This paper examines the relationship between existential and locative sentences in Italo-Romance and in Sardinian. According to the locative approach, existential sentences and locative predications are generated from a common initial structure (cf. Freeze 1992, Moro 1997). Within this approach, existential sentences are assumed to constitute a subtype of the locative construction. The raising of either the theme/subject (2a) or the locative predicate (2b) from the original small clause determines how the common structure is ultimately realized (cf. also Partee & Borschev 2007):

(1)  BE  [SC SUBJECT  PREDICATE]  locatives

(2)  a.  SUBJECT  BE  [SC  tSUB  PREDICATE]  ‘normal order’
    b.  PREDICATE  BE  [SC  SUBJECT  tPRED]  ‘inverted order’

In contrast, a well-established tradition of syntactic and semantic studies on the existential construction rejects the idea that existentials are to be reduced to locative structures, and claims that it is the pivot, and not the (optional) locative phrase, that is the predicate in existential sentences (cf. Williams 1984, 1994, Hazout 2004, Francez 2007). On these grounds, the latter approach relies on a clear-cut syntactic and semantic distinction between existentials and locative predications. Following this second approach, I claim that existential and locative sentences generate from the opposite argument structure within the small clause: the DP is the argument of the predication in the locative construction (3a), but the predicate in the existential sentences (3b), while the location is the predicate in the locative constructions (3a), but the argument of the predication in existentials (3b). More specifically, the (null) location in the existential construction is represented by means of an expletive locative pronoun, i.e. the proform:

(3)  a.  BE  [SC DPSUBJ  LOCATIONPRED]  locative
    b.  BE  [SC PRO-LOCATIONSUBJ  DPRED]  existential

However, not all apparent occurrences of existential sentences are genuine existentials in Italo-Romance. Some must be classified as ‘inverse locatives’, generating from the same argument structure as locative predications (cf. 1, 3a), and derived through the raising of the predicate. This type of existential sentence is mainly characterized by the presence of a focal definite DP, and by a presupposed dislocated locative phrase (cf. Leonetti 2008):

(4)  C’è  ta  sùəru,  nta  cucina.  Sicilian,  Mussomeli
    there.CL-is  your  sister  in-the  kitchen
    *‘There’s your sister in the kitchen’ / ‘Your sister is in the kitchen.’

(5)  [ IP  Infl ... [FocP  [ TopP  [vP  è  [SC  [DP  ta  sùəru]  [DP  ci]  ]  [PP  nta  cucina] ]]]]
The distinction between existential sentences proper (type I) and inverse locatives (type II) raises a series of questions, which summarize the main agenda for this paper:

(6) a. What is the function of the locative proform in type I and in type II?
   b. What is the nature of the locative phrase in both types?
   c. Is this distinction reflected in the information structure of the two types?
   d. Is this distinction supported by any morpho-syntactic differences?

Drawing from a large set of data collected in the field as part of the project ‘Existential constructions: An investigation into the Italo-Romance dialects’, University of Manchester, several pieces of evidence in favour of this analysis will be reviewed and discussed, providing an answer to the questions above. In particular, it will be shown that the proform has a referential locative function in type II, but not in type I, being coindexed with the locative PP. As for the information structure, in inverse locatives (type II) the locative phrase must be a topic and, hence, dislocated (cf. Leonetti 2008), and must be excluded from the focus of the sentence due to clitic doubling effects. No such information-structure constraints hold, instead, for type I, in which the locative expression may or may not be part of the focus. The distinction between type I and type II, moreover, is marked morpho-syntactically in some dialects, as is the case in Sardinian where the two structures are distinguished by the use of different copulas, a distinction that goes hand in hand with the specificity of the DP (cf. Jones 1993, La Fauci & Loporcaro 1997, Bentley 2004, 2011, Remberger 2009).

(7) B’at metas frores in sa tanca.  
    cl-has many flowers in the meadow  
    ‘There are many flowers in the meadow.’ (Jones 1994: 113)

(8) B’est sore tu, in coghina.  
    cl-is sister your in kitchen  
    *‘There’s your sister in the kitchen. / Your sister is in the kitchen.’ (Bentley 2011)

REFERENCES


