

Incremental existence: the world according to the Finnish existential sentence¹

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Abstract

This work is a cognitive semantic study on existential constructions in Finnish, the main argument being that existentials code an idiosyncratic, external perspective on the semantic relationships they designate. Unlike nonexistential (transitive and intransitive) sentences, existentials do not assign the status of the semantic starting point to a single participant (typically the referent of the subject), that then steers our perspective toward the other relations designated in the sentence. In existentials, the perspective on the situation remains external to activities and events that take place in the location or other dimension within which the existential relationship is established. Existentials also suppress individual activities and foreground a holistic viewpoint over the event. It is theoretically important that the central differences between existential and nonexistential sentences are not found in the “objective” semantic content of the sentence construction but rather in the conceptualizer’s subjective way of approaching the situation.

1. Introduction

This article deals with the Finnish existential construction, with special emphasis on its holistic, clause-level meaning. It will be argued that existentials are constructions whose specialized function is the introduction of discourse-new referents into situations or mental spaces (in the sense of Fauconnier 1994 [1985]), and that they conventionalize an external perspective on activities that take place within the space. They select a mental space as the semantic starting point of the predication (in the sense of Langacker 1991) and produce a holistic, collective interpretation of activities within that space. The participation of individual entities in the activity is backgrounded.

The main morphosyntactic criterion for distinguishing Finnish existentials from nonexistential clause types is the morphological case marking of the element whose existence is being asserted. This element, which traditionally has been analyzed as the subject of the construction, is often marked with the partitive instead of the nominative of canonical subjects in other clause types. However, since its status as a syntactic subject is highly questionable, it will henceforth be referred to as the *e-theme*, or “existential theme,” a label that reflects its semantic role as the entity whose existence is being asserted.

A pair of contrasting examples is given below to show the main morphosyntactic differences between a nonexistential intransitive sentence, (1), and an existential sentence, (2). In (1) the subject precedes the verb, is in the nominative case, and triggers number and person agreement in the verb. In (2) the *e-theme* comes after the verb, is marked with the partitive case, and does not trigger agreement. The verb always takes a petrified 3rd person singular form in existentials, regardless of the person and number of the *e-theme*. As in (2), existentials typically have a locative element beginning the sentence and setting the frame for the existential relationship. However, since Finnish has a discourse-pragmatically conditioned (“free”) word order, the clausal position of elements can easily be varied, and word order is therefore a less reliable criterion in distinguishing clause types in actual usage than morphosyntax.

- (1) Poja + t juokse + vat piha + lla.
 boy + PL.NOM² run + PRES.3PL yard + ADE
 ‘The boys are running in the yard.’
- (2) Piha + lla juokse + e poik + i + a.
 yard + ADE run + PRES.3SG boy + PL + PAR
 ‘There are boys running in the yard.’

In this paper, I use contrasting pairs of existential vs. nonexistential examples where the word order is the same in both, to show that the semantic differences between them are in fact due to the morphosyntactic construction type, rather than to the linear organization of information based on such principles as given vs. new information.

In the earlier literature (for details see section 2), the central semantic differences between the nominative subject and the partitive *e-theme* have been related to definiteness and quantity. The partitive is indefinite and designates an unbounded quantity of individuals (in the plural) or of a substance (in the singular), while the nominative is definite and designates a bounded quantity (see Chesterman 1991 for a Finnish–English contrastive study on definiteness). It has also been argued that the verb

receives a special interpretation in existentials, with agentivity and volitionality suppressed. However, the main argument of my paper is that existential sentences differ from nonexistential sentences most fundamentally in their holistic interpretation on a constructional level. These differences can be summed up in the general observation that, unlike the nominative subject, the e-theme does not constitute a semantic starting point for predication; thus the relationships designated by the verb and other relational elements (such as locational modifiers) are not approached from the perspective of the e-theme, but either from the perspective of the locative element or from the implicit perspective of an external conceptualizer who is not referred to in the sentence. Thus even though the partitive e-theme often indicates the agent of an activity (agentive verbs such as 'run', 'study', 'compete', etc., are allowed by the construction) and resembles nominative subjects in this respect, it behaves more like a downstream participant in the holistic semantic construal of relations indicated in the sentence. Existentials do not favor detailed characterizations of the e-theme; on the contrary, their characteristics and the relations in which they participate are suppressed.

The prominent status of the locational element in existentials is also reflected in the semantic interpretation of the sentence. Since the locational element is the starting point for the existential relationship, it also becomes the prominent participant in other respects. For instance, the temporal duration of the activity that takes place within the space is constrained from the viewpoint of the location, not from the viewpoint of the agent of the activity. Examples with a durative adverb primarily associate the duration with the existential relationship, not with the activity. Furthermore, existentials with a motion verb often have an interpretation where the motion is fictive, or subjective, rather than objective (for these terms see Langacker 1991, Talmy 2000). This is because an interpretation of objective motion would require the assignment of starting-point status to the mover (the e-theme), and this is in conflict with the general semantic function of the construction.

Another idiosyncratic semantic feature of existentials that will emerge from the present discussion is the collective interpretation of the event. If the space has multiple occupants (i.e. if the partitive e-theme is in the plural), then the occupants and the relations in which they participate are conceived of in a collective rather than distributive manner (cf. Schlachter 1958). Component actions performed by individual entities are suppressed, and the event is viewed on a higher level of abstraction where the component processes constitute a collective super-process. Existentials also favor an interpretation whereby the component processes are sequential rather than simultaneous, and the participation of each

individual is conceived of as punctual. Nevertheless, the super-process, which is the sum of its components, can have a more extensive duration that subsumes the duration of the punctual components as its parts. In these instances the e-theme takes on a semantic function reminiscent of what Dowty (1991) calls the *incremental theme* — a participant whose part-whole relations are mapped onto the temporal part-whole relations of the event as a whole. It is often the unbounded quantity designated by the partitive that makes such an interpretation possible when the duration of the existential relationship is “stretched” in time.

2. Background: earlier accounts of Finnish existentials

Undoubtedly the most controversial issue in Finnish syntax has been the morphological case marking of the subject. The default case of the subject in intransitive and transitive clauses is the nominative, while the “partitive subject,” that is, the e-theme, only occurs in existential constructions where the existence of an entity or a set of entities is either asserted (in affirmative examples) or denied (in negated examples). In affirmative existentials, the use of the partitive reflects the semantic and syntactic properties of the NP itself: it must be a mass noun or a plural form designating an unbounded quantity. Singular countable nouns designating a bounded quantity do not normally occur as partitive e-themes. In negated existentials, on the other hand, the partitive is used even with singular count nouns.

The traditional view of Finnish linguistics has taken all sentences with a partitive e-theme to be existentials; the reverse, however, does not hold, since existentials sometimes have a (singular count noun) nominative e-theme, in which case word order alone determines the interpretation of the sentence as an existential:

- (3) Poika on piha + lla.
 boy.NOM be.PRES.3SG yard + ADE
 ‘The boy is in the yard.’
- (4) Piha + lla on poika.
 yard + ADE be.PRES.3SG boy.NOM
 ‘There is a boy in the yard.’

The existentiality of (4) would show up even in its morphosyntax if the sentences were negated: in that case only the nominative subject of (3) would maintain its case marking, whereas the nominative e-theme of (4) would be marked with the partitive.

However, since Finnish has a flexible, discourse-pragmatically conditioned word order (see Vilkuna 1989 for details), the morphosyntactic marking of the elements has traditionally been taken as the most reliable criterion in distinguishing existentials from other clause types. For instance, in actual written and spoken discourse the partitive e-theme actually quite often precedes the verb. As has been repeatedly shown in the literature (cf. Hakulinen and Karlsson 1979: 95–96), the distinction between existentials and nonexistentials is not clear-cut, and different kinds of hybrids exist that have frustrated the efforts of scholars striving toward a clear-cut classification of clause-level syntactic structures into discrete subclasses, or *clause types*. Emphasizing one criterion (word order, morphological case, subject–verb agreement) at the cost of the others results in different classifications with regard to the existentiality of certain intermediate constructions (cf. Hakulinen 1982; Karlsson 1978). Karlsson (1978) shows that the partitive subject can easily be placed in clause-initial position (as in example [5]) if this is required by textual or pragmatic factors, yet the case selection and the lack of subject–verb agreement suggest that the example should be classified as an existential:

- (5) Tyttö + j + ä oli piha + lla.
 girl + PL + PAR be.PST.3SG yard + ADE
 ‘There were [some] girls in the yard.’

The outline of the prevailing concept of the use of the “partitive subject” was drawn by early scholars, including Setälä (1884), Airila (1924), and Hakulinen (1926). In their view, sentences with a partitive subject express existence, that is, are existential sentences. In addition, these scholars observed that the partitive is indefinite and indicates what was then called *partiality*, or *divisibility* but what later was given the labels *quantity allowing surplus* (by Itkonen 1980) or *open quantity* (by Larjavaara 1988). It was observed that even though the quantity that constitutes the referent of the partitive is unbounded and unknown, it does not necessarily have to be part of a larger whole as the earlier terminology had suggested. According to Siro (1957), the partitive is actually indefinite in two ways: first, in the classic sense of indefiniteness, having a discourse-new referent; and second, in the quantitative sense of indefiniteness, referring to an unbounded amount of a substance or of instances. Siro assumed these two to be independent factors, which evoked criticism by later scholars (e.g. Vähämäki 1984; Vilkuna 1992). It was also observed in early studies that existential constructions set semantic constraints on their verb selection. According to Airila’s (1924) formulation, repeated in numerous later discussions, the verb had to express “existence” (in a wide sense) rather than “activity” or “quality”

of the subject. Thus practically all transitive verbs and some intransitive action and achievement verbs were excluded from the construction. However, the range of verbs available in the construction is actually quite broad, including agentive verbs, and it is quite unclear how these verbs in themselves “express existence.” Rather, the question seems to be about the compatibility of individual verbs with the holistic existential sense of the construction.

In the 1950s, the “partitive subject” became the object of a lively debate in the leading linguistic journal in Finland, *Virittäjä*. The debate was launched by Ikola (1954), whose view was holistic in nature. He characterized the semantics of the existential construction as a whole and thus implicitly assumed a position reminiscent of today’s construction grammarians: that a high-level syntactic schema can have a meaning of its own, not directly derivable from the meaning of its components. Ikola argued that in the existential construction, “the question is of a location [designated by the clause-initial locative adverbial], the contents of which the sentence expresses,” or more precisely, “what the location contains, starts to contain, or ceases to contain.” It is noteworthy that Ikola intended his characterization to include examples where the partitive e-theme occupies the initial position (as in example [5]); thus his formulation was intended to cover all uses of the partitive e-theme, not only examples with the canonical *Loc + V + Subj* word order. In this sense, as he stated, his argument was not intended to be a characterization of the linear ordering of information in the existential sentence but of the semantics of the morphosyntactic construction itself.

Another scholar who took an active part in the debate was Aarni Penttilä (1955, 1956). Penttilä made some important observations concerning the semantic behavior of the verb in the construction. He was on traditional lines in arguing that the construction only accepts verbs that share a common semantic feature of “existentiality”; on the other hand, he also argued that even one and the same verb can have different interpretations with regard to existentiality: “When the verb *juosta* [‘run’] has [existential] occurrences which do not denote actual running but just give an idea of a liveliness prevailing in a place, it belongs quite clearly to the list [of existential verbs]” (Penttilä 1956: 32; translation mine).

Perhaps the most insightful contribution in the 1950s debate was Wolfgang Schlachter’s paper (1958), which in a sense returned to Ikola’s original idea in assuming a holistic approach to existential constructions. Schlachter’s purpose was to reveal the semantic functions of the construction by systematically contrasting it with corresponding nonexistential examples with the nominative subject and a verb showing agreement (a strategy also utilized in the present work). In Schlachter’s view, the main

difference between existential and nonexistential constructions was the way of conceiving of the referent of the subject and its relation to the process designated by the verb. Schlachter argued that a (plural) nominative subject triggering subject–verb agreement foregrounds the individual actions of its referents and thus results in a distributive reading. The partitive e-theme and a petrified 3rd person singular verb form, on the other hand, represent the event in a collective manner. Furthermore, the referents of the partitive constitute a homogeneous “mass” as opposed to the “plurality” (*Vielheit*) expressed by the nominative (Schlachter 1958: 57). He also argued that the partitive e-theme does not express volitionality, or agentivity, in the same way as the nominative subject, and therefore the existential sentence has a “static” meaning even in cases where the verb itself belongs to a dynamic class. The function of the verb is merely to “give the relation of containment a temporal dimension” (Schlachter 1958: 58–61, 72) — a statement remarkably similar to present-day cognitive linguistic analyses of verbs as indicators of a process, that is, a relationship with a temporal profile.

In research conducted after the 1950s, the correctness of Schlachter’s observations has been widely acknowledged; for instance Ikola (1961), Itkonen (1974), and Hakanen (1972) all agree with his views concerning the interpretation of the verb in the existential sentence. The locative element has received particular attention in the work of Paavo Siro (e.g. 1964, 1974), who went even further than Schlachter in arguing that the primary relational expression in the existential construction is not the verb at all but the locative element; the verb has a “pale” meaning and serves only the formal function of connecting the two nominal elements (the subject and the locative) with each other.

It should be kept in mind that my summary of early research devoted to Finnish existentials is far from complete. What it has shown, however, is the recurrence over the decades of certain aspects of the semantic functions of existentials. These include the following:

- a. Irrespective of their word order, existentials give a predication about a location by introducing its content; the basic function of the construction is to characterize the relation of containment, not to express activity;
- b. The semantic function of one and the same verb can be different in existential and nonexistential sentences;
- c. The partitive e-theme differs semantically from the nominative subject, not only “in itself” (by this I mean its function of expressing indefiniteness and unbounded quantity) but also with respect to other semantic aspects of the sentence.

In spite of being widely acknowledged, these assumed differences still wait to be linguistically demonstrated. For one thing, it is not at all clear

how a simple pair of contrasting examples can manifest these alleged differences ([6] vs. [7]).

- (6) Tyttö + t juokse + vat piha + lla.
 girl + PL.NOM run + PRES.3PL yard + ADE
 ‘The girls are running in the yard.’
- (7) Tyttö + j + ä juokse + e piha + lla.
 girl + PL + PAR run + PRES.3SG yard + ADE
 ‘There are [some] girls running in the yard.’

Native-speaker intuition suggests that the two examples are not semantically identical, but to name their precise differences is extremely difficult. Both, after all, indicate the same kind of activity (running) performed by the same kind of entities (girls) in the same kind of location (yard). The assumed nonagentive reading of the verb in (7) is not easy to demonstrate. Nor is it clear why the activity should be understood as “collective” in (7) but as “distributive” in (6), or why (7) should be “a predication about the yard” in any deeper sense than (6) is. The only clear and unquestionable difference between the two examples is associated with the semantic function of the nominative vs. the partitive: the quantity of the girls is linguistically represented as unbounded and indefinite in (7) but as bounded and definite in (6). The other alleged semantic differences remain latent.

This is not to say, however, that the arguments of the early scholars studying existentials are incorrect; quite the contrary. The problem is rather that they have not been demonstrated with the right kind of data, that is, examples that foreground the assumed differences in a clear and unquestionable way. The examples studied in earlier works have been simple constructions, rarely containing for instance optional modifiers. Thus what is needed is a careful analysis of more complex examples that might foreground the semantic aspects and necessarily incorporate them as part of their meaning structure.

In the following sections, the matter will be studied by means of complex existential constructions, where different optional modifiers are introduced to foreground different semantic aspects. The purpose of the study is to show that the (somewhat impressionistically formulated) views of Finnish existentials presented in the early literature are in fact correct, vague as they are, and that a cognitive linguistic approach can offer a more explicit and multifaceted analysis of the matter.

3. A collective perspective: how expressions of manner and quantity modify existentials

In the extensive literature on Finnish existentials, attention has been repeatedly paid to the fact that partitive e-themes disfavor manner adverbs in the same sentence (e.g. Airila 1924: 17–18; Siro 1943: 278). While this constraint is not absolute, and while judgments by native speakers seem to reflect a gradience of acceptability rather than a strict dichotomy, the following examples have often been represented as straightforward cases: nonexistential (8) is acceptable, but existential (9) is not.

- (8) Omenapuu + t kasvo + i + vat hitaasti puutarha + ssa.
 apple-tree + PL.NOM grow + PST + 3PL slowly garden + INE
 ‘The apple trees grew/were growing slowly in the garden.’
- (9) *Omenapu + i + ta kasvo + i hitaasti puutarha + ssa
 apple-tree + PL + PAR grow + PST.3SG slowly garden + INE
 ‘There were apple trees growing slowly in the garden.’

It has been argued that (9) is unnatural because the adverb of manner makes the activity too “individual,” that is, picks up and characterizes individual component processes (“growings”) independently of each other. It has also been argued that the manner adverb makes the verb too “concrete,” contradicting the semantic tendency to suppress the activity in existentials (for similar arguments concerning verbs of English locative-inversion constructions, see Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1996: chapter 6 and the literature mentioned there). Modification of manner is thus in conflict with the general semantic function of existentials. A characterization of the manner of individual component processes would also conflict with the semantic function of the partitive, which represents its referents as a homogeneous and inactive mass rather than a group of active individuals (as argued by Schlachter 1958: 83 and Ikola 1961: 30).

However, Hakanen (1972: 54) and Itkonen (1974: 187) give the following two examples of well-formed existentials with a manner adverb.

- (10) Uudisraivio + lle kasvo + i nopeasti oras + ta.
 clearance + ALL grow + PST.3SG quickly new-crop + PAR
 ‘New crop grew quickly in the clearance.’
- (11) Uut + ta metsä + ä kasvo + i haka + tu + n
 new + PAR forest + PAR grow + PST.3SG fell + PRTC + GEN
 tila + lle nopeasti.
 place + ALL quickly
 ‘New forest grew quickly in the place of the one cut down.’

What is exceptional in these examples is that their locative modifiers are in the directional allative ‘to’ case rather than the static inessive of the earlier examples. Indeed, the static cases (‘in’, ‘at’) would not be appropriate in such examples. The allative case generally designates a goal, a location entered by a moving entity, but since (10) and (11) are existential sentences, the directionality of the allative also needs to be understood in the existential sense. The examples say that the subject APPEARS in the location by coming into existence there, not by transition from another place. In these examples the viewpoint clearly remains within the location in the sense of Ikola (1954). We do not mentally follow an entity into a location but fix our viewpoint in the location first and only then encounter the entity coming into existence there. The situation in a sense resembles what Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1996: 242–244) observed by studying locative-inversion constructions in English: when we say a sentence like *Susan’s cat ran out of the kitchen* we mentally follow the cat from inside the kitchen to the outside, but in saying *Out of the kitchen ran Susan’s cat* we select an external perspective from the very beginning.

Alhoniemi (1989a) has made the important generalization that the constraint on the use of manner adverbs in existentials holds only for static examples (of the type *In Y [there] is X*), while dynamic examples are more tolerant. The contrast shows up in (12), which is only acceptable with the locative in the allative, not the adessive.

- (12) Pensa + i + ta kasvo + i hitaasti
 bush + PL + PAR grow + PST.3SG slowly
 ojanvarre + lle / *ojanvarre + lla
 ditch-bank + ALL / ditch-bank + ADE
 ‘Bushes slowly grew [=appeared] on the ditch bank.’

It is important to note that the manner adverb itself has an atypical reading in (12). What is “slow” here is the collective manner of coming into existence, not the process of “growing bigger” by each individual bush. As Vilkuna (1989: 163) puts it, a change-of-state verb like *kasvaa* ‘grow’ does not mean ‘grow bigger’ in an existential sentence: “to grow in the E[xistential]-sense is to exist in the way of all flora.” Manner adverbs thus require a collective interpretation of the event in the sense suggested by Schlachter (1958): they relate to the process only at the collective but not at the individual level. Thus, in the present examples, one of the “latent” features of existentials that often remains backgrounded is actually revealed and forced into the foreground.

The following two examples display a similar contrast, perhaps even more straightforwardly.

- (13) Uude + t tietokoneohjelma + t synty + vät
 new + PL.NOM computer-program + PL.NOM arise + PRES.3PL
 firma + ssa + mme niin nopeasti, että kilpailijo + i + ta
 firm + INE + 1PLPX so quickly that competitor + PL + PAR
 huolestu + tta + a.
 worry + CAUS + 3SG
 ‘New computer programs are produced so quickly in our firm that
 our competitors are getting worried.’
- (14) Uus + i + a tietokoneohjelm + i + a synty + y
 new + PL + PAR computer-program + PL + PAR arise + PRES.3SG
 firma + ssa + mme niin nopeasti, että kilpailijo + i + ta
 firm + INE + 1PLPX so quickly that competitor + PL + PAR
 huolestu + tta + a.
 worry + CAUS + 3SG
 ‘New computer programs are [being] produced so quickly in our
 firm that our competitors are getting worried.’

These two examples differ from (12) in that they actually have a punctual change-of-state verb *syntyä* ‘arise; be born’. Both designate a replicate process (in the sense of Langacker 1991) whereby computer programs are being produced in the firm and different programs are completed at different points of time. The manner adverb ‘quickly’, however, reveals that the construal of the process is different in the two examples. In the nonexistential (13), the manner adverb receives a distributive reading and characterizes each component process individually: each program is “finished quickly,” and thus the time interval that separates the inception and the completion of a program is short. In the existential (14), on the other hand, the manner adverb modifies the collective process and produces a punctual-iterative reading where short time intervals separate the moments of completing different programs. The example thus means that programs are being produced with a high frequency.

Note that even though the verb is in principle punctual in both examples, its way of profiling the process is different. In (13) it implies that the endpoint of each process in which an individual program is completed is preceded by other activity, the making of the program. This activity is then modified by the manner adverb. In (14), the focus is solely on the momentaneous endpoint of the process, with all previous activities suppressed. These activities (the making of each individual program) cannot be modified by the manner adverb. Note that these two readings exclude one another. Example (13) does not say anything about the frequency or quantity of programs. As a matter of fact, the firm may produce fewer programs than its competitors do; its asset is that the ones

it makes are completed so quickly. On the other hand, (14) does not say that individual programs are finished quickly; in fact, the firm may now be a slower producer of individual programs than its competitors are, but it makes programs with a higher frequency.

As can be seen from these semantic characterizations, the manner adverb also takes on the secondary function of QUANTIFYING the process in an existential sentence. Since in (14) the frequency is high, the number of component events must also be high; and since each component event has one referent of the partitive e-theme as its participant, the number of these referents (computer programs) must also be high. Thus the manner adverb also indirectly affects the interpretation concerning the quantity designated by the partitive.

Against this background, it may not be surprising that proper expressions of quantity also have different functions in existential vs. nonexistential sentences. The following examples are from Alhoniemi (1989b).

- (15) Lapse + t leikk + i + vat ranna + lla paljon.
 child + PL.NOM play + PST + 3PL beach + ADE lot
 'The children played a lot on the beach.'
- (16) Laps + i + a leikk + i ranna + lla paljon.
 child + PL + PAR play + PST.3SG beach + ADE lot
 'There were a lot of children playing on the beach.'

As pointed out by Alhoniemi (1989b), example (15), which has a nominative subject, results in a reading where the quantifier *paljon* 'a lot' modifies the verb and indicates the quantity of the activity (roughly, its duration). In the existential (16), on the other hand, the quantifier constrains the referential extension of the partitive. Here quantification is thus directly associated with a nominal element, not with the verb. This should not be surprising: on the one hand, as we have seen, the activity designated by the verb in existentials does not easily offer itself to modification; on the other hand the referential extension of the partitive itself is open, resulting in a "demand" for nominal quantification.

In fact, this "demand" for quantification is sometimes so strong that even certain manner adverbs can take on a direct quantifying function (Alhoniemi 1989b). If we replace the quantifier *paljon* 'a lot' of (15) and (16) with the manner adverb *järjettömästi* 'unreasonably, irrationally', we get a straightforward opposition between manner and quantification. In (15) it is then the manner of playing that is 'unreasonable', whereas in (16) it is the number of the children that is so characterized ('There were unreasonably many children playing on the beach'). Of course, not all manner adverbs allow such interpretations: the quantitative interpretation must be compatible with the general meaning of the adverb for the

quantitative reading to arise (thus e.g. **eagerly many children* would not be possible).

To sum up the observations made in the present section, we have seen that adverbs of manner have different functions in existential as opposed to nonexistential sentences. In nonexistential examples with the nominative subject, manner adverbs tend to get a distributive reading where they modify each component process individually. In existential examples with the partitive e-theme, on the other hand, they modify the superordinate process that comprises the component events as its parts. The modification thus proceeds via different levels of abstraction and reveals the otherwise backgrounded meaning of the constructions — that is, that nominative vs. partitive reflect a different way of conceptualizing the process and its participants. This observation, of course, provides concrete and clear evidence in support of Schlachter's (1958) idea that the partitive marking of the e-theme and lack of subject-verb agreement represent the event with a collective meaning.

4. The locative perspective and the temporal extension of the event

Another semantic feature of the existential sentence is the locative perspective it imposes on the event. This means that the activity taking place within the location is observed from the perspective of the location, not from the perspective of the element performing the activity (the e-theme). This is again a factor distinguishing e-themes from nominative subjects, as the latter clearly constitute semantic starting points for the relationships in which they participate. Even though the difference in perspective selection remains latent in canonical simple examples, it can be revealed if we add a durative modifier that highlights the temporal extension of the event. Compare (17) and (18):

- (17) Lapse + t leikk + i + vät piha + lla koko päivä + n.
 child + PL.NOM play + PST + 3PL yard + ADE whole day + ACC
 'The children played in the yard the whole day.'
- (18) Laps + i + a leikk + i piha + lla koko päivä + n.
 child + PL + PAR play + PST.3SG yard + ADE whole day + ACC
 'There were children playing in the yard the whole day.'

In (17), the duration is associated with the activity performed by the referent of the nominative subject. The sentence is about the continuous activity of a specific set of children who perform the activity at each point of time. In (18), on the other hand, the partitive e-theme allows its reference to change over time; it is possible that none of the children

playing in the yard at the beginning of the day are still there when the day ends. The only important thing is that the location has a content ('some children') at each point of time during the day. This shows how the duration of the event is not associated with the activity of a particular set of individuals but with the existential relationship itself: at any one point of time, the yard has to have playing children as its content. Note, too, that the indefiniteness of the partitive seems here to have a peculiar temporal extension. Thus it not only introduces indefinite entities into the location at the beginning of the event but continues its indefiniteness throughout.

Existentials with a directional locative show similar differences even more strikingly. Consider (19) and (20):

- (19) Muuttolinnu + t lentä + vät Suome + en kaksi
 migrating-bird + PL.NOM fly + PRES.3PL Finland + ILL two
 viikko + a.
 week + PAR
 'It takes the migrating birds two weeks to fly to Finland.'
- (20) Muuttolinnu + j + a lentä + ä Suome + en kaksi
 migrating-bird + PL + PAR fly + PRES.3SG Finland + ILL two
 viikko + a.
 week + PAR
 'For two weeks there are migrating birds flying to Finland.'

In the nonexistential (19), the duration of the event is again associated directly with the activity: the durative adverb indicates its temporal extension. The sentence says that it takes the birds two weeks to fly to Finland after they start their flight from an unspecified point of departure. In the existential (20), on the other hand, the duration of the process is again associated with the location ('Finland'). Unlike (18), however, the location in (20) is only the goal of the motion, not an all-embracing setting; thus only the final part of the actual motion takes place there, when the mover enters the goal and the event ends.

Since (20) is an existential sentence and limits its perspective to the goal of the motion, it cannot include within its scope of predication activities that have taken place before the mover reaches the goal. The example does not allow the durative modifier to be associated with the total flight time of the birds. On the other hand, since an arrival at a location is a punctual event without a relevant duration, it cannot as such be modified by a durative element. It is only the collective process that can be modified for duration in (20): the birds arrive in a sequence, and their punctual arrivals constitute a collective process that has a duration of two weeks. In a way, then, the current example resembles

example (14) with a manner adverb in including only the final portion of the process within its scope of predication and making the participation of each individual within the process punctual. Such examples clearly show the difference between nonexistential and existential sentences: even in cases where they refer to the “same” situation, in an objectivist sense, they still select a different viewpoint on it.

As regards the status of the locative element, another interesting case in point is that of existential constructions that lack it altogether. Such examples are of course problematic for an analysis that argues that existentials set up a locative perspective on the event. Ikola (1954) gave the following two examples.

- (21) Kirje + i + tä saapu + i.
 letter + PL + PAR arrive + PST.3SG
 ‘(Some) letters arrived.’
- (22) Ihmis + i + ä synty + y ja kuole + e.
 person + PL + PAR be-born + PRES.3SG and die + PRES.3SG
 ‘People are being born and dying.’

Ikola explained the well-formedness of these examples by saying that even though they lack a locative modifier, they have verbs that strongly imply that a location is involved. Such an implicit location could be, according to him, the center of discourse (‘letters arrived here’) or, in (22), the whole world itself (‘people are being born and dying in the world’). If such an implication is missing, then the sentence is awkward unless an actual locative element is present. Consider Ikola’s examples (23) and (24).

- (23) *Ihmis + i + ä kävele + e.
 person + PL + PAR walk + PRES.3SG
 ‘There are people walking.’
- (24) Ihmis + i + ä kävele + e kadu + lla.
 person + PL + PAR walk + PRES.3SG street + ADE
 ‘There are people walking on the street.’

Ikola’s idea was criticized by Schlachter (1958), who pointed out that the strength of the locative implication varies even in well-formed instances and doubted whether a missing locative could explain the phenomena. Schlachter also argued that an implicit location such as *in the world* is far too general to have any semantic relevance, since almost ALL predications we use, existential or not, are about things and events that happen in the world. Furthermore, there is no reason to assign the locative implication to the existential construction itself but to particular

verbs. A verb meaning ‘arrive’, for example, implies a locative relationship even in nonexistential sentences (cf. *The letters arrived*).

Even though the assumption about the missing locative cannot be straightforwardly supported, there are semantic features in locativeless existentials that set them apart from corresponding nominative-subject examples and suggest that an external perspective on the event is indeed selected, even though this perspective is not associated with a particular location as in the earlier examples in this section. One peculiar feature can be revealed by taking a more careful look at the meaning of examples such as (22). This example has two elliptically coordinated verbs that share the partitive e-theme (i.e. the single e-theme introduces the participants of both activities, ‘be born’ and ‘die’). In the corresponding nonexistential example, the individual referents of the nominative subject are understood to participate in both activities, (25).

- (25) Ihmise + t synty + vät ja kuole + vat.
 Person + PL.NOM be-born + PRES.3PL and die + PRES.3PL
 ‘People are born and die.’

Example (25) can be understood as a generic statement of the life cycle of human beings: first they are born and later they die. Each referent of the plural nominative subject participates in both events in a sequence. Example (22) is different in this respect. It describes two independently unfolding events where people are being born and dying, with no implication that the same individuals are involved in both processes. If the term *scope* were used to describe the difference, we could say that in (25) the nominative subsumes both verbs within its scope, whereas in (22) the partitive subordinates itself under the scope of the two verbs. This is again an indication of the non-starting-point status of the partitive, this time with regard to the verb.

The observation that the partitive e-theme does not support the process over time can account for another special feature of the “locativeless” construction that was found to be problematic in earlier approaches. It was observed that locativeless existentials favor punctual, telic verbs (designating an entity’s emergence) but generally reject imperfective, atelic verbs. Siro (1974: 40) observed that only (26) and (27) are acceptable, while (28) and (29) are not.

- (26) Jun + i + a saapu + u.
 train + PL + PAR arrive + PRES.3SG
 ‘Trains are arriving.’
- (27) Sotila + i + ta kuole + e.
 soldier + PL + PAR die + PRES.3SG
 ‘Soldiers are dying.’

- (28) ?Sus + i + a ulvo + o.
 wolf + PL + PAR howl + PRES.3SG
 ‘Wolves are howling’/‘There are wolves howling.’
- (29) ?Viera + i + ta tanssi + i.
 guest + PL + PAR dance + PRES.3SG
 ‘Guests are dancing’/‘There are guests dancing.’

To be sure, there is no abrupt boundary between well-formed and ill-formed instances here; yet it is clear that the first two examples are better than the last two. The examples reflect a strong tendency to reject atelic verbs in the locativeless construction. It is again interesting that the introduction of a locative makes (28) and (29) acceptable (cf. [30] and [31]).

- (30) Sus + i + a ulvo + o metsä + ssä.
 wolf + PL + PAR howl + PRES.3SG forest + INE
 ‘Wolves are howling / There are wolves howling in the forest.’
- (31) Viera + i + ta tanssi + i lattia + lla.
 guest + PL + PAR dance + PRES.3SG floor + ADE
 ‘Guests are dancing / There are guests dancing on the floor.’

The oddity of (28) and (29) thus seems to be a direct result of combining a partitive e-theme with an atelic verb but no locative. This is perhaps not surprising if we recall from the earlier examples that partitive e-themes in fact often produce a punctual-iterative interpretation of the event, where a continuous participation of their individual referents is not required. An atelic verb (as in [28] and [29]), on the other hand, would specifically require the continuous participation of each individual referent of the partitive. In [29], for instance, each individual guest would have to continuously participate in the atelic process of ‘dancing’, and a punctual-iterative interpretation would not be available. But when the locative element is present, it takes on the function of providing the starting point and allows the partitive to change its reference over time, even if the verb is atelic and durative.

The following examples demonstrate that if possible, many otherwise nonpunctual verbs change their interpretation to the punctual-iterative type in the locativeless existential construction:

- (32) Lasi + t tyhjene + vät jatkuvasti.
 glass + PL.NOM empty + PRES.3PL continuously
 ‘The glasses keep getting empty.’
- (33) Lase + j + a tyhjene + e jatkuvasti.
 glass + PL + PAR empty + PRES.3SG continuously
 ‘There are glasses getting empty all the time.’

- (34) Järve + t kuivu + vat jatkuvasti.
 Lake + PL.NOM dry + PRES.3PL continuously
 'The lakes are drying all the time.'
- (35) Järv + i + ä kuivu + u jatkuvasti.
 Lake + PL + PAR dry + PRES.3SG continuously
 'Lakes are drying out all the time.'

In (32) vs. (33) the difference between the nominative and the partitive shows up in the understood nature of the replicate action. Example (32) has the same entities repeatedly participating in an iterative event (= the same glasses are getting empty [and then refilled] over and over again), while (33) does not (= each glass gets empty only once, entering a new state as if coming into existence). In (34) vs. (35) the crucial semantic difference between the nominative and the partitive lies in the atelic vs. telic interpretation of the temporally continuous, durative process. In (34) the process of 'drying' is understood as a gradual change. 'Drying' as such is of course a telic process with a natural endpoint (when there is no water left), but the reaching of this endpoint is not included within the scope of predication in (34). On the other hand, in (35) it is precisely the endpoint of 'drying' that is selected in the scope of predication; no attention is paid to the gradual change that precedes the endpoint.

5. Space, time, and motion

After seeing that nominative subjects and partitive e-themes often assume a different function with respect to the temporal construal of events, we can now take a closer look at their behavior in examples with more complex spatial expressions. First we will take a look at static (nondirectional) spatial expressions that designate a multiple container, that is, a space consisting of a number of components in which the referents of the subject or e-theme are situated. Such examples will be discussed in section 5.1. In section 5.2, we concentrate on dynamic expressions designating a path (*from X to Y*), which are normally used with verbs designating motion. We will pay special attention to the understood nature of the motion, the crucial difference between existentials and nonexistentials being the distinction between objective and subjective motion: partitive e-themes favor interpretations where the path is constructed subjectively.

5.1. *Discontinuous space*

5.1.1. *Overtly expressed discontinuous spaces.* Languages have a number of ways of setting up complex spaces composed of multiple

components. Perhaps the most obvious case in point are plural locative modifiers and locatives with quantifiers (e.g. *in the boxes*, *in each/every box*, *in all boxes*, etc.). Different expressions of this type are of course not identical in meaning (cf. Langacker 1991: 111–118), but they share the common feature of multiplicity.

The internal complexity of a discontinuous space leaves the conceptualizer with a number of alternative ways to associate the space with the entities referred to in the clause nucleus. One important factor is temporal order: the relations of containment between the component spaces and the interacting participants may be either simultaneous or successive in time. If the simultaneous interpretation is made, the process is understood as going on in each component space independently, with different individuals participating in each space. For instance, the referential extension of a plural subject can now be divided between many component spaces, as in *The schoolchildren were sitting on all the sofas of the furniture store*, with different children sitting on different sofas. In the sequential interpretation, on the other hand, the relations of containment have a temporal order, and the participants proceed from one space to another. In *The schoolchildren sat on all the sofas of the furniture store*, for instance, a sequential interpretation is possible whereby the children sat on each sofa in turn.

The probability of selecting one interpretation over another depends on the semantic relations expressed in the clause nucleus, more precisely on the type of process designated by the verb, on the number of participants, and on definiteness. If for instance the process has only one participant, the successive interpretation is made, since one individual can only be at one location at a time. Consider *Every apartment in the house was visited by the police officer*. An individual police officer can only be in one apartment at a time, and the locative relationships must therefore be temporally ordered. Another way of saying this is that the quantifier *every* is under the scope of the definite agentive phrase. The situation is different, however, if the agent is indefinite, and indefinite NPs often fall within the scope of a quantifier. In the sentence *Every apartment in the house was visited by a police officer* the quantifier *every* now has the “wide scope” over the indefinite agentive phrase, and this results in a reading whereby different individual police officers visit different apartments (and possibly simultaneously). Even though the indefinite NP is in the singular, the quantified spatial expression enables it to refer to a number of individuals as if it were a plural form. This is characteristic of indefinite NPs in general: their function is to introduce new entities into mental spaces (Fauconnier 1994 [1985]: 20), and if the

space consists of multiple components, then the number of individuals corresponds to the number of the components.

Returning now to Finnish existentials, we will contrast pairs of examples with nominative subjects vs. partitive e-themes and see how these examples represent the temporal order of the multiple relations of containment. As such, both the plural nominative and the plural partitive designate a plenitude of individuals. Thus both in principle allow the distributive interpretation, whereby different spaces are occupied by different individuals. However, the nominative subject, which constitutes a starting point, is more likely to favor the sequential interpretation. Consider (36) and (37):

- (36) Asiakkaa + t istu + i + vat huonekaluliikkee + n
 customer + PL.NOM sit + PST + 3PL furniture-store + GEN
 sohvi + i + lla.
 sofa + PL + ADE
 ‘The customers sat ~ were sitting on the sofas of the furniture store.’
- (37) Asiakka + i + ta istu + i huonekaluliikkee + n
 customer + PL + PAR sit + PST.3SG furniture-store + GEN
 sohvi + i + lla.
 sofa + PL + ADE
 ‘There were customers sitting on the sofas of the furniture store.’

In the nonexistential (36), both interpretations are possible: either the customers were sitting on all the sofas simultaneously, or they were moving from one sofa to another in a sequence. The existential (37) has only the first-mentioned interpretation: the unbounded number of customers is divided among different sofas, and the relations of containment are simultaneous (as also suggested by the progressive construction in the English translation). Another way of putting it would be to say that in (37) the partitive is necessarily subsumed within the scope of the locative element.

Since the partitive designates a discourse-new element that can be conceptually accessed only after the conceptualizer has shifted attention to the space (or, in this case, to the individual components of a multiple space), it is incapable of being mapped from space to space and of binding the spaces together in time. Such a function would require the partitive to have an autonomous starting-point status with regard to the relationship of containment, in the very same way as the nominative. Since the space is multiple and discontinuous, the partitive must also represent the occupant(s) of each component space, similarly to the singular indefinite NP in the English example with the police officer.

There is no basis for creating a temporal arrangement for the relations of containment.

Such contrasts are even more prominent in examples where the very meaning of the spatial element suggests a temporal order. As has been pointed out by Langacker (1991: 114–115), quantifiers differ in the way they order the quantified instances with respect to time. The quantifier *each* imposes a sequential order on the instances it quantifies and differs, for instance, from *every*, which foregrounds all instances simultaneously (Langacker 1991: 115). Langacker's examples (38) and (39) demonstrate this difference.

(38) Tonight you can see each star in the Milky Way.

(39) Tonight you can see every star in the Milky Way.

According to Langacker, (38) evokes the image of the viewer shifting his/her gaze from star to star, while (39) suggests their simultaneous visibility. Langacker argues that the same sense of ordering is present in instances of *each* where no objective ordering is actually involved. His example is *Each student finished the exam with time to spare*; he argues that even though the example can refer to a situation where the students finished simultaneously, it nevertheless incorporates *subjective sequentiality* in its interpretation. In other words, in building up the mental representation of the complex situation the speaker makes mental contact with a number of instances in succession and construes the profiled instance as being just part of such a sequence.

It is interesting to see that the use of the corresponding Finnish quantifier *jokainen* 'each' highlights the successive vs. simultaneous interpretations in examples with a nominative subject vs. a partitive e-theme; see (40) and (41).

(40) Asiakkaa + t istu + i + vat huonekaluliikkee + n
customer + PL.NOM sit + PST + 3PL furniture-store + GEN
jokaise + lla sohva + lla.
each + ADE sofa + ADE

'The customers sat on each sofa of the furniture store.'

(41) Asiakka + i + ta istu + i huonekaluliikkee + n
customer + PL + PAR sit + PST.3SG furniture-store + GEN
jokaise + lla sohva + lla.
each + ADE sofa + ADE

'There were customers sitting on each [every] sofa of the furniture store.'

The Finnish *jokainen* resembles the English *each* in incorporating a temporal order as part of its meaning. The sequential interpretation is favored

in (40), with the group of customers sitting on one sofa at a time and moving along as time evolves. In (41), on the other hand, the partitive e-theme excludes the sequential interpretation and the sentence maintains the simultaneous reading in spite of the sequential quantifier. The sequential ordering implicated by the quantifier is conceived of as subjective, with the conceptualizer shifting the focus of attention from one sofa to another and observing different customers on different sofas.

5.1.2. *Implicitly established discontinuous spaces.* Instead of overtly setting up a discontinuous space, certain linguistic expressions may merely implicate that the space currently in focus is to be understood as part of a more extensive continuum of spaces ordered in time. In this section we will look at one construction type that specializes in the implication of such a continuum, called the *sequential space construction* (cf. Huumo 2001). This construction is the result of combining a scalar particle (e.g. *already, still, not until*) with a locative expression; its semantic function is to evoke an implicit continuum of spaces that are sequentially ordered in time and scanned through in a sequence by the conceptualizer.

In prototypical instances, the order of the spaces on the continuum reflects the objectively construed experience of one entity, a mover, who occupies each space in turn. Consider (42) and (43).

- (43) Jo Lontoo + ssa Elmeri oli vihainen.
 already London + INE Elmer be.PST.3SG angry
 'Elmer was already angry in London.'
- (44) Vielä Helsingi + ssä Elmeri oli koulupoika.
 still Helsinki + INE Elmer be.PST.3SG schoolboy
 'In Helsinki, Elmer was still a schoolboy.'

Since the locative elements of these examples designate spatial places, the scalar particles are understood as implying a continuum of locations. The order of the locations on the continuum is the order they were occupied by the referent of the subject. London and Helsinki are parts of a more extensive continuum of places visited by Elmer at different points of time. However, a subjective ordering of locations can also arise if the occupant of the focus space is not a movable entity, (45).

- (45) Jo Helsingi + ssä kaupungintalo on tarpeeksi
 already Helsinki + INE town-hall be.PRES.3SG enough
 iso kokoukse + lle
 big meeting + ALL
 'The Town Hall in Helsinki is already big enough for the meeting.'

To be sure, (45) does not mean that an individual town hall becomes big enough for the meeting when it is moved to Helsinki (which would be the objective-motion reading analogous to [43] and [44]). What the example says is that each city on an implicit continuum has its own town hall, and that only some of these are big enough for the meeting. Helsinki is then introduced as the “first” city on the continuum where the (respective) town hall fulfills the criterion. The locations are ordered in time by the conceptualizer, who mentally scans through them, considering possible places for the meeting. No actual motion from one place to another is involved.

In deciding whether the constitution of an implicit continuum of locations is based on subjective or objective motion, we also need to pay attention to the definiteness of the linguistic elements referring to the occupants of the location. Indefinite NPs set up new elements in mental spaces, while definite NPs generally point to elements that have already been established in another space. Thus we would expect definite NPs to introduce elements that are mapped from space to space along the continuum, while indefinite NPs would be expected to introduce new elements only accessed in their current location. (Note, however, an exception: definite NPs that form part of the internal role structure of a space are only accessed when the conceptualizer’s attention has shifted to the space, an example being the town halls in [45]). Consider the Finnish examples (46) and (47), where the clausal position of the subject NP correlates with its definiteness interpretation (Finnish has no articles to indicate definiteness explicitly).

- (46) Jo odotushuonee + ssa lapsi itk + i.
 already waiting-room + INE child cry + PST.3SG
 ‘While in the waiting room the child was already crying.’
- (47) Jo odotushuonee + ssa itk + i lapsi.
 already waiting-room + INE cry + PST.3SG child
 ‘In the waiting room, there was already a child crying.’

In (46) the subject ‘child’ is definite and hence understood as moving from space to space along the continuum, which is construed in the objective way as reflecting the experience of the child. The example says that the child already cried when it was in the waiting room (and went on crying in the doctor’s office). In (47), on the other hand, the entity designated by the indefinite subject is a new element and is only encountered as part of the content of its current location. Specifically, it is not a starting point binding the spaces of the continuum together, and therefore no implication arises that the child will move into other locations. The continuum rather reflects the experience of an external

conceptualizer, who is most likely the speaker. Example (46) receives a reading whereby each location on the continuum contains a counterpart for the occupant of the focus space. This counterpart can be a crying child, or — if the role is understood in a wider sense — another kind of disturbance or another inspirer of compassion.

After seeing that definite and indefinite subjects usually evoke different readings with respect to the construal of the implicit continuum, it may not be surprising to learn that in Finnish, case marking has a similar effect: in general, only the nominative, (48), but not the partitive, (49), allows the interpretation with objective motion from space to space.

- (48) Vielä kylä + ssä suunnistaja + t juoks + i + vat
 still village + INE orienteerer + PL.NOM run + PST + 3PL
 pello + lla.
 field + ADE
 ‘[Even] in the village, the orienteerers³ were still running in the field.’
- (49) Vielä kylä + ssä suunnistaj + i + a juoks + i
 still village + INE orienteerer + PL + PAR run + PST.3SG
 pello + lla.
 field + ADE
 ‘[Even] in the village, there were still orienteerers running in the field.’

The referents of the nominative subject in (48) are understood as being in motion along the continuum of spaces (they occupy each space in turn), whereas the partitive e-theme produces a reading with a subjective ordering of the spaces where nothing actually moves. It is interesting that this occurs even though the verb ‘run’ in itself designates physical motion. The partitive here designates an unbounded quantity that is understood as being divided between the spaces of the continuum, so that each space contains its own set of running orienteerers: the sentence implicates that the speaker has seen running orienteerers before he gets to the village and keeps seeing them there.

5.2. Paths, terminatives, and “directional existence”

In this section we study dynamic path expressions (*from X to Y*), and their relation to the existential relationship designated by the clause nucleus. Path expressions include complex adverbial specifications of spatial paths and other similar continua that incorporate motion (i.e. change of spatial position) as an inherent part of their meaning.

5.2.1. *General characteristics of path expressions.* One factor that distinguishes static (*in X*) and dynamic (*from X to Y*) relations of containment is their relation to time: static expressions do not constrain the duration of the process that takes place within the location, but dynamic expressions do. In a sentence with a dynamic path expression, like *Elmer ran from his house to the railway station*, a telic interpretation is made where the process starts when the mover leaves the source of the motion and lasts up to the point when it reaches the goal. The spatial limits of the motion indirectly constitute its temporal limits as well. In this sense, path expressions have a function reminiscent of proper durative modifiers: *Elmer ran for two hours.*

For obvious reasons, path expressions are normally used in sentences with a motion verb. These sentences prototypically designate a situation where an individual mover traverses the path from end to end and keeps its identity throughout the process. In traversing the path the mover occupies different positions at different points in time. Obviously, the semantic starting point is the mover, as the sentence follows its activities and spatiotemporal position over time. The path, which is the spatial area between two landmarks, has a dynamic sense only if the motion takes place along it. Its conceptualization as a path thus depends directly on the motion; the corresponding static construal is represented by expressions such as *between X and Y*, where no directionality is involved. In syntax this is reflected by the fact that (motion) verbs normally have a tighter syntactic connection with directional spatial expressions than they have with expressions designating a static setting.

However, path specifications also have less prototypical uses, where their status with respect to the process is more autonomous. Consider a sentence such as (50).

- (50) From Venice to Rome, there were little children sitting on the railway bed.

Example (50) reveals an indirect way of assigning the dynamic interpretation to a path expression. It includes the verb *sit*, which indicates no spatial motion, modified by both a static locative (*on the railway bed*) and a path expression (*from Venice to Rome*). The example involves no motion by the children (the ones who perform the 'sitting'); however, it implicates a change in perspective as time evolves. The sentence strongly implicates motion by the conceptualizer, who most likely has been travelling on a train. But since the actual mover is not referred to in the sentence, we can say that the example follows the strategy of representing a static relationship in a dynamic sense and is an example of subjective motion (e.g. *This mountain range goes from Mexico to Canada*). In

scanning through the path, the conceptualizer moves his focus of attention along the path and finds different individuals belonging to the class designated by the NP *little children*. One factor that makes this possible is that the subject is an indefinite plural form, thus designating an “indefinite number of discrete entities all of the same type” (and hence falling under the mass-noun category; Langacker 1991: 77–81).

The following example combines objective (but implicit) motion with an indefinite subject.

(51) From Venice to Rome, little children ran wild in the dining car.

In this example the dining car, which itself is a container for other objects, is moving along the path and occupying different positions along the path in a sequence. The dining car contains ‘little children’, who are also in motion. A common factor connecting (50) and (51) is that neither requires the subject to maintain its reference throughout the process. In (50) such an interpretation would be straightforwardly impossible, but even in (51) a reading can arise where children come and go all the time, and it may be that no single child who was in the dining car when it left Venice is still there when it arrives in Rome. In this respect the sentence bears a resemblance to our Finnish example (18), where the subject was allowed to change its reference during the temporal period designated by the adverb of duration.

5.2.2. *Path expressions in Finnish existentials.* At first sight, both nominative subjects and partitive e-themes appear to be compatible with the sense of actual transition, as in (52) and (53).

(52) Suunnistaja + t juoks + i + vat kylä + ltä
 orienteerer + PL.NOM run + PST + 3PL village + ABL
 rautatieasema + lle.
 railway-station + ALL
 ‘The orienteerers ran from the village to the railway station.’

(53) Suunnistaj + i + a juoks + i kylä + ltä
 orienteerer + PL + PAR run + PST.3SG village + ABL
 rautatieasema + lle.
 railway-station + ALL
 ‘There were orienteerers running from the village to the railway station.’

The fact that the partitive e-theme is compatible with a motion verb and produces the sense of actual (objective) motion in (53) may seem problematic for our previous arguments concerning the selection of the semantic starting point in existentials. If existentials always selected the locative

element as their starting point, then examples with a path specification would have to assign that function to the path itself and introduce the content of the path as new information. The problem is that a path expression is directional and dynamic in meaning and has a tighter connection with the verb compared to the static nondirectional locative modifier of canonical existentials. As argued in the previous section, the construal of a space as a path is also conceptually dependent on the motion that takes place along the path, and that motion in turn depends on the moving entity. Does the partitive e-theme not suggest itself as a starting point now, in the same sense as the nominative subject in (52)?

Recall that the situation was very much the same when we looked at examples with a simple static locative element, until the durative adverb was introduced to reveal the hidden but crucial semantic distinctions that ultimately produced evidence that set the examples apart. A similar operation can be performed with the present examples; consider (54) and (55):

- (54) Suunnistaja + t juoks + i + vat kylä + ltä
 orienteerer + PL.NOM run + PST + 3PL village + ABL
 rautatieasema + lle kaksi tunti + a.
 railway-station + ALL two hour + PAR
 ‘The orienteers ran two hours from the village to the railway station’ [‘It took the orienteers two hours to run from the village to the railway station’].
- (55) Suunnistaj + i + a juoks + i kylä + ltä
 orienteerer + PL + PAR run + PST.3SG village + ABL
 rautatieasema + lle kaksi tunti + a.
 railway-station + ALL two hour + PAR
 ‘For two hours, there were orienteers running from the village to the railway station.’

In the nominative-subject example (54), the adverb of duration has its prototypical function: it specifies the duration of the process from the perspective of the mover, that is, it indicates the time it takes the orienteers to traverse the path from end to end. It does not matter whether the orienteers are running in one group (= the collective interpretation) or one by one (= the distributive interpretation); in the latter case the example would mean that their average running time was two hours. In (55), on the other hand, the duration is associated with the process in a different, more holistic way. Only the collective interpretation is now available, not the individually construed one (‘each orienteerer ran two hours’). This is, again, because the durative adverb indicates the temporal extension of the process from the viewpoint of the location. This is

equivalent to the collective duration of the process, not to the distributive duration of the individual components. The meaning of (55) could be paraphrased as “for two hours, the path had orienteers running along it.” Note in particular that even if the orienteers in this example started the track one by one, the duration of two hours nevertheless covers the whole event: two hours is now the time between the first departure of the first orienteerer and the last arrival to the goal by the last orienteerer.

However, even though the construal can be shown to be different in the two sentences, we are still left with the original problem: the partitive e-theme is nevertheless used in a sentence with objective motion. As argued, the existence of the path is conceptually dependent on the motion of the mover. We can, however, question the assumption that the construal of the path in an existential sentence is actually dependent on the motion; another possibility is that its direction is construed in a subjective manner and merely reflects the direction of mental scanning of the conceptualizer (which can, but does not have to, coincide with the direction of actual motion along the path). In fact, there are examples suggesting that this is indeed the case. This difference shows up if the path is a setting for another, static relation of containment. Compare (56) with (57):

- (56) Kylä + Itä rautatieasema + lle suunnistaja + t
 village + ABL railway-station + ALL orienteerer + PL.NOM
 juoks + i + vat tienvarre + ssa.
 run + PST + 3PL roadside + INE
 ‘From the village to the railway station, the orienteerers ran along the roadside.’
- (57) Kylä + Itä rautatieasema + lle suunnistaj + i + a
 village + ABL railway-station + ALL orienteerer + PL + PAR
 juoks + i tienvarre + ssa.
 run + PST.3SG roadside + INE
 ‘From the village to the railway station, there were orienteerers running along the roadside.’

Examples (56) and (57) display a nested locative effect (cf. Langacker 1991) between the path and the static setting ‘on the roadside’: the path is the outermost setting and includes the static setting of the roadside, while the mover is situated in both. The relationship between the mover and the path differs crucially in the two sentences. In (56), the construal of the path reflects the actual motion by orienteerers who run the whole distance from the village to the station, in the direction specified by the path expression. In doing this they proceed along the roadside. Thus the nominative subject is, as expected, the starting point for both relations

of containment and determines the construal of the locative relationships at both levels. In (57), on the other hand, an interpretation with a subjective motion is favored where the construal of the path does not reflect the experience of the runners. The sentence merely says that the path between the two landmarks contained (running) orienteerers, but does not specify the direction of the running, which may even be opposite to the one specified by the path expression; it is quite possible in this case that the orienteerers were actually running toward the village. This example shows clearly that in a nested locative construction where the partitive is the occupant of the innermost space, it is “blocked” and incapable of affecting the construal of the outermost space in the way possible for the nominative subject.

6. Modal contexts

At the level of modality and modal expressions, other kinds of semantic differences show up between the nominative and the partitive. In general, the nominative subject is capable of being the experiencer of the modal force (e.g. obligation or constraint) expressed by the modal verb. The partitive e-theme, on the other hand, does not experience modality directly but is conceived of as a nonvolitional participant of a holistic process, which is only indirectly under the influence of modality. Compare (58) and (59):

- (58) Vartija + t saa + vat jää + dä talo + on.
 Guard + PL.NOM may + PRES.3PL stay + INF house + ILL
 ‘The guards may stay in the house.’
- (59) Vartijo + i + ta saa jää + dä talo + on.
 Guard + PL + PAR may.PRES.3SG stay + INF house + ILL
 ‘There may stay some guards in the house.’

In (58), permission to stay in the house is granted directly to the guards, who are thus treated as conscious and volitional participants: it is up to them to decide whether or not they want to stay. In (59) the interpretation is holistic, and no permission to stay in the house is granted directly to the guards, who are treated as nonvolitional participants. Thus example (59) could be uttered for example by the house-owner to the person responsible for the positioning of the guards.

If a modal verb has both an intentional and a nonintentional meaning, then factors such as animacy affect its interpretation. In the following examples, the verb *tahtoa* ‘want; tend to’ takes on different interpretations depending on the animacy of the subject:

- (60) Liisa tahto + i kadot + a heinäkuorma + an.
 Lisa want + PST.3SG disappear + INF hay-load + ILL
 ‘Lisa wanted to disappear in the hay load.’
- (61) Vasara tahto + i kadot + a heinäkuorma + an.
 hammer want + PST.3SG disappear + INF hay-load + ILL
 ‘The hammer tended to disappear in the hay load.’

Thus in (60) the verb *tahtoa* has its intentional sense (Lisa intentionally wanted to hide in the load of hay), whereas in (61) it describes a tendency for a situation to occur (see also Heine et al 1991: 172–174, who argue that this is a case of grammaticalization). Such interpretations of modals have been studied by Talmy (1985: 320), who gives the following example.

- (62) The cake can / may / must / should / need not / had better stay in the box.

Talmy points out that in (62) the inanimate subject, ‘the cake’, is not an “agonist” of the situation, and thus the responsibility for staying in the box cannot be attributed to it directly. Rather, such examples imply the existence of an unmentioned agonist, who “acts as an Agent controlling as a Patient the object named by the subject.” Similarly, in sentences such as (60) and (61) the difference in volitionality is a straightforward consequence of the animacy vs. inanimacy of the subject.

However, grammatical means can be used in creating similar interpretations, and from the present perspective it is interesting that partitive e-themes again behave in an idiosyncratic way. Vilkuna (1989: 158–159) points out that partitive e-themes favor the nonvolitional reading even if their reference is animate. Consider (63) and (64):

- (63) Professori + t tahto + i + vat tul + la kahvila + an.
 professor + PL.NOM want + PST + 3PL come + INF cafe + ILL
 ‘The professors wanted to come to the cafe.’
- (64) Professore + i + ta tahto + i tul + la kahvila + an.
 professor + PL + PAR want + PST.3SG come + INF cafe + ILL
 ‘Professors tended to come to (appear in) the cafe.’

In (63) the intention of coming to the cafe is attributed to the professors directly, and they are represented as volitional participants who consciously decide to carry out the activity. In (64), on the other hand, the verb *tahtoa* has a nonvolitional sense and designates a tendency for a certain state of affairs to occur. It thus has the same sense as in (61), with ‘the hammer’ as the subject. Sentence (64) would be appropriate in a context where the speaker goes to the cafe to avoid meeting professors, but professors keep coming there anyway. Thus the partitive e-theme is

not the experiencer of an obligation, intention, or other modal meaning: unlike the nominative subject, the partitive is not treated as a conscious and volitional participant in the situation.

7. Conclusions

The general results of the present study can be summed up as follows. As has been argued throughout this paper, the nominative subject in a nonexistential sentence constitutes the starting point for the predication. This means that the nominative has an autonomous status; it is, so to speak, established independently of whatever information surrounds it in the sentence, and it is often mapped into the current discourse space from another space that has been set up previously. This fact has many consequences for the semantic structure-building that takes place when the conceptualizer builds up his/her interpretation of the situation: the existence of the subject is “presupposed,” that is, taken for granted, and the other elements of the predication are seen, one way or another, as subordinated to or even conceptually dependent on the subject.

The partitive e-theme does not have such privileges. It is mentally accessed only after the conceptualizer’s viewpoint has already shifted into the current space and is subordinated to all kinds of relationships designated in the sentence. In aspectual terms, its referents do not participate in the ongoing event continuously. Being indefinite and designating an unbounded quantity, it receives the interpretation as an incremental theme, and its participation in the event is sequential. Thus the existence designated by the sentence also becomes aspectually incremental. The partitive e-theme does not semantically dominate the sentence in any sense. When optional modifiers are introduced, they do not relate to the partitive e-theme in the same way they relate to the nominative subject; other ways of combining their meaning with the existential nucleus must be found.

In this paper I have put forward a number of arguments to support the view that the differences between existential and nonexistential sentences are found at a holistic, constructional level of interpretation. It is important to see that such differences cannot be reduced to the meaning of individual elements of the sentence, if these are studied in isolation from their environment of occurrence. For instance, it does not make much sense to argue that the partitive is “less agentive” than the nominative with regard to the verb. If we look for such differences, we soon find that there is no difference in agentivity, intensity, or volitionality. What is different is the way we look into the event and the perspective

we select in approaching it. The existential construction represents a conventional way of coding a situation from an external viewpoint.

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Notes

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2. The following abbreviations are used in the glossings:

ABL = ablative	PAR = partitive
ACC = accusative	PL = plural
ADE = adessive	PRES = present tense
ALL = allative	PRTC = participle
CAUS = causative derivational affix	PST = past tense
GEN = genitive	PX = possessive suffix
ILL = illative	NOM = nominative
INE = inessive	SG = singular
INF = infinitive	

Numbers indicate persons.

3. Practitioners of a sport that involves using a map and a compass to navigate a course, passing designated checkpoints, in the shortest possible time.

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