

Workshop proposal for SLE 2023

Locative and existential predication - Core and periphery

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Locative and existential predications and their interaction have been studied for a long time from many perspectives using various approaches, including formal semantics, generative syntax, typology and functional grammar (Lyons 1967, Clark 1978, Freeze 1992, Koch 2012, Haspelmath 2022 among others). Here, we consider locative and existential predication as structures expressing the temporary presence/absence of a given referent (henceforth: figure) at a certain location (henceforth: ground). Thus, we do not focus on constructions such as English *there are many unhappy people*, but rather on locative and locational-existential clauses which contain a ground element such as English *the book is on the table* vs *there is a book on the table*. Following i.a. Creissels (2019), we assume locative predications being perspectivized starting from the figure, whereas existential predications are perspectivized starting from the ground. As a corollary, the figure is often definite and topical in locative predication, but indefinite and focal in existential predication (see e.g. Milsark 1974, Freeze 1992, Bentley et al. 2015).

Many works on locative and existential predication concentrate on constructions, which include a copula (1) or an existential item (2) as the linking element.

- (1) *Mat taw e-a-k.*
I here **be-AOR-1SG**
'I am here.'
(Central Selkup (< Uralic); Budzisch 2017: 52)
- (2) *Onno emiē kī:l-lar ba:l-lar.*
there again wild.reindeer-PL **EX-3PL**
'There are again wild reindeer.'
(Dolgan (< Turkic); Däbritz 2022: 366)

Still, many languages exhibit various less-studied and less-described means to express locative and existential predications. Ameka & Levinson (2007) account for locational and posture verbs playing a crucial role in locative predication. As a case in point, Northern Khanty (< Uralic) shows posture verbs in both existential (3a) and locative (3b) predication.

- (3a) *̄w šuŋ-ən šēl woj-i pūška ̄məs-ḷ.*
door corner-LOC pure fat-PROPR barrel **sit-PRS.3SG**
'In the corner [next to] the door, there **is ~ stands** a barrel with pure fat.'
(Northern Khanty (< Uralic); Steinitz 1975: 116, own glossing)

- (3b) *janɣ-əm* *χ̣əp-em* *tata* *ši* *̄məs-ɫ*.
 go-PTCP.PST boat-POSS.1SG here so **sit-PRS.3SG**
 ‘The boat, with which I went, **is** ~ **lies** here so.’
 (Northern Khanty (< Uralic); Steinitz 1975: 107, own glossing)

Additionally, Basile (2021, 2022) accounts for situative constructions in European languages. Situatives are a class of locational verbs that, despite their complex semantics, have the mere function of situating a figure in a ground. In most European languages, situative constructions are characterized by the verb ‘to find’, usually marked by a reflexive or passive strategy (4). In Finnic, situative constructions are also characterized by a partitive-marked figure (5) and in some Uralic languages by an accusative-marked one (6). As can be seen, situative constructions can express both locative (4) and locational-existential (5) predications; additionally, generic existence can be expressed with them (6).

- (4) *Il* *ristorante* *si* *trov-a* *sulla spiaggia*
 the restaurant REFL **find-3SG** on.the beach
 ‘The restaurant is (lit. finds itself/can be found) on the beach.’
 (Italian (< Indo-European); Basile 2022)

- (5) *Ero-j-a-kin* *toki* *löyt-y-y*
 difference-PL-PTV-ENCL certainly **find-REFL-3SG**
 ‘There are certainly also differences.’
 (Finnish (< Uralic); Basile & Ivaska 2021)

- (6) *takšym* *tu-št-at* *jön-ym* *mu-mo*
 generally there-INE-ENCL method-ACC **find-PTCP.PASS**
 ‘Generally, there is always a way.’
 (Meadow Mari (< Uralic); Volga-Kama Corpora)

When comparing (1) and (2) on the one hand to (3) to (6) on the other hand, it sparks the eye that all constructions seem to cover a similar domain, namely locating a figure element in a ground element. Formally, however, they diverge to a noticeable extent, especially when taking into account the posture verbs in (3) and the situatives in (4) to (6). The role of posture verbs in locative predication has been discussed to some extent by Ameka & Levinson (2007), making up a typology of locative predication based on the amount of locational and posture verbs used in one language. Nevertheless, it is often hard to decide whether a posture verb in a relevant sentence must be analyzed as a full semantic verb or as a (semi-)copula, as amply described by Hengeveld (1992: Ch. 7). The same holds for situative verbs: The Finnish example (5) can even well be formed with a form of the copula verb *olla* ‘to be’ so that the question arises which function the usage of the situative verb *löytyä* ‘to be found’ indeed has. One possible explanation is that situatives account for a certain degree of expectedness and anaphoricity. In essence, situative constructions are highly dependent on pragmatics and the discourse context, in that they tend to connect to previously mentioned arguments or to answer questions the interlocutor is expected to ask (e.g. *where can one find X?* - *X can be found...*). This would explain the mental process encoded in the lexical semantics of situative predicates, and is especially interesting from a cognitive point of view.

The aim of this workshop is to target the question whether constructions like those shown in (3) to (6) are indeed instances of locative and existential predication. In this context, we aim at establishing criteria to answer this question, whereby both formal-morphosyntactic and functional-semantic criteria shall be taken into account. Furthermore, the role of the semantics of the figure element shall be targeted: Do the Northern Khanty examples in (3) also work with animate figures, such as a cat and a mouse, and does the formal shape of the figure element also play a role, e.g. when replacing the barrel in (3a) by a knife? Finally, it shall be discussed to what extent the named criteria and restrictions are language-specific, or whether cross-linguistic criteria and restrictions can be established.

To account for these questions, we invite contributions dealing with various aspects of non-prototypical instances of locative and existential predication, i.e. morphosyntax, semantics and pragmatics. We favor functional and typological approaches over formal and derivational accounts, but may recognize the latter as well, if they clearly target the above-mentioned questions. Finally, we aim at a cross-linguistic perspective so that contributions targeting single languages should also connect their results to a wider background.

As can be seen in the list below the references, the provisional abstracts submitted cover various languages from very different regions of the world (Central and South America, Australia, Northern Eurasia, Mediterranean Sea), as well as creole languages. Besides that, they cover a wide range of aspects important for the topic, such as the role of posture verbs in existential and locative predication, transitive habeo-verbs and the discrimination of existential against possessive readings. Including one rather theoretically oriented contribution, all abstracts promise a vivid discussion with input from many different perspectives.

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