ANY IN THE THERE-CONSTRUCTION

KUNITOSHI TAKAHASHI
Yokohama National University

Ota (1980: 325) claims that the usage of any can be accounted for if we interpret it, following Vendler 1967, as meaning 'arbitrary,' and furthermore, he claims, presenting 1 as proof, that any in an existential sentence has the sense ‘arbitrary.’

(1) There may be any number of people who would be willing to do the job.

The purpose of this note is to show that 1 does not count as relevant evidence for his second claim.

As demonstrated by Milsark 1977, a group of quantifiers he calls expressions of quantification, but not the other group of quantifiers, i.e. expressions of cardinality, are banned in focus positions of existential sentences, as seen in the following:

(2) *There is the wolf at the door.
(3) *There was everyone in the room.
(4) *There were all viewpoints considered.
(5) *There is anything John would do for you.
(6) There is a wolf at the door.
(7) There are some [sm] people in the bedroom.
(8) There are unicorns in every wood.

Let us refer to the constraint in question as the Cardinality Constraint (CC).

Now, the question is why 1 is grammatical in contrast to the ungrammaticality of 5 in spite of the fact that any appears in both of them. A characteristic of any in 1 is that it carries heavy stress on it. This usage of any is licensed, for instance, by such modals as may, would, etc. (cf. Klima 1964), and is often called free-choice any (cf. Carlson 1981). Hence, if may is ommitted from 1, the result becomes ungrammatical.

(9) *There are any number of people who would be willing to do the job.

However, 5 would not improve at all even such a modal as may is used.
(10) *There may be anything John would do for you. Thus, the existence or nonexistence of a modal does not explain the difference in grammaticality between 1 and 5.

Now, let us pay attention to the structural/positional difference of 1 and 5. We assume, for the sake of exposition, that the English existential construction has the basic structure shown in 11 (cf. Williams 1984):

(11) There Aux [QP NP]NP

where QP+NP is the focus NP. In 1, any modifies the head of QP, number, but not the head of the focus NP, people, while in 5, it modifies the head of the focus NP, thing. It follows from these facts that the CC is in fact a constraint on the QP immediately modifying the head of the focus NP, i.e. the QP of 11. This proviso to the CC, of course, is not peculiar to any. Thus, compare 1 and 5/11 with the following, where certain, specific in reference, is the relevant quantifier:

(12) There are a certain number of people in the hall.
(13) *There are certain people in the hall.

In conclusion, the grammatical existence of any in 1 is not subject to the CC and should not be used to support Ota's claim that the there-construction tolerates the 'arbitrary' sense of any.

REFERENCES

Milsark, Gary L. 1977. Toward an explanation of certain peculiarities of the existential construction in English.