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Teaching and Learning the Awareness of Existence in English Existential Sentences

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ABSTRACT

This present study investigates the reasons that cause Chinese students' difficulties, in learning English existential sentence, *there-be* structure. A set of questions are designed to examine their awareness of 'existence' in both languages. 609 participants attain this study. After data analysis, two findings indicate: (1) Students are used to selecting location as a subject starting an existential sentence which is similar to Chinese syntax, and *there-be* might be considered of using only when location is not given. (2) With the influence of Chinese syntax, the awareness between the place and the main noun forms because that a thing/object as a subject keeps have / has as its verb could change sentence construction and cannot effectively express the original existence in English. Therefore, this grammatical error stems not only from differences in awareness of existence between languages, but also from different grammar expressions about existence. In addition, in Chinese, existence [there-be] and possession [have/ has], are expressed and translated by the only one Chinese character '有'. Most teachers normally adopt "have" idea to help interlingual translation to learn EES. However, this teaching might lead to a potential difficulty for students to be aware of existential difference between English and Chinese.

Keywords: English existential sentence, linguistics, intercultural learning, language education, English grammar teaching, ESL

INTRODUCTION

English existential structure is not new for Chinese students in Taiwan, but the awareness of existence in English is still confusing to them. This grammar structure, *there-be*, has been taught early from the seventh grade in public school in Taiwan. After teaching English in college for years,

the authors still hear students' expressing "I have five people in my family." or "My family has five members." in their English self-introduction on the first day of school. Although the authors can understand the L1 [mother tongue] has affected students' learning of L2 [foreign language], the authors would like to learn about why *there-be* structure is not the first option for the students to describe a situation of existence.

A research design is created to examine how different or complicated learning English awareness of existence can be for Chinese students. 609 college students from two universities attend this study, including 58 percent of higher intermediate levels and 42 percent of intermediate levels. The instrument, a ten-question quiz is designed to test if students are clear about *there-be* sentences. The outcomes indicate that the awareness of ownership from have/has sentences in Chinese usually replaces or blends with the awareness of existential sentence in English, particularly in spoken English. The result also implies whether instruction of existential structure is specific enough in current English language education in Taiwan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English existential sentences [EES] might be both the easiest and the most difficult grammar for ESL teachers and learners whose first language is Chinese. Although several of previous studies, including in linguistics, literature and English grammar teaching fields, have broadly discussed English existential structures, function, and features the awareness of 'existence' demonstrates various cognition and ways of expression rooted from different language systems [3], [5], [6], [9], [10], [12-14].

This present study focuses on exploring and understanding the reasons why teaching and learning English existential structures, 'there-be' [EES] is still a difficulty for Chinese ESL students and teachers in Taiwan. However, in this study, no other pattern of existential sentences is focused except *there-be* structure. One reason is that participants are confused about how to use it, and the other is that the sentences without accusative verbs, such as come, exist, remain, and live; contain more existential meaning [10].

To improve current learning and teaching in EES, *there-be*, the awareness of existence should be clarified in the definition and structures, including both in English and Chinese. Chomsky mentioned in his lecture that 'there' is an expletive word which serves as a place for the subject and according to the extended Projection Principle, all sentences to have a subject of the predicate at logical form [LF] [3]. In general, *There* + *be* + *NP* [+locative phrase] [9] is the basic existential sentence structure required to be taught in junior high school in Taiwan. But, it is not sure that the awareness of existence for native English speakers has been exactly aware of or understood by ESL teachers and students. Therefore, the semantic meaning of EES needs to be explained specifically. Fillmore and Lyons suggest that in the structure, *There* + *be* + *NP* [+locative phrase], "*there*" is transformed by copying the locative phrase into subject position, and then replaces it by the preform there [5], [12]. Lyons proposes that existential sentences contain, in effect, a locative 'dummy'. This dummy element is equivalent to 'in the universe' [12]. For example:

There are ghosts.

There are ghosts in the universe [9].

In other words, the source of *there* in existential sentences is not the locative phrase, despite appearances. However, Allen also discusses the contrast of *there-be* structure and *have* sentence [9]. In the former structure, the objective element is thematised, whereas the locative element is thematised in the later. He accounts furthermore, there is a correlation between the sentences with a thematised objective case element and the sentences with the locative element thematised with the concomitant replacement of the verb *be* by the verb *have*. For example:

Africa has lions in it.

The box has many toys in it.

The library has books in it.

Compare to the two groups of sentences (1) and (2), we can find that if existential sentences contain no realized locative phrase, they will not submit to the *have*-transformation. This finding implies that in English *have* sentence always keeps a subject which in meaning owns or possesses an object/some objects but is not related to something existing or not [9].

Interestingly, in Chinese [Mandarin], both *there-be* structure and *have* sentence, in meaning, correspond to the verb '有', which sounds like *you* and means 'have' in Chinese. The *you*- sentence construction in Chinese is the closest counterpart to English *there* insertion [8]. This Chinese construction starts with the existential marker *you* (literally 'have') at the beginning of a regular sentence [14]. The examples from White's study are as follows:

you yiben shu zai zhuozi shang

have one book at table top

有 一本 書 在 桌 上

'There is a book on the table.'

In terms of the contrast of the two languages from the examples, the awareness of existence in Chinese can directly transfers into '有' which means 'have' in English. However, in English grammar teaching, it is not difficult for students to distinguish the awareness of existence from the feeling of possession because there is no specific subject [owner] can be found in this type of sentence. In general, the Chinese existential sentence above can usually be spoken in the other way:

桌上 有 一本 書

On the table has a book

If existential sentences in English are a sentence pattern of denoting somebody or something exists, appears or disappears somewhere, a localizer at the beginning of the sentence and an object of the sentence indicates the one there exists, appears or disappears in Chinese [7]. In Chan's study, the survey result from 710 Hong Kong Chinese ESL learners shows they are not able to use the *there-be* structure for expressing the existential or present function in English because many of them in Hong Kong tend to think in Chinese first before they wrote in English [2]. Chan notices that the corresponding existential meaning is '*have*' in Chinese, with the locative expression function as the subject of the sentence and the resultant structure resembling a possessive sentence. Chinese learners of English often misuse the verb '*have*' to express the existential or present function. Some of these translated versions used structures of Chinese:

There have/has many Japanese tourists on the ship / in the vessel.

The ship has many Japanese tourists.

On the vessel, I / here have many Japanese tourists.

The sentence structure is very similar to a word-for-word translation of the corresponding Chinese sentence [2]. That is, Chinese students' English existential sentence learning is highly influenced by their first language [L1].

Zhang concludes two main factors influenced Chinese leaners' *there-be* sentences over generations [16]. One is the influence from L1. Zhang thinks "Chinese is topic-prominent language while English is a subject-prominent language. This phenomenon is caused by transfer from learner's first language." [p. 713] The other is a developmental factor. Zhang found the L2 learners with the development of English proficiency, gradual perception and understanding of L2 rules employ other structures and use fewer *there be*-sentences. Furthermore, the errors that the L2 learners created in learning *there be*-sentences have developed into a fossilized language format which is even accepted in L2 acquisition.

In addition, Zhang also analyzes why Chinese students produce "*there* + *have*" sentences instead of "*there* + *be*" ones. It's because they confuse both of sentence patterns which can express the same meaning of the Chinese word "*you*" [have], and it is translated into the English verb "have." Particularly, Chinese students also express "have" which means "own." The transfer of the vocabulary expands the usage of "have" as well as decrease the appliance of "*there be*." These errors are assumed to be affected by the typical Chinese construction.

METHODOLOGY

Research questions

This design of study attempts to explore and clarify possible factors that might cause Chinese students' confusion and misuse in using English existential structures, *there-be*. In accordance with the previous research about how Chinese language has influenced the students in learning EES, and the authors' observation of using EES in English class, there are four research questions proposed for this study:

1. How much are L2 college students aware of existence in both Chinese and English?
2. How do they distinguish the awareness between existence and possession in both languages?

Qualitative research questions:

1. How has Chinese language affected ESL college students' expression of EES?
2. How do ESL college teachers connect their EES grammar knowledge with Chinese students' learning?

Participants

The participants are from two universities in central Taiwan, whose first language is Chinese (or Mandarin). There are totally 609 college students attending this research, including freshmen and sophomores. These subjects have learned English for more than six years and are sorted into two

English levels, higher intermediates [58 percent; n = 355] and intermediates [42 percent; n = 254] since they entered college. A few of the students major in English language and literature.

Additionally, several English teachers, whose students participate in this study, attain the interview by providing their teaching experience about how they teach EES in.

Instruments

There is a set of ten-question quiz designed to test the subjects [Appendix I]. Eight of them are multiple-choice grammar questions to test students whether they have clear or basic concepts about how to make English existential sentences. According to Allen's study, if EES [*there-be* structure] contains no realized locative phrase, the sentence pattern will not transform into the structure with *have/has* as verb [9]. Both *there-be* structure and *have/has* sentence, in meaning, correspond to the verb '有', which sounds like *you* and means 'have' in Chinese [2], [8], [16]. Both of sentence structures accord with the similar basic grammar construction: *subject + verb + object / complement* [2], [7], [14], [16]. Under the influence of first language, how difficult for students to distinguish the awareness of existence from the established feeling of possession is the major expectation and purpose of creating the set of questions.

In each of the eight questions, it provides a Chinese sentence with "有" ["*you*" in Chinese means "have/has" in English] and three English answers, including a sentence translation starting with *there-be* [A1], a sentence translation with *have/has* as verb [A2], and the third is both of the two translations are correct [A3].

In addition, to realize why Chinese students make "*there* + *have*" sentences instead of "*there* + *be*" ones [2], [16], and how they compose an EES through their previous English grammar learning, two sentence-making questions, Question Nine and Question Ten are added to the quiz. Question Nine and Ten are English sentence translation and the participants have to translate the Chinese sentences into English ones. The last two questions are to elicit quiz takers to employ *there-be* structure to answer. It took the quiz takers about eight to ten minutes to finish.

Three questions for the interviewed instructors are as follows:

1. Have you ever heard "English Existential Sentence?" If not, do you know *there-be* structure?
2. Under what conditions would you use *there-be* structure to make a sentence?
3. How do you teach *there-be* structure to college students?

Data Collection

This study started in February, 2018. Data collection for quiz took around one month. 609 college students and 8 English teachers in the college language center were interviewed to provide their experience in learning and teaching English existential sentences.

Data Analysis

Most of the answers with *there-be* structures [A1] are selected [See the study questions on Appendix I]. The answers with *have/has* as verb [A2] are less selected. High percentage of subjects also selects the third answer [A3] which is designed as "both A1 and A2 are correct." As to Question Nine and Question Ten, whether *there-be* structure is considered in doing translation by the participants is

the main concern, rather their grammar mistakes. Among these eight designed questions, all of A1 choices are correct to each question, and all of A2 choices are incorrect except the A2s in Question Three and Question Seven. In other words, the correct answers to Question Three and Question seven are A3 [both A1 and A2 are correct].

After data analysis, there are several findings collected as follows:

1. Most of the participants select A1 among each question. A1 choice is the most selected in each question, particularly, in Question One, Four, Six and Eight. According to Figure 1, Question Four shows the most students think A1 [*there-be* structure] is correct [n = 443]; Question One shows the second highest percentage of A1 choice [n = 386] and Question Eight is the third one [n = 349]. The fourth A1 selections are from Question Six. [n = 225] This result indicates that although over half of the participates select the correct answers from Question One, Four, Six and Eight, relatively speaking, participants might be only more clearly aware of the similar existence in English from these four sentences, compared to the other questions.

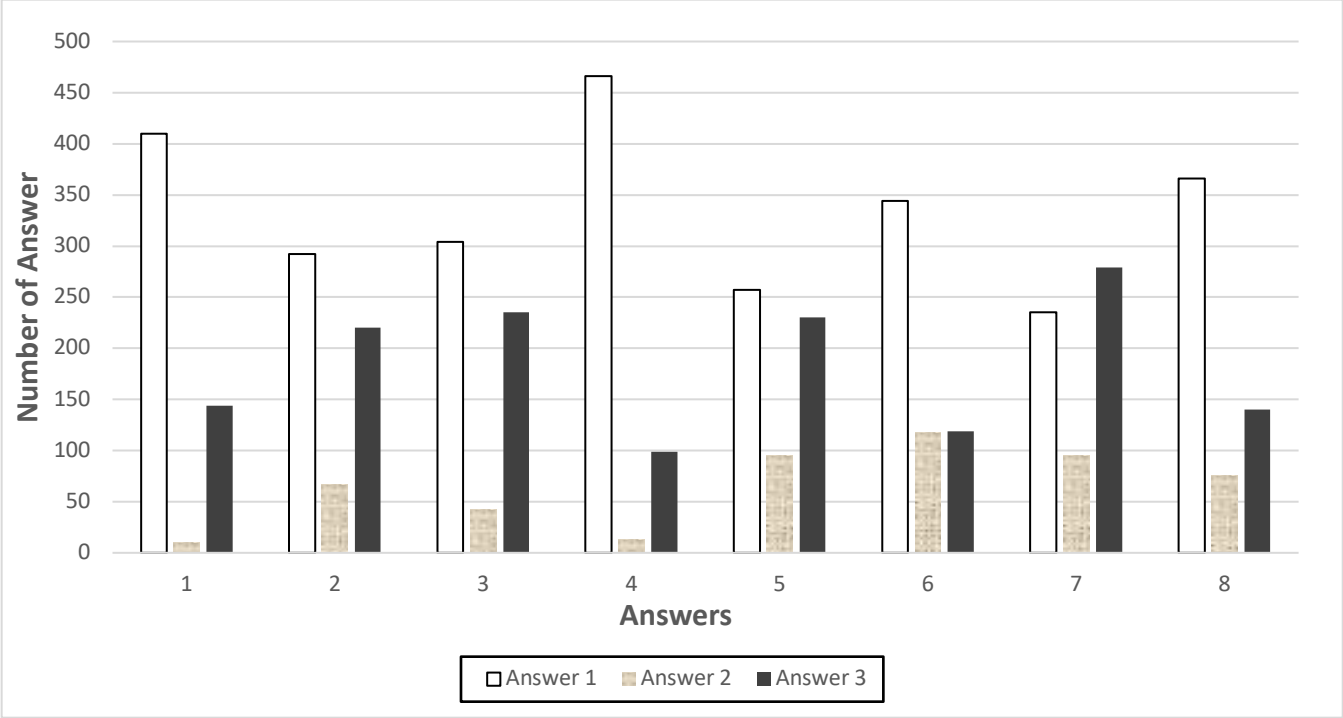


Figure 1. Answers to Questions One to Eight

2. On the other hand, fewer students select A2 [*have/has* as verb] as the answers to each question compared to the other two answer, A1 and A3. The fewest students select A2 to Question One [n = 7], 12 select A2 to Question Four, and 39 participants do to Question Three. The highest percentage of A2 shows in Question Six. [n = 112] 86 subjects select A2 as the answer to Question Five.
3. 264 participants think A3 [both A1 and A2 are correct] is the correct answer to Question Seven and this number is higher than A1 [n = 225]. There are the same number of participants [n = 220] respectively select A3 to Question Three and Question Five. The number of selections between A1 and A3 in Question Three and Question Five is close.

[Question Three, A1:A3 = 292:220; Question Five, A1:A3 = 225:264] Only 93 participants select A3 to Question Four

4. In Figure 2, there are more detailed comparisons between the answers from higher intermediate level and intermediate one. The changes of the stripes in Figure 2 between the two levels are similar. This finding might imply that the two levels have similar grammar concepts and awareness of existence/ownership. Question Six can be an obvious example accounting for it. The selections on A2 and A3 from both of the levels are close. This finding is unusual because that A2 and A3 are significantly incorrect answers but the most higher-intermediate level selects A2 than the A2 selections in the other questions.

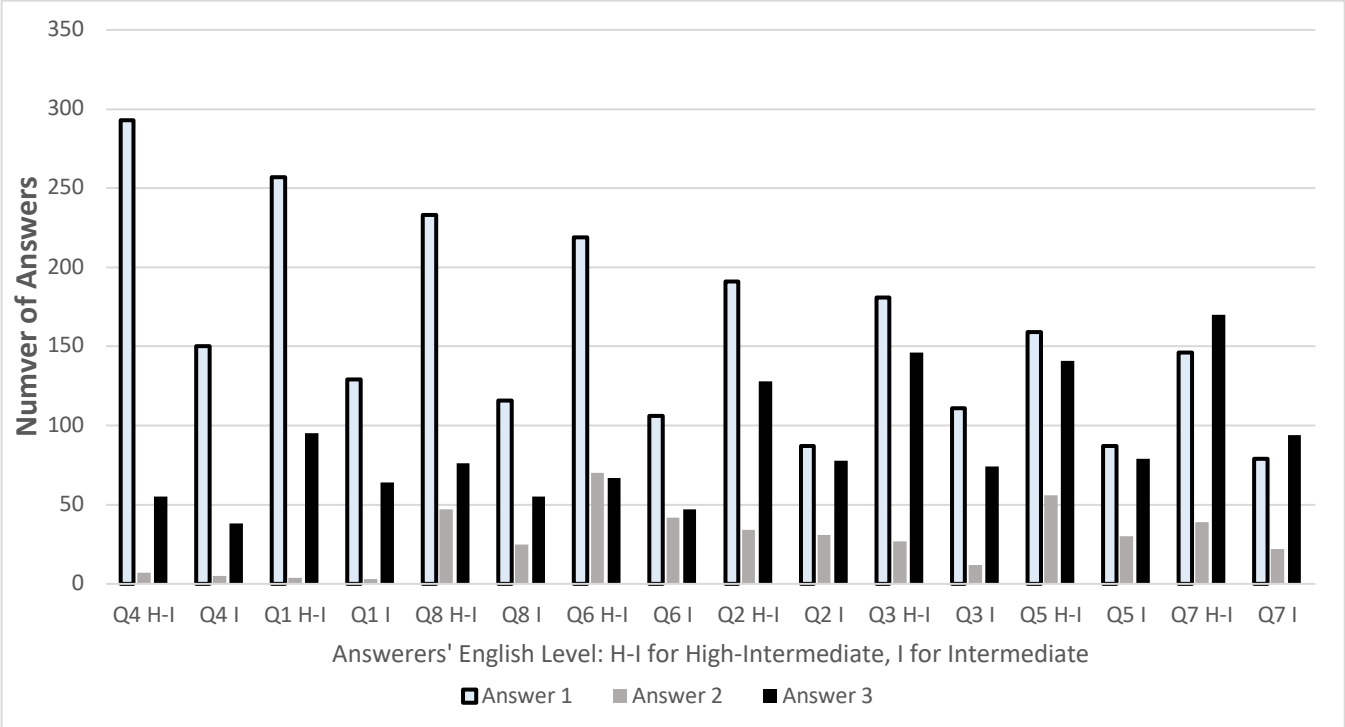


Figure 2. Questions Ranked by Answers

5. In Question Three and Question Seven, the second answers, A2, are differently designed from the other questions. The A2 sentences in Question Three and Question Seven are added preposition phrases in the end of answers. Besides, the number of students who choose A3 in Question Seven is higher than that of the others who choose A3 in the rest of questions.
6. The same Chinese word, "家", is designed to show in Question Five and Question Six. However, this Chinese word corresponds to two different English words, "family" in Question Five, and "house" in Question Six. "家" is an abstract and complicated existence to Chinese people because it covers both physical context and psychological function for people's life. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish whether it is a place or an existence of abstraction for participants when answering these two questions. That might be the reason why the number of A2 plus A3 is higher than the number of A1 in Question Five, and the number in Question Six is close to A1
7. According to grammar construction of Chinese, a place, house, is a physical existence which can store or possess things. Therefore, compare to "family" in Question Five, "house" could

be more reasonable and imaginable to be a subject, and that's why the selections for A2 in Question Six is more than that in Question Five.

8. However, the selections of A3 in Question Five are much more the number is Question Six. One possible explanation for that might be based on a long-term existing relationship between family and family members in Question Five, whereas, the relationship between a house and a dog is changeable and meaningless in Question Six because a house cannot possess a dog, even a house accords with a consideration as a subject in basic Chinese grammar construction [Subject + verb + object / complement].
9. Question Nine and Question Ten [Appendix I] are translation questions designed to explore the interlingual process of how students can generate *there-be* sentence based on Chinese questions. According to Figure 3, in Question Nine, 367 students of all 564 students answer the questions. Of those who answered the question, only 149 use the sentence pattern, *there-be*. In Question Ten, the number of students [n = 144+69] who used *there-be* structure is lower than that of students who use other sentence patterns [n = 282]. Of those who use other sentence patterns, most of them use a place [Taipei 101] as the subject of the sentence. By contrast, in Question Nine, there is no location that can be found, it is assumed that these subjects might choose not to answer the question because they might not know how.
10. In Question Nine and Question Ten [Appendix II, including quiz and answer], because of the instruction that suggests the quiz-takers to translate Chinese sentences into English ones referring to the other eight questions. This advice design is to guide the subjects to make sentences in order to examine the different awareness between existence and possession. There are 564 subjects in total answering the two questions [See Figure 3]. Figure 3 demonstrates that 367 subjects translate the Chinese sentence in Question Nine into English, and 495 ones answer Question Ten. In Question Nine, 149 out of 367 create English starting with *there-be* regardless of grammatical correction, 74 make sentences with "There have / has…" at the beginning, and the other 144's sentences don't follow the instruction. In Question Ten, 114 out of 495 make *there-be* type of sentences, 69 of them start their answers with there have / has, and the other 282 cannot even make correct English sentences in grammar.
11. These two qualitative questions reveal two points worthy of paying attention to: (1) In reference to the examples in the other questions, only 40 percent of quiz-takers translate the sentence with *there-be* structure in Question Nine, and 20 percent of them make the same decision in Question Ten. (2) In terms of (1), If the relevant direction is not provided, it is nearly uncertain whether *there-be* structure could possibly be considered to apply to answer the two sentence-making questions. Moreover, the findings in this study opposite to the ideas that Zhang [16] proposed. Zhang observes Chinese learners with low proficiency level make more *there-be* sentences than learners with higher proficiency. In other word, Chinese students with the higher level of English proficiency try to use fewer English existential sentences. However, Zhang's observation doesn't happen in Taiwanese students, even though Chinese is the official language in both China and Taiwan.

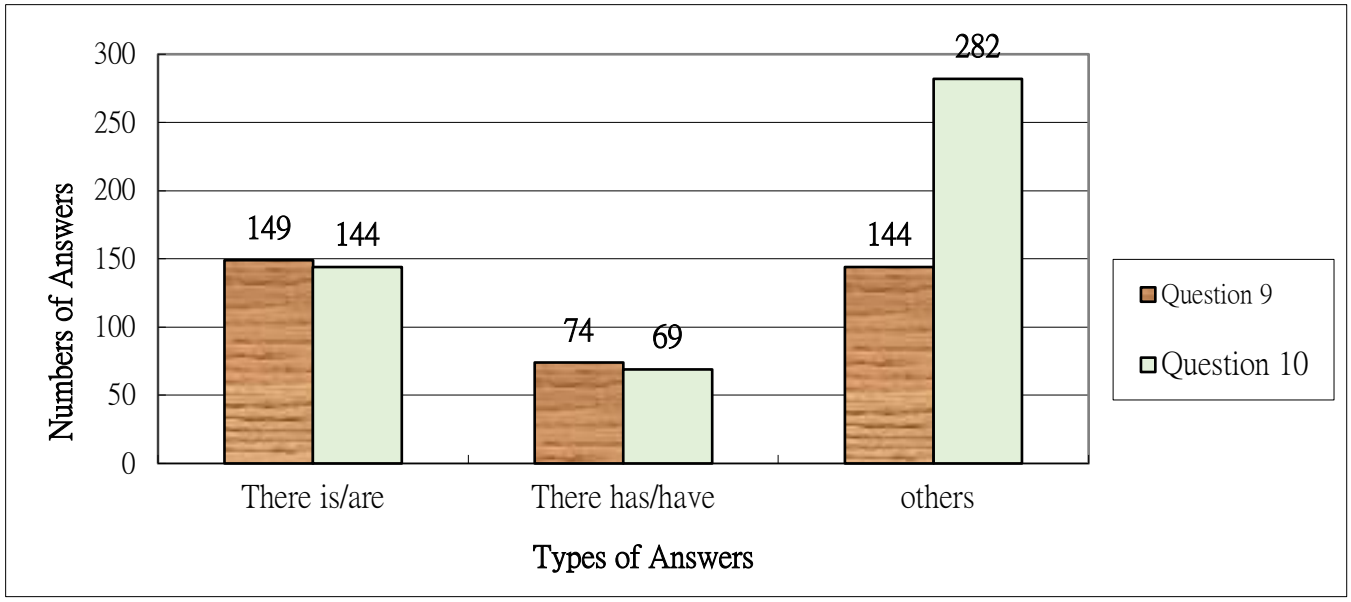


Figure 3. Answers to Question Nine and Ten

The teachers interviewed by the author provide their grammatical perspectives in teaching EES in their classes. A main question asked by the author is how they start to teach EES to students although they have learned about this structure when they were junior high school students. During the process of their talking, the author also asked the questions listed on our quiz of this study to know whether these Chinese ESL teachers can be confident in using *there-be* because they had learnt and grown up in the similar cultural and linguistic context to their student's in college.

The response from the teachers interviewed for this study are as follows:

a. "What is EES?" After the author's explanation, the teacher was surprised and responded "Oh, that means *there-be* structure! I don't know about the term but I know that structure."
b. "Sometimes, my students ask me about whether some *there-be* sentences are correct or not. Honestly, I am not quite sure about them. But I will respond to them after checking if these sentences were used before through Google search."
c. "I have basic and limited knowledge about EES. However, even so, I can be aware of the right moment of using *there-be* sentence because I have been required to practice that type of sentences for thousands of times when I was a junior high, you know. I think our students have not practiced so much as we have before."
d. "EES is interesting but difficult to me. It's confusing. Compare these there-be sentences:
    - There are two cats in the cage. (O)
    - The cage has two cats. (X)
    - There are three parts in the theory. (O)
    - The theory has three parts. (O)
    - The room has several lights. (X)
    - The room has several lights in it. (O)
e. "I tell my students to use have/has as verb in an English sentence when the subject in Chinese semantics is human being or living things because that is a kind of awareness of possession. On the contrary, they have to choose *there-be* structure if the subject is not people or

something alive because this subject cannot actively achieve anything. I think this is an easy way to help them tell a different awareness from the other."

f. "I do notice that the international students from Mainland China use more *there-be* sentences than local students in their English writing. I don't know why."
g. "I tell my students that they have to use ESS if they would describe people or objects in a close or open space. It is because there is no necessary connection within the individual existence. They don't belong to one another."
h. "The awareness of existence is quite different from the awareness of possession or ownership.

For example, we may say 'The table has four legs.' A table with four legs is a complete thing. This is a relationship of possession between table and legs. However, we may not say 'The wall has two paintings.' It is because the paintings are not part of the wall. It is clear. They are existential, not belong to the wall and the later cannot have them."

RESULTS

The Results From Data Analysis Of The Study Questions

The finding that the most students select A1in every question, except Question Seven, might mean two possible inferences. First of all, the students have already established the basis of the TBSS during their middle school; however, their TBSS learning might not complete or enough and lead that the selections of A1to each question is significantly different. Second, the awareness of existence under the influence of Chinese language may be converted into the awareness of possession in expression. In other words, TBSS [there is/are + object / complement + place] in English may be expressed by HSS [subject + have/has + object] through Chinese. Therefore, simple awareness of existence in English turns into a consideration or concern about the connection between subject and object. Both of the inferences account for the result displayed in Figure 1.

After data analysis, the authors found that the idea, existence, is expressed by "有" [sounded like "*you"* in English], which means and functions like "have" in Chinese. With the different ways of expression in the two languages, two facts can be observed. First, the sentence pattern of expressing the idea, existence, is different in Chinese. It is because "have" is a transitive verb and it grammatically has its subject[s] and object[s]. This sort of sentence pattern with have-verb is frequently used to display the idea, existence, in the way of "S + have/has + O." in Chinese. Secondly, based on the established HSS utilized to express existence, place in TBSS is used as subject and the other noun is used as object in Chinese. In other words, the Chinese express the idea of existence by way of the HSS. Each of the sentences showed in the quiz of this study can be taken as an example:

[English] There are 25 students in the classroom.
有　25個學生(noun) 在教室裡(place)

[Chinese] 教室裡 有二十五 (25) 個學生。
In the classroom has 25 students verb object

Therefore, TBSS is replaced by HSS in Chinese when expressing the idea of existence.

Furthermore, the authors find that "**有**" covers more connotations in Chinese in addition to the idea of "existence," at least, including the meanings applied in the questions of this study. Along with the relationships between places and the major noun in a Chinese sentence, "**有**" may also express the following verbs / verb phrases: belong to, be a part of, connect, own, cover, have, include, maintain, possess, and so on. [See Figure 1] A verb standing for so many meanings might be the other reason to make students confused so that they cannot be completely aware of what existence is when learning EES. In the quiz of this study, the third selection of answer, A3, for each question accounts for the uncertainty and confusion.

According to the finding one and two, the relationship between places and the subjects in Question One, Four, and Eight cannot be clearly aware of and corresponded to the most of connotations of "**有**" in Chinese but can only be close to awareness of existence. Therefore, the correct selections [A1] are much higher and the incorrect ones [A2] are relatively lower in these three questions, compared to the other ones. [See Table 1] Except Question One, Four, and Eight, the awareness of have-verb from the other questions can correspond to the connotations of **"有"** in Chinese, listed as follows:

- Q2: **"有"** means "a part of"
- Q3: "a part of"
- Q5: "belong to"
- Q6: "possess"
- Q7: "a part of"

Because of the interference of corresponding connotations of **"有" [**have] in Chinese, it is not easy for students to distinguish whether TBSS could be a better or appropriate selection. According to the outcomes, most of Chinese students have learnt that TBSS could be the correct answer to each question; however, HSS [A2] or both TBSS and HSS [A3] might still be correct selections. This result implies the idea of **"有"** in Chinese might have really affected these students' learning in ESS in English.

The result helps illustrate the following findings. In terms of finding three and five, the selections of A3 are higher 200 in Question Two, Three, Five and Seven, and the numbers are close to the selections of A1 in the same questions except Question Seven. The ratio of A1:A3 of the four questions are Question Two: Question Three: Question Five: Question Seven = 278/208: 292/220: 246/220: 225/264 = 1.3: 1.3: 1.2: 0.85. [See Figure 1] This ratio shows that the difference between the two sets of numbers [A1:A3] is not large. In other words, near half of these students consider both TBSS and HSS are right expressions, particularly in the four questions.

Further, A3 is not a correct selection in Question Two and Question Five; however, the incorrect sentences sound normal and popular in Chinese. Whereas, Question Three and Question Seven need discussing more because A3 [both A1 and A2 are correct] is a correct answer in the two questions. Chinese students who choose A3 might be aware of the differences in Question Two and Question Five from in Question Three and Question Seven because the sentences of A2 in Question Three and Question Seven are added the prepositional words. [A2 in Question Three: The wall has some paintings ***on it***. A2 in Question Seven: The school has five main buildings ***in it***.] This result may not indicate that they could not be affected by HSS in Chinese, but at least they may be more confident in doing their selections. Strictly speaking, the two sentences in Question Three and Question Seven

are almost similar to the expression of HSS in Chinese and they also correctly express EES in English. That is, this influence from Chinese does not necessarily conflict with the expression of EES in English; in addition, the way of expression seems more intuitive and easier for Chinese students. This is why EES in English is complicated to learn for Chinese students.

The selections of A3 in Question Seven is the highest of all the questions, even higher than A1 in Question Seven. [A1:A3 = 225/264] As A2 in Question seven mentioned above, there is a connection between school and buildings. Chinese students would be first aware of is the connection between place and noun based on HSS. In this sentence, there is even a long-term existing relationship, such as being a part of or covering, between the school and the five buildings and the relationship is steadily existing and unchangeable as well. Therefore, the stable relationship might directly lead Chinese students to feel that both of the buildings and school are maintaining an existing whole. This inseparable relationship might also be unconscious expression of awareness of existence.

In comparison with Question Seven, the selections of A2 and A3 in Question Three are fewer, even though there is also a proposition phrase at the end of the sentence of A2. Apparently, the structures of A2 in Question Three is very similar to the A2 in Question Seven; however, whether the existing relationship between the subject [wall] and the object [paintings] is stable enough to continue, being long or unchangeable is the major assessment made by the students. A wall, reasonably, cannot produce paintings; that is, the relationship between wall and paintings is more changeable than the relationship between school and buildings in A2 in Question Seven. Paintings are, relatively, more easily removed from a wall than buildings from the campus of a school, according to common sense. With the awareness of the different stability, the students may make their different choices.

The similar content of analysis may lead to the clue that the association or relationship between each subject and object in each A2 in each question is the idea or concept of existence that Chinese students might apply to assess. However, the assessment could be a little difficult for the students when considering about the relationship between the subjects and the objects in A2s in Question Five and Question Six. The subject in Question Five, family [家], is a complicated word. Owing to both abstract and concrete concept of this word, it is not easy for the students to distinguish the relationship between "family" and its object. Therefore, the students may be only aware of the long-term existing and unchangeable relationship between family and family members, even it is an incorrect sentence in terms of English grammar. On the other hand, the word in Question Six, house [家/房子], is different from family. "House" is a specific and concrete entity, similar to classroom or park. It is easy to be aware that "house" cannot produce or possess a living dog. There is not necessarily existing relationship between the house and the dog. Thus, the reason might support the result that the selections of A3 in Question Six are significantly fewer than that of Question Five.

The selections of A2 and A3 in Question Four are fewest, compared to the other questions.

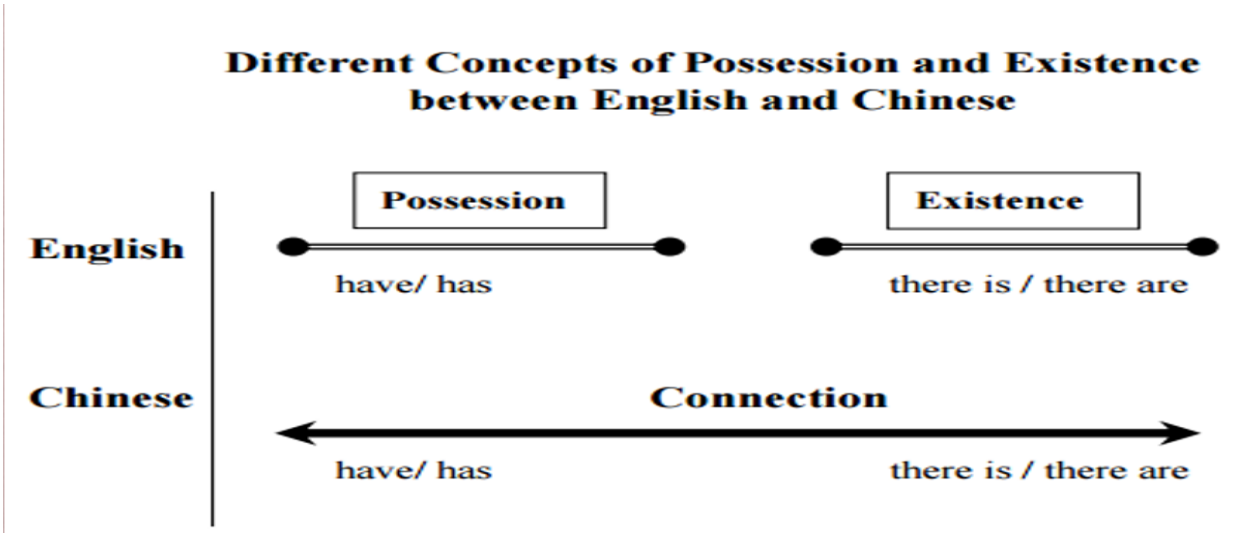


Figure 4. Different Concepts of Possession and Existence between English and Chinese

The reason is similar to the others discussed above. In other words, if constantly analyzing and tracking the association between each subject and object in each A2 of the questions, the rule might be discovered that an assessment of relationship between subject and object in HSS could be the awareness of existence for Chinese students. This is a unique discovery. Because of the influence of HSS, there may be an association between the subject and object in such a sentence; then, Chinese native speakers, without specific awareness of existence, could normally turn to assess the so-called existing connection between the subject and object in an HSS. [See Figure 4]

Finally, as to the qualitative questions, Question Nine and Question Ten, the rule mentioned above could be also applied to account for the results related to the both of them. First of all, there are around one fifth of the quiz takers using TBSS to finish the Chinese-English translation regardless of any other grammar mistakes in their written sentences, according the data analysis in methodology of this study. [See Figure 3] The result about Question Nine is much different from the outcomes in the other quiz-questions. Figure 1 displays that the selections of A1 [TBSS] in four questions [Question One, Four, Six and Eight] are more than 325, and in other four questions [Question Two, Three, Five and Seven] are at least more than 225. In contrast, there are only 149 students use TBSS to translate the sentence in Question Nine, and 197 students don't even answer the questions.

These data probably indicate that most of the students might know to use TBSS to express existential concept in English; however, they still don't know how to translate an existential sentence from Chinese into English, if there is no "place" showing in this sentence. "Time" [Question Ten], generally, expresses only an abstract concept and cannot be considered as a subject of HSS, either. In other words, most of the students are used to thinking an existential sentence through HSS. They might choose to give up answering Question Nine or Ten because they have no idea how to make a sentence without a specific subject. Moreover, it might be easier to answer multiple-choice questions for most students, but it is not so simple to make completely sentences on their own.

Secondly, the instructions notified in Question Nine and Question Ten, suggest the participants to start their translation with TBSS on purpose, rather than HSS. Unexpectedly, this suggestion does not receive much response. The two questions are designed to test how location and time may affect students to create a correct existential sentence. It is obvious in Question Nine, no subject (location / place) can be found to help most of them create an existential sentence; thus, they could either make an incorrect sentence or give up answering the question. However, in Question Ten, some participants still follow the way of thinking of HSS to translate the sentence because the subject [location], Taipei 101, is provided in this question. In accordance with the data displays in Figure 3, around 282 students, more than half of the test takers, don't choose TBSS to answer the question. This result implies that the 282 students might consider creating HSS sentences, or other incorrect ones, but fewer students give up answering it, compared to the data in Question Nine.

To sum up the results of Question Nine and Question Ten, there are about 20 percent or 30 percent of test takers try to use TBSS to answer the two questions. Most of students might still consider about whether they can find specific subject [place] to create a sentence. The meaning of existence might not be the first idea for them to think about, instead, a subject could be the critical part to complete a sentence.

The results from the teachers' interview:

There are three questions designed to investigate whether Chinese ESL teachers can be confident in using EES because they had been learning and growing up in the same cultural and lingual context similar to the participants. [See Appendix II] Strictly, the facilitation from the college instructors, the interviewees, is limited in improving Chinese college students' concepts of existential sentence structure. According to the college ESL instructors invited to be interviewed for this study, teaching EES seems not easy for them.

These interviewees could not be precisely aware of what existential sentence is in English or in Chinese, as well as, they might be confused in the different awareness between existence and possession, because they could have been also influenced by Chinese. As the results indicate that in English, everything is existential and the concepts of existence are different from possession or belonging to. In other words, TBSS and HSS describe two different situations and awareness. In Chinese, on the contrary, HSS might be the way to describe existence in a large scale.

After the whole data analysis, sentences with have/has as a verb, are used in Chinese daily life often. To Chinese native speakers, this type of sentences has mixed awareness of existence [存在] and ownership [有]. The English instructors interviewed for this study mention that their acquisition of *there-be* [有] structure is from their public school teacher's instruction. When making an English existential sentence, students may consider using *there-be* structure to describe this sentence after they cannot find a specific subject to put in a typical Chinese sentence [? + have/has [有] + object]. "?" as a subject in HSS can be people, things, places or time in Chinese.

That is, expression of existence in Chinese language, basically, is usually comprehended and felt like awareness of ownership or possession. With this strong or weak connection/awareness between a subject and an object, Chinese native speakers can decide whether they would use TBSS. Therefore,

if Chinese ESL teachers could clearly analyze the differences between grammar and cognition, the students should be able to understand this sentence pattern better.

CONCLUSION

Summary of the study results

This research is mainly to explore how the mother tongue, Chinese, has affected Taiwanese students' learning existential sentence in English, and simultaneously, the English sentence pattern, HSS, has also confused these students in comprehending English existential sentence. Because of the influence from each other, learning this grammar is not easy to students. The complexity of grammar and the influence of mother tongue might have made both learning and teaching difficult. Through the process of doing this research, the results indicate that most ESL teachers might have not precisely learnt the definition and suitable situations of applying *there-be* sentence structure [TBSS] in English before teaching this grammar. In addition, the study results also reveal that ESL teachers need to further recognize the difference between frequently used *have-verb* sentence structure in Chinese [HSS] and the similar sentence patterns in English language. To give students enough TBSS spoken practice might aid the students in getting used to using TBSS and appropriately expressing something existential in English as well.

Most of the participants keep a certain awareness of existence that is composed of two characteristics: (1) Being affected by Chinese, HSS might intuitively be the main way of expressing awareness of existence in English. Therefore, measuring the closeness of the relationship between the subject and the object in an HSS may have become the way of expression about existence. If the relationship is close, the expression of existence is leading to possession [HSS]; for example, "My family has five people." [A2 in Question Five] In the sentence, the family is composed of five people and the relationship between family and people is close as well. For Chinese students, the awareness of composition could naturally be expressed through HSS, but not TBSS. It could be because HSS is the major or only way in Chinese to express feeling of existence.

On the other hand, if the relationship is remote, a simple and common of existence [TBSS] could be aware of. For example, in Question Four [A2: The table has two books], table, basically, is not much connected to book; that means there is no necessary connection between the two objects. Therefore, HSS might not be considered to write but TBSS then could be a possible choice.

Further, (2) with the influence of Chinese syntax, the relationship or connection between the place and the main noun forms because the place/location, appearing at the end of an English existential sentence, is naturally moved to be a subject which is usually a thing or an object at the beginning of a sentence and keeps have / has as its verb. This changed sentence construction and cannot effectively express the original meaning of existence in English. With this discovery, the content of this entire study is a process of reasoning. This grammatical error stems not only from differences in awareness of existence between Chinese and English languages, but also from grammatically different expressions about existence.

Contribution

The quiz designed for this study could be an effective material applied to teach Chinese ESL students about EES. It is because the quiz is designed to examine and solve students' confusion caused by translation and the interlingual gap of awareness of existence between the two languages.

Therefore, a contrastive difference between Chinese and English sentence examples can be helpful and effective for teaching and learning more correct EES/TBSS in English class, compared to the past ways of instructions provided by the interviewees.

In spoken English, students with Chinese as a mother tongue are intuitionally used to using *have/have* structure sentence instead of *there-be* one to express English existential situation. The study suggests that ESL instructors in college should explain the basic differences in accordance with the discovery from this study; that is, they can tell the learners the result, strong or weak connection between a subject and a object, illustrated in Figure 4. In addition, practice makes perfect. Whether school students have practiced this sentence pattern enough to use it normally and correctly might still be a critical factor that makes existential structure become a frequently used language.

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APPENDIX I

請根據中文挑出其英文翻譯，在前方空格打"√"。謝謝!

Please select the English translation for each Chinese sentence. Thank you.

1.教室裡有25個學生。
_____ There are 25 students in the classroom.
_____ The classroom has 25 students.
_____ 兩者皆可。
2.公園裡有兩個廁所。
_____ There are two toilets at the park.
_____ The park has two toilets.
_____ 兩者皆可。
3.牆上有兩幅畫。
_____ There are some paintings on the wall.
_____ The wall has some paintings.
_____ 兩者皆可。
4.桌上有兩本書。
_____ There are two books on the table.
_____ The table has two books.
_____ 兩者皆可。
5.我家有5個人。
_____ There are five people in my family.
_____ My family has five people.
_____ 兩者皆可。
6.我家有一隻狗。
_____ There is one dog in my house.
_____ My house has one dog.
_____ 兩者皆可。
7.學校裡有五個主要建築物。
_____ There are five main buildings at school.
_____ The school has five main buildings.
_____ 兩者皆可。
8.爐子上有些食物。
_____ There is some food on the stove.
_____ The stove has some food.
_____ 兩者皆可。
9.請參照以上例句翻譯成英文：昨晚有地震(earthquake)。
_____
10. 請參照以上例句翻譯成英文：明天台北101有煙火表演(firework display)。
_____

APPENDIX II

Three interview questions for the English instructors in college are about to investigate whether Chinese ESL teachers can be confident in using EES/TBSS because they had learnt and grown up in the similar cultural and lingual context to their college students.

1. Have you ever heard “English Existential Sentence?” If not, do you know *there-be* structure?
2. Under what conditions would you use *there-be* structure to make a sentence?
3. How do you teach *there-be* structure to college students?