

# Structure and interpretation in Swahili existential constructions

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Swahili has two existential constructions, one formed with a possessive copula and a locative subject marker (locative-possessive constructions), the other formed with a locative copula and a non-locative subject marker agreeing with the theme argument (locative-copula constructions). Both constructions can be used to express existence in a place or more abstract existence. However, the constructions differ with respect to structure and interpretation: the locative-possessive construction has a more rigid word-order and a narrower range of interpretations than the locative-copula construction. On the other hand, the two constructions share the possibility to take ‘clausal’ complements, where a post-copular NP functions at the same time as the subject of a following clause. The paper illustrates the similarities and differences between the constructions and shows how these are related to information structure and to lexical and morphosyntactic constraints imposed by the two copula forms\*.

## 1. Introduction

The relation between locative, presentational, existential and possessive constructions has long been noted cross-linguistically (e.g. Clark 1978, Freeze 1992, Lyons 1967) as well as for Swahili (e.g. Ashton 1947, Christie 1970, Contini-Morava 1977). In Swahili this relation is particularly complex due to the articulated morphosyntax of locative marking, which is based on the noun class system of the language. There are two types of existential constructions in Swahili, formed with two different complex copulas: locative-possessive constructions and locative-copula constructions. The former type is based on a possessive copula and a locative subject marker (1), while the latter is based on a locative copula and a non-locative subject marker agreeing with the theme argument (2).<sup>1</sup>

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- (1) Ku-na n-jia n-yingine y-a ku-punguza bei z-a vi-tu.  
SM17-POSSCOP 9-way 9-other 9-GEN 15-reduce 10.price 10-GEN 8-thing  
'There is another way of reducing the prices of thing' [Nye Uja 155:009]
- (2) Zi-po n-chi amba-zo hu-tegeme-a ki-limo.  
SM10-LOCOP16 10-country RELREFCD10 HAB-depend-FV 7-farming  
'There are countries which depend on agriculture.' [Majira, 2003-02-06]

The paper presents an overview of the two existential constructions in Swahili and shows how the form and function of the construction types partly overlap and are partly distinct. After discussing the morphological structure of the two copula forms and how they relate to wider paradigms of (non-locative) copulas and subject agreement marking, the paper turns to differences in syntax and interpretation between the two existential constructions. It proposes that the greater flexibility of locative-copula constructions in terms of structure and interpretation results from the pragmatic meaning and information structure of existential and locative constructions, and from the lexical constraints on how this meaning is expressed, which are imposed by the relevant copulas and subject markers. Information structure also plays a role in the presence of clausal complements which are found in both types of existential constructions, and which are discussed in a separate section. In these constructions, a theme argument functions at the same time both as the post-copular NP of the existential construction and as the subject of a following predicate, resulting in a hybrid or amalgamated structure, in the sense of Lambrecht (1988, 2001):<sup>2</sup>

- (3) Ku-na m-ge-ni ha-pa a-me-ku-j-a na siri kubwa.  
SM17-POSSCOP 1-stranger DEM-16 SM1-PERF-STM-come-FV CONJ 9.secret 9.big  
'There is a stranger here (who) has come with a big secret.' [Kez Kic 160:031]

The final section summarizes the findings of the paper and offers some conclusions. The aim of the paper is mainly descriptive, and no formal analysis is developed. However, it is hoped that the discussion and data provided give an indication of the wider theoretical and typological interest of existential constructions in Swahili.

## *2. Two Swahili existential copulas*

There are three copula forms in Swahili: the ‘pure’ copula (4a), the possessive copula (4b) and the locative copula (4c) (Ashton 1947, Schadeberg 1992). Of these, the latter two are found in existential constructions.

- (4) a. Jumani mw-alimu.  
Juma COP 1-teacher  
‘Juma is a/the teacher.’
- b. Juma a-na wa-nafunzi wa-tano.  
Juma SM1-PossCOP 2-student 2-five  
‘Juma has five students.’
- c. Shule i-ko m-ji-ni.  
9.schoolSM9-LOC COP17 3-town-LOC  
‘The school is in town.’

The two kinds of existential construction in Swahili both employ copulas which involve locative morphology. The locative-possessive construction is based on the possessive copula with the formative *-na* and a locative subject marker of one of the locative noun classes 16, 17 and 18 (5). The locative-copula construction involves the locative copula with a non-locative subject marker (6).

- (5) Ku-na ma-endeleo sana.  
SM17-PossCOP 6-development much  
‘There is a lot of development.’ [Kez Kic 186: 026]
- (6) Wa-tu wa-po.  
2-person SM2-LocCOP16  
‘There are people/people are there/available.’ [Kez Gam 052: 014]

Both constructions are copula constructions, involving non-tensed copulas. The similarity between the two constructions can further be shown in tensed contexts (as well as in relative constructions), where both constructions are replaced by a complex copula construction where tense-aspect distinctions are marked on the verb *-wa* ‘to be’:<sup>3</sup>

- (7) Ku-li-ku-w-a na ma-endeleo sana.  
 SM17-PAST-STM-be-FV POSSCOP 6-development much  
 ‘There was a lot of development.’
- (8) Wa-tu wa-li-ku-w-a-po.  
 2-person SM2-PAST-STM-be-FV-LOCOP16  
 ‘There were people.’

Both these copula forms involve locative agreement morphology, which is part of the Swahili noun class system. Locative-possessive constructions include locative concords used as subject marker like *ku-* in (5) and (7), while locative-copula constructions have a non-locative subject marker, but a locative copula such as *-po* in (6) and in (8), which is formally identical to the so-called referential concord used, for example, in relative clauses and anaphoric demonstrative pronouns, as will be discussed in more detail below. The position of these locative forms in the noun class system is given in the noun class overview in Table 1, where the locative classes (conventionally numbered as classes 16, 17, and 18) are highlighted in italics.

**Table 1.** Swahili noun classes.

CLASS	CLASS PREFIX	EXAMPLE WORD	CONCORD (SUBJECT, OBJECT)	REFERENTIAL CONCORD	POSSESSIVE CONCORD	‘MEANING’
1	m	mtu ‘person’	a/ya	ye	wa	People
2	wa	watu ‘people’	wa	o	wa	
3	m	mti ‘tree’	u	o	wa	Trees, plants
4	mi	miti ‘trees’	i	yo	ya	
5	ji/Ø	jicho ‘eye’	li	lo	la	Round things, liquids, masses, augmentatives
6	ma	macho ‘eyes’	ya	yo	ya	
7	ki	kiti ‘chair’	ki	cho	cha	
8	vi	viti ‘chairs’	vi	vyo	vya	Artefacts, tools, manner, diminutives
9	n/Ø	ndege ‘bird’	i	yo	ya	Animals, loanwords
10	n/Ø	ndege ‘birds’	zi	zo	za	
11	u	ubao ‘board’	u	o	wa	Long things, abstracts
15	ku	kuimba ‘to sing’	ku	ko	kwa	Infinitives
16	<i>(pa)</i>	<i>mahali ‘place’</i>	<i>pa</i>	<i>po</i>	<i>pa</i>	<i>Locatives</i>
17	<i>(ku)</i>		<i>ku</i>	<i>ko</i>	<i>kwa</i>	
18	<i>(mu)</i>		<i>m</i>	<i>mo</i>	<i>mwa</i>	

While both existential constructions in Swahili involve locative agreement morphology, the difference in the specific locative morphology (locative subject concord vs. locative copula/referential concord) is correlated to a number of other differences between the two copula forms and the constructions in which they are found. The following sections describe in more detail possessive copulas in locative-possessive constructions, first, and then locative copulas in locative-copula constructions. As an aid for the ensuing discussion, Tables 2 and 3 provide a schematic summary of the copula forms in the two constructions.

**Table 2.** Locative-possessive constructions.

LOCATIVE SUBJECT MARKER (CONCORD)	POSSESSIVE COPULA	LOCATIVE-POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS
cl. 16 <i>pa-</i>	<i>-na</i>	<i>pana</i>
cl. 17 <i>ku-</i>		<i>kuna</i>
cl. 18 <i>m-</i>		<i>mna</i>
‘There is / are...’ / ‘(In) there is / are...’		

**Table 3.** Locative-copula constructions.

SUBJECT MARKER (CONCORD)	LOCATIVE COPULA	LOCATIVE-COPULA CONSTRUCTION
1 sg. <i>ni-</i>	<i>-po</i> <i>-ko</i> <i>-mo</i>	<i>nipo / niko / nimo</i>
2 sg. <i>u-</i>		<i>upo / uko / umo</i>
1 pl. <i>tu-</i>		<i>tupo / tuko / tumo</i>
2 pl. <i>m-</i>		<i>mpo / mko / tmmo</i>
cl. 1 <i>yu-</i>		<i>yupo / yuko / yumo</i>
cl. 2 <i>wa-</i>		<i>wapo / wako / wamo</i>
...		...
cl. 9 <i>i-</i>		<i>ipo / iko / imo</i>
cl. 10 <i>zi-</i>		<i>zipo / ziko / zimo</i>
cl. 11 <i>u-</i>		<i>upo / uko / umo</i>
‘There is / are I / you / we / you / she / he / it / they’ / ‘I / you / we / you / she / he / it / they is / are there’		

### *2.1. Locative-possessive copulas*

The forms called ‘concord’ in Table 1 function as subject or object markers in inflected verb forms, such as the subject marker *ku-* in the verb form *kulikuwa* in (7), and in copula constructions such as *kuna* in (5). There are three locative classes in Swahili, approximately denoting proximity (class 16 *pa-*), distance (class 17 *ku-*) and interiority (class 18 *m-*). All three locative classes are found in so-called locative inversion constructions, in which a locative is coded as gram-

matical subject, and the logical subject follows the verb (cf. Ashton, 1947: 125-129):

- (9) a. M-ji-ni pa-me-ku-f-a wa-tu w-engi.  
3-town-LOC SM16-PERF-STM-die-FV 2-person 2-many  
'(Here) at the town many people have died.'
- b. M-ji-ni ku-me-ku-f-a wa-tu w-engi.  
3-town-LOC SM17-PERF-STM-die-FV 2-person 2-many  
'(There) at the town many people have died.'
- c. Ki-sima-ni m-na ma-ji.  
7-well-LOC SM18-POSSCOP 6-water  
'There is water in the well.' (Lit.: 'In-well therein-with water')

In terms of information structure, locative inversion constructions express presentational focus, where the referent of the post-verbal NP and/or the event in which it plays a part are introduced as discourse-new, while syntactically the post-verbal NP has to follow the verb immediately and cannot be omitted; the locative phrase, on the other hand, can be dropped (see Bresnan and Kanerva 1989, Marten 2006 among others). Swahili canonical word-order is SVO, but as a head-marking language (Nichols 1986), arguments can be marked on the verb, and word-order is correspondingly free. Focus is typically associated with the post-verbal position, as in the locative inversion examples in (9), although in Swahili this correlation is not as strict as in some other Bantu languages (cf. Marten 2007, 2011). In locative inversion constructions without an overt locative phrase, the interpretation of the subject marker depends on the availability of a contextually accessible topical locative antecedent. Swahili subject markers are – in contrast to object markers – obligatory in the inflected verb, except for imperatives, and function like incorporated pronouns. They can normally be interpreted discourse-anaphorically as well as as expletive place-holders for (logical) subjects placed after the predicate (cf. Bresnan and Mchombo 1987, Marten 2007, 2011). So if the subject markers in (9) can be interpreted contextually, a locative reading obtains. However, in the absence of a suitable locative antecedent, the locative subject marker may function as an expletive subject marker:

- (10) Mw-aka u-le ku-li-fuat-i-a u-kame na n-jaa...  
3-year 3-DEM SM17-PAST-follow-APPL-FV 11-drought CONJ 9-hunger  
'That year there followed drought and hunger...' [Mun Njo 12]

- (11) Pa-li-pit-a      mu-da.  
SM16-PAST-PASS-FV 3-while  
 ‘A while passed. / There passed a while.’ (Marten 2011: 790)

There is a difference between the three locative markers in terms of the extent to which they can be used in expletive contexts, and in locative-presentational constructions. Both class 16 *pa-* and class 17 *ku-*, as in (12) and (13), are frequent in expletive and presentational contexts, but class 18 forms less so, although the negative form *hamna* has developed wider uses, and can be used for the expression of negative existential meaning (i.e. absence) or as a general negation marker (14).

- (12) Pa-na      wa-chache wa-ji-som-e-a-o      kwa moyo...  
SM16-POSSCOP 2-few      SM2-REFL-read-APPL-FV-REFCD2 with 3-heart  
 ‘There are (only) a few who study from their heart...’ [Sha Kie 34/5]

- (13) Je, ku-na      ma-swali?  
q SM17-POSSCOP 6-question  
 ‘Are there any questions?’ [Hus Kin 043:015]

- (14) Ha-m-na      sababu y-a ku-huzunika.  
NEG-SM17-POSSCOP 9.reason 9-GEN 15-become\_sad  
 ‘There is no reason for sadness.’ [Majira 2003-05-16]

While often it is not obvious without context whether a locative or an existential interpretation is expressed, it is clear that at least the class 17 copula *kuna* has a grammaticalised usage in which *ku-* does not function as a referential, locative subject marker, but as an expletive. This is shown in contexts in which even in the presence of a locative topic, the copula does not agree in class:

- (15) Ha-pa-ku-na      kazi moja n-zuri sana...  
DEM-16 SM17-POSSCOP 9.work 9.one 9-good very  
 ‘Here there is a very nice job...’ [Sem Njo 090:013]

While the locative demonstrative in (15) is of class 16 (*hapa*), the copula shows class 17 inflection (*ku-*), indicating that the class 17 subject marker in this construction functions as an expletive marker rather than as an agreeing anaphoric marker.

The first morpheme of the copula used in existential locative-possessive constructions is thus a locative subject marker used as an

expletive subject marker, as shown, for example, in (12-14) above. The second morpheme is the form *-na* which is often analysed as a possessive copula. However, *na* is found in a variety of other contexts in Swahili grammar, and the basic underlying function of the form can be described as conjunction or comitative preposition. The form is found in NP coordination (16), comitatives (17), agents of passives (18), following locative prepositions (19) and as additive focus marker (20):<sup>4</sup>

- (16) Juma na Nayla wa-li-fik-a.  
Juma CONJ Nayla SM2-PAST-come-FV  
'Juma and Nayla came.'
- (17) Juma a-li-zungumz-a na Nayla.  
Juma SM1-PAST-talk-FV CONJ Nayla  
'Juma had a conversation with Nayla.'
- (18) Juma a-li-pig-w-a na Nayla.  
Juma SM1-PAST-beat-PASS-FV CONJ Nayla  
'Juma was beaten by Nayla.'
- (19) Juma a-li-ka-a karibu na Nayla.  
Juma SM1-PAST-sit-FV near CONJ Nayla  
'Juma sat close to Nayla.'
- (20) Sadru na-ye a-li-tamk-a kwa sauti.  
Sadru CONJ-REFCD1 SM1-PAST-speak-FV with voice  
'Sadru, too, spoke loudly.' [Lem Yar 110:020]

As can be seen from the examples, *na* can variously be translated as 'and', 'with', 'together with', 'by' or 'to', and it has been analysed as a conjunction and/or a preposition (e.g. Mous and Mreta 2004: 225), as a marker of 'association' (Ashton 1947: 102), and as syntactically underdetermined conjunction (Marten 2005). Given the wide range of functions of *na*, it might be the case that there is no unified underlying syntactic or semantic characterisation of this form. On the other hand, it has often been observed that possession is cross-linguistically commonly expressed as 'be + with', and so examples of tensed locative-possessive constructions in Swahili, which are formed with *-wa* 'to be' and *na* would support an analysis of *na* as corresponding to a comitative preposition 'with' (cf. also 7, above):

- (21) Ku-li-ku-w-a    na        vy-akula vy-a kila aina.  
 SM17-PAST-STM-be-FV POSSCOP 8-food        8-GEN every kind  
 ‘There was food of every kind.’ [Sem Njo 28]

In the case of non-tensed possessive copulas such as *kuna*, the argument could be made that the specific copula interpretation results from the morphological context in which *na* is found in these forms: it is the only context in which *na* is directly preceded by a subject marker, and this may license the use of *na* as providing some form of predicate-argument structure and the interpretation of ‘possession’ rather than ‘conjunction’ as is the case with, for example, NP conjunction as in (16), above. For the present purposes I analyse *na* in copula constructions as a possessive copula (glossed as POSSCOP) and as a conjunction elsewhere (glossed as CONJ), without precluding the possibility of a more abstract, unified analysis.

The possessive interpretation of *na* when preceded by a subject marker is not restricted to locative subject markers, but is found with all other subject markers, resulting in different interpretations with animate and non-animate subjects (cf. Christie 1970):

- (22) Nayla a-na        vi-tabu vi-tatu.  
 Nayla SM1-POSSCOP 8-book        8-three  
 ‘Nayla has three books.’

- (23) M-pango hu-u u-na        ma-tatizo y-ake.  
 3-plan        DEM-3 SM3-POSSCOP 6-problem        6-its  
 ‘This plan has its problems.’

- (24) M-toto a-na        baridi.  
 1-child SM1-POSSCOP 9.cold  
 ‘The child is cold.’ (Ashton 1947: 98)

- (25) Chai hi-i i-na        m-oto.  
 9.tea DEM-9 SM9-POSSCOP 3-heat  
 ‘This tea is hot.’ (Ashton 1947: 98)

- (26) Dunia-ni ku-na        ku-danganyana kw-ingi.  
 9.world-LOC SM17-POSSCOP 15-deceive        15-much  
 ‘The world has a lot of deceit/there is a lot of deceit in the world.’  
 [Kez Gam 107:030]

- (27) Ku-na sababu m-bili z-a ku-chapisha upya makala ha-yo.  
SM17-POSSCOP 10.reason 10-two 10-GEN 15-publish again 6.article DEM-REFCD6  
 ‘There are two reasons for publishing this article again.’  
 [Mba His 047:001]
- (28) Tu-na ma-adui, na katika sisi w-enyewe ku-na ma-adui.  
SM1PL-POSSCOP 6-enemy CONJ among 1PL 2-self SM17-POSSCOP 6-enemy  
 ‘We have enemies and even among ourselves there are enemies.’  
 [Hus Kin 005:011]

The range of interpretations of *-na* in (22-28) shows that the relation encoded by the possessive copula varies in different contexts, resulting in pragmatically plausible readings given the semantics of the subject and, to a lesser extent, of the post-copular NP. The interpretation of the locative-possessive copula in (26-28) is part of this paradigm, resulting in (26) in a reading where the existence of deceit holds at the location of the world. In (27), the interpretation of *-na* as encoding existence remains the same, but with the expletive subject marker, there is no particular space at which this existence holds, and so a more existential reading obtains. The example in (28) illustrates the subtle difference between the possessive copula used with an animate subject marker (*tuna* ‘we have’) and a locative one (*kuna* ‘there are’).

In summary, in terms of morphology, the locative-possessive copula consists of a locative subject marker followed by the conjunction/preposition *-na* in non-tensed contexts, and of an inflected verb based on *-wa* ‘to be’ followed by *na* in tensed and relative contexts. The possessive copula *na* is not only found with locative subject markers, and a comparison of the use with different subject markers shows that the range of interpretations covered under ‘possession’ is wide and dependent on the specific semantics of the subject and the post-verbal NP. Furthermore, *na* has a number of other functions in other contexts, many of which can be related to the use as comitative preposition and/or conjunction, and it is probable that an underlying abstract function of *na* can be found unifying most of, it not all of the different uses. The locative subject marker found in the locative-possessive construction can have a referential, locative interpretation, in which (the existence of) an entity is located at a particular location, or can function as expletive subject marker, resulting in a more existential interpretation. Before discussing syntactic aspects of locative and existential constructions in Swahili, the next section will provide an overview of the morphological aspects of the second type of existential constructions in Swahili, locative-copula constructions.

*2.2. Locative copulas in existential constructions*

Like locative-possessive constructions, locative-copula constructions are based on locative morphology. However, in this case, the locative marker is the so-called referential concord of class 16, 17 or 18 (*-po*, *-ko*, *-mo*), which follows a non-locative subject marker and functions as locative copula. In addition to locative-copula constructions, the referential concord is found in different constructions, most notably in relative clauses, but also in demonstrative forms:

- (29) Soko-ni pa-li-po-ja-a wa-tu pa-li-ku-w-a m-ji-ni.  
 5.market-LOC SM16-PAST-REFCD16-be.full-FV 2-person SM16-PAST-STM-be-FV 3-town-LOC  
 ‘The market that was full of people was in the town.’ (locative subject)
- (30) Soko-ni tu-li-po-kwend-a pa-li-ja-a wa-tu.  
 5.market-LOC SM1PL-PAST-REFCD16-go-FV SM16-PAST-be.full-FV 2-person  
 ‘The market that we went to was full of people.’ (locative object)
- (31) Ha-pa amba-po wa-vulana wa-ta-(pa)-nunu-a pombe...  
 DEM-16 REL-REFCD16 2-boy SM2-FUT-(OM16)-buy-FV 9.beer  
 ‘Here where the boys will buy beer...’ (locative object, ‘amba-’ relative)
- (32) Mahali wa-fik-a-po ...  
 place.LOC SM2-arrive-FV-REFCD16  
 ‘The place where they arrived...’ (untensed relative)
- (33) u-li-po-fik-a...  
 SM2SG-PAST-REFCD16-arrive-FV  
 ‘When you arrived...’ (headless relative)
- (34) a. ha-pa b. pa-le c. ha-po  
 DEMI-Cd16 Cd16-DEMI Cd16-REFCD16  
 ‘here’ ‘there’ ‘there’ (referred to)

The data in (29-33) show the use of the class 16 referential concord *-po* in the three different relative clause constructions commonly distinguished in Swahili (Schadeberg 1989): in subject and object relatives of the synthetic tense-marked relative clause, where the relative is marked by the referential concord following the tense marker within the inflected verb (29-30); in the analytic or ‘amba-’ relative construction, where the referential concord follows the relativiser

*amba-* (31); and in the untensed relative construction without overt tense marking, with *-po* following the verb stem (32). The headless relative construction in (33) shows the idiomatic (grammaticalised) use of *-po* as a relative of time, without any implied antecedent (there is no appropriate word of class 16, the word meaning ‘time’, *wakati*, being of class 11). The final example (cf. (34)) shows the use of the referential concord in demonstratives, where anaphoric demonstratives, which refer to contextually salient antecedents (often translated as ‘already mentioned’) are based on a demonstrative form plus the referential concord (34c).<sup>5</sup> A common semantic characteristic of the referential concord in these forms is reference to some antecedent provided or assumed to exist in the context – although this is not quite so clear for the grammaticalised use in (33). However, an alternative, distributional approach to explain the form is to relate it to its final position: this is most clear in (31), (32) and (34c), where *-po* is word-final, while for the synthetic relatives in (29-30) and (33), a secondary morpheme break before the verb stem is sometimes postulated (see e.g. Buell 2002, Vitale 1981). However, if *-po* is simply the concord in final position, the difference between (34a) and (34c) is difficult to explain, since the concord in (34a), being word-final, should then take the form *-po*, when in fact it is *-pa*. Be that as it may, it is the referential concord which is found in locative-copula constructions. As with locative-possessive constructions, the class 16 and class 17 forms (*-po* and *-ko*) are more frequent than the class 18 form (*-mo*). In contrast to locative-possessive forms, existential-locative copulas are not part of a wider paradigm with different interpretations. The existential-locative interpretation is maintained with both animate (35, and *wapo* in 36) and non-animate (*upo* in 36, 37-38) subjects, and in either order of copula and theme argument: with preceding theme (35-36) or with following theme (37-38). Furthermore, the locative referential concord cannot be replaced in this construction by a non-locative referential concord since only locative referential concords can function as copulas (39).<sup>6</sup>

(35) Yeye yu-ko            Ukerewe mimi ni-ko            Usukuma.  
 3SG    sm1-LocCOP17 Ukerewe    1SG    sm1SG-LocCOP17 Usukuma  
 ‘He is in Ukerewe, I am in Usukuma.’ [Kez Ros 040:030]

(36) Kweli maskini wa-po,...    lakini na u-tajiri pia u-po.  
 true    10.pauper sm2-LocCOP16 but    conj 11-wealth also sm11-LocCOP16  
 ‘It is true, there are poor people, but wealth, too, is there.’ [Yah Pep 015:014]

- (37) Zi-ko            sababu m-bili            zi-li-zo-fany-a  
SM10-LocCOP17 10.reason 10-two            SM10-PAST-REFCd10-make-FV  
 ki-tabu        hi-ki        ki-andik-w-e.  
8-book            DEM-8            SM8-write-PASS-SBJV  
 ‘There are two reasons which made this book be written.’ [Jen Fal 1]

- (38) U-po            u-husiano kati y-a elimu    na ki-pato.  
SM11-LocCOP16 11-relation between 9-GEN 9.education CONJ 7-earnings  
 ‘There is a relation between education and earnings.’ [Mbi Wan]

- (39) \*wa-yo  
SM2-REFCd6

In the locative use, the referential concord is grammaticalised to assume a specific function, and its interpretation is not necessarily discourse anaphoric as is usually the case with referential concords. In this respect, existential-locative copulas are similar to the use of locative referential concords in headless relatives to refer to time without implying a salient antecedent. Both are instances of grammaticalised uses of locative referential concords. As with the conjunction/possessive copula *na*, I will assume here that the forms *-po*, *-ko* and *-mo* in locative and existential constructions are locative copulas, and referential concords elsewhere. Both with *na* and with *-po*, *-ko* and *-mo*, the copula interpretation obtains when the forms are preceded by a subject marker or by the verb *-wa*. The copula interpretation is thus restricted to the same specific morphosyntactic context. The difference between the two constructions is that the locative aspect of the interpretation is introduced by the locative subject marker in locative-possessive constructions, but by the locative copula in locative-copula constructions. It will be seen below that several structural and interpretation differences between the constructions result from this difference in morphological form.

### *3. Structure and interpretation*

The two existential constructions are similar in that both can express existence in a place, or, in the absence of an appropriate locative referent, existence or availability more generally. However, there are also differences between the two constructions. As shown above, locative-possessive constructions are similar to general possessive constructions as well as to locative inversion constructions, while

locative-copula constructions do not share any similarities with other constructions types. Furthermore, locative-possessive constructions are more restricted in terms of structural flexibility, complementation and interpretation than locative-copula constructions, as will be shown in more detail below.

### 3.1. *Locative-possessive constructions*

There are comparatively strict word-order restrictions on the locative-possessive construction. The locative-possessive copula may be preceded by a locative phrase, and is obligatorily followed by the theme argument.

- (40) Hu-ko    nje    ku-na    mw-anga?  
DEM-REFCD17 outside SM17-POSSCOP 3-light  
‘There outside is there light?’ [Kez Nag 042:023]

- (41) Ku-na    m-oshi!  
SM17-POSSCOP 3-smoke  
‘There is smoke!’ [Hus Kin 007:027]

The presence or absence of the pre-copular locative phrase often correlates with a more locative vs. a more existential interpretation. The close relation between ‘existence’ and ‘existence in a place’ (cf. Lyons 1967, Freeze 1992) is particularly clear in the locative-possessive construction, in which at least historically, the locative subject marker indicates a locative subject or topic of which a certain action or state is predicated. The order between copula and post-copular theme NP is fixed, and the theme argument cannot precede the copula (42); this is in contrast to locative-copula constructions where both orders are possible, as seen in (35-38) above, and further discussed below.

- (42) \*M-oshi ku-na.  
3-smoke SM17-POSSCOP

Furthermore, the post-verbal NP cannot normally be omitted, even in elliptic contexts, as (43B) shows.

(43) A: Je, ku-na soda?  
 q sm17-PossCOP 9.soda  
 ‘Is there any soda?’

B: \*Ndiyo, ku-na  
 yes sm17-PossCOP

B’: Ndiyo, zi-po  
 yes sm10-LocCOP16  
 ‘Yes, they are there.’

B’’: Ha-ku-na.  
 neg-sm17-PossCOP  
 ‘No, there is not/aren’t any.’

Instead of a locative-possessive construction, in contexts like in (43), a locative-copula construction can be used, and the theme argument omitted (43B’), showing another contrast between the two constructions. However, in negative contexts, the locative-possessive construction can be used without a theme argument (43B’’). The asymmetry between affirmative and negative copulas in this respect is found with all uses of possessive copulas, and is not restricted to the locative use. Another structural restriction on the locative-possessive construction is that it cannot be used with an adjectival rather than nominal post-copular phrase, in contrast to locative-copula constructions, as will be shown below. In summary, the locative-possessive copula is restricted to two typical construction types: with a preceding locative phrase and following theme NP (44a), or without the locative phrase and simply with post-copular theme (44b). All other orders or complementation types are ungrammatical (in 44, *kuna* is short-hand for *kuna*, *pana*, and *muna*):

(44)	Construction (schematic)	Typical interpretation (* = ungrammatical)
a.	LOC <i>kuna</i> NP	locative-existential
b.	<i>Kuna</i> NP	locative-existential
c.	NP <i>kuna</i>	*
d.	NP <i>kuna</i> LOC	*
e.	<i>Kuna</i> LOC	*
f.	<i>Kuna</i> LOC NP	*
g.	<i>Kuna</i>	*
h.	<i>Kuna</i> ADJ	*
i.	ADJ <i>kuna</i>	*

However, although restricted to the two constructions types in (44a, b), there is considerable variation in the kind of NP complement found in locative-possessive constructions which includes simple NPs (45a), NPs modified by genitives (45b) or by relatives (45c), as well as wh-phrases (45d):

- (45) a. Ku-na m-kutano leo.  
SM17-POSSCOP 3-meeting today  
'There is a meeting today.' [Hus Kin 003:019]
- b. Ku-na vi-fo vy-a aina ny-ingi.  
SM17-POSSCOP 8-death 8-GEN 9.kind 9-many  
'There are deaths of many kinds.' [Kez Kic 210:027]
- c. Ku-na ki-tu muhimu amba-cho ha-ki-ku-taj-w-a.  
SM17-POSSCOP 7-thing important REL-REFCd7 NEG-SM7-PAST-mention-PASS-FV  
'There is an important thing which has not been mentioned.'  
[Kez Gam 116:012]
- d. Nyumba-ni ku-na m-ambo gani?  
9.home-LOC SM17-POSSCOP 6-matter which  
'At home what is the matter?' [Kez Kic 030:010]

In addition, locative-possessive constructions, as well as locative-copula constructions, are found with clausal complements, without relative marking. This is shown in (46), a structure to which I will return in section 4.

- (46) Ku-na ki-tu ki-na-m-taabish-a.  
SM17-POSSCOP 7-thing SM7-PRES-OM1-worry-FV  
'There is a thing (which) worries him.' [Hus Mas 034:007]

### 3.2. *Locative-copula constructions*

The structural contexts in which the locative copula is found are much more diverse than those described in the previous section for the locative-possessive copula. Where only two word orders were possible in (44), above, eight possibilities summarised in (47) are found with locative-copula constructions (in 47, *yuko* stands as a shorthand for any locative copula):

*Structure and interpretation in Swahili existential constructions*

(47)	Construction (schematic)	Typical interpretation (* = ungrammatical)
a.	LOC <i>yuko</i> NP	existential
b.	<i>Yuko</i> NP	existential
c.	NP <i>yuko</i>	existential
d.	NP <i>yuko</i> LOC	locative
e.	<i>Yuko</i> LOC	locative
f.	<i>Yuko</i> LOC NP	locative
g.	<i>Yuko</i>	existential
h.	(NP) <i>yuko</i> ADJ	descriptive
i.	ADJ <i>yuko</i>	*

The schematic representations in (47) show how the interpretation of locative-copula constructions depends on the presence and word-order of copula, locative and theme NP. If the theme NP follows the copula, the result is typically an existential reading, irrespective of whether there is a preceding locative phrase (cf. 47a-b):

(48) a.	Leo	katika Afrika	y-a	Mashariki	yu-ko	m-tu
	today	in	9.Africa	9-GEN east	SM1-LocCOP17	1-person
	a-na-ye-wez-a	ku-ji-tokez-a	na	ku-sem-a	kuwa	
	SM1-PRES-REFCD1-be.able-FV	15-REFL-come.out-FV	CONJ	15-say-FV	COMP	
	Ki-swahili	ch-a	leo	ni	mali	y-ake?
	7-Swahili	7- GEN	today	COP	9.wealth	9-his

‘Today in East Africa is there a man who can come out and say that today’s Swahili is his own possession?’ [TUK Lug 017:009]

b.	Wa-po	pia	wa-chunguzi	binafsi.
	SM2-LocCOP16	also	2-investigator	private

‘There are also private investigators.’ [TUK Fas 155:010]

In the absence of a locative phrase, the theme NP may also precede the copula and still receive an existential interpretation, often with a meaning of availability (cf. 47c):<sup>7</sup>

(49) a.	Mimi	ni-na-amini	kama	ma-shetani	wa-po.
	1SG	SM1SG-PRES-believe	COMP	6-evil.spirit	SM2-LocCOP16

‘I believe that there are evil spirits.’ [Hus Mas 029:026]

- b. Madini tu-na-yo,                      reli    tu-na-yo,  
     9.metal   SM1PL-POSSCOP-REFCD9 9.train   SM1PL-POSSCOP-REFCD9  
     na        wa-tu                              wa-po...  
     CONJ     2-person                        SM2-LOCOP16  
 ‘Metals we have, a railway we have, and people are available...’  
 [Kez Gam 052:014]

However, if a locative phrase follows the copula, a locative reading is strongly preferred, irrespective of the presence or absence of the theme NP (cf. 47d-f). This may reflect the different interpretations available for the locative copula (and referential concords more generally), varying between interpretations with respect to contextually overt or implied antecedents such as overt locative NPs, and grammaticalised and expletive interpretations which may result in more abstract, non-locative interpretations (cf. section 2.2., above).

- (50) a. Bwanyenye yu-ko            m-ji-ni,    m-kulima yu-ko            shamba.  
     1.rich.person   SM1-LOCOP17 3-town-LOC 1-farmer    SM1-LOCOP17 5.field  
 ‘The rich man is in town, the farmer is in the field.’ [\$ TUK Fas 005:008]
- b. Yu-ko            London  
     SM1-LOCOP17 London  
 ‘He is in London.’
- c. Wa-ko            wapi wa-toto w-angu?  
     SM2-LOCOP17 where 2-child    2-my  
 ‘Where are they, my children?’ [Kez Ros 008:029]

A different interpretation results when the existential-locative copula is used with an adjective phrase, which has to follow the copula, resulting in a descriptive reading:

- (51) a. Wa-tu wa-li-ji-on-a            wa-po            huru zaidi.  
     2-person SM2-PAST-RELF-see-FV   SM2-LOCOP16 free    more  
 ‘People saw themselves as being more free.’ [Liw Nyo 144:013]
- b. Ha-wa wa-tu wa-po            w-engi sana.  
     DEM-2    2-person SM2-LOCOP16 2-many    very  
 ‘These people are very many.’ [Liw Nyo 078:007]

- c. Vi-jana wa-ko            tayari ku-ahirisha n-doa...  
 8-youth SM2-LocCOP17 ready 15-postpone 9-marriage  
 ‘The young people are ready to postpone getting married...’  
 [Kez Kic 144:005]

In terms of the morphosyntactic variation of the complement NP, the locative-copula construction does not differ from the locative-possessive construction. It allows simplex (52a) and complex NPs, including genitive (52b) and relative NPs (52b-c), and also including clausal complements without relative marking (52d).

- (52) a. Wa-po            ma-ofisa, ma-fundi, ma-mesenja...  
 SM2-LocCOP16 6-official 6-technician 6-messenger  
 ‘There are officials, technicians, messengers...’ [Mac Twe 008:005]
- b. Wa-po            wa-tu w-engi w-a    Zanzibar wa-li-o-ji-zamish-a  
 SM2-LocCOP16 2-person 2-many 2-GEN    Zanzibar SM2-PAST-REFCD2-REFL-dive-FV  
 katika            fani    z-a    tenzi na            ma-tumbuizo  
 in                10.kind 10-GEN 10.poem CONJ            6-song  
 ‘There are many Zanzibari people who have immersed themselves into various kinds of poems and songs.’ [TUK Lug 039:009]
- c. Lazima yu-ko            m-tu a-taka-ye-fanya-a    mi-pango...  
 necessary SM1-LocCOP17 1-person SM1-FUT-REFCD1-make-FV 4-plan  
 ‘There has to be a person who will make plans...’ [Nye Uja 153:003]
- d. Yu-ko            m-tu a-na-pig-a hodi m-lango-ni.  
 SM1-LocCOP17 1-person SM1-PRES-hit-FV hodi 3-door-LOC  
 ‘There is someone knocking “hodi” on the door.’ (i.e. asking to enter)  
 [Sem Njo 071:035]

In addition to the differences in word order and interpretation, the difference between locative-possessive and locative-copula constructions is also reflected in the availability of definite interpretations of complements. Definiteness is not morphologically marked in Swahili, but is related to the morphosyntactic context, and in particular to word-order, as discussed in the following section. A clear illustration of the difference between the two constructions in this respect is the different acceptability of proper names. While proper names are possible in locative-copula constructions, they are only marginally possible in locative-possessive constructions.

- (53) a. Juma yu-ko.  
Juma SM1-LocCop17  
'Juma is there.'
- b. Yu-ko Juma.  
SM1-LocCop17 Juma  
'Juma is there/There is Juma.'
- c. <sup>?</sup>Ku-na Juma  
SM17-PossCop Juma  
'Juma is there/There is Juma.'

Although not fully ungrammatical, the locative-possessive construction with a proper name complement in (53c) is significantly worse than the locative-copula constructions in (53a, b). Locative-possessive constructions might thus be analysed as a more canonical existential construction in that the post-copular position is virtually restricted to indefinite NPs, while the locative-copula construction in (53a, b) has no such restriction (cf. Milsark 1974, 1977).

The locative-copula construction is thus structurally less restricted than the locative-possessive construction, and can express a wider range of interpretations. The following section will discuss how this difference is related to word-order and information structure and the morphological structure of the two copula forms.

### *3.3. Word-order, agreement and information structure in Swahili existential constructions*

The description of the two existential constructions in Swahili above has shown similarities, but also a range of differences between the two constructions. Locative-possessive constructions conform more closely to typical existential constructions, both in terms of their structural restrictions and in terms of the definiteness restriction. Freeze (1992: 556) notes that existential constructions in basic SVO languages typically have the word-order LOC Cop NP, exactly as the order in Swahili locative-possessive constructions. Similarly, the restriction on definite theme NPs as seen in the locative-possessive construction is a typical characteristic of existential constructions (e.g. Christie 1970, Freeze 1992, Milsark 1974, 1977, Lyons 1999). On the other hand, while some uses of the locative-copula construction conform to typical existential uses, the construction exhibits a wider range of syntactic

possibilities, and it can be used in a wider range of contexts. In part this difference is related to the functional closeness, and cross-linguistically common correlation, between possessive and existential constructions, which is evident in the Swahili locative-possessive construction, but which does not play a role for the locative-copula construction, which has a locative, but not a possessive component. Within the specific Swahili context, this difference is reflected in the fact that *-na* is a predicate in other contexts as well, namely in pure (non-locative) possessive constructions, as illustrated in section 2, above, while the locative referential concords *-po*, *-ko* and *-mo*, even though they have other uses, are not used as predicates other than in locative-copula constructions. A second difference between the two construction types concerns the subject agreement markers used in the constructions. The locative subject marker (*ku-*, *pa-*, or *m-*) used in locative-possessive constructions has two distinct uses. On the one hand, it functions as a locative subject marker, agreeing with a semantic locative subject, which may be coded as grammatical subject or topic (Swahili subject markers being quite generally underspecified as to whether they agree with extra-clausal topics or clause-internal subjects). Agreement with semantic locative subjects results in ordinary predicate-argument structure such as in the intransitive structure in (54).

- (54) Nyumba-ni ku-na-pendez-a.  
9.house-LOC SM17-PRES-be.pleasant-FV  
'At home (it) is pleasant.'

On the other hand, locative markers function as grammaticalised expletive markers, where they may or may not agree with a locative topic, but where they fill the verbal subject agreement slot, with the semantic subject encoded by an NP immediately following the verb. This usage is found, for example, in locative inversion constructions (55) (repeated from above).

- (55) M-ji-ni ku-me-ku-f-a wa-tu w-engi.  
3-town-LOC SM17-PERF-STM-die-FV 2-person 2-many  
'(There) at the town many people have died' (Ashton 1947: 125-129)

It is locative expletive markers as in (55) which are found in existential locative-possessive constructions, without an implied locative topic (56), or failing to agree with a preceding locative phrase (cf. 15, repeated here as 57).

- (56) Wao wa-na-amini kuwa ku-na Mungu m-moja.  
3PL SM2-PRES-believeCOMPL SM17-POSSCOP 1.god 1-one  
'They believe that there is one god.' [Hus Kin 000:056]
- (57) Ha-pa ku-na kazi moja n-zuri sana...  
DEM-16 SM17-POSSCOP 9.work 9.one 9-good very  
'Here there is a very nice job...' [Sem Njo 090:013]

Expletive markers cannot be used with a preceding (non-locative) semantic subject, and their central function is to allow for the introduction of semantic information in post-verbal position, which in turn serves to express presentational focus. It is thus the interpretational restriction on expletive subject markers which renders any order in which a theme NP precedes a locative-possessive copula ungrammatical. Furthermore, since expletive subject markers also disallow reference to contextually given non-locative logical subjects, that is, to antecedents in the context, the locative-possessive copula cannot be used in elliptical contexts. This means that the only possible word order of locative-copula constructions is (LOC) *kuna* NP, as shown above.

Grammaticalised locative markers as used in Swahili locative-possessive constructions are the only or primary expletive markers in many Bantu languages (see e.g. Buell 2012 for Zulu). However, in Swahili other subject markers function in expletive contexts, such as class 9 markers in raising predicates (58). Furthermore, quite generally subject markers in Swahili may be used to introduce a new referent in post-verbal position in presentational constructions (59). This interrelation between subject agreement, word-order and information structure in Swahili is discussed in more detail in Marten (2011), and is also central for the interpretation of existential constructions in Swahili.

- (58) I-na-onekan-a kwamba a-me-ondok-a.  
SM9-PRES-seem-FV COMPL SM1-PERF-leave-FV  
'It seems that he has left.'
- (59) A-li-fik-a Juma.  
SM1-PAST-arrive-FV Juma  
'Juma arrived / There arrived Juma.'

It is the difference in subject markers which explains the structural versatility and difference of locative-copula constructions from existential locative-possessive constructions. The central relevant quality of non-locative subject markers in Swahili such as in (59) is

that they allow both anaphoric and expletive use, that is, interpretation with reference to, and agreement with, either preceding or following NPs. The difference between constructions with pre-verbal NPs and those with post-verbal NPs is related to information structure. Pre-verbal NPs function as antecedent for the pronominal interpretation of the subject marker, which is thus interpreted anaphorically. The pre-verbal NP is thus typically interpreted as a discourse-old topic. In contrast, in constructions with post-verbal NPs, the subject marker cannot be interpreted anaphorically, since no antecedent is available.<sup>9</sup> This means that the subject marker functions as an expletive marker, that is, as a place-holder for the subject interpretation which will be provided by the post-verbal NP. In the latter function ordinary subject markers are similar to locative expletive markers – with the difference that they show agreement in class with the following subject, rather than invariant, historically locative, agreement. Since subject markers in locative-copula constructions are of the ordinary, non-locative kind, their syntactic and interpretational qualities inform the construction overall. In contrast to grammaticalised locative expletive markers, non-locative makers can be used with either pre-verbal or post-verbal NPs, and so both these word-orders are possible in locative-copula constructions: NP *yuko* (LOC) or (LOC) *yuko* NP. As with ordinary verbal predicates, the difference in order is related to a difference in information structure:

(60) M-geni yu-ko  
1-guest SM1-LocCOP17  
'The guest is there'

(61) Yu-ko m-geni  
SM1-LocCOP17 1-guest  
'There is a guest'

In (60), the pre-copular NP is introduced first, and provides the topic of the assertion. The subject marker is interpreted with respect to the topic, and existence in some location is predicated of that topic, so that the result is a locative reading. In contrast, in (61), no interpretation is available for the subject marker, and so an expletive reading obtains. The post-copular NP is interpreted as new information, and introduced as new against the background of some location. Without a specific location available in the context of the sentence, and the introduction of the theme argument as new, an existential reading obtains.

The difference between locative-possessive and locative-copula constructions is thus a function of their constituent morphemes. They differ in the copula employed, where in locative-possessives the possessive copula receives a locative, and hence existential, interpretation only when combined with a grammaticalised locative subject marker, while in other cases it functions to express possession. In contrast, in locative-copula constructions the copula is a locative expression and only used as a copula in these constructions. Furthermore, the locative subject markers in locative-possessive constructions only have expletive use, while the non-locative subject markers in locative-copula constructions can be used both anaphorically and as expletives. These two differences are thus at the heart of the different structural and interpretational qualities of the two constructions.

Before turning to the summary and conclusion of the paper, the next section turns to ‘clausal’ complements found in both Swahili existential constructions.

#### 4. ‘Clausal’ complements

As noted above, both locative-possessive constructions and locative-copula constructions can be followed by what appear to be clausal complements. In terms of their meaning the constructions are similar to existentials with relative clause complements (62), but in contrast to these, with the clausal structures no relative marking is found (63).

- (62) Ku-na        wa-tu        w-engine wa-na-o-vi-sifu  
SM17-POSSCOP 2-person        2-other        SM2-PRES-REFCD2-OM8-praise  
 vi-tendo    hi-vyo        hi-vyo  
8-action        DEM-REFCD8    DEM-REFCD8  
 ‘There are other people who praise these very same actions.’  
 [Nye Uja 084:002]

- (63) a. Ku-na        poultry farm ha-pa i-na-uz-w-a.  
SM17-POSSCOP 9.poultry farm    DEM-16    SM9-PRES-sell-PASS-FV  
 ‘There is a poultry farm here (which) is being sold.’ [Hus Mas 024:004]

- b. Ku-na        m-tu        a-me-kw-ambi-a    a-na-ku-chumb-i-a.  
SM17-POSSCOP 1-person    SM1-PERF-OM2SG-tell-FV    SM1-PRES-OM2SG-engage-APPL-FV  
 ‘There is a person (who) told you he will propose to you.’  
 [Kez Gam 011:007]

Due to the head-marking quality of Swahili verbs, in the absence of relative marking, the resulting verb form is an inflected main clause verb form. Syntactically the examples in (63) thus look like two juxtaposed clauses, with the NP linking the two clauses functioning at the same time as post-copular NP and as subject or topic of the following clause. Interestingly, similar structures are found in English and German, where they also appear in existential and other copular contexts (the English examples are from Lambrecht 2001: 654; capitals indicate stress):

- (64) a. There was a BALL of FIRE shot up through the seats in FRONT of me.  
b. We had a FRIEND of mine from NORWAY was staying here.
- (65) a. Es gibt Leute, die ihren Kindern zu viel Eis kaufen.  
it exist people REL/DEM their children too much ice-cream buy  
'There are people who buy their children too much ice-cream.'
- b. Es gibt Leute, die kaufen ihren Kindern zu viel Eis.  
it exist people REL/DEM buy their children too much ice-cream  
'There are people who buy their children too much ice-cream.'

The examples in (64) show VP complements in English with *there* and *have* constructions, while the German examples in (65) show complements in existential constructions with expected subordinate verb-final syntax (65a), but also with unexpected verb-second syntax (65b). Verb-second word-order in German is normally restricted to main clauses, while subordinate clauses, such as the relative clauses in (65), show verb-final word-order. In (65b) the appearance of verb-second word-order is thus surprising in the syntactic context. Lambrecht (1988, 2001) presents a range of examples like (64) from English and proposes that 'presentational amalgam constructions' like (63-65) are characterised by the fact that 'an NP coding a discourse-new entity functions simultaneously as the complement of a presentational verb and as the subject of a regular predication' (2001: 655). This description is indeed applicable to the Swahili constructions, where, as noted above, the post-verbal NP is presentationally focused, while the predication in an example like (63a) is that the poultry farm is being sold. The Swahili, German, and English examples all share the same information structure, while the resultant syntactic structure differs, depending on the underlying clausal syntax, verb morphology and relative clause formation. In Swahili, due to the rich verbal inflection, the absence of relative morphology results

in a clausal complement, while in English it results in a VP complement. In German the use of the same form as relative and demonstrative pronoun (*die*) means that in examples like (65) word-order distinguishes between subordinate and main clause, so that in (65b), like in Swahili, the complement is clausal. Like in the previous section, the examples here show the central role information structure plays in existential constructions, and how intra- and cross-linguistic variation results from construction-specific or language-specific lexical and morphosyntactic constraints.

### 5. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was two-fold. On the one hand it aimed at describing and illustrating two kinds of existential constructions found in Swahili, locative-possessive constructions and locative-copula constructions. The constructions are interesting because of their interaction with the complex Swahili locative morphology; locative-possessive constructions exhibit locative subject markers which are prefixed to a possessive copula, while in locative-copula constructions a locative copula is used with non-locative subject markers. The difference in morphological structure corresponds to a number of differences between the two constructions in terms of syntactic structure and range of interpretations. The second aim of the paper was to show, based on this description, how existential constructions in Swahili are related to information structure, and how their interpretation interacts with word-order and lexical and morphosyntactic constraints, such as restrictions on the interpretation of locative vs. non-locative subject markers, and the interpretation and complementation of the two different copulas involved. The tight restrictions on word-order and interpretation on locative-possessive constructions result from the use of locative subject markers, which in locative-possessive constructions function as expletive subject markers, and thus require the theme NP not to be encoded as grammatical subject and to be placed after the predicate. The post-verbal position of the logical subject results in a presentational construction, and the use of the possessive copula in an existential interpretation. On the other hand, in locative-copula constructions, the non-locative subject marker can be used both anaphorically and as expletive marker. This means that a much wider variety of word-orders are possible in the locative-copula construction, and that the construction is available for a wider range of interpretations, result-

ing from the respective placement and information-structural role of the locative and the theme argument.

A further aspect of existential constructions in Swahili which is noteworthy is the possibility of ‘clausal’ complements, where the post-copular NP is pragmatically focussed as new information introduced by the existential construction and, at the same time, fulfils the function of subject in the underlying predication. While formally close to constructions with post-copular NPs modified by a relative clause, the absence of relative clause marking makes these complements formally clausal. Interestingly, comparable structures are found in the same context in unrelated languages such as English and German.

Given the descriptive aim of the paper, no formal analysis of Swahili existential constructions has been proposed, and comparative aspects have only been touched upon. These two areas thus remain for future research. While the main aspects of Swahili existentials are maybe not surprising from a comparative-typological perspective, the specific interplay between the pronominal/agreement system, the particular role of locatives in existential constructions, and the availability of clausal complements are all aspects of the construction which could profitably be investigated further from a theoretical perspective.

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#### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> The majority of data in this paper are from the ‘Books’ sub-collection of the Helsinki Corpus of Swahili which contains about 1 million words from Swahili novels (the source tag of the example is given in square brackets). Examples without reference are from first-hand data collection in London as well as from research visits to Tanzania in 2001 and 2006. I am grateful to Yussuf Hamad for discussion of examples in the paper. The following abbreviations are used in the glosses: 1, 2, 3 = noun class number, 1/2/3SG/PL = 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> person singular/plural, APPL = applicative, CD = concord, COMPL = complementiser, CONJ = conjunction, COP = copula, DEM = demonstrative, FUT = future, FV = final vowel, GEN = genitive, HAB = habitual, LOC = locative, LOCOP = locative copula, NEG = negation, OM = object marker, PASS = passive, PERF = perfect, POSSCOP = possessive copula, PRES = present, Q = question marker, REFCd = referential concord, REFL = reflexive, REL = relative, SBJV = subjunctive, SM = subject marker, STM = stem marker.

<sup>2</sup> The stem marker *ku-* in (3) – historically a class 15 infinitive marker – is added to monosyllabic verb roots in certain tenses (see Ashton 1947: 142, Marten 2002).

<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the pure, locative and possessive copulas introduced above, *-wa* ‘to be’ behaves morphologically like a verb and can be inflected for tense, aspect, negation etc. and, as a monosyllabic verb root, is preceded by the stem marker in the relevant contexts. The form functions as an auxiliary in complex tenses, as well as in complex copulas. In the latter function it may be combined with a pure, locative or possessive copula and carries the temporal, aspectual etc. specifications of the sentence.

<sup>4</sup> Animacy has an effect on agreement in Swahili: nouns denoting living beings show verbal agreement of class 1/2. This includes personal names such as in examples (16-20), independent pronouns, as well as any noun from any class denoting a living being. For example, the class 10 noun *maskini* ‘poor people’, used in example (36), below, and the class 8 noun *vijana* ‘youths’ in (51), show class 2 verbal agreement.

<sup>5</sup> The semantics of locative demonstratives is slightly more complex than indicated by the translations here, as it interacts also with the semantic distinctions between the three different locative classes, noted above.

<sup>6</sup> As noted above, independent pronouns such as the 3rd person singular pronoun *yeye* in (35) and nouns from any class denoting living beings such as *maskini* ‘poor people’ in (36), take class 1/2 verbal agreement. In (35), the class 1 concord is *yu-* rather than *a-*; this is the class 1 form used with the locative copula. In all other classes there is only one form of the concord.

<sup>7</sup> The pre-copula position of the focal NP in (49a) may result from the specific discourse context; (49a) is the answer to the questions whether the speaker believes that there are evil spirits. In the question, *mashetani* ‘evil spirits’ follows the copula *wapo*, and so in the answer in (49a) *mashetani* may be taken as discourse old. A better translation of (49a) might be ‘I believe that they exist, evil spirits.’ The subtle differences between pre- and post-copula theme NPs need further investigation.

<sup>8</sup> I am abstracting away from afterthought constructions, in which a topic is contextually given, and resumed by the post-verbal NP, for example to ensure correct reference.

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