

Having a Topic, Wanting a Focus

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I. Introduction

This paper compares various uses of English non-auxiliary *have*, including the following:

1. Mary had a yoga class yesterday. (eventive light verb)
2. Mary has a sister. (relational)
3. Mary has a mirror. (possessional)

The eventive light verb *have* in (1) has interesting discourse properties that are virtually identical to those previously noted for relational *have* (Partee 1999) and possessional *have* (Tham 2002; Tham 2005). For example, the pronoun *it* in the collocation *had it* cannot be topic-anaphoric to a specific event: hence, (1) can appear in discourse (4) but not (5) (where *it* refers to the Mary's specific yoga class token):

4. Mary had a yoga class yesterday. Apparently she really enjoyed it.
5. Mary had a yoga class yesterday. #Sam **had it** too.

In essence, I propose that the eventive light verb (LV) *have* is not distinct from the other uses of 'heavy' *have*. The subject of the eventive light verb *have*+NP conventionally expresses a particular participant in the NP-denoted event, much as it expresses an argument of the *sister* relation in (2). When the NP fails to supply an open argument, as in (3), *have* defaults to the alienable possession relation.

II. A puzzle.

English has many light verb *have* + NP collocations such as the following:

6. a. **events**: Mary is having *an operation/ knee surgery/ a haircut/ an argument/ a yoga class/ a tantrum/ dinner / a beer/ an accident/ a discussion*
- b. **states**: Mary has *total freedom/ faith in the flying spaghetti monster/ a headache/ a cold/ the chills/ the hiccups/ the creeps*
- c. **relational DPs**: Mary has *a sister/ a big nose/ an agreement with Susan/ bad breath/ a charming personality/ a Norwegian accent*
- d. **inanimate subjects**: The room has *a mirror/ four walls/ a nice view*
- e. **alienable possession**: Mary has *the key to the safe/ a mirror*

Focusing for the moment on eventive *have*+NP expressions (6a), we note that pronouns can be topic-anaphoric to the event, as in these various alternative continuations in the following two-sentence discourses:

7. Mary **had a yoga class** yesterday at Casa de Luz.
 - a. ...Apparently she really enjoyed **it**.
 - b. ...But **it** was too crowded.
 - c. ...Ruth enjoyed **it** too.
 - d. ...I enjoyed **it** too.
 - e. ...I attended **it** too.

However, the same pronoun resists topic anaphoricity when it is the object of the LV *have*:

8. Mary **had a yoga class** yesterday at Casa de Luz.
 - a. ... I know. #I **had it** too.
 - b. ... #Ruth **had it** too.

Acceptability improves considerably if the subject of *had it* is coreferential with the antecedent's subject:

9. Mary **had a yoga class** yesterday at Casa de Luz.
... She [Mary] **had it** right before lunch.

And it also improves if the anaphora involves only type-identity and not token-identity with the antecedent event nominal:

10. Have you taken **phonetics** yet?
— Sure, I had **it** last fall.
(*it* = a class of the type 'phonetics')

Putting aside the exceptions in 9 and 10 for now, the puzzle is as follows: Why can't *it* in *had it* be topic-anaphoric to a specific event?

Let's first confirm that we are dealing with true anaphora and not, for example, object expletives (like the *it* in *Cool it with the bongos, yo.*). Swedish shows exactly the same pattern, and moreover has grammatical gender agreement with the antecedent event nominal. Swedish has two genders: the pronoun *den* in 11 agrees with the Non-neuter (NN) noun *olycka* 'accident' and the pronoun *det* in 10 agrees with the Neuter (Nt) noun *personalmöte* 'personnel meeting':

11. Jag hörde att Johan hade **en olycka**. ...
I heard that John had **an.NN accident**
- a. **Den** hände klockan fem, mitt i rusningstiden.
it.NN happened 5:00, in middle of rush hour

- b. #Sten **hade den** också; han satt på passagerarsidan.
Sten **had it.NN** too; he sat in the passenger seat
- c. ?Och han **hade den** klockan fem, mitt i rusningstiden.
and he **had it.NN** at 5:00, in the middle of rush hour

12. Jag hade ett personalmöte igår. ...

I had **a.Nt** personnel meeting yesterday

- a. Var **det** spännande som vanligt?
was **it.Nt** exciting as usual
- b. Ja, jag vet. #Jag **hade det** också!
yes, I know. I **had it.Nt** too
- c. Jaså det; var **hade du det** då?
oh yeah? where did you **have it.Nt** then

As in English, the pronoun can be anaphoric to a topical event nominal unless that pronoun is the object of *ha* 'have' with a new subject that differs from that of its antecedent. Example 12c illustrates the ameliorating effect of having the same subject (cp. 9). Gender agreement shows that we are dealing with true pronominal anaphora.

The difficulty of a pronominal object of LV *have* is reminiscent of definiteness restrictions on relational *have* as in *John has a/*the sister* (Partee 1999, Tham 2004, 2005). So that is where we will seek our explanation.

II. The semantics and discourse pragmatics of the other *have*'s.

Partee (1999) noted that *have*+relational NP exhibits a definiteness effect that parallels *there*-existential constructions.¹ She pointed out that exactly the same set of determiners is permitted in the slots in 13 and 14, namely the so-called weak determiners listed in 15:

13. There is/are ____ candidate(s) for the job.

14. John has ____ sister(s).

15. OK in 13, 14: *a, some, three, at least three, several, many, a few, no, few, at most three, exactly three.*

16. * in 13, 14: *the, every, both, most, neither, all, all three, the three.*

Partee analyzed these *have*+relational NP collocations as existential constructions: *John has a sister* asserts the existence of an x such that the **sister**' relation holds between x and *John*. Partee's analysis of relational *have*:

17. *John has a sister*: $\exists x[\textit{sister-of}(j)(x)]$
have a sister: $\lambda y[\exists x[\textit{sister-of}(y)(x)]]$
a sister: $\lambda P\lambda y[\exists x[\textit{sister-of}(y)(x) \wedge P(x)]]$
have: $\lambda R[\mathbf{R}(\textit{exist})]$

where \mathbf{R} is of type $\langle\langle e,t \rangle, \langle e,t \rangle\rangle$, and *exist* is $\lambda z[z = z]$.

Note that *have* lacks rich semantic content, acting instead as a kind of 'support verb' or 'light verb' to mark an argument of the semantic relation denoted by its complement NP.

¹ Partee cites Landman and Partee (1987) for the origin of this observation.

Building on Partee's work, Tham (2004, 2005) adopted a discourse-pragmatic approach and effectively extended the Partee's existential account to *non-relational* indefinite objects of *have* as in *John has a book*. On the face of it this may seem like a surprising move, since there appears to be no definiteness effect here: *John has the book* is also acceptable. Tham basically assimilated indefinites like *a sister* and *a book*, and argued that definites like *the book* have a different interpretation. The 'existential' *have* appearing with indefinites, which she calls Possessive *have*, denotes the two place relation $\text{POSS}[+\text{exist}](x,y)$, where:

18. a. POSS is the relation inherited from a relational complement

b. if the complement of *have* is non-relational then POSS defaults to the (alienable) possession relation, which Tham calls *control*.

Logical forms for relational and non-relational indefinites are shown in 19 and 20 respectively:

19. a. Eliza has a sister.

b. $\exists x[\text{sister}(\text{eliza}, x)]$

20. a. Eliza has a mirror.

b. $\exists x[\text{mirror}(x) \wedge \text{control}(\text{eliza}, x)]$

Although not mentioned by Tham, a potential argument for unifying these two is that they can be coordinated under a single *have*:

21. a. Susan has [three daughters and a big house].

b. Susan has [big hands and big gloves].

While the technical details of making the default **control** relation apply to one conjunct of a coordinate NP remain to be worked out, at the very least this suggests we are dealing with one and the same verb *have*, whether expressing alienable or inalienable possession.

Tham argues that the **possessive** *have* just described is but one of three different *have*'s, the other two being '**focus** *have*' and '**control** *have*'. Continuing first with possessive *have*, Tham separates the semantic and information structure (discourse-pragmatic) components of possessive *have* as follows:

22. Possessive *have*

- a. Semantics: a **possessive** relation, either inalienable (*a daughter*) or alienable (*a mirror*)
- b. Information structure: presentation of **new information**.

Tham supports the restriction to new information with discourses like the following:

23. A: This is a good mirror.

B: #Yes, Eliza has it.

(cp. B': It belongs to Eliza. / Eliza owns it.)

Since the mirror is topical or old information, possession of the mirror cannot be expressed using *have*, as shown in 23B. Instead another verb must be used (see 23B'). The 'yoga class' puzzle that we started with resembles the oddity of 23B noted by Tham, and indeed I will suggest that it is the same phenomenon.

Tham further suggests that either (i) the semantic component or (ii) the information structure component can be bleached out, yielding two more functions for *have*, *focus have* and *control have*, respectively.

Tham illustrates *focus have* with this example:

24. Context: *Duties are being divvied up for a refurbishing project; A asks about Eliza's duties.*

A: What will Eliza be polishing?

B: Eliza has all the mirrors.

In this scenario Eliza does not in any sense 'possess' the mirrors. Utterance 24B is interpreted by substituting 'all the mirrors' for the variable X in the open proposition 'Eliza will be polishing X', which is contributed by 24A in this discourse context (on the notion of *open proposition* see (Prince 1986)). So the interpretation of 24B is 'Eliza will be polishing all the mirrors.' Thus 'all the mirrors' is in focus, representing new or unpredictable information relative to the given background information; hence the term 'focus *have*'. Focus *have* maintains the 'new information' requirement observed above for possession *have*, but lacks the specific semantic relation of possession. It requires a salient presupposed open proposition in the discourse context.

Tham illustrates the last type, control *have*, with this example:

25. A: Where are all the mirrors?

B: Eliza has them.

Utterance 25B conveys a particular sense of possession that Tham calls **control**. Essentially it means that Eliza controls the destiny of the mirrors, through physical possession or some more abstract entitlement. The use of the pronoun *them* prevents a focus *have* reading, forcing this specific semantic relation of control. Crucial evidence is that inanimate possessors are not permitted. Inanimate subjects can normally appear with indefinite DPs:

26. The bathroom has several mirrors/ a mirror.

Since the NP is indefinite it is not topical and so this is not **control have** (but rather possession have). Interestingly, control *have* disallows inanimate subjects:

27. A: Where are the mirrors?

B: #The bathroom has them.

(cf. They're in the bathroom.)

Utterance 27B is strange. It seems to be attributing sentience to the bathroom, because 'control' requires a sentient controller.

Summarizing, Tham posits three *have*'s:

28. a. possessive have: (i) encodes a semantic possessive relation, either inalienable or alienable, and (ii) must present new information.

b. focus have: presents new information relative to a salient open proposition.

c. control have: encodes possessive control relation.

With this as background, let us return to the eventive light verb *have*, as in *have a yoga class*.

III. Back to the yoga class

Consider 8 above, repeated here:

29. Mary **had a yoga class** yesterday at Casa de Luz.

a. ... I know. #I **had it** too.

b. ... #Ruth **had it** too.

What is the eventive LV *have* in 29? I propose that the eventive LV *have* is not distinct from 'heavy' *have* discussed in the previous section. Then which *have* is it, possessive, focus or control? It cannot be focus *have* because the LV picks out an argument of the NP-denoted event

and expresses it as its subject, while focus *have* does not function this way. It cannot be control *have*, because control *have* expresses a special semantic relation (namely control), while the LV inherits the NP-denoted relation.

That leaves possessive *have*. I would like to propose that the eventive LV *have* is just (Tham's) possessive *have*. The various collocations differ in the aspectual class of the complement NP, but the function of *have* is identical across them:

30. a. Mary has a sister. (sister: i-level)
 $\exists x[\mathbf{sister}'(\text{Mary}, x)]$
- b. Mary has a headache. (headache: state, s-level)
 $\exists e[\mathbf{headache}'(\text{Mary}, e)]$
- c. Mary is having a yoga class. (yoga class: event)
 $\exists e[\mathbf{yoga\ class}'(\text{Mary}, e)]$

Crucially, the relation, whether an individual level predicate (*sister'*), a stage-level or transitory state (*headache'*), or an event (*yoga\ class'*), comes from the complement NP and not from the verb. The subject of *have* expresses an undischarged argument of that NP-denoted relation, just as in Partee's analysis of *have a sister*. This means that the noun *yoga class* is relational, with an argument position corresponding to a student (or perhaps a teacher) of the class. This must be an optional argument position, that is, one that can optionally be existentially quantified over, since *yoga class* can appear without a LV (see below). To effect this valency reduction one could, for example, use Dowty's (1989:88) operator O.

The yoga class puzzle in 8 (=29) is now assimilated to Tham's example in 23. The discourse pragmatics of possessive *have* require that it express new information, so a topic anaphoric pronoun is not possible.

IV. The thematic role of the subject.

This analysis of the LV may help solve another problem regarding light verb constructions. There is nothing to prevent the other two *have*'s, control *have* and focus *have*, from taking event nominals as their complements. In those cases the event nominal lacks the argument position for the subject and so the thematic role played by the subject is not grammatically fixed. For example, consider the following narrative describing the hunt for a fugitive at a new age retreat.

31. A: Sgt. Kowalski looked in the herb garden. Malloy checked out the meditation room.

B: What about Officer Krupke?

A: Officer Krupke had the yoga class.

In this case the NP *the yoga class* is understood as filling the variable in the open proposition [Krupke investigated X]. In this utterance [*the yoga class*] does *not* have an unsaturated argument position for the 'student' thematic role, waiting to be filled by the subject. (This is the case described at the end of the last section, where the 'student' thematic role is bound off.) Hence Krupke is not interpreted as a yoga student.

We predict a systematic aspectual difference between the two types of sentence. Focus and control *have* are stative, while possessive *have* acts as a true light verb and thus aspect is determined by the complement NP, as noted above. Hence the present progressive, which forces non-stativity—

32. Officer Krupke was having a yoga class.

—allows only the interpretation where Krupke is doing yoga (as student or teacher). Also, the possessive/LV construction favors an indefinite object because it expresses new information.

Similarly, the present progressive in the following example forces the possessive/LV reading:

33. Jane is having an operation right now.

(Jane = patient/ *doctor / *other)

Thus Jane must be understood as the patient on the operating table. But now suppose Jane is a doctor and her receptionist is explaining to an irate patient why Jane was 90 minutes late for her appointment. The receptionist can say:

34. Jane had an operation.

(Jane = patient/ doctor / other)

where Jane is understood as the surgeon. In contrast, this reading is impossible for the progressive aspect example 33, even in an appropriate pragmatic context. The assignment of the ‘doctor’ role in 34, unlike the patient role in 33, appears to be a purely pragmatic assignment that is not grammatically fixed. For example, if Jane is a reporter covering medical issues and various reporting tasks are being assigned by the editor, then the editor can say

35. Jane has an operation.

to indicate that Jane will be reporting on an operation. And 34 could be a description of Jane’s past reporting assignment.

We’ve seen eventive LV constructions corresponding to Tham’s possessive and focus *have*, respectively. Are there eventive LV constructions corresponding to the third type, control *have*? It’s not clear, but a possible candidate is something like 36:

36. A: Who is teaching the introductory syntax class this fall?

B: John has it.

Compare 25 above. The verb in 36B can't be focus *have* because the object of *have* presents old information ('the introductory syntax class'). An inanimate subject can express the location of the event, as in 37:

37. Room 100 has a syntax class from 10 to 11.

But a pronoun that is anaphoric to a discourse topic is difficult with an inanimate subject:

38. A. Where is the syntax class being held?

B: #Room 100 has it.

Sentence 38B cannot involve focus *have*, because of the pronoun; but control *have* requires its subject to be sentient, hence the oddity of this sentence. Compare 26-27 above.

A remaining question: why is (b) better than (a)?

39. Mary **had a yoga class** yesterday at Casa de Luz.

a. #Ruth **had it** too.

b. She [Mary] **had it** right before lunch.

We may assume that the VP *had it* is anaphoric to the yoga class event in the antecedent. Since Mary was the agent of that event then she must be the agent of the one referred to by the anaphor. That is, the sentence *Mary had a yoga class yesterday* translates as 40a:

40. a. $\exists e.[\text{yogaclass}(e, \text{Mary}) \wedge \text{yesterday}(e)]$

b. $\text{right-before-lunch}(e)$

The VP *had it* in 39b is anaphoric to the specific event *e*, of which Mary is the agent.

For the same reason, *it* as object of *have* can be anaphoric to an event *type*, as we saw in 10 above, repeated here:

41. Have you taken **phonetics** yet?

— Sure, I had **it** last fall.

(*it* = a class of the type ‘phonetics’)

As expected, it is worse with the token reading:

42. Were you in my phonetics class last fall?

—?#Sure, I had it. Don’t you remember me?

In fact, Tham (2005:222) observed the same contrast with possessive *have*, contrasting the definiteness effect in examples like 23 above with the following:

43. This is a good book, have you read it before?

— I have the book. (Tham 2005:222)

(= I have a book of the type under discussion)

Similarly, eventive definites are very difficult when they denote specific events (the Ride for the Roses is an annual cycling fundraiser):

44. a. I had a long bike ride last fall.

b. #I had the 2005 Ride for the Roses last fall.

V. Conclusion: How many *have*’s are there?

The main proposal put forth in this paper is that the very same verb *have* is found in eventive collocations like *have a yoga class* and in relational expressions like *have a sister*. In

both expressions *have* functions as a support verb, expressing through its subject an open argument of its nominal complement. Tham assimilated the relational type to the *have* of alienable possession in *have a mirror*, where the object must be indefinite; that semantic relation of alienable possession acts as a default applying when the object fails to supply the needed open argument.

The remaining senses of *have* in Tham's typology can apparently take event nominals too, but in this case the nominal is fully saturated, so *have* is not acting as a support verb in the sense just described. Thus the role played in the event by the subject is not grammatically fixed but rather determined by pragmatics. Since these senses of *have* are stative, any non-stative uses (forced by progressive aspect, for example) are predicted to assign a fixed thematic role, in contrast to stative uses which are freer (cp. examples 33 and 34).

A separate issue is whether the subtle semantic and pragmatic properties of *have* in its various uses should really be captured in the lexical entry (or entries) for this word (or words), as Tham's pioneering study suggests, or rather can be explained in more general terms. One way to address that question is by studying verbs that incorporate a 'have'-like meaning component, such as *get*, *give*, and the use of *want* with a nominal object, as in *Mary wants a new car*. That question will be left for future research.

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