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PRESENT DAY ENGLISH EXISTENTIAL *THERE*-CONSTRUCTIONS AND THEIR PRAGMATICS. TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED CATEGORISATION.[1]

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1. Introduction

This study is intended to examine English existential *there*-constructions[2] (hereafter TCs) from the pragmatic point of view. It attempts to determine their functions in discourse, and provide a possible categorisation. Aiming to be a study in empirical pragmatics, the classification advanced here is offered as a tool for describing and understanding TCs. This paper can be regarded as an exploratory, initial approach towards a typology of TCs from the perspective of their communicative functions, even though space constraints have limited the inclusion of as many examples as it would be appropriate for a study of this kind. Also, the overall context from which the examples are taken will by necessity be short. Despite these constraints, the contexts included will hopefully determine the features associated with the TCs in question, and provide the reader with enough information to identify the functions attributed to them.

Section 1 of this paper (sub-sections 1.1. and 1.2.) will briefly refer to some of the traditional attempts to explain TCs as thematic structures, and as strategies for the introduction of *new* information or the assignment of focus (Huddleston 1988; Quirk *et al.* 1985). Sub-section 1.3. will outline some of the semantic characterisations of TCs that preceded the more strictly pragmatic ones (especially, Davidse 1992a, 1992b, 1997 and Wierzbicka 1996), and will then refer to some relevant attempts at a pragmatic classification available in the

literature (Abbott 1992, 1993, 1997; Birner and Ward 1998; Ward and Birner 1994, 1995, 1997).

Section 2 presents an alternative pragmatic typology of TCs, displaying new labels and hopefully being more thorough and integral than others previously available in the literature. Sub-section 2.1. focuses on the distinction between Lakoff's cognitive approach to TCs and the communicative one here advanced, inserted in the framework of corpus-driven studies.[3]

The label *existential construction* will be employed here with the meaning Jespersen (1924: 155) first assigned to it. That is, *existential construction* refers to those sentences in which *there* appears as an unstressed, non-deictic and non-locative element, functioning as their syntactic subject. The element generally accepted as the *notional subject* of the sentence appears therefore in post-verbal position.

> (1) Interesting buildings are not confined to the ancient, ornate or foreign; we are shown that there are plenty of ideas on our own doorstep! (CL0 1195; wr, arts)[4]

In a general sense, and from the perspective of meaning, the label TC will be understood as defined by Lakoff (1987) and other scholars: as the construction that brings entities into the mental space of participants, by means of designating a conceptual space in the speaker's presence.

These constructions, their formal features, and their behaviour within the system of language are frequently discussed in the literature. Many studies have been conducted on their structure and formal characteristics (Breivik 1977, 1981, 1983; Hannay 1985; Milsark 1977, 1979a, 1990, to mention just a few), some investigations confer priority to the semantic aspects of the construction (Davidse 1992a, 1992b, 1997; Lakoff 1987), other analyses are more general and make reference to both the syntactic and the semantic aspects of TCs, as well as to their pragmatic characteristics (Hannay, 1985). However, rather than being itself an ultimate aim, the study of the pragmatic features of TCs has been generally treated as an implement for the explanation of some very specific cases and apparent counter-examples to what are generally considered to be constraints on the TCs. As has already been said, the present paper approaches the pragmatics of TCs as the main object of analysis. It seeks to provide the labels for a possible classification of the TCs according to their communicative roles in their contexts of occurrence. Given that some of these general studies do not successfully account for the whole range of possible functions that could be assigned to TCs, I propose a number of labels for the pragmatic functions that could be assigned to them as used in discourse. As will be seen, these possible functions may overlap in some cases, and a single TC may appear to be performing more than a single function within the linguistic context in which it is used.

This attempt to determine the discourse functions of TCs is neither definite nor perfect. Nevertheless, based on previous work on the topic, and a corpus-driven perspective, as it is, it is hoped that it will be an effective initial methodology.

2. Pragmatics and the pragmatics of TCs

In essence, a functional framework will be adopted for the structuring of this study. This means that the essentials of functionalism as first set out by Dik (1978, 1980) will be followed here. Thus, language is conceived as an instrument of social interaction between humans, primarily used with the aim of establishing communicative relations between individuals. By means of language human beings can communicate with each other and also influence each other's mental and practical activities. Being functional in this respect, the present linguistic description attempts to "reveal the instrumentality of language with respect to what people do with it in social situations" (1978: 1).

Dik's model is also followed here in the sense that TCs, like all other linguistic expressions, are not considered as isolated objects "but as instruments which are used by the Speaker in order to evoke some intended interpretation in the Addressee, within a context defined by preceding expressions, and within a setting defined by the essential parameters of the speech situation" (Dik 1997: 13; see also 1997: 214, and Hannay 1985: 171). It is here accepted that Speakers decide to use TCs with a specific pragmatic aim: basically, the introduction of an entity into the discourse, presenting it as a *New Topic*.

As a result, a further point in common with Dik's model is the importance given to the context and the communicative situation in which TCs are embedded, as the key to an understanding of the communicative role of the TC and the assignment of a classificatory label to it. As will be seen in section 2.2. below, these assumptions are also, broadly speaking, at the basis of the *Cobuild Grammar* (Stubbs 1993), whose major contributor is John Sinclair, and essentially emerges from Firth's notion of meaning as function in context.

The general tendency to pay little attention to meaning in the study of language is frequently linked to the conviction that semantics and pragmatics are fields independent of grammar in general, and syntax in particular. The view of this paper, however, is quite different and language is regarded here as an integrated system, ultimately aiming to convey meaning. Meaning is understood as the human (and therefore, subjective) interpretation of the world, and "pragmatic meanings" as inextricably linked with meanings based on "denotational conditions" (see Wierzbicka 1988: 2).

If "semantics as subservient to pragmatics, and syntax as subservient to semantics" (Dik 1980: 2),[5] the pragmatic aspects of TCs acquire a central role in the

explanation of certain cases that, otherwise, might seem to go against the syntactic-semantic constraints that are generally accepted as restraining the usage of TCs. Early attempts to adopt the point of view of the users appeared in the study of existential TCs as one of the so-called thematic structures of the message. They sought to gain a certain insight into the effects that their use had on the other participants of the communicative act.

2.1. *There* as a strategy in assigning focus. TCs as thematic structures

It is quite common in the literature to regard TCs as belonging to the thematic systems of the clause, and therefore as the result of (transformational) derivations or movements of elements from their canonical positions (Huddleston 1971:322, 1988: 184; Quirk *et al.* 1985). Thus, TCs and their presumed non-existential counterparts (from which they derive) have been frequently treated as two thematic variants that have the same propositional contents, but that differ in the way that the proposition is packaged as a message. Speakers select one or another depending on which part(s) of the message they want to emphasise, or what they regard as known by the addressee, etc.

As a thematic system, TCs involve differences in the sequential arrangement of constituents (Huddleston 1988: 184) and become a strategy in which word order is used for pragmatic purposes (as in the case of left and right dislocations or raising). The function of *there* is to shift the notional subject towards a position where it carries *end-weight* and *end-focus*⁶ (Abbott 1993: 41). The idea is that grammatical distinctions are motivated (in the synchronic sense) by semantic distinctions. The fact that each grammatical construction reflects a certain semantic structure explains the range of use of such grammatical construction.⁷

2.2. Given and New Information. The TC as a presentative of new information

It has often been observed that many languages show a tendency to order *given* information before *new* information in an utterance, and that syntactic constructions seem to prevent NPs representing unfamiliar information from occurring in subject position.⁸ In a similar way, it has been argued that rightward movement phenomena such as the one performed in TCs serve to postpone unfamiliar or non-thematic information.

Both concepts, *given* and *new information*, have acquired a relevance in the pragmatic and semantic explanations of TCs. Traditionally, *there* has been seen as introducing *new* information into the discourse. From this point of view, TCs introduce *new* information or bring new elements into the scene of discourse.⁹

Since new information is regarded as somewhat marked, and since the *unmarked-before-marked*¹⁰ and the *given-before-new* principles are admitted as determinant for word order in English, a connection was generally posited between the introductory-presentative function of TCs and the necessity for their post-verbal NP (hereafter PVNP) to be indefinite (the so-called *Definiteness Restriction,* hereafter DR). To a certain extent, both the DR and the *given-before-new* principle support each other in most approaches to TCs, and notions such as *new, irrecoverable, not previously mentioned* or *indefinite* came to be crucial in any approach to TCs.

Although attractive, this explanation runs into a number of problems when applied to real data. *Given* and *new* may remain problematic if further clarification is not made. In fact, terminological confusion abounds in the literature concerning the relationship between linguistic items and their contexts, and how they can be treated by the speaker/writer as either *given* information or *new* information (*theme* or *rheme, background* or *focus,* are other labels sometimes used). Difficulties may arise when deciding which elements are *given* and which are *new* in a certain sentence, and the context and the situation must be always considered. In some cases, what is given may at the same time function as new if the relation is changed in some way, so the terms *given* and *new* information should be treated as relative and dependant on the development of the discourse. As shown by Ribarkiewicz (1977: 79), as the discourse develops, the store of assertions that represent the shared knowledge of speaker/writer and hearer/listener is constantly increasing "with every new utterance whose validity is not challenged". This common store, or *Presupposition Pool,* as it is sometimes called, must comprise every item of knowledge or piece of information both overtly expressed or implied or hinted at.

The concept of *recoverability* of the information (Geluykens 1991) appeared as an attempt to solve the somehow loose, non-rigid use of the terms *given - new. Recoverable* information is derivable from the discourse record, while *Irrecoverable* information is not thus derivable. Further refining the notion, various degrees of recoverability are recognised, rather than a simple binary distinction. The recoverability scale would go from 100% recoverable items to 100% irrecoverable ones.

2.3. The function of TCs. Semantic and pragmatic approaches

In general terms, most of the literature available assigns to TCs the semantic value of the expression of existence (Bolinger 1977; Breivik 1977, 1979, 1981, 1983; Hannay 1985; Huddleston 1988; Milsark 1977, 1979a,b, 1990; Quirk *et al.* 1985). *THERE IS/ARE* has even been characterised as a *Semantic Primitive* or *Semantic Prime,*¹¹ in the sense that the concept of existence, as a non-verbal predicate, is so clear that no definitions could make it any clearer (Wierzbicka 1996: 12-13).

As a semantic primitive, THERE IS/ARE is grouped together with concepts such as MOVE, LIFE, HEAR, INSIDE, HERE, CAN, DO, HAPPEN, THINK, KNOW, FEEL, SAY, etc. (Wierzbicka 1996, chapter 2).[12] They are treated as the group of elements that can be used to define the meaning of words but cannot be defined themselves. Without this set of semantic primitives, it is claimed, descriptions of meaning are actually or potentially circular. They exist as protolinguistic representations of the world, and their full, final realisation depends on the cultural tool of language. They are a group of innate basic ideas with which children embark on the quest for meaning, and in fact, this concept of existence/non-existence is one of the first to emerge in children's speech (Wierzbicka 1996: 86).[13]

From this perspective, the English forms *there is* and *there are* are regarded as the primary lexical exponent of the primitive *THERE IS/ARE*, just like similar expressions that have the same function in other languages: *hay* in Spanish, *il y a* in French, *c'è / ci sono* in Italian, *jest / są* in Polish, *es ist / es sind / es gibt* in German, etc. (cf. Lyons 1967: 390). Most languages then have a lexical counterpart of English *there is/are*, and in some of these languages, this lexical item may be homophonous with the exponents of other meaning(s), usually the copula.[14] Polish is one of those languages in which the lexical items employed in existential statements are homophonous with the exponents of the copula.[15]

In general, it was claimed that this characterisation of TCs as mainly expressing existence, or introducing entities into the scene of discourse, implied the necessity for the notional subject to be a piece of *new information* (from a pragmatic point of view), and an indefinite term (from the formal one). This claim about TCs disallowing definite PVNPs (the widely known DR) has been characterised in a number of different ways and from various perspectives: Milsark (1979: 215ff), for instance, talked of a *Quantification Restriction*, and indebted to his view, Davidse (1992a: 123) claimed that TCs construe a specific kind of instantiation relation which is the notion of *Quantifiable Occurrence*. Thus, rather than a question of definiteness, the constraint is that the PVNP should never denote the whole class but rather one item, or more, or none of the class. This is what she calls the *Positive Set-Totality Constraint*.

This small sample of the different characterisations of the DR evinces that the characterisations of existential constructions postulating a close interrelation between the DR and principles such as the *Given-before-New* one, do not seem to have completely accounted for real data. In real language, we may find cases that apparently go against the principles mentioned above, but are felicitous and admissible from the communicative point of view. The most frequent case is that of TCs with a definite PVNP, which according to the DR, should be considered as either infelicitous, anomalous or ungrammatical.

(2) Now, incorporate in your play, there is the, **there** are the benefits of dressing up using clothes that may well be available or using er, specific outfits as well. (FM8 847 sp. educational/informative).

(3) For humour **there** was Ian Ford's rat tool, and below it Lee Dickenson's Kitchen carver. (A0X 1081 wt. leisure).

(4) **There** was the usual collection of war updates, then the weather report, which promised a grey Christmas, accompanied by a spring-like balm. (CRE 2733 wt. imaginative).

As observed by many scholars (Abbott 1992, 1993, 1997; Birner and Ward 1998; Hannay 1985; Holmback 1984; Lakoff 1987; Rando and Napoli 1978; Ward and Birner 1994, 1995, 1997), the DR is far from absolute. The wide range of definite PVNPs that occur in TCs and their sensitivity to contextual constraints argue for a pragmatic account of the phenomenon.

In her analysis of felicitous definite TCs, Abbott (1993) first brings pragmatic arguments to her explanation and contextualisation gains a crucial role: "The role of context is crucial in predicting what kinds of NPs can occur in *there*-constructions as well as the restrictions that exist" (1993: 52).

Subsequent attempts at a pragmatic study can be found in the literature (Birner and Ward 1998; Ward and Birner 1994, 1995, 1997). With them there also appear new labels and a renewed attention to the contextual environment of the TC. However, these analyses seem to be somehow restricted to accounting for the acceptability of some very specific and frequently problematic examples that would be otherwise difficult to account for (see examples (2)-(4) above).

From the basic tenet that TCs help the development of discourse by introducing entities into it as *New Topics* (Dik 1997: 214), this study seeks to get a comprehensive categorisation of TCs, without focusing only on those with definite PVNPs.

3. Towards an integrated pragmatic classification of English existential there-constructions

3.1. Method. The corpus employed for the study

A number of examples will be provided to support the classification I propose here. The data analysed come from a one-million-word sample of spoken and written present-day English (PDE), selected from the *British National Corpus* (BNC).[16] Here, I will briefly refer to the main criteria followed in the design of the sub-corpus employed for this study.

Given that the BNC is generally characterised as a *sample corpus* (the samples it contains do not generally exceed 45,000 words), a *synchronic corpus* (containing

samples of English from the year 1960), a *general corpus* (not restricted to any particular subject field, register or genre), a *monolingual corpus* (in the sense of containing only British English) and a *mixed corpus* (with both spoken and written English), the sub-corpus used for the present study was designed with the aim of maintaining, as far as possible, these main features. The samples contained in the sub-corpus do not exceed 45,000 words and belong to the same period of time. The texts selected provide the sub-corpus with data from both the written and the spoken samples, as well as with data from all the different genres included in the BNC. Apart from the obvious difference in size (one million words vs. almost 100 million words in the BNC), other variations in the structure of the sub-corpus were made in order to make it as reliable and up to date as possible. The texts selected belong only to the last decade (from 1989 onwards) and equal proportions of words were taken from speech and from writing (that is: half a million words for the spoken sample and half a million words for the written one). The different genres, which were present in different proportions in the BNC, were here made equal, and approximately equal numbers of words were taken from each of the genres specified in the BNC.[17]

This sub-corpus was designed to constitute a *disproportionally stratified sample* (Butler 1985: 6), since this kind of sample creates the optimum situation for the comparison of subgroups.[18] The fact that the samples in the BNC are not equal in size, and some of them are proportionally small, also encouraged the choice of a *disproportionally stratified sample*. This prevents the types of unit with a small overall proportion in the population (the BNC, in this case) from not being represented in the sample at all. In *stratified random samplings*, once the proportions of the different subgroups within the population are known, random sampling is undertaken within each stratum and the resulting sub-samples are then combined to give an overall sample. The designing of the sub-corpus as a *disproportionally stratified sample* explains why the different subgroups of the sample employed for this study have an equal size, despite their unequal proportions in the population as a whole (that is, in the BNC).

Once these texts were selected, the TCs contained in them were identified, counted, and entered into a database. Notice that the scope of this study comprises only existential constructions containing the word *there*. No sentences without *there* were included in the database, in spite of the fact that some scholars would regard certain *there*-less sentences as existentials.[19]

3.2. The classification proposed: a pragmatic one

In contrast to certain recent views, the categorisation advanced here focuses only on the functions of TCs in discourse, and tries to provide self-explanatory labels with reference to the communicative roles they refer to. One such recent view is

the full analysis and categorisation of TCs that Lakoff (1987) has provided from a cognitive perspective.

Even if the present classification shares a number of basic assumptions with Lakoff's, there are also some clear differences between them. The common points are rooted in the general rejection of the transformational approaches to grammar, as well as in the assumptions that the primary function of language is to convey meaning, that there is a continuum between grammar and lexicon implying that many syntactic properties of grammatical constructions are consequences of their meanings. As said above, the basic function that Lakoff posited for TCs, that is, to focus the addressee's awareness on the referent of the PVNP, is also at the basis of the present analysis.

Regarding the differences, the present study tries primarily to provide a complete categorisation of TCs as they occur in natural language, from a data-driven perspective. The formal features of the TCs analysed will not be seen as criteria for their classification, while Lakoff (1987) considers such features to be criteria for classification at least in the cases of *Infinitival* or *Strange Existentials*. No reference will be made here to what Lakoff calls the *motivation* of constituents and the *motivated properties* of constructions. Moreover, the fact that no difference is established here between *central* existential constructions (with *be* as their main verb) and *non-central* ones (with verbs other than *be*) will exclude the need to refer to certain elements in the central existential construction as the "ancestors" of other elements in the non-central ones. Since many of the categories set up here could be included within Lakoff's *Central* and *Presentational* categories, the aims of the present analysis could be said to be somewhat more refined and less broad. Essentially, the nature and starting points of both studies are different. Lakoff adopts a cognitive perspective, searching for the processes and steps followed by speakers in the production of TCs, searching for the origins of such constructions in the deictic one. By contrast, the present study adopts a primarily pragmatic approach, an analytic approach that implies contextual considerations. Its main objective is to describe what people do when they use language, explaining linguistic constructions and features as the means used in such activity, rather than as something fixed by grammatical rules, to which the message should adapt itself. The TCs here analysed are treated as the register of a dynamic process in which speaker and addressee use language as an instrument for communication, in a given context, so as to express meanings and make their intentions effective. As mentioned in section 1 above, this analysis tries to follow the so-called *Cobuild grammatical model* (Tognini-Bonelli 1993; Stubbs 1993). It sets out to make generalisations (about the functions of TCs) from the cumulative effect of instances of actual use, adopting a data-driven, bottom-up methodology. For this reason, only authentic examples were taken as evidence of the ways in which language is really used. Only real TCs were considered in this search for an answer to the question *What communicative functions do they typically encode?*

3.3. Initial divisions

Rather than replace classifications previously offered in the literature (Abbott 1992, 1993, 1997; Lakoff 1987; Ward and Birner 1994, 1995, 1997; Ziv 1982a, 1982b, among others), this study has attempted to conflate and implement them as much as possible and provide them with a full range of potential pragmatic functions. To a certain extent, the labels used here will be new although this does not imply the invalidation of notions such as *new topic, foregrounding / backgrounding* or *hearer-old / -new* and *context-old / -new* -which were already present in the studies previously conducted by scholars such as Dik (1997), Ziv (1982a, 1982b) or Ward and Birner (1995, 1997) and Birner and Ward (1998). Building on such notions, the new labels seek to be more accurate and to provide a thorough classification of the possible pragmatic functions of English TCs, that, it is hoped, will be all-embracing.

As a first step, two basic and main functions are distinguished when considering TCs in their context of occurrence. These are here called the *retrospective* function and the *prospective* function.

The term retrospective refers to the function of those TCs in which the PVNP points backwards in its context, commenting and completing or somehow summarising what has been stated before. It could be said then that the information brought into the text by means of the TC is not entirely new, but recoverable, to a certain extent, from the previous context. Some element or aspect of the TC in question refers back, or is connected, to what can already be found in the text (most frequently explicitly, but occasionally implicitly), while at the same time the TC as a whole brings some new information into the text. In some cases, the TC contains a nominalization of some category that has been introduced in the text at some earlier point. In such cases, the communicative content of the claim made in the TC is supported or justified by the information already available in the previous context.

Very characteristic examples of this retrospective function can be found in question tags. These are constructions that use their interrogative character to elicit confirmation of what has already been stated in the previous context. Thus, the question tag in (5) requires the presence of a previous TC for its comprehension, and does not itself introduce any new piece of information into the scene of discourse.

(5) Yes, but there is a rule isn't there?
(F7N 118 sp. educational/informative).

Another possible example (also frequent) is the short TCs, in which the PVNP is sometimes omitted, that functions as a kind of comment on a previous TC. These may behave as short answers, corroborations or even corrections of what

has already been stated. It is this behaviour that confers on them a retrospective character.

In example (6), the second TC cannot be understood without looking back at the first one. In fact, the omission of the PVNP in the second serves to highlight and reinforce this connection between both.

(6) Perhaps there ought to be a law like that, but there isn't at the moment
(FUT 480 sp. public/institutional).

This kind of TC, with a retrospective function (at least partial, since as stated above, they always add some new communicative nuance to the text), will include examples of the so-called anaphoric definites (referring back to something already known). Such anaphoric grounding "involves connecting incoming new information chunks to some existing mental representation – either of the text or of the mental entities" (Givón 1995: 347). The speaker or writer using then assumes that the addressee "will be able to make the connection with the referent immediately" (Bolinger 1977: 119). Functioning as grounding devices, anaphoric definites make "NPs relevant at the point in the conversation at which they are introduced" (Fox and Thompson 1990: 301). Like other grounding devices, these proposition-linking elements primarily aim to achieve effective communication.

In example (7) below, the possessive *their* is implying the existence of some possessors whose identity is recoverable from the previous context (*many trade unionists*), and therefore belong to the shared knowledge of the participants in the communicative act.

(7) One, that many trade unionists work at and there's a threat to their future careers
(H4A 27 sp. public/institutional).

The label *prospective*, on the other hand, is meant to imply the meaning that the TC is introducing and presenting some piece of (completely or partially) new information. The claim or statement made in the TC most frequently finds supportive arguments or further developments and complementations in what follows. In such cases, it cannot be initially assumed that the addressees will find a hint (explicit or implicit) in the previous context that may lead them to expect the information provided in the TC.

TCs introduced by words such as *however, but, yet*, etc, which signal a change of topic or perspective will also be subsumed under this *prospective* label, generally speaking. In example (8) below, the information provided in the TC is completely new and may even be characterised as unexpected, with respect to previous context. The use of *however* is drawing the addressee's attention towards the unanticipated, unexpected character of the information provided.

(8) 0034 He was, by contrast, a plain Man; well scrubbed, but plain. 0035 He'd made his fortune selling baths, bidets and toilets, which lent him little by way of mystique. 0036 So, when he'd first laid eyes on Judith — she'd been sitting behind a desk at his accountant's offices, her beauty all the more luminous for its drab setting — his first thought was: I want this woman; his second: she won't want me. 0037 **There was**, however, an instinct in him when it came to Judith that he'd never experienced with any other woman. (CRE 37 wt. imaginative).

In TCs with this prospective function, cataphoric definites (those referring to something that is being presented and that need post-modifiers to pin them down) conveying *contextual deixis* (Bolinger 1977: 114) may be found. That is, the deixis is not to a physical setting, but rather to the linguistic context. The pattern technically known as cataphora is the reversal of the antecedent-anaphor pattern. In this case, the referent of the cataphoric element comes after it. Cataphoric grounding, "involves the opening of pending connections in yet-to-be completed structure, in anticipation of a text that is in the process of being constructed (Givón 1995: 347). The use of cataphora is, however, much less common than that of anaphora.

(9) **There were** those amongst his small circle of intimates who said it would be his undoing, but they or their predecessors had been prophesying the same for three decades, and Klein had out-prospered every one of them. (CRE 368 wt. imaginative).

Example (9), by means of the cataphoric item *those*, first introduces into the scene of discourse, the existence of a number of entities that will be further defined or described in the following context. *Those* does not refer back to some referent already mentioned in the preceding sentences; it rather refers forward to a group that is specified or defined by means of the relative clause in the following context (*who said it would be his undoing*). Using Givón's terms, it opens a pending connection in a yet-to-be-completed structure that requires the presence of post-modifiers to complete it. Using Bolinger's words, "the determiner does no more than to point to a clause as something designating a thing that is known to exist but about which nothing is presupposed" (1977: 119).

In some cases, TCs with a prospective function may be particularly emphasised by means of linguistic sequences that have some kind of *signalling* force. The ultimate aim here is to draw the listener's attention to the given piece of information that the TC introduces. This is specially frequent in spoken language, where TCs may be introduced by expressions such as *what I want you to know*, *what I am saying to you is that...*, *you know...*, *I mean...*

With the sequences *I mean*, *What I'm saying to you is...*, the speakers in (10) and (11) below emphasise the content of the TC and call the addressee's attention to them.

(10) 052 Now what I'm saying to you is that there's a big question mark as far as Goodey er report is concerned and they can talk about the surpluses, they can talk about the trustees, but **there's** no majority as far as the employees are concerned and this was the question mark that we— we were saying that one of the reasons why they were saying <pause dur=3>20 you know that the employee should be in the minority because in the end paragraph of the summing up of the Goodey report that states quite clearly that all the responsibility and all the <unclear>21 but the employer, now you yourself have said that er as far as the schemes and we're talking of something in the region of a hundred and twenty eight thousand. (K77 52 sp. public/institutional).

(11) Because I mean th **there's** more teaching hospitals in London going an and right throughout the country. (H4A 468 sp. public/institutional).

However, it does not seem to be enough to say that the TC under analysis has either a prospective or a retrospective character. It is possible to add some further information about the meaning conveyed by the clause and its communicative role in the specific context in which it appears. In what follows I will propose a group of feasible labels.

Parallel to this main division into retrospective and prospective, it is possible to distinguish TCs according to whether the claims they make are justified, supported, corroborated, corrected or simply completed and elaborated in the following sentences, or else in the preceding context. Consequently, it will be frequently understood that a TC has a retrospective character when it makes a claim that is justified by the content of the clauses and statements preceding the TC. By contrast, TCs with a prospective character will usually make a claim that is further developed in the following clauses or statements.

Notice then that, from this perspective, the introduction of a new entity into the discourse or the statement of its existence does not necessarily have to be prospective. It is seen as prospective if the claim is made first and the information supporting that claim comes afterwards. It is seen as retrospective if the claim is made at the end, after having presented a certain amount of information leading to such claim.

In some cases, the borderline between retrospective and prospective does not seem to be very clear, and a TC with the prospective function of introducing a new idea into the discourse may, as well, contain elements already known that connect it with the immediately preceding context. The fact that the categories

prospective and *retrospective* are not mutually exclusive may lead us to problematic cases in which a TC performs both functions simultaneously. However, I will argue that it is necessary to distinguish between these two main functions. Examples will be provided in support of this view.

(12) 237 In the old days when **there** was a possibility of <pause dur=2> of erm ad hoc payments made er that sort of thing was taken care of, since the takeover of the company that hasn't happened to the same extent, so **there's** a very strong feeling with the older pay— er pensioners that they paid money into a pension scheme which now shows a surplus, but other people are benefiting from it. (K77 237 sp. public/institutional).

In example (12), the claim made by the first TC functions as an explanation or clarification of the previous prepositional phrase. It adds further information about the sequence *old days*, to which it is inextricably linked, being in that sense retrospective. However, the fact that the information it introduces is new for the addressee provides it with a prospective character. In fact, what follows can be said to further develop the claim made in it. The second TC, introduced by *so*, states a deduction or claim about the consequence brought about by the circumstances just mentioned. In this sense, being so strongly connected with the previous context, it has a somewhat retrospective character. However, the prospective nature of the TC is here considered to be stronger than its possible retrospective one. The deduction itself, the information contained in the TC, is not a mere repetition of those preceding statements and it is, in addition, further developed in the context that follows (*that they paid money into a pension scheme which now shows a surplus, but other people are benefiting from it*).

3.4. Further divisions

It is possible to make further sub-divisions of that initial distinction between prospective and retrospective, if the communicative aim of the TC is considered. In this section a number of labels are proposed for as many possible functions of TCs within their context of occurrence. The explanation of the categories thus proposed will be followed by an example, which is intended to serve as an illustration. For reasons of space it is impossible to cite more examples with their corresponding contexts.

3.4.1. *Prospective Functions*

The analysis of TCs with a prospective character may be further refined and clarified using as criteria the facts TCs convey:

3.4.1.1. *The introduction and presentation of new ideas and/or entities into the text*

This is the most neutral and commonest function, and also the function that literature in general most frequently assigns to TCs. The speaker/writer chooses the specific syntactic structure of TCs in order to provide (frequently, for the first time) the addressee's knowledge-store with some new data. This enlargement of the knowledge-store is done in a neutral way without any other obvious intention on the part of the speaker/writer.

(13) 305 You see in British Steel we <pause dur=2> we have seventy thousand deferred pensioners and er it is a group of people that I feel extremely sorry for, because er in nineteen eighty-six British Steel introduced into their pension scheme while it was still in the public sector, retirement at sixty where with a pension credit spaced on length of service, so if you were sixty-five years service in, you could retire at sixty as if you were sixty-five <pause dur=3> and **there** was nothing done at all for deferred pensioners and in certainly our submission to British Steel for seeking improvements, we <pause dur=2> we asked that they er they look at deferred pensioner with a view to paying their pensions at sixty, recognising that it was a very high-class plane that might have to be er achieved in stages. (K77 305 sp. public/institutional).

The TC in K77 305 is a typical case of prospective presentation or introduction of some information into the discourse, in this case, the lack of action being taken for deferred pensioners. The notional subject of the TC, this lack of action, is further elaborated on in the next statement, which informs us about the requests made by the speaker and others.

3.4.1.2. *The correction of something already stated and the presentation of contrasts and objections*

In this case, the use of a TC helps the speaker/writer in the correction of a statement or idea present in the previous context. The new, and somehow different, information is brought into the text by means of a TC, and the following context usually contains a further development of such new information. These TCs may be either directly introduced into the discourse, without any connective element, or preceded by connectives as for instance (*or*) *rather*. For those cases of TCs introduced by means of a conjunction or connective element, the corrective meaning, which might initially seem to belong only to the connective, is here considered as a content of the TC and all its elements, as a whole.

(14) Erm <unclear> erm <pause> it's twelve. 0573 <pause> Oh right that's not right is it, no. 0574 Erm <pause>

John 0575 Mm.
0576 <pause dur=10> Okay so we've got eleven and four is fifteen, and seventeen <pause> is thirty two.
John577 <pause> It says there were thirty pupils.
(FM4 573-577 sp. educational/informative).

In this case, at first sight, the TC apparently has the prototypical introductory, presentational function. However, taking into account the previous context, it can be said that it introduces a very subtle correction of what has been previously said: the previous speaker talked of fifteen students, and the speaker using the TC "corrects" him, and says that the number of pupils was thirty. Very near those *corrective* TCs are some others that could be considered as establishing constraints on information already known. Usually introduced into the discourse with conjunctions such as *but, however, nevertheless,* these TCs bring about the existence of a new element or argument that is, to a certain extent, in contrast with what has been explicitly stated or can be inferred and expected from the previous context. For a detailed approach to the relevance of context and inferencing in human communication, cf. Prince 1978, where the notion context is analysed as relative to individuals and their assumptions about other individuals. Again, it might be thought that the conjunction is the only ultimately contrastive element. However, it is posited here considered that such a character or function belongs to the whole TC and the information it contains.

(15) 052 Now what I'm saying to you is that there's a big question mark as far as Goodey er report is concerned and they can talk about er the surpluses, they can talk about the trustees, but there's no majority as far as the employees are concerned and this was the question mark that we— we were saying that one of the reasons why they were saying <pause dur=3> you know that the employee should be in the minority because in the end paragraph of the summing up of the Goodey report that states quite clearly that all the responsibility and all the <unclear> but the employer, now you yourself have said that er as far as the schemes and we're talking of something in the region of a hundred and twenty eight thousand.
(K77 52 sp. public/institutional).

The two TCs in (15) have a parallel structure and are linked by the conjunction *but*, thus emphasising the contrastive character that the second of them has with respect to the first one. Both of them bring into the scene of discourse a piece of new information (the existence of an entity and the absence of another, respectively). They contribute to the progress of the text with their prospective functions: first, a presentation of a given entity is made, and then, the lack of a *majority* is expressed by means of another TC so as to give a contrastive sense (existence/absence).

3.4.1.3. *The posing of questions*

TCs may also have the function of advancing a question about the existence or presence of something. These TCs, inserted in direct or indirect interrogative structures, pose questions that expect an answer, a confirmation or a denial, to come in the context that follows.

(16) Speaker A:692 Should children be allowed to receive Holy Communion, discuss. <pause>
693 What's a scriptural point.
694 What's the scriptural?
695 <-|-> Are you asking me? <-|->
696 <-|-> If there if <-|-> there is a point <unclear> scripture.
697 I don't know whether there is or there isn't.
Speaker B: 698 Can I just say something?
699 Yes.
(FYB 692-699 sp. public/institutional).

First TC in this example (*If there if <-|-> there is a point <unclear> scripture*) introduced by *if,* is within an indirect question that the speaker puts forward with the aim of confirming exactly what information is required by the other participant. In the sense that it is used for indirectly asking about the existence of a given entity, and that it therefore expects an answer or clarification to be given in the ensuing context, TC FYB 696 is regarded here as prospective in its character.

3.4.1.4. *The deduction of an idea from what has already been stated*

Frequently introduced into the discourse with connectives such as *so, therefore, thus,* deductive TCs insert new elements of information that are presented as what the speaker is deducting or inferring from what has been said above. The degree of subjectiveness of these deductions may go from highly subjective to plainly objective. In the case of more objective deductions, it is frequently possible to find informational elements in the preceding context that serve as a firm basis for the statement or claim made in the TC.
As in the case of objections and corrections, the conjunction is not considered in isolation, as the element conveying the deductive (in this case) function; it is rather seen as an integrated part of the whole TC, and the deductive function is assigned to the whole TC.

(17) 237 In the old days when there was a possibility of <pause dur=2> of erm ad hoc payments made er that sort of thing was taken care of, since the takeover of the company that hasn't happened to the same extent, so there's a very strong feeling with the older pay— er pensioners that they paid money into a pension scheme which now shows a surplus, but other people are benefiting from it.
(K77 237 sp. public/institutional).

As seen (example (12) above), the claim made by the first TC in K77 237 provides an explanation or clarification of the previous prepositional phrase. It is in that sense, somehow retrospective, although at the same time, it is presenting new information that is developed or explained in what follows, which provides it with a prospective character. On the other hand, the second TC, introduced by *so*, makes a claim about the result (the existence of a very strong feeling) brought about by the things and events already mentioned. It is prospective also in the sense that the claim made is further explained in the following lines (*that they paid money into a pension scheme which now shows a surplus, but other people are benefiting from it*).

3.4.1.5. The statement of a personal opinion

Finally, another of the sub-categories that may be set up among those TCs with a prospective character is the statement of a personal valuation or appreciation of what has just been mentioned. With this kind of TCs, speakers/writers state their point of view, adopt an attitude or take up a position, often in a parenthetical construction. Sequences such as *I think..., for me..., personally...,* may be found before TCs with this communicative aim.

(18) 0878 Yes **there's** a technique for, for raising it, isn't it?
Cathy 0879 I think **there** must be because I've seen it several times now and just in, in, you know.
(F7C 878/879 sp. business).

F7C 879 is a case in which the TC is within the statement that expresses the personal opinion of the speaker about what has just been said. This function is reinforced by the verb introducing the TC (*I think there must be...*), which clearly marks the personal, subjective character of the claim made. The prospective character of the TC is also seen in the 'fact that the meaning it conveys finds further completion in the immediately following clause, introduced by *because*.

2.4.2. Retrospective Functions

For the TCs with a retrospective character, another set of five possible categories are initially proposed:

2.4.2.1. The formulation of a summary or conclusion

Some TCs may provide a summary or conclusion to close what has been said or stated before. These TCs have a somewhat closing character with respect to their preceding context. In these cases, the TC provides a kind of recapitulation or abridgement of

the contents present in the previous context, or a conclusive, terminative statement resulting from the consideration of such contents by the speaker/writer.

(19) Don 404 Instead of <-|-> <unclear> <-|->
Rod 405 <-|-> general skills <-|->
Don 406 alright, problem solving, <-|-> at last! <-|->
Rod 407 <-|-> So at <-|-> the moment we've got one, two, three, four, five six
408 **There's** only an extra <-|-> <unclear> <-|->
Rod 409<-|-> so seven <-|-> eight
Andrew 410 Fine.
Don 411 '**There's** only an extra one there!
Don 412 One, two, <-|-> three, four, five, six, seven <-|->
Angela 413 <-|-> We could leave literacy, numeracy <-|-> no?
Don 414 **there's** only an extra one there.
(F7G 404-414 sp. educational/informative).

These three TCs are uttered by the same speaker and have an identical structure. However, they have different functions. The first of these TCs is initially introducing into the scene of discourse the existence of a unique *extra one*. In this sense, it is prospective and presentative or introductory. The other two TCs are retrospective in the sense that they point backwards (repeat) towards a statement already made, to which the other participants do not seem to be paying much attention. The second TC is, according to the categorisation proposed here, a reiteration or corroboration of the statement already made, while the third TC is another repetition but goes a bit further in the sense that it has a closing and somehow conclusive character.

3.4.2.2. The elaboration or explanation of an idea

This is another one of the possible functions that TCs with an initially retrospective function may have. In this sense, the TC under analysis provides a further explanation or development of an entity, idea, concept or statement that is present in the previous context. To a certain extent, the fact that the information they introduce is new might be an argument for considering these TCs as prospective. However, it is their necessary and clear connection with the (immediately) previous context what leads me to classify them as retrospective.

(20) 176 The revenue is so desperate now because of this change in banks and building societies have left people not knowing what the situation is, and er **there** are millions, I'm, I'm not exaggerating **there** are twelve million, over two million pounds is being spent by the revenue on a new tax-back advert, sorry I did exaggerate, the idea is to remind about ten million people on all, on low income, that they could claim back tax which has been deducted from taxed savings.
(G4F 176 sp. public/institutional).

The first TC is a prototypical case of introductory, presentative clause with a prospective character. It is the following context that completes the information that the TC first introduces, specifying what is the composition of those *millions* (*ten million people on all, on low income, that...*). According to the classification I present here, the second TC is considered as retrospective, since it not only corroborates the existence of those millions by repeating the term, but also further elaborates or specifies the content of the first TC. In the first one, millions/are mentioned but it is not specified how many of them. The second one completes the statement by providing an exact quantity (*there are twelve million*). Nevertheless, the fact that it is only after both TCs that their real notional subject is given (*ten million people...*) admittedly confers a certain prospective character also on the second TC.

3.4.2.3. *The search for a confirmation*

Some TCs, especially those within question tags (and also some other kinds of questions), introduce the speaker/writer's search for a verification or ratification of something already stated by means of a question tag or some other kind of question. The function of question tags is to look for a confirmation of the immediately preceding statement and therefore, in order to understand them, it is necessary to look at the preceding context. The fact that the notional subject is not expressed in these questions highlights the strong linkage existing between the immediately previous statement (necessarily another TC) and the TC in the question tag. Notice that in some cases, especially in spoken language, the question tag be quite distant from the TC it tries to confirm. However, this does not eliminate its retrospective character.

(21) F7FPS000 0700 Either in <-|-> principle <-|->
PS000 0701 <-|-> Am I right in <-|-> saying then <pause> j—j— is the first
thing we need to agree on whether we're gonna have a staff comment, and a
pupil comment <pause> on there <pause> <-|-> is tha—, is that the first
decision? <-|->
F7FPS000 0702 <-|-> I think everybody's in agreement <-|-> about staff
aren't they>
PS000 0703 **There's** no question about staff comment on <-|-> there? <-|->
F7FPS001 0704 <-|-> No. <-|->
PS000 0705 Right, fine!
0706 <-|-> Right. <-|->
(F7F 700-706 sp. educational/informative).

The first of the TCs makes a strong negative claim regarding the absence of questions or doubts about certain comments. It has a prospective character, and no element in it establishes a connection with the previous context. By uttering a question tag (incomplete in this particular case due to questions of disfluency), the

speaker looks for the addressee's agreement. Therefore, the second TC (as has been said, incomplete most probably because the speaker was interrupted by the other participant or by some other kind of interference) forms part of a question tag that retrospectively looks backwards into its immediate preceding context, in search of confirmation.

2.4.2.4. *The statement of short answers*

There are some cases in which the TC provides a short answer, or is embedded within a short answer to a previous question (either direct or indirect). This refers to those TCs that either confirm or deny some piece of information, rather than to those cases that could be considered as presentative, in which the TC would be presenting the existence of some new entity as an answer to a previous question. In these TCs giving short answers, the PVNP is often omitted, thus highlighting the strong connection existing between the TC and the previous context.

(22) Speaker A:692 Should children be allowed to receive Holy Communion, discuss. <pause>
693 What's a scriptural point.
694 What's the scriptural?
695 <-|-> Are you asking me? <-|->
696 <-|-> If **there** if <-|-> **there** is a point <unclear> scripture.
697 I don't know whether **there** is or **there** isn't.
Speaker B: 698 Can I just say something?
699 Yes.
(FYB 692-699 sp. public/institutional).

In example (22), line 697 provides a short answer to the indirect question previously formulated (example (16) above). The PVNPs are omitted due to the closeness between the question (with an explicit PVNP) and this answer (with omitted PVNPs). FYB 967 is possible only if FYB 696 is provided, and that confirms its retrospective character.

2.4.2.5. *The repetition and corroboration of an idea or statement*

The last of the sub-categories here proposed for TCs with a retrospective character includes TCs that contain a repetition, reiteration or even corroboration of something already stated. Such TCs repeat or corroborate information already present in the previous context, either explicitly or implicitly. Lexical repetitions and parallel structures may be found in TCs with this function, as can be seen on line 411 below:

(23) Don 404 Instead of <-|-> <unclear> <-|->
Rod 405 <-|-> general skills <-|->
Don 406 alright, problem solving, <-|-> at last! <-|->

Rod 407 <-|-> So at <-|-> the moment we've got one, two, three, four, five six
408 There's only an extra <-|-> <unclear> <-|->
Rod 409<-|-> so seven <-|-> eight
Andrew 410 Fine.
Don 411 There's only an extra one there!
Don 412 One, two, <-|-> three, four, five, six, seven <-|->
Angela 413 <-|-> We could leave literacy, numeracy <-|->
Don 414 **there's** only an extra one there.
(F7G 404-414 sp. educational/informative).

In this example, already analysed as (19) above, the same TC is repeated and its repetition brings about a slight change in its communicative role. While it has a more or less neutral introductory presentative character in 408, it becomes reiterative and corroborative in 411 and 414. In the case of 414, the reiterative character also acquires conclusive tones, as seen above.

4. Concluding remarks

Without dismissing any of the previous approaches to the question of the semantic and pragmatic meanings of TCs available in the literature, this paper has sought to provide an all-embracing classification of TCs from the communicative point of view. Taking as a basis notions already used in such previous studies (foregrounding/backgrounding, hearer-old/new, context-old/new), and considering two of the most basic and primary communicative roles, a wider range of possible functions have been recognised and labelled.

The two main pragmatic functions initially outlined are the prospective and the retrospective. The criterion for such a distinction was the consideration of whether the information given in the TC is supported, justified or further elaborated on in the previous context (retrospective) or in the following context (prospective).

Each of these two functions was further subdivided into a number of more specific roles that the TCs may perform. In the case of prospective TCs, I have proposed five possible labels for as many possible functions: introduction or presentation of an entity; correction of a statement or idea or presentation of a contrast; introduction of direct or indirect questions; presentation of a deduction or inference; statement of a personal appreciation or comment by the speaker/writer. For TCs with a retrospective function, which maintain a close relation with the previous context or point backwards towards it, another five possible functions have been mentioned: introduction of a summary or conclusion; elaboration or explanation of a given idea or entity; confirmation of something already stated by means of a question tag; introduction of a short answer to a previous question; presentation of corroborative or repetitive arguments.

All in all, it can be concluded that the common function of TCs is, in general terms, one of helping in the informational progress and development of the discourse. By first introducing pieces of *new* information into the text, TCs help the discourse to develop towards new areas and topics. The claims made in TCs that will be subsequently supported or developed in the following context open and enhance the text and its meaning, giving it new aspects and directions. Those TCs that make claims that find that justification or source in the preceding context bring summaries or closures to the texts.

5. Questions for further research

This exploratory study of the pragmatics of English existential TCs is far from being exhaustive. It is a part of a larger project concerned with the study of TCs in Present Day English, from the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic points of view. This large-scale analysis of the corpus aims to examine whether the variables of medium of expression and genre have any significant influence either on the frequency and distribution of TCs in PDE, or on their formal features, as well as on their pragmatic functions. The study and the classification that I have proposed here remain open to further analysis and study. Most specifically, it would be interesting to investigate the possible effects that the variable of medium of expression may have on the frequency and distribution of the communicative functions of TCs.

It seems to be the case that functions such as the search for confirmation or the reiterative one would be somewhat less frequent in writing than in speech (given the lower frequency of question-tags and repetition in planned writing). Despite its preliminary character, I believe that the present proposal for a classification of TCs according to their pragmatic functions within their context, might be the basis for an effective methodology.

Notes

2. Following Birner and Ward (1998), the term *construction* is here used in the sense of one of the various grammatical configurations of constituents within a particular language.

3. *Corpus-driven* (rather than *corpus-based*) implies that the study displays a bottom-up approach to TCs. It does not start from intuitions and then look for confirmation in testing the corpus (Aarts 1991), but rather, these attempts do not seem to have been successful in accounting for "a wide range of naturally occurring linguistic data in a rigorous and predictable way" (Birner and Ward 1998: 9).

4. The alphanumerical code which appears after most of the examples cited in the paper refers to the text and the lines of the British National Corpus (hereafter BNC) from which the example has been taken. *Wt.* stands for written, and *sp.* stands for spoken. The data come first and the corpus constitutes the major informant for the generalisations made (Stubbs 1993; Tognini-Bonelli 1993).

5. Notice, however, the fuzzy boundaries of the concepts *semantics* and *pragmatics*. See for instance Crystal, 1997: 301; Wierzbicka, 1991: 19.

6. According to the *End-Weight principle*, also called *Heavier Element Principle*, heavier elements, containing *new* information, tend to come towards the end of the sentence or clause, whereas the elements containing *given* information (the topic) tend to come at first. In Downing and Locke's (1992: 237) words, "unmarked focus falls on the last item of the information unit". "The neutral position for information focus is therefore towards the end of the information unit" (1992: 244).

7. For further details on the relationship between grammatical constructions and semantic structures, see Wierzbicka (1988: 3ff).

8. As an attempt to account for this intuition that *given* information precedes *new* information, many scholars have proposed dichotomies such as theme/rheme, topic/comment, or focus/ground. However, these attempts do not seem to have been naturally occurring for "a wide range of naturally occurring linguistic data in a rigorous and predictable way" (Birner and Ward 1998:9).

9. "The sole function of the presentative in [...] is to introduce an entity into the file of discourse referents. [...] The pragmatic function of an entity introduced in a presentative construction, on the other hand, is specifically an introductory one" (Siewierska 1991: 162-163).

10. For an in-depth study of the *unmarked-before-marked principle*, see Sobkowiak (1993).

11. From the 17th century, the existence of semantic primitives was promoted by scholars such as Pascal, Descartes, Arnauld or Leibniz. However, since the 1970s, the general enthusiasm for primes decreased for a number of reasons (see Goddard and Wierzbicka, 1994). To this day, Anna Wierzbicka has been their most persistent promoter. Following Wierzbicka, primitives are here written in capital letters.

12. In Wierzbicka (1996), THERE IS/ARE is included among the so-called *New Primitives*. This means that they have not been extensively tested, and cross-linguistic evidence is vital for deciding their future fate. It is for this reason that the concept of existence was not mentioned in previous approaches to semantic primes, such as Goddard and Wierszbicka (1994), for instance.

13. According to Wierzbicka, in English, "the clearest early realisation of this concept comes in the form of one-word utterances combining "existence", with negation, such as "allgone", and, at a later stage, with two-word combinations such as "milk allgone"" (1996: 85).

14. Notice, however, that the notion of existence is not lexically encoded as a verb or a verbal phrase in all languages. There are some other possibilities, such as for instance, the Austronesian language Tolai, which expresses the concept of "existence" by means of the definite articles (see Wierzbicka 1996: 84-85).

15. For an in-depth study of the similarities found between Polish and English existential constructions, see Lipińska, 1973. Such commonality can be summarised in the fact that "both languages use the same verb (*to be / być*) as an indicator of existence and in the function of copula" (1973: 90). The noun here used by the compilers of the BNC so as to designate the existent occurs in the nominative case, just like the subject of *Być* in copulative clauses:

$Jest_{3rd\ sg.\ pres.}$ $chleb_{noun'\ nomin.\ sg.}$ $dla_{prep.}$ $Ciebie_{pron.\ acc.sg'.}$
Is   bread   for
you

(There is bread for you).

$Studentka_{noun,\ nomin.\ sg.}$ $bardzo_{adv.}$ $mądra_{adj.\ nomin.\ sg.}$ $Student_{fem'.}$
wise/clever
is   very

(The student is very wise).

$Są_{3rd\ pl.\ pres.}$ $duchy_{noun,\ nomin.\ pl'}$ ghosts/spirits
Are

(There are ghosts).

$Chłopci_{noun,\ nomin.\ pl}$ $są_{3rd\ pl.\ pres.}$ $w_{prep.}$ $parku_{noun,\ loc.sg'}$
Boys   are   in   park
(The boys are in the park).

16. The BNC, internationally recognised as a reliable source of linguistic data (Biber *et al.* 1999: 27), contains a total of about 100 million words of Standard English and around 90 million words of written English).

17. The labels found in the BNC for these genres change depending on the medium of expression. In the written sample, nine different categories are distinguished (Imaginative, Arts, Belief and Thought, Commerce, Leisure, Natural Science, Applied Science, Social Science and World Affairs). In the spoken sample, by contrast, four categories are recognised (Educational and Informative, Business, Public and Institutional and Leisure).

18. Although in this paper no reference is made to the frequency of use of other possibilities, such as for instance, the different communicative functions of TCs, it is one of the aims of this classification to observe the frequency of the different functions both in speech and in writing.

19. See Davidse (1992b), among others, for a detailed account of these existential constructions without *there*.

20. The label <pause dur=3> was here used by the compilers of the BNC to indicate the existence of a pause in the speech of the speaker, as well as its duration.

21. Labels such as <unclear> or <end of tape> are used by the compilers of the BNC to signal that they were unable to transcribe a certain word or sequence, because the speaker did not clearly pronounce it, because they could not hear it properly (maybe due to some interference) or even because the tape ended before some word or statement had been recorded. The label </> also present in some of the examples given here, indicates some kind of interruption in the utterance. It is particularly frequent in dialogues, where speakers interrupt each other and their discourses overlap. All these labels occur in the written sample, rather than in the spoken one, where disfluency phenomena of this kind are less frequent, given the more planned character of writing.

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EXTENDED THEMATIC PROGRESSION

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1. Thematic progression

A now traditional analysis of sentence, if understood as message, is that it carries out the basic task of conveying information, and for that reason it is said to be made up of a segment with known or old information and another one with new information. In English, and to a certain extent also in Spanish, there is a strong tendency for the old information to be located in the initial constituent of the sentence (which receives the name of "theme"), whereas the new information usually comes in the final segment (which receives the name of "rheme"). Therefore, if messages are the sum of a theme and a rheme, and texts are the sum and concatenation of several messages, it follows that the sequence of thematic and rhematic segments constitutes one of the pillars of textual organization. This statement is, in fact, an imprecise paraphrase of thematic progression, a concept employed to designate (Daneš 1974:115):

> The choice and ordering of utterance themes, their mutual concatenation and hierarchy, as well as their relationship to the hyperthemes of the superior text units (such as the paragraph, chapter, etc) to the whole text, and to the situation. Thematic progression might be viewed as the skeleton of the plot.

Other definitions of thematic progression insist on the same elements (Enkvist 1974: 116; Fries 1983: 121;[1] Glatt 1982: 88;[2] Petöfi 1988: 87; Scinto 1986: 111