

Nonverbal existential sentences in Udmurt

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*New results in the syntax of Uralic
languages*

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Aims

- A less studied clause type of Udmurt: existential (?) and predicative possessive sentences without an existential verb:
 - What factors condition the appearance vs. omission of the ex. verb?
(→ hypothesis: information structure plays a role)
 - Are the conditions similar to the ones that operate in Russian?
- Pilot study

Outline of the talk

1. Existential and predicative possessive sentences in Udmurt
2. Existential and predicative possessive sentences in Russian
3. Testing existential clauses in Udmurt (existential presupposition of S, contrastivity, exhaustivity)
4. Results
5. Conclusions

Existential clauses in Udmurt: canonical expression

(**Loc/Temp** +) **S** + **ex.** **V**:

(1) *Ta gurt-yn odig motor nyl vań.*
this village-INE one nice girl EX.PRS

‘There is a nice girl in this village.’

(Csúcs 1990: 63)

Existential clauses in Udmurt: word order variation

(**Loc/Temp** +) **ex. V + S** :

(2) *Tolon* *val* *pumiškon.*

yesterday EX.PST meeting

'Yesterday there was a meeting.'

(udmurto4ka.blogspot.ru)

→ both word order variants may be neutral in contemporary Udmurt (Asztalos 2018)

Predicative possessive sentences:
canonical expression

(**GEN** +) **S-Px** + **ex. V**:

(3) *Tynad pinal-jos-yd vań.*

2SG.GEN child-PL-2SG EX.PRS

‘You have children.’ (Csúcs 1990: 73)

Verbless existential and predicative poss. sentences

(4) *Komnata-yn kyšnomurt.*

room-INE woman

'There is a woman in the room.'

(Winkler 2011)

(5) *Mil'am tunne šutetskon nunal.*

1PL.GEN today rest day

'We have a day off today.' (Winkler 2011)

Background

- Winkler (2011): existential clauses may be verbless
- Edygarova (2010): verbless pred. poss. sentences:
 - when S (possessee) = abstract entity, e.g., a disease (6)
 - when S has a focussed modifier

(6) *Tuberkuloʻoz* *so-len.*

tuberculosis 3SG-GEN

'S/he has tuberculosis.' (Edygarova 2010: 237)

Russian: existential sentences

(7) a. *V* *holodil'nike* *jest'* *pivo*.

in refrigerator-PP EX.PRS beer

'There is beer in the refrigerator.'

b. *V* *holodil'nike* *pivo*.

in refrigerator-PP beer

'In the refrigerator there is beer.'

(Partee & Borshev 2009)

Russian: predicative possessive sentences

(8) a. *U* *ńego* *jest* *intéresnyje* *kńigi*.

ADE 3SG.GEN EX.PRS interesting book.PL

'He has interesting books (and non-interesting ones, as well.) ('Vannak érdekes könyvei.')

b. *U* *ńego* *intéresnyje* *kńigi*.

ADE 3SG.GEN interesting book.PL

'He has interesting books.' ('Érdekes könyvei vannak.')

(Seliverstova 1973)

The alternation in Russian

sentences with <i>jest'</i>	null verb
no existential presupposition of S	existential presupposition of the subject (S)
V focus (sufficient, but not necessary)	if S has a modifier (Adj/Num) → it is focussed
non-exhaustive S (the S whose existence is asserted belongs to a plurality of other existing S-s)	no information provided about the exhaustivity of S
S cannot be contrasted	S can be contrasted
„presence/possession in general”	„actual presence/possession”

(On the basis of Seliverstova 1973, 1990; Shatunovskiy 2000; Yanko 2000; Partee & Borschev 2008)

Testing existential clauses in Udmurt

- questionnaire filled in by 2 native speakers
- configurations:
 - a) Loc (Num)S V
 - b) Loc V (Num)S
 - c) Loc (Num)S
- pred. poss. sentences tested only marginally

Tested parameters

1. Is there an existential **presupposition** of S in any of the configurations?
2. Is S associated with **contrast** in any of the configurations?
3. Is S necessarily **exhaustive** in LocS? Is S non-exhaustive in LocSV and/or LocVS?

Results

Existential presupposition on S

→ all of the tested variants are grammatical:

Context: 'What is in your bag?' (**presupposition:** There is something in your bag.)

(9) a. *Sumka-jam kníga-os.*

bag-INE.1SG book-PL

b. *Sumka-jam kníga-os vań / vań kníga-os.*

bag-INE.1SG book-PL EX.PRS EX.PRS book-PL

'There are books in my bag.'

Existential presupposition on S

'How many people are there at your place?'

(**presupposition:** There are people at your place.)

(10) a. *Mi doryn vit' ad'ami.*

1PL at five person

b. *Mi doryn vit' ad'ami vań / vań vit' ad'ami.*

1PL at five person EX.PRS EX.PRS five person

'There are five people at our place.'

No existential presupposition

→ verbless ex. clauses are ungrammatical:

Someone is introducing himself by telling a few sentences about himself.

(11) a. ****Mynam – puny-je.***

1SG.GEN dog-1SG

b. ***Mynam puny-je vań / vań puny-je.***

1SG.GEN dog-1SG EX.PRS EX.PRS dog-1SG

'I have a dog.'

Contrastivity

- Non-contrastive contexts so far
- Contrastive context (with existential presupposition): sentences with the ex. V + verbless sentences are both grammatical:

One supposed there is only one beer left in the fridge, but s/he discovers there are two of them.

(12) a. ***Holod'il'nik-yn kyk sur.***

refrigerator-INE two beer

b. ***Holod'il'nik-yn kyk sur vań / vań kyk sur.***

refrigerator-INE two beer EX.PRS EX.PRS two beer

'There are two beers in the refrigerator.'

Exhaustivity

- Non-exhaustive context: verbless sentences are ungrammatical:

There are some pieces of furniture in the room, among which a table.

(12) a. ****Komnatayn džök.***

room-INE table

'There is a table in the room.' ('A table is in the room.')

b. ***Komnatayn džök (no) vań / vań džök (no).***

room-INE table also EX.PRS EX.PRS table also

'There is (also) a table in the room.'

Verb focus

- Not surprisingly, only variants with the ex. V are grammatical:

'Do you have wifi here?' (lit. 'Is there wifi here?')

(13) a. ****O-o, tatyn wifi.***

yes here wifi

b. ***O-o, tatyn wifi vań / vań wifi.***

yes here wifi EX.PRS EX.PRS wifi

'Yes, there IS wifi here.'

Conclusions

- sentences with the ex. V: wider distribution – grammatical in all tested contexts → default variant
 - unlike in Russian, they can also appear with a focussed/contrasted S
- null verb constructions are ungrammatical if
 - the existence of S is not presupposed
 - non-exhaustive contexts
 - the verb is focussed→ associated with **existential presupposition + exhaustivity of S or the modifier of S** → S or its modifier is presumably focussed

Left for future research...

- judgements from more native speakers
- comparing the semantics of Udmurt verbless existential clauses with that of Hungarian locational sentences (cf. Hegedűs 2013) of the type “*Egér van a szobában*” ‘A mouse is in the room’
- categorization: existential clauses? or other (locative? presentational?) sentence type?
- syntactic analysis - what is the predicate in verbless ex. sentences?

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