

## Contrastive Linguistics, Translation, and Parallel Corpora

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L'approche basée sur le corpus  
The Corpus-based Approach

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Article abstract

This paper regards parallel corpora as suitable sources of data for investigating the differences and similarities between languages, and adopts the notion of translation equivalence as a methodology for contrastive analysis. It uses a bidirectional parallel corpus of Norwegian and English texts to examine the behaviour of presentative English there-constructions as well as the Norwegian equivalent det-constructions in original and translated English, and original and translated Norwegian respectively.

# CONTRASTIVE LINGUISTICS, TRANSLATION, AND PARALLEL CORPORA

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## **Résumé**

*Cet article traite des corpus parallèles comme source utile de données pour l'étude des différences et similarités entre des langues. La notion d'équivalence traductionnelle sert de méthodologie pour l'analyse contrastive. À partir d'un corpus parallèle bidirectionnel de textes norvégiens et anglais, on examine le comportement des constructions présentatives anglaises (there) et celui des constructions équivalentes norvégiennes (det) dans des textes en anglais et en norvégien tant originaux que traduits.*

## **Abstract**

*This paper regards parallel corpora as suitable sources of data for investigating the differences and similarities between languages, and adopts the notion of translation equivalence as a methodology for contrastive analysis. It uses a bidirectional parallel corpus of Norwegian and English texts to examine the behaviour of presentative English there-constructions as well as the Norwegian equivalent det-constructions in original and translated English, and original and translated Norwegian respectively.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The headache of any contrastive study has been finding the so-called *tertium comparationis* (TC), that is, the common ground on which two languages can be compared to be able to establish (dis)similarities. In James (1980), translation equivalence is seen as the best TC for contrastive analysis. James sees translational equivalence in light of Halliday's (e.g. 1994) three metafunctions of language, and writes: "For two sentences from different languages to be translationally equivalent they must convey the same ideational *and* interpersonal *and* textual meanings" (James 1980: 178).<sup>1</sup> The present article looks at translations to see what they can tell us about the differences and similarities between English and Norwegian. We shall concentrate on a structure found in both languages, and which fulfills the formal criteria of being interpreted as equivalent. There are, however, differences with regard to the frequency with which certain verbs and verb forms occur in the structure, and this affects the translation of it.

To investigate the structure we shall use a parallel corpus of English and Norwegian with translations in both directions.

## **2. ENGLISH AND NORWEGIAN**

English and Norwegian are closely related languages. They have a common root, Germanic, and there has been considerable contact between the language communities over the years. It is debatable whether the two languages were mutually intelligible in the Old English period, but there was considerable overlap both with regard to morphology,

lexis, and syntax. Even today, a Norwegian sentence like *Der var en mann i båten* should be understandable to an English reader.<sup>2</sup> Norwegian- and English-speaking learners also have relatively little trouble acquiring each other's languages.

Since the two languages have a common ancestry, they have structures which are similar both with regard to form and function. One such construction is the existential *there*-construction or the presentative *det*-construction in Norwegian, with *there* and *det* as a dummy subject.<sup>3</sup>

- (1) There is a waiting room along the hall  
*Det er et venterom borte i gangen*

Both constructions will be referred to as presentative constructions (*there-/det*-presentatives) to underline what I believe is their basic function, viz. to present new information into the discourse. Even though the constructions have many features in common, there are differences as well. In the present study, we shall focus on one such difference, namely the use of verbs in these constructions.

### 3. PARALLEL CORPORA

Several new parallel corpora have been compiled over the last few years, many with a basis in foreign language departments and institutions specialising in translation studies.<sup>4</sup> Both kinds of institutions have realised that, even though their ultimate aims may not be exactly the same, they need parallel texts as a foundation for empirical research. The fact that both camps can use the same data and the same tools shows the usefulness of a parallel corpus.

To me a parallel corpus consists of at least two subcorpora which exhibit some kind of parallelism. The parallelism can be (i) that the two subcorpora represent different languages or dialects with the same amount of data drawn from comparable sources; or (ii) that they express the same content in different languages or dialects; or (iii) that the same effect is aimed at using different languages or dialects (or even styles); or (iv) that one subcorpus consists of original text, the other of translated text in the same language. The texts of the corpus are generally of the same text type or drawn from similar genres. If a comparison of the two subcorpora is aimed at, the same kind of design criteria should be employed, i.e. equivalent sample sizes, samples from the same period, comparable amounts of spoken and written language, etc.

The first type of corpus, which has been referred to as a multilingual corpus (Baker 1995), can be used for contrastive studies of different languages or dialects, e.g. British English and American English, or to control for translationese in a translation corpus (see the next type). The second type is called a parallel corpus in Baker (1995) and a translation corpus in Schmied and Schäffler (1996). The most common variety seems to be a corpus containing original texts in one language and their translations in a different language, but one could also imagine two or more independent reports of the same event in different languages, e.g. commentaries on a sports event broadcast live in several languages. The latter would then not be a translation corpus, but would still qualify as a parallel corpus. The third type of corpus would consist of collections of texts which have the same purpose or aim, but which do not express the same content in semantic terms. What I have in mind are programs of political parties from different countries; speeches made at comparable events, e.g. the opening of parliaments; etc. Such a corpus would be useful to study the style and rhetoric of different languages. The last type of corpus consists of original and translated texts in the same language, and has been referred to as a comparable corpus by Baker (1995).

The English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus incorporates three of the four types of parallel corpus.<sup>5</sup> It is a translation corpus with original texts and their translations (English-Norwegian and Norwegian-English); it can be used as a comparable corpus to study general features of translation (Baker 1993); and it can be used as a multilingual corpus for contrastive studies of English and Norwegian as well as to control for translationese<sup>6</sup> in the translated parts of the corpus. I shall focus on the translation corpus, and study the translation of what appear to be equivalent constructions in the two languages.

#### 4. THE MATERIAL

The material investigated, taken from the English-Norwegian Parallel Corpus (ENPC), consists of approximately 0.5 million words of original text in each language, where 70% is from fiction and 30% is from non-fiction. The amount of translated text is roughly the same, 0.5 million words for each language. The material is made up of extracts from books, between 10,000 and 15,000 words from the beginning of each book. All in all there are 40 extracts from English books and 39 from Norwegian (see Appendix). In most cases, there is only one text per author, but one English writer is represented by two text extracts and three of the Norwegian writers are represented by two extracts each.

Not much is known about the translators. What we do know is that all the fiction material has been published by reputable publishers, and we have no reason to believe that they did not employ professional translators. Even though some of the translators have translated more than one text, there is a fairly good spread among the translators; 17 different translators have been involved in translating the 26 Norwegian fiction texts into English. The number is even higher in the other direction: 21 different translators are responsible for translating the 26 English novels. When it comes to the non-fiction material, we know very little because the translations have been done by institutions (e.g. the Foreign Office), and the information is lacking in the publications.

All quotations taken from the material are followed by a text code and sentence reference. For example AT1.3.s159 means Anne Tyler (author), text number 1, chapter 3, s-unit number 159. An s-unit is roughly the same as an orthographic sentence. A capital T after the text number shows that it is a translation. Where necessary or appropriate, I have included a (literal) translation of my own. I have, however, disregarded the systematic difference in subject-verb inversion between the languages. For example, when Norwegian has *I dag kommer det en hest*, it has been translated as *Today there comes a horse*, and not word-by-word as *Today comes there a horse*.

#### 5. VERBS IN PRESENTATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

##### 5.1. English Verbs

Apart from *be*, the verbs occurring in English *there*-sentences “must be intransitive [...], and of fairly general presentative meaning: verbs of motion (*arrive, enter, pass, come, etc.*), of inception (*emerge, spring up, etc.*), and of stance (*live, remain, stand, lie, etc.*)” according to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 1408). Transitive verbs are rare in active form in *there*-constructions, *follow* and *enter* being notable exceptions. Transitive verbs in the passive are almost non-existent, and where aspectual forms like the perfective and the progressive occur, they come after the postverbal noun phrase (the notional subject), and the construction can be seen as a special type of *there be* existential (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1409, Note a).<sup>7</sup> It has also been noted that verbs of disappearance (*die, disappear, lack, vanish*) rarely

occur in English existential *there*-constructions. All this shows that the classes of verbs that can appear are very limited.

Levin (1993) presents an impressive list of verbs attested in English *there*-constructions (more than 250), but says nothing about the frequency of the various verbs. In the original English texts of the ENPC, only fifteen different verbs are attested, and *be* accounts for 98% of the instances. The only other verbs occurring more than once are *come*, *follow*, *remain*, and *pass*. This suggests that *be* is now almost the only verb occurring in English *there*-constructions, at least in the text types and genres covered by the corpus. Example 2 is a typical instance.

- (2) There was a girl on a stool behind the counter, a waifish little person in a halter top.  
(AT1.3.s159)

The total number of English *there*-constructions in the original texts is 1214. Of these, 1193 are *there be*-presentatives.

## 5.2. Norwegian Verbs

For Norwegian, the situation is quite different. Norwegian allows a wider set of verbs, and verbs in the passive are permissible. Transitive verbs in the active voice are rare though (but see example 4). We can also notice that Norwegian has several verbs whose meaning is very close to *be* (Norw. "være").<sup>8</sup> The most frequent one is *finnes* which has no direct English equivalent, but which is regarded as the existential verb par excellence in Norwegian; and *det finnes* ("there is") often corresponds to French *il y a*, German *es gibt*, or Spanish *hay*.<sup>9</sup> Despite the many verbs meaning "being in existence," they only account for 57% of the total Norwegian material. Examples 3 - 6 show Norwegian *det*-constructions with verbs other than *være* ("be") where the literal translations sound awkward or are unacceptable.

- (3) ..., og det bodde litt over førti mennesker i dalen. (SH1.1.1.s62)  
...; about forty people lived in the valley. (SH1T.1.1.s61)  
Lit.: ..., and there lived a little over forty people in the valley
- (4) Det lukter kommende høst. (CL1.1.3.11.s44)  
There's the smell of the coming autumn. (CL1T.1.3.11.s44)  
Lit.: There smells coming autumn
- (5) ..., og mellom dem slynget det seg underlige draker og fabeldyr. (TTH1.1.s207)  
..., and between them twined dragons and fantasy animals. (TTH1T.1.s215)  
Lit.: ..., and between them there twined themselves strange dragons and fable animals
- (6) ... at det var blitt begått et mord like i nærheten. (FC1.2.s133)  
... that a murder had been committed right there in his neighbourhood.  
(FC1T.2.s129)  
Lit.: ... that there had been committed a murder close in the vicinity

The most frequent Norwegian verbs in the original texts (more than 10 occurrences), disregarding those with a meaning close to "being in existence" and *være* ("be") itself, are: *bli* ("become"), *bo* ("live"), *gjelde* ("concern"), *gjøre* ("do"), *gå* ("go/walk"), *hende* ("happen"), *henge* ("hang"), *komme* ("come"), *ligge* ("lie"), *lukte* ("smell"), *oppstå* ("arise"), *sitte* ("sit"), *skje* ("happen"), *stå* ("stand"), *velge* ("elect"). Most of the verbs lie within the semantic range covered by verbs found in English as well, i.e. verbs of motion, inception, or stance. *Velge* ("elect") is only found in the passive as in 7.

Norwegian has no problem in allowing verbs of disappearance, and reflexive verbs are quite common (see ex. 5). Norwegian can even accept agentive verbs like *arbeide* ("work"), *spise* ("eat"), and *handle* ("shop") according to Norwegian grammars (e.g.

- (7) *På høsten ble det valgt nye verneombud, og arbeidsmiljøutvalg blir etablert tidlig i 1994.* (NFRA1.3.13.s21)

In autumn, new safety deputies were elected, and occupational environment committees will be formed early in 1994. (NFRA1T.3.13.s21)

Lit.: In the autumn, there were elected new safety deputies...

Faarlund *et al.* 1997). No instances of verbs of the latter category are found in my material.

The total number of Norwegian *det*-constructions in the original texts is 2076, i.e. much higher than the number of *there*-constructions in the English material.

## 6. TRANSLATIONESE

We started out by quoting James' (1980) rather rigorous definition of translation equivalence as the best tertium comparationis for contrastive analysis. After looking at grammars of the two languages and evidence from the corpus, we find that there are differences with regard to the frequency of certain classes of verbs as well as of certain verb forms in the two constructions. How does this affect the translation of *there-/det*-constructions into the other language? If the constructions are equivalent, one would expect *there*-constructions to be translated by *det*-constructions, and vice versa. But if we want to avoid translationese, that is, "deviance in translated texts induced by the source language" (Johansson and Hofland 1994: 26), we will, on many occasions, have to choose a different verb or verb form in the translation. This is the kind of translationese Schmied and Schäffler (1996: 45-6) call deviations from the target norm. Deviations from the norm are different from language or system error which they refer to as deviations from the target system (p. 45). The latter is what has traditionally been termed translationese (see Newmark 1988: 285 and Baker 1993: 249, Note 5). As an instance of a deviation from a target norm, Schmied and Schäffler present an example where an English nominalisation is translated by a German verbal structure. This would be a deviation they say "if we assume that German, as a norm, has greater tendency towards nominalisations than English" (p. 46). In the same fashion, one could argue that a translation of a Norwegian *det*-construction with the verb *stå* ("stand") by an English *there*-construction with *stand*, and not *be*, would be a deviation from the norm and not the system. English, we have seen, tolerates intransitive verbs of stance in *there*-constructions, and the verb is listed in Levin (1993: 89) as a verb of spatial configuration attested in *there*-constructions. Hence, it would not be a system error. It would also be a deviation from the norm if English *there be*-constructions were always translated by *det være*-constructions, since only about 50% of Norwegian *det*-presentatives have *være* ("be") as the main verb.

If translators wanted to be as true to the target language norm as possible, they would, it seems, translate Norwegian lexical verbs with English *be* and vice versa.<sup>10</sup> This, however, would lead to what I call despecification and specification, respectively.

Despecification means loss of semantic (ideational) or pragmatic (textual) information. If a semantically richer verb (than *be*) is translated by *be*, semantic information is lost; when a Norwegian *det*-construction with the verb in the passive is translated by an English construction in which the postverbal noun phrase (the grammatical object) of the Norwegian original ends up in preverbal (subject position) in the English translation, textual information is lost. In example 6 above, the postverbal NP *et mord* ("a murder") of the original is the subject of the English translation and is in preverbal position. In this case, we have a loss of textual information since both languages, in most situations, try to adhere to the principle of end-focus (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1357). This principle states that there is a tendency for new information to come late in the clause.

Specification, which means adding information, occurs when an English *there be*-construction is translated by a Norwegian *det*-construction with a semantically richer verb, as in 8.

- (8) There were two bar stools at the counter and ... (SG1.2.s147)  
*Det stod to krakker ved kjøkkendisken.* (SG1T.2.s145)  
 Lit.: There stood two stools at the kitchen counter

Depending on the type of verb and the direction we translate in, we can now set up the following hypotheses about Norwegian-English and English-Norwegian translation of presentative constructions.

Norwegian <i>det</i> -constructions with lexical verbs	<b>obligatory despecification</b> must be translated into	English <i>there be</i> -constructions or non- <i>there</i> -constructions
Norwegian <i>det</i> -constructions with the verb in the passive	<b>obligatory despecification</b> must be translated into	English constructions with the verb in the active, or passive constructions without the dummy subject <i>there</i>
English <i>there</i> -constructions With <i>be</i> as the main verb	<b>optional specification</b> can be translated into	Norwegian <i>det</i> -constructions with lexical verbs

**Table 1**  
Obligatory and optional (de)specification

In general, (de)specification can either be obligatory or optional. In the case of optional (de)specification, the translator is free to choose between a construction which is formally and semantically equivalent to the source, and a construction where information is added or lost. That is, the system of the target language does not put the same kind of constraint on the construction as the source language does.

To resolve the dilemma of either deviating from the norm or losing or adding information, we can of course select a completely different construction. But if this happened in a sufficient number of cases, the *there-/det*-constructions would presumably not be translationally equivalent, and hence not similar in a contrastive perspective.

I should stress that I have made no attempt to look at a wider context to see if the information added or lost can be found outside the sentence translated, or can be recovered by social or cultural knowledge or logical inference. The latter, to my mind, lies outside the scope of contrastive linguistics, at least at the level of syntax.

The next section looks at the translation of English *there be*-constructions into Norwegian, and the translation of two Norwegian *det*-constructions into English, one with verbs in the active voice, the other with verbs in the passive voice, with a view to assessing the extent to which the hypotheses are confirmed.

### 7.1. Translation of English *there be*-presentatives

Of the total 1193 *there be*-presentatives in the English material, 786 (66%) have been translated by a corresponding Norwegian *det*-construction with a verb denoting existence only. Of the remaining 407 tokens, only 97 are translated by a *det*-construction with another verb in the active. The most frequent are inchoative *bli* ("become"), *komme*, ("come"), *ligge*, ("lie"), and *stå* ("stand"). Table 2 summarizes the findings.

<i>bli</i>	33
<i>komme</i>	16
<i>ligge</i>	10
<i>stå</i>	13
others	25
Total	97

**Table 2**  
Lexical verbs in Norwegian translations of English *there be*-constructions

In subsection 5.2, we saw that Norwegian verbs of existence accounted for 57% of all occurrences in the original material. The other 43% contained other verbs. The figures for verbs of existence vs. other active verbs in translated *det*-constructions (786+97) are 89% and 11%. This then seems to be a case of translationese, that is, over-use of verbs of existence in translated Norwegian text.<sup>11</sup>

What is perhaps more interesting is to see what other constructions are used to translate English *there be*-constructions. The *have*-existential device (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1411) is the most frequent (61 instances), followed by locative inversion (26 instances), and *det*-presentatives with the verb in the passive (10 instances). Examples 9 to 11 show the three options.

- (9) There's a long trip ahead. (ABR1.1.1.s92)  
*Du har en lang tur foran deg.* (ABR1T.1.1.s91)  
Lit.: You have a long trip ahead of you.
- (10) There was a half-eaten chicken tikka in front of her and a half-drunk glass of white wine. (JB1.3.s55)  
*Foran henne sto en halvspist tikka-kylling og et halvt glass hvitvin.* (JB1T.3.s55)  
Lit.: In front of her stood a half-eaten chicken tikka and a half glass white wine
- (11) There was a scuffling sound at the door behind her. (AT1.3.s615)  
*Det hørtes en tassende lyd ved døren bak henne.* (AT1T.3.s617)  
Lit.: There was heard a scuffling sound at the door behind her

The rest, 213 instances, consist of various constructions where the entity introduced by the postverbal NP of the English original is integrated in the verb of the translation, as in example 12, or where the meaning of the *there*-construction is incorporated somehow into a larger structure as in example 13. Among the 213 instances, we also find verbless structures and instances where the construction in question is not translated at all.



- (12) Or they can postpone it and decide to wait; there is no hurry, they have time, a lifetime. (ABR1.1.1.s917)  
*Eller de kan utsette det og bestemme seg for å vente; det haster ikke, de har tid, et liv.* (ABR1T.1.1.s919)  
 Tran.: Or they can postpone it and decide to wait; it isn't urgent, they have time, a life
- (13) Tubular neon in cursive script decorates the restored brick façades, and there's a lot of brass trim, a lot of real estate, a lot of money. (MA1.1.2.s135)  
*Neon i skråskrift pryder nå de restaurerte murfasadene, som strutter av messingpynt og eiendomsutvikling og penger.* (MA1T.1.2.s140)  
 Lit.: Neon in cursive script decorates now the restored brick façades, which protrude of brass trim and real estate development and money

On the basis of the quantitative information from the translations, we can set up a tentative equivalence hierarchy which shows the closest Norwegian equivalents of the English *there be*-construction.

- A *det*-constructions with verbs of existence
- B *det*-constructions with other verbs in the active voice
- C *have*-existentials
- D locative inversion
- E *det*-constructions with verbs in the passive voice
- F other constructions

In spite of the tendency to choose a verb of existence when the English original has *be*, there is a sufficient number of instances of other verbs in the translations to claim that Norwegian has the option of specification in the translation of *det*-constructions. *Have*-existentials and *det*-constructions with the verb in the passive can also be said to add information. In the *have*-existential construction, an agentive or affected subject role is added, and with verbs in the passive an agent is also often implied. In both constructions the new information comes towards the end of the clause as it does in *there*-presentatives, so little textual information is lost. Locative inversion can be seen as informationally equivalent to a *there*-presentative as well, since it uses inversion to place the new information, i.e. the subject, late in the clause.

## 7.2 Translation of Norwegian *det*-constructions with Lexical Verbs

Of the total 2076 Norwegian *det*-constructions in the material, 1183 contain a verb of existence (i.e. *finnes*, *foreligge*, etc.).

Of the remaining 893 instances, 235 contain passive *det*-constructions; we shall come back to these in section 7.3. This leaves us with 658 active *det*-constructions with semantically richer verbs. Of these only 181 (27%) are translated by an English *there be*-construction and 4 (0.6%) by *there* + lexical verb. The remaining 473 instances (72%) are translated by other constructions. See Table 3.

The Norwegian *det*-presentatives with semantically richer verbs, which have been translated by English *there*-presentatives, fall into two main groups. The larger one has some kind of *there be*-construction; the smaller one, only a handful of instances in my material, has *there* together with a lexical verb. The first group can be divided into several subgroups. The largest has simply *there be* + NP, where the semantic component specifying inception, stance, etc. of the Norwegian original verb is lost. The most common Norwegian verbs in this category include *bli* ("become"), *bo* ("live"), *gå* ("go/walk"), *komme* ("come"), *ligge* ("lie"), *skje* ("happen"), and *stå* ("stand"). All these are prototypical verbs of existence or appearance, and it has been claimed, for verbs of existence at

<i>det</i> -constructions with lexical verbs in the active	
(tran. by) <i>there be</i> -constructions	181 (27%)
(tran. by) <i>there</i> -constructions with verbs other than <i>be</i>	4 (0.6%)
(tran. by) other constructions	473 (72%)
Total	658

**Table 3**  
Norwegian *det*-constructions with active verbs and their translations

least, that they are informationally light and that they “can often be replaced by the copula without a noticeable change in sentence meaning” (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995: 231). This may be the reason why they have fallen out of use in English, but I will still claim that this leads to despecification when the above verbs are translated by the English *be*, and that the despecification is due to the English norm which tolerates lexical verbs in *there*-presentatives only in certain contexts.

The English translator may choose a compensatory strategy to keep as much of the semantic information of the Norwegian verb as possible. One way is to have an *-ing* form after the NP, which is allowed by the English system. The *-ing* form is then often the translational equivalent of the Norwegian verb. Below are two examples:

- (14) - *Nina sier det sitter en mann i treet.* (THA1.58.s23)  
 "Nina says there is a man sitting in the tree." (THA1T.58.s23)  
 Lit.: Nina says there sits a man in the tree
- (15) *"Så har da heller ingen visst at det har hengt et mesterverk av en altertavle i kirken i mange hundre år."* (JW1.1.2.s216)  
 "So no one knew either that there had been a masterpiece hanging above the altar in the church for hundreds of years." (JW1T.1.2.s213)  
 Lit.: ... that there has hung a masterpiece of an altarpiece in the church for several hundred years

Another way to include the semantic information of the Norwegian lexical verb is to introduce a complex postverbal NP where the first part corresponds to the meaning of the original verb as in 16.

- (16) *I rekkehusene nedenfor kryr det av dagammaer, unger og eldre, et evig tog til og fra supermarkedet.* (KF1.1.7.s32)  
 In the row houses down below there's a swarm of baby-sitters, kids and older people, an eternal procession to and from the supermarket. (KF1T.1.7.s36)  
 Lit.: In the row houses down below there swarm with baby-sitters, kids, and old people ...

To summarize thus far, we have seen that 27.6% (185 instances) of the Norwegian *det*-presentatives with lexical verbs have been translated into English *there*-constructions. Nearly all of these have some type of *there be*-construction which in many cases leads to despecification compared to the Norwegian original. The despecification is not obligatory, as we hypothesized, since English has ways of compensating by including additional information in the postverbal part of the construction.

We shall now have a look at what happens in the majority of cases (72%), namely where the Norwegian *det*-construction is not translated by an English *there*-construction.

If the original *det*-construction has a semantically richer verb, most translators seem to prefer to move the postverbal noun phrase into subject position and translate the verb with the closest English equivalent. Since the postverbal NP of the original is mostly indefinite, so is the subject of the English translation. In some cases, however, it can be made definite, which makes it less marked from an informational point of view. This option of moving the grammatical object in the Norwegian original to subject position in the English translation is chosen in about half the cases. If the original has an adverbial of place in initial position, locative inversion is sometimes preferred. The next three examples illustrate the three options (indefinite subject, definite subject, and locative inversion).

- (17) *Plutselig kom det et rop fra huset.* (THA1.17.s21)  
Suddenly a shout came from the house. (THA1T.17.s22)  
Lit.: Suddenly there came a shout from the house
- (18) *Han tidde først, men så kom det et svar.* (THA1.74.s27)  
He paused at first, but then the answer came. (THA1T.74.s27)  
Tran.: He kept quiet at first, but then there came an answer
- (19) *Og i pakken lå det et kort med en hilsen fra kardinalen.* (JW1.1.1.s222)  
And inside was a card bearing greetings from the Cardinal. (JW1T.1.1.s218)  
Lit.: And in the package there lay a card with a greeting from the Cardinal

In quite a number of cases, approx. 20%, the original grammatical object is kept in postverbal position, either as an object or as a subject complement. This requires the introduction of a subject. The subject can be empty *it*, referential *it*, or some other pronoun, or a full noun phrase referring to a thing or person(s) from the context. Often a change of verb is necessary to make the new structure acceptable, as in example 22.

- (20) *Forsøk å få jevnt med maling på mønsteret, ellers blir det bare søl.* (BV1.1.s270)  
"Try to spread the paint evenly over the pattern, or it'll just be a mess."  
(BV1T.1.s266)  
Lit.: Try to get even with paint on the pattern, or else there becomes only mess
- (21) *Det mangler bare geitfjøs og løe før anlegget er komplett.* (AOH1.5.1.7.s3)  
The farm lacks only a goatshed and a barn. (AOH1T.5.1.7.s3)  
Lit.: There lack only goatshed and barn before the place is complete
- (22) *Ut fra alt hun hørte vokste det frem en slags vemmelig erkjennelse at mamma også var en del av den.* (HW1.6.s46)  
From everything she heard, she had a sickening feeling that Mama was also a part of it. (HW1T.6.s46)  
Lit.: Out from everything she heard there grew forth a kind of sickening realisation that mama too was a part of it

In the remaining cases, the translator has either used various constructions involving verbs needing other kinds of complementation, or has made more substantial changes.

Before we look at the remaining instances of Norwegian *det*-constructions with lexical verbs, the ones in the passive voice, we may conclude that Norwegian *det*-presentatives involving lexical verbs cause problems for English translators. One way of dealing with them is to choose a construction without existential *there* as a dummy subject.

Since an equivalent construction is not available, translators often choose a construction involving despecification.

On the basis of our quantitative information, we can set up an equivalence hierarchy, similar to the one for English *there be*-constructions, that shows the closest English equivalents of Norwegian *det*-constructions with lexical verbs in the active voice.

- A constructions with preverbal NPs (subjects);
- B *there*-constructions with *be* as the main verb;
- C constructions with postverbal NPs (objects and subject complements);
- D locative inversion;
- E *there*-constructions with *be* and a postnominal *-ing* form;
- F other constructions.

The two most frequent construction types (A and B), which account for approximately 64% of the cases (disregarding verbs in the passive), involve some kind of despecification. Again, we may conclude that our hypothesis regarding obligatory despecification is not complete, but if one chooses to translate *det*-constructions with lexical verbs by structures which are close in form to the original, despecification seems to be unavoidable.

### 7.3. Translation of Norwegian Passive Presentatives

Our hypothesis about the translation of Norwegian *det*-passives was that there would be obligatory despecification since English must either front the grammatical object (the postverbal NP) of the original and make it the subject of the clause, or have a clause with an active verb and thus lose the semantic feature of passivisation. The first kind of despecification can be said to be pragmatic and is part of the textual meaning of language; the second is a semantic despecification, and is part of the ideational meaning of language. Before we go on to look at the figures, I should point out that 77% of the instances come from the non-fiction part of the material which says something about the use of the construction.

In more than half of the translations (59%), all or part of the postverbal NP of the original has been moved to subject position, as in example 23.

- (23) *I 1959 ble det oppdaget gass i Holland, og oljeselskapene begynte ivrig å utforske andre deler av Nordsjøen.* (ABJH1.2.13.s3)  
 In 1962 [*sic.*] gas was discovered in Holland and oil companies began to look with interest at other areas of the North Sea. (ABJH1T.2.13.s3)  
 Lit.: In 1959 there was discovered gas in Holland ...

In 27% of the cases, the original postverbal NP is kept in postverbal position also in the translations. In these cases, some kind of subject (dummy or full noun phrase) has been introduced. See example 24.

- (24) *Det ble funnet noe som kunne ha vært en brist i konstruksjonen, og gassen som eventuelt ville ha lekket ut, var i aller høyeste grad eksplosiv.* (GS1.4.s301)  
 They found something that *could* have been a construction defect and the gas that would have leaked out as a result was highly inflammable. (GS1T.4.s293)  
 Lit.: There was found something that *could* have been a defect in the construction ...

There are also a few instances of locative inversion. In all but a few of the latter two cases, the verb is in the active voice. The remaining 14% is made up of various other constructions, and instances where there is no translation of the construction in question at all.

Even though most postverbal NPs in the originals have been moved to subject position in the translations, everything is done to try to keep as much of the new information as possible in postverbal position in the translations as well. That is why we often have a split subject in the English translation. In the translation of example 25, the complex noun phrase *attempts to increase influence in other border areas* is split so that most of it comes after the verb. In the Norwegian original this is achieved by using the dummy subject.

- (25) *Det ble gjort forsøk på å styrke innflytelsen i andre grenseområder.* (GL1.2.3.2.s26)  
 Attempts were made to increase influence in other border areas. (GL1T.2.3.2.s24)  
 Lit.: There were made attempts to increase the influence in other border areas

The reluctance of English to have passive verbs in *there*-constructions inevitably leads to either a change of verb form or a non-*there*-construction. There is strong pressure to keep the passive verb form since it is either put there for a specific purpose, as a marked structure, or the passive is one of the hallmarks of exactly this particular text type. In the cases where a *there*-construction or locative inversion is a possible alternative, the original verb adds very little to the meaning of whole proposition. One such verb is *holde* ("hold"). Further evidence of this comes from the fact that English accepts *hold* in postnominal position in original *there*-constructions, e.g. *there was a demonstration held last night*. Norwegian passive presentatives with *holde* ("hold") are repeatedly translated by an English *there*-construction in the material. One example is 26.

- (26) *Den kvelden ble det holdt en stor fest med bål og ringdans.* (SH1.1.8.s165)  
 That night there was a great festival with fires and circle dancing. (SH1T.1.8.s164)  
 Lit.: That night there was held a great party with fires and circle dancing

Table 4 summarises in some detail the translation of Norwegian *det*-constructions where the verb is in the passive.

fronted NP	79
partly fronted NP	59
	138 (59%)
locative inversion	7
dummy subjects ( <i>there/it</i> )	19
subjects <i>they/you</i>	11
other subjects	27
	64 (27%)
other constructions	33 (14%)
Total	235 (100%)

**Table 4**  
 Translation of Norwegian *det*-passive constructions

Of the three construction types discussed, the translation of *det*-constructions with verbs in the passive comes closest to being predicted by our hypothesis. The reluctance to allow verbs in the passive in English *there*-constructions coupled with the rich semantic content of transitive verbs leaves the translator little choice.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In light of the evidence from the corpus material, our initial hypotheses about optional and obligatory (de)specification in relation to the translation of presentative constructions between English and Norwegian have been partly confirmed. English *there-be*-constructions can be translated into Norwegian *det*-constructions with lexical verbs, which leads to specification. When translating Norwegian *det*-constructions with lexical verbs into English, despecification is often the result since the parallel English construction is rare and stylistically marked. The English translation of Norwegian passive presentatives very often leads to despecification.

The study also showed that only prototypical *there-/det*-constructions, i.e. the *there be*-construction and the *det være*-construction, can be said to be equivalent, but even these were not always translated by one another. The reasons for choosing a different construction in the translations are varied, and a more thorough study incorporating more context is needed.

The investigation of the translation of *there*- and *det*-constructions has demonstrated the usefulness of a translation corpus in contrastive analysis. Without the support of authentic translations in context, the concept of translation equivalence as a contrastive methodology is only tentative and lacking in content.

### Notes

1. The term "ideational" is replaced by "experiential" in more recent books on Systemic Functional Grammar.
2. The translation reads "There was a man in the boat" (lit.: There was a man in boat—the).
3. Norwegian can have both *det* ("it/that") and *der* ("there") as a dummy subject. *Der* is used by a minority of Norwegian speakers and occurs in only a few of the corpus texts.
4. To mention but a few corpora: The Chemnitz English—German/German—English Translation/Parallel Corpus (Schmied and Schäffler 1996), the English Comparable Corpus (Laviosa—Braithwaite, forthcoming), the English—Swedish Parallel Corpus (Aijmer, Altenberg, and Johansson 1996), and the German—Norwegian Parallel Corpus (Fabricius-Hansen 1994).
5. A more detailed description of the structure of the corpus can be found in Johansson and Ebeling (1996).
6. Deviance in translated text induced by the source language. See section 6.
7. I disregard here gerundive constructions like *There is no telling what she will do*.
8. Other Norwegian verbs with the meaning of "being in existence" are: *befinne seg* ("find oneself"), *forekomme*, *foreligge*, *eksistere* ("exist"), *herske*, *råde*.
9. It may be that English *there's* is becoming more and more like the presentative constructions of the other languages mentioned here in having no concord of verb and postverbal NP, and the formal subject *there* and the present tense form of *be* are becoming "fused into a single presentative formula" (Breivik 1990: 151).
10. For the purpose of this article, lexical verbs refer to verbs that can be said to be semantically richer than *be*, *være*, or other Norwegian verbs denoting existence only. Lexical verbs incorporate an additional semantic component besides "being in existence", e.g. inception, stance, directed motion.
11. Ideally, one would like to compare the figures of the Norwegian original texts with figures calculated from an equivalent amount of translated Norwegian text. This has not been feasible within the scope of the current study.

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## APPENDIX I

### English texts

#### *Fiction*

AB1	Brookner, Anita: Latecomers
ABR1	Brink, André: The Wall of the Plague
AT1	Tyler, Anne: The Accidental Tourist
BC1	Chatwin, Bruce: Utz
BO1	Okri, Ben: The Famished Road
DF1	Francis, Dick: Straight
DL1	Lessing, Doris: The Fifth Child
DL2	Lessing, Doris: The Good Terrorist
FW1	Weldon, Fay: The Heart of the Country
GN1	Naylor, Gloria: The Women of Brewster Place
JB1	Barnes, Julian: Talking It Over
JC1	Crace, Jim: Arcadia
JH1	Heller, Joseph: Picture This
JSM1	Smiley, Jane: A Thousand Acres
MA1	Atwood, Margaret: Cat's Eye
MD1	Drabble, Margaret: The Middle Ground
MM1	Magorian, Michelle: Goodnight Mister Tom
NG1	Gordimer, Nadine: My Son's Story
PDJ3	James, P.D.: Devices and Desires
RD1	Dahl, Roald: Matilda
RDO1	Doyle, Roddy: Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha
RR1	Rendell, Ruth: Kissing the Gunner's Daughter

SG1	Grafton, Sue: "D" is for Deadbeat
SK1	King, Stephen: Cujo
ST1	Townsend, Sue: The Queen and I
TH1	Hayden, Torey: The Sunflower Forest

*Non-fiction*

AEEA1	European Union: Agreement on the European Economic Area
DM1	Morris, Desmond: Animalwatching
EEA1	European Council: Council Directive 86/378/EEC
EEA2	European Council: Council Directive 89/391/EEC
EEA3	European Council: Council Directive 93/104/EC
HB1	Bloom, Harold: Ruin the Sacred Truths
KAR1	Armstrong, Karen: A History of God: from Abraham to the present: the 4000-year Quest of God
LT1	Timberlake, Lloyd: Only One Earth: Living for the Future
MAAS1	European Union: The Maastricht Treaty
MAW1	Walker, Martin: The Waking Giant
OS1	Sacks, Oliver: The Man who Mistook His Wife for a Hat
PM1	Mayle, Peter: A Year in Provence
RF1	Ferguson, Robert: Henry Miller - A Life
SJG1	Gould, Stephen Jay: Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes

**Norwegian texts***Fiction*

BV1	Vik, Bjørg: En håndfull lengsel (Out of Season and Other Stories)
BV2	Vik, Bjørg: Kvinneakvariet (An Aquarium of Women)
CL1	Løveid, Cecilie: Sug (Sea Swell)
EG1	Griffiths, Ella: Mord på side 3 (Murder on Page Three)
EG2	Griffiths, Ella: Vannenken (The Water Widow)
EH1	Hoem, Edvard: Kjærleikens ferjereiser (The Ferry Crossing)
EHA1	Haslund, Ebba: Det hendte ingenting (Nothing Happened)
FC1	Carling, Finn: Under aftenhimmelen (Under the Evening Sky)
GS1	Staalesen, Gunnar: I mørket er alle ulver grå (At Night All Wolves Are Grey)
HW1	Wassmo, Herbjørg: Huset med den blinde glassveranda (The House with the Blind Glass Windows)
JW1	Wiese, Jan: Kvinnen som kledte seg naken for sin elskede (The Naked Madonna)
JG1	Gaarder, Jostein: Sofies verden - Roman om filosofiens historie (Sophie's World)
KA1	Askildsen, Kjell: En plutselig frigjørende tanke (A Sudden Liberating Thought)
KF1	Faldbakken, Knut: Adams dagbok (Adam's Diary)
KF2	Faldbakken, Knut: Insektsommer (Insect Summer)
KFL1	Fløgstad, Kjartan: Dalen Portland (Dollar Road)
KH1	Holt, Kåre: Kappløpet (The Race)
LSC1	Christensen, Lars Saabye: Herman (Herman)
LSC2	Christensen, Lars Saabye: Jokeren (The Joker)
MN1	Newth, Mette: Bortførelsen (The Abduction)
OEL1	Lønn, Øystein: Tom Rebers siste retrett (Tom Reber's Last Retreat)
SH1	Holmås, Stig: Tordensønnen (Son-of-Thunder)
SL1	Lie, Sissel: Løvens hjerte (Lion's Heart)
TB1	Brekke, Toril: Jakarandabloomsten (The Jacaranda Flower)
THA1	Haugen, Tormod: Zeppelin (Zeppelin)
TTH1	Hauger, Torill Thorstad: Røvet av vikinger (Captured by the Vikings)

*Non-fiction*

ABJH1	Bryne, Arvid and Joan Henriksen: Norge fra innsiden (Norway behind the Scenery)
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AOH1	Hauglid, Anders Ole: Maihaugen - De Sandvigske Samlinger (Maihaugen - The Sandvig Collections Guide)
BAA1	Aarseth, Bjørn: Samene igår og idag (The Sami - Past and Present)
GL1	Lundestad, Geir: Øst, vest, nord, sør - Hovedlinjer i internasjonal politikk 1945-1990 (East, West, North, South - Major Developments in International Politics 1945-1990)
JIH1	Haugen, Jan Ivar (ed.): Norges historie - Fra istid til oljealder (History of Norway)
JS1	Sandnes, Jørn (ed.): Trondheim - Olavs by i tusen år (Trondheim - One Thousand Years in the City of St. Olav)
KL1	Kommunaldepartementet: Kommuneloven (Act Concerning Municipalities and County Municipalities (Local Government Act))
KP1	Prytz, Kåre: Vestover før Columbus (Westward before Columbus)
KT1	Thorsen, Kjell: Christian Radich - Det store Amerikatoktet (Christian Radich. The Adventure of Oslo's Square Rigger)
NFRA1	Norges forskningsråd: Årsmelding 1993 (Annual report 1993)
PEJ1	Johnson, Pål Espolin: Alt for Norge (For Love of Norway)
SI1	Statens informasjonstjeneste: Småbarnsforeldres rettigheter (The rights of parents of small children)
TG1	Greipsland, Torbjørn (ed.): Kongen på kirkevei (Olav V: A King and His Church)