English Sentences Beginning with *there* and Their Vietnamese Counterparts

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Abstract: English sentences beginning with *there* do not constitute only existential sentences; most important among their other uses are presentational *there*-constructions. Since it is almost impossible to distinguish pure existential sentences from presentational *there*-constructions due to the two homographs called Empty *there* in pure existential sentences and Locative *there* in presentational *there*-constructions without considering the fact that the former has no stress and the latter is pronounced with some degree of stress, language users have to care for other sentence components, both obligatory and optional, that follow *there* in the clause in question. Comparing *there*-constructions and their Vietnamese counterparts helps to identify translated versions of each subtype of *there*-constructions, both semantically and pragmatically equivalent, irrespective of the fact that Vietnamese has neither the empty subject nor subject-verb inversion – the two phenomena quite easily observed in a Subject-prominent language like English.

Keywords: Existential sentences, *there*-constructions, Empty *there*, Locative *there*.

1. “*There*”-constructions in the English language

Sentences with *there* in the initial position do not constitute a homogeneous class. “Existential clauses generally contain either a complex notional subject or an adverbial expansion … Minimal existential clauses, i.e. clauses which lacks both adverbial expansions and subjects with postmodification, are most common in conversation, with academic prose at the other extreme … Postmodification often takes the form of prepositional phrases and relative clauses” [1: 949]. Let us have a close look at different types of *there*-constructions⁠1.

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⁠1It is necessary to indicate now a number of conventions applied throughout this paper:
- The optimal Vietnamese equivalent version or versions will be placed right under its or their original English *there*-construction in question.
- The lexical items in round brackets, like “*(there)*” in (27), may or may not be verbalized, while those in square brackets are embedded clauses, like “[as if there’S a tap running somewhere]” in (5);
- The three symbols “/”, “*”, and “?” respectively stand for “or,” “unaccepted,” and “possibly accepted.”
- Modifiers of the subject NP, either pre-nominal or post-nominal, are underlined; *adverbs* are in italic; the *negative*, either adjectival like *no* or adverbial like *n’t*,

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1.1. Bare existential sentences

**Frame 1**: there + VERB + indefinite subject NP

Bare existential sentences, i.e. those in which the subject NP, with or without postmodification, is not followed by any adverbial, are always themeless. The speaker has no other choice, except to choose a different verb:

1. There ARE no ghosts.
   \(Kýng\ CÓ\  mà.\)

2. *No ghosts ARE.
   *\(Kýng\ ma\  CÓ. / *\(Kýng\ ma\  THÝ.\)

3. *Ghosts ARE NOT.
   *\(Ma\  THÝ\ /String.\)

4. Ghosts DO NOT EXIST.
   \(Kýng\  CÓ\  mà.\)
   *\(Ma\  THÝ\ /String\. / *\(Ma\  THÝ\ /String\  TÝN TÆI\  mà.\)

Generally, bare existential sentences assert the existence or non-existence of some entity with some property described by the modification of the subject NP, prenominal or postnominal. Being the focus, the subject NP has a higher degree of communicative dynamism (abbreviated to C.D.) than its preceding verb. Textually, (1) and (3) are not equivalent. In (4) the NP ghosts is anaphoric, probably mentioned in the context or co-situation; therefore, ghosts in (4) carries a lower C.D. degree than its following verb, i.e. it is not the focus of information conveyed by (4). Its verb is.

It is accepted for a bare existential sentence to be embedded in another clause:

(5) It sounds to me [as if there’S a tap running somewhere].
   Tôi nghe [như thể CÓ tiếng với nước chảy đầu dây].

1.2. True existential sentences

It is the occurrence of the adverbial that distinguishes true existential sentences from bare existential sentences. Since “place adverbials are the most common type of adverbial expansion” [1: 949], the two subtypes of true-existential sentences respectively named Frame 2a and Frame 2b below are collectively called “locative-existential sentences” by Grzegorek [2: 149-154, 157-160].

“Final position for adverbials is by far the most common choice in clauses that have a notional subject without postmodification … Where the notional subject has postmodification, preferences are less clear. Most often, however, the adverbial is placed towards the end of the clause, either in final position, or in initial-end position” [1: 949].

**Frame 2a**: there + VERB + indefinite subject NP + adverbial(s)

**Frame 2b**: adverbial(s) + there + VERB + indefinite subject NP

True existential sentences in Frame 2a and Frame 2b present two problems:

1. What is the relationship between true existential sentences – Frame 2a and sentences in which the subject NP is in thematic position, i.e. what is the relationship of (6) and (7)?

6. There’S a strange-looking woman in the house.
   Có một người phụ nữ la mả ở trong nhà.

7. A strange-looking woman IS in the house.
   Một người phụ nữ la mả THÝ Ở trong nhà.
2. What is the relationship between true existential sentences – Frame 2b and sentences with a preposed locative adverbial without there, i.e. what is the relationship of (8) and (9)?

(8) In the house there’s a strange-looking woman.

(9) In the house is a strange-looking woman.

In the same veins with Grzegorek [2], we argue here that a sentence of the type:

- indefinite NP – BE – Locative

(A strange looking woman IS in the house.)

is not existential and hence is not cognitively synonymous to

- there – BE – indefinite NP – Locative

(There’s a strange looking woman in the house.)

because only 6 asserts existence of the referent of the subject NP, and in fact this assertion is the main purpose of uttering such sentences. In a, the purpose of the speaker is not to assert existence of the referent of the indefinite NP (a strange looking woman) but rather her location.

Observed by Breivik [3, as quoted in [2: 150-151]], for Type a-sentences to be acceptable, there are two requirements:


b. There IS a book on the table.

(11)a. *A famous cathedral IS in Guildford.

b. There IS a famous cathedral in Guildford.

(12)a. *Lions ARE in Africa.

b. There ARE lions in Africa.

The locative adverbial must be [+ deictic], i.e. must refer to some well-defined, usually small area, known to the addressee: only then the spatial relationship between the referent of the subject and the location is clearly defined and hence the referent of the subject is identified. Since the requirement that the referent of the subject identified to the hearer does not hold in the case of true existential sentences – Frame 2a, which are in fact the above-mentioned Type b-sentences, they are acceptable in the following examples; Type a-sentences are not accepted because they fail to meet such requirement:

(13)a. *Space IS in the manger.

b. Bầu Thể ở trong cái manger dùng thức ăn cho gia súc.

(14)a. There IS space IS in the manger.

You do not have to identify the object if your purpose is merely to assert its existence.

Quite probably, the generic state of the NP “sư tử”, meaning “lions” (or “the lion”), in thematic position makes this Vietnamese version acceptable. For further information, read “Generic sentences in Vietnamese and English” [4].
There IS corn in the manger.
*CÓ bắp ở trong cái manger dùng thực ăn cho gia súc.
(15a). *Nothing IS in the house.
*Không cái gì THÌ ở trong căn nhà này.
(15b). *No sign of life IS in the house.
*Không dấu hiệu của sự sống nào THÌ ở trong căn nhà này.

Only there-constructions, the subject NP of which is post-modified by a participial phrase, always have accepted counterparts with indefinite NPs in thematic position. These counterparts cannot be considered as existential, though:

(17a). A demonstrator WAS KILLED by a policeman in Oakland.
Một người tham gia biểu tình dã bi cảnh sát GIẾT CHẾT ở Oakland.
There WAS a demonstrator KILLED by a policeman in Oakland.
Đã Có một người tham gia biểu tình bị cảnh sát GIẾT CHẾT ở Oakland.
(18a). A girl IS PLAYING in the roof of your house.
Một bé gái đang CHƠI trên mái nhà của anh.
There IS a girl PLAYING on the roof of your house.
Không Có một bé gái đang CHƠI trên mái nhà của anh.

The relationship of true existential sentences – Frame 2b to sentences with a preposed locative adverbial without there is not clear. With the same reason concerning Type a-sentences, we again argue that a sentence of the type:

c. Locative – BE – indefinite NP
(On the table WAS a book.)
is not existential and hence is not cognitively synonymous to
d. Locative – there – BE – indefinite NP
(On the table there WAS a book.)

Observed by Breivik [3, as quoted in [2: 153-154], for Type c-sentences, which are inverted sentences, to be accepted, there is one requirement: Locative must be specific enough:
(19) *In the house WAS no sign of life.

*Trong căn nhà LÀ không dấu hiệu nào của sự sống.

(20) *In Africa ARE lions.
*Ở Châu Phi LÀ sư tử.
(21) Under the desk IS a woven wastepaper basket.
Đưới bàn LÀ một cái giỏ rác dan hàng may tre.
(22) To the east of the pier WERE miles of sandy beaches.
Về phía đông của cái cầu tàu LÀ những bãi cát dài hàng đăm.

Quite probably, Locative is made specific by the preceding sentence of the there-construction, not by itself [4: 220]:
(23) Alan walked along Elmdate Avenue and found number sixteen without difficulty. Outside the house WAS a furniture van.
Alan đi bộ dọc theo Đại lộ Elmdate và tìm ra căn nhà số 16 không khó khăn gì. Bên ngoài căn nhà ấy Có một chiếc xe chở hàng mới thật.
(24) The room contains a table and four chairs. *On the table* is a newspaper.

Căn phòng có một cái bàn và bốn cái ghế. Trên bàn Có một tờ báo.

In brief, not considered as existential are *Type a-sentences* and *Type c-sentences*, with (i) the indefinite NP playing the semantic role of *Carrier* (called *Đường thể* in Vietnamese [4: 136-143, 214-217]) and (ii) *be* translated into Vietnamese typicalled as là, when *Locative* preceding the indefinite NP in *Type c-sentences*, or optionally as thì, when *Locative* following the indefinite NP in *Type a-sentences*. True existential sentences in *Frame 2a* and *Frame 2b* are “variants of the same existential proposition” [2: 154], with (i) the indefinite NP playing the semantic role of *Existent* (called *Hữu thể* in Vietnamese [4: 157-158]) and (ii) *be* or verbs other than *be* but of related meaning typicalled translated into Vietnamese as có:

b. there – BE – indefinite NP – Locative, i.e. true existential sentences – *Frame 2a*

(There WAS a book on the table.)

(25) If the police hadn’t reacted quickly, there COULD HAVE BEEN a bad accident.

Nếu cảnh sát không phản ứng kịp thì có thể đã Có một tai nạn thấm thía.

(26) Because natural gas is an environmentally clean fuel, there IS great interest on the part of many scientists and policy makers to assess its availability. [1]

Do khi thiên nhiên là một thứ nhiên liệu sạch echt từ góc độ môi trường Có sự quan tâm lớn từ nhiều nhà khoa học và chuyên gia hoach định chính sách nhằm đánh giá trừ lượng của nó.

True existential sentences can be easily identified thanks to the tag question though *there* may be optionally omitted from the clause preceding the tag:

(27) On the wall (there) IS a Picasso painting, isn’t there?

Trên tường Có một bức tranh của Picasso, phải không?

(28) All around (there) WAS a thick hedge, wasn’t there?

Xung quanh Có một bụi cây rậm rạp, phải không?

However complex it is, a true existential sentence can easily play the role of an embedded clause, as in (29).

(29) It is obvious [that in my first poems there EXISTS kind-heartedness of a young man who has learned to love the poor and the miserable].

Rõ ràng [là trong thơ tôi buổi đầu Có tâm lòng của con người trẻ tuổi biết yêu thương những thân phận nghèo khổ đó đây].

Though *Locative* and *Temporal* form the two most common types of adverbials in true existential sentences, others are adverbials of condition, as in (25), and of cause or reason, as in (26):
There is not stressed and is often spoken in its weak form, like the. In other words, Empty there, which has no lexical meaning, is not the same as Locative there meaning “in that place.” The adverbial is pronounced in its strong form, like their, with some identifiable stress:

(30) There WAS a van there, outside the house.4 [5]

Đã Có một chiếc xe nhỏ ở đó, bên ngoài căn nhà.

1.3. There-constructions as ‘lists’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame 3: (adverbial +) there + VERB + definite or indefinite subject NP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

“On context where it is appropriate to focus on the existence of something is at the beginning of a story. The fairy-tale opening is well-known” [1: 951]:

(31) Once upon a time there WAS a wicked step-mother.

Ngày xưa ngày xưa Có một bà mẹ kế độc ác.

In there-constructions as ‘lists’, the subject NP can be either indefinite or definite. When the subject NP is definite, i.e. encoded by a definite noun phrase or a proper noun, the effect of Empty there is “to bring something already known back to mind rather than asserting that it exists” [1: 953]. Below are two other examples with there-constructions as ‘lists’ being part of the dialogues given by Grzegorek [2]:

Dialogue 1  A: How could we get there?
Làm sao bọn mình đến đó?

B: There ’S the trolley …
CÓ xe điện …

Dialogue 2  C: What’s worth visiting here?
Có gì đáng tham quan nơi đây?

D: There ’S the park, a very nice restaurant, and the library.

CÓ công viên, một nhà hàng rất đẹp, và thư viện.

Even if the subject NP is definite, still the general condition of there-constructions is met because this NP is non-anaphoric. Rando and Napoli [6: 300], explain this fact as follows:

‘Existential’ there-sentences typically allow only indefinite NP arrangements, while ‘list’ there-sentences accept both definites and indefinites. The reason for this difference is that the argument of an existential there-sentence is the NP itself; but the argument of a list there-sentence is the list, not the individual members comprising that list.

In other words, it is the list, i.e. the choice of the items, is the new information irrespective of the fact that all the items of the list are anaphoric. It is acceptable that the list consists of only one member, as in There ’S the trolley …, because “list there-sentences do not assert existence. They can be paraphrased as ‘one could mention …’ i.e. only bring the referent of the focus NP to the addressee’s consciousness” [2: 154].

The term “list” is quite useful in describing as well as distinguishing there-constructions as ‘lists’ from ‘true’ existential there-sentences. Biber et al [1: 947] also imply such a list: “Existential there-constructions with a definite notional subject tend to occur when a series of elements is introduced, often marked explicitly by a conjunction or a linking adverbial (e.g. first) or additive adverbial (e.g. too).”

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4 Locative there is the antonym of the adverb here, meaning “in this place,” as in (30"): (30”) “There’ S a cat here under the casket,” she called to her brother. [1]

“CÓ một con mèo ở đây bên dưới cái trap nhỏ đang thưới,” nó kêu anh trai.
There’s Raymond and his wife Sherry’s, I think, brother and his wife.

Có Raymond và vợ của ông, và tôi nghĩ rằng, người anh em trai của vợ ông và vợ của anh ấy.

First there’s the scandal of Fergie romping with John Bryan.

Trước hết Có tại tiếng rạng Fergie tằng tưu với John Bryan.

The definite subject NP may contain the demonstrative determiner this or these, “often found in joke-telling” [1: 947].

Dad, there is this alien. He had enormous hands and silver eyes and he was really ugly.

Ba à, Có người ngoài hành tinh này nè. Hân có đôi tay to, đôi mắt màu bạc và trông hân thì thật là xấu xí.

“The notional subject is occasionally a definite noun phrase or a proper noun. Examples are found in all registers … these constructions occur primarily in conversation (about 50 instances per millions of words) and occasionally in fiction” [1: 947].

1.4. Presentational there-constructions

**Frame 4a:** adverbial + there + VERB + definite or indefinite subject NP

(35) On the table there LAY a newspaper.

Trên bàn LÀ một tờ báo.

(36) Inside the walls of the palace there SIT the European leaders.

Bên trong các bức tường của nó LÀ nơi họp bàn của các nhà lãnh đạo Châu Âu.

**Frame 4b:** there + VERB + adverbial + indefinite subject NP

(37) There LIVES next door to me a blind woman.

SÔNG LÀNG Lê 5 cảnh nhà tôi LÀ một người phụ nữ mù.

*Cảnh nhà tôi SÔNG LÀNG Lê một người phụ nữ mù.*

(38) There FOLLOWED after weeks of intense fighting a brief period of calm.

Sau nhiều tuần giao tranh ác liệt LÀ một khoảng khắc yên bình.

The choice between presentational there-constructions like (39) and (40), which are non-thematic, and their thematic counterparts respectively numbered (41) and (42) depends typically on the way the speaker wants to present things. By stating that the referent of the subject NP seen from the speaker’s view as “coming into the perceptual field of the speaker,” Kimball [7: 265] explains why only a specific group of verbs allows the presentational orders: active verbs indicating the appearance on the scene such as run out, burst in, step in, etc., and stative verbs describing location such as hang, lie, sit, stand, live, etc.

(39) All of a sudden there BURST IN his younger sister Jane. [2]

Đột nhiên Bắt thình linh em gái của anh, Jane, XÔNG VÀO.

?Đột nhiên/ Bắt thình linh XÔNG VÀO em gái của anh, Jane.

?Em gái của anh, Jane, đột nhiên/ bắt thình linh XÔNG VÀO.

(40) There STEPPED OUT in front of the car a small child. [2]

Ngay trước mủi xe BUÔC RA một đứa bé.

BUÔC RA ngay trước mủi xe một đứa bé.

?Một đứa bé BUÔC RA ngay trước mủi xe.

<sup>5</sup>which means “silently”
His younger sister Jane BURST IN all of a sudden.

(41) Đột nhiên/ Bất thình lình em gái của anh, Jane, XÔNG VÀO.

*Em gái của anh, Jane, đột nhiên/ bất thình linh XÔNG VÀO.

(42) A small child STEPPED OUT in front of the car.

Một đứa bé BUÔC RA ngay trước mũi xe.

*Ngay trước mũi xe BUÔC RA một đứa bé.

This type of there-constructions can also be identified thanks to the tag question though there may be optionally omitted from the clause preceding the tag:

(43) On the wall there HANGS a landscape.

Trên tường CÓ TREO một bức tranh phong cảnh.

(44) On the wall HANGS a landscape, doesn’t there?

Trên tường CÓ TREO một bức tranh phong cảnh, phải không?

2. Counterparts of English there-constructions in Vietnamese:

2.1. Some preliminary notes

There-constructions constitute the third type [4: 217-223] of subject-verb inversion or full inversion – “where the subject is preceded by the entire verb phrase” [1: 911]. This phenomenon is easily observed in English, as mentioned by Eastwood [5: 55]:

The subject often comes at the beginning of a statement, but not always. We sometimes put another phrase in front position before the subject. We do this to emphasize the phrase or to contrast it with phrases in another sentence. The phrase in front position is more prominent than in its normal position.

♠ The empty subject

To obey the basic word order of English sentences, which is SV(O), Empty there – a lexically empty formative functioning as a slot filler – is introduced in there-constructions. While no English there-constructions begin with a finite verb, their Vietnamese counterparts may: the Vietnamese verb is shifted to the the initial position and no slot filler is necessary; in other words, there is no empty subject in Vietnamese in any counterpart of any type of English there-constructions quite probably because (i) SV(O) is not the basic word order in Vietnamese and (ii) the function of word order in English is to signal syntactic functions of lexical items while in Vietnamese to signal the communicative function of the lexical items (old versus new information).

In the beginning, Vietnamese learners of English may find it uneasy to deal with Empty there because they are not used to the fact that “in a Subject-prominent language a subject may be needed whether nor not it plays a semantic role” [8: 467].

Also, Vietnamese learners of English may find it even more difficult to distinguish Empty there in various types of there-constructions

6Sentence-finally, i.e. in the common position of an adverbial, all of the sudden strictly obeys the principle of end-weight: “the tendency for long and complex elements to be placed towards the end of a clause” [1: 898]. especially when burst in is too short to fill naturally in the final position.

7called “câu trúc đạo” in Vietnamese
that have been discussed up to the present in this paper from Locative *there* in what Biber *et al* [1: 954-956] call “Locative inversion,” which looks just like what we name in this paper Type c-sentences, as in (45-47):

(45) *There’s* my father.
*Kia LÀ cha của tôi.*

(46) *There GOES* William!
*Kia, William DỊ ở đây lại!*

(47) Behind the sundial *there WERE* a few trees, some of them in flower; a small path led into their deceptive shallow depths, and [*there, in a hollow* a few yards from a high brick wall that bordered the garden, STOOD* a sculpture].

Unlike Empty *there*, Locative *there*, enclosed in the square brackets[*] in the English sentence numbered (47), must be spoken with stress, as previously mentioned.

♣ The definiteness of the English subject NP in ‘list’ *there*-constructions

There are two rules concerning the statement that “definiteness and Topic status of the Subject will very often coincide” [9: 182]: backshifting indefinite subjects, as in the above-mentioned (10)b, and *frontering* definite subjects, as in the following (10)c:

Quyền sách dỗ thi ở trên bàn.

d. *There IS the book on the table.*
*CÓ quyền sách dỗ ở trên bàn.*

Accordingly, the fact that ‘list’ *there*-sentences also accept definite subject NPs is not readily acquired by Vietnamese learners of English, as far as second language acquisition is concerned.

♣ The word order in *there*-constructions

The fact the verb precedes the NP in both English *there*-constructions and their Vietnamese counterpart follows the principle of arranging lexical items according to the increasing C.D. degree. This order is unmarked in the two languages: it is not motivated by contextual factors but rather by the inherent semantic feature of verbs of being – those that always have a lower C.D. degree than any noun accompanying them.

2.2. Counterparts of bare existential sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Vietnamese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>There IS</em> a gentleman <em>in black</em> waiting outside.</td>
<td><em>CÓ</em> một quý ông mặc toàn đen đến đằng đối (ở) bên ngoài.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For direct naming and quicker retrieving, it is necessary to confirm one more convention applied in this paper from now on, in addition to the other three presented right at the beginning of the paper: each of the original English constructions selected as illustrations is numbered, marked *a* and followed its the Vietnamese translated version(s), marked either *b*, or both *b* and *c*, etc.
(49)a. There WAS a rumor that the president was killed.
   b. Có tin rằng Tổng thống đã bị giết.

The negative form of có is không có, không còn, or hết. Again, no signal of the simple past of be in (50)a is necessary because the Vietnamese word ã refers to the perfect aspect rather than the past tense; native speakers of Vietnamese identify the simple past via some clue from context instead of verb conjugation.

And the combination of be, no and left in (51)a and that of remain and no in (52)a both result in không còn or hết, while không có in (50)b is equivalent to be no or be not. This indicates that no word-by-word translation is treated as appropriate, irrespective of our effort to present the meaning of individual words, if possible.

(50)a. There WAS nobody.
   b. Không Có ai.
   c. Không Có ai.

(51)a. There 'S no money left.
   b. Không Có tiền.
   c. HẾT tiền.

(52)a. There REMAINS nothing more to be done.
   b. Không Có cái gì để làm nữa.
   c. ?HẾT việc.

The fact that the sentence (53)c\(^{11}\) is typically found in a Topic-prominent language like Vietnamese illustrates another way to express the meaning conveyed by (53)a. Most less accepted is (53)d the word order of which strictly follows that of (53)a – the original English sentence.

(53)a. There ARE only a few pieces of candy left.

\(^{11}\)A stricter English version of which is (53)c'. As for candy, there ARE only a few pieces left.

b. Chỉ Còn (LAI) máy cái kéo thời.
   c. Kéo chỉ Còn (LAI) máy cái/ máy chỉ kéo thời.
   d.?Chí Có vài cái kéo còn để lại/ được để lại.

Together with (53)a-d, (54)a-c again help to prove that word-by-word translation fails.

(54)a. There’S nothing wrong with your car.
   b. Cái xe của anh Có làm sao đâu.
   c. Cái xe của anh không (b落下) sao hết.

2.3. Counterparts of true existential sentences – Frame 2a

English: there + VERB + NP + adverbial(s)
Vietnamese: EE adverbial(s) + VERB + NP
   VERB + NP + adverbial(s)

The grammatical properties of the Equivalent to the English adverbial\(^{12}\) commonly placed at the beginning of the Vietnamese clause, which is abbreviated to EE adverbial, makes this case definitely unmarked; therefore, “during the process of English-Vietnamese translation, the adverbial of time is almost obligatorily” fronted usually from the end of an English clause to the beginning of its Vietnamese version, following the Topic-Comment structure prominently observed in the Vietnamese clause. Such fronting is not obligatory but optional in a number of cases:

+ When the translated version has its final adverbial of time in the form of not an NP but a PP so that the principle of end-weight may be obeyed strictly;
+ When there exists a final sequence of an adverbial of space before an adverbial of time,

\(^{12}\)For further information, read “The English adverbial of time vs. The Vietnamese range topic of time” [10], please.
which is quite common in the two languages in question:
+ When the English clause has its final adverbial of time referring to extent in time.”
[10: 73]

(55)a. There HAVE BEEN several breaks this year.
  b. Năm nay đã Có nhiều vụ đột nhập giùa ban ngày.
  d. Trong năm nay đã Có nhiều vụ đột nhập giữa ban ngày.
  c. *Đã Có nhiều vụ đột nhập giữa ban ngày trong năm nay.

(56)a. There WERE several people sick after the party.
  b. Sau bữa tiệc Có nhiều người bi bệnh / đỡ bệnh.
  c. *Có nhiều người bi bệnh / đỡ bệnh sau bữa tiệc.

(57)a. There IS snow on high ground every winter.
  b. Mỗi mùa đông đều Có tuyệt trên vùng cao.
  d. Trên vùng cao đều Có tuyệt mỗi mùa đông.
  c. Có tuyệt trên vùng cao mỗi mùa đông.
  e. Mùa đông nào cũng Có tuyệt trên vùng cao.

Fronting is also recommended in the case of the final adverbial of space as in (58-59)a. The combination of be and still in (59)a result in vẫn còn, while còn is the Vietnamese equivalent of exist in (60)a whose Vietnamese version, which is (60)b, is its thematic variant; like (53)c, (54)b-c, (57)e, and (59)d-e:

(58)a. There WAS no beer left in the fridge.
  b. Trong tủ lạnh không Có bia.
  c. Không Có bia trong tủ lạnh.

(59)a. There IS still some money in the pocket.
  b. Trong túi vẫn Có tiền.
  c. Vẫn Có tiền trong túi.
  d. Tủ vẫn Có tiền.

(60)a. There EXISTS a king in Sweden.
  b. Thụy Điển Có vua.

Since there is no verb conjugation in Vietnamese, the simple past, which is a grammatical means in English, is replaced by the Vietnamese lexical item lúc ấy meaning “at that time”:

(61)a. There WAS nobody home.
  b. Lúc ấy không Có ai ở nhà.
  c. Lúc ấy ở nhà không Có ai.
  d. Không Có ai ở nhà lúc ấy.
  e. *Không Có ai lúc ấy ở nhà.
  f. *Ở nhà lúc ấy không Có ai.

The optional fronting of the final adverbial of space during the Vietnamese-English process of translation holds true even when the Vietnamese equivalent version of (62)a, which is (62)b, is only an embedded clause.

(62)a. There IS SAID TO BE a mismatch between the mother tongue and the target language at these points.
  b. Người ta NÓI [rằng ở những điểm này Có một sự thiếu tương ứng giữa tiếng mẹ đẻ và ngôn ngữ dịch].
  c. Người ta NÓI [rằng Có một sự thiếu tương ứng giữa tiếng mẹ đẻ và ngôn ngữ dịch ở những điểm này].

2.4. Counterparts of true existential sentences – Frame 2b

English: adverbial + there + VERB + NP
Vietnamese: EE adverbial + VERB + NP
The adverbial is usually at the end of the English clause; however, clause initial placement is also possible.

(63)a. Near the park there WERE no more trees, just rock and grass.

b. Gần công viên không CÒN cây nữa, chỉ toàn là đá và cỏ.

(64)a. Inside the hall there WAS PILED a large assortment of packages and parcels and small articles of furniture. On every item there WAS a label tied. [1]


The ordering is conditioned by the same factors that affect the placement of time and place adverbials in general. In (63-64)a, which are two fiction examples, the adverbial are tied to the preceding text and the clause ends with the indefinite NP, which contains new information. The ordering is therefore in agreement with the information principle.

2.5. Counterparts of there-constructions as ‘lists’

English: (adverbial +) there + VERB + NP
Vietnamese: (EE adverbial +) VERB + NP

(65)a. Once upon a time there WERE three bears: Mama bear, Papa bear and Baby bear.

b. Ngày xưa ngày xưa CÓ ba con gấu: Gấu mẹ, Gấu cha và Gấu con.

(66)a. There IS also the group of non-benzenoid aromatic compounds. [1]

b. Cùng CÓ hồn hợp gồm nhiều hợp chất không chứa benzene và có mùi thôm đặc trưng.

(67)a. There ’S the school bell – I must go now.

b. Có chương từ ơi – bây giờ tôi phải đi đấy.

It seems like no adverbial is needed sentence-initially when the NP is encoded by a definite noun phrase or a proper noun; as previously mentioned, the effect of Empty there in this case is just to bring something already known back to the addressee’s mind, not asserting that it exists.

2.6. Counterparts of presentational there-constructions

With a stative verb describing location such as lie, hang, sit, stand, etc.:

English: there + VERB + adverbial + NP
Vietnamese: EE adverbial + VERB + NP

(68)a. There HANGS on the wall a picture of the President.

b. Trên tường TREO một bức tranh của Tổng thống.

c. TREO trên tường LÀ một bức tranh của Tổng thống.

(69)a. There STAND in the corner of the room a file cabinet.

b. Trong góc phòng DUNG VƯông VÂN một cái tủ đựng hồ sơ.

c. DUNG VƯông VÂN trong góc phòng LÀ một cái tủ đựng hồ sơ.

(70)a. On top of the hill there STANDS an ancient church.

b. Trên đỉnh đồi DUNG Süns Süns một ngôi nhà thờ cúng.

c. Süns Süns trên đỉnh đồi LÀ một ngôi nhà thờ cúng.

13which means “neatly” or “tidily”
14“Süns sùng”, which means “bulkily”, temporarily plays the role of the verb when “DUNG (STAND)” is omitted.
It deserves noticing the second translated version of each of the examples given above in which là is placed right before the NP as a “pure” Vietnamese expression.

▲With an active verb of directional movement such as burst in, jump out, step out, run through, walk into, enter, etc. or a stative verb denoting existence or occurrence such as appear, arise, come, emerge, exist, develop, follow, live, loom, remain, occur, etc.:

English: there + VERB + adverbial + NP

Vietnamese: EE adverbial + VERB + NP
VERB + adverbial + NP

(71)a. Then there RAN out of the bushes a grizzly bear.

b. Rồi thì từ trong bụi rậm CHAY RA một con gấu to lớn và hung dữ.

c. Rồi thì CHAY RA từ trong bụi rậm một con gấu to lớn và hung dữ.

(72)a. There OCCURRED the next day a strange incident.

b. Ngày hôm sau DÀ XÂY RA một việc là lùng.

c. ĐÃ XÂY RA trong ngày hôm sau một việc là lùng.

(73)a. There EXISTS in all such relations a set of mutual obligations in the economic field. [1].

b. Trong tất cả các mối quan hệ như vậy TÔN TAI một lượt những trách nhiệm qua lại trong lĩnh vực kinh tế.

c. Vfoon TÔN TAI trong tất cả các mối quan hệ như vậy một lượt những trách nhiệm qua lại trong lĩnh vực kinh tế.

(74)a. Out of the mist there LOOMED a strange shape.

b. Từ trong lần suồng mộng LỘ MÔ HIỆN RA một dáng hình kỳ lạ.

c. LỘ MÔ HIỆN RA từ trong lần suồng mộng một dáng hình kỳ lạ.

In brief, to deal with there-constructions beginning with an adverbial, apply “Tip 2: Do not change the Topic-Comment structure when translating from English to Vietnamese, if there is no compelling reason” [10: 70-71].

In the following (75)b, the pre-verbal adverb of time is shifted to the left-most position, filling the slot of the first adverbial; next comes Locative. This obeys the preferred order of a successive of two adverbials sentence-initially in the Vietnamese clause: time – space, following “Tip 1: Apply frequently in the Vietnamese clause the range topic of time as well as the double topic, the first member being time; pay attention to the Vietnamese final sequence of two adverbials, the last member being time” [10: 70].

(75)a. In a small town in Germany there ONCE LIVED a rich merchant who had a beautiful daughter.

b. Thuở xưa trong một thị trấn nhỏ ở nước Đức CÔ một thuong gia giàu có sống với cô con gái xinh đẹp.

c.*Trong một thị trấn nhỏ ở nước Đức thuở xưa CÔ một thuong gia giàu có sống với cô con gái xinh đẹp.

There is no doubt that the two most common types of adverbials in true existential sentences are Locative and Temporal while
adverbials of manner easily go with in presentational there-constructions:

(76)a. Suddenly there ENTERED a strange figure dressed all in black.

b. Bỏng BUỐC VÀO một người lả mặt mặc toàn đồ đen.

This is true even when Locative already exists in the clause, as in (77)a:

(77)a. Suddenly there JUMPED out of the hole a rabbit.

b. Từ trong cái lỗ bỏng NHÂY RA một con thỏ.

c. Bỏng NHÂY RA từ trong cái lỗ một con thỏ.

As for the existence of adverbials of manner in presentational there-constructions, there is definite affinity between English and Vietnamese. The adverbial of manner not optionally but almost obligatorily occurs in the translated version numbered (78)c, to make it sound more like Vietnamese, even when the original English sentence numbered (78)a does not actually include it:

(78)a. There AROSE somewhere deep inside her a desperate hope that he would embrace her.

b. Ở đâu đó trong sau thảm lồng có TRỞ ĐÂY một niềm hy vọng mong manh rằng anh ấy sẽ ôm ghi lấy cô.

c. Chờ TRỞ ĐÂY ở đâu đó trong sau thảm lồng có một niềm hy vọng mong manh rằng anh ấy sẽ ôm ghi lấy cô.

3. Conclusion

- English constructions with Empty there and their Vietnamese counterparts indicate the existence or occurrence of something (including the non-existence or non-occurrence of something). The use of Empty there in there-constructions “is in agreement with the information principle, as it serves to delay, and prepared the ground for, new information later in the clause” [1: 951]. Also, there is to bring something already known back to mind, rather than asserting that it exists. This is the case of there-constructions as ‘lists’ in which definite subject NPs may be employed to refer to known entities or phenomena, whose existence is not at issue.

- Their sound forms may help to distinguish Empty there from Locative there, the latter being stressed and frequently used as an adverbial in presentational there-constructions. Below are examples given by Thomson and Martinet [12: 120]:

(79)a. There’S a man I want to see. (He is standing by the door.)

b. Kia LÀ một người đàn ông mà tôi muốn gặp. (Anh ấy dang đứng gần cạnh cửa.)

(80)a. There’S a man I want to see. (This man exists.)

b. Có một người đàn ông mà tôi muốn gặp. (Anh ấy tồn tại.)

We also find another pair of there-constructions that appropriately tells a presentational there-construction from a true existential sentence – Frame 2a:

(81)a. There’S my father.

b. Kia LÀ cha của tôi.

(82)a. There’S your father on the phone.

b. Có cha của chí (dang chò đê nói chuyện) trên điện thoại.

Such a distinction is a bit harder but necessary within one and the same sentence, given as example by Murphy [13: 166]:

(83)a. When we arrived at the party, there WERE already a lot of people there (= at the party).
b. Khi chúng tôi đến bến tàu, dâ CÔ nhiêu người ở đó (= ở tại bến tàu).

- As far as the adverbial in there-constructions is concerned, “in English a contextually bound locative phrase may occur in the clause initial position (marked construction) or in clause final position (neutral word order)” [2: 159]. In Vietnamese, the adverbial in true existential sentences occurs almost always in the initial position as the range topic: more frequently of time and/or of space and less frequently of condition, of cause (or reason), or of manner. When there is the double topic in Vietnamese translated versions, the first member should be time; in case of a sequence of two final adverbials in the Vietnamese clause, the last member should be time.

- The most common verbs in Vietnamese existential sentences are CÓ, CÒN, HẾT and their elaborate variants such as hiện CÓ, dâ CÓ, không CÓ, nhất ra lại CÓ, CÓ TREO, hiện CÒN, vở CÒN, đang CÒN, không CÒN, CÒN LẠI, dâ HẾT, etc. Roughly speaking, these are the Vietnamese equivalents of various affirmative and negative forms the English verb be conjugated in a number of different tenses. Among others are:

(i) Verbs other than be but of the related meaning of existence or occurrence: CÒN (remain), XUẤT HIỆN or HIỆN RA (occur, appear, arise, come, loom or emerge), TƠN TÀI (exist), PHÁT TRIỂN (develop or grow), XƯƠNG SUỐT (run), TIẾP THEO (follow), SÔNG (live), etc.

(ii) Active verbs temporarily used as stative verbs describing location: STAND (đứng), NGÔI (sit), NÀM (lie), ĐƯ (hang), TREO (hang), etc.

(ii) Active verbs of directional movement:
BUỘC VÀO (step in, walk into, or enter), XÔNG VÀO (burst in), BUỘC RA (step out), etc.

- It is not only the lexical meaning of the English verbs but also the syntactic meaning of the whole clause in question that sometimes determines a more appropriate equivalent translated version in Vietnamese: follow means tiếp theo LÀ in (84)b; the verb is simply translated as LÀ in (85)b. This partially proves that word-by-word translation is in danger of being a complete failure in the case of there-constructions:

(84)a. There FOLLOWED an uncomfortable silence.

b. Tiếp theo LÀ một sự im lặng không mấy dễ chịu.

(85)a. After weeks of intense fighting there FOLLOWED a brief period of calm.

b. Sau nhiều tuần giao tranh ác liệt LÀ một khoảng khá yên bình.

- Though there exists the distinction between definiteness and indefiniteness applied to the NP in there-constructions and their Vietnamese counterparts, ways to indicate such a distinction are unfortunately not the same, considering as an example the fact that the zero article is [+definite, +singular] in Vietnamese [4: 28, 33], as in (86)b, while it is [−definite, +plural], as in (86)a.

(86)a. There ARE lions in Africa.

b. CÓ sự từ ở Châu Phi.

c.*CÓ những con sự từ ở Châu Phi.

- Presentational there-constructions are characteristic of having their thematic counterparts and employing only two subtypes of verbs: active verbs of directional movement and stative verbs describing location. The group
of verbs other than be denoting existence or occurrence is the overlap, as far as the employment of the verb is concerned, between presentational there-constructions and various types of existential sentences in English. Undoubtedly, be is the “privilege” of English existential sentences, both bare and pure, just like có in their Vietnamese counterparts. The vital role of be in there-constructions is undeniable, seemingly simple but in fact too complicated for generations of learners of the English language, both native and non-native, to toss and turn.

References


Câu tiếng Anh mô tả bằng there và cách diễn đạt tương trong tiếng Việt

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Tóm tắt: Câu tiếng Anh mô tả bằng there không chỉ là câu tỏ ra mà còn diễn đạt một số ý nghĩa khác trong đó quan trọng hơn cả là câu thực hiện chức năng giới thiệu. Do không thể phân biệt hai loại câu này bằng hình thức chủ yếu, vòng hoàn toàn giống nhau, của hai từ động từ là Tài từ rộng nghĩa there trong câu tỏ ra và Trạng từ chỉ nơi chọn there trong câu thực hiện chức năng giới thiệu
nên người sử dụng tiếng cần lưu ý đến các thành phần cấu tạo câu bất bước và tùy chọn khác theo sau there, nếu không kể đến việc Trạng từ chỉ nơi chọn there được phát âm với dấu nhân còn Tác từ rộng nghĩa there thì không. Việc so sánh đối chiếu Anh – Việt cho phép nhận diện những cách diễn đạt tương tương về ngữ nghĩa và ngữ dụng trong tiếng Việt ứng với từng tiêu loại câu tiếng Anh mô đâu bằng there cho dù tiếng Việt không có chủ ngữ rộng nghĩa và cũng không nhất thiết phải có cấu trúc đáo vốn là hiện tượng đặc sắc của một ngôn ngữ thiên Chữ ngữ như tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: Câu tồn tại, cấu trúc có there, Tác từ rộng nghĩa there, Trạng từ chỉ nơi chọn there.