

<特集「所有・存在表現」>

## Possessive, existential, and other nonverbal constructions in Estonian エストニア語の所有・存在表現およびその他の非動詞構文

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**要旨:** 本稿は、エストニア語の所有・存在表現およびその他の非動詞構文を概観するものである。本稿は、東京外国語大学言語研究所誌『語学研究所論集』第14–23号（2009–2018年）の特集号に掲載されたアンケート項目のデータを提供する。

**Abstract:** This paper is an overview of the Estonian possessive, existential, and other nonverbal constructions. It provides data on the questionnaire items featured in the special issue on “Expressions of possession and existence” (*Journal of the Institute of Language Research* 14–23, 2009–2018, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies).

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.15026/0002001456>

**キーワード:** エストニア語, 所有, 存在表現

**Keywords:** Estonian, possessive constructions, existential constructions

### 1. Introduction

This paper is a data-based overview of some nonverbal constructions in Estonian, with particular reference to possessive and existential constructions. It is well known that the expression of possessive and existential functions can be syncretic in the languages of the world (Creissels 2023). These two functional categories belong to what is usually called nonverbal predication (see an overview in Haspelmath 2025) or intransitive predication (Stassen 1997). Existential constructions are also called *inverse-locational predication* (ILP) by Creissels (2019), who distinguishes them from *plain-locational predication* (PLP). These two terms define the two types of predication based on the perspectivization of the semantic arguments involved. Namely, PLP involves a perspectivization from Figure to Ground, while ILP a perspectivization from Ground to Figure, with the Figure being a rather mobile entity in the predication, and Ground being a rather fixed location. PLP can also be referred to as *locative predication* or *locative construction* (see also Budzisch et al. 2025).

In the Estonian tradition, locative and other intransitive constructions are also called *normaallused* or ‘normal sentences’, while existential and possessive constructions, respectively called *olemasolulused* and *omajalused*, are considered marked (Metslang et al. 2023: 498). The most commonly used strategy for locative and existential constructions is the copula *olema* ‘to be’ (1a-b). The locative cases used in locative or existential constructions can be the inessive (-s) and the adessive (-l), but the latter is also used in possessive constructions to indicate the possessor (1c).



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- (1) a. Locative construction  
*Karu on metsa-s*  
 bear.NOM be.3SG forest-INE  
 ‘The bear is in the forest.’
- b. Existential construction  
*Metsa-s on karu-sid*  
 forest-INE be.3SG bear-PART.PL  
 ‘There are bears in the forest.’
- c. Possessive construction  
*Mu-l on kass*  
 1SG-ADE be.3SG cat.NOM  
 ‘I have a cat.’

Recently, some other constructions have been shown to convey locative and existential meaning. These are called *invenitive-locational constructions* and make use of a verb with meaning FIND that becomes intransitivized and then semantically bleached (Basile 2024, 2025). An example of these constructions is provided below (2).

- (2) Invenitive-locational construction, existential (Basile 2025: 386)  
*Mets-a all leid-u-b kukeseen-i ja metsa=maasika-id*  
 forest-GEN under find-MM-3SG chanterelle-PL.PART and wild=strawberry.PL.PART  
 ‘There are chanterelles and wild strawberries on the forest floor.’

In Section 2, I provide Estonian data translated from the questionnaire items featured in the special issue on “Expression of possession and existence” of the Journal of the Institute of Language Research. The items are also reported in their Japanese original version, and accompanied by a brief comment on the grammatical features of Estonian. I thank Anni Polding, a native speaker of Estonian and PhD candidate at the University of Tartu, for checking that every example was grammatical.

## 2. Data

In the examples below, a possessive construction is used to indicate that a body part belongs to a person (3a; 4a; 5a). When said body part is used in an adnominal function to modify the head noun of the NP, it is marked with the comitative case *-ga*. These two strategies can also be used in a figurative or metaphorical manner (6).

- (3) あの人は青い目をしている。／青い目の人・目が青い人 [5-1]
- a. *Ta-l on sinise-d silma-d*  
 3SG-ADE be.3SG blue-PL eye-PL  
 ‘S/he has blue eyes.’
- b. *sinis-te silma-de-ga inimene*  
 blue-GEN.PL eye-GEN.PL-COM person.NOM  
 ‘A person with blue eyes.’

(4) あの女 {は／の} 髪が長い・あの女は長い髪をしている／長い髪の人・髪の長い女 [5-2]

- a. *Ta-l on pika-d juukse-d*  
 3SG.ADE be.3SG long-PL hair-PL  
 ‘S/he has long hair.’
- b. *pikka-de juus-te-ga naine*  
 long-GEN.PL hair-GEN.PL-COM woman.NOM  
 ‘A woman with long hair.’

(5) あの人には髭がある。／髭の男 [5-3]

- a. *Ta-l on habe*  
 3SG.ADE be.3SG beard.NOM  
 ‘He has a beard.’
- b. *habeme-ga mees*  
 beard-COM man.NOM  
 ‘A man with a beard.’

(6) あの人には (見る) 目がある。／見る目のある人 [5-4]

- a. *Se-l inimese-l on asja-de jaoks silm-a*  
 that-ADE person-ADE be.3SG thing-GEN.PL for eye-PART  
 ‘That person has an eye for things.’
- b. *inimene, kelle-l on asja-de jaoks silm-a*  
 person.NOM RELP-ADE be.3SG thing-GEN.PL for eye-PART  
 ‘A person with an eye for things.’

Some languages, such as Italian, express age using a possessive construction. Estonian resembles English in that it uses a predicative construction with the noun ‘year’ in the partitive singular and an adjective meaning ‘old’ (7a). It should be noted that all numerals in Estonian trigger the appearance of the partitive case, always in the singular. The attributive adjective *aastane* is instead used when it modifies the head of the NP (7b). In this case, the head noun can be omitted as this construction is highly contextual.

(7) あ的人是は22歳だ。／22歳の人 [5-5]

- a. *Ta on 22 aasta-t vana*  
 3SG be.3SG 22 year-PART old  
 ‘S/he is 22 years old.’
- b. *22-aasta-ne (inimene)*  
 22-year-ADJ person  
 ‘A 22-year-old person.’

There is generally no difference between the use of other adjectives in predicative (8a; 9a) or attributive functions (8b; 9b). When a quantifying phrase is present, it precedes the head nominal in predicative functions (10). Neither concreteness (cf. [8] and [9]) nor animacy affect the form of the adjective (11).

(8) あの人は優しい性格だ。／優しい性格の人 [5-6]

- a. *Ta on lahke*  
 3SG be.3SG kind  
 ‘S/he is kind.’
- b. *lahke inimene*  
 kind person  
 ‘A kind person.’

(9) あの人は背が高い。／背の高い人 [5-7]

- a. *Ta on pikk*  
 3SG be.3SG tall  
 ‘S/he is tall.’
- b. *pikk inimene*  
 tall person  
 ‘A tall person.’

(10) あの人は背が 190 センチもある。 [5-8]

- Ta on 190 sentimeetri-t pikk*  
 3SG be.3SG 190 centimeter-PART tall  
 ‘S/he is 190cm tall.’

(11) その石は四角い形をしている。／四角い (形の) 石 [5-9]

- a. *Kivi on kandiline*  
 stone be.3SG square  
 ‘The stone is square.’
- b. *kandiline kivi*  
 square stone  
 ‘A square stone.’

When a noun like ‘talent’ (i.e., an abstract quality) modifies the head NP of a possessive construction, it becomes marked for partitive case (12a). In an attributive function, instead, it turns into an adjective through the productive derivational suffix *-kas* (12b).

(12) あの人には才能がある。／才能のある人 [5-10]

- a. *Ta-l on anne-t*  
 3SG-ADE be.3SG talent-PART  
 ‘S/he has talent.’
- b. *ande-kas mees*  
 talent-ADJ man  
 ‘A talented man.’

To indicate general sickness, an adjective is used both in predicative (13a) and attributive (13c) functions. However,

more specific illnesses like fever are expressed through a possessive construction (13b).

(13) あの人は病気だ。／あの人は熱がある。／病気の人 [5-11]

- a. *Ta on haige*  
3SG be.3SG sick  
'S/he is sick.'
- b. *Ta-l on palavik*  
3SG-ADE be.3SG fever  
'S/he has a fever.'
- c. *haige inimene*  
sick person  
'A sick person.'

Possessive constructions are also used with pieces of clothing, but when the possessor is wearing them then the word *seljas* is used (14a). Alternatively, the verb *kandma* 'to carry' plus the item of clothing in partitive can be used (14b; 15).

(14) あの人は青い服を着ている。／青い服の男 [5-12]

- a. *Ta-l on sinise-id riide-id selja-s*  
3SG-ADE be.3SG blue-PL.PART clothe-PL.PART back-INE  
'S/he is wearing blue clothes.'
- b. *Ta kannab sinise-id riide-id*  
3SG carry-3SG blue-PL.PART clothe-PL.PART  
'S/he is wearing blue clothes.'
- c. *sinis-te riie-te-ga mees*  
blue-GEN.PL clothe-GEN.PL-COM man  
'A man with blue clothes.'

(15) あの人はメガネをかけている。／メガネの男 [5-13]

- a. *Ta kannab prill-e*  
3SG carry-3SG glass-PART.PL  
'S/he is wearing glasses.'
- b. *prilli-de-ga mees*  
glass-GEN.PL-COM man  
'A man with glasses.'

When referring to having a partner, a possessive construction is used. If married, the word for 'woman' (*naine*) and 'man' (*mees*) suffice (16a). A married man can also be referred to with a compound word (16b). For referring to having children, a possessive construction is used just like in English (17a). A pregnant woman (17c) is lexically distinguished from the comitative-marked expression of 'having children' (17b).

(16) あの人には妻がいる。／既婚の人・妻のいる人 [5-14]

- a. *Ta-l on naine*  
 3SG-ADE be.3SG woman  
 ‘S/he has a wife.’
- b. *abielu=mees*  
 marriage=man  
 ‘A married man.’

(17) あの人には3人子供がいる。／3人の子持ちの人・あの人の3人の子供／妊娠している女性 [5-15]

- a. *Ta-l on kolm las-t*  
 3SG-ADE be.3SG three child-PART  
 ‘S/he has three children.’
- b. *kolm-e lapse-ga mees*  
 three-GEN child-COM man  
 ‘A man with three children.’
- c. *rased naine*  
 pregnant woman  
 ‘A pregnant woman.’

Indefinite possessors are not marked in any particular way (18). Body parts are counted like any other noun. They are marked for partitive when modified by a numeral.

(18) タコには足が8本ある。 [5-16]

- Kaheksajala-l on kaheksa jalg-a*  
 octopus-ADE be.3SG eight leg-PART  
 ‘An octopus has eight legs.’

When the “possessor” of a certain thing or quality is inanimate, then it appears in the inessive case (19a). The inessive case is a so-called internal locative case, while the adessive case is its external counterpart. In Estonian, directional locative cases also come in internal-external pairs (illative-allative for direction *towards* and elative-ablative for direction *from*). In some cases, the adjectivizer *-ne* is used when the quality possessed is in attributive function (19b). Below follows a series of examples that substantiate the descriptions made until here.

(19) その飲み物にはアルコールが入っている。／アルコール入りの飲み物 [5-17]

- a. *Selle-s joogi-s on alkohol-i*  
 that-INE beverage-INE be.3SG alcohol-PART  
 ‘That drink has alcohol in it.’
- b. *alkohool-ne jook*  
 alcohol-ADJ beverage  
 ‘An alcoholic drink./A drink with alcohol in it.’

(20) あの人はお金を持っている。／お金持ちの人 [5-18]

- a. *Se-l mehe-l on raha*  
 that-ADE man-ADE be.3SG money.PART  
 ‘That man has money.’
- b. *rikas /raha-kas mees*  
 rich money-ADJ man  
 ‘A rich man.’

(21) おまえのところには犬がいるか？／犬のいる人 [5-19]

- a. *Kas su-l on koer?*  
 INTER 2SG-ADE be.3SG dog  
 ‘Do you have a dog?’
- b. *koera-ga mees*  
 dog-COM man  
 ‘A man with a dog.’
- c. *mees, kelle-l on koer*  
 man RELP-ADE be.3SG dog  
 ‘A man who has a dog.’

(22) おまえは（自分の）ペンを持っているか？／ペンを持っている人 [5-20]

- a. *Kas su-l on pastakas?*  
 INTER 2SG-ADE be.3SG pen  
 ‘Do you have a pen?’
- b. *pastaka-ga mees*  
 pen-COM man  
 ‘A man with a pen./A man who has a pen.’

(23) あの人は（誰か別の人の）ペンを持っている。 [5-21]

*Ta-l on kellegi teise pastakas*  
 3SG-ADE be.3SG someone.GEN other.GEN pen  
 ‘S/he has somebody else’s pen.’

(24) あの人は運がいい。／幸運な人 [5-22]

- a. *Ta-l on õnn-e*  
 3SG-ADE be.3SG luck-PART  
 ‘S/he has good luck.’
- b. *õnne-lik mees*  
 happiness/fortune-ADJ man  
 ‘A lucky man.’

Existential constructions in Estonian usually feature a clause-initial locative phrase, then a copula, and the argument being located (25a). Again, if the located element also represents an intrinsic feature of the location expressed

by the locative phrase, it can be turned into an attributive adjective (25b), otherwise either the comitative case (26b) or a locative-case-marked relative pronoun (27b) are used. (28a) shows the prototypical locative construction, in which the located element is also the subject of the utterance and is usually clause-initial. An active participle strategy can be used to relativize the located element (28b).

(25) ここは石が多い。／石の多い土地 [5-23]

- a. *Siin on palju kiv-e*  
 here be.3SG many stone-PART.PL  
 ‘There are many rocks here.’
- b. *kivi-ne maa*  
 stone-ADJ land  
 ‘A land with (many) rocks.’

(26) その部屋には椅子が3つある／3つ椅子のある部屋 [5-24]

- a. *Toa-s on kolm tool-i*  
 room-INE be.3SG three chair-PART  
 ‘There are three chairs in the room.’
- b. *kolm-e tooli-ga tuba*  
 three-GEN chair-COM room  
 ‘A room with three chairs in it.’

(27) テーブルの上にスプーンがある。／スプーンのあるテーブル [5-25]

- a. *Laua-l on lusikas*  
 table-ADE be.3SG spoon  
 ‘There is a spoon on the table.’
- b. *laud, mille-l on lusikas*  
 table RELP-ADE be.3SG spoon  
 ‘A table with a spoon on it.’

(28) そのスプーンはテーブルの上にある。／テーブルにあるスプーン [5-26]

- a. *Lusikas on laua-l / laua peal*  
 spoon be.3SG table-ADE table.GEN on.ADE  
 ‘The spoon is on the table.’
- b. *laua-l ole-v lusikas*  
 table-ADE be-ACT.PTCP spoon  
 ‘The spoon on the table.’

When the possessed thing is definite and not discourse-new like in most possessive constructions, we have what Haspelmath (2025) calls an *appertentive construction*. In Estonian, such constructions usually feature the located element in clause-initial position, alongside a constructionalized GEN + *oma* ‘own’ post-verbal possessor (29a). When the possessor is in attributive position, it is only marked for genitive (29b).

(29) そのペンは私のだ。・そのペンは太郎のだ。／私のペン・太郎のペン [5-27]

- a. *See pastakas on minu (/Anni) oma*  
 that pen be.3SG 1SG.GEN Anni.GEN own  
 ‘That pen is mine (Anni’s).’
- b. *minu (/Anni) pastakas*  
 1SG.GEN Anni.GEN pen  
 ‘My (Anni’s) pen.’

Some existential constructions do not have the primary function of locating something or someone in space, but rather to indicate the absolute existence or non-existence of something (30). Such constructions can also be called *generic-existentials* (Koch 2012) and are also used as devices to introduce new referents into discourse (31).

(30) (この世には) お化けなんていない。 [5-29]

*Kummitus-i pole olema-s / ei eksisteeri*  
 ghost-PL.PART NEG.3SG.be be.PTCP-INE NEG exist.CONNEG  
 ‘Ghosts don’t exist.’

(31) 私より英語ができる人は (ほかに／もつと) います。 [5-31]

*On ka teis-i, kes räägi-vad inglise keel-t paremini*  
 be.3SG also other-PART.PL RELP speak-3PL English.GEN language-PART better  
*kui mina*  
 than 1SG  
 ‘There are others who are better at speaking English than I am.’

(32) ちょっとあなたにお願いがあります。 [5-32]

*On midagi, mida ma taha-n, et sa tee-ksi-d*  
 be.3SG something.PART RELP.PART 1SG want-1SG RELP 2SG do-COND-2SG  
 ‘There is something I want you to do.’

Below follows the rest of the example sentences taken from the questionnaire. In Japanese, some of these items have in common the morpheme の *no* which also expresses possession, among other functions. In Estonian, however, while some possessors are marked for genitive case, some other strategies to translate the morpheme *no* include adjectivization (e.g., *inglisekeelne kiri* ‘a letter in English’) or compound words (e.g., *puuviljanuga* ‘a fruit knife’).

(33) 昨日、学校で火事があった。／私は明日用事があります。 [5-28]

- a. *Eile oli meie kooli-s tulekahju*  
 yesterday be.PST.3SG 1PL.GEN school-INE blaze  
 ‘There was a fire at our school yesterday.’
- b. *Mu-l on homme asj-u aja-da*  
 1SG-ADE be.3SG tomorrow thing-PART drive-INF  
 ‘I have things to do tomorrow.’

(34) (そこには) 英語を話す人もいるが、話さない人もいる。 [5-30]

*Mõne-d seal räägi-vad inglise keel-t, aga teise-d mitte*  
 some-PL there speak-3PL English.GEN language-PART but other-PL NEG  
 ‘Some speak English there, but the others do not.’

(35) 冬の雨／東京の家 [5-33]

- a. *talvi-ne vihm*  
 winter-ADJ rain  
 ‘A winter rain.’
- b. *maja Tokyo-s*  
 house Tokyo-INE  
 ‘A house in Tokyo.’

(36) 彼の泳ぎ／犬の鳴き声／火山の爆発／車の運転／～の小説 [5-34]

- a. *tema uju-mine*  
 3SG.GEN swim-NMLZ  
 ‘His swimming.’
- b. *koer-a hauku-mine*  
 dog-GEN bark-NMLZ  
 ‘A dog’s bark.’
- c. *vulkaani=purse*  
 volcano=eruption  
 ‘A volcano eruption.’
- d. *auto=juhti-mine*  
 car=drive-NMLZ  
 ‘Driving a car.’
- e. *Anni romaan*  
 Anni.GEN novel  
 ‘Anni’s novel.’

(37) X さん (固有名詞) のお母さん／机の横に／机の前に／\*机に (来て!) ／あの人の次 [5-35]

- a. *Anni ema*  
 Anni.GEN mother  
 ‘Anni’s mother.’
- b. *laua kõrva-l*  
 table.GEN ear-ADE  
 ‘Next to the desk.’
- c. *laua taga*  
 table.GEN behind  
 ‘At the desk.’

- d. *Tule minu laua juurde!*  
 come.IMP 1SG.GEN table.GEN to  
 ‘Come to my desk!’
- e. *se-lle inime-se kõrva-l*  
 that-GEN person-GEN ear-ADE  
 ‘Next to that person.’

(38) バラの花びら／果物のナイフ／紙の飛行機／チューリップの絵／花の匂い／英文の手紙／日本語の先生／井戸の水／雨の日 [5-36]

- a. *roos-i kroonleht*  
 rose-GEN petal  
 ‘A rose petal.’
- b. *puuvilja=nuga*  
 fruit.GEN=knife  
 ‘A fruit knife.’
- c. *paber=lennuk*  
 paper=airplane  
 ‘A paper airplane.’
- d. *roos-i pilt*  
 rose-GEN picture  
 ‘A picture of a rose.’
- e. *lill-e lõhn*  
 flower-GEN scent  
 ‘The scent of a flower.’
- f. *inglis=keel-ne kiri*  
 English=language-ADJ letter  
 ‘A letter in English.’
- g. *jaapan-i keel-e õpetaja*  
 Japanese-GEN language-GEN teacher  
 ‘A Japanese teacher.’
- h. *kaevu=vesi*  
 well=water  
 ‘Water from the well.’
- i. *vihma-ne päev*  
 rain-ADJ day  
 ‘A rainy day.’

(39) 妹の花子／社長の田中さん [5-37]

- a. *minu noor-em õde Hanako*  
 1SG young-COMP sister H.  
 ‘My younger sister Hanako.’

- b. *president Tanaka*  
 president T.  
 ‘President Tanaka.’

(40) となりの家の友達のお父さんの車のタイヤ（が昨日突然パンクしたんだって。） [5-38]

*Mu naabri=sõbr-a isa auto rehv*  
 1SG.GEN neighbor=friend-GEN father.GEN car.GEN tire  
 (*selle auto rehv, mis on mu naabri=sõbr-a isa-l*)  
 that.GEN car.GEN tire RELP be.3SG 1SG.GEN neighbor=friend-GEN father-ADE  
 ‘The tire of the car my next-door friend’s dad has.’

#### List of abbreviations

1 – first person; 2 – second person; 3 – third person; ACT – active; ADE – adessive; ADJ – adjectivizer; COM – comitative; COMP – comparative; COND – conditional; CONNEG – connegative; GEN – genitive; IMP – imperative; INE – inessive; INF – infinitive; INTER – interrogative; MM – middle marker; NEG – negative; NMLZ – nominalizer; NOM – nominative; PART – partitive; PL – plural; PST – past; PTCP – participial; RELP – relative pronoun; SG – singular

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原稿受理 : 2025 年 11 月 30 日

刊行年月日 : 2026 年 3 月 31 日