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Existential predication and have-possessive constructions in the languages of the world

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Abstract. The present article deals with the relationship between have-possessive constructions and inverse-locational predication, a type of construction commonly characterized as ‘existential’, illustrated by English *There is a cat in the tree* (contrasting with the plain-locational clause *The cat is in the tree*). Some of the languages that have a transitive ‘have’ verb use the same verb as an inverse-locational predicator. Two types of historical explanations can be considered: either the inverse-locational construction developed from the impersonalization of a pre-existing have-possessive construction, or the possessive construction initially belonged to the locational-possessive type, but has undergone changes making the coding of the possessor more similar to that of A in transitive clauses and/or the coding of the possessee more similar to that of P (have-drift).

Keywords: have-drift, ‘have’ verb, impersonalization, inverse-locational predication, plain-locational predication.

1. Introduction

This article deals with the relationship between have-possessive constructions and a type of construction commonly characterized as ‘existential’ but designated here as ‘inverse-locational predication’.

EXISTENTIAL is the term commonly used by linguists to characterize clauses such as *There is a cat in the tree*, whose distinctive property is that they denote the relationship between a situation and its constituent elements with the perspectivization (or profiling) ‘from situation to entity’. In other words, the meaning of such clauses can be broadly paraphrased as ‘Situation S has entity E as one of its constituent elements’.

As rightly observed by Sarda and Lena (this volume), the fact that sentences such as *There is a cat in the tree* figure prominently in discussions of ‘existential constructions’ poses a terminological problem that may be a source of confusion, since these sentences “express the presence of an entity in a place rather than its mere existence”. In particular, it is noteworthy that not all ‘existential’ constructions can be paraphrased by means of the verb *exist*, as for example *There is a cat in the tree* vs. **There exists a cat in the tree*. In order to clarify the confusion surrounding the use of ‘existential’ as a linguistic notion and its relationship to the notion of ‘existence’ as defined in dictionaries and/or discussed by philosophers, I propose to introduce the notion of INVERSE-LOCATIONAL PREDICATION and to limit the term EXISTENTIAL to constructions in which a nominal expression is assigned the semantic role of being a

constituent element of the universe of discourse, or of a situation within the universe of discourse which is not overtly specified, and whose identity must be retrieved from the context.

INVERSE-LOCATIONAL PREDICATION as defined by Creissels (2019) refers to constructions typically found in clauses such as *There is a cat in the tree*, contrasting with the plain-locational clause *The cat is in the tree*. Prototypical instances of plain-locational predication (PLP) and inverse-locational predication (ILP) equally encode EPISODIC SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS involving two concrete entities: a FIGURE that has the ability to move, and a GROUND occupying a fixed position in space (or at least less mobile than the figure). The difference lies in the perspectivization of the relationship: from figure to ground in plain-locational predication, from ground to figure in inverse-locational predication.¹ For a general discussion of inverse-locational predication, its relationship with other types of constructions (including existential constructions in the narrow sense suggested above), and a detailed account of the typology of ILP constructions, readers are referred to (Creissels 2019).

In the languages that commonly express predicative possession by means of a transitive ‘have’ verb with the possessor in the role of A and the possessee in the role of P (have-possessive constructions), there may be no formal relationship between the predicators used in predicative possession and inverse-locational predication. This is the situation found in English (possessive *have* vs. inverse-locational *there be*). However, another possible configuration is the use of an inverse-locational predicator distinct from that found in plain-locational predication but identical to the verb ‘have’ expressing predicative possession, as in Bulgarian (example (1)).

(1) Bulgarian (pers.doc.)²

- a. *Kotka-ta e pod masa-ta.*
 cat-D be.PRS.3SG under table-D
 ‘The cat is under the table.’
- b. *Ima kotka pod masa-ta.*
 have.PRS.3SG cat under table-D
 ‘There is a cat under the table.’

¹ The notion of perspectival structure has been proposed by Barbara Partee and Vladimir Borschev in a series of articles (Partee and Borschev (2004, 2007), Borschev and Partee (2002)), in which they argue that the contrast between locational and existential predication is only indirectly related to information structure, and basically reflects the ‘perspectivization’ of figure-ground relationships. A notion arguably identifiable to Partee and Borschev’s perspectival structure has been discussed in the cognitive or ‘functional’ literature under names such as VIEWPOINT (DeLancey 1981) or SEMANTIC STARTING POINT FOR THE PREDICATION. To put it in a nutshell, the idea is that syntactic structure reflects the fact that uttering a sentence referring to a given situation implies first ‘scanning’ the situation in a particular order. Starting from a participant inherently more salient than the others constitutes the unmarked way of carrying this operation, but depending on the individual languages, alternative constructions encoding the choice of another participant as the perspectival center may have been grammaticalized.

² The abbreviation ‘pers.doc.’ (personal documentation) refers to data I collected myself on poorly documented or undocumented languages on which I carried out fieldwork, or to data taken from various sources other than descriptive grammars, or constructed according to the indications given by descriptive grammars, which in both cases have been checked with the help of native speakers.

- c. *Sestra mi ima kotka.*
sister 1SG have.PRS.3SG cat
'My sister has a cat.'

It may also happen that the same verb (glossed 'be/have') acts as a transitive verb of possession and as a locational verb also used in typical plain-locational contexts, as in Qiang. In example (2), the 'be/have' verb agrees with the figure in the plain-locational clause (2a), and with the possessor in the possessive clause (2b).

(2) Puxi Qiang (Tibeto-Burman, Qiangic; Huang 2004: 93, 94)

- a. *ŋa tso zəʔ.*
1SG:TOP here be/have:1
'I am here.'
- b. *tɕi ʃkueʃkue-ta dzua zə.*
house around-LOC army be/have
'There is a team of soldiers around the house.'
- c. *ŋa tsutsu a-la zəʔ.*
1SG:TOP younger.brother one-CLF be/have:1
'I have a younger brother.'

The article is organized as follows. After an overview of have-possessive (Section 2) and have-ILP constructions (Section 3), Sections 4 and 5 discuss the two types of evolutions that may be responsible for the emergence of configurations of the type illustrated in example (1) above: creation of ILP constructions via impersonalization of have-possessive constructions (Section 4), and transitivization of possessive constructions that initially belong to the oblique-possessor type (Section 5). Section 6 deals with the configuration illustrated in example (2) above, in which the same verb is used as a 'be' verb and as a 'have' verb. Section 7 summarizes the main conclusions.

2. Have-possessive constructions

2.1. Have-possessive constructions and other types of predicative possession

In accordance with common practice, PREDICATIVE POSSESSION is used here as an abbreviation for 'direct/plain predicative possession', i.e. predicative constructions encoding a variety of possessor-possessee relationships with the unmarked perspectivization 'from possessor to possessee', illustrated by English *John has a book / two sons / short hair* (as opposed to inverse predicative possession expressing the alternative perspective 'from possessee to possessor', illustrated by English *The book is John's*). As a rule, languages have a limited number of predicative constructions (often just one) available to express a relatively wide range of possessive relationships.

Heine (1997) and Stassen (2009) constitute the most detailed and comprehensive accounts of the typology of predicative possession published so far. Although they differ in important respects, they basically agree on the types of predicative possession that can be identified in the world's languages.³ Apart from definitional and terminological issues, the main difference between the typology of predicative possession sketched in this section and those proposed by Heine and Stassen is the rejection of the so-called Topic Possessive type as a possible basic type of predicative possession. For a detailed discussion of this point, readers are referred to Chappell and Creissels (2019).

With very few exceptions that can mostly be explained as due to an ongoing process of have-drift (see Section 5), possessive clauses can be identified as belonging to one of the following three types:

- the HAVE-POSSESSIVE (or TRANSPOSSITIVE) type, with the possessor and the possessee coded like A and P in transitive predication;
- the S-POSSESSOR type, with the possessor coded like the S term of intransitive verbal predication or like the figure in plain-locational predication, and the possessee showing some non-core coding;
- the S-POSSESSEE type, with the possessee coded like the S term of intransitive verbal predication or like the figure in plain-locational predication, and the possessor showing some non-core coding.

(3b), to be compared to the prototypical transitive clause (3a), illustrates the have-possessive type.⁴

(3) Mandinka (Mande; pers.doc.)

a. *Fàatú yè kín-òo tábí kèê-lú yè.*
 Fatou CPL.TR meal-D cook man.D-PL for
 'Fatou cooked the meal for the men.'

b. *Fàatú yè báadiŋ-ò-lú sòtó ñiŋ sàatêe tó.*
 Fatou CPL.TR relative-D-PL have DEM village.D LOC
 'Fatou has relatives in this village.'

The S-possessor type can be further divided into two subtypes:

- the INCORPORATED-POSSESSEE type, in which the possessor is the single core argument of a proprietive predicate (either verb or adjective) derived from the noun designating the possessee, as in (4);

³ For a formal analysis of the different types of predicative possession identified in the typological literature, see Myler (2016).

⁴ The aspectual marker *yè* found in the two sentences of this example is basically a completive (or 'perfective') marker implying reference to past events, which, however, also allows for a stative reading with some verbs (including *sòtó* 'get' or 'have'). For more details on this point, see Creissels and Sambou (2013: 70-73).

- the COMITATIVE-POSSESSEE type, with the coding of the possessor and the possessee aligned with the coding of the NPs referring to an individual and his/her companion in comitative predication, as in (5).

(4) Kalaallisut (Eskimo-Aleut, Eskimo; Van Geenhoven 1998: 25)

Angut taana illu-qar-puq.
man that house-PROPR-IND.3SG
'That man has a house.' lit. 'This man is house-owning.'

(5) Hausa (Afroasiatic, Chadic; Newman 2000: 222)

Yārō yanà dà fensir̃.
boy 3SG.M.ICPL with pencil
'The boy has a pencil.' lit. 'The boy is with pencil.'

The S-possessee type can be further divided into two subtypes:

- the OBLIQUE-POSSESSOR type, with the possessor showing some kind of oblique marking: adessive (as in (6b), to be compared with (6a)), comitative, benefactive, etc.;
- the GENITIVE-POSSESSOR type, illustrated in (7), with the possessor and the possessee showing the same coding characteristics (genitive marking of the possessor and/or possessive or construct marking of the possessee) as in adnominal possession.

(6) Belarusian (Mazzitelli 2015)

a. *Mašyna byla kalja jaho.*
car be.PST.SG.F near 3SG.M.GEN
'The car was near to him.'

b. *U jaho byla mašyna.*
at 3SG.M.GEN be.PST.SG.F car
'He had a car.' lit. 'At him was a car.'

(7) Turkish (pers.doc.)

a. *Murat-in otomobil-i*
Murat-GEN car-CSTR
'Murat's car' (noun phrase including a adnominal possessor)

b. *Murat-in otomobil-i var.*
Murat-GEN car-CSTR there_is
'Murat has a car.'
(possessive clause, lit. 'Of_Murat there is his car.')

Of these five types, the have-possessive type and the oblique-possessor type have a particularly wide distribution in the languages of the world.

2.2. ‘Have’ verbs as more or less atypical transitive verbs

It is important to observe that the definition of the have-possessive type of predicative possession formulated in the previous section refers exclusively to the coding characteristics of the arguments. A more restrictive definition, according to which ‘have’ verbs should have all the behavioral properties of typical transitive verbs, would be hardly applicable, due to the fact that, cross-linguistically, the verbs involved in this type of construction are rarely (if ever) perfectly canonical transitive verbs. For example, in Spanish, as illustrated in (8), the behavior of *tener* ‘have’ in differential P flagging is not identical to that of more typical transitive verbs.

(8) Spanish (pers.doc.)

- a. *Conozco a una persona que te puede ayudar.*
 know.PRS.1SG ACC INDEF.F.SG person.SG that 2SG.DAT be.able.PRS.3SG help.INF
 ‘I know a person who can help you.’
- b. *Tengo un amigo que te puede ayudar.*
 have.PRS.1SG INDEF.M.SG friend.SG that 2SG.DAT be.able.PRS.3SG help.INF
 ‘I have a friend who can help you.’

2.3. Possible sources of have-possessive constructions

Historically, have-possessive constructions may result either from a semantic change affecting transitive verbs expressing meanings such as ‘take’, ‘grasp’ ‘hold’, ‘get’, ‘bear’ (a kind of evolution widely attested not only in various branches of the Indo-European family, but also in many other language families all around the world),⁵ or from the transitivity of possessive constructions of other types. Given the topic of this article, it is not necessary to enter into the details of the former type of evolution, i.e., the semantic bleaching process by which transitive verbs with more specific meanings may be converted into ‘have’ verbs. The latter type, commonly designated as HAVE-DRIFT, may affect all the other types of predicative possession, and is in fact a major source of typological change in the way languages express predicative possession.

2.3.1. Transitivity of incorporated-possessee constructions

The transitivity of constructions belonging to the incorporated-possessee type can be illustrated by Palikur (Arawak). As illustrated by example (9), synchronically, the possessive clauses of Palikur belong to the have-possessive type.

⁵ Interestingly, ‘have’ verbs resulting from this kind of semantic shift are particularly common in pidgins and creoles – see §2.4 below.

(9) Palikur (Arawak ; Launey 2003: 80)

Nah kadahan aynesa karukri.
 I have some money
 ‘I have some money.’

However, diachronically, *kadahan* ‘have’ was originally a monovalent predicate glossable as ‘be the owner of unspecified things’, consisting of the proprietive prefix *ka-* ‘endowed with’ and the noun *dahan* ‘possession’, but it now occurs in a construction in which it is followed by a noun phrase analyzable as fulfilling the syntactic role of object, to which the role of possessee is assigned. One may imagine that, originally, this construction involved a kind of apposition, something like, literally, ‘I am endowed with something, namely money’, with the specification of the possessee expressed as an afterthought in right-dislocated position. Starting from that, the possessee NP in right-dislocated position was reanalyzed as the object NP in a transitive clause.

2.3.2. *Transitivization of comitative-possessee constructions*

The transitivization of constructions belonging to the comitative-possessee type is widely attested in Bantu languages (Creissels Forthcoming). As a rule, the linear order in the comitative-possessee constructions found in Bantu languages is ‘possessor – copula – *with* – possessee’, and nothing can interrupt the sequence formed by the copula and the comitative preposition. Moreover, the copula typically includes prefixal elements (in particular, a subject index) also found in verb forms. Since the linear order in the basic transitive construction is A V P, this quite obviously favors the reanalysis of the sequence ‘copula + comitative preposition’ as a single unit with the categorial status of verb stem in a transitive construction. However, the reanalysis can only be considered as effective if the former ‘copula + comitative preposition’ acquires morphological properties incompatible with a decomposition as ‘copula + comitative preposition’.

Guérois (2015: 445-6) provides a good example of such a reanalysis in Cuwabo. This language has a verb *okáâna* etymologically decomposable as *okála* ‘stay, remain’ + *na* ‘with’. The clearest evidence that this decomposition is not possible anymore in a synchronic analysis of Cuwabo comes from the fact that the last vowel of *okáâna* behaves as the final vowel of a verb. In particular, it becomes *e* in the subjunctive.

(10) Cuwabo (Guérois 2015: 446)

Míyô maásikini ddi-kaán-ê dálá dhaaví ójá múkucé? Néé!
 1SG even_if 1SG-have-SBJV hunger how CL16.eat CL3.leftover no
 ‘I am very hungry, but to eat the leftovers? No way!’

Similarly, a distinction between *ukána* ‘have’ and *uká na* ‘be with’ is described by Madi (2005: 542) for Maore. The distinction is not immediately apparent in the infinitive, but for example *tsiná* ‘I have’ is formally distinct from *tsá na* ‘I am with’.

Other examples of have-drift from comitative-possessee constructions are provided by Stassen (2009: 209-219).

2.3.2. *Transitivization of locational-possessive constructions*

A transitivization process may also affect locational-possessives. Since this question is particularly relevant to the topic of the present article, it will be discussed in more detail in Section 4.

2.4. **Have-possessive constructions in the languages of the world**

Have-possessive constructions are very common cross-linguistically, much more common than was thought some decades ago. The widespread view that have-possessive constructions are rare outside Europe does not stand to scrutiny.⁶

The have-possessive type of predicative possession is strongly predominant not only in several branches of the Indo-European family, but also for example among the Atlantic languages of West Africa. I am aware of only one case of an Atlantic language (Balant Kentohe) in which the usual expression of possessive predication does not belong to the have-possessive type. Have-possessive constructions are also common (although less predominant) in several other languages families of Sub-Saharan Africa (East-Sudanic, Gur, etc.).

According to the data provided by Stassen (2009), the have-possessive type of predicative possession is also widespread among Austronesian languages, several groups of Australian languages, and several groups of Amerindian languages (Uto-Aztecan, Tucanoan, etc.).

The have-possessive type of predicative possession is also by far the commonest type of predicative possession in creoles and pidgins, with ‘have’ verbs that are reflexes of an acquisitive verb of the lexifier language (English *get*, French *gagner*, etc.) (Michaelis et al. 2013).

The languages of continental South East Asia are another case in point. Chappell and Creissels (2019) show that, contrary to previous accounts of the typology of predicative possession, this area should be considered as showing a particularly high concentration of have-possessives.

Moreover, sporadic attestations of the have-possessive type can be found in most of the languages families or linguistic areas in which another type is strongly predominant. For example, the predominance of the oblique-possessor type in Uralic is unquestionable, but the have-possessive type is attested in Vogul (also known as Mansi) and Ostyak (also known as Khanty). Similarly, almost all Caucasian languages have the S-possessee type of predicative possession, with however the exception of Ubykh, whose possessive clauses illustrate the have-possessive type.

⁶ The origin of this opinion can be traced back to a theory of the relationship between societal change and linguistic change elaborated in the first half of the 20th century by some Indo-Europeanists, which in particular inspired Meillet’s (1923) analysis of the emergence of have-possessive constructions in Indo-European languages.

3. Have-ILP constructions

3.1. Introductory remarks

In (Creissels 2019), I propose the following definition of ‘plain-locational predication’ and ‘inverse-locational predication’ as comparative concepts in the sense of Haspelmath (2010).

PLAIN-LOCATIONAL PREDICATION (Koch’s (2012) THEMATIC LOCATION), illustrated by English *The cat is in the tree* or French *Le chat est dans l’arbre*, is identified as such cross-linguistically by its ability to encode prototypical figure-ground relationships with the unmarked perspectivization ‘from figure to ground’. By ‘prototypical figure-ground relationship’, I mean an EPISODIC spatial relationship between two concrete entities differing in their degree of MOBILITY: the ground typically occupies a fixed position in space, whereas the figure is mobile, which regardless of information structure gives it a higher degree of saliency, hence the unmarked nature of the ‘from figure to ground’ perspectivization.

INVERSE-LOCATIONAL PREDICATION (Koch’s RHEMATIC LOCATION) is identified as such by its ability to encode the same prototypical figure-ground relationships, but with the marked perspectivization ‘from ground to figure’: English *There is a cat (in the tree)*, French *Il y a un chat (dans l’arbre)*, etc.

In order to qualify as a representative instance of the comparative concept ‘ILP construction’, a predicative construction must fulfill the following conditions:

- a. it must be available to encode spatial relationships involving prototypical figures and grounds;
- b. it must be typically used in communicative settings where the relevant information is the presence of an entity at some place and its identification;
- c. it must not be analyzable as deriving from a general-locational predication construction via the application of some morphosyntactic device generally applicable to predicative constructions (such as variation in constituent order, topic/focus marking, or definiteness marking).

According to these criteria, many languages (probably more than half of the world’s languages) lack an ILP construction contrasting with the construction found in plain-locational clauses, and in many of them, contrary to a widespread opinion, it is even impossible to use variation in constituent order as a rough equivalent of the plain- vs. inverse-locational predication contrast found in other languages (for more details on this particular point, readers are referred to Creissels 2019).

In the remainder of the present article, predicative constructions used to encode figure-ground relationships with the unmarked perspectivization ‘from figure to ground’, but also found in contexts in which other languages tend to select a distinct ILP construction, will be designated as general-locational predication (GLP) constructions.

Among the types of ILP constructions identified in Creissels (2019), three have a relatively wide distribution in the world’s languages: the THERE_BE-ILP type, the HAVE-ILP type, and the type involving the use of a DEDICATED INVERSE-LOCATIONAL PREDICATOR.

THERE_BE-ILP constructions are defined as differing from plain-locational predication by the obligatory presence of a locative expletive. In most cases, the presence of the locative expletive implies a constituent order distinct from that found in the corresponding PLP

construction. English *There is N (Loc)*, Italian *C'è N (Loc)* and German *Da ist N (Loc)* are typical examples of there_be-ILP constructions.

DEDICATED INVERSE-LOCATIONAL PREDICATORS are defined as words or clitics constituting the distinctive element of ILP constructions that cannot be analyzed synchronically as resulting from the addition of a locative expletive to the corresponding PLP construction, or from impersonalization of a possessive construction with the possessor in A or S role. For example, synchronically, Spanish *haber* can only be analyzed as a dedicated inverse-locational predicator, but it was originally a ‘have’ verb used impersonally in an ILP construction. What happened is that, in the history of Spanish, a new ‘have’ verb developed from *tener* (whose original meaning was ‘hold’), so that *haber* eventually lost the possibility of being used transitively with the meaning ‘have’ and was completely replaced by *tener* in this function.

HAVE-ILP constructions are defined as ILP constructions meeting the following two conditions:

- (i) have-ILP constructions involve a predicator distinct from that used in plain-locational clauses, but also used in a have-possessive construction;
- (ii) in have-ILP constructions, the coding of the figure NP is identical to the coding of the possessee NP in the have-possessive construction.

In its inverse-locational use, the predicator shared by a have-possessive construction and a have-ILP construction may occur either alone or combined with an expletive pronoun (see §3.2 for illustrations).

In the THERE_HAVE-ILP variant of the have-ILP type, mainly found in some Romance varieties, a locative expletive (French *y*) is an obligatory element of the construction.

3.2. Have-ILP constructions: some illustrations

The use of a ‘have’ verb as an inverse-locational predicator has been illustrated for Bulgarian in the introduction (example (1)). A similar configuration is found in Modern Greek, with the difference that in the transitive construction of Greek, case-marking distinguishes A from P, which makes more apparent the fact that, in the have-ILP construction, the figure inherits the P-like coding that characterizes the possessee in the have-possessive construction.

In its transitive construction, the Greek verb *écho* ‘have’ has a nominative subject (the possessor) with which it agrees, and an accusative object (the possessee), as in (11a). But this verb also has an inverse-locational use in an impersonal construction with an accusative NP representing the figure, but no nominative NP, the verb invariably including a non-referential 3rd person singular index, as in (11b).

(11) Greek (Indo-European; pers.doc.)

- a. *Ta chōriá den échoun dáskalous.*
the villages NEG have.PRS.3PL teachers.ACC
‘The villages don’t have teachers.’

- b. *Den eíche dáskalous sta chōriá.*
NEG have.PST.3SG teachers.ACC in.the villages
'There were no teachers in the villages.' (also interpretable as
'He/she did not have teachers in the villages.' in an appropriate context)

Example (12) illustrates a have-ILP construction in a language that does not have subject-verb agreement, and in which the absence of a noun phrase preceding a verb also used as a transitive verb of possession is the only thing that differentiates inverse-locational clauses from possessive clauses.

(12) Vietnamese (Austroasiatic, Mon-Khmer; pers.doc.)

- a. *Tôi có sách.*
I have book
'I have books.'
- b. *Có một con ruồi trong bát canh của tôi.*
have one CLF fly in bowl soup of me
'There was a fly in my soup.'

Example (13) illustrates the there_have-ILP variant of the have-ILP type.

(13) Occitan (pers.knowl.)

- I a un can dins l'òrt.*
there_{expl} has a dog in the-garden
'There is a dog in the garden.'

Have-ILP constructions may be ambiguous with possessive predication involving a third person possessor, as in (11b) above. Wolof (14) provides an additional illustration.

(14) Wolof (Atlantic; Creissels & al. 2015)

- Am na woto.*
have PRF.3SG car
'He/she has a car.' or 'There is a car.'

In (15), a possessive reading would be at odds with our knowledge of the world, but from a strictly linguistic point of view, 'They have a fly bothering me' would be a possible reading.

(15) African American English (Green 2002: 82)

- Dey got a fly messing with me.*
they have a fly messing with me
'There is a fly bothering me.'

In other languages, have-ILP constructions are organized in a way that limits or even rules out the possibility of ambiguity with the possessive use of ‘have’. In Alemannic – example (16), the obligatory presence of an expletive third person neuter pronoun limits the possibility of ambiguity, since possessors are typically human, and therefore represented rather by masculine or feminine pronouns.

(16) Alemannic (Germanic; Czinglar 2002)

Es hot Rössr voram Hus.
3SG.N have.PRS.3SG horses in.front.of.the house
‘There are horses in front of the house.’

3.3. Have-ILP constructions in the languages of the world

As already mentioned, have-possessive constructions are quite frequent in the languages of the world. Have-ILP constructions are not found in all the languages that have a transitive verb of possession, but they are not rare either.

Have-ILP constructions are common in Central and Southern Europe:⁷

Albanian (Newmark et al. 1982),
Alemannic (Czinglar 2002),
Bulgarian (pers.doc.),
Calabrese and other Italo-Romance varieties (Cruschina 2015, Ciconte 2013, Bentley et al. 2013, 2015),⁸
Greek (pers.doc.),
Polish (pers.doc.),
Romanian (Lombard 1974).

In West Africa, have-ILP constructions are particularly common in the Atlantic family:

Fula (Creissels et al. 2015),
Joola (Creissels et al. 2015),
Lehar, as known as Laalaa (Creissels et al. 2015),
Mankanya (pers.doc.),
Ndut (Morgan 1996),
Nyun (Creissels et al. 2015),
Pepel (Creissels et al. 2015),
Saafi (Mbodj 1983),
Seereer (Creissels et al. 2015),
Wolof (Creissels et al. 2015).

Have-ILP construction are also very common in a vast region of mainland South East Asia including Sinitic languages (Mandarin, Cantonese, etc.), Tai-Kadai languages, Hmong-Mien

⁷ In Polish and Romanian, the availability of the have-ILP constructions is limited to negative clauses.

⁸ Have-ILP constructions were more widespread in early Italo-Romance varieties than in their descendants, characterized by a strong predominance of there_be-ILP constructions, cf. Bentley et al. (2013, 2015).

languages, most Mon-Khmer languages (Vietnamese – cf. (12) above, Cambodian, etc.), and some Tibeto-Burman and Austronesian languages. The use of the same predicators in possessive and inverse-locational predication has long been recognized as an areal feature of the languages spoken in this area, but in the typological literature, the received view is that the predicators in question are purely ‘existential’ predicators also found in possessive clauses belonging to Stassen’s ‘Topic Possessive’ type. In fact, as shown in (Chappell and Creissels 2019), to which the reader is referred for a detailed discussion, the languages of this area have possessive clauses of the have-possessive type, and most of them have an ILP construction belonging to the have-ILP type of inverse-locational predication.⁹

Pidgins and creoles constitute a fourth group of languages characterized by a strong predominance of have-ILP constructions. Out of the 75 pidgin and creole varieties represented in the Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures (Michaelis et al. 2013), 41 have a have-ILP construction. Interestingly, in this language sample, have-ILP constructions are found in 19 out of the 26 pidgin and creole varieties whose lexifier language is English, i.e. a language which does not have this type of ILP construction.

Outside of these four groups of languages, I also have identified the have-ILP type in the following languages:

Daba (Afroasiatic, Chadic; Lienhard 1978),
 Igbo (Niger-Congo, Benue-Congo; Onumajuru 1985),
 Langi (Benue-Congo, Bantu; Dunham 2005),
 Maasai (Eastern Sudanic, Nilotic; Payne 2007),
 Majang (Eastern Sudanic, Surmic; Joswig 2019),
 Obolo (Niger-Congo, Benue-Congo; Rowland-Oke 2003),
 Ostyak (Uralic; Nikolaeva 1999),
 Palikur (Arawakan; Launey 2003),
 Saisiyat (Austronesian, Formosan; Zeitoun et al. 1999),
 Sama-Bajau (Austronesian, West Malayo-Polynesian; Jun 2005),
 Seediq (Austronesian, Formosan; Tsukida 2005),
 South Efate (Austronesian, Oceanic; Thieberger 2006),
 Tenneset (Eastern Sudanic, Surmic; Randal 1998),
 Tetun dili (Austronesian, West Malayo-Polynesian; Williams-van Klinken et al. 2002),
 Ute (Uto-Aztecan; Givón 2011).

The there_have-ILP variant of the have-ILP type is very rare. Five of the seven languages in which I have found it belong to the Romance family:¹⁰ Catalan, French, Occitan, Sardinian (Jones 1993), and Calabrian (Bentley et Cruschina 2016, Bentley 2017). The other two are a

⁹ In some of the languages spoken in this area, the ‘have’ verb is also found in locational predication regardless of a distinction between plain- and inverse-locational predication. According to the definitions adopted in the present article, such languages do not have a have-ILP construction, and must rather be characterized as using the same verbs as copulas in GLP constructions and as ‘have’ verbs in have-possessive constructions – see Section 6.

¹⁰ Historically, the present form *hay* of Spanish *haber* ‘there be’ originates from such a construction, since it can be decomposed as *ha* third person singular of *haber* plus the reflex *-y* of a locative expletive, but synchronically, *hay* can only be analyzed as the irregular present form of a dedicated inverse-locational verb, since in Spanish, *haber* has been completely replaced by *tener* (from *tenere* ‘hold’) in the expression of possession.

Bantu language (Kagulu; Petzell 2008) and a mixed language with Bantu and Cushitic elements (Ma'a/Mbugu; Mous 2003).

4. The creation of ILP constructions via impersonalization of have-possessive constructions

IMPERSONALIZATION must be understood here as backgrounding of the participant expressed as the A term of a canonical transitive clause or as the S term of a canonical intransitive clause.

Before putting forward a diachronic scenario for the creation of ILP constructions from have-possessive constructions, it is interesting to remind that 'have' verbs can be found in clauses in which the only thing that relates the possessee to the possessor is the fact that they are simultaneously present in a given situation. For example, in English, a possessive clause such as *I had a policeman in front of me* is commonly used as an equivalent of the inverse-locational clause *There was a policeman in front of me*, not only as regards its denotative meaning, but also with respect to its discursive implications. Example (17) illustrates the same phenomenon in French.

(17) French (pers.knowl.)

a. *A votre gauche vous avez un tableau de Picasso.*
at your left you(pl.) have a painting of Picasso
(a museum guide, to visitors) 'On your left there is (lit. you have) a Picasso painting.'

b. *Fais attention, tu as une voiture derrière toi.*
do attention you(sg.) have a car behind you(sg.)
'Be careful, there is (lit. you have) a car behind you.'

Crucially, the same phenomenon can be observed with have-clauses referring to unspecified possessors, as in (18), where the subject is generic *you*. The compositional meaning of this sentence is something like 'People who live in that neighborhood have many restaurants in their vicinity', which in fact boils down to 'In that neighborhood there are many restaurants'. In other words, such a clause does not really denote that a given entity belongs to the personal sphere of a possessor, but rather that it is a constituent element of a spatial situation.

(18) French (pers.knowl.)

Dans ce quartier vous avez beaucoup de restaurants.
in that neighborhood you(pl.) have many of restaurants
lit. 'In that neighborhood you have many restaurants.'
> 'There are many restaurants in that neighborhood.'

Moreover, at least some of the languages in which have-possessive constructions can be found also have the possibility of expressing the relationship between a place and an entity

located at the place in question with the perspectivization ‘from place to entity’ by means of possessive clauses in which the possessor phrase refers to the place and the possessee phrase to the entity, as in (19).

(19) French (pers.knowl.)

Ce quartier a beaucoup de restaurants.

that neighborhood has many of restaurants

lit. ‘That neighborhood has many restaurants.’

> ‘There are many restaurants in that neighborhood.’

Based on such observations, a plausible hypothesis is that ILP constructions may develop from possessive constructions that do not refer to any specific possessor, such as (18), since the fact that no specific possessor is implied automatically makes more prominent the situation within the limits of which the potential possessors to which the clause refers are located.

The crucial move in this scenario is the routinization of the expression of the relationship between a place and an entity, without any reference to a person that could be viewed as a possessor (even in a very broad sense of this term), by means of the impersonalized variant of the have-possessive construction. At this stage, the possessor is suppressed from the argument structure of the clause, although a morphological element that initially implied reference to non-specific possessors may subsist as an expletive:

X have Y

> *X_{n.spec.} have Y* ‘(at some place) people have Y’

> (*X_{expl.}*) *have Y* ‘(at some place) there is Y’

In this perspective, inverse-locational predicators such as Krio *den get*, African American English *dey got*, lit. ‘they have’ (example (15), repeated here as (20)), or Jamaican *yu gat* lit. ‘you have’ (all from English *get*), are particularly suggestive, since they include a third person plural and second person expletive respectively, and cross-linguistically, third person plural and second person pronouns constitute a particularly widespread way to express non-specific reference to humans.

(20) African American English (Green 2002: 82)

Dey got a fly messing with me.

they have a fly messing with me

‘There is a fly bothering me.’

However, as suggested to me by Daniel Petit (pers.com.), one may also imagine an alternative scenario whose starting point is the possibility of expressing the relationship between a place whose precise identity needs not be specified and an entity located at the place in question as literally *it has X*, *it* referring to the place in question, and *X* to the entity. If such a formulation becomes the usual way of expressing that an entity *X* can be found at a place whose precise identity needs not be specified, speakers may reanalyze the construction as being locational

rather than possessive in nature, with the consequence that, if a noun phrase specifying the identity of the place referred to is (re)introduced, it is not coded as the possessor in predicative possession, but as the ground in locational predication. At the final stage of this evolution, if an anaphoric element that originally referred to a place assimilated to the possessor in predicative possession is maintained, its status is that of an expletive in an impersonal construction. For example:

- The garden has a tree.*
 > *It_i has a tree (the garden_i)*
 > *It_{expl} has a tree (in the garden)*

5. The transitivization of oblique-possessor constructions

5.1. Introductory remarks

The transitivization of incorporated-possessee constructions and of comitative-possessee constructions has been evoked in §§2.3.1–2 above. In this section, we examine in more detail the transitivization of oblique-possessor constructions, which constitute one of the two major types of predicative possession in the world’s languages.

Oblique-possessor constructions (‘locational possessive’ constructions in Stassen’s (2009) terminology) are possessive constructions in which the possessee is coded like S in canonical verbal predication, or like the figure in locational predication, whereas the possessor shows some kind of oblique marking, as in example (6), reproduced here as (21).

(21) Belarusian (Mazzitelli 2015)

- a. *Mašyna byla kalja jaho.*
 car be.PST.SG.F near 3SG.M.GEN
 ‘The car was near to him.’
- b. *U jaho byla mašyna.*
 at 3SG.M.GEN be.PST.SG.F car
 ‘He had a car.’ lit. ‘At him was a car.’

As rightly observed by Stassen (2009: 209), in a diachronic perspective, there is a clear asymmetry between have-possessives and the other types of predicative possession, in the sense that constructions initially belonging to any of the other types of predicative possession may acquire features that make them more similar to the have-possessive type (‘have-drift’), whereas the detransitivization of possessive constructions initially belonging to the have-possessive type is not attested. In the history of a language, it is possible that a have-possessive construction becomes obsolete and is replaced by a construction belonging to another type. For example, it is commonly admitted that, in the history of Russian and Latvian, an oblique-possessor construction replaced a more ancient have-possessive

construction as the usual way of expressing predicative possession.¹¹ By contrast, there seems to be no example of a have-possessive construction affected by morphosyntactic changes analyzable in terms of drift toward another type of predicative possession.

In oblique-possessor constructions, the have-drift may manifest itself in changes in the coding of the possessee that make it more similar to that of P in the basic transitive construction, in changes in the coding of the possessor that make it more similar to that of A in the basic transitive construction, or both.

5.2. Development of P-like coding of the possessee in oblique-possessor constructions

Evolutions by virtue of which the possessee in an oblique-possessor construction acquires coding properties typical of P in transitive predication have been described among others for Finnish (Creissels 2013), Israeli Hebrew (Ziv 1982, Zuckermann 2009), and Amharic (Ahland 2009).

For example, sentences such as those in (22) may suggest that, in Finnish, predicative possession is a typical instance of the oblique-possessor type, and that, syntactically, both the figure NP in the ILP construction and the possessee NP in the possessive construction are inverted subjects.

(22) Finnish (Seppo Kittilä, pers.com.)

- a. *Kadulla on auto.*
 street.ADESS be.PRS.3SG car
 ‘There is a car in the street.’
- b. *Pekalla on auto.*
 Pekka.ADESS be.PRS.3SG car
 ‘Pekka has a car.’

However, in the possessive construction, the case marking of the possessee NP departs from that of subjects, and is more similar to that of objects. In Finnish, the case marking of subjects and objects is complex, and largely ambiguous. Zero (or ‘nominative’) marking is not decisive, since in constructions that do not include a zero-marked subject (for example, in the imperative), object NPs may be in the zero case, and personal pronouns are the only nominals having an accusative form that unambiguously marks their use in object function.

In the construction illustrated in (22a), the status of the figure NP as an inverted subject is corroborated by the impossibility of having an accusative-marked personal pronoun in the same position. By contrast, as illustrated in (23), in the possessive construction, personal pronouns in possessee role are usually in the accusative case, which excludes analyzing them as inverted subjects.

¹¹ Contact with Uralic languages has been proposed as a possible cause of this change.

(23) Finnish (Seppo Kittilä, pers.com.)

a. *Pekalla on hänet.*
 Pekka.ADESS be.PRES.3SG 3SG.ACC
 ‘Pekka has her.’

b. *?Pekalla on hän.*
 Pekka.ADESS be.PRS.3SG 3SG

A plausible explanation is that the possessee, contrary to the figure in a spatial relationship, has at least some affinities with the patient of prototypical transitive predication in terms of affectedness and lack of control. Consequently, in a locational construction whose use has been extended to the expression of possession, the syntactically ambiguous zero marking of the NP representing the possessee may easily be reanalyzed as encoding object rather than subject function, and this reanalysis may subsequently concretize with the possible use of unambiguous accusative forms in the same syntactic slot. The result is a non-canonical (or hybrid) coding frame partially aligned with transitive coding, in which however the possessor NP maintains an oblique coding aligned with that of the ground NP in locational predication.

Example (24) illustrates the same kind of non-canonical coding frame (with a dative-marked possessor and an accusative-marked possessee) in Modern Hebrew.

(24) Modern Hebrew (Semitic; Rubin 2005: 60)

Yeš li 'et ha-sefer šelxa.
 there.is to.me ACC the-book of.you
 ‘I have your book.’

5.3. Topicalization of the possessor and reanalysis of oblique-possessor constructions

Due to their human nature, prototypical possessors have a high degree of inherent topicality, which may explain a tendency to topicalize them in possessive clauses of the oblique-possessor type, since in this particular type of predicative possession, the syntactic treatment of the possessor does not imply the status of default topic.

Let’s take for example the case of a language in which inverse-locational predication and predicative possession can be schematized as follows:

There.is figure (at ground)
There.is possessee at possessor

NPs moved to a topic position at the left periphery of the clause are commonly involved in two phenomena variously regulated by the individual languages: they may lose the adpositions or case marks they would take in the argumental position corresponding to their semantic role, and they may be resumed by pronouns. Consequently, depending on the topicalization strategies of the individual languages, the following types of constructions may develop as topicalizing variants of *There.is possessee at possessor*:

Possessor, there.is possessee

Possessor, at him/her there.is possessee

Given the inherent topicality of prototypical possessors, it is not surprising that constructions that are initially the topicalizing variant of an oblique-possessor construction tend to generalize as the unmarked way of formulating predicative possession, making obsolete the original oblique-possessor construction. The absence of flagging of the possessor in the resulting possessive construction implies reanalyzing the inverse-locational predicator as a polysemous predicator occurring in two distinct constructions:

- an inverse-locational construction in which the role of ground is expressed by an oblique-marked NP;
- a possessive construction in which the role of possessor is expressed by an NP showing no evidence of an oblique status.

In other words, in the possessive construction, the possessor occupying a topic position at the left periphery of the clause is reanalyzed as occupying an argumental position, and it can be expected that this reanalysis manifests itself by the possibility of operations (in particular, questioning), to which topicalized phrases do not have direct access.

Further evolutions and/or reanalyses of the possessive construction resulting from this change are conditioned by the precise form of the source construction (in particular, the presence or absence of a resumptive pronoun) and by the coding characteristics of the transitive construction in the language in question.

The most straightforward case is that of languages in which A and P in the basic transitive construction are neither flagged nor indexed, and are ordered according to the A V P pattern. In such a case, the obsolescence of the *There.is possessee at possessor* construction and the generalization of the topicalizing variant *Possessor, there.is possessee* immediately results in a possessive construction in which the coding of the possessor and the possessee is aligned with that of A and P in transitive coding. In other words, in such languages, the obsolescence of the original oblique-possessor construction and its replacement by its topicalizing variant automatically results in the emergence of a have-possessive construction.

An ongoing process of this type can be observed in Burmese. Like the vast majority of Tibeto-Burman languages, Burmese has an oblique-possessor construction involving the existential verb *εí* and the locative postposition (or case-marker) *hma*.

(25) Burmese (Tibeto-Burman; Jenny & Hnin Tun 2016: 247)

θəŋε.dzìn-hma kà hnə-zì εí-de.
 friend-at car two-CLF exist-NFUT
 ‘My friend has two cars.’

According to Jenny and Hnin Tun (2016: 247), in the possessive construction, the locative case-marker flagging the possessor may be dropped, which makes the construction at least superficially similar to a transitive construction (characterized by the lack of flagging of its two core terms). Moreover, there is evidence that the unflagged possessor can be reanalyzed as occupying an argumental position, rather than a topic position at the left periphery of the

clause. Crucially, if the dropping of *hma* were to be interpreted as strictly conditioned by topicalization, it should not be possible to drop *hma* with an interrogative pronoun fulfilling the semantic role of possessor, since interrogatives cannot be topics. However, this possibility is attested in the Burmese data quoted by Chappell and Creissels (2019), which means that, in its present state, Burmese attests a transitional stage in the evolution converting an oblique-possessor construction into a have-possessive construction.

(26) Burmese (Tibeto-Burman; Chappell & Creissels 2019)

$f\ddot{i}^n_2$ - do_1 - de_3 - hma_2 $b\varepsilon_2$. $\dot{\delta}u_1$ (- hma_2) k^h \dot{a} . le_3 \dot{a} . $\eta\varepsilon_2$ - le_3 - dwe_2 $f\ddot{i}_1$ - $\dot{\delta}a$ = le_3
 2F-ASS.PL-inside-at who(-at) child young-small-PL exist/have-NFUT=CQ
 ‘Among you, who has small children?’

Arabic illustrates a more complex case of have-drift in an oblique-possessor construction triggered by the generalization of possessor topicalization. As shown in detail for Maltese by Comrie (1989), in Arabic, the outcome of this evolution is a possessive construction that cannot be analyzed as an oblique-possessor construction anymore, but cannot be analyzed as fully aligned with the basic transitive construction either, except in pidginized varieties of Arabic in which reanalysis is facilitated by the reduction of inflectional morphology.

The predicative construction expressing possession in Arabic is originally a typical oblique-possessor construction, still considered the norm in Modern Standard Arabic. The possessor is flagged by a preposition, *ʕinda* ‘beside’ or *li* ‘to, for’, and the predicator is *kāna* ‘be’ (or its zero variant in the present), as in (27a). However, a variant in which the possessor NP is topicalized and resumed by an index suffixed to the preposition is possible, as in (27b). In both cases, ‘be’ agrees with the possessee phrase, in the same way as it agrees with the figure phrase in locational constructions.

(27) Modern Standard Arabic (Comrie 1989: 223-224)

- a. *Kānat li Zaydin xubzatun.*
 was.F to Zayd.GEN loaf.INDEF
 ‘Zayd had a loaf.’
- b. *Zaydun kānat la-hu xubzatun.*
 Zayd was.F to-him loaf.INDEF
 ‘Zayd had a loaf.’

Ex. (28) illustrates the variant with the preposition *ʕinda* ‘beside’.

(28) Modern Standard Arabic (Ambros 1969: 89)

ʕinda l-muʕallimi sayyāratun.
 beside D-teacher.GEN car.INDEF
 ‘The teacher has a car.’

In Maltese and other vernacular Arabic varieties, the variant of the possessive construction illustrated by Ex. (27a) and (28) has become obsolete. In Maltese, *għand* (phonetically *ʕand*, cognate with Classical Arabic *ʕinda*) still exists as a spatial preposition (‘at’) followed by a noun phrase to which the role of ground is assigned, but possessive *għand* cannot be analyzed as a preposition, since it obligatorily combines with a suffixed possessor index and can only be preceded by a possessor NP co-referent with this index, as in (29). Possessive *għand* can only be analyzed as a possessive predicator (or possessive ‘pseudo-verb’ in the traditional terminology of Arabic linguistics) whose coding frame is at least to some extent similar to that of a transitive verb: *għand* ‘have’ is preceded by the unflagged possessor NP in the same way as typical transitive verbs are preceded by the A phrase, and the obligatory indexation of the possessor on *għand* is comparable to the obligatory indexation of A on transitive verbs. The reanalysis of possessive *għand* as a word with a verb-like syntactic behavior is confirmed by the fact that *għand* ‘have’ is negated by means of the circumfix *m(a)...x* also used to negate verbs.

(29) Maltese (Comrie 1989: 221-222)

- a. *Il-ktieb għand Pawlu.*
 D-book at Pawlu
 ‘The book is at Pawlu’s.’
- b. **Għand Pawlu ktieb.*
 at Pawlu book
 intended: ‘Pawlu has a book.’
- c. *Pawlu għand-u ktieb.*
 Pawlu have-3SG.M book
 ‘Pawlu has a book.’
- d. *Pawlu m’ għand-u-x ktieb.*
 Pawlu NEG have-3SG.M-NEG book
 ‘Pawlu does not have a book.’

In Maltese, the possessive construction has undergone other changes that accentuate the difference with the original oblique-possessor construction. *Għand* ‘have’ has suppletive past and future forms (*kell* and *sa jkoll* respectively) originating from the combination of the verb ‘be’ with the preposition *li* – example (30). Like the present form *għand*, these past and future forms are obligatorily suffixed by a possessor index, whereas the agreement with the possessee NP that operated in the original oblique-possessor construction (as in (27) above) has been lost. This is visible in (30b), since *ħobża* is feminine, and **Pawlu sa tkollu ħobża* with feminine agreement is not possible.

(30) Maltese (Comrie 1989: 221-222)

a. *Pawlu kell-u ktieb.*

Pawlu have.PST-3SG.M book

‘Pawlu had a book.’

b. *Pawlu sa jkoll-u ħobża.*

Pawlu have.FUT-3SG.M loaf

‘Pawlu will have a loaf.’

Moreover, the preposition *lil* ‘to, for’ has acquired in Maltese an accusative function in a ‘differential object marking’ system, and this use of *lil* may extend to the marking of the possessee phrase in the construction of *għand* ‘have’, in particular when the possessee is pronominalized, as in (31).

(31) Maltese (pers.doc.)

Għand-i lil-ha.

have-1SG ACC-3SG.F

‘I have it (the car).’

However, the construction of *għand* ‘have’ is not fully aligned with the transitive construction, since the possessor phrase and the possessee phrase have indexation properties different from those of A and P in the transitive construction:

- contrary to P in the transitive construction (which can be represented by indexes suffixed to the verb), the possessee in the construction of *għand* ‘have’ cannot be represented by indexes suffixed to *għand*;
- the form of the possessor indexes attached to *għand* ‘have’ is different from that of the A indexes in the transitive construction, since the possessor indexes attached to *għand* ‘have’ originate from the paradigm of suffixes used to index the complement of prepositions. In Arabic, the person-number suffixes indexing the complement of prepositions coincide with the P indexes suffixed to transitive verbs in all persons except the 1st person singular, and consequently, the possessor indexes obligatorily attached to *għand* ‘have’ are more similar to P indexes than to A indexes.

Several other Arabic varieties (Moroccan, Tunisian, Lebanese, etc.) have been described as having predicative possession constructions more or less similar to that described above for Maltese. Interestingly, in Juba Arabic (a pidginized variety of Arabic spoken in South Sudan), the loss of agreement morphology has resulted in full alignment of the coding frame of *éndu* ‘have’ with the basic transitive construction (Manfredi 2017: 120). For a more detailed discussion of the have-drift in Arabic varieties, see (Creissels 2022).

6. ‘Have’ verbs also used as locational predicators in a GLP construction

In the configuration examined in the present section, the same verb has a transitive use in which it assigns the role of possessor to the referent of A (and the role of possessee to the referent of P), and an intransitive use in a GLP construction with the figure in the role of S. In other words, in the languages in which a grammatical relation ‘subject’ conflating transitive A and intransitive S can be recognized, an alternative characterization of this pattern is that the same verb can be used transitively as a ‘have’ verb with the possessor in subject role, and intransitively as a general-locational copula with the figure in subject role. In the presentation of the examples, such verbs are glossed ‘be/have’.

For example, in Qiang languages (Tibeto-Burman), verbal predication involves indexation of the S/A argument (32a-b), and S, A and P NPs are equally unflagged. The same verbs are used in the GLP construction and in possessive predication (32c-e). As can be expected, in locational predication, the indexed argument is the figure (32c-d). In the possessive use of the same verbs, the possessor and possessee NPs are equally unflagged, but the indexed argument is the possessor (32e), which unambiguously shows that the construction must be analyzed as belonging to the have-possessive type.

(32) Puxi Qiang (Tibeto-Burman, Qiangic; Huang 2004: 93, 94)

- a. *ŋa* *χa-bzi-si*.
 1SG:TOP DIR-big-CSM:1
 ‘I grew up.’
- b. *ŋa* *tʰala* *ʂeʰ*.
 1SG:TOP 3SG beat:1
 ‘I am beating him/her.’
- c. *ŋa* *tso* *zəʰ*.
 1SG:TOP here be/have:1
 ‘I am here.’
- d. *tɕi* *ʂkueʂkue-ta* *dzua* *zə*.
 house around-LOC army be/have
 ‘There is a team of soldiers around the house.’
- e. *ŋa* *tsutsu* *a-la* *zəʰ*.
 1SG:TOP younger.brother one-CLF be/have:1
 ‘I have a younger brother.’

Mainland South East Asia seems to be the only area where this configuration is relatively common. Within the sample of South East Asian languages analyzed by Chappell and Lü (2022), it is mainly found in Tibeto-Burman (Jingpho, Tujia, and several languages belonging to the Lolo-Burmese, Qiangic and Karenic branches of Tibeto-Burman), but also in two Austroasiatic languages (Bugan and Mang), in one Hmongic language (Yanghao), and in three Sinitic languages (Hainan Southern Min, Linxia and Dabu Hakka). Moreover, in four

varieties of Bai (a language whose classification as a Sinitic language or a highly siniticized Tibeto-burman language is unclear), the same verb is used not only as a ‘have’ verb and a locational copula, but also as an equative copula.

Outside of Mainland South East Asia, the languages in which I have found this configuration are Indonesian (Austronesian; Sneddon 1996), Diu Indo-Portuguese (Creole; Cardoso 2009), Gulf Pidgin Arabic (Bakir 2014), Iatmul and Manambu (two Papuan languages of the Ndu family; Jendraschek 2012, Aikhenvald 2008), Kikuyu (Bantu; Li & Navarro 2015), Nkonya (Kwa; Reineke 1972), Lama (Gur; Simnara 2019) and Akan (Kwa; Boadi 1971, Redden and Owusu 1995).

Interestingly, the data from Mainland South East Asia provided by Chappell and Lü (2022) point to two distinct diachronic scenarios as potential sources of this configuration, and yet a third possibility is suggested by the Iatmul data.

In some of the South East Asian languages that use the same verbs as ‘have’ verbs and as locational copulas in a GLP construction, the verbs in question also have intransitive uses as posture verbs or with meanings such as ‘dwell’ or ‘stick’. It seems plausible that this was their original meaning, and they first acquired the function of locational copula in a GLP construction also used to encode predicative possession, in a construction belonging to the oblique-possessor type. Subsequently, the predicative possession construction underwent a have-drift process by which routinization of possessor topicalization and deletion of the oblique flagging that initially characterized possessor phrases allowed for the reinterpretation of the possessor phrase as the A term of a transitive predication.

In other languages, the verbs used as ‘have’ verbs and as locational copulas in a GLP construction also have transitive uses with meanings such as ‘take’. This is in particular the case for the Qiang verb *zə* in example (32) above. In such cases, the reasonable hypothesis is that a ‘take’ verb was first converted into a ‘have’ verb, according to a scenario particularly well-attested in various branches of Indo-European.¹² Subsequently, a have-ILP construction developed according to the scenario sketched in section 4, and finally, the have-ILP construction was reanalyzed as a GLP construction. The reanalysis of an ILP construction as a GLP construction does not seem to be very frequent in the history of languages, but it is at least clearly attested in Juba Arabic (Manfredi 2017), which makes this scenario plausible.

Iatmul (Jendraschek 2012) and Manambu (Aikhenvald 2008), two closely related Papuan languages, also provide interesting data in this perspective. The verb found in Iatmul and Manambu possessive clauses (Iatmul *ti’~li*, Manambu *tə*) is basically a posture verb ‘stay’ used as a locational predicator, and there is no grammaticalized ILP construction. Judging from the data provided by Aikhenvald, the possessive construction of Manambu can be analyzed as a have-possessive construction, but the situation of Iatmul is more complex, and clearly suggests a possible development path.

In Iatmul, according to Jendraschek, three distinct constructions are possible for possessive clauses, all involving *ti’~li* ‘stay’, and the most frequent one is the comitative-possessee construction illustrated in (33a). The alternative constructions are the genitive-possessor construction illustrated in (33b), and the have-possessive construction illustrated in (33c).

¹² In Indo-European languages, two variants of this scenario should be distinguished: either verbs ‘take’ are converted into verbs ‘have’ directly, as in Greek, or stative forms of verbs ‘take’ acquire the meaning ‘be in the state of having taken, have in hands’ > ‘have’, as in Lithuanian (Daniel Petit, pers.com.).

(33) Iatmul (Sepik, Ndu; Jendraschek 2012: 215, 216)

- a. *Nyaan gusa okwi li'-di'*
 child paddle with be/have-3SG.M
 'The child had a paddle.' lit. 'The child stayed with a paddle.'
- b. *Wun-a saanya wugi li'-ka*
 1SG-GEN money that.which be/have-PRS(SR)
 'I have money.' lit. 'Of me money is that which stays.'
- c. *Nyaan gusa li'-di'*
 child paddle be/have-3SG.M
 'The child had a paddle.' lit. 'The child stayed a paddle.'

Consequently, a reasonable hypothesis is that the have-possessive construction resulted from the deletion of the comitative postposition in the comitative-possessee construction.

A situation similar to that of Iatmul is attested in the Bantu language Kikuyu, where the comitative preposition *na* 'with' in a comitative-possessee construction can be deleted to indicate "more permanent possession", as in *n-dĩ na mbuku* 'I have a book (in my possession at the moment)' vs. *n-dĩ mbuku* 'I own a book' (Li & Navarro 2015: 92), converting thus a former copula into a 'be/have' verb.

7. Conclusion

The typological and diachronic investigation of possible relationships between existential predication and predicative possession contradicts the still popular assumption that locative, existential and possessive predications must be viewed as deriving from a single underlying locative structure (Freeze 1992). Have-possessive constructions are much more widespread in the languages of the world than is commonly assumed, have-ILP constructions (which are simply absent from most discussions of existential predication) are in fact a major type of inverse-locational predication, and several well-attested types of historical change may result in situations in which predicative possession cannot be described as a possible reading of an existential variant of locational predication:

- the process of semantic bleaching converting transitive verbs expressing meanings such as 'take', 'grasp', 'get', 'hold', or 'bear' into transitive verbs of possession;
- the development of a possessive reading of comitative predication;
- the development of the use of proprietive verbs or adjectives derived from nouns as the standard way of encoding predicative possession;
- the development of ILP constructions via the impersonalization of have-possessive constructions;
- the transitivization of possessive constructions initially belonging to the oblique-possessor, comitative-possessee, or incorporated-possessee types.

Crucially, if the view that locative, existential and possessive predications universally derive from a single underlying locative structure were correct, the oblique-possessor (or ‘locational possessive’) type of predicative possession should be expected to be the privileged target of morphosyntactic changes affecting predicative possession. Quite on the contrary, as already shown by Stassen (2009), the transitivization of constructions that initially belong to types other than the have-possessive type (including the oblique-possessor or ‘locational possessive’ type) seems to be the only possible evolution leading to a change in the typological characteristics of predicative possession constructions.

In fact, this is not very surprising if one considers the basic contrast between locational and possessive predication in terms of relative topicality of the participants. Whatever might be the motivations for aligning the possessor in possessive predication with the ground in locational predication, and the possessee in possessive predication with the figure in locational predication, this alignment is at odds with the fact that prototypical grounds are inanimate, whereas prototypical possessors are human. In this respect, it is at least as natural to align the possessor in predicative possession with the agent of typical transitive verbs, and the possessee with the patient.

Abbreviations

A: the nominal term of transitive clauses whose coding characteristics are identical to those of the agent in prototypical transitive clauses, ACC: accusative, ASS: assertive, CL: noun class, CLF: classifier, CPL: completive, CQ: content question, CSM: change-of-state marker, CSTR: construct, D: definite, DAT: dative, DEM: demonstrative, DIR: directional, expl: expletive, F: feminine, FUT: future, GEN: genitive, GLP: general-locational predication, ICPL: incompletive, ILP: inverse-locational predication, or inverse-locational predictor, IND: indicative, INDEF: indefinite, INF: infinitive, LOC: locative, M: masculine, N: neuter, NEG: negation, NFUT: nonfuture, NP: noun phrase, P: the nominal term of transitive clauses whose coding characteristics are identical to those of the patient in prototypical transitive clauses, PL: plural, PLP: plain-locational predication, PRF: perfect, PROPR: proprietive, PRS: present, PST: past, S: single core-argument in intransitive clauses, SBJV: subjunctive, SG: singular, SR: subordinator, TOP: topic, TR: transitive.

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