

The Semantics of Verb-particles: A Basic Literature Review

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Background

- Desire for some semantic account of the semantics of VPCs, at least in terms of compositionality/predication (e.g. *cheer up* vs. *bring up* vs. *own up*)
- Interface between semantic compositionality/idiomaticity and particle position (e.g. *pick a broken lead pencil up* vs. *?pick a disease up*; cf. *have the second and fourth Friday of each month off*)

The Semantics of Verb-particle Constructions (VPCs)

- Sense classification/compositionality
 - ★ enumeration of verb/particle senses
 - ★ cognitive account of how VPC semantics formed
- Aktionsart and aspect
- Modification
- Semantic exposition

Sense Disambiguation (1)

- Map VPCs onto inventory of verb and particle senses (Bolinger 1971, Side 1990)
- *out*:
 1. into the open, away from, not in or at a place, removal (e.g. *break out*, *spell out*, ?*act out*)
 2. thoroughly/to completion (e.g. *bottom out*, ?*turn out*, ?*trace out*)

Sense Disambiguation (2)

- Potential for overlap between particle senses (e.g. literal vs. metaphorical/aspectual *up*: *blow up*)
- Anything which cannot be sense-determined is classified as non-compositional
- Boundary between non-compositionality and sense-extension/metaphor

Metaphor-based Analysis (1)

- Classify particle sense according to (hierarchical) inventory of (domain-specified) particle sense metaphors (Lindner 1982, Lindner 1983)
- The verb contributes the source domain of the VPC, and the particle the “cognitive image schema” (Morgan 1997)
- Four possibilities for metaphor extension:

VERB	PARTICLE	EX.
literal	literal	<i>take mug out of box</i>
metaphorical	literal	<i>fish out the ring</i>
literal	metaphorical	<i>hand out the brochures</i>
metaphorical	metaphorical	<i>pick a name out</i>

Metaphor-based Analysis (2)

- Analysis for *figure out* (Morgan 1997):
 1. *figure* = “reach solution by thinking” (from THINKING IS CALCULATING)
 2. *out* = “not within boundaries of container” (from A PROBLEM IS A (LOCKED) CONTAINER)
 3. *figure out* = “make a solution cognitively accessible by thinking”
 4. ACCESSIBLE/VISIBLE IS OUT + KNOWING IS SEEING
→ “cause something to be known by thinking about

it''

Aktionsart (1)

- In (semi-)compositional VPCs, the particle modifies/reinforces the aktionsart of the verb (Bolinger 1971, Brinton 1985)
- Basic function of particles (e.g. *through, out, up, down*:
ACTIVITY → ACCOMPLISHMENT (e.g. *textiteat up, fade out, squander away*)

Verb Classification (Vendler++)

	Stative	Durative	State-change
State (<i>know, hope</i>)	+	—	—
Accomplishment (<i>heal, cool</i>)	—	+	+
Activity (<i>sit</i>)	—	+	—
Achievement (<i>realise, win</i>)	—	—	+
Semelfactive (<i>knock, attack</i>)	—	—	—

Aktionsart (2)

- Stative verbs do not readily occur in VPCs, but there are examples of state-derived accomplishment VPCS (e.g. *be off, want out, have on*)
- Particles can occur redundantly with achievement (e.g. *win out, find out*) and accomplishment (e.g. *cool down, heal up*) verbs
- Particles can contribute distributive or iterative semantics to an achievement verb (e.g. *die out*)

Aspect

- Certain particles (*on, along, away*) mark (with telic/punctual verbs) iterative or (with durative verbs) continuative aspect (e.g. *jog along, work away*)

Particle Modification

- Particle pre-modifiers (*straight, right, back, right back, all the way, all, way ...*) offer some insight into the compositionality of VPCs (e.g. *pick the pencil straight/right/back/right back/*all/way up vs. pick a disease ?right/?back/*way up vs. add the numbers *straight/right/back/right back/*way up*)
- Scope effects (e.g. *clean the room right up vs. jump right up vs. jump back up*)

- Incompatible with aspectual particles? (e.g. *work*
**straight/*right/*... away*)

Particle Placement

- With transitive VPCs, joined configuration preferred for “objects requiring a high amount of consciousness,” and split configuration preferred for “objects requiring none or only a limited amount of consciousness for their processing” (Gries 1997, 1999)
- Consciousness determined by: **discourse context, entrenchment of linguistic form** (= inverse Silverstein hierarchy)

- Effects of verb sense accessibility/habituality

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