

The Definiteness Effect of Sentences with *Have* and Verbs of Acquisition and the Notion of Pre-Existence*

Yuko Kobukata

1. Introduction

The definiteness effect, which is a manifestation of the requirement that the referent of the post-verbal noun phrase must be indefinite, is one of the most discussed features of *there* sentences (cf. Milsark (1974)). In addition to *there*-sentences, it is said that *have* sentences also exhibit the effect (cf. Partee (1999)):

- (1) a. John has a sister.
b. * John has the sisters.

Based on the observation in Kobukata (2004b), this paper examines the definiteness effect of sentences with *have* and verbs of acquisition such as *get*, *choose*, *select* and the like. The goal of this paper is to show that objects of these verbs can be definite in a certain interpretation, which is not accounted for in previous studies, and that the notion of pre-existence (cf. Nakau (1989)) plays an important role in accounting for when the definiteness effect arises.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 observes the definiteness effect of sentences with *have* and points out that the effect does not arise in a certain interpretation, which is not discussed in previous studies. Section 3 treats definiteness effect of sentences with verbs of acquisition. Section 4 proposes a descriptive generalization about the definiteness of the object of *have* and verbs of acquisition by using the notion of pre-existence. Section 5 makes some concluding remarks.

2. The Definiteness Effect of Sentences with *Have*

In previous studies, it is argued that *have* sentences exhibit the definiteness effect. However, this is not always the case: Not only indefinite objects but also definite objects can be used, as exemplified below:

- (2) a. Mary has a husband.
b. Mary has the husband as a dance-partner.

In (2a), the verb *has* takes the indefinite noun as its object. In this sentence, the object *a husband* is understood as Mary's own husband and in this sense *Mary* and *a husband* have a marital relation. Thus, there holds a possessive relation between the subject and object referents. We will call this kind of interpretation a relational reading. It should be noted that it is not until the

time of utterance that the addressee can identify the possessive relation between them. In (2b), on the other hand, the verb *has* takes the definite noun phrase *the husband* as its object. This sentence, unlike the sentence in (2a), does not convey that the husband is Mary's own: The man referred to as *the husband* is married to someone else. Thus, there holds a possessive relation not between *Mary* and *the husband* but rather between *the husband* and someone other than *Mary*. We will refer to this kind of interpretation as a non-relational reading. *Mary* and *the husband* are simply in a temporal possessive relation to each other (i.e., the sentence simply conveys that Mary's dance-partner is a married man). It should be noted here that the fact that the man that is referred to as *the husband* is married to someone else is understood prior to the utterance of the sentence.

In what follows, by examining each reading in more detail, we will argue that definite objects can be used in a non-relational reading.

2.1. Relational Reading

In this subsection, we consider sentences that obtain a relational reading. First observe the following sentences:

- (3) Mary has a husband. (= (2))
 (4) Mary has a book.

As is mentioned at the beginning, the sentence in (3) expresses the possessive relation between *Mary* and the object referent. Likewise, the sentence in (4) expresses the possessive relation between *Mary* and *a book*. That is, these sentences obtain a relational reading. What is important here is that the objects in these sentences are indefinite. Thus, it can be said that sentences with indefinite objects obtain a relational reading.

By contrast, the following sentence shows that it is impossible to get a relational reading when the object is definite:

- (5) # Mary has the husband of her own.

The object *the husband* in (5) cannot be *Mary's* own because the sentence is not compatible with the phrase *of her own*. With the definite object, the sentence in (5) does not obtain a relational reading. In other words, a relational reading is incompatible with a definite object.

In sum, when a relational reading is obtained, indefinite objects are required, i.e., the definiteness effect arises.¹

2.2. Non-Relational Reading

As observed in the preceding subsection, when a relational reading is obtained, the objects need to be indefinite. It should be noted here that when

the verb *have* takes an indefinite noun as its object, not only a relational reading but also a non-relational reading can be received. Observe the following sentence:

(6) Mary had a husband as her dance-partner.

In this sentence, the object referent is not understood as Mary's husband. Rather, the sentence expresses that someone who was independently a husband stood in a dance-partner relationship to *Mary*. In this sense, the possessive relation has been established between the object referent and someone in the discourse. Thus, an indefinite object is compatible with a non-relational reading as well as a relational reading.

The following sentence also shows that an indefinite object is compatible with a non-relational reading:

(7) Mary has a mirror with her.

The sentence in (7), with the locative phrase *with her*, expresses a temporal possessive relation between *Mary* and *a mirror*. That is, it does not assert that *Mary* owns a mirror. The owner of the mirror has already been specified at the time of utterance. Thus, the sentence in (7) with an indefinite object receives a non-relational reading.²

In addition to indefinite objects, definite objects are also compatible with a non-relational reading as the following example illustrates:

(8) Mary had the husband as her dance-partner.

The sentence in (8) does not assert that someone is a husband to *Mary*. Rather, it expresses that there was a person who was already a husband to someone and it was this person that *Mary* had as her dance-partner. This means that the possessive relation between the husband and his wife (not *Mary*) has already been established at the time of utterance. Thus, definite objects are compatible with a non-relational reading.

By contrast, as observed in the previous subsection definite objects are incompatible with a relational reading:

(9) # Mary has the husband of her own. (= (5))

The sentence in (9) with the phrase *of her own* is anomalous. The phrase *of her own* forces a relational reading. This means that definite objects are incompatible with a relational reading. In other words, definite objects are compatible only with a non-relational reading.

The following sentence with *have* can be accounted for in the same way:

(10) John has that car today. (Dixon (1991:308))

The sentence in (10) obtains a non-relational reading. That is, the sentence

simply asserts that *John* is using that car irrespective of whose car it is. Thus, it follows that definite objects are compatible with a non-relational reading.

To sum up, indefinite objects are compatible with a non-relational reading as well as a relational reading, while definite objects are compatible only with a non-relational reading. In other words, when a non-relational reading is received, indefinite objects are not necessarily required. Thus, when a non-relational reading is received, the definiteness effect does not arise.

2.3. Summary

The definiteness effect of sentences with *have* emerges when a relational reading is obtained, while it does not when a non-relational reading is obtained. Thus, when a relational reading is obtained, the object must be indefinite.

3. The Definiteness Effect of Sentences with Verbs of Acquisition

This section deals with the definiteness effect of sentences with verbs of acquisition. Verbs of acquisition such as *get* and the verb *have* are assumed to be related: It is often the case that the acquisition of something implies the possession of it.³

Let us first consider the case where verbs of acquisition take indefinite objects. Observe the following examples:

(11) Mary got a husband. (Burton (1995:57))

In (11), the verb *got* takes the indefinite object *a husband*. In this sentence, the object referent became a husband to *Mary* as a result of her action described by the verb. That is, *Mary* and husband entered into a marital relation and as a result, a possessive relation is established between *Mary* and *a husband*. Following Burton (1995), we will call this type of reading a resultative reading. Note that it is not until the time of utterance that the possessive relation between them is identified.

As the sentence in (11) shows, indefinite objects are compatible with a resultative reading. By contrast, it is argued that definite objects are not compatible with such a reading (cf. Moltmann (1995), Burton (1995)). Consider the following sentence:

(12) # Mary got the husband.

In (12), the object is definite. This sentence does not assert that the object referent became a husband to *Mary*. That is, this sentence cannot receive a resultative reading. Thus, definite objects are incompatible with a resultative reading.

What is important here is that definite objects are compatible with a

reading other than a resultative reading as in (13):

(13) Mary got the husband as a dance partner, and she is still single.

In (13), the object is definite. The sentence does not describe that *Mary* got married but describes that *Mary* got a man who is a husband to someone independently of *Mary* as a dance-partner. We will call this kind of reading an independent reading.⁴ It should be noted that the fact that the man referred to as *the husband* had a possessive relation with someone other than *Mary* is understood prior to the utterance of the sentence. Thus, the possessive relation between *the husband* and someone other than *Mary* is identified in advance of the utterance.

Moreover, when an independent reading is obtained, indefinite objects can also be used: Consider the following sentence:

(14) Mary got a husband as a dance-partner.

In (14), the object is indefinite. In this sentence, it is not the case that the object referent became a husband to *Mary* as a result of her action described by the verb. Thus, the sentence in (14) does not receive a resultative reading. It expresses that *Mary* and *a husband* are in a temporal possessive relation. For example, we can interpret the sentence in (14) as follows: *Mary* was looking for a dance-partner and she chose a certain married man.

In this section, we have observed that verbs of acquisition exhibit the definiteness effect when the sentences receive a resultative reading, while they do not when they obtain an independent reading. Thus, when a resultative reading is received, the object must be indefinite.

4. Generalization Based on the Notion of Pre-Existence

We have observed that objects of *have* need to be indefinite when the sentences in question obtain a relational reading, while they do not when the sentences obtain a non-relational reading. Likewise, the object of verbs of acquisition need to be indefinite when a resultative reading is obtained, whereas they do not when an independent reading is obtained. In this section, we propose that these contrasts can be accounted for by the notion of pre-existence, which is introduced by Nakau (1989). He defines the notion as follows:

(15) An entity is pre-existent, and the expression describing that entity forms a pre-established (or inherently anaphoric) domain if and only if it is perceived, with respect to the associated situation, to be present there in advance of the occurrence of that

situation.

(Nakau (1989))

Let us adapt this notion to the distinction of each reading in question, which is obtained in sentences with *have* or verbs of acquisition. First of all, consider the following sentence with *have* that obtains a relational reading. The relevant example is repeated below:

(16) Mary has a husband. (= (3))

In this sentence, the object *a husband* is understood as Mary's own husband, i.e., there holds a possessive relation between *Mary* and the object referent. Recall that it is not until the time of utterance that the possessive relation between them is identified. In other words, the sentence in a relational reading introduces the possessive relation between the subject and object referents newly into the discourse. In this respect, the possessive relation is understood not to be pre-existent.

Likewise, when a sentence with *have* obtains a resultative reading, the possessive relation between the subject and object referents cannot be identified prior to the utterance. To see this, consider the following sentence:

(17) Mary got a husband. (= (11))

The sentence in (17) asserts that the object referent became Mary's own husband. It follows that the possessive relation was established between *Mary* and the object referent. Note that we do not perceive that *Mary* entered into a possessive relation with the object referent until the sentence is uttered. Thus, the sentence introduces the possessive relation into the discourse. Therefore, the possessive relation is not pre-existent in (17).

By contrast, when a non-relational reading is received, a possessive relation is understood to be pre-existent in advance of the utterance. For example, consider the sentence in (6), repeated here as (18) below:

(18) Mary had a husband as her dance-partner. (= (6))

In (18), the object referent is married to some other person than *Mary*. In other words, there holds a possessive relation not between *Mary* and the object referent but rather between the object referent and someone other than *Mary*. Thus, the fact that the object referent is married to someone is understood prior to the utterance of the sentence. That is, the possessive relation in question is pre-existent prior to the utterance.

When a sentence with a verb of acquisition obtains an independent reading, a possessive relation is also understood to be pre-existent in advance of the utterance. Consider the sentence below:

(19) Mary got the husband as a dance partner, and she is still single.

(= (13))

The first conjunct in (19) describes that *Mary* got a man who is a husband to someone as a dance-partner. Thus, the fact that **there** is a possessive relation between the object referent and someone other than the subject referent is understood prior to the utterance. Hence, the possessive relation is pre-existent.

In sum, when sentences receive a relational or resultative reading, the possessive relation between the subject and object referents is not pre-existent, while when sentences obtain a non-relational or independent reading, the possessive relation between the object referent and someone other than the subject referent is pre-existent prior to the utterance. The observation so far leads to propose the following descriptive generalization about the definiteness of the object noun phrase in a sentence with the verbs in question:

- (20) The object of *have* or verbs of acquisition must be indefinite if and only if a possessive relation between the subject and object referents is not pre-existent prior to the utterance of the sentence in question.

The definiteness of objects depends on whether or not a possessive relation between the subject and object referents is pre-existent. In this way, the notion of pre-existence can capture the relevant contrast correctly.

The close investigation of several readings which are obtained in the sentences with *have* or verbs of acquisition has revealed that the definiteness of the objects can be best captured by the notion of pre-existence in an integrated way.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have dealt with the definiteness effect of sentences with *have* and verbs of acquisition, pointing out the fact that there are some cases in which the definite objects can be used. Whether or not the definiteness effect emerges depends on what interpretation is obtained: The definiteness effect of sentences with *have* emerges when a relational reading is obtained, while it does not when a non-relational reading is received. As for the definiteness effect of sentences with verbs of acquisition, it arises when a resultative reading is obtained, while it does not when an independent reading is received. Whether the objects of these verbs are required to be indefinite or not can be accounted for by the notion of pre-existence: The object needs to be indefinite when a possessive relation between the subject and object referents

is not pre-existent.

NOTES

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¹ The fact that a relational reading is not obtained when definite objects are used is also shown by the following examples:

- (i) a. Mary has the mirror today, but she does not own it, she has borrowed it.
 b. Mary has the mirror.

The first conjunct *Mary has the mirror today* in (ia) does not receive a relational reading, because the second conjunct negates *Mary's* ownership of the mirror. Even without the temporal expression *today* as in (ib), this sentence does not convey that *the mirror* is *Mary's* own mirror.

However, there seems to be an apparent counterexample to our claim here:

- (ii) Now who has that book? (Costa (1974:11))
 (iii) Did you say you have bought *Your Timple and You*?
 I have that book too. (Costa (1974:7))

The sentence in (ii) is ambiguous in that it asks about the current location of the book or inquires about who or how many people own(s) the book. Likewise, the sentence in (iii) obtains a relational reading. That is, sentences with the definite object can receive a relational reading, which seems to be a contradiction with our claim here. However, it is not. As Costa explains, *that book* in (ii) is understood as "that type of book", which is also true of (iii). This means that although *that book* is superficially definite, it is semantically indefinite in that it is not referential. This, however, brings us to the question of why the verb *own* itself is compatible with a definite object as the following example shows:

- (iv) John owns that car.

It is unclear how this fact should be accounted for at present.

² Even without a locative phrase such as *with her* in (7), it is possible to get a non-relational reading in the following sentence:

- (i) Mary has a mirror.

For, example, we can get a non-relational reading if we know the fact that *a mirror* belongs to someone other than *Mary*. Needless to say, a relational reading is preferred unless otherwise stated.

³ There are some other related verbs such as *choose*, *select*, *find*, *pick*. Sentences with these verbs also exhibit the definiteness effect.

⁴ Consider the following sentences:

- (i) Mary {got/selected/chose/picked/picked out} a secretary.

These sentences can obtain an independent reading as well as a resultative reading. For the independent reading of the sentences in (i), Burton (1995:49) gives the following context. There was an existing secretary, and it was this person who already worked as a secretary, that Mary got (selected, chose, picked, or picked out) for some other (non-clerical) purpose. Thus, it is possible to get an independent reading as well as a resultative reading in these

cases.

By contrast, the following sentences prefer an independent reading rather than a resultative reading.

(ii) a. Mary {got/selected/chose/picked} {an idiot/a Bulgarian}.
(Burton (1995:58))

b. Mary got a {book/mirror/skirt}.

The sentences in (iia) assert that there was a person who was idiot (or Bulgarian) and it was this person that Mary got for some reason. The person is an idiot (or a Bulgarian) independently of Mary's action. Thus, it does not follow that he became an idiot (or a Bulgarian) as a result of Mary's action. The sentences in (iib) can be accounted for in the same way. Thus, the sentences in (ii) obtain an independent reading.

However, it could be possible to get a resultative reading in these sentences. In order to get a resultative reading, we need an appropriate context. When we can take an idiot or a Bulgarian as a changeable property (e.g. playing a role as an idiot or a Bulgarian in a movie), a resultative reading is possible. But an independent reading is strongly preferred in these sentences at any rate.

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Doctoral Program in Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Tsukuba
e-mail: ykobu@f2.dion.ne.jp