

Existential sentences in the Kazym dialect of the Khanty language

The present paper describes the modes of expressing existential sentences in the Kazym dialect of the Khanty language (Uralic, agglutinative; spoken in Northwest Siberia). Furthermore, it aims to reveal the rules of applying the zero form in the subtype containing the BE-verb. To this end, I make an attempt to assign the presence and lack of the BE-verb to pragmatic and textual functions.

The corpus of the investigations consists of extracts from primers, newspapers, and other types of short texts, which allowed me to analyze the existential sentences within their context. The corpus covers the last six decades (from 1958 to 2018) of the language of schoolbooks and journalism.

From morphological and lexical points of view, the Kazym Khanty existential sentences do not have special forms. There are three ways of expressing existential meaning in this dialect: the role of the verbal element can be played by (a) the BE-verb, (b) the HAVE-verb, as well as (c) copulas grammaticalized from posture verbs, of which the verb *omas-* 'sit' is highly significant.

From syntactic point of view, the (b) and (c) subtypes do not considerably differ from the non-existential sentences containing the very same verbs. The difference lies in that, in the case of existential sentences, the Figure is expressed with a [–animate] noun phrase.

The existential sentences containing the BE-verb and the corresponding locative sentences built up of the same elements differ only in the order of Figure and Background.

We can often find a zero BE-verb in the Kazym Khanty existential sentences. The presence and lack of the BE-verb seem to be defined by the pragmatic relations within the text. Topic-initiating existentials typically have a BE-verb, both in text initial and paragraph initial positions. However, text-initial existentials may occasionally have zero form BE-verbs, which can be explained with the title's Topic-initiating function.

In text-internal existential sentences, where the sentence adds new information to a Topic that has already been introduced, the BE-verb nor-

mally has a zero form. In terms of textology, this can be observed in the case of linear text progression.

However, there are also text-internal existential sentences containing a BE-verb. The majority of them can be explained by the pragmatic function of marking the availability or usefulness of the entity that is presented in the sentence.

In short, all the above observations point towards the conclusion that in the Kazym Khanty dialect, the BE-verb is obligatory in real existentials, while in localizing existential sentences, it is the zero form of the BE-verb that can be considered typical.

Keywords: Kazym Khanty, existential sentence, zero form BE-verb, linear text progression, pragmatic function

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