

# Q-Step Internship: Have/Take Alternation in Light Verb Constructions in British English

Amy Morgan, BA English Language

## Objectives

Light verbs 'have' and 'take' can occur interchangeably within light verb constructions (LVCs) such as 'have a bath' vs 'take a bath', with no change in meaning. This study aimed to discover which grammatical conditions favoured the 'take' variant. Due to a lack of research surrounding this alternation, the hypotheses were vague, though we predicted tense and aspect, amongst other variables would contribute to the difference.

## Methodology

The first step of the study involved extracting relevant data from the British National Corpus (BNC) by searching for every instance of 'take a(n) NOUN' and 'have a(n) NOUN'. Once each noun used within this phrasing was extracted, the BNC was then searched for if each noun can function as a verb. Upon extracting the nouns which take place in 'take/have a' constructions and deciding which can take the syntactic position of verbs we then had to objectively decide whether each noun made sense within a light verb construction and which were interchangeable with the other light verb and deleted those which were not. Therefore a strict criteria was decided upon, allowing both observers to achieve high inter rater reliability. The remaining LVCs were then manually coded based on surrounding context for telicity, durativity, polarity, tense, aspect, modality, transitivity of coverb, thematic role of subject and subject person. The final step was to cross tabulate the number of tokens of 'have' and 'take' in each condition.

## Results

The results showed an unexpected and huge disparity between have/take alternation in spoken and written texts, with 'have' accounting for 95.3% of spoken LVCs, perhaps indicating that 'take' is entering the British vocabulary via written language. [Figure 2] Therefore, we decided to analyse and compare the variables in different conditions of spoken and written using logistic regression.

One of the most interesting findings of this study showed that 'take' is preferred in non-local subjects (non-speech participants including 3rd person pronouns and proper nouns), while 'have' is greatly preferred in combination with 1st and 2nd person pronoun subjects. [Figure 3] A  $\chi^2$  test was performed, giving the p-value of  $< 2.2e-16$ , confirming this to be a significant different. This is likely due to the difference in number of spoken 'take' tokens compared to 'have', as speech participants (1st and 2nd person pronouns) are understandably more common in spoken texts. [Figure 1] The chart shows the probability of 'take' selection in just written conditions, with 1 equalling a 100% probability of 'take' being selected in that context. The evidence for written language shows that the difference in 'take' selection in non-local contexts is not entirely due to the written/spoken disparity, and that the probability of 'take' being selected is increased in non-local situations even in written text. This suggests the animacy hierarchy may play a role in use of 'take' as a light verb, with 'have' being most commonly used in those higher on the hierarchy (1st and 2nd person pronouns). Further findings showed transitivity of coverb

influenced the alternation, with 'take' being preferred in transitive conditions. This was surprising, as the element of transitivity adds complexity to the construction and with 'take' being the less accessible light verb, we predicted 'have' would be far more common. [Figure 4] A  $\chi^2$  test showed the p-value of this difference to be  $< 2.2e-16$ , confirming the difference as significant.

Further variables found to influence the choice in light verb constructions included the thematic role of the subject, constituency of subject, modality, tense and aspect, illustrating the number of constraints which can apply to the complexity of the English language.

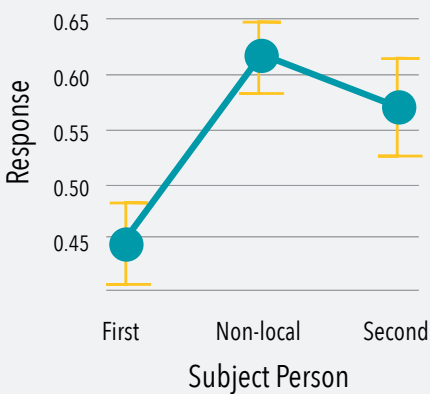


Figure 1

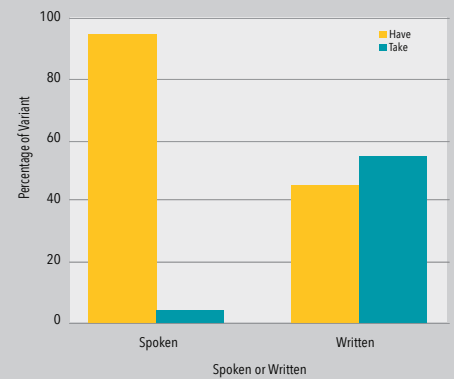


Figure 2

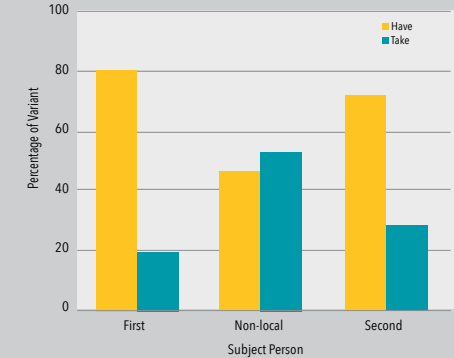


Figure 3

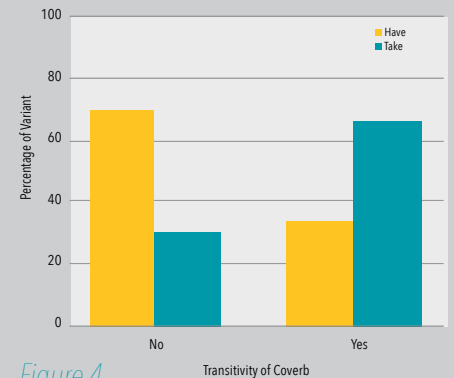


Figure 4