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PERSONALIZATION OF THE EXISTENTIAL HABER IN MEXICAN SPANISH

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The Spanish verb haber, like the English to have, functions as a personal verb when followed by a past participle to form the perfect tenses. It is also inflected for person and number when followed by the preposition de in a construction that expresses obligation. However, haber serves as an impersonal verb in the third person singular to denote existence. This impersonal use is similar to the English existential construction there is. In this existential use of haber, the verb has traditionally been treated as a transitive verb, with the entity whose existence is pointed out functioning grammatically as the direct object of the haber phrase. However, Spanish speakers have reanalyzed this verb in its existential use as an intransitive verb and at times mark the verb for number and even person (in the first person plural) to agree with the grammatical direct object, which in turn has become the logical subject of the phrase.

The Royal Spanish Academy has described the grammatical personalization of haber, indicating that it may convey existence or presence in much the same way as ser and estar 'to be' and that in some dialects of eastern Spain and in many Spanish-American dialects haber is interpreted as a personal verb. The Academy provides two examples which demonstrate this personalization: hubieron fiestas and habían muchos soldados 'There were parties,' and 'There were many soldiers' (384). In the two examples the verb haber is conjugated in the third person plural to agree with its grammatical direct object. Traditionally this grammatical personalization of the existential haber when it is used with plural objects has been considered incorrect. The third person singular constructions hubo fiestas and había muchos soldados are the preferred structures. The plural nouns fiestas and soldados are considered the grammatical direct objects, and Spanish morpho-syntax requires verbs to agree in number and person with subjects, rather than with direct objects.

Rafael Lapesa, in his comprehensive Historia de la lengua española (1980), notes this tendency to personalize the existential haber, claiming that the practice of using the plural forms of this verb with plural direct objects is found extensively in Spanish America. He contends that the direct object is converted into the subject of the sentence causing the verb to agree with the logical subject in number (587).

Lapesa also comments on other forms of personalization of haber. In the present indicative tense the form of haber for existential use differs from the form used to create the perfect tenses. When haber is used to denote existence in the present indicative the Old Spanish adverb y 'there' accompanies the third person singular ha forming hay, which expresses there is/are. The form ha is reserved for functions other than the existential use. The presence of the y in the present indicative form generally prevents the addition of the morpheme n, which marks the verb form for the plural. However, Lapesa claims that personalization occurs at times in the present indicative despite the presence of the y, allowing Spanish speakers to use hayn in phrases that contain plural direct objects (587).

Another form of haber personalization that Lapesa describes is the use of the form habemos, the first person plural, to denote existence and include the speaker. Lapesa cites as an example en la clase habemos cuarenta estudiantes 'There are forty of us students in the class' (587). In this case as well as in the case of hay, the form of the verb in its existential use differs from its form in other functions. The modern first person plural of the present indicative of haber is hemos, the abbreviated form used in the formation of perfect tenses.

Alonso Zamora Vicente, in his chapter on American Spanish in Dialectología Española (1967), contends that the personalization of haber has been recorded in "todas las comarcas" [all regions] (435). He also describes the existence of the same practice in the Canary Islands (347).

Bourciez's Éléments de Linguistique romane (1956) gives information on the history of this construction. Bourciez points out that an impersonal use of habere began at the end of the Latin era and that the verb in this existential use was accompanied by a noun in the accusative. He cites the example in arca Noe habuit homines 'there were men in Noah's ark' (252).

Kany, in American-Spanish Syntax (1951), provides examples of this use of haber from Old Spanish. He argues that there has always been a difference between the psychological concept, "the noun as subject", and the grammatical expression "the noun as object." He further explains, "It is not surprising, therefore, that speakers should often allow the psychological concept to dominate, making the impersonal verb agree with its grammatical object as if it were a grammatical subject" (212).

According to Kany, plural conjugations of haber occur with plural direct objects in both spoken and written language in all regions of Spanish America: "In Spanish America . . . [the personalization of the existential haber] is extremely common everywhere, in speech and in writing, and the lashing

of grammarians seems to have done little to eradicate it" (212). He writes that it can be heard in the speech of both educated and uneducated speakers: "It can be found side by side with the correct form among cultured folk and in some of the foremost writers" (213). Although he believes that its frequency "naturally differs from country to country" (212), he maintains that it "seems to be particularly widespread in Argentina, Chile, and Central America" (213).

He also points out that this personalization may occur when haber is accompanied by auxiliary verbs such as poder, deber, and soler (212). For example, in the phrase deben haber tres sillas 'there should be three chairs', the auxiliary verb deber is marked for the plural to agree with the grammatical direct object sillas.

Although these linguists have described the occurrence of the agreement between haber and its grammatical direct object in the speech of Spain and Spanish America, apparently no attempt has been made to measure the extent of this practice in native speech. Recent publications of authentic samples of native speech facilitate the analysis of spoken Spanish and provide a basis for the current study of the personalization of the existential haber.

Every use of haber in two complete novels written by Mexican authors and in two volumes of recorded speech of educated and uneducated Mexicans was analyzed. Carlos Fuentes's La muerte de Artemio Cruz (316 pages) and Gustavo Sainz's Gazapo (187 pages) formed the corpus for the study of the written language, and El habla de la ciudad de México (463 pages) and El habla popular de la ciudad de México (446 pages), collections of interviews conducted by members of the Centro de Lingüística Hispánica de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, respectively, served as the bases for the study of the speech of educated and uneducated Mexicans. The volumes examined are part of a corpus assembled at Brigham Young University by Dr. J. Halvor Clegg, under whose direction this project was carried out.

Spanish varies from region to region. Thus the results of the current study, which is based on a corpus of Mexican Spanish, may not be fully representative of the many varieties of the language spoken today. Nevertheless, there is no reason to believe that Mexican Spanish greatly varies from the Spanish of other areas in its use of haber.

Because personalization of the existential haber has not been observed in certain forms of the verb, conjugations which belong only to the first and second person singular, such as he, has, habré, and habrás, were not included in the study. Forms of the third person singular and plural and special cases of the first person plural were studied in all tenses as were the infinitive and present participle forms.

A total of 3,669 occurrences of haber were analyzed. The two novels provided 760 of the verb forms counted; the remaining 2,909 occurrences of haber came from the volumes of speech samples. In slightly over half (1,888) of the occurrences, the verb is used with the past participle to form perfect tenses. Haber occurs one hundred times in the construction haber + de + infinitive, a form roughly the equivalent to the English to be + infinitive. For example, yo he de llegar mañana could be translated into English as 'I am to arrive tomorrow.'

Another common use of this verb, haber + que + infinitive, is much like the English one must + verb. This use of haber, which is syntactically related to the existential use, was found 158 times. In this impersonal use the verb occurs only in the third person singular and in the special form hay in the present indicative.

The remaining 1,523 occurrences of haber in the two novels and in the two volumes of recorded speech are instances of the existential use of haber. Of these, 870 are accompanied by singular direct objects, and 653 by plural direct objects. When used with singular direct objects the singular form was consistently employed because, whether the speaker conceives of the object as the subject or the direct object of the verb, the singular is the only appropriate form to use.

The 653 cases of haber with a plural direct object are the occurrences of primary interest in the study of the personalization of the existential haber. In the texts studied, examples of haber with a plural direct object were found in all seven simple tenses. Additionally, the infinitive itself was found with plural objects, both alone and preceded by auxiliary verbs such as poder, deber, ir a, llegar a, and tener que. Other uses of the existential haber in the sample included the present participle habiendo by itself or accompanied by seguir, and the past participle habido used in the present perfect indicative, pluperfect indicative, and pluperfect subjunctive tenses.

By far the most common form of haber used with a plural direct object is the special present indicative hay. This form occurs with a plural direct object 453 times in the novels and speech samples, accounting for almost seventy percent of the 653 cases examined.

Although Lapesa has written that this present indicative form can be heard with the n plural morpheme attached to form hayn in the speech of some native Spanish speakers, this word does not occur in the corpus studied. This absence suggests that this personalized existential form is rarely used.

Other conjugations of haber do not attach the y for existential use; personalization of the existential haber is

more likely in those verb forms that do not have the final *y*. Other than the present indicative hay and the present participle and infinitive without auxiliaries (which cannot be marked for number and occur five times in the sample), haber was found 195 times with plural objects. In seventeen instances (8.7%) the verb is personalized to agree with the grammatical direct object.

The plural forms habían, hubieron, hubieran, habemos, and habíamos are the only conjugations which are personalized in the existential uses. Of these five forms the imperfect indicative habían, which was found six times, is the most common with plural direct objects. First person plural forms of the present indicative and imperfect indicative, habemos and habíamos, which are unique in that they differ not only in number but also in person from the standard existential third person singular and include the speaker in addition to noting existence, were found five and four times respectively. The preterit hubieron and the imperfect subjunctive hubieran occur once each.

Personalization of the impersonal haber was not found in either of the novels. In La muerte de Artemio Cruz the present indicative hay occurs sixteen times with plural objects. Other forms occur a total of fifteen times with plural objects. In Gazapo, hay was found eleven times, habiendo one time, and other forms six times with plural objects. In each case, the singular form of haber is used to note existence of the plural object. Although some authors may employ the personalized existential haber in an attempt to accurately reflect speech, this construction does not appear in the two novels under consideration.

The speech sample of uneducated Mexicans provides ten examples of the personalization phenomenon. Habían occurs three times with plural objects; first person plural forms occur seven times. Examples of the first person plural use include: Habemos dos Irmás 'There are two of us Irmás' (49) and Habemos dos que sabemos trabajar 'There are two of us who know how to work' (89).

Perhaps the most unusual personalization occurs in the speech sample of uneducated Mexicans. A speaker who states, Habíamos como cinco casitas aquí (438), has apparently expanded the semantic bounds of the haber construction beyond the accepted notions of existence (there were) and inclusion of the speaker (of us). The literal translation "There were some five of us little houses here" does not seem not logical. The speaker seems to be including the idea of possession, with a meaning closely related to the semantic possibilities of the verb's Latin or Old Spanish ancestors.

Personalization occurs in the speech sample of educated Mexicans as well. Habían was found three times with plural

objects; hubieron and hubieran occur once each. The first person plural habíamos is used twice in the speech sample of educated Mexicans: "Habíamos muchas muchachas," and "Habíamos muchos grupos" (231).

Disregarding those forms which cannot be personalized (the infinitive and present participle without auxiliaries) and hay, personalization of haber occurs in ten of sixty-three cases (16%) of plural direct objects in the speech sample of uneducated Mexicans and in seven of 101 cases (7%) in the speech sample of educated Mexicans. Although the personalized existential haber is more common in the speech of the uneducated, as Kany asserts it also surfaces in the speech of "cultured folk" (213).

The corpus also provides evidence that this verb is still syntactically classified by speakers as transitive. In several cases speakers supplied a direct object pronoun to accompany haber. The occurrence of an object pronoun with the existential haber appeared in both volumes of speech samples. For example, in the speech of the educated Te digo que las hay 'I am telling you that there are' (29), and in the speech of the uneducated Tiempo lo hay 'There is time' (420), the informants have complemented the existential haber with the direct object pronouns las and lo.

The use of accusative pronouns with haber demonstrates the syntactic ambivalence of the verb in its existential use. In phrases such as habían muchos soldados the speaker treats the logical subject soldados as the grammatical subject and thus uses the plural form of the verb. But in sentences such as tiempo lo hay the speaker treats the logical subject tiempo as the grammatical object and employs an accusative pronoun to complement haber. Even when replacing human direct objects with with pronouns in this construction, speakers never use subject pronouns to represent the logical subject. Phrases such as ellas hay do not appear in the corpus.

Other constructions with haber observed in the corpus deserve further study. The use of the partitive with haber as in Hay de cosas 'There are of (some) things' (Habla 45), and the use of singular nouns to refer to more than one countable item when English speakers would expect a plural noun as in Había mucho conejo 'There was a lot of rabbit' (Habla popular 186), are not thoroughly treated in most grammars.

A diachronic study of the personalization of the existential haber would also be useful in determining in what direction this phenomenon is moving. The former semantics of the verb haber 'to have', showing possession, seem to be almost completely lost in this existential use, but at present the verb appears to be true to its syntactic roots as an impersonal transitive verb, with writers employing the third person singular of haber with plural direct objects, and both

educated and uneducated speakers rarely personalizing the verb in its existential use.

In the corpus examined the grammatical personalization of the existential haber is rare. This finding is at odds with descriptions such as Kany's that "this faulty agreement" is "extremely common everywhere" in Spanish America (212). There are three possible explanations for the difference between the statements of the linguists cited and the findings of this study. First, the speech samples may not be transcribed accurately. The transcribers may not have recorded all the word-final n's that would have demonstrated personalization. However, the speech samples were transcribed by linguists who must have been aware of this construction. The samples are filled with transcriptions of substandard grammar and pronunciation. Furthermore, examples of the existential haber personalization occur in the samples. There is no reason to believe that the transcribers recorded the final n in some cases and not in others. Second, speakers from Mexico City may not be representative of Spanish America in their use of this particular construction. However, as stated above, there is no known reason for believing that Mexican use of haber is unusual. Third, the linguists cited may have exaggerated the extent of this personalization. While others have observed and commented on this phenomenon, this project is the first attempt to quantify the extent of existential haber personalization. It may serve as a basis for comparison with speech and writing of other regions and help determine whether speakers in Mexico differ from those of other regions in this regard or whether personalization is equally rare in all of the Spanish-speaking world.

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