

EXPRESSING EXISTENCE IN FLEMISH SIGN LANGUAGE & FINNISH SIGN LANGUAGE

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1. Background:

Locative sentences:

The book is on the table.

Possessive sentences:

Tom has a book.

Existential sentences:

There is a book on the table.

Semantically related:

Express a certain object (*book*) on a certain location (*table / Tom*).

Syntactically related:

Word order in existential sentence resembles the possessive one, but differs from the locative one.

Function: *to introduce new and important referent(s) in a discourse.*

2. Research questions:

What are the ways to express existence in Flemish Sign Language (VGT) and Finnish Sign Language (FinSL)?

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How are signs ordered in an existential construction?



3. Data:

- 4 and 2 native signers of VGT and FinSL respectively
- Elicitation test: 'finding differences'
- Total length approx. 60 minutes
- Transcribed on ELAN and Word
- Data approached from functional point of view

4. Preliminary findings:

VGT	FinSL
a. The signs HEEFT / OLLA ('have')	
<u>OUTSIDE HAVE GRASS GREEN</u> Location Located Element 'There is green grass outside.'	<u>INDEX-3(picture) HAVE WHALE</u> Location Located Element 'There is a whale in the picture.'
b. Verb Construction(s)	
<u>TABLE VASE</u> vc-(vase) vc-(table) Loc Loc EI Loc EI / Loc Relation Loc EI / Loc 'There is a vase on the table.'	<u>WALL PICTURE</u> vc-(picture) Loc Loc EI Loc EI / Loc Relation 'There is a picture on the wall.'
c. Localized lexical signs	
<u>WALL THREE PAN HANG-a HANG-b HANG-c</u> Loc Loc EI Located Elements / Location 'There are three pans hanging on the wall.'	<u>STOVE TWO DRAWER-a DRAWER-b</u> Loc Located Elements / Location 'There are two drawers on the stove.'
d. Pointing	
____nod INDEX-3 'Yes, there is.'	<u>WALL CLOCK INDEX-3</u> (mouthing 'o') Loc Loc EL 'There is a clock on the wall.'
e. Combination of previous ways a - b	

5. General conclusions so far:

- **5 different ways** to express existence in both VGT and FinSL
- **Similarities on word order:** Location precedes Located Element in both VGT and FinSL
 - The Locative Relation between Location and Located Element can be marked by a preposition sign (rare in FinSL!), a verb construction or a localized lexical sign
 - The choice of these markers affects the place of Locative Relation within the construction
 - Verb constructions and localized lexical signs appear at final position, and preposition signs can occur both at initial position as well as right after Location
- **Differences:** Finnish signers rarely use preposition signs & the use of pointing

References:

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