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EXISTENTIAL AUXILIARIES IN TANTI AND OTHER DIALECTS OF DARGWA[1]

Most dialects of Dargwa have two types of copulas: and identificational copula (ca=b/ca=b=i or sa=b/sa=b=i,[2]) and a set of auxiliaries with the existential meaning. Along with the existence, the existential auxiliaries express spatial deixis, cf. in the dialect of Icari: le=b 'exist (close to the hearer or in an undefined place)' ~ že=b 'exist (close to the speaker)' ~ te=b 'exist (far away from the speaker)' ~ č'e=b 'exist (higher than the speaker)' ~ he=b 'exist (lower than the speaker)'.

Morphologically, both identificational and existential auxiliaries cannot be viewed as verbs: the structure of their roots (CV=) and the position of the class marker at the end of the stem are not characteristic of verbs. On the other hand, they can have some typically verbal forms – a converb (for example, in Tanti le=b-le, sa=b-le), a participle (le=b-se, sa=b-se), a masdar (sa=b-ni).

The functions and the distribution of existential and identificational copulas vary across the dialects of Dargwa. In Icari and other dialects situated in the South-West part of the Dargwa-speaking area, the existential copula is only used as a predicate expressing existence, including existence in a certain place, in certain ownership, etc. That is why it is confined to certain types of nominal predicate sentences and never used in verbal clauses.

In the North of the Dargwa-speaking area the existential copulas expanded their domain. The extreme variant is found in Mehweb where the former existential auxiliary le=b is now the only copula used in both nominal and verbal predications.

A less obvious case is observed in Tanti. In nominal predicate clauses, the distribution of the two copula types is approximately the same as in Icari: the identificational copula is used in the clauses expressing identity, property or possession, whereas the existential copulas express different varieties of existential meaning:

(1)   hiž   mašina   di-la   sa=b
        this   car   I-GEN   COP-N
        'This car is mine'.

(2)   di-la   mašina   le=b
        I-GEN   car   EXST-N
        'I have a car' (lit. 'There is car of mine').

(3)   če   quli=d   š:ajt'un-te   č'e=d
        up   room-NPL   devil-PL   EXST-NPL
        'There are devils upstairs'.

There are three important aspects concerning the meaning of the existential copulas: (1) the existential component: these copulas assert that an object exists (in a certain situation), (2) the deictic component: these copulas point at the location of the existing object as compared to the location of the speech act

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[2] The sign '=' separates class agreement markers. Agreeing words are cited with the non-human singular class marker =b. Other class markers are =w (masculine); =r (feminine); =b (human plural); =d (non-human plural; first or second person plural pronoun).

participants; (3) the information structure: the assertion of existence is part of the sentence focus; the sentences with an existential auxiliary are often thetic, if not – their only topical part are the scene-setting adverbials (like če quli = d 'in the upper floor in example 3).

In Tanti, the existential copulas are undergoing a functional expansion based on these three components. They show a number of functions which have not been attested in the dialects of the South.

- The existential copulas are used in both nominal and verbal presentational sentences (which retain all the three components listed above – existential, deictic, thetic):

(4) hit   dubur-li-ja = b   či.la.sa = b.enne   qali   č'e = b
     that   mountain-OBL-SUPER-N(ESS)   of.someone(N)   room   EXST-N
     'There is someone's house standing on the top of the mountain over there'.

(5) xːun-ne-ħe-r-se   rucːi   le-r = q'-un-ne   le = r
     road-OBL-IN-EL-HITHER sister   PV-F-go:IPF-PRS-CONV   EXST-F
     'There is my sister going along the road over there' (lit. 'My sister is going along the road').

- They are used in verbal clauses with an existential component:

(6) neš-li   dam   t'ulekːa   čː-ib-le   le = b
     mother-ERG   I:DAT   ring   give:PF-PRET-CONV   EXST-N
     '(My) mother presented me a ring' (and I have it now).

- They are used in thetic verbal clauses even without an existential component:

(7) mašina   b = al-ʔaˤ-b = irk-u-le   le = b-de
     machine   N-work-NEG-N-happen:IPF-PRS-CONV   EXST-N-PST

     ʔaˤr.ʔaˤr-d = ik'-u-le   qːač-ne-ra   le = tːe
     cry-NPL-say:IPF-PRS-CONV   calf-PL-ADD   EXST-NPL+PST
     'The creamer was not working, the calfs were crying'.

- They are used in the exclamatives (which, like thetic sentences, do not oppose topic vs. focus):

(8) hiž   dewgale   q'uʁa-se   le = r
     this   very   beautiful-ATR   EXST-F
     'How beautiful she is!'

(9) ʔaˤbraˤ   r = amsː-ur-le   le = r-da !
     INTERJ   F-get.tired:PF-PRET-CONV   EXST-F-1
     'Oh, how tired I am!'

In Tanti, the opposition of the two copula types is used to express elements of information structure. The identificational copula is characteristic of categorical sentences, i.e. declarative and interrogative sentences with a clear topic *vs.* focus opposition. The existential copulas have originally expressed existence, but a live grammaticalization process is now converting them into auxiliary elements that are used in all situations when a copula is obligatory for syntactic reasons, but the semantics of the sentence is not compatible with the identificational copula (these are, in particular, presentational, thetic and exclamative sentences). Simultaneously, the existential copulas seem to undergo syntactic changes which turn them from one-place predicates of existence into two-place auxiliaries, which are syntactically similar to the identificational copula.