

# Salish Denominals: ‘Full’ and Light Verb Interpretations of *have*\*

Frances Sobolak  
Cornell University

**Abstract:** In this paper, I build upon Gerdtts and Hukari (2008) to provide further generalizations about verbal prefixes across the Salish language family. I focus on outlining two different uses of verbal prefixes: denominals and light verb constructions. I present syntactic generalizations and diagnostics to distinguish the two constructions. I also consider the Halkomelem verbal element *c-* ‘have’ that can be used in both denominals and light verb constructions. I outline a relational understanding of *have* that attempts to capture its different interpretations with the help of syntactic restrictions of the verb’s semantics. I argue that verbs like *have* can occur as a light verb when its syntactic position forces the verb to lose its lexical semantics. This is preliminary work of an investigation into a verb’s different interpretations throughout the verbal spine.

**Keywords:** denominal, light verb, syntax-semantics interface

## 1 Introduction

Salish verbal prefixes exist across the language family, though not robustly. Gerdtts and Hukari (2008) provide an extensive description of verbal prefixes in Island Halkomelem, as well as an overview of verbal prefixes across the language family. The most common verbal prefix across the family goes back to Proto-Salish \*ʔapʔ ‘have’ (Kroeber 1999). The reflexes of this verbal prefix across the family most often are used to denote possession, as shown in (1–4).<sup>1</sup>

(1) čn ep-síc’m  
1sg.abs have-blanket  
‘I have a blanket.’ (Montana Salish; Pete 2010)

(2) kən kʔ-q<sup>w</sup>ácqən  
1sg.abs have-hat  
‘I have a hat.’ (Okanagan; Mattina 1993:247)

---

\* The Salish data in this paper come from a combination of published works, unpublished manuscripts, and personal correspondences — all of which would not be possible without those who share their knowledge of the languages they speak, including: Hul’q’umi’num’ (Halkomelem), Secwepemetsin (Shuswap), Nsyilxcən (Upper Nicola dialect of Okanagan), Séliš (Montana Salish).

Contact info: fes56@cornell.edu

<sup>1</sup> The lateral fricative ʔ in Montana Salish and Okanagan gets deleted when preceding *s*. Orthography in the examples are exactly as they are in the sourced material, and thus certain characters might not be standardized across the languages.

Glossing abbreviations are as follows: lnk= Linking particle, q= Question particle, neg= Negation, aux= Auxiliary, tr= Transitive suffix, subj= Subject, obj= Object, erg= Ergative argument, abs= Absolutive argument, sg= Singular, pl= Plural, erg= Ergative, obl= Oblique argument, 1= First person, 2= Second person, 3= Third person, loc= Locative, det= Determiner, mid= Middle Voice, past= Past tense, redup= Reduplication, dem= Demonstrative, fem= feminine, masc= Masculine, nom= Nominative, perf= Perfective aspect.

(3) pəl-cítx<sup>w</sup>  
 have-house  
 ‘have a house’ (Shuswap; Kuipers 1974:71)

(4) c-tiqiw  
 have-horse  
 ‘have a horse’ (Halkomelem; Gerdts and Hukari 2008:489)

In this paper, I aim to provide further generalizations about verbal prefixes. In Section 2, I focus on outlining two different uses of verbal prefixes: in denominals and in light verb constructions. In Section 3, I present syntactic generalizations and diagnostics to distinguish the two constructions.

In Section 4, I consider the Halkomelem *c-* ‘have’ that can be used in both denominals and light verb constructions. I outline a relational understanding of *have* that attempts to capture the different interpretations of *have* in a way that recognizes restrictions the syntax puts on a verb’s semantics. I argue that verbs like *have*, which have a relational and lexical semantic component, can occur as a light verb when its syntactic position forces the verb to lose its lexical semantics when occurring with a verbal complement. This is preliminary work of an investigation into a verb’s different interpretations throughout the verbal spine.

I conclude in Section 5.

## 2 Salish verbal prefixes

A theoretical survey of verbal prefixes in all Salish languages is beyond the scope of this paper, but see Gerdts and Hukari (2008) for a more robust overview of verbal prefixes across the language family. The term *verbal prefix* is used regularly in the Salish linguistics literature to refer to a verbal bound morpheme that must attach to a noun host (see Krober 1999, Gerdts and Hukari 2008 for Halkomelem; Lyon 2010; 2011; 2013 for Okanagan; Davis et al. 2020 for Lillooet and ʔayʔaʃuθəm). Verbal prefixes cannot stand alone as an independent root. The term *verbal prefix* is misleading in some contexts, as the verbal element in at least three Salish languages is a verbal clitic that attaches to the leftmost-edge of its complement. In the Halkomelem example (5), *c-* is attached to the left edge of *p’əq’ swetə* ‘white sweater’, not just the noun *swetə*. Also see the Montana Salish and Okanagan examples (6–8).

(5) ʔi ʔə č ʔəw’ c-p’əq’ swetə?  
 aux q 2subj lnk have-white sweater  
 ‘Do you have a white sweater?’ (Halkomelem; Gerdts and Hukari 2008:496)

(6) ʔi ʔə č ʔəw’ c-płet p’əq’ swetə?  
 aux q 2subj lnk have-thick white sweater  
 ‘Do you have a thick, white sweater?’ (Halkomelem; Gerdts and Hukari 2008:496)

(7) čn epł-esxmíp t sp’iqáłq  
 1sg.abs have-dried obl berry  
 ‘I have dried berries.’ (Montana Salish; Thomason 2018)

- (8) 1 q<sup>w</sup>’umqn-átk<sup>w</sup> k-síl<sup>w</sup>a? i? xλ’ut ...  
 loc head-water have-big det rock  
 ‘At Chapperon Lake there is a big rock...’ (Okanagan; Lyon 2013:129)

In this paper, I will use the term *verbal prefix* when speaking more broadly about the language family or when a verbal element’s status as prefix or clitic is unclear, and I will use the term (*verbal*) *clitic* when referring to a specific verbal clitic in one of the above languages. Not all Salish languages have verbal prefixes; those that do typically only have one or two (the most common meaning ‘have’) (Kroeber 1999; Gerdts and Hukari 2008). In fact, some Salish languages do not have a verb root for ‘have’, leaving the verbal prefix the only way to denote simple possession predicates. The table below shows the forms for ‘have’ in the three languages that I focus on in this paper, and the Proto-Salish form (which, as a prefix itself, shows that the reflexes of it are not newly/synchronically reanalyzed from roots) (Kroeber 1999; Gerdts and Hukari 2008; Pete 2010; Lyon 2013).

**Table 1:** Verbal prefix ‘have’ across Proto-Salish, Halkomelem, Okanagan, and Montana Salish.

	Prefix	Meaning	Corresponding root?
Proto-Salish	*ʔapɫ-	‘have’	×
Halkomelem	c-	‘have’	×
Montana Salish	epɫ-	‘have’	×
Okanagan	(ʔa)kɫ-	‘have’	×

## 2.1 Denominals

The most common Salish verbal prefix construction is a denominal construction. The above examples (1–3) in Section 1 are denominal constructions. A Salish denominal construction is defined as an intransitive predicate comprised of, typically, a noun root and a verbal prefix. Before jumping into the Salish, I first want to consider ‘denominal’ more broadly — and the syntactic assumptions/implications I’ll be making in this paper. This will help motivate my analysis in Section 4. Consider the English sentences below:

- (9) a. Katherine gave a sigh.  
 b. Katherine sighed.
- (10) a. Manny took a drive.  
 b. Manny drove.
- (11) a. Lennon did a dance.  
 b. Lennon danced.

The (a) sentences have an overt verb and a nominal complement. The verbs in the (b) sentences are clearly (lexically) related to the nominal complements in the (a) sentences, and we want to capture that relationship. Following Hale and Keyser (1993; 2002), we assume that the noun form is the underlying lexical item, and the verbal forms are derived via syntactic incorporation. Hale and Keyser (1993) propose that an English denominal verb (like in the (b) sentences above) is formed when a nominal complement is incorporated into an abstract light verb (LV). The motivation for such

is a combination of syntactic behavior and economy. Syntactically, denominal verbs are constrained by locality restrictions like the Head Movement Constraint (Travis 1984). If the process of creating a denominal verb was simply lexical, there's not much explanation for why we can't create denominal verbs with indirect objects or subjects. These constraints show that the process of creating an English denominal verb is indeed syntactic and not simply a lexical process.

(12) English light verb construction:

[<sub>v</sub> LV [<sub>DP</sub> NP]]  
 [<sub>v</sub> give [<sub>DP</sub> a sigh]]

(13) English denominal:

[<sub>v</sub> LV+NP [<sub>DP</sub> ]]  
 [<sub>v</sub> sighed [<sub>DP</sub> ]]

Interestingly, the English denominal doesn't always have the same aspectual sense as its overt light verb counterpart construction (see Harley 2005 for a systematic look at how denominals get different aktionsart properties). Consider the difference between the light verb construction (14a) and the denominal construction (14b). Example (14a) isn't compatible with the tag 'for 15 minutes' which means it is a bound, telic event. Example (14b) however is compatible with the tag, meaning the denominal is atelic. This generalization doesn't hold across the examples in (15), where both the denominal and light verb construction is compatible with the tag.

(14) a. Katherine gave a sigh \*for 15 minutes.  
 b. Katherine sighed for 15 minutes.

(15) a. Manny took a drive for 15 minutes.  
 b. Manny drove for 15 minutes.

In comparison, Salish denominal constructions are formed with an overt verbal prefix that attaches to a nominal complement. Compare (13) with (16–19). Unlike an English denominal, a Salish denominal does not have an abstract light verb.

(16) [<sub>v</sub> epʔ [<sub>DP</sub> NP]]  
 čn ep-síc'm  
 1sg.abs have-blanket  
 'I have a blanket.'  
 (Montana Salish; Pete 2010)

(17) [<sub>v</sub> kʔ [<sub>DP</sub> NP]]  
 kən kʔ-q<sup>w</sup>ácqən  
 1sg.abs have-hat  
 'I have a hat.'  
 (Okanagan; Mattina 1993:247)

(18) [<sub>v</sub> pəʔ [<sub>DP</sub> NP]]  
 pəl-cítx<sup>w</sup>  
 have-house  
 'have a house'  
 (Shuswap; Kuipers 1974:71)

- (19) [<sub>v</sub> c [<sub>DP</sub> NP]]  
 c-tiqiw  
 have-horse  
 ‘have a horse’ (Halkomelem; Gerdts and Hukari 2008:489)

Given these basic similarities and differences, let us now consider Salish denominals more closely. There has been some descriptive coverage of Salish denominals in the literature, but most extensively in Halkomelem (Gerdts and Hukari 2008). Other mentions of denominals include Okanagan (Lyon 2010; 2011; 2013), Lillooet and ʔayʔajuθəm (Davis et al. 2020), and some comparative work in Kroeber (1999).

The Halkomelem minimal pair below shows a contrast between a regular transitive construction in (20), where the verb root ʔiləq ‘buy’ has the required transitivity suffix and ergative agreement, and a denominal construction in (21) where the verb root ʔiləq is absent and instead a verbal prefix *tx<sup>w</sup>*- ‘buy’ attaches to its nominal complement. Note that a denominal construction doesn’t have a transitivity suffix or ergative agreement. The denominal construction is an intransitive predicate. The subject of a denominal construction is an absolutive argument.<sup>2</sup>

- (20) niʔ ʔiləqə-t-əs k<sup>w</sup>θə swəy’qeʔ k<sup>w</sup>θə ka:  
 aux buy-tr-3erg det man det car  
 ‘The man bought a car.’ (Gerdts and Hukari 2008:497)

- (21) niʔ tx<sup>w</sup>-ka: k<sup>w</sup>θə swəy’qeʔ  
 aux buy-car det man  
 ‘The man bought a car.’ (Gerdts and Hukari 2008:497)

Denominal constructions, as intransitive predicates, don’t have transitive morphology (the transitive suffix *-nt* or the transitive person marking). The intransitive subject pronominal must be used (*čn* in the below example).

- (22) čn epɬ-pus  
 1sg.abs have-cat  
 ‘I have a cat.’ (Montana Salish; Pete 2010)

- (23) \*epɬ-pus-nt-n  
 have-cat-tr-1sg.subj  
 ‘I have a cat.’

However, even though denominals can’t occur with transitive morphology, they seem to be compatible with the Middle suffix *-m*.

<sup>2</sup> Additional evidence in Halkomelem comes from ergative argument restrictions: Island Halkomelem doesn’t allow proper nouns to be subject of transitive clauses but does allow proper nouns to be subject of denominal constructions, showing that denominal constructions are syntactically intransitive (Gerdts and Hukari (2008)). Additionally, see Davis et al. (2020) for further evidence that subjects of denominals in Salish are not ergative, by exploring ergative extraction restrictions in Lillooet.

- (24) c-məq'méq'-əmə  
 have-fill.oneself-mid  
 'to fill oneself until bloated' (Halkomelem; Gerdts and Hukari 2006:59)
- (25) qe epł-ʔewtús-m  
 1pl.subj have-oppose-mid  
 'We have an enemy.' (Montana Salish; Thomason 2018)
- (26) ʔaws-píx-əmə  
 go-hunt-mid  
 'to go hunting' (Okanagan; Lindley 2016:224)

This fact is important for two reasons: first, it will help distinguishing denominals from light verb constructions, and second, this shows that since the verbal clitic and Middle suffix (Voice suffix) can co-occur, they must be in different syntactic heads in denominals, unlike in light verb constructions (see Section 4).

In summary, Salish verbal prefixes can attach to nominal complements to produce a denominal construction, which is an intransitive predicate with absolutive person marking. The denominal predicate does not host transitive or ergative morphology, but can host the Middle Voice suffix. Given these basic properties of Salish verbal prefixes and denominal constructions, in the next section I introduce another verbal prefix construction: the light verb construction.

### 3 Light verb constructions

In the above section, we saw how verbal prefixes can attach to nominal complements to create denominals. In the beginning of the previous section, I noted similarities and differences between English and Salish denominal constructions — the main difference being that Salish denominals have an overt verbal element, while English denominals have an abstract verbal element. Traditionally, these abstract verbal elements in English denominals are referred to as *light verbs*. Light verbs are verbal elements that don't fully predicate, meaning they don't syntactically or semantically behave like their main verb counterparts. The English examples (27–29) all contain a light verb.

(27) Katherine **gave** a sigh.

(28) Manny **took** a drive.

(29) Lennon **had** a laugh.

Semantically, the subject in (27) is not *giving* a sigh. The light verb *give* is also not requiring its full/usual three theta-role arguments: actor, benefactor, theme (*\*Katherine gave a sigh to Frances*). These English examples demonstrate how light verbs can act as a main verb with a nominal complement. Light verbs, cross-linguistically, often act as a modifier to the event argument, and the light verb's function in those cases has more to do with the event structure. In fact, much of cross-linguistic research on light verbs has focused on the light verb's effect on event structure (e.g. Butt 2010; Diesing 2000). These changes to the events, aspectual changes, appear with light verb constructions. Compare (30) to the clearly shortened event in (31). In (32), the event of petting the

cat is a repeated action. Compare that to (33), where the light verb *git* ‘gives’ works with the main verb *glet* ‘pet’ to create an event of giving the cat a single pat. The light verb constructions in (34) and (35) show how different light verbs in Jaminjung can attach to the same main verb *bul* ‘appear’, creating different effects on the event. Depending on the event, light verbs can create inceptive readings, mirative readings, truncated readings, etc.

- (30) Fran looked at the painting.  
(for an indefinitely long time)
- (31) Fran got a look at the painting.  
(for a short moment ≈ glance)
- (32) *zi glet di kats*  
she pets the cat  
‘She pets the cat (repeatedly).’ (Yiddish; Diesing 1998:126)
- (33) *Zi git a glet di kats*  
she gives a pet the cats  
‘She gives the cat a pat (once only).’ (Yiddish; Diesing 1998:126)
- (34) *bul ga-ruma-ny*  
appear 3sg-come-past  
‘appear’ (Jaminjung; Butt 2010:11)
- (35) *bul gani-ma*  
appear 3sg-hit.past  
‘appear (suddenly)’ (Jaminjung; Butt 2010:11)

Certain instances of the Halkomelem verbal clitic *c-* ‘have’ are light verbs. The below examples (36) and (38) show the ‘regular’ uses of the verb roots *lem* ‘look’ and *haq<sup>w</sup>* ‘smell’. Adding the verbal clitic *c-* ‘have’ turns the construction into a light verb construction — the verbal prefix *c-* clearly isn’t contributing possession and the construction’s interpretation takes on a diminutivized reading of the event. Example (37) is expressing a shortened event of looking and (39) is expressing a shortened event of smelling.

- (36) *lem-ət*  
look-tr  
‘look at it’ (Gerdts and Hukari 2008:493)
- (37) *c-lem*  
have-look  
‘have a look’ (≈ catch a glimpse) (Gerdts and Hukari 2008:493)
- (38) *haq<sup>w</sup>-əm*  
smell-mid  
‘smell (v.)’ (Gerdts and Hukari 2008:493)

- (39) *c-haq<sup>w</sup>*  
 have-smell  
 ‘catch a whiff’ (Gerdts and Hukari 2008:493)

Just like denominals, light verb constructions are intransitive predicates with absolutive arguments. They do not occur with transitive morphology or ergative agreement. Also, as mentioned above, light verbs modify the event — often changing the aspectual class, or aktionsart, of the event. It’s worth noting that the Halkomelem light verb *c-* seems to change activities into achievements, though a more thorough investigation is needed. As of now, I don’t have evidence that light verb *c-* only attaches to activity roots like ‘smell’ and ‘look,’ and turn those activities into achievements — ‘get a whiff’ and ‘have a look’. A more systematic look at this is needed, though I suspect one might find different kinds of event modification depending on what kind of verb root the light verb attaches to (see Bar-el 2005 for systematic aspectual class behaviors and patterns in Squamish).<sup>3</sup>

I’ll touch on this more in the next section, but I haven’t found any light verb constructions in Okanagan or Montana Salish, and I haven’t investigated beyond these three languages. A more thorough investigation is needed, to see what other Salish languages have light verb constructions with a verbal prefix.

### 3.1 Generalizations

As mentioned above, the Halkomelem light verb construction consists of the verbal clitic *c-* ‘have’ and a verb root. More specifically, these light verb interpretations appear when the verbal clitic is attaching to a dynamic, event-denoting verb root. Not all roots denote events, and so not all Halkomelem constructions with *c-* will have an event that can be modified. For example, a simple possessive construction with a noun root that doesn’t denote an event will not appear with any event modification, since there is not much to modify in a stative event.<sup>4</sup>

- (40) *c-tiqiw*  
 have-horse  
 ‘have a horse’ (Halkomelem; Gerdts and Hukari 2008:489)

- (41) *c-telə*  
 have-money  
 ‘have money’ (Halkomelem; Gerdts and Hukari 2008:491)

This holds true in Montana Salish and Okanagan. In these languages, the verbal clitic meaning ‘have’ mostly attaches to nouns and expresses possession — which is a stative (non-dynamic) event. In fact, I have found no evidence of light verb interpretations — meaning, occurring with event modification — in either Montana Salish or Okanagan.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Also see Diesing (2000) for an account of what kind of event modification systematically occurs depending on the verb’s aktionsart in Yiddish.

<sup>4</sup> This isn’t true cross-linguistically. Some languages can get mirative readings of light verb constructions with stative events. See Diesing (1998; 2000) for mirative readings in Yiddish.

<sup>5</sup> There is always the possibility that light verb constructions exist in these languages, I just haven’t come across them.



(42) čn epł-síc'm  
 1sg.abs have-blanket  
 'I have a blanket.'  
 (Montana Salish; Pete 2010)

(43) kən kł-q<sup>w</sup>ácqəŋ  
 1sg.abs have-hat  
 'I have a hat.'  
 (Okanagan; Mattina 1993:247)

This is not to say that in Montana Salish and Okanagan the verbal clitic *have* only attaches to nouns and denotes possession. Verbal clitics in these languages can attach to verbs, and result in existential predicates. Compare the simple predicate *x<sup>w</sup>úy* in (44) with the existential predicate in (45), formed by adding the verbal clitic *epł-*. The same distinction exists between (46) and (47). Note that in (48), the existential reading exists with a noun complement. I leave the possibility of systematically distinguishing possessive from existentials with noun roots to future work. The examples in (49–50) show existential predicates in Okanagan can be formed with nouns, too.

(44) x<sup>w</sup>úy  
 go  
 'S/he/they went.'  
 (Montana Salish; Pete 2010)

(45) epł-x<sup>w</sup>úy  
 have-go  
 'Some (people) went.' / 'There was going.'  
 (Montana Salish; Thomason 2018)

(46) χ<sup>w</sup>a-χ<sup>w</sup>ʔéy  
 redup-laugh.pl  
 'They laughed.'  
 (Montana Salish; Pete 2010)

(47) hoy epł-χ<sup>w</sup>ʔ-χ<sup>w</sup>ʔéy  
 finish/quit/then have-redup-laugh.pl  
 'There was some laughter.'  
 (Montana Salish; Thomason 2018)

(48) ta epł-ʔék<sup>w</sup>n  
 neg have-fish.eggs  
 'There are no fish eggs.'  
 (Montana Salish; Thomason 2018)

(49) ik'líʔ kł-sʰ'aʔcínəŋ iʔ k'ł wist  
 dem have-deer det loc up.high  
 'There's deer up in the hills.'  
 (Okanagan; Lyon 2011:228)

(50) kn nstils ik'líʔ kł-síyaʔ  
 1sg.abs think dem have-saskatoon  
 'I think there's some berries over there.'  
 (Okanagan; Lyon 2011:238)

I leave further investigation of these to future work, as I haven't found any diagnostic differences between denominals and existential uses of *have*. But, crucially, while Montana Salish and

Okanagan *have* can occur with verbs, the result is not a light verb construction. There is no aspectual modification to the event (like diminutivizing the event, inceptive reading, etc.). Table 2 highlights some distinguishing characteristics between denominals (consistent across Halkomelem, Okanagan, and Montana Salish) and Halkomelem light verb constructions. Salish denominals don't appear with any aspectual modification, and they appear to contribute their main verb/regular semantics. In contrast, Halkomelem light verb constructions occur with a verb root. The *c-* 'have' clitic is light, and the event is diminutivized. This raises a curious, but maybe circular, point: light verb interpretations only arise when the verbal prefix is attached to a verb root, so we can say that if the complement is a verb root, it must be a light verb interpretation. And likewise, we don't get light verbs in Montana Salish or Okanagan because the clitic doesn't attach to verbs. This doesn't explain why the light verb requires a verbal complement, or if the verbal complement forces the verbal prefix to take on a light verb interpretation. I offer an explanation for this in the next section.

**Table 2:** Summary of verbal prefix 'have' and interpretation diagnostics.

	Denominal	Light verb construction	Existential
Complement type	noun	verb	noun/verb
Complement aspectual class	state	dynamic	state/dynamic
Co-occur with Middle Voice suffix?	yes	no	?

#### 4 Why *have*?

In this section, I consider why light verb constructions aren't possible with other verbal prefixes in Halkomelem. Given the generalizations and patterns observed so far, it's important to address the fact that the only light verb constructions that I've found are (i) in Halkomelem, and (ii) are with the *c-* 'have' verbal clitic. Halkomelem has four verbal prefixes, and only *c-* seems to be compatible with a light verb interpretation. Consider these other verbal prefix constructions in Halkomelem:

(51) ɬ-səplil  
 ingest-bread  
 'eat bread' (Halkomelem; Gerdts and Hukari 2008:490)

(52) tx<sup>w</sup>-lələm'  
 buy-house  
 'buy a house' (Halkomelem; Gerdts and Hukari 2008:490)

I have found no evidence of the other verbal prefixes occurring with a verbal complement. As mentioned above, we can descriptively (and a bit circularly) say that these verbal prefixes cannot be used as light verbs because they don't attach to a verbal complement — and a verbal complement is a necessity in a light verb construction. Consider the discussion in the beginning of this paper: why, in English, can some verbs be light verbs but other, semantically similar, verbs cannot? *I had a laugh* versus *\*I owned a laugh*. In order to understand why *have* and not *own*, consider the function of *have* more closely. The verb *have* appears in quite a lot of contexts. The different uses and interpretations of *have* are well-explored (e.g. Harley 1998; Ritter and Rosen 1997; Beavers et al. 2008). A brief overview of some different interpretations of *have* is below.

- (53) Possessive:  
Fran **has** a horse.
- (54) Locative:  
The horse **has** a bird on its head.
- (55) Causative:  
Fran **has** the horse walk around.
- (56) Auxiliary:  
The horse **has** walked four miles.

Additionally, others have noted a fairly robust connection in many languages between how the language forms possessive, locative, and existential constructions. Given these behaviors of *have*, some have argued for a partial or complete unification of the different interpretations of *have*, accomplished with the use of an underspecified denotation of *have*. For example, Harley (1998) and Ritter and Rosen (1997) argue for a syntactically determined interpretation of *have*, heavily dependent on the nature of its complement. The crucial observation is that *have* is a relational element — *have*, no matter its ‘final’ interpretation, is expressing some relation between two or more arguments. In fact, Harley (1998) notes that *have* always requires a subject, across all interpretations. This could account for why no interpretation of *have* can be passivized.

- (57) Possessive:  
Fran **has** a horse.  
\*A horse was had by Fran.
- (58) Locative:  
The horse **has** a bird on its head.  
\*A bird on its head was had by the horse.

Syntactic attempts at capturing some interpretations of *have* all require *have* to have no lexical semantic content — and its semantics are often not addressed. Some have proposed a formal semantics for *have*, which formalize this relational nature of *have* by utilizing the variable R (e.g. Partee 1997; Beavers et al. 2008; Sæbø 2009). Crucially, none of these analyses assume a rather transparent semantic denotation like:<sup>6</sup>

- (59)  $[[have]] = \lambda x_e \lambda e_s [have(x)(e)]$

They, instead, formalize the (R)elational aspect of *have*. There is much more to a full overview and investigation into the formalization of *have*, but for the purposes of this paper, the relational nature of *have* is important because I here propose a denotation of possessive-*have* that is compatible with the light verb interpretations we see in Salish light verb constructions. I follow much of the previous literature in assuming that the denotation for *have* is underspecified. I differ slightly from much of the above literature in that I follow a Ramchand-esque understanding of the verbal spine, where the denotation of the verb changes as it moves higher in the VP. Butt (2003) and Butt and

<sup>6</sup> Semantic types (subscripted) are as follows: *e*=individuals, *s*=eventualities (not to be confused with the event argument *e*).

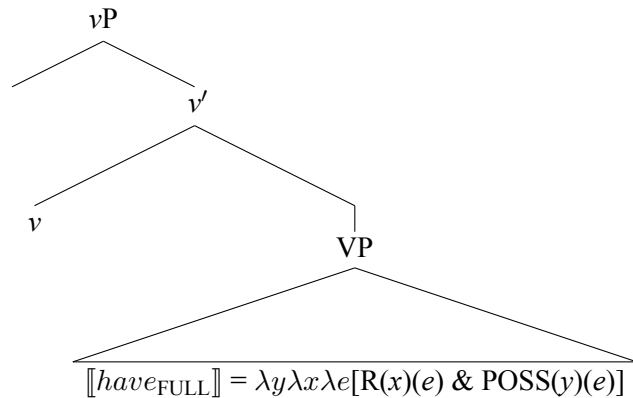
Ramchand (2005) outline this kind of proposal for light verbs in Urdu, where the light verb *li* ‘take’ contributes differently to the event’s interpretation based on its location on the verbal spine. In (60), the light verb *li* ‘take’ is situated, syntactically, above the main verb *likʰ* (V) ‘write’ and isn’t contributing any sense of ‘taking’, but instead is contributing the sense of ‘completely’.

- (60)    nadya=ne            xat                    lkʰ    li-ya  
           Nadya.fem=erg   letter.masc.nom   write   take-perf.m.sg  
           ‘Nadya wrote a letter (completely).’    (Urdu; Butt and Ramchand 2005:19)

Given this understanding of the relationship between syntactic position and semantic contribution to the event, I propose the following denotation for ‘full’ possessive-*have*:

(61)     $\llbracket have_{FULL} \rrbracket = \lambda y_e \lambda x_e \lambda e_s [R(x)(e) \ \& \ POSS(y)(e)]$

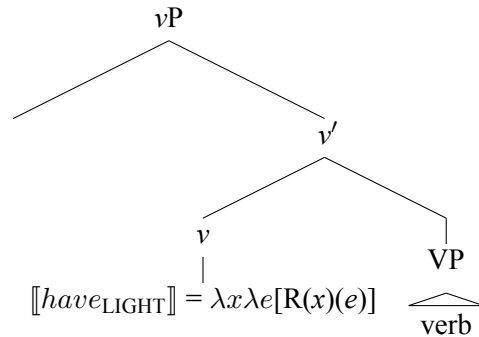
(62)



The denotation in (61) reads: there is a relation between  $x$  and the event argument, and in that event,  $y$  is being possessed. The VP is traditionally associated with classical lexical semantics — the verb’s meaning — while the vP is traditionally associated less with the verb’s meaning and more with syntactic relationships (i.e. agreement). I propose the nature of these two heads (V and  $v$ ) restrict what amount (or what kind) of semantics is allowed at those particular heads. Verbs, like *have*, that have both a clear lexical semantics part (in this case, possession) and a relational part (see Ritter and Rosen 1997; Beavers et al. 2008) are compatible with both heads, assuming the denotation is truncated to accommodate the syntactic heads’ requirements. I propose that, if *have* is situated higher in the VP (if, for example, another verb occupies the V head), the denotation of the verb is truncated to remove some of the lexical semantics content, see (63–64). The denotation in (63) reads: there is a relation between  $x$  and the event argument. The lexical semantics of possession is not present in this light verb.

(63)     $\llbracket have_{LIGHT} \rrbracket = \lambda x \lambda e [R(x)(e)]$

(64)



I take R in these denotations to be a variable for the subject’s role in the sentence. For Partee (1997) specifically, R is a predicate variable over two-place relations. In sum, we can think of *have* as a slightly unspecified lexical entry, where R is a variable for whatever role the external argument will have in relation to the predicate.<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, these proposed denotations of *have* that are sensitive to the syntactic position that they are occurring in raises questions about what kinds of verbs can be light verbs — I address this in the conclusion, as an area for future study.

#### 4.1 Putting it all together

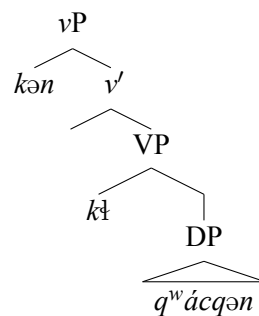
Let’s start by considering the full interpretation cases of the verbal prefixes in denominals. We can start by assuming a basic syntactic structure, with the verbal clitic in V and its nominal complement base-generated as the VP’s complement, as shown in the Okanagan example in (65). I leave the question of how/if these two elements are syntactically incorporated in some way to future research.

(65) *kən kɫ-qʷácqən*  
 1sg.abs have-hat  
 ‘I have a hat.’

(Okanagan; Mattina 1993:247)

(66)  $[[have]] = \lambda y_e \lambda x_e \lambda e_s [R(x)(e) \ \& \ POSS(y)(e)]$

(67)



The verbal clitic *kɫ* sits low in the VP, which is compatible with its fullest lexical semantics, resulting in its ‘regular’ possessive interpretation.

<sup>7</sup> See Sobolak (2021a) for an explanation of how R helps accomplish a compositionally-determined understanding of the subject.

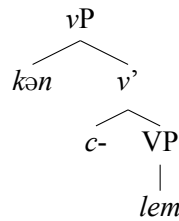
For light verb constructions, since the base is a verb root, this verb root would naturally be in the V-head (69). This requires the verbal clitic to be situated elsewhere in the structure, presumably the next higher head, *v*. Following the above discussion, the denotation of *have* will be truncated (see (69)), since *have* is situated in *v*. This is also compatible with the Middle Voice suffix data — light verb constructions cannot co-occur with a Middle Voice suffix because the light verb is occupying that syntactic head.

- (68) *kən*    *c-* *lem*  
 1sg.abs have-look  
 ‘I had a look.’

(Halkomelem; Gerdt and Hukari 2008)

- (69)  $[[have_{LIGHT}]] = \lambda x_e \lambda e_s [R(x)(e)]$

- (70)



In sum, in denominal constructions, the verb is situated in V-head, where it contributes its lexical semantics (possession). When forced to sit higher in the VP, like *v*-head, the verb will lose some of its semantics, specifically the lexical semantics of possession. In doing so, we’ve now come away from the traditional understanding of ‘light verb’ in close relationship with aspectual modification of the event. The ‘lightness’ that we see in the verb *have* is a semantic lightening due to syntactic restrictions.<sup>8</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

The main goal of this paper was to outline the differences between two verbal prefix constructions: denominals and light verb constructions. I also considered why light verb interpretations seem to be reserved to only *have* (specifically in Halkomelem). I proposed a relational understanding of *have* that attempts to capture the different interpretations of *have* in a way that recognizes restrictions the syntax puts on a verb’s semantics. I argue that verbs like *have* have a relational and lexical semantic component to its semantic denotation — the latter of which gets truncated when occurring with a verbal complement (i.e. in light verb constructions). This is a preliminary investigation into understanding why some verbs can be light, while others with similar semantics cannot.

More broadly, this investigation leaves open the possibility that other verbal prefixes across Salish can be used ‘lightly’, and hopefully makes predictions of their syntactic behavior. Lastly, I want to acknowledge the possibility of a blurred line between some light verb constructions (with compositional meaning) and idiomatic expressions. Consider the English expression:

<sup>8</sup> See Sobolak (2021a) for an explanation of the aspectual changes to the event, separate from the light verb.

(71) Don't have a cow!

We might want to say that the *have* here is a light verb, since the meaning clearly isn't a possessive, locative, or causative one. But there's also this understanding of the sentence as an idiomatic expression, in which case the meaning is not compositional at all, even with a light verb understanding of the verb. As fluency of the endangered Salish languages decline, it's possible that use of these light verb constructions become somewhat idiomatic. The more patterns and generalizations that we can observe and document, the more a compositional understanding can be posited and preserved.

## References

- Beavers, John, Elias Ponvert, & Stephen Wechsler. 2008. Possession of a controlled substantive: Light 'have' and over verbs of possession. *Proceedings of SALT XVIII*:108--125.
- Butt, Miriam. 2003. The light verb jungle. *Harvard Working Papers in Linguistics* 9:1--49.
- Butt, Miriam. 2010. The light verb jungle: Still hacking away. In Mengistu Amberber, Brett Baker, & Mark Harvey (eds.), *Complex predicates: Cross-linguistics perspectives on event structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 48--78.
- Butt, Miriam & Gillian Ramchand. 2005. Complex aspectual structure in Hindi/Urdu. In Nomi Erteschik-Shir & Tova Rapoport (eds.), *The Syntax of Aspect: Deriving Thematic and Aspectual Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 117--153.
- Davis, Henry, Laura Griffin, Marianne Huijsmans, & Gloria Mellesmoen. 2020. Extracting possessors in ʔayʔajuθəm (and beyond). *Papers of ICSNL* 55:87--106.
- Diesing, Molly. 1998. Light verbs and the syntax of aspect in Yiddish. *Journal of Comparative Germanic Linguistics* 1(2):119--156.
- Diesing, Molly. 2000. Aspect in Yiddish: The semantics of an inflectional head. *Natural Language Semantics* 8(3):231--253.
- Gerds, Donna & Hukari, Thomas. 2006. The Halkomelem Middle: A complex network of constructions. *Anthropological Linguistics* 48(1):44--81.
- Gerds, Donna & Hukari, Thomas. 2008. Halkomelem denominal verb constructions. *International Journal of American Linguistics* 74(4):489--510.
- Hale, Kenneth & Keyser, Samuel Jay. 1993. In Kenneth Hale & Samuel J. Keyser (eds.), *The view from Building 20: Essays in linguistics in honor of Sylvain Bromberger*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 53--109.
- Hale, Kenneth & Keyser, Samuel Jay. 2002. *Prolegomenon to a theory of argument structure*.

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Harley, Heidi. 1998. You're having me on!: Aspects of *have*. In Jacqueline Guéron & Anne Zribi-Hertz (eds.), *La grammaire de la possession*. Paris: Université Paris, 195–226.
- Harley, Heidi. 2005. How do verbs get their names? Denominal verbs, manner incorporation, and the ontology of verb roots in English. In Nomi Erteschik-Shir & Tova Rapoport (eds.), *The Syntax of Aspect: Deriving Thematic and Aspectual Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 42–64.
- Kroeber, Paul. 1999. *The Salish Language Family*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Kuipers, Aert. 1974. *The Shuswap Language: Grammar, Texts, Dictionary*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Kuipers, Aert. 2002. *Salish Etymological Dictionary*. Missoula, MT : Linguistics Laboratory, University of Montana.
- Lindley, Lottie. 2016. *Okanagan Grouse Woman*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Lyon, John. 2010. Nominal modification in Upper Nicola Okanagan: A working paper. *Papers of ICSNL* 45:199–233.
- Lyon, John. 2011. The semantics of determiner phrases in Okanagan. *Papers of ICSNL* 46:194–266.
- Lyon, John. 2013. *Predication and Equation in Okanagan Salish*. PhD thesis. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.
- Mattina, Anthony. 1987. *Colville-Okanagan Dictionary*. Missoula, MT: Dept. of Anthropology, University of Montana.
- Mattina, Anthony. 1993. Okanagan aspect: A working paper. *Papers of ICSNL* 28:233–263.
- Partee, Barbara. 1997. Genitives: A Case Study. In: Johan van Benthem & Alice ter Meulen (eds.), *Handbook of Logic and Language*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 464–470.
- Pete, Tachini. 2010. *seliš nyoʔnuntn: Medicine for the Salish Language*. Pablo, MT: SKC Press.
- Ramchand, Gillian. 2008. *Verb meaning and the lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ritter, Elizabeth & Rosen, Sara. 1997. The function of *have*. *Lingua* 101(3):295–321.
- Sæbø, Kjell Johan. 2009. Possession and pertinence: The meaning of *have*. *Natural Language Semantics* 17:369–397.
- Sobolak, Frances Ellie. 2021. *Revisiting light verbs: Salish denominal constructions*. [ms]. Cornell



University.

Thomason, Sarah Grey. 2018. *Flathead language dictionary*. [ms]. The University of Michigan.

Travis, Lisa. 1984. *Parameters and effects of word order variation*. PhD thesis. MIT, Boston, MA.