Is there an Equivalent to English Existential Sentences with 'There' in Modern Standard Arabic?

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Abstract

From a systemic perspective, existential sentences with 'there' are considered one of a two-types minor process of the Halliday's (1994) ideational function of language, namely, language as representation of experience, the other being the behavioral process. According to systemic linguists, an existential process has only one participant, the Existent, and two main forms of grammatical realizations. Other grammarians, including R. Quirk et. al., identify four types and/or functions of such realizations in English.

This paper tries to come out with an additional discourse description of this linguistic phenomenon by carrying out a contrastive discourse analysis of a number of English and MSA (Modern Standard Arabic) political texts, once as source language texts (SLT's) and once as target language texts (TLT's). It will attempt to investigate whether or not such a linguistic phenomenon exists, in both languages, in the same degree, whether 'there' in English and its equivalence in MSA has some additional discoursal functions, other than what has been discussed by systemic and other linguistics. This paper will also try to discuss how English existential sentences with 'there' and their MSA equivalents are rendered in translation from English into Arabic and from Arabic into English. All of this will be carried out in an attempt to give a satisfactory answer to the question posed by the paper's title.
1. A Linguistic Background

1-1. English Existentials with ‘There’.

From a syntactic perspective, Quirk et al. divide existential sentences with ‘there’ into four main categories: (1) bare existentials, (2) there-cleft existentials, (3) existential sentences with verbs other than ‘be’ and (4) existentials with an initial (e.g. marked) space adjuncts. These four types can be respectively illustrated from English as:

1. There is God (0). [0 = exists in the universe]
2. There is the student whom I saw last night.
3. There sprang up a dangerous cat that night.
4. That night there sprang up a dangerous cat.²

From a semantic perspective, a number of linguists suggest a close relation between possession and existence. Duff, for instance, points out that “the universe (a location, the grand setting) could be construed as the ultimate possessor/container of all, and domains within the universe are other potential local settings and thus possessors as well.” Furthermore, Clark posits that possessive/existential constructions are subsumed in a ‘potentially’ universal configuration, under the overriding semantic category of “locationals” because they share the same basic conceptual properties. Therefore, each existential sentence contains a [+definite] locative phrase and a [± definitive] nominal. In addition to the semantic element (+locational), Clark also identifies other cross-linguistic similarities among the various categories of existential sentences such as word order (e.g. copula, auxiliaries and other types of verbs) and definiteness of nominals involved. In this respect she says:

psychologically, it would appear quite plausible to argue if an object is in some place, and the place is actually an animate being, the object is possessed by that “place”. In other words, it is the [+animate] feature added to the locational feature that transforms it into [POSSESSOR-ANIMATE] (Clark).

In this respect, there are several proposals by Lyons on existential sentences, from which the following examples are extracted:

5. Lions exist in Africa.
6. There are lions in Africa.
7. A book is on the table.
8. There is a book on the table.
9. Coffee will be here in a moment.
10. There will be coffee here in a moment.
These pairs of sentences are obviously related. However, Lyons admits that he finds it hard to distinguish an existential without ‘there’ such as 5 above from 6 with ‘there’. The former has a lexical paraphrase “exist”, which speaks for a classification of an existential sentence (i.e. a sentence which denotes pure existence, with an optional locative); the latter has a lexical paraphrase “are located” (i.e. a sentence which implies existence), and which, in a sense, speaks of a classification of an existential sentence as well.

What is of interest is Lyons’ interpretation of ‘there’ in locative sentences. Expletive ‘there’ in locative sentences like 8 which extends to existential sentences like 5 receives the following explanation:

Although ‘a book is on the table’ is acceptable in English, it is a less common sentence than ‘there is a book on the table’. Let us therefore say that what is sometimes called the expletive (‘dummy’) use of ‘there’ in locative sentences is a syntactic choice of English for ‘anticipating’ the locative phrase in the surface structure. It is noteworthy that the expletive ‘there’ is not generally found in locative sentences with a definite subject (e.g. the book is on the table); and it also serves in ‘existential’ sentences, which we have related to indefinite locatives.

Thus, it is obvious that Lyons views expletive (dummy) ‘there’ as anticipating the locative phrase and not replacing it (cataphoric in Halliday’s cohesive terms). This seems to mean that expletive ‘there’ in locative sentences has stronger deictic force than, for example, in a sentence like ‘there was no one missing’. Therefore, expletive ‘there’ in locative sentences takes more of the local meaning of the locative than in other types of ‘there’ sentences. Expletive ‘there’, however, remains the subject of the sentence.

Furthermore, Lyons also points out that in a number of Indo-European languages, the existential sentence, whether of the verb ‘to be’ type or not, includes remnants of what was originally known as a locative element. In this respect, he says:

‘Existential be-copula’ does not normally occur in English without a locative or temporal complement, and it might appear reasonable to say that all existential sentences are at least implicitly locative.... (Khan 1966 : 258). Khan has argued this view in relation to Greek, and also more generally, as he observes, both pre-Socratic and the ordinary Greek of Plato’s days took it as axiomatic that “whatever is, is somewhere; whatever is nowhere, is nothing” (Lyons 390-391).
In discussing existentials, Milsark points out that definite NP's (or quantified NP's as he calls them) carry a presupposition with regard to their referents, whereas indefinite NP's do not. Put another way:

The difference between the two cases can be expressed in these terms: existence of the referent of a definite NP is a precondition for an utterance containing that NP in a referential position to have a truth value, while existence of the referent of an indefinite NP is an entailment that the utterance in which it occurred was true (Woisetschlaeger 140).

Woisetschlaeger also points out that existential sentences with 'there' followed by a definite NP are "typically marginal", and one way of making their marginality explicit is to say that their users are confined to "list contexts", (whether it is an explicit or an implied/contrastive list), and it is customary to indicate what 'list contexts' are, by providing bits of connected discourse to such sentences:

11. A: Is there anything to drink?  
   B: Well, there is the leftover wine from last night.

This, according to Woisetschlaeger, could occur in the following context: a couple of roommates have been imbibing and, having come to the apparent end of their supply of alcoholic beverages, one of them might ask, 'Isn't there anything left to drink in this joint? The other, with a sly grin spreading over his face, might say: 'Well, there is....'

With regard to the marginality of existentials which contain a definite NP following 'there', Woisetschlaeger points out that such marginality comes from the fact that such sentences foreground an existence claim of an entity whose existence is presupposed in the discourse, which seems an odd thing to do. What is more intriguing, according to him, is why there-constructions of this type are used in discourse at all, if they are 'odd'. In response to this, he lists a number of discoursal functions such sentences may serve:

(1) The listener/reader may know of some entity that it exists, and yet he may not have that fact "before his mind": he may have momentarily forgotten, in which case the speaker/writer may remind him.

(2) The listener/reader may simply not be thinking of the entity in question in some specific connection, in which case the speaker may cooperatively suggest that the entity might be relevant by simply reaffirming its existence.

(3) In certain cases, also, the speaker/writer may not be certain whether an existential presupposition that was valid in the past is still valid now, in which case, he may, by means of a suitable question, invite his listener/reader to confirm its continued existence.
With these three discoursal functions of the existential sentence with 'there' followed by a definite NP, we come to the pragmatic functions of such constructions, which is related to their thematic structure in discourse. Following from Abbot, I believe that the main predication in an existential sentence is one of existence with a possible secondary predication. However, it must be noted, as I indicated above, that the existence in question here is not necessarily ordinary, real world existence. It is of a broader concept, or what Kartunnen calls "discourse existence", which includes the possibility of actual existence as a special case.

From a pragmatic perspective, the function of 'there' is to introduce the referent of the NP, of which it is an anticipating constituent, as a 'new' theme of the discourse. In all relevant sentences, the NP dominating the existential 'there' has occurred in the position of theme although non-initial. It is possible, however, for either a locative phrase or a manner adverb to occur as what Halliday (1967 & 1994) calls 'marked theme', and which I call marked-scene-setter-theme.

In this respect, Halliday only mentions such sentences in passing when he discusses predicated thematic structure with cleft construction. He says: "with 'there' it [the theme] is described (non-uniquely specified)", and that, "it' and 'there' are cataphoric, corresponding, respectively, to definite and indefinite articles" (Halliday: 238). This was said in reference to examples of predicated themes that have a structural formula like: (there + be + indefinite NP + that-sentence), as in:

12. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that he [= Saddam Husein] was a murderouygangster, but it was assumed, he was "our gangster." (SLT-1)

In his model of thematic structure, Holliday never mentions the status of the 'there' sentence, as an 'existential' sentence, let alone the fact of not providing illustrative examples to demonstrate its thematic status or syntactic, semantic or pragmatic characteristics, especially when the focused NP is a definite NP or proper noun.

I believe the main reason which prompts Halliday to mention sentences with 'there' is the fact that such a construction constitutes a type, where the theme, in the sense of 'what the sentence is about', is not an initial element. And a type of construction, where the speaker/writer places the information focus (the weighty part of his message) in a position other than the final lexical item in the sentence.

As has been discussed above, we explain the raison d'etre of 'there' by either modifying Halliday's account of thematisation, or by abandoning the
above description of the functions of 'there be' – although the latter seems substantially sound. A choice of solution perhaps would be totally ad hoc if we did not already require a more sensitive statement of theme than Halliday provides. In order to accord, for instance, some thematic status to the subject of a declarative sentence containing a marked theme, and indeed to the grammatical function (surface) subject itself, marked themes are indicated not only by preposing of a sentence constituent, but also by a number of prosodic features such as pitch, loudness, tempo and rhythm. These features often indicate variation in the underlying structure concealed by surface syntax. Thematisation may, therefore, be a much more complex phenomenon than Halliday suggests.

If an unspecified existential sentence is directly dominated by an NP, it would, as a whole, constitute the theme of the sentence dominated by that NP. Thus, the theme of a sentence like 'There is a book on the table' cited above, is not 'a book' as would be suggested by Halliday (1967), but rather 'there is a book', which expresses an assertion of the existence of 'the book'. It is intuitively satisfactory that the theme of an existential sentence can be shown to be the assertion of the existence of the object (referent), be it real or unreal (discoursal or hypothetical). If, however, there-constructions do not include additional or secondary predication, to use Abbot's (1993) terms, as is frequently the case with there-constructions where the 'be' is followed by a definite NP (indicating an implied contrast), 'there' will be treated as the theme of the sentence (the dummy surface grammatical subject) and the rest of the sentence will be theme. In this case, I consider 'there' to assert the existence of the entity in contrast with an implied list of entities that are either present on the scene, or in the addressor's mind.

1-2 Arabic Existential-Equivalents.

Like Halliday (1967, 1994 and elsewhere), Traditional Arab Grammarians (TAG's) did not carry out (as far as I know) a very elaborate and systematic study of existential sentences in classical (Sibawayh) Arabic. Ibn Ya'ish (n.d.), a member of the Baghdad School of Grammar, in his book Sharḥu I-Muşāṣṣat: vol III, considers existential nouns (as he calls them) a sub-category of 'demonstrative nouns', and describes them by saying:

Be informed that this type of 'nouns' are those which point at what they name. This is the reason why they have some of the meaning of the verb [e.g. that of location and existence]. . . . They are said to be 'ambiguous' because they point at whatever exists in the speaker's vicinity, where there may be more than
one entity around. Therefore, they have to be disambiguated by a gesture to whatever is present (by part of the body, e.g. the eye or the hand, or ‘by your heart’) (126-138) [my translation, emphasis and ellipsis]

In this respect, Al-Anṭāki (vols. 1 & 3, pp. 204 and 248, respectively), among other grammarians, ‘semantically’ classifies these ‘existential nouns’ in terms of the distance/location of the pointed at from the speaker. Thus, al-Anṭāki proposes that ‘huna’/‘hāhuna’ (there) is used for relatively closer distance/location, ‘hunāka’/‘hunālika (there) is used for farther distance/location than what is been indicated by ‘hunā’, and ‘ṭhamma/ṭhammata’ (‘there’; used for masculine and feminine respectively) is used for farthest distance/location possible.7 As for the verbal meaning of existential nouns indicated in the above quotation, this can be realized in MSA by the use of the present passive of ‘yūjadu’ from the active verb ‘wajada’, which has to do the semantic value of ‘existence’ rather than ‘location’.

Arab grammarians point out that, in MSA, a nominal sentence cannot start with an indefinite subject. Thus an indicative sentence like:
13*. rajulun fi l-bayti,
13E. A man in the-house,
13E. There is a man in the house,
is syntactically unaccepted because it starts the sentence with ‘new/unknown’ piece of information and ends it with ‘given/known’ information.8 This constraint confirms the syntactic restriction on existential sentences with regard to an indefinite NP in the initial position. To overcome such restriction, MSA, like English in Halliday’s (1994) terms, organizes the message in a way where a ‘dummy’ existential particle, indicating the existence and/or location of the referent (a cataphoric/postponed/delayed ‘new’ theme) into a later position in the sentence, as in:
14. hunāka RAJULUN fi l-bayti.
14E. There is A MAN in the house.

2. The Concept of Equivalence Sought for when Translating 'There-Constructions' into MSA and Vice Versa.

In all their attempts to systemize the ‘concept’ of equivalence in translation, be it grammatical, semantic/logical, semiotic/cultural, pragmatic and textual, translation theorists failed their mission, and most of them ended their discussion by very skeptical and sarcastic remarks about the concept altogether.9
However, the concept of equivalence still constitutes the core of any translation theory. With regard to the topic at hand, our main concern will be in what translation theorists call textual and pragmatic equivalence, since there is some sort of lexical equivalence of 'there' in MSA (cf. 1-2 above). Therefore, I will be discussing the concept of equivalence from a text linguistics perspective, depending on the contextual dominant focus of the text, its macro-rhetorical purpose, and within this, the micro-rhetorical purpose of existential sentences in English and their equivalence in translation into Arabic and vice versa, will also be discussed.

Generally speaking, linguistic communication appears in textual form, i.e. as a piece of text. Therefore, texts are regarded as the primary linguistic manifestations/realizations of the social semiotics of the speaking community and show different conditions of the source/target groups, and, are thus produced for a large specter of communication nature.

What has just been said now is also true of translation, since it is the process by which a text is recreated in another language. During this process, the translator does not translate words/individual sentences, but texts. Translation, therefore, is a text-oriented process: it is a procedure which leads from a written SLT to an optimally TLT and requires the syntactic, semantic, stylistic and text pragmatic and semiotic comprehension of the SLT.

From a text linguistic perspective, every text is characterized by one or more of several basic communicative functions (i.e. rhetorical purposes). Texts with a comparable basic communicative functions or dominant contextual foci, in Werlich's terms, can be combined into various text types.\textsuperscript{10} Hence, different text types require, in translation, not only different transfer methods, but also different translation equivalence criteria.

Following from the above, one can say that translation falls under the category of \textit{linguistique de parole}, combining linguistics, socio- and psycholinguistics and – in some text areas – aesthetic/stylistic aspects of language. In this respect, translation research must not, primarily, be concerned with abstract issues (e.g. text definition, text extension/delimitation) or in formulating universal rules of text constitution, but has to take translation relevance texts at face value, thereby giving priority to 'communicative text theory' i.e. the text's dominant contextual focus or, according to Schmidt, its 'rhetorical purpose'.

Hence, it is the task of the translator to deal with SLT's in such a way as to guarantee an optimal degree of translation equivalence. In other words, text-linguistically focused translation research must develop a frame of
reference which views a text as a communicatively oriented configuration with a thematic, a functional and a text pragmatic dimension. These three dimensions can be derived from the respective text surface structure. Text surface structure, therefore, acquires the dimension of an instrumental set of instructional guiding the comprehension of the text by the receiver.

Broeck feels that the above functional features which constitute the textual world can be determined, standardized and evaluated. In this respect, he suggests that the original author's pragmatic intentions as well as the original function of the text (i.e. its rhetorical purpose) can be determined and rendered into a target language via a method of typologizing and topicalizing, so that "the TLT will possess a literary value equivalent to the SLT, and functions accordingly." He also concludes by saying:

"It is right to say... [that] translation can only be complete if and when the communicative value and the time-place tradition element of the SLT has been replaced by their nearest possible equivalents in the TLT. (39) [my ellipsis]."

Thus, following in the footsteps of text linguists and translation theorists like Broeck, the equivalence which this study is after is not only the lexical, since it is more-or-less available as noted earlier, but also the textual and/or pragmatic equivalence. Therefore, an investigation of the various discoursal functions of existential sentences should precede discussing the various methods and techniques adopted by the translators to render such constructions into English or Arabic, since the former investigation determines the latter, as we alluded to in this section, and not the other way round.

3. Analysis of Data

For the purpose of analysis, a corpus of 5 (1-5) English texts and 5 (6-10) Arabic texts, which were written during the period following the second Gulf War, were randomly selected. It is found that the ratios of occurrence of existential sentences in English SLT's and their Arabic TL ones are, respectively, 4.5% (39 sentences out of 867), and 3.4% (13 sentences out of 856; cf. Appendix-A). By comparison, when the Arabic SLT's and their corresponding English TLT's were analyzed, it is found that the ratios of existential-equivalent sentences in The Arabic SLT's and their corresponding English TL ones are, respectively, 4% (15 sentences out of 382) and 3.4% (13 sentences out of 394; cf. Appendix B).

It is also found that most of the existential sentences identified are either of the 'bare type' or the 'there-cleft' type. However, there are a few examples of the
other two types suggested by Quirk et al. (cf. section 1-1 above), but they constitute a marginal percentage of the overall ratio of occurrence of existentials, either in English or their equivalence in MSA (e.g. out of the 39 occurrences in the English SLT’s, only 3 occurrences are formed by verbs other than ‘be’).

In dividing the Arabic texts into sentences, I followed in the footsteps of the definition of Al’Anṭāki (III : 305) when he says: "a sentence consists of a theme/topic, ‘musnad’ ‘ilayh’ and a rheme/comment, ‘musnad’ ...; one which benefits [the reader/hearer], and, at the end of which, he can pause” [my translation and ellipsis]. On the other hand, I adopted Halliday’s (1994, chapter 7) definition of a clause complex when he says that a clause consists of one simple clause plus one or more subordinate ones.

As for the technique of analyzing the corpus, the pass system was adopted.12 Three passes of analysis were carried out: the first to count the occurrence of existential sentences in English and Arabic in the SLT’s and the TLT’s. The second pass was carried out to determine their discoursal function(s) in political discourse; whereas the third pass was carried out to determine the method(s) of rendering them in translation from English into Arabic and vice versa.

One might, then, simply argue that such a construction, having such a minimal distribution, is of little or no importance in discourse. But an equally persuasive argument can be made that its rarity points to some special usage, so that when it is used — sparingly — it signals something specific. Thus, its scarcity might rather be interpreted as a major vehicle for indicating something noteworthy in discourse.

4. Discussion of Analysis

The analysis of data has revealed additional discoursal functions of the existential sentences with ‘there’, other than those already mentioned above.13 In the context of this study, they appear to serve the following additional discoursal functions in political discourse:

A. To introduce a discourse topic (or a sub-topic), which is usually developed throughout the overall text or a portion of it (a paragraph or a section).14 In the latter case, such a newly introduced topic may contribute to the overall macro-structure of the overall topic of discourse, as in:  

15. There are also important changes in the world, to which this strategic conception must be adopted. (SLT-1)

16. There had been diplomatic possibilities for resolving the crisis since August, including Iraqi offers described by high U.S. officials as "serious" and "negotiable." (SLT-1)

16A. laqad kāna hunāka majmū'atun mina l-ḥtamālati d-diblumāsiyyati li-t-tawāsuwli 'la ḥallin liḥādhi l-'azmati mundaṣṣ shar 'ughṣtus min baynihā 'urūđun 'irāqiyyatun waṣafaḥā mas'ulūna 'amrikīyyūna 'ala mustawān ḍālin bi'annahā "jiddyyatun wa qābilatun li-t-taflwūd". Here, 15 and 16, respectively illustrate the first discoursal function. In 15, for instance, the asserted (focused) indefinite NP 'important changes', the new theme/topic of the existential sentence is developed, through the writer's argument and counter argument up to approximately 40 paragraphs of the text, through which additional sub-topics are introduced to supplement it. Sub-topics, like 'the New World Order', 'Latin-Americanization of the Republics of the disintegrating Soviet Union', 'the Grand Area', 'the Role of the Third World within that area, among others, are developed in the context of developing the 'main discourse topic' which is introduced by sentence 15 above. Example 16, on the other hand, represents one of these sub-topics, in which the new theme/topic of the existential sentence ('diplomatic possibilities') is introduced as the topic of paragraph 33, and is developed throughout the two following paragraphs (34 and 35) by substantiating sentences like: 'The last (0-diplomatic offer) made public . . . .', 'US officials describe the offer . . . .', 'A State Department for the ME described the proposal . . . .', 'Iraq would withdraw . . . .', among others.

B. To substantiate a proposed thesis/hypothesis of an argument in the text, by introducing or presenting and asserting the existence of a new topic/theme realized by the focused NP, which adds new evidence in support of the argument being developed, as in:

17. There are no reasons to expect changes in the principles that guide policy. There are no significant public pressures for policy change. (SLT-1)

17A. fa'l-layṣa thammata mā (=amrun) yad'ūnā 'ila tawāqu'i ḥudūth taghayyurātin fi l-mabādili llati taqūdu ḍhālik n-nahja s-siyāsiyy, wa-lā tūjadu ḍughūṭun sha'biyyatun tuthukarū litaghīyi ḍhālik n-nahj.

18. There is another way of understanding the cold war, not as a conflict but as a kind of collusion, although the term 'collusion' perhaps implies too much conscious purpose. There were two distinct systems in the East and West: the Fordist variant of capitalism and Stalinist or the Post-Stalinist variant of socialism (SLT-3).

In 17, the two 'there' existential sentences substantiate the newly introduced theme/topic realized by the rhetorical question posed at the beginning of the paragraph, which can be interpreted as something like: 'there will be no change in the US policy towards the Middle East'. The first existential sentence presents a very general type of hypothesis by introducing a negated and an abstract (i.e. a very general) NP 'no reason', as a new topic of the sentence in question. In the second substantiating sentence, the focused NP becomes more specific 'no significant public changes' which is, in turn, made more and more specific by introducing a regular declarative sentence, in which "2/3 of the public express support for international consensus."

By the same token, example 18, which consists of two consecutive existential sentences, illustrates an opposition to the substantiation given for the proposed hypothesis presented in the first sentences of the paragraph (i.e. the cold war as a way of organizing global relations), and provides an alternative substantiation of the same hypothesis. In this respect, it seems that the implicitly rejected substantiation reflects the dominant world view; whereas, the alternative substantiation reflects the writer's own view, which he tries to convince the reader with, via changing own ideological beliefs.

C. To introduce or substantiate an introduced counter argument to a proposed thesis/hypothesis. Again, this is also done by introducing a new theme/topic realized by the focused NP, which may constitute a piece of evidence for the invalidity of that proposed thesis, as in:

19. But there is a disturbing feeling about that. [that= end of the cold war] (SLT-3)

19A. ghaiya ‘annahu/hunāka/(yūjadu) iḥsāsun muslijun tijāha dhālik.

20. There is a sense in which the existence of nationalism, or more accurately, of old-fashioned nation-states on the periphery, can be convenient to hegemonic power-blocks. (SLT-4)

20A. fa-hunāka iḥsāsun bi’ann wujūda sh-shu’tūrī l-qawmiyyi aw bi-ma’na ‘adaq ḥukumātī z-zillīn t-taqli diyya’ti yumkinu ‘an yakūna mulā’imān li-ḥaymanati lilqawwā l-uzmā.
Here, 19 introduces a counter argument to the proposed hypothesis set forth in the previous paragraph, namely, 'the changes of foreign policy in the UK, following the disintegration of the former Soviet Union'. The existential-there sentence, starting with the adverse/opposition conjunction, 'but', and having an indefinite new topic, 'a disturbing feeling', stands in opposition to 'winding the business down and going into something more profitable.' This counter argument is further substantiated by the sentence 'following the there-existential'. These consecutive substantiating sentences have their thematic structures, respectively, changing gradually from a more general to a more specific topic: 'something irreversible', to 'the fear that Britain's long stay in international sun' and, then, to 'a sense of hope.'

Following from the above paragraph, 20 also substantiates a counter argument by the fact that there exists 'a sense that nationalism can be convenient to hegemonic power-blocs', which is further supported by providing examples like the 'Bantustan' shadow governments in South Africa, and some other states in South America.

D. To sum up an extended discourse argument or simply conclude a sub-argument which extends to one paragraph or more, and prepare the reader for a new topic or sub-topic, as in:

21. As noted earlier, there are real changes in the world system, with a number of important consequences: (1) ... (2) ... (3) ... (SLT-1)

21A. wa kamā 'ašhrā fīmā maḍā yūjadu 'adadun mina t-taghayyurātī l-ḥaqiqiyati fi n-nizāmi l-ālamiyi tamakhaḍa 'anāh majmu'atun mina n-nata'ījī l-hammātī l-latī yumkinu 'l-jāzuḥ bimā yāli: (1) ... (2) ... (3) ...

22. There is, then, little reason to anticipate a shift in the US rejectionism, (SLT-1)

22A. liḏhā yūjadu 'amaḵun ẓa'ifun bi-tawaqqūtī ḥudūthī taghīrīn fi mawqīfī r-rafīdī l-ḥmrīkiy.

Example 21 sums up the discourse argument developed in the first 40 paragraphs. This was also indicated by the use of both the special adjunct ('as noted earlier'), which acts, as a marked-scene-setter-theme/topic and the existential sentence with its focused NP, ('real changes'), as the new theme/topic. This focused NP theme/topic, originally introduced in the first paragraph of the text in question (cf. example 15 above), sums up these changes as being three. By contrast, 22 sums up a portion of the text in question by being the concluding sentences of paragraph 44 (cf. also example 23 below, which sums up all discourse topics of Chomsky's article, being the last sentence of it.
Thus, whether it is an extended or a small portion of the text, existential sentences with 'there' sum up that portion and prepare the reader to start a new sub-topic with its substantiated and/or counter argument.

5. Translating English Existential Sentences and their Arabic Equivalents

With regard to translating English existential sentences with 'there' into MSA, the rendition was partial, as far as lexical equivalence is concerned. The reason, as I see it, is due to the flexibility of the Arabic language and the various stylistic methods adopted by the native Arab translator, following the development of the SLT's. However, the translator maintained the status of the focused NP with regard to definiteness or indefiniteness, whether that NP remains thematic or is downgraded into a rhematic sphere of the translated sentences. The other two features of 'there' existential were also preserved: the assertion of existence and location of the entity realized by the focused NP were both preserved by translating the 'there' existential into a nominal sentence, with the demonstrative pronoun 'hunāka' (here-be/there), 'thammata' (there-be) or some other words, asserting existence and indicating location. Another method by which the assertion of existence is preserved is by translating such sentences into declarative active or passive sentences, where, in the latter, the passive verb 'yūjatu' (exist) asserts the existence of the focused NP. In the passive existential form, the focused NP, 'the surrogate subject' (nā'ib l-fā'il), acts as the theme/topic of the translated sentence; whereas the grammatical subject of the active existential form, the grammatical subject (al-fā'il), is the theme/topic. Whether active or passive, the verb which asserts the existence of the entity realized by the focused NP of the SL existential sentence, joins the rhematic field of the TL sentences. The locational status of the focused NP (preserved by translating the 'there' sentence into a verbal sentence) is taken for granted, since, according to Lyons, "whatever is, is somewhere."

There are, however, some of the translated examples in which the 'there' existential is translated into an active declarative sentences which, while thematizing/topicalizing the focused NP of the SL sentence, seems to lose some of its assertiveness. Nevertheless, such TL sentences still preserve the presentative function of the SL sentence, by using what Arab grammarians call ('afā il sh-shru\(^{15}\), 'the verbs of inception', to use Quirk et al's term, as in:

23. There are some of the contours of the planned new world that come into view as the beguiling rhetoric is lifted away (SLT-1).
23A. wa qad bada't tażharu ba'du l-khtūti r-ra'isati li-lnizāmi l-ālamiyi l-jadīdi al-lati badat tażharu ill'ayāni hālamā tawwaqqafa t-tashhdūqu l-bayāniyyu l-muḍallilīl.

To sum up the question of translating the two major types of 'there' existentials (the bare and there-cleft), the following two points may be mentioned:

(1) If a there-existential is translated into a verbal sentence in Arabic (passive or active), and depending upon the discoursal function of the 'there-existential (in this case, it is either introducing a new topic or summing up an argument), the definite or indefinite focused NP, following the VP, be it a 'be' type or otherwise, is the theme/topic of the sentence, in the sense of what Halliday (1994) calls: 'what the sentence is about.' In such case, the assertion of existence, originally realized by 'there + be', is now downgraded to the rhematic or comment sphere of the sentence, since it is rendered as a verb in Arabic, which, in Arabic as well in English, is the core of predication.

(2) If a there-existential is translated into a nominal sentence in Arabic (in this case, the there-existential is either introducing or substantiating a counter argument of a proposed thesis/hypothesis) the NP, which asserts the existence and location of the entity in question and follows the demonstrative pronoun, is downgraded to the rhematic or comment sphere of the sentence. In this case, the demonstrative pronoun acts as theme/topic of the sentence, in the sense of asserting the location and existence, following Lyons', understanding of the term 'existence'. In a word, the verbal existential sentence in Arabic corresponds, more-or-less, to those of English that are of the 'bare' and the 'cleft' types; whereas the nominal existential do not, since they rhematise the focused NP.

As for the Arabic corpus, SLT's and the Arabic TLT's of the English SLT's, the there-existentials were identified on the following bases. Firstly, a verbal sentence is identified, in the corpus, as being of the existential type either because it starts with the positive passive verb of existence 'yūjadu' (there is/exists) which asserts both the existence and location, its negative counterpart (usually preceded by the negative particle 'lā n-nāfiya' in Arabic), as, respectively, in:

24. kashālika tūjadu darajalun 'āliy atun mina t-tanāqūdī fi l-masālihi bayna ljanibī l'amrikiyyi wa lisrāliyyi nastāṭīl'ū 'aydan 'istiqāḥalāha wa ta'mī qahā. (SLT-9)

24E. Furthermore, there is a high degree of conflict between the US and Israel, which we/[the Arabs] can exploit and deepen.

25. fa-lā yūjadu 'itiḥadun sufiṭiyyun yarda'ū isrāli wa yaḍ'amu ljūhda addifāliyyi l-'arabiyy. (SLT-7)
25E. The Soviet Union is no longer present to deter Israel and bolster Arabs' defence effort.

Secondly, existentials are identified on the basis of the use of categories of Arabic verbs which are lexically/ semantically equivalent to what Quirk et al. call the verbs of 'motion/appearance into the scene, those of inception/creation and those of stance. In all the instances, the subject or the surrogate subject, definite or indefinite, is made 'the point of departure of the clause as a message', i.e. its theme/topic, as well as the focus of attention, since it is 'what the clause is all about' (Halliday 1994), as in:

26. wa fi zilli hādhihi l-‘ajwā‘, wa ma‘a bawākiri l-amali wa lwā‘i‘idi, ta‘ti ‘zmatu l-khālī biṣh-shakli l-‘lāhi tatawwarat ilayhi litamtaḥina l-‘ālama fi tawajuhīhi wa nuzū‘īh. (SLT-6)

26E. As this new situation began to emerge, and with it (0= emerges) the first sign of a new era of hope and promise, the current crisis erupted in the Gulf, developing in such a way as to constitute the first real test of the intention of the world community.

Thirdly, a nominal sentence in Arabic is identified as being existential-equivalent because there exists one of the demonstrative pronouns mentioned in section 1-2 above, which asserts both existence and location of the entity in question. This entity, realized as a definite or indefinite NP, acts as the theme/comment of the sentence, and, in such case, receives what Halliday (1994) calls 'the unmarked' focus of the information unit, whether such sentence consists of one or more such units, as in:


27E. As you know, there is an Arab consensus regarding adherence to this principle, which states that the unacceptability of the acquisition of territory by force, especially if it leads to the elimination of a state which is a member of the Arab League and the United Nations.

Finally, a few of these equivalent existentials were identified on the basis of having the existence of their focused entities being asserted by a spatial adjunct (usually realized as a prepositional phrase in which such entities are contained (Quirk, et al., fourth type; cf. 1-1 above), as in:

28. ..... wa ‘annahu mā yazālu fi l-munāzamati ba‘dū ‘ljayyidīna . . . . (SLT-8)

28E. There remained, however, some good people in the PLO.

29. wa fi t-tārikhi l-adībi l-katā‘irun mina l-‘amthili‘alā l-atā‘idtī l-Hatt janaṭāhā duwālun ‘ista‘ā‘at ‘an tata‘lūma ma‘a l-‘ālama biwāqī‘īyya wa murūnāh. (SLT-9)
29E. There are many examples in modern history of the great benefit gained by countries which were able to deal with the world in a realistic and flexible manner.

From a discourse perspective, all of the examples above, in addition to confirming the existence of their focused entity realized by an NP (be it theme or rheme), also serve to introduce a new theme/topic into the discourse world. In such cases, the Arabic existential-equivalent sentence either introduces a hypothesis or substantiates an already introduced hypothesis. An illustrative example of the latter function is example 25 above, in which the existential-equivalent sentence substantiates the proposed hypothesis introduced as the theme/topic of the first sentence of paragraph 15 of text 7, namely, 'the creation of a dangerous situation in the Middle East, following the end of the Cold War and the abandonment by Egypt of the struggle against Israel'. This hypothesis is substantiated by two consecutive negative existential equivalent sentences, one of which is example 25 which has an indefinite and focused NP (cf. underlined NP of 25 above). What applies to 25 applies to the first existential-equivalent sentence of text 9, which is introduced by the verb of inception, 'tshadu' (witness) and followed by two substantiating equivalent-existential nominal sentences, starting with the demonstrative pronoun 'hunäka' there is; cf. example 30 below.

In rendering this type of equivalent existentials in translation into English, the translator has a limited range, and, thus, less freedom than he does with the translation of English existentials into Arabic. As a result, the rendition is complete with regard to the various functions of such existentials (e.g. assertion of existence, location and the various discoursal functions outlined above). There remains, however, the fact that some of the existentials (mainly the nominal type that contains 'there' in its positive or negative mood), were not rendered with 'there' as the grammatical (dummy) subject of the sentence, as they were in the MSA SL nominal sentences (cf. example 25 for the negative mood). Instead, the focused NP in either mood, which acts as the rheme/comment of the Arabic negative existential-equivalent nominal sentence is now upgraded to a typical/unmarked theme/topic of the TL sentence, in a typical English SVO word order, as in:

30. taşhadu 'asabatu l-urduniyyatu jadal an haddan hawla l'indimami l-urduna l-mufawadāt s-slāmi l-muqbilah. fa-hunāka shariḥatun mina n-nwābi tu'āridu l'indimama ila haddā l-mufawadāt 'ala 'asāsi 'ann s-slāma fi zilli zurāfi 'adami t-takāfu'i fi mizāni lqwuā la ya'ni 'illa l'istīsām, wa hunāka shariḥatun 'ukhrā. . . . (SLT-9)

30E. There is currently a heated debate going on in Jordanian political circles regarding Jordan's participation in the forthcoming peace negotiations.
One group of MPs opposes Jordan's participation on the basis that the imbalance of power between the parties means that such participation is equivalent to surrender. Another group of MPs.

Thus, from both a discoursal as well as a stylistic view point, it seems that the translator ignores, in some instances, the equivalent 'there' in Arabic, and opts for the typical English SVO word order, so long as the semantic, the pragmatic and/or discoursal functions of the SLT are being met (cf. the contrastive use of 'One group of MPs' in 30E above); something which, I believe, is, somehow, restricted in Arabic.

6. Conclusion

On the basis of the above analysis and the discussion following it, it is found that existentials, relatively speaking, occur in both English and MSA in almost the same degree and serve, more-or-less, the same discoursal/ rhetorical functions in political discourse (cf. appendices A and B). These functions range from introducing a discourse topic or sub-topic in an argument, to substantiating an existing one or counter arguing it (in the sense of, respectively, upgrading or downgrading its validity) or to summing up an on-going one to the arguer's goal/benefit.

As for translating existential sentences from English into MSA and vice versa, the degree of rendition of sentences' structure and/or their syntactic features is nearly equal in both languages (cf. appendices A and B), although rendition into English seems to be more complete than Arabic, due to the former's rigid word order. With regard to the somehow partial English renditions of, existentials into Arabic, the case can be attributed to the relatively free word order of Arabic and to the fact that Arabic has two major types of sentences: the nominal with its S(V)C word order and the verbal with its VS(C). Following from the above, it is typical to translate English existential sentences into their Arabic equivalents, using one of the following lexical equivalences of 'there': 'hunāka', 'thamma', 'thammata', or 'hunālika'. An alternative is to translate it into a normal verbal sentence. In either approach, the decision depends on the macro-rhetorical function of the overall text, within which the micro-rhetorical function of existential sentences follow suit. Thus, when the dominant rhetorical function of the English text is to narrate, describe, expose (e.g. analyze and synthesize), or to emphasize the composition of future behavior (e.g. to direct), the rendition of English existentials in translation into Arabic is predominantly done via verbal sentences, since these are predominantly non-evaluative. But when the dominant rhetorical function of such a text is to argue, such rendition is predominatly carried out via nominal sentences, since these are predominantly evaluative.16
1. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), referred to here, (also known as Modern Written Arabic and Modern Literary Arabic) is the uniform variety of Arabic used all over the Arabic speaking world as the usual medium of written communication in books, periodicals, journals, magazines, newspapers and business correspondence. It is also used as a medium of the oral communication in radio and television broadcasts, formal speeches, learned debates, conferences and on occasions accompanied by some degree of formality and solemnity. In this study, illustrative examples of MSA are transliterated into English by using the transliterating table of The Encyclopedia of Islam, adopted from Ali Yousof Al-Ali’s book: The meaning of the Holy Quran, 2nd. Ed. (1992).

2. For more details and illustrations of these and other sentence structures using the existential ‘there’, the reader is referred to Quirk.

3. In this respect, I would say that it would be too literal-minded to take all of these reference to existence as being about ‘real-existence-in-the-real-world.’ The only sensible view to take here is that a discourse builds its own world, so that what is at stake is always existence-in-the-discourse-world. The question of whether a discourse world is meant to represent some aspect of the real world (and what consequences that has) is an interesting though a separate issue.

4. Woisetschlaeger points out that one way of making sense of the idea that ‘there’ specifically signals the existence of the referent of the focus NP, and that any further property predications affected by existential sentences as subordinate to this primary signalling function, is to interpret these notions in discourse terms. Assuming that a discourse essentially builds a cast of characters, on the one hand and involves these characters in a plot, on the other, ‘there’ could be considered as an explicit means of adding to the cast of characters; any property ascription would serve the plot function by saying something about where the new character comes into the picture. For a detailed analysis of ‘there’ from a semantic perspective as well as a pragmatic one, the reader is referred to Milsark and Woisetschlaeger.

5. I believe that the term ‘main predication’ means ‘new information’ in terms of Halliday’s given-new formulation, where the focus falls on the definite/indefinite NP in question, which with the ‘there be’, are within the thematic sphere of the clause. On the other hand, ‘secondary predication’ is given information lying within the thematic sphere of the clause, hence Halliday’s formulation that theme should not always consist of given information. For additional details, the reader is referred to Abbot.

6. Halliday (1967 : 238) points out, when discussing the thematic structure of what he calls ‘predicated theme’, (cleft constructions and existential sentences with ‘there’, that “with ‘there’ the theme of the clause is undefined (i.e. non-uniquely specified)”. Thus in a sentence like: ‘there is a book on the table’, the theme, a book, is ‘possibly among others’. This is said on the basis of the fact that ‘there’, according to him, “being cataphoric corresponds to an indefinite article”. With this, he disregards the fact that the thematic sphere could have a definite article ‘the’ (e.g. there is the book on the table), as discussed in this paper.
7. By doing this, Al-Anṣāki is following in the footsteps of Ibn Yaʿīṣ (n.d.) in his book *Sharḥ I-Muṭassāt*: vol III (137-138), with regard to the relative proximity and/or location of the object, which these various 'demonstrative nouns' are pointing at.

8. Although Arab grammarians do not accept nominal indicative sentences which start with an indefinite NP, they, however, accept the negative and the interrogative moods of such sentences. Their justification for this acceptance is based upon the fact that the negative mood of a sentence negates the existence of that indefinite referent which follows the negative particle ('lāː: no), and the interrogative mood of the sentence usually inquires about some referent which is unknown the speaker/writer altogether. These two occurrences can be exemplified, respectively, as follows:
   1. Lā rajula fi l-baytī. no a-man in the-house
   1E: There is no man in the house,
   2. ṭarajulun fi l-baytī? a man in the-house
   2E: Is there a man in the house?
   For additional information, the reader is referred to Al-Anṣāki.

9. Below are some of the most sarcastic remarks of a number of translation theorists, regarding the question of equivalence in translation:
   (1) "The concept of translation equivalent itself seems to repeat a theoretical claim that a priori acceptance of which is misleading rather than fruitful" (Van den Broeck : 84; [original emphasis])
   (2) "Other subjects, such as the unit of translation, translation equivalence ... I regard as dead ducks – either too traditional or arbitrary." (P. Newmark, p. x; [my emphasis and ellipsis])
   (3) "Equivalence is one of the central ideas in the theory of translation, and yet one which linguists seem to have agreed to disagree." (Swe joking 1981 : 321; [my emphasis])
   (4) "The term equivalence, apart from being imprecise and ill-defined between languages ... presents an illusion of symmetry of vague approximation which distorts the basic problem of translation." (Mary Snell-Hornby 22; [my emphasis and ellipsis])
   (5) "Equivalence is a Chimera or ... a HOLY GRAIL, glimpsed but almost never grasped." (Russkaen 892; [my ellipsis & emphasis])

10. Werlich classifies texts into five major types, following their dominant contextual focus. The five text types with their dominant contextual foci are as follows:
   (1) Descriptive texts: when the dominant contextual focus emphasizes a factual phenomenon (e.g. persons, objects, relations ... etc) in its locational context.
   (2) Narrative texts: when the dominant contextual focus emphasizes a factual and/or conceptual phenomenon in its temporal context.
   (3) Expository text: when the dominant contextual focus emphasizes the composition (synthesis) or decomposition (analysis) of an element/concept in either its temporal/locational context or a combination of both.
   (4) Argumentative texts: when the dominant contextual focus emphasizes a relation between concepts of phenomena that the communicants may have.
   (5) Instructional texts: when the dominant focus emphasizes the composition of an observable future behaviour, with reference to phenomena, in one of the communicants, that is either in the speaker/writer or reader/bearer.
11. The five English SLTs were taken from two main sources. The first source is a book entitled *Beyond the Storm*, edited by P. Bennis and M. Moushabec, published by Canongate Press PLC., 1992, from which the following articles were extracted:

Text-1: "After the Cold War: US Policy Towards the Middle East" (pp. 75-87), by N. Chomsky.  
Text-2: "The Politics of Linkage: The Arab-Israeli Conflict in the Gulf" (pp. 183-190), by I. Abu-Lugud.

The other three English articles were taken from a British magazine entitled *Marxism Today*, vol. LVI, the March 1991 issue:

Text-3: "The War of Imagination", by M. Kaider (pp. 13-20).  
Text-4: "Nations in the Thaw", by N. Ascherson (pp. 32-34).  
Text-5: "The Mirror of the Unseen", by K. Robins (pp. 39-40).

As for the five Arabic SLTs, they were taken from three main sources. The first is a book entitled *The White Book*, published by the Jordanian Government in September 1991, from which was taken his Majesty, King Hussein’s letter (pp. 11-14: Text-6 in the data) to Saddam Hussein, advising him not to continue with his losing adventure and not to embark on inflicting brutal and inhuman massacres and atrocities against his fellow Arab neighbors. Texts 7 & 9 were written by Dr. Radwan Abdullah, an academic at the University of Jordan, published in the Jordanian daily newspaper, ‘Al-Dostoir’, in March 1991; whereas Texts 8 & 10 were written by Dr. Asa’ad Abdurahman, a Palestinian academic and member of the Palestinian National Council, published in the Jordanian daily newspaper Al-Rai’ in March 1991.

These texts were translated, by professional translators, including the author of this paper, proofread and edited by native speakers of Arabic and Arabists.

12. By the ‘pass’ system, I simply mean analyzing the data in passes, i.e. number of times, and each time with one specific purpose in mind.

13. For the purpose of this study, I took for granted or, at least, assumed the world knowledge necessary (i.e. the unjustified invasion of Iraqi regime of Kuwait) to fully comprehend and understand the extracts taken from the selected texts as examples that demonstrate the discoursal and pragmatic motivations of using existential sentences with ‘there’.

14. For more details regarding the macro-structure of discourse, the reader is referred to Van Dijk.

15. “il-‘anta‘iki, (Vol. II, p. 18) gives this name to a group of verbs such as ‘bada‘a, shara‘a, fasaqa, ‘akhbar (‘start/begin’), ja‘ala (make) and any Arabic verb denoting inception.

16. Abbas (91-92) points out that nominal sentence bare sentences that have the meaning of ‘something is well-established as a result of having something of an attribution/ascription to something else’ (tufid ‘ath-thibi‘ ‘ay thub‘i‘ shay‘ li.shay‘). i.e. you prove or disprove the validity of a concept by attributing it (e.g. comparing/contrasting) to some other concept(s). On the other hand, the verbal sentence have the meaning of ‘regeneration or happening again and again’ (tufid ‘at-tjadud wa-thudthi‘), i.e., it fits well the development, analysis or synthesis of ideas. For additional details the reader is referred to Abbas.
Works Consulted


Dayî, Sh. al-madâriz n-nabawiya [The Grammatical Schools], (Cairo: dî l-ma‘ârif, 1978).


### Appendix-A

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<td>3</td>
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<td>07</td>
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**Table 3-1:** Existential Sentences in the English SLTs

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**Table 3-2:** Existential-Equivalent Sentences in the Arabic TLTs
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Table 3-3: Existential-Equivalent Sentences in the Arabic SLTs

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Table 3-4: Existential Sentences in the English TLSs

* * *