Encoding the EXISTENCE-LOCATION semantic area in French, Chinese and German

Existential constructions (ECs) (e.g., *There is a cat under the car*) are generally defined as noncanonical structures that convey specific semantic and pragmatic content, typically related to the introduction of new entities in the form of indefinite noun phrases (Bentley et al. 2013, McNally 2016). From the outset of research on ECs, defining their precise boundaries across languages has proven challenging, due to significant variability both in form and meaning. Recent research (e.g., Sarda&Lena 2023) has examined the relationship between ECs and other functionally related forms, such as locative-inversion constructions (e.g., *Under the car lay a cat*). While these constructions are less formally codified, they share specific syntactic and semantic features, including desemanticized predicates and indefinite noun phrases, and may either compete with ECs or serve as the only available option in particular contexts in some languages. From a cognitive-semantic perspective, languages vary in their (co-)expression of the semantic domains of EXISTENCE, LOCATION and POSSESSION (Koch 2012). The co-expression of the EXISTENCE-LOCATION cluster is often found crosslinguistically, as in French *il y avoir* construction. In other languages such as Chinese, the same form (e.g., the verb *yǒu* 'have, there be') is used to denote EXISTENCE, LOCATION and POSSESSION. Unfrequently, EXISTENCE and LOCATION are encoded separately. German is a notable example, where the *geben*-construction is strictly existential (e.g., *Es gibt unglückliche Leute*) while LOCATION is expressed with the copula or positional verbs (e.g., *In dem Glas ist Whiskey*; Czinglar 2002). The current study aims to establish a typological profiling of the three languages sampled through elicited data, focusing on the EXISTENCE-LOCATION cluster. Particular attention is given to the variety of linguistic strategies employed to encode these domains, to identify which contexts are prototypical – resulting in a higher convergence of forms – and which are peripheral, with greater variation in the forms used. Three groups of speakers are assessed, i.e., French, Chinese, and German (n=24). The data for the study is collected by using picture description tasks. The stimuli consist of images depicting fictional planets, populated by both familiar elements (e.g., *water*, *humans*) and unfamiliar variants of known entities (e.g., *winged horses*, *electrified plants*). The pictures are designed to assess participants' preferred encoding strategies for each semantic domain, while examining their correlation with parameters such as the ontology of the entity, animacy, noun quantification, hypernymy/hyponymy and mass/count distinctions, polarity, among others.

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