

Agreement, Case and Definiteness in Balkan Existential Constructions

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Abstract This paper discusses agreement and definiteness effects in existential constructions in Balkan existential constructions. I build on the restriction on definiteness properties of existential pivots known as definiteness effect: post-copular pivots in existentials have to be indefinite. In Balkan languages, the contrast is also signaled by the use of a dedicated copula exhibiting singular neuter agreement. I argue that existential pivots are interpreted as semantic objects, as evidenced by the assignment of non-nominative case. I propose that existential copulas take two nominals: the post-copular pivot and a pre-copular null expletive, which behaves as the subject of the construction.

Keywords Agreement. Case. Definiteness. Expletives. Existentials. Syntax.

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1 Introduction

This paper presents a minimalist syntactic account of agreement and definiteness effects in existential constructions, focusing on Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian and Serbian counterparts of English there-constructions. Despite the superficial differences, I argue for a unified syntactic analysis for these constructions in Balkan languages. The study eventually aims at defining the type of construction exhibited by the languages under analysis as a generalized Balkan¹ existential pattern.

The study builds on a well-known contrast between locative and existential constructions in English; starting from Milsark (1974), literature has revealed a cross-linguistic restriction on definiteness properties of existential pivots: the *definiteness effect* predicts that post-copular pivots in existential constructions have to be indefinite. This effect extends to Balkan languages, where the contrast between locative and existential constructions is also signaled using a dedicated *have* copula, which exhibits singular neuter² agreement.

In line with previous formal approaches to Balkan languages (Turano 2021; Kampanarou 2023; Frasson, Vaikšnoraitė forthcoming), I argue that existential pivots are interpreted as ‘semantic objects’, as evidenced by the assignment of accusative (in Albanian and Greek) or genitive (in Serbian) to post-copular pivots. I propose that existential copulas take two nominals: the post-copular pivot and a pre-copular null expletive, which behaves as the grammatical subject of the construction.

Hence, the indefinite pivot is assigned structural accusative case by the copula in Albanian and Greek, as nominative is already assigned to the null expletive subject. Bulgarian and Macedonian do not morphologically mark case on the pivot, which however needs to be indefinite. I argue that such restriction on definiteness is responsible for genitive assignment to Serbian existential pivots: following Kagan (2009; 2012), I assume that genitive is particularly likely to appear on indefinite arguments as it expresses lack of existential commitment.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 discusses the contrast between locative and existential constructions; Section 3 presents the Balkan data, focusing on formal and interpretive differences

1 I refer to Balkan languages as to the languages spoken in the Balkan peninsula, rather than just those belonging to the Balkan Sprachbund.

2 The data show that neuter gender is not marked on all copulas, but only in participle forms used in past tenses. Given that existential agreement is analyzed here as a regular instance of subject-verb agreement, I propose that the lack of gender marking on present tense copulas follows from a more general configuration of the verbal system in the languages under analysis, whereby the gender of the subject is normally not realized on finite verbs, but only on (some) non-finite verbs.

between locative and existential constructions in Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian and Serbian. In Section 4, I show that the difference between locative and existential constructions is reflected in their interpretation as predicative orthetic constructions; in addition, I propose that existential pivots do not exhibit subject properties. Building on this notion, in Section 5 I present a syntactic analysis of locative and existential constructions, discussing agreement, case assignment and interpretive properties of the copula. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2 Existential and Locative Constructions

This paper analyzes the opposition between locative and existential copular constructions from the perspective of Balkan languages. The difference between locative and existential constructions has received wide attention in the generative syntactic tradition, since Milsark (1974), who studied the contrast between existential *there*-constructions (1a) and locative structures (1b) in English.

(1) English

- a. There are cats here.
- b. The cats are here.

Locative constructions (1b) can be assimilated to regular predicative constructions, with a definite nominal functioning as a subject of predication. The components of an existential construction require the introduction of some additional concepts. Existential constructions like the one in (1a) exhibit special morphosyntactic properties that set them apart from locatives; they are made up of a pivot, a copula, a coda and an expletive subject.

The *pivot* is a noun phrase denoting an entity whose existence is presented in the sentence. Cross-linguistically, pivots tend to be realized as indefinite nouns. The restriction on the realization of definite pivots is known in the literature as *Definiteness Effect* (Milsark 1974):

Definiteness effect (Milsark 1974)

The post-verbal noun phrase of existential *there*-clauses in English must be indefinite.

This effect seems to hold quite generally cross-linguistically, as Balkan languages will confirm.

The second component of an existential construction is the *coda*, representing the portion of an existential construction where the spatial or temporal coordinates in which the existence of the pivot is

assumed; the coda provides a domain in which the pivot can be interpreted. For the present discussion, I assume that the coda is represented in syntax as a VP adjunct (McNally 1992).

The *copula* is generally (though not universally) represented as a verb predicating the existence of the pivot.

Finally, the *expletive* is intended as a dummy form which lacks referential properties, whose role is assumed to be that of a filler of the subject position if, for independent reasons, the subject cannot be null.

Most relevantly for the present discussion, not all elements discussed above need to be present in an existential construction. Francez (2007) showed that only the pivot is cross-linguistically universally obligatory in existential constructions. Codas are always available, but never obligatory. Copulas are always optional and there is cross-linguistic variation in their realization. Expletives are generally obligatory, if available in the system.

The literature on existential constructions is extensive and discusses the nature of such constructions in a variety of languages. Cross-linguistic studies (Bentley et al. 2015; Francez 2007; McCloskey 2014; McNally 2011; Moro 1997; Sarda, Lena 2023) revealed that both existential and locative constructions express the existence or the presence of someone or something in a context (McNally 2011). However, existential constructions may exhibit a cluster of formal properties that set them apart from locative constructions. Consider the French examples in (2a) and (2b):

(2) French

- a. Il y a des chats ici.
EXPL.3SG.NOM LOC have.PRS.3SG IND cat.PL.PART here
 'There are cats here.'
- b. Les chats sont ici.
the.DEF.PL cat.PL.NOM be.PRS.3PL here
 'The cats are here.'

The existential sentence in (2a) uses the expletive pronoun *il*, the *have* copula *y a*, the indefinite pivot *des chats* and the locative coda *ici*. In (2b), the locative construction exhibits a preverbal definite nominal and uses a *be* copula.

There are even more fine-grained differences between the structures presented in (2a) and (2b). First, the use of a *be* copula in the locative in (2b), which contrasts with the use of a *have* copula in the existential construction (2a). Besides, the *be* copula in (2b) exhibits full person and number agreement with the preverbal plural DP *les chats*. The *have* copula in (2a) does not agree with the post-copular pivot: the copula is marked for third person singular whereas the

pivot is marked for plural. The *have* copula in (2a) agrees with the preverbal dummy subject *il*, a masculine singular form. Third, the post-copular pivot in (2a) is preceded by the preposition *des*, used in French as a partitive marker. In Section 3, I show that parallel contrasts between existential and locative constructions can be found across Balkan languages too.

3 Data

Balkan languages exhibit a high degree of variation in the rendition of English and French existential constructions (see Sobolev 1997 on Balkan Slavic). Nevertheless, locative and existential constructions can be clearly identified based on a number of formal properties, similarly to what was shown in Section 2. In the present study, I focus on standard³ varieties of Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian and Serbian, where a contrast emerges between locative sentences and existential structures exhibiting default third singular neuter agreement on a *have* copula. I identify three patterns in the realization of existential constructions: the Bulgarian-Macedonian one, the Albanian-Greek one and the Serbian one. In the remainder of this section, I present them separately.

The first pattern is represented by Bulgarian⁴ and Macedonian, which alternate different copulas and definite or indefinite forms of the nominal in the construction.

(3) Bulgarian

- a. Tuk ima kotk-i.
 here have.PRS.3SG cat-PL
 'There are cats here.'
- b. Kotk-i-te sa tuk.
 cat-PL-DEF be.PRS.3PL here
 'The cats are here.'

³ For the purposes of the present study, I focus on standard varieties of the languages under analysis. I leave the discussion of dialectal variation in the use of existential and locative constructions in Balkan languages for future research.

⁴ An anonymous reviewer pointed out that Bulgarian allows for existential constructions with definite pivots and doubling accusative clitics:

- (i) Ima gi dārveta-ta (...).
 have.PRS.3SG them.ACC.3PL tree-PL-DEF
 'There are the trees (...).'

I leave the discussion of the role of the definite article in such examples for future research. The presence of an accusative clitic in (i) can support the analysis of case assignment presented in the following sections.

(4) Macedonian

- a. Tuka ima mačk-i.
here have.PRS.3SG cat-PL
'There are cats here.'
- b. Mačk-i-te se tuka.
cat-PL-DEF be.PRS.3PL here
'The cats are here.'

In both languages, existential constructions (3-4a) exhibit a *have* copula in the third person singular followed by an indefinite pivot. Conversely, locative constructions (3-4b) exhibit a pre-copular definite nominal, followed by a fully agreeing *be* copula.

Albanian and Greek present a similar, but slightly more complex pattern: just like Bulgarian and Macedonian, existential constructions use a third person singular *have* copula and a post-copular indefinite pivot (5-6a), while locative constructions use a pre-copular definite nominal and a *be* copula (5-6b).

(5) Albanian

- a. Ka mac-e këtu.
have.PRS.3SG cat-PL.ACC here
'There are cats here.'
- b. Mac-e-t janë këtu.
cat-PL.NOM-DEF be.PRS.3PL here
'The cats are here.'

(6) Greek (Kampanarou, 2023)

- a. Échei kafé sto ntoulápi.
have.PRS.3SG coffee.SG.ACC in cupboard.
'There is coffee in the cupboard.'
- b. O kafé-s éinai sto ntoulápi.
the.DEF.PL coffee-SG.NOM be.PRS.3SG in cupboard.
'The coffee is in the cupboard.'

Unlike Bulgarian and Macedonian, Albanian and Greek existential constructions reveal another important property: the post-copular indefinite pivots in (5a) and (6a) are assigned accusative case. I will assume that this holds both for Greek, where accusative is sometimes morphologically distinct from nominative, and Albanian, as argued in Turano (2021), even though the nominative-accusative alternation is not morphologically realized in Albanian indefinite nouns.

Finally, Serbian exhibits properties that parallel the ones discussed for the remaining languages: existentials use a *have* copula

that does not agree in number with the post-copular pivot (7a),⁵ while locatives are formed with a nominative case-marked nominal, a fully agreeing *be* copula and an obligatory locative marker (7b).

(7) Serbian

- a. Ima mačak-a ovde.
have.PRS.3SG cat-PL.GEN here
'There are cats here.'
- b. Mačk-e su ovde.
cat-PL.NOM be.PRS.3PL here
'The cats are here.'

However, Serbian presents a further complication; on a par with Albanian and Greek, Serbian post-copular pivots are not nominative-marked. Unlike Albanian and Greek, the Serbian pivot in (7a) is genitive-marked.

A further difference between Serbian and other Balkan languages regards the use of *have* copulas. In the other languages discussed in the present study, the use of different copulas in locative and existential constructions is preserved in past tense: a non-agreeing *have* copula is used in past existential constructions in Albanian in (8a), in contrast with the fully agreeing *be* copula in the past locative construction in (8b).

(8) Albanian

- a. Këtu kishte mac-e.
here have.PST.3SG cat-PL.ACC
'There were cats here.'
- b. Mac-e-t ish-in këtu.
cat-PL.NOM-DEF be.PST.3PL here
'The cats were here.'

The difference between the two constructions in the past tense parallels the one shown in (5a-b) for present tense.

In the case of Serbian, the alternation between *be* and *have* is neutralized in the past, as both existential and locative constructions

⁵ As pointed out by a reviewer, Serbian allows for full agreement in constructions with a *have* copula and a post-copular nominative nominal:

- (ii) Ima-ju mačk-e ovde.
have.PRS-3PL cat-PL.NOM here
'There are cats here.'

Such examples are discussed, among others, in Hartmann and Miličević (2008). I assume that these structures represent a third possibility, not discussed in the present work, which can be defined as "inverse locatives" (see Frasson 2024).

use a *be* copula.⁶ However, the difference regarding the agreement pattern is retained in the past tense: the existential copula (9a) does not agree in number and gender with the post-copular pivot, while the locative copula (9b) exhibits full agreement.

(9) Serbian

- a. Bi-l-o je mačak-a ovde.
be-PRT-3SGN be.PRS.3SG cat-PL.GEN here
'There were cats here.'
- b. Mačk-e su bi-l-e ovde.
cat.PL.NOM be.PRS.3PL be-PRT-3PLF here
'The cats were here.'

Finally, Serbian (and Slavic, more generally) past existentials reveal another interesting fact about the nature of existential agreement: the copula does not display gender agreement, as the participle form is always neuter.

Before moving to the analysis, Section 3.1 will present additional relevant interpretive properties of Balkan existentials.

3.1 Other Properties of Existentials

The Greek example in (6a) evidences an additional property of Balkan existential constructions. Unlike other examples, (6a) exhibits a singular pivot,⁷ which is generally interpreted as a partitive.⁸ Consider the following examples in the remaining languages:

(10) Albanian

- a. Ka sheqer në tryezë.
have.PRS.3SG sugar.SG.ACC on table
'There is some sugar on the table.'
- b. Ka tort-ë në tryezë.
have.PRS.3SG cake-SG.ACC on table
'There are (parts of) cake on the table.'

6 Some speakers of Serbian accept a *have* copula in the past too. Sobolev (1997) shows that there is variation in the use of *be* and *have* copulas in dialects of Serbian and Croatian. Here I mainly focus on constructions with *have*, leaving the question of the alternation with *be* for future research.

7 As shown in Kampanarou (2023), the distinction between nominative and accusative is not always morphologically marked in Greek. Crucially, examples parallel to the ones in (3), (4), (7) would not provide direct evidence for case alternation. The distinction between nominative and accusative is never marked in the Albanian indefinite declension.

8 According to an anonymous reviewer, the Bulgarian example in (12a) can (but needs not) be partitive. The partitive reading is ensured by the presence of an adverb like *malko* (*a little*).

(11) Serbian

- a. Na stolu ima šećer-a.
on table.LOC have.PRS.3SG sugar-SG.GEN
'There is some sugar on the table.'
- b. Na stolu ima tort-e.
on table.LOC have.PRS.3SG cake-SG.GEN
'There are (parts of) cake on the table.'

(12) Bulgarian

- a. Na masa-ta ima zaxar.
on table-DEF have.PRS.3SG sugar
'There is some sugar on the table.'
- b. Na masa-ta ima torta.
on table-DEF have.PRS.3SG cake
'There are (parts of) cake on the table.'

In all these examples, a singular indefinite mass or count noun is interpreted as a partitive pivot in *have* constructions.

In addition, post-copular pivots of existential constructions are generally incompatible (or less compatible) with an agent-oriented adverbs such as *intentionally* or *deliberately* (Grimshaw 1990) when such adverbs refer to the pivot. Conversely, locative sentences with pre-copular nominative pivots are compatible with such adverbs. Notice that this restriction holds in all the languages under analysis. Consider the difference in the interpretation of the existential constructions in (13a-17a), with respect to the locative constructions in (13b-17b):

(13) Albanian

- a. *Kishte vajz-a në festë me qëllim.
have.PST.3SG girl.PL at party with purpose
'There were girls at the party on purpose.'
- b. Vajz-a-t ishin në festë me qëllim.
girl.PL-DEF be.PST.3PL at party with purpose
'The girls were at the party on purpose.'

(14) Bulgarian

- a. *Umišleno imaše student-i na săbitie-to.
intentionally have.PST.3SG student-PL at event-DEF
'There were students at the event intentionally.'
- b. Student-i-te umišleno bjaxa na săbitie-to.
student-PL-DEF intentionally be.PST.3PL at event-DEF
'The students were at the event intentionally.'

(15) Greek (Kampanarou 2023)

- a. *Échei skopima paidiá sto párko.
have.PRS.3SG deliberately kid.PL.ACC at park
'There are kids at the park deliberately.'
- b. Ta paidiá ítan sto párko skopima.
the.PL.DEF kid.PL.NOM be.PRS.3PL at park deliberately
'The kids are deliberately at the park.'

(16) Macedonian

- a. *Na zabava-ta namerno imaše student-i.
at party-DEF intentionally have.PST.3SG student-PL
'There were students at the party intentionally.'
- b. Student-i-te namerno bea na zabava-ta.
student-PL-DEF intentionally be.PST.3PL at party-DEF
'The students were at the event intentionally.'

(17) Serbian

- a. *Namerno je bi-l-o devojak-a na žurci.
intentionally be.3SG be-PRT-3SGN girl-PL.GEN at party.SG.LOC
'There were girls at the party intentionally.'
- b. Devojk-e su namerno bi-l-e na žurci.
girl-PL.NOM be.3PL intentionally be-PRT-3PLF at party.SG.LOC
'The girls were at the party intentionally.'

The only possible interpretation for the existential examples in (13a – 17a) is the one in which the agent-oriented adverb reflects the intention of someone other than the pivot. Conversely, locative constructions in (13b – 17b) only allow for an interpretation by which the adverb reflects the intention of the definite noun.

One final consideration regards binding of possessives. Existential constructions exhibit a restriction on the binding of subject-oriented possessive *svoj* in Slavic languages. Consider the following examples:

(18) Serbian

- a. Student-i_y su u svoj-im_y sob-ama.
student-PL.NOM be.PRS.3PL in own-PL.LOC room-PL.LOC
'The students are in their own rooms.'
- b. *Ima studenat-a_y u svoj-im_y sob-ama.
have.PRS.3SG student-PL.GEN in own-PL.LOC room-PL.LOC
'There are students in their (*own) rooms.'

(19) Macedonian

- a. Student-i-te_y se vo svoi-te_y sob-i.
 student-PL-DEF be.PRS.3PL in OWN-DEF ROOM-PL
 ‘The students are in their own rooms.’
- b. *Ima student-i_y vo svoi-te_y sob-i.
 have.PRS.3SG student-PL in OWN-DEF ROOM-PL
 ‘There are students in their (*own) rooms.’

In the Serbian (18a) and Macedonian (19a) locative constructions, *svoj* is bound by the subject of predication. However, *svoj* resists binding by the genitive or indefinite pivot in the existential examples in (18b) and (19b).

3.2 Summary

In the present Section, I identified morphosyntactic and interpretive properties of Balkan existential constructions that evidence a contrast with locative constructions. Such properties are summarized in [tab. 1] for existentials and [tab. 2] for locatives.

Table 1 Morphosyntactic and interpretive properties of existential constructions

	Bulgarian	Macedonian	Albanian	Greek	Serbian
Copula	have	have	have	have	have/be
N Position	post-copular	post-copular	post-copular	post-copular	post-copular
N Case	-	-	accusative	accusative	genitive
Definite N	no	no	no	no	no
Agreement	neuter sg	neuter sg	sg	sg	neuter sg
Partitive	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Agent adverbs	no	no	no	no	no
<i>svoj</i>	no	no	-	-	no

Table 2 Morphosyntactic and interpretive properties of locative constructions

	Bulgarian	Macedonian	Albanian	Greek	Serbian
Copula	be	be	be	be	be
N position	pre-copular	pre-copular	pre-copular	pre-copular	pre-copular
N Case	-	-	nominative	nominative	nominative
Definite N	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Agreement	full	full	full	full	full
Partitive	no	no	no	no	no
Agent adverbs	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>svoj</i>	yes	yes	-	-	yes

I argue for a unified analysis of existential constructions in Balkan varieties. I show that language specific differences, such as case properties of existential pivots in Albanian, Greek and Serbian, are captured in syntactic terms by assuming different Agree operations in the two types of constructions.

4 Towards an Analysis: The Interpretation of Existentials

Before moving to the syntactic analysis of existential constructions, I will briefly discuss their interpretation. Previous literature on existential constructions (Partee, Borschev 2004; Błaszczak 2009) showed that the incompatibility of an indefinite pivot with agent-oriented adverbs depends on the fact that the post-copular pivot is characterized by the lack of specific interpretive properties, such as agentivity and volitionality (as independently shown in Grimshaw 1990). In other words, the indefinite post-copular pivot in existential constructions is not agentive and does not have control over the situation.

At the information-structural level, existential constructions have been analyzed as presentative (thetic) structures in Lambrecht (1994): existentials report the existence of a newly introduced referent, but do not commit to the existence of the pivot in a specific place. Conversely, locative structures predicate the actual existence of a previously introduced referent, occupying a definite location.

In sum, existential pivots do not express agentivity, volitionality and definiteness, and they introduce a new discourse referent. As shown in Section 3, languages like Albanian, Greek and Serbian do not assign nominative case to existential pivots, which need to appear in a post-copular position and do not agree with the copula. Additionally, it was shown that existential pivots in Slavic languages fail to bind subject-oriented possessive *svoj*. These facts point to the lack of any syntactic or interpretative subject properties of existential pivots, following Keenan' (1976) hierarchy of subject features.

The lack of subject properties of the existential pivot indicates a general desubjectivization of the pivot (Sasse 1987): while the post-copular pivot is the logical subject of existential constructions, it does not occupy the grammatical position of the subject. Following Błaszczak (2009), in Section (5) I will propose that the existential pivot is merged as an internal argument in the VP complement.

5 The Syntax of Existential Constructions

5.1 Neuter Agreement and Expletive *pro*

The analysis presented in this study builds on the approach to the structure of existential constructions in Serbian and Lithuanian discussed in Frasson and Vaikšnoraitė (*forthcoming*). The main assumption behind this analysis is that the existential copula cannot assign nominative case to the pivot in languages like Albanian, Greek and Serbian because it assigns nominative case to a preverbal silent element. The impossibility of assigning nominative case to the post-copular pivot is also reflected in the agreement pattern displayed by existential constructions: singular (neuter) agreement is not a 'default' pattern, but rather represents full agreement with a silent expletive in the pre-verbal subject position.

In other words, the pivot cannot receive nominative case because of the presence of a null expletive *pro*, which is first merged in Spec-vP, intervening between the copula and the pivot. Therefore, the agreement pattern displayed by Balkan existentials is captured as an instance of regular subject-verb agreement.

Frasson and Vaikšnoraitė (*forthcoming*) propose a syntactic analysis of both locative and existential constructions, building on a minimalist version of the analysis originally presented in Kayne (1989) and Belletti (2006) for Romance past participle agreement, as discussed in D'Alessandro and Roberts (2008). This analysis shows that full agreement between a direct object and a past participle results from internal argument fronting. I propose that parallel considerations holds for full agreement between a VP-internal pivot and a copula. The minimalist version of such approach, discussed in D'Alessandro and Roberts (2008), can be summarized as follows:

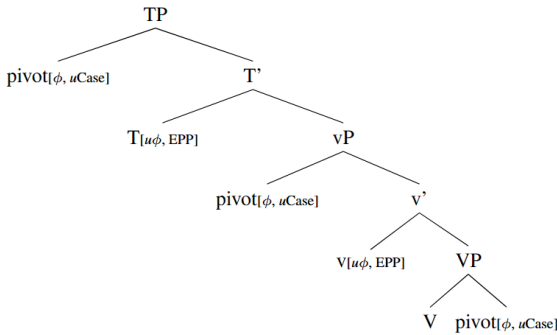
(20) Adapted from D'Alessandro and Roberts (2008)

- v has unvalued ϕ -features, as well as an EPP feature.
- v probes the VP-internal nominal in order to have its features valued.
- The VP-internal nominal has valued ϕ -features and is an active goal because of its unvalued case feature.
- The nominal moves to Spec-vP, it values the EPP and ϕ -features on v.
- T has unvalued ϕ -features too, as well as an EPP feature.
- T probes for the nominal in Spec-vP in order to have its features valued.
- The nominal moves to Spec-TP, it values the EPP and ϕ -features of T and receives structural nominative case.

Following this approach, I argue that the agreement pattern exhibited by locative constructions is associated with the promotion of

a post-copular pivot to subject position: the post-copular nominal is raised to Spec-vP, satisfies the EPP feature on v and values v's ϕ -features; the nominal is subsequently raised from Spec-vP to Spec-TP, it satisfies the EPP feature on T and values T's ϕ -features. The pivot is eventually assigned structural nominative case from T.

(21)



The locative pivot in (21) acts in all respects as a subject. It has the interpretive properties of the subject and, at the syntactic level, undergoes movement to Spec-TP, agreeing with the verb and receiving structural nominative case.

I argue that the agreement pattern exhibited by Balkan existential constructions results from similar structural considerations; however, it requires an account of the fact that, in presentative constructions like existentials, the pivot is left in situ. The agreement pattern exhibited by existentials depends on the presence of an expletive *pro* that satisfies v's EPP feature: since *pro* has valued neuter singular ϕ -features, the participle used in past tense copulas will exhibit singular neuter agreement.

D'Alessandro and Roberts (2008) reject the existence of expletive *pro* in view of its lack of visible properties at LF or PF. In view of this, they finally adopt a different analysis in their study.⁹ However, the Balkan data presented in Sections 3 and 4 suggest that there are clear LF and PF effects associated with existential constructions. LF effects are identified with the presentative interpretation of existentials, suggesting that the post-copular pivot cannot be analyzed as a subject. I argue that the subject function is rather performed by

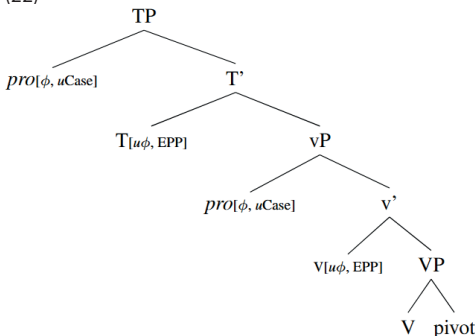
⁹ D'Alessandro and Roberts' (2008) approach builds on Italian data on participle agreement and shows that lack of agreement with a post-verbal nominal depends on a notion of phase and requires PF-mapping assumptions. While I do not discuss nor argue against this approach in the present paper, I maintain that the subject position in existential constructions is filled by a null expletive.

the pre-copular null expletive. As for PF effects, the Serbian example in (9) showed that existentials exhibit morphological neuter singular agreement: this specification cannot be analyzed as a default type of agreement, but rather a full agreement pattern with a singular neuter null subject. I argue that such effects motivate the requirement of an expletive *pro* in Spec-TP.

Therefore, my analysis departs from D’Alessandro and Roberts (2008); I show that the lack of agreement with the post-copular pivot in Balkan existential constructions reflects an agreement relationship holding between the copula and a pre-copular null expletive. Balkan expletive *pro* carries third person singular neuter valued features: the singular neuter features on the participle in past copulas provide clear morphosyntactic evidence that there is no default agreement; ϕ -features on the copula are fully valued and agree with a singular neuter expletive *pro*. I argue that this analysis can be extended to all the Balkan languages included in this study, even though gender is not always morphologically marked on the copula: the syntactic operation I adopt for existentials reduces to a regular instance of subject-verb agreement, whereby the languages under analysis mark gender only on participle forms.

The analysis of existential constructions proceeds as follows. Expletive *pro* is merged in Spec-vP and satisfies *v*’s EPP ϕ -features; the presence of *pro* has an intervention effect, resulting in the impossibility of establishing an agreement relationship between the copula and the VP-internal pivot. Therefore, *pro*, rather than the pivot, raises to Spec-TP and satisfies the EPP on T, eventually valuing its ϕ -features as third person singular neuter. As a consequence, the expletive is assigned nominative case from T. The resulting syntactic configuration sees the pivot being c-commanded by the expletive nominative *pro*, and is therefore assigned structural accusative case in Albanian and Greek (contra Burzio 1986). I leave the discussion of genitive-marked pivots in Serbian to Section 5.2. The structure of existential constructions is shown in (22).

(22)



The syntactic configuration of existentials and locatives are therefore very similar and do not require additional functional heads (see Hartmann 2008 for an alternative proposal); the main difference in the agreement pattern exhibited by existentials depends on the presence of an expletive *pro* that constitutes the closest Goal for agreement with the copula in T, which is valued as singular neuter.

5.2 Genitive Case Assignment in Serbian

As shown throughout the paper, the main difference between the Albanian/Greek and Serbian agreement pattern consists in the type of non-nominative case used in existential pivots. Crucially, while Albanian and Greek indefinite pivots are accusative-marked, Serbian pivots are genitive-marked. This question was addressed in Frasson and Vaikšnoraitė (*forthcoming*), with respect to the use of genitive pivots in Serbian and Lithuanian existential constructions. To answer this question, it is necessary to reconcile the use of genitive with the definiteness effect (Milsark 1974), according to which post-copular pivots are generally indefinite. This is clearly shown in Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek and Macedonian, where a definite post-copular pivot is generally not accepted. I argue that the use of a genitive-marked pivot in Serbian, a language lacking dedicated definiteness markers on nouns, follows from similar considerations. Kagan (2009, 2012) shows that genitive marking is particularly likely to appear on indefinite internal arguments of a verb and establishes a correlation between the distribution of accusative and genitive and the lack of existential commitment. In view of the analysis of interpretive and syntactic properties of existentials, Frasson and Vaikšnoraitė (*forthcoming*) argued that genitive case is inherently licensed on the pivot in the sense of Woolford (2006), which can be summarized as in (23):

(23) Adapted from Woolford (2006, 117)

Inherent case is licensed by a v-head to a theta-position in its c-commanding domain.

In view of (23), I argue that post-copular Serbian pivots are assigned inherent genitive case by the copula in *v*. The pivot cannot receive an agent theta role from *v*, consistently with the definition of existentials as presentative (thetic) constructions; recall that the genitive-marked nominal is structurally analyzed as an internal argument that has the semantic properties of an object.

In Section 4, I showed that existential pivots have no structural or interpretive properties of subjects; such properties are only exhibited by raised pivots in locative constructions. In existentials, the pivot is realized VP-internally and an expletive *pro* is raised to Spec-TP, is assigned nominative case and agrees with the copula.

Following Frasson and Vaikšnoraitė (*forthcoming*), I argue that genitive assignment to Serbian post-copular pivots applies as an elsewhere principle:

- (24) Adapted from Frasson and Vaikšnoraitė (*forthcoming*)
Genitive case is inherently licensed on post-copular pivots in Serbian existential constructions if:
- the pivot has the structural and interpretive properties of an internal argument, and;
 - the pivot is not assigned an agent theta-role by *v*, and;
 - a dummy form, lacking theta-roles, satisfies the EPP on T.

I remain agnostic on whether inherent case assignment is related to structural considerations resulting from the embedding of the pivot under additional functional heads on top of N (Q, P,....). For the purposes of the present discussion, I will assume that accusative pivots in Albanian and Greek and genitive pivots in Serbian do not exhibit structural differences and the difference in case marking is handled post-syntactically.

5.3 A Note on the Have Copula

One last question regards the nature of the *have* copula employed in Balkan existential constructions. In this section, I tentatively show that the distinction between existential and locative agreement patterns depends on a difference in the choice of copulas in the two types of constructions. A complete analysis of this issue is a matter of current research. The structure in (22) shows that Balkan existential copulas require an expletive *pro* in Spec-TP and a pivot in the VP complement. Conversely, locative structures (21) exhibit only one nominal, which is raised to Spec-TP. I argue that the requirement to merge an expletive *pro* in existentials depends on a difference in the featural composition of the two copulas.¹⁰

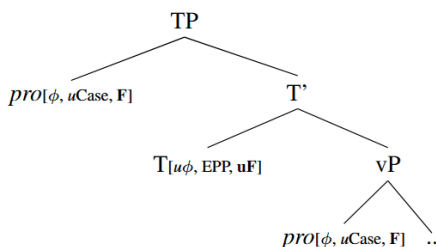
Błaszczak (2009) proposed that existential *have* copulas encode specific featural, thematic and formal properties and are therefore to be analyzed as separate lexical items. In this sense, the use of a dedicated existential copula represents a requirement of the LF interface for interpretive purposes. This idea is in line with the discussion carried out in Section 4, where I defined existentials as presentative structures, whose pivots are interpreted as new information. Such interpretation does not hold for locative constructions.

10 Recall that the discussion fully holds for Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek and Macedonian, but only partially for Serbian: as shown in Section 3, the copula alternation is morphologically realized in the present tense, by means of an alternation of *have* and *be* forms, while it is neutralized in the past tense: both existentials and locatives use *be* forms.

In the previous sections, I showed that the presentative interpretation obtains in the presence of an expletive *pro*, which moves to the structural subject position (Spec-TP) and blocks agreement with the pivot, which is left in the VP complement. I tentatively interpret this as a special requirement of existential T. The presentative interpretation associated with existentials allows only an element carrying additional interpretive properties to be raised to Spec-TP in existentials.

This possibility was discussed in the cartographic analyses presented in Rizzi and Shlonsky (2007) and Sigurðsson (2010). These studies show that the presence of interpretive features such as topic and focus may result in a special EPP property, requiring a (null or overt) expletive to be raised to a functional head higher than TP (more specifically, to SubjP in Rizzi and Shlonsky 2007, or to a functional head in the lower CP field in Sigurðsson 2010). In the present study, I assume no special EPP requirements and propose that the presentative interpretation exhibited by existentials results from the presence of an additional unvalued feature *uF* on T, which has an interpretive import and therefore needs to be valued by a constituent carrying a valued feature *F* with matching interpretive import. The Agree relationship proceeds as follows: T probes down to find a compatible Goal to value its *uF*. Expletive *pro* carries such a feature, making it a compatible Goal for T and agreeing with it (25).

(25)



In (25), an expletive *pro*, carrying *F* is merged in Spec-vP. When raised to Spec-TP, *pro* satisfies the EPP on T and values its ϕ -features, as well as the interpretive *uF* feature.

The use of a *have* copula in existential constructions morphologically signals the different featural composition of the copula in T.

In this last section, I provided additional evidence for the LF and PF motivations of expletive *pro* in existential constructions. Besides, I showed that the *have* copula carries no relation to the argumental structure of *be* copulas, allowing me to argue that *have* constitutes a separate lexical item. Crucially, the existential *have* copula requires an additional (accusative- or genitive- marked) nominal – the pivot, which is realized as an internal argument.

6 Conclusion

This paper proposed a unified syntactic approach to Balkan existentials. Based on Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Macedonian and Serbian data, I showed that the contrast between locative and existential constructions is realized in these languages using the same morphological and syntactic components, yielding parallel interpretations. I conclude that it is possible to define the *have*-existential construction as a generalized Balkan pattern: the case alternation in Albanian, Greek and Serbian depends on structural and argumental properties of existential constructions. In particular, I argued for an analysis of the existential copula as a separate lexical item, which takes two noun phrases: a post-copular pivot (indefinite and non-nominative – in languages that morphologically mark case) and a pre-copular expletive *pro*. This proposal is supported by the fact that the existential copula is spelled-out as *have* at PF. At LF, I proposed that the agreement relationship in existential constructions needs to hold between an expletive *pro* and T because of a feature F, associated with special interpretive properties related to the thetic nature of the existential construction.

Additional support for expletive *pro* was provided based on the agreement pattern exhibited by existential constructions: I showed that post-copular existential pivots do not act as grammatical subjects, but rather qualify as internal arguments, in that they do not agree with the copula. Conversely, the copula fully agrees in ϕ -features with the null expletive in the subject position.

Finally, I showed that the definiteness effect exhibited by the pivot holds across Balkan languages: the Serbian genitive-marked pivot expresses indefiniteness and lack of existential commitment, on a par with Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek and Macedonian indefinite pivots.

Abbreviations

acc	Accusative
def	Definite
expl	Expletive
f	Feminine
gen	Genitive
ind	Indefinite
loc	Locative
n	Neuter
nom	Nominative
part	Partitive
pl	Plural
prs	Present
prt	Participle
pst	Past
sg	singular

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