

Have a N (verbal-stem) Periphrastic Verbal Construction: A Reference-Point Model Approach

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Have a N (verbal-stem) periphrastic verbal construction (henceforth HPVC) as in *Mary had a walk in the garden* is reported to carry a special constructional meaning, which is not observed in the corresponding expression *Mary walked in the garden* (Wierzbicka 1988; Dixon 1991). She insightfully points out that the subject of HPVC plays dual role (i.e. agent; experiencer), claiming that the semantic contribution of the construction results in a notion of action construed as the agent's experience.

It is well known that focal participants in a sentence often play hybrid roles combining ACTIVE and PASSIVE participants (cf. Langacker 1990: 239) such as the subject of *walk* [AG-MVR] and the object of *kick* [EXPER-PAT]. HPVC primarily serves as expressions for a conceptual focus-shift whereby the emphasis moves from the subject entity's agent role in its action to its experiencer role in a potential effect on itself. HPVC as in (1) *I had a kick of the ball* (cf. *I kicked the ball*) is distinguished from other formally identical expressions as in (2) *I had a kick from the horse* (cf. *The horse kicked me*), of which the subject is inconsistent with that of the corresponding sentence (Dixon 1991). Wierzbicka (1988) claims that *have* in HPVC with a transitive-verbal-stem as in (1) functions as a detransitivizer so that the predication concerning the object may be backgrounded, arguing that while the object is de-emphasized, the emphasis on the agent increases. Although her semantic analysis explains characteristics of HPVC in a descriptive manner, it does not reveal the underlying mechanism of the conceptual focus-shifting. This paper elucidates the underlying conceptual manipulation of the focus-shift.

The semantics of HPVC is best characterized in reference-point model. It is claimed that the correspondence between the reference-point participant in the profile determinant component structure predicated by *have* and the internal trajector-substructure of verb-stem *kick* results in shifting a predication of verbal-stem in HPVC into an implicit predication about subject (i.e. subject (experiencer)-oriented conceptualization).

The assembling of component structures is sketched in Figure 1. The box in bold indicates that the enclosed component structure is a profile determinant, from which the composite structure inherits the profile. The correspondences between the substructures are represented by dotted lines. The semantic component structures of *have* and *a kick* are depicted on the left and the right respectively. The target participant of the profile determinant component corresponds with the profile of the count noun *kick*, not with any particular internal substructure of the noun. The internal trajector-substructure of verb-stem *kick* corresponds with the reference-point participant of the semantic component structure of *have* whereas the internal landmark-substructure does not have a direct correspondent substructure. The correspondence with the reference-point participant in the profile determinant component structure and the trajector status of the verb-stem *kick* result in the subject-oriented conceptualization. The dual role of the subject is also straightforwardly explained in the proposed reference-point model analysis. The trajector of the overall composite structure predicated by *have* is the experiencer/recipient and the corresponding substructure of the verb-stem *kick* is the agent. The subject nominal *I* in (1) elaborates the reference-point participant of the component structure on the left, not the trajector-substructure of the verb-stem *kick*. Thus HPVC profiles the experience or mental gain of the subject. Telic verbs and verb phrases do not occur in HPVC because the profile of the end point is incompatible with the constructional meaning of HPVC. The fact that specifying external goal as in *?John had a walk to the post office to post a letter* renders HPVC less acceptable is explained in the same fashion.

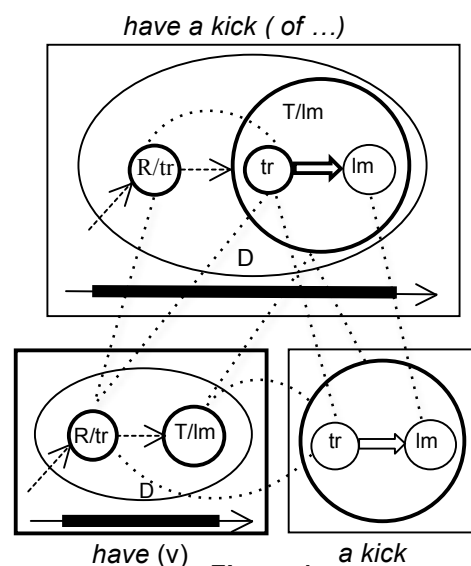


Figure 1

References

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- Wierzbicka, A. (1988) *The Semantics of Grammar*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.