THE CASE OF APPALACHIAN EXPLETIVE *THEY*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines Appalachian English existentials, which employ *they* as the so-called "expletive" (e.g., *They is a big creek yet*). Given the morphological identity of expletive *they* with the third-person plural pronoun (e.g., *They are happy*), the question arises as to why the verb appears in the singular form in the existential despite the expletive's apparent plurality; this question arises in light of Cardinaletti (1997), who observes that cross-linguistically, Nominative Case–marked expletives trigger agreement. To explain the Appalachian contradiction, this work pursues the proposal that Appalachian expletive *they* is "weak," lacking a value for its number feature. This allows us to maintain the idea that the Appalachian expletive does trigger agreement, despite appearances to the contrary. The article also explores (rarer) cases of Appalachian existentials with an apparently plural verb (e.g., *They are another one down the street*), and discusses three possible analyses of such grammars, where (1) the expletive might have a [+plural] number feature, (2) the verb might actually be singular (despite appearances to the contrary), or (3) in the case of a plural postverbal subject (*They have been some fellows*...), the "associate" might raise at LF to agree with the verb.

IN THIS PAPER I examine Appalachian English existentials that employ *they* as the so-called "expletive," a construction discussed by Hackenberg (1972), Wolfram and Christian (1976), and Montgomery and Hall (2004), among others. An example of this construction can be seen in (1):[1]

1. THEY is something bad wrong with her. [Montgomery and Hall 2004, lxii]

I show that this particular use of *they* presents an interesting case for the theory of agreement, expletives, and Case put forth in Cardinaletti (1997). (The word *Case* is capitalized when used in the technical sense of 'abstract Case', as opposed to 'morphological case', written with a lowercase *c*.)[2] Specifically, the sentence in (1) exhibits an agreement pattern whereby the apparently plural-marked expletive does not seem to trigger plural agreement with the verb (*is*). This is unexpected, given Cardinaletti's (1997) observation that languages with Nominative Case–marked expletives trigger agreement.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 1, I review Cardinaletti's (1997) theory of expletives and Case, discussing the motivation for her

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NOMINATIVE AGREEMENT HYPOTHESIS (NAH). In section 2.1, I discuss Appalachian examples, such as that in (1), and discuss how they can be taken to be apparent counterexamples to Cardinaletti's hypothesis. In section 2.2, I review Cardinaletti and Starke's (1999) theory of weak pro-forms (and Tortora's 1997 modification to their analysis of feature impoverishment); the purpose of this review is to set the stage for an analysis of Appalachian expletive *they* (given in section 2.3.1) that allows us to maintain Cardinaletti's (1997) theory of expletive agreement. In section 2.3.2, I review additional Appalachian data, which are compared with German expletive constructions, a comparison that highlights further cross-linguistic variation in agreement in expletive constructions not considered in Cardinaletti (1997). In section 2.4, I discuss the relevance of cases of *they*-sentences with apparently plural verbs (e.g., *They are another one down the street*) to the theory put forth in this paper. In the appendix, I support the view that the NAH should be extended to existentials.

1. EXPLETIVES, AGREEMENT, AND NOMINATIVE CASE

Before I show how Appalachian examples such as that in (1) present a challenge for Cardinaletti's (1997) theory of agreement, expletives, and Case, it is necessary to review Cardinaletti's data and conclusions.

As Cardinaletti notes, there appear to be two different agreement patterns in expletive constructions.[3] One is the French pattern, exhibited in (2a), where the "associate," or "inverted subject" (*trois hommes*), does not seem to trigger verb agreement; as can be seen in (2a), the associate is plural, but the verb (*arrive*) is singular:

2. a. Il arrive trois hommes.
   il arrive.3sg three men
   'There arrives three men.'
   b. *Il arrivent trois hommes.
   il arrive.3pl three men

The other is the German pattern, exhibited in (3a), where the associate (*viele Leute*) does seem to trigger verb agreement; as can be seen in (3a), the associate is plural, and so is the verb (*sind*):

3. a. Es sind wohl viele Leute angekommen.
   es are probably many people arrived
   'There probably arrived many people.'
   b. *Es ist wohl viele Leute angekommen.
   es is probably many people arrived

Cardinaletti interprets the difference between the French (2) and German (3) patterns as follows: in examples such as (2) (also exhibited in some Northern Italian dialects; see Tortora 1999), where there is no agreement with the associate, the singular number observed on the verb is in fact triggered by the (singular) expletive (in this case, *il*), rather than by the (plural) associate. In contrast, in examples such as (3) (also exhibited by Norwegian, Swedish, standard English, Italian, and Galician), the singular expletive (in this case *es*) does not trigger agreement with the verb; rather, it is the associate (which moves covertly) that triggers plural agreement.

Why is French *il* capable of triggering agreement with the verb, while German *es* is not? To answer this question, Cardinaletti observes that there are two different types of expletive: the first type (exemplified by French *il*) can occur only as a subject. That is, French third-person *il* (also translatable as 'he') can never occur in object (or any oblique) position (the masculine singular object pronouns in French are *lui/le*); this can be seen in (4):

4. a. Il a vu Marie.
   he has seen Marie
   b. *Marie a vu il.

The second type (exemplified by German *es*), on the other hand, is a morpheme that can occur either as a subject or as an (oblique) object (i.e., such morphemes are homophonous with both nominative and accusative third-person pronouns). Since French-type expletives are permitted only as structural subjects, Cardinaletti concludes that they must be marked with Nominative Case; French *il* is thus not unlike English *he* (as opposed to *him*), which must also be taken as nominative. German-type expletives, on the other hand, are not marked with any Case, which is what allows such morphemes to occur freely in different structural positions (which are associated with different Cases).

Cardinaletti demonstrates that across languages, French-type expletives always yield the agreement pattern seen in (2), while German-type expletives always yield the agreement pattern seen in (3), and concludes that expletives specified for Nominative Case trigger agreement, while Case-vague expletives do not.

> NOMINATIVE AGREEMENT HYPOTHESIS (NAH): The verb agrees with the expletive if and only if the expletive morpheme is not ambiguous with an object morpheme; i.e., only those expletives that are unambiguously marked as nominative trigger agreement with the verb. [1997, 526][4]

As we will see below (section 2), Appalachian expletive *they* (exhibited in 1 above) provides an interesting potential counterexample to the NAH;

ultimately, though, I will suggest that the NAH can be maintained, provided we account for some of the factors that Cardinaletti could not take into account given the types of examples she considered.

2. APPALACHIAN EXPLETIVE *THEY*, AGREEMENT, AND NOMINATIVE CASE

2.1. A POTENTIAL COUNTEREXAMPLE TO THE NAH. Let us begin this section by reexamining example (1), repeated here in (5a), as well as a couple of other similar examples of Appalachian existentials with *they*:[5]

5. a. THEY is something bad wrong with her. [Montgomery and Hall 2004, lxii]
   b. [Did the creek ever go dry?] Uhh-uhh. THEY is a big creek yet. [Dante Oral History Project (DOHP), GAC]
   c. I believe THEY is a cemetery there too, ain't there? [Montgomary and Hall 2004, lxii]

Before I discuss the verb agreement facts in Appalachian *they*-constructions, it is important to make one specific assumption clear: along with what is suggested in Wolfram and Christian (1976, 125), I do not take the morpheme *they* in existentials as a phonologically reduced form of *there*. Rather, I take it to be synchronically analyzed by speakers as a morpheme homophonous with referential third-person plural *they* (e.g., *They* [the girls] *are happy*) and thus to be synchronically analyzed by the linguist as such. This is not to deny a possible diachronic phonological process which may have led from *there* to *they*. Such a process may have obtained as follows: expletive *there*, a "weak" pronoun (in the sense of Cardinaletti and Starke 1999; see below), might have been subject to postvocalic *r*-dropping (something that "strong" locative *there* was not subject to), yielding [ðeə], with subsequent dropping of schwa, yielding [ðe].[6] As Wolfram and Christian (1976) seem to suggest, though, there is good reason to believe that this historical phonological process is no longer available to speakers, who may very well analyze this expletive as equivalent to the nominative pronoun *they*.[7]

Having established the well-supported assumption that expletive *they* is homophonous with referential third-person plural nominative *they*, I can now return to the examples in (5) and my claim that such examples present an interesting challenge to the NAH, discussed in section 1. Recall that the NAH states that "expletives that are unambiguously marked as nominative trigger agreement with the verb."[8] Now, by assumption, Appalachian expletive *they* is unambiguously marked as nominative (note that it can never be used in

these varieties as an object or as an oblique argument).[9] As such, by virtue of the NAH, it should trigger agreement with the verb, much as referential (nonexpletive) *they* does. The examples in (6), which were produced by the same speaker who produced (5b), show that nonexpletive *they* obligatorily triggers plural agreement:[10]

6. a. [What made you a Democrat?] Well, because THEY're for the poor class of people, that's the reason I'm a Democrat! THEY believe in helpin' the poor man and THE OTHERS is big fat cats. [DOHP, GAC]
   b. You know when it come a snow they didn't work roads back to like THEY do now [DOHP, GAC]

However, as can be seen in the examples in (5), expletive *they* (in contrast with referential *they* in 6) does not trigger plural agreement; the copula is in its third-person singular form (*is*).[11]

This apparent use of the singular is unexpected given the NAH (as expletive *they* is apparently nominative, and apparently plural). In fact, given the NAH, we should never expect to find examples such as those in (5); only the following in (7) should be possible (cf. 5a–5c).[12]

7. a. *THEY are something bad wrong with her.
   b. *THEY are a big creek yet.
   c. *I believe THEY are a cemetary there too, ain't there?

In the remainder of this paper, I would like to provide a perspective that allows us to analyze Appalachian expletive *they* as nominative, while at the same time allowing us to preserve the NAH. That is, the analysis I provide will ultimately show that contrary to appearances, examples such as those in (5) are not counterexamples to the NAH. In particular, I will argue that expletive *they*'s homophony with the referential (third-person plural) pronoun *they* does not force us to conclude that there is only one pronoun *they* in the language.

2.2. WEAK EXPLETIVES. Along the lines of Tortora (1997) and Cresti and Tortora (1999), who analyze the morpheme *there* in English existentials (e.g, *THERE are two men in the room*) as a "weak" pronoun (in the sense of Cardinaletti and Starke 1999), I would like to suggest that the apparently anomalous behavior of Appalachian expletive *they* discussed above can be shown to derive from the following hypothesis: Appalachian *they* is ambiguous between a WEAK pronoun (expletive *they*) and a STRONG pronoun (referential *they*). That is, it is possible that there are two different homophonous morphemes *they* in Appalachian English, just as there are two different homophonous morphemes *there* in other varieties of English. In order to

motivate this hypothesis and illustrate its usefulness, I first briefly review the theory of "weak" and "strong" pronouns and then discuss how this theory has been applied to English existentials. The following discussion derives from Tortora (1997) and Cresti and Tortora (1999).[13]

Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) claim that pronouns divide into three distinct grammatical classes: strong, weak, and clitics. Strong and weak pronouns differ syntactically and semantically (even though they are both taken to be maximal projections [XPs]). First, while weak pronouns can refer to nonhuman entities, strong pronouns cannot. This is illustrated with the two morphologically distinct third-person plural feminine nominative pronouns in Italian, *loro* 'they' and *esse* 'they':

8. a. Esse sono troppo alte. (= the girls; the roses)
they-fem are very tall
'They are very tall.'
b. Loro sono troppo alte. (= the girls; *the roses)
they-fem are very tall
'They are very tall.'

The sentences in (8) show that *esse* can refer to [–human] entities, while *loro* is restricted to [+human] entities. Second, as Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) explain, it seems that weak pronouns must move overtly to a Case-related position; consider (9):

9. Hanno mangiato loro/*esse.
have eaten they-fem (cf.: Esse hanno mangiato.)
'They have eaten.'

The sentence in (9) shows that *esse*, unlike *loro*, cannot remain in its base position (Spec, VP). There are several other syntactic differences exhibited by these two pronouns. Example (10a) shows that *loro* can be coordinated with another NP, whereas *esse* cannot; furthermore, *loro* can be modified, whereas *esse* cannot (10b); another syntactic difference between these two pronouns is that *loro* can occur in peripheral positions, such as in a cleft, right dislocation, and in isolation, while *esse* is allowed none of these options (10c–10e; examples all taken from Cardinaletti and Starke 1999).

10. a. Loro/*Esse e quelle accanto sono troppo alte.
they-fem and those besides are too tall
b. Anche loro/*esse sono troppo alte.
also they-fem are too tall
c. Sono loro/*esse che sono belle.
are they-fem that are beautiful

d. Arriveranno presto, loro/*esse.
will.arrive.3pl soon, they-fem
e. Quali sono belle? Loro./*Esse
which are beautiful? They-fem.

In contrast to Italian, which has two different morphological forms for the strong and weak pronouns (*loro* and *esse*), French has the single morphological form *elles* 'they (fem)'. Like Italian *esse*, French *elles* can refer to both human and nonhuman entities; this suggests that *elles* is a weak pronoun, like *esse*. Yet unexpectedly, *elles* can be coordinated (unlike *esse*), thus exhibiting the syntactic behavior seen with the strong pronoun *loro*. However, Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) note the revealing fact that when *elles* is coordinated with another NP, it can refer only to a [+human] entity:

11. a. Elles sont trop grandes. (= the girls; the roses)
they-fem are too big
b. Elles et celles d'à côté sont trop grandes. (= the girls;
they-fem and those besides are too big. *the roses)

Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) propose that the behavior of *elles* can be understood in the context of Italian *esse* and *loro* if French, just like Italian, is analyzed as having two third-person plural feminine nominative pronouns, one weak and one strong. The two pronouns in French, however, are homophonous; let us refer to them as weak *elles* and strong ELLES.

In the context of the above discussion, Tortora (1997) and Cresti and Tortora (1999) hypothesize that English possesses a weak *there* (e.g., *There are four women in the room*) and a strong THERE (e.g., *I saw four women there*). In support of this hypothesis, note that the syntactic restrictions exhibited by the weak pronoun *esse* in Italian are exactly the same restrictions exhibited by weak *there* in English: weak *there* (i.e., existential *there*) cannot be coordinated, modified, clefted, or used in isolation; this can be seen in examples (12b)–(12e) (cf. Allan 1971, who uses some of these tests also to show that this morpheme is different from strong "deictic" *there*).[14]

12. a. There are four women (in the room).
b. *Here/It and there are four women (in the room).
c. *Right/Even there are four women (in the room).
d. *It is there that are four women (in the room).
e. Where are there four women (in the room)? *There.

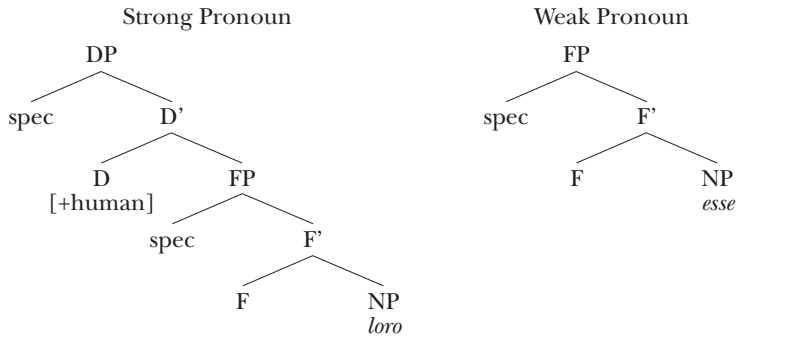
This contrasts with the behavior of strong THERE; as can be seen in (13), strong THERE can be coordinated (13a), modified (13b), clefted (13c), and used in isolation (13d):

13. a. Here and THERE are four women.
    b. Right/Even THERE are four women.
    c. It is THERE/that four women arrived.
    d. Where did four women arrive? THERE.

As we can see, the differences in syntactic behavior exhibited by strong pronouns versus weak pronouns correlate with a semantic difference. This was illustrated with Italian's two morphologically distinct third-person plural feminine nominative pronouns, weak *esse* and strong *loro*, as well as with weak *elles* and strong ELLES in French. We saw that strong *loro*/ELLES are restricted to [+human] referents, while weak *esse/elles* can refer to both [+human] and [−human] referents. In order to account for this pattern, Cardinaletti and Starke (1999) propose that the strong and weak pronouns differ in their feature composition. Strong pronouns, they argue, have a feature specification which is lacking in weak pronouns. Specifically, a pronoun such as strong *elles* is specified for the feature [+human], while a pronoun such as weak *elles* does not have this feature. They claim that the weak pronoun's lack of [+human] specification is due to a missing functional head in its structure. This contrasts with the structure projected by a strong pronoun, which projects the functional head in which the feature resides. This is illustrated in figure 1. (I use a DP, Determiner Phrase, for the purposes of exposition, although Cardinaletti and Starke use a CP; FP refers to a generic Functional Projection.) Under Cardinaletti and Starke's analysis, then, the entire [±human] feature is missing in the weak pronoun.

This contrasts with the analysis provided in Tortora (1997), which holds that the weak pronoun possesses the [human] feature, which however is not specified for a value. This "impoverishment" in the specification of the

FIGURE 1
Cardinaletti and Starke's (1999) Strong versus Weak Pronoun
(adapted for the present purposes)



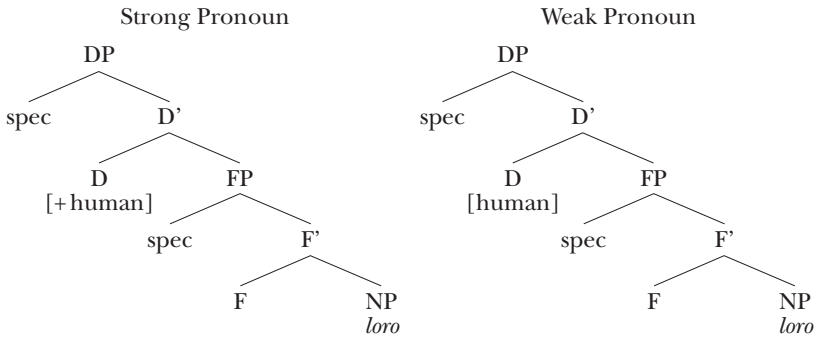
feature [human] is what enables the weak pronoun to refer to [±human] referents: with no value for the feature specified, the pronoun is "free to co-refer with any … antecedent" (Cardinaletti and Starke 1999, 189). The strong pronoun, on the other hand, is constrained by its [+human] feature specification to corefer with an antecedent that is [+human]. This revised view is illustrated in figure 2. The reasons for my modification (feature present with no value) to Cardinaletti and Starke's analysis are somewhat involved, but I try to summarize the essence of the argument here (so that the modification does not appear to be totally stipulative and unmotivated): Tortora (1997) develops an analysis which takes existential (weak) *there* to have locative semantic content (see n. 13). The fact that existential *there* does not have the same "deictic" or "referential" properties as strong THERE (*I saw John there*), however, needs an explanation. To explain the difference in interpretation between weak *there* and strong THERE, Tortora (1997) proposes that the strong pro-form THERE is associated with the features in (14) (in contrast with *here*, seen in 15):

14. Strong *there*: [+locative], [−speaker]
    I saw John there.
15. Strong *here*: [+locative], [+speaker]
    I saw John here.

Weak *there* is taken to differ from strong THERE in lacking a specification for the feature [speaker], which yields the desired (nondeictic) interpretation for existential *there*:

16. Weak *there*: [+locative], [speaker]
    There are three men in the room.

FIGURE 2
A Reinterpretation of the Strong versus Weak Proposal



This approach to the semantic difference between strong THERE and weak *there* (whereby the [speaker] feature is present for the latter, but lacks a value) is used to explain a complex set of syntactic and semantic phenomena across languages (involving variable interpretation of the location with respect to the speaker, when the weak locative is present). Putting a review of these phenomena aside (which is outside the scope of this paper), this analysis of weak *there* and strong THERE is illustrated in figure 3 (cf. fig. 2).

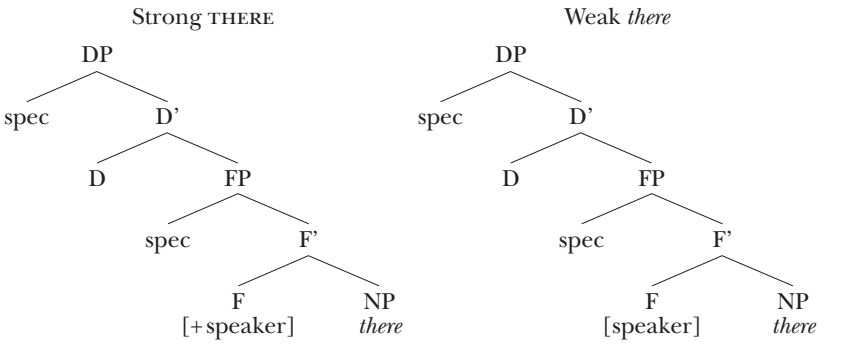
So the correlation between the syntactic and semantic differences between weak and strong pronouns finds its locus in the feature makeup of the pronouns in question (weak pronouns having a more impoverished feature structure than strong pronouns).

2.3. APPALACHIAN EXPLETIVE *THEY* AS A WEAK PRONOUN.

2.3.1. *An Analysis of Expletive* they. The above review of the theory of weak and strong pronouns, and how it is applied to the case of "expletive" *there* and "deictic" *there* in English, sets the stage for discussion of Appalachian *they*. The apparently anomalous behavior of Appalachian expletive *they* discussed in section 2.1 above can be shown to derive from the following hypothesis: Appalachian *they* is ambiguous between a WEAK pronoun (expletive *they*) and a STRONG pronoun (referential *they*). That is, it is possible that there are two different homophonous morphemes *they* in Appalachian English, just as there are two different homophonous morphemes *there* in other varieties of English (discussed in section 2.2).

Of course, as it stands, I have no way of showing independently that expletive *they* in Appalachian is weak (e.g., via any of the tests discussed in section 2.2 above); I know of no fieldwork that applies the weak/strong

FIGURE 3
Strong versus Weak *there*



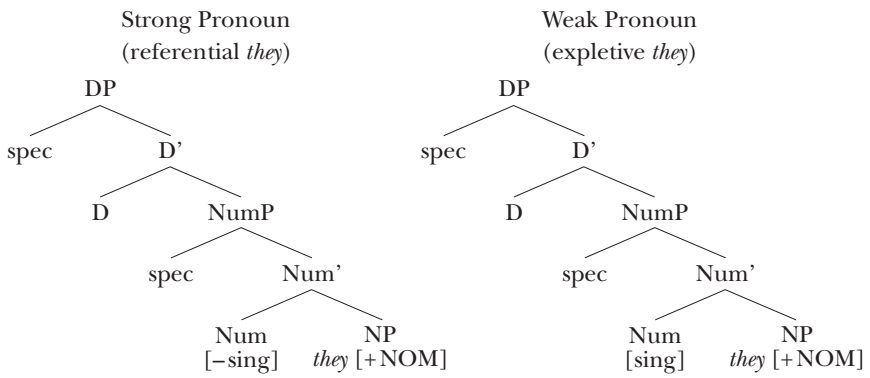
tests to relevant data. Thus, for the purposes of this paper (and pending the pursuit, in future fieldwork, of tests of the type illustrated in section 2.2), I will simply hypothesize, without having any independent empirical evidence, that Appalachian expletive *they* is weak; similarly, I will hypothesize that Appalachian referential *they* is strong.

Under this hypothesis, we can now wonder what aspects of weak pronouns discussed in section 2.2 might manifest themselves in weak Appalachian *they*, in contrast with strong (referential) *they*. As we saw, weak pronouns are associated with impoverished feature structure. Given this theory, I would like to pursue the idea that weak (expletive) *they* also has an impoverished functional structure, like the weak pronouns we have already seen.

Extending the proposal on weak pronouns/weak *there* to Appalachian weak *they*, we can take this latter morpheme to have an "impoverished" Number Phrase (NumP). To be more precise, I take strong *they* (*They are happy*) to project a functional structure that contains a Num head with a plural feature (which I will suggest, for argument's sake, is manifested as [−sing], as opposed to [+sing], which would characterize a singular pronoun such as *he*). In contrast, I propose that the weak *they* of Appalachian existentials also has a Num, but one which is unspecified for a value (in other words, it is [sing]). This analysis of strong *they* and Appalachian weak *they* is illustrated in figure 4 (cf. fig. 3).[15]

Under this hypothesis, expletive (weak) *they* is not specified for plural (or singular), and thus cannot trigger plural agreement with the verb in existentials. This would explain the lack of agreement with the nominative expletive in (6) (which was otherwise unexpected, under the NAH). In contrast, the NumP projected by referential (strong) *they* in Appalachian does

FIGURE 4
The Strong versus Weak *they* Hypothesis



have a value ([–sing]); this explains the fact that this pronoun does trigger plural agreement (as we saw in section 2.1 and n. 10). Note that crucially, both forms of *they* can still be associated with the feature [+nominative] ([+NOM] in fig. 4), which is what distinguishes these pronouns from accusative pronouns (such as *him* or *them*) or Case-vague pronouns (such as *it*); it is this Case feature that restricts both forms of *they* to subject position within the clause (i.e., the position associated with Nominative Case).

To summarize: I have proposed that Appalachian English expletive *they* is weak, in contrast with strong referential *they*. As a weak pronoun, expletive *they* is hypothesized to have an impoverished functional structure, much like the weak pro-forms English *there* (*There are three girls*), French *elles*, and Italian *esse*. Specifically, the number feature of weak *they* does not have a value, which accounts for the "default" verb agreement this expletive triggers. As such, contrary to appearances, Cardinaletti's NAH is not violated; nominative expletives can agree, so long as they are also associated with the necessary phi-features (in this case, number). In the absence of a valued number feature, the nominative expletive can only trigger default agreement, which is identical to singular. (This idea is reminiscent of Schütze's 1999 suggestion that the presence of *-'s* in English existentials—regardless of the number of the associate—may indicate the absence of any agreement relations in the presence of *there*; on a more specific discussion of the nature of "default" agreement, see section 2.3.2, immediately below.)

Before I move on to some additional Appalachian data, I would like to point out that this analysis recalls note 4, where I observed that Cardinaletti's NAH, as it stands, presupposes that Nominative Case–marked expletives necessarily have phi-features (i.e., number); that is, if Nominative Case makes expletives agree, then such expletives, in order to trigger agreement, must have phi-features. As noted in Tortora (1999), this entailment is strange, because there is nothing obvious that logically precludes the existence of a morpheme which is specified for Nominative Case, but not number. If my analysis of Appalachian expletive *they* is on the right track, then we in fact do find an example of an expletive specified for Nominative Case, but not for number. In a sense, though, Cardinaletti's NAH remains untouched, as we are still dealing with the idea that an expletive's endowment with Nominative Case makes the expletive agree (even if it is unspecified for number), thus precluding the "associate" (postverbal subject) from triggering agreement.

The question of whether a Nominative Case–marked expletive in a given language is morphologically endowed with a valued number feature would in fact have to be determined on a case by case basis. At the moment, it is not obvious to me how easy this would be to do, however. Take, for example, French *il*; as Marcel den Dikken (pers. comm., Apr. 5, 2005) has pointed out

to me, nothing seems to prevent us from proposing that *il* lacks number in the same sense I have proposed for Appalachian expletive *they*. I will leave this question open.

2.3.2. *Additional Appalachian Data.* There is one more aspect of the Appalachian *they* existential worth considering here. In order to understand the importance of the yet-unconsidered data, I return for a moment to the German example in (3). As discussed in section 1 above, German expletive *es*, despite the fact that it is singular, does not trigger singular agreement with the verb. According to Cardinaletti (1997), this is because it is Case-vague (i.e., not specified for nominative or any other Case). Note, rather, that in the grammatical (3a) the verb is plural. The plural number on the verb, according to Cardinaletti, is triggered by (LF movement of) the "associate" (*viele Leute* 'many people'). So, it seems that when the expletive is incapable of triggering verb agreement (as a result of its lack of case feature), the associate moves at LF to take care of the unchecked phi-features that the expletive cannot check off.

Now, given the idea that Appalachian expletive *they* only triggers "default" agreement, we might expect the Appalachian "associate" to behave like the German associate; that is, it should move at LF to take care of the unchecked phi-features that the expletive cannot take care of. The only Appalachian examples we have seen so far, however, are those in (6). In all three examples in (6), the associate is singular, making it appear as if it is in fact triggering agreement with the verb (much as the German associate does in 3a). However, this apparent agreement between the verb and the associate is only an illusion. To see why, let us consider a set of Appalachian *they* existentials where the associate is plural:

17. a. THEY is not so many there now. [Montgomery and Hall 2004, lxii]
    b. THEY is six trees would have made anybody a good dwelling house. [Montgomery and Hall 2004, xlix]
    c. THEY's about six or seven guitar players here. [Montgomery and Hall 2004, xlix]
    d. THEY's copperheads around here. [Wolfram and Christian 1976, 125]

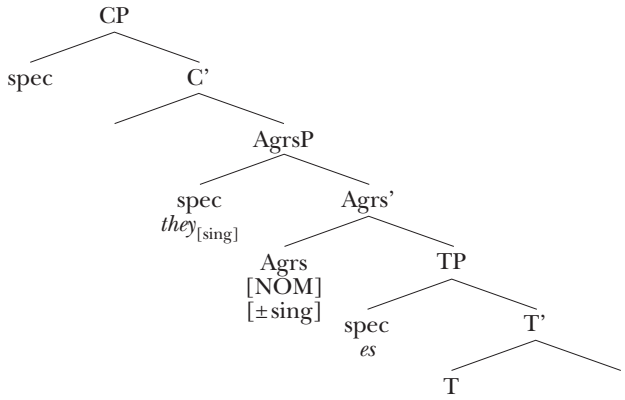
As can be seen by these examples, when the associate is plural, it does not trigger agreement with the verb, in contrast with the German example in (3).[16] In other words, the examples in (17) seem to suggest that in Appalachian *they* existentials, nothing triggers agreement with the verb (neither the expletive nor the associate). This is strange, especially in the context of the theory adopted by Cardinaletti (1997), which assumes that some DP (expletive or associate) should check off the uninterpretable phi-features on the relevant

functional head in the IP field (a la Chomsky 1995).[17] So, something more needs to be said about agreement in Appalachian *they* existentials.[18]

I would like to suggest that Appalachian *they* existentials represent true instances of so-called "default agreement." Let us recall the proposal put forth in section 2.3.1 regarding weak expletive *they*, which takes weak *they* to have a number feature which is specified neither for singular nor plural. How does this view of weak *they* help us with the fact that nothing seems to check off the clause's phi-features in Appalachian *they* sentences (in contrast with German-type expletive constructions)? In other words, how does the structure in figure 4 help us give content to the notion of "default agreement"?

Here I must explicate some assumptions. First, I assume that the clause contains (at least) two different subject positions (along the lines of Henry 1995, where the higher position is the specifier of a Subject Agreement Phrase [Spec, AgrsP] and the lower position is the specifier of a Tense Phrase [Spec, TP]).[19] Second, I assume (again, along with Henry 1995) that the Nominative Case feature is found on the Agrs head, along with the phi-features; this view of the clause is illustrated in figure 5.[20] I take the pronouns specified for Nominative Case to reside in the higher subject position, while DPs that do not have a Case specification reside in the lower subject position. Specifically, figure 5 shows that Appalachian expletive *they* (which is morphologically marked for nominative) appears in Spec, AgrsP, while German expletive *es* (which is not morphologically marked for any Case) resides in Spec, TP (note that the $they_{[sing]}$ in fig. 5 is a shorthand for the entire structure of weak expletive *they*, seen in fig. 4).

FIGURE 5
Structure of the Clause and the Syntactic Position of Appalachian Weak *they* versus German *es*



Now, recall that the question which needs to be addressed is why the associate in Appalachian *they* sentences does not raise (as it does in German). Let us take (17a), for example; there are two possibilities for the Numeration with respect to the number feature that heads AgrsP (in fig. 5): either it includes a [−sing] head (plural) or a [+sing] head (singular). To explain the notion of "default agreement" here, I would like to suggest the following: no matter what the feature specification of this Agrs head is (i.e., whether the Numeration contains a [+ or −sing] feature), the unvalued [sing] feature that weak *they* is morphologically endowed with can check this feature. I propose, furthermore, that the checking of an unvalued [sing] feature against a valued [±sing] feature (in the clausal Agrs) results in a "default," which is apparently singular.

Now, imagine that in this same Numeration, the associate is plural (as in 17); a question which arises is why the *they* in Spec, AgrsP automatically checks this [±sing] feature (yielding "default agreement"), preventing the associate from doing so (if it did, plural agreement would be triggered if the feature in the Numeration were [−sing]; in contrast, the derivation would crash if the feature in the Numeration were [+sing], due to a mismatch in features). To explain why the associate does not move, I follow Cardinaletti (1997) here in assuming that all of the features on the Agrs head have to be checked by one and the same element; given that *they* checks the [NOM] feature in figure 5, it must check the [±sing] feature, and the associate is thus prevented from then moving (at LF) to check the number feature.[21] In other words, expletive *they*, because it is specified for Nominative Case, checks the [NOM] feature in Spec, AgrsP; as a consequence, it must also be the element to check the [±sing] feature. So, Appalachian *they* sentences are like French *il* sentences (see 2a) in that the associate never moves at LF; the difference between the two languages, however, is that French involves a [+sing] *il* checking a [+sing] Agrs, resulting in singular agreement, while Appalachian English involves a [sing] *they* checking either a [+sing] or a [−sing] Agrs (it does not matter), resulting in "default agreement."[22]

The case of German *es* is entirely different. First, because *es* lacks a Nominative Case feature, it does not reside in the higher subject position (a la Henry 1995). The remainder of the explanation for *es* would be exactly along the lines given by Cardinaletti (1997): the Nominative Case feature residing in the Agrs head must be checked. Furthermore, it must be checked by one and the same element that checks the number feature (a la Cardinaletti). Because *es* cannot check the [NOM] feature, the associate must move (at LF) to do so; because it does so, the associate must also check the [±sing] feature. Movement of the associate, although costly, is necessary, because no other (less costly) derivation is possible.

2.4. THE LARGER CONTEXT OF AGREEMENT PATTERNS IN THE ENGLISH OF APPALACHIA. In the preceding discussion we concluded that expletive *they* does not contain a plural feature [–sing], but that it does contain an unvalued number feature [sing], the checking of which always results in a default singular agreement. This checking prevents the associate (singular or plural) from moving at LF. This proposal was based on a highly robust pattern seen in the English of Appalachia, namely, that the form of the verb in present-tense existentials is *is/-'s*. In the following subsection, however, we will consider another pattern attested in the literature on Appalachian English.

2.4.1. *Agreeing Associate/Agreeing Expletive* they *in Appalachian?* Despite the robustness of the data discussed until now, some data are attested which might suggest that for some Appalachian speakers, at least, agreement with the associate is possible:

18. a. Are THEY stories about snakes? [Wolfram and Christian 1976, 125]
    b. So, I've got the rock upstairs. THEY've been some fellows still wanting to buy it. [DOHP, CC; see n. 1]

The sentences in (18), which contrast with all of the Appalachian examples we have seen until now (which involve singular *is* or *-'s*), appear to indicate that the plural associate (*stories* and *some fellows*) can trigger verb agreement. However, if we consider the following data, we are led to believe that the presence of *are* in (18a) (as opposed to *is*) and *have been* in (18b) (as opposed to *has been*) has a different source; that is, the data in (19) suggest that it cannot be the plural associate that is triggering the apparent plurality of the verb:

19. a. THEY are another one down the street [Montgomery and Hall 2004, xlix]
    b. It seems like they used to be more water in the streams than THEY are [water in the streams] now. [Montgomery and Hall 2004, xlix]
    c. THEY have been a big change. [Montgomery and Hall 2004, l]

In the sentences in (19), we see that the associate (*another one*, *water*, and *a big change*) is singular, yet the verb is apparently plural nevertheless. This gives reason to believe that in (18) (and 19), it may not be the plurality of the associate that is causing the apparent plurality on the verb (*are* in 19a and 19b and *have been* in 19c).[23]

Given the evidence that it may not be the associate that is responsible for these apparently plural verb forms (but with the caveat in n. 23), we might be led to hypothesize that the apparent plurality of the verbs in (18) and (19) is the result of expletive *they* triggering plural agreement with the verb; that is, perhaps it is the case that expletive *they* in some people's grammars

has a value specified for number (i.e., [–sing]), and as such does trigger plural agreement with the verb (this would make expletive *they* like strong referential *they*, as in figure 4; on this, see n. 24).

Before we jump to this conclusion, however, we might want to consider the following data from Montgomery and Hall (2004, xlix), where the forms *are* and *were* are used with third-person singular subjects:

20. You're better than he are!
21. The moon were shining bright.

In the grammars that generate (20) and (21), there seems to be leveling, in the sense of Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2003), such that *are* (and *were*) are generalized throughout the paradigm (this would be along the lines of the leveling, found for many speakers, of the past-tense paradigm for *was*; see n. 11). In these grammars, then, (19) and (20) are examples of third-person singular agreement (where *are/were* have to be taken to be third-person singular verbs).

Once we recognize this phenomenon, it becomes possible (although see n. 24 below) that the examples in (18) and (19) could be cases of this type (where *are/have been* are not reflections of plural agreement at all, but rather instances of singular verbs). We could be certain that they were, if we knew that the speakers who produced (18) and (19) also produce constructions such as those in (20) and (21). If they do, then (18) and (19) would be taken to be instances of third-person singular verbs; as such, these examples would get no different an analysis than the examples in (5) and (17), where I have argued that expletive *they* has no value for the feature [sing], thus triggering a "default agreement," no matter what the nature of the associate or the Agrs head in the Numeration. In other words, the examples in (18) and (19) would be, like those in (5) and (17), cases of default (singular) agreement.[24]

2.4.2. *Summarizing the Patterns and the Theory of Expletive* they *Sentences.* For the sake of clarity (both regarding the data as well as the theoretical framework), here I summarize the various agreement patterns we see in the English of Appalachia and what the theory in this paper has to say about them. Essentially, we find four possibilities:

Patterns of Expletive *they* Sentences
I. *They* with *is/'s* and a singular associate
(e.g., They is something bad wrong with her. [5a])
II. *They* with *is/'s* and a plural associate
(e.g., They is not so many there now. [17a])

III. *They* with *are* and a singular associate
(e.g., They are another one down the street. [19a])
IV. *They* with *are* and a plural associate
(e.g., Are they stories about snakes? [18a])

How should we account for the simultaneous existence of all four patterns in the English of Appalachia? The answer is embedded in the paper's argument so far: patterns I and II are by hypothesis part of the same grammar (i.e., that discussed in section 2.3.2; let us call it "Grammar 1"); *they* triggers "default" singular agreement. Since *is/'s* is the most common verb form in present-tense *they* existentials (regardless of the number of the associate), we have no reason to believe they are not produced by the same grammar.

As for patterns III and IV, they are either (a) together part of another grammar (let us call this "Grammar 2") or (b) part of two separate grammars (let us call these "Grammar X" and "Grammar Y"). Recall that option (a) would involve a grammar which marks the form *are* as singular. As such, the analysis of patterns III and IV would not differ from that for I and II. That is, Grammar 2 would be just like Grammar 1, except for the fact that in Grammar 2, the form of the singular verb would be *are* (and not *is*). This possibility arises if we have independent evidence that *are* is a singular form; recall, though (n. 24) that *He are* is so rare that it may be implausible to claim that this construction is any indication that the less rare pattern III involves a singular verb. This leads us to possibility (b), which is also corroborated by the discussion in note 23 (namely, that pattern III is a relative peculiarity in the corpus, with respect to IV). That is, there is some indication (from frequency of examples in the corpus) that patterns III and IV may not "go together" (recall that III occurs less frequently than IV in the corpus referenced by the reviewer). If this evidence turns out to be further corroborated by native speaker judgments so that we have further independent evidence that patterns III and IV are produced by different Grammars X and Y, then the theory of expletive *they* sentences for these grammars would have to be different from that proposed for Grammar 1. Specifically, Grammar X (which generates pattern III) may mark *they* as plural (i.e., [−sing]), which would account for the plural number on the verb, despite the singularity of the associate. In contrast, Grammar Y (which produces pattern IV) may involve movement of the (plural) associate at LF (like in German expletive constructions), so that the plurality of the verb would be due to the plurality of the associate (and not to any plural marking on the expletive, as in Grammar X). If this were the mechanism leading to plural marking on the verb in Grammar Y, we would have to further investigate why movement of the associate at LF is possible in Grammar Y (in contrast with Grammar 1;

see section 2.3.2). Furthermore, we would expect Grammar Y to generate pattern I (given that the singular associate would also move at LF, triggering singular agreement on the verb). As such, Grammar 1 and Grammar Y would both generate tokens of pattern I, but for completely different reasons. A question which arises here is whether we have any independent evidence (e.g., frequency in the corpus, native speaker judgment) that patterns I and IV "go together."

Note in this regard that, given the theory, patterns II and IV should never "go together," no matter what we hypothesize concerning IV: if IV is produced by Grammar 2, then by hypothesis, *are* is the singular verb (so II would not be possible, given the use of *is*); if IV is produced by Grammar Y, then the plural associate moves at LF (so that II would not be possible, given the plural associate and the singular verb). Another observation worth making is the following: there is one problem with proposing a Grammar X to account for pattern III (namely, that expletive *they* is marked as plural). Specifically, if expletive *they* is marked for plural, then such a grammar would also generate tokens of pattern IV (note that the plurality of the associate would be irrelevant; the plurality of the expletive is what would trigger *are* no matter what). Again, then, we see a situation in which Grammars X and Y would both generate tokens of pattern IV, but for completely different reasons. With this observation, note too that we would return to the question of whether patterns III and IV "go together" or not. If they do not, we would have to reconsider Grammar X as an explanation for III.

Whether patterns III and IV belong to the same Grammar 2, or to two separate Grammars X and Y, will be left as an open question here. Note that despite the observations made by the reviewer regarding frequency in the corpus (discussed in nn. 23 and 24)—which suggest that (18)–(21) may not go together—it is important to support such corpus findings with native speaker judgment and other kinds of follow-up studies (given that gaps in the corpus could simply be accidental).

It is also important to recognize that on top of everything else, different speakers might produce different combinations of patterns I–IV, as single speakers may have knowledge of and may use more than one grammar (here I have in mind Kroch's [e.g., 1994] work on "competing grammars"). This of course would make the endeavor of determining "what goes with what" even more complex. Nevertheless, we would like more than just a theory-internal means of determining which data are produced by which grammars. On the bright side, though, this question underscores two important points, namely: (1) the rich and careful description of Appalachian speech that we find in works such as Wolfram and Christian (1976) and Montgomery and Hall (2004), even in a realm as seemingly limited as one type of existential

sentence, proves to be of tremendous import to syntactic theory (and our understanding grammatical universals) and (2) the need to do continued fieldwork on an already very well-documented variety remains.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Appalachian expletive *they* is rather unusual in nature in that it is homophonous with a plural pronoun; this contrasts with other well-studied pronominal expletives in various languages, which are homophonous with singular pronouns. This peculiarity is what makes the Appalachian existential *they* stand as a unique case which challenges views in the syntax literature on the proper syntactic treatment of agreement in expletive constructions. In particular, until now it has stood as a potential counterexample to Cardinaletti's (1997) otherwise well-supported theory, which holds that if an expletive is morphologically marked with Nominative Case, it triggers agreement with the verb. As I have shown, if nothing else is stated, Cardinaletti's theory predicts Appalachian expletive *they* to trigger plural agreement, since it is clearly nominative and apparently plural; this prediction, however, is not borne out.

In treating Appalachian expletive *they* as a weak pronoun, however, I hope to have reduced its apparently anomalous behavior to properties we find with weak pronouns in general. That is, like other weak pronouns, it arguably has an impoverished feature structure. Specifically, I have argued that its number feature is not specified for singular or plural. This feature impoverishment is what leads to its triggering of a default singular agreement.

The fact that the associate in Appalachian *they*-sentences unexpectedly does not trigger agreement (in contrast with languages like German) is attributable to the hypothesis that although Appalachian weak *they* may not have a value for number, it is morphologically endowed with Nominative Case; this "denies" the associate any right to agreement (so to speak).

Furthermore, I have considered cases of Appalachian *they*-sentences where the verb is apparently plural and have tentatively proposed (pending future fieldwork) that such cases may nevertheless also involve default singular agreement, contrary to appearances. Another possible analysis of the apparent counter-examples would take *they* in some grammars to not trigger agreement at all (not even default), or on the contrary, to be richly marked for plural number.

Finally, I cannot conclude without pointing out that syntacticians, who are driven to focus on the "universal grammar" implications of syntactic variation (by virtue of the nature of the field), are fortunate to find before

them incredibly rich and highly theoretically significant data on Appalachian English provided by linguists such as Wolfram and Christian (1976) and Montgomery and Hall (2004) (to name but a few).

APPENDIX

Ergative-Expletive versus Existential-Expletive Constructions

As stated in note 3, Cardinaletti (1997) considers only expletive constructions with ergative verbs (e.g., *There arrive three girls*); furthermore, she explicitly denies that her conclusions regarding expletives and Case (and therefore, the NAH) can be extended to existential-expletive constructions (e.g., *There are three girls*). This of course calls into question the overarching assumption I have made in this paper, namely, that the Appalachian existential *they* (e.g., *They is something bad wrong with her*) is relevant to Cardinaletti's NAH.

Clearly, in contrast with Cardinaletti (1997), I do think that Appalachian existential *they* does bear on the NAH. My job here, then, is to discuss Cardinaletti's reasons for denying that the NAH is extendable to existential constructions and, furthermore, to show how these reasons evaporate upon closer inspection of the data.

Before I discuss the two arguments Cardinaletti (1997) gives against extending the NAH to existential constructions, I will briefly review her analysis of English expletive *there*. Specifically, she illustrates with the following example that expletive *there* does not trigger agreement with the verb:

a. i. *THERE arrives three girls.
   ii. THERE arrive three girls.

As can be seen by the grammatical (a.i), it is the plural associate (*three girls*) that triggers verb agreement. The observation that *there* does not seem to trigger agreement with the verb (a.i) serves as support for the NAH. In particular, she notes that *there* is not specified for Nominative Case (note that it can appear in nonsubject positions: *I went there yesterday*); as such, it should not trigger verb agreement (only expletives specified for Nominative Case trigger agreement).

She notes, however, that the following colloquial English sentence might be thought of as a potential counterexample to the NAH:

b. THERE's three girls in the room.

That is, she raises the question of whether the *-'s* in (b), which seems to indicate singular agreement, indicates that *there* can (at least in colloquial

English) trigger agreement with the verb, contrary to what is predicted by the NAH (i.e., *there* should not trigger agreement, as it is not specified for nominative). Given this example, she concludes that the NAH, which she develops on the basis of data from ergative-expletive constructions, cannot be extended to existential-expletive constructions.

I would like to question, however, the assumption that the-*'s* in (b) plainly indicates that singular agreement is triggered. If (b) were indicative of *there*'s ability to trigger singular agreement in colloquial English, we would expect the uncontracted form of the singular verb to be licit. As we saw in note 17, this is contrary to fact (similar such ungrammatical examples have been mentioned by, e.g., Chomsky 1995, in an effort to dismiss the relevance of *there's* + plural associate):

c. *There is two guys in the room. (cf. There is a guy in the room)
d. *Is there two guys in the room? (cf. Is there a guy in the room?)

I take the ungrammaticality of (c) and (d) to suggest that *there* does not in fact trigger singular agreement in colloquial existentials.[25] As such, the claim that the NAH cannot be extended to existential-expletives is weakened.

Now let us consider the second argument against the idea that the NAH be extended to existential-expletives. In order to understand the argument, I briefly review Cardinaletti's appeal to "control" facts to support the idea that the associate in ergative-expletive constructions raises at LF (in languages like German; recall section 2.3.2 above). Specifically, Cardinaletti shows that languages like English and German (whose expletives do not trigger agreement) allow control of PRO by the embedded associate; this can be seen for English in (e):

e. There entered two men [PRO without identifying themselves].

The grammaticality of (e) suggests that the associate *two men* c-commands the embedded PRO, despite surface appearances to the contrary. This in turn supports the idea that the associate moves at LF to a position (e.g., the position occupied by *there*) from which it can c-command (control) PRO. In other words, the control facts of (e) corroborate the idea, independently argued for, that English/German-type expletives do not trigger agreement (and as such the associate in these languages has to raise at LF).[26]

Cardinaletti (1997) further shows, however, that in contrast with ergative-expletive constructions, existential-expletive constructions do not allow control; compare (e) with (f):

f. i. *There are three men in the room [PRO without introducing themselves].
ii. *I do not want there to be any man in the room [PRO without introducing himself].
iii. *There was believed to be no one serving on the committee until interviewed by Bob.

The ungrammaticality of (f) is taken to indicate that the associate—*three men* in (f.i), *any man* in (f.ii), *no one* in (f.iii)—does not control the embedded PRO. This thus indicates, according to Cardinaletti, that "an inference from existential-expletive to ergative-expletive constructions is doubtful" (p. 525, n. 7).

However, it is unclear why the ungrammaticality of the sentences in (f) would necessarily entail that the NAH cannot be extended to expletives in existential constructions. That is, although the sentences in (f) are ungrammatical, it does not follow that the NAH is therefore not applicable to existential-expletive constructions. Whatever the reason for the ungrammaticality of the sentences in (f) (which at first glance might seem to indicate that the associate cannot control PRO in existentials), the NAH could still hold independently. In fact, the relevance of the examples in (f) is called into question by the following nonexpletive data; the examples in (g) indicate that the ungrammaticality of those in (f) is not clearly due to any inability of the associate to raise:

g. i. *Three men are in the room [PRO without introducing themselves].
ii. *?I do not want any man to be in the room [PRO without introducing himself].
iii. *No one was believed to be serving on the committee until interviewed by Bob.

That is, the sentences in (g) show that even when the DP overtly resides in a position from which it can c-command (and hence theoretically control) the embedded PRO, the sentences are still ungrammatical. As such, we cannot take (f) to tell us anything about whether or not the associate raises at LF in existential-expletive constructions (in contrast with ergative-expletive constructions as in [e]); in essence, whatever the reason for the ungrammaticality of (f), it would seem it needs to find itself in the reason for the ungrammaticality of (g) (whatever that may be). So, there is no real contrast between (e) and (f) (since there is also an identical contrast between [e] and the irrelevant [g]). To summarize, given the data in (g), the data in (f) provide no strong indication that the expletive does not raise at LF; this in turn means that the data in (f) provide no real indication that the NAH is not applicable to the expletive in existentials. As such, the claim that there is

no parallelism between ergative-expletive and existential-expletive constructions is again weakened.

I have thus shown that the two arguments used to deny the NAH's relevance to existential constructions weaken substantially, once examined closely. The overarching assumption made in this paper, then (namely, that the Appalachian existential *they* is relevant to the NAH), can stand.

NOTES

I first described the problem addressed in this paper at two conferences in Italy in 2003 (the Nona giornata di dialettologia in Padova and the Convegno internazionale di studio: I dialetti e la montagna in Sappada) and in a paper that grew out of the latter conference (Tortora 2004). I would like to thank the audiences at those talks for interesting observations and Paola Benincà for helpful feedback on that paper. I also would like to thank the audience at SECOL 72 for valuable comments (especially Michael Montgomery, Michael Picone, and Walt Wolfram). I further thank Michael Montgomery, and an extremely careful anonymous reviewer, for the bounty of comments that resulted in the vast improvement of this article. This work was supported in part by a grant from the City University of New York PSC-CUNY Research Award Program (Grant #60052-32-33).

This article represents the development of part of a larger project in which I am involved on the syntax of Appalachian English, in collaboration with Judy Bernstein, Marcel den Dikken, and Raffaella Zanuttini. I thank Judy Bernstein and Marcel den Dikken for reading and commenting on the first draft.

1. For the purposes of this paper I am putting aside the existential constructions seen in (a) (with *it*) and (b) (with *there*), which are also found in Appalachian, as well as other varieties of English:

   a. It's too much murder. [Wolfram and Christian 1976, 126]
   b. There's a place over here at the tower. [DOHP, CC]

   Example (b) (as well as other examples in this paper) come from the Dante Oral History Project (DOHP), which includes a series of taped interviews with residents of Dante, Virginia. The tapes are housed at the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State University (and I thank the curators and archivists, especially Norma Myers and Ned Irwin, for their help). Abbreviations of the names of the cited interviewees are as follows: CC = Clyde Carter and GAC = Gladys Amburgey Carter.
2. The word *Case*, when capitalized, represents a theoretical notion, referring to an abstract feature associated with a Noun Phrase (NP). "Assignment" (or "checking") of Case obtains when the NP occupies a particular syntactic position (this kind of Case is thus said to be "structural"). So, for example, the NP *the woman* is assigned Accusative Case in *Mary saw the woman*, but Nominative Case in *The*

woman saw Mary, despite the fact that there is no morphological marking on either instance of *the woman*. This contrasts with lowercase *case*, which refers to the more familiar notion of the overt morphological marking realized on determiners, adjectives, and nouns in many languages. The two notions may overlap, so that Case on an NP may have an overt morphological reflex; this is the situation, for example, with pronouns in English (such as *they*, which is morphologically marked for nominative, in contrast with *them*). Nevertheless, I continue to use *Case*, given that the problem treated here involves structural Case.

3. Cardinaletti (1997) considers only expletive constructions with ergative verbs (e.g., *There arrived three girls*) and explicitly denies that her conclusions can be extended to existential-expletive constructions (e.g., *There are three girls*). In the appendix, I discuss why it is not obvious Cardinaletti's generalizations based on ergatives cannot be extended to existentials.

4. Note that in order for the NAH to be correct, Cardinaletti's claim must assume that specification of Nominative Case on an expletive morpheme entails specification of phi-features:

   Case → phi-features
   ∴ ~phi-features → ~Case

   This unidirectional entailment is curious, since there is nothing obvious which would logically preclude the existence of a morpheme which is specified for Nominative Case but not for phi-features (something noted in Tortora 1999, but not pursued). I argue below (section 2) that Appalachian *they* may very well be an example of such an expletive morpheme (i.e., one which is specified for Nominative Case, but not for phi-features) and as such presents a challenge for the presupposed entailment above.

5. Note, too, that this construction also freely allows the contracted form of *is*:

   a. THEY's nothin' to keep 'em from turnin'. [Wolfram and Christian 1976, 125]
   b. Now, THEY's a difference in sayin' a fun ghost story and … [Wolfram and Christian 1976, 125]

   The examples in (a) and (b) should not be confused with the contracted form of past-tense *was*, which is often written as *'us* and pronounced [əz], as in *They'us big apple trees* (DOHP, GAC; see n. 1).

6. This is in fact a phonological process that Labov (1969) suggests may have led to the possessive form *they* (*They friends are late* 'Their friends are late'), found in some varieties of English. A syntactic analysis of possessive *they* is given in Bernstein and Tortora (2005), who similarly agree that such a diachronic process may have been responsible for the ultimate pronunciation of this possessive morpheme as [ðe]. Nevertheless, they argue that, whatever the diachronic process leading to this pronunciation, possessive *they* is to be synchronically analyzed as the third-person plural nominative pronoun *they*.

7. One reason to deny synchronic *r*-dropping is that expletive *they* is robust in non-*r*-dropping Appalachian varieties. Another possible historical source of expletive *they* is the following (suggested by Montgomery 2006): at an earlier period (in Scotland), the contracted copula *'re* was "absorbed" into *there*, yielding *there're/there* in speech (followed by both plural and singular postverbal subjects):

   a. There're two men.
   b. There two men/a man.

   At a later period, the forms in (a) and (b) were reanalyzed as *they're*, as in (c),

   c. They're two men/a man.

   and then of course as *they* + *are*. The singular-versus-plural nature of the copula will be discussed below.
8. This generalization in fact seems to be exhibited for nonexpletive pronouns in Belfast English, as described by Henry (1995). That is, as she notes, the subject pronouns *they* and *we* obligatorily trigger plural agreement with the verb (e.g., *They are late*), while the subject pronouns *themuns* and *usuns* do not have to (e.g., *Themuns is late*; something Henry calls "singular concord"; see n. 10 below). Interestingly, Henry notes that the latter (*themuns/usuns*) can be used as object pronouns; the former, however (*they/we*), are used only as subjects. This suggests that the former are unambiguously marked for Nominative Case, while the latter are Case-vague. From this perspective, one could conclude that the NAH applies to nonexpletive pronouns as well.
9. This is in contrast with expletive *it* (see example [a] in n. 1 above), which can also be used as an object in these varieties.
10. It is a well-documented fact (see, among others, Hackenberg 1972; Wolfram and Christian 1976; Hazen 1996, 2000; Montgomery 1997; and Montgomery and Hall 2004) that varieties which allow "lack of agreement" (or "singular concord"; see n. 8 above) with plural full-DPs do require plural agreement with the referential plural pronoun; compare (a) and (b):

    a. The boys is here; The others is big fat cats.
    b. They are here.

    It is thus to be expected that the speaker who produced (5b) and (6) above never once in her taped interview exhibits lack of agreement with referential *they*. (It is also notable that she never exhibits agreement with expletive *they*.)
11. In this paper, I use only present-tense examples, for a very good reason: this is the only tense where we can be guaranteed to see a difference in number with both *be* and main verbs (e.g., *She is late/walks*, *They are late/walk*) in this particular variety of English. Past-tense examples are avoided because the verb *be* does not, for many speakers, exhibit difference in number. That is, there appears to have occurred a "leveling" of the past-tense paradigm of *be* (in the sense of, e.g., Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2003), whereby the form *was* is used for all persons and numbers. As such, whereas a speaker X might allow only *They are*

late (disallowing **They is late*), the same speaker X may exhibit only *They was late.* This leveling (which, of course, has taken place for main verbs and modals in all varieties of English) suggests that plural agreement may in fact be exhibited in examples such as *They was late* (much as in *They walked*). This in turn makes it difficult to determine whether existential examples such as the following exhibit plural or singular number on the verb:

> THEY was a cemetery out on Hazel Mountain. [DOHP, GAC; see n. 1]

That is, because *was* is both a singular and a plural form, we have no way of determining what kind of agreement is exhibited. I thus stick to present-tense examples, where the distinction (*is/are*) in the paradigm is maintained.

12. Examples of Appalachian *they* existentials with *are* will be discussed in section 2.4 below; as I will argue, there may be reason to believe the verb *are* is singular in these cases (despite appearances to the contrary).
13. Tortora (1997) and Cresti and Tortora (1999) argue against the idea that the morpheme *there* in existentials is an expletive (the former takes it to be an argument with semantic content; the latter take it to be the clitic-double—also with semantic content—of a locative PP). However, whether or not we analyze this element as an expletive is not directly relevant to the argument at hand.
14. Note, too, that as with Italian weak *esse*, these syntactic restrictions exhibited by weak *there* correlate with a semantic distinction: weak *there* does not have the same ability to refer to a contextual location as strong THERE (this is why strong THERE has been called "deictic," in contrast with existential *there*). Furthermore, the syntactic behavior exhibited by *esse* allows us to understand weak *there*'s obligatory occupation of Spec, IP: the obligatory overt movement of weak *there* to subject position is not an isolated fact about *there*, but rather a general cross-linguistic fact about weak pronouns that they cannot remain in their base positions (Tortora 1997).
15. I realize that the trees for the pronouns in figures 2 and 4 may be inconsistent with many recent proposals and questions posed in the literature regarding the nature of pronouns (e.g., whether some pronouns, if not all, are dominated by DP; what other functional categories dominate pronouns; and what their specific categorial status is [i.e., D or N]). My purpose here is not to provide a definitive analysis of pronouns (or contradict any well-motivated proposals in the literature), but rather to simply loosely illustrate the idea that weak pronouns have a more impoverished functional structure than strong pronouns.
16. For apparent counterexamples to this, see section 2.4 below.
17. This is reminiscent of the fact that English *there*, for some speakers, allows apparent lack of agreement with the associate in the following type of example:

    a. There's two guys in the room.

    It is important to note, however, that speakers (such as myself) who allow (a) do not allow singular *is* in its uncontracted form with a plural associate:

    b. *There is two guys in the room. (cf. There is a guy in the room)
    c. *Is there two guys in the room? (cf. Is there a guy in the room?)

This contrasts with the Appalachian *they* facts, where we can see that uncontracted *is* is allowed alongside contracted *'s* with plural associates (see 17a and 17b) above; see also Rupp (2005), who discusses varieties which allow expletive *there* with uncontracted *is* in certain contexts). For further discussion of examples such as (a) and (b), see the appendix.

18. Note that if nothing else is stated, one could argue that the plural associate (e.g., *six or seven guitar players* in 17c) does not trigger agreement for the same reason that full plural DPs exhibit "singular concord" in Appalachian (see n. 10 above); compare (17c) with the following:

    Six or seven guitar players is here.

    Thus, one could argue that there is no reason to expect to find plural agreement in (17c). However, I do not believe we can pursue this line, given the following fact regarding data collected from the Dante Oral History Project: while plural *are* is not impossible with full plural DPs (i.e., *Six or seven guitar players are here* is possible), I have not found one instance of plural *are* with existential *they*. This disparity is also discussed in Wolfram and Christian (1976, 83), who observe that statistically, agreeing *be* in the present tense is far more common for plural DPs in subject position than it is in existentials. These facts suggest that the explanation for the nonagreeing associate in (17) cannot find itself in the "singular concord" phenomenon noted for the full DP in subject position.

19. This idea, which involves the "Inflectional Field" (IP) being split up into various functional heads (a la Pollock 1989), has of course been explored by a number of different authors, to explain a number of different phenomena in different languages. The ways in which the IP field has been split up vary in the literature, as does the nature of the different proposed subject positions, depending on the phenomena to be explained (e.g., Taraldsen 1995; Tortora 1999; Poletto 2000; Shlonsky 2000; Cardinaletti 2004). My use of Henry's (1995) proposal here is for the purpose of illustrating a solution to the question of Appalachian *they*-existentials; I am, however, not closed to analyzing the problem under a view of subject positions that may be different from Henry's. I leave this matter open.

20. One potential problem with the present proposal is that there is evidence that German expletive *es* appears in a position higher in the tree than that depicted in figure 5; I thank Marcel den Dikken (pers. comm., Apr. 5, 2005) for pointing this out to me.

21. I speculate this may be an economy of derivation issue; the derivation in which the associate does move to check the [±sing] feature is more costly (due to an additional move) than the derivation in which the expletive (which already resides in Spec, AgrsP and checks the [NOM] feature) checks the [±sing] feature.

22. If the French sentence involved a [−sing] feature in the numeration, the derivation would crash, due to a feature mismatch (the associate would be prevented from raising at LF, due to *il*'s ability to check the [NOM] feature).

23. A reviewer, however, points out a potentially relevant point regarding the examples in (19). Specifically, constructions with *They are* + [singular NP], although

attested, are relatively rare in the corpus (for example, there is not a single occurrence in Montgomery's Corpus of Smoky Mountain English, among more than 1,500 existential clauses). If it turns out that this construction is considerably rarer than that found in (18) (with *They are* + [plural NP]), this may indicate that the phenomena in (18) and (19) do not necessarily go together, contrary to what I am suggesting above, in the text. That is, the apparent plurality of the verb in (18) would not necessarily be assimilable to the apparent plurality of the verb in (19). In this case, it would once again become plausible that it is the plural "associate" that is triggering plural agreement with the verb in examples like (18); given that, one would need to provide an account for the syntax of agreement in the grammar of speakers who produce (18) which would be different from the account discussed in section 2.3.2 (where the associate does not trigger agreement). I will leave the matter open here, since, for the purposes of the kind of syntactic analysis given in this paper, it would need to be ascertained whether single speakers who allow (18) also allow (19) (i.e., whether 18 and 19 are possible in the same grammar).

24. Of course, if there are speakers who accept examples such as those in (18) and (19), but do not accept examples such as those in (20) and (21), then we have to consider the possibility that the grammar of such speakers might involve a [–sing] feature on expletive *they* (which would cause expletive *they* in this alleged grammar to trigger plural agreement). In this regard, consider another relevant observation (made by the same reviewer whose observations are discussed in n. 23): the pattern seen in (20) (*He are*) is even rarer than that seen in (19) (*They are another one*). The reviewer notes specifically that the pattern seen in (20) is "almost certainly now moribund." This contrasts with an observation made about (19), namely, that this construction, although relatively rare, is used by younger speakers. If the data in (20) then are not relevant to the data in (19), we would have to return to the hypothesis that, for speakers who produce (19), expletive *they* may very well have a plural feature [–sing]. The grammar of these speakers would thus differ minimally from the grammar of speakers who produce *They is*... in that in the former, expletive *they* has the feature [–sing], whereas in the latter, expletive *they* has the feature [sing]. In this case, it would be difficult to see, for the grammar of speakers who allow (19) (and have a [–sing] expletive *they*) what the morphological difference would be between expletive *they* and referential *they*. I leave this as a matter for further investigation.

25. Of course, this raises the question of what in fact *-'s* is in (b). I do not offer an analysis here (although I do think it is possible to pursue the idea that *-'s* may not even be the contracted form of *is* at all; only future research can tell whether it may be, in fact, a functional morpheme of a different nature). What is important to note, however, is that the data in (c) and (d) serve as evidence that in colloquial English existentials, *there* does not readily trigger singular agreement.

    The reader may wonder what is meant here by "colloquial" English. I certainly do not intend for the immediate discussion to encompass the facts of all nonstandard varieties. Rupp's (2005) study, for example, discusses nonstandard agreement patterns in *there* sentences in a British Midlands variety which are

more complex than that mentioned here (and compares the facts of the Midlands variety to those from numerous studies of other varieties; see references cited therein). For the present discussion, I am merely referring to the facts of my own colloquial American variety, which is reflected by (b)–(d) (and which is shared by other speakers, whom I have consulted).

26. This contrasts with languages like French, which Cardinaletti claims do not allow control by the associate:

*?	Il	est	entré	trois	hommes	sans	s'excuser.
	it	is	entered	three	men	without	self-excuse'

This in turn corroborates the idea that in French-type languages, the associate does not raise at LF, as it is the expletive that triggers agreement with the verb (in conformity with the NAH).

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