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## SEMANTICALLY LIGHT *SEE*

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### 0. Introduction

This paper has two goals, first descriptive and second theoretical. The first goal is to reveal a hitherto unfamiliar meaning/usage of the verb *see* by making an extensive observation of a construction which contains *see* as the main verb and certain types of inanimate subject. Well-known examples of such a construction are given in (1):

- (1) a. The past 18 months have seen unprecedented chaos.
- b. New York saw its first New Year's ball drop in 1907.

Let us call this kind of *see* 'light *see*' for reasons that will be made clear shortly. We show that the light *see* construction can have a kind of causative interpretation, which can be observed in (2):

- (2) a. The success of the strategy saw her move into production.
- b. The outbreak of war in September 1939 saw him at the regimental depot at Fort George on the Moray Firth.

The second goal is to propose an analysis of light *see* in terms of a configurational meaning of (non-)central coincidence.

### 1 Existential *See*

Langacker (1991:346) mentions that the subject that denotes location or time may cooccur with *see* and give the setting for seeing. The following

examples that we have found might be considered to have this type of subject in some extended sense:

- (3) a. Theirs is the view which sees young women heading out on the town in mini skirts.
- b. This novel sees some of his finest writing to date. . .
- c. Of late every London recital has seen her trying out a new one.
- d. Miklosko's brainstorm saw him place a goalkick straight at Sturridge's feet.

It might be the general understanding, as observed in descriptions in most English dictionaries, that the subject in the light *see* construction is semantically restricted to location or time. For example, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* has the entry for *see* which refers to the usage in question (p. 1156). It gives two relevant submeanings: (i) to be the time when an event happens, as in (4a), and (ii) to be the place where an event happens, as in (4b):

- (4) a. Next year sees the centenary of Verdi's death.
- b. This stadium has seen many thrilling football games.

We claim that such understanding as well as Langacker's description captures only a part of the semantic properties of the light *see* construction. This part of the meaning of light *see* might be called 'existential' in the sense that it means the occurrence and existence of an event denoted by the complement of *see*.

## 2. Causative *See*

Based on our extensive research of data (559 sentences from *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, and others; detailed descriptions are given in Onoe (2000); see also Onoe (2001)), we have noticed the fact, which has not been well-attested, that light *see* can be associated with a kind of causative meaning. The examples in (2) are repeated below:

- (2) a. The success of the strategy saw her move into production.
- b. The outbreak of war in September 1939 saw him at the regimental depot at Fort George on the Moray Firth.

In (2a), for instance, the subject *the success of the strategy* is most naturally interpreted as a kind of cause of *her move into production*. More examples are given in the following:

- (5) a. Requisite changes to Lower's diet have seen his weight rise.
- b. Hayes's determination to work their way back into the match saw them lift the tempo even higher.
- c. Celtic, with the sturdiness that has seen them keep a clean sheet in their past six matches, look equipped to maintain a gruelling struggle.

These examples (as well as many others) make it clear that the subject in the light *see* construction is not restricted to locative and temporal NPs. In (2a) again, *the success of the strategy* may be considered an event but not a place or a time in any reasonably extended or metaphorical sense.

A question that arises at this point is whether the light *see* construction can be associated with the two *distinct* (though maybe related) meanings, existential (as in (1, 4)) and causative (as in (2, 5)). One might give an affirmative answer. Specifically, for example, it might appear to be possible at first sight to adopt a type of analyses proposed by Belvin (1993) and Suzuki (1999) (cf. Ritter and Rosen (1993, 1997)). Consider a sentence such as the following:

(6) John had the wallet stolen.

(6) may yield an experiential or a causative reading. Belvin and Suzuki argue that the experiential, but not causative, reading arises from the complement structure that has an empty pronominal controlled (or bound) by the subject, as in (7):

(7) John<sub>i</sub> had the wallet stolen [<sub>PP</sub> e pro]<sub>i</sub>.

This analysis accounts, among others, for an optional appearance of an overt PP with the experiential but not causative interpretation, as in (8):

(8) John<sub>i</sub> had the wallet stolen *on him*<sub>i</sub>.

There is, however, an obvious problem of this approach applied to the light *see* construction. The light *see* construction does not permit an overt PP corresponding to *on him* in (8); we have found no examples like (9):

(9) \*This stadium has seen many thrilling football games *in it*.

### 3. Light *See*

#### 3.1 Underspecification of Light *See*

We would like to propose an alternative. We first show that the interpretive differences of the light *see* construction are not due to distinct lexical meanings of light *see*. Consider (10):

(10) The heavy snows have seen several regions declare states of emergency.

(10) could mean either that the heavy snows have caused the several regions to declare states of emergency or that during the heavy snows, the several regions declared states of emergency. Notice that either meaning is possible in one and the same context. In fact, how the speaker/hearer interprets the subject NP is significant in getting specific interpretations of these sentences. The noun *snows* can be taken to mean the period of snowing and, if it is, the interpretation of the sentence is existential ('during the heavy snows, the several regions declared states of emergency'). When *snows* is taken to denote an event of snowing, the interpretation is causative ('the heavy snows have caused the several regions to declare states of emergency'). This suggests that the meaning of light *see* is just vague, indeterminate between existential and causative.

The semantic properties of the subject NPs are also crucial in (1-5). In (1a), *The past 18 months have seen unprecedented chaos*, for instance, the temporal subject is considered to denote the period of time when unprecedented chaos took place, without causal implication. In (1b), *New York saw its first New Year's ball drop in 1907*, the subject is interpreted as the place where the event expressed by the complement took place. The sentences in (2, 5) (e.g. (2a) *The success of the strategy saw her move into production*), in which the subject NPs denote some kind of event, yield causative, but not existential, interpretations. Therefore, the interpretation of the light *see* construction depends on the semantic properties of the subject NP rather than multiple specifications of the lexical meaning of light *see*. In general, we suggest, temporal and locative subjects lead to existential interpretations whereas eventive subjects lead to causative interpretations.

More examples can be added to support the above argument. Consider (11):

(11) An incident early in the third period saw five players ejected. Since the noun *incident* can have a temporal meaning, (11) may mean that during an incident early in the third period, five players were ejected. More natural interpretation might be causative, however, meaning that players were ejected because of the incident, an event. In either case, whether the relevant sentences are existential or causative depends on the interpretation of the subject NP.

Furthermore, in addition to the properties of subject, other factors such as tense might affect the interpretation of the light *see* construction. Consider the following:

- (12) The temperate weather {will see/saw} piano recitals and jazz played in the city's squares during the tournament.

With the future-denoting auxiliary *will*, the eventive or stage-level subject NP *the temperate weather* might be most naturally taken to be the cause (or condition) of the event denoted by the complement ('if the weather is mild, ...jazz will be played...'). In contrast, with the past tense, the causative force might be rather weakened and the subject can be naturally taken to be the period for the event expressed by the complement ('during/under the temperate weather, ...jazz was played...').

Effects of the interaction between the subject NP and tense can be observed in the examples like the following:

- (13) a. The deal, which will see the award-winning sports writer Hugh McIlvanney working with Ferguson, was signed yesterday...  
b. The sale will see 1,500 staff transferring to Alexon,...

Although the nouns *deal* and *sale* could be interpreted as temporal ('during the deal/sale'), *will* in (13) somehow forces the eventive readings of these nouns and the causative interpretations of the sentences.

The fact made clear above that the interpretation of the light *see* construction is sensitive to several factors indicates that light *see* itself is just vague rather than polysemous. Specific interpretations such as existential and causative arise depending on other factors including speaker/hearer's pragmatic knowledge.

We would like to go further to claim that even the existential and the causative readings are in fact artifacts. Notice that the causative interpretations observed above arise when (i) the subject NP denotes an event and (ii) the two events denoted by the subject and the complement are placed sequentially in time, an event after another. For example, in (2a) *The success of the strategy saw her move into production*, *the success of the strategy* temporarily precedes *her move into production*. This sequential connection of two events seems to be the core meaning of 'causative' light *see*. We conjecture that the human cognitive system is inclined to assume a causal relation on such temporarily sequential events. The sense of

causation arises from this. Thus, we claim that causation is not specified in the lexical meaning of light *see*.

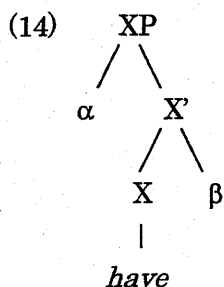
Even the notion of sequentiality of events should not be included in the lexical meaning of light *see*. When a time or a place (denoted by the subject) is related by light *see* with an event (denoted by the complement), there is only one event and thus one point of time; hence no sequentiality of events involved. Rather, the time and the place indicate when and where the event takes place. This gives rise to the existential meaning of light *see*. In this meaning, the basic function of light *see* is adjunction.

To sum up the above discussion, we have argued for underspecifying causative and existential meanings for light *see*. The causative reading arises from various factors when two events (expressed by the subject and by the complement) are interpreted as sequential. The existential reading arises also from various factors when a time/place is related with an event.

### 3.2 (Non-)Central Coincidence

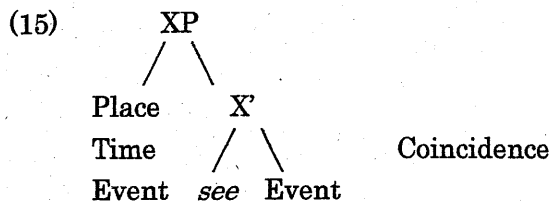
What is left in the meaning of light *see*? How can it be represented? For the second goal of this paper, we propose that this type of *see* is semantically light in a way parallel to the verb *have* (Hale (1986, 1995), Suzuki (1999); for light verbs, see Chomsky (1995), Harley (1995), Miyagawa (1999), and Richards (2001), among others). As discussed by Hale (1986) and Suzuki (1999), *have* expresses the notion of *central coincidence*, the bare minimum relation that holds between  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  when  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  co-exist in a certain place at a certain time (approximately, when  $\alpha$  is contemporary with or in the neighborhood of  $\beta$ ). To put it differently, central coincidence indicates that the location of  $\alpha$  coincides with the location of  $\beta$  (this could be informally expressed as ' $\alpha$  AT  $\beta$ '). Conversely put, *noncentral coincidence* indicates that the locations of  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  coincide partially in time or place ( $\alpha$  TO  $\beta$ ) (see Demirdache and Uribe-Etxebarria (2000:176)). Applying noncentral coincidence to the relation between two events, we suggest that when  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$  are events, noncentral coincidence indicates that  $\alpha$  starts and then  $\beta$  starts ( $\alpha$  TO  $\beta$ ).

Central coincidence is one of the basic meanings that are encoded in configurational terms in l(lexical)-syntax (see Hale and Keyser (1993), Déchaine (1996), and Suzuki (1999)). The relevant configuration is as follows:



Suzuki (1999) suggests that predicates like *have* are associated with 1-syntactically encoded meaning but no other semantic features, thus semantically light.

Given these, we propose that *see* in question is semantically light and, heading the structure in (15), expresses *coincidence* between a place/time/event (in the subject position) and an event (in the complement position), the centrality of coincidence being neutral:



The centrality is determined by such factors as the semantic properties of the arguments of light *see*. When *see* associates two events, the default association is in terms of noncentral coincidence because points of time that are associated with the two distinct events are unmarkedly distinct. The sentence is interpreted as sequentially connected ( $\alpha$  starts/happens and later  $\beta$  starts/happens) and most naturally as causative, though *see* lexically specifies no causative import. On the other hand, when light *see* associates a time/place with an event, they are related in terms of central coincidence. Since there is only one event and hence only one point of time involved, the coincidence between a time/place and an event is naturally central. The sentence is interpreted as existential, expressing when or where the event happens.

The difference in terms of tense can be analyzed in a similar way. Consider (12), repeated here:

- (12) The temperate weather {will see/saw} piano recitals and jazz played in the city's squares during the tournament.

In the future tense, the most natural understanding of (12) is that the event



denoted by the subject temporarily precedes the event denoted by the complement. When so interpreted, they can assume a cause-effect relation due to the human cognitive inclination. In the past tense, by contrast, (12) is likely to be interpreted in the way that the referents of the subject and of the complement are contemporary, thus, most naturally related in terms of the temporal relation.

The present analysis raises the question of how semantically light *see* can be related to the other usages of *see*. We suggest that the prototypical meaning of *see* (something like 'having a mental image through vision') is the complex of the configurational meaning associated with (15) and appropriate semantic features associated with the head *see*. We assume that under some conditions to be made precise, some sort of semantic bleaching is allowed and affects the associated semantic features. In an extreme case, all the associated semantic features may be eliminated from the head. We conjecture that what must remain is the configurational meaning. What arises as a consequence is semantically light *see*.

We can now answer another question: why *see* can have this semantically light function. It can, because it is associated with the configuration exactly for that function and because the irrelevant semantic features can be eliminated.

Having claimed that (15) is possible in principle, we leave open an important question of what are the conditions under which (15) is derived from the meaning of prototypical *see*.

#### 4. Implications for *Have*

Finally, we would like to explore a theoretical implication of this analysis for the experiential-causative distinction of the *have* construction, touched upon earlier. Although *have* is another semantically light verb, Belvin (1993) and Suzuki (1999) claim that it can be associated with two different structures (those with an empty PP and without) giving rise to different interpretations. We denied the same approach to semantically light *see* since the corresponding overt PP may not appear with light *see* (as in (9) \**This stadium has seen many thrilling football games in it*).

However, the semantic parallelism observed between *have* and light *see* seems to be more than a coincidence. These verbs are sometimes interchangeable with only subtle differences:

- (16) a. The Paris Ritz has had/seen enough publicity for a while.  
b. The rather grander room upstairs has had/seen its name changed to the Picasso Room.

*Have* has experiential and causative usages whereas *see* has existential and causative usages. In fact, the experiential and the existential usages are quite similar: the existential meaning of *see* implies a certain pragmatic relation parallel to the control/binding relation in the experiential reading of *have*. For example, (1a), *The past 18 months have seen unprecedented chaos*, means that the chaos happened *during* those past 18 months, though this temporal relation follows from nothing logical or syntactic in our analysis.

It seems likely that this pragmatic relation can be, but not yet, 'incorporated' into the syntax of light *see*, which would express it in terms of control or binding, as in the case of *have*. In other words, light *see* is 'younger' than experiential/causative *have*. A piece of suggestive evidence for this is the semantic restriction on the subject of light *see*, which the subject of experiential/causative *have* is free from.

Putting this relation between light *see* and experiential/causative *have* in the other way, the *have* construction might have had the properties parallel to the present light *see* construction at some point of the history of English and might have incorporated the above-mentioned pragmatic relation into syntax. This remains to be substantiated.

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