THE FUNCTIONING OF EXISTENTIAL CLAUSES ACROSS THE STAGES OF NARRATIVE IN *A HOUSE OF POMEGRANATES*, BY OSCAR WILDE

O funcionamento de orações existenciais nos estágios da narrativa em A house of pomegranate*, de Oscar Wilde*

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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to identify the functions prototypical existential clauses (*there-be* construction) may perform across the stages of narratives in a small corpus comprising *A house of pomegranates*, a collection of short stories by Oscar Wilde. The analysis draws upon Systemic-Functional Linguistics as theoretical framework for the concepts of existential clause and stages of narrative and builds upon Corpus Linguistics as a method of collecting and preparing data. After finding the instances of prototypical existential clauses and tagging the corresponding stages, the functions of the existential clauses in the narratives were identified. Findings show that existential clauses may occur in any stage of a narrative and perform five functions, namely, describing, introducing, listing, pointing, and pondering. Describing and pondering are the most frequent functions in the corpus. The describing function is mainly related to the Orientation and Resolution stages, while the pondering function mostly relates to the Complication and Evaluation stages.

KEYWORDS: Systemic-Functional Linguistics. Transitivity. Existential clause. Stage of narrative.

RESUMO: O presente artigo tem por objetivo identificar que funções as orações existenciais prototípicas na língua inglesa (construções com *there be*) podem exercer nos estágios da narrativa em um *corpus* de pequenas dimensões composto de *A house of pomegranates*, coleção de contos de Oscar Wilde. A análise assenta-se no aporte teórico da Linguística Sistêmico-Funcional para conceituar as orações existenciais e os estágios da narrativa e nos procedimentos metodológicos da Linguística de *Corpus* para compilar e preparar os dados. Identificadas as instâncias de orações existenciais prototípicas e os estágios da narrativa correspondentes, depreenderam-se as funções que as orações existenciais realizaram nas narrativas. Os resultados mostram que as orações existenciais podem ocorrer em quaisquer estágios da narrativa e exercem cinco funções: apontar, descrever, introduzir, listar e ponderar. Descrever e ponderar são as funções mais frequentes no *corpus* – aquela relaciona-se principalmente com os estágios de Orientação e Resolução; esta, com os estágios de Complicação e Avaliação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Linguística Sistêmico-Funcional. Transitividade. Oração existencial. Estágio da narrativa.

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1 Introduction

This paper is part of a MA thesis in Linguistics[1] and reports on a study that aimed at investigating the functions that prototypical existential clauses (*there-be* constructions) perform across the stages of narrative in a small corpus comprising the collection of short stories *A house of pomegranates* (1891), by Oscar Wilde. Considering strictly the perspective of Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL), existential clauses are frequently mentioned in passing as part of the system of TRANSITIVITY by studies that focus on any other language aspects or on their lexicogrammatical features (AHMAD, 2019; DAVIDSE, 1992, 1999; FERREGUETTI, 2014; HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 1999, 2014; HANNAY, 1985; SYED; AKRAM; HUSSAIN, 2020; TIA; SETIANI; KUNING, 2022). Some have pointed to the general functions that existential clauses may perform in the flow of the discourse (FERREGUETTI; PAGANO; FIGUEREDO, 2012; LIMA, 2013; MIRANDA; OLIVEIRA, 2020; MORAIS, 2015; PAGANO; FIGUEREDO; FERREGUETTI, 2015), but only few have looked into the functions they may perform in the Recreating socio-semiotic activity (LIMA; BARROS, 2018).

Considering the lack of studies correlating existential clauses and narratives, this paper poses the following questions (Figure 1):

Figure 1 – Research questions and objectives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	OBJECTIVES
1) In what stages of narrative an existential clause occurs?	To identify the context of occurrence (stage) of existential clauses in the narrative
2) What functions do existential clauses perform in narrative?	To identify the functions existential clauses may perform in a narrative
3) To what extent do the stages of narrative relate to the functions of the existential clauses?	To establish a correlation between the stages of narrative and the functions of existential clauses

Source: the authors.

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[1] MARIOTTO, V. P. *Existential clauses and their contributions to the stages of narrative in Oscar Wilde's* A house of pomegranates *in English and Brazilian Portuguese*. 2023. Thesis (Master's in Linguistics) – Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, Uberlândia, 2023. To be available at: http://repositorio.ufu.br.

The hypothesis was that existential clauses, as a presentative construction as held by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), are more common in the Orientation stage.

The study draws upon SFL as theoretical framework for the concepts of existential clause and stages of narrative via Martin and Rose (2008), and builds upon Corpus Linguistics as a method of collecting, preparing, and analysing data. It was conducted in three stages, each meeting one of the research objectives. Firstly, the corpus was scanned to identify the instances of prototypical existential clause and their corresponding stage of narrative in the short stories. Secondly, each instance of existential clause had its function identified according to the functions pointed out in the literature on the subject and considering the context in which existential clauses occurred. Thirdly, the functions were related to the stages of narrative, in order to identify any pattern between them.

This paper is divided into five sections, including this Introduction. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework, Section 3 outlines the methodological procedures, Section 4 reports data and discusses the findings, and Section 5 provides final remarks. Finally, there follows the reference list.

2 Theoretical framework

This section provides the theoretical framework in two subsections. Subsection 2.1 presents existential clauses within SFL, and Subsection 2.2 addresses the social-semiotic approach to genre, with a focus on the stages of narrative.

2.1 Existential clauses

An existential clause represents that something exists or happens. Along with other five types of clauses – namely, behavioural, mental, material, relational, and verbal – they form the lexicogrammatical resource of the system of TRANSITIVITY for representing the human experience through language. Each type of clause comprises a certain configuration of process [2],

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[2] The SFL notation distinguishes between 'process', 'participant', and 'circumstance' (lower case) as the elements of a figure in the semantic stratum, and 'Process', 'Participant', and 'Circumstance' (upper case) as the *functions* that the elements perform in the experiential structure of the lexicogrammatical stratum.

participants and circumstances that construes the domain of experience as a figure of a particular kind (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2014).

The figure of existing in particular construes an existential clause with an existential Process and one Participant, the Existent, and may be expanded with Circumstances, usually of place or time – although other circumstantial meaning may attend an existential clause, as Ferreguetti (2014) has found in her corpus of socio-semiotic activity Recreating. In the English system of TRANSITIVITY, existential clauses are typically realised by the verb *be* along with the (interpersonal) Subject *there*[3] (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2014). This shows in the following example:

> There (Process:) is (Participant:) blood (Circumstance:) in the heart of the ruby (HP1)[4]

Despite its infrequent use in English (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2014), the existential clause makes an important contribution to different texts. For instance, they present characters and things in the Placement (Orientation) stage of a narrative or introduce places and features of interest in a guidebook (HASAN, 1984).

For this reason, existential clause is considered a *presentative construction*: textually, the Existent is commonly considered as either not presumed by or unknown to the addressee, which coincides with the newness of the Existent as a component of the message in the clause (DAVIDSE, 1992). Accordingly, the Existent is usually realised by an indefinite nominal group due to some constraints that principle the use of determiners and quantifiers in the Existent. Davidse (1992) refers to them as *positive set-totality constraints*: the nominal group is determined by (i) a non-specific or (ii) a cardinal positive quantitative value or it may express (iii) a negative set-totality. In other words, the Existent realises a member of a set, but not the set as a whole, except for negative sentences, in which the Existent can be denied as an entire set.

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[3] For an account of the existential *there*, see Davidse (1992, p. 91-93, 2017, p. 101-115, 1999, p. 233-238).

[4] Examples and samples come from research data and were labelled as HP1 for "The young King"; HP2 for "The birthday of the Infanta"; HP3 for "The Fisherman and his Soul"; and HP4 for "The Star-child".

The Existent may also comprise a nominal group with (iv) definite article followed by an adjective restricting the set of things (post-Deictic) or (v) a definite partitive expression; or it may even depict (vi) a definite list of options/members of a class (providing existential clauses with a *listing function*) (DAVIDSE, 1992). Additionally, Davidse (1999) distinguishes the cardinal from enumerative existential clauses:

> The cardinal existential cardinally measures, within its search domain, the instantiation of the type designated by the "type specification" part of the existent NP [noun phrase] itself. […] The enumerative existential enumerates in ordinal fashion instances of a superordinate type which corresponds to a specific type fleshed out in the context (DAVIDSE, 1999, p. 243).

In any case, the positive set-totality constraints remain valid, as the definite nominal groups still realise part of the set, not the entire set.

In addition to that, the Participant itself may be classified as of the nature of the thing that instantiates that element which is "the semantic core of the nominal group" (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2014, p. 383), the Thing[5]. Figure 2 depicts a primary taxonomy of thing – for a full account of this taxonomy, see Halliday and Matthiessen (1999, p. 190).

Figure 2 – Taxonomy of things.
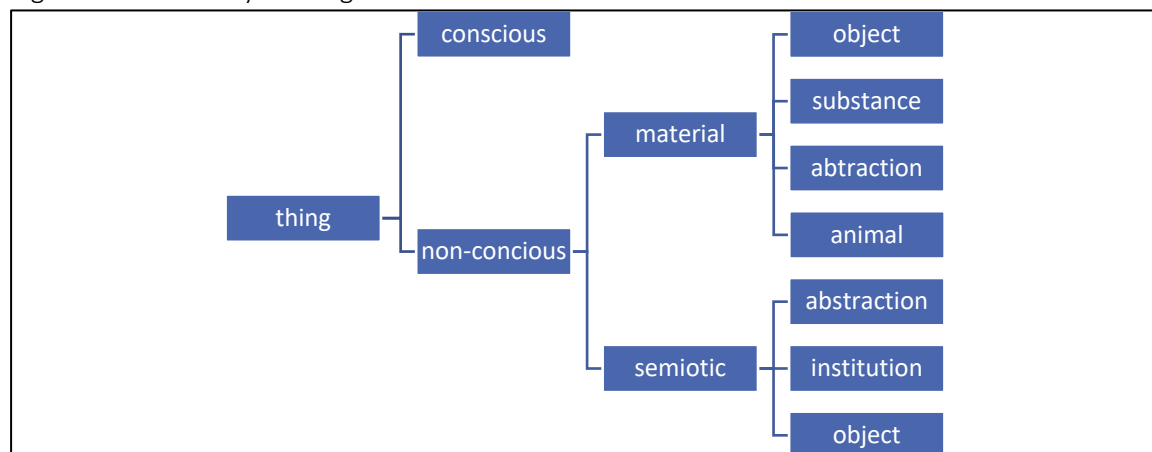
Source: based on Halliday and Matthiessen (1999, p. 190).

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[5] Within the framework of SFL, 'thing' (small T) refers to an *entity* (such as person, animal, object, institution, abstraction, event), whilst 'Thing' (capital T) refers to the *function* that a thing (meaning *an entity*) may perform in the experiential structure of the nominal group. For a full account of the nominal group, see Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, 364).

Based upon the figures of existence (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 1999) (being in existence, coming into existence, staying in existence, and ceasing to exist) applied to the phases of narrative (MARTIN; ROSE, 2008), Lima and Barros (2018) assessed the contributions of 531 existential clauses to the phases of the narrative in *The lord of the rings*, by J. R. R. Tolkien, translated into Brazilian Portuguese. Their findings show that the existential clauses contribute both to the description phase, describing creatures, objects and natural elements that characters met along their path, and the reflection phase, instantiating the characters' thoughts.

In sum, the existential clause is a figure of existing, one which selects a Process concerned with existence in the system of TRANSITIVITY and a single Participant inherent to the Process, the Existent, and one which may be followed by a Circumstance. Functionally, an existential clause recognises that things of all kinds exist or occur. It may, for instance, introduce characters in the flow of a narrative, present sites of interest in a guidebook, and serve as a resource for listing examples of a class of things.

The next subsection approaches the stages of narrative, which provide the context for analysing the occurrences of existential clauses in the corpus.

2.2 Stages of narrative

Language operates in context, and as such, any use of language (text included) has a context (HALLIDAY; HASAN, 1989). The context of culture is the environment of the linguistic system and corresponds to the potential pole of the cline of instantiation. According to Fuzer and Cabral (2014), it also relates to the idea of social purpose: when using language for similar purposes, people develop typical kinds of written and oral texts, i.e., *genres*, to achieve common goals. (FUZER; CABRAL, 2014)

The context of situation is the immediate environment wherein text operates and is represented as a complex of the dimensions of field, tenor, and mode. Within the context of situation, *register* refers to the configuration of semantic resources typically associated with a type of situation. It is, then, understood as the semantic variety of which a text is an instance (HALLIDAY, 1978).

Thus, a taxonomy of text should rely on contextual consideration. From the perspective of field, texts may be classified as socio-semiotic activities, i.e., "the social and/or semiotic process that the interactants in the context are engaged in" (MATTHIESSEN; TERUYA; LAM, 2010, p. 95): *Doing*, *Enabling*, *Exploring*, *Expounding*, *Recommending*, *Recreating*, *Reporting*, and *Sharing*.

This paper deals with a small corpus of short stories, which are written, monologic instances of the socio-semiotic process of Recreating: a short story recreates experiences in prototypically human life, by narrating a flow of (imaginary) events which involve a number of key characters and develop through time and space according to a plot (MATTHIESSEN; TERUYA; LAM, 2010).

Martin and Rose (2007) consider narratives as a particular type of the genre story. The authors define genre as a staged, goal-oriented social process, which means that people (socially) interact with each other to get things done (goals) by taking some steps (stages) to reach their goals. Genre refers, thus, to different pieces of text with consistent patterns of meaning by enacting several social contexts.

Stories are the most widely studied family of genres and are central in all cultures. Starting from previous models of genre classification, Martin and Rose (2008) propose their own model based upon the SFL framework of context and culture as socio-semiotic strata. The authors distinguish six types of stories, namely, anecdotes, exemplum, narratives, news stories, observations, and recount. Each one comprises a specific way of engaging interactants, reaching goals, and combining predefined stages.

Narrative genres entail a disrupting event which is evaluated and then resolved by the characters, restoring the story's balance – "[s]o the 'point' of a narrative is how the protagonists resolve a complication in their lives, once they have evaluated the complicating action with some type of attitude" (MARTIN; ROSE, 2008, p. 67). Narrative genres typically comprise the Orientation, Complication, Evaluation, Resolution and Coda stages (Figure 3).

Complication and Resolution are the only obligatory stages in narrative genres. Despite being typical stages in the beginning and in the middle of narrative respectively, Orientation and Evaluation are optional stages and may be interspersed with other stages throughout the narrative. Coda is an optional, final stage that serves to bring a closure and a sense of resolution

to narrative, providing a reflection on the events that have taken place and a consideration of their significance or consequences (MARTIN; ROSE, 2008).

Figure 3 – Stages of narrative.

STAGE	FUNCTION
Orientation	To set the scene of the story
Complication	To introduce a disruption in the flow of events
Evaluation	To provide characters with thoughts on what is happening and how to solve problems
Resolution	To resolve the disrupting events and restore the story's balance
Coda	To assess the whole story and to provide it with a moral

Source: based on Martin and Rose (2008).

The following section describes the methodological procedures used in this study.

3 Methodology

The methodological procedures comprised three major steps: compiling the corpus, annotating it, and then analysing the data.

Firstly, a small[6] corpus of written, monologic narratives was complied, comprising the seventh edition (WILDE, 1915) of the collection of short stories *A house of pomegranates* (HP), by Oscar Wilde (originally published in 1891), freely available online at Project Gutenberg in plain text format. It afforded an opportunity to develop a previous study (PALMA, 2018) on the same Wilde's work. The file was manually split in four files, one for each short story, named HP_1, HP_2, HP_3, and HP_4, which were then imported into the Wordlist programme included in Word Smith Tools – WST version 8 (SCOTT, 2020) to automatically create a list of all words in the corpus.

Then, a WST Concord window was opened to generate a list of concordance lines of the words *there*, previously selected from the Wordlist. After careful reading, the concordance lines were either tagged for stage, if they consisted of a prototypical existential clause, or otherwise deleted. Tags were entered in Set column (Figure 4). The Set column information was

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[6] The corpus is nearly 33,000-token (3,780 types) long. It is considered a small corpus, according to the corpus size classification in Sardinha (2002).

transferred to the files by means of the *Modify Source Texts* command in the *Compute* menu, choosing the option *Set*, leaving 'your initials (optional)' field blank, and unchecking the box next to *add time & date stamp*. This led WST to insert a tag on the left side of the search word and update the plain text files used to generate the word list and the concordance lines. The same procedure was applied to the lemma *be* since there may be existential clauses with elliptical *there*.

Figure 4 – Annotation of the existential *there*.

In addition, the clause's Participants were manually tagged as of the type of thing that realises the Existent, according to the taxonomy displayed in Figure 2, and the attendance of Circumstances, according to the types of circumstantial elements provided by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 313). Lastly, the files tagged with stages and functions were reimported into the WST Wordlist and Concord to supply a new wordlist including tags and the corresponding concordance lines for each one.

The findings are displayed and discussed in the next section.

4 Results

Since this study focuses on prototypical existential clauses in English, only there-be constructions were analysed. Eighty-four instances of existential *there-be* constructions were found in the corpus. Figure 5 depicts the dispersion of existential clauses throughout the corpus, segmented by short story.

Figure 5 – Dispersion of existential clauses throughout the corpus.

Source: the author.

The dispersion plot displays the distribution of the search word across text(s) and helps visually identify linguistic patterns. The blue area is a graphical representation of text files. The vertical red lines (quartile) divide the plot into four quarters, which roughly correspond to the beginning, middle, and end of the text. In turn, the vertical white lines represent each instance of the search word (in the figure, the content of the tag <EX>, previously added to the text files in the annotation step of the methodology). The first line (overall) sums up the findings and the following lines display the results of each file separately. The window also displays the number of occurrence (Hits) of the search word in the files, the total number of tokens (Words), and the dispersion value. The dispersion value ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 suggests "burstiness" and 1 suggests very uniform dispersion (SCOTT, 2020).

On the one hand, the individual dispersion values of HP2 (0.71), HP3 (0.77), and HP4 (0.86) suggest a tendency for existential clauses to be uniformly dispersed along the stories, corroborating the overall dispersion value (0.80). Nonetheless, there is an increasing overall occurrence of existential clauses from the second quarter, reaching the maximum in the third quarter, mainly because of HP3, which accounts for the highest number of existential clauses.

Actually, the third quarter gathers the highest number of existential clauses in all four stories, whereas the first quarter gathers a low figure, suggesting that the least existential clauses do in the corpus is "to introduce central participants in the Placement (Setting, Orientation) stage at the beginning of a story" (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2014, p. 308). On the other hand, the dispersion value of HP1 indicates a "bursting" occurrence of existential clauses, scattered through the story, and loosely grouped in the third quarter, with a single occurrence in the first and second quarters each, but none in the last.

As for the Existent, the findings show that non-conscious was the category of thing that most frequently construed Existent in the corpus (Figure 6) and accounted for a total of 67 instances (79.76 %), whereas the conscious category contributed with 17 instances (20.24 %). It suggests that the Participant of an existential clause is not bond to any category of things, such as the Senser in a figure of sensing, which must be of the conscious type.

As for Circumstances, the findings show that 46 instances of existential clauses were associated with at least one circumstantial element (Figure 7). As some clauses are attended
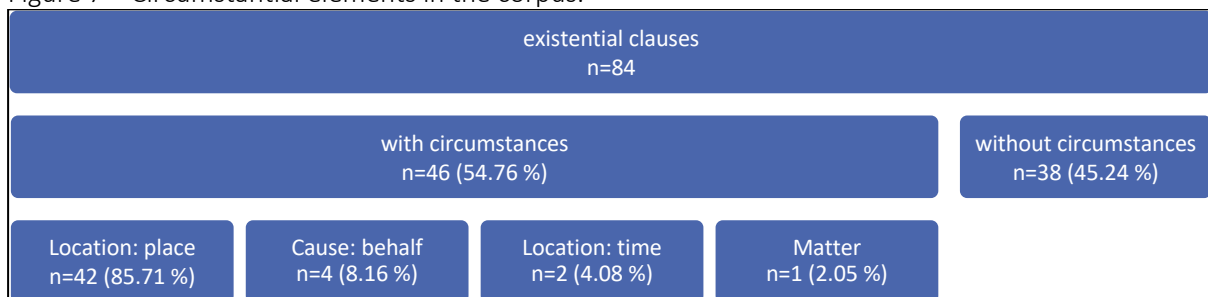
by more than one Circumstance at once, the total of circumstantial elements (49) is greater than the sum of clauses with Circumstance (46).

Figure 6 – Types of things realising the Existent in the corpus.
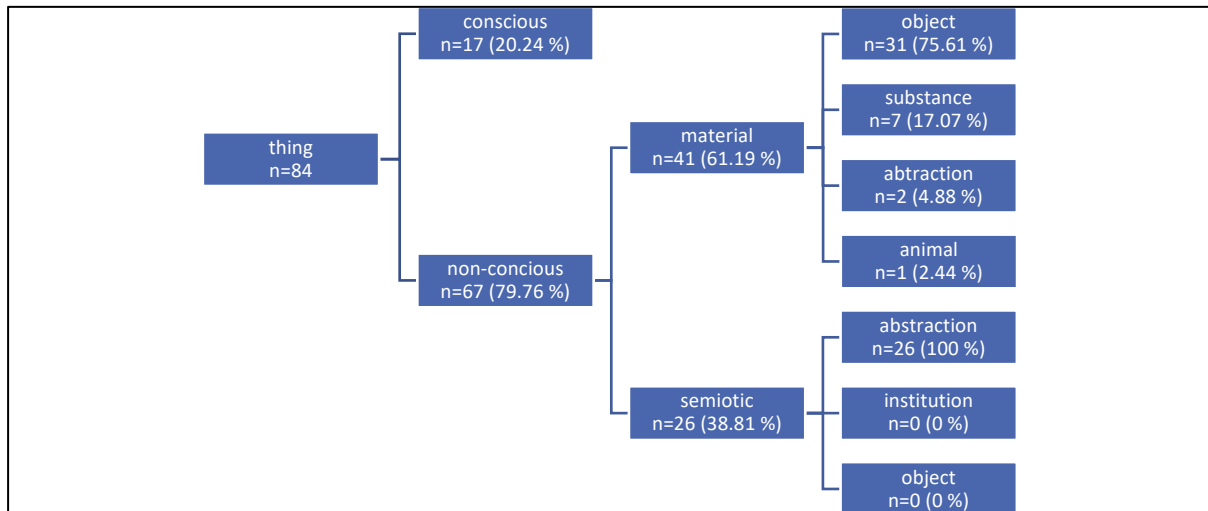
Source: the authors.

Figure 7 – Circumstantial elements in the corpus.

Source: the authors.

The type of circumstantial element within existential clauses was, by far, Location, accounting for 44 instances (about 90 %) alone or conflated with other type, providing the figure of existence with Circumstances of place (42) and time (2). There occurred also instances of Cause: behalf (4) and Matter (1).

In addition, stages of narrative offered an oportunity to look beyond the lexicogrammatical aspects. Existential clauses are said to introduce New information to the addressee. For this reason, they have been interpreted as presentative constructions in narratives: not only existential clauses represent that someone or something happens or exists,

but they also introduce Participants in the Placement stage (Orientation, setting) at the beginning of a story and phenomena throughout the narrative (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2014). Nevertheless, existential clauses occur in all stages of narrative in the corpus, except for Coda – there was only one instance of Coda (in HP4) and no existential clause was found in it. Figure 8 depicts the dispersion plot of existential clauses across the stages of narrative, sorted by number of occurrences (hits).

Figure 8 – Dispersion of existential clauses per stage of narrative.

N	File	Hits	Dispersion	Plot
1	OVERALL	84	0,78	
2	COMPLICATION	33	0,65	
3	EVALUATION	22	0,44	
4	ORIENTATION	15	0,62	
5	RESOLUTION	14	0,57	
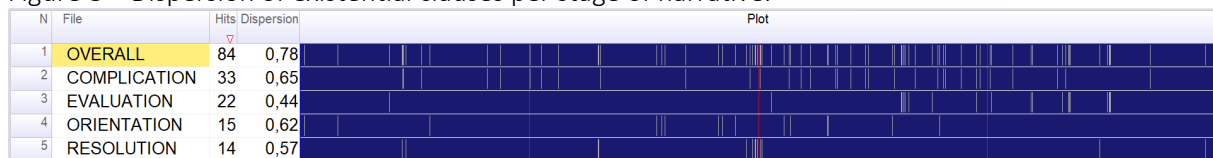
Source: the author.

The figures point to an unexpected result: as a presentative construction, existential clauses were expected to be more frequent in the Orientation stage, as this is the stage that sets the scene in a typical narrative, but Complication accounted for most occurrences of existential clauses in the corpus (39 % of the total against 18 % for Orientation). This could be explained by the very structure of the narratives: like a pomegranate, each short story in *HP* is an intricate piece of narrative, comprising all the stages repeatedly and in different sequences. Moreover, at some points of the narrative, one stage lasted longer than the others, partially motivated by Wilde's long paragraphs, as pointed out by Palma (2018). However, the corpus is too small to allow any extrapolation.

The Orientation stage has a few instances of existential clause at the beginning of the narratives but none in the final quarter; most are grouped in the central quarters. The Complication stage has instances of existential clause dispersed throughout the narratives, but they cluster mainly in the third quarter.

Likewise, the Evaluation stage has existential clauses grouped primarily in the third and fourth quarters, especially the last one, with thirteen instances. Finally, the Resolution stage has few instances, largely at the end of the second quarter. The distribution is influenced by the very structure of the narratives – and may also be influenced by the present focus on prototypical existential clauses.

Therefore, results suggest that existential clauses participate primarily in the creation of problematic situations and in the evaluation of problems across the narratives. For instance, the tension escalates as the young King uncovers the cruelty behind his fancy life in the palace through the speaking of Avarice to Death:

> **There is famine in the walled cities of India**, and the cisterns of Samarcand have run dry. **There is famine in the walled cities of Egypt**, and the locusts have come up from the desert. (HP1, emphases added)

Although the Orientation stage may occur at any point, elaborating the narrative or unfolding it into new directions, existential clauses in the Orientation stage occur mainly in the central quarters of the HP narratives.

Moreover, when relating the instances of existential clause to the context in which they occur, it is clear that they do not contribute equally to the narrative, that is, they seem to perform an array of speciallised functions according to the stages of narrative, i.e., their function is not restricted to a presentative contruction. This study proposes a set of functions – *existential functions* – that existential clauses perform in a narrative, as follows:

- *Describing*: to describe things and places across the narrative

  On its forehead was a ruby, and thick oil dripped from its hair on to its thighs. (HP3, emphasis added)

  Context: Reporting its first travel after been sent away, the Soul describes a chamber in the city of Illel whereto it came, following a company of merchants.

- *Introducing*: to introduce things and places that will play a role in the narrative

  […] and at last he became aware that **under the shadow of a rock there was a figure** that had not been there before. (HP3, emphasis added)

  Context: During the witches' sabbath, the young Fisherman becomes aware of the intimidating presence of a man dressed in black who will try to bargain his soul.

- *Listing*: to give examples of a class of things along the narrative

  There are the dancing-girls of Samaris who dance in the manner of all kinds of birds and beasts. (HP3, emphasis added)

Context: The Soul tries to entice the young Fisherman to abandon the one he loves by offering him pleasures that the mermaid cannot grant him.

- *Pointing*: to state the existence of things and places (with no practical effect on the narrative)

  Nor would he suffer any to be cruel to bird or beast, but taught love and loving-kindness and charity, and to the poor he gave bread, and to the naked he gave raiment, and **there was peace and plenty in the land**. (HP4, emphasis added)

  Context: After suffering a long ordeal for his arrogant manners, the Star-child is eventually redeemed and made a humble king.

- *Pondering*: to provide a thoughtful consideration on things along the narrative

  'I had thought that **there had been men who were kinglike**,' he answered, 'but it may be as thou sayest. (HP1, emphasis added)

  Context: Being reprimanded by his chamberlain after refusing to wear his royal raiment because of three disturbing dreams, the young King ponders on the idea that he must be dressed accordingly to be recognised as the king.

The introducing and pointing functions were drawn from the presentative function of existential clauses as stated by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014); the listing function came from Davidse (1992), when she describes the conditions for a definite nominal group instantiating the Existent; the describing function was based on the setting and description phases of narrative; and the pondering function was based on the comment and reflection phases of narrative, as proposed by Martin and Rose (2008).

The distinction between one function and the others is subtle and relies heavily upon context. In any function, existential clause brings places, objects, and characters into play, but the introducing and pointing functions, for instance, differ in that the former puts phenomena "into motion", so to speak, along the stream of the narration, whereas the latter indicates the existence of phenomena that do not act upon anything else in the story.

In turn, the listing function provides the narrative with a sort of inventory list construed with specific Deictic or mass noun in the nominal group. The describing function details the setting and evokes sensual imagery. Finally, the pondering function occurs mainly in the

narrator's comments or in the characters' thoughts and feelings, construing the characters' inner word.

Although the functions may occur in any stage throughout the narrative, some of them tend to be more frequent in one stage than in the others, as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 – Functions across the stages of narrative.

FUNCTION	ORIENTATION	COMPLICATION	EVALUATION	RESOLUTION	TOTAL
describing	9	6	7	9	31
introducing	0	4	1	3	8
listing	3	4	1	0	8
pointing	2	3	0	1	6
pondering	1	16	13	1	31

Source: the authors.

Describing and pondering existential functions are the most frequent in the corpus and occur in all stages. Each function account for 36.90 % of all existential clauses in the corpus. These figures resonate with Lima and Barros (2018), whose findings show that existential clauses in the Portuguese translation of *The lord of the rings* contribute primarily to the description and reflection phases of narrative.

Since descriptive passages may occur at any point in a narrative, the describing function is almost evenly distributed across the stages. It helps create the scene in the Orientation stage, as when the narrator begins the story about the young King (HP1):

> IT was the night before the day fixed for his coronation, and the young King was sitting alone in his beautiful chamber. His courtiers had all taken their leave of him, bowing their heads to the ground, according to the ceremonious usage of the day, and had retired to the Great Hall of the Palace, to receive a few last lessons from the Professor of Etiquette; **there being some of them who had still quite natural manners**, which in a courtier is, I need hardly say, a very grave offence (WILDE, 1891, p. 1, emphasis added).

The describing function also adds colourful details to the story by providing descriptions of things with which it deals and places wherein it takes place, as in the Complication stage when the dwarf, struggling to find the Infanta, makes his way into the castle (HP2):

> He slipped through, and found himself in a splendid hall, far more splendid, he feared, than the forest, **there was so much more gilding everywhere**, and even the floor was made of great coloured stones, fitted together into a sort of geometrical pattern (WILDE, 1891, p. 52, emphasis added).

Moreover, the description of wealth and beauty contrasts with the dwarf's physical deformity, highlighting his fateful encounter with his own reflection in a mirror and leading to the tragic ending.

In the Evaluation and Resolution stages, the describing existential clause provides the details of the places where characters assess the problems they experience and come up with feasible solutions. For instance, the Resolution stage when the Soul restores the vision to a servant, after getting what it wanted, describes the room where it thought it could find the god it had been searching for (HP3):

> So I breathed with my breath upon his eyes, and the sight came back to them, and he trembled again, and led me into the third chamber, and lo! **there was no idol in it, nor image of any kind, but only a mirror of round metal set on an altar of stone** (WILDE, 1891, p. 95, emphasis added).

In turn, most of the pondering existential clauses occur in the Complication and Evaluation stages of HP, when characters tend to ponder and assess their actions, as when the priest replies to the young Fisherman's question about how to dispose of his soul (HP3):

> Alack, Alack, thou art mad, or hast eaten of some poisonous herb, for the soul is the noblest part of man, and was given to us by God that we should nobly use it. **There is no thing more precious than a human soul**, nor any earthly thing that can be weighed with it. It is worth all the gold that is in the world, and is more precious than the rubies of the kings (WILDE, 1891, p. 70, emphasis added).

Listing and introducing existential functions account for 12.50 % of the total existential clauses in the corpus, with both functions occurring mostly in the Complication stage. In the young King's third dream, for instance, the Avarice uses the listing function to send Death away by providing it with "an inventory" of the poor conditions in the neighbour countries:

And Avarice shuddered, and put ashes on her head. 'Thou art cruel,' she cried; 'thou art cruel. **There is famine in the walled cities of India**, and the cisterns of Samarcand have run dry. **There is famine in the walled cities of Egypt**, and the locusts have come up from the desert (WILDE, 1891, p. 16, emphasis added).

Furthermore, some functions seem to select some sort of Existent according to the nature of the thing realising the Participant in the corpus. The describing existential clause realises all kinds of thing, but tends to realise mainly non-conscious material things, especially material objects, presenting their existence as an element of the surroundings where the story unfolds, as in

There is no (material object:) **god** but this (material object:) **mirror** that thou seest, for this is the Mirror of Wisdom. (HP3, emphasis added)

In turn, the pondering existential clause tends to realise both non-conscious semiotic abstractions and conscious things in the corpus, providing narrator and characters with careful thought about people and things that disturb them somehow:

Injustice has parcelled out the world, nor is there equal (semiotic abstraction:) **division** of aught save of sorrow. (HP3, emphasis added)

Their hired men drave him away, and there was (conscious thing:) **none** who had pity on him. (HP4, emphasis added)

Existential functions can also be related to the Circumstances in the clause. Despite having an equal number of existential clauses with or without Circumstances (31 each), describing and pondering functions are inversely related. The describing function accounts for most instances (17) of circumstantial elements in the corpus, usually in thematic position, suggesting that the Existent from the material realm is best described when it is located in space:

(Location: place:) **In the flat oval shields** there were carbuncles. (HP3, emphasis added)

In contrast, the pondering function is more frequently realised without Circumstance in the corpus, suggesting that it would be of no use presenting semiotic abstractions, incorporeal by nature, in space and time, as in

> there was no (semiotic abstraction:) **reason** why one should admire a person because he was incurable. (HP2, emphasis added)

Listing existential clause has an even distribution of instances with and without Circumstances (two instances each) in the corpus, suggesting that it may be Circumstance unbound.

> There is famine (Location: place:) **in the walled cities of India**. (HP1, emphasis added)
>
> There are the dancing-girls of Samaris who dance in the manner of all kinds of birds and beasts. (HP3, emphasis added)

It is worth noting that different lexicogrammatical resources other than Circumstances strictly speaking may also provide circumstantial meaning, thus leading to *semiotic fractal* (BRAGA, 2021; MATTHIESSEN; TERUYA; LAM, 2010). Considering that, the prepositional phrase 'of Samaris' (HP3 above) would not only qualify the Head 'dancing-girls', but also locate it in space, indicating (from) where the dancing-girls are.

In turn, pointing existential clause attended by a circumstantial element is slightly more frequent than that without Circumstance (four vs. two instances) in the corpus, suggesting that the pointing function tends to ascribe at least one circumstantial feature to the existence. However, the frequency is too low in the corpus to allow any extrapolation.

> And there was peace and plenty (Location: place:) **in the land**. (HP4, emphasis added)
>
> So he ran away into the forest and called out to his mother to come to him, but there was no answer. (HP4, emphasis added)

Finally, circumstantial features attend all the instances (eight) of introducing existential clauses in the corpus:

There is a chamber (Location: place:) **in the palace** that has eight walls of red porphyry. (HP3, emphasis added)

In all cases, the Circumstance ascribes a Location circumstantial feature to the existence. This suggests that the introducing function might be Circumstance bound. However, the frequency is too low in the corpus to allow any extrapolation.

5 Final remarks

This study set out to accomplish the objectives mentioned in the Introduction. Firstly, it intended to identify the context of occurrence of existential clauses in the narratives that comprise the collection of short stories *A house of pomegranates*, by Oscar Wilde. To this end, the methodological procedures of Corpus Linguistics helped prepare the data, by finding the prototypical existential clauses and tagging the Existent, the circumstantial elements, and the stages of narrative. Secondly, this study sought to identify the functions existential clauses may perform in a narrative. Thirdly, this study sought to establish a correlation between the stages of narrative and the functions of existential clauses.

The narrative staging step fulfilled the first objective of this study, showing that existential clauses occur in all stages, save for Coda, which features only once in the corpus and does not instantiate any prototypical existential clause. Moreover, being a presentative construction (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2014), existential clauses were expected to occur more frequently in the Orientation stage, which has the basic property of particularising characters and setting the scene.

However, such clauses proved to be most frequent in the Complication stage followed by the Evaluation stage. Orientation is only third in the stage frequency ranking, counting half the instances of existential clauses in the Complication stage in the corpus. Resolution ranks fourth in the corpus. Results suggest that existential clauses mainly participate in the creation of problematic situations (instances occurring in the Complication stage) and in the evaluation of problems across the narratives (instances in the Evaluation stage).

As for the second objective of this study, the narrative staging also provided an opportunity to capture existential clauses in context and study its functioning. Besides being presentative constructions, existential clauses fulfil further functions – labelled as *existential*

functions in this study – in the short stories, namely, *describing*, *introducing*, *listing*, *pointing*, and *pondering*. Describing and pondering are the most recurrent functions in the corpus.

Particularly, describing existential clauses tend to select non-conscious material things as Existent, especially material objects, and are mainly attended by Location: place Circumstance in the corpus. This suggests that they are mainly used to provide the narrative with details about characters, things, and places. Pondering existential clauses tend to select non-conscious semiotic abstractions as Existent and are not attended by Circumstances most of the time in the corpus, suggesting that they are mainly used to portray the characters' inner world.

Lastly, as for the third objective of this study, there seemed to emerge a correlation between stages of narrative and existential functions. Despite being almost evenly distributed across the stages, as descriptive passages may occur at any point in a narrative, describing existential clauses are more frequent in the Orientation and Resolution stages in HP, suggesting that descriptions help characterize the initial and the final situation. Pondering existential clauses occur primarily in the Complication and Evaluation stages in the corpus, providing characters with consideration on their actual or previous situation.

Additionally, introducing, listing, and pointing existential clauses are also more frequent in the Complication stage in the corpus. Nonetheless, no instance of introducing function is spotted in the Orientation stage in HP, which is a curious finding, since the introducing function resonates with this stage's "property" of setting the scene. No instance of pointing and listing functions is found in the Evaluation and Resolution stages in HP respectively. However, the frequency is too low in the corpus to allow any extrapolation.

Therefore, the findings reject the hypothesis posited at the beginning of this study, i.e., *that existential clauses, as presentative construction, are more common in the Orientation stage*. This contributes to a better understanding of existential clauses in English narratives. In fact, this study proposed an original correlation between lexicogrammatical resources and context by deriving functions from existential clauses in each stage of narrative. Contextualising existential clauses proved to be an opportunity "to look beyond" their lexicogrammatical features and to recognise functions – or ways of functioning – other than those already documented in the literature about the system of TRANSITIVITY.

Further research should map other types of processes, including non-prototypical existential Processes and other authors or literary works. This should add quantitative and qualitative data to the present findings and eventually show consistency in the categorisation and in the incipient patterns found in this study.

Acknowledgement

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