

On the Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics of Some *have* Sentences

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This paper discusses the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic status of *have* sentences with the general structure given in (1), and exemplified by (2) and (3):

(1) NP₁ - have - NP₂ - V_{non-finite}

(2) I have two buttons missing on my jacket.

(3) My friend had a valuable watch stolen.

The syntactic evidence adduced in the paper shows that the NP₂ - V_{nonfinite} part of the sentence does not instantiate complex-transitive complementation by an object and an *-ing* participle or *-ed* participle complement, as is argued by Quirk et al. (1985:1206ff). The postverbal part in (1) is shown to constitute a single argument of the verb *have* with NP₂ as a semantic argument of the non finite verb, i.e. *have* is described as a two-place predicate with an Experiencer and the Content of Experience in its semantic predicate frame. Pragmatically, this sentence type enables the speaker to empathize with the referent of NP₁ and to present the state of affairs expressed by the NP₂ - V_{nonfinite} part from the point of view of that referent. This paper also argues against the traditional view that such *have* sentences are derived from constructions with a possessive determiner and that they primarily express possession.

1 Introduction

Students of English are often confused by the multiplicity of descriptions of identical sentence structures found in reference grammars of English. A case in point is the analysis of verb complementation found in grammars written by Randolph Quirk and his associates and grammars based on their work. This paper will focus on sentences whose general structure is given in (1) and exemplified by (2) and (3):

- (1) NP₁ – have NP₂ – V_{nonfinite}
- (2) I have two buttons missing on my jacket.
- (3) My friend had a valuable watch stolen.

Quirk et al. (1972) describe this sentence type as an instantiation of monotransitive complementation by a non-finite clause with subject, which means that the whole post-verbal part functions as the object of *have* and that NP₂ is the subject of the following non-finite verb. However, this analysis was abandoned in Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), where the same sentence type is described as complex transitive complementation with NP₂ functioning as the direct object of *have*. This view is also advocated by Quirk et al. (1985) and van Ek and Robot (1984). Complex transitive verbs are defined by van Ek and Robot as 'verbs taking a direct object and another (non-object) complement' (1984:319).

2 On the Syntax and Semantics of *have* Sentences

The two conflicting analyses described above raise the following questions:

- a. What is the syntactic status of NP₂, and
- b. What is the syntactic status of the complement of *have* in (1)?

The answer to the second question depends in large measure on how the first question is answered. If we adopt the view that *have* is a monotransitive verb in (1), then the question of the syntactic relation of NP₂ to *have* does not arise at all because it is a part of a monotransitive complement consisting of NP₂ and nonfinite verb (*-ing* participle or *-ed* participle). However, the argument that NP₂ is a part of a nonfinite clause with subject, which as a whole functions as a complement of *have*, raises a totally different question: Is subject a syntactic, semantic, logical or pragmatic notion?¹ The position of Quirk et al. (1985) on this issue seems to be ambivalent. On the one hand, subjects are defined in terms of their coding and control properties (case marking, position, control of agreement and reflexivization), but, on the other hand, the notions like the implied subject of a subjectless nonfinite or verbless clause and 'nonfinite clause with subject' imply that subjects are also a semantic notion (overt arguments of verbal predicates) and a pragmatic notion (covert

¹ See Shibatani (1991) for a short review of various approaches to the notion of subjecthood. A general discussion of coding, behavioural and control properties of subjects in a wide variety of languages can be found in Keenan (1976).

arguments of verbal predicates which can be inferred from the context) (Quirk et al. 1985:724ff). The view adopted in this paper is that subject is a syntactic notion with clearly defined coding, control and behavioural properties, i.e. every semantic argument of a verbal predicate need not have a clearly defined syntactic function if it has a semantic and/or a pragmatic function. In the sentences above, NP₂ is undoubtedly a semantic argument of the following nonfinite verb, but this does not necessarily make it the syntactic subject since it lacks the typical coding properties of subjects.²

On the other hand, if we adopt the second view, namely that NP₂ in (1) is a direct object followed by another non-object complement, as van Ek and Robot (1984:319) have put it, then some evidence must be found to prove that this NP is the object of *have* and that *have* is a three-place predicate. Quirk et al.(1985:ff) admit that verb classification into complement types is not discrete but rather a matter of gradience and multiple analysis. Nevertheless, *have* is lumped together with perceptual verbs *see*, *hear* and *watch* on account of superficial similarities between sentences like (4) and (5):

(4) The guard patrol had two men shot.

(5) Someone must have seen/heard the car stolen.

Despite this superficial similarity there are a number of syntactic and semantic differences between these two sentences which do not justify their classification into the same complementation type. First, seeing the car stolen also entails seeing the car, whereas this entailment is lacking in (4) on either of its readings, that is (4) is ambiguous between a causative reading (*The guard patrol caused two men to be shot*) and an experiential reading (*The guard patrol suffered the loss of two men*). In either case, the content of causing the event or experiencing the event is expressed by the whole postverbal part (i.e. NP₂ + nonfinite verb) and there is no direct semantic relationship between *have* and NP₂. To put it differently, the state of *two men shot* is an argument ascribed to the Causer or Experiencer.

The argument that there is a semantic difference between structurally identical complements of perceptual verbs and *have* is supported by their different behaviour under the scope of negation. Compare (6) and (7):

(6) The guard patrol didn't have two men shot.

(7) No-one could have seen the car stolen.

² In a theory which recognizes multiple levels of syntactic analysis (e.g. Relational Grammar), the argument of the nonfinite complement would certainly be a subject in the initial stratum since grammatical relations at that level of syntactic analysis are determined by the semantics of the verb: »There exist principles of universal grammar which predict the initial relation borne by each nominal in a given clause from the meaning of the clause« (Perlmutter and Postal, 1984:97). See also Perlmutter (1980, 1982).

The negation in (6) does not entail denial of the fact that the guard patrol had two men; what is negated is the state of *two men shot*. The scope of negation in (7), on the other hand, includes *see* and entails *not seeing the car*. It should also be noted that the meaning changes when the nonfinite complement is omitted after *have*, but it does not change radically when the complement is left out after *see*, as is evident from (6a) and (7a):

(6a) The guard patrol didn't have two men.

(7a) No-one could have seen the car.

These semantic differences between the complements of perceptual verbs on the one hand, and *have* on the other hand, are also reflected in the different syntactic behaviour of NP₂. The sentence (4) cannot be passivized, as is evident from the ungrammaticality of (8), which shows that NP₂ after *have* does not have object properties. On the other hand, the passive counterpart of (5) is (9) since the noun phrase following perceptual verbs does have object properties.³

(8) *Two men were had shot.

(9) The car must have been seen stolen.

The fact that the whole complement of a complex transitive verb is a single semantic argument of the verb is recognized by Quirk et al. (1985:1195), as is evident from the following quotation: This divisibility into two elements of a semantically clausal construction following the verb is the defining property of complex transitive complementation.' What is at issue here is the claim that the complement of complex transitive verbs in spite of its clause-like meaning and appearance, does not act syntactically as a single constituent, as is evident in the passive, where the O is separated from its complement' (Quirk et al. 1985:1195). Given that the transformation of an NP following the verb into the subject of a passive clause is one of the major syntactic criteria for distinguishing between monotransitive, ditransitive and complex transitive complementation, there seems to be no reason to classify *have* as a verb which takes a direct object and a non-object complement.

The unclear status of the complement of *have* in (1) has also puzzled adherents of Functional Grammar, as developed in Dik (1978, 1980 and 1989). Goossens (1993) has argued that *have* is a three-place predicate in such constructions and that

³ Direct objects are taken for granted in this paper, which does not mean that the author is not aware of the difficulties facing theoretical linguists and grammarians. As Collinge (1984:10) has nicely put it 'an NP which is »heir-apparent-to S(subject)« could perhaps be usefully titled DO'. The promotion of an *heir apparent* to subject is certainly not a sufficient criterion to establish the (direct) objecthood of an NP, but it is definitely one of the most frequently used criteria in the linguistic literature. See also Anderson (1984) for a general discussion of criteria for the identification of objects.

the semantic function of NP₂ can be defined both in relation to *have* and in relation to the following nonfinite verb phrase. In this view, NP₂ has a Zero semantic function in relation to the participle since the past participle is adjectival, and the semantic function Reference in relation to *have*. Reference is defined by Dik (1979:103) as 'the second or third term of a relation with reference to which the relation is said to hold.' Although Goossens (1993) does not say anything about the syntactic function of NP₂, his approach is reminiscent of the analysis by Quirk et al. (1985:1218), where the NP following a complex transitive verb is assigned a double syntactic function, that is, a NP like *two men* in (4) would be simultaneously an object of *have* and the subject of *shot*. A closer look at sentences which exemplify this type of construction ((10) – (13)) shows that both these views are untenable.

(10) I have an aunt coming on Sunday.

(11) He has a new book coming out next month.

(12) She has had some poems published.

(13) Even great lords and ladies have their mouths sometimes stopped.

In (8), the semantic function of the NP after *have* does not depend on the semantics of this verb but is solely determined by the semantics of the following *-ing* participle, that is, it is an Agent. Similarly, *some poems* in (12) is an affected participant (Patient), and the assignment of a semantic function to this NP is again independent of the meaning of *have* as the main verb. To sum up, the assignment of a semantic function to NP₂ in *have* sentences considered here is determined by the semantics of the nonfinite verb phrase, i.e. NP₂ + nonfinite verb phrase is an independent predication which functions as a single argument of *have* as the main verb. If this argument of *have* needs to be assigned a semantic function, then the whole predication consisting of NP followed by a nonfinite verb phrase could be assigned the semantic function Reference, which would be much more in line with the original definition of Reference as 'the second or third term of a relation with reference to which the relation is said to hold' (Dik 1989:103). To put it very simply, the relation holds between the subject of *have* and NP₂ + nonfinite verb phrase as the complement of *have*. In the case of ambiguous sentences like (4) this would mean that the relation holds between the Causer or Experiencer and the predication *two men (were) shot*. A provisional semantic makeup of (4) is given as (14) and (15):

(14) The guard patrol_(Causer) had ((two men_(Pat) shot))_(Ref)

(15) The guard patrol_(Exp) had ((two men_(Pat) shot))_(Ref)

The representation in (14) reflects the causative meaning (*The guard patrol caused two men to be shot*) and the fact that the NP *two men* is an argument of the participle *shot* which assigns a semantic function to it. The Ref(ERENCE) function

assigned to *two men shot* indicates that this predication as a whole bears a semantic relation to *have* and its first argument. The representation in (15) differs from that in (14) only in the assignment of the semantic function Experiencer to the first argument of *have*. At a more general level, all *have* sentences considered so far could be assigned the semantic structure given in (16):

(16) NP₁ (X) have ((NP₂ (Y) V_{nonfinite}))(Ref)

where Y stands for a variable semantic function which is assigned by the nonfinite verb phrase, and X stands for a semantic function whose interpretation depends on the meaning of Ref(erence). This boils down to the claim that *have* is intrinsically neither causative nor experiential predicate and that the subject of *have* cannot be assigned a semantic function independently of the meaning of Ref. This is particularly obvious in sentences like (2) – **I have two buttons missing on my jacket** and (13) – **Even great lords and ladies have their mouths sometimes stopped**, where the causative reading is virtually impossible.

At the syntactic level, this would mean that the *have* sentences described here belong to the monotransitive complementation type with NP₂ + nonfinite VP functioning as a single complement whose syntactic function remains vague. As for the syntactic status of NP₂, there seems to be no convincing evidence that it is either the object of *have* or the subject of the nonfinite verb phrase. Since English is a strict SVO language, the object does not necessarily have to be a semantic argument of the verb and yet it can have some crucial object properties, like transformation into the subject of a passive sentence. A case in point are the so-called raised objects, which are semantic arguments of the verb in the dependent clause, as is exemplified by (17):

(17a) They believe that he killed his wife.

(17b) They believe him to have killed his wife.

(17c) He is believed to have killed his wife.

Moreover, the object does not have to bear any semantic relation with respect to either the matrix verb or the verb in the dependent clause, as is the case with the existential *there* or *it* in meteorological predications:

(18a) They believe that there is a lion in the garden.

(18b) They believe there to be a lion in the garden.

(18c) There is believed to be a lion in the garden.

(19a) I believe that it is raining in Osijek.

(19b) I believe it to be raining in Osijek.

(19c) It is believed to be raining in Osijek.

Given the fact that subjects and objects do not have to be semantic arguments of a predicate in English (cf. Kučanda 1990), it also seems plausible to suggest that a semantic argument of a predicate is not necessarily assigned a syntactic function.

3 On the Pragmatics of *have* Sentences

The final issue to be addressed in this paper is a brief analysis of some pragmatic aspects of the use of *have* sentences considered here. They are described as *the have-existential device* by Quirk et al (1985:1411ff), who also note that this is a type of presentative sentence in which the thematic position is not occupied by a dummy, as is the case in *there* existential constructions, but is filled by a noun phrase subject preceding the verb *have* or *have got* in British English.⁴ The semantic function of the subject of *have* is described as affected, as in (20) or, as either affected or agentive, as in (21):

(20) He had a book stolen.

(21) She has had some poems published.

What seems most controversial in this analysis is the derivation of *have* sentences from sentences in which the subject of *have* corresponds to a possessive construction, that is (22) is argued to be derived from (22a), and (23) is argued to be derived from either (23a) or (23b), depending on its meaning.

(22) I have two buttons missing.

(22a) Two of my buttons are missing.

(23) She has had some poems published.

(23a) Some poems (of hers) have been published.

(23b) She has caused some poems (of her own or by someone else) to be published.

⁴ It should be noted that *the have-existential device*, as described by Quirk et al. (1985:1411ff) does not include only *have* sentences discussed here, but also sentences like (i) and (ii), which are beyond the scope of this paper because they do not have the syntactic pattern illustrated in (1).

(i) The porter has a taxi ready.

(ii) He had several friends in China.

The idea that the verb *have* is used in some languages, including English, as a special device for the thematization or topicalization of the person interested in, experiencing or causing the state of affairs expressed by the predication following *have* (i.e. NP₂ + nonfinite verb phrase) is not new and stems from the works of Havers (1911), Bally (1926) and Mathesius (1929, 1964).⁵ The analyses of Havers (1911) and Bally (1926) have been taken up by Fillmore (1968:63), who has argued that sentences like (24), (25) and (26)

(24) I have a missing tooth.

(25) My tooth is missing.

(26) One of my teeth is missing.

are distinct superficial ways of expressing the same relationship, and this seems to be also the position taken by Quirk et al. (1985:1411ff), as is exemplified by (22) and (23) above. The approach adopted in this paper is that different linguistic expressions of what may be the same "reality" do not express this »reality« from the same point of view. In (22) the speaker emphasizes his/her personal involvement in the event, whereas (22a) is noncommittal, i.e. it is a simple statement of facts. More generally, the construction type discussed in this paper is a pragmatic device which enables the speaker to empathize with the referent of the subject of *have*⁶. In the possessive construction, the degree of the speaker's identification with a person who participates in the event is 0, whereas in the *have* constructions it is 1. Moreover, it is not the case that all *have* sentences can be derived from underlying possessive constructions, as is exemplified by (27):

(27) He has his wife's aunt coming on Sunday.

The subject of *have* in (27) cannot be identified with the »possessor«, as is the case in sentences like (22) and (24). It may indeed be the case that the *have* sentences and sentences with a possessive determiner or genitive express the same real world situation, but this does not necessarily mean that one of them is more basic than the other, unless basic is understood to mean more 'transparent' or 'simpler in structure'.

⁵ It is a well known fact that many languages employ the so-called dative of possession to express what Havers (1911:2) has called 'innere Anteilnahme der von dem Verbalbegriff betroffenen Person aus'. In the course of its historical development the English language has gradually replaced the possessive dative with the possessive determiner or the genitive case, and it has thus lost a morphosyntactic device which enables the speaker to present the same extralinguistic content from two different perspectives, since the possessive determiner/the genitive simply states a relationship of possession and does not include an element of personal involvement (cf. Havers, 1911). Bally (1926:75), on the other hand, speaks of the invention of the verb *have*, whose function is to make the *personne intéressée* the subject of a sentence as an alternative to dative or possessive constructions. Mathesius (1929, 1964) has also pointed out that the subject of *have* may be affected by what is expressed by the nonfinite complement and implicitly argues that *have* is a device which enables the thematization of the subject.

⁶ Empathy is defined by Kuno and Kaburaki (1977:628) as 'the speaker's identification, with varying degrees (ranging from degree 0 to 1), with a person who participates in the event that he describes in a sentence'.

4 Conclusions

This paper has argued that *have* sentences with an NP and a nonfinite verb phrase complement are not instantiations of complex transitive complementation. It has been argued that *have* is a two-place predicate which takes a monotransitive complement with no clearly defined syntactic function. The noun phrase following *have* does not show any clear object or subject properties with respect to either the preceding finite verb or the nonfinite verb, although it is a semantic argument of the latter, as is evident from the fact that its semantic function depends on the meaning of the nonfinite verb. The assignment of a semantic function to the first argument of *have*, which functions as its syntactic subject, is determined by the semantics of the complement. *Have* sentences with a noun phrase and nonfinite verb complement are considered to be a special pragmatic device which enables the speaker to empathize with the referent of the subject of *have*.

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O SINTAKSI, SEMANTICI I PRAGMATICI NEKIH REČENICA S GLAGOLOM *HAVE*

U radu se raspravlja o sintaktičkim, semantičkim i pragmatičkim aspektima analize nekih tipova rečenica s glagolom *have* kao glavnim glagolom i dopunom u obliku imenskoga izraza i nefinitnoga glagola. Sintaktička analiza pokazuje da imenski izraz iza glagola *have* nije ni direktni objekt toga glagola ni subjekt nefinitnoga glagola jer nema svojstva kodiranja i ponašanja tipična za direktni objekt, odnosno subjekt u engleskome jeziku. Nominalni izraz iza *have* je semantički argument nefinitnoga glagola s kojim čini jednu sintaktičku i semantičku dopunu glavnome glagolu. Semantička interpretacija toga izraza zavisi od semantike nefinitnoga glagola, a semantička interpretacija subjekta glagola *have* proizlazi iz semantike cijele dopune toga glagola. Analizirani tip rečenice predstavlja pragmatičko sredstvo koje omogućava govornicima engleskoga jezika prikazivanje neke izvanjezične situacije iz perspektive referenta subjekta glagola *have*.