

The syntax of having: An NRT proposal for Afranaph

We propose ‘the syntax of having’ as an NRT for Afranaph. More specifically, we envision study of (a) predicative possession; and (b) so-called possessor raising—where a nominal syntactically occurs as dependent of a verb but is semantically understood as possessor of one of the verb’s arguments. We illustrate these two construction types with data from the Bantu language Kinande (J42):

- (1) a. Kámbale a-wíte nyúmba. [predicative possession]
1Kambale 3s-have 9house
‘Kambale has a house.’
- b. ná-kúrugut-a [Sáráh] y’ [oko-mugóngo] [possessor raising]
1s-scrubbed-fv 1Sarah lk’ 17loc-3back
‘I scrubbed Sarah’s back (Lit: I scrubbed Sarah on the back.)’

Consider first predicative possession, which involves a relation between two entities, a possessor and a possessum. Generativists (e.g., Kayne 1993, Hoekstra 1991, den Dikken 1995, a.o.) and typologists (e.g., Locker 1954, Clark 1978, a.o.) alike share the intuition that this relation has a locational component. The idea of possession expressing a sharing of location finds some morphological support in predicative possession in Swahili, for example, where the possessor is the subject and the *be* verb plus the comitative marker *na* appears followed by the possessum (possessor+be+with+possessum):

- (2) ni- li- kuwa na nyumba (Halpert & Diercks 2015, p.3)
1SG-PST-be with 9house
‘I had a house.’

Stassen (2013) indicates five major forms for the expression of predicative possession (<https://wals.info/chapter/117>): i) a transitive *have*-type construction; ii) an oblique locative intransitive structure involving the possessum as grammatical subject, a copula, and a locative possessor; iii) an oblique genitive intransitive structure, with the possessum as grammatical subject, a *be*-type copula and a genitive possessor; iv) a topic possessive where, as with obliques, the possessum is grammatical subject of *be* copular verb and the possessor is expressed as a topic; v) a *with*-possessive construction where the possessor is grammatical subject of a *be*-type copula and the possessum is introduced by a comitative/conjunctive marker, which suggests a “simultaneity” between possessor and possessum. Wals.info shows all five construction types can be found in languages of Africa (<https://wals.info/feature/117A#3/4.21/95.98>). However, the oblique genitive occurs in just one African language in the data base (*Beja*–Cushitic).

Both WALS and Halpert & Diercks (2015) appear to agree that (narrow) Bantu languages have only *with*-possessives. However, the example in (1) from Kinande, which has a *have* verb, shows this generalization is incorrect. Afranaph currently has no systematic data on predicative possession for any language in the project, although it is possible to infer, by searching the database for the word *have* in the translation, that five languages have a *have*-type construction. Furthermore, a focused search of Tamanji’s Bafut grammar reveals Bafut has a *with*-possessive. Otherwise, there is no information about predicative possession. A systematic questionnaire can straightforwardly establish the form for predicative possession. Moreover, it can be structured to reveal the complexity of predicative possession in a language. For example, English uses *have* in a broad and general way. Not only is ownership expressed with *have*, but also experiences such as illnesses (to *have* a cold), or inalienable possession, or temporary possession. Our investigation of Kinande demonstrates that a rich variety of predicative possessive forms are used depending on the semantics of the possession. In addition, we found that internal cognitive and physiological states such as thoughts, ideas, dreams, and illnesses cannot be expressed using predicative possession (the equivalent of *to have a dream* is impossible). Of relevance to the intuition that possession involves shared location, we observed that when possession literally indicates a shared physical location between inanimate possessor and possessum, an oblique locative possessive must be used (the equivalent of *on the tree are three birds*) rather than a *have*-type construction (intended: *the tree has three birds on it*).

Finally, we discovered differential object marking in Kinande predicative possessive constructions such that things that can be held in the hand are marked with a locative class marker. A syntactic analysis of this phenomenon is offered in Irimia and Schneider-Zioga (2019).

Systematically collected data as sketched above can help establish whether semantically different possessive relations are instantiated via different syntactic structures, as the Kinande data seem to suggest. We also note that the idea of possession extends to other areas of the grammar such as DOC's (Kambale gave Magulu the book → Magulu has the book), modal meanings (*to have to do*), adnominal possession, and possessor raising. Concrete data that indicates the syntax of predicative possession will bear on questions such as whether possession is thematically or structurally encoded.

A fuller understanding of the *syntax of having* will also shed light on questions of nominal licensing. This issue has been explicitly addressed with respect to Bantu languages (Harford Perez 1985, Diercks 2012, Halpert 2015, van der Wal 2015, Carstens & Mletshe 2015). We have discovered differential object marking in predicative possession in Kinande such that nominals referring to objects that can be held in the hand (a type of salience/specificity) are differentially marked with a locative class marker. As Irimia and Schneider-Zioga (2019) discuss, this suggests that nominal licensing is at play in at least one Bantu language. Another phenomenon related to nominal licensing has to do with the status of transitive verbs such as *need*; where, as Halpert & Diercks (2015) discuss, a correlation between transitive *have* and transitive *need* has been argued to relate to argument licensing in a language. Comparing languages in this respect, that are otherwise similar, except with regard to predicative possession, is likely to shed light on nominal licensing, in keeping with the discussion of Halpert & Diercks (2015).

We also propose that the *syntax of having* project investigate the widespread phenomenon of external possession/possessor raising. The relation between adnominal possession constructions and possessor raising poses the question of whether that relation might best be captured via movement or control or perhaps something entirely different. We identified little research beyond the interesting work of Keach & Rochemont (1992) and Henderson (2014) that directly addresses external possession in African languages. Building on their research, we identified three distinct classes of external possession in Kinande, with possessor raising in inalienable possession illustrated in (1b). We note that the inalienable possessum is placed in the locative class and the external possessor occurs behaves like a full argument of the verb without any additional morphology, such as an applicative marker, occurring. Only the external possessor here behaves fully like an object, contrary to expectations for multiple XP constructions in Kinande. There are clearly identifiable restrictions on which verbs can be part of the inalienable possessor raising construction as well as what type of inalienable objects can participate. External possession when part-whole possession and alienable possession constructions with animate possessors are also considered. In that case, both possessor and possessum behave like objects in Kinande and the possessors are marked with the locative class marker *oko-*.

- (3) a. mó-b-erír-y-e [*(**okó-**)mútóká] kw' [ebíringo] **[part-whole external possession]**
 aff-2-clean-trans-fv 17loc-3car lk' 8wheel
 'They cleaned the wheels of the car.' (wheels are necessarily on the car)
- b. ná-mat-ul-a [*(**oko-**)Sárah] kw' [ezípe] **[alienable external possession]**
 1S-fasten-REV-FV 17LOC-1Sarah lk' 9zipper
 'I unfastened Sarah's zipper.' (she is necessarily wearing the thing with the zipper)

The Afranaph project currently has no data concerning external possession. Our work on Kinande, which rests on the aforementioned literature, allows us to identify relevant parameters of variation with respect to external possession. In short, our proposed NRT on the *syntax of having* promises to bring to light data and generalizations that are not yet available within the Afranaph project. Moreover, its findings will support theoretical work of interest to linguists of various theoretical backgrounds.