

## THE PROTO-INDO-EUROPEAN ORIGINS AND DIACHRONIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE GERMAN VERB *HABEN*: FROM CONCRETE PHYSICAL ACTION TO GRAMMATICAL AUXILIARY IN THE GERMANIC

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## NEMIS TILIDAGI *HABEN* FE'LINING PROTO-HIND-YEVROPA ILDIZLARI VA DIAKRONIK RIVOJLANISHI: KONKRET JISMONIY HARAKATDAN GRAMMATIK YORDAMCHI FE'LGA O'TISH JARAYONI

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## ПРОТОИНДООЕВРОПЕЙСКИЕ ИСТОКИ И ДИАХРОНИЧЕСКОЕ РАЗВИТИЕ НЕМЕЦКОГО ГЛАГОЛА *HABEN*: ПЕРЕХОД ОТ КОНКРЕТНОГО ФИЗИЧЕСКОГО ДЕЙСТВИЯ К ГРАММАТИЧЕСКОМУ ВСПОМОГАТЕЛЬНОМУ ГЛАГОЛУ

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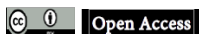
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**Abstract.** The German verb *haben* occupies a pivotal position in the diachronic analysis of the Germanic languages, serving as a key example of how lexical items evolve through the interwoven processes of *semantic expansion*, *morphological restructuring*, and *grammaticalization*. Deriving from the Proto-Indo-European root *keh₂p-* ('to seize, grasp, or take possession of'), the verb originally conveyed a concrete sense of physical control or acquisition. In Proto-Germanic, this root developed into both *stative forms* (*haben-*) and *factive forms* (*habjan-* / *hafjan-*), reflecting an early diversification of aspectual and valency distinctions within the verbal system. These forms eventually gave rise to the modern German *haben*, whose semantic and grammatical versatility makes it a cornerstone of the language's verbal paradigm. Over time, *haben* underwent a profound *semantic shift* from expressing tangible acts of possession or holding to denoting more abstract relationships of ownership and obligation. This transition exemplifies a broader typological tendency in the world's languages, whereby verbs of possession often grammaticalize into *auxiliary verbs* marking perfect aspect constructions. By the Middle High German period, *haben* had become fully integrated as an auxiliary in compound tenses, functioning alongside *sein* ('to be') to mark the distinction between transitive and intransitive verbal classes in the formation of the



perfect and pluperfect. Comparative evidence from related early Germanic languages *Gothic, Old Norse, Old English, Old Frisian, Old Saxon, Dutch, and Old High German* illustrates both the shared Proto-Germanic inheritance and subsequent *dialect-specific innovations*. For instance, Gothic *habais* and Old English *hæbbe* retain the original lexical meaning ‘to have,’ while their use as auxiliaries emerges progressively in later stages. This gradual grammaticalization trajectory highlights the dynamic interplay between syntax, semantics, and morphology in historical language development. Furthermore, the productivity of the root *keh<sub>2</sub>p-* extends beyond the verbal domain. Nominal derivatives such as *English haven* (‘harbor’), *German Hafen* (‘port’), and even *Old Irish cuan* (‘bay’) testify to the enduring semantic field of containment and possession across the Indo-European languages. These reflexes underscore the *conceptual continuity* linking physical possession with spatial enclosure and, by extension, grammatical possession.

**Keywords:** Haben; habjan; hafjan; habban: semantic evolution; class 3 weak verbs; historical morphology and Proto-Indo-European root *keh<sub>2</sub>p-*.

**Annotatsiya.** Nemischa *haben* fe’li german tillarining diaxronik tahlilida markaziy o’rin tutadi va leksik birliklarning *semantik kengayish, morfologik qayta tuzilish* hamda *grammatikallashtirish* jarayonlari orqali qanday rivojlanishini ko’rsatuvchi muhim misol hisoblanadi. U dastlab “ushlamoq, egallamoq, o’zlashtirmoq” ma’nolarini bildirgan *Proto-Hind-Yevropa* ildizi *keh<sub>2</sub>p-* dan kelib chiqqan. Proto-german davrida bu ildiz *statik shakllar (haben-)* va *faktiv shakllar (habjan- / hafjan)* sifatida rivojlanib, fe’l tizimida aspektual va valentlik farqlarining ilk shakllanishini aks ettirgan. Ushbu shakllar keyinchalik hozirgi nemischa *haben* fe’liga asos bo’lgan bo’lib, uning semantik va grammatik moslashuvchanligi uni til tizimining markaziy elementi darajasiga ko’targan. Vaqt o’tishi bilan *haben* fe’li *semantik o’zgarishni* boshdan kechirdi u dastlabki aniq egalik yoki ushlash harakatidan *mayhum egalik va majburiyat* ifodalariga o’tdi. Bu jarayon ko’plab tillarda kuzatiladigan umumiy tipologik hodisadir, ya’ni egalik bildiruvchi fe’llar *yordamchi fe’llarga* aylanib, perfekt zamon shakllarini ifodalay boshlaydi. O’rta yuqori nemis davriga kelib, *haben* murakkab zamonlarda *sein* (“bo’lmoq”) bilan bir qatorda yordamchi fe’l sifatida to’liq shakllangan edi; u tranzitiv va intransitiv fe’llarni perfekt va pluperfekt tuzilmalarda farqlashda ishlatilgan. *Gotcha, qadimgi islandcha, qadimgi inglizcha, qadimgi frizcha, qadimgi sakscha, gollandcha* va *qadimgi yuqori nemischa* manbalar bilan taqqoslash *habenning proto-german merosi* va *dialektal yangiliklarini* yoritadi. Masalan, gotcha *habais* va qadimgi inglizcha *hæbbe* dastlab “ega bo’lmoq” ma’nosini saqlagan, biroq ularning yordamchi fe’l sifatidagi ishlatilishi keyinchalik asta-sekin shakllangan. Bu grammatikallashtirish jarayoni tarixiy tildagi *sintaksis, semantika* va *morfologiya* o’zaro ta’sirining murakkab dinamikasini namoyon etadi. Bundan tashqari, *keh<sub>2</sub>p-* ildizining *so’z yasovchi kuchi* faqat fe’llar bilan cheklanmaydi. Masalan, *inglizcha haven* (“bandargoh”), *nemischa Hafen* (“port”) va *qadimgi irlandcha cuan* (“qo’ltiq”) kabi ot shakllari butun hind-yevropa tillarida “egalik” va “makon” ma’nolari o’rtasidagi semantik uzluksizlikni ko’rsatadi. Bu birliklar *fizik egalik, joyni egallash* va *grammatik egalik* o’rtasidagi tushunchaviy bog’liqlikni ta’kidlaydi.

**Kalit so’zlar:** *haben; habjan; hafjan; habban*; semantik evolyutsiya; 3-sinf sust fe’llar; tarixiy morfologiya; proto-hind-yevropa ildizi *keh<sub>2</sub>p-*.

**Аннотация.** Немецкий глагол *haben* занимает центральное место в диахроническом анализе германских языков, служа ключевым примером того, как лексические единицы развиваются под влиянием взаимосвязанных процессов семантического расширения, морфологической перестройки и грамматикализации. Происходя от праиндоевропейского корня *keh₂p-* («схватывать, хватать, владеть»), глагол первоначально выражал конкретное значение физического обладания или присвоения. В прагерманском языке этот корень развился как в *стативных формах* (*haben-*), так и в *фактивных формах* (*habjan-* / *hafjan-*), что отражает раннее разграничение аспектуальных и валентных свойств в системе глагола. Эти формы со временем привели к появлению современного немецкого *haben*, чья семантическая и грамматическая гибкость делает его краеугольным элементом немецкой глагольной парадигмы. Со временем *haben* претерпел глубокий *семантический сдвиг* — от выражения конкретных актов обладания к обозначению абстрактных отношений собственности и обязательства. Этот переход иллюстрирует более широкий типологический процесс, характерный для многих языков мира, в которых глаголы обладания грамматизируются как *вспомогательные глаголы*, выражающие перфектные конструкции. Уже в период средневиссаксонского языка *haben* полностью интегрировался в систему сложных времен, функционируя наряду с *sein* («быть») и разграничивая переходные и непереходные глаголы в образовании перфекта и плюсквамперфекта. Сравнительные данные из родственных древнегерманских языков *готского*, *древнеисландского*, *древнеанглийского*, *древнефризского*, *древнесаксонского*, *нидерландского* и *древневерхненемецкого* показывают как общегерманское наследие, так и *диалектные инновации*. Например, готское *habais* и древнеанглийское *habbe* сохраняют исходное значение «иметь», в то время как их вспомогательное употребление возникает постепенно. Эта постепенная грамматикализация демонстрирует динамическое взаимодействие синтаксиса, семантики и морфологии в историческом развитии языка. Кроме того, продуктивность корня *keh₂p-* выходит за пределы глагольной сферы. Существительные, такие как *английское haven* («гавань»), *немецкое Hafen* («порт») и даже *древнеирландское siap* («залив»), свидетельствуют о прочности семантического поля обладания и пространства во всей индоевропейской семье языков. Эти рефлексy подчеркивают *понятийную преемственность*, связывающую физическое владение с пространственным заключением и в дальнейшем с грамматическим выражением обладания.

**Ключевые слова:** *haben; habjan; hafjan; habban*; семантическая эволюция; слабые глаголы III класса; историческая морфология; праиндоевропейский корень *keh₂p*.

## Introduction

One of the most intricate and contentious areas of historical linguistics is the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) language's verbal system. This is because verbs showed far more dialectal diversity than other grammatical categories like nouns or adjectives, and the system itself was extremely complex internally. The reconstruction of the verb system has thus not been entirely agreed upon by Indo-Europeanists. However, the

majority of scholars concur on a number of essential characteristics of the Proto-Indo-European verb. First, the single (I eat), plural (we eat), and dual (we two eat) forms of verbs were inflected for three numbers. This pattern mirrored the language's noun declension.

Additionally, the action had two voices, or orientations. I wash the child, for instance, is an example of the active voice indicating that the subject did something else. I wash myself is an example of the middle or medio-passive voice, which indicates that the activity was focused on the subject. Although the middle voice might potentially express a passive sense in the right situation, proto-Indo-European did not have a clear passive form, such as the kid bathed by the mother.

The system of tenses was very intricate. There were at least three different verb tenses: the aorist (simple past, I ate), the perfect (finished action, I have eaten), and the present (I eat). Most academics think that the Anatolian (Hittite) stem developed later, after the earlier Anatolian grouping had already split apart, because the perfect tense is not present in this branch.

An imperfect tense (I was eating) was also used in several branches, especially Indo-Iranian, Greek, and Armenian, to convey continuous action in the past. Since other branches like Slavic, Italic, or Tocharian appear to have acquired the imperfect independently, this is believed to have been a Southeast invention. Only a few peripheral branches, especially Celtic, Balto-Slavic, and Indo-Iranian, used the future tense (I will eat), which is also thought to be a later invention. Originally, the present or the selective mood may have been used to convey what is meant of the future. Different moods were conveyed by proto-Indo-European verbs, which reflected the speaker's perspective on the activity. There were probably four primary moods: imperative (direct commands), optative (wishes or intents), injunctive (possibly mild directives or prohibitions), and indicative (simple declarations of truth). Only the imperative and indicative remain in the Anatolian branch. Traces of a fifth mood, the subjunctive, which expresses potentiality or possibility, are also present in both Indo-European languages.

The verb's meaning was altered or new meanings were created by using a variety of derivational suffixes. The suffixes -eye/o- and -neu-, for example, created causative verbs: ters-, which means "dry," → torseye/o-, which means "to make dry." Verbs were created from nouns or adjectives by adding the suffix -eh<sub>2</sub>-, which means "to make or become [that quality]." For instance, new- "new" → neweh<sub>2</sub>- "to make new," as in the Hittite newahh- "to make new," the Greek neaō "to plough again," and the Latin novāre "to renew." In general, the Proto-Indo-European verbal system had a multi-layered, extremely complicated structure with a great deal of internal and dialectal variety. Restoring its original form is still one of the most difficult and significant problems in Indo-European studies because of its intricacy [Mallory & Adams 2006:63].

The verb *haben* constitutes a pivotal element within the grammatical and lexical framework of the Germanic languages, functioning as a key indicator of diachronic linguistic processes such as semantic shift and grammaticalization. In its Proto-Germanic stage (*habjanq*), *haben*

originally denoted concrete physical actions “to hold,” “to grasp,” or “to carry” and is etymologically derived from the Proto-Indo-European root *keh<sub>2</sub>p-*, which conveyed the notion of “grasping” or “seizing.” Thus, its earliest usage was grounded in tangible, physical possession and manipulation.

Throughout its historical evolution, *haben* underwent systematic **semantic expansion**, moving from denoting physical actions to expressing abstract concepts of possession, control, and ownership. This transition exemplifies a universal linguistic mechanism whereby verbs of physical manipulation develop into markers of abstract relations. In parallel, *haben* experienced **grammaticalization**, progressively losing its original lexical meaning and acquiring an auxiliary function. In contemporary German, this process culminated in its role as a key auxiliary in the formation of perfect (*Perfekt*) and pluperfect (*Plusquamperfekt*) constructions (e.g., *ich habe gesehen* “I have seen”). The convergence of these two processes semantic broadening and syntactic reanalysis illustrates how high-frequency lexical items evolve into central grammatical markers within a linguistic system.

Comparative evidence from across the Germanic branch further substantiates this development. Cognate forms such as Gothic *haban*, Old Norse *hafa*, Old English *habban*, Old Frisian *hebba*, Old Saxon *hebbian*, Dutch *hebben*, and Old High German *haben* represent direct reflexes of Proto-Germanic *habjaną*. While these forms maintain semantic continuity, they also display dialect-specific phonological and morphological differentiation, reflecting the inherent tension between lexical stability and regional divergence in historical language change. The semantic productivity of the root extends beyond the verbal domain into nominal derivations. Nouns such as English *haven*, German *Hafen*, and Dutch *haven* all meaning “harbor” or “refuge” are morphologically and semantically connected to the same Indo-European root, preserving the underlying sense of containment and protection. Earlier attested forms, including Old English *hæfen* and Old Norse *höfn*, confirm the longevity and cross-linguistic diffusion of this semantic field. The parallelism with Celtic forms, such as Old Irish *cuan* (“harbor, bay”), further demonstrates the wide Indo-European network of cognate terms associated with the concept of “holding” or “sheltering.”

From a diachronic linguistic perspective, the development of *haben* exemplifies the interaction between **lexical continuity and grammatical innovation**. The verb’s trajectory from a concrete, action-oriented meaning to an abstract auxiliary function illustrates how core lexical items adapt to shifting communicative and structural needs within evolving linguistic systems. The persistence of cognate forms across the Germanic continuum underscores the stability of key lexical roots, while their functional diversification highlights the dynamic processes that drive grammatical change. The history of *haben* encapsulates the broader mechanisms of linguistic evolution within the Indo-European family. It reveals how a verb rooted in concrete human experience could, through gradual semantic and syntactic transformation, become a cornerstone of modern German grammar. This development not only reflects the



adaptability of linguistic systems but also underscores the interconnectedness of form, meaning, and function in the historical progression of language [Kroonen 2013: 307].

### Literature reviews and methods Etymological Origins

The German verb *haben* plays a crucial role in understanding the historical and structural evolution of the Germanic languages, illustrating the interaction between semantic change and grammaticalization. Deriving from the Proto-Germanic *habjaną*, the verb originally conveyed meanings related to physical activity “to hold,” “to grasp,” or “to carry.” In its earliest usage, *haben* described concrete, tangible actions involving physical possession or control. Over time, however, the verb’s meaning gradually expanded through **semantic extension**, moving from the realm of physical manipulation to that of abstract possession. Thus, what once denoted the act of physically holding an object came to signify the broader and more conceptual idea of possessing or maintaining something within one’s control. Alongside this semantic broadening, *haben* underwent a significant **grammaticalization process**, transforming from a full lexical verb into a grammatical auxiliary. During the Old High German and Middle High German periods, it began to serve a structural role in the verbal system, marking completed actions in compound tenses. In modern German, *haben* functions as an auxiliary verb in the formation of the *Perfekt* (perfect) and *Plusquamperfekt* (pluperfect) tenses, as in *ich habe gesehen* (“I have seen”). In such constructions, the verb no longer retains its original lexical meaning of “possession,” but instead serves a purely grammatical purpose, indicating aspect and temporal relationships within the sentence.

As Don Ringe observes, *haben* is today one of the most fundamental lexical and grammatical elements of the German language. Its development exemplifies how verbs that were once semantically concrete can evolve into highly abstract grammatical markers. Cognate forms across the Germanic languages such as Gothic *haban*, Old Norse *hafa*, Old English *habban*, Old Frisian *hebban*, Old Saxon *hebbian*, Dutch *hebben*, and Old High German *haben* attest to the shared Proto-Germanic origin and parallel historical processes across regional dialects. Despite phonological and morphological variation, these forms demonstrate the common path from concrete action to grammatical function. The diachronic evolution of *haben* thus reflects a broader typological pattern in linguistic change. It shows how high-frequency verbs, due to their central communicative importance, are especially susceptible to semantic bleaching and syntactic reanalysis. The verb’s transformation from denoting physical holding to marking completed verbal actions captures the dynamic interplay between meaning, structure, and function in the history of language. Consequently, the development of *haben* not only reveals the internal mechanisms of Germanic language change but also provides a representative model of how core verbs evolve within the Indo-European linguistic tradition [Ringe 2006: 257].

## The Evolution and Linguistic Significance of the German Verb “haben”

The verb *haben* holds a prominent place in the structure and history of the German language. According to linguists W. P. Lehmann and J. Slocum, it plays a central role not only in the development of German itself but also in the comparative study of the entire Germanic language group. In present-day German, *haben* generally conveys the idea of “to have” or “to own.” Yet, its earliest function was far more tangible it originally referred to physical actions such as “holding,” “grasping,” or “carrying.” The word can be traced back to the **Proto-Germanic root *habjaną***, which described the act of physically keeping or bearing something. Over centuries, the meaning of the verb gradually expanded beyond physical activity to encompass more abstract ideas like “to retain,” “to keep,” or “to possess.” Consequently, *haben* evolved into a fundamental verb in modern German, expressing ownership and possession in both literal and figurative senses. Beyond its lexical meaning, *haben* performs an essential grammatical role in German syntax. It functions as an **auxiliary verb** in the formation of **compound tenses**, including the **Perfekt**, **Plusquamperfekt**, and **Futur II**. In this grammatical capacity, *haben* mirrors the function of English *have*, forming part of complex verbal constructions that express completed or resultant actions. This dual role as both a full and auxiliary verb demonstrates how *haben* serves as one of the structural foundations of the German verbal system.

### Etymological Origins and Indo-European Connections

Etymologically, *haben* is rooted in a much older linguistic layer. Its ultimate source is the **Proto-Indo-European (PIE)** base **\*keh<sub>2</sub>p-**, meaning “to seize,” “to grasp,” or “to take.” From this ancestral root, a number of related terms emerged across different Indo-European languages, illustrating shared semantic development. Examples include:

- **Latin *capere*** “to seize,” “to capture”;
- **Ancient Greek *kaptein*** “to grasp,” “to snatch”;
- **Sanskrit *gabhasti-*** “to seize with the hand.”

These parallels reveal that the historical progression of *haben* belongs to a larger network of related forms within the Indo-European language family. Hence, its development reflects not only Germanic linguistic evolution but also a broader Indo-European heritage of shared vocabulary and meaning. The semantic broadening of *haben* mirrors a universal linguistic process through which concrete physical meanings evolve into abstract conceptual ones. In human cognition, the connection between “holding” and “having” is natural: what one physically holds is, in a sense, what one possesses. As language and culture advanced, the literal sense of grasping gradually came to signify ownership, control, or possession in a non-physical sense. Thus, the verb’s evolution

encapsulates a wider human tendency to extend physical experience into the domain of abstract thought. the German verb *haben* represents a striking example of how a word can evolve from denoting concrete physical actions to expressing abstract notions of possession and grammatical relations. Its historical pathway from *habjanq* in Proto-Germanic to its present-day form illustrates both the internal development of German and its deep connections with the Indo-European linguistic tradition. As such, *haben* remains not only a core lexical and grammatical unit in German but also a significant key to understanding the broader dynamics of semantic and morphological change across Indo-European languages [Lehmann & Slocum 2007: 51].

The history of the German verb *haben* offers an illuminating example of how words can undergo both **semantic transformation** and **grammaticalization** over time. In its earliest forms, this verb conveyed direct, physical actions such as “to hold,” “to carry,” or “to grasp.” Gradually, however, it shifted toward expressing more abstract ideas like “to possess” or “to have control over,” and eventually came to serve an important grammatical role as an **auxiliary verb**. This transition from concrete physical meaning to abstract and functional usage demonstrates a widespread linguistic process observed across many Indo-European languages. From an **etymological standpoint**, the verb goes back to the **Proto-Germanic** form *habjanq*, which ultimately originates from the **Proto-Indo-European root** *\*keh<sub>2</sub>p-*, meaning “to seize,” “to grasp,” or “to take.” This same root produced many cognates throughout the Indo-European language family, reflecting a shared conceptual foundation. Examples include **Latin** *capere* (“to seize, to take”), **Ancient Greek** *kaptein* (“to grasp, to capture”), and **Sanskrit** *gabhasti-* (“to seize with the hand”). These parallels suggest that the basic image of physically holding something served as a powerful metaphor that extended into the abstract domains of ownership, control, and possession across different linguistic and cultural contexts. In the **early stages of the Germanic languages**, several cognate forms of the verb existed, each representing a different branch of the family. **Gothic** had the form *habjan*, **Old English** used *habban* (the ancestor of modern English *have*), **Old High German** recorded *habēn* (modern *haben*), and **Old Norse** employed *hafa*. In these earliest attestations, all forms shared the same concrete meaning: the act of physically holding, carrying, or grasping something. As time progressed, a **semantic shift** occurred. The verb’s meaning began to move away from physical activity toward the more **abstract domain of possession and retention**. This change reflects a common cognitive and linguistic process known as **metaphorical extension**, where tangible human experiences are reinterpreted to describe abstract relationships. In this way, the literal act of holding something in one’s hands came to represent the concept of having something as one’s own. Gradually, this metaphorical sense took precedence, and the older, literal meanings either weakened or disappeared completely.



### Functions of *haben* in Modern German

In contemporary German, *haben* operates on two distinct but related levels.

1. **As a main (lexical) verb**, it retains its fundamental sense of “to have” or “to possess.” It is used to express ownership, possession, or states of being, as in *Ich habe ein Buch* (“I have a book”) or *Er hat Zeit* (“He has time”). In this usage, *haben* is indispensable to the expression of possession and remains one of the most frequently used verbs in modern German.

2. **As an auxiliary verb**, *haben* has taken on an additional grammatical role in the **formation of compound tenses**, especially the **Perfekt**, **Plusquamperfekt**, and **Futur II**. In sentences like *Ich habe gesehen* (“I have seen”), *haben* no longer carries its original meaning but instead functions as a marker of **aspect** or **tense**, helping to indicate that an action has been completed. This change exemplifies the process of **grammaticalization**, through which a lexical verb gradually becomes a functional grammatical element.

The coexistence of these two roles lexical and auxiliary demonstrates how one verb can evolve to perform multiple grammatical functions while maintaining semantic coherence. It also illustrates how shifts in meaning and function often occur hand in hand as languages develop more complex syntactic structures. The historical development of *haben* mirrors a **broader typological pattern** found in many languages: verbs that originally denote possession, holding, or existence frequently evolve into auxiliaries or tense markers. This transformation reflects a universal cognitive link between the ideas of **possession** and **control over events or actions**. To “have” something, whether a physical object or a completed event, expresses a similar conceptual relationship of ownership or completion. In this sense, the grammatical use of *haben* in German can be viewed as an abstract extension of its original physical meaning.

Moreover, studying the evolution of *haben* sheds light on the **mechanisms of language change** particularly how new grammatical structures emerge from older lexical items. Through centuries of phonological, syntactic, and semantic modification, the ancient Proto-Indo-European root \*keh<sub>2</sub>p- generated a network of related forms across the Indo-European family, each retaining traces of the original concept while adapting to its own linguistic environment. The case of *haben* thus reveals not only the internal development of German but also the **shared heritage and adaptive flexibility** of Indo-European languages as a whole. The verb *haben* stands as a clear example of the intertwined processes of **semantic evolution** and **grammaticalization**. Emerging from a Proto-Indo-European root meaning “to seize” or “to grasp,” it developed through Proto-Germanic and the early Germanic dialects to become both a key lexical verb and a crucial auxiliary in modern German. This journey from concrete physical action to abstract conceptual and grammatical function reflects a broader tendency in language to transform everyday human experiences into linguistic systems that encode increasingly complex relationships. The study of *haben* therefore offers valuable insights into the

ways languages preserve ancient meanings while continuously reshaping them to meet the communicative and structural needs of new generations of speakers [Fortson 2010: 123].

According to Winfred P. Lehmann and Jonathan Slocum, the evolution of **weak verbs** in the Germanic languages represents one of the most distinctive and independent developments within the broader Indo-European verbal system. While the strong verb system in Germanic largely continued the inherited Proto-Indo-European (PIE) ablaut-based morphology, weak verbs followed a separate **innovative trajectory**. This class arose through the creation of new morphological markers that replaced the older, inherited ablaut alternations with productive suffixal morphology. In this process, Proto-Germanic introduced unique morphemes that became defining characteristics of the weak verb conjugations. One of the most significant among these was the **-ái-** **morpheme**, which served as a marker for **Class III weak verbs**. During the **Proto-Germanic period**, the **-ái-** **suffix** emerged as a crucial formative element that distinguished this subclass from both strong verbs and other weak verb classes. Its function was to signal **preterite tense** formation and to establish a consistent morphological pattern within the developing verbal system. According to Lehmann and Slocum, this morpheme was not inherited directly from Proto-Indo-European but instead represented a **pan-Germanic innovation** — a morphological feature that arose after the divergence of the Germanic branch from the rest of the Indo-European family. As such, it provides a valuable window into the early internal development of Germanic grammar, demonstrating how new forms could emerge within a linguistic subgroup while still maintaining continuity with older structural principles.

### The Gothic Evidence: *habáida*

The Gothic language, which preserves many archaic features of early Germanic morphology, offers particularly clear evidence for the function of the **-ái-** **morpheme**. In Gothic, the verb *habán* (“to have”) forms its **preterite** as *habáida*. Morphological analysis of this form reveals that it is composed of the verbal stem *hab-* combined with the **-ái-** **suffix**, followed by the standard dental preterite ending **-da**. Thus, the structure of *habáida* can be represented as:

*hab-* + *-ái-* + *-da* → *habáida* (“had”)

This construction exemplifies the typical **Class III weak verb formation pattern** in Proto-Germanic. The **-ái-** **morpheme** acts as a linking vowel and morphological marker that indicates the weak preterite, while the final **-da** represents the regular past tense ending common to all weak verbs. The presence of this morpheme in Gothic, therefore, demonstrates both the productivity of the suffix and its distinctive function in the Proto-Germanic verbal system. It shows that Class III weak verbs were formed not by internal vowel alternation (as in strong verbs) but by

the addition of a **characteristic morphological marker**, which created a transparent and systematic method for tense formation.

### Old High German and Dialectal Adaptation

In Old High German (OHG), we observe a continuation of this morphological innovation, albeit with **phonological adaptation** specific to the dialect. The corresponding preterite form of *haben* appears as *habēta*, which reflects both the retention of the Proto-Germanic weak verb structure and the influence of sound changes within the High German context. Here, the original **-ái-** morpheme underwent **phonological reduction and vowel lengthening**, resulting in **-ē-**. This development aligns with general OHG vowel patterns and illustrates how inherited Proto-Germanic features were reanalyzed and reshaped in later stages of the language. The OHG form *habēta* thus serves a dual function: it **preserves the morphological structure** of the Proto-Germanic weak verb system while also showing evidence of **dialect-specific phonological innovation**. This illustrates how early Germanic dialects, though sharing a common grammatical foundation, diversified in their surface realizations of inherited morphemes. The *habēta* example underscores how Proto-Germanic morphological templates remained influential but were not static—they adapted to the phonetic and morphological pressures of each emerging dialect. Taken together, the Gothic *habáida* and Old High German *habēta* forms provide strong evidence for the **historical continuity and internal innovation** that characterized weak verb development in Germanic. The consistent presence of the **-ái-** morpheme (and its reflexes) across multiple early Germanic languages points to its **Proto-Germanic origin**. At the same time, the varying realizations of this morpheme across dialects—whether as **-ái-**, **-ē-**, or other reflexes reveal the processes of **dialectal differentiation** and **phonological adaptation** that accompanied the geographic and social expansion of the Germanic peoples. This dual process **inheritance and innovation** — lies at the heart of the weak verb system's evolution. On one hand, the weak verb pattern inherited fundamental Indo-European verbal principles such as tense marking and derivational morphology. On the other, it introduced new structural devices that replaced the older ablaut mechanism with **dental suffixation and thematic vowels**. The emergence of the **-ái-** morpheme is a clear example of how new morphological tools were integrated into the system, creating a productive and regularized class distinct from strong verbs. The development of the **-ái- morpheme** in Proto-Germanic and its subsequent adaptation in Gothic and Old High German demonstrate how **weak verbs evolved through both continuity and innovation**. The Gothic *habáida* offers direct morphological evidence of the original Proto-Germanic form, while the Old High German *habēta* shows how that same structure was reshaped by local phonological processes. Together, these forms illustrate the complex interplay between shared inheritance and dialectal evolution.

As Lehmann and Slocum argue, the history of weak verbs such as *haben* encapsulates the **dual nature of Germanic linguistic change** —

rooted in Indo-European heritage yet marked by distinctive internal developments. The *-ái-* morpheme thus stands as a tangible symbol of this balance, representing both the **shared grammatical identity** and the **dialectal diversity** that define the early history of the Germanic languages [Lehmann & Slocum 2007: 60].

### The Historical Role and Evolution of the *-ái-* Morpheme in the Germanic Weak Verb System

Within the **historical morphology of the Germanic languages**, the *-ái-* morpheme holds a particularly important position, especially in connection with the **Weak Verb/Class III system**. This suffix functioned as one of the defining innovations that distinguished the weak verbs from their strong counterparts in early Germanic. In its earliest phase, the *-ái-* element served not merely as a formal marker but as an integral part of the **verbal paradigm**, contributing to the expression of **tense** and **aspect** and ensuring the internal consistency of Proto-Germanic verb morphology. In the **Proto-Germanic** verbal system, the *-ái-* morpheme was employed as a formative element used to construct the **preterite tense** of certain weak verbs. One of the clearest examples appears in forms such as *habdái*, the preterite of *habjanq* (“to have”). The internal structure of this form—comprising the root *hab-*, the formative suffix *-ái-*, and the dental preterite marker *-da*—reveals the systematic organization of early Germanic verbal inflection. Morphologically, the suffix provided an intermediate link between the verb stem and the dental suffix, preserving both phonological balance and morphological transparency. Functionally, this morpheme carried dual importance. On the **morphological level**, it served as a **class marker**, clearly identifying Class III weak verbs within the wider weak verb system. On the **phonological level**, the presence of the diphthong *-ái-* ensured rhythmic and prosodic stability in verbal forms, which may have contributed to its persistence across the earliest Germanic dialects. This dual role highlights the extent to which form and function were intertwined in Proto-Germanic, demonstrating how sound patterns and grammatical meaning operated together to maintain a cohesive and productive verb system. As the **Germanic dialect continuum** began to expand and diversify, the fate of the *-ái-* morpheme diverged sharply among the emerging branches. In some dialects, particularly within **East Germanic**, this morpheme remained relatively stable. The **Gothic** language, for instance, provides direct evidence of its preservation through forms such as *habdái*, which retain both the phonetic and morphological characteristics of the Proto-Germanic pattern. The continued use of this morpheme in Gothic demonstrates that, at least during the early stages of the Germanic period, the **Class III weak verb morphology** remained largely intact and functional.

However, other dialects, most notably within the **West Germanic** group, underwent a process of **phonological reduction and morphological reorganization** that led to the loss or transformation of the *-ái-* element. In **Old English**, for example, the preterite form evolved into *hæfde*, which displays no surviving trace of the original diphthongal

morpheme. This change reflects a general trend in the phonetic and morphological simplification of West Germanic languages. The weakening of unstressed syllables and the subsequent erosion of inflectional vowels contributed to the disappearance of many formative morphemes, including *-ái-*. The loss of *-ái-* in Old English represents more than a phonetic change — it exemplifies the broader phenomenon of **paradigmatic divergence**, in which originally uniform morphological systems gradually differentiate due to cumulative sound change and analogical restructuring. As stress patterns shifted toward the initial syllable, the final and medial syllables — where suffixal morphemes like *-ái-* occurred — became phonetically weakened. Over time, this **phonological erosion** resulted in the **loss of vowel-based morphemes**, particularly in unstressed positions. This phonetic simplification was accompanied by **morphological leveling**, a process through which irregular or complex paradigms were reorganized into more regular and uniform patterns. The Old English weak verb system thus became simpler and more transparent: instead of maintaining a distinct Class III structure, it absorbed the forms into a more generalized weak verb pattern centered on the dental suffix. The resulting forms, such as *hæfde* from *habjaną*, demonstrate the **integration of older morphological elements into a streamlined system** that prioritized regularity over morphological richness.

The historical distribution of the *-ái-* morpheme across the Germanic languages provides an important diagnostic tool for reconstructing the **evolution of Proto-Germanic verbal morphology**. Its **retention** in East Germanic (e.g., Gothic *habdái*) and its **loss** in West Germanic (e.g., Old English *hæfde*, Old High German *habēta*) exemplify how dialectal differentiation arises through a combination of phonological, morphological, and analogical processes. These contrasting developments demonstrate that language change is rarely uniform; rather, it reflects a series of **localized adaptations** influenced by sound change, stress patterns, and evolving morphological systems.

Furthermore, the history of *-ái-* underscores the **interaction between phonology and morphology** in historical linguistics. The disappearance of this suffix in some dialects was not an isolated event but part of an interdependent process in which **sound change triggered morphological reorganization**. As phonological distinctions eroded, speakers compensated through **analogical remodeling**, reinforcing regularity within the verbal paradigm. Over time, these small cumulative changes reshaped the entire weak verb system, giving rise to the forms that characterize the later Germanic and modern Germanic languages. The *-ái-* morpheme serves as a critical marker in the study of Germanic historical morphology. Its presence in **Gothic** and other early dialects attests to the complex and systematic nature of the Proto-Germanic verb system, while its disappearance in **Old English** and related West Germanic languages reflects the long-term effects of **phonological attrition, analogical leveling, and paradigm simplification**. The divergent outcomes of this morpheme's development across the Germanic dialect continuum offer valuable insight into the mechanisms of **linguistic change** — how sound shifts influence morphology, how paradigms reorganize under pressure for



regularity, and how shared Proto-Germanic features evolved into distinct grammatical systems. By tracing the evolution of the *-ái-* suffix from Proto-Germanic through its subsequent transformations, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic processes that shaped the early Germanic languages and the complex interplay between inheritance and innovation that defines their history [Kroonen & Ringe 2010].

According to Valentina Concu, the German verb *haben* occupies a particularly central position in the historical and structural development of the **Germanic languages**. Its significance extends far beyond its role as a lexical item — it also serves as a key component of the grammatical architecture of German. Functioning both as a **main verb** and as an **auxiliary**, *haben* illustrates the intricate relationship between **lexical meaning** and **grammatical function** in the evolution of the Germanic verbal system. In its auxiliary capacity, *haben* is indispensable to the formation of compound tenses, especially the **perfect (Perfekt)** and **pluperfect (Plusquamperfekt)** constructions. This use of *haben* demonstrates a clear instance of **grammaticalization**, a process through which a verb with concrete meaning gradually develops into a more abstract and functional grammatical marker. The transition of *haben* from a verb denoting possession or holding to a marker of verbal aspect and tense reflects one of the most fundamental mechanisms of **language change**. By tracing its historical and semantic development, scholars gain insight into how a single lexical form can expand its function over time, adapting to the evolving structural and communicative needs of the language. The diachronic study of *haben* thus provides valuable evidence for understanding broader **morphosyntactic transformations** within the Germanic branch, including the shift from **lexical verbs with full semantic content** to **auxiliary verbs** with primarily grammatical functions. For this reason, *haben* serves as more than an isolated lexical phenomenon it exemplifies the dynamic processes of **semantic extension**, **morphological adaptation**, and **syntactic reorganization** that characterize the historical development of German and related languages. The detailed examination of its trajectory not only illuminates the internal history of German but also contributes to the comparative study of **Indo-European linguistic change**, revealing how concrete verbs of possession frequently evolve into central elements of tense and aspect systems across diverse language families [Concu 2015: 44 ].

In Germanic languages, *haben* was originally a possession verb that came from the Latin *habere*, which means "to have." It functioned as a standard lexical verb at this early stage, needing an accusative object, usually signifying possession or authority.

This usage is demonstrated by a well-known example from Old High German:

"Someone had a fig tree planted in his vineyard," according to Phigboum *habeta sum gipflanzotan in sinemo uuingarten*.

The past tense form of *haben*, *habeta*, denotes possession in this context. The possessed item, the fig tree, is described by the participle *gipflanzotan*, which means "planted." Thus, a predicative relation is expressed by this construction: the possessed entity is characterised by the

participle.

At this point, *haben* + participle was a descriptive construction that depicted rather than a grammatical tense form.

Reanalysis is the process by which certain lexical elements are reinterpreted and given new grammatical functions when languages change. The grammaticalization of *haben* was significantly influenced by this technique.

*Haben* became a functional auxiliary denoting perfect aspect after losing its autonomous lexical meaning of ownership through reanalysis. Originally used to indicate a possessed noun, the participle eventually came to signify the action of the main verb, whereas *haben* started to communicate aspect and tense instead of possession.

As a result, they stopped taking a direct object. Its function changed from indicating ownership to supporting the participial verb form structurally. The periphrastic perfect construction in German was made possible by this modification.

The first known instances of *haben* acting as an auxiliary verb are from the ninth century AD, according to Öhl. This change is illustrated by the Old High German phrases that follow:

Tar habet si imo geantwurtet sinero frago "She has responded to his inquiry."

So habet er gelogen "He has lied"

In these instances, *haben* only functions as an auxiliary and no longer signifies "to own." While *haben* indicates the grammatical connection of tense, the participles *geantwurtet* ("answered") and *gelogen* ("lied") represent completed activities. This is the point at which *haben*'s modern auxiliary function was fully assumed [Öhl 2009: 275].

### Results and discussions Cross-Linguistic and Indo-European Connections

The historical distribution of *haben* across the Germanic language family further attests to its antiquity and significance. In Gothic, it appears as *haban*; in Old Norse, as *hafa*; in Old English, as *habban*, which eventually developed into modern English *have*; in Old Frisian, as *hebbā*; in Old Saxon, as *hebbian*; in Dutch, as *hebben*; and in Old High German, as *haben*. This widespread presence across multiple branches of the Germanic family underscores not only the verb's deep historical roots but also its central role in the shared grammatical and lexical heritage of these languages. The diachronic development of *haben* exemplifies several key processes in the history of the Germanic languages. Initially, the verb denoted concrete physical actions such as "to hold" or "to grasp," consistent with its Proto-Germanic antecedent *\*habjaną*. Over time, however, its semantic range broadened to encompass more abstract notions of possession and ownership. Concurrently, the verb underwent grammaticalization, assuming a critical auxiliary function in perfect tense constructions. This dual evolution semantic expansion alongside grammatical specialization illustrates the dynamic interplay between lexical meaning and grammatical function in historical linguistics.

Moreover, *haben* provides a valuable lens through which to examine the interaction of phonological, morphological, and syntactic developments within the Germanic dialect continuum. Its reflexes across Gothic, Old Norse, Old English, Old Frisian, Old Saxon, Dutch, and Old High German reveal both common Proto-Germanic inheritance and dialect-specific innovations. For example, while Gothic *haban* and Old Norse *hafa* preserve the original form closely, Old English *habban* exhibits phonological and morphological changes that eventually led to the modern English *have*. Similarly, Old Frisian *hebba* and Old Saxon *hebbian* reflect localized adaptations, while Dutch *hebben* and Old High German *haben* demonstrate further phonetic and morphological developments within the West Germanic branch [Beekes 1995: 325].

The widespread attestation of *haben* across Germanic languages also facilitates comparative studies of verb paradigms, weak and strong verb distinctions, and the mechanisms of grammaticalization. By tracing its evolution, linguists can reconstruct Proto-Germanic verb systems and better understand the processes by which lexical verbs acquire auxiliary functions. In addition, the verb's persistence across divergent dialects highlights the resilience of core lexical items in maintaining semantic continuity even as phonological and morphological shifts occur. In sum, *haben* represents a paradigmatic case of both historical continuity and linguistic innovation. Its central role in the lexicon and grammar of German, combined with its wide distribution across Germanic languages, makes it an indispensable subject for Germanicists and historical linguists alike. Analysis of *haben* not only sheds light on the semantic and morphological evolution of a single verb but also offers broader insights into the dynamics of language change, grammaticalization, and the development of the Germanic verb system over time.

Liberman showed that the contemporary German verb *haben* finds its origin in the Proto-Germanic root and reflects a shared linguistic heritage across the Germanic language family. Comparative evidence demonstrates that forms such as Gothic *haban*, Old Norse *hafa*, Old English *habban*, Old Frisian *hebba*, Old Saxon *hebbian*, Dutch *hebben*, and Old High German *haben* all trace back to a common Proto-Germanic ancestor. Linguists connect *haben* with the Proto-Indo-European root *keh₂p-*, which originally conveyed the meaning “to seize, grasp, or take possession of.” [Liberman 2008: 366].

During the Proto-Germanic period, this root gave rise to two principal derivatives:

- *habjan-* / *haffjan-* — a factitive form denoting “to lift, hold, or grasp.”
- *haben-* — a stative form conveying “to possess, to have.”

On the basis of these developments, the semantic evolution of *haben* can be understood in three sequential stages:

### The Semantic and Grammatical Development of the Verb *haben*

#### 1. Shift from physical to conceptual meaning:

In its earliest usage, *haben* originated from the Proto-Indo-European root

*keh<sub>2</sub>p-*, meaning “to grasp” or “to seize.” At this stage, the verb referred to concrete physical actions involving direct contact or control, such as “holding” or “carrying.” Gradually, this literal sense evolved into a more abstract one, expressing the idea of “keeping” or “retaining something.” This semantic transition from a tangible action to an abstract concept of control marks the first major stage in the verb’s historical evolution.

## 2. Extension to the notion of possession:

The verb’s meaning subsequently broadened beyond physical retention to include the idea of **ownership or possession**. The earlier sense of “holding something in one’s hand” was reinterpreted as “having something under one’s control” or “possessing property.” This semantic expansion reflects a typical process in language change, whereby verbs originally denoting concrete, physical acts develop into expressions of social, mental, or material possession. In this stage, *haben* came to represent the state of owning or controlling something, even when no physical contact was involved.

## 3. Development of auxiliary function (grammaticalization):

In the final phase of its evolution, *haben* underwent **grammaticalization**, transitioning from a full lexical verb with independent meaning into a grammatical auxiliary. This change allowed it to participate in the formation of compound tenses, most notably the *Perfekt* and *Plusquamperfekt* in modern German. For instance, in constructions such as *ich habe gesehen* (“I have seen”), the verb no longer conveys possession but functions as a structural element marking completed action and temporal relationships. This stage illustrates how *haben* moved from a verb of concrete physical meaning to one with abstract and, ultimately, purely grammatical significance an archetypal example of semantic and functional evolution within the Germanic languages.

The semantic and morphological influence of this root is also observable in a wide range of nouns across the Germanic and related Indo-European languages. Derived forms include English **haven**, German **Hafen**, Dutch **haven**, Old English **hæfen**, and Old Norse **höfn**, all of which can be traced back to the Proto-Germanic proto-form *\*habnī-* / *hafna-*. These nouns originally denoted “a place of refuge, shelter, or secured location,” thereby preserving the fundamental semantic core of *safety, possession, and containment* that characterized the earlier verbal root. The notion of a *haven* or *harbor* as a locus of security mirrors the functional metaphorical shift from the concrete sense of “to hold, to grasp” toward the abstract domain of “to possess, to protect.” This semantic continuum illustrates how early Indo-European speakers conceptualized possession not as an abstract legal category, but as a physical state of holding or keeping within one’s control a conceptual framework that later extended into the spatial domain, where harbors and shelters “hold” ships within a protected boundary. Interestingly, a cognate appears outside the Germanic family as well: Old Irish **cuan** (“port, harbor”) shares this semantic field, establishing a noteworthy Germanic-Celtic *isogloss* in the conceptual sphere of safe harbors and protected enclosures. The recurrence of such semantic patterns across linguistic boundaries suggests either deep Proto-Indo-European inheritance or early areal contact between

neighboring speech communities during the formative stages of the Northwest Indo-European continuum. From a diachronic perspective, the development of the verb *haben* epitomizes a classic trajectory of semantic expansion, morphological differentiation, and grammaticalization. Originating as a verb of concrete physical manipulation (“to grasp, to hold”), it gradually evolved into a general verb of *possession* and, in the context of auxiliary constructions, came to mark *grammatical aspect and tense*. This functional reanalysis demonstrates the natural linguistic tendency for high-frequency lexical verbs to undergo semantic bleaching and grammatical specialization.

Simultaneously, the existence of nominal derivatives such as *Hafen* and *haven* reveals the ongoing productivity of the underlying root in generating new lexemes tied to the conceptual metaphor of containment and protection. These parallel developments in the verbal and nominal domains highlight the semantic flexibility of the Proto-Indo-European root *keh<sub>2</sub>p-* (“to seize, to grasp”), whose reflexes span a wide semantic range—from the abstract domains of possession and obligation (e.g., German *haben*, English *have*) to the concrete spatial and protective meanings found in harbor-related nouns. Ultimately, the historical trajectory of this root provides valuable insight into the internal mechanisms of lexical change within the Germanic languages and their broader Indo-European relationships. It showcases how a single Proto-Indo-European verbal base could diversify semantically and morphologically, producing both grammatical auxiliaries and tangible nouns of safety and enclosure. This dynamic interplay between form, function, and meaning underscores the deep interconnectedness of lexicon, metaphor, and structure in the evolution of the Indo-European language family [Kroonen 2013: 96].

The verb *haben* has undergone a profound and multifaceted historical evolution, transforming over the centuries from a verb denoting concrete physical possession or holding into a central linguistic element with highly abstract and grammaticalized functions. Its origins can be traced back to the **Proto-Indo-European (PIE)** root *\*kap-*, meaning “to grasp,” “to seize,” or “to hold.” From this early notion of physical acquisition emerged a semantic trajectory that progressively moved from tangible possession to more abstract conceptual domains, a process that exemplifies one of the fundamental mechanisms of **semantic bleaching** and **grammaticalization** in Indo-European languages. During the **Proto-Germanic** period, this PIE root developed into *\*habjanq*, already showing signs of semantic extension from the concrete sense of “holding in one’s hand” to the more generalized notion of “having” or “possessing.” This semantic shift reflected a broader cognitive change: possession came to be understood not only as physical ownership but also as social, emotional, or intellectual control over something. From Proto-Germanic, the form evolved into **Old High German** *habēn*, **Old English** *habban*, and **Old Norse** *hafa*, all retaining the basic meaning of “to have” while also serving as foundational verbs in the emerging Germanic grammatical systems. In the course of **Middle High German** and later **Early New High German**, *haben* underwent a significant process of **grammaticalization**, assuming a pivotal auxiliary role in the formation of compound tenses. In



contemporary German, *haben* thus performs a **dual function**: on the one hand, it remains a principal **lexical verb** expressing possession, obligation, or experience (e.g., *Ich habe ein Buch*, “I have a book”); on the other hand, it operates as an **auxiliary verb** indispensable to the formation of the **Perfekt** (*Ich habe gelesen*, “I have read”) and the **Plusquamperfekt** (*Ich hatte gelesen*, “I had read”). Through this evolution, *haben* has transcended its original lexical boundaries, becoming one of the structural pillars of German verbal morphology. The **diachronic development** of *haben* exemplifies a broader pattern observable across the Indo-European and especially Germanic linguistic continuum: verbs of possession and holding often evolve into auxiliary verbs that express perfective or resultative aspect. This typological tendency reveals deep cognitive and linguistic connections between notions of **possession**, **completion**, and **resultativity** concepts that mirror the way human cognition links “having” something with the outcome of an action. The historical path of *haben* thus serves as an illuminating case study for understanding **semantic change**, **morphological innovation**, and **the evolution of grammatical structures** within the Germanic family. The etymological and functional transformation of *haben* from a concrete verb of physical possession to an abstract grammatical marker not only reflects the internal dynamics of the German language but also illustrates universal principles of **language change**. Its evolution embodies the intricate interplay between **lexical meaning** and **grammatical function**, offering linguists a window into how verbs can shift from denoting action to shaping the very **temporal and aspectual framework** of a language. The study of *haben* therefore occupies a central position in historical Germanic linguistics, shedding light on how deeply rooted lexical items become integral to the syntax and morphology of modern German [Hock & Joseph 2009].

### Conclusion

The historical development of the German verb *haben* provides a comprehensive illustration of how lexical items evolve through the complex interaction of **semantic generalization**, **morphological innovation**, and **syntactic grammaticalization**. Emerging from the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root *keh<sub>2</sub>p-* originally denoting concrete physical acts such as “to seize, grasp, or take possession of” *haben* exemplifies the dynamic processes that shape the Germanic verbal system over time. This transformation from a verb of tangible physical action into an abstract grammatical auxiliary encapsulates the mechanisms through which meaning, structure, and syntax evolve together within a language family. In its earliest stages, the PIE root *keh<sub>2</sub>p-* developed into both stative and factitive forms within Proto-Germanic, represented by *haben-* and *habjan-* / *hafjan-*, respectively. These morphological variants already reflect a key division in verbal semantics: the stative form expressing the state of possession, and the factitive form indicating the act of causing possession or acquisition. Such morphological differentiation laid the groundwork for later syntactic and semantic developments in the daughter languages. Over time, the stative meaning became dominant, forming the

lexical basis for verbs of possession throughout the Germanic branch. The **semantic trajectory** of *haben* from “to hold” or “to grasp” to “to have” and ultimately to an auxiliary function in perfect constructions reflects a broader cross-linguistic pattern. Possessive verbs, by their inherent connection to notions of agency and control, often become grammaticalized into markers of completed action or resultant state. In German, this process was already underway in the Old High German period, reaching full integration in Middle High German. By this stage, *haben* functioned as a perfect auxiliary with transitive verbs, while *sein* (“to be”) served as the auxiliary for intransitive and motion verbs establishing a syntactic division that remains productive in Modern German. Comparative evidence across the early Germanic languages further illustrates this development. In Gothic, *habais* retained its original lexical sense of possession but did not yet serve as an auxiliary, while **Old English** *hæbbe* and **Old High German** *habēn* began to acquire secondary grammatical functions in periphrastic constructions. **Old Norse** *hafa*, **Old Frisian** *hebbā*, **Old Saxon** *hebbian*, and **Middle Dutch** *hebben* all display parallel patterns of usage, confirming both the persistence of Proto-Germanic features and independent regional innovations. These correspondences underline the shared structural foundations of the Germanic languages, even as each dialect adapted morphologically and phonologically to its own linguistic environment. The **phonological evolution** of *haben* across the Germanic continuum also provides insight into dialectal divergence. The alternation between *b* and *f/v* (as in *habjan* vs. *haffjan*) reflects early phonetic shifts influenced by Verner’s Law and by subsequent assimilation processes. Likewise, morphological leveling and analogical formation in Middle High German contributed to the stabilization of *haben* as a regular weak verb (Class III), preserving its thematic vowel while expanding its syntactic versatility.

Beyond its verbal evolution, *haben*’s underlying root *keh<sub>2</sub>p-* proved semantically fertile in the **nominal domain** as well. Cognate forms such as **English** *haven* (“harbor”), **German** *Hafen* (“port”), and **Old Irish** *cuan* (“bay”) reveal a conceptual network linking possession, containment, and protection. The connection between “to have” and “to hold within a space” is neither accidental nor isolated; it reflects a fundamental cognitive metaphor wherein physical control over objects or territory is extended to the abstract realm of ownership and security. This metaphorical extension contributed to the root’s enduring productivity across Indo-European languages. In addition to its lexical persistence, *haben* serves as an exemplary case of **grammatical refunctionalization** the process through which a lexical verb acquires grammatical meaning while retaining traces of its original sense. As an auxiliary, *haben* no longer denotes possession directly, yet its semantic residue remains perceptible in the perfect aspect, which often conveys a sense of resultant ownership of an action’s outcome. This duality semantic retention alongside functional innovation demonstrates how linguistic change operates not through abrupt replacement, but through gradual layering and reanalysis. From a theoretical perspective, the history of *haben* contributes significantly to our understanding of **grammaticalization pathways** in Indo-European. It

supports the hypothesis that verbs of possession constitute one of the principal sources for perfect auxiliaries, a pattern observable in Latin (*habere*), French (*avoir*), and Italian (*avere*), among others. The Germanic evidence thus situates *haben* within a wider typological framework, reinforcing the view that grammaticalization is both a universal and a language-specific process driven by communicative efficiency, syntactic economy, and semantic transparency. Ultimately, the diachronic evolution of *haben* epitomizes the balance between **linguistic resilience and innovation**. It demonstrates how a verb can preserve its core semantic identity over thousands of years while simultaneously adapting to new grammatical roles and structural environments. Through its continuity across Gothic, Old Norse, Old English, Old Frisian, Old Saxon, Dutch, and Old High German, *haben* embodies the interplay between inherited Proto-Germanic features and dialect-specific adaptation. Its nominal reflexes extend the semantic reach of its original root, connecting notions of possession, enclosure, and security across multiple Indo-European branches.

In conclusion, *haben* stands as a **paradigmatic illustration of historical linguistic evolution**, epitomizing the intricate interplay between meaning, form, and function that characterizes the continuous transformation of human language. Its historical trajectory—from a verb expressing a concrete, physical action of “holding” or “grasping” to one denoting abstract possession, and ultimately to a **fully grammaticalized auxiliary** demonstrates with remarkable clarity how lexical items can evolve into essential structural components of grammar. This transformation reflects not only phonological and morphological adaptation over time but also deep **semantic abstraction** and **syntactic integration**, processes that together exemplify the universal mechanisms of linguistic change. The case of *haben* highlights how **semantic bleaching** (the gradual loss of specific lexical meaning) and **morphological reanalysis** (the reinterpretation of word forms within new grammatical contexts) jointly contribute to grammaticalization. Once a verb describing concrete possession, *haben* became increasingly abstract in function, eventually serving as a syntactic tool for expressing **aspectual relations** specifically, the completion or result of an action in the **Perfekt** and **Plusquamperfekt** tenses. In this role, it no longer denotes possession in a literal sense, but rather functions as a **carrier of grammatical meaning**, linking the subject to a past event and situating it within a temporal framework. Thus, *haben* bridges the gap between lexical semantics and grammatical structure, embodying the natural tendency of human language to repurpose existing elements for new communicative and structural needs.

Moreover, the diachronic development of *haben* mirrors broader **cross-linguistic patterns** observed across the Indo-European family, where verbs of possession or existence often evolve into auxiliaries marking perfect or resultative aspect (as seen, for example, in English *have* or French *avoir*). This typological consistency underscores a fundamental cognitive principle: the conceptual association between “having” and “completing.” To *have done* something implies not merely possession but

the **ownership of an accomplished event**, a metaphorical extension that lies at the core of this grammatical shift. The historical evolution of *haben* thus provides compelling evidence of how human cognition shapes and constrains linguistic structure, driving languages toward parallel solutions to universal communicative needs.

In a broader sense, the study of *haben* offers invaluable insight into the **dynamic equilibrium of language systems**, where stability and innovation coexist. It exemplifies how **language change is not arbitrary** but governed by recurring pathways of development—semantic generalization, morphological simplification, and syntactic consolidation that collectively produce the complex yet orderly systems we observe in modern languages. As one of the most frequently used and semantically versatile verbs in German, *haben* remains a cornerstone of both lexical and grammatical expression, linking ancient Indo-European roots with the living, evolving fabric of contemporary German. Ultimately, *haben* is more than a verb it is a linguistic artifact that encapsulates millennia of **historical continuity and structural innovation**. Its journey from the concrete to the abstract, from action to relation, reveals the remarkable capacity of human language to adapt, simplify, and reorganize itself while preserving coherence and communicative efficiency. By tracing the evolution of *haben*, linguists gain not only a clearer understanding of **Germanic verbal morphology** but also a deeper appreciation for the **universal principles** that govern the evolution of grammar itself principles that illuminate how meaning, form, and function continuously interact in the ever-changing landscape of human communication.

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