A generalized TP and repair-driven verb movement in English Locative Inversion

1. Introduction. Locative inversion (LI) in English is one among several inversion constructions that seem exotic within the grammar of English in that apparently a non-subject XP precedes a finite full verb while the subject appears postverbally, cf. (1). Much of the literature has attempted to accommodate LI by subsuming it under predicate inversion (PI) (Hoekstra & Mulder 1990, den Dikken 2006, Broekhuis 2008). This involves the derivation in (2) where theme and locative are equidistant from Spec, TP so that the locative may move to Spec, TP to satisfy the EPP. This accounts for a number of subject properties of the locative: raising, that-trace effects and absence of do-support, cf. (3)–(5). Further movement to a topic position captures topic properties such as the creation of a topic island and the impossibility to occur in non-finite clauses, cf. (6)–(7). A PI analysis also accounts for the often-cited restriction of LI to unaccusative verbs, cf. (8). Only with unaccusatives are theme and locative base-generated within the same maximal projection and thus equidistant from Spec, TP.

3. Arguments against the PI account. First, LI is possible with unergative verbs (9). Secondly, „locative“ inversion is found with (non-locative) adjuncts of all kinds (10). These facts are incompatible with PI: Un ergative subjects are structurally closer to Spec, TP than locatives so that the latter cannot move to Spec, TP. Second, adjuncts normally cannot target Spec, TP. Re-interpreting the adjuncts as predicates that turn the unergatives into unaccusatives (Hoekstra & Mulder 1990), fails since these adjuncts express properties of events, not of individuals. Moreover, Levin & Rappaport-Hovav (1995) document selectional restrictions on the subjects, which argues against a small clause analysis.

4. Other previous approaches. Postal (2004) argues that LI involves locative topicalization and a silent version of there (11). Bresnan (1994), however, has pointed out many asymmetries between presentational there and LI that argue against a unification. Culicover & Levine (2001) analyze (some cases of) LI as locative topicalization plus subject extraposition (12). That approach fails because subject extraposition from Spec, TP is normally impossible in English (Rizzi 1990), cf. (13), and because postverbal unergative subjects are not always heavy (as required for extraposition), cf. e.g. (9b).

5. A new proposal. I would like to propose that LI in English is best understood as displaying vestiges of topic prominence. Spec, TP is not to be analyzed as a subject position, but rather as a flexible position that can host elements of various types: subjects, expletives, and, crucially: topical arguments and adjuncts. The EPP simply requires that Spec, TP be filled, but there is no reference to case, grammatical relation, category or A- vs. A'-status. Such a reinterpretation of the subject position has e.g. been suggested for languages like Yiddish (Diesing 1990), Spanish (Gutiérrez-Bravo 2007, Zubizarreta 1998) or Finnish (Holmberg & Nikanne 2002). However, Spec, TP may be filled by non-subjects only under specific information structural conditions in English, namely when the subject is in (presentational) focus. This is the case in LI, (presentational) there-constructions and some other focus inversion constructions, cf. Culicover & Winkler (2008). To capture the dependency of flexible Spec, TP on focus I will propose an optimality-theoretic analysis where the constraint SUBJECTCASE (Grimshaw 1997), which forces overt checking of nominative case, is outranked by ALIGNFOCUS, which requires focal elements to be rightmost. If focus is at stake, the subject will be required to remain low and some other element may satisfy the EPP. TOPICFIRST (Gutiérrez-Bravo 2007), a relational constraint requiring topics to be sentence-initial, triggers fronting of topical elements which in the absence of a fronted subject may satisfy the EPP. If focus is not at stake, SUBJECTCASE forces overt movement of the subject to Spec, TP. These assumptions yield the right result for LI with unaccusatives. With unergatives, this is not sufficient since the vP-internal subject would precede the finite verb and therefore would not be in focus. Here, repair-driven verb movement (Heck & Müller 2006) comes in. Although movement of the lexical verb is normally banned in English (by NOLEXMVT), it may exceptionally take place so that the subject can be in focus, to satisfy ALIGNFOCUS. LI-derivations with (vP-adjoined) adjuncts are sketched in (14), the composite ranking is given in (15).

The generalized TP accommodates LI with unergatives and preverbal adjuncts, the topic properties follow from topicalization. As for the subject properties: raising can be reanalyzed as long-distance topicalization (16), the that-trace effects will be reanalyzed as topic-trace effects (Bayer 2005), and the absence of do-support will be linked to Op-Spec, (Grimshaw 1997), which forces operators to occupy a specifier, but not necessarily Spec, CP. Rather, wh-operators take the first available Spec they encounter. Since ALIGNFOCUS forces the subject to stay low in LI, the locative-wh may move to Spec, TP and stay there. Finally, differences between English, which disallows inversion with DPs, and more flexible languages like German will be shown to be related to the English case system.
(1) Down the hill rolled the baby-carriage.

(2) \[\text{[TOP Loci} [\text{VP } V [\text{[t} \text{theme } t])]\]

(3) [Over my windowsill] seems to have crawled an entire army of ants.

(4) [In which villages] do you believe (*that) can be found examples of this cuisine?

(5) a. On which wall hung a portrait of the artist? b) On which wall did hang a portrait of the artist?

(6) a.*When did he say that into the room walked Jack? b) *What did to Mary John say?

(7) a. Among the guests was sitting my friend Rose. (Bresnan 1994) unaccusative

b.* Among the guests was knitting my friend Rose. unergative

b.* Among the guests of honor seated my mother my friend Rose. transitive

(8) a. Above them pranced the horses on the Parthenon frieze. (Levin & Rappaport-Hovav 1995)
b. On the folds of his spotless clothing, above his left breast, glittered an enormous jewel.

(9) a. Yesterday came a new idea: compensation for terrorism suspects who turn out to have been locked up without good cause. The Guardian, Thursday, June 12, 2008, Editorial.
b. With talent comes responsibility. (clown in Woody Allen’s Shadows and Fog)
c. For that perverted cause were slaughtered thousands of innocents (Postal 2004: 17)
d. With this pen was written the signature that made the great change in our banking system.

(10) a. Among the guests was sitting my friend Rose. (Bresnan 1994) unaccusative

b.* Among the guests was knitting my friend Rose. unergative

b.* Among the guests of honor seated my mother my friend Rose. transitive

(11) a. [Down the hill] pro rolled a baby-carriage __.
b. [Down the hill] there rolled a baby-carriage __.

(12) \[\text{[TOP } [\text{VP } V [\text{pranced } t]] [\text{the horses on the Parthenon frieze}]]\]

(13) * __ will give a book to John [the author whom I decided to recommend for the literary prize],

(14) a. unaccusatives: \[[\text{V } \text{[SU ] Loci } V [\text{[tLoc } \text{Loc } [\text{[tLoc } \text{[tLoc } \text{Loc } V S verb mvt}]]]\]

b. unergatives: \[[\text{[SU } V ] Loci } V [\text{[tLoc } V [\text{[tSU } tv ] tLoc}]\]

(15) EPP >> ALIGNFOCUS >> SUBJECT CASE >> NOLEXMVT

(16) locative-“raising” = topicaliz.: \[[\text{TP } \text{Loc seems } [\text{[tLoc aux } [\text{[V } V [\text{[SU } tLoc]}}]]\] (unaccusatives)

References