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# Non-canonical structures in locative and existential predication in the Ob-Ugric languages

The study at hand deals with different structures applied for expressing locative and existential predication in Khanty and Mansi, analyzing a comparatively large amount of data from various databases. Apart from the "expected" and traditionally described pattern "figure (theme) + ground (location) + copula", the paper also accounts for posture verbs and transitive *have*-verbs playing a role in the named functional domain. Additionally, it is shown that a significant number of relevant clauses are structurally ambiguous between a locative and an existential reading. Finally, the paper underlines that the Ob-Ugric languages show a clear polarity split in the expression of locative and existential predication, since the observed variation mainly involves affirmative clauses. In contrast, negative clauses are, as a rule, formed with negative existential particles.

## 1. Introduction

While many Uralic languages are described as behaving relatively uniformly in expressing locative and existential predication, exhibiting copula verbs and existential items (cf. Laakso & Wagner-Nagy 2022), the Ob-Ugric languages Mansi and Khanty display structures like in (1).

(1a) *Kol    soxrip-e-t         joxul          kossum    **unl-i.***
house    entrance.hall-3SG-LOC    common.dace    basket    **sit-PRS.3SG**
'On the house's patio, there is a basket with common dace [= a fish species].'
(Northern Mansi; Chernetsov 1935: OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1234, 142)

(1b) *Ottə    tᴜq    quːtʲəŋ-it-nə       pəsᴇn-əli    **ɒːməs-t.***
eh    3SG.PRO    beside-3SG-LOC    table-DIM    **sit-PRS.3SG**
'Eh, besides her, there is a small table.' (Yugan Khanty; Schön 2017: OUDB Yugan Khanty (2010–) Corpus, Text ID 1619, 069)

Both sentences introduce a new referent into the discourse and locate it in a given space, so that either predication expressed adheres to the semantics of existential predications (see Section 2). However, it is neither a copula verb nor an existential item that links the new referent to the space but rather a posture verb: *unl-* in Mansi and *ɒːməs-* in Khanty, both meaning 'sit'. The given examples evoke the central question of whether posture verbs are a standard means for expressing locative and existential predication in Khanty and Mansi. Moreover, it can be asked whether the choice of the posture verb correlates to its first argument; in other words, do the posture verbs select their first argument in the relevant context or can this position be filled by any referent?

As suggested by examples (1a) and (1b), the expression of locative and existential predication in Khanty and Mansi appears to be more complex than in other Uralic languages. This paper aims to analyze this functional domain in a structured way, relying on a comparatively large amount of data provided by databases and text collections. More precisely, the empirical basis of this study consists of the following materials, representing different varieties of Khanty and Mansi:

- Glossed Khanty (Kazym, Yugan, Surgut) and Mansi (Northern, Western, Eastern) texts from the *Ob-Ugric Database*.[1]

- Glossed Khanty (Vasyugan) texts from the series *Annotated Folk and Daily Prose Texts in the Languages of the Ob-Yenisei Linguistic Area*, published by the Tomsk State Pedagogical University (Filchenko et al. 2010–2022).

- Khanty (Synya, Sherkaly) texts from Steinitz' (1975, 1989) *Ostjakologische Arbeiten*, volumes 1 & 3.

- Mansi (Southern ~ Tavda) texts from Munkácsi's (1896) *Vogul népköltesi gyűjtemény*, volume 4, and Kannisto & Liimola's (1951, 1955) *Wogulische Volksdichtung*, volumes 1 & 2 (digitized texts provided by courtesy of Katalin Sipőcz and glossed by Beáta Wagner-Nagy).

Out of these sources, a collection of existential and locative clauses has been compiled in the XML-based EXMARaLDA format,[2] making concordance searches possible. In total, the database contains 529 existential clauses (Khanty: 320, Mansi: 209) and 212 locative clauses (Khanty: 152, Mansi: 60). In the database, the original transcription and glossing are mainly kept, whereas both are slightly adapted and unified in what follows for the sake of better comparison and readability – when relevant for the discussion, I will comment on the decisions made.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides the necessary theoretical background on locative and existential predication from both a functional and formal point of view. Section 3 describes the patterns of existential and locative predication in Khanty and Mansi. In doing so, Section 3.1 starts with the "expected" or "standard" patterns containing copula and existential items, and Section 3.2 is devoted to posture verbs replacing the latter. Section 3.3 looks at some noteworthy instances of a *have*-verb appearing in existential predications. Section 3.4 examines structurally ambiguous instances of locative and existential predication. Finally, Section 4 ties up loose ends and provides some concluding remarks and thoughts.

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1.    <http://www.babel.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/index.php?abfrage=welcome&navi=introduction>,  last accessed 18 September 2023.
2.    <https://exmaralda.org/en/>, last accessed 18 September 2023.

## 2. Theoretical background

The complex of locative and existential predication has been dealt with in several works, following different approaches and taking different perspectives (e.g. Lyons 1967, Clark 1978, Freeze 1992, Hengeveld 1992, Koch 2012, Creissels 2019, Haspelmath 2022). In this paper, I conceive locative and existential predications from a semantic point of view as expressing the presence or absence of a figure (a.k.a. theme, pivot) in a ground (a.k.a. location, coda). Following Hengeveld (1992: 94–100) and Creissels (2019: 37), both types of predication thus have the same underlying semantic structure, and their difference lies in the perspectivization of the relationship of figure and ground. Locative predications are perspectivized starting from the figure, and existential predications are perspectivized starting from the ground. As a corollary, the figure element is often definite and topical in locative predications but indefinite and focal in existential predications (see e.g. Milsark 1979, Freeze 1992, Bentley et al. 2015). As shown by Hengeveld (1992: 96–98), Koch (2012: 538–541, 545), and Haspelmath (2022: 17–20), the prototypical instances of locative and existential predications are clauses like (2a) and (2b), respectively. In turn, predications, which lack a specified location (2c), represent a different, though often formally similar, type of predication (ibid.). Following Koch (2012), I call them *generic existentials*. In what follows, I will exclude these from the systematic discussion.

(2a)  *The book is on the table.*          (LOCATIVE)
(2b)  *There is a book on the table.*          (EXISTENTIAL)
(2c)  *There are many unhappy people.*          (GENERIC EXISTENTIAL)

From a formal perspective, locative and existential predications are often instances of non-verbal predication, though not obligatorily (Hengeveld 1992: 27, 98–100). In the case of e.g. English *be*, Finnish *olla*, or existential items such as Hungarian *nincs* 'there is no(t); NEG.EX', it can be shown relatively straightforwardly that the emerging clauses are instances of non-verbal predication. All named items are not argument-selective, and Hungarian *nincs* additionally exhibits no verbal properties (Hengeveld 1992: 29, 32–34; Pustet 2003: 5–6). Locative and existential predications formed with posture verbs such as *stand*, *sit*, and *lie*, however, are instead not instances of non-verbal predication due to their argument-selecting properties: usually, one posture verb is used only with a limited set of figure elements (Newman 2002: 1, 8–9). Additionally, posture verbs tend to behave morphosyntactically like other intransitive verbs. Section 3.2 deals with posture verbs in locative and existential predication in the Ob-Ugric languages. Moreover, several languages employ strategies for the expression of existential predication based on transitive *have*-verbs, e.g. French *il y a* 'lit. it there has' or dialectal German *es hat* 'lit. it has' (Creissels 2019: 70–76; Haspelmath 2022: 16); Section 3.3 discusses some Khanty and Mansi examples which seem to show similar structures. Generally, it can be concluded that locative and existential predications are often realized as non-verbal clauses, but not necessarily.

Given the semantically based approach applied here, this does not pose a problem for their analysis since either formal realization can be accounted for.

Finally, some comments on the differentiation of locative and existential predications are necessary. According to Creissels (2019: 55–56, 60–65), languages can be classified into three groups.

1.    The formal expression of locative and existential predication differs morphosyntactically (e.g. English: *be* in locative vs *there is* in existential),

2.    locative and existential predications differ only in word order and, following from this, in information structure (e.g. Russian, Finnish, or Estonian),

3.    locative and existential predications do not differ formally; they can only be disambiguated via the context.

As shown by Laakso & Wagner-Nagy (2022), Uralic languages prototypically belong to group (2), Khanty and Mansi being no exception. Nevertheless, as shown in Section 3.4, Khanty and Mansi exhibit a statistically non-negligible amount of structurally ambiguous clauses, which can only be disambiguated via the given context.

## 3. Locative and existential predication in the Ob-Ugric languages

In this section, the linguistic expression of locative and existential predications in Khanty and Mansi is systematically described and analyzed. In doing so, both languages and their partly heavily divergent varieties are discussed together, and the analysis is structured according to thematic aspects. However, the eventual variation between languages and dialects is examined when it becomes relevant for the discussion. Due to the chosen topic, the discussion focuses on the linking elements appearing in locative and existential clauses and rather leaves the coding of figure and ground element aside. Generally, it can be said that the figure element is realized as the unmarked subject of the clause. The ground element prototypically forms part of the predicate and is somehow marked for location, instantiated via a case suffix, a locative adverb, or a locative postposition.

Coming to the linking elements occurring in locative and existential clauses in the Ob-Ugric languages, Table 1 summarizes the observed patterns in the analyzed material to get a first impression. Here the label "copula" denotes items like Kazym Khanty *βɵːɬ-*, Surgut Khanty *βaɬ-*, or Northern Mansi *oːl-*, which occur in other types of non-verbal predication as well. "Zero copula" means the lack of any linking element in a given clause. "Existential item" covers the negative existential particles like Kazym Khanty *antɵːm*, Surgut Khanty *ǝntem*, or Northern Mansi *atʲim*. "Posture verb" denotes translational equivalents of *sit*, *stand*, and *lie*, whereby only instances with inanimate figures were counted (see below for a justification). Finally, "*have*-verb" denotes Kazym and Surgut Khanty *taj-* 'have' or Northern Mansi *oːnʲsʲ-* 'have'.

| | KHANTY | | MANSI | | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | LOCATIVE | EXISTENTIAL | LOCATIVE | EXISTENTIAL | |
| | AFFIRMATIVE | | | | |
| ZERO COPULA | 37 (32.7%) | 63 (42%) | 3 (7.5%) | 25 (19.2%) | 128 (29.6%) |
| COPULA | 52 (46%) | 31 (20.7%) | 33 (82.5%) | 48 (36.9%) | 164 (37.8%) |
| POSTURE VERB | 24 (21.2%) | 50 (33.3%) | 4 (10%) | 54 (41.5%) | 132 (30.5%) |
| *have*-VERB | - (0%) | 6 (4%) | - (0%) | 3 (2.3%) | 9 (20.1%) |
| TOTAL | 113 (100%) | 150 (100%) | 40 (100%) | 130 (100%) | 433 (100%) |
| | NEGATIVE | | | | |
| COPULA | 5 (12.8%) | 2 (1.2%) | 3 (15%) | 5 (6.3%) | 15 (4.9%) |
| EXISTENTIAL ITEM | 34 (87.2%) | 168 (98.8%) | 17 (85%) | 74 (93.7%) | 293 (95.1%) |
| TOTAL | 39 (100%) | 170 (100%) | 20 (100%) | 79 (100%) | 308 (100%) |

*Table 1*. Observed patterns in LOC/EX-predication

The first clear tendency observed is a split between affirmative and negative clauses. In affirmative clauses, copulas – either lexical or zero – and posture verbs are most frequent, whereas it is negative existential items in negative clauses. In Section 3.1, the affirmative copula and the negative existential patterns are briefly discussed, while Section 3.2 deals with posture verbs, which interestingly appear exclusively in affirmative clauses. Section 3.3 comments on the few, though interesting, instances of *have*-verbs in affirmative existential clauses, and Section 3.4 discusses structurally ambiguous examples regarding their locative or existential reading.

## 3.1. "Standard" patterns

In this section, I briefly present the widely acknowledged "standard" patterns appearing in locative and existential predication. Given the above-mentioned polarity split, I discuss the affirmative and negative structures separately.

Like in many other Uralic languages, affirmative existential and locative clauses in Khanty and Mansi can contain a copula as the linking element, as displayed in

(3) and (4), respectively. Existential clauses show the word order "ground – figure – copula", as opposed to "figure – ground – copula" in locative clauses.

(3a) *βɵːnt-ət-ən*    *aːr_sir*    *βɔːj-ət*    **βɵːs-ət.**
    forest-PL-LOC    many.kinds.of    animal-PL    **be.PST-3PL**
    'In the forests, there were many kinds of animals.' (Kazym Khanty; Rédei 1968: OUDB Kazym Khanty Corpus, Text ID 878, 006)

(3b) *nin*    *jołən*    **βɵːł-atən.**
    2DU.PRO    at.home    **be-IMP.2DU**
    'You two be at home.' (Kazym Khanty; Rédei 1968: OUDB Kazym Khanty Corpus, Text ID 883, 048)

(4a) *ti*    *jänu*    *ääx-pöŋ-t*    *šerkəs'*    *kʰul-i*    **ɔl.**
    this    big    hill-head-LOC    eagle    house-3SG    **be.3SG**
    'On the top of this big mountain, there was the eagle's house.' (Tavda Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: 361; transcription adapted)

(4b) *äm*    *tut'*    **ɔɔl-s-əm.**
    1SG.PRO    there    **be-PST-1SG**
    'I was there.' (Tavda Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: 371; transcription adapted)

As Honti (2013: 245–252), among others, has noted, the forms of the Ob-Ugric copula(s) are manifold and cannot simply be traced back to a single Proto-Finno-Ugric or Proto-Uralic form. Due to the synchronic orientation of this paper, I do not discuss this further but merely cite the forms of the copula as indicated in the sources. In any case, it can be observed that a copula element occurs in locative and existential clauses if the expression of verbal categories, such as person-number, tense, or mood, is needed; from a comparative Uralic perspective, this is fairly common and expected (Ajanki et al. 2022: 982, 987). However, as can be seen in example (4a), the copula is not excluded in third-person present tense contexts either, though less frequent than in other persons, tenses, and moods. More frequently, the copula is omitted in these contexts. Comparing different varieties, the omission of the copula is frequent in all Khanty varieties in both existential and locative predication (5). Mansi shows a more complex picture. In existential predications, the omission of the copula is regular in Western Mansi (6a) but seldom in other varieties. In locative predication, this pattern is generally rare and is attested only with the adverb *tot ~ tɒt ~ tætʲ* 'there' in the analyzed material (6b).

(5a) *qat-əl-nə*    *t'umɨn*    *jəm*    *ni.*
    house-3SG-LOC    such    good    woman
    'In his house, there is such a good woman.' (Vasyugan Khanty; Filchenko et al. 2013: 45)

(5b) *wajaɣ    jiɣi    jor-nə.*
animal    river    middle-LOC
'The animal is in the middle of the river.' (Vasyugan Khanty; Filchenko 2017: 33)

(6a) *kysnus    jalpoṇlt    kɘːlʲ.*
window    under    birch
'Under the window, there is birch.' (Western Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1956: OUDB
Pelym Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1264, 145)

(6b) *waːps-aɣe          jaɣaːɣi-aɣe    tot.*
son.in.law-3SG>DU    sister-3SG>DU    there
'His brother-in-law and his sister are there.' (Northern Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola
1956: OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1239, 189)

In Vasyugan Khanty locative clauses, the nominal predicate indicating location can
additionally be suffixed with the predicative suffix *-(ä)ki* (Filchenko 2010: 338), as
displayed in example (7).

(7)  *ämp-äm    ajrɨt-nə-**ki**.*
dog-1SG    canoe-LOC-**PRED**
'My dog is in the canoe.' (Vasyugan Khanty; Filchenko 2017: 31)

Due to the focus of this paper on non-prototypical structures expressing locative and
existential predication, I do not discuss the copula-based usages further. Instead, it
can be noted that the observed variation seems to not yet be fully understood and calls
for further investigation.
    Negative locative and existential clauses are formed with negative existential par-
ticles in all dialects: Kazym Khanty *antɵːm*, Sherkaly Khanty *antɔm*, Synya Khanty
*antum*, Yugan and Surgut Khanty *əntem*, Vasyugan Khanty *əntim*, Northern Mansi
*aːtʲim*, Western Mansi *oṇtʲəm*, Eastern Mansi *øǣtʲi*, and Tavda Mansi *iikəm* (Wagner-
Nagy 2011: 203–208). Historically, the forms probably trace back to the combination
of the standard negation particle – e.g. Surgut Khanty *əntə* – and a participle suffix
*-m* (Sal 1955: 65). Examples (8) and (9) illustrate the usage of the negative existential
particles, whereby the (a) variants are existential clauses and the (b) variants locative
clauses.

(8a) *χɔ̄t    kim    pēlək-ŋ    nēmḻ    χojat    **antum.***
house    outside    side-LOC    nothing    person    **NEG.EX**
'There is nobody outside the house.' (Synya Khanty; Steinitz 1975: 155)

(8b) *łʉβ    iːki-ł        jaqən    **əntem.***
3SG.PRO    old.man-3SG    at.home    **NEG.EX**
'Her husband isn't at home.' (Surgut Khanty; Sosa 2009: OUDB Surgut Khanty Corpus,
Text ID 1086, 002)

(9a) *näjär-wooš-t      pəl     **iikəm**      tɔməŋ    kʰɔtči.*
     prince-town-LOC   EMPH    **NEG.EX**    such    writer
     'In the town of the prince, there is no such writer.' (Tavda Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: 362)

(9b) *Küšüx     ä      kaat     pəl    **iikəm.***
     Küshükh    NEG    where    EMPH   **NEG.EX**
     'Küshükh is nowhere.' (Tavda Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1955: 3)

In Vasyugan Khanty, the negative existential particle can again be suffixed with the predicative suffixes *-(ä)ki* (singular) and *-(ä)tə* (plural) (Filchenko 2010: 339, 429–431). This applies to both existential (10a) and locative (10b) predication.

(10a) *wajaɣ     lök     **əntim-äki.***
      animal    track   **NEG.EX-PRED**
      'There are no animal tracks.' (Vasyugan Khanty; Filchenko 2017: 56)

(10b) *joq-ən      **äntim-ätä.***
      home-LOC    **NEG.EX-PRED.PL**
      '[Their sons] are not at home.' (Vasyugan Khanty; Filchenko et al. 2015: 69)

In third-person dual and plural contexts, the negative existential particle can exhibit nominal dual and plural marking, respectively, but not tense or mood marking (Wagner-Nagy 2011: 206); this constraint is surely in line with analyzing the item diachronically as a participle form. Example (11a) displays a Western Mansi locative clause with a third-person dual figure, and (11b) displays an elicited Northern Mansi existential clause with a third-person plural figure. Note that number agreement in existential clauses is optional and rather infrequent in spoken language (Sipőcz 2015: 200). According to Sal (1956: 76), Western Mansi also allows person agreement with the negative existential particle *oŋtʲəm*, as displayed in (11c); in the material analyzed here, however, such structures are not attested.

(11a) *joŋ    jæɣoŋ-əɣ    tætʲ    **oŋtʲəm-əɣ.***
      and    sister-DU    there   **NEG.EX-DU**
      'And the sisters are not there.' (Western Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1956: OUDB Pelym Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1264, 029)

(11b) *Pasan-t     nēpak-ət    **āt'im-ət.***
      table-LOC   book-PL    **NEG.EX-PL**
      'There are no books on the table.' (Northern Mansi; Sipőcz 2015: 200)

(11c) *äm     jun     **oŋtʲəm-em.***
      1SG.PRO   at.home   **NEG.EX-1SG**
      'I am not at home.' (Western Mansi; Sal 1956: 76)

If tense or mood shall be expressed, the negative existential particle is combined with a copula verb like Kazym Khanty *βɵːɬ-*, Sherkaly Khanty *u-*, Surgut Khanty *βaɬ-*, Northern Mansi *oːl-*, or Tavda Mansi *ɔl-* be'. The latter carries the required verbal morphology, as displayed in the Khanty examples (12).

(12a) *śeman    jŏtṇ        ăntɔm    u-s.*
      Semyon  at.home     **NEG.EX**  **be-PST.3SG**
      'Semyon was not at home.' (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1975: 168)

(12b) *jetə    tatəs-əm          tăχe-w-na       χɔt      ăntɔm    u-s*
      further  roam-PTCP.PST    place-1PL-LOC   house   **NEG.EX**  **be-PST.3SG**
      'At the place we went to, there was no house.' (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1975: 188)

Finally, a few Khanty examples seemingly exhibit standard negation patterns in locative and existential predication, that is, the combination of a negative particle and the copula verb. Wagner-Nagy (2011: 207) accounts for such constructions elicited from a native speaker of Surgut Khanty, as displayed in (13a), for which, naturally, context is lacking. Relevant instances in the material analyzed here seem to indicate that the scope of negation is narrower if the negative particle is combined with the copula verb, namely negating only one constituent of the clause. In (13b), it is not the proposition as a whole that is negated since the speaker and their companions were there, but not for an extended period. This explication could also hold for example (13a), if a narrow/contrastive focus reading like 'not at school, but at…' is intended but cannot be proven given the missing linguistic context.

(13a) *məŋ       əškola-nə      əntə    wŏs-uw.*
      1PL.PRO   school-LOC    **NEG**   **be.PST-1PL**
      'We were not at school.' (Surgut Khanty; Wagner-Nagy 2011: 207)

(13b) *śĭ    χɔt-na      mŏŋ        neməttə   χŭw    ănt    u-s-əw.*
      that  house-LOC   1PL.PRO   nothing   long   **NEG**  **be-PST-1PL**
      'It was not long that we were in that house.' (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1975: 181)

Summarizing the patterns discussed in this section, one can say that (zero) copula constructions prevail in affirmative locative and existential predication. In contrast, negative existential particles function as the linking element in their negative counterparts. Having this background in mind, Section 3.2 deals with posture verbs replacing these linking elements in the relevant types of predication.

## 3.2. Posture verbs

Posture verbs make up a semantic field which prototypically denotes body postures and body positions of human beings. The corresponding verbs *stand*, *sit*, and *lie* are the central items of this semantic field, but the amount of items included is principally open and extends to verbs such as *squat*, *crouch*, *kneel*, *lean*, etc. (Newman 2002: 1, 7–8). Given that the former three verbs form the core of their semantic field and are most prone to semantic extensions (ibid.), I limit my study to them and leave further posture verbs aside for the time being. As for their semantics and usage, Newman (2002: 1–3) establishes the delimiting criteria set out in Table 2.

| VERB | CHARACTERISTICS |
|------|-----------------|
| STAND | - referent in a vertically elongated position |
| | - high degree of control and balance |
| | - active zone: legs/feet |
| SIT | - referent in a compact position |
| | - medium degree of control and balance |
| | - active zone: buttocks |
| LIE | - referent in a horizontally elongated position |
| | - low degree of control and balance |
| | - active zone: whole body |

*Table 2.* Semantics of central posture verbs

This simplified presentation of the semantics of *stand*, *sit*, and *lie* easily explains why humans usually sit on a chair but stand in a queue or lie on an airbed. When it comes to animals as referents, being the first argument of these verbs, the usage of the posture verbs is also relatively straightforward. Four-legged animals usually stand if all their legs are upright, but they may sit if their hind legs are bent or lie if most of their body touches the ground (Newman 2002: 7–9). At least for English, it can be stipulated that the usage of posture verbs with animate referents always entails a closer description of a body position so that the sentences *the child is sitting in the room* and *the child is in the room* are not synonymous. Consequently, the former variant is no instance of locative predication. Judging from the Khanty and Mansi material analyzed for this study, it seems to be the case that both of them behave similarly to English in this respect. The Yugan Khanty examples (14a) and (14b) are collected from the same speaker and occur in the same text. In either case, a similar situation is described. Still, in (14a), the verb *ɐ:məst-* 'sit' explicitly describes the body position of the old woman, whereas this information is missing in (14b). Therefore, I assume that example (14a) is not an instance of locative predication, because the primary function of the posture verb used is to denote a body position and not a mere location. Consequently, I exclude sentences with animate referents from the following discussion.

(14a) *qɒːt-nə*  *əj*  *puːrəs*  *iːmi*  *ɒːməst-ɬ.*
house-LOC  one  old  woman  sit-PRS.3SG
'In the house, there sits an old woman.' (Yugan Khanty; Paasonen 2001: OUDB Yugan Khanty (1901) Corpus, Text ID 1315, 131)

(14b) *qɒːt-nə*  *əj*  *puːrəs*  *iːmi.*
house-LOC  one  old  woman
'In the house, there's an old woman.' (Yugan Khanty; Paasonen 2001: OUDB Yugan Khanty (1901) Corpus, Text ID 1315, 89)

The usage of posture verbs with inanimate referents to express locative and existential predication is cross-linguistically attested, the most famous example probably being Dutch (< West Germanic < Indo-European) (see Newman (2002) and Ameka & Levinson (2007) for a general discussion). In Dutch, the three central posture verbs *staan* 'stand', *zitten* 'sit', and *liggen* 'lie' have extended their semantics to the mere expression of episodic presence/absence in locative and existential predication, as displayed in the existential clause (15) (Lemmens 2002: 106).

(15) *Er*  ***zit***  *water*  *in*  *de*  *fles.*
there  **sit.3SG**  water  in  DEF  bottle
'There is water in the bottle.' (Dutch; Lemmens 2002: 103)

In this example, it is straightforward that *zit* 'sits' cannot be interpreted lexically since water as a referent lacks any ability to be in a sitting position. Moreover, Lemmens (2002: 133) states that the usage of *zit* 'sits' is more natural here for Dutch native speakers than a form of the copula *zijn* 'be'. Therefore, one can conclude that (15) is indeed an instance of existential predication.

As noted in the studies of Sipos (2018, 2019, 2021) and Németh (2021), also Khanty and Mansi use posture verbs in constructions, which are at least very close to locative and existential predications. Here the translational equivalents of *sit* seem to be the central items (ibid.). A corpus analysis of the translational equivalents of *stand*, *sit*, and *lie* yielded the following results for Khanty and Mansi. First, posture verbs occur exclusively in affirmative locative and existential clauses but never in their negative counterparts. This distribution is, one assumes, statistically valid given the roughly 150 relevant affirmative clauses formed with posture verbs. All three posture verbs occur within this amount of relevant clauses, as displayed in examples (16–18). For the sake of space, only existential clauses are shown here since the argumentation holds for both predication types.[3]

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3.　It should be noted that approximately three-quarters of the relevant instances are existential predications. This imbalance is, however, not restricted to constructions containing posture verbs, but rather it holds for the proportion of existential versus locative clauses in general in the analyzed material. Therefore, it can be assumed to be irrelevant for the further discussion.

(16a) *süɣmit-äli* **jal-wəl…** *süɣmit-äli* **jal-wəl.**
    birch-DIM **stand-PRS.3SG** birch-DIM **stand-PRS.3SG**
    'There is [lit. stands] a small birch… there is [lit. stands] a small birch.'
    (Vasyugan Khanty; Filchenko et al. 2013: 114–115)

(16b) *joːrn* *kol* **lʲuːlʲ-i.**
    Samoyed house **stand-PRS.3SG**
    '[He was taken for a long time or a short time, he looks ahead:] there is [lit. stands] a chum [lit. Samoyed house].' (Northern Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1956: OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1239, 187)

(17a) *ɔːβ* *xɔːnəŋən* *søːn* **ɔːməs-əł.**
    door besides vessel **sit-PRS.3SG**
    'Next to the door, there is [lit. sits] a vessel.' (Kazym Khanty; Rédei 1968: OUDB Kazym Khanty Corpus, Text ID 883, 073)

(17b) *awrəx-pöŋ-ət* *mus'* *kʰul* **woon-ə.**
    steep.bank-head-LOC small house **sit-PRS.3SG**
    'There is [lit. sits] a small house on the steep bank.' (Tavda Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: 352)

(18a) *pā* *ilŋ̣-šak* *χō̄n* *sō̄rŋəŋ* *oχ-i* *χir-ət* **ol-l-ət.**
    and down-COMPR tsar golden money-PROPR sack-PL **lie-PRS-3PL**
    'And further down, there are [lit. lie] the tsar's sacks with golden money.'
    (Synya Khanty; Steinitz 1975: 102)

(18b) *pæːsən* *jɒlpøǽlt* *svɣrəp* **koj-i.**
    table under ax **lie-PRS.3SG**
    'Under the table, there is [lit. lies] an ax.' (Eastern Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1959: OUDB Eastern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1552, 004)

The examples (16–18) evoke the question of whether they display instances of existential predication or whether the posture verbs included are still constitutive for the semantic reading of the clause, as in example (14a) above. Without consulting native speakers, e.g. conducting acceptability tests, this question can hardly be answered reliably. However, it can be noted that the posture verbs occur only with a limited set of referents, thus being argument-selective. In turn, the referents belonging to this set seldom appear together with a (zero) copula in existential or locative clauses (see the discussion below and Table A in the appendix). This circumstance can be assessed as valid negative evidence in favor of examples (16–18) being instances of existential predication, since otherwise one would expect to have parallel examples with a (zero) copula as well. Furthermore, this means that the posture verbs are on a grammaticalization pathway in the given contexts but are still argument-selective for the figure element. Consequently, they are to be classified as semi-copulas in Hengeveld's (1992:

29) and Pustet's (2003: 5–6) terms, which is also in line with Sipos' (2018, 2019, 2021) and Németh's (2021) studies.

Given that the translational equivalents of *stand*, *sit*, and *lie* are argument-selective in Khanty and Mansi locative and existential clauses, there should be semantic features triggering this argument selection. The semantic features of referents, selected by *stand* and *lie*, are most transparent in this context. Vertically elongated referents, possibly having legs or feet (e.g. several kinds of trees, pillars, or sledges), tend to stand. In contrast, horizontally elongated referents, which have a significant zone of contact with the ground (e.g. axes, rocks and stones, or clothes), tend to lie. Judging from Newman's (2002: 1–3) observations, these tendencies are fully expected. Examples (19) and (20) illustrate this; see Table A in the appendix for a complete list of occurring referents.

(19a) *tʲuː    poriɬ    nɐːj-nə    ɐːɬ-ɐs.*
　　　 that    drill    fire-LOC   **lie-PST.3SG**
　　　 That drill was [lit. lay] in the fire.' (Yugan Khanty; Paasonen 2001: OUDB Yugan Khanty (1901) Corpus, Text ID 1314, 020)

(19b) *jaː    waːta-t    janəɣ    aːxtas    xuj-i.*
　　　 river   bank-LOC   big      stone     **lie-PRS.3SG**
　　　 'There is [lit. lies] a big stone by the riverbank.' (Northern Mansi; Chernetsov 1933: OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1238, 011)

(20a) *i    lʲoɣ    qiwəl-nə    sajm-a    niɣpə-pä    oŋq-ət    jalʲ-wəlʲ-t.*
　　　 and   yar    slope-LOC   brook-ILL   downward-ALL   pine-PL   **stand-PRS-3PL**
　　　 'On the slope down to the brook, there are [lit. stand] pine trees.' (Vasyugan Khanty; Filchenko et al. 2013: 114–115)

(20b) *ti    kʰoorəm    lʲɔŋ-kɔs-pɔɔx-t    lʲɔpɔ    toonʲsʲ-i.*
　　　 this   three   path-branching-side-LOC   pillar   **stand-PRS.3SG**
　　　 'Besides the three-way-branching, there is [lit. stands] a pillar.' (Tavda Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: 351, transcription adapted)

Interestingly, Northern and Western Mansi can use the equivalents for *stand* with referents designating a hole (21a) and a path (22a), for which a semantic explanation is hardly feasible. In Tavda Mansi, in turn, a zero copula (21b) and the equivalent of *lie* (22b), respectively, are used. Given the small number of relevant instances in the analyzed material, it cannot be decided whether this distribution is a dialectal feature or a mere coincidence.

(21a) *aːtʲim,    tup    as-e    lʲuːlʲ-i.*
　　　 NEG.EX    only    hole-3SG    **stand-PRS.3SG**
　　　 '[The pike] is not [in the net], there is [lit. stands] only its hole.' (Northern Mansi; Chernetsov 1933: OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1237, 038)

(21b) *ääx    jɔlö-päälən    äs.*
hill    bottom-to    hole
'Under the hill, there is a hole.' (Tavda Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: 358, transcription adapted)

(22a) *jaʃə-l    tajlaxt-əm    lʲoŋk    **tunʲsʲ-i.***
ski-INS    ski-PTCP.PST    path    **stand-PRS.3SG**
'There is [lit. stands] a track made by skis.' (Western Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1956: OUDB Pelym Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1260, 130)

(22b) *məskäu-l'ɔŋ    wäip    n'umɔs    l'ɔŋ    **ko̦j-i.***
Moscow-road    like    good    road    **lie-PRS.3SG**
'There is [lit. lies] a good road, like the Moscow road.' (Tavda Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: 370, transcription adapted)

Regarding the translational equivalents of *sit*, the situation is more complex than in the case of *stand* and *lie*. According to Sipos (2018: 229), figure elements selected by Synya Khanty *ɔməs-* 'sit' are stable in their position, have a compact and relatively low form compared to their basis, or have a thick basis. Németh's (2021: 45–46) results for the Northern Mansi verb *u:nl-* 'sit' point in the same direction. Generally, the material analyzed here supports these approaches since typical figures selected by the equivalents of *sit* are vessels, pots, barrels, chests, traps, or heaps, as exemplarily displayed by (23).

(23a) *ōw    śuŋ-ən    śēl    woj-i    pūśka    **ɔ̄məs-L̥.***
door    corner-LOC    pure    fat-PROPR    barrel    **sit-PRS.3SG**
'There is [lit. sits] a barrel with pure fat in the door corner.' (Synya Khanty; Steinitz 1975: 118)

(23b) *pat    wa:ta    palit-əl    **u:nl-i***    *portaŋ    anʲa.*
only    bank    length-INS    **sit-PRS.3SG**    brushwood    heap
'There is [lit. sits] only a heap of brushwood along the shore.' (Northern Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1951: OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 750, 003)

Frequently, the equivalents of *sit* also select houses and storage places. Thus, it seems to be the case that the compactness of these buildings overrides their vertical elongation, which is perfectly understandable if one thinks of traditional wooden huts in contrast to modern multistory facilities. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that houses are typically embodied in the traditional worldview of the Khanty and Mansi peoples (Solovar & Vylla 2009: 84; Ulrike Kahrs, p.c.), which also supports their selection by a posture verb. Examples (24–25) illustrate the posture verb *sit* together with referents denoting buildings. When it comes to chums, Khanty and Mansi exhibit differences, which, again, are statistically insignificant due to the small number of relevant

instances. In Synya Khanty, the figure *χɔ̄t* 'house; chum' occurs together with the posture verb *ɔ̄məs-* 'sit' when denoting a chum (25a), whereas Northern Mansi *joːrn kol* 'chum; lit. Samoyed house' is selected by the posture verb *lʲuːl-* 'stand' (25b). As for an explanation, it may hold that *χɔ̄t* 'house; chum' is polysemous whereas *joːrn kol* 'chum; lit. Samoyed house' is opposed to *kol* 'house'.

(24a) *moχa      taj-əm        topas-ŋət     χɔ̄t-ŋət     iśə      wot-et-na*
     before     have-PTCP.PST     storage-DU     house-DU     same     place-3SG-LOC
     ***ɔ̄məs-t-aŋṇ.***
     **sit-PRS-3DU**
     'The storage and the house, which he had before, are [lit. sit] at the same place.'
     (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1975: 299–300)

(24b) *paǫl      jɔlə-pääl-t        kwiir-wɔx-ne        kʰul     **woon-ə.***
     village     down-side-LOC     iron-beat-PTCP.PRS     house     **sit-PRS.3SG**
     'Under the village, there is [lit. sits] a forgery.' (Tavda Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: 355, transcription adapted)

(25a) […] *wɔ̄təm     ńuki      lāŋk-əm        χɔ̄t     **ɔ̄məs-ḷ.***
       gray      leather     cover-PTCP.PST     tent     **sit-PRS.3SG**
     '[They went into the third house,] there is [lit. sits] a tent covered with gray leather.' (Synya Khanty; Steinitz 1975: 111)

(25b) […] *joːrn          kol      **lʲuːlʲ-i.***
       Samoyed     house     **stand-PRS.3SG**
     '[He looks ahead:] There is a chum.' (Northern Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1956: OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1239, 030)

Finally, there are borderline cases in which more than one posture verb selects a given figure. For example, Sherkaly and Synya Khanty *χĭrə* 'sack' can occur with *əmas-* 'sit' and *ol-* 'lie', as seen in examples (26a–b), respectively. Not knowing the details of the described situation, it seems to make a difference in how upright the sack is standing or lying. Another example is Kazym Khanty *aːŋkəɬeːnki* 'tree stump', which is selected by *ɬɔːlʲ-* 'stand', whereas Vasyugan Khanty *äŋkəl* 'tree stump' is selected by *amis-* 'sit' (27a–b). Here, the former pattern probably traces back to the original tree as a vertically elongated object, whereas the compact form with a thick basis is decisive in the latter case. Generally, these examples show that the boundaries between the domains of the discussed posture verbs may be fuzzy, especially *stand* versus *sit* and *sit* versus *lie*, which is in line with Lemmens' (2002: 108) observation that Dutch *zitten* 'sit' takes an intermediate position between *staan* 'stand' and *liggen* 'lie'.

(26a) […] *mŏt*    *sĭr*    *χĭrə*    **ɔməs-ət.**
      some    as    sack    sit-**PRS.3SG**
    '[She came to the edge of the ice hole and sees:] There is [lit. sits] a sack.'
    (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1989: 39)

(26b) *pā*    *ilŋ̯-šǝk*    *χɔ̄n*    *sɔ̄rŋǝŋ*    *oχ-i*    *χir-ət*    **ol-l-ət.**
     and    down-COMPR    czar    golden    money-PROPR    sack-PL    lie-PL-3PL
    'Further down, there are [lit. lie] the tsar's sacks filled with golden money.'
    (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1975: 102)

(27a) *ij*    *łijəm*    *tonti*    *a:ŋkəlle:nki*    **łɔ:ł̭.**
    one    rotten    birchbark    stump    **stand.PRS.3SG**
    'There is [lit. stands] only a rotten birchbark stump.' (Kazym Khanty; Rédei 1968:
    OUDB Kazym Khanty Corpus, Text ID 886, 138)

(27b) *nöŋ*    *poŋla-nə*    *söŋ*    *äŋkəl*    **amis-wəl.**
    you    side-LOC    burnt    stump    **sit-PRS.3SG**
    'There is [lit. sits] a burnt stump beside you.' (Vasyugan Khanty; Filchenko et al. 2013: 66)

Above, it was briefly mentioned that posture verbs do not occur in negative locative and existential clauses. Instead, the negative existential particles shown in Section 3.1 are used, as demonstrated by example (28). Given that, *inter alia*, the figure *qɒ:t* 'house' and its cognates are selected by posture verbs in affirmative clauses but not in negative clauses, a polarity split is again observed. The latter fits the overall locative and existential predication patterns in the Ob-Ugric languages very well, since it again points to a fair amount of variation in affirmative clauses, as opposed to no variation in negative clauses.

(28) *qɒ:t*    **ɛntem,**    *əj*    *mətti=p*    **ɛntem.**
    house    **NEG.EX**    one    some=EMPH    **NEG.EX**
    'There is no house, there is nothing.' (Yugan Khanty; Kayukova & Schön 2016: OUDB
    Yugan Khanty (2010–) Corpus, Text ID 1469, 021)

Summing up this discussion, posture verbs indeed form existential and locative clauses in Khanty and Mansi. As demonstrated above, it can be shown that they are semi-copulas which are argument-selective and, thus, occur only with a limited set of figure elements as their first argument. Since these figure elements, in turn, seldom occur with a (zero) copula in relevant contexts, it must be concluded that the posture verbs have taken over the copula function in locative and existential clauses. Chappell & Lü (2022: 37–42), analyzing over a hundred Mainland East and Southeast Asian languages, account for the following grammaticalization pathway: posture verb > (verb meaning *dwell*) > locative verb > existential verb. Generally, Khanty and Mansi support their observation, though the intermediate stage of a verb meaning *dwell*

cannot be shown systematically. Still, two minor domains account for this meaning as well. First, in Synya and Sherkaly Khanty, the verb *ɔ̄məs- ~ ɔməs-* 'sit' can mean 'inhabit' or 'live somewhere' (DEWOS: 103). Some relevant instances exist within the analyzed material from Steinitz's (1975, 1989) collections. However, it should be noted that this pattern seems to be almost formulaic in folklore texts, and most instances show a relative clause headed by the verb *ɔ̄məs- ~ ɔməs-* 'sit' so that the reading 'location, [which is] inhabited by X' is most frequent. Example (29a) illustrates this. As for Mansi, this pattern can also be shown, but in contrast to Khanty, finite verb forms also occur regularly in folklore texts and songs, as shown in (29b).

(29a) *ak-et-ɔjka*              **ɔməs-tə**       **wɔš-a**       *jŏχt-əs.*
      uncle-3SG-old.man     **sit-PTCP.PRS**    **town-LAT**   come-PST.3SG
      'He came to the town where his uncle lives.' <small>(Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1989: 84)</small>

(29b) *sinʲsʲər*    *jæː*    *tɔlʲək-tə*        *kum*    **unl-ent-æs-əm.**
      smew    river    headwater-LOC   man    **sit-DRV-PST-1SG**
      'I, the man, lived in the headwaters of the Smew River.' <small>(Western Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: OUDB Middle Lozva Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1393, 003–004)</small>

The second minor domain is a peculiar opening formula of Mansi tales, composed of the copula verb and the verb meaning *lie*, ultimately meaning '[once upon a time], there lived…'. The Western (30a) and Tavda (30b) Mansi examples illustrate this.

(30a) **oːl-s**         **kuj-s**       *nasəŋ*    *pʲyw,*   *nasəŋ*   *oːlp.*
      **be-PST.3SG**   **lie-PST.3SG**   Nasəŋ    boy    Nasəŋ   hero
      '[Once upon a time,] there lived the Nasəŋ boy, the Nasəŋ hero.' <small>(Western Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1955: OUDB Pelym Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1270, 001)</small>

(30b) *jukʰä-nət*    *änčux*    **ɔɔl-s-t,**    **kʰɔj-ɔs-t.**
      woman-COM   old.man   **be-PST-3PL**   **lie-PST-3PL**
      '[Once upon a time,] there lived an old man and a woman.' <small>(Tavda Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: 351, transcription adapted)</small>

Although it must be said that these two usages of posture verbs in Khanty and Mansi are relatively small domains, they still support Chappell & Lü's (2022) observations regarding the grammaticalization pathway of posture verbs.

Finally, it is an interesting question whether Khanty and Mansi are prominent in the languages of the Ob-Yenisei area concerning the usage of posture verbs or whether similar patterns are merely not yet recognized in surrounding languages. The illustrative Northern Selkup (31a) and Central Ket (31b) examples may point in the latter direction but still await systematic analysis and description. In any case, either of them looks suspiciously similar to the Khanty and Mansi structures discussed above. However, this paper cannot provide an analysis of the necessary depth, so it leaves space for further (areal-)typological studies.

(31a) *manˈi-mpa-tɨ*      *konnä,*    *warqə*   *mɔːt*   **ɔːmna-nti.**
      give.a.look-DUR-3SG.O   upwards   big   tent   **sit-INFER.3SG**
      'He looks upwards: a big tent is [lit. sits] there, apparently.' (Northern Selkup; Brykina et al. 2021, SAI_1965_LittleDoll_flk.027)

(31b) *duːtəŋ*    *kä*    *ʔiʁus*   **haːptə.**
      see.3SG.M   big   house   **stand.upright.3SG.INAN**
      'He sees [that] there is [lit. stands upright] a big house.' (Central Ket; Kotorova & Porotova 2001: 20, author's glossing)

## 3.3. *have*-verb in existential predication

It is widely known that Khanty and Mansi – together with Nganasan and South Sámi – are the only Uralic languages exhibiting transitive possessive clauses with a *have*-verb (Laakso & Wagner-Nagy 2022: 977), as demonstrated by (32).

(32a) *mā*    *tāpət*   *poχ*   **taj-t-əm.**
      1SG.PRO   seven   boy   **have-PRS-1SG**
      'I have seven sons.' (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1975: 238–239)

(32b) *møǣn*    *woj*   *kʷæl*   **ənʲsʲ-ow.**
      1PL.PRO   bear   hut   **have.PRS-1PL**
      'We have a bear hut.' (Eastern Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1959: OUDB Eastern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1557, 008)

As for the relationship between possessive and existential clauses, many studies have argued that the possessor in possessive predication is typically animate, whereas its counterpart in existential predication, i.e. the ground, is usually inanimate (Clark 1978: 118–119; Heine 1997: 136–138). In the analyzed Khanty and Mansi material, a handful of instances structurally resemble a possessive clause but contain an inanimate "possessor", yielding an existential reading instead. Example (33) shows this pattern.

(33a) *teːm*    *tʃeːmotɐn*   *antɐ*   *muβəli*   **taj-ɐł?**
      this   suitcase   whether   what   **have-PRS.3SG**
      'What on earth can be inside this chest?' ~
      ?'What on earth does this chest have?' (Surgut Khanty; Csepregi 1998: OUDB Surgut Khanty Corpus, Text ID 735, 088)

(33b) *Pajp-ən*    *matər*   **oːnsʲ-i.**
      birchbark.bag-2SG   something   **have-PRS.3SG**
      'There is something in your birchbark bag.' ~
      ?'Your birchbark bag has something.' (Northern Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1956: OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1235, 211)

However, compared to the existential clauses discussed in Section 3.1, there is no locative marking of the ground element in example (33). Still, one Kazym Khanty example in the analyzed material contains a locative-marked ground element (34). Additionally, the ground element can be left out when retrievable from the context, as displayed by the Yugan Khanty example (35). Finally, Nikolaeva (1999: 41) states that in Obdorsk Khanty "[…] existential constructions the copula *tajl* 'there is/are' is used (from *taj-* 'to have' and the 3rd person Singular Non-Past tense inflection), although the copula *uː(l)-* is also possible". The example which she provides is seemingly a generic existential clause (36), but since there is unfortunately no further context provided, this analysis must be handled with some reserve.

(34) […] **tam**   **muβ-ən**   **łoβattałn**   **βɵːnt**   **βułi**   **taj-əs.**
     **this**   **earth-LOC**   completely   forest   reindeer   **have-PST.3SG**
     '[But in olden times] there were a lot of forest reindeer everywhere.'
     (Kazym Khanty; Moldanov 1997: OUDB Kazym Khanty Corpus, Text ID 1024, 022)

(35) *ɵːrjɛt-ət-təɣː*       *ottə*   *pəsɛn,*   **taj-ɛt.**
     inspect-PRS-3SG>SG   ehm   table   **have-PRS.3SG**
     '[He went into the house, into the girl's room]. He inspects it: A table, there is a table.' (Yugan Khanty; Schön 2017: OUDB Yugan Khanty (2010–) Corpus, Text ID 1619, 093–094)

(36) *seːŋk*   *suːkəŋ*   *mutra*   **taj-l.**
     very   difficult   miracle   **have-PRS.3SG**
     'There is a very difficult miracle.' (Obdorsk Khanty; Nikolaeva 1999: 41, glossing adapted)

The usage of *have*-verbs in existential predication is well attested cross-linguistically (see Creissels (2019: 70–75) and Chappell & Lü (2022: Chapter 3) for typological accounts). The same holds for the correlating grammaticalization pathway "verb with meaning *grasp/hold/seize/take* > *have*-verb > existential" (Koch 2012: 572–575; Chappell & Lü 2022: 37), which fits the Khanty and Mansi patterns very well since, in either language, the *have*-verb has the initial semantics 'hold; contain; carry' (Honti 2008: 172). In more detail, Creissels (2019: 72–73) explains the grammaticalization pathway as follows. First, the possessor is omitted, which can frequently be observed in the Ob-Ugric languages given their pro-drop property, and the predication can obtain an impersonal reading. Second, the impersonal possessor is abstracted to a location, and the possessive relationship becomes existential. Coming back to the Khanty data, it can be imagined that examples (33) and (35) are the first step when the ground element is formally still an inanimate "possessor", eventually omitted in the clause. After that, the ground element receives locative coding (34), like in regular existential clauses, as described in Section 3.1. Generic existentials such as (36) are the final step of the grammaticalization process since no location is expressed

– neither syntactically nor semantically – but the *have*-verb still conveys an existential reading. Given this typological and theoretical background, the observed patterns in the analyzed material should indeed be classified as instances of existential predication rather than possessive predication. Still, it must be noted that from a quantitative point of view, this pattern is significantly less frequent than the patterns discussed in Sections 3.1 and 3.2.

## 3.4. Structurally ambiguous clauses

In Sections 2 and 3.1, it was stated that it is word order which distinguishes existential from locative clauses in Khanty and Mansi. Locative clauses show the word order "figure – ground – copula", and existential clauses have the word order "ground – figure – copula". Given that the figure element is regularly realized as the subject of the clause, the word order in locative clauses is less marked from an information-structural point of view since the subject usually coalesces with the topic of the clause (Däbritz 2021: 125–126, 146–147). Although information structure and perspectivization do not always match in locative and existential predication (Creissels 2019: 47–50), these patterns provide evidence that Khanty and Mansi instantiate the ground-to-figure perspectivization in existential predication via word-order permutations. According to Creissels' (2019: 60–65) typology of existential predication (*dedicated existential construction* vs *word-order permutation in existential clauses* vs *no formal difference of locative and existential clauses*), Khanty and Mansi thus belong to the second group of languages, as is typical of the Uralic languages. However, the analyzed material also contains several examples pointing to the third type. Thereby, two cases must be distinguished in order to not come to faulty conclusions: firstly, clauses which lack the ground element, and secondly, clauses which contain both figure and ground but exhibit ambiguous word-order patterns.

As for the first type, the ground element is frequently not expressed in Khanty (104 out of 320 clauses; 32.5%) and Mansi (94 out of 209 clauses; 45%). In locational existential clauses, this occurs if the ground is contextually available and, thus, omitted, as demonstrated by (37) and (38). The preceding context, indicated in square brackets, presupposes a situation located in space and time so that the speaker need not explicitly mention the location in the following sentence. Consequently, the ground element can be omitted. Although the linguistic structure of the predication is ambiguous, the context evokes the existential reading desired by the speaker.

(37a) *sɵːn      ɔːməs-əł.*
vessel    sit-PRS.3SG
'[She came to the edge of the village.] There is [lit. sits] a vessel.' (Kazym Khanty; Rédei 1968: OUDB Kazym Khanty Corpus, Text ID 883, 068–069)

(37b) *pojtəl    o:l-i.*
    mare      be-PRS.3SG
    '[The boy came to a horse stall.] There is a mare.' (Western Mansi; Kannisto &
    Liimola 1955: OUDB Pelym Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1268, 091)

(38a) *łuβ      łi:-tə         mət       ot       ɛntem.*
    in.fact   eat-PTCP.PRS   some.kind   thing   NEG.EX
    '[He went there. There are only some pieces of mud.] There is nothing to eat,
    in fact.' (Yugan Khanty; Kayukova & Schön 2020: OUDB Yugan Khanty (2010–) Corpus,
    Text ID 1658, 040–042)

(38b) *kʷonʲsʲ-i,       wətʲ     øætʲi.*
    urinate-PRS.3SG   water   NEG.EX
    'He urinates, there is no water.' (Eastern Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1959: OUDB
    Eastern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1549, 016)

In locative clauses, the omission of the ground element is by far not as frequent as
in existential clauses. Additionally, it almost exclusively occurs in negative clauses,
yielding a reading 'X is not there [= at a contextually given location]', as displayed in
(39).

(39a) *āme-t     imə      antɔm     ij     ime-t      antɔm.*
    aunt-3SG   woman   NEG.EX   and   wife-3SG   NEG.EX
    '[He got up, his house is open.] His aunt is not there, and his wife is not there.'
    (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1989: 289)

(39b) *uxsal'-kʰum      iikəm.*
    copper-person   NEG.EX
    '[They come to the prince and say:] The copperman is not there.' (Tavda Mansi;
    Munkácsi 1896: 346)

Such clauses appear to be suspiciously close to negative existential clauses. According
to Koch (2012: 539–540), negative locative clauses even automatically switch to
negative existential ones since one "actually cannot locate an entity that does not
exist within the given local area". As a whole, this statement seems too strict, given
e.g. negative locative clauses with a narrow focus on the ground element, where the
perspectivization figure-to-ground still holds. Nevertheless, the ground element is
undoubtedly less salient in negative locative clauses than in their affirmative counter-
parts. This circumstance also explains why the omission of the ground element can be
observed almost exclusively in negative locative clauses instead of affirmative ones.
    In the existential and locative clauses displayed above, the ground element is
retrievable from the context. Still, some clauses lack a ground element altogether, as
shown in (40) and (41). These clauses are generic existentials (Koch 2012: 538–539),

also named *hyparctic* clauses (Haspelmath 2022: 19–20). Here, it is not the location of a referent at a particular place that is predicated, but rather the pure (non-)existence of this referent. As the examples show, frequent referents are divine or spiritual entities. Generic existentials can be affirmative or negative, whereby their morphosyntax is similar to the core existential clauses described in Section 3.1. They do not formally differ from the examples in (37) to (39), so they are potentially ambiguous concerning their intended reading. Again, only the context and world knowledge provide the necessary information for singling out the intended generic existential reading.

(40a) *βɵːs-ət      jiŋ     βɵːrt-ət    paː    βɵːn    łɵːŋx-ət.*
be.PRS-3PL   water   spirit-PL   and   forest   spirit-PL
'There are water spirits and forest spirits.' (Kazym Khanty; Rédei 1968: OUDB Kazym Khanty Corpus, Text ID 878, 049)

(40b) *paŋx      te-ne           xum     pəɣ    ol-i.*
fly.agaric   eat-PTCP.PRS   man     boy    be-PRS.3SG
'[Where do I find a shaman?] – There is the son of the man who eats fly agarics.' (Northern Mansi; Chernetsov 1935: OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1234, 133–134)

(41a) *neməttə    turəm    ăntɔm    ĭ     neməttə    tuŋχ    ăntɔm.*
nothing    God      NEG.EX   and   nothing    spirit   NEG.EX
'There is no God, and there are no spirits.' (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1989: 165)

(41b) *øǣnəm    eːrkələǫæl-p    soːt    pəl    øǣtʲi,    øǣnəm*
1SG.DAT   force-PTCP.PRS   master   EMPH   NEG.EX   1SG.DAT
*eːrkələǫæl-p    toːrəm    pəl    øǣtʲi.*
force-PTCP.PRS   God     EMPH   NEG.EX
'There is no master that can command me, there is no God that can command me.' (Eastern Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1959: OUDB Eastern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 1532, 012–013)

Coming to the second type of ambiguity, two subtypes must be distinguished again. First, there are a few locative clauses that display the word order "ground – figure – copula". All of these can be explained by word-order permutations due to information-structural processes that seem to override the word-order patterns typical for locative and existential predication. In example (42a), the speaker talks about different places where he and his companion were selling their goods and how much time they spent there. This evokes a list reading, having the place names, i.e. the ground elements, as contrastive topics of the clauses, which in turn are realized clause-initially (Däbritz 2021: 160–162). Still, the reading is locative since it is asserted that the speaker and his friend were somewhere and not that they, somebody, "existed" at the named places. However, only the context and inherent properties of the figure – here

the first-person referent, human, definite – determine this reading, whereas the morphosyntactic realization of the predication is ambiguous. Example (42b), in contrast, rather shows an instance of postfocal backgrounding (see Däbritz 2021: Chapter 8.3 for details). The speaker introduces the figure element in the discourse but falters and seeks a continuation, which is indicated by the filler word *ottə*. Then she continues her speech, starts the clause with the ground element included in the focus domain, and repeats the figure element afterwards, probably in order to clarify the proposition. Again, only the context provides the locative reading, whereas the word order itself would point to an existential reading.

|  | GROUND | FIGURE |  |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (42a) | *pɔlŋawət-wɔš-na* | *men* | *tĭləś* | *kem* | *u-s-mən* | *tĭnes-man.* |
|  | Polnovat-town-LOC | 1DU.PRO | month | time | be-PST-1DU | sell-CVB |

'In the town Polnovat, we were a month for selling [our goods].' (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1989: 155)

|  |  | FIGURE |  | GROUND |  | FIGURE |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (42b) | *tʃoːp-na,* | *tʲoβel* | *ottə,* | *qɒːt* | *tiɣpin* | *tʲuː* | *tʲoβel* |
|  | side-LOC | chuval | eh | house | inside | that | chuval |

'At the side, the chuval, eh, it is inside the house, that chuval.' (Yugan Khanty; Schön 2017: OUDB Yugan Khanty (2010–) Corpus, Text ID 1596, 017)

Besides these locative clauses with unexpected word-order patterns, there are 28 existential clauses (15 in Khanty, 13 in Mansi), which show the word order "figure – ground – copula". Both affirmative and negative clauses can be observed, whereby the former almost exclusively contain posture verbs as the copula element, as shown in (43). For now, it is not entirely clear whether this is a coincidence in the analyzed material, which is perfectly possible given the low number of instances altogether, or indeed a structural constraint. In the latter case, I am unaware of any functional motivation for why word order should be "less important" in existential clauses formed with posture verbs than in those formed with copula verbs. In either sentence in (43), the protagonist comes to a formerly unknown place described as a whole. Additionally, the ground elements are aforementioned in the given contexts, but the figure elements are not. Consequently, a perspectivization pattern from ground to figure is more plausible here, yielding an existential reading.

|  | FIGURE |  | GROUND |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (43a) | *tʲaqɐ* | *əj* | *qɒːt* | *tot* | *ɒːməs-ɬ.* |
|  | well | one | house | there | sit-PRS.3SG |

'[She looked ahead], well, there is [lit. sits] a house.' (Surgut Khanty; Csepregi 1998: OUDB Surgut Khanty Corpus, Text ID 735, 016)

FIGURE                                                    GROUND

(43b) *jalpəŋ    sʲakʷ       pyːsʲka-ɣ    aːwi    kit      paːl-t     uːnl-eɣ.*
holy       fireflood    barrel-DU    door    two      side-LOC   sit.PRS-3DU

'[His youngest son suddenly arrived at his father's front door and jumped off his horse.] There are [lit. sit] two barrels of Holy Fireflood on either side of the door.' (Northern Mansi; Kannisto & Liimola 1951: OUDB Northern Mansi Corpus, Text ID 742, 007–008)

In negative clauses, the negative existential particle occurs, as expected from the discussion in Section 3.1. Again, the speaker explicitly talks about the place where the named people are/were in examples (44a–b), so that only a perspectivization from ground to figure is feasible, again yielding an existential reading.

FIGURE      GROUND

(44a) *tŏχtŭr    mŏŋ        χŏśaŋ-ew     ăntɔm      u-s.*
doctor     1PL.PRO    at-1PL       NEG.EX     be-PST.3SG

'There was no doctor at our place.' (Sherkaly Khanty; Steinitz 1989: 138)

FIGURE                      GROUND

(44b) *mäŋu         äl-əp          ti       maa-ut'-t          iikəm.*
1PL.PRO.ACC   kill-PTCP.PRS   this     earth-water-LOC    NEG.EX

'There is nobody in this country who could kill us.' (Tavda Mansi; Munkácsi 1896: 353)

Summing up this section, one can say that Khanty and Mansi distinguish locative and existential predications via word-order permutations. Still, there are several statistically not negligible instances in which the word order does not reflect the predication type. In these cases, Khanty and Mansi pattern like languages that exhibit rigid word order in locative and existential predication (Creissels 2019: 63–65). Consequently, they are structurally ambiguous between a locative and an existential reading from a morphosyntactic point of view. Only the linguistic and extra-linguistic context, as well as inherent properties (animacy, definiteness) of the figure and ground element, can disambiguate them.

## 4. Conclusions and further outlook

This paper analyzed locative and existential predications in the Ob-Ugric languages Khanty and Mansi and observed a fair amount of – partly unexpected – variation. As content-related conclusions, the following main issues can be pointed out:

1.    Khanty and Mansi show a clear polarity split in the expression of locative and existential predication.

2.  Affirmative locative and existential clauses contain various linking elements, namely a copula verb, a zero copula, posture verbs, and *have*-verbs, the latter only in existential predication.

3.  As a rule, negative locative and existential clauses contain a negative existential particle as the linking element.

4.  Locative and existential clauses are usually distinguished via word order. Thereby, locative clauses show the pattern "figure – ground – linking element", and existential clauses exhibit "ground – figure – linking element".

5.  Still, many instances are structurally ambiguous from a morphosyntactic point of view. Only the semantic-pragmatic properties of the figure and ground element, as well as the context, disambiguate them.

Comparing these patterns to the "typical" Uralic patterns (Ajanki et al. 2022; Laakso & Wagner-Nagy 2022), there are surprisingly many divergences. Posture verbs as semi-copulas in locative and existential predication are generally not a recognized feature of the Uralic languages. There may be two reasons for this: either Khanty and Mansi are peculiar in this respect, or other Uralic languages have similar features not yet recognized. Given that posture verbs functioning as semi-copulas are relatively frequent in the languages of the world (Newman 2002; Ameka & Levinson 2007), I would not exclude the latter possibility (see also example (31) in Section 3.2). As for transitive *have*-verbs in existential predication, it would be worth investigating South Sámi and Nganasan in this respect as the only other Uralic languages exhibiting such verbs.

When it comes to structurally ambiguous locative and existential clauses, languages exhibiting them appear to be very unevenly distributed from a global perspective, being dominant only in the so-called Sudanic belt, i.e. in Sub-Saharan Africa (Creissels 2019: 63–65). Still, I would dare to stipulate that this pattern may be often overlooked due to its inherent "non-markedness", so further typologically oriented research is highly desired, both within and outside the Uralic language family.

From a methodological point of view, the study clearly shows that "big data" is an immeasurably valuable asset for morphosyntactic research, especially if semantic and pragmatic factors are touched upon as well. Without the systematic analysis of the databases used, Sections 3.2 to 3.4 would probably not be very expressive, if existent at all. Therefore, similar studies targeting further languages from the Uralic language family, the Ob-Yenisei area, and beyond seem highly promising.

## Acknowledgements

## Abbreviations

The varieties of the Ob-Ugric languages are abbreviated as follows:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| EM | Eastern Mansi | SyK | Synya Khanty |
| KK | Kazym Khanty | TM | Tavda (Southern) Mansi |
| NM | Northern Mansi | VK | Vasyugan Khanty |
| ObK | Obdorsk Khanty | WM | Western Mansi |
| ShK | Sherkaly Khanty | YK | Yugan Khanty |
| SK | Surgut Khanty | | |

The glossing follows the Leipzig Glossing Rules where applicable. Additionally, the following glosses are used:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| COMPR | comparative | ILL | illative |
| DIM | diminutive | INAN | inanimate |
| DRV | (unspecified) derivational suffix | INFER | inferential |
| | | LAT | lative |
| EMPH | emphasis | O | objective conjugation |
| EX | existential | PROPR | propriative |

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# Appendix

As pointed out in Section 3.2 on posture verbs, I provide a table with all figure elements selected by them in the analyzed material. The leftmost two columns indicate the meaning of the figure element and its translational equivalents in the Ob-Ugric varieties, where it occurs in the studied material (see also the list of abbreviations above). The third and fourth columns indicate the posture verb occurring with the relevant figure element and the number of instances in the material. The rightmost column answers the question of whether the named figure element also occurs with a (zero) copula verb. Importantly, the translational equivalent of *house* does not appear with a regular copula verb in most Ob-Ugric varieties except for Northern Mansi. Most Northern Mansi instances, however, are from a text about the Institute for Finno-Ugric Studies at LMU in Munich, which generally shows heavy Russian influence.

*Table A.* Figure elements selected by posture verbs

| FIGURE | | POSTURE VERB | AMOUNT | ALSO COPULA? |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MEANING | LEXEMES | | | |
| aircraft | VK *samolet* | *aməs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| arrow | NM *nʲaːl* | *lʲuːl-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| axe | EM *svɣrəp* | *koj-* 'lie' | 1 | no |
| barrel | SyK *pūśka* | *ɔ̄məs-* 'sit' | 2 | no |
| | NM *pyːsʲka* | *uːnl-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| basket | NM *kossum* | *uːnl-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| birch | WM *kɜːlʲ* | *tunʲsʲ-* 'stand' | 2 | yes |
| | VK *süɣmit* | *jal'-* 'stand' | 3 | no |
| birch forest | VK *süɣmit-əl-sa* 'birch-DRV-COLL' | *jal'-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| boat | SyK *χɔ̄p* | *ɔ̄məs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| | VK *kirip* | *amɨs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| bone | VK *loɣ* | *al-* 'lie' | 1 | no |
| bow trap | YK *jaβəł* | *ɒːməs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| bowl | YK *ɐːnəɣ* | *ɒːməs-* 'sit' | 2 | yes (zero) |
| cape | SyK *nol* | *ɔ̄məs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| chain of bones | SuK *łoβi kɛri* | *łʲɒːlʲ-* 'stand' (on a skewer) | 1 | no |
| chest | SuK *suːntuk* | *ɒːməs-* 'sit' | 5 | no |
| coat | VK *pəl'ta* | *ola-* 'lie' | 1 | no |
| cone | WM *kʷæsʲ* | *kuj-* 'lie' | 1 | no |
| cone piece | WM *poƥkʷ ʃup* | *kujjəloƥl-* 'lie about' | 1 | no |
| corpse | YK *qałi* | *ɐːł-* 'lie' | 1 | no |
| drill | YK *porił* | *ɐːł-* 'lie' | 1 | no |
| fir | TM *ɔɔnu* | *toon's'-* 'stand' | 2 | no |
| food | WM *tep* | *unl-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| | VK *iɣ-wəs* 'eat-DRV' | *aməs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| foot; leg | NM *laːɣəl* | *xuj-* 'lie' | 2 | no |
| forest island | TM *wɔr-toomp* | *toon's'-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| gun | VK *pötʃkän* | *olaɣ-* 'lie' | 2 | yes (zero) |
| hammer | ShK *śak* | *tɔt'-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| hand | NM *kaːt* | *xuj-* 'lie' | 2 | no |
| heap | NM *anʲa* | *uːnl-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| | WM *eɐ̯nʲə* | *wunl-* 'sit' | 1 | no |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| heap of bones | YK *łoβi pɐːj* | *ɐːł-* 'lie' | 1 | no |
| hole | NM *as* | *lʲuːl-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| | WM *æs* | *tunʲsʲ-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| house; hut; chum | ShK *χɔt* | *ɔməs-* 'sit' | 2 | yes |
| | SyK *χɔ̄t* | *ɔ̄məs-* 'sit' | 3 | |
| | SuK *qɒːt* | *ɒːməs-* 'sit' | 3 | |
| | YK *qɒːt* | *ɒːməs-* 'sit' | 1 | |
| | VK *kat* | *aməs-* 'sit' | 1 | |
| | NM *kol* | *uːnl-* 'sit' | 4 | |
| | WM *kʷælʲ* | *unl- ~ wunl-* 'sit' | 4 | |
| | WM *kʷæl-kæepi* | *unl- ~ wunl-* 'sit' | 1 | |
| | TM *kul* | *woon-* 'sit' | 3 | |
| house → chum, "Samoyed house" | NM *joːrn kol* | *lʲuːl-* 'stand' | 2 | no |
| house → pole hut | WM *nʲirpykʷæːl* | *unlant-* 'sit' | 4 | no |
| kettle; pot | SyK *put* | *ɔ̄məs-* 'sit' | 1 | yes |
| | SuK *puːt* | *ɒːməs-* 'sit' | 2 | |
| | YK *puːt* | *ɒːməs-* 'sit' | 1 | |
| knife | KK *keːʃi* | *łɔːłʲ-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| larch forest | WM *nʲix woɳniɣ* | *wunl-* 'sit' | 2 | no |
| opening | WM *sut* | *tunʲsʲ-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| path; road | WM *lʲoŋk* | *tunʲsʲ-* 'stand' | 2 | yes |
| | TM *lʼɔŋ* | *koj-* 'lie' | 1 | |
| pike | WM *sart* | *wunl-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| pillar | TM *lʼɔpɔ* | *toonʼsʼ-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| pine (Siberian) | VK *jiɣəl* | *jalʼ-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| pine | VK *oŋq* | *jalʼ-* 'stand' | 1 | yes (zero) |
| pinery forest | VK *oŋq-il-sa* 'pine-DRV-COLL' | *jalʼ-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| pole | WM *ʃoplə* | *tunʲsʲ-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| rock; stone | NM *aːxʷtas* | *xuj-* 'lie' | 2 | no |
| | WM *axtʃ* | *kuj-* 'lie' | 1 | |
| sack | ShK *χĭrə* | *ɔməs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| | SyK *χĭrə* | *ol-* 'lie' | 1 | |
| shoe | VK *potinka* | *aməs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| skin; fur | YK *soβ* | *ɐːɫ-* 'lie' | 1 | no |
| skirt | SyK *saχ* | *ol-* 'lie' | 3 | no |
| sledge | NM *sun* | *lʲuːl-* 'stand' | 2 | no |
| storage | ShK *ampar* | *ɔməs-* 'sit' | 1 | yes |
| storage | ShK *topas* | *ɔməs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| suitcase | SuK *tʃeːmoten* | *ɒːməs-* 'sit' | 4 | no |
| table | SyK *pasan* | *ɔ̄məs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| | YK *pəsɐn* | *ɒːməs-* 'sit' | 1 | |
| thing | EM: covertly realised | *wonl-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| threshing floor [for silver] | TM *ɔlən-jɔməl* | *woon-* 'sit' | 1 | yes |
| torso | NM *kakre* | *xuj-* 'lie' | 1 | no |
| trap | YK *βɛɫtip* | *ɒːməs-* 'sit' | 1 | no |
| (tree) stump | KK *aːŋkəɫeːnki* | *ɫɔːɫʲ-* 'stand' | 1 | no |
| | VK *äŋkəl* | *amis-* 'sit' | 1 | |
| vessel; basket | KK *søːn* | *ɔːməs-* 'sit' | 2 | no |
| | WM *ʃɘːn* | *kuj-* 'lie' | 1 | no |