

snippets

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Harves and Kayne (2012) argue that only those languages that have a transitive verb of possession also have a transitive ‘need’, which takes a nominative subject and an accusative direct object (with no preposition). Based on the distribution of transitive ‘have’ and ‘need’, they distinguish three types of languages: (i) Be-languages that lack possessive ‘have’ and transitive ‘need’, such as Russian, Hindi and Hungarian, (ii) Have-languages with transitive ‘need’, such as English, Icelandic and Basque, and (iii) Have-languages without transitive ‘need’, such as French, Latin and Farsi.

The present snippet aims to provide data showing that Farsi is a Have-language that allows transitive as well as non-transitive ‘need’ with different syntactic properties. It is also shown that Farsi uses ‘be’ to express predicative possession in idiomatic expressions.

Firstly, as can be seen in (1), *ketab* ‘book’ can appear as the accusative direct object of *ʔehtiaj daštæn* ‘to need’ (as in (1a)) or as the object of the preposition *be* ‘to’ (as in (1b)).

- (1) a. *ʔin ketab-o ʔehtiaj dar-æm* (transitive ‘need’)
 this book-OM need have-1SG
 ‘I need this book.’
 b. *be ʔin ketab ʔehtiaj dar-æm* (non-transitive ‘need’)
 to this book need have-1SG
 ‘I need this book.’

Interestingly, however, when *ketab* ‘book’ appears between the preverb *ʔehtiaj* ‘need’ and the light verb *daštæn* ‘to have’, it must necessarily be the object of the preposition *be* ‘to’. This is illustrated in (2a-b).

- (2) a. *ʔehtiaj be ʔin ketab dar-æm* (non-transitive ‘need’)
 need to this book have-1SG
 ‘I need this book.’
 b. **ʔehtiaj ʔin ketab-o dar-æm* (transitive ‘need’)
 need this book-OM have-1SG

As can be seen in (3)-(4), this seems to be a standard behavior for objects of Persian complex predicates that can appear in transitive or non-transitive form.

- (3) a. *be ʔin ketab dæst zæd-æm* (non-transitive)
 to this book hand hit.PST-1SG
 b. *dæst be ʔin ketab zæd-æm*
 hand to this book hit.PST-1SG
 ‘I touched this book.’

- (4) a. ?in ketab-o dæst zæd-æm (transitive)
 this book-OM hand hit.PST-1SG
 b. * dæst ?in ketab-o zæd-æm
 hand this book-OM hit.PST-1SG
 ‘I touched the book.’

The only case where the accusative direct object can appear between the preverb and the light verb is the case of clitic pronouns, as in (5a). The clitic pronoun *-eš* ‘it’ can also be the object of the preposition *be* ‘to’, as in (5b).

- (5) a. ?ehtiaj-eš dar-æm (transitive ‘need’)
 need-it have-1SG
 b. beh-eš ?ehtiaj dar-æm (non-transitive ‘need’)
 to-it need have-1SG
 ‘I need it.’

Secondly, Farsi uses another complex predicate, *lazem daštæn*, to express transitive ‘need’. This is shown in (6).

- (6) a. ?in ketab-o lazem dar-æm (transitive ‘need’)
 this book-OM necessary have-1SG
 ‘I need this book.’
 b. * be ?in ketab lazem dar-æm
 to this book necessary have-1SG

Thus, Farsi is a Have-language with both transitive and non-transitive ‘need’.

In addition, as Farsi is a Have-language, we do not expect that it uses ‘be’ to express possession. Yet, there are fixed expressions with idiomatic reading in this language where possession is expressed by *budæn* ‘to be’. This can be seen in (7). Note that, similar to Be-languages, the case on the possessors *nun* ‘bread’ and *?ab* ‘water’ is nominative.

- (7) nun-et næ-bud ?ab-et næ-bud
 bread.NOM-you.GEN NEG-be.PST.3SG water.NOM-you.GEN NEG-be.PST.3SG
 lit. ‘You didn’t have bread? You didn’t have water?’
 idiomatic ‘You had everything you needed, so why did you do x?’ (x determined in context)

The nouns *nun* ‘bread’ and *?ab* ‘water’ may occasionally be replaced with other nouns such as *xune* ‘house’, *pul* ‘money’, etc. However, these substitutions do not change the idiomatic interpretation.

Reference

Harves, S. and R.S. Kayne. (2012) “Having ‘need’ and needing ‘have’.” *Linguistic Inquiry* 43(1), 120-132.