

# The Low Origin Hypothesis for "There" Constructions

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Kim, Hakyeon. 2007. The Low Origin Hypothesis for "There" Constructions. *The Linguistic Association of Korean Journal*, 15(1), 199-217. The primary goal of this paper is to show the proper syntactic position for the generation of the expletive *there*. We advocate the "low origin" hypothesis in which it is argued that the expletive *there* is merged in the specifier position of *v* and agree locally with its associate NP. We employ the strict successive cyclicity to explain the peculiar behaviors of the expletive constructions. We also argue that the expletive *there* has Case and its associate NP bears partitive Case, providing a way to dispense with the EPP or Inverse Case Filter.

**Key Words:** expletive *there*, strict successive cyclicity, EPP, partitive Case

## 1. Introduction

This paper is concerned with the licensing of the English expletive *there* mostly focusing on how and when it gets its place. Expletive constructions in many languages have motivated extensive literature throughout the history of generative syntax. Substantial advances have been made throughout the history in understanding the typology of the expletives and in revealing the general conditions for the constructions. This work mainly deals with the English expletive *there*, criticizing the "high origin" account in favor of the "low origin" account. We adopt the successive cyclicity proposed in Bošković (2005), which ensures the locality of Move and Agree operating on the licensing of the expletive *there*.

To prove the "low origin" hypothesis, we assume the proposal suggested in Deal (2006), which is based on the apparent "selection" of

*there* by various predicates, as in (1) and (2).

- (1) a. There appeared a shadowy figure in the doorway.  
b. There arrived a train in the station.
- (2) a. \*There disappeared a shadowy figure from the doorway.  
b. \*There melted a block of ice in the front yard.

As observed in Deal (2006), the correlation between *there* and particular verb class provides compelling evidence for a "low origin" account, where *there* is base-generated in the specifier of the verbalizing head *v*.

In the following chapter, the traditional Merge-over-Move analysis based on the "high origin" hypothesis will be criticized. In chapter 3, various verb groups will be classified to support the "low origin" account. To explain the movement of *there* to Spec TP, we will briefly explore the Belletti/Lasnik's proposal of partitive Case, followed by the discussion of Bošković (2005)'s Case theory which we assume in this paper.

## 2. Merge-over-Move Accounts

As surveyed in many researches, the syntactic analysis for the expletive *there* constructions has undergone many changes. In Chomsky (1986), for instance, NP *a man* in (3) was argued to raise at LF to the specifier of TP, adjoining to the expletive *there*, due to the Principle of Full Interpretation.

- (3) a. There is a man in the garden.  
b. [<sub>TP</sub> there + a man<sub>t</sub> is [<sub>VP</sub> t<sub>t</sub> in the garden]]

Chomsky (1986) assumes that *there* is a "LF affix," meaning that at LF it must have an NP adjoined to it to be interpretable. Furthermore, in order for an NP to move at LF. Chomsky (1993) argues that all movements need a driving force called "Greed". Thus an NP in (3) moves to Spec TP to check its morphological properties such as a

Case<sup>1</sup>).

Lasnik (1995), assuming the LF affix hypothesis, argues that the moving of an NP conforms to "Enlightened Self-Interest": an NP moves either to satisfy its own requirement or those of position it moves to. For instance, in (4), *a strange man* checks its Case (and  $\varphi$ -features) within the PP.

(4) \*There seems to a strange man that it is raining outside.

There is no need for the associate to raise to *there* to check features in Chomsky's account. In (4), *a strange man* is supposed to move due to the affixal nature of *there*. Thus the movement of NP can not be driven by any morphological properties of its own but be driven by "Enlightened Self-Interest". So the problem with (4), would be that *a strange man* is checking a standard dative Case (a structural Case), hence is not movable, leaving *there* without a morphological host.

However, as noted in Groat (1999), the stipulation that *there* is LF affix, assumed in both Chomsky (1986, 1993) and Lasnik (1995), has a theory internal problem: an affix *there*, occupying a specifier position, must be a maximal projection, which is hard to be borne out.

A similar line of thoughts continue to appear in Chomsky (1995, 1999, 2000). Chomsky (1995) still maintaining the LF affix hypothesis, proposes that the associate raises to *there* in the construction where the expletive is affixed to the associate, as in (3). However, the associate NP raises to *there* not by its own necessity, but by Attract-F<sup>2</sup>) operation which requires that the functional head attracts the relevant

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1) If *there* is literally replaced by its associate in LF as argued in Chomsky (1986), the two sentences below should mean the same, contrary to the fact.

- a) An error is likely to appear in the proof.
- b) There is likely to appear an error in the proof.

a) is ambiguous. It can either present a claim about the proof, or it can invoke reference to a persistent error that will appear in the proof. (b), however, is not ambiguous: it just means a claim about the proof. To avoid this puzzle, Chomsky (1991) suggests that the associate adjoins to *there*, as if this element were a kind of 'LF affix'.

features from the associate to check off.

Chomsky (1999, 2000), abandoning the feature movement, introduces the Agree operation (henceforth AGREE). AGREE establishes a relation between a probe and a goal in the overt syntax. A probe with some illegible features (–interpretable features) searches its domain for an item with matching features—the Goal. A probe that finds a matching goal results in the application of AGREE which eliminates –interpretable  $\varphi$ -features of a probe while holding a long-distance agreement between a probe and a goal. Since AGREE is assumed to be a syntactic operation, LF raising to the expletive position is finally dispensed with.

Chomsky (1995, 1990, 2000)’s proposals for the derivational analysis of the expletive constructions have been based on the notion of Merge-over-Move, the notion of economy and optimality in language design. Specifically, Move is a more expensive operation than Merge<sup>3</sup>). Hence derivational steps are required to choose the ‘cheaper’ Merge operation as the next step.

So this line of analyses posit that *there* is freely Merged into Spec T in order to fulfill the requirement that this head have a specifier (an EPP feature). Since *there* is a deficient nominal, it does not participate in Case-checking relations. Whenever *there* is inserted in Spec T, the NOM Case assigned by the head T must target some other nominal.

However, Bošković (2002), Grohmann, Drury, and Castillo (2000), and Epstein and Seely (1999) observe several problems with the

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2) K attracts F if F is the closest feature that can enter into a checking relation with a sublabel of K (Chomsky 1995: 297).

3) As discussed in Lasnik, Uriagereka and Boeckx (2005), Chomsky assumes Merge-over-Move just because the movement operation is more cumbersome, as opposed to a simple merge. The reason, he said, is that Merge is a type of operation necessary for the convergence in (ia), while Move isn’t as in (ib). (Chomsky 1995: 226).

- (i) a. [There was believed [*t* to be [a unicorn in the garden]]]
- b. \*[There was believed [a unicorn to be [*t* in the garden]]]

We will criticize this notion of Merge-over-Move in the next chapter, suggesting an alternative derivational approach which employs Move over Merge.

Merge-over-Move account. Consider, for instance, the following sentence from Grohmann, Drury, and Castillo (2000), where the indefinite has apparently moved to Spec I although an expletive is available for lexical insertion.

(5) There was a rumor that a man<sub>i</sub> was t<sub>i</sub> in the room.

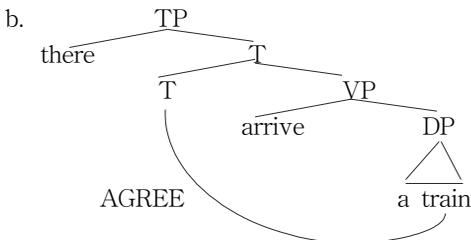
Chomsky (2000) might introduce the concept of subnumeration under the notion of phase. Since the expletive is not present in the subnumeration corresponding to the embedded clause, the option of expletive insertion is not available. But this analysis faces a serious problem. Consider (6).

(6) a. There has been a book<sub>i</sub> put t<sub>i</sub> on the table.  
 b. \*There has been put a book on the table.

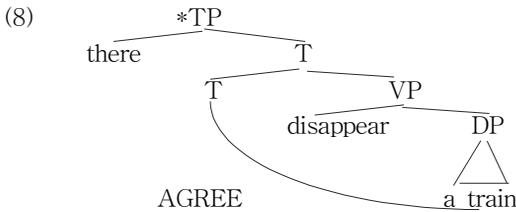
Since passive VP is not a phase for Chomsky, the construction in (6) contains only one phase. As a result, the expletive should be available for lexical insertion at the point when the indefinite undergoes movement in (6a). Given the Merge-over-Move preference, the possibility of expletive insertion should block indefinite movement. Then (6b) should be grammatical and (6a) should be ungrammatical, contrary to the fact.

Another problem we can think of is the position where the expletive is inserted. If we assume Merge-over-Move and AGREE, the derivation will have the following structure.

(7) a. There arrives a train.



However, as observed in Deal (2006), it is not clear how the theory rules out cases which seem to differ from (7) only with respect to the content of the V head, e.g. *\*There disappeared a train*.



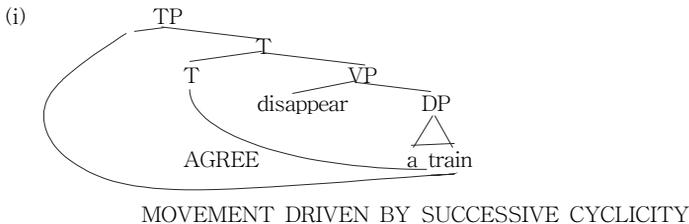
If Chomsky (1995, 1999, 2000) is right in that T has an EPP feature and the associate is Case marked via AGREE (in this case, verbal semantics plays no role), the high origin account of his will overgenerate a massive *there* constructions as demonstrated in (8)<sup>4</sup>.

So far, we have shown that Merge-over-Move account and high origin hypothesis for the insertion position of the expletive should be abandoned.

Now if we abandon Merge-over-Move account and high origin

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4) Abandoning the high origin hypothesis doesn't mean that we discard the notion of AGREE. Rather, the following grammatical sentence shows that AGREE operates between T and DP *a train*. As a result of this relationship, *a train* receives nominative Case. And then, by successive cyclicity, *a train* moves to Spec T.



In terms of Case-assignment and AGREE, this sentence is exactly the same as the ungrammatical (8). The only difference is that the expletive is removed in (i).

hypothesis, what choice do we have? An apparent candidate position would be the specifier of a verbalizer *v* head which is not occupied by some thematic element from where it moves to Spec T via successive cyclic movement.

### 3. Low Origin Hypothesis and Case of "There"

#### 3.1 Verb classes and *there* insertion

Many have argued that *there* insertion is not possible with verbs that take agent arguments. Let's call this Agentivity hypothesis which is stated as follows (Deal 2006: 5);

- (9) Agentivity hypothesis: *There*-insertion is incompatible with agentivity, i.e., *there* insertion is possible in all only non-agentivity contents.

This hypothesis faces empirical problems; one is that *there* is allowed in the progressive, unergative constructions as in (10a) or in the passive, transitive constructions (10b), another is that *there* is not allowed in some unaccusative constructions as in (11=2).

- (10) a. There was a man laughing.  
b. There was an apple eaten.
- (11) a. \*There disappeared a shadowy figure from the doorway.  
b. \*There melted a block of ice in the front yard.

Another hypothesis regarding the verbal class for *there*-constructions is called the aspect hypothesis, which assumes that "change-of-state verbs" are incompatible with *there*.

- (12) Aspect hypothesis: *There* is not compatible with achievement predicates.

The (un)grammaticality (or (un)acceptability) in the following examples show that Dowty (1979)'s diagnostics for achievementhood<sup>5)</sup> can be applied for the verb "disappear".

- (13) a. The gorilla disappeared into the mist in an hour.  
b. ??The gorilla disappeared into the mist for an hour.
- (14) The gorilla was disappearing into the mist for an hour.  
(not entailed by (13a))
- (15) The gorilla stopped disappearing into the mist.  
(repetitive reading only)

So we might support the aspect hypothesis since the verb *disappear* doesn't allow *there*-insertion and it constitutes an achievement construction.

But if we consider the verb *melt*, things are different; both the *in*-adverbial and *for*-adverbial are possible as in (16), a repetitive reading is not a requisite in (17).

- (16) a. My ice cream sundae melted in an hour.  
b. My ice cream sundae melted for an hour.
- (17) My ice cream sundae stopped melting.

As argued in Hay, Kennedy, and Levin (1999), so-called degree achievements are aspectual activities unless their endpoint is specified. Since no endpoint is specified in (16)-(17), *melt* can be grouped as an activity verb. The hypothesis (12) fails here; despite the fact that

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5) As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, Dowty (1979) provides the following diagnostics for achievementhood.

- (i) a. Achievement can be modified with *in*-adverbials (e.g., *in an hour*) but not *for*-adverbials (e.g., *for an hour*)  
b. If V is an achievement, *X V-ed in Y time* does not entail *X was V-ing during Y time*.  
c. Achievements cannot be the complement to *stop*, except on a habitual reading.

*disappear* differs from *melt* in their achievement/activity, the verbs show the same grammaticality in *there* constructions<sup>6</sup>).

Now, it is worth considering the linkage between *there*-insertion and causative meaning, which can be stated as follows:

- (18) Causative hypothesis: An unaccusative verb will not allow *there* just in case it participates in the causative alternation.

The hypothesis predicts that *disappear* should have a causative alternant since it is unaccusative not allowing *there*-insertion. The examples (19)–(21) show the hypothesis is right for many speakers.

- (19) ?John was never put on trial; they just disappeared him, and he was never seen again.  
(20) \*John was not really a witness, but they just appeared him for the trial.  
(21) \*?John was never put on trial; they just vanished him, and he was never seen again.

The correlation between acceptability of the causative alternant and unacceptability with *there*-insertion contributes to the explanation why *disappear* patterns with change-of-state verbs on *there*-insertion even though it does not seem to denote a change-of-state. Based on the above observations, we can arguably predict that if an unaccusative fails to participate in the causative alternation, it should allow *there*-insertion<sup>7</sup>). Thus we have classified between inchoative unaccusatives that block them from taking *there* and non-inchoative unaccusatives that allow them to take *there*.

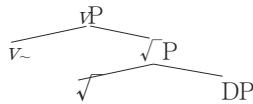
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6) A third hypothesis related with *there*-insertion in *disappear* structures is the presupposition hypothesis: *there*-insertion is pragmatically anomalous with verbs which presuppose the existence of their argument. The hypothesis predicts the failure of *disappear* to take a *there*-construction. But some counter examples call the hypothesis into question. See Deal (2006:9) for further discussion.

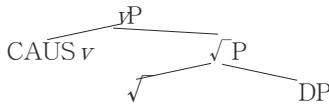
7) More examples of change-of-state verbs which do not have causative alternants are *flower*, *bloom*, *blossom*, and *sprout*, etc..

Summarizing the observations, Deal (2006) suggests two types of unaccusatives: a class of  $v$  head which is the CAUS head found in inchoatives (e.g. *melt*, *cool*), and the other, a default verbalizer head<sup>8</sup>)  $v$  without CAUS head (e.g. *arrive*, *appear*). The results from the data so far observed led Deal (2006) to propose the following constructions for each class of verbs.

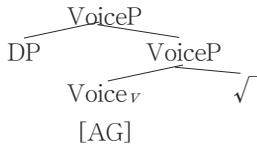
- (22) a. Non-inchoative unaccusative



- b. Inchoative



- c. Unergative



For the verbalizer,  $v$  in (22a), the verbalizing head introduces neither an argument<sup>9</sup>) nor an event, its specifier is entirely free to accommodate *there*. The second verbalizer CAUS  $v$  in (22b) cannot host *there* in its specifier. The position must already be occupied by some covert

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8) Following Marantz (1997), the notion of lexical roots devoid of category label is employed here. The verbalizing head is responsible for turning roots into verbs.

9) Since the verbalizing head  $v$  does not induce an argument, the specifier of the verbalizing head is not a theta-position, where *there* can be freely inserted.

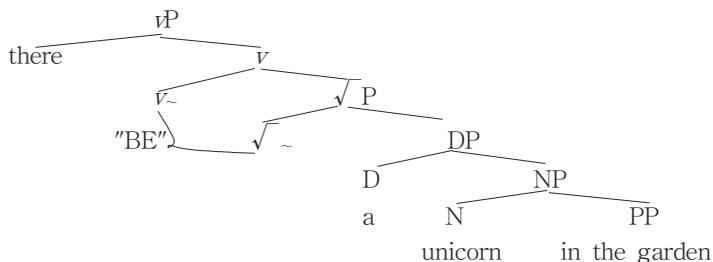
element, the causing event, for example. The incompatibility of *there* with unergative predicates as in (22c) suggests that *there*-insertion in the specifier of Voice interferes with the composition of the agent with the predicate.

Armed with the above tools, let's tackle the structures of *there-be* examples.

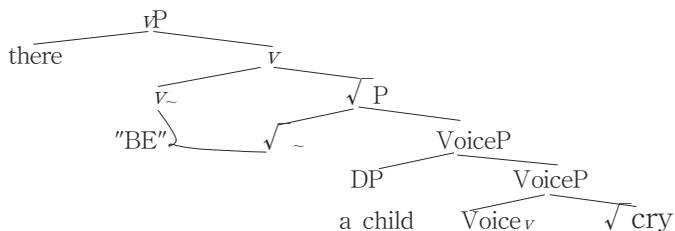
- (23) a. There is a unicorn in the garden.  
 b. There was a child loudly crying in the campground.

We might think of the copula as composed of a root, potentially the dummy root  $\sqrt{\sim}$ , along with the dummy verbalizer  $v_{\sim}$ . (These two head will be merged in the morphology.) Then the structures in the framework of Deal (2006) would be as follows:

- (24) a. There is a unicorn in the garden.



- b. There was a child loudly crying in the campground.



So far we have shown that the licensing position for *there* is "low"

in structure; at least it passes the specifier of a verbalizer head, which is not an argument position. Now that we have shown that "low origin" hypothesis is more proper, we will suggest our own idea of its original place and account for why it moves up to its higher position and how.

### 3.2 Case theory for "there" and its derivation

The idea that the associate enters into a dependency with the expletive can be traced back to Burzio (1986) and Chomsky (1986). The linkage between the expletive and the associate involves a single theta-role and a single Case, the theta-role being assigned to the lowest link and the Case to the highest link<sup>10</sup>.

Belletti (1988), rejecting this idea, showed how certain properties of 'unaccusative' constructions follow from assuming the Case independency of associate. She argues that the Case of *a unicorn* in *there is a unicorn in the garden* has nothing to do with that in the expletive. Her proposal is that, regardless of what Case verbs generally license, they also license a special Case called 'partitive<sup>11</sup>'.

Recently, Epstein and Seely (1999), Martin (1999), Grohmann, Drury, and Castillo (2000) attempted to eliminate the traditional EPP account, suggesting the Inverse Case Filter that requires that traditional Case assigners must check their Case in a Spec-head configuration. However, as observed in Bošković (2005), there is no need to enforce the checking of the Case assigners' Case. If we consider the existence of

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10) Since Case was thought to be shared by the expletive and the associate within a CHAIN, this hypothesis was known as the Case Transmission Hypothesis. (Lasnik, Uriagereka, and Boeckx 2005: 150)

11) Although Lasnik (1992) follows Belletti's central thesis, his theory differs from Belletti's in explaining the following example.

- (i) There was believed a unicorn to be in the garden.

They both agree that *be* assigns Case, but where they differ is in the fact that in the Belletti's approach the Case *be* assigns is inherent or lexical, whereas for the Lasnik's approach it must be structural

the verbs that assign Case optionally, the suggestion is desirable. Compare the following pairs of sentences.

- (25) a. John laughed.  
b. John laughed himself silly.
- (26) a. Mary is dressing.  
b. mary is dressing herself.
- (27) a. Peter is eating.  
b. Peter is eating apples.

If the Inverse Case Filter were right, the verbs in (25)–(27) should come into the computation bearing the uninterpretable Case feature which should be checked and deleted at LF. Under this assumption, the optionality in (25)–(27) cannot be explained.

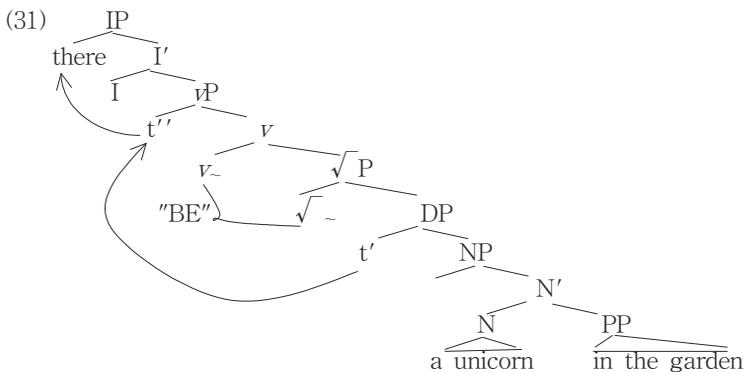
Abandoning the Inverse Case Filter and EPP, Bošković (2005) suggests that the Case Filter is the sole driving force for A-movement. Consider the following constructions ((28) is not a question).

- (28) \*[<sub>IP</sub> Is someone in the garden]
- (29) [<sub>IP</sub> Someone is in the garden]
- (30) [<sub>IP</sub> There is someone in the garden]

(29) is straightforward; the subject NP moves to Spec IP to license its structural Nominative Case. Why is (28) wrong? Since the partitive Case option is not taken in the construction, the Case feature of *someone* cannot be checked, resulting in the ungrammaticality. Suppose that we take the partitive Case option, in which case the indefinite NP would be Case-licensed by the verb, we could ask why the construction is ungrammatical; the partitive Case derivation for (28) should be blocked. The answer for the question can be sought by the assumption that only in the presence of *there*, the partitive Case can be assigned. But then we should explain why the partitive case option is possible only in the presence of *there*. Following Bošković (2005), we suggest that the partitive Case can be borne only by NPs, not by DPs. This is

responsible for the definiteness effect of existential constructions, given the natural assumption that definiteness requires presence of the DP projection. So we suggest, based on the intriguing proposal made in Chomsky (1995), that the expletive/associate pair is a complex DP, *there* being the DP layer and its associate the NP part.

Based on these observations, the construction for (24) can be revised as follows:



We argue that *there* is merged in the Spec DP forming a complex DP with NP. It moves to Spec IP for Case via Spec vP thus satisfying successive cyclicity<sup>12</sup>). If our assumption is on the right track, the relation between the D (*there*) and the NP can be established; *there* and its associate would be involved in an Agree relation.

We employ the successive cyclic movement suggested in Bošković (2005) for the derivation of (31). Contra Chomsky (1995), he does not assume feature checking in intermediate Spec IP in the following constructions.

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12) As an anonymous reviewer points out, if movement implies a semantic dualism, what kind of semantic effects would be involved in the movement of *there* to Spec IP position? Our tentative answer would be that it is possible to interpret *there* as referring to an event. See Svenonius (2006) for more discussion.

- (32) a. There seems to be a man in the garden.  
b. \*There seems a man<sub>i</sub> to be t<sub>i</sub> in the garden.

A problem arises if there is a feature checking requirement on the intermediate infinitival I; why the requirement cannot be checked by the movement of the indefinite. Chomsky (1995) assumes EPP for the feature checking requirement based on Merge-over-Move. According to him, at the point when the embedded clause is built, something should be inserted into the infinitival Spec IP in order to satisfy EPP.

However, as criticized in the previous chapter, this proposal of Merge-over-Move shows some empirical problems. Consider (33).

- (33) Mary believes John<sub>i</sub> to t<sub>i</sub> know French.

Given the Merge-over-Move preference, Merge of Mary blocks Move of John. As a result, we cannot derive (33). Chomsky (1994) observes that theta-criterion is violated if *Mary* is introduced into the embedded Spec IP. This observation is evidently a look-ahead. To avoid this look-ahead, Chomsky (2000) proposes the condition that arguments can be merged only in theta position. But as pointed out in Epstein and Seely (1999: 48–50), this condition is redundant. Consider (34).

- (34) \*John seems that Peter likes Mary.

In (34), because the presence of John induces a Full Interpretation violation, the theta condition is not necessary. Based on these observations, we argue, following Bošković (2005), that the ungrammaticality of (32b) is Last Resort Condition violation; abandoning EPP or any feature checking operation, there is no reason to move the indefinite to the embedded Spec IP.

The successive cyclicity employed for the derivation of raising constructions and the basic expletive structure given in (31) enable us to explain the derivation of the following construction.

(35) There is likely [<sub>IP</sub> to be someone in the garden]

We argue that the expletive *there* is merged in the Spec DP in the embedded clause as assumed in (31), then it moves to Spec *v*P, and then to Spec IP. But this Spec IP (embedded) is Caseless position, so it finally moves to the higher position to Spec IP (matrix)<sup>13</sup>.

Our proposal can be further supported by the first conjunct agreement found in the following constructions.

(36) There is a woman and five men in the garden.

(37) \*There are a woman and five men in the garden.

We can see from the data that the *there* existential construction is characterized by first conjunct agreement. Based on the above observation, Bošković (2005) suggested the following assumption: Coordinate phrase (BP) is dominated by an Agreement projection (Agr&P), where the first conjunct is located in Spec Agr&P, asymmetrically *c*-commanding the second conjunct. If his idea is on the right track, our analysis for (36) is straightforward; as in (31), the expletive *there* is merged in the Spec DP, which itself is located in Spec Agr&P. Then, the expletive moves through the intermediate Spec positions under successive cyclicity to its final position. The ungrammaticality of (37) is due to no Agree between the complex DP comprised of the expletive and the NP (*a man*) and the verb BE.

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13) Bošković (2005) argues that the intermediate Spec IP in (35) is indeed not created, which means that the expletive is generated in its surface position; if expletives do not undergo raising, locality violations with A-movement are routinely voided. We suggest a supporting evidence for the successive cyclicity with the following constructions in Grohmann, Drury, and Castillo (2000).

- (i) a. Mary seems to John [<sub>IP</sub> to appear to herself to be in the room].
- b. \*Mary seems to John [<sub>IP</sub> to appear to himself to be in the room].

The ungrammaticality of (ib) follows if the matrix subject passes, in fact, must pass through the embedded clause Spec IP on the way to matrix Spec IP.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the two things; the first one is the origin of the expletive *there* and the second one is the derivational mechanism of the expletive constructions. Based on Deal (2006)'s observations, we suggest that the expletive *there* is not inserted in Spec IP position by Merge-over-Move preference but is merged in the lower position.

Adopting Chomsky (1995)'s idea that the expletive/associate pair is a complex DP, *there* being the DP layer and its associate the NP part, we argue that the expletive *there* is merged in Spec DP position, from where it moves to Spec IP to check its Case. The motivation for the movement is provided by successive cyclicity hypothesis proposed in Bošković (2005) which enables us to dispense with EPP and Inverse Case Filter.

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