There’s three variants: Agreement variation under existential *there*
Agreement variation under existential *there*

*there* + BE + NP$_{plural}$

1) AGREEMENT: *There are* more new subdivisions in the south side of town.

2) NON-AGREEMENT WITH FULL VERB: *There is* basically no jobs in the industry.

3) NON-AGREEMENT WITH CLITIC: *There’s* only two thrift shops down there.
Non-agreement predominates

Non-agreement occurs in 60-90% of existential *there* constructions (Meechan & Foley 1994; Tagliamonte 1998; Riordan 2007)

1) **AGREEMENT**: *There are* more new subdivisions in the south side of town.
2) **NON-AGREEMENT WITH FULL VERB**: *There is* basically no jobs in the industry.
3) **NON-AGREEMENT WITH CLITIC**: *There’s* only two thrift shops down there.

60-90% of tokens

This is despite the relative infrequency of non-agreement elsewhere, especially in standard varieties of English
Defining the variants – Past studies

Agreement
- there are + NP\text{pl}
- there were + NP\text{pl}
- there have been + NP\text{pl}
- ...

Non-agreement
- there’s + NP\text{pl}
- there is + NP\text{pl}
- there was + NP\text{pl}
- there has been + NP\text{pl}
- ...

## Defining the variants – This study

### Agreement
- *there are* + NP<sub>pl</sub>
- *there were* + NP<sub>pl</sub>
- *there have been* + NP<sub>pl</sub>
- ...

### Non-agreement with copular clitic
- *there’s* + NP<sub>pl</sub>

### Non-agreement with full verb
- *there is* + NP<sub>pl</sub>
- *there was* + NP<sub>pl</sub>
- *there has been* + NP<sub>pl</sub>
- ...

Motivating the three-way distinction

- each correlates differently with age, education and sex
- *there’s* may be an unanalyzed lexical unit for some speakers, not a contraction of *there is* (Crawford 2005)
Main argument

Non-agreement with copular clitic \((\text{there’s} + \text{NP}_{\text{pl}})\) is distinct from full verb non-agreement (e.g. \(\text{there is} + \text{NP}_{\text{pl}}\))

These two realizations of non-agreement merit distinct sociolinguistic and syntactic analyses
Data

144 sociolinguistic interviews
- from three cities in California’s Central Valley
- collected between 2010-2012
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4,368 tokens of existential *there*
- 1,960 with plural NPs
- 1,304 (66% of total) with non-agreement
- 1,028 (79% of non-agreement) with copular clitic (*there’s*)
Circumscribing the variable context

**CRITERIA**

Existential *there*, not presentational *there*

**EXAMPLES**

EXISTENTIAL: *There’s an old house on our block.*

PRESENTATIONAL: *Here’s my house, and there’s Jan’s house.*
Circumscribing the variable context

CRITERIA

Existential *there*, not presentational *there*

Syntactically plural postverbal subjects

EXAMPLES

PLURAL: *There was about 800 students at our school.*

SINGULAR: *There was a popular crowd at school.*
Circumscribing the variable context

CRITERIA

Existential *there*, not presentational *there*

Syntactically plural postverbal subjects

Verbs that display number agreement

EXAMPLES

Display number agreement: *is/are, was/were, is/are going to be, was/were going to be, has/have been*

Do not display number agreement: *will be, might be, may be, can be, would be, could be, should be, used to be*
## Circumscribing the variable context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existential <em>there</em>, not presentational <em>there</em></td>
<td><strong>AGREE</strong>: <em>there are, there were, there are going to be, there were going to be, there have been</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntactically plural postverbal subjects</td>
<td><strong>NON-AGREE</strong>: <em>there is, there was, there is going to be, there was going to be, there has been</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Verbs that display number agreement</td>
<td><strong>CLITIC</strong>: <em>there’s</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coded as AGREE, NON-AGREE or CLITIC</td>
<td><strong>EXCLUDED FOR NOW</strong>: <em>there’s going to be, there’s been</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Social factors

### Age
- 18 – 93

### Field site
- Merced
- Redding
- Bakersfield

### Sex
- Female
- Male

### Education
- some high school
- completed high school
- some college or 2 year degree
- completed 4 year degree
- completed graduate degree

**Speaker as a random effect**

Effects of social factors tested with mixed-effects logistic regressions
Results - summary

Non-agreement with copular clitic and full verb non-agreement correlate with different social factors:

- **there’s + NP_{pl}**
  - used more by
    - younger speakers

- **there is + NP_{pl}**
  - used more by
    - male speakers
    - speakers with less education
Results - education

Non-agreement with full verb occurred significantly more often than agreement in the speech of less educated speakers (p = 0.01)

Non-agreement with copular clitic did not significantly differ from agreement wrt education
Non-agreement with copular clitic was used by younger speakers significantly more often than either of the other variants ($p = 0.006$).
Interpreting the results – education

*There’s* + NP$_{pl}$ seems to be less socially marked and stigmatized than full verb non-agreement (e.g. *there is* + NP$_{pl}$)

- Squires (2013) noted the relative unmarkedness of *there’s* + NP$_{pl}$ in comparison to other forms of non-agreement (e.g. *he don’t*)

- Work on the social perceptions of this variable found that *there is* + NP$_{pl}$ negatively affects perceptions of intelligence, education, articulateness and wealth, while *there’s* + NP$_{pl}$ had no effect relative to standard agreement (Hilton & Krejci in progress)
Interpreting the results – age

Greater use of $there’s + NP_{pl}$ by younger speakers suggests possible change in progress with increasing lexicalization of $there’s$.
Younger speakers use *there’s* + NP$_{pl}$ at higher rates than older speakers but not non-agreement more generally.

Younger speakers use *there’s* more often with singular NPs.

Younger speakers use other contractions (e.g. *here’s*, *can’t*, *she’s*) at the same rate as older speakers. Greater use of *there’s* by younger speakers is not merely due to higher rates of contraction.
Theoretical implications for syntax

Although most theoretical syntactic work on agreement in existential constructions does not account for variation, some do

- Schütze (1999) argues that both agreeing and non-agreeing variants are unproblematically generated by the grammar
- Crawford (2005) argues that there’s is an unanalyzed lexical unit not generated by the grammar
- Our account can reconcile these two approaches: there’s can be a lexicalized unit, and there is and there are can be generated by the grammar
Conclusion

There’s should be treated separately from other non-agreeing forms
- *there’s* patterns differently from full verb non-agreement with respect to education, age and sex
- our results and ongoing work on social perceptions of this variable suggest that there are distinct social meanings for *there’s* and *there is*
- *there’s* may be increasingly becoming an unanalyzed lexical unit
References


