ON SO-CALLED 'EXISTENTIALS': A TYPOLOGICAL PROBLEM

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The paper examines the validity of classifying sentences in Colloquial Modern Hebrew which differ in syntactic, prosodic, and semantic-pragmatic properties under the common label 'existentials'. A consideration of putatively universal generalizations as well as language specific distributional properties of entities is shown to result in potentially conflicting classificatory criteria, and problems of the delimitation of syntax, semantics and pragmatics are brought up in this context.

1. Background and purpose

Existential sentences have been characterized across languages either on the basis of their semantic-pragmatic properties, namely, asserting existence of some entity (cf. Lyons 1967; Kuno 1971; Berman 1978; inter alia) or introducing an entity into the discourse (Bolinger 1977) or on the basis of their morphosyntactic characteristics, some of which are language specific (e.g. an unstressed, non-deictic there sentence initially in English, Milsark 1974 and Clark 1970) and some of which are assumed to be universal: (a) the indefiniteness restriction (to the extent that it is a syntactic restriction) and (b) the obligatory locative element underlingly.

The semantic-pragmatic definitions give rise to the putative universal that the indefinite NP designating the entity of which existence is asserted or the entity which is introduced into the discourse must be non-thematic, but at the same time they seem to lead to an insignificant notion of existentials, classifying English sentences as diverse as:

* I wish to thank A. Mittwoch and A. Ziv for their suggestions.
Lions exist.

There are lions in Africa. (Lyons 1967: 390)

(Some) lions are in Africa. (Adapted from Kuno 1971)

all as existential (cf. Milsark 1974 for interesting arguments against this open-ended classification).

The putative syntactic universals have been claimed to be non-arbitrary. The indefiniteness restriction has usually been explained on the basis of the assumption that the communicative functions of existentials are either to assert existence, in which case it would be absurd to establish the existence of an entity that is already presupposed to exist (by virtue of its definiteness, Kuno 1971) or to introduce an entity into the discourse, in which case it would be nonsensical to introduce an entity into the discourse, if it had already been mentioned in the previous context (and hence its definiteness). The obligatory locative element underlingly (with optional occurrence on the surface) has been justified on the grounds that, logically, “whatever is, is somewhere; whatever is nowhere, is nothing” (Kahn 1966: 258; Kuno 1971; Chayen and Dror 1976).

In this paper I will examine the validity of classifying sentences in Colloquial Modern Hebrew (CMH) which differ in syntactic, prosodic, and semantic-pragmatic properties under the common label ‘existential’. In this connection it is important to mention that in his study on existential sentences in English, Milsark (1974) distinguishes several types of structurally and semantically distinct existentials (ontological, locational, periphrastic, and verbal) all of which are, nevertheless, found to constitute a coherent class. They all seem to share: (a) the unstressed, non-deictic there sentence initially, (b) a notion of class existence (Exist-C), which is, supposedly, the meaning of the existential there, (c) the indefiniteness restriction (with a different explanation for it by Milsark), and (d) the non-topic (theme) restriction on the indefinite NP.

The construction in CMH which I will examine here seems to show some properties of existentials, but, unlike other existentials in CMH, it violates some of the putative universals and fulfils a communicative function other than establishing existence or introducing an entity into the

1 Several linguists have been concerned with the establishment of the synchronic basis of there in existentials in English (e.g. Kuno 1971; Bolinger 1977). Others (e.g. Milsark 1974) doubt the syntactic validity of the assumption, admitting an abstract logical relation between existence and location but not a concrete syntactic reflex of it.

2 But see Ziv (forthcoming b) where the non-thematicity criterion is challenged.
discourse. The existential status of this construction will be at issue. The question will be raised as to what factors are to determine the typological classification of sentences, and problems of the delimitation of syntax, semantics and pragmatics will be crucially involved.

2. Existentials in CMH: general characteristics

Existential sentences in CMH have been characterized as follows: The existential particle yeš occurs sentence initially in the affirmative, with eyn as its negative counterpart. In the past and future tenses the invariable yeš/eyn are replaced by the appropriately inflected form of the verb h-y-y 'be' with lo 'not' added in the negative. yeš/eyn/h-y-y is followed by an indefinite non-locative NP, which, in turn, is followed by a locative element (Clark 1970; Berman 1978). The putative universals mentioned in section 1: the indefiniteness restriction, the occurrence of a locative element underlyingly and the non-thematicity of the indefinite NP, are assumed to hold true of CMH.

The only reservations that I have with regard to the characterization of existentials in CMH are (a) the claim that the indefinite non-locative NP precedes the locative element and (b) the lack of specification of intonation. Word-order wise, it seems to me, as to a variety of native speakers whom I have consulted, that the existential construction is, in many cases, just as natural or, in some instances, even more natural when the locative element precedes the indefinite non-locative NP and they are both 'equally heavy'. This order may be affected by the organization of the thematic-thematic elements in the existential sentence; the indefinite NP is rhematic (making up either the whole or part of the rheme) and hence it tends to occur sentence finally. As for intonation, it is noteworthy

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3 Hayon (1972) observes that in a few cases an inflected form of yeš may introduce an existential sentence, e.g.

(i) yešnam anašim bamisrad
   Yeš inflected people in the office

Such sentences, however, are considered sub-standard and are extremely rare.

4 Wherever a locative element is mentioned in existentials the reference appears to extend to either locative elements or temporals (Lyons 1967; Berman 1978).

5 It is important to point out the relatively free word order in CMH, such that claims about word order, especially in such constructions as hardly interact with others, are hard to establish.
that irrespective of the relative position of the indefinite NP and the locative element the nucleus stress always falls on the non-locative, indefinite NP.

3. The construction under investigation

The construction under investigation can be represented as:

yeš (et definite marker) NP locative element
existential definite
particle accusative
marker

Concrete examples are provided by the following sentences:

(2a) yeš (et definite marker) hasefer (def. acc. m. the book) haze basifriya (the this) haleumit.
exist. part. deLa def. acc. m. the book the this in the library the national

oto
him (= it)
lit.: There is this book/Chomsky's book/it in the National Library
'The National Library has this book/Chomsky's book/it.'

(2b) eyn et hasefer haze basifriya haleumit.
negative part. def. acc. m. the book the this in the library the national
'The National Library does not have this book.'

(2c) haya et hasefer haze basifriya kvar lifney šana.
was def. acc. m. the book the this in the library already before year
'They already had this book in the library a year ago.' (impersonal)

(2d) iye et hasefer haze basifriya be'od xodeš be'erex.
will be def. acc. m. the book the this in the library in more month approximately
'They'll have this book in the library in about a month.'

(3) yeš me'ilim (et definite marker) me'ilim deLa def. acc. m. the coats
exist. part. def. acc. m. the coats
lit.: Every/any (old) store carries Dior coats
'Dior coats can be found in every store.'
Y. Ziv / 'Existentials' - a typological problem

Not only is the non-locative NP potentially definite in these sentences, counter to the restriction on existentials, but also the intonation pattern, the distribution of information in the sentence, and the communicative function differ from those evident in existentials at large. I will postpone the discussion on the violation of the indefiniteness restriction till after I have dealt with some of the other peculiarities of this construction.

As far as intonation is concerned, in the unmarked case, the nucleus stress falls on the locative element and not on the non-locative NP, as is the case in existentials elsewhere. As for the distribution of information in the sentence and the communicative function for which such sentences are used, the following contexts, where sentences such as (2)–(4) can felicitously occur, indicate that the non-locative NP is thematic and the locative element is rhematic (in clear violation of the non-thematicity restriction on the non-locative NP) and that the sentences are used neither to assert the existence of some entity, nor to introduce it into the discourse, but, rather, to predicate location of an entity whose existence is presupposed.

Consider the following exchange:

(5) Where can I find Chomsky's book (= the book that Chomsky wrote)?

(2a) ye$  
exist. part.  
{
  mhxonit kazot  
car like this
}
  et hamxonit hazot  
def. acc. m. the car the this
  ota  
her (= it)

'Such a car/This car/It can be found at every dealer's in the country.'
You must get hold of Chomsky's book,

and a sentence like (4) would be appropriate as a continuation of

As for definiteness, in Ziv (forthcoming a) I show that the violation of the indefiniteness restriction in such constructions cannot be accounted for without considerable difficulties either on the basis of an abstract syntax approach, whereby the definite NP is only a surface remnant of an underlyingly indefinite NP the head of which (e.g. a copy, an exemplar, an instance) has been removed, or on the basis of claims about semantic indefiniteness, especially in light of the potential anaphoricity of the NP in question (cf. (2a), (4) and the contexts provided in (5)–(7)). It is suggested that technically ingenious solutions could, perhaps, be devised to overcome some of the more problematic aspects of these attempts at explaining the violation of the indefiniteness restriction, but that they would involve potentially ad-hoc modifications of notions such as 'anaphora' and 'unique reference' and would be clearly non-insightful. It is claimed, in this context, that the occurrence of a definite non-locative NP in such constructions is, in fact, a true violation of the indefiniteness restriction on existentials, but that the existential status of the sentence is in question.

What emerges from an examination of the type of sentences in (2)–(4) is that they seem to share a variety of properties with locative sentences. Thus, the rhematicity of the locative element, the potential definiteness of the non-locative NP, the unmarked intonation pattern, whereby the nucleus stress falls on the locative element, and the relative appropriateness in contexts where specification of location is required are all known to constitute characteristic features of locative statements (cf. Clark 1970; Berman 1978, inter alia). Despite these similarities, however, the sentences under investigation cannot, quite significantly, occur in place of just any locative statement. Consider:

Where is the book that I just bought?
(9) *yeş oto al hašulxan.
exist. part. him (= it) on the table
'There is it on the table.'

(10) I don't see your car.

(11) *lama? yeş ota mamaš mitaxat la'af šelxa.
why exist. part. her (= it) practically under to the nose your
lit.: Why? There is it practically under your nose

The question in (8) and the statement in (10) can be said to be about the
location of a specific or unique entity, the book that I just bought and
your car, respectively. The ill-formedness of (9) and (11) in these contexts
suggests that the construction in question cannot serve to predicate location
of a specific or unique entity. It seems that only characteristically locative
sentences can fulfill this communicative function and hence the appropriateness
of (12) and (13) as a response to (8) and a continuation of (10), respectively:

(12) hu yešno / nimeca / ō al hašulxan.
he (= it) 'be' conjugated (m.) is found on the table
is located
'It is on the table.'

(13) lama?hi yešna / nimeet / ō(po) mamaš mitaxat la'af šelxa,
why she(= it) exist. part. conj. (f.) is located here practically under to the nose your
'Why? It is (here) practically under your nose.'

It follows that the non-locative NPs in (2)-(4) cannot be specific/unique.
A consideration of the following facts supports this contention: (a) sentences
like:

(2a') yeş el hasefer haze basifriya halcumin bešlọša otakim.
exist. part. def. acc. m. the book the this in the library the national in three copies
'They have three copies of this book in the National Library.'

where it is impossible on logical grounds to assume that either one unique
copy of the book or its type are referred to; (b) the ill-formedness of
sentences like (14) which is a characteristic locative construction, where a
specific and unique book as the referent cannot co-occur with the phrase
bešlọša otakim (lit.: 'in three copies', meaning: 'there are three copies
of it').

* This example is due to Mira Ariel, who pointed out to me the requirement for a specification
of location when yešna is used.
and (c) the nature of the locative expression in (3) and (4), where all the relevant locations are cited. It is self-evident that no unique entity can be simultaneously in two or more different places.

The nature of the non-locative NP is hard to characterize, but for the present purposes it is enough to note that the NP in question cannot be interpreted as referring to a unique, specific entity, but rather to a more general entity, not the type, perhaps, but probably some non-specific subset of tokens of the type of the relevant entity. The following is a particularly interesting example in this context.

(15a) What is Sophia Loren doing these days? Is she still playing in movies?
(15b) betaq, yes ota hamon basratim yesel de sika.
   sure exist. part. her a lot in the movies of De Sica
   rough transl.: Sure, you can find her in De Sica's movies a lot
   'She appears in De Sica's movies frequently.'

At first glance (15b) seems to constitute an exception to the specific/unique non-locative NP restriction, which we just attributed to the construction in question. However, a thorough examination of such examples reveals that the accusative pronoun in (15b) is, in fact, understood to refer not to Sophia Loren the person as a unique entity, but rather to certain instantiations of Sophia Loren the actress on the screen. It is as if we have an abstract set of Sophia Loren's performances and the reference is made to a subset of this set. It is important to note in this connection that (15b) cannot be used in a context where Sophia Loren the person is mentioned: hence the inappropriateness of (16b) as an answer to (16a):

7 Note that once the verbs nimca 'is found'/'is located' or yešno (conjugated form of the existential particle) occur in a sentence like (14) its acceptability is improved considerably. A discussion of the various types of locative/existential statements is beyond the scope of this paper, but cf. Berman (1978) for some discussion.
8 Concerning the characterization of the NP in question, Geoffrey Nunberg (personal communication) has suggested that the use of the definite NP in these sentences is 'strictly non-coreferential' to its mention in the previous context. The question whether it is wise to characterize the indefiniteness restriction on existentials in terms of coreferentiality is answered in the negative in Ziv (forthcoming a).
(16a) Where is Sophia Loren right now?
(16b) *yeʃ ota beulam hakolnoa haez.
    exist. part. her in the hall (of) the movie the this'
rough transl.: There is her in this movie house
'She is in this movie house.'

4. The typological problem

In trying to determine the typological classification of the sentences
under investigation, we are faced with the problem of evaluating their
various differences from and similarities to existential sentences, on the
one hand, and locative sentences, on the other. The criteria of evaluation
are rather elusive, depending, as they do, on the overall linguistic theory
espoused. It should be mentioned that resolving the typological problem
will potentially rid us of some pseudo problems (e.g. if the construction in
question turns out to be a special type of locative construction, no ex-
planation need be provided for the violation of the indefiniteness restriction,
since the restriction will simply be irrelevant, cf. Ziv forthcoming a) and
will permit the pursuit of real issues (e.g. the reason for the restriction on
specificity/uniqueness of reference of the non-locative NP in this construc-
tion). Not all such questions can be answered at the present stage of our
linguistic understanding, of course, but even raising the right kinds of
question may count as a step in the right direction (cf. Zwicky 1968).

4.1. The yeʃ-eyn alternation

We have observed that the construction under investigation is introduced
by the existential particle yeʃ in the affirmative, with eyn functioning as
its negative counterpart. There are two more idiosyncracies involved here:
(a) in CMH yeʃ is restricted in its occurrence to sentence initial position
and (b) the usual negative particle is lo, with eyn being severely restricted.
yeʃ occurs sentence initially in existentials, possessives, a few construc-
tions where it is used as a modal-like element, and some idiomatic expressions.
Consider:

(17a) yeʃ baxeder ʃelxa xatul ʃaxor (existential);
    exist. part. in the room your cat black
    'There is a black cat in your room.'
The occurrence of yes sentence initially can, thus, count as an argument for classifying the construction in question as an existential only if it is sufficiently distinct from all other yes-initial sentences, on the one hand, and sufficiently similar to an existential, on the other. There is, of course, also the possibility that the relevant construction is an additional yes-initial construction, related grammatically neither to existentials nor to the other yes-initial sentences. I will postpone this discussion till after I have presented a few more considerations concerning the grammatical classification of the construction under investigation.

The yes–eyn alternation, which is evident in the construction in question, is characteristic of existential sentences at large. The regular negative particle lo does not occur in the negative version of the construction under investigation, nor in the negative existentials; eyn is the only negative marker in these environments, hence the well-formedness of (2b) (repeated here) and (17a') vs. the ill-formedness of (2b') and (17a'') as the negative counterparts of (2a) and (17a), respectively.

\[(2a)\] yes et hasefer haze basifriya haleumit.
exist. part. def. acc. m. the book the this in the library the national

\[(2b)\] eyn et hasefer haze basifriya haleumit.
neg. part.

\[(2b')\] *lo et hasefer haze basifriya haleumit. (* in the intended sense)
not

\['17a\] yes baxeder %elxa xaul 5axor.
exist. part. in the room your cat black

\[^{9}\] Note that the following existential sentence with lo 'not' is not, in fact, a negative existential: it is an affirmative existential used to correct a previous misconception.

(ii) yes sfrim ka'elelo basifriya haleumit, ela besifriyat hamuxlaka.
exist. part. books such not in the library the national but in the library of the department

'There are books like these not in the National Library but in the departmental library.'
The question arises whether these are idiosyncracies of structure which are shared by the construction under investigation and existentials and which point to a grammatical affinity between the two, or whether the yesh-eyn alternation can be attributed to a lexical property of yesh, namely some type of suppletion of yesh, such that any construction with yesh sentence initially would have eyn in its negative counterpart, in place of the usual lo. If it turns out to be a lexical property, then the yesh-eyn alternation cannot effectively be used to argue for the classification of the sentences in question as existentials.

A consideration of a variety of sentences where yesh occurs sentence initially suggests that we are dealing with a lexical property. Thus:

(17b') eyn li ax katan. (possessive)
    neg. part. to me brother little
    lit.: There is not to me a little brother
    'I do not have a little brother.'

(17c') eyn li fnot lamenshele bemikrim ka'ele. (modal sense)
    neg. part. to address to the manager in cases like these
to go to
    'One must not contact the manager in such cases.'

(17d') eyn le'el yado leharam Lahem. (idiomatic expression)
    he is incapable (of) to hurt to them
    'He is incapable of hurting them.'

10 Although the prediction is that every occurrence of yesh (in non-frozen expressions, cf. fn. 11) will be realized as eyn in the corresponding negative context, the opposite is not true; not every instance of eyn has yesh as its affirmative counterpart. This is due to the Normative Literary Hebrew use of eyn as the negative marker in the present tense. Thus, some frozen expressions or forms belonging to a different register may occur in CMH which show eyn in its general negative marker function. These would be instances where eyn is not the negative counterpart of yesh.

11 The occurrence of:
    (iii) yeš (ha) omrim še ...
        exist. part. def. art. say (pl.) that ...
        'There are those who say that ...'

and the non-occurrence of:

    (iv) *eyn (ha) omrim še ...
        neg. part. def. art. say (pl.) that
        (* in the intended sense)
4.2. The yeš-h-y-y alternation

4.2.1. yeš-haya/iye

The alternation yeš (present tense)--haya (past tense)/iye (future tense), which is evident in our construction (cf. 2a, 2c, 2d), is shared by existentials, possessives, and some idiomatic expressions as is evident in:

(18a) haya boxeder šelxat šaxor. (past tense of 17a)
     "There was a black cat in your room."

(18b) iye boxeder šelxat šaxor. (future tense of 17a)
     "There will be a black cat in your room."

(19) haya/iye li ax katan. (past/future tense of 17b)
     was/will be to me brother little
     "I had/will have a little brother."

(20) haya/iye le'el yado lehara lahem. (past/future tense of 17d)
     was/will be capable of his to hurt to them
     "He was/will be capable of hurting them."

The inadmissibility of (21), however.

(21) *haya/iye lifnot lamenahel bemikrim ka'ele.
     was/will be to address to the manager in cases like these
     "One had to/will have to contact the manager in such cases."

as the past tense c* future tense counterpart of (17c), which shows the modal use of yeš, complicates the argument based on the data in (18)–(20), would seem to count as counter evidence to the claim about the lexical property of yeš. However, the well-formedness of:

(v) eyn anāšim ha / še omrim še ...
    neg. part. people def. art. that/who say that
    "There are no people who say that ..."

on the one hand, and the ill-formedness of (vi):

(vi) *lo (anāšim) ha / še/θ omrim še ...
    not people def. art. who say that
    (" in the intended sense)

on the other, indicate that this is no exception to the generalization about the realization of yeš in the negative. The only peculiarity of (iii) is that anāšim 'people', which is understood as an element in the sentence, is not specified in this expression, but is specified in its negative counterpart in (v).

Note that frozen expressions for which there are no negative counterparts do not count as counterexamples to the generalization about the lexical property of yeš in the negative.
that the yeš–haya/iye alternation is another lexical property of yeš. (Cf. Berman and Grosu (1976) where yeš/ʊ/haya are claimed to constitute suppletive forms of the same verbal entity, the exact realization in each case depending on the overall construction.) If the often defective nature of modal uses of verbs is taken into account, then the problem raised by the non-occurrence of past/future tense equivalents of (17c) need not bear on the suppletion yeš–haya/iye elsewhere.¹²

4.2.2. A problem of agreement (concord)

In the previous section we have observed that yeš–haya/iye are suppletive forms of the same entity. yeš is known not to be marked for number or gender when occurring sentence initially (but cf. fn. 3), but haya and iye do show number and gender agreement. In existential sentences we find (17a), (18a), and (18b) (repeated here) when the element triggering agreement is 3rd person masculine singular, and (22a/a’) and (22b/b’) where it is 3rd person feminine singular and 3rd person masculine plural, respectively.

(17a) yeš baxeder ṣelxa ṣatul ᵥxor.
exist. part. in the room your cat (m.) black (m.)
(18a) haya baxeder ṣelxa ṣatul ᵥxor.
was 3sg. m. cat (m.) black (m.)
(18b) iye baxeder ṣelxa ṣatul ᵥxor.
will be 3sg. m. cat (m.) black (m.)
(22a) yeš baxeder ṣelxa ṣatula ᵥxor.
exist. part. cat (f.) black (f.)
(22a’) haya/iye baxeder ṣelxa ṣatula ᵥxor.
was 3sg. f./will be 3sg. f. cat (f.) black (f.)
(22b) yeš baxeder ṣelxa ṣatulim ᵥxorim.
cats (m.) black (pl. m.)

¹² An interesting, if problematic, alternation yeš–haya/iye is evident in what seems like a modal use of yeš:

(vii) yeš hilmod be’al pe et kol ḥašir ṣel byalik
need to study by heart def. acc. m. all the poem of Bialik
‘One has to learn the whole of Bialik’s poem by heart.’
(vii) etmol haya hilmod be’al pe et kol ḥašir ṣel byalik.
yesterday was to study by heart def. acc. m. all the poem of Bialik
‘Yesterday we had to learn the whole of Bialik’s poem by heart.’
(ix) maxar iye hilmod be’al pe et kol ḥašir ṣel byalik.
tomorrow will be to study by heart def. acc. m. all the poem of Bialik
‘Tomorrow we’ll have to learn the whole of Bialik’s poem by heart.’

However, it may turn out that this is a special use of yeš.
The same agreement pattern is evident in possessives where the NP designating the possessed entity is indefinite. (The question of grammatical concord is irrelevant in either the modal use of yeg or the few idiomatic expressions that I have examined.) It is interesting to observe that the agreement pattern just displayed is not shared by the construction under investigation. The 3rd person singular masculine realization of grammatical concord is evident in (2c) and (2d) (repeated here):

(2c) haya et nasefer haze basifriya kvar lifney 'ana.
    was 3sg. m. def. acc. the book (m.) this (m.) in the library already before year
    They already had this book in the library a year ago.

(2d) iye et nasefer haze basifriya be'od xodes
    will be 3sg. rh. def. acc. the book (m.) this (m.) in the library in more month
    be'retx.
    approximately
    'They'll have this book in the library in about a month.'

however, if the NP triggering agreement is definite and is other than 3rd person singular masculine we end up with highly questionable to utterly impossible sentences if we try to observe regular concord. Hence:

(23a) */???haya/iye et hamxonit hazot ecel hasoxen betelaviv.
    was 3sg. f./will be 3sg. f. def. acc. the car (f.) this (f.) at the dealer in Tel Aviv
    roughly: This car was/will be available at the dealer's in Tel Aviv

(23b) */???pa'am haya/iyu et hame'ilim sel dyor bekol xanut.
    once were 3pl.m./will be 3pl.m. def. acc. the coats (m.) of Dior in every store
    'Every/any (old) store carried/will carry Dior coats once/one day.'

The sentences in (23) are improved considerably if the verbal entity is realized as 3rd person singular masculine irrespective of the number or gender of the non-locative NP:

(23a') */???haya/iye et hamxonit hazot ecel hasoxen betelaviv.
    was 3sg. m./will be 3sg. m. def. acc. the car (f.) this (f.) at the dealer in Tel Aviv

(23b') */???pa'am haya/iye et hame'ilim sel dyor bekol xanut.
    once was 3sg. m./will be 3sg. m. def. acc. the coats (m.)

Third person singular masculine being the unmarked case for problematic instances of concord, it seems that, in fact, no agreement is evident in the construction under investigation.
The distinct concord patterns may count as a significant difference between the construction at hand and existentials. However, the careful reader might have noticed that in mentioning the agreement pattern in possessives I emphasized that it only takes place when the 'possessed NP' is indefinite. It seems that when a definite NP is preceded by et it can hardly, if ever, trigger agreement. This is the case both when the 'possessed NP' is definite in possessives and when the non-locative NP is definite in the construction under investigation. (Cf. Ziv 1976, where possessive constructions with definite NPs denoting the possessed entities are discussed and the lack of concord is interpreted as one indication that these constructions are being reanalyzed in CMH.) Thus, it turns out that this total lack of or defective agreement is principled, and is not peculiar to the construction under investigation as against existentials. Likewise, the cases where the non-locative NPs are indefinite do show concord. It appears, then, that no argument could be raised against grouping the construction in question with existentials on the basis of these facts about concord.

4.3. Sentence constituents and word order

We have observed that the construction under investigation is introduced by yeq/eyn/haya/iye (in the appropriate form) as a variety of other yeq-initial constructions. In addition, the construction in question contains a non-locative NP and a locative element, in that order. The only other yeq-initial construction consisting of these constituents is existential.

As for word order, I indicated in section (2) above that there are claims (e.g. Clark 1970; Berman 1978) that the unmarked word order in existentials is non-locative NP preceding the locative element. If this is the case (and I have strong reservations about it) then existential sentences in CMH do not differ from locative sentences with respect to the relative order between the non-locative and the locative constituents. Accordingly, the construction in question is no different from existentials or locatives as far as the relative order non-locative–locative constituents is concerned. If, however, the common order in existentials in CMH is locative element preceding non-locative NP, as I suggested above, then the construction in question differs from existentials in the relative order between these two constituents, showing the order exemplified by locative sentences. Word order claims being hard to establish in CMH, we may conclude that evidence from word order cannot be used either to support the classification of the construction in question with existentials or to reject it. It seems,
however, that the identity of the constituents yes, non-locative NP, locative element can be used to argue for such a classification. The question arises, especially in view of the evidence in sections 4.1 and 4.2, as to whether this constitutes sufficient grounds for establishing such a typological affinity. In the following sections I will cite more evidence which will bear on this theoretical issue.

4.4. The definiteness problem

Unlike existential sentences, the construction in question does not show the indefiniteness restriction on the non-locative NP. Since the indefiniteness restriction is considered a significant characteristic feature of existentials across languages, its non-existence with respect to the construction under investigation constitutes a major problem in establishing the typological affinity between the construction in question and existentials. The main question that arises in this context is what status to accord the potential definiteness in the construction under investigation and the definiteness involved in the definiteness restriction. If definiteness is to be considered a syntactic property in both these cases — and in Hebrew there is an obvious syntactic relevance to definiteness: it determines the occurrence of et — then the difference between the construction in question and existentials would amount to a considerable syntactic difference; one that could potentially determine the syntactic affiliation of the construction in question. If, on the other hand, definiteness in one or both of these cases is considered a semantic property, then it depends on our overall linguistic theory whether we accord it the status of a classificatory criterion in the present context. It should be mentioned that indeterminacies concerning the notion of semantic definiteness weaken any attempt to use it in grammatical argumentation. Attempts to account for it in the present context by reference to anaphoricity or to the more restricted notion of ‘proper unique reference’ (Rando and Napoli 1978) are shown to be insufficient for the construction under investigation (cf. Ziv forthcoming a).

If definiteness is perceived as neither syntactic nor semantic, as in Kempson (1975), where definiteness and indefiniteness are regarded as syntactically and semantically identical, the differences between them being accounted for on the basis of pragmatics, then, depending on the overall grammatical theory, the construction in question could be accorded the same syntactic/semantic status as an existential with respect to definiteness.

We have thus seen that the potential definiteness of the non-locative NP
in the construction in question could be used to argue for or against the classification of this construction as an existential, depending on the status accorded definiteness and the overall grammatical conception of the linguist.

4.5. Prosodic and discourse functional features

In what follows I will consider the non-contrastive stress pattern, the thematic-rhematic relations and the communicative functions displayed by the construction under investigation, in an attempt to shed more light on the problem of its typological classification.

Concerning the prosodic features, I have indicated in section 3 that the intonation pattern displayed by the construction in question is such that in the unmarked case the nucleus stress falls on the locative element and not on the non-locative NP as is the case in existentials. The question arises as to the status this difference in prosodic features should be accorded in establishing the affiliation of the relevant construction. Although they have a clear phonological realization and show an obvious dependence on syntactic and semantic factors, the prosodic features are rarely regarded as belonging to either of these components of grammar proper. They have been shown to be determined by reference to the communicative content of the sentence and claims have been made that they are not wholly predictable independently of presuppositions, illocutionary forces, and speakers' attitudes in uttering given utterances (Bolinger 1972; Schmerling 1974, inter alia). It thus depends on the linguistic theory espoused whether such differences between sentence types should be regarded as criterial. Theoretically, and in fact according to several schools of linguistics practically as well, sentences could be classified as syntactically and semantically identical but still differ in their prosodic features. In our case, the construction in question could be classified as an existential with distinct prosodic features.

The thematic-rhematic relations which are evident in the construction at hand differ radically from those that are characteristic of existentials. As pointed out in section 3 above, the non-locative NP constitutes the theme in the construction under investigation. This was claimed to be impossible in existentials (Milsark 1974; Berman and Grosu 1976, inter alia). The question here, as in the case of the prosodic features, which, incidentally, tend to show a high degree of correlation with the non-contrastive theme-rheme distribution, is how to regard such differences when trying to determine the typological classification of the construction.
in question. Since the theme–rHEME distribution is known to depend largely on pragmatic factors (presuppositions and contextual clues among others), it is, according to a variety of linguistic theories, legitimate to regard differences in thematic–rHEME relations as non-criterial in establishing the typological classification of sentences. Special provisions have been made in other theories for taking such distinctions into account in determining the typological status of a given sentence.

As for the communicative functions for which the construction in question may be used, they too differ from those of existentials, as was pointed out in sections 1 and 3 above. For the present purposes it is enough to note that the sentences under investigation are never used to assert existence or introduce an entity into the discourse. The problem here is identical to the one we faced in the case of the prosodic features and the thematic–rHEME relations: how to conceive of these differences? In theories of grammar where considerations of language use are irrelevant to the establishment of typological classifications of sentences (and there are various such theories), the sentences under investigation could be considered grammatically akin to existentials. In theories where language use is regarded as criterial in establishing typological affinities between sentences this is not the case.

4.6. The problem of specificity/uniqueness

The construction under investigation and existential sentences differ in the kind of restrictions imposed on their non-locative NPs. While the non-locative NP in existentials cannot be definite (the indefiniteness restriction), the non-locative NP in the construction under investigation can and characteristically is, definite, but it cannot refer to a unique or specific entity (cf. sentences (8)–(16) and the concomitant discussion). This restriction on the type of referent is not imposed on the usual variety of existentials, as is evident from the well-formedness of the following existential sentences, where the non-locative NPs are clearly specific, if not unique.

(24a) There is a man at the door.
(24b) Yet tekud haknisa xorula axat im salusraglayim.
exist. part. near the entrance cat (f.) one with three legs
'There is a three-legged cat near the entrance.'

The question arises as to the nature of these differences. Specificity has been suggested (Baker 1966; Fillmore 1967) as a syntactic property de-
termining the distribution of personal pronouns. Uniqueness of reference seems to constitute a pragmatic notion, but it seems to be syntactically relevant in determining the relative acceptability/grammaticality of passives of obliques in sentences containing direct objects in English (cf. Ziv and Sheintuch 1981) and it was suggested (Rando and Napoli 1978) as a factor determining anaphoricity, which in turn seems to be on the border line between pragmatics and semantics. Until more is known about the nature of the restriction on the construction in question, it will be hard to assess whether these differences should count as criterial in determining the typological classification of the construction in question.13

5. Conclusion

I have presented various facts which are to be taken into consideration in determining the typological classification of the construction under investigation. The ultimate solution depends, naturally, on the overall linguistic theory espoused, and such considerations as the exact delimitations between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics are of primary importance in this context. I will not attempt to resolve the issue here. The significance of establishing the relevant typological affinities lies in the determination of future research concerning existentials and locatives, e.g. the need to provide explanations for apparent exceptions if the construction in question is claimed to be an instance of an existential sentence, or, if it is considered to be grammatically akin to locatives, this turns into a pseudo-problem and other theoretical questions become relevant. Likewise, the solution to such questions, whatever it ultimately turns out to be, may not just be derived from the overall linguistic theory, but it may, instead, affect it and help shape a more comprehensive theory.

In Ziv (forthcoming a) I portray, briefly, a somewhat less well understood construction which seems to share more properties with existentials than does the construction examined in this paper, but which still violates the indefiniteness restriction. The definiteness problem there seems to lend itself to the 'list solution' offered by Rando and Napoli (1978), but I am not satisfied that this, in fact, is the appropriate explanation for the con-

13 From a strictly formal point of view, the fact that in both the construction under investigation and in existentials the non-locative NP is restricted in some manner could count as a similarity. However, the restrictions seem rather different and I doubt whether this could count as more than a trivial argument for some kind of affinity.
sistent violation of the indefiniteness restriction in that construction. Likewise, I suspect that we might be dealing with more than one construction there.

In light of the existence of at least three constructions converging on a suspiciously similar surface structure, the question is raised whether this is an incidental property of language (why these and not other constructions? – cf. Zwicky 1968). It seems that the answers to such questions – if they are ever to be answered – must await a much broader understanding of linguistic, psychological, and philosophical issues than we currently possess.

References


Ziv, Y., forthcoming b. Some communicative functions of so-called existentials in English.