

## Expressing (non)existence in some Oceanic languages

### 1. Existence

Denis Creissels's classification (to appear) includes seven types of existential predication: 1. Loc-existentials: *English*; 2. Trans.poss-existentials; 3. Poss/loc-existentials: *French*; 4. Incorp.poss-existentials: *Tagalog*; 5. Com-existentials; 6. Id-existentials: *Tahitian*; 7. Dedicated existential predicator.

#### 1.1. Locative (existential) predicates

In Oceania, some languages use posture verbs to express existence; in others, localisation and existence are kept separate, each having its own verbal or non-verbal expression.

\* “Oceanic languages typically have verbs that serve to express what one might call locative, existential, and possessive situations or relations. In some languages such verbs also have posture meanings; in others they do not” (Lichtenberk 2002:271).

According to Lichtenberk the two lexical uses of verbs expressing both existence and location are linked to the degree of definiteness of the relevant subject:

*definite subject* > *locative meaning*, *indefinite subject* > *existential meaning*

\* “Verbs used to encode the location and existence of an entity, without any necessary implication of posture or spatial orientation” (Lichtenberk 2002:305).

\* Kanak and Polynesian languages: ‘pure’ existential verbs (expressing existence *as such*) different from the locative and posture verbs (existence *in situ*).

##### 1.1.1. Locative predication (Thematic Locations, P. Koch 2012)

Drehu (Lifu, Loyalty Islands)

1. *Eni me Drilē e celē.*  
 1SG and Drilē LOC DEIC  
 ‘I am here with Drilē.’

East Uvean (Wallis island)

2. *'E i fale ia te 'ofafine o te pule o Lausikulá.*  
 NPAST OBL house ABS SPEC daughter POSS SPEC chief POSS Lausikula  
 ‘The daughter of the chief from Lausikula is at home.’
3. *'E mole i fale ia te 'ofafine o te pule o Lausikulá.*  
 NPAST NEG OBL house ABS SPEC daughter POSS SPEC chief POSS Lausikula  
 ‘The daughter of the chief from Lausikula is not at home.’

##### 1.1.2. Locative and posture verbs

- locative verbs

Xârâcùù (South of the Mainland, New Caledonia)

4. *Chaa mârâdii nöö nèmèi.*  
 one snake stay bush  
 ‘There is a snake in the bush.’

Haméa (South of the Mainland, New Caledonia)

5. *Nrâ ni truu nû nrâ mwâ loto anâ.*  
 3SG FUT stay for.ever SM DEM car there  
 ‘This car will stay there for ever.’

-posture verbs

Xârâcùù *cuè* "sit", *tââ* "stand", *mètù* "lie"; Haméa *yoo* 'sit', *mérrö* 'lie' and *trurrö* 'stand up'

6. *Vé mé mwâ ö nrâ yoo rrö nríto.*  
 take DIR DEM cooking.pot 3SG sit at ground  
 'Bring the cooking pot which is on the ground.'

7. *Nrá mérrö nrâ chaa chóbwi rrö drôô-taapëë*  
 3SG lie SM one mat at top-table  
 'There is a mat (spread) on the table.'

8. *Nrá trurrö huyui tröö chaa e.*  
 3SG stand.up hide behind one tree  
 '(S)he is hiding behind a tree.'

East Futunan

9. *E na'a le matu'a i loku kogafale.* (locative verb)  
 NPAST be.at SPEC old.man OBL his room  
 'The old man is (staying) in his room.'

10. *Ko leinei le koloa e nofo mo au la ke avatu mo 'ou.*  
 PRED DEM SPEC wealth NPAST stay with 1SG EMPH that take.away with 2SG  
 'Here is the wealth that I have and that I give to you.' (Lit. here is the wealth it stays with me to take with you)

"What distinguishes existential clauses from plain locational clauses is a different perspective on figure-ground relationships whose most obvious manifestation is that, contrary to plain locational clauses, existential clauses are not adequate answers to questions about the location of an entity, but can be used to identify an entity present at a certain location." (Creissels, to appear)

## 1.2. Dedicated existential predicator

### 1.2.1. The verb 'do, make', and its development as an existential verb

11. *Ri xwi farawa va nèkè-ri ngê pa pwângara.*  
 3PL make bread ASS CLASS-3PL SM COLL European  
 'Europeans make bread as their starchy food.' (Lit. they make bread as their starchy food, the Europeans)

12. *È nää xwi (ngê) mîi pè-ngáârû rè ri.*  
 3SG PAST.PROG exist (SM) PL stone-seed POSS 3PL  
 'There used to be stones for seed-plants.' (Lit. it used to exist, their stones for seed-plants)

13. *È xwi bachéé daa mè péépé wâ paii.*  
 3SG amount.to three day that baby PFV sick  
 'The baby has been sick for three days.' (Lit. it amounts to three days that the baby got sick). French: *Cela/ça fait trois jours que Bébé est tombé malade.*

Nemi: *pmwa* 'exist' < *pmwa-i* 'do, make (tr.)', Nyelâyu *thu* 'exist' < *thu* 'do, make' (+ incorporated object), Tîrî *fwi*, Numèè *awe*, Ajië *wii*, Cèmuhî *pwö*, Xârâcùù *xwi*, etc.

Cèmuhî (Centre of the Mainland, New Caledonia) (Rivierre, 1980)

14. *Go pwö dè? Ko pwö apuliè.*  
 2SG do what PROG exist people  
 What are you doing? 'There are (lots of) people.'

Haméa (South of the Mainland of New Caledonia)

15. *Nrâ fi nrâ suka.*

3SG exist SM sugar

‘There is sugar.’

16. *Nrâ fi nrâ chaa chôbwi rru newe loto.*

3SG exist SM one mat in inside car

‘There is a mat in the car.’

17. *Nrâ fi nōrrō nrâ auwō anâ mwââ-nrei a.*

3SG exist only SM cagou here content-island DEM

‘Cagous only exist here in this island.’

### 1.2.2. Relexicalisation of the stative preposition *i* + deictic anaphoric *ai>iai*

East Futunan

18. *E iai le faletosi i Vasavasa e se na'a ai se tosi mo Futuna.*

NPAST exist SPEC library in Vasavasa NPAST NEG be.at ANAPH NSPEC book for Futuna

‘In the library of Vasavasa, there are no books on Futuna.’ (*Lit.* exists the library in Vasavasa, there are no books there on Futuna)

19. *Ko leia lona fia ilo pe iai se ta'ine e toe tupulaga ake ia Sina.*

PRED DEM his will know if exist NSPEC young.girl NPAST still beautiful DIR OBL Sina

‘He wants to know if there is a girl who is more beautiful than Sina.’

20. *...kae e iai lona tupuna e nofo i le tasi gā motu.*

...but NPAST exist her grandmother NPAST stay OBL SPEC one CLAS island

‘[Sina is drifting] but there is her grandmother who is living in another small island.’

East Uvean

21. *'E iai nā te fo'i maka laulahi 'e tuku ki lalo.*

NPAST exist there SPEC CLAS stone tall NPAST put OBL under

‘There is (there)a huge rock lying on the side.’

22. *E iai he motokā i fale? Io, 'e iai te motokā.*

NPAST exist NSPEC car in house yes NPAST exist SPEC car

‘Is there any car at home? Yes, there is one.’

23. *'E iai ni'ihī i fale?*

NPAST exist others OBL house

‘Are there people in the house?’

24. *O kaku atu loa ki Mamalu'a e iai le nofolaga i ai....*

and reach DIR SUCC OBL Mamalu'a NPAST exist SPEC camp OBL ANAPH

And arriving in Mamalu'a, there is a camp there...’

Similar relexicalisation process described by John Lynch (2000:74) for Anejoñ (South Vanuatu): “The existential verb bears a strong formal resemblance to the anaphoric demonstrative pronouns:

Existential verb	Anaphoric demonstrative
<i>yek</i> singular	<i>yīiki</i> singular
<i>rak</i> dual	<i>raaki</i> dual
<i>sjek</i> plural	<i>jiiki, jeken</i> plural

It may be that the existential verb is a verbalisation of the demonstratives, which might explain its irregularity.”

## 2. Non-existence

### 2.1. What we know about negative existential constructions

Croft (1991)'s typology of the relationship “between verbal negators and negative existential verbs”: most Kanak languages would be of type B, that is, “having different forms for the negative existential predicate and the verbal negator”.

Cf. U. Mosel (1999:6-7) for the three types of negative verbs in Oceanic languages: general negative verbs, negative imperative verbs, and specific negative existential verbs and C. Moyse-Faurie & F. Ozanne-Rivierre (same volume) for an inventory of the negative morphemes in Kanak languages.

### 2.2. Dedicated negative existential verbs

Xârâcùù, Haméa, Ajië: one negative verb for the two values ‘be absent’ and ‘not exist’.

Fagaueva, Nyelâyü: two negative verbs, one for each value

#### 2.2.1. The negative existential verb also expresses absence

Xârâcùù: (i) unique argument = object; (ii) animate ( $\Rightarrow$  absence)  $\neq$  inanimate ( $\Rightarrow$  non-existence)

25. *Va siè ra pa xûûchî.*

ASS not.exist still COLL child  
‘The children are not here yet.’

26. *Wâ siè laasi.*

PFV not.exist rice  
‘There is no more rice.’

27. *Wâ siè êré-fârá rê dôu.*

PFV not.exist NMLZ-count POSS thing  
‘One cannot count anymore.’ (*Lit.* count doesn’t exist anymore)

28. *Siè rô!*

not.exist 2SG.OBJ  
‘You are not here!’

Haméa: (i) expletive pronominal subject; (ii) postposed argument = object

29. *Nrâ hwé suka.*

3SG not.exist sugar  
‘There is no sugar.’

30. a. *Nrâ hwé nrî.*

3SG not.exist 3SG.OBJ  
‘(S)he is not present.’

30. b. *Nrâ hwé tréan anâ érré.*

3SG not.exist man here home  
‘Nobody is at home.’

$\Rightarrow$  We can thus assert the nonexistence of inanimate or nonhuman entities we have never seen, but only assert the absence of human entities, whose existence we must be aware of.

#### 2.2.2. Two different negative verbs

Fagaueva: *isi* (existence) *noo* (locative), *siage* (non-existence) *siai* (absence).

31. *Odi la e isi he tama, goa tangata i dena uta, e noo*  
then EMPH NPAST exist NSPEC boy PFV man OBL DEM upwards NPAST be.at

*uta i motu ma de fafine matua.*

upwards OBL island with SPEC woman old

‘Once upon a time there was a young boy, he became a man and was living in the upper part of the island with an old woman.’

32. *E siage he drube i Uvea.*  
 NPAST not.exist NSPEC deer OBL Ouvéa  
 ‘There are no deer in Ouvéa.’
33. *Goa siage he kuli i de mahale o dogu enge.*  
 PFV not.exist NSPEC dog OBL SPEC house POSS my aunt  
 ‘There are no more dogs in my aunt’s house.’
34. *E siage he nea i loto o de fale.*  
 NPAST not.exist NSPEC human.being OBL inside POSS SPEC house  
 ‘There is nobody in the house.’
35. *Anaafi na siai he nea na seke o kitea iaau.*  
 yesterday PAST not.be.at NSPEC human.being PAST arrive COMP see 1SG  
 ‘Yesterday, nobody came to see me.’ (Someone was expected).
36. *De vaka goa siai balua i taikona.*  
 SPEC boat PFV not.be.at for.ever OBL sea  
 ‘The boat has disappeared for ever in the sea.’
37. *E siai dagu tama i mahale.*  
 NPAST not.be.at my son OBL house  
 ‘My son is not at home.’ (He was expected to be at home)

Nyelâyu (North of the Mainland of New Caledonia) (Ozanne-Rivierre, 1998)

38. a. *Thuya no.* exist fish  
 ‘There are fish.’
38. b. *Haria no.* not.exist fish  
 ‘There is not any fish.’
39. a. *Hon cia er.* PFV not.be.there 3SG  
 ‘She/he is not there.’
39. b. *hon cian tina hele.* PFV not.be.there DEM knife  
 ‘The knife is lost.’

### 3. Non-presence: Combination of existential verbs and standard negation

Haméa

- negative existential verb: non-existence ⇒ unmarked argument

40. *Nrâ hwé mââmürre a-fi*  
 3SG not.exist children NMLZ-go  
 ‘No children are leaving.’ (none were expected to leave)

- standard negation + positive existential verb: absence ⇒ subject marked argument

41. *Nrâ ché fi nrâ méré mââmürre a-fi.*  
 3SG NEG exist SM DEF.PL children NMLZ-go  
 ‘There will be no children leaving.’ (Some were expected to leave)

42. a. *Nrâ hwé hau.* 3SG not.exist evil  
 ‘Evils don’t exist.’
- b. *Nrâ ché fi nrâ hau.* 3SG NEG exist SM evil  
 ‘Evils are not there.’

East Futunan

43. *Na le’e ni puaka i Futuna i le temi mu’a.*  
 PAST not.exist NSPEC.PL pig in Futuna OBL SPEC time before  
 ‘In the past, there were no [existing] pigs in Futuna.’

44. *Na se iai ni puaka i Futuna.*  
 PAST NEG exist NSPEC.PL pig OBL Futuna  
 ‘There were no pigs [living] in Futuna.’

East Uvean (Wallis Island) (Croft’s 2001 type C classification)

45. *'E mole he 'aliki.*  
 NPAST not.exist NSPEC chief  
 ‘There is no [such person as a]chief.’
46. *'E mole iai he 'aliki.*  
 NPAST NEG exist NSPEC chief  
 ‘There is [presently] no chief.’
47. *'E mole he ma'uga i 'Uvea.*  
 NPAST not.exist NSPEC mountain OBL Wallis  
 ‘There is no mountain inWallis.’
48. *'E mole iai ni 'ao i te lagi.*  
 NPAST NEG exist NSPEC.PL cloud OBL SPEC sky  
 ‘There are no clouds in the sky (today).’

<b>1. Negative existential verb</b>
<i>indefinite argument &gt;generic non-existence</i>
<i>definite argument &gt;locative meaning (non-presence)</i>
<b>2. Verbal negative marker + positive existential verb</b>
<i>definite or indefinite argument &gt;locative meaning (non-presence)</i>

#### 4. (Non-)Existence and (Non-)Possession

“In many Oceanic languages possessive sentences are in essence existential sentences” (Lichtenberk 2002:272).

P. Koch (2012:561) distinguishes several types of realization of alienable Possession: Type I have-possessive (*Maltese*); Type II adjectival possessive; Type III comitative possessive (*Sango*); Type IV oblique possessive with three subtypes: a. genitive possessive, b. locational possessive, c. dative possessive (*Latin*); Type V topic possessive (*Mandarin*).

Stassen classifies Tîrî as belonging to Type V topic possessive:

Tîrî (South of the Mainland, New Caledonia) (Osumi 1995:243)

49. *Sonya nrâ fwi nrâ rroto nrâ nrî.* Fronting of the possessor NP  
 Sonya 3SG exist SM car POSS 3SG  
 ‘Sonya has a car.’ (*Lit.* Sonya, her car exists)
50. *Nrâ fwi nrâ rroto nrâ Sonya.* Basic construction ⇒ genitive possessive?  
 3SG exist SM car POSS 3SG  
 ‘Sonya has a car.’/ ‘There is Sonya’s car.’ (*Lit.* Sonya’s car exists)

Xârâcùù: different word orders for positive and negative possession

51. *Kée-rè xwi.*  
 basket-3SG.POSS exist  
 ‘(S)he has one/several basket(s).’ (*Lit.* his/her basket exists)

52. *Xè mîî êrêcaa bwa purè-ri xwi.*  
 color PL game.from.hunt/fish DEM shell-3PL.POSS exist  
 ‘Color the creatures which have a shell.’ (Lit. color the creatures their shell exists)

53. *Siè xêê-da rè nâ, pââ-nâ paii.*  
 not.exist possibility-eat POSS 1SG.POSS tooth-1SG.POSS sick  
 ‘I cannot eat, my teeth hurt.’ (Lit. my possibility to eat doesn’t exist...)

Haméa (Mainland of New Caledonia)

54. *Nrâ nori pe, nrâ fi nrâ vére-nrî.*  
 3SG give flyingfox 3SG exist SM sacred.stone-POSS.3SG  
 ‘He gave the flyingfox, she had a sacred stone.’

55. *Nrâ fi nrâ u-nô. Nrâ hwé u-nô.*  
 3SG exist SM yam-POSS.1SG 3SG not.exist yam-POSS.1SG  
 ‘I have yams.’ ‘I do not have yams.’

Samoan (Mosel and Hovdhaugen, 1992:334)

56. *E iai sau telefoni? E leai sau telefoni?*  
 NPAST exist POSS.2SG.NSPEC telephone NPAST not.exist POSS.2SG.NSPEC telephone  
 ‘Do you have a telephone?’ ‘Don't you have a telephone?’

East Uvean

57. *'E mole he tamasi'i a Soane.*  
 NPAST not.exist NSPEC child POSS Soane  
 ‘Soane has no children.’

58. *'E iai haku tohi? 'E mole iai haku tohi.*  
 NPAST exist my.NSPEC book NPAST NEG exist my.NSPEC book  
 ‘Do I have a book?’ ‘I don’t have any book.’

East Futunan

59. *Ku se iai so'oku gā kie.*  
 PFV NEG exist POSS.1SG.NSPEC CLAS loin.cloth  
 ‘I have no loin cloth anymore.’

60. *E le'e se fā sikaleti ma Petelo.*  
 NPAST not.exist NSPEC CLAS. cigarette BEN Petelo  
 ‘Petelo has no cigarettes.’ (Lit. there is no cigarettes for Petelo)

61. *E le'e ni toe mo Malia " "*  
 NPAST not.exist NSPEC.PL child BEN Malia  
 ‘Malia has no children.’

**Conclusion**

“... in many, and perhaps in all, languages existential and possessive constructions derive (both synchronically and diachronically) from locatives” (Lyons 1967:390)

In Kanak languages however, we have the following evolution:

ACTION (‘DO, MAKE’) ~ PROCESS (‘OCCUR’, ‘HAPPEN’) ⇒ EXISTENCE (‘EXIST’) ⇒ POSSESSION (‘HAVE’)

In some languages, non-location may be expressed either by the combination of the standard negative marker with the existential verb, or by a specific negative verb, different from the one expressing non-existence.

Positive existential verbs and negative ones do not enter symmetric constructions. Their word orders, and the marking of their arguments often differ. In a few Kanak languages, negative existential verbs express non-presence when their argument –an object – refers to an animate being, whereas positive existential verbs occur with subjects. In all other Oceanic languages, negative existential verbs only occur with a non-specific nominal subject argument, whereas negative locative verbs may take specific or non-specific arguments.

## Abbreviations

ABS absolutive, ANAPH anaphoric, ASS assertive, CLAS classifier, COLL collective, COMP complementizer, DEF definite, DEIC deictic, DEM demonstrative, DIR directional, DU dual, EMPH emphatic, FUT future, LOC locative preposition, NEG negation, NMLZ nominalizer, NPAST non past, NSPEC non specific article, OBJ object, OBL oblique preposition, PERS personal article, PL plural, POSS possessive, PROG progressive, PST past, PRED predicative, PFV perfective, SG singular, SM subject marker, SPEC specific article.

## References

- Creissels, Denis, to appear, Existential predication in typological perspective.
- Croft, William. 1991. The evolution of negation, *Journal of Linguistics* 27, 1:1-27.
- Freeze, Ray, 1992. Existentials and other locatives, *Language* 68-3: 553-595.
- Koch, Peter, 2012. Location, existence, and possession: A constructional-typological exploration. In: M. Koptjevskaja-Tamm and M. Vanhove (eds), *New Directions in Lexical Typology*. [special issue] *Linguistics* 50-3: 533-604.
- La Fontinelle (de), Jacqueline, 1976. *La langue de Houailou (Nouvelle-Calédonie). Description phonologique, description syntaxique*, Paris, Selaf.
- Lichtenberk, Frantisek, 2002. Posture verbs in Oceanic. In John Newman (ed.), *The Linguistics of Sitting, Standing and Lying*, Typological Studies in Language 51, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins, 269-314.
- Lynch, John, 2000. *A Grammar of Anejom*, Canberra, Pacific Linguistics 507.
- Lyons, John, 1967. A Note on possessive, existential and locative sentences, *Foundations of Languages* 4: 390-396.
- Mosel, Ulrike, 1999. Towards a typology of negation in Oceanic languages. In E. Hovdhaugen and U. Mosel (eds.), *Negation in Oceanic Languages*, Lincom Studies in Austronesian Linguistics 2, 1-19.
- Mosel, Ulrike and Even Hovdhaugen, 1992. *Samoan Reference Grammar*. Oslo, Scandinavian University Press/Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture.
- Moyse-Faurie, Claire, 2010, (Dé)Grammaticalisation d'expressions spatiales dans des langues océaniques, in *Typologie et Comparatisme. Hommages offerts à Alain Lemaréchal*. Textes réunis par Injoo Choi-Jonin, Marc Duval et Olivier Soutet, Leuven: Peeters, Orbis/Supplementa, t. 28, 295-314.
- Moyse-Faurie, Claire and Françoise Ozanne-Rivierre, 1999. Negation in New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands languages. In E. Hovdhaugen and U. Mosel (eds.), *Negation in Oceanic Languages*, Lincom Studies in Austronesian Linguistics 2, 57-79.
- Ozanne-Rivierre, Françoise, 1998, *Le nyelâyu de Balade (Nouvelle-Calédonie)*, Langues et Cultures du Pacifique 12, Paris, Peeters.
- Pawley, Andrew, 2000. Two be's or not two be's. On the copulas of Wayan Fijian. In Bill Palmer and Paul Geraghty (eds), *SICOL, Proceedings of the Second International Conference in Oceanic Linguistics* vol. 2, Historical and descriptive Studies. Canberra, Pacific Linguistics, 297-314.
- 2003. Grammatical Categories and Grammaticalisation in the Oceanic Verb Complex. In A. Riehl and T. Savella (eds), *Cornell Working Papers in Linguistics* 19, 149-172.
- Rivierre, Jean-Claude, 1980. *La langue de Touho. Phonologie et grammaire du cèmuhi (Nouvelle-Calédonie)*, Paris, Selaf, Langues et civilisations à tradition orale 38.
- Stassen, Leon, 2001. Predicative possession. In Haspelmath, M., E. König, W. Oesterreicher and W. Raible (eds). *Language Typology and Language Universals. An International Handbook*, Berlin, New York, Mouton de Gruyter, vol. II: 954-960.
- 2009. *Predicative possession*, Oxford Studies in Typology and Linguistic Theory.