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## DEFINITENESS AND THE ENGLISH EXISTENTIAL

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Numerous attempts have been made to place restrictions on the occurrence of formally definite NPs in English existential *there*-sentences. The wide range of definite NPs found in this construction, however, precludes any (noncircular) characterization of such a DEFINITENESS EFFECT based on linguistic form alone. Nonetheless, previous functional analyses of definites in *there*-sentences have also failed to account for all of the problematic data in a unified way. We present an account of existential *there*-sentences in which the postverbal NP is required to represent a HEARER-NEW entity; based on a large corpus of naturally occurring data, we identify five types of formally definite yet hearer-new NPs that may felicitously occur in *there*-sentences. The alleged restriction against definite NPs in *there*-sentences is shown to be the result of a mismatch between the cognitive status to which definiteness is sensitive and that to which the postverbal position in *there*-sentences is sensitive.\*

**1. INTRODUCTION.** Few syntactic constructions in English have received more attention in the past decade or so than the so-called existential *there*-sentence. This sentence type has intrigued researchers in syntax, semantics, and pragmatics alike due to the interesting restriction on the kinds of NPs that can appear in postverbal position. As is well known, certain *there*-sentences with definite NPs in this position are either infelicitous, anomalous, or ungrammatical, depending on whether one takes the restriction to be pragmatic, semantic, or syntactic, respectively. Consider, for example, the postverbal NP in 1a:

- (1) Have you see the dog or the cat around?
  - a. Not lately. #There's the dog running loose somewhere in the neighborhood.
  - b. Not lately. The dog is running loose somewhere in the neighborhood.

In 1a, the existential with the definite postverbal NP *the dog* is ill formed; note that this ill-formedness is not due to the definiteness of the NP alone, as shown by the acceptability of 1b. What is at issue, of course, is the source of the restriction, i.e. what makes the existential in 1a bad.

It has long been claimed that *there*-sentences disallow a lexically definite postverbal NP; this restriction has come to be known as the DEFINITENESS RESTRICTION OR DEFINITENESS EFFECT (Milsark 1974, 1977; Jenkins 1975; Guéron 1980; Reuland 1985; Safir 1985; Szabolcsi 1986; Reuland & ter Meulen 1987; Belletti 1988; Larson 1988; Lasnik 1992; Freeze 1992; inter alia). How-

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ever, it has been observed by many others that this restriction is far from absolute (Erdmann 1976; Rando & Napoli 1978; Ziv 1982; Woisetschlaeger 1983; Penhallurick 1984; Holmback 1984; Hannay 1985; Lakoff 1987; Lumsden 1988; Prince 1988, 1992; McNally 1992; Abbott 1992, 1993). Indeed, the wide range of definite postverbal NPs that occur in *there*-sentences and the sensitivity of those NPs to contextual constraints argue for a pragmatic account of the phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> As with previous functional accounts, we take the alleged restriction against definite postverbal NPs in *there*-sentences to be epiphenomenal, the result of an imperfect correlation between the cognitive status to which definiteness in general is sensitive and that to which the referent of the postverbal NP of a *there*-sentence is sensitive. However, we will show that previous functional analyses are unsatisfactory in that they fail to account for the full range of felicitous postverbal NPs. We will present the results of a corpus-based study of the contexts in which definites may appear in postverbal position in *there*-sentences, and show that a single discourse-based principle can account for the distribution of definites in this construction.<sup>2</sup>

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES. As Prince (1992) notes, much confusion surrounds the use of the term DEFINITE with regard to the so-called definiteness restriction and *there*-sentences. At times, the term is taken to denote a formal property of determiners or NPs, but at other times (sometimes within the same study) it is taken to denote a conceptual category for discourse entities (cf. Bolinger's (1977) distinction between SEMANTIC DEFINITENESS and GRAMMATICAL DEFINITENESS). What is certain is that the class of formally defined definite NPs—i.e. proper names, personal pronouns, and NPs headed by definite or possessive determiners (e.g. *the, this, those, our, her*) or certain quantifiers (e.g. *all, every*)—is NOT categorically excluded from postverbal position in *there*-sentences. While numerous attempts have been made to place formal restrictions on the appearance of definite postverbal NPs in *there*-sentences, equally numerous have been the attempts to account for the extensive counterexamples to those restrictions. Such accounts typically take definiteness to be a cognitive category rather than a formal one, formulating the restrictions on *there*-sentences in terms of the information status of the discourse entity to which a

<sup>1</sup> Thus, we take issue with Safir's claim that 'it is only through the mediation of formal syntactic properties, particularly syntactic chains and the theory of indexing, that the distribution of the definiteness effect can be predicted in an explanatory way' (1985:171).

<sup>2</sup> The corpus used in this study consists of over 1.3 million words of transcribed oral data drawn from the transcripts of The Presidential Commission on the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident. While examples in this paper are drawn from a variety of other sources, the study proper was limited to the approximately 100 *there*-sentences with definite postverbal NPs appearing in this corpus. Moreover, we will be restricting our discussion to so-called existential *there*, i.e. *there*-sentences with BE as the matrix verb, for two reasons. First, our corpus contained very few instances of so-called presentational *there* (i.e. a *there*-sentence with a main verb other than BE), and none containing a definite postverbal NP. No doubt this reflects the fact that our corpus represents exclusively spontaneous, oral data, and the restriction of presentational *there* to formal or planned registers is well known. Second, as argued in Ward & Birner 1995, presentational *there*-sentences, while also allowing definite postverbal NPs, are subject to a rather different pragmatic constraint.

particular NP is used to refer, rather than in terms of the NP itself. Thus, the infelicity of examples like 1a above is said to result from the general incompatibility of placing given information in a position reserved for new information. That is, the use of a definite NP is said to require that its referent be known, given, or inferrable in context, and this information status is incompatible with a pragmatic condition on *there*-sentences that the postverbal NP represent an unfamiliar, or new, discourse entity. Previous studies, however, differ in their characterization of what it means for an entity to be new.

For example, Rando and Napoli (1978) argue that the correct restriction on *there*-sentences is not that the postverbal NP must not be formally definite, but rather that it must be NONANAPHORIC. For Rando and Napoli, anaphoricity is defined in terms of what is familiar to both speaker and hearer (Kuno 1972). Under this view, then, postverbal NPs in *there*-sentences must represent unfamiliar entities. One type of apparent counterexample discussed by Rando and Napoli themselves is the so-called LIST SENTENCE, illustrated in 2:

- (2) Q. What's worth visiting here?  
 A. There's the park, a very nice restaurant, and the library. [= Rando & Napoli 1978, ex. 4]

To account for the well-formedness of such (formally definite) postverbal NPs in *there*-sentences, Rando and Napoli argue that in these cases the requirement of nonanaphoricity applies to the list itself and not to the individual items on it. While they may be formally definite, postverbal NPs in list *there*-sentences are part of a SEMANTICALLY INDEFINITE (and therefore nonanaphoric) list and thus satisfy Rando and Napoli's condition.

However, as Abbott (1992), *inter alia*, notes, anaphoric NPs may also be fully felicitous in nonlist *there*-sentences; an examination of our corpus bears this out. Consider the examples in 3.

- (3) a. A: Don't forget that Kim will be bringing a salad.  
 B: Oh right—there is that. [= Abbott 1992, ex. 15]  
 b. Ms. Trapnell: Was there any discussion in figuring out what was going to be put on this chart, was there any discussion about creating the chart in such a way that it continued to reflect the concerns?  
 Mr. Russell: You have to realize that I wasn't in there for the full time of this chart preparation. In reading the chart, there were still some concerns there and some admissions, and I do recall discussions that, yes, we do expect more blow-by. But the system, the O-ring sealing system in the joint should still work. *But yeah, there were the reservations which are reflected on the chart here that, yeah, we're definitely not going in a better direction.* I think that was realized, and I can't remember if that was stated exactly that way or not, but I got the impression that that was realized.  
 [Challenger Commission transcripts, 3/19/86]

In 3a, *that* is clearly anaphoric, and in 3b, *the reservations* is readily interpretable as anaphoric to the preceding discussion of concerns—and in neither case does a list seem to be involved.

Abbott (1992, 1993) argues against Rando & Napoli's treatment of lists as a special class of exceptions to the definiteness restriction. Instead, she argues that such sentences are CONTEXTUALIZED EXISTENTIALS, requiring only an appropriate licensing context for their felicity, but not constituting a formally or functionally distinct subclass. Particularly relevant is Abbott's discussion of examples such as 4.

(4) A: I guess we've called everybody.

B: No, there's still Mary and John. [= Abbott 1993, ex. 5]

With respect to this discourse, Abbott says 'the utterer [B in ex. 4] does not seem to be asserting the existence of a list with Mary and John on it, but rather simply drawing the addressee's attention to the existence of Mary and John as filling the predicational slot "people for us to call"' (1993:43). Instead, Abbott argues for a unified account of both list and nonlist *there*-sentences under which the function of all *there*-sentences is 'to draw the addressee's attention to the existence and/or location of the entity or entities denoted by the focus [postverbal] NP' (1993:41). Moreover, Abbott observes, it will generally be anomalous to assert the existence of an entity presumed to be familiar to the addressee. However, if the existence of this entity is pointed out as a response to a request for entities of a certain type or a request for entities to fulfill a certain role, then, according to Abbott, asserting the existence of such an entity will not be anomalous. Consider her analysis of 5, adapted from Lumsden 1988.

(5) A: What could I give my sister for her birthday?

B: There's John's book on birdwatching.

For Abbott, 'use of the anaphoric definite implies the speaker is assuming the addressee is familiar with the referent' (1992:10). Thus, in a context where one has been asked to supply an entity to fill a certain role, as in 5, use of a contextualized existential 'becomes a polite way to suggest that [familiar] entity as suitable for the purposes at hand' (1992:10), that is, a sort of gentle suggestion. However, there are other felicitous cases of postverbal NPs representing seemingly familiar entities which do not seem to be filling such a role:

(6) The worst one that existed was 10 thousandths on the single O-ring on the Titan, and there are 20 of the five-segment. That was the earliest version. There were four of the seven-segment, which never went into production, but was just a development; and then two five-and-a-half segments, which was a way of getting a little additional performance. And I believe every one of them flying now is the five-and-a-half-segment device. And there is not any evidence, but *there was this 10 thousandths*. [Challenger Commission transcripts, 2/10/86]

Nonetheless, Abbott's basic insight about the conditions under which definite postverbal NPs may felicitously appear in *there*-sentences can, as we will see, be extended to accommodate a much broader range of data.

Holmback (1984) bases her analysis of definites in *there*-sentences on Hawkins's (1978) theory of definiteness. Hawkins (1978, 1991) argues that definite descriptions require INCLUSIVE REFERENCE, that is, reference to the totality of objects satisfying the definite description relative to some pragmatically defined

set. Under this view, entities need not be familiar or known for successful definite reference, merely UNIQUELY IDENTIFIABLE (Gundel et al. 1990, 1993; cf. Abbott 1993).<sup>3</sup> Thus, for Holmback, the definiteness effect for *there*-sentences is simply the consequence of the general incompatibility between the presentational meaning of a *there*-sentence and an inclusiveness condition on definite descriptions which she states as follows: '[T]he description must be such that it can be seen to refer inclusively independent of the immediate context in order for an existential [*there*-sentence] to have a definite description as [postverbal NP]' (1984:209). To illustrate, consider the following examples:

- (7) a. There were both major political parties represented at the conference. [= Holmback 1984, ex. 35]  
 b. There is the village idiot at the front door. [= Holmback 1984, ex. 49b]

In each case the definite description contains enough information for a hearer to uniquely identify the intended referent even on first mention, thus satisfying the inclusiveness condition on definite reference.

While we agree with Holmback's general characterization of definiteness as marking referents that are uniquely identifiable (see also Gundel et al. 1990, 1993; Birner & Ward 1994), we take issue with her claim that *there*-sentences have a presentational meaning. Consider the following examples of definites in *there*-sentences that are clearly not presentational.

- (8) a. There was that deaf comedienne I was telling you about on TV today.  
 b. I'd love to get away from my job, the kids, the bills... I've thought of chucking it all and going to Hawaii. *But there are the kids to consider.*  
 c. Like voters everywhere, Montanans are in a resentful mood, and Marlenee is adept at exploiting that resentment. ... To add to his troubles, Williams used to be chairman of the subcommittee overseeing grants to the National Endowment for the Arts, and he firmly defended the agency against charges that it funded 'obscene' art works.

That's what won him the support of Keillor, who said, 'It's a measure of the man when he's courageous when it's not absolutely required of him.'

But it has inspired the opposition of national conservatives, including Pat Robertson, who referred to Williams as 'Pornography Pat.'

*Then there is that resentment.* [Chicago Tribune, 9/4/92]

<sup>3</sup> The term UNIQUELY IDENTIFIABLE is somewhat misleading in that it suggests that a hearer must be able to actually identify the object in the world. In fact, all that is required for felicitous definite reference is that the (speaker believe that the) hearer be able to INDIVIDUATE the referent in question from all others within the discourse model. For example, if the speaker utters the NP *the man sitting next to me on the train*, all that is required is that the hearer be able to individuate this man from all other entities in the hearer's discourse model. Whether or not the hearer would be able to identify this man on the street, for example, is irrelevant. Thus, a more accurate statement of the condition would be to say that the entity in question is individuable within the discourse model. However, to avoid confusion, we shall continue to use the more conventional term.

In none of these examples of felicitous definites in *there*-sentences is the relevant discourse entity being introduced into the discourse; hence Holmback's claim cannot be maintained as it stands.

Hannay (1985) discusses a number of types of definite NPs that occur in *there*-sentences and provides a different kind of pragmatic condition to account for them, which he calls the TOPIC RESTRICTION: 'It is inappropriate to assert the existence of a state of affairs if the Subject term of the predication which designates that state of affairs is also the Topic, i.e. what the predication is about in the given setting' (1985:130). A postverbal NP of a *there*-sentence that asserts the existence of a state of affairs may be definite, then, just in case it does not represent the sentence topic.

Hannay's proposed restriction applies only to definites, however. As Davison (1984) and others observe, indefinite NPs are possible sentence topics just in case they are specific. Thus, consider the specific indefinite postverbal NP in 9.

(9) Hey, look! There's a huge raccoon asleep under my car!

Here, *a huge raccoon* is presumably the subject term of the relevant predication and is, at least intuitively, the sentence topic. Thus, Hannay's account does not extend to indefinite NPs.

Furthermore, it is not the case that definite topic NPs are categorically excluded from *there*-sentences; consider 10.

(10) I think there was one flight where we had one problem. It wasn't ours, but *there was that one flight*. Other than that, I believe the answer to the remaining flights is yes. [Challenger Commission transcripts, 4/2/86]

Although the determination of sentence topics is notoriously difficult (see Ward 1988 for discussion), it seems intuitively clear that the postverbal NP of the *there*-sentence in 10 constitutes the sentence topic. Indeed, it passes Gundel's (1974) classic 'what about x' test.

(11) A: What about that one flight you mentioned?

B: It wasn't ours, but there was that one flight.

Thus, we conclude that the NP *that one flight* in 10 represents the topic of its sentence and, contra Hannay 1985, may nonetheless felicitously appear in postverbal position.

Lumsden (1988), following Milsark 1974, argues for a distinction between STRONG and WEAK quantified expressions, with only the latter being permissible in *there*-sentences. Under Lumsden's analysis, the interpretation of strong quantified expressions 'is characterized by the expectation of the hearer that the set of objects over which quantification takes place is in some form already accessible to him' (1988:144). In other words, when the hearer expects the relevant object set to be accessible, then, according to Lumsden, the interpretation is strong and outside the province of *there*-sentences. In this way, Lumsden's restriction on *there*-sentences, unlike Milsark's, is a (hearer-based) interpretive one rather than a formal one.

There are, however, a number of problems with Lumsden's analysis as it stands. First, it is unclear what exactly Lumsden means by a set of objects being 'in some form already accessible'. As Prince (1981c, 1992) notes, there

are a variety of information statuses covering given and new information. Second, under Lumsden's view, *there*-sentences are unacceptable if the hearer expects the object in question to be accessible; however, since the speaker must assess his/her hearer's knowledge store, any condition on the use of *there*-sentences must be in terms of the speaker's beliefs about the hearer. Finally, and more importantly, Lumsden argues against approaching the definiteness effect (his QUANTIFICATION EFFECT) as a unitary phenomenon, and instead distinguishes between enumerative (list) and nonenumerative *there*-sentences. Like Abbott, we consider this distinction unmotivated, and in the next section we will propose a unified account of *there*-sentences based on a single pragmatic principle which we believe captures the intuition behind Lumsden's analysis.

3. THE INFORMATION STATUS OF DEFINITE POSTVERBAL NPs IN *there*-SENTENCES. As we have seen, a number of researchers have attempted to account for various categories of definite postverbal NPs that can appear in *there*-sentences, with little consensus about the nature of these categories. While the list reading is almost universally acknowledged as permitting definites, other types are either variously categorized or recognized by only a subset of the researchers.

Nonetheless, an examination of our corpus reveals that all existential *there*-sentences with definite postverbal NPs can be accounted for by a single pragmatic principle: that the postverbal NP of a *there*-sentence represents an entity that is not presumed by the speaker to constitute shared knowledge. That is, the speaker treats the postverbal NP in *there*-sentences as representing a HEARER-NEW entity (Prince 1992), where a hearer-new entity is one that the speaker does not assume to exist within the hearer's knowledge store.

Prince introduces the terms HEARER-OLD/HEARER-NEW and DISCOURSE-OLD/DISCOURSE-NEW in order to distinguish two information statuses that have often been conflated in the literature: that of having been previously evoked within the discourse (i.e., old with respect to the discourse, or discourse-old), and that of being (believed by the speaker to be) previously known to the hearer (i.e., old with respect to the hearer's beliefs, or hearer-old). Information may be known to the hearer by virtue of having been evoked in the current discourse, in which case it is both hearer-old and discourse-old, or it may have become known to the hearer independently of the current discourse. For this reason, the two are distinct; that is, a speaker may very well believe that some entity is known to the hearer (i.e., hearer-old) despite its not having been evoked in the current discourse (i.e., discourse-old). For example, *the moon* and *the White House* mentioned discourse-initially to an American adult may be assumed to be hearer-old despite being discourse-new.

Thus, for an entity to be hearer-old entails that the speaker believe or assume it to be present within the hearer's knowledge store, while for an entity to be hearer-new entails that it not be assumed to be present within the hearer's knowledge store.<sup>4</sup> As we will show, however, it is possible for an entity to be

<sup>4</sup> We follow Birner 1994 in taking those entities that are inferrable (Prince 1981c) to be discourse-old, and therefore necessarily hearer-old; however, the validity of our analysis does not depend on this.

treated by the speaker as being hearer-old in one respect yet hearer-new in another. Moreover, we will show that an entity's status as hearer-old or hearer-new is independent of whether it is taken to be uniquely identifiable (and thus capable of being felicitously realized by a definite NP). We will discuss a number of circumstances in which an entity may be both hearer-new and uniquely identifiable, supporting our claim that definiteness and postverbal position in *there*-sentences are subject to distinct discourse constraints.

As Prince observes, a definite postverbal NP is permitted in a *there*-sentence just in case it represents an entity that the speaker believes is not already known to the hearer. Examples of such hearer-new, formally definite NPs are found in 12.

- (12) a. There were the same people at both conferences. [= Prince 1992, ex. 5a]  
 b. There was the usual crowd at the beach. [= Prince 1992, ex. 5b]  
 c. There was the stupidest article on the reading list. [= Prince 1992, ex. 5c]

Thus, although the postverbal NPs in 12a–c are all formally definite, Prince notes that in all cases the entities they represent are assumed to be new to the hearer.<sup>5</sup>

Our analysis of the English existential is based on a corpus of 100 naturally occurring existential *there*-sentences with definite postverbal NPs. We found that, indeed, the postverbal NP of an existential *there*-sentence consistently represents a hearer-new discourse entity. However, in certain circumstances this entity may nonetheless be uniquely identifiable and therefore realized by a definite.

Moreover, an examination of the corpus not only provides conclusive evidence against the notion of a definiteness effect, but also helps to clarify the pragmatic constraints on both definiteness and existentials. Specifically, we have identified five distinct cases in which formally definite yet hearer-new NPs may felicitously occur in *there*-sentences. In each case, the definiteness of the NP was found to be licensed by the unique identifiability of the referent, while the *there*-construction is licensed by the hearer-new status of the referent.<sup>6</sup> These five classes of definite postverbal NP, categorized by the relation-

<sup>5</sup> McNally (1992) basically accepts Prince's novelty condition for most types of definite NPs, but argues that necessarily quantificational NPs are categorically excluded from postverbal position. Consider, however, the following examples:

- (i) a. I think that's probably still a NASA job because of the number of contractors involved.  
*In firing room two, there's every contractor we've got, just about, over there.* [Challenger Commission transcripts, 3/4/86]  
 b. There were both cars in the driveway when the burglar entered the house.  
 c. Although the Hatfields and the McCoys had not gotten along for years, there were both families at the wedding.

In each of these examples, the postverbal NP is necessarily quantificational, yet nonetheless represents a hearer-new entity. In addition, McNally argues that the novelty condition may be blocked for bare NPs in list contexts; however, we will argue below that such contexts are not exceptional and can be straightforwardly handled by our unified account.

<sup>6</sup> The only exceptions would be what we are calling FALSE DEFINITES, that is, those formally definite NPs whose referents are not uniquely identifiable (see §3.5). Nonetheless, when appearing

ship between the referent of the postverbal NP and its context, are listed in 13.

- (13) I Hearer-old entities treated as hearer-new  
 II Hearer-new tokens of hearer-old types  
 III Hearer-old entities newly instantiating a variable  
 IV Hearer-new entities with uniquely identifying descriptions  
 V False definites

Although we are not suggesting that these classes are theoretically significant per se, they nonetheless serve to illustrate the variety of ways in which a definite NP may represent a hearer-new entity and thus satisfy the constraint on postverbal NPs in existentials. These five types will be discussed in turn.

**3.1. HEARER-OLD ENTITIES TREATED AS HEARER-NEW.** This category includes the REMINDER *there*-sentences noted by Bolinger (1977), Hannay (1985), Lakoff (1987), and Abbott (1993), as illustrated in 14.

- (14) a. Mr. Rummel: Well, didn't the designer of the orbiter, the manufacturer, develop maintenance requirements and documentation as part of the design obligation?

Mr. Collins: Yes, sir. And that is what we showed in the very first part, before the Pan Am study. *There were those other orbiter maintenance and requirement specifications*, which not only did processing of the vehicle, but in flow testing, pad testing, and what have you, but also accomplished or was in lieu of an inspection plan. [Challenger Commission transcripts, 3/31/86]

- b. Like voters everywhere, Montanans are in a resentful mood, and Marlenee is adept at exploiting that resentment. ... To add to his troubles, Williams used to be chairman of the subcommittee overseeing grants to the National Endowment for the Arts, and he firmly defended the agency against charges that it funded 'obscene' art works.

That's what won him the support of Keillor, who said, 'It's a measure of the man when he's courageous when it's not absolutely required of him.'

But it has inspired the opposition of national conservatives, including Pat Robertson, who referred to Williams as 'Pornography Pat.'

*Then there is that resentment.* [= 8c]

Although the entity represented by the postverbal NP in each of these examples has been previously evoked, there are sufficient grounds for the speaker to believe that the entity has been (at least momentarily) forgotten (see Hawkins 1978, Lakoff 1987). For this reason, the speaker is licensed to treat the referent as though it were hearer-new. The use of the definite in conjunction with the *there*-construction reflects the treatment of the referent as simultaneously

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as the postverbal NP of a *there*-sentence, false definites also represent hearer-new entities; see below.

hearer-new and uniquely identifiable. Indeed, it is precisely this mixed marking that leads the hearer to infer that the utterance is a reminder—that is, that despite the entity's apparent newness to the hearer, it nonetheless constitutes shared knowledge. Note that an indefinite in this context would misleadingly instruct the hearer to construct a brand-new discourse entity for what is in fact a previously evoked referent.

It is also interesting to note the use of demonstratives in the postverbal NPs in 14.<sup>7</sup> Although the *there*-sentence in each case would be equally felicitous with *the* replacing the demonstrative, the demonstrative conveys not only that the NP represents a uniquely identifiable entity in context, but also that this entity is assumed to be part of the interlocutors' private shared knowledge store, based on prior co-presence (Clark & Marshall 1981). Thus, compare the sentences in the following pairs.

- (15) a. Those neighbors have been circulating petitions.  
 b. The neighbors have been circulating petitions.  
 (16) a. That fence fell down yesterday.  
 b. The fence fell down yesterday.

The felicitous use of 15a requires that there be specific neighbors whose existence is known to constitute shared knowledge by the speaker and hearer (Gundel et al. 1990, 1993); for example, the speaker may have complained to the hearer about these neighbors before. In 15b, on the other hand, there need not have been prior discussion of the neighbors; the use of the NP will evoke the culturally inferrable neighbors one is plausibly assumed to have. Similarly, the use of 16a conveys that the fence under discussion is a specific one of which the speaker and hearer share knowledge via prior co-presence, while the fence referred to in 16b can be the generally inferrable fence that might plausibly surround one's home. Since it would be odd to remind a hearer that people have neighbors, *the neighbors* is infelicitous as the postverbal NP in this type of *there*-sentence, as shown in 17.

- (17) #There were the neighbors at the City Council meeting yesterday.

The demonstrative, on the other hand, is not thus constrained:

- (18) There were those neighbors at the City Council meeting yesterday.

Here *those neighbors* conveys a sense of reminder—saying, in effect, 'remember the ones I mean?' Thus, use of the demonstrative signals that the speaker believes the hearer is able to RECOGNIZE the entity in question, while use of the *there*-sentence signals that the hearer is not expected to RECALL it.

**3.2. HEARER-NEW TOKENS OF HEARER-OLD TYPES.** Examples in which the postverbal NP in a *there*-sentence represents a new instance of a known type are well attested in the literature (Jenkins 1975; Erdmann 1976; Ziv 1982; Hannay 1985; Lakoff 1987; Lumsden 1988; Prince 1988, 1992; Abbott 1993). These include postverbal NPs with adjectives indicating a type that is either known

<sup>7</sup> See Gundel et al. 1993 for a discussion of the felicity conditions on demonstrative *that* outside of *there*-sentences.

(e.g., *same, usual, regular, traditional, obligatory, expected*) or inferrable (e.g., *ideal, correct, perfect, necessary, required*), as in 19 and 20, respectively.

- (19) a. The Woody Allen-Mia Farrow breakup, and Woody's declaration of love for one of Mia's adopted daughters, seems to have everyone's attention. *There are the usual sleazy reasons for that, of course*—the visceral thrill of seeing the extremely private couple's dirt in the street, etc. [*San Francisco Chronicle*, 8/24/92]
- b. Mr. Lee: Aren't you contractually required to perform a hazard analysis? I thought that was in all of our contracts. Aren't you? Dr. Peller: Yes, we do perform a hazard analysis. It's very similar to what Rocketdyne has done because we've got the same guidelines put out by NASA, which go across the board. And unfortunately, by the way, without the instructions for what information you wish to hear today, they mention the FMEAs and the CIL and did not mention the hazard analysis. So the charts aren't physically in my presentation, but I could have them by tomorrow. Mr. Lee: I believe they are contractually required. *There is the same requirement placed on all our contractors to perform a hazard analysis, I believe.* [Challenger Commission transcripts, 4/3/86]
- (20) a. The real trouble is, of course, that there isn't the necessary intelligence. [Huxley, A. 1968. *Eyeless in Gaza*. New York: Penguin; cited in Erdmann 1976:276]
- b. There is the perfect man for Mary in my 210 class. [= Holmback 1984, ex. 25]

In each of the above examples, the postverbal NP has dual reference, both to a type and a token (Peirce 1931–58; see also Lyons 1977, Nunberg 1979). The definite is licensed by the identifiability of the (hearer-old) type, while the *there*-construction is licensed by the hearer-new status of the current instantiation of that type.<sup>8</sup> That is, we have here a case in which the postverbal NP has essentially two distinct referents simultaneously: the hearer-old type and the hearer-new token. Consider the *there*-sentence in 21:

- (21) There was the usual crowd at the beach today.

Notice that in 21, the group identified as 'the usual crowd' need not always

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, to the extent that identifiability is an integral part of the lexical meaning of the adjective, the use of an indefinite in conjunction with that adjective will be unacceptable.

- (i) a. The usual crowd was at the beach.  
 b. The same crowd was at the beach.  
 c. ?A usual crowd was at the beach.  
 d. ?A same crowd was at the beach.

*Obligatory* or *expected*, on the other hand, may be used with an indefinite to indicate that the referent of the NP is not uniquely identifiable, since identifiability is not inherent in the meaning of these terms.

- (ii) a. An obligatory meeting was held at the beach.  
 b. An expected crowd was at the beach.

In (iia), the obligatory nature of the meeting in question does not necessarily render its type uniquely identifiable; likewise for the expected crowd in (iib).

consist of exactly the same members; the phrase can also be used to refer to a group of people whose members at any given time may vary.<sup>9</sup> Consider 22:

- (22) There was the usual crowd at the beach today. They were there yesterday too.

Here, the postverbal NP cannot be said to refer only to the current instantiation of the crowd, since it is not just today's instantiation of 'the usual crowd' that is specified by *they*; 22 may be equally true if several members of today's beach crowd differed from yesterday's.

Nor can the phrase be said to refer only to the entire group. As illustrated in 23, the speaker can go on to describe other attributes that hold only of the current instantiation.

- (23) There was the usual crowd at the beach today. They were playing volleyball and eating pizza, and today for the first time they sat around a fire and roasted marshmallows.

Thus, the postverbal NP cannot be said to refer only to the type, since sitting around the fire and roasting marshmallows is not being predicated of the entire type, but only of today's instantiation. It might be argued that *the usual crowd* is in fact ambiguous between the type interpretation and the token interpretation, but this cannot be the case, since both readings may be applied to the same utterance simultaneously, as in 24.<sup>10</sup>

- (24) There was the usual crowd at the beach today. They were there yesterday too. Today for the first time they sat around a fire and roasted marshmallows.

Thus, *the usual crowd* has dual reference, both to a type and a token. The definite is licensed by the hearer-old—and thus uniquely identifiable—status of the type, while the *there*-construction is licensed by the hearer-new status of this particular instantiation of the type.<sup>11</sup>

Note that an explicit adjectival marker isn't necessary; the instantiation of a known type may be indicated instead by the use of a demonstrative, as in 25a and 26a.

<sup>9</sup> As Barbara Abbott points out (p.c.), there is an ambiguity associated with *usual*: 21 can mean either that the same general crowd was at the beach again today, or else it can mean that there was a crowd at the beach today, as usual. It is the first reading that concerns us here.

<sup>10</sup> A naturally occurring example of such dual reference in a non-*there*-sentence is provided in (i):

- (i) Fellow-linguists—I'm going to be running the traditional sessions to do problems in comparative reconstruction this term. Scheduling constraints are already pretty tight...  
[D. Ringe, electronic bulletin board posting]

Here, the NP *the traditional sessions* simultaneously specifies both a type and a token. The adjective *traditional* applies to the (hearer-old) type, while the predicate *going to be running* applies to the (hearer-new) instantiations of that type. As we would predict, this NP is felicitous in a *there*-sentence.

- (ii) There will be the traditional sessions to do problems in comparative reconstruction this term.

<sup>11</sup> Ziv (1982) discusses a similar type/token effect on definiteness in a related construction (*yeš*) in Colloquial Modern Hebrew.

- (25) a. And there was this problem with ALL of his analyses of *there*.<sup>12</sup>  
 b. And there was the same problem with ALL of his analyses of *there*.  
 (26) a. There was never that situation in America. [= Hannay 1985, ex. 32a]  
 b. There was never the same situation in America.

In these examples, the use of the demonstrative indicates the relationship of a specific hearer-new token to a previously evoked type (cf. Hannay 1985).

While the adjectives discussed above indicate the instantiation of a previously known type, adjectives such as *ideal*, *correct*, *perfect*, *necessary*, and *required* indicate the instantiation of an inferrable type. That is, in 27, for example, the actual amount of money needed to proceed with the project needn't be previously known; given a project, it is inferrable that some amount of funds will be necessary.

- (27) There weren't the funds necessary for the project. [= Abbott 1992, ex. 31a, adapted from Bolinger 1977, ex. 359]

It is this inferrable type that is familiar in the discourse. However, this particular instantiation of that inferrable type—i.e. the amount of money needed for this particular project—is hearer-new.

**3.3. HEARER-OLD ENTITIES NEWLY INSTANTIATING A VARIABLE.** The most frequently discussed exception to the definiteness restriction is what is typically referred to as the list reading, exemplified in 28.

- (28) And there's two components in [Division H], which is the operations division: the people that do the flight activity planning procedures work, provide for the crew activity planning and the time line support and integrated procedures development and overall flight data file management; *and then there is the payload support folks*, who provide for customer operations integration and support of their onboard interfaces. [Challenger Commission transcripts, 4/8/86]

Here the individuals listed are uniquely identifiable; however, their membership in the set being enumerated is new to the hearer (cf. Rando & Napoli 1978). That is, the individuals constitute hearer-new instantiations of the variable in some salient OPEN PROPOSITION. An open proposition represents PRESUPPOSED or BACKGROUNDED information, and is obtained by replacing the constituent bearing nuclear accent with a variable in the semantic representation of the sentence (cf. Wilson & Sperber 1979). The element that instantiates the variable of the open proposition constitutes the new information, or FOCUS, of the utterance (for details see Prince 1981b, 1986; Ward 1988). In 28 above, *there's two components in Division H* evokes a proposition of the form:

- (29) X is a component in Division H.

Here, X is a variable, one instantiation of which is represented by the postverbal NP *the payload support folks*. This uniquely identifiable entity is hearer-new with respect to its role as a component in Division H. If, as has often been

<sup>12</sup> The demonstrative *this* in 25a is to be distinguished from the use of *this* as a false definite; see below.

claimed, *there*-sentences are existential in force, one could say that the open proposition (OP) sets up a narrower context into which the entity is to be introduced as new; in 28 it is the context of Division H components. Thus, the entity is hearer-new, but (perhaps) only within the context established by the salient OP (cf. Hannay 1985, Abbott 1992). Without such an OP being salient, a list *there*-sentence with a uniquely identifiable postverbal NP, as in 30a, is infelicitous.

- (30) a. What a great time I had last night! #There was/were John, Mary, Fred, Susan, Hilda, Xavier, and Ethel at this party I went to. We danced for hours. [cf. John, Mary, Fred, Susan, Hilda, Xavier, and Ethel were at this party I went to.]  
 b. A: Who was at the party last night?  
 B: There was John, Mary, Fred, Susan, Hilda, Xavier, and Ethel.

The infelicity of 30a indicates that it is not the enumerative nature of the postverbal NP that renders it felicitous in a *there*-sentence, but rather its status as representing the instantiation of a variable in an OP. Note that in the presence of the relevant OP, as in 30b, use of the *there*-sentence is fully felicitous. In fact, the postverbal NP needn't be a list at all, as long as it instantiates a variable in a salient OP, as illustrated by the examples in 31.

- (31) a. A: It's been a rotten month. John's arm has been in a cast since last week's stupid accident, and now we've cancelled that ski trip we've been planning for months.  
 B: Why aren't you going?  
 A: We wanted to, *but there's the damned cast*, and it would make traveling difficult.  
 [OP: X is a reason for not going on the ski trip.]  
 b. A: What's on the office desk?  
 B: There's the telephone, but nothing else.  
 [OP: X is on the office desk.]

In each of these examples, the postverbal NP represents a hearer-old entity newly instantiating the variable in an OP; hence, it is hearer-new in the restricted context of the OP, rendering the *there*-sentence felicitous. Again, notice that in the absence of the relevant OP, the use of a *there*-sentence is infelicitous. Compare, for example, 31b with 32:

- (32) Let's go over to my office. #There's the telephone, so we can order a pizza.

Thus, a speaker may use a definite postverbal NP in a nonlist *there*-sentence in offering a countervailing consideration or an answer to some inferred or explicit question, despite the hearer-old status of the referent of the NP in the wider context.

**3.4. HEARER-NEW ENTITIES WITH UNIQUELY IDENTIFYING DESCRIPTIONS.** Unlike the first three classes discussed, this group of definite postverbal NPs do not depend on the prior context for their felicity. In fact, these definites are equally felicitous outside of *there*-sentences in first-mention contexts. Consider

33, in a context where the referent of the direct object NP is entirely hearer-new.

- (33) Postponing the investigation will increase the chance that we'll uncover something additional that is significant.

Here, although the referent may be new to the hearer, the description provided by the NP is sufficient to fully and uniquely identify the particular chance in question, hence the felicity of the definite. Since such NPs may felicitously represent hearer-new entities in non-*there*-sentence contexts, it is unsurprising that they may also appear felicitously as the postverbal NP in a *there*-sentence:

- (34) In addition, as the review continues, there is always the chance that we'll uncover something additional that is significant. [Challenger Commission transcripts, 3/18/86]

Also unsurprisingly, such *there*-sentences tend to be infelicitous when negated:

- (35) a. #In addition, as the review continues, there isn't the chance that we'll uncover something additional that is significant.  
 b. #In Kittredge's latest book there isn't the claim that syntactic structure is inferrable from pragmatic principles.

Such sentences are unacceptable because it is generally odd to deny the existence of some entity that is simultaneously being introduced into the discourse: why introduce a new, unique entity into the discourse only to deny its existence? This accounts for the contrast in acceptability between 35 and 36.

- (36) a. There weren't the necessary funds to complete the project. [cf. 27]  
 b. There wasn't the usual crowd at the beach today. [cf. 21]

In 36a, the inferrable type *necessary funds* is hearer-old, hence the felicity of denying the existence of an instantiation of that type; similarly, in 36b, *the usual crowd* represents a hearer-old type. In 35, however, the entities represented by the postverbal NPs are new at every level; consequently, it is pointless, and therefore infelicitous, to both introduce and deny the existence of these entities. It is for this reason that negating *there*-sentences of this type results in infelicity, while negating *there*-sentences of Type II (hearer-new tokens of hearer-old types) is fully felicitous.

This analysis also accounts for the contrast between 37a and 37b.

- (37) a. In Kittredge's latest book there is the claim that syntactic structure is inferrable from pragmatic principles.  
 b. #In Kittredge's latest book there is the claim about the interaction of syntax and pragmatics.

Since there are many possible claims that could be made about the interaction of syntax and pragmatics, the postverbal NP in 37b is not uniquely identifiable, and therefore is infelicitous as a definite.

Other cases in which a postverbal NP may represent an entity that is both hearer-new and uniquely identified by this NP (and where the postverbal NP is hence both definite and acceptable in *there*-sentences) include superlatives, deictics, and cataphoric references, as in 38a–c, respectively.

- (38) a. There was the tallest boy in my history class at the party last night.  
 b. You can see the runway and the HUD that overlays the Edwards runway, and *then there is this line which comes out to the outer glide slope aim point*. It is hard to see the PAPIs there because of the lights that are here. [Challenger Commission transcripts, 4/9/86]  
 c. There are the following reasons for this bizarre effect...

In 38a, *the tallest boy in my history class* is sufficient to uniquely identify a new entity which the hearer is being instructed to add to his or her model of the discourse. Similarly, in 38b the speaker refers to a line while gesturing toward it; in this case the gesture serves to uniquely identify the new entity represented by the postverbal NP. Finally, *the following reasons* in 38c uniquely identifies the set of reasons in question, even though they are new to the hearer; it's the set of reasons about to be presented. Similar to this are examples like 39, where the relative clause serves to fully specify the referent of *those*.

- (39) There are those who would claim that computers will take over the earth within the next decade.

Again, in each case the unique identification justifies the definite, while the hearer-new status of the referent of the postverbal NP licenses the *there*-sentence; that is, although the hearer is being instructed to add a new entity to his or her model, that entity is provided with a sufficiently rich description to make it unique within the model.

The last group of hearer-new entities with uniquely identifying descriptions is somewhat different, in that the identifiability of the entity is due to a particular type of inferential relationship that holds of the information represented within the postverbal NP. This class corresponds to Woisetschlaeger's (1983) CONCEPTUAL GENERICS, exemplified in 40.

- (40) a. The child crowed. Small feet ran. *There was the sound of a smart slap, and a wail, which subsided quickly*. [E. Thane. 1943. *Dawn's Early Light*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, p. 35]  
 b. There was the wedding picture of a young black couple among his papers. [= Woisetschlaeger 1983, ex. 15f]

Here, *the sound of a smart slap* and *the wedding picture of a young black couple* constitute CONTAINING INFERRABLES in the sense of Prince 1981c. According to Prince, a containing inferrable is a special case of an inferrable entity in which 'what is inferred off of is properly contained within the Inferrable NP itself' (1981c:236). That is, the entity represented by the inferrable constituent can be inferred from some other constituent syntactically contained within it; we will refer to this latter element as the TRIGGER for the inference. Thus, in 40a the NP *a smart slap* is the trigger for the inferrable NP *the sound of a smart slap*, which properly contains it. Given that a slap has a characteristic sound associated with it, the sound is inferrable from the slap. Similarly, in 40b the trigger *a young black couple* gives rise to the inferrable *wedding picture of a young black couple*, since married couples typically have a characteristic wedding picture associated with them (cf. Lumsden 1988, McNally 1992). In this way, the sound in 40a and the wedding picture in 40b are rendered uniquely

identifiable by virtue of their relationship to the trigger, licensing the use of the definite article. Notice that when no such inferential relationship holds, the definite fails.

- (41) a. #There was the picture of a young black couple among his papers.  
 b. #The picture of a young black couple was among his papers.  
 c. There was a picture of a young black couple among his papers.

Since couples typically have no characteristic picture associated with them, 41a is less acceptable than 40b. Note that an equivalent sentence without *there* (41b) seems equally unacceptable, while an equivalent sentence with an indefinite postverbal NP (41c) is fine. Thus it is unique identifiability, by virtue of the inferential relationship between the containing inferrable and the trigger, that licenses the use of the definite.

Despite being uniquely identifiable and hence definite, however, the containing inferrables in 40 are nonetheless hearer-new (cf. Prince 1992). Birner (1994) shows that the discourse status of a containing inferrable is dependent on the discourse status of the trigger; that is, when the trigger is discourse-old, the entire containing inferrable is treated as discourse-old, whereas when the trigger is discourse-new, the entire containing inferrable is treated as discourse-new. Similarly, the evidence from *there*-sentences shows that when the trigger is hearer-new, as in the examples in 40, the entire containing inferrable is treated as representing a hearer-new entity and thus may felicitously appear in postverbal position in a *there*-sentence.<sup>13</sup>

**3.5. FALSE DEFINITES.** It has been noted (Prince 1981a, Wald 1983) that the demonstrative *this* can felicitously introduce an NP whose referent is brand-new, as in 42.

- (42) One day last year on a cold, clear, crisp afternoon, I saw *this huge sheet of ice* in the street. [Hockey player: S. Terkel. 1974. *Working*. New York: Avon, p. 505; from Prince 1981a]

Here, *this huge sheet of ice* can be used to refer to a specific entity that the speaker believes is unknown to the hearer. While most uses of demonstratives require that the speaker assume the hearer is in a position to identify the referent, the use of *this* exemplified in 42 assumes the hearer is not in such a position, and instructs the hearer to add a new entity to his/her model of the discourse. And, as we would expect, NPs that represent such hearer-new entities are fully felicitous in postverbal position in *there*-sentences. Consider 43:

- (43) One day last year on a cold, clear, crisp afternoon, there was *this huge sheet of ice* in the street.

<sup>13</sup> Likewise, when the trigger is hearer-old, the entire containing inferrable is treated as hearer-old and thus infelicitous in postverbal position in a *there*-sentence.

(i) #There was the wedding picture of the Clintons on his table.

Similarly, we would predict that the trigger can felicitously be definite in exactly the same cases in which any other postverbal NP can be definite, that is, when it represents hearer-new information.

(ii) There was the sound of the traditional cork-popping as the clock struck midnight.

Whether one wishes to call *this* in 42 and 43 definite or indefinite depends entirely on whether definiteness is being defined as a formal or a cognitive category (cf. Prince 1992). There is, of course, only one form *this*; however, it has two distinct uses. It can be used to instruct the hearer to locate (or construct) a uniquely identifiable discourse entity, and it can be used to indicate that there is no such uniquely identifiable entity available to the hearer. Note that in 43, the discourse entity the hearer is instructed to construct is not necessarily uniquely identified by the NP; there may be any number of other entities in the hearer's knowledge store describable by *huge sheet of ice*. Thus far, we have been restricting our discussion to formal definites used to refer to uniquely identifiable referents; we will use the term FALSE DEFINITE to refer to formal definites used to represent entities not assumed to be uniquely identifiable to the hearer.<sup>14</sup>

Although *this* is by far the most widely discussed of this class, there are other types of false definites that occur in *there*-sentences as well, as illustrated in 44.

- (44) a. There are all sorts of other false definites.  
 b. There is the most curious discussion of them in our paper.  
 c. There is every reason to study them.

In 44a, *all sorts of* does not mean literally 'every sort of', but rather is used colloquially to mean, in effect, 'a lot of.' Likewise, in 44b, *the most curious discussion* is not a literal superlative. The speaker will not be taken to believe that this discussion is actually the most curious of some set of discussions; rather, the superlative is used as a simple intensifier (see Hawkins 1978, 1991). Finally, in 44c, *every reason* doesn't mean literally each one of a set of reasons, but rather something more like 'good reasons' or 'many reasons.' Note that when the meaning is truly exhaustive, as with *each*, use of a *there*-sentence is infelicitous.

- (45) #There is each reason to study them.

None of these false definite NPs, then, is being used to refer to an entity that the speaker believes is uniquely identifiable to the hearer. Note that false definites can, in the same context, be felicitously replaced by indefinites, but not by true definites. Compare the examples in 44 with those below:

- (46) a. There are other false definites.  
 b. #There are the other false definites.  
 (47) a. There is a curious discussion of them in our paper.  
 b. #There is the curious discussion of them in our paper.  
 (48) a. There is a reason to study them.  
 b. #There is the reason to study them.

<sup>14</sup> Under a functional or cognitive characterization of definiteness as a category reserved for those discourse entities that a speaker has reason to believe are uniquely identifiable, our false definites would not be definites at all; indeed, such NPs provide a strong motivation for treating definiteness as a cognitive (and presumably universal) category that maps imperfectly onto the formally defined class of definite NPs within a particular language.

Since the postverbal NPs in 44a–c are formally definite yet cognitively indefinite, they constitute false definites (along the lines of *this* in 42). In each case, the postverbal NP represents a hearer-new entity at the time of utterance; hence its felicity in the *there*-sentence is predicted.

4. CONCLUSION. The wide range of definite postverbal NPs found in *there*-sentences precludes a (noncircular) characterization of any definiteness restriction based on linguistic form alone. However, previous functional analyses have also failed to account for all of the problematic data in a unified way. While many have attempted to capture the intuition that *there*-sentences serve to introduce a new referent into the discourse, all have failed to adequately characterize the discrepancy between the felicity conditions on *there*-sentences and those on definiteness.

Our empirical study of the contexts in which definite postverbal NPs may appear in *there*-sentences has shown that a single discourse-based principle can account for the distribution of definites in this construction: The postverbal NP in a *there*-sentence must represent an entity which is hearer-new (Prince 1992). Definiteness, on the other hand, requires the referent of the NP to be uniquely identifiable to the hearer (Hawkins 1978, 1991). Typically this identifiability is due to prior shared knowledge; for this reason, many NPs that are definite, and thus uniquely identifiable in a discourse, will also be hearer-old, and thus infelicitous as a postverbal NP in a *there*-sentence. This infelicity has been variously termed the definiteness restriction, quantification effect, and definiteness effect in the formal syntax and semantics literature, on the erroneous assumption that the ill-formedness in question is due to the appearance of a formally definite postverbal NP in a *there*-sentence. As we have shown, the infelicity in the use of such sentences instead arises from a mismatch between the cognitive status to which definiteness is sensitive and that to which postverbal position in *there*-sentences is sensitive. Postverbal position in *there*-sentences may felicitously be occupied by exactly those definite NPs that are construable as hearer-new in context. Based on a study of a large corpus of natural data, we have identified five such types of definite postverbal NPs; what all have in common is the hearer-new status of the referent. Whether our findings extend to other languages remains to be seen, but what is certain is that the alleged restriction against definite postverbal NPs in *there*-sentences is an epiphenomenon, and the much-discussed definiteness effect a misnomer.

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