

## Irrealis and the rise of HAVE in the history of English

While older forms of English had variation between HAVE and BE with intransitive perfects, BE was gradually restricted and replaced by HAVE over several centuries. We will argue in this paper that the way in which this change occurred militates against the hypothesis that the choice of auxiliary is based on (and diagnostic of) whether the verb is unergative or unaccusative (see e.g. Burzio, 1986). Instead we will propose that what is relevant is access to a resultative state denoted by the perfect participle, an issue which is related to, but distinct from, unaccusativity (see e.g. Levin and Rappaport Hovav, 1995; Alexiadou et al., 2004). The strongest version of Burzio's hypothesis is implausible, as it would force us to assume that unaccusative verbs moved wholesale to the unergative class in English. This problem can be avoided if BE is indeed universally restricted to unaccusatives, but its ability to appear with perfects is parametrized. The parameter would then have flipped in the history of English, with the less restricted HAVE taking over as the default. Such a change could be seen as a response to ambiguities arising in connection with the additional use of BE in the passive, as has been suggested by Mustanoja (1960); Zimmermann (1973); Rydén and Brorström (1987) among many others. While this account can accommodate a change in auxiliary selection, it predicts that the advance of HAVE should be uniform across syntactico-semantic environments that are not defined in terms of unaccusativity.

However, this is not how the change proceeded in English. Specifically, HAVE took over earliest and most completely in irrealis contexts (see e.g. Rydén and Brorström, 1987; Kytö, 1997; Lipson, 1999). E.g., the earliest examples of HAVE with *come* that we have been able to find are in texts dating from 1350 to 1420 in Kroch and Taylor (1999) (searches of an OE corpus, Taylor et al., 2003, found no such examples). At this time, 16 perfects of *come* occur with HAVE, 12 of which are irrealis, either with finite HAVE used counterfactually (1) or a modal auxiliary plus infinite HAVE (2). There are 100 perfects of *come* with BE from this period, but not one is introduced by a modal or has counterfactual sense. According to Lipson (1999), HAVE next spread to existential perfects, only later being fully generalized to universal perfects. Following Iatridou (2000), she accounts for this development by arguing that counterfactuals and existential perfects are unified in **not** asserting that an eventuality holds at the relevant reference time.

We will attempt to account for why irrealis contexts came to favor HAVE in the first place. We will argue that auxiliary selection depends on whether the participle denotes a resultative state predicated of the subject, in which case BE can appear, functioning as a copula. Access to this state can, however, be blocked by the Exclusion feature that Iatridou posits for irrealis contexts. This analysis will allow us to explain the change in auxiliary selection without assuming dubious changes in the syntax or semantics of verbs like *come* or stipulating changes in the properties of BE. As it turns out, the examples like 2 which we found after 1350 are the very first examples of perfect *come* with modals in our corpora at all. It is not that they took BE beforehand and then switched to HAVE, but that they simply did not occur. As soon as they do appear, they take HAVE, a connection which has not been previously noted to our knowledge. What started the replacement of BE by HAVE was thus the appearance of a new structure for irrealis perfects, which was not compatible with auxiliary BE because the intervening irrealis modal rendered the participle inaccessible. Since the use of HAVE was not restricted in the relevant way, it appeared in this context even if the participle denoted a resultative state predicated of the subject. Additional means will be needed to handle the complete loss of BE in later English, but in this way we at least have an independent explanation for why HAVE first began to expand its domain.

- (1) And if þow hadest come betyme, he hade yhade þe maistre  
and if you had come timely he had had the master  
'And if you had come in time, he would have prevailed.' (CMBRUT3,227.4105)
- (2) þei myton ligtly haue come to blysse  
they might easily have come to bliss  
'... they might have easily come to bliss.' (CMWYCSE,303.1386)

## References

- Alexiadou, Artemis, Elena Anagnostopoulou, and Martin Everaert. 2004. Introduction. In *The unaccusativity puzzle*, ed. Artemis Alexiadou, Elena Anagnostopoulou, and Martin Everaert, 1–21. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burzio, Luigi. 1986. *Italian syntax*. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Iatridou, Sabine. 2000. The grammatical ingredients of counterfactuality. *Linguistic Inquiry* 31:231–270.
- Kroch, Anthony, and Ann Taylor. 1999. *Penn-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English, 2nd ed.* University of Pennsylvania.
- Kytö, Merja. 1997. *Be/have + past participle: the choice of the auxiliary with intransitives from late middle to modern english*. In *English in transition: corpus-based studies in linguistic variation and genre styles*, ed. Matti Rissanen, Merja Kytö, and Kirsi Heikkonen. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Levin, Beth, and Malka Rappaport Hovav. 1995. *Unaccusativity: at the syntax-lexical semantics interface*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Lipson, Mimi. 1999. The loss of auxiliary selection in English. *University of Pennsylvania Working Papers in Linguistics* 6.2.
- Mustanoja, Tauno. 1960. *A Middle English syntax*. Helsinki: Société Néophilologique.
- Rydén, Mats, and Sverker Brorström. 1987. *The Be/Have variation with intransitives in English*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.
- Taylor, Ann, Anthony Warner, Susan Pintzuk, and Frank Beths. 2003. *York-Toronto-Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Old English Prose*. University of York.
- Zimmermann, Rüdiger. 1973. Structural change in the English auxiliary system: on the replacement of be by have. *Folia Linguistica* 6:107–117.