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# Another look at definites in existentials

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Existential sentences have usually been defined on the basis of their Existential sentences have usually been defined on the basis of their morpho-syntactic characteristics. In English, the term has been used to morpho-syntactic characteristics. In English, the term has been used to morpho-syntactic characteristics. In English, the term has been used to morpho-syntactic that most such sentences contain the verb be, an has been further observed that most such sentences contain the verb be, an has been further observed that most such sentences contain the verb be, an has been allocative adverbial following there in that order. Despite indefinite NP and a locative adverbial following there in that order. Despite this syntactic characterization, however, the term 'existential sentence as been taken, erroneously, to refer to some semantic features of the sentence as been taken, erroneously, to refer to some semantic features of the sentence as well, and so it has been generally assumed that existential sentences always assert the existence of some entity.'

Various cross linguistic similarities have been observed to hold of existential Various cross linguistic similarities have been observed to hold of existential sentences (cf. Clark, 1970; Kuno, 1973, inter alia); in particular the restriction sentences (cf. Clark, 1970; Kuno, 1973; has been taken to be a basic characteristic of on the occurrence of definite NP's has been taken to be a basic characteristic of on the occurrence across languages. The most commonly cited explanation existential sentences across languages. The most commonly cited explanation of an entity that is already presupposed to exist (by virtue of its semantic of an entity that is already presupposed to exist (by virtue of its semantic of definiteness) (cf. Kuno, 1971). Instances where definite NP's were found to occur in an apparently existential sentence have usually been reduced to occur in an apparently existential sentence have usually been reduced to occur in an apparently existential sentence have usually been reduced to occur in an apparently existential sentence have usually been reduced to occur in an apparently existential sentence have usually been reduced to occur in an apparently existential sentence have usually been reduced to occur in an apparently existential sentence have usually been reduced to occur in an apparently existential sentence have usually been reduced to occur in an apparently existential sentence where definite NP's, certain superlatives semantic indefiniteness (i.e. relativized and modified NP's, certain superlatives semantic indefiniteness (i.e. relativized and modified NP's, certain superlatives semantic indefiniteness (i.e. relativized and modified NP's, certain superlatives semantic indefiniteness (i.e. relativized and modified NP's, certain superlatives semantic indefiniteness (i.e. relativized and modified NP's, certain superlatives semantic indefiniteness (i.e. relativized and modified NP's, certain superlatives semantic indefiniteness (i.e. relativized and modified NP's, certain superlativity (i.e. re

Napoli, 1978).

Recently (Milsark, 1974; Rando & Napoli, 1978) a whole class of there Recently (Milsark, 1974; Rando & Napoli, 1978) a whole class of there sentences with potentially definite NP's has been observed, and the claim has sentences which potential sentences are list there-sentences which constitute a special been advanced that these are list there-sentences which constitute a special subset of existential sentences allowing definite NP's since the assertion of

<sup>[1]</sup> I wish to thank A. Mittwoch, R. Berman, D. Bolinger, A. Ziv and an anonymous reader for

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[2] By definite NP's is meant not just nouns occurring with the definite determiner, of course, but also personal pronouns, proper nouns, demonstratives, and possessives (cf. Bolinger, 1977: 119 also personal pronouns, proper nouns, demonstratives, and possessives (cf. Bolinger, 1977: 119).

for a discussion of a scale of definiteness in reference to existential sentences).

[3] Another type of explanation is provided in Milsark (1974, 1977) where definite determiners are taken to be instances of universal quantification. Existential sentences are thus claimed to exclude definite NP's due to the potential double quantification of the sets denoted by the NP's exclude definite NP's due to the potential double quantification of the sets denoted by the NP's (universally quantified by virtue of occurring with the definite determiner and existentially quantified by virtue of their occurrence in an existential sentence).

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existence is made of the list (which is conceived of as indefinite) and not of the entities (definite or indefinite) comprising it. In other words, the list and not its components constitutes the argument in list-there sentences and hence a definite NP which is but a member of the list is not an argument of the existential predicate and its definiteness is fully compatible with the restriction on the distribution of definites in existential sentences.

In this paper I will discuss an apparently existential construction in Colloquial Modern Hebrew (CMH) where the non-locative NP is definite. It will be shown that there are at least two different constructions that converge on a similar existential syntactic structure and that for only one of them could the 'list interpretation' be offered to explain away the definiteness.

I shall discuss two types of explanations for the apparent distributional oddity in the second construction. The first concentrates on the nature of the problematic definite NP in question, in an attempt to show that it is in fact indefinite either semantically or both syntactically and semantically. This attempt at saving the generalization about the non-occurrence of definites in existential sentences is in line with the general treatment of such apparent exceptions (cf. Kuno, 1973; Rando & Napoli, 1978).

The second type of explanation involves a discussion of the nature of the relevant construction, in an attempt to show that the term 'existential sentence' is a misnomer on semantic and communicative functional grounds. The restriction on the occurrence of definites may, thus, simply apply to only a subset of the set of sentences originally conceived of as 'existential' and the occurrence of definite NP's in the sentences under consideration might turn out to be non-problematic since these sentences would not belong to the relevant set of existentials to which the restriction is applicable.

# 2. A DESCRIPTION OF THE CONSTRUCTION IN QUESTION

### 2.1. General comments

The pattern that is under investigation can be represented as:

	particle 'be'	existential	,	yeš
marker	accusative	definite		ef
				definite NP
	pronoun)	phrase or adverbial	(=prepositional	locative element

The occurrence of the existential particle sentence initially is one of the major characteristics of this construction as an existential sentence. As stated

[4] The particle yet is restricted in its occurrence to existentials and possessives when occurring sentence-initially in the unmarked case. It may occur in certain locatives following the subject and showing agreement with it (cf. Berman & Grosu, 1976; Clark, 1970). With respect to the construction under investigation, we will not be concerned with its origin here, but see Ziv (1976) for a discussion of definite NP's in certain possessive constructions.

in the introduction there are at least two different constructions converging on this type of pattern; the two differ as to the nature of, and co-occurrence constraints between, the non-locative and the locative elements in them. I will discuss both constructions in some detail so that the differences between them will be clear and the necessity for a 'non-list explanation' for the occurrence of definite NP's in the second of these constructions will be evident.

### 2.2. The 'list reading' construction Consider the following sentences:

			Ξ
ę,	part.	exis.	yeš
pron.)	(loc.	there	šam
m.	acc.	def.	ርደ
		Chomsky	xomski (et
Ħ.	acc.	(def.	(et
		Ross	ros
		and more	ve od

kama balšanim mefursamim) several linguists famous)

literally: 'There is/are Chomsky (Ross and some other famous linguists) there.'

	(2)
9	(2) (a) yeš
(b) yeš	yeš
et	šam
xomski	et
æ	xomski
am	
ay ti	(same gloss as in (1))

lit: 'There is Chomsky at M.I.T.'

		Ť
		(a)
part.	exis.	) (a) yeš
acc.m.	def.	ሷ
	Moshe	moše
	Dayan	dayan
government	in the	bamemšala
	the:	hazot

9

lit: 'There is Moshe Dayan in this government.'

ર) (b)		šam /	Ď.	Ç	moše	dayan
exis.		there	in her	def.	Moshe	Dayan
	part	(loc.		acc.m.		
		pron.)	i)			
<u>4</u>	yeš	_	haze /	šam	et	hame'il
	<i>-</i>	in the	the	there	def.	the coat
	6	closet	this	(loc. pron) acc.m	acc.m.	
	haxadaš	šelxa				

lit : 'There is in this closet/there your new coat.'

the new your

In the sentences of (1)-(4) the non-locative, definite NP's or proper nouns constitute the non-contrastive intonation nucleus (irrespective of their location in the sentence). As is generally the case in existential sentences the

government (3) and this closet (4) and not of Chomsky, Dayan and your coat occur.5 Sentences (1), (2a) and (2b) can all serve as appropriate responses to rheme, the predications in (1)-(4) are of the institute (M.I.T.) (1-2), this respectively. This is evident from the context in which such sentences can locative element functions as the theme and the non-locative element as the

ত Who is teaching linguistics at M.I.T. this year?

hence

but not to

Where is Chomsky this year?

(2) (5) \* yeš oto/et xomski 8 23 چ ₫.

likewise (3a) and (3b) are appropriate as continuations of

but not as responses to a query about Dayan as in 3 Don't put down the present government in Israel

8 What do you know about Moshe Dayan?

(3) (a')\* yeš oto/et (acc.) min moše dayan bamemšala government in the hanoxexit the present

and also (4) is appropriate in a context where the content of the brown closet is

9 What's in the brown closet?

and not in a context where the coat is being asked about as in

<u>ē</u> Do you know where my coat is?

hence:

ğ, 010 et hame'il šelxa the coat your! closet in the ba'aron haxum the brown

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The potential anaphoricity of the locative expression in (1)-(4) may serve as anaphoric expressions tend to constitute part of the theme and not to occur in additional evidence for its thematic status; in general non-contrastive

and the person/thing present in it (cf. Bolinger, 1977, and Ziv, forthcoming). a given location, or even the establishment of a relation between the location exist, but rather a reminder of the presence of the people/objects in question in assertion of existence of entities which were previously not presupposed to the rheme It is worth noting that the claim made in these sentences is not in fact an

example sentences such as (1), where the list is explicit, and the similarity in the consider the 'list solution' fully worked out, but it seems to me that in light of explained in the same way whatever the final explanation turns out to be. general characteristics (intonation, appropriateness in context) that the present case as well. The above statement does not necessarily imply that I English (Milsark, 1974; Rando & Napoli, 1978) might be relevant in the Napoli, 1978) show, it is logical to assume that in essence the two would be sentences in (1)-(4) and the list-there sentences (as discussed in Rando & The solution to the occurrence of definite NP's in list-there sentences in

construction, for which the existing explanations for the definiteness are either irrelevant (e.g. list) or unsatisfactory (as will become evident shortly). The main concern of this paper, however, is a similar yet distinct

### 2.3. The second construction (non-list) Consider the following sentences:

							۳
library	and in the	vebesifriyat			particle	exist.	yeš
9				^	acc.m.	def	et
	the department	hamaxlaka	oto him(= it)			the book	hasefer
	ment	ω.		of Chomsky	*-1	this	haze
				_	norary	in the	) basifriya
						the national	hale umit

the departmental library. lit.: 'There is this book/Chomsky's book/it in the National Library and in

<sup>[5]</sup> The terms 'theme' and 'rheme' are used here in the sense of the Prague School Granunarians respect to existentials) and the theme - what the predication is of, and (b) that this distribution rheme constitutes the predication (to the extent that the term 'predication' is appropriate with (cf. Firbas, 1971). Their most important characteristics in the present context are (a) that the

contrastive stress, which not only violates the assignment of unmarked intonation, but also of information in the sentence correlates highly with the intonation pattern, such that the rheme, but not the theme, contains the intonation nucleus. Mention has to be made, though, of indicates an irregular 'theme' 'rheme' distribution (cf. Erteschik-Shir and Lappin, ms., and Taglicht, ms.).

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Transl.: 'The National Library and the departmental library have this/ Chomsky's book' it

(12) yeš et hame'ilim šel dyor bekol xanut exist. def. the coats of Dior in every store part. acc.m.

'Every/any (old) store carries Dior coats/Dior coats can be found in every store/You can find Dior coats in any (old) store.'

and

			(61
	part.	exist.	yeš
	acc.m.	def.	e e
her(=it)	ota	the car	hamexonit
_	this	the	hazot
		at	<u>ec</u>
		every	kol
		dealer	soxen

in the cour

in the country

This car can be found at any/every dealers' in the country.

The nature of the definite non-locative NP is hard to characterize, but for the present purposes it is enough to note that the NP in question cannot be interpreted as referring to a unique, specific entity, but rather to a more general entity, not the type, perhaps, but probably some non-specific subset of tokens of the type of the relevant entity.

This is evident from a consideration of (a) sentences like

(11) yeš et hasefer haze basifriya hale'umit bešloša otakim

There is this book in the National Library in three copies.

'They (impersonal) have three copies of this book in the National Library' (So you do not need to buy a copy of your own).

where it is impossible on logical grounds to assume that either one unique copy of the book or its type are referred to; (b) the ill formedness of sentences like (14), which is a characteristic locative construction, where a unique and specific book as the referent cannot co-occur with the phrase 'bešloša otakim' (lit.: 'in three copies' meaning: 'there are three copies of it')

4)\* hu / hasefer haze basifriya hale'umit he(=it) this book

bešloša otakim.6

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and (c) the nature of the locative expression in (11), (12), and (13); in (11) two distinct locations are mentioned, in (12) and (13) all the relevant locations are cited. It is self evident that no unique entity can be simultaneously in two or more different places.

The contexts in which sentences such as (11)-(13) can felicitously be uttered differ significantly from the kinds of contexts that were observed to be appropriate for (1)-(4). As will become evident from an examination of these contexts, the distribution of information in the sentences (11)-(13) is such that, unlike the large majority of existential sentences, the non-locative, definite NP is the thematic element (the element of which the predication of location is made) whereas the locative element constitutes the rheme (here, the predication of location).

Witness the following contexts:

(15) Where can I/one find/get Chomsky's book (=the book that Chomsky wrote)?

(15), which is a request for information about the location where any of the set of tokens of the book may be obtained, may be answered felicitously by (11), but (16), which is usually interpreted as a question about the location of a specific, unique book, cannot. Hence:

(16) Where is (Chomsky's book (=Chomsky wrote, Chomsky? owns))?

my book
the book that I just bought

(II)\*

The sentence is ill formed even if one location only is cited

(11')\* yeš oto al hašulxan there is it on the table

Only characteristically locative sentences can serve as appropriate responses to (16),

nq be(=it) exist. part. conjugated yemno found located, nimca / Ø in the library basifriya 엺 <u>a</u> the table hašulxan

'It is in the library/on the table.'

The same is true in the case of (12) and (13). Sentence (13), to take another example, can comfortably occur in a context like

<sup>[6]</sup> Note that once the verbs nima ('is found', 'is located') or yetho (conjugated form of the existential particle) occur in a sentence like (14) its acceptability is improved considerably. A discussion of the various types of locative/existential statements is beyond the scope of this paper, but cf. Berman (1978) for some discussion.

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(18) I wanted to order a VW from Europe - What for? (13) yes exist, part.

acc def. the car hamexonit hazot the this ece) 2 <u>k</u>ol every dealer in the country soxen ba'arec

Transl.: 'You can get this car/This car is available at every dealers' in the country.

cannot be answered felicitously by a sentence like (13) (even if only one Sentence (19), where the reference is clearly to a unique and specific car, Here the reference is clearly to a non-unique, non-specific token of the VW location is cited)

(19) I didn't see your car.

naxon, part. yeš exist. ota her(=it) in the garage bagaraj

'True, there is it in the garage.' ('It is in the garage.')

Only a clearly locative sentence can serve as an appropriate response in this

naxon, true she(=it)≓. exist. part. yešna / conjugated nimcet / ø is found in the garage

True, it is in the garage

counter to the universal generalization concerning existential sentences. now proceed to seek an explanation for the occurrence of the definite NP in it, Having sketched the main characteristics of the relevant construction, we can

### 3. Possible explanations

surface syntactic property, and that in fact the NP's in question are either occurrence of definites. The two alternatives will be discussed here in some existential sentence in the sense which is relevant for the restriction on the indefinite, and the second is that the structure under investigation is not an semantically or both syntactically (in underlying form) and semantically the relevant existential sentences: the first is that the definiteness is only a There are two basic alternative explanations for the occurrence of definites in detail. Before we engage in this discussion, however, it is important to reiterate

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so a different explanation is required be, is irrelevant to the construction in question (the second construction) and the position that the 'list-reading solution', whatever it ultimately turns out to

3.1 Semantic indefiniteness

existential sentences in terms of semantic indefiniteness (the type of explanaclear-cut, non-controversial notion, and this, of course, is a major drawback notion of semantic definiteness. Unfortunately, however, there is no such tion offered in Kuno, 1973, inter alia) presupposes a relatively well-defined Explaining the apparent violation of the restriction on definiteness in

of this whole endeavour. namely, no anaphoric NP can occur in existentials. If this criterion is adopted, definiteness in terms of which the restriction on existentials should be stated, violation of the restriction. Witness the following exchange: which the NP in question is realized as an anaphoric pronoun, stand in clear then the sentences under investigation (11)-(13), particularly the version in Rando and Napoli (1978) offer anaphora as the criterion of semantic

(21) Where can I/one find Dior coats in this country?

(22) yeš part. exist. pron. (acc.)) (anaphoric otam bekol in every xanut gdola **6** 

Transl: 'They have them in every big department store.'

status of the NP in question with respect to anaphora is not very clear. Rando anaphoric NP should be 'the proper unique referent.' They claim that generics and Napoli suggest that for the restriction on existentials to hold the A further problem with this approach concerns anaphora as a criterion. The that non-specific/non-generics are non-anaphoric. properly refer to the unique class (and hence can not occur in existentials), but

criterion could perhaps be observationally adequate in accounting for the accounted for, but that a sufficiently detailed and modified version of this in question indicates that there are still some problems that need to be distribution of the relevant NP's in existential sentences. Thus, an exchange The application of the finer criterion of 'proper unique referent' to the NP's

(15') Where can I get Chomsky's Aspects?

(11) (a) yes exist. part. (i=i him bekol in all hasifriyot the libraries the municipal ha'ironiyot

in mind. Can we then say that this is not 'the proper unique referent'? are, however, cases where the speaker does have a particular token of the book to a non-specific token of the book, any copy will satisfy the description. There token of the book in mind. In both the question and the answer the reference is unique referent', since the speaker in (11a) cannot be said to have a particular seems to abide by the requirement that the NP in question not be 'the proper

Consider (11b) (following) as a response to (15').

(II) (b) y g exist. oto him only 7ak in the library of basifriya šel the department hamaxlaka

question and the answer the reference is to any non-specific token(s) of the question mentions a non-specific token and the answer a specific one? I believe answer are not identical (see Nunberg's suggestion, following)? Where the abide by the restriction in terms of 'the proper unique referent'.7 specific token. It turns out then that even such cases could be worked out to answer the question, but in the actual reply he makes no reference to this because the speaker has a particular token of the book in mind that he can question about a non-specific token of the book. To be more precise, it is referent in mind, which he uses as the basis for his statement in answer to the type of book in question, but that the speaker could in fact have a specific that this is not in fact the case, and that it could be argued that in both the Is this a case where the reference in the question and the reference in the

non-anaphoric and therefore as not violating the restriction on the relevant discourse could, perhaps, permit a characterization of the NP's in question as anaphora together with some assumptions about how reference is used in characterized as factually adequate but not as revealing NP in existentials. I would like to claim, however, that though workable, this type of solution to the definiteness problem is not very insightful. It may be The preceding discussion has indicated that a sufficiently relaxed notion of

explanation the definite NP in question is but a surface remnant of an the NP in question, is the abstract syntax solution. According to this 3.2. Abstract syntax underlyingly indefinite NP the head of which (e.g. a copy/an exemplar/an the semantic definiteness approach in its attempt to account for the nature of An alternative explanation to the definiteness problem, which is in line with analysis seems to be semantically insightful, since this is indeed the instance) has been removed. (cf. Langendoen, 1966; McCawley, 1968; Postal, 1969, and Green, 1974 for a similar treatment of other problems.) Such an appropriate meaning of the definite NP in question; however, it is immensely

complicated syntactically. Consider a case like the following:

- (23) (a) What is Sophia Loren doing these days? Is she still playing in
- 3 betax, yeš exist, her a lot ota hamon basratim šel de in the movies <u>o</u>, De Sica

Rough translation: 'Sure, you can find her in De Sica's movies a lot' 'She appears in De Sica's movies frequently.'

a unique entity, but rather to certain instantiations of S.L. the actress on screen. It is as if we have an abstract set of S.L.'s performances and the reference is made to a subset of this set. The accusative pronoun in (23b) does not refer to Sophia Loren the person as

hence the inappropriateness of (24b) as an answer to (24a) Note that a sentence like (23b) cannot be used to refer to S.L. the person;

- (24) (a) Where is Sophia Loren now?
- **⊕** ğ exist. ota beulam her in the hall(of)the movie hakolnoa

Rough translation: 'She is in this movie house/cinema hall.'

semantically definite) in (23b) by means of the abstract syntax approach roughly the material in (25): would probably require a representation of the NP in question which includes An attempt to account for the occurrence of the pronoun (presumably

- (25) (a) a certain subset of the set of performances of Sophia Loren
- ङ certain instantiations of the actress Sophia Loren.

<sup>[7]</sup> Concerning the characterization of the NP in question, Geoffrey Numberg (personal communication) has suggested that the use of the definite NP in the existential sentence is could not, as far as I know, be described in terms of coreference in a case where the existential constraint on the occurrence of generic NP's in existentials (to the extent that it is required) statements as first mention of the NP in question; however, it is clearly insufficient. Thus, a characterization of this kind seems initially appealing in light of the nature of existential is wise to characterize the restriction on existentials in terms of coreferentiality. A 'strictly non-coreferential' to its mention in the previous context. The question arises whether it non-coreferential NP (e.g. the sun) that cannot occur in existentials an ad hac addition to the generalization in terms of it. A similar problem would arise with any would amount to either introducing a more relaxed notion of coreference or simply proposing sentence contains the only reference in the discourse. Any attempt at patching up this gap

of lack of independent syntactic motivation for, or reflex of, this abstract additional problems of pronominalization and there is, of course, the problem to the representation of various meanings of polysemous items is described as representation. (See also Nunberg (1978), where an abstract syntax approach Not only is the exact nature of the abstract NP unclear, but there are being workable but unrevealing.)

away the apparent violation of the restriction on existentials. These are not mechanism such solutions are clearly workable, but they are hardly revealing insurmountable problems technically, with the help of the appropriate Such problems abound within the abstract syntax attempt at explaining

3.3 The existential status of the relevant construction

suggestion attempts to challenge the status of the construction under assumption that this is indeed an existential sentence. The following definite NP in what appears like an existential construction are based on the investigation as an existential sentence. The alternatives presented in 3.1 and 3.2 to explain the occurrence of the

semantically and functionally. However, I would like to claim that this is not syntactic structure utilized by an existential sentence is in fact an existential existential sentences is that every sentence showing the morphological and assumption underlying the restriction on the occurrence of definite NP's in communicative functional characteristics with locative sentences and that distribution of definite NP's in existentials does not hold in such cases. In sentences is perfectly natural, since the logical basis for the restriction on the other communicative function. The occurrence of definite NP's in these tials, but which are themselves not used to assert existence, but to fulfil some in fact always the case and that there are sentences which bear morpho-syntacconstitute no violation of the restriction on existentials. once communicative function is taken into consideration these sentences particular, I will try to show that the sentences under investigation share tic similarities to sentences which are semantically and functionally existen-The term 'existential sentence', I would like to suggest, is a misnomer. The

statement, so to speak. Thus in (15) (repeated here for convenience) the some entity/entities is required, or where the speaker wishes to make a locative distribution is quite revealing. As noted in 2.3. the most natural context for question is clearly about a location (namely, an appropriate informative sentences such as (11)-(13) is one where information about the location of kinds of contexts in which they can occur and their thematic-rhematic answer would specify the location), An examination of the sentences of (11)-(13) from the point of view of the

(15) Where can I/one find/get Chomsky's book?

(11) yeš exist. him in the basifriya hale'umit the National and in the vebesifriyat hamaxlaka library (of) department

part. (=it) library

obtained. counts as a felicitous reply specifying the location where the book could be

coats, and as the exchange (18) and (13) (repeated here) indicates could be an appropriate response to a query about where one can buy classy A similar context would be natural for sentences (12) and (13). Sentence (12)

(18) - I wanted to order a VW from Europe - What for?

(E3) ğ exist. def. part, acc.m 으 the car hamexonit hazot the this at every dealer in the ecel kol soxen ba'arec country

apparently, not known to the addressee. (13) is used, felicitously, to convey information about location, which is,

All known instances of existentials are claimed to have the locative element as proper noun or a definite NP in our sentences) serves as the thematic element. the rheme and the non-locative NP (the one that is realized by a pronoun, a reveals that unlike the ordinary variety of existentials, the location constitutes the theme and the non-locative NP as the rheme (here, the point of the A consideration of the thematic-rhematic distribution in such sentences

serves as additional evidence for this peculiar thematic-rhematic distribution assertion). The potential realization of the NP in question as an anaphoric pronoun

of information in sentences such as (11)-(13). anaphoric pronoun cannot, by definition, occur in the rhematic part of the as contrastive elements, with the tendency to constitute new information), an sentence, in fact, unless heavily stressed (in which case they probably function Anaphoric pronouns most naturally occur in the thematic part of the

differing in fact mainly in the nature of the NP of which the location is constructions and purely locative sentences. Both make locative statements, felicitously occur, establish a functional affinity between our special existential investigation, as well as the kinds of contexts in which these constructions can of a presumably non-specific subset of tokens of the type of some entity predicated, such that the construction under investigation predicates location The rhematic nature of the locative element in the constructions under

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tional characteristics are at the heart of the restriction on existentials. If characteristics with locative rather than existential statements. These funcsentences under investigation have been shown to share crucial functional and functional characteristics of existentials, turns out to be unmotivated. The implicit assumption that all structurally similar sentences share the semantic communicative function of existentials needs to be taken into account. The sentences (whatever the ultimate formulation) to be non-arbitrary, the constitutes no violation of the semantically-logically motivated restriction on requires no further explanation the distribution of definites in existentials and hence is perfectly natural and follows that the occurrence of the definite NP in the relevant construction For the restriction on the distribution of definite NP's in existential

## 4. SPECULATIONS AND POSSIBLE EXTENSION

## 4.1. Speculations and potential implications

assertions of existence, and that apparent peculiarities in distribution in some of so-called 'existential sentences' could be shown not to be used to make On the basis of the present research, I have come to suspect that other varieties cative function for which these sentences are designed. of these so-called 'existentials' are, presumably, due to the different communi-

certain formal generalizations are to be preserved. The term 'existential' then would be best to replace it with a functionally-semantically neutral term, if which it makes semantic and functional sense is to be reserved for only that subset of what is known today as 'existential' for literature is a misnomer; it is semantically and functionally misleading and it It follows that the term 'existentials' as currently used in the linguistic

### 4.2 Topics for further research

existentials' with definites occur in other languages and if so, what properties anonymous reader for Journal of Linguistics) may count as likely candidates: are associated with them. The following English sentences (suggested by an An obvious topic for further research is the question whether 'non-list

A: Where can I get cloth like this?

There's that cloth exactly on the first floor in Harrods.

## ANOTHER LOOK AT DEFINITES IN EXISTENTIALS

- 3 A: Where did you get that painting?
- B: There's either it or its twin brother in the Rembrandthuis in Holland.
- When you go to France, there's Brigitte Bardot or Simone Signoret behind the counter in every tabac
- (d) I don't think what you just said is original. There's exactly that argument/exactly the same argument on the first page of Syntactic

illformedness of the following: determiners can hardly occur in such constructions unmodified; hence the It should be noted, however, that NP's preceded by definite or demonstrative

- (26) (a') A: Where can I get cloth like this? B:\* There's that cloth on the first floor in Harrods
- 3 I don't think what you just said is original.\* There's that argument/the argument on the first page of Syntactic structures.

communication) raised the possibility that this might be a rather superficial restriction on the pronoun system in English, in view of examples such as: pronoun in such sentences (cf. 26b) quite impossible. Bolinger (personal cf. Rando & Napoli (1978: 305-306) for more examples and some discussion. Likewise, the native informants whom I consulted found the use of a

- (27)If you want a copy of Chomsky's book,
- you'll find it in the university bookstore.
- you'll find one in the university bookstore
- ලබ්ලිම there's it in the university bookstore.
- there's one in the university bookstore

A full examination of the English data, however, is clearly beyond the scope of this paper

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<sup>[8]</sup> In Ziv (forthcoming) the construction in question is shown to manifest on the one hand a strong formal affinity with existential sentences (the existential particle occurs sentence-initially in both (cf. fn. 4)), and on the other hand both a minor structural affinity (in the relative position of the locative element and the non-locative NP) and a major functional affinity (in the nature of the predication) with locative sentences

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