**Predicative possession in a cross-linguistic perspective**

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**1. Description of the topic**

**1.1. Aim and scope**

This thematic workshop aims to bring together linguists working on predicative possession primarily in Slavic and Finno-Ugric. The predominant way of expressing predicative possession in Slavic languages is to use HAVE-possessives, while in Finno-Ugric languages BE-possessives are more prevalent. Though typologically remote, there is a fair amount of interaction between these two language families, especially in the areas of direct language contact (see MacAnnallen 2011, Mazzitelli 2017). A good example of such interaction is Balto-Slavic, where both HAVE-possessives and BE-possessives are used, with certain semantic restrictions on these two forms. The workshop will address the following issues:

1. Definiteness Restriction in existential and possessive sentences
2. Genitive of Negation in negated existential and possessive sentences
3. Lexical-semantic factors determining the choice between BE-possessives and HAVE-possessives
4. Agreement in possessive sentences
5. The case of the possessor and the possessee in BE-possessives
6. The argument structure of BE-possessives
7. Types of possessive sentences in a cross-linguistic perspective

**1.2. Current approaches**

Predicative possession is realized in various ways cross-linguistically. Stassen (2009) establishes four major types of predicative possession: locational BE-possessives, BE WITH-possessives, topic possessives and HAVE-possessives. While in Slavic languages HAVE-possessives are predominantly used, Uralic languages employ locational BE-possessives with the possessor taking a more prominent VP-internal position and bearing oblique case. In the Slavic language family, West Slavic predominantly uses HAVE-possessives while East Slavic has locational BE-possessives. Old Church Slavic displays locational BE-possessives, which is replaced by HAVE-possessives in present-day Bulgarian. In Balto-Slavic the two types co-occur with some semantic restrictions on the possessee. These areal and lexical considerations give rise to the question whether the choice between HAVE-possessives and locational BE-possessives is the syntactic reflex of parametric variation or whether the two forms are derivationally related.

**1.2.1. The derivational approach relates BE-possessives and HAVE-possessives to copular sentences. This view goes back to Benveniste’s (1966) claim that possessive sentences are nothing but inverted copular sentences. This is also reflected in Freeze (1992), Kayne (1993),**
Belvin & Den Dikken (1997), and Myler (2016). Although these approaches differ in the structure of the derivational input, they share the basic concept that BE selects a small clause complement in all these sentence types. This makes existential and possessive BE-sentences look exactly like copular BE-sentences.

Freeze’s (1992) locative hypothesis seeks to derive all existential, locative and possessive constructions from the same underlying structure. Kayne (1993), building on Szabolcsi (1983), proposes that BE selects a possessive DP, which is the source of the possessive relation in his theory.

Other approaches seek to relate existentials to possessives. For example, Belvin & Den Dikken (1997) claim that an analysis of existential THERE constructions can be extended to possessive HAVE constructions, arguing that the distinction between existential statements and possessive HAVE statements is made by the ability to assign Case, which they assume is due to preposition incorporation into Agr.

Myler (2016), building on Jung (2011), argues that, “copulas exist to “sentencify” fundamentally non-sentential syntactic units. The copula is usually realized as BE. To achieve this, he introduces the VoiceP functional projection, surmounting the lexical layer of copular BE and he employs the mechanism of delayed gratification to introduce the possessor in this functional projection. The differences between existential/possessive BE-sentences vs. copular BE-sentences in his theory are not attributed to the BE-predicate itself, even in languages with morphologically distinct BE predicates in this domain; rather, to the different functional layers and the syntactic mechanisms employed in them. The same meaningless BE verb is involved in each case, and the existential/possessive content comes from elsewhere.

1.2.2. Under the lexicalist approach, BE-possessives and HAVE-possessives are structurally distinct constructions. Both sentence types have two participants, the possessor and the possessee (see Paducheva 2000, Błaszczak 2007, Partee & Borschev 2008). BE-possessives share a whole range of syntactic and semantic properties with BE-existentials. The Definiteness Restriction in affirmative sentences, GEN NEG in Slavic negated sentences, binding relations, verb agreement and case marking on the possessor and the possessee are the most important questions to be raised in relation to predicative possession.

Paducheva (2000) proposes that in addition to copular BE, Russian has a distinct existential BE. This type of BE-sentence has several properties in common with possessive BE-sentences. The author argues that Russian existential BE appears in existential and possessive BE-sentences alike, and it invariably takes two arguments: a location and a theme in the former, and a possessor and a theme in the latter. She offers semantic, syntactic and prosodic tests, including Definiteness Restriction, GEN NEG, sentence stress, and word order, in support of this.

Błaszczak (2007) distinguishes between three different meanings of BE (different BEs) each of which has its own selectional properties/argument structure:

(i) existential BE: \[vP PPLOC [v' v [vP V NP THEME]]\]
(ii) locative BE (‘agentive’ reading): \[vP NPA GENT [v' v [vP VP PPLOC]]\]
(iii) locative BE (‘simple position’ meaning): \[vP v [vP NP THEME [v' V PPLOC]]\]

The postulation of three different types of BE, Błaszczak (2007) argues, can help us explain the puzzling phenomenon of GEN NEG.

Partee & Borschev (2008) assume that existential BE is also present in possessive BE-sentences. They derive the difference between locative copular sentences and locative existential sentences
from their different perspectival center. While in locative copular sentences the subject is interpreted as definite/specific, existential and possessive sentences impose the Definiteness Restriction, hence the theme argument must be indefinite/non-specific. Genitive of Negation is found in negated existential and possessive BE-sentences but never in copular BE-sentences.

1.3. The multiplicity of theories attempting to capture these puzzling facts indicates that predicative possession is a complex phenomenon. The comparative approach taken in this workshop makes it possible to test the various theories against some, so far under-estimated, empirical data.

References

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Szabolcsi, A. 1983. The possessor that ran away from home. The Linguistic Review 3: 89-102