

IS EXISTENTIAL THERE EVER A MOOD PARTICLE? EVIDENCE FROM TUNISIAN ARABIC (TA)

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Existentials in TA can be with a dummy expletive besides the standard weak pivot in (1a) as well as with a presentational mood particle *famma* allowing a strong pivot in (1b) (Milsark, 1974, 1977).

- (1) a. *famma wled yalʕeb fi-l-ku:ra* b. *famma le-wled yalʕeb fi-l-ku:ra*
 ‘There is a boy playing football.’ ‘I can see the boy playing football.’

Contra Milsark’s DE permitting only a weak pivot in existentials, (1b) displays a distinct *famma*-existential hosting a strong (definite) nominal pivot. Constructions like (1b) beg the question as to the nature of such existentials and the optimal account to take up to for a construal of existentials in TA. Abbott (1993, 1997), for example, advances the pragmatic approach as the most convenient approach for existentials crosslinguistically. Abbott perceives existentials as assertive constructions where the DE equates to the Novelty Condition on discourse referents; i.e., the pivot, and a three-way division of the existential there: a locational, a dummy expletive, and a paralinguistic particle-like there. Interestingly, the existential *famma* in TA is divisible into a purely dummy one in (1a) and an exclusively existential mood particle *famma* like in (1b), in addition to another locative *ga:di*: ‘there’. Knowing that the existential is an optimal device to save a canonical construction from a poor indefinite (weak) focus DP subject, then (1b) is licit. It is saved in this respect by *famma* which reduces to a mood particle the function of which is that of a paralinguistic interjection drawing the hearer’s attention to a given event or discourse referent. Syntactically, ‘there-insertion’ is standardly assumed to save the valuation of EPP in the case of weak pivots. This holds for TA even if the DP pivot is strong as in (1b). According to (2), the strong pivot values its Case and ϕ -features in SpecTP, and climbs to SpecTopP to value referentiality, specificity and EPP alongside, taking specificity to be tied up to EPP (Chomsky, 2000). Relevant to us here is that all made possible by the mood particle mood *famma* which heads a MoodP.

- (2) [MoodP Mood *famma* [TopP le-wledi [TP ti T...]]]

The mood particle construal of the existential *famma* has many merits. It first challenges stringent nature of DE. Second, it makes a pragmatic approach to existentials plausible. Third, it attests evidence to SpecTopP the EPP position in TA. Finally, it makes the syntax of interface to existentials very tempting.

References

- Abbott, Barbara, 1993. A pragmatic account of the definiteness effect in existentials sentences. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 19: 39-55.
McCloskey, Jim & Sandra Chung. 2002. *Existentials*. Maryland: Mayfest.
Milsark, G. (1974). Doctoral dissertation, MIT, Cambridge, Mass.