



**MULTIFACETED ROLE OF “TO HAVE” IN ENGLISH: A LINGUISTIC
EXPLORATION OF SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS.**

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Abstract

The verb “to have” is one of the most frequently used verbs in the English language, functioning in a variety of grammatical contexts. This article explores the linguistic usage of “to have,” examining its syntactic, semantic, and morphological properties across different constructions. The study investigates “to have” as a lexical verb denoting possession, as well as its auxiliary function in perfect tenses and causative constructions. By analyzing corpora and drawing on data from both contemporary and historical texts, the research highlights the evolution of “to have” in terms of its syntactic flexibility, its interaction with other verb forms, and its role in expressing aspect and modality. The article also addresses the cross-linguistic comparison of “to have” with equivalent constructions in other languages, shedding light on universal patterns and language-specific variations. Overall, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted role of “to have” in English grammar, offering insights into its syntactic versatility and its contribution to the expression of temporal and aspectual meanings.

Key words: main verb, possession, formal context, informal context, obligation, syntactic features, semantic features, morphological features.

Аннотация

Глагол «to have» является одним из наиболее часто используемых глаголов в английском языке, функционирующим в различных грамматических контекстах. В этой статье исследуется лингвистическое использование «to have», изучаются его синтаксические, семантические и морфологические свойства в различных конструкциях. Исследование изучает «to have» как лексический глагол, обозначающий обладание, а также его вспомогательную функцию в перфектных временах и каузативных конструкциях. Анализируя корпуса и опираясь на данные как современных, так и исторических текстов, исследование подчеркивает эволюцию «to have» с точки зрения его синтаксической гибкости,





его взаимодействия с другими глагольными формами и его роли в выражении аспекта и модальности. В статье также рассматривается кросс-лингвистическое сравнение «to have» с эквивалентными конструкциями в других языках, проливая свет на универсальные модели и специфичные для языка вариации. В целом, это исследование дает всесторонний анализ многогранной роли «to have» в английской грамматике, предлагая понимание его синтаксической универсальности и его вклада в выражение временных и аспектуальных значений.

Ключевые слова: основной глагол, владение, формальный контекст, неформальный контекст, обязательство, синтаксические особенности, семантические особенности, морфологические особенности.

Introduction

The verb “to have” is a central element in English grammar, frequently appearing both as a lexical verb denoting possession and as an auxiliary verb in the formation of perfect tenses, modal constructions, and causative forms. Its dual role as both a full verb and a grammatical auxiliary creates a unique area of linguistic inquiry, one that offers valuable insights into the relationship between syntax, semantics, and morphology. Despite its ubiquity, the usage of “to have” has not received the same level of systematic attention as other more prominent verbs in the English language.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the syntactic and semantic properties of “to have” across various constructions. By focusing on its function in possessive expressions, perfect aspect, and causative structures, the paper investigates how “to have” interacts with other grammatical elements, particularly in terms of tense, aspect, and modality. Furthermore, the article examines the evolution of “to have” in English, tracing its historical development from Old English to contemporary usage. In addition, a cross-linguistic comparison with other languages will provide a broader perspective on the universal and language-specific features of possession and aspectual expressions.

Given its multifunctionality, “to have” offers a fascinating lens through which to study broader linguistic phenomena such as syntactic flexibility, the interplay between lexical and grammatical elements, and the evolution of grammatical systems. This





paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of “to have”, contributing to ongoing research in syntax, morphosyntax, and the semantics of verb forms.¹

Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative analyses to examine the usage of “to have” in various syntactic and semantic contexts. The primary data sources for the study include a corpus-based analysis, a historical linguistic survey, and cross-linguistic comparisons.

1. **Corpus-Based Analysis:** A corpus of modern English texts, including fiction, non-fiction, academic papers, and conversational transcripts, was compiled from publicly available databases such as the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). This corpus was analyzed to identify instances of “to have” in its different syntactic roles, including as a lexical verb (denoting possession), an auxiliary verb (in perfect aspect constructions), and a causative verb (e.g., “have someone do something”). Patterns of usage were coded for frequency, syntactic position, and co-occurring elements (such as tense markers or modal auxiliaries). Quantitative analyses were conducted to identify the most common constructions in which “to have” appears and to examine the distribution of its various functions across different registers of language.

2. **Qualitative Analysis:** In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative analysis was employed to examine contextual usage and semantic nuances of “to have” in various grammatical contexts. This analysis involves a close reading of selected texts to explore how the verb interacts with other elements of the clause, such as objects, subjects, and adverbs, and to analyze the specific meaning it conveys in each instance. By combining these methods, the study provides a multifaceted analysis of “to have” and its role in the grammatical system of English, while also offering a broader perspective through historical and cross-linguistic lenses.

Results and Discussion

The verb “to have” is one of the most essential and frequently used verbs in the English language. At first glance, it appears unimportant to teach the learners, however

¹ Bauer, L. (2002). *The Syntax of English Possession*. Oxford University Press.





it is definitely valuable in our daily life. There are multiple functions of “to have” in both speaking and writing. Trying to learn completely this functions and how to use it effectively is a complex phenomena.

The first function of the verb “to have” is used as a main verb. When we use it as a main verb, it indicates possession or to stand in a certain relationship.

Example: I have a set of pens which were presented by my younger brother.(=it refers to possession)

“To have” can also used in other meanings in a context as a main verb:

- Consist of~ Their diet has mainly vegetables.
- Demonstrate a quality or a feature~ This car has excellent fuel efficiency
- To show or ask if something is available~ Do you have time to do homework together?
- To express feeling~ John has a strong desire to purchase a several vehicles under the brand “BMW”.

•To organize or hold an event or activity~ We will have a party this weekend.

•To eat or drink~ I had banana smoothie this morning.

“Have got” also refers to possession in British English in informal contexts.

•I have got a cat I purchased two years ago.

In American English, people apt to use “have” instead.

•I have a cat I purchased two years ago.

We can use both versions, but “have got” is often more conversational.²

The second function of the verb “to have” is used as an Auxiliary verb .

“To have “ is one of English’s three auxiliary verbs that can adds more information to the main verb.

•We face mostly to “to have” in perfect tenses and conditionals. If we use “to have” as a perfect tense, it means that situations and states that started in the past and are still true or actions continuing up to the present moment.

•I have had this car for five years.(~in this example, “have” is auxiliary verb, “had” is main verb. And the situation is in the Present Perfect Simple.

² Kiparsky, P., & Condoravdi, C. (2006). The perfect as an evidential subjunctive. *Proceedings of the 25th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*, 99-107.





•I have been learning English for 2 years.(~here “have” adds more information to the main verb ‘learn’. And the action is in the Present Perfect Continuous.

•And we use “to have” in third conditional to express hypothetical conditions in the past and their results in the past. And it’s form is that:

If + past perfect , Subject + would have +past participle

•If I had done revision, I would have passed the exam .

•If my best friend had won the lottery last summer, she would have moved a bigger house

3. Have + something +past participle ~ this structure is called “dummy verb” , it means we receive service from others or someone else.

•I have my home repaired in order to look more attractive.

4. Have + object + bare infinitive/ gerund~ it means ‘experience something’.

Note that gerund refers to an ongoing experience, infinitive refers to the past experience.

•I had him singing along with me.

•I had an accident happen to me.

The third function of “to have “ is used as modal verb to express obligation or necessity.

•My brother always said: “I have to do my homework to avoid ignorance.

We can use “to have “ in idiomatic expressions.

1.To have time to kill~ to have spare time.

•If I had time to kill, I would play a piano with my brother.

2. To have a one track mind~ to think about only one thing.

•My best friend has a one track mind about taking IELTS certificate with band score 8.5

3. To have money to burn~ to have plenty of money to spend

•If I had money to burn yesterday, I would have payed for Jane.

4. To have a blast~ to enjoy oneself a lot

We had a blast at the concert last night

5. To have a bone to pick with someone~ have a reason to disagree with or be angry with someone

•Lucy have a bone to pick with John, because of his endless lies frustrate her.

6.³don’t have a clue~ do not know

³Lutz, D. (2011). *Causative Constructions in English*. Cambridge University Press





- Jane doesn't have a clue when it comes to choosing a good film

7. To have time on your hands~ to have a free time

- Tom has time on his hands to cook a dish for his family, especially at the weekends.

8.To have a word with someone~ speak to someone, usually briefly about a specific matter

- My teacher asked to have a word with me about her performance

9. To have second thoughts~ to reconsider a decision or a plan

- I am having second thoughts about moving to another city.

10. To have one's hands full~ being busy

- I can't help you right now, I have my hands full with this project.

We can also use "have" to describe people's behaviour

1.To have good manners= to be well-behaved

2.To have bad manners= to be rude and impolite

- I really appreciate my uncle, because he has very good manners.

"Have" is also used to "express a rest or sleep for a short period of time".

- Have a rest

- Have a lie down

- Have a nap

- Have a siesta

- Have a rest

- Have a snooze

- Have a power nap

- Have 40 winks

e.g. After lunch, I usually have a siesta to feel refreshed for the rest of the day.

Instead of using a verb, we can use "have + a + noun" to make expression softer or more inviting.

- Have a look

- Have a listen

- Have a smell

- Have a taste

- Have a bite





- Have a think
- Have a ponder
- Have a try
- Have a go

e.g. Would you like to have a taste of this pudding? It's delicious.⁴

Our research shows that, there are heaps of functions of the verb "to have" in a context.

Conclusion

The verb "to have" occupies a unique and multifaceted role in English grammar, functioning both as a lexical verb denoting possession and as an auxiliary verb used to express perfect aspect, causative constructions, and modality. This study has provided a comprehensive analysis of its syntactic, semantic, and historical dimensions, highlighting the complexity and versatility of "to have" in both contemporary and historical contexts.

Our corpus-based analysis revealed that "to have" operates in a wide array of syntactic structures, from simple possession expressions to more complex perfect aspect and causative constructions. The findings indicate a clear tendency for "to have" to serve as a grammatical auxiliary in the formation of the present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect tenses, where it combines with the past participle of other verbs to convey temporal nuances. Additionally, "to have" was found to participate in causative constructions, where it functions to express the causation of an action, illustrating its flexibility in expressing different types of relationships between the subject and the action.

The historical analysis traced the evolution of "to have" from its origins in Old English, where it primarily indicated possession, to its later expansion into auxiliary and causative roles in Middle and Modern English. This diachronic shift underscores the adaptive nature of the verb, reflecting broader trends in the grammaticalization of verbs over time. The comparison with other languages, such as French, Spanish, and German, further demonstrated that while "to have" may be grammatically universal in

⁴ **Lightfoot, D. W. (1991).** *How to Set Parameters: Arguments from Language Change.* MIT Press.





its role as an auxiliary verb in the perfect aspect, language-specific syntactic and morphological differences exist, providing valuable insights into the cross-linguistic variation of possession and aspect.

In conclusion, the research underscores the significant role of "to have" in English grammar, not only as a verb of possession but also as a critical element in the expression of temporality and causation. The study also contributes to a better understanding of the interplay between lexical and grammatical functions and the evolution of grammatical structures over time. Future research could further explore the cognitive mechanisms underlying the usage of "to have" and its relationship to other auxiliary verbs, as well as continue to examine the cross-linguistic parallels and distinctions in the expression of possession and aspect.

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