

Title	A Brief Note on There Contact Clauses: With Special Focus on There Contact Clauses Selecting Come as the Second Verb
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Citation	言語文化共同研究プロジェクト. 2022, 2021, p. 51-60
Version Type	VoR
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/88341">https://doi.org/10.18910/88341</a>
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**A Brief Note on *There* Contact Clauses:  
With Special Focus on *There* Contact Clauses Selecting *Come* as the Second Verb\***

MINO Takashi

## 1. Introduction

This study examines a special case of *there* constructions, called “*there* contact clauses,” in which two clauses are combined without relative pronouns, as in (1), although the omission of the subject relative pronoun is generally not allowed in present-day English, as in (2). For example, in (1a), the two clauses “there was a farmer” and “a farmer had a dog” are united without the relative pronoun *who*.

- (1) a. There was a farmer had a dog. (Lambrecht 1988: 319)  
b. There’s a man lives in China. (Quirk et al. 1985: 1407)  
c. There’s a man at the door wants to see you. (Curme 1931: 236)
- (2) a. \* The table stands in the corner has a broken leg. (Quirk et al. 1985: 1250)  
b. \* I know a man lives in Canada. (ibid.: 1407)

Although this construction is ungrammatical, it is used (subconsciously) by native English speakers irrespective of geographical and social backgrounds (e.g., Lodge (1979), Lambrecht (1988), and Doherty (2000)). Because of its syntactic and semantic peculiarities, scholars have paid considerable attention to this construction, revealing its many distinctive aspects (e.g., Jespersen (1929), Lambrecht (1988), and Doherty (2000)). However, these studies have focused on overall features of *there* contact clauses without observing individual examples closely (a noticeable exception is a series of studies conducted by Yaguchi, such as Yaguchi (2017)).

In contrast, this study focuses on one type of *there* contact clause in which the verb *come* is used as a verb of the second clause, as in (3):

- (3) a. There was two guys came to see me at the restaurant where my wife worked at. (COCA: SPOK)  
b. There’s nobody comes out she says. (BNC: spoken)

The goal of the study is to describe the syntactic and semantic features of such a clause to provide a useful perspective that helps future studies to elucidate these constructions.<sup>1</sup>

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\* This work was funded by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 21K20003.

<sup>1</sup> This study does not attempt to refute previous studies. Further, it does not criticize previous studies by suggesting that they are insensitive to individual usages. Rather, it aims to supplement existing research.

This article is organized as follows: section 2 summarizes previous studies on *there* contact clauses to illustrate that these clauses are motivated by an informational structure requirement, and the verbs *come* and *go* are more often used than other verbs. Section 3 claims, based on the corpus study using *the British National Corpus* (BNC) and *the Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA), that the use of *there* contact clauses with the verb *come* is partially motivated by the occurrence of *to*-infinitives, particles, and short subject nouns (especially human nouns). Section 4 concludes this paper.

## 2. Previous Studies

This section presents semantic and pragmatic reasons why the “ungrammatical” construction, that is, the *there* contact clause, is appropriately used, with reference to previous studies such as Lambrecht (1988) and Hannay (1985). Next, on the basis of Yaguchi’s (2017) work, it is claimed that the motion verbs *come* and *go* are frequently used in such constructions.

Lambrecht (1988) proposes that the use of *there* contact clauses is motivated by the requirement of information structure: as English does not begin a sentence with new information, *there* contact clauses are chosen. By adding *there* to example (4a), it is possible to “establish a new discourse referent and to express a proposition about it in the same minimal sentential processing unit” (Lambrecht (1988: 333)).

- (4) a. A farmer had a dog.  
 b. There was a farmer had a dog.<sup>2</sup> (= (1a))

The expletive *there* and the semantically weak *be*-verb are selected because they do not convey anything more than the second clause “a farmer had a dog” in (4b). (See Jespersen (1927) and Doherty (2000) as well.) In fact, many studies such as Yaguchi (2017) propose that *there* contact clauses are observed most frequently when the contracted form *there’s* is chosen, as in (1b) and (1c).

Hannay (1985: 92) proposes a semantic difference resulting from the (un)occurrence of relative pronouns in *there* constructions: (5a) has an entity reading, while (5b) has a state-of-affairs reading. In other words, *there* contact clauses introduce an event rather than an entity. In fact, only *there* contact clauses such as (5b) can be appropriate in answer to a question such as *What happened?*

- (5) a. There was something hard that fell on the floor. (entity reading) (Hannay 1985: 92)  
 b. There was something hard fell on the floor. (state-of-affairs reading) (ibid.)

Yaguchi (2017) elaborates upon the discussion regarding *there* contact clauses with special focus

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<sup>2</sup> There is no consensus of opinion on whether transitive sentences such as *A farmer had a dog* are informationally not preferred. See Breivik (1990) and Irwin (2020).

on which verbs are often used in second clauses. Before we jump into her findings, it is necessary to introduce her methodology. She primarily analyzes written data and distinguishes between (6a) and (6b): the former structure, *there + be + NP + pp*,<sup>3</sup> is called “the TP construction,” while the latter structure, *there + be + NP + VP*, is called “the TV construction.”

- (6) a. There’s a parcel come. (TP construction) (Quirk et al. 1985: 1409)  
 b. There’s a man lives in China. (TV construction) (=1b)

Yaguchi (2017) examines words that are mainly used as verbs in second clauses using *the Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), *the Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA), and COCA, revealing the frequent use of the verbs *come* and *go* in TP and TV. In the case of TP, *come* and *gone* account for 52.9% and 23.5% of data in OED, 70.4% and 17.0% in COHA, and 12.5% and 56.3% in COCA, respectively. In the case of TV, *came* accounts for 75% of the preterit verbal forms (*there was* and *there were*) in COHA, as shown in (7):

- (7) a. Well, there was a man came by who wanted me to help him head his cow back to the pasture. [1956, Kenneth Roberts *Boon Island*, COHA] (Yaguchi 2017: 125)  
 b. There were some people came in here at noon after Arkansas. [1945, William Camp *Skip to my Lou*, COHA] (ibid.)

On the basis of these results, Yaguchi (2017: 125) concludes “*there + be + NP + come/go*<sup>4</sup> in the TP construction is more or less a fixed unit, and *there + was/were + NP + came/went* is also a sentence unit to a considerable degree.”

This raises one question: why is the verb *come* often used in “abnormal” *there* constructions despite its felicitous use as the main verb in “normal” *there* constructions? The use of transitive verbs such as *have* in *there* contact clauses is understandable because such verbs are not allowed in normal *there* constructions, as in (8). In contrast, the restriction on verbs does not motivate the occurrence of the verb *come* in *there* contact clauses because the verb *come* can be freely used as a main verb in normal *there* constructions. In addition, the *there* sentence in (9) is capable of indicating a state-of-affairs reading and thus can be appropriate in answer to *What happened?* Also, the *there* sentence with *come* following the phrase “what happened next?” was attested in *the News on the Web* (NOW), as in (10).

- (8) \* There had a dog a female farmer in the village. (constructed)

<sup>3</sup> The word *pp* stands for past participle.

<sup>4</sup> *Go* might be *gone*. See also Yaguchi (2017: 103).

- (9) A: What happened to the kingdom?  
 B: Suddenly, there came to the castle a handsome knight who wanted to marry a princess.  
 (constructed)
- (10) [S]o when the Blues acquired Snepsts along with Rich Sutter at the trade deadline from the Canucks in 1990, he (=Snepsts) was surprised by what happened next. # There came the chant. “Har-old! Har-old!” # “Holy geez,” he recalled of the first time he heard it. (NOW: US)

Thus, far more research is needed on why the verb *come* is frequently used in *there* contact clauses. The following section attempts to describe some syntactic and semantic features of the pattern to provide a useful perspective to assist future scholars to elucidate this construction.

### 3. Corpus Study of *There* Contact Clauses with the Verb *Come*

This research discusses the behaviors of *there* contact clauses with the verb *come* in an attempt to answer the following two questions: (i) What types of nouns are selected as the subject of the main clause? and (ii) What kind of elements are used after the verb *come* in the second clause? These questions are tackled in section 3.1 and 3.2, respectively.

Three caveats are in order regarding our data. First, this study is thoroughly usage-based by focusing on actual examples occurring in COCA and BNC, but it is extremely difficult to judge whether the sentences attested in corpora are actually accurate and well-formed because of their anomalous nature. Second, this study counts the frequency of particular examples, but because of the small number of attested examples in corpora, it is impossible to present statistical results. Third, although this study strongly agrees with Yaguchi’s (and Quirk et al.’s (1985)) classification of *there* constructions (the TP construction vs. the TV construction), it, expediently, lumps them together to understand the overall features of *there* constructions with *come*, because this study seeks to determine why the verb *come* follows, not precedes, subject nouns in *there* constructions.<sup>5</sup>

#### 3.1. Frequently Used Subject Nouns

The preferred subject nouns of *there* contact clauses are rather different from those of normal *there* constructions. This subsection investigates subject noun phrases with respect to their length and types. *There* contact clauses are collected by using the search formulas of online COCA and BNC listed in Table 1. As a result, 106 and 68 *there* contact clauses were retrieved from COCA and BNC, respectively.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Only the TV construction corresponds to *there* contact clauses in many previous studies. Thus, my classification might cause some confusion.

<sup>6</sup> This study excludes examples in which commas are inserted between *be*-verbs and subject nouns or subject nouns and the verb *come*, as in (i) and (ii):

there's * come	there is * come	there was * come	there are * come	there were * come	there're * come
there's ** come	there is ** come	there was ** come	there are ** come	there were ** come	there're ** come
there's *** come	there is *** come	there was *** come	there are *** come	there were *** come	there're *** come
there's * comes	there is * comes	there was * comes	there are * comes	there were * comes	there're * comes
there's ** comes	there is ** comes	there was ** comes	there are ** comes	there were ** comes	there're ** comes
there's *** comes	there is *** comes	there was *** comes	there are *** comes	there were *** comes	there're *** comes
there's * came	there is * came	there was * came	there are * came	there were * came	there're * came
there's ** came	there is ** came	there was ** came	there are ** came	there were ** came	there're ** came
there's *** came	there is *** came	there was *** came	there are *** came	there were *** came	there're *** came

Table 1. The search formulas (noun types)

Interestingly, many of the subject nouns are categorized as human nouns, as listed in (11); two examples are quoted from COCA and BNC in (12):

- (11) a. a gentleman (3), somebody (3), nobody (2), people (2), someone (2), a casting director, a counselor, a farmer, a fellow, a geezer, a girl, a Japanese destroyer, a little baby, a man, a new boarder, a noisy neighbor, a nurse, a wizard, a woman, Americans, an Indian, an officer, five murderers, Jerry Hall, learned man, many people, no one, no other, no shadowy figure, some, some Italians, some unknown man, Spanish, staff sergeant, such a one, the man, this couple, two guys, two Republican senators, 150000 people (47 nouns [44.34%]) (COCA)
- b. another lot (3), somebody (3), a company (2), a gentleman (2), a lady (2), people (2), a champion strong-man, a Chris, a dentist, a fella, a fellow, a few, a lot, a man, a new man, a Norwegian, a party, an old man, another one, many tourists, Michelle, Molly, no one, nobody, one child, six black doctors, so many people, some, the mass producer, this bloke, this old lady, two guys, two little boys (41 nouns [60.29%]) (BNC)
- (12) a. There was **a nosy neighbor** came by that said that the deceased bought the gun a few months back for protection from her estranged husband. (COCA: TV)
- b. There was **this old lady** comes towards me; she was fussing about her luggage, that a porter was pushing behind her on a trolley. (BNC: spoken)

Some readers might think that the frequent use of human nouns is not worth mentioning, but this usage

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- (i) Finally, you know-there's, this documentary came out in France this week, which is really incredible. (COCA)
- (ii) There's this guy, comes in here every May 1st. Every May 1st, every December 1st. Like clockwork. (COCA)

is a rather distinctive feature of *there* contact clauses when one considers the distributional behaviors of other *there* constructions: normal *there* constructions with *be*-verbs and *come*. For example, Sasaki (1991) and Pfenninger (2009) have claimed on the basis of quantitative surveys that abstract nouns tend to be used in *there* constructions with *be*-verbs. In addition, the author's previous research (e.g., Mino (2020)) revealed that approximately 95% of the subject nouns of *there* constructions with *come* are abstract nouns such as *time* or *sound* in COCA and BNC. Thus, the frequent use of human nouns is a remarkable feature of *there* contact clauses, which potentially motivates the use of the construction.

Next, this subsection analyzes the length of subject nouns of *there* contact clauses. In this case, examples are collected from BNC by using the search formulas listed in Table 2. As a result, 66 *there* contact clauses were attested in BNC.

there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? (_{V})? come
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? comes
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? came
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{PRON} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? (_{V})? come
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{PRON} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? comes
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{PRON} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? came
there {be/V} _{ADV} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? (_{V})? come
there {be/V} _{ADV} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? comes
there {be/V} _{ADV} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? came
there {be/V} _{ADV} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{PRON} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? (_{V})? come
there {be/V} _{ADV} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{PRON} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? comes
there {be/V} _{ADV} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{PRON} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? came
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? (_{V})? _{ADV} come
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? _{ADV} comes
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? _{ADV} came
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{PRON} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? (_{V})? _{ADV} come
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{PRON} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? _{ADV} comes
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{PRON} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? _{ADV} came
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? _{ADV} _{V} come
there {be/V} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{PRON} _{PREP} _{ART}? ((_{ADV})? _{A})* _{N}? _{ADV} _{V} come

Table 2. The search formulas (word length)

The examination of data revealed that most subject nouns are much shorter, and the majority of them consist of two words. The ratio of each word length is summarized in Table 3, and each actual

example from each length is presented in (13).

length of subject nouns	Total (66 examples)
one word	11 (16.67%)
<b>two words</b>	<b>36 (54.55%)</b>
three words	12 (18.18%)
four words	6 (9.09%)
more than four words	1 (1.52%)

Table 3. Length of subject nouns (BNC)

- (13) a. There's **nobody** comes out she says. (BNC: spoken)  
 b. There's **a gentleman** come. (BNC: written)  
 c. Yeah I know they come er there's **a big lorry** comes and collects them. (BNC: spoken)  
 d. That was the time when there was **a first portable radios** come out. (BNC: spoken)  
 e. There's **a man with a Doberman** comes around two or three times every night. (BNC: written)

This result is compatible with Yaguchi's (2017: 90) finding that "almost all the NPs in the OED's TV tokens after 1700 consisted of fewer than six words."

This study assumes that the short length of subject nouns potentially motivates the use of *there* contact clauses because normal *there* constructions with non-*be* verbs are often motivated by a stylistic perspective: to locate a considerably longer component of the subject within the final position of the sentence for easy processing. The *there* should be used in (14a) because the canonical word order in (14b) is awkward when the two grammatical elements, the subject and the verb, are so far apart:

- (14) a. There exist unicorns that are white in the winter, green in the spring, grey in the summer and black in the autumn. (Breivik 1990: 158)  
 b. Unicorns that are white in the winter, green in the spring, grey in the summer and black in the autumn exist. (constructed)

On the basis of such discussion, it can be assumed that the short length of subject nouns prevents some speakers from using normal *there* constructions with *come*. Thus, abnormal *there* contact clauses are selected instead.



### 3.2. Elements Following *Come* (*To*-infinitive and Particles)

This subsection claims that the use of *to*-infinitive and particles with *come* potentially motivates the use of *there* contact clauses. First, let me focus on *there* contact clauses with *to*-infinitives. In corpora, *there* contact clauses followed by *to*-infinitives functioning as purpose adjuncts are relatively often attested as in (15), where the verb *see* appears most frequently:<sup>7</sup>

- (15) a. It, well, it ought, see there were so many people come **to see it**, but there was thousands you know, at different times like, you know. (BNC: spoken)
- b. There was this bloke came **to see me**. (BNC: written)
- c. Aye er the [unclear] when I was [unclear] I got better and [unclear] I got down to [unclear] and there was a fella come **to look and see me**. (BNC: spoken)
- d. There's an officer come **to escort you** to the police station. (COCA: MOV)
- e. There's actually somebody come from the Fed **to make sure** we hand them back, \$100 bills. (COCA: SPOK)

However, such *to*-infinitives are avoided in normal *there* constructions with *come*. In BNC, only the *there* sentences in (16) are followed by *to*-infinitives (purpose adjuncts) among all the *there* sentences (*there comes/there come/there came*).<sup>8</sup> Thus, the occurrence of *to*-infinitives is considered to be one factor motivating the use of *there* contact clauses.

- (16) But then there came 'new' comedy **to blow away the medieval cobwebs**; and then there came Russell Davies **to make documentaries about it**, with titles like *There's A Racial Stereotype In My Soup* (Radio 4 Saturday). (BNC)

Second, the occurrence of particles potentially motivates the use of *there* contact clauses as well. My impression is that the particles *out* and *up* are comparatively frequently attested in the corpora.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Examples are as follows:

- (17) a. There are good things have come **out** if as well like (BNC: spoken)
- b. That was the time when there was a first portable radios come **out** (BNC: spoken)

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<sup>7</sup> The raw frequency of such expressions is not high because of the small number of *there* contact clauses.

<sup>8</sup> There are two reasons for this infrequency. First, the number of human nouns is extremely low in *there* constructions with *come*. Second, purpose clauses are not easily compatible with *there* constructions because the construction cannot express the volitional action performed by subject nouns. See Lumsden (1988) for further details.

<sup>9</sup> Again, the raw frequency of such expressions is not high because of the small number of *there* contact clauses.

<sup>10</sup> Examples with other particles are as follows:

- (i) Now there's this couple came **by**, and... - Yeah. Yeah. - they didn't know you were open. (COCA: MOV)
- (ii) As a matter of fact, we just want to let people know, Matthew, as you were reporting, there was a plane came **in** over your shoulder and landed. (COCA: SPOK)
- (iii) There was a cab came **along**, dropped a guy in front of the place. (COCA: FIC)

- c. There's a little baby comes **out** and there's the little baby and then you start to grow up. (COCA: SPOK)
  - d. But I think the question is, some kinds of anger are unconcealed and they stay suppressed forever, like Nixon's, where there's resentments would come **out**. (COCA: SPOK)
- (18) a. There's a very interesting issue has just come **up** actually 'cause we're having this fashion show. (BNC: written)
- b. And the books of, are useful because there are lots of new ideas have come **up**. (BNC: spoken)
  - c. Oh and you can hold [pause] i-- i-- if there's one comes **up** you can hold it. (BNC: spoken)
  - d. There was one child came **up** about seventeen times (BNC: spoken)

However, such particles tend to be avoided in normal *there* constructions with *come*. In BNC, only the following two *there* sentences are attested when searching for the configurations *there* {*come/comes/came*} *out* and *there* {*come/comes/came*} *up*. Thus, the occurrence of particles is considered to be a factor motivating the use of *there* contact clauses.

- (19) a. As they did so there came **out** of the mist a car and it must have seen the crows at me for it stopped. (BNC)
- b. [A]nd there came **up** from the depth of his heart such petitions for men as I had never heard be-fore. (BNC)

In conclusion, what is common to these two patterns is that they make verb phrases heavier and longer. In other words, *there* contact clauses are motivated with respect to informational structure.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study focuses on *there* contact clauses in which the verb *come* is used as a verb of the second clause. It reveals that the use of particles and *to*-infinitives potentially motivates the use of *there* contact clauses. In addition, the subject nouns play an important role in the use of *there* contact clauses: shorter nouns, especially human nouns, are often selected as the subject of *there* contact clauses. What these findings have in common is that they make VPs longer but subject NPs shorter. Thus, the information structure might have an influence on the use of *there* contact clauses. This author hopes that these findings will assist future scholars to elucidate these constructions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The frequent use of the verb *go* might be caused by another factor: the existence of one frequently used pattern, as in (i) and (ii).

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## Data Sources (Corpora)

*The British National Corpus* (BNC)

*The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA)

*The NOW corpus* (NOW)

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- (i) There's not a day goes by that I don't think of her.  
(ii) There isn't a day goes by I don't think about my daughter.

(COCA: MOV)  
(COCA: TV)