials in (28) share a movement process affecting the head of a phase – that is, the lexical DP. However, only (28a,b) appear to be acceptable, which further would seem to support an account like the present one against one like McNally (1997), where the participle is an adjunct of D in both eventive and non-eventive sequences (see 3.1). It is to be hoped that future research can throw more light on this specific issue.

- (28) a. [How many people arrested] are there (already) [t]? (non-event. struct.)  
 b. [How many books already signed by their authors] were there [t]? (non-event. struct.)

#### 4. Summary

It has been argued in this paper that eventive *there*-passive participle constructions cannot properly be analysed as standard or regular passives, which means that [DP-Pr<sub>pass</sub>P] is rejected as a derived order, whether it is implemented through a syntactic Th/Ex position or a phonological one. The evidence that is provided against the regular passive approach relates to (a) interpretive properties of the constructions involved, (b) extraction phenomena, and (c) properties of auxiliary chain formation. The restrictions affecting agentive adverbs and similarly the syntax of progressive *be* are claimed to point in the direction of existential *be* as distinct from passive *be*.

[*There be*]-sequences are defined on a general basis as sentences that denote a property consisting in the existence of an individual. While granting that the interpretive force of eventive *there*-passive participle constructions on the one hand and that of standard passives on the other are very close to each other, it is suggested that the eventive interpretation of the former, but not crucially that of standard passives, is subordinated to the above-mentioned existential meaning. Eventive *there*-passive participle constructions are therefore characterised as both existential and (trivially) eventive, whereas standard passives are characterised as both eventive and agentive, and still non-eventive *there*-passive participle constructions are analysed as existential but stative, as is currently assumed in the literature.

The syntactic configuration that is proposed for *there*-passive participle constructions is based on Hazout (2004), and in it the lexical DP figures as the core or primary predicate of a small clause construction (Pr[edicative]P[hrase]) whose subject is expletive *there*. The difference between eventive structures and non-eventive ones is argued to lie in the location of Pr<sub>pass</sub>P: whereas the participle of non-eventive constructions is analysed as the verb of a reduced relative clause that is adjunct of the lexical DP, the participle of eventive sequences is claimed to be an adjunct predicate of the small clause PrP. This distinction would appear to correlate with differences of interpretation, and also with contrasts regarding extractability of constituents, which are specifically tackled by invoking a phase-based approach to PrP. Nonetheless, no definitive solution is offered for the seemingly marginal status of a sequence like *\*/?How many people were there arrested?*

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