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THE SYNTACTIC STATUS OF THE NOMINAL CONSTITUENT
IN GREEK EXISTENTIAL CONSTRUCTIONS

This paper addresses the syntax of the nominal constituent (pivot) in Greek existential sentences. Once I present that Greek has three types of existentials, namely *exi-, ime-* and *iparxo-*sentences, I demonstrate that, in all sentences, the pivot remains in the post-verbal position and is subject to a definiteness restriction. At the same time, it bears accusative case marking in *exi-*sentences and nominative in all other sentences. By examining the behavior of the pivot with respect to its ability to raise to object and control an absolute construction, I conclude that the pivot behaves as a subject in all cases but *exi-*sentences. Finally, I combine this with assumptions about the predicative structure of existentials and offer a possible analysis for the predication layer in existentials.

Keywords: existential, pivot, definiteness effect, raising

1. INTRODUCTION

McNally (2011: 1829) suggests that an existential sentence is "a specialized or non-canonical construction which expresses a proposition about the existence or the presence of someone or something". Based on this definition, the English sentence in (1a) qualifies as existential due to the presence of expletive *there* which makes it non-canonical compared to the canonical one in (1b).

1.   a. There are some books on the table.
        b. Some books are on the table.

Unlike English, Greek has three types of sentences that express the same proposition and are more or less canonical. Namely, HAVE- (2a), BE- (2b), and EXIST-sentences (2c) (Delveroudi 1992; Kampanarou 2021a).

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2. a. HAVE (*exi*) -sentences: Exi kati markaðorus sto trapezi.
    HAVE.3SG some marker.PL.ACC. on.the table
    b. BE (*ime*) - sentences: Ine kati markaðori sto trapezi.
    BE.3PL some marker.PL.NOM. on.the table
    c. EXIST (*iparxo*) - sentences: Iparxun kati markaðori sto trapezi.
    EXIST.3PL some marker.PL.NOM. on.the table
    'There are some markers on the table.'

In these Greek sentences, the nominal constituent is obligatory, as is the case cross-linguistically (Clark 1978; Francez 2007). This paper discusses the properties of this nominal constituent, often called the *pivot,* in the sentences above to determine its syntactic status.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 demonstrates the key characteristics defining the pivot in Greek existentials. In Section 3, I consider its behavior concerning its ability to raise to object and control an absolute construction. I conclude that the pivot constitutes an object in *exi*-sentences and a subject in *ime-* and *iparxo*-ones. Section 4 shows how this conclusion can be combined with assumptions regarding the predicative structure of existentials. Section 5 concludes the discussion and presents the issues left for future research.

2. THE NOMINAL CONSTITUENT IN GREEK EXISTENTIALS

2.1. Case pattern and Agreement

To begin with, Greek existential sentences are differentiated based on the case and the agreement pattern they exhibit. On the one hand, in *exi*-sentences, the post-verbal nominal is marked for accusative case, while the verb does not agree with it. As shown in (3), the verb retains the third-person singular marking even if its sole nominal argument is marked for plural. This is a distinctive pattern in Greek, as it is attested only with impersonal verbs, thus immediately capturing the 'non-canonicality' of existentials.

3. Exi kafe/*kafes/ kafeðes sto dulapi.
    HAVE.3SG coffee.SG.ACC/coffee.SG.NOM/coffee.PL.ACC in.the cupboard
    'There is coffee/There are coffees in the cupboard.'

On the other hand, the nominal in *ime-* and *iparxo*-sentences bears nominative case, and the verb fully agrees with it (4).

4. a. Ine/Iparxi arketos kafes sto dulapi.
    BE.3SG/EXIST.3SG enough coffee.SG.NOM in.the cupboard
    'There is enough coffee in the cupboard.'

b. Ine[2]/Iparxun   arketi kafeðes   sto   dulapi.
BE.3PL/EXIST.3PL enough coffee.PL.NOM in.the cupboard
'There are enough coffees in the cupboard.'

An essential characteristic of all existentials is that the nominal constituent stays in the post-verbal position.

2.2.   Definiteness & Bareness Effects

The so-called *Definiteness Effect* (henceforth called DE) is a second property that makes these constructions non-canonical. This property that has been thoroughly discussed in the literature ever since Milsark (1974) refers to the fact that in all existentials, definite noun phrases (5a) and phrases with strong quantifiers (5b) like *kaϑe* 'each' are not allowed in the post-verbal position.

5.   a.*Exi/#Ine/ #Iparxi   to vivlio   sto   trapezi.
            HAVE/BE/EXIST.3SG the book.SG on.the table
            lit. 'There is the book on the table.'
        b. #Exi/#Ine/ #Iparxi   kaθe vivlio   sti   vivlioθiki.
            HAVE/BE/EXIST.3SG each   book.SG   at.the library
            lit. 'There is each book at the library.'

Witness that although the strongest version of the DE suggests that definite determiners and strong quantifiers are prohibited, most examples in (5) are not ungrammatical (i.e., marked with '*'). Instead, they are marked as infelicitous (#) in a specific context (explained in detail below). Several authors hold that they are infelicitous when the sentences are intended to introduce new discourse referents or, in other words, assert that a property is instantiated in the discourse (McNally 1997; McCloskey 2014; Irwin 2018; Myler 2018).

Notice that if the function of the sentence changes, definite noun phrases are allowed, if not required. For instance, when the sentence in (5a) includes *ine,* it allows the definite noun phrase when it establishes the location of the presupposed entity *to vivlio*, i.e., when behaving as a locative sentence. In fact, on this occasion, the definiteness of the nominal is necessary. Further, the same sentence licenses a definite noun phrase when it includes *iparxo* and is used to confirm the existence of a specific item already known in the discourse.

However, the sentences in (5b) do not have a function distinct from the sentences in (2), (3), and (4) when containing *kaϑe*. They, too, introduce

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[2] Note that the third person singular form of *ime*, *ine,* is homophonous to the third person plural form.

a discourse referent. However, unlike the sentences above, they introduce a different kind of referent. Instead of entities, they introduce types. They are interpreted as conveying that every type of book is instantiated in the current discourse. This means, then, that strong quantifiers are allowed in existentials when they quantify over types. The examples in (6) illustrate this more clearly as they overtly express reference to types.

6.   a. Exi   opjoðipote   (iðos)   maθiti   stin taksi.
                HAVE.3SG whichever.ACC   type.SG.ACC student.SG.ACC/GEN in.the class
                lit. 'There is whichever (type of) student in the class.'
      b. Iparxi   kaθe   (tipos)   etisi(s)   onlain.
                EXIST.3SG each type.SG.NOM application.form.SG.NOM/GEN online
                 lit. 'There is each (type of) application form online.'

Notice, also, in (7), that if we add to a definite nominal a complement that reduces some of the semantic definiteness, e.g., an indefinite complement, the *morphologically* definite nominal is no longer *semantically* definite. Thus, it can denote a novel referent instantiating a property. Hence, it is licensed in the post-verbal position of an existential sentence, introducing this referent into the discourse.

7.   a. *Exi   tis simiosis   sto   θranio.
                HAVE.3SG the note.PL.ACC on.the desk
                lit. 'There are the notes on the desk.'
      b. Exi   tis simiosis   enos maθiti   sto   θranio.
                HAVE.3SG the note.PL.ACC a.GEN student.SG.GEN on.the desk
                'There are a student's notes on the desk.'

Therefore, we see that the DE is not a prohibition on determiners. It is a restriction on particular denotations or semantic types when the sentences are used to introduce new discourse referents of a specific semantic type. In other words, when the sentences have the abovementioned function, they license pivots with denotations corresponding to the type of referent they are intended to introduce. These denotations must also guarantee that the referent is novel. Thus, the DE is determined as a prohibition driven by semantics and pragmatics (Bassaganyas-Bars & McNally 2019).

A second relevant characteristic is detected for *ime*-sentences in particular. In *ime*-sentences, one additional restriction prohibits bare noun phrases from being used in any sentence function. This is unsurprising for Greek, as bare arguments, and bare singulars in particular, are dispreferred in the language (Alexiadou 2001;

Sioupi 2002; Lazaridou-Chatzigoga 2011; Alexandropoulou 2013; Alexopoulou et al. 2013; Kampanarou 2019; Alexopoulou & Folli 2019).

8.   a.*(To) vivlio   ine   sto   trapezi.
         the book.SG.NOM BE.3SG on.the table
       'The book is on the table.'
      b. Ine   *(ena/to) vivlio   sto   trapezi.
         BE.3SG a/the   book.SG on.the table
       'There is a book on the table.'

I will call this the Bareness effect (BarE) and discuss its significance in Section 3.

In view of these facts, we can pin down where the 'non-canonicality' of existentials stems from, at least with regard to the nominal constituent. The case/agreement pattern, partially, the surface word order, and the Definiteness and Bareness effects are the characteristics substantiating their 'non-canonicality'. Nonetheless, the presentation of the DE suggests that the 'non-canonicality' arises on specific occasions, i.e., when the sentences are used to introduce novel discourse referents of a particular type.

It seems, then, that we can refine the definition of existentials to incorporate these observations. Existentials could be defined as 'non-canonical' sentences introducing new discourse referents.

No matter which definition of existentials we adopt, it is essential to understand whether their morphological similarities depict a uniform syntax. In the following section, I gather evidence supporting this is not true for Greek.

3. ASPECTS OF THE SYNTAX OF GREEK EXISTENTIALS

3.1. Case pattern and Agreement

In 2.1., I noted that, in contrast with *ime-* and *iparxo*-sentences, *exi*-sentences include the invariable form of HAVE marked for third person singular. Traditionally, this has been attributed to an empty pronoun *(pro)* that controls subject agreement. This silent pronoun has been assumed for weather verbs, among other impersonal structures, and has been argued to yield default agreement manifested as third-person singular marking (Iatridou & Embick 1997). Moreover, Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (1998) claim that the DE in existentials (as it differs from the DE in unaccusatives) is indicative of an expletive *pro.*

Nonetheless, the postulation of *pro* in *exi*-sentences is also required for case-reasons. To give some background, according to a recent view on the Case algorithm in Greek, accusative qualifies as a dependent case. Anagnostopoulou and Sevdali (2020) argue that it is assigned under the rule in (9), according to which a DP is marked for accusative when a second DP c-commands it in the TP domain.

9.	Dependent accusative case rule in SMG: *If DP$_1$ c-commands DP$_2$ in TP, then assign U (accusative) to DP$_2$.*

By contrast, nominative is treated as the unmarked case in the TP domain and is not assigned under agreement with T. In this view, nominative is the case that marks the unique or the highest (pro)nominal argument appearing in the TP domain. Further, Alexiadou and Anagnostopoulou (2021) propose that verb agreement always goes with nominative when both nominative and accusative are present.

Based on the above, the accusative case marking on the post-verbal nominal in *exi*-sentences suggests a case competitor exists in the TP domain. Out of all the overt constituents of the sentence, the only one that could possibly act as a case competitor is the locative PP since it is the sole constituent that includes a second nominal. However, the locative PP in an *exi*-existential (or any other existential) could be replaced by an adverb (10). In this case, the post-verbal nominal would still be marked for accusative.

10.	Exi	ena vivlio	eki	pera.
	HAVE.3SG a	book.SG.ACC	there over
	'There is a book over there.'

Baker (2015) and Anagnostopoulou and Sevdali (2020) convincingly show that the nominals contained in PPs cannot act as case competitors for the dependent case mechanism since the heading preposition delineates a phase and makes them inaccessible to the case algorithm.

Furthermore, cross-linguistic evidence suggests that invariant forms of verbs are often preceded by subject expletives. Romance existentials, counterparts to the Greek constructions discussed in this study, illustrate this. The French (11a) and Catalan (11b) examples below show that the non-agreeing form of the HAVE-verb in existentials is preceded by an overt expletive subject.

11.	a. *French*
	Il	*y* a	beaucoup de fleurs	dans le	jardin.
	EXP. PF HAVE.3SG many	of flower.PL in	the garden
	'There are many flowers in the garden.'
	b. *Catalan* (Leonetti 2008: 9, ex. 11b)
	Hi	ha	la policia	al	pati.
	there$_{EXPL}$ HAVE.3SG the police.SG in.the courtyard
	'There are the police in the courtyard.'

Francez (2007) also claims that if a language has expletives, it obligatorily uses them to mark the difference between existential and locative sentences.

Therefore, it is reasonable to posit that the expletive *pro* acts as the case competitor because it is a covert item of a (pro)nominal status that can be case-marked (see Kampanarou 2024: 16–22 for more details). If *pro* is the highest argument in the sentence, it is expected to get assigned nominative, as the unmarked case in the TP domain, thus yielding default verbal agreement. Hence, the verb appears non-agreeing with the pivot and is invariably marked for third person singular as *exi.* This constitutes a first indication that the pivot in *exi*-sentences is not a subject.

3.2. The syntactic status of the nominal

The Definiteness Effect has been recognized as the second key property of existentials and as a condition implied by semantics and pragmatics. However, the Bareness effect, identified for *ime*-sentences, is, arguably, a syntactic condition. BarE is a property indicative of, but not exclusive to, subjects. Generally, bare arguments in Greek are preferred in the object position of transitive verbs or the post-verbal position of unaccusative verbs (see the references in 2.2). In the first case, they bear accusative case marking, whereas, in the second, they bear nominative.

Thus, the licensing of accusative bare nominals in *exi*-sentences indicates that the nominals occupy an object position. In contrast, the fact that bare nominative nominals follow the unaccusative verb of existence *iparxo* in the respective sentences suggests that they are subjects. The question is, then, what happens with the post-verbal position in *ime*-sentences that prohibits bare arguments? The rest of this section provides support for the above assumptions regarding *exi* and *iparxo* and shows that *ime*-sentences assimilate *iparxo*-ones as their nominal constituent patterns with subjects. To demonstrate this, I consider their behavior with respect to raising to object and control of an absolute construction.

First, it is evident in (12b) that the nominal in *ime*- and *iparxo*-sentences[3] can raise to object as any subject of a typical transitive verb like *pezo* 'play'.

12.   a. Iða   na ine/?iparxun/exi/pezun   kabosa peðja sto   parko.
           see.PST.1SG to   BE.3PL/EXIST.3PL/HAVE.3SG/PLAY.3PL some   kids   in.the park

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[3] The slightly reduced acceptability of *iparxo*-sentences in this context does not seem to be a matter of word order, since the sentence is judged similarly even when the nominal surfaces after *iparxun*. The reduced acceptability should be attributed to the fact that *iparxo* denotes a state that is not necessarily perceptible. Thus, it is bad as a complement of verbs of perception (Roy 2013).

    b. Iða   kabosa peðja na ine/iparxun/pezun   sto parko.
        see.PST.1SG some   kids   to BE.3PL/EXIST.3PL/PLAY.3PL in.the park
        'I saw some kids being/playing in the park.'

The acceptability of the above sentences comes in clear contrast with the ungrammatical *exi*-sentence in (13).

13.   *Iða   kabosa peðja na exi   sto   parko.
        see.PST.1SG some   kids   to HAVE.3SG in.the park
        int. 'I saw some kids being in the park.'

On the other hand, the same contrast appears regarding the nominal's ability to control PRO in an absolute construction. In (14), the nominal constituent of the *exi*-sentence cannot control the PRO in the absolute construction appearing at the beginning of the utterance. In contrast, the pivot in *iparxo-* and *ime*-sentences can.

14.   Vlepodas ti simveni se ales xores, *[exi   ðiaðilotes$_i$] /?[iparxun ðiaðilotes$_i$]
      seeing   what happens in other countries, HAVE.3SG protesters.ACC EXIST.3PL
      protesters.NOM
      /[ine   poli ðiaðilotes$_i$]   stus ðromus tis   Elaðas.
       BE.3PL many protesters.NOM in.the streets   the.GEN Greece
      'Seeing what's happening in other countries, there are protesters/many protesters are in the streets of Greece.'

Building on Anagnostopoulou (1999), the ungrammaticality of the above *exi*-sentence suggests that the nominal is an object. Based on the same author, this assumption is further supported by the fact that the post-verbal nominal can be clitic doubled, which applies only to objects of transitive verbs in Greek (Anagnostopoulou 2003).

15.   A: Kseris ti psaxno?   Astinomika miθistorimata.
        know.2SG what look.for.1SG detective   novels
        'Do you know what I'm looking for? Mystery novels.'
      B: A! Ta exi   afta   sto kato rafi!⁴
        ah! CL HAVE.3SG these.ACC on.the bottom shelf
        'Ah! They are on the bottom shelf.'

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⁴ Note that a minority of speakers accepts this sentence with a coerced "possessive" reading with a dropped subject, roughly meaning 'keeps them at the bottom self'.
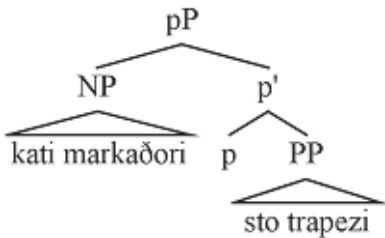
Therefore, the above distribution suggests that the nominal constituent is an object in *exi*-sentences, and a subject in *iparxo-* and *ime*-sentences. This means there must be at least two structures with mirrored argument arrangements: one in which the nominal is a subject and one in which it is an object. The following section accommodates this assumption within a hypothesis about the syntax of existential predication.

4. THE SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE OF GREEK EXISTENTIALS

To begin with, as argued elsewhere (Kampanarou 2021b), independent reasons lead us to assume that a functional preposition, p, introduces a predication relationship between the NP pivot and the locative PP. To sum up, the arguments supporting this analysis are (a) the fact that *iparxo* is a verb prefixed with *ip-* which originates as an independent argument-introducing prepositional head that incorporates into the verb (Asyllogistou 2018; Alexiadou 2020), (b) the fact that *ime* and *exo* are covert prefixed verbs, which becomes evident in their nominalizations, *parusia* and *katoxi* respectively, where the overtly prefixed variant is used, (c) the fact that these sentences are stative (when they do not include eventive nominals) and for Hale and Keyser (2002) stativity derives from the inclusion of such a p-head, and (d) *ime* is a deponent and according to Alexiadou (2019) unaccusative deponents include a p-head regulating the projection of an intrinsic type of non-Active Voice.

Although the assumption of a prepositional head echoes analyses in the style of Freeze (1992), the current analysis does not argue for a unified structure underneath all types of existentials and locatives. Instead, in the spirit of Harley (1995, 2002) and Pesetsky (1995), I propose that p-heads come into two variants. In the *standard* arrangement, the NP is the subject, and c-commands the PP (16a). In contrast, in the *reversed* p-structure, the NP is the object and is c-commanded by the PP (16b).

16.   a. Standard p-structure (pP)   b. Reversed p-structure (RpP)
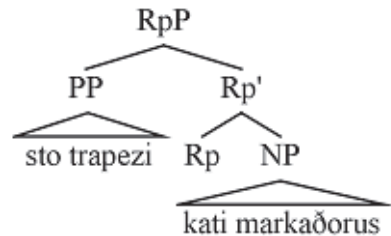
Then, each p-structure is selected by the verb. The standard structure in (16a) is assumed for *iparxo-* and *ime-*sentences, as in (2c) and (2b), respectively, whereas the reversed structure in (16b) for *exi-*sentences as in (2a). Therefore, although existentials are structurally unified in having a preposition heading their predication layer, they are dissociated due to the argument arrangement within this layer.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has demonstrated that Greek has three existential constructions. Besides the fact that they are headed by different verbal items, they are also distinguished based on the status of their nominal constituent. Considering the latter's properties and behavior in several environments, I have argued that the nominal is a subject in *ime-* and *iparxo-*sentences, and an object in *exi-*ones. Studying the locative constituent's behavior and comparing these constructions with others using the same verbal items may reveal additional points of divergence. This is, however, left for future research.

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Η ΣΥΝΤΑΞΗ ΤΗΣ ΟΝΟΜΑΤΙΚΗΣ ΦΡΑΣΗΣ ΣΤΙΣ ΔΟΜΕΣ ΥΠΑΡΞΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ

Περίληψη

Το άρθρο αυτό εξετάζει τη μορφολογία και τη σύνταξη της ονοματικής φράσης που εμφανίζεται στις δομές ύπαρξης της ελληνικής. Εφόσον διαπιστωθεί ότι η ελληνική διαθέτει τρεις δομές ύπαρξης, καθεμία βασιζόμενη στα ρήματα *έχει, είμαι* και *υπάρχω*, παρουσιάζεται ότι η ονοματική φράση που περιλαμβάνεται σε αυτές παραμένει υποχρεωτικά σε μετα-ρηματική θέση και διακρίνεται από ένα διαφορετικό μαρκάρισμα πτώσης και έναν περιορισμό οριστικότητας. Στη συνέχεια, εξετάζοντας τη συμπεριφορά αυτών των προτάσεων σε περιπτώσεις όπου η ονοματική φράση καλείται να ανυψωθεί στη θέση αντικειμένου κύριας πρότασης και να ελέγξει απόλυτες μετοχές, συμπεραίνεται ότι η ονοματική φράση λειτουργεί ως αντικείμενο στις προτάσεις με το *έχει* και ως υποκείμενο στις προτάσεις με τα *είμαι* και *έχω*. Τέλος, προτείνεται πώς το συμπέρασμα αυτό μπορεί να συνδυαστεί με άλλες υποθέσεις που αφορούν τη γενικότερη δομή των προτάσεων ύπαρξης.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: δομές ύπαρξης, υπαρκτικές προτάσεις, μετα-ρηματικά υποκείμενα, περιορισμός οριστικότητας, ανύψωση σε θέση αντικειμένου.