

# Motivations for Grammaticalization: A Case Study of the Realis Marker *YOU* (有) in Taiwan Mandarin\*

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the motivations for grammaticalization by examining the use of *yǒu* (有, meaning “have”) as a realis marker *yǒu* in Taiwan Mandarin. It has been a disputable issue if “*yǒu* + VP” is allowed in Mandarin. Two domestic corpora were examined for the previously disputable “*yǒu* + VP” construction and *yǒu* is found to occur with four situational types of verbs. The semantic change of *yǒu* goes from coding possession (*tā yǒu qián/他有錢*) to existence in space (*dì shàng yǒu qián/地上有錢*) and then to existence in time (*tā yǒu huā qián/他有花錢*). Specifically, the derived meaning of *yǒu* can be viewed as a metaphorical extension from a concrete sense to an abstract one. This is compatible with the general tendency of semantic change and grammaticalization proposed by Heine, Ulrike & Friederike (1991). As *yǒu* is an extremely high-frequency word, frequency effect is regarded as the language-internal motivation for the grammaticalization of *yǒu*. Although Taiwan Mandarin has discourse-pragmatic pressure for selecting a realis marker, the communicative necessity alone is still an insufficient language-external motivation that triggers grammaticalization because grammaticalization does not necessarily happen in any given instance of potential grammaticalization (Traugott & Heine, 1991). Because the existence of “*yǒu* + VP” construction in Taiwan Mandarin is a result of language contact between Taiwan Mandarin and Taiwanese (Kubler, 1985), it is, thus, argued that communicative necessity and language contact are the language-external motivations for the grammaticalization of *yǒu*.

**Keywords:** motivations for grammaticalization, realis marker, YOU, language contact, frequency effect

## 1. Introduction

This study concentrates on the verb *yǒu* (有) in Taiwan Mandarin. Specifically, the goal of this study is to investigate if “*yǒu* + VP” construction prevails among Taiwan Mandarin speakers by observing the data from two domestic corpora. (1) is an example containing the “*yǒu* + VP” construction.

(1) 我有學過。

wǒ yǒu xué guò

‘I have learned it.’

Additionally, if such construction exists, the next step is to identify the

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functional and semantic properties of the *yǒu* in the construction and what factors motivate such functional and semantic formation.

The major two functions of *yǒu* among others are possessive *yǒu* (2) and existential *yǒu* (3).

- (2) 我有一百元。 (Possessive *yǒu*)

wǒ yǒu yì bǎi yuán

‘I have 100 dollars.’

- (3) 桌上有一本書。 (Existential *yǒu*)

zhuō shàng yǒu yì běn shū

‘There is a book on the desk.’

A possessive *yǒu* is used to denote the subordinative relationship between its two adjacent NPs. The *yǒu* in (2), for instance, denotes that the following NP (100 dollars) belongs to the first NP (I). An existential *yǒu* is used to refer to the existence of an entity (the NP follows *yǒu*) at a given location (the NP precedes *yǒu*), as shown in (3).

Unlike possessive *yǒu* and existential *yǒu*, literature on “*yǒu* + VP” reveals a chaotic phenomenon. Predominantly, previous studies regard positive sentences containing “*you*+VP” construction as illegitimate in Taiwan Mandarin (Cheng 2004) or as a construction under the influence of Southern Min (Cheng, 1990; Tsao & Cheng, 1994; Tsai, 2004). Chao (1968) claims that this construction only appears in negation – “*mei you* + VP”. Coincidentally, although Huang (1988) does not explicitly deny the existence of “*you* + VP” construction, all the related examples he presents are in the negative form “*mei you* + VP”. By examining news corpus, Wei (1995), on the other hand, argues that “*you* + VP” is widely used in Taiwan Mandarin and is a product of language contact between Mandarin and Southern Min. The “*you* + VP” construction in Taiwan Mandarin is also reanalyzed by Lin (1999). Given the inconsistent treatment on “*you* + VP”, the data from two corpuses in Taiwan serve to be the most persuasive evidence to refine the discrepancies presented previously.

(4) – (7) are instances of *yǒu* with four situation types of VPs collected from the NCCU Corpus of Spoken Chinese (<http://140.119.172.200/index.php>) (Chui & Lai, 2009).

- (4) 我那天晚上有打給我同學。 (*yǒu* + Activity VP)

I called my classmate that night.

- (5) 我有學過。 (*yǒu* + Achievement VP)

wǒ nà tiān wǎn shàng yǒu dǎ gěi wǒ tóng xué

‘I have learned it.’

- (6) 你國中三年的基礎都有打好。 (*yǒu* + Accomplishment VP)

nǐ guó zhōng sān nián de jī chǔ dōu yǒu dǎ hǎo

‘You have fundamentally acquired the knowledge taught in your three-year junior high schooling.’

(7) 我有瘦一點。 (yǒu + Stative VP)

wǒ yǒu shòu yī diǎn

‘I become a little bit thinner (than before).’

The *yǒu* in this construction is neither the possessive *yǒu* nor the existential *yǒu*. *Yǒu*, in contrast, is reduced to a realis marker, indicating an event or a state perceived as actually occurring or having occurred (Trask, 1993). Explicitly, *yǒu* changes from a lexical content word to a grammatical marker, which is known as grammaticalization—the creation of a new grammatical morpheme and a new construction out of a particular instance of an old construction (Traugott & Heine, 1991; Hopper & Traugott, 2003; Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca, 1994; Bybee, 2006 ),

## 2. *Yǒu* as a Realis Marker

Mandarin is known as a tenseless language, because it has no formal means of expressing tenses morphologically if a situation obtains before, simultaneously with or after the time of utterance (Comrie, 1976; Li & Thompson, 1981; Arin, 2003). A bare Chinese present tense sentence usually has a habitual meaning as habitual tense refers to an event or state that either occurs always, or is timeless (Givón, 1993). On the other hand, temporal adverbs such as *gāng cái* (剛才) and *děng yí xià* (等一下) are indicators of past tense and future tense respectively although it is generally agreed that there are no grammatical markers or inflectional morphemes that signal where on the time line the reference time of the utterance is positioned relative to the speech time (Arin, 2003).

In Mandarin Chinese, *zai* (在) is a progressive marker which presents an internal interval of a durative situation, and often has the connotations of activity and temporary imperfectivity associated with non-statives (Lin & Liu, 2004). The sentence-final *le* in Mandarin Chinese is a perfective marker which indicates a view of a situation from the outside, as a single whole, without paying any attention to the internal complexity of that situation (Comrie, 1976) or to signal that a situation is bounded temporally (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca, 1994; Li & Thompson 1981).

The interrelationship of *yǒu*, two aspects (progressive and perfective) and three tenses (past, future and present) are presented in (8).

(8) Interrelationship of *yǒu*, two aspects and three tenses in Taiwan Mandarin

	Progressive 在 (zài)	Perfective 了 (le)
	我剛才在吃蘋果。	我剛才吃蘋果了。
Past	wǒ gāng cái yǒu zài chī píng guǒ ‘I was eating apples a while ago.’	wǒ gāng cái yǒu chī píng guǒ le ‘I have eaten apples a while ago.’

	*我等一下有在吃蘋果。	*我等一下有吃蘋果了。
Future	*wǒ děng yí xià yǒu zài chī píng guǒ * ‘I will be eating apples later.’	*wǒ děng yí xià yǒu chī píng guǒ le * ‘I will have eaten apples later.’
	我有在吃蘋果。	我有吃蘋果了。
Present	wǒ yǒu zài chī píng guǒ ‘I am eating apples.’	wǒ yǒu chī píng guǒ le ‘I have eaten apples.’

Furthermore, as manifested in (9), “*yǒu* +VP” construction is also incompatible with imperative and conditional moods, which are two of the irrealis constructions.

(9) a. \*有吃蘋果了。 (Imperative mood)

\*yǒu chī píng guǒ le

\*Somebody has eaten apples.

b. \*如果我肚子餓，我有吃蘋果。 (Conditional mood)

\*ru guo wo du zi e , wo you chi pin guo .

\*If I am hungry, I have eaten apples.

(9a) is grammatical only if the covert subject is understood as the first person “I”. However, the subject of an imperative sentence must be “you”. (9b) shows that “*yǒu* +VP” construction could not co-occur with a conditional mood.

In short, (8) demonstrates an crucial fact: only future tense is incompatible with *yǒu*. Additionally, (9) indicates that “*yǒu* +VP” could not co-occur with other irrealis constructions such as imperative and conditional moods. “*Yǒu* +VP” is compatible with realis assertions like past tense, present tense and perfective aspect. These provide strong evidence that *yǒu* is a realis marker.

### 3. Unidirectionality Associated with Grammaticalized *YOU*

#### 3.1 Increase in Abstractness

One kind of unidirectionality often associated with grammaticalization is increase in abstractness (Traugott & Heine, 1991). This notion involves the following metaphorical change: PERSON > OBJECT > SPACE > TIME > PROCESS > QUALITY (Heine, Ulrike & Friederike, 1991). Similar metaphorical change is found in *yǒu* (10).

(10) Metaphorical Change of *YOU*

	PERSON	>	SPACE	>	TEMPORAL
Functional / Semantic Property	Possessive “有”, meaning “have”		Existential “有”, meaning “there is”		Grammatical marker, denoting “realis”
Example	我有一百元。 wǒ yǒu yì bǎi yuán ‘I have 100 dollars.’		桌上有一本書。 zhuō shàng yǒu yì běn shū ‘There is a book on the desk.’		我有學過。 wǒ yǒu xué guò ‘I have learned it.’

(10) presents the derivational process of the metaphorical change of *yǒu*. The

abstractness of *yǒu* is increased as its functional / semantic property is reduced from denoting a person's possession to denoting the existence of an entity in a space and ultimately to denoting realis, a temporal status.

### 3.2 Desemanticization

Much of the literature on unidirectionality characterizes the development of grammaticalization in terms of desemanticization (Traugott & Heine, 1991; Hopper & Traugott, 2003). It has been proposed that grammaticalization is the evolution of grammatical forms out of earlier lexical forms (Meillet, 1948 [1912]). *Yǒu* in Taiwan Mandarin indeed undergoes this process as its semantic property is reduced from a lexical item meaning “possession” to a grammatical marker denoting realis.

### 3.3 Increase in Bondedness

Increase in boundedness (positional fixing) is another kind of unidirectionality often considered as a characteristic of grammaticalization (Traugott & Heine, 1991; Hopper & Traugott, 2003). At the phrase level, forms may become less free and more bound via grammaticalization (Traugott & Heine, 1991). *Yǒu* also has this typical characteristic. *Yǒu* is reduced from a lexical verb to a realis marker which always prefixes a verb. Explicitly, after *yǒu* is grammaticalized, its position is fixed, which gives rise to the formation of “*yǒu* +VP” construction.

## 4. Motivations for Grammaticalization of *YOU*

### 4.1 Frequency Effect—the Language-internal Motivation

Frequency of use has long been argued to be one of the factors that conditions functional change (Bybee & Hopper, 2001; Bybee 2003). How functional and semantic change in high frequency strings or constructions receives central focus in recent research in grammaticalization (Bybee, Perkins & Pagliuca, 1994; Hopper and Traugott, 2003). To examine if frequency is a factor that triggers *yǒu* to undergo grammaticalization, the word frequencies of *yǒu* in the Balanced Sinica Corpus (<http://wordsketch.ling.sinica.edu.tw>) (Huang et al., 2005) and the NCCU Corpus of Spoken Chinese (Chui & Lai, 2009) are indicated below (11).

(11) Word Frequency of *YOU* from Two Corpora

Corpus	Frequency Ranking	Frequency	Percentage
Sinica Corpus	5	45436	0.931 %
NCCU Corpus	12	1222	1.5067 %

According to the statistics, *yǒu* is an extremely high-frequency word in Taiwan Mandarin. Bybee (2006) claims that there are various degree of effects, depending upon the extent of the frequency and extreme high frequency leads to the creation of grammatical morphemes. Thus, it is not unexpected that *yǒu* is desemanticized from a lexical content word to a realis marker.

## 4.2 Discourse-pragmatic Pressure and Language Contact — the Language-external Motivations

Although there are markers to indicate perfectivity and perfection (post-verbal *le* (了) and sentence final *le* (了)) in Taiwan Mandarin, the realis marker is originally lacking (Tsao, 1998). As Langacker (1977) notes, Taiwan Mandarin has discourse-pragmatic pressure — the need to be informative and processable and expressive all at the same time — which motivates the beginning of the grammaticalization process of *yǒu*. However, this raises issues of teleology because grammaticalization does not necessarily happen in any given instance of potential grammaticalization (Traugott & Heine, 1991). The author, thus, proposes that with communicative necessity, language contact can be another language-external motivation for grammaticalization.

Taiwanese is the most used variety of Mandarin in Taiwan. In Taiwanese, *u*, nearly the counterpart of *yǒu* in Taiwan Mandarin, is a realis marker to denote that the event of its following verb has occurred. (12) is an example from Tsao (1998).

(12) 伊冊有讀啊，m koh 讀猶未了。

‘He read the book, but does not finish it yet.’

On the other hand, as discussed above, the realis marker is originally absent in Taiwan Mandarin. After language contact, the Mandarin used in Taiwan is gradually influenced by Taiwanese and thus the *yǒu* in Taiwan Mandarin ultimately becomes a realis marker. To be precise, the “*yǒu* + VP” construction is a manifestation of the influence imposed by the “*u*+VP” construction through language contact (Kubler, 1985).

In short, the author supports the concept that discourse-pragmatic pressure alone is inadequate to motivate the development of grammatical categories. Some other factor(s) is necessary. In the case of Taiwan Mandarin *yǒu*, discourse-pragmatic pressure and language contact collectively motivate the grammaticalization of *yǒu*.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper explores the motivations for grammaticalization by examining the use of *yǒu* as a realis marker *yǒu* in Taiwan Mandarin. The semantic change of *yǒu* goes from coding possession (*tā yǒu qián*/他有錢) to existence in space (*dì shàng yǒu qián*/地上有錢) and then to existence in time (*tā yǒu huā qián*/他有花錢). This is compatible with the general tendency of semantic change and grammaticalization in general. It has been a disputable issue if “*yǒu* + VP” is allowed in Mandarin. Two domestic corpora were examined for the previously disputable “*yǒu* + VP” construction and *yǒu* is found to occur with four situational types of verbs.

It is also evident that the verb *yǒu* is reduced from a lexical verb meaning “a

person's possession" to "existence in a space" and ultimately to a realis marker. Specifically, the derived meaning of *yǒu* can be viewed as a metaphorical extension from a concrete sense to an abstract one. This study also investigates the motivations for grammaticalization. As *yǒu* is an extremely high-frequency word, frequency effect is regarded as the language-internal motivation for the grammaticalization of *yǒu*. Although Taiwan Mandarin has discourse-pragmatic pressure for selecting a realis marker, the communicative necessity alone is still an insufficient language-external motivation that triggers grammaticalization because grammaticalization does not necessarily happen in any given instance of potential grammaticalization (Traugott & Heine, 1991). Because the existence of "*yǒu* +VP" construction in Taiwan Mandarin is a result of language contact between Taiwan Mandarin and Taiwanese, it is argued that communicative necessity and language contact are the language-external motivations for the grammaticalization of *yǒu*.

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