

Definiteness, existentials, and the 'list' interpretation

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1. Introduction

The ultimate explanation for the definiteness effect in existential sentences depends in part on decisions about the class of existential sentences. Probably no one is in doubt about examples such as those in (1):

- (1) a. There is a fly in your soup.
- b. There are three students waiting to be seen.
- c. There are people to see and places to go.

A crucial question here is whether or not examples like those in (2) should be included in this category or regarded as belonging to a different construction:

- (2) a. There is the leftover chicken from last night.
- b. There are only thee and me (and sometimes I wonder about thee).
- c. There is the laundry to be brought in and the dishes to be dried.

In this paper I want to defend the position that the examples in (2) belong to essentially the same construction as those in (1) (thus supporting the views of, e.g., Bolinger 1977, Barwise and Cooper 1981, Woisetschlaeger 1983, and Lumsden 1988). Hence I will argue that the definiteness effect should not be regarded as a prohibition against (some) definites but rather the fact that (some) existentials with definites require special contextualization. This in turn suggests that the best account of this effect will be in pragmatic, rather than purely syntactic or semantic, terms. Finally, it will be noted that the NPs requiring special contextualization do not coincide with those frequently defined in formal terms as definite (i.e. NPs whose determiner is *the*, a demonstrative, or a possessive, as well as proper names and pronouns). This in turn has consequences for what the formally definite NPs DO have in common.

2. The status of contextualized existentials

Sentences like those in (2) have a couple of well known distinctive characteristics. Pragmatically, they virtually require a context in which a question has been raised about the existence of some entity to fill a certain need or other role. Thus the examples in (2) are natural answers to the questions in (3), respectively.

- (3) a. What is there to eat?
 b. Are there any sane people in the world?¹
 c. How much work is there left to do?

In view of this property I will henceforth refer to this kind of existential as a 'contextualized existential' (or CE). Secondly (a related fact) -- an example like (2a) may occur with rising (or at any rate non-falling) intonation, as pictured in (2a').



(2a') There's the leftover chicken...

These characteristics have apparently led a number of people, following Milsark (1974:126-7), to regard sentences like (2) as invoking a (possibly incomplete) list. In fact these examples are frequently called 'list' existentials. Furthermore in some analyses of existentials this hypostatization of a list plays a crucial role in accounting for definiteness effects. In the remainder of this section I will argue against such analyses.²

2.1. Safir's analysis.

Probably the most extreme example is the analysis in Safir 1985, 1987.³ Safir regards the superficial similarity of examples such as those in (1) and (2) (e.g. dummy *there* as subject, presence of *be*⁴) as concealing important differences. While the *be* in (1) is predicational, and the *there* simply a dummy; in (2) *be* is asserted to be 'identificational', and the *there* 'stands for some discourse-controlled presupposed heading of the list' (1985:119). Thus the examples in (2) are held to be similar in structure and interpretation to Safir's example (4) (1985:119):

(4) The starting five are Bob, Carol, Alice, Ted and Lenin.

¹Larry Horn reminds me that the exact quote I am alluding to here is: 'All the world is queer save thee and me, and even thou art a little queer', attributed to Robert Owen on separating from his business partner William Allen, in 1828.

²Lakoff (1987:561f) has asserted a similar view concerning list analyses.

³Safir 1987 does not actually discuss CEs, but the analysis of ordinary existentials given there provides a relevant contrast and aspects of it will be cited below.

⁴Discussion of the presumably related construction with dummy *there* as subject but main verb other than *be*, such as

(i) There strode into the room a tall young woman.

are beyond the scope of this paper. See Aissen 1975, Bolinger 1977, for some early discussion.

This analysis is inspired by the need to account for Case on the definite NPs in focus position. In ordinary existentials, on Safir's analysis, indefinite NPs receive Case by being bound by *there*, and escape Principle C of the Binding Theory by not being considered R-expressions. In fact they are considered to be predicate nominals.

There are a number of problems for Safir's analysis.⁵ Although it is claimed to 'account plausibly for the semantics of the list interpretation' (ibid.), it is not clear how this is so. Note for instance that replacing *be* in examples like (2) with *consists of* or *includes* is not possible preserving either sense or grammaticality. Then too it is not possible to reverse the supposed arguments of *be*, in contrast to the case with ordinary identification statements. Compare the examples in (5) and (6) below:

- (5) a. The starting five are Bob, Carol, Alice, Ted and Lenin.
 b. Bob, Carol, Alice, Ted and Lenin are the starting five.
- (6) a. There is the leftover chicken from last night.
 b. The leftover chicken from last night is there.

There in (6b) has only the locational reading -- i.e. (6b) does not mean the same thing as (6a). In reply it might be pointed out that proforms in identificational sentences frequently cannot occur in object position. Thus the example in (7a) below, with demonstrative *that*, is not reversible.

- (7) a. That is Mary.
 b. *Mary is that.

However note that *there* in its demonstrative function can appear in object position in an identificational sentence, as in (8b):

- (8) a. There is where the forks go.
 b. Where the forks go is there.

Another problem for Safir's analysis is explaining why *there* should have this particular pronominal type of interpretation only in sentences like those in (2). Corresponding to (5a) we can have something like (9a), but this type of use is not possible with *there*, as (9b) shows:

⁵See also Heim 1987 for a discussion of the problem presented by what Carlson 1977 calls 'amount relatives', such as example (i):

- (i) What light there is in this painting is quite diffuse.

I am grateful to Greg Stump for reminding me of this.

- (9) a. The starting five/they are (listed) on the blackboard.
 b.*There is (listed) on the blackboard.

(We must imagine (9b) as a response to, e.g., *What is there on special today?*, in order to provide the 'discourse controlled presupposed heading of the list'. It doesn't help.)

Finally, Lumsden (1988:133) notes that the relatively high degree of referentiality of a number of indefinites in ordinary existentials, such as (10):⁶

- (10) There was this weird guy in the bookstore this morning.

weakens the grounds for claiming a distinction between ordinary existentials and CEs on the grounds of referentiality. On Safir's analysis *this weird guy* in (10) is a predicate nominal, but that does not seem to be right. Note on the one hand that it cannot occur as a complement of *seem* (one of Safir's diagnostics for predicate nominals (cf. 1987:86)):

- (11) a. John seems a fool.
 b.*John seems Mary's brother.
 c.*John seems this weird guy.

And on the other hand it can occur with apparently the same sense and reference it has in (10) in ordinary argument positions:

- (12) a. This weird guy came up to me in the bookstore this morning.
 b. I saw this weird guy hanging around the bookstore this morning.

(See also the examples of ordinary existentials with definite NPs given below in section 3.) Safir's analysis is open to other objections aimed generally at hypostatization of a list which will be discussed below in section 2.3.

2.2. Rando and Napoli's analysis.

Rando and Napoli (1978) also invoke a list as an essential part of their account of the definiteness effect. On their theory (1) and (2) do belong to basically the same type of construction, and both assert existence. The difference lies in what is being asserted to exist, and in (2) 'what is predicated as existing is

⁶Prince 1981 argues that NPs like *this weird guy* in (10) are indefinite but necessarily specific. I use this kind of example because it brings out Lumsden's point especially clearly. The same point could have been made with an ordinary indefinite like *a very weird guy*, the difference is that the latter may have a nonspecific, nonreferential interpretation in some contexts, while *this weird guy* cannot.

the entire list⁷ rather than the items on it. Their explanation for the definiteness effect itself involves not definiteness but anaphoricity -- the focus NP in an existential must be nonanaphoric, in some sense. More specifically, they characterize anaphoric NPs as those whose referents are 'previously mentioned or otherwise known to both speaker and hearer' (p. 307). This is intended to capture the intuition that the focus NP introduces new information.

Rando and Napoli's analysis is an appealing one, but it too is not without problems. Note first that the relevant notion of anaphoricity needs revision in the light of examples like (13), which would be strained even in a context in which the speaker does not assume the addressee knows of her brother:

(13) ?There's my brother in the living room.

Apparently the degree of accommodation such examples call for (cf. Stalnaker 1974, Lewis 1979) is not sufficient for assertion. A more serious problem for Rando and Napoli is that it is not true that the focus NP in an existential, whether or not it is construed as introducing a list of some kind, can never be anaphoric. The examples below show this:

(14) A: Who should greet the guests?
 B: Well, there's John.
 A: Yes, I suppose there's always him.

(15) A: Don't forget that Kim will be bringing a salad.
 B: Oh right -- there is that.

The focus NPs in the existentials in these examples are clearly anaphoric in the relevant sense, and the notion of a list will not be helpful here. Rando and Napoli say that 'for a list to be non-anaphoric, some aspect of it must be unknown -- must be new information, e.g. the choice of members or the number of members' (p. 311). But neither the choice of referent nor its cardinality is new information in either (14) or (15), and nothing else seems to be new either.

Rando and Napoli were apparently strongly influenced toward their 'list' analysis by the distinctive nonfalling intonation contour of a typical utterance of (2a), which they describe as 'the intonation of a list' (p. 300). However this is not, in fact, ordinary list intonation (which is a simple rise) but rather a pattern called 'fall-rise' (or FR) by Ward and Hirschberg 1985 (following Ladd 1980).⁸ Note the

⁷(P. 306) Actually Rando and Napoli attribute this assertion to Milsark 1974, 1977, but they do accept it as being 'essentially correct' (p. 307). Furthermore I do not believe Milsark ever said exactly this. Milsark's view will be touched on below.

⁸I am grateful to Craige Roberts for pointing this out to me in comments following the oral presentation of this paper. Ward and Hirschberg cite a number of other discussions of this contour (1985:749), which they also refer to in later work (Ward and Hirschberg 1989) as 'L*+H L H%', following Pierrehumbert 1980.

following examples, in which \ / marks the same FR pattern. ((16) is Ward and Hirschberg's (6), and (17) is their (85).)

- (16) A: How can anyone with any sense not like San Francisco?
 B: \Bill/ doesn't like it.
- (17) A: Can you sing a Motels song right now?
 B: Now?
 A: Yeah.
 B: My \cou/sin can.

On Ward and Hirschberg's analysis examples like those in (16A) and (17A) invoke an open predicate, where potential satisfiers of this predicate form a scale (analyzed by Ward and Hirschberg as a partially ordered set (or poset)). It seems clear that CEs like (2a) function to suggest items to fulfill certain roles, which seems at least consistent with the Ward and Hirschberg analysis.⁹ Ward and Hirschberg argue that the intonation pattern itself conveys a conventional implicature of uncertainty, or a lack of speaker commitment. The lack of completion this contour conveys could be the result of anticipation by the speaker of some kind of judgment on the part of the addressee as to whether the suggestion is a good one or adequate for the job at hand. Of course it could be maintained that this in turn implies a hypothetical list of some kind -- namely a list consisting of other suggestions if the current one is not acceptable. This might correspond to Ward and Hirschberg's scale, and may, in fact, be the source of Milsark's original intuition that there is a list 'lurking in the background' (see below). However even if that were true, there would be no reason to incorporate such a list into the truth conditions of examples like (16B) or B's second utterance in (17). As Ward and Hirschberg note, that utterance 'is true if and only if it is true that B's cousin "can sing a Motels song right now"' (p. 773). By the same token I claim it has no place in the truth conditional semantics of examples like those in (2). And note finally that (2a) need not be uttered with the FR intonation pattern. It might, in the same context, have a sharp fall indicating a sudden inspiration. In that case both the hesitancy, and the implication of other satisfiers for the need at hand, would not be present.

2.3. General arguments against the 'list' hypostasis.

Above we have looked at two fairly specific versions of the view that CEs introduce or make reference to a list of some kind, and seen that there are problems with each of them. These two are not the only analyses that invoke a list

⁹ I am a bit hesitant about the need to postulate a scale in these cases.

for CEs,¹⁰ although they are among the most explicit. I have two arguments aimed generally at analyses that invoke a list for CEs.

My first argument is really a challenge -- how exactly is the list to be incorporated into the semantic interpretation of such sentences? I take it as uncontroversial that a verbal list is not in question here. We would need something more abstract. In another sense a list could be construed as a sequence of items, but there is no evidence that ordering is part of the interpretation of examples like those in (2). Thus the truth conditions seem unaffected by changes in ordering; (2b) (repeated here) expresses the same proposition as (2b').

- (2) b. There are only thee and me.
b'. There are only me and thee.

Furthermore one can explicitly deny the relevance of order, as in (2c'), below.

- (2) c'. There is the laundry to be brought in and the dishes to be dried, but not necessarily in that order.

We seem to be left with a mereological sum or (equivalently here, I think) a set. Milsark 1974 suggests this route, using the examples in (18) (his (97)-(99)):

- (18) a. Is there anything worth seeing around here? Well, there's the Necco factory.
b. Well, there are all those potholes on Main Street.
c. Well, there are many of my favorite eyesores.

One could imagine that in such cases some principle allows the class predicate EXIST to take not the set denoted by the (quantified) NP as its argument, but rather a hypothetical set which is projected from the NP by taking the set actually denoted by NP as a member. This larger set would be the 'list' which seems to be lurking in the background of the interpretation of sentences such as [(18)]. (p. 127)

Passing over issues to do with the nature of the denotation of the focus NP itself, this sketch still leaves unanswered the question of the determination of the hypothetical set which is to be 'projected from the NP'. One possible answer in the case of (18a) would be that the larger set is the singleton which contains the denotation of the NP. However this set is completely determined by the NP, and thus equally definite. On the other hand if the hypothetical set is required to contain at least one additional member, then there arises the question of how the additional member is to be determined. Presumably the discourse context would

¹⁰Ziv 1982 is one example, although she indicates some hesitancy (p. 77). Belletti (1988:15) is more enthusiastic.

come into play here -- so that in example (18) the additional items would be things to see. However this suggestion would run into problems with examples like (19), which explicitly assert that there are no additional items of the requested type.

- (19) A: Is there anything left to do?
 B: There is only the wrapping and mailing -- that's all.

Alternatively one might try to propose some kind of intensional entity -- for (18) something like the sense of the phrase *things to see around here*. However that move would seem to have trouble getting the truth conditions of sentences like (18) correct. (Presumably abstract things like intensions exist independently of which particulars happen to fall into their extensions at any given time or place. Thus there may be things to see in Cambridge even after the Necco factory is torn down.) There may be other possible ways to incorporate a list into the semantics of CEs, but the burden of pursuing them is clearly on the person who wants to claim that this is the right approach to take. The only reason I can see for doing so is to try to maintain the view that definites are excluded from existentials in the face of clear counterexamples.

My final argument against lists is that the invocation of a list does not adequately distinguish CEs from ordinary existentials. (This may seem odd from one who wants to argue that the construction is essentially the same. My point is going to be that the construction is syntactically, semantically, and functionally essentially the same. It is clear that there are differences, but I want to try to explain those differences in pragmatic terms.) Observe first that we can have what seem to be quite ordinary existentials where a list of NPs is in focus, e.g. (20).

- (20) There are three carrot sticks, some broccoli, and a fly in your soup.

Note that an example like (20) does not require any special contextualization -- i.e. it could begin a discourse. (A suitable next utterance might be *Are you sure you followed the recipe exactly?*) If (20) is, despite this, regarded as also invoking a list in the same sense that the examples in (2) are so regarded, then it needs to be explained how (20) is different from (1a):

- (1) a. There is a fly in your soup.

It is not a possible response to say that in (1a) there is only a single NP in focus, since that is also true of (2a). By the same token the list analysis does not explain the other distinctive property of CEs noted above, namely the fact that they typically require special contextualization. As just noted, (20) could begin a discourse. One can even have an ordinary existential which explicitly introduces a list at the beginning of a discourse. Compare (21):

- (21) Hi -- there's a list of possible things for dinner posted on the fridge. I'll be home about 9:00. See you later.

The examples in (2), on the other hand, do not seem suitable for discourse openers. An adequate account of CEs and the definiteness effect should give an explanation for this.

3. The 'unified' view.

Of those analyses which regard CEs like (2) as different syntactically and/or semantically from ordinary existentials like those in (1), probably the majority invoke a list in some way.¹¹ In the preceding section we have seen a number of arguments against such approaches. I want to turn now to a 'unified' view of existentials. This is the view that CEs and ordinary existentials belong to a single construction type and have the same kind of semantic interpretation. This approach has immediate plausibility in view of the fact that the examples in (1) and (2) are quite parallel in surface form (although see note 16, below). Note too that CEs like (2) typically provide answers to questions which have been couched with ordinary existentials, such as those in (3). It is also the case that both kinds of sentences seem to function typically to present items to the addressee, and an existence asserting analysis of their meaning seems apropos in both cases. This approach also has the methodological edge of Occam's Razor.

To complete this happy picture we need to provide an explanation for the fact that CEs typically cannot be felicitously used to initiate a discourse. This follows almost immediately from two facts. One is that the focus in such examples is an NP whose denotation is explicitly presumed to be familiar to the addressee. The other fact is that, given this, it should be anomalous simply to assert the existence of such an entity. However it is not anomalous if the existence of this entity is pointed out as a response to a request for entities to

¹¹There are other possibilities, of course. Some (Heim 1987, Higginbotham 1987, Eng 1991) simply do not mention CEs. Keenan 1987 seems to ignore them for the most part, but does assert that (on his analysis, and correctly) existentials which have a focus NP with a definite determiner do not have an 'existence assertion' reading. Thus he states that (ia) below has only the reading of (ib) and not (ic) (p. 304).

- (i) a. There were most of the students at the party.
 b. Most of the students were at the party.
 c. Most of the students at the party existed.

However this is not true. (ia) can have the reading of (ic) as a response to a question like (ii):

- (ii) How many people were there at the pep talk following the party?

On the other hand it is not clear to me that (ia) can have the interpretation of (ib) at all.

fulfill a certain role, or a request for entities of a certain type.¹² In such a context to assert the existence of something which is assumed to be known to the addressee becomes a polite way to suggest that entity as suitable for the purposes at hand. It is polite because it is indirect -- as Lumsden notes (1988, p. 224) both (22b) and (22c) are possible answers to the question in (22a):

- (22) a. What could I give my sister for her birthday?
 b. John's book on birdwatching.
 c. There's John's book on birdwatching.

However, Lumsden argues, while (22b) asserts (23), (22c) only implicates it:

- (23) You could give your sister John's book on birdwatching.

Lumsden points out that the implicature is cancellable with (22c), but the assertion of (22b) is not cancellable:¹³

- (24) a. What could I give my sister for her birthday?
 b. ?John's book on birdwatching, but I'm not suggesting it's a suitable present.
 c. There's John's book on birdwatching, but I'm not suggesting it's a suitable present.

Note too the apparent need for politeness here. As noted above, use of the anaphoric definite implies the speaker is assuming the addressee is familiar with the referent. Hence in this kind of context, that is in the face of a request by the addressee for entities for some purpose, it must be supposed that the addressee has either forgotten about the existence of this entity, or hasn't considered it as a possibility for the purpose at hand. The existential construction allows the speaker to make a suggestion without preempting the addressee's right to make their own judgment as to its suitability.

I need to acknowledge at this point that the explanation offered here has an element of the *post hoc* about it. One could ask why it should be considered polite to assert the existence of an entity that you are in the same breath acknowledging your addressee's familiarity with. It is not inconceivable that to do this should, on occasion or in some possible world, be construed as rude. Hence I wouldn't want to predict that this kind of sentence is universally usable in this way. Nevertheless it seems clear that in present day English examples like (22c) are in fact more

¹²Again I want to stress that a number of people have already asserted essentially this view, e.g. Bolinger 1977, Barwise and Cooper 1981, Woisetschlaeger 1983, Lakoff 1987 and Lumsden 1988. (I should note that I did not become aware of the excellent discussion in Lumsden 1988 until quite recently, after the main content of this paper was already formulated.)

¹³I have changed Lumsden's examples slightly. See his discussion, pp. 215-25.

polite than ones like (22b), and the account offered above provides at least a partial explanation of that fact.¹⁴

It has been suggested that CEs are subject to some other peculiar restrictions in addition to those noted already. Rando and Napoli cite Hankamer 1973 as claiming that CEs do not allow future or perfect tenses, or negation, but give the examples below in reply (n. 14, p. 311).

- (25) Q: What will be there be to see in London?
A: There'll be the Tower of London, St. Paul's, and much more.
- (26) Q: What families have ruled England?
A: There have been the Plantagenets, the Tudors, and the Stuarts.
- (27) Q: What is there to see around here?
A: ?Well, there isn't the Washington Monument anymore -- that was swept away in the flood.

Note too that the account supported here predicts that negative, as well as interrogative, CEs should be odd (note Rando and Napoli's question mark for (27A)). It ought to be odd to deny or question the existence of something whose existence you are explicitly presupposing. On the other hand when negative questions are used as tentative positive assertions, we would expect the naturalness which we find in an example like (28), for which I thank Bill Ladusaw.

- (28) Isn't there the leftover chicken from last night?

Finally Geoff Nunberg contributed the examples in (29):

- (29) a. Is there the IRS to worry about?
b. Too bad there isn't Dick Nixon to kick around anymore.

Given what I just said about predicting badness for negative and interrogative CEs, these examples need an explanation which I do not have at present. It may be that the infinitival complement is, in effect, what makes these o.k.

At this point I would like to summarize the view defended above before turning to a consideration of the nature of definiteness. The view defended here starts with the assumption (shared by many) that existential sentences are interpreted as assertions of existence.¹⁵ The definiteness effect, reinterpreted

¹⁴In the discussion following the talk questions were raised about the possibility of CEs in other languages. It was reported to me that these are fine in Dutch, but there seemed to be some doubt about their possibility in German and French (but of the remarks by Rando and Napoli (1978:312)). This issue requires further investigation.

¹⁵Craige Roberts and Alessandro Zucchi both stressed to me in comments following this talk that existentials cannot be held to assert ordinary, real world existence. This issue is discussed at greater length in Abbott 1991.

here as a requirement of special contextualization for NPs which indicate that the speaker assumes the addressee is familiar with their denotation, is held to be a pragmatic consequence of this interpretation. Thus the distinctive properties of CEs are explained with a minimum of arbitrary stipulation or unmotivated apparatus.¹⁶ We saw above that one attempt to give an account of the definiteness effect syntactically -- in terms of Case marking -- suffered from a number of unsolved problems. We saw also that the Milsark/Rando and Napoli semantic account was problematic. I have not shown that no purely syntactic or semantic analysis of existentials and the definiteness effect can succeed, but the prospects for such an eventuality do not look bright.¹⁷

4. Definiteness.

We turn now to a brief consideration of the nature of definiteness. Definite NPs are typically defined formally to include (in addition to personal pronouns and proper names) NPs whose determiner is *the*, a possessive NP, or a demonstrative. As is well known, there have been traditionally two major competing conceptions of what this group of NPs have in common. Christopherson 1939 argued that the essence of definiteness was familiarity, and Heim 1982 incorporated this theory into her file change semantics. Russell's analysis of definite descriptions imposed instead a condition of uniqueness (which

¹⁶In this context it should be pointed out that there are two other distinctive properties of CEs which require an explanation. The first is the fact that whereas ordinary existentials may include a predicating phrase in addition to the focus NP, CEs are definitely constrained in this regard. Thus in the ordinary existential in (ia) the PP is a separate constituent, but the PP in (ib) must be construed as part of the focussed NP.

- (i) a. There's a book on the table.
b. There's the book on the table.

((ib) is heard naturally as an answer to a question like *What can we use to prop open the window?*) In Abbott 1991 I attempt to account for this property in pragmatic terms.

The other property is the greater ability of CEs to lack number agreement with the focus NP. Thus compare the examples in (ii) and (iii):

- (ii) a. There are three apples on the table.
b. ?There's three apples on the table.
c. *There is three apples on the table.
- (iii) A: Is there anything to eat?
B: There are the apples we bought yesterday.
B': There's the apples we bought yesterday.
B'': ?There is the apples we bought yesterday.

I am grateful to Arnold Zwicky for pointing this phenomenon out to me. Unfortunately I do not have an explanation for it at present.

¹⁷See Abbott 1991 for more extensive arguments in favor of a pragmatic view and against syntactic and semantic accounts

differentiates them from indefinites). This view was supported by Hawkins, who argued however (on the basis of definite plurals and mass NPs) that the essence was inclusiveness rather than uniqueness: '...reference must be to the totality of objects or mass...' (1978:160). Hawkins' 'inclusiveness' could be taken as the natural extension of 'uniqueness' to masses and plurals. Given a group, in general there is only one unique subgroup (that is, there is only one which is uniquely determined by just the descriptive material in a CNP whose extension is the group), and that is the one which is equal to the whole. This inclusiveness or uniqueness must be relativized to the context in some way. Hawkins' speaks of a 'shared set of objects' -- that is, shared by speaker and addressee.¹⁸

Given the view of existentials supported here, and the assumption that the definiteness effect is appropriately named, we would expect to find support for the familiarity theory. That is, ordinary existentials should exclude definites because of their presumed familiarity (or accommodability, as noted above in connection with (13)). Any occurrence of a definite in focus position should introduce the requirement of special contextualization, because of the anomaly of asserting the existence of something marked as familiar to the addressee. However this is not the case.¹⁹ At least some cataphoric definites ('where what follows the head noun, rather than what precedes it, enables us to pinpoint the reference uniquely' (Quirk, et al. 1985:268)) can occur in ordinary existentials. One clear example is the following, from Eng 1991 (attributed to David Pesetsky):

(30) There are the following counterexamples to Streck's theory...

NPs like that focussed in (30) provide support for the uniqueness/inclusiveness view of definiteness and against the familiarity view.²⁰ (30) itself suggests that the crucial factor as far as existential sentences go is (as Prince 1992 notes) not definiteness but familiarity. Note that such cases must be distinguished from cases frequently described as involving accommodation such as example (13) above. (30) should also be distinguished from a number of examples of formally definite NPs occurring in ordinary existentials such as the following:

¹⁸See Wilson 1991 for arguments that the uniqueness property as described here cannot be extended to all uses of definite descriptions, and that we must recognize a 'pronominal' use as a distinct type of reading. It is nevertheless true that the reference of definites is fixed, even on the pronominal use, in contrast to the use of indefinites.

¹⁹This point is made by Prince (1992), who says 'In point of fact, There-sentences do not require indefinite NPs at all; rather, they require Hearer-new NPs' (p. 9). I would modify this claim in a couple of ways. First, of course, I would restrict it to ordinary There-sentences. But in addition the assertion that these NPs 'evoke an entity that is Hearer-new' (p. 10) needs at least some discussion in the light of examples such as those in (30) below (which are similar to examples cited by Prince). See below, where it is suggested (following Woisetschlaeger 1983 and Lumsden 1988) that the 'hearer-new' entity in question is an instance of a kind of thing.

²⁰See also the discussion in Kadmon 1990.

- (31) a. There weren't the funds necessary for the project. [Bolinger 1977]
 b. There was never that problem in America. [Rando and Napoli 1978]
 c. There was the usual crowd at the beach last Sunday. [Prince 1981]
 d. There was the smell of pot all over the apartment. [Woisetschlaeger 1983]
 e. There were the same people at both conferences. [Prince 1992]
 f. There is always the possibility that they'll be late.

Any of these (like (30)) could be used to begin a discourse (possibly with irrelevant modifications). Hence they must be classified as ordinary existentials rather than CEs. However for at least some of these examples it does not seem to be true that the focus NP denotes something unfamiliar to the addressee. Indeed, in (31b) *that problem* clearly refers deictically to a problem under discussion; in (31c) the phrase *the usual crowd* seems to entail that the entity denoted is in fact familiar to the addressee; and (31d) seems to assume familiarity with the smell of pot. The best explanation for these examples seems to be along the lines proposed in Woisetschlaeger 1983, and elaborated in Lumsden 1988. That is that the definite NPs in (30) denote kinds of things, in some sense, and what is being introduced are instances of those kinds. It remains to be seen how such an approach, if correct, is best formalized.

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