

Existentials and Locatives in (Forest) Nenets

Josefina Budzisch

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Nenets



Rantanen et al. 2021



- > Samoyedic > Uralic
- Two languages: Tundra and Forest Nenets
- Forest Nenets is much less documented and described
- 21,926 speakers (2010), about 2,000 of whom speak Forest Nenets
- Agglutinative with some fusional tendencies
- NOM-ACC language
- head final, SOV
- no genus
- singular, dual, plural
- rich case system, complex verbal morphology



- Corpus based: corpus currently being assembled in Hamburg within the INEL project
 - Planned to be published by the end of 2024
 - Archived data, unpublished and published texts
 - Narratives and folklores
- Here: a total of 457 existential, possessive and locative sentences in Forest and Tundra Nenets

Existentials and Locatives in Nenets

- Descriptions (mostly) only take Tundra Nenets into account
 - Tereshchenko 1973, Wagner-Nagy 2011, 2016, Nikolaeva 2014, Mus 2022
- Distinction of existentials and locatives based on linking element (among other features)
 - Hegedús et al. (2017) already note that the distribution might not be as straightforward as presented

Tunda Nenets	Forest Nenets	function	clause type	Glossing
ŋa-	ŋa-	copula used with inanimate referents	locative	be
me-	me-	copula used with animate referents	locative	be.there
tan'a-	tad'a-, tat'a-	affirmative existential verb	existential (+ possessive)	exist
jan̄ko-	d'ako-	negative existential verb	existential (+ possessive)	neg.ex



tol' labe-kāna ***ŋa.***
table room-LOC be.3SG

'The table is in the room.' [locative clause with inanimate subject]

Igoŕ xarād-ŕ m'uńa ***me.***
Igor house-GEN inside be.3SG

'Igor is in the house.' [locative clause with animate subject]

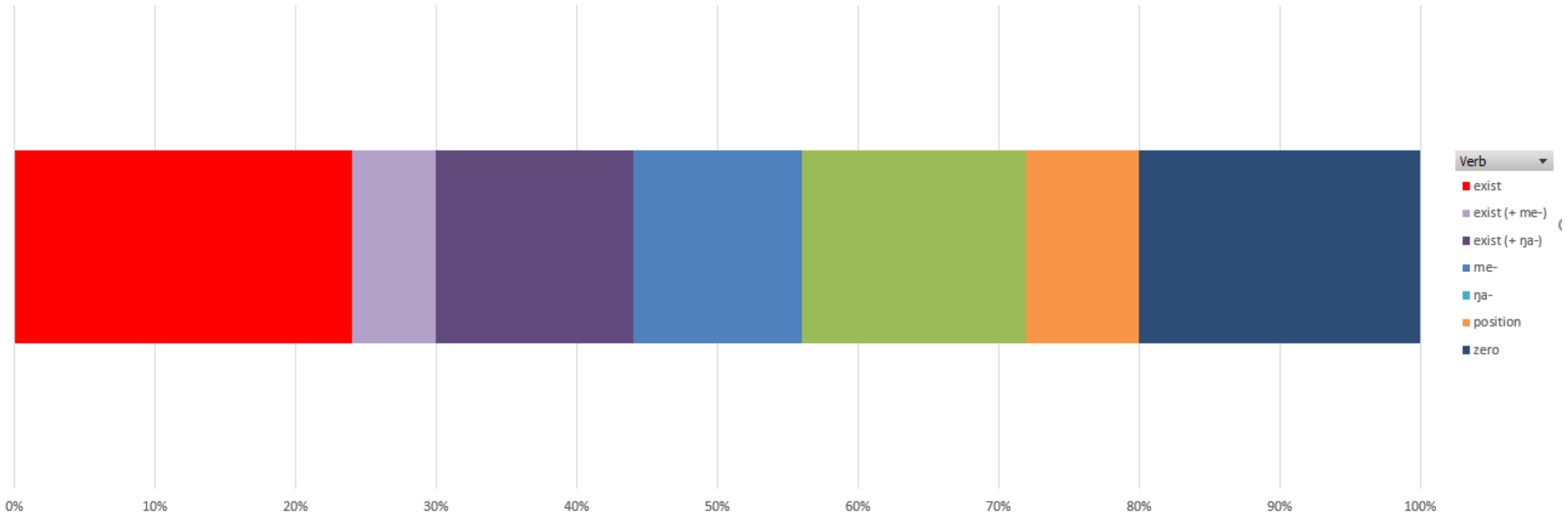
labe-kana xasawa ***tāńa.***
room-LOC man exist.3SG

'There is a man in the room.' [existential clause]

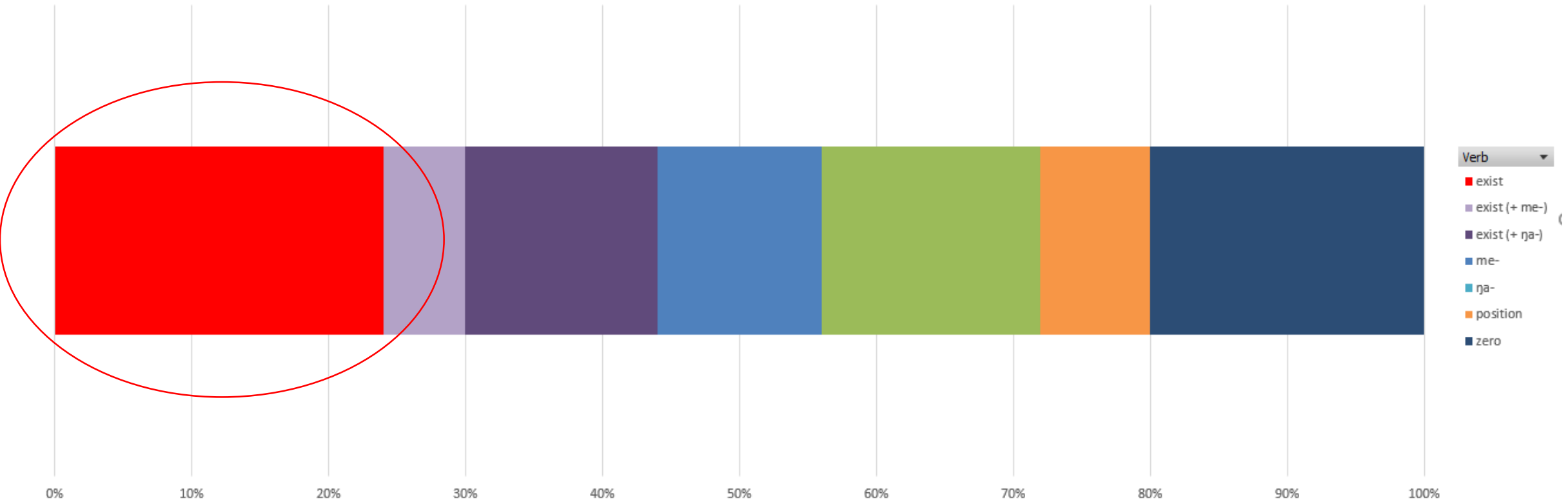
Existentials in Forest Nenets data

- (1) *Namta-tuŋ tad'a.*
food-3PL exist.3SG.S
'There is their food.'
(TPG_2002_Nalisha_flk.011)

Existentials in Forest Nenets data: statistics



Existentials in Forest Nenets data: statistics





Existentials in Forest Nenets data

(2) *Čik'e-xäna* *ŋup* *wäʔku,* *ŋup* *puxša,*
 this-LOC.SG one old.man one old.woman
n'in'u-č *tad'a* *me.*
 child-NOM.SG.3DU exist.CVB be.there.3SG.s

'There was an old man, an old woman and their child.'
 (TPG_2002_DewakuRiver_flk.023)

(3) *Wajmat'a-xaʔna* *waŋk-t'aaj-ʔ* *tat'a* *ŋe-štu-ʔ.*
 bad earth-LOC.PL pit-AUG-PL exist.CVB be-HAB-3PL.S

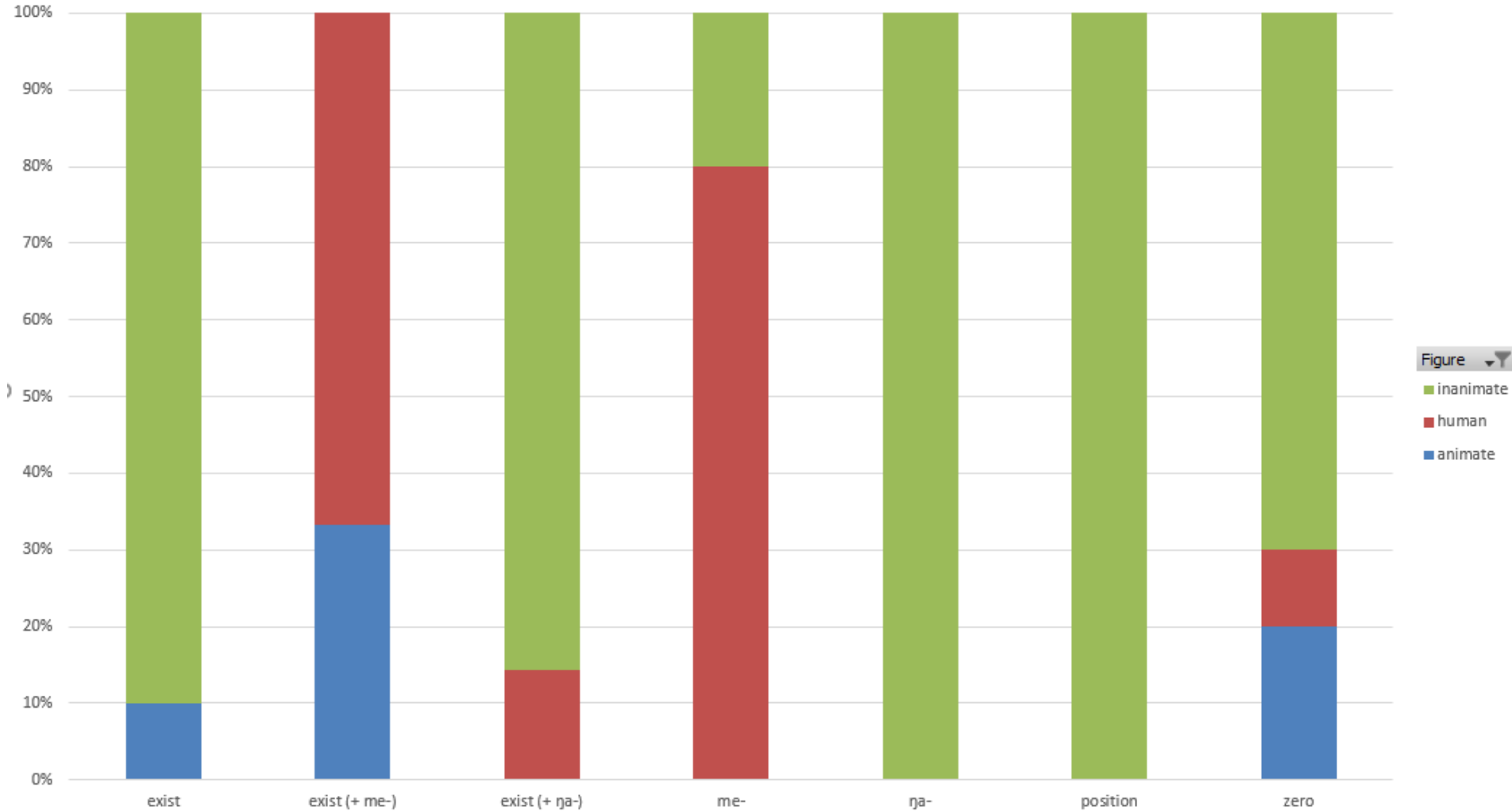
'There were large pits in those bad places.'
 (AAK_200311_MyLife_nar.190)

Existentials in Forest Nenets data

- (4) *Najŋ čik'e-x'enna ŋini-ʔko-ta-xaŋ*
 again this-LOC.SG bow-DIM-OBL.3SG-NOM.DU
n'eša-ʔ ŋ'imi-ʔ me-xeŋ.
 person-NOM.PL other-NOM.PL be.there-3DU.s
 'Again, there are two people with bows.'
 (PIK_TPG_2002_KontscheeyKopanyta_flk.PIK.095)
- (5) *Naŋka to-j ŋa-š.*
 big lake-NOM.SG.1SG be.3SG.S-PST
 'There was a big lake.'
 (ILA_200411_Lake_nar.033)

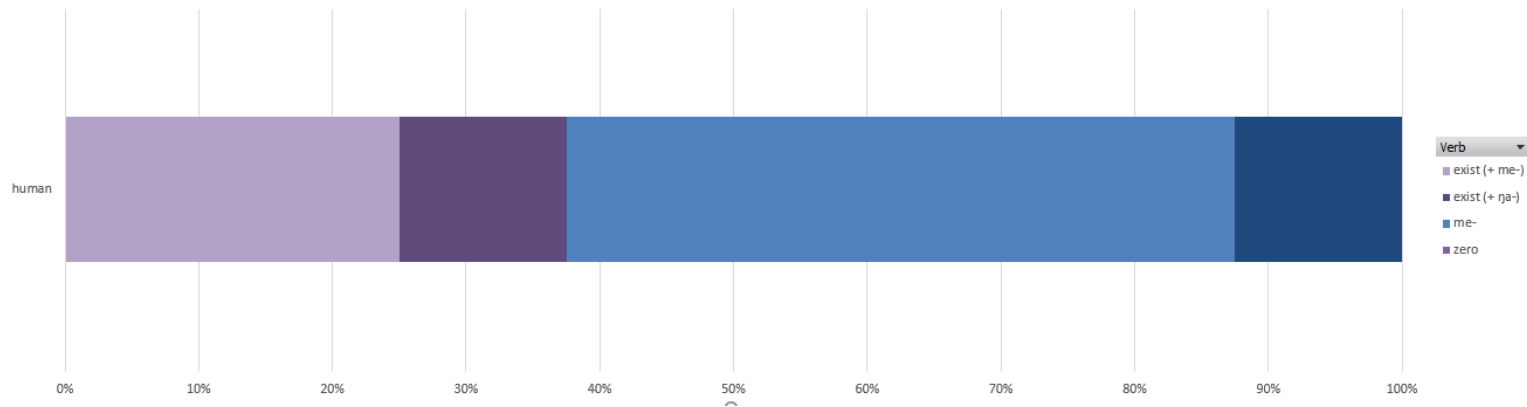
Existentials in Forest Nenets data

Animacy of the figure



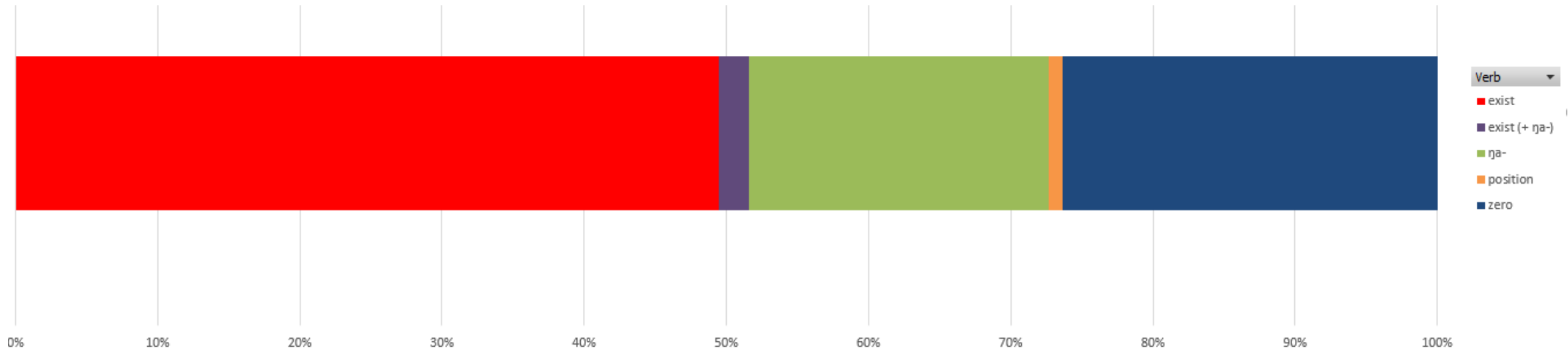
Existentials in Forest Nenets data: summary

- The existential verb is not the only linking element used in existential predication in Forest Nenets
- Tendency: Human figures seem to be unlikely to be used with only the existential verb



- Postural verbs are rarely used
- Linking element can be dropped
- Question of the two Nenets: structural differences or simplification in the presentation of Tundra Nenets?

Existentials in Tundra Nenets data: statistics



Existentials in Tundra Nenets data

- (8) *Tamna čet ti tan'a.*
 still four reindeer exist.3SG.S
 'And then there are four reindeer.'
 (YaVD_1976_ThreeEnets_flk.052)



Existentials in Tundra Nenets data

- (9) *N'enej* *n'eneča-ʔ* *tan'a-wi* *ŋe-ptu [...]*
 true person-NOM.PL exist-NAR.3SG.S be-DUB.3SG.S

'If there were real humans [...].'

(YaVD_1976_ThreeShamans_flk.034)

- (10) *Ŋarka to-xona* *xal'a-da* *ŋoka* *ŋe-s'ti.*
 big lake-LOC.SG fish-NOM.SG.3SG many be-HAB.3SG.S

'[...] there were many fishes in the big lake.'

(YaML_1973_ThreeEnetsSister_flk.007)

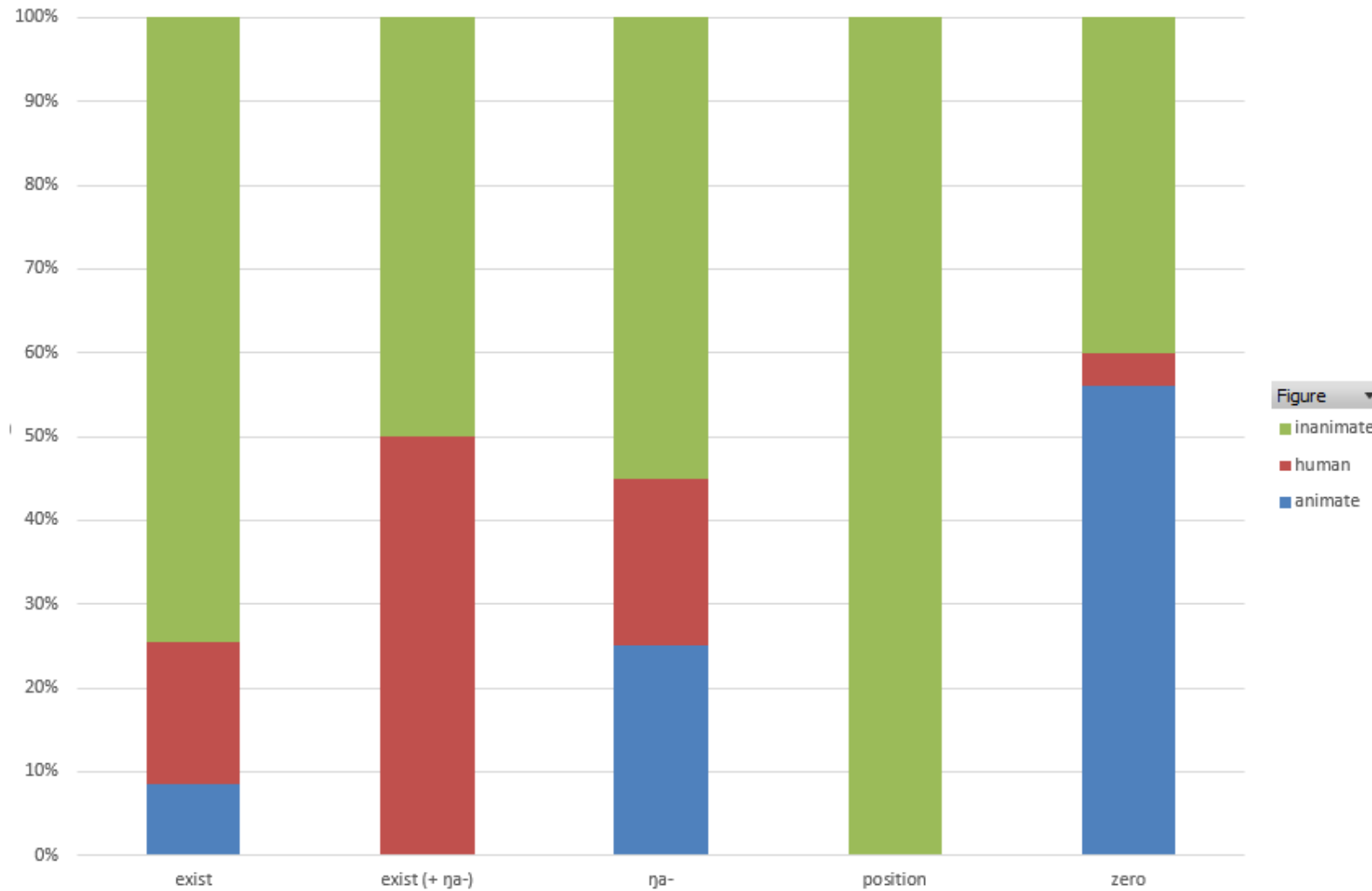


Existentials in Tundra Nenets data

- (11) *M'ad* *m'u-n'a* *čet* *xal'm'ar* *jus'ida.*
 tent.GEN.SG inside-LOC.ADV four dead.man lie.3SG.S
 'There were four dead men in the tent.'
 (YaVD_1977_Inggrav_flk.047)
- (12) *M'ad* *xew-xana* *xan-ʔ* *ηoka-ʔ*
 tent.GEN.SG side-LOC.SG sledge-NOM.PL many-NOM.PL
ti-ʔ *ηoka-ʔ.*
 reindeer-NOM.PL many-NOM.PL
 'There were many sledges and deer around the tent.'
 (YaVD_1979_HolyLegend1_flk.094)

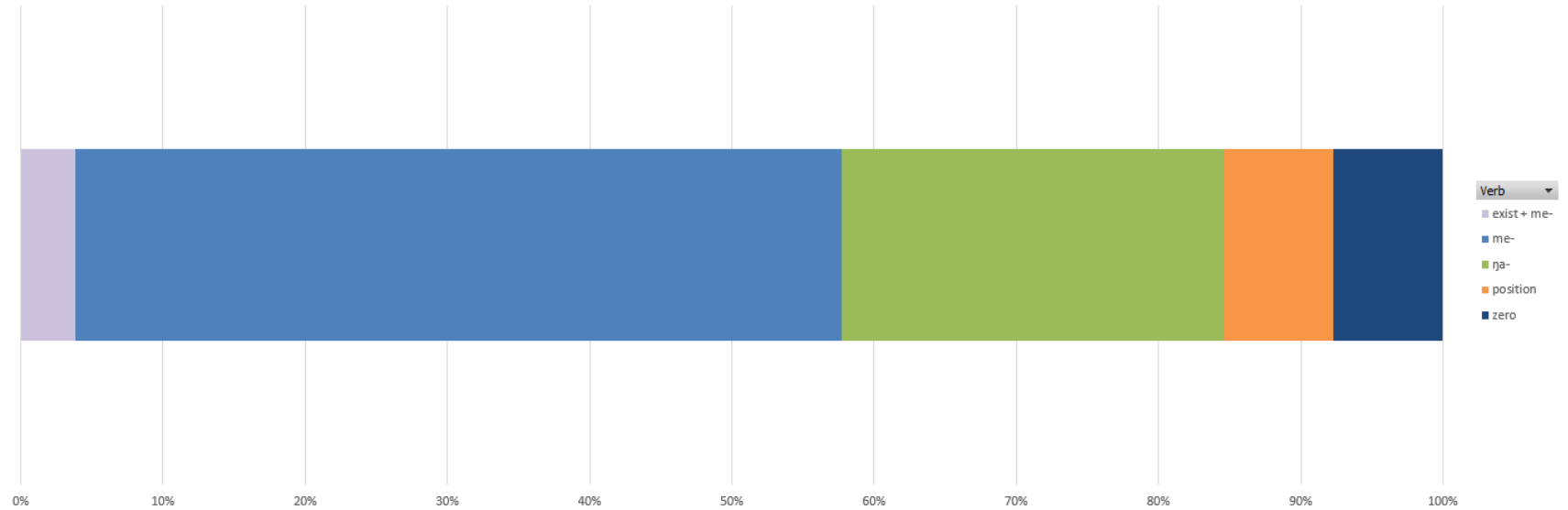
Existentials in Tundra Nenets data

Animacy of the figure



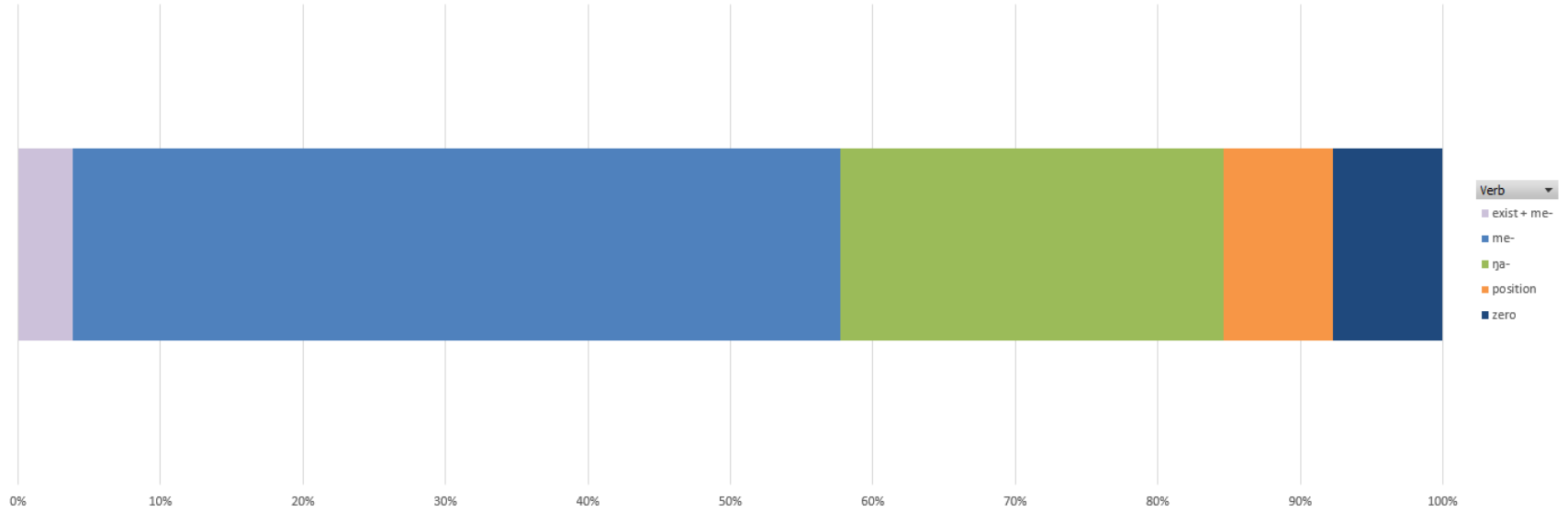
Locatives in Nenets: Statistics

Forest Nenets

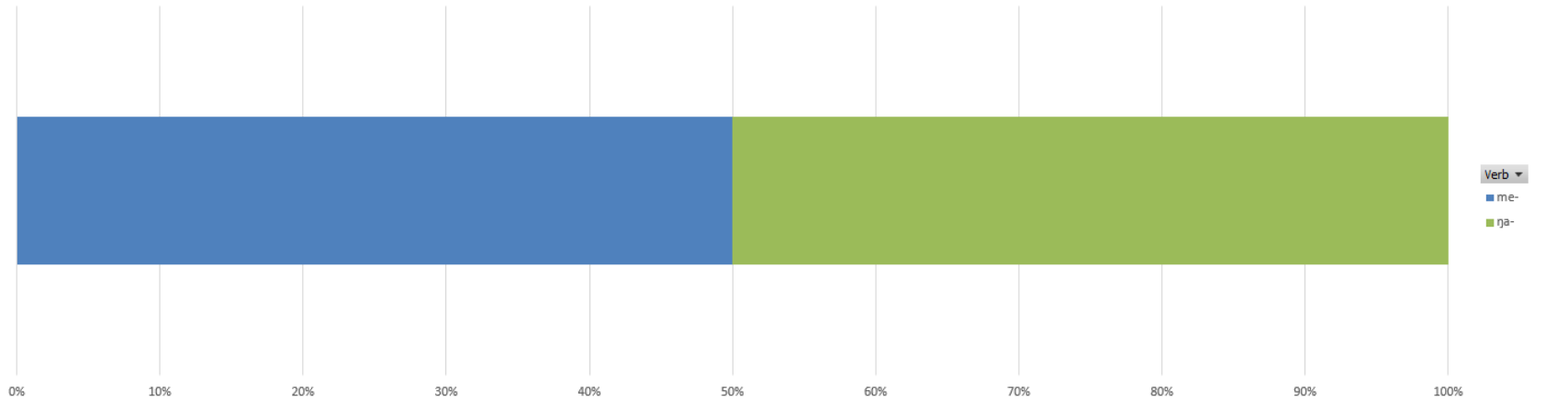


Locatives in Nenets: Statistics

Forest Nenets



Tundra Nenets





- (13) *Pon čik'e-xe?na d'ošita-štu šu?m'a-n-ta ηamsa.*
 long this-LOC.PL lie-HAB.3SG.S jay-GEN-OBL.3SG meat
 'For a long time, the meat of the jay was there.'
 (TPG_2002_Jay_flk.005)

- (14) *N'u-ti kuna?*
 child-NOM.SG.2SG where
 'Where is your daughter?'
 (TPG_2002_OldShaman_flk.006)



(15) *Tajše?* *me-na-xa-na?*

so *be.there-DUR-HORT-1PL.MD*

‘[This sister helped us] as long as we were there.’

(AAK_200311_MyLife_nar.393)

(16) *Šex’eti-tuŋ* *tajna* *ŋä-maj, [...]*

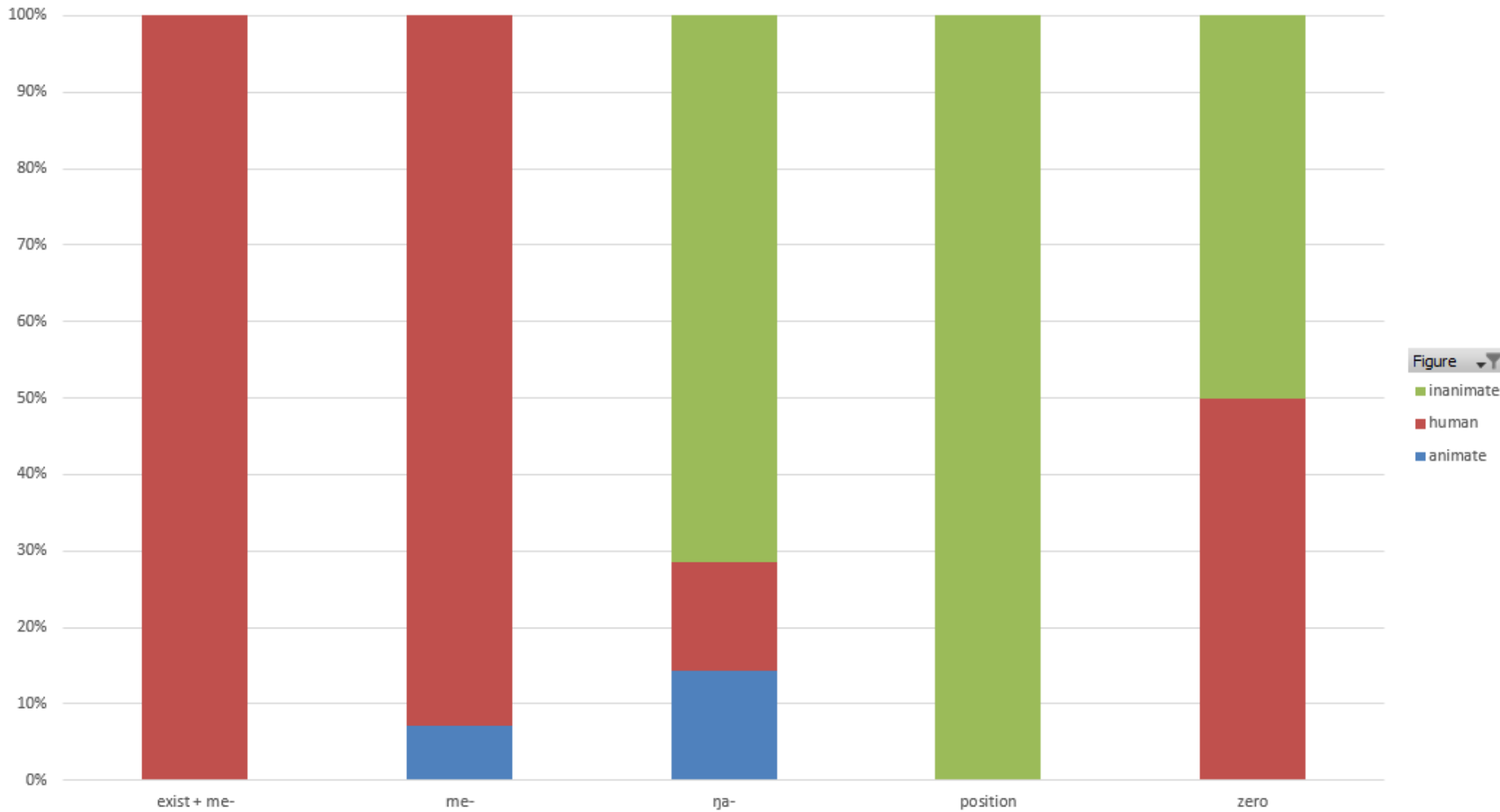
road-NOM.SG.3PL there *be-NAR.3SG.S*

‘Their path is there, [...].’

(VA_VR_200206_Wandering_nar.VA.045)

Locatives in Forest Nenets data

Animacy of the figure





Locatives in Tundra Nenets data

(17) *Pida mal'e pedara-xana me-wi.*
 3SG already forest-LOC.SG be.there-NAR.3SG.S

'He is already in the forest.'

(YaVD_1977_Marincha_flk.140)

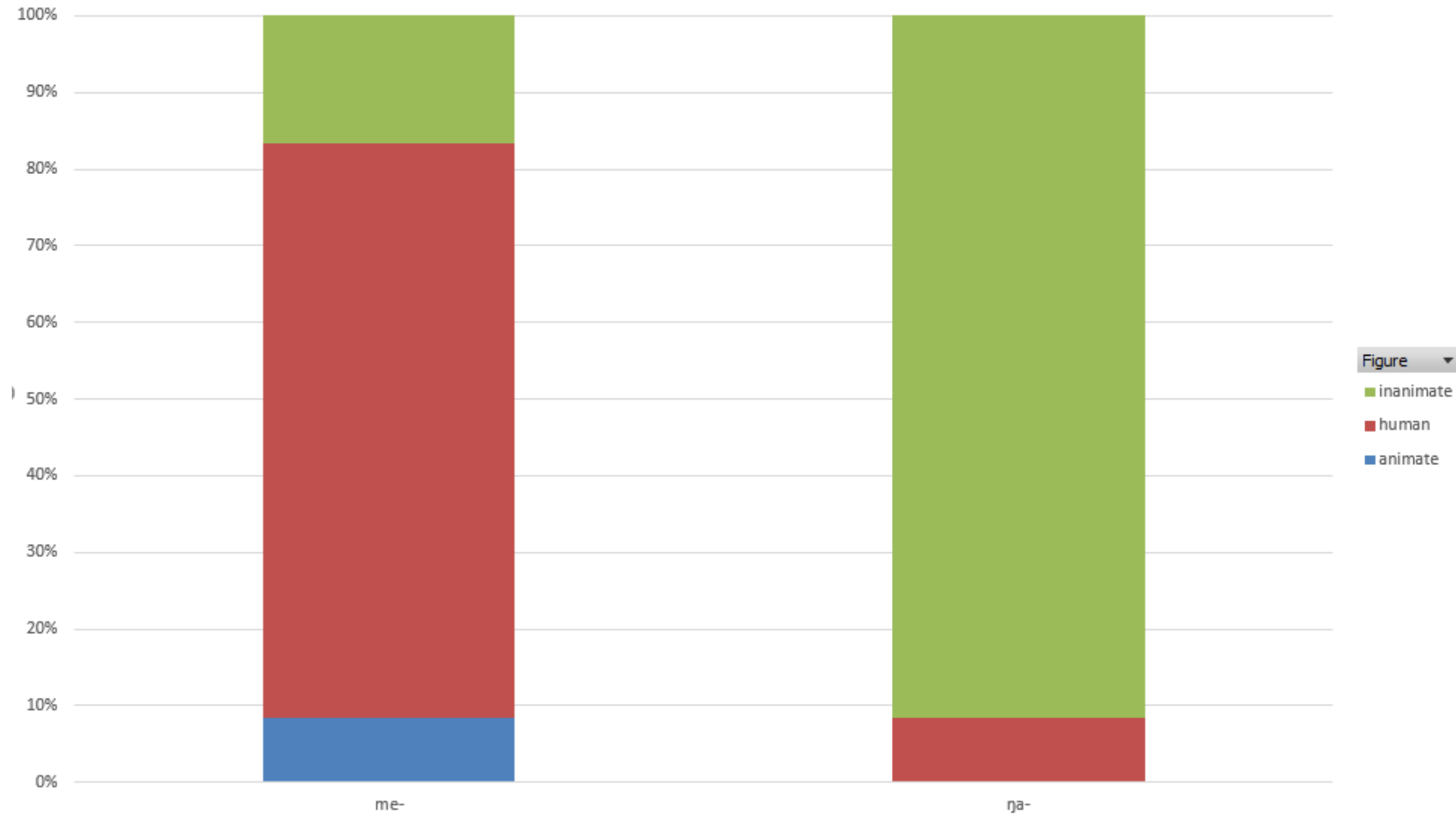
(18) *Xan n'i-n'a ηa-?*
 sledge.GEN.SG on-LOC.ADV be-3PL.S

'It's on the sledge.'

(YaVD_1976_ThreeEnets_flk.046)

Locatives in Tundra Nenets data

Animacy of the figure





Locatives in Tundra Nenets

jexena-ʔ *to-xona* *me-ʔ.*
 sturgeon-PL lake-LOC be-3PL
 ‘The sturgeons are in the lake.’

jexena-ʔ *to-xona* *ŋa-ʔ.*
 sturgeon-PL lake-LOC be-3PL
 ‘The sturgeons are in the lake.’

Mus 2022: 248

Summary

- The existential verb appears only in existential predication
- Copula verbs appear in both: existential and locative predication
 - In locative predication, there is a strong tendency for the use of *me-* with animate and *ŋa-* with inanimate referents
 - the distribution is more complex in existential predication
- the parameters that determine whether the existential verb or a copula is used in an existential construction are (still?) unclear.
- Apart from locative sentences in Tundra Nenets, the linking element can be dropped
- Postural verbs play a minor role and do not seem to be used systematically.



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Thank you!