

Above and Beyond Phonology in Ethnolinguistic Variation: Existentials in Toronto English

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INTRODUCTION*

(1) Variable Agreement in Plural Existentials

Plural agreement

a. We had to hang our food because there **were** bears. (004:774)¹

Singular agreement

b. There **'s** black bears, I believe there **'s** brown bears. (006:059)

(2) Questions

a. What is the linguistic conditioning of singular agreement?

- Does it differ from the conditioning of *there's*? (Walker 2007)

b. Is singular agreement available for social evaluation?

LINGUISTIC FACTOR GROUPS

(3) Tense + Form

Present, contracted

a. There **'s** other jobs that you can get with criminology. (014:348)

Present, uncontracted

b. There **is** no municipal laws or anything like that. (020:789)

Past, uncontracted

c. It was very cramped 'cause there **was** like a lot of people in one room. (031:817)

(4) Plural -s

Absent

a. Yes, there **are** a few select people that I wish I could fire. (024:224)

Present

b. There **'s** just a lot of things I want to learn about. (007:712)

(5) Intervening Material

Present

a. 'Cause there **were** just so many different types of people. (014:728)

Absent

b. There **'s** always people who like that sort of darker fashion. (025:514)

(6) Extension (Martinez Insua & Palacios Martinez 2003)

None

a. There **weren't** actually a lot of Caucasians. (066:1012)

Adverbial

b. There **are** people from every culture still down there. (020:364)

Clausal

c. And then sometimes there **'s** fights breaking out. (014:786)

(7) Polarity

Positive

a. Up in the sky, there **was** two rainbows. (022:647)

Negative

b. And there **weren't** a lot of houses for sale then. (027:061)

(8) Type of Determiner (Meechan & Foley 1994)

No determiner

a. I know there **'s** good Americans in America. (007:099)

Number

b. There **were** about six families that left our church. (027:809)

Definite

c. Then there **'s** like the holidays like Halloween ... (002:432)

Indefinite

d. There **'s** a bunch of apartments right up on the hill. (032:201)

Other

e. Yeah, there **were** some Asian math teachers. (020:059)

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¹ Examples are identified by speaker number in the Toronto English corpus (Hoffman & Walker 2007) and line number in the transcription.

Table 1: Factors contributing to singular agreement in plural existentials in Toronto English (excluding there's).

	Total N:	173		
	Input:	.337		
			%	N
Tense				
Past	.63		46	107
Present	.31		18	66
Not selected as significant:	Type of determiner, Plural -s, Intervening material, Polarity, Extension			

Table 2: Factors contributing to there's in plural existentials in Toronto English.

	Total N:	401		
	Input:	.574		
			%	N
Type of Determiner				
Indefinite	.71		75	99
Definite	.52		64	14
No determiner	.52		60	171
Number	.42		51	35
Other	.24		31	82
	Range:	37		
Intervening Material				
Present	.65		66	84
Absent	.46		55	316
	Range:	19		
Plural -s				
Present	.54		61	270
Absent	.42		48	131
	Range:	12		
Not selected as significant:	Polarity, Extension			

CONCLUSIONS

- linguistic conditioning differs for singular agreement and *there's* (Walker 2007)
- existentials appear to be available for social evaluation (Meyerhoff & Walker 2008; cf. Cheshire 1998)
 - rates differ according to ethnic group and enclave status
- groups follow community in linguistic conditioning (Meyerhoff & Walker 2008)
 - rate of singular agreement relative to *there's* remains constant
 - primary effects for singular agreement and *there's* parallel across ethnic groups and enclave status
 - secondary effects for *there's* weakened in +enclave groups

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