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# An Unbridgeable Gap? The Treatment of Definiteness Restrictions in French and Chinese Presentational Constructions

*La restriction de la définitude dans les constructions présentatives en français et en chinois : divergences et points communs*

Ludovica Lena

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Availing ourselves of a parallel corpus – composed of two written and spoken subcorpora –, in this study we adopt a contrastive perspective to explore the (lack of) correspondence between French *il y a*-constructions with a definite pivot and Chinese *yǒu*-constructions. It is shown that most *il y a*-constructions appear in enumerative contexts (including the sentence-level and inter-clause list-reading, as well as the instantiation of an explicit part-whole relation). Written Chinese uses other strategies to ensure textual coherence and to mark a part-whole relation between the “pivot” and a given referential group (e.g., the lexical verb *bāokuò* “include”). In the spoken subcorpus, the *yǒu*-construction is the most frequent strategy which however competes with the locative *shì* “be” construction when a Ground is overtly expressed. Presentational and event-reporting *il y a*-constructions are mostly found in the spoken corpus and align more neatly with *yǒu*-constructions. Overall, the present study argues that the differences between the two languages are more nuanced than has so far been believed, showing that the correspondence between the cognitive status of referents and the formal marking of definiteness is not straightforward. Chinese pivots that are unmarked with respect to definiteness (e.g., bare nouns and bare-head noun phrases) can be semantically definite despite their postverbal position. At the same time, French definite pivots do not always denote identifiable referents, as is the case of the weak use of the definite article but also the special use of demonstrative determiners in topic-promoting and event-reporting contexts.

**Keywords:** presentational, existential, definiteness restrictions, contrastive analysis, French, Chinese

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*Sur la base d'un corpus parallèle – composé de deux sous-corpus écrit et oral –, cette étude adopte une perspective contrastive pour explorer l'(éventuelle) équivalence entre les constructions en il y a du français avec un pivot défini et les constructions en yǒu du chinois. Nous montrons que la plupart des constructions en il y a apparaissent dans des contextes énumératifs. Le chinois écrit utilise d'autres stratégies pour assurer la cohérence textuelle et pour marquer l'inclusion du « pivot » dans un groupe référentiel donné (ex. le verbe lexical bāokuò « inclure »). Dans le sous-corpus parlé, la construction en yǒu est la stratégie la plus fréquente, mais elle est en concurrence avec la construction avec shì « être » lorsqu'un locatif est ouvertement exprimé. Les emplois présentatifs et événementiels de il y a s'observent principalement dans le sous-corpus parlé et s'alignent plus clairement avec les constructions en yǒu. Dans l'ensemble, la présente étude soutient que les différences entre les deux langues sont plus nuancées qu'il n'y paraît à première vue, montrant que la correspondance entre le statut cognitif des référents et le marquage formel de la définitude n'est pas univoque. Les pivots du chinois formellement non marqués peuvent être sémantiquement définis malgré leur position postverbale. En même temps, les pivots définis du français ne dénotent pas toujours des référents identifiables, comme c'est le cas des emplois faibles de l'article défini mais aussi de certains usages marqués des déterminants démonstratifs.*

**Mots clés :** présentatif, existentiel, restriction de la définitude, analyse contrastive, français, chinois

## 1. Introduction

- 1 This study focuses on the forms called “presentational” in French and in Chinese, of which examples are provided in [1]. The label is motivated by the main discourse function of these constructions, which is that of calling “the attention of an addressee to the hitherto unnoticed presence of some person or thing in the speech setting” (Lambrecht, 1994: 39; see Li & Thompson, 1981: 509 on Chinese). In the literature, monoclausal constructions (e.g. [1a-b], [2a], [3b]) are generally named “existential sentences” (McNally, 2011; Koch, 2012; Bentley et al., 2013, 2015; Creissels, 2019, among many others; see Sarda & Lena, *forth.*, for a recent review), while biclausal constructions (e.g. [2b], [3a]), are more often labelled “presentational clefts”, at least in the literature on French<sup>1</sup>.

[1a] *Évidemment, il y avait un léger problème.*  
 of.course it<sub>EXPL</sub> there have.PST.3SG a.M light problem  
 Lit. ‘Of course, there was one tiny problem.’  
 (OpenSub)<sup>2</sup>

[1b] 当然有个小小的问题。  
*Dāngrán yǒu ge xiǎoxiǎo de wèntí.*  
 of.course HAVE CL little SUB problem  
 ‘Of course there was one tiny problem.’  
 (OpenSub)

[2a] *Il y avait un homme avec toi.*  
 it<sub>EXPL</sub> there have.PST.3SG a.M man with 2SG  
 ‘There was a man with you.’  
 (OpenSub)

[2b] 还有一个男人和你们在一起。  
*Hái yǒu yí-ge nánrén [hé nǐmen zài yìqǐ].*  
 also HAVE one-CL man with 2PL stay together  
 Lit. ‘There was also a man who was with you.’  
 (OpenSub)

1. See for instance Karssenbergh, 2018; Carlier & Lahousse, *forth.* The term “cleft” is generally not used to characterise Chinese biclausal *yǒu*-constructions (e.g. [2b]) as they are not seen as involving a relative clause. The functional correspondence between French and Chinese biclausal constructions was noted by Lambrecht (2000, 2001). See also Lena (2020a, *forth.* 1 and 2).

2. The parallel corpus collected for this study, along with its subcorpora, is described in Section 3. Whenever possible or useful, the translation of the examples is taken from the aligned English sentence. Otherwise, the indication “lit.” is provided.

[3a] Il y a un élément [qui cloche],  
 it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has a.M element REL.S be.wrong.PRS.3SG  
 dans ton histoire.  
 in POSS.2SG.SG story  
 Lit. ‘There is an element which is wrong, in your story.’  
 (OpenSub)

[3b] 在你的故事里有个大漏洞。  
 Zài nǐ de gùshì=li yǒu ge dà lòudòng.  
 at 2SG SUB story=in HAVE CL big hole  
 ‘There’s one major hole in your story.’  
 (OpenSub)

<sup>2</sup> *Il y a*-constructions and *yǒu*-constructions have been a central topic in the research agenda on French and Chinese, respectively. The two forms show striking points of similarity. On a formal level, they both rely on an existential verb built on the copula HAVE, although this appears in the grammaticalised form *il y avoir* ‘it there have’ in French, which includes the expletive subject *il* [3SG.M] and the frozen locative adverb *y* ‘there’<sup>3</sup>. As just mentioned, monoclausal constructions coexist with biclausal constructions in the two languages. From a discourse-pragmatic point of view, these forms represent a device often used to introduce new referents into the discourse (see Lena, 2020a, forth.2, for a recent review). However, a major point of divergence is represented by the treatment of the definiteness restrictions.

<sup>3</sup> Across languages, one of the main characteristics of existential/presentational constructions is the indefiniteness of the pivot (e.g., *a little problem* in [1a-b]), and the related impossibility of having a definite noun phrase (NP) in this position (since Milsark, 1974)<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, exceptions to the definiteness restrictions have been extensively discussed in the relevant literature (Rando & Napoli, 1978; Lumsden, 1988; Abbott, 1993; Ward & Birner, 1995; Leonetti, 2008; Bentley, 2013; Bentley et al., 2013, 2015, among others), with some languages being stricter than others with regard to the possibility of admitting definite pivots (Beaver et al., 2006; Bentley et al., 2015; Creissels, 2019). In this respect, French is particularly ‘tolerant’, as *il y a*-constructions, both monoclausal and biclausal, often include definite pivots. Sentences such as the following naturally occur in discourse:

3. As pointed out by Chappell and Creissels (2019: 487), the possessive use of *yǒu* is to be distinguished from its use as an existential predicator. (See, e.g., Li & Thompson, 1981: 513 for a different position.) Throughout this work, the existential value of *yǒu* is glossed as ‘HAVE’ in small capitals to underline – at least – its possessive source construction. See the end of the article for a full list of the glosses used in the examples.

4. Milsark (1974) distinguishes two basic types of NPs: ‘weak’ NPs which are allowed in existential sentences, and ‘strong’ NPs which – in principle – are not. Weak NPs include for instance indefinite articles, cardinal numbers and mass nouns. Strong NPs include nouns modified by the definite article, demonstratives, pronouns, possessive determiners, universal quantifiers and generics.



[4a] Tiens, il y a Jean!  
 hold.PRS.2SG it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has J.  
 Lit. 'Hey, there is John!'  
 (from Creissels, 2019: 40)

[4b] Il y a Jean qui a téléphoné.  
 it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has J. REL.S has call.PTCP  
 Lit. 'There is John who telephoned.'  
 (from Lambrecht, 1988: 136)

- 4 By contrast, it is well-known that *yǒu*-constructions do not easily tolerate definite pivots (since Lü, 1985 [1942]: 101). In fact, the literal Chinese translation of French examples such as [4] are ungrammatical<sup>5</sup>:

[5] \*有约翰（打了电话）。  
 \*Yǒu Yuēhàn (dǎ-le diànhuà).  
 HAVE Y. make-PFV phone.call  
 \*'There is John (who telephoned).'

- 5 Exceptions to the definiteness constraint have been identified in Chinese as well. Li (1996) argued that two types of *yǒu*-constructions should be identified, one introducing a new entity (example [2b]) and the other asserting the existence of an event (example [6a]), with definiteness restrictions being relevant only in the former. Hu and Pan (2007) discussed the role of focalizing adverbs such as *hái* "also" in [6b] – which is reminiscent of the neutralization of definiteness restrictions identified in the so-called "list reading" use of existential sentences (see 4.2.1) – or *zhǐ* "only" in [6c]: "what is unnoticed in the literature is that, although it is generally excluded from the post-*you* position, a definite NP can occur there if a focus particle is introduced into the relevant sentences" (Hu & Pan, 2007: 134). Cai (2000) and Xia (2009) report on the contexts that allow definite pivots within the *yǒu*-construction, showing that these are rarely found in main clauses. When this is the case, they are strongly context-dependent and cannot stand in isolation [6d].

[6a] 如果有张三/那个老板来，我们就可以马上解决问题了。  
 Rúguó yǒu Zhāngsān / nà-ge lǎobǎn lái,  
 if HAVE Z. that-CL boss come  
 wǒmen jiù kěyǐ mǎshàng jiějué wèntí le.  
 1PL then can immediately solve problem CRS  
 'If there was Zhangsan / that boss coming, we could solve the problem right away.'  
 (Li, 1996: 178)

5. Similar ungrammatical examples are discussed in Xú (2015).

[6b] 还有那个人/张三。

**Hái yǒu nèi-ge rén / Zhāngsān.**

also HAVE that-CL person Z.

‘There’s also that person / Zhangsan.’

(Hu & Pan, 2007: 134)

[6c] 眼里只有你。

Yǎn=li **zhǐ yǒu nǐ.**

eye=in only HAVE 2SG

‘There’s only you in [my] eyes.’

(Retrieved from a WeChat commercial)

[6d] 金姑:我上不了树。高振义:有我托着你。

Jīn Gū: Wǒ shàng-bu-liǎo shù.

J.G. 1SG go.up-NEG-PSB tree

Gāo Zhènyì: **Yǒu wǒ tuō-zhe nǐ.**

G.Z. HAVE 1SG support-DUR 2SG

Lit. ‘Jin Gu: “I can’t climb the tree.” Gao Zhenyi: “There’s me supporting you.”’

(Cai, 2000: 95)

- 6 Despite these exceptions, it is generally assumed that in the vast majority of contexts only weak determiners such as indefinite NPs can occupy the pivot position (e.g. [1b]). Lena (2020a) analysed a semi-spontaneous corpus of spoken Chinese and found that the pivots in biclausal *yǒu*-constructions strongly tend to be indefinite. Monoclausal *yǒu*-constructions, on the other hand, can include definite pivots in list-reading contexts. In the following example, the second pivot has a possessive determiner, and hence it denotes a highly accessible referent (Ariel, 2002) (note that focalising adverbs need not to be expressed):

[7] 家里情况也挺好的，呵。有一老人，有我爱人，有两个小孩儿。嗯，爱人有工作，小孩也工作啦。

Jiālǐ qíngkuàng yě tǐng hǎo de, hē.

home situation also very good SUB INT

**Yǒu yí lǎorén, yǒu wǒ àirén,**

HAVE one.CL old.person HAVE 1SG partner

**yǒu liǎng-ge xiǎoháir.** Ñg, àirén yǒu gōngzuò,

HAVE two-CL child INT partner have job

xiǎoháir yě gōngzuò la.

child also work SFP.CRS

Lit. ‘At home the situation is very good too, huh. There is an elderly person, there is my partner, there are two children. [My] partner has a job, the children also work.’

(BJKY semi-spontaneous spoken corpus, Lena, 2020a: 41-42)

- 7 On the basis of elicited spoken narratives based on a filmed stimulus, Lena (2020b) found that French speakers can use the *il y a*-construction to reintroduce discourse-old referents (example [8a]), while Chinese speakers do not assign such function to the *yǒu*-construction. Hence, sentences such as [8b], uttered by a French learner of Chinese, are not accepted by native speakers.

[8a] Il y a la fille qui l’attend à la sortie.  
 it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.F.SG girl who him wait.PRS.3SG at the exit  
 Lit. ‘There is the girl waiting for him at the exit.’

[8b] \*有这个女人等他。  
 \*Yǒu zhè-ge nǚrén děng tā.  
 HAVE this-CL woman wait 3SG  
 Int. ‘There is this woman waiting for him.’

- 8 The purpose of the present study is to examine in detail the (lack of) correspondence between the presentational structures of the two languages, taking as the starting point the French *il y a*-construction including a definite pivot. Before turning to the results of the contrastive analysis, a note on the marking of (in)definiteness distinctions in Chinese is necessary.

## 2. (In)definiteness marking in Chinese

- 9 Contrary to French, Chinese is an article-less language, which thus relies on different strategies to mark (in)definiteness oppositions. Leaving aside its non-referential uses, the [(numeral +) classifier] sequence (e.g. *yí-ge lièrén* ‘a hunter’ in [8]), is typically used to express unanchored unidentifiable referents (LaPolla, 1995; Chen, 2003), that is, prototypical (quantified) new referents – the ones marked by the indefinite article in languages such as English and French<sup>6</sup>. By contrast, nouns modified by demonstrative determiners *zhè* ‘this’ and *nà* ‘that’ are used to encode identifiable referents, that can be in one of the three activation states – active, accessible or inactive – according to LaPolla (1995). The NP *zhè-zhī gǒu* ‘this dog’ in [9] (from Chen, 2004: 1153) points to an activated referent thus offering an example of the anaphoric use of the demonstrative determiner:

6. On accessibility and identifiability, see for instance Prince, 1981; Ariel, 1990; Gundel et al., 1993; Chafe, 1994; Lambrecht, 1994.

- [9] 有一个猎人…养着一只狗。这只狗很懂事。  
 Yǒu yí-ge lièrén... yǎng-zhe yì-zhi gǒu.  
 HAVE one-CL hunter keep-DUR one-CL dog  
 Zhè-zhi gǒu hěn dǒngshì.  
 this-CL dog very intelligent  
 ‘There was a hunter who had a dog. The dog was very intelligent.’

10 Although demonstrative determiners in Chinese are “the closest to definite articles in other languages” (Chen, 2004: 1151), the two are not equivalent. While serving all the typical functions of demonstratives (situational in [10], discourse deictic in [11] and contrastive anaphoric in [12]), *zhè* “this” and *nà* “that” can be used in contexts where demonstratives (say, in languages like English) are not allowed: non-contrastive anaphoric in [9], shared knowledge in [13], frame-based association in [14] (the following examples are from Chen, 2004: 1151–1153):

- [10] 请把这/那张椅子搬到那间房间去。  
 Qǐng bǎ zhè/nà-zhāng yǐzi bān-dào nà-jiān fángjiān qù.  
 please ACC this/that-CL chair move-to that-CL room go  
 ‘Please move this/that chair to that room.’
- [11] 他想回去? 这你可不能答应。  
 Tā xiǎng huíqù? Zhè nǐ kě bùnéng dāying.  
 he want return this you surely cannot agree  
 ‘He wants to go back? You surely cannot give your permission to that.’
- [12] 一个小孩子碰到了一个女孩子…这个时候, 这个小孩子又看了那个女孩子, 看了一眼。  
 Yí-ge xiǎoháizi... lù=zhong de shíhòu ne, pèngdào-le  
 one-CL kid road=middle SUB time PAUS run.into-PFV  
 yí-ge nǚháizi... zhè-ge shíhòu, zhè-ge xiǎoháizi yòu  
 one-CL girl this-CL time this-CL kid again  
 kàn-le nà-ge nǚháizi, kàn-le yì yǎn.  
 look-PFV that-CL girl look-PFV one eye  
 ‘A kid in the middle of the road ran into a girl... this time the kid had another look at the girl.’
- [13] 这天气真怪十二月了可一点不冷。  
 Zhè tiānqì zhēn guài shí’èr yuè le kě yídiǎn bù lěng.  
 this weather really strange twelve month CRS but bit not cold  
 ‘The weather is really strange. It is December now, but it is not cold at all.’

[14] 他买了一辆旧车，那轮胎都磨平了。

Tā mǎi-le yí-liang jiù chē, nà lúntāi dōu mó píng le.  
he buy-PFV one-CL old car that tire even wear flat CRS

‘He bought an old car. All the tires are worn out.’

11 At the same time, uses characteristic of fully grammaticalised definite articles (e.g., shared knowledge and frame-based association) “are exceptional rather than the norm” with Chinese demonstratives (Chen, 2004: 1156). Crosthwaite et al. (2018) found that Chinese speakers more often use bare nouns when establishing bridging reference (i.e., frame-based anaphora relations, as in *war...soldier*<sub>[+DEF]</sub>) (see also Lena, 2020b).

12 Besides nouns that are formally marked (either by a classifier or by a demonstrative) Chinese speakers can make use of bare nouns as referring expressions. These present the highest degree of ambiguity, given that they can designate unidentifiable, inactive, accessible and active referents (LaPolla, 1995: 305, see also Huang, 2013: chap. 5). Between accessible referents, bare nouns can denote deictically (situationally) identifiable referents and uniquely identifiable referents (Cheng & Sybesma, 1999: 510; Chen, 2004: 1165).

[15] 狗要过马路。

Gǒu yào guò mǎlù.  
dog want cross road

‘The dog(s) want to cross the road.’

(Cheng & Sybesma, 1999: 510)

[16] 月亮升上来了。

Yuèliàng shēng-shang-lai le.  
moon rise-up-come CRS

‘The moon has risen.’

(Chen, 2004: 1165)

13 It has been noted that the interpretation of bare nouns is influenced by their syntactical contexts, and they are generally interpreted as indefinite in the postverbal position (Chao, 1968: 76; Li & Thompson, 1981: 510; Xu, 1995; Hole, 2012: 61). In Hole’s (2012: 61) terms:

bare nouns constitute an especially interesting domain of investigation because they contain no functional morphemes indicating their status as given or new. Despite the lack of definiteness marking, bare nouns display definiteness effects in some syntactic environments. The first such effect concerns subjects vs. objects. Bare nouns in a non-subject (and non-topical) position are typically interpreted as indefinite (unless they denote inherently definite entities), whereas they are invariably definite in the subject position preceding the verb. (Hole, 2012: 61)

14 The crucial point here is that bare nouns which have a unique reference do not change their interpretation when appearing as the pivots of a *yǒu*-construction, and thus are semantically definite even though they are formally unmarked with respect to definiteness, and despite their postverbal position.

### 3. The data

15 The study relies on a parallel corpus of French-Chinese aligned sentences built via the Sketch Engine software. Two subcorpora within the OPUS2<sup>7</sup> corpus were selected, i.e. the Opensubtitles<sup>8</sup> corpus (hereafter OpenSub), consisting of the aligned translations of film subtitles, and the MultiUN corpus, which is a collection of translated documents from the United Nations. The first is representative of the spoken language while the latter reflects the written register. The following French sequences were extracted:

[17]  $[Il + y + avoir (...0-4) + \{DEF.ART / DEM / POSS / PRO / Proper\ name\} (\pm R_{relative\ Clause})]$

16 French definite pivots are nouns modified by a definite article (*le/la/les*), a demonstrative determiner (*ce/cette/ces*) or a possessive determiner (*mon/ma/mes*), as well as personal pronouns (e.g., *moi* “me”) and proper names. The search in [17] left open the possibility of obtaining both monoclausal and biclausal *il y a*-constructions (i.e., constructions including a relative clause [RC], as in [3a])<sup>9</sup>. Specifically, the data consists of all sentences identified in the OpenSub corpus (n = 68) and an equivalent number of items extracted from the MultiUN corpus (random sample). This resulted in a total of 136 sentences per language, after noise elimination.

17 It should be stressed that, as the starting point is the French construction, the Chinese aligned sentences do not necessarily include a *yǒu*-construction.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Distribution of pivot types in the French *il y a*-constructions

18 Table 1 illustrates the definite pivot types in French *il y a*-constructions.

7. See: <https://www.sketchengine.eu/opus-parallel-corpora/>.

8. See: <http://www.opensubtitles.org/>.

9. The French subcorpus contains 40/136 (29.4%) occurrences of *il y a*-construction including a relative clause. Note, however, that only *qui*-relative clauses were calculated. Building upon Karssenbergh (2017) and Carlier and Lahousse (forth.) it is assumed that mono- and biclausal *il y a*-constructions can express the same range of meanings.

Pivot types	Count	%
Definite article + N	94	69.1%
Demonstrative determiner + N	16	11.7%
Proper name	11	8.0%
Definite article + Proper name	6	4.4%
Personal pronoun	4	2.9%
Possessive determiner + N	4	2.9%
Demonstrative pronoun	1	0.7%
Total	136	100%

Table 1 – French: distribution of definite pivot types

- 19 Most pivots are represented by nouns modified by the definite article (69.1%; raising to 73.5% when proper names introduced by the definite article are also considered), as shown in Table 1 above. Among these forms, 34 instances (34% of the pivots with a definite article) are represented by a NP of the type [N1 SUB N2], in which the definite marking is provided by the N2, which plays an identifying role and contributes to restrict the reference of the N1 (e.g. [18a])<sup>10</sup>. These forms typically correspond in Chinese to bare-head NPs (as in [18b]). The N1 modified by the definite article can be a general noun (e.g., *question* “question”, *problème* “problem”, *cas* “case”), as in [19a]<sup>11</sup>. Note that while the use of the indefinite article is not felicitous in French [19a], Chinese can express such NPs by means of quantified indefinite nouns [19b].

[18a] Premièrement, il y a le principe de  
 firstly it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.M.SG principle of  
 l' égalité souveraine des États.  
 the equality sovereign of.the.PL States  
 Lit. ‘First, there is the principle of the sovereign equality of States.’  
 (MultiUN)

10. In an additional 4 examples (4% of *il y a*-constructions including a pivot modified by a definite article) the pivot is modified by a superlative (e.g. *le plus de N* “the most of N”), which has been identified as a context neutralizing the definiteness restrictions (Meulleman, 2012: 39).
11. Such general nouns are labelled “low-content nouns” in Bolinger (1977: 5-6), highlighting their semantic generality or unspecificity. See also Schmid’s (2000) analysis in terms of “shell nouns”, in which a general noun such as *question* or *point* allow speakers to encapsulate complex chunks of information in temporary nominal concepts.

[18b] 第一个原则是国家的主权平等。

Dìyí-ge yuánzé shì guójiā de zhǔquán píngděng.  
first-CL principle be State SUB sovereignty equality

Lit. 'The first principle is the sovereign equality of States.'

(MultiUN)

[19a] Enfin, il y a la question de l' égalité  
finally it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.F.SG question of the equality

entre les hommes et les femmes.  
between the.PL men and the.PL women

'Finally, there is the issue of equality between women and men.'

(MultiUN)

[19a'] ??Il y a une question de l' égalité  
it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has a.F question of the equality

entre les hommes et les femmes.  
between the.PL men and the.PL women

Lit. 'There is an issue of equality between women and men.'

[19b] 最后，还有一个男女之间平等的问题。

Zuìhòu, hái yǒu yí-ge nánǚ  
finally also HAVE one-CL men.and.women

zhījiān píngděng de wèntí.  
between equality SUB problem

Lit. 'Finally, there is also an issue of equality between men and women.'

(MultiUN)

20 In the following example [20a], the use of the definite article before *voiture* "car" is clearly triggered by the complement *de quelqu'un* "of somebody" and is not motivated semantically (Milsark's [1974: 6] "crypto-indefinites", discussed in Meulleman, 2012: 39). The use of an indefinite classified pivot in the Chinese aligned *yǒu*-construction does not entail a substantial change in meaning (example [20b]).

[20a] *Faites vous voler votre voiture, elle sera revendue en pièces dans cet atelier, vous pouvez voir ça,*

il y a la voiture de quelqu'un là dedans.  
it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.F.SG car of someone there inside

'You have a car hijacking, there's a chop shop there, you can see that, that (lit. there)'s somebody's car in there.'

(OpenSub)



[20b] 你可以看那里有一辆车。

Nǐ kěyǐ kàn nàlǐ yǒu yī-liang chē.  
2SG can see there HAVE one-CL car

Lit. 'You can see there's a car there.'

(OpenSub)

21 In other cases, the definite article is used to denote uniquely identifiable referents (that is, a referent which is identifiable independently from the discourse structure or the extra-linguistic setting):

[21] En effet, à la base de l'organisation administrative,  
in fact at the base of the organisation administrative

il y a le Fokontany qui est la subdivision  
it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.M.SG F. REL.S is the subdivision  
administrative de base de la commune.  
administrative of base of the.F.SG commune

Lit. 'Indeed, at the base of the administrative organisation, there is the Fokontany, which is the basic administrative subdivision of the Commune.'

(MultiUN)

22 The definite article can also modify in French nouns describing uncountable intangible entities or abstract concepts that pertain to general world knowledge such as *terrorism*, *poverty*, *truth*. They cannot be modified by other determiners (cf. [22a] with [22a']). Such referents are typically expressed by bare nouns in Chinese (example [22b]).

[22a] Oui, je crois qu'il y a le typhus.  
yes 1SG believe.PRS.SG that it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.M.SG typhus

'Yes, I believe there's typhus.'

(OpenSub)

[22a'] Je crois qu'il y a {\*un/\*du} typhus.  
1SG believe.PRS.1SG that it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has a.M/PA.M.SG typhus

\*'I believe there's one/some typhus.'

[22b] 是的, 我知道有伤寒病在流行。

Shìde, wǒ zhīdào yǒu shānghánbìng zài liúxíng.  
right 1SG know HAVE typhus PROG spread

Lit. 'Right, I know there is typhus spreading.'

(OpenSub)

- 23 Demonstrative determiners (11.7%) tend to appear in event-reporting *il y a*-constructions (see 4.2.3), in which they denote discourse-new referents (see [23a]) instead of discourse-old referents (i.e., the prototypical anaphoric function of demonstrative determiners)<sup>12</sup>. Such referents are encoded by indefinite nouns in the Chinese aligned sentences (within or outside a *yǒu*-construction). In [23b], a rather marginal formulation (2 instances), the relevant NP appears as an indefinite quantified subject.

[23a] Il y a huit ans il y a ce vieil homme  
 ago eight years it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has this.M old man  
 qui est venu me frapper le visage  
 REL.S is come.PTCP.M.SG to.me hit.INF the.M.SG face  
 devant mon personnel.  
 in.front.of POSS.1SG.M.SG staff

[23b] 八年前一个老头进来当我手下的面扇了我耳光。

Bā nián qián [yí-ge lǎotóu jin-lái]  
 eight year before one-CL old.man enter-come  
 dāngzhe wǒ shǒuxià de miàn shàn-le wǒ ěrguāng.  
 facing 1SG leadership SUB face box-PFV 1SG ear

‘Eight years ago this old man came in and slapped me around in front of my crew.’

(OpenSub)

- 24 Despite being frequently included in the examples of *il y a*-constructions provided in the literature (at least on *il y a*-clefts), proper names are less frequent (8%), as already pointed out by Karssenbergh (2018: 99).

[24a] – Je ne suis pas seul. Il y a Sal.  
 1SG NEG be.PRS.1SG NEG alone it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has S.

– *Pour Salvatore? – C’est un tueur. On a fait le Vietnam. Pour nous, tuer c’est rien.*

‘I’m not alone. I got (lit. there is) Sal. – Sal, what’s that for, Salvatore? – Yeah. Sal, he’s a killer. We’re Vietnam veterans so killing don’t mean anything to us.’

(OpenSub)

[24b] 我不是一个人。还有沙尔。

Wǒ bú shì yí-ge rén. Hái yǒu Shā’ěr.  
 1SG NEG be one-CL person also HAVE S.

Lit. ‘I’m not alone. There’s also Sal.’

(OpenSub)

12. See Lambrecht (1994: 83) on English. Such usage of the demonstrative determiner has been labelled “indefinite *this*” (Prince, 1981).

25 Taken together, proper names and personal pronouns – and to a lesser extent possessive determiners – are elements highly ranked in topichood hierarchies (Gundel et al., 1993), and as such these forms are expected to be most strongly banned from Chinese *yǒu*-constructions.

26 The most definite pivots (i.e., all pivot types except the ones modified by definite articles) are predominantly found in the spoken corpus (37 out of 42 occurrences in the OpenSub corpus).

#### 4.2. The functions associated to French *il y a*-constructions

27 The occurrences of *il y a*-constructions have been classified according to their discourse functions and semantic properties (the labels used in the tables are illustrated in the next subsections). As several parameters can coexist, the numbers in brackets illustrate the total number of occurrences of a given property (Table 2). This is especially true for sentences where the pivot stands in a part-whole relation with a given referential set. Such part-whole relationship often underlies the expression of a list-reading meaning.

Functions		Count (including overlaps)	%
Enumerative	Inter-clause list	27 (32)	19.8% (22.7%)
	Sentence-level list	16 (35)	11.7% (18.3%)
	Sentence-level list + Inter-clause list	3	2.2%
	Sentence-level list + Locative	3	2.2%
	Part-whole	8 (23)	5.8% (16.9%)
	Part-whole + Sentence-level list	13	9.5%
	Part-whole + Inter-clause list	2	1.4%
Locative	Locative	20 (24)	14.7% (17.6%)
	Locative metaphoric	11	8%
	Locative + Event-reporting	2	1.4%
	Locative + Topic-promoting	2	1.4%
Event-reporting		16 (18)	11.7% (13.2%)
Topic-promoting		10 (12)	7.3% (8.8%)
Existential		3	2.2%
Total		136	100%

Table 2 – The functional classification of French *il y a*-constructions (both subcorpora)

Functions	Count	%
Enumerative	72	52.9%
Locative	35	25.7%
Event-reporting	16	11%
Topic-promoting	10	7.3%
Existential	3	2.2%
Total occurrences	136	100%

Table 3 – The functional classification of French *il y a*-constructions in both subcorpora (main categories)

28 When several parameters are associated to the *il y a*-construction, one of them turns out to be significant in motivating the choice of the aligned Chinese form. Hence, for the sake of clarity – and at the cost of a certain simplification – Table 3 illustrates the data by classifying each sentence according to its most relevant property only (e.g., “locative + event-reporting” sentences are classified as “locative”). Note that, with the exception of the part-whole meaning, the concurrence of functions remains relatively marginal.

29 Tables 4 and 5 below show the distribution of the functional properties identified in *il y a*-constructions in the spoken and written subcorpora, respectively. Table 6 offers a global comparison of the main categories identified in the two subcorpora.

Functions		Count (including overlaps)	%
Enumerative	Sentence-level list	13 (19)	19.1% (27.9%)
	Inter-clause list	0	0%
	Sentence-level list + Locative	2	2.9%
	Part-whole + Sentence-level list	4	5.8%
Locative	Locative	18 (23)	26.4% (33.8%)
	Locative metaphoric	3	4.4%
	Locative + Event-reporting	2	2.9%
	Locative + Topic-promoting	2	2.9%
Event-reporting		14 (16)	20.5% (23.5%)
Topic-promoting		9 (11)	13.2% (16.1%)
Existential		1	1.4%
Total		68	100%

Table 4 – The functional classification of French *il y a*-constructions in the OpenSub corpus

Functions		Count	%
Enumerative	Inter-clause list	27 (32)	39.7% (47%)
	Part-whole	8 (19)	11.7% (27.9%)
	Sentence-level list	3 (16)	4.4% (23.5%)
	Sentence-level list + Inter-clause list	3	4.4%
	Sentence-level list + Locative metaphoric	1	1.4%
	Part-whole + Sentence-level list	9	13.2%
	Part-whole + Inter-clause list	2	2.9%
Locative	Locative	2	2.9%
	Locative metaphoric	8 (9)	11.7% (13.2%)
Event-reporting		2	2.9%
Topic-promoting		1	1.4%
Existential		2	2.9%
Total		68	100%

Table 5 – The functional classification of French *il y a*-constructions in the MultiUN corpus

Subcorpora	OpenSub		MultiUN	
	Count	%	Count	%
Enumerative	19	27.9%	53	77.9%
Locative	25	36.7%	10	14.7%
Event-reporting	14	20.5%	2	2.9%
Topic-promoting	9	13.2%	1	1.4%
Existential	1	1.4%	2	2.9%
Subtotal	68	100%	68	100%

Table 6 – The functional classification of French *il y a*-constructions in each subcorpus (main categories)

30 In what follows, the criteria for identifying each function are detailed and examples are provided.

4.2.1. *Enumerative*

- 31 The “enumerative” or “list-reading” use of the existential/presentational construction<sup>13</sup> has been identified as a context neutralising the definiteness restriction on the pivot. As Lambrecht (2002: 199) puts it:

English and French behave alike with respect to the possible occurrence of definite NPs, including independent pronouns, in the so-called “listing” use of the existential construction [...]. In both languages, the constraint on the cognitive status of the presented entity can be cancelled if the entity belongs to a SET whose existence is pragmatically presupposed in the discourse, but whose MEMBERS have not yet been determined at utterance time.  
(Lambrecht, 2002: 199)

- 32 Overall, 72 out of 136 occurrences (52.9%) of *il y a*-constructions in my data (Table 3) are characterised by the expression of an enumerative meaning. This can either occur within the same sentence (labelled “sentence-level list”, 31 occurrences) (e.g. [25a]), as a connection between sentences (labelled “inter-clause list”, 35 occurrences) (e.g. [25b]) and by establishing an explicit part-whole relation between the pivot and a larger referential group (labelled “part-whole”, 25 occurrences) (e.g. [25c]). As mentioned earlier, the three parameters can coexist, as in example [25d] and [25e] which instantiates a part-whole relation while expressing a sentence-level and inter-clause list meaning, respectively.

[25a] Enumerative *il y a*-construction (sentence-level list)

**Il y avait moi, Nicky, et un jeune, Carson.**  
it<sub>EXPL</sub> there had me N. and a.M.SG young.person C.  
'It (lit. There) was me, Nicky and this kid Carson.'  
(OpenSub)

[25b] Enumerative *il y a*-construction (inter-clause list)

**Premièrement, il y a le lien entre ce**  
firstly it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.M.SG link between PRO  
**que nous accomplissons ici et ce que les**  
that 1PL accomplish.PRS.1PL here and PRO that the.PL  
**parlementaires, dans des cadres similaires,**  
parliamentarians in INDF.ART.PL settings similar  
**sont appelés à accomplir chez eux.**  
be.PRS.3PL call.PTCP.PL to accomplish.INF at them

13. “[T]he communicative function of [enumerative existential] sentences [...] is to draw the attention of the addressee towards some entity (or a set of entities) that is relevant for some purpose under discussion” (Lumsden, 1988: 151).

Lit. ‘First, there is the link between what we do here and what parliamentarians in similar settings are called upon to do at home.’

(MultiUN)

- [25c] Enumerative *il y a*-construction (part-whole relation)

Parmi les défis qu’affronte l’Union  
 between the.PL challenges REL.O face.PRS.3SG the Union  
 du Maghreb arabe, il y a le problème  
 of.the.M Maghreb arab it\_EXPL there has the.M.SG problem  
 dit du Sahara occidental.  
 called of.the.M Sahara western

‘Among the challenges faced by the Mahgreb, there is the so-called problem of the Western Sahara.’

(MultiUN)

- [25d] Enumerative *il y a*-construction (part-whole + sentence-level list)

Parmi les nombreux obstacles au développement  
 between the.PL numerous impediments to.the development  
 socio-économique en Afrique, il y a la pauvreté,  
 socio-economic in Africa it\_EXPL there has the.F.SG poverty  
 les systèmes médiocres de prestation des soins de santé,  
 the.PL systems poor of delivery of.the healthcare  
 les guerres régionales et les conflits civils.  
 the.PL wars regional and the.PL conflicts civil

Lit. ‘Among the many impediments to social and economic development in Africa there are poverty, poor health delivery systems, intra-regional wars and civil conflicts.’

(MultiUN)

- [25e] Enumerative *il y a*-construction (part-whole + inter-clause list)

*Le terrorisme d’Al-Qaida se décline aujourd’hui en trois groupes distincts mais liés entre eux:*

premièrement, il y a les anciens dirigeants,  
 firstly it\_EXPL there has the.PL ancient leaders  
 dont les noms sont bien connus;  
 of.which the.PL names be.PRS.3PL well know.PTCP.PL  
 deuxièmement, il y a les combattants qui  
 secondly it\_EXPL there has the.PL fighters REL.S  
 sont passés par les camps d’entraînement  
 be.PRS.3PL pass.PTCP.PL by the.PL camps of training

afghans et en sont sortis terroristes confirmés;  
 Afghan and of.it be.PRS.3PL exit.PTCP.PL terrorists experienced

*et troisièmement, il y a une nouvelle génération en pleine expansion de partisans qui peuvent très bien n'être jamais sortis de leur pays mais qui adhèrent aux fondements du message d'Al-Qaida.*

Lit. 'Al-Qaida terrorism now comprises three distinct but interlinked groups: first, there is the old leadership whose names are well known; second, there are the fighters who attended the camps in Afghanistan and graduated as experienced terrorists; and third, there is a new and growing generation of supporters who may never have left their countries of residence but have embraced the core elements of the Al-Qaida message.'

(MultiUN)

#### 4.2.2. Locative

- 33 The sentences classified as "locative" are those expressing an explicit relation between the pivot and a spatial reference frame, i.e. between a Figure (F) and a Ground (G) in Creissels' (2019) terms (see Talmy, 2000, who introduced the Figure/Ground dichotomy in linguistics), as in [26a]. These include metaphorical locative relations (e.g. [26b]). Metaphorical locative sentences are mostly found in the MultiUN corpus (8/10 occurrences), while concrete locative sentences are mostly found in the OpenSub corpus (20/23 occurrences).

[26a] Locative *il y a*-construction

[À 15 km]<sub>(G)</sub>, il y a les Allemands<sub>(F)</sub>!  
 at 15 km it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.PL Germans

Lit. '15km from here, there are the Germans!'

(OpenSub)

[26b] Metaphorical locative *il y a*-construction

[Au cœur de chaque phobie]<sub>(G)</sub>, il y a  
 at.the heart of each phobia it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has

la peur de perdre le contrôle<sub>(F)</sub>.  
 the.F.SG fear of lose.INF the.M.SG control

Lit. 'At the heart of every phobia, there is the fear of losing control.'

(MultiUN)

#### 4.2.3. Event-reporting

- 34 In event-reporting sentences (see Sasse, 1987, and Lambrecht, 1988), the (unanchored) pivot is expressed as participating in an event and is not promoted to topic status in the continuing discourse.



[27a] Event-reporting *il y a*-construction (written register)

Il y a le terrorisme qui frappe  
 it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.M.SG terrorism REL.S hit.PRS.3SG  
 de nombreuses sociétés  
 of numerous societies

*alors même que la pauvreté, l'ignorance et la maladie se répandent dans maintes régions du monde.*

Lit. 'There is the terrorism hitting several societies while poverty, ignorance and illness are spreading in many regions of the world.'

(MultiUN)

[27b] Event-reporting *il y a*-construction (spoken register)

Ensuite... Oh, il y a eu Don qui  
 then INT it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has have.PTCP D. REL.S  
 rompait avec moi tous les vendredis pour que je  
 break.PST.3SG with me all.PL the.PL Fridays for that 1SG  
 sois pas dans ses pattes le weekend.  
 be.SBJV.PRS.1SG NEG in POSS.3SG.F.PL paws the weekend

'And then... Oh, there was (lit. there has been) Don who broke up with me every Friday so that he could have his weekends free.'

(OpenSub)

#### 4.2.4. Topic-promoting

- 35 In principle, all – or most – *il y a*-constructions are “presentational” in the sense that they include at least non-topical and typically discourse-new referents (see Carlier & Lahousse, forth.). The term “topic-promoting” is preferred here to characterise, in a narrow sense, the constructions including unanchored referents that are explicitly promoted to topic status. This is an operational choice as pivots standing in a part-whole relation with a given set, can of course be promoted to the topic status at least within the paragraph that concerns them. For the purposes of this study, this distinction suffices in that the enumerative function turns out to be crucial in identifying a subgroup of constructions in Chinese. By contrast, the topic-promoting function can coexist with the establishment of a locative relation between the Figure and an explicit Ground, as can be seen in the examples below.

[28a] Topic-promoting *il y a*-construction

Il y avait ce gars, Wayne Dobbs,  
 it<sub>EXPL</sub> there have.PST.3SG this.M guy W.D.  
 il avait 24 ans. Il travaillait à  
 3SG.M have.PST.3SG 24 years 3SG.M work.PST.3SG at

temps partiel dans un magasin de copies.  
part-time in a copy shop

Lit. ‘There was this guy, Wayne Dobbs, 24 years old. He worked part-time in a copy shop.’

(OpenSub)

[28b] Locative + topic-promoting *yǒu*-construction

这里有人，叫Wayne Dobbs，24岁，在一个影印店里做兼职。

[Zhèli]<sub>(G)</sub> **yǒu** ge rén<sub>(F)</sub>, jiào Wayne Dobbs, 24 suì,  
here HAVE CL person be.called W.D. 24 years

zài yí-ge yǐngyìndiàn=li zuò jiānzhí.  
at one-CL copy.shop=in do part.time.work

Lit. ‘There’s a person here, named Wayne Dobbs, 24, working part-time in a copy shop.’

(OpenSub)

- 36 Note that the pivot in the French sentence is represented by a noun modified by a demonstrative determiner. Here the demonstrative determiner is used not to refer anaphorically or deictically, but to encode a discourse-new referent by highlighting its salience in the continuing discourse.

#### 4.2.5. Existential

- 37 Finally, the few sentences classified as “existential” are those expressing the literal existence outside enumerative contexts. In the following example [29a], the pivot (*le terrorisme* “the terrorism”) is discourse-old and topical, and its inclusion in the *il y a*-construction is allowed by the full existential meaning of *il y a*. Note that the same proposition is expressed in Chinese by using the lexical verb *cúnzài* “exist” (see [29b]).

[29a] Il ne peut pas y avoir de démocratie  
it<sub>EXPL</sub> NEG can.PRS.3SG NEG there have.INF of democracy

tant qu’ il y a le terrorisme.  
as.long.as it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.M.SG terrorism

‘There can be no democracy as long as there is terrorism.’

(MultiUN)

[29b] 只要存在恐怖主义，就不会有民主。

Zhǐyào **cúnzài** kǒngbùzhǔyì, jiù bú huì yǒu míngzhǔ.  
provided exist terrorism then NEG can HAVE democracy

Lit. ‘As long as terrorism exists, there can be no democracy.’

(MultiUN)

38 In what follows, I will analyse the Chinese examples aligned with the  
 39 *il y a*-constructions of the French subcorpus, by considering first the syntactic  
 structures before turning to the marking at the NP level, and the interaction  
 between the two levels of analysis.

#### 4.3. The distribution of Chinese structures

39 Table 7 shows the Chinese syntactic structures aligned with French *il y a*-constructions  
 (the spoken and written registers are both considered).

40 As expected, there is no one-to-one correspondence between French  
*il y a*-constructions and Chinese *yǒu*-constructions. However, somewhat surprisingly,  
 the *yǒu*-construction is nonetheless the most frequent (36.7%). In section 4.5, I will  
 analyse the definiteness of the pivots included in these constructions. In the copular  
*shì*-constructions (19.8%), the relevant NP (i.e., the “pivot” in the French sentence)  
 is introduced as the argument of the copular verb *shì* “be”, while in subject-verb (SV)  
 sentences, it appears as a canonical preverbal subject (11%). The use of lexical verb  
*bāokuò* “include” (8.8%) makes explicit the meronymic relation (i.e., the inclusion  
 of the relevant NP to a larger group) often observed in the written register. NP-only  
 constructions are also found in enumerative contexts. Locative *shì*-constructions (8%)  
 differ from copular *shì*-constructions in that the precopular position is occupied by a  
 locative expression ([NP<sub>Ground</sub> + *shì* + NP<sub>Figure</sub>]). In 4 occurrences, *il y a* is aligned with the  
 lexical verb *cúnzài* “exist” (as in [29b] above). The possessive use of verb *yǒu* is rather  
 marginal (2.2%), as are other strategies identified in the corpus: verb-subject (VS)  
 order, the other verb-object (VO) constructions – beside the ones classified separately,  
 the use of the form [*zài* “at” + NP] and perception verbs.

Structure	Count	%
<i>Yǒu</i> “there be”	50	36.7%
Copular <i>shì</i> “be”	27	19.8%
SV	15	11.0%
<i>Bāokuò</i> “include”	12	8.8%
Locative <i>shì</i> “be”	11	8.0%
NP only	5	3.6%
<i>Cúnzài</i> “exist”	4	2.9%
Possessive <i>yǒu</i>	3	2.2%
VS	3	2.2%
Other VO	3	2.2%
<i>Zài</i> “at”	2	1.4%
Perception verbs	1	0.7%
Total	136	100%

Table 7 – The overall distribution of the Chinese structures  
 aligned with French *il y a*-constructions

	MultiUN	OpenSub
<i>Yǒu</i> “there be”	12 (17.6%)	38 (55.8%)
Copular <i>shì</i> “be”	23 (33.8%)	4 (5.8%)
Locative <i>shì</i> “be”	2 (2.9%)	9 (13.2%)
<i>Bāokuò</i> “include”	11 (16.1%)	1 (1.4%)
SV	10 (14.7%)	5 (7.4%)
NP only	3 (4.4%)	2 (2.9%)
<i>Cúnzài</i> “exist”	4 (5.8%)	0 (0%)
Possessive <i>yǒu</i>	0 (0.0%)	3 (4.4%)
VS	1 (1.4%)	2 (2.9%)
<i>Zài</i> “at”	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.9%)
Perception verbs	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.4%)
Other VO	2 (2.9%)	1 (1.4%)
Subtotal	68 (100%)	68 (100%)

Table 8 – The distribution of Chinese structures in each subcorpus

41 Table 8 illustrates the distribution of the Chinese structures aligned with French  
*il y a*-constructions in each subcorpus.

42 Several findings are noteworthy. In the spoken corpus, the *yǒu*-construction  
is the most frequently used strategy (55.8%), while in the written register, most  
French *il y a*-sentences with a definite pivot correspond in Chinese to strategies  
other than the use of *yǒu*. In particular, recall that in the MultiUN corpus the  
*il y a*-construction is primarily used in enumerative contexts, and especially to ensure  
inter-clause list reading (47%). For this purpose, written Chinese tends to use the  
copular verb *shì* “be” associated to a connector such as a generic noun preceded  
by an ordinal number. The lexical verb *bāokuò* “include” makes explicit a relation  
between the “pivot” and a given referential set. By contrast, the latter strategy is  
almost absent in the OpenSub corpus (one occurrence). The SV construction is  
more frequent in the written corpus (14.7%) but is represented in the spoken  
corpus as well (7.4%).

43 In what follows, the strategies observed in each subcorpus are analysed in detail.

#### 4.3.1. The written corpus

44 In the MultiUN corpus, within the inter-clause list the relevant NP is systematically  
introduced by the copular verb *shì*, with a lexical connector such as *shǒuxiān* “first”  
or a generic noun (such as *diǎn* “point”) preceded by an ordinal number (e.g. *dìyī/*  
*dìèr/... diǎn* “the first/second/etc. point”) in the preverbal position.

[30a] Enumerative *il y a*-construction (inter-clause list)

Premièrement, il y a le lien entre ce  
 firstly it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.M.SG link between PRO  
 que nous accomplissons ici et ce que les  
 that 1PL accomplish.PRS.1PL here and PRO that the.PL  
 parlementaires, dans des cadres similaires,  
 parliamentarians in INDF.ART.PL settings similar.PL  
 sont appelés à accomplir chez eux.  
 be.PRS.3PL call.PTCP.PL to accomplish.INF at them

Lit. ‘First, there is the link between what we do here and what parliamentarians in similar settings are called upon to do at home.’

(MultiUN)

[30b] 首先是我们在这里所做的工作和议员们在类似环境中被要求在国内所做的工作之间的联系。

Shǒuxiān shì [women zài zhèlǐ suǒ zuò de gōngzuò hé  
 first be 1PL at here SUB do SUB work with  
 yìyuánmen zài lèisì huánjìng zhōng bèi yāoqiú  
 parliamentarian at similar context in PASS request  
 zài guó-nèi suǒ zuò de gōngzuò zhījiān de] liánxi.  
 at State-inside SUB do SUB work between SUB link

‘First is the link between what we do here and what parliamentarians, in similar settings, are called upon to do at home.’

(MultiUN)

45 This subgroup of copular *shì*-constructions, whose structure can be illustrated by [31], is systematically associated to the expression of inter-clause listing (all 15 occurrences) and is only found in the MultiUN corpus.

[31] [{Connector / ordinal No + N1} + *shì* “be” + N2]

46 When the expression of inter-clause list goes along with the instantiation of an explicit meronymic relation, the N1 is no longer a generic noun (such as *diǎn* “point” or *wèntí* “question”), but rather it is an hyperonym pointing to the broader set to which the N2 belongs. In [32], the general referent (i.e., “the three groups of Al-Qaida terrorism”) is first introduced before detailing its members. In the Chinese version, each instance of the group is introduced as the argument of the copular verb *shì* “be” within the pattern “the first/second/... N1 is N2”. (Note that in the aligned English sentence [32c], only the connectors are used.)

[32a] Enumerative *il y a*-construction (part-whole + inter-clause list)

*Le terrorisme d’Al-Qaida se décline aujourd’hui en trois groupes distincts mais liés entre eux:*

**premièrement, il y a les anciens dirigeants,**  
 firstly it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.PL ancient.PL leaders  
 dont les noms sont bien connus;  
 of.which the.PL names be.PRS.3PL well know.PTCP.PL  
**deuxièmement, il y a les combattants qui**  
 secondly it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.PL fighters REL.S  
 sont passés par les camps d'entraînement  
 be.PRS.3PL pass.PTCP.PL by the.PL camps of training  
 afghans et en sont sortis terroristes confirmés;  
 Afghan and of.it be.PRS.3PL exit.PTCP.PL terrorists experienced  
*et troisièmement, il y a une nouvelle génération en pleine expansion de partisans qui  
 peuvent très bien n'être jamais sortis de leur pays mais qui adhèrent aux fondements du  
 message d'Al-Qaida.*  
 (= [25e])

- [32b] 基地组织恐怖主义现在由三个不同、但是又相互联系的集团组成：第一组的是原来的领导层，他们的名字大家耳熟能详，第二组是在阿富汗营地受训毕业的战斗员，他们是经验丰富的恐怖义分子，第三组是新的一代人数不断增加的支持者，他们可能从来没有离开过居留国，但是拥护基地组织信息的核心内容。

*Jīdì zǔzhī kǒngbùzhǔyì xiànzài yóu sān-ge bùtóng, dànsì yòu xiāngbù liánxì de jítuán zǔchéng:*

**Dìyī zǔ de shì yuánlái de lǐngdǎo céng,** tāmen  
 first group SUB be originally SUB boss level 3PL  
 de míngzì dàjiā ěrshúnéngxiáng, **dìèr zǔ shì zài**  
 SUB name everyone be.familiar.with second group be at  
**Afùhàn yíngdì shòuxùn bìyè de zhàndòuyuán**  
 Afghanistan campsite be.trained graduate SUB fighter  
 tāmen shì jīngyàn fēngfù de kǒngbùyì fēnzǐ,  
 3PL be experience rich SUB terrorism element

*dì-sān zǔ shì xīn de yīdài rén shǔ bùduàn zēngjiā de zhīchízhě, tāmen kěnéng cónglái méiyǒu líkai-guo jūliú guó, dànsì yǒngbù Jīdì zǔzhī xīnxī de héxīn nèiróng.*

- [32c] 'Al-Qaida terrorism now comprises **three distinct but interlinked groups: first, the old leadership** whose names are well known; **second, the fighters who attended the camps in Afghanistan** and graduated as experienced terrorists; and **third, a new and growing generation of supporters** who may never have left their countries of residence but have embraced the core elements of the Al-Qaida message.'

(MultiUN)

47 In the remaining occurrences of the copular *shì*-construction, the relevant NP is also introduced as the argument of *shì*, but without this specialised use of a connector. Such sentences are found in sentence-level enumerative and locative contexts.

48 As mentioned earlier, another strategy linked to the written register is the use of the lexical verb *bāokuò* “include”. All sentences with *bāokuò* in the data occur when a meronymic relation is instantiated. Note that sometimes such part-whole relation may be expressed only in the Chinese sentence and not in the aligned French *il y a*-construction (recall that only explicitly marked relations were considered in the classification)<sup>14</sup>.

[33a] Enumerative *il y a*-construction (inter-clause list)

Deuxièmement, **il** **y** **a** les prisonniers qui  
secondly it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.PL prisoners REL.S  
ont achevé de purger leur peine  
have.PRS.3PL finish.PTCP of serve.INF their sentence

*mais sont encore incarcérés et dont la détention est donc à la fois illégale et arbitraire.*

‘Second, there are prisoners who have completed their sentences but are still being held, making their detention both illegal and arbitrary.’

(MultiUN)

[33b] Enumerative *yǒu*-construction (part-whole + inter-clause list)

第二类，包括服满刑期但仍然被拘留的囚犯，将他们拘留狱中是非法和任意的行为。

Dìèr lèi, **bāokuò** [fúǎn xíngqí dàn  
second type include finish.to.serve detention.time but  
réngrán bèi jūliú de] qiúfàn,  
yet PASS detain SUB criminal

*jiāng tāmen jūliú yù zhōng shì fēifǎ hé rènyì de xíngwéi.*

‘The second category includes prisoners who have served their sentences but are still in detention, and whose detention in prison is an unlawful and arbitrary act.’

49 The canonical SV order (14.7%) is not associated to any one particular function in the written corpus. One consistent parameter is that SV sentences are not used in contexts where a part-whole relation is instantiated. In [34b], the SV pattern is aligned with a locative *il y a*-construction in French [34a].

[34a] Locative *il y a*-construction

C’ est [en Inde]<sub>(G)</sub> qu’ **il** **y** **aurait** le plus  
it is in India that it<sub>EXPL</sub> there have.COND.3SG the.M most

14. Only 2 sentences of this kind are found in the corpus.

de séropositifs<sub>(F)</sub>.

of HIV.positive.persons

Lit. 'It is in India that there would be the most HIV-positive people.'

(MultiUN)

[34b] 据估计，印度艾滋病患者超过世界上任何其他国家。

Jù gūjì, Yìndù Aizībìng huànzhě chāoguò  
according estimate India AIDS patient exceed

shìjiè=shàng rēnhé qítā guójiā.  
world=on any other country

Lit. 'It is estimated that India's HIV-positive people exceed (those of) any other country in the world.'

'India is now estimated to have more people living with HIV than any other country in the world.'

(MultiUN)

50 Note that in the French sentence, the locative (*en Inde* "in India") is focalised by means of the *c'est* "it"-construction. In the Chinese sentence, the locative appears as a nominal complement, while the relevant noun (i.e., the "pivot") is encoded as the nominal head (*Aizībìng huànzhě* "AIDS patients"). The pivot NP plays the role of the subject of the sentence.

51 Besides the increased presence of bare-head NPs, the SV order cannot be seen as a strategy to prevent strong NPs from appearing in the pivotal position of a *yǒu*-construction, as the same kind of nominals can occur in both positions (see Section 4.4) with the exception of marked indefinite NPs which do not occur as preverbal subjects in the written subcorpus.

52 The *yǒu*-construction (17.6%) is used in enumerative contexts in the MultiUn corpus, and especially to express inter-clause list-readings. Contrary to the copular *shì*-construction that can be used to the same purpose, here most pivots are indefinite (i.e., classified nouns) (see Section 4.4).

#### 4.3.2. The spoken corpus

53 As mentioned earlier, the *yǒu*-construction is the most frequent syntactic form in the spoken subcorpus, where it can convey the (i) event-reporting, (ii) topic-promoting, (iii) sentence-level list-reading and (iv) locative functions, to the same extent. It competes with the locative *shì*-construction ([NP<sub>GROUND</sub> + *shì* "be" + NP<sub>FIGURE</sub>]) in contexts where the relation between the Figure and a Ground is explicitly expressed (13.2%) (cf. [35b], [36b] with [37b]). This strategy is mostly observed in the OpenSub corpus.

[35a] Locative *il y a*-construction

[À 15 km]<sub>(G)</sub>, il y a les Allemands<sub>(F)</sub>!  
at 15 km i<sub>T</sub>EXPL there has the.PL Germans



Lit. ‘15km from here, there are the Germans!’

(= [26a], OpenSub)

[35b] 那条路的十哩处，就是德国人。

[Nà-tiao lù de shí lǐ chù]<sub>(C)</sub>, jiù shì Déguórén<sub>(F)</sub>.  
that-CL road SUB ten mile place then be German

‘Ten miles up that road are the Germans!’

(OpenSub)

[36a] Locative + event-reporting *il y a*-construction

Je me vois monter sur scène, et il y a  
1SG me see.PRS.1SG go.up.INF on stage and it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has  
tous ces jeunes<sub>(F)</sub> [dans le public]<sub>(C)</sub> qui scandent  
all.M.PL these young.PL in the audience REL.S chant.PRS.3PL  
mon nom, comme si j’étais une rock-star.  
POSS.1SG.M.SG name like if 1SG be.PST.1SG a.F rockstar

‘It’s just this fantasy of me stepping out on stage, and there are all these kids out in the audience chanting my name, like I’m a rock star.’

(OpenSub)

[36b] 观众席上都是我的同学尖叫着我的名字

[Guānzhòngxí=shàng]<sub>(C)</sub> dōu shì wǒde tóngxué<sub>(F)</sub>  
audience=on all be my classmate

jiānjiào-zhe wǒde míngzì  
scream-DUR my name

Lit. ‘On the whole audience were my classmates screaming my name.’

(OpenSub)

[37a] Locative *il y a*-construction

[Au sous-sol]<sub>(C)</sub>, il y a le seul PDP-10  
at.the basement it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.M.SG only PDP-10

encore relié au net<sub>(F)</sub>.  
still connected at.the net

‘In the basement is (lit. there is) the only PDP-10 still active and on the Internet.’

(OpenSub)

[37b] 那里有原始的资料处理器。

[Nàlǐ]<sub>(C)</sub> yǒu yuánshǐ de zīliào chǔlǐqì<sub>(F)</sub>.  
there HAVE original SUB processor

Lit. 'There is the original processor there.'

(OpenSub)

54 For the sake of completeness, it should be noted that in 2 occurrences classified as locative *shì*-constructions in the OpenSub corpus, the verb *shì* is preceded by the forms *jiēxiàláilái* or *jiēxiàqù* 'next, then'. Both occur in event-reporting contexts. Although a locative expression is not present, these forms also introduce the relevant NP in the postcopular position, with no (regular) subject in the precopular position.

[38a] 我大概该把那些该死的药片吞了但之后我大概就一睡不起了, 接下去就是该死的噩梦啊

*Wǒ dàgài gāi bǎ nàxiē gāisǐ de yàopiàn tūn-le dàn zhīhòu wǒ dàgài jiù yì shuì bù qǐ le,*

[jiēxiàqù] jiù shì gāisǐ de èmèng a  
next then be damned SUB nightmare SFP

'I should probably just take those fucking pills, but then I just sleep all the time, and then there's the fucking nightmares.'

(OpenSub)

[38b] 接下来是...哦, 是堂, 他每周五要和我分手一次这样他就拥有自由的周末

[jiēxiàláilái] shì... ò, shì Táng, tā měi zhōuwǔ  
next be INT be T. 3SG every Friday

yào hé wǒ fēnshǒu yīcì zhèyàng tā jiù  
want with 1SG break.up once this.way 3SG then

yǒngyǒu zìyóu de zhōumò  
have free SUB weekend

'And then... Oh, there was Don who broke up with me every Friday so that he could have his weekends free.'

(OpenSub) (cf. with [27b])

55 SV sentences (7.4%) mostly occur in event-reporting contexts where the relevant NP is encoded as an indefinite quantified subject (as in [23b] above), either marginally it is a noun modified by a demonstrative used deictically (example [39b]) or as an indefinite noun modified by a possessive determiner (example [40b]), denoting an anchored indefinite referent (in a deictic locative sentence).

[39a] Event-reporting *il y a*-construction

*Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé là-bas?*

Il y avait ce crabe qui ne voulait  
it<sub>EXPL</sub> there have.PST.3SG this.M prawn REL.S NEG want.PRS.3SG

pas m'écouter, un crabe très indiscipliné  
NEG to.me listen.INF a.M prawn very unruly

‘What happened out there? (Lit. There was) this prawn (lit. who) wouldn’t listen to me, one really unruly prawn.’

(OpenSub)

[39b] 那边出什么事了? 那些大虾们根本不肯听我的其中一个还特别不守规矩

*Nàbiān chū shénme shì le?*

Nà-xiē dà xiā-men gēnběn bù kěnxīng tīng wǒ de,  
that-few big prawn-PL basically NEG willing hear 1SG SUB

qízhōng yí-ge hái tèbié bù shǒu guījǔ  
between.them one-CL also especially unruly

Lit. ‘What was going on over there? Those prawns wouldn’t listen to me, one of them was particularly unruly.’

(OpenSub)

[40a] Event-reporting (deictic) *il y a*-construction

Uh-oh, il y a ton copain.  
INT it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has POSS.2SG.M.SG mate

‘Un-oh, there’s your mate.’

(OpenSub)

[40b] 你的另一伴在那

Nǐ de líng yí bàn zài nà  
2SG SUB other one mate be.at there

Lit. ‘Your other mate is there.’

(OpenSub)

56 All these pivot types, including the strong ones, can occur in the pivotal position of a *yǒu*-construction (4.5).

#### 4.4. NP types in the Chinese subcorpus

57 Let us now consider the types of NPs aligned with the French pivots, by first considering all the structures identified in the Chinese corpus (Table 9).

58 As discussed in Section 2, bare nouns are unmarked with respect to indefiniteness. Previous studies pointed out that their interpretation is dependent on their sentence position, with the postverbal position (including the post-*yǒu* position) being associated to the indefinite reading. However, bare nouns which have an intrinsic unique reference make an exception. In [41a] the *yǒu*-construction includes the bare noun *shàngdì* in the pivotal position which refers to the uniquely identifiable “entity” of “God” (cf. with the French [41b] and English [41c] aligned sentences).

NP types	Count	%
Bare noun	28	20.5%
Classifier + N	24	17.6%
Bare-head NP + Pre-nominal RC	23	16.9%
Bare-head NP	21	15.4%
Clause	10	7.3%
Proper name	10	7.3%
Demonstrative + N	6	4.4%
Personal pronoun	4	2.9%
Possessive determiner + N	4	2.9%
Classified noun + Proper name	2	1.4%
Indefinite quantifier + N	2	1.4%
Ordinal number + N	1	0.7%
Possessive determiner + Proper name	1	0.7%
Total	136	100%

Table 9 – The distribution of NP types in the Chinese subcorpus (all sentence structures)

[41a] 原来一开始只有上帝和天使。

Yuánlái yī kāishǐ zhǐ yǒu shàngdì hé tiānshǐ.  
originally as.soon.as start only HAVE god and angel

Lit. 'Originally, when it all started there was only God and angels.'

(OpenSub)

[41b] Au début, il y avait Lui et nous  
at.the beginning it<sub>EXPL</sub> there have.PST.3SG 3SG and 1PL

Lit. 'In the beginning, there was him and us.'

(OpenSub)

[41c] See, in the beginning it was just us and him, angels and God.

(OpenSub)

59 A particular case is that of bare nouns denoting abstract notions such as *terrorism*, *poverty*, *truth* (which in French, but not in English, are modified by a definite article). Although such concepts defy definiteness or specificity by virtue of their

being abstract (and indeed the relevant nouns are uncountable<sup>15</sup>), they are familiar to the interlocutors and as such are comparable to nouns with a uniquely identifiable reference<sup>16</sup>. The following are examples of a bare noun of such kind in preverbal (example [42a]) and postverbal (example [42b]) position. In both cases, *kǒngbùzhǔyì* refers to the abstract concept of “terrorism”, and its referential value is not influenced by the position in the sentence<sup>17</sup>.

[42a] 恐怖主义正威胁着许多国家(…)

*Kǒngbùzhǔyì* zhèng wēixié-zhe xǔduō guójiā (...).  
terrorism PROG threat-DUR many countries

‘Terrorism is threatening many countries (...).’

(MultiUN)

[42b] 只要存在恐怖主义，就不会有民主。

Zhǐyào cúnzài kǒngbùzhǔyì, jiù bú huì yǒu mínzhǔ.  
provided exist terrorism then NEG can HAVE democracy

Lit. ‘As long as terrorism exists, there can be no democracy.’

(MultiUN) (= [29b])

60 In the corpus, 16 out of 28 occurrences of bare nouns either have a unique reference or denote invariably familiar abstract concepts, and as such can be considered as strong pivots.

61 Bare-head NPs are highly represented in the data collected (32.3% of the total occurrences, including bare-head NPs with a pre-nominal relative clause). Although formally unmarked, these referring expressions are no less “definite” than French nouns modified by a definite article including a nominal complement. They can be considered as invariably definite since the pre-nominal material contribute to single out the reference of the noun phrase. For this reason, Chen (1986: 16-17, cited in LaPolla, 1995) considered that all NPs marked with a genitive phrase or a relative clause to be “definite”.

62 Formally marked indefinite NPs (i.e., classified nouns and indefinite quantifiers) strongly tend to occur as the pivots in *yǒu*-constructions (21/28 occurrences).

63 Nouns marked by a demonstrative determiner are rather underrepresented in the Chinese data (4.4%), a fact that directly points to a low functional correlation

15. A reviewer points out to me examples such as *zhè zhong kǒngbùzhǔyì* “this kind of terrorism” and *liǎng zhǒng bùtóng de kǒngbùzhǔyì* “two different kinds of terrorism”. Such forms include *zhǒng* which is a measure word and not an individual classifier. Mass nouns are compatible with the former but not the latter (Liu, 2012).

16. I am thankful to Delia Bentley (personal communication) for her insightful remarks on this point.

17. Similar observations can be made of the bare noun *míngzhǔ* “democracy” appearing as the pivot of a *yǒu*-construction in [42b].

between these referring expressions and the grammaticalised category of definite articles in French (see Section 2).

- 64 Pivots marked as “clause” (7.3%) reflect the cases where French (nominal) pivots are aligned with verbal phrases in Chinese. In [43a], the nominal head *la nécessité* “the need” in the French pivot correspond to the auxiliary verb *xūyào* “to need” in Chinese (example [43b]), both followed by an infinitive (“make globalization more inclusive”).

[43a] Enumerative *il y a*-construction (part-whole instantiation)

Parmi les messages essentiels qui figurent  
among the.PL messages essential.PL REL.S appear.PRS.3PL  
dans ce rapport, il y a la nécessité de  
in this.M.SG report it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.F.SG necessity of  
rendre la mondialisation plus accessible à tous (...).  
make.INF the.F.SG globalization more accessible to all.PL

Lit. ‘Among the essential messages that appear in this report, there is the need of making globalization more inclusive (...).’

(MultiUN)

[43b] 报告中的关键信息中，包括需要使全球化更具包容性(…)。

Bàogào zhōng de guānjiàn xīnxi zhōng, bāokuò  
report among SUB key information among include  
xūyào shǐ quánqiúhuà gèng jù bāoróngxìng (...).  
need make globalization more possess inclusivity

Lit. ‘Among the key messages in this report include needing to make globalization more inclusive (...).’

(MultiUN)

- 65 Note that *yǒu* is not used to introduce verbal phrases in the corpus (one occurrence, where it is followed by a comma); instead this is characteristic of *bāokuò* “include” and the copular *shì*-construction.

66 The next section focuses on the pivots observed in *yǒu*-constructions.

#### 4.5. NP types within the Chinese *yǒu*-construction

- 67 Table 10 illustrates the types of NPs occurring as the pivots in *yǒu*-constructions aligned with the French *il y a*-constructions with a definite pivot.

68 Most pivots included in *yǒu*-constructions are indefinite (e.g., classified nouns) or unmarked with respect to definiteness (e.g., bare nouns). Among the latter type of forms, 5 instances denote uniquely identifiable referents. Bare-head NPs and bare-head NPs including a pre-nominal RC are scarcely represented in

*yǒu*-constructions (8%), especially with respect to their general distribution in the Chinese data (32.3%). As mentioned earlier, such forms can be considered to be invariably definite due to the identifying function of the pre-nominal material. The under-representation of bare-head NP with prenominal RC can also be seen as motivated by the tendency to avoid such complex NPs in the pivotal position. All pivot types considered (n = 50), the data include 30 instances of monoclausal *yǒu*-constructions (i.e., without RC), 15 instances of *yǒu*-construction with a post-nominal RC (i.e., biclausal constructions), and only 5 instances of *yǒu*-construction with a pre-nominal RC.

69 Finally, *yǒu*-constructions can include proper names (10%) and personal pronouns (6%), with other types of strong modifiers (ordinal numbers, possessive and demonstrative determiners) being marginal but attested.

70 Let us consider the distribution of pivot types in relation to the functions of the *yǒu*-constructions in the data (Table 11).

Pivot types	Count	%
Classifier + N	18	36%
Bare noun	12	24%
Proper name	5	10%
Personal pronoun	3	6%
Classifier + Proper name	2	4%
Bare-head NP	2	4%
Bare-head NP + Pre-nominal relative clause	2	4%
Indefinite quantifier + N	1	2%
Demonstrative determiner + N	1	2%
Ordinal number + N	1	2%
Possessive determiner + N	1	2%
Possessive determiner + Proper name	1	2%
Clause	1	2%
Total	50	100%

Table 10 – Pivot types in Chinese *yǒu*-constructions aligned with the French *il y a*-constructions + definite pivot

Functions	Count (including overlaps)	%
Sentence-level list	9 (14)	18% (28%)
Event-reporting	10 (12)	20% (24%)
Topic-promoting	8 (9)	16% (18%)
Inter-clause list	7 (8)	14% (16%)
Locative	4 (8)	8% (16%)
Part-whole	3 (6)	6% (12%)
Part-whole + Sentence-level list	3	6%
Locative + Event-reporting	2	4%
Locative + Topic-promoting	1	2%
Locative + Sentence-level list	1	2%
Locative metaphoric	1	2%
Sentence-level list + Inter-clause list	1	2%
Total	50 (107)	100%

Table 11 – The functions expressed by the *yǒu*-constructions (both subcorpora)

71 The high frequency of indefinite pivots (Table 10) can seem surprising in a corpus aligned with *il y a*-constructions including definite pivots. Recall that event-reporting *il y a*-constructions in the data included discourse-new referents that are encoded by nouns modified by the demonstrative determiner (e.g. [45a]) or by the definite article (e.g. [44a]). Such pivots are typically expressed by indefinite NPs in Chinese, i.e. classified nouns (e.g. [44b]) or semantically-indefinite bare nouns (e.g. [45b]).

[44a] Event-reporting *il y a*-construction

Et **il y a** la fille qui a escaladé la barrière.  
and it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the<sub>F</sub> girl REL.S has climbed the<sub>F</sub> fence

Lit. ‘And there is the girl who climbed over the fence.’

(OpenSub)

[44b] Event-reporting *yǒu*-construction

还有一女孩爬越前门的栏。

Hái **yǒu** yī nǚhái páyuè qiánmén de lán.  
also HAVE one girl climb front.door SUB fence

Lit. ‘There is also a girl who climbed the fence of the front door.’

(OpenSub)



[45a] Event-reporting *il y a*-construction

Il y avait ces moines et ils psalmodiaient.  
 it<sub>EXPL</sub> there have.PST.3SG these monks and they chant.PST.3PL  
 ‘There were these monks, and they were chanting.’  
 (OpenSub)

[45b] Locative + event-reporting *yǒu*-construction

那里有僧人在颂歌。  
 [Nàli]<sub>(G)</sub> yǒu sēngrén zài sònggē.  
 there HAVE monk PROG chant  
 Lit. ‘There were monks chanting there.’  
 (OpenSub)

- 72 Topic-promoting *yǒu*-constructions tend to include indefinite quantified NPs (not indefinite bare nouns). Among these, it is worth mentioning the form [*yǒu* CL *jiào*...] ‘there is one called...’ (2 occurrences), as in [46b], which introduce a new and definite referent by means of an indefinite nominal expression (such forms were discussed by Zhang, 2006):

[46a] Et il y avait Walter.  
 and it<sub>EXPL</sub> there have.PST.3SG W.  
 ‘And there was Walter.’  
 (OpenSub)

[46b] 还有个叫 Walter。  
 Hái yǒu ge [jiào Walter].  
 also HAVE CL call W.  
 Lit. ‘There was also one called Walter.’  
 (OpenSub)

- 73 Although marginal, other NP types are attested as the pivots in topic-promoting *yǒu*-constructions, such as proper names and nouns modified by a possessive determiner. *Yǒu*-constructions expressing an inter-clause list-reading (e.g. [47b]) also tend to include indefinite pivots (7/8 occurrences).

[47a] Enumerative *il y a*-construction (inter-clause list)  
 D’autre part, il y a les États qui voient  
 on other side it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has the.PL States REL.S see.PRS.3PL  
 leur sécurité menacée par l’ éventuelle agression  
 their security menaced by the possible aggression

contraire au droit international (...).  
 contrary to.the law international

‘On the other hand, there are those (lit. the) States that see their security threatened by possible acts of aggression contrary to international law (...).’

(MultiUN)

[47b] Enumerative *yǒu*-construction (inter-clause list)

另一方面, 有一些国家看到其安全受到有违国际法的可能侵略行为的威胁 (...).

Lìng yī fāngmiàn, **yǒu** yìxiē guójiā kàndào  
 other one aspect HAVE a.few State see

qí ānquán shòudào yǒu wéi guójīfǎ de  
 OBJ.PRO security receive have violate international.law SUB

kěnéng qīnlüè xíngwéi de wēixié (...).  
 possible aggression action SUB menace

Lit. ‘On the other hand, there are some countries that see their security threatened by possible acts of aggression that are contrary to international law (...).’

(MultiUN)

74 On the other hand, strong pivots tend to appear in constructions instantiating a sentence-level list-reading (11/21), but also in topic-promoting, event-reporting, and locative constructions.

75 Importantly, demonstrative determiners are almost absent as the pivots of a *yǒu*-construction (one occurrence). Most pivots in *il y a*-constructions modified by a demonstrative appear in event-reporting contexts (where they point to a referent available in the projected situational setting<sup>18</sup>) (9/16), with the cataphoric (the encoding of salient referents in topic-promoting constructions) (3/16), anaphoric (2/16) and situational deictic (2/16) uses being also attested. Chinese demonstratives aligned with French demonstratives express all kind of reference except the encoding of a topic-to-be (i.e., a discourse-new referent that will play a central role in the continuing discourse). The pivots in *yǒu*-constructions (all types considered) aligned with French demonstratives are mainly classified nouns and marginally indefinite bare nouns. The only occurrence of [DEM + N] found as the pivot of a *yǒu*-construction is found in an event-reporting context.

76 Overall, 21/50 occurrences of *yǒu*-constructions contain strong pivots – including proper names, personal pronouns, possessive determiners (and marginally demonstrative

18. A typical context for such use of the demonstrative found in the corpus is when speakers report on a dream that they made (e.g., *Ensuite, il y avait tous ces gens autour de nous... des centaines, partout... tout le monde baisait...* ‘Then there were all these other people around us... hundreds of them, everywhere. Everyone was fucking...’, OpenSub).

determiners and ordinal numbers) but also semantically-definite NPs which are formally unmarked. These are by no way marginal with respect to the total number of *yǒu*-constructions (42%), although decreasing with respect to their general distribution in the Chinese data (88/136; 64.7%). The small sample, however, does not allow for generalisations.

- 77 A preliminary observation that can be made is that only 8/21 instances of strong pivots occur outside enumerative contexts, of which an additional 4 instances include a focalizing adverb before *yǒu*, a condition identified by previous studies for neutralizing the definiteness effect (see the introduction). This also shows that not all instances of the [*hái yǒu* NP] “there’s also NP” sequence are used in enumerative contexts. In [48b], the preceding sentence provides a strong presupposition allowing the use of *yǒu* with a definite pivot, where an enumerative meaning can still be implied. In [49b] the pivot does not belong to a discourse-old group, nor it is involved in any kind of list-reading; the adverb *hái* “also” is used to focalise on such NP. Conversely, not all (sentence-level) enumerative *yǒu*-constructions need to include the focalising adverb *hái* “also”, as is the case in [50b].

[48a] Je ne suis pas seul. Il y a Sal.  
 1SG NEG be.PRS.1SG NEG alone it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has S.  
 ‘I’m not alone. There is Sal.’  
 (OpenSub) (= [24a])

[48b] 我不是一个人。还有沙尔。  
 Wǒ bú shì yí-ge rén. Hái yǒu Shā’ěr.  
 1SG NEG be one-CL person also HAVE S.  
 Lit. ‘I’m not alone. There’s also Sal.’  
 (OpenSub) (= [24b])

[49a] Et il y a Megan, la cadette de  
 and it<sub>EXPL</sub> there has M. the.F youngest.daughter of  
 mes enfants.  
 POSS.1SG.PL children  
 Lit. ‘And there is Megan, my youngest child.’  
 (OpenSub)

[49b] 还有我的小宝贝女儿。  
Hái yǒu wǒ de xiǎo bǎobèi nǚ’ér.  
 also HAVE 1SG SUB little baby daughter  
 Lit. ‘There’s also my baby girl.’  
 (OpenSub)

[50a] Il y avait moi, Nicky, et un jeune, Carson.  
 it<sub>EXPL</sub> there had me N. and a.M.SG young.person C.  
 Lit. ‘There was me, Nicky and a kid, Carson.’  
 (OpenSub) (= [25a])

[50b] 有我，尼可，和一个小鬼卡森  
 Yǒu wǒ, Níkě, hé yí-ge xiǎoguǐ Kǎsēn  
 HAVE 1SG N. and one-CL little.devil K.  
 Lit. ‘There was me, Nicky and a kid Carson.’  
 (OpenSub)

78 The sequence [*bái yǒu* NP] ‘there’s also NP’ (19 occurrences in the data out of 50 instances of *yǒu*-constructions) mainly appears in sentence-level and inter-clause list, but also outside enumerative contexts (i.e., in event-reporting and topic-promoting constructions). In these sentences (e.g. [50b]), *bái yǒu* is used as a focalising device whose usage is broader than the expression of a list-reading.

79 Finally, given that strong pivots mostly occur in monoclausal *yǒu*-constructions (18/21 occurrences), this casts doubts on the usefulness of assimilating mono- and biclausal constructions, in Chinese at least (cf. Carlier & Lahousse, forth., on French and Italian).

## 5. Conclusions

80 Much research has been done on existential/presentational constructions in both Chinese and French (see Zhang, 1998; Ceng & Wang, 2004; Chao, 1968: 727-729; Li & Thompson, 1981: 509, for Chinese; and Lambrecht, 1988, 2000, 2002; Karszenberg, 2017, 2018, for French, among many others). A crucial point of divergence that emerges from previous studies is the treatment of the definiteness restriction on the pivot, with French *il y a*-constructions naturally including strong NPs in the pivotal position and Chinese *yǒu*-constructions showing a clear definiteness effect. Such a constraint in Chinese has been illustrated in the literature by the ungrammaticality of *yǒu*-constructions with proper names and nouns modified by a demonstrative determiner. At the same time, the inclusion of bare nouns is not considered a ‘violation’ of the definiteness effect – at least not explicitly – because such nominals are formally unmarked with respect to definiteness.

81 This study has demonstrated that the difference in the definiteness restrictions in the two languages is more nuanced than has so far been thought. First, the local marking of definiteness (at the NP level) is to be considered. As ‘purely surface phenomena’ (Lenart, 2020: 184), definite articles are a discrete representation of one – or rather several – cognitive, non-discrete considerations (Lambrecht, 1994: 105), which concern not only the accessibility and identifiability of a referent but also its role in the continuing discourse. Their use may also respond to formal constraints,

pertaining to the position of the noun modified by the article in relation to its complement. Significantly, Chinese unmarked nominals are not always indefinite in the postverbal position. Hence, pivotal bare nouns within *yǒu*-constructions can denote unique referents and are thus semantically definite. Bare-head NPs are also interpreted as definite because the subordinate material (be it a nominal complement or a clause) contribute to single out the referent of the pivot.

82 In the spoken subcorpus, the *yǒu*-construction is the most frequently used strategy (55.8%), which however competes with the locative *shì* “be” construction when the pivot is spatially related to a Ground. Presentational and event-reporting *il y a*-constructions are mostly found in the spoken corpus and are systematically aligned with *yǒu*-constructions, which, however, tend to include indefinite pivots in these contexts.

83 It should be noted that the corpus collected for this study is not informative with regards to the actual distribution of definite vs. indefinite pivots in the presentational constructions of the two languages. It is revealing that, although aligned with definite-pivot *il y a*-constructions, most pivots in the *yǒu*-constructions are nevertheless indefinite (56%). The fact that definite pivots in French can denote unidentifiable referents (e.g., in the projected-deictic use of demonstratives, and the topic-promoting use of demonstrative and definite articles, but also in semantically-indefinite sequences [DEF.ART + N1 SUB N2<sub>INDF</sub>]), cannot fully account for the frequency of indefinite NPs in the Chinese data.

84 In fact, *il y a*-constructions such as *il y a Jean qui a téléphoné*, lit. “there is John who telephoned”, which include an identifiable but non-topical pivot are completely natural and common in French. By contrast, non-topical pivots strongly tend to map with unidentifiable pivots in Chinese *yǒu*-constructions, as also reflected by the data analysed in this work. However, there exist a certain number of exceptions to this tendency. Sentence-level list reading is a context allowing for definite pivots in Chinese, as is the use of focalizing adverbs before *yǒu*.

85 Given that even the most definite pivots (such as personal pronouns or proper names) are not excluded from *yǒu*-constructions, on the one hand, and considered the tendency for French *il y a*-constructions to include indefinite pivots (see for instance Karssenbergh, 2018 on biclausal *il y a*-constructions), as well as the lack of one-to-one correspondence between the definite meaning and the formal marking of definiteness, on the other, the different treatment of definiteness restrictions in the two languages is to be understood as a gradient phenomenon rather than a categorical opposition.

### List of glosses

86 1: first person; 2: second person; 3: third person; ACC: pretransitive marker; ART: article; CL: classifier; COND: conditional; CRS: current relevant state particle *le* 了; DEF: definite; DEM: demonstrative; DUR: durative aspect; EXPL: expletive; F: feminine;

HAVE: existential copula 有; INDF: indefinite; INF: infinitive; INT: interjection; M: masculine; NEG: negation; O: object; PA: partitive article; PAUS: particle marking a pause; PFV: perfective; PL: plural; POSS: possessive; PRO: pronoun; PROG: progressive; PRS: present; PSB: verbal complement expressing possibility; PST: past; PTCP: participle; RC: relative clause; REL: relative marker; s: subject; SBJV: subjunctive; SFP: sentence final particle; SG: singular; SUB: subordinative particle; v: verb.

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