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Author(s)	Mino, Takashi
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On the Subject Selection of the *There Came* Construction
MINO Takashi

1. Introduction

This study focuses on a type of *there* construction, namely, with the past tense of the verb *come*, as shown in (1) and (2). In many studies, sentences such as (1) have been unconsciously used as examples of a *there came* construction. However, our quantitative study with *the Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) and *the Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA) shows that *there came* constructions tend to select sound-class-nouns such as *noise* and *voice* as their logical subject as in (2). This paper names expressions similar to (2) as *there came* sound-class-noun constructions.

(1) a. There came into the room <u>a group of inspectors</u>.[1] (Lumsden 1988: 234)

  b. Bill had said that he didn't expect any Christmas cards, so when there finally came <u>one</u> in the mail, he was surprised. (one=a Christmas card) (Lakoff 1987: 573)

(2) a. There came <u>a large thrumming noise</u> and the garbage in the dumpster began to sink.

  b. There came <u>a voice</u> from a short distance away. (COCA)

The preference for abstract nouns such as sound-class-nouns can be attributed to the pragmatic function of *there* constructions: to introduce a new entity into discourse (for pragmatic and discourse functions of *there* constructions, see Breivik (1990), Birner and Ward (1998) and among others). As a pragmatic device for presenting new information, the semantics of the verb in *there* conversations should be informationally light as proposed in Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) for locative inversions. According to them, existence and appearance are most suitable for this function. Based on this claim, this study identifies how the senses of the verb *come* are compatible with the pragmatic function of *there* constructions. Specifically, as for the *there came* constructions, the sense of motion denoted by the verb *came* is abstract, consequently expressing the appearance of sounds.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a literature review on semantic restriction analyses of verbs. Section 3 presents results from the corpus study and describes several unique synchronic behaviors and the diachronic development of the *there came* sound-class-noun construction. Section 4 discusses two types of *there came* sound-class-noun constructions: *there came a knock*(*ing*) *and there came a silence*. Finally, Section 5 concludes the paper.

2. Previous Studies

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[1] All underlining has been added by the author.

The semantic restriction on verb choice in *there* constructions has been widely discussed especially in Generative Grammar (Milsark (1979), Levin (1993), Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995) and Deal (2009)). These studies claim that in *there* constructions, only unaccusative verbs denoting existence or appearance are generally considered acceptable.

Some previous studies have shown that the semantics of verbs used with *there* constructions should denote existence or appearance. For example, Milsark (1979) and Deal (2009) discussed change-of-state verbs considered unacceptable in *there* constructions. They noted that verbs such as *grow* have two readings, only one of which is compatible with *there* constructions:

(3)   a.   There grew some corn in our garden last year.

      b. * There grew some corn <u>very slowly</u> in Massachusetts.   (Deal 2009: 296)

(4)   a.   There bloomed a rosebush on the patio.

      b. * There bloomed a rosebush <u>very slowly</u> on the patio.   (ibid.)

Only the (a) sentences are acceptable because they can be interpreted as stative. The (b) sentences, meanwhile, cannot be interpreted as such because they denote event readings as exemplified by the adverb *very slowly*. In addition, *there* constructions can use manner-of-motion verbs such as *walk* and *run* if the direction of the motion can be specified by prepositional phrases and if the motion can be interpreted to be a kind of appearance as demonstrated in (5) (See Milsark (1979), Levin (1993), and Kuno and Takami (2004)):

(5)   a.   There darted <u>into</u> the room a little boy.   (Levin 1993: 89)

      b. ? There ran <u>in</u> the yard a little boy.   (ibid. 90)

Of these two, (5a) is acceptable because the goal is specified by the preposition *into*, but (5b) is not appropriate because the preposition *in* only denotes the region where the action takes place. That means that *there* constructions are acceptable only when the verbs or verb phrases are considered to denote the existence or appearance of entities. Thus, *there* constructions follow a severe semantic restriction on verbs and verb phrases.

The relationship between the semantic restriction on verbs and pragmatic function is discussed in Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995), one of the representative studies of locative inversions, which are considered to have functions similar to *there* constructions.[2] Consider the following quotation by Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995):

(6)   [t]he canonical locative inversion verbs are verbs of existence and appearance. Such verbs are inherently informationally light since they add no information to

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that provided by the preverbal PP, which, by setting a scene, suggests that something will exist on that scene: (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 231)

Existence and appearance verbs are chosen in locative inversions because they clarify the presentation of a new entity into discourse. The notion of informationally light should also account for behaviors of *there* constructions as well as those of locative inversions.

The abovementioned studies have correctly identified semantic conditions where verbs can be felicitously used which are acceptable but highly restricted in usage such as *grow*, *bloom* and *walk*. However, the present study investigates the verb *come*, which has been said to be freely used in *there* constructions in that the directed motion denoted by the verb can be construed as appearance and can be compatible with the pragmatic function of such constructions. In fact, *come* can be used in both inside verbal *there* constructions (7a) and outside verbal *there* constructions (7b).[3] As mentioned in Milsark (1979), inside verbal *there* constructions permit only a small class of intransitive verbs that lexically denote existence and appearance, but outside verbal *there* constructions are not subject to this restriction. Therefore, the following examples indicate that *come* is a kind of appearance verbs:[4]

(7) a. And we were walking downtown and there came <u>a black woman</u> looking in our baby carrier, looking at us. (inside)

b. And yet, when there came into the car <u>a little woman</u>, as foolish as any, but pretty and sweet-looking, up rose Gerald Mathewson and gave her his seat. (outside)

(COCA)

In sum, existence and appearance verbs can be used in *there* constructions because they can serve the discourse function of *there* constructions. Also, verbs that do not fall under existence and appearance verbs can be used in certain contexts as demonstrated in (3), (4) and (5).

The next section focuses on the verb *come*, which can be considered a kind of appearance verb itself, and proposes, based on the corpus study, that even such a verb presents some biased distribution: that is, the *there came* construction tends to select abstract nouns, especially sound-class-nouns. This tendency should be accounted for by the pragmatic function of *there* constructions.

3. Several Findings through the Corpus Study

This section investigates the semantic types of nouns that likely occur as the subject in *there*

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[3] By definition, the logical subject immediately follows the verb in inside verbal *there* constructions, but is separated by adverbials in outside verbal *there* constructions.

[4] By contrast, manner-of-motion verbs can be used only in outside verbal *there* constructions.

(i) There walked into the courtroom <u>two people I had thought were dead</u>.

(ii)* There walked <u>two prisons guard</u> into the courtroom. (Kuno and Takami 2004: 45)

came constructions, examples of which were collected from COCA and COHA. Then, based on the high frequency of sound-class-nouns, this study proposes that the *there came* sound-class-noun construction exists independently in our language network. The present study discusses only the behaviors of the past tense of *come*.[5]

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the four noun classes selected as subjects for the *there came* construction in COCA: time-class-nouns, sound-class-nouns, other abstract nouns and concrete nouns. In this study, we define what can move or can be moved physically as a concrete noun. A total of 675 examples of *there came* were attested in COCA. Our survey revealed that sound-class-nouns (243 of 675 [36%]) were most frequently attested with *there came*.[6]
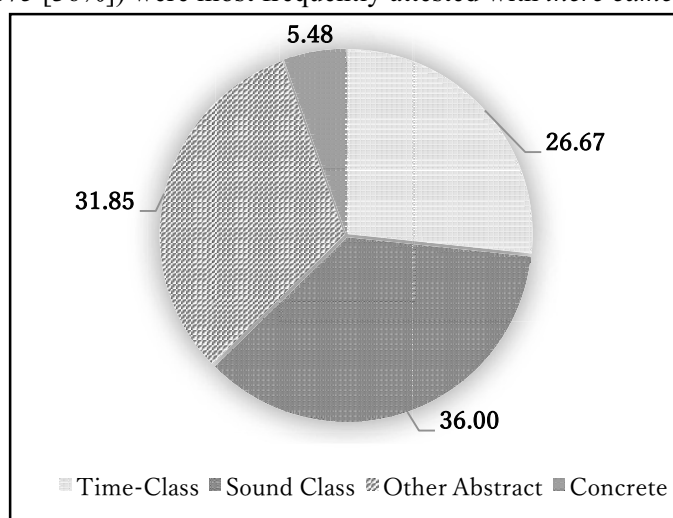
(Figure 1. Ratio of Logical Subject Nouns of *There Came* in COCA)

Sound (40 examples) was most frequently attested of the sound-class-nouns, followed by *knock* (28), *knocking* (10) and *silence* (10):

(8) a.   Instead there came <u>a crackling sound</u> that might have been laughter.

   b.   There came <u>a knock</u> at the door.

   c.   Later there came <u>a soft knocking</u> at his door.

   d.   Always after the voices there came <u>silence</u>.   (COCA)

In addition, this construction can be used with a wide variety of sound-class-nouns; more than 120 types of sound nouns were attested in COCA. For example, both loud and light sounds can

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[5] As for *there come(s)* construction, see Mino, Shibata and Hattori (forthcoming), which reveals that the majority of logical subject of the *there come(s)* is classified as time-class-nouns, as exemplified bellow.
  (i)   There comes <u>a moment</u> when it's just time to give some other people a chance.
  (ii) There comes <u>a time</u> when a child is not thriving at home, says Catherine Jones of Houston, Barbara's mother.   (COCA)
[6] A similar result was obtained in *the British National Corpus* (BNC) as well. 68 out of 193 samples are sound-class-nouns (about 35%).

be described as in (9a) and (9b). In addition, an onomatopoeic word (9c) and a direct quotation (9d) can be selected as logical subjects of *there came* constructions:

(9) a. There came a <u>loud</u> crack of energy and a fountain of blue sparks cascaded from the globe.

b. I was startled out of my enchantment suddenly when there came a <u>light</u> rapping on the door of my chamber.

c. Suddenly there came a loud <u>POW</u>.

d. The first ring was barely done when there came a fast and furious <u>"Hello?"</u>

(COCA)

Moreover, as discussed in Levin (1993), sound-emission verbs such as *rumble* and *jingle* can be used with *there* constructions. However, finding these examples in corpora is extremely difficult. By contrast, the nominal counterparts of these sound-emission verbs were frequently attested as in (11):

(10) a. Her eyes rolled, keeping track of the men on either side, and from within her chest there <u>rumbled</u> a warning. "Just keep mad for tomorrow and you'll win me my prize money." (*A Yellow Raft in Blue Water,* 1987)

b. And there <u>roared</u> a great revel near the Walmart. (COCA)

(11) a. And in the silence there came a dense low <u>rumble</u>.

b. There came a loud <u>roar</u> from outside, which, given the thin Martian air, meant something really loud was happening. (COCA)

As indicated in these results obtained by the corpus research, a wide variety of sound-class-nouns are attested as logical subjects of *there came* constructions.

By contrast, concrete nouns such as those in (12) are not frequently attested.

(12) a. At wash-time, from the cell at the far end, there came <u>a man</u> with a tattoo of a winged star with a dagger plunged into it.

b. When Buell first arrived, Edwards complained, "there came with him <u>a number of the zealous people</u> from Suffield, who continued here for some time." (COCA)

Therefore, the abstract motion is found to be preferable to the concrete ground motion in that abstract nouns tend to be used more frequently. Initially, such a biased distribution seems surprising because most importantly the verb *come* can be felicitously used in *there* constructions since the motion can be easily interpreted as appearance. However, this usage can be accounted for by the pragmatic function of *there* constructions to introduce a new entity into discourse. In grammaticalization, abstract motion is considered to be more semantically bleached or general (Bybee (2003) and Sweetser (1988)). Therefore, abstract motion—that is, appearance—does not strongly obscure the introduction of a new entity, and thus, abstract nouns are more frequently

selected as subject.[7] This also provides an important consequence of Construction Grammar: we need to consider the most suitable verb meaning for the construction among the candidates, which are thought to be used in such construction. To achieve this, we need to investigate many aspects of the construction, such as subject types or information structure, as was done in this study.

The preference for sound-class-nouns is only observed in this pragmatically unique construction. One hundred samples of *came* that take the SV pattern are also collected randomly from COCA. As a result, 30 tokens have abstract nouns as subjects while 70 tokens have concrete nouns in my criterion. In addition, just one example is classified as a sound-class-noun. Therefore, the unbalanced preference for abstract nouns and especially sound-class-nouns is a typical feature of the *there came* construction, not the canonical word-order SV. This result also verifies our claim that abstract nouns such as sound-class-nouns are often selected for a pragmatics purpose.

Moreover, there has been an increase in the use of sound-class-noun in *there came* constructions based on COHA. Figure 2 shows the number of sound-class-nouns selected as subject of *there came* constructions:
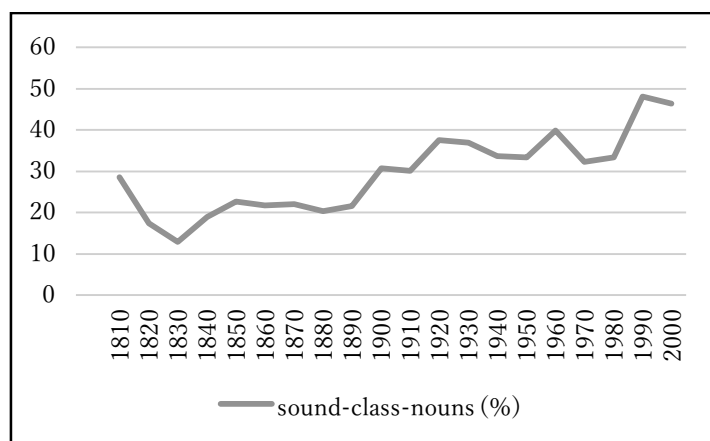
(Figure 2. The Ratios of Logical Subject Nouns in *There Came* from COHA)[8]

For example, 165 out of 536 examples (30.78%) are classified as sound-class nouns in the 1900s. Through the 1800s to the 1900s, usage ratio of sound-class-nouns are around 20 %, which then increased between 30% to 40%. Finally, the ratios in the 1990s and the 2000s are over 40%.

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[7] Now, it is also necessary to consider how the sound generally appears. It might be said that the sound tends to appear suddenly or unexpectedly.

(i) Suddenly there came a roaring whoosh, and a huge, bulging – eyed, incredulous face rose before me, peering over the gunwale. (COCA)

Also, even when we close the eyes, we can hear the sound. It is very difficult to follow the path with which the sound comes. The sound tends to appear in the situation at a sudden. Therefore, the sound is easy to be construed as a new entity, and is frequently used in *there came* constructions, though the suddenness and unexpectedness do not always correspond to the newness.

[8] The ratio of sound-class-nouns in 1810s is high because of the extreme shortage of the samples in that period: only seven sentences were found and two of them are sound-class-nouns.

Interestingly, the gradual increase in sound-class-noun ratios since the 1900s seems inversely proportional to the decrease in *there came* constructions. The data in Figure 3, collected from COHA, shows the number of *there came* constructions per million since the 1810s to the 2000s. In the table, the number of *there came* constructions per millions has been dropping since the 1920s.[9] These corpus data imply that *there came* sound-class-noun constructions have resisted a sharp decline among *there came* constructions: that is, as the *there came* constructions have become less frequently used, it has been using only sound-class-nouns.
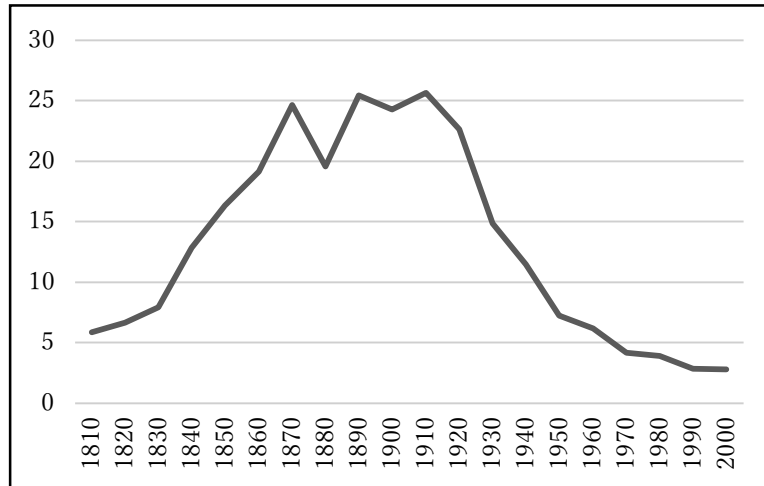
(Figure 3. The Numbers of *There Came* Expressions per Million)

Recently, the role of frequency within languages has become more prominent (for example, Goldberg (2006), Bybee (2010) and Taylor (2012)). As shown so far, *there came* constructions with sound-class-nouns are frequently used, and such an expression can thus be treated as entrenched according to the following definition by Goldberg (2006):

(13)   Any linguistic pattern is recognized as a construction as long as some aspect of its form or function is not strictly predictable from its component parts or from other constructions recognized to exist. <u>In addition, patterns are stored as constructions even if they are fully predictable as long as they occur with sufficient frequency.</u>

(Goldberg 2006: 18)

Also, the *there came* sound-class-noun construction is highly productive because it can use many sound expressions as subjects. Thus, the *there came* sound-class-noun construction should be represented in our network of knowledge.

Furthermore, we emphasize the importance of *lower-level* schema in describing a unique expression (Croft (2003) and Iwata (2008)). So far, a few studies have been conducted on specific verbs in *there* constructions. Some noteworthy ones are Yaguchi (2017), Mino (2018) and Mino, Shibata and Hattori (forthcoming). Yaguchi (2017) deeply investigated the *there exist* expression,

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9 Generally, *there* constructions with non-*be* verbs have been getting rarer (Yaguchi (2017)).

and Mino (2018), despite being a study of deictic *there* constructions, thoroughly discussed such expressions with *speak*. These fine-grained studies are extremely important in describing and understanding *there* constructions; this study has shown so far *there came* constructions present a biased and seemingly unpredictable distribution, but such a feature can be attributed to the function of *there* constructions in general. Thus, the behavior of *lower-level* constructions is highly related with the general feature of *higher-level* ones.

4. The Particular Usages of *There came a knock* and *There came a silence*

In section 3, we discussed the synchronic and diachronic behaviors of the overall usages of *there came* sound-class-nouns constructions. This section discusses two unique expressions: *there came a knock*(*ing*) and *there came a silence*.

4.1 *There came a knock*(*ing*)

The frequent use of *knock* and *knocking* as subjects is very interesting and is an important feature of *there came* constructions, as illustrated in (14). Similar types of nouns are also listed in (15). The commonality of these expressions is that someone's knocking at the door or window causes some noise:

(14) a. His mind was still disputing with his body when there came <u>a knock</u> <u>at the door</u>.

　　 b. There came <u>a rather assertive knocking</u> <u>on Riley's door</u>.　　　　(COCA)

(15) a. After a while, there came <u>a rapping</u> <u>at the window</u>.

　　 b. After a few silent minutes, there came <u>a muffled pounding</u> <u>at the door</u>.

　　 c. The second evening, after supper, there came <u>a tap</u> <u>at the saba lattice</u>.

　　 d. There came <u>a noise</u> <u>at the door</u>.　　　　(COCA)

In the expressions above, no sound motion is described because of the use of preposition *at* or *on*. Consider the difference between (14-15) and (16):

(16)　　There came a loud roar <u>from outside,</u> which, given the thin Martian air, meant something really loud was happening.　　　　(COCA)

On the one hand, (16) denotes an abstract motion of the sound from somewhere outside. On the other hand, it can be said that in (14) and (15), some noise just occurred at the door or window.[10] In this respect, the expressions of (14) and (15) only describes an appearance of sound. Therefore, these more semantically bleached expressions are preferable in *there* constructions, which can be accounted for by the construction's discourse function.

There came a knock(*ing*) is a kind of metonymic expression in that it introduces not only

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[10]　The example below explicitly denotes an abstract motion of the knocking sound, as shown by the preposition *from*.

(i)　After a moment, there came an answering knock <u>from outside</u>.　　　　(COCA)

knocking sounds but also someone who has knocked on the door. Simply put, these expressions pragmatically imply that some visitors have come to someone's place. Consider the following two expressions:

(17) a. He was seated behind his desk, awaiting the end of the play, when there came a knock at the door. "Come in." The door opened and Joseph Harker entered.

b. His mind was still disputing with his body when there came a knock at the door. "Who?" he called, without rising.   (COCA)

The replies to the knocking sound, *come in* and *who*, demonstrate that the knocking sounds alerted the speakers that someone has come. In this respect, these expressions can be used as starters of new events. Therefore, *there came a knock* adequately fulfill the duty to introduce a new entity into discourse.

4.2 *There came a silence*

Similar to *there came a knock(ing)*, *there came a silence* does not mention any movement. Similar expressions are as follows:

(18) a. There came a pause, then Neville continued.

b. There came a stillness as if the whole world were holding its breath.

c. There came no reply. After ten seconds or so, Paul said "Victor?"   (COCA)

When someone makes a sound, a sound wave travels. However, when someone is quiet, nothing moves. In this respect, the verb *come* with silence is more semantically bleached. This example can be considered an example of subjective motion expressions (Matsumoto (1996)).

5. Conclusion

This quantitative study has shown that *there* constructions with *came* tend to select sound-class-nouns such as *noise* and *voice* as their logical subjects. The preference for abstract nouns such as sound-class-nouns has been accounted for by the pragmatic function of *there* constructions: to introduce a new entity into discourse. As a pragmatic device for presenting new information, verb semantics should be informationally light. Therefore, the verb *come* frequently selects sound class-nouns as its subjects in that the abstract motion or the appearance of the sound is more semantically bleached and do not blur the introduction of a new entity into discourse.

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