Predicative possession choice in Argentinian Spanish: An experimental study

Martín Fuchs
Freie Universität Berlin
m.fuchs@fu-berlin.de

Kendra V. Dickinson
Rutgers University
kendra.dickinson@rutgers.edu

Scott A. Schwenter
The Ohio State University
schwenter.1@osu.edu

Abstract

This study investigates the expression of predicative possession in Argentinian Spanish, focusing on the alternation between two constructions: *tener* ('have') + NP and *estar con* ('be with') + NP. Building on previous research, we explore the factors that determine speakers' choices between these constructions, particularly the influence of temporal context and the presence of adverbs. Using a forced-choice experimental design, participants were presented with vignettes varying in temporal duration (durative vs. non-durative) and adverbial modification (extending, limiting, or none). Results show a strong overall preference for the *tener* + NP construction, particularly in durative contexts. However, the *estar con* + NP construction is more likely to be selected in non-durative contexts, especially when a limiting adverb is present. These findings suggest that the distinction between the two constructions is not purely semantic but also pragmatically modulated by temporal and contextual factors. We argue that this pattern reflects a subset-superset relationship between the two constructions, where *tener* + NP can cover a broader temporal scope than *estar*

con + NP. This overlap mirrors cross-linguistic findings on possessive constructions and aspectual distinctions, with implications for understanding grammaticalization processes in Romance languages.

Keywords: possession, Spanish, aspect, grammaticalization.

1. Introduction
1.1. Different ways of expressing possessive relations

Spanish displays a wide array of morphosyntactic strategies to encode possessive relations between a *possessor* and a *possessum.* Among them, the main grammatical devices[1] include attributive possession, as in (1), and predicative possession, as in (2):

(1)   Spanish
        El   auto   de   María   es   rojo.
        the   car   of   Mary   be.3SG.PRS red
        'Mary's car is red'

(2)   Spanish
        María tiene   un   auto   rojo.
        Mary have.3SG.PRS   a   car   red
        'Mary has a red car'

In this paper, we focus on the latter type—predicative possession—and two of its different means of expression in the Spanish language: *tener* 'have' + Noun Phrase (NP) and *estar con* 'be with' + Noun Phrase (NP).

From a crosslinguistic perspective, Stassen (2009) has shown that languages generally provide four ways of encoding predicative possession: three intransitive types and one transitive type with a direct object. Among the intransitive types, the first is a locative or existential construction that could be paraphrased as 'at *possessor*, there is *possessum*'. This type of device is used by languages such as Latin, Russian, or Irish, among others. The second type of intransitive construction is what Stassen calls the *topic construction*, where the *possessum* is construed as the grammatical subject of the sentence. We observe this construction in Mandarin and Thai, among other languages. Finally, the third intransitive construction is known as the WITH-possessive construction, where the *possessum* is constructed as an oblique argument, as in most Papuan languages, for example. As for the transitive construction with a direct object—also known as the HAVE-possessive construction—we can find it in languages such as Norwegian, Romanian, Albanian, or Wolof, among many others.

---

[1]   Spanish can also express possessive relations in many other ways. For example, the *possessor* can be instantiated by a possessive determiner agreeing in person and number features with the *possessor* and in number with the *possessum* (e.g., *Mi*/s auto/s 'my car/s', *Nuestro*/s auto/s 'our car/s'), or by a so-called *strong* possessive, which shares person and number features with the *possessor* and gender and number features with the *possessum* (e.g., El auto *mío* 'My car', Los autos *nuestros* 'Our cars'). For other less frequent ways of expressing possession in Spanish, see for instance Rodríguez and Howe (2023) and Suárez Palma (2024).

Stassen also mentions that these last two types—the WITH-possessive and the HAVE-possessive—are the two most common ways of expressing predicative possession across the languages of the world.

Nevertheless, many languages have more than one of these construction types available to express predicative possession in what are called *split predicative possession* systems (e.g., Stolz et al. 2008, Aikhenvald 2012). While some possessive splits are much more well-known, such as the contrast between alienable vs. inalienable possession, or the pronominal vs. genitive constructions in the domain of attributive possession, predicative possession splits can occur across different dimensions: (1) they can be possessor-oriented, such that the kind of possessor leads speakers to use one or the other construction; (2) *possessum*-oriented, where the grammatical form speakers use depends on properties of the *possessum*; or (3) time/manner oriented, where the choice of grammatical device is driven by considerations about the kind of relation that obtains between *possessor* and *possessum*.

1.2. Split predicative possession in Spanish

Our goal in this paper is to explore this last kind of split predicative possession system in Spanish since, in this language, we observe (at least) two different means of expression for predicative possession: a HAVE-possessive and a WITH-possessive, as in (3) and (4) respectively:

(3)   Spanish
        Tengo   ciudadanía   argentina.
        have.1SG.PRS   citizenship   Argentinian
        'I have Argentinian citizenship'

(4)   Spanish
        Estoy   con   auto.
        be.1SG.PRS   with   car
        LIT: 'I am with car' > 'I have a car'

In Spanish, this split in predicative possession appears to be influenced by the grammatical aspect of the relation between *possessor* and *possessum*. Specifically, it has been argued (e.g., Cifuentes Honrubia 2015) that the distinction between these forms is driven by the nature of the possessive relation –whether it is viewed as ongoing or as a completed, punctual event. According to this account, the HAVE-possessive, instantiated in Spanish by the *tener* + NP construction, expresses inalienable possession, conveying aspectual *imperfectivity*, since it conveys a possessive relation between *possessor* and *possessum* that extends over time without an explicit ending point. On the other hand, the WITH-possessive—expressed in Spanish by the *estar con* + NP construction—conveys alienable possession, and is claimed to be related to *perfectivity*, implicating a punctual, limited possessive relation. This kind of distinction between means of expression in a split possessive system—that is, a distinction based on grammatical aspect, and whether the sentence conveys an imperfective or a perfective possessive relation—has also been claimed to

be present in many other languages, such as Moroccan Arabic, Lithuanian, or Turkish (Stolz et al. 2008).

Spanish, though, seems to present a more complex distributional pattern, since the split displays more variability in usage. On the one hand, inalienable or permanent possession seems to be expressed exclusively with the HAVE-possessive, as can be seen in (5) and (6) below (we use singular 'they' as a gender-neutral pronoun in the English idiomatic translations):

(5)   Spanish
        Tiene   el pelo   rubio.
        have.3SG.PRS   the hair   blond
        'They have blond hair' ($\rightarrow$ it's their natural color)

(6)   Spanish
        Está   con   el pelo rubio.
        be.3SG.PRS   with   the hair blond
        LIT: 'They are with blond hair' > 'They have blond hair' ($\rightarrow$ they've dyed it)

In the sentence in (5), the use of the HAVE-possessive construction with no prior context leads to the interpretation that their natural hair color is blond, emphasizing the permanent nature of the possessive relation. By contrast, in the sentence in (6) (again, without additional context), the use of the WITH-possessive implies that their hair has been dyed from a different color, conveying the temporariness of the 'blondness' of their hair. That said, the implication that the HAVE-possessive construction conveys the permanence of the property ascribed to the possessor can be canceled by additional contextual information, as in (7), which is felicitous in a context where, for example, there is a person who changes their hair color every week:

(7)   Spanish
        Tiene   el pelo   rubio esta   semana.
        have.3SG.PRS   the hair   blond this   week
        'They have blond hair this week' ($\rightarrow$ they've dyed it)

In this case, we can observe that the use of an adverbial like *esta semana* 'this week' limits the temporal interval within which the person's 'blondness' holds, such that the HAVE-possessive construction conveys the same interpretation as the WITH-possessive construction; that is, a non-permanent, temporary one. Indeed, the sentence in (7) could be easily rendered with the WITH-possessive, but also adding the temporal adverbial specification in (7), since it is not redundant to use the purportedly temporary WITH-possessive with an adverbial that makes this temporariness explicit. This pattern is in line with a generalization made by Stassen (2009: 560 et seq.), where it is claimed that across languages, HAVE-possessives can always express WITH-possessive meanings, but that the opposite is not the case (that is, WITH-possessives should not always be able to express HAVE-possessive meanings, e.g., for inalienable possession in Spanish). Besides (7) above, showing how this generalization applies to Spanish in the case of a typically-permanent *possessum*, where the use of a HAVE-possessive does not necessarily convey permanent possession, we can also observe that in cases of

more typically-temporary *possessums*, the alternation between the HAVE-possessive and the WITH-possessive construction is also allowed, as in (8) and (9):

(8)   Spanish
        Tengo   plata   (conmigo)   ahora.
        have.1SG.PRS   money   with.me   now
        'I have money (with me) now'

(9)   Spanish
        Estoy   con   plata   ahora.
        be.1SG.PRS   with   money   now
        LIT: 'I am with money (on me) now' > 'I have money now'

We claim that this kind of distribution, which Stassen has observed for split possession systems, is very similar to theoretical proposals about a unified semantics for Progressive and Imperfective operators that analyze their differences in superset/subset terms (Deo 2009, 2015). According to these accounts, general imperfective forms, such as the Simple Present, can express all *imperfective* meanings, including the *progressive* one, but more specific progressive forms, such as the Present Progressive, can only convey a *progressive* meaning, and thus cannot express more general *imperfective* ones, such as the *habitual* or the *continuative*. This distinction creates an implicational relationship between these forms and meanings, such that all progressives are imperfective, but not all imperfectives are (solely) progressive. For example, when looking at present-day Spanish, we can observe that (10) below, where a Simple Present is used, is said to be ambiguous between a *progressive* and a *habitual* meaning, but (11), with the use of the Present Progressive, is said to only be able to express a *progressive* meaning:[2]

(10)   Spanish
        Ana   fum-a
        Ana   smoke-3SG.PRS
        'Ana smokes / Ana is smoking'

(11)   Spanish
        Ana est-á   fuma-ndo.
        Ana be-3SG.PRS   smoke-PROG
        'Ana is smoking'

Now, when we look at the Spanish predicative possessive system again in detail, both grammatical markers that express possession—the *tener* + NP construction, and the *estar con* + NP construction—seem to run counter to Stassen's generalization, since both markers appear to be compatible with adverbial modification that entails an extended, durative state of the possessive relation between

---

[2]   This is the view advanced in traditional descriptions of the alternation between the Simple Present and the Present Progressive in Spanish (e.g., Bull 1965, de Bruyne 1995, Roca Pons 1958, i.a.), but we are very much aware that the pattern is more complex, determined by linguistic and situational contextual factors, and varies across different Spanish dialects (e.g., Fuchs et al. 2020a, b).

possessor and *possessum* (also contra 'perfectivity' accounts of temporariness, such as Cifuentes Honrubia 2015). We can see this pattern in (12) and (13):[3]

(12)   Spanish
        Siempre   tengo   plata.
        always   have.1SG.PRS   money
        'I always have money'

(13)   Spanish
        Siempre   estoy   con plata.
        always   be.1SG.PRS   with money
        LIT: 'I am always with money (on me)' > 'I always have money'

These examples illustrate that both possessive constructions in Spanish can be used with the same NP, in the presence of an adverb like *siempre* 'always' that forces an imperfective, habitual, meaning, indicating that previous descriptions of the Spanish split possessive system do not sufficiently account for the observed overlap in their distribution.

Nevertheless, accounts of the Imperfective-Progressive alternation (Deo 2015, Fuchs 2020) also include a diachronic dimension that can help in understanding the distribution of split possessive systems like the Spanish one. In the analysis of progressive and imperfective markers, it has been observed that progressive constructions slowly but steadily develop into more general imperfective ones over time, acquiring these more general imperfective readings, such as the *habitual* or the *continuative*, in what is known as the Progressive-to-Imperfective grammaticalization path (e.g., Bybee et al. 1994). So, if a similar distinction is at work in the expression of predicative possession in Spanish, we can expect WITH-possessives to increasingly develop into more general markers of possession that are allowed to express more durative and permanent relations between *possessors* and *possessums*, just like the HAVE-possessives usually do.

Moreover, this kind of diachronic development has already been observed in Brazilian Portuguese (Schwenter & Dickinson 2020). In this language, the semantic difference between the HAVE-possessive –the construction *ter* + NP—and the WITH-possessive—realized by *estar com* + NP– has also been characterized in aspectual terms, but with a focus on imperfectivity (Avelar 2009). Under this account, *estar com* + NP establishes a relation between *possessor* and *possessum* that is transitory – a relation that is said to hold now, at this moment. In contrast, *ter* + NP expresses a relation between *possessor* and *possessum* that is taken to hold for a longer period of time. The diachronic relation between these two markers is mentioned by Perini, who argues that "*ter* + NP can also be used to express a momentary state, but this use is not common and sounds literary or old-fashioned. Thus, the sentence *Ele tem dor de cabeça* will normally be understood only as 'He is subject to headaches' and not as 'He has a headache (now)'" (Perini 2002: 277).

While 'permanent' versus 'transitory' (or 'temporary'; see Ruvalcaba 2020 for use of this term as applied to Spanish) is a good first description of most uses of *ter* +

---

[3]   We present constructed examples here for reasons of space and simplicity, but this exact pattern can be widely found in Twitter/X and corpus data.

NP in contrast to *estar com* + NP in Brazilian Portuguese, Dickinson and Schwenter (2020) show that the account fails to explain the considerable overlap that is found in the natural use between the two constructions. They argue, thus, that the distinction between them is not semantic, but more properly pragmatic in nature, such that certain contexts of interpretation lead to one form being preferred over the other. To make sense of these overlapping distributions, they propose an account very similar to existing approaches for progressives and imperfectives in Spanish (Fuchs 2020). In particular, they argue that the temporal interval to which *ter* + NP refers always includes the one that *estar com* + NP can refer to, in a superordinate-subordinate relation. In a nutshell, their argument –and the experimental evidence they provide– supports a subset-superset relation between the two Brazilian Portuguese constructions, such that *estar com* + NP makes salient the reference interval at which the possessive relation holds, while *ter* + NP makes salient a superinterval thereof.

Therefore, here we ask ourselves about the strength of the association of the HAVE-possessive construction in Spanish with the permanence of the possessive relation, and the linking of the WITH-possessive construction to the temporariness of the relation between *possessor* and *possessum*. To that end, we construct a forced-choice task that helps in assessing the preferences of native speakers to use one or the other grammatical construction in specific contexts that make salient distinctions about the length of the temporal interval at which the possessive relation holds. Our main hypothesis is that—just as in the Brazilian Portuguese case—the distinction between the two grammatical forms is not semantic but pragmatic in nature, such that the encoded meaning of both constructions overlaps considerably, and their distribution in usage is affected by additional contextual parameters. The prediction is that *estar con* + NP can only be used to refer to possessive relations that hold at a given reference interval, while *tener* + NP can be used not only to refer to these kinds of possessive relations, but also to ones that hold more extensively, at a superinterval of the reference interval. If any differences in usage patterns arise between Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese, we argue that they will be explained by diachronic processes where one of the two languages is further ahead in the grammaticalization and expansion of the WITH-possessive construction.

Before continuing, we should state that our focus on Argentinian Spanish in this study is mainly due to the goal of investigating the system of one particular variety of Spanish, and is not based on any dialect-specific hypotheses. Nevertheless, just as recent studies have shown that there are completely different predicative constructions in some varieties—e.g. the transitive *andar* possessive in Central American Spanish studied by Rodríguez and Howe (2023)—we do not discount the possibility that there could be dialectal differentiation in the use of the two instantiations of the HAVE- and WITH-possessive constructions that we analyze in this paper. Thus, we hope that future studies will employ methodologies similar to ours here in order to uncover possible dialect differences.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the methods of the experimental study we conducted to assess the distribution of the HAVE-possessive and the WITH-possessive construction in Argentinian Spanish. In Section 3, the results of the study are presented, first at a descriptive level, and then with the use of inferential statistical analysis. Section 4 discusses the results taking into account a variationist and diachronic perspective, and Section 5 offers conclusions.

2. Methods
2.1. Forced choice task study

In order to assess the distribution of the HAVE-possessive construction—*tener* + NP—and the WITH-possessive construction—*estar con* + NP—in Spanish, we designed a forced choice task study. To create our experiment, we used a 2x2 experimental design, where our first independent variable was context, which presented two levels based on a temporal and aspectual distinction: durative and non-durative contexts. Our second independent variable was whether or not the target sentence included an adverb that made salient the duration of the interval during which the possessive relation held between *possessor* and *possessum*. Specifically, we included *extending* temporal adverbs in the case of durative contexts, and *limiting* temporal adverbs for non-durative contexts. We did not include examples in which there was a clash between the aspectual value of the context and the semantic content of the adverb. An example of each case is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Experimental stimuli across all conditions, crossing the two independent variables: duration of the context (durative vs. non-durative) and presence or absence of an adverb that made salient the temporal nature of the possessive relation (limiting vs. extending vs. none).

Duration	Adverb	Context (example)	Choice A (*tener*)	Choice B (*estar con*)
non-durative	none	Pedro comió **hace dos horas**, pero quiere comer de nuevo. ¿Qué es más probable que diga? 'Pedro ate two hours ago, but he wants to eat again. What is he more likely to say?'	Tengo hambre 'I'm hungry'	Estoy con hambre 'I am with hunger'
non-durative	limiting	Pedro comió **hace dos horas**, pero quiere comer de nuevo. ¿Qué es más probable que diga? 'Pedro ate two hours ago, but he wants to eat again. What is he more likely to say?'	**Ya** tengo hambre 'I'm already hungry'	**Ya** estoy con hambre 'I am already with hunger'
durative	none	Pedro come **mucho**, pero para él nunca es suficiente. ¿Qué es más probable que diga? 'Pedro eats a lot, but it is never enough for him. What is he more likely to say?'	Tengo hambre 'I'm hungry'	Estoy con hambre 'I am with hunger'
durative	extending	Pedro come **mucho**, pero para él nunca es suficiente. ¿Qué es más probable que diga? 'Pedro eats a lot, but it is never enough for him. What is he more likely to say?'	**Siempre** tengo hambre 'I'm always hungry'	**Siempre** estoy con hambre 'I am always with hunger'

Each experimental item consisted of a contextual vignette aimed at establishing the context as either durative or non-durative, as exemplified in Table 1. We created

pairs of vignettes that were maximally similar, including the same topic and *possessum*, varying only in their establishment of the contextual duration, for a total of 24 different vignettes (12 general scenarios that varied across the dimension of duration, for a total of 24 vignettes). *Possessums* were of four different kinds (mental states, illnesses, objects, and abstract concepts) following existing typologies of *possessums* (see Heine 1997, Stassen 2009, Stolz et al. 2008); these are kept as a random effect in this study, since even though we included each kind in the vignettes, we are not able to guarantee that other *possessums* within each category that we did not employ in the experimental stimuli would behave similarly.

Each of the 24 contextual vignettes was followed by two target stimuli, one including *tener* + NP and one including *estar con* + NP. The experimental task given to participants was to choose one of the two options (*tener* + NP or *estar con* + NP) as the most likely continuation, given the context and the optional adverb. We utilized each contextual vignette twice in our experiment. In one version, the target stimuli that followed included a temporal adverb that made salient the temporal nature of the possessive relation, and in the other, no temporal adverb was included in the target stimuli. In this way, we created a total of 48 experimental items for the study.

With these items, we created four different versions of the experiment using a Latin Square Design, so that each participant only saw one condition per experimental stimulus. Consequently, each participant saw 24 items in total (12 target items and 12 fillers), in a fully randomized sequence. The experiment was hosted on Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT), and distributed via social media and researcher contacts.

2.2. Participants

Our participants consisted of 59 Spanish-native speakers (45 female) from Argentina, for a mostly homogenous sample. Almost all of them (n = 56) were from Buenos Aires, with the exceptions of one speaker from Santa Fe, one from Córdoba, and one from Misiones. They were between 29 and 69 years old (mean = 44.2 years old), had all at least completed high school (53 of them had a college degree or higher), and all self-identified as middle or upper-middle class. We collected a total of 707 data points for our analysis.

2.3. Statistical Methods

Data were analyzed using R software (R Core Team 2024). We performed initial descriptive analysis of the data and used the *ggplot2* package (Wickham 2016) for visualization. Then, we conducted an inferential analysis using the *lme4* package (Bates et al. 2015). We constructed a series of nested mixed-effects logistic regression models with *possessive type* as the dependent variable, and *context*, *temporal adverb*, and *participant demographic characteristics* as potential predictors. For our linguistic predictors, we utilized treatment contrast coding due to the experimental design of our study. In addition to fixed effects, all nested models included random intercepts for *respondent* and *possessum*. The former was included to account for repeated measures, and the latter to account for well-established differences in possessive type selection according to *possessum* (Stolz et al. 2008), which, while of interest, are not central to the present analysis. We then compared our models using the *anova* function (Fox & Weisberg 2018), a likelihood ratio test, to determine the optimal model for the data.

Finally, we used the *party* package (Hothorn et al. 2006) to generate a conditional inference tree (CIT), which uses regression and p-values to identify the best splits in predictors, in order to visualize possible interactions in our data.

3. Results
3.1. Description of the data

Data for the analysis consist of the aforementioned 707 data points from the experimental forced-choice task. Overall results show that *tener + NP* was selected by respondents more frequently overall (74.4%, n=526) than was the *estar con* + NP construction (25.6%, n=181). Nevertheless, respondent possessive type preference showed considerable variation according to both contextual and grammatical factors.

The first notable pattern in our data, aside from the overall preference for *tener + NP*, is the even greater selection of this construction by respondents in durative contexts (79%, n=279) compared to non-durative contexts (69.8%, n=247). Conversely, respondents were more likely to select *estar con* + NP in non-durative (30.2%, n= 107) than in durative contexts (21%, n=74). This pattern in our data shows that durative contexts lead to increased selection of *tener + NP*, and therefore decreased selection of *estar con + NP*. This difference is visualized in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Distribution of possessive selection by context
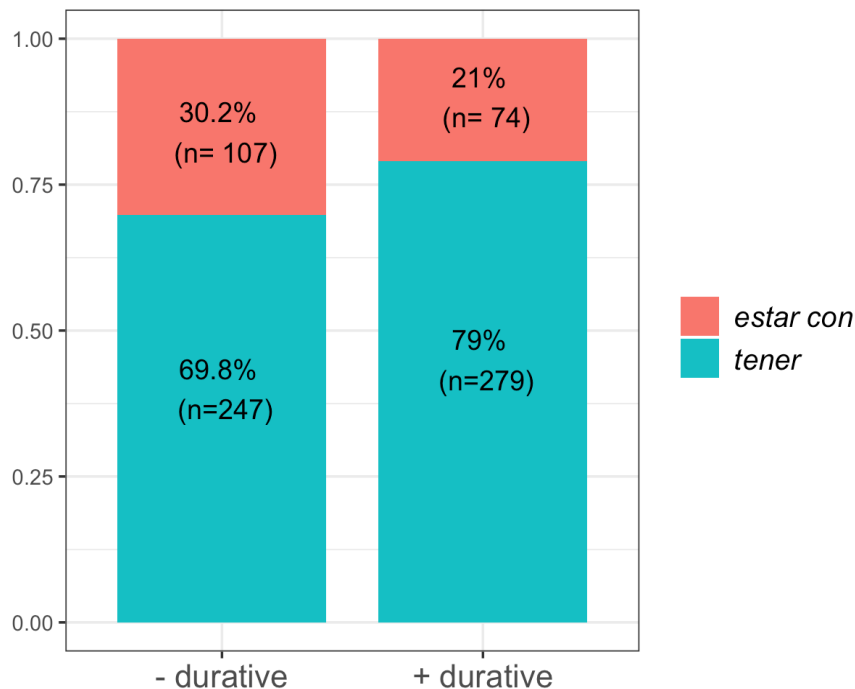
The second notable pattern in our data relates to the differences in rates of possessive type selection according to the presence or absence of temporal adverbs. The presence of a limiting adverb increased the likelihood of respondent selection of *estar con* + NP (35.6%, n=63) compared to extending adverbs (24.3%, n=43) and adverb absence (21.9%, n=75). The full distribution of possessive selection according to content and temporal adverb is included in Table 2. These differences are also

visualized in Figure 2, which highlights the role of temporal adverbs in modulating possessive construction selection.

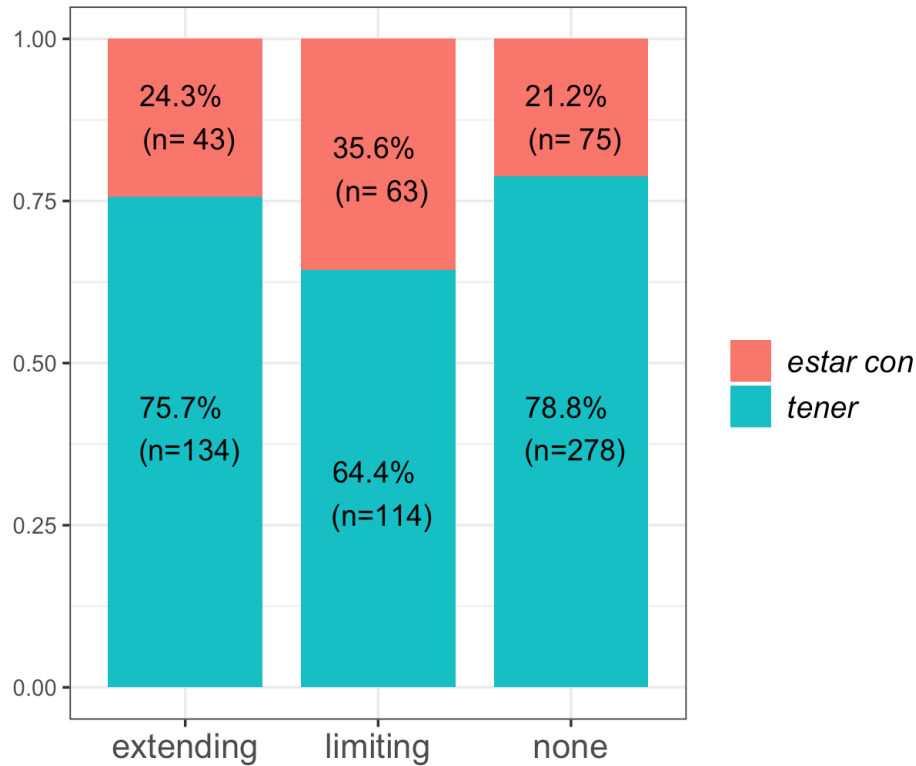**Figure 2.** Distribution of possessive selection by temporal adverb

Table 2. Rates of possessive type selection according to content and adverb

Context	Adverb	*tener* + NP (74.4%, n=526)	*estar con* + NP (25.6%, n=181)
+ durative (n=353)	none	82.4% (n=145)	17.6% (n=31)
	extending	75.7% (n=134)	24.3% (n=43)
- durative (n=354)	none	75.1% (n=133)	24.9% (n=44)
	limiting	64.4% (n=114)	35.6% (n=63)

Overall, the distribution of possessive type selection among our participants shows disparate patterns according to context and the presence/absence of a temporal adverb. To further examine these potential effects, we now turn to the inferential analysis of the data.

3.2. Inferential analysis

The best-fit model for these data included a significant interaction between context and adverb, with respondent and *possessum* as random intercepts. The output of this model is provided in Table 3, and shows the comparative likelihood of participants

selecting *tener + NP* compared to *estar con + NP* in non-durative contexts with no temporal adverb versus other factor combinations.

Table 3. Output of best-fit mixed-effects logistic regression model

		Estimate	**Std. Error**	**z value**	**p value**
	(Intercept)	*1.39223*	*0.38726*	*3.595*	*0.000324*
+ durative	Extending adverb	0.54034	0.29156	1.853	0.063843
- durative	No adverb	0.05727	0.27592	0.208	0.835564
- durative	Limiting adverb	-0.66463	0.26201	-2.537	0.011193*

First, this output shows that in durative contexts, the presence of an extending adverb does not significantly increase the likelihood of selection of *tener* + NP among our participants. We interpret this result as reflecting the default status of *tener* + NP in the predicative possessive paradigm in present-day Argentinian Spanish. Similarly, non-durative contexts with no temporal adverb do not demonstrate meaningful differences in use of *tener* + NP compared to durative contexts, again supporting the view of *tener* + NP as the default possessive. Nevertheless, this output shows that the presence of a limiting adverb in non-durative contexts significantly decreased the likelihood of participant selection of *tener* + NP, and correspondingly increased the likelihood of participant selection of *estar con* + NP, effectively illustrating its locus in the space of predicative possession tested. Figure 3 visualizes this interaction.

As can be observed in Figure 3, *tener* + NP was selected as the predicative possessive type of preference by participants across all contexts, thereby corroborating its expansive range across the realm of the predicative possessive space. Nevertheless, participants showed an even greater preference for *tener* + NP in durative contexts (Node 5), independent of the presence or absence of a temporal adverb compared to non-durative contexts. This overarching preference for *tener* + NP, as well as the lack of impact of temporal adverbs in durative contexts on selection of this construction, highlight its broader applicability in comparison to *estar con* + NP. By contrast, while non-durative contexts without a co-occurring temporal adverb increase the likelihood of participant selection of *estar con* + NP compared to non-durative contexts (Node 4), the greatest rates of selection of *estar con* + NP in non-durative contexts are found in the presence of a limiting adverb (Node 3). Overall, these findings highlight the role of *tener* + NP as the less contextually-restricted variant as well as the role of limiting adverbs in providing contextual support for the use of the less-frequent *estar con* + NP construction in non-durative contexts.

Figure 3. Conditional Inference tree of interaction between context and adverb
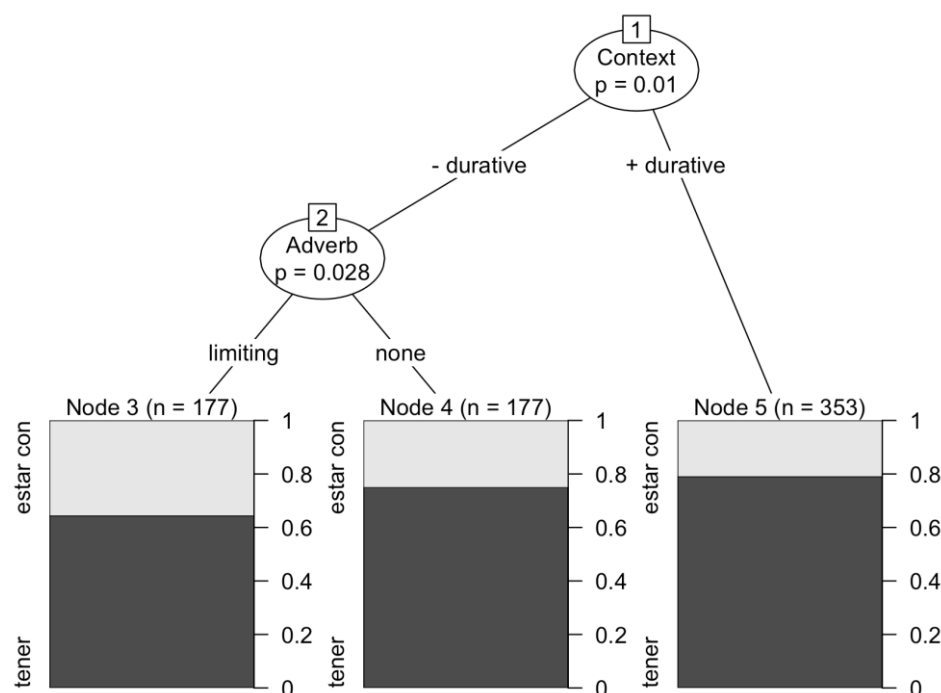
4. Discussion

Overall, these results show that respondents variably select both possessive forms in Argentinian Spanish across all experimental conditions. However, they choose *tener* + NP—the HAVE-possessive construction– more often, and especially in durative contexts, while they decide to use *estar con* + NP—the WITH-possessive construction– in non-durative contexts, particularly when the temporariness of the possessive relation is made salient by the presence of a limiting adverb. Though not unexpected, these results provide empirical corroboration for the view that *tener* + NP is the default predicative possessive construction in this variety and most likely across Spanish dialects more generally. Most importantly, and in line with our predictions, our findings show that the meaning of these possessive constructions can be modulated by both grammatical devices (such as temporal adverbs) and discourse conditions (such as the aspectual nature of the situational context), which function as modifiers of the temporal and aspectual nature of the possessive relation between *possessor* and *possessum*.

We have therefore provided empirical verification of the "splitness" (e.g., Stolz et al. 2008) of the predicative possessive system in Argentinian Spanish, but at the same time we have highlighted the overlapping nature of the two grammatical forms included in our study that help make up this system. We have done this by changing the way that the aspectual distinction between these forms is conceptualized. Instead of an analysis that distinguishes the HAVE-possessive construction and the WITH-possessive construction in terms of *imperfectivity* vs. *perfectivity*, we claim that these results are better explained by sustaining that both *tener* + NP and *estar con* + NP convey imperfectivity. Their true aspectual difference concerns the temporal interval

that each construction refers to: in the case of *estar con* + NP, the interval at which the possessive relation holds is co-extensive with a contextually determined reference interval; on the other hand, in the case of *tener* + NP, the possessive interval is co-extensive with a superinterval of the reference interval determined by the context. This subset/superset relation is what allows for a broader usage of the HAVE-possessive construction—i.e., *tener* + NP—over the WITH-possessive construction—i.e., *estar con* + NP. This pattern also corresponds to the well-known use of *tener* + NP in Spanish for inalienable possession, as in *Tengo dos manos* 'I have two hands' (where *estar con* + NP is regularly not used[4]), while still being compatible with alienable possession contexts.

When we take into consideration a cross-Romance diachronic dimension to these results, we observe differences between Argentinian Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese (Schwenter & Dickinson 2020). When looking at Spanish, we see that *estar con* + NP appears to signal the temporariness of the possessive relation by making salient the (reference) interval at which the relation between the *possessor* and the *possessum* holds. To be felicitous, this marker requires both situational context support—in the form of a non-durative context—and linguistic material support—such as the presence of a limiting temporal adverb. A following stage in the potential generalization pathway of this marker can be found in present-day Brazilian Portuguese, where Schwenter and Dickinson (2020) have shown that the corresponding WITH-possessive construction—*estar com* + NP—is able to appear in a broader set of non-durative contexts, regardless of the presence/absence of a limiting temporal adverb. In addition, Schwenter and Dickinson (2020) found, using similar experimental materials, that the *estar com* + NP construction was actually more frequent in the Brazilian Portuguese data than the competing *ter* + NP construction, a result not found in the Argentinian Spanish data presented here.[5] The expectation is that the *estar com* + NP construction will later generalize as well to durative contexts,

---

[4]   Both reviewers ask whether *estar con* is ruled out with inalienable possession (and relatedly, with kinship terms—*Tengo una hermana* 'I have a sister', but not *Estoy con una hermana* 'LIT: I am with a sister') on semantic or pragmatic grounds. Under this account, we argue that the incompatibility is pragmatic; there are not very few contexts where a proposition involving inalienable possession (or a kinship term) would hold for a specific reference interval without holding for a superinterval thereof. That said, one could come up with contexts that allowed for the use of *estar con* and inalienable possession: for example, someone who has lost an arm in an accident and uses a prosthetic one when they are in public could say *Estoy con dos brazos* 'LIT: I am with two arms' when they are using the prosthetic arm, and *Estoy con un brazo* 'LIT: I am with one arm', when they are not using it. We did not include these kinds of items in our experimental task since they are not easily amenable to the kind of contextual manipulation that we were interested in, and are very uncommon in natural spoken data.

[5]   There are other, non-quantitative, sources of difference between Argentinian Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese, e.g. the availability of a cleft-like exclamative that can only be rendered with *tener* + NP in Spanish (¡Qué hambre que tengo! 'How hungry I am!') that can occur with both the HAVE-possessive and with the WITH-possessive in Brazilian Portuguese (Que fome que tenho! Que fome que estou/tô!). This latter version is not possible in Spanish (*¡Qué hambre que estoy!). We take this dual possibility in Brazilian Portuguese to be another piece of evidence that the WITH-possessive is more generalized and can thus be used in a broader set of contexts than in Argentinian Spanish.

thereby constraining the use of the now contextually more general HAVE-possessive construction.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we set out to understand the distribution of partially overlapping forms for the expression of predicative possession in Argentinian Spanish; namely a HAVE-possessive construction—the *tener* 'have' + NP combination—and a WITH-possessive construction—made up of *estar con* (infinitive 'be' and 'with') plus an NP. The results of the experimental task carried out with native Argentinian speakers showed that these two constructions are not equivalent in usage, but that their encoded semantics is equal, and the distinction in their distributions arises from pragmatic parameters that manipulate the length of the temporal interval at which the relation between the *possessor* and the *possessum* holds. The WITH-possessive construction can be used to make reference to a contextually salient reference interval that overlaps with the possessive relation, while the HAVE-possessive construction can also refer to a superinterval of that relation, but does not do so necessarily.

      In line with previous research in Brazilian Portuguese (Schwenter & Dickinson 2020), we found that "permanent" against "temporary" is a good first description for most uses of *tener* + NP and *estar con* + NP in Argentinian Spanish, but this account implies that the two forms are in complementary distribution and fails to explain the considerable overlap that is found in usage between the two grammatical devices. The distinction between the two constructions is better explained by considering the temporal interval that each of these constructions makes salient, as stated above. In a nutshell, *tener* + NP always includes the reference interval of *estar con* + NP, showing a strong parallelism between these competing possessive forms and imperfective and progressive operators, whose interpretation is also contextually dependent along the same parameters (Deo 2009, 2015; Fuchs et al. 2020a, b).

      All in all, we have shown that a phenomenon in Spanish that has long been thought to have a purely semantic or grammatical basis has a crucial additional pragmatic dimension, with specific contexts triggering different interpretations of overlapping linguistic expressions. In future research we hope to extend this approach to other forms found in some Spanish varieties that likewise appear to overlap with the HAVE-possessive construction and with the WITH-possessive construction examined here. In particular, we are interested in the use of *traer* 'to bring' + NP (see Rábago Tanori & Melis 2005, Ruvalcaba 2020) in Mexican Spanish and its overlap with *tener* + NP, and in the use of *andar* 'to walk, go around' *con* + NP in both Mexican and Central American Spanish varieties (Rodríguez & Howe 2023), which competes with *estar con* + NP, as well as in the recently-described innovative direct transitive use of *andar* + NP in Central American varieties (ibid.).

Acknowledgments

References

Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2012. Possession and ownership: a crosslinguistic perspective. In A. Y. Aikehenvald, & R. M. W. Dixon (eds), *Possession and ownership: A cross-linguistic typology*, 1-64. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bates, Douglas, Maechler, Martin, Bolker, Ben, & Steve Walker. 2015. Fitting linear mixed-effects models Using lme4. *Journal of Statistical Software* 67(1): 1-48. https://doi.org/10.18637/jss.v067.i01

Bull, William E. 1942. New Principles for Some Spanish Equivalents of "To Be". *Hispania* 25(4): 433-443. https://doi.org/10.2307/334262

Cifuentes Honrubia, José Luis. 2015. *Construcciones posesivas en español*. Leiden: Brill/Rodopi.

de Bruyne, Jacques. 1995. *A Comprehensive Spanish Grammar*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Deo, Ashwini. 2009. Unifying the imperfective and the progressive: Partitions as quantificational domains. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 32: 475-521. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10988-010-9068-z

Deo, Ashwini. 2015. Diachronic semantics. *Annual Review of Linguistics* 1: 179-197. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-linguist-030514-125100

Fox, John, & Sanford Weisberg. 2018. *An R companion to applied regression*. California: Sage Publications.

Fuchs, Martín. 2020. *On the Synchrony and Diachrony of the Spanish Imperfective Domain: Contextual Modulation and Semantic Change*. PhD Dissertation, Yale University.

Fuchs, Martín, Deo, Ashwini, & María Mercedes Piñango. 2020a. The progressive-to imperfective shift: Contextually determined variation in Rioplatense, Iberian, and Mexican Altiplano Spanish. In A. Morales-Front, M. J. Ferreira, R. P. Leow, & C. Sanz (eds.), *Hispanic linguistics: Current issues and new directions*, 119–136. Amsterdam: Johns Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/ihll.26.06fuc

Fuchs, Martín, Piñango, María Mercedes, & Ashwini Deo. 2020b. Operationalizing the role of context in language variation: The role of perspective alignment in the Spanish Imperfective domain. In S. Löbner, T. Gamerschlag, T. Kalenscher, M. Schrenk & H. Zeevat (eds.), *Concepts, Frames and Cascades in Semantics, Cognition and Ontology*, 201-217. Berlin: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50200-3_10

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

Perini, Mário. 2002. *Modern Portuguese: A reference grammar*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

R Core Team. 2024. *R: A language and environment for statistical computing*. R Foundation for Statistical Computing.

Rábago Tánori, Álvaro, & Chantal Melis. 2005. El sentido posesivo de *traer*. *Lingüística Mexicana* 11(2): 227-247.

Roca Pons, José. 1958. *Estudios sobre perífrasis verbales del español.* Madrid: CSIC.

Rodríguez, Shannon P., & Chad Howe. 2023. Big data and small dialects: Transitive *andar* in Central American Spanish. In B. Baird, O. Balam, & M. Parafita Couto (eds.), *Linguistic Advances in Central American Spanish*, 168-192. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004679931_009

Ruvalcaba, Christian. 2020. "¿Qué traes güey?": An analysis of Spanish clausal possession. In J. J. Colomina Almiñana, & S. Sessarego (eds.), *Language Patterns in Spanish and Beyond*, 52-74. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003091790

Schwenter, Scott A., & Kendra V. Dickinson. 2020. A distinct aspectual analysis of predicative possession in Brazilian Portuguese. *Proceedings of the Linguistic Society of America* 5(1): 242-256. https://doi.org/10.3765/plsa.v5i1.4702

Stassen, Leon. 2009. *Predicative possession*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stolz, Thomas, Kettler, Sonia, Stroh, Cornelia, & Aina Urdze. 2008. *Split possession: An areal-linguistic study of the alienability correlation and related phenomena in the languages of Europe*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Suárez Palma, Imanol. 2024. Inalienable possession (and lack thereof) in Spanish. *Studies in Hispanic and Lusophone Linguistics* 17(1): 109-136. https://doi.org/10.1515/shll-2024-2005

Wickham, H. 2016. *ggplot2: Elegant graphics for data analysis* (R package version 3.3.5). Springer. https://ggplot2.tidyverse.org