

Verb Particle Constructions: Their Meanings and Word Orders*

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1. Introduction

This paper concerns verb particle constructions, (henceforth, VPCs).¹ It has been observed that VPCs have two types of word orders as in (1):

- (1) a. He sped the process up. (C1) (Fraser (1974:2))
 b. He sped up the process. (C2) (Fraser (1974:1))

Sentence (1a) indicates the verb-noun-particle order of VPCs, and sentence (1b) the verb-particle-noun order. Following Gries (1999), we call the former the construction 1 (henceforth, C1) and the latter the construction 2 (henceforth, C2).

It is also mentioned that there are three types of VPCs in terms of their meanings: Literal VPCs, idiomatic VPCs, and aspectual VPCs, as shown in (2)-(4) respectively:

- (2) literal VPCs
 Fred picked the book up. (Gries (2003:1))
 (3) idiomatic VPCs
 She ran off the pamphlets. (Fraser (1974:2))
 (4) aspectual VPCs
 Aaron wiped up the counter. (Jackendoff (2002:76))

According to my informants, the examples above in (2)-(4) are preferred to the following examples in (5)-(7), respectively:²

- (5) ? Fred picked up the book.
 (6) ? She ran the pamphlets off.
 (7) ? Aaron wiped the counter up.

Among the examples in (2)-(7), we can find a preference in word orders relative to the meanings of the VPCs. Previous researches, such as Fraser (1974), actually note that there is a relationship between the word orders and the meanings of VPCs, but there is no comprehensive research concerning their relationships.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the relationships between the word orders and the meanings of VPCs. This article is organized as follows: Following this introductory section, section 2 deals with three types of meanings of VPCs. Section 3 deals with the meanings of VPCs and their preferred word orders. Section 4 presents concluding remarks.

2. Three Types of Meanings of VPCs

In this section, we focus on the meanings of VPCs. As we mentioned above,

we can classify the meanings of VPCs into three types: Literal VPCs, idiomatic VPCs and aspectual VPCs.

Firstly, let us confirm the examples of literal VPCs.

- (8) a. Fred picked the book up. (Gries (2003:1))
 b. I switched the light off. (Aarts (1989:277), Boas (2003:33))

The example in (8a) means that Fred picked the book, and as a consequence, the book moved upward, or the book is the state of "up." The example in (8b) means that I switched the light, and as a result, the light is "off."

We can rephrase the sentences above by using their original verbs and particles. Roughly speaking, these rephrased sentences can be formulated as [NP₁ V NP₂ and NP₂ is particle]. That is, the sentence in (8a) can be rephrased into *Fred picked the book and the book is up*. Likewise, the sentence in (8b) can be rephrased as *I switched the light and the light is off*. As long as this rephrasing succeeds, we call such VPCs literal VPCs.

Secondly, let us observe the examples of idiomatic VPCs:

- (9) a. She ran off the pamphlets. (Fraser (1974:2))
 b. Harry will look over the client. (Fraser (1974:1))

These examples cannot be rephrased in the same way as in literal VPCs: We cannot rephrase the sentence in (9a) as **she ran the pamphlets and the pamphlets are off* and the sentence in (9b) cannot be rephrased into **Harry will look the client and the client is over*. Instead, the combination of the verb and particle is taken as a single verb. In (9a), for example, we can put "run off" into "print," and in (9b), we can put "look over" into "examine." Unlike verbs and particles of literal VPCs above, those of idiomatic VPCs are paired up and their combinations have idiosyncratic meanings which can be inferred neither from the meaning of verbs nor from that of particles. Accordingly, idiomatic VPCs do not allow the rephrasing with their original verbs and particles, as we have mentioned above.

Thirdly, let us observe the following examples of aspectual VPCs.³

- (10) a. He ate up the whole cake.
 b. He heated up water in that bucket. (Fraser (1974:18))

In the examples in (10), the verbs retain their original meanings, which is parallel to literal VPCs. However, the particle does not retain its original meaning. We cannot rephrase the postverbal elements of the sentence in (10a) into *the whole cake is up*, like literal VPCs of which particles have their original meanings. Rather, we can rephrase the sentence without a particle in (10a) as *he ate the whole cake*. Thus, one may argue that particles in aspectual VPCs do not affect the meaning of the whole sentence, but this is not plausible. To see this, let us consider Jackendoff's (2002)

analysis. He contends that the particles of aspectual VPCs mean "completely," mentioning that aspectual VPCs mean roughly [V NP completely].⁴ With his statement in mind, let us consider the examples in (10) again. The meaning of the sentence in (10a) is *he ate the whole cake completely*, and that of sentence (10b) is *he heated water in that bucket completely*. From this rephrasing test, we can say that this type of VPCs belongs neither to literal VPCs nor to idiomatic VPCs.

In this section, we have classified VPCs into literal, idiomatic, and aspectual VPCs based on their meanings. In the next section, we will investigate the relationship between their word orders and meanings.

3. Word Orders of VPCs

In this section, we are concerned with the relationship between word orders of three types of VPCs and their meanings. Fraser (1974) points out that some VPCs prefer C1 to C2 and others prefer C2 to C1. Nevertheless, he does not give a detailed account of this word order preference. Thus, we investigate the relationship between the word orders and the meanings of VPCs in some detail.

3.1. Preferred Word Order in Literal VPCs

In this subsection, we deal with the preferred word order in literal VPCs. Some examples of literal VPCs are given in (11):

- (11) a. John threw the garbage away.
b. John threw the ball up.

The sentence in (11a) expresses that John threw the garbage and the garbage is in the state of "away." The sentence in (11b) means that John threw the ball and the ball is in the state of "up." As we have argued above, literal VPCs involve verbs and particles, and their meanings remain unchanged. It has been pointed out that literal VPCs have not only C1 as in (11a, b), but also C2 as in (12a, b) (cf. Bolinger (1971), Emonds (1972), Fraser (1974), among others):

- (12) a. John threw away the garbage.
b. John threw up the ball.

From the examples in (11) and (12), it seems that literal VPCs equally allow C1 and C2. However, there is a clear word order preference in literal VPCs. My informants report that literal VPCs prefer C1 to C2. This is shown in (13) and (14):

- (13) a. John threw the garbage away. (C1)
b. ? John threw away the garbage. (C2)
(14) a. John threw the ball up. (C1)
b. ? John threw up the ball. (C2)

The a-examples above have the C1 order, and the b-examples the C2 order. As the

- b. John will turn down that job. (C2) (Emonds (1972:546))
- (19) a. ? The store keepers took the students in. (C1)
 b. The store keepers took in the students. (C2) (Ishikawa (1999:332))
- (20) a. ? You shouldn't put such tasks off. (C1)
 b. You shouldn't put off such tasks. (C2) (Emonds (1972:546))
- (21) a. ? He has taken the government over. (C1)
 b. He has taken over the government. (C2) (Emonds (1972:546))

Through examples in (17)-(21), the a-examples are less preferred to the b-examples.

We can summarize the fact above as in (22):

(22) Idiomatic VPCs

?C1

C2

Notice that the word order preference of idiomatic VPCs is opposite to that of literal VPCs. In the next subsection, we will consider the case of aspectual VPCs.

3.3. Preferred Word Order in Aspectual VPCs

In this subsection, we deal with the preferred word order in aspectual VPCs.

Let us observe the following examples:

- (23) a. He ate up the whole cake.
 b. He heated up water in that bucket. (Fraser (1974:18))

As we have seen in section 2, the sentences in (23) are examples of aspectual VPCs, in which the particle *up* means completely.

My informants report that the sentences of aspectual VPCs prefer the C2 order to C1 order, as shown in (24) and (25):

- (24) a. ? John ate the food up. (C1)
 b. John ate up the food. (C2)
- (25) a. ? It says on the bottle that it kills all known germs off. (C1)
 b. It says on the bottle that it kills off all known germs. (C2)

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In (24)-(25), the a-examples are less preferred to the b-examples.

We can summarize the fact above as in (26):

(26) Aspectual VPCs

?C1

C2

This word order preference is opposite to literal VPCs. The relevant contrast is repeated in (27a, b).

- (27) a. He threw the ball up.

b. ? He threw up the ball.

(Fukui, Kanetani and Kobukata (2004))

The word order preference in aspectual VPCs is seemingly the same as that of idiomatic VPCs as in (22), repeated as (28).

(28) Idiomatic VPCs

?C1

C2

(= (22))

Then, one may argue that this parallelism is problematic for our claim, because it seems to make idiomatic VPCs and aspectual VPCs identical. In fact, some researchers regard aspectual VPCs as idiomatic VPCs (e.g. Wurmbrand (2000)). It is not plausible, however, considering the following examples:

(29) a. ? John ate the food up.

b. ??John threw the dinner up.

The sentence in (29a) is an example of aspectual VPCs of C1 order, while the sentence in (29b) is an example of idiomatic VPCs of C1 order. My informants report that sentence (29a), compared with (29b), sounds better. That is, if the C1 order of aspectual VPCs and the C1 order of idiomatic VPCs are compared, the former sounds more natural than the latter.

From the observation in sections 3.1 through 3.3, we can summarize the word order preference in each type of VPCs as follows:

(30) Idiomatic VPCs ----- Aspectual VPCs ----- Literal VPCs

?? C1

?C1

C1

C2

C2

?C2

The diagram in (30) indicates that word order preference is not clear-cut but gradational. By putting the three types of VPCs on the scale, we can successfully capture the word order preference in VPCs.

3.4 *Why is the Scale Analysis Useful?*

The scale analysis in the previous subsection explains the word order preference of VPCs. In this subsection, we show the validity of this analysis summarized in (30). We have the following examples:

(31) a. I could hardly tell the two of them apart. (C1)

b. * I could hardly tell apart the two of them. (C2)

(Farrell (2005:108))

(32) a. * He eked his income out. (C1)

b. He eked out his income. (C2)

(Farrell (2005:107))

The sentences in (31) are the examples of literal VPCs and the sentences in (32) are those of idiomatic VPCs. The sentences in (31b) and (32a) are completely unacceptable. From the examples in (31), we can say that some literal VPCs not only have the word order preference but have the absolute word order restriction to the C1 order. Likewise, from the examples in (32), we can say that some idiomatic VPCs have the strong word order restriction to the C2 order. In brief, we can summarize the above facts in the following scale:

(33) Idiomatic VPCs	----- Aspectual VPCs	----- Literal VPCs
*C1	??C1	?C1
C2	C2	C2
		C1
		?C2
		* C2

Thus, the above scale shows that word order preferences in VPCs are not clear-cut but gradational. Therefore, the scale analysis that we proposed is plausible.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we observed that there are three types of VPCs: Literal VPCs, idiomatic VPCs, and aspectual VPCs. These VPCs have two possible word orders and they show the gradational word order preference relative to their meanings. By postulating the scale of word order preferences, we explained the relation between the word orders and the meanings of VPCs.

NOTES

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¹As far as this paper is concerned, we do not deal with the verb preposition construction, as in (i), which has a similar surface word order but obviously different characteristics. For example, contrary to the examples of VPCs in (iia), (iiaa), and (iva), the verb preposition construction does not accept C1 order at all as in (iib), can undergo topicalization as in (iiib), can undergo gapping as in (ivb).

- (i) John ran up the hill.
- (ii) a. John ran up the flag.
- b. * John ran the hill up.

- (iii) a. * Up the flag, John ran.
 b. Up the hill, John ran.
- (iv) a. * He sped up the process, and she, up the distribution.
 b. He sped up the street, and she, up the alleyway.

(Fraser (1974:2))

Some researchers regard verb preposition constructions and VPCs as a single class (e.g. Emonds (1972) and Farrell (2005)), but because of the above facts, I do not treat them like that.

²Throughout this paper, I use the symbol * for unacceptable sentences, the symbol ?? for barely acceptable sentences, the symbol ? for not good but acceptable sentences.

³Some researches seem to assume that aspectual VPCs are classified as literal VPCs (e.g. Ishikawa (1999)). Other researches classify them into idiomatic VPCs (e.g. Wurmbbrand (2000)).

⁴For detailed discussion of aspectual particles, see Fukui (2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006a, 2006b).

⁵All the sentences that I research involve definite noun phrases as the objects.

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