

Existential Predication in Kulung

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Abstract

Kulung language belongs to the Niger-Congo Phylum; classified as a member of the Niger-Congo, Southern Jarawa Language family Greenberg (1963). In the literature of the missionaries, other names have been used for the language such as Bambur and Wurkun. This paper tries to examine one of the essential constructions found in the language. The discussion on the subject matter reveals that existential constructions are headed by NP which is preceded by dedicated existential predicator element *yakam*. The structures of these types of sentences are formed by means of a predicator *yakam* which can be translated into English as there is/there are, Other forms are *yawo* he or she has/they have and *ami* locative. Syntactically these types of constructions are verbal and nonverbal in nature, and by extension, the existential construction involves an expression of attributes and can, as well be transformed into negative existential constructions.

Keywords: *Kulung, Predication, Existential, Construction*

Introduction

In the literature of the missionaries, other names have been used for the Kulung language such as Bambur and Wurkun. Wurkun is more geographical than linguistic. It is generic and a toponym for a number of tribes in the area north of the Benue River, around Karim Lamido and Muri in Taraba State of Nigeria, McBride (1972)

The people refer to themselves as Kulung, which is a cover term for the land, people and the language. As we have *murin nzale* Kulung (Kulung Land) *minam ni Kulung* (I am a native of Kulung) *m wawam bal kun Kulung* (I can speak Kulung language). The surface meaning of Kulung is *tortoise*, a reptile that is known for its hard shell that serves as a protection against predators. The term Kulung according to oral tradition is a metaphorically derived allusion as symbol of protection for the Kulung people.

Kulung has been classified as a member of the Niger-Congo, Southern Jarawa Language family Greenberg (1963). A detailed account of Kulung early settlers is contained in the works of McBride (1972) and Saleh (2010). These accounts trace the origin of the Kulung people to a man named Mbur who left Kona to look for a new abode. According to McBride, this journey took Mbur to the northward across the Benue River and its wide valley to some rocky ridges. After climbing the hill, Mbur discovered suitable terrain with enough water encircled by a chain of hills. The new location happened to enjoy a natural fortress. As time went on, many groups from different ancestries and languages converged on this location to form a homogeneous tribal unit, speaking the Kulung language. For the purpose of this presentation, this paper is divided into five main areas of discussions.

Definition of Existential Predication

Jespersen defines existential construction as “the existence of something is asserted or denied” (Jespersen, 1924:155), as if reference to the philosophical notion of existence were sufficient to validate the use of the label “existential construction”. This definition does not involve location or possession of the asserted entity.

Lyons (1967) has been particularly influential in the subsequent development of studies investigating the relationship between existential, possessive and locational clauses, but no definition is formulated in respect of these three sentence types are just introduced by English examples. This is not very relevant for the discussion.

Similarly, Matthews (2007:131) defines existential clause as a construction indicating “what does” or does “not exist”. For instance, the construction with *there* in [*there is a wasp in your hairs*] and [*there are no white crocodiles*]. This definition entails the existence and non-existence of an entity. Therefore, what is in existence and what does not exist constitute major theme in the construction of existential predication. This definition does not depart significantly from the ones above, because it is simply the same.

According to Crystal (2008:178) existential is a term used in the grammatical description of clause or sentence types, referring to a type of structure commencing with the unstressed word *there* followed by a form of the verb *be*, the notion of existence thereby being expressed, e.g. *there's plenty to do*, *there are three cats on the wall*. The relationship between such sentences and others (cf. *three cats are on the wall*, *the wall has three cats on it*, etc.) has attracted particular interest in linguistics, especially in generative grammar. Several types of existential sentences have been recognized including some where other forms than *there* and *be* are involved such examples as *she has a meal ready* and *there exist several such figures*, and the relationship between these and other semantic categories (such as location and possession) is considered to be an important aspect of the investigation of universal grammatical functions.

Similarly, in a study on semantics, MacNally (2011:1830) introduces two precisions: “The term ‘existential sentence’ is used to refer to a specialized or non-canonical construction which expresses a proposition about the existence or the presence of someone or something”. However, despite the fact that, the term “presence” figures in her definition, she does not comment on it, and the remainder of her paper shows that she does not really depart from the common view according to which the notion of existence as defined in dictionaries of French or English provides an adequate characterization of the meaning expressed by so-called existential constructions.

Another seminal work is that of Creissels (2014:3) existential predication’ is the usual designation of predicative constructions such as English *There is N (Loc)*, French *Il y a N (Loc)* (N a noun phrase, Loc a phrase expressing location), and their equivalents in other languages. There is wide consensus on considering *There is N (Loc)* in English and *Il y a N (Loc)* in French as constructions in their own right, that cannot be analyzed as mere variants of the other predicative constructions in which the same vein can be found (locational predication *N is Loc* in the case of English *be*, possessive predication *N₁ a N₂* in the case of French *avoir*). There is departure here, because this characterization has involved location and possession from the previous definitions. For this singular reason, this study has been anchored on the characterization of Creissels (2014).

Related Works

Many linguists have undertaken various studies on the phenomenon of existential predication with the aim of providing a cross-linguistic definition. One of the seminal works is that of Creissels (2014). In this work a sample of two hundred and fifty six languages were analyzed. By any standard such sample has presented a good picture of the cross-linguistic diversity in the study of existential predicative constructions. This is not to say that there are no problems, among the languages of the world, there is probably a much higher proportion of languages that have not grammaticalized special predicative construction for inverse locational predication, and a much lower proportion of languages with dedicated existential predicators.

Another seminal work is that of Czinglar (2002), which provides a distinction between locative existential expressing accidental and temporary (stage-level) presence (there is a book on the table) from pure existential. Another work which this study also relied upon is Schuh (1972). This study has provided additional data on existential construction in Chadic Languages.

According to Schuh (1972:84), the neutral form of existential sentences is *náa* + NP, i.e. identical to an associative sentence with no subject. The source of such sentences is open to question. Schuh (1972:84) states that existential sentence in Ngizim can be derived from the associative sentences with null subject underlying. Consider the following examples as in (1):

- (1) *náa bèezà*
 there salt
 there is salt
- náa m̄arak bai*
 there oil not
 There is no oil
- náa k̄ama ḡamsək aa m̄əzə n̄ən náa t̄ətaa aa t̄əkaəgari*
 If you hear a man groaning, there is pain in his body.

From this data, it has been observed that Ngizim can be said to have a dedicated existential predicator with *náa* +NP

According to Caron (2005:208), Za:r uses verbal and non-verbal clauses. In verbal clauses, the syntactic nexus is a verb. He further states that the verb, as a lexical category, is defined by its inability to assume any other function than that of nexus of a sentence. He further describes how the verb is inflected for Tense, Aspect and Mood (TAM). In Za:r, this inflection is combined with a personal mark of agreement with the subject.

NP	TAM	Verb	NP
(Subject)			(Object)
<i>ŋanyá:s</i>	<i>tə</i>	<i>d̄ya</i>	<i>va:t</i>
NEG	3p.aor	can	forge
The Nganyas can forge.			

In non-verbal clauses, the syntactic nexus is a Predicative Particle (PPrt). PPrt are not marked for Tense, Aspect and Mood. (see Caron, 2005:209). Consider (2):

- (2) NP PPrT NP

dà makullintà cikin àjihin
There is the key for it in my pocket.

àkwai mutnè masu yawa dà bà sü san amsa ba
There are many people who don't know the answer.

àkwai lokàcin dà mutnè zã sü ganè cêwa bâ Sarki sai Allah
There is a time when people will understand that there is no Lord except God.

Sababbin motocin da ke akwai, yawanci ana kawowa daga Japan
New cars which there are, most have been brought from Japan.

The predicator *àkwai* makes use of the weak object pronoun set whereas *dà* is followed by an independent pronoun, e.g.,

akwai ta = dā it There is it/her.

àkwai mu cikin maganar
there was us in the matter
We were involved in the matter.

da su wadanda ba su ji ba, ba su gani ba
and who don't hear and don't see
There are those who have nothing to do with the matter.

If no overt object is expressed immediately after the existential marker, *àkwai* must be used; *dà* cannot be stranded.

àkwai? Is there any? (not ***da?*)

Is there some remaining? I, *àkwai* Yes, there is. (not ‘‘T, *dà*)

the onions that there are (not ***albasa dà k d*)
There are onions.

àkwai saura? àlbasàì' d ke àkwai cf. d àlbasa

Existential Sentence Constructions

Kulung effects existential construction by placing the noun before the dedicated existential predicator. This type of construction involves what does or does not exist. The discussion is going to be made under the following sub-headings:

- i. Comitative Existential Predication and its Negative Form
- ii. Identification Existential predication and its Negative Form
- iii. Accidental Existential Predication and its Negative Form
- iv. Temporary Existential Predication and its Negative Form

Comitative Existential Predication and its Negative Form

There is evidence of comitative predication (possessor is with the possessed). This is found also in Kulung. The negative counterpart is derived from the affirmative via the negative existential predicator *birawo*. Consider the following examples as in (6):

- (6) **Affirmation**
Adamu yawo mota
Name 3sg. M INCOMP with car
Adamu has a car

Mudi yawo soro:
Boy the 3sg. M. CMP with hoe
The boy has a hoe

A: yawo mondolong deng
3sg PL are with money plenty
They have a lot of money

Negation
Adamu birawo mota ba
Adamu not have motor not
Adamu does not have a car

Mudi birawo soro: ba
boy the not have hoe not
the boy has no hoe

A: birawo mondolog deng ba
they have no money plenty not
they don't have plenty money

Identificational Existential Predication Construction

Id-Existential are defined as existential constructions characterized by the presence of either a dedicated identificational/locational predicator accompanied by a non-locative expletive element also used in identificational clause equivalent to English This/That is an N, Kulung illustrates this type of existential predication as in (7):

- (7) **Affirmation**
muko ni nda-Adua:
that is room of prayer
That is a Church

bako ni dimbauri ami cukha:r
those are lizards in cave
these are lizards in the cave

muko ni babar ami mbugwu
that is monitor lizard in a hole tree
there is a monitor lizard in a hole of a tree

Negation
muko ni nda adua ba:
that is room of prayer not
That is not a Church

bako ni dimbauri ba ami cukha:r ba
those are not lizards in cave not
these are not lizards in the cave

muko ni babar ba ami mbugwu
that is not monitor lizard in a hole tree
there is no monitor lizard in a hole the tree

Accidental Existential Predication and its Negative Form

This type of existential construction entails the existence of an entity which is considered a natural occurrence for example, mountain, river, gully erosion. Consider the following sentences in Kulung as in (8):

- (8) **Affirmation**
Mgbang mur yakam a Lau
big river there is in Lau
There is big river at Lau

Ntwa yakam ami woyong
there snail shells inside big mountain
there are snail shells in the mountain

Kila mur yakam akuni nfwam
hole water there is in front of farm my
there is a stream in front of my farm

Negation
Mgbang mur bira a Lau
big river there not in Lau
There is no big river at Lau

Ntwa bira ba ami woyong
snail shells not in big mountain
there are not snail shells in the big mountain

Kila mur bira akuni nfwam ba
hole water there is not in front of farm my not
there is no stream in front of my farm

Temporary Existential Predication and its Negative Form

This type of construction suggests the existence of spatial entity. The state of temporal location can be moved or changed at any given point in time. Consider the following in (9):

- (9) **Affirmative**
Bau yakam a muri t̄abur
knife there is on table
there is knife on the table

mondolong yakam ami jibe:
money there is in pocket his
there is money in his pocket

Toksok yakam ami ngwari
soup there is in pot
there is soup in the pot

Nkari yakam ami mbosok

beer there is in jug
there is beer in the jug

Negation

Bau bira a muri t̄abur ba
knife there is not on table not
there is no knife on the table

mondolong bira ami jibe ba
money there is not in pocket his
there is no money in his pocket

Toksok bira ami ngwari ba
soup there is not in pot
there is no soup in the pot

Nkari bira ami mbosok ba
beer there is not in jug
there is no beer in the jug

Conclusion

In this paper, an attempt has been made to define existential predication in relation to other forms as inverse locational predication and possessive construction. The main types of existential constructions found in Kulung and their construction strategies have been exemplified. In this study it has been established that Kulung has a dedicated existential predicator which has the same semantic features with many languages which have dedicated existential predicators. It has been established that the existential constructions can be transformed into their negative counterparts. This has been illustrated in the cause of the discussions. Another interesting aspect of the discussion is the distinction made between locative existential expressing accidental and temporary stage level, presence from pure existential. *Bakurgak yakam a Mgbang jegunda* (there is expressing a habitual (or individual level) relationship between entity and its location *Nzhi:r bunna: ami tagla Chadi* (there are many fishes in the lake Chad).

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