

Existential predication in the languages of the Sudanic belt

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Abstract

Among the various types of constructions that may have been referred to as ‘existential’ in the literature, the present article deals with inverse locational predication (abbreviated as ILP), illustrated by English *There is a cat in the tree*. Inverse locational predication, like plain (or direct) locational predication, illustrated by English *The cat is in the tree*, is characterized by its ability to encode prototypical figure-ground relationships; it differs from plain locational predication in that it encodes the marked perspectivization ‘from ground to figure’. Not all languages have an ILP construction morphologically distinct from plain locational predication, but in many languages that do not have a specialized ILP construction, variation in constituent order is related to variation in perspectivization. However, this is not the case for the languages of the Sudanic belt. A remarkable typological particularity of the languages of this area is that most of them do not have a morphologically distinct ILP construction, and at the same time do not use variation in constituent order to express variation in perspectivization.

Résumé

Parmi les différents types de constructions qui ont pu être désignées comme ‘existentielles’ dans la littérature, cet article s’intéresse à la prédication de localisation inverse, illustrée en français par *Il y a un chat dans l’arbre*. La prédication de localisation inverse, comme la prédication de localisation simple, illustrée en français par *Le chat est dans l’arbre*, se caractérise par son aptitude à encoder les relations figure-fond prototypiques; elle diffère de la prédication de localisation simple par le fait qu’elle encode la perspectivisation marquée ‘du fond à la figure’. Toutes les langues n’ont pas une construction prédicative de localisation inverse morphologiquement distincte de la prédication de localisation simple, mais dans beaucoup de langues qui pas une telle construction, l’ordre des constituants peut varier en relation avec la perspectivisation. Ce n’est toutefois pas le cas pour les langues de la ceinture soudanaise. Une particularité typologique remarquable des langues de cette zone est que la plupart d’entre elles n’ont pas une construction morphologiquement distincte pour la prédication de localisation inverse, et en même temps n’utilisent pas la variation de l’ordre des constituants pour exprimer un changement de perspective dans la prédication de localisation.

Zusammenfassung

Zu den verschiedenen Konstruktionstypen, die in der Literatur als existenzbeschreibend diskutiert werden, befasst sich der vorliegende Artikel mit inversen lokalen Prädikationen (abgekürzt ILP), wie z.B. Deutsch *Da sitzt eine Katze im Baum*. Inverse lokale Prädikation, wie einfache lokale Prädikation, z.B. Deutsch *Die Katze sitzt im Baum*, zeichnet sich durch ihre Fähigkeit prototypische Figure-Ground Beziehungen zu beschreiben. Sie unterscheidet sich von einfachen lokalen Prädikationen, durch die markierte Perspektive ‘von Ground zu Figure’. Nicht alle Sprachen haben eine ILP Konstruktion, die sich von der einfachen morphologisch unterscheidet. In vielen Sprachen aber, die keine spezielle ILP Konstruktion haben, werden die verschiedenen Perspektiven durch unterschiedliche Reihenfolgen der Konstituenten ausgedrückt. Das gilt allerdings nicht für die Sprachen des Sudanic Belt. Eine bemerkenswerte typologische Eigenart der Sprachen dieser Region besteht darin, dass sie weder eine spezifische morphologische ILP Konstruktionen haben, noch unterschiedliche Konstituentenfolgen, um Variation der Perspektiven auszudrücken.

1. Introduction

1.1. Existential predication as inverse locational predication

<1> The term ‘existential’ is not used by all authors with the same meaning, and many authors use it without any real definition, or even with no definition at all, which results in considerable fluctuation in its extension. For some authors, an existential verb is simply what is more commonly called a ‘be’ verb, whereas for some others, ‘existential’ refers specifically to constructions expressing existence in the usual sense of this term.

Among the various types of constructions to which the term ‘existential’ may have been applied, the constructions considered in this article can be unambiguously characterized as expressing *inverse locational predication* (abbreviated as ILP). The question of the relationship between inverse locational predication as defined below and the other types of constructions to which the same label ‘existential’ may have been applied in the literature is not discussed in this article.

<2> Inverse locational predication must be defined in its relationship to *plain/direct locational predication*, illustrated by English **The cat is in the tree**. Plain/direct locational predication is identified as such cross-linguistically by its ability to encode prototypical figure-ground relationships with the unmarked perspectivization ‘from figure to ground’.¹ By ‘prototypical figure-ground relationship’, I mean an *episodic* spatial relationship between two concrete entities differing in their degree of *mobility*: the ground typically occupies a fixed position in space, whereas the figure is mobile, or at least easy to move, which regardless of information structure gives it a higher degree of saliency, hence the unmarked nature of the ‘from figure to ground’ perspectivization.

Inverse locational predication, illustrated by English **There is a cat in the tree**, encodes the same prototypical figure-ground relationships (i.e. episodic spatial relationships between a mobile/movable figure and a ground occupying a fixed position in space), but with the marked perspectivization ‘from ground to figure’. This corresponds to Koch’s (2012) *rhematic location*.² Inverse locational predication is a comparative concept in the sense of Haspelmath (2010), which means that the predicative constructions identified cross-linguistically as expressing inverse locational predication must not be expected to have the same range of possible uses. In particular, as discussed by Koch (2012), there is cross-linguistic variation in the codification of the distinction between *episodic presence* and *long-term presence* (Koch’s *bounded existence*, as in

¹ On the notion of perspectivization in relationship to the analysis of existential predication, see Partee & Borschev (2007). I agree with Partee & Borschev that the choice between plain locational and inverse locational predication does not boil down to the expression of distinctions in information structure, and reflects a deeper semantic distinction, which in my understanding of this notion also underlies the choice between, for example, active and passive constructions, in the languages that have this distinction. Perspectival structure has been discussed in the cognitive linguistics literature under names such as *viewpoint*, or *semantic starting point for the predication*. To put it in a nutshell, the idea is that uttering a sentence referring to a given situation implies first ‘scanning’ the situation; starting from a participant inherently more salient than the others constitutes the unmarked way of carrying this operation, but depending on the individual languages, alternative constructions encoding the choice of another participant as the perspectival center may have been grammaticalized.

² According to Koch (2012), the distinction between plain and inverse locational predication directly reflects a difference in the information structure status of the figure and the ground, hence the terms of thematic vs. rhematic location he proposes. In the present article, I adopt a different approach, developed by Barbara Partee and Vladimir Borschev in a series of articles in which they argue that the contrast between plain and inverse locational predication is only indirectly related to information structure, and basically reflects the ‘perspectivization’ of figure-ground relationships. The crucial observation is that both plain and inverse locational predication can be manipulated to express variation in information structure, which should not be the case if the choice were basically a question of information structure. For a detailed discussion of this point, the readers are referred to Partee & Borschev (2004, 2007), Borschev & Partee (2002), and Creissels (Forthcoming).

There are many lions in Africa, paraphrasable as ‘Africa is a place where many lions spend their lives’).

- <3> In the literature, the term ‘existential predication’ is commonly used as referring specifically to inverse locational predication. An obvious drawback of this practice is that inverse locational predication has little to do with ‘existence’ in the ordinary use of this word (and typical inverse locational clauses cannot be paraphrased by clauses whose nucleus is the verb ‘exist’), which may be a source of confusion.
- <4> The question addressed in this article is the distribution of the possible types of ILP constructions in a particular area (the Sudanic belt) which exhibits interesting particularities in this respect. For a more detailed and more general discussion of the typology of inverse locational predication, the readers are referred to Creissels (Forthcoming).

1.2. The Sudanic belt

- <5> The Sudanic belt (Clements & Rialland 2008), aka Macro-Sudan belt (Güldemann 2008, 2018b), is a large belt of northern sub-Saharan Africa from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ethiopian plateau. Some important structural characteristics are particularly frequent among the languages spoken in this area irrespective of their genetic affiliation as analyzed among others by Westermann (1911) and Greenberg (1959). In the case of language families that are only partially included in the Sudanic belt (such as the Benue-Congo family), the phenomena in question are not found with a comparable frequency in the genetically related languages outside of this region, which suggests an important role of language contact.
The delimitation of the Sudanic belt adopted here is based on Güldemann (2018b: 473, 502). It includes the following ‘basic classificatory units’ as identified by Güldemann (2018a): Central Sudanic, Ijoid, Ubangi, Dakoid, part of Benue-Kwa (all the non-Bantu Benue-Kwa languages plus the Bantu languages of zone A),³ Adamawa, Gur, Kru, Pere, Mande, Songhay, Chadic, the western branch of Nilotic, and Atlantic.⁴
- <6> Recent areality hypotheses dealing with the Sudanic belt have focused on features such as labial-velar stops, labial flaps, implosives and other ‘nonobstruent’ stops, nasal vowels and lack of contrastive nasal consonants, ATR vowel harmony, tone, ‘lax’ polar question markers, logophoricity markers, S-(Aux)-O-V-X and V-O-Neg order patterns.
This article deals with an areal feature of the Sudanic belt not mentioned so far in the literature: the particularly high frequency of a type of behavior of locational clauses which is relatively rare at world level, characterized by the combination of the following two features: rigid constituent order in locational predication and lack of a morphologically distinct ILP construction.

2. Types of ILP constructions

- <7> In a typology of ILP constructions, the first distinction is between languages in which a predicative construction morphologically distinct from plain locational predication is available

³ At least the Northern part of Bantu zones C and D would probably also deserve to be included in the Sudanic belt, but on the basis of the data I have at my disposal, I am not in a position to propose a precise decision on this point, so that I preferred not to include languages from the Bantu zones C and D in my sample.

⁴ In the context of the present article, it is not necessary to discuss the possible relationships between Güldemann’s (2018a) ‘basic classificatory units’ within the frame of broader groupings such as Niger-Congo or Nilo-Saharan. It is not necessary, either, to have a firm position about the distinction between a core and a periphery of the Sudanic belt, since the discussion concentrates on a particular feature that has not been considered so far as potentially contributing to the delimitation of this area. We will see for example that Atlantic and Songhay, equally included in the periphery of the Sudanic belt by Güldemann (2018a), behave very differently with respect to the particular feature investigated in this article.

to encode an alternative perspectivization of prototypical figure-ground relationships, and languages in which no such predicative construction exists.

As regards ILP constructions morphologically distinct from plain locational predication, a general typological approach cannot be based on criteria referring to grammatical functions in inverse-locational clauses, or to the morphological nature of the predicators involved in ILP constructions, since the cross-linguistic comparability of such notions cannot be taken for granted. The only possible criterion is the formal resemblance with predicative constructions expressing other functional types of predication. On this basis, I propose to distinguish seven types briefly presented in Sections 2.2 to 2.8.

2.1. Languages lacking a morphologically distinct ILP construction

- <8> Probably more than half of the world's languages lack a morphologically distinct ILP construction (Creissels, Forthcoming). All major language families (Indo-European, Uralic, Sino-Tibetan, Austronesian, Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Congo, Tupi-Guarani, etc.) include languages both with and without morphologically distinct ILP constructions, and the same situation is found in many smaller language families with a relatively low degree of historical depth.
- <9> In many such cases, constituent order in locational predication is flexible, and variation in constituent order is to some extent comparable to the choice of a morphologically distinct ILP construction in the languages that have such a construction. A widely attested situation, illustrated in (1) by Finnish, is that the basic constituent order in locational predication is FIG Pred GR, with the ground phrase after the locational predicator, whereas the alternative order GR Pred FIG provides a rough equivalent of the 'from ground to figure' perspectivization. Note however that, if one adopts Borschev and Partee's analysis, (1b) does not count as a true ILP construction, since "it is natural to view [sentences such as those in (1)] as differing only in Theme-Rheme structure and word-order (and correspondingly in definiteness of the bare NP); the issue of whether there is any deeper syntactic difference between them is controversial." (Partee & Borschev 2002).

Finnish (Uralic, Huumo 2003:464)

- (1) a. **Poika on piha-lla.**
 boy be.PRS.3SG yard-ADESS
 'The boy is in the yard.'
- b. **Piha-lla on poika.**
 yard- ADESS be. PRS.3SG boy
 'There is a boy in the yard.'

- <10> However, such constituent order alternations are not universal. Some of the languages lacking a morphologically distinct ILP construction have locational clauses with a rigid constituent order that excludes the possibility of de-topicalizing the figure by moving the figure phrase. In such languages, as illustrated by example (2), in the absence of indications provided by definiteness marking or focus marking, the same locational clauses can be used indiscriminately in contexts that would trigger a choice between plain and inverse locational predication in other languages.

Mangarayi (Gunwingguan, Merlan 1982, quoted by Dryer 2007: 243)

- (2) **Mawuj ja-Ø-ŋi biyanġin ŋa-bonġan.**
 food 3-3SG -be inside LOC-box
 'There's food in the box.' or 'The food is in the box.'

2.2. There.be ILP constructions

<11> *There.be ILP constructions* are ILP constructions that differ from plain locational predication by the addition of an element analyzable as marking inversion of perspectivization. In most cases, this element is an expletive locative element, i.e., a word used in other constructions with a meaning such as ‘there’ or ‘in it’, but whose only function in inverse locational predication is to mark the distinction with plain locational predication. Crucially, non-referential locative elements acting as perspectivization markers occupy a fixed position distinct from that of the ground phrase. English *there is N (Loc)*, Italian *c’è N (Loc)* (example (3)), and Arabic *hunāka N (Loc)* (example (4)) are typical examples of there.be ILP constructions.

Italian (Indo-European, pers.knowl.)

- (3) a. **La chiave è sul tavolo**
 the key is on.the table
 ‘The key is on the table.’
- b. **C’è una chiave sul tavolo**
 there_{expl}-is a key on.the table
 ‘There is a key on the table.’

Standard Arabic (Afroasiatic, Aziz (1995) and Darine Saïdi, pers.com.)

- (4) a. **Ar-rajulu fī-l-maktabi.**
 DEF-man in-DEF-office.GEN
 ‘The man is in the office.’
- b. **Hunāka rajulu-n fī-l-maktabi.**
 there_{expl} man-INDEF in-DEF-office.GEN
 ‘There is a man in the office.’

2.3. Have ILP constructions

<12> *Have ILP constructions* are ILP constructions involving a predicator not used in locational predication, but also used in a transitive possessive construction, i.e. in a possessive predicative construction in which the possessor and the possessee show coding characteristics identical to those of the agent and the patient of typical transitive verbs. The use of this predicator in the ILP construction can be described in terms of impersonalization. In the ILP construction, it may occur either alone, as in Brazilian Portuguese *tem N (Loc)* lit. ‘has N (Loc)’ (example (5)), or combined with an expletive pronoun, as in Alemannic *es hot N (Loc)* lit. ‘it has N (Loc)’ (example (6)). In languages in which this predicator as a transitive verb of possession agrees with the possessor NP, its use in the ILP construction implies default agreement.

Brasilian Portuguese (Indo-European, Callou & Avelar 2013)

- (5) a. **Ele tem dois computadores no escritório**
 he has two computers in.the office
 ‘He has two computers in the office.’

- b. **Tem dois computadores no escritório**
 has two computers in.the office
 ‘There are two computers in the office.’⁵

Alemannic (Indo-European, Czinglar 2002)

- (6) **Es hot Rössr voram Hus.**
 it has horses in_front_of_the house
 ‘There are horses in front of the house.’

2.4. There.have ILP constructions

<13> *There.have ILP constructions* are ILP constructions involving a predicator also used in a transitive possessive construction, plus an additional element generally used with a meaning such as ‘there’, but whose only function in inverse locational predication is to reinforce the distinction between inverse locational predication and possessive predication, as in Occitan *i a N (Loc)* lit. ‘there has N (Loc)’ – example (7). French *il y a N (Loc)* lit. ‘it there has N (Loc)’ is a well-known illustration of this type.

Occitan (Indo-European, pers.knowl.)

- (7) **I a un can dins l’ort.**
 there_{expl} has one dog in the-garden
 ‘There is a dog in the garden.’ lit. ‘There has a dog in the garden.’

2.5. Incorporated.figure ILP constructions

<14> *Incorporated.figure ILP constructions* are ILP constructions in which the figure is treated like the possessee in an incorporating possessive construction. By ‘incorporating possessive construction’, I mean a possessive predicative construction in which the noun referring to the possessee cannot be analyzed as the head of an NP in a construction including two slots for NPs (as in the other types or predicative possession), and must be analyzed as converted into a one-place predicate meaning ‘be an N-owner’ by a ‘proprietary’ operator.

For example, Kalaallisut (aka West Greenlandic) has a suffix **-qar** converting nouns into intransitive verbs ‘be an N-owner’ or ‘be endowed with N’ (proprietary verbs) that assign the role of possessor to their argument, encoded as a noun phrase in the zero case (alias absolutive case) and cross-referenced on the verb, as in (8a). In the ILP construction, a proprietary verb derived from the noun referring to the figure is invariably in the third person singular, and no noun phrase in the zero case is present – example (8b).

Kalaallisut (Eskimo-Aleut, Van Geenhoven 1998: 25, 27)

- (8) a. **Angut taana illu-qar-puq.**
 man that house-PROPR-IND.3SG
 ‘That man has a house.’
- b. **Nillataartarfim-mi tallima-nik manne-qar-puq.**
 fridge-LOC five-INSTR.PL egg-PROPR-IND.3SG
 ‘There are five eggs in the fridge.’

⁵ Note that Brazilian Portuguese, in contrast to European Portuguese, does not allow null subjects with an anaphoric reading. Consequently, in BP, contrary to EP, this sentence cannot be interpreted as ‘He/she has two computers in the office’.

2.6. Be.with ILP constructions

<15> *Be.with ILP constructions* are ILP constructions in which the figure is encoded like the phrase representing the companion in comitative predication. This construction type, found mainly among Bantu languages, is illustrated here by Swahili *ku na N (Loc)* lit. ‘there with N (Loc)’ – example (9).⁶

- Swahili (Niger-Congo, pers.doc.)
- (9) **Kisima-ni m na maji.**
CL7.well-LOC CL18 with CL6.water
‘There is water in the well.’ lit. ‘at-the-well there (is) with water.’

2.7. It.be ILP constructions

<16> *It.be ILP constructions* are ILP constructions formally similar to identificational predication. As illustrated in (10), they are characterized by the presence of either a specialized identificational predicator, or an identificational/locational predicator accompanied by a non-locative expletive element also used in identificational clauses equivalent to English *This/that is an N*.

- Icelandic (Indo-European, Neijmann 2001, Freeze 2001)
- (10) a. **Það er kirkja.**
that is church
‘That is a church.’
- b. **Það eru mys í baðkerinu.**
that are mice in bathtub
‘There are mice in the bathtub.’ lit. ‘That are mice in the bathtub.’

2.8. ILP constructions involving a specialized inverse-locational predicator

<17> *Specialized inverse-locational predicator* is the term I propose for predicators found in ILP constructions that, synchronically,⁷ do not cumulate this function with that of equative predicator, locational predicator, comitative predicator, or transitive verb of possession.

- Turkish (Turkic, pers.doc.)
- (11) a. **Kitap masa-da(-dır).**
book table-LOC(-be)
‘The book is on the table.’
- b. **Kitap masa-da değil(-dir)**
book table-LOC NEG(-be)
‘The book is not on the table.’

⁶ Note that, in this construction, the locative can be analyzed as the syntactic subject, since it is resumed by the subject index of one of the locative classes (here class 18) in the same way as non-locative NPs in subject function.

⁷ This precision is crucial, since diachronically, any of the types listed in the previous sections can be converted into a construction involving a specialized inverse-locational predicator, as the result of evolutions that blur the relationship between the ILP construction and the locational or possessive construction to which it was related originally. For example, Spanish **haber** ‘there be’ was originally a transitive verb of possession also used impersonally as an inverse-locational predicator, but its replacement by **tener** in the function of verb of possession resulted in that, synchronically, **haber** can only be analyzed as a specialized inverse-locational predicator.

c. **Masa-da bir kitap var.**
 table-LOC one book ILP
 ‘There is a book on the table.’

d. **Masa-da kitap yok.**
 table-LOC book ILP.NEG
 ‘There is no book on the table.’

3. ILP constructions morphologically distinct from plain locational predication in the languages of the Sudanic belt

<18> Among the types of ILP constructions listed in Sections 2.2 to 2.8, only two are well-represented among the languages of the Sudanic belt included in my sample:⁸

- ILP constructions involving a specialized inverse-locational predicator (18 languages out of 106)
- have ILP constructions, i.e. ILP constructions involving a predicator also used as a transitive verb of possession (13 languages out of 106).

3.1. Specialized inverse-locational predicators in the languages of the Sudanic belt

<19> Specialized inverse-locational predicators, illustrated in (12) by Hausa (Chadic) **àkwai**, are common among Chadic languages. They are also attested in some of the other language families found in the Sudanic belt, but only sporadically.

Hausa (Chadic, Kraft & Kraft 1973)

(12) a. **Yaàraa su nàa gidaa.**
 children 3PL be_at home
 ‘The children are at home.’

b. **Àkwai yaàraa naàn.**
 ILP children here
 ‘There are children here.’

3.2. Have ILP constructions in the languages of the Sudanic belt

<20> This type of ILP constructions, illustrated in (13) by Wolof (Atlantic), is very common among Atlantic languages. It is also attested in some of the other language families found in the Sudanic belt, but only sporadically.

Wolof (Atlantic, Creissels et al. 2015)

(13) a. **Musaa am na woto.**
 Moussa have PRF.3SG car
 ‘Moussa has a car.’

⁸ The language sample I used for this study is a convenience sample including all the languages spoken in the Sudanic belt as delimited in section 1.2 for which I had no difficulty in finding relevant data, with however an important reservation: whenever two or more languages with a very close genetic relationship show the same configuration as regards locational and inverse locational predication, I have arbitrarily selected one of them. For example, Mandinka is the only Manding language included in the sample, but the same configuration is found in all the other Manding varieties (Bambara, Maninka, Jula, Koyaga, etc.).

- b. **Am na woto.**
 have PRF.3SG car
 ‘He/she has a car.’ or ‘There is a car.’

3.3. Others

<21> Among the languages included in the sample, be.with ILP constructions are found only in three languages, all belonging to the Chadic family, and in two of them, they are in competition with a specialized inverse-locational predicator.

Mmala (Bantu A) is the only language of the sample having a there.be ILP construction. Interestingly, the scarcity of there.be ILP constructions among the languages of the Sudanic belt sharply contrasts with the high proportion of languages having this type of ILP construction in the part of the Bantu area that does not overlap with the Sudanic belt (Devos et al. Forthcoming). The other three types are not represented at all.

3.4. Conclusion of Section 3

<22> In the following two respects, the distribution described in Sections 3.1 to 3.3 is inline with the trends observed in the worldwide sample analyzed in Creissels (Forthcoming):

- In the worldwide sample, more than half of the languages do not have an ILP construction morphologically distinct from plain locational predication; in the Sudanic sample the proportion is particularly high: 72 languages out of 106, i.e. 67.92 %.
- The two types of ILP constructions relatively well-represented in the Sudanic sample (ILP constructions involving specialized inverse-locational predicators, and have ILP constructions) are precisely those that have a particularly wide distribution at world level.

It is however striking that, among the languages of the Sudanic belt, these two types of ILP constructions are mainly found in two particular families:

- The Chadic family is the only one in which constructions with a specialized inverse-locational predicator are well-represented.
- The Atlantic family is the only one in which ILP constructions involving a predicator also used as a transitive verb of possession are well-represented.

<23> This means that, with the exception of these two families (considered by Güldemann 2018b) as peripheral members of his Macro-Sudan belt), the overwhelming majority of the languages spoken in the Sudanic belt do not have an ILP construction morphologically distinct from plain locational predication: if Atlantic and Chadic languages are removed from the sample, the proportion rises to 87.01 %

4. Languages of the Sudanic belt lacking a morphologically distinct ILP construction

<24> Outside of the Sudanic belt, the lack of an ILP construction morphologically distinct from plain locational predication is overwhelmingly observed in languages in which constituent order in locational predication is flexible, and variation in constituent order is to some extent semantically comparable to the choice between plain locational predication and inverse locational predication in the languages that have grammaticalized this distinction. Two variants of this situation are particularly well attested.

In languages with basic OV order in transitive predication, it is common that the basic constituent order in locational predication is FIG GR Pred, with the ground phrase immediately before the locational predicator, whereas the alternative order GR FIG Pred provides a rough equivalent of the alternative perspectivization ‘from ground to figure’ – example (14).

- Basque (isolate, pers.doc.)
- (14) a. **Parke-a ibai-ondo-an dago.**
 park-SG river-side-SG.LOC be.PRS.3SG
 ‘The park is next to the river.’
- b. **Ibai-ondo-an parke eder bat dago.**
 river-side-SG.LOC park lovely one be.PRS.3SG
 ‘There is a lovely park next to the river.’

<25> In languages with basic VO order in transitive predication, it is common that the basic constituent order in locational predication is FIG Pred GR, with the ground phrase after the locational predicator, whereas the alternative order GR Pred FIG provides a rough equivalent of the alternative perspectivization ‘from ground to figure’ – example (1), repeated here as (15).

- Finnish (Uralic, Huumo 2003:464)
- (15) a. **Poika on piha-lla.**
 boy be.PRS.3SG yard-ADESS
 ‘The boy is in the yard.’
- b. **Piha-lla on poika.**
 yard-ADESS be. PRS.3SG boy
 ‘There is a boy in the yard.’

There are however languages with rigid constituent order in locational clauses and in which the same locational clauses with the same constituent order can be used indiscriminately in contexts that would trigger a change in constituent order in languages such as Basque or Finnish. Interestingly, almost all of them have rigid VO constituent order in transitive predication, and rigid FIG Pred GR in locational predication – example (2), repeated here as (16), illustrates this situation.

- Mangarayi (Gunwingguan, Merlan 1982, quoted by Dryer 2007: 243)
- (16) **Mawuj ja-Ø-ŋi biyaŋgin ŋa-bongan.**
 food 3-3SG-be inside LOC-box
 ‘There’s food in the box.’ or ‘The food is in the box.’

<26> Among the languages included in my worldwide sample, leaving aside the languages located in the Sudanic belt as delimited in Section 1.2 or in its immediate vicinity, such as Lingala (Bantu C) or Lango (Eastern Nilotic), the languages described as combining rigid constituent order in locational predication and lack of a morphologically distinct ILP construction are not very numerous. They include Beja (Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic), Gaelic (Indo-European, Celtic), †Hoan (Kx’a), Irish (Indo-European, Celtic), Kalkatungu (Pama-Nyungan), Kamaiurá (Tupi-Guarani), Mangarayi (Gunwingguan), Nengee (English-based Creole), Retuarã (Tucanoan), Puyuma (Austronesian), Seri (Isolate, Mexico), Urim (Toricelli), Wa (Austro-Asiatic, Mon-Khmer), Wampis (Jivaroan), Yéli Dnye (Isolate, New Guinea), and !Xun (Kx’a).

The situation is strikingly different in the Sudanic belt. As already mentioned, in my sample of languages spoken in this area (see Appendix), 72 languages out of 106 (67.92 %) do not have an ILP construction morphologically distinct from plain locational predication. In one of them (Jaad –Atlantic), the constituent order in locational predication is flexible, and the examples suggest a situation of the type illustrated above by Basque and Finnish. The sample also includes a

problematic case (Akan) that will be discussed in section 5. For the remaining 70 languages (66.04 % of the sample), as illustrated in examples (17) to (25), either the descriptions explicitly mention rigid constituent order in locational predication and lack of a morphologically distinct ILP construction, or the examples they provide unambiguously point to a situation of this type.

<27> Interestingly, the proportion of languages combining rigidity of constituent order in locational predication and absence of a morphologically distinct ILP construction rises to 84.42 % if Atlantic and Chadic (considered by Güldemann (2018b) as peripheral members of his Macro-Sudan belt) are excluded from the sample.

Mandinka (Mande, Creissels & Sambou 2013)

- (17) **Wùlòò bé yíròò kótò.**
 dog.D LCOP tree.D under
 ‘The dog is under the tree.’ or ‘There is a dog under the tree.’

Ganja (Atlantic, Creissels & Biaye 2016: 241, 244)

- (18) a. **Ànîn mà âg-gî à f0àambé**
 woman DEF NEG-be at rice_field
 ‘The woman is not at the rice field.’

- b. **Wèdé âg-gî hǎj.**
 water NEG-be place
 ‘There is no water.’

Kulango (Gur, Kra 2016: 246-247)

- (19) a. **Hò dékéré dî.**
 3SG bed.DEF on
 ‘He is on the bed.’

- b. **Dògòjò bótóré ò.**
 maize bag.DEF in
 ‘There is maize in the bag.’

Supyire (Gur, Carlson 1994: 246-247)

- (20) a. **Pi na wá aní.**
 they PROG be_there there
 ‘They are there.’

- b. **Wà na wá méŋi i.**
 INDEF PROG be_there there.DEF at
 ‘There is someone over there.’

Mungbam (Benue-Congo, Lovegren 2013: 441)

- (21) a. **Ītī jī kō-kpē kō á sú**
 CL5-stone CL5.DET CL12-shoe CL12.DET PREP LOC.face
 ‘The stone is in front of the shoe.’

- b. **Ā-dzàŋ ì-fè ì-kòŋ á m̀.**
 CL5-fly CL5.head CL5-funnel PREP LOC.at
 ‘There’s a fly on the rim of the funnel.’

Gbaya (Ubangian, Roulon-Doko 1998: 116)

(22) a. **Mí ʔá dõnmé ʔéá.**
 1SG be_at behind.2SG only
 ‘I am just behind you.’

b. **Zóróó ʔá dǝ́ yì.**
 fish be_at under water
 ‘There are fish in the water.’

Ngambay (Central Sudanic, Ndjerareou & al. 2010: 21-22)

(23) a. **Kàù tò mè kàrè =gó.**
 egg 3SG.lie inside basket LOC
 ‘The egg lies in the basket.’

b. **Kāg tò nàng bè.**
 tree 3SG.lie ground EMPH
 ‘There is a tree lying on the ground.’

Dinka (Nilotic, Anderson 2016: 649, 2012: 158)

(24) a. **Tòop à=tỳ mǝǝc.**
 pot DECL.SG=be_present fire.ESS/ABL
 ‘The pot is on the fire.’

b. **Nǝaŋ à=tỳ ẹ wǝar ịc.**
 crocodile DECL.SG =be_present PREP river stomach
 ‘There is a crocodile in the river.’

Pere (Isolate, Jeffrey Heath, pers.com.)

(25) a. **Kè tǝgbè wǝ jínáà kíngè.**
 1SG friend be the.house under
 ‘My friend is in the house.’

b. **Níní wǝ lǝyǝnà.**
 house be over.there
 ‘There is a house there.’

5. A problematic case: Akan (Kwa)

<28> As regards the relationship between plain locational, inverse locational, and possessive predication, Akan (Kwa) shows an atypical configuration, and its classification in a typology of ILP constructions is problematic.

As a rule, in the languages of the world, if a transitive verb of possession is also used as an inverse-locational predicator, a distinct predicator is found in plain locational predication, and if the same predicator is found in plain and inverse locational predication, this predicator is not used as a transitive verb of possession. In other words, if the same predicator is found in plain locational, inverse locational, and possessive predication, its possessive use cannot be analyzed as an instance of transitive coding with the possessor coded like transitive agents. In addition to Akan (Kwa), the only exceptions to this generalization I came across in my worldwide sample are Qiang (Tibeto-Burman), Manambu and Iatmul (two closely related Papuan languages of the Sepik family), and Malay/Indonesian (Austronesian).

<29> As illustrated by (26a), Akan **wɔ** can be used in plain locational predication. (26b) shows that the same construction with the same constituent order can be used in contexts suggesting the marked perspectivization ‘from ground to figure’. Therefore, (26a-b) suggest that Akan behaves like most of the languages of the Sudanic belt. However, as shown by (26c), **wɔ** can also be used as a transitive verb of possession (in Akan, the constituent order in transitive predication is agent-verb-patient, and there is no case marking of the patient). Finally, (26d) shows that Akan has the ability to express the marked perspectivization ‘from ground to figure’ by means of a construction analyzable either as a variant of the locational construction (in comparison with (a)), or as a have ILP construction (in comparison with (c)).

- Akan (Boadi 1971, Redden & Owusu 1995)
- (26) a. **Me wɔ fie nó mú.**
 1SG be/have house DEF in
 ‘I am in the house.’
- b. **Siká wɔ ɔdán nó mú.**
 money be/have room DEF in
 ‘There is money in the room.’
- c. **Me wɔ fie bí.**
 1SG be/have house INDEF
 ‘I have a house.’
- d. **Ɔdán no mu wɔ siká.**
 room DEF in be/have money
 ‘There is money in the room.’

<30> Diachronically, comparison with Anyi-Baule (a close relative of Akan) suggests that this very atypical configuration may have emerged as the result of a process of *have-drift*, i.e. acquisition of transitive features by a possessive construction that, originally, did not belong to the Have Possessive type.⁹ The point is that Akan **wɔ** is probably cognate with Anyi-Baule **wɔ/wɔ**, and in Anyi-Baule, **wɔ/wɔ** is exclusively used as a locational predicator, whereas possessive predication involves a transitive verb of possession (**le**) distinct from the locational predicator **wɔ/wɔ**. However, other scenarios can be imagined, and I am aware of no concrete evidence that could help solve this puzzle. More data about possible variation across Akan varieties and closely related languages would be necessary before trying to elaborate a solution.

6. Conclusion

<31> The main conclusions of this typological study of inverse locational predication in the languages of the Sudanic belt are as follows:

- The proportion of languages that have not grammaticalized a construction specifically expressing inverse locational predication is higher among the languages of the Sudanic belt than at world level. Have ILP constructions are mainly found among Atlantic languages, specialized inverse-locational predicators are mainly found among Chadic languages, and the other possible types of ILP constructions are marginal or inexistent in this area.

⁹ On the notion of have-drift, see Stassen (2009: 208-243).

- Contrary to the tendency that prevails in the other parts of the world, in the majority of the languages spoken in the Sudanic belt (two thirds of the sample, more than 80 % if Atlantic and Chadic languages are removed from the sample), the construction expressing plain locational predication is also used without any constituent order change in contexts that typically trigger the choice of an ILP construction, in the languages in which such a construction is available.

<32> Since the languages of the Sudanic belt are overwhelmingly SVO languages, the latter conclusion contradicts the common opinion that ILP constructions in basic SVO languages typically have the constituent order GR Pred FIG (Freeze 1992: 256), or that non-canonical constituent order is a typical characteristic of ILP constructions (Veselinova 2013: 108).

Typologically, this particular rigidity of constituent order in locational predication is not unexpected, since generally speaking, rigidity of constituent order is unquestionably a particularly salient typological feature of the languages of the Sudanic belt. What is however interesting theoretically is that, given the tendency observed elsewhere in the world, languages characterized by a particular rigidity in constituent order could be expected to favor the development of morphologically distinct constructions expressing the inversion of the unmarked perspective ‘from figure to ground’ perspective in locational predication. This assumption is, however, clearly contradicted by the data discussed in this article.

Abbreviations

ABL	ablative	IND	indicative
ADESS	adessive	INDEF	indefinite
CL	noun class	INSTR	instrumental
D	default determiner	LCOP	locational copula
DECL	declarative	LOC	locative
DEF	definite	NEG	negative
ESS	essive,	PL	plural
expl.	expletive	Pred	predicator
FIG	figure	PREP	preposition
GEN	genitive	PRF	perfect
GR	ground	PROG	progressive
ILP	inverse locational predication, or specialized inverse locational predicator	PROPR	propriative
		SG	singular

Appendix: The language sample

This appendix lists the languages spoken in the Sudanic belt that constitute the sample on which this study is based. The languages are grouped on the basis of the ‘basic classificatory units’ proposed by Güldemann (2018a), with two exceptions: Mel (Güldemann’s U11.B) is distinguished from (Core) Atlantic (Güldemann’s 11.A), and the distinction between (Narrow) Kwa and Benue-Congo (conflated by Güldemann into his U6 Benue-Kwa) is maintained. The second column indicates the availability of a construction expressing inverse locational predication morphologically distinct from plain locational predication. ILP constructions morphologically distinct from plain locational predication are characterized according to the typological grid put forward in section 2. In this column, ‘spec. pred.’ signals the use of a specialized inverse-locational predicator. The third column indicates the source of the data.

BENUE-CONGO

Bafia (Bantu A)	—	Devos et al. (spec. pred.)
Bambalang (Grassfields Bantu)	—	Wright (2009)
Duala (Bantu A)	—	Devos et al. (forthcoming)
Eton (Bantu A)	—	Van de Velde (2008)
Fang (Bantu A)	—	Pither Medjo Mve (pers. com.)
Gunu (Bantu A)	—	Devos et al. (forthcoming)
Igbo	have ILP	Onumajuru (1985)
Kana	—	Ikoru (1996)
Koko (Bantu A)	—	Devos et al. (forthcoming)
Mankon (Grassfields Bantu)	—	Leroy (2007)
Mmala (Bantu A)	there.be ILP	Devos et al. (forthcoming)
Mungbam	—	Lovegren (2013)
Nizaa	—	Kjelsvik (2002)
Obolo	have ILP	Rowland-Oke (2003)
Oko	—	Atoyebi (2008)
Tiv	—	Abraham (1940)
Urhobo	spec.pred.	Blanc (1985)
Yoruba	—	pers. doc.

DAKOID

Samba-Daka	—	Koch (2012)
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KWA

Abidji	—	Tresbarats & Vick (1992)
Akan	? (see Section 5)	Boadi (1971)
Attie	—	Kouadio (1996)
Baule	—	Creissels & Kouadio (1977)
Ewe	—	Felix Ameka, pers. com.
Fon	spec. pred.	Segurola & Rassinoux (2000)
Ikposo	—	Soubrier (2013)
Logba	—	Dorvlo (2008)
Tafi	—	Bobuafor (2013)

PERE

Pere	—	Jeffrey Heath, pers. com.
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KRU

Newole	—	Grah (1983)
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MEL

Gola	—	Koroma (1994)
Kisi	—	Paulme (1964)
Mani	—	Childs (2011)
Temne	—	Bai-Sheka (1981)

ATLANTIC

Basari	spec. pred.	Loïc-Michel Perrin (pers. com.)
Bijogo	—	Guillume Segerer (pers. com.)
Fula	have ILP	Creissels et al. (2015)
Ganja	—	Creissels and Biaye (2016)
Jaad	—	
Joola	have ILP	Creissels et al. (2015)
Lehar, aka Laalaa	have ILP	Creissels et al. (2015)
Mankanya	have ILP	pers.doc.
Nalu	—	Frank Seidl (pers. com.)
Ndut	have ILP	Morgan (1996)
Nyun	have ILP	Creissels et al. (2015)
Pepel	have ILP	Creissels et al. (2015)
Saafi	have ILP	Mbodj (1983)
Sereer	have ILP	Creissels et al. (2015)
Wolof	have ILP	Creissels et al. (2015)

GUR

Chakali	—	Brindle & Atintono (2012)
Dagara	—	Somé (2013)
Gurenne	—	Brindle & Atintono (2012)
Gurmanche	—	Chantoux et al. (1968)
Koromfe	—	Prost (1980)
Kulango	—	Kra (2016)
Lobi	—	Becuwe (1982)
Moore	—	Kabore (1980)
Pana	—	Beyer (2006)
Supyire	—	Carlson (1994)
Syer	—	Dombrovsky-Hahn (2015)
Tiefo	—	Heath et al. (2017)

ADAMAWA

Samba-Leko	—	Fabre (2003)
Tupuri	spec. pred.	Ruelland (1992)

MANDE

Beng	—	Paperno (2014)
Bobo	—	Le Bris & Prost (1981)
Boko	—	Prost (1976)
Dzuungoo	—	Solomiac (2007)
Gban	—	Fedotov (2017)
Kpelle	—	Konoshenko (2017)
Mano	—	Khachatryan (2014)
Mandinka	—	Creissels & Sambou (2013)
Soninke	—	pers.doc.
Soso	—	pers.doc.
Tigemaxo	—	Blecke (1996)

Vai	—	Welmers (1976)
Wan	—	Nikitina (2017)
SONGHAY		
Humburi Senni	—	Heath (2014)
Koyra Chiini	—	Heath (1999a)
Koyraboro Senni	—	Heath (1999b)
Tadaksahak	—	Christiansen-Bolli (2010)
CHADIC		
Baraïn	spec. pred.	Lovestrand (2012)
Bole	spec. pred. / be.with ILP	Russell Schuh (pers.comm.)
Buwal	spec. pred.	Viljoen (2013)
Daba	have ILP	Lienhard (1978)
Goemai	—	Hellwig (2011)
Hausa	spec. pred. / be.with ILP	Newman (2000)
Hdi	spec. pred.	Frajzyngier & Shay (2002)
Lele	spec. pred.	Frajzyngier (2001)
Mina	spec. pred.	Frajzyngier & Johnston (2005)
Miya	spec. pred.	Schuh (1998)
Moloko	spec. pred.	Friesen (2017)
Sakun	be.with ILP	Thomas (2014)
Wandala	spec. pred.	Frajzyngier (2012)
Zaar	spec. pred.	Bernard Caron (pers. com.)
UBANGIAN		
Baka	—	Djoupée (2017)
Banda-Linda	—	Cloarec-Heiss (1998)
Gbaya	—	Roulon (1998)
Sango	—	Diki-Kidiri (1998)
CENTRAL SUDANIC		
Bagiro, aka Furu	—	Boyeldieu (2000)
Deme	spec. pred.	Palayer (2006)
Ma'di	spec. pred.	Blackings and Fabb (2003)
Mangbetu	—	Larochette (1958)
Ngambay	—	Ndjerareou et al. (2010)
Sar	—	Palayer (1989)
WESTERN NILOTIC		
Anywa, aka anuak	spec. pred.	Reh (1993)
Dinka	—	Andersen (2019)

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