

EXISTENTIAL *THERE*-CONSTRUCTIONS IN PRESENT DAY ENGLISH. A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

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This paper is intended to study existential *there*-sentences in present day written English. A corpus-based approach was adopted and a sample of 200.000 words of literary and scientific writings was selected. The investigation was conducted in different stages, taking into account different parameters: the frequency and distribution of existential *there*-sentences in the two samples, their polarity, clause-type, syntactic pattern and structural complexity, the verbs and the verbal tenses employed, the pragmatic functions and the illocutionary acts expressed by these sentences. The results obtained suggest that the frequency, distribution, meanings, structures, uses and pragmatic functions of English existential *there*-constructions may vary according to the format, the purpose, the subject matter of the text and the relationship between the writer and a hypothetical reader. Literary and scientific writings were expected to make a different use of existential *there*-sentences as a result of their different nature.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an intended study of several syntactic and pragmatic features of the so-called *Existential There-Constructions* in Present Day English (PDE). These belong to the group traditionally known as *Existential Sentences*, using the term Jespersen (1949, 107) coined; in these existential sentences, *there* appears as an unstressed, non-deictic and non (-clearly) locative element, functioning as their subject (in a syntactic sense). As a consequence, what could be called the *notional subject* of the sentence appears after the verb (generally a copula); something that goes against the general rule of English word-order, according to which the standard and most common word-order is S-V-O.

The label of Existential Sentences (hereafter ES) stems, according to Quirk et al (1985, 1403), from their bringing the «existence of an entire proposition to the attention of the hearer.»

For P. Guerra (personal communication), «sentence initial *there* is, at least in PDE, an item whose purpose is to initiate a sentence and to add the content of ‘this element exists: Look!’. It could be said that the main aim of ESs is «to introduce a phrase in the discourse in a presentational way (appearance-effect) and to characterise such as existing (existence-effect).»

As far as the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic behaviours of ESs within the system of language are concerned, we can say that all these sentences share a number of general features. Although linguists (Milsark 1979; Rando and Napoli 1978; Aniya 1992) have been engaged for a long time in the task of satisfactorily and comprehensively analysing their structure and pragmatic function, they have come to face a series of principles and restrictions that determine the form and meaning of ESs, realising that these constructions constitute a phenomenon full of complexity, in which the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic aspects of English show a complicated interaction. Questions as crucial as the agreement between subject and verb (Milsark 1979; Givón 1993), the verbs allowed to occur

in ESs (Downing and Locke 1995; Quirk et al. 1985; Bolinger 1977) or the kind of references that *there*-constructions may have [definite or indefinite (Milsark 1979; Givón 1993); specific or non-specific (Aniya 1992); anaphoric or non-anaphoric (Rando and Napoli 1978)] are some of the issues that scholars have been trying to explain and clarify. However, these and other points are still open to new approaches and analyses.

Making a review of the literature shows that a number of points about ESs are controversial in the sense that they provoke different linguistic approaches and views on the part of different scholars; views that sometimes contradict, but sometimes complement each other. That is what happens, for instance, with the different approaches to the so-called *Definiteness restriction* or *Question of the indefinite NP* that authors such as Rando and Napoli (1978), Aniya (1992) or P. Guerra (1995) offer. Side by side with the different views that try to give a syntactic or structural explanation to this question, there are also approaches that try to explain such restrictions from a pragmatic perspective (Abbott 1993). The syntactic nature of *there* and its semantic value have also given rise to different perspectives. *There* has been therefore regarded as subject (Jespersen 1949), syntactic filler or *dummy* (Abbott, 1993) or even as cataphoric proform of a small clause (P. Guerra 1998).¹ The semantic value of *there*, as an extension of locative *there* (Bolinger 1977) or as a presentative element, minimally referential, without any locative meaning (Breivik 1983; Downing and Locke 1995), is also one of those points that are extensively discussed in the literature.

Nevertheless, making a study of all these conflicting points, with a careful and detailed review of the literature, could somehow take us far from the main purpose of this piece of work: to study the presence and behaviour of ESs in two different kinds of actual PDE, the illocutionary acts they perform and their pragmatic implications, trying to account as effectively as possible for the evidence found in the analysis of a corpus of ESs taken from PDE written texts.

As a working hypothesis it was assumed that the frequency and use of ESs is different depending on the type of writing (literary or scientific) in which they occur. It was therefore assumed that the conventions, format, purpose and subject matter of the text, as well as the relationship established between writer and reader may produce a variation in the general frequency, the distribution, the meanings and the pragmatic uses of ESs.

2. METHOD

A written Present Day English (PDE) corpus amounting to 210.000 words was used, selecting samples of equal proportions from literature and scientific writings.

For the literary sample, the material surveyed was taken from both American and British writers (three American writers and three British ones) as an attempt to provide a certain variety of styles and uses of the literary conventions. The plays chosen were: Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, K. A. Porter's *Collected Stories* and J. A. Phillips' *Black*

¹ In a paper read in the II International Conference of English Philology, held in A Coruña last March, 1998, P. Guerra claimed that *there* is to be seen as a cataphoric proform of small clauses. He defines *proform* in the following terms:

(usually short unaccented) recapitulatory lexical item whose complete interpretation draws either on other maximally construed lexical constituent (anaphoric/cataphoric dimension) or on referents found in or derived from current extratextual environmental circumstances (deictic dimension).

Tickets, for the American sample and V. Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, J. Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, for the British one.

Table 1: Distribution and number of words contained in the literary sample

	American literature			English/Irish literature			Total
	Hemingway	Porter	Phillips	Woolf	Joyce	Lawrence	
Number of Words	16.655	18.000	16.500	16.200	17.500	16.800	101.655

The selection was made with the intention of obtaining significative samples of the written English used by some of the American, English and Irish most outstanding novelists of this century, with its tendencies and features.

In the case of the scientific writings, excerpts were taken from a number of different journals, scientific magazines and publications with wide international audiences. The texts selected belong to the fields of Dentistry, Chemistry and the industry of cement production, Biology, Pharmacy, Optics and Astronomy-Physics. Again, the aim was to get a significative sample of the English currently used in scientific writings, with its linguistic features and conventions. As before, American and British magazines and articles were selected.

Table 2: Distribution and number of words contained in the scientific sample

	Industry	Biology	Chemistry	Pharmacy	Optics	Astronomy	Dentistry	Total
	of cement							
Number of Words	10.021	21.722	25.436	11.934	15.224	6.573	18.608	109.518

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that both samples have weaknesses: both are limited in their number of words and the styles and genres they deal with. In this sense, this could be seen as a preliminary analysis of ESs, meant to be expanded (possibly including also data from spoken language) so as to get higher levels of accuracy and reliability.

The study consisted in a comparative analysis of the use of ESs in both kinds of written PDE. It was intended to identify the frequency, significance, structural features and pragmatic-illocutionary implications that ESs showed in each sample. The ultimate aim was to test the initial hypothesis that the general features of the writings may affect their use of ESs.

After the identification of the ESs and their introduction into a computerised database, the comparative study of both samples was made, taking into account a number of parameters. Thus, the frequency and distribution of ESs was analysed with regard to aspects such as the polarity of the constructions, their clausal typology, their syntactic structure and complexity, the pragmatic functions and illocutionary acts performed by the ESs the verbs or the verbal tenses they contain.

ESs were regarded as those with an unstressed and non (-clearly) deictic *there*, syntactically functioning as their subject. In some of these existential units, there was not just a single *there*-construction, but rather two (or even more).

(1) *There could be neither luck nor grace in a house where there is no respect for the pastors of the Church* (J.Joyce, 37).² (Emphasis mine)

In some of these cases, *there* explicitly appears just once (at the beginning of the whole existential syntactic sequence) and is then omitted, thanks to its presence in the preceding context. Given this co-occurrence of two (or more) *there*-constructions within a single syntactic sequence, I decided to count as two *independent* ESs each one of the following entries:

(2) *And it came out there was not a person in the group, possibly no one in all Mexico, indelicate enough to do such a thing* (Porter, 36).

(3) *There being no more marrying, no more having of children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them...* (Woolf, 13).

(4) *There's money to bezzle with, if there is money for nothing else* (Lawrence, 32).

(5) *There was no tea, no coffee, in those days, only wine* (Lawrence, 45).

(6) *There could be neither luck nor grace in a house where there is no respect for the pastors of the Church* (Joyce, 37).

Note that *there* is explicitly written only in (4) and (6). Nevertheless, what led me to consider (3) and (5) as containing two ESs was the fact that there is a change in their polarity: the first *there*-construction of these two examples is negative, while the second one (with *there* + V omitted) is positive. In the case of (2), I decided to count two ESs because of the occurrence of two different kinds of negation (i.e. intensification of negation and *no*-negation).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total number of ESs found in the corpus is 370, but as can be easily gathered from table 3 and figure 1, a great difference was observed in their frequency and distribution in the two chosen samples of written English.

Table 3: Frequency and distribution of ESs in two samples of PDE writings

	Number of ESs found	Percentage
Literary sample	296	80%
Scientific sample	74	20%
Total	370	100%

² From now onwards, the examples mentioned belong to the corpus formed by all the ESs found in the two samples (a total of 370). The name and the number that appear at the end of each example refer to the author and the page of the text from which the ES was taken.

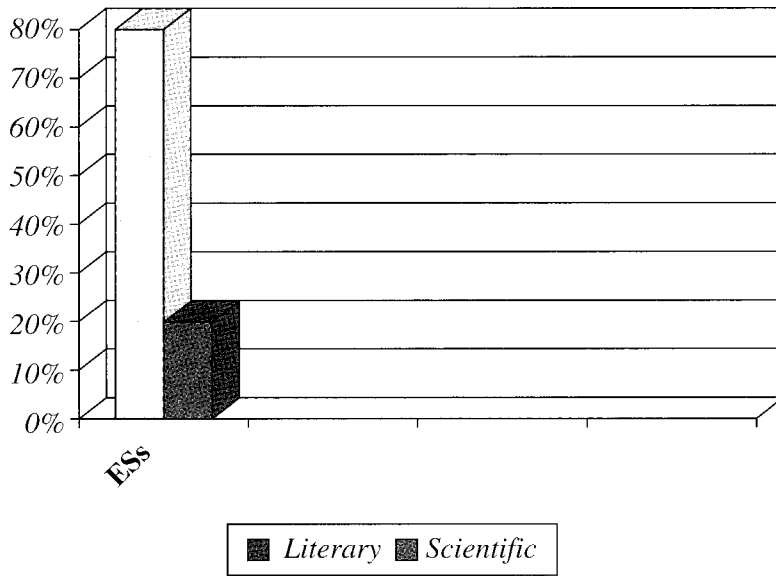


Figure 1. Frequency and distribution of ESs

Both the literary and the scientific samples contain a similar number of words (100.000 words/sample, approximately), but while 80% of the total number of ESs were found in the literary sample, only 20% of them were reported for the scientific sample.

This striking difference in frequency cannot be a mere question of chance, and there must be a reason for it. It could be due to the difference in aims, priorities and ultimate purposes that the two different sets of writings under analysis have. Side by side with this, the role that these texts seem to assign to their readers and the desired degree of clarity they look for could also influence the frequency of ESs in both linguistic samples.

Table 4 and figure 2 show that most of the ESs in both samples are positive (73,99% of them, in the literary sample and 68,91% in the scientific one), whereas negative ESs do not reach 50% in either of them (26,01% and 31,09%, respectively).

Table 4: Frequency and distribution of the ESs found according to their polarity

	Positive ESs		Negative ESs	
	No.	%	No.	%
Literary sample	219	73,99%	77	26,01%
Scientific sample	51	68,91%	23	31,09%
Total	270	72,93%	100	27,02%

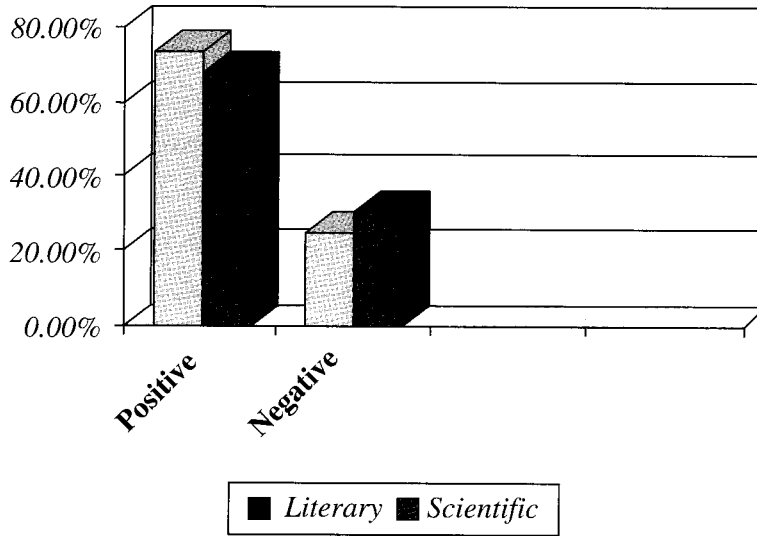


Figure 2. ESs according to the Polarity System

Taking into account that Palacios (1995) and Tottie (1991) claim that negative statements have a higher frequency in spoken than in written language, it seems reasonable that the samples under analysis, being both of them written, do not present a high number of negative ESs.

As regards the classification and distribution of the ESs attending to their clause-types, there is an unquestionable predominance of declaratives.

Table 5: Classification and distribution of ESs according to the criterion of clause-type

Sample type	Clause type									
	Declarative		Direct Interrogative		Indirect Interrogative		Exclamative		Imperative	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Literary	277	93.58%	13	4.4%	3	1.01%	2	0.68%	1	0.33%
Scientific	73	98.65%	-	-	1	1.35%	-	-	-	-

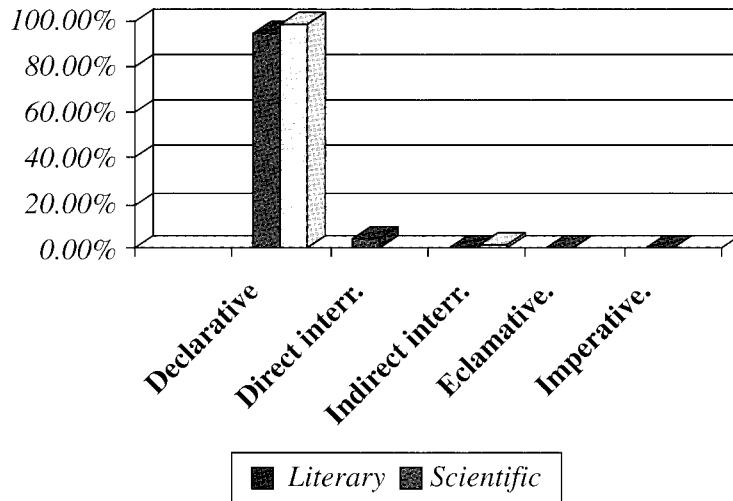


Figure 3. Clause type of the ESs

The percentage of declarative ESs, though high in both samples, is even higher in the scientific one (98.65% vs. 93.58%, in the literary one); pointing out then the general absence of interrogative and exclamative ESs that results from the assertiveness of the style here used. The main aim of scientific articles is to explain a number of concepts, ideas, theories and/or results and conclusions in a clear and straightforward way, sounding as much convincing as possible, leaving no room for doubt. Declarative statements (either positive or negative) reveal the truth and the proven character of their content; they avoid the ambiguity and subjectivity that interrogative and exclamative convey, highlighting the objectivity and credibility of the arguments exposed.

The syntactic and structural features of the ESs found are also sources of information for our comparison between the use of ESs that these two kinds of writings do.

Table 6: Frequency and distribution of the syntactic patterns of the ESs in the two samples

Syntactic pattern	Literary sample		Scientific sample		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
There + V + S	205	69.26%	42	56.76%	247	66.75%
A + there...	42	14.19%	21	28.38%	63	17.02%
Conj. + there...	23	7.77%	11	14.86%	34	9.19%
S + there...	8	2.70%	-	-	8	2.16%
A + S + there...	1	0.34%	-	-	1	0.27%
V + there...	6	2.03%	-	-	6	1.63%
Aux. + there...	4	1.36%	-	-	4	1.08%
Conj. + A + there...	2	0.67%	-	-	2	0.54%
Conj. + S + V + there...	3	1.01%	-	-	3	0.82%
S + V + there...	2	0.67%	-	-	2	0.54%

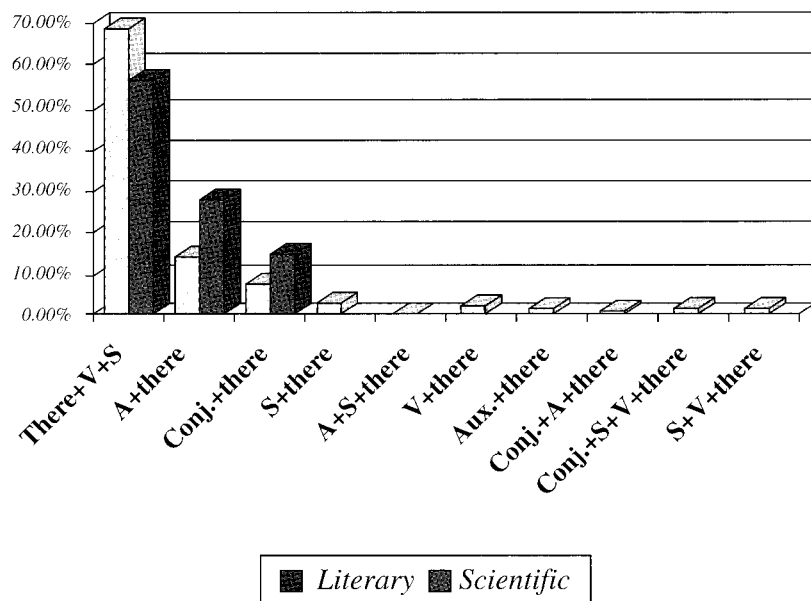


Figure 4. Syntactic patterns of the ESs

As in the case of the verbs found in these constructions, we observe that the literary sample allows for a wider variety of possible structures. More ESs with different syntactic patterns are found in the literary sample than in the scientific one. Nevertheless, there is a remarkable common feature for the two samples: the great predominance, in both cases, of ESs with *there* in initial position. This happens either in those cases in which the ES is the main clause (in such cases, *there* comes at the absolute initial position), or when it is subordinated to another clause (in these cases, although some other words appear before it, *there* is still the first word in its clause).

(7) *There were many orchards of fruit trees (Hemingway, 3).*

(8) *I wish there was some place we could go (Hemingway, 28).*

In those cases in which a co-ordinating conjunction appeared before *there*, I just considered the later to be the first word of the clause when studying the syntactic patterns of the ESs. Therefore, we speak of Conj. + *there*... when *there* is following a subordinating conjunction.

(9) *...if there were any rubber gloves in the village (Porter, 46).*

(10) *...whether there was any clicking or crepitus (Sidelsky and Clayton, 580).*

There + V + S (NP) is the most frequent pattern, with the possibility of the NP being followed by a predicative complement (PC), a modifier of the head noun or an adjunct (A).

(11) *There was fighting in the mountains and... (Hemingway, 3).*

(12) *...as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots (Woolf, 15).*

Adjuncts frequently occur in initial position, before the *there*-construction itself, but no inversion in word order is detected.

(13) *In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and...* (Hemingway, 3).

(14) *In the U.S., there are seven approved, systematically-active transdermally-delivered drugs* (Guy, 1765).

In the literary sample, there are also a number of cases in which *there* has not a sentence initial position. These are the cases of interrogative ESs, with the pattern V + *there*

(15) *Isn't there anywhere we can go?* (Hemingway, 28).

(16) *Is there anything you'd like me to talk about?* (Hemingway, 30).

(17) *Was there going to be a division of the housework?* (Porter, 47).

Or S + V + *there*:

(18) *What is there to eat?* (Hemingway, 48).

(19) *But what was there to laugh at in it?* (Joyce, 50).

and some ESs that, although not strictly speaking exclamations, might be considered as somehow doubly marked: on the one hand, they are marked through the use of *there*, and on the other hand, they are overly marked through the process of fronting of the NP subject.

(20) *...what confusion there would be sometimes with a girl running raving...* (Porter, 39).

The absence of these ESs (with the subject preceding *there*) from the scientific sample could be a result of that higher degree of *restraint* of the scientific linguistic code, which does not look for any particular linguistic, stylistic or rhetoric richness. In addition, it fits with the already seen general absence of interrogations and exclamations in the scientific genre.

In the study of the syntactic structure of the ESs of the corpus, we come across a worthwhile mentioning fact: in some of the scientific texts, the same syntactic pattern and almost the same words (with little variation) are repeated in all the ESs; they contain a special type of formulas.

(21) *There were significant differences between (...) and (...).*

(22) *There were significant differences (...) between (...) and (...) (both of them in Keng and Lim, 343).*

(23) *There were no differences in (...) between (...) and (...).*

(24) *There were no differences in (...) between (...) (both of them in Hirasawa et al., 384 and 385).*

Repetitions at the levels of phonology, lexicon and syntax provide the written text with a high level of structural coherence and formal cohesion, as well as somehow making easier the reading task. That is to say: using the same (and therefore familiar and known) syntactic pattern for presenting different data seems to be a part of the *guiding* labour on the part of the scientific texts.

With regard to lexicon, this use of repetition prevents, to a certain extent, the lexical richness that would derive from syntactic variation. We cannot speak of a rich and varied vocabulary for the scientific sample, but rather of a fixed and formulaic kind of language, from which the syntactic and lexical variations of the literary language have been taken out.

Through repetition one gets the feeling that readers are given a less active role in the comprehension of messages; being easier for them to decode messages from which *unnecessary* elements are deleted and only crucial contents are made explicit (using the same structures and lexicon).

There are not many ESs involved in processes of subordination and comparison in either sample.

Table 7: Frequency and distribution of subordinate ESs in the two samples

Sample type	Cases of subordinate ESs	
	No.	%
Literary	39	13.17%
Scientific	10	13.51%
Total	49	13.24%

The explanation for these low frequencies of ESs being subordinate to other non-existential clauses may be that, as subordinate clauses, rather than as main ones, the thematic and pragmatic effects of *there*-constructions become less evident and prominent; something that does not really fit with their inherently marked nature.

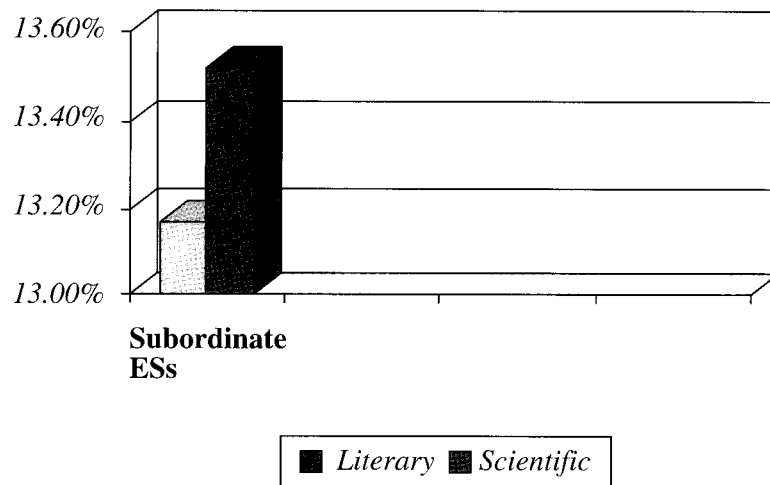


Figure 5. Subordinate ESs

The number of ESs involved in comparisons is not really significant in either sample. Although comparisons would permit to establish connections between different elements, the combination of comparative and existential constructions could bring about a considerable amount of complexity to the communicative process, being that the reason why ESs are not frequently involved in comparisons.

Table 8: Frequency and distribution of the ESs involved in comparisons

Sample type	Number of ESs involved in comparisons	
	No.	%
Literary	10	3.38%
Scientific	1	1.35%
Total	11	2.98%

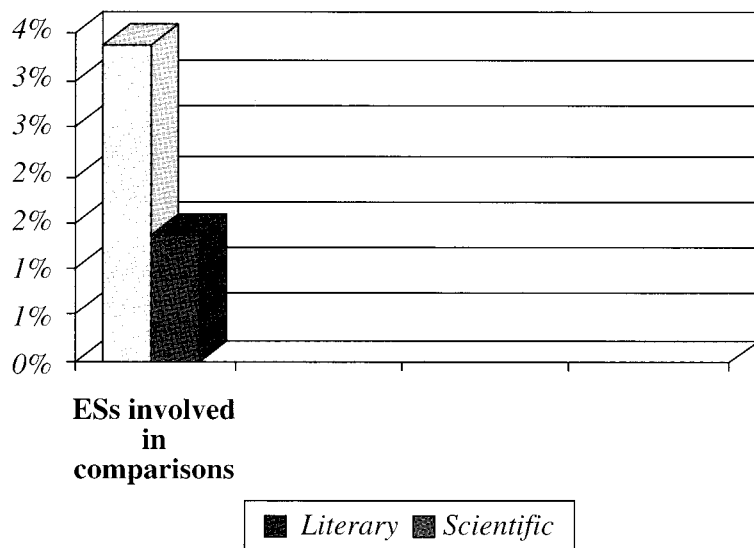


Figure 6. ESs involved in comparisons

This apparent avoidance of *overcomplicated* ESs could be also seen in the fact that not really many ESs contain embedded clauses as complements.

Table 9: Frequency, types and distribution of clausal complementation embedded within the post-verbal NP of the ESs in the two samples

Sample type	Type of embedded clause					
	Non-finite clause		Relative clause		That-clause	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Literary	23	7.78%	15	5.06%	2	0.67%
Scientific	7	9.46%	9	12.16%	5	6.75%
Total	30	8.10%	24	6.48%	7	1.89%

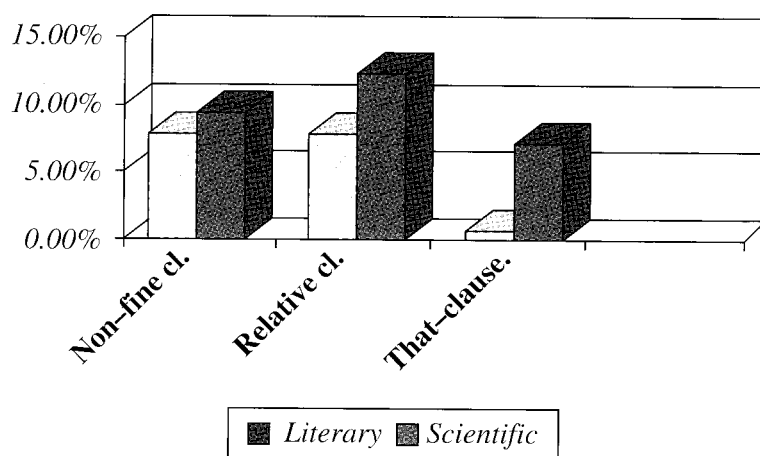


Figure 7. Embedded clauses within ESs

It is worthwhile mentioning that the quantity of ESs with embedded clauses is lower than 14% in the literary sample, while in the scientific one, which only contain 20% of the ESs of the corpus, we find almost 29% of ESs with complex or *heavy* constituents in the post-verbal position. The fact that the *notional subjects* of all these ESs are quite long could be understood as a proof that scientific language tends to use ESs not only for the sake of it, but rather as a way of introducing long new pieces of information into the discourse, without shocking readers or making them get lost in their reading. Scientific texts seem then to use ESs when they actually favour a clearer organisation of ideas.

As mentioned, in the literary sample, not even 14% of the ESs have embedded clauses functioning as complements; they seem to lack *heavy* elements with the function of *notional subjects*. As a result, one may think that non-existential constructions could have been used instead of the ESs, but nevertheless, the ESs were chosen. This means that in literary texts, ESs do not occur only for questions of *end-weight*, but rather because they are *preferred* by writers.

In the literary sample there seem to be some more cases in which the ES could have a grammatical non-existential counterpart, while for the ESs of the scientific sample most of the intended non-existential counterparts are ungrammatical, or at least, doubtfully acceptable (given that scientific texts tend to use ESs when they are syntactically required, so as to place a *heavy* subject at the end of the clause).

Further differences in the characteristics of the ESs in the two samples under analysis can be observed when paying attention to the verbs they contain, the verbal tenses in which such verbs occur and whether they go with modal auxiliaries or not. Tables 10 and 11 and figures 8 and 9 show once more the greater richness of the ESs found in the literary texts, in the sense that they contain more different verbs (always within the restricted group of them allowed in these clauses) and also more modal auxiliaries than those in the scientific excerpts.

Table 10: Frequency and distribution of the verbs contained in the ESs of the two samples

Verb	Sample Type					
	Literary sample		Scientific sample		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Be (to)	281	94.93%	71	95.93%	352	95.13%
Come	5	1.69%	-	-	5	1.35%
Seem (to be)	2	0.69%	-	-	2	0.55%
Be going to	1	0.34%	-	-	1	0.27%
Begin	1	0.34%	-	-	1	0.27%
Appear (to be)	1	0.34%	2	2.70%	3	0.81%
Exist	-	-	1	1.36%	1	0.27%
Hang	1	0.34%	-	-	1	0.27%
Remain	1	0.34%	-	-	1	0.27%
Stand	1	0.34%	-	-	1	0.27%
Follow	1	0.34%	-	-	1	0.27%
Hear	1	0.34%	-	-	1	0.27%

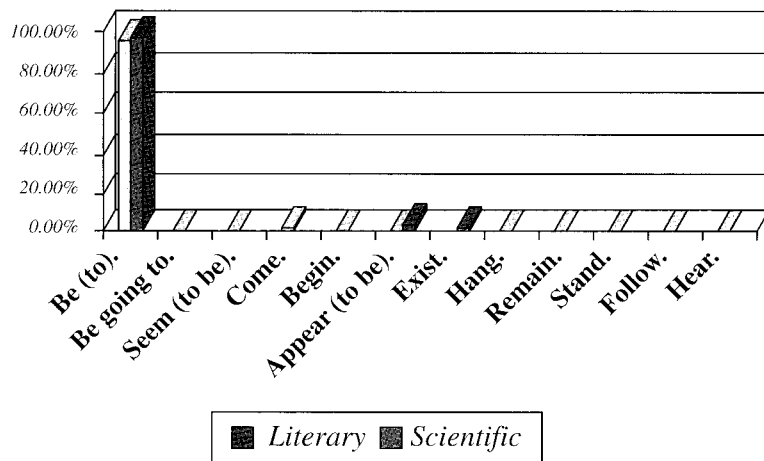


Figure 8. Verbs of the ESs

As already mentioned, the verbs that may occur in ESs are highly restricted.³ The ESs of our corpus confirm the general predominance of *be*: more than 95% of the verbal forms combined with *there* belong to the paradigm of *to be*. In a number of cases, the form of the verb *to be* is followed by a *to*-infinitive, thus referring to arrangements planned for the future or, if used in the past, to a past intention; having a similar semantic implication to that of the combination *to be* + *going (to be)*.

³ See page 8 above. These are verbs of existence (*to be, to exist*), position (*to stand, to sit, to lie down*) or entrance into the scene (*to come, to enter, to arrive, to appear*).

(25) *Was there going to be a division of the housework? (Porter, 47).*

(26) *The next afternoon we heard there was to be an attack up the river that night and... (Hemingway, 39).*

A bit further below, it will be seen that *be* may appear preceded by a modal such as *must, can, could, may* or *might*.

The verb *exist*, which has a very similar meaning to *be*, occurs just in one of the ESs of the scientific sample. This reflects the fact that, even in normal every-day speech, and although their meanings are very similar, *be* and *exist* have a very different frequency of occurrence. While the former is a highly common verb in everyday language, the use of *exist* seems to imply a higher degree of elaboration as if it were the product of a *more educated language*.

Other intensive verbs, such as *appear* and *seem* are also found in ESs.

When they are followed by a form of *to be*, they add certain nuances to the meaning of *be*; however, when they are used on their own, (at least in the case of *appear*), they apparently express a somehow different meaning.

(27) *...towards the close of which there appeared an image of himself grown older and sadder (Joyce, 70).*

Here *appear* not only brings the existence of something into the scene of speech; it also seems to convey semantic references to the way in which or the moment when that thing appeared in such scene. Thus, (27) lets the addressee know that the image was not already there but rather came into the scene more or less suddenly

Other verbs identified in the ESs of the literary sample express the ideas of position or entrance into the scene and make it easier then to find hints of what Bolinger (1977) called *locative repercussions*. These verbs are *come, follow, remain, hang, begin* and *hear*.

(28) *There could come to his mind the bright picture of Marseilles, of sunny trellises and of Mercedes (Joyce, 70).*

Table 11: Frequency and distribution of modal auxiliaries in the ESs of the corpus

Modal Auxiliary	Literary Sample		Scientific Sample	
	No.	%	No.	%
Would	5	1.69%	-	-
Could	4	1.35%	-	-
Will	2	0.67%	-	-
May	1	0.34%	-	-
Might	1	0.34%	-	-
Must	1	0.34%	-	-
Can	-	-	1	1.36%
Total	14	3.78%	1	0.27%

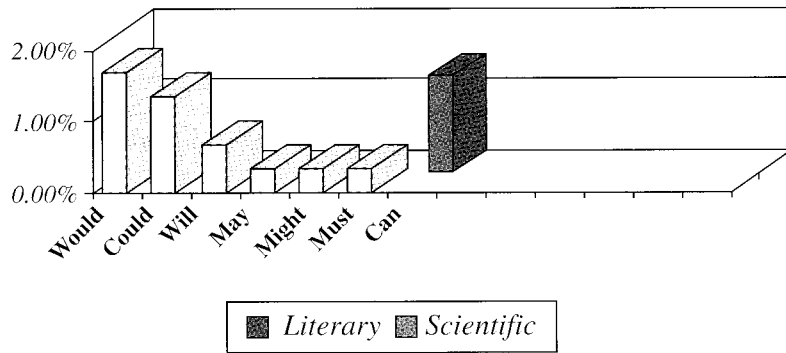


Figure 9. Modals found in the ESs

As already hinted, in scientific writings and articles, facts are presented in as a direct, comprehensive and simple a way as possible, generally avoiding *superfluous* modal implications, subtle stylistic variations and any other device that could make the text less assertive (although maybe richer). This is confirmed in the corpus under analysis, by the lack of modals—except *can*—from the ESs of the scientific sample, composed of texts where one does not usually face possibilities or doubts, but rather actual facts, results and evidence.

Table 12: Frequency and distribution of the verbal tenses in the ESs of the corpus

Tense	Literary Sample		Scientific Sample		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Present	75	25.34%	49	66.21%	124	33.51%
Past	204	68.92%	24	32.43%	228	61.62%
-ing¹	3	1.01%	-	-	3	0.82%

Regarding the tense of the verbal forms, table 12 and figure 10 show how both present and past forms are the most frequent ones. However, while more than 65% of the literary ESs contain a past verbal form, the tendency reverses in the scientific sample, where more than 65% of the ESs present a verbal form in the past tense.

The predominance of past forms in the literary sample might be due to the communicative function of the fragments selected. These, having a descriptive-narrative character, let us find a speaker who «brings into scene/consciousness» things, experiences, events and scenarios he/she met in the past or meets in the present.

In the scientific sample, by contrast, the general tendency is for ESs to contain present verbal forms (maybe) as a result of the main aim of those scientific writings: not only to get the description and explanation of processes, realities and experiments of the past, but also to achieve the reader's approval and agreement. Maybe for that reason they prefer a verbal tense (the present) that presents things as something actual, close to the reader and perfectly observable in the present.

¹ Rather than a verbal tense, -ing should be considered as a verbal form.

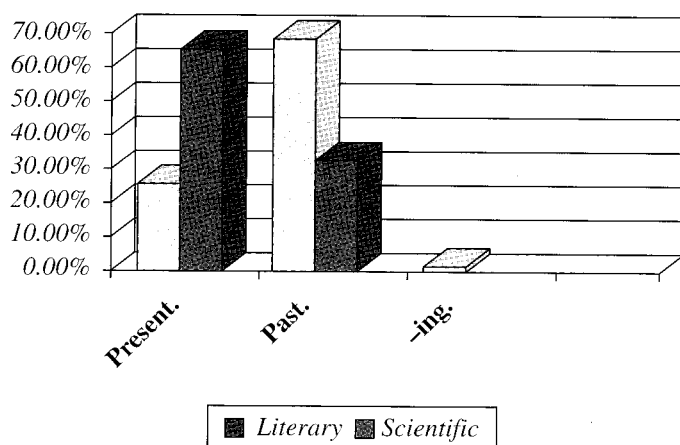


Figure 10. Tenses of the verbs in the ESs

Apart from all the syntactico-semantic implications that ESs may have, attention must also be paid to their pragmatic value and significance. According to Breivik (1983, 176), from a pragmatic point of view, *there*-constructions may be regarded as devices of postponement that serve the *topicalization principle* (and hence the *heavier element principle*). Thus, the subject NP receives nuclear prominence, becoming the focus of information, or as Leech and Svartvik (1975, 171) claim, «the part of the unit to which the speaker especially draws the reader's attention.»

In table 13 and figure 11 ESs are pragmatically classified according to Abbott's (1997) criteria. From this point of view, both positive and negative ESs may be pragmatically analysed, but table 14 and figure 12, which follow Tottie (1991) and Palacios (1995), focus only on the pragmatics of negative ESs.

Table 13: Frequency and distribution of the different pragmatic significances of the ESs in the two samples

	Sample type					
	Literary		Scientific		Total	
Pragmatic significance	No.	%.	No.	%.	No.	%.
Making the addressee aware of the existence/absence of certain entities	107	36.15%	36	48.65%	143	38.64%
Drawing the addressee's attention to the existence/absence of certain entities	94	32.78%	23	31.08%	120	32.44%
Simply acknowledging the existence/absence of certain entities	75	25.33%	14	18.92%	89	24.06%
Questioning about the existence/absence of certain entities	14	4.73%	-	-	14	3.78%
Indirectly questioning about the existence/absence of certain entities	3	1.01%	1	1.35%	4	1.08%

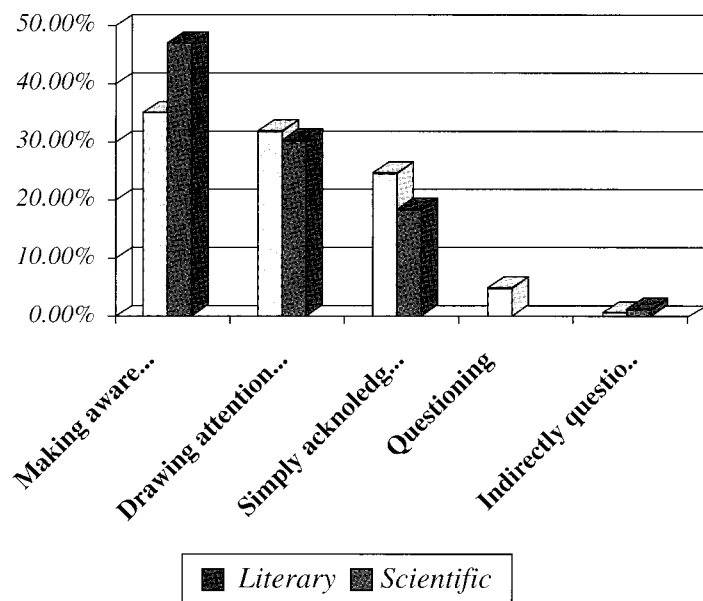


Figure 11. Pragmatic significances of the ESs found

It is first of all necessary to say that the classification of ESs according to their pragmatic significance largely depends on subjective and personal conceptions and views. More often than desired, we cannot speak of unquestionable justifications to classify a given ES into one or another of the five groups seen in table 13. In addition, the boundaries between such pragmatic significances are fuzzy, and it is sometimes difficult to know the difference between making someone aware of something or drawing their attention to it; as well as it is hard to say whether the writer wants to make the addressee aware of something or to simply acknowledge its existence/absence before them.

Another possible weakness of our classification is the fact that, when concentrating on the contexts in which ESs occur, only some sentences before and after each one of them were considered.

Both in the literary and the scientific samples most ESs make the addressee aware of the existence/absence of a given entity (36,15% and 48,65%, respectively). Maybe, at first sight, the pragmatic function that could be considered as most neutral seems to be that of simply acknowledging the existence/absence of a given entity, but one can infer why this is not the most frequent function of the ESs analysed. Very rarely do people utter a certain sequence just for the sake of it, with the only intention of acknowledging something. By contrast, when speakers use such a construction as an ES, they have a concrete communicative aim in mind, and that is why other pragmatic meanings, which could be regarded as *not so neutral*, have a higher frequency of occurrence.

It is difficult to draw a borderline between the two functions that appear to be most frequent, making the addressee aware of the existence/absence of a given entity (38.64%) and drawing the addressee's attention to the existence/absence of a given entity (32.44%). As a result, the numbers and percentages here used do not seem to be completely reliable. Maybe it would be wiser to speak of a single pragmatic function instead, labelled *trying*

to cause a certain effect on the addressee, listener or reader, by means of bringing the existence/absence of a given entity into the scene of the discourse. This function would include a number of subtle variations of meaning, and would be present in about 70% of the ESs studied.

In that case, numbers would leave no doubt that the ultimate pragmatic aim of ESs in the present corpus is that of somehow modifying or affecting the addressee's state of mind, attitude or knowledge, by bringing the existence/absence of entities to the communicative scene.

The simple acknowledgement of the existence/absence of entities seems to be predominant in descriptions, where rather than trying to call the addressee's attention to a given object, the speaker is just providing a general presentation of a given scenario or situation.

It is significant that in the scientific sample no direct questions about the existence/absence of entities were found. As already said, this is a consequence of the general assertive character of scientific articles and their seeking in language an aid to their aims. Therefore, to sound convincing, they must be clear and simple in the presentation of concepts and ideas (syntactic clarity) and they cannot leave any room for doubt (predominance of declarative sentences over interrogative ones).

By contrast, literary language tends to give less importance to assertiveness, clarity and syntactic simplicity. It rather looks for linguistic beauty and realism in the reproduction of people's speech; its containing dialogues explain the presence of ESs with the pragmatic function of questioning about something, (they are inserted in interrogative constructions).

The illocutionary acts performed by negatives, as seen by Tottie (1991, 314-15), are mainly of two types: *Denial* and *Rejection*.

With the label *Implicit Denials*, Tottie refers to the negation of statements which have not been asserted by anyone but are expected or easily inferred from the context. By contrast, she maintains that speakers produce *Explicit Denials* when they negate a statement that has been explicitly mentioned before.

Table 14: Frequency of the illocutionary acts performed by negative ESs

Sample type	Illocutionary Acts									
	Implicit denial		Explicit denial		Question		Hedge		Directive	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Literary	54	70.13%	17	22.07%	4	5.2%	1	1.3%	1	1.3%
Scientific	21	91.30%	2	8.7%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	74	74%	20	20%	4	4%	1	1%	1	1%

As seen in table 14, *implicit denials* are predominant in both samples, while *explicit denials* are rather limited. Side by side with this, we observe that the literary sample appears to be richer than the scientific one in the illocutionary acts performed by ESs. Thus, although not many, we can also find negative ESs performing illocutionary acts such as questions, hedges or directives/commands in the literary sample.

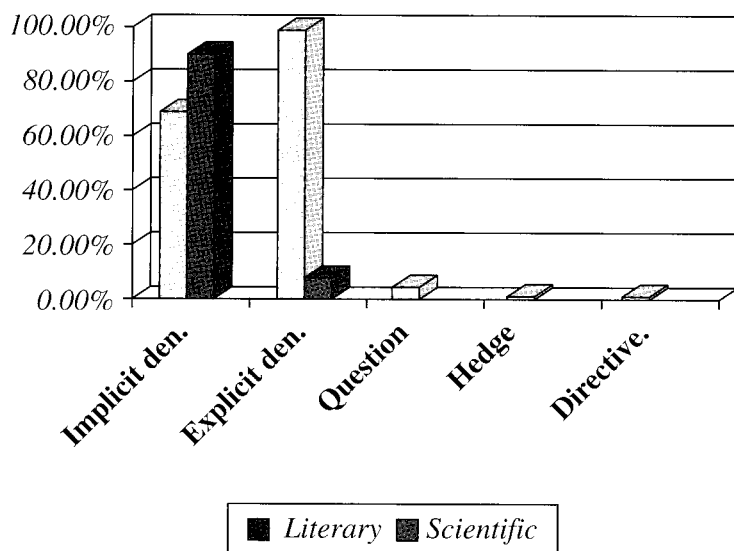


Figure 12. Illocutionary acts performed by negative ESs

(29) *No, there's nothing for you to do-except take Annie out* (Lawrence, 29).-Directive.

(30) *...or wasn't there?* (Porter, 47).-Question.

(31) *There isn't always an explanation for everything* (Hemingway, 17). – Hedge.

This is related with the data in table 5 above (where it was seen that most ESs of the scientific sample were declarative). Most negative ESs in the scientific texts have the more or less neutral functions of making the addressee aware of the absence of certain entities, or simply acknowledging it. Scientific writings are mainly descriptive and assertive; they are not so close to spoken language as literary texts, and therefore, they have no room for hedges, doubts, questions or commands.

Other aspects of ESs which were also taken into consideration in this contrastive study were the use of the colloquial contracted form *there's*, the co-occurrence of locative *there* and existential *there* within a same clause and the opposite possibility of finding just one ambiguous form, either clearly a locative nor an existential.

The form *there's* is the result of the contraction of the existential *there* and the following verbal form when this is the third singular person of the present of *to be*. As a consequence of people's tendency to economy and speed, and like most English contractions, *there's* is quite common in everyday oral speech but rather infrequent in the written medium. Thus, when it occurs in a text, it is for some given purpose, not just for a question of chance or as a sign of the writer's carelessness.

Table 15 and figure 13 show that, although not really common in either sample, *there's* is not infrequent in the literary sample (9.46%). The reason why this is so may be that literary language usually tries to reproduce people's actual speech as far as possible; writers would then use such contracted form (among others) to reproduce someone's speech, dialogues, monologues or even thoughts. *There's* is then a way of giving the text a higher degree of realism, veracity and proximity to the reader.

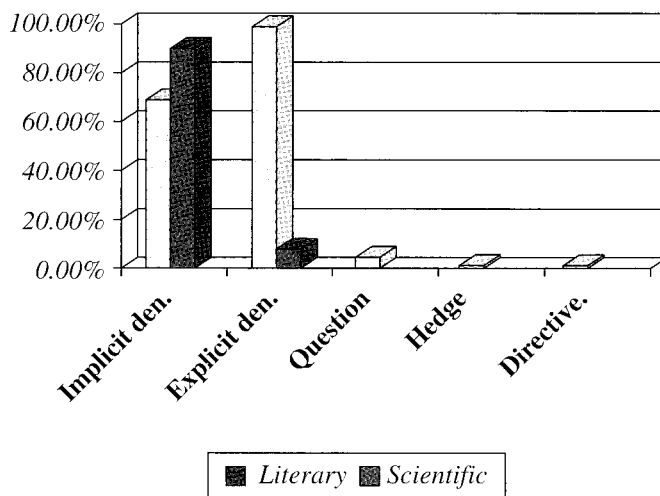
Table 15: Frequency and distribution of the contracted form *there's* in the two samples

Sample type	Contracted <i>there's</i>	
	No.	% ⁵
Literary	28	9.46%
Scientific	3	4.05%
Total	31	8.38%

Quite on the contrary, scientific texts, in their attempt to appear impersonal, expository, explanatory and completely neutral, avoid the use of linguistic forms that could let the reader infer the presence of a particular person behind the speech. They avoid then forms as *there's*, which appears just in 4.05% of the ESs. The only three cases of *there's* found in the scientific sample belong to a pair of magazines⁶ with an *informative* character, intended to be read by a large audience, rather than a *scientific* one. By using a somewhat colloquial language, those articles want to present a piece of scientific knowledge as clearly as possible, trying to make readers feel the closeness of such facts to their lives.

(32) *There's a whole lot of redundancy built into the system* (Gillis, 75).

(33) *But there's a neighbouring eclipsing binary that ranks among the oddest stars known* (Kaler, 51).

Figure 13. Cases of contracted *there's*

⁵ The figures here presented mean that 9.46% of the ESs found in the literary sample contain contracted *there's*, while in the scientific sample only 4.05% of the ESs contain such form.

⁶ These magazines deal with the fields of astronomy (*Astronomy*) and biology (*Bioscience; American Institute of Biological Sciences*).

Table 16 and figure 14 contain data about the cases in which both the locative *there* and the existential *there* co-occur in a single clause, making thus their difference most evident.

(34) *There were little cottages there* (Joyce, 19).

(35) *There's more snow there than here* (Hemingway, 8).

Table 16: Frequency and distribution of the cases of existential *there* co-occurring with the locative adverb *there* within the same clause

Cases of co-occurrence of existential and locative <i>there</i>		
Sample type	No.	%.
Literary	10	3.38%
Scientific	-	-
Total	10	2.70%

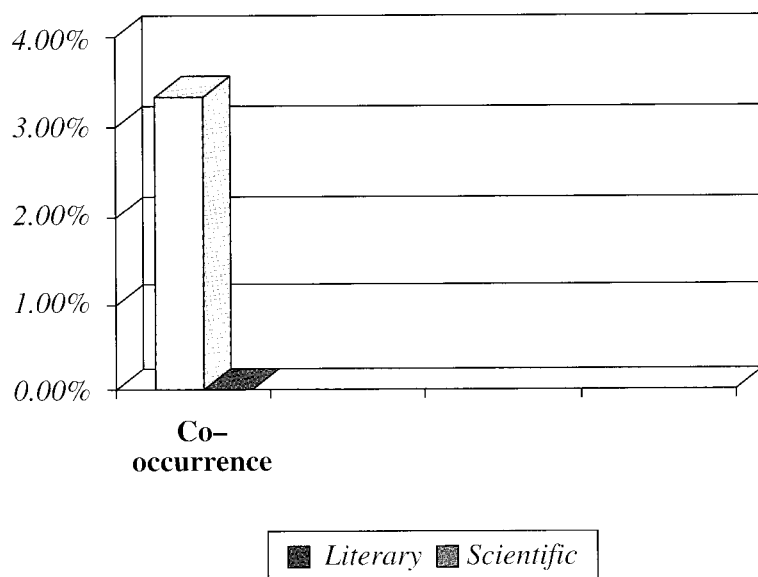


Figure 14. Co-occurrence of locative and existential *there*

The possible occurrence of existential *there* in tags, as opposed to the impossibility for the locative *there* to do so, comes to reaffirm their different nature:

(34b) *There were little cottages, weren't there?*

(34c) **Some cottages were there, weren't there?*

Again the ESs of the scientific and the literary samples are quite different according to this parameter. What happens is that the place adjuncts of the scientific texts are far more precise in their meanings than the locative adverb *there*. This has, to a certain extent, a too vague referential meaning for a register (the scientific) that looks for explanatory clarity and precision.

Table 17: Frequency and distribution of the cases of ambiguous *there* in the two samples

Sample type	Ambiguous <i>there</i>	
	No.	%
Literary	4	1.35%
Scientific	-	-
Total	4	1.08%

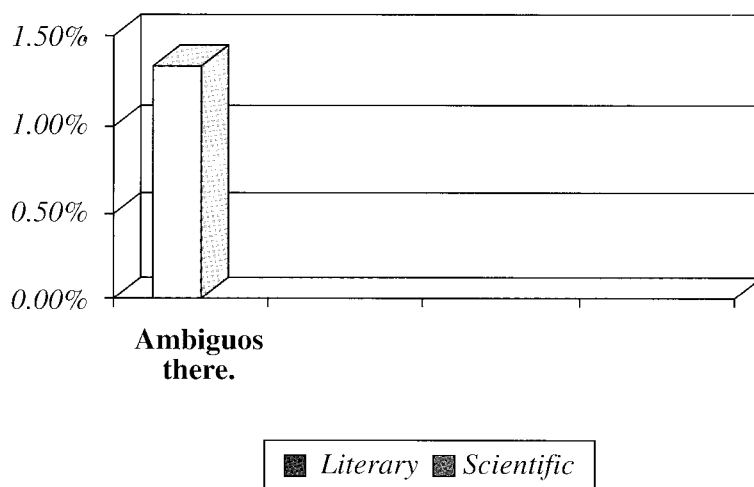


Figure 15. Cases of ambiguous *there*

This also applies for the fact that no cases of ambiguous *there* appear in the scientific writings of the corpus. In them, all forms of *there* are clear cases, either of existential *there* or of locative *there*. Any source of doubt or ambiguity (even linguistic ambiguity) is avoided.

The ambiguous cases of the literary sample, as Breivik (1983) maintains, are not a proof of existential *there* having sometimes a deictic force; they are cases of neutralisation of the two different uses of *there*. Thus (36) is ambiguous as a surface string that has two possible readings: (36b) and (36c).

(36) *There stood the silver grey night, fearful to him, after the tawny light of the lamp* (Lawrence, 36).

(36b) *The silver grey night stood there, fearful to him, after the tawny light of the lamp.*

(36c) *The silver grey night stood, fearful to him, after the tawny light of the lamp.*

4. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of all these points in two different linguistic samples leads to a number of conclusions, not only about ESs themselves, but even about the way in which the ultimate aims of a given genre may affect the use of language—in general—and of ESs—in particular.

Literary and scientific writings have a rather different character, not only regarding their contents, but also as far as their formal structure and aims are concerned. While scientific texts are intended to be didactic (communicating concepts, ideas or pieces of evidence as much clearly as possible), literary writings usually look for linguistic richness and variation; beauty in diction and pragmatic as well as rhetoric effects.

Their difference of priorities provokes a difference in the style and language employed: the scientific text seeks linguistic simplicity and clarity, assertiveness and restraint, so as to somehow facilitate the process of the reader's understanding the meanings conveyed. By contrast, the literary text is much more variable and quite often tries to reproduce people's own words and expressions, making use of any linguistic device, rhetoric and stylistic effects that might help in such an attempt.

This initial differentiation between both kinds of writings must be undoubtedly related with the striking difference in the frequency of ESs found in both samples.⁷

It seems that, generally speaking, scientific texts look for assertiveness and avoid syntactic complexity as much as possible (avoiding ESs, negatives and other kind of constructions). It seems as if, in the scientific sample, ESs are restrained to those cases in which they are strictly necessary:

Due to the *Principle of End-Weight*, if the NP is too long/*heavy*, it cannot be initially placed in the sentence, since *heavy* elements tend to come at the end. This could be why in the scientific sample there is a higher percentage of ESs containing embedded clauses in their post-verbal NP than in the literary one, since it seems that the ESs found in the scientific sample were necessary and not introduced just for the sake of it.

In addition, ESs may help to avoid the reader's getting lost by means or removing the pieces of new information far from the initial position of the sentence.

On the contrary, literary language makes use of ESs on a wider range of occasions. Sometimes, they are used to achieve a particular pragmatic effect other than merely making the addressee aware of the existence/absence of a given entity. Other times, it is a question of putting a given element under special focus. There are also many cases in which the *Principle of End-Weight* is the main reason for the occurrence of *there*-constructions. Even the attempt to reproduce people's speech could be an explanation for the usage of ESs in a number of cases, something that literary writings deliberately seek on some occasions.

Summing up then, it seems that the different use of ESs that literary and scientific writings make fits their different characters, priorities and final purposes.

Scientific writings, clear and with somewhat fixed patterns, tend to *guide* the reader to the desired aim: a correct interpretation of the ideas presented. That is why they prefer straightforward language and style, avoiding those linguistic devices that (as ESs may do) could make comprehension difficult.

⁷ See table 3 and figure 1 above.

The ultimate aim of literary texts is not just the comprehension of the content but also that of making the process something enjoyable, attractive, even challenging and never monotonous. In this sense, they present syntactic richness and variation, ambiguities, Subjectiveness and colloquialisms, without avoiding the use of devices and syntactic structures that, as ESSs, might add some complexity to the text.

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