Intensional transitives and silent HAVE: Distinguishing between WANT and NEED

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Background: Intensional transitive predicates have received a great deal of attention in the philosophical and semantic literature for decades (Quine 1960, Montague 1960, Partee 1974, Karttunen 1976, among many others). Recently a number of proposals have been made to bring the underlying syntactic representations of these predicates in line with their semantics (Larson et al. 1997, Harley 2004, Marušič and Žaucer 2006). Larson et al. (1997) argue explicitly that these predicates are in fact not regular transitives at all, but rather, concealed clausal complement constructions, which accounts for their intensional semantics. They argue that sentences such as those in (1) are derived from the control structures in (2).

Problems: While appealing on a number of levels, such an analysis fails to account for a number of diagnostics typically used to distinguish between raising verbs, such as NEED, and control verbs, such as WANT. It is well known, for example, that raising verbs allow for expletive subjects (3), maintain a constant semantics under passivization (4), and allow for low scope of indefinite subjects (5). Control verbs, on the other hand, exhibit none of these behaviors, suggesting that the underlying syntax of these two constructions cannot be identical.

Furthermore, from a broader typological perspective, one is struck by the fact that the vast majority of Indo-European languages have a productive transitive verb WANT, while only some of them have a transitive verb NEED. Even more striking is the fact that of those languages with transitive NEED, all of them are HAVE-languages rather than BE-languages, i.e., languages with a productive verb HAVE used for possession. Until now, this generalization has gone unnoticed and unaccounted for in the literature. To put it simply, the generalization is that you can't NEED if you don't HAVE, but you're free to WANT all you like. This suggests that Larson et al.'s (1997) analysis for intensional transitives in English cannot be extended straightforwardly to languages such as Russian and Hindi that have a productive verb WANT but lack a productive verb HAVE for general cases of possession (see 6-7).

If possessive HAVE is a crucial component in the syntactic derivation of WANT, we have no straightforward explanation for the existence of such a predicate in various BE-languages of the world. However, it very well might be the case that NEED requires HAVE at some level of representation, since having this verb seems to be a necessary, but not sufficient, requirement for the existence of transitive NEED within Indo-European languages. Russian, a BE-language, has numerous ways of expressing necessity, although it has no transitive verb NEED (8). In contrast, Czech, Polish, Spanish, Dutch, German, Swedish, and Icelandic are all HAVE-languages that do have a transitive verb NEED (see 9 for Swedish). Interestingly, however, the mere presence of HAVE in a language is not enough to guarantee the existence of NEED. Bulgarian, Romanian, French, and Italian are all HAVE-languages that lack a transitive verb NEED (see 10 for French) and instead make use of the *have need of* construction.

Proposal: In order to account for these facts I propose, contra Larson et al. (1997), that the underlying syntactic structures for WANT and NEED are in fact distinct. A control analysis of WANT is argued for that does not (necessarily) involve a null predicate HAVE, while a raising analysis of NEED is posited that involves incorporation of HAVE and NEED. The challenge that such an analysis must face is to explain why various HAVE-languages (e.g., Bulgarian, Romanian, French, Italian) do not allow incorporation of HAVE to yield transitive NEED. I argue that this is due to the fact that the lexical item for NEED in these languages has lexical specifications that prohibit HAVE from incorporating into it. Specifically, I argue that NEED is an inherent case-assigner in these languages, assigning case via a preposition, and that this fact prevents incorporation with a structural Case-assigning predicate such as HAVE. I conclude with a discussion of Finnish, a non-Indo-European language, which at first glance appears to be a counterexample to the generalization noted here, since it seems to be a BE-language, yet it has transitive NEED. Following Pylkkänen (1998) I argue that Finnish is underlyingly a HAVE-language. In addition, I show that it offers independent evidence for the raising analysis of NEED and the control analysis of WANT argued for here.

(1) a. John wants a new car. (2) a. John$_i$ wants [$_{CP}$ PRO$_i$ to HAVE a new car].
     b. John needs a new car.   b. John$_i$ needs [$_{CP}$ PRO$_i$ to HAVE a new car].

(3) a. There **needs** to be an adult in every car.
     b. *There **wants** to be an adult in every car.

(4) a. The doctor **needs/wants** to examine every patient.
     b. Every patient **needs/wants** to be examined by the doctor.   *(Meaning shift for WANT)*

(5) Somebody **needs/wants** to be home when the kids get back.

     a. NEED/*WANT > Somebody
     b. Somebody > NEED/WANT

(6) a. Ivan   **xočet**   novuju mašinu.   (Russian)
        Ivan-NOM   wants-3 SG   new   car-ACC

     b. U Ivana   **byla**   novaja   mašina.
        at Ivan-GEN   was-FEM   new   car-NOM FEM

(7) a. mai~   caaval   **caahta**   hu~.   (Hindi)
        I   rice   want-MASC   be-1 SG
        'I want rice.'

     b. Mohan   ke-pass   ek   kitaab   **hai**.
        Mohan   GEN-near   one   book   be-3SG
        'Mohan has a book.'

(8) a. Mne   **nužna**   èta   kniga   (Russian)
        me-DAT   necessary-FEM   this book-NOM FEM

     b. Rebenok   **nuždaetsja**   v   vashej   pomošči
        child-NOM   needs-3SG   in your   help-PREP

     c. Nam   **trebujutsja**   perevodchiki
        us-DAT   needs-3 PL   translators-NOM PL

(9) a. Anna   **har**   en   ny   bil.   (Swedish)
        Anna   have-3SG   a   new car

     b. Anna   **behöver**   en   ny   bil.
        Anna   need-3SG   a   new car

(10) a. J'**ai**   une   voiture.   (French)
        I-have-1SG   a   car

     b. J'**ai**   **besoin**   d'une voiture.
        I-have-1SG   need   of-a   car

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