

A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF CAUSATIVE AND EXPERIENTIAL *HAVE**

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I. *Introduction*

Much popular interest has been taken in the semantic distinction often made between expressions involving causative MAKE, LET, and HAVE in English, as illustrated by the following:

- (1) John made his brother help him.
- (2) John let his brother help him.
- (3) John had his brother help him.

The account of these sentences might go as follows: (1) means that John caused his brother to help him against his will or in spite of his reluctance; (2) implies that John allowed or permitted his brother to help him, as he wished to; and (3), which is semantically more neutral than the other two, suggests just that John told his brother to help him, with no indication as to his desire to do so.

Although analyses of this sort may appear to be sufficiently illuminating, the semantics of the causative verbs in question — MAKE, LET, and HAVE — still remains a subject of great interest to those concerned in any way with the description of lexical verbs in English. This is especially true for the verb HAVE, which on examination turns out to be richer in meaning and thus more intriguing than the account presented above would suggest. Many works devoted to the grammar of English fail to explore some important aspects of expressions with causative HAVE, neglecting to fully clarify the semantic peculiarities they are expected to show. This may well be responsible for the relative difficulty of getting a clear overall picture of the nature of the causation encoded by the construction.

The aim of the present paper is to shed light on the semantic potentiality of the verb HAVE as it appears in causative and related constructions, an issue that should deserve some academic as well as popular attention. Our discussion centers around the type of expression in which HAVE is followed by object and bare infinitive (exemplified by (3)), but mention is also made of cases where the verb takes complements of other types.

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II. *Previous Analyses*

2.1. Wierzbicka (1988)

Wierzbicka (1988, pp.240-41) analyzes the HAVE causative sentence (4) in terms of the semantic configuration (5):

- (4) Hilary had Robin type the letters.
 (5) Hilary had Robin do Z (type the letters).→
 Hilary wanted this: Robin will do Z (type the letters)
 Hilary said this: I want this: Y will do Z
 Robin did Z (typed the letters) because of that
 Hilary knew this:
 Robin will not say this: I don't want it
 Robin cannot say it¹

In this case, Hilary (the causer) wanted Robin (the causee) to type the letters, and he communicated his will to him. Robin, the causee, readily performed the causer's will because the causer knew that the causee would not and could not say that he was unwilling. According to Wierzbicka, this type of HAVE causative implies some sort of "power" relation between the causer and the causee: the latter is expected to comply with the former's will, and there is no assumption, or expectation, of unwillingness on the part of the latter.²

2.2. Goldsmith (1984)

Goldsmith (1984) presents the following examples (ibid. p.118):

- (6) Mr. Malone had his secretary type up several extra copies of the letter.
 (7) Joan had her brother pick up an extra bottle of milk on the way home.
 (8) Mr. McCarthy had the worst-behaved students stand up and present their book reports from memory.

These sentences, it is claimed, indicate a situation where the will of the causer is taken in the social context to suffice to define the action of the causee. Examples (6) and (8) involve a relationship in which the causer is taken to be of higher status than the causee, a situation where the will of the former arguably constitutes a sufficient condition for the performance of the action by the latter. Example (7) illustrates a situation that involves, as causer and causee, siblings of much the same status, a situation which may presumably allow the causer's will to be readily carried out by the causee, except in special circumstances.³

¹ This configuration for HAVE causatives applies only to those cases in which the verb of the complement expresses an intentional action.

² Wierzbicka (1988, p.241) notes that the MAKE causative construction also implies a sort of power relation between the causer and the causee, though in a different way. The MAKE causative usually implies that the causee is acting against his/her will, an implication HAVE causatives do not share.

³ Shibatani (1973, p.43) states that the HAVE causative expresses a situation without any resistance involved. This generalization, as Goldsmith (1984, p.117) points out, is counterexampled by sentence (8), where there may in fact have been some sort of resistance on the part of the causee.

As appears from the discussion above, the type of HAVE causative under consideration requires for its appropriate application a social situation where one person's wish is tantamount to another's command. Failure to meet this condition would usually lead to unacceptability, as the following sentence indicates (*ibid.*):

- (9) *Elizabeth had her mother let her stay up late.

The use of the HAVE causative is quite odd in this context because the sentence describes, or purports to describe, a situation where the causer, who is unquestionably lower in status than the causee, succeeded in attaining her wish after persuading the latter. In this case, the intended meaning could be more naturally expressed by the substitution of the GET causative construction (*ibid.*):

- (10) Elizabeth got her mother to let her stay up late.

Generally speaking, HAVE causatives seem impossible where persuasion of some sort is involved, as sentences like the following indicate (*ibid.*):

- (11) *Sarah had the baby stop crying.
 (12) *Lisa had the puppy stop barking.
 (13) *I had the terrorist put down his gun.

2.3. Ikegami (1990)

Ikegami (1990) discusses the HAVE + Object + Infinitive construction on the basis of its actual uses found in the SEU (Survey of English Usage) corpus. According to Ikegami, the semantic range of the construction is wider and looser than that of the GET + Object + *to*-Infinitive construction, covering those cases in which the causer is in control of the causee ("maximal control" on the part of the causer and "minimal spontaneity" on the part of the causee) at one end and those in which the causee stays out of the control of the causer ("minimal control" on the part of the causer and "maximal spontaneity" on the part of the causee) at the other, with the focal meaning tending toward the latter cases. The construction, it is claimed, is characterized by a lack of the implication of resistance on the part of the causee, which generally sets it apart from the GET + Object + *to*-Infinitive construction.⁴

Ikegami (1990) distinguishes between the following three cases where the pattern HAVE + Object + Infinitive is used:

- A. the subject is unable to control the event represented by Object + Infinitive
- B. the subject functions as a full-fledged causer, being in control of the causee
- C. the status of the subject is located somewhere between these two extremes

Examples include (*ibid.* p.183-86):

- A. (14) ...if you do have any emergency arise, I'll just have to pack up and go...
- (15) ...having people pat me on the head and then I get all frightened up.
- B. (16) she's had kids go through that home...that have had nothing but hate and rejection from people.

⁴ See Note 3. Examples like (8) seem to have escaped Ikegami's attention.

- C. (17) A woman I know has just had Gerald Pollinger sell serial rights of her FIRST novel to Woman's Realm for 600 guinis!

In (14) and (15), the HAVE+Object+Infinitive construction takes on a non-causative character, conveying the idea of the subject being affected in some way by the uncontrollable event expressed by the complement Object+Infinitive. By contrast, sentences like (16) lend themselves very naturally to a causative interpretation, in the sense that the subject can be regarded as having brought about the event involved more or less intentionally. It could reasonably be argued that examples of this type are related to the ones we have discussed in 2.1. and 2.2. Example (17), a sentence treated as somewhat different from those of the former two types, represents a less prototypical expression of causation, for the sentence seems to have its semantic focus on the way the subject is affected, adversely or favorably, by the event reported by the complement, rather than on the idea of causation with which the construction is associated. One might argue, therefore, that this example of HAVE+Object+Infinitive is somewhat more closely related to examples (14) and (15) than it would be to (16). One might also argue that examples of this sort may serve to illustrate the continuum character of seemingly diverse uses of a lexical construction.⁵

III. *An Inquiry into Types of HAVE*

The previous section has been devoted to an examination of some analyses presented so far of a construction involving the verb HAVE followed by an object and an infinitive. In the present section, based on the insights now shared, we will attempt to inquire into the form with a view to gaining a coherent picture of its semantic aspects.

3.1. Causative HAVE

The first point to note in the analyses considered above is that the uses of the verb HAVE treated in Wierzbicka (1988) and Goldsmith (1984) constitute a type of semantic category that distinguishes it from other verbs of the same general kind.⁶ The category may be characterized in terms of a social situation where two participants, the causer and the causee, are related in such a way that the latter is assumed or expected to comply with the former and thus the will of the former is usually all it takes to bring about the action of the latter. This can be taken to imply that, in the type of causative under consideration, there is little or no need for the causer to work hard on the causee to perform the action intended, due to the preestablished social relationship between them.⁷ Another way of interpreting the situation

⁵ The term "lexical construction" is to be understood to refer to a structure organized around a lexical rather than grammatical item (such as the lexical verb HAVE).

⁶ The type of usage which Ikegami (1990) classifies as the case B can presumably be subsumed under this category.

⁷ Although Okuyama (1992) and Okuyama (1993) are right in pointing out the crucial role played by the will of the causer in situations described by HAVE causatives, her characterization of the construction as having a non-coercive meaning, which follows Shibatani (1973), does not gain universal support (cf. Yagi (1999, p.84)). The relevance of the notion of coerciveness, we might argue, is relative to how we interpret the preestablished relationship presupposed by the causative in question between the causer and the causee and which allows the performance of the action by the causee to be brought about.

would be to say that the HAVE causative in question is marked by what may be referred to as a smooth process of causation; the causer can usually expect to have little difficulty in realizing his/her will.⁸ This explains the general unacceptability of the expression as used to depict situations like those in (11) – (13), where one participant persuades the other to do something. It is easy to see that, more often than not, the road to successful persuasion is not so smooth as one wishes it to be; it is a matter of getting over difficulties.

One common type of situation for which the HAVE construction is particularly appropriate is what may be called “expert causation,” where one causes an expert in some field to do what it is impossible for one to do. The following examples are a case in point:

- (18) We decided to have a specialist examine the child. (Goldsmith 1984, p.127)
 (19) I had a technician fix my computer.

The object + infinitive structure can be replaced by one of an object and a past participle:

- (20) I've just had my car repaired./I'm going to have my hair cut. (Alexander 1988, p.247)

This situation type, which is arguably characteristic of the HAVE causative, brings us to the second point to make about the semantics of the construction: in the case of expert causation, the causer does not always hold a higher status than does the causee, as examples like (18) indicate. It is true that inequality of status is often observed in the relationship between participants in a HAVE causative situation, but it is by no means a necessary or sufficient condition for a causation to be described by the verb. The use of the expression is crucially dependent upon the possibility of a smooth process of causation without the causer working hard on the causee, rather than upon a hierarchical relation between them.

The unique type of situation associated with HAVE causatives discussed so far is also shown to characterize another variant of the construction:

- (21) He had us laughing all through the meal. (Swan 1995, 242)
 (22) I'll have you speaking English in six months. (Alexander 1988, p.247)

Like the examples of other variants presented, these sentences, involving complements of an object + present participle pattern, do not mean that the causer tries to (directly) persuade the causee into doing something, as would be meant by causatives of some other type. Rather, this variant of HAVE causative indicates that the causer does some sort of action (one other than (direct) persuasion) that leads to the causee performing the action denoted by the participial clause. Lack of an implication of persuasion on the part of the causer is shared by the following example, where the duration of a causative situation is stressed:

- (23) She had us working day after day. (Quirk et al. 1985, p.1207)

⁸ This is not to say that the process of causation is always free from any kind of difficulty. As noted above, some HAVE causatives, albeit less prototypical ones, can describe situations in which a communication of the causer's will does not really suffice to define the action of the causee.

3.2. Experiential HAVE

In the preceding subsection, we have been concerned with the semantics of HAVE causative expressions of various complement types. Most of the cases treated, as we have seen, illustrate the same general kind of usage, one that is characterizable with respect to the nature of the causation and the relationship between the participants. Although this represents a major semantic category, it is not the whole picture and the construction is known to appear in a somewhat different though related context of use. This fact is appreciated in Ikegami (1990), which recognizes cases of the HAVE+object+infinitive pattern exemplifying this meaning possibility.⁹ Further examples include:

- (24) It's lovely to have people smile at you in the street. (Swan 1980, 286)
- (25) Having somebody take an interest in me after all these years makes me feel as though I had found a sort of family.¹⁰
- (26) I've never had such a thing happen(ing) to me before. (Alexander 1988, p.303)

As Ikegami (1990) suggests, in these cases the subject is not in a position to be in full control of the event reported by the complement, in the sense that its occurrence is not regarded as being governed by the will of the subject. This type of HAVE construction is often claimed to undergo an experiential interpretation, under which the subject experiences or is in some way affected by the complement-denoted event.¹¹ While there is some positive intuitive validity in analyses along this line, that does not mean that it is pointless to attempt to bring the apparently non-causative use into relation to the idea of causativity, with which we have been operating in our inquiry into the lexical construction. In sentences (24) and (25), it could be argued that the subject, though certainly experiencing the event described by the complement, functions as the causer of that event by being held, to a greater or lesser extent, responsible for it: it is some sort of preexisting qualities marking the subject that cause him/her to experience the complement-denoted event. Another point to be noted is that these HAVE causatives, like those more prototypical ones discussed earlier, can be distinguished by the smoothness of the process of causation involved, in that all that is needed to bring about the event is the kind of responsibility on the part of the subject that follows from his/her preexisting qualities, which situation indicates that the causation involved is expected to have little difficulty in its process. The notion of processual smoothness, it may be noted, also seems applicable to situations presumably non-causative in character, such as that described by sentence (26), where it is arguable that nothing in the subject blocks him/her from experiencing the event depicted; the process of experience typically goes on without any problems. Thus, HAVE experiential expressions with varying degrees of causativity attributable to them share with true causative uses of the verb an intriguing characteristic with regard to the nature of the process involved. This characteristic seems to be also ascribable to HAVE experientials of the following kind, expressions used with a distinct adversative implication:

- (27) He had his pocket picked in the bus.

⁹ See 2.3.

¹⁰ This sentence is found in Jean Webster, *Daddy-Long-Legs*.

¹¹ See Masuoka (1979), Palmer (1987), Ritter and Rosen (1993), Inoue (1995) and Washio and Mihara (1997) for more discussion.

- (28) The house had its roof ripped off by the gale.
 (29) She had her house destroyed in an earthquake. (Alexander 1988, p.248)
 (30) Robert Thomas tells a famous story concerning the Cherokee who had a white man kill his children, steal his wife, sell his cattle, and burn his farm.¹²

The HAVE construction in these cases describes a situation in which the subject adversely experiences the complement-reported event, whether or not it is something for which the subject is considered to be responsible. A prominent feature of this type of situation associated with the verb, it will be noted, is that the subject is marked by general inability to resist the event described, a quality that should contribute to producing an experiential process with little to block it from going on. This indicates that the presence of processual smoothness is what may characterize situations described by HAVE experiential expressions, irrespective of the way the subject experiences the event involved. The bafflingly diverse uses of a construction prove to have running through them a common semantic characteristic, one that can be observed at a higher level of schematicity, lending support to the symbolic view of grammar distinctive of cognitive approaches to language.¹³

IV. *Processual Smoothness: A Motivation*

In the preceding section we have explored various types of expressions involving the verb HAVE and succeeded in identifying a semantic core shown to be common to all of them. Our inquiry into the construction will conclude with a brief consideration of how the existence of the common core is to be motivated, with reference to the usage of the lexical item around which it is organized.

A basic word usually covers a wide range of uses. It is generally accepted that the verb HAVE is primarily used to express a kind of possessive relation, where, as is often claimed, a sphere of some sort is defined in such a way that in the sphere the possessor successfully exerts some influence on the possessed.¹⁴ The sphere of influence is usually conceived of as being relatively stable, a conceptualization that is reflected in the stativity normally encoded by the verb. This state of affairs, it can be claimed, seems enough to make the verb ensure the presence of processual smoothness when it is extended to cover situations of the kinds illustrated above: that the process associated with those situations is expected to go on with little difficulty is amenable to connection with the relative stability of the base schema of a possessive sphere. This can be taken to imply a link between basic and extended uses of the same form, with the latter being motivated by the former: the semantic core shared by causative and experiential HAVE derives from the imagery associated with the kind of possessive relation for which the verb is primarily intended. It can claim to serve to hold the category together, by making the semantic extension accessible to our understanding.¹⁵

¹² This sentence is found in Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*.

¹³ See Langacker (1991), for instance, for an exposition of cognitively oriented linguistic research.

¹⁴ See Okuyama (1993, p.167).

¹⁵ See Dirven and Verspoor (1998, Chapter 2) for more illustration.

V. Summary

In this paper, we have concerned ourselves with the semantics of the verb HAVE as it appears in causative and experiential constructions. Both are capable of characterization in terms of the notion of processual smoothness, with the former evoking a smooth process of causation that often rests on a preestablished social relationship between the causer and the causee, and with the latter allowing association with a process of experience that typically goes on with little difficulty thanks to the presence or absence of relevant qualities in the subject. A seemingly baffling diversity of uses are shown to be brought into relation at a higher level of abstraction.

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