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Response to Harves and Kayne 2012

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1 Introduction

In a recent article, [Harves and Kayne \(2012, 120-121\)](#) propose the following universal:

- (1) All languages that have a transitive verb corresponding to *need* are languages that have an accusative-case-assigning verb of possession.

The authors argue for the validity of (1) based upon a typological survey of about 50 languages. They introduce the terms “*H*-languages” and “*B*-languages” in order to classify languages from the viewpoint of their predicative possessive constructions. *H*-languages have a transitive verb “to have” whose subject is the possessor and whose object is the possessee. *B*-languages, on the other hand, use a construction with a copular or existential verb in which the possessor is marked with an oblique case and the possessee is treated as the subject of an intransitive verb.

This terminology presents two major problems.

First, it neglects the fact that one language can have several competing constructions to express possessive predication. This is for example the case of Latin which according

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to Table 1 (Harves and Kayne, 2012, 126) is an “*H*-language” whereas the most common predicative possessive construction in this language is of the type normally found in a “*B*-language”. It would thus be more appropriate to talk of *B*- and *H*-constructions rather than of *B*- and *H*-languages.

Second, the classification of possessive predicative constructions into two classes neglects the recent work of typologists on this topic, which distinguishes many more categories (Heine, 1997, Stassen, 2009, Stassen, 2011). Stassen (2011), in particular, classifies these constructions into five types (Have-Possessive, Locational Possessive, Genitive Possessive, Topic Possessive, Conjunctive Possessive), to which he adds some transitional types.¹

Furthermore, the authors do not seem to take into consideration the fact that in many languages constructions corresponding to the English verb “need” often have additional (and usually primary) meanings such as “want”, “have to”, “lack”, and the fact that many languages have distinct constructions for expressing “need” with inanimate (“I need money”) and animate, particularly human, nouns (“I need someone”), as well as with a complement clause (“I need to go”). We will therefore not address these issues in this short paper.

Table 1, adapted from Harves and Kayne (2012, 126), provides a classification of the languages in their survey along the following two parameters: languages with an *H*- or *B*- construction vs. languages with an *N*-construction (presence of transitive ‘need’) or \bar{N} -construction (absence of transitive ‘need’). This table, of course, does not consider the possibility for one language to have several types of constructions for the same meaning.

¹However, to ease comparison with Harves and Kayne’s work, we will use the terms *H-construction* to refer to Stassen’s “have-possessive”, and *B-construction* to refer to all other types of construction.

Table 1: *H*-construction vs *B*-construction languages and the presence or absence of a transitive ‘need’ construction

	<i>H</i> -construction	<i>B</i> -construction
<i>N</i> -construction	Yes	No
\bar{N} -construction	Yes	Yes

According to the authors, while languages that have \bar{N} -constructions can also have *B*- or *H*-constructions, there are no examples of languages with *N*-constructions that would at the same time have only a *B*-construction for expressing predicative possession.

It should be noted that (1) accounts not only for languages with transitive ‘have’ but also for those which have a quasi-*B*-type predicative possessive construction in which the possessee receives accusative case.

Thus, languages like Finnish which have a transitive verb meaning ‘to need’ as in (2) and an accusative case assigning existential verb as in (3) do not constitute counter-examples to (1) even though they do not have a proto-typical transitive verb corresponding to ‘have’ (Harves and Kayne 2012, 129-30).

(2) Minä tarvitse-n sinu-t.
 I.NOM need-1SG you-ACC
 I need you.

(3) Minu-lla on häne-t.
 I-ADP be.3SG he-ACC
 I have him.

Still, (1) suffers from accusativity bias, and so it seems preferable to us to provide a cross-linguistically neutral formulation using Dixon (1994)’s syntactic primitives S (sole argument of an intransitive verb), A (subject of a transitive verb) and O (object of a transitive verb).

(4) All languages that have at least one construction corresponding to ‘need’ in which ‘need’ is a transitive verb (whose A is the person in need and O the entity needed) are languages that have at least one predicative possessive construction in which the

possessed entity has the same morphosyntactic status as the O of a proto-typical transitive verb in that language.

The reformulation of (1) as (4) also takes into account the fact, already mentioned, that many languages have several competing constructions used to express predicative possession or necessity.

Still, counterexamples to both (1) and (4) exist in several unrelated languages: Estonian, Arabic (Moroccan & Algerian varieties), Bantu (isiZulu, isiXhosa and kiSwahili), Kwa (Likpe and Ewe) and Ayacucho Quechua. For want of space, we will not include the Kwa data.

2 Estonian

Estonian, a language closely related to Finnish, has two parallel constructions corresponding to English ‘need’.

First, there is a *B*-type construction involving what seems to be a petrified abstract noun *vaja* ‘need’ and the 3rd person singular form of the verb *olema* ‘be; exist’, in which the person needing something is marked with the adessive (locative) case, but interestingly enough the entity needed is in the accusative.

(5) Meil on vaja teie toetus-t.
IPL:ADESS be:PRS:3SG:SUBJECT need 2PL:GEN support-ACC
We need your support.

(6) Tal on vaja sind.
3SG:ADESS be:PRS:3SG:SUBJECT need 2SG:ACC
She needs you.

Still, this is not the only possible way of expressing English ‘need’, and indeed, not the most frequent one either since, just like Finnish, Estonian has a transitive verb *vajava* whose subject (in the nominative) is the person needing something and whose object (in the accusative) is the entity needed. It is thus possible to reformulate 5 and 6 as follows.

(7) Me vaja-me teie toetus-t.
 IPL:NOM need-IPL:SUBJECT 2PL:GEN support-ACC

We need your support.

(8) Ta vaja-b sind.
 3SG:NOM need-3SG:SUBJECT 2SG:ACC

She needs you.

Thus, Estonian turns out to be a language with an *N*-type construction in which case we would expect it to also be an *H*-type language with a transitive verb used to express predicative possession. Yet, this is not the case as predicative possession is expressed using a *B*-type construction ('locative' according to [Stassen 2011](#)) almost identical to the one found in Finnish (cf. 3)², except for one crucial difference: the possessee stands in the nominative and not the accusative case.

(9) Meil on auto(*-t).
 IPL:ADESS be:PRS:3SG:SUBJECT car:NOM(*-ACC)

We have a car.

(10) Meil on teie toetus(*-t).
 IPL:ADESS be:PRS:3SG:SUBJECT 2PL:GEN support:NOM(*-ACC)

We have your support.

As a language with a transitive verb corresponding to English 'need', but no transitive verb corresponding to English 'have', Estonian is a counter-example to (4).

3 Arabic

The most common construction used to convey the meaning 'to need' in Moroccan Arabic is an \bar{N} -type construction with a verb meaning 'to be lacking' and an object pronoun encoding the person to whom, literally, something is lacking.³

²On which the \bar{N} -type construction presented in 5 and 6 is based, the petrified noun *vaja* 'need' appearing in the slot normally reserved for the possessee.

³This verb is also used with completive clauses to express deontic modality '(someone) must/should (do something)', a well-known reanalysis in the case of constructions with a basic meaning NEED ([Heine and Kuteva, 2004, 215-216](#)).

- (11) χəsˤsˤ-ni l-wəld.
 need-1SG:OBJECT DET-son
 I need a son. (lit. A son is lacking to me) (Brustad 2000, 147)

But there is also a quite common verb *ħta:ʒ* ‘to need’, already present in Classical Arabic (*ħta:ʒa* (إحتاج)), related to a very common noun *ħa:ʒa* which today means ‘thing’ but which originally meant ‘want; need’ (Lane, 1863, 663-664, Badawi and Haleem, 2008, 241). This latter meaning is still apparent in this noun’s use in an \bar{N} -type construction (lit. *to be in need of*), but the related verb usually (though not always) takes the entity needed as its direct object, unlike in Classical and prescriptive Modern Standard Arabic where the preposition *ħila:* must precede it⁴. The following examples are from Caubet (1993, 139):⁵

- (12) ka-n-ħta:ʒ əl-χəɖma.
 PRS-IPFV:1SG:SUBJECT-need DET-work
 I need work.
- (13) ħta:ʒ-i:t əs-səkka:rˤ.
 need-PFV:1SG:SUBJECT DET-sugar
 I need (some) sugar.
- (14) əl-ba:reħ ħta:ʒ-i:t-ək u
 DET-yesterday need-PFV:1SG:SUBJECT-2SG:OBJECT and
 ma-sˤob-t-ək-ʃ.
 NEG-find-PFV:1SG:SUBJECT-2SG:OBJECT-NEG
 Yesterday I needed you but I couldn’t find you.

Example (15) is a representative example taken from the Internet which illustrates the present tense use of this verb in modern colloquial Moroccan⁶.

- (15) bɛi-t n-ħref wəʃ ʋadi n-ħta:ʒ
 want-PFV:1SG:SUBJECT IPFV:1SG:SUBJECT-know if FUT IPFV:1SG:SUBJECT-need
 l’original wella la.
 DET:original or not

⁴Actual MSA usage often drops the preposition.

⁵Accusative case in Moroccan Arabic is overtly marked only in the case of personal pronouns for which there are special subject and object affixal forms, glossed as such. While subject markers can be either prefixed or suffixed depending on TAM, object markers are always suffixed. Contrary to Classical Arabic (and prescriptive MSA), noun phrases on the other hand are never overtly marked either for nominative or accusative case.

⁶This example has been re-transcribed using a simplified version of the IPA for the sake of clarity.

I'd like to know if I'll need the original or not.

On the other hand, predicative possession in Moroccan Arabic, as well as in Arabic in general, can only be expressed as a *B*-type construction quite like the Estonian one, in which the possessor is preceded by a preposition meaning 'at' and followed directly by the possessed entity with or without an intervening copular element depending on tense (Caubet, 1993, 355).

- (16) ʔand m^sm^{ʔw}-ʔa ʔe:r^s bni:ta.
at mother-POSS:3SG only little.girl
Her mother had only one daughter.

Interestingly enough, actual MSA usage seems to allow the transitive use of *ʔta:ʒ* as witnessed by the following example.

- (17) ʔa-ʔta:ʒ-ʔk.
IPFV:1SG:SUBJECT-need-2SG:OBJECT
I need you. (Title of a song by an UAE singer)

An Internet search with *ʔaʔta:ʒ* followed by a couple of common nouns such as *waqt* 'time' and *ʔus* 'money' returned close to a hundred pages of results showing just how common this construction seems to be.

Furthermore, Algerian Arabic (especially as spoken in Algiers), with no transitive verb of predicative possession (as all other Arabic dialects), uses a transitive verb *stʔaqq* 'to need' which has its source in Classical Arabic *ʔistabʔaqq* استحق meaning 'to deserve, to merit' (Lane, 1863, 606-7, Badawi and Haleem, 2008, 224). This latter meaning is still widely attested in all other varieties, but has shifted to that of 'need' in the Arabic spoken in Algiers. The following sentences illustrate this quite common use with a direct object, the only possible construction available with this verb (Redouane Djamouri, p.c.).

- (18) n-stʔaqq ʔus.
IPFV:1SG:SUBJECT-need money
I need money.

- (19) n-stħaqq-ək.
 IPFV:1SG:SUBJECT-2SG:OBJECT
 I need you.

Moroccan, Algerian and informal MSA seem thus to be another counter-example to the generalization in (4). This counter-example is all the more noteworthy since it illustrates a case where transitive ‘need’ is the result of natural evolution running counter to prescriptive grammar which only allows an intransitive construction. Incidentally, Turkish presents the opposite situation: one in which actual usage favors an intransitive construction over the transitive verb (*gereksmek* ‘need’) created by prescriptive grammarians which never really won any currency⁷.

4 Bantu

In this section, we cite three Bantu languages, isiZulu, isiXhosa and kiSwahili, and present data from two of them.

First, IsiZulu and its closest relative isiXhosa (Nguni, Bantu) offer us another example of a typical *N*-type construction. These two languages have a transitive verb *ukudinga* corresponding to English ‘need’, whose subject is the person needing something and whose object is the entity needed. Although noun phrases in Nguni languages do not receive accusative case marking, they are unambiguously indexed on the verb by way of subject and object concord prefixes. The following examples are from isiZulu:

- (20) a. Si-dinga i-mali e-ningi.
 IPL:SUBJECT-need CL9-money CL9-many
 We need more money.
- b. Si-yi-dinga.
 IPL:SUBJECT-CL9:OBJECT-need.
 We need it (the object belongs to class 9, e. g. *the money*).

⁷Which is why, although it does not have a transitive HAVE, Turkish does not constitute a valid counter-example to Harves and Kayne’s generalization.

construction (as in example 23) which accounts for the ungrammaticality of the following example:

- (23) *U-yi-na.
 I:SUBJECT-CL9:OBJECT-with
 Intended meaning: She has it.

There is thus no doubt that the predicative possessive construction with *na* ‘with’ cannot be analyzed as a case of an accusative-case-assigning verb of possession.

This situation is by no means unique among Bantu languages. Indeed, kiSwahili for instance also has a transitive verb corresponding to English ‘need’⁹. Note that agreement marking in this language follows the same principles as in Nguni languages.

- (24) a. Ni-na-taka ku-nunua gari, lakini mimi ni-na-hitaji
 ISG:SUBJECT-PRS-want INF-buy car but ISG ISG:SUBJECT-PRS-need
 pesa.
 CLIO.money
 I want to buy a car, but I need money.
- b. Ni-na-zi-hitaji.
 ISG:SUBJECT-PRS-CLIO:OBJECT-need
 I need it (the object belongs to class 10, e. g. *the money*).

KiSwahili has thus an *N*-type construction which according to (4) would entail the existence of a transitive verb of possession, but this is not the case, as predicative possession is expressed as in most other Bantu languages by means of the preposition *na* ‘with’, just as in isiZulu and isiXhosa (cf. 22).

- (25) a. Ni-na pesa.
 ISG-with CLIO.money
 I have money. (lit. I am with money)
- b. Ni-na-zo.
 ISG-with-CLIO
 I have it. (lit. I am with it, the object belongs to class 10, e. g. *the money*)

⁹Which, incidentally, seems to have been borrowed from Arabic (*ʔihta:za* حَتَّاجٌ).

As in Nguni languages, the ungrammaticality of the following example shows that we are not dealing with an accusative-case-assigning verb of possession.

- (26) *Ni-zi-na.
 1SG:SUBJECT-CL9:OBJECT-with
 Intended meaning: I have it.

This does not mean that this kind of construction cannot be reanalyzed and undergo what [Stassen \(2011\)](#) calls an H-drift, moving thus towards a more transitive-like construction. This is what seems to be happening in the Bantu language seTswana, to cite but one example ([Creissels 2010](#)).

5 Quechua

Peruvian (Cuzco, Cajamarca, Huallaga) and Bolivian Quechua are presented by [Harves and Kayne \(2012\)](#) as examples of *B*-languages without transitive ‘need’. While we have been unable to verify this claim, Ayacucho Quechua has a transitive verb whose primary meaning is ‘want’, but which is the normal (and seemingly only) way to translate English ‘need’ ([Soto Ruiz, 2010](#), 102 *et passim*). Its subject in the (unmarked) nominative is the person needing something and its object in the accusative is the entity needed.

- (27) (Ñuqa) Hatun wasi-ta-m muna-n-i.
 (1SG:NOM) big house-ACC-ASSERT need-PRS-1SG:SUBJECT
 I need a big house.

- (28) (Ñuqa) Mana-m pay-ta-chu muna-n-i.
 (1SG:NOM) NEG-ASSERT 3SG-ACC-NEG need-PRS-1SG:SUBJECT
 I don’t need him.

Now this makes Ayacucho Quechua a language with an *N*-type construction and we would expect it to also have an *H*-type construction with a transitive verb used to express predicative possession. Yet, this is not the case as predicative possession is expressed using a *B*-type construction with the copula verb *kay* ([Zariquiey and Córdova, 2008](#), 181), in

which the possessor is either encoded in the genitive and cross-referenced on the possessee by the corresponding possessive suffix (cf. 29), or else goes in the nominative while the possessee carries a special possessive suffix *-yuq* meaning ‘provided with’ (cf. 30).

(29) (Ñuqa-pa) Hatun wasi-y-mi ka-n.
 (1SG-GEN) big house-POSS:1SG-ASSERT be-PRS:3SG:SUBJECT
 I have a big house. (lit. My big house exists.)

(30) (Ñuqa) Pichqa wawa-yuq-mi ka-n-i.
 (1SG:NOM) five child-with:POSS-ASSERT be-PRS-1SG:SUBJECT
 I have five children. (lit. I am provided with five children.)

6 Discussion

The facts presented in this short paper offer a challenge to Harves and Kayne’s generalization, as languages from four unrelated language families spoken on three different continents without any *H*-construction turn out to have an *N*-type construction. The authors’ hypothesis is thus unlikely to be valid as an absolute universal.

This is not all that surprising for at least three reasons.

First, the sample used by Harves and Kayne (2012) has a clear Eurasian bias. Although some non-Eurasian languages have been included (Amharic, Guarani, Mapudungun, Purépecha, Mohawk and Quechua), they only represent approximately one-eighth of the sample. It is well known that Eurasia as a whole constitutes a large linguistic area (Dryer 1989, 274-275). Therefore, the observed correlation might be a by-product of a genetically and areally unbalanced sample.

Second, the proposed generalization runs counter to Tsunoda (1985)’s verb type hierarchy (cf. Table 2). This hierarchy classifies predicates into seven classes based upon the affectedness of the participants. Predicates that are higher on this hierarchy tend to be coded as prototypically transitive verbs, while those on the lower end tend to be expressed as intransitive predicates whereby one of the participants receives oblique case. According to this hierarchy, verbs like *have* (class 6) rank lower than verbs like *need* (class 5) and

therefore should be less prone to be expressed by transitive predicates within the same language.

Table 2: Tsunoda (1985)'s verb type hierarchy

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
effective action	perception	pursuit	knowledge	feeling	relation	ability
<i>hit, kill</i>	<i>see, hear</i>	<i>search, look for</i>	<i>know, understand</i>	<i>love, like</i>	have, lack	<i>be able to, capable</i>
<i>break, shoot</i>	<i>find, look</i>	<i>wait</i>	<i>remember</i>	<i>want, fear</i>	<i>resemble</i>	<i>proficient</i>
<i>eat</i>	<i>listen, smell</i>		<i>forget</i>	need	<i>correspond</i>	<i>good</i>

It should be noted that predicates' behavior in individual languages does not always conform exactly to this hierarchy as first formulated. Indeed, recent work (Malchukov 2005) has proposed a more fine-grained two-dimensional classification which discriminates between affectedness of the more subject-like and more object-like participants. Still, the revised version of Tsunoda's hierarchy has not contested the validity of Tsunoda's ordering of verb type classes 5 and 6 which are directly relevant to the present discussion. Thus, the generalization one would be tempted to make on the basis of this hierarchy is one which predicts that if a language has a transitive verb 'to have' it should also have a transitive verb 'to need', the exact opposite of Harves and Kayne (2012)'s proposal.

Third, generalizations in lexical typology are made with respect to semantic classes rather than to individual items since the latter often show exceptional behavior in individual languages. It is thus unlikely that an exceptionless universal can be established on the basis of translational equivalents of individual items taken from any given language in particular.

Still, Harves and Kayne (2012)'s findings seem to challenge Tsunoda's hierarchy and so the cross-linguistic correlation between *N*-type constructions and *H*-type constructions which they posit is certainly worth investigating. As Kayne (2013) points out, the way this generalization has been formulated allows it to be easily tested on other languages. We think, however, that further work on a larger sample is necessary in order to ascertain whether or not it remains statistically significant and can thus be used in studies in

comparative syntax.

Furthermore, future work on the subject should include a diachronical study in order to ascertain the possible origins of constructions which correspond to English 'need'.

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