

A SPECIAL FEATURE OF THE EXISTENTIAL SENTENCE IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: *Existential sentences in English, featured by the typical structure There-be, so far have been extensively described, analyzed in numerous research and English teaching documents. When the authors analyze their syntactical features, almost all of them claim that the word there is not the subject of the sentence; the subject is the noun, also called noun phrase, which stands after the verb predicate be and controls the verb in terms of its singular or plural number. As a result, in teaching existential sentences, teachers of English often instruct their learners to base themselves on the form of the noun after be to decide on the singular or plural form of the verb. By means of analyzing their syntactic and semantic features of the parts of the sentence and referring to related documents, we have found out that the existential sentences in English have normal word order: Subject (S) - Verb (V)- Subject Complement (Cs).*

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I. Introduction

In many English learning documents which refer to the existential structure *there-be* learners are often instructed that English existential sentences have reversed word order, *there* is said to stand in initial position, functioning as a formal subject, also called *dummy subject* and that the noun followed the verb *be* is the real subject of the sentence. For example, in the sentence *There was a noise in the night*, the word *There* is called dummy or formal subject. Therefore, learners of English are often guided to define the noun after the verb *be* as the real subject of the existential sentence, and make sure that the verb agrees with the subject. However, according to grammar rules for

the sentence structure in English the basic constituents of the sentence usually follow this order: Subject standing at the beginning of the sentence, after the subject is the Verb, and other parts: the Object (S-V-O), or Subject Complement (S-V-C). The question which may arise at this point is what the syntactic function and meaning of the word *there* in the English existential sentence are and whether the *there-be* sentence has a normal structure. In this article we would like to address these issues.

II. An overview of English pronouns

In English grammars, pronouns can be classified according to their syntactic and semantic features as follows:

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Order	Types of English pronouns	Examples
1	Personal pronouns: <i>I, you, she, they...</i>	<i>I</i> come from Hanoi. Please don't look at me that way.
2	Reflexive and intensive pronouns: <i>myself, herself, themselves...</i>	This refrigerator defrosts itself . (Reflexive) The film itself wasn't very good but I like the music (Intensive)
3	Demonstrative pronouns: <i>this, that, these...</i>	This is my wife. Those books are mine.
4	Possessive pronouns: <i>mine, yours, hers...</i>	My books are here. Yours are there. He did his work. I did mine .
5	Relative pronouns: <i>who, which...</i>	That is the boy who helped me to find your house. This is the book which I like best.
6	Indefinite pronouns <i>one, someone...</i>	Everybody is here.
7	Interrogative pronouns: <i>who, what,..</i>	Who keeps the key? Whom did they invite? What caused the explosion

Based on their classification and examples as has been provided in the table, English pronouns can be said to have different types, stand in different positions, and perform different functions in the sentence. Typically, most of them can stand at the beginning of the sentence, functioning as the subject, such as: personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, indefinite pronouns, interrogative pronouns, etc.

In general, one of the semantic typical features of English pronouns is that they have referential meaning; some of them have exophoric reference; for example, the first singular personal pronoun *I* refers to the speaker or writer and the plural pronoun indicates the speaker together with other people. Some English pronouns have anaphoric reference, replacing the word used before them in the sentence, for example: *His car is new. **Mine** is old*, or cataphoric reference as in the example: *When I met **her**, **Mary** looked so pale*.

Morphologically, English pronouns do not change their forms in the same way as English nouns do. For example, if English nouns use affixes to indicate singular or plural number: *book* (singular)

– *books* (plural), then the singular or plural meanings of pronouns are represented by different words. For example, the personal pronoun *I, he, or it* has singular and *we or they* has plural number; the demonstrative pronoun *this* is singular whereas *those* is plural, etc. However, in English there are a number of pronouns which have only one form, their singular or plural meaning depends on what their users mean. For example, in the situation when there are several people ahead, if they want to know who these people are, the English will ask: *Who are there?* And if there is only one person in front, their question will be: *who is there?*. The same case can happen with the relative pronoun *who, which, that* as the subject in the relative clause, these pronouns bear only one form but have singular or plural meaning, their meanings of number are realized by the preceding nouns which the pronouns replace. In the following sentence, the relative pronoun *which* has singular meaning [1a] or plural meaning [1b], depending on the number meaning of the noun which stands before.

[1] a. Take the book **which** is lying on the table.

b. Take the books **which are** / *is lying on the table.

Syntactically, pronouns can stand in different positions and perform different functions in the English sentence; they can be the subject: *Mai is always the first person **who** helps me.* (Relative pronoun), subject complement: *This book is **mine*** (Possessive pronoun), object: *She cut **herself** in the finger* (Reflexive pronoun), complement after the preposition: *Every one in the office is afraid of **him*** (Personal pronoun). In short answers, personal pronouns are used instead of the subject noun, standing before the auxiliary verb, for example: *Is **Nam** a student? - Yes, **he** is,* or in the question tag, pronouns are used to replace the subject noun and stand after the auxiliary verb, such as: ***Nam** is a student, isn't **he**?*

In short, English pronouns divide into many types and perform different syntactic functions; their singular or plural meanings are realized by the corresponding forms of the letters that represent them or by what their users mean in communication. When they function as the subject, the verb predicate must agree with them in number.

III. The concept of existence

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2010), the verb *exist* means “to happen or be present in a particular situation or place” (eg. *The custom of arranged marriages still exist in many countries*) and existence is the state of existing (p.590). The meaning of existence can be understood in many ways and there can be many ways of expressing this meaning. Particularly, existential sentences in English could be used with many word classes, such as nouns: *existence, presence, survival..*

, for example: *The peasants depend on a good harvest for their very **existence**,* adjectives: *existing, alive, present, current...* , for example: *In its **current** state, the car is worth £1,000* , or verbs: *exist, have, contain, comprise, consist of...* , for example: *The house **comprises** two bedrooms.* In English existential sentences the presence of things is identified in specific situations represented by words or groups of words denoting particular places or times, for example: *There are four people **in my family**.* In line with this concept of existence, the article focuses on the discussion about *there-be*, a typical structure often used in the existential sentences in English .

IV. An overview of the word *there* in English

The ways of looking at the word *there* in English grammars are not the same from one author to another. For example, in her book Alice Maclin states that *there* is a word that has no meaning and can be called “filler” when it is used to make a full sentence with the subject at the beginning (p.152). For this reason, in the example sentence ***There** are several bananas on the table,* the true subject is said to be the noun after the verb *be*, the word *bananas*, and *There* is just the formal subject. According to the author, sentences with formal subjects are not recommended to be used in formal writing. Instead, writers are advised to use sentences with true subjects at the beginning: ***Several bananas** are on the table,* or at the end of the sentence for emphasis: *On the table are **several bananas*** (p.37).

In English dictionaries or English-Vietnamese dictionaries *there* is not classified in the same way. For example, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary

(2010) classifies *there* as adverb denoting something which exists or happens, for example: *Suddenly **there** was a loud bang* (p.1604). English-Vietnamese Dictionary (1993) states that there are two words *there* in English and are both adverbs; the typical meaning of the first *there* refers to the place far from the speaker, in contrast with the adverb *here* referring to the near place, answering the question *Where?*, for example: *If John sits here, Mary can sit **there***. The typical meaning of the second *there* can be found when it is used as the subject in combination with such verbs as *be*, *seem*, *appear*, etc., for example: ***There's** no reason to go*. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2010) has three *there's* with different meanings; however, basically the first *there* is a pronoun, used to indicate that something exists or happens, for example: ***There** are a few things we need to discuss* (p.1828), the second *there* is an adverb denoting place, in contrast with *here*, and the third *there* is an interjection, used to express satisfaction in spoken language when the speaker has fulfilled a task or plan, for example: ***There!** I've done it!*.

Besides the idea that *there* is an adverb, pronoun, some authors assume that *there* can be a noun, denoting a definite place: that place, that area, that position. In the following sentences, *there* is a noun since it combines with the preceding preposition [2a, b] or non-defining clause that follows [2c]:

[2] a. *He lives somewhere near **there*** .

b. *Tide comes up to **there***.

c. *See **there**, where the willow bends over the brook*.

In this article, we base ourselves on Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2010), assume that in the English existential sentence *there* is a pronoun and is the subject.

V. English existential sentences with *there-be*

5.1. Categorical features

In general, different authors have different views on the structure *there-be* in English. In the years of 1960 – 1970 in the previous century, English linguists did not consider *there* to be the subject when the word stood at the beginning of the sentence, did not classify it as a specific word class since *there* had special features which were not the same with and not contrastive to any word class; no word could replace *there*. Chalker (1992) posits that there are two ways of dealing with *there*, in the first way *there* could be an adverb with no meaning; when used with the verb *be*, followed by the noun subject in the existential sentence. In *there-be* sentences the word *there* refers to and emphasizes the place [There + verb + subject + adverb]. According to this view, in the following examples ***There** was nothing here* or *Where **there** is oppression, **there** is struggle*, the word *there* is supposed to stand for and bears the meaning of the word *here* and *where* respectively (<http://tratu.coviet.vn/hoc-tieng-anh/tu-dien/lac-viet/A-V/there.html>). In addition, *there* could be interpreted in another way: *there* is the informal or dummy subject. According to this view, the existential sentence in English has two subjects: *there* and the noun after the verb *be*. In addition to these views, Pence (1963) calls *there* a *filler* or *expletive there*, in the sentence *there* is considered to be a *catalyst* to help make a chemical reaction happen,

and the subject of the sentence is the noun after the verb *be*.

English-Vietnamese Dictionary (1993) explains that *there* is an adverb used to replace the subject, combines with such verbs as *be, appear...* especially when referring to somebody or something for the first time, for example: *There's a man at the bus stop* (p.1777).

Based on the ways of classifying *there* in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary (2020), we notice that the English existential sentence used with the structure *there-be* has the following syntactic-semantic features.

5.2. Syntactic features

Subject (S)

We assume that in existential sentences in English, *there* is the subject. There are several reasons for this stance. Firstly, in many English sentences, personal pronouns function as the subject, expressing the topic, in reference to different things: objects (*It, They...*), persons (*I, She...*), natural facts or time (*It*). In existential sentences, *There* also stands in initial position, referring to objects or persons which exist in a particular situation. The examples are:

- [3] a. ***She's my teacher.*** (Person)
 b. ***It's raining outside.*** (Natural fact)
 c. ***There's nobody inside.*** (No object/person in existence)

Secondly, in the Yes/No question with the verb *be*, for example: *Are you from Vietnam?*, the subject stands after the verb. This also the case of *there* in the existential sentence: *Is there anybody inside?*

Another reason is that in short answers, according to English grammar rules, the pronoun which is the subject in a Yes/No question must be repeated in the answer. Similarly, in the Yes/No question with the existential structure, *there* is repeated, not the noun after the verb *be*. The examples are:

[4] a. *Is he a student?* - Yes, ***he is***

b. *Are there two men in the room?*
 Yes, ***there are*** / **they are*.

Predicate Verb (V) Be

In English existential sentences, the verb predicate *be* agrees with the subject *There* in number, aspect, and tense as in other types of sentences. If *there* denotes the presence or existence of one or more things; accordingly, the verb *be* will be in singular or plural number.

Examples:

[5] a. *There was a light on; there must have been somebody at home.*

b. *When we got to the party, there were already a lot of people there.*

In the two sentences above, in the first clause of the sentence [5a] *be* is in singular number, in the simple past tense, and in the second clause the verb *be* is in the perfect aspect, *there* refers to one thing whereas in the second sentence [5b] *be* is in plural number since *there* refers to many people.

Subject Complement (Cs)

According to English grammar rules used in writing, in the sentence structure SVC, the subject complement stands after the verb *be*, and agrees in form, meaning and number with the subject, constructing a parallel structure. For example:

[6] a. *Seeing is believing / *to believe*
 (Parallelism in form).

b. *He is a good man / * a good table*
(Parallelism in denotation).

c. *I am a student / *students.*
(Parallelism in number)

In questions about the subject complement, usually the word *what?* or *who?* is used, this is also the case with the noun in the existential sentence. The examples are:

[7] a. ***What is your job? I'm a teacher.*** (Declarative sentence)

b. ***What is there on the wall? - There is a picture.*** (Existential sentence)

The examples above have shown that the noun after the verb *be* in the *there-be* sentence functions in the same way as the noun used in the sentence structure SVC in English. That means it is the subject complement in the existential sentence.

Adverbial (A)

In existential sentences, there are often words or groups of words after the subject complement which function as adverbial. The adverbials are used to refer to the situation, a particular time or place in which things denoted by subject complement nouns exist. For example:

[8] a. ***There is no milk in the fridge.***
(Where?)

b. ***There are twenty members online now.*** (When?)

As has been discussed above, syntactically the existential sentence in English is featured by the structure: SVC(A).

5.3. Semantic features

As the name indicates, the existential sentence denotes the existence of something or somebody at a specific point

of time or place. In other words, the subject of the sentence refers to something, one or more objects, in existence, which is named by the noun after the verb *be*, the subject complement. In many cases, the meaning of the existential sentence is incomplete if after the subject complement there are no words which denote the situation in which the objects exist, as in the sentence [9a] below. However, when the situation is clear, no more words are needed to express it after the subject complement, as in the sentence [9b].

[9] a. ***There's a man at the door / *There's a man.***

b. ***There's no news.***

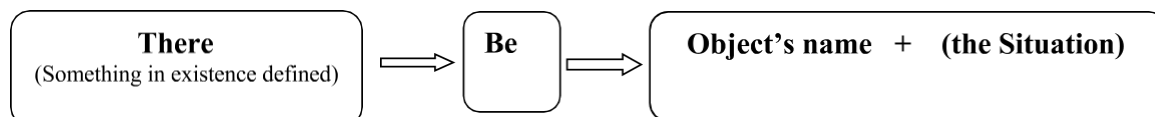
In comparison, in English declarative sentences with the structure SVC, the subject which can be a pronoun, personal or demonstrative, is the topic, referring to something or somebody and the noun after the verb *be* denotes what something or somebody is. However, in contrast to the sentences of this type, the subject pronoun of the existential sentence refers to something or somebody existing in a specific situation. The situation is often expressed by the words or groups of words denoting place or time, where or when the thing or the person is present. The difference between the subject of the declarative and existential sentence can be made in the two following sentences:

[10] a. ***What is this? It's a book.***
(Declarative)

b. ***What is there on the table? There's a book (on the table) / * It's a book / *A book is.*** (Existential)

In the view as has been discussed above, it could be roughly said that the existential

sentence in English has three parts: Subject *There*, the defined, which denotes something in existence or non-existence, Verb predicate *be* which grammatically connects the subject with the subject complement. The third part, the definer, consists of the subject complement noun which names the object *there* refers to,



VI. Discussion

6.1. Word order of the English existential sentence.

We assume that the existential sentence in English is structured with SVC(A). The word *there* in the structure is not the adverb of place standing in initial position for emphasis. The reason is that inversion with the adverb of place, as a rule, follows the order (AVS), for example: ***In front of the museum is a statue.*** However, in the existential sentence: *There is a statue in front of the museum*, the adverbial of place is the prepositional phrase after the subject complement noun, and in order for the the adverbial to be emphasized, it could be shifted to the beginning of the sentence before the subject: ***In front of the museum there is a statue.*** In addition, if *there* is considered to be the adverb of place, standing in initial position for emphasis, then in some sentences when the communicative situation is implied, the referential meaning of *there* is not easily perceived, for example: ***There's no news*** or ***There is no need to hurry.*** What is more, if *there* is used for emphasis, then *there* should be stressed /'ðer/; however, in the existential sentence *there* is a pronoun, pronounced as /ðə(r), according to the rule that pronouns in the sentence are not content words; *there* is not not stressed. In

and the adverbial indicating the situation where or when the object exists. The adverbial could be implied in the sentence when the situation is clear in communication. To sum up, the semantic structure of the English existential sentence could be represented in the following diagram:

short, the English existential sentence has normal word order: SVC.

6.2. *There* as a pronoun

As has been discussed above, in reference to the English existential sentence with the structure *there-be*, so far many authors have not paid much attention to the word *there*, considering *there* to be minor, have only form, but no meaning. We assume that, in terms of word category, *there* is featured in many aspects as a pronoun. Firstly, like other pronouns in English, *there* does not change its form in the sentence. Usually, in the interrogative sentences with a personal pronoun as the subject, the pronoun is repeated in the answer, this also happens to *there*. Examples are:

[11] a. Do **they** know English? - Yes, **they** do.

b. Is **there** any water in the tank? - Yes, **there** is some.

Secondly, in declarative sentences, personal or demonstrative pronouns stand in initial position, being the subject, *there* also occupies the same position, being the subject in the existential sentence. We can compare the two sentences:

[12] a. **These** are my children.
(Demonstrative pronoun)

b. **There** are two men in the room.
(Existential *there*)

Thirdly, in answers to Yes/No questions, and in tag questions with the verb *be*, pronouns, not nouns, are used, the word *there* is also used in the same way:

[13] a. *Does Nam know English?* -
Yes, he does (Yes/No question)

b. *There are two men in the room,*
*aren't **there**/*they?* (Question tag)

Semantically, as has been discussed in the section about English pronouns (Sec. 2), pronouns stand for nouns, have denotational meaning, referring to objects or ideas. Similarly, in the existential sentence, the word *there* stands at the beginning, referring to one or more objects which exist in a particular situation. Existential sentences in English could be compared with identification sentences which have the same parts: SVC as in the following examples:

[14] a. **This** is a book / b. **Those** are books. (Identification)

c. **There** is a book on the table
/ d. **There** are two books on the table.
(Existence)

In the two pairs of sentences above, the first [14a,b] are used to identify the objects with the demonstrative pronouns in the singular or plural, corresponding to one or more things in a near or far position from the speaker respectively. In the second pair, the subject with the pronoun *there*, has both singular referring to one object [14c] and plural meaning referring to many objects of the same kind [14d] which co-exist in a particular place.

Like other personal and demonstrative pronouns functioning as

object, apart from the role of subject in the sentence, *there* can function as object, too:

[15] a. *I want **him** to do the job.*
(Personal pronoun)

b. *I would not **wish there to be** more cold weather.* (Existential *there*)

As with other pronouns, *there* can also be the complement after the preposition:

[16] a. *I'm afraid of **him**.* (Personal pronoun)

b. *Just the idea of **there** being a gun near me is unnerving.*

6.3 The singular and plural meaning of the word *there* in the existential sentence

Before discussing the meaning of number of the word *there*, we could take into account some of the following situations. In the first case, we could think of a situation when the English ask the question: *Who is at the door?* It is certain that they mean one person at the door and if the question is *Who are talking inside?* they mean more than one person. This is also the same with the word *What* as the subject in the question. One example is that, because of some reason a person does not know what is in a box, he or she can ask the question *What is inside the box?*, in this case the word *What* refers to one object, and if the person thinks there are more than one, the question may be: *What are inside?*. In other words, in English there are some pronouns that have only one form but with both singular and plural meaning. It could be concluded that the number meaning of most English pronouns is realized by different words, such as: *I, this, she...*(singular), *we, they,*

these... (plural); however, some pronouns have only one form but they have both singular and plural meaning, such as: *what, who, you, there*, etc.

In addition to pronouns as has been discussed, in English there are also some nouns which have only one form but have both singular and plural meaning. Some nouns have plural form: *series, means, ...* but they can be used with singular meaning; some have singular form but could be used with plural meaning: *data, committee, group, people...* When words of these types are used as subject of the sentence, their number meaning depends on the word users and dictates the form of the verb predicate. For example:

[17] a. *This / **These** means of transport is / **are** popular in Vietnam.*

b. *The committee **has** / **have** decided to close the restaurant.*

Based on the examples above, we can see that in English sentences the singular or plural meanings of nouns or pronouns are not always represented by word forms. Their number meaning depends on the speaker or writer in communication.

As for the number meaning of the word *there* in the existential sentence, we could consider the two examples below:

[18] a. ***There** is **no water** in the tank.*

b. ***There** are **two cups** on the table.*

In the sentence [18a], *there*, the subject, denotes the non-existence of something in the container, the noun after the verb *be* names it (water). In the second sentence [18b] *there* refers to the two objects on the table; the noun after the verb *be* gives the name of the object (cup).

Therefore, *there* in the English existential sentence has both singular and plural meaning, denoting one or more things; the nouns after the verb *be* give names to the things referred to.

So far, we have found that the number meaning of the word *there* is decided by the speaker or writer, the noun after the verb *be* is the reflection, defining the word *there* in terms of name and number of the thing *there* refers to. In other words, the verb *be* depends on *there*, not on the noun after it. This helps to explain the fact that in some cases, for example, in speech the verb *be* could be in the singular, the subject complement noun could be in the plural or could be a noun in combination with other nouns. Below are some examples:

[19] a. *There's **so many things** to do.*

b. *There's **only two days** left.*

c. ***There's** a book, a pen, **and three rulers** on the table.*

In the first sentence [19a] the speaker refers to a lot of work, in the second [19b] to a length of time, and in the third sentence [19c] to being together with, not in addition to other objects. In these sentences the subject pronoun *There* refers to a mass of things, not to separate pieces [19a] or units [19b, c].

6.4. *The noun after the verb be*

In English, SVC sentences with NP + V + NP are usually used to identify or define things. In this structure, the noun after *be* relates to and identifies the subject (S) and the verb predicate *be* is a linking verb. For example:

[20] a. *This is **a book**.* (Pronoun subject)

b. *Mai and Phong are both students.*
(Noun subject)

In sentences of this type the noun after the verb *be* defines the subject and has the same number meaning with the subject noun or pronoun. However, in English there are some cases the subject could be a noun in the singular but with plural meaning; in these cases the subject noun dictates the verb *be* and the subject complement noun in form and meaning. This could be illustrated in the examples below:

[21] a. *My family is a happy family.*
(Singular in form and meaning)

b. *My family are all workers.*
(Singular in form but plural in meaning)

in the first sentence above [21a], the verb *be* is conjugated in the simple present tense in the singular since the subject noun *family* denotes the family as a whole, a group of people. In contrast, in the second sentence [21b], the noun *family* focuses on the members in the family as its constituents, so the verb *be* is in the plural. In other words, the noun after *be* is semantically or grammatically related to the subject noun, not to the verb *be*. This is also obvious as in the following case when the personal pronoun *I* cannot be used in the subjective case:

[22] A. *Who is there who could help?*
- B. *There is always me / * I, I suppose*
(Huddleston & Pullum:462)

Apart from that, according to grammar rules, the subject must stand before the verb predicate in declarative sentences and in short answers, stands after *be* or auxiliary verbs in Yes/No questions and question tags in tag questions, this

does not happens to the noun in English existential sentences:

[23] a. *Is there any water in the tank? Yes, there is / * Yes, it is*

b. *There are two men in the room, aren't there/*they?*

What is more, it has ever been assumed that because *there* is a formal or dummy subject with no meaning, existential sentences are advised not to be used, especially in formal writing; instead, sentences with normal word order SV should be a better choice (Maclin, 1992, p.37). However, in many cases when the situation in communication is clear, not expressed into words, the transfer from the *there-be* sentence into the SV sentence is not so easy. For example:

[24] a. *There are two cars in the car park* (Improved: *Two cars are in the car park*)

b. *There is another way of doing this*
(Improved: **Another way of doing this is*)

Based on the above cases, it could be concluded that in the sentence structure *there-be* the noun or noun phrase is the subject complement which gives denotational and number meaning of the subject noun.

6.5. Teaching and learning English existential sentences

There have been many different ways of teaching existential sentences in English so far. However, before discussing the methods of teaching this type of sentence, there should be a brief review on the similarities and differences between the sentences with demonstrative pronouns: *this/that-be* and those with

there-be. The reason is that these two sentence structures have something in common; they are basic structures which language learning beginners should learn in their first lessons.

In terms of semantics and syntax, these two types of sentence have something in common; they are used to identify things and follow the structure SVC (Pronoun + Be + Noun). However, their way of identifying things is different. The *this/that-be* sentence is used to identify the identity, the noun after *be* naming the thing it denotes whereas the *there-be* sentence identifies the existence of the thing the noun after *be* refers to. In addition, the basic difference between them lies in the way they are structured. Firstly, while the subjects of *this/that-be* sentences are realized by demonstrative pronouns, the deictic words: *this/that* (singular) or *these/those* (plural), the subject of the existential sentence *there* has only one form with both singular and plural meaning, with no difference between being near or away from the speaker. Another difference is that in the existential sentence after the subject complement noun comes a word or a group of words denoting the situation, when or where the things exist. This cannot be seen in the structure of the other type of sentence. The following are two examples:

[25] a. **This/That is a book**/* a book on the table.

b. **There is a book on the table** / *There is a book.

Even though these two types of sentences have some linguistic and communicative differences as has been discussed above, we assume that in language teaching they are closely related

in methods of teaching them. The reason is that when teaching how to identify whether an object is near or away from the speaker, by using the Direct Method the teacher can use real objects or objects in pictures to instruct his or her learners to build sentences by combining the deictic expression *this is...* or *that is...* with singular nouns, according to the near or far distance between the object and the speaker, for example: *This is a pen*, *That is a doll*. With nouns in the plural, in the same way the teacher can instruct his or her learners to combine *These are* or *Those are* with plural nouns denoting objects: *These are pens* or *Those are dolls*. Similarly, before teaching the existential sentence with *there-be* the teacher firstly should introduce its use to the learners by showing some examples, explaining that this expression is used to identify things which exist at a particular time or in a particular place. Then, by using the Direct Method, and based on their ability to use singular or plural nouns with the verb *be* in demonstrative pronouns the learners have learned before, in making existential sentences learners can know how to use singular or plural nouns followed by words or groups of words indicating a time or a place with *there is* or *there are* respectively. In this way the teacher can help his or her learners to distinguish between the identification sentence with deictic expressions and the existential sentence with *there-be*. As a result, the learners can say *This is a book* rather than **This is a book on the table*, or they can say *There is a book on the table*, but not **There is a book* only.

To sum up, the structure *there-be* should be taught in the form of two **set expressions**: In the first expression, *there is* combines with nouns in the singular and

in the second *There are* combines with nouns in the plural. In both expressions, the subject complement nouns after the verb *be* are often followed by words or groups of words denoting the place and time of existence. By doing in this way, together with teaching aids, when making existential sentences in English learners can combine words in the linear way from left to right (*There is/ are +...*), but not the other way round. In practice activities, teachers do not need to point out what the subject of the sentence is or explain why singular or plural nouns are used with *There is* or *there are*. Later on, when the learners have learned more English they will be able to understand and explain that in English there are some nouns or pronouns which have one word form but have both singular and plural meaning; the word *there* in the existential sentence is one of them; its number meaning depends on the word users. In English existential sentences, *There is* or *There are* stands at the beginning to inform the topic, the *defined*; the rest of the sentence after the verb *be* gives the information about the topic, the *definer*. Once the English learners have been able to understand the syntactic and semantic features of every part of the sentence, they will understand why in existential sentences in English the verb *be* has two word forms, singular and plural, whereas the subject word *There* has only one.

VII. Conclusion

Language reflects human thinking. The structure *there-be* is used in English sentences to refer to the existence of one or more objects in a particular communicative situation. If the *there-be* sentence is said to have a special word order, the subject stands after, not

before the verb *be* as usual, we assume that the English existential sentence has normal word order SVC(A) and that in this sentence structure the word *there* is a pronoun and is the subject, referring to the existence of objects (so-called *existential pronoun* or *existential 'there'*). Its singular or plural meaning depends on how many things the speaker or writer wishes to define in existence in communication.

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