

英語の動詞・不変化詞構文の獲得に関する研究

Acquisition Process of Verb-Particle Constructions in English

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore acquisition process of verb-particle constructions (henceforth, VPCs, for expository convenience) in English from the viewpoint of Construction Grammar (CxG) approach. CxG is one of the best known approaches to language (Lakoff (1977), Fillmore, Key and O'Connor (1988), Goldberg (1995, 2006)). CxG is typically associated with cognitive linguistics, based on the idea that the primary unit of grammar is the grammatical construction, which is defined as a pairing of grammatical form and the corresponding meaning. From CxG viewpoint, constructions reflect scenes which human beings frequently experience. This study shows that there is a relationship between the constructional properties of VPCs and the cognitive development of infants.

Keywords — verb-particle constructions, cause and effect, focal point

1. Introduction

VPCs in English are exemplified by sentences such as those in (1):

- (1) a. Mary lifted the box up.
- b. John put your hat and coat in.
- c. Wipe away your tears.

(1a), for instance, encodes the box's change of location resulting from the action of lifting it. With respect to the semantic feature of the particle, Bolinger (1971: 85) states that in its core meaning (though not necessarily in the figurative

extensions) the particle must contain two features, one of motion-through-location, the other of terminus or result. In CxG theory, VPCs are linked to resultative constructions like *He cut the speech short/He cut short the speech*, *Break the cask open/Break open the cask* (Goldberg (1995)). The adjectives *short* and *open* are called resultative phrases, which describe the resultant change of the postverbal NPs which the action denoted by the verbs bring about.

In general, VPCs are more commonly used in daily conversation between family members, friends, and so on. The Latinate verb which consists of one word is more formal compared to the corresponding VPC. Consider the following two sentences which encode the same objective scene:

- (2) a. He took off his hat.
- b. He removed his hat.

According to the native English speakers who acted as informants, (2b) is used in situations which require more politeness or formality; by comparison, (2a) may be used in informal speech. In fact, (2a) is used by young children as well as adults.

On close examination, a large number of VPC's expressions appear frequently in picture books for infants and their conversations. Some of them are as follows:

- (3) a. clean up time
- b. pick it up

- c. put your toys away
- d. switch on a computer
- e. climb down a mountain

Then why is it that VPCs are used more frequently than Latinate verbs by young children? Little attention has been given to the point. This paper is intended as an investigation of the relationship between the constructional properties of VPCs and acquisition process of the construction in question.

2. Constructional Properties of VPCs

2.1. Focal Point

Let us begin by considering the semantic and syntactic properties of VPCs.

Bolinger (1971: 82) comments that though the phrasal verb embodies both the action and the result, the position of the particle tends to make one or the other paramount. With transitive verbs, when the particle is postponed it tends to modify the noun; when it stands next to the verb it behaves more like a verbal affix, as shown in the following contrast:

- (4) a. Get in that report. (deliver it)
 - b. Get that report in. (delivered)
- (Bolinger 1971: 82)

Along the same lines, Gries (1999: 111) refers to the word order in which the particle is positioned adjacent to the verb as construction₁ and the word order where the direct object is adjacent to the verb as construction₂. According to Gries (1999:111), construction₁ highlights the adverbial value of the particle (since the particle stands closer to and modifies the verb) so that the action is focused upon; analogously, construction₂ highlights the adjectival value (since the particle is further away from the verb and stands closer to and modifies the direct object) so that the resultant state of the direct object is concentrated

upon.

There is a point which needs to be clarified. As we shall see later in the next section, the particle is anchored in position when the action is in focus.

Given this, we can say that there are at least two different focal points relevant to VPCs: One is a focal point which emphasizes the result, and the other is a focal point which emphasizes the action. VPCs can be shown schematically as in (5). I referred to these two syntactic forms as Action-focused (AF) and Result-focused (RF) VPCs respectively.

- (5) a. [NP₁ V P NP₂] [AF]
 - b. [NP₁ V NP₂ P] [RF]
- (NP: Noun Phrase, V: Verb, P: Particle)
(Honda (2012 : 226))

Empirical motivation for this distinction may be found in the following contrast:

- (6) a. Gura piles up some stones to make a fireplace and puts lots and lots of firewood under the pan.
- [Guri and Gura, 2005: 17]
- b.*Gura piles some stones up to make a fireplace and puts lots and lots of firewood under the pan.

(5a) is acceptable as a VPC; on the other hand, (5b) is not. The reason is that ‘piles up some stones’ in (5a) describes the action to perform the purpose of making fireplace, whereas the result-focus meaning of ‘pile some stones up’ in (5b) is contradictory to the meaning conveyed by ‘to make a fireplace.’

The reason why VPCs have two possible foci is that they basically encode cause-and-effect sequence of events. In VPCs the cause is encoded by the verb (phrase), while the effect is encoded by the particle.

It is necessary, at this point, to explain the type of VPCs in connection with the semantic property of this construction.

2.2. Three Types of VPCs

This section gives an overview about Honda's (2012) analysis of particle placement phenomena in VPCs.

VPCs fall into three types (Type A, Type B, and Type C) according to the position of the particle, including idiomatic VPCs.

- (7) A) [NP V NP P]/[NP V P NP]
 e.g. *put one's toys away, walk one's headache off, ring the curtain down, etc.*
- B) [NP V NP P]/*[NP V P NP]
 e.g. *sing one's heart out, cry one's eyes out, walk one's legs off, etc.*
- C) [NP V P NP]/*[NP V NP P]
 e.g. *let off steam, lay down one's arms, take up the challenge, etc.*

The particle in Type A can be placed on either side of the postverbal NP, the particle in Type B must follow the postverbal NP, and the particle in Type C must precede the postverbal NP.

As stated in Honda (2012), the notion of 'markedness' is useful in describing the differences among types of VPCs. Recall that VPCs basically encode causality and the particle inherently encodes 'result' (Visser (1963), Bolinger (1971)). With this in mind, I proposed that telic VPCs are regarded as unmarked, whereas atelic ones as marked.

- (8) a. telic: unmarked
 b. atelic: marked

One of the most useful tests that ascertain whether result-focused or action-focused VPCs is the so-called 'telicity' test. A telic eventuality can

occur with a time adverbial *in*-phrase, whereas an atelic eventuality can occur with a *for*-phrase (cf. Tenny (1994)).

- (9) a. The child put her toys away in ten minutes/*for ten minutes.
 b. He sang his heart out for an hour hour/*in an hour.
 c. She let off steam for an hour/*in an hour.

(6a) describes a telic eventuality (Type A); while (6b) and (6c) describe atelic eventualities (Type B and Type C).

With regard to the syntactic forms, we regard the form [NP V NP P] as unmarked; on the other hand, the form [NP V P NP] as marked, since an unmarked meaning is basically denoted by the word order [NP V NP P].

- (10) a. [NP V NP P]: unmarked form
 b. [NP V P NP]: marked form

On these grounds I proposed that Type A can be represented by either an unmarked or a marked form, since this type is semantically unmarked; on the other hand, Type B denotes a marked meaning in the sense that it describes an atelic eventuality and focuses on the action by using the unmarked form, thus the corresponding marked form is blocked; Type C focuses on the action and therefore the marked form is primarily selected.

Having noticed the constructional properties of VPCs, one can then go on to consider the acquisition process of infants.

3. The Cognitive Development of Infants

According to Piaget (1964), young children acquire spatial perception through various activities with the things they have at hand in their infancy. The activities contain 'grasp,' 'heap up,' 'drop' and 'pull,' etc. Through such

activities they also acquire the ability to understand ‘means’ and ‘ends,’ or cause-and-effect sequence of events. The following serves as an example: an infant drops a spoon on the floor, then an adult around her/him picks it up, but (s)he repeats the same action over and over. The reason why the infant repeats the same action is that (s)he tries to see the effect of it.

Below is a selection of VPCs in picture books written for young children.

- (11) a. I'll tidy up the garden now it looks an awful mess.
[1977 Dick Bruna, *Poppy Pig's Garden*]
- b. ... and the smoke will drive that demon away.
[1995 Jan Mark, *The Tale of Tobias*]
- c. The Prince took off his cloak, and wrapped it about the old woman.
[1987 George MacDonald and Dorothee Duntze, *Little Daylight*]
- d. Pretty soon they tore down the apartment houses and tenement houses around the Little House and started digging big cellars . . . one on each side.
[1942 Virginia Lee Burton, *The Little House*]
- e. He picked out his wide-brimmed straw hat, his town hat, and set it on the scarecrow's head.
[1987 Peter Sis, *The Scarebird*]
- f. He drank up all the water.
[1988 Nadine Bernard Westcott, *The Lady the Alligator Purse*]

First, the point to observe is that the VPCs in (11) encode cause and effect. Thus in (11b) the demon went away as a consequence of the action of driving it. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the

VPCs belong to Type A. As we have seen in the preceding subsection, this type is taken as semantically unmarked; it basically encodes causality and describes a telic eventuality (e.g., *He drank up all the water in ten seconds/*for ten seconds*). On the other hand, the VPCs belonging to Type B and Type C, which are semantically marked, cannot be found in the picture books for infants. I assume that VPCs are acquired in the following sequence; from a semantically unmarked type to a marked type. A full discussion of this topic will have to be left for my future research.

Secondary, young children often ask the adults around them “why?” in everyday speech. Taking into the consideration that young children have the ability to perceive causal sequence, it is easy for them to understand VPCs in light of their real-world experiences, since particles in VPCs encode the effect caused by the action denoted by the verb (phrase).

The following are part of practical examples of VPCs. (12a) is an infant speech, while (12b) and (12c) are an adult speech to a child.

- (12) a. Don't put your hand in!
b. You must eat up all your dinner!
c. Watch your feet, when you climb down the stairs in the station.

In the speech-act (12c), for instance, the mother communicates to her child that falling down the stairs may cause injury. In this case, we can use the corresponding single-word English *descend* instead of *climb down*. However, in fact, the mother selected the latter. According to Levin (1993), the verb *descend* is classified as a verb of inherently directional motion, while the verb *climb* is classified as a verb of manner of motion. That is to say, the former implies the direction of the action, while the latter does not. The verb

climb may denote the direction by taking a directional phrase like *down*. VPCs have the advantage of being able to encode a series of actions.

Thirdly, VPCs also have unique characteristics in that they can express two opposing goals simply by interchanging particles. Consider the following two pairs:

- (13) a. Mary turned the light on/off.
b. Tom climbed up/down the mountain.

The VPCs encode the goals to achieve. Thus the particle *on* encode the situation in which the light is operating, whereas *off* encodes the situation where it is not working. It is easy for young children to image the situations denoted by VPCs, since they encode means and ends.

It follows from what has been said that the VPC is, by its nature, productive for young children.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that there is a relation between the constructional properties of VPCs in English and acquisition process of the construction. VPCs encode cause and effect. Children acquire means and goals in early childhood as a result of their various experiences. VPCs reflect scenes which human beings frequently perceive and experience.

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