

# IMPERSONAL *HABER* AND THE ROAD TO COPULA FUNCTION

LINDA M. NICITA

*Haber* serves Spanish as its primary existential-presentative form, however it is in the process of acquiring copula functions. By examining the pattern of evidence regarding the behavior of *haber* with respect to prototypical verbs and to copular verbs, I contend that the status of the argument is in the process of being reanalyzed from its original object complement status to subject status. There are three convincing pieces of evidence which suggest that the argument is the subject: 1) *haber* may not be passivized nor may it take a reflexive/passive clitic; 2) in widespread familiar use of the language, the verb agrees not only in number, but oftentimes in person marking, with its obligatory argument; and 3) the obligatory argument may not take accusative case marking when the referent is human. Additionally, the copula-like function of *haber* in its periphrastic function, along with its locative reading in its existential sense, affords an analogy with the locative copula. Also, the presentative function that *haber* carries in Spanish is consonant with that of the *ser* presentative.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION.** In this paper I will attempt to account for the syntactic behavior of the verb *haber* in current usage, specifically its propensity to display overt number agreement between its argument and finite verb. By examining the behavior of *haber* currently in light of select historical factors in its development, I intend to show that *haber* is in the process of acquiring copula functions. This is seen in the failure of its argument to behave as a canonical object, and in the subject qualities of the argument. The paper will be divided into two main sections: the first will describe the impersonal use of *haber* in Modern Spanish, including some of the more non-traditional uses of the form which, despite their relegation to stigmatized dialect, are nonetheless prolific in modern familiar speech; the second part of the paper will account for these stigmatized uses of *haber* by drawing analogies to the common features *haber* shares with other copula verbs.

**1.1 HISTORY OF *HABER*.** The Latin verb, *habere*, in its original form functioned as a transitive verb with a mandatory human/animate subject (Martínez Amador 1985; Olbertz 1992; Pountain 1985). Its adoption into Old Spanish as both a transitive verb with the lexical meaning, 'to have', and as a member of periphrastic constructions which relied on both semantic meaning and selectional syntactic restrictions to define the parameters of its use, facilitated the development of what today are perfect aspect marking, future marking, obligation periphrasis, and existential predicates (Miles 1990; Olbertz 1992; Pountain 1985). Throughout the period of Old Spanish, roughly from the 12th to the 16th centuries, the cognate of the current Spanish form *haber* competed for dominance with a number of rivals for each of the various functions listed above; most notable among these rivals were the precursors of the verbs which are today *ser* and *tener* (Luque Moreno 1978; Martínez Amador 1985; Roca Pons 1958). Also during this period, word order concerns sparked by loss of case inflections significantly impacted the development of the four functions from one source (Feldman 1973).

In the minds of modern-day Spanish speaker, the meaning of impersonal *haber* is disjointed, if not quite disconnected, from its use in periphrasis. In its present indicative sense, the third person singular form of *haber*, *ha* has fused with the Old Spanish adverb *i*, or *y*, derived from Latin *ibi*, meaning 'there', such that a frozen or non-inflectable verb meaning 'there is/are' is expressed by the lexical item, *hay*. For this reason, many speakers may no longer perceive the connection between the uses of *haber* as a perfect marker and *haber* as an impersonal existential verb. The impersonal form of *haber* appears most often in its present indicative form.

**2.0 OVERVIEW OF CURRENT USE OF IMPERSONAL *HABER*.** The English equivalent of the IMPERSONAL *haber* is 'there is/are'. That is, *haber* corresponds to the English EXISTENTIAL-PRESENTATIVE construction. Like its English counterpart, *haber* fulfills this function in Spanish. Due to its inability to occur with an agent/actor, *haber* is considered an impersonal verb. In its

impersonal use, "[h]aber can be characterized as a subjectless verb which surfaces only in the third person singular form of any tense and aspect in standard Spanish. Its obligatorily subcategorized NP displays the grammatical function of direct object; and, contrary to what is the norm for Spanish, this object never occurs with the so-called personal 'a'" (Suñer 1982:107).

Conforming to its characterization as an existential and presentational verb, impersonal *haber*, when realized with its argument, either asserts the existence of the referent of its argument and/or introduces new entities into the discourse, usually to be taken up for further elaboration. Many linguists have attempted to explain the link between existential and presentational constructions (Lambrecht 1994; Lumsden 1988; Suñer 1982a). Lumsden (1988:240) notes, "...in certain circumstances a hearer may regard the most important part of an utterance as the establishment of an entity within some contextually determined location. In such cases, we can say that the utterance carries an indirect force broadly equivalent to the direct and overt presentational construction, namely 'be' ES [existential sentence]'. Similarly, Lambrecht (1994:179) explains, 'Mere assertion of the existence of some entity is a rather special kind of speech act which is of limited use in every day communication ... Such a statement would be most naturally used...where the purpose of the speech act is to introduce the NP referent into the discourse world of the interlocutors by asserting its presence in a given location ... From the discourse pragmatic point of view, it is therefore preferable to interpret the function of such sentences as that of presenting or introducing a referent into the 'place' or 'scene' of the discourse and thereby of raising it into the addressee's consciousness, rather than of asserting its mere existence.' Suñer (1982:107) reiterates these sentiments with particular regard to *haber*: '...impersonal *haber* is an existential verb which serves to assert the existence of its only NP argument. Furthermore, *hay* sentences constitute the presentational construction par excellence in Spanish; they herald the appearance of the referent of their NP object in the universe of discourse.'

Patterns of actual use of the impersonal *haber* show that, like its counterparts cross-linguistically, it is primarily used to introduce new and indefinite arguments into the discourse. Givón (1979:72) advances two characteristics of interest to us here regarding the existential-presentative construction cross-linguistically: it is found in discourse-initial positions, i.e. in contexts where little shared information has been established; and, in languages whose normal word order is subject first, the verb usually appears before the subject.

Supporting Givón's first contention vis-a-vis discourse initial positions, *haber* is often used as introductory statements for chapters in novels. The following examples were found as first statements in chapters.

- (1)a. *Detrás del templo, al otro lado de la calle,*  
 Behind from-the temple to-the other side of the street,  
*había un patio sin árboles.*  
 there-was a patio without trees.

'Behind the temple, on the other side of the street, (there) was a patio without trees.'  
 (García Márquez 1983:51)

- b. *En la cocina de la casa hay un viejo asiento de madera*  
 In the kitchen of the house there-is an old seat of wood  
*labrada...*  
 carved

'In the kitchen of the house, there is an old chair of carved wood, ...'  
 (García Márquez 1983:61)

- c. *Hay un minuto en que se agota la fiesta.*  
 There-is a minute in that REFL exhaust-3sg.PRES the party  
 'There is one minute in which the party ceases.'

(García Márquez 1983:71)

- d. *Hay una fundamental diferencia entre los hombres*  
 There is a fundamental difference between the men  
*que han perdido la vista por enfermedad o*  
 that have lost the vision by infirmity or  
*accidente y los ciegos de nacimiento*  
 accident and the blind from birth

'There is a fundamental difference between men who have lost their eyesight through an illness or accident and those who are blind from birth.'

(Sábato 1983:298)

Furthermore, examples which are not chapter-initial reflect the well-known characteristics of presentatives of setting the scene (2a, 2b and 2c) and introducing topics for later elaboration (2d and 2e).

- (2) a. *-En la calle Isabel la Católica hay una casa en ruinas.*  
 In the street Isabel the Catholic there is a house in ruins.  
*Mejor dicho había, ...*  
 Better said there was...

'On the street Isabel the Catholic, there is a house in ruins. Better said, there was...'  
 (Sábato 1983:59)

- b. *En el contorno hay matorrales secos, ...*  
 In the surroundings, there are thickets dry

'In the surrounding (countryside), (there) are dry thickets.'

(Vargas Llosa 1986:81)

- c. .... *Hay una hamaca en el rincón, colgada de la*  
 There is a hammock in the corner, hung from the  
*argolla por uno de sus extremos. Hay un olor*  
 ring by one of its ends. There is an odor  
*a desperdicios.*  
 of waste.

'There is a hammock in the corner, hung from the ring by one of its ends. There is an odor of waste.'

(García Márquez 1983:12)

- d. *Creí entonces que había alguien en la*  
 think-1sg.PAST then that there was someone in the  
*habitación, pero al entrar la sentí oscura y*  
 room, but to-the enter.INF CLT feel-1sg.PAST dark and  
*vacía.*  
 empty

'I thought then that there was someone in the room, but upon entering I felt it dark and empty.'

(García Márquez 1983:14)

- e. *Había un hombre oscuro, estirado, inmóvil.*  
 There was a man dark rigid motionless.

'There was a dark man, rigid (and) motionless.'

(García Márquez 1983:14)

These examples represent prototypical uses of *haber* as an existential-presentative form.

**2.1 NOTABLE FEATURES OF *HABER*.** As Givon's observations about existential-presentative constructions suggest, we can expect *haber*, as one of the Spanish representatives of this construction, to diverge in characteristics from its verbal counterparts. And, indeed, this is what we find; the properties of impersonal *haber* are unlike canonical verbs in Spanish. Impersonal *haber* reportedly does not take a subject argument (more on this later), thus the 'impersonal' moniker. Furthermore, although in most situations the argument of *haber* is indefinite, a feature normally associated with objects, definite arguments are known to occur with it. The following examples come from Suñer (1982b).

- (3) a. *En la clase hoy, había el olor más peculiar*  
 In the class today there was the odor more peculiar  
*que te puedas imaginar.*  
 that to you you could imagine.INF  
 'In class today, there was the most peculiar odor that you can imagine.'
- b. *Siempre hay la endencia a inercia, ¿no?*  
 Always there is the tendency to inertia no  
 'There is always the tendency towards inertia, isn't there?'
- c. *¿Hay el mismo sistema en su país?*  
 There is the same system in your country  
 'Is there the same system in your country?'
- d. *Había el silencio, el ruido solitario del mar,*  
 There was the silence the sound solitary of-the sea  
*la inmovilidad con fugas de ciempiés.*  
 the immobility with flights of centipedes.  
 'There was silence, the solitary sound of the sea, the immobility with the flights of centipedes.'
- e. *No hay ya los grandes poetas de otros tiempos.*  
 No there are now the great poets of other times  
 'Today there aren't the great poets of other times.'
- f. *Había la necesidad imperiosa de resolver este caso.*  
 There was the necessity imperious of resolve.INF this  
 case.  
 'There was the inescapable necessity to resolve the case.'

Suñer (1982b) discusses the restrictions on definiteness as illustrated in the above examples. Example 3a conforms to a restriction with respect to superlatives; 3b to cataphoric reference; 3c to anaphoric reference; 3d to list-like constructions; 3e and 3f to the non-referential/generic quality of the argument. Despite restrictions on the appearance of definiteness, they undoubtedly do appear, and readily.

Moreover, in many situations, especially when speaking informally, the argument, which we would expect to appear in the form of a direct object pronoun, is routinely dropped.

- (4) a. Q: *¿Hay un servicio aquí?*  
 A: *Sí, hay.* or *No, no hay.*  
*Sí, lo hay* or *\*No, no lo hay.*  
 Q: 'Is there a restroom here?'  
 A: 'Yes, there is' or 'No, there isn't.'<sup>1</sup>
- b. Q: *¿Hay alguien que sepa de matemáticas aquí?*  
 A: *Sí, hay.* or *No, no hay nadie.*  
*Sí, lo hay.* or *\*No, no lo hay.*  
 Q: 'Is there someone here who knows about mathematics?'  
 A: 'Yes, there is. or No, there isn't anyone.'
- c. Q: *¿Hay esa Marilín aquí?*  
 A: *Sí, hay.* or *No, no hay.*  
*\*Sí, la hay.* or *\*No, no la hay.*  
 Q: 'Is there that Marilyn here?'  
 A: 'Yes, there is (one). or No, there isn't.'

In all of the above examples, the reply without the clitic was the preferred form. The point here is to note only that, at times, the behavior of the argument shares characteristics with 'pro'-drop subjects. It is duly noted that objects, when highly topical in the discourse, can optionally remain unrealized.

Furthermore, *haber* and its argument do not conform to other well-established rules of Spanish grammar, i.e., when the argument of impersonal *haber* is human, it does not take the objective case marker for humans, *a*, required when functioning as an argument of a verb<sup>2</sup>. For example, a prototypical transitive verb such as *ver*, 'to see', requires that an argument which refers to a person, but not one which refers to a non-human referent, take the objective marker, *a*. Consider the following:

- (5) a. *Vi un accidente ayer.*  
 see-1sg.PAST a accident yesterday  
 'I saw an accident yesterday.'

<sup>1</sup>Notice in English that the argument of the existential verb is also dropped. However, in English the dummy subject, *there*, fills the subject slot. With *haber*, the only such candidate for the subject, optional in any given utterance though it may be, is the argument.

<sup>2</sup>It has been noted (Miles 1990) that *tener*, *haber*'s historical counterpart, does not take the personal *a* marker. Witness:

- i. *Tengo un novio bien guapo.*  
 have-1sg a boyfriend well handsome.  
 'I have a very handsome boyfriend.'

However, this is not invariably true. In cases such as the following, the *a* marker is obligatory.

- ii. *Tengo al hijo enfermo.*  
 have-1sg pers.mrkr-the son sick.  
 'I have my son (at home) sick.'
- iii. *Tengo a la policía a mis talones.*  
 have-1sg pers.mrkr the police at my heels.  
 'I have the police on my heels.'

- b. *Vi*                      *a*            *Susana*            *ayer.*  
 see-1sg.PAST      OBJ      Susana            yesterday  
 'I saw Susana yesterday.'

These examples make it clear that the object marker distinguishes between animate and inanimate referents. Moreover, the explicit object marking is not limited by considerations of referentiality and specificity, as illustrated in the following examples:

- (6) a. *Vi*                      *a*            *tu*      *hermano*            *ayer.*  
 see-1sg.PAST      OBJ      your      brother            yesterday  
 'I saw your brother yesterday.'
- b. *Vi*                      *a*                      *alguien*            *ayer*  
 see-1sg.PAST      OBJ      someone            yesterday  
*que se*                      *parecía*                      *a*      *tu*      *hermano*  
 that refl-PRON      seem-3sg.PAST      OBJ      your      brother  
 'I saw someone yesterday who looked like your brother.'
- c. *Busco*                      *a*            *una*      *persona*            *que*  
 look for-1sg.PRSNT      OBJ      a      person            that  
*sepa*                      *manejar.*  
 know-3sg.SUBJ      drive-INF  
 'I'm looking for someone (anyone) who knows how to drive.'

As these examples illustrate, the personal object marker is used in all cases, regardless of referentiality or specificity. Therefore, in the following example we can see that, in light of the traditional understanding of the argument of *haber* as an object argument, it is, in fact, very odd that the animate non-referential argument of *haber* does not take the object marking.

- (7) \**No hay a nadie que no le deteste.*  
*No hay*                      *nadie que no*            *le*      *deteste.*  
 no there.is-IMPRS.PRSNT      no.one that      no      CLT.sg detest-3sg.SUBJ  
 'There isn't anyone who doesn't detest him/her.'

(Miles, 1990, 319)

While 'official' grammarians of the language discuss the expression of impersonal *haber* as a frozen form, modern linguists and observers of the language acknowledge that, in fact, in all but the present indicative, many dialects of Spanish allow agreement between the NP argument and the verb. Consider the following:

- (8a) *Hubieron*                      *fiestas.*  
 There.are-IMPRS.PAST      parties.  
 'There were parties.'

(Cano Aguilar:298 and Gili y Gaya:78)

- (8b) *Habían*                      *muchos*            *soldados.*  
 There.are-IMPRS.PAST      many            soldiers.  
 'There were many soldiers.'

(Gili y Gaya:78)

In both the 8a and 8b examples, the verb is in a past tense form, the preterit in 8a and the imperfect in 8b. In all but the present form of *haber*, the adverb *i* did not fuse with the *haber* form, leaving it

to correlate in form exactly to the perfect auxiliary. That is a 'frozen' form only developed for the impersonal *haber* in the present tense. 'Officially' (RAE 1981), the 'correct' forms to convey the meaning of examples 8a and 8b above would be the singular form of *haber*, i.e., *hubo fiestas* and *había muchos soldados*. Although these latter 'correct' forms are, indeed, widely used (as they are the forms of the *norma culta* in the language), the aberrant forms of 8a and 8b above are also commonly heard.

Even more aberrant, but by no means uncommon in familiar speech, are the forms of *haber* in which the verb is inflected for person other than third person. The only examples I have encountered involve first person-plural marking, as follows:

- (9) a. *Habíamos muchos.*  
       have.3pl/there-were many.  
       'There were many of us.'

(Martinez Amador 1985:332)

- b. *Habemos seis hermanos.*  
       have.3pl six brothers.  
       'There are six siblings in our family.'

(Miles 1990: 322)

The expected expression of these concepts would employ the verb *ser* in the place of *haber*. However, even more interesting than the catapulting of *ser* in favor of *haber* in these examples is the use of the antiquated conjugation of the present tense form, example 9b, in *habemos*; had the use of the existential *haber* form developed inflections as a process of analogy to the perfect auxiliary, we would have expected *hemos*, the current-day perfect auxiliary corresponding to first-person plural, to fill this position.

Generally, we have seen that in its impersonal or existential sense, *haber* is used to introduce new information or arguments in the form of NPs or clauses. Moreover, we have seen that the status of the impersonal or existential *haber* in Spanish is in flux, or perhaps never quite stabilized as evidenced by 9b above. First, it is widely accepted that *haber* may not in its impersonal forms accept overt subjects, although its expression of personal direct objects lacks the obligatory personal object marker, *a*. Further, even in its impersonal function, it is commonplace for the verb to show agreement with the direct object when the direct object is plural. And, though not quite as common as the previous phenomenon, existential *haber* overlaps with *ser* in the first person, plural form of presentational functions, including in some Iberian dialects, as noted by Martín Alonso (1962).

**3.0 GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS.** Until this point in the paper, I have but alluded to the reanalysis of the direct complement argument of the impersonal *haber* as a subject argument. Much of the literature defends the traditional notion that the argument of *haber* is actually an object of the verb (Suñer 1982a; Bassols de Climent 1928; Miles 1990; Gili y Gaya 1961; and others). The evidence for this claim, which will be examined in this section, is the following: 1) when the argument is rendered in a pronominal/clitic form it takes the case of an accusative clitic; 2) the argument is said to be obligatory, which, given the 'pro'-drop parameter of Spanish precludes it from being the subject; and, 3) the argument's unmarked position is after the verb, a position traditionally reserved for objects. These arguments notwithstanding, there are three convincing pieces of evidence from syntax which suggest, in fact, that the argument is the subject: 1) *haber*, like intransitives—which are also one-argument verbs—may not passivize nor may it take a reflexive/passive clitic; 2) in widespread familiar use of the language, the verb agrees not only in number, but oftentimes in person marking, with its obligatory argument; and 3) the obligatory argument may not take accusative case marking when the referent is human. Furthermore, evidence related to the development of *haber*, coupled with cognitive explanations, supports the notion that, although the

argument of *haber* was originally an object of the verb, a reanalysis of the structure in light of other changes in the language have initiated its evolution to full subject status.

**3.1 QUIRKY OBJECT STATUS.** It has been argued that the argument of *hay* in examples such as the one in 10 below—in this case *un médico*—must be represented in the response to the question posed in the first part of the adjacency pair. Putting to one side the objections to this claim for the moment, let us examine the evidence for the claim that because the argument of the verb may be omitted, it must, thus, be an object.

- (10) Q: *¿Hay un médico en este pueblo?*  
           there.is a doctor-m.sg in this town  
           ‘Is there a doctor in this town?’  
       A: *Sí, lo hay.*  
           yes, CLT-m.sg. there-is.  
           ‘Yes, there is one.’

(Suñer 1982a:22)

Despite the clearly accusative nature of the clitic, the presence of such clitic does not necessarily admit the object status of the argument. Proponents of the argument-as-object position draw an analogy to English; the ‘object’ argument in the English translation may be omitted due to the copula function of the verb, ‘is’, i.e. ‘Yes, there is’. Therefore, in response to an English question with a lexical verb, such as, ‘Do you like sugar?’, one can not respond, \*‘Yes, I like’; the lexical status of ‘like’ does not allow such a rendering. By such reasoning, the ‘lo’ in example 10 above is an obligatory argument, much like ‘sugar’, and as such, may not be omitted (Suñer, 1982a:22ff.). However, this analogy does not quite hold. Although the practice in English is to allow copula verbs to drop arguments when already entered into discourse, Spanish does not necessarily permit this same freedom in its copula verbs. Thus, the following question illustrates the use of a clearly copula verb, *ser*, with an attributive, not object, argument; this attributive feature must also be realized in the corresponding response with a clitic argument.

- (11) Q: *Es Mayela inteligente?*  
           is Mayela intelligent  
           ‘Is Mayela intelligent?’  
       A: *Sí, lo es.*  
           yes CLT.m.sg is.3sg  
           ‘Yes, she is.’

The point here is only that there are, in fact, other uses for the clitic *lo* than that of representing the accusative function. Tellingly, the feature of *hay* which allows it to take clitics may contribute to the ongoing reanalysis of *haber* as a copula. Such clitics may be interpreted as deriving from the same source as that from which the clitic used with copula verbs and attributive arguments derive, further entangling the features of these two constructions.

Of course, the object need not always be obligatory. In fact, the argument of *hay* regularly remains unrealized or implied. Consider the following examples taken from Suñer (1982a:45):

- (12)a. *Hay con qué taparse?*                    *Sí, (lo) hay.*  
           there-is with what cover-REFL.INF    Yes, (CLT-m.sg) there-is.  
           ‘Is there something to cover oneself with?’    ‘Yes, there is.’



- b. *Hay sol?*<sup>3</sup>  
 there-is sun  
 'Is there sun?'

*Sí, hay.*  
 Yes, there-is  
 'Yes, there is.'

- c. *De acuerdo.*                      *Pero aquí lugar no hay.*<sup>4</sup>                      *O hay?*  
 Of accord                      But here place no there-is.                      or there-is  
 'Fine. But here there is no room. Or is there?'

The arguments in these examples are intangible, indeterminate referents: a non-restrictive relative, *con qué taparse*; force of nature, *sol*; and reference to space that has been asserted not to exist, *lugar*. The point is that the unrealized argument in the answers to these questions is consistent with behavior of 'pro'-drop subjects. If, in fact, the phenomenon was perceived as such, it would signal a change in the psychological status of the argument. Granted, this change is not a notable change in syntactic behavior. It is customary to leave such arguments unrealized when they have been activated in the discourse. However, let's return to example 10. Returning to the claim that the object clitic in example 10 is obligatory, we encounter disagreement among native Spanish speakers. When question 10 was put to native speakers with a surrounding context,<sup>5</sup> the answer received was, *Sí, hay*, without the object clitic. When prodded as to why the clitic was not included in the response, informants explained that since they had a particular person in mind, that replying with *lo*—presumably a non-referential form—would be inappropriate. That is, the speakers' sense is that with impersonal *haber*, *lo* can not be used to refer to a specific entity. Note that this is not the case with objects of personal verbs.

- (13) a. *Vi*                      *a*                      *José.*  
           see-1sg.PAST                      OBJ                      José  
           I saw José.
- b. *Lo*                      *vi.*  
           CLT.m.sg    see-1sg.PAST  
           I saw him.

However, the explanation given by the speakers for their response with *haber* fits the case of the copula nicely.

- (14) *¿Es*                      *Gustavo*                      *profesor?*  
           is                      gustavo                      profesor  
           'Is Gustavo an instructor?'
- Sí,*                      *lo*                      *es.*<sup>6</sup>  
           yes                      CLT.m.sg                      is-3sg  
           'Yes, he is.'

<sup>3</sup>An alternate, and presumably, more natural way to express this question would be to use the verb *hacer*, i.e., *hace sol?*

<sup>4</sup>Suner (45) took this example from a play.

<sup>5</sup>The context given was the following: A stranger comes from another town looking for medical help. You're the first person s/he encounters. S/he puts the following question to you. How do you respond?

<sup>6</sup>We know that *lo* refers to *profesor* and not *Gustavo* because *Gustavo* is recoverable as the subject of *es*, yielding *Gustavo lo es*. However, 'the roles may not be reversed: \**El profesor lo es*.'

As illustrated in these examples, the behavior of the pronominal clitic with *haber* is more akin to object behavior with copula verbs than to object behavior with canonical verbs.

Furthermore, the fact that the position of the argument is after the verb does not necessarily imply the argument's status as an object. The underlying assumption of linguists who claim that the position after the verb does imply object status is that Spanish is in fact an SVO language. However, this is a position which has been challenged recently (Ocampo, 1991; and Pottier, 1988). In fact, in Spanish many subject arguments appear after the verb. Consider the following piece of dialogue excerpted from Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?* (114):

- (15) —*Son*<sub>a</sub> *ustedes*<sub>a</sub> *unos* *abusivos*, *además de*  
 be.3rd.pl. you.FRML.pl INDEF.pl.masc abusive.people moreover from  
*cochinos—repitió*<sub>b</sub> *la* *muchacha*<sub>b</sub>—*Vaya* *policías*<sup>7</sup>.  
 pigs repeat.3.sg.PAST the girl go.3rd.pl.IMP police  
*Son*<sub>c</sub> *todavía* *peor de* *lo que dice*<sub>d</sub> *la gente*<sub>d</sub>  
 be.3.pl. till worse from he that say.3.sg. the people  
*que son*<sub>c</sub> *los policías*<sub>c</sub>.  
 that be.3rd.pl. det.masc.pl police  
 'You are abusive, aside from being pigs—repeated the girl—Damn cops. You are even worse than what people say the cops are.'

The placement of the subject after the verb reinforces the psychological salience of that argument vis a vis the proposition expressed. However, none of the linguists who claim that the argument of *haber* is an accusative argument would make the same claim about the sentences in the example 15 above. The principle which accounts for salient subjects to appear post-verbally, together with the locative/existential nature of the predicate *haber*, encourages the reanalysis of the originally accusative argument of *haber* as a subject.

3.2 CONVENTIONAL SUBJECT STATUS. *haber* in its existential/impersonal sense may not be passivized. This feature of *haber* conforms to prototypical behavior of intransitive verbs—i.e. one-place predicates whose argument is its subject argument—as well as that of the copular. In this light, consider the following examples:

- (16)a. *Hay un libro en la mesa.*  
 there-is a book on the table  
 'There is a book on the table.'
- b. \**Es habido en la mesa (por un libro.)*  
 Is.3.sg had-PAST.PART on the table (by a book).  
 \*'Is had on the table (by a book).'
- c. \**Es habido un libro en la mesa.*  
 Is.3.sg have-PAST.PART a book on the table  
 \*'Is had a book on the table.'

The examples 16b and 16c are clearly unacceptable. The sentence in 16b reflects a passive rendering of the argument, *un libro*, as if it were a subject; of course, one-place predicates—

<sup>7</sup>As this sentence is an imperative, the positioning of the subject after the verb is not a phenomenon which supports the point I am making here.

intransitives, including other presentatives,<sup>8</sup> may not be passivized. On the other hand, the illustration in 16c takes *un libro* to be an object. Naturally, if *un libro* functions as the object, it should passivize easily. However, it does not. Of course, there is no observable subject if we take *libro* to be the object. This fact may preclude its passivization, even considering the fact that agents and agentive phrases normally do not appear in passive sentences (Shibatani 1985). In any case, both 16b and 16c are equally unacceptable in a passivized form.<sup>9</sup>

Operating under the assumption that *haber* may function as a one-place predicate with a PP argument, we may compare passivization properties of an intransitive verb such as *caminar* with *haber*:

- (17)a. *Camina Roxana por la calle.*  
 walk-3.sg Roxana through the street  
 'Roxana walks down the street.'
- b. \**Es caminada por la calle (por Roxana).*  
 Is-3.sg walk-PAST.PART.f.sg by the street (by Roxana)  
 \* 'It is walked by the street (by Roxana).'

Intransitive verbs with PP arguments may not passivize. Therefore, the example in 17 above clearly fits the pattern established here with *caminar*. Moreover, the locative underpinnings of the existential construction suggest that a comparison with the copula *estar* would be appropriate.

- (18)a. *Está el libro en la mesa.*  
 LOC-3sg the book on the table.  
 'The book is on the table.'
- b. \**Es estado en la mesa (por un libro).*  
 is-3sg LOC-PART on the table  
 \* 'Is been on the table.'

<sup>8</sup>Other presentatives in Spanish, such as,  
 iv. *Apareció Juan.*  
 appear-3.sg.PAST Juan  
 Juan appeared.  
 are clearly verb-subject.

<sup>9</sup>*tener*, a verb with which *haber* shares many characteristics due to their shared pattern of development and which does have a recognizable subject, is not capable of passivizing in this way either:

- (v)a. *Tiene un libro.*  
 he/she-has a book.  
 'He/She has a book.'
- (v)b. \**Un libro es tenido por él/ella.*  
 a book is had by him/her.  
 \* 'A book is had by him/her.'

These examples make it apparent that *tener* may not passivize, conforming to the same restriction as that to which *haber* conforms. That is, we find the iib example to be unacceptable. Still, we would not argue that *tener*, due to its inability to passivize, does not have a subject. The conjoint development of *tener* and *haber* would suggest that the verbs share similar properties, one of which being that what was originally its object argument, and in the case of *tener* clearly still is, does not passivize.

Again, we see a pattern of non-passivization to which the *haber* construction conforms. Therefore, the fact that *haber* may not passivize is convincing evidence that its argument must function as a subject.

The pattern of evidence regarding the behavior of *haber* with respect to that of other verbs suggests that the status of the argument is compatible with a reanalysis from its original object complement status to subject status. That *haber* may be said to be undergoing such a process suggests that *haber* is, in fact, being reanalyzed as a type of copula. Although it is true that some verbs may not be passivized by the strategy *ser* + past participle, such as *tener*, some of this class may undergo reflexive passivization by the attachment of the *se* clitic to its third-person form. This form of passivization yields impersonal constructions. *Tener*, but not *haber* may take the *se* clitic.

- (19) *Se*                      *tiene*                      *un*      *libro.*  
       CLT.REFL.3sg      have-3sg.PRES      a      book  
       ‘One has a book.’

Notice the impersonal rendering of the sentence with the aggregation of *se*. In fact, this impersonal reading is already implied in existential/impersonal *haber*. This may account for why *haber* is precluded from accepting the reflexive passive clitic. In fact, *haber* is not alone in this exclusion; there are other verbs with an existential reading which may not undergo *se* impersonal passivization. For example, *existir* is infelicitous if rendered as \**Se existe*. Moreover, verbs with such prevalent use as *gustar*<sup>10</sup> may not passivize, either with a copular or with an impersonal *se*. Yet no one doubts that the arguments of these verbs function as their respective subjects. Interestingly, both of these verbs’ arguments are right-tending; that is, the subjects most often appear in the post-verbal position, the position normally reserved for the logical object.

Lastly, the fact that the argument of *haber* may not, and never has been able to, take accusative marking on its argument when the referent is animate argues for its construal as a subject.

- (20)a. \**No*              *hay*              *a nadie*              *en la casa.*  
       no              there-is              no.one in the house  
       ‘There isn’t anyone home.’

Example 20a above would be perfectly acceptable were the accusative marking *a* to be removed. Thus, in this case *nadie* clearly functions as if it were a subject adjunct to *hay*. Keeping in mind the relationship between locatives, possessives and existentials, we should examine a similar structure with the locative predicate.

- b. *No hay*              *nadie en casa.*<sup>11</sup>  
       no              LOC-3sg              no.one in              house  
       ‘There isn’t anyone home.’<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>*Se gusta* is a grammatical sequence in Spanish, but with a reflexive, not impersonal reading.

<sup>11</sup>*No está nadie en casa* seems somewhat odd. Perhaps this is because the *haber* construction in 20b has taken over this function from *estar*.

<sup>12</sup>The semantic difference between 20b and 20c is not immediately clear. It seems to involve an issue of information management whereby in the utterance in 20b the speaker’s focus is on *nadie*, whereas in 20c the focus is the whole proposition. For example, 20b might be uttered as you and your friend pay a surprise visit to his grandmother, but upon arriving and ringing the doorbell, no one answers. Then you might say to your friend 20b. In the case of 20c, we might postulate that during a conversation in which your husband badgers you to call the home of friends to see if anyone knows the secret ingredient in Coca Cola, you, having just called your friends, might respond 20c.

- c. *Nadie*      *está*      *en*      *casa.*  
      No      LOC-3sg      in      house.  
      'No one is home.'

Clearly, the *haber* construction can be compared with the *estar* construction above; and perhaps that is just what native speakers unconsciously do when they implement verb-argument agreement with the *haber* construction.

**3.3 CONTRIBUTION OF DIACHRONY.** In discussing the evolution of *haber*, linguists (Martínez Amador, 1985; and others) posit a process of semiotic metonymy and analogy which yielded the modern-day existential structure. For example, to derive the existential construction as we know it, first, the subject of *haber* is omitted with the understanding that the agent/actor of the verb is some generalized entity:

- (21)a. *España*      *hubo*      *guerras.*  
      spain      had      wars  
      'Spain had wars.'
- b. *La gente*      *hubo*      *fiestas.*  
      the people      had      parties  
      'The people had parties.'

yields to

- c. *hubo guerras*  
      'had wars'
- d. *hubo fiestas*  
      'had parties'

Then, an analogy with the presentative function of *ser* added the optional locative argument but, more importantly, provided a source for the number agreement between the verb and the post-verbal argument, which in the following examples is the subject.

- (22)a. *Fueron*      *guerras en*      *España.*  
      be-3rd.pl.PAST      wars in      Spain.  
      'Wars were in Spain.'
- b. *Fueron*      *fiestas en Talamanca.*  
      be-3rd.pl.PAST      parties in Talamanca  
      'Parties were in Talamanca.'

Thus, the combination of the impersonal, generalized animate subjects underlying the original omission of subject realization in examples 21 above with the subject-verb number agreement of the second set of examples in 22 above, yielded the present-day existential constructions cited below:

- (23)a *Hubieron*      *fiestas.*  
      There.were-IMPRS.PAST      parties.  
      'There were parties.;

(Cano Aguilar:298 and Gili y Gaya:78)

- b *Habían* *muchos* *soldados.*  
 There.were-IMPRS.PAST many soldiers  
 'There were many soldiers.'

(Gili y Gaya:78)

In fact, there is evidence that this construction has been in process for some time as the following example from the 17th century illustrates:

- (24) *La primera* (*romería*) *que hize* *después* *que*  
 the first (roving adventure) that make.1sg.PAST after that  
*murió* *mi madre,* *fue* *a* *Arenillas:* *la*  
 die-3sg.PAST my mother was-3sg to Arenillas: that  
*cual* *contaré* *por* *extenso, por* *cuanto* *en* *ella*  
 which tell-1sg.FUT for extensive for as-much in her there-

*hubieron* *cosas dignas* *de memoria.*  
 were things dignified of memory.

'The first trip I made after my mother died was to Arenillas, which I will tell of extensively as there were many things which merit remembering.'

(Martínez Amador, 1985, from *La Pícara Justina* (1605))

Therefore, we see, that like other linguistic phenomena, the reanalysis of the argument of *haber* as a subject argument is a systematic development which has unfolded throughout the history of the language.

**4.0 CONCLUSION.** Because the *hay* form is a frozen form, it managed to maintain its integrity throughout a period when periphrastic *haber* was undergoing semantic bleaching on its way to becoming a strictly grammatical morpheme, which status the periphrastic counterpart holds today. However, due to its existential meaning and due to its similarity in all other forms to the periphrastic auxiliary, existential/impersonal *haber* in forms other than the third person singular present form is in the process of developing number agreement with its argument. This is mainly happening as a result of its locative reading rendering an analogy with the locative copula. Additionally, the copula-like function of *haber* in its periphrastic function probably contributes to this rendering. Continuing the historical overrun of *ser*, the presentative function that *haber* carries in Spanish makes an analogy to the *ser* presentative appealing. Thus, we see examples such as 9a and 9b, repeated below:

- (25) a. *Habíamos* *muchos.*  
 have.3pl/there.were many.  
 'There were many of us.'

(Martínez Amador 1985:332)

- b. *Habemos* *seis* *hermanos.*  
 have.3pl six brothers.  
 'There are six siblings in our family.'

(Miles 1990: 322)

It seems from this perspective on diachrony, that *haber* shares the auxiliary and copula functions with *ser*.

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