Unpronounced locatives in inversion constructions
Jenneke van der Wal, University of Cambridge
Manchester Symposium on Existentials, 28-29 June 2012

1. Invisible expletives?
Observation 1: existentials and presentational constructions can contain a preverbal
locative expletive, as in 'THERE are so many children around here'

Observation 2: existentials and presentational constructions can lack a locative
expletive

The fact that there is no audible expletive does not necessarily mean that there is
nothing, but at the same time a convincing analysis positing a null expletive for some
languages should not lead us to conclude that any similar construction works the same
way; perhaps not all languages need a subject position.

Question: Is a syntactic element present in structures where we cannot see it?

Why would this be the case anyway?
- Because of the Extended Projection Principle: "Every clause must have a
  subject occupying the privileged subject position that features in all clauses,
  i.e. Spec-IP/TP." (Chomsky 1982:10). If there is no overt element in this
  position, like a subject or a 'there', then there may be a null/unpronounced
  element to satisfy the EPP.
- Because every proposition needs a topic. Erteschik-Shir (2007:15) states that
  in order to calculate the truth value of a sentence, we evaluate a proposition
  within the frame set by the topic. Every sentence with a truth value must hence
  have a (pragmatic) topic, which functions as the "pivot for truth value
  assessment". Presentational sentences are defined as 'topicless' (Lambrecht
  2000), which means that they may have no overt topic expression in the
  sentence, but does not mean that there is no topic present. The topic on which
  the whole thetic proposition forms a comment is the 'here and now', what
  Gundel (1974) calls a 'stage topic'. The question is whether this pragmatic
  topic is also present in the syntax.

The hypothesised presence of a null expletive can be studied in Bantu subject
inversion, especially in cases where the subject is in a low position.

2. Bantu
Basic properties Bantu
- canonical word order SVO
- noun class system
- locative DPs
- agreement in class on the verb (prefix)
- pro-drop
- verbal morphology: SM-TAM-OM-V

Lusoga

(1) a. Abasaadha ba-gula amatooke.
     2.men   2SM-buy 6bananas
     'The men buy bananas.'

    b. Ba-gula amatooke.
     2SM-buy   6.bananas
     'They buy bananas.'

(2) ku-n-te   'on/at/near the cow'
    17-9-cow
    mu-n-gira   'on the road'
    18-9-road

3. Locative Inversion

In LI, the logical subject appears in a postverbal position and a locative preverbal DP triggers agreement on the verb.

Chichewa (Bresnan&Kanerva 1989)

(3) a. A-lendô-wo a-na-bwérá ku-mudzi.
     2-visitor-2.DEM   2SM-RECPST-come 17-3.village
     'Those visitors came to the village.'

    b. Ku-mu-dzi ku-na-bwérá a-lendô-wo.
     17-3-village   17SM-PAST-come 2-visitor-2.DEM
     'To the village came those visitors.'

    c. Pa-m-chenga p-a-ima nkhandwe.
     16-3-sand   16SM-PERF-stand 9fox
     'On the sand is standing the fox.'

The possible syntactic structure of LI can be represented as in (4), where each possibility obeys the EPP.

(4) Buell (2007)
a. [$_{AgrSP'}$ locative [$_{AgrS'}$ SM-V...
b. [$_{TopP}$ locative$_i$ [$_{AgrSP'}$ t_i [$_{AgrS'}$ SM-V...
c. [$_{TopP}$ locative$_i$ [$_{AgrSP'}$ *pro*$_i$ [$_{AgrS'}$ SM-V...

The preverbal locative can be pro-dropped like normal subjects, rendering a referential locative reading. If the subject marker is always an agreement marker, agreement in this case is with an (unpronounced fully specified) locative DP.[1]

Herero (Lutz Marten, 2006 and p.c.)

(5) a. òvà-ndù v-á-hìtí mó-ngándá
     2-people 2SM-PAST-enter 18-9.house
     'The guests entered the house/home'

---

[1] The alternative is an analysis where the subject marker is pronominal and checks EPP, à la Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (1998, 1999).

     b.   Mò-ngàndá   mw-á-hìtí   òvá-ndù.
               18-9.house   18SM-PAST-enter2-people
               'Into the house entered (the) people.'

(6)   Mw-á-hìtí é-rùngà.
       18SM-PAST-enter 5-thief
       'In there entered a thief.' (i.e. a place we've been talking about)

Conclusion: the locative DP or a locative null pro are in the preverbal subject position.

4. Default Agreement Inversion
In DAI the subject also appears postverbally, but importantly 1) the preverbal locative is not obligatory, 2) the subject marker is restricted to only one (default) class, usually 16 or 17, and 3) the interpretation is not referential.

Tswana (Creissels 2011, adapted)
(7)   a.   Basadi   ba-opela   mo-kereke-ng.
            2.women   2SM-sing   18-9.church-LOC
            'The women are singing in the church.'

      b.   Mokereke-ng   go-opela   basadi.
            18-9.church-LOC 17SM-sing 2.women
            'in the church there are women singing'

      c.   Go-opela   basadi.
            17SM-sing 2.women
            'There are women singing.'

Tswana (Demuth and Mmusi 1997)
(8)   a.   Fá-se-tlharé-ng   gó-émé   ba-símané.
            16-7-tree-loc   17SM-stand.PERF   2-boys
            'By the tree stand the boys'

      b.   Kó-Maúng gó-tlá-ya   roná maríga.
            17-Maung 17SM-FUT-go 1PL   winter
            'To Maung we shall go in winter.'

      c.   Mó-le-fátshé-ng gó-fúla   di-kgomo.
            18-5-country   17SM-graze 10-cattle
            'In the country are grazing the cattle.'

Is there a null preverbal locative in these cases?

If so, then it cannot be the same as in (6) if we want to account for the difference in referential and non-referential reading and the limited agreement. This could be thought of as the difference between a (null) DP and a null phiP. But does this null pronoun have any semantic content?

Interestingly, Pinto (1997) claims that the null element in Italian presentational VS constructions actually is a null loco/temporal argument which checks EPP if the sentence is presentational and refers to the here-and-now (9). This extra loco-temporal argument is selected by some verbs, restricted to a subset of intransitive predicates. Although there are transitivity restrictions on DAI in some Bantu languages, it is in Herero possible with transitives as well.

Italian (Pinto 1997:128, 130)
(9)   a   Irene è arrivata a Milano.
            Irene arrived at Milan

       b.   Irene è arrivata.
            Irene arrived (somewhere)

       c.   LOC è arrivata Irene.
            (here/at this place) arrived Irene

Herero (Marten 2006)
(10)   Pé-rísà   òvá-éndá òzò-ngòmbé.
       16SM.HAB-feed   2-guests   10-cows
       'There feed guests cattle.'

Another prediction is that inversion constructions cannot cooccur with a temporal or locative expression which does not refer to the 'here and now', as is the case in (11b,c). The same is not true for the Sesotho DAI, where the locative can freely occur in a VS sentence.

(11)   a.   Irene è arrivata a casa.
            Irene arrived at home

       b.   *E' arrivata Irene a casa.
            arrived Irene (here/at this place) at home

       c.   *A casa è arrivata Irene.
            at home arrived Irene (here/at this place)

Sesotho (Demuth 1990:241)
(12)   Hó-lisá   bashányána (ma-símó-ng).
       17SM-herd 2.boys   6-fields-LOC
       'There are boys herding (in the fields).'

Conclusion: if there is any preverbal null element, it is neither a referential locative, nor a "here and now" loco/temporal argument (cf. Buell 2007).

5. Agreeing inversion
Yet another construction features a postverbal subject, but it differs from DAI in that the subject marker agrees with the postverbal subject. Where for DAI there is still an argument to be made for a null expletive on the basis of the subject agreement with a preverbal element, this is clearly not the case in AI.

Matengo (Yoneda 2011)
(13)   Ju-híkití   Marî:a.
        1SM-arrive.PERF   1.Maria
        'Maria has come.'

If the hypothetical preverbal expletive is a loco/temporal argument, we predict a not-here not-now adverb to be ungrammatical. This restriction could account for the infelicitous use of the inversion construction in (14b), where the adverb 'this morning' is not compatible with the 'here and now'. Instead, the SVO order in (14a) is used, where S fills the preverbal subject position and there is no null expletive.

Matengo (Yoneda 2011:760)
(14)   To explain the reason for borrowing a cooking pan from someone.
        a.   Mwaná ju-kájwi   pulukê:la.
              1.child   1SM-break/PF   18.morning
              'My child has broken (it) this morning.'

        b.   #Ju-kájwi   mwaná pulukê:la.
              1SM-break/PF   1child   18.morning
              'My child has broken (it) this morning.'

However, the VSX order is grammatical if the subject is in narrow focus.

Matengo (Yoneda 2011: 760)
(15)   (Answer for the question "Who has broken it?")
        a.   Ju-kájwi   mwá:na.
              1SM-break.PERF 1.child
              'My child has broken (it).'

        b.   #Mwaná ju-kájwí:le.
              1.child   1SM-break/PF
              'My child has broken (it).'

        c.   #Mwaná ju-kájwi   pulukê:la.
              1.child   1SM-break.PERF   morning
              'My child broke (it) this morning.'

        d.   Ju-kájwi   mwaná pulukê:la.
              1SM-break.PERF 1.child   morning
              'My child broke (it) this morning.'

Fundamental objections against Pinto's account are thus:
    1) why is the loco/temporal argument present for some predicates but not others (e.g., why for 'break' in Matengo but not for 'shout' in Italian?)? See Deal (2009) for an account of English verbs allowing 'there'.
    2) where is the loco/temporal argument with narrow subject focus? It would be strange if suddenly the same verb does not have its extra LOC argument. Yet this would have to be assumed if we take into account the grammatical VS, VSX and even VSOX sentences where focus is on the subject. If LOC would

be present in these examples, we cannot explain its compatibility with a different time/place than the here-and-now.

Conclusion: if there is any preverbal null element, it is neither a referential locative, and not likely a "here and now" loco/temporal argument.

> So either
> A. there is a meaningless unpronounced expletive pro in preverbal position, or
> B. the EPP is not universally valid and the topic requirement is pragmatic.[2]

6. Definiteness effects
In favour of A, linguists usually refer to definiteness effects: if there is an overt expletive, inversion is fine with an indefinite subject like 'a dog', but weird with a definite subject like a proper name 'Snoopy'.

(16)   There came a dog into our street.
        ?* There came Snoopy into our street.

Assuming that covert and overt elements differ only in their phonological representation and otherwise have the same effect, we may expect the presence of a null expletive to trigger the same definiteness effect as observed in languages with an overt expletive. This is not the case:

Makwe (Devos 2004:316)
(17)   Aníúuma   nakádíímu.
        1SM.PRES.PERF.come.out 1.giant
        'And so, (the giant) Nakadimu leaves.'

Although it is known that definiteness effects are generally not present in unaccusative construction in NSLs, they do appear in presentational sentences with an overt locative argument. This is why in Portuguese inversion is ungrammatical in such a context if the subject is a proper name (18c), but not if it is an indefinite non-specific noun (18b). Sheehan (2006, 2010) claims that these effects support the presence of a null expletive. In the data Yoneda provides for Matengo, this does not seem to work the same way. Instead, in a thetic sentence that has more than one participant, the subject is moved to a preverbal position, even if it is indefinite (19a). It is ungrammatical in such a sentence to leave both the (indefinite) subject and the locative in postverbal position (19b). Note that in the same context, VS order is allowed and in fact preferred if no other elements are present (19c,d).

Portuguese (Sheehan 2006: 149)
(18)   a.   O   que   é que   aconteceu?
            the what is that happened
            'What happened?'

---

[2] Other possibilities are checking the EPP by a nominal feature in the verbal inflection (in the Bantu case, the subject marker), à la Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou (1998, 1999), which is problematic, and for AI we can think of the EPP being checked by the raised/copied subject and spelling out a low copy.

      b.   Chegou alguém a-o   colégio.
           arrived someone to-the school
           'Someone arrived at school.'

      b′.   * Chegou o   João   a-o   colégio.
           arrived the João   to-the school
           int. 'João arrived at school.'

Matengo (Yoneda 2011:761)
(19)   As an answer to 'what happened?'
      a.   Mundu   ju-hikití   ku-nyû:mba.
           1.someone 1SM-arrive/PF 17-9house
           'Someone has come to the house.'

      b.   *Ju-hikití   mundu   ku-nyû:mba.
           1SM-arrive/PF 1.someone 17-9house

      c.   Ju-hikití   mû:ndo.
           1SM-arrive/PF   1.someone
           'Someone has come.'

      d.   #Mundu   ju-hikí:te.
           1.someone 1SM-arrive/PF

These data suggest that the restriction on multiple postverbal elements in a thetic sentence may be due to another –possibly pragmatic- restriction in Matengo, rather than showing the presence of a null locative.

7. Alternative
Against the assumption of an expletive is –first- the general scientific point of departure that we would rather not postulate the existence of an invisible element for purely theoretical reasons, and –second- the argument from learnability: the child must be able to recover the underlying structure from observable properties.

If the EPP is not responsible for subject raising, then a preverbal position for the subject must be triggered by something else. This can be a certain discourse function, such as topic. Two ways of implementation of discourse-driven subject movement are, on the one hand, postulating no EPP at all and having the movement trigger associated not with T-related phi-features but with a discourse feature (e.g., [top]), and on the other hand postulating the EPP not as an obligatory but an optional movement trigger, its presence resulting in an interpretational difference at the interface between syntax and interpretation.

If there is no null element in specTP, then what determines agreement in DAI? The class 17 or 16 subject marker can be a default prefix that is inserted if it is not clear what to agree with. This is supported by the range of contexts in which Buell (2007) shows that class 17 subject marking appears, including quotative inversion (20), conjunct NP agreement (21) and impersonal expressions (22).

Zulu (Buell 2007:114)
(20) "Ngi-ya-ku-thanda."   Ku-sho   uSipho.
       1SG.SM-DJ-2SG.OM-love   17SM-say 1.Sipho
        'I love you,' said Sipho.

(Nyembezi 1990, cited in Buell 2007)
(21) Izinkuni   n-amalahle ku-phelile.
       10.firewood   and-6.coal 17-finish.PERF
       'The firewood and coal is finished.'

(Buell 2007: 113)
(22) U-phendule   kahle! Kw-a-kuhle   bo!
       2SG.SM-answer   well   17SM-PAST-17good really
       'You answered correctly! Great!/Well done!'

8. Conclusion
Is a syntactic element present in structures where we cannot see it?
        LI: yes
        DAI & AI: only true expl
So far, the only motivation for positing a (meaningless and unpronounced) expletive is the EPP and the semantic-pragmatic conjecture that every sentence needs a topic, which does not have to be a syntactic entity.

What other tests and arguments do we have to detect a null expletive?

References
Alexiadou, Artemis & Elena Anagnostopoulou (1998). Parametrizing AGR: Word Order, V-Movement and EPP-checking. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 16: 491 – 539.
Alexiadou, Artemis & Elena Anagnostopoulou. 1999. EPP without Spec,IP. In *Specifiers: minimalist approaches,* D. Adger, S. Pintzuk, B. Plunkett, and G. Tsoulas (eds), 93-109. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Bresnan, Joan, and Jonni M. Kanerva. 1987. Chichewa lovative inversion: a case study of factorization in grammar. *Linguistic Inquiry* 20 (1):1-50.
Buell, Leston. 2007. Semantic and formal locatives: implications for the Bantu locative inversion typology. In *SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics 15: Bantu in Bloomsbury*, edited by N. C. Kula and L. Marten, 105-120.
Creissels, Denis. 2011. Tswana locatives and their status in the inversion construction. *Africana Linguistica XVII*.
Deal, Amy Rose. 2009.The origin and content of expletives: evidence from 'selection'. Syntax 12(4), 285-323.
Demuth, Katherine. 1990. Locatives, impersonals and expletives in Sesotho. *The Linguistic Review* 7 (3):233-249.

Demuth, Katherine & Sheila Mmusi. 1997. Presentational focus and thematic structure in comparative Bantu. *JALL* 18:1-19.

Devos, Maud. 2004. *A grammar of Makwe*. Ph. D. dissertation, Leiden University, Leiden.

Erteschik-Shir, Nomi. 2007. *Information structure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gundel, Jeanette. 1974. *The role of topic and comment in linguistic theory*. Ph. D. dissertation, University of Texas, Austin.

Lambrecht, Knud. 2000. When subjects behave like objects. *Studies in Language* 24: 611-682.

Marten, Lutz 2006. 'Locative inversion in Herero: More on morphosyntactic variation in Bantu'. *ZAS Papers in Linguistics* 43: 97-122.

Marten, Lutz 2010. 'The great siSwati locative shift.' In: Breitbarth, Anne and Lucas, Christopher and Watts, Sheila and Willis, David, (eds.), *Continuity and Change in Grammar*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, pp. 249-267

Nurse, Derek, and Gérard Philippson, eds. 2003. *The Bantu languages*, *Language Family Series*. London: Routledge.

Odden, David. 1996. *The phonology and morphology of Kimatuumbi*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Pinto, Manuela. 1997. Licensing and interpretation of inverted subjects in Italian. UiL OTS Dissertation series, Utrecht.

Samek-Lodovici, Vieri. 1996. *Constraints on Subjects. An Optimality Theoretic Analysis*. PhD Dissertation, Rutgers University.

Samek-Lodovici, Vieri. 2005. Prosody-syntax interaction in the expression of focus. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 23, 687-755.

Sheehan, Michelle. 2006. *The EPP and Null Subjects in Romance*. Ph.D. dissertation: University of Newcastle.

Sheehan, Michelle. 2010. 'Free' inversion in Romance and the Null Subject Parameter. In Biberauer, Theresa, Anders Holmberg, Ian Roberts and Michelle Sheehan, *Parametric variation. Null subjects in Minimalist theory*, p.231-262. Cambridge: CUP.

Van der Wal, Jenneke. 2008. Agreement in thetic sentences in Bantu and Romance. In *The Bantu-Romance connection. A comparative investigation of verbal agreement, DPs and information structure*, edited by C. De Cat and K. Demuth, 323-350. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Yoneda, Nobuko. 2009. The CJ/DJ verb forms and focus in Matengo. Handout of talk at Bantu 3 conference, Tervuren.

Yoneda, Nobuko. 2011. Word order in Matengo: topicality and informational roles. *Lingua* 121(5): 754-771.

Contact information
Jenneke van der Wal
jennekevanderwal@gmail.com
www.jennekevanderwal.nl

Faculty of Modern & Medieval Languages
University of Cambridge
Sidgwick Avenue
CAMBRIDGE   CB3 9DA

Abbreviations and symbols

High tones are indicated by an acute accent, low tones are unmarked. Numbers refer to noun classes, or to persons when followed by SG or PL

AI	agreeing inversion
CJ	conjoint verb form
DAI	default agreement inversion
DEM	demonstrative
DJ	disjoint verb form
HAB	habitual
LI	locative inversion
LOC	locative
OM	object marker
RECPST	recent past
SM	subject marker