

LANGUAGE-SPECIFIC EXISTENTIAL SENTENCE TYPES: A CASE STUDY OF LITHUANIAN

Violeta Kalėdaitė

Department of English Philology
Vytautas Magnus University
Donelaičio g. 52-615, LT-44248 Kaunas
Tel.: +370 37 327838
E-mail: V.Kaledaite@hmf.vdu.lt

The article is devoted to the analysis of a specific syntactic structure in Lithuanian, the BKI construction. This type of sentence is also attested in Russian, where it has got a wide coverage.

The BKI construction in Lithuanian is made up of the following elements: (i) a form of the existential verb *būti* ‘be’, (ii) the *k-word*, and (iii) the *infinitive*. The type is attested both in positive and negative forms. The peculiarity of the construction has been noted by a number of Lithuanian scholars, however, no link has been recognized between the semantic content of the sentence, the existential verb *būti* ‘be’, and the syntactic structure of the construction. The data used for the analysis (2,000 entries) are taken from *Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos tekstynas* at <http://donelaitis.vdu.lt>.

In the article the author offers a new approach to the analysis of the BKI construction and claims that it represents a language-specific existential structure. Evidence is presented to the effect that the BKI construction in Lithuanian is a syntactic synonym of the existential type ‘proper’.

Introductory remarks

The existential construction in English and Lithuanian of the type *There is someone in the garden* / *Ant tėvų trobos yra žaibolaidis* and *There are no ghosts* / ... *iš tiesų yra vaiduoklių* ... has many common features. This, first and foremost, concerns the semantic types of ESs, which, in turn, depend on the meanings of the verb *be/būti*.

The values of the verb *be/būti* in English and Lithuanian (see *The Oxford English Dictionary* 1989, 1-5; LKŽ 1968, 1213-6 and Sližienė 1994: 158) can be grouped as representing two central meanings which lie at the heart of all semantic types and the corresponding syntactic structures of the ES in the two languages. The first value is expressed in the absolute use of ‘be’ in the meaning of *exist, be alive, be in the world of fact*.

- (1) a. *There are no ghosts.*
 b. ... iš tiesų yra vaiduoklių ...
 'There are really ghosts/ghosts exist'
- (2) a. *There was an accident.*
 b. *Bus didelė šventė.*
 'There will be a big festival'

Examples (1) and (2) demonstrate that the structural pattern of absolute existence takes the following form:

English: *There* *verb_{exist}* *subjNP* (*XP*)
 Lithuanian: *Verb_{exist}* *subjNP* (*XP*)

The second sense of the verb *be/būti* conveys the most general *relation of a thing to its place*:

- (3) a. *There is someone in the garden.*
 b. *Ant tėvų trobos yra žaibolaidis.*
 'There is a lightning conductor on my parents' house'
- (4) a. *There was a demonstration in London.*
 b. *Buvo nemaloni pažintis tuščioje Vilniaus gatvėje...*
 'There was an unpleasant meeting in an empty street in Vilnius...'

Thus, the structural pattern of locative existence is as follows:

English: *There* *verb_{exist}* *subjNP* *LocP*
 Lithuanian: *Verb_{exist}* *subjNP* *LocP*

Structural core of the existential assertion

The typological differences between English and Lithuanian are especially conspicuous on the syntactic level. In English, position is a defining criterion for the grammatical subject; this is not the case in Lithuanian, where the subject can be dispensed with. However, it appears that in spite of this essential difference in syntactic structure, existential constructions in both languages have identical structural elements which constitute the core of an existential assertion. Thus both languages exploit (almost) the same clause structure, i.e. the *existential verb*, the *subject NP*, and (*XP*) for assertions of absolute existence, whereas the locative model makes use of the *existential verb*, the *subject NP*, and the *locative phrase*. The only difference in the syntactic structure of ESs in the two languages is the occurrence of an empty subject *there* in the English ES. This aspect goes hand in hand with the subject-prominent quality of the English declarative clause and is noted in all discussions of the subject.

Since the idea of an existing entity is fundamental for an existential assertion, the *VS* sequence of the core elements is attested across languages. This particular ordering allows the speaker to arrange the sentence constituents according to the increasing degree of com-

municative dynamism and, at the same time, to focus the addressee's attention on the entity conveyed by the subject NP.

The existential sentence type, or 'there-family' (Ross 1974), in English takes a number of different syntactic forms. The basic structure of existential sentences *there be NP (XP)* can be realised by different syntactic patterns. Most authors agree that the main predication in an existential sentence is that of existence; however, a secondary predication, XP, is possible too. XP expresses the property attributed to the NP in question. Huddleston and Pullum (2002, 1393ff) divide extended existentials into locative and temporal extensions, predicative extensions, infinitival extensions, and relative clause extensions.

As regards Lithuanian ESs, the structural extensions also include locative and temporal elements, appositive, relative and participial clauses. The aim of this paper is to show that in addition to these patterns, Lithuanian exhibits a very special existential structure, not found in English – the BKI-construction. Moreover, it will be demonstrated that the BKI-construction in meaning is equivalent to the existential assertion 'proper'. It has to be pointed out that no such structure is mentioned in Holvoet 2005 or Labutis 2008.

The BKI-construction in Lithuanian

One of the most striking existential sentence patterns appearing in the Lithuanian corpus is what I term (following Rappaport, 1986: 1) the BKI-construction. It is made up of the following elements: (i) a form of the existential verb *būti* 'be', (ii) the *k-word* (for an explanation of this item see below), and (iii) the *infinitive*. The type is attested both in positive and negative forms; the target structures are exemplified in (5) and (6):

- (5) *Tabariškių parapijos namai dar remontuojami, bet nėra kada laukti.*

Tabariškės:GEN parish:GENsg house:NOMpl still refurbish:PPRP, NOMpl but not-is when wait:INF

'The house that belongs to Tabariškiai parish is still being refurbished, but there is no time to wait'

- (6) *Ketinau rašyti pareiškimą, kol dar yra kam pasiskųsti.*

plan:IPAST write:INF application:ACCsg till still is who:DAT complain:INF

'I was planning to hand in an application as long as there still is someone/there is somebody to be found to complain to'

The peculiarity of the construction has already been noted by Jablonskis (1928/1957: 460). This sentence pattern is mentioned in DLKG (584-5) in the context of negative sentence types in Lithuanian and is called a 'petrified negative construction'. An insightful comment is made with respect to the semantic content of such utterances: it is posited that the function of this type of structure is 'not to deny the action itself, but the *existence* (my emphasis) of the doer of the action, of the object or of certain circumstances' (DLKG:

584). As in other similar cases, no link is recognised between the semantic content of the structure and the existential use of the verb *būti* ‘be’.

It has to be pointed out in this connection that a similar sentence type (affirmative and negative patterns) is attested in Russian. Moreover, the construction has got quite a wide coverage in the literature, especially the negative variant which exhibits an idiosyncratic morphological form of the *k*-word. There is no consensus on the syntactic analysis of the BKI sentence type; however, the approaches adopted by Garde (1976) and Rappaport (1986) are closest to my own interpretation of the issue in that both of them treat the BKI structure as an ‘existential BE construction’ (Rappaport 1986, 20).

The peculiarity of the BKI construction lies in its syntactic organisation, on the one hand, and the grammatical form that the three obligatory elements take, on the other. Quite often, it is embedded in another clause (cf. examples (5)-(6) and takes one more optional NP, as is shown in (7) and (8) below:

(7) *Kojos nēra kur pastatyti!*

leg:GENsg not-is where put:INF

‘There is no place to put a foot in!’ / ‘It is not possible to find some place to put a foot in!’

(8) *Aš kovoju, kraują liejau, o dabar nēra kam mane apginti?*

I fought blood:ACC shed and now not-is who:DAT I:ACC protect:INF

‘I fought in the war, I shed my blood and now there is no one to protect me?’

The first constituent, i.e. the verb *būti* ‘be’, appears in both the affirmative (e.g., (6) and negative form (see examples (7)-(8)), and present (5), past (9) and future (10) tenses thus admitting a full paradigm of the verb *būti*:

(9) *Nesvarstė, nebuvo kada svarstyti.*

not-consider:3PAST not-was when consider:INF

‘He wasn’t thinking, there was no time to think.’

(10) *Dvarininkai nenori žemės duot, sako, nebus kam dirbt ...*

landowner:NOMpl not-want land:GENsg give:INF say will not-be who:DAT work:INF

‘Landowners do not want to give the land away; they are saying there will be nobody to take care of it.’

There is one restriction, though; as in other types of ES, *būti* in the BKI construction appears in the third person.

The second constituent, i.e., the *k*-word, is more problematic to define. What is certain, though, is that the *k*-words acceptable in the BKI construction fall into two distinct classes which are either nominal or adverbial in nature. The nominal forms *kas* ‘who’, ‘what’, *kam* ‘to whom’, *ką* ‘what’, *kuo* ‘with what’ in form are identical with interrogative pronouns.

The adverbial k-words include *kada* ‘when’, *kur* ‘where’, *iš kur* ‘from where, whence’, all of which can actually be interpreted as the most general expressions of a spatio-temporal location. Other words of the type, like *kaip* ‘how’, can also appear in the BKI.

The *infinitive* is the third obligatory element of the construction. However, other verbal forms in this position are attested too, but their grammatical form is restricted to the present active participle (11), subjunctive mood (12), or present indicative form of the verb, as in (13):

(11) *Nėra kas jai būtu gerą rimba parodęs.*
not-is who she:DAT be:3.SBJN good:ACCsg whip:ACCsg PREF:show:PPA
‘There was no one to teach her a lesson’

(12) *Vilniaus lietuvių kredito kooperatyvas ... neturi*
Vilnius:GEN Lithuanian:GENpl credit:GENsg cooperative:NOMsg not-has
lėšų ir nėra kas juomi pasirūpintų.
fund:GENpl and not-is who it:INSTRsg procure:SBJN
‘For example, the Cooperative Credit Organisation of Lithuanians in Vilnius doesn’t have any funds; moreover, there is no one/no one could be found who could procure any money.’

(13) *Nėr kas daro.*
not-is who do:3PRES
‘There is no one who can/would do it.’

Example (13), which is taken from Palmaitis (1984: 127), is referred to in his article for different purposes. What is important for our analysis is that the present indicative form of the Lithuanian verb ‘do’ in example (13) is rendered into English by the infinitive, which gives us ‘there is nothing to do’. However, we argue that in cases like this a certain ambiguity of interpretation arises due to the dual meaning of the form *kas*, which is both, ‘who’ and ‘what’. Jablonskis (1957: 460) points out that the structure can mean two things: first, that there is no person to perform the action, and second, that there is no object to be acted upon. The ambiguity is resolved by the introduction of the dative experiencer, as in (14):

(14) *Šuniui nebebus kas ėda.*
dog:DATsg will not-be hat:NOM eat:3PRES
‘There will be nothing for the dog to eat.’

Thus, in addition to the three obligatory elements discussed above, an optional noun phrase, most commonly in the dative case, occurs in the BKI as well (cf. (11), (12) and (14)). The genitive case, which is invariably used with negation in Lithuanian, appears in the negative BKI, as in (7) above.

The case form taken by the k-word in the BKI construction is assigned by the infinitive;

thus according to the norms of Lithuanian grammar it is in the accusative in (15), while the infinitive of (16) imposes the instrumental case:

- (15) *Gražios taurelės, nėra ką ir sakyt ...*
nice:NOMpl glasses:NOMpl not-is what:ACC and say:INF
'Very nice glasses, there is nothing else to add...'
- (16) *Tiesą sakant, yra kuo džiaugtis, nes knygos pareikalavimas kyla.*
to tell the truth is what:INSTR be-glad:INFrefl because book:GENsg
demand:NOMsg rises
'To tell the truth, there is something to be glad about, because the demand for the book is rising.'

Rappaport (1986: 4) notes with reference to Russian (and the same applies to Lithuanian) that when the k-word is assigned the grammatical function of the subject of the infinitive, the k-word takes the dative case. However, in a case like this, Lithuanian exhibits two different syntactic patterns: one takes the infinitive and the dative case with no agreement (17), whereas the other structure consists of *būti* 'be', the k-word *kas* 'who' in the nominative and the *present indicative* instead of the infinitive (18):

- (17) *Yra kam perimti dvasinį močiutės palikimą.*
is who:DAT take:INF over spiritual:ACCsg grandmother:GENsg heritage:ACCsg
'There is somebody who is taking/can take over the spiritual heritage of our grandma.'
- (18) *Yra kas perima dvasinį močiutės palikimą.*
is who:NOM take:PRES over spiritual:ACCsg grandmother:GENsg heritage:ACCsg
'There is somebody who is taking over the spiritual heritage of our grandma.'

Most analysts of the BKI construction disagree about the syntactic function performed by the k-words. One of them, the 'indirect question analysis' advanced by Garde (1976) treats the k-word as an interrogative pronoun. Of particular interest is Garde's idea (as cited in Rappaport 1986: 8-9) that the BKI construction is 'a bi-clausal structure, with a finite form of existential BE in the matrix clause, and an indirect question embedded as an argument of BE'.

Another valuable insight, from our point of view, is that of Rappaport (1986), who, drawing on Garde (1976), also suggests that the matrix clause of a BKI construction is a syntactically affirmative existential 'be' construction. Especially close to my own treatment of the issue is his definition of the BKI construction, which is claimed to assert the (non-) existence of some objects with property Y, where Y is identified by the infinitival clause (Rappaport 1986, 26). All of these arguments allow us to posit that the BKI construction is not just a 'syntactic idiom' but a distinct existential sentence type; more specifically, we claim that it represents a 'syntactic synonym' of the existential assertion. Consider some typical examples below:

(19) *Dar yra nemažai dėstytojų, kurie nepakenčia kritikos ...*

still are many teacher:GENpl who hate criticism:GEN

'There are still quite a few university teachers who hate criticism.'

(20) *Protestuoti dėl to nebuvo kam.*

protest:INF because of that not-was who:DAT

'There was no one who would protest about that.'

My first claim is that the existential assertion in (19) is equivalent to that of the BKI construction (20): both types assert that *there is some/no x having the property F*. The sentence in (20) actually means the following 'There were no such people who would protest because of that'.

Next, as regards the syntax of the *būti* clause in (19), it is an example of an absolute construction (Kalėdaitė 2002); consequently, the subject NP introduced by the forms *yra/nėra* 'there is/there is not' in the main clause has to be attributed a certain property in the relative clause, or XP. With respect to the obligatory elements, the BKI, as well as existential utterances, has three positions to be filled in, namely, *Slot 2*, or the existential verb, *Slot 3*, i.e. the subject NP, and *Slot 4*, or secondary predication. What makes the BKI construction so distinct syntactically is that the absolute assertion of existence in the BKI clause expressed by the concise forms like *yra kam* 'there is someone who', *nėra kas* 'there is no one who', *nėra kaip* 'there is no way how', *yra už ką* 'there is for what', etc., is followed by an XP which is not a full relative clause, but an infinitival phrase which could be regarded as a type of free relative clause. The *k*-word then serves a double function: it is both the subject NP of the absolute clause, and the 'implicit' or 'contextual' head of the free relative clause. This property is brought out clearly in the English glosses – there is no other way to render the idea expressed in the Lithuanian example except for the formula 'there is someone who/there is no one who'; moreover, as exemplified by (6) and (20), the BKI construction, as any other type of ES, can exhibit different word order patterns. Note also that the absolute construction *nebuvo kam* 'there was no one who' has grown into a syntactically unpartitioned unit: in (20) the infinitive, the optional prepositional phrase, and the absolute construction are distinct items and only as such move in the sentence. Thus the sequence of elements as in (21) is extremely unlikely:

(21) **Protestuot nebuvo dėl to kam.*

protest:INF not-was because of that who:DAT

'There was no one who would protest about that.'

There is an important difference, though, between the two existential types with respect to the subject NP of the absolute clause. In Lithuanian 'existence proper' sentences the NP is invariably expressed by the partitive genitive, suggesting a generality of the assertion. On the other hand, the *k*-word or *t*-word (e.g., *toks, tokie* 'such' for masculine, singular and plural;

tokia, tokios ‘such’ for feminine, singular and plural) marked by the nominative case points to a specific entity (cf. (22) below).

I would also venture to suggest that the sentence type instanced in (23) could be taken as a model half-way example between the absolute existential sentences as the one in (22) and the BKI construction in (24). Consider:

(22) *Niekas man ir neleis valdyti, nes juk yra toks, kuris
nobody:NOM I:DAT and will not-allow rule:INF because really is such:NOMsg who:NOMsg
visus valdo.*

all:ACCpl rules

‘I will not be allowed to rule, anyway, because there is somebody who is ruling us all.’

(23) *Niekas man ir neleis valdyti, nes juk yra
kas visus valdo.*

nobody:NOM I:DAT and will not-allow rule:INF because really is who:NOM

all:ACCpl rules

‘I will not be allowed to rule, anyway, because there is somebody who is ruling us all’

(24) *Niekas man ir neleis valdyti, nes juk yra kam visus
valdyti.*

*nobody:NOM I:DAT and will not-allow rule:INF because really is who:DAT all:ACCpl
rule:INF*

‘I will not be allowed to rule, anyway, because there is somebody who is ruling us all.’

The three different syntactic structures in fact express the same idea, and this is demonstrated clearly by the English glosses. Example (23) contains an ‘implied’/elliptical relative clause with subject-verb agreement, while (24) is an instance of the BKI construction with the dative subject and the infinitival clause in the obligatory position of XP.

There is one last point to be made before we close this discussion. As indicated by the English glosses, most examples can be actually rendered with an additional modal idea of an existing/not existing ‘possibility’ for carrying out an action referred to by the infinitive. In this respect the BKI construction is reminiscent of the Greek ‘potential’ ‘be’+ *infinitive* construction discussed in Kahn (1973, 292ff). Especially relevant in our case is Kahn’s (1973, 295) assertion that

(...) the infinitive expresses the verbal idea in general, in abstraction from the personal, modal, and to some extent also from temporal marks of the finite verb form. ... But whereas the structure of the nomen actionis, as a noun with singular-plural and case forms, tends to present the action (or the verbal idea, whatever it may be) as a kind of entity, as a second-order ‘thing’, the infinitive presents the same idea as a project or intention, a course of action desired, undertaken or reported (e.g. in indirect discourse). ... In the construction with

infinitive, what the same verb asserts as present and given is not this action as the fact but as a goal or project to be carried out.

The quotation captures perfectly the function of the infinitive appearing in the BKI construction. In fact, all the above affirmative examples bear a strong implication of intention; while the negative form *nėra* ‘there is not’ denies the availability of the course of action.

Concluding remarks

The discussion presented above allows us to claim that the BKI-construction in Lithuanian is a distinct existential sentence type and represents a ‘syntactic synonym’ of the existential assertion ‘proper’. Our claim rests on the following evidence:

1. The existential assertion inherent in the BKI-construction posits that *there is some/no x having the property F*. This is exactly the assertion which characterizes the existential type ‘proper’ (*Yra naujovių, kuruos tautai gali būti nepriimtinos / There are changes which might be unacceptable for the nation*).
2. As regards the syntax of the two types of ES, they have the same structural elements, namely, the existential verb, the subject NP, and secondary predication.
3. The BKI construction, as any other type of ES in Lithuanian, can exhibit different word order patterns.

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SAVITAS LIETUVIŲ KALBOS EGZISTENCINIŲ SAKINIŲ TIPAS – BKI KONSTRUKCIJA

Violeta Kalėdaitė

Santrauka

Straipsnyje aptariamos sintaksinės ir semantinės bendraties junginių su esaties veiksmažodžiu ypatybės. Remdamasi egzistencinių sakinių analizės principais, taikomais šio tipo sakiniams anglų kalboje nagrinėti, autorė siūlo tradicinėje lietuvių kalbotyroje neišryškintą šios konstrukcijos interpretaciją.

BKI konstrukcija susideda iš trijų privalomų elementų: bazinio veiksmažodžio *būti* formos, k-žodžio (*kada, kam, kur*, etc.) ir bendraties. Šios konstrukcijos ypatumus pabrėžė jau J.Jablonskis, kurio dėmesį patraukė netradicinė veiksnio raiška. Išnagrinėjusi konstrukcijos sintaksinės struktūros bei atskirų elementų gramatinės raiškos ypatybes, autorė apibrėžia ją kaip savitą lietuvių kalbos egzistencinio sakinio sintaksinį variantą.

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