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Topicality and the typology of predicative possession

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Abstract: Recent accounts on the typology of predicative possession, including those by Stassen, recognise a Topic Possessive type with the possessee coded like the figure in an existential predication, and the possessor coded as a topic that is not subcategorised by the predicate and is not related to any syntactic position in the comment, literally: *As for Possessor, there is Possessee*. The Asian region is explicitly singled out as being a Topic Possessive area.

On the basis of a sample of 71 languages from the four main language families of continental East and Southeast Asia – Sino-Tibetan, Hmong-Mien, Tai-Kadai and Austroasiatic, contrary to these previous accounts of the distribution of the main types of predicative possession in the world's languages, we argue that this area should rather be considered as showing a particularly high concentration of Have-Possessives, with the additional particularity that the verbs occurring in the Have-Possessive constructions in this linguistic area are polysemous verbs also used for existential predication.

After briefly reviewing Stassen's typology of Predicative possession, we discuss his account of the Topic Possessive type and then present five arguments for considering why the possessor NP of the existential/possessive verb **yǒu** 有 in Standard Mandarin Chinese cannot be analysed as invariably occupying the position of a topic, and consequently, that the construction should be reclassified as an instance of the Have-Possessive type. In the final sections, the situation is examined for other Southeast Asian languages showing the same configuration for predicative possession and existential predication as Standard Mandarin, to the extent that data is available.

Keywords: predicative possession, topicalisation, topic-comment, existential verbs, Sino-Tibetan, Sinitic, Standard Mandarin, Hmong-Mien, Tai-Kadai, Austroasiatic

1. Introduction

Stassen (2009, 2013) and other general accounts on the typology of predicative possession (among others Creissels 1979, Heine 1997, Mazzitelli 2015, and Myler 2016) recognise a Topic Possessive type with the possessee coded like the figure in existential predication, and the possessor coded as a dangling topic, i.e. a disjunct topic that is not subcategorised by the predicate, nor related to a syntactic position in the comment, literally *As for Possessor, there is Possessee*.

It is uncontroversial that, in many languages, as illustrated in section 4 by Japanese, possessive clauses in which the possessor NP is topicalised constitute a common way, or even the preferred way, of expressing predicative possession. It is, however, extremely

dubious that constructions in which the possessor NP invariably occupies a topic position not related to any syntactic position in the comment, could constitute the only type or the more basic type of predicative possession in a language, as explicitly claimed by Stassen (2009: 753-754) for Mandarin and other East and Southeast Asian languages. This would certainly contradict a fundamental functional principle on which all introductions to general linguistics insist, namely, that languages are adapted to the communicative needs of their speakers. A general application of this principle is that basic types of predicative constructions whose function is to encode fundamental notions pervasive in discourse (such as possession) should not be limited in the operations they allow on NPs representing participants.¹ As Keenan (1976: 309) puts it, "... we expect that basic sentences will present the greatest morphological and syntactic potential of the sentences in any given language." Hence, in a language in which the possessor NP in predicative possession could only be encoded as a dangling topic preceding an existential clause, it would consequently be inaccessible to the mechanisms to which dangling topics are not accessible, and to which possessors have access in the other types of predicative possession – in particular, questioning.

In this article, we argue that, contrary to Stassen's (2009) claim, in Mandarin Chinese and other languages of this area showing the same configuration of predicative possession and existential predication, the predicative possession construction is an instance of the Have-Possessive type, although it involves the same predicator as an existential predication.

The article is organised as follows. In Section 2, we briefly review the aspects of Stassen's (2009) typology of Predicative possession that, in our view, do not require radical revision. In Section 3, we discuss his account of the Topic Possessive type. Section 4 presents the case of a language (Japanese) with a Locational Possessive construction, but in which the topicalisation of possessor NPs is usual, and topicalised possessors are commonly devoid of case marking. Section 5 clarifies our use of the terms 'subject' and 'topic'. Section 6 discusses the argument structure and syntactic properties of the existential/possessive verb **yǒu** 有 in Mandarin Chinese. Section 7 briefly examines the situation for other Sinitic

¹ For example, in K'iche' (Campbell 2000), the agent in the basic transitive construction cannot be questioned, focalised, or relativised, but this impossibility is compensated by the existence of a variant of the transitive construction in which the agentive argument of the transitive verb is coded as an intransitive subject, thus enabling access to the operations in question. Similarly, in Wolof (Nouguier-Voisin 2002), comitative adjuncts cannot be focalised or relativised, but this impossibility is compensated by the existence of an applicative derivation by which they can acquire the status of object, which makes them accessible to focalisation and relativisation.

languages. Section 8 discusses data from Hmong-Mien, Tai-Kadai, Austroasiatic, and Tibeto-Burman languages showing the same configuration of predicative possession and existential predication. Section 9 summarises our conclusions.

2. The typology of predicative possession: the unproblematic types

In Stassen (2009), which constitutes the most recent and most detailed general account of the typology of predicative possession, four basic types are recognised: the Locational Possessive type, the With-Possessive type, the Have-Possessive type, and the Topic Possessive type.² In this section, we briefly review the first three types, which are not particularly problematic. The fourth one, the Topic Possessive type, will be introduced in section 3, as its status is, in fact, the central topic of our article.

2.1. Definitions

In (1-6) below, we reproduce Stassen's definitions of the Locational Possessive, With-Possessive, and Have-Possessive types and reproduce one example of each with Stassen's (2009) glossing.

(1) The Locational Possessive type according to Stassen (2009: 49-50)

- a) The construction contains a locative/existential predicate, in the form of a verb with the rough meaning of 'to be'.
- b) The POSSESSEE NP (PE) is constructed as the GRAMMATICAL SUBJECT of the predicate. As such, it takes all the morphosyntactic 'privileges' that the language allows for grammatical subjects. For example, if the language allows subject-agreement on verbs the PE will be the determining factor in that agreement. Likewise, if the language has a case system, the PE will be in the case form that is employed for intransitive subjects in general.

² This typology has been slightly revised in Stassen (2013) which recognises a fifth type –the Genitive Possessive, placed with the Locational Possessive under the new rubric of 'Oblique Possessive'. The With-Possessive is renamed the 'Conjunctive Possessive' in order to encompass a group of minor marking strategies that share a similar set of features to the comitative. Since these revisions do not directly concern our argumentation here, we will continue to refer to Stassen (2009) which is by far the more comprehensive exegesis of his standpoint.

- c) The POSSESSOR NP (PR) is constructed in some OBLIQUE, ADVERBIAL CASE FORM. As such, the possessor may be marked by any formal device that the language employs to encode adverbial relations in general, such as cases affixes or adpositions.

(2) Russian (Indo-European, East Slavonic)

U Ivana byl sinij avtomobil’.

at I.-GEN be.3SG.M.PAST blue car

‘Ivan had a blue car.’ (Stassen 2009: 51, citing Chvany 1973: 71)

(3) The With-Possessive type according to Stassen (2009: 54) or Conjunctive Possessive in Stassen (2013)

- a) The construction contains a locative/existential predicate, in the form of a verb with the rough meaning of ‘to be’.
- b) The POSSESSOR NP (PR) is constructed as the GRAMMATICAL SUBJECT of the predicate.
- c) The POSSESSEE NP (PE) is constructed in some OBLIQUE, ADVERBIAL CASE FORM.

This type has been expanded in Stassen (2013) to include conjunctions expressing simultaneity between clauses.

(4) Hixkaryana (Macro-Carib, Carib)

Apaytara hyawo naha biryekomo.

chicken with 3SG-be-PRES boy

‘The boy has chickens.’ (Stassen 2009: 56, citing Derbyshire 1979: 110)

(5) The Have-Possessive type according to Stassen (2009: 62)

- a) The construction contains a transitive predicate.
- b) The POSSESSOR NP is constructed as the SUBJECT/AGENT.
- c) The POSSESSEE NP is constructed as the DIRECT OBJECT/PATIENT.

(6) Ubykh (North-West Caucasian)

Zä-c' a-w-qa-ge.

one-house.ABS 3SG.ABS-2SG.ERG-have-PRES

‘You have a house’ (Stassen 2009: 65, citing Dumézil 1931: 85)

2.2. General comments

A serious shortcoming of the definitions reproduced in 2.1 is that they imply the universality of a grammatical relation ‘subject’, a postulate which was widely accepted some decades ago but is now rejected by many general linguists and typologists. However, it would not be difficult to replace them by more or less equivalent definitions formulated in terms of alignment relationships between predicative possession and other functional types of predication (locational predication, comitative predication, transitive predication). We will not discuss further Stassen’s account of the constructions he classifies as Locational Possessive, With-Possessive, or Have-Possessive, since our purpose is to discuss much more fundamental issues concerning the very recognition of his ‘Topic Possessive’ type as a fourth basic type of predicative possession in a synchronic typology of predicative possession. With a view to the questions that will be discussed in the remainder of this article, some remarks are nonetheless in order about the Have-Possessive type.

2.3. Three remarks on the Have-Possessive type

Our first remark on the Have-Possessive type is that ‘transitive predicate’ in the definition reproduced in (5) above must not be understood as ‘verb showing all the properties of prototypical transitive verbs’. The verbs found in constructions for which the consensus holds that they belong to this type, even those whose transitive origin is unquestionable, are rarely if ever perfectly canonical transitive verbs. A case in point is Spanish **tener** ‘have’, whose behaviour in differential object marking differs from that of typical transitive verbs (Creissels 2013). Consequently, our proposal is to reformulate the definition of the Have-Possessive type as indicated in (7).

(7) Redefinition of the Have-Possessive type

- a) The POSSESSOR NP shows the same coding characteristics as the AGENT in the basic transitive construction.
- c) The POSSESSEE NP shows the same coding characteristics as the PATIENT in the basic transitive construction.

The second remark is that predicators shared by predicative possession and existential predication (such as **var** in Turkish – example (7) and **écho** in Greek – example (8)) can be found in two types of situations that must be distinguished carefully. Turkish illustrates a situation where the possessive use of an existential/possessive predicator must be analyzed as an instance of the Locational Possessive type of predicative possession (or its Genitive Possessive variant): in (7a), the possessee NP is in the Nominative case, and the possessor NP has coding properties identical to those of adnominal possessors while (7b) shows its relation to a plain existential clause that also has a locative adjunct.

By contrast, Greek illustrates a situation where the possessive use of an existential/possessive predicator is an instance of the Have-Possessive type: in (8a), the possessor NP is in the Nominative case, and the possessee NP in the Accusative case. Note that example (8b) shows the inherent ambiguity of **écho** constructions in Greek between existential and possessive interpretation, in spite of the fact that the analysis of possessive clauses with **écho** as belonging to the Have-Possessive type is absolutely uncontroversial.

(7) Turkish (Turkic, Altaic)

- a. **Ayten-in İstanbul-da iki arkadaş-ı var.**
Ayten-GEN İstanbul-LOC two friend-CSTR there.be
'Ayten has two friends in Istanbul.'

- b. **Buzdolabın-da iki şişe bira var.**
fridge-LOC two bottle beer there.be
'There are two bottles of beer in the fridge.'
(Göksel & Kerslake 2005: 112)

(8) Greek (Indo-European)

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

b. **Den eíche dáskalous sta chōriá.**

NEG have.PST.3SG teachers.ACC in.the villages

‘There were no teachers in the villages.’ (also interpretable as

‘He/she did not have teachers in the villages.’ in an appropriate context)

(Creissels, *Elicited data*)

The distinction between the situations illustrated by examples (7) and (8) is crucial for the discussion of the diachronic developments underlying the situation we analyse in Southeast Asian languages (see section 6.4).

The third remark is that diachronic change in predicative possession does not necessarily result from the emergence of new predicative possession constructions due to an extension of the uses of locational/existential predication, or to semantic changes affecting verbs such as ‘take’, ‘hold’, ‘get’, or ‘bear’ (as widely attested, among others, in various branches of Indo-European). Diachronic change in predicative possession may also result from purely formal changes in constructions already expressing predicative possession. As rightly highlighted by Stassen (2009: 208-243), the *have*-drift, by which predicative possession constructions of other types tend to acquire characteristics of the Have-Possessive type, is a very common type of evolution. Maltese, analysed by Comrie (1989: 219-225), constitutes a well-known case of such an evolution.

3. The Topic Possessive type of predicative possession according to Stassen’s (2009) typology of predicative possession

In addition to the three types commented upon in section 2, Stassen’s (2009) typology of predicative possession includes a fourth basic type, the Topic Possessive type, whose definition is reproduced in (9).

(9) The Topic Possessive type according to Stassen (2009: 58)

- a) The construction contains a locative/existential predicate, in the form of a verb with the rough meaning of ‘to be’.
- b) The POSSESSEE NP (PE) is constructed as the GRAMMATICAL SUBJECT of the predicate.

- c) The POSSESSOR NP (PR) is constructed as the SENTENCE TOPIC of the sentence.

Stassen (2009: 58) further comments that

“As such, the possessor NP ‘limits the applicability of the main predication to a certain restricted domain’ (Chafe 1976: 50) and indicates ‘the frame within which the sentence holds’ (Chafe 1976: 51). Thus, the possessor NP indicates the SETTING or BACKGROUND of the sentence, and its function can be circumscribed by English phrases such as *given X*, *as for X*, *with regard to X*, *speaking about X*, *as far as X is concerned*, and the like. Given this, the standard form of the Topic Possessive can be represented as *(As for) PR, PE is/exists.*”

This gloss clearly points to the type of topic commonly designated as ‘dangling’ or ‘hanging’ topic, i.e., the kind of topic devoid of any structural link to the comment clause, whose licensing/interpretation is a purely semantic matter (see also §5.2).

It is absolutely uncontroversial that, in many languages, possessive clauses instantiating a topic-comment construction with the possessor NP in topic role are very common. Moreover, an increase in the tendency to topicalise possessors in constructions belonging to the Locational Possessive type is a decisive move in processes of *have*-drift of the type analysed by Comrie (1989) for Maltese, also discussed by Stassen in his chapter 6. What is problematic, however, is Stassen’s claim that, in some languages, a topic-comment construction with a topic devoid of any syntactic relationship with the content clause is the only available option to express predicative possession. According to Stassen (2009: 748-768), this would be the case for at least 75 languages out of the 420 languages included in his sample.

A first observation is that most of the languages listed by Stassen as exclusively making use of a Topic Possessive construction have constructions he analyses as non-standard variants of the Topic Possessive type, in which the possessor is encoded on the possessee NP in the form of a possessive pronoun or affix, as in Jacalteco –example (10), or on the verb in the form of an oblique agreement affix, as in Seneca – example (11).

(10) Jacaltec (Mayan, Kanjobalan)

Ay no' in txitam.

there.be CLF 1SG pig

'I have a pig.'

(Stassen 2009: 73 quoting Craig 1977: 21)

(11) Seneca (Iroquoian)

Uhūsa' ak-yk'.

egg 1SG.OBL-there.be

'I have an egg.'

(Stassen 2009: 99 quoting Holmer 1954: 53)

In the languages in question, it may well be that possessors expressed as full NPs are most commonly topicalised, but the index representing them within the clause excludes analysing them as dangling topics. Consequently there is no justification for an analysis in terms of hybridisation with the Topic Possessive type, since the possibility of topicalising possessors is shared by all types of predicative possession constructions, whereas Stassen's definition of the Topic Possessive type refers specifically to the coding of the possessor as a dangling topic.

There are also problems with the data on the basis of which Stassen classified some languages as having the standard Topic Possessive type of predicative possession. For example, the characterisation of Fongbe (Kwa) as having the standard Topic Possessive as its only option relies on a distortion of the data, since in the Fongbe sentence he quotes on p. 554, taken from Lefebvre & Brousseau (2002: 254), **ɔ́** 'have' has been replaced by **ɔ̀** 'be at'.

In the rest of this article, we will focus on the analysis of predicative possession in Southeast Asian languages. Our database includes 71 languages (see Appendix and Map 1 with locations in section 3). Among the languages spoken in this area, those listed by Stassen (2009) as having the standard Topic Possessive type as their only available option are as follows:³

³ We reproduce here the genetic affiliation of the languages in question, as indicated by Stassen. The bolded languages are those also included in our own database.

Mandarin	Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan
Cantonese	Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan
Eastern Kayah	Karen, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan
Arleng Alam (aka Karbi)	Mikir, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan
Lisu	Burmese-Lolo, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan
Lahu	Burmese-Lolo, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan
White Hmong	Hmong-Mien
Thai	Kam-Tai
Khasi	Mon-Khmer, Austroasiatic
Sedang	Mon-Khmer, Austroasiatic
Cambodian	Mon-Khmer, Austroasiatic
Vietnamese	Mon-Khmer, Austroasiatic

4. Topicalisation of possessors in the Locational Possessive type of predicative possession: the case of Japanese

Before discussing the analysis of predicative possession in Southeast Asian languages, it is interesting to evoke the case of Japanese, since in Japanese, the topic-comment construction involves overt marking of the phrase in topic role. Japanese has a predicative possession construction belonging to the Locational Possessive type, with the possessee encoded as the subject of an existential verb, either **iru** (with animate subjects) or **aru** (with inanimate subjects), and the possessor marked with the particle **ni**, used to code various types of oblique NPs – example (12b).

(12) Japanese (Japonic)

a. **Heya ni otoko ga iru.**

room OBL man SBJ there.be

‘There is a man in the room.’

b. **John san ni kuruma ga aru.**

John HON OBL car SBJ there.be

‘John has a car.’

(Keidan 2008: 354-355)

However, according to Keidan (2008: 354-355), for most speakers, in assertive possessive clauses, the possessor must also be overtly marked as topical, as in (13a). Moreover, in the presence of the topic marker, **ni** can be omitted, as in (13b), which according to Keidan seems to be the preferred pattern for many speakers.

(13) Japanese (Japonic)

a. **John san ni wa kuruma ga aru.**

John HON OBL TOP car SBJ there.be

‘John has a car.’

b. **John san wa kuruma ga aru.**

John HON TOP car SBJ there.be

‘John has a car.’

(Keidan 2008: 354-355)

Marking the possessor as topical is however impossible when it is questioned. In (14), **dare** ‘who?’ in possessor role may combine with the oblique marker **ni** or with **ga** in the role of focus marker, but not with the topic marker **wa**.

(14) Japanese (Japonic)

Dare ni/ga kodomo ga iru ka?

who OBL/FOC child SBJ there.be Q

‘Who has children?’

(Martin 2003: 26)

Japanese is a clear case of a language in which a construction with the possessor NP marked as topical is highly salient, but must nevertheless be analysed as combining the topic-comment construction with a predicative construction belonging to the Locational Possessive type. Crucially, in Japanese, the possessor NP can be marked by the topic marker **wa**, the oblique marker **ni**, or both, but the possibility of using **wa** depends on information structure, whereas the use of **ni** is not bound to such conditions. Consequently, Japanese predicative possession can be analysed as belonging basically to the Locational Possessive

type, with the possessor marked in principle by the oblique particle **ni**. Although particularly frequent, possessive clauses with the possessor NP marked only as a topic are better accounted for as deriving from the Locational Possessive construction by means of a rule allowing **ni** to be omitted in the presence of the topic marker **wa**.

5. Subject and topic in Standard Mandarin

In this section, we briefly clarify our use of the terms ‘subject’ and ‘topic’ with reference to Standard Mandarin.

5.1. Subject in Standard Mandarin

Most descriptions of the languages dealt with in this paper (including Mandarin Chinese) use the term ‘subject’ without really discussing its definition, but the way they use it is mostly consistent with a general definition according to which, in the valency frame of a verb, the subject is the argument showing a cluster of morphosyntactic properties shared by the agent of prototypical transitive verbs and the sole argument of semantically monovalent verbs. However, as discussed by Lu et al. (2015) for the case of Standard Mandarin, East and Southeast Asian languages share area-specific features such as lack of argument flagging and indexing, and extensive use of the ellipsis of NPs whose referents can be recovered from the discourse context. These make it difficult to base the recognition of subjects on reliable tests, and in particular, to distinguish subjects from topics.

As far as Standard Mandarin is concerned, an array of empirically-based studies using text counts has shown that AVO and SV are statistically by far the basic word orders, consequently contesting the notion of topic-prominence advocated by Li and Thompson (1976). Relevant text studies include Sun & Givón (1985), M. Wang (1988), Wang-Alibert (2005), J. Chen & Gao Yuan (2000), and S.F. Huang (2013) *inter alia*. Consequently, the subject in Mandarin Chinese is typically preverbal but not necessarily clause-initial, unlike the topic, as we will see below. However, due to ellipsis (or coreferential deletion) of pronominal subjects, a noun phrase immediately preceding the verb is not necessarily a subject. Moreover, there is an important exception to the preverbal position of subjects, which is that the subject of intransitive verbs occurs postverbally in the presentative construction.

5.2. Topic-comment constructions in Standard Mandarin

In this section, we clarify our use of the terms ‘topic-comment construction’ and ‘dangling topic’ while giving a brief overview of the research in this domain for Standard Mandarin.

The topic-comment construction comprises several subtypes, whose unifying feature is a topic NP occurring in clause-initial position (the classic description being Chao 1968: 69, 95-104, see also Rygaloff 1971 and Li & Thompson 1976). Furthermore, according to some researchers, there is a fundamental distinction between syntactically licensed and semantically licensed topics (Huang & Ting 2006).

Topic-comment constructions with syntactically licensed topics include, in particular, patient (or object) topicalisation and so-called double subject or double nominative constructions.

In patient topicalisation, an O-argument can be placed in clause-initial position as topic to produce a non-canonical construction type with $O_{\text{topic}}\text{-(A)-VP}$ word order, either with an omitted agent, understood from the immediate context, (15a) or with the agent overt as in the $O_{\text{topic}}\text{ AV}$ structure in (15b). The topic NP may be reprised by a co-referential pronoun, as in (15c), or not at all, as in (15b).

Note that the first example is about a time of famine and poverty in China while the second is about contemporary avant-garde art: the narrator describes how an unknown English word has been stamped all over an animal’s body:

(15) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

a. 这敞儿房儿不让我们住了。⁴

zhè chǎngr fánggr bù ràng wǒmen zhù le.

this open house NEG let 1PL live CRS

‘This house without a roof, (they) didn’t let us live in it anymore.’

(Sun Wang’s narrative ; Wang-Alibert 2005: 119, Line 61)

⁴ We use the official *pīnyīn* transcription for the Standard (Mandarin) Chinese examples, indicating common tone sandhi. For cited examples of Mandarin, we reproduce the authors’ transcription. Lack of any tone diacritic indicates an atonal syllable. For examples from internet corpora for Standard Chinese, transcriptions, glossing and translations have been provided by the two joint authors.

b. Topic, A-VP structure, Topic = O

这个词儿,咱就不知道了,刻满了全身。

zhèi-ge	cír,	zán	jiù	bù	zhīdao	∅	le,
this-CLF	word	1PL:INC	then	NEG	know		CRS

kè	mǎn	le	quán	shēn.
engrave	full	PFV	whole	body

‘The words, we didn’t even know which ones, were engraved all over its body.’

(Ma Desheng’s narrative ; Wang-Alibert 2005: 157, Line 89)

c. Resumptive pronoun in topic-comment structure Topic_(i)// AVO_{PRONOUN (i)}(COPULA-COPULAR complement ...)

它就说呢,任何万物呵,只要你认为它是艺术,它就是艺术啦。

tā	jiù	shuō	ne,	rènhe	wànwù_(i)	ā,	zhǐyào	nǐ	rènwei
3SG	then	say	PRT	any	all.things.	PRT	if	2SG	consider
					in.existence _(i)				

tā_(i)	shì	yìshù,	tā	jiù	shì	yìshù	la.
3SG _(i)	be	art	3SG _(i)	then	be	art	PRT

‘(discussing the concept of ‘art’): So it means then, **any thing** under the sun_{TOPIC}, if you consider **it** to be art, well then, it *is* art.’ (the two occurrences of ‘it’ in line 2 refer back to ‘any thing’)

(Ma Desheng’s narrative ; Wang-Alibert 2005: 165, Lines 124-125)

In the ‘double subject construction’, the relationship between the topic and the subject is generally one of possessor and possessed, if not of a whole and its part, the latter including the possibility of a group and its subset. The possessive relationship is typically one of inalienability (as argued in Chappell (1996)). In fact, Li and Thompson (1976: 480) treated

this subtype as the prototypical topic-comment sentence.⁵ In spite of this, S. Huang (2013: 111) shows, on the basis of a corpus of discourse data, that the double subject type of topic-comment structure is rare in spoken and written Mandarin, as opposed to SVO clauses.

(16) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

她眼睛近视得厉害。

NP ₁	NP ₂	VP		
whole	part	stative predicate		
Tā	yǎnjīng	jìnshì	de	lìhài.
3SG	eye	short-sighted	EXT	serious

‘She is extremely short-sighted.’

(<https://zhidao.baidu.com/question/279982264.html>, consulted 18 April 2018)

There are also some other minor subtypes with idiom chunks in the comment or with universal quantifiers as the subject (see Shi 2000 and Xu & Liu 2007 for examples and a discussion).

The semantically licensed topics, known as ‘dangling’ or ‘aboutness’ topics, are claimed to be particularly prominent in Mandarin Chinese, and for that reason are sometimes designated as ‘Chinese-style topics’ (Chafe 1976). The very notion of dangling topic is however rejected by some authors like Shi (2000), who argues that, even in Mandarin, topics are always syntactically licensed.

It is true that some types of topics for which a dangling-topic analysis has sometimes been proposed lend themselves to an analysis in terms of syntactic licensing. For example, it can be argued that, in (17), ‘this proposal’ is not really a dangling topic, since it can be linked to the argument structure of ‘objection’ (an objection is necessarily against something).

⁵ It is important to note that the double subject or double nominative construction shows a strong tendency to lexicalise the comment as an attribute. For example, the common way of expressing ‘He is hungry’ adopts this form in Mandarin: **Tā dùzi è** 3sg-stomach-hungry ‘He’s hungry’. Note also that the construction turns out to have a very low frequency in discourse (Chappell 1996).

(17) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

这个方案 // 我和她都没有意见。

NP // Sentence

Zhèi-ge fāng'àn // wǒ hé tā dōu méi yǒu yìjian.

this-CLF proposal 1SG and 3SG all NEG EPP objection

‘As for this proposal, neither she nor I have any objections.’⁶

(Elicited data)

Theoretical frameworks which reject the possibility of the semantic licensing of topics do so by viewing utterances as the visible part of an underlying discourse including as many ‘invisible’ elements as necessary to enable the appropriate syntactic treatment. In such a perspective, the “complete discourse” for (18) could be (among many other possibilities) something like ‘As for that fire_i, fortunately the fire brigade came quickly [otherwise it_i would have killed many people]’.

(18) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

那场火, 幸亏消防队来得快。

NP // Sentence

Nà-cháng huǒ // xìngkuī xiāofáng-duì lái-de-kuài

that-CLF fire fortunately fire-brigade come-DE-fast

‘As for that fire, fortunately the fire brigade came quickly.’

(Huang & Ting 2006: 133-134 quoting Shi 2000 ; originally from Li & Thompson 1976: 462)

We fundamentally agree with the dangling-topic analysis of constructions such as (18), according to which, in a generative account, the topic NP cannot be analysed as extracted or moved from other loci, and must be base-generated. The criteria for analysing a sequence ‘NP(topic) – Clause(comment)’ as involving a dangling topic is that the topic NP is neither coreferential with a resumptive pronoun in the clause, nor analysable as filling a gap in the expression of the argument structure of one of the terms of the clause it precedes.

⁶ Similar examples can be found on the internet where the topic constituent is equivalent to either a whole clause or else the element being objected to is introduced by the preposition 对 duì ‘with respect to, to, for’.

In our analysis of predicative possession in Mandarin, we exclusively refer to constructions with a dangling topic, structurally independent from its following comment, since this is precisely the one involved in Stassen’s definition of the Topic Possessive type.

6. Predicative possession in Standard Mandarin

6.1. Possessive and existential *yǒu* in Mandarin

Like the other Mainland East and Southeast Asian languages analysed in the remainder of this article, Mandarin has a verb (**yǒu**) that can be used as a possessive or existential predicator. In some of the languages dealt with in the following sections, the existential/possessive verb is also used as a plain locational predicator, but this is not the case in Mandarin.

In its possessive use, Mandarin **yǒu** occurs in a frame that can be schematised as follows:

NOUN_{POSSESSOR} Yǒu NOUN_{POSSESSEE}

This construction can express ownership of material possessions, as in (19a), but also ‘ownership’ of less tangible objects such as ‘solution’ in (19b), or an illness in (19c), as expected of a possession verb (see Bally’s characterisation of ‘have’ verbs (1926), including French **avoir**).⁷

(19) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

a. 我们村喽，老孙家有一个坟地。

Wǒmen cūn lou, Lǎo Sūn jiā yǒu yí-ge féndì.
 1PL village PRT Lao Sun family EPP one-CLF cemetery

‘(In) our village, the Sun family had a plot in the cemetery.’

(Sun Wang’s narrative, Wang-Alibert 2005: 174, line 46)

⁷ In the descriptions of Mandarin and other Mainland East and Southeast Asian languages, there is no consistency in the glossing of existential/possessive verbs syntactically and functionally similar to Mandarin **yǒu**. Some authors gloss them uniformly by ‘have’, others by ‘exist’, still others use both glosses more or less randomly. Consequently, in the examples we quote, reproducing the glosses of the verbs in question as they appear in our sources might have obscured the points we are making, and this is the reason why we have taken the liberty of glossing them uniformly by EPP ‘existential/possessive predicator’.

- b. 我实在没有办法了。

Wǒ shízài méi yǒu bànfǎ le.

1SG really NEG EPP method CRS

‘I really had no solution.’

(China Education conversational text; line 406)

- c. 你妻子有病是私事。

Nǐ qīzi yǒu bìng shì sīshì.

2SG wife EPP illness be private.matter

‘Your wife being ill is your private affair.’

(PKU Center for Chinese Linguistics – Modern Chinese corpus

<http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/corpus.asp> Li Wencheng Nu’er Hachi.txt)

Furthermore, **yǒu** can be used for ‘possession’ of body parts, as in (20).⁸

(20) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

你有两只眼睛, 一个鼻子, 一张嘴。

Nǐ yǒu liǎng-zhī yǎnjīng, yí-ge bízi, yí-zhāng zuǐ.

2SG EPP two-CLF eye one-CLF nose one-CLF mouth

‘(to a child): You have two eyes, a nose and a mouth.’

(Elicited data)⁹

As an existential predicator, **yǒu** ‘there is’ needs only one, typically, postverbal argument, in a construction that can be schematised as follows:

YOŮ NOUN_{FIGURE}

⁸ This may appear to contradict its characterisation as a construction expressing alienable possession (Chappell 1996). However, even in Mandarin genitive NP constructions, body part terms are more commonly marked by the overt genitive marker **de** 的 in the NP_{POSS_R} DE NP_{POSS_{’EE}} form than by simple juxtaposition which iconically expresses inalienability (Chappell & Thompson 1992).

⁹ Similar examples may be easily found in the PKU Center for Chinese Linguistics database. <http://ccl.pku.edu.cn>

The existential construction has an important discourse function as a presentative, introducing new referents (see Li & Thompson 1981: 509-519). As has been well-established, new information in Mandarin typically occurs in postverbal position, as for **yí-ge hěn zhùmíng de yí-ge zuòpǐn** ‘a very famous work of art’ in (21) (see, for example, Chao 1968: 76-78):

(21) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

唉，说在下面有一个很著名的一个作品啊。

ai, shuō zài xiàmiàn yǒu yí-ge hěn zhùmíng de yí-ge
 eh say at below EPP one-CLF very famous MOD one-CLF

zuòpǐn a.

work PRT

Eh, they said that below (the highway interchange), there was a very famous work of art.’

(Ma Desheng’s narrative; Wang-Alibert 2005: 215, line 35)

It is not normally possible to place the single argument in the position preceding the existential verb **yǒu** ‘there is’, unless it has been fronted and topicalised in a listing construction. By contrast, locative prepositional phrases (ZÀI)-NOUN_{GROUND}-POSTPOSITION-SPATIAL may be found in clause-initial position, as in (21) above. This PP slot is ‘optional’ in the sense that the referent of the ground (the location) may be known from the prior discourse, or from some kind of shared knowledge.

As a rule, in Mandarin, locative phrases are introduced by the preposition **zài** 在 ‘at, in’, but the preposition is omissible in clause-initial position of existential clauses.¹⁰

[(ZÀI)-NOUN_{GROUND}-POSTPOSITION_{SPATIAL}]_{GROUND} Yǒu NOUN_{FIGURE}

¹⁰ Note that for nouns which are not inherently place names or toponyms such as ‘France’ or ‘Shanghai’, one of the spatial postpositions such as **-li** 里 ‘in’ also needs to be used. Hence, **Xiāngzi-li yǒu yì-zhī māo** 箱子里有一只猫 (box-in there.be one-CLF cat) ‘There’s a cat in the box’) is acceptable without the preposition **zài** ‘at’ but not without the postposition **-li** ‘in’: ***Xiāngzi yǒu yì-zhī māo**. In other kinds of constructions, the constraints on the use of this locative preposition **zài** may differ. For example, **túshūguǎn** ‘library’ has an intermediary semantic status between a place name and a common noun so that **-li** ‘in’ is not required: **Wǒ zài túshūguǎn(-li) kàn shū** 我在图书馆(里)看书 (1SG-at-library(-in)-read-book ‘I read books in the library’). Cf. Peyraube (1981) and Chu Zexiang (1996) on the diachronic development of locatives.

(22) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

(在)花园里有一群孩子在放风筝。

(Zài) huāyuán-li yǒu yì-qún hái zài fàng fēngzhēng.

(at) garden-in EPP one-CLF_{group} child at_{prog} let.go kite

‘There is a group of children flying kites in the garden.’

*(Elicited data)*¹¹

Locative phrases preceding the locative-existential predicate **yǒu**, as seen in example (22) above, may also be readily postposed after the sole argument NP (the figure element, **yì-qún hái zài** ‘a group of children’), as in (23), but in this case, the preposition **zài** ‘at, in’ is obligatory:

YŌU NOUN_{FIGURE} ZÀI NOUN_{GROUND}

(23) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

有一群孩子在花园里放风筝。

#Yǒu yì-qún hái zài huāyuán-li fàng fēngzhēng.

EPP one-CLF_{group} child at garden-in let.go kite

‘There is a group of children flying kites in the garden.’

(Elicited data)

The question that arises here is to what extent the possessor NP in the possessive use of **yǒu** could be analysed as a kind of animate location preceding the existential verb in the same way as the locative phrase in (22), according to Lyons’ suggestion (1967: 393ff.).¹² The main reason for rejecting this analysis is that, in contrast to the available alloforms for the existential construction in (22) and (23), it is usually impossible for the possessor NP in the possessive construction to be moved into a locative PP at the end of the clause, since it is not a locative referent in the first place. Moreover, it would be nonsensical in effect for this

¹¹ For ease of exposition, we have used elicited sentences here with basic structure. See acknowledgements for language informants.

¹² This type of approach was taken up in a later cross-linguistic comparison by E. Clark (1978) and also by Norman (1988: 97), specifically for Mandarin Chinese in which possessive **yǒu** is treated as a subclass of existential sentences. Such was also the view adopted by one of the present authors in an account of the typology of predicative possession (Creissels 1979: 367-426), strongly influenced by Lyons (1967).

function of **yǒu** ‘have’, when it is used to express the possession of illness or body parts, as in (19c) and (20) above.¹³ This already suggests that, as discussed in the following sections, the possessive use of **yǒu** ‘have’ is not fundamentally an existential construction at all and that its possessor NP acts rather as an argument of a possessive predicator. Put differently, in this new analysis of ours, we neither view the possessor as a dangling topic nor as a kind of animate location in the possessive clauses with **yǒu**, thereby reclassifying it as a Have-Possessive.

6.2. Argument structure and syntactic properties of possessive *yǒu* in Standard Mandarin

In this section, we present a series of observations showing that, in the possessive clauses of Mandarin, the possessor NP cannot be analysed as invariably and obligatorily occupying a topic position. We successively examine the following points:¹⁴

- (i) the prosodic properties of the clause-initial NP
- (ii) information structure, givenness, and the morphology of the initial noun phrase
- (iii) interrogative constructions
- (iv) ‘whoever’ constructions
- (v) headless relative clauses

¹³ In the case of (23), this would produce the rather comical **Yǒu liǎng-zhī yǎnjīng zài nǐ nàr** 有两只眼睛在你那儿。(there.be two-CLF eye at 2SG-place) ‘There are two eyes with you/at your place’, since the ‘two eyes’ would appear to be dislocated from their owner. Some possessive constructions may be so transformed into existentials with a locative PP, but this implies that the possessor NP is susceptible to an interpretation as a place.

¹⁴ A sixth point could in fact be added concerning topic stacking: if one agrees with Wu Tong’s (2016) analysis of the distinction between dangling topics and anchored topics in Mandarin Chinese, constraints on topic stacking provide additional support to our analysis, since in possessive clauses, the possessor NP can be preceded by another NP in topic function. Compare the following example with (18) above:

Nà-chǎng huǒ, xìngkuāi wǒmen yǒu mièhuǒqì. 那场火，幸亏我们有灭火器。
that-CLF fire fortunately 1PL have extinguisher
‘As for that fire, luckily we had an extinguisher.’ (*Elicited data*)

Crucially, according to Wu Tong’s analysis, it is not possible to add more than one dangling topic to the same clause, while by definition dangling topics obligatorily occur in the leftmost position. See also example (26b) below, where the position of the possessor NP is not that expected for a dangling topic.

6.2.1. Prosodic properties of the clause-initial NP: the NP preceding **yǒu** is not necessarily a disjunct NP

There is a general consensus in studies on Mandarin Chinese, that a topic in a topic-comment construction may be separated from the subject of the comment by an intonation break, prosodically realised as a pause. This may additionally be reinforced by the insertion of discourse markers **a** (**yā**) 啊 (呀), **ba** 吧, **ne** 呢 or **me** 嘛 (see, for example, Chao 1968: 81-82, Li & Thompson 1976, Tsao 1978: 184-185, 1979: 87, Chappell 1996: 490-492 and Stassen 2009: 50). In sum, the intonation break, with or without such a discourse particle, separates the topic NP from the following comment, serving as a kind of demarcation line reinforcing the unique status of the topic-comment construction (Jeng 1978: 328).¹⁵

This is exemplified by (24) where the discourse marker **ne**, followed by an intonation break, separates the term **nánháizi** ‘boy’ from **liǎn** ‘face’.

(24) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

那个小男孩子呢 // 脸上没有表情。

Nèi-ge xiǎo nánháizi ne, // liǎn-shang méi yǒu biǎoqíng.

that-CLF little male.child RP face-on NEG EPP expression

‘The little boy, well, there was no expression on [his] face whatsoever.’

(Pear II.7/8:77-78)

A consequence of the disjunct status of the topic is the fact that the regular rules of tone sandhi in Mandarin do not apply. For example, Chao (1968: 27, 67) and Wiedenhof (2015: 23) describe a well-known rule for Mandarin by which, given a sequence of two consecutive third tones that have the identical relative pitch values of 214, the first one “is pronounced as a second tone, i.e. with a rising pitch 35 (middle to high),” when the syllables or words involved are “constructed together”:

$$\sigma^{214} \sigma^{214} \rightarrow \sigma^{35} \sigma^{214} \quad (\sigma = \text{syllable})$$

The tonal realisation in (25a), in which this rule of tone sandhi applies between the 1st person pronoun **wǒ** and the possessive verb **yǒu** (indicated by the change in tone diacritic on

¹⁵ This is in fact also mentioned by Stassen (2009: 58) in the definition of the Topic Possessive type.

wǒ to **wó**), contrasts with that observed when they belong to separate clauses or are “punctuated by a pause”, as in (25b).

(25) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

a. **Wó yǒu.** [35 214]

1SG EPP

‘I have got them.’

b. **Wǒ? yǒu.** [214 214]

1SG EPP

‘Me? I have got them.’

(Wiedenhof 2015:25)

The occurrence of tone sandhi in (25a), but not in (25b), can be viewed as evidence that the analysis of a possessor NP as occupying the topic position at the left periphery of the clause only holds for (25b), and that in (25a), the 1st person pronoun **wǒ** does not occupy the position of a topic, but rather that of a subject:

	Topic	Subject	Verb
(25a)	—	Wó	yǒu.
(25b)	Wǒ	—	yǒu. ¹⁶

6.2.2. Information structure, givenness, and the morphology of the initial noun phrase

In Mandarin, indefinite NPs that are formally marked as such by a numeral and classifier, as in (26a) with **yí-jìan shì** 一件事 ‘a matter’, are not normally acceptable as the topic term of a topic-comment construction. The acceptability changes with the morphologically definite NP in (26b) formed by means of a modifying demonstrative and classifier: **zhè-jìan shì** 这件事 ‘this matter’:

¹⁶ See also Chao (1968: 67) who gives a paradigm whereby **wǒ** is followed by one of four pause particles setting it off from the main clause. For example, **Wǒ ne — yóu shuǐ** 1SG-PRT - have water ‘I have water’, or more literally ‘Me? – (I’ve) got water’.

(26) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

a. *一件事,我有责任。

***Yí-jiàn shì, wó yǒu zérèn.**

one-CLF matter 1SG EPP responsibility

b. 这件事,我有责任。

Zhè-jiàn shì, wó yǒu zérèn.

DEM_{prox}-CLF matter 1SG EPP responsibility

‘As for this matter, I take responsibility [for it].’

(PKU Center for Chinese Linguistics – Modern Chinese corpus)¹⁷

This is due to the fact that indefinite NPs generally code new information whereas topics are generally held to represent old or given information (see Chafe 1976, Shyu 2016: 522 for Mandarin). Apart from morphologically definite topics, generic nouns – often realised in the form of a bare noun – are also able to occur in topic position, being used to code some kind of shared knowledge, as for example **fángjià** ‘house price’ in (27).

(27) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

房价又开始涨起来。

Fángjià yòu kāishǐ zhǎng-qǐlai.

house.price again start rise-QILAI

‘And the price of housing has started to go up again.’

(S. Huang 2013: 78)

In contrast to this, the NP preceding **yǒu** may be clearly indefinite, yet specific, as in (28a), or may refer to an entity randomly selected from a set, such as the unspecified individual in (28b). In such cases, the NP preceding **yǒu** cannot be the topic in a topic-comment

¹⁷ The Peking University website for the corpus of Modern Chinese set up by the Center for Chinese Linguistics was consulted on 30 January 2017: http://ccl.pku.edu.cn:8080/ccl_corpus/ and again on 10 February and 18 April 2018 for these and other examples. Elicited example (26a) was tested with native speakers of standard Mandarin (for whom, see *Acknowledgements*) since the exact example, as predicted, could not be found in the Peking University corpus. We also tested **yí-jiàn shì** ‘one-CLF matter’ on its own and for the first 50 examples on the same website, this noun phrase unsurprisingly turned up as either a direct object, an oblique NP or a copular complement.

construction, and can only be analysed as acting as the subject of a bivalent verb **yǒu** ‘have’.

(28) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

a. 某一位老师有不同意见。

Mǒu yī wèi lǎoshī yǒu bùtóng yìjian.

certain one CLF teacher EPP different opinion

‘A certain teacher has a different opinion.’

b. 任何人都权利表达自己的意见。

Rènhe rén dōu yǒu quánlì biǎodá zìjǐ de yìjian.

any people all EPP right express self DE opinion

‘Anybody would have the right to present his opinion.’

(Shi 2016: 208, 211)

6.2.3. Interrogative constructions with **yǒu**

A particularly strong argument in favour of our analysis is that, in questions about the identity of a possessor, the interrogative **shéi** 谁 ‘who’ occupies the same position to the left of **yǒu** as the alleged dangling topic interpreted as a possessor in assertive possessive clauses. In other words, the possessor noun phrase is accessible to questioning exactly like noun phrases occupying the argumental position of subject/agent in the basic transitive construction – as shown by comparing the examples in (29).

(29) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

a. 他有书。

Tā yǒu shū.

3SG EPP book

‘He has a book/books.’

(Elicited data)

b. 谁有书?

Shéi yǒu shū?

who EPP book

‘Who has a book/books?’

(Elicited data)

c. (你们当中), 谁有孩子?

(Nǐmen dāngzhōng), shéi yǒu háizi ?

2PL among who EPP child

‘Amongst you, who has children?’

(Elicited data)

d. 谁有那么大的本事?

Shéi yǒu nàme dà de běnshi ?

who EPP so big MOD ability

‘Who has that much ability?’

(PKU Center for Chinese Linguistics – Modern Chinese Corpus)

If **tā** in (29a) were really a dangling topic in a construction with no argumental slot to the left of **yǒu**, the examples in (29b-d) would not be possible, since interrogative words cannot act as topics, and if the possessor were just some kind of ‘animate location’ occupying the topic slot in assertive clauses, then interrogatives questioning the identity of a possessor would require another construction with the possessor coded as a locative adjunct.

The fact that possessor NPs in Mandarin can be questioned *in situ* and without any locative marking is a decisive proof that the position they occupy is not necessarily a topic position, but may also be the argument position commonly analysed as that of subject in Mandarin Chinese syntax. Consequently, possessive **yǒu** and existential **yǒu** do not have the same argument structure, and possessive **yǒu** is a bivalent verb whose coding frame is aligned with that of typical transitive verbs. In other words, the construction with possessive **yǒu** is an instance of the Have-Possessive type.

6.2.4. 'Whoever' constructions with **yǒu**

In addition to interrogative constructions of the type illustrated in (29b-d) being possible, so too are biclausal 'whoever' constructions with the indefinite use of interrogative pronouns, as in (30).

(30) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

往后谁有难处，大伙儿帮他，谁不讲理，大伙儿管他。

Wǎnghòu, shéi yǒu nánchù, dàhuǒr bāng tā,
afterwards who_{INDEF} EPP difficulty everyone help 3SG

shéi bù jiǎng dàolǐ, dàhuǒr guǎn tā.
who_{INDEF} NEG talk reason everyone control 3SG

'Afterwards, whoever has difficulties, everyone helps them;
whoever is unreasonable, we'll bring them back to order.'

(PKU Center for Chinese Linguistics – Modern Chinese Corpus)

This related syntactic operation is thus similarly incompatible with the hypothesis that, in the possessive use of **yǒu**, NPs preceding **yǒu** can only be topics in a topic-comment construction.

6.2.5. Headless relative clauses with **yǒu**

The analysis of headless relative clauses presents another means of testing the argument structure of verbs in Mandarin.

In order to determine verb valency, Lu et al. (2015) propose a set of diagnostics, one of which involves the formation of a headless relative clause making use of the subordinating and nominalising morpheme, **de** 的 in the construction VERB - DE. For example, with **chī** 'to eat', **chī de** can refer to either what is eaten (DIRECT OBJECT) or to who is eating (AGENT) but apparently to neither what you are eating with (INSTRUMENT) nor the PLACE where you are eating (Lu et al. 2015: 719). An example with the direct object reading for the headless relative is next given:

(31) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

吃的在哪儿?

Chī de zài nǎr?

eat DE at where

‘Where is (are) the thing(s) to be eaten?’

(Lu et al. 2015: 719)

Using this test, we similarly find that **yǒu-de** can be used not only in the sense of ‘what one has’, but also in the sense of ‘the one who has / the ones who have’). Importantly, the possession (‘what one has’) generally needs to be overtly mentioned in the preceding context for it to be possible to use **yǒu-de** felicitously with this subject interpretation. Example (32) presents a common leave-taking formula at the end of class.

(32) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

有问题吗? **有的**留下, **没有的**下课。

Yǒu wèntí ma ? Yǒu-de liú-xià, méi yǒu-de xià-kè.

EPP question Q EPP-DE stay-DIR NEG EPP-DE leave-class

lit. ‘Any questions? **Those who have** (questions) can remain, and those who don’t have any (questions) may leave.’

(Elicited data)

Hence, the two possible interpretations of **yǒu** in a headless relative provide evidence of its valency as a bivalent verb ‘to have’.

6.3. Possessive *yǒu* as a non-canonical transitive verb

One might object to our analysis that possessive **yǒu** is not a canonical transitive verb. However, as has already been emphasised in Section 2.1.4, the verbs found in Have-Possessive constructions, even those whose transitive origin is unquestionable, are rarely if ever perfectly canonical transitive verbs. Consequently, the notion of Have-Possessive does not imply that possessive clauses have all the properties of prototypical transitive clauses, but only that the coding of the possessor and the possessee is similar to that of the agent and the patient in the basic transitive construction.

First of all, the verb **yǒu** may not occur in the S **bǎ** O VP construction, cf. (33b):

(33) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

a. 我有零钱了。

Wó yǒu língqián le.

1SG EPP small.change CRS

‘I’ve got some small change.’

(<http://new.qq.com/omv/video/w0521q2f9ay>)

b. *我把零钱有了。

***Wó bǎ língqián yǒu le.**

1SG DOM small.change EPP CRS

(*Elicited data*)

The object-marking construction is high on any transitivity scale (Hopper & Thompson 1980, Tsunoda 1985) and its requirement of both a referential and affected direct object is symptomatic of this. The behaviour of **yǒu** in this respect is reminiscent of Spanish **tener**, which does not strictly adhere to the rule of marking referential human NPs in object role by the preposition **a** (Creissels 2013).

A second and related restriction is that **yǒu** ‘have’ cannot be passivised, and this resembles the situation for non-canonical transitive verbs of possession in other languages such as English **have**, French **avoir** or German **haben**.¹⁸

Third, whereas most transitive verbs are negated by the general negator **bù** 不 in present and irrealis contexts, **yǒu** ‘have’ has its own specific negator, **méi** 没 (otherwise mainly used in past or perfective contexts to negate the presupposition that an event has taken place).

¹⁸ Notwithstanding the colloquial uses of **have** and **avoir** in English and French passives: **I’ve been had** and **Je me suis fait avoir** (meaning similarly ‘I’ve been taken in/tricked’).

(34) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

a. 我没有零钱。

Wǒ méi yǒu língqián.

1SG NEG₁ EPP small.change

‘I haven’t got any money.’

(<http://www.dictall.com/>)

b. *我不有零钱。

***Wǒ bù yǒu língqián.**

1SG NEG₂ EPP small.change

(attempted meaning: ‘I haven’t got any money.’)

(Elicited data)

Here again, cross-linguistically, there are similar cases of ‘have’ verbs behaving differently from other verbs with respect to negation. For example, the negation of ‘have’ involves a suppletive form in Dagbani (Gur, Ghana) and in Dhassanac (Cushitic, Ethiopia & Kenya) (Dixon 2010, Vol 2: 299).

Finally, unlike transitive action verbs, **yǒu** ‘have’ does not generally allow perfective aspect marking.¹⁹

(35) Mandarin Chinese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

*我有了零钱。

***Wǒ yǒu le língqián.**

1SG EPP PFV small.change

(attempted meaning: ‘I did have some small change.’)²⁰

(Elicited data)

¹⁹ However, this verb may co-occur with two other main grammaticalised markers of aspect in Mandarin, **yǒu-zhe** have-PROG and **yǒu-guo** have-EVD.

²⁰ This is certainly the case for simple S-V-O clauses. However, we recognise that the situation is more complicated when it comes to complex NPs following **yǒu** or its use in complex sentences such as the conditional where it may co-occur with **le**: 如果我有了零钱，我会把它存进银行。 **Rúguo wǒ yǒu le língqián, wǒ huì bǎ tā cúnjìn yínháng.** ‘If I had small change (or: pocket money), I would deposit it in the bank.’ (zhidao.baidu.com 5th July 2013). This is a vast topic concerning aspect that would need its own detailed explanation, given the existence of two homophonous **le** morphemes in Mandarin with different functions, one as a verbal aspect marker and the other as a clause-final discourse marker. We found many examples of **yǒu-le** in the PKU corpus, in particular, when used with deverbal nouns denoting a change of state such as **fāzhǎn** ‘development’ and **gǎibiàn** ‘change’. Native speakers accepted its use particularly in subordinate clauses of complex sentences.

6.4. Diachronic development

Two kinds of diachronic change may lead to the use of the same predicator in existential predication and in predicative possession of the Have-Possessive type. The first one is the creation of an existential predicator via impersonalisation of a ‘have’ verb (i.e., development and grammaticalisation of the use of a ‘have’ verb with unspecified possessors), as attested in the history of French and other European languages such as Spanish, Alemannic, or Greek. The second one is that a Locational Possessive construction undergoes changes that eventually lead to its reanalysis as a Have-Possessive construction (*have-drift*), as attested by Maltese and other Arabic varieties (Comrie 1989: 219-225; Heine 1997: 99). In this latter scenario, the crucial move in the evolution is the development of a tendency to topicalise possessors and to drop the locative marking of such topicalised possessors, as can be observed for example in Japanese.

Documentation for the Sinitic family dates back to the Shang dynasty oracle bone inscriptions of 14th-11th centuries BC, known as the **jiǎgǔwén** 甲骨文, which are representative of Pre-Archaic Chinese.²¹ Even in this early corpus of divinatory texts, both the existential and possessive interpretations of **yǒu** may be found, cf. Takashima (1996: 303-348) and Djamouri (1987).

Controversy abounds in the domain of Chinese historical linguistics as to whether the existential use preceded the possessive use of **yǒu** or vice versa. In the tradition of European scholarship on the Chinese language, a dominant view has been that existential ‘there is’ derives from possessive ‘have’, thus described by Downer (1959), Nivison (1977) and Karlgren (1933: 64) (see discussion in Takashima, 1996: Vol I, 303-348).²² In contrast to this, many scholars in China take the diametrically opposed view that the existential construction predated its possessive use (for example, Zhu Lei 2010, Yao Zhenwu 2015). Still a third approach is seen in the work of von der Gabelentz on Classical Chinese (1881: 445-446) and in the Japanese tradition. Here, a more prudent standpoint is taken, viewing the possessive and existential uses as equally attested from the time of the earliest known inscriptions (Takashima 1996: Vol I, 307-309).

In a detailed analysis of the polysemy of **yǒu** in the Oracle Bone Inscriptions, Takashima

²¹ The periodization for the Sinitic branch of Sino-Tibetan is as follows : 14th-11th c. BC: Pre-Archaic Chinese; 11th – 2nd c. BC: Archaic Chinese which includes the period of Classical Chinese and the texts of Confucius & Mencius; 5th-2nd c. BC; 2nd BC – 2nd AD: Pre-Medieval Chinese; 2nd-13th AD: Medieval Chinese; 13th – 19th: Modern Chinese. These divisions are based on inscriptions and texts that are representative of each period.

²² In an investigation of word families in Archaic Chinese, Karlgren (1933: 64) links the reconstruction of **yǒu**, *g’wǐk, with a phonetically related series of words meaning ‘seize’, ‘grasp’, ‘lay hands on’ and ‘catch’.

indeed shows that both uses were possible as early as the Period I inscriptions and argues that they should, therefore, be considered separate constructions (1996: Vol I, 304-5, our transcriptions and glossing):

(36) Oracle Bone Inscriptions, Period I (1200-1181)

a. *Existential*: 有大雨。 (Qianbian 3.19.2)

Yǒu dà yǔ.

EPP big rain

‘There will be much rain.’

(Takashima 1996: Vol 1: 305)

Possessive: 王有夢，不佳害。 (Héjǐ 655)

b.

Wáng	yǒu	mèng	bù	wéi	hài
king	EPP	dream	NEG	COP.EXP	harm

‘As for His Majesty having had a dream [nightmare], it does not signify some (ancestor caused) harm.’

(Takashima 2010: Vol. 1: 614; pers. comm.)

He proposes that the etymological origin of **yǒu** is ‘the right hand’, the source for a bifurcation into the two main meanings of ‘have in abundance in the right hand’ and ‘exist in abundance in the right hand’, a stage from which these eventually generalise into ‘have’ and ‘exist’.²³ Such an origin evidently evokes the notion of holding, as too another main transitive sense of this verb (that of ‘offer’), also found in this early period of Pre-Archaic Chinese.

²³ The same verb, **yǒu**, also has an array of meanings associated with the performance of sacrifices that can be translated as ‘to offer (a sacrifice)’, ‘to bless’, and ‘to honour’. As Takashima explains, these undoubtedly are related to the notion of possessing in abundance objects that may be given to a superior, a king or a divinity – and note, incidentally, that the etymology of **yǒu** is for ‘the right hand’ and not for the left. The polysemy is described in detail in Part I, Chapter 2 of Takashima (1996).

(37) Oracle Bone Inscriptions, Period I (1200-1181)

有于示壬二牛。(Bingbian 203 (15))

Yǒu yú Shì Rén èr niú.

offer to name two ox

‘Offer two oxen as a sacrifice to Shi Ren.’

(Takashima 1996 Vol 1: 312)

Note that an interesting parallel can be found in Indo-European languages, since Latin **habeo** ‘have’ is cognate with Old Indian **ghábhasti-ḥ** ‘forearm’, their common etymon being a root reconstructed as ***ghabh-** ‘grasp’ (Creissels 1979: 642).

Additionally to the above, in a detailed study of the Oracle Bone Inscriptions, Djamouri (1987: 113-114) makes the highly relevant observation that in its existential use, the subject of **yǒu** is found only in postposed position: \emptyset -**yǒu**-Noun_{SUBJECT}. This, in itself, clearly distinguishes the existential use structurally from the possessive one, in which it typically occurs before the verb: Noun_{SUBJECT} -**yǒu**-Noun_{OBJECT}.²⁴

The Bronze Inscriptions and early transmitted texts²⁵ provide a further important source of historical data for the following period of the Western Zhou (11th-7th centuries BC), corresponding to Early Archaic Chinese. The two main uses of **yǒu** continue to be found, according to Yao Zhenwu (2015: 59), not to mention those of ‘take possession’ and ‘be rich’ which Schuessler explicitly relates to the sense of ‘possessing’ (1988: 769-771) and, we can add, to ‘have in abundance’ identified by Takashima in the earlier period of Pre-Archaic.

(38) 人有土田,女反有之.

Rén yǒu tǔ tián, nǚ fǎn yǒu zhī.

people have land field 2SG however have 3SG

‘People have their lands and fields, you, however, take possession of them.’

(Shījīng 诗经 264: 2, Schuessler 1988: 770)

²⁴ In the oracle bone inscriptions of the Shang dynasty (14th – 11th centuries BCE), the dominant word order found for nominal objects in transitive clauses is SVO as counted in a corpus of 26,094 complete sentences: 93.8% are SVO and 6.2% are SOV (see Djamouri 2001: 146-147).

²⁵ This refers to major portions of the classic works of the *Book of Odes* (Shījīng 诗经) and the *Book of Documents* (Shūjīng 书经), see Schuessler (1988). Note that Standard Mandarin is not the direct descendant of Archaic Chinese, a period in which dialect variation also existed. Nonetheless, the earlier meanings of ‘take possession’, ‘have abundantly’, and ‘be rich’ can still be perceived in compounds and phrases formed with **yǒu** in the contemporary language.

(39) 歲其有.

suì qí yǒu

year AUX_{FUT} have

‘This year will be rich.’ < ‘possessing’

(Shījīng 诗经 298: 3, Schuessler 1988: 770)

In example (40) below, Yao explicitly translates **yǒu** as **zhàn** 佔 ‘occupy’ in Standard Mandarin. The dynamic action it connotes points to an earlier meaning of acquisition such as ‘hold’ or ‘grab’, suggesting that, historically, the direction of evolution may have been *acquisition* > *possession* > *existence*.

(40) Early Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, 11th-7th BC (Da Yu Ding [Greater Tripod of Yu] 大盂鼎, 西周早期)

鬲畢慝，撫有四方 (...)

... **pì jué tè, fǔ yǒu sì fāng** (...)

rid 3SG evil wide EPP four direction

‘Evil having been got rid of, (the King) occupied the whole country.’

(Yao Zhenwu 2015: 59).

6.5. Conclusion to Section 6

In this section, we hope to have shown that the possessive use of Mandarin **yǒu** is *not* a case of a possessor encoded as a dangling topic in a topic-comment construction based on a locative-existential predicate, but rather a separate construction type, a Have-Possessive, albeit potentially diachronically related to the former. In Mandarin clauses including a single NP in preverbal position, it is not immediately obvious whether this NP should be analysed as occupying the argumental position of subject or the position of a topic at the left periphery of the clause. Nonetheless, the observation regarding prosody suggests that the NPs preceding **yǒu** in possessive clauses are not to be uniformly analysed as occupying the topic position, and this is confirmed by the observation of their syntactic behaviour.

As regards the diachronic development, in spite of the fact that the existential use of **yǒu** is unquestionably very ancient, the historical data also attest uses of **yǒu** that, while no

longer found in contemporary Mandarin, are much easier to explain as retentions of an original meaning such as ‘take’ or ‘hold in the hand’ than as a development from an existential meaning.

7. Existential and possessive constructions in other Sinitic languages

Verbs cognate with Mandarin **yǒu**, and showing similar polysemy and syntactic behaviour, can be found in the majority of Sinitic languages. In our sample, we have included data on possessive and existential verbs from 37 languages belonging to the ten main branches recognised for Sinitic (for details, see the Appendix). There are two main exceptions. One is Haikou Southern Min, spoken on the island province of Hainan, which appears to have a second possessive and existential verb, **ʔdu**³³, in addition to the form cognate with **yǒu**, **u**³³. Both verbs may additionally act as locative verbs and prepositions (Chen 1996). The data are insufficient to make any conclusions about its origins or use, however. The second is Baoding Jilu Mandarin spoken in Hebei province which uses a locatively marked possessor with the existential verb for alienable possession, whereas it employs verbless clauses for inalienable possession (Song Na, pers. comm. & data).²⁶

For the purposes of greatest contrast with the standard language, we exemplify the existential-possessive polysemy in a non-Mandarin language using data from Caijia, an unclassified Sinitic language that does not have a written tradition and is spoken in Guizhou province in the southwest of China.²⁷ Following this, various aspects of the syntactic behaviour of possessive verbs are briefly described for Cantonese Yue, Yichun Gan and Hui’an Southern Min.

In Caijia, the existential verb **ɣã**²¹ as an existential verb is intransitive and has a presentative function in discourse, illustrated in (41). It similarly doubles as the verb ‘to have’ with a transitive valency, as in (42).

(41) Caijia (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

mɔ ³³	ku ²⁴	ɣã ²¹	u ³³	tsʰo ³³	fɛ ³¹	sɿ ³³
DEM	time	EPP	people	CLF	STAT	plant

²⁶ There is in fact greater diversity for locative verbs in Sinitic languages.

²⁷ The Caijia data are courtesy of Shanshan Lü, EHESS, Paris, and have been generously provided from her fieldwork corpus and analyses.

tsɔŋ⁵⁵ ma³³ sɿ⁵⁵ pie⁵⁵ lɛ³³ mo⁵⁵. [...]

grain into field inside

‘There once was a family. (They) sowed seeds in the field.’

(42) Caijia (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

je⁵⁵ ɣã²¹ la²¹ ɔ⁵⁵ ji²¹ pie²¹.

3SG EPP big house one CLF

‘He owns a big house.’

As in a majority of Sinitic languages, the Caijia existential/possessive verb in its possessive use does not exclusively code alienable possession but also inherent characteristics of a person, which are therefore of the inalienable type, including age, height and personal qualities as in (43), (44) and (45) below (see also Bally 1926 on similar uses of ‘have’ verbs in French, German, Russian, Latin and Homeric Greek, explained in terms of the notion of the personal domain –‘sphère personnelle’):

(43) Caijia (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

je⁵⁵ ɣã²¹ pe⁵⁵ neŋ²¹ to⁵⁵ o.

3SG EPP eight year can PRT

‘He’s probably eight years old.’

(44) Caijia (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

je⁵⁵ ɣã²¹ ji²¹ mi²¹ tɕ^hi⁵⁵ k^wɔ⁵⁵.

3SG EPP one metre seven tall

‘He’s 170cm tall.’

(45) Caijia (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

ɔ²⁴ fɛ⁵⁵ mɔ³³ tsɿ⁵⁵ ni⁵⁵ ɣã²¹ fɛ⁵⁵ka³³ xiŋ⁵⁵.

DEM.PROX family DEM.DIST son CLF EPP ability very

‘The son of this family is very capable.’

A semantic extension of this inalienable *have* verb use is the formation of adjectives describing personal qualities such as **ɣã³³fɛ⁵⁵ka³³** have-ability ‘capable’ in (45).

Apart from the two problematic cases mentioned at the beginning of this section, nothing in the available data from our corpus on Sinitic languages suggests variation that could lead to analyses of their predicative possession constructions different from that proposed in Section 6 for Mandarin. For example, the ‘whoever’ construction already illustrated for Mandarin, which provides a strong argument in support of our analysis, is found in Hong Kong Cantonese (Yue) as well:

(46) Cantonese (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

邊個有錢, 邊個俾.

Bīngō yáuh chín, bīngō bēi.

who has money who pays

‘Whoever has the money pays.’

(Matthews & Yip 2011: 334)

Another interesting feature of Cantonese is the existence of a highly productive means of forming adjectives by compounding the existential/possessive verb **yáuh** with nouns, as in **yáuh-chín** have-money ‘rich’ or **yáuh-hohkmahn** have-knowledge ‘learned, cultured’ (Matthews & Yip 2011: 58). The crux of the matter is that the possessive meaning of such compounds cannot be explained by purely semantic mechanisms such as those implied by the Topic-Possessive analysis. If **yáuh** were a pure existential verb, and the NP to its left could only be a dangling topic, such compounds would be expected to have a general meaning ‘where there is...’ or ‘the fact that there is...’, rather than referring specifically to a possessive relationship. This compounding pattern, manifested in many languages in our sample, including Mandarin, Hmong, Caijia, and Lao in itself implies the possibility of a bivalent argument structure <Possessor, Possessee>.

Two further construction types involving a possessive verb are found serendipitously in descriptions of Sinitic languages included in our sample. These are respectively right dislocation in Yichun Gan and left dislocation in Hui’an Southern Min. Both examples make use of pronouns in preverbal position in the main clause and furnish further support to our analysis, since each contains an extraposed noun representing the possessor and a pronoun coreferent with this noun in subject position.

In a description of the Yichun variety of Gan, we came across a fairly rare example of right dislocation of the subject of a Have-Possessive. The speaker, a Mr Wu, asks about the

age of a house, coded as the subject in the main clause by the demonstrative **ko**³⁴ ‘that’, while the full lexical noun appears in the afterthought position, following the main clause:

(47) Yichun Gan (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

Right dislocation of the subject of a Have-Possessive

吴: 格有几百哩啊, 里只屋?

Wu: **ko**³⁴ **iu**⁴²⁻³³ **tei**⁴² **pa?** **ɲien**⁴⁴ **li** **a,** **li**⁴² **tcia?** **u?** ?
DEM have several hundred year PRF INTJ DEM CL house

‘Is it a few hundred years old, this house?’

(Xuping LI 2018: 226)

The following example of left dislocation from Hui’an Southern Min presents an even clearer case in favour of distinguishing the valency structures of the existential and the possessive uses. It begins with a topic, **pan¹tshia¹** ‘shuttle bus’, taken up again by a resumptive 3SG pronoun as the subject of the main clause, a Have-Possessive:

(48) Hui’an Southern Min (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan)

Left dislocation of the subject of a Have-Possessive

班車, 伊有幾條線嘛.

pan¹tshia¹, **i¹** **u⁴** **kui³⁻²-tiau²⁻⁴** **pan¹tshia¹** **suã⁵** **bã⁰**
shuttle.bus 3SG have several-CLF shuttle.bus line SFP

‘As for the shuttle bus, it has several shuttle bus lines.’

(Weirong CHEN, Forthcoming)

8. Existential and possessive constructions in other Southeast Asian languages

8.1. Introductory remarks

In the following sections, we present data supporting the view that the analysis developed above for Mandarin and other Sinitic languages also applies to the other Southeast Asian languages analysed by Stassen as having Topic Possessive constructions as their only available option. As illustrated in (49), like Sinitic languages, the languages in question

Have-Possessive clauses in which the possessor NP precedes a predicator also found in existential clauses, but shows no flagging that could justify a Locational Possessive analysis.

(49) Khmer (Mon-Khmer, Austroasiatic)

- a. **Niw psaa nih miən mənuh craən nah.**
at market this EPP person be much very much

‘There are a lot of people at this market.’

- b. **Kñom miən prədap krup baep.**
I EPP tool every kind

‘I have all kinds of tools.’

(Clark 1989: 207)

In fact, this polyfunctionality of existential/possessive predicators has been viewed as an important areal feature in earlier literature on this linguistic area, for example, in M. Clark (1989) who discusses data from languages belonging to four unrelated language families: Hmong (Hmong-Mien), Khmer and Vietnamese (both Mon-Khmer, Austroasiatic), Thai and Lao (both Tai-Kadai) and Mandarin (Sinitic, Sino-Tibetan).²⁸

The existential predicates which have the same form as the possessive predicates similarly allow locative phrases in either clause-initial or clause-final position, the latter being the unmarked position (Jarkey 2015: 204-205). These locative phrases are all overtly marked by spatial terms and so cannot be interpreted as some kind of subject, either in (50a) or (50b) from Hmong, exemplifying the two different uses of **muaj** ‘there.is’ and ‘have’ respectively.

(50) Hmong (Hmong-Mien)

- a. **Nyob hauv lawv lub vaj, muaj ib tug npua.**
at inside 3PL area garden EPP one ANIM.CLF pig

‘In their garden, there’s a pig.’ (Clark 1989: 207)

²⁸ For a summary of the argumentation concerning the reasons for including Sinitic in a larger East and Southeast Asian linguistic area, see Chappell (2015).

- b. **Nws muaj peb lub ntim hauv nws lub hnab thoom.**
3SG EPP three thing.CLF bowl inside 3SG thing.CLF shoulder bag
'She has three bowls in her bag.'
(Clark 1989: 208)

As in Mandarin, the possessive construction includes no obvious indication that the possessor phrase occupies a preverbal argument position or a topic position at the left periphery of the clause. However, if possessor NPs in possessive clauses such as (49b) or (50b) above could only be analysed as dangling topics, there should exist an alternative construction expressing predicative possession with possessors that *cannot* be topicalised. None of the descriptions we have consulted mentions the existence of such an alternative construction, while some descriptions do mention features that provide additional evidence supporting a Have-Possessive analysis, in particular, prosody, distributives, right and left dislocation, headless relative clauses, as well as interrogatives.

8.1. Predicative possession in Hmong-Mien languages

The Hmong languages (Hmong-Mien family, known in China as Miao-Yao 苗瑶) are found as far north as the province of Hunan in central China and extend to the southwest through Guizhou, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces into Vietnam, Laos and Thailand.

Our sources are principally Clark (1989) and Jarkey (2015) for White Hmong spoken in Xieng Khoung and Luang Prabang provinces in Laos, as well as Sposato (2015) on Xong, also known as Western Xiangxi Miao, spoken in the northwest of Hunan province in China.²⁹

Jarkey observes (2015: 43-44) that, in the “generic existential” use of the existential/possessive verb of White Hmong **muaj**, a non-referential or ‘dummy’ 3rd person pronoun **nws** is found in the clause-initial position usually reserved for subjects, whereas a generic noun occurs in postverbal position.

²⁹ Note that tonal spelling is used in the following Hmong examples whereby the final consonant (**x**, **j**, **b** etc) indicates a particular tonal value.

(51) White Hmong (Hmong-Mien)

nws yeej yuav-tsum muaj rog.

3SG HAB must EPP war

‘There must (always) be wars.’

(Jarkey 2015: 44)

In the presentative construction, temporal and locative adpositional phrases may occur in clause-initial position, and in this case, the 3rd person pronoun is absent. The single argument in the form of an indefinite, specific NP occurs postverbally.

(52) White Hmong (Hmong-Mien)

thaum ub muaj ib tug tsov.

time yonder EPP one CLF tiger

‘Once upon a time, there was a tiger.’

(Jarkey 2015: 44)

In contrast to the existential use of **muaj**, possessive clauses make use of a clause-initial NP:

(53) White Hmong (Hmong-Mien)

kuv muaj ob tug me-nyuam.

1SG EPP two CLF children

‘I have two children.’

(Jarkey 2015: 49)

Relevant to our discussion is also the possible diachronic relationship between **muab** ‘grasp with the hand, take’ and **muaj** ‘have’ (Jarkey 2015: 50), which formally differ only for their tone. This hypothesis is consistent with the presence of an expletive third person pronoun in existential constructions such as (51) above,³⁰ since such expletives are typically found in existential constructions that developed historically from an impersonal use of Have-Possessives, as **dey** in African American English **dey got** (54), or **es** in Alemannic **es hot** – example (55).

³⁰ The lack of any preverbal locative adjunct facilitates the reanalysis of the structure as an existential one. We thank the Hmong specialist who was one of our four reviewers for their question on this feature.

(54) African American English

Dey got a fly messing with me.

they have a fly messing with me

‘There is a fly bothering me.’

(Green 2002: 82)

(55) Alemannic (Germanic, Indo-European)

Es hot Rössr voram Hus.

it has horses in.front.of.the house

‘There are horses in front of the house.’

(Czinger 2002: 94)

In Xong, the cognate verb to White Hmong **muaj** is **mex**. Similar to Mandarin **yǒu**, **mex** is a defective verb in that it may only co-occur with certain aspect markers, such as the experiential, but not with completive or progressive ones (Sposato 2017: 497). It has three main meanings: (i) ‘to exist’ – example (56), (ii) ‘to have’ – example (57), and (iii) ‘to be wealthy’ – example (58).

(56) Xong (Hmong-Mien)

Bid-gheul laot-gheul mex aod-ngonl daob-mel.

FRT-mountain top-place₂ EPP one-CLF:animate AN-horse

‘There’s a horse on the mountain top.’

(Sposato 2017: 391)

In (57), given the context of childbirth, the dynamic interpretation of an acquisition for this verb of having appears to be uppermost, providing more clear evidence for the existence of a transitive valency for **mex**.

(57) Xong (Hmong-Mien)

Aod-dieud dox Sank.ux.baob naond qik.zib mex ngonl deb-deb.

one-CLF:time₂ that San U Bao ASSOC wife EPP CLF:animate child-RED

‘At that time, San U Bao’s wife had a child.’

(Sposato 2017: 230)

In example (58), **mex** is ambiguous between ‘be wealthy’ and ‘have’ according to Adam Sposato (pers.comm):

(58) Xong (Hmong-Mien)

Mex lah.

EPP PRF

‘Now (I’m) wealthy.’ or: ‘Now (I) have (it).’

(Haili Shi, fieldnotes of A. Sposato)

Expressing ‘be wealthy’ by means of a bivalent verb ‘have’ in a construction not including any overt possessee phrase is a quite natural semantic extension, also found in other Hmongic languages, in Eastern Kayah Li, in Lao and in Sinitic languages including Baoding Jilu Mandarin – even for the earlier period of Western Zhou Chinese (11th – 7th c.).

In addition to these uses, *mex* combines with a variety of nouns to form compounds that would be difficult to explain without resorting to the presence of a transitive valency in its semantic structure:

(59) **mex weik** have interest > ‘interesting’

mex nghaot have price > ‘powerful’

mex cef have wealth > ‘wealthy’

(Sposato 2017: 347, 353)

The same formation of compounds with cognate **muaj** ‘EPP’ is also found in White Hmong:³¹

(60) **muaj hlob** ‘have pride; have a proud heart’ (Heimbach 1979: 134.)

muaj hmoo ‘have luck, fortune; to have good fortune’ (Heimbach 1979: 69)

In sum, our analysis of the existential/possessive verbs of Sinitic languages also applies to Hmong languages.³²

³¹ We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing these data to our attention.

³² For each of the language families represented in our sample, we did strive to include all the data available, including on questions, and, in a less complete fashion, any fortuitous examples of clause types other than declaratives. For reasons of space, we do not present the interrogative examples here.

8.2. Predicative possession in Tai-Kadai languages

The Tai-Kadai language stock, also known as the ‘Kra-Dai’ family (Ostapirat 2000) is spread over southern China, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar (Burma) and Vietnam.³³ Our sample includes data from eight Tai-Kadai languages representing its three primary divisions of Li/Hlai, Geyang/Kra and Kam-Tai (for details, see Appendix).

The largest and most complete descriptions of this family, not surprisingly, relate to the languages with official status, Thai and Lao. In the Kam-Tai branch of Tai-Kadai, to which both Thai and Lao belong, the existential/possessive verb is regularly **mii** or a closely similar form. In the other two small branches of Hlai and Geyang, the forms are respectively **tsau**² and **aŋ**³¹, the latter being the form in Judu Gelao.

Similarly to the case for Hmong languages, there appears to be a consensus among specialists that **mii** has both transitive and intransitive valencies and can be interpreted as possessive ‘have’ in the first instance or as existential ‘there is/are’ in the second. For example, for Standard Thai, Noss (1964: 124) describes **mii** ‘have’ as “a typical transitive verb” but one which can have the translation of ‘S exists, there is S’ when it is used with just one S argument. The same explicit claim of possessive **mii** being “a typical transitive verb” can be found in Sookgasem (2016: 46).

Furthermore, as illustrated in (61), the figure NP in the construction of existential **mii** is normally required to occur postverbally (for Thai, see Clark 1989, Noss 1964, Sookgasem 1992, Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom 2005; for Lao, see Enfield 2007: 157-158 and for Maonan, see Lu 2008: 211).

³³ This large group of languages is generally divided into three main branches of Kam-Tai, Hlai and Kra (or Geyang) (Diller 2008). Most of the described varieties, however, belong to the Kam-Tai branch which is further subdivided into Kam-Sui, Lakjia and Tai. The estimated 15 million speakers of Zhuang languages in China belong to the Tai branch of Kam-Tai (Lewis et al. 2016), which in turn is further divided into three main subdivisions: Northern, Central and Southwestern, following Li Fang-kuei’s classification (1977). Standard Bangkok Thai and Lao belong to the Southwestern group while Zhuang languages belong mainly to either the Northern Tai (Northern Zhuang) or the Central Tai subdivisions (Southern Zhuang).

(61) Standard Thai (Tai-Kadai)

mii _{NP}[**phaayú rxn**]

EPP storm strong

‘There exists a strong storm.’

***phaayú rxn mii**

***phaayú mii rxn**

Sookgasem (1992: 285)

The use of this intransitive structure with its postverbal subject NP is naturally linked to information structure, the new referent being typically realised as a morphologically indefinite NP. In Maonan (Kam-Sui), for example, Lu observes (2008: 212-213) that demonstratives such as ‘this’ and ‘that’ may not modify the postverbal subject of **mɛ²** ‘exist’.

(62) Maonan (Tai-Kadai)

ʔju¹ pɔŋ³ mɛ² dɔ² la:k⁸kje³ bi²bəŋ⁶ ʔdeu² / (*na:i⁶)

top bed EPP CLF:animal child very:fat one / (*this)

‘On the bed, there is a (*this) very fat child.’

(Lu 2008: 211)

The same situation applies in Lao (Enfield 2008: 157-161).

A closely related property of the intransitive existential structure, pointed out in several studies, is its typical function as a presentative, as in narratives, for example, whenever a new and major character is to be introduced.

In Maonan (Kam-Sui, Northern Guangxi), **mɛ²** in its existential use may be accompanied by an optional clause-initial NP coding locus or time, as we have seen in many other languages. Lu (2008: 211) describes this NP as an adjunct functioning as the topic. Similar to Mandarin **zài**, the locative preposition **ŋa:u⁶** ‘be at’ is omissible in the clause-initial topic position, but obligatory when the locative adjunct occurs in post-verbal position:

(63) Maonan (Tai-Kadai)

a. (ɲa:u⁶) ʔju¹ pɔŋ³ mɛ² dɔ² la:k⁸kje³ bi²bəŋ⁶ ʔdeu².
(be:at) top bed EPP CLF:animal child very:fat one
'On the bed, there is a very fat child.'

b. mɛ² dɔ² la:k⁸kje³ bi²bəŋ⁶ ʔdeu² non² ɲa:u⁶ ʔju¹ pɔŋ³
EPP CLF:animal child very:fat one sleep be:at top bed
'There was a very fat child sleeping on the bed.'
(Lu 2008: 211-212)

The descriptions of Tai-Kadai languages that we have consulted do not really discuss the status of the NP preceding the existential/possessive verb in its possessive use, but some of them at least provide examples of possessive clauses whose meaning excludes analysing the possessor phrase as a dangling topic, for example in (64) and (65), where the possessor phrase is a distributive.

(64) Maonan (Tai-Kadai)

ʔna:k⁷ ʔai¹ ʔai¹ mɛ² kɔŋ¹ ve⁴
let person person EPP work make, do
'Let everyone have a job.'
(Lu 2008: 195)

(65) Nùng (Tai-Kadai)

nohc hah nohc tô mi bɔc.
bird which bird also EPP flower
'Every bird had flowers.'
(Saul & Wilson 1980: 35)

In Lao (as in Hmong), **mii2** used as a one-place verb can also mean 'be wealthy' which as pointed out earlier, is necessarily related to the notion of 'have':

(66) Lao (Tai-Kadai)

phuø-nii4 mii2

MC.HUM-DEM EPP

‘This person is wealthy.’

(Enfield 2007: 158)

In Lao, Enfield (2007) provides an example of a construction with the possessor fronted in a kind of left-dislocation construction and reprised by the anaphoric 3rd person pronoun, **man2**:

(67) Lao (Tai-Kadai)

haan1 khòòj5, man2 mii2 luuk4,

goose 1SG.P 3.B EPP child

man2 mii2 kaw4 too3 phunø déj2

3.B EPP nine CLF.ANIM TOP.FAR FAC.NEWS

‘My goose, it has goslings, it has nine, you know.’

(Enfield 2007: 158)

In (67), **haan1 khòòj5** ‘my goose’ occupies the clause-initial position of a ‘classical’ framed topic-comment construction where it is followed by a pause. The presence of a co-referent pronoun in the following two clauses supports the view that the possessive use of **mii2** is not classifiable as a Topic Possessive, but rather belongs to the Have-Possessive type.

To conclude this section, we observe that Sookgasem (2016: 46) mentions an interesting difference between **mii** ‘have’ (which she characterises as “a regular transitive verb”) and **mii** ‘exist’ in nominalisation. In Thai, as illustrated by (68a), verb phrases (i.e. verbs possibly followed by objects and/or adjuncts but not preceded by a subject) can be nominalised by preposing **kaan**. In this respect, **mii** ‘have’ can be nominalised like any other transitive verb, and **kaan mii N** is interpreted as ‘for an unspecified possessor to have N’, as in (68b). By contrast, as indicated in (68c), the nominalisation of existential **mii** is “questionable” at best.

(68) Standard Thai (Tai-Kadai)

a. **kaan thamlai mùubân**

NMLS destroy village

‘destroying a village’

b. **kaan mii phǐw sǔay**

NMLS EPP complexion beautiful

‘having a fine complexion’

c. **?kaan mii phaayú rxɿ**

NMLS EPP storm strong

?‘existing a strong storm’

(Sookgasem 2016: 46)

Although Sookgasem does not comment further on this point, one may imagine that the problem with **?kaan mii phaayú rxɿ** ‘existing a strong storm’ is that ‘**kaan mii** N’ evokes the <Possessor, Possessee> argument structure of transitive **mii** ‘have’, and storms are not among the types of entities to which the role of possessee in the construction of a ‘have’ verb can normally be assigned.

8.3. Predicative possession in Austroasiatic languages

Austroasiatic languages are distributed in a discontinuous fashion from Northeastern India to Myanmar (Burma), Southern China, the Malaysian peninsula and Indo-China, and extend as far southwest as the Nicobar Islands in the Andaman Sea. The best-known members of the family are Vietnamese and Khmer (Cambodian). Our sample of 14 languages includes these two national languages as well as a range of less well-known ones (for details, see the Appendix, and Sidwell 2015 for a phylogenetic classification). The languages of the Munda branch, spoken principally in Central and Eastern India, are not included in our survey, since they are outside the linguistic area in question and have unproblematic Locational Possessives (Stassen 2009: 311-313).

With the exception of the Munda branch, most of the Austroasiatic languages for which the relevant data are available pattern in a very similar manner to Sinitic, Hmong-Mien and

Tai-Kadai languages: they use the same verb for both possession and existence, and in the possessive construction, possessor NPs are invariably unflagged.³⁴ Vietnamese may be used to illustrate these features, also replicated in Jing (Vietic, see Ouyang Jueya et al. 1984: 110-111); Bugan (Pakanic, see Li Yunbing 2005: 100); Khmer (see Haiman 2011: 208)

(69) Vietnamese (Vietic, Austroasiatic)

a. **Tràng có vợ.**

Tràng EPP wife

‘Tràng has a wife.’

b. **Có mấy người trong nhà.**

EPP several person in house

‘There are several persons in the house.’

(Phan 2010: 119)

Mon is however an exception, with an alternative construction in which the possessor NP is locative-marked. Interestingly, according to Jenny (2005: 83), the construction with an unflagged possessor NP (i.e., the construction typical of Mon-Khmer languages) was more common in Old Mon, and the development of the construction with a locative-marked possessor NP is probably the result of contact with Burmese.

Here again, the descriptions we have consulted do not really discuss the status of the NP preceding the existential/possessive verb in its possessive use, but some of them at least provide examples of possessive clauses whose meaning excludes the possibility of analysing the possessor phrase as occupying a topic position. In examples (70) to (72), the possessor NP is an interrogative in a ‘whoever’ construction, or a distributive. As pointed out earlier, this type of NP cannot act as a topic by definition.

³⁴ In a small number of cases, this verb also has a third function as a locative verb, which is rare in Sinitic, Hmong-Mien or Tai-Kadai. One of our four reviewers pointed out in a very pertinent manner that there is, in fact, some evidence of the historical existence of this pattern in Munda, such that in Sora there is a negative copular form that is used in both existential/possessive constructions (Anderson 2007: 150). The reviewer continued with the following observations that within Austroasiatic, the Have-Possessive with the same form as the existential copula is found in at least Khasian (Khasi: Nagaraja 1985) in India, Palaungic (Plang: Lewis 2008; Eastern Lawa: Block 2013) in China/Thailand; Mon in Burma (Jenny 2005), and in other Austroasiatic languages of MESEA which are located further to the east. See also Jenny & Sidwell (2015) for descriptions of a large range of Austroasiatic languages.

(70) Vietnamese (Vietic, Austroasiatic)

Gì có cánh đều bay được.

what EPP wing all fly be.possible

‘Whatever has wings can fly.’

(Thompson 1987: 203)

(71) Jing (Vietic, Austroasiatic)

ηwəi: ηwəi: kuŋ₃ kə₅ koŋ₁ la:m₂.

person person all EPP work do

‘Everyone has work to do.’

(Ouyang Jueya et al. 1984: 61)

(72) Pacoh (Katuic, Austroasiatic)

mə:j na? ti.kuj vi: ba:r lam mat.

each UNIT person EPP two UNIT eye

‘Every person has two eyes.’

(Alves 2006: 44)

Another piece of evidence against the Topic Possessive analysis is that in Khmer “nouns of agency are regularly formed by the syntactic device of prefixing **neak** ‘person’ to a verb or a noun” (Haiman 2011: 74), as illustrated by **neak naenoam** lit. ‘person advise’ > ‘advisor’, and ‘rich’ is revealingly expressed by **neak mian** lit. ‘person have’ (Haiman 2011: 288), which can only be understood with reference to the <possessor, possessee> argument structure of a bivalent ‘have’ verb.

We also found in Bon’s (2014) grammar of Stieng (Bahnaric) the following example, which can hardly be reconciled with a Topic Possessive analysis.

(73) Stieng (Bahnaric, Austroasiatic)

biəl hej ʔən lu:j ʔək hej han-məl digrəŋ P^hnom Bep.

time 1SG have money much 1SG visit town Phnom Penh

‘When I get a lot of money, I’ll visit Phnom Penh.’

(Bon 2014: 474)

Crucially in this sentence, the possessor NP is found within a temporal subordinate clause, which is clearly not a position where dangling topics are expected to occur.

8.4. Predicative possession in Tibeto-Burman languages

A striking feature of a large number of Tibeto-Burman languages is the fact that they may have anywhere from three to six existential and possessive verbs, typically distinguished according to parameters such as animacy of the possessee and manner of existence. For example, Shixing/Shihu (Qiangic, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan) has four existential/possessive verbs including ^{LH}**ji** for animate beings, ^{LH}**dzõ** for inanimate entities, ^{HL}**khu3** for existence inside a location or a container and ^{LH}**dzi** for existence of an entity attached to a location (Chirkova 2009).³⁵

As rightly observed by Stassen (2009: 316), in the Tibeto-Burman languages of Tibet, Nepal, north-eastern India, and northern Burma, “locational Possessives are without competition”. However, among the Tibeto-Burman languages geographically close to the languages families examined in the previous sections, the situation typical of the East and Southeast Asian area can be observed, with possessive clauses involving the same predicators as existential clauses, and invariably unflagged possessor NPs. Four such languages are mentioned by Stassen (Eastern Kayah, Arleng Alam (a.k.a. Karbi), Lisu, and Lahu), and the same configuration is also described in grammars of Nuosu (Loloish, cf. Gerner 2013), Guiqiong (Qiangic, cf. M. Rao 2015) and Menya (Qiangic, cf. Y. Gao 2015).

In the Tibeto-Burman languages in question, as was the case with the languages dealt with in the previous sections, the available descriptions do not discuss the status of possessor NPs as topics or subjects in the possessive use of the existential/possessive verb. Several of them provide, however, data which would essentially contradict the analysis of the possessor NP as a dangling topic in a Topic – Comment construction.

For example, Gerner’s description of Nuosu provides examples of possessive clauses in which the possessor is an interrogative or a distributive – example (74), and in example (75) from Guiqiong (Qiangic), the possessor NP is **suu**⁵⁵ ‘who’.

³⁵ The superscripts LH and HL on the Shixing verbs indicate contour tonal values : L= low and H = high. See Chirkova (2009) for a full description.

(74) Nuosu (Loloish, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan)

- a. **cop wox ggu dut go kax ddi ma sse jjo?**
3PL among LOC who CLF son EPP
‘Who among them has a son?’

- b. **la dda cyp lo zzix ap zi mu ry jjo.**
valley one CLF every all grass EPP
‘Every valley has grass.’
(Gerner 2013: 166, 108)

(75) Guiqiong (Qiangic, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan)

- nũ³³ku⁵³ suu⁵⁵ tsi⁵⁵ nã³⁵ ?**
2PL who son EPP
‘(Among) you, who has a son?’
(Rao Min pers. comm.)

Furthermore, there is another verb **jẽ⁵⁵** in Guiqiong expressing existence or possession of an inanimate entity, and the noun **jẽ³³-wu⁵³** derived from this verb by suffixing the nominaliser **-wu** can be interpreted either as ‘rich person’, or ‘belongings’ (Rao 2015: 429-430). As already discussed above for several other languages, this derivation is difficult to reconcile with the hypothesis of a monovalent predicate of existence expressing possession in combination with a dangling topic.

Similarly, in Menya (a language belonging to another branch of Qiangic), the noun resulting from the suffixation of the nominaliser **-mi** to the existential/possessive verb **²ndzy** can be interpreted either as ‘person possessing something’ or ‘person present somewhere’ (Gao 2015: 417-8), which again points to a distinct argument structure in the two uses of this verb.

The case of Qiang (Qiangic) is particularly interesting. In the same way as the East and Southeast Asian languages whose existential and possessive constructions have been analysed above, Qiang uses the same verbs for possessive and existential predication (and also for locational predication). In their possessive use, possessor NPs are consistently left unflagged, and consequently cannot be analysed as assimilated to locative adjuncts.

There is, however, an important difference with the languages analysed so far: in Qiang, 1st and 2nd person subjects are in general overtly indexed on the verb. Unsurprisingly, in the locational-existential use of the existential/possessive verbs of Qiang, the argument indexed on the verb is the figure NP. If their possessive use were a case of the Topic Possessive construction, in possessive clauses, the existential/possessive verbs would be expected to index the possessee, but this is not what can be observed. As illustrated by the following examples from three distinct Qiang varieties, in the possessive use of these verbs, the argument indexed on the verb is the possessor, that is, 1SG ‘I’ in (76b) and not ‘younger brother’, and similarly 1SG ‘I’ in (77b) and (78b) and not ‘legs’.

(76) Puxi Qiang (Qiangic, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan)

a. **ŋa tso zəʔ.**

1SG:TOP here EPP:1

‘I am here.’

b. **ŋa tsutsu a-la zəʔ.**

1SG:TOP younger.brother one-CLF EPP:1

‘I have a younger brother.’

(C. Huang 2004: 93, 94)

(77) Yadu Qiang (Qiangic, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan)

a. **qəl-la səf-o-zgu we.**

below-LOC tree-one-CLF EPP

‘There is a tree below.’

b. **qa dzoqu-ji-tua wa. < we+a**

1SG leg-two-CLF EPP:1SG

‘I have two legs.’

(La Polla & Huang 2003: 134)

(78) Longxi Qiang (Qiangic, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan)

a. **ɕíɕí meì-jì tǎpà tʰəká piápù ɕyòɕaũ jì-ŋó=pù=ǎ' wè.**

Xixi ANA-GEN uncle there beside school IN-EPP=HET=HS ATT

‘(I heard) there is a school beside Xixi’s uncle’s (house).’

b. **qâi ŋò ŋó=à.**

1SG:EMPH leg EPP=1SG:IPFV

‘I have legs.’

(W. Zheng 2016: 389, 277)

Consequently, argument indexation in possessive clauses rules out the Topic Possessive analysis and forces us to analyse the verbs in question as polysemous verbs occurring in two distinct coding frames, depending on the meaning they express: as verbs of location-existence, they select an intransitive construction with the figure encoded as the subject, whereas as verbs of possession, they select a transitive construction with the possessor encoded as the subject.

In other words, in Qiang, argument indexation provides crucial support for the analysis already proposed above for the existential/possessive verbs of other languages in which, unlike Qiang, the situation is obscured by the lack of any morphological marking of core syntactic relations.

Incidentally, we observe that, in addition to existential/possessive verbs such as those illustrated above, pure possessive verbs are also attested in Qiang. Unsurprisingly, they also have a transitive coding frame characterised by indexation of the possessor NP. What is particularly interesting is that one of them, Longxi Qiang **tsé**, has exactly the same form as **tsé** ‘catch, hold’, which suggests that **tsé** ‘have’ arose from **tsé** ‘catch’ via the same kind of semantic evolution as the Indo-European ‘have’ verbs, and possibly White Hmong ‘have’ as well (cf. §7.1 above). Moreover, one of the existential/possessive verbs of Puxi Qiang (**zə**, cf. ex. (76)) has exactly the same form as a ‘take’ verb in Longxi Qiang. All this suggests that the process of creation of transitive verbs of possession from verbs such as ‘take’ or ‘catch’ has been active in the history of Qiang, and that the existential/possessive verbs found in this language may have resulted from a subsequent evolution of ‘have’ verbs.

A situation very different from that found in the languages examined so far, but equally interesting from our perspective, is attested in Burmese. Like the vast majority of Tibeto-

Burman languages, Burmese has a Locational Possessive construction involving the existential verb transcribed as **ɕí** or **ʃí** depending on the sources, and the locative postposition (or case-marker) **hma** (also transcribed as **hma₂** depending on the transcription system).

(79) Burmese (Lolo-Burmese, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan)

θəŋɛ.dzìn-hma kà hnə-zì ɕí-dɛ.

friend-at car two-CLF exist-NFUT

‘My friend has two cars.’

(Jenny & Hnin Tun 2016: 247)

According to Jenny & Hnin Tun (2016: 247), the locative case-marker may be dropped. The optional dropping of locative flagging with topicalised locative phrases is relatively common in the languages of the word, but interestingly, this phenomenon cannot explain all the details of the behavior of **hma** in the possessive clauses of Burmese. Crucially, if the dropping of **hma** were to be interpreted as conditioned by the topicalisation of a locative adjunct, it should not be possible with an interrogative pronoun fulfilling the semantic role of possessor. However, the data kindly provided to us by San San Hnin Tun attest to this possibility:

(80) Burmese (Lolo-Burmese, Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan)

ʃíⁿ₂-do₁-dɛ₃-hma₂ bɛ₂.ðu₁(-hma₂) k^hə.le₃ ə.ŋɛ₂-le₃-dwe₂ ʃí₁-ðə=le₃

2F-ASS.PL-inside-at who(-at) child young-small-PL exist/have-NFUT=CQ

‘Among you, who has small children?’

(San San Hnin Tun, pers. comm.)

The optional dropping of the locative marker even with an interrogative pronoun in the role of possessor can only be analysed as a transitional stage in a process of *have*-drift, since the variant of (80) in which the locative marker **hma₂** is not attached to the interrogative pronoun implies the possibility of treating the coding frame of **ʃí₁** as including an argumental position in which unflagged NPs are assigned the semantic role of possessor.

9. Conclusion

Our investigation of predicative possession in Mainland East and Southeast Asian languages was grounded in the idea that, for obvious functional reasons, possessive clauses with the possessor encoded as a dangling topic preceding an existential clause cannot be the only type of predicative possession in a given language, since the possessor would then be denied access to the common/basic operations to which NPs encoding event participants must have access in one way or another. This includes interrogation, ‘whoever’ constructions and distributives, as we have shown for several of the languages in our sample. Consequently, there are only two possibilities for the languages mentioned in the typological literature as having the Topic Possessive type of predicative possession as their only available option:

- either there is a gap in the data, and the language also has another (probably less frequent) type of predicative possession construction available to encode non-topicalisable possessors;
- or the possessive construction in question would be more appropriately analysed as belonging to another type, either the Locational Possessive or the Have-Possessive.

We have tried to show that the configuration found in the East and Southeast Asian languages analysed by Stassen as having the Topic Possessive type as their only available option is better analysed as being a case of the Have-Possessive type, the confusion being due to the lack of clear morphological evidence for distinguishing subject NPs in preverbal position from topics in a topic-comment construction.

Rejecting the Topic Possessive as a basic type in a synchronic typology of predicative possession does not invalidate the possibility that topicality plays a crucial role in the evolution of possessive predication, and in particular, in the emergence of Have-Possessives. The high degree of inherent topicality of prototypical possessors (in comparison with prototypical possesseees) favours a widespread tendency to topicalise them in clauses of the Locational Possessive type, since this particular type of predicative possession (contrary to the Have-Possessive type) does not designate the possessor as the default topic (Creissels 2013, Forthcoming). However, a construction whose initial function diachronically is to express topicalisation of an NP can only become the sole possible way of encoding a given type of event, if the NP in a framing topic position has been reanalysed as occupying an argumental position, becoming thus accessible to operations to which topics in topic-comment constructions do not have access.

As regards the relationship between locational, existential, and possessive predication, the history of linguistic theory in the 20th century has been deeply marked by the idea that the Have-Possessive type of predicative possession is a typological oddity that opposes the so-called ‘Standard Average European’ languages to the rest of the world, and that possessive constructions must derive in some way or another from locational-existential predication. With the dramatic increase in the documentation available on the morphosyntax of a wide variety of languages, and also in the quality and precision of language descriptions, it should be clear now that the Have-Possessive type of predicative possession is quite widespread in the languages of the world, and is the dominant type in many language families or linguistic areas outside of Europe. In fact, Stassen (2009: 560-695) provides a wide coverage of languages with Have-Possessives across several continents : Eurasia, Africa, Australia and the Americas – to which the following language families in Asia can be added: Sinitic, Hmong-Mien, Tai-Kadai, most of Austroasiatic and part of Tibeto-Burman.

However, as a consequence of the common view that East and Southeast Asian languages are “topic-prominent” languages (which in fact largely relies on the lack of obvious morphological devices that could distinguish preverbal subjects from left-dislocated topics, and on the tendency not to use resumptive pronouns in topic-comment constructions), their status has never been adequately discussed in the literature on the typology of predicative possession.

As regards the historical origin of this use of the same verbs as transitive verbs of possession and as existential verbs, unfortunately, the available data are not decisive, even in the case of Sinitic, whose history is relatively well-documented for its official varieties. As noted at the beginning of section 6.4, two scenarios are *a priori* equally possible. Moreover, the use of calque in situations of language contact probably played an important role in the spreading of the configuration we have analysed across this region.

None of the Have-Possessive constructions we have analysed shows evidence suggesting that it might result from a *have*-drift process having affected a construction that initially belonged to the Locational Possessive type.

As regards the other possible scenario (creation of an existential predication construction via impersonalisation of a ‘have’ verb historically derived from a ‘take’ or ‘hold’ verb), several languages (including Pre-Archaic and Archaic Chinese) attest uses of the existential/possessive verbs suggesting an original meaning of acquisition. We have evoked the possibility that Hmong **muaj** ‘have’ might be cognate with **muab** ‘grasp with the hand,

take’, and that some of the existential/possessive verbs of Qiang might be cognate with ‘take’ or ‘catch’ verbs. This is, however, clearly not enough to draw a general conclusion. A systematic investigation of the polysemy and possible cognates of the existential/possessive verbs of Mainland East and Southeast Asian languages would be necessary before trying to elaborate a detailed historical explanation of the existential-possessive polysemy in Southeast Asian languages.

Abbreviations

ABS: absolutive, ACC: accusative, AN: “animal” nominal prefix, ANA: anaphoric pronoun, ANIM: animate, ASSOC: associative marker, ASS.PL: associative plural, ATT: speaker attitude marker, AUX: auxiliary, B: bare, CL: classifier, CLF: classifier, COP.EXP: explanatory copula, CQ: content question, CRS: currently relevant state marker, CSTR: construct marker, DE: nominaliser, genitive, attributive and relative clause marker, DEM: demonstrative, DIR: directional, DIST: distal, DOM: differential object marker, EMPH: emphatic, EPP: existential/possessive predicator, ERG: ergative, EVD: evidential, EXT: marker of verbal complement of extent, F: feminine, FAC.NEWS: factive, proposition is news, FAR: far distal, FOC: focus, FRT: “fruit” nominal prefix, GEN: genitive, HAB: habitual, HET: exophoric, HON: honorific particle, HS: hearsay marker, HUM: human, ICPL: incomplete, IN: inwards, INC: inclusive, INDEF: indefinite, INTJ: interjection, IPFV: imperfective, LOC: locative, M: masculine, MC: male child, MOD: marker of modification of the head noun; NEG: negative, NFUT: non-future, NMLS: nominaliser or noun marker, OBL: oblique case marker or index, PAST: past, P: polite, PFV: perfective, PL: plural, PRES: present, PRF: perfect, PROX: proximal, PRS: present, PRT: discourse particle, PST: past, Q: question marker, QILAI: qǐlai, the inchoative aspect marker, RED: reduplication, RP: rhetorical particle, SBJ: subject, SFP: sentence-final particle, SG: singular, STAT: stative, TOP: topic marker, UNIT: measure word.

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APPENDIX

DATA AND METHODOLOGY USED IN THIS STUDY

For this study, we have set up a small convenience corpus of data from 71 languages belonging to the four main language families of continental East and Southeast Asia. Some of the data come from fieldwork corpora, including elicited sentences, while some are from reference grammars, if not from internet sources, as indicated for each example. A sample of these data is available at the following website : <https://doi.org/10.1515/lingty-2019-0016>

For each language included in the database, we have compiled examples of both existential and possessive predicates, with a particular attention to data on questions, distributives and left or right dislocation.

The genres included in the corpus range from elicited sentences from our informants or from colleagues who have kindly provided the data in addition to examples found in transcriptions of natural discourse. This is also indicated in Table 1 below in the Appendix. Published reference grammars generally include both discourse and elicited data. Consequently, we do not indicate the genres for these in Table 1.

TABLE 1: LANGUAGE SAMPLE

A map with the locations of the 71 languages is presented in section 3.

1. SINITIC

REFERENCES

MANDARIN OR NORTHERN CHINESE

BEIJING	Standard Mandarin (Pǔtōnghuà)	Chao (1968), Li & Thompson (1981), Chappell <i>Texts</i> , internet databases
JILU	Baoding	Song Na <i>Elicited data</i>
NORTHEASTERN	Jilin	Boyang Liu <i>Elicited data</i>
CENTRAL PLAINS	Shangshui	Yujie Chen (In preparation) <i>Texts & elicited data</i>
SOUTHWESTERN	Jishou	Li Qiqun (2002)

JIN

BINGZHOU	Jinyuan	Wang Wenqing (2007)
WUTAI	Xinzhou	Hou Jingyi & Wen Duanzheng (1993)

XIANG

CHANGYI	Changsha	Yunji Wu (2005)
LOUSHAO	Longhui	Ding & Luo (2006); Ding (1996, 1998)
LOUSHAO	Loudi	Peng Fengshu (1996, 1998, 2000, 2006)

GAN

YILIU	Yichun	Xuping Li (2018)
CHANGJING	Nanchang	Sagart (1999) <i>Fieldwork data</i>
CHANGJING	Pingjiang	Peng Daxing Wang <i>Elicited data</i>
LEIZI	Anren	Chen Manhua (1995)

HUI

JISHE	Jixi	Wang Jian (In preparation) <i>Fieldwork data</i>
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		Yixian	Hirata Shoji (1998)
WU			
	SUHUJIA	Shanghainese	Xiaonong Zhu (2006); Qian Nairong (2000);
	TAIZHOU	Tiantai	Dai Zhaoming (2006)
	YONGJIANG	Ningbo	Ruan Guijun (2009)
	OUJIANG	Wenzhou – Rui’an	You Rujie (1999); Milena Lazzaretti (2018) ; <i>Fieldwork data</i>
MIN	SOUTHERN MIN		
	<i>Quanzhang</i>	Taiwanese	Lin (2015), Chappell <i>Texts</i>
	<i>Quanzhang</i>	Hui’an	Weirong Chen (Forthcoming) <i>Fieldwork data</i>
	<i>Wenchang</i>	Hainan Wenchang	Huichi Lee <i>Fieldwork data</i>
	<i>Qionghen</i>	Hainan Haikou	Chen Hongmai (1996)
	<i>Chaoshan</i>	Chaozhou	Xu Huiling (2007)
	EASTERN MIN	Fuzhou	Zheng Yide (1985) Liang Yuzhang (1990)
	NORTHWESTERN MIN (<i>Shaojiang</i>)	Shaowu	Sing Sing Ngai (In preparation) <i>Fieldwork data</i>
YUE			
	GUANGFU	Hong Kong Cantonese	Matthews & Yip (2011), Chappell <i>Texts</i>
	GAOYANG	Xinyi	Luo Kangning (1987)
HAKKA			
	YUGUI	Shangyou	Huang Zhiquan (2005)
	TINGZHOU	Liancheng	Xiang Mengbing (1997)

	YUETAI	Dabu	He Gengyong (1993)
PINGHUA			
	SOUTHERN	Nanning	Hilário de Sousa (In preparation) <i>Fieldwork data</i>
	NORTHERN	Hezhou Jiudusheng	Zhang Xiuzhen 张秀珍 (2005)
UNCLASSIFIED SINITIC LANGUAGES OF HUNAN AND GUIZHOU			
		Caijia	Shanshan Lü (2018) <i>Fieldwork data</i>
		Rucheng	Lisha He <i>Elicited data</i>
		Xianghua (Waxiang)	Chappell <i>Fieldwork data</i>
2. HMONG-MIEN			
		White Hmong	Clark (1989), Jarkey (2015)
		Xong	Sposato (2015)
3. TAI-KADAI (KRA-DAI)			
LI/HLAI			
		Hlai (Hainan, China)	Yuan Zhongshu (1994)
GEYANG/KRA			
		Gelao, Judu variety (Guizhou, China)	Kang Zhongde (2009)
KAM-TAI			
	KAM-SUI	Maonan (N. Guangxi, Guizhou, China)	Lu Tianqiao (2008)
	TAI		
	<i>Northern</i>	Wuming Zhuang (Guangxi, China)	Zhang Junru et al. (1999)
		Xia-ao Zhuang (Guangxi, China)	Wei Maofan (2012)
	<i>Central</i>	Nùng (Vietnam)	Saul & Wilson (1980)
	<i>Southwestern</i>	Standard Thai	Sookgasem (2016), Noss

	(Thailand)	(1964), Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom (2005)
	Lao (Laos)	Enfield (2007)
4. AUSTROASIATIC: MON-KHMER		
VIETIC	Vietnamese	Phan (2010)
	Jing	Ouyang Jueya (1984)
KHMER	Khmer	Haiman (2011)
MONIC	Mon	Jenny (2005)
PALAUNGIC	Wa	Zhou Zhizhi & Yan Qixiang (1984); Wang Jingliu (1994)
	Blang	Li Daoyong et al. (1986)
	Hu	Jiang Youguang & Shi Jian (2016)
KHMUIC	Khmu	Chen Guoqing (2002)
	Bumang	Dao Jie (2007)
PAKANIC	Bugan (or Khmuic)	Li Yunbing (2005)
MANGIC	Kemie	Chen Guoqing (2005)
	Buxing (Bit) (or Palaungic/Pakanic)	Gao Yongqi (2004)
KATUIC	Pacoh	Alves (2006)
BAHNARIC	Stieng	Bon (2014)
5. TIBETO-BURMAN		
KUKI-CHIN	Daai-Chin	So-Hartmann (2009)
LOLO-BURMESE	Burmese	Jenny & Hnin Tun (2016)
	Nuosu	Gerner (2013)
QIANGIC	Guiqiong	Rao Min (2015), pers.comm.
	Menya	Gao Yang (2015)
	Shixing	Chirkova (2009)
	Puxi Qiang	Huang Chenglong (2004)
	Longxi Qiang	Zheng Wuxi (2016)
	Yadu Qiang	LaPolla & Huang (2003)

KAREN

Eastern Kayah Li

Solnit (1997)