



# Existential and locative sentences in Central and Southern Selkup



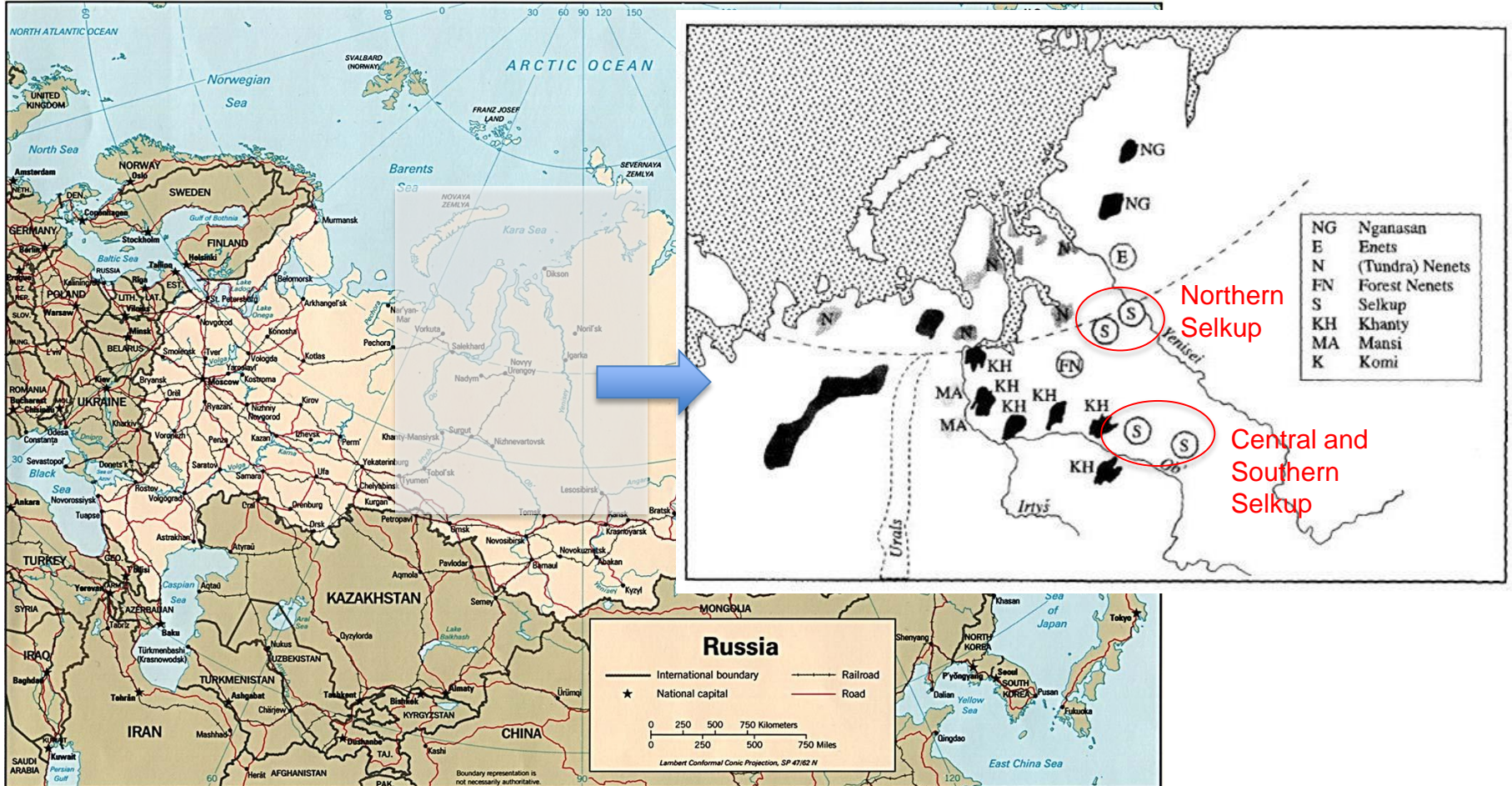
Josefina Budzisch, Universität Hamburg  
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# Structure

- Selkups and their language
- The corpus
- Existential and locative sentences
  - Definiteness effect

# Selkup language

- Selkup belongs to the Samoyedic branch of the Uralic language family
- According to the Russian Census (2010): 3,649 Selkups and 1,023 speakers
- Three main dialectal groups: Northern, Central and Southern
  - Each of these groups has various subdialects
  - Most speakers speak a variant of Northern Selkup, Central and Southern Selkup are almost extinct
  - Central and Southern Selkup are presumably closer to each other



# Selkup language: typology

- Agglutinative language (some fusional tendencies)
- Word order: SOV?, head-final
- NOM-ACC-language
- No gender marking
- 3 numbers: singular, dual, plural
- Rich case system
- Grammars for Central and Southern Selkup so far basically cover phonological and morphological features

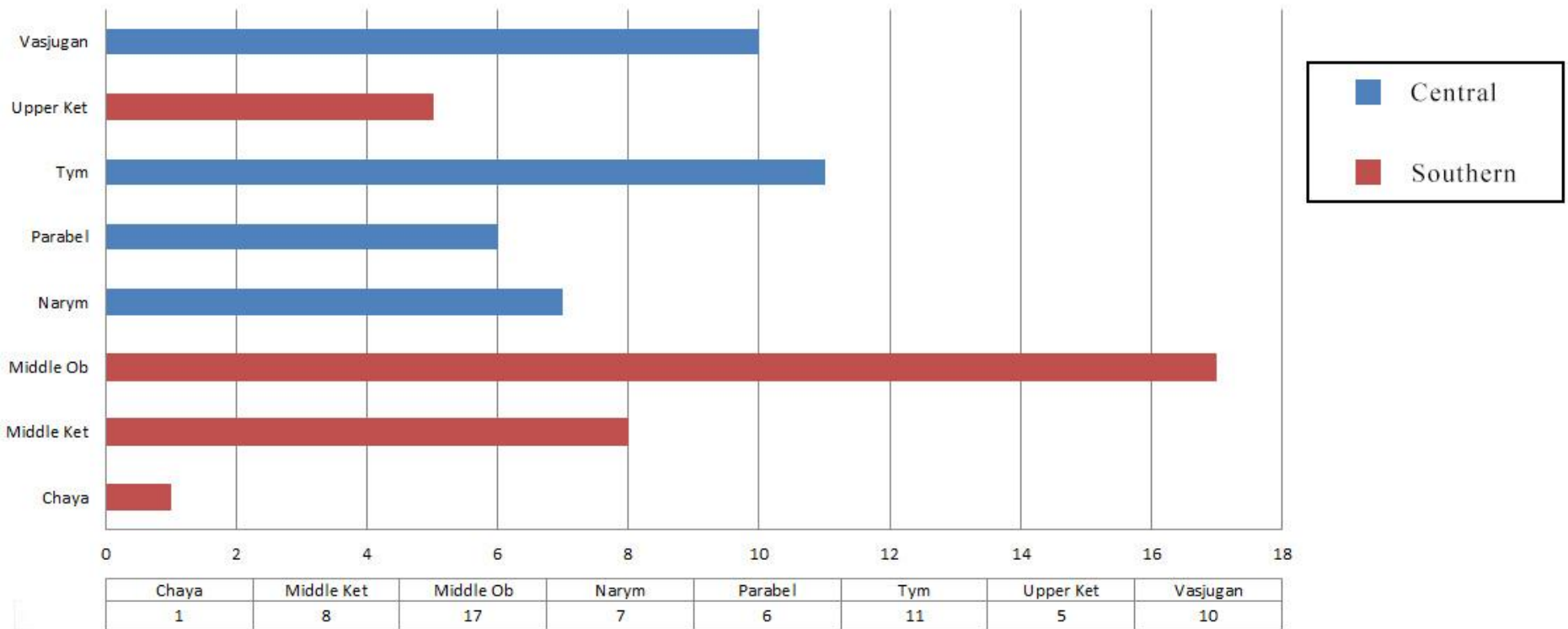
# Corpus

- DFG project: *Syntactic description of Central and Southern Selkup dialects: a corpusbased analysis* (WA 3153/3-1)
- Covering 100 years of data
  - Total of 113 texts
  - All texts are previously published (only written material!)
  - Mostly folklore and narratives, some translations

## Subcorpus for the present study

- 65 texts – 2,290 sentences, 14,024 tokens
  - 25 speakers (21 female, 3 male, 1 unknown)
  - Date of recording: 1961–2014
  - Covering three genres: 50 folklore texts, 14 narratives and 1 translation
- 34 Central and 31 Southern Selkup texts

# Dialectal distribution of the texts





## Existential and locative sentences

- In existential sentences the existence or the nonexistence of something or someone is stated
- In locative sentences the being of something or someone at a certain place is expressed
- Both types of sentences contain the same three basic elements: Location, Theme and Copula
  - In existential sentences location does not need to be expressed

## Existential and locative sentences in Central and Southern Selkup

- Selkup does not have a special existential verb – the verb *equ* ‘to be’ is used in both types of sentences
- It is expected that the differences between existential and locative sentences are marked by word order:
  - Existential: (Loc) – Th – Cop
  - Locative: Th – Loc – Cop

– In the corpus: 53 existential and 21 locative sentences

– Existential sentence:

(1) Central Selkup, Parabel

<i>Nača-t</i>	<i>hombla</i>	<i>ma:n</i>	<i>e-ya.</i>
there-LOC.ADV	five	house	be-AOR.3SG.S

‘There are five houses.’ (SAI\_1984\_StoryAboutLifeLong\_nar.030)

– Locative sentence:

(2) Central Selkup, Parabel

<i>Kiba-qup</i>	<i>twe:-l</i>	<i>čebo-yit</i>	<i>e-ppa.</i>
small-human.being	birchbark-ADJZ	cradle-LOC	be-HAB.3SG.S

‘The child was in the cradle.’ (SAA\_1984\_MyGrandmother\_nar.007)

# Existential sentences in Central and Southern Selkup

– Expected word order: (Loc) – Th – Cop

(3) Central Selkup, Vasjugan

*Nat'e-yit*      *tudo-t*      *ukkir*      *haj-he*      *e-ja-dit.*  
there-LOC.ADV    crucian-PL      one      eye-INS      be-AOR-3PL

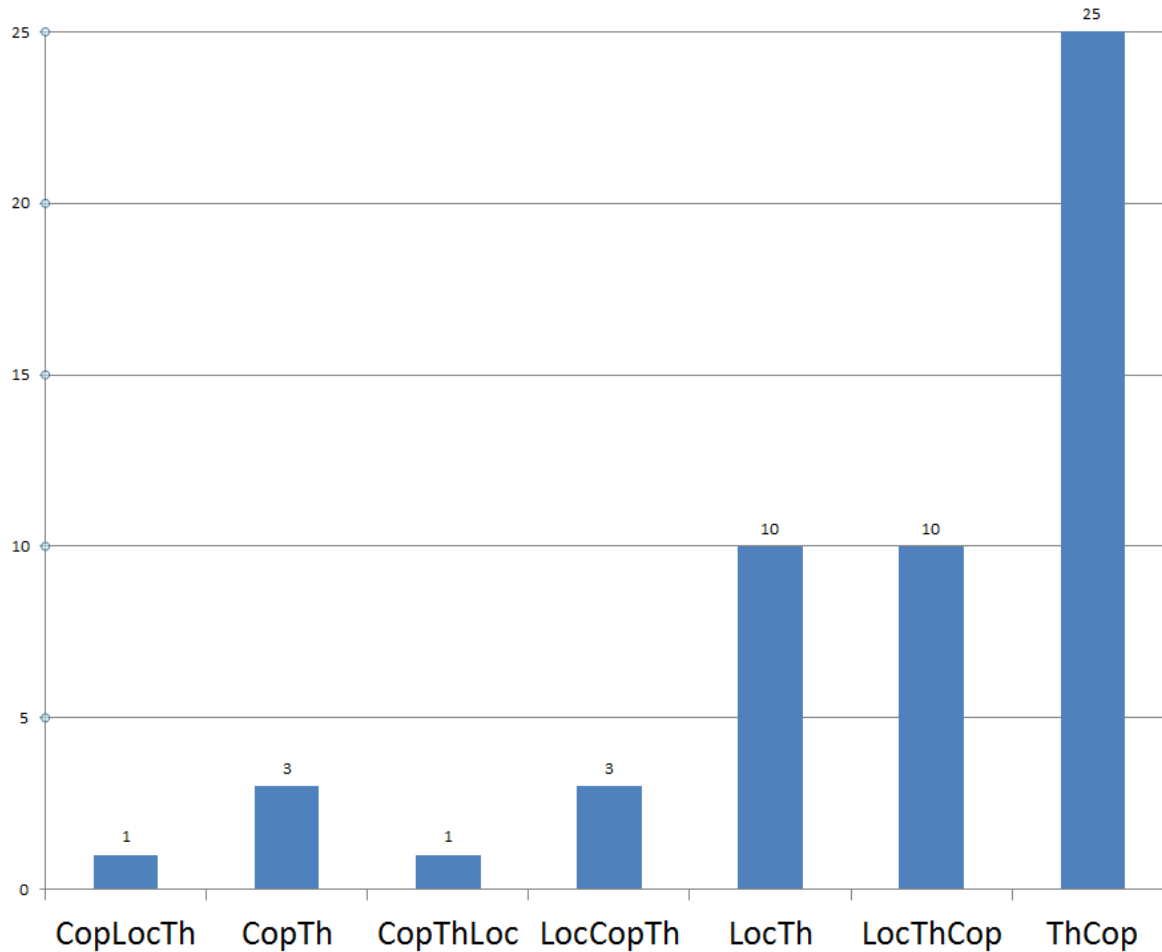
‘There are one eyed crucians.’ (ChDN\_1983\_Nikita\_flk.005)

(4) Southern Selkup, Middle Ob

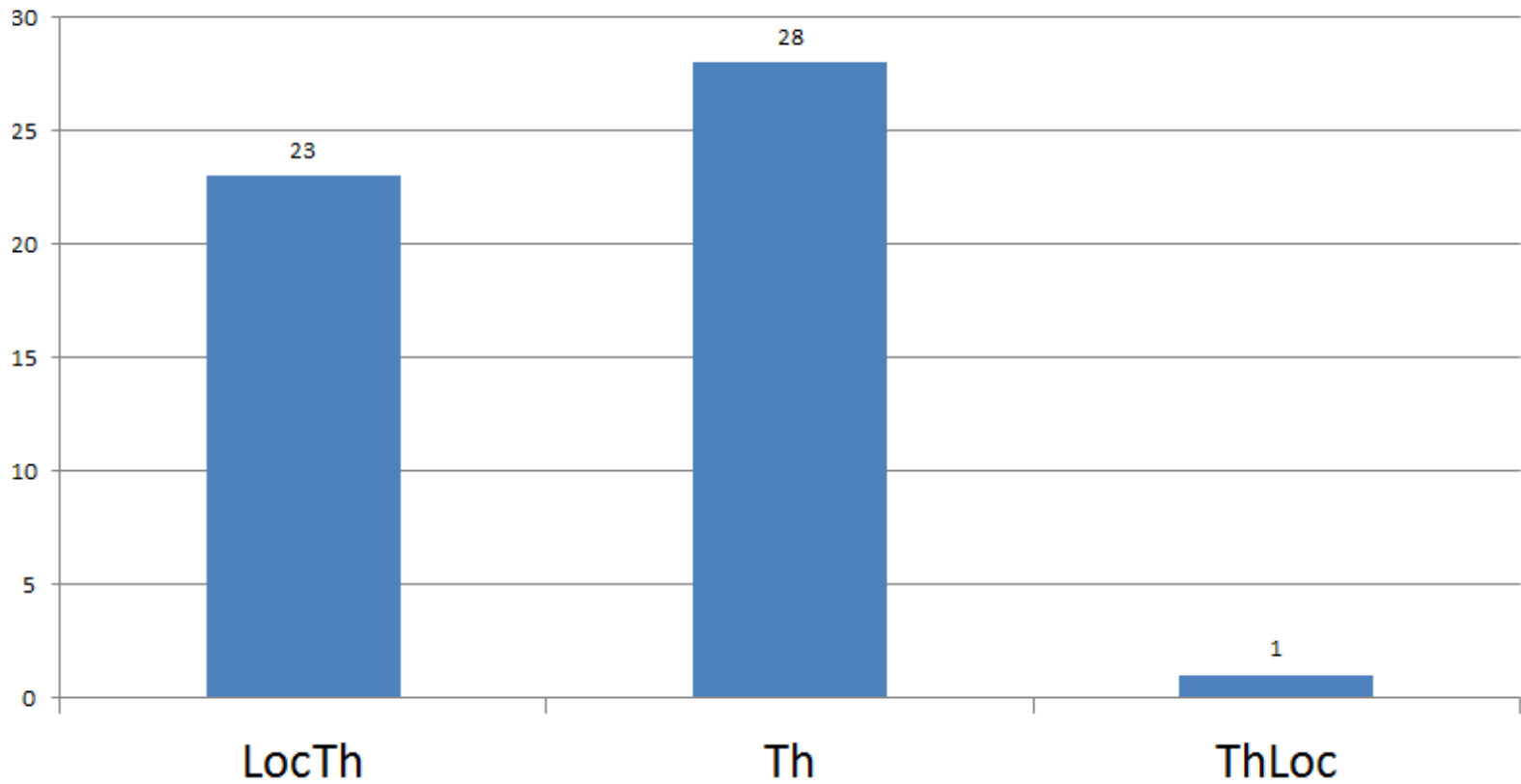
*Swεšk*      *koti-ŋ*      *ε:-ja.*  
cone      much-ADV      be-AOR.3SG.S

‘There are many cones.’ (SMS\_1980\_ItjaForest\_flk.030)

### Word order in existential sentences



### Word order in existential sentences (without copula)



- In 43 out of 53 sentences copula is used (81,13%)
  - zero copula is possible but not frequently used

(5) Central Selkup, Narym

*Nača-yət*

there-LOC.ADV

*ki-ge.*

river-DIM

‘There is a river.’ (MNN\_1977\_Hunt\_nar.007)

- 18 negated sentences
  - non-existent verb: *čaŋkigu* ‘to be absent’
  - Russian loan *n’etu*

(6) Central Selkup, Parabel

<i>Hör</i>	<i>ča:ŋg-wa.</i>
snow	NEG.EX-AOR.3SG.S

‘There is no snow.’ (MNS\_1984\_BrotherSister\_flk.017)

(7) Central Selkup, Parabel

<i>Aldibodi</i>	<i>n’etu.</i>
ground	NEG.EX-3SG.S

‘There was no floor.’ (SAA\_1984\_MyGrandmother\_nar.009)



# Locative sentences

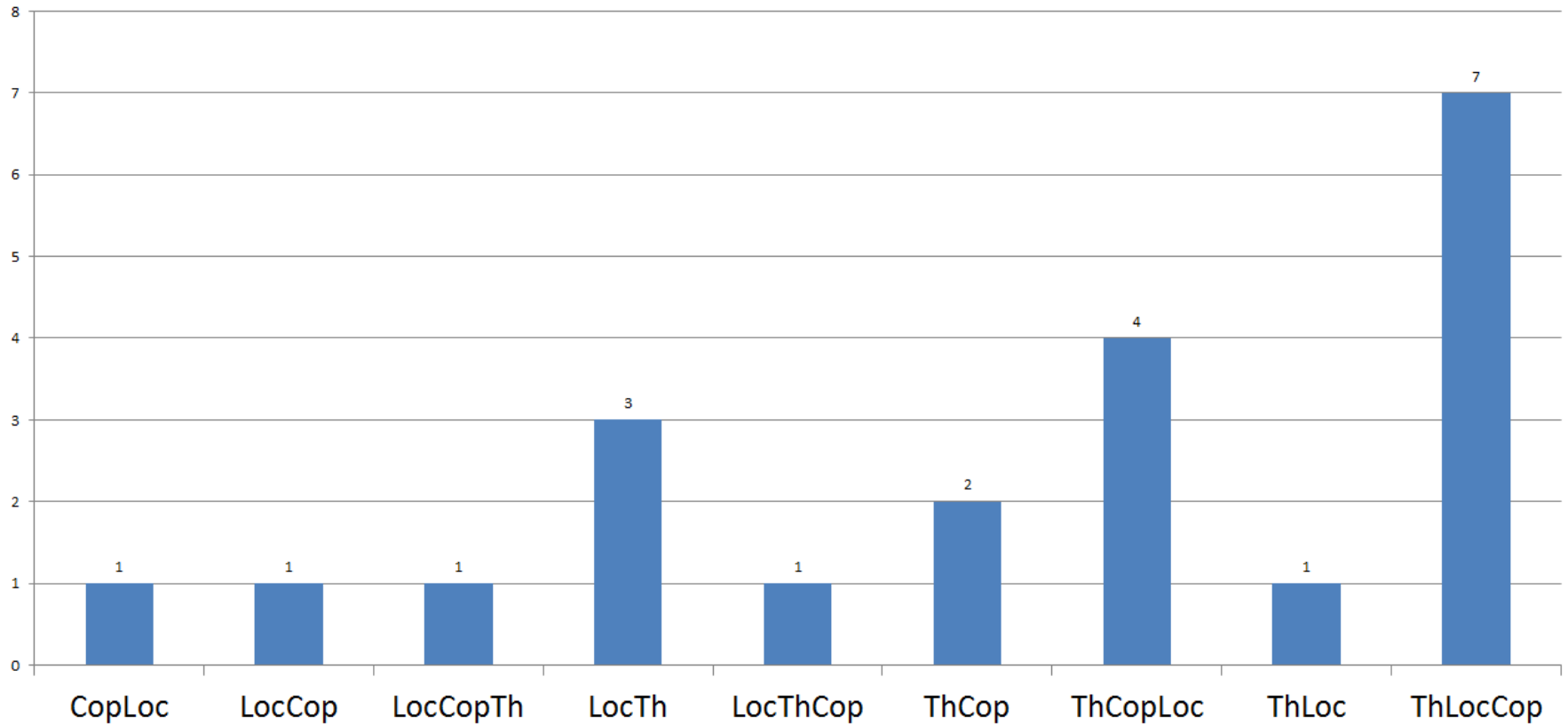
– Expected word order: **Th** – **Loc** – Cop

(8) Central Selkup, Narym

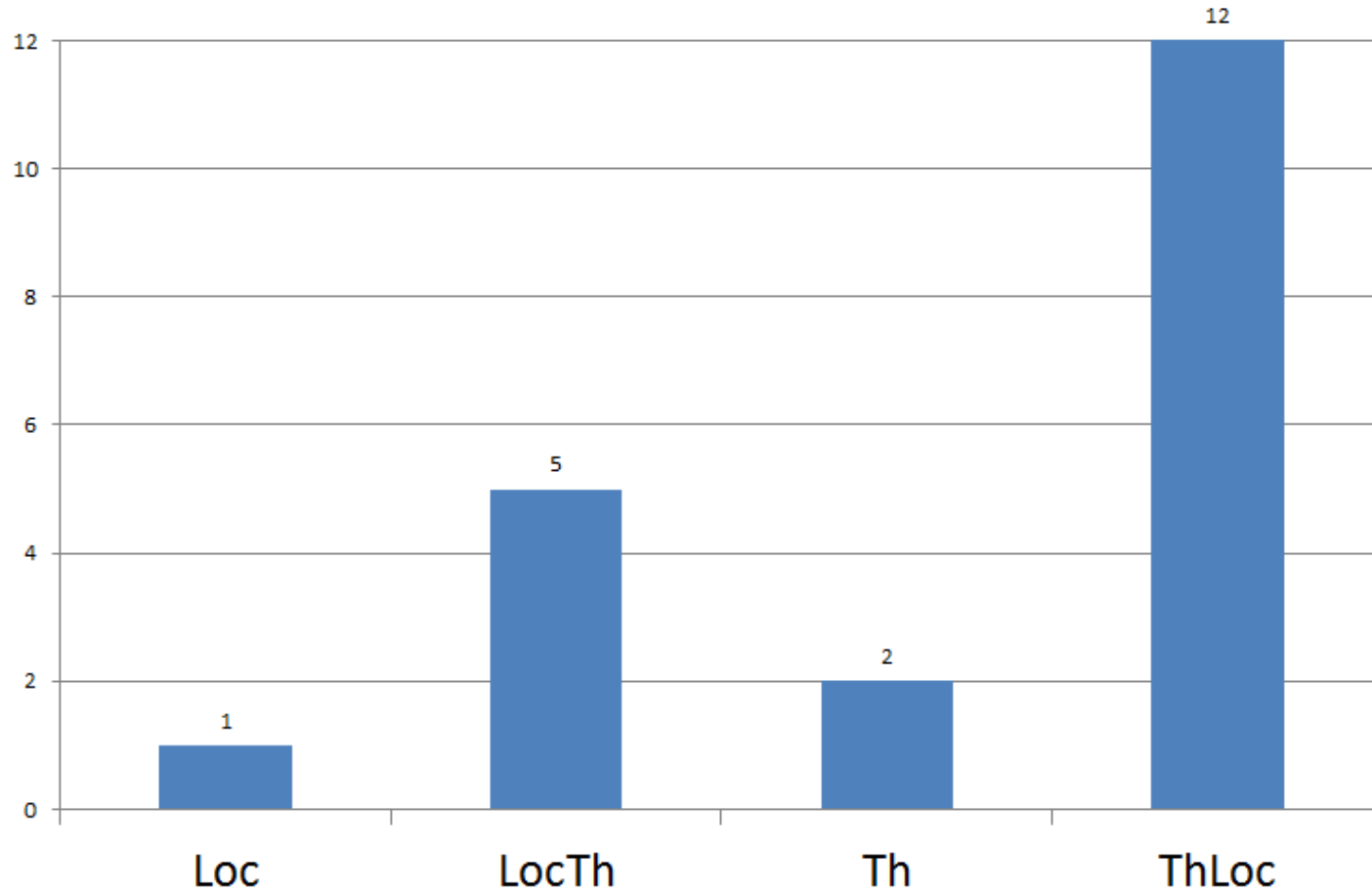
<b>Mat</b>	<b>taw</b>	ea-k.
I	here	be-1SG.S

'I am here.' (MNN\_1977\_ItjaGrandmother\_flk.021)

### word order in locative sentences



### word order in locative sentences (without copula)



- Again: the use of copula is very common but zero copula is possible:

(9) Southern Selkup, Middle Ket

<i>teb-i-n</i>	<i>pidə-t</i>	<i>t'u:-n</i>	<i>pu:čo-yən.</i>
he-EP-GEN	nest-3SG	earth-GEN	inside-LOC

'His nest is in the ground' (KMS\_1966\_MouseGray\_flk.005)

- In the corpus there are no negated locative sentences (yet)

## Exeption: Loc – Th

(10) Central Selkup, Tym

<i>N'aro-kin</i>	<i>e-ja</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>tu.</i>
swamp-LOC	be-AOR.3SG.S	this	lake

'This lake is at the swamp.' (KFN\_1967\_HumanSizedPike\_flk.011)

- Overt definiteness marker: demonstrative pronouns, possessive marking...

## Definiteness effect

- The theme of an existential sentence cannot be definite
  - While in locative sentences it mostly is
- Milsark (1977), Leonetti (2008) and many others

(11a) *There is a cat. vs. \*There is the cat.*

(11b) *Es gibt eine Katze. vs. \*Es gibt die Katze.*

## Strong and weak DPs

- Some modifying elements can be regarded as indefinite, whereas others mark the DP as definite

strong DPs	weak DPs
the	a
Demonstratives	something, someone
Pronouns	Number determiners
Possessive DET's	Plural and mass
Universals (all, every, each..)	Determiner in nonuniversal reading
DET in universal reading	

Milsark (1977: 46): strong and weak DPs for English

# Definiteness effect in Central and Southern Selkup

- Selkup is a non-article language
- Existential and locative sentences differ only in regards to word order
  - Available data suggests that DPs in existential sentences cannot receive a definite interpretation
  - Word order is used to mark definiteness



# Strong and weak DPs in Central and Southern Selkup

strong DPs	weak DPs
Proper names	Number determiners
Demonstratives	Quantifiers as 'such', 'many', 'few'
Possessive markers	
Universals	

(following Wagner-Nagy 2016: 233 for Nganasan)

- Strong DPs can only be found in locative sentences
- If there is a special marker for definiteness, the word order is variable

- Existential with number:

(12) Central Selkup, Parabel

<i>Nača-t</i>	<i>hombla</i>	<i>ma:n</i>	<i>e-ya.</i>
there-LOC.ADV	five	house	be-AOR.3SG.S

‘There are five houses.’ (SAI\_1984\_StoryAboutLifeLong\_nar.030)

- Locative with possessive marking

(13) Southern Selkup, Middle Ket

<i>teb-i-n</i>	<i>pide-t</i>	<i>t'u:-n</i>	<i>pu:čo-yən.</i>
he-EP-GEN	nest-3SG	earth-GEN	inside-LOC

‘His nest is in the ground’ (KMS\_1966\_MouseGray\_flk.005)

# Summary

- Selkup does not have a verb solely expressing existence
  - *equ* ‘to be’ is used in existential and locative sentences
- The word order in existential sentences is (Loc) – Th
  - The position of the copula is variable, zero copula is possible
  - For negation a special NEG.EX-verb is used
- The word order in locative sentences is Th – Loc
  - The position of the copula is variable, zero copula is possible
- (In)Definiteness in existential and locative sentences is mainly marked by word order
  - Strong DPs can only occur in locative sentences
  - If a strong determiner is used, the word order in locative sentences is more variable

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