

The existential copula in Xhosa in relation to indefiniteness

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Bare nouns in languages without articles can be semantically ambiguous between definite and indefinite interpretations. It is assumed here that speakers of such languages can still signal to the hearer when such nouns refer to unique and identifiable referents. This paper contributes to the long-standing cross-linguistic question of how bare nouns are interpreted and what means languages without articles have to disambiguate between definite and indefinite readings. This question is largely unexplored for Bantu languages. The answer is sought in the use of different word orders and morphosyntactic constructions, with a focus on the existential, in this paper. In many languages of the world, there is a restriction on definites as pivots in existential constructions, which serves as a motivation for exploring these constructions in Xhosa. Xhosa makes use of a non-verbal copula *-kho(na)* in prototypical existentials as well as in presentationals. The combination of a long and a short version of the copula, together with a choice between expletive and subject agreement, gives rise to four different forms which express the identification or location of a referent. The aim of this paper is to answer the question of how these different forms map onto a difference in meaning and function, based on examples from a corpus of natural speech and checked in follow-up elicitation. It is shown that Xhosa has a dedicated existential which is used when the coda, rather than the pivot, is the perspectival center. The existential takes expletive agreement on the copula, and the copula plus pivot have a fixed word order. When the same copula agrees with the theme argument, which can be pre- or postverbal, it functions as a presentational. The existential is used with new referents, which are overwhelmingly indefinite. However, there is no strict definiteness effect. The presentational takes a wider range of referents, which are also mostly indefinite. When it comes to the use of the short and long forms of the copula, the paper reveals an unexpected analogy with the use of the so-called conjoint and disjoint forms in Xhosa tense-aspect paradigms.

Key words: (in)definiteness, existential, presentational, Bantu, bare nouns, activation states

1. Introduction

1.1 Four different forms - four different meanings? Existential interpretations in Xhosa¹ are often formed with the non-verbal copula *-kho(na)* ‘exist/be present’. The noun phrase argument that follows this copula in an existential sentence is not normally definite in a cross-linguistic perspective (Lumsden 1990). As Xhosa is a language without articles, the use of existential constructions is examined here as a possible strategy to convey indefiniteness. This is part of a larger aim to establish the means used to convey definiteness/indefiniteness distinctions – if such distinctions are possible

¹ Xhosa or isiXhosa (the name in the language itself) is a Nguni language of South Africa. Nguni is a subgroup of the Bantu language family, also containing the closely related languages Zulu, Xhosa, Swati and Ndebele.

or relevant – in the article-less Bantu languages.² This paper shows, based on natural spoken examples,³ that existential constructions in Xhosa are used for non-active (new) referents. Following this, the referents are overwhelmingly indefinite, but there is no definiteness effect; definite referents are possible in elicitation. Such definites – identifiable and unique – are very rare in existentials in natural conversation, however, and not found in the corpus used. I therefore propose that existentials are indeed communicative tools for indicating referential and non-referential indefinite meanings in Xhosa.

The existential predicate under investigation, then, is *-khona*, and the shorter form *-kho*. Both forms can be used with expletive agreement (examples (1) and (2)) or agreement with the theme argument (examples (3)⁴ and (4)):

- (1) **Ku-khon(a)** um-phand(a) o-bumkhulu ke phaya entla.
 SM17-be.present 3-barrel 3RC-somewhat:big then there LOC.inside
 ‘There is a biggish container inside that house.’ [PSJ150517O]
- (2) U-bona njengoba **ku-kho** in-gca kanje?
 SM2SG-see seeing.that SM17-be.present 9-grass like.this
 ‘You see that there is grass like this?’ [PSJ150517M_b]
- (3) **i-khon(a)** (i)-nto (e)-za-z(i)-push-w-a
 SM9-be.present 9-thing 10RC-SM.PST10-IPFV10-push-PASS-FV
 ‘There was a thing that was pushed.’ [BLN150924D_b]
- (4) sa-vel-e **sa-kho** isi-kolo
 SM.PST7-appear-REC SM.PST7-be.present 7-school
 ‘There came to be schools.’ [BU160401D_a]

Hence, there are four different, related forms. The question that naturally arises is why this would be the case. In order to answer this question, the aim of this paper is two-fold:

- ♦ to explain the difference in use between the long and short forms, *-khona* and *-kho*
- ♦ to explain the difference in use between expletive agreement and agreement with the noun class, and to relate this to the question of definiteness

The first aim is addressed in section (2). I will argue in this paper that the distinction between *-khona* and *-kho* relates to the conjoint/disjoint distinction that occurs in certain tense-aspects in Xhosa and many other Bantu languages. This is a paradigmatic distinction between a verb

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³ The examples in this paper mainly come from a corpus of spoken and transcribed Xhosa from across the region of Eastern Cape. Parentheses indicate sections that were not heard by the transcriber, mainly elided vowels in fast speech. The examples are coded with an abbreviation of the place name, the date of recording and a letter D (dialogue), O (oral tradition, story) M (monologue) or S (based on stimuli). At present, the corpus contains around 9 hours of recordings, of which 6.5 hours are transcribed. All transcribed texts have been consulted for the use of *-kho/-khona*. Elicited examples are coded with the initials of the speaker, the date and a letter E. I thank Onelisa Slater for help in annotating the examples in this paper.

⁴ *za-zi-* in example 3 forms a complex tense, a (remote) past imperfective, in which the two morphemes vary according to noun class. The second morpheme could also be seen as a subject marker but is glossed IPFV to express the semantics of the complex tense.

form that is in a close relation (phonological, morphosyntactic) with what follows – called conjoint – and a form in which this is not the case, called disjoint. The disjoint form is the only one that can be clause-final. This distinction, however, is normally made in the tense-aspect morphemes, which makes it unexpected that a shorter and longer form of a non-verbal copula stem can show a similar pattern. However, there is strong evidence, presented in section (2.3), that *-kho* and *-khona* follow a similar pattern. I propose that the syntactic conditioning of their use has developed in analogy with the conjoint/disjoint distinction. This development has been possible, I argue, because *-khona* originates in a locative plus a comitative, a so-called *be_with* type of existential (Creissels 2019).

The second aim is the topic of section (4), and requires an introduction to definiteness in Xhosa, as provided in section (3). The choice of expletive agreement (examples (1) and (2)) indicates that the referent is inactive and new in the discourse. Also, as a prototypical existential, the construction is used when the location is the perspectival center rather than the introduced referent. The choice of agreement with the theme argument (examples (3) and (4)), also introduces a new referent, and is a presentational construction. The introduced noun phrase appears to always be referential and refers to a specific entity. In both cases, the noun can be indefinite and these constructions are important in expressing indefiniteness in Xhosa, a language without articles. As we will see, there are exceptions to this and there is no definiteness distinction; both forms can be followed by a definite noun phrase. There are, however, arguments that this is due to so-called list readings (see section 4.2). The results are summarized and conclusions drawn in section (5).

1.2 Prototypical existentials. The non-verbal copula with expletive agreement in Xhosa is a prototypical existential construction. An existential construction is often characterized as expressing the plain “existence or the presence of someone or something in the context” (Bentley et al. 2013: 1). Creissels (2019) points out that the meaning more often entails a spatial relationship between an entity and a location rather than mere existence, and proposes the label inverse-locational predication. I find this appealing but will stick with the traditional term ‘existential’ here, for comparative reasons. Such a spatial relationship can also be expressed by a predicate locative construction (or plain locational), and existential sentences are defined in relation to predicate locatives: they are characterized by a reversed perspective (Creissels 2019); see further below. Compare, for example, the English existential sentence in ((5) with the predicate locative in ((5) (Milsark 1977: 1):

- (5) a. There is a wolf at the door.
b. A wolf is at the door.

Regarding the form of the existential, Bentley et al. (2013: 1) give the following structure, based on research on existentials since at least Milsark (1974):

- (6) (Expletive) (proform) (copula) pivot (coda)

In the English example in (5); ‘there’ is a proform, ‘is’ a copula, ‘wolf’ the pivot and ‘at the door’ the coda. According to Bentley et al. (2013), only the pivot is universally available and obligatory in existential sentences. Many languages do not have a clear distinction between a predicate locative and a grammaticalized existential (Creissels 2019). Instead, the predicate locative and the existential can be represented by a different ordering of the same constituents, such as in Finnish:

(7) a. mies on huonee-ssa [Finnish]
 man.NOM is room-INESSIVE
 ‘The man is in the room.’

b. huonee-ssa on mies
 room-INESSIVE is man.NOM
 ‘There is a man in the room.’ (Freeze 1992: 556)

Research on existentials in the Bantu language family is scarce. In a first typology comparing 100 Bantu languages, we see that dedicated (grammaticalized) as well as non-dedicated strategies are used to express existential meanings across the language family (Bernander et al. Forthcoming). A majority of languages employ locative marking, such as the location argument seen in Swahili ((8)a). This can be compared with the predicate locative construction in ((8)b):

(8) a. Meza-ni ku-na ki-tabu [Swahili]
 9.table-LOC SM17-POSS.COP 7-book
 ‘There is a book on the table’

b. Ki-tabu ki-po meza-ni
 7-book SM7-LOC.COP 9.table-LOC
 ‘The book is on the table’ (Bernander et al. Forthcoming)

According to Creissels (2019), the most important characteristic of an existential is that it changes the perspective between pivot (‘figure’ in his terminology) and coda (‘ground’). In a typical locational clause the event is viewed from the perspective of the pivot/figure, such as in Swahili ((8)b), in which *kitabu* ‘the book’ is the perspectival centre. In an existential, it is the other way around, and the coda is at the centre of attention, e.g. *mezani* ‘on the table’ in ((8)a). This is regardless of the position of the coda, as Swahili allows for a word order in which the coda/ground follows the pivot/figure (i.e. *kuna kitabu mezani*) without an apparent change in meaning.

The definition of an existential hence depends on its contrast with predicate locatives, or plain locational clauses, as Creissels (2019) calls them. A plain locational clause can answer questions about the location of an entity. For this purpose, Xhosa employs a locative copulative *se-*, such as in:

(9) Incwadi i-se-tafil-eni
 9.book SM9-COP.LOC-table-LOC⁵
 ‘The book is on the table’ [OS200315E]⁶

The predicate locative, then, refers to the location of an object, and has a primarily adverbial function (Hengeveld 1992). To achieve a different perspectivization of pivot/figure-coda/ground, Xhosa uses *-kho(na)*; in these examples, the short form is preferred by the consultant (see also section 2.3):

⁵ The locative suffix *-ini* (in example (9) there is vowel coalescence with the last vowel of *itafile* ‘table’) serves to form a locative noun, together with the prefix *e-*, which can also be seen in example (10), *etafileni* ‘on the table’.

⁶ Note that the language consultant, Onelisa Slater, has a preference for a definite translation in English. To render the referent indefinite, she prefers the existential construction as in example (10).

- (10) a. Ku-kho incwadi e-tafil-eni.
 SM17-be.present 9.book LOC-table-LOC
 ‘There is a book on the table.’
- b. E-tafil-eni ku-kho incwadi.
 LOC-table-LOC SM17-be.present 9.book
 ‘On the table there is a book.’ [OS200315E]

The examples in (10), which have expletive agreement based on the locative, can be considered true existentials in Xhosa: the coda is the perspectival centre. They also fulfil other criteria often mentioned in relation to existentials (e.g. Veselinova 2013): they have non-prototypical agreement, their word-order differs from the canonical word order in the language and the pivot is non-referential. Interestingly, then, another construction with *-kho(na)* is possible; with agreement according to the noun class. This construction also roughly expresses the “existence or the presence of someone or something in the context”, as defined by Bentley et al. (2013), and therefore has the same translation in English as the existential:

- (11) i-khona incwadi e-tafil-eni
 SM9-be.present 9.book LOC-table-LOC
 ‘There is a book on the table.’ [OS200315E]

This construction differs from the existential, as we shall see in section (4.3), and the construction in ((11)) is here analysed as a presentational, in which the noun phrase is introduced into the speech setting.

The true existential does not refer to the location of the object, such as the predicate locative in ((9)), and its primary function is not to introduce the entity into the discourse, as in ((11)), but to reverse the perspective of a predicate locative and present the coda as the centre of attention, as in ((1)-(2)) and ((10)). It does have an extended function as a presentational, however, in examples such as the following:

- (12) ku-khona aba-ntu aba-nga-sa-goduk-i-yo
 SM17-be.present 2-person 2RC-NEG-ANYMORE-go.home-NEG-REL
 ‘There were people who didn’t go home anymore...’ [BLN150924D_b]

It is a common extension of existential sentences that a new participant can be introduced as the pivot, in an ‘existential cleft’, such as in English *There are many students who work in supermarkets* (Creissels 2019: 15). The same can be said to be true for Xhosa.

As seen in the structure in ((6)), the coda is optional. When the location is unspecified, it is implicitly assumed to still be there (Francez 2010). The existential construction can leave the location unspecified (Hengeveld 1992), as in the following Xhosa example:

- (13) Ewe but i-nga-thi ku-kho ubu-longwe
 yes but SM9-POT-say SM17-be.present 14-cow.dung
 ‘Yes but there might be cow dung.’ [MTF170609D_f]

In Bantu existential constructions, locative agreement and the use of distinct copulas are common (Bernander et al. Forthcoming). Xhosa is no exception to this. Of the dedicated existential constructions attested in the world-wide typology by Creissels (2019), Xhosa exhibits a so-called *be_with-ILP* (Inverse-Locational Predication), as will be shown in the following section. This kind

of existential is not unusual in Bantu (Bernander et al. Forthcoming) but is hardly attested elsewhere (Creissels 2019).

2. The long and short forms of *-khona*

2.1 Copular element. Although *-kho(na)* is translated as ‘be present’ in this paper, it is strictly speaking not a verb. The Xhosa language employs several constructions in which the main predicate is not a verb, referred to as non-verbal predicates. Some of these use the copular verb *ukuba* ‘to be’, as with the recent past form *be-* in example ((14)), but Xhosa also exhibits constructions without such a copular verb. A copular morpheme is used that varies with the noun class, such as in examples ((15)-(16)):

- (14) (i)-**be**-ntle
SM9-**be.REC**-nice
‘It has been nice.’ [BLN150925D_c]
- (15) **Yi**-ntombazana.
9COP-9.girl
‘It is a girl.’ [BU160401O]
- (16) **Li**-sel(a) eli la-dl-(a) i-nkukhu y-onke
5COP-5.thief 5DEM.PRX SM.PST5-eat-FV 9-chicken 9-all
‘It’s a thief this one, it ate all the chicken.’ [BLN150927M_a]

In another type of non-verbal predication, then, *-khona* or *-kho* can be used. This can be considered a copular verbal element:

- (17) (ku)-khona ne-apile, ku-khon(a) i-banana
(SM17)-be.present COM-5.apple SM17-be.present 9-banana
- a-(ku)-kho nto i-nge-kho-yo
NEG-SM17-be.present 9.thing 9RC-NEG-be.present-REL
‘There are apples, there are bananas, there isn’t anything that isn’t there.’ [BLN150924D_b]

As mentioned in the introduction, it is characteristic of many Bantu languages that a copula is used for existential predication (Bernander et al. Forthcoming). The copular element *-khona* can have expletive agreement, in which case it is a prototypical existential; see section (4.2). Furthermore, it can agree with the pivot in presentational constructions; see section (4.3).

The existential *-kho(na)*, as well as the presentational, can be fully inflected for tense and aspect, here in the past imperfective:

- (18) Kwa-ku-khon(a) i-tshali
SM.PST17-IPFV17-be.present 9-shawl
‘There was a shawl.’ [MTF170609D_i]

In many other Bantu languages, such as Swahili, the existential locative copula is only used in the present (19), while a copular verb ‘be’ is needed in tensed contexts (19):

- (19) a. wa-tu wa-po [Swahili]
2-person SM2-LOC.COP16
‘There are people/people are there/available.’

- b. wa-tu wa-li-ku-w-a-po
 2-person SM2-PST-STM-be-FV-LOC.COP16
 ‘There were people.’ (Marten 2013: 47-48)⁷

This is not the case in Xhosa, as seen in ((18)). However, the copular verb *-ba* is sometimes used in the existential.

- (20) ku-**ba**-khon(a) ama-bhongu nee-ndlavini
 SM17-**be**-be.present 6-stick.fight COM:AUG-10.rogue
 ‘there are stick fighters and rogues...’ [BLN150925D_c]
- (21) Ndi-jong-(e) u(ku)ba ku-**be**-kho ke
 SM.PRT1SG-look-REC.CJ that SM17-**be**.REC-be.present then
 ngoku lo wo-mnakwethu wa-sweleka-yo
 now IDEM.PROX 1AS-1.brother SM.PST1-die-REL
 ‘I am looking for that there be this one (child) of my brother that passed away...’ [GU151208D_f]⁸

The recent past perfective form *be-* (from *-ba*) in example ((21)) appears to have been grammaticalized into a recent past marker, which can also precede *kukho*:

- (22) Ndi-hlupheka kakhulu ingase **be**-ku-kho n-omnye umntu kuba
 SM1-be.worried much that **be**.REC-SM17-be.present COM-other 1.person that
 ‘I’m very worried, I wish there was another person too because...’ [GU151208D_c]

This form is used interchangeably with *kubekho* by the same speaker in the same conversation. In conclusion, *-kho(na)* can take TAM inflection, with or without the copular verb *-ba*. Whether there are any conditions for the inclusion of *-ba* is a topic for future research. The following section deals with the possible background of *-kho(na)*.

2.2 Origins of -kho(na). It is common for existential expressions in the languages of the world to have close resemblance with some kind of locative construction (Hengeveld 1992). In Bantu languages, too, locative morphology is prevalent in the different existential constructions attested (Bernander et al. Forthcoming). As expected, then, the existential in Xhosa bears a resemblance to the locative on several levels. Firstly, the subject marker of noun class 17 in the prototypical existential is of locative origin. In several other Bantu languages, such as Swahili, locative phrases have the ability to function as a subject, in agreement with one of the three locative noun classes (see Marten 2013). The locative noun class 17 is not productive any more in Xhosa, nor in other Southern Bantu languages, unlike many Bantu languages further to the north (Creissels 2011). It now has a purely expletive use but is glossed SM17 (subject marker of noun class 17) in this article for Bantu comparative reasons. Secondly, the existential copula also has locative origin. It has the same form as the absolute pronoun of noun class 17 and has been claimed to have originated from this form (Louw and Jubase 1963: 123; du Plessis and Visser 1992: 239):

⁷ STM refers to ‘stem marker’ in Marten (2013).

⁸ A recent past such as in *ndijonge* results in an ongoing reading in this case, although *-jonga* ‘look’ is not a typical change-of-state verb (cf. Crane 2019: ex. 86, p.675).

- (23) ba-fumana i-thafa eli-hle, ba-hlala khona
 SM.PST2-find 5-plain 5RC-beautiful SM.PST2-stay there
 ‘They found a beautiful plain and stayed there.’ (Oosthuysen 2016: 105)
- (24) apho ku-xhelwe khona in-komo.
 there SM17-slaughter.PASS there 9-cattle
 ‘...where a cow was being slaughtered.’ [PSJ150517O]

As can be seen from the above examples, *khona* functions as a non-deictic locative. This is in line with the closely related language Zulu (Buell 2012). The language makes use of *apha* ‘here’ and *apho* ‘there’ as deictic locative pronouns.

However, I argue that the copula *-kho(na)* does not stem from the locative pronoun. Rather, in line with other Bantu languages such as Tswana, Shangaji and Digo (Bernander et al. Forthcoming), it is likely that the comitative *na* ‘be with’ is the origin of the second part of *kho-na* as an existential. According to Creissels (2019), this kind of ‘be_with’ existential is typical of Bantu and also occurs in some Chadic languages. The comitative can be used prefixed to a nominal to indicate possession, as in *u-na-mahashe* [SM1-COM-6.horses] ‘he has horses’ (Louw and Jubase 1963: 124).⁹ In combination with the locative *kho* of noun class 17, it can be argued that it expresses ‘there be with’. This can be compared with the Tswana example in ((25)). Creissels (2014) gives a negated example of the possessive use of the comitative predication in ((25)a), with the 1st person singular, and a corresponding example with the expletive *go*:¹⁰

- (25) a. Ga ke na mathatha [Tswana]
 NEG SM1SG be.with problems
 ‘I have not problems.’ lit. ‘I am not with problems.’
- b. Ga go na mathatha
 NEG there_{expl} be.with problems
 ‘There’s no problem.’ lit. ‘There_{expl} is not with problems.’ (Creissels 2014: 40)

I propose that the complex origins of *-khona* – a combination of the locative *kho* and the comitative *na* – have resulted in a ‘dividable’ unit. Synchronically, the semantics of this unit is not dividable; both the short and the long form express ‘be present’. The synchronic omission of *na* has other motivations, as will be discussed below.

The use of the long or short form is generally considered in the literature to be due to free variation, with the short form being the most commonly used (du Plessis and Visser 1992; Oosthuysen 2016). It has also been claimed that the short form is used in the existential with expletive agreement (example (26)), in contrast with the long form being used when the verb agrees with the subject (example (27)):

- (26) Ku-kho imi-yalezo? Ewe, ku-kho imi-yalezo.
 SM17-be.present 4-messages yes SM17-be.present 4-messages
 ‘Are there messages?’ ‘Yes, there are messages.’

⁹ The comitative can also be used in another kind of existential construction, here exemplified with Zulu. This type of construction also occurs in Xhosa but is not further considered in this paper:

Ku-ne-mali e-ningi e-lahlekile
 SM17-COM:AUG-9.money 9RC-9.much 9RC-lost:DJ
 ‘There’s a lot of money that has been lost.’ (Buell and De Dreu 2013: 443)

¹⁰ The affirmative has a somewhat different kind of construction, see Creissels (Forthcoming).

- (27) Lu-khona u-siba? Ewe lu-khona.
 SM11-be.present 11-pen yes SM11-be.present
 ‘Is there a pen?’ ‘Yes, it (is) there.’ (Kirsch and Skorge 2010: 167)

As seen from the examples in the introduction, this is clearly not the case. Both the short form and the long form can be used with either agreement, as seen in Table 1. The small corpus that is used for the present study, which contains approximately 30 000 tokens (6.5 hours of transcribed recordings), contains 308 instances of *-kho(na)*, not counting the pronominal/adverbial use exemplified in ((23) - (24)). These 308 instances are of the following kinds:

Table 1 Breakdown of different types of 308 instances of *-kho(na)*

	<i>-kho</i>	<i>-khona</i>
<i>Expletive agreement</i>	32	47
<i>Agreement with subject</i>	27	104
<i>Negative</i>	98	

From this table, we can see that the long form is the more commonly used for both kinds of agreement. The inflected *-khona*, such as that exemplified in ((27)), is by far the most common form.

Other explanations given in the literature can also be rejected based on this. For Zulu, (Buell 2005: 95) analyses *-na* as a stabilizer needed for phonological reasons, to satisfy a phonological minimality constraint, although no further details on this constraint are given. Buell and De Dreu (2013) state that *-khona* is used in the affirmative and *-kho* in the negative in Zulu. According to Oosthuysen (2016), *-na* is usually retained when *-khona* represents a known place, whether explicitly mentioned (28)) or not ((29)):

- (28) Wa-buyel-a e-Ncise ngokuba ya-yi-khona in-dlu
 SM.PST1-return-FV LOC-Ncise because SM.PST9-IPFV9-be.present 9-house
 y-akhe
 9AS-POSS3SG
 ‘S/he returned to Ncise because her/his house was there.’

- (29) uNombulelo u-khona
 1a.Nombulelo SM1-be.present
 ‘Nombulelo is present here/there.’ (Oosthuysen 2016:XX)

Counterexamples to this are easy to find; see for example ((10)) with a short form and the place specified. In what follows, I will instead argue for an analogy with the conjoint/disjoint distinction found in some TAM paradigms in Xhosa.

2.3 *-khona* and *-kho* in relation to disjoint vs. conjoint. As mentioned in the introduction, many Bantu languages, including Xhosa, make a distinction between two forms with the same tense-aspect. One form is used when there is a close connection with what follows the verb form (conjoint) and the other when there is no such close connection or when the verb form is clause-final (disjoint).

The following is an example in the present with a following object. In the present, the conjoint form is unmarked ((30)) and the disjoint is indicated by the morpheme *ya-* ((31))¹¹:

(30) (ba-vúl' ín-cwa:df)
SM2-open 9-book
'They open the book.'

(31) (bá-ya-yi-vú:l') (ín-cwa:df)
SM2-DJ-OM9-open 9-book
'They open it, the book.'

(Jokweni 1995: 31)

This distinction between conjoint and disjoint forms also occurs when the subject follows the verb. For the Bantu languages, these are considered inversion constructions, as the canonical word order is SVO. In these inversion constructions, the subject can follow the verb in a conjoint form if the verb takes expletive agreement, such as in example ((32)). Alternatively, the verb, in a disjoint form, can agree with the following subject, in which case the subject is dislocated and usually preceded by a phonological phrase break (see also Carstens and Mletshe 2015; Bloom Ström 2017):

(32) (Ku-gijim-a uNontle)
SM17-run-FV 1a.Nontle
'Nontle is running.'

[BN150927E]

(33) (ba-ya-dlal-a) (aba-ntwana)
SM2-DJ-play-FV 2-children
'They are playing, the children.'

[NF151210E]

Although *-kho/-khona* is not a verb, I argue that the distinction between a short and a long form is similar to the one made in the tense-aspect marking of ordinary verbs. It is possible that it has developed in analogy with the conjoint-disjoint distinction. Arguments for this are presented in what follows.

Firstly, there is a finality restriction. Although Bantu languages mark the distinction between conjoint and disjoint in different ways, there is consistency in that the conjoint form cannot occur in final position with nothing following; and that the disjoint form – allowed in final position – is the more marked one (van der Wal and Hyman 2017). The *-khona/-kho* distinction is in analogy with this. This is regardless of its use as an existential with expletive agreement or as a presentational with agreement with the theme. The longer (or more marked) form *-khona* occurs in final position¹², here in its use as a presentational:

(34) Ngokuba nee-ndlavini zi-zo-(ku-)b-e zi-khona
Because COM-10.rogue SM10-FUT-(INF)be-SBJV SM10-be.present
'Because the rogues will also be present.'

[BLN150925D_c]

¹¹ Parentheses indicate phonological phrasing in these examples. An apostrophe indicates vowel elision in the examples from Jokweni.

¹² This fact can be considered a counter-argument to the analysis of *-kho-na* as consisting of a locative and a comitative, as the comitative *na* can only occur followed by a noun phrase or a pronoun (Denis Creissels, p.c.). My hypothesis is that the analogy with the conjoint/disjoint is of a later date than the development of *-khona* as a complex form, and that the long *-khona* is therefore allowed in final position.

In the corpus material, the short form *-kho* is never in final position in the affirmative. Examples such as ((34)) are common but the existential *kukhona* is not found in final position in the material. This, however, is not strange if we consider that it introduces a referent in discourse and is therefore followed by this referent; see section (4.2). It is possible, however, in elicitation. For example, a phrase from the corpus like ((35)a) can be commented on with ((35)b):

- (35) a. kudala kwa-ku-khona u-buntu¹³
 long.ago SM.PST17-IPFV17-be.present 11-ubuntu
 ‘Long ago there was ubuntu.’ [PSJ150516D_a]
- b. kwa-ku-khona
 SM.PST17-IPFV17-be.present
 ‘There was.’ [OM190818E]

The short *-kho* is never final with either agreement type, and such constructions are also rejected in elicitation.

Secondly, in the negative, only the short form *-kho* is possible. This is also in line with the conjoint/disjoint distinction, which is rarely found in the negative. This has, amongst other explanations, been argued to be due to the inherent focal nature of negation (see van der Wal 2017: 35). The short form *-kho* is used in both the existential ((36)) and the presentational ((37)) negative constructions.

- (36) kwa-k(u)-nge-kho n-dawo
 SM.PST17-IPFV17-NEG-be.present 9-place
 ‘There was no place...’ [BLN150924D_b]
- (37) a-bu-kh(o) u-bu-hlungu lawo
 NEG-SM14-be.present AUG-14-pain 6DEM.MED
 ‘There is no pain there’ [MTF1706009D_i]

Interestingly, the augment (a nominal prefix preceding the root or the noun class prefix) is dropped in the negated existential, as in ((36)), where the *i-* augment of *indawo* ‘place’ is omitted, and retained with the presentational as in ((37)).¹⁴ Remember from examples ((32)-(33)) that the post-verbal subject is dislocated if the verb is in the disjoint form and there is a phonological phrase break. For the Nguni languages, the subject in these cases is analysed as being vP-internal (vP standing for ‘little VP’) in the case of the conjoint and vP-external (dislocated) in the case of the disjoint (van der Spuy 1993; Buell 2006; Buell and De Dreu 2013). In the negative, the augment always has to be omitted in the case of the vP-internal subject ((38)a), and this is only possible with expletive agreement. This is in analogy with the behaviour of the post-verbal object; this can occur vP-internally and the augment is necessarily omitted ((38)b). Crucially, when the augment is present, the object in ((38)c) is analysed as dislocated (Buell and De Dreu 2013). Xhosa behaves in the same way as Zulu in this respect.

¹³ A concept of compassion and humanity, often termed an African philosophy.

¹⁴ I find very few exceptions to this in the corpus. When the pivot is preceded by the comitative, the augment remains in the existential. The comitative *na-* followed by *imali* ‘money’ results in vowel coalescence. If there was no augment, the result would be *namali*:

- kwa-k(u)-nge-kho ne-mali yo-kubuya
 SM.PST17-IPFV17-NEG-be.present COM:AUG-9.money 9AS-to.return
 ‘There was no money to return...’ [BLN150924D_b]

- (38) a. A-ku-fik-anga muntu [Zulu]
 NEG-SM17-arrive-NEG.PST 1.person
 ‘Nobody came.’
- b. A-ngi-funi mali
 NEG-SM1SG-want-NEG 9.money
 ‘I don’t want any money.’
- c. A-ngi-fun-i i-mali.
 NEG-SM1SG-want-NEG AUG-9.money
 ‘I don’t want money.’ (Buell and De Dreu 2013: 430)

Normally, then, it is the conjoint form of the verb (together with the omission of augment and phonological phrasing) that indicates that the following element is vP-internal. In ((36)-(37)), the copula has the short form regardless of dislocation. So, although I argue that the short and long forms appear in different syntactic contexts along the lines of the conjoint and disjoint, it is not likely that the pivot following the short copula in the affirmative is vP-internal. This is only the case in the negative existential ((36)), and not in the negative presentational ((37)), nor in the affirmative, whether short *-kho* or long *-khona* is used. The absence or presence of the augment in the negative rather depends on the kind of morphosyntactic construction used. Consequently, the analogy with the conjoint/disjoint distinction is only partial. See also the phonological argumentation below.

The negative always takes the short form, even when the verb is final. It cannot be replaced with a long form, according to my consultant:

- (39) ngob(a) aba-ntwan(a) a-ba-se-kho
 because 2-child NEG-SM2-ANYMORE-be.present
 ‘Because the children are not here anymore.’ [MTF170609D_i]
 *ngoba abantwana abasekhona [OS190818E]

Thirdly, the short form is used when a relative particle morpheme follows *-kho*; a long form (i.e. **likhonayo*) is not accepted (Onelisa Slater, p.c.):

- (40) ub(a) u-ya-yi-thand-a kwe-lixesha li-kho-yo ke
 if SM2SG-DJ-OM9-love-FV LOC:AUG-5.time SM5-be.present-REL then
 ‘..if you love her (referring to *intombazana* ‘girl, cl.9’) at this time’ [BU160401D_c]

A fourth argument is that the short form *-kho* has to be used when the post-verbal element is used with the focus particle ‘only’. In many Bantu languages with a conjoint/disjoint distinction, such focus particles have to follow the conjoint form (van der Wal 2017).

- (41) Kodwa l(e)ya nto i-ba-kho phela
 But 9DEM.DIST 9.thing SM9-be-be.present only
- pha nge-xesha le-pasika
 16DEM.DIST INS:AUG-5.time 5AS:AUG-9.easter
 ‘But that thing is present/takes place only at Easter time.’ [BLN150925D_c]

There are no instances of the existential followed by ‘only’ in the corpus. They are accepted in elicitation, however, and the short form is strongly preferred by the speaker:

- | | | | | |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------|------|-------------|
| (42) | Kwa-ku-kho | imbiz-ana | qha | |
| | SM.PST17-IPFV17-be.present | 9.pot-DIM | only | |
| | 'There was only a small pot.' | | | [OS190815E] |

A final important argument is that inherently focused *wh*-elements also need to follow the conjoint form, such as in the elicited example in ((43)). The (corpus) example in ((44)) is both negative and followed by a content question word (the *ku-* in *akukho* is left out in this case due to fast/natural speech):

- | | | | | |
|------|---------------------|--------|----------|----------------|
| (43) | Ku-kho | ntoni | phayana? | |
| | SM17-be.present | what | there | |
| | 'What is there?' | | | [OS190815E] |
| (44) | A-kho | ntoni? | | |
| | NEG-be.present | what | | |
| | 'There isn't what?' | | | [MTF170609D_1] |

Answers to content questions are also generally given in the short form, and the long form is dispreferred. The following is the answer to the question *kwenzeka ntoni ekhaya?* 'What is happening at home?'

- | | | | | |
|------|----|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| (45) | a. | ku-kho | izi-vakashi | |
| | | SM17-be.present | 10-visitors | |
| | | 'There are visitors.' | | |
| | b. | ?kukhona | izivakashi | [AB190227E] |

But then, having presented all these arguments for a conjoint/disjoint distinction, the question arises as to whether there is also a difference in information structure. The disjoint form is often found to express predicate-centered focus in Bantu languages, while the conjoint form relates to term focus (van der Wal and Hyman 2017). If this is the case here, we would expect the examples with a long form to be used when the verb lexeme and/or tense-aspect are focused; we would expect the short form to be used when what follows – the pivot, in the case of the existential – is focused. In the examples from the corpus, it is hard to make a case for this. As the existential introduces an inactive referent, these arethetic sentences, i.e. all-new information. The choice of short or long form does not make a difference here.

Nor does the position of the coda make a difference. Remember from the introduction that the coda can precede the copula. In example ((46)), this is probably the case due to a heavy specification of the pivot, but the coda can also follow the short form plus pivot (cf. example (10)).

- | | | | | |
|------|---|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| (46) | e-ziko | kwa-ku-kho | imbiz-an(a) | e-ncinci |
| | LOC-stove | SM.PST17-IPFV17-be.present | 9.pot-DIM | 9RC-small |
| | e-sa-si-si-thi | xa | si-yi-biz-a | ngu-Nongcotsholo |
| | 9RC-SM.PST1PL-IPFV1PL-PRT-say | when | SM1PL-OM9-call-FV | 1COP-1a.Nongcotsholo |
| | 'On the stove there was a small pot that we called Nongcotsholo.' | | | [BLN150927M_a] |

The coda can also be implicit (see examples (72)-(74); those examples have the long form but this is also possible with the short form, as in (45)). No difference in information structure is therefore found between the short and the long forms, and there is also no difference due to the position of the coda.

The connection between the conjoint/disjoint distinction and term vs. predicate focus can be argued to be indirect in the Nguni languages. Instead, the distinction is mainly due to syntactic constraints, so that the disjoint form is used when the verb is final in some constituent (the Intonational Phrase (IP) or the vP), and the conjoint form when it is not (van der Spuy 1993). A vP-internal subject can be focused, and a dislocated one cannot (Buell and De Dreu 2013). A diagnostic for dislocation is that the noun phrase following the verb (always a subject with *-kho(na)*) is often preceded by a phrase break. Phonological phrasing can therefore be an indication of a conjoint/disjoint alternation.

In this case, however, an argument cannot be made for a phrase break following *-kho(na)*, on the basis of the data analysed. A small sample of phrases, of which a few examples are given in ((47)-(51)), were elicited from different speakers (natural language samples are much more difficult to measure) and the length of the vowel /o/ in *-kho(na)* was measured. In affirmative presentationals ((47)-(48)) as well as in existentials ((49)-(50)), the vowel length remained approximately the same (around 90-100msec). A difference was found, however, in the negative ((51)), in which the vowel is around 60msec and audibly shorter.

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|--|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------|----------------|------------------|------------|
| (47) | ú-khó
SM3-be.present | úm-phanda
3-barrel | om-khúlu
3AC-big | ke
then | phaya
there | éntla
inside | |
| | ‘There is a big barrel there inside.’ | | | | | | [OM190222] |
| (48) | bá-khón(a)
SM2-be.present | ábá:-ntu
2-people | é-ndI-in(i)
LOC-house-LOC | | | | |
| | ‘There are people in the house/at home.’ | | | | | | [NF161212] |
| (49) | kú-khó
SM17-be.present | ábá:-ntu
2-people | é-ndI-in(i)
LOC-house-LOC | | | | |
| | ‘There are people in the house/at home.’ | | | | | | [NF161212] |
| (50) | kú-khóna
SM17-be.present | úm-phánda
3-barrel | om-khúlu
3AC-big | ke
then | phaya
there | é:ntla
inside | |
| | ‘There is a big barrel there inside.’ | | | | | | [OM190222] |
| (51) | a-kú-khó
NEG-SM17-be.present | m-phanda
3-barrel | om-khúlu
3AC-big | ke
then | phaya
there | éntla
inside | |
| | ‘There is no big barrel there inside.’ | | | | | | [OM190222] |

This brief analysis is not, of course, based on a proper phonetic investigation but rather on careful phonological transcription. The results give a first indication that phonological phrasing is not a distinguishing factor in the alternation between *-kho* and *-khona*. That the analogy between *-kho(na)* and the conjoint/disjoint distinction is imperfect should not surprise us, as *-kho(na)* is different from a regular verb. We also know that phrasing alone is not an argument for a conjoint/disjoint distinction. Rather, if a conjoint/disjoint distinction exists, this *may* be reflected in the phrasing (van der Wal 2017).

In brief: there are strong arguments for considering the use of a shorter and a longer form of *-kho(na)* as being part of the conjoint/disjoint paradigm. It is unexpected, based on what we know about this distinction. Segmental marking of conjoint/disjoint is fused with tense-aspect morphology in the languages that exhibit the distinction (van der Wal 2017). A possible hypothesis is that this copula construction has developed similar ‘behaviour’ in analogy with the conjoint/disjoint distinction, and that this was possible or logical for speakers due to the complex morphology of the copula. An alternative analysis is that there were two starting points, one with *-kho* ‘there PIVOT’

and one with *-kho-na* ‘there be_with PIVOT’. These then developed certain uses that do not overlap, although in fact they do overlap in most contexts. In any case, the use of the short and long form now matches with the conjoint/disjunct distinction in several aspects.

3. Definiteness in Xhosa

Section (2) addressed the first aim of this paper, regarding the form of the copula. We now turn to the second aim: to answer the question on function. Is there a difference in meaning and use between the copula with expletive agreement and the copula with agreement with the noun class? And how does the use of the existential and the presentational relate to definiteness?

Xhosa, like many other Bantu languages, lacks articles, both definite and indefinite. A definite article, in languages with such articles, indicates that the intended referent of the noun phrase can be identified, or rather that the speaker assumes that the hearer can identify it (Chafe 1976; Lambrecht 1994; Lyons 1999). One might also say that the definite noun phrase signals that reference is made to a unique entity; there is only one referent satisfying the description used. In the following example, the hearer knows that reference is being made to the bride of the wedding just mentioned (Lyons 1999: 7):

(52) I’ve just been to a wedding. **The bride** wore blue.

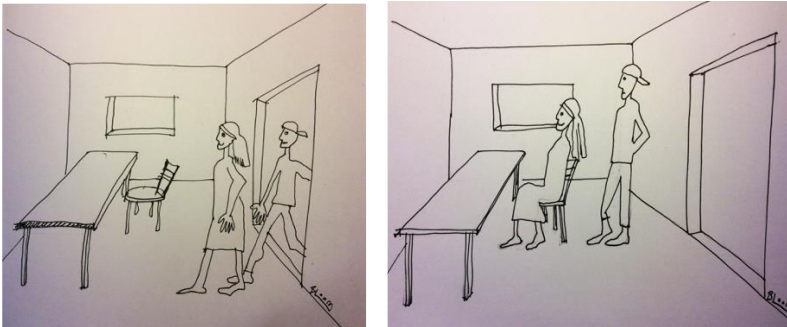
This is an associative use of the definite article. The hearer can infer the reference from his or her knowledge that weddings generally involve brides. The referential use of definite descriptions is dependent on context, general knowledge, and so on, and is therefore pragmatic. We cannot abstract from the pragmatic usage of definite descriptions when aiming to explain their meaning (Hawkins 1978). Givón (2001) points out that in languages with *and* without articles, the use of definite NPs is usually determined by the discourse-pragmatic context. In other words, uniqueness has to be understood relative to a particular context (Lyons 1999).¹⁵

Perhaps the pragmatic context has even more importance in languages without articles. Semantically, Xhosa nouns are ambiguously indefinite or definite. This can be shown by an anaphoricity test (Dayal 2018) such as the following, in which ‘girl’ in the first sentence is treated as newly introduced, and indefinite, on the basis of the picture given below the example. In the second sentence, ‘girl’ is definite, referring back to the previously mentioned girl:

(53) a. **in-tombazana** ne-n-kwenkwe ba-ngena e-kamer-eni
 9-girl COM:AUG-9-boy SM2-enter LOC-room-LOC
 ‘A girl and a boy enter a room.’

b. **in-tombazana** i-hlala e-situlw-eni in-kwenkwe i-ma emva
 9-girl SM9-sit LOC-chair-LOC 9-boy SM9-stand behind
 kwa-khe
 17AS-POSS3SG
 ‘The girl sits on the chair (and) the boy stands behind her.’ [OM190222S]

¹⁵ It is hard to find exceptions to this. (Lyons 1999: 8) gives *the Pope* as an example of a uniquely referring noun. A reviewer of the present paper points out that this is not entirely the case and gives the following example (which is in the plural, however): *Popes have always been weird people, obsessed with power at any point in history.*

Figure 1 Story board used for example ((53))

From this, it can be concluded that the bare NP *intombazana* ‘girl’ can be either unique or non-unique, i.e. it is ambiguous. The same goes for *inkwenkwe* ‘boy’. The ambiguous status of Xhosa bare NPs is shown with further tests by Carstens and Mletshe (2019). Bare NPs in other Bantu languages have also been argued to be ambiguously (in)definite (Mojapelo 2007; Asiiimwe 2014). However, speakers of languages without articles are still expected to be able to indicate to a hearer that there is a unique referent, or that they think that the hearer can identify the intended referent. Indeed, it has been shown that bare nouns in languages without definite articles can have anaphoric, definite readings (Despić 2019).

For bare noun languages, then, we need to find out if the language signals in some other way that a referent is (non-)unique or (non-)identifiable. Asiiimwe (2014) shows how the (in)definite interpretation of bare nouns is determined by knowledge shared between discourse participants in the Bantu language Runyankore-Rukiga. Ambiguity is often reduced through nominal (unique entities, proper nouns) and verbal (including tense-aspect) semantics. For example, the noun *omukazi* ‘woman’ in the following sentence is necessarily unique due to its relationship with the subject proper noun:

- | | | | | |
|------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------|----------------------|
| (54) | Baine | naakunda | omukazi. | [Runyankore-Rukiga] |
| | Baine | ni-a-kund-a | o-mu-kazi | |
| | PN.Baine | PRES-1.3SG-love-FV | IV-1-woman | |
| | ‘Baine loves his wife.’ | | | (Asiiimwe 2014: 156) |

Of course, ambiguity remains in many cases, and the question here is what other means the speaker may make use of in order to disambiguate identifiable and non-identifiable referents.

Certain morphosyntactic elements have been argued to play a role in the expression of definiteness in Bantu languages. Firstly, the augment is a nominal prefix that is used in a subset of Bantu languages. In those languages, the augment can in some cases be omitted, and has been analysed as a definiteness or specificity marker for certain languages, including Xhosa (Visser 2008). Bloom Ström and Miestamo (Forthcoming), however, show that the presence of the nominal augment does not indicate referentiality in present-day Nguni languages, although the – exclusively non-factual – contexts in which the augment can be omitted indicate that such a distinction was previously productive. For some speakers, a distinction in certain non-factual contexts can still be made.

Secondly, cross-referencing of the object on the verb by means of an object marker is a strategy that has been claimed to indicate a definite reading of the object noun phrase. It has, however, been shown that object marking is rather an indication of syntactic structuring in the Nguni

languages; it is strictly required when a noun phrase object is dislocated or extraposed (Buell 2005; Adams 2010; Halpert 2012; Zeller 2012). This extraposing has an information structural background, as the extraposed object noun phrases are mostly topical. They therefore often – but not necessarily – receive a definite interpretation.

Thirdly, the demonstrative is often used by speakers as a strategy when they are asked to translate a definite phrase from English into Xhosa or other Bantu languages. The demonstrative adds a deictic meaning, however, and is not needed in a definite noun phrase, as ((53)b) shows.

In this paper, I examine the role of a special kind of inversion construction, namely the existential, as a strategy to mark a referent as inactive and new. Is the referent also signalled as non-identifiable through this? And does it follow that the existential is a strategy for signalling that the noun phrase is indefinite? It has previously been shown for many Bantu languages that information structure plays a role in the ordering of elements in a sentence. The activation state or accessibility of a referent, i.e. how accessible the speaker assumes that the referent is to the hearer – whether it is totally new information or whether it is the topic that is under discussion right now – has influence on word order. For example, the pre-verbal position is often used for discourse-old objects (van der Wal 2009: 178). This is the result of left-dislocation and these objects are often highly accessible to the hearer. This position is also used for topic shift (van der Wal 2009: 180). The notion of activation state interacts with definiteness as discourse-old objects, for instance, are often definite.

For example, Asimwe (2014) argues that in an identifying copulative in Runyankore-Rukiga, a reversed word order can render a bare noun indefinite. The noun in complement position receives an indefinite reading (55a), while the reference to the existence of a role as expressed by the noun in subject position renders the noun definite (55b):

- (55) a. Kato ni omu-hiigi [Runyankore-Rukiga]
Kato COP 1-hunter
‘Kato is a hunter.’
- b. Omu-hiigi ni Kato
1-hunter COP Kato
‘The hunter is Kato.’ (Asimwe 2014: 136)

The role of different word orders and morphosyntactic constructions in the expression of definiteness needs further examination. In a Xhosa construction with a right-dislocated subject, for example, this subject is a topic and appears to be always definite:

- (56) li-ya-khal-(a) i-zim
SM5-DJ-cry-FV 5-giant
‘The giant cries.’¹⁶ [PSJ1505170]

Another morphosyntactic construction in Xhosa is agreeing inversion, in which the verb agrees with the subject, but this subject is not dislocated but in a close bond with the verb. The construction is – at least in the limited examples available – used with inactive referents that are introduced in the discourse, but where the whole proposition indicates a new turn of events. Although new, these subjects are interpreted as definite due to common knowledge (Bloom Ström 2017):

¹⁶ This example is from a story published in Bloom Ström (2017) in which the giant in question is a discourse topic.

- (57) la-tshona i-langa
 SM.PST5-set-FV 5-sun
 'The sun set.' [PSJ150517O]

On the other hand, as mentioned in the introduction, an existential VS construction is often used for discourse-new referents. The remainder of this paper will therefore examine the Xhosa existential construction in terms of the role it plays in (in)definiteness distinctions.

4. The existential and definiteness

This section examines the existential in Xhosa and its use. In many other languages of the world, the existential is used when the pivot is indefinite. A brief introduction to this link is given in section (4.1). Thereafter, we will analyse the Xhosa existential with *-kho(na)* in section (4.2).

4.1 The role of the existential in indefinite constructions. In English and many other languages existential constructions do not usually have definites as complements (Milsark 1977: 4):

- (58) *There is the wolf at the door.

This is referred to as the 'definiteness restriction' (Milsark 1977) (also often 'definiteness effect') and is used in the literature as evidence for the indefiniteness of complements in existential constructions. Definite noun phrases as in ((58)) – including proper names, anaphoric pronouns and noun phrases determined with demonstratives or possessives – pattern with universally quantified NPs (e.g. all, every) (example (59)) and are therefore analysed as also being expressions of universal quantification by Milsark (1977). Because they are expressions of quantification, and 'there be' implies existential quantification of the complement, their use following 'there be' would imply double quantification, and is therefore ungrammatical (Milsark 1977: 6):

- (59) *There was everyone in the room.

Existential sentences, then, are interesting for studies of (in)definiteness. For example, Matthewson (1999) argues in the case of St'át'imcets that a certain set of determiner phrases are indefinite. One piece of evidence for this is that these determiner phrases are possible in existential sentences. She shows that, just as in English, weak quantifiers ((60)) (in this case 'many') and strong quantifiers ('all' in (61)) are contrasted in the existential. The indefinites under analysis pattern with the weak quantifiers and are accepted ((62)):

- (60) wa7 [i cw7ít-a míxalh] [láku7 sqwém-a] [St'át'imcets]
 be [DET.PL many-DET bear] [DEIC mountain-DET]
 'There are many bears on that mountain.'

- (61) *wa7 [tákem i míxalh-a] [láku7 sqwém-a]
 be [all DET.PL bear-DET] [DEIC mountain-DET]
 '*There are all (the) bears on that mountain.'

- (62) wa7 [ti míxalh-a] [láku7 sqwém-a]
 be [DET bear-DET] [DEIC mountain-DET]
 'There is a bear on that mountain.' (Matthewson 1999: 106)

A restriction on definite complements is even taken as argument in distinguishing the existential from other, similar constructions in Pirahã (Salles and Matthewson 2016). The authors assume that the restriction on definites as pivots in existential constructions is universal. Based on this universal restriction, a construction that does not accept a definite expression as complement is analysed as a true existential in Pirahã. As possessives and pronouns are definite in the language, a construction that cannot take possessives and pronouns as complements is analysed as an existential. This is the case, in Pirahã, with the locative copula in combination with a possessive morpheme, *xao xáagá*:

- (63) *tí xao xáagá [Pirahã]
 I POSS LOC
 Intended: ‘There is me here.’ (Salles and Matthewson 2016)

Consequently, a construction that occurs with possessives and pronouns, as well as with bare nouns, is interpreted as a predicate locative, such as with the ‘plain’ *xáagá* in ((64)):

- (64) tí xáagá-há [Pirahã]
 I LOC-EVID
 ‘There is me here.’ (Context: The speaker sees herself on a picture) (Salles and Matthewson 2016)

Following this, bare nouns are argued to be indefinite, as they can occur as complements of *xao xáagá*. Bare nouns in Pirahã are analysed as indefinites with a wider range of interpretations than indefinites in languages with a definite/indefinite distinction.

This argumentation appears somewhat circular. The argument for calling a construction ‘existential’ here is that it cannot have definite complements. And then when the construction has received this analysis, it is used as proof that bare NPs are indefinite, because they can occur as complements in this existential.

Moreover, as pointed out in several publications (Lyons 1999; Creissels 2019), definites do occur as complements in existential constructions, and not only in the so called ‘list reading’ (‘What have we got to eat? Well, there’s the chicken, the bacon...’). There is considerable variation between dialects and individuals, such that many speakers of English accept the following (Lyons 1999: 239):

- (65) There’s John waiting at the door for you.
 (66) Go and open the door; there’s the postman coming up the drive.

In other languages, too, there are special situations in which the complement of the existential can be definite, such as in French and Hausa:

- (67) Y a Jean qui t-attend. [French]
 there is Jean who you-awaits
 ‘Jean’s waiting for you.’ (lit. ‘There’s Jean who is waiting for you.’) (Lyons 1999: 239)
- (68) àkwai mù cikin màganàĩ [Hausa]
 EXIST IPL in matter.DEF
 ‘We are involved in the matter.’ (lit. ‘There is us in the matter.’) (Newman 2000: 178)

In conclusion, the occurrence of bare NPs as pivots cannot be taken as straightforward evidence that such NPs are indefinite. Nevertheless, definite pivots do tend to be unusual, and this tendency is stronger – and possibly even a constraint – in some language varieties (Lyons 1999).

4.2 The existential with *-kho(na)*. With this background to the link between existential construction and indefiniteness in mind, we now turn to Xhosa existentials. The research questions we want to answer here are whether *-kho(na)* is used to introduce indefinite and inactive referents into discourse, and whether there is a definiteness effect with the existential in Xhosa.

The existential has the strict order Copula Pivot. As discussed in the introduction, the main function of an existential is to reverse the perspective from the pivot (as in a predicate locative) to the coda (whether explicitly mentioned or not). The existential, then, does not answer a question about the location of an entity, such as in a predicate locative. That the pivot is indefinite seems to naturally follow from this. In the examples from the corpus, all pivots following the copula *-kho(na)* do indeed have an indefinite reading.

(69) ku-khon(a) ii-gusha e-zinantsik-eni
SM17-be.present 10-sheep LOC-10.those.place-LOC
'There are sheep at those places.' [PSJ150516D_c]

(70) aba-ntu ba-krokrel(a) ubangathi ku-khon(a) aba-ntu
2-person SM.PST2-suspect-FV that SM17-be.present 2-person

kwe-zi ngxowa
LOC-10.DEM.PRX 10.bags
'they got suspicious that there might be people in those bags.' [PSJ150517O]¹⁷

(71) Ku-kh(o) u-nyana o-wa-lusa-yo
SM17-be.present 1a-son 1RC-SM.PST1-herd-REL

aph(e) ku-le-k(h)aph(a)
16DEM.PROX LOC-9DEM.PROX-5.home
'There was a shepherd in this homestead.' [BU160401O]

Typically, in those examples that can be considered presentational uses of the existential ('existential cleft'; see section 1.2), the non-identifiable referent is specified with a relative clause or similar:

(72) ngaba mhlembe ku-khon(a) in-t(o) e-qubul-isa-ko
if maybe SM17-be.present 9-thing 9RC-emergency-CAUS-REL
'if maybe there is something that causes an emergency.' [MTF170609D_c]

(73) (i)-be-ntle ukuba kanti (ku)-khon(a) um-ntu
SM9-be.REC-nice that actually SM17-be.present 1-person

o-no-mdla nge-ndlel(a) e-si-phil-a nga-yo
1RC-COM-interest INS:AUG-9.way 9RC-SM1PL-live-FV INS-9PRO
'It is nice that there is actually someone who is interested in the way we live.' [BLN150925D_c]

¹⁷ Context: in the folktale, a group of men have called the giant in order to talk to it, and the giant has a bag. There are two girls in the bag, whom the giant intends to eat.

- (74) ku-khona le nto ku-th-(i)w-a yi-rwabaxa,
 SM17-be.present 9DEM.PROX 9.thing SM17-say-PASS-FV 9COP-11.rwabaxa,
 u-ya-l-az(i) u-rwabaxa?
 SM2SG-DJ-OM11-know 11-rwabaxa
 ‘There is this thing it is called *rwabaxa*¹⁸, do you know *urwabaxa*?’ [STP160430D_c]

This is also the case in Zulu:

- (75) ku-khona um-ntwana o-cul-ile-yo [Zulu]
 SM17-be.present 1-child 1RC-sing-REC.DJ-REL
 ‘A child sang. There’s a child who sang.’ (Buell 2005: 156)

Moreover, the referents are indeed inactive, i.e. new. There are a few instances when *-kho(na)* is used in two turns following each other; however, this appears to be mere repetition of what the previous speaker said, for confirmation. In the following turns, for example, speaker A ((76)) introduces the referent; the pivot refers to an unknown person in the chief’s place. Speaker B follows up (in the immediately following turn), referring to the same person.

- (76) A: Ku-be-khon(a) um-nt(u) e-ndaw-eni ya-khe
 SM17-REC-be.present 1-person LOC-9.place-LOC 9AS-POSS3SG
 ‘There was a person in his/her place.’ [GU151208D_f]
- B: Ewe ku-be-kh(o) um-ntu o-za-wu-thi ku-bonakal-e ukuba
 yes SM17-REC-be.present 1-person 1RC-FUT-INF-say SM17-clear-SBJV that
 ‘Yes there is a person who will make it clear that...’ [GU151208D_f]

Evidence that the existential is used for inactive referents also comes from questions. The answer to the question *kwenzeka ntoni ekhaya?* ‘what is happening at home?’ is athetic sentence, repeated from ((45)):

- (77) a. ku-kho izi-vakashi
 SM17-be.present 10-visitors
 ‘There are visitors.’ [AB190227E]

Content questions in which the referent is non-identifiable are also often formed with the existential construction, and only the short form is accepted, as expected from what we’ve seen in section (2.3):

- (78) Ku-kho bani phayana?
 SM17-be.present who there
 ‘Who is there?’ [OS190815E]

In conclusion, the existential in Xhosa – in its use as an existential and in its use as a presentational – is used when the referent is inactive, and in all the examples in the corpus, it is also indefinite. What about a definiteness effect? Is the existential restricted to indefinites? The answer to this is no. In elicitation, an answer to ((78)) can include a definite referent such as a personal name ((79)) or a possessive construction ((80)-(81)). The short form is natural in such an answer:

¹⁸ A product made of goat’s milk.

- (79) Ku-kho u-Zintle
SM17-be.present 1a-Zintle
'There is Zintle.'
[OS190815E]
- (80) Ku-kho um-nyeni wa-m
SM17-be.present 1-husband 1-1SG.POSS
'There is my husband.'
[OS190815E]
- (81) Ku-kho u-nyana wa-m apha.
SM17-be.present 1a-son 1-1SG.POSS here
'There is my son here.'
[OM181212E]

The existential is hence not restricted to indefinites. However, all natural examples in the corpus occur with indefinite referents as complements. It can therefore be said that the existential in Xhosa is used for inactive, but not necessarily non-familiar/non-identifiable (i.e. indefinite) referents. The construction favours an indefinite reading, however. It appears that the existential, as used with definites, is rather marginal and can be compared with the English list-reading discussed in section (4.1). A definite pivot is therefore not accepted in an out-of-the-blue context such as the following:

- (82) a: Awusanxibanga kakuhle namhlanje.
'You are dressed so well today'.
- b: ? Kukho uZintle ekhaya, u-ndi-bolek-e le
SM17-be.present Zintle LOC.home SM1-OM1SG-borrow-REC 5DEM.PRX
lokhwe.
5.dress
Intended: 'There is Zintle at home, she lent me this dress.'

4.3 Presentational sentence with -kho(na). As mentioned in the introduction, there is a close relationship between the prototypical existential and a construction in which there is agreement with the theme on the copular verb *-kho(na)*.

The function of a presentational sentence is to introduce a new referent into discourse, and to call the attention of the addressee to its – hitherto unnoticed – presence in the speech setting (Lambrecht 1994: 39). Its communicative function is therefore not used to predicate something about this referent. The referent can be introduced by a noun phrase ((83)) and it can also be a speech participant ((84)):

- (83) in-gxaki i-khona
9-problem SM9-be.present
'There is a problem.'
[PSJ150516D_b]
- (84) ndi-khona
SM1SG-be.present
'I am here.'
[ND161210M]

In Xhosa, the non-verbal copula *-kho(na)* can thus be used in an existential construction with expletive agreement and in a presentational construction with agreement with the theme argument. Unlike the existential *-kho(na)*, which has a strict Copula Pivot word order, the theme noun phrase can precede or follow the copula in the presentational sentence:

- (85) Na-ma-bhong(u) a-be-khona
 COM-6-stick.fight SM6-be.REC-be.present
 ‘And there were stick fights.’ [BLN150925D_c]
- (86) zi-khona iin-komo ezi-mbini
 SM10-be.present 10-cows 10AC-two
 ‘There are two cows.’ [STP160430D_a]
- (87) e-Mandlwani i-khona yonke la nto e-yenziwa
 LOC-Mandlwani-LOC SM9-be.present 9.all 9DEM.DIST 9.thing 9RC-be.done
 pha
 there
 ‘In Mandlawani there are all those things being done there.’ [STP160430D_c]
- (88) Ingaba kudala sa-si-khon(a) isi-kolo
 Q long.ago SM.PST7-IPFV7-be.present 7-school
 na-ni-fund-a kudala?
 SM.PST2PL-IPFV2PL-learn-FV long.ago
 ‘Were there schools back in the days, did you (pl) study back then?’ [BU160401D_a]

The presentational construction is used to form questions in which the subject is mentioned. This is in contrast with the existential, which is used when the pivot itself is questioned; see ((78)). Note that the short form *-kho* has to be used when a question word follows, such as *nini* ‘when’ in ((90)):

- (89) Li-khona igumbi la-nga-sese?
 SM5-be.present 5.room 5AS-LOC-toilet
 ‘Is there a toilet?’ [OS190818E]
- (90) i-kho nini i-pati?
 SM9-be.present when 9-party
 ‘When is there a party?’ [OS190818E]
- (91) a. *bakhona abavakashi ekhaya?*
 ‘Are there visitors at home?’
 b. ba-khona aba-vakashi
 SM2-be.present 2-visitors
 ‘There are visitors.’ [AB190227E]

The presentational construction cannot be concluded to play a role in disambiguating between indefinite and definite readings in Xhosa. In the examples from the corpus, the referent is usually indefinite, as in the following:

- (92) Kwa-ths-(i)w-a hayi (u)-khon(a) um-nt(u) o-ta-wu-khamba na-we
 SM.PST17-say-PASS-FV no SM1-be.present 1-person 1RC-FUT-INF-go COM-2SG.PRO
 ‘It was said, no, there is a person that will go with you.’ [MTF170609D_c]¹⁹

¹⁹ Note that *kwathsiwa* would in standard Xhosa be *kwathiwa*. This example is from the Bhaca variety of the Mount Frere region; see Bloom Ström (2018: 109).

- (93) ingaba u-khona um-ahluko o-kho-yo
 could SM3-be.present 3-difference 3RC-be.present-REL
 ‘could there be a difference that is present...’ [BU160401D_a]

However, this is not necessarily the case and there is no definiteness effect. The subjects can be definite, such as when preceded by a demonstrative in example ((41)), and in the following examples. In ((94)), reference is made to the unique noun God, and in ((95)) a pronoun is used in a situational context, referring to someone who’s around in the speech situation (see also (84)):

- (94) U-khon(a) u-thix(o) u-kholos-a nga-ye
 SM1-be.present 1a-God SM.SG2-believe.in-FV INS-1.PRO
 ‘God exists, you believe in him.’ [MTF170609D_i]

- (95) Tshin(a) esi-sa-khona
 1PL.PRO 1PL.RC-still-be.present
 ‘We who are still here...’ [MTF170609D_i]

In some cases, the construction with theme argument can be said to indicate pure existence or availability, rather than being presentational. The referent in such examples has previously been mentioned and is active. The referring noun phrase is often omitted in such cases.

- (96) E-ya-yi-khona ngok(o) a-yi-se-kho ngoku
 9RC-SM.PST9-IPFV9-be.present then NEG-SM.NEG9-ANYMORE-be.present now
 ‘Which (kind of bird mentioned earlier) existed then and doesn’t exist anymore?’ [MTF170609D_i]

- (97) E-b(u)sika zi-bunqab-a kodwa z(i)-khon-a
 LOC-14.winter SM10-be.scarce-FV but SM10-exist-FV
 ‘During winter they are scarce (fish, previously mentioned) but they are there.’ [BU160401D_b]

In sum, the function of the presentational with *-kho(na)* is to introduce a referent into the speech situation.

5. Conclusions

This paper has outlined the different uses of the copula *-kho(na)*, in a long and a short form and with two different kinds of agreement. With expletive agreement, the copula forms a prototypical existential construction together with the pivot and the optional coda. The existential turns the perspective around from the pivot to the coda (explicit or not). The existential has an extended use as a presentational in an ‘existential cleft’. When there is agreement with the theme subject, on the other hand, the copula is used in a presentational construction. A close connection between the two is common cross-linguistically.

The paper has answered a number of questions regarding these constructions and their different uses. First of all, the copula was assumed to be a so-called ‘be_with’ type existential, originally formed by a locative element *kho* and the comitative *na-*. The comitative existential is typical for the Bantu language family. The complex origins of the copula were proposed to be the reason that there is a long and a short form, i.e. the second part can be dropped. Secondly, the paper has presented arguments in support of an analysis of the short/long distinction along the lines of the conjoint/disjoint distinction. The short and long forms of the copula cannot be argued to be used in the same contexts as the tense-aspect forms that occur in a conjoint and disjoint form. Instead, my proposal is that its use has been shaped along the same lines and in analogy with conjoint/disjoint

distinction, so that there is morphosyntactic conditioning of its use just like with the conjoint/disjoint distinction (e.g. the short form cannot be final in the affirmative) but no conditioning based on information structure.

Following this, I turned to the question of how the different agreement patterns relate to definiteness. In order to answer this question, an introduction to definiteness in Xhosa and the state of our current knowledge in this respect was presented. This knowledge is rather limited, in fact even with regard to the whole language family. Different word orders have been shown to be sensitive to information structure in Bantu languages. Because of the relationship between information structural notions and definiteness, word order is examined here as a possible disambiguation strategy in Xhosa. Specifically, the existential construction is interesting because there is a cross-linguistic tendency for pivots in existential constructions to be indefinite.

The main findings of the paper, then, are that the existential is often used for indefinite referents in Xhosa. These can be non-referential, or referential through specification in the same sentence or through situational use. The referents are always inactive/new. In the presentational construction, an inactive referent is introduced into discourse. The referent can be definite or indefinite. The existential is overwhelmingly used for indefinite referents, but can in fact also be used with definite referents. Such uses were not found in natural speech but accepted as exceptional uses in elicitation.

Therefore, identifiability can not be shown to be a determining factor in the choice of one of these constructions. The existential is used when the coda is the perspectival centre, or it is used as a presentational. In that case, its use is similar to the presentational in which agreement is with the theme. The identifiability of a referent perhaps follows from these functions. In any case, the pivot in an existential is overwhelmingly indefinite, although it might not be the main function of the existential to render the referent indefinite. This paper has answered questions about the constructions with *-kho(na)* in Xhosa and added a piece to a still incomplete puzzle on definiteness in Xhosa and Bantu.

Abbreviations

The glossing follows the Leipzig Glossing Rules and suggested abbreviations. The following abbreviations are in addition:

AS	associative
CJ	conjoint
DJ	disjoint
FV	final vowel
IPFV	imperfective
MED	medial
OM	object marker
POT	potential
PRT	participial
RC	relative concord
REC	recent past
SM	subject marker

Numbers refer to noun classes

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