



## The Functions of “BE”, “DO”, and “HAVE” as ‘lexical’ verbs - An Experiment in Teaching More of English through Less of Grammar

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses the forms and functions of “BE”, “DO” and “HAVE” as ‘lexical verbs’. Its main aim is to enable the elementary and intermediate level learners of English to form sentences with these verbs to express ideas in a variety of situations. This will be done with a minimum discussion of grammar rules and with a wide number of examples drawn from varied sources like literature, history, philosophy, religion etc. Various sentence structures formed with the use of BE are also discussed. This method of teaching makes language learning intellectually more interesting and will possibly encourage students to have a greater exposure to language for ideas.

**Keywords :** Forms and Functions, Lexical Verbs, Language, Thought, Sentence Structures

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is the recurrent experience of the average English language teacher that the moment you talk of grammar rules in the classroom the students tend to put off. This paper is an incipient step in the researcher’s endeavour to teach more of language through less of grammar. It is universally accepted that ‘language’ and ‘thought’ are closely associated. The Greek word “logos” is used to mean both ‘language’ and ‘thought’. The Latin words “oratio” (speech) and “ratio” (reason) are akin to one other. As lexical verbs, BE, DO and HAVE express a great variety of ideas in many different situations. Most writers of English grammar seem to have taken these verbs for granted and avoided discussing them because they are so simple and common. But from the second language learners’ point of view, BE, DO, and HAVE can be of immense value.

The principal aim of this paper is to present different sentence structures in English that are formed with the help of BE, DO and HAVE as lexical verbs. Many writers, poets, thinkers, philosophers, and religious leaders have made meaningful observations with the use of BE, DO and HAVE. This paper draws facts, ideas, and quotations from varied sources – literature, politics, religion, mythology, philosophy etc - to encourage students to make sentences on their own in real life situations. As ‘primary auxiliary’ verbs, BE, DO and HAVE help in forming many tenses in English but it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the point here.





**Forms of BE, DO and HAVE:**

Verb	Present forms	Past forms	Future forms	Present participle	Past participle
BE	I am He/ She/ It is We/ You/ They are	I/ He/ She/ It was We/ You/ They were	will be	being	been
DO	I/ We/ You/ They do He/ She/ It does	did	will do	doing	done
HAVE	I/ We/ You/ They have He/ She/ It has	had	will have	having	had

Note: Forms of BE, DO and HAVE remain the same whether they are used as lexical or auxiliary verbs.

**Important meanings of BE, DO and HAVE:**

BE does not suggest an action but a state. It tells us what someone or something is or was. The most common meaning of BE is “to live” or “to exist.”

DO is used to talk about any kind of activity - performing an action, studying something, serving some purpose, or being sufficient etc.

HAVE can be used with a wide range of meanings - possessing property or quality, receiving or getting something, eating or drinking, experiencing or feeling etc.

BE, DO and HAVE are frequently used in everyday communication. DO and HAVE are also used in a number of idiomatic expressions.

**The uses of BE as a lexical verb:**

(a) BE can be followed by a Noun/ a noun phrase or an Adjective/ an adjective phrase

- 'I am two fools, I know, for loving and for saying so' – John Donne
- 'I am the king of the world'. (Muhammad Ali, US Boxer)
- 'The Kingdom of God is within you.' – (King James Bible, Luke 17:21)
- 'Man is by nature a political animal.' – Aristotle
- 'If adversity is great, man is greater than adversity.' – Rabindranath Tagore
- Truth is stranger than fiction.
- 'All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.' – George Orwell
- Judaism, Christianity and Islam are monotheistic religions.
- 'Are you a man or a mouse?' – an American slang
- Krishna was the eighth avatar of Vishnu.
- George Washington was the first President of the USA.
- 'Nietzsche was stupid and abnormal.' – Leo Tolstoy
- Pandavas were five brothers.
- Abraham Lincoln and Walt Whitman were contemporaries.
- You will be a famous man.
- India will be a super-power in future.





(b) BE + 'to-infinitive' structure is used to talk about a planned activity or an obligation to act in a certain way

Where am I to write my name?

Nobody is to make any noise here.

We are to do it in the evening.

Students are not to leave the class now.

The President is to address the nation on the eve of the Independence Day.

(c) BE can be used in sentences beginning with "It" and "There":

It is possible to state facts and express ideas, plans, desires etc. in a variety of situations using the following sentence structures:

(i) It is/ was + adjective + infinitive ...

It is impossible for man to fly like a bird.

It is harmful to smoke.

It was good to have a short vacation.

It was fantastic to watch the match.

(ii) It is/ was + noun + infinitive ...

It is our plan to save more money.

It is my son's dream to drive a BMW car.

It was my mistake to help them.

It was your decision to sell the house.

(iii) There is/ was or There are/ were ...

'There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet.'

'Behind every great fortune there is a crime.' – Honoré de Balzac

There was a shortage of fuel last week.

When Gandhi stood up, there was a complete silence in the hall.

'There are no facts, only interpretations.' – Friedrich Nietzsche

There are 30 days in June. (June has 30 days.)

There were some mistakes in your answer.

### **The uses of DO as a lexical verb:**

(a) to talk about different activities like studying, washing, cooking, shopping, behaving etc

My brother is doing a computer course from the Gujarat University.

'I do washing and my wife does cooking.' – Ronald Reagan, former US President

Bill, do the dishes before you leave.

We hope to do some shopping this weekend.

'Do unto others as you would have them do to you.' - (Luke, **New Testament** – 6:31)

'When in Rome, do as the Romans do.'

What shall we do now?

Shahrukh did a lot of acting in college.

We'll do our duty honestly and sincerely.





'If we can bury the hatchet, I'll do the digging.'

(b) DO is also used to talk about something that serves purpose or something being sufficient

Mere talk won't do. The boss wants results.

I've only a thousand rupees with me. Will that do?

The room is not big enough but it may do for the meeting.

#### **The uses of HAVE as a lexical verb:**

(a) HAVE can be used with different meanings - possessing property or quality, receiving or getting something, eating or drinking, experiencing or feeling etc.

'I have a dream.' - (Martin Luther King, Jr)

Allah has ninety-nine names in the Holy **Koran**.

Time has no beginning and no end.

A poor man has no friends.

All birds have beaks but no teeth.

I have breakfast before I go to work.

The movie had a good beginning but a dull ending.

Ravana had ten heads.

'Mary had a little lamb.'

The children had a good time during the vacation.

My brother had a severe back pain.

We had guests last Sunday.

Have a happy journey!

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The above given sentence structures and examples may not help much the advanced level learners of English but mastering various forms and functions of BE, DO, and HAVE would help the elementary or intermediate level learners to express a variety of ideas in different situations in everyday life. While discussing BE, DO, and HAVE, if the teacher draws examples from learners' cultural and religious backgrounds and local life, the learners are likely to find language learning more meaningful. As pointed out above, 'language' and 'thought' go together. This method has been devised to arouse students' intellectual curiosity which in turn may encourage students to have a greater exposure to English to explore new ideas.

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