

## 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*-constructions<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>It 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; *adverbials* 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.

Không CÓ ma.

(2) \*No ghosts ARE.

\*Không ma CÓ. / \*Không ma THÌ.

(3) \*Ghosts ARE NOT.

\*Ma THÌ không.

(4) Ghosts DO NOT EXIST.

Không CÓ ma.

\*Không TỒN TẠI ma.

?Ma THÌ không CÓ. / ?Ma THÌ không TỒN TẠI.

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:

and *its Vietnamese equivalent(s)* are both underlined and in italic.

- English VERBS, either one-word or multiple-word, and their Vietnamese equivalents are capitalized.

(5) It sounds to me [as if there'S a tap running somewhere].

Tôi nghe [như thể CÓ tiếng vòi nước chảy đâu đây].

### 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 lạ mắt ở trong nhà.

(7) A strange-looking woman IS *in the house*.

Một người phụ nữ lạ mắt THÌ 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.

*Ở trong nhà* CÓ một người phụ nữ lạ mắt.

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

*Ở trong nhà* LÀ một người phụ nữ lạ mắt.

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

a. indefinite NP – BE – *Locative*

(A strange looking woman IS *in the house*.)

is not existential and hence is not cognitively synonymous to

b. there – BE – indefinite NP – *Locative*

(There'S a strange looking woman *in the house*.)

because only *b* 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:

- (13)a. \*Space IS *in the manger*.  
\*Khoảng không THÌ ở trong cái máng đựng thức ăn cho gia súc.  
Corn IS *in the manger*.  
b. Bắp THÌ ở trong cái máng đựng thức ăn cho gia súc.  
There IS space IS *in the manger*.  
(14)a. CÓ khoảng không ở trong cái máng đựng thức ăn cho gia súc.

*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<sup>2</sup> 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:

(10)a. \*A book IS *on the table*.

\*Một quyển sách THÌ ở trên bàn.

b. There IS a book *on the table*.

CÓ một quyển sách ở trên bàn.

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

\*Một nhà thờ rất nổi tiếng THÌ ở Guildford.

b. There IS a famous cathedral *in Guildford*.

CÓ một nhà thờ rất nổi tiếng ở Guildford.

(12)a. \*Lions ARE *in Africa*.

?Sư tử THÌ ở Châu Phi<sup>3</sup>.

b. There ARE lions *in Africa*.

CÓ sư tử ở Châu Phi.

The NP subject must be capable of referential use, i.e. it must be **specific** rather abstract. There is no such condition for *there*-constructions

<sup>2</sup>You do not have to identify the object if your purpose is merely to assert its existence.

<sup>3</sup>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].

- b. There IS corn *in the manger*.  
CÓ bắp ở trong cái máng đựng thức ăn cho gia súc.
- (15)a. \*Nothing IS *in the house*.  
\*Không cái gì THÌ ở trong căn nhà này.
- b. \*No sign of life IS *in the house*.  
\*Không dấu hiệu của sự sống nào THÌ ở trong căn nhà này.
- (16)a. There IS *nothing in the house*.  
Không CÓ cái gì ở trong căn nhà này.
- b. There IS *no sign of life in the house*.  
Không CÓ dấu hiệu của sự sống nào 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:

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

*Dưới gầm bàn* LÀ một cái giỏ rác  đan bằng mây 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 dặm.

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 nội thất.

(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 *Đương 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*.)

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

(*On the table* there WAS a book.)

In comparison to true existential sentences – *Frame 2a*, true existential sentences – *Frame 2b* are more marked because the S-V-O order of English clauses does not treat the adverbial in the left-most position as normal; on the contrary, *Type a*-sentences, with a number of strict restrictions presented previously in the paper, are much less common and thus far more marked than *Type c*-sentences, those quite often being employed rhetorically in academic writing.

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):

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

**Nếu** cảnh sát không phản ứng kịp thời **thì** có thể đã CÓ một tai nạn thảm khốc.

(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* khí thiên nhiên là một thứ nhiên liệu sạch xét từ góc độ môi trường **nên** CÓ sự quan tâm lớn từ nhiều nhà khoa học và chuyên gia hoạch định chính sách nhằm đánh giá trữ 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 tấm lòng

của con người trẻ tuổi biết yêu thương những thân phận nghèo khổ đau đày].

*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*.<sup>4</sup> [5]

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

### 1.3. *There*-constructions as ‘lists’

**Frame 3:** (*adverbial* +) *there* + VERB + definite or indefinite subject NP

“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 kẻ 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 ...

<sup>4</sup>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 tráp nhỏ đựng thư,” nó kêu anh trai.

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*).”

(32) There'S Raymond and his wife *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.

(33) *First* there 'S the scandal of Fergie romping with John Bryan.

*Trước hết* CÓ tai tiếng rằng Fergie tâng tịu với John Bryan.

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

(34) Dad, there WAS this alien. He had enormous hands and silver eyes and he was really ugly.

Ba à, CÓ người ngoài hành tinh này nè. Hắn có đôi tay to, đôi mắt màu bạc và trông hắn 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.

SÓNG LẶNG LẼ<sup>5</sup> *cạnh nhà tôi* LÀ một người phụ nữ mù.

*Cạnh nhà tôi* SÓNG LẶNG LẼ 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 khoảnh 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/ Bất thành linh* em gái của anh, Jane, XÔNG VÀO.

?*Đột nhiên/ Bất thành linh* XÔNG VÀO em gái của anh, Jane.

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

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

*Ngay trước mũi xe* BUỐC RA một đứa bé.

BUỐC RA ngay trước mũi xe một đứa bé.

?Một đứa bé BUỐC RA ngay trước mũi xe.

<sup>5</sup>which means “silently”

(41) His younger sister Jane BURST IN *all of a sudden*<sup>6</sup>.

*Đột nhiên/ Bất thình lình* em gái của anh, Jane, XÔNG VÀO.

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

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

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

Một đứa bé BUỐC RA *ngay trước mũi xe*.

?*Ngay trước mũi xe* BUỐC 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*<sup>7</sup> – “where the subject is preceded by

<sup>6</sup>Sentence-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.

<sup>7</sup>called “cấu trúc đảo” in Vietnamese

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<sup>8</sup>

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 or 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

<sup>8</sup>called “chủ ngữ rỗng (nghĩa)” or “chủ ngữ giả” 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 ĐI ở đằng kia!

(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]. [1]

*Đằng sau cái đồng hồ mặt trời* CÓ dăm ba cây xanh, một số đang trở hoa: một con đường mòn dẫn đến những vũng nước có vẻ cạn, và [*ở đó*, trong một cái hõ cách vài mét là đến bờ tường cao xây bằng gạch bao bọc khu vườn, ĐÚNG SỪNG SỪNG một tác phẩm điêu khắc].

Unlike Empty *there*, Locative *there*, enclosed in the square brackets<sup>9</sup> 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 **fronting** definite subjects, as in the following (10)c:

(10)c. The book IS *on the table*.

Quyển sách đó thì ở trên bàn.

d. \*There IS the book *on the table*.

?CÓ quyển sách đó ở trên bàn.

<sup>9</sup>i.e. [*there*, in a hollow a few yards from a high brick wall that bordered the garden, STOOD a sculpture]

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<sup>10</sup>

English: there + VERB + NP

Vietnamese: VERB + NP

The most common existential verb in Vietnamese is *có*; next comes *còn* (*lại*). It is worth noticing that no signal of the simple past of *be* in (49)a is necessary because it is already conveyed in that of *was killed*, resulting in *đã bị giết*; this partly helps to prove that redundancy is not characteristic of the Vietnamese language:

(48)a. There 'S a gentleman in black waiting outside.

b. CÓ một quý ông mặc toàn đồ đen đang đợi (ở) bên ngoài.

<sup>10</sup>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 đồn 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 *đã* 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 CÒN tiền.

c. HẾT tiền.

(52)a. There REMAINS nothing more to be done.

b. Không CÒN cái gì để làm nữa.

c. ?HẾT việc.

The fact that the sentence (53)c<sup>11</sup> 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.

b. Chỉ CÒN (LAI) mấy cái kẹo thôi.

c. Kẹo chỉ CÒN (LAI) mấy cái/ mấy chiếc thôi.

d. ?Chỉ CÓ vài cái kẹo 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 (bi làm) 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*<sup>12</sup> 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*,

<sup>11</sup>A stricter English version of which is (53)c'. As for candy, there ARE only a few pieces left.

<sup>12</sup>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 break-ins *this year*.

b. *Năm nay đã* CÓ nhiều vụ đột nhập giữa 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 bị bệnh / đổ bệnh.

c. \*CÓ nhiều người bị bệnh / đổ bệnh *sau bữa tiệc*.

(57)a. There IS snow on high ground every winter.

b. Mỗi mùa đông đều CÓ tuyết trên vùng cao.

d. Trên vùng cao đều CÓ tuyết mỗi mùa đông.

c. CÓ tuyết trên vùng cao mỗi mùa đông.

e. Mùa đông nào cũng CÓ tuyết 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 CÒN bia.

c. Không CÒN bia trong tủ lạnh.

(59)a. There IS still some money in the pocket.

b. Trong túi vẫn CÒN tiền.

c. Vẫn CÒN tiền trong túi.

d. Túi vẫn CÒN tiền.

e. ?Túi đang CÒN một số tiền. [11]

(60)a. There EXISTS a king *in Sweden*.

b. Thụy Điển CÒN 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 xứng giữa tiếng mẹ đẻ và ngôn ngữ đích].

c. *Người ta* NÓI [rằng CÓ một sự thiếu tương xứng giữa tiếng mẹ đẻ và ngôn ngữ đích 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]

b. *Bên trong hành lang cửa vào* CÓ một đồng lớn gồm các thùng và gói hàng và đồ dùng trong nhà thuộc loại nhỏ. *Trên từng mỗi thứ* CÓ một cái nhãn được cột vào.

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. *Cũng* CÓ hỗn hợp gồm nhiều hợp chất không chứa benzene và có mùi thơm đặc trưng.

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

b. CÓ chuông trường rồi – *bây giờ* tôi phải đi đây.

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  
| VERB + *adverbial* + LÀ + 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* ĐỨNG **VUÔNG VẮN** một cái tủ đựng hồ sơ.

c. ĐỨNG **VUÔNG VẮN**<sup>13</sup> *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* ĐỨNG **SỪNG SỪNG** một ngôi nhà thờ cổ.

c. **SỪNG SỪNG**<sup>14</sup> *trên đỉnh đồi* LÀ một ngôi nhà thờ cổ.

<sup>13</sup>which means "neatly" or "tidily"

<sup>14</sup>"Sùng sùng", which means "bulkily", temporarily plays the role of the verb when "ĐỨNG (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*<sup>15</sup>, 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 CHẠY RA một con gấu to lớn và hung dữ.

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

(72)a. There OCCURRED<sup>16</sup> the next day a strange incident.

b. Ngày hôm sau đã XẢY RA một việc la lùng.

c. Đã XẢY RA trong ngày hôm sau một việc la 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 TỒN TẠI một loạt những trách nhiệm qua lại trong lĩnh vực kinh tế.

<sup>15</sup>which means “go into”

<sup>16</sup>Which verbs other than *be* can occur in English existential sentences cannot be determined on a purely semantic basis. The matter remains a mystery. There is no explanation why *begin* can occur in *there*-constructions and its synonymy *start* is less acceptable [2: 167]: There BEGAN a riot.

??STARTED

The same phenomenon can be observed between the two so-called synonyms *occur* and *happen*:

(72)a'. ??There HAPPENED the next day a strange incident.

c. Vẫn TỒN TẠI trong tất cả các mối quan hệ như vậy một loạt những trách nhiệm qua lại trong lĩnh vực kinh tế.

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

b. Từ trong làn sương mỏng LỒ MỒ HIỆN RA một dáng hình kỳ lạ.

c. LỒ MỒ HIỆN RA từ trong làn sương mỏng 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 CÓ một thương gia giàu có sống với cô con gái xinh đẹp.

c.\*Trong một thị trấn nhỏ ở nước Đức thuở xưa CÓ một thương 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. *Bỗng* BUỐC VÀO một người lạ 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 bỗng* NHẢY RA một con thỏ.

c. *Bỗng* NHẢY 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 sâu thẳm lòng cô TRÔI DẬY một niềm hy vọng mong manh rằng anh ấy sẽ ôm ghì lấy cô.

c. *Chợt* TRÔI DẬY ở đâu đó trong sâu thẳm lòng cô một niềm hy vọng mong manh rằng anh ấy sẽ ôm ghì 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 đang đứng gần cánh 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 chi (*đang chờ để 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 bữa tiệc, đã CÓ nhều người ở đó (= ở tại bữa tiệc).

- 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, đã CÓ, không CÓ, thật ra là CÓ, CÓ TREO, hiện CÒN, vẫn CÒN, đang CÒN, không CÒN, CÒN LAI, đã 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*), TỒN TẠI (*exist*), PHÁT TRIỂN (*develop or grow*), XUYÊN SUỐT (*run*), TIẾP THEO (*follow*), SỐNG (*live*), etc.

(ii) Active verbs temporarily used as stative verbs describing location: STAND (đứng), NGỒI (sit), NẤM (lie), ĐU (hang), TREO (hang), etc.;

(ii) Active verbs of directional movement: BUỐC VÀO (*step in, walk into, or enter*), XÔNG VÀO (*burst in*), BUỐC 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 khoảnh khắc 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 sư tử ở Châu Phi.

c.\*CÓ những con sư tử 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.

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## Câu tiếng Anh mở đầu bằng *there* và cách diễn đạt tương đương trong tiếng Việt

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**Tóm tắt:** Câu tiếng Anh mở đầu bằng *there* không chỉ là câu tồn tại 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 chữ viết, vốn hoàn toàn giống nhau, của hai từ đồng tự là Tác từ rỗng nghĩa *there* trong câu tồn tại và Trạng từ chỉ nơi chốn *there* trong câu thực hiện chức năng giới thiệu



nên người sử dụng tiếng cần lưu ý đến các thành phần cấu tạo câu bắt buộc và tùy chọn khác theo sau *there*, nếu không kể đến việc Trạng từ chỉ nơi chốn *there* được phát âm với dấu nhấn còn Tác tử rỗng nghĩa *there* thì không. Việc so sánh đối chiếu Anh – Việt cho phép nhận diện những cách diễn đạt tương đương về ngữ nghĩa và ngữ dụng trong tiếng Việt ứng với từng tiểu loại câu tiếng Anh mở đầu bằng *there* cho dù tiếng Việt không có chủ ngữ rỗng nghĩa và cũng không nhất thiết phải có cấu trúc đảo vốn là hiện tượng đặc sắc của một ngôn ngữ thiên Chủ ngữ như tiếng Anh.

*Từ khóa:* Câu tồn tại, cấu trúc có *there*, Tác tử rỗng nghĩa *there*, Trạng từ chỉ nơi chốn *there*.