

On the edge of verb shell: What makes complex verbs so versatile?



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Introduction

- ✓ An overview of empirical facts and challenges of complex verbs;
- ✓ An explanatory model within the Minimalist Program of linguistics.

Complex Verbs

- Verbs with more than one meaningful component.
 - Like simple verbs, they denote **single events**;
 - Unlike simple verbs, they have **complex internal make-up**.
- Widely exist in world languages, though in different names.

“Prefixed verb”: a main verb + an adposition/adverb-source element, e.g.

ENGLISH *over-run, out-cry, up-raise; con-solidate, at-tain, re-move*
 GERMAN *auf-stehen* “up-stand”, *ab-lehnen* “off-lean→reject”; *ver-binden* “VER-bind”
 RUSSIAN *vy-tjanut’* “out-pull”, *raz-jest’* “around-eat→corrode”, *za-igrat’* “ZA-play”
 HUNGARIAN *fel-repül* “up-fly”, *be-rüg* “in-kick→get very drunk”, *meg-csinál* “MEG-do”...
 (also in Yiddish, Dutch, and Afrikaans, cf. Dehé 2015) (Romance: only the *re-move* type)



“Phrasal/Particle verb”: a main verb + a particle (adpositional) element, e.g.

ENGLISH *run over, cry out, raise up...*
 (also in Icelandic, Norwegian, and Faroese, cf. Dehé 2015)

For expository purpose, I use “particle” only for elements that always appear detached, thus excluding separable prefixes.

“Compound verb”: a main verb + a verb-source element, e.g.

CHINESE *xiang-chu* “think-exit→think out”, *zou-kai* “walk-open→walk away”, *gan-shang* “chase-up”
 JAPANESE *omoi-dasu* “think-exit”, *shi-ageru* “do-raise→finish”, *kiki-komu* “listen-enter→listen carefully”
 KOREAN *ijeo-beorida* “forget-throw→totally forget”, *useo-daeda* “laugh-attach→laugh loudly”
 HINDI *ro-dena* “cry-give→suddenly cry”, *maar-Daalnaa* “kill-pour→violently kill”...

Commonality

- Structure: a main verb (M) + a secondary element (2ND).
- Verb modification = event modification: specifying more details for the event situation.
- Meaning shift: i) 2ND may lose meaning to various degrees; ii) overall meaning may be idiomatic.

Variation: Form

- Linear order: 2ND~M or M~2ND. • 2ND categorial source: adpositional/adverbial or verbal.
- Correlation between the two: {adp/adv : 2ND-M}, {verbal : M-2ND}, NB English.
- Inflection-bearing component: M (*ran over, auf-gestanden*) or 2ND (*omoi-dashita*).
- Level of cohesion and separability:



- Cohesion and separability are two related but different properties, e.g. *overrun* vs. *attain*. (When and how to separate separable complex verbs is another issue.)

Variation: Meaning

- 2ND: predicative (e.g. *raise up*) or non-predicative (e.g. *eat up*).
- The non-predicative meaning is usually **aspectual**. Here “aspect” = abstract property of verbal event along some scalable dimension (time, degree, intensity, etc.) (contra usual definition).
 - e.g. GER *ver-binden* [Time: Perfective], HUN *el-ábrándozik* “daydream for a while” [Time: Delimitative], KOR *useo-daeda* “laugh loudly/without stop” [Intensity: Intensive], etc.
- Again, the [±pred] variation is related but not tied to cohesion/separability.



Questions

- Complex verbs pose many questions for theoretical linguistics, e.g.
- Are they (especially the less cohesive ones) words or phrases?
 - How to model the observed commonality and variation?
 - Languages feature different 2NDs (in both category and morphological status).
 - Restriction on the number of 2ND (1~3), e.g. German immobile verbs.

Lexical Integrity Hypothesis (LIH): “Words are ‘atomic’ at the level of phrasal syntax and phrasal semantics...the internal composition of the word cannot be relevant in syntax.” (Di Sciullo & Williams 1987)

Apparently the internal composition of complex verbs matters to syntax!



an-melden: separable
Sie meldete ihre Tochter zu diesem Kurs an.
 “she enrolled her daughter in this course.”



vor-an-melden: immobile
XDu meldest uns voran. XDu anmeldest uns vor. XDu voranmeldest uns.
 Intended: “You preregister us.” Compare: ✓...wenn du uns **voranmeldest**.

Theoretical background

- **Human Language Faculty** minimally consists of a repertoire of building blocks (Lexicon) and a computational system (Syntax) which interfaces with other cognitive systems. (Hauser et al. 2002)
 - Syntax is minimally a recursive binary combinatorial operation (Merge).
 - The nature of Lexicon is elusive and still under investigation. (Berwick & Chomsky 2016)
- By exploring complex verbs, we can
 - better understand the **Lexicon** and the **Syntax-Semantics Interface**;
 - know more about the linguistic encoding of **event situation**, its possible variation and limits.

Verb Shell

- I propose a shell-like structure for complex verbs:
 - M = CORE, 2ND = EDGE or SC (Small Clause, Hoekstra 1988).
 - EDGE is [-pred], SC is [+pred];
 - Both involve further internal structure, thus making variation possible.
 - EDGE can be recursive, but with consequences (e.g. immobility).
- Syntactic derivation takes place in **Multiple Workspaces** (MW, Nunes 2004) and by **Phases** (Chomsky 2001). The interaction of WM, Phase, and Verb Shell
 - yields synchronic variation, e.g. cohesion level;
 - provides paths for diachronic change, e.g. SC→EDGE.

