

## Existential constructions in early Italo-Romance vernaculars: the locative hypothesis

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In this paper I consider existential constructions in a corpus of early Italo-Romance texts dating from the C13<sup>th</sup> to the C16<sup>th</sup>. In my analysis I put to test Freeze's (1992) idea that all existential pro-forms are invariably locative, as existentials are locatives. My initial findings show that in C13<sup>th</sup> and C14<sup>th</sup> Tuscan the pro-form occurs in complementary distribution with a locative phrase, e.g.: *Uno re fu nelle parti d'Egitto* (Novellino, V) vs. *Egli ci sono delle altre donne* (Boccaccio, *Decameron*, III, 3:13). This result would seem to corroborate the view that existential pro-forms are locative, assuming that, in the variety under consideration, a locative pro-form cannot co-occur with a locative phrase within the clause (La Fauci and Loporcaro 1993, 1997). If this assumption also holds true for C14<sup>th</sup> Sicilian, however, the existential pro-form is not locative in this variety, as it can co-occur with a locative phrase within the clause: *chi fu in Sichilia grandi fami* (*La conquista di Sichilia*, 18:25). The co-occurrence of the existential pro-form with a locative phrase also characterizes Modern Italian, as is shown in *\*(Ci) sono due gatti in giardino*, where *ci* is existential, which differs from *\*(Ci) vado a casa*, where *ci* would clearly be locative. The contrast between, on the one hand, the early-Tuscan data and, on the other hand, the early-Sicilian and Modern Italian data suggests that existential pro-forms are not necessarily locative. Furthermore, I note that in the early stages of the history of Italo-Romance, the existential pro-form exhibits geolinguistic discrepancies: whereas in Tuscan it appears to be the spell-out of a locative argument, in Sicilian it seems to be a marker of existentiality which joins with the copula to form an existential predicate (Bentley 2006). Diachronically, Tuscan – or at least C13<sup>th</sup> literary Tuscan – seems to be rather conservative, both because it adheres to the Latin type of existentials (where the pro-form never occurs, e.g.: *est puellā in viā*) and because it contrasts with Sicilian, which already exhibits the existential pattern of Modern Italo-Romance. These results challenge the traditional Tuscan-centred view of the origin of Modern Italian (Renzi 2000, Vincent 2004). The data and analysis proposed in my paper also appear to suggest that existential constructions are not locative by definition, begging for further research into the nature of existential pro-forms.

## References

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