

‘That ther lakke no word...’

**A COGNITIVE STUDY OF EXISTENTIAL *THERE* IN THE WORKS
OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER**

Gard Buen Jensen



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Department of English
University of Bergen
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ABBREVIATIONS

General abbreviations and conventions

EXISTENCE	Metaphorical concept, indicated by small capitals
N	Number
Misc.	Miscellaneous
PP	Prepositional phrase
Sub-clause	Subordinate clause
VP	Verb phrase
∅	Zero realization
*	Asterisks denote ungrammatical constructions
?	Questions marks denote questionable grammaticality

Word order patterns

STV	Subject + existential <i>there</i> + Verb
SVT	Subject + Verb + existential <i>there</i>
TVX	Existential <i>there</i> (functioning as subject) + Verb + X
VTX	(X +) Verb + existential <i>there</i> + X
SVO	Subject + Verb + Object (Present-day and Middle English canonical main clause word order)

Texts

Astr	<i>A Treatise on the Astrolabe</i>
Bo	<i>Boece</i>
CkT	<i>The Cook's Tale</i>
CIT	<i>The Clerk's Tale</i>
CYT	<i>The Canon's Yeoman's Tale</i>

FranT	<i>The Franklin's Tale</i>
FrT	<i>The Friar's Tale</i>
GP	<i>General Prologue</i>
KT	<i>The Knight's Tale</i>
MancT	<i>The Manciple's Tale</i>
Mel	<i>The Tale of Melibee</i>
MerT	<i>The Merchant's Tale</i>
MilT	<i>The Miller's Tale</i>
MkT	<i>The Monk's Tale</i>
MLT	<i>The Man of Law's Tale</i>
NPT	<i>The Nun's Priest's Tale</i>
PardT	<i>The Pardoner's Tale</i>
ParsT	<i>The Parson's Tale</i>
PhyT	<i>The Physician's Tale</i>
PrT	<i>The Prioress's Tale</i>
RvT	<i>The Reeve's Tale</i>
ShipT	<i>The Shipman's Tale</i>
SNT	<i>The Second Nun's Tale</i>
SqT	<i>The Squire's Tale</i>
SumT	<i>The Summoner's Tale</i>
Thop	<i>Tale of Sir Thopas</i>
Tr	<i>Troilus and Criseyde</i>
WBT	<i>The Wife of Bath's Tale</i>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim and scope

The present thesis is concerned with existential constructions in Middle English, focusing on the status of the morpheme *there*. The study is based on a corpus of 653 clauses from the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. The aim of the investigation is to describe the semantic and syntactic status of *there*. By taking a cognitive approach to the interpretation of the empirical results from the corpus, the study attempts to shed some new light on the nature of existential *there*. The main focus of this study is synchronic, but comparisons with Present-day English *there* will be made, thus adding a diachronic aspect.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Existential *there*

In Present-day English, there are two types of *there*¹: The locative adverb *there* (*there*₂) and the existential *there* (*there*₁), exemplified in (1.1) and (1.2) below.

(1.1) **There** is a bug in the software (*there*₁).

(1.2) Last summer I went to London. **There** I visited the Houses of Parliament (*there*₂).

The primary focus of the present thesis is *there*₁, and the distinction between *there*₁ and *there*₂ is taken to be applicable to Middle English as well as Present-day English. As *there* is an extremely complex area of English grammar, an in-depth introduction is given in chapter 2 below.

The term traditionally used for structures like (1.1) is ‘existential sentence’ (Breivik 1983: 1). Although the structure in (1.1) corresponds to a simple sentence, *there*₁ may occur in both main clauses and subordinate clauses (Breivik 1983: 2). This is also

attested in the corpus used as a basis for this thesis. In the examples below for instance, *there₁* occurs in a simple main clause (1.3), in a subordinate relative clause acting as complement in a prepositional phrase (1.4) and in a coordinated main clause (1.5).

(1.3) Ther nas no man nowher so vertous. (GP, 251)

(1.4) ther is in Yorkshire [...] / A mersshy contree called Holdernesse, in which / Ther wente a lymytour aboute to preche, (SmT, 1709-1711)

(1.5) His presse ycovered with a faldyng reed; / and al above ther lay a gay sautrie, (MilT, 3212-3213)

For this reason the term ‘existential clause’ will be used rather than ‘existential sentence.’

The term ‘existential’ is often used to describe sentences containing existential *there₁*, i.e. it used as a label for a syntactic class (Breivik 1983a: 3). However, there are several definitions of an existential sentence, some of which include *there₁* and some of which do not (for a full discussion, see Breivik 1983a: ff 3-7). Following Breivik, both syntactic and semantic criteria will be considered defining characteristics of an existential clause.

In the present study, existential clauses are taken to represent the meaning of ‘coming into existence’ or ‘being in existence’, in a fairly wide sense. However, the possibility of paraphrasing the expression with *exist* is not seen as essential, nor is the presence of *there₁* required for a clause to be considered existential. All the clauses in (1.6) – (1.9) (from Breivik (1983a: 4-5)) are thus considered to be existential:

(1.6) There are two books on the table.

(1.7) Two books are on the table.

(1.8) There are lions in Africa.

(1.9) Lions exist in Africa.

Breivik limits his definition to ‘clauses containing existential / locative *be* or an intransitive verb which has included in it the meaning “be in existence” or “come into existence”.’ For the purposes of the present investigation, certain other meanings are also included in the definition, as well as other verb types.

(1.10) Ther made nevere womman moore wo than she (Tr. Book V, 1052)

In (1.10), for instance, we have an example from *Troilus and Criseyde* of *there*₁ co-occurring with a transitive verb in the active voice, which is considered ungrammatical in Present-day English. Transitive verbs are only allowed in Present-day English existential clauses if they occur in the passive voice, and Breivik makes a distinction between passive *there*₁ clauses and other existential constructions (1983a: 7). Quirk et al. (1985: 1409), on the other hand, regard passive *there*₁ constructions as being ‘special cases of *be* existentials.’

In the present thesis, the term existential clause will be used in a broad sense to designate clauses containing a form of *to be* with the meaning of ‘being in existence’ (expressed through location in some kind of time and space), an intransitive verb with the meaning of being or coming into existence, or, finally, a transitive verb in the active or passive voice with a general meaning relating to presentation or existence. Such verbs include verbs of motion, inception and stance. This broad definition with an emphasis on the connection between semantics and syntax is a result of the cognitive framework of this thesis (see section 1.2.2 and chapter 3 below). Excluded from the present study are passive *be* clauses without *there*₁ as the corpus would otherwise have become very extensive. Apart from this exception, all the above structures are included in the investigation, in order to get a better overview of the occurrence and non-occurrence of *there*₁.

1.2.2 Cognitive Linguistics

As this thesis takes the view that no meaning exists independently as such in a corpus of linguistic material, some kind of theoretical framework is needed in order to interpret the corpus data. In other words, although the linguistic units in the corpus are needed for the investigation, they only attain a ‘meaning’ when they are categorized, classified and interpreted in some way; i.e. assigned some kind of significance or meaning by someone. In the present study, a cognitive approach is taken to the interpretation of the results from the investigation of the corpus data.

The term ‘cognitive’ is often applied to a number of sciences. In addition to linguistics and psychology, Taylor (2002: 4) mentions e.g. ‘cognitive anthropology’ and ‘cognitive archaeology’. Other examples of cognitive disciplines that have emerged so far are ‘cognitive sociology’ and ‘cognitive economics’ (Matlin 2005: 21). Cognitive sciences all have in common an interest in ‘the mind and its workings – such things as memory, learning, perception, attention, consciousness, reasoning, and what, for want of a better word, one can call simply, “thought”’ (Taylor 2002: 4).

Based mostly on the theories of Lakoff and Langacker, the theoretical framework of the present thesis is ‘Cognitive Linguistics’ which is, broadly speaking, a view of language as symbolic and of linguistic capabilities as extensions of more general cognitive capabilities. The terminology in this study will follow Taylor, who differentiates between ‘Cognitive Linguistics’ with capital letters and ‘cognitive linguistics’ with small letters. The latter refers to any theory which claims that language resides in the mind in some way, while the former is committed to the view that language should be ‘embedded in what is known independently about human cognition’ (Taylor 2002: 5). In other words, Cognitive Linguistics does not see language as some autonomous, special module in the human mind. Instead, language is regarded as an integrated part of cognition and understood in light of other cognitive capacities. This implies an assumption that language is something which is inextricably linked to the mind, as opposed to non-Cognitive Linguistics such as formalist or behaviorist approaches. Where the former tends to see language as formal system, a Grammar, which is ‘disembodied’ and ‘independent’ from its users, the latter views language as nothing but ‘observed behaviour’ (Taylor 2002: 6). Cognitive Linguistics, on the other hand,

seeks to study the conventional units of linguistics, such as syntax, morphology, phonology etc. and understand and explain these language structures in terms of what is known about the mind independently of strictly linguistic behavior, paired with the communicative aspects of language (Taylor 2002: 9). This leads to a view of e.g. units of grammar and morphology as inherently meaningful, rather than semantically empty pieces to be filled into correct ‘slots’ in the grammatical system. A more detailed introduction to Cognitive Linguistics is presented in chapter 3 below.

1.3 The corpus

As mentioned above (section 1.1), the present study is based on a corpus consisting of 653 existential clauses of Middle English. All the clauses are taken from the works of Geoffrey Chaucer and both verse and prose are included. The prose texts are *Boece*, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, and *The Tale of Melibee* and *The Parson’s Tale* from *The Canterbury Tales*. The verse texts are *Troilus and Criseyde* and the rest of the *The Canterbury Tales*, all in all 405 pages.

The choice of Chaucer as the source for data is partly a matter of personal preference. As well as being a great author, Geoffrey Chaucer had a fascinating career and life (see section 1.3.1 below for further details), which brought him into contact with royalty, nobles, bureaucrats, merchants, lawyers, clerks and artisans. In addition to English, he spoke French, Italian and Latin, and he undertook translations into English of works from all three languages. He must obviously have had many sources on which to draw inspiration for his language. However, there is also a practical side to the matter. There can be no doubt that a more extensive examination of works by several Middle English authors would have provided a better foundation for making general claims about Middle English. However, as this is a master’s thesis, the scope must necessarily be limited to what can be achieved within two semesters, and in light of that I felt more comfortable with an in-depth investigation of one author than a superficial look at works by several authors. The following sections give a brief introduction to the life of Geoffrey Chaucer and the texts used as a basis for the corpus.

1.3.1 The author

Geoffrey Chaucer was probably born in the early 1340s, as the son of a wealthy wine merchant living in London. In his teens, he served in the household of the Countess of Ulster who was married to one of the sons of King Edward III. From 1360 to 1366 little is known about his activities, except for two pieces of information: He participated in King Edward's campaign in France from 1359 to 1360 where he was captured and then ransomed with the aid of the king; and he was granted safe conduct through the kingdom of Navarre in 1366, perhaps on a mission for King Edward or possibly on a pilgrimage. In the same year Chaucer married Philippa, a member of the queen's household; and the following year Chaucer himself became a member of the royal household, performing various duties ranging from military service, messenger service and diplomatic missions. During his time in the king's service, he probably studied law at the Inns of Court, and it has been suggested (Crow and Leland 1987: xviii) that he started experimenting with various popular verse forms at this time.

From 1366 to 1370 Chaucer went on a number of missions to the continent for the king, but exactly where his journeys took him is uncertain. In this period he also produced his first major work, *The Book of the Duchess*. His first confirmed contact with Italy took place in 1373 when he was sent to Genoa and Florence, where he may have met, and hardly could have avoided hearing about, such authors as Petrarch and Boccaccio, as well as the recently deceased Dante. In 1374 Chaucer was appointed controller of the export tax (i.e. customs) on wool and sheepskins. This was an important (and lucrative) appointment as wool was England's main export commodity and the customs were a major source of revenue for the monarchy. Chaucer evidently did a good job, as he kept his commission for twelve years, longer than anyone else at that time (Crow and Leland 1987: xx). During this period, which must have been very busy, Chaucer also somehow found time to write some of his major poems. He was also sent as an envoy to Italy and France again during this period, and it was from France that the first tributes to Chaucer as a poet came, from the leading French poet of the time, Eustache Deschamps. In one of his ballads, Deschamps referred to himself as 'a nettle in Chaucer's garden of poetry' (Crow and Leland 1987: xxiii).

In 1386 Chaucer's service as a customs official came to an end, and he did not receive another major appointment until 1389 when he became Clerk of the king's works and later deputy Forester in Somerset.

Little is known of Chaucer's last years, but in December 1399 he leased a house near Westminster Abbey and for some time he collected royal payments that had been granted to him. The last payment to Geoffrey Chaucer was made on June 5 1400, and no records of him exist after this date. His tomb in Westminster Abbey pins down his date of death to October 25 1400, but since this tomb may have been erected as late as 1555; no reliable evidence exists as to the exact date of his death (Crow and Leland 1987: xxvi).

1.3.2 Boece

Boece is Chaucer's translation, probably carried out between 1380 and 1387, of the famous work *De consolacione philosophiae* or *The Consolation of Philosophy*. This work, written by the late-Roman philosopher and politician Anicius Manilius Severinus Boethius (ca. 480-524 AD), was 'immensely popular throughout the Middle Ages' (Hollister 1994: 34). Written as a consoling dialogue between the imprisoned author and the female personification of philosophy, this work has been subsumed under the prose category, although some parts of the text lean more towards poetry.

1.3.3 Troilus and Criseyde

Written possibly sometime between 1380 and 1382, the story of *Troilus and Criseyde* is based on an Italian poem, *Il Filostrato*, by Giovanni Boccaccio. This poem, like Chaucer's translation, is centered on the Trojan War. With the war as a background, the romance between Troilus and Criseyde is described in a way which is radically transformed from Boccaccio's poem (Barney 1987: 472). Although he probably made use of both the Italian original and a very close French translation, Chaucer made the story distinctly his own, both in terms of structure, characters and tone.

1.3.4 A Treatise on the Astrolabe

This treatise is written to Chaucer's son, Lewis, as a manual for using this elaborate instrument for measuring the position of stars and other celestial bodies. Although this is

a short, textbook-style piece, Chaucer's clear and precise language, paired with a well-planned structure, makes this a good example of his writing skills as well as displaying his diversity, through his knowledge of astronomy (Reidy 1987: 661).

1.3.5 The Canterbury Tales

Chaucer's main work, *The Canterbury Tales*, was written over a long period of time. The earliest fragments may date from the period 1372-1380, while the latest may have been written as late as 1396-1400 (Benson 1987a: xxix). In fact, some of the individual tales probably existed before Chaucer came to the idea of using a pilgrimage as a narrative frame for a number of different stories (Benson 1987b: 3). Although no evidence exists to prove that Chaucer read the *Decameron* by Boccaccio, he might have heard of it, and the resemblances are as obvious as are the differences. In both cases a narrative frame is constructed as an occasion for the characters to tell stories. However, while Boccaccio's storytellers are presented as a homogenous group of young aristocrats, Chaucer's collection of characters have little in common (to the extent that they argue and interrupt one another), all of them with their own distinct personalities. As a pilgrimage was one of the few occasions when people of very different backgrounds might meet in medieval society, a touch of realism is added, which is reinforced by Chaucer's 'ear for colloquial speech' (Benson 1987b: 4). It is clear from the *General Prologue* that Chaucer intended the collection to be quite voluminous, but for unknown reasons only 24 tales were completed. Nevertheless, *The Canterbury Tales* are still considered one of the greatest works of literature of the Middle Ages (Hollister 1994: 361).

1.4 Hypotheses

As mentioned in section 1.2.1 above, there was a *there*₁ / *there*₂ distinction in Middle English.² Moreover, it is often assumed that the relationship between Middle English *there*₁ and Present-day English *there*₁ was more or less as it is today. The aim of this thesis is to investigate this, and the following hypotheses are put forward:

Hypothesis 1: A qualitative difference in terms of usage exists between Middle English *there*₁ and Present-day English *there*₁.

Hypothesis 2: Middle English *there*₁ was more closely related to *there*₂ than Present-day English *there*₁ is.

In other words, a significant change has taken place in terms of usage since Middle English. It is hypothesized that the reason for this change is that the cognitive relation between *there*₁ and *there*₂ has changed. As a result of this change, the semantic and syntactic affinities between *there*₁ and *there*₂ have been weakened.

An attempt will be made to test these hypotheses through an investigation of the structure of existential clauses in Chaucer with particular emphasis on the verb phrase and the absence or presence of *there*₁.

1.5 Organization

The thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 2 presents previous research on *there* in Present-day English and Middle English, in addition to other topics related to the discussion on the development of *there*. Chapter 3 gives an outline of the theoretical framework and the methods used, as well as problems that had to be solved while working on the thesis. Chapter 4 presents the distributional characteristics of the existential clauses in the corpus. The main chapter of the thesis, chapter 5, discusses the findings in chapter 4 from the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics and seeks to understand Middle English *there*₁ as part of a coherent category-system. Finally, chapter 6 summarizes the most important results that have emerged from the investigation.

Notes

¹ In the present thesis, the form *there* without a subscript number is used as an umbrella term for both *there*₁ and *there*₂.

² See also section 2.4 below.

CHAPTER 2

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a survey of some previous research on existential *there* as well as two additional concepts central to this work, grammaticalization and negation. Much has been written in these fields and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to draw a complete picture of existing research. Here we shall look at some of the works that are most relevant to the present investigation.

Section 2.2 is concerned with the theoretical framework, whereas section 2.3 gives an outline of some of the work on Present-day English *there*₁. Section 2.4 contains a brief survey of the historical development of existential *there*, before sections 2.5 and 2.6 turn to the topics of grammaticalization and negation, respectively.

A full presentation of Cognitive Linguistics, and more specifically the works of Lakoff and Langacker which constitute the theoretical framework of this study, is for reasons of consistency given in chapter 3. However, Lakoff's case study on *there*₁ is introduced in the present chapter, as this study contrasts with other research and also serves as a preliminary introduction to the field of Cognitive Linguistics.

2.2 On theoretical focus

Although the theoretical framework of the present thesis is Cognitive Linguistics, a number of scholars who do not work within this tradition will be referred to. This slightly eclectic approach is based on the assumption that linguistic theories are not discrete entities, and that work from another theoretical tradition will only serve to enrich the present account. Thus, the ideas of Lakoff and Langacker (using both theories in fact constitutes a blending of theories in itself, as their ideas share common ground, but differ in certain respects, as shown in chapter 3), are employed alongside ideas from the generative tradition (represented by e.g. Pinker (1995) and Coopmans (1989)¹). This does not entail a theoretical position which claims that all and any parts of the various theories

can be combined at will, but rather that a strict paradigmatic dogmatism is counterproductive when it excludes useful viewpoints, solely on the grounds that they belong to a different theoretical tradition. This does not, in my opinion, affect the overall framework of the thesis, since the results are interpreted along the lines of Cognitive Linguistics.

2.3 *There* in Present-day English

2.3.1 Locative vs. existential *there*

As mentioned in section 1.2.1 above, Present-day English has two types of *there*, existential *there* (*there*₁) and locative *there* (*there*₂):

(2.1) **There** are students in Bergen (*there*₁).

(2.2) The students are over **there**, hiding from the professor (*there*₂).

*There*₂ functions as a fully-fledged locative adverb; it bears stress and is in deictic contrast with *here* (i.e. a contrast which depends on the context, like e.g. the position of the speaker relative to another entity; cf. Lakoff 1987: 468). *There*₁, on the other hand, acts as a subject noun phrase in the clause and can behave like any other noun phrase with respect to syntactic operations like inversion and subject raising.²

Typically, *there*₁ in Present-day English occurs with a form of the lexical verb *to be* or some other verb of existence, appearance or emergence (cf. Breivik 1997: 33). The prototypical occurrence of *there*₁, referred to as ‘the central existential construction’ (cf. Lakoff 1987), is a clause beginning with *there*₁ followed by a verb, a noun phrase and a final adverbial phrase, as in (2.1). *There*₁ cannot co-occur with locational verbs like *sit*, *stand* and *lie* in the central existential construction (Lakoff 1987: 544). The following clause is thus not permitted:

(2.3) *There stood a student in the classroom.

Furthermore, *there*₁ cannot occur with a transitive verb, takes no stress, does not contrast with *here* and has undergone phonological reduction, being usually pronounced /ðə(r)/, while *there*₂ is pronounced /'ðeə(r)/ (Breivik 1997: 41). *There*₁ is often referred to as a semantically empty 'dummy subject' since it occupies the syntactic position of the subject in the clause (Breivik 1989: 32), seemingly without adding any meaning in itself.

2.3.2 Bolinger

The apparent meaninglessness of *there*₁ is disputed by Bolinger, who claims that *there*₁ is 'neither empty nor redundant, but is a fully functional word that contrasts with its absence' (1977: 121). Bolinger emphasizes that semantics rather than syntax, seem to govern the use of *there*₁, claiming that "'existential" *there* is an extension of locative *there*, with a meaning that refers to a generalized "location" in the same abstract way that the anaphoric *it* refers to a generalized "identity" in *It was John who said that*' (Bolinger 1977: 91-92).

Bolinger compares *there*₁ to *it*, which is another morpheme generally considered to be void of semantic content and simply inserted for syntactic reasons. It is therefore relevant to take a brief look at his treatment of *it*, before returning to *there*₁.

Looking at the two main uses of *it*, the 'pronominal copy' found in e.g. *It is hard to say* and the 'weather' use as in *It is hot down here*, Bolinger claims that in both cases 'it remains a pronoun whose meaning contrasts with its absence' (1977: 66). *It*, according to Bolinger, always refers to someone or something that is already known or understood from prior context; and is 'the pronominal neuter counterpart of the definite article' (1977: 74). *It* is thus related to other nominals such as *the fact*:

(2.4) Our interview brought **it** (brought **the fact**) into consciousness that we had a deep rapport.

(From Bolinger 1977: 75)

It is, from Bolinger's point of view, simply the most abstract among a number of nominals, and he hypothesizes that the reason for the apparent meaninglessness of the 'weather' *it*, is that there is no need for further specification when referring to the weather

as this is understood from the context (1977: 79). Bolinger maintains that ‘if the two [forms of *it*] are not the same they are at least connected by a gradient too smooth for separation to be anything but arbitrary’ (1977: 82). *It* is thus seen by Bolinger as being definite while semantically being associated with general meaning,³ and he states that ‘[our] mistake has been to confuse generality with lack of meaning’ (1977: 85).

The parallel between *it* and *there*₁ is thus that they both refer to abstract and generalized meanings. This has, according to Bolinger, caused them to be wrongfully classified as semantically empty; and he also refers to Brown (1884: 666, in Bolinger 1977: 92), who points out that ‘[the] noun *place* itself is just as loose and variable in its meaning as the adverb *there*; “*There* is never any difference”; *i.e.*, “No difference ever takes *place*.”’

As mentioned above, *there*₁ is for Bolinger an extension of *there*₂, *i.e.* basically a locative expression in terms of meaning (1977: 92). However, this is an abstract location, and the function of the so-called ‘existential’⁴ *there*₁ is to bring ‘something into awareness’ (1977: 93). To illustrate the contrast between ‘presentative constructions’ with and without *there*₁, Bolinger cites the following data:

- (2.5) a. Across the street is a grocery.
b. Across the street there’s a grocery.
(From Bolinger 1977: 93)

In (2.5a), something is presented on a physical scene immediately in front of us, whereas in (2.5b) something is presented to our mind or consciousness (Bolinger 1977: 94). Since (2.5a) refers to an entity which is immediately and physically in front of us, it can be accompanied by a pointing gesture, whereas (2.5b) cannot. As it would obviously be meaningless to point at something which is out of sight, *there*₁ is used to help bring the entity in question into the hearer’s awareness. Or as Bolinger puts it: ‘The less vividly on stage an action is, the more necessary *there* becomes’ (1977: 96). In order to bring something into the awareness of the recipient of the information, a new entity can be related to ‘a concrete scene or to an abstract one (existence). Location and existence are the two extremes, but there is no dividing line between them’ (Bolinger, 1977: 99). In

other words: for something to exist it must have a location and vice versa. In the presentative constructions without *there*₁, such as (2.5a), the stage is known and present in the narrative (being physically in front of us), it is ‘in a sense topicalized’ (Bollinger, 1977: 110). However, in (2.5b), no stage has been set, and this is, in Bolinger’s view, precisely the function of *there*₁: to set the stage and orient the hearer to it (1977: 114).

There differs from *it*, according to Bolinger, in the sense that whereas no sharp distinction between the abstract and concrete meanings of *it* can be drawn, *there*₁ and *there*₂ are clearly separated. Nevertheless, he maintains that although *there*₁ has an abstract meaning, it is still ‘locative in the broadest sense of whatever in space and time can be seen as something “out there”’ (1977: 120).

2.3.3 Breivik

Breivik takes the view that the use of *there*₁ in Present-day English is closely associated with the ‘topicalization principle’ which is a tendency for ‘elements containing given information (i.e. the topic) to come first in the sentence and for elements containing new information (i.e. the comment) to come near the end’ (Breivik 1989: 31). In the examples below, (2.6a) is thus very rare in Present-day English, while (2.6b) follows the topicalization principle.

- (2.6) a. An account book is on the table.
b. There is an account book on the table.
(From Breivik 1989: 31)

The ‘real’ or ‘logical’ subject (the account book) has, in other words, been moved to post-verbal position for reasons of communication; and the initial subject-slot in the clause structure has been filled by *there*₁, which functions as a ‘dummy subject’ (Breivik 1989: 32).

Furthermore, Breivik hypothesizes that *there*₁ is obligatory in *be*-sentences which do not convey ‘visual impact’ (Breivik 1989: 32), as in these examples:

- (2.7) a. *No sign of life was in the house.

- b. There was no sign of life in the house.
(From Breivik 1989: 32)

If a sentence like (2.7a) is to be considered acceptable, it ‘must bring something – literally or figuratively – before our eyes’ (Breivik 1989: 33). In other words, *there_I* is not necessary when the sentence conveys visual impact as in (2.6a).⁵

Nevertheless, *there_I* does not carry any semantic information in itself according to Breivik; however, he suggests that it carries ‘a kind of information which we may call **signal information**: *there_I* functions as a signal to the addressee that he must be prepared to direct his attention towards an item of new information’ (Breivik 1989: 33).

In sentences with other verbs than *to be*, *there_I* can be regarded as a presentative signal too, but it is not obligatory in the same way:

- (2.8) a. Unicorns exist.
b. There exist unicorns that are white in the winter, green in the spring, grey in the summer and black in the autumn.
(From Breivik 1989: 34)

In (2.8a) the topicalization principle is violated and the sentence also fails to convey visual impact. However, this sentence follows the ‘heavier-element principle’ (Breivik 1989: 34), which causes heavy elements to move to the end of the sentence. The subject in (2.8a) is simply not heavy enough to be moved to the post-verbal position, whereas in (2.8b) the subject is syntactically heavy and represents new information.

The non-*be* verbs that can co-occur with *there_I* are claimed to be verbs of ‘‘appearance or existence on the scene’’, i.e. verbs like *appear*, *emerge*, *exist* and *remain*’ (Breivik 1989: 35). This is a result of the status of *there_I* as a presentative signal and explains why (2.9a) is acceptable and (2.9b) is not.

- (2.9) a. There appeared a man in front of us.
b. *There disappeared a man in front of us.
(From Breivik, 1989: 35)

It also explains why *there*₁ likewise cannot co-occur with a transitive verb in the active voice, as in e.g. (2.9), since *break* is not a verb of appearance or existence:

(2.10) *There broke a girl a vase.

(From Breivik 1989: 35)

The subsequent chapters will show that the conditions under which *there*₁ could be used in Middle English differed to some degree from Present-day English usage.

2.3.4 Lakoff

Lakoff (1987) takes a holistic view of *there*, looking at both the locative and the existential *there* within a framework that has some similarities with Bolinger's view. Working from a cognitive point of view, Lakoff claims that the 'parameters of linguistic form in grammatical constructions are not independent of meaning; rather they are **motivated**, and in many cases even **predicted**, on the basis of meaning' (Lakoff 1987: 463). In other words, syntactic structures are not formal, mathematical systems without inherent meaning. Rather, they are a subset or specialization of our more general cognitive abilities; and they carry a semantic content.

Lakoff's starting point is the problems that the morpheme *there* poses for generative linguistics. According to Lakoff (1987: 557), generative linguistics cannot adequately account for the relationship between *there*₁ and *there*₂ by deriving existential clauses from expressions without *there*. Instead, Lakoff proposes an approach in terms of 'based-on,' rather than 'derived-from,' relationships. This entails that although *there*₁ and *there*₂ display many similarities, they nevertheless form two distinct, but adjacent categories (Lakoff 1987: 556). There is in other words no generalized deictic or existential construction, with necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in each category. The reason for this is simply that a generalized construction would not have enough properties in common with the noncentral cases to formulate sufficient conditions that describe all the constructions. Thus, the membership in these categories is determined by necessary conditions which are generalizations based on a central, or

prototypical, category. These conditions can be extended via based-on relationships to noncentral category members, thus forming a radial category system. The radial category system is, according to Lakoff (1987: 537), to be expected ‘since such structures have the effect of maximizing motivation. Thus, radial structures in grammar have the same function that they do in the lexicon – that of reducing the arbitrariness of form-meaning correspondences.’ This function is achieved by the concept of motivation, where ‘central principles’ that define the central constructions do not necessarily apply to the noncentral category members, but they are nevertheless linked to the noncentral members via the based-on relationships, which Lakoff calls an ‘ecological location’ (1987: 464). These links can be defined by semantic and pragmatic relationships rooted in metaphors and metonymy, and distinguished by minimal differences from the central case. Thus, the notion of ecological structure is a way of describing a system where constructions ‘fit well’, i.e. are well motivated, by a correspondence between the meaning and form of constructions and the conceptual system (cf. chapter 3 below) they are based on. This will, with respect to e.g. *there*, make ‘minimal variations on it [...] easy to learn, remember, and use’ (Lakoff 1987:538).

The locative adverb *there*₂, which *there*₁ is based on, has a central category member, the central deictic, and ten noncentral category members. The central deictic uses *here* or *there* to point out entities and objects in a locative context relative to the speaker. The typical verbs in this construction are verbs of location, like *be*, *sit* and *stand*, or verbs of motion, like *go*, *come*, *run* or *walk*. The noncentral deictics are all motivated by and based on this central member. The following noncentral categories are posited by Lakoff (e.g. 1987: 580-581): The perceptual deictic, the discourse deictic, the existence deictic, the activity start deictic, the delivery deictic, the paragon deictic, the exasperation deictic, the enthusiastic beginning deictic, the narrative focus deictic and the presentational deictic. All these categories cannot be discussed in the present thesis; however, one is worth mentioning both as a general example and because it is referred to below. The existence deictic is based on the metaphor EXISTENCE IS LOCATION HERE; NONEXISTENCE IS LOCATION AWAY, and is found in expressions reporting birth and death like e.g. *He’s gone*, *The baby has arrived* and *There goes our last hope* (Lakoff 1987: 518). This construction also shows that the deictics not only refer to physical

locations, but also to conceptual spaces concerning existence, which are ‘divided into two parts so that entities in locations near the speaker exist and those far from the speaker do not exist’ (Lakoff 1987: 519). This space is thus structured, or organized, in a way which is based on concrete locations.

Existential *there*₁ on the other hand cannot, according to Lakoff (1987: 540), refer to specific, concrete locations. *There*₁ can only refer to mental spaces and this is in Lakoff’s view (1987: 541) the source of all major differences between *there*₁ and *there*₂. However, he nevertheless proposes that there is a continuum between the deictics and the existentials. This is illustrated in that the concrete locations referred to by the central deictic, as in *She’s over there*, are further from the existentials than e.g. the space referred to by the existence deictic or the narrative focus deictic, as in *There I was, in the middle of the forest*. The space referred to by *there*₁, on the other hand, is based on Fauconnier’s (1985, in Lakoff 1987: 281) concept of ‘mental spaces,’ involving ‘cognitive models that structure those spaces’ (Lakoff 1987: 281). This mental space is, according to Lakoff, ‘a medium for conceptualization and thought’ (1987: 281), which can represent both ongoing and fixed states of affairs. *There*₁ can thus be seen to ‘designate a mental space in which a conceptual entity is to be located’ (Lakoff 1987: 542). This space is not a location, it is ‘a medium in which there are many locations,’ where the entities referred to are located. The central existential is defined by Lakoff as consisting of *there*₁, *be*, a noun phrase designating a conceptual entity set up in the mental space by the indefinite article, and finally a final phrase which indicates the nature of the space, e.g. ‘a dream [or] a portion of the physical world’ (Lakoff 1987: 543). Thus, the mental space may, or may not, correspond to the ‘real’ world. The central existential is exemplified in (2.11a) and (2.11b).

- (2.11) a. In my dream there was a rabbit.
b. In the yard there was a rabbit.
(From Lakoff 1987: 543)

Based on this, Lakoff makes the following predictions concerning *there*₁ (1987: 544 ff): (1) *there*₁ is not a locative adverb; (2) *there*₁ does not contrast with *here*; (3) *there*₁ does

not occur independently of existential constructions; (4) *there*₁ does not bear stress; (5) *there*₁ cannot be accompanied by a pointing gesture; (6) locational verbs like *sit* and *stand* cannot occur with *there*₁; (7) *there*₁ cannot point to a specific location since it designates a mental space, not a location; (8) *there*₁ can take negatives and questions; (9) *there*₁ can take full auxiliaries; (10) *there*₁, like *there*₂, functions to focus the hearer's attention on the entity referred to by the noun phrase; (11) the noun phrase is not both definite and specific; (12) *there*₁ is the first syntactic element, the final phrase is the last; (13) the verb precedes the noun phrase; (14) *there*₁ is the subject; (15) *there*₁ is unmarked and represents background; (16) the final phrase is optional; (17) the noun phrase is the subject of the final phase; (18) no verbs of motion are allowed. A number of these predictions will be further discussed in the following chapters.

Like the deictics, the existential category has a number of noncentral members. The most frequent of the noncentral existentials described by Lakoff found in the corpus compiled for this thesis is the presentational existential. It differs from the other existentials in that it allows a complex verb phrase, and the function of the construction is to bring an entity into a narrative, as in *There once lived in Transylvania an old woman with three sons* (Lakoff 1987: 570), or to set up a background, as in *There were singing in the alley below a hearty group of carolers undaunted by the snow and cold*. It also allows other verbs than the central existential (Lakoff 1987: 570 ff), as exemplified below in an example from the corpus data:

(2.12) In which ther ran a rumbel in swongh, (KT: 1979)

The other noncentral existentials are the strange existential, the ontological existential and the infinitival existential (Lakoff 1987: 581), of which only the last two were found in my material, exemplified in (2.13) and (2.14) respectively.

(2.13) I / suppose that ther be prescience, (Bo, V. Pr. 4: 51-52)

(2.14) Forwhy ther ben some / thingis to betyden, of whiche the eendes, and the / bytydynges of hem ben absolute and quit of alle / necessite. (Bo, V. Pr. 4: 103-106)

The fact that the strange existential construction is not attested in the corpus does of course not mean that its existence in Middle English can be ruled out.

2.4 The history of existential *there*₁

The historical development of *there*₁ has not been studied quite as extensively as present-day English *there*₁; however, there is still a fair amount that has been published on the subject. This section is not an attempt to cover in detail every aspect of the discussion on the origin of *there*₁; rather, it is intended to provide some background necessary for the study of the construction in Middle English.

Most scholars seem to agree that *there*₁ has developed from *there*₂ (see for instance Lakoff 1987: 470; Breivik 1997: 33). However, there is disagreement as to when this separation took place. According to Quirk (1951, in Breivik, forthcoming: 1), instances of *there*₁ can be found in *Beowulf*, while other scholars, like Mitchell (1985: 625, in Breivik, forthcoming: 2) disagree; arguing that the first unambiguous instances of *there*₁ are found in Middle English. Breivik maintains that *there*₁ and *there*₂ were differentiated as early as in Old English and that already at this point there were similarities with Present-day English usage (Breivik 1989: 36). The following section is a brief summary of the historical development of *there*₁, based mainly on Breivik (1989).

2.4.1 The existence of *there*₁ in Old English

The existence of a *there*₁ construction in Old English different from the deictic locative adverb *there*₂ is supported by the fact that instances of *there*₁ in Old English are used interchangeably both with ‘the classic dummy form *it*’ and a zero form (Breivik 1989: 37). The use of an existential *it* in certain clauses, especially weather statements, was common in both Old English and Middle English; and is indeed still found in present-day English:

(2.15) **It** is raining.

Here, *it* takes the role of grammatical subject, which would otherwise have been left empty by the lack of an agent. In this clause, *it* is traditionally simply considered to be a semantically empty slot-filler (but see section 2.3.2 above for Bolinger's discussion of this subject). For instance, in the Lauderdale manuscript of *Orosius* we find clauses with *there*₁ and clauses with the zero form or *it* in the corresponding Cotton manuscript version of the same text. This alternation is present in other Old and Middle English texts as well, e.g. the various manuscripts of *Cursor Mundi*. Line 2210 exhibits all three options:

- (2.16) a. Pat tim **it** was bot a langage
'At that time there was only one language' (Cotton MS).
b. Pat time was bot an langage (Fairfax MS).
c. Pat tyme was **Per** but o langage (Trinity MS).
(From Breivik 1989: 38)

2.4.2 Old English word order

The hypothesis presented by Breivik for the development of *there*₁ is closely connected with changes in word order⁶ that took place from the Old English to the Middle English period. When classifying languages according to word order (i.e. the relative position of clause constituents like subject, verb, objects and adverbials), we subsume present-day English under the verb-medial category, which is also referred to as verb-third, SVX or XSV (Heggelund 2002: 1). This means that the subject will normally precede the verb in declarative main clauses, whether the subject is in clause initial position or not (thus making the finite verb the third constituent in those cases where the subject is preceded by e.g. an adverbial), as illustrated below:

- (2.17) a. Yesterday Jane bought a new motorbike.
b. Jane bought a new motorbike yesterday.

Old English, on the other hand, was a verb-second language, or at least operated under some sort of verb-second constraint (Breivik, 1989: 40). In such a language⁷ the finite verb will be the second constituent in a declarative main clause, no matter which element comes first, as in (2.18):

(2.18) *Yesterday bought Jane a new motorbike.

It is, however, important to emphasize that this type of classification does not imply that the dominant word order pattern is the only pattern. Breivik (1989: 38) identifies three basic patterns in Old English, listed in a somewhat simplified form below:

(2.19) SVO (the modern verb-medial pattern, where the subject precedes the verb)

(2.20) S(...)V (where there is some other element intervening between subject and verb, usually found in subordinate clauses)

(2.21) XVS (the verb-second pattern, where the verb is in second constituent position)

In Old English, XVS was the dominant word order pattern, but decreased in favor of SVO as the language gradually changed into a verb-medial language during the Middle English period. In the process of this change, *there*₁-sentences ‘represent a compromise in the conflict between pragmatic and syntactic structure’ (Breivik 1989: 50). The initial position in the sentence is taken up by *there*₁, acting as a ‘dummy subject’, thus fulfilling the requirements of the verb-medial syntax. This allows the logical subject to be moved into the post-verbal position, as was the case in the verb-second pattern. Additionally, it conforms to the topicalization principle. On this basis Breivik argues that *there*₁ has developed the function of signaling new information through its use as a ‘dummy’ subject noun phrase: ‘Since this morpheme has come to be associated with the introduction of new information, it has itself acquired the status of presentative signal’ (Breivik 1989: 51).

The circumstances under which *there*₁ separated from *there*₂ and developed this function can be seen as an early phase in a process of grammaticalization (Breivik 1997: 41), a topic which will be dealt with separately in the following section.

2.5 Subjectification in grammaticalization

‘Subjectification’, according to Traugott, refers to ‘a pragmatic-semantic process whereby “meanings become increasingly based in the speaker’s subjective belief state/attitude towards the proposition”, in other words, towards what the speaker is talking about’ (Traugott 1995: 31). This is mostly a diachronic concept, and covers the development of semantic change in individual morphemes as a consequence of users assigning new meanings to those morphemes (Stein 1995: 130). As Traugott admits (1995: 31), this is a very broad definition. Stein (1995: 129-130) operates with five different notions of subjectivity and subjectification, the fourth of which corresponds to Traugott’s. It is this notion of subjectification which will be dealt with in this section.

‘Subjectification in grammaticalization’ is the grammatically identifiable manifestation of this process, whereby the repeated use of a morpheme in a special context gives it an increasingly abstract and pragmatic function. ‘Grammaticalization’ is, according to Traugott’s definition, the process in which a lexical morpheme is reanalyzed through this special use as having a syntactic function (Traugott 1995: 32). As an example, Traugott uses the phrase *be going to*:

- (2.22) a. Mary **is going to** visit her agent.
b. Mary **is going to/gonna** visit her agent.
(From Traugott, 1995: 31)

In (2.22a), *is going to* is a motion verb in the progressive, i.e. Mary is at this very moment going or walking somewhere in order to visit her agent. In (2.22b), however, she intends to visit her agent sometime in the future, i.e. the issue here is the intention, and not the manner in which it will be carried out in the future. *Going to/gonna* has through repeated use developed a new meaning, which has led the hearers to reanalyze it

syntactically from a verb in the progressive to what Traugott refers to as a ‘quasi-auxiliary’ (1995: 31).

The reason for this process, according to Traugott, is that as the speaker starts to use a more ‘reserved’ variant of a morpheme and the meaning is obvious for pragmatic reasons (i.e. from the context of the conversation), a ‘pragmatic strengthening’ takes place, allowing the hearer to ‘infer more than what is said’ (Traugott 1995: 49). Gradually, this may over time cause a morpheme to increasingly ‘serve pragmatic, interpersonal, speaker-based functions’ (Breivik 1997: 42); so that presented in the correct context the pragmatically strengthened form is unambiguous, while it continues to be potentially ambiguous when presented out of context.

Breivik hypothesizes that the development of *there*₁ from *there*₂ is an example of subjectification in grammaticalization (Breivik 1997: 41): The written form of both *there*₁ and *there*₂ is identical, some of the original meaning has been lost (since *there*₁ cannot refer to a concrete, physical location), *there*₁ is syntactically reanalyzed as a subject noun phrase (as opposed to *there*₂ which is an adverb of place) and finally, *there*₁ has undergone a phonological reduction.⁸

2.6 Negation

Negation in Old English was expressed through the negative adverb *ne*, which could be strengthened with *na* or *naht* following or preceding *ne* to produce a more emphatic form. In Early Middle English, as this construction was used more frequently, it gradually lost its emphatic function until the common negator was the adverb *ne* followed by the finite verb and *naht* (Fischer 1992: 280). This *ne ... naht* pattern occurred virtually without exception in the Middle English period, but gradually the phonologically weak element *ne* came to be dropped; and in late Middle English *nat/noght/not* was the common negator. However, Chaucer’s and other texts from the southeast and London still used *ne ... not* and unsupported *ne* regularly. The latter was, according to Fischer (1992: 281), particularly common when *ne* was used as an auxiliary in one of its contracted forms like *nys*:

(2.23) Ther nys no man that may reporten al. (SqT: 72)

Since the main concern of the present study is with existential constructions, negation will only be touched upon to the extent that it can shed light on the discussion of the main topic. Interestingly, Iyeiri notes that the use of negation (especially *never* and *no*) in existential clauses is so frequent that it ‘seems to be almost conventionalized’ (2001: 119). In his material, Iyeiri finds that *never* and *no* frequently occur in existential clauses irrespective of whether the clauses contain *there₁* (2001: 118). This feature is more common in verse than in prose, but the proportion of existential clauses containing a negator is often over 80% even in the prose texts (Iyeiri 2001: 120).

In the following chapters no distinction will be made between the various negators *no*, *never*, *ne*, *ne ... not* and *nys/nis/nas/nere*. The crucial line will be drawn between those clauses containing a negator and those that do not. The main focus will be on how the negative existential clauses relate to the concept of NONEXISTENCE and how this contrasts with EXISTENCE. Horn divides NEGATION into REJECTION and DENIAL, with NONEXISTENCE as a subcategory of the latter (1989: 182-183), as in:

(2.24) There isn’t any (more) soup
(From Horn 1989: 183)

In (2.24), which is a negative existential clause, the proposition that there is any more soup left is denied. The term ‘denial’, however, does not necessarily mean that someone has explicitly claimed that there is more soup left; ‘all that is required is that the positive proposition be somehow accessible as a good or natural guess’ (Horn 1989: 182).

2.7 Summary

This chapter has presented a survey of previous research on *there₁* in Old, Middle and Present-day English. In section 2.2 it was stated that the present thesis takes, within a cognitive framework, an eclectic approach to linguistic theory, while section 2.3 gave an account of research on *there₁* in Present-day English and established that there are good reasons to be suspicious of the claim that *there₁* is completely void of semantic meaning. Section 2.4 established the existence of *there₁* in Old English and traced its development

into Middle English, before section 2.5 presented a hypothesis for how the split between a locative *there*₂ and an existential *there*₁ could have taken place. Finally, section 2.6 gave a brief presentation of negative constructions in Old and Middle English, followed by data from Iyeiri's and Horn's studies; stating that there is a connection between existential constructions and negatives in Middle English and Present-day English, respectively.

Notes

¹ See chapters 3 and 5, respectively.

² The exact classification of *there*₁ appears to be, to a certain degree at least, a subject of controversy. However, for the purposes of the present thesis, existential *there*₁ will simply be considered to have subject-noun phrase-like properties.

³ In Palestinian Arabic, the corresponding expression to English 'it is raining' is 'the world is raining' (Givón 1984: 90 in Smith 2002: 92).

⁴ Bolinger feels that the term 'existential' covers too much and claims that 'the existential meaning is more a function of the verb than of *there*' (Bolinger, 1977: 92).

⁵ According to Breivik, native speakers tend to find this example 'dubious, marginal or even unnatural' when it is presented out of context. It is, however, considered natural under certain circumstances (see Breivik, 1989: 32-33).

⁶ What we look at is, in fact, not the order of words, but the order of syntactic elements or clause constituents. Thus, 'constituent order' would be a more precise term. However, for simplicity the term 'word order' will be used throughout the remainder of this thesis.

⁷ E.g. Present-day Norwegian or German. (2.17a) thus exhibits verb-third order, while (2.17b) is an example of verb-second order, which is found in both verb-second and verb-third languages.

⁸ See section 2.3.1 above.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

3.1 Introduction

The first part of the present chapter gives a general introduction to the theoretical framework, before exploring some of the more important themes in more depth. Furthermore, the implications of both the theoretical framework and the choice of material for the study are discussed. Of particular relevance are the notions of metaphors and prototype theory, as these concepts will be central in the discussion of the status of *there*₁ in chapter 5. The second part deals with various problems which have been encountered, as well as the concrete techniques used for analyzing and interpreting the clauses in the corpus, including a description of how the program FileMaker Pro 5.5 has been employed for the purposes of this study.

3.2 Cognitive Linguistics

3.2.1 The cognitive aspects of Cognitive Linguistics

3.2.1.1 Defining the field of study

As mentioned in section 1.2.2 above, Cognitive Linguistics is just one of a number of different cognitive sciences. The common denominator for all of them is a focus on ‘the mind’, or more specifically, what goes on in the mind; viz. ‘the manipulation of internal representations of the external world’ (Matlin 2005: 21), i.e. what we can call ‘thoughts’. The problem with this is of course not only how to access these internal representations, but also how to access them in a way which is relevant for the field of study.¹

An experimental approach is presented by Gibbs and Colston (1995). Working from a background in cognitive psychology, their research is nevertheless focused on Cognitive Linguistics and deals with the existence of ‘image schemas’. Image schemas are ‘patterns of [...] perceptual interactions’ (Gibbs and Colston 1995: 347) which direct

our everyday mental activities. When we think of the external, physical world in terms of e.g. a container, we express ourselves via metaphors (see section 3.2.3 below), and these metaphors rest, according to Gibbs and Colston, on ‘schematic structures’ like CONTAINER, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL and BALANCE (1995: 348). These image schemas emerge as a result of the way we ‘manipulate objects, orient ourselves spatially and temporally, and direct our perceptual focus for various purposes’ (1995: 347). In other words, our physical surroundings (and our own bodies’ interactions with them), have an impact on the way we form abstract metaphorical notions and express ourselves through language. Consider the following example:

(3.1) I’m **in** Norway.

When an area of land, such as a country, is viewed as a container (with a ‘boundary’, separating the ‘exterior’ from an ‘interior’ which can contain e.g. people inside it), this is achieved metaphorically through the preposition *in* based on an image schema which arises out of our knowledge of physical containers. Thus, this has implications both for semantics and the use of grammatical forms, like prepositions.² Through a series of psycholinguistic experiments, Gibbs et al. 1994 (in Gibbs and Colston 1995: 352-354) found data that provides support for the hypothesis that the various meanings that people attribute to a polysemous word like *stand*³ are ‘partly motivated by image schemas that arise from their bodily experiences of standing’ (1995: 353).

The experiments conducted by Gibbs et al. support the theories that have evolved from a more introspective approach to language and the human mind, taken by e.g. Lakoff and Langacker. In both cases, the objectives are much the same, viz. to understand language in terms of general cognitive capabilities. The underlying assumption in Langacker’s work is that language is ‘inherently symbolic nature’ and that ‘[l]inguistic expressions symbolize, or stand for, conceptualizations’ (Taylor 2002: 20). Any linguistic expression is, according to this theory, composed of a phonological structure,⁴ a semantic structure and a direct, symbolic relation between the two. The ‘conventionalized association of a phonological structure with a semantic structure’ constitutes a ‘symbolic unit’ (Taylor 2002: 25). In slightly simplified terms, the symbolic unit symbolizes a

'concept', e.g. TREE (or an idea or emotion for that matter), which is an abstract, mental entity which resides in the mind of the individual language user (Taylor 2002: 42). However, Taylor points out that a concept is not a mental picture of a tree, but rather an abstract principle of categorization, which helps us to separate trees from other physical objects (2002: 43). Categorization is further discussed below, alongside other general cognitive capabilities.

3.2.1.2 Some general cognitive capabilities

Some selected aspects of Cognitive Linguistics that bear particular relevance to the present study are briefly introduced below. These are examples of general cognitive abilities which are also plausibly involved in language. A more detailed discussion of these topics is found in Taylor (2002: 9-16).

Categorization is, according to Taylor, a very basic ability possessed by all living creatures and one that humans in particular excel at (2002: 9). Whereas it for some creatures is sufficient to operate with categories like *harmful* and *non-harmful* and *edible* and *non-edible*, humans can take advantage of the ability to employ vast numbers of categories from the very narrow and specific to extremely general ones. Both physical objects and internal states like emotions are categorized. Examples of categories are concepts like *trees*, *cars*, *fear* and *ideas*. By categorizing social situations, processes and other people we can function in highly complex societies; and the categories are flexible allowing them to accommodate new experiences as well as different physical and cultural environments. In language, we categorize not only objects, ideas and various grammatical features like *noun*, *verb*, *relative clause* etc. Oral communication is the result of a division of different sound signals into categories, so that in English [t] and [t^h] are both categorized (and thus interpreted for communicative purposes) as / t /.⁵ The same holds true for written communication where signs on a background are categorized into symbolic representations of phonemes. Regardless of the choice of font type; or for that matter upper or lower case, the following combinations of black lines and curves against the white background are all categorized⁶ as the letter *t*, symbolizing the phoneme / t /: T, T, t and t. The concept of categories is further discussed in section 3.2.4 below.

Figure-ground organization is based on visual perception, where certain parts of an image ‘stand out’ from the background. This is linked to attention and how we focus on a scene, e.g. when reading a page: The page of a book is perceived as a white background (ground) with black letters on it (figure) which stand out against the background. It is not likely that a page in a book is viewed as a black background with a very complex white pattern on it. However, it is not inconceivable, since the figure-ground organization is quite flexible, which is illustrated in well-known ambiguous cases like the ‘vase-faces effect’ (Matlin 2005: 36). Such a picture can be viewed either as a white vase against a black background, or two black face profiles against a white background. To illustrate further how this organization is linked to attention, Taylor (2002: 10) points out that ‘we can have several levels of figure-ground organization. What is the ground at one level becomes the figure at another level.’ Although the letters on this page form a ‘primary figure’ against the white page, the whole page ‘constitutes a “secondary figure”, against the background of the wider visual scene’ (Taylor 2002: 10).

Mental imagery and construal is another general cognitive ability which is relevant when studying linguistics. A specific scene or idea can be structured in different terms in order to mentally ‘construe’ the situation from different view points. A glass containing a certain amount of water can for instance be described in two distinct ways:

- (3.2) a. The glass is half empty.
b. The glass is half full.

The same situation is described in (3.2a) and (3.2b), but the words chosen to encode each scene, structures it in a way which entails two different mental perspectives.

Metaphors reflect our ability to think of something in terms of something else; and this is not limited to ‘fancy’ or literary language. Metaphors are seen as necessary to structure our thoughts, even in fairly prosaic sentences like (3.3):

- (3.3) We came to this conclusion.

Here, a mental activity (making a conclusion) is expressed as a physical location one can arrive at. Metaphors are further discussed in section 3.3 below.

The notion of *conceptual archetypes*, whether seen as preprogrammed into the mind or something that is learned, is an important area in language acquisition research. It also illustrates another cognitive aspect of Cognitive Linguistics, as it is possible to assume that the conceptual archetype *thing*, i.e. a ‘spatially bounded physical object which persists over time’ (Taylor 2002: 12), is what lies behind the syntactic category *noun*. In other words, conceptual archetypes express general (idealized) cognitive models which structure the language. As another example, Langacker (1999: 24-25) describes the conceptual archetype of the *canonical event model* as being composed of notions of (among others) ‘objects moving around in space and impacting other objects [and] two *role archetypes*, namely agent and patient.’ According to Langacker, there is a natural correlation between this model and the realization of a transitive finite clause with a subject (agent) interacting with (or having an impact on) an object (patient). Other such conceptual archetypes include for instance *animacy* and *causality* (Taylor 2002: 13). Through these idealized, general cognitive models based on ‘the physical realm of experience’ (Langacker 1999: 24), it is thus possible to assume that the motivation for a particular grammatical feature might be accessed; even in the case of a language with no native speakers.

However, paramount to all the features discussed above, Cognitive Linguistics views language as ‘inherently symbolic in nature’ (Taylor 2002: 16). Language is thus seen as an expression of the human capability of *symbolic behavior*. All languages provide their users with a set of resources for representing thought, and Cognitive Linguistics is concerned with identifying and analyzing those resources, through a number of different approaches. This is reflected in all the cognitive aspects of Cognitive Linguistics discussed above.

3.2.2 Cognitive grammar

In addition to the general characteristics discussed above, some characteristics more specific to Langacker’s cognitive grammar deserve mentioning as they constitute an

important part of the foundations and assumptions which the discussion of *there*₁ in the following chapters is based on.

Cognitive grammar is, according to Langacker (1991b: 264), usage based. This entails that knowing a language means possessing knowledge of actual usage, conventions and exceptions which are not always particularly abstract, i.e. a 'bottom-up' approach with less emphasis on general rules. Language knowledge is dynamic in the sense that grammar is not seen as a device producing a specific 'output.' Rather, it is a system which 'provides the speaker with an inventory of symbolic resources' (Langacker 1991b: 265) which the speaker can use in a new or canonical way according to the situation. Furthermore, cognitive grammar is surface oriented, in that it does not assume any underlying structures symbolizing the 'real' grammar, since '[c]ognitive grammar claims that grammatical structure is almost entirely overt. Surface grammatical form does not conceal a "truer", deeper level of grammatical organization; rather, it itself embodies the conventional means a language employs for the structuring and symbolization of semantic content' (Langacker 1991a: 46-47).

Secondly, the study of semantics is important, because it is argued that the syntactic and morphological systems of a language are neither random nor preprogrammed universal rules, but motivated by their semantic aspects. Rather than describing lexical categories in terms of distribution, categories like *noun* and *verb* can be described through symbolic structures that illustrate their semantic motivation (Taylor 2002: 29). An example of this would be the *canonical event model* as described in section 3.2.1.2 above.

Based on all this, cognitive grammar takes the view that a language cannot be reduced to a set of grammatical rules, but rather is understood as 'a set of resources that are available to language users for the symbolization of thought, and for the communication of these symbolizations.' (Taylor 2002: 30). This view is also adopted in the present thesis and constitutes an important basis for the argumentation regarding the status of *there* in Middle English.

3.2.3 A metaphorical approach

Another branch of Cognitive Linguistics is focused on metaphor, and Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 4) argue that our conceptual system is metaphorical in nature and these metaphorical concepts (given in small capitals below) structure the way we act, think and talk about those concepts. A concept like ARGUMENT is e.g. expressed through the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR, and this structures the way we think and talk about arguments, leading to expressions like *She won the argument* and *He attacked my argument*. In short, '[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 5). We simply cannot avoid using metaphors in our daily lives when thinking and talking about these concepts and it is assumed in the present thesis that this was the case for Middle English as well. Of course, the conceptual system of Present-day English is bound to be somewhat different from that of Middle English. As an extension of the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor, expressions like *He machine-gunned all my arguments to pieces* and *She 'nuked' her opponents* would be acceptable in Present-day English, but are obviously unthinkable in Middle English.

Metaphorical concepts can be divided into many categories. For instance, Lakoff and Johnson differentiate between structural metaphors where one thing is understood in terms of another (e.g. ARGUMENT IS WAR) and orientational metaphors where one system is structured in relation to another (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 14). An example of the latter would be metaphors like HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN and CONSCIOUS IS UP; UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN. There are also other groups of metaphors mentioned by Lakoff and Johnson, but these two broad categories illustrate two main points relevant to the present discussion:

- (3.4) a. Some of the metaphorical concepts are culture-specific. A hypothetical culture in which the concept of ARGUMENT is seen as a dance would argue and talk about arguments very differently from what is common in Europe and North America. In fact, it might not seem like an argument at all to someone accustomed to the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5).

- b. Some of the metaphorical concepts are based on physical experiences. For instance, the fact that we all have three-dimensional bodies influenced by gravity gives us the basis for structuring metaphorical concepts (and thus our existence) in terms of UP and DOWN. However, the choice of whether e.g. UP constitutes health or sickness is a matter of cultural variation. The physical experience simply provides us with the notions of UP and DOWN which are then applied to concepts in different ways.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 17) state that the conceptual system is rooted in a combination of culturally and physically based metaphors, and that they constitute ‘a coherent system rather than a number of isolated random cases.’ Sometimes the distinction between the two is unclear because ‘the choice of one physical basis from among many possible ones has to do with cultural coherence’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 19). It is pointed out by Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 19-20) that the experiential basis of metaphors is something we do not know much about. Thus, rather than saying that MORE IS UP, a more complex approach where the two parts MORE/LESS and UP/DOWN were linked by a common experiential basis, could be adopted. However, this is avoided out of ‘ignorance’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 19). As mentioned above (section 3.2.1.1), Gibbs and Colston (1995: 347) present research that supports the existence of image schemas which provide an experiential basis for conceptual metaphors, nevertheless, the present thesis will continue to use the terminology employed by Lakoff and Johnson. In conceptual metaphors, the verb *is* will be used as ‘a shorthand for some set of experiences on which the metaphor is based and in terms of which we understand it’ (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 20). This applies both to the physical and the cultural base for metaphors.

As these two bases for metaphors will be central in the discussion of *there*₁ in chapter 5, it will be important to avoid any anachronistic interpretation or imposition of metaphors in the source material (see section 3.4.5.1 below). The central metaphorical concepts which will be dealt with in the present study are EXISTENCE, NONEXISTENCE and NEGATION, and how they relate to *there*₁ and the notion of *mental space* (see section 2.3.4 above).

3.2.4 Prototype theory

Prototype theory, according to Lakoff (1987: 58), works (like Cognitive Linguistics in general does) on the assumption that language is based on ‘our general cognitive apparatus.’ If this assumption is correct, it would be natural to expect similarities between linguistic categories and other categories in our conceptual system. One of the expected similarities mentioned by Lakoff is prototype effects. These prototype effects reflect more general categorization mechanisms which help organize our linguistic resources. For instance: the morphological category ‘number’ has, according to Lakoff (1987: 59), ‘marked’ and ‘unmarked’ members, singular and plural respectively. The singular, lacking a specific mark as in *boy* is unmarked, whereas the plural stands out as marked with its *-s* ending in *boys*. This difference between marked and unmarked is a prototype effect, with one member of the category being in some way more basic or prototypical than the other, with the unmarked member as the ‘default value’ (Lakoff 1987: 61).

Lakoff (1987: 79), points out that an important source of these prototype effects is metonymy, i.e. ‘a situation in which some subcategory or member or submodel is used (often for some limited and immediate purpose) to comprehend the category as a whole.’ An example of such a metonymic model is the category of *mother*. Lakoff lists a number of subcategories of mothers, such as *working mothers*, *stepmothers*, *foster mothers*, *biological mothers*, *unwed mothers* etc. (1987: 83). All these subcategories are variations on a central case, defined on cultural expectations of what a mother is supposed to be like or not be like. And the central case, which metonymically stands for all these noncentral cases, is the cultural stereotype of the married housewife-mother who gave birth to her children and raised them herself. Furthermore, as these noncentral cases are based on, or motivated by, stereotypes and normal expectations; they are not produced by the central case on the basis of a set of ‘necessary - and - sufficient conditions.’ Rather, they are a result of cognitive models which are adaptable to different cultural settings. For instance, Lakoff gives the example of traditional Japanese society, where it was common for a woman to give birth to a child which was then raised by her sister (1987. 84). No exact equivalent to this kind of mother exists among the categories of mothers in English.

The category *mother* is used by Lakoff as an example of a *radial structure*. This he defines as a structure where ‘there is a central case and conventionalized variations on

it which cannot be predicted by general rules.’ (1987: 84). Lakoff thus rules out categories that are generated by central cases plus general rules and also cases where the noncentral cases simply have additional properties (i.e. are specializations) but are otherwise similar to the central cases.

The present thesis will adopt Lakoff’s notion of a central subcategory with additional radial noncentral categories that are variants of this central category, as a basis for a discussion of the status of *there*₁ in Middle English. The categories in question are not specialized instances of the central category, but rather deviations of it motivated by cultural conventions which must be learned one by one. These noncentral categories are thus ‘not understood purely on their own terms; they are comprehended via their relationship to the central model’ (Lakoff 1987: 91).

Although Lakoff’s research is based on modern languages and cognitive psychology, the human brain has probably changed so little over the last 600 years that it is not unreasonable to assume that the same cognitive mechanisms for category extension that exist today were at work in Middle English. This is an argument which also applies to the notion of conceptual archetypes (section 3.2.1.2 above).

3.3 Analysis and methodology

The analysis of the corpus material has been carried out through two distinct steps, a quantitative analysis followed by a qualitative one. For the quantitative analysis, the clauses in the corpus were entered into files in FileMaker Pro, version 5.5, and coded with respect to syntactic and semantic criteria. This includes word-order patterns, transitive/intransitive verb phrase, active/passive and other features. Also included were features like negation and the non-occurrence of *there*₁ in existential clauses. See section 3.5 below for a complete list of features.

For the qualitative analysis, the results from the quantitative analysis have been employed as a basis on which to apply the theoretical framework, viz. that of Cognitive Linguistics. This analysis has involved prototype theory, metaphors and other features of Cognitive Linguistics discussed above.

3.4 Problems of analysis

3.4.1 Introduction

Certain problems are particularly associated with the study of historical data. Since no native speakers of Middle English are alive, we must rely on written material and one problem is deciding how representative the texts are. When working from a cognitive perspective there is the additional problem of interpreting the texts, i.e. assigning a plausible meaning to signs written down over 600 years ago. On top of that, no original manuscript written by Chaucer himself survives. This means that all the copies which the modern editions are based on have been copied and probably altered by scribes and copyists. Also, the rules of punctuation and spelling were not as firmly set as today, which means that sentence analysis can sometimes be difficult, especially in the original manuscripts.

3.4.2 Are the texts representative?

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the basis for this study is 653 existential clauses taken from the works of Chaucer, both verse and prose. Of course, since none of the surviving manuscripts containing Chaucer's work were written by the author himself, there is no way we can be certain that the manuscripts in existence today accurately reflect Chaucer's language. In fact, they probably differ to some degree, judging from the discrepancies between the various surviving manuscripts. These differences are most likely a result of different scribal practices as the manuscripts were copied in the decades following Chaucer's death. However, the aim of this thesis is not to describe specifically the language of a man named Geoffrey Chaucer. Rather, the texts produced by him are taken as a representative basis which can be used to make generalizations and predictions concerning a specific dialect of Middle English in the decades before and after AD 1400. Therefore, it does not matter that certain aspects of the texts have been altered from the version produced by Chaucer's own hand, as long as the alterations took place in the early 15th century and not the early 20th century. The language is still a sample of late Middle English as used in and around London.

The same goes for the question of dialect features. Chaucer wrote in a London dialect based on or influenced by the East Midlands dialect, although he sometimes used other dialect features, most notably northern features, to create a stylistic effect. This means that studying Chaucer does not necessarily provide an insight into what ‘English’ at the time was like. However, in a sense, there were many ‘Englishes.’ There did not exist a notion of linguistic standardization comparable to Present-day Standard English. So even if several dialect samples from other authors had been included in the corpus material, no claim could have been made that the results were representative of Middle English in general unless all dialects were included and the results were valid for all of them. Such a survey of Middle English dialects might yield some interesting results in regard to how the dialects compare with each other; but that is still not the same as studying a standard dialect which is more officially sanctioned or representative than others. It was in fact Chaucer’s own, London-based dialect, which came closest to acting as such a standard at the time. A comprehensive survey of Middle English dialects falls outside the scope of this thesis, and the term ‘Middle English’ is here used as a convenient way of referring to the specific dialect used by Chaucer, unless it is explicitly stated otherwise.

Since this investigation is based on a modern edition of Chaucer’s works, it is important to bear in mind that this also constitutes an interpretation of the texts. However, apart from working with the original manuscripts, one can do little but trust the work of the editors of Houghton Mifflin and other publishers.

3.4.3 Prose and verse

Both verse and prose are represented in the texts which the corpus is based on, but it is assumed that this does not constitute a major dividing line in Chaucer’s language as far as the topic of existential constructions is concerned. Roscow (1981: 11) cites studies which have established ‘the bounds within which deviations were permitted, thereby providing evidence to refute any claim that that ME. writers, especially the poets, enjoyed a freedom of word-order amounting to licence.’ With a few exceptions, most notably some adjectival constructions, there are no major differences in word-order between Chaucer’s

verse and his prose according to Roscow. This is further discussed in chapter 4 in light of the corpus data which the present thesis is based on.

However, even if the writers and poets at Chaucer's time had enjoyed an extremely great freedom of choice in questions of grammar, it is hard to imagine a speech community without any notions of what constitutes a valid utterance. If a language is to function in its capacity of communicative tool, it needs certain rules (regarding both grammar and pragmatics) for that communication to be effective. The rules may differ, but they are most certainly present. We must therefore discard any notion that Middle English was 'primitive' and not effective from a communicative point of view. Middle English is simply a different language from Present-day English and both are languages of their times, suited for the communicative purposes of their times.⁷ These purposes are of course different and this may sometimes cause us to judge Middle English by the rules that have developed in Present-day English, which may lead to an unfortunate labeling of the former as being 'illogical and undisciplined' (Roscow, 1981: 7). In fact, Spearing (1972: 47, in Roscow 1981: 7) proposes that 'fourteenth-century English falls naturally into [...] physical conceptions of events'; i.e. what might in Present-day English be apprehended as abstract could be conceived of as more concrete in Middle English.

As pointed out in section 3.2.3 above, Lakoff and Johnson propose that by using metaphors, we express something in terms of something else (1980: 5). As most of the examples of metaphors above show, an abstract proposition is often expressed in terms of something concrete. Sweetser points out that not only historical research, but also research on contemporary creoles as well as studies in children's language development concerning the meaning of modals, show a tendency for abstract meaning to develop from concrete meaning (Sweetser 1990: 50). Section 2.5 above presented Traugott's suggestion that the repeated use of a morpheme in a special context could give it an added, abstract meaning. Sweetser (1990: 49-75) uses this model to discuss how the English modal auxiliaries have evolved an abstract, or 'epistemic,' meaning, in addition to their concrete, or 'root' meaning⁸ (further discussed in chapter 4). Thus, without passing any qualitative judgments, it would seem reasonable to expect a tendency towards more concrete or physical meaning associated with certain Middle English morphemes that have since acquired and added, abstract meaning in Present-day English.

This highlights the flexibility in the human cognitive capability of mental imagery and construal (Taylor 2002: 11) discussed in section 3.2.1 above; that is, to structure events in different ways, as well as our ability to use metaphor in order to understand one entity in terms of another (cf. section 3.3 above). There is no reason to expect this general cognitive ability to limit itself to works of poetry only.

Whether Chaucer's poetry is seen as essentially different from his prose or not, it is hard to understand how he could have won such acclaim in his own lifetime if his audience had deemed his language to be ungrammatical. Chaucer's success with a contemporary audience could perhaps be taken as support of a view of both his prose and his verse as representative samples of Middle English. Of course, the language in Chaucer's texts is no accurate reflection of the spoken language. Being literary texts, they belong to a very different genre. However, at the time when Chaucer wrote, literature was written not to be read in solitary silence, but rather to be read out aloud (Benson 1987: xlvii, McDowall 1989: 64). For this reason, it is perhaps not unreasonable to assume that although the texts are examples of literature and not transcriptions of spoken language, they are nevertheless closer to the spoken language than a business contract or some other official or legal document. Crystal (1995: 38) points out that despite the fact that Chaucer uses a regular metrical structure, rhyme and other such features of poetry in much of his works, '[i]n no other author, indeed, is there better support for the view that there is an underlying correspondence between the natural rhythm of English poetry and that of English everyday conversation.'

3.4.4 Introspection and intuition vs. empirical research

This question is important because it determines not only the approach to the material examined in a very fundamental way, but also the choice of material itself. For instance, should the linguist use his or her 'own' vocabulary or rely on a corpus gathered from various native speakers? Should the linguist's theories and conclusions be tested on a control group of native speakers or left to his or her own judgment? In a historical survey the answer to this question is given. Since no native speakers of Middle English are alive, no introspection is possible and the language can only be examined through corpora based on historical documents. And again it is important to keep in mind that this is in

fact, a separate language and not some unpolished, imperfect stage of a development destined to move 'forwards' to Present-day English. Languages, of course, move neither forwards nor backwards; they simply change as the native speakers of a given language gradually use it in different ways to express different concepts as their surroundings change in terms of cultural norms and technological innovations. The fact that there is some mutual intelligibility between Chaucer's Middle English and Present-day English which enables us to read his texts with relative ease, should not make us forget that it is a separate language with no native speakers alive today.

This poses a particular difficulty to those working with historical material from a cognitive point of view, namely how to decide what the native speaker(s) actually meant by the letters carefully written down in manuscripts hundreds of years ago. Lakoff (2004: COGLING e-mail list) points out the difficulty of assigning meaning to other people's utterances, saying that '[s]ince you have a better idea of what **you** mean than you can have of what other people mean, your semantic introspection is more likely to be accurate when you are working on your own "corpus" than when you are working with other people's utterances.' When working with contemporary material, however, this can be at least partially offset by corroborating the findings with evaluations made by native speakers. This is of course not possible in historical studies. In any event there is nevertheless the inevitable interpretation by the linguist. As Lakoff puts it, 'you need to interpret the data—to give it meaning. The meaning doesn't occur in the corpus data. [...] There is no empirical research in cognitive linguistics without introspection. The idea that there is an empirical research / introspection contrast makes no sense at all in our field' (2004: COGLING e-mail list).

Suzie Bartsch, though agreeing with Lakoff that the linguist's interpretation (based on a certain degree of introspection) is inescapable, proposes that we in fact have three interrelated continua, concerning introspection, empiricism and formality (2004: COGLING e-mail list). A given approach can have a high or a low degree of introspection; it can be more or less empirical in nature; and finally, more formal with an emphasis on abstractness or less formal with a more cognitive-functional perspective. Bartsch takes the position that a cognitive approach should rely primarily on empirical data coupled with (non-linguist) native speakers' judgments, and less on introspection on

the part of the linguist. However, she disagrees with Lakoff by claiming that ‘meaning does occur in the corpus data and our task is to attempt to find it out’ (2004: COGLING e-mail list).

The present thesis attempts to avoid both the positions proposed by Lakoff and Bartsch above. Thus, the corpus on which this study is based is not just seen as a source of utterances on which judgments of grammaticality may be passed, based on intuitive interpretations of semantic content. But neither is the ‘The Meaning’ seen as something existing ‘out there’ which can be ‘found’. Instead, it is attempted to take a middle position. Although the present thesis is based on the assumption that ‘meaning’ does not occur independently in a corpus material as such, it is nevertheless assumed that there are some conclusions which can be drawn from the corpus material. And even if the meaning of these results is in a sense constructed by the interpretations of the author, the results are still consequences of very specific tasks performed on the corpus data and those data must obviously be taken into account when formulating the conclusions to the investigation. When tests are performed on a corpus material, some features are tested and some are left out. This influences the results of the tests and thus the interpretations and conclusions which can be drawn from them. It is thus a bit simplistic to say that Cognitive Linguistics has no empirical research vs. introspection distinction. Both the choice of material and methods of dealing with that material will influence the linguist’s interpretations in some way.

Thus, the question of empirical research versus introspection and intuition has some relevance to both how the material should be treated and the legitimacy of the conclusions based on it. In section 3.4.5 some possible ways of overcoming this problem are discussed.

3.4.5 Some possible solutions

The list of problems discussed above is not exhaustive, as only those considered to be most relevant to the discussion in the present thesis have been dealt with. Some of these problems are not easily solved, but that does not, in my opinion, mean that a cognitive perspective has no place in historical linguistics. It is, however, important to keep these problems in mind and try to minimize their effects.

The present thesis is a cognitive study of corpus data and, as pointed out above (section 3.4.4), distributional characteristics of the corpus material will serve in a supporting role to an intuitive analysis. Following Bartsch's proposal of three continua, this study can be described as empirical, in that the corpus consists of representations of utterances formulated in the late 14th century. Furthermore, it is cognitive-functional, as the focus is on how cognitive factors may have contributed to the evolution of meaning in the morpheme *there*. And finally, it involves a high degree of intuition and introspection on my part, since there are no native speakers on which to test the hypotheses presented. However, a native speaker would also have to rely on intuition and introspection. True, if enough native speakers agree that an utterance is grammatical, it probably is. And if enough native speakers agree on the classifications of the mental representations which an utterance is based on, the linguist is probably on the right track. Nevertheless, it is still a matter of introspection and intuitive thinking at some point. When working on historical material, there are obviously no native speakers around. Instead, certain distributional characteristics of the corpus data will, in combination with the theoretical apparatus of Cognitive Linguistics, in the present study serve as a basis for intuitive interpretations of the status of *there* in Middle English.

3.4.5.1 The metaphors

One of the foundations of this thesis is that some conceptual metaphors are so basic to human experience and cognition that they have not changed considerably over the past 600 years, e.g. UNKNOWN IS UP AND KNOWN IS DOWN. This conceptual metaphor is presumably based on the fact that gravity makes it easier to examine something if it is on the ground than if it is flying through the air high above you (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 20). It is not unreasonable to assume that a concept based on a force of nature like gravity was equally potent in the days of Chaucer as it is today. There is in fact evidence of metaphors in Chaucer resembling some of those that are operational in Present-day English:

- (3.5) What asketh men to have? / Now with his love, now in his colde grave /
Allone, withouten any compaignye. (KT: 2778-2779)

In sentence (3.5), death (i.e. nonexistence) is presented as a solitary existence in a different place (the cold, lonely grave), making it a good example of the NONEXISTENCE IS LOCATION AWAY metaphor. This metaphor is also expressed in (3.6), where being dead is expressed as existing in a house (i.e. physical location) in another place:

(3.6) His spirit changed hous and wente ther, / As I cam nevere, I can nat tellen wher.
(KT: 2809-2810)

(3.7) The coold of deeth, that hadde hym overcome, (KT: 2800)

Example (3.7) expresses another metaphor which is also found in today's language (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 15): HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP; SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN. In (3.7) the cold of death is construed as a personification which overcomes Arcite, i.e. is over or above him.

(3.8) [Deeth] out of this world this kyng Alla he hente, (MLT, 1144)

In sentence (3.8), the world (i.e. physical existence) is presented as a container which king Alla is taken out of, prompting us to see a land area (the world) as a container. This metaphor also exists in Present-day English (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 29).

This is of course not meant as a claim that any conceptual metaphor in Present-day English can be found in Middle English. I simply propose that some of the more basic (in the sense of dealing with existence, location and orientation) conceptual metaphors discussed in relation to existential constructions probably were a part of the English linguistic system in the 14th century.

3.4.5.2 Frequencies of occurrence

As mentioned above, the lack of native speakers of Middle English makes it impossible to test linguistic hypotheses concerning this language through interviews or experiments. However, based on the assumption that the boundary between grammatical and

ungrammatical statements is fuzzy, rather than sharp, a different approach may be employed to test the acceptability of the hypotheses presented.

By following Langacker (1987: 52) in assuming that there is no abrupt division between what is linguistically possible and what is not possible, a continuum from the clearly grammatical to the clearly ungrammatical is implicitly established. Furthermore, it is assumed that the frequency of a given construction is an indication of its degree of grammaticality; and that this continuum corresponds to one of prototypicality, where the most prototypical or central constructions will occur more often than the noncentral constructions. Pinker (1995: 113-114) points out that the fact that '[p]eople do not remember an arbitrary pairing (like a name with a face, or a treaty with a date) perfectly on a single exposure' is 'an uncontroversial principle in the psychology of memory.' This is also true for grammar, and he gives the example (1995: 114) that if 'children have heard *held* less often, their memory trace for it will be weaker, and retrieval less reliable,' thus producing a non-standard form like *holded*. Adults make mistakes like this as well, though less frequently, especially with a rare form like the past tense of certain irregular verbs like *shend*, *stride*, *cleave* and *geld* (*shent*, *strode*, *clove* and *gelt*, respectively). The low frequency of these forms cause adults to make mistakes like *shended* and *gelded*, and Pinker refers to a study by Ullmann (1993 in Pinker 1995: 120) which found that 'the more often the irregular version of one of these verbs is found in the written language, compared with the regular version, the better the irregular form sounded to people.'

Pinker's point is that repeated exposure triggers retrieval of the correct form of the verbs, which is not really what the investigation in the present thesis is concerned with. However, it is not irrelevant. As Lakoff points out in his case-study of *there* (1987: 537), radial structures are employed in grammar as well as in the lexicon to minimize the 'arbitrariness of form-meaning correspondences.' Presumably, if a grammatical construction or morpheme is well-motivated through a radial structure (i.e. is a central member of the radial category), the form-meaning relationship will be felt to be less arbitrary, thus making retrieval (i.e. use) easier. Lakoff (1987: 438) makes this claim, but qualifies it by pointing out that '[w]hat is being explained is not why those expressions mean what they mean, but why those are natural meanings for them to have.' One could consequently assume that these forms would be used more often by the speakers since

they would feel more 'right' on the central/grammatical- noncentral/ungrammatical scale. This would seem like turning Pinker's argument upside down, but all the irregular verbs listed above have very low frequencies of occurrence. Pinker refers to Bybee's (in Pinker 1995: 121) investigation of 33 irregular Old English verbs that also exist in Present-day English, of which 18 had become regular. Bybee found that the past tense forms of the 15 verbs that still were irregular had a mean frequency of 137 per million words (Pinker 1995: 121). In other words, Pinker refers to noncentral members of the verb category, which are, possibly by virtue of being less well-motivated through a radial structure, noncentral and thus harder to learn, remember and use, which could be a contributing factor to a correspondingly low frequency of occurrence.

A high frequency of occurrence in a corpus could thus be taken as an indication of 'cognitive entrenchment' as the term is used by Langacker, caused by the prototypicality of the construction. Langacker (1987: 59) views cognitive entrenchment as a continuum, in which symbolic units (see section 3.2.1.1) are organized according to their degree of automatization, based on their frequency. This automatization, or 'habit', is the result of a process where a sound or segment acquires 'unit status', which means that it no longer needs to be constructed. Instead, the speaker is able to immediately access the entire unit without constructing it from its constituent parts (Langacker 1987: 57-58). Thus, a well-motivated, prototypical form would presumably be very easy to learn and use and would as a result of this be expected to occur quite often. A noncentral form, on the other hand, would, as Pinker's article suggests, take more effort both to learn and use and consequently occur less often in a corpus. However, a low frequency is not taken as a defining characteristic of a noncentral construction in itself. The distinction central/noncentral is based on to what degree the construction corresponds to the central, prototypical construction (i.e. syntactic criteria). By looking at the frequencies of occurrence, this study attempts to indicate the relationship between various noncentral constructions and the central construction. It is thus to be expected that a structure which is noncentral will occur less frequently. Thence, it is assumed that any noncentral category identified in the corpus material will reflect to what degree it is prototypical through its frequency. In other words, a given form or construction may be unusual in terms of grammatical acceptability, but that does not automatically mean that it will not

be used or occur in a corpus. It simply means that it might occur less frequently in a corpus material due to a relatively low degree of cognitive entrenchment.

3.5 FileMaker categories

The foundation for the theoretical discussion of the status of *there*₁ in Middle English is the analysis carried out on the corpus data collected from Chaucer's works. The categories in section 3.5.1 have been employed in FileMaker as a basis for categorizing the clauses in the corpus. This quantitative survey of various features provides the data to which the theoretical apparatus of Cognitive Linguistics is applied. See the appendix for an example of a FileMaker record.

3.5.1 Word order patterns

This section presents the different word order patterns and the criteria for assigning a clause to a given pattern. In the present thesis, the notation 'S' denotes the (logical) subject in cases where the subject is realized by a noun phrase (and not by *there*₁) and occurs in front of the verb phrase. 'T' denotes *there*₁ (regardless of the presence or absence of 'S'), 'V' denotes the verbal element and 'X' represents one or more clause elements belonging to any other class. In order to keep the notation simple, not all possible variations are covered through the use of these three-letter descriptions, as illustrated by (3.10) and (3.12) below.

3.5.1.1 STV

Clauses belonging to the STV pattern have the logical subject in initial position followed by *there*₁ and the predicator. This non-canonical structure thus has two elements that in Present-day English are mutually exclusive in initial position (viz. the formal subject *there*₁ and the logical subject in the form of an indefinite noun phrase) preceding the verbal element. This is illustrated below in (3.9) and (3.10). Note that in (3.10) the verbal element is followed by two adverbials.

(3.9) A KNYGHT ther was (GP: 43)

(3.10) Many fair shap and many fair visage/

Ther passeth thurgh his herte nyght by nyght, (MerT: 1580-81)

3.5.1.2 SVT

In the SVT pattern exemplified in (3.10) and (3.11) below, *there_I* follows the verbal element, but is otherwise similar to STV in that S and T do not occur in their canonical positions.

Note that in (3.12) an adverbial element precedes the subject.

(3.11) A MARCHANT was ther (GP: 270)

(3.12) In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon (GP: 449)

3.5.1.3 TVX

In TVX clauses, *there_I* functions as subject and this is the prototypical form of the existential clause as it is found in Present-day English, with *there_I* preceding the verbal element which is followed by a noun phrase. In Chaucer, the T element may be preceded by another element, typically some kind of prepositional phrase as seen in (3.13).

(3.13) With hym ther was a Plowman (GP: 529)

(3.14) Ther was also a reve (GP: 542)

3.5.1.4 VTX

The VTX pattern has the verbal element preceding *there_I* which functions as subject. The VTX pattern is thus similar to the TVX pattern, with the exception of the order of the syntactic elements. The VTX pattern usually has some other element (typically an adverbial) in clause initial position, as seen in the examples below.

(3.15) In al the halle ne was ther spoken a word (SqT: 86)

(3.16) fro Berwyk into Ware / Ne was ther swich another pardoner. (GP: 692-693)

3.5.1.5 Misc.

This category comprises a number of structures that do not fit the patterns listed above. These are predominantly clauses where *there_i* is to be expected, but does not occur as in (3.17) or they are existential clauses that do not need *there_i* as in (3.18).

(3.17) Was nevere wight, sith that this world bigan, (MkT: 2111)

(3.18) I was atte dore of thyn herte (ParT: 288)

3.5.2 The verb phrase

When classifying existential clauses, the verb phrase⁹ is very important, as indicated by Lakoff's predictions in section 2.3.4 above. The verb phrases have been classified on the basis of the following criteria:

3.5.2.1 Transitive/intransitive

The transitive/intransitive distinction is important, as Present-day English does not allow transitive verbs in the active voice (see sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.3 above).

3.5.2.2 Simple/complex

As Lakoff points out (1987: 551, 570), the central existential construction does not take a complex verb phrase as its predicator in Present-day English. Consequently this feature has been included among the classification criteria.

3.5.2.3 Active/passive voice

In Present-day English, only the passive voice is allowed with transitive verbs in existential clauses (section 2.3 above), making the active/passive distinction a useful feature for examining the contrast between Present-day and Middle English.

3.5.2.4 Lexical verbs

As mentioned above (section 2.3), the canonical verb in Present-day English existential clauses is *be*. The use of other verbs is rare and somewhat restricted (Lakoff 1987: 544 ff). It is therefore interesting to explore which lexical verbs could occur in Middle English existential constructions.

3.5.2.5 Auxiliary verbs

In order to further explore the possible contrast between Lakoff's predictions concerning Present-day English *there*₁ and Middle English *there*₁, the auxiliary verbs have also been included as a separate FileMaker category.

3.5.3 Negation

Iyeiri (2001) notes, as mentioned in section 2.6 above, that negation is a very common feature of Middle English existential constructions, and a separate Filemaker category was included for this feature. The criterion for subsuming a clause under this category is the presence of at least one of the negators such as *ne*, *naht*, *no*, *noon*, *nevere*, or one of the contracted forms *nys*, *nis*, *nas*. The semantic content of the clause is considered less important, as illustrated by the examples below. While the statement in (3.19) can be rephrased as *He was busy*,¹⁰ (3.20) is a 'true' negation in that the existence of all things in the town is denied. (See sections 2.6 above and 4.7 below for further discussion of this feature.)

(3.19) Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas (GP: 321)

(3.20) The toun destroyed, ther was no thyng left. (KT: 2016)

3.5.4 Other features

A number of other features that also have been investigated are briefly mentioned below:

3.5.4.1 Main/subordinate clause

The clauses in the corpus have been marked for whether they occur in a main clause or a subordinate clause. According to Breivik (1983a: 276), *and*-clauses in this period ‘normally exhibit main clause order.’ Thus, *and*-clauses are, for the purposes of the present thesis, treated as main clauses and no distinction is made between simple and coordinated structures.

3.5.4.2 Poetry/prose

As mentioned above (section 3.4.3), the poetry/prose distinction is not expected to be of major significance. However, all clauses have been marked for whether the source material was a poetry or prose text, in order to test this statement.

3.5.4.3 Absence of *there*₁

In section 3.5.1.5 above, it was pointed out that some existential clauses found in the corpus material, have a structure where the morpheme *there*₁ is missing when it normally would be expected. Since Lakoff predicts that *there*₁ normally is present in the central existential construction, this feature has been included as a category in FileMaker.

3.5.4.4 Various comments

A number of various other features were also included in the FileMaker classification-categories. In addition to a *present/past* distinction (which I deemed as rather trivial after investigating the material¹¹), various ad-hoc comments have been made in the textboxes in the FileMaker records. For this reason, there is not a complete 1:1 relationship between the categories used for analyzing the corpus in FileMaker and the topics discussed in chapters four and five.

3.6 Summary

This chapter has been concerned with the theoretical framework of the thesis, the methods employed and methodological problems connected with the analysis. The first part of the chapter focused on the theoretical foundations of Cognitive Linguistics and their implications for the choice of methodology and material. The second part presented the specific ways in which the methodology has been employed. Included in this part was

also a discussion of various problems connected with the material, the chosen approach and attempts at solving them; as well as a description of the categories used for analyzing the material in the computer program FileMaker Pro 5.5.

Notes

¹ A more comprehensive list of 'cognitive sciences' (but with an emphasis on those involving psychology) with additional information can be found in Matlin 2005: 13-21.

² Lakoff (1987: 271-272) points out that we 'conceptualize an enormous number of activities in CONTAINER terms.'

³ Gibbs and Colston give various examples of a total of 35 different uses of *stand*, such as *stand at attention, it stands to reason* and *don't stand for such treatment* (1995: 353).

⁴ 'Phonological' is here to be understood in a wide sense, encompassing not only audible representations of language, but also e.g. writing and sign language (Taylor 2002: 21).

⁵ In Vietnamese, on the other hand, there is a phonemic difference. There is no inherent quality in these sounds which should cause them to be categorized as distinctive or not, and the classification is thus completely arbitrary from a phonological perspective (Haslev 1985: 57).

⁶ Several theories have been proposed as explanations for the actual process of visual object recognition by which we recognize and classify e.g. letters. Some of these theories are presented in Matlin (2005: 38-44).

⁷ George K. Zipf has summed up the general motivation for language change in the following manner: 'Man talks in order to get something' (Zipf 1949: 19 in Blank 1999: 63).

⁸ In modals, 'root' meaning is characterized as 'permission' or 'ability', as in *John must be home by ten*, whereas 'epistemic' meaning denotes 'probability' or 'possibility', as in *John must be home already* (Sweetser 1990: 49).

⁹ In the present thesis, the term 'verb phrase' is used for all realizations of the verbal element in the clauses. Lakoff (1987) states that in the central existential construction, only a simple verb form may occur, whereas in some noncentral constructions a verb phrase may occur. However, following Quirk et al. (1985) all verbal elements in the present survey are seen as verb phrases, categorized either as a simple or a complex verb phrase.

¹⁰ This is what Iyeiri (2001: 116) labels 'figurative negation.' However, it still expresses the concept of NEGATION.

¹¹ Bolinger (1977: 99) notes that '[t]he simple tenses, past and present, virtually monopolize the field.' In my corpus, 340 clauses were in the simple present, while 205 were in the simple past tense. This makes the total number of clauses in the simple present or past tense 545 (83.5%). Of the remaining clauses, a large number are in the present progressive, but as no indication was found that the choice of tense or aspect would significantly influence the conclusions of the investigation, the topic was not pursued further.

CHAPTER 4

DISTRIBUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EXISTENTIAL CLAUSES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the corpus data and their distributional characteristics. The subsequent sections address the following main topics: Word order patterns, the verb phrase, the noun phrase, final phrases, the presence and absence of *there*₁, negation and some additional minor features. The data presented in this chapter are the result of the analysis performed on the FileMaker categories posited in chapter 3, section 3.5 above.

4.2 Word order patterns

Describing existential clauses at the clause-level involves looking at the word order patterns that are attested in the corpus. As mentioned above (section 2.3.4), Lakoff (1987: 544 ff) makes a number of predictions concerning the characteristics of Present-day English *there*₁ and some of these predictions, numbers 12, 13 and 15, deal with the order of elements in an existential clause. According to Lakoff, *there*₁ is the first syntactic element in a prototypical, or central, existential construction, while the noun phrase is the last; the verbal element precedes the noun phrase. It is therefore interesting to see whether Middle English allows other word order patterns in existential clauses than Present-day English does.

The word order patterns described in section 3.5.1 above are presented in terms of distributional characteristics in tables 4.1 and 4.2. This will give at least some indication of the order of clause elements in Middle English, although the word order in itself is not a marker of centrality or noncentrality as far as classification of existential clauses in the present thesis is concerned.

Table 4.1 summarizes the distribution of word order patterns in Middle English existential clauses.

Table 4.1: Word order distribution in Middle English existential clauses

Word order pattern	N	%
STV	12	1.8
SVT	18	2.7
TVX	498	76.3
VTX	84	12.9
Misc.	41	6.3
Total	653	100

The summary in table 4.1 is broken down to allow for more details in table 4.2 below, where the word order patterns are marked for occurrence in main or subordinate clauses.¹ Additionally, the table shows whether the source material is a poetry or prose text.

Table 4.2: Word order distribution in main and subordinate existential clauses

Word order pattern	Poetry				Prose			
	Main clause		Sub clause		Main clause		Sub clause	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
STV	10	1.5	2	0.3	-	-	-	-
SVT	13	2.0	5	0.7	-	-	-	-
TVX	154	23.6	185	28.3	90	13.8	69	10.6
VTX	19	3.0	26	4.0	27	4.1	12	1.8
Misc.	16	2.4	17	2.6	5	0.8	3	0.5
Total	212	32.5	235	35.9	123	18.9	83	12.7

It is evident from tables 4.1 and 4.2 that the STV and SVT patterns are quite infrequent and limited to poetry texts. It is possible that these patterns are variations that prevent the text from becoming monotonous when a high number of new characters are being introduced; that is, they function as some kind of literary device. Alternatively, since these patterns occur in poetry, metrical or rhythmical considerations might influence the word order, as proposed by Breivik (1983a: 351). These considerations would to a certain degree go hand in hand, and consequently neither possibility excludes the other.

Regarding the TVX, VTX and Misc. patterns, there is a difference in frequencies of occurrence between poetry and prose. This difference between poetry and prose in the distribution of word order patterns is statistically significant in regard to main clauses, but not subordinate clauses. In view of the low number of occurrences in some categories this difference should perhaps be regarded as a general rule of thumb. Nevertheless, this indicates that the main clauses in the poetry texts allow a greater variation in word order patterns than the prose main clauses do; that is, the differences in word order patterns in main clauses are greater than what would normally be expected. In other words, it would appear that the poetry/prose distinction does make a difference in the choice of clause pattern, which could be seen as qualifying Roscow's (1981) statement (section 3.4.3 above) that there were no major differences between Chaucer's poetry and prose.² This indicates that the relative position of *there*₁ within the clause should be used with some caution in an argumentation regarding the status of this morpheme, at least as far as Middle English is concerned. Bolinger (1977: 112) states that 'when *there* is introduced, only a literal locative can stand to the left of it as part of the presentative expression.' For the most part, this does seem to be the case in the corpus material compiled for the present thesis, but there are exceptions, which (with the reservations stated above) could be seen as an indication that this was not an absolute rule in Middle English. However, the data are far from conclusive.

The dominant pattern in both poetry and prose is the TVX pattern; that is, the same pattern as found in Present-day English with *there*₁ acting as subject, followed by the verb and other clause constituents. However, more interesting for the present thesis is the comparison of the TVX and VTX patterns with Misc. The latter constructions show non-canonical behavior in terms of presence and absence of *there*₁, and the comparison illustrates some of the functions attributed to Middle English *there*₁. The constructions subsumed under these categories will be further discussed in sections 5.5.5 and 5.5.6 below.

4.3 The verb phrase

4.3.1 The importance of the verb phrase

Moving down to the phrase level, the most important feature of existential clauses is the verb phrase, as is evident from the attention dedicated to this clause constituent in sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4 above. Breivik states that *there_I* will not co-occur with a transitive verb in the active voice, and according to Lakoff existential clauses do not contain verbs of motion (prediction number 18) or location (prediction number 6). The prototypical verb found in existential clauses in Present-day English is *be* and this holds true for Middle English as well, as illustrated in table 4.4 below. However, table 4.3 shows that transitive verbs in the active voice do occur, even if they are infrequent compared to the more canonical occurrence of *be* or some other intransitive verb.

Table 4.3: Type of verb phrase in the active vs. passive voice

Type of verb phrase	N	%
Intransitive	563	86.2
Transitive	59	9.0
Linking verb	2	0.3
Passive	29	4.5
Total	653	100

4.3.2 Intransitive verbs

As mentioned above (section 2.3), the prototypical verb in existential clauses is *to be*, and although other intransitive verbs are allowed in Present-day English, they are very rare. However, in the corpus material which forms the basis for the present study, 192 occurrences of non-be lexical verbs are attested, i.e. 29.4 % of the verbs in the corpus are a lexical verb other than *be*. In Present-day English this is usually a verb denoting appearance or existence (Breivik 1983a: 230). However, in Middle English such verbs as *come*, *speke* and *wite* are found in existential clauses which are otherwise similar to the prototypical form.

Table 4.4: Intransitive verbs: *be* vs. non-*be* verbs

Main verb	N	%
<i>Be</i> (simple VP)	433	77.0
<i>Be</i> (complex VP)	19	3.3
Non- <i>be</i> (simple VP)	85	15.1
Non- <i>be</i> (complex VP)	26	4.6
Total	563	100

Below are examples of various existential clauses with intransitive verbs: A simple verb phrase with *be* as main verb (4.1); a complex verb phrase with *be* as main verb (4.2); a simple verb phrase with a non-*be* verb as main verb (4.3) and (4.4); and a complex verb phrase with a non-*be* verb (4.5).

(4.1) A KNYGHT ther was (GP: 43)

(4.2) Yet natheles/ Bitwixe yow ther moot be some tyme pees, (KT: 2474)

(4.3) With hym ther rood a gentil pardoner (GP: 669)

(4.4) or elles as manye / rychesses as ther schynen bryghte sterres in / hevene on the sterry nyghtes; (Bo, II. Metr. 2: 5-7)

(4.5) Whilom ther was dwellynge at Oxenford a riche gnof, (MilT: 3187)

4.3.3 Transitive verbs

Breivik (1989: 35) points out that in Present-day English, *there*_I cannot occur with a transitive verb in the active voice since these verbs do not convey appearance or existence. However, as table 4.3 shows, this was possible in Middle English. Although the total percentage of transitive verbs in the active voice in the corpus is small (6.4 %), it is nevertheless interesting since this feature would not be found at all in a corpus based on Present-day English texts.

Table 4.5: Transitive verbs: Active (simple vs. complex) vs. passive voice

Type of verb phrase	N	%
Active voice, simple VP	32	36.4
Active voice, complex VP	27	30.7
Passive voice	29	32.9
Total	88	100

Below are examples of transitive verbs in the active voice (with two passive voice examples for comparison), from both Chaucer's poetry and prose:

(4.6) Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette (GP: 280)

(4.7) ther maketh no man himselven riche, (Mel: 1582)

(4.8) Ther kan no man in humblesse hym acquite (CIT: 936)

(4.9) ther may no man taken vengeance on no wight but the the juge... (Mel: 1378)

(4.10) That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene (GP: 134)

(4.11) yif ther were maked comparysoun of / the erthe to the gretenesse of hevene, (Bo, II. Pr.7: 28-29)

(4.6), (4.8) and (4.10) are examples of a transitive verb in the active voice with a simple verb phrase, a complex verb phrase and the passive voice, respectively, taken from poetry texts. Sentences (4.7), (4.9) and (4.11) are examples of the same features, but taken from prose texts. This feature is further discussed in section 5.5.3 below.

4.3.4 Non-*be* verbs

According to Lakoff's prediction number 18, the main verb in the central existential construction is the verb *to be*. Other intransitive verbs may only appear in the noncentral presentational construction, and transitive verbs in the active voice, as pointed out above, cannot occur at all. However, a number of clauses in the corpus do not fit the predictions for the noncentral existential construction. These clauses are further discussed in the subsequent sections. In total, 199 (30.5%) of the existential clauses in the corpus contain a non-*be* verb³ (either as the only verb or as part of a complex verb phrase), with 91 lexical items attested and a total of 201 occurrences of those items:

Table 4.6: Frequencies of non-*be* verbs (simple and complex, active and passive, intransitive and transitive)

Verb	N	%
<i>Come</i>	19	9.4
<i>Dwelle</i>	12	6.0
<i>Go</i>	10	5.0
<i>Lakke</i>	9	4.5
<i>Falle</i>	8	4.0
<i>Stonde</i>	7	3.5
<i>Make</i>	6	3.0
<i>Nede</i>	5	2.5
5 < > 1 occurring verbs	70	34.8
1 occurring verbs	55	27.3
Total	201	100

Below are examples of existential clauses with non-*be* verbs:

(4.12) Til that ther cam a greet geaunt, (Thop: 807)

(4.13) Whilom ther was dwellynge in my contree/ An erchedeken, (FrT: 1301)

(4.14) With hym ther wenten knyghtes many on; (KT: 2118)

(4.15) Ther lakketh noght oonly but day and place (MerT: 1998)

(4.16) For if ther fille tomorwe swich a cas, (KT: 2110)

(4.17) Upon the which brook ther stant a melle; (RvT: 3923)

(4.18) ther maketh no man himselven riche, (Mel: 1582)

(4.19) Ther neden none ensamples of this; (ParT: 926)

(4.20) That, save his wyf, ther wiste of it namo. (WBT: 957)

(4.21) For hym ther wepeth bothe child and man; (KT: 2830)

The following non-*be* verbs were found in the corpus material:

Accorden, acquite, appeere, arace, asterte, availen, bete, bigynne, bihoven, bityde, brynge, clepe, come, comprehend, convicte, cowche, cross, dare, dawe, defoulen, destourben, devyne, devyse, discryve, displese, do away, douten, dryven, dwelle, dye, embrace, enclose, escapen, establishe, expresse, fail, falle, follow, forge, fynde, gayn, go, gynne,⁴ have, help, hold, knele, lakke, leve, liken, lorn, love, lye, lyve, make, mortifie, nede, pass, perisse, ride, run, rysen, see, seme, serven, seye, shal,⁵ shyne, sitte, slaye, sowe, speke, spryngen, stand, stiken, suffer, swere, synke, take, tell, thenke, twynne, tyden, walken, wepe, will, wite, withholde, wonen, writen, wroughten.

Only a few of the verbs listed above are found in Erdmann's (1976 in Breivik 1983a: 231) relatively extensive list of verbs that may occur with *there_i* in Present-day English. This does not necessarily mean that the rest of the verbs on Erdmann's list cannot occur

in Middle English, they are simply not found in the corpus compiled for the present thesis. The following verbs are found in both surveys:

Appear, begin, come, escape, follow, lack, live, pass, rise, shine and stand.

A number of the verbs listed above, such as e.g. *come, go, run, sit* and *stand* are not supposed to occur in the central existential construction according to Lakoff. Nevertheless, Erdmann (1976 in Breivik 1983a: 231) includes both *come* and *stand* among the lexical verbs found in his Present-day English material. However, Lakoff points out that existential clauses like (4.22) and (4.23) below are allowed in Present-day English and Erdmann's cases may be of these types, which are classified as noncentral by Lakoff, and more specifically as a presentational existential construction.

(4.22) There will come a time when you'll be sorry.

(4.23) There ran into the room three strange men dressed as walruses.
(From Lakoff 1987: 551)

The examples from Chaucer, on the other hand show a different behavior. In the following sections some special cases of non-be verbs will be dealt with.

4.3.4.1 Movement verbs

According to Lakoff (1987: 550) no verbs of motion are allowed since entities do not move through mental spaces. Thus the following examples are found to be ill-formed in Present-day English:

(4.24) *There will go a boy to the ballgame.

(4.25) *There can't come any muggers in here.
(From Lakoff 1987: 550)

Lakoff proposes that these constructions, unlike those in (4.22)-(4.23), are not allowed since they do not convey appearance. It follows from this that the presentational constructions above cannot be negated (Lakoff 1987: 573). Although the positive statement in (4.23) above is allowed, the following is not:

(4.26) *There did not run into the room three strange men dressed as walruses.

Yet, in Chaucer, negation does occur as (4.27) exemplifies.

(4.27) Ne noon so grey goos goth ther in the lake (WBP: 269)

Below is another example of movement, with the verb *come*:

(4.28) Doun fro the castel comth ther many a wight / To gauren on this ship and on
Custance. (MLT: 911-912)

Here, it is not a question of presentation or appearance, but rather a description of movement, as is evident from the second line, *To gauren on this ship and on Custance*; that is, the focus here is on the movement through space from the castle to the ship.

With the presentational existential, movement verbs that have the meaning of coming into existence, moving from one location to another or changing into a new state can, according to Lakoff, 'fit more easily than others' (1987: 572), as shown in the following example where a situation evolves into a new state:

(4.29) There arose a commotion.
(From Lakoff 1987: 573)

This use is also found in Chaucer:

(4.30) Ther rose a contek and a gret envye; (Tr, V: 1479)

Here it is probably a question of changing into a new state, in a similar manner to (4.29). The example below, on the other hand, is more ambiguous.

(4.31) Ther spryngen herbes grete and smale, (Thop: 760)

This sentence could be interpreted as the herbs simply existing above ground level, in which case it is not in accordance with Lakoff's predictions concerning this construction. Or the herbs could possibly be seen to spring up and out, thus moving from a state of 'unsprungness' to one of being fully developed, which would allow it to fit Lakoff's theory better. The next sentence, however, is obviously not dealing with either changing into a state, coming into existence or moving from one location to another.

(4.32) Of which ther ryseth swich fumositee (PardT: 567)

This sentence deals with motion, as it would make little sense to argue that the smoke is moving from one location to another. It simply moves, or rises, through space. These constructions are further discussed in section 5.5.2 below.

4.3.4.2 Location verbs

As Lakoff (1987: 544) points out, '[t]he basic-level locational verbs *sit*, *stand*, and *lie* cannot occur in the central existential construction.' Just as was the case with motion verbs, verbs dealing with location ought to be restricted to situations dealing with physical space. Nonetheless, in Chaucer's works, no less than 11 instances have been found of *sit* and *stand*. In the examples below, there is a certain presentational element, as in both cases an entity is being presented or located in relation to an adverbial of place.

(4.33) A woolf ther stood bifron hym at his feet (KT: 2047)

(4.34) Ther sat a faucon over hire heed ful hye, (SqT: 411)

As mentioned above, *stand* also occurs in Erdmann's material of Present-day English, but presumably not in constructions subsumed under the term central existential in Lakoff's model. *Sit* may occur in Present-day English as a part of the presentational existential, as exemplified below:

(4.35) In the cubicle there was sitting alone a pretty young woman writing a term paper.
(From Lakoff 1987: 570)

However, a sentence like (4.36) below is inconsistent with the presentational existential as described by Lakoff.

(4.36) But ther sat oon, al list hire nought to teche, / That thoughte, 'Best koud I yet ben his leche.' (Tr, II: 1581-1582)

Here, a new element is introduced, but no scene is described as in (4.35) above. Additionally, the information content of the noun phrase is very low (realized by the pronoun *oon*), and Lakoff predicts that the indefinite pronoun *one* will not occur here, as he considers the sentences below ungrammatical:

(4.37) a. *There arose one.
b. *There ensued one.
c. *There entered one.
(From Lakoff 1987: 573)

These constructions, which do not fit either the central existential or the presentational existential, are further discussed in section 5.5.1 below.

4.3.4.3 Help/lack/need verbs

According to Lakoff, any intransitive verb should be able to occur in the presentational existential, provided that 'the verb phrase functions to set up an appropriate background for the noun phrase' (Lakoff 1987: 572). Thus, with an intransitive verb like *bleed*, which

denotes a process rather than a background situation, the following sentence becomes ungrammatical:

(4.38) *There bled a hemophiliac.

(From Lakoff 1987: 572)

However, a number of constructions (18, to be specific) occur in Chaucer where the verb does not set up such a background as required by the presentational existential. These verbs are passive in meaning, but have been analyzed as transitive verbs in the active voice for the purposes of the present thesis. However, their passive meaning warrants a separate category.

(4.39) Ther helpeth noht; al goth that ille weye. (KT: 3033)

(4.40) Ther lakketh noht oonly but day and place (MerT: 1998)

(4.41) Ther neden none ensamples of this; (ParT: 926)

In these sentences *there*₁ occurs with verbs that denote existence in some form, i.e. not involved in setting up a background. This topic is further discussed in section 5.5.4 below.

4.3.5 Linking verbs

In the present thesis, the term linking verb is restricted to verbs that identify some kind of quality of the subject. Two instances of linking verbs have been included in the discussion of the verb phrase.

(4.42) For he was yet in memorie and alyve, (KT: 2698)

(4.43) she trowed that he was in maladye (MilT: 3416)

Although describing a quality of the subjects, being ‘alive’ and ‘ill’, respectively, the structure of these clauses makes it relevant to include them in the corpus. Metaphorically, the state of health or existence is here expressed as EXISTENCE in a LOCATION via a container metaphor, which could be taken as an indication of a close connection between EXISTENCE, LOCATION and POSSESSION. Since qualities (both permanent and temporary) are seen as being possessed by an entity (as in e.g. *She **has** a bad temper* and *He **has** a serious disease*), this could be interpreted as some kind of connection between these concepts, at least when the qualities involved are seen as relevant to the notion of EXISTENCE as in (4.42) and (4.43).

4.3.6 Modal auxiliary verbs

Lakoff makes no specific prediction concerning modals. To the extent that his noncentral cases have complex verb phrases, the examples usually contain one of the primary auxiliaries. However, he points out (1987: 520) that the presentational deictic (i.e. one of the noncentral *there*₂ constructions, see section 2.3.4 above) can occur with ‘full auxiliaries’, which is relevant to the present discussion as it designates, either directly or indirectly, a location. Table 4.7 presents the modal auxiliaries found in the corpus.

Table 4.7: Modals

Modal	N	%
<i>May</i>	31	46.2
<i>Shall</i>	14	20.9
<i>Must</i>	7	10.4
<i>Should</i>	5	7.5
<i>Can</i>	4	6.0
<i>Might</i>	4	6.0
<i>Could</i>	2	3.0
Total	67	100

The use of the modals is illustrated in the sentences below:

- (4.44) Ther may no man clepen it cowardye. (KT: 2730)
- (4.45) Honour is eek cleped greet lordshipe; ther shal no wight serven other, but of harm and torment. (ParT: 189)
- (4.46) And therefore ther moote been marchantz to bryngen fro that o contree to that oother hire marchandises. (ParT: 778)
- (4.47) That nevere sholde ther be defaute in here. (FranT: 779)
- (4.48) Ther kan no man in humblesse hym acquite (CIT: 936)
- (4.49) Ther myghte ben no fairer creature. (Tr, V: 808)
- (4.50) Ther koude no man brynge hym in arrerage (GP: 602)

(4.46), (4.47) and (4.49) are examples of intransitive clauses, the rest are transitive. Although this is not proportionally in accordance with the frequencies of occurrence in the corpus data, it illustrates a general tendency for modals to occur with transitive verbs. Of the existential clauses with modals, 30 (44.8 %) occur with transitive verbs, the rest with intransitive verbs. When we consider that there are only 71 clauses in the corpus containing transitive verbs, while 580 contain intransitive verbs (10.9 % and 88.8 % respectively⁶), it would seem that the modals do tend to occur with transitive verbs to a higher degree than one would otherwise expect.⁷

The semantics of the modals could possibly have an impact on the meaning of *there*₁. Sweetser (1990: 50) argues that the *epistemic*, or abstract, meaning of modal verbs is motivated by their *root*, or concrete, meanings rather than being a separate, unrelated meaning. Whereas the former is often seen as involving ‘force or obligation’, the latter is often associated with logical possibility. By applying an analysis involving mapping from the physical to the epistemic domain, Sweetser attempts to show how the epistemic meaning is motivated by the root meaning through the semantics of force dynamics, more

specifically ‘forces’ and ‘barriers’ (Sweetser 1990: 51-52). She suggests that *may* and *must* are ‘the most clearly force dynamic modals’ (1990: 52). The corpus data show that *may* is the most frequent modal in existential clauses, and it is interesting to speculate if the reason for this could be a metaphorical connection between the locativeness (or concreteness) of certain *there*₁ constructions and the force dynamic nature of *may*. According to Sweetser (1990: 74), the extension of modal root meanings to abstract mental spaces, allow the root meanings to motivate the epistemic meanings of the morphemes. This is certainly parallel to the relationship between *there*₁ and *there*₂, but whether the application of forces and barriers to a mental space can be seen as evidence of locativeness is uncertain. However tempting it is to project Sweetser’s analysis of modals in terms of physical and sociophysical forces and barriers onto a more concrete or locative interpretation of the mental space designated by *there*₁; more research than what is possible within the scope of the present thesis is needed before any substantial claims can be made on this topic.

4.4 The noun phrase

In prediction number 11, Lakoff (1987: 545) states that no noun phrases with a definite article can occur in the central existential construction, simply because ‘[t]he function of the construction is to focus the hearer’s awareness on the referent of the construction.’ In other words, if the construction is to function as an awareness device, then it must direct the awareness at something which the hearer was not previously aware of. The following sentence is thus not permitted in Present-day English:

(4.51) *There wasn’t the man in the room.

(From Lakoff 1987: 545)

However, the definite article is allowed if the noun phrase is not specific (Lakoff 1987: 546), as in the example below.

(4.52) There was the usual argument in class today.

(From Lakoff 1987: 546)

In Chaucer, three examples of existential clauses with definite noun phrases have been found, of which one is of the same type as (4.52) above, while at least two of the others have a noun phrase which is both definite and specific. Consider e.g. the following:

(4.53) But certes, to the harmes that I have, / ther bytideth yit this encrees of harm, that
the gessynge... (Bo,I. Pr. 4: 281-282)

Bolinger (1977: 102) notes that even in Present-day English a definite noun phrase is possible with ‘an appropriate setting which can be described by the action,’ which is close to Lakoff’s description of the presentational existential (1987:570). As mentioned in section 2.3.4 above, the presentational existential functions to bring a new entity into a narrative, and it is possible that the definite noun phrase in (4.53) is some sort of anaphoric *the*, i.e. a literary device used to create what Bolinger (1977: 111) calls ‘a kind of artificial continuity.’ (4.53) could thus be seen as an instance of the presentational existential.

4.5 Final phrases

Lakoff points out (1987: 549) that existential constructions have ‘final phrases’, optional elements which broadly correspond to the meanings of ‘location,’ ‘manner’ and ‘comparison.’ These elements can be realized by prepositional phrases, non-finite clauses or adjective phrases. However, some final phrases are not allowed in the central existential construction in Present-day English. Adjectives describing a quality of the noun phrase are problematic, as illustrated below.

(4.54) *There is a man tall.

(From Lakoff 1987: 550)

In Chaucer, we find the following examples of this construction in Middle English:

(4.55) ne ther nys no man siker / that sche ne hath nat forsake. (Bo, II. Pr. 1: 72-73)

(4.56) And, deere sire, for as muchel as ther is no man certein if he be worthy that God yeve hym victorie or naught, (Mel: 1663)

However, this could be a question of inherent vs. noninherent qualities, as *tall* is an inherent, or permanent, quality in a person, while *certain* is temporary and determined by the situation. In the following clauses, on the other hand, a temporary interpretation seems unlikely:

(4.57) Ther is no man kan deemen, by any fey, (SmT: 2236)

(4.58) Ther nys no man so wys that koude thenche, (MilT: 3253)

These sentences contain adjectives describing inherent or permanent qualities, since ‘being able to judge’ and ‘being wise’ must be considered relatively permanent states, at least once they have been reached or acquired. Milsark (1979: 211) refers to these two types of adjectives as ‘property’ and ‘state-descriptive’ respectively. According to Milsark, ‘properties are those facts about entities which are assumed to be, even if they are not in fact, permanent, unalterable, and in some sense possessed by the entity, while states are conditions which are, at least in principle, transitory’ (1979: 212). He proposes that in existential clauses, only state-descriptive adjectives can occur as final phrases with an ‘unambiguous cardinality word.’ In Milsark’s interpretation, cardinality words, such as the indefinite article *a/an* and numerical expressions like *two* or *fifty*, contrast with quantifier words like e.g. *the*, *each*, *most* and *two of the*, *fifty of the*; where the former ‘specify the size of the class involved, while [the latter] express quantification over (part of) the class under consideration’ (Breivik 1983b: 355). Thus, (4.59a) is unambiguously grammatical since *a* expresses cardinality. *Some* on the other hand, can be either cardinal or quantificational (Breivik 1983b: 355). A weakly stressed form of *some* (written ‘sm’), such as in (4.59b), gives a cardinal meaning; that is, it refers to a class of people, all of whom were sick. While (4.59b) is acceptable, (4.59c) is not. This is a quantificational

interpretation meaning that a selection of the people was sick, and as a consequence it is not permitted in a construction with *there*₁ with a state-descriptive adjective.

- (4.59) a. There was a man sick.
b. There were sm people sick.
c. *There were some people sick.
(From Breivik 1983b: 357-358)

The clauses in (4.55)-(4.58) can all be given a cardinal interpretation; since *no man* can be seen as specifying the size of a class of people (the fact that the size of the class is zero is less important). But this means that the state descriptive adjectives in (4.55)-(4.56) are grammatical, whereas the property adjectives in (4.57)-(4.58) are not. However, I would propose that *no man* has more or less the same properties as *some*, since a quantificational interpretation is not unreasonable either. *No man* can also refer to a part of the class of men. Although this sub-group contains no members, it can nevertheless be seen as quantification, making the clauses with property adjectives acceptable: Of all men, no men are e.g. wise enough to imagine such a woman as the one referred to in the lines following (4.58). The final phrases of the clauses in the corpus can thus be seen as operating under more or less the same constraints as in Present-day English.

4.6 Absent *there*₁

Although the presence of the morpheme *there*₁ was not regarded as necessary for the classification of a clause as existential, the vast majority of clauses in the corpus do contain *there*₁. Only 37 clauses, or 5.7 %, of the clauses in the corpus do not contain *there*₁. However, among these 37 clauses, 30 are of a type where *there*₁ is absent despite the fact that it would normally be expected (see e.g. section 3.5.1.5 above). This feature is found both in main and in subordinate clauses, in prose and poetry texts.

(4.60) Was nevere wight, sith that this world bigan, (MkT: 2111)

(4.61) That is or was sith that the world bigan. (MancT: 120)

The existence of a zero (or \emptyset) realization of the *there*₁ morpheme is supported by the fact that English (Middle English as well as Present-day English), unlike e.g. Spanish and Latin, requires an overt subject.⁸ As discussed in section 2.4.2 above, Middle English, like Present-day English, has an SVO word order, which requires the presence of an expressed subject in the clause. Despite the fact that examples like those cited above would be considered ungrammatical according to this restraint both in Present-day English and consequently also in Middle English (since they are both SVO languages), eight examples of the first type are found in Chaucer's texts. Additionally, in most languages, the existence of 'linguistic zeroes', i.e. 'the complete absence of linguistic material in a place where we normally expect to hear something' (Labov 1995: 29) is by no means uncommon, and it is not unreasonable to consider the existence of a zero-formal subject. This construction is further discussed in section 5.5.5 below.

Of the 30 clauses that can be argued to have a 'missing' realization of *there*₁, there is one that deserves special attention. As mentioned above (section 2.3), a crucial distinction between the locative adverbial *there*₂ and the existential *there*₁ is that the former contrasts with *here*, whereas the latter does not. This distinction is one of the most basic between the two uses of *there* in Present-day English. Consider the examples below:

- (4.62) a. I left the book *there*₂.
 b. I left the book *here*.

- (4.63) a. *There*₁ is a book on the table.
 b. **Here* is a book on the table.

Sentence (4.63b) is clearly ill-formed according to the grammar of Present-day English, since there is no 'existential *here*' which can function as grammatical subject in an existential clause. Nevertheless, we do find the following construction:

- (4.64) *Here* is a book and a pencil.

The grammaticality of (4.64) is due to the fact that this construction could (according to Lakoff) be classified either as a delivery deictic (1987: 522) or as a presentational deictic (1987: 520). The classification would depend on the circumstances. In most cases the delivery deictic would probably be the preferred classification, but a presentational function would be acceptable if the noun phrase was considered sufficiently significant, e.g. as in *Here is a book and a pencil that used to belong to George Washington*.

However, in Chaucer's texts, the following sentence occurs:

(4.65) Here nys no peril, (Bo, I. Pr. 2: 18)

This sentence clearly corresponds to Present-day English in the following way:

(4.66) There is no peril here.

The more canonical construction with *there*₁ is also found in Chaucer:

(4.67) Now woot I wel, ther is no peril inne. (Tr, II: 875)

Another construction was also available, as illustrated below:

(4.68) Nas nevere yet seyn thyng to ben preysed derre, (Tr, I: 174)

If sentence (4.65) were of this type, one could hypothesize that it could have been formulated thus: *?Nys no peril here*.⁹ The question is thus whether (4.65) is to be analyzed as containing an existential *here*₁ or as having an initial locative adverbial and a zero *there*₁. This construction is further discussed in section 5.5.6 below.

4.7 Negation

As mentioned above (section 2.6), Iyeiri (2001) has found that there is an especially close link between negation and existential clauses in Middle English. Table 4.8 below lists the

occurrence of negative existential clauses in relation to word order distribution in the corpus.

Table 4.8: Negation and word order distribution

Word order pattern	N	%
STV	1	0.3
SVT	10	2.8
TVX	281	78.5
VTX	47	13.1
Misc.	19	5.3
Total	358	100

358 clauses or 54.8 % of the clauses in the corpus contain some negative particle. This is in correspondence with Iyeiri's material, which shows that the use of negation in existential clauses 'seems to be almost conventionalized, although not exactly to the extent of consistency' (Iyeiri 2001: 119).¹⁰ Table 4.9 below presents the distribution of negative clauses between poetry and prose texts.

Table 4.9: Negation and word order distribution in main and subordinate clauses

Word order pattern	Poetry				Prose			
	Main clause		Sub clause		Main clause		Sub clause	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
STV	-	-	1	0.3	-	-	-	-
SVT	6	1.7	4	1.1	-	-	-	-
TVX	81	22.6	118	33.0	48	13.4	34	9.5
VTX	12	3.3	21	5.9	9	2.5	5	1.4
Misc.	10	2.8	6	1.7	2	0.5	1	0.3
Total	109	30.4	150	42.0	59	16.4	40	11.2

Due to the low number of occurrences for some of the patterns, only the TVX and VTX patterns in this section have been tested for significance. The difference between poetry

and prose is significant in regard to TVX, but not in regard to VTX.¹¹ However, the small size of the material means that the chi square test (which shows whether the pattern tested can be generalized to a larger population) is not entirely reliable. Nevertheless, a greater tendency for negative expressions to occur in poetry than in prose is also attested by Iyeiri (2001: 120), who notes that ‘[*n*]ever, no etc. are in usual cases less frequent in prose than in verse.’ A possible explanation for this could be that the figurative negation mostly found in poetry (Iyeiri 2001: 116) ensures that negated expressions are more frequent here than in prose.

Although not always statistically significant, the corpus data on negation point in the same general direction as Iyeiri’s material (which is also significantly larger). The interesting tendency of a correlation between negation and existential clauses will be given a metaphorical interpretation as part of the discussion on EXISTENCE in chapter 5, especially in sections 5.3 and 5.5.6.

4.8 Other structures

Below, I will briefly discuss a construction that does not have a direct equivalent in Present-day English.

(4.69) *Ther good thrift on that wise gentil herte!* (Tr, III: 947)

On page 526 in the source material, the explanatory footnote for (4.69) says that the meaning of this expression is ‘good luck to’ and that *ther* has not been translated. The status of this instance of *there* could either be interpreted as some kind of special *there*, as in the comforting expression *there, there*. Another possible interpretation, is that *ther* in (4.69) is an instance of *there*₁ and that the clause is some kind of formulaic subjunctive with a non-realized *be*. If (4.69) is some kind of subjunctive construction with a verb that is non-realized for pragmatic reasons, this would remove the need for any special rule to be formulated. However, as this is the only construction of its type in the corpus, it is difficult to make any further clarification as to its status.¹²

4.9 Summary

This chapter has focused on describing existential clauses in Middle English at the clause and phrase level. The analyses of the corpus data indicated that the most typical occurrences of *there*₁ show similar characteristics to Present-day English *there*₁, in terms of position in the clause, the verb phrase, the noun phrase and the final phrase. However, some clauses were found to behave non-canonically in that they contained verbs of a type not usually found in Present-day English existential constructions, or lacked the morpheme *there*₁ where it would otherwise have been expected. These features, which would have been considered deviant in Present-day English, will form the basis for the discussion in chapter 5.

Notes

¹ In the present thesis, the term ‘main clause’ is used as an umbrella term for matrix clauses and main clauses proper.

² To check for significance, the chi square test was employed (threshold $p < .05$). With no occurrences of the STV and SVT patterns in the prose texts, these patterns obviously could not be tested for statistical significance. The difference is significant in the TVX and VTX patterns, but not in the Misc. pattern. However, since the chi square test is inappropriate (or at best unreliable) with five or fewer occurrences, the results for the Misc. pattern are questionable.

TVX, $p = .025$

VTX, $p = .025$

Misc., $p = 1$

³ Modals are dealt with separately, but instances of main verb use of e.g. *shall* and *will* are included.

⁴ This form of ‘begin’ appears as a catenative verb.

⁵ Examples of both *shall* and *will* used as independent main verbs are found.

⁶ The two linking verbs constitute the remaining 0.3%. See also table 4.3.

⁷ The difference is statistically significant, with $p = .001$.

⁸ Haiman (1974) makes a distinction between Type A and Type B languages, where the former type requires ‘overt subjects, including dummy subjects’, while the latter type does not (Heggelund 2002: 13). Present-day English and Middle English are thus both classified as Type A languages, while e.g. Latin, Spanish and Italian are Type B languages.

⁹ However, this would require an adverbial of time to be added. See sections 5.5.5 and 5.5.6.

¹⁰ As table 4.8 shows, over 50% of the clauses contain some negative element. However, the difference is not statistically significant, with $p = 1$.

¹¹ However, the number of negative prose sub-clauses in the VTX pattern is only five, which means that the use of the chi square test is questionable, and that the results must consequently be treated with caution.

TVX, $p=.01$

VTX, $p=.1$

¹² A third possibility is of course that the missing *be* is simply a copying mistake in the manuscript.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETING THE DATA

5.1 Introduction

In the present chapter, I will discuss the data from chapter 4 and attempt to interpret the material from a cognitive point of view, with reference to both syntactic and pragmatic properties. Section 5.2 is a short recapitulation of the corpus material, followed by section 5.3 which briefly sums up some basic points concerning Cognitive Linguistics. Section 5.4 recapitulates some of Lakoff's work on *there* before section 5.5 discusses the status of the noncentral existential constructions in Middle English based on the corpus data. In section 5.6, some thoughts on the status of *there*₁ in Middle English are presented, along with some possible implications of the discussion of the noncentral existential constructions.

5.2 The corpus data

As posited in chapter 4, most of the corpus material is not very dissimilar from Present-day English in terms of distributional characteristics. Based on the corpus data, it appears that no substantial differences with impact on the interpretation of *there*₁ can be detected in regard to word order patterns, the noun phrases of existential constructions or the final phrases. However, a number of features in Middle English which would not be allowed in Present-day English existential clauses have been identified, specifically in regard to the verb phrase and the presence or absence of *there*₁. These features will be further discussed in detail in section 5.5 below.

5.3 Cognitive Linguistics revisited

As the title indicates, the purpose of the present chapter is to understand, i.e. assign meaning to, the data in the corpus. Although the theoretical framework chosen for this thesis was introduced in chapter 3, a brief summary of Cognitive Linguistics is nevertheless in order prior to the discussion of the corpus material.

The philosophy underlying this theory is that language is best understood in terms of our general cognitive abilities. The main focus of Cognitive Linguistics is that language (including grammar) is seen as symbolic, and that there is a continuum of lexicon and grammar, making grammatical structures heavily imbued with semantic content. In sections 3.2.1.2 and 2.3.4 above, such important concepts as ‘conceptual archetypes’ and ‘mental space’ were discussed. A conceptual archetype is a cognitive model which provides a coherent structure to language, based on certain prototypical features. A mental space is, according to Lakoff (1987:281), ‘a medium for conceptualization and thought.’ In a mental space we can conceptualize not only our immediate surroundings, but also fictional, hypothetical and abstract situations and concepts.

Section 3.2.4 above discusses prototype effects, which are, according to Lakoff (1987), often found in language and constitutes the basis for the noncentral categories discussed below. In the present thesis, prototype effects are employed both descriptively and explanatorily. In other words, the corpus data are described in terms of radial prototype effects, but it is also attempted to explain the data by these effects. The explanatory force of prototype effects is discussed by Geeraerts (1999), who points to three main functions of prototype relations. First of all, it is ‘cognitively advantageous to lump as much information as possible into one’s conceptual categories [which enables] one to retrieve the most information with the least effort’ (1999: 97). Furthermore, prototype categories combine the function ‘structural stability with flexibility’ (1999: 97). This means that although the system can adapt to change, it does not have to change its overall structure every time circumstance change. This allows for a dynamic system, which at the same time preserves cognitive and communicative efficiency.

Although prototype effects can explain the overall structure, the motivation for each category is, in the present thesis, mainly sought in metaphors (discussed in section 3.2.3 above). As documented by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors structure our language, our thoughts and our actions. One such common metaphor often found in expressions connected with birth and death is EXISTENCE IS LOCATION HERE; NONEXISTENCE IS LOCATION AWAY (Lakoff 1987: 518). This is illustrated in (5.1) below:

- (5.1) a. There's a baby on the way.
b. We've lost him.
(From Lakoff 1987: 518)

Implicit in the metaphor NONEXISTENCE LOCATION AWAY is the notion that NONEXISTENCE can actually be understood to be a location in itself. This is explicitly stated in the example below:

- (5.2) I'm in the middle of nowhere.

In (5.2) a remote (i.e. distant, AWAY) location is expressed as NONEXISTENCE (nowhere). In other words, *there*₁ can, under this interpretation, easily refer to both EXISTENCE and NONEXISTENCE, since both concepts are seen as structured in locative terms. *There*₁ simply points to a mental space, which can signify either EXISTENCE or NONEXISTENCE, depending on the circumstances. These concepts are conceived as different locations in a mental space referred to by *there*₁. On this background, the subsequent sections will discuss the corpus material in relation to the noncentral existential constructions in Present-day and Middle English.

5.4 The noncentral constructions in Present-day English

As mentioned in section 2.3.4 above, Lakoff (1987) deals extensively with the noncentral constructions that he has identified; both the deictics and the existentials. The central point made by Lakoff is that there is neither a general deictic nor a general existential construction with several special cases (1987: 576). Instead, he proposes that the deictic and existential constructions are made up of radial categories that are 'defined by a central member and conventionalized variations on it' (1987: 577). In addition to a central deictic and a central existential which is based on the central deictic, he proposes the following noncentral categories (1987: 580-581), which are based on the central constructions.¹ The deictic categories are: The perceptual deictic, the discourse deictic, the existence deictic, the activity start deictic, the delivery deictic, the paragon deictic, the

exasperation deictic, the enthusiastic beginning deictic, the narrative focus deictic and the presentational deictic. The existential categories are: The strange existential, the ontological existential, the infinitival existential and the presentational existential.

This general pattern is the inspiration for the discussion of the corpus data that showed a considerable discrepancy from Present-day English.

5.5 The noncentral existential constructions in Middle English

In the following sections the findings in the corpus material will be interpreted in terms of the existence of a number of noncentral existential constructions. These noncentral categories are described in terms of both syntactic and semantic properties, and for each category a brief summary is attempted. This summary is inspired by Lakoff's (1987) notation used for describing the various categories of *there*, but since the notation in the present thesis is considerably simplified, there is by no means a 1:1 relationship between Lakoff's system of notation and the one used below. In the following sections under 'constituent parts', (1) will simply designate the first element occurring in the construction, (2) the second,² etc. The constructions discussed in this section are those that explicitly differ from Lakoff's noncentral constructions. Although at least three of the noncentral constructions identified by Lakoff, of which the presentational existential is the most frequent (see section 4.3.4.1, examples (4.30) and (4.31)), are found in the corpus which the present thesis is based on, the description given above in sections 5.5 and 2.3.4 are considered sufficient for the forms also found in Present-day English. For further details see Lakoff (1987).

5.5.1 The location existential

The occurrence of basic level location verbs with *there_l* is one of the interesting features in the material presented in chapter 4, as Lakoff predicts that this is not supposed to take place, due to the difference in nature between physical and mental space (Lakoff 1987: 550). However, as the following examples attest, this construction was possible in Middle English.

(5.3) But ther sat oon, al list hire nought to teche, / That thoughte, ‘Best koud I yet ben his leche.’ (Tr, II: 1581-1582)

(Presented as (4.36) above)

(5.4) Ther stood the temple of Mars, armypotente, (KT: 1982)

The perhaps most straightforward way of analyzing this construction is in terms of metaphors dealing with existence. As Lakoff (1987: 518) points out when referring to the existence deictic, ‘[t]hings that exist exist in locations. To be is to be located.’ The metaphor EXISTENCE IS LOCATION could thus account for the use of locational verbs, although it requires some modification of the mental space that *there*₁ refers to, so that it allows an entity located in it to e.g. sit down. However, as illustrated in section 5.5.2 below, this is not unreasonable. Given that an entity is located, this location could very well imply a potential for action, such as e.g. sitting or lying down and staying there. In (5.4) there is no entity with potential for motion as such; however, I suspect that ‘the temple of Mars’ stands in the same sense that a tree stands. As pointed out by Gibbs and Colston (1995), the word *stand* is partly motivated by our physical experience of standing (cf. section 3.2.1.1 above), which, at the physical or bodily level, implies an activity (which can wear you out etc.) and thus has some characteristics in common with other activities such as motion. This can then be applied to inanimate buildings such as *trees* and *buildings*, even though they are not capable of motion as such.

(5.5) The location existential

Based on: The central existential

About: Location in a mental space

Metaphors involved: EXISTENCE IS LOCATION, LOCATION IS ACTIVITY

Number of examples: 5

Constituent parts:

1: *There*₁

2: *Sit, stand* or *lie*

3: A full noun phrase or a preposition

4: An optional final phrase

5.5.2 The motion existential

Lakoff predicts that verbs of motion are ruled out of the central existential construction, but that they can occur in the noncentral presentational constructions. In section 4.3.4.1, however, a number of clauses were presented that do not fit either category.

(5.6) Ne noon so grey goos goth ther in the lake (WBP: 269)

(Presented as (4.27) above)

(5.7) Doun fro the castel comth ther many a wight / To gauren on this ship and on
Custance. (MLT: 911-912)

(Presented as (4.28) above)

Consequently, another category can be proposed, based on the assumption that mental spaces are indeed sufficiently similar to physical spaces that entities can move through them. The metaphorical justification for this construction is perhaps found in the notion of conceptual archetypes. As mentioned in the previous section, Lakoff says (1987: 518) that '[t]o be is to be located', and it is not unreasonable to open up the possibility for the fact that an entity which is located in a space can move or be moved, as expressed in the conceptual archetypes of e.g. 'the canonical event model' and also, implicitly, in connection with it a canonical agent. In the examples above, an agent is presented, and agents, even abstract ones, can have certain properties like existence in some kind of space. This is found in Present-day English with expressions concerning e.g. time. Through the metaphor TIME IS A PERSON, the abstract concept TIME is assigned properties usually associated with persons. For instance, TIME *heals wounds*, *stands still* and *goes* (or *flies*, when e.g. a deadline is approaching). The agents in (5.6) and (5.7) can also be seen as having, at least prototypically, roughly similar capacities, thus being able to move or be moved in a mental space designated by *there*₁. Verbs like *come* and *go* indicate that an agent that is located in a space and otherwise is capable of action; is capable of movement. The fact that the mental space (or rather: that specific property of mental

spaces) referred to by the motion existential is no longer operational in Present-day English is no reason why it could not occur in Middle English.

(5.8) The motion existential

Based on: The central existential

About: Moving entities in a mental space

Metaphors: AN ANIMATE ENTITY IS CAPABLE OF ACTIVITY, LOCATION IS POTENTIAL FOR MOTION

Number of examples: 21

Constituent parts:

1: *There*₁

2: A verb of motion

3: A final phrase designating a destination or point of departure

5.5.3 The unfolding activity existential

The occurrence of existential clauses with *there*₁ in combination with transitive verbs in the active voice suggests the existence of a noncentral category dealing with unfolding activities or events, since these verbs would not be expected to occur in the central existential (cf. section 4.3.3 above).

Lakoff proposes the existence of a noncentral delivery deictic which is based on the metaphor ACTIVITY IS MOTION with the metaphorical extension (via the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema) ACTIVITY IS MOTION ALONG AN ACTIVITY PATH. A similar solution can perhaps explain the occurrence of the transitive verbs in the active voice. All the clauses with a transitive verb in the active voice describe some kind of activity, either physical or mental. (5.9) is an example of a physical activity, while (5.10) exemplifies a mental activity.

(5.9) ther maketh no man himselven riche, (Mel: 1582)

(Presented as (4.18) above)

(5.10) Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette (GP: 280)

However, not all cases are equally clear-cut. Consider the following examples:

(5.11) Ther myghte asterte hym no pecunyal peyne. (FrT: 1314)

(5.12) Ther may no man han parfite blisses two (MerT: 1638)

In (5.11)-(5.12) the clauses do not express explicit activities. (5.11) is actually passive in meaning, but is best analyzed as active (and is thus a fuzzy case between this category and 5.5.4), and (5.12) deals with possession. One possible interpretation for this is that these clauses nevertheless express metaphorical activities. In (5.11), the verb *asterte*, which means ‘to escape’ or ‘slip away’, signals that some kind of process or activity is going on, even if no active participant is overtly signified. The same situation is found in e.g. (5.16) below, where the meaning is that ‘great courage is needed’, which entails that something or someone needs great courage. It can be argued that a state, such as being in need of something, is a process or activity (see section 5.5.4 below), which would connect it to the metaphor ACTIVITY IS MOTION ALONG AN ACTIVITY PATH. The case of *han*, i.e. ‘have,’ in (5.12) is also a special case since the semantic content refers to possession. However, Koch (1999: 285 ff) points out that *to have* in many languages has developed locative and existential meanings from its original possessive meaning. A close connection between the concepts POSSESSION, EXISTENCE and LOCATION makes it natural that a verb like *have* should appear in an existential construction (see also section 4.3.5 above).

The justification for the unfolding activity existential is thus possibly rooted in the ACTIVITY IS MOTION ALONG AN ACTIVITY PATH metaphor, which, since an activity with a source, a path and a goal must take place somewhere, needs to be located in a mental space designated by *there*₁. It follows from this that one of the properties of this space is that activities may take place there, thus giving these constructions an implicit aspect of EXISTENCE.

(5.13) The unfolding activity existential

Based on: The central existential

About: An activity or process running its course

Metaphors: ACTIVITY IS MOTION ALONG AN ACTIVITY PATH, ACTIVITY IS LOCATION

Number of examples: 41

Constituent parts:

1: *There*₁

2: A transitive verb phrase in the active voice

3: A noun phrase, implicit or explicit, signifying an agent

4: A nominal constituent acting as object

5.5.4 The action/process recipient existential

The *help/lack/need* type constructions, illustrated in (5.14), (5.15) and (5.16) below, are also to be considered noncentral since they contain a transitive verb in the active voice, as mentioned in section 4.3.4.3 above, and exemplified below. I find it difficult to determine whether this constitutes a separate category or if it is a special case of the preceding category. However, since it has some special characteristics I have decided to deal with it separately.

(5.14) Ther helpeth noght; al goth that ille weye. (KT: 3033)

(Presented as (4.39) above)

(5.15) Ther lakketh no thyng to thyne outter yen (SNT: 498)

(5.16) For certes, ther bihoveth greet corage agains Accidie, (ParT: 730)

A possible explanation for this construction can be found by generalizing the examples above into abstractions, in order to try to identify the metaphors involved.

As the label for this category suggests, all the examples in the corpus deal with some kind of action or process, with, typically, an overt agent, although sometimes only the patient is directly identified. Langacker's notion of conceptual archetypes (section

3.2.1.2 above) provides a tool for analyzing these clauses. The canonical event model encompasses the notion of objects moving and affecting other objects, as well as the conceptual archetypes agent and patient (Langacker 1999: 24-25). It is possible then, to suggest that the canonical event model is the basis for the examples above. This is not unreasonable with a verb like *help*. However, to explain how a model with agents and patients justifies using verbs like *lack* and *need*, we must turn to metaphors. The canonical event model is based on objects being affected. This is expressed in the conceptual metaphor DIRECT MANIPULATION, which Lakoff and Johnson propose as ‘the prototype of causation’ (1980: 69). This prototype is then ‘elaborated by metaphor to yield a broad concept of CAUSATION which has many special cases’ (1980: 75). Some of these special cases are CREATION IS BIRTH and CAUSATION IS EMERGENCE. Based on the examples in my corpus, I would like to propose another special case, at least as far as Middle English is concerned, namely A STATE IS A PROCESS.³ All the verbs in the examples above, *help*, *lack* and *need* are verbs that denote some kind of state of mind or aspect of the existence of some entity. This state can be viewed metaphorically as CAUSATION, since a state is prototypically seen as caused by someone or something. And since someone or something has caused the state, then some kind of process must (metaphorically) be at the bottom of it, i.e. a DIRECT MANIPULATION, by an agent on a patient. Although the agent or patient do not have to be human, it is clear from the description of this concept that this is the prototypical case, since the concept is (probably) based on physical experience (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 70).

This analysis is not unproblematic, however. Some of the criteria listed by Lakoff and Johnson are that the agent has a desire, a plan and control over the process, and the lack of which would make the clauses at best questionable instances of the CAUSATION concept (1980: 72). One way to get around this problem would be to assume that the state (e.g. hopelessness) could be a result of a plan and subsequent action (or lack of such) on the part of some abstract agent. There is no denying, however, that the above line of argumentation is not entirely convincing.

The next problem is how this accounts for the use of *there*₁. However, as Lakoff (1987: 542), Bolinger (1977: 93) and Breivik (1989: 33) all point out, the meaning of the existential *there*₁ is to bring something into ‘awareness’, ‘before our eyes’ or ‘into a

mental space'. And as Bolinger (1977: 96) notes, '[t]he less vividly on stage an action is, the more necessary *there* becomes.' Few things can be seen as less on-stage than an implied, abstract agent in a metaphorical process, which would account for the use of *there*₁ to introduce these constructions.

(5.17) The action/process recipient existential

Based on: The unfolding activity existential

About: A process involving an agent, a patient and state of existence

Metaphors: A STATE IS A PROCESS

Number of examples: 18

Constituent parts:

1: *There*₁

2: A transitive verb with an unexpressed agent, denoting a state

3: A noun phrase

5.5.5 The zero existential

The absence of *there*₁ in some of the clauses in the corpus material can be interpreted in a number of different ways which have an impact on the status of *there*₁. One possibility is that *there*₁ is optional in Middle English and as a consequence of this can be omitted. A second possibility is that *there*₁ has two realizations in Middle English, the full *there*₁ form and a 'zero' form. The final possibility is that *there*₁ is phonologically reduced and not articulated, but still is present as a grammatical form. The first possibility could be taken as an indication that *there*₁ is semantically empty and inserted for syntactic reasons. If some special syntactic condition made *there*₁ superfluous the morpheme could be dispensed with if it carried no meaning. However, as stated in section 1.2.2, the notion of 'meaningless' words is avoided in Cognitive Linguistics (see also section 2.3.2 on Bolinger's (1977) view). In the other two options, on the other hand, the zero form can contain some kind of meaning, even if the morpheme is not articulated, as the grammatical category of *there*₁ is present, albeit in slightly different forms, depending on whether option two or three is chosen.

The above argumentation is inspired by Labov's (1995) treatment of the absence of the linking verb *be* in African American Vernacular English, where *be* is sometimes present and sometimes absent:

(5.18) He fast in everything he do.

(From Labov 1995: 31)

(5.19) About two is in jail, now.

(From Labov 1995: 32)

Based on this, he suggests that the linking verb *be* (in the present tense) either can be omitted; or has 'three alternate forms: *is*, 's, and zero'; or that '*is* may be present regularly in the grammar, just as in other dialects, but be reduced by the contraction rules of casual speech to 's and then zero' (Labov: 1995: 34). Labov concludes that the 'zero copula' in African American English is a result of the last option; that is, the forms *is* and *are* can in certain environments be contracted and deleted. That this process is restricted to certain environments is illustrated in (5.20) below, which has both a full form and a zero form:

(5.20) He my man, is he not?

(From Labov 1995: 41)

The phonetic processes involved are, according to Labov (1995: 38), 'something akin to the regular rule for the contraction of the auxiliary in English, which takes the full form *is* and converts it to 's.' The following conditions (Labov 1995: 37-39) must be present for this process to occur:

(5.21) The verb must be the first member of the verb phrase and end with / z / or / r /.

This explains why *is* and *are* can be deleted, but not 'm.

(5.22) Only short, unstressed vowels, like / ə /, can be reduced.

(5.23) The verb must begin with a vowel and must be a ‘weak word’, i.e. completely unstressed (which explains why the verb in the tag question in (5.20) above cannot be deleted, since it has at least secondary stress in the clause due to inversion).

(5.24) The verb can only contain one consonant.

If these criteria are compared to Middle English *there*₁, it would seem that the possibility that the absence of this morpheme is simply the result of phonological reduction rules is worth some consideration. *There*₁ satisfies a number of Labov’s requirements: In Present-day English, it is unstressed, contains the short, unstressed vowel / ə / and it ends with / r /. However, there are also some conditions which are not met, specifically (5.23) and (5.24), since / ðər / contains two consonants, one of which is in initial position. In addition to this, condition (5.22) is not met, since Middle English *there*₁, unlike its Present-day English equivalent, had a long, open front vowel and was (probably) pronounced / θɛ:r /.⁴ This does not, of course, rule out the possibility of some kind of assimilation process, similar to, but with different conditions than, the process described by Labov. Consider e.g. the following clause:

(5.25) That at the feeste was that ilke day (WBT: 1076)

A tentative transcription with *there*₁ inserted before the verb would give the following result (only *there*₁ and the phonemes immediately surrounding it are transcribed):

(5.26) / ...stθɛ:rwas... /

It is possible to imagine that in this context assimilation could affect the / θ / and / r / of *there*₁. / t / is normally an alveolar stop, but can also approach a dental position. If the final vowel in *feeste* was elided, assimilation between the stop and the dental fricative

/θ/ could take place. In the case of /r/, which is a postalveolar approximant, the manner of articulation is close to the following consonant /w/ which is a bilabial-velar approximant. As a consequence, a full assimilation (with deletion of the vowel when it ends up in word-final position) could occur. However, this explanation has some weaknesses. The first and most obvious of these is that Middle English used a trilled /r/, and not the approximant of Present-day English. It is much more difficult to imagine assimilation between a trill and an approximant than between two approximants. Secondly, the phonetic environments in which the zero form occurs vary so much that it is difficult to come up with general conditions to cover all instances, or in fact, any of them, as (5.25) represents the closest to a plausible case. And finally, the phonological assimilation and deletion in everyday speech of the morpheme *there*₁ is no explanation for its nonoccurrence in a written context. Consequently, it is legitimate to consider the existence of an alternative realization of *there*₁, viz. a zero form, equivalent in function and meaning, but with a phonologically empty realization, and restricted to certain environments.

An interesting approach to the nonoccurrence of *there*₁ can be found in Coopmans (1989), who discusses inversions in Present-day English triggered by a fronted locative adverbial of the type shown below:

(5.27) Down the hill marched a column of ants.

Writing within a generative framework, Coopmans argues that ‘whatever regularity there is to be found in the inversion constructions in [(5.27)] can be captured syntactically’ (1989: 729). Nevertheless, a study of this construction is interesting also from a Cognitive perspective. Coopmans takes the notion of semi-pro-drop, found in e.g. Dutch, which means that the subject position can be left empty if there is no need for an expressed subject. This is found e.g. in impersonal passives with an adverbial element in initial position (5.28) and in constructions with the Dutch equivalents of *it* and *there* (5.29) (Coopmans 1989: 733-734), as shown below:

(5.28) a. Er werd gevoetbald. (There was played football.)

- b. Op straat werd gevoetbald. (On street was played football.)
- (5.29) a. Omdat duidelijk is dat hij ziek is. (Because clear is that he is ill)
- b. Vandaag werd duidelijk dat hij ziek was. (Today became clear that he ill was.)
- (From Coopmans 1989: 734)

Coopmans hypothesizes that ‘pro-drop in English manifests itself roughly in the environment that we observe for a language like Dutch’ (1989: 734); that is, when no overt subject is required and the sentence starts with a topicalized adverbial realized by a prepositional phrase expressing location, as illustrated in (5.28) above. Coopmans points out that ‘only PP adverbials which are somehow subcategorized by the verb can trigger inversion in English. This would rule out PPs expressing manner, instrument, reason, and time, and it would allow locative PPs that express direction or position’ (1989: 735), in other words, they act as adverbial complements.

This approach, when applied to the missing *there*₁ in Middle English, can give an indication of the behavior of this morpheme. As pointed out above, some clauses lack *there*₁, but just as intriguing is the similarity between those zero *there*₁ clauses and clauses with *there*₁. Consider the following clauses:

- (5.30) a. In al this world of falsehede nis his peer, (CYT: 979)
- b. In al this world ther nys a bettre knyght (Tr, II: 177)

Adding to the complexity are constructions of the following type:

- (5.31) Was nevere brid gladder agayn the day, (CYT: 1342)

An account of the occurrence and nonoccurrence of *there*₁ must necessarily take all these constructions into consideration. At first glance, it would appear that the use of *there*₁ is optional in cases where an adverbial of place is in front position, as in (5.30). Note that this is not dependent on the semantic content of the adverbial, as seen in (5.32).

(5.32) That in this tyme was or myghte be; (Tr, I: 1082)

In this clause the adverbial obviously refers to time; however, the temporal meaning is expressed in terms of location. To be more precise, the concept of time is metaphorically expressed as a location through the use of the preposition *in* (cf. section 3.2.1.1 above). It can thus be seen as locational, and grouped with the clauses in (5.30). (5.31) on the other hand, has an adverbial of time, realized by the adverb *never*. This adverb, which literally means ‘not ever’ and thus is concerned with time only, is present in six out of a total of nine occurrences of this construction; the other three contain the adverbs *thanne*, *sith* and *syn* (i.e. *then* and *since*).

It would seem, then, that a plausible explanation of this phenomenon is that when a topicalized adverbial (of place) occurs in initial position, Middle English had a choice of using *there_I* or leaving it out. Coopmans proposes that *there_I* in Present-day English functions as ‘a true adverbial introducing a particular context for presentational focus’ (1989: 745). However, as seen from (5.28), Dutch allows an adverbial to take this role, and it is not unreasonable to assume that this could also have been possible in Middle English. This means that no special instance of *there_I* is needed for cases like (5.30a), perhaps making the nonoccurrence of *there_I* in these structures more of a stylistic choice than one of grammar, although this does not appear to be an entirely satisfactory explanation. Another possibility is discussed by Bolinger (1977). He notes that in Present-day English, in constructions with ‘presentatives without *there*, the stage is a link to what has gone before; it is in a sense topicalized. [...] But if the presentative initiates a line of thought, *there* must be added’ (1977: 110). In fact, there does appear to be a tendency for this in the corpus material, with 18 out of 20 *there*-less clauses with topicalized adverbials referring to a previously introduced entity or situation. The noncentral zero *there_I* clauses (e.g. 5.31) on the other hand, appear to introduce a new line of thought in eight out of nine cases. This would seemingly provide a reason or motivation for the topicalization discussed by Coopmans, and can to a certain extent provide grounds for predicting the environments where the central existential *there_I* will be present or absent.

This approach would also explain, at least to some degree, the variations found in the different versions of *Cursor Mundi*, which are more or less contemporary with Chaucer (presented as (2.16) above).

- (5.33) a. Pat tim **it** was bot a langage
'At that time there was only one language' (Cotton MS).
b. Pat time was bot an langage (Fairfax MS).
c. Pat tyme was **Þer** but o langage (Trinity MS).
(From Breivik, 1989: 38)

Although it does not give any clues as to the seemingly free variation between *it* and *there*₁, the view presented above can be supported by the fact that in (5.33) there is an initial adverbial realized by a noun phrase, which, although the semantic reference is temporal, is metaphorically expressed in locative terms. However, it is not a clear-cut support to the view presented above, since the typical environment allowing the semi-pro-drop is a fronted prepositional phrase, not a noun phrase like *Pat time*. However, Quirk et al. (1985: 1243) point out in regard to noun phrases that 'premodification is to be interpreted [...] in terms of postmodification and its greater explicitness.' Thus, implicitly included in the examples in (5.33a) – (5.33c) is the relation below:

- (5.34) That is the time **when** there only existed one language.

According to Quirk et al. (1985: 443), *where*, *when* and *how* function as 'pro-forms for adjuncts', i.e. as obligatory adverbials in the same way as prepositional phrases:

- (5.35) a. *He lived.
b. He lived **in** the 14th century.
c. I wonder **when** he lived.
(Based on Quirk et al. 1985: 443)

The adverbial noun phrase in (5.34) above could in other words be seen as being close to a prepositional phrase in function, in that both constructions often realize adverbial complements. Additionally, it could be argued that *Pat time* refers to TIME explicitly as an identifiable entity, and possibly in at least implicitly locative terms. Implied in the metaphors TIME IS A PERSON and TO BE LOCATED IN TIME IS TO BE LOCATED IN SPACE is also the opposite relation: If time is a person, it is located somewhere; and even though it could be argued that time is not explicitly personified in this case, it certainly is identified in terms of a discrete entity. And if time can be identified, then it is also located somewhere, since it could be argued that TO BE LOCATED IN SPACE IS TO BE LOCATED IN TIME. This could be the reason for the similarities between the (5.33b) and (5.33c) and the expressions with prepositional phrases. As predicted above, there is a choice between the full form and the zero form of *there₁* in this situation, depending on the context.

The above data could also be seen as strengthening the case for a locative interpretation of *there₁*, since the morpheme can be substituted by an adverbial of place.⁵

(5.31), on the other hand, has no initial locative adverbial which can fill this role, and all occurrences have, without exception, an adverbial of time following the verb. Implied in this is that this is a different construction than the semi-pro-drop construction. The locative aspects of a zero-*there₁* could be the result of a need to locate the noun phrase in both time and space; that is to accurately identify the mental space in which the entity is located. The metaphors involved are, as far as I can determine, the same as in the location existential; that is, EXISTENCE IS LOCATION. To be located in time is to be located in space. The zero form is thus to be considered noncentral, whereas the example in (5.30a) would be a special case of the central existential construction where the morpheme *there₁* has been dropped in order to create a link to the prior context (cf. Bolinger 1977: 111). The number of clauses with a zero form proper as the term is used in the present thesis is thus lower than the number of existential clauses lacking *there₁*. A zero realization of *there₁* would in cases like this serve the functional purpose of subject, as summarized below:

(5.36) The zero existential

Based on: The central existential

About: Initiating a new line of thought in a temporal context. A phonological non realization of *there*₁

Metaphors: EXISTENCE IS LOCATION, LOCATION IN TIME IS LOCATION IN SPACE

Number of examples: 9

Constituent parts:

1: Ø-*there*₁

2: *be*

3: An adverbial of time

However, as the renowned paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould has pointed out, '[n]o scientific activity teeters more precariously on the precipice between bravery and foolishness than descriptions of unobserved objects justified only by their necessity in theory' (1985: 438). Although this is written with natural science in mind, it is an appropriate caveat in linguistics as well, since the theoretical possibility that a zero form might exist is no reason for (nor an explanation of) its actual existence; an independent justification is required. The reason for having and using a non realized, or phonologically empty, form of *there*₁ could be taken as an indication of Traugott's notion of 'pragmatic strengthening' (1999: 188). Through subjectification, where speakers through pragmatic strengthening use old structures and assign new meaning to them in order to 'externalize their subjective point of view' (Traugott 1999: 189), the new meaning of *there* develops. A zero form suggests that the process of subjectification has entrenched the 'existential' meaning of *there* to a degree where its meaning is still expressed in a zero form. This can be combined with Lakoff's notion of 'ecological location', characterized by redundancy (1987: 493), as well as Bolinger's view that 'with the *there* construction [...] the existential meaning is more a function of the verb than of *there*' (1977: 92). To Bolinger, the division of labor between *there*₁ and the predicate in the communicative process thus differs somewhat from Lakoff's view, although I interpret this as more a question of degree than of essence. In other words, given sufficient pragmatic strengthening and communicative redundancy (both through the motivations for *there*₁ and through the verb; and perhaps the construction as a whole), it is possible to see the contours of a situation opening for the use of a zero-*there*₁ form.

The view that these existential clauses lack any realization of *there*₁ whatsoever would imply that they were completely void of the semantic and pragmatic contents of *there*₁. A corollary of this could be that *there*₁ is in fact completely empty; not only of semantic content, but also of what Breivik (1989: 33) calls ‘signal information’ (cf. section 2.3.3 above).

There are in other words good reason to consider the existence of an alternative zero realization of *there*₁, although it is open to discussion to what degree it is noncentral in the strict sense of the term, since the main difference between the zero and the central existential could be argued to be the non realization of the former. However, it has been discussed along with the noncentral categories, since there is at least some reason to assume that the form was not in free variation with *there*₁, but restricted to certain constructions and carried at least a certain degree of additional locative implications.

5.5.6 The deictic existential

Perhaps the most speculative of all these noncentral categories is the deictic existential, which is based on one single clause:

(5.37) Here nys no peril, (Bo, I. Pr. 2: 18)

(Presented as (4.65) above)

Of course, one single clause in a corpus of 653 is not an overwhelming material on which to construct a hypothesis, but certain aspects make it worthwhile to at least consider the existence of this category. As mentioned in section 4.6 above, the question is whether to interpret this construction as having a locative adverbial in initial position, or if it can be interpreted as containing some kind of existential *here*₁.

At first glance, the idea of a fronted adverbial does not seem unreasonable. However, as pointed out in the preceding section, such fronted adverbials are typically realized by a prepositional phrase,⁶ not an adverb. Although this is somewhat speculative, it is possible that prepositional phrases are better suited for the topicalization required in this construction⁷ (cf. 5.5.5). If (5.37), in spite of this, is nevertheless interpreted as having a deictic *here*₂ in initial position, the clause could be seen as a special case of the

zero existential. Or, possibly, (5.37) could be interpreted as a special case of the semi-pro-drop discussed in section 5.5.5 above. None of these options are satisfactory since they would make the predictions for these constructions very complex. The zero existential would have to include constructions with both adverbs of time and place; and this would complicate matters, especially vis-à-vis the constructions with fronted locative adverbials. Or, possibly, the principles for locative inversion would have to include both adverbial complements (i.e. compulsory elements) realized by prepositional phrases, as well as other (optional) adverbials. As pointed out in section 4.6, (5.37) corresponds to the Present-day English clause (5.38a), a clause which is perfectly acceptable without the adverbial as shown in (5.38b). This illustrates that no adverbial complement is required (which does not exclude the possibility of adding another optional adverbial of place as in (5.38c)).

- (5.38) a. There is no danger here.
 b. There is no danger.
 c. There is no danger in this place.

In addition to this, the clause in (5.37) contains the verb *to be*, whereas Coopmans predicts that only ‘verbs of locomotion for which an unaccusative⁸ analysis is possible if they are combined with a locative adverbial’ (1989: 744) can trigger this kind of inversion. These are verbs like e.g. *walk*, *run* and *fly*. Thus, it seems that *be* is not a likely candidate as the main verb in this kind of clause. The sum of all this, is that it is difficult to see how the solutions discussed above could add to the understanding of the behavior of *there_I* in Middle English in any systematic way. Thus, in this situation it would simplify matters to have a separate, noncentral deictic existential category (i.e. a *here_I*) that can function as subject. Despite the fact that one of the defining characteristics in Lakoff’s description of *there_I* is that it does not contrast with *here* (1987: 544), there are examples of the equivalent of *here* functioning as subject. In Swedish, we find the following synonymous constructions:

- (5.39) a. På kusten blåser **det** förskräckligt. (On the coast blows **it** terribly)

- b. **Här** blåser förskräckligt på kusten. (**Here** blows terribly on the coast)
(From Falk 1993: 270)

There is no implication in this that the Present-day Swedish construction in question is directly analogous to the Middle English clause in (5.37), but it is worth noticing that there are no inherent qualities in a morpheme that has the meaning of *here* which excludes it from subject position.⁹ There are also other indications that an existential *here*_I could be considered the subject of (5.37), and not merely a fronted adverbial. As mentioned in chapter 2, one of the arguments for the subjecthood of *there*_I is the fact that it can be raised (Lakoff 1987: 547). If we incorporate (5.37) into a sentence which opens the possibility for subject-raising, we get the following result:

(5.40) It is believed that **here nys no peril**.

To test for subject-status, either the noun phrase or *here* can be raised.

- (5.41) a. **No peril** is believed **here** to be.
b. **Here** is believed to be **no peril**.

Without placing too much emphasis on this test, since it cannot be corroborated either by other corpus findings or by native speakers, it must be pointed out that (5.41b) sounds decidedly better than (5.41a), at least in Present-day English.

To investigate the justifications for, and meaning of, this existential *here*_I, a closer look at the metaphors involved might be in order. If the deictic existential is based on the location existential, then it would somehow be connected with the main metaphors in that construction, which are NONEXISTENCE IS LOCATION AWAY and NONEXISTENCE IS A PLACE. As pointed out in section 2.6 above, Horn (1989) categorizes NONEXISTENCE as a subcategory of DENIAL. (5.37) is an example of DENIAL, since the existence of peril is denied. Horn states that the denial does not have to be explicit in nature, ‘all that is required is that the positive proposition be somehow accessible as a good or natural guess’ (1989: 182). In other words, for something to be denied, the possibility of

existence must, at least theoretically, be present. If something is to exist, it must exist somewhere, as stated in the metaphors EXISTENCE IS LOCATION and NONEXISTENCE IS LOCATION AWAY. This means that, as far as the metaphors are concerned, the negation entails some kind of existence. Since NONEXISTENCE IS LOCATION AWAY and EXISTENCE (i.e. any kind of existence, including nonexistence) IS LOCATION, then it is in fact possible to propose that, implicitly, NEGATION IS EXISTENCE. Any entity which is negated thus has some kind of existence at some kind of location, and, if NONEXISTENCE IS LOCATION AWAY, then EXISTENCE IS LOCATION HERE (cf. Lakoff 1987: 518).

The meaning of the deictic existential would then be something along the lines of negating an entity by implicitly setting up its existence in an appropriate mental space signaling nonexistence. This existence in the remote nonexistence-location would consequently be implicitly designated by *there*₁, which means that, logically, a location signaling existence could be overtly designated by *here*₁. Or, to put it differently, if nonexistence is existence away (and the peril does not exist, because its existence is being explicitly denied), then the non-existing entity must be *there*, and if it is *there* then it cannot be *here* since it would not make any sense for it to be located in two different spaces, implying both existence and nonexistence at the same time. When *here* is thus 'freed' to act as a subject referring to a mental space in this manner, its occurrence in a deictic existential construction is a little more plausible. However, it is implied in the above argumentation that *here*₁ can only occur in a construction which contains a negative particle or negative adverb. The following clause in (5.42a) would not be expected given the metaphors involved in this construction. (5.42b), on the other hand, is acceptable since this is an example of the central existential *there*₁.

- (5.42) a. *Here is danger in the myth of a quick and easy weight loss.
b. There is danger in the myth of a quick and easy weight loss.

As long as *there*₁ is the unmarked member of the pair (Lakoff 1987: 549), the deictic existential must be considered marginal due to the degree of markedness it represents. Even though it would be possible to set up a simple system where *here* signals existence and *there* signals nonexistence, this hardly seems to be the case, judged from the corpus

material. Consequently, it would be counterintuitive to use the marked member of the pair to signify general existence (in a mental space that does not signify nonexistence), which, for all practical purposes, must be considered the unmarked state for a given entity to be in.

The argumentation above is based on the assumption that *there*₁ in Middle English was structured by a coherent metaphorical system, in much the same way as Lakoff claims that Present-day English *there*₁ is. This is not necessarily the case. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 52-55) discuss the ‘partial nature of metaphorical structuring.’ They claim that some metaphors imply a more extensive system than what is actually found in the language. For instance, the metaphors THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS and A MOUNTAIN IS A PERSON are only used to produce a limited number of expressions based on selected parts of the metaphors, as shown below:

- (5.43) a. The theory is based on a solid empirical foundation.
b. ?All that remains is finishing the penthouse apartment of the theory.
- (5.44) a. They stood at the foot of the mountain, gazing at the summit.
b. ?They had just passed the knee of the mountain and stopped for lunch on its lower thigh.

Although theories have foundations and mountains have a foot,¹⁰ there are no corresponding theory-penthouse apartments or mountain-knees or thighs. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 52), metaphors have a ‘used part’ and an ‘unused part,’ and they emphasize the importance of keeping these isolated cases separate from the more complex, coherent systems like e.g. ARGUMENT IS WAR (1980: 55). At the same time it is worth noticing that under some circumstances, the unused parts can be used to coin new expressions, especially in ‘imaginative language’ (1980: 53); which is why the (b)-sentences above have been labeled with question marks, rather than asterisks.

In light of this, it is interesting to consider the use of an existential *here*₁ as an example of an unused part of the metaphor which has been employed to create an imaginative language. However, the differences are considerable between the metaphors in (5.43) and

(5.44) above and those involved in existential clauses. *There*₁ is based on, or motivated by, *there*₂ which has the contrast with *here*₂ as one of its most important defining features. This means that even if an existential *here*₁ were to be seen as nothing but a case of imaginative language, it would nevertheless still constitute a part or extension of a substantial metaphorical system structured in terms of this contrast.

Alternatively, an approach based on conceptual metonymic change is possible. This does not necessarily rule out the metaphorical view on the rise of *here*₁ presented above. Traugott (1999: 187) points out that ‘good metonymies are often metaphorical as well, so there is no difficulty in looking at [a] change either way.’

Nevertheless, metonymy and metaphor are different processes, as stated by Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 36): ‘Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding. Metonymy, on the other hand, has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to **stand for** another.’ This is of course also part of the process of understanding something, even though that is not the primary function of metonymy. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 38-39) identify a number of metonymic concepts, one of which is THE PLACE FOR THE EVENT, as in (5.45):

(5.45) Let’s not let Thailand become another **Vietnam**.

(From Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 39)

It could be that a similar concept, such as perhaps THE PLACE FOR THE CIRCUMSTANCES, is the cause of (5.37). This is based on a view of (5.37) where the subject *here*₁ is seen as co-referential with the predicate *nys no peril*. The process whereby *here*₁ comes to stand for *nys no peril*, could be approached through investigating what the syntactic constituents of (5.37) refer to. It is worth noticing that the clause in (5.37) can be rephrased in two distinct ways in Present-day English (‘theme’ and ‘rheme’ correspond to ‘topic’ and ‘comment’, respectively (Breivik 1983a: 23)):

- (5.46) a. No danger_x is here. (x = thematic)
b. There is no danger_x here. (x = rhematic)

- c. There is no danger.

(5.46a) corresponds to what Koch labels as thematic ‘bounded’ (i.e. limited in terms of time or space) existence, while (5.46b) can be classified as ‘rhematic bounded existence’ (Koch 1999: 282-283), as opposed to the ‘unbounded’ (5.46c). Koch says that bounded existence is a prototypical case of EXISTENCE, since all forms of existence are bounded in some way, at the very least by ‘the universe of discourse’ (1999: 295). As a result of this, he claims that ‘[a] new expression for EXISTENCE in general is created with more than random probability by extension of meaning from an expression for BOUNDED EXISTENCE’ (Koch 1999: 296). This seems to be the case in (5.37), where the bounded existence similar to that expressed in e.g. a clause like (5.46b) is the cause of the existential *here*₁ construction in (5.37) through a metonymic change. This change could be effected through a reinterpretation of the parts of the clause, as follows: The terms ‘thematic’ and ‘rhematic’ can be interpreted as ‘figure’ and ‘ground’, respectively (cf. section 3.2.1.2). Since ‘figure’ is associated with ‘foreground’ and ‘ground’ with ‘background’, it is natural to assign these properties to ‘theme’ and ‘rheme.’ If we assign properties to the subject and predicate based on this, we get the following result:

Table 5.1: The figure-ground organization of the deictic existential

Feature:	Thematicity	Figure	Foreground
Linguistic unit:	(syntactically)	(logically)	(semantically)
<i>Here</i>	+	-	+
<i>Nys no peril</i>	-	+	+

Table 5.1 shows that the thematic position usually associated with ‘figure’, has the element *here*, which can logically be regarded as ‘ground’, given that it occurs in a position usually occupied by the *there*₁, which functions to signify background in existential clauses (cf. the central existential). At the same time, the predicate, though being in rhematic (i.e. typically ground) position, is the logical figure of the construction. Both elements refer semantically to the foreground, as *here* signifies proximity (the opposite of *there*), while the situation or circumstance *no peril* must apply to some place,

and that place is *here*, i.e. the same location which is referred to by the foreground. Thus, the subject and predicate can be seen as semantically co-referential, with *here* standing metonymically for *nys no peril*. In effect, the use of an existential *here*₁ is to ‘background’ the foreground, so that it can act as a background (or subject) in an existential construction, in the same way as *there*₁ does. In other words, the meaning of *here* is pragmatically strengthened, thus ‘enriching [...] the form-meaning pair in question with the speaker’s perspective’ (Traugott 1999: 188). The bounded existence of (5.46b) can in this way be seen as giving rise to a new existential construction.

The internal relationship between the possible metaphorical and metonymic processes described above is not easy to determine. Traugott notes that in a case of metonymic change, ‘a metaphorical interpretation is not ruled out at the earliest stage. On the metaphorical view, physical deeds come to be understood as mapped onto anything that is observable’ (1999: 187). However, the metonymic leap of interpreting *here* as standing for *nys no peril* is based on both entities being regarded as non-metaphorical.

Even though the corpus material is scarce, it is thus not all that unreasonable to consider (5.37) above an example of a noncentral existential category, even though its status must remain uncertain. Below is a schematic summary of the above account of the existential *here*₁. Note that no final phrase is needed, since the locative aspect which is typically the function of the final phrase in the central existential, is implied in the construction itself (both in the metaphorical and the metonymical approach).

(5.47) The deictic existential

Based on: The location existential

About: Implicit existence through negation

Metaphors: NONEXISTENCE IS EXISTENCE AWAY, EXISTENCE IS EXISTENCE HERE

Number of examples: 1

Constituent parts:

1: *Here*₁

2: Negative particle + *be*

3: A noun phrase

5.6 The status of existential *there*₁ in Middle English

The preceding sections have all dealt with the various noncentral categories found in the corpus material. However, in a discussion of the status of *there*₁ in Middle English, it must be pointed out that the overwhelming majority of the clauses found are strikingly modern. Of the 653 clauses in the corpus, 563 or 86.2% contain an intransitive verb, of which 433 or 77.0% (i.e. 66.3% of the entire corpus) are instances of a simple verb phrase with the verb *to be*. Except for the orthographic conventions, a number of the clauses display striking similarities with clauses that could have been written today, at least as far as *there*₁ is concerned.

An interesting aspect of the noncentral existential constructions discussed above is that they may provide some indications of what the differences between Present-day English and Middle English existential clauses were based on. The noncentral constructions (with the possible exception of the zero existential) all have in common that they assign other properties to the mental space referred to by *there*₁ than do those existential constructions that exist today (cf. section 2.3.4 above). The Middle English noncentral constructions give a combined image of a mental space with a number of properties in common with the space referred to by *there*₂, and especially by Lakoff's noncentral existential deictic. Lakoff's prediction number 7 (1987: 544) basically states that *there*₁ cannot refer to locations, because the morpheme refers to a mental space. As the existence deictic illustrates, this is not really a universal proposition since this construction refers to an abstract space structured in locative terms, which means that nothing inherent in such a space precludes a locative understanding, especially not when faced with contradictory corpus data. Thus, it does appear that the continuum between *there*₁ and *there*₂ was structured differently in Middle English, and that the noncentral existentials could refer to mental spaces conceived of as having other properties than in Present-day English. This suggests that although *there*₁ has a nominal function in Middle English, some of its noncentral variants are more closely connected with the place adverb *there*₂ in terms of the mental space it refers to. It also supports the claim that *there*₁ has developed from *there*₂, as well as Lakoff's proposition that there is no 'generalized existential' (1987: 575). Such a construction would be even more complicated with the

noncentral constructions listed above. However, a ‘based on’ model is able to include these noncentral cases, since all that needs to be specified is where they differ from the central existential. Below is an illustration of the proposed existential category system in Middle English:

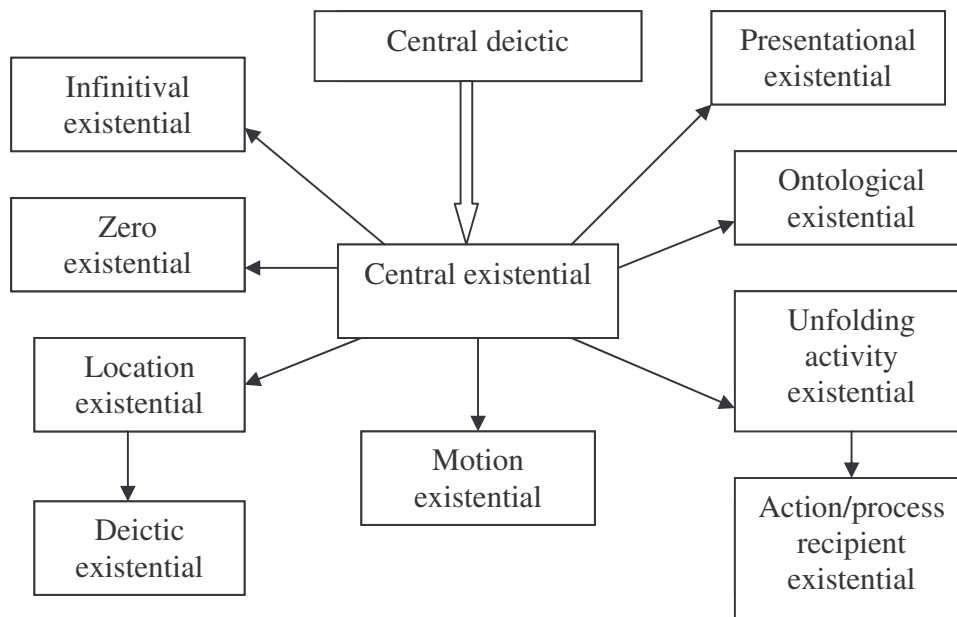


Figure 5.1: The radial category relations of Middle English *there*₁

This is of course an illustration of one possible interpretation, based on one theoretical approach, viz. that of Cognitive Linguistics and more specifically Lakoff’s. Coopmans for instance, has another interpretation, where *there*₁ is seen as ‘a true adverbial introducing a particular context for presentational focus’ (1989: 745). The functional aspect is not altogether dissimilar from Lakoff’s view; however, Coopmans offers a purely syntactic analysis, which (as pointed out in section 2.3.4 above) is unable to cope with the wide range of existential constructions. In the present thesis, syntactic factors have been discussed and certainly play a part in the understanding of *there*₁, however, it is posited that semantic and pragmatic factors must be included in the predictions for the construction in order to fully account for the corpus data. In this way, a cognitive approach is able to account for the various constructions in terms of radial category structure, based on metaphor and metonymy. The significance of cognitive entrenchment,

as proposed in section 3.4.5.2 above, proved more difficult to interpret, since the frequencies in the corpus material were very low.¹¹ If anything, one could tentatively propose that the deictic existential shows least entrenchment, whereas the unfolding activity existential shows the most. This could be taken as an indication that the former was more well-motivated, i.e. had a better ecological location, than the former. However, the conclusions are uncertain, and consequently no attempt has been made to include this in the illustration above. Figure 5.1 shows the central existential as being based on the central deictic, as well as illustrating the various based-on relationships organizing the other categories. However, the nature of the corpus data has some effect on the process by which this radial structure has developed best can be understood.

Traugott holds the view that '[i]f the meaning of a lexical item or morpheme is grounded in the socio-physical world of reference, it is likely that over time speakers will develop polysemies that are grounded in the speaker's world, whether reasoning, belief, or metatextual attitude to the discourse' (Traugott 1999: 179). A similar claim is made by Sweetser (1990: 50) who states that 'creoles first develop their expression of root modality before going on to extend that expression fully to the epistemic domain.' In other words, the 'starting point' of a morpheme is concrete, and then gradually, new and abstract meanings develop. However, as the present study illustrates, in the case of *there*₁ this is not a clear-cut and linear process. It would seem that the number of noncentral existential constructions was higher in Middle English than in Present-day English. This could, possibly, indicate a situation where the number of noncentral constructions was greatest in the early stages of English, i.e. shortly after the difference between *there*₁ and *there*₂ had been established. Then, as the cognitive efficiency of each category influenced the cognitive entrenchment, the number of noncentral constructions was whittled down to those operational in Present-day English. This argumentation is presented by Gould (1989) in regard to the evolutionary process, and although his viewpoints are controversial when it comes to the evolution of life forms, this does not mean that his way of thinking loses its potential power as a source of inspiration to other fields.¹² Interestingly, Bergen and Plauché (2005) in their study of French and English deictics and existentials, make use of another concept from biology, viz. that of convergence, which is a tendency for organisms facing similar challenges to develop similar responses

independently of each other. Bergen and Plauché (2005: 37) note that ‘[r]adial categories of constructions have a straightforward analog in the domain of biology. Understanding how this biological counterpart develops over time can afford us new ways to conceptualize how and why radial categories of constructions develop over time.’ Although Bergen and Plauché do not refer to Gould’s theories, they strengthen the argument for using biological theory as a model for linguistic theory.¹³

Based on the interpretation of certain fossil findings in British Columbia, Gould proposes a pattern of ‘maximal initial proliferation’ (1989: 301), followed by a ‘pronounced decimation.’ This is in sharp contrast to earlier views based on a continuous expansion, from a small number of simple life forms, to an ever greater number of more advanced forms. Gould’s proposal of ‘rapid initial diversification’ can be interpreted as ‘early experimentation and later standardization’ (Gould 1989: 304). This is not all that different from the development of *there*₁, where the number of noncentral constructions in Middle English was higher than in Present-day English. It is thus possible to suggest a process whereby a large number of noncentral constructions have developed relatively recently after the establishment of the ‘new’ linguistic device *there*₁. This is illustrated in figure 5.2 below.

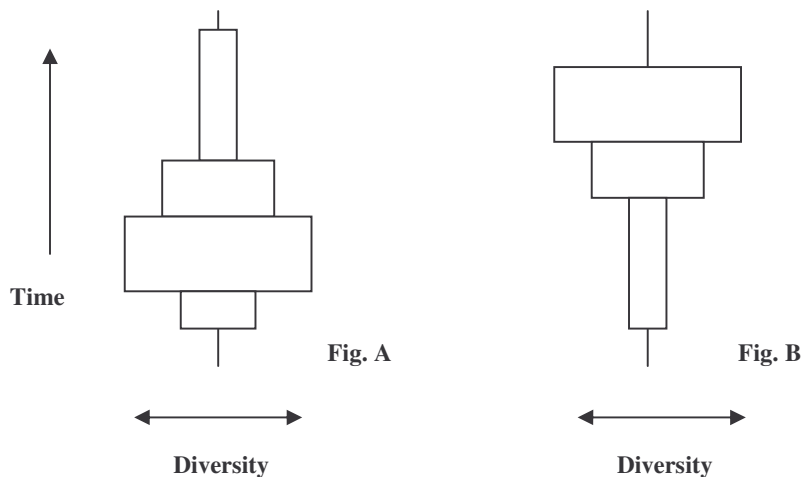


Figure 5.2: Alternative centers of gravity in the diachronic development of *there*₁
 (Based on Gould 1989: 303)

In figure 5.1, the view attributed to e.g. Traugott and Sweetser is represented in fig. B. Here the diachronic development starts with a small number of constructions which gradually develop a more abstract meaning, and grow in number and diversity as time passes. The ‘Christmas-tree’ shaped fig. A on the other hand, has its center of gravity at an early point in the history of *there*₁ and represents a view of initial maximal proliferation, where the number of existential constructions rapidly increase, and then decline as some constructions through experience are found to be more efficient and thus easier to reproduce than others. According to Breivik (1983a: 136), *there*₁ becomes ‘more and more common during the Old and Middle English periods,’ which, at the very least, does not contradict a hypothesis of early diversity. Intuitively, it seems natural that there is a period of trial and error in a wide range of environments as *there*₁ becomes more widespread, in order to test the efficiency of the construction (which would involve some testing to find out where it does not work). This does not affect the basic view that *there*₁ has developed from *there*₂ and attained a more abstract meaning through a process of grammaticalization; rather, it constitutes a nuance in regard to the diachronic development of *there*₁.

It seems likely that the degree of prototypicality has influenced the use and retrieval by the users, thus creating various degrees of cognitive entrenchment of the different categories. During a period of evolution, or trial and error, the number of categories is reduced to those identified by Lakoff in Present-day English. This analogy is useful as far as it goes, but it should not be stretched too far. Gould implies that coincidence is a main contributing factor in the evolutionary process (1989: 301), a viewpoint which has earned him some criticism. However, it would be unreasonable to propose that linguistic change is completely arbitrary, since, as Lakoff has pointed out (1987: 84), there is always a cultural aspect to these categories; and as the culture changes there will also be some impetus for a change in the category system.

Nonetheless; it is difficult to take the corpus material in the present thesis as basis for a deterministic view, where some noncentral constructions were ‘doomed’ to extinction from the start. This is also Gould’s point, when he says that ‘[u]npredictability must rule if geological longevity depends upon the lucky side consequences of features

developed for other reasons' (1989: 308). Blank (1999: 71) points to enhancement of 'communicative efficiency' as the governing motivation for semantic change, with six broad categories of factors causing the change (1999: 71-80): A new concept causing the need for a new name; expressing abstract concepts in concrete terms via metaphors; sociocultural change; close conceptual relations coupled with contextual information (which appears to be close to Traugott's notion of grammaticalization); attempts at reducing complexity and irregularity in the lexicon; and the need to express emotionally marked concepts.¹⁴ As far as *there*₁ is concerned, the cognitive efficiency of the categories would probably have been determined by interaction between several of these cognitive and cultural factors. It would appear then, that the overall view which best explains the results from the corpus material seems to be that of a large number of early categories, of which a few have survived and acted as basis for possible additional development.

5.7 Summary

This chapter started with a brief summary of chapter 4, before recapitulating some main points of Cognitive Linguistics. The subsequent sections compared Lakoff's noncentral categories of existential constructions in Present-day English to those of Middle English. The possible existence of a number of noncentral categories of existential *there*₁ in Middle English was discussed; and, based on this, I argued that there was a closer link in Middle English than in Present-day English between some of these categories and the deictic *there*₂, since there appear to be greater similarities in the mental spaces which both constructions refer to. The question of the implications this might have on the process through which *there*₁ has evolved was also raised.

Notes

¹ Or, in some cases, one of the other noncentral constructions.

² The notation does not include inverted structures, as these are considered to be derived from a construction which is covered by the present notation.

³ This is based on the examples in the corpus. In Present-day English it seems that the common metaphor for emotional states is locative, via a container metaphor, as in *they are in love*, *she is in pain*, etc.

⁴ In Middle English, the fricatives were mostly voiceless, except between vowels or in positions without stress (Davis 1987: xxxiv). Thus, the pronunciation of the initial fricative in *there*₁ would presumably depend to a certain degree on the context.

⁵ It seems that the relationship between *there*₁ and initial locative expressions is profound, as noted by Bolinger (1977: 100) and Lakoff (1987: 570). The presence of an initial locative adverbial is in many cases obligatory in Present-day English for the use of *there*₁ to be grammatical.

⁶ All the examples given by Coopmans are prepositional phrases.

⁷ A prepositional phrase could be seen as giving more concrete information about a location than a simple adverb does. *In the yard* is a concrete location, while *here*₂ and *there*₂ require the listener to be aware in advance of which locations these adverbs refer to. This means that a prepositional phrase could be seen as carrying at least relatively more new information than the deictic adverbs.

⁸ According to Crystal (1992: 403), an unaccusative (also called ‘ergative’) verb is ‘an intransitive verb whose subject originates as an object, [e.g.] *The vase broke* (i.e. someone or something broke the vase).’

⁹ The acceptability of (5.39b) may be connected to the verb involved, which implies some general background to a force of nature, similar to Bolinger’s interpretation of weather *it* (section 2.3.2). In that case, the grounds for accepting the construction would be somewhat different from those involved in (5.37), which simply suggests that different metaphorical processes may lead to similar results.

¹⁰ As Lakoff and Johnson point out, there is no such thing as ‘the feet of the mountains,’ which strengthens the case for the partial nature of this metaphor.

¹¹ However, the sum of all the occurrences of the various noncentral constructions is 95 or 14.5 % of the entire corpus.

¹² See e.g. Swedish historian Peter Englund’s *Tystnadens historia och andra essäer* (Stockholm: 2003) for an interesting view on the applicability of both the ideas of Gould and those of his critic Simon Conway Morris in the field of history.

¹³ In the present thesis, the decision to employ biological theory as a model for diachronic linguistic development was arrived at independently from Bergen and Plauché. This can be seen as an example of convergence in itself, i.e. a similar response to similar challenges, and in my view only serves to strengthen the argument for this approach further.

¹⁴ An example of an emotionally marked concept is DEATH, which is expressed as EXISTENCE AWAY in *She has left us*. The taboo of death leads to the creation of a euphemism.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study is an attempt to gain insight into the principles which govern the use of existential *there*₁ in Middle English. With a basis in Cognitive Linguistics, this investigation has examined the use of *there*₁ in 653 Middle English clauses, taken from the works of Geoffrey Chaucer.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 provided the background for the thesis. The introduction in chapter 1 gave a brief overview of the field of study and the theoretical framework, as well as presenting two hypotheses. According to the first hypothesis, there was a qualitative difference in terms of usage of the morpheme *there*₁ between Middle English and Present-day English. Hypothesis two predicts that the reason for this is that there is a closer link between Middle English existential *there*₁ and the locative adverbial *there*₂ than between their Present-day English equivalents. Chapter 2 presented previous research on *there*₁, as well as other relevant topics. Chapter 3 dealt with theory and method, and presented the theoretical framework in some detail, as well as discussing the methods used and certain problems connected with them. In connection with the discussion of method, an introduction to the criteria for analyzing the corpus material was given.

The main chapters of this study are chapters 4 and 5, where the results of the investigation were presented and discussed. Chapter 4 addressed the distributional characteristics of Middle English existential clauses, and showed that the majority of the clauses in the corpus display very similar characteristics to Present-day English existential constructions. However, the proportion of forms that must be considered noncentral is higher in Middle English than what is found in corpora based on Present-day English. But although there are differences, the similarities are greater than the differences. For this reason, hypothesis one was only partially corroborated by the corpus material.

A number of noncentral constructions were identified in the corpus material. This revealed a number of constructions which would not only be scarce in Present-day

English, but which would not be expected to occur at all. With the exception of the existential *here*₁ category, these noncentral features were all connected either with certain aspects of the verb phrase or the presence or absence of *there*₁.

In chapter 5, the results from chapter 4 were discussed from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics. It was shown that six distinct Middle English noncentral existential constructions could be identified and explained with a Cognitive approach. Since at least three of Lakoff's noncentral constructions are also present, this brings the total number of noncentral existentials up to at least nine vs. four in Present-day English. The first part of the chapter gave a brief account of some of the main points from the previous chapters, before the various noncentral constructions were discussed, followed by a short description of the characteristics of each construction. Within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, a number of theoretical variations were referred to, as well as the works of linguists working in other paradigms. However, these viewpoints were all interpreted within a frame of understanding based on Cognitive Linguistics. The last section in chapter 5 presented some thoughts on the status of *there*₁ in Middle English, and it was posited that the status of the noncentral existential constructions in Middle English has possible implications both for the status of *there*₁ and the perspectives and terms in which we can best understand the changes this morpheme has gone through.

Based on the interpretations of the noncentral existential constructions in the corpus and their tentative degree of cognitive entrenchment, it was suggested that the nature of the mental space that Middle English *there*₁ refers to is somewhat different than that of Present-day English *there*₁, as described by Lakoff (1987). It was argued that the mental space referred to by some of the noncentral Middle English *there*₁ constructions had certain locative properties usually associated with *there*₂ in Present-day English. Locative properties like deictic oppositions and movement were identified as aspects of the metaphorical properties of the noncentral existential constructions. Again, as with hypothesis one, this represents only a partial corroboration of hypothesis two, in the sense that some aspects of the noncentral existential constructions displayed a closer affiliation with *there*₂, but no closer relation in general was established.

The question of the implications of this for the development of *there*₁ was also raised. It was suggested that the material presented in this thesis is not consistent with a

view that the meanings associated with *there*₁ have gradually evolved from a concrete, or root, meaning, which has then gradually become more complex and abstract, evolving into more epistemic uses of the morpheme. Instead, a ‘Christmas-tree’ shaped development is proposed, with a high number of early inventions based on the root meaning of *there*, followed by decimation and standardization based on those metaphors that over time proved more cognitively efficient.

An obvious problem connected with the results presented in this thesis is the small material. To make predictions regarding such a complex theme as *there*₁ based on only 653 clauses from a single 14th century author could with justification be regarded as foolhardy; even if that author is Geoffrey Chaucer. However, as pointed out in chapter 1, there was a need to keep the size of the material within manageable limits of two semesters’ work, given that this is a master’s thesis. There is nevertheless no doubt that the study would have benefited from a greater diversity in material, both synchronically and diachronically. Another problem is that there are no native speakers of Middle English available to support the interpretations of the noncentral constructions. Although an approach to overcome this was sketched in chapter 3, it proved difficult to use the frequencies of occurrence for anything but tentative suggestions based on such a small material. A cognitive, semantic study of historical material will always balance precariously between science and guesswork, with the implications this has for the status of the conclusions that can be drawn from the material. However, with that said, historical linguistics can in my opinion contribute much to the field of linguistics both in general terms and in terms of methodology. As the present study has shown, there are ample possibilities for further research on the noncentral constructions in earlier English, both synchronically and diachronically, as well as on the methodological questions connected to a historical cognitive approach.

Although it is based on current, mainstream linguistic theory, the present thesis is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to combine a cognitive and a quantitative approach in a historical study of *there*₁. Nevertheless, in spite of some of its shortcomings and its experimental nature, this study has hopefully contributed something to the understanding of *there*₁ in Middle English.

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APPENDIX

