# DEONTIC EXISTENTIALS

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In this paper I start from the claim that at least in some languages there are constructions which work parallel to canonical existential constructions but which are characterised by a surplus value consisting in deontic modality, cf. (1) from Italian:

(1) a.  Canonical existential
  *Ci sono  tre uova nel  frigorifero.*
  LOC BE.3PL  three eggs in-DET fridge
  'There are three eggs in the fridge.'

  b.  Existential + deontic modality
  *Ci vogliono tre uova per fare  questa torta.*
  LOC BE.3PL three eggs for make this  cake
  'There must be three eggs/Three eggs are needed to make this cake.'

This special type of existential, which I call "deontic existential" and which in the languages under discussion is instantiated by a construction with the modal verb WANT, is more specialised in interpretation than the simple combination of deontic modal plus canonical existential would be, cf. (2a) vs. (2b):

(2) a.  *Ci devono essere  tre  uova.*   $\Rightarrow$ Interpretation: deontic / epistemic
  LOC MUST.3PL BE.INF  three eggs
  'There must be three eggs.'

  b.  *Ci vogliono tre  uova.*   $\Rightarrow$ Interpretation: deontic / *epistemic
  LOC BE.3PL  three eggs
  'There must be three eggs/Three eggs are needed.'

Thus, 'coming into existence' can be semantically modalised in several ways, but in the WANT-construction (2b), contrary to the construction with the modal MUST and BE in (2a), the modality can only be interpreted as deontically, but not epistemically, necessary.

    Crosslinguistically, the deontic existential at issue behaves syntactically like its canonical counterpart: in Italian, in both existential constructions there is an obligatory locative element, the unmarked position of the pivot is postverbal, but still it agrees with the finite verb. Once a clear distinction between existential constructions proper and locatives is drawn (as the ones observed by Leonetti 2008) one can also observe definiteness effects in both deontic and canonical existentials in Italian. Definiteness effects are even more obvious in Sardinian, which also has both types of existentials. Moreover, also in Sardinian canonical and deontic constructions behave syntactically in similar ways and show the same correlations with the definiteness effect, cf. (3) (cf. Jones 1993, La Fauci & Loporcaro 1997, Bentley 2004, 2011, Remberger 2009):

(3) a.  *B' at  kérfitu    tres ovos* [...].     (Jones 1993:101)
  there HAVE.3SG WANT.PARTICIPLE three eggs
  'Three eggs were needed.'
  $\Rightarrow$ indefinite DP, postverbal position, no agreement, auxiliary: HAVE
  $\Rightarrow$ deontic existential with an existential operator in subject position

b.   *Bi     sun     kérfitos          cussos  ómines* [...].              (Jones 1993:101)
    there BE.3PL   WANT.PARTICIPLE   these  men
    'These men were needed there.'
    ⇒ definite DP, subject-verb and participle agreement, auxiliary: BE
    ⇒ deontic copula with a locative clitic in subject position

The difference in meaning of these two constructions stems from the difference of the functional meaning encoded in the copula BE, normally considered to be semantically almost empty, and the verb WANT, which, in its canonical use, would be a modal verb encoding volitionality (for *volerci*, cf. also Remberger 2005, Russi 2006; for similar verbs of necessity, cf. Benincà & Poletto 1994, 1997). The aim of this paper is thus to further investigate the ingredients of the "deontic existentials" presented here, in order to shed new light on the interplay of syntax and semantics in canonical existential constructions.

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