

Topicality and the typology of predicative possession

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1. Introduction

Stassen (2009) and other general accounts on the typology of predicative possession (in particular Creissels (1979), Heine (1995)) recognize a topic possessive type with the possessee coded like the figure in existential predication, and the possessor encoded as a framing topic. It is uncontroversial that, in many languages, this constitutes a common way, or even the preferred way, of expressing predicative possession. Japanese (Section 2) provides a good example of this type of situation. It is, however, extremely dubious that such constructions could constitute the only type of predicative possession in a language, as explicitly claimed by Stassen (2009: 753-754) for Mandarin and other Southeast Asian languages. This would certainly contradict a fundamental functional principle, according to which a basic clause type encoding a given type of event/relation such as possession should not be limited in the operations it allows on NPs representing the participants in the event. Hence, the topic possessive type can hardly be the only available option in a given language, since in a language in which the possessor NP in predicative possession could only be encoded as the framing topic of an existential clause, it would not be accessible to the mechanisms to which framing topics are not accessible – in particular, questioning.

In this presentation, we argue that Stassen's (2009) analysis of Southeast Asian languages must be reconsidered, and that, in particular, the predicative possession construction found in Sinitic languages must be analysed as an instance of the *have*-possessive type, although it involves the same predicator as an existential predication, and probably results from the reanalysis of a topic possessive construction that was initially a variant of a predicative possession construction of the locational possessive type.

2. Topic possessive clauses as a variant of the locational possessive type of predicative possession: the case of Japanese

In a discussion about topicality and predicative possession, the case of Japanese is particularly interesting, since in Japanese, topicality is overtly marked. Japanese has a predicative possession construction belonging to Stassen's locational possessive type, with the possessee encoded as the subject of an existential verb, either **iru** (with animate subjects) or **aru** (with inanimate subjects), and the possessor marked with the particle **ni**, used to code various types of oblique NPs – Ex. (1b).

(1) Japanese (Keidan 2008: 354-355)

a. **Heya ni otoko ga iru.**

room OBL man SUBJ exist

'There is a man in the room.'

- b. **John san ni kuruma ga aru.**
John HON OBL car SUBJ exist
'John has a car.'

However, according to Keidan (2008: 354-355), for most speakers, in assertive possessive clauses, the possessor must also be overtly marked as topical, as in (2b). Moreover, in the presence of the topic marker, **ni** can be omitted, as in (2c), which according to Keidan seems to be the preferred pattern for many speakers.

(2) Japanese (Keidan 2008: 354-355)

- a. **John san ni kuruma ga aru.**
John HON OBL car SUBJ exist
'John has a car.'

- b. **John san ni wa kurumaga aru.**
John HON OBL TOP car SUBJ exist
'John has a car.'

- c. **John san wa kuruma ga aru.**
John HON TOP car SUBJ exist
'John has a car.'

Marking the possessor as topical is however impossible in possessive clauses in which the possessor is questioned. In (3), the term marked as topical and placed at the initial position is the possessee, whereas the possessor marked by **ni** is placed in the following preverbal position. Note that, in this example, the interrogative **nani** 'what?' excludes any ambiguity between a possessive and a locative reading: a locative reading would only be possible with the interrogative **doko** 'where?'

(3) Japanese (Keidan 2008: 356)

- Puopera wa nani ni aru no?**
propeller TOP what OBL exist Q
'What has a propeller?'

To summarize, Japanese is a particularly clear case of a language in which the topic possessive type of predicative possession is highly salient, but must nevertheless be analysed as a variant of a more basic construction which according to Stassen's typology of predicative possession belongs to the locational possessive type. Crucially, in Japanese, the possessor NP can be marked by the topic marker **wa**, the oblique marker **ni**, or both, but the possibility of using **wa** depends on information structure, whereas the use of **ni** is not bound to such conditions. Consequently, Japanese predicative possession can be analysed as belonging basically to the locational possessive type, with the possessor marked in principle by the oblique particle **ni**. Although particularly frequent, possessive clauses of the topic possessive type are better accounted for as deriving from the locational possessive construction by means of a rule allowing **ni** to be omitted if the possessor is marked as topical.

3. Existential and possessive constructions in Sinitic and other Southeast Asian languages: introductory remarks

Contrary to Stassen's claim that Southeast Asian languages (including Sinitic languages) typically have constructions of the topic possessive type, we adopt the view that Sinitic and probably other Southeast Asian languages present a clear case in which the predicator of existential constructions is shared by a possessive construction fully aligned with the basic transitive construction, and thus belongs to Stassen's *have*-possessive type.

In fact, this polyfunctionality has been viewed as an important areal feature in earlier literature on this linguistic area, for example, in M. Clark (1989) who discusses data from four unrelated language families of Hmong (Hmong-Mien), Khmer and Vietnamese (both Mon-Khmer, Austro-asiatic), Thai and Lao (both Tai-Kadai) and Mandarin (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan).¹ In spite of this, the distinction between the two interpretations of existential and possessive can be clearly made synchronically at the syntactic level of the clause, as treated in the following discussion for Standard Mandarin.

The existential construction is monovalent, but is frequently combined with a locative expression, whereas the possessive construction is bivalent with the possessor coded as the subject/agent and the possessee coded as the direct object or patient. Below are two examples from Khmer (data from M. Clark 1989, her transcriptions and translations):

(4) Khmer: (a) existential construction and (b) possessive construction with *miən*

- a. **Niw psaa nih miən mənuh craən nah.**
at market this have person be much very much
'There are a lot of people at this market.'
- b. **Kñom miən prədap krup baep.**
I have tool every kind
'I have all kinds of tools.'

In the typological literature, constructions such as (4b) are commonly presented as cases of the possessor been encoded as a framing topic (*As for Possessor, there is Possessee*), and Mandarin Chinese is commonly mentioned as a typical example of a language lending itself to this analysis – Ex. (5).

(5) Mandarin Chinese (Stassen 2009: 59 quoting Li & Thompson 1981: 513 who treat this construction as a variant of locus-existential presentatives of the nature 'As for him/her [locus], there are three children')

- Tā yǒu sān-ge háizi.** 她有三个孩子。
3SG exist/have three-CLASS child
'He/she has three children.'

In the following section, we will argue that, although the lack of morphological evidence makes it difficult to distinguish the argumental position of subject from the topic position at the left periphery of the clause, this is not a case of the possessor being encoded as a framing topic.

¹ For a summary of the argumentation concerning East and Southeast Asia as a linguistic area, see Chappell (2015).

4. Existential and possessive constructions in Sinitic languages: Standard Mandarin

Verbs cognate with Mandarin **yǒu** 有 and showing similar syntactic behaviour can be found in all ten main branches of Sinitic, including Yue (e.g. Cantonese), Wu (e.g. Shanghainese), Min (e.g. Taiwanese) and Hakka among many other languages in this family. In addition to this set of cognate existential and possessive verbs, the majority of Sinitic languages also have a counterpart set of portmanteaux negative existential and possessive verbs. In this analysis, we will use Standard Mandarin examples in our argumentation, merely for the reason of space restrictions.

4.1. Possessive and existential *yǒu* in Mandarin

In its possessive use, **yǒu** occurs in a frame that can be schematized as follows:

NOUN_{POSSESSOR} Yǒu NOUN_{POSSESSED}

The **yǒu** of possession can be used in a very general way to express ownership of material possessions, as in (6a), but also extends its use to ‘ownership’ of less tangible objects such ‘words’ in (6b), or an illness in (6c), just in the way expected of a possession verb (see Bally’s characterization of ‘have’ verbs (1926), including French **avoir**).

(6) Mandarin Chinese

- a. **Wǒmen júzhǎng yǒu hǎo jǐge shǒujī.** 我们局长有好几个手机。
 1PL director have very many:CL mobile
 ‘Our bureau director has several mobiles.’
- b. **Gāngcái nèi-jù huà zhēn-de yǒu qíyì.** 刚才那句话真的有歧义。
 just.then that-CL words real-ADV have ambiguity
 ‘That sentence just then really was ambiguous.’ (Leiden Weibo Corpus)
- c. **Wǒ nǎinai yǒu bìng.** 我奶奶有病。
 1SG grandmother have illness
 ‘My grandmother is ill.’

Furthermore, **yǒu** 有 can be used for ‘possession’ of parts of the body as well, as in (7). This may appear to contradict its characterization as a construction expressing alienable possession (Chappell 1996). However, even in Mandarin genitive NP constructions, body part terms are more frequently marked by the overt genitive marker **de** 的 in the NP_{POSS’R} DE NP_{POSS’EE} form than by simple juxtaposition which iconically expresses inalienability. Put differently, zero-marking is more common with possessed head nouns such as kin terms and spatial orientation than with body parts (Chappell & Thompson 1992).

(7) Mandarin Chinese

- Nǐ yǒu liǎngzhī yǎnjing, yīge bízi, yīge zuǐ.**
 2SG have two:CL eye one:CL nose one:CL mouth
 ‘You have two eyes, one nose and one mouth.’
 你有两只眼睛，一个鼻子，一个嘴。

As an existential predicate, **yǒu** 有 ‘there is’ needs only one, typically, postverbal argument, in a construction that can be schematized as follows:

YǒU NOUN_{FIGURE}

The existential construction has an important discourse function as a presentative, introducing new referents (see Li and Thompson 1981: 509-519). As has been well-established, new information in Mandarin typically occurs in postverbal position, as for **mǎyǐ** 蚂蚁 ‘ant’ in (8) which follows the existential verb **yǒu** 有 ‘there is’ (see, for example, Chao 1968):

(8) Mandarin Chinese

Qiáo! Yǒu hǎo duō mǎyǐ! 瞧！有好多蚂蚁！

look there.be very many ant

‘Look! There are lots of ants.’

It is normally not possible to place the single argument in the position preceding the existential verb **yǒu** ‘there is’, unless it has been fronted and topicalised in a listing construction.

Existential constructions hold an optional slot for a locative prepositional phrase which can occur clause-initially and has the form (ZÀI)-NOUN_{GROUND}-POSTPOSITION_{SPATIAL}. This slot is ‘optional’ in the sense that the referent of the ground may be known from the prior discourse, or from some kind of shared knowledge between the interlocutors, or it is exophoric, making explicit mention unnecessary, as in (8) above.

In Mandarin, locative phrases are introduced by the preposition **zài** 在 ‘at, in’ which is omissible in clause-initial position of existential clauses. In contrast to this, for nouns which are not inherently place names or proper nouns referring to geographical locations such as ‘France’ or ‘Shanghai’, one of the spatial postpositions such as **-li** 里 ‘in’ also needs to be used and, in this case, it is obligatory:²

[(ZÀI)-NOUN_{GROUND}-POSTPOSITION_{SPATIAL}]_{GROUND} YǒU NOUN_{FIGURE}

(9) Mandarin Chinese

(Zài) huāyuán-li yǒu rén. (在)花园里有人。

(at) garden-in there.be person

‘There is someone in the garden.’

Note also that in monovalent structure with locative-existential predicate **yǒu**, the locative prepositional phrase, as seen in example (9) above, may be readily postposed after the sole argument NP (the figure element, **rén** ‘person’), but in this case the preposition **zài** ‘at, in’ is obligatory:

² Hence, **Túshūguǎn-li yǒu shū** 图书馆里有书 (library-in there.be books ‘There are books in the library’) is acceptable without the preposition **zài** ‘at’ but not without the postposition **-li** ‘in’: ***Túshūguǎn yǒu shū**. In other kinds of constructions, the constraints on the use of this locative preposition **zài** may differ: **Wǒ zài túshūguǎn(li) kàn shū** 我在图书馆(里)看书 (1SG-at-library-(in)-read-book ‘I read books in the library’). Cf. Peyraube (1981), Chappell & Peyraube (2008) and Chu Zexiang (1996) on the diachronic development of locatives.

YǒU NOUN_{FIGURE} ZÀI NOUN_{GROUND}

(10) Mandarin Chinese

Yǒu rén zài huāyuán-li. 有人在花园里。
 there.be person at garden-in
 ‘Someone is in the garden.’

In M. Clark’s description of several Southeast Asian languages (1989), the monovalent existential predicates which have the same form as the possessive predicates similarly allow locative phrases in either clause-initial or clause-final position. These locative phrases are all overtly marked by spatial terms and so cannot be interpreted as some kind of subject, either in (11a) or (11b) from Hmong, exemplifying the two different uses of **muaj** ‘there.is’ and ‘have’ respectively (data from M. Clark 1989).

(11) Hmong locative-existential **muaj** (a) and possessive **muaj** (b)

a. **Nyob hauv lawv lub vaj muaj ib tug npua.**
 at inside 3PL area garden have one anim. pig
 ‘In their garden, there’s a pig.’

b. **Nws muaj peb lub ntim hauv nws lub hnab thoom.**
 3SG have three thing bowl inside 3SG thing shoulder bag
 ‘She has three bowls in her bag.’

In contrast to this, it is usually not possible for the possessor NP in the related possessive construction to be moved into a locative PP at the end of the clause, since it is not a locative referent in the first place. Moreover, it would be nonsensical in effect for this function of **yǒu** ‘have’, when it is used to express the possession of body parts and illnesses, as in (7) and (8) above.³

This already suggests that, as shown in the following section, the possessive use of **yǒu** ‘have’ is not at all fundamentally a existential construction and that its possessor NP acts as a subject rather than as a framing topic.

4.2. The case for a syntactic distinction between possessive and existential *yǒu* in Mandarin

According to our analysis, possessive and existential **yǒu** are distinguished by occurrence in different *syntactic* frames: the possessive **yǒu** takes two arguments in a relational type of clause, whereas the existential **yǒu** needs only one, typically, postverbal argument. The identification of the possessive construction of Mandarin as an instance of the topic possessive type implies another analysis, according to which there is no *syntactic* distinction

³ In the case of (7), this would produce the rather comical **Yǒu liǎngzhī yǎnjīng zài nǐ nàr** 有两只眼睛在你那儿。 ‘There are two eyes with you/at your place’, since the structure is now monovalent and, moreover, the ‘two eyes’ would appear to be dislocated from their owner. Some possessive constructions may be so transformed into existentials with a locative PP, but this implies that the possessor NP can be interpreted, or is susceptible in the first instance to an interpretation as a place in the new locative PP.

between possessive and existential **yǒu**, and a possessive clause is just an existential clause with a framing topic interpreted as a possessor: ‘As for Possessor, there is Possessee.’

Lyons (1967: 393ff.) is in fact one of the first analyses to relate existential, locative and possessive sentences and to make the claim that possessors can be viewed as ‘animate locations’, an approach taken up in a later cross-linguistic comparison by E. Clark (1978) and also in Norman (1988:97), who treats possessive **yǒu** as a subclass of existential sentences in Mandarin Chinese. This was also the view adopted by one of the present authors in an account of the typology of predicative possession (Creissels, 1979: 367-426) that was strongly influenced by (Lyons 1967). We take issue with this viewpoint, since we do not view the possessor in the possessive use of **yǒu** as a syntactically disjoint topic, the implication of this approach. This is a separate construction type, in spite of the fact that there is a possible diachronic relationship between the two.

A particularly strong argument in favor of our analysis is that, in questions about the identity of a possessor, the interrogative **shéi** 谁 ‘who’ occupies the same position to the left of **yǒu** as the alleged framing topic interpreted as a possessor in assertive possessive clauses. In other words, the possessor noun phrase is accessible to questioning exactly like the noun phrases occupying the argumental position of subject/agent in the basic transitive construction – Ex. (12).

(12) Mandarin Chinese

- a. **Tā yǒu shū.** 他有书。
 3SG have book
 ‘He/she has a book.’
- b. **Shéi yǒu shū?** 谁有书?
 who have book
 ‘Who has a book?’

If **tā** in (12a) were really a framing topic in a construction without any argumental slot to the left of **yǒu**, (12b) would not be possible, since interrogative words cannot act as framing topics. If the possessor were just some kind of ‘animate location’ occupying the topic slot in assertive clauses, questioning the identity of a possessor would require another construction in which it would behave more or less like a locative adjunct.

The fact that possessor NPs can be questioned *in situ* and without any locative marking is a decisive proof that they do not occupy a topic position, but rather the argument position commonly analysed as the subject position in Mandarin Chinese syntax. Consequently, possessive **yǒu** and existential **yǒu** do not have the same argument structure, and possessive **yǒu** is a bivalent verb whose coding frame is aligned with that of typical transitive verbs. In other words, the construction of possessive **yǒu** is an instance of Stassen’s *have*-possessive type.

4.3. A note on possessive **yǒu** and the topic-comment construction

In the previous section, we have proposed that possessive **yǒu** should not be treated as a subtype of the topic-comment construction in Mandarin since the possessor is clearly accessible to syntactic mechanisms such as questioning in WH-content interrogatives (see example (12)). As is well-recognized, a real syntactic topic is disjoint from the main clause it frames, to which it bears no syntactic relation as an argument of the verb (the classic

description being Chao 1968: 95-104, see also Rygaloff 1971 and Li & Thompson 1976 on these constraints).

One of the present authors has argued in an earlier work (Chappell 1996) that in spite of Li & Thompson's characterization of Mandarin as a topic-prominent language, topic-comment constructions are in fact relatively rare in both spoken and written genres of Standard Mandarin, in particular for the double subject subtype in which the framing topic is a fully lexical NP.

To take one example, in the corpus of 21 narrative texts constituting the Mandarin version of the Pear Stories, there are only 22 clauses which could be considered as belonging to the double subject subtype of the topic-comment structure and just 15 of these contained two fully lexical NPs as respectively the topic and the subject of the following minor clause.⁴ These 22 double subject clauses constitute just 1.2% of all 1804 intonation units in the sample of texts used. Below are two such examples from the Pear Stories:

(13) Mandarin Chinese

NP_{1POSS'R} // NP_{2POSS'EE} VP
 那 个 女 孩 子 // 个 子 显 得 比 较 大。
Nèigè nǚháizi, // gèzi xiǎnde bǐjiào dà.
 that:CL girlchild build appear rather big
 'The girl, she appeared to be quite big in build.' (Pear I.0:200)

This second example contains a minor clause with the existential predicate **yǒu** 'there is' which can occur in the comment part of a topic-comment structure, unlike *have*-possessive **yǒu**.

(14) Mandarin Chinese

那 个 小 男 孩 子 呢 // 脸 上 没 有 表 情。
Nèigè xiǎo nán-háizi ne, // liǎn-shàng méi yǒu biǎoqíng.
 that:CL little boy-child PRT face-on NEG have expression
 'The little boy, well, there was no expression on his face whatsoever.'
 (Pear II.7/8:77-78)

4.4. Possessive **yǒu** as a non-canonical transitive verb

One might object to our analysis that possessive **yǒu** is not a canonical transitive verb. However, it is important to remember that verbs found in *have*-possessive constructions, even those whose transitive origin is unquestionable, are rarely if ever perfectly canonical transitive verbs. A case in point is Spanish **tener**, whose properties with respect to differential object marking are not identical to those of typical transitive verbs (Creissels 2013). In fact, the notion of *have*-possessive implies that the coding of the possessor and the possessee is similar to that of the agent and the patient in the basic transitive construction, but does not imply that

⁴ The Mandarin Pear Stories comprise 1804 intonation units and two and half hours of recording, carried out by Mary Erbaugh in Taiwan. The double subject construction in Mandarin functions to express an inalienable relation in the personal domain, typically describing a person's physical or psychological condition through a related part of the body or some aspect of the personality, but can also refer to kin relations. There are of course even 'looser' types of topic-comment structures to be found in spoken genres of Mandarin, with a much reduced predictability for the semantic relation and which were not treated in this 1996 study.

possessive clauses have all the properties of prototypical transitive clauses. Moreover, the fact that, historically, possessive **yǒu** is more likely to have derived from existential **yǒu** than vice versa, cannot be used as an argument against the *have*-possessive analysis, since the transitivization of initially non-transitive possessive constructions (or *have*-drift) is a common type of evolution.

Synchronically, possessive **yǒu** is clearly a non-canonical transitive verb. There are in fact several diagnostics which show this to be the case, and, furthermore, suggest that the direction of reanalysis and semantic change has most likely proceeded from the monovalent existential verb to the bivalent transitive possessive verb.

First of all, the verb **yǒu** may not occur in the differential object-marking construction in Mandarin, formed with the marker **bǎ** : S **bǎ** O VP, as in (15b):

(15) Mandarin Chinese

- a. **Wǒ yǒu língqián le.** 我有零钱了。
 1SG have small.change CRS
 ‘I’ve got some small change.’
- b. ***Wǒ bǎ língqián yǒu le.** *我把零钱有了。
 1SG DOM small.change have CRS

The object-marking construction is high on any transitivity scale (Hopper & Thompson 1980, Tsunoda 1985) and its requirement of a both referential and affected direct object is symptomatic of this. This situation resembles somewhat that for Spanish **tener** which does not strictly adhere to the rule of marking referential human NPs serving as direct objects by the DOM preposition **a** (see Creissels 2013).

A second and related restriction is that **yǒu** ‘have’ cannot be passivized, and this resembles the situation for non-canonical transitive verbs in other languages such as English **have**, French **avoir** or German **haben**.⁵ Compare the attempted passivization in (16a) of the SVO sentence in (15a) above and also with the passive in (16b) from a Chinese website which has **língqiánbāo** ‘coin purse’ as its subject.

(16) Mandarin Chinese

- a. ***Lǐngqián bèi wǒ yǒu.** *零钱被我有。
 small.change PASS 1SG have
 (?‘The small change was had by me.’)
- b. **Wǒ zhù péngyǒu jiā, qián, huàzhuàngpǐn, língqiánbāo**
 1SG stay friend home, money, cosmetics, change.purse
bèi tā mèi tōu le.
 PASS 3SG Y.sister steal CRS
 我住朋友家, 钱, 化妆品, 零钱包被她妹偷了。

‘When I was staying at a friend’s place, her money, cosmetics and coin purse were stolen by her younger sister.’ (Zhidao.Baidu.com 12 June 2015 «5Candy2 »)

⁵ Notwithstanding the colloquial uses of **have** and **avoir** in English and French passives: **I’ve been had** and **Je me suis fait avoir** (meaning similarly ‘I’ve been taken in/tricked’).

Third, **yǒu** ‘have’ is aberrant in that it has its own specific negator, **méi** 没, which precedes the verb, whereas most transitive verbs are negated by **bù** 不 in present and irrealis contexts.

(17) Mandarin Chinese

- a. **Wǒ méi yǒu língqián.** 我没有零钱。
 1SG NEG₁ have small.change
 ‘I haven’t got any small change.’
- b. ***Wǒ bù yǒu língqián.** *我不有零钱。
 1SG NEG₂ have small.change
 (attempted meaning: ‘I haven’t got any money.’)

Finally, **yǒu** ‘have’ does not allow modification by perfective aspect marking which follows the verb, yet this is a typical trait of transitive action verbs in Mandarin.⁶

(18) Mandarin Chinese

- ***Wǒ yǒu le língqián.** *我有了零钱。
 1SG have PFV money
 (attempted meaning: ‘I did have some small change.’)⁷

4.5. Diachronic development

Documentation for the Sinitic family dates back to the Shang dynasty oracle bone inscriptions of 14th-11th centuries BC, known as the **jiǎgǔwén** 甲骨文. Even in this early corpus of divinatory texts, both the existential and possessive interpretations of **yǒu** may be found, (Takashima (1996: 303-348) and Djamouri (1987).

Controversy abounds in the domain of Chinese historical linguistics as to whether the existential use preceded the possessive use of **yǒu** or vice versa. In the tradition of European scholarship, the dominant view has been that existential ‘there is’ derived from possessive ‘have’, thus described as early as in the work of von der Gabelentz on Classical Chinese (1881). In contrast to this, many scholars in China take the diametrically opposed view that the existential construction predated the possessive use (for example, Zhu Lei 2010, Yao Zhenwu 2015), yet the argumentation is lacking. A third approach is seen in the Japanese tradition which has tended to adopt potentially what is a more prudent standpoint, viewing the possessive and existential uses as essentially revealing different syntactic and semantic structures, both attested in the earliest known documents (Takashima 1996: 307-309).

In a detailed analysis of the polysemy of **yǒu** in the Oracle Bone Inscriptions, Takashima indeed shows that both uses were possible as early as the Period I inscriptions and argues that

⁶ However, this verb may co-occur with two other main grammaticalized markers of aspect in Mandarin, **yǒu-zhe** 有着 have-PROG and **yǒu-guo** 有过 have-EXP. It remains to be explained why there is a gap for the perfective aspect marker in simplex clauses (see Note 8).

⁷ This is certainly the case for simple S-V-O clauses. However, the situation is more complicated when it comes to complex NPs following **yǒu** or its use in complex sentences such as the conditional where it may co-occur with **le**: 如果我有了零钱, 我会把它存进银行。 **Rúguo wǒ yǒu le língqián, wǒ huì bǎ tā cúnjìn yínháng.** ‘If I had small change (or: pocket money), I would deposit it in the bank.’ (zhidao.baidu.com 5th July 2013). This is a vast topic concerning aspect that would need its own detailed explanation, given the existence of two homophonous **le** in Mandarin with different functions, one as a verbal aspect marker and the other as a clause-final discourse marker.

they should, therefore, be considered separate constructions (1996: 304-5, our transcriptions and glossing):

(19) Oracle Bone Inscriptions, Period I (1200-1181)

a. Existential

Yǒu dà yǔ. 有大雨。 (Qianbian 3.19.2)
 there.be big rain
 ‘There will be heavy rain.’

b. Possessive

Wǒ qī yǒu huò. 我其有禍。 (Bingbian 3.11)
 1PL AUX have misfortune
 ‘We will perhaps have misfortunes.’

In another detailed study of the Oracle Bone Inscriptions, Djamouri observes (1987 :113-114) that the subject of **yǒu** is found only in postposed position for its monovalent existential use : \emptyset -**yǒu**-Noun. This in itself clearly distinguishes the existential use structurally from the possessive one.

The Bronze Inscriptions provide another main source of historical data in Chinese linguistics for the following period of the Western Zhou (11th-7th centuries BC), representing Early Archaic Chinese. In these inscriptions, both uses of **yǒu** continue to be found with an increase in the possessive use, according to Yao Zhenwu (2015: 59).

(20) Bronze Inscriptions, Rubbing from the *Da Yu Ding* 大盂鼎 (Great Tripod of Yu), Early Western Zhou dynasty (1046-771 BC)

... **pì jué tè, pǔ yǒu sì fāng** (...)
 rid 3SG evil wide have four directions
 ‘Evil having been got rid of, (the King) occupied the whole country.’
 鬪畢慝，撫有四方 (...)

yǒu chái zhēng sì, wú gǎn zuì.
 there.be fire.rite winter.rite sacrifice NEG dare get.drunk
 ‘Whenever there were sacrificial rites, no-one dared to get drunk.’
 有柴烝祀，無敢醉。

And both uses of **yǒu** have been used continuously up to the present.

The upshot of these data is that, in terms of the historical documents, it is very difficult, nigh impossible, to determine the direction of grammatical change that combined with the grammatical development of these two construction types – monovalent and bivalent.

Therefore, we need to rely more upon the synchronic behaviour of these two types of predicates, as outlined in the previous sections. If one accepts the hypothesis of an evolution from existential **yǒu** to possessive **yǒu**, the ambiguous bridging context which allowed re-interpretation of the locative prepositional phrase in clause-initial position may have been created by the use of proper nouns for locations that do not need any overt marking by spatial prepositions or postpositions, as outlined in Section 4.1 above.

This would have paved the way for the new interpretation of the clause-initial NP as the possessor and syntactically as the ‘agent’ argument of the verb in a possessive clause aligned with the basic transitive construction, rather than simply the location at which the given object

is found. The diachronic development thus may have proceeded as follows:

1. Locative-existential (monovalent)
 $(\text{NP}_{\text{GROUND}})_{\text{LOC}} \text{YŌU} \text{NP}_{\text{FIGURE}}^8$

> 2. Transitive possessive (bivalent)

$\text{NP}_{\text{POSSESSOR}} \text{YŌU} \text{NP}_{\text{POSSESSED}}$

There is also a third possible extension to an aspectual use which lies outside the scope of our discussion but merits being mentioned here:

> 3. Present perfect auxiliary in V1-V2 constructions

$\text{NP}_{\text{SUBJECT}} \text{YŌU} \text{VERB} (\text{NP}/\text{X}\dots)$

(only in certain Sinitic languages including Taiwanese Mandarin and Hong Kong Cantonese)

4.6. Conclusion to Section 4

In this section, for the case of Mandarin, we hope to have shown that the possessive use of *yōu* is *not* a case of a topic-framed possessor in a topic-comment construction based on a locative-existential predicate but rather a separate construction type, a *have*-possessive, albeit potentially diachronically related.

5. Discussion and general conclusion

Our main claim is that, for obvious functional reasons, the ‘topic possessive’ type cannot be the only type of predicative possession in a given language, since the possessor would then be denied access to operations to which NPs encoding event participants must have access in one way or another. For example, in some ergative languages, the agent in the basic transitive construction cannot be questioned, focalised, or relativised, but this impossibility is compensated by the existence of an antipassive variant of the transitive construction in which the agentive argument of the transitive verb is coded as an intransitive subject, thus getting access to the operations in question. Similarly, in some languages, some types of adjuncts cannot be focalised or relativised, but this impossibility is compensated by the existence of an applicative derivation by which they can acquire the status of object, which makes them accessible to focalisation and relativisation.

Consequently, there are only two possibilities for the languages mentioned in the typological literature as having the topic possessive type of predicative possession as their only available option:

- either there is a gap in the data on which the analysis is based, and the language also has another (probably less frequent) type of predicative possession construction;
- or the possessive construction would be more appropriately analysed as being a case of the *have*-possessive (or a more or less non-canonical variant thereof), and the confusion is due to the lack of clear morphological evidence for distinguishing subject NPs from framing topics.

⁸ $\text{NOUN}_{\text{GROUND}} = (\text{ZAI}) \text{NOUN}_{\text{LOCATION-POSTPOSITION}}_{\text{SPATIAL}}$

Diachronically, the generalization of a ‘topic possessive’ construction is only possible if it is accompanied by the reanalysis of the position occupied by the possessor phrase as an argumental position accessible to a range of operations (such as questioning) to which framing topics are not accessible.

Crucially, rejecting the ‘topic possessive’ as a basic type in a synchronic typology of predicative possession does not contradict the idea that topicality plays a crucial role in the evolution of possessive predication, and in particular in the emergence of *have*-possessives. The high degree of inherent topicality of prototypical possessors (in comparison with prototypical possesseees) favours a widespread tendency to topicalise them in clauses of the locational possessive type, since this particular type of predicative possession (contrary to the *have*-possessive type) does not designate the possessor as the default topic (Creissels 2013, forthcoming). However, an initially topicalising construction can only become the sole, possible way of encoding a given type of event, if the NP in framing topic position has been reanalysed as occupying an argumental position. In this way, it becomes accessible to operations to which framing topics do not have access.

In Section 2, we have presented the case of a language (Japanese) in which a topic possessive construction, although particularly frequent in assertive clauses, must be analysed as a variant of a more basic locational possessive construction.

In Section 4, we have argued that, at some stage in the history of Sinitic languages, the situation was probably similar to that synchronically found in Japanese (with however the important difference that Sinitic languages have nothing similar to the topic marking and argument-role marking found in Japanese), but in their present state, the predicative possession constructions found in Sinitic languages have to be analysed as instances of the *have*-possessive type.

On the basis of diachronic and synchronic data, Sinitic languages point to a possible development from verbs of existence which take just one argument, cf. Mandarin **yǒu** X ‘there is X’, to syntactically transitive verbs of possession which take two arguments, X **yǒu** Y ‘X has Y’. This may have been enabled by the presence of a clause-initial locational adjunct (**zài** X, **yǒu** Y ‘at X, there is Y’), subsequently reanalysed as the subject argument (and semantically as the possessor) on ellipsis of the locative adposition (see Chu Z. 1996; Chappell & Peyraube 2008).

We are not able to establish to what extent this conclusion holds true for the other Southeast Asian languages mentioned by Stassen (2009) as illustrations of the topic possessive type of predication possession. It is possible that some of them have not yet reached the final stage of the evolution resulting in the emergence of a *have*-possessive construction, and still have a topic possessive construction analysable as a variant of a locational possessive construction that has passed unnoticed so far. However, our impression on the basis of the documentation we have been able to consult is that, far from being an isolated case, the situation found in Sinitic languages is probably typical for this area.

For example, Guiqiong (Qiangic, Sino-Tibetan) has a verb **jẽ⁵⁵** expressing existence or possession of an inanimate entity, and the noun **jẽ³³-wu⁵³** derived from this verb by suffixing the nominaliser **-wu** can be interpreted either as ‘rich person’, or ‘belongings’ (Rao 2015: 429-430). This derivation is difficult to reconcile with the hypothesis of **jẽ⁵⁵** being only a monovalent predicate of existence used to express possession in a topic possessive construction, and rather supports the view that, alongside existential **jẽ⁵⁵**, Guiqiong also has a synchronically distinct (although homophonous and probably cognate) bivalent verb **jẽ⁵⁵** ‘have’ with the argument structure <Possessor, Possessee>.

Similarly, in Menya (a language belonging to another branch of Qiangic), the noun resulting from the suffixation of the nominaliser **-mi** to the existential/possessive verb **2ndzy**

can be interpreted either as ‘person possessing something’ or ‘person present somewhere’ (Gao 2015: 417-8), which again points to a distinct argument structure in the two uses of this verb.

Contrary to previous accounts of the distribution of the types of predicative possession in the world’s languages, Southeast Asia should probably be considered as showing a particularly high concentration of *have*-possessives, which M. Clark’s analysis (1989) seems to suggest.

As regards the relationship between locational, existential, and possessive predication, the history of linguistic theory in the 20th century has been deeply marked by the idea that the *have*-possessive type of predicative possession is a typological oddity that opposes the modern languages of Europe (the so-called ‘Standard Average European’ languages) to the rest of the world, and possessive constructions must derive in some way or another from locational-existential predication. Recent typological investigation has shown that the *have*-possessive type of predicative possession is quite widespread in the languages of the world, and the *have*-drift, by which predicative possession constructions of other types tend to acquire characteristics of the *have*-possessive type, is a very common type of evolution in the domain of predicative possession. However, as a consequence of the common view that Southeast Asian languages are ‘topic-prominent’ languages (which in fact largely relies on the lack of obvious morphological evidence for distinguishing pre-verbal subjects from left-dislocated topics in the languages in question), the status of Southeast Asian languages has never really been adequately discussed in the literature on the typology of predicative possession. In general accounts on this subject, it is simply taken for granted that the possessor in the predicative possession constructions of Southeast Asian languages is not the subject in a *have*-possessive construction, but rather a framing topic added to the construction of a monovalent existential predicate. In this presentation, we hope we have made it clear that this position should be reconsidered.

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Grammatical abbreviations used in the glossing of examples: ADV adverbialiser; ASST assertive use of sentence-final particle; CLASS ~ CL classifier; CRS currently relevant state marker; DOM differential object marker; HON honorific particle; NEG negative adverb; OBL oblique case marker; PASS passive marker; PRT discourse particle; PL plural; PRT discourse particle; Q question marker; SG singular; SUBJ subject; TOP topic marker; Y younger.

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