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THE VERB PHRASE. FINITE FORMS

Chapter 1
The English Verb Phrase

A ***phrase*** is generally defined as a linguistic unit at a level between the word and the clause. The most important types of phrase are: noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase, and prepositional phrase. They are adequately headed, namely adjective phrases are headed by adjectives, adverb phrases are headed by adverbs, etc. (Aarts et al., 2014: 307).

There are various perspectives on the structure of the ***verb phrase*** (VP):

1. It is considered to be made up either of a single-word verb, or of a group of verbs which behaves in the same way as a single-word verb. In Systemic Functional Grammar, it is called *verb(al) group*.

The verb phrase can be *finite* or *non-finite*. In a finite verb phrase, the first verb is finite, namely it carries tense. The last verb in both finite and non-finite verb phrases is a main/ lexical verb. If a finite verb phrase is made up of a single verb, then it must be a main/ lexical verb that carries tense. However, as explained by Biber et al. (1999: 101), the verb phrase can consist only of an auxiliary when the main/ lexical verb is omitted (e.g. *Emily said she would never go away. She **couldn't**.*).

Verb phrases can often be discontinuous. This is possible in clauses with subject-operator inversion and *not*-negation. Likewise, adverbials are commonly placed between the constituents of the verb phrase (e.g. *He **will** always **be** my friend*) (ibid.).

Moreover, verb phrases can be classified as *simple* and *complex*. A simple verb phrase contains only one verb (e.g. *I **bought** a novel yesterday*), whereas a complex verb phrase consists of two or more verbs (e.g. *You **should have told** us about it*) (Quirk et al., 1972: 72-73).

2. It is defined as a sequence of words comprising a lexical verb together with any complements and adjuncts, excluding the subject (in theoretical grammar and recent descriptive grammars). Moreover, in Generative Grammar (2) auxiliary verbs are not included in the verb phrase, being placed under 'Aux', or an equivalent node (Aarts et al., 2014: 435).

1.1. Classification of Verbs

Verbs can be classified on the basis of three main criteria: *form*, *lexical meaning* and *complementation* (Trantescu, 2018: 13-37).

I. Form

a) morphological structure

Taking into account their morphological structure, verbs can be:

- **One-word/ Single-word verbs**:
- *simple verbs*: they cannot be decomposed into other morphological elements (e.g. *eat, read, sleep, study, work, play,* etc.);

- *compound verbs*: they consist of two or more morphological elements combined together (e.g. *babysit, broadcast, underline, blackmail, spotlight, waterproof, proofread, brainwash,* etc.);

- *derivative verbs*: they are formed using prefixes and suffixes (e.g. *discourage, enlighten, enrich, encourage, misprint, amplify, purify, classify, generalize,* etc.);

- *conversion/zero derivation*: a word that belongs to a word class is changed into another word class, without adding any affix (e.g. nouns can be converted to verbs: *to book*, *to paper, to park, to service*, *to process, to water*, *to head*, *to elbow*, *to eye*, *to face;* adjectives can also be converted to verbs: *to clean, to dirty, to wet,* etc.)

- **Multi-word verbs**:

According to Biber et al. (1999: 403-404), there are four types of multi-word combinations containing relatively idiomatic units which function like single verbs:

- *phrasal verbs* (verb + adverbial particle: e.g. *pick up, carry out, find out,* etc.);
- *prepositional verbs* (verb + preposition: e.g. *look at, wait for, think of,* etc.);
- *phrasal-prepositional verbs* (verb + particle + preposition: e.g. *get away with, look up to, look down on,* etc.)
- *multi-word verb constructions* [verb + noun phrase (+ preposition): e.g. *take a look (at);* verb + prepositional phrase: e.g. *take into account;* verb + verb: e.g. *make do*]

A *phrasal verb* consists of a verb followed by an adverbial particle which can have a spatial or locative meaning (e.g. *out, in, up, down, on, off*). A *prepositional verb* contains a verb followed by a preposition (*at, about, to,* etc.). A *phrasal-prepositional verb* comprises both an adverbial particle and a preposition (e.g. *on with, up with, out of, up against*, etc.).

Phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs are single units whose meanings cannot be inferred from the individual meanings of the two parts. Thus, there are simple lexical verbs that have meanings similar to these multi-word verbs (e.g. *carry out = perfom/ undertake; look at = observe*).

Intransitive phrasal verbs cannot be used in the passive voice. They are sometimes used in imperative clauses.

E.g.

Watch out*! There's ice on the sidewalk.*
Come on*! We're running late!*

In the case of transitive phrasal verbs, the object expressed by a noun can be placed either between the verb and the particle or after the particle, whereas the object expressed by a pronoun is placed only between the verb and the particle.

We cannot place an adverb between the verb and the particle or between the particle and the object.

E.g.

*She **picked** <u>the child</u> **up**. / She **picked up** <u>the child</u>.*
*They **have found** <u>it</u> **out**.*
*I have been **carrying out** some research <u>lately</u>.*

There are some phrasal verbs that are transitive when used with one meaning and intransitive when used with a different meaning.

E.g.

*I **took off** my jacket and put it on the hanger.* (transitive verb = 'remove')
*The plane **takes off** at 10 a.m.* (intransitive verb = 'leave the ground/start flying')

As regards prepositional verbs, the noun or pronoun functioning as prepositional object is always placed after the preposition.

We can place an adverb between the verb and the preposition, but not between the preposition and the object.

E.g.
*She **was looking** <u>at the clear blue sky</u>.* (the prepositional object is expressed by a noun phrase)
*I **was waiting** <u>patiently</u> **for** him at the station.*

Phrasal-prepositional verbs can be turned into the passive voice.

E.g.
Active Voice: *The students **look up to** Professor Smith.*
Passive Voice: *Professor Smith **is looked up to** (by the students).*

We place nouns or pronouns after the preposition, except when the verb takes two objects and one of them is put immediately after it. Likewise, we can put an adverb between the adverbial particle and the preposition.

E.g.
*He **came up** <u>with a brilliant solution</u>.*
*She offered to help me with the project, so I **took** <u>her</u> **up on** <u>it</u>.*

*The government **has cut down** <u>dramatically</u> **on** funds for cultural events.*

b) base (inflectional) forms

The English verb has the following forms:

- the ***base form*** (e.g. *read, write, see, feel,* etc.) which represents the uninflected form of the verb that we usually find in dictionaries and which can be used as: the Infinitive (the long infinitive contains the particle *to*), the Imperative (2nd person singular and plural), the Synthetic Subjunctive (Present Subjunctive), and the Present Tense Simple (except for the 3rd person singular);

- the ***Past Tense form*** (e.g. *wrote, saw, felt, studied, slept, walked, talked,* etc.);

- the ***Past Participle form*** (*written, seen, eaten, studied, slept, run, walked,* etc.);

- the *–(e)s **form*** which is added to the base for the 3rd person singular, Present Tense Simple: *writes, lives, reads, studies, sleeps, runs, walks, talks,* etc.);

- the *–**ing form*** or the form of the Present Participle which is obtained by adding *–ing* to the base: *writing, living, reading, studying, running, walking, talking,* etc.).

A **regular verb** just adds inflections to the base form without any change (base form: *laugh*; present form: *laugh*; *–s*

form: *laughs*; *–ing* form: *laughing*; past form: *laughed*; past participle: *laughed*).

An **irregular verb** has various types of ending and internal change applied to the base form. They are similar to regular verbs as regards the *–s* form and *–ing* form (*finds, finding; takes, taking; swims, swimming*). However, almost all irregular verbs are irregular in their past form and past participle form (*spoke, spoken; met, met; took, taken; swam, swum*) (Carter & McCarthy, 2006: 909; 921).

Biber et al. (1999: 394-396) present the seven classes of irregular verbs:

- Class 1: verbs take a voiceless *-t* suffix that marks both the past tense and past participle; it can replace a final *d* of the base (e.g. *build – built – built*);
- Class 2: verbs take a *-t* or *-d* suffix that marks both the past tense and past participle, with a change in the base vowel (e.g. *feel – felt – felt*);
- Class 3: verbs take the regular *-ed* suffix for the past tense but the *-(e)n* suffix for the past participle (e.g. *show – showed – shown/showed*);
- Class 4: verbs have no suffix for the past tense but take the suffix *-(e)n* for the past participle, with a change in the base vowel for one or both (e.g. *give – gave – given*; *know – knew – known*);

- Class 5: verbs have the past tense and past participle forms marked only by a change in the base vowel (e.g. *begin – began – begun*);
- Class 6: verbs have the past tense and past participle identical to the base form (e.g. *cut – cut – cut*);
- Class 7: verbs have one or more completely unmatched forms (e.g. *go – went – gone*).

II. Lexical meaning

a) Full/main/lexical/ordinary verbs have full lexical meanings and can function as predicate on their own (e.g. *She **works/is working/has worked** in the garden*);

b) Auxiliary verbs have no independent meaning of their own and need to be followed by full/ main/ lexical/ ordinary verbs.
There are two categories of auxiliary verbs:

- *primary auxiliary verbs* (*be, do, have*) which can also be used as main/ lexical verbs; when used as auxiliaries before infinitives, present and past participles, they carry the grammatical categories of tense, aspect, and voice; as auxiliaries they form the interrogative and negative forms of main/ lexical verbs;

The auxiliary *be* is used for the progressive aspect and the passive voice, the auxiliary *do* occurs in interrogative, negative

and emphatic structures, and the auxiliary *have* is used for the perfect aspect.

E.g.
*She **is** doing her homework.* (auxiliary verb)
*I've **been** invited to their wedding.* (auxiliary verb)
*This dress **is** beautiful.* (lexical verb – copula verb –)
*He has **been** to London twice.* (lexical verb = 'has visited')
*Why don't you **be** more careful?* (lexical verb = 'become')

*What **do** you mean?* (auxiliary verb)
*She **doesn't** care much about her appearance.* (auxiliary verb)
*I **do** love you!* (auxiliary verb – emphasis –)
*What are you **doing** tomorrow?* (lexical verb)
*You can **do** whatever you want.* (lexical verb)
*I haven't **done** my homework yet.* (lexical verb)

***Have** you thought about it?* (auxiliary verb)
*Can I **have** a cup of coffee, please?* (lexical verb)
*My friend **has** a cat and two dogs.* (lexical verb)

   Have as a lexical verb can be used without the auxiliary *do* in questions and negatives, in British English (BE).

E.g.
***Do** you **have** any money left?*
***Have** you any money left?* (BE)