

## How paradigmatic contrast works in the grammar network: The case of the mental-state *there* construction

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Several studies in Cognitive Construction Grammar have emphasized the importance of considering paradigmatic relations between constructions, along with their taxonomic relations (Cappelle 2006, Perek 2015, Diessel 2019, to name a few). This paper supports this approach by analyzing a clause-level construction exemplified by (1), which I dub “Mental State *there* Construction (= MSC)”. MSC is a clause-level construction whose post-verbal NP (=PVNP) is occupied by nouns denoting mental states (e.g. *comfort* and *consolation*). I argue that MSC holds a paradigmatic relation to the transitive-verb construction in (3), in addition to being a type of the existential *there* construction as in (2).

(1) There was {comfort/consolation} in that thought. [MSC]

(2) There is a vase on the table.

(3) {I/she/they} took {comfort/consolation} in that thought. [transitive-verb construction]

In terms of taxonomic relations, MSC would count as a lower-level, relatively specified version of the existential *there* construction as the former shares the surface form (“there + be + PVNP + PP”) with the latter. However, this view does not help to capture MSC’s “ecological location” (Lakoff 1987) in the speaker’s mind because it misses a potential close connection between MSC (1) and the transitive-verb construction (3): the PVNP in the former corresponds to the object of the transitive verb in the latter (e.g. *take*, *find*, *seek*, etc.), and the two constructions share the same range of formal variation in the PP-complements. The only difference is that the “experiencer” role is mostly left unexpressed in the former while it is realized as the subject in the latter. These suggest that (3) and (1), corresponding to Predicate Focus and Sentence Focus constructions respectively, are in the relation of *paradigmatic contrast* (Lambrecht 1994, 2000).

The assumed paradigmatic relation between MSC and the transitive construction helps to explain the fact that, while (2) can have (4a) and (4b) as alternative variants, as pointed out in the literature (Kimball 1973, Milsark 1974, Lakoff 1987, among others), (3) cannot, as shown in (5a) and (5b). This is because the paradigmatic contrast between (1) and (3) has to do with whether or not to explicitly encode the experiencer, whereas this does not apply to the paradigm consisting of (2), (4a) and (4b):

(4) a. The table has a vase on it.      b. A vase is on the table.

(5) a. #That thought has comfort in it.    b. #Comfort is in that thought.

To support this analysis, I conducted a survey of COCA, examining the distribution of six mental-state nouns (*comfort*, *consolation*, *pleasure*, *pride*, *satisfaction*, and *solace*), which are typically attested in MSC. The results showed that these nouns appear much less frequently in MSC than in its transitive-verb counterpart, indicating the marked status of the former in the paradigmatic contrast with the latter. This conforms to the hypothesis that MSC is a Sentence Focus construction which is defined to be the marked alternative to a Predicate Focus construction, i.e. the unmarked subject-predicate (or “topic-comment”) structure, such as (3).

The present case study also suggests the possibility that at least part of the category of “*there* sentences” in the literature will be more properly captured by representing *noun-class-specific* constructions, just as has been argued for verb-class-specific constructions in relation to argument structure constructions (Croft 2003).

## References

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