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Non-concord in existential there be sentences

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Abstract

This investigation consists of a syntactic analysis on the frequency of cnon-concord in existential there be sentences of spoken registers. It examines concord and non-concord by considering number agreement with the notional subject in *Existential There Be Constructions (ETBs)*.The main claim is that contraction of the copula is correlated with non-concord. Thus, these types of sentences are analyzed with singular and plural notional subjects to determine the constituents that favor concord and non-concord. Samples sentences like; "There's several reasons…" in a university lecture; "there's going to be storms tonight," in the weather channel; and "there's people…" in the CNN news, motivated this research. Studies of ETBs have found variation in the rule for number agreement. The traditional grammatical rule indicates that ETBs take their form from the notional subject. This agreement pattern is called concord. Plural notional subjects normally take plural verbs and singular notional subjects take singular verbs. Recent studies claim that there is a strong tendency in conversation to use a singular verb regardless of the number of the notional subject [of ETBS]. Other studies indicate that non-concord is found primarily in spoken language and it occurs more frequently when the verb is contracted. As stated, my objective is to investigate variables that motivate non-concord in ETBs. I analyze the role of the syntactic constituents of ETB sentences and find the possible correlations with non-concord. In addition, I determine the role of age and gender in concord variation of ETBs.

Keywords: existential there be sentences, non-concord in existential there be constructions, subject verb agreement of notional subjects.

I. Introduction

The frequent occurrences of sentences like "There's several reasons…" in a university lecture, "there's going to be storms tonight," in the weather channel and "there are people…" in the CNN news, motivated this research. Scholars interested in linguistic change have commented on changes at the syntactic level. For instance, studies of *Existential There Be Constructions* (ETBs) have found variation in the rule for number agreement. The traditional grammatical rule indicates that ETBs take their form from the notional subject. This agreement pattern is called concord. Plural notional subjects normally take plural verbs and singular notional subjects take singular verbs. However, *The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* claims that there is a "strong tendency in conversation to use a singular verb regardless of the number of the notional subject [of ETBS]" (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan, 1999, p. 944). Research by Meechan and Foley (1994), Cheshire (1999) Martinez and Palacios (2003) and Crawford (2005) indicates that non-concord is found primarily in spoken language and occurs more frequently when the verb is contracted. In this project, my objective is to investigate variables that motivate non-concord in ETBs. I analyze the role of the syntactic constituents of ETB sentences and find the possible correlations with non-concord. In addition, I determine the role of age and gender in concord variation of ETBs.

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Concord in *Existential There Be Constructions* can be viewed from different linguistic perspectives. For example, the main purpose of prescriptive grammars is to state the principles and rules of formal standard language, which refers to the forms of written language (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002 p. 5). This view restricts change to the written norms of language. Prescriptive rules focus on the way people ought to write, and pays little attention to actual language use. From the point o view of prescriptive grammars, non-concord in ETBs is generally considered an ungrammatical pattern, because it does not follow the rules prescribed for concord.

A descriptive approach is less restrictive with respect to language change. The goal of a descriptive grammar is to describe how people actually speak and claims about grammar are based on evidence of real language use (Huddleston & Pullum, pp. 5-6). Descriptive grammars acknowledge the fact that language varies. Based on the descriptive model's objectives, concord variation in ETBs is viewed as a reflection of language use. This investigation consists of a syntactic analysis on the frequency of non-concord in existential there be sentences of spoken registers. It examines concord and non-concord by considering number agreement with the notional subject in *Existential There Be Constructions (ETBs)*.

II. Background Information

Existential There Be Constructions and Concord

Little emphasis is given to *Existential There Be Constructions (ETBs)* in descriptive grammar books. The three most relevant grammar works that address this syntactic structure include: *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik, 1985; *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written Language*, Biber et al., 1999; and *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language,* Huddleston & Pullum, 2002. However, it is the volume by Douglas Biber et al. that gives the most detailed description of both the form and variation of this structure. Biber et al. define *existential there* as "a device used together with an intransitive verb to predicate the existence or occurrence of something (including the non-existence or non-occurrence of something) (p. 943). The main function of this structure is to present new information. The formal structure to *existential there* is:

There + be + indefinite NP (+ place or time position adverbial)

"There" is placed before the verb in declarative clauses and can be used in tags. "*There"* is a function word which developed from the locative (positional) adverb to an existential. According to Biber et al., these two forms differ in three major aspects. First, in terms of phonology, they are pronounced differently; existential "*there"* is normally reduced to /□□(□)/. Second, the original locative meaning of "*there"* is lost in existential sentences. Third, in terms of syntax, *existential there* functions as a grammatical subject rather than as an adverbial (p. 944). This type of grammatical subject is known as empty or dummy subject. Biber et. al. provide the following example to illustrate the difference between these two units, and explain them as follows.

<u>There</u> is still no water <u>there</u>, is <u>there</u>?
1 2 3

Physically they look like the same word, but functionally they are different. The words numbered 1 and 3 are clearly existential: they indicate the existence or non-existence of water. Nonetheless, example 2 refers to a position or place which indicates "*there"* is functioning as an adverb. It is only existential "*there"* which requires number inflection. My research focuses only on *existential there.*

Quirk et al. point out that speakers often feel uncertain about the rules of concord. They list the cases in which concord is more troublesome and summarize them as follows. They agree that concord causes more problems when the subject contains: a collective head noun (e.g., the public is/are tired of demonstrations); coordination (e.g., The captain, as well as other players, was tired); and an indefinite expression (e.g., Some of the guests have arrived, and either is welcome) (pp. 755-766). Huddleston & Pullum (2002) explain that in subject-verb concord the subject serves as the source and the verb as the target (p. 499). Biber et al. state that in the case of existential sentences, concord is formed when "the verb phrase combining with *existential there* takes its number from its notional subject; a plural verb form is generally used with plural noun phrases, a singular form otherwise" (p. 186). Biber et al., claim that non-concord has a single origin: "because of contraction, *there's* tends to behave as a single invariable unit for the process of speech processing" (p. 186).

Research by Meechan & Foley (1994), Cheshire (1999), Martinez & Palacios (2003), and Crawford (2005) demonstrates that plural notional subjects often take singular verbs. They argue that this situation has several origins and conclude that a single approach is not sufficient to explain concord variation of ETBs. They agree that the motive for non-concord is mainly the interaction of both linguistic and social factors

Grammar and Standards

Prescriptive grammar views favor the maintenance of traditional structures, and often reject any type of variation to mainstream English language. Grammarians like Quirk et al. and Biber et al., define Standard English as the forms that are normally included in school textbooks and student reference handbooks. It is the dialectal variety that has been codified in dictionaries and in usage grammar books. According to Biber et al., "this variety is characterized by a very high degree of uniformity" (p. 18).

Sociolinguistic studies portray standards in a broader sense. Wolfram & Schilling-Estes mention that stylistic features affect Standard English (2006, pp. 10-11). They list formal and informal styles. Formal styles match the features provided by prescriptive views. These authors explain that informal styles are hard to define because they are seen as a continuum rather than a categorical notion. Wolfram & Schilling-Estes state that Formal Standard English "tends to be based on the written language of established writers and is typically codified in English grammar texts" (p. 11), whereas "Informal Standard English is the variety free of stigmatized features" (p. 13). They also state that standard dialects are defined by the absence of socially disfavored structures of English. In contrast, vernacular or non-standard varieties are characterized by the presence of socially conspicuous structures (p.15).

Wolfram & Schilling-Estes acknowledge that Informal Standard English (ISE) allows certain types of language variation. They maintain that this variation is accepted at certain linguistic levels like pronunciation and lexicon, but not as accepted in grammatical structures which are socially stigmatized (p. 12). An interesting point that this notion includes is respect for dialectal variation and the identification of standards among dialects. Huddleston & Pullum agree that informal language styles are often mistaken as ungrammatical. For instance, Quirk et al. (1985) state, "the forms that are associated with uneducated are generally called nonstandard" (p. 18). However, not all linguists agree with this definition. Most scholars argue that speaking non-standard English is not necessarily linked to lack of education. It has been demonstrated that even highly educated people show traits of vernacular forms in their speech. Therefore, one cannot assume that only the uneducated use non-standard forms. Sociolinguistic views consider it important to take into account other factors before making these types of judgments.

Linguists consider spoken and written registers as the most common forms in which language is depicted. Biber et al. claim that "conversation is the most commonplace, everyday variety of language" (p. 1040). They add that the grammar of conversation is a system with different rules from the written grammars. They recognize that conversation has special grammatical characteristics not typically found in writing. They note that the grammar of conversation has also mistakenly been compared to the written forms, but they point out that conversation is a register which carries specific features not shared with written registers.

The volume *"The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English"* (1999) provides the following list of features that distinguish conversation from other registers: a) it takes place in the spoken medium, usually in a shared context; b) a key feature of spoken language is the lack of elaboration or specification in meaning; c) it is dynamic, interactive and allows for the expression of extra-linguistic features such as politeness, emotion, and attitude; d) it employs the vernacular. This book asserts that conversation often takes place among intimates or in contexts that do not necessarily require standard usage. These conditions provide the opportunity for vernacular forms to occur and be accepted without prejudice in everyday conversations among people with close ties.

Holmes (1991) confirms that "the better you know someone, the more casual and relaxed the speech style you will use to them, certainly, people use considerably more standard forms to those they don't know well, and more vernacular forms to their friends" (pp. 224). She adds that we have the tendency to use more relaxed language at home with those we know well; that we talk differently to people from different social backgrounds; and that we tend to elaborate our language according to our audience. In other words, we adapt or accommodate our language depending on the addressee. I claim that given the high frequency of non-concord ETBs in all types of registers and by all types of peoples and ages, the structure "there's + plural subject" seems to be widely accepted across all spoken dialects and is free of stigma. I therefore categorize it as part of Informal Standard English.

Language Change

In order to understand the changes taking place in *Existential There Be Constructions,* I consider it important to refer to approaches and principles of language change. The socio-historical approach worries about the timing and sequence of language change. Non-concord ETBs seem to be a recently documented phenomenon. Sparks (1984) is the first work to acknowledge concord variation in ETBs. His work focuses on number neutralization of certain grammatical structures. He concludes that number neutralization affects *Existential There Be Constructions*. Then, David Cristal continued the research in 1987. He worked with concord in general and concluded that there is a tendency in informal English to use the singular rather than the plural in ETBs. More specific and recent research documenting of non-concord in ETBs include Meechan & Foley (1994), Cheshire (1999), Biber et al. (1999), Martinez & Palacios (2003) and Crawford (2005).

Variationist methodology examines correlations between language and social factors. Sociolinguistics also explores language change by centering on the speakers themselves. This model lists three key elements involved in language variation; the society, situation, and speaker. Milroy (1992) states that the major problem sociolinguistics faces is to explain the causes of language change (p. 184). In his book *Linguistic Variation and Change* he states that sociolinguistics approaches language change by giving a social characterization to persons and sections of society who are responsible for initiating the actuation problem (or spreading change).

The actuation problem starts by distinguishing speaker innovation from language change. It defines speaker innovation as the act of the speaker which is capable of influencing linguistic structure. In contrast, language change is observed within the system. According to Milroy, speakers innovate, not language (p. 169). This indicates that innovators have an important role in language change.

According to Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, innovators are the first people to adopt changes (p. 157). Labov lists two important features an innovator must have. First, they must be individuals with the highest status in their communities. Then, among persons with an equal status, they must be the "individuals with the highest local prestige who are responsive to a somewhat broader form of prestige at the next larger level of social communication" (Labov, 1980 p. 261). In order for language change to take place, it is necessary that a new language form be accepted. This success will depend greatly on the so-called *early adopters*. These people normally have great acceptance among close-knit groups. They are the ones in charge of spreading the new form. If the new form is well accepted among the social groups they interact with, then other speakers will end up adopting their speech.

Milroy states that "a change is not a change until it has been adopted by more than one speaker, [besides] we cannot demonstrate systematically that it leads to a linguistic change until after it has spread"(p.171). Thus, both innovators and early adopters are fundamental for social language change to take place.

Gender and Age Variation

Sociolinguistic studies investigate factors such as social class, age, sex, network, and style affecting language change. These factors often correlate with each other. For instance, gender as a variable often interacts with social class and style. Research on gender differentiates between gender and sex. *Gender* relates to cultural features and *sex* to biological features. Gender is not a discrete variable. In terms of status, Romaine (2004) claims that "women, regardless of other characteristics tended to use more standard forms than men" (p. 101). With respect to style, she states that "the use of non-standard forms increases the less formal the style and the lower one's social status, with men's scores higher than women's" (p. 101). Romaine reports that often working-class men in a casual conversation speak the most non-standard forms; whereas, middle-class women often tend to speak closest to the standard in a formal conversation (p. 102). In discussing sociolinguist patterns and language change, linguists have distinguished changes from "above" and "below:"

Change from *above* is conscious change originating in more formal styles and in the upper end of the social hierarchy; change from *below* is below the level of conscious awareness, originating in the lower end of the social hierarchy. (Romaine, p. 103)

Romaine claims that men tend to use the standard less often than women of the same status. Conversely, women tend to use more prestigious forms in societies that high status and power are conferred to men. Chambers (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2004 qtd) explains that all these socially conditioned situations have their basis on the biological differences between men and women. He claims that sociolinguistic patterns are ultimately the result of *sex* differences. In discussing gender, it is also important to relate it to innovation and prestige. Labov (1990) states that, "in change from below, women are most often the innovators" p. 213). Women lead language change when the form is neither stigmatized, nor non-standard. Some studies tend to associate women with prestige, but Milroy, J., Milroy, L., Harley, S., & Walshaw, D. (1994) suggest that women do not necessarily favor prestige forms. They conclude that women create prestige forms rather than simply follow them. Romaine quotes, "it may not be so much the supposed prestige connotations of the standard that attracts women, but the stigma of non-standard speech that women are avoiding" (p. 110).

Age seems to be less troublesome than gender when discussing language change. Holmes summarizes her findings regarding age in the following way. Speakers tend to be divided into three main groups; the young, the middle-aged, and the elderly. Holmes quotes "people normally use more vernacular forms while they are young and tend to use more standard forms as they get older and respond to the pressure of the society expectations" (p. 206). Chambers et al. (2013) claims that in terms of language variation "the primary social correlate is age, and the change reveals itself prototypically in a pattern whereby some minor variant in the speech of the oldest generation with greater frequency in the middle generation and with still greater frequency in the youngest generation" (p. 355).

Labov (1994) bases his division of age continuum on life stages. He refers specifically to the American society which he categorizes as follows: a) pre-adolescent peer group (8-9); b) membership in the pre-adolescent peer group (10-12); c) involvement in heterosexual relations and the adolescent group (13-16); d) completion of secondary schooling and orientation to the wider world of work and/or college (17-19); e) the beginning or regular employment and family life (20-29); f) full engagement in the work force and family responsibilities (30-59); g) retirement (60s). He suggests that for the main extend of adult life, sociolinguistic behavior has to be traced by decades (Labov, p. 101).

In general, language change is motivated by different factors. From the sociolinguistic approach I have discussed age and gender as possible variables related to non-concord ETBs. Nevertheless, I am aware that there are other internal as well as external factors that can influence language variation. However, they are beyond the scope of my research. Of the social variables I only consider gender and age.

III. Literature Review

The major and specific investigations on ETBs include three important national varieties of English: Canadian, British and American English. All of them used spoken and written corpus data to draw conclusions. One exception is Cheshire (1999) who worked only with spontaneous spoken langauge. In 1994, Meechan & Foley conducted one of the earliest relevant research on *Existential There Sentences* (ETBs). The main objective was to investigate what motivated concord in *there be existentials* (p.65). This study analyzed the speech of 31 speakers over 55 years of age. The data came from two different corpora which feature recordings of the speech of Canadian speakers. The first source is the African Nova Scotian English Control Group Corpus, and the second is the Linguistics Department Archives of Spoken Language Materials at the University of Ottawa. Only spoken language was analyzed in this study. They examined both the social and linguistic variables related to subject-verb non-concord, but their major focus was on linguistic variables.

Meechan & Foley examined how four social variables correlated with ETB non-concord. They include gender, location (rural versus urban), education, and topic. One of their expectations was to find more concord among educated speakers. The linguistic factors included the type of existential pronoun, either *there* or *it*. The type of noun phrase with respect to plurality: count, proper, abstract, mass and other nouns. They addressed summation plurals such as scissors. They also coded if the presence or absence of the plural marker –s in the noun affected concord. Another factor was the form of the copula, either contracted or full.

Finally, they made other classifications such as: strong and weak determiners; small and non-small clauses; adjacency; and specificity. Meechan & Foley based their predictions on the assumption that "subject-verb agreement in existential constructions may be subject to influences related to its unique structure: post-verbal placement of the subject" (p. 65).

Their results both proved and disproved their predictions. This study demonstrated that singular concord in *existential sentences* was not necessarily motivated by the type of determiner. The authors expected more concord with NPs containing strong determiners such as the definite article "the," and universal determiners like "all, every, each, any." The data showed that the type of determiner was irrelevant to concord. The findings indicated that preference towards non-concord was linked to the form of the copula and not the type of determiner. Meechan & Foley conclude that the contraction of the copula *be* was the most important linguistic factor affecting concord.

Meechan & Foley indicate that education level was the most significant social marker in determining subject-verb concord of existential sentences. They stated that "there was an overall increased use of concord associated with high school attendance and exposure to more advanced rules of grammar" (p. 82). They also indicate that in "the context of existentials, prescriptive grammar rules for this structure exert a powerful influence on perceived agreement patterns" (p 83). Nevertheless, the data also showed that non-concord was present even in the speech of Standard English speakers. Plural concord was only found in 28% of plural contexts of those they considered Standard English speakers.

The second relevant study on ETBs was by Martinez and Palacios (2003). This study also used corpora data, but the sample population was composed of British English speakers. This study obtained the data from one-million word corpus of spoken and written English. They came from the British National Corpus (BNC). The texts date from 1989 and use equal proportions of words for both speech and writing. In contrast to Meechan and Foley who emphasized on social factors, this study focused mainly on linguistic factors. Martinez and Palacios' main objective was to find the grammatical factors that affect ETB concord. They found that type of polarity, the length of complexity of the post-verbal sequence, and the presence of intervening material correlated with non-concord.

Their hypothesis stated that "the presence of non-concord in there constructions is favored by lengthy and structurally complicated post-verbal sequences, and also by the existence of (adverbial) elements intervening between the verb and the PVNP [Post-Verbal Noun Phrase]" (p. 265). The results showed that length and complexity of the post-verbal sequence correlated with non-concord. They concluded that in complex and long sentences, the verb tended to non-concord with its notional subject. On the other hand, the probability of non-concord decreased in simple sentences. The data also supported that the amount of intervening material such as post-modifiers and other expressions between verbs and notional subjects affect concord. For this reason Martinez and Palacios concluded that, "the longer the post-verbal sequence [in ETBs], the higher the likelihood of non-concord" (p. 277).

Martinez & Palacios found relevant correlations that help explain the lack of concord in TBCs. First, non-concord tended to occur more often in spoken than in written language. Second, lack of concord was an exclusive feature of there construction with the verb *to be*, and not of other verbs that attach to there, like *exist, come,* or *appear.* Moreover, non-concord was recurrent with the *copula* in present tense. Finally, the verb *to be* can be either in full or contracted form for non-concord to occur; nevertheless, it occurs most often with contracted forms. It is important to note that not all of the predictions were successful. For instance, the claim that "type of polarity" (negative sentences) correlated with non-concord was not supported. This means, sentences containing the negation markers *"no"'* or *"not"* did not necessarily lead to a lack of concord. They found that the type of polarity of the noun phrase provided little evidence about non-concord.

The most recent study of non-concord in ETBs is by William Crawford (2005). His research included more features than previous work on this syntactic structure. Like Martinez and Palacios, he used spoken and written corpora. However, he focused on American English and added new factors. He used a multi-register corpus that included not only linguistic factors but also social factors. In opposition to Meechan & Foley, he hypothesized that education and formality were not clear indicators of non-concord.

This multi-register corpus compared and contrasted spoken and written registers. The two spoken corpora consisted of the American face-to-face conversation sub-corpus Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (LGSWE). The other corpora consisted of academic lectures constructed for the Educational Testing Services (ETS), the TOEFL 2000 Spoken, and the Written Academic Language Corpus known as T2K-SWAL Corpus. The spoken registers included conversation (informal) and lecture (formal). The three written registers were textbooks, fiction and chat. Textbooks were classified as formal, fiction less formal, and chat informal.

In this study, Crawford explored the linguistic and situational factors that correlated with ETB concord variation. His objective was to disprove conclusions drawn by previous studies which claimed that education level and formality were strong indicators of concord.

Crawford's findings supported his predictions. Higher rates of non-concord were found in spoken registers: conversations and lectures. This indicates that despite the fact that lectures were categorized as formal, a higher percentage of non-concord sentences were found in both spoken registers. These findings supported that formality was not an impeding factor for non-concord in spoken language. His findings also suggested that lack of concord was not necessarily related to level of education, as stated by Meechan and Foley. He noted that lectures, which are normally held by highly educated people, revealed considerable uses of ETBs with non-concord. Crawford concluded that "the similarities between non-concord in conversation and lectures point to spoken language as a better indicator of non-concord in ETBs than the concept of formality" (p.48-9).

Crawford's findings with respect to linguistic features supported the previous studies on ETBs. First, non-concord was mainly a feature of spoken language. Non-concord was most frequently found in contracted forms of *there* and *the copula* in present tense. He also claimed that concord variation should be "best viewed as a formulaic sequence of existential subject and copular verb" (p. 58). There was one more pertinent study on ETBs, which gave a different explanation to the non-concord issue. This work was part of a wide debate on Standard English in which several linguists discussed this topic. In this debate, Cheshire (1999) made reference to language standards by considering different grammatical structures where non-concord is recurrent, including ETBs.

She claimed that people tend to perceive some grammatical variations as "ungrammatical," "wrong" or "incorrect" because of frequent exposure to the written grammar. She argued that the syntax of spoken contexts should be examined separately from the written contexts. Furthermore, she quotes: We cannot assume that the speech of academics is necessarily representative of the speech of other educated speakers of English who may have less exposure to the written language. If we wish to determine the syntactic structure of spoken English, then we need to widen the debate of educated speech. (Cheshire, 1999, p. 130)

Other linguists such as Biber et al. agreed with her claim. They stated that the grammar of conversation may be seen as a different system, with different rules from the grammar of written English (1999, p. 1066). Similarly, Crawford indicates that non-concord was a feature of spoken registers, rather than formality. There are two claims that all studies made clear. First, ETBs non-concord is a feature almost exclusive of spoken registers. Second, the contraction of the copula is a factor that is directly linked to subject-verb non-concord. It is important to note that most of the research done on this structure was based on syntactic analysis. Cheshire ended her article by suggesting further research on the possible relation between the phonology and syntax of ETBs.

In conclusion, all studies agree that there are changes taking place, at least in spoken language. Labov is optimistic regarding this issue and states that "every change represents a falling away from the golden age, rather than a return to it. Every new sound will be heard as ugly, and every new expression will be heard as improper, inaccurate, and inappropriate" (2001, p. 514).

IV. Methods and Procedures

Methodology

A variationist approach is used in this research. Experts in this area such as Wolfram & Schilling-Estes state that during the past years the methods for data collection and analyses have changed. They mention that spontaneous, casual conversation is currently a key source for data analysis. They mention that media sources are also becoming popular. Victoria Fromkin (2000) considers that the naturalistic approach is a good method to study grammatical patterns. It basically consists of documenting actual speech. She states that, spontaneous language use provides "positive evidence" of a syntactic structure. This study focuses on the analysis of concord in the *Existential There Be Constructions* (ETB's). I obtained the samples of this structure by collecting naturally occurring speech and actual conversations of different spoken registers and settings, including the media.

I included three types of registers, face-to-face interaction, lecture-type speech and T.V. broadcasts. I documented tokens from speakers in conversations which demanded face-to-face interaction (or turn taking) in public contexts such as the bus stop, store, and food court. I also documented tokens from lecture-type speech, such as that heard in public lectures and presentations.

This setting of observation was at the *40th Annual International Convention and Exhibit* held by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. The speakers were often experienced scholars. The audience usually consisted of teachers and students. The conferences normally had one presenter and an audience of approximately 20 to 40 people. Finally, I coded speech from T.V. broadcasts such as, T.V. news and weather broadcast. The news broadcast included CNN news, and the weather broadcasts from the Weather Channel and the sports transmission from ESPN. The broadcast includes journalists in the conference room and reporters at different locations outside the conference room, e.g. commentaries on riots, strikes, etc. at the locations they were taking place.

Observation and documentation took place at several different locations. The regions where people were observed include; Muncie, Indiana; Las Vegas, Nevada; Los Angeles, California; and Tampa, Florida. I will not assign the T.V. broadcasting a specific place, since this is quite variable. For the effect of my analysis, I will refer to this type of location as the "conference room." The procedure I used consists of unobtrusive observation. I jotted down ETB sentences when people were interacting, lecturing, or broadcasting. I was not a participant of the conversations, only an observer. Verbatim constructions were jotted down. There were no audio recordings of the speakers.

I wrote down chunks or full sentences containing ETB's as they were heard, with or without concord. I note only those ETB sentences which allowed analysis of concord. A phrase with a grammatical subject, the verb to be, and a notional subject were considered sufficient material for concord analysis. For example, sentences like "*There isn't many students*" were included, because subject-verb concord could be determined in both the noun and the verb. Nevertheless, sentences like "*There will be many students*" were ignored, since the finite form of the verbdoes not allow concord analysis. The purposive or judgment sampling was used to collect the data. Bernard states that in this type of sampling "there is no overall sampling design, you basically take what you can get" (2011, p. 182). I collected a total 381 ETB sentences containing the structure "*there + be + noun phrase*" from a total of 108 speakers. The number of sentences and speakers vary because multiple sentences were sometimes gathered from one speaker.

The purpose of my research was to work with American English. Thus, as long as accent and other extra-linguistic features allowed the recognition of native speakers, only American English speakers were considered. They were males and females over 18 years old. In order to protect the speakers' identities, they were coded as Speaker 1, 2, 3 etc. Identification of the subjects was unnecessary; as was any record of their names or of full conversations which could reveal private information. The only pertinent feature annotated was the speaker's gender and approximate age.

For the analysis of social variables, it was necessary consider the distribution of concord and non-concord by males and females. It was also necessary to distinguish three age groups: young, middle-aged and the elderly. To motivate those age groups I based my criteria on Holmes' claims that as people get older, their language has to respond to the "*pressure of society expectations*" (p. 206). I interpreted those "*pressures of society expectations,*" as schooling, job immersion and retirement.

Based on the U.S. Census Bureau (2000) of the United States, chapter 9 for educational attainment, Americans complete higher education by the age of 29. In this project, young people includes speakers from 18 to 29 years old. I based the other age ranges on the division of age continuum provided by Labov's *Principles of Linguistic Change: Social Factors.* Regarding job immersion, he states that "full engagement in the work force and family responsibilities [in the American society] is from 30 to 59" (2004 p. 101). The middle-aged group includes this age range.

With respect to retirement the Social Security Administration, the USA Statistical Reports, and the U.S. Government Information Resources state, "you are eligible to receive full benefits when you reach age 65. You can start to receive partial benefits at age 62" (see links in the reference list). Labov suggests that while working with sociolinguistic behavior it is recommended to trace groups by decades. In this project, the elderly will include people over 60 years old, but too few tokens were obtained from older speakers to make further analysis on this age group.

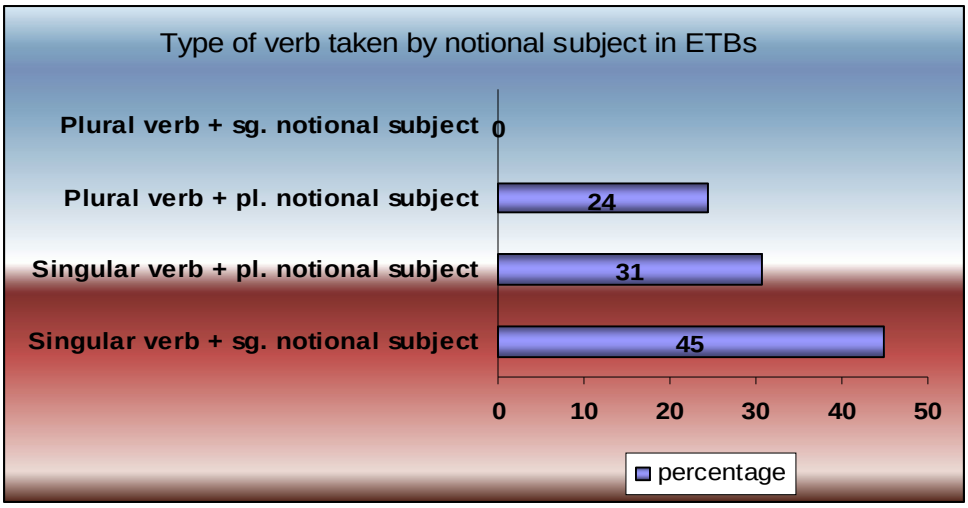
V. Analysis

In this study 381 tokens were obtained from 108 speakers. I gathered 283 tokens from women and 98 tokens from men.

I also considered three age groups; 164 tokens were obtained from young people (18 to 29 years old); 214 tokens from the middle-aged (30 to 59 years old); and only 3 tokens were obtained from the elderly (people over 60 years of age). The analysis of the data includes only those men and women from 18 to 59 years old.

Figure 1 shows the type of verb taken by the notional subject in ETBs. Non-concord occurred with 31% of plural notional subjects taking a singular verb. Sentences like "there's some rock stars," "there's all kinds of women," and "there's 2 pages," illustrate it. A 100% of non-concord sentences were formed with verb "to be." In 94% of those sentences the copula was contracted. There were no instances of singular notional subjects taking plural verbs (0%). These results agree with most literature by indicating that non-concord is mainly a phenomenon of plural subjects with singular verbs.

Figure 1: Type of the verb taken by the notional subject



The prescriptive grammar rules state that the noun phrase determines the form of the verb, but figure 1 indicates that in conversation this rule is not applied on a regular basis. 31% of plural noun phrases took a singular verb. I categorized NPs as simple and complex. Simple NPs were composed of a bare noun, while complex NPs had different types of constituents (especially determiners). I categorized sentences with bare nouns using Quirk's noun classification p. 298. The nouns found in simple *there be constructions* consist of plural invariable nouns such as "there's *people*;" nouns with regular plural such as "there's *countries*;" and nouns with irregular plural such as "there's *children*."

Complex NPs include sentences that are formed by different determiners. For instance, the NPs in the sentences "there's a lot of interesting articles" and "there's a number of network activities" several determiners precede the noun. These examples are composed of pre, central and post determiners. Martinez and Palacios argued that these kinds of sentences did affect non-concord. Nevertheless, the findings in this work do not support their claim. Certainly, a great number of non-concord sentences were formed by simple NPs (with few determiners).

Figure 2 correlates with figure 1. Both of them indicate that non-concord is more frequently found with plural notional subjects. Sentences with plural subjects showed 55.7% of non-concord, whereas with singular subjects 0%. These data confirm Biber et al. claims that plural notional subjects have the tendency to take singular verbs. They also claim that "there + singular be" tends to turn into a unit that takes both singular subjects (concord) and plural subjects (non-concord), especially in spoken registers.

Figure 2: Type of subject and concord: subject-verb agreement.

			Concord: subject-verb agreement		
			Concord	Non-concord	Total
Type of subject	Singular	Count	171	0	171
		Expected Count	118.5	52.5	171.0
		% within Subject Type of subject	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	11.7	-11.7	
	Plural	Count	93	117	210
		Expected Count	145.5	64.5	210.0
		% within Subject Type of subject	44.3%	55.7%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	-11.7	11.7	
Total		Count	264	117	381
		Expected Count	264.0	117.0	381.0
		% within Subject Type of subject	69.3%	30.7%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual			

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	137.494(b)	1	.000		
Continuity Correction(a)	134.888	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	181.590	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	137.133	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	381				

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 52.51.

Figure 3 correlates the form of verb, either plural or singular, with concord. It shows that 75, 59% of the sentences take a singular verb and only 24.41% take a plural verb. It is also observed that 40% of non-concord occurs with singular verbs and 0% with plural verbs. This preference for singular verbs versus plural verbs leads to variation. It seems that the form of the verb was a crucial factor determining concord. The strong preference towards singular verb indicates that "there + singular be" behaves as a single unit that takes both plural subjects (40.6%) and singular subjects (59.4%). Singular verbs with plural subjects (non-concord) consisted of 13.6% of NPs with bare nouns and 76% of NPs with numbers and quantifiers. Plural verbs took 100% plural subjects (concord). If consisted of 12% bare nouns and 52% determiners. These figures indicate that the major issue is not necessarily on the components of the NP, but on the preference of singular verbs, especially when it is contracted.

Figure 3: Form of verb and concord: subject-verb agreement.

			Concord: subject-verb agreement		
			Concord	Non-concord	Total
Form of verb	Singular	Count	171	117	288
		Expected Count	199.6	88.4	288.0
		% within Form of verb	59.4%	40.6%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	-7.4	7.4	
	Plural	Count	93	0	93
		Expected Count	64.4	28.6	93.0
		% within Form of verb	100.0%	.0%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	7.4	-7.4	
Total		Count	264	117	381
		Expected Count	264.0	117.0	381.0
		% within Form of verb	69.3%	30.7%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual			

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	54.525(b)	1	.000		
Continuity Correction(a)	52.633	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	80.896	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	54.382	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	381				

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 28.56.

The next figure shows that contraction of the verb does affect concord. The Continuity Correction ($p<.001$) indicates that the influence of contraction on non-concord is statistically significant. Notice that the majority of verbs in ETBs use contracted forms; out of 381 tokens, 225 (59.05%) are contracted. The figures also indicate that if the verb is contracted there is about 50% of probability to have non-concord; in contrast, having the verb in its full form leads to a 96.2% of concord.

Note also that of the total non-concord tokens (117), 111 sentences were composed of a singular contracted verb and a plural notional subject e.g., "There's people," "There's a lot of feminists," "There's so many levels," etc. The rest 6 cases of non-concord were composed of singular verbs in their full form and a plural notional subject. Full forms of the verb include two declarative sentences in past tense with a numeral subject e.g., "There was 5 of us" and "There was 6 hours a day of teaching." One declarative sentence in present with an irregular plural noun, e.g. "There is young people," and three if clauses in the present with regular and irregular plural nouns eg. "If there is words/questions/children."

Figure 4: Contraction of the verb and concord; subject - verb agreement

			Concord: subject-verb agreement		
			0 Concord	1 Non-concord	Total
Contraction of the verb form	1 Full	Count	150	6	156
		Expected Count	108.1	47.9	156.0
		% within contraction Full or Cont	96.2%	3.8%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	9.5	-9.5	
	2 Contraction	Count	114	111	225
		Expected Count	155.9	69.1	225.0
		% within contraction Full or Cont	50.7%	49.3%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	-9.5	9.5	
Total		Count	264	117	381
		Expected Count	264.0	117.0	381.0
		% within contraction Full or Cont	69.3%	30.7%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual			

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	89.582(b)	1	.000		
Continuity Correction(a)	87.457	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	107.224	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	89.347	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	381				

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 47.91.

To demonstrate that non-concord in ETBs is a frequent phenomenon, I observed three different types of spoken registers. They include face-to-face interaction, lecture-type and T.V. broadcast. These three registers exhibited concord variation regardless the degree of formality. Figure 5 shows that non-concord is present in the three registers investigated. The highest occurrence of non-concord was observed in face-to-face interaction. The percentages indicate that the occurrence of non-concord is significant, 30.7%. The Chi-Square ($x^2= 16.36$, $df= 2$, $p<.001$) suggests that this pattern is a frequent incident of American English. In other words, there is a significant association between register and concordance. Note that the use of the naturalistic approach in these three registers permitted to determine the current situation of this structure in present-day American English. The data indicates that non-concord is present in the speech of many Americans. For each register I assigned a degree of formality to find possible relations of language style and concord variation. I classified face-to-face interaction as the least formal register. Most of these interactions took place among friends in public contexts.

The people observed seemed familiar to their interlocutors. Holmes claims that this kind of interaction, where people use everyday language with friends, tends to be considered as informal. Thus, face-to-face interaction was categorized as *informal*. The lecture-type register was labeled as formal. The types of lectures observed were academic for the most part. The speakers were highly educated and the topics were directed to teachers and adult students. This event had a large number of presenters speaking about education/teaching topics. This type of lecturing style normally demands previous preparation and certain degree of formality, for that reason I classified this register as *formal*. Finally, I considered T.V. broadcasts as the most formal language style, especially because I listened to T.V. news and weather broadcasts. This assumption was made on the wide agreement of prescriptive books to relate formal styles and standard language to T.V. broadcasts. Linguists explain that since English has not a Language Academy; people have to rely on usage manuals (for written English) and on T.V. broadcasting (for spoken English).

I proposed that the less formal the context the higher the chance to find non-concord sentences. Certainly, the data shows that from the three registers a significant amount of non-concord was found in face-to-face interactions. As one can expect in the lecture-type register, people normally tend to standardize their language structures, and the data above seems to evidence it. My hypothesis was that formality will demand more standard forms in one's language. However, the data suggests that T.V. broadcasts used more frequently non-concord forms. The few number of tokens obtained has no statistical significance in this register and invalidates any generalization. Nevertheless, the data is still useful to make another claim. Those percentages demonstrate that non-concord occurs even in the registers where standard language forms are highly expected.

Despite the fact that the numbers obtained indicate that T.V. broadcasts have a considerable amount of Informal Standard English forms, I agree that the few tokens obtained is insufficient to make that claim. I also agree with most grammarians who state that T.V. broadcasting has a big responsibility in reflecting standard language. Huddleston & Pullum support this issue when defining Standard English; There is a high degree of consensus about the appropriate variety of English to use… [it] is confirmed by the decisions of broadcasting authorities about the kind of English that will be used for public information announcements, newscasts, commentaries to broadcasts of national events. (p.4)

Figure 5: Type of Register and Frequency of Concord Variation: subject-verb agreement.

			Concord: subject-verb agreement		
			0 Concord	1 Non-concord	Total
Register	1 Face-to-face	Count	161	88	249
		Expected Count	172.5	76.5	249.0
		% within register of observation	64.7%	35.3%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2.7	2.7	
	2 lecture-type	Count	97	21	118
		Expected Count	81.8	36.2	118.0
		% within register of observation	82.2%	17.8%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	3.7	-3.7	
	3 TV broadcast	Count	6	8	14
		Expected Count	9.7	4.3	14.0
		% within register of observation	42.9%	57.1%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2.2	2.2	
Total		Count	264	117	381
		Expected Count	264.0	117.0	381.0
		% within register of observation	69.3%	30.7%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual			

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.355(a)	2	.000
Continuity Correction			
Likelihood Ratio	16.856	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.437	1	.118
N of Valid Cases	381		

a 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.30.

I hypothesized that certain constituents of the NP must influence non-concord. I argue that specific grammatical units of existential sentences seem to affect concord. For instance, the type and number of determiners in the noun phrase could be key factors influencing subject-verb concord. For the analysis of these constituents, I will use Biber's classification for determiners. He mentions pre-determiners, central determiners, post-determiners and heads and gives the following sentence to exemplify them, "all those other guys" (p. 259) The relevance of determiners in ETBs lies on the multiple uses some of them have with the different types of nouns: singular and plural; and countable and non-countable. I theorized that noun phrases composed of numerals and quantifiers increased the probability of subject-verb non-concord. Figure 6 indicates numerals and quantifiers were found very often in ETBs. The determiners with the highest frequency in non-concord *Existential There Be Constructions* are *numerals*, and the quantifiers "*a lot of, many,* and *some*." I also theorized that ETBs with bare nouns would promote concord. The findings suggest that sentences formed by "there + be + bare noun" do not necessarily promote concord. A total of 32 tokens had a bare noun in its structure: 46.8% sentences showed non-concord and 53.2% concord.

I considered that the close placement of the subject to the verb in sentences lacking determiners would make the speakers apply the prescriptive rule for concord more straightforwardly. But, sentences such as "there's restaurants," "there's things," "there's cables," "there's chemicals," and "there's museums" suggest that proximity of the subject to the verb is not impeding factor to lack concord.

I also hypothesized a higher frequency of non-concord in quantifiers that take both count and non-count nouns such as *all (of) the, a lot of, lots of, plenty of, some (of the), enough and any*. Figure 6 illustrates how the above determiners are distributed among non-concord, plural concord, and singular concord. The results indicate that only the quantifiers "a lot of" and "some" from the list above, are tied to non-concord. Contrary to my predictions, the quantifier exclusive for plural count nouns "many" seems to be the preferred determiner. This means, non-concord is not necessarily related to the type of determiner in the noun phrase.

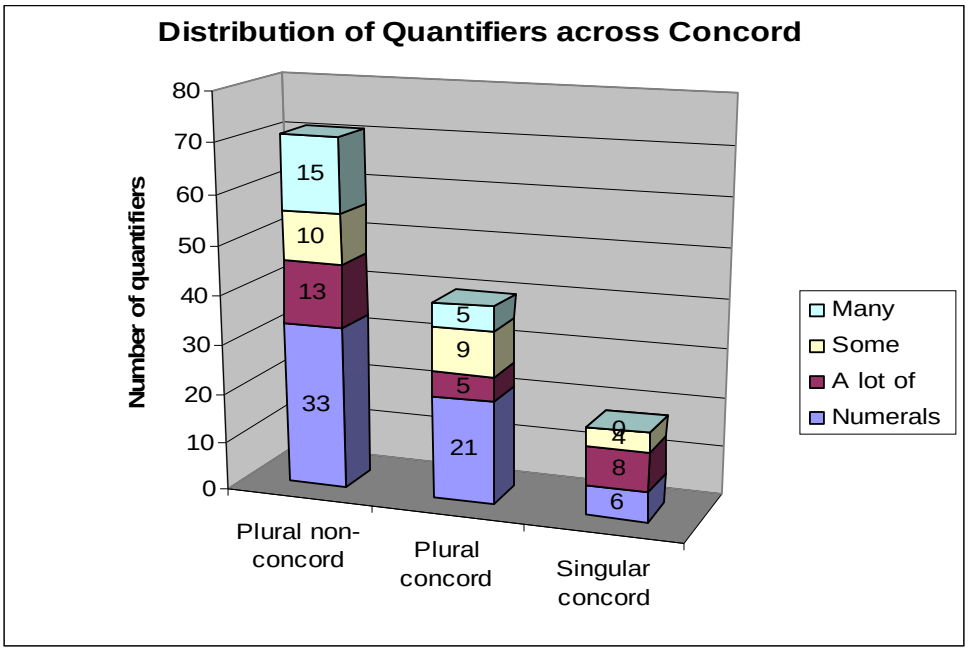
An unexpected result in the determiners was with the determiner "no" which works with either countable or non-countable nouns. It is observed that in non-concord only 2 tokens have "no," whereas in concord 32 tokens have it. This suggests that the usage of the determiner "no" increases the chance of concord. The other determiner often found in singular concord includes the indefinite article "a."Nevertheless, this usage in singular concord is predictable because it is restricted to only singular subjects.

Figure 6.Determiners that immediately follow "there + be"

Type of Determiner		Non-concord (sg.verb + pl. subj.) (**117 tokens**)	Plural Concord (pl. verb + pl. subj.) **(93 tokens)**	Singular Concord (sg. verb + sg. subj.) **(171 tokens)**	Frequency of Determiner usage
Determiners that take either countable plural & uncountable nouns	**A lot of**	**13**	**5**	**8**	**26**
	Plenty of	0	0	0	0
	All (of)	3	1	0	4
	Some (of the)	**10**	**9**	**4**	**23**
	Enough	0	0	0	0
	Any (of the)	1	1	0	2
	No	**2**	**3**	**32**	**37**
	None (of)	0	0	0	0
Determiners exclusive for Plural Count Nouns	**Many**	**15**	**5**	0	**20**
	Few	2	0	0	2
	Several	0	1	0	1
	A couple (of)	5	1	0	6
	Both	0	0	0	0
	(Great) number of	1	0	0	1
	These/Those	1	0	0	1
	Numerals (2 up)	**33**	**21**	0	**54**
Determiners that take only singular nouns	Much	0	0	6	6
	Little	0	0	5	6
	A (not part of quantitative phrases)	**0**	**0**	**50**	**50**
	This/That	0	0	2	2
	Numeral (one)	0	0	6	6
Others	A lot	0	0	3	3
	Like	2	1	1	4
	A set of things	0	1	0	1
	Lots	1	0	0	1
Total number of specifiers that immediately followed ETBS		90	49	117	256
The classification of determinatives is based on Quirk et. al., 1985, p.253-264 and Biber et. al., 1999 pp. 258-259					
Note that some quantifiers and determiners are not included because they were not found in the sentences collected					

Figure 7 shows the distribution of quantifiers across concord. The numerals (2 and up) are the most used determiners with plural nouns. Fewer cases of numerals (only number 1 possible) are reported with singular noun usage. Of the open class quantifiers "*a lot of*" and "*some*" have the highest rankings with plural non-concord. Of the closed class quantifier "*many*" has the highest distribution.

Figure 7: Distribution of the most used and shared determiners in three different contexts of concord.



I hypothesized that the wide usage of open class determiners with different types of nouns motivated non-concord. The quantifier "a lot of" has a high distribution in singular concord eg. "There's a lot of debate," plural concord eg. "There are a lot of links," and plural non-concord eg. "There's a lot of reasons." Similar to the determiner "a lot of," the quantifier "some" is used with several types of nouns eg. "There's some cooperative knowledge," "There are still some challenges," and "There's some spotlight sessions." The quantifier "a lot of" has more occurrences than "some" in non-concord instances. I theorized that the great distribution of the determiners "a lot of" and "some" with different notional subjects had to be related to non-concord in ETBs. This prediction is somehow confirmed, but it is invalidated if considering that "many" is restricted to only plural nouns and has a similar distribution to "a lot of" and "some."

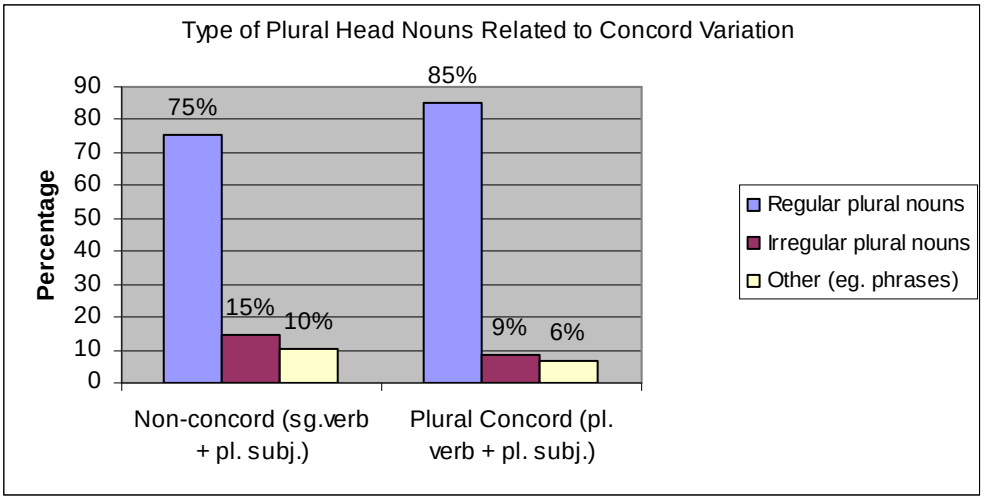
The determiner "many" belongs to the closed-class of determiners that work only with plural count nouns. I expected it to occur mostly with plural concord (plural verb + plural subject). Nevertheless, it was found more often with non-concord sentences (singular verb + a plural subject). Figure 7 indicates that "many" is the most used determiner with non-concord sentences.

This result can be interpreted in several ways. The speakers apply to a certain extend the prescriptive grammar rules for concord. In a sentence they use "many" with a plural subject, but use a singular verb e.g., "There's many things," "There's so many examples," and "There's too many people." This data evidences that there is awareness of concord rules, at least by relating "many" exclusively to plural count nouns. But, the prescriptive rules are not applied to subject-verb concord. It is probable that overtly marked plurals are not ambiguous. Therefore, plural marking on the verb is redundant.

I argue that non-concord is not necessarily the result of "ignorance" of rules for concord formation. Instead, I claim that speakers simply neutralized number for "there + be" construction in spoken registers. I consider that the particular features that distinguish verbal communication, such as the need to communicate the message promptly and the lack of elaboration of spoken language, led to this neutralization. Another of my theories predicted that the type of noun –either regular or irregular- plays an important role in concord variation. I theorized that concord was going to be affected by the irregularity of plural nouns in *Existential There Be Constructions*. Nevertheless, figure 8 illustrates the opposite.

Figure 8 shows the distribution of head nouns and other elements in ETBs' plural concord and non-concord. Regular plural nouns dominate in most of the sentences obtained for both concord and non-concord sentences. This indicates that irregular plural nouns are not necessarily linked to non-concord. Certainly, the number of irregular plural heads is very low in both contexts; 15% in non-concord and 9% in concord ETBs. The figures indicate that the difference is minimal and not significant.

Figure 8: Type of noun phrases and their relation to concord variation.



The linguistic factors considered in this research are summarized as follows (see charts on next page). Figure 9a shows that even though non-concord has a high incidence in spoken registers (30.7%), concord governs (69.3%). Figure 9b and 9c indicate that although 55.1% of subjects are plural, the form of verb commonly used in ETBs is singular (75.6%). Finally, figure 9d shows that contractions are frequently used (59.1%) in existential sentences.

Figure 9a Concord: subject-verb agreement

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Concord	264	69.3	69.3	69.3
	2 Non-concord	117	30.7	30.7	100.0
	Total	381	100.0	100.0	

Figure 9b Type of subject

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Singular	171	44.9	44.9	44.9
	2 Plural	210	55.1	55.1	100.0
	Total	381	100.0	100.0	

Figure 9c Form of verb

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Singular	288	75.6	75.6	75.6
	2 Plural	93	24.4	24.4	100.0
	Total	381	100.0	100.0	

Figure 9d Contraction of the verb: Full or Contracted

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1 Full	156	40.9	40.9	40.9
	2 Contraction	225	59.1	59.1	100.0
	Total	381	100.0	100.0	

The social factors, age and gender, are predicted to be related to non-concord. Figure 10 displays the distribution of concord according to gender: 27.5% of women's ETBs showed non-concord, while 38.8% of men's ETBs showed non-concord.

Figure 10: Gender of speaker and subject-verb agreement

			Concord: subject-verb agreement		
			0 Concord	1 Non-concord	Total
Gender of speaker	f	Count	204	79	283
		Expected Count	196.1	86.9	283.0
		% within gender of speaker	72.1%	27.9%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	2.0	-2.0	
	m	Count	60	38	98
		Expected Count	67.9	30.1	98.0
		% within gender of speaker	61.2%	38.8%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2.0	2.0	
Total		Count	264	117	381
		Expected Count	264.0	117.0	381.0
		% within gender of speaker	69.3%	30.7%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual			

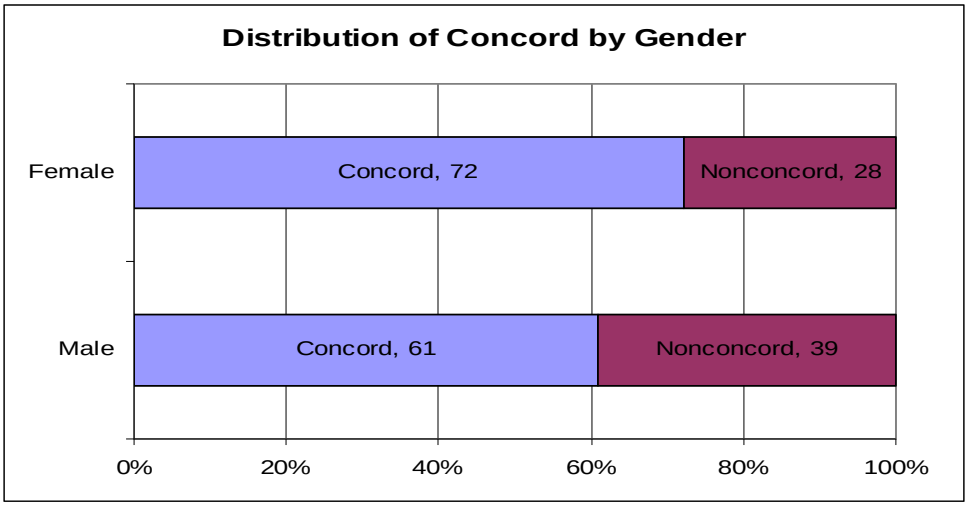
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.035(b)	1	.045		
Continuity Correction(a)	3.541	1	.060		
Likelihood Ratio	3.930	1	.047		
Fisher's Exact Test				.056	.031
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.024	1	.045		
N of Valid Cases	381				

a Computed only for a 2x2 table

b 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 30.09.

Based on the Chi-Square test, the variables approached statistical significance (continuity corrected x2= 3.54, df=1, p= 0.6). The graphic below illustrates better the findings. Observe concord distribution by each group gender.
Figure 10. Distribution of concord by gender.



Men seem to favor non-concord (39%) more than women (28%) do. These results contradict my predictions. I expected women to use this form more often than men. I based this hypothesis assuming that non-concord ETBs were considered as informal standard forms rather than non-standard forms. I also theorized that variation in ETBs was a relatively new language change. Then, considering both the literature and these results, I conclude that women are using less often the non-concord form than men because "there + singular be + plural notional subject" is not a recent language change and it is becoming a stigmatized form. I expected that women, as innovators of non-stigmatized standard forms, would use more informal standard ETBs. Based on the results, it seems that this language change is not an innovation and that non-standard ETBs are becoming a stigmatized form that women refuse to use.
Figure 11 shows the distribution of concord by age groups. Only the young and middle-aged show statistically significant data to draw any conclusions. Because very few tokens were obtained from the elderly I do not make claims about this age group.

Younger generations use non-concord ETBs (36.6%) more often than the middle-aged (25.7%). It seems that the younger the speaker the higher the chance to find non-concord. These results also agree with Holmes' claims that "people normally use more vernacular forms while they are young, and tend to use more standard forms as they get older" (2013, p. 206).

Chambers et al., Holmes, Labov, and Wolfram & Schilling-Estes normally associate young people with non-standard forms. The results obtained in this study indicate that the age group from 18-29 years old used more non-concord forms than the group from 30-59 years old. This data seems to supports the findings in figure10 about "there + singular be + plural notional subject" becoming a stigmatized structure rather than an informal standard form, as I suggested.

The data indicate that the middle-aged group used less often non-concord ETB forms (28%). Labov states that people from 30 to 59 years old engages fully in the work force. In addition, Holmes claims that as people get more involved in the labor force the usage of standard forms exerts more pressure. Based on these statements, I assume the middle-aged speakers were immersed in the work force; therefore, their language reflects less non-standard forms than younger age group.

Figure 11: Age Group and subject-verb agreement.

			Concord: subject - verb agreement		
			Concord	Non-concord	Total
Age Group	18-29	Count	104	60	164
		Expected Count	113.6	50.4	164.0
		% within Age Group	63.4%	36.6%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	-2.2	2.2	
	30-59	Count	159	55	214
		Expected Count	148.3	65.7	214.0
		% within Age Group	74.3%	25.7%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	2.4	-2.4	
	60 or older	Count	1	2	3
		Expected Count	2.1	.9	3.0
		% within Age Group	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual	-1.4	1.4	
Total		Count	264	117	381
		Expected Count	264.0	117.0	381.0
		% within Age Group	69.3%	30.7%	100.0%
		Adjusted Residual			

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.007(a)	2	.030
Continuity Correction			
Likelihood Ratio	6.823	2	.033
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.470	1	.063
N of Valid Cases	381		

a 2 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .92.

VI. Conclusions

The significance of this work lies in establishing the current status of non-concord *Existential There Be Constructions* in present-day American English. Examining spontaneously produced speech helps determine whether the use of non-concord in ETB is a frequent phenomenon in present day American English. In addition, obtaining data from different areas of the USA (Inland North, East and West Coast), indicates that this structure is not simply a regional variety. This research seems to support the linguistic findings by earlier works. The data indicates that lack of concord is a very frequent pattern of spoken registers in American English. The linguistic factor that seem to support this finding include the contraction of the verb to be to "there's." I conclude that speakers consider "there + be" as a single grammatical unit that makes no differentiation for number.

It was difficult to identify a pattern for non-concord in sentences composed of quantifiers and the ones formed by bare nouns. It seems that non-concord occurs arbitrarily in simple sentences (there be + bare noun) and in complex sentences (there be + determiners + noun). In addition, the data indicates that irregularity of the noun is not a factor linked to non-concord. After analyzing the distribution of regular or irregular nouns, I conclude that this is not an aspect related to non-concord. I claimed that open-class determiners would favor non-concord, whereas closed class determiners would favor concord. The findings indicate that non-concord ETBs occurred with both open class determiners (e.g., a lot of) and closed class (e.g., many) in similar proportions. Thus, the type of determiner does not necessarily favor or disfavor concord.

The finding for stable social factors such as gender and age are summarized below. More non-concord sentences were found in the speech of men than women. This is opposite to my hypothesis. I claimed that women as innovators of non-stigmatized forms will use more informal standard ETBs. Regarding age, the data indicates that speakers from 18 to 29 years old have a preference towards non-concord ETB forms. In contrast, people from 30 to 59 years old used more the standard ETB forms. I agree with Crawford's conclusion that ETBs can be best viewed as "a formulaic sequence of existential subject and copular verb" (2005, p. 58). I consider that the only pattern that seems to be directly linked to lack of concord is the contraction of the copula, especially in spoken registers. I also agree with Biber's claims that "there + be" has turned into a single grammatical unit that works with both singular and plural nouns.

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