"Having" and "Being" Across Languages- Spring 2015

Time: Mon-Weds-Fri, 12-1   **Location:** KCB 107
Professor: Neil Myler   **Email:** myler@bu.edu
Office: 621 Commonwealth Ave   **Office hours:** Monday 3.30-5 & Thursday
       Room B08   10-11.30; or by appointment

Course website: Blackboard Learn

Course objectives:

This course aims to introduce students to a number of fundamental questions about linguistic relativism, language universals, and the relationship between grammar and meaning, as well a number of techniques and frameworks in comparative morphosyntax. It does this by focusing on an issue that has vexed linguists from many different subtraditions: the expression of the notions of "possession" and "essence" across languages. Despite the apparently basic nature of these notions, languages differ strikingly in how they are expressed. This variation leads to a number of difficult questions. Why do languages vary so much in how they convey possession and essence? Why do only a minority of the world's languages have a transitive verb "have"?   Why do languages like English have a verb "be", whereas many other languages do perfectly well without one? Why do some languages, like Spanish, have more than one verb equivalent to "be"? Are such differences indicative of culture influencing grammar, or not? What do the notions "having a sister", "having a cold", and "having a car" have in common, that they employ the same structure in so many languages? Why do the verbs meaning "have" and "be" creep their way into the grammatical systems in so many languages, becoming auxiliaries and other grammatical morphemes?   Students explore such questions, and write a short research paper addressing some aspect of the topic in a language of their choice.

Prerequisites for the course:
CAS LX 250 Introduction to Linguistics (or equivalent), or permission of the instructor.

Students completing the course will learn:
- To show knowledge of the major empirical phenomena in the domains of "possession" and "essence", and how they relate to broader issues in morphosyntax and semantics
- To use online data-bases, such as the *World Atlas of Language Structures* and *Syntactic Structures of the World's Languages*, to carry out research in comparative morphosyntax

- To engage critically with primary linguistic literature, both generative and functional-typological
- To evaluate arguments concerning whether there are any direct links between culture and grammar, using the typology of possession as a case-study
- To extract relevant data from grammatical descriptions on unfamiliar languages, and show what bearing they have on a theory of Universal Grammar

Required Reading:

There is no main textbook for this course. Instead, we will be reading a variety of papers and chapters from various books on the topics we will be covering. All readings will be posted to Blackboard Learn well in advance of the class to which they correspond. Since class discussion will often revolve around the readings or presuppose them as a starting point, be sure to complete the readings before class. Keeping up with the reading is essential to passing this course- it is your responsibility to gauge how much time you will need to complete each week's reading, and to budget your time accordingly.

Course Requirements and grading:

- Class participation (10%)
- Assignments (30%)
- Essay on linguistic/cultural relativism (20%)
- Presentation based on final-project-in-progress (10%)
- Final project (30%)

Class participation will be assessed on the basis of your attendance record and your level of participation in class discussions/in-class exercises.

The Assignments will be a mixture of linguistic problem-solving (i.e., applying analytical techniques and skills learned in class to unfamiliar linguistic data) and short-answer critical thinking questions.

The Essay on linguistic/cultural relativism is a 4-page essay to be turned in at the beginning of class on **Friday, April 10**. It has occasionally been suggested that the vast amount of grammatical variation in possession constructions is caused by cultural differences amongst different groups. Students read primary literature on this topic and, assimilating this literature with their knowledge from the rest of the course, produce a 4-page essay evaluating the debate.

For the Final project, students produce a 5-10 page paper (single spaced). Students can choose from two possible types of final project, depending on their interests and knowledge of relevant areas of theoretical linguistics. Option (i) is to produce a descriptive study of some aspect of possession and/or copula constructions in a particular non-Indo-European language or language family, showing how the constructions in question fit into the broader typology of "having" and "being" across languages. Students may choose any non-Indo-European language or group of related languages, so

long as adequate sources on the language(s) are available. Option (ii) is to write a theoretical syntax and/or semantics paper on any topic related to "having" and "being", on any language or group of languages. To be eligible for Option (ii), students need to have taken Syntax I and/or Semantics (or have equivalent knowledge), and the intended topic must be discussed with and approved by the instructor.

By Spring Break, students taking Option (i) must have settled upon a choice of language(s) and have established (in co-ordination with the instructor) a reading list of descriptive materials on the language(s) (this list could consist of a single descriptive grammar, if it is of high enough quality). Students taking Option (ii) must meet with the instructor to gain approval for their topic **by Spring Break**, and they too will establish a suitable reading list with the help of the instructor by this date.

Students give a Presentation based on their final-project-in-progress in Week 14. The final project itself should be submitted in pdf form by email by Noon on **Tuesday, May 5.**

Course policies:

Copyright. All materials used in this course are copyrighted. This is obvious in the case of the textbook readings, **but it also holds of my lecture slides, exercises, and other materials.** Reproducing class materials, or uploading them to websites, is a copyright infringement.

New assignments are posted to Blackboard on Friday mornings, and are due on the following Friday. Completed assignments are to be printed out and turned in at the beginning of Friday class. Email submission is not permitted unless you are unable to attend class for some valid reason.

Late assignments are not accepted, except under relevant extenuating circumstances.

Please let me know of any unavoidable absences, whether for religious, personal, or health reasons, as soon as you become aware of them. If you know you will be observing one or more religious holidays this semester, please examine the syllabus to determine which class days you will need to miss, and let me know by email as soon as possible. I will work with you to help you catch up on missed work, in accordance with BU's policy on religious absences:
(http://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/absence-for-religious-reasons/)

Procedures. Class time will be used to reinforce, practice, and extend material found in the readings. As well as new material, classes will often involve group exercises designed to reinforce the more difficult concepts.

Classroom etiquette. No cell phones. Laptops are to be used only for taking notes. Even so, you might be better off leaving your laptop at home and taking hand-written notes:
 http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop

Extra credit exercises will be granted only at my discretion and, if granted at all, will be made available to the whole class in the form of additional "bonus" sections of assignments or exams.

Academic Integrity. All students are responsible for understanding and complying with the BU Academic Conduct Code, available at:
http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/

Graduate students should refer to the GRS Academic Conduct Code, which can be found here:
http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/forms-policies-procedures/academic-discipline-procedures/

Collaboration. If you decide to form a study group to work together on assignments, your collaboration should not go beyond discussing ideas together. In other words, **you must write up your own assignment separately from the group, using only your own words** (except when quoting other work directly, in which case use citations as standard).

The following are all **banned forms of collaboration**:
- Having one or more members of the group produce a "group draft", or "group essay plan", which individual members of the group then customize.
- Writing up on separate computers while conferring with each other in real time (whether in person or via skype, chat services, or any other medium).
- Using another student's complete assignment as a reference when completing your own.

Furthermore, **when assignments are problem-set-based rather than essay-based, I encourage you to try to work alone**, at least at first. Otherwise, it will be hard for you to tell how much you've really understood.

Grading standards:

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93-100	A	78-79.99	C+
90-92.99	A-	73-77.99	C
88-89.99	B+	70-72.99	C-
83-87.99	B	60-60.99	D
80-82.99	B-	< 60	F

Course Overview (subject to change- any updates will be posted to Blackboard)

Week Dates	Topic	Readings	Deadlines
Week 1 Wednesday, Jan 21	**Introduction** *Course overview* *Class logistics*		
Friday, Jan 23	**Possession,** *having* **and** *being***: the key mysteries**	*Myler 2014 pp.1-14*	
Week 2 Monday, Jan 26	**"Too many meanings"** *The meaning of BE and HAVE* *Different subtypes of "possession"* *Alienable vs. Inalienable possession* *Non-possessive uses of "possessive" verbs*	*Heine 1997 Ch 1 pp.10-44*	
Wednesday, Jan 28	*"too many meanings" cont.*		
Friday, Jan 30	*"too many meanings" cont.*		
Week 3 Monday, Feb 2	**Basics of Morphosyntactic Typology** *Grammatical functions* *Case and agreement* *Word order* *Argument structure*	*Greenberg 1963*	
Wednesday, Feb 4	*Basics of morphosyntactic typology cont.*		
Friday, Feb 6	*Introduction to online typological databases: WALS and SSWL*		Assignment 1 Due (short-answer essay prompt evaluating theories of the meaning of HAVE)
Week 4 Monday, Feb 9	**Morphosyntactic typology and syntactic theory** *Sentence structure* *Word-order and the head*	*Baker 2003 Ch 3 & 5*	

	parameter		
Wednesday, Feb 11	*The structure of verb phrases unaccusativity*		
Friday, Feb 13	*Case and grammatical functions in syntactic theory*		Assignment 2 Due (Problem set working with WALS)
Week 5 Monday, Feb 16	NO CLASS-PRESIDENT'S DAY (make-up day Feb 17)		
Tuesday, Feb 17	***The typology of "being"*** *What are copulas for? Copula morphology: verbal, pronominal, and other copulas Languages with multiple copulas Existential vs. predicative copulas*	*Pustet 2003 Ch 2*	
Wednesday, Feb 18	*The typology of "being" cont.*		
Friday, Feb 20	**The structure of copular sentences** *unaccusativity and unergativity "Pred" Formal analyses of languages with multiple copulas*		Assignment 3 Due (Drawing trees, working with the head parameter, unaccusativity)
Week 6 Monday, Feb 23	**Typology of Possession I- Possession in the Noun Phrase** *Major typological patterns of possessed Noun Phrases The morphosyntax of (in)alienability*	*Heine 1997 Ch 3*	
Wednesday, Feb 25	*Typology of possession in the noun phrase cont.*		
Friday, Feb 27	*The structure of Noun Phrases; Capturing (in)alienability in*	*Adger 2003 Ch 7*	Assignment 4 Due (Problem set on BE structures)

	a formal approach		
Week 7 Monday, Mar 2	**Typology of Possession II** *Stassen's typology of possession sentences*	*Stassen 2009 Ch 2*	
Wednesday, Mar 4	*More on the typology of possession sentences; critiques of Stassen*	*Myler 2014 Ch 2 pp. 100-121*	
Friday, Mar 6	*The typology of possession cont.*		Assignment 5 due **Students must inform me of the topic language(s) for their Final project by this date**
Monday, Mar 9	SPRING BREAK		
Wednesday, Mar 11	SPRING BREAK		
Friday, Mar 13	SPRING BREAK		
Week 8 Monday, Mar 16	**Formal Approaches to the Typology of Possession** *The "too many (surface) structures" puzzle* *Main types of reaction to the puzzle* *Relating HAVE and BE*		
Wednesday, Mar 18	*Movement-based analyses of the typology of possession*	*Myler 2014 Ch 2 138-158*	
Friday, Mar 20	*Non-movement-based analyses of the typology of possession*		No Assignment Due
Week 9 Monday, Mar 23	**Having desires and having needs: possession and psychological predicates** *Typology of psychological predicates and their relation to possession*	*Isačenko 1974*	
Wednesday, Mar 25	*Formal approaches to psych predicates*		
Friday, Mar 27	*Having need and needing have(?)*	*Harves and Kayne 2012* *Halpert and Diercks 2013*	Assignment 6 Due (syntax of possession constructions)

Week 10 Monday, Mar 30	**Cultural influence on language (?)** *Discussion of the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis; Neo-Whorfianism*	*Everett 2012 Ch 10 & 11*	
Wednesday, Apr 1	*Possession and culture*	*Aikhenvald 2012*	
Friday, Apr 3	*Possession and culture cont.*	*Dixon 2012*	No Assignment Due (work on Linguistic/Cultural Relativism Essay)
Week 11 Monday, Apr 6	**"Have" and "Be" beyond possession** *"Grammaticalization" and auxiliary uses of HAVE and BE*	*Heine 1997 Ch 4*	
Wednesday, Apr 8	*The history of the future in Romance*		
Friday, Apr 10	*Possession and obligation*		Essay on Linguistic/Cultural Relativism is due
Week 12 Monday, Apr 13	**Case study of possession and essence in a particular language family: Quechua** *Introduction to the Quechua family and Quechua morphosyntax*	*Sample final project*	
Wednesday, Apr 15	*BE and possession in Bolivian Quechua vs. Argentine Quechua*		
Friday, Apr 17	*A case study in predicativization*		No Assignment Due (work on Final Project & Presentation)
Week 13 Monday, Apr 20	NO CLASS- PATRIOT'S DAY		
Wednesday, Apr 22	**Discussion of Linguistic/Cultural Relativism Essays** *Essays are returned to students, class discussion of*		

	major themes arising from the essays		
Friday, Apr 24	**Wrapping up** *Retrospective look on the course* *Discussion of logistics for class presentations* *Final-project troubleshooting*		No Assignment Due (work on Final Project & Presentation)
Week 14 Monday, Apr 27	**Class Presentations**		
Wednesday, Apr 29			

Final Project Due: 11.59am Tuesday, May 5th (by email in pdf format)

Course Bibliography

Adger, David. 2003. *Core Syntax: A Minimalist Approach*. Oxford University Press.

Aikhenvald, Alexandra. 2012. *Possession and Ownership: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective*. In Aikhenvald, Alexandra & R. M. W. Dixon (eds.) *Possession and Ownership* pp.1-64. Oxford University Press.

Baker, Mark C. 2003. *The Atoms of Language*. New York: Basic Books.

Dixon, R. M. W. 2012. *Possession and also ownership- vignettes*. . In Aikhenvald, Alexandra & R. M. W. Dixon (eds.) *Possession and Ownership* pp. 291-308. Oxford University Press.

Everett, Daniel. 2012. *Language: The Cultural Tool*. New York: Vintage.

Greenberg, Joseph H. 1963. *Some universals of grammar with particular reference to the order of meaningful elements*; reprinted in Roberts, Ian (ed.) 2007. *Comparative Grammar Vol 1* (London: Routledge)

Halpert, Claire and Michael Diercks. 2013. No need for 'have' (for 'need'): A reply to Harves and Kayne (2012). Ms, University of Minnesota and Pomona College.

Harves, Stephanie and Richard S. Kayne. 2012. Having 'need' and needing 'have'. *Linguistic Inquiry* 43.1:120-132.

Heine, Bernd. 1997. *Possession*. Cambridge University Press.

Isačenko, Alexander V. 1974. On 'HAVE' and 'BE' Languages (A Typological Sketch). In Flier, Michael (ed.) *Slavic Forum: Essays in Linguistics and Literature* pp.43-77. The Hague: Mouton

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Pustet, Regina. 2003. *Copulas: Universals in the categorization of the lexicon.* Oxford University Press.

Stassen, Leon. 2009. *Predicative Possession*. Oxford University Press.