Non-prototypical locational constructions and partitivity in Finnic

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Locational predication can be defined as a spatial relation between a *Figure* and a *Ground*, where the Figure is located in the Ground or is in motion towards or from it (Creissels 2009). In European languages (Standard Average European sprachbund - Haspelmath 1998, 2008), this relation is prototypically defined on an information structural principle: i.e., the Figure is given and in thematic position, while the Ground is the new piece of information, in rhematic position. This translates, in many languages, as a simple change of word order (Creissels 2019). In Russian, for example, swapping the position of Figure and Ground gives an existential reading to the sentence:

(1) Russian (East Slavic) – [Partee & Borschev 2008: 147 – adapted]

a. *Доктор был в городе*

*Doktor byl v gorode*

doctor.nom.m.sg was.m.sg in town

‘The doctor was in town.’

b. *В городе был доктор*

*V gorode byl doktor*

in town was.m.sg doctor.nom.m.sg

‘There was a doctor in town.’

The definition of existential construction is not, however, as clear or easy in most languages, where it cannot be reduced to a simple matter of word order. Namely, in Romance or Scandinavian languages the line between existential and presentational constructions (Gast & Haas 2011) is thin:

(2) Italian (Romance) – pers.knowl. [see also Creissels 2014]

*C’-è Gianni che ti vuole parlare*

**there**-is G. that 2sg.dat want.3sg talk

‘(\*There is) Gianni (who) wants to talk to you.’

(3) Swedish (East Scandinavian) – [Åbo Underrättelser 2012]

*Det finn-s**stor-a förväntning-ar på nanomedicin*

**expl find-mpas** big-pl expectation-pl on nanomedicine

‘There are high expectations on nanomedicine.’

In (3) the verb used is a morphologically derived mediopassive/deponent form of *finna* ‘to find’. This locational strategy involves a morphologically marked predicate which, despite its complex semantics, has a function similar to that of the copula: it indicates the plain existence or location of something somewhere. In most of the other European languages, this strategy is widespread, but does not coincide with existential constructions, which usually allows copulas only. While the word order of prototypical locational predication may be preserved, this strategy is, however, non-prototypical from the point of view of meaning and of verbal morphology:

(4) Campidanese Sardinian (Romance) – [elicited, pers.doc.]

*Su pisci si agattara in s’-acqua*

the fish **refl.3sg find.3sg** in the-water

‘The fish is in the water.’

(5) Albanian – [elicited, pers.doc.]

*Italia gje-nd-et në Mesdhe*

Italy **find-refl-3sg** in Mediterranean.acc

‘Italy is situated in the Mediterranean.’

In Finnic, the same strategy can be implied in existential constructions (Hakanen 1972), because of the advantage given by the grammaticalized partitive case. It alternates with the nominative to constitute an *e-NP* (‘existential NP’, see Huumo & Helasvuo 2015, Helasvuo 1996):

(6) Estonian (Finnic) – [etTenTen – Web 2019]

*Mets-a all leid-u-b kukeseen-i ja*

forest-gen under **find-refl-3sg** chanterelle**-ptv**.pl and

*metsamaasik-aid*

wild.strawberry-**ptv**.pl

‘There are chanterelles and wild strawberries on the forest floor.’

(7) Finnish (Finnic) – (Basile & Ivaska, forthcoming)

*Ero-j-a-kin toki löyt-y-y*

difference-pl-**ptv**-encl certainly **find-refl-3sg**

‘There are certainly differences, too.’

The Finnic overlapping of existential constructions and the above-described non-prototypical locational constructions corroborates the idea according to which the latter express, on a clause-semantic level, the same meaning as the copula ‘to be’ in prototypical locational constructions.

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