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Introducing discourse referents in Germanic and Romance:
Presentationals in comparative perspective

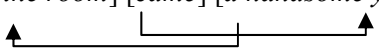
1 Overview

- 'Presentational' as a property of utterances and sentences
- The 'constituents' of a presentational
- Major types of presentationals (existential vs. descriptive)
- Towards a typology of existential presentationals, with a focus on argument structure

2 What is a 'presentational'?

- 'Presentational' as a **type of utterance** (*tertium comparationis*), namely an utterance in which the speaker introduces a new referent into the discourse, i.e. s/he "call[s] the attention of an addressee to the hitherto unnoticed presence of some person or thing in the speech setting" (Lambrecht 1994: 39, 177; cf. also Hetzron 1975: 374, Bresnan 1994: 90 for similar definitions)
- **'Presentational sentence/construction**' as conventionalized, language-specific instantiations of the utterance type 'presentational'.
- Presentational constructions of English: [*there is* + NP], main verb inversion:

(1) English
  a. ***There is*** *a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him....*
    (*there*-existential)
  b. [*Into the room*] [*came*] [*a handsome young man with a black beard*]. (main verb inversion)



- Presentational constructions of Spanish ([*hay* + NP], S-V order), German ([*es gibt* + NP]):

(2) Spanish
  a. ***Hay*** *un hombre en tu imperio...*
    'There is a man in your kingdom ...'
  b. [$_{V}$ *Entró*] [$_{NP}$ *un hombre con una barba larga*].
    lit. 'Entered a man with a long beard.'

(3) German
  a. ***Es gibt*** *einen Mann in deinem Reich ...*
    'There is a man in your kingdom...'
  b. [*Herein*] [*kam*]$_{V}$ [*ein junger Mann mit einem schwarzen Bart*].
    'In came a young man with a black beard.'

- But: (3b) instantiates a common verb-second structure, which is not specialized to presentational sentences

➢ Different **degrees of specialization** to the function of a presentational utterance

- Remarks on terminology:
  - **Presentational** sentences are special cases of **thetic** sentences, i.e. sentences without a topic; thetic sentences can, but need not, be used as presentationals (cf. Lambrecht 2000: 623: "the overriding function of the SF category [thetic sentences] is presentational").
  - '**Presentational**' is a pragmatic category, '**existential**' a semantic one; presentational utterances always have an existential implication.

3 The constituents of a presentational

- Minimal conditions on a presentational sentence/construction (**core constituents**):
  (i) There is a predicate either **expressing** or **entailing existence**;
  (ii) There is a constituent providing an '**initial categorization**' of the new referent, typically an **indefinite noun phrase**.

(4) a. *There is **a man**...* → x ∈ [[MAN]]
b. *There is **somebody** at the door.* → x ∈ [[PERSON]]
c. *There was **something** in the garden.* → X ∈ [[OBJECT]]

- As a consequence of (i), there is also a **place** and a **time** at which the referent introduced exists.

(5) [*Once upon a time*]$_{\text{time}}$ [*there was*]$_{\text{existence}}$ [*a king*]$_{\text{new referent}}$ [*in Ireland*]$_{\text{place}}$.

- While time is often implicit or merely expressed in the verb (tense), the indication of place plays a particularly important role in presentationals: many languages use locative predicates as presentationals, and locative pronouns as expletives (cf. below).

- **Additional (peripheral) constituents** of a presentational utterance:

(6) **manner of appearance**
*The next morning there **arrived** a herald at the Court.*

(7) **attributes** of the new referent (in addition to the initial classification)
*Once upon a time there was a king **who had three daughters**.*

(8) **link** (often providing temporal or locative information)
*He entered the room. There was a table. **On the table** was a wallet. **In the wallet** was a photo. He looked at the photo and recognized his daughter.*

> The **link** within an utterance is the linguistic material representing information ... which serves as a point of connection between the information presented in the current utterance and the prior context. (Birner & Ward 1998: 20)

- An example of an attested, particularly rich presentational:

(9) *Until the end of the war so very few folk had beards, and then only short ones nicely trimmed, but* [*into the room*] [*came*] [*a young man*] [*with a black fuzz of over eight inches*]. (BNC)

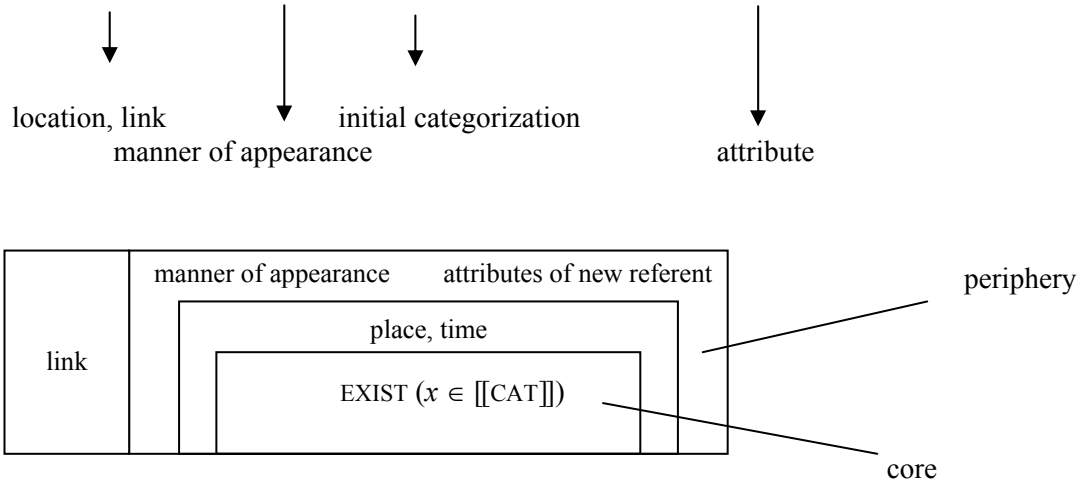


Diagram 1: The constituents of a presentational utterance

4 Existential vs. descriptive presentationals

- **Existential presentationals** contain an '**explicit existential formula**' (Engl. *there is*, Germ. *es gibt/hat*, *es war einmal*, Fr. *il y'a*, Sw. *det finn-s*, Span. *hay*, etc.).

(10) ***There was*** *a dead man in the bathtub.*
(11) ***Había*** *un hombre muerto en la bañera.*

- **Descriptive presentationals** are associated with **non-canonical sentence structures** (as a result of syntagmatic rearrangement rules, e.g. main verb inversion in English); may contain predicates other than existential ones.

(12) English main verb inversion: [XP_{link} V NP_{new}]
[*Into the room*] [*came*] [*a young man*].
link manner of appearance new referent

- Interesting question: Relationship between existential and descriptive presentationals (will not be pursued here); focus on existential presentationals in the following.

5 Existential presentationals in Germanic and Romance

- Defining criterion: presence of an '**explicit existential formula**', consisting of an existential predicate and (optionally) an expletive: Engl. *there is*, Germ. *es gibt*, Fr. *il y'a*, etc.; no expletive is used in some Romance languages, e.g. Span. *hay*, Port. *há*, Rom. *există.*

- Major types of **existential predicates**

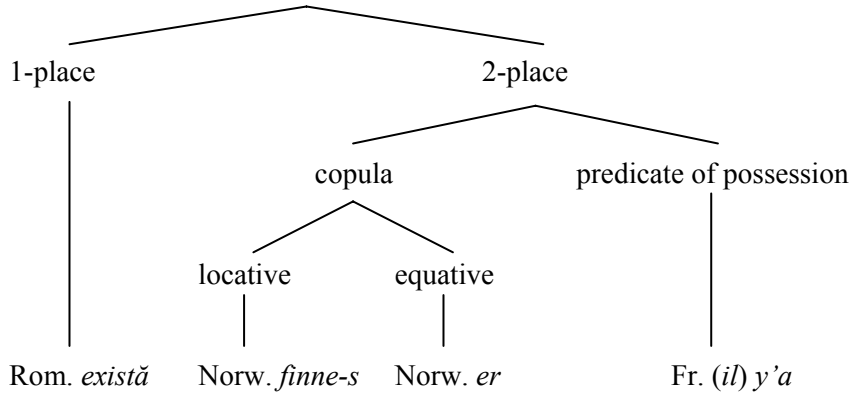


Diagram 2: Types of existential predicates

- Two uses of the **copula (**typically not distinguished in European languages**)**
a. **equative** use ($x = y$, e.g. *John is my father.*);
b. **locative** use (x is at place y, e.g. *John is in London.*).
(c. predicative use, not relevant here)

- Some minor types of existential predicates:
  - Germ. (*es*) *gibt* may have derived from a mono-transitive use of that verb, roughly meaning 'give rise to' (cf. Mod. Germ. *er-geben*).
  - Derived existential predicates: Dan. (*det*) *give-s*, Norw. *gi-s*, Sw. *ge-s* ('give-MID/PSV'; 3→2-place); cf. also Sw. *finn-s*, Dan. *finde-s*, Norw. *finne-s* ('find-MID/PSV'; 2→1-place); cf. also the Romanian middle form *se află*.

- Corresponding to the four types of existential predicates,
four types of presentationals can be distinguished:
  1. **plain** presentational (Rom. *există* NP)
  2. **locative** presentationals (Engl. *there is* NP, It. *c'è* NP, Norw. *det finnes* NP);
  3. **possessive** presentationals (Fr. *il y'a* NP, Span. *hay* NP)
  4. **equative** presentationals (Norw. *det er* NP)

- Three major types of **expletive**:
  (i) **locative expletives** (e.g. Engl. *there*, It. *ci*, Dt. *er*, Cat. *hi*)
  (ii) **weak pronouns** (e.g. Fr. *il*, Germ. *es*, Norw. *det*)
  (iii) **zero expletives** (e.g. Span *hay*, Port. *há*)

- Expletives and types of existential sentences can be combined relatively freely; sometimes, both types of expletives co-occur (e.g. Fr. *il y'a*).

6 The argument structure of existential formulas

- Argument structure of major types of existential predicates:

1.	**plain presentational**	EXIST(x)
2.	**locative presentational**	BE.AT(x,y)
3.	**possessive presentational**	BE.AT(y,x)
4.	**equative presentational**	BE(x,y)

- Difference between 2. and 3.: mapping from semantic to syntactic roles

(13) Forlí$_{SUBJ}$ has [beautiful buildings]$_{OBJ}$.
(14) [Beautiful buildings]$_{SUBJ}$ are (located) [in Forlí]$_{COMP}$

- Two 'challenges' languages have to cope with:
  1. Existentials are 1-place predications (from a functional point of view); languages with 'locative', 'possessive' and 'equative existentials' need to get rid of one of their arguments
     → **use of an expletive**
  2. The NP introducing the new referent should have focal status, i.e. it should occupy a post-verbal position (cf. Lambrecht 1986, 1988, 1994, 2000)
     → **NPs introducing new referents are hybrid** (exhibit both subject and object properties)

- **Important question**: What grammatical functions do the constituents of an expletive have?

- NPs introducing new referents in presentational sentences are often regarded as subjects even though they do not have all properties typical of a subject (position, agreement, etc.; cf. Lazard 1994 ["actant H"], Lambrecht 2000, Koch 2003).

- Lambrecht: 'Principle of Detopicalization'

  The Principle of Detopicalization
  SF [sentence focus] marking involves cancellation of those prosodic and/or morphosyntactic subject properties which are associated with the role of subjects as topic expressions in PF [predicate focus] sentences. (Lambrecht 2000: 624)

- However, it would be simplistic to say that post-verbal NPs simply get rid of their subject-properties. In some languages, post-verbal NPs have even *acquired* subject properties:

(15) *Habían/*había muchos problemas.*
'There were many problems.'

- Generalizations concerning the status and historical development of the constituents of presentational constructions need to be based on a typology of presentationals.

6.2 Possessive existentials

- The post-verbal NP is a genuine object; the expletive has most if not all subject properties; it is best regarded as an '**impersonal subject**' (a subject that is conceptually present, but that is not referentially specified):

(16) Germ. *es hat*
Es hat ein Schloss in Stuttgart.
'There is a castle in Stuttgart.'

(17) Fr. *il y'a*
Il y'a un château à Paris.
'There is a castle in Paris.'

- The post-verbal NPs in possessive existentials may be reanalyzed as subjects (cf. the Mexican Spanish example in (15)).

6.3 Locative existentials

- One way of analyzing the relationship between a locative expletive and the rest of the sentence is to regard it as a cataphoric copy of the location at which the element introduced is asserted to exist:

(18) Engl. *there is*
a. *There*$_i$ *is a castle* [*in London*]$_i$.
b. [*In London*]$_i$, *there*$_i$ *is a castle.*

- The post-verbal NP is originally a subject (agreement!) while the expletive has the status of an adverbial. As a result of historical change, however, it may acquire subject properties (cf. Bolinger 1977).

(19) *There is a man, isn't there.* (question tags)
(20) *There seems to be a problem.* (raising)
(21) *Is there a problem?* (S-Aux inversion)

- Spoken English: Loss of agreement

(22) *There's two students waiting outside.*

- Cf. Spoken Italian

(23) *C'era dei contadini.*
'There were (lit. 'was') farmers.' (cf. Koch 2003: 158)

6.4 Equative existentials

- Cf. locative existentials; the new referent is 'anticipated' by a pronoun of category NP (cf. 'anticipatory *it*' in English); there is a **copy** of the NP; the expletive can also be regarded as a **cataphoric copy** (of category NP).

(24) Norw. *det er*
Det$_i$ *er* [*en slott*]$_i$ *i Oslo.*
lit. 'It is a castle in Oslo.'

- Originally, such sentences could be regarded as having two subjects, or one subject distributed over two constituents. In contemporary Scandinavian languages, it is generally the expletive that is assigned subject status on the basis of syntactic tests (cf. Askedal 1986, Lazard 1994, Lødrup 1999).

7 Conclusions

- Presentationals vary along a limited number of typological dimensions, but there are striking differences between the various types.
- A (partly historical) typology based on argument structure seems to allow for some generalizations.
- Important parameter of analysis: Relationship between 'existential presentationals' and 'decriptive ones'; are the former instances of the latter?

(25) *Into the room* *came* *a man.*
(26) *There* *arrived* *a man.*
(27) *There* *is* *a man.*

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