Abstract Nouns in the
There/Have Alternation: A Preliminary Study*

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1. Introduction

Close relationships between existential, possessive and locative constructions have been commonly observed in different languages (Lyons 1967, 1968; Christie 1970; Clark 1978, Freeze 1992; Heine 1997, Langacker 2009: Chapter 4, among others). As to English, it has often been noted that the *there*-construction (an existential construction) and the *have*-construction (a possessive construction) can be used synonymously, as in (1):

(1)　a.　There are four windows in this room.　　　　　　　　　[*there*-construction]

　　　b.　This room has four windows in it.　　　　　　　　　　[*have*-construction]

Sentence (1a) is a typical instance of the *there*-construction: it describes a situation in which a certain entity (*four windows*) exists at a specific location (*in this room*). Sentence (1b) is an instance of the *have*-construction. Although the *have*-construction is typically used to describe a possessive relation, (1b) designates an existential relationship just as (1a) does.[1] Despite such semantic affinity, the two constructions have not been explicitly treated as constituting an "alternation." Levin (1993), the most comprehensive work on alternations, deals only with "argument alternations." An argument alternation consists of a pair of constructions that are identified as two argument realizations of a certain set of verbs. Therefore, the two constructions as in (1) can never be a source of an *argument* alternation since no *verb* can occur in both of them. It is theoretically possible, however, to assume that the two constructions in question organize another kind of alternation; i.e. an alternation defind by the existence of *nouns* denoting things to be located ("locatum," henceforth) that occur in both constructions. This proposed alternation will be called the "*there/have* alternation" in the remainder of this paper.

In this paper, based on a preliminary survey with COCA, I will argue that there actually exists a type of *there/have* alternation which is realized by a class of nouns denoting highly abstract concepts such as *edge* and *aura*, as exemplified in (2) and (3).

⑵　a.　There was an edge to her voice.

　　b.　Her voice had an edge to it.

⑶　a.　There is an aura about John.

　　b.　John has an aura about him.

It will also be pointed out that such abstract nouns as *edge* and *aura*, unlike those referring to concrete objects (e.g. *window* in (1)), have a semantic impact on the two alternating constructions, and that in this respect they parallel certain verbs in argument alternations.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 will briefly review the two previous studies whereby the three existential constructions (including the two in question) are compared with one another to highlight their similarities and differences. Section 3 will present the results of a preliminary corpus-based survey of the *there/have* alternation by abstract nouns of property, and will discuss that those nouns exhibit several features that cannot be accounted for by the hypotheses introduced in section 2. Section 4 concludes this paper.

2. Previous studies

Examples of the *there/have* alternation with highly abstract nouns such as (2) and (3) have received little attention in the literature. What most studies have focused on is the comparison between the three apparently synonymous constructions, two of which are our primary concern. In what follows we will review some noteworthy ideas presented in Anderson (1971) and Lakoff (1987).

2.1 Anderson (1971)

In Anderson (1971), the three constructions exemplified in (4) are treated as structural variants bearing the same propositional meaning.

⑷　a.　There is a book on the table.　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Anderson 1971: 107)

　　b.　A book is on the table.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(ibid.: 108)

　　c.　The table has a book on it.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(ibid.: 110)

(4a) and (4c) are examples of the *there*-construction and the *have*-construction, respectively. (4b) is an instance of another existential construction, which will henceforth be called the "bare existential construction." Sentence (4b) is not usual because of the general tendency to avoid an indefinite subject,[2][3] and that the *there*-construction variant (4a) serves as an alternative to (4b) when the locatum noun (*book*) needs to be indefinite. It is then pointed out that the have-

construction (4c) and the *there*-construction (4a), despite their difference in word order, show similar behavior with regard to definiteness of the noun phrases:

　(5)　a.　*A table has a book on it.

　　　b.　The table has a book on it.

　　　c.　The table has the book on it.

　　　d.　*A table has the book on it.　　　　　　　(Anderson 1971: 110)

　(6)　a.　?There is a book on a table.

　　　b.　There is a book on the table.

　　　c.　There is the book on the table.

　　　d.　?There is the book on a table.　　　　　　　　　(ibid.)

As shown in (5) and (6), "both variants are associated with definite locatives" (Anderson 1971: 111). The noun phrase that denotes locatum (i.e. what is placed in a specific location), on the other hand, can either be indefinite or definite in either variant.

Anderson further notes that each of the two constructions is under a different kind of animacy constraint. As illustrated by (7) and (8), if the locatum noun and the locative noun do not agree in animacy, an inanimate locative fits the *there*-construction better as in (7), while an animate (particularly human) locative is more naturally encoded by the *have*-construction as in (8).

　(7)　a.　There's a man in the garden.

　　　b.　?The garden has a man in it.　　　　　　　(Anderson 1971: 111)

　(8)　a.　?There's a book with me.

　　　b.　I have a book with me.　　　　　　　　　　(ibid.)

Despite such a difference, a basic assumption in Anderson (1971) seems to be that the *there*-construction and the *have*-construction have the same propositional ("conceptual") meaning.

In the next section, we will turn to a view that contradicts such an assumption.

2.2　A semantic description of the three constructions (Lakoff 1987)

Lakoff (1987) observes that the three existential constructions differ from one another in conceptual meaning, referring to (9) and (10):

　(9)　a.　There's a Japanese executive in the waiting room.

　　　b.　A Japanese executive is in the waiting room.

    c.   There's a Japanese executive in our company.

    d.   *A Japanese executive is in our company.   (Lakoff 1987: 557)

(10) a.   The reception room has a receptionist in it.

      b.   *The reception room has a Japanese executive in it.   (Lakoff 1987: 558)

Lakoff attributes the difference between (9b) and (9d) to a conceptual difference between companies and rooms, saying "companies are institutions that are in part constituted by the people who are employed in them. Rooms are not like this" (Lakoff 1987: 557). The appropriate interpretation of (9a) and (9b) is that a Japanese executive happens to be in the waiting room, while that of (9c) is that a Japanese executive belongs to our company. It then follows from the unacceptability of (9d) that the bare existential construction cannot be used to refer to any situation where the locatum constitutes part of the makeup of the location. On the other hand, the facts in (10) indicate that the *have*-construction, a supposedly structural variant of the *there*-construction, is usable only when the locatum is part of the location: (10a) makes sense since the receptionist is understood as (probably crucial) part of the reception room, whereas (10b) sounds strange because it is difficult to conceptualize a Japanese executive as crucial part of the reception room.

    Lakoff proceeds to give a more comprehensive picture by the examples in (11):

(11) a.   There is a vase on the table.

      b.   A vase is on the table.

      c.   The table has a vase on it.   (Lakoff 1987: 558)

Sentence (11a) can be interpreted in two ways; either (i) "a vase happened, incidentally, to be placed there", or (ii) "the vase is part of the table setting". On the other hand, neither (11b) or (11c) can be ambiguous: (11b) is limited to the interpretation (i) while (11c) is restricted to (ii). Henceforth, the interpretation (i) and (ii) will be called "incidental occurrence" and "part-whole relationship," respectively. The overall picture can be summarized as Table 1.

Table 1: Matches between the three constructions and the two interpretations (based on Lakoff 1987)

	(i) incidental occurrence	(ii) part-whole relationship
bare existential construction	✓	*
there-construction	✓	✓
have-construction	*	✓

    Lakoff's analysis, which clearly builds upon the theoretical assumption that each linguistic form carries its own meaning (cf. Bolinger 1977), is also in accord with the basic tenets in the

Construction Grammar enterprise as developed by subsequent scholars of cognitive linguistics (Fillmore et al. 1988; Goldberg 1995, 2006; Croft 2001, inter alia). Yet two supplementary notes in support of Lakoff's insights are needed.

The first thing to be noted is that the notion of "part-whole relationship" does not refer to an *objective* organization of a situation but to a *construal* of a situation by the speaker or "conceptualizer"[4] (see Cognitive Grammar by Langacker (2008), etc.). This modification helps us understand why examples of the *have*-construction such as (12) are felicitous.

(12)　Sue's trousers had grass on them.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Nakau 1998: 96)

It is almost impossible that grass objectively constitute part of a pair of trousers, but this does not mean that (12) cannot convey a part-whole relationship between the locatum and the locative. The fact is that the use of (12) is motivated by the conceptualizer's perception of a part-whole relationship between grass and a pair of trousers.

Secondly, the notion of part-whole relationship should not be mixed up with so-called "inalienable possession," which is notably defined by Kimball (1973) as: "A is inalienably possessed by B if A exists only insofar as it is possessed by B." Despite a considerable degree of overlap, these two are different notions, as has been cautioned in a number of studies (Chappell and McGregor 1989: 28; Heine 1997: 38, inter alia). This can be confirmed by comparing the two sets of examples of the *have*-construction as follows:

(13)　a.　That tree has crows on it.
　　　b.　My study has a lot of useless books in it.　　　　　　　　　　(Heine 1997: 35)
(14)　a.　This table has a marble top to it.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Kuno 1971: 367)
　　　b.　His theory has a good deal of merit in it.　　　　　　　　　　(Lakoff 1987: 559)

While sentences in (13) are labeled by Heine (1997) as examples of *alienable* possession, sentences in (14) express inalienable possession in the sense that the object NP (locatum) refer to things inseparable from the subject referents (locative). It is obvious from looking at examples (10a) and (11c) that Lakoff (1987) does not regard *inseparability* as an essential component of the notion of part-whole relationship. It is therefore reasonable to assume that all the examples in (13) and (14) signify part-whole relationship in any way.[5]

In the next section, we will move on to investigating abstract nouns of property attested in *there/have* alternation.

3. Nouns in the *there/have* alternation: A preliminary survey and discussion

Although the definiteness or activation status of locatum/locative nouns has been a primary interest in the literature on the existential *there*-construction and/or the possessive *have*-construction (Anderson 1971; Milsark 1974; Rando and Napoli 1978; Ward and Birner 1995; Heine 1997; Onishi 2010, among others), scanty attention has been paid to *kinds of individual nouns* observed in these constructions. This can be attributed to a hidden assumption that the locatum nouns, of whatever kind they might be, behave the same way in these constructions. There is no problem with this as far as instances portraying locations of physical objects are concerned. Looking at (11), for instance, no one would be tempted by the idea of counting *vase* as one of the nouns that enter into the *there/have* alternation. However, the assumption is called into question by a class of abstract nouns that are best analyzed as participating in the *there/have* alternation. (15) is a tentative, non-exhaustive list of such nouns. [6] Some examples (3) and (4) are repeated here as (16) and (17):

(15)　　air, aura, component, edge, element, quality, ring, tone, way

(16) a.　There was an edge to her voice.

　　 b.　Her voice had an edge to it.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(= (3))

(17) a.　There is an aura about John.

　　 b.　John has an aura about him.　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(= (4))

One primary feature shared by all the items in (15) is that each of them denotes an abstract concept of "property." We will thus call these nouns *property nouns* in the present study. A property, by definition, cannot exist on its own but requires the existence of *something it belongs to*, which henceforth will be called the "property holder." In a *there*-construction the property holder is coded as the locative phrase, while in a *have*-construction it is coded as the subject and the locative phrase, which are in an anaphoric relation through the pronominalization of the latter. Another feature shared by the items in (15) is that they are attested with the locative phrase headed by *about* and/or *to*, both of which are suitable for attributing a property to a certain entity. While *to* can be used to describe a physical location, especially when the locatum is physically attached to the location (e.g. *The jar has a lid to it*), *to* in examples like (16) designates a schematic relation; the attribution of *an edge* ("locatum") to *her voice* ("locative"). *About* is more severely restricted to the description of an abstract ("metaphorical") relationship between the locatum (= a property) and the locative (= the property holder). In (17), *about* serves to associate *an aura* ("locatum") with *him* ("locative"), and the association is schematic, not physical or tangible (at least for normal people).

This section is devoted to a further examination of the nouns in (15) as items organizing the

there/have alternation. In 3.1, the results of a preliminary survey with COCA will presented. In 3.2, it will be discussed how the two constructions with these nouns exhibit some features that evade the hypotheses presented by Anderson (1971) and Lakoff (1987).

3.1 The result of a preliminary survey

A preliminary survey has been conducted through the following three steps: (i) extract all the data matching the sequence of [Noun + *to*] and/or [Noun + *about*]; (ii) exclude the instances that are neither the *there*-construction nor the *have*-construction; (iii) count instances of each construction. The result is given in Table 2. [7]

Table 2: Number of occurrences of property nouns in the *there/have* alternation with *to/about* in COCA, 1990-2017

property noun	preposition	*there*-construction	*have*-construction
air	to	1	1
	about	24	74
aura	to	6	2
	about	25	30
component	to	133	26
edge	to	118	99
	about	0	3
element	to	167	21
	about	3	1
feel	to	5	10
	about	1	1
quality	to	142	75
	about	71	38
tone	to	37	24
	about	1	2
ring	to	11	186
	about	0	1
way	about	1	90

It is easy to see from Table 2 that some nouns exhibit clear preference for one of the two constructions/prepositions. For example, *ring*, which is combined fairly exclusively with the preposition *to*, displays strong preference for the *have*-variant over the *there*-variant. By contrast, apparent synonyms *element* and *component*, both of which dominantly co-occur with *to*, prefer the *there*-variant. A very skewed distribution can be observed with *way*; it never appears in this alternation with *to*, and it almost always occurs in the *have*-construction. A relatively well-balanced distribution between the two variants can be observed with *aura*, *edge*, *feel*, *quality*, and *tone*.

Sampled examples from each category are as follows:

(18) examples of *ring* [strong preference for *have*-construction with *to*]

    a. The name stemmed from a joke about someone naming a dinosaur for the president, and "*Obamadon*" *had a good ring to it*. (2016 Academic)[8]

    b. She was beginning her twenty-third year. The thought brought a huge smile to her face. *Twenty-three had a nice ring to it*. (2014 Fiction)

(19) examples of *element* and *component* [preference for *there*-construction with *to*]

    a. When I grew up in Scotland in the music shop my mother and father ran, you'd listen to a Gene Pitney or Righteous Brothers song and *there was always this dramatic element to the production and melody*. (2017 News)

    b. There's a traditional element to golf that can't be ignored, but nobody's going to deny the power of technology, social media and instant access. (2015 Magazine)

    c. … I mean I've come to the conclusion that *there is a rather large genetic component to one's underlying temperament*. (2014 Spoken)

    d. I think it's a made up diagnosis. I think it's a diagnosis that has a moralizing component to it. (2008 Spoken)

(20) examples of *way* [strong preference for *have*-construction with *about*]

    a. *Meredith had always had a regal way about her*, and it was something he usually liked. (2013 Fiction)

    b. "*He just had a way about him that drew people in*," Orson said. (2013 News)

(21) examples of *aura*, *edge*, *feel*, *quality*, and *tone* [*there*-construction]

    a. There was always this tragic aura about her on stage, whereas Mabel Mercer was very regal. (2017 Spoken)

    b. The piece he played was both rapid and lively, yet *there was a passionate, desperate edge to it*. (2016 Fiction)

    c. Could there be something innately wrong with the boy? *There's a feel to Bud that emanates through the scree*n. (1996 Magazine)

    d. No. But I'm just saying, like, *there's an overheated quality to your critic*. (2017 Spoken)

    e. There is a natural leadership quality about him. (2015 News)

    f. "Hello, Phoebe," Val said. There was a slightly disapproving tone to her voice, as if Phoebe had burst in late for an important meeting. (2011 Fiction)

(22) examples of *aura*, *edge*, *feel*, *quality*, and *tone* [*have*-construction]

    a. I got a sense that he had a real elegance and an aura about him that's not typical of trainers I've met, … (2016 News)

b. I said, "What happened to Doolan, Pat?" *His frown had a ragged edge to it*, as if he didn't like the way it was going to sound. (2011 Fiction)

c. Photograph Braxton says *her new album has "a younger feel to it"* and shows how she has grown vocally over the last three years. (1996 Magazine)

d. Your voice has that operatic quality to it. (2013 Fiction)

e. She was a likable person who had a quality about her. (2009 Spoken)

f. "It's me." Walter's voice had a strange tone to it. (2011 Fiction)

If my claim about the *there/have* alternation is on the right track, it is only expected that nouns with similar meanings exhibit similar behavior in this alternation, just as verbs with similar meanings do in argument alternations. In the present survey result, a piece of evidence in this regard can be found in the fact that *element* and *component* show a similar degree of preference for the *there*-construction. For more substantial evidence, needless to say, a closer investigation into a larger amount of relevant data is required.

In the next section we will look further into the *there/have* alternation with property nouns in light of the hypotheses outlined in Section 2.

3.2 Discussion

Let us begin with Anderson's (1971) hypothesis about animacy constraints (see 2.1), which states that: when there is a gap in animacy between the locatum and the locative, an inanimate locative prefers the *there*-construction and an animate (human) locative prefers the *have*-construction. This constraint is illustrated by (7) and (8), repeated here as (23) and (24).

(23) a. There's a man in the garden.

  b. ?The garden has a man in it.   (= (7))

(24) a. ?There's a book with me.

  b. I have a book with me.   (= (8))

To see if this hypothesis is applicable to the data in the present study, let us take *aura* as an example. A key question regarding this attempt is whether an aura is animate or inanimate. It would not be a wise choice to start an ontological debate about it. Rather, my suggestion is to reformulate the question as follows: "Is it appropriate to apply the notion of animacy to property nouns?" The answer to this should be "no" because, as I discussed earlier, a property is a dependent concept in nature: unlike individual objects such as artefacts, places, and humans, properties cannot stand on their own but have to be attributed to some other individual entities (i.e. property holders).

It follows from this that Anderson's hypothesis about animacy constraints cannot tell us anything about the *there/have* alternation under consideration. One possible alternative would be to assume that a property "inherits" the animacy status of its property holder. Even if this route was taken, again, the hypothesis could play no role since the locative and the locatum agree in animacy. This is supported by the survey result given in Table 3:

Table 3. Animacy status of locative in the case of *aura (about)* (based on COCA)

	animate (human) locative	inanimate locative
there-construction	16	6
have-construction	25	5

Although the total number of examples is too small to draw any definitive conclusion, inferable from Table 3 are: (i) the locative is more likely to refer to a human than an inanimate entity; (ii) whether the locative is animate or not, there seems to be no particular inclination toward either of the two constructions. Concerning (ii), even if any more skewed distribution were observed, the animacy status of the locative noun would not be the only explanation; it would also be possible to attribute such a distribution to the lexical meaning of the property noun *aura* (see 3.1).

Another noteworthy issue concerns the interpretative possibilities associated with each construction. Lakoff's (1987) semantic description of the two constructions (see 2.2) entails that there is an interpretative discrepancy between the *there*- and *have*-constructions in the sense that while the former can take either the "incidental occurrence" reading or the "part-whole relationship" reading, the latter is only compatible with the "part-whole relationship" reading. With property nouns in (14), however, such a difference disappears. This is because the conceptual nature of property nouns eliminates the possibility of the "incidental occurrence" interpretation. As mentioned earlier, any property is inherently dependent on the existence of its holder (i.e. property holder). This is in a total mismatch with the concept of incidental occurrence, which is defined by Lakoff as "something (locatum) incidentally happens to be in a certain place (locative)." Incidental occurrence, therefore, carries a strong implication that "something" could have been somewhere else, and such an implication is hardly available for instances of the *there/have* alternation with property nouns. The "part-whole relationship" reading, on the other hand, well matches the concept of property. Most commonly, an entity is conceptualized to consist of multiple properties, which naturally induces a construal that any property attributable to a particular entity constitutes *part* of that entity.

To put it differently, property nouns, by making unavailable the "incidental occurrence" interpretation in the *there*-construction, reduces the semantic difference between the *there*-construction and the *have*-construction. This means that with property nouns both constructions

are compatible only with the "part-whole relationship" reading. From the perspective of the two-way classification of predication into event predication and property predication (Masuoka 2008), the two constructions with property nouns are unambiguously sentences for property predication rather than those for event predication.

When a locatum noun refers to a physical object occupying a certain location, the semantic impact it has on the interpretation of the whole sentence is minimal (or nothing, practically). This is the reason why previous studies have paid no particular attention to individual nouns occurring in the *there-* and *have*-constructions. When nouns refer to properties of entities denoted by the locative phrase, however, those nouns rule over the interpretation of the whole sentences. It is worth noting in this connection that a similar situation can be observed with argument alternations; it sometimes happens that certain verbs with a specific semantic characteristic serve to minimize the semantic discrepancy that is normally recognized between the two alternating constructions. [9] It thus stands to reason that just as verb meaning can take precedence over constructional meaning in an argument alternation, noun meaning can "have the final say" about the interpretation available in the *there/have* alternation. This also supports the idea of positing the *there/have* alternation as a kind of alternation defined by a class of property nouns.

4.　Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I hope to have argued for the validity of counting the *there/have* alternation as part of the speaker's knowledge, by focusing on individual nouns occurring in the locatum position. It has been shown through a preliminary survey by use of COCA that a class of property nouns (e.g. *aura*, *air*, *edge*, *ring*, and *tone*) are attested in both constructions, and that they then exhibit several features that the analyses proposed in previous studies fail to capture. In particular, it was pointed out that those property nouns serve to eliminate the semantic difference that is otherwise detectable between the two constructions, just as certain kinds of verbs do in argument alternations.

There are two directions for further research. First, it is necessary to expand the list in Table 2 by collecting data of a wider range of abstract nouns. The immediate task, in particular, will be to identify de-adjectival property nouns that enter into the *there/have* construction (see note 6). Second, the phenomena in question is worth investigating further in light of Predication Typology (Masuoka 2008, etc.), in which it is hypothesized that sentences for property predication is characterized as having the "topic-comment" structure. While it is easy to see that the subject of the *have*-construction serves as the topic (Langacker 2009: Chapter 4; Onishi 2010), the topicality of the *there*-construction is a matter of debate (McNally 2011). It will thus be worth exploring whether or not the *there*-construction of property predication has the topic structure, as claimed by

Predication Typology. To this end it is necessary to implement an extensive discourse-based analysis in terms of noun phrase accessibility, information structure, and so forth (cf. Lambrecht 1994). All these await future study.

Notes

*I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their comments and stylistic suggestions on the earlier version of this paper. All remaining errors are my own. This research is supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 19K00697.

1 In this respect (1b) would be more precisely named the "existential" *have*-construction, but I will use the simpler, traditional label "*have*-construction" in this paper.

2 See also Jespersen (1924: 154-156) about the general tendency to avoid an indefinite subject.

3 Kuno (1971: 350 fn) points out that bare existential constructions with an indefinite subject like (4b) are acceptable in certain contexts where the subject receives emphatic stress, and he also comments that these sentences "have the tone of a child's English."

4 The importance of construal by the conceptualizer as part of an expression's meaning is extensively discussed in Langacker (2008: Chapter 3).

5 Nakau (1998: 95-96) criticizes Lakoff's (1987) analysis, saying that it fails to account for examples such as (12) in which there is no inalienable relationship between the locatum and the locative. This argument is untenable because it builds on a confusion of part-whole relationship with alienable possession.

6 The list will expand further if it includes de-adjectival nouns such as *unfairness* and *toughness*.

7 The survey was conducted in September, 2019.

8 Hereafter, all the italics in cited examples are added by the author.

9 For example, such "semantic neutralization" by verbs is sometimes observed with so-called dative alternation; a certain group of verbs, due to their semantic structure, "nullify" the semantic difference otherwise observed between the ditransitive construction and the *to*-dative construction (see Rappaport Hovav and Levin 2008 for more detail).

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