There does not undergo predicate inversion

Moro (1997, 2006) proposes that existential sentences containing *there* (and Italian counterparts with *ci*) are derived from a structure in which *there* originates as a predicate of the "associate" DP and moves to surface subject position by a process of predicate inversion:

(1)   [$_{IP}$ [$_{IP}$ There are [$_{VP}$ t_V [$_{SC}$ [many copies of the book] t_{there}]]] [in the studio]]

This view, coupled with the assumption that *there* can acquire the agreement features from the associate via predication, could allow a non–ad hoc explanation for long distance agreement in this construction (which has otherwise invoked the machinery of Agree (Chomsky 2000)). The structure and movement in (1) are claimed to be required independently, to account for inverse copular sentences:

(2)   [$_{IP}$ [The cause of the riot] is [$_{VP}$ t_V [$_{SC}$ [a picture of the wall] t_{pred}]]]

Moro's central argument is that (1) patterns sufficiently similarly with (2) to pursue a unification. I disagree.

Moro focuses on two environments where existentials and inverse copulars are purported to parallel each other. The first involves *which-NP* phrases. Inverse copular sentences disallow their extraction:

(3)   *Which picture of the wall do you think the cause of the riot was *t* ?

Moro claims the same is true for existentials:

(4)   *Which girls do you think that there are *t* in the room?

I contend that (4) does not generalize the way (3) does. Specifically, the examples in (5) are grammatical:

(5)   a.   Which magazines did you say there were *t* in the waiting room?
        b.   Which eco-friendly options do you think there will be *t* on the new Lexus?

An obvious difference between (4) and (5) lies in the interpretation of the WH-phrase: (5) naturally invokes a reading where the answer set contains kinds rather than particular tokens. This is unavailable in (4). Crucially, however, extraction from inverse copulars cannot be saved by this "trick": (6a,b) should allow the same sorts of answers as (5a,b), but they are ungrammatical.

(6)   a.   *Which magazines did you say the cause of the riot was *t* ?
        b.   *Which options do you think the cause of the recall was *t* ?

Moro's second argument is based on the observation that existentials (8), like inverse copulars (7), are disallowed in small clauses:

(7)   *Mary considers [the cause of the riot a picture of Stalin].

(8)   *The District Attorney considers [there insufficient evidence to prosecute].

In fact, when we consider passive examples, it seems that the parallel breaks down again: the contrast between (9) and (10) for some (but not all) speakers demonstrates another context where existentials are fine but inverted copular constructions are not. (Note that Heycock (1995) uses (9) to suggest that the problem with (7), considered by Moro, is plausibly not the lack of a landing site for the inverted predicate.)

(9)   *The cause of the riot is considered a picture of Stalin.

(10)   There is considered insufficient evidence to prosecute.

Thus, the two environments that were meant to provide independent evidence for (1) being analogous to (2) in fact militate against that conclusion.

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