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Degrees of grammaticalization in three Romance languages: A comparative analysis of existential constructions¹

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Grammaticalization is generally assumed to be a gradual process and languages are thought to be grammaticalized to different degrees. For Romance languages, it has often been claimed that French is far more grammaticalized than Spanish, and that Italian occupies an intermediate position between these two. The aim of this study is to investigate to what extent this claim applies to existential constructions. In present-day French, Italian and Spanish, the most frequent existentials are *il y a*, *c'è* and *hay* respectively, all three being highly grammaticalized expressions. My analysis of these constructions will be based on the six parameters of grammaticalization as defined by Lehmann (1985, 1995), looking at instances drawn from a large newspaper corpus. The discussion will suggest that, as expected, French existential constructions display several signs of a highly advanced grammaticalization process which their Spanish and Italian counterparts lack. Moreover, it will be shown that the existential construction is least grammaticalized in Italian.

Keywords: grammaticalization, existential constructions, Romance languages, corpus study

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1. Grammaticalization of existentials in French, Spanish and Italian

Although relatively recent, grammaticalization theory has developed into a large and complex field of research. Despite a considerable amount of terminological confusion, a widely recognized definition of grammaticalization is Hopper & Traugott's (2003: 18): "the change whereby lexical items and constructions come in certain linguistic contexts to serve grammatical functions, and, once grammaticalized, continue to develop new grammatical functions". Moreover, it is generally acknowledged that grammaticalization is a gradual and irreversible process, and that languages belonging to the same language family can be grammaticalized to different degrees.² According to Lamiroy (2011), this phenomenon can and should be understood as twofold: whereas some languages display more areas of grammaticalization than others, a particular phenomenon might be grammaticalized to a greater extent in one language than in another. Within the West Germanic languages, English is often claimed to be more grammaticalized than Dutch, which in turn is more grammaticalized than German (cf. König & Gast 2007, Lamiroy 2011). With regard to the Romance languages under consideration, it has been argued that French is the most grammaticalized of the three, with Spanish the least grammaticalized and Italian standing midway between the two. Evidence for such a claim comes from studies of auxiliaries (Lamiroy 1999, Kuteva 2001), modals (Cornillie et al. 2009), prepositions (Lamiroy 2001) and word order (Marchello-Nizia 2009). The main objective of the present article is to examine whether - and if so, to what extent - this hypothesis can be applied to existential constructions in French, Italian and Spanish.

In many SVO languages, among them English, Hebrew and the three Romance languages under consideration here, the existential verb tends to become a grammaticalized particle with reduced control of verb agreement. Also known as *existential presentative constructions* (EPC), these particles are typically used to introduce (typically indefinite) referents into the discourse (Givón 1988, Givón 2001: 255). In French, Italian and Spanish, the most frequent existential verb appearing in presentational contexts is, respectively, *y avoir* (1), *esserci* (2) and *haber* (3):

² For an overview of the various definitions of grammaticalization and its key principles, see Marchello-Nizia (2006).

- (1) *Il n'y a plus de forces russes en Lituanie depuis le mois d'août 1993.* (Le Monde, 29 Jan. 1994)
'There haven't been any Russian forces in Lithuania since August 1993.'
- (2) *Fidel mi ha assicurato: posso morire, ma a Cuba c'è una squadra ed un popolo pronti a fare andare avanti la Rivoluzione.* (Il Tempo, 14 Aug. 2006)
'Fidel assured me: I may die, but in Cuba there is a team and a people ready to continue the Revolution.'
- (3) *En España hay 150.000 ecuatorianos, de los cuales 58.000 están empadronados en Madrid.* (El Norte de Castilla, 30 Mar. 2001)
'In Spain there are 150,000 Ecuadoreans, of whom 58,000 are registered in Madrid.'

As noted by Blasco Ferrer (2004), these EPCs are highly grammaticalized in the three languages. Firstly, they contain a locative morpheme which has lost its original semantic load and has come to occupy a fixed position relative to the verb: enclitic *-y* in Spanish and preverbal *y* in French and *ci* in Italian. Secondly, the verb used in French and Spanish has a possessive origin (HABET), which is desemanticized in its existential use (Heine & Kuteva 2005: 33). Thirdly, in all three languages, the existential meaning of the EPC is associated with the construction as a whole and is unpredictable from the individual lexical items involved. In other words, EPCs function as single processing units or chunks (cf. Haiman 1994).

In order to investigate the degree of grammaticalization of EPCs in French, Spanish and Italian, the present study will use the six independent parameters of grammaticalization proposed by Lehmann (1985, 1995: 108–159). The central idea of his framework is that grammaticalized signs are characterized by (a) their loss of weight, (b) their loss of autonomy (which he defines positively in terms of an increase of cohesion with other signs), and (c) their loss of variability. The results of such changes can be seen on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes, in accordance with the syntagmatic or paradigmatic relation that a grammaticalized sign has with other signs. In order to account for the combination of these three phenomena on the two axes, Lehmann developed six parameters, which allow for the measurement of the degree of grammaticalization of a sign by examining the dynamic process related to each of them (see Figure 1).

	Paradigmatic	Syntagmatic
Weight	Attrition	Condensation
Cohesion	Paradigmaticization	Coalescence
Variability	Obligatorification	Fixation

Figure 1. Lehmann's parameters of grammaticalization

Lehmann's structural method³ is particularly useful for the purposes of this article since his parameters are "characteristic of grammaticalization which has already attained a fairly advanced stage" (Hopper 1991: 21). Given that there is no doubt that this is the case for the EPCs in the three languages under consideration, we will now apply the parameters to these constructions in French, Spanish and Italian. Where appropriate, we will use examples drawn from a large corpus of contemporary written newspaper articles.⁴ The choice for this specific kind of corpus is that EPCs are particularly important in this text genre.⁵

2. Lehmann's parameters applied to existential constructions

2.1. Attrition

The first parameter of grammaticalization concerns the paradigmatic integrity of the grammaticalized sign. The more a sign is grammaticalized, the more it will lose its weight, which is the substance by which it keeps its identity and differs from other members of its class. This loss in weight,

³ For more recent, functional and cognitive approaches see, amongst others, Traugott & Heine (1991), Hopper & Traugott (2003) and Heine & Kuteva (2005).

⁴ This corpus aims to be representative of standard written journalistic language in modern French, Spanish and Italian. In total it contains 7315 tokens of the most common existential construction in European Spanish, French and Italian. For Spanish there are 3415 cases from the electronic database CREA, the *Corpus de Referencia del Español actual*, from 2001 and 2002; for French it includes 2389 examples from *Le Monde* from 1994 and 1996; and for Italian there are 1511 examples mainly taken from *Il Corriere della Sera* and to a lesser degree from *Il Mondo*, *Il Tempo* and *Avvenire*, for the period 2006 to 2008. Although the three sub-corpora are not comparable in size, we consider them to be sufficiently large to allow a valid comparison.

⁵ As has been pointed out by Gómez González (2001: 265), "existential-*there* constructions allow mainly news-readers, columnists and commentators to locate a cardinal or an enumerative quantification of entities and situations with respect to the previous co(n)texts, presenting them in the scene of discourse and within clausal Rhemes and thereby getting

also known as *attrition*, may occur on both the phono-morphological (2.1.1) and semantic (2.1.2) planes.

2.1.1.1. *Phono-morphological attrition*

Attrition involves, among other things, phonological *erosion* and morphological *degeneration*. The latter process concerns the “loss of the ability to inflect” (Lehmann 1985: 307) and is currently more often referred to as *decatégorialization*, a well-established term introduced by Hopper & Thompson (1984) to denote the loss of syntactic properties associated with the lexical category of a word. Hence, for our purposes it is appropriate to look at what extent the three existential verbs differ as regards their degree of (in)variability concerning tense, mood and number distinctions. Although there is no doubt that all three languages show variation for tense and mood, it is interesting to note that with respect to agreement with the postponed NP, the three languages seem to have undergone different evolutions.

At first sight, Spanish seems to show the most extreme process of attrition, given that from old Spanish the present tense has evolved into *hay*, which is a monosyllabic, invariable and completely fossilized combination of the verb *ha* and the enclitic locative morpheme *-y*. However, currently in the spoken language, *haber* often shows non-standard agreement with the postposed NP⁶ and thus tends towards morphological extension rather than attrition. Some such examples even occur in written text genres (Montes Giraldo 1982: 384):

- (4) *Se sabe que en las logias norteamericanas habían también oficiales ingleses.* (Ciencias Sociales 3, 1981: 118)
‘It is known that there were also English officers in the North American lodges.’
- (5) *No hubieron presos políticos, ni torturas, ni asesinatos.* (Desarrollo Indoamericano 27, 1950)
‘There were no political prisoners, nor tortures, nor murders.’

unmarked end-Focus and end-Weight. At the same time, the side-effect is often caused of silencing the agency of a process, which imbues these constructions with depersonalised quality. This permits speakers to avoid claims about the responsibility for the assertion in question, which is often necessary in objective constructive and reconstructive texts.⁷

⁶ The agreement of the Spanish existential verb with the postponed NP occurs chiefly (but not exclusively) in past tenses (*habían*, *hubieron*). In addition, the phenomenon is also sensitive to geolinguistic and sociolinguistic factors (cf. Fernández Soriano & Táboas Baylín 1999, Koch 2003).

In contrast, Italian *c'è*, which normally shows agreement with the post-posed NP, shows a clear tendency towards invariability in the popular register of northern varieties (Koch 2003: 158):

- (6) *C'era dei contadini.* (Koch 2003: 158)
'There was farmers.'

The French *il y a*-construction is an impersonal construction, which does not show agreement. Its quasi systematic phonological reduction to the monosyllabic *ya* has been well documented (see Maillard 1985). Although it is a phenomenon associated largely with spoken language, some examples can be found in the newspaper corpus of *Le Monde*. In example (7), the existential *ya* appears without the impersonal morpheme *il*:

- (7) *La condition féminine ? Elle fait de nous des écorchées vives, répond Martha Graham, qui aussitôt passe à l'acte, en se lacérant la poitrine pour dévoiler ses viscères. Rassurez-vous, y a un truc.* (Le Monde, 28/01/94)
'The female condition? It makes us people skinned alive, Martha Graham answers, who instantly comes into action, tearing up her chest in order to reveal her intestines. Don't worry, there is a trick.'

So, in terms of morphological attrition, French *il y a* manifests a lack of number flexion; meanwhile, Italian *c'è* seems to be undergoing loss of agreement, whereas Spanish *hay* presents the opposite tendency. In addition, *il y a* seems to have evolved further in the process of grammaticalization than *hay* and *c'è* with regard to its phonological integrity.

2.1.2. Desemanticization

Another aspect of the loss of weight of a sign is the progressive loss of its semantic substance. This process is also known as *desemanticization* or *semantic bleaching* and manifests itself synchronically as a specific kind of polysemy. The original core meaning (or *Grundbedeutung*) of the item gets lost in favour of a more general meaning (or *Gesamtbedeutung*). Nevertheless, according to Hopper's (1991: 24) Principle of Divergence, at a synchronic level the original (lexical) meaning may coexist with the bleached (grammatical) meaning.

At the logico-semantic level, the literature generally distinguishes between existential *assertion* and *predication* (Maillard 1985: 99). Essentially, the difference consists of the fact that existential assertion expresses athetic or entirely rhematic proposition, whereas existential predication expresses

a categorical proposition between a theme (a preverbal subject) and a rheme (the existential predicate). As illustrated in the example below, the existential assertion with *c'è* introduces the NP into the discourse without claiming the actual existence of the place. On the contrary, the existential predication *questo luogo esiste* ('this place exists') affirms the existence of the NP in reality:

- (8) *C'è un luogo sulle colline toscane dove la natura, la storia, la bellezza armoniosa e prodotti naturali di eccellente qualità convivono dolcemente; dove l'acqua sgorga leggera, limpida e luminosa. Questo luogo esiste, è a Panna.* (Found on a bottle in 2008)
 'There is a place on top of the Tuscan hills where nature, history, harmonious beauty and natural products of excellent quality gently coexist; where the water flows light, limpid and luminous. This place exists, it is in Panna.'

As for the semantics of existential assertion, Treviño (2003: 179) distinguishes between an ontological-existential use (asserting the absolute existence of a referent) as in (9), a locative use (indicating the presence or availability of a referent in a place) as in (10), and a contingent use (expressing the existence of X as a property of Y) as in (11).⁷ The following examples show that the EPCs of all three languages can be used in all three meanings:

- (9) *Il y a des trèfles à quatre feuilles.*
Hay tréboles de cuatro hojas.
Ci sono dei quadrifogli.
 'There are four-leaf clovers.'
- (10) *Il y a un chat noir sur le toit.*
Hay un gato negro en el tejado.
C'è un gatto nero sul tetto.
 'There is a black cat on the roof.'
- (11) *Il y a un toboggan dans la cour de récréation.*
En el patio de recreo hay un tobogán.
Nel cortile c'è uno scivolo.
 'There is a slide in the playground.'

⁷ cf. Heine (1997: 94–96), who distinguishes between *nuclear* existence ('X exists') and *extended* existence ('X exists with reference to Y'). Treviño's *locational* and *contingent* types of existence correspond *mutatis mutandum* to Heine's *extended* existence.

As noted by Treviño (2003: 188), the ontological-existential meaning only allows generic NPs, while for the locative and contingent uses in which the NP is anchored to something, non-generic referents are preferred. Indeed, in our corpus, whenever Spanish *hay* and French *il y a* express ontological existence, the NP has a non-specific reading, as in (12) and (13) respectively. In general, this non-specific reading is obtained by a restrictive relative clause restricting the meaning of the NP to a group of referents. As pointed out by Van de Velde (2005: 49), this amounts to the placement of an entity in a set of entities.

- (12) *Hay gente que tiene gran éxito social y por dentro sensación de fracaso, y viceversa.* (El Norte de Castilla, 21 Mar. 2001)
 ‘There are people who have enormous social success but on the inside a feeling of failure, and vice versa.’
- (13) *«Il y a des moments où les gens devraient savoir se taire», a répliqué Michel Vion.* (Le Monde, 15 Feb. 1994)
 ‘“There are moments when people should be able to be silent,” answered Michel Vion.’

However, there seems to be a difference between Spanish and French as to the restrictions on the expression of ontological existence. Unlike French *il y a*, Spanish *hay* may find itself alone in a relative clause of which the antecedent is a superlative, as in *lo más rutinario* in (14), or may be a N modified by an adjective like *único* in (15).

- (14) *“Las imágenes en las que se le ve cómo le examinan para ver si tiene piojos y le miran la garganta son lo más rutinario que hay, lo que viene a mostrar que es un mortal común y corriente, [. . .].* (La Razón Digital, 16 Dec. 2003)
 ‘The images in which we see how they examine him to verify if he has lice and how they look into his throat are the most routine that exist, which is meant to show that he is a common and ordinary mortal, [. . .].’
- (15) *P. “Sólo tenéis una certeza, pero no queréis mirarla a la cara: es la igualdad de los muertos”. R. Sí, es la única igualdad que hay.* (El País, 15 Feb. 2003)
 ‘“Q. You have only one certainty, but you do not want to look it in the face: it is the equality of the dead.” A. Yes, it is the only equality that exists.’

In our French corpus, *il y a* only appears without anchoring in enumerative contexts. In example (16), the non-existence of *mémoire* is opposed

to the existence of *transmission*, while example (17) illustrates a so-called list construction. Interestingly, these lists often have a connotation of disaster, with the sentence challenging the existence of such a negative state. Strikingly, the adverb *bien sûr* appears generally at the beginning of the statement.

- (16) *La «mémoire collective» existe-t-elle ? Il n'y a pas mémoire. Il y a transmission. Par la famille, par l'école ou encore par la télévision.* (Le Monde, 28 Jan. 1994)
 'Does "collective memory" exist? There is no memory. There is transmission. Through family, school or television.'
- (17) *Si certains se désintéressent de leur histoire, d'autres renouent avec la tradition, avec les personnes âgées, les «sages». C'est un signe positif. Bien sûr, il y a les revendications territoriales, les discussions sur l'autonomie, l'enchâssement de leurs droits dans la Constitution canadienne, les conventions avec les gouvernements, etc.* (Le Monde, 19 Feb. 1994)
 'While certain people lose their interest in their history, others pick up the thread of tradition, with the elderly, the "wise men". This is a positive sign. Of course, there are the territorial claims, the discussions about autonomy, the inclusion of their rights in the Canadian Constitution, the conventions with the governments, etc.'

Turning now to the expression of existential predication, it is striking that only Italian *c'è* can affirm the existence of a preverbal subject such as *God* in example (18) or a *star* in example (19). In order to express the absolute existence of non-generic NPs, French and Spanish have to use the verb *exist* or look for an alternative formulation (19). In other words, Spanish *hay* and French *il y a* cannot be used in categorical constructions.

- (18) *Dio c'è.*
 **Dios hay.*
 **Dieu (il) y a.*
 'God exists.'
- (19) *La stella che non c'è.*
La estrella ausente.
L'étoile imaginaire.
 'The star that does not exist./The absent star./The imaginary star.'

In fact, only thethetic existential assertion corresponds to a prototypical EPC, since in the existential predication the NP is thematic and as a result the construction is not presentative (see Zamparelli 2000: ch. 5). In

this light, it is particularly revealing that Italian *c'è* can be used both in existential assertions (8) and predications (18). Interestingly, in our corpus the existential predication generally has a negative polarity. This may well be related to the fact that “mere assertion of the existence of some entity is a rather special kind of speech act which is of limited use in everyday communication” (Lambrecht 1994: 178). However, it seems to be more relevant to discuss the need or usefulness of objects yet to be created.

- (20) *Mancano i libri che riassumano un mondo, che rappresentino il mondo come totalità di esperienze eterogenee. . . Se tutti vogliono scrivere il proprio romanzo, vuol dire che un romanzo che parli di tutti non c'è.* (Corriere della sera, 20 Oct. 2008)

‘There is a lack of books summarizing a world, representing the world as a totality of heterogeneous experiences. . . If everyone wants to write their own novel, this means that a novel which speaks about everyone does not exist.’

In addition, Italian *c'è* is also used in categorical propositions which do not predicate the existence of the preverbal NP, but its presence (or absence) in a place, as in example (21). This meaning is perfectly predictable from the combination of the verb *essere* and the locative adverb *ci*. In other words, Italian *c'è* can still express its original meaning (‘to be somewhere’), apart from its use as an EPC.

- (21) *Bertinotti mi scuserà ma il discorso che sto per fare è lo stesso che faccio anche quando lui non c'è.* (Corriere della sera, 04 Sept. 2005)

‘Bertinotti shall excuse me but the speech I am preparing is the same I make when he is not there.’

French and Spanish EPCs, then, express a general meaning of existence, but unlike the Italian EPCs they are unable to predicate existence or presence in a place, presumably the original core meaning of EPCs. Moreover, the existing NP with a non-specific reading seems to be subject to more restrictions in French than in Spanish. We conclude, then, that the semantic weight of Italian *c'è* is more important than that of Spanish *hay*, and this in turn is more important than French *il y a*.

2.2. Obligatorification

The loss of paradigmatic variability may be interparadigmatic or intra-paradigmatic. The loss of interparadigmatic variability concerns *obliga-*

torification, which is the process by which the presence of a sign becomes grammatically obligatory in an increasing number of contexts (cf. subject pronouns in modern French). The loss of intraparadigmatic variability concerns the extension of the distribution of a sign, as a consequence of the gradual dropping of discourse restrictions (Lehmann 1995: 142).

This parameter is of interest to us on two counts: firstly, to look for syntactic contexts which require the use of the existential constructions; and then to explore the discourse-pragmatic restrictions on the determination of the existent NP in EPCs, especially with regard to the strength of the so-called *Definiteness Restriction* in the three languages.⁸

2.2.1. Syntactic obligatorification

The use of *il y a* is syntactically obligatory when it is used as an *introducer of restriction* (Pierrard 1985). Indeed, in order to allow the extraposition of a constrained constituent, French has to employ the restrictive construction *il n'y a que X qu-*. In this construction *il y a* functions as a mere restrictive tool which can be used both with NPs (22) and PPs (23):

- (22) *Il n'y a que la mort qui tire des accents véritablement tragiques au saltimbanque: «Je ne crois pas en l'au-delà. Les religions sont toutes cruelles, la juive comme la chrétienne. La mort c'est un naufrage: ce n'est pas marrant, mais c'est ainsi!»* (Le Monde, 28 Feb. 1994)
 'Only death gets a truly tragic accent from the street acrobat: "I do not believe in the hereafter. All religions are cruel, Jewish as well as Christian. Death is a shipwreck: it is not funny, but it is like that!"'
- (23) *L'offre radiophonique demeure vivace, riche et diffuse. Il n'y a qu'à Paris qu'on croit que la radio, en France, est une et unique.* (Le Monde, 24 Jan. 1994)
 'The offer on the radio remains lively, rich and diffuse. Only in Paris do people think that the radio, in France, is one and unique.'

⁸ A third way to investigate the loss of paradigmatic variability is to study the (potential) existence and use of alternative existential patterns in the three languages under discussion. Indeed, in support of our hypothesis, it has previously been shown that unlike *il y a*, the use of the French constructions with *il est* (e.g. *il est des jours où l'on se sent plus léger qu'un oiseau*) and *il existe* (e.g. *il existe une solution à tout problème*) is constrained by certain semantic conditions linked with the attribution of a differential property in the case of *il est* (Méry 2006) and non-specific existence in the case of *il existe* (Martin 2002). To our knowledge, no such study has ever been done in Spanish or Italian.

In the Spanish and Italian corpora, there are no such constructions. In these languages, in order to restrict an extraposed constituent, it is sufficient to use the respective adverbs *sólo* and *solo*. In other words, with respect to the reduction of the interparadigmatic variability, *il y a* is more grammaticalized than *hay* and *c'è*.

2.2.2. Discourse-pragmatic extension

With respect to the loss of intraparadigmatic variability, it is interesting to investigate the discourse-pragmatic restrictions on the determination of the existent NP in the EPC. Recall that existential constructions are presentation constructions which are known to undergo the *Definiteness Restriction*, that is, they only introduce weak referents such as indefinite NPs or pronouns (see Leonetti 2008):

- (24) «Accréditer l'idée que derrière un diplôme il n'y a plus rien est dangereux pour l'avenir d'une génération», prédit le dirigeant de l'UNEF-ID. (Le Monde, 2 Mar. 1994)
 “‘To give credence to the idea that behind a diploma there is nothing any more is dangerous for the future of a generation”, predicts the leader of the UNEF-ID.’

Table 1 reveals that, in our corpus, the three languages behave very differently with regard to the strength of this indefiniteness constraint in EPCs. In Spanish the introduced NP must be weak, whereas it may be a strong NP in both French and, especially, in Italian.⁹

Table 1. Determination of the NP in the EPC

	Weak NP		Strong NP		Other		Sum	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<i>il y a</i>	2,015	84	322	14	52	2	2,389	100
<i>hay</i>	3,208	94	27	1	180	5	3,415	100
<i>c'è</i>	995	66	474	31	42	3	1,511	100

⁹ The weak–strong distinction was first made by Milsark (1977). A *weak* NP, traditionally called *indefinite*, is an indefinite referential expression (like indefinite pronouns) or an NP with a cardinal determiner (*a/an, some, many, etc.*). A *strong* NP, traditionally called *definite*, is a definite referential expression (such as proper names and definite pronouns) or an NP determined by a universal quantifier (*every, all, the etc.*), possessives or demonstratives. Finally, the category *other* includes relative pronouns and implicit NPs, which can either be semantically *weak* or *strong*.

If we take a closer look at the data, we see that this formal difference corresponds to a discourse-pragmatic difference between the languages. In Spanish EPCs the introduced NP can be formally definite, but it must be pragmatically unknown, as is the case with the superlative in example (25) and the post-modified NP in example (26). In other words, in the terminology of Prince (1992), Spanish *hay* only introduces *brand-new* referents.¹⁰

- (25) *La Trienal sigue al pie de la letra los consejos de George Steiner sobre el sentido de los festivales: no hay la más mínima concesión a la rutina; cada espectáculo es una aventura del espíritu.* (El País, 20 June 2003)
 ‘The Triennial follows the advice of George Steiner to the letter regarding the sense of festivals: there is not the slightest concession to routine; each show is an adventure of the spirit.’
- (26) *El líder socialista se cuidó en sus entrevistas de aparecer con una posición consensuada con la del Ejecutivo de Aznar, llegando a afirmar que transmitía lo que consideraba “la posición del Gobierno español y de la sociedad española” de que haya la voluntad recíproca de sanear la actual situación de tensión.* (La Razón, 18 Dec. 2001)
 ‘The socialist leader took care in his interviews to appear in agreement with the executive council of Aznar, even stating that he communicated what he considered to be “the position of the Spanish government and the Spanish society” that there is a reciprocal wish to clear up the present-day situation of tension.’

Nevertheless, there are some examples in our corpus which show that the introduction of active referents is not absolutely impossible in Spanish EPCs. For instance, in example (27) below, the strong NP *esa reacción* marks the anaphoricity of the introduced referent. There is thus a certain dropping of discourse restrictions in Spanish EPCs.

- (27) *El público canario reacciona muy bien y enseguida a cualquier guiño que le hagan desde la escena y cuando el actor nota esa reacción se siente muy a gusto. Ese tipo de reacciones hace crecer el espectáculo. Lo llena de calidad, cuando hay esa reacción, esa complicidad, se nota.* (Canarias 7, 22 Jan. 2001)

¹⁰ As has often been noted in the literature, in Spanish there seems to be a very strict division of labour between the existential verb *haber* and the situational verb *estar*, the first being used with indefinite NPs and the second with definite NPs (i.a. King 1992: 99–122). Note that this complementarity does not hold in Italian, where the use of *stare* is restricted to some specific contexts, nor does it exist in French (Feuillet 1998: 694–696).

‘The public of the Canary Islands reacts very well and immediately to any wink given to them from the stage and when the actor notices this reaction he feels very much at ease. This kind of reaction makes the show grow. It fills it with quality, one notices, when this reaction takes place, this complicity.’

On the other hand, Italian *c'è* and French *il y a* can introduce any kind of unused referent. Such referents are usually unknown, but they may be known (such as proper names), as long as they are new in the discourse (*hearer new* in the terminology of Prince 1992). The examples (28) and (29) illustrate that when the introduced NP is a proper name, in the majority of cases the NP appears in an enumerative context. This corresponds to the *list* or *enumerative* context in the literature on English EPC (Rando & Napoli 1978, Lumsden 1988: 214–223).

- (28) *La chanteuse arrive en concierge, [. . .]. Sous les oripeaux, il y a Catherine Ringer en robe courte jaune et noir et collants écossais.* (Le Monde, 2 Feb. 1994)
 ‘The singer arrived as a caretaker, [. . .]. Under the rags you can see Catherine Ringer in a short yellow and black dress and Scottish tights.’
- (29) *Al fianco del regista ci sono Sienna Miller [. . .], il grande Jeremy Irons, vescovo del potere papale deciso a sedare le lussurie veneziane, Oliver Platt fidanzato ricco quanto grasso di Francesca e che finirà felice tra le braccia della mamma della promessa sposa, Lena Olin, moglie nella vita di Hallström.* (Corriere della sera, 4 Sept. 2005)
 ‘Next to the director we see Sienna Miller [. . .], the great Jeremy Irons, bishop of the papal power determined to suppress the Venetian lusts, Oliver Platt, Francesca’s rich and fat fiancé who will end up happy in the arms of the mom of the bride-to-be, Lena Olin, Hallström’s wife in real life.’

If both French and Italian can introduce known but new referents, how can we account for the difference in frequency of strong NPs? As examples (30) and (31) illustrate, in Italian EPCs the existent NP may be an anaphoric demonstrative pronoun or even remain implicit. In other words, unlike French, Italian EPCs can even recall used or old referents in the discourse.

- (30) *Intanto il marchio romano si prepara ad allargare il proprio mondo. Nei gioielli e negli orologi di alta gamma. Ma anche negli interni di lusso. Nel futuro di Fendi c'è tutto questo secondo uno schema ad anelli concentrici che parte dal core business di pelletteria e pellicceria.* (Il Mondo, 29 June 2007)

‘In the meantime the Roman brand is preparing to broaden its own world. To upmarket jewels and watches. But also within the luxury products. In the future of Fendi we find all this, following a plan with concentric circles which starts from the core business of leather goods and furs.’

- (31) «*Elezioni subito? Il Paese ne avrebbe bisogno, quindi penso che non ci saranno*». (Corriere della sera, 4 Sept. 2005)
 ‘Elections right away? The Country would need them, therefore I think there will not be elections.’

To conclude, Italian *c’è* does not seem to undergo the Definiteness Restriction, whereas this is particularly strong for Spanish *hay*.¹¹ This probably has to do with the fact that unlike *hay*, *c’è* is not an impersonal construction. Indeed, the Definiteness Restriction has often been linked to the impersonal construction (for a discussion on French here, see, amongst others, Rivière 1981 and Dobrovie-Sorin & Beyssade 2004: 61–95).

In this light, it is particularly revealing that the French *il y a* (an impersonal construction) can introduce known referents perfectly well, although it does so less frequently than in Italian. It is worth noting here that this is particularly the case in enumerative constructions. Yet, according to Béguelin (2004: 149) this context can be considered as one of the most important catalysts of grammaticalization. If this holds true, *il y a* might have undergone a discourse-pragmatic extension as a result of grammaticalization in enumerative contexts.

In short, if grammaticalization goes hand in hand with the dropping of discourse restrictions, we can conclude that French *il y a* is more grammaticalized than Spanish *hay*, whereas for *c’è* this issue is not relevant.

2.3. Paradigmaticization

Paradigmaticization or paradigmatic integration is the process which involves the reduction of paradigmaticity or paradigmatic cohesion. Non- or weakly grammaticalized members of a paradigm are linked to each other by clear-cut paradigmatic relations, especially opposition and complementarity. In the process of paradigmaticization, the differences between the members are leveled out (Lehmann 1995: 135).

¹¹ However, according to Leonetti (2008), the Definiteness Restriction does apply in Italian when the EPC contain a locative coda.

In this respect, it is interesting to mention that EPCs belong to the paradigm of the above mentioned *thetic constructions*, also known as *sentence focus constructions* (Lambrecht 2000). The literature traditionally distinguishes between two types of thetic constructions: *existential constructions* as in (32) and *event-reporting constructions* as in (33) (Lambrecht 1994: 143–144).¹²

(32) *Il n'y a pas d'amour heureux.*
No hay amor feliz.
Non c'è amore felice.
 'There is no happy love.'

(33) *Il y a Manuel qui a téléphoné.*
Ha llamado Manuel.
Ha chiamato Manuel./C'è Manuel che ha chiamato.
 'Manuel called.'

If we accept that these thetic constructions form a paradigm, it then becomes clear that in Spanish the functional opposition between *hay* and subject inversion is clear-cut. The EPC is used to express existential theticity, whereas subject-inversion is used to express event-reporting theticity. On the contrary, in French both types of thetic constructions are formally expressed by *il y a*. Indeed, it is well known that subject-inversion is only possible under very strict conditions in French (Willems 1985, Lahousse 2010). This is probably due to the strong pressure of the syntactic order SV, which seems to be grammaticalized to a much greater degree in French than in Spanish and Italian (Marchello-Nizia 2009). Italian seems to occupy a midway position: on the one hand, both strategies to express theticity are used in a complementary way, but on the other hand, *c'è* sometimes is used in event-reporting sentences.

Since our corpus is composed exclusively of newspaper articles, it is not surprising that there are no event-reporting sentences, except perhaps for example (34) in French. Therefore, we cannot investigate the paradigmatic cohesion of thetic constructions in the framework of this contribution.

(34) *Pour que les utilisateurs regardent un billet, le prennent en compte, il doit comporter de l'information, et pas seulement des guillemets ou des décors. Là, les gens disent: «Ah, il y a le Petit Prince», «Ah, il y a l'Aéropostale»,*

¹² The existential and event-reporting constructions correspond *mutatis mutandum* to the *daseinssetzend* and *ereignisbezogen* constructions in the terminology of Ulrich (1985) and to the *entity-central* and *event-central* constructions in the terminology of Sasse (1987).

«*Ah il y a le boa qui mange l'éléphant*». (Le Monde, 29 Jan. 1994)
 'For the users to look at a ticket and take it into consideration, it has to contain information, and not only guillocks or sceneries. Then, people say: "Ah, it's the Little Prince", "Ah, it's the airmail", "Ah, it's the boa eating the elephant".'

In conclusion, then, the paradigmatic cohesion betweenthetic sentences is very strong in Spanish, while it is completely lost in French. In Italian there seems to be a reduction in paradigmatic cohesion, even if the process of paradigmaticization is definitely not at an advanced stage.

2.4. Condensation

The next parameter is condensation. This is the process by which the syntagmatic weight of a grammatical sign, that is, the hierarchical level it helps to construct, decreases as the grammaticalization of the sign increases. For example, the Latin pronoun *ille* has become an article in the Romance languages: instead of functioning on the level of a NP (by substituting it), it now acts as a modifier inside the NP.

In the case of the EPCs, the temporal use of the French *il y a*, as in *il est arrivé il y a deux heures* ('he arrived two hours ago'), provides another illustration of this phenomenon. From a verbal construction, the temporal *il y a* has come to function as a prepositional expression (cf. *ago* in English). From this point of view, the condensation of *il y a* is clearly more advanced than is the case for Spanish *hay* and Italian *c'è*.

Apart from the temporal use, there are other indications that *il y a* does not have the same structural scope as *hay* and *c'è*. Thus it has been suggested that the verb in the French EPCs has become nothing more than a verbal support of the introduced NP (Blanche-Benveniste 1983: 96–97). Several arguments support such an interpretation. Firstly, French *il y a* is often used to avoid a non-topical subject appearing in initial position, while Spanish and Italian prefer to use subject-verb inversion under equivalent discourse-pragmatic circumstances. As this syntactic construction is highly constrained in French, recourse is made in this language to a bi-clausal cleft construction with *il y a*, in which the sequence of *il y a* is followed by a special kind of relative clause (*i.a.* Lambrecht 1994: 169). Unlike restrictive or explicative relative clauses, the relative clause in the French EPC is not syntactically integrated in the existent NP (see Willems & Meullemans 2010). In fact, the cleft sentence '*il y a NP qui*' should be

interpreted as a mono-clausal sentence containing both topic (NP) and comment (relative clause).

- (35) *il y a des garçons qui sont partis* (Jeanjean 1979: 129)
 ‘there are boys who have left’

Given *il y a*’s purely grammatical role in this construction, as illustrated in example (35), Béguelin (2000: 37–38) argues that the verbal nucleus of *il y a* has undergone a change of grammatical status, specifically, from a construction verb to a “means of extraposition”. Conversely, *il y a* would function as a construction verb in its other uses (existential and locative). Interestingly, Béguelin (2000: 38) points out that these different capacities of *il y a* can appear simultaneously in one sentence without producing an effect of contradiction, as can be seen in example (36). The possibility of the co-occurrence of a grammaticalized morpheme with its source could be considered an indication of a very high degree of grammaticalization (Hagège 1993: 200).

- (36) *il y a quand même des livres qu’il n’y a pas dans ta bibliothèque* (Blanche-Benveniste 1983: 97)
 ‘yet there are books that (there) are not in your library’

In the literature, this bi-clausal cleft construction with *il y a* is traditionally considered to be a gallicism (cf. Léard 1992: 25–98). Indeed, in Spanish, a literal translation of example (35) using *hay* would be infelicitous (?*hay chicos que salieron*). In contrast, in Italian, this construction (*ci sono ragazzi che sono andati via*) has been attested in colloquial speech (Berruto 1986: 63–66, Fiorentino 1999, Aureli 2003). The fact that the use of “weak relative clauses” is increasing in Italian, albeit in a much less advanced stage than in French, could indicate that Italian *c’è* is subject to a slightly higher degree of condensation than Spanish *hay*. Due to the oral nature of this construction, though, we cannot verify this hypothesis in our corpus.

However, other lines of enquiry are open to us here. It is interesting, for example, that EPCs sometimes contain predicative PPs like *en marcha* (37), *in corsa* (38) or *en cours* (39). If it is true that the verb in an EPC functions as an auxiliary verb, as has been suggested by La Fauci & Loporcaro (1997), and if condensation goes hand in hand with a loss in capacity of (double) predication,¹³ then the frequency of these predicative PPs should decrease with increasing grammaticalization.

¹³ Analogously, Lamiroy (2001: 96) observes that the verb *avoir/tener* allows a double predication as a lexical verb of possession, as in *j’ai mon fils malade* (‘I have my sick son’) and

- (37) *Llegados a este punto, conviene añadir algo. Hay ahora mismo en marcha un intento de cargar las tintas contra el director general de Pesca europeo, [. . .]* (Faro de Vigo, 21 June 2001)
 ‘Once arrived at this point, it is suitable to add something. There is currently an attempt going on to embroider against the general director of European Fishery, [. . .]’
- (38) *Insomma ancora molta strada da fare: secondo il presidente José Manuel Barroso la Croazia non potrà tagliare il traguardo prima del 2009. In corsa c’è anche la Macedonia, Repubblica dell’ex Jugoslavia.* (Corriere della sera, 8 Nov. 2006)
 ‘In short, there still remains a lot to do: according to the president José Manuel Barroso Croatia will not be able to reach the goal before 2009. Also in the running is Macedonia, a Republic of former Yugoslavia.’
- (39) *«Il n’y a en cours ni gel ni processus de recomposition», [. . .]* (Le Monde, 23 Feb. 1994)
 ‘“There is in progress neither freezing nor a process of recomposition”, [. . .]’

Table 2 reveals that the frequency of predicative PPs is the lowest in French, while it is highest in Italian. Spanish occupies an intermediate position. We argue that this could be explained in terms of the loss of predication capacity and thus condensation.

Table 2. Presence of predicative PPs in the EPC

	#	%	# Sum
<i>hay</i>	15	0.4	3,415
<i>il y a</i>	3	0.1	2,389
<i>c’è</i>	32	2.1	1,511

Indeed, if in an EPC with a predicative PP (such as *en cours*) the existential expression expresses a double predication (*il y a un travail en cours* corresponding to *il y a un travail et il est en cours*), it seems that French *il y a* shows a tendency towards the loss of the capacity of double predication, since the EPC with a predicative PP is considerably less frequent in French than in Spanish and Italian. From this perspective, the quantitative

tengo a mi hijo en América (‘I have my son in America’), but not in its grammaticalized use as an auxiliary perfective, as in *j’ai conduit mon fils à l’école* (‘I brought my son to school’).

data are in complete accord with the hypothesis that *il y a* is the most grammaticalized expression of the three and that *c'è* is the least grammaticalized.

2.5. Coalescence

Bondedness concerns the syntagmatic cohesion of a sign with its surrounding elements. In the case of non-grammaticalized items this cohesion is weak: the items are independently juxtaposed. When a sequence of elements is grammaticalized, the elements lose their proper substance and tend to be automatized into a single processing unit or chunk (Haiman 1994). In the case of very strong cohesion, the grammaticalized item becomes an affix, formally bound to another item. This process is traditionally known as *coalescence*. A good illustration of this phenomenon is the clitic of locative origin in existential constructions. In Spanish, the coalescence has gone furthest, since the clitic has become enclitic in *hay*. In our corpus, the parameter of bondedness can be applied both to the locative adverb (2.5.1) and the existent NP (2.5.2).

2.5.1. Locative adverb

If we have a look at the distribution of locative adverbs in the EPC in the three languages, we see that the frequency of *là* in French is comparatively much higher than that of the most frequent adverb in Spanish (*aquí*) or in Italian (*qui*) (see Table 3).

Interestingly, the most frequent adverbs in French (*là*) and Italian (*qui*) are the only ones used to refer anaphorically to abstract situations:

- (40) *M. Seillière s'est vivement inquiété de l'alourdissement des charges des entreprises et des salariés consécutif à l'accord du 30 décembre 1993 sur le financement des retraites complémentaires à soixante ans. Il a souligné que, sous la pression, le CNPF avait dû faire des concessions qui n'étaient pas compatibles avec les exigences de la compétition. «Il y a là une contradiction qui n'est pas soutenable.» (Le Monde, 15 Jan. 1994)*
 'M. Seillière was deeply worried about the increase in the expenses of firms and salaried employees resulting from the agreement of December 30th of 1993 on the financing of supplementary pensions at the age of sixty. He underlined that, under pressure, the CNPF had had to make concessions that were not compatible with the demands of the competition. "There is a contradiction there that is untenable."

Table 3. Lexical distribution of locative adverbs in the EPC

il y a	#		hay	#		c'è	#	
	2,389	%		3,415	%		1,511	%
<i>là</i>	59	63	<i>aquí</i>	22	36	<i>qui</i>	15	47
<i>ici</i>	14		<i>detrás</i>	8		<i>lì</i>	3	
<i>là-dedans</i>	4		<i>ahí</i>	7		<i>dietro</i>	3	
<i>partout</i>	4		<i>allí</i>	6		<i>dentro</i>	3	
<i>autour</i>	3		<i>dónde</i>	3		<i>sottobanco</i>	1	
<i>là-bas</i>	2		<i>alrededor</i>	3		<i>sotto</i>	1	
<i>ici ou là</i>	2		<i>de ahí a inf/que</i>	3		<i>qua e là</i>	1	
<i>ici et là</i>	1		<i>dentro</i>	2		<i>lì dentro</i>	1	
<i>nulle part</i>	1		<i>debajo</i>	2		<i>lì accanto</i>	1	
<i>quelque part</i>	1		<i>ahí fuera</i>	2		<i>intorno</i>	1	
<i>au-delà</i>	1		<i>afuera</i>	1		<i>davanti</i>	1	
<i>au-dessus</i>	1		<i>allá fuera</i>	1		<i>accanto</i>	1	
<i>dedans</i>	1		<i>enfrente</i>	1				
			<i>fuera</i>	1				
TOTAL	94	4		62	2		32	2

- (41) *Ma perché questo strano fenomeno di una notte dello spirito che dura praticamente tutta la vita? Qui c'è qualcosa di nuovo rispetto a quello che hanno vissuto e spiegato i maestri del passato, [. . .]* (Avvenire, 26 Aug. 2007)
 'But why this strange phenomenon of a night of the spirit that lasts practically a life long? There is something new here as regards what the masters of the past have lived and explained, [. . .]'

In contrast, in Spanish both the adverbs *aquí* (42) and *ahí* (43) can assume the function of an abstract anaphor, as illustrated in the following examples:

- (42) *La otra gran preocupación de los demógrafos es que el rico Occidente, tan parco en nacimientos, se vea sumergido por los prolíficos países pobres, especialmente por los musulmanes. Aquí hay implícitos sentimientos y temores que tienen más que ver con el racismo que con la demografía.* (Canarias 7, 14 Mar. 2001)
 'The other large concern of the demographers is that the rich West, so sparse in births, sees itself submerged by the prolific poor countries, especially by the Muslims. There are implicit feelings and fears here that have more to do with racism than with demography.'

- (43) *Olga Gallego considera lógico que se mantenga el Archivo Diocesano, [. . .]. Pero advierte: ‘Ahí hay un problema. (Faro de Vigo, 5 Apr. 2001)*
 ‘Olga Gallego considers it logical that the archives of the diocese are maintained, [. . .]. But she warns: There is a problem here.’

Furthermore, as for the position of these spatial adverbs in the EPCs, the following table reveals that the French adverb *là* appears mainly in intercalated position, whereas the Spanish and Italian spatial adverbs figure mostly in initial position (see Table 4).

Table 4. Position of spatial adverbs in the EPC

	adverb V SN		V adv SN		V SN adv		Sum	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<i>il y a</i>	16	17	62	67	15	16	93	100
<i>hay</i>	36	72	7	14	7	14	50	100
<i>c'è</i>	24	83	1	3	4	14	29	100

Note: The figures take into account only those structures in which the NP appears post-verbally.

A closer look at the data reveals that the French adverb *là* always appears in postverbal position when referring anaphorically to an abstract situation (cf. (40)). Hence, in this context it clearly tends to form a chunk with *il y a*, showing very high cohesion. On the other hand, when *là* appears in front of the EPC it refers to a concrete place, as in example (44). The other spatial adverbs appearing in this position also refer to concrete positions, as is the case of *ici* in example (45).

- (44) *J'étais très métro. Je ne le suis plus. J'ai viré bus. Depuis quand ? Depuis que le Monde s'est installé rue Falguière, à deux pas d'un terminus, celui de Montparnasse. Ce qui évite de poireauter interminablement dans le froid, sous la pluie à regarder défiler les «48», alors que vous attendez le «96». Là, des «96», il y en a toujours plusieurs à l'arrêt. (Le Monde, 22 Jan. 1994)*

‘I was very keen on the Underground. I am not any more. I changed to the bus. Since when? Since Le Monde moved to rue Falguière, very close to a bus terminus, the Montparnasse one. It avoids waiting endlessly in the cold, in the rain, seeing the “48” busses passing by, while you are waiting for the “96”. There, there are always several “96” buses at the bus stop.’

- (45) *M. Colliard sourit lorsqu'on lui parle d'une «culture communiste havraise». Il l'analyse, plutôt, comme une unité dans la diversité. «Ici, il y a une vraie culture populaire, car la plus grande partie des faubourgs sont à l'intérieur de la commune, avec de très nombreux comités de quartier créés avant la guerre par le maire radical, Léon Meyer», explique-t-il. (Le Monde, 20 Jan. 1994)*

'Mr. Colliard smiles when they speak to him about "a communist culture of Le Havre". He analyses it rather as a unity in the diversity. "Here, there is a real popular culture, because the majority of outskirts are situated inside the district, with a very high number of local committees created before the war by the radical mayor, Léon Meyer", he explains.'

In Spanish and Italian, the spatial adverbs used to refer anaphorically to an abstract situation appear generally in initial position (cf. (41)–(43)). It thus seems that *aquí* and *ahí* in Spanish and *qui* in Italian always remain deictic and that these languages do not have at their disposal a generic locative such as the French *là*. Moreover, as for the parameter of bondedness of spatial adverbs, the process of coalescence has gone furthest in French, which displays a very strong cohesion between the existential verb and the generic spatial adverb *là*. Indeed, in a generic meaning, *là* always appears immediately after the existential verb. In this position the adverb *là* thus seems to reinforce the highly grammaticalized spatial clitic *y*, which is no longer able to represent a generic locative universe of discourse in EPC (Roegiest & Meulleman 2005).

2.5.2. *Existent NP*

A second interesting question is to what extent the existent NP tends to form a chunk with the existential verb in the three languages. Does the French EPC manifest a stronger tendency to form fixed expressions?

Table 5 lists the fifteen most frequent nouns that appear in the EPC in decreasing order.

These data reveal that, in all three languages, the most frequent N after the existential verbs are hyperonyms (such as *chose*, *personne* and *gens*) and abstract nouns (such as *problème* and *différence*). At first sight, it thus seems that there are no substantial differences between French, Spanish and Italian in terms of the high frequency of certain fixed expressions with the existential verb.

Table 5. Lexical distribution of NP in the EPC

<i>il y a</i>	#	<i>hay</i>	#	<i>c'è</i>	#
<i>raison</i>	35	<i>persona</i>	51	<i>problema</i>	25
<i>problème</i>	33	<i>gente</i>	48	<i>dubbio</i>	16
<i>chose</i>	24	<i>diferencia</i>	43	<i>spazio</i>	16
<i>lieu</i>	23	<i>problema</i>	39	<i>bisogno</i>	14
<i>risque</i>	21	<i>cosa</i>	36	<i>persona</i>	12
<i>pas</i>	17	<i>duda</i>	29	<i>differenza</i>	12
<i>personne</i>	15	<i>manera</i>	25	<i>cosa</i>	11
<i>gens</i>	14	<i>posibilidad</i>	25	<i>tempo</i>	10
<i>chance</i>	14	<i>motivo</i>	23	<i>motivo</i>	8
<i>monde</i>	14	<i>acuerdo</i>	22	<i>modo</i>	8
<i>différence</i>	13	<i>interés</i>	17	<i>errore</i>	8
<i>place</i>	12	<i>razón</i>	17	<i>possibilità</i>	8
<i>solution</i>	11	<i>cambio</i>	17	<i>bambino</i>	7
<i>limite</i>	11	<i>mujer</i>	17	<i>momento</i>	7
<i>homme</i>	11	<i>tiempo</i>	16	<i>lavoro</i>	7

However, on careful inspection of the data, it turns out that in the French EPCs some of these nouns appear (almost) exclusively without any determination, that is, with the ‘zero article’. This is the case, among other nouns, with *lieu*, as in example (46). As we know, in French there is a correlation between the zero article and fixed expressions (Picabia 1983: 157). This has to do with the fact that the zero article confers a non-referential reading on the noun it determines. Indeed, in the example below *lieu* does not refer to a concrete place and the semantic interpretation of *il y a lieu* does not correspond with the simple combination of the meaning of the existential verb and the N *lieu*. Interestingly, in this example, the PP *à ce stade* appears inside the postverbal NP, interrupting it, but preserving in this way the cohesion between *il y a* and *lieu*.

- (46) *Au terme de l'ultimatum lancé par l'OTAN [. . .], les Nations unies et l'Alliance atlantique sont convenues que le retrait des armes serbes était suffisamment avancé pour qu'il n'y ait pas lieu, «à ce stade», de mener des frappes aériennes.* (Le Monde, 22 Feb. 1994)
 ‘At the end of the ultimatum issued by NATO [. . .], the United Nations and the Atlantic Alliance agreed that the pullback of Serbian weapons was sufficiently advanced that it was not necessary “at this stage” to carry out an airstrike.’

In Spanish, *hay* can appear perfectly well in an idiomatic expression like *hay lugar*, as in example (47). However, it is revealing that – unlike *lieu* in French – the Spanish N *lugar* does not appear in the list of the twenty most frequent nouns in EPC. Indeed, it is generally accepted that the grammaticalization of an item manifests itself through an increase in its frequency. Moreover, *il y a lieu* cannot be translated into Spanish by *hay lugar*, but must be translated by the single verb form *conviene*, which also suggests the strong cohesion between *il y a* and *lieu* in French.

- (47) *Según los asesores legales del concello, tal incumplimiento sin que hubiese lugar a la señalada revocación o caducidad de la autorización supone su tipificación como falta leve, con la consiguiente diferencia sancionadora que esto supone.* (Faro de Vigo, 15 June 2001)

‘According to the legal advisors of the council, a failure of this kind without leading to the mentioned revocation or lapsing of authorization, implies its qualification as a minor fault, with the resulting difference in sanction that this supposes.’

In Italian, there are no fixed expressions with the N *posto*. The absence of determination in example (48) must be explained by the generic reference of the NP and not by a possible fixation. The meaning of *non c'è posto* corresponds simply to the combination of its constituents: French *il y a lieu* does not correspond to *c'è posto* but to *conviene o è necessario*.

- (48) *Infatti, nell'Italia che ricorda tutte le sue tragedie – da quelle naturali a quelle terroristiche – e le commemora ogni anno con cerimonie e discorsi sempre più triti, non c'è posto per Balvano.* (Corriere della sera, 4 Sept. 2005)

‘As a matter of fact, in the Italy that remembers all its tragedies – from the natural to the terroristic – and commemorates them every year with ever more trite ceremonies and speeches, there is no place for Balvano.’

Nevertheless, Italian has some idiomatic expressions with *esserci*, namely *c'è bisogno* meaning ‘it is necessary’. Yet, unlike *il y a lieu* in the French EPC, *c'è bisogno* allows for an adverb between the V and the N, as exemplified in example (49), and the N can be modified, as illustrated in example (50). This suggests that the coalescence between *c'è* and *bisogno* in Italian is considerably weaker than that between *il y a* and *lieu* in French.

- (49) *Come ha capito bene Vladimir Putin, George W. Bush intende militarizzare lo spazio, e lo scudo spaziale europeo sarebbe il primo passo. Ma c'è proprio bisogno di una corsa al riarmo in orbita intorno alla terra tra l'America, la Russia e la Cina?* (Il Mondo, 22 June 2007)
 'As Vladimir Putin has understood well, George W. Bush is intending to militarize outer space, and the European space shield would be the first step. But do we really need a race to arms in orbit around the earth between America, Russia and China?'
- (50) *Rutelli ha quindi precisato che c'è «da una parte il bisogno di mettere i conti a posto, i 15 miliardi per il rientro del Pil secondo l'impegno dell'Italia».* (Corriere della sera, 11 Sept. 2006)
 'Therefore, Rutelli has specified that there is "on the one hand the need to tidy the accounts, 15 billion for the return of Pil according to the commitment of Italy".'

Finally, French *il y a* shows a more significant tendency to cohesion with its surrounding elements (both for adverbs and nouns) than Spanish *hay* and Italian *c'è*. Moreover, in these expressions the coalescence between the existential verb and the N seems to be strongest in the French EPC.

2.6. Fixation

The loss of syntagmatic variability goes hand in hand with a process of *fixation*. This means that the more a sign is grammaticalized, the more it loses its capacity to move in the proposition. The grammaticalized sign tends to occupy a fixed position, until it becomes a syntagmatic *slot filler* (Lehmann 1985: 308). With regard to EPCs, it is interesting to study the degree of mobility of (a) the existent NP and (b) the locative anchoring vis-à-vis the verb.

2.6.1. Position of the NP

In all three languages the existent NP almost always appears in postverbal position (see Table 6). This general tendency can probably be explained by the discourse-pragmatic presentational function of the EPC. Despite this, all three languages occasionally allow the NP to appear in preverbal position. However, they clearly differ as to the frequency with which this occurs. In Italian, the NP appears in preverbal position in more than six percent of all occurrences, whereas in French it does not even reach half a percent.

Table 6. Position of the NP vis-à-vis the verb

	Preverbal NP		Postverbal NP		Sum	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<i>il y a</i>	9	0.4	2,015	99.6	2,024	100
<i>hay</i>	31	1.1	2,822	98.9	2,853	100
<i>c'è</i>	79	6.4	1,161	93.6	1,240	100

Moreover, careful examination of the data reveals that this quantitative difference corresponds to qualitative differences between the three languages. As mentioned above in section 2.1.2, Italian is the only language that allows the VP to predicate the existence of a specific NP as in *Dio c'è*. However, when the NP refers to a non-specific entity, it may be thematic both in Italian and Spanish. The predicate may consist of the verb alone, as illustrated in (51) and (53), or be more complex. For instance, it may contain a locative PP, as in example (52), or an adjectival phrase such as *muchos* in (54) or *capaces de hablar de fútbol* in (55). In other words, in Italian and Spanish the NP may be thematized in preverbal position.

- (51) *Più eritropoietina c'è più il midollo fabbrica globuli rossi, [. . .].* (Corriere della sera, 1 Aug. 2008)
 'The more erythropoietin there is, the more the medulla produces red globules, [. . .].'
- (52) *Con gli occhi di oggi il giudizio su Pio XII nel mondo ebraico non appare severo? «Esagerazioni ci sono nell'accusa e nella difesa. Ho letto: "Era il Papa degli ebrei"». Questo non si può dire.* (Corriere della sera, 20 Oct. 2008)
 'Does the judgement of Pius XII in the Jewish world not seem severe through today's eyes? "There are exaggerations both in accusation and in defence. I read: "He was the Pope of the Jews." That is something you cannot say.'
- (53) *P. En el prostíbulo, la existencia de las mujeres depende de la voluntad de los hombres a los que satisfacen. ¿Ocurre actualmente lo mismo? R. Ahora y siempre. Madames creo que ya no hay, pero hoy existen mafias que manejan a las mujeres de una forma más terrible.* (Faro de Vigo, 15 June 2001)
 'Q. In the brothel, the existence of the women depends on the will of the men whom they satisfy. Is this what is happening now? A. Now and forever. I don't think there are any Madames left, but today there exist mafias that treat the women in a more terrible way.'

- (54) *A mí me queda la amargura de sentir que me arrancaron un trozo de mis entrañas porque mi hijo es un hijo e hijos hay muchos, pero tú eras único.* (Faro de Vigo, 18 June 2001)
 ‘I am left with the bitterness to feel that they snatched a part of my insides away from me because my son is a son and there are many sons, but you were unique.’
- (55) *Será odiado o querido, pero lo que está claro es que pocas personas hay en España capaces de hablar de fútbol con tanta facilidad y con tanta elocuencia.* (El Norte de Castilla, 24 Jan. 2001)
 ‘Whether he’s hated or loved, it is clear that there are few people in Spain able to speak about soccer with that much ease and eloquence.’

In contrast, in French the existent NP cannot function as a topic, except in one specific context: it may appear in preverbal position in a conditional subordinate clause introduced by *si* under the form of an unmodified N (56).

- (56) *Pour Nabil Darwish, professionnel de la radio arrivé en France en 1967, une télévision ne se crée pas du jour au lendemain. Si retard il y a, il est de peu d’importance.* (Le Monde, 10 Feb. 1994)
 ‘For Nabil Darwish, a radio professional who arrived in France in 1967, a television cannot be created from one day to the next. If there is a delay, it is a matter of minor importance.’

In short, although the preverbal position is rather rare in all three languages, the mobility of the existent NP for pragmatic purposes is far more common in Italian and Spanish than in French, where it is subject to important restrictions.

2.6.2. *Position of the locative anchoring*

As for the position of the locative in EPCs, we can distinguish between two positions vis-à-vis the existential verb. The locative can appear either in preverbal (57) or postverbal position (58):

- (57) *In Italia ci sono troppe tasse e pochi servizi.* (Il Tempo, 27 Aug. 2007)
 ‘In Italy there are too many taxes and too few services.’
- (58) *Pourtant, il va falloir rectifier par petites touches certaines impressions légèrement erronées de Lillehammer. Il n’y a pas d’élans à chaque coin de rue. Nous ne mangeons pas que des baleines et du saumon.* (Le Monde, 1 Mar. 1994)

'And yet, it will be necessary to correct somewhat a few impressions which are slightly erroneous about Lillehammer. There are no elks at the corner of every street. We don't eat only whales and salmon.'

When examining the frequency of these positions in our corpus, it is striking that French *il y a* appears in initial position in more than three out of four cases, whereas Spanish *hay* and Italian *c'è* are preceded by the locative in almost two out of three cases (see Table 7). In other words, *il y a* tends to become a *slot filler* at the head of the EPC. This fact confirms the idea formulated in section 2.2.2 that *il y a* has become a fixed formula functioning as a grammaticalized introducing device forthetic propositions. This correlation can easily be accounted for in our hypothesis that *il y a* has grammaticalized to a much higher extent than *hay* and *c'è*.

Table 7. Position of the LOC vis-à-vis the verb

	Preverbal Loc		Postverbal Loc		Sum	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<i>il y a</i>	249	23	834	77	1,083	100
<i>hay</i>	715	61	454	39	1,169	100
<i>c'è</i>	430	67	209	33	6,39	100

3. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to investigate the degree of grammaticalization of EPCs in three Romance languages, French, Spanish and Italian. The discussion of Lehmann's six parameters of grammaticalization suggests two basic tendencies.

As expected, French EPCs display several signs of a very advanced grammaticalization process, which their Spanish and Italian counterparts lack. As well as a manifest reduction of phono-morphological and semantic weight, *il y a* seems to have undergone a remarkable discourse-pragmatic extension for an impersonal construction. On similar lines, it is striking that the paradigmatic complementarity between existential and event-reportingthetic sentences is completely lost, with the use of *il y a* being the only way to indicate theticity in French. Moreover, the French EPCs have lost interparadigmatic variability, since they have come to function as a disposal of extraposition (unlike in Spanish and Italian). As for

coalescence, *il y a* shows a higher tendency than *hay* and *c'è* towards the creation of idiomatic expressions with a nominal context (such as *il y a lieu*). Finally, the position of *il y a* in the EPC is considerably more fixed in comparison with Spanish and Italian: *il y a* clearly tends to appear at the front of the sentence, preceding both the generic spatial adverb *là* and the existent NP.

The other general tendency to emerge from my analysis is that - at least in the case of existential constructions - it is not Spanish but Italian which is the least grammaticalized of the three Romance languages here. First, it is the only language of the three in which there is normally agreement with the existent NP. Second, Italian existential *c'è* carries a heavier semantic weight, since it is able to express the ontological existence of specific NPs. Third, it has a more important predication capacity than French *il y a* and Spanish *hay*. Finally, there is no real tendency towards fixation, since the existent NP occurs quite freely in preverbal position.

Nevertheless it is necessary to discuss two counterarguments: (a) the strength of the indefiniteness restriction is more limited in Italian than in French and Spanish, and (b) the paradigmatic cohesion between existential and event-reportingthetic sentences is weaker than in Spanish (but much stronger than in French). As for the apparent discourse-pragmatic extension of *c'è*, it seems to be essential that *c'è*, unlike *hay* and *il y a*, is not an impersonal construction. This characteristic might account for both phenomena.

How can we explain the decreasing extent of grammaticalization for *il y a*, *hay* and *c'è*? First of all, the fact that French has progressed further than Spanish and Italian in terms of the grammaticalization of EPCs might be linked to the fact that French also outstrips Spanish and Italian in terms of linear SV pressure. In this light, the more advanced grammaticalization of *il y a* can be seen as a morphological reflection of the strength of the syntactic SV pressure.¹⁴

As for the position of Italian, which has the least grammaticalized EPCs of the three languages, it might be significant that Italian is the only language which has opted for an EPC based on the verb *essere* (although the use of *averci* is not impossible in present day Italian). If the use of the possessive verb *avere* in a construction with an existential meaning can be

¹⁴ Indeed, according to Lambrecht (2000: 646), it is the syntactic pressure SV which motivates the choice for the verb *avoir* in the French EPC.

considered *in se* as a sign of a highly advanced grammaticalization, it does not seem contradictory that Italian *c'è* is grammaticalized to a lesser extent than French *il y a* or Spanish *hay*.

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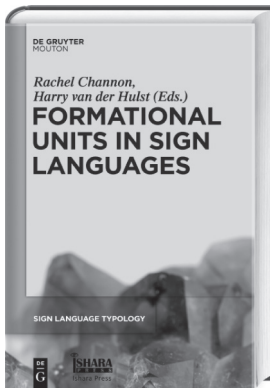
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