

## **Predicative possession: Typology and diachrony**

**Denis Creissels**

Université Lumière (Lyon 2)

[denis.creissels@univ-lyon2.fr](mailto:denis.creissels@univ-lyon2.fr)

<http://deniscreissels.fr>

### **1. Introduction: possession as a linguistic concept and its morphosyntactic manifestations**

Possession AS A LINGUISTIC CONCEPT refers to constructions involving two nominal terms whose referents, designated as the POSSESSOR and the POSSESSEE, are interpreted as having some kind of privileged relationship on the basis of which the possessee can be viewed as an element of the possessor's PERSONAL SPHERE as this notion was introduced by Bally (1926). The prototypical possessor is a highly individuated human, and the prototypical possessee is a concrete entity, but not necessarily highly individuated, and not necessarily located at a particular point of the empathy hierarchy, which has with the possessor some privileged relationship. The precise nature of the relationships that may allow considering an entity as an element of the personal sphere of a possessor can be extremely diverse, depending on the nature of this entity, but there is consensus that the relationships between human individuals and the following three types of entities constitute the semantic core of the linguistic notion of possession (see in particular Langacker 1995):

- body parts;
- relatives;
- objects that humans may have at their disposal (without necessarily owning them strictly speaking).

The distinctive property of the constructions designated as possessive constructions by linguists is that they do not encode the concrete and precise relationships that may justify including a possessee in the personal sphere of a possessor. The constructional meaning of possessive constructions may involve abstract notions such as animacy, or the semantic distinctions commonly subsumed under the notion of alienability, but possessive constructions by themselves do not specify the precise nature of the relationship between the possessor and the possessee, which can only be inferred from lexical and contextual information. However, the distinction between bona fide possessive constructions and constructions specifying the nature of the relationship between two entities may be problematic, and this has to do with the fact that semantic bleaching of constructions that initially express more concrete meanings is widely attested as the source of possessive constructions abstracting from the exact nature of the relationships that justify considering that a possessee is an element of the personal sphere of a possessor.

Possession manifests itself in the following types of constructions:

- in noun-modifier constructions with an NP in the role of modifier, the referent of the head noun may be characterized as an element of the personal sphere of the referent of the modifier, as in *the man's hat*, or vice versa, as in *the man with a hat*;
- in predicative constructions, a possessive relationship may be predicated on the possessee, as in *The hat is the man's*, or on the possessor, as in *The man has a hat*;
- in the constructions commonly designated as EXTERNAL POSSESSION, for which Van de Velde (2020) proposes the term CONCERNEE-CONCERN CONSTRUCTIONS, the referent of one of the nominal terms in the coding frame of a verb is interpreted as concerned by the event because an element of its personal sphere, encoded as a distinct term, is directly involved in the event denoted by the verb, as in Spanish *Se me perdió el sombrero* ‘I lost my hat’, lit. ‘The hat got lost to me’).

The term ‘predicative possession’ is commonly restricted to predicative constructions in which a possessive relationship is predicated on the possessor (*The man has a hat*), and there is no consensus about the term to use for the predicative constructions predicating a possessive relationship on the possessee (*The hat is the man's*). INVERSE-POSSESSIVE PREDICATION (as contrasted with PLAIN-POSSESSIVE PREDICATION) could be a convenient term in the sense that the perspectivization of the possessive relationship it encodes reverses the natural saliency hierarchy between Possessor and Possessee.<sup>1</sup> The contrast in perspectivization between plain- and inverse-possessive clauses is comparable to that between plain- and inverse-locational clauses (*The dog is in the garden* / *There is a dog in the garden*) or between active and passive clauses (*The dog ate the meat* / *The meat was eaten by the dog*).<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to plain-possessive predication, inverse-possessive predication has not drawn much attention from linguists in general, and from typologists in particular. The obvious reasons are that inverse-possessive predication is much less frequent in discourse, and shows much less variety in its cross-linguistic manifestations. In general, inverse-possessive predication is encoded as a variety of nominal predication in which the predicate role is fulfilled by a full adnominal possession construction, (*This book is John's book*), or by an expression variously analyzable as the reduced form of an adnominal possession construction, such as English *This book is John's* or *This book is mine*, cf. example (1).<sup>3</sup>

(1) Mandinka (Central Mande, Mande)

*Ñĩŋ bą̀ŋkóo mú ñtèlú lè taa tí.*

DEM land.D COP 1PL FOC that.of as

‘This land is ours.’ lit. ‘This land is that of us.’

<sup>1</sup> The term APPERTENTIVE has been proposed by Haspelmath (2022) for this type of predicative construction. Note that this label is also used, mainly in the literature on Nilotic languages, for noun forms fulfilling the role of head in the adnominal possession construction (also designated as “construct forms”).

<sup>2</sup> On the notion of inverse-locational predication, see Creissels (2019).

<sup>3</sup> The examples for which no source is given are either based on my personal knowledge of the language (in the case of French and a few other languages I am particularly familiar with), or on my personal documentation. By personal documentation, I mean data I collected directly from native speakers, or data extracted from various types of sources other than language descriptions or scientific articles (newspapers, Internet, pedagogical grammars, etc.) and checked with the help of native speakers.

Three rare exceptions to this general tendency in the expression of inverse possessive predication are, on the one hand, constructions involving a verb such as English *belong*, and on the other hand, constructions in which the possessor phrase shows dative or benefactive flagging and acts as a predicate assigning the role of possessee to an unflagged NP that constitutes its argument, as is French *Ce livre est à moi*, lit. ‘This book is to me’ > ‘This book is mine’.

In the remainder of this presentation, in accordance with common practice, unless otherwise specified, the term ‘predicative possession’ will be used as referring specifically to plain-possessive predication.

## 2. A typology of predicative possession

### 2.1. Preliminary remarks

What justifies recognizing a given predicative construction in a given language as an instance of predicative possession is that it constitutes a regular way of encoding a wide variety of relationships between entities that can be subsumed under the general notion of possession with the unmarked perspective ‘from Possessor to Possessee’. This means that, in order to be totally rigorous, the recognition of a given construction as an instance of predicative possession should be justified by the quantitative analysis of large corpora. However, in common practice, linguists skip this step, and in fact, the frequency of possessive clauses in any kind of text is such that a rigorous quantitative approach is not necessary to identify in every language a limited number of predicative constructions (often just one) that can be viewed as instances of predicative possession.

The classification of predicative possession constructions presented here is consistently based on the morphosyntactic nature of the element responsible for the assignment of the semantic roles of possessor and possessee. The following six types of strategies are distinguished:<sup>4</sup>

- the BIVALENT POSSESSIVE VERB STRATEGY, in which the roles of possessor and possessee are assigned by a bivalent verb to its arguments;
- the PROPRIETIVE DERIVATION STRATEGY, in which a monovalent predicate (verb, adjective or noun) derived from a noun and glossable as ‘(be the) possessor of an N’, assigns the role of possessor to its argument;
- the FLAGGED-POSSESSEE STRATEGY, in which the role of possessor is assigned to an unflagged NP by a case-marked NP or adposition phrase in predicate role referring to the possessee;
- the FLAGGED-POSSESSOR STRATEGY, in which the role of possessee is assigned to an unflagged NP by a case-marked NP or adposition phrase in predicate role referring to the possessor;
- the POSSESSED-EXISTENT strategy, in which the possessive interpretation of an existential clause follows from the adjunction of possessive indexes or of an adnominal possessive modifier to the noun in the role of existent.

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<sup>4</sup> Here and in the remainder of this presentation, ‘unflagged NP’ must be understood as ‘NP in a form also used in the extra-syntactic function of quotation or pure designation’.

- the IMPLICIT POSSESSION strategy, in which an unflagged NP adjoined as a topic to an existential clause including nothing that could suggest a possessive interpretation is interpreted as fulfilling the role of possessor, the existent being then interpreted as fulfilling the role of possessee.

Of these six strategies, those that have by far the widest distribution, either in genetic or geographical terms, are the bivalent possessive verb strategy (especially the subtype in which the possessive verb is a transitive verb assigning A coding to the possessor and P coding to the possessee, commonly designated in the literature as HAVE-POSSESSIVE) and the flagged-possessor strategy (especially the subtype in which the case marker or adposition flagging the possessor is found in other constructions with a locative function, commonly designated in the literature as LOCATIONAL POSSESSIVE).

After discussing these six strategies in the remainder of this section, §3 will be devoted to comparison with previous approaches to the typology of predicative possession.

## 2.2. The bivalent possessive verb strategy

The essential characteristic of this strategy is that the possessor and the possessee are encoded as unflagged NPs (i.e., as NPs in the form also used in the extra-syntactic function of quotation or pure designation), or as NPs flagged as core syntactic terms whose semantic role must be retrieved from the lexical meaning of the verb that projects the clause. Cross-linguistically, the vast majority of bivalent possessive verbs are transitive verbs that assign A-coding to the possessor and P-coding to the possessee, as illustrated in (2), where a possessive clause (b) is compared to a prototypical transitive clause of the same language (a).

### (2) Mandinka (Central Mande, Mande)

- a. *Fàatú yè kín-òò 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 ññ sàatêe tó.*  
Fatou CPL.TR relative-D-PL have DEM village.D LOC  
'Fatou has relatives in this village.'

Example (3b) illustrates a clause projected by a transitive possessive verb in a language in which, as can be seen from (3a), the transitive construction shows a contrast between unflagged A and accusative-flagged P.

### (3) Serbo-Croatian (Slavic, Indo-European)

- a. *Ivan je kupio kuću.*  
PRN AUX.I<sub>S/A</sub>:3SG buy.PST.SG.M house.SG.ACC  
'Ivan bought a house.'
- b. *Ivan ima kuću.*  
PRN have.PRS.I<sub>S/A</sub>:3SG house.SG.ACC  
'Ivan has a house.'

Example (4b) illustrates a clause projected by a transitive possessive verb in a language in which, as can be seen from (4a), the transitive construction shows a contrast between ergative-flagged A and unflagged P.

(4) Central Basque (Euskaran)

- a. *Jon-ek bi etxe egin zituen.*  
 PRN-ERG two house make.CPL AUX.I<sub>ZER</sub>:3PL.I<sub>ERG</sub>:3SG  
 ‘Jon has built two houses.’
- b. *Jon-ek bi seme dauzka.*  
 PRN-ERG two son have.I<sub>ZER</sub>:3PL.I<sub>ERG</sub>:3SG  
 ‘Jon has two sons.’

However, contrary to what the available literature on the typology of predicative possession suggests, bivalent possessive verbs are not always transitive verbs that assign A-coding to the possessor phrase and P-coding to the possessee phrase.

Possessive verbs whose coding frame is clearly different from the basic transitive construction are found for example in Arabic dialects. In Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic, the standard expression of predicative possession belongs to the type characterized here as the flagged-possessor strategy (see §2.5), but this situation has not been maintained in Arabic dialects. As discussed in more detail in Creissels (2022), most vernacular varieties of Arabic have possessive clauses projected by a word belonging to a category for which the label ‘pseudo-verb’ is commonly used in descriptions of Arabic dialects, and the coding frame of this possessive (pseudo-)verb departs from the basic transitive construction in several respects.

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 like verbs, and in which they have acquired some properties typical of verbs in Arabic morphosyntax, 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 (5), *ʔand* ‘have’, contrary to *ʔand* ‘at’, obligatorily combines with a person-number-gender suffix indexing the possessor, but cannot be followed by a noun phrase expressing the semantic role of possessor. A possessor noun phrase can only precede *ʔand*, whereas the possessee is expressed as an unflagged noun phrase following *ʔand*.

(5) Moroccan Arabic (Semitic, Afroasiatic)

- Ḥməd ʔand-u əl-ktāb.*  
 PRN have-I:3SG.M D-book  
 ‘Ahmed has the book.’  
 (Caubet 1993: 51-52)

The coding frame of Moroccan *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, the paradigm of obligatory indexes suffixed to *ʔand* is distinct from the standard paradigm of subject indexes and more similar (although not identical) to the paradigm of object 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.

Georgian has two possessive verbs (one used with animate possessee, the other with inanimate possessee) belonging to a class of bivalent verbs whose coding frame departs from the transitive construction in that they invariably assign the cases traditionally designated as dative and nominative to the possessor phrase and the possessee phrase, whereas in the transitive construction, the coding of A and P in Georgian varies according to the tense value expressed by the verb. Historically, the Georgian possessive verbs result from the evolution of verbs whose etymological meaning is ‘bear’ (for inanimate possessee) and ‘be accompanied by, lead’ (for animate possessee) cf. Deeters (1954).

(6) Georgian (Kartvelian)

- a. *Vano-s axali megobari hq'av.*  
 Vano-DAT new friend be.in.the.sphere.of.PRS.I<sub>S</sub>:3SG.I<sub>IO</sub>:3SG  
 ‘Vano has a new friend.’
- b. *Vano-s axali saxli akvs.*  
 Vano-DAT new house be.in.the.sphere.of.PRS.I<sub>S</sub>:3SG.I<sub>IO</sub>:3SG  
 ‘Vano has a new house.’

A similar situation is found in West Circassian, with the difference that the possessive verb of West Circassian derives from a ‘be’ verb via applicativization, and can consequently be glossed as ‘exist.for’, whereas the possessive verbs of Georgian show no evidence of an applicative origin. In the possessive clauses of West Circassian, in conformity with the general properties of Northwest Caucasian applicatives, the possessee is expressed as an intransitive S, and the possessor as an indirect object.

(7) West Circassian (Northwest Caucasian)

- W-jane-w-jate-xe-r w-jə-ʔe-x-a?*  
 I<sub>ADP</sub>:2SG -mother-I<sub>ADP</sub>:2SG-father-PL-ZER I<sub>IO</sub>:2SG-APPL-EXIST-PL-Q  
 ‘Do you have parents?’  
 (Arkadiev & al. 2024: 887)

Possessive verbs deriving from an existential or locational verb via applicative derivation are also found in some indigenous languages of South America. As in West Circassian, the clauses they project can be explained as meaning literally ‘Possessee exists.for Possessor’. However, in accordance with the general properties of applicative derivation in the languages in question (in which applied phrases are not coded as indirect objects, as in Circassian, but as direct objects), such possessive verbs assign A coding to the possessee, and P coding to the possessor (i.e., the mirror-image of the coding frame of transitive ‘have’ verbs such as those found in European languages).

For example, Overall (Forthcoming) shows that Chicham / Jivaroan languages have transitive possessive clauses of this type, as in (8b), to be compared with the intransitive inverse-locational clause (8a). Note in particular the accusative flagging of the possessor.

(8) Wampis (Chicham/Jivaroan)

a. *Aánman nápi áwai.*

aa=numa=ni      napi    a-ua-i  
outside=LOC=ALL   snake   EXIST.IPFV-I<sub>S/A</sub>:3-DECL  
'There is a snake (somewhere) outside.'

b. *Arútam mína arútiawee.*

arutam      mi=na      a-ru-tu-a-ua-i  
power.vision   1SG=ACC   EXIST-APPL-IP:1SG -IPFV-I<sub>S/A</sub>:3-DECL  
'I have an Arutam power.'  
(Peña 2015: 521, 759 quoted by Overall Forthcoming)

Transitive possessive clauses of the same type as (8b) have also been signaled in some varieties of Quechua (Myler 2016) and in Mataguyan languages (Vidal & Nercesian Forthcoming).

### 2.3. The proprietive derivation strategy

The proprietive derivation strategy may involve denominal verbs glossable as 'be the possessor of an N' (or 'have an N') or denominal nouns or adjectives glossable as 'possessor of an N'. In some languages, the use of proprietive verbs (9) or nouns/adjectives (10) as one-place predicates assigning the role of possessor to their argument constitutes the standard way of forming possessive clauses.

(9) West Greenlandic (Eskimo, Eskimo-Aleut)

*Angut taana illu-qar-puq.*

man      that      house-PROPR-IND.I<sub>S</sub>:3SG  
'That man has a house.' lit. 'This man house.has.'  
(Van Geenhoven 1998: 25)

(10) Nahuatl (Aztecan, Uto-Aztecan)

*Ni-cal-ê.*

I<sub>S/A</sub>:1SG-house-PROPR  
'I have a house.' lit. 'I am a house-owner.'  
(Launey 1981)

The proprietive derivation strategy is common among the languages spoken in Siberia and in the Americas, but relatively rare elsewhere in the world.

Two problems must be mentioned in the identification of this strategy. On the one hand, in some languages, for example in Yukaghir (Pakendorf Forthcoming), and in some Uto-Aztecan languages (Álvarez González & Estrada Fernández Forthcoming), the words resulting from proprietive derivation have both verb- and noun-like properties. On the other hand, it is sometimes difficult to characterize some nominal affixes as case markers or as derivational morphemes, and consequently, in some languages, as discussed by Valenzuela & Zariquiey (Forthcoming) for Panoan languages, and by Ennever & Gaby (Forthcoming) for Ngumpin-Yapa languages, the proprietive derivation strategy is not always easy to distinguish from the flagged-possessee strategy discussed in the following section.

## 2.4. The flagged-possessee strategy

In the flagged-possessee strategy, a case-marked NP or adpositional phrase referring to the possessee acts as a non-verbal predicate assigning the role of possessor to an unflagged NP that constitutes its argument, as in (11).

- (11) Hausa (West Chadic, Chadic, Afroasiatic)  
*Yārō yanā dà fensĩr.*  
 boy I<sub>S/A</sub>:3SG.M.COP PSEE pencil  
 ‘The boy has a pencil.’ lit. ‘This boy is in.possession.of a pencil.’  
 (Newman 2000: 222)

In its use in possessive clauses, the case marker or adposition flagging the possessee phrase, for which the abbreviation PSEE is used here, can be glossed as ‘in possession of’. However, in all the cases I am aware of, the case marker or adposition in question is also used to flag comitative adjuncts in verbal predication.

This type of predicative possession is not limited to particular areas or language families, but it is particularly prominent in the Bantu language family, cf. Creissels (Forthcoming a).

## 2.5. The flagged-possessor strategy

In the flagged-possessor strategy, a case-marked NP or adpositional phrase referring to the possessor acts as a non-verbal predicate assigning the role of possessee to an NP that constitutes its argument and is neither flagged nor explicitly encoded as being possessed.

In its use in possessive clauses, the case marker or adposition flagging the possessor phrase, for which the abbreviation PSOR is used here, can be glossed as ‘in the personal sphere of’. However, in sharp contrast to the flagged-possessee type, in which the case marker or adposition that flags the possessee phrase in predicate role is invariably found in other constructions with a comitative function, the case marker or adposition that flags the possessor phrase in the flagged-possessor strategy shows a wide variety of possible functions in its possible uses in other constructions.

Mandinka and some other Mande languages have constructions of this type in which the postposition that flags the possessor phrase specifically refers to possession. Interestingly, this postposition results from the grammaticalization of the noun ‘hand’.

- (12) Mandinka (Central Mande, Mande)  
*Màkàaamà té ñĩŋ kèê búlù.*  
 prestige COP.NEG DEM man.D PSOR  
 ‘This man has no prestige.’ lit. ‘No prestige is in the sphere of this man.’

It is particularly common that the case markers or adpositions used to flag the possessor phrase in this kind of possessive clauses are used in other constructions to express spatial meanings (in particular adessive, as in (13)), but benefactive (14), dative (15), comitative (16) or genitive (17) case markers or adpositions can also be recruited to flag the possessor in possessive clauses of the flagged-possessor type. In the glosses of these examples, glosses such as



PSOR<sub>ADESS</sub> in (13) must be understood as ‘adessive marker used to flag the possessor phrase in a possessive clause of the flagged-possessor type’.

- (13) Russian (Slavic, Indo-European)

*U Ivana byla sestra.*

PSOR<sub>ADESS</sub> PRN.GEN COP.PST.I<sub>S/A</sub>:SG.F sister(F)

‘Ivan had a sister.’ lit. ‘At Ivan was a sister.’ interpreted as  
‘In Ivan’s personal sphere was a sister.’

- (14) Soso (Soso-Jalonke, Mande)

*Bànxíi yí xámée bé.*

house DEM man PSOR<sub>BEN</sub>

‘This man has a house.’ lit. ‘A house (is) for this man.’

- (15) Latvian (Baltic, Indo-European)

*Viņam ir mašīna.*

3SG.M.PSOR<sub>DAT</sub> COP.PRS.I<sub>S/A</sub>:3SG car

‘He has a car.’ lit. ‘To him is a car.’

- (16) Welsh (Celtic, Indo-European)

*Mae ci gyda fi.*

COP.PRS.I<sub>S/A</sub>:3SG dog PSOR<sub>COM</sub> 1SG

‘I have a dog.’ lit. ‘A dog is with me.’

- (17) Northern Akhvakh (Nakh-Daghestanian)<sup>5</sup>

*Di-be bik'iġa ači.*

1SG.PSOR<sub>GEN-N</sub> COP.PST.NEG.N money(N)

‘I had no money.’ lit. ‘Of me was no money.’

It is not rare that the flagging of the possessor phrase in possessive clauses of the flagged-possessor type coincides with the flagging of concernees (or external possessors), as in (18), to be compared with (13) above.

- (18) Russian (Slavic, Indo-European)

*U nas umerla babuška.*

CCNEE 1PL.GEN die.PST.I<sub>S/A</sub>:SG.F grandmother(F)

‘Our grandmother died.’ lit. ‘At us (i.e., in our sphere) the grandmother died.’

It is also interesting to observe that, cross-linguistically, the case markers or adpositions used to flag comitative adjuncts can equally be found as possessor flags in possessive clauses of the flagged-possessor type (16) or as possessee flags in possessive clauses of the flagged-possessee type (11).

<sup>5</sup> The possessive clauses of the type illustrated in this example, if reduced to their essential terms, may be superficially similar to the type presented in §2.7.2. The difference is that, in the type presented in §2.7.2, the possessor and the possessee are obligatorily contiguous and can be analyzed as forming a constituent, which is not the case here.

## 2.6. A variant of the flagged-possessor strategy

Some languages have possessive clauses whose construction can be analyzed as a variant of the flagged-possessor strategy. The difference with the flagged-possessor strategy as defined above is that the possessee phrase, instead of being unflagged, is accusative-flagged (i.e., in the same form as P in the transitive construction), as in (19) and (20).

(19) Finnish (Finnic, Uralic.)

*Pekalla on hänet.*  
 Pekka.ADESS COP.PRES.I<sub>S/A</sub>:3SG 3SG.ACC  
 ‘Pekka has her.’  
 (Seppo Kittilä, pers.com.)

(20) Modern Hebrew (Semitic, Afroasiatic)

*Yeš li ’et ha-sefer šelxa.*  
 COP DAT.1SG ACC D-book GEN.2SG  
 ‘I have your book.’  
 (Rubin 2005: 60)

What justifies analyzing such constructions as a variant of the flagged-possessor strategy is that accusative flagging, as a variety of core syntactic term flagging, does not provide direct information on the semantic role of the referent of the NP, and rather acts as an instruction to retrieve a semantic role from the meaning of the verb or some other role-assigning element of the construction, here the flagged possessor.

## 2.7. The possessed-existent strategy

In the type of possessive clauses discussed in this section, predicative possession is expressed as EXISTENCE OF A POSSESSED ENTITY. The possessee is treated as the existent in clauses projected by an existential predicator (in the narrow sense of monovalent predicator assigning to its argument the role of element of some not overtly specified situation), and the possessive interpretation of the clause follows from the fact that the existent bears a possessive index, or is modified by an adnominal possessor. The first variant of such possessive clauses can be glossed literally as “Possessor his-Possessee exists”, and the second one as “Possessor’s Possessee exists”.

### 2.7.1. The “Possessor his-Possessee exists” subtype

The variant of the possessed-existent strategy with the possessor cross-referenced by a possessive index attached to the possessee/existent is by far the most common one in the languages of the world. The possessor phrase is most commonly coded as an unflagged NP, as in (21).

(21) Vitu (Oceanic, Austronesian)

*Matabunu, vazira vuluk-a vona.*  
snake long.ago hair-I<sub>ADP</sub>:3SG EXIST

‘Formerly snakes had fur.’ lit. ‘The snake, formerly its hair existed.’

(van den Berg and Bachet 2006: 144)

However, in the same type of construction, the possessor phrase may also show some kind of overt flagging, as in (22).

(22) Hungarian (Ugric, Uralic)

*Nek-em azonban van néhány kérdés-em.*  
DAT-1SG however EXIST.PRS.I<sub>S/A</sub>:3SG a.couple.of question-I<sub>ADP</sub>:1SG

‘However, I have a couple of questions.’

lit. ‘To me, however, there is a couple of questions of mine’.

In Turkish (23), contrary to Hungarian (where the morphological treatment of the possessor is different in the adnominal possessive construction and in predicative possession), the morphological characteristics of the possessor and the possessee are identical in both constructions. However, syntactically, it would not be correct to analyze the possessor in predicative possession as an adnominal possessor, since an adnominal possessor could not be separated from its head by the insertion of a locative adjunct, as in (23b).

(23) Turkish (Turkic, Altaic)

a. *Murat-ın arkadaşı*

Murat-GEN friend-I<sub>ADP</sub>:3SG

‘Murat’s friend’ (noun phrase including a adnominal possessor)

b. *Murat-ın İstanbul-da iki arkadaş var.*

Murat-GEN İstanbul-LOC two friend-I<sub>ADP</sub>:3SG EXIST

‘Murat has two friends in İstanbul.’

(possessive clause, lit. ‘Of Murat in İstanbul two friends of his exist.’)

2.7.2. The “Possessor’s Possessee exists” subtype

In this rare variant of the possessed-existent strategy, the possessor is not cross-referenced on the possessee, but forms with it a phrase whose internal structure is that of the adnominal possession construction: *bĩ lē kǒ dō* ‘a house of the man’ in (24), *se maafaufauga o te kau fai gaaluega* ‘an idea of the workers’ in (25).

(24) Guro (South Mande, Mande)

*Bĩ lē kǒ dō à.*

man GEN house IDF EXIST

‘The man has a house.’ lit. ‘A house of the man exists.’

(Kuznetsova and Kuznetsova 2017: 851)

(25) Tuvaluan (Oceanic, Austronesian)

*Koo isi se maafaufauga o te kau fai gaaluega kee toe ffoki.*  
 INC EXIST IDF idea GEN D group do work that again return  
 ‘The workers had the idea that they’d return.’  
 lit. ‘An idea of the workers came into existence that they’d return.’  
 (Besnier 2000: 134)

Example (26) illustrates the same kind of construction in a language (Maori) in which positive existential clauses involve no overt predicator, and simply coincide with indefinite NPs.

(26) Maori (Oceanic, Austronesian)

*He waka t-ō Rei.*  
 IDF canoe SG-GEN Rei  
 ‘Rei has a car.’ lit. ‘A car of Rei (exists).’  
 (Harlow 1996: 24)

## 2.8. The implicit possession strategy

In some languages, existential clauses to which a topic NP is adjoined, without anything that could be analyzed as coding the relationship between the topic and the existent, are more or less regularly used as possessive clauses with the topic in the role of possessor and the existent in the role of possessee: “(As for) Possessor, Possessee exists”. Japanese is a case in point.

Japanese also has possessive clauses of the flagged-possessor type in which the possessor phrase combines with the postpositional clitic *ni*, also used in allative, dative and locative functions (27a). Another possibility is the use of the postpositional clitic *ga*, also used to flag not only NPs in S/A role, but also NPs in the role of concernee (or external possessor) in the so-called double-subject constructions.<sup>6</sup>

(27) Japanese (Japonic)

- a. *John san ni kuruma ga aru.*  
 PRN HON PSOR car S/A COP  
 ‘John has a car.’  
 b. *Taroo ga kuruma ga aru.*  
 who PSOR child S/A COP  
 ‘It is Taroo who has the car.’  
 (Keidan 2008: 355, 358)

According to Keidan (2008: 354-355), for most speakers, in assertive possessive clauses, the possessor must also be overtly marked as topical, as in (28a). Moreover, in the presence of the topic marker, *ni* can be omitted, as in (28b). This construction, which according to Keidan seems to be the preferred pattern for many speakers, meets the definition of the implicit possession strategy.

<sup>6</sup> Keidan (2008) glosses the first occurrence of *ga* in (27b) as FOC, because this construction is typically used when the possessor is in focus, but what is really relevant for information structure is not the presence of *ga*, but the absence of the topic marker *wa*. A true focus marker should be available to mark the focalization of NPs regardless of their role in the clause, which is not the case for *ga*.

(28) Japanese (Japonic)

- a. *John san ni wa kuruma ga aru.*  
 PRN HON PSOR TOP car S/A COP  
 ‘John has a car.’
- b. *John san wa kuruma ga aru.*  
 PRN HON TOP car S/A EXIST  
 ‘John has a car.’ lit. ‘As for John, there is a car.’  
 (Keidan 2008: 254-355)

However, the construction illustrated in (28b) is only possible with topicalizable possessors. In particular, when the possessor is questioned, as in (29), the interrogative *dare* ‘who?’ in possessor role may be marked by *ni* or *ga* but not by the topic marker *wa*.

(29) Japanese (Japonic)

- Dare ni/ga/\*wa kodomo ga iru ka?*  
 who PSOR/PSOR/\*TOP child S/A COP Q  
 ‘Who has children?’  
 Keidan (2008: 358)

This is in fact a general characteristic of this kind of possessive clauses: whatever their prominence in discourse, the languages in which such possessive clauses are widely used must necessarily also have possessive clauses of another type to express operations on the possessor incompatible with the status of topic, such as questioning.

In the languages in which existential clauses may consist of a mere NP, possessive clauses instantiating the implicit possession strategy may consist of the mere juxtaposition of two unflagged NPs, one of them interpreted as the possessor and the other as the possessee. Such possessive clauses, documented among others in Northern Tepehuan (30), are therefore potentially ambiguous with equative clauses, and their interpretation as possessive (rather than equative) clauses mainly relies on the lexical meaning of the juxtaposed NPs.

(30) Northern Tepehuan (Tepiman, Uto-Aztecan)

- Gíika go-kʰli.*  
 plow D-man  
 ‘The man has a plow’  
 (Bascom 1982: 283)

## 2.9. Competition between different strategies

Cross-linguistically, the types of possessive clauses enumerated above can be used to express the same relationships between a possessor and a possessee. However, when two or more different strategies are in competition in the same language, the choice may imply semantic nuances. In particular, when the flagged-possessor strategy is in competition with the possessed-existent strategy, the flagged-possessor strategy typically expresses contingent possession, whereas permanent possession tends to be expressed via the possessed-existent strategy. Such a contrast can be found for example in Hungarian.

(31) Hungarian (Ugric, Uralic)

- a. *Van nál-am kocsí.*  
 COP.PRS.I<sub>S/A</sub>:3SG PSOR<sub>ADESS</sub>-1SG car  
 ‘I have a car (at my disposal at the moment).’
- b. *Van kocsí-m.*  
 EXIST.PRS.I<sub>S/A</sub>:3SG car-I<sub>ADP</sub>:1SG  
 ‘I have a car (in general).’

### 3. Comparison with previous approaches

#### 3.1. General remarks

All recent discussions of the typology of predicative possession acknowledge Heine (1996, 1997) and Stassen (2009, 2013) as the main references on the typology of predicative possession.

What crucially distinguishes the typology of predicative possession presented in §2 from those proposed by Heine (1997) and Stassen (2009, 2013) is that it is a purely synchronic typology that consistently classifies possessive clauses according to their intrinsic morphosyntactic properties and the place occupied in their morphosyntactic structure by the element that can be analyzed as responsible for the possessive interpretation of the clause.

In contrast to this approach, Heine and Stassen have in common that the criteria according to which they distinguish types of predicative possession basically rely on similarities with other semantic types of constructions and/or their possible etymology, as evidenced by the use of labels such as ‘location schema’ (Heine) or ‘locational possessive’ (Stassen).

Heine’s and Stassen’s approach unavoidably leads to difficulties with the classification of possessive clauses that are not unambiguously aligned with one of the well-established semantic types of clauses on the prominence of which there is consensus. This explains in particular why neither Heine nor Stassen discusses the existence of possessive clauses projected by bivalent possessive verbs that are not transitive verbs assigning A flagging to the possessor and P flagging to the Possessee. This is also the reason why they do not give their rightful place to the types that have been characterized in §2 in terms of propriative derivation strategy and possessed-existent strategy.

#### 3.2. Heine (1996, 1997)

Heine (1996, 1997) proposes to classify possessive constructions in general and possessive clauses in particular according to the ‘source schemas’ accounting for their genesis. The following table reproduces the characterization of the six source schemas relevant for predicative constructions expressing possession with the perspectivization ‘from possessor to possessee’ as it is formulated by Heine (1996). X and Y stand for the source of possessor and possessee respectively.

Action Schema	X takes Y	The predicative nucleus involves verbs like ‘take’, ‘catch’, ‘hold’, ‘get’, etc.
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Location Schema	Y is located at X	The possessor is presented as a location.
Companion Schema	Y is with X	The companion schema is based on a cognitive structure where the possessee appears as a comitative participant.
Genitive Schema	X's Y exists	The possessor appears as a genitive modifier.
Goal Schema	Y exists for/to X	The possessor appears as a dative/benefactive participant.
Topic Schema	As for X, Y exists	In the topic schema, the possessor is likely to be encoded twice: once as a theme and second as a pronominal modifier.

Table 1. Types of predicative possession as per Heine (1996)

The basic idea of this typology is that the alignment relationships between predicative possession and other semantic types of constructions retain traces of the genesis of predicative possession constructions, and consequently, of their original cognitive motivation. However, as legitimate as such a diachronic approach may be in itself, it cannot replace a systematic synchronic typology. It must rather be articulated with it, since the etymological information necessary to identify a source schema with certainty is far from being always available, and when it is available, it sometimes obliges to abandon the idea of a straightforward correspondence between the structure of predicative possession constructions and their original cognitive motivation. In fact, a given type of predicative possession construction may have more than one possible cognitive motivation, and predicative possession constructions may undergo structural changes that blur the relationship with their sources.

For example, verbs such as ‘take’, ‘catch’, ‘hold’ or ‘get’ are well-attested as the historical source of transitive ‘have’ verbs, but many languages have transitive ‘have’ verbs whose etymology is not known, and some of those whose etymology can be established with certainty can hardly be analyzed as instances of the Action Schema.

For example, many Bantu languages have transitive ‘have’ verbs resulting from the univerbation and reanalysis of the sequence ‘be with’ in possessive clauses whose literal meaning was originally ‘X is with Y’, which means that their source schema is not the Action Schema, but the Companion Schema.

Diyari is another case in point, with a transitive ‘have’ verb which is etymologically the applicative form of the verb ‘sit’. Originally, this was presumably a comitative applicative (X sits-with Y), which means that, in terms of cognitive sources, the source schema of this transitive ‘have’ verb should also be analyzed as being the Companion Schema.

In fact, the relationship between the cognitive patterns and the predicative constructions that may reflect them is more complex than assumed by Heine. For example, one may argue that, in terms of cognitive motivations, there is no difference between the transitive ‘have’ verb of Spanish, whose original meaning is ‘hold’, or the transitive ‘have’ verbs of Ob-Ugric languages, whose original meaning is ‘bear’, and the Mandinka construction of the flagged-possessor type, illustrated in (12) above, in which the possessor phrase is flagged by a postposition cognate with the noun ‘hand’.

One may also mention the Goal Schema, which accounts not only for flagged-possessor constructions ‘Possessor (exists) for/to Possessor’, but also for the bivalent transitive verbs derived from a ‘be’ verb via applicativization that assign A or S coding to the possessee.

To conclude, Heine's classification of possessive clauses in terms of 'source schemas' offers interesting insights into some aspects of the diachronic typology of predicative possession, but does not qualify as a typology of the constructions expressing predicative possession, since the same cognitive pattern may be the source of possessive clauses having very different structures, and possessive clauses structurally similar may originate from different cognitive patterns.

### 3.3. Stassen (2009,2013)

Stassen (2009, 2013) distinguishes four types of predicative possession, the type labeled Oblique Possessive being subdivided into two subtypes. The following table reproduces the definitions of each of the types as they are formulated by Stassen (2013).

Have-Possessive	This strategy encodes the possessive relationship between possessor and possessed item in the form of a transitive construction. In this Have-Possessive, the possessor NP and the possessed NP function respectively as the subject and the direct object of a 'have'-verb.
Oblique Possessive	The possessed NP functions as the grammatical subject of the 'exist'-predicate, while the possessor NP is constructed in some oblique form.
Locational Possessive	The possessor NP is marked by some item meaning 'at', 'on' or 'in', or by a marker 'to' or 'for'.
Genitive Possessive	The possessor NP is marked by an item which typically does not have a locational interpretation; moreover, the possessor NP is commonly (though not necessarily) constructed as an adnominal modifier to the possessed NP.
Topic Possessive	The possessor NP is construed as the topic of the sentence. As such, the possessor NP indicates the "setting" or "background" of the sentence, that is, the discourse frame which restricts the truth value of the sentence that follows it.
Conjunctive Possessive ('With-Possessive' in Stassen 2009)	The possessor NP is encoded as the grammatical subject. The possessed NP is accompanied by, and usually in construction with, a marker which can be analyzed neither as a locational item nor as an indicator of topic. Closer inspection reveals that this marker in all cases originates from an item which is, or at least has been, employed as a means of indicating simultaneity between clauses. A prominent option within the Conjunctive Possessive is the use of the comitative marker 'with' on the possessed NP.

Table 2. Types of predicative possession as per Stassen (2013)

A first remark is that, if taken at face value, the definitions of these four types merely exclude from the classification several types of possessive clauses, such as those projected by bivalent possessive verbs that are not transitive verbs assigning A coding to the possessor and P coding, and also those classified above as instances of the proprietive derivation strategy.



A typology of possessive clauses based on such definitions cannot be at the same time exhaustive and consistent in the application of the definitions, and in fact, the possessive clauses that do not meet the definition of any of the four types are classified by Stassen ON THE BASIS OF ETYMOLOGICAL SPECULATIONS as ‘non-standard variants’ of one of his four types, or as ‘hybrid’ types. For example, possessive clauses instantiating the proprietive derivation strategy as defined in §2.3 do not meet the definition of any of the four types, and are analyzed by Stassen as “copular variant of the predicativized With-Possessive” if they involve a proprietive noun or adjective, and as “flexional variant of the predicativized With-Possessive” if they involve a proprietive verb.

A crucial aspect of Stassen’s typology of predicative possession is that he explicitly discards the possible presence of possessive indexes attached to the possesse as a possible criterion in the classification of possessive clauses, hence the problematic status of his Topic Possessive type. The problem is that the way this type is defined seems to refer to the kind of topic known in the literature as dangling topic, i.e., topic devoid of any syntactic link to the comment clause, but in practice, most of the languages mentioned by Stassen as illustrating this type of predicative possession have possessive clauses for which this is clearly not the case. For example, the Jacaltec example (32) is an instance of what has been defined above as the possessed-existent strategy, but Stassen classifies it as ‘non-standard’ instance of the Topic Possessive. In fact, what crucially determines the possessive interpretation of this clause is not the coding of the possessor as a topic NP (since no such topic NP is present in this example), but the possessive index attached to the existent NP.

(32) Jacaltec (Mayan)

Ay no’ in txitam.

EXIST CLF 1SG pig

‘I have a pig.’

(Stassen 2009: 73 quoting Craig 1977:21)

Another problem is that Stassen analyzes as dangling topics possessor NPs that in fact occupy an argumental position in the clause. It is true that, in some languages, the distinction between subjects and topics is not obvious, but Chappell & Creissels (2019) have shown that, in the possessive clauses of Mandarin Chinese and other Mainland South East Asian languages analyzed by Stassen as having the Topic Possessive as their only type of predicative possession, the possessor phrase cannot be analyzed as a topic adjoined to an existential clause, and is in fact the subject of a verb that has the ability to be used transitively as a ‘have’ verb and intransitively in existential and inverse-locational clauses.

In Stassen’s typology of predicative possession, the Conjunctional Possessive is also problematic, in the first place because its definition is not really a definition, and also because there is no justification for stating that the comitative adpositions that mark the possessee phrase in most of the instances of this type “in all cases originate from an item which is, or at least has been, employed as a means of indicating simultaneity between clauses”. For example, to the best of my knowledge, this possibility has never been evoked for the comitative preposition *na* involved in the With-Possessive construction that constitute the most common way of expressing predicative possession across Bantu.

## 4. The diachrony of predicative possession

### 4.1. Introductory remarks

An essential characteristic of my approach to the typology and diachrony of predicative possession is that, in contrast to previous approaches, the classification of possessive clauses I propose involves no etymological consideration. This is in my opinion a necessary condition in order to avoid circularity and confusions in the analysis of the emergence and evolution of predicative possession constructions.

In the history of a language, two types of evolutions may straightforwardly result in the emergence of a new type of possessive clause. A first possibility is that a predicative construction whose initial function was not the expression of possession undergoes a semantic shift (metaphorical extension or semantic bleaching) converting it into a predicative possession construction. For example, it has sometimes been claimed that, in the history of Russian and Latvian, a flagged-possessor construction entered into competition with a more ancient construction involving a 'have' verb as the usual way of expressing predicative possession, and the opposite change, with an emerging 'have' verb competing with a more ancient flagged-possessor construction, is widely attested in various branches of Indo-European. A second possibility is that a construction already established as a predicative possession construction undergoes structural changes that modify its status in the typology of predicative possession.

However, the emergence of some strategies as a prominent expression of predicative possession does not necessitate any semantic or formal change affecting another type of construction, and is purely a matter of discourse frequency of a type of construction that is in principle available to form possessive clauses. This concerns the possessed-existent strategy and the predicative use of propriative adjectives or nouns.

In the case of the possessed-existent strategy, all languages have constructions expressing existential predication and adnominal possession, and consequently can in principle combine them to form possessive clauses instantiating the possessed-existent strategy.

In the case of the predicative use of propriative nouns or adjectives derived from nouns, such derived nouns or adjectives exist in many languages, and can in principle be used predicatively. Consequently, in the languages that have this type of derived nouns or adjectives, the emergence of the propriative strategy as a prominent expression of predicative possession is just a matter of increase in the discourse frequency of the predicative use of propriative adjectives or nouns.

### 4.1. Emergence of new types of possessive clause via semantic shift

#### 4.1.1. Possible sources of bivalent possessive verbs

A well-known source of transitive possessive verbs assigning A coding to the possessor and P coding to the possessee is a semantic change affecting transitive verbs expressing meanings variously related to possession, 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). Interestingly, 'have' verbs originating from verbs expressing acquisition ('get') are particularly common in pidgin and creole languages.

Worth mentioning is the use of 'see' as a 'have' verb in the Mataguyan language Wichi (Vidal & Nercesian Forthcoming) and in the Kwa language Ewe (Heine 1997: 43). The

semantic link between ‘see’ and possession is not immediately obvious, but the co-lexification of ‘see’ and ‘find’ is cross-linguistically common, and this may be the explanation of the development of the possessive use of a verb initially expressing ‘see’.

In addition to the transitive verbs commonly mentioned in the literature as possible origins of ‘have’ verbs, transitive ‘have’ verbs may originate from the applicative form of an existential verb, as in some varieties of the Kx’a language !Xun (Heine & König 2015: 80-84, 233-235), or from the applicative form of a locational/postural verb, such as ‘sit’ in Diyari (Austin 2024) and in Yimas (Foley 1991).

In languages having Philippine-type systems of voice, ‘have’ verbs may stem from the locative voice of a ‘be’ verb (i.e. from constructions that can be glossed etymologically as ‘X is the place where Y is’). Such ‘have’ verbs are found in the Formosan languages Bunun and Seediq (Zeitoun Forthcoming). In terms of cognitive motivations, this expression of predicative possession is comparable to the cross-linguistically common locative variety of the flagged-possessor strategy (At X (is) Y > ‘X has Y’), but morphosyntactically, the possessor and the possessee are encoded as the A and P terms of a transitive construction.

Finally, applicative derivation has already been mentioned in §2.2 as a possible source of bivalent possessive verbs that, in contrast with the predominant pattern, assign A or S coding to the possessee.

#### *4.1.2. The emergence of the flagged-possessee strategy*

The semantic shift that may result in the emergence of the flagged-possessee strategy (in which the possessee phrase is invariably flagged by a case marker or adposition also used in comitative function) is the acquisition of the additional meaning ‘in possession of’ by a case marker or adposition previously available to express a comitative meaning.

#### *4.1.3. The emergence of the flagged-possessor strategy*

The emergence of the variety of the flagged-possessor strategy with genitive flagging of the possessor does not necessarily involve a semantic shift, since constructions such as the Northern Akhvakh construction illustrated in (16) may result from a structural change by which an adnominal possessor in possessive clauses of the “Possessor’s Possessee exist” type is reanalyzed as a distinct constituent of the clause, not necessarily adjacent to the possessee.

As regards the emergence of the other varieties of the flagged-possessee strategy, the most obvious explanation is a semantic shift by which case markers or adpositions previously available to express locative, comitative, dative or benefactive meanings acquire the additional meaning ‘in the sphere of’.

### **4.2. Emergence of new types of possessive clauses via structural change**

As rightly observed by Stassen, most of the structural changes affecting clauses whose status as possessive clauses is already established can be subsumed under the notion of have-drift, i.e. affect possessive clauses that initially instantiate strategies other than the use of a transitive ‘have’ verb and makes them more similar to ‘have’ clauses. However, the types of changes evoked in §4.2.1 and §4.2.2 are exceptions to this generalization.

#### 4.2.1. Emergence of the flagged-possessor strategy via dislocation of an adnominal possessive modifier in a construction of the “Possessor’s Possessee exists” type

The possibility of this type of change has already been evoked in §4.1.3.

#### 4.2.2. The possible scenarios resulting in the emergence of propriative verbs

I am aware of no historically attested source of propriative verbs, but several linguists working on Yupik-Inuit languages and other languages that have propriative verbs have observed that the derivational affixes yielding propriative verbs are most probably former transitive ‘have’ verbs that have ceased to be used in the transitive construction and only subsist in an intransitive construction that initially involved incorporation of a noun in P role expressing the semantic role of possessee.

Another possible source of propriative verbs is that, in a construction that is originally “Possessor is Possessee-PROP”, i.e., in which a propriative noun or adjective in predicate function combines with a copular verb, the sequence ‘copular verb + propriative noun or adjective’ fuses into a single word reanalyzed as a propriative verb.

Finally, one can imagine that, in a construction that is originally “Possessor his-Possessee exists” the sequence “possessed noun + existential verb” fuses into a single word reanalyzed as a propriative verb.

#### 4.2.3. Propriative derivation > ‘have’ verb

The emergence of a transitive ‘have’ verb from a construction that originally was an instance of the propriative derivation strategy is attested in Palikur (Arawakan). As illustrated by example (33), synchronically, Palikur has a transitive ‘have’ verb.

- (33) Palikur (Palikur, Arawakan)  
Nah kadahan aynesa karukri.  
1SG have some money  
‘I have some money.’  
(Launey 2003: 80)

However, *kadahan* ‘have’ was originally a monovalent predicate glossable as ‘be the owner of unspecified things’, consisting of the Arawakan propriative 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 and expressing the role of possessee. 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.

#### 4.2.4. Flagged-possessee construction > ‘have’ verb construction

The conversion of flagged-possessee constructions, in which the possessee is flagged by a comitative preposition, into ‘have’ verb constructions is in particular widely attested in Bantu

languages (Creissels Forthcoming a). 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 word resulting from the univerbation of the sequence ‘copula + comitative preposition’ acquires morphological properties (in particular, suffixal inflexion) 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, in example (34), it becomes  $\varepsilon$  in the subjunctive.

(34) Cuwabo (Bantu, Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo)

<i>Míyô</i>	<i>maásikini</i>	<i>ddi-kaán-ê</i>	<i>dálá</i>	<i>dhaavi</i>	<i>ójá</i>	<i>múkucé?</i>	<i>Néé!</i>
1SG	even.if	I <sub>S/A</sub> :1SG-have-SBJV	hunger	how	INF.eat	leftover	no

‘I am very hungry, but to eat the leftovers? No way!’  
(Guérois 2015: 446)

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).

A variant of this scenario, attested among others in the Bantu language Kikuyu and discussed in detail in Creissels (Forthcoming b), is the mere deletion of the comitative preposition in a construction of the type ‘Possessor is with Possessee’, converting the copula into what Creissels (Forthcoming b) calls a ‘be/have’ verb.

#### 4.2.5. ‘Have’ verbs originating from the evolution of a flagged-possessor construction

In the evolutions that may convert flagged-possessor constructions into constructions analyzable as involving a ‘have’ verb, the crucial move is the routinization of a variant of the flagged-possessor construction in which the possessor is topicalized.

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

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 or indexes. Consequently, depending on the topicalization strategies of the individual languages, a construction schematizable as

*In.the.sphere.of possessor (is) possessee* may have a topicalizing variant schematizable as *Possessor, there.is possessee* or *Possessor, in.his/her.sphere (is) possessee*.

Given the inherent topicality of prototypical possessors, it is not surprising that constructions that are initially the topicalizing variant of a flagged-possessor construction may tend to generalize, regardless of the discursive context, as the unmarked way of formulating predicative possession, the final outcome of this trend being the obsolescence of the original flagged-possessor construction. The absence of flagging of the possessor in the resulting possessive construction *Possessor, in.his/her.sphere (is) possessee* implies the reanalysis of the former flagged-possessor construction as a possessive construction in which none of the two nominal terms can be analyzed as the predicate assigning a semantic role to the other.

Further evolutions and/or reanalyses of the possessive construction resulting from this change are conditioned by its precise form (in particular, the possible presence of a copula or existential predicator, either verbal or non-verbal, and the possible presence of a pronoun or index resuming the possessor) and by the coding characteristics of transitive and intransitive verbal predication in the language in question.

The most straightforward case is that of languages in which topical NPs moved to the left-periphery of the clause are not resumed, and A and P in the basic transitive construction are neither flagged nor indexed. In such a case, the obsolescence of the *In.the.sphere.of possessor (is) possessee* 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. Consequently, in such languages, if the original flagged-possessor construction includes an existential verb, the generalization of its topicalizing variant automatically results in the emergence of a construction analyzable as a transitive construction involving a ‘have’ verb homonymous with an intransitive existential verb.

An ongoing process of this type can be observed in Burmese. Like the vast majority of Tibeto-Burman languages, Burmese has a flagged-possessor construction with locative flagging of the possessor, cf. (34).

- (35) Burmese (Burmese-Lolo, Sino-Tibetan)  
*θəŋɛ.dzìn-hma kà hnə-zì ɛí-de.*  
 friend-PSOR<sub>ADESS</sub> car two-CLF COP-NFUT  
 ‘My friend has two cars.’  
 (Jenny & Hnin Tun 2016: 247)

According to Jenny and Hnin Tun (2016: 247), in this 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 both A and P). 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), as in (36). This means that, in its present state, Burmese attests a transitional stage in the evolution converting a flagged-possessor construction into a bona fide have-possessive construction.

(36) Burmese (Burmese-Lolo, Sino-Tibetan)

$\hat{f}i_2^n$ -do<sub>1</sub>-de<sub>3</sub>-hma<sub>2</sub>    bε<sub>2</sub>.ðu<sub>1</sub>(-hma<sub>2</sub>)    k<sup>h</sup>ə.le<sub>3</sub>    ə.ŋε<sub>2</sub>-le<sub>3</sub>-dwe<sub>2</sub>     $\hat{f}i_1$ -ðə=le<sub>3</sub>  
 2F-ASSPL-inside-at    who(-PSOR<sub>ADESS</sub>)    child    young-small-PL    COP/have-NFUT=CQ  
 ‘Among you, who has small children?’  
 (Jenny & Hnin Tun 2016: 247)

Arabic illustrates a more complex case of structural change in a flagged-possessor construction triggered by the generalization of possessor topicalization, by which a former preposition that initially flagged the possessor phrase was converted into a ‘have’ verb whose coding frame differs in some respects from the transitive construction, cf. Comrie (1989) for a detailed analysis of this evolution in Maltese, and (Creissels 2022) for a survey of predicative possession in other vernacular varieties of Arabic.

## 5. Conclusion

In this presentation, I have tried to show the advantages of an approach to the typology of predicative possession systematically based on the morphosyntactic nature of the element responsible for the assignment of the semantic roles of possessor and possessee in possessive clauses, as opposed to approaches based more or less systematically on similarities with other types of construction:

- It makes it possible to deal consistently with types of possessive clauses whose status is problematic in alignment-based approaches;
- it makes it possible to integrate some minor types that have been neglected in previous typologies of predicative possession;
- it makes it possible to articulate consistently a typology of possessive clauses as they can be found in the world’s languages with a diachronic typology of predicative possession, without the risk of confusion due to the fact that possessive clauses may undergo structural changes that blur their initial motivation and relationships with other semantic types of predication.

## Abbreviations

ACC = accusative, ADESS = adessive, ALL = allative, APPL = applicative, ASSPL = associative plural, AUX = auxiliary, BEN = benefactive, CCNEE = concerne (adnominal possessor), CLF = classifier, COM = comitative, COP = copula, CPL = completive, CQ = content question, D = definiteness marker or default determiner, DAT = dative, DECL = declarative, DEM = demonstrative, ERG = ergative, EXIST = existential predicator, F = feminine, FOC = focus marker, GEN = genitive, HON = honorific, ICPL = incomplete, IDF = indefinite, I = index, I<sub>A</sub> = index cross-referencing the A term of a transitive clause, I<sub>ADP</sub> = index cross-referencing an adnominal possessor, I<sub>ERG</sub> = index cross-referencing an ergative-flagged NP, I<sub>IO</sub> = index cross-referencing an indirect object, INC = inceptive, IND = indicative, I<sub>P</sub> = index cross-referencing the P term of a transitive clause, IPFV = imperfective, I<sub>S</sub> = index cross-referencing the S term of an intransitive clause, I<sub>S/A</sub> = index cross-referencing the S term of an intransitive clause or the A term of a transitive clause, I<sub>ZER</sub> = index cross-referencing a zero-flagged NP, LOC = locative, M = masculine, N = neuter, NEG = negative, NFUT = non-

future, OBL = oblique, PL = plural, PRN = proper name, PROPR = proprietive, PRS = present, PSEE = possessee, PSOR = possessor, PST = past, Q = question marker, S/A = case marker or adposition flagging NPs in A or A role, SBJV = subjunctive, SG = singular, TOP = topic, TR = transitive, ZER = zero-case (case form of nouns that can be used in the extra-syntactic function of quotation or pure designation).

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