

#### LOCATIVE AND EXISTENTIAL MEANING OF THE RUSSIAN *BYT'* \*

The problem of locative vs. existential BE was discussed in Lyons 1968. Sentences (1a) and (1b) have different structures but only slightly differ from one another semantically:

- (1) a. Coffee will be here in a moment; b. There will be coffee here in a moment.

Meanwhile this semantic difference is crucial for Russian (as well as for some other Slavic languages), for it is connected with the use of Genitive vs. Nominative subject in negative sentences.

Let us begin with formal differences, two of which are relatively clear, cf. Borschev, Partee 2007. (Following V.Borschev and B.Partee, I call the two semantic arguments of *быть* – in its existential and locative meaning – Thing and Location.)

1) Existential sentences have *est'* as a present tense form, which is opposed to the null form in locative sentences.

2) In locative sentences the argument Thing can be, and usually is, definite; in particular, it can be a proper name. While in existential sentences Thing is indefinite or even non-referential.

Location NP in a locative sentence is usually referential, while in a paradigmatic existential sentence Location is the world. **In a concrete place** the semantic difference between existence and location becomes unclear, see (1). We shall consider several constructions, trying to disclose semantic connotations distinguishing locative and existential interpretation of *byt'* in the context of a definite NP Thing. Many examples are taken from Арутюнова, Ширяев 1983.

• Example (2) demonstrates a clear-cut semantic opposition: locative meaning of *byt'* engenders the EXHAUSTIVE LIST INTERPRETATION of the NP in the final position, while existential meaning does not:

- (2) a. В комнате книжный шкаф и письменный стол [ $\supset$  'nothing else'];

b. В комнате *есть* книжный шкаф и письменный стол.

• Sentence (3a) is locative as to its form; but semantically it is almost synonymous to existential (3b):

- (3) a. В этом дворе *сторожевая собака*.

b. В этом дворе *есть сторожевая собака*.

The fact is that (3a) expresses not existence but rather AVAILABILITY (in Russian availability is expressed by the verb *иметься*, Падучева 2004: 433–436; cf. Clancy 2000 on connections between *be* and *have*). This meaning arises in the context of a Thing having inherent semantics of FUNCTION, or INTENDED USE: the Thing should be **useful** (for somebody). This semantics is inherent not only in (3b), but also in (3a). Hence the quasi-synonymy of (3a) and (3b). In fact, the locative sentence (4a), with a Thing having no useful function in the context of utterance, is not synonymous to (4b) – the meaning of which, it should be added, is cloudy:

- (4) a. В огороде свинья; б. <sup>?</sup>В огороде *есть свинья*.

• Sentences (5), (6) are locative. Still the exhaustive list interpretation of the subject NP does not arise – these sentences have INTRODUCTORY meaning:

- (5) В огороде *свинья*. <Надо ее водворить на место>

(6) В Москве *Коля*. <Хорошо бы с ним повидаться>

The locative meaning of *byt'* in (6) accounts for the fact that the NP Thing in (6) is a proper name; in the corresponding existential sentence a proper name is not at place:

- (7) <sup>?</sup>В Москве *есть Коля*.

• Sentence (8a) is treated by N.D.Arutjunova as neither locative nor existential. Meanwhile, semantic opposition in (8) is, essentially, the same as in (2), so locative analysis of (8a) seems adequate:

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(8) a. В квартире старинная *мебель* = ‘мебель в квартире старинная’;

b. В квартире есть старинная *мебель* = ‘некоторые предметы мебели в квартире старинные’.

• In the context of (9) the form *есть* is excluded, so the locative meaning is not opposed to the existential one:

(9) На ней коричневое *платье* = ‘платье на ней коричневое’.

In fact, a person is not just a Location for his/her clothes. Still in (10) the opposition of locative and existential meaning is possible:

(10) a. На нем *шапка*? [locative]; b. На нем *есть* (была) *шапка*? [existential]

• Example (11) arouses a suspicion that the form *есть* is not an unambiguous marker of existentiality:

(11) a. В этой реке (*\*есть*) *масса /много рыбы*;

b. В этой реке *есть рыба*.

Perhaps, in (11a) the impossibility of *есть* is conditioned by the context of a quantitative NP, and then semantic parallelism between (11a) and (11b) can be explained by the fact that they are both existential.

• In (12), where Thing denotes a state or event, only the locative construction is possible:

(12) a. В квартире (*\*есть*) беспорядок;

b. В зале (*\*есть*) собрание;

c. На улице (*\*есть*) дождь.

In fact, existence of Things that are states or events cannot be expressed by *быт*’.

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The list of contexts influencing the meaning of *быть* is not in the least exhausted. Let us mention two formal features that **cannot** serve as unambiguous markers of existential meaning.

1) Topic-Focus structure of existential sentences can vary, so inverted word order, though statistically predominating, cannot be considered a marker of existential meaning:

(13) a. На веранде *есть кресло*;

b. *Кресло* *есть* на веранде.

A change of the word order can transform an existential sentence into a locative one only if an indefinite NP becomes definite in the Thematic position:

(14) a. На веранде *стоит кресло* [indefinite NP] [existential sentence];

b. *Кресло* [definite NP] *стоит* на веранде [locative sentence].

2) Negation *нет* is sometimes treated as a marker of existential meaning. In Падучева 1992 *нет* in locative contexts was explained as expressing the presence of an Observer. In fact, perceptual component can engender the Genitive even in the case of a proper name, where existential interpretation is excluded:

(15) *Маше* в зале не оказалось = ‘оказалось, что Маша не находится в зале’.

So, negation *нет* cannot serve as an unambiguous marker of existential meaning.

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Thus, existential meaning cannot be given one explication, valid for all contexts. Not even is there a hope that a finite set of contexts can be distinguished explicating the existential meaning. Perhaps, the locative meaning will be easier to handle.