

# Subject case alternation in negated existential, locative, and possessive clauses in Latvian

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**Abstract.** The goal of this article is to analyse the alternation between the genitive and nominative cases in Latvian. As the alternation between genitive and nominative cases is possible in all clauses in which the verb *būt* ‘to be’ is used as an independent verb, this article examines existential, locative, and also possessive clauses, while also demonstrating that distinguishing these clause types is problematic for Latvian utilising the criteria given in the linguistic literature. Clauses containing the negative form of *būt* ‘to be’, i.e. *nebūt*, form the foundation of those selected for this study, as only in these sentences the genitive/nominative alternation can be seen for the subject in Latvian.

There are only fragmentary descriptions of existential clauses as a unique semantic type, primarily in connection with the function of the verb *būt* ‘to be’ and the problems associated with distinguishing its independent and auxiliary meanings. Word order in existential, locative, and possessive clauses has, until now, been examined in connection with typical clause expanders – adverbial modifiers and the dative of possession as well as the information structure of the clause. At the same time, case choice for objects in negative existential clauses has traditionally been one of the most studied themes

regarding language standardisation. In order to determine which factors affect the choice of either the genitive or nominative case, a corpus study was done analysing 979 examples: 882 with a genitive subject and 97 with a nominative subject.

It was found that a connection exists between the definiteness of the subject, word order, and case choice; however, this manifests only as a tendency rather than as a strict rule.

**Keywords:** existential clauses, possessive clauses, locative clauses, genitive, nominative, subject

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## 1 Introduction

This article is devoted to a corpus analysis of negative existential clauses in Latvian. Existential clauses are interesting in the sense that in addition to describing “bare existence” they are also used to express location and possession. For this reason, there is a continuing discussion in linguistics as to the question of whether three different clause types are to be distinguished or if they all are actually varieties of a single clause type, describing location, possession, and the like (for further discussion on this topic, see Kalēdaitē 2002, 2012). There are languages where each subtype has its own unique construction or uses verbs with a different lexical meaning for each type of clause; the definiteness/indefiniteness and other referential properties of the subject are also important in this regard (e.g. Creissels 2014; Myler 2014). However, there are also languages in which there is an absence of unique features allowing one to distinguish existential clauses from locative and possessive clauses (see Creissels *op. cit.*; Myler *op. cit.*). Therefore, it is important to examine Latvian to determine whether there are any formal criteria which would allow for foregrounding the “existence” meaning for location, possession, and other ways of being.

Section 2 of this article is devoted to a general description of existential as well as locative and possessive clauses and their distinctive features. Section 3 examines case choice for subject and subject negation in Latvian in relation to existential, locative, and possessive clauses. Section 4 is an empirical analysis of corpus data in Latvian. The conclusion discusses both general observations regarding the analysis of Latvian existential, locative, and possessive clauses and the choice of the subject case form.

The Latvian examples discussed in Sections 2 and 3 have been taken from Līdzsvarotais mūsdienu latviešu valodas korpuss 2018 [The Balanced Corpus of Modern Latvian 2018] (<http://www.korpuss.lv/id/LVK2018>). While this study was being designed (2016–2017), data from another annotated balanced sub-corpus *miljons2.0m* was accessible through the Balanced Corpus of Modern Latvian, and as a result, data from *miljons2.0m* was

used in Section 4 of this study. Since 2018, all earlier subcorpora have been combined in the newest version of the Balanced Corpus of Modern Latvian 2018 and are no longer differentiated. When necessary the sample sentences have been shortened (indicated by <...>). All examples are marked with (C).

## 2 Existential clauses

Existential clauses constitute a separate clause type the main communicative aim of which is to state the existence of something (Kalēdaitē 2002, 2012; Holvoet 2005; Partee & Borschev 2007; Paducheva 2008). The new information presented in an existential clause is a referent in a location. A key function of the existential clause is expressing an existential presupposition. The predicate of existential clauses is the lexical verb *būt* ‘to be’ in Latvian:

- (1) *Tādi mēģinājumi ir bijuši.*  
 such.NOM.PL attempt.NOM.PL be.PRS.3 be.PTCP.ACT.PST.NOM.PL  
 ‘There have been such attempts.’ (C)

The scope of the existence may be diverse, starting from the whole world down to the inner or outer microcosm of a single person (Kalēdaitē 2002). Existence can be expressed using locative, temporal, experiential, or benefactive complements (Bondarko 1996; Kalēdaitē 2002; Leonetti 2008; Bentley 2015). Therefore, existential clauses are semantically and structurally close to locative ones as well as to possessive ones (for further discussion on this topic, see Metuzāle-Kangere & Boiko 2001; Kalēdaitē 2002, 2012). One of the elements uniting existential, locative, and possessive constructions in Latvian is the verb *būt* ‘to be’, examples (2)–(4):

- (2) **Existential clause**  
*Un arī dabā viss ir mainīgs –*  
 and also nature.LOC.SG all.NOM.SG be.COP.PRS.3 changing.NOM.SG  
*tauri reiz bija un tagad vairs nav.*  
 auroch.NOM.PL once be.PST.3 and now any\_more not\_be.PRS.3  
 ‘And also in nature everything is changing, there once were aurochs, but not anymore.’ (example from Nītiņa, Grigorjevs 2013, 463)

- (3) **Locative clause**  
*Pēc pāris minūtēm vecā atkal ir pagalmā.*  
 after couple minute.DAT.PL old.NOM.SG again be.PRS.3 yard.LOC.SG  
 ‘After a couple of minutes the old one is back in the yard.’ (C)

(4) **Possessive clause**

|                     |              |                   |                |
|---------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------|
| <i>Bet konkrētu</i> | <i>plānu</i> | <i><u>man</u></i> | <i>nebija.</i> |
| but concrete.GEN.PL | plan.GEN.PL  | I.DAT             | not_be.PST.3   |

‘But I did not have any concrete plans.’(C)

As is usually stated in Latvian grammars (e.g. Nītiņa & Grigorjevs 2013, 725–726), the verb *būt* has three lexical meanings: existential, locational, and possessive. However, as we will see later on (Sections 3 and 4), there are many cases where the distinction of the three meanings and, respectively, the three types of constructions are not clear-cut in Latvian (Lagzdiņa 1997; Metuzāle-Kangere & Boiko 2000; Nītiņa & Grigorjevs 2013, 725–726.). Typologically, Latvian belongs to the group of languages without an easily distinguishable formal construction for each of these meanings (e.g. Creissels 2014; see Myler 2014 about this typology).

The parallelism of the three clause types – the locative, existential, and possessive clauses – has been commented upon by many authors. One of the first researchers to identify these different clause types in English was Lyons (1968, 390) (both examples are from Lyons op. cit.):

1 There are lions in Africa.

2 There is a book on the table.

*We might be inclined to say that the first is ‘existential’ and the second is ‘locative’, on the grounds that the first, but hardly the second, can be paraphrased with a sentence containing exist: Lions exist in Africa. And one might add that in Africa is syntactically ‘detachable’ (and therefore an adjunct): Lions exist. On the other hand, there is an obvious structural similarity between 1 and 2. Moreover, from the point of view of their semantic analysis, existential clauses might be described as implicitly locative (or temporal). The assertion that something exists, or existed, requires ‘complementation’ with a locative (or temporal) expression before it can be interpreted.*

Thus Lyons introduces two distinct types of clauses in English, nevertheless, he admits (op. cit.):

*<...> it remains true that in many languages, as in English, there are obvious similarities between locative and existential sentences. There is little or no difference in meaning between such sentences as Coffee will be here in a moment and There will be coffee here in a moment: one might suspect that they have the same deep structure analysis.*

Since the time Lyons wrote these words, the parallels between existential, locative, and possessive clauses have been studied exhaustively (to mention just a few, see Partee &

Borschev 2007; Paducheva 2008; Creissels 2014; Bentley 2015; as well as Lagzdīņa 1997; Kalēdaitē 2002; Holvoet 2005 about Baltic languages). Special attention has been paid to existential and locative clauses, because languages lacking a special existential construction put the same elements in a different order. To put it in other words, “in languages devoid of a dedicated existential predication, rough equivalents of existential predication can be obtained by means of manipulations of the information structure of locational sentences” (Creissels 2014, 10).

The prototypical differences between existential and locative clauses described in linguistic literature (Lyons 1967; Kalēdaitē 2002; Partee & Borschev 2007; Metslang 2012; Creissels 2014) may be summed up as follows (Table 1):

| Existential clauses   | Locative clauses  |
|---|---|
| <b>Semantic differences</b>   |   |
| The fact of the existence or non-existence of an entity in a location is asserted.                                  | The existence of the subject referent is presupposed.   |
| (5) <i>Pagalmā ir suns.</i><br>yard.LOC.SG be.PRS.3 dog.NOM.SG<br>‘There is a dog in the yard.’                     | (6) <i>Suns ir pagalmā.</i><br>dog.NOM.SG be.PRS.3 yard.LOC.SG<br>‘The dog is in the yard.’             |
| <b>Word order and information structure</b>   |   |
| The locative adverbial is in the beginning of the clause and it is the Theme (Topic) of the clause ( example (5)).  | The adverbial is post-verbal and is the Rheme (Focus) of the clause ( example (6)).                     |
| <i>Adverbial – predicate – subject.</i>   | <i>Subject – predicate – adverbial.</i>   |
| <b>Definiteness and referentiality of the subject</b>   |   |
| The subject is usually indefinite. The subjects of negative existential clauses are often non-referential.          | The subject is usually definite.  |
| (7) <i>Pagalmā ir kāds suns.</i><br>yard.LOC.SG be.PRS.3<br>some.NOM.SG dog.NOM.SG<br>‘There is a dog in the yard.’ | (8) <i>Mūsu suns ir pagalmā.</i><br>we.GEN dog.NOM.SG be.PRS.3 yard.LOC.SG<br>‘Our dog is in the yard.’ |
| <b>Case-marking</b>   |   |
| The genitive of negation and the nominative in affirmative clauses.   | The subject of negative locative clauses is in the nominative.  |
| (9) <i>Pagalmā nav suņa.</i><br>yard.LOC.SG not_be.PRS.3 dog.GEN.SG<br>‘There is no dog in the yard.’               | (10) <i>Suns nav pagalmā.</i><br>dog.NOM.SG not_be.PRS.3 yard.LOC.SG<br>‘The dog is not in the yard.’   |

Table 1. The distinguishing features of existential and locative clauses

Examples (11) and (12) illustrate how negation differs in existential (typical word order *adverbial – predicate – subject*) and locative clauses (typical word order *subject – predicate – adverbial*):

(11) **Genitive of negation in a negative existential clause**

*Šeit nav vairs pat jūsu pēdu.*  
 here not\_be.PRS.3 anymore even you.GEN trace.GEN.PL

‘There is not even a trace of you here anymore.’ (C)

(12) **Locative clause**

*Viņš nav šeit, viņš ir citur.*  
 he.NOM.SG not\_be.PRS.3 here he.NOM.SG be.PRS.3 elsewhere

‘He is not here, he is somewhere else.’ (C)

In canonical examples (as in (5) and (6), (11) and (12)), the above-mentioned properties, namely the definiteness and referentiality of the subject, a genitive or nominative subject in negated clauses, and word order, are realised together as a cluster; however, there are many cases where the properties of both clause types combine.

A different kind of parallelism exists between locative and possessive constructions. While in Latvian, the possessive constructions are said to contain the possessor noun phrase in the dative (13), quite often a similar meaning is expressed by the locative (14). Both case forms may combine the semantic roles of the experiencer, possessor, and even location.

(13) *Viņiem nebija tā sarūgtinājuma,*  
 they.DAT not\_be.PST.3 this.GEN.SG embitterment.GEN.SG  
*kas piemita vecākajai paaudzei.*  
 which be.PST.3 older.LOC.SG generation.LOC.SG

‘They didn’t have that embitterment, which characterises the older generation.’ (C)

(14) <...> *bet viņā nebija ne smakas no*  
 but he.LOC.SG not\_be.PST.3 no smell.GEN.SG of  
*uzbrucējiem nepieciešamās viltības.*  
 attacker.DAT.PL necessary.GEN.SG cunning.GEN.SG

‘There was no trace of the cunning in him that is necessary to strikers.’ (C)

A clause may also contain both the dative of the possessor and the locative of the place:

- (15) *Man Latvijā ir mazs zemes pleķītis.*  
 I.DAT Latvia.LOC.SG be.PRS.3 small.NOM.SG  
 land.GEN.SG patch.NOM.SG  
 ‘I have a small patch of land in Latvia.’ (C)

### 3 Negation in existential clauses

Since all the three features allegedly differentiating locative and existential clauses, namely, definiteness/referentiality, the case form of the subject, and word order, are realised together only in negated clauses in Latvian, and the following section focuses on these. It should be noted, however, that the factors determining the use of the genitive of negation and its alternation with the nominative are still understudied in Latvian linguistics. A short account of the variation of the genitive and the nominative with negated existential *būt* ‘to be’ is presented by Berg-Olsen (2005, 123–124, 186–187) and Kalnača (2002, 2007). Statistical analysis of subject case marking has been carried out, however, we do not analyse any possible factors triggering the choice of the subject case form. A detailed analysis of different constructions with negated existential *būt* ‘to be’ is provided by Lagzdiņa (1997), but the possible semantic and syntactic factors affecting the choice between nominative and genitive subjects are not analysed in any systematic way. This is the reason these factors are at the focus of this study.

For example, in the first half of 20th century, in Latvian the subject genitive of indefinite quantity and unspecified number was used in affirmative clauses as well (examples from Endzelīns & Mīlenbahs 1939, 130):

- (16) a. *Kam [ir] draugu,*  
 who.DAT [be.PRS.3] friend.GEN.PL  
*tas bagāts.*  
 that.NOM.SG rich.NOM.SG  
 ‘The one who has friends is rich.’
- b. *Ir gan pasaulē bēdu šādu un tādu.*  
 be.PRS.3 PTCL world.LOC.SG worry.GEN.PL such.GEN.PL and such.GEN.PL  
 ‘There are all manner of worries in the world.’

In the present day, Standard Latvian has abandoned use of the genitive as a marker of indefiniteness and it is only still regularly used with the verb *nebūt* ‘not to be’ (Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli 2001; Holvoet 2011, 18; Leinonen 2016).

Although genitive subject-marking in negation is often considered to be a distinctive feature of Latvian (and Baltic) existential clauses (Holvoet & Grzybowska 2014, 118 about Lithuanian; Lindström 2017 on Circum-Baltic), this is not true for Latvian. A clear structural and semantic similarity between negated existential and locative clauses can be seen in the following examples with genitive subjects:

- (17) *Eglu*                      *šajā*                      *mežā*                      *nav.*  
fir-tree.GEN.PL      this.LOC.SG      forest.LOC.SG      not\_be.PRS.3

‘There are no fir-trees in this forest.’ (C)

- (18) *Mašīnas*                      *tur*                      *vairs*                      *nebija.*  
car.GEN.SG                      there                      anymore                      not\_be.PST.3

‘The car was not there anymore.’ (C)

The English translations suggest that (17) is existential, whereas (18) is locative. These two negated clauses have the same subject case, word order, and information structure. The only difference between the two is found in the referentiality of the subject.

It should also be mentioned that in examples (17) and (18) the word order, with the negated predicate as the rheme of the clause (*subject – adverbial – predicate*), is different from the canonical one (with the predicate in the middle). The word order *adverbial – subject – predicate* is also possible:

- (19) *Šajā*                      *upē*                      *zivju*                      *nav.*  
this.LOC.SG                      river.LOC.SG                      fish.GEN.PL                      not\_be.PRS.3

‘There are no fish in this river.’ (C)

On the other hand, the subject of the existential negated clauses may be referential and definite as well, especially if the subject has ceased to exist (Lagzdīņa 1997, 177):

- (20) <...> *pašu*                      *piļu*                      *vairs*                      *nav.*  
itself.GEN.PL                      castle.GEN.PL                      anymore                      not\_be.PRS.3

‘The castles do not exist anymore.’ (C)

Similar definite genitive subjects are found in Russian (example from Partee & Borschev 2007, 11):

- (21) *Ivana*                      *ne*                      *bylo*                      *na*                      *lekcii.*  
Ivan.GEN.SG      NEG      be.PST.3      at      lecture.GEN.SG

‘Ivan wasn’t at the lecture.’



In Latvian prescriptive grammar, it has been stated that the genitive subject must be used with the verb *nebūt* “as a strict norm of the standard language” without more closely examining the conditions for this use (Ahero et al. 1959, 395; Nītiņa & Grigorjevs 2013, 349). However, actual language use exhibits different tendencies (Berg-Olsen 2005; Kalnača 2002, 2007, 2014; Leinonen 2016). For example, in the negated locative clauses we would expect a nominative subject; however, these clauses may follow the existential model with a genitive subject:

- (22) *Meklējiet agrākās ziņas arhīvā,*  
 look.IMP.2PL former.ACC.PL information.ACC.PL archive.LOC.SG  
*ja to nav šeit.*  
 if this.GEN.PL not\_be.PRS.3 here  
 ‘Look for the former information in the archive if it is not found here.’ (C)

In example (22) we see the word order which is typical of locative clauses (the adverbial at the end of the clause) and a definite referential subject, which makes us consider the clause to be locative rather than existential.

On the other hand, nominative subjects are often used in negated existential clauses:

- (23) <...> *mājās nav internets.*  
 home.LOC.PL not\_be.PRS.3 internet.NOM.SG  
 ‘There is no internet at home.’ (C)

The structural similarity of the existential negated and locative negated clauses often influences the choice of the case form of the subject as well as the semantic interpretation of the actual clauses (Lagzdiņa 1997, 178).

The same parallelism of genitive and nominative subjects is observed in possessive clauses (Nītiņa & Grigorjevs 2013, 728; Leinonen 2016), (24) and (25):

- (24) <...> *daudziem no viņiem nebija dokumentu.*  
 many.DAT.PL of this.DAT.PL not\_be.PST.3 document.GEN.PL  
 ‘Many of them did not have any documents.’ (C)

- (25) *Princīts [suns] tad man nemaz nebija.*  
 Princīts.NOM.SG [dog] then I.DAT not\_at\_all not\_be.PST.3  
 ‘I did not have Princīts [a dog] then.’ (C)

#### 4 Corpus data analysis

Now we will proceed to the description of the empirical part of our study. In order to discover the main factors triggering the use of the genitive of negation in Latvian in 2016–2017, we extracted all the examples with the negated lexical verb *būt* ‘to be’ i.e. *nebūt*, from the morphologically marked subcorpus *miljons2.0m* (containing approximately 3.5 million tokens) of The Balanced Corpus of Modern Latvian. The queries were made to look for sentences with foregrounded existential meaning of the negated verb *būt* ‘to be’. However, manual filtering was necessary to remove the sentences in which negated *būt* ‘to be’ was in the function of copula. After filtering we had 882 examples with genitive subjects and 97 examples with nominative subjects, altogether 979 examples. This subcorpus mostly included edited texts; other studies (Lagzdiņa 1997; Nītiņa & Grigorjevs 2013) are in line with the finding that genitive subjects are more widely used with the lexical verb *nebūt* ‘not to be’ than nominative subjects, at least in written texts.

We tagged all the examples for the following features:

- a) number of the subject (singular/plural),
- b) animacy/inanimacy of the subject,
- c) definiteness/indefiniteness of the subject,
- d) expression of the subject (noun phrase/bare noun/demonstrative/personal pronoun/negative indefinite pronoun),
- e) pre-verbal/post-verbal subject,
- f) word-order parameters of three components (*subject – predicate – adverbial* for clauses containing adverbial of place and *subject – predicate – possessor* for clauses containing the name of possessor).

Only 250 (or 28.34%) out of 882 examples with genitive subjects and 38 (or 39.17%) out of 97 examples with nominative subjects contained adverbials of place. This might suggest that in Latvian there is a tendency to use the genitive subjects in negated existential clauses and the nominative subjects in negated locative clauses (as suggested by several grammarians, e.g. Lagzdiņa 1997; Partee & Borschev 2007; Leinonen 2016). However, the material is not extensive enough and the difference is not essential enough to draw such a conclusion. This is evidenced also by the fact that approximately 60% of the negative nominative subject clauses do not contain the adverbial of place – hence the nominative is quite common in the existential clauses as well.

For clauses containing a dative of possession we also tagged word-order parameters of the three components *subject – predicate – possessor*. We found that 324 (or 36.73%) out of 882 examples with genitive subjects and 33 (or 34.02%) out of 97 examples with nominative subjects contained the dative of possession. These figures suggest that the negative possessive construction as such does not favour the use of either genitive or nominative subjects.

Then we looked for the absolute numbers in all positions, as well as interconnection of the marked features.

Our data in Figure 1 and Table 2 show that the choice of the case form in negated existential clauses does not depend on the animacy/inanimacy of the subject.

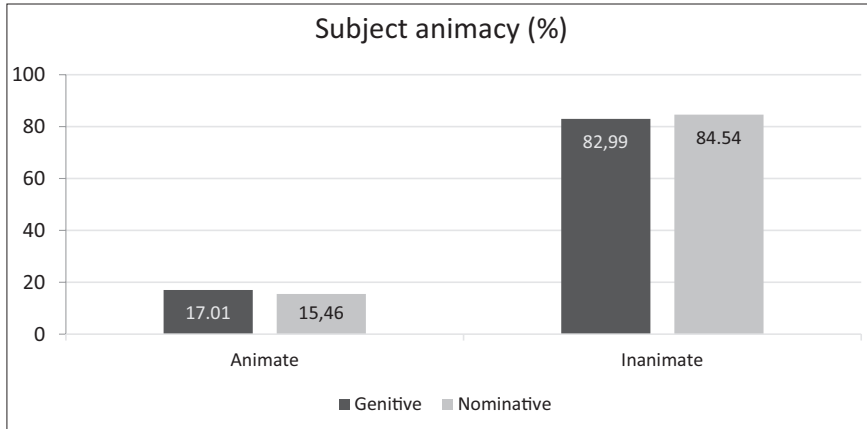


Figure 1. The subject's animacy and case usage (%)

| Subject animacy | GEN subjects | NOM subjects |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Animate         | 150          | 15           |
| Inanimate       | 732          | 82           |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>882</b>   | <b>97</b>    |

Table 2. The subject's animacy and case usage (absolute numbers)

The choice of the case form in negated existential clauses also does not depend on the subject's number, as illustrated in Figure 2 and Table 3.

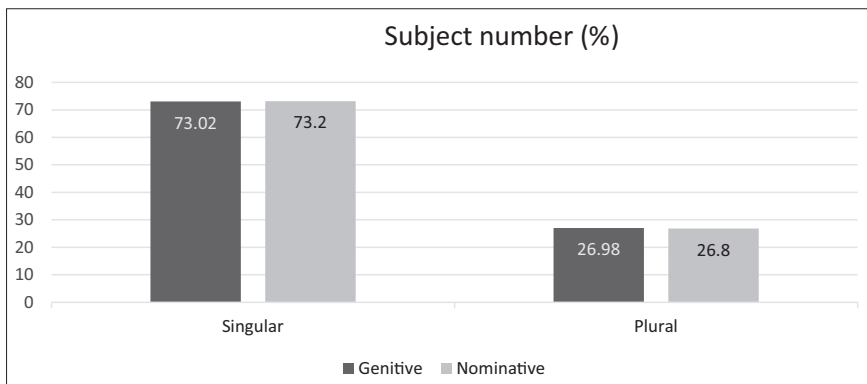


Figure 2. The subject's number and case usage (%)

| Subject number | GEN subjects | NOM subjects |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| SG             | 644          | 71           |
| PL             | 238          | 26           |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>882</b>   | <b>97</b>    |

Table 3. The subject's number and case usage (absolute numbers)

On the contrary, the feature of definiteness seems to be related, at least to some extent, to the choice of the subject's case form (see Figure 3 for relative numbers and Table 4 for absolute numbers).

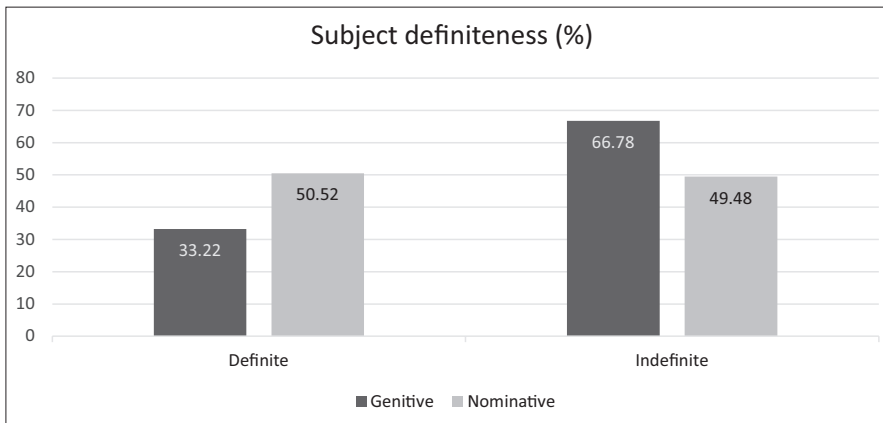


Figure 3. The subject's definiteness and case usage (%)

| Subject definiteness | GEN subjects | NOM subjects |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Definite             | 293          | 49           |
| Indefinite           | 589          | 48           |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>882</b>   | <b>97</b>    |

Table 4. The subject's definiteness and case usage (absolute numbers)

It should be pointed out that definiteness in Latvian is expressed only by a noun phrase containing a definite or indefinite pronoun or an adjective in the definite or indefinite form. Bare nouns (except proper nouns, which are definite) are not marked for definiteness; therefore, this feature was tested with the possibility to add a respective pronoun or adjective in the given context, e.g. in (26) it is obvious from the context that a definite father ('my father') is meant.

- (26) *Tad mammai būtu vieglāk,*  
 then mummy.DAT.SG be.COP.COND easier  
*ja tētis te nebūtu.*  
 if dad.NOM.SG here not\_be.COND

'It would be easier for my mummy if my dad was not here.'

The fact that there is a higher proportion of indefinites among the genitive subjects than among the nominative subjects might suggest that there is a connection between the case form of the subject and its level of definiteness.

As far as phrase weight is concerned, no convincing data about the influence of this feature on the choice of the subject’s case form can be found (see Figure 4 and Table 5).

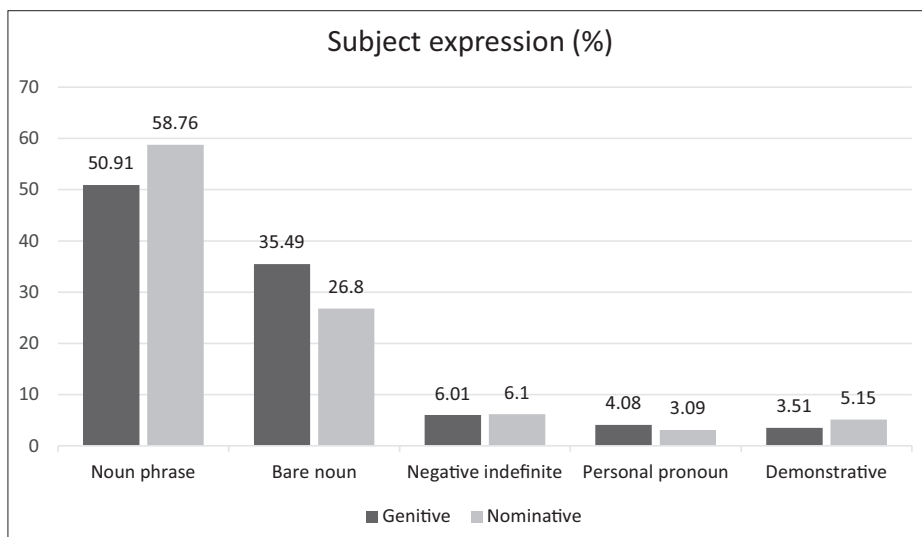


Figure 4. The subject’s case and phrase weight (%)

| Subject expression  | GEN subjects | NOM subjects |
|---------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Noun phrase         | 449          | 57           |
| Bare noun           | 313          | 26           |
| Negative indefinite | 53           | 6            |
| Personal pronoun    | 36           | 3            |
| Demonstrative       | 31           | 5            |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>882</b>   | <b>97</b>    |

Table 5. The subject’s case and phrase weight (absolute numbers)

The same can be said about the pre-verbal vs. post-verbal position of the subject (see Figure 5 and Table 6) – also in this instance, the data do not identify the factors determining the choice of the subject’s case in Latvian.

In addition to the isolated features illustrated in this section, their connections are also worth considering. The next section provides discussion of some possibly interrelated features and their impact on the choice of subject’s case.

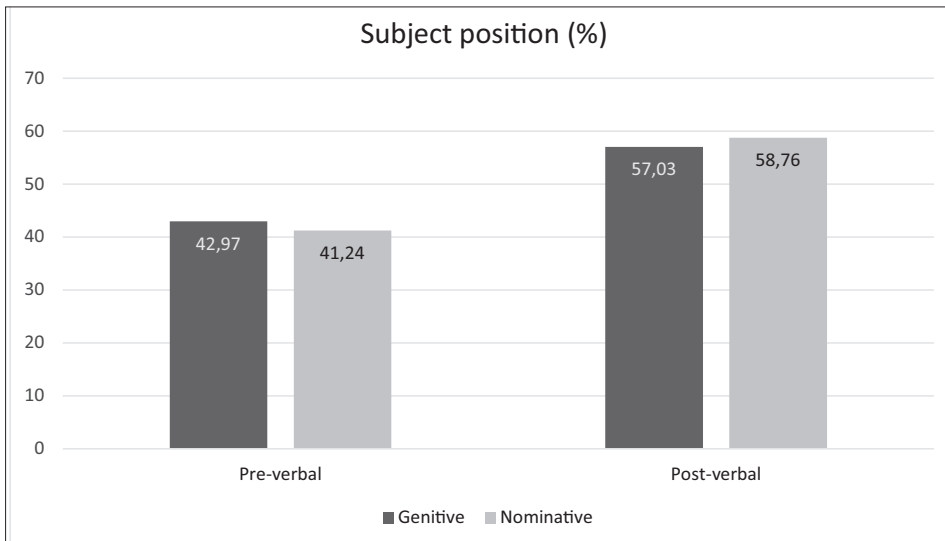


Figure 5. The subject's position and case usage (%)

| Subject position | GEN subjects | NOM subjects |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Pre-verbal       | 379          | 40           |
| Post-verbal      | 503          | 57           |
| <b>Total</b>     | <b>882</b>   | <b>97</b>    |

Table 6. The subject's position and case usage (absolute numbers)

#### 4.1 Definiteness and word order

The above-mentioned differences between the existential and locative clauses suggest that there should be a connection between the definiteness of the subject and the word order, i.e., while there should be indefinite post-verbal subjects in existential clauses, there should instead be definite pre-verbal subjects in locative clauses (on the same tendency in Romance see Leonetti 2008; Bentley 2015).

As shown in Figure 5, there are more post-verbal than pre-verbal subjects in our data, and this is true for both genitives and nominatives, the difference in proportion being approximately the same.

However, the definite genitive subjects tend to be pre-verbal, whereas the indefinite genitive subjects tend to be post-verbal.

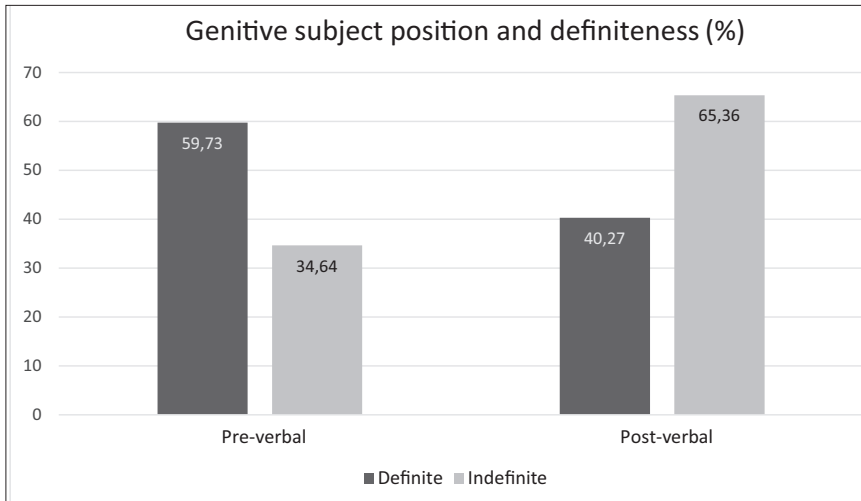


Figure 6. Genitive subject position and definiteness (%)

| GEN subject  | Pre-verbal GEN subjects | Post-verbal GEN subjects |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Definite     | 175                     | 118                      |
| Indefinite   | 204                     | 385                      |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>379</b>              | <b>503</b>               |

Table 7. Genitive subject position and definiteness (absolute numbers)

This means that in the negated clauses with genitive subjects there is a correlation between the definiteness and the word order, and this correlation manifests itself exactly as would be expected. However, such a correlation does not seem to exist for nominative subjects, as shown in Figure 7 and Table 8.

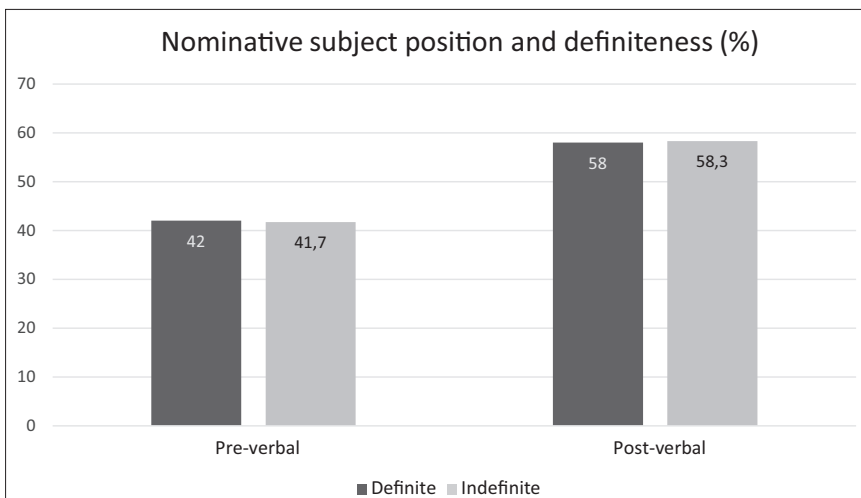


Figure 7. Nominative subject position and definiteness (%)

| <b>NOM subject</b> | <b>Pre-verbal NOM subjects</b> | <b>Post-verbal NOM subjects</b> |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Definite           | 20                             | 29                              |
| Indefinite         | 20                             | 28                              |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>40</b>                      | <b>57</b>                       |

Table 8. Nominative subject position and definiteness (absolute numbers)

Therefore, our data show that for nominative subjects, no correlation exists between the definiteness of the subject and word order. This fact is one of the arguments for asserting that locative clauses and nominative clauses cannot be clearly differentiated in Latvian.

#### 4.2 Existential vs. locative clauses

We found all the six possible types of word order in the clauses containing adverbials of place. Due to the relatively small number of examples (250 with genitive subjects and 38 with nominative subjects) these are only preliminary results.

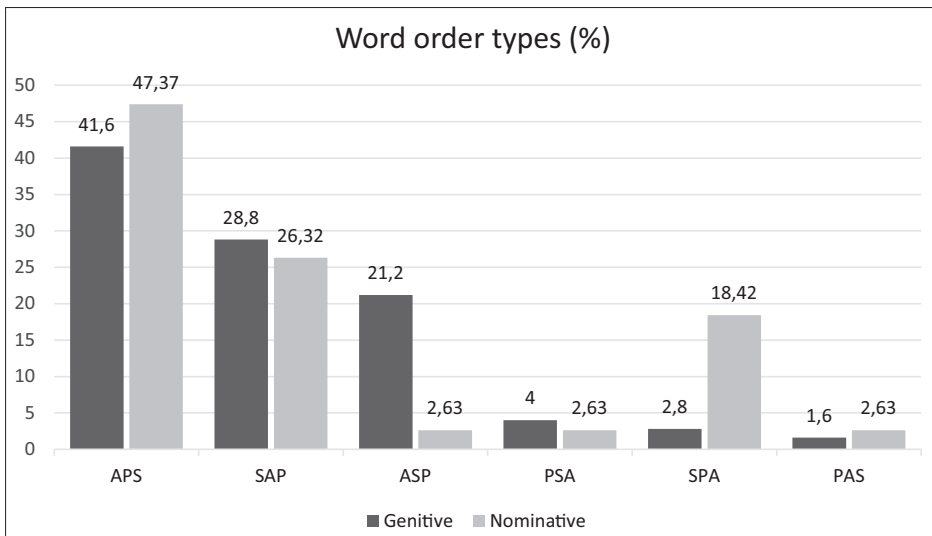


Figure 8. The subject's case and word order (%)

| <b>Word-order types</b>            | <b>GEN subjects</b> | <b>NOM subjects</b> |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Adverbial-predicate-subject</i> | 104                 | 18                  |
| <i>Subject-adverbial-predicate</i> | 72                  | 10                  |
| <i>Adverbial-subject-predicate</i> | 53                  | 1                   |
| <i>Predicate-subject-adverbial</i> | 10                  | 1                   |
| <i>Subject-predicate-adverbial</i> | 7                   | 7                   |
| <i>Predicate-adverbial-subject</i> | 4                   | 1                   |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>250</b>          | <b>38</b>           |

Table 9. The subject's case and word order (absolute numbers)



There is a higher proportion of nominative subjects in the clauses with the word order *subject – predicate – adverbial*, which is the canonical word order for locative clauses. However, the word order *adverbial – predicate – subject*, which is considered to be the canonical word order for existentials, is almost equally typical for both nominative and genitive subjects. This demonstrates that the case of the subject cannot be used as a criterion for differentiating existential clauses from locative clauses in Latvian.

As for the high proportion of the word order *adverbial – subject – predicate* for genitive subjects, more than one half of these (28 out of 53) are negative indefinites or noun phrases containing the negative indefinites (Table 9). Their pre-verbal position is not surprising, because the pronoun (if not stressed) is never positioned at the end of the clause. Interestingly, however, nearly all the genitive personal pronouns appear in initial position, mostly in *subject – adverbial – predicate* type (16 out of 21), a few in *subject – predicate – adverbial* type (3 out of 21), probably due to their definiteness (Table 9).

Thus, nearly all the pronouns in subject position are pre-verbal, however, the position in relation to the adverbial modifier of place is different for different groups of pronouns. It might be related to definiteness, because during the course of this research an additional interesting feature was noticed: in *subject – predicate – adverbial* (27)–(28) word order type we find almost exclusively definite subjects, whereas in *subject – adverbial – predicate* (29)–(32) word order type the proportion of definite and indefinite subjects is equal, and this is true for both nominatives and genitives:

a) *Subject – predicate – adverbial*

(27) *Mammas naktī atkal nebija mājās.*  
 mother.GEN.SG night.LOC.SG again not\_be.PST.3 home.LOC.PL  
 ‘Mother was not at home again at night.’ (C)

(28) *Morics nebija savā gultā.*  
 Morics.NOM.SG not\_be.PST.3 oneself.LOC.SG bed.LOC.SG  
 ‘Morics was not in his bed.’ (C)

b) *Subject – adverbial – predicate*

(29) *Nekā vairāk šajā celtnē nebija.*  
 nothing.GEN more this.LOC.SG building.LOC.SG not\_be.PST.3  
 ‘There was nothing else in this building.’ (C)

- (30) *Izmaiņas sacīkstēs nebija.*  
 change.NOM.PL competition.LOC.PL not\_be.PST.3  
 ‘There were no changes in the competition.’ (C)

- (31) *Liepājas rajona koru starp tiem nebūs.*  
 Liepāja.GEN.SG district.GEN.SG choir.GEN.PL.M  
 among that.DAT.PL not\_be.FUT.3  
 ‘There will be no choirs from Liepāja district among them.’ (C)

- (32) <...> *kura teicējs laikam Nacionālajā teātrī šosezon neesot bijis.*  
 which.GEN.SG author.NOM.SG probably national.LOC.SG theatre.LOC.SG  
 this\_season not\_be.AUX.OBL be.PTCP.PST.NOM.SG  
 ‘The author of which is said not to have been at the National Theatre this year.’ (C)

In order to resolve this puzzle more material should be gathered and investigated in detail. In clauses containing an adverbial, only small differences in frequency were observed in the word order types depending on the case of the subject. These differences suggest a small tendency for using nominative subjects in clauses with word order characteristic of locative clauses. However, this demonstrates that the parameter of word order cannot be used for differentiating existential clauses from locative clauses in Latvian.

### 4.3 Possessive clauses

The next step is to determine any possible correlations between word order and the case of the subject in possessive clauses. There are considerably more possessive clauses with a genitive than a nominative in our data (see Table 10).

As can be seen in Figure 9, all six possible word order types are found in possessive constructions with a genitive subject. In clauses with a nominative subject, some of the less common word order types are not found in our data at all; however, the data analysis allows us to propose the hypothesis that there exists no correlation between word order and the case of the subject in possessive clauses. The most frequent word order type in both constructions is clearly *possessor – predicate – subject*.

Therefore, our data allow us to conclude that the main identifying feature of possessive clauses in Latvian is the dative of possession and that the use of a genitive or nominative as a subject does not correlate with word order. Therefore, word order cannot be used to differentiate among semantic clause types.

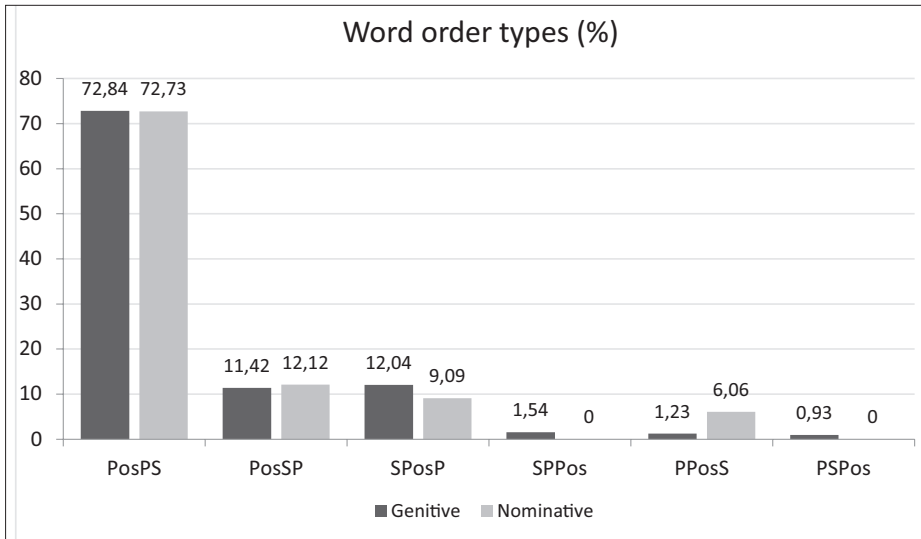


Figure 9. The subject’s case and word order in possessive clauses (%)

| Word-order types                   | GEN subjects | NOM subjects |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| <i>Possessor-predicate-subject</i> | 237          | 24           |
| <i>Possessor-subject-predicate</i> | 37           | 4            |
| <i>Subject-possessor-predicate</i> | 39           | 3            |
| <i>Subject-predicate-possessor</i> | 5            | 0            |
| <i>Predicate-possessor-subject</i> | 4            | 2            |
| <i>Predicate-subject-possessor</i> | 3            | 0            |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>325</b>   | <b>33</b>    |

Table 10. The subject’s case and word order in possessive clauses (absolute numbers)

## 5 Conclusion

Latvian does not possess a unique structural existential clause type. Instead it is a semantic type, which exists alongside possessive and locative clauses. A single clause can combine two or even all three of these meanings. Therefore, there is no strict boundary between existential, locative, and possessive clauses in Latvian. Marginal uses share characteristic features of different canonical cases of clause types (for similar conclusions see Partee & Borschev 2007; Metslang 2013; Bentley 2015; Leinonen 2016).

There are no crucial semantic differences between negated clauses with a nominative subject and negated clauses with a genitive subject (Lagzdiņa 1997, 169). Thus, the prescription to use only genitive in clauses with *nebūt* ‘not to be’ should not be so strict.

All possible word order types have been observed in negated clauses with the verb *nebūt* ‘not to be’, which indicates that word order is not clearly linked with any structural or

semantic clause type, but instead can vary in response to the demands of the information structure and context. In sentences with the verb *nebūt*, which also contain an adverbial or the name of the possessor in the dative, the most common word order types are *adverbial – predicate – subject* and *possessor – predicate – subject*.

Considering the corpus data according to the three main features – the case form, the definiteness/referentiality of the subject, and word order in negated clauses – we may conclude that in Latvian, in clauses with the verb *nebūt* ‘not to be’, there is a correlation between definiteness and the case form of the subject, definiteness and the word order, though it manifests itself only as a tendency, not as a strict rule. The three above-mentioned aspects (the case of the subject, definiteness/referentiality, and the word order) are related, namely, the definite genitive subjects tend to be pre-verbal, whereas the indefinite genitive subjects tend to be post-verbal. However, with respect to nominative subjects, no relationship was found between definiteness and word order.

We can propose the hypothesis that other lexical and contextual factors might be involved in the choice of the subject case form as well, but that remains the focus for a future study.

### List of Abbreviations

|      |   |
|------|---|
| 3    | person  |
| A    | adverbial   |
| ACC  | accusative  |
| AUX  | auxiliary   |
| C    | <i>The Balanced Corpus of Modern Latvian 2018</i> |
| COND | conditional                                       |
| COP  | copula  |
| DAT  | dative  |
| GEN  | genitive  |
| IMP  | imperative  |
| LOC  | locative  |
| NEG  | negative particle                                 |
| NOM  | nominative  |
| OBL  | oblique   |
| P    | predicate   |
| PTCL | particle  |
| PL   | plural  |
| Pos  | possessor   |
| PRS  | present   |
| PST  | past  |
| PTCP | participle  |

S – subject  
SG – singular

## Data Sources

*Līdzsvarots mūsdienu latviešu valodas tekstu korpuss 2018*. [The Balanced Corpus of Modern Latvian 2018]. Available at: <http://www.korpuss.lv/id/LVK2018>

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