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# The Existential Use of Positional Verbs in Texmelucan Zapotec<sup>1</sup>

Charles H. Speck

*In Texmelucan Zapotec there is no single verb with just an existential meaning. Rather, eleven positional verbs cover the same range of meaning that one verb covers in other languages. Each of these eleven verbs may occur as predicate of the locative clause, the existential clause or the possessive clause, and none of them occur as predicate of the attributive clause or of the identifying clause. This article explores the syntax of clauses determined by these predicates and the semantic parameters by which the Zapotec speaker controls their use. The results are then compared with what is known about existential verbs universally.*

## 1. Introduction

Although it is common in languages for the same verbs which predicate existence to occur in copulative constructions, linguistic semanticists point out that these two categories are semantically distinct.<sup>2</sup> In fact, this distinction is maintained by the grammars of many languages, including Texmelucan Zapotec (TZ).

Copulative verbs are words that are without semantic content, but which serve to carry tense or aspect. They are used to connect a nominal (in subject position) either with an adjectival complement which qualifies it, or with a nominal complement which determines its identity or class membership. In some cases the copula may be absent on the surface. The following examples illustrate copulative constructions of these types in TZ.

- (1)    ji   rit    yu  
      very skinny 3Mas  
      *He is very skinny.*
- (2)    yu   re    Bartol  
      3Mas there Bartolome  
      *He is Bartolome.*
- (3)    yu   re    tub mbek<sup>y</sup>   šk<sup>y</sup>e<sup>'y</sup>  
      3Mas there one person San.Lorenzo  
      *He is a person of San Lorenzo.*
- (4)    yu   re    nak   yu   tub mbek<sup>y</sup>   šk<sup>y</sup>e<sup>'y</sup>  
      3Mas there S-be 3Mas one person San.Lorenzo  
      *He is a person of San Lorenzo.*
- (5)    yu   re    guk   yu   president  
      3Mas there C-be 3Mas president  
      *He was president.*

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<sup>1</sup> Texmelucan Zapotec is spoken by about 4,100 people in the municipality of San Lorenzo Texmelucan, district of Sola de Vega Oaxaca. The phonological transcription follows the Americanist tradition and should be self-evident with the exception of the contrast between laryngealized vowels, V<sup>ʔ</sup>, and glottalized vowels, V<sup>ʔ</sup>. I benefited greatly from discussions with my Zapotec teacher, Claudio Martínez Antonio and from comments on this manuscript by Stephen Levinsohn and Stephen Marlett. I use the following abbreviations: 1 - first person, 2 - second person, 3 - third person, Anim - Animal, C - Completive, Cmp - Complementizer, Emp - Emphatic, In - Inanimate, Mas - Masculine, Neg - Negative, P - Potential, Pl - Plural, Pp - Preposition, Pr - Progressive, S - Stative, Q - Question marker, U - Unreal, X - Clause boundary marker. When several words gloss a single morpheme, they are separated by a period. When a word is composed of several morphemes, their glosses are separated by a hyphen.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn (1966:247, 263) traces this distinction to John Stuart Mill.

In the first three examples there is no copula. (1) illustrates a descriptive clause in which an adjective occurs as the predicate and there is never a copula.<sup>3</sup> (2) contains a clause which establishes the identity of the subject, and (3) illustrates a clause which establishes class membership of the subject. In clauses of these types the copula is optionally absent (as in (2) and (3)), but may be present as in (4). Indeed the copula must be present, as in (5), if these clauses are to be inflected for aspect. These sentences illustrate the defining features of copulative verbs: they are semantically empty, they link the subject with its adjectival or nominal complement, and they provide a place for tense or aspect markers.

Unlike copulative verbs, existential verbs are not semantically empty.<sup>4</sup> In TZ they are distinct from the copulative verb. In addition to predicating existence, in TZ they communicate information about the position, animacy and referentiality of the subject. Consider the following:

- (6)    bzu        tub yu    bel  
          C-stand one 3Mas old  
          *There was an old man.*

zu is one of eleven verbs which predicate existence in TZ. Most of these verbs have a primary meaning of position,<sup>5</sup> although this positional meaning is bled out in the existential predication. The verb zu, for example, normally indicates that the subject is standing, but in its existential use, as in (6), it does not carry any information about the subject's position. It is the only verb that can be used in the existential predication when the subject is animate and referential in a sense discussed below.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the existential use of these eleven positional verbs. In §2 I discuss the semantic parameters by which Zapotecs control the selection of these verbs. In §3 I characterize the syntax of clauses determined by these verbs. I discuss differences between the existential construction and other constructions. I also discuss the use of existential constructions to indicate possession. Finally, I discuss some special uses that these verbs have. The final section concludes this article with a discussion of how Zapotec fits the notion of what existential verbs are like in natural language.

## 2. Semantics

Existential verbs predicate existence in time and space (Kahn 1966:257-58) and thus often occur with a locative or temporal adjunct (Clark 1978:89). Time and location, however, may be implicit. Thus (7), which lacks locative and temporal adjuncts, is ambiguous.

- (7)    a zu            uz        ru  
          Q Pr-stand father 2  
          *Is your father alive? (Do you have a father?)*  
          *Is your father here?*

The first reading follows from understanding implicit time as being *now*. The second reading follows from understanding implicit location as being *here*.

<sup>3</sup> In §3 I show that they determine a distinct class from verbs.

<sup>4</sup> Lyons 1968 and Clark 1978 view existential clauses, locative clauses and possessive clauses as being essentially the same. Since the grammars of many languages distinguish between existential clauses and locative clauses on the surface, Lyons uses traditional terminology. Clark uses Locational as a cover term for all three types. The grammar of TZ does not distinguish between any of these types. The same verbs, whose primary meaning is positional, are used in all three types of clauses.

<sup>5</sup> Each of these eleven verbs may indicate position. Such predications are not existential. The same verb may also indicate presence or absence, existence or nonexistence, or possession. Such predications are existential. The positional component of the meaning of the verb may be absent altogether, or it may contribute slightly to the interpretation of such clauses.

Eleven verbs occur in this type of construction. The selection of the verb is not arbitrary, but is determined by two types of lexical information. First, is the subject grouped or individuated?<sup>6</sup> *zu* is the appropriate verb for singular individual subjects. It is also appropriate when the subject is several individuals who are clearly identified.

- (8) *zu kʷup yu feñ nuy bikʷ yu*  
 Pr-stand two 3Mas young and-3Mas brother 3Mas  
*There were once a young man and his brother.*

If the subject is a group who members are not individually identified, however, *yu?* is the appropriate verb for the existential predication.

- (9) *a yu? famil nir*  
 Q Pr-be.in family Pp-2  
*Do you have family?*  
*Is your family here?*

The second piece of lexical information that is needed to properly select the correct verb is the position of the subject. In the existential predication, this position is inherent, and does not necessarily coincide with the subject's position in the real world. For human subjects, only *zu stand* or *yu? be in* can be used in the existential predication. For inanimate subjects, there may be several choices, each slightly coloring the meaning of the predication. The following table gives the eleven existential verbs with their semantic correlates. The basic meaning of each verb is given in parentheses.

**Table 1. Existential Verbs**

	<i>Individuated</i>	<i>Grouped</i>
<i>I. Position</i>		
attached	<i>ka be attached</i>	<i>ta? be attached</i>
upright	<i>zub sit</i>	<i>ŋgʷa? be on</i>
erect	<i>zu stand</i>	
horizontal	<i>mbiš lie</i>	
on top of	<i>riʷb be on</i>	
inside of	<i>ri be in</i>	<i>yu? be in</i>
suspended from	<i>zaʷb hang</i>	
<i>II. Animate</i> <sup>6</sup>	<i>zu stand</i>	<i>yu? be in</i>
<i>III. Plant</i>	<i>zub sit</i>	<i>naš stick</i>

<sup>6</sup> 'Grouped' is the same as Givón's (1978) 'generic' or 'non-referential'. 'Individuated' is the same as his 'referential'. Referentiality is discussed in §3. I have avoided his terms before §3, because I think he uses them in a very specialized way. They could be confusing out of context.

Each of these predicates may be used with a locative adjunct in a clause that is not existential. Thus one may describe the location of a pencil that one wants to buy as follows:

- (10) a. bi't lap nu ka lo g'yik'y ze? nē  
C-sell pencil Cmp Pr-be.attached face paper that Pp-1  
*Sell me the pencil that is on that card!*
- b. bi't de lap nu ta? lo g'yik'y ze? nē  
C-sell Pl pencil Cmp Pr-be.attached face paper that Pp-1  
*Sell me the pencils that are on that card!*
- c. bi't lap nu mbiš lo yu re nē  
C-sell pencil Cmp S-lie face ground there Pp-1  
*Sell me the pencil that is lying on the ground here!*
- d. bi't lap nu ri'b lo mez ze? nē  
C-sell pencil Cmp Pr-be.on face table that Pp-1  
*Sell me the pencil on the table!*
- e. bi't de lap nu ŋg<sup>w</sup>a' lo mez ze? nē  
C-sell Pl pencil Cmp S-be.on face table that Pp-1  
*Sell me the pencils that are on the table there!*
- f. bi't lap nu ri nañ bid nir nē  
C-sell pencil Cmp Pr-be.in inside pocket Pp-2 Pp-1  
*Sell me the pencil that is in your pocket!*
- g. bi't de lap nu yu? nañ kah ze? nē  
C-sell Pl pencil Cmp Pr-be.in inside box that Pp-1  
*Sell me the pencils that are in that box!*
- h. bi't tub lap nu za'b lo du' i'l'y nē  
C-sell one pencil Cmp Pr-hang face cord cotton Pp-1  
*Sell me the pencil that is hanging on that cord!*
- i. bi't de lap nu za'b lo du' i'l'y nē  
C-sell Pl pencil Cmp Pr-hang face cord cotton Pp-1  
*Sell me the pencils that are hanging on that cord!*

The verbs in (10) are selected according to the position of the inanimate subject and whether the subject is grouped or individuated. All of the verbs listed in the table are illustrated except for *zu*, *zub* and *naš*, since *standing*, *sitting* and *sticking* are not appropriate positions for a pencil. These are illustrated in (11).

- (11) a. bi't trapič yag nu zub re nē  
C-sell cane-press tree Cmp Pr-sit there Pp-1  
*Sell me the wooden cane press over there!*
- b. bi't mul'y nu zu re nē  
C-sell mule Cmp Pr-stand there Pp-1  
*Sell me the mule standing over there!*
- c. bi't yag nu naš re nē  
C-sell tree Cmp S-stick there Pp-1  
*Send me the tree that is over there!*

None of the clauses in (10) and (11) is existential. Rather, they assume the existence of the subject. It is not always easy to distinguish between existential and non-existential clauses, but there are differences in meaning and syntax that require the distinction to be made. The syntactic differences are discussed in §3.

Semantically, the existential predication can occur without a locative adjunct and without communicating anything about the position of the subject in the real world. For example, (12) tells nothing about the exact location or position of the pencil.

- (12) a mbiš tub lap kut ru nē  
 Q S-lie one pencil P-sell 2 Pp-1  
*Is there a pencil that you could sell me?*

The speaker cannot assert the exact location of the pencil because he has made no commitment as to its existence. Consequently, the use of these positional predicates is more restricted in the existential predication. Most of the verbs of (13) are totally inappropriate in the existential clause with the same subject.

- (13) \*a  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} ta? \\ ka \\ ri'b \\ za'b \end{array} \right\}$  lap nu kut ru nē  
*Is (are) there pencil(s) that you could sell me?*

The pencil in question may very well be lying on a table, clipped to a card, or hanging from a string, but since the speaker is questioning its existence, he does not assert its position. Since the inherent position for *pencil* is horizontal, he must use the verb *mbiš*. Thus, the selection of existential verbs is to some extent independent of the position the nominal subject may have in real life.

When these predicates occur with explicit location in the existential clause, they may indicate the position of the subject in the real world, as in (14).

- (14) yu? ru? lap nañ kah re  
 Pr-be.in still pencil inside box there  
*There are still pencils in that box.*  
*The pencils are still in the box.*

Sentence (14) is ambiguous as to its predication. The first reading is existential: It asserts the presence of the pencils. The second reading is non-existential. It asserts the position of the pencils. A syntactic test for this distinction is presented in §3.

When several positional verbs can occur with the same noun, different options carry with them fine nuances of meaning that arise from the primary meaning of the verbs. The following example illustrates differences in referentiality:

- (15) a. yu? tiñ rikā nir  
 Pr-be.in money P-give-1 Pp-2  
*There is some money I could give to you (a lot).*  
 b. ri tiñ rikā nir  
 Pr-be.in money P-give-1 Pp-2  
*There is some money I could give to you (a small amount).*

(15a) refers to a 'group' (quantity) of money. (15b) refers to several individual pieces of money. The next example illustrates differences in referentiality and position.

- (16) a. mbiš manjik nē  
 S-lies machete Pp-1  
*I have a machete (to work with).*  
 b. yu? manjik nē  
 Pr-be.in machete Pp-1  
*I have machetes (to sell).*

(16a) refers to one or two machetes that are out in the open. (16b) refers to a group of machetes in storage. The next examples illustrate differences in position.

- (17) a. a ta? laž kut ru dō?  
 Q Pr-be.attached orange P-sell 2 P-drink-1  
*Are there any oranges (on the tree) you could sell me to drink?*

- b. a yu?      laž      kut      ru dó?  
 Q Pr-be.in orange P-sell 2 P-drink-1  
*Are there any oranges (in the house) you could sell me to drink?*
- (18) a. zu      tub k<sup>w</sup>ay      bik<sup>y</sup>      l<sup>y</sup>uč  
 Pr-stand one horse mountain pointed  
*There is a (live) horse at Pointed Mountain.*
- b. mbiš      tub k<sup>w</sup>ay      bik<sup>y</sup>      l<sup>y</sup>uč  
 S-lie one horse mountain pointed  
*There is a (dead) horse at Pointed Mountain.*

(17a) refers to oranges attached to the tree. (17b) refers to oranges in storage. (18a) refers to a live animate horse. (18b) refers to a dead horse. Thus, both position and referentiality color the meanings of the predications.

The following are some examples of the existential use of the positional verbs presented in Table 1.

- (19) a. zub      tub yu?      par ju  
 Pr-sit one house to side  
*There is a house across the way.*
- b. ta?                      za?                      na  
 Pr-be.attached fresh.corn now  
*There is fresh corn (in the field) now.*
- c. naš      ya      maŋ      šk<sup>y</sup>e'y  
 S-stick tree mango San.Lorenzo  
*There are mango trees in San Lorenzo.*
- d. zub      k<sup>y</sup>up yu?      wej      šk<sup>y</sup>e'y  
 Pr-sit two house church San.Lorenzo  
*There are two churches in San Lorenzo.*
- e. yu?      de fuštiz  
 Pr-be.in Pl authorities  
*The town authorities are in (their office).*
- f. ŋg<sup>w</sup>a'      libr nañ      yu?  
 S-lie book inside house  
*There are (a few) books in the house.*
- g. yu?      ri'ñ lola?  
 PR-be.in work Oaxaca  
*There is work in Oaxaca.*
- h. za'b      bjiĵ      tiem na  
 Pr-hang pineapple time now  
*At this time of year there are pineapples (on the plant).*

In summary, an inherent position is associated with every noun. The inherent positions of pencils, for example, are 'horizontal', or 'inside of'. Although a pencil may occur in other positions in the real world, in the existential predication the only verbs that can be used with it are those that conform to its inherent positions. Several positional verbs can be used for some nouns. In those cases, the primary meaning of the predicate influences the meaning of the existential predication.

### 3. Syntax

In this section I show that the existential construction differs syntactically from other constructions with the same positional verbs in two ways: in the way in which they are negated, and in their permitting an indirect object. Then I describe some miscellaneous constructions in which positional verbs occur. Existential verbs from other languages typically occur in similar constructions.

## 3.1. Negation

Existential clauses differ from other clauses in the way in which they are negated. Three morphemes negate predicates of independent clauses. *sak* is the negative existential; it substitutes for each of the eleven existential verbs in the negative existential predication. *ā?* negates the predicate adjective. The prefix *wa-* negates all other predicates. Examples (20-22) illustrate these three negative morphemes.

- (20) a. a mbiš manjik nir  
Q S-lie machete Pp-2  
*Is there a machete here?*  
b. sak ñi  
Neg 3In  
*There isn't one.*
- (21) a. a ri?ñ manjik nir  
Q sharp machete Pp-2  
*Is your machete sharp?*  
b. ā? ri?ñ ñi  
Neg sharp 3In  
*It is not sharp.*
- (22) a. a bzab manjik nir lo g<sup>y</sup>ita?  
Q C-jump machete Pp-2 fact rock  
*Did your machete bounce on the rock?*  
b. wansab ñi  
Neg-P-U-jump 3In  
*It didn't bounce.*

Thus, in independent clauses, existentials are negated in a different way from both non-existentials and adjectivals. This contrast helps to distinguish between the two readings of (14), which is repeated below.

- (14) yu? ru? lap nañ kah re  
Pr-be.in still pencil inside box there  
*There are still pencils in that box.*  
*The pencils are still in the box.*

(14) is ambiguous in the affirmative, but not in the negative.

- (23) a. sak ñi  
Neg 3In  
*There aren't any.*  
b. wag<sup>y</sup>u?ñ  
Neg-P-be.in-3In  
*They are not inside (but somewhere else).*

(23a) is the negative of the existential reading. (23b) is the negative of the non-existential reading.

Two morphemes negate predicates of dependent clauses. *ā?* negates a dependent predicate adjective. *k<sup>w</sup>e?* negates other dependent clauses. (*k<sup>w</sup>e?* is also the negative imperative.)

- (24) bik<sup>y</sup>na nu ā? ri?ñ manjik nir  
if Cmp Neg sharp machete Pp-2  
*If your machete had not been sharp, it would not*  
*orze? wak<sup>y</sup>ug ñi bil<sup>y</sup> nu bru' lor*  
X Neg-cut 3In snake Cmp left face-2  
*have cut the snake in two that appeared before you.*



- (25) bik<sup>y</sup>na nu k<sup>w</sup>e? mbiš manjik  
 if Cmp Neg S-lies machete  
*If there had not been a machete,*
- orze? warug<sup>y</sup>u?n g<sup>y</sup>iš nir  
 X Neg-clean bush Pp-2  
*your fields would have not been cleaned off.*
- (26) bik<sup>y</sup>na nu k<sup>w</sup>e? nzab manjik nir lo g<sup>y</sup>ita?  
 if Cmp Neg U-jump machete Pp-2 face rock  
*If your machete had not bounced off the rock,*
- orze? waši?ñ ru ub ru  
 X Neg-cut 2 self 2  
*you would not have cut yourself.*

Thus, in dependent clauses, existentials are negated in the same way as non-existentials, but in a different way from adjectivals.

### 3.2 Indirect Object

None of the eleven verbs in Table 1 subcategorizes for indirect object under its primary meaning. However, each can occur with an indirect object under the existential meaning indicating possession. (27) illustrates this construction:

- (27) mbiš manjik nē  
 S-lie machete Pp-1  
*I have a machete.*

nē is a contraction of the preposition ni and the first person bound pronoun -ā. ni occurs before possessors in the noun phrase, and before indirect objects and benefactives at the clause level. Since pronouns cannot be modified by a possessor, (28a), replacing manjik with a pronoun, (28b), shows that nē is not possessor in the noun phrase, but indirect object, a clausal constituent.

- (28) a. ra's čē? nē  
 Pr-sleep dog Pp-1  
*My dog is asleep.*
- \*ra's ma nē  
 Pr-sleep 3Anim Pp-1  
*Mine is asleep.<sup>7</sup>*
- b. mbiš ñi nē  
 S-lie 3In Pp-1  
*I have it.*

Many languages express possession with structures of this type. Clark suggests that they should be understood as having an animate location (1978:89). Existential constructions of this kind are the most common means of indicating possession in TZ.<sup>8</sup> They help to distinguish the existential use of the positional verb from the non-existential use which cannot occur with an indirect object.

<sup>7</sup> Possessors also do not occur in headless noun phrases. The closest thing I have seen to the English word *mine* is *koz nē my thing* even when its referent is human. I once heard a man say about his wife, *fiñ ze? koz nē That young woman is my thing.*

<sup>8</sup> The only other expression for indicating possession is the idiom *g<sup>y</sup>ik<sup>y</sup> kup*. *g<sup>y</sup>ik<sup>y</sup>* is the verb *do, cause*. I think *kup* comes from *čup climb* which is also used to mean *become affluent*.

### 3.3 Miscellaneous facts

In many languages, existential predicates are used as auxiliary verbs, often with an aspectual meaning. In TZ, *za'b* occurs as part of the verb phrase meaning *continually*.<sup>9</sup> *za'b* is not inflected for aspect and is not followed by a subject pronoun.

- (29) a. *za'b rik<sup>y</sup> lay ri'ñ*  
 Pr-hang do Emp-3Mas work  
*He continually works.*
- b. *za'b bik<sup>y</sup> lay ri'ñ*  
 Pr-hang did Emp-3Mas work  
*He continually worked.*

The existential verb *yu?* occurs in a cleft construction.

- (30) *yu? mbek<sup>y</sup> nu nap rik<sup>y</sup> yu*  
 Pr-be.in people Cmp good Pr-do 3Mas  
*There are people who do good.*

Note the resumptive pronoun, *yu*, in the embedded clause. This distinguishes it from a relative clause which would have a gap in that place.

- (31) *mbek<sup>y</sup> nu nap rik<sup>y</sup>*  
 people Cmp good Pr-do  
*people who do good*

Finally, *yu?* occurs in a special construction with a sentential subject meaning *at times*.

- (32) *yu? nu nap rik<sup>y</sup> mbek<sup>y</sup>*  
 Pr-be.in Cmp good Pr-do person  
*At times people act good.*

In summary, positional verbs occur as predicate of two distinct clause types. One clause type is non-existential and is syntactically like all other clauses with intransitive verbal predicates. The other clause type is existential and has a distinct syntax from the non-existential type. The existential clause type differs from the other clause type in that it is negated differently, it can often occur without a locative adjunct, and it can occur with an indirect object which is semantically a possessor. The non-existential clause with the same positional predicate usually occurs with a locative adjunct and does not occur with an indirect object. Positional verbs are also like existential verbs in other languages in that they occur in some special constructions where existential verbs typically occur.

## 4. Universal Perspective

The discussion of the TZ copula and existentials presented here follows a framework that draws from Lyons (1967; 1968). This framework was applied by Eve Clark in 1978 to a sample of thirty languages. She argues that Lyons is right in relating so-called locative, existential and possessive clauses. She notes certain recurring patterns, and gives functional explanations for some of them. I begin this section by reviewing aspects of this framework. I relate TZ positional verbs to it. Then I discuss how TZ relates to some of Clark's results. I conclude by relating the notions grouped and individuated to Givón's work on definiteness and referentiality.

In discussing the different uses of the verb *to be* in English, Lyons relates the clauses in (33) and distinguishes them from the clauses in (34) and (35).

<sup>9</sup> In many dialects of Zapotec a distinct progressive aspect is marked by *ka* which looks like the positional verb *to be attached*. In TZ most verbs do not have a distinct progressive aspect. For those verbs that do, it is distinguished by the lack of an aspectual prefix.

- (33) a. The fox is in the field. (*Locative*)  
 b. There is a fox in the field. (*Existential*)  
 c. The book is mine. (*Possessive*)
- (34) The book is a novel. (*Identifying*)
- (35) The book is black. (*Attributive*)

(33a) differs from (33b) in definiteness of the subject. (33a) and (33b) differ from (33c) in animateness of the locative. Each of the clauses in (33) predicates the existence of the subject in time and space. So I refer to them collectively as the existential construction. The predicate of the existential construction differs from the copulative predicates in (34) and (35) in that copulas are semantically empty and serve primarily to carry tense.

Most of the languages in Clark's sample reflect this framework only in part. The same verb is used for the locative, existential and possessive clauses in only about half of the languages. The copula is the same as at least one predicate of an existential construction in most of the languages. Only Yurok and Turkish use one verb for existential, locative and possessive clauses and a distinct verb for the copula. TZ is like these languages. The attributive construction, the identifying construction, and the existential construction are all distinct.<sup>10</sup>

Adjectives are distinct from verbs in TZ. Like verbs, they occur as the predicate of a clause. Unlike verbs, they are not inflected for aspect. They require a different negative than verbs. They occur with different derivational prefixes than verbs. The tonal changes associated with them are different from those associated with verbs. However, they never occur with a copula. So clauses with adjectival predicates are distinct from clauses with nominal predicates and clauses with verbal predicates.

Nouns occur with the copula -ak. As in many other languages, the grammar of TZ does not distinguish between nouns which indicate identity and those which indicate class membership or class inclusion. Also, as is common in other languages, the noun may occur as predicate without the copula with a present interpretation.

In TZ there is no single verb with just an existential meaning. Rather, eleven positional verbs cover the same range of meaning that one verb covers in other languages. Each of eleven verbs may occur as predicate of the locative clause, the existential clause, or the possessive clause. Clark claims that it is common for languages to use inherently locative verbs in existential constructions (1978:102). She cites languages that use such verbs as *lie*, *sit*, *stand*,  *dwell*, *be at*, and *find*. TZ uses some of these same verbs. However, unlike any language in Clark's sample, TZ uses eleven such verbs in the existential construction.

Clark also claims that it is common for a special negative verb to be used in existential constructions (1978:105). In TZ each of these eleven verbs in the existential clause is negated by replacing it with a single negative verb, *sak not any*, *not here*, *not have*. When the same verbs occur in a non-existential clause, they are negated by attaching the prefix *wa-* to the stem of each verb: *wa-STEM not (on, in, standing, attached to...)*. *wa-* occurs with all other verbs in independent clauses.

In the TZ existential construction each of these eleven verbs may occur with an indirect object indicating possession. Clark claims that this is a common pattern. She says that the

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<sup>10</sup> Clark found insufficient evidence to decide for two more languages: Burmese and Chuvash. However, since she does not distinguish between types of copulas, it is hard to know if any of the languages in her sample make the same distinctions TZ makes.

possessor usually has the syntactic form of the indirect object, a clausal constituent, or of the noun phrase possessor (1978:115).<sup>11</sup>

Existential verbs and copulas often occur as auxiliary verbs and in cleft constructions. In TZ positional verbs are the only ones that occur in similar constructions. The copula never does. This is not surprising since the copula is semantically empty. TZ auxiliaries have an aspectual meaning.

Finally, there is the well known distinction between the English locative clause (33a), with definite subjects, and the existential clause (33b), with indefinite subjects, which is sometimes described as having undergone indefinite extraposition. Word order differences between clauses of the existential construction based on definiteness are claimed to be very common in the world's languages. Clark (1978:88) attributes this difference to the universal tendency for indefinite nominals to occur late in the sentence<sup>12</sup>. In fact, she points out that for some languages word order is the primary indicator of definiteness. It does not indicate definiteness in TZ, however. TZ has definite markers in the noun phrase. *tub* *one* occurs before the head noun as an indefinite marker. The demonstrative adjectives, *i'* *this*, *re* *there (close)*, and *ze?* *there (far)*, occur last in the noun phrase to mark definite head nouns.<sup>13</sup> TZ also has a highly constrained Verb-Subject-Direct Object-Indirect Object order. While a sentence constituent can be fronted, the semantic trigger for fronting does not seem to be definiteness. Note that (36) with an indefinite subject and (37) with a definite subject occur with the same word order.

(36) bzu tub yu bel  
C-stand one 3Mas old  
*There (once) was an old man.*

(37) a zu uz ru zuy  
Q Pr-stand father 2 Pr-stand-3mas  
*Is your father here? He is here.*

*yu 3mas* is a contracted pronoun and a sentence constituent. It is not fronted. Thus, the word order distinction illustrated by (33a) and (33b) for English does not exist for TZ.

Similarly, there is a universal tendency for animate nominals to be ordered before inanimate nominals (Clark 1978:101). This explains why most of the languages in Clark's sample have the possessor ordered before the possessed nominal. In fact, those languages that allow the possessed nominal to be ordered before the possessor all had the more expected word order as an alternative. In the existential construction in TZ, the possessed nominal, which is the subject, always occurs before the possessor, which is indirect object. This is because indirect objects occur after subjects and direct objects. Thus the grammatical relation a nominal bears is more important to word order than definiteness or animacy in TZ.

Another article, by Talmy Givón, from the same volume in which Clark's article appeared, provides a more complete account of definiteness. Givón shows that it is necessary to distinguish definiteness from referentiality in order to understand different ways in which languages encode these two concepts in the grammar. Definiteness is a pragmatic concept which refers to whether or not a noun phrase is new information in the discourse. Referentiality is a semantic concept which concerns how well a noun phrase identifies the thing it is referring to "within a particular universe of discourse" (Givón 1978:293). On the referentiality scale nominals may be either

<sup>11</sup> This is my understanding of what she means when she says that they are usually in the genitive or dative case.

<sup>12</sup> Givón (1978:295) provides the same explanation.

<sup>13</sup> In Givón's frame work, discussed below, *tub* is used only for referential-indefinites, and *ze?*, *re*, and *i'* are used only for referential-definites.

generic (or non-referential) or referential. About generic, Givón says, "the speaker is engaged in discussing the genus or its properties, but does not commit him/herself to the existence of any specific individual member of that genus." And, "one may, though, commit oneself to the existence/ referentiality of the genus itself within the universe of discourse" (1978:294). It is common for the same grammatical device to encode information about both referentiality and definiteness. Givón gives many examples. He also discusses one language, Bemba (Bantu), which encodes only information about referentiality in its articles.

Although TZ existential clauses differ from most languages in that they do not encode information about definiteness, they do seem to encode information about referentiality. Above, I showed that *zu*, which requires animate individuated subjects, can occur with both definite and indefinite subjects. Similarly, *yu?* requires animate grouped subjects. They can be definite.

- (38) a *yu?*            de *φuštiz*  
 Q Pr-be.in Pl authorities  
*Are the town authorities in (their office)?*

*yu?y*  
 Pr-be.in-3Mas  
*They are in.*

They can also be indefinite.

- (39) a *yu?*            [koyot] *škʷe'y*  
 Q Pr-be.in coyote San.Lorenzo  
*Are there coyotes in San Lorenzo?*

*zu* and *yu?* both occur with animate subjects. *zu* occurs with referential subjects. It clearly refers to specific individuals. *yu?* occurs with generic subjects. It refers to a genus and communicates no information about any individual members of the genus. The question (38) might be answered "*They are in,*" if any subset of the set of town authorities is in.

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