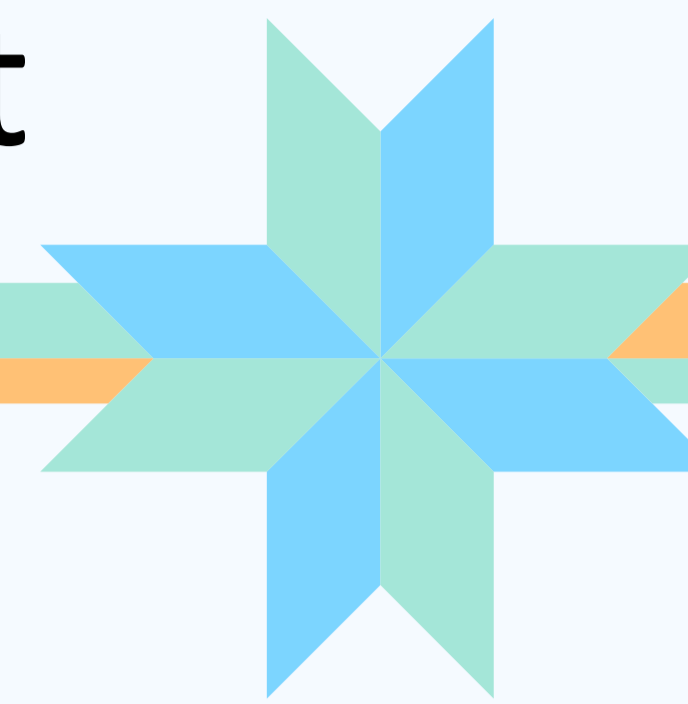


Nonverbal existential sentences in Udmurt

A preliminary study

Asztalos Erika

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest



1. Research questions

- What factors condition the appearance/omission of the existential verb in existential sentences in Udmurt?
(→ hypothesis: information structure plays a role)
- Are these conditions similar to the ones that operate in Russian?

2. The Udmurt language

- Uralic language family, Permic subgroup
- spoken mainly in Russia, by cca. 340 000 speakers (2010 census)
- mostly bilingual (Udmurt-Russian) speakers → strong Russian influence

3. The problem

- nominal sentences without any overt verbal element in Udmurt:
 - in non-negative, PresInd clauses
 - when the predicate = Pron/Nom/Adj/Num/PTCP/Adv (Csúcs 1990: 62; Winkler 2001: 65-66) (≈ predicational, specificational, equative, locative sentences):

(1) *so dyšetiš.*
3sg teacher
'He/She is a teacher.' (Csúcs 1990: 62)

in Neg and non-PresInd sentences → copula (= existential V):

(2) *so dyšetiš val.*
3sg teacher ex.pst
'He/She was a teacher.'

- existential sentences (including predicative possessive ones as a subtype): usually claimed to contain the existential verb (ex. V) independently of polarity, tense, and mood → also in Non-Neg PresInd(ref):

(3) *ta gurt-yn odig motor nyl vañ.*
this village-ine one nice girl ex.prs
'There is a nice girl in this village.' (Csúcs 1990: 63)

(4) *tynad pinal-jos-yd vañ.*
2sg.gen child-pl-2sg ex.prs
'You have children.' (Csúcs 1990: 73)

relative order of S and ex. V: SV (3-4) or VS (5)

(alternation conditioned by information structural factors (Edygarova 2010), and by the ongoing typological change of Udmurt from the head-final to the head-initial type (Asztalos 2018))

(5) *tolon val pumiškon.*
yesterday ex.pst meeting
'Yesterday there was a meeting.' (udmurto4ka.blogspot.ru)

- !! BUT: instances of the omission of the ex.V in Non-Neg PresInd in ex.and pred. poss. sentences (6-7) → unclear conditions:

(6) *konnata-yn kyšnomurt.* (Winkler 2011)
room-ine woman
'There is a woman in the room.'

(7) *mi'am tunne šutetskon nunal.* (Winkler 2011)
1pl.gen today rest day
'We have a day off today.'

4. Background

- Udmurt:
 - Edygarova (2010: 237-241; 2015: 276): verbless pred. poss. sentences:
 - when the subject (S) (= possessee) expresses an abstract entity, e.g., a disease
 - when the modifier of the S is focussed
 - Winkler (2011): simply mentions that existential clauses may be verbless
- Russian:
 - similar alternation in PresInd in Non-Neg ex. and pred. poss. sentences

sentences with <i>jest'</i>	null verb
existential presupposition of the subject (S)	no existential presupposition of S
V focus (sufficient, but not necessary condition)	if S has a modifier (Adj/Num), the latter 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 the S
S cannot be contrasted	S can be contrasted
„presence/possession in general”	„actual presence/possession”

*Existential and predicative possessive sentences with *jest'* and with null verb in Russian* (on the basis of Seliverstova 1973, 1990; Shatunovskiy 2000; Yanko 2000; Partee & Borschev 2008)

→ with null V, the subject behaves in Russian like a Focus-like element

5. Testing the semantics of existential clauses in Udmurt

- questionnaire filled in by two native speakers of Udmurt
- 3 configurations: Loc (Num)S, Loc (Num)S V, Loc V (Num)S
- the tested parameters:
 - *presupposition*: is there an existential presupposition on S in any of the configurations?
 - *contrast*: is S associated with contrast in any of the configurations?
 - *exhaustivity*: is S necessarily exhaustive in LocS? Is S non-exhaustive in LocSV and/or LocVS?
- as a first attempt, I mainly concentrated on *non-possessive* ex. sentences, pred. poss. sentences were only examined marginally

6. Results

- **verbless sentences**
 - grammatical only:
 - when the existence of S is presupposed (8a, 9a, 11a)
 - both when S is contrasted (11a) and when it is not (8a, 9a)
 - ungrammatical:
 - when there is no existential presupposition on S (10a)
 - in non-exhaustive contexts (12a)
 - in contexts eliciting focus on the V (13a)
- variants with the ex. V *vañ* → wider distribution - grammatical:
 - independently from whether there is an existential presupposition on S (8b, 9b) or not (10b)
 - both when S is contrasted (11b) and when it is not (8b, 9b)
 - acceptable/grammatical in non-exhaustive contexts (12b) (completely grammatical when the particle *no* 'also' is added)
 - with V focus (13b) (but not only, cf. (8b), (9b), (10b), (11b), (12b))

Context: *Mar sumkajad?* 'What is in your bag?' (**Presupposition**: There is something in your bag.)

(8) a. *sumka-jam kñiga-os.*
bag-ine.1sg book-pl
b. *sumka-jam kñiga-os vañ / kñiga-os vañ.*
bag-ine.1sg book-pl ex.prs book-pl ex.prs
'In my bag, there are books.'

Context: *Kõña adami ti doryn?* 'How many people are there at your place?' (**Presupposition**: There are people at your place.)

(9) a. *mi doryn vit' adami.*
1pl at five people
b. *mi doryn vit' adami vañ / vañ vit' adami.*
1pl at five people ex.prs ex.prs five people
'There are five people at our place.'

No existential presupposition on S (tested on pred. poss. sentences). Situation: Someone is introducing himself/herself by telling a few sentences about himself/herself.

(10) a. **mynam - puny-je.*
1sg.gen dog-1sg
b. *mynam puny-je vañ / vañ puny-je.*
1sg.gen dog-1sg ex.prs ex.prs dog-1sg
'I have a dog.'

Contrastive context (with existential presupposition). Situation: One supposed there is only one beer in the fridge, but (s)he sees there are two of them.

(11) a. *holod'il'nik-yn kyk sur.*
fridge-ine two beer
b. *holod'il'nik-yn kyk sur vañ / vañ kyk sur.*
fridge-ine two beer ex.prs ex.prs two beer
'There are two beers in the fridge.'

Non-exhaustive context. Situation: There are some pieces of furniture in the room, among which a table.

(12) a. **konnatayn džök.*
room-ine table
'There is a table in the room.' ('A table is in the room.')

b. *konnatayn džök (no) vañ / vañ džök (no).*
room-ine table also ex.prs ex.prs table also
'There is (also) a table in the room.'

Verb focus. Context: *Tatyn wifl vañ-a?* 'Do you have wifl here?' (lit. 'Is there wifl here?')

(13) a. **o-o, tatyn wifl.*
yes here wifl
b. *o-o, tatyn wifl vañ / vañ wifl.*
yes here wifl ex.prs ex.prs wifl
'Yes, there IS wifl here.'

7. Conclusion

- verbless ex. sentences → associated with existential presupposition + exhaustivity → S (or its modifier) is presumably focussed
- sentences with the ex. V *vañ* → wider distribution than nonverbal ex. sentences → used by default?
- unlike in Russian, sentences with *vañ* can also appear with a focussed/contrasted S
- which also means that verbless ex. sentences + sentences with *vañ* are not in complementary distribution in Udmurt

8. Left for future research...

- Obtaining judgements from more native speakers
- A systematic analysis of predicative possessive sentences
- To what extent do Udmurt verbless existential sentences semantically resemble Hungarian locational sentences (cf. Hegedüs 2013) of the type "Egér van a szobában" 'A mouse is in the room'?
- Categorization: can the Udmurt verbless ex. sentences be categorized as existential sentences, or do they represent some other (locative? presentational?) sentence type?
- A syntactic analysis - what is the predicate in verbless ex. sentences?

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