

**LOCATIVES IN EXISTENTIAL CONSTRUCTIONS:
A COMPARATIVE APPROACH IN SPANISH, FRENCH AND ITALIAN**

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There is a widespread assumption that existential constructions are (at least in some way) related to locative constructions (i.a. Freeze 1992). Indeed, in French, Italian and Spanish the existential verb often appears with locative PP's:

- 1) *Il n'y a plus de forces russes en Lituanie depuis le mois d'août 1993.* (Le Monde, 29/01/1994)
- 2) *Fidel mi ha assicurato: posso morire, ma a Cuba c'è una squadra ed un popolo pronti a fare andare avanti la Rivoluzione.* (Il tempo, 14/08/2006)
- 3) *En España hay 150.000 ecuatorianos, de los cuales 58.000 están empadronados en Madrid.* (El Norte de Castilla, 30/03/2001)

The existing literature proposes several competing interpretations as to the status of this locative PP: some consider it as an argument, whereas other believe it to be an adjunct (Treviño 2003) or a NP modifier (Hazout 2004). According to Fernandez Soriano (1999) Spanish impersonal *haber* selects for a locative argument that occupies subject position. Therefore she claims that the unmarked position of the locative with this verb is preverbal.

The purpose of this contribution is to offer a contrastive syntactical description of these existential constructions in French, Italian and Spanish drawing on a systematic and statistical corpus study (written newspaper articles of i.a. "Le Monde" for French, "Il Corriere della Sera" for Italian and "El País" for Spanish). My analysis will concentrate on the morpho-syntactic behaviour of locatives with these verbs in the three languages. In the first place I will discuss the frequency of locatives in existential sentences and give a brief survey of the different kinds of locatives that can be found in these sentences. Furthermore I will investigate in which position locatives appear most frequently in existential sentences, and this with respect to their morphological, semantic and discourse-pragmatic characteristics.

My data suggest that all three existential verbs behave very similarly as to their distribution with locatives. However they clearly differ with respect to the preferred position of these locatives in the existential sentences. Italian *c'è* and Spanish *hay* prefer preverbal position for locatives, as was expected by Fernandez Soriano (1999), whereas the locatives appear systematically after the French existential *il y a*. This difference of word order may be explained in terms of a different degree of grammaticalization and delexicalization. Our analysis suggests that *il y a* in French functions to a larger extent as a topic-introducing device than Italian *c'è* and Spanish *hay*, which conversely are shown to function more as lexical predicates with existential meaning.

References

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