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‘Be/have’ verbs in historical perspective

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Abstract. It is cross-linguistically common that verbs whose use in possessive clauses is comparable to that of English *have* are also used impersonally in existential and inverse-locational clauses, but in most of the languages in which a ‘have’ verb also acts as an existential predicator, its possible functions do not include that of copula in plain-locational clauses. The term ‘be/have’ verb refers to verbs involved in a much less common configuration, in which a verb used in possessive clauses like English *have* is also found not only in inverse-locational and existential clauses, but also in the role of copula in plain-locational clauses. After sketching a typology of the verbs projecting possessive clauses and discussing the distribution of ‘be/have’ verb in the world’s languages, this article analyzes the scenarios that may lead to the emergence of ‘be/have’ verbs in the history of a language.
Keywords. Predicative predication, existential predication, locational predication, ‘have’ verb, grammaticalization.

1. Introduction

It is cross-linguistically common that, as discussed in (Creissels 2023), verbs whose use in possessive clauses is comparable to that of English *have* are also used impersonally in existential clauses (i.e. in clauses in which an entity of any kind is just characterized as constituting an element of some situation, such as English *There are two ways of doing that*) and in inverse-locational clauses (i.e. in clauses that describe the spatial relationship between a figure and a ground with the perspectivization ‘from ground to figure’, such as English *There is a cat in the tree*, cf. (Creissels 2019)).[1] However, in most of the languages in which a ‘have’ verb also acts as an existential predicator, its possible functions do not include that of copula in plain-locational clauses (i.e. in clauses that describe the spatial relationship between a figure and a ground with the perspectivization ‘from figure to ground’, such as English *The cat is in the tree*). Example (1) illustrates this cross-linguistically common configuration.

(1) Bulgarian (Slavic, Indo-European)
a. *Sestra* *mi* ***ima*** *kotka.*
sister I_{ADP}:1SG **have.PRS.$I_{S/A}$:3SG** cat
‘My sister has a cat.’ (possessive clause)

[1] Däbritz (this volume) addresses this question for Siberian Uralic languages.

b. ***Ima*** *kotka pod masa-ta.*
have.PRS. $I_{S/A}$:$3SG_{EXPL}$ cat under table-D
'There is a cat under the table.' (inverse-locational clause)

c. *Kotka-ta* ***e*** *pod masa-ta.*
cat-D **be.PRS. $I_{S/A}$:3SG** under table-D
'The cat is under the table.' (plain-locational clause)
(pers.doc.)[2]

Example (2) illustrates the same configuration in a West-African language.

(2) Wolof (Wolof, Atlantic, Niger-Congo)

a. *Astu* ***am*** ***na*** *muus.*
PRN **have** **PRF. $I_{S/A}$:3SG** cat(clM)
'Astou has a cat.' (possessive clause)

b. ***Am*** ***na*** *a-m muus ci suufu taabal b-i.*
have **PRF. $I_{S/A}$:$3SG_{EXPL}$** INDEF-clM cat(clM) under table(clB) clB-D
'There is a cat under the table.' (inverse-locational clause)

c. *Muus m-i* ***mu*** ***ngi*** *ci suufu taabal b-i.*
cat(clM) clM-D **$I_{S/A}$:3SG** **LocCOP** under table(clB) clB-D
'The cat is under the table.' (plain-locational clause)
(pers.doc.)

Example (3) from the Na-Qiangic language Qiang illustrates a much less common configuration, in which a verb whose use in possessive clauses is similar to that of English *have* can also be found not only in inverse-locational and existential clauses, but also in the role of copula in plain-locational clauses. Qiang is a verb-final language with a grammatical relation 'subject' conflating transitive A and intransitive S, manifested in obligatory indexation of subjects on the verb, and no flagging of either subjects or objects. As can be seen in (3), in the plain-locational clauses of Puxi Qiang involving *zə* in the role of copula, the subject represents the figure, whereas in the possessive use of the same verb, the subject represents the possessor. In other words, in Puxi Qiang, the same verb occurs in possessive clauses in which it behaves like verbs commonly identified as 'have' verbs in language descriptions, and in plain locational clauses in which it behaves like verbs commonly designated as 'be' verbs.

(3) Puxi Qiang (Na-Qiangic, Sino-Tibetan)

a. *ŋa* *tso* ***zəˈ.***
1SG.TOP here **be/have.$I_{S/A}$:1**
'I am here.' (plain-locational clause)

[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.

b. *Tɕi* *ʂkueʂkue-ta* *dzua* ***zə.***
house around-LOC army **be/have.$I_{S/A}$:3**
'There is a team of soldiers around the house.' (inverse-locational clause)

c. *ŋ̍a* *tsutsu* *a-la* ***zəˈ.***
1SG.TOP younger.brother one-CLF **be/have.$I_{S/A}$:1**
'I have a younger brother.' (possessive clause)
(Huang 2004: 93, 94)

In this article, after sketching a typology of the verbs that have the ability to act as the predicative nucleus of possessive clauses (§2) and summarizing the data I have been able to gather about the distribution of the configuration illustrated by example (3) in the world's languages (§3), I discuss data suggesting possible scenarios that may lead to the emergence of this configuration in the history of a language (§4). §5 summarizes the main conclusions.

2. Verbs of possession, 'have' verbs and 'be/have' verbs

2.1. Predicative possession between verbal and non-verbal predication

2.1.1. Predicative possession and the distinction between verbal and non-verbal predication

Two varieties of predicative possession can be recognized, depending on the perspectivization of the possessive relationship: either from possessor to possessee (English *I have a book*) or from possessee to possessor (English *The book is mine*). This latter type, for which I propose the term INVERSE-POSSESSIVE PREDICATION, is much less frequent in discourse, and cognitively marked in the sense that the perspectivization of the possessive relationship it encodes reverses the natural saliency hierarchy between possessor and possessee. This article deals exclusively with predicative possession constructions expressing the perspectivization 'from possessor to possessee'.

Building on (Hengeveld 1992) and (Stassen 1997), I adopt the definition of non-verbal predication constructions as constructions giving rise to non-elliptical clauses analyzable as consisting of an argument phrase and a predicate phrase in which THE PROPERTY- OR RELATION-DENOTING ELEMENT THAT ACTS AS THE SEMANTIC NUCLEUS OF THE PREDICATE PHRASE IS NOT A VERB. Within this approach to non-verbal predication, even if some functional types of predication are more commonly expressed via constructions meeting the definition of non-verbal predication than others, functional types of predication cannot be a priori classified as being verbal or non-verbal in nature. In particular, predicative possession is typically a functional domain characterized by competition between verbal and non-verbal predication, and verbal and non-verbal types of predicative possession are equally common cross-linguistically.

2.1.2. Types of possessive clauses analyzable as instances of non-verbal predication

In the possessive clauses analyzable as instances of non-verbal possession, a verb may be present, as in example (6), but its role is that of a copula that plays a role in the expression of TAM categories, but not in the identification of the semantic roles expressed by the nominal terms of the construction.

Exampe (4) illustrates a type of possessive clauses in which a proprietive noun or adjective glossable as 'provided with possessee' acts as a predicate assigning the role of possessor to an unflagged noun phrase that constitutes its argument.

(4) Classical Nahuatl (Aztecan, Uto-Aztecan)
Ni-cal-ê.
$I_{S/A}$:1SG-house-PROPR
'I have a house.'
(Launey 1981)

In the type illustrated by example (5), an adpositional phrase or case-marked noun phrase glossable as 'with possessee in his/her personal sphere' acts as a predicate assigning the role of possessor to an unflagged noun phrase that constitutes its argument.

(5) Hausa (Afroasiatic, Chadic)
Yaaròo yanàa dà fensìr̃.
boy $I_{S/A}$:3SG.M.LocCOP with pencil
'The boy has a pencil.'
(Newman 2000: 222)

In the type illustrated by example (6), an adpositional phrase or case-marked noun phrase glossable as 'in possessor's personal sphere' acts as a predicate assigning the role of possessee to an unflagged noun phrase that constitutes its argument.

(6) Estonian (Finnic, Uralic)
Mu-l oled sina.
1SG-ADESS be.PRS.$I_{S/A}$:2SG 2SG
'I have you.'
(Erelt & Metslang 2006: 258)

In the type illustrated by example (7), a possessive-marked noun phrase combines with an existential predicator into a predicate glossable as 'his/her possessee exists' that assigns the role of possessor to a noun phrase that constitues its argument. What is crucial for the possessive interpretation of the construction is not the existential predicator, but the possessive marking of the possessee, and it is interesting to observe that some languages have the same type of construction without any overt existential predicator, as in (8)

(7) Turkish (Turkic, Altaic)
Murat-ın otomobil-i var.
PRN-GEN car-I_{ADP}:3SG EXIST
'Murat has a car.'
(pers.doc.)

(8) Emerillon (Maweti-Guarani, Tupian)
e-kija
I_{ADP}:1SG-hammock
'my hammock' (noun phrase) or 'I have a hammock' (clause)
(Rose 2002: 325)

2.1.3. Types of possessive clauses analyzable as instances of verbal predication

The distinctive property of the possesssive clauses analyzable as instances of verbal predication is that the possessive interpretation is not determined by the coding of the nominal terms but by the lexical meaning of a verb that can consequently be analyzed as the predicative nucleus of the clause.

The verbs having the ability of acting as the predicative nucleus of possessive clauses may be monovalent denominal verbs (proprietive verbs) assigning to the sole core nominal term of the clause the role of possessor of an entity belonging to the category denoted by the noun from which they derive, as in (9).[3] This type of predicative possession is relatively common in some geographical areas only.

(9) Kalaallisut (Eskimo-Aleut, Eskimo)
Angut taana illu-qar-puq.
man that house-PROPR-IND.I_S:3SG
'That man has a house.'
(Van Geenhoven 1998: 25)

The verbs acting as the predicative nucleus of possessive clauses are more commonly bivalent verbs that assign the roles of possessor and possessee to two nominal terms of the clauses they project. A distinction can be made between those in which the possessee is expressed as the A term of a transitive construction or the S term of an intransitive construction (i.e., the subject, in the languages that have a grammatical relation 'subject'), and those in which the A term of a transitive construction or the S term of an intransitive construction expresses the role of possessor.

[3] Diachronically, a relationship between transitive 'have' verbs and proprietive verbs is plausible, since in a language in which a transitive 'have' verb has the ability to incorporate its P, the generalization of the incorporating construction may lead to the obsolescence of the original transitive construction, which automatically converts the former 'have' verb into an affix deriving proprietive verbs from nouns.

The first possibility is sporadically attested among the indigenous languages of South America with the possessee and the possessor encoded as the A and P terms of a transitive construction. It is also found in Northwest Caucasian and Kartvelian languages with the possessee encoded as the S term of an intransitive construction and the possessor encoded as an indirect object.

Most of the verbs projecting possessive clauses whose A or S term expresses the role of possessee derive from an existential or locational verb via applicative derivation. Such possessive clauses can consequently be explained as meaning literally 'Possessee exists.for Possessor'.

For example, Overall (Forthcoming) shows that Chicham / Jivaroan languages have transitive possessive clauses of this type, as in (10).

(10) Wampis (Chicham/Jivaroan)
Arútam míŋa arútɨawɛɛ.
arutam mi=na a-ru-tu-a-ua-i
power.vision 1SG=ACC exist-APPL-I_P:1SG -IPFV-I_A:3-DECL
'I have an Arutam power.'
(Peña 2015: 759 quoted by Overall Forthcoming)

Transitive possessive clauses of the same type as (10) have also been signaled in some varieties or Quechua (Myler 2016) and in Mataguayan languages (Vidal & Nercesian Forthcoming).

Example (11) illustrates a possessive verbe deriving from a 'be' verb via applicativization and projecting clauses in which the possessee is expressed as S, and the possessor as an indirect object.

(11) West Circassian (Northwest Caucasian)
W-jane-w-jate-xe-r *w-jə-ʔe-x-a?*
I_{ADP}:2SG -mother-I_{ADP}:2SG-father-PL-ABS I_{IO}:2SG-APPL-be-PL-Q
'Do you have parents?'
(Arkadiev & al. 2024: 887)

Example (12) illustrates a similar construction, in which, however, the verb stems glossed 'be in the sphere of' cannot be decomposed morphologically. Note that the choice between the two verbs of possession of Georgian illustrated in (12) depends on animacy of the possessee.

(12) Georgian (Kartvelian)
a *Vano-s* *axali* *megobari* *hq'avs.*
Vano-DAT new friend be.in.the.sphere.of.PRS.I_S:3SG.I_{IO}:3SG
'Vano has a new friend.'
b *Vano-s* *axali* *saxli* *akvs.*
Vano-DAT new house be.in.the.sphere.of.PRS.I_S:3SG.I_{IO}:3SG
'Vano has a new house.'
(pers.doc.)

In contrast to the scarcity of the constructions of the type illustrated in examples (10) to (12), clauses projected by verbs of possession in which the A term of a transitive construction or the S term of an intransitive construction expresses the role of possessor, discussed in more detail in §2.2, are extremely common cross-linguistically. Alongside with the type illustrated in (6) above (characterized by adjunct-like coding of the possessor), they constitute in fact one of the two major types of predicative possession in terms of distribution across geographical areas and language families,

2.2. 'Have' verbs

According to the broad definition adopted in this article, a 'have' verb is a semantically bivalent verb projecting possessive clauses in which the possessor is coded like the agent of prototypical transitive verbs (A) or like the sole essential participant of a semantically monovalent verbs (S).[4]

Cross-linguistically, the vast majority of the verbs that meet this definition of 'have' verbs select a coding frame identical to that of prototypical transitive verbs, and consequently meet the narrower definition of 'have' verbs found in the litterature (including my previous publications on predicative possession), according to which transitivity is a definitional feature of 'have' verbs. For example, in Mandinka, the verb *sòtó* 'have' projects clauses expressing a variety of possessive relationships comparable to that expressed by English *have*, and, as shown in (13), its coding frame is fully aligned with that of a prototypical transitive verb such as *tábì* 'cook'.

(13) Mandinka (Central Mande, Mande)

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

b. *Fàatú yè báadíŋ-ò-lú sòtó ñĭŋ sàatêe tó.*
PRN CPL.TR relative-D-PL have DEM village.D LOC
'Fatou has relatives in this village.' (possessive clause)
(pers.doc.)

Example (14) illustrates a clause projected by a transitive 'have' verb in a language in which thre transitive construction shows a contrast between ergative-marked A and zero-marked P.

(14) Central Basque (Euskaran)
Jon-ek bi seme dauzka.
PRN-ERG two son have.I_{ZER}:3PL.I_{ERG}:3SG
'Jon has two sons.
(pers.doc.)

[4] In the languages that have a grammatical relation 'subject' encompassing the agent of prototypical transitive verbs and the sole essential participant of semantically monovalent verbs, 'have' verbs can equally be characterized as taking the possessor as their subject.

However, the broad definition formulated above also encompasses verbs selecting coding frames that variously depart from the transitive construction, but sharing with transitive 'have' verbs the essential property of being bivalent verbs that project possessive clauses in which they are solely responsible for the assignement of the semantic roles of possessor and possessee, and in which the coding of the possessor as A or S characterizes it as the participant having the highest degree of inherent topicality.

Verbs that meet the broad definition of 'have' verbs but whose coding frame variously departs from the transitive construction are attested in quite a few languages, and the obvious advantage of adopting the broad definition of 'have' verbs adopted in this article is that their status is problematic in a general typology of predicative possession excluding them from the notion of 'have' verbs, since the constructions in which they are involved do not meet the definition of any of the other types of predicative possession commonly recognized.

Arabic dialects are a case in point. In Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic, the standard expression of predicative possession is a construction of the type 'At Poseessor is Possessee', but this situation has not been maintained in Arabic dialects. As discussed in more details in (Creissels, 2022), most vernacular varieties of Arabic have a predicative possession construction involving a word belonging to a category for which the label 'pseudo-verb' is commonly used in descriptions of Arabic dialects, and this possessive (pseudo-)verb meets the broad definition of 'have' verbs but not the narrow one.

In vernacular Arabic varieties, pseudo-verbs are words of non-verbal origin that have acquired uses in which they can be analyzed synchronically as projecting clauses, and in which they have acquired some properties typical of verbs in Arabic morphoxyntax, in particular in the expression of negation. For example, Moroccan Arabic has a pseudo-verb *ʔand* 'have' cognate with the preposition *ʔand* 'at', but synchronically distinct from it in its syntactic and semantic properties. As illustrated in (15), *ʔand* 'have' obligatorily combines with a person-number-gender suffix indexing the possessor, and a noun phrase expressing the semantic role of possessor can only precede *ʔand*, whereas the possesse is expressed as an unflagged noun phrase that follows *ʔand*.

(15) Moroccan Arabic (Semitic, Afroasiatic)
Ḥməd ʕand-u əl-ktāb.
PRN have-I:3SG.M book
'Ahmed has the book.'
(Caubet 1993: 51-52)

The coding frame of Morrocan *ʔand* 'have' is similar to the basic transitive construction as regards constituent order and the obligatory indexation of the participant that can be expressed as a pre-verbal noun phrase. However, it cannot be analyzed as an instance of the transitive construction, for the following two reasons: the paradigm of obligatory indexes suffixed to *ʔand* is distinct from the standard paradigm of subject indexes (the explanation being that it originates historically from the paradigm of indexes representing the complement of prepositions), and, contrary to the object of transitive verbs, the participant encoded as a postverbal noun phrase in possessive clauses cannot be alternatively represented by an index suffixed to the verb.

2.3. The historical origin of 'have' verbs

Historically, the emergence of 'have' verbs as the result of a process of semantic bleaching affecting transitive verbs expressing meanings such as 'take', 'grasp' 'hold', 'get', 'bear' is an 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]

Evolutions affecting constructions that originally belong to other types but acquire coding properties making them more and more similar to the transitive construction, commonly designated as HAVE-DRIFT, are also very common. They may affect all the other types of predicative possession, and are in fact a major source of typological change in the way languages express predicative possession, cf. (Creissels 2023). The evolution of predicative possession in Arabic, evoked in §2.2, illustrates this possibility.

'Have' verbs may also emerge as the result of the lexicalization of the applicative form of locational or existential verbs. As already mentioned in §2.2, the applicativization of locational or existential verbs may yield verbs of possession with which the possessor is coded as the P term of a transitive construction, but, due to the remarkable semantic plasticity of applicativization, the applicativization of verbs expressing location, posture or existence may also yield 'have' verbs with which the possessor is coded as the A term of a transitive construction or the S term of an intransitive construction, as for example in the Australian language Diyari, where the applicative form of 'sit' has lexicalized as a 'have' verb (16).

(16) Diyari (Central Pama-Nyungan, Pama-Nyungan)
Yundru karna tharla ngama-lka-yi
2SG.ERG person name.ACC sit-APPL-PRS
'Do you have an Aboriginal name?'
(Austin 2024: 402)

2.4. 'Be/have' verbs

The term 'BE/HAVE' VERB is the term I propose for verbs that have the ability to act not only as 'have' verbs in possessive clauses and as existential predicators, but also as copulas in plain-locational predication, i.e. in clauses denoting the spatial relationship figure-ground with the perspectivization 'from figure to ground', such as English *John **is** in his office*). This configuration, already illustrated in the introduction by an example from the Na-Qiangic language Qiang, is also found in Indonesian (17).

(18) Indonesian (Malayo-Sumbawan, Austronesian)
a. *Saya tidak ada uang.*
1SG NEG be/have money
'I don't have any money.' (possessive predication)

[5] Interestingly, 'have' verbs resulting from this kind of semantic shift are particularly common in pidgins and creoles.

b. *Di Indonesia tidak ada kanguru.*
in PRN NEG be/have kangaroo
'In Indonesia there are no kangaroos.' (inverse-locational predication)

c. *Ayah tidak ada di kantor.*
father NEG be/have in office.
'Father isn't in the office.' (plain-locational predication)
(Sneddon 1996: 264)

Some of the verbs that meet this definition of 'be/have' verbs also have a copular use in nominal and/or adjectival predication (i.e. in clauses such as *John **is** a teacher*, *John **is** tall*). This is not the case in Qiang or in Indonesian, but example (18) illustrates such a configuration in the Bantu language Kikuyu, an AVP/SV language in which A in transitive predication and S in intransitive predication are obligatorily indexed by means of the same set of verbal prefixes.[6]

(18) Kikuyu (Bantu, Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo)

a. ***Tũ-rĩ*** *n-gari.*
$I_{S/A}$:1PL-be/have SG-car(cl9)
'We have a car.' (possessive predication)

b. ***Ha-rĩ*** *benjũ* *metha-inĩ.*
$I_{S/A}$:$cl16_{EXPL}$-be/have SG.pencil(cl9) SG.table(cl9)-LOC
'There is a pencil on the table.' (inverse-locational predication)

c. *I-bera* ***rĩ-rĩ*** *gĩ-kombe-inĩ.*
SG-pear(5) **$I_{S/A}$:cl5-be/have** SG-cup(cl7)-LOC
'The pear is in the cup.' (plain-locational predication)

d. ***Mũ-ti-rĩ*** *arimũ.*
$I_{S/A}$:2PL-NEG-be/have PL.teachers(cl2)
'You are not teachers.' (nominal predication)

e. ***Tũ-rĩ*** *a-rũaru.*
$I_{S/A}$:1PL-be/have cl2-sick
'We are sick.' (adjectival predication)
(Li & Navarro 2015: 86, 89, 93)

3. 'Be/have' verbs in the world's languages

Two hotspots of 'be/have' verbs can be identified: Mainland South East Asia in the first place, and to a lesser extent the Ghana-Togo region in West-Africa. The other languages for which I have been able to find mentions of the existence of a 'be/have' verb show no genetic or areal

[6] The role played by the expletive S/A index of class 16 (etymologically a locative index) in the inverse-locational clause (18b) is comparable to that of *there* in the English equivalent of this clause.

clustering. However, in the absence of a more systematic investigation, I cannot exclude that this might be due to accidental gaps in the data.

3.1. 'Be/have' verbs in Mainland South East Asia

'Be/have' verbs are particularly prominent in Mainland South East Asia. In this area, the data analyzed by Chappell & Creissels (2019) and Chappell & Lü (2022) show the existence of 'be/have' verbs in the following languages:

- one Hmongic language (Yanghao),
- two Austroasiatic languages (Bugan and Mang),
- among Sino-Tibetan languages, Jingpho (Brahmaputran), Tujia (unclassified Sino-Tibetan), several languages belonging to the Burmese-Lolo, Na-Qiangic and Karenic branches of Sino-Tibetan, three Sinitic languages (Haikou Southern Min, Linxia and Dabu Hakka), and four varieties of Bai (unclassified Sino-Tibetan).

In Bai languages (and only in Bai languages) the 'be/have' verb is also used as a copula in equative clauses (nominal predication).

3.2. 'Be/have' verbs in the Ghana-Togo region

In West Africa, 'be/have' verbs are attested in several languages of the Ghana-Togo region belonging to the Kwa and Gur subfamilies of the Niger-Congo family:

- Akan (Tano, Kwa, Niger-Congo; Boadi 1971, Redden & Owusu 1995),
- Nkonya (Tano, Kwa, Niger-Congo; Reineke 1972 and Nkonya dictionary online),
- Likpe (Na-Togo, Kwa, Niger-Congo; Ameka 2007, 2009 and pers.com.),
- Tuwuli (Ka-Togo, Kwa, Niger-Congo; Harley 2005),
- Lama (Gurunsi, Gur, Niger-Congo; Simnara 2019).

3.3. 'Be/have' verbs in other parts of the world

The other languages for which I have been able to find mentions of the existence of a 'be/have' verb show no areal or genetic clustering:

- Indonesian (Malayo-Sumbawan, Austronesian; Sneddon 1996),
- Diu Indo-Portuguese (Portuguese-based creole; Cardoso 2009),
- Gulf Pidgin Arabic (Arabic-based pidgin; Bakir 2014),
- Français Tirailleur (a French-based pidgin that was used as a lingua franca by West African soldiers and their white officers in the French colonial army; Skirkgård 2013),
- Iatmul (Ndu, Sepik; Jendraschek 2012),
- Kikuyu (Bantu, Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo; Li & Navarro 2015),

– some varieties of !Xun (Kx'a; Heine & König 2015).

4. Possible origins of 'be/have' verbs

For some of the languages mentioned in §3, the data at my disposal are not suggestive of any particular historical scenario. For some others, however, there is evidence that the 'be/have' verb results from the evolution of a word that was originally either a 'have' verb (§4.1), a locational copula (§4.2 and §4.3), an existential predicator (§4.4), or the applicative form of an existential verb.

4.1. 'Have' verb > 'be/have' verb

In some of the South East Asian languages in which the data analyzed by Chappell & Creissels (2019) and Chappell & Lü (2022) show the existence of a 'be/have' verb, the verb in question also has transitive uses with meanings such as 'take'. This is in particular the case for the Qiang 'be/have' verb *zə* illustrated in example (1) above.

Since it is difficult to imagine the direct conversion of a 'take' verb into a locational copula , whereas 'have' verbs resulting from the semantic bleaching of 'take' verbs are common, the reasonable hypothesis in such a configuration is the following three-stage evolution:

– a 'take' verb was first converted into a 'have' verb;
– subsequently, the 'have' verb acquired the possibility of being used as an existential predicator and as a copula in inverse-locational predication;
– finally its copular use extended to all locational clauses, irrespective of the distinction between plain- and inverse-locational predication.

The first stage of this evolution is a scenario particularly well-attested cross-linguistically (in particular, but not only, in various branches of Indo-European).

The second stage is also a well-attested type of historical change, analyzed in detail in (Creissels 2023).

The third stage, by which an existential predicator extends its use from inverse-locational clauses to plain-locational clauses, seems to be less common in the history of languages. However, some clear cases of such an evolution can be found in the world's languages, as in Arabic-based Pidgins or Creoles, and in some Turkic languages.

Many vernacular Arabic varieties have an existential predicator *fī(h)*, etymologically 'in it'. As a rule, *fī(h)* occurs only in existential and inverse-locational clauses, but the extension of its use to plain-locational clauses, illustrated in (6), is one of the features that characterize the pidginized/creolized varieties of Arabic spoken in Sudan.

(19) Sudanese Arabic-based pidgins/creoles
Úwo fí fi bét.
3SG LocCOP in house
'(S)he is at home.'
(Miller 2002: 32)

This evolution also occurred in the Turkic languages of Northeast Siberia (Sakha and Dolgan). Most Turkic languages have an existential predicator (Turkish *var*), reconstructed as **bār* in Proto-Turkic. In most Turkic languages (including Turkish), the reflexes of **bār* are used in inverse-locational predication, but not in plain-locational predication, cf. (20). However, as illustrated in (21) for Sakha, in Sakha and Dolgan, this existential predicator has extended its use to plain-locational predication, resulting in locational clauses in which the contrast between the two possible perspectivizations of the ground-figure relationship is manifested in constituent order only.

(20) Turkish (Turkic, Altaic)
a. *Kedi bahçe-de.*
cat garden-LOC
'The cat is in the garden.' (plain-locational predication)
b. *Bahçe-de bir kedi var.*
garden-LOC one cat EXIST
'There is a cat in the garden.' (inverse-locational predication)

(21) Sakha (Turkic, Altaic)
a. *Xarandaas ostuol-ga baar.*
pencil table-LOC LocCOP
'The pencil is on the table.' (plain-locational predication)
b. *Ostuol-ga xarandaas baar.*
table-LOC pencil LocCOP
'There is a pencil on the table.' (inverse-locational predication)
(Xaritonov 1987: 16)

4.2. Locational copula > 'be/have' verb as the result of changes affecting a possessive construction of the type 'At Possessor is Possessee'

In some of the South East Asian languages for which the data analyzed by Chappell & Creissels (2019) and Chappell & Lü (2022) show the existence of a 'be/have' verb, the verb in question is also attested as an intransitive posture verbs or as an intransitive verbs expressing meanings such as 'dwell' or 'stick'. For example, Naxi (Na-Qiangic, Sino-Tibetan) has a 'be/have' verb *zi*^{33} cognate with *zi*^{55} 'lie' (Chappell & Lü 2022: 39-40)

Since the grammaticalization of such verbs as locational copulas is a widely-attested phenomenon in the history of languages, it seems plausible that this was their original meaning,

which means that the first stage in the evolution leading to the emergence of a 'be/have' verb in the languages in question was the grammaticalization of an intransitive verb as a locational copula via semantic bleaching.

Given that possessive clauses of the type 'At Possessor is Possessee' constitute a widespread type of predicative possession, in particular among Tibeto-Burman languages, the second stage of the evolution was probably the development of the use of the locational copula in possessive clauses of the type 'At Possessor is Possessee'.

Finally, as discussed in detail by Creissels (2023, §5.3), it is not uncommon that possessive predication constructions of the type 'At Possessor is Possessee' have a variant expressing topicalization of the possessor in which the left-dislocated possessor phrase looses the adjunct-like flagging that characterizes it in the absence of topicalization (something like '(As for) Possessor, there is Possessee'), and the generalization of this variant may lead to the reanalysis of the construction with an unflagged possessor phrase as a construction in which the existential predicator acts as a 'have' verb. Chappell & Creissels (2019) show that Burmese (Burmese-Lolo, Sino-Tibetan) can be analyzed as attesting a transitional stage in this evolution.

4.3. Locational copula > 'be/have' verb as the result of changes affecting a possessive construction of the type 'Possessor is with Possessee'

4.3.1. The case of Kikuyu

There can be little doubt that the historical change responsible for the emergence of the Kikuyu 'be/have' verb *rĩ* illustrated in example (18), reproduced here as (22), is the mere deletion of the comitative preposition in a predicative possession construction '$NP_{POSSESSOR}$ *rĩ na* $NP_{POSSESSEE}$' lit. 'Possessor is with Possessee', where *rĩ* [rɪ] is the regular reflex of the Bantu copula **dɪ* and *na* is the pan-Bantu comitative preposition.

(22) Kikuyu (Bantu, Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo)

a. ***Tũ-rĩ*** *n-gari.*
$I_{S/A}$:1PL-be/have SG-car(cl9)
'We have a car.' (possessive predication)

b. ***Ha-rĩ*** *benjũ* *metha-inĩ.*
$I_{S/A}$:$cl16_{EXPL}$-be/have SG.pencil(cl9) SG.table(cl9)-LOC
'There is a pencil on the table.' (inverse-locational predication)

c. *I-bera* ***rĩ-rĩ*** *gĩ-kombe-inĩ.*
SG-pear(5) **$I_{S/A}$:cl5-be/have** SG-cup(cl7)-LOC
'The pear is in the cup.' (plain-locational predication)

d. ***Mũ-ti-rĩ*** *arimũ.*
$I_{S/A}$:2PL-NEG-be/have PL.teachers(cl2)
'You are not teachers.' (nominal predication)

e. ***Tũ-rĩ*** *a-rũaru.*
$I_{S/A}$:1PL-be/have cl2-sick
'We are sick.' (adjectival predication)
(Li & Navarro 2015: 86, 89, 93)

The data that support this analysis are that, on the one hand, constructions glossable as 'Possessor is with Possesse' are by far the most widespread type of predicative possession across the Bantu language family (Creissels Forthcoming), and on the other hand, reflexes of **dɪ* acting as copulas (and only as copulas) are pervasive across the Bantu language family. Moreover, the creation of 'have' verbs resulting from the fusion and reanalysis of the sequence 'copula + comitative preposition' in possessive constructions of the type 'Possessor is with Possessee' is a very common process in Bantu (Creissels Forthcoming). Consequently, the deletion of the comitative preposition that occurred in Kikuyu (resulting in the creation of a 'be/have' verb) can be viewed as a borderline case of this general trend toward converting comitative-possessive constructions into have-possessive constructions.

Moreover, in Kikuyu, the original construction '$NP_{POSSESSOR}$ *rĩ na* $NP_{POSSESSEE}$', where *rĩ* acts as a copula, still exists in competition with the construction '$NP_{POSSESSOR}$ *rĩ* $NP_{POSSESSEE}$', where *rĩ* acts as a 'have' verb in a construction at least superficially similar to the transitive construction. I checked this with a corpus of Kikuyu proverbs available on the Internet in which possessive clauses abound, and it turned out that in this corpus both possibilities are widely attested. According to Li & Navarro (2015: 92), in the possessive clauses of Kikuyu, "the presence of *na* highlights the immediateness of the possession, so that a possessive clause lacking *na* indicates more permanent possession", cf. example (23).

(23) Kikuyu (Bantu, Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo)
a. *N-dĩ* *na* *m-buku.*
$I_{S/A}$:1PL-be/have with SG-book(cl9)
'I have a book (in my possession at the moment).'
(*rĩ* as a 'be' verb' in a possessive clause of the *be-with* type)
b. *N-dĩ* *m-buku.*
$I_{S/A}$:1PL-be/have SG-book(cl9)
'I own a book.'
(*rĩ* as a 'have' verb')
(Li & Navarro 2015: 92)

As far as I am aware of, the situation of Kikuyu as regards the expression of predicative possession is unique among Bantu languages.

4.3.2. The case of Lama

Although the available evidence is less conclusive than in the case of Kikuyu, the same historical scenario is probably responsible for the presence of the 'be/have' verb *wɛ* in Lama (Gurunsi, Gur, Niger-Congo).

The observation that supports this hypothesis is that closely related Tem and Kabiye have a copula *wɛ* that cannot be used as a 'have' verb, and express 'have' by means of a verb *wɛna* whose obvious etymology is the freezing of the sequence 'be + with' in a predicative possession construction of the type 'Possessor is with Possessee'.

4.3.3. The case of Iatmul

The creation of a 'be/have' verb as the consequence of the deletion of the comitative preposition in a predicative possession construction that originally belonged to the type 'Possessor is with Possessee' is also the scenario suggested by the data of the closely related Papuan languages Iatmul (Jendraschek 2012) and Manambu (Aikhenvald 2008).

Iatmul and Manambu possessive clauses involve a verb (Iatmul *ti'~li'*, Manambu *tə*) which is basically a verb 'stay' used as a locational copula. Judging from the data provided by Aikhenvald, the possessive construction of Manambu can be straightforwardly analyzed as involving a 'have' verb, but the situation of Iatmul is more complex, and clearly suggests the same development path as that already proposed for Kikuyu and Lama.

In Iatmul, according to Jendraschek, three distinct constructions are possible for possessive clauses, all involving *ti'~li'* 'stay'. The most frequent one, illustrated in (24a), belongs to the type 'Possessor is with Possessee'. The alternative constructions are a construction that can be glossed as 'Of Possessor is Possessee' (24b), and a construction with no flagging of either the possessor or the possessee, in which consequently *li'* can be analyzed as acting as a 'have' verb (24c).

(24) Iatmul (Ndu, Sepik)

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.'
(Jendraschek 2012: 215, 216)

Consequently, a reasonable hypothesis is that, in the same way as in Kikuyu and in Lama, the construction in which *li'* can be analyzed as acting as a 'have' verb resulted from the deletion of

the comitative postposition in a possessive construction that was originally 'Possessor is with Possessee'.

4.4. Existential predicator > 'be/have' verb

In §4.1 it has been mentioned that, in the Arabic-based pidgins or creoles of Sudan, an existential predicator found as *fī(h)* in many vernacular varieties of Arabic (whose ultimate origin is *fī-hi* 'in it') has become a general locational copula marking locational clauses irrespective of the perspectivization of the figure-ground relationship. The same evolution occurred in Gulf Pidgin Arabic, as illustrated in (25b), but in addition to that, *fī* in Gulf Pidgin Arabic has acquired the function of a 'have' verb (25c), and also that of an equative copula (25), resulting in the configuration already mentioned for Kikuyu (cf. §2.4) and Bai languages (cf. §3.1).

(25) Gulf Pidgin Arabic

a. ***Fī*** *moni* *mā-fī* *muškila.*
be/have money NEG-be/have problem
'If there is money, there is no problem.'

b. *Ana* *bēt* ***fī*** *wara* *dukkān.*
1SG home **be/have** behind shop
'My home is behind the shop.'

c. *Alhīn* *walla* *ana* ***fī*** *talāta* *arba* *bačča*
now by.God 1SG **be/have** three four child
'I swear I have three, four children.'

d. *Ana* ***fī*** *maskīn* *sah* *walla* *lā?*
1SG **be/have** poor right or no
'I am a poor fellow, right?'
(Bakir 2014: 418)

Given that it can be taken for granted that this situation developed from the use of *fī* as an existential predicator, the emergence of a 'be/have' verb in Gulf Pidgin Arabic can be analyzed as resulting from the conjunction of two distinct evolutions whose starting point was the use of *fī* in existential and inverse-locational clauses. On the one hand, in a construction combining existential predication with a topic pragmatically interpreted as denoting a possessor (something like *(As for) X, there is Y* interpreted as 'X has Y), the existential predicator can easily be reanalyzed as a 'have' verb. On the other hand, as already mentioned in §4.1, an existential predicator may extend its use from inverse-locational clauses to plain-locational clauses, acquiring thus the status of general locational copula.

The same explanation applies to the distribution of *y(en)a* across equative, locational, existential and possessive clauses in Français Tirailleur (a French-based pidgin that was used as a lingua franca by West African soldiers and their white officers in the French colonial army), whose origin is French *il y (en) a* 'there is (some)'.

4.5. Applicative form of an existential predicator > 'be/have' verb

In general, the existential predicators have the ability to occur in the same form not only in clauses giving no overt indication about the situation of which their argument is an element, but also in clauses in which they combine with a locative expression, the S term in the construction of the existential predicator fulfilling then the semantic role of figure in a ground-figure relationship.

A remarkable property of the Kx'a language !Xun is that it has an existential verb *gè* wich in its underived form cannot combine with a phrase expressing location. In !Xun, the use of the existential verb *gè* in locational clauses requires applicative marking. Moreover, as illustrated in (26) in some varieties of !Xun, the applicative form *gèā ~ gèà* has the ability of projecting clauses that constitute the usual way of expressing not only locational predication, but also predicative possession (Heine & König 2015: 80-84, 233-235). (26b) is a plain-locational clause in which the applied phrase expresses the ground in a figure-ground relationship, whereas in (26c), the applied phrase is interpreted as the possessee in a possessor-possessee relationship.

(26) !Xun (!Xun, Kx'a)

a *Tsǐrì(-sǐ) rē gè.*
chair-PL Q there.be
'Are there chairs?'

b *Tsǐrì mī gè-à tc'ū ǹǃńŋ́*
chair TOP there.be-APPL house inside
'The stool is in the house.'

c *Nā gè-ā gùmì*
1SG there.be-APPL cattle
'I have a cow.'
(Heine & König 2015: 82, 83, 233)

The explanation of this situation is that the construction in which *gèā ~ gèà* acts as a copula in locational clauses (including plain-locational ones) is a locative applicative (i.e., a construction in which applicative derivation licenses an applied phrase expressing the semantic role of location), whereas the use of *gèā ~ gèà* as a 'have' verb results from the lexicalization of a comitative applicative (i.e., a construction in which applicative derivation licenses an applied phrase expressing the semantic role of companion).

A possible objection to this analysis is that, synchronically, *gèā ~ gèà* does not seem to be productively used with the meaning 'be with', but Heine & König (2015: 83) quote an example from an old description of a !Xun variety in which *gèā* unquestionably expresses a comitative meaning.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to show that for at least some of the languages that have 'be/have' verbs, it is possible to find comparative data that support the reconstruction of a historical scenario resulting in the conversion of a word that was originally a 'have' verb, a locational copula, an existential predicator or the applicative form of an existential verb into a 'be/have' verb.

In the scenario discussed in §4.3, a SINGLE-STEP CHANGE (the deletion of the comitative preposition in a predicative possession construction of the type 'Possessor is with Possessee') directly results in the emergence of a 'be/have' verb.

The other scenarios discusses in §4 are COMPLEX SCENARIOS combining two changes which, with the exception of the creation of a locational copula via applicativization of an existential verb, are well-attested separately in the history of locational, existential and possessive constructions:

- the scenario analyzed in §4.1 combines the acquisition of the function of existential predicator by a have verb and the conversion of an existental predicator into a general locational copula;
- the scenario analyzed in §4.2 combines the developement of a possessive predication construction of the type 'At Possessor is Possessee' and the acquisition of transitive features by a possessive predication construction that originally belongs to the type 'At Possessor is Possessee' (have-drift);
- the scenario analyzed in §4.4 combines the conversion of an existental predicator into a general locational copula and the acquisition of transitive features by a possessive predication construction that originally belongs to the type 'At Possessor is Possessee' (have-drift);
- the scenario analyzed in §4.5 combines the creation of a locational copula and of a 'have' verb via applicativization of an existential verb in a language where the same applicative marker can be found in locative-applicative and comitative-applicative functions.

Abbreviations

A = the nominal term of transitive clauses that represents the agent if the verb projecting the clause is a prototypical transitive verb, ABS = absolutive, ACC = accusative, ADESS = adessive, APPL = applicative, cl = gender-number agreement pattern (class), CLF = classifier, CPL = completive, D = definite determiner or default determiner, DAT = dative, DECL = declarative, DEM = demonstrative, ERG = ergative, EXIST = existential predicator, EXPL = expletive, GEN = genitive, I = index, I_{ADP} = index cross-referencing an adnominal possessor (possessive index), I_{ERG} = index cross-referencing an ergative-marked term of the clause, I_{IO} = index cross-referencing an indirect object, IND = indicative, INDEF = indefinite, I_P = index cross-referencing the P term of a transitive clause (object index), IPFV = imperfective, $I_{S/A}$ = index

cross-referencing the S term of a transitive clause or the A term of a transitive clause (subject index), I_{ZER} = index cross-referencing a zero-marked term of the clause, M = masculine, LOC = locative, LocCOP = locational copula, P = the nominal term of transitive clauses that represents the patient if the verb projecting the clause is a prototypical transitive verb, NEG = negative, PL = plural, PRF = perfect, PRN = proper name, PROPR = proprietive, PRS = present, Q = question marker, S = the nominal term of intransitive clauses that represents the sole essential participant if the verb projecting the clause is a semantically monovalent verb, SG = singular, SR = subordinator, TOP = topic, TR = transitive.

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