The definiteness effect in English HAVE sentences

The extent of the definiteness effect (DE) – a prohibition against definite or strong NPs (Milsark 1974) – on the complement position of English *have* is a long-standing puzzle that has only received partial accounts so far. I show first that the DE extends to non-relational *have* complement NPs, and is not restricted to relational *have* complement NPs, where the phenomenon is usually noted (Partee 1999). I then clarify what kind of context licenses strong/definite *have* complement NPs. These results point to a discourse-pragmatic basis behind both the DE and the licensing conditions of strong NP complements in *have* sentences. (I ignore *have* sentences with a post-complement XP, e.g. *Eliza has a book to read.*)

The DE shows up clearly with a relational complement to *have*, such as *sister, mother, aunt, nose,* etc. (1).

(1) Eliza has a/three/#every/#the sister(s).

In contrast, a strong NP *have* complement headed by a non-relational noun (e.g. *mirror, pen, clock* etc.) seems acceptable (3).

(2) Eliza has a/three mirror(s).

(3) Eliza has the/every mirror(s).

Despite this apparent absence of the DE, I show that (3) must be licensed by a particular kind of discourse context (discussed below) and is infelicitous discourse-initially, whereas (2) is acceptable across discourse contexts. Thus, even with a non-relational NP, *have* discriminates against a strong NP complement.

Moreover, the interpretation of (3) is more context-dependent than that of (2). While the relation described by (3) between Eliza and the relevant mirror(s) is always contextually-determined, example (2), besides the same contextually-furnished interpretation, yields an additional interpretation of alienable possession (implying though not entailing ownership) available across contexts. For example, suppose a hairdressing school uses some special mirrors for training. Someone tracking down these mirrors on hearing (3) must conclude that the mirrors are with Eliza. If told (2), however, (s)he can conclude that one or three of these mirror(s) are with Eliza, *or* that Eliza herself provides her own mirrors and doesn't need the school's. That is, the DE with a non-relational complement is associated with a context-independent possessive interpretation for *have*. I thus propose that the DE shows up on the complement, relational or otherwise, of POSSESSIVE *have*. I model these effects by giving possessive *have* the lexical semantic representation POSS[+exist](x,y), where V[+exist] means that the complement of V must be an *existential NP* as defined in Keenan (1987).

I then show that strong NP *have* complements are felicitous only when the *have* sentence is interpretable as containing (i) a contextually-licensed open proposition (OP) (Prince 1986) constituting shared knowledge between speaker and hearer and (ii) a focus contributed by one of the argument NPs of *have*. In the hairdressing school mirror context above, (3) contains the OP [X has control over the/every mirror] and the focus "Eliza".

Definite complement *have* sentences bring out a discourse-pragmatic basis of the DE of possessive *have*: a (positive declarative) *have* sentence introduces a brand-new entity (Prince 1986) into discourse, performing a function of presentational focus – analogously to verbs of existence/appearance (Guéron 1980, Rochemont 1986). That is, there are two parts to possessive *have*: (i) expressing a possessive relation; (ii) ensuring that its complement constitutes focus, or unfamiliar information.

This two-part rendition of the meaning of *have* suggests that, if polysemies of *have* arise, they should in principle be able to reflect different aspects of the meaning of *have*. This prediction is

supported by subtler distinctions within definite complement *have* sentences. I show that these sentences actually fall into two groups, depending on where the focus falls. We can attribute these groups to different senses of *have*. If focus falls on the definite complement, the relation in the OP is contextually determined and need not be possessive. This sense of *have* reflects the discourse-pragmatic requirement of *have* that its complement constitutes focus. If focus falls on the subject, the relation in the OP is confined to a sense of "having control over", which I argue is a particular sense of possession. This sense of *have* reflects the possessive meaning of *have*, but loses the focus requirement on its complement.

This pragmatically-based characterisation of the DE of *have* ties in with the much more prominent literature on the DE in existential *there* sentences, which has also been linked to the discourse-pragmatic function of introducing unfamiliar entities into the discourse (McNally 1997; Birner and Ward 1998). It adds to the inventory of 'presentational focus' verbs that are known to perform this function (e.g. verbs of appearance (Guèron 1980)). In some languages (e.g. Mandarin, French, Malay), the counterpart of *have*, besides expressing possession, is also widely recognised to have an existential use. My approach demonstrates a greater similarity between English *have* and its counterparts in these languages than might be initially apparent.

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