

Multiple functions of HAVE in Cantonese: a corpus study

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This study argues that 有 *jau5* ‘have’ is special in its acceptance of a wide range of complements. In addition to verbal use (1) as ‘possess’, *jau5* also has multiple functions: it is an existential marker of nominals (2), an experiential aspect marker (3), and denotes equative comparatives (4). Corpus data support the case for the crosscategorical behaviors of functional *jau5*.

(1) Lexical verb: ‘have; possess’

keoi5 jau5 leong5 zek3 gau2
3SG HAVE two CL dog
‘S/he has two dogs.’

(2) Nominal: Existential marker

jau5 leong5 go3 jan4 zyu6 hai2dou6
HAVE two CL person live at.here
‘There are two people living here.’

(3) Verbal: Experiential marking

keoi5 jau5 heoi3 guo3 faat3gwok3
3SG HAVE go EXP France
‘S/he has been to France.’

(4) Adjectival: Equative comparative

keoi5 jau5 maa1mi4 gam3 gou1
3SG HAVE mom so tall
‘S/he is as tall as mom.’

This study contributes two observations. First, fig. 1 shows that *jau5* occurs far more frequently than other common verbs¹. Second, the high frequency is not caused by occurrences in compounds (e.g. *jau5 si4* ‘sometimes’), because (i) there are far more tokens of *jau5* tagged as verbs (N=1628, 86%) than other common verbs, and (ii) other verbs occurs in compounds too (e.g. *hou2 sik6*, ‘tasty, lit: good-eat’). Fig. 2 shows that *jau5* has similar distribution as other common verbs, which means that the compounding is not the cause of the high frequency of *jau5*.

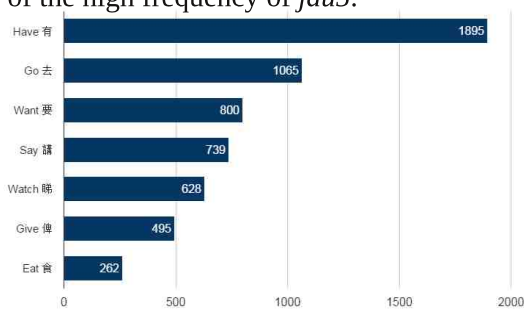


Fig 1. Number of tokens of common verbs

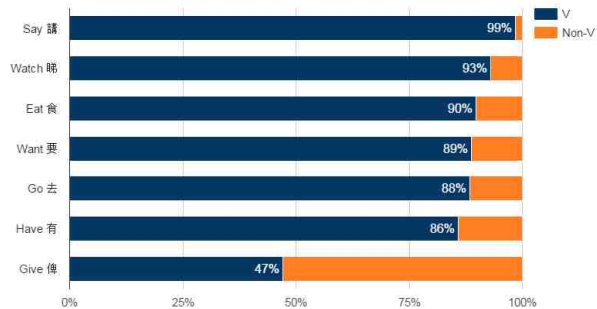


Fig 2. Percentage of verbal use in HKCanCor

This study explains the versatility / grammaticalization of *jau5* by its semantics, following Xie’s (2014) degree analysis on Mandarin *yǒu*. **Across semantic domains, *jau5* denotes a minimal degree.** This means existential (i.e. ‘at least one’) in the nominal domain, experiential (i.e. ‘events occurring at least once’) for events and equative comparative (i.e. ‘at least as tall as, or taller’) for properties.

Building on the part-of-speech annotation in HKCanCor (Luke & Wong, 2015), we are able to narrow down the verblike uses of *jau5*. However, HKCanCor does not differentiate uses like (2-4). Examples attested in HKCanCor (5-6) clearly show experiential marking, similar to (3), but are nevertheless annotated as a verb.

(5) *jau5 gam2 gong2 gwo3 me1*
HAVE so speak EXP Q
‘Did (anyone) say so?’

(6) *jau5 syun1bou3 gwo3 gaa4*
HAVE announce EXP Q
‘Was there really an announcement?’

This study gives a distributional solution by incorporating the part-of-speech of the complement to improve the current annotation. The implication is that (i) more specific coding is needed to address the research question, and (ii) *jau5* presents an interesting case of cross-categorical behavior as a functional item.

References:

Luke, K.K. & Wong M.L.Y. (2015). The Hong Kong Cantonese Corpus: Design and Uses. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*.
Xie, Z. (2014). The degree use of the possessive verb *yǒu* in Mandarin Chinese: a unified analysis and its theoretical implications. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 23 (2), 113-156.

¹ Expectedly, 係 *hai6* ‘be’ occurs even more frequently than *jau5* (N=10,146), with 6381 tokens tagged as a verb (N=6381, 62.9%).