

## SYNTACTIC CONDENSATION AND THE COMMUNICATIVE INFORMATION STRUCTURE OF THE *HAVE*-EXISTENTIAL SENTENCE

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The article discusses the *have*-existential sentence both as an example of syntactic condensation and as a syntactic device of Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP), which serves to locate the communicative focus of the message. The functional characteristics of syntactic condensation in written communication are illustrated by examples of *have*-existential sentences from a contemporary British novel. The research aims at testing Grancharov's model for functional analysis within the functionalist framework of the Prague School of Linguistics. The correlation between formal and communicative word order outlines a distinction between the terms focus and emphasis and classifies a syntactic device of FSP either as actualizer or as rhematizer, depending on whether it serves to encode new or old information. For maximum objectivity the quality of the information is established on its retrievability from the immediate context.

**Key words:** Functional Sentence Perspective, syntactic condensation, focus, emphasis, *have*-existential sentence

### **I. What is a *have*-existential sentence?**

Quirk et al. (1994:1411) use the term “*have*-existential device”. This draws the attention to the function of the structure as a syntactic device for positioning the focus in the sentence, which seems to have more to it than simply expressing “existence”. The correspondence with basic clause types also points to the potential of the *have*-existential as a syntactic device of FSP. Quirk further explains that this correspondence is by no means as straightforward as it is with the *there*-existential. E.g.:

*I have friends living in London.*  
*Friends of mine are living in London.*  
*There are friends of mine living in London.*

The difference between the *there*-existential and the *have*-existential is that the second structure introduces an extra participant as a theme. Another difference is that the *have*-existential more readily allows definite NPs after the main predicate. The semantic implications of the existential proposition are outside the scope and purpose of this article. However, it is interesting to note that according to a survey carried out by Francis and Kucera in 1982 (cf. Pinker, 1999:10) based on a million-word corpus, the verb which has the highest frequency of occurrence in the English language is *be* and the second most frequently used verb is *have*. *Have* is almost universal in its uses – it can mean *drink* and *eat*, (*consume*); it can mean *receive*, *take*, etc. As Pinker (2007:64,84) explains, it is part of conceptual metaphors with the general meanings of *having and benefiting*, *having and knowing*, *having and moving*, etc. Along these lines it is easy to understand the connection in *having* and *being/existing*. *Have* also forms what is known in traditional syntax as simple verbal phraseological predicate. Apart from its basic meaning of *possession* it has a modal meaning as in *have (got) to*, as well as idiomatic uses. In the *have*-existential device, the construction may have causative interpretation (Quirk et al., *ibid.*).

1. *I had friends working in the garden.*

1.a) *Friends of mine were working in the garden.* – existential reading

1.b) *I got friends of mine to work (be working) in the garden.* – causative reading

The question arises: which of all the above mentioned cases should be considered to be a *have*-existential device proper? The answer is again given by Quirk et al. (*ibid.*) According to him the structure roughly corresponds to basic clause types. It serves to locate the focus/emphasis on the object of *have* or on the elements which follow it. This explanation suggests that the *have*-existential sentence involves secondary predication, either implied or explicit, because the object of *have* is at the same time subject of the participle or of the following predicative phrase. The cases of secondary predication involve syntactic condensation (cf. Mathesius, 1975). This means that the uses of *have* in the so-called simple verbal phraseological predicate (e.g. *have a drink*, *have a walk*, etc.) should not be included in the discussion of the *have*-existential. The same holds for the

uses with the meaning “possess”, the idiomatic expressions and the structures without secondary predication, in which the object of *have* is not perceived as the subject of a following infinitive or participle, as in the following example, in which *difficulty* cannot be analyzed as the subject of the *-ing* form, nor can it be fully interpreted as object of *have*:

*He had difficulty understanding plain English.*

Thus, the formal structure of the *have*-existential device can be rendered be as follows:

S → P (*have*) → O/S<sub>1</sub> → infinitive, participle, predicative phrase, adverbial phrase

## II. Grancharov’s model of functional analysis.

The *have*-existential sentence as an FSP syntactic device is discussed by Grancharov (2010) as an *actualizer* and a *rhematizer*. His formal model for functional analysis is “maximally constrained” in the Chomskyan sense and explicit because it outlines and strictly defines the parameters of the concepts and terms. It aims at maximum objectivity and is empiricist because it is based on the findings in a manually collected corpus of about 6 000 pages covering three periods in the development of the English language (15<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> c.). The quality of the information carried by the sentence constituents is established on the basis of their retrievability from the immediate context taking into account the morphological and lexical markers of the theme and rheme, as well as other textual theme-rheme indicators.

According to Chernyahovskaya (in Grancharov, 1976: 49) and Alexieva (ibid. 1980: 5, 1988:9) the linear arrangement of the components of FSP yields two structures: a) *progressive* in which the theme occupies initial position in the message (sentence, information unit, distributional field) with the rheme following it (T→R), and b) a *regressive information structure* in which the linear ordering is the opposite – the rheme comes first, followed by the theme (R→T). On the grammatical (syntactic) level these two types of communicative word order can be realized by two types of word order – direct, uninverted, unmarked S-V-O, and inverted O-S-V, O-V-S, etc. Therefore, the communicative word order R→T and the grammatical word order O-S-V, O-V-S are considered marked, differing from the normal, unmarked word order not only in the linear arrangement of the components but also in their semantic and communicative load.

In the study these four types of word order are treated as four parameters – 1) unmarked communicative word order, 2) marked communicative word order, 3) unmarked grammatical word order, 4) marked grammatical word order. On the basis of considerable corpus material, the author proves that progressive, unmarked communicative structures (T→R) can be realized syntactically both by unmarked, uninverted grammatical word order, as well as by marked, inverted grammatical word order. Grancharov's research is focused on progressive and regressive communicative structures realized by marked, inverted grammatical word order, dislocations and special constructions.

The thematic and rhematic status of the sentence elements is determined according to a) the information criterion – the quality of the information which they carry (old/new); b) the positional criterion – which element comes first; and c) the “aboutness” criterion – the rheme is what is said about the theme. When the information criterion is not relevant, the other criteria are applied, e.g. if a sentence contains only old information or only new information, then we determine the theme as “what the sentence is about” or as the starting point of the message; and the rheme is defined as “what is said about the theme” or “what follows the theme”. In such cases the communicative purpose is realized by the relation of the rheme to the theme, i.e. by the theme-rheme nexus.

In addition, distinction is made between *focus* and *emphasis/prominence* and in this way the author solves the confusion created by the introduction of different terms like *contrastive focus*, *marked theme*, *unmarked focus*, some of which are examples of oxymoron in themselves. He defines the *focus* as the rheme proper; it coincides with the information center. This means that the focus is always located on elements within the rhematic field encoding new information. When sentence elements encoding old information are located at the end of the sentence or in the focal position of special constructions, then they receive prominence, or emphasis. On this is based the distinction between a syntactic device (e.g. word order changes or constructions) which functions as a *rhematizer* and serves to locate the rheme/focus, and an *actualizer*, which serves to give prominence/emphasis to an element encoding old information.

### III. Testing the structures

In the modern English period, including the most recent period of contemporary English, the *have*-existential sentence never presents a *regressive* communicative structure, i.e. the subject of *have* never functions

as the rheme of the whole (main, primary) communicative field. Such examples were found, though not many, in the previous two periods covered in the study. The object of *have* is perceived at the same time as the subject of the secondary predication introduced by the construction. This means that with the *have*-existential we should distinguish between the main, primary distributional field and a secondary distributional subfield, in which the object of *have* functions as subject, and which has its own communicative-information structure.

Aiming at testing the claim that there are no regressive structures in Modern English, I analyzed 59 manually collected examples of sentences containing *have* as main predicate verb from a contemporary British novel of 376 pages, “All ends in tears” by Ruth Rendell. The number of the examples has been then limited to 34 by the restrictions based on the considerations mentioned above. Thus the modal uses have been excluded, the idiomatic expressions, the phraseological predicates, and any other uses which do not involve implied or explicit secondary predication. The examples fall into the following basic communicative structures outlined by Grancharov:

**A. The *have*-existential device as *rhematizer*.**

1. **Progressive communicative structures** in which the *have*-existential sentence is a rhematizer of the subject of the distributional subfield (the object of *have*) when it carries new information and the other elements of the subfield carry old information. Then the subject of the subfield has the focus, too. – Number of examples: **17**

1. a) [The woman who emerged from the house as they came up the drive][ had a

**T**  
child of about a year in][ her hands.]  
**R**                      **T<sub>1</sub>**

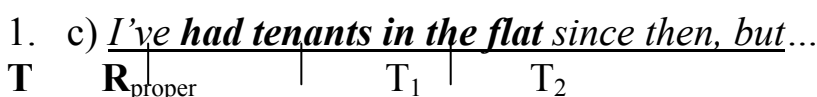
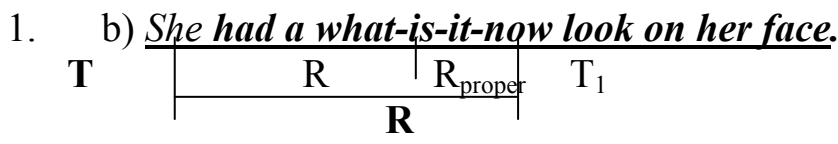
The distributional rhematic subfield has the following communicative structure:

... had a child of about a year in her hands.  

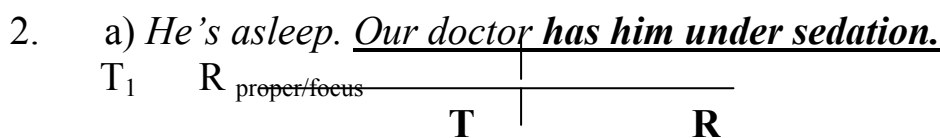
R <sub>proper</sub>	R <sub>1</sub> T <sub>1</sub>
R	T

In (1a) above the whole sentence is a progressive communicative structure with the *have*-existential device comprising the rhematic subfield, in which the object of *have* (a child) is the Rheme proper

and therefore has the information focus. This is indicated by the indefinite article – *a* child, *a* year, whereas the pronoun *her* marks the prepositional phrase *in her hands* as thematic because pronouns as a rule encode old information. The same analysis can be applied to (1b) and (1c) below.

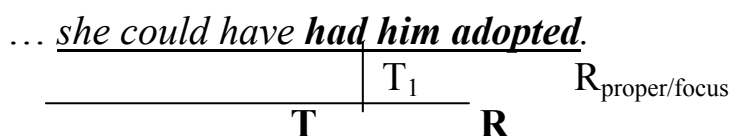


2. **Progressive communicative structures** in which the subject of the distributional subfield carries old information, the sentence elements which follow it are rhematized and the communicative focus is located at the end of the distributional subfield. - Number of examples: 7



2. b) *Why did the girl keep him? If she doesn't care for him, she could have had him adopted.*

The distributional rhematic subfield in (2b) above has the following communicative structure:



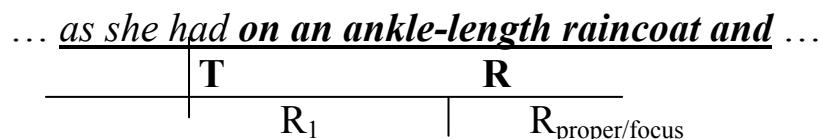
3. **Progressive communicative structures** in which all the elements of the distributional subfield carry new information. The whole subfield functions as rheme and the focus is on the subject of the subfield (the object of *have*) because it is located in the focal position of the *have*-existential device. – Number of examples: 0

4. **Progressive communicative structures** in which the subject of the distributional subfield carries new information and is shifted

(postponed) towards the end of the subfield. Then it takes the focus, too. –  
 Number of examples: 1

4. a) *The dark glasses she wore were hardly appropriate for this weather, especially as she **had on an ankle-length raincoat and ...***

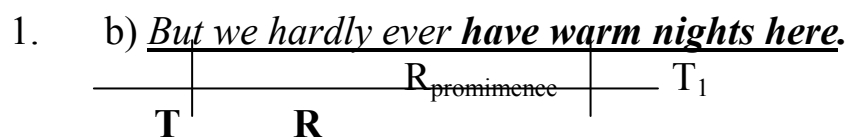
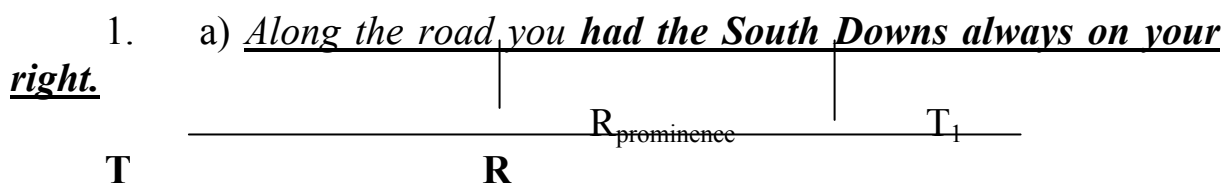
The distributional subfield of (4a) above has the following communicative structure:



The postponed object of *have* (but subject of the subfield) is marked by the indefinite article as a sentence element which encodes new information and, therefore, as one belonging to the rhematic subfield. Its postponement to the final position in the subfield defines it as the Rheme proper (focus) in the structure.

**B. The have-existential device as *actualizer*.**

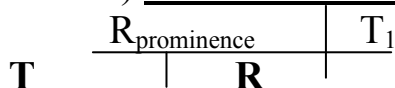
1. **Progressive communicative structures** in which all the elements carry old information. In these structures there is no rheme proper (focus). The subject of the distributional subfield is actualized and receives prominence. It belongs to the rhematic field according to the “aboutness” criterion and is a rheme which carries old information. - Number of examples: 9 (with variations)



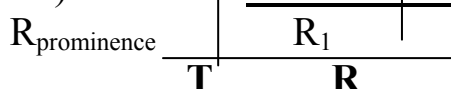
In the above sentence (1b) all elements carry old information. The NP *warm nights* is mentioned in the previous sentence and encodes old

information. The only new information is “hardly ever” – it is within the rheme. As a rule the negative sentence elements have the communicative focus because the purpose of the utterance is the negation itself. The negative adverb reinforces the prominence on the NP warm nights. The same analysis holds for example (1e) below.

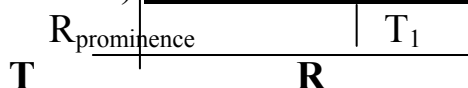
1. c) He had his back to her.



1. d) *He means* he's had his tubes tied.



1. e) I wouldn't have him in here.



2. **Progressive communicative structures** in which the subject of the subfield carries old information and is shifted (postponed) towards the end of the subfield; the elements before it also carry old information. The subject is actualized and receives thematic prominence. - Number of examples: **0**.

Although in Grancharov (2010) a number of examples are found under A.3. and B.2 of the patterns listed above, no such examples were attested in the present corpus. The negative result may be due to some extent to the strict definition applied to the *have*-existential device here. This fact is by no means conclusive but it calls for further research to establish a tendency for the use of the *have*-existential sentence as a syntactic device of FSP, which involves condensation and serves to localize the communicative focus.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. When discussing the *have*-existential sentence in terms of its communicative structure, we need to define clearly what is to be understood by *have*-existential device. This need arises from the various uses of the verb *have* and its great frequency of occurrence. As I have argued above, only those uses which present implied or explicit secondary predication with complex object, or when the object of *have* is followed by



an predicative phrase or an adverbial phrase (with the link verb missing), should be considered *have*-existential device proper. The other uses of *have*, such as modal, idiomatic or that in a simple verbal phraseological predicate, as well as when it is used as a lexical verb meaning “possess”, should be excluded from this syntactic frame because they are not strictly related to the correlations of grammatical and communicative word order.

2. The analysis of the corpus examples confirms Grancharov’s finding that the *have*-existential device in contemporary texts does not function as a regressive communicative structure. This means that the subject of *have* (it is the subject of the main clause, too) always encodes old/given/retrievable information, as can be ascertained from the examples in which most subjects are realized by a personal pronoun or a definite NP. Therefore the grammatical subject of the main clause coincides with the communicative subject, i.e. with the theme.

*Symbols used in the representations:*

T – theme, sentence elements encoding old information

R – rheme, sentence elements encoding new information

T<sub>1</sub> – thematic element

R<sub>1</sub> – rhematic element

R<sub>proper</sub> – element within the field of the rheme which has the communicative focus

R<sub>prominence</sub> – rheme encoding old information which has received prominence

## LITERATURE

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