Nemáme sa čoho báť. Nie mamy się czego bać
The have PRON INF construction
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The paper focuses on the construction *have* PRON INF in Slavic languages (e.g. Czech *Nemám kam jít,* lit. 'I don't have where to go'). The construction is shown to have a preference for negative uses, which justifies its classification as a negative polarity item (NPI). This behavior is argued to be an iconic reflection of the construction's form and its inclusion of an interrogative pronoun. The construction's semantic content is analyzed as that of expressing 'incapacity'. It is argued that the construction in question reverses the typical positive-over-negative priority in favor of the negative-positive asymmetry, where the negative functions as an unmarked default.

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1. Introduction

In many Slavic and Romance languages, a grammatical construction is used, with a remarkable form and meaning, as in the following Slovak example.

(1) *Nemal   som   ako   zaplatiť.*
     NEG-have.PART   be.1PSG   how   pay
     'I had no way to pay'

In this construction, the verb *have* is followed by an interrogative infinitival clause. Such clauses are more typically attested in indirect questions, as complements of verbs like *know,* or *ask*, but not *have*. The construction allows many interrogative pronouns.

(2)   a. *Deti   sa   nemajú   **kde**   hrať.*
          Children   REFL   NEG-have.3PPL where   play
          'Children have nowhere to play.'

       b. *Tu   nemáme   **čo**   hľadať.*
          Here   NEG-have.1PPL what   search
          'We have nothing to look for here.'

       c. *Žena   sa   nemá   **začo**   hanbiť.*
          Woman   REFL   NEG-have.3PSG for-what   be-ashamed
          'A woman has nothing to be ashamed about.'

It is easy to find similar examples in other Slavic languages. The following come from Polish (3a), Czech (3b), Croatian (3c), and Ukrainian[1] (3d).

(3)   a. *Nie   mam   z   **kim***   *rozmawiać.*
          NEG have.1PSG   with   whom   talk
          'I have no one to talk to.'

       b. *Také   bych   měla   ráda   vymalováno,   ale   …   můj   nemá   **kdy**   to   udělat.* (www.modrykonik.cz) (This and all further Internet sources accessed December 2016)
          Also would have happy-FEM painted, but … mine NEG-have.1PSG when it do
          'I would also like to have (the home) painted, but my (husband) has no time to do it.'

       c. *Rekla   je   da   ima   **gdje**   spavati   i   nije   gladna.* (www.jutarnji.hr)
          Say-PART.3PSG-FEM is   that   has   where   sleep   and   NEG-is   hungry
          'She said that she has a place to sleep and is not hungry.'

       d. *Не   маю   **що**   вдягнути.* (ne mayu scho vdiahnuty)
          NEG have.1PSG   what   wear
          'I have nothing to wear.'

The construction can be represented by means of the following formula:

(4)   *have* PRON INF

where PRON is an interrogative pronoun followed by INF, an infinitive.

2. Negative readings

One salient characteristic of the construction is an overwhelming predominance of negative over positive readings. In all languages exemplified above as well as in Romance languages (more examples further in the paper), most uses of the construction feature the verb *have* in negative form. For example, a quick Google search of a Czech string like *nemá jak zaplatit* ('has no way to pay') yields dozens of examples like (5)

(5)   a. *…dluhy nemá jak zaplatit.* ('has no way to pay debts.')

        b. *Svoje zaměstnance nemá jak zaplatit.* ('has no way to pay her employees.')

        c. *Nemá jak zaplatit účty za hospitalizaci.* ('has no way to pay hospitalization bills.')

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[1] All Ukrainian examples provided by Monika Hałaś

Only one positive use was found for *má jak zaplatit* ('has a way to pay'), but as I will argue soon, it is not a typical, pure affirmative.

(6)   *Když rodič dítěti dá mobil za deset tisíc, tak ten rodič asi taky má jak zaplatit pár korun za aplikace.* ('When a parent gives a child a cell phone for over 10,000 crowns, then that parent perhaps can also pay a couple of crowns for an app.') (forum.iphone.cz)

Apart from such uses, one should also mention the existence of fixed phrases like *není zač* in Czech, *nie je začo* in Slovak, *nie ma za co* in Polish, or *ні за що* in Ukrainian (each meaning 'you're welcome'), which have variants with the verb *have*:

(7)   a. *Nemáš zač děkovat.* (Czech) (Lit. 'You don't have anything to thank for')
        b. *Nemáš začo ďakovať.* (Slovak)
        c. *Nie masz za co dziękować.* (Polish)
        d. *Не має за що дякувати.* (nye maye za scho dyakuvaty) (Ukrainian)

Affirmative uses of the expressions are attested (e.g. *Máš začo ďakovať*, 'you do have reasons to be thankful'), but there is a sense that they are marked. The negative form is not only more frequent, but it is considered the default, expected thing to say: the point of the expression (in the negative) is for the speaker to demonstrate his or her detached generosity and humility by not making too big a deal of a favor just granted. Only under special circumstances is the expression uttered in the affirmative. For this to happen, the expectation of gratitude must outweigh the speaker's need to project a magnanimous self-image. No need to say, such situations are probably very infrequent and they occur by way of exception rather than norm.

This holds for affirmative uses of the *have* PRON INF construction in general. For example, in example (6), although the speaker asserts some parents' ability to pay for a cellular phone application, the statement conceals a negation in the background. That is, the statement is meant to refute a claim to the contrary made in prior discourse: the parents' ability to buy a 10,000-crown phone is brought up as an argument that they cannot possibly claim not being able to afford an inexpensive application. Without a prior "bankruptcy" claim, there would be no need to build an argument.

Similarly, negation is inherent in the following two examples. The question in (8a) leaves open whether or not the listener is able to pay. In (8b) ability to pay is contingent on following the advice offered – the speaker allows for a negative scenario. It could be ventured that all affirmative uses presuppose negative readings in the background.

(8)   a. *Máte   jak   zaplatit?*
           Have.2PPL   how   pay
           'Are you able to pay?'

        b. *Nezapomeňte   si   předem   pořídit   embosovanou*
           NEG-forget.2PPL   REFL   before   get   embossed

platební kartu, ať   máte   jak   zaplatit.
debit   card so-that have.2PPL   how   pay
'Don't forget to get yourself an embossed debit card, so that you can pay.'

To sum up, negative uses of the construction are more frequent and more basic. Although affirmative uses are possible, whenever they occur, they also trigger a negative counterpart scenario. This is the reverse of how most other constructions work.

2.1 *Asymmetry in simple clauses*
The norm observed by Talmy (2000) in simple declarative sentences is that it is affirmative sentences that are more basic and take precedence over negative sentences. Quite obviously, affirmative sentences are generally more common (affirmative sentences make up more than 80% of all sentences in any piece of text). But perhaps more interestingly, affirmative sentences predominate in one more sense. As Talmy notes,

> a syntactically negative clause (e.g., *I didn't go to John's party last night*) overtly names something that did not take place but tends to evoke consideration of the corresponding unrealized positive event–and in this respect it differs from a simple positive clause, which tends not to evoke consideration of its negative counterpart. (Talmy 2000: 291)

Simple declarative clauses are characterized by a strong asymmetry in favor of affirmative sentences. This asymmetry is reverted in the *have* PRON INF construction, where it is negative sentences that are more natural and implicit even in affirmative uses.

2.2 *Non-assertive forms and Negative Polarity Items*

To understand the logic behind the negative preference of the *have* PRON INF construction, it is helpful to observe that that preference is parallel to what has been referred to as non-assertive forms (Quirk et al. 1985: 83). The following examples illustrate the negative nature of non-assertive forms.
The most important non-assertive forms given by Quirk et al. are negative (9a) and interrogative (9b) constructions, but the non-assertive meaning is also present in the conditional (9c) and the comparative (9d) construction, as well as in semi-negative words such as *hardly* or *without* (Downing & Locke 2006: 24). A distinctive feature of non-assertive forms is the presence of the quantifier *any*:

(9)   a. *I don't have **any** idea.*
        b. *Do you know **any** experts in the area?*
        c. *If **any** accident takes place, it must be reported.*
        d. *Democracy is better than **any** other known system.*
        e. *Without **any** apparent reason, Amy hit Tom.*
        f. *There was hardly **any** snow to be seen.*

What these uses have in common is that they all carry a negative element (Klima 1964). While negation is rather evident in (9a), it is implicit in the other cases. Yes/no questions like (9b) presuppose two options, one affirmative and the other negative. The conditional construction (9c) allows for a possibility of a positive scenario (i.e. an accident taking place), but it suggests that as of now, no accident is being reported. In the comparative construction example (9d), the assertion is also negative in nature: namely, it states that no systems exist better than democracy. The negation in *without any* can easily be demonstrated by paraphrasing it as *with no*. Finally, the adverb *hardly* conveys the idea of an infinitesimally small amount, so small that it is practically equivalent to a complete absence, or in other words, negation.

It should be noted that the *have* PRON INF construction can be used in non-assertive contexts too. The construction can be used in interrogative (10a), conditional (10b), and comparative form (10c). Additionally, it is also possible with semi-negative words *hardly* (10d) or *only* (10e), as illustrated by the following Czech examples.

(10)   a. *Máte   kde   spát?*
          Have.2PPL   where sleep
          'Do you have a place to sleep?'

       b. *Kdybych   měl   jak   zloděje   nafotit,*
          If-would.1PSG   have.PART   how   thief   photograph,
          už   bych   to   udělal.
          already would.1PSG   it   done
          'If I could photograph the thief, I would have done it already.'

       c. *Nemají   kde   pracovat   a   vydělávat   víc   než   tady.*
          NEG-have.3PPL where work   and   earn   more   than   here
          'They have no other place to work and earn more than here.'

       d. *Málokdy*   mám   s   kým   hovořit   řecky.
          Hardly-ever have.1PSG   with   whom talk   Greek
          'Hardly ever can I talk Greek with anyone.'

       e. *Jen* někteří   *se   mají   kde*   léčit.
          Only some   REFL have.3PPL   where cure
          'Only some have a place to receive medical treatment.'

Owing to their attraction toward negative contexts, non-assertive forms are considered negative polarity items (NPIs), constructions that resist affirmative uses (Giannakidou 2008: 1661).

2.3 *Minimizers*

More specifically, the above uses of non-assertive forms (as well as uses of *have* PRON INF) can be included under a sub-category of NPIs, so called minimizers. Like other NPIs, minimizers

like *red cent*, *an inch*, or *a wink* too exhibit a preference for negative contexts, but they share one additional property, namely the expression of negligible amounts (Bolinger 1972: 17).

(11)   a. *They complain about the poor in America; yet won't <u>give a red cent</u> to the poor.* (Michelle Malkin, *Fonda & Redford: Hollywood's New Welfare Mooches*. townhall.com)

   b. *Locked in a conflict with the biggest superpowers the world had ever known, Castro did not <u>budge an inch</u>.* (Shane Trejo, *Cuban Leader Fidel Castro*. www.thelibertyconservative.com)

   c. *Of course, I didn't* <u>sleep a wink</u> *that night in anticipation of our date the next day.* (Deborah Bonnell, *Diary of a Self-Conscious Woman*)

   d. *Sisson said she wouldn't <u>touch</u> sliced white bread <u>with a ten-foot pole</u>.* (Laura Baker, *How do you make the perfect cheese toastie?* www.stuff.co.nz)

Minimizing expressions work the same way in Slavic languages:

(12)   a. *Palcem nie ruszył, żeby nam pomóc.* (Polish)
       'He didn't lift a finger to help us.'

   b. *V noci jsem ani oka nezamhouřil.* (Czech)
       'At night I didn't sleep a wink.'

The logic behind the negative propensity evinced by minimizers is that they serve to emphasize the absence of a given action. For example, a person's reservations concerning white bread (11d) are illustrated by means of exaggeration: an implicit scale is being set up stretching from one extreme (an enthusiast fetishizing and embracing white bread), through accepting it (eating it as a staple), to avoiding it at the other extreme. Touching it indirectly with a long pole would represent an insignificant concession, insufficient to affect the person in any way. On a scale of flexibility and openness to concessions, touching something with a ten-footpole would correspond to the lowest degree, just above an absolute zero. To say that that person is not ready to do even that is to express the most extreme degree of intransigence more emphatically than a simple negative would.
As a result, minimizers are confined to negative contexts, and even when they do appear in affirmative form, it is obvious that negation was expected, as in (13).

(13)   *Eve was surprised that she <u>had managed to sleep a wink</u>, … with all the stuff that was whirring around in her head.* (Milly Johnson, *A Winter Flame*)

The sense of symbolic insignificance conveyed by expressions like *lift a finger, miss a beat, hurt a fly, have the faintest idea* or *be worth the paper it is written on* also explains why they are rare in true affirmative contexts. The minimal degree in question would make little difference to the

point being made. For example, inability to "hurt a fly" is normally cited to illustrate someone's gentle nature. To do the opposite and insist that a person would indeed hurt a fly would not be enough to portray him or her as a violent person.

An alternative treatment of minimizing expressions is offered by Sinclair (1998). He analyzes the behavior of the verb *budge* and concludes that "English does not talk much about budging at all, but about *not* budging" (Sinclair 1998: 16). Sinclair proposes to treat the lexical item *budge* as being accompanied at its core by the negative element NEG, so that in speakers' lexicons the entry is represented as 'NEG *budge*'. As a result, the verb is typically found in negative contexts collocating with *refuse to*, *won't*, *wouldn't*, etc. Under Sinclair's analysis, the verb *budge* does not exist in a basic positive form; instead, it comes pre-equipped with an underlying negation marker. This view is probably too extreme, though. If the item *budge* were indeed conventionally stored as an inherently negative meaning, with a postulated NEG element integrally attached to its content, one would not expect any positive uses of this and other minimizing expressions. And the fact is that *budge* does occur in positive contexts:

(14)   a. *Try it sideways, there, I did budge a little*. (Thomas Fleming Day, *The Rudder*)

        b. *The glass box did budge an inch*. (John Bates, *The Keepers Gate*)

        c. *Something has slipped – the keystone has budged an inch*. (*Seven Gates*)

It seems the explanation of the item's behavior lies not in the presence of a pre-inserted NEG element, but in the nature of its meaning. Because *budge* means 'to make the slightest movement', it appears, for the most part, in negations, because microscopic degrees generally trigger automatic associations of the "as little as nothing" kind. It takes very special contexts, ones like (14a-c) where such minute changes make a difference, for *budge*-type lexical items to make sense in the positive.

2.4 *Iconicity in have* PRON INF

I would like to propose that the construction *have* PRON INF is also a minimizing NPI by virtue of its form. More specifically, it is the presence of the interrogative pronoun that triggers the minimizing interpretation associated with the construction. Here is how the mechanism involved works. For example, housing options can be imagined as a continuum, with one extreme representing unlimited comfort and a wealth of places to live, and the other corresponding to an absence of options. Suppose that in the Slovak example below, hypothetically there are some places to live, but they are so few that one needs to ask *kde* ('where') they are. To negate the existence of even such limited options is to emphasize that there are really no viable options. The interrogative is an iconic means of conveying scarcity.

(15)   *Mladé rodiny   nemajú   **kde**   bývať*.
        Young family.PL   NEG-have.3PPL   where   live
        'Young families have no place to live.'

There is probably no other plausible explanation for the presence of the interrogative pronoun in the construction. It is certainly not the case that it appears there completely accidentally and arbitrarily, with no real role to play. This possibility could perhaps be accepted if the construction had such a peculiar form in one language, but given its recurrence in Slavic[2], Romance languages (examples 16-19), and Chinese (20), it would be rather beyond belief to entertain the idea that the pronoun (underlined) appears in the construction in each language entirely randomly. This would be one of many examples of constructions that may strike one as being formally arbitrary, but turning out to have iconic motivation, upon closer inspection (Szcześniak 2013, 2015).

(16) *Non posso,   non   posso,   non ho   **come** pagare.*   (Italian)
      NEG can.1PSG, NEG   can.1PSG,   NEG have.1PSG how   pay
      'I can't, I can't, I am unable to pay.' (*Commedie di Gio. Gherardo De Rossi*, 1792)

(17) *No   tengo   **donde** vivir.*   (Spanish)
      NEG   have.1PSG   where   live
      'I don't have a place to live.' (José M. Moral, *Incondicionalmente Amados*)

(18) *Não   têm   com   **quem** deixar o   filho.*   (Portuguese)
      NEG   have.3PPL   with   who   leave   ART   child.
      'They don't have anyone to leave their child with.' (Albertina de Oliveira Costa, *Direitos tardios*)

(19) *Nu   am   **cum**   să   câştig tot.*   (Romanian)
      NEG   have.1PSG   how   CONJ   win   everything.
      'I can't win everything.' (Ioana Baldea Constantinescu, *Dincolo de portocali*)

(20) 哪儿 也没 有   去[3]   (Chinese)
      Where NEG   have   go.
      'I have nowhere to go.'

3. Believing propositions

The facts presented above, especially the unmarked negative default, may appear surprising in light of what psychology says about how people comprehend new propositions.
One (commonsensical) possibility is that people consider new ideas by first suspending judgment (not committing to whether the proposition is true or false). According to this view, championed by Descartes (1984/1644), propositions can enter the mind without "true" or "false" labels; in

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[2] With the exception of Russian, where the construction does not exist at all, because of Russian's limited use of the verb *have*.
[3] Example provided by Sabina Dubiel.

Descartes's words, "we have power...to give or withhold our assent at will" (1984/1644: 205). This possibility seems rather reasonable, given that we often admit uncertainty toward many propositions (e.g. Is there life in outer space?).

However, various studies (Gilbert 1991, Gilbert, Tafarodi, Malone 1993) suggest that this is not how the human mind processes new propositions. To be more exact, comprehension proceeds in a way first proposed by Baruch Spinoza (1982/1677), who argued that when presented with a new idea, we assume immediately that it is true. Quite simply, people believe everything they hear, at least for an instant, and to understand is to accept as true. In practice, this means that any proposition is analyzed under the assumption of an affirmative default.
Of course, this does not mean that people are doomed to believe indefinitely everything they are told. After accepting a bare proposition as true, a person has the option of either *confirming* or *un-accepting* it. That is, negation is added as a second step. And as Spinoza (1982/1677: 96-101) observed, believing and un-accepting a proposition do not involve the same mental effort. While believing is spontaneous and fairly effortless, doubt requires some mental work. Under circumstances of "resource depletion" (such as distraction, stress), people do not always reject propositions as expected. If the mind is imagined as a Spinozan system, one can expect that it will only make an effort to un-accept an idea if it has "has both the time and energy necessary to do so" (Gilbert 1991: 112), which is in fact what various studies demonstrate.

This Spinozan modus operandi of the mind also explains why affirmative sentences are unmarked variants heavily outnumbering their negative counterparts: Negative sentences are affirmative assertions with the additional label "it is not the case that". In order to understand a negated proposition, a person has to first accept the proposition and in the second step, un-accept it. On the other hand, an affirmative sentence does not make reference to nor presuppose its negative version.

Negations are often particularly taxing for the mind. Indeed, speakers themselves often lose track of the content they intended to negate and confusing over-negations abound. Examples like (21) below have been collected in online forums like Language Log (languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu).

(21) *Hillary's been failing for 30 years in not getting the job done - it will never change.* (Donald Trump's tweet on September 27, 2016)

This example illustrates (the otherwise familiar experience) that negation takes extra effort: it often takes some time to unpack a statement to its bare proposition, so that negations can be applied in order to arrive at the intended reading.

4. Conclusion

It should be fairly obvious then that successful negation requires favorable circumstances to go through without the complications seen in (21). The construction *have* PRON INF, and minimizers in general, can be considered one example of a natural context in which negation is intuitively facilitated. They frame content in such a way that negation is not only easy to process, but is

more likely than a positive alternative, or, to put it in Spinozan terms, in such a way that the positive is spontaneously un-accepted in favor of a more plausible negative. They do so by presenting an idea (e.g. helping the needy) as an implicit continuum of degrees (from sacrificing one's life, through making generous contributions, and through further diminishing degrees, crying, praying, lifting a finger, to doing nothing). They then select the smallest positive degree (lifting a finger), so small indeed that it makes no sense to seriously consider it in the affirmative, so the only option left is to express it in the negative. While minimizing NPIs like *lift a finger*, *miss a beat* or *give a damn* abound, there are very few grammatical constructions like *have* PRON INF with a preference for negative form.

Abbreviations used

ART	article
CONJ	conjunction
FEM	feminine
NEG	negation
PART	l-participle
PPL	person plural
PSG	person singular
REFL	reflexive pronoun

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