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Building and interpreting HAVE sentences in (mostly) English

The literature on the syntax and semantics of possession sentences is vast. However, much of it can be seen as trying to deal with two major puzzles: what we might call the *too many meanings* puzzle (why do possession constructions across languages have the ability to convey a myriad of seemingly unrelated meanings, like kinship, body parts, permanent ownership, abstract attributes, etc.?), and the *too many (surface) structures* puzzle (why do possession constructions vary so much in their surface syntax across languages, from transitive HAVE constructions, to existential BE constructions containing an oblique possessor, to copular BE constructions containing a PP possessee?; Why is the transitive HAVE pattern relatively rare?).

I suggest that a solution to both of these puzzles is forthcoming if we take thematic roles out of the syntax, and instead have them be read off from the output of syntax in the semantic component (a conclusion argued for already on different grounds by Schäfer 2008; Wood 2012; Bruening 2013; Marantz 2009, 2013). The post-syntactic conception of thematic roles has an important consequence: whether a given argument-introducing head takes a complement or specifier is determined in the syntax, but whether it assigns a thematic role or not is determined in the semantics. This means that the notion of "syntactic argument of head X" is potentially independent of the notion of "semantic argument of head X". I argue that this independence is key to understanding the syntactic structures of possession sentences and how they give rise to the gamut of apparently unrelated "possessive" interpretations. In particular, I argue for the following hypotheses, which rely on this conception

(1) a. HAVE and BE are realizations of the same abstract light verb 'v'. Semantically, this 'v' is a type-neutral identity function, which will simply pass the denotation of its complement up the tree (this follows a long tradition of proposals that BE and HAVE are meaningless in themselves).

b. This 'v' is spelled out as HAVE only if it occurs in the environment of Kratzer's (1996) Voice, and Voice takes a specifier. Otherwise, this 'v' is spelled out as BE. (i.e., HAVE is simply the transitive form of BE- much in the spirit of Hoekstra 1994. The analysis also follows the tradition of Freeze 1992 and Kayne 1993 in taking HAVE to be BE+"something else", but takes the "something else" to be something other than an incorporated preposition).

c. The thematic roles associated with permanent ownership and the various inalienable possession relations (the part-of relation, kinship, etc) are associated with distinct DP-internal argument-introducing heads, but languages may vary in whether they first-merge the possessor in a possession sentence into the specifier of one of these DP-internal positions, or somewhere higher up in the tree.

d. The main source of cross-linguistic variation in the syntax of possession sentences is thus *the position in which the possessor is introduced into the structure.* If the possessor is introduced in spec-VoiceP, we have a HAVE construction/language. If the possessor is introduced anywhere lower than spec-VoiceP (e.g. in a spec position inside the possessee DP itself, in the spec of a pP which takes the possessee as its complement, in the spec of an applicative head, etc.), then we have a BE construction/language.

1

Since there are many ways of merging a possessor into the structure which lead to BE (anywhere below VoiceP), but only one way to merge a possessor into the structure which yields HAVE (into spec-VoiceP), we account for both the relative rarity of HAVE languages and the formidable amount of variation within and across BE languages (compare Freeze 1992; Boneh & Sichel 2010; Rezac and Jouitteau 2008).

The main focus of this talk will be applying this perspective to main-verb have in English, with occasional reference to HAVE verbs in Romance languages. The account will cover possessive main verb have (including inalienable possession, permanent ownership, and temporary possession uses), light verb *have* (*we had a fight*), and various ECM-like uses of *have* (*the stadium has two pubs next to it, I had something terrible happen today, we had them rolling in the aisles, I had my butler shave the cow*, etc.). All of these uses of have will involve 'v' passing up the denotation of its complement up the tree to Voice (as per (1a)). Voice will then relate the DP in its specifier to that denotation via one of the independently-motivated options for interpreting Voice that have been proposed in the literature; e.g., by assigning a causer role, an agent role, an experiencer role, or by being interpreted expletively (an option motivated in Schäfer 2008; Wood 2012). The resulting analysis is very similar in spirit to those proposed in Belvin (1996), Cowper (1989), Harley (1998, 2002), Iatridou (1995), Kim (2011a,b), Ritter & Rosen (1997), and Saebo (2009), with several friendly (yet important) amendments. Most prominently, I will argue that it is not the case that HAVE's complement is invariably a small clause, but that it is sometimes a simple DP. I will show that this helps the account to avoid some awkward English-internal and cross-linguistic questions concerning when the predicate of this putative small clause has to be overt. In addition, assumption (1c), in combination with standard views on the semantics of definite determiners, will lead to a novel account of definiteness effects in HAVE sentences which attributes to them a different source than the definiteness effects found in existential sentences. This is a desirable move- as I will show, there are many mismatches between the definiteness effects found in HAVE sentences and those found in existentials (something which in itself militates against assigning possessive HAVE sentences the same underlying syntax as existentials, as Freeze 1992 does).