



# ‘There’s an issue there ...’: Signalling functions of discourse-deictic *there* in the history of English



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## ABSTRACT

This paper sketches the use of simple discourse-deictic *there* in the history of English and shows that – in contrast to the frequent and varied employment of discourse-deictic *there* in *there*-compounds such as *therein*, *thereby* or textual *therefore* in written genres – simple *there* was only rarely and restrictedly used with discourse-deictic reference until the 19th century. In Present-Day English, discourse-deictic *there*, as in *you are wrong there*, is almost exclusively found in face-to-face interaction of a particular type, which may be labelled ‘issue(s)-at-debate discussion type’, such as TV and radio broadcast discussions or council or staff meetings. For these communicative situations, two particular pragmatic functions are identified, both of them discourse-organizational in nature: Speakers may signal their wish to expand on or enforce an argument which has been neglected or misinterpreted in the immediately preceding discourse or they index their wish of ‘end of topic (or even discourse)’ by simple discourse-deictic *there*. These functions are linked to *there* being deictic, an element of the ‘field of pointing’, and its inherent pointing functions to a distal place/space.

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## 1. Discourse-deictic *there*

In Present-Day English spontaneous spoken interaction in TV and radio discussion panels, council meetings or teacher/staff conferences, we find a use of *there* as illustrated in (1) and (2):

- (1) Q: You have been quoted as saying: “Nike’s model is you do what makes most sense. I didn’t want to have the best idea but be beaten on product, be beaten on price, be beaten on speed to market or be beaten because I didn’t understand the local conditions.” Expand on that, if you would.  
A: What I’m **saying there** is that being ideological about where it’s made isn’t necessarily what’s in the best interest of our customer. [...] (NOW Corpus, 13-08-19, US [OregonLive.com](http://OregonLive.com))
- (2) “[...] Perhaps The Orb – earthbound anti-stars – have been over-analysed?” “You might have a point **there**, people might have read too much into it. Orb music sets the imagination going, and some people’s imagination runs a lot further than others [...]” (BNC, CK5, W\_pop\_lore)

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Even without giving much further context, it can be seen that *there* in these examples is used discourse-deictically: *There* does neither refer exophorically to a particular space/place somewhere in the extra-linguistic world, as in (3), nor anaphorically to a particular space/place introduced in the earlier discourse, as in (4):

- (3) “[...] I see a friend of yours standing over **there**”. GILLEN Absolutely, Peter. This is Jason. [...] (COCA, 1991, SPOK, ABC\_Special)  
 (4) (SP:JJPPSUNK) you know, I just put it on the **table** and left it **there** [...] (BNC, JJP, S\_unclassified)

In examples such as (1) and (2), *there* refers not to a place/space introduced in the earlier discourse, but to (a part of) the preceding discourse itself, namely to the quote in (1) and both the question *Perhaps The Orb – earthbound anti-stars – have been over-analysed?* and the discussion leading to this question in (2). These referencing functions are intrinsic to originally spatial-deictic *there*, which is an item of what Bühler calls the ‘field of pointing’ (*Zeigfeld* ‘field of pointing’; Bühler, 1934, English translation 2011; for details, see section 2.2 below).

In the case of spoken interaction – and in contrast to a piece of writing, in which the part of communication referred to anaphorically or cataphorically by *there* could indeed be identified by a pointing gesture – there is never a concrete space which could be pointed at in examples such as (1) and (2). In this perspective, it is intriguing that this use of *there* – which is labelled ‘simple discourse-deictic *there*’ in this study – is restricted to spoken interaction in Present-Day English (for details of a corpus study based on the BNC and COCA, see section 5.2 below). This restriction to spoken interaction, however, warrants a common coordinate system of speaker and their interlocutor(s), a prerequisite for the use of all items of the ‘field of pointing’, by providing a point of reference for *there* in the communicative situation (time, space, person) shared by speaker and interlocutors.

Despite its common employment in today’s spoken English in spontaneous dialogic interaction, in particular in panel discussions and meetings (on this, see section 5.2 below), the particular function of discourse-deictic *there* as illustrated in (1) and (2) have to my knowledge not been discussed in the linguistic literature. The present paper will summarize the discourse-deictic use(s) of *there* in the history of English and will also relate these to other changes in the deictic system of English, in particular the loss of pronominal connectors and their replacement by the so-called ‘*there*-compounds’, i.e., combinations of pronominal *there* with a ‘suffixed preposition’ such as *in*, *on* or *by* in, e.g., *therein*, *thereon* and *thereby* (for the term ‘*there*-compound’, see Österman, 1997). Section 3 will describe the particular ‘pronominal force’ of originally spatial-deictic *there* in *there*-compounds and will then focus on earlier uses of *there* as in (1) and (2), i.e. in the uses which are labelled ‘simple discourse-deictic *there*’ in this study. After a diachronic account of similar uses of simple *there* in section 4, the distributional patterns of Present-Day English simple discourse-deictic *there* will be tested in corpus studies conducted on the basis of the BNC and COCA, which attest to the distributional restrictions of these uses of *there* to spontaneous spoken interaction in broadcast discussion panels and meetings/conferences where certain issues are at debate (see section 5.2 below). In qualitative studies of selected examples taken from the corpus studies, it will be examined whether the signalling function of simple discourse-deictic *there* in spoken spontaneous interaction is restricted to referring to earlier parts of the shared discourse, and it will be argued that it also has subjective and interpersonal signalling functions, which – just as its discourse-deictic function – are inherent in the deictic character of *there*. I will demonstrate that ‘pointing’ in spontaneous interaction marks the speaker’s subjective perspective on the interaction in the discourse, signalling ‘resumption of topic’ or ‘end of topic’ in dialogic face-to-face interaction.

## 2. Deictic *there*

### 2.1. Spatial *there*

When looking at the entries for PDE *there* in period dictionaries of Old English, Middle English and Present-Day English, there does not seem to be much evidence for meaning change, except for, of course, its grammaticalization to existential *there* (as in, e.g., **There** are ten desks here).<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of their entries for *there*, dictionaries give almost identically its meaning as a locative adverb ‘in that place’:

- (5) (a) Old English  
*adv. There, where.* I. local, a. with demonstrative force, (i) there, in that place [...] (*BT*, s.v. *þær*)  
 (b) Middle English  
 1a. As dem. adv. with locative function, used to indicate essentially spatial relationships: (a) with ref. to a clearly specified place or point in space, physically removed from the setting of the action: in that place, in those places [...] (*MED*, s.v. *thēr* (adv.))

<sup>1</sup> Existential *there*-constructions have only become this frequent since the Middle English period (for details, see Breivik, 1983; Pérez-Guerra, 1999: Chapter 3, Pfenninger, 2009, 2013 or Jensen, 2010). It is commonly acknowledged that this particular change was constrained by larger systemic changes in the morpho-syntax of English, in particular the loss of flexibility in word order and the need for an obligatorily filled subject position (see the notion of ‘dummy subject’ for existential *there*). More recently, some researchers, among them Breivik and Jensen, have highlighted the pragmatic functions of the existential *there*-construction in terms of a ‘signal function’, namely as a signal for information structure.

## (c) Present-Day English

1 in [...] a particular place that is not where you are → here (*LDOCE*, s.v. *there*<sup>2</sup>)

*There* – except for its grammaticalization to existential *there* in initial position – thus seems to have been constant in its primary meaning as a space adjunct (in the terminology of Quirk et al., 1985; Hasselgård, 2010). More specifically, it can be characterized as a position or direction adjunct and has since Old English referred “to a spatial setting or location for the process (situation or event) and one or more of the participants in the process” (Hasselgård, 2010: 187):

(6) I saw him standing **there** (= ‘at this place’).

*There* is – as is also pointed out by all of the dictionaries – intrinsically deictic: Proximal *here* contrasts with distal *there*, the distinction being dependent on the frame of reference of the speaker (in (5c) in the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* referred to by you).

## 2.2. The signalling function(s) of deictic *there*

In the present study, the deictic character of *there* is considered crucial for the development and analysis of the different functions of *there* from Old English to Present-Day English. My understanding of deixis rests on 19th- and early 20th-century research into the development of demonstratives in Indo-European by, e.g., Brugmann (1904), and, in particular, on Bühler’s two-field theory, where he crucially distinguishes items of the *Zeigfeld* ‘field of pointing’ from those of the *Symbolfeld* ‘field of naming’ (Bühler, 1934; English translation 2011). While the *Symbolfeld* contains *Nennwörter* ‘naming words’ such as nouns, verbs and all other lexical expressions (see Bühler, 2011: Part III ‘The Symbolic Field of Language and the Naming Words’), the meaning of the elements of the *Zeigfeld* ‘field of pointing’ is determined by a reference frame for pointing (Part II ‘The Deictic Field of Language and Deictic Words’). In Bühler’s conceptualization of deixis, linguistic elements of the ‘field of pointing’ are anchored in the *origo*, which is the centre of a coordinate system involving the three dimensions space (*here* and *there* and *this* and *that* as spatial deictics), time (*now* and *then*) and person (*I* and *you*).

Common to all deictic expressions and crucial to their understanding is what Bühler calls their *Signalfunktion*, their ‘signal function’. Their primary function is that of a signal used by the Speaker to establish a joint focus of attention of Speaker and Addressee (on this, see also Diessel, 2012). The particular communicative function of spatial deictics was already noted by Brugmann, who argued that demonstratives are *lautliche Fingerzeige* ‘acoustic pointers’ (1904: 5), whereby speakers draw the addressee’s attention to concrete objects and locations in the surrounding situation or in the preceding or following discourse. Accordingly, Present-Day German *da*, originally a temporal/spatial deictic and very similar in its functions to Present-Day English *there*, has been characterized as a “verbal signal [...] by which the speaker can focus his own perception and that of the hearer on something within the shared perceptual field” (Moilanen, 1979: 187).

The following investigation into the functions of *there* will rest on this understanding of *there* as a ‘pointer’, in particular its signal function utilized by speakers to focus their own perception and that of the hearer within the shared perceptual field of the discourse activity, thus establishing (joint) attention. All of the functions of *there* are seen to crucially rest on the deictic character of *there* and the inherent demonstrative force of linguistic elements of the ‘field of pointing’.

## 3. The pronominal force of deictic OE *þær*

### 3.1. Old English *þær*-compounds

As pointed out above (section 2.1), the deictic locative adjunct of *there* meaning has been fairly constant from OE *þær* to PDE *there*, with some minor changes as to whether *there* allows only a position ‘at that place’ or also a direction reading ‘thither’ (cf. *BT*, s.v. *þær*, 1a.2; *MED*, s.v. *thēr*, 1a. (d); *OED*, s.v. *there*, 8).<sup>2</sup>

For Old English, a concrete spatial meaning of *þær* is absolutely dominant, either in exophoric reference or in anaphoric reference to items mentioned in the preceding discourse, as in (7):

(7) *BT*, s.v. *þær*: Add. *there*, in that place Hig cōmon tō ðære stōwe, and hé gebæd hine **þær** (*ibi*) tō Gode, (Gen. 13, 4)  
‘They came to this place, and he prayed there (Latin *ibi* ‘at that place’) to God’.

In addition to its exophoric and anaphoric locative uses and early constructions similar to PDE existential *there* (‘preparing the way for the subject’, s.v. III.; on these Old English existential uses, see Pfenninger, 2013), *BT* also refers to early uses of *there*-compounds: “in combination with suffixed prepositions the word [= *þær*] has the force of a pronoun; [...] (though the attachment is rather slight, see e. g. *þær-on*)” (s.v. IV).

<sup>2</sup> This account only deals with the adverbial meanings of *there*. The form has also been used as a relativizer or conjunction (similar to *where*); see *BT*, s.v. *þær*, 1b and 1c; *MED*, s.v. *thēr*, 5–9; *OED*, s.v. *there*, II.

This pronominal force of Old English *þær*-compounds is attested with spatial prepositions such as *at*, *about*, *by*, *in*, *upon* and thus in *þær*-compounds with a clearly locative, spatial reference (see, e.g., *BT*, s.vv. *þær-æt*, *þær-ábútan*, *þær-big*, *þær-binnan*, *þær-in*, *þær-ofer*, *þær-oninnan*, *þær-onuppan*), be it exophoric or endophoric; in (8), we see an anaphoric reference to *ðæt templ*:

- (8) Forðæm Moyses oft eode **inn & ut** on ðæt templ, forðæm he wæs **ðærinne** getogen to ðære godcundan sceawunga, & **ðærut** he wæs abisgod ymb ðæs folces ðearfe. (*DOEC*, CP B9.1.3, [0438 (16.101.24)])  
 ‘Therefore Moses often went in and out of that temple, because he was therein (= in the temple) drawn to the divine showing/contemplation, and there-out (= outside; out of the temple) he was occupied by the people’s need’.

In comparison with later periods of English, these *þær*-compounds are not very frequent in Old English: In the 3-million-word corpus of all surviving texts of Old English (*DOEC*), only *þærto* ‘thereto’ (401 instances), *þærin(ne)* ‘therein’ (168 instances) and *þæron* ‘thereon’ (197 instances) are attested more than 100 times.<sup>3</sup> Since *to*, *in* and *on* may be characterized as the basic spatial prepositions, this again shows that also the reference point for the deictic Old English *þær*-compounds is generally locative, as in (8). The identification of the exact space/place, however, rests on the ‘suffixed preposition’, while *þær* only provides the point of reference.

Already in Old English, the point of reference for *þær*-compounds such as *þæron* can also be the earlier discourse, as in (9), where the Present-Day English translation of anaphoric *þæron* ‘about that’ clearly shows the functional parallelism in the pronominal force of *þær* and the demonstrative *that*:<sup>4</sup>

- (9) And he sona hig ealle axode, hwylce dæda be þam hælende gedone wæron. Ða com Ioseph of Arimathia and Nychodemus myd hym and hym eall sædon, þæt ðæt hig **þæron** wyston. (*DOEC*, VSal 1 (Cross) B8.5.4.1, 0069–0070)  
 ‘And he soon asked all of them which deeds had been done by the Saviour. Then there came Joseph of Arimathia and Nicodemus with him; they told him everything that they knew **about that**’.

### 3.2. Shifting deictics: from pronominal to spatial deixis

The “force of a pronoun” of *there* (and also *here* and *where*), which was still rather marginal in Old English, came to be exploited in an increasing number of *here-*, *there-* and *where-*compounds from Middle English onwards (on their history, see Österman, 1997, 2001; Lenker, 2010: 111–114). As *there*-compounds, the *OED* lists

- (10) *thereabout(s)*, *thereabove*, *thereafter(ward)*, *thereagain*, *thereagainst*, *thereamong*, *thereas*, *thereat*, *thereatour*, *thereaway*, *thereaways*, *therebefore*, *therebeside*, *thereby*, *theredown*, *thereforth*, *therefro*, *therefrom*, *theregain*, *therehence*, *therein(ne)*, *thereintill*, *thereinto*, *ther(e-mid)*, *-mydde*, *there-nigh*, *thereon*, *thereof*, *thereout*, *thereover*, *thereright(s)*, *theretill*, *thereto*, *theretofore*, *theretoward(s)*, *theretoyens*, *thereunder*, *thereuntill*, *thereunto*, *thereup*, *thereupon*, *thereward*, *therewhile(s)*, *therewith*, *therewithal*, *therewithin*.

The reason for the increasing number and frequency of these *there-*, *here-* and *where-*compounds from early Middle English onwards has been related to the break-down of the system of the Old English pronominal connectors, which are formed by means of a prepositional phrase consisting of a preposition (*æfter*, *ær*, *mid* etc.) and a form of the distal demonstrative in the dative (*þæm*) or the instrumental *þy* (governed by the preposition), followed at times by the optional particle *þe* (e.g. *æfter þæm (þe)* ‘after’, *ær þæm (þe)* ‘before’, *mid þæm (þe)* ‘during’). When the inflection of case and gender in the demonstratives collapsed at around 1200, pronominal connectors of that pattern were given up (for details, see Lenker, 2010: 98–102). In what has been called ‘shifting deictics’ (Lenker, 2007), speakers coined new connectors by replacing the deictic demonstrative with other deictic means. The primary items chosen were spatial *here*, *there* and *where*.

This choice of spatial deictic elements such as *here*, *there* and *where* for the explicit deictic reference is connected to the cognitive centrality of the source domain ‘space’ in human thinking: Spatial cognition seems to be the evolutionarily earliest domain of systematic cognition (Levinson, 2003). This reference can be exophoric or endophoric. For endophoric reference, it

<sup>3</sup> Since the “attachment” of pronominal *þær* to its ‘suffixed preposition’ is “rather slight” (see *BT*, s.v. IV), there may be instances of *þær* and preposition as separate words. These, however, have not been counted.

<sup>4</sup> As Diessel has recently reminded us, Brugmann and Delbrück saw the origin of the demonstratives in deictic particles such as *there* (German *da*): “Vielleicht sind alle Demonstrativa einmal deiktische Partikeln, also indeklinable Wörter gewesen. Sie traten, wenn der Gegenstand zugleich genannt war, vor oder hinter seine Bezeichnung. Dergleichen Partikeln finden sich in attributiver Verbindung mit Substantiven auch noch vielfach in den historischen Perioden der indogermanischen Sprachen, z.B. nhd. der Mensch da, da der mensch, du da” (Brugmann & Delbrück 1911: 311) ‘Perhaps at times all demonstratives were deictic particles, i.e. indeclinable words. If the object was simultaneously denoted by a noun, they were placed before or after it. Such particles are still commonly found in attributive conjunction with nouns in the historical (i.e. documented) periods of the Indo-European languages, e.g. New High German the man there, there the man, you there’ (translation from Diessel, 2012: 43).

has been suggested that such a metaphoric extension of spatial terms is a function of literacy since it is only with literacy that language is objectified in visual space (see Ong, 1982):

[...] [v]isual presentation of verbalized material in space has its own particular economy, its own laws of motion and structure. [...] Texts assimilate utterance to the human body. They introduce a feeling for 'headings' in accumulation of knowledge: 'chapter' derives from the Latin *caput*, meaning head (as from the human body). Pages have not only 'heads', but also 'feet', for footnotes. References are given to what is 'above' and 'below' in a text when what is meant is several pages back or farther on. (Ong, 1982: 100)

This idea of the “spatialization of language in literacy” corresponds to the fact that – throughout the history of English, but particularly in Present-Day English – *there*-compounds are most frequent in written genres, in particular in formal written genres such as administration, law etc. In her corpus study based on different corpora of Present-Day English (*LOB*, *Brown* and the *London–Lund* corpus), Österman (2001: 204–206) finds that *there*-compounds are on the wane in Present-Day English: In contrast to 14.7 instances per 10,000 words in the Early Modern period (based on the *HC*), the corpus analysis shows 3.2/10,000 words for the *LOB* corpus, 2.8/10,000 words for the *Brown* corpus, and only 2.0/10,000 words for the spoken *London–Lund* corpus (Österman, 2001: 205). The only compound that has more than one token per 10,000 words in the spoken corpus is *therefore*.

The distributional pattern of *there*-compounds in Present-Day English is thus very different from that of simple discourse-deictic *there* (see section 5.2 below), so that we cannot assume a simple direct transfer of functions from *there*-compounds to simple discourse-deictic *there*. The discourse functions of both *there*-compounds and simple discourse-deictic *there* are grounded in *there*'s deictic character, in its function as a signal.

#### 4. The diachrony of simple discourse-deictic *there*

##### 4.1. Simple discourse-deictic *there*

While the pronominal force of *there* has thus been widely employed for anaphoric, discourse-deictic and textual uses (predominantly with *therefore*) from the end of the Old English period and was particularly frequent in the Early and Late Modern English period, 'simple' discourse-deictic *there* relating to earlier (parts of the) discourse was comparatively rare through the early history of English.

In the *OED*, the first example of an unambiguous discourse meaning of simple *there* '[i]n that thing, matter, or business; [...] in that respect, as to that' (*OED*, s.v. *there*, 6b) is from the end of the nineteenth century, where *there* refers to “his” perspective that something was *beastly awkward certainly*:

(11) 1884 H. James in *Eng. Illustr. Mag.* Dec. 248/2 It was beastly awkward certainly; **there** I could quite agree with him.

In order to test my impression that simple discourse-deictic *there* was not at all frequent in the early periods of English, I examined the uses of *there* in all prose texts by Chaucer and Gower on the basis of the *Glossarial Database of Middle English* (compiled by Benson). In order to cover face-to-face interaction in particular, the *Corpus of English Dialogues 1560–1760* was used for the Early Modern English era (see Kytö and Walker 2006). This investigation showed that there are two patterns of discourse-deictic *there*, namely a) a conjunction use in narratives (which will be mentioned here because of its pragmatic similarities, even though the focus of the present study is on adverbial and pronominal *there*; see section 4.2) and b) a pattern with initial *there* functioning as a (positive or negative) evaluation of the preceding utterance(s) of an interlocutor” (see section 4.3).

##### 4.2. Simple discourse deictic *there*: conjunction

Simple discourse-deictic *there* is found in written narratives as a conjunction as in *And **ther** I lefte I wol ayeyn bigynne* 'And where (= at this part of the story) I left (the story), I will begin (= take up the story line) again'. This use is identically attested in (12), a variant reading of the conjunction *where* in a manuscript of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*,

(12) And **ther** [vr. **where**] I lefte I wol ayein bigynne. (*MED*, (c1385) Chaucer *CT.Kn.* (Manly-Rickert) A.892)

and in (13), where the story line is then taken up with the historical present tense form *whirlleth* 'whirls':

(13) [...] For Canacee er that he myghte hire wynne./And **ther** I lefte I wol ayein bigynne./Appollo whirlleth up his chaar so hye [...] (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, 'Squire's Tale', 669–671)

These uses will not be further considered in this study because they are structurally not comparable to *there* as attested in (1) and (2): As conjunctions they have to be placed sentence-initially. They are also different in their medium and genre distribution, since they are employed in (written) narratives and not in face-to-face interaction.

### 4.3. Initial simple discourse-deictic *there* in spoken interaction

The other discourse-deictic use of 'simple' *there*, by contrast, is restricted to spoken interaction, as attested in direct speech in fictional texts from the Middle English period onwards:

- (14) He served hem with nyfles and with fables,/“Nay, **ther** thou lixt, thou Somonour!” quod the Frere./“Pees,” quodoure Hoost, “for Cristes mooder deere! [...]” (Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, ‘Summoner’s Tale’, 1760–1762)  
‘He deceived them with his tricks and his lies. “No, there you are lying, you summoner!”’, said the Friar. “Peace”, said our Host, “for the sake of the holy mother of Christ”’.

In (14), the friar defends himself vehemently and accuses the summoner of lying in his *nyfles* and *fables* ‘tricks/fiction/falsehood’ by referring to the summoner’s words, i.e., earlier fictional discourse, by *ther*. In doing this, he places a focus on the fact that he regards the summoner’s words as lies. The reference, however, is very general: An understanding of the exact point of reference of *there* is highly situation-dependent and the primary function of initial *there* is not to identify a particular passage of the preceding discourse, but rather to highlight the pertinency of his attack, which is revealed by an aggressive direct address in the highly emotional combination of the personal pronoun *thou* plus the – negatively connotated – ‘title’ *Somonour*.

Such a profile of *there* is similarly found in the examples attested in the *Corpus of English Dialogues*. Also in (15), there is an accusation of lying and the utterance by the King starts with initial *there* and a direct address by the second person personal pronoun *you* and the proper name *Eccho*:

- (15) King. **There** you lie Eccho, for if he were here we must needes see him. Lem. Indeed sweete King, [...] (CED, D1CCHAPM; 1599)

Most of the altogether very few pertinent examples of simple discourse-deictic *there* are attested for the last of the periods covered by the CED (i.e., from 1680 to 1750). All in all, in these periods, there are only four examples of the kind illustrated by (16) and (17):

- (16) [\$ (‘Bev. jun.’) \$] Well Sir, [...] Now pray consider, Sir, when my Affair with (‘Lucinda’) comes, [...], to an open Rupture, how are you sure that (‘Cimberton’s’) Fortune may not then tempt her Father too, to hear his Proposals?/[ \$ (‘Myrt.’) \$] **There** you are right indeed, that must be provided against. (CED, D5CSTEEL; 1723)  
(17) [\$ (‘Bev. jun.’) \$] Why then, to give you Ease at once, tho’ I allow (‘Lucinda’) to have good Sense, Wit, Beauty and Virtue; I know another, in whom these Qualities appear to me more amiable than in her./[ \$ (‘Myrt.’) \$] **There** you spoke like a reasonable and good-natur’d Friend. (CED, D5CSTEEL; 1723)

In these patterns, *there* is placed initially (and thus topicalized) and introduces a metalinguistic comment on the words of an interlocutor (*you*) in the earlier discourse, to which *there* refers in a very general fashion. Once more, the face-to-face interaction can be characterized as intense, since the earlier discourse of another interlocutor is again assessed – in contrast to the earlier examples, however, not in a negative, but in a positive way (strengthened by *indeed* in (16)).

My investigation of the Chaucer and Gower corpus has shown that simple discourse-deictic *there* was indeed not very frequent until at least the middle of the eighteenth century. In all of the instances attested in the corpora examined for the present study (apart from the conjunction uses described in section 4.2), simple discourse-deictic *there* is attested in fictional face-to-face interaction: In all of the instances there is an (emotional) evaluation of the earlier discourse of an interlocutor, on which the speaker draws attention to by the very general reference of topicalized *there*, whose exact point of reference (if there is one) can only be identified by those sharing the communicative situation.

All in all, the investigations into the discourse-deictic use of *there* in the history of English have shown that the deictic, ‘pronominal’ character of *there* led to its frequent and varied employment in a high number of different *there*-compounds until the Late Modern English period. For Present-Day English, there has been a decline in the use of *there*-compounds and, in particular, their restriction to the written mode. Uses of *there* as illustrated in (1) and (2) above are thus not directly dependent on the discourse-deictic use of *there*-compounds, but rather on the general uses of deictic *there* as a signal (see above section 2).

## 5. Discourse-deictic *there* in Present-Day English

### 5.1. New patterns in simple discourse-deictic *there*

In earlier English, a discourse-deictic use of simple *there* seems to have been restricted to one particular pattern in spoken interaction, namely topicalized *there* in initial position of an utterance evaluating the earlier utterance(s) of another speaker. The other speaker is referred to by a second person pronoun (*thou* or *you*), the act of speaking by ‘verbs of speaking/communication’ such as *lie*, *speak* or *to be right*. Speakers may employ this pattern *there* + *you* + ‘verb of speaking/communication’ also in Present-Day English, as in

- (18) Tsar Ivan in the West is called terrible. “[...]”. Kovansky pronounced the word as in the English language. “But the Russian, grozny, really means “awesome.” He was Ivan the Awesome. “[...]” The Tatars you fear are long gone,” I said. “**There** you are wrong. The symbol of our country is the bear. The bear hibernates. They are hibernating too, waiting to wake up, to turn on Russia again (COCA, 2001; FIC, FantasySciFi)

Example (18) is, however, the only example I could find for the search strings *There you are correct/right/wrong* and *there you [lie]* in COCA and the BNC. What we find frequently, by contrast, are examples such as (19), taken from a face-to-face interaction of the American television news anchor and co-host of NBC’s *Today Show*, Hoda Kotb, and Kathie Lee Gifford:

- (19) KATHIE-LEE-GIFFORD So Stevie Jo was picked, the longhaired kid was. WOMAN Yes. HODA-KOTB Which is what I said. Again, I’m right. I love when I’m right about singing things. KATHIE-LEE-GIFFORD Okay. Oh, yeah. You are right **there**, baby. All right. What are we going to do about Kanye? [...] (COCA, 2014, SPOK, NBC)

This example, which will be analysed in more detail below (see discussion of ex. 21), is structurally similar to examples such as (1) and (2) above, in that discourse-deictic *there* is not placed sentence-initially as in the examples discussed in 4.3, but after the verb.

In the following sections, I will first summarize the results of two small corpus investigations I conducted on the basis of the BNC and COCA with the aim of delimiting the distributional characteristics of the use of discourse-deictic *there* in Present-Day English. Because of the high frequency and the polyfunctionality of *there* in all of its meanings<sup>5</sup> and the complexities of analysing functions in face-to-face interaction, a sound, statistically significant quantitative study is of course not possible. What corpus studies can provide us with is a survey of the distribution of discourse-deictic *there* across various media and genres and in any case a sufficient number of examples for qualitative analyses.

## 5.2. Distributional characteristics of simple discourse-deictic *there* in Present-Day English

In order to determine the key properties of simple discourse-deictic *there*, I first conducted a corpus study on the basis of the BNC (100 million, British English, 1980s–1993), which was chosen because of its possibilities of identifying not only the spoken and written medium, but also different genres in a compact form. Since the distribution of spoken vs. written is very uneven in the BNC, as the spoken corpus only contains 10 million words, frequencies are given per million for the survey. Because of the high frequency of *there* as an adverb and pronoun (in particular existential *there*), the search was restricted to a small number of phrases, which were chosen on the basis of information found in dictionaries of Present-Day English, namely *there* following the ‘verb of speaking’ *say* (*saying there*, *said there*, *want to say there*) and the phrase *the point there*. For *saying there* we find the following distribution:

**Table 1**

*saying there*: Analysis per function per 1 million words (123 tokens).

		existential <i>there</i>	locative (exophoric and anaphoric)	discourse-deictic
<i>saying there</i> 6.62/mil (66)	spoken	4.4/mil (44)	0.6/mil (6)	1.3/mil (13)
<i>saying there</i> 4.76/mil (63)	written	0.73/mil (60)	– (0)	– (0)

Table 1 shows that simple discourse-deictic *there* is only attested in the spoken medium.<sup>6</sup> This restriction of discourse-deictic *there* to the spoken medium was corroborated by the results for the search string *point there*, which yielded 29 tokens (2.9/mil), all of them from the spoken medium (including fictional face-to-face interaction). Simple discourse-deictic *there* is such a feature of spoken face-to-face interaction: A closer look at the genres shows that it is almost exclusively used in face-to-face interaction of a particular kind, namely in TV and radio discussions or meetings, such as council meetings or staff meetings, where certain issues are not just narrated or told to somebody, but debated and negotiated by the interlocutors (for examples, see section 5.3 below).

Since these results from the BNC might have been triggered by the very restricted search strings (and in particular the verb form *saying* in the progressive), I designed a search in the much larger *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA; 520 million words, US English, 1990–2017). In order to exclude existential *there* constructions, I searched for *there* followed by a punctuation mark. On the basis of my earlier research on discourse-deictic *there*, the particular co-texts were

<sup>5</sup> *There* is among the most frequent words in Present-Day English. In the OED (s.v. *there*, adv.), it is classified as “Band 8”, which means that it occurs “more than 1000 times per million words in typical modern English usage” (only about 0.02% of all non-obsolete OED entries are in this category, most of them function words). These numbers reflect the fact that PDE *there* is not only highly frequent as an adverb but also as a pronoun in existential *there*-constructions – both in the spoken and in the written medium: Both *there*<sup>2</sup> adv. and *there*<sup>1</sup> pron. (*there is* [...]) are identified as “S1/W1” in the LDOCE, i.e., they are among the most frequent 1000 words in both the spoken and the written genres.

<sup>6</sup> For the sake of completeness, Table 1 also lists the results of the other functions and shows that existential *there* is by far the most frequent function of *there*, in both the spoken and the written medium, in this search string (e.g., in *Oh no, look I was saying there are no primroses out yet!* (BNC, KE2, S\_conv). Locative *there* is also only attested in the spoken medium, which may be explained by the restricted co-text (i.e., a verb of saying in the progressive form).

- a) “[any form of a particular verb of speaking] + *there* + punctuation mark”  
 b) “any noun + *there* + punctuation mark”.

For a) “[any form of a particular verb of speaking] + *there* + punctuation mark”, *say* emerged as the central verb: In COCA, there are 143 relevant hits for the forms of *say*, while other speaking verbs are attested very rarely in this context, namely – as the next most frequent – *mention* (18) and very low numbers for, e.g., *tell* (4), *express* (4) and no hits at all for, e.g., *declare*, *bring about*, *affirm* or *assert*. This shows that simple discourse-deictic *there* is predominantly used in a phrase with the rather unspecific verb *say*, but interestingly not with *tell sb. sth.*. All of these instances of simple discourse-deictic *there* are attested in spoken face-to-face interaction of an ‘issues at debate-type’ (for examples, see below section 5.3).

The second search string used was “any noun + *there* + punctuation mark” (based on *good point there* etc.). This search predominantly yielded – as was to be expected – hits in which *there* is used as a locative circumstance adverb, as in *people there*, *way there* etc. followed by a colon (*people there* is the most frequent collocation in both COCA and BNC, with 399 and 45 hits respectively). With respect to non-locative uses, however, an interesting set of collocations emerges, which nicely agrees in both corpora. The most frequent collocations in COCA (with more than 50 hits) are *problem there* (185),<sup>7</sup> *point there* (128), *surprise there* (108), *difference there* (88), *question(s) there* (84), *issue(s) there* (81) and *story there* (76).

While a comprehensive discussion of all of these collocations and instances can, of course, not be provided within the scope of this study, the following aspects emerge as crucial: Of these collocations, only *problem there* and *surprise there* are at times used in registers which are not spoken or interactional. They are also different from, e.g., *point*, *question* or *issue*, in that most of the instances are of one type: Thus 89 of the 108 instances of *surprise there* are *no surprise there*. Similarly, 39 of the 76 instances of *story there* are variants of the phrase *There’s a story there*. As concerns the other collocations, all of them – *problem* (on the phrase *no problem there*, however, see below section 5.3), *point*, *question* and *issue* – basically belong to one lexical set, namely *issue* ‘a matter that is in dispute between two or more parties’ (all senses are cited from *Merriam-Webster*):

*issue*: 6a ‘a matter that is in dispute between two or more parties’

*point*: 1b ‘the most important essential in a discussion or matter’

*problem*: 1a ‘a question raised for inquiry, consideration, or solution’, 2a ‘an intricate unsettled question’, 2b ‘a source of perplexity, distress, or vexation’, 2c ‘difficulty in understanding or accepting’

*question*: 1b ‘a subject or aspect in dispute or open for discussion’, 1d ‘the specific point at issue’.

These collocations support the earlier findings that discourse-deictic *there* is mainly employed in communicative situations where meanings and contents (i.e., issues) are being negotiated, i.e. discussions or debates. It is also very interesting to see that all of these terms – just as the verbs *say* and *mention* – are rather unspecific, in particular since they are regularly used with indefinite determiners, such as *a(n)* or *no(t)* (for examples see below section 5.3). In this lack of precise reference, they are similar to simple discourse-deictic *there*: In contrast to the specific reference of *there* in *there*-compounds, where the point of reference is specified by the ‘suffixed preposition’, simple discourse-deictic *there* refers very generally to the preceding discourse. Thus, the deictic function of *there*, which above was characterized as a signal function (see section 2), should not primarily be seen as a signal referring to the earlier discourse, but to the discourse situation as a whole, as has been cited for the functions of German *da* above (section 2.2): A “verbal signal [...] by which the speaker can focus his own perception and that of the hearer on something within the shared perceptual field”, which in this case is the communicative situation as a whole.

### 5.3. Simple discourse-deictic *there* as a signal

I will illustrate the primary subjective and interpersonal functions of simple discourse-deictic *there* on the basis of selected examples taken from the about 400 examples of discourse-deictic *there* retrieved from the corpus studies of COCA and the BNC. Among them are instances which clearly seem to place prominence on their reference to parts of the earlier discourse, as in (1) and (2) above, and also in (20), where this is made explicit by *let’s go back to what you just said*:

- (20) MS-WARNER: All right. Let me ask you about cultural and social issues, because, again, in your announcement, you said you wanted to win the cultural war for the soul of America. What did you mean by that? And let’s go back to what you just said **there**. What would be the first three things you’d do that would address that? PATRICK-BUCHANAN: Well, five things I would do would be to repeal the first five executive orders of Bill Clinton that made our country a country that believes in abortion on demand. [...] (COCA, 1995, SPOK, PBS\_Newshour)

This example also shows, however, that *there* is not specific enough in its reference to any particular part of the preceding discourse, since the interviewer has to specify his particular point of reference by *What would be ...?*. Also the question – *What did you mean by that?* – suggests that the interviewer was not completely satisfied with Buchanan’s answer, since she

<sup>7</sup> *Problem there* (49) and *point there* (25) are also most frequent in the BNC, which then only has hits with low numbers and thus little explanatory value. In both COCA and BNC, there are high numbers of *problems* (Plural) *there*, but most of these refer to problems in a certain area and are therefore locative.



specifies her question. While the discourse-deictic task of *there* is augmented by the repetition of the question, there is also a steering of the interlocutor towards finally answering an earlier question. As in (1), the interlocutor asks for a resumption of a topic (or argument) which had been brought forward in the earlier, i.e. not immediately preceding, discourse. For this reference and this function of resuming an earlier line of discourse, distal simple *there* is chosen as a signal.

Such a recipient design of *there* is even more explicit in example (21; = ex. 19):

- (21) KATHIE-LEE-GIFFORD So Stevie Jo was picked, the longhaired kid was. WOMAN Yes. HODA-KOTB Which is what I said. Again, I'm right. I love when I'm right about singing things. KATHIE-LEE-GIFFORD Okay. Oh, yeah. You are right **there**, baby. All right. What are we going to do about Kanye? [...] (COCA, 2014, SPOK, NBC)

In this spoken piece of face-to-face interaction, the interlocutors negotiate meaning by specifically referring to the preceding discourse, in particular to the words of Hoda Kotb, who refers to her earlier words explicitly by *which is what I said*, highlighting that she *was right*. In her own words, she does not specify a particular part of the earlier discourse by any (discourse) deictic means such as *about that/this* or *there*. Discourse-deictic *there*, however, is employed by the other interlocutor, Kathie Lee Gifford, who apparently supports this view about the “correctness” of Hoda Kotb's utterance in *Oh, yeah. You are right there, baby*, then changing the topic of the conversation by *All right* and the question *What are we going to do about Kanye?*. In addition to – very generally – referring to the earlier discourse, *there* gives the perspective of the speaker on a whole chunk of the earlier discourse and signals the speaker's wish for an ‘end of discussion’. If we relate this to our earlier view that discourse-deictic *there* is used in communicative situations in which there is ‘a matter that is in dispute between two or more parties’, then *there* can be seen as a signal that Kathie Lee Gifford considers this dispute settled.

Also in (22), *there* can be interpreted as a signal with interpersonal reference to the hearer, since it again highlights the wish of the speaker for ‘end of discourse’:

- (22) (SP:PS5TF) You very humbly describe yourself as an absent Pro-Chancellor, but you have taken a considerable interest in this university over the years, and we've been grateful for it. How do you perceive the flavour of Sussex? (SP:PS5TD) It's unique, there's no question about that. I don't know any university that's quite like it. [...] (6 sentences; 200 words) Again, I repeat with this problem of unemployment and so on, and the really obscene level of unemployment in this country at the moment – absolutely shocking I think – and I think the universities have to address themselves to that problem. (SP:PS5TF) Thank you **for that**. I'm all in favour. All I can say is Amen in respect of what you were saying **there**. All right, let's go and talk about films now. You've done your bit for the universities. (SP:PS5TD) Oh no, I'd much rather not (laugh) [...] (BNC, KRH, S\_brdcast\_discussn, (1985–1994), Ideas in Action programmes (04): radio broadcast. 9 parts, 1382 utts)

In (22), the speaker F uses two different phrases for referring to D's answer to his question, namely the prepositional phrase with demonstrative *that* as a prepositional complement in *for that*, which – in a very general way – refers to the whole (long) answer. Before moving on to another subject by *All right, let's go* [...], F again refers to D's answer, evaluating it by *I'm all in favour. All I can say is Amen in respect of what you were saying there*. F enforces his support of D's understanding of the situation in Sussex and the role universities should play explicitly by *All I can say is Amen*, referring to D's answer with *what you were saying there*, with the progressive form of *saying*, which could be considered a modal progressive. Also *there* does not focus on any of the particular utterances, but on the whole of the answer (as *all you were saying*). The function of *there* – together with the *All I can say is Amen* and the modal progressive – is thus not only to refer to the preceding discourse, but also to signal F's wish to move on to another topic.

This analysis of the function of discourse-deictic *there* signalling ‘end of discourse/topic’ also fits the many instances of the phrase *no problem there* in (also fictional) face-to-face interaction, as in (23) and (24), where the topic is changed after *no(t) (a) problem there*:

- (23) “As if,” she said. “Friends at school?” “Not a problem **there**.” “Your boyfriend?”. Chandra stuck out her tongue-pierced [...] (COCA, 2005, FIC, SouthernRev)
- (24) The president scratched his head: “Invite you to my hotel room, I can. Food: no problem **there**. But go every night with you in the bus to keep an eye on you while you play? I'm wondering. (COCA, 1998, FIC, PartisanRev)

In the case of argumentative interaction, we also see this function in the phrase *no argument there* as in

- (25) One of the great – one of the great and proudest things this federal government has ever done, has to do with the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act [...] I mean, if we did not have those laws, this country would not be as strong as it is now and we wouldn't have the upward mobility that we now have. REPRESENTATIVE-PAU No argument **there**. REPRESENTATIVE-BAR Can I get an answer on marijuana, George? Are you with me on marijuana? I mean [...]

In some instances, this ‘end of topic’ function is even made explicit by *enough*, as in

- (26) LEMON: “Let’s face it many on the political right believe this President ought not to be there. They oppose him not for his policies and political view but for who he is, an African-American.” Finally the elephant in the Rose Garden. Thank you, Sam Donaldson, enough said **there**. (2012, POK, Fox\_OReilly)

or in (27), where a certain indignation about the contents of earlier words by the interlocutors and the wish to close the conversation is highlighted by the progressive and the phrase *at the end*:

- (27) Ms. ZIEGENMEYER: I think it’s the stigma that this only happens to someone else, and then you get into the “What was she wearing, what was she doing, was she in a bar, did she deserve this?” There’s just-it’s a broad scale of what’s happening, and I- SAWYER: Ms. Ziegenmeyer, I’m sorry to say that we’re out of time. I think we understood what you were trying to say **there**, at the end. But I thank you, I thank Ms. Quindlen and Ms. Ryback, all of you, for joining us tonight. (1990, SPOK, ABC\_Nightline)

## 6. Conclusions

In contrast to the frequent and varied employment of discourse-deictic *there* in *there*-compounds such as *therein*, *thereby*, *thereon* or textual *therefore* – in particular from the Middle English to the Late Modern English period (see section 3.1) – simple *there* was only rarely and restrictedly used with discourse-deictic reference for much of the history of English. The only adverbial pattern attested until the 19th century is “topicalized initial *there* + second person pronoun (*thou* or *you*) as subject + verb of communication”, usually in a function of evaluating the earlier words of an interlocutor (as in *There you lie Eccho* or *There you are right indeed*; see section 4.3).

In Present-Day English, discourse-deictic *there* is usually placed after the verb, not in initial position, as in *your are wrong there*. This use of simple discourse-deictic *there* is almost exclusively found in face-to-face interaction of a particular type, which may be labelled ‘issue(s) at debate discussion type’, such as TV and radio broadcast discussions or council or staff meetings (or fictional representations of those). In these communicative contexts, *there* is discourse-deictic by referring to (parts of) the earlier discourse, but in a rather unspecific way: Even the shared communicative situation of the speaker and the interlocutor(s) does often not allow an exact identification of the exact point of discourse *there* refers to – in contrast to *there*-compounds, where this identification is given by the ‘suffixed preposition’. Because of this specific identification, *there*-compounds may be – and are predominantly – used in written communication. Simple discourse-deictic *there* (in earlier initial uses and today’s uses), by contrast, is only found in spoken face-to-face interaction, which provides the frame of reference.

Since simple discourse-deictic *there* is not used for a particular reference to earlier parts of the discourse (and is therefore also not used textually), but rather refers to the discourse as a whole (which is present in any case in the shared communication), this study suggests that speakers use simple discourse-deictic *there* for other purposes. These purposes are seen to be related to the inherently deictic character of *there*, and in particular the signal function of all elements belonging to the ‘field of pointing’, in that speakers signal their subjective viewpoint on a part of the earlier discourse which is not immediately preceding or, alternatively, to the whole of the earlier discourse: For this, distal *there* (and not proximal *here*) is an appropriate means of reference.

Two particular pragmatic functions have been identified, namely (a) that speakers want to expand on or enforce an argument brought forward by themselves or one of the interlocutors in the earlier discourse, usually arguments which have been neglected in the immediately preceding discourse or which have been misunderstood or misinterpreted in the immediately preceding discourse, but which the speaker considers essential: S/he brings back these particular arguments in the discourse. Another function similarly indexing the speaker’s viewpoint of the discourse is that speakers signal their wish of ‘end of topic (or even discourse)’ by *there*. *There* indicates that the speaker has taken notice of the arguments brought forward by the other interlocutor(s) during the whole debate but does not wish to pursue (this aspect of) the debate any further, but wants to move on to another topic. Similar to discourse markers such as *anyway*, *there* can be said to signal a ‘shift in topic’.

These subjective and interpersonal functions of simple discourse-deictic *there* in Present-Day English face-to-face interaction where issues are at debate are strikingly reminiscent to regularities of semantic change as postulated by Elizabeth Traugott and collaborators (see, e.g., Traugott 1995 and, for a monograph account, Traugott and Dasher 2002). Among these regularities are regular paths from “non-subjective to subjective and intersubjective” uses of particular content items or the so-called “adverbial cline”, which describes a regular development of certain adverb(ial)s on a trajectory “clause-internal adverbial > sentence adverbial > discourse particle” (classic cases are *indeed*, *in fact*, *actually* and *well*). I have refrained from using this terminology in this paper (but see Lenker, 2017) not only because especially the term “intersubjectivity” has received a variety of – often divergent – interpretations and definitions in different frameworks and different stages of the same frameworks (for recent surveys, see, e.g., Ghesquière et al., 2014; Narrog, 2014), but more particularly because these regularities apply to elements in which the intersubjective meaning is not only pragmatically inferred but semantically encoded (Ghesquière et al., 2014: 132). The regularities expressly describe semantic change of items of the ‘field of naming’,

not those of the ‘field of pointing’. As an element of the ‘field of pointing’, *there*, however, inherently exhibits pointing functions to a distal place/space, which are pragmatically utilised in simple discourse-deictic *there* in subjective and intersubjective functions of signalling the speaker’s viewpoint of a shift in topic, either in an resumption of arguments brought forward in the (much) earlier discourse, or, signalling the wish for an ‘end of topic’ of a whole long chunk of discourse.<sup>8</sup> For signalling these discourse-deictic functions, simple distal *there* is an appropriate ‘pointer’.

## Corpora and Concordances

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- BYU Corpora = <<https://corpus.byu.edu/>>.
- CED = *A Corpus of English Dialogues 1560–1760*. 2006. Compiled under the supervision of Merja Kytö (Uppsala University) and Jonathan Culpeper (Lancaster University).
- COCA = Davies, Mark. 2008–. *The Corpus of Contemporary American English*. <<https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>> [last accessed 26 August 2017].
- DOEC = *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, compiled by Antonette diPaolo Healey with John Price Wilkin and Xin Xiang. Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project 2009. <<http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/o/oec/>> [last accessed 26 August 2017].
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- NOW Corpus = *NOW Corpus (News on the Web)*. <<https://corpus.byu.edu/now/>> [last accessed 26 August 2017].

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2017.12.003>.

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<sup>8</sup> I would like to express my in this case particularly heartfelt thanks to the anonymous reviewers for their critical comments on an earlier version of this paper, specifically for alerting me to the various problems of applying Traugott’s “regularities of semantic change” on deictic *there*, as concerns questions of the directionality from subjective to intersubjective, the issue of “intersubjectification” and the problems of textual uses of *there* (on the status of textual uses in these frameworks, see Narrog, 2014). I would also like to thank Ulrich Detges and Judith Huber for (vehemently) debating these issues with me. Thanks are also due to Carolin Harthan for her help in formal matters. All remaining errors are, of course, my own.

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