

An Economical Semantics for Existential There Sentences  
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Wednesday, February 1st, 1-2pm.  
Conference Room, 2nd floor, Campbell Hall

ABSTRACT:

(1a,b) are both grammatical and logically equivalent. This claim fails in (2), where most has replaced more than five:

- (1) a. More than five undergraduates are in John's biology class  
b. There are more than five undergraduates in John's biology class
- (2) a. Most undergraduates are in John's biology class  
b. \*There are most undergraduates in John's biology class

Naive Economy "The more you say the more you pay" suggests that (1a) should block (1b) unless it exhibits some interpretative difference from (1a). I claim there is such a difference. I take ET Ss to have the gross form in (3), compositionally interpreted.

(3) [There [BE [DP [Coda]]]]

The Coda, e.g. in John's biology class, determines a property of objects, the existential DP, e.g. more than five undergrads, maps that property to an S meaning; BE is a propositional operator like affirmation is, negation isn't, possibility might be, should be, ought to be, ... and there denotes the identity map on propositions. (From this the logical equivalence of (1a,b) follows). ET Ss like (1b) are distinguished from their unmarked counterparts (1a) by the Coda Condition:

Coda Condition To determine the truth of an ET S just consider objects with the coda property.

So if the DP[exist] is of the form [Det N] the CC requires that Det be Cons2, conservative on its second (predicate) argument. That is, it must satisfy  $D(A)(B) = D(A1B)(B)$  – we can decide the truth of  $D(A)(B)$  by limiting ourselves to those objects in A which are B's. MORE THAN FIVE meets this condition, MOST does not. In fact among standard Dets (all are Cons1,

conservative on their Noun argument) the Cons2 ones are exactly the intersective Dets. But in addition a few non-standard Dets, like only, just, and (possibly) mostly are Cons2 (but not Cons1) and so are, correctly, predicted to occur in DP[exist].

(4) There are only / mostly freshmen in John's biology class

In the handout for the talk I list many DPs correctly predicted to occur (or not) as DP[exist]. Open issues remain concerning: John, boolean compounds, non-extensional Dets (too many, not enough,...), possessives (some student's bike), the top of a box,...