

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01263-9 - Morphosyntactic Change: A Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes

Bettelou Los, Corrien Blom, Geert Booij, Marion Elenbaas and Ans Van Kemenade

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1 *Separable complex verbs*

1.1 Introduction

In this monograph, we present a comparative and historical analysis of particle verbs in the West Germanic languages, with special focus on Dutch and English. Taking particle verbs as one type of complex predicate, our account is embedded in a broader discussion of such constructions in the Germanic languages and cross-linguistically. Complex predicates in general, and the morphosyntactic and semantic behaviour of West Germanic particle verbs in particular, present a number of intriguing analytical challenges which touch on the relation between morphology and syntax and more generally on the architecture of grammar. These challenges are compounded when we take on board the historical development of Dutch and English particle verbs. We will show that in their older stages, Dutch and English particle verbs were much more similar than they are in the present-day languages. This should be viewed against the backdrop of the fact that Dutch and English were generally more similar in their older stages: Middle Dutch (MD) was a looser variety of SOV language than Present-Day Dutch (PDD), and early English had substantial SOV characteristics. Furthermore, early English, like Dutch, had a form of Verb Second (V2) for all lexical finite verbs. Both these properties are crucial to the word order of SCVs in PDD: verb particles are in clause-final position in main clauses and are stranded there by V2:

- (1)
- a. Jan *belde* zijn moeder *op*.
John phoned his mother up
'John phoned his mother.'
 - b. Gisteren *belde* Jan zijn moeder *op*.
Yesterday phoned John his mother up
'Yesterday, John phoned his mother.'
 - c. Ik wilde dat Jan zijn moeder *opbelde*.
I wanted that John his mother up-phoned
'I wanted John to phone his mother.'

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01263-9 - Morphosyntactic Change: A Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes

Bettelou Los, Corrien Blom, Geert Booij, Marion Elenbaas and Ans Van Kemenade

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 *Separable complex verbs*

We will see that these two properties are very dominant characteristics of particle verbs in Old English (OE) as well. In its further historical development, English diverged from this West Germanic SOV mould, losing SOV word order, which ensured that particles became exclusively postverbal, and losing finite verb movement (V-movement), further circumscribing the word order patterns of particle verbs. Even though the morphosyntax of particle verbs underwent pervasive change in the history of English, more prominently so than in the history of Dutch, the analytical puzzles they present still have important points in common. We turn to these first in the next subsection.

1.1.1 *Separable complex verbs*

The West Germanic languages have the common property of having a class of complex predicates which in the literature on Dutch and German is referred to as Separable Complex Verbs (SCVs), and in the literature on English as the Verb Particle Combination (VPC), among numerous other terms. In these three languages together, the terms refer to combinations of a verb and another word that is traditionally referred to as a preverb. SCVs and VPCs raise a number of analytical issues which are discussed in chapter 2, and which form the backdrop for a comparative study of the history of the construction in Dutch and English.

Let us first consider some of the basic phenomena involved. Preverbs in PDD and Present-Day German (PDG) are quite similar in their behaviour. Most of them derive historically from adpositions and adverbs. In addition, there are some nouns and adjectives that pattern in the same way as preverbs, in the sense that the N-V or A-V combination behaves as an SCV. Preverb–verb sequences in these languages differ from prefixed verbs and verbal compounds in that the preverb is separable from the verb. Dutch and German word order is asymmetric between main clauses and subclauses: main clauses have XvSOV word order (where v stands for the finite verb), and subclauses have SOV word order. This difference in word order has the effect that preverbs can be stranded in clause-final position in the main clause, as a result of V-movement to second constituent position of the verbal part of the separable verb complex. The separability of preverbs in Dutch is illustrated in (2) (Booij 2002a: 205):

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| (2) | <i>main clause</i> | <i>subclause</i> |
| a. | Hans <i>belde</i> zijn moeder <i>op</i> . | ... Hans zijn moeder <i>op-belde</i>
'Hans phoned his mother (up).' |
| b. | De fietser <i>stortte neer</i> . | ... de fietser <i>neer-stortte</i>
'The cyclist hurtled down.' |
| c. | Jan <i>maakte</i> het huis <i>schoon</i> . | ... Jan het huis <i>schoon-maakte</i>
'John made the house clean. / John
cleaned the house.' |

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01263-9 - Morphosyntactic Change: A Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes

Bettelou Los, Corrien Blom, Geert Booij, Marion Elenbaas and Ans Van Kemenade

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction 3

- | | |
|--|--|
| d. Rebecca <i>speelde piano</i> . | ... Rebecca <i>piano-speelde</i>
'Rebecca played the piano.' |
| e. Dit resultaat <i>stelde</i> ons <i>teleur</i> . | ... dit resultaat ons <i>teleur-stelde</i>
'This result made us sad. / This result
disappointed us.' |

In the first example, the word *op* 'up' combining with the verb can also be used as an adposition. In that case, the non-verbal element is also referred to as a particle, and combinations of a particle and a verb form a highly productive class of SCVs. In the second example, the word *neer* 'down' can also be used as an adverb. (2c) and (2d) show that adjectives (like *schoon* 'clean') and nouns (like *piano*) can also occur in SCVs. In the last example, the preverb *teleur-* 'sad' cannot occur as an independent word. SCVs are felt to be word-like units, which is reflected in Dutch orthography where SCVs are written as one word, without internal spacing if the two constituent words are adjacent.

The separability of SCVs is further manifested in a number of other syntactic constructions in Dutch, as exemplified in (3):

- | | |
|-----|---|
| (3) | a. ... dat hij urenlang heeft geprobeerd zijn moeder <i>op te bellen</i>
that he for hours has tried his mother up to call
'... that he tried for hours to reach his mother by phone' |
| | b. ... dat hij zijn moeder gisteravond <i>op-ge-beld</i> heeft
that he his mother last night up-PREF-called has
'... that he called (up) his mother last night' |

In (3a) the particle is separated from the verb by the infinitive marker *te* 'to', and in (3b) by the perfective prefix *ge-*. In derivational morphology, SCVs behave similarly: for instance, the *ge-*-nominalization of *opbellen* is *opgebel* 'calling-up', with the prefix between the particle and the verbal stem.

A number of particles correspond to bound morphemes with an identical phonological form, but these are real prefixes that cannot be separated from the verbal stem. Prefixed verbs carry main stress on the verbal stem, not on the prefix, whereas the corresponding SCVs carry main stress on the non-verbal constituent. This yields minimal pairs like the following:

- | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| (4) | <i>SCV</i> | <i>prefixed verb</i> |
| | dóor-boren 'to go on drilling' | door-bóren 'to perforate' |
| | óm-blazen 'to blow down' | om-blázen 'to blow around' |
| | ónder-gaan 'to go down' | onder-gáan 'to undergo' |
| | óver-komen 'to come over' | over-kómen 'to happen to' |
| | vóor-komen 'to occur' | voor-kómen 'to prevent' |

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01263-9 - Morphosyntactic Change: A Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes

Bettelou Los, Corrien Blom, Geert Booij, Marion Elenbaas and Ans Van Kemenade

Excerpt

[More information](#)4 *Separable complex verbs*

Similar facts can be cited for German (Lüdeling 2001; Zeller 2001a, 2003): German preverbs can be stranded and they can be separated from the verb by the infinitive marker *zu* ‘to’ and by the participial prefix *ge-*.

Like VPCs in English (cf. Brinton 1988; Brinton and Akimoto 1999), the meaning of the preverb–verb combination (PV-V) in Dutch and German is often not fully predictable, and this implies that these combinations are lexical units of some sort. Typically, the preverbs contribute to the aspectual properties of the PV-V, in particular lexical aspect (Aktionsart) such as telicity or duration, and thus they may also affect the syntactic valency of the verb. For instance, the Dutch verb *lopen* ‘to walk’ is intransitive, whereas the SCV *aflopen* ‘to tramp’ can be used as a transitive verb, as in the VP *de straten aflopen* ‘to tramp the streets’. In this respect, preverbs are quite similar to verbal prefixes that also influence the aspectual and syntactic properties of a verb.

A second domain in which the unitary character of the PV-V combination manifests itself, is that of word formation: PV-Vs can feed word formation, both compounding and derivation, as illustrated by the following examples from Dutch with SCVs in the left column (from Booij 2002a: 209):

- (5)
- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| a. | <i>deverbal suffixation</i> | |
| | aan-bied ‘offer’ | aan-bied-er ‘offerer’, aanbied-ing ‘offer’ |
| b. | <i>deverbal prefixation</i> | |
| | in-voer ‘introduce’ | her-in-voer ‘to reintroduce’ |
| | uit-geef ‘publish’ | her-uit-geef ‘to republish’ |
| c. | <i>compounding with verbal left constituent</i> | |
| | door-kies ‘dial through’ | door-kies-nummer ‘direct number’ |
| | door-kijk ‘see through’ | door-kijk-bloes ‘lit. see-through blouse, transparent blouse’ |

These PV-V sequences pose a challenge for our view of the relation between syntax and morphology. On the one hand, PV and V do not form a syntactic atom, as is clear from their separability in various syntactic contexts. Yet, their behaviour is similar to that of complex, morphologically derived verbs in the sense that they form lexical units of some sort, expressing aspectual notions and having derivational effects such as affecting the valency of the verb. They thus raise some intriguing questions with respect to the question of how to model the relation between syntax and morphology.

Let us now turn to the English VPC. Unlike in Dutch and German, where particles are always preverbal when adjacent to the verb, English particles always follow the verb. Also, particles in English can be famously separated from the verb, yielding the particle alternation as in (6):

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01263-9 - Morphosyntactic Change: A Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes

Bettelou Los, Corrien Blom, Geert Booij, Marion Elenbaas and Ans Van Kemenade

Excerpt

[More information](#)

- (6) a. Suzanne *looked up* the information.
 b. Suzanne *looked* the information *up*.

However, the conditions on separability of verb and particle in English are very different from those in Dutch and German: separability in English is not triggered by productive (morpho)syntactic processes such as V-movement, infinitive marking and perfect prefixation. Rather, the English particle alternation offers two word order options, and the choice between them does not seem to be dictated by any syntactic considerations. In fact, we will argue in chapter 5 that this choice is dictated by considerations of information structure (cf. Dehé 2002).

The behaviour of the English VPC is similar to that of Dutch and German SCVs in that it offers similar paradoxes: verb and particle form a semantic, and hence a lexical unit, and yet they do not qualify as words since they are not syntactic atoms, as shown by (6). But even though the VPC in English is not a syntactic atom, it may be input to derivational morphology, like its Dutch and German sisters. In this context, it is interesting to note that in English the postverbal position of the particle is maintained in derivation, which gives rise to a violation of the Right-hand Head Rule (RHR, see Williams 1981). The examples in (7) illustrate this:

- (7) a. a fallout, a break-up, a kick-off, a break-in
 b. a pull-down menu, a dial-up connection

This paradox between syntactic separability and lexical unity echoes that discussed above for Dutch and German, even though there are important differences between the actual realization of the VPC within the morphosyntactic make-up of English on the one hand and Dutch and German on the other hand: English has rigid SVO as the unmarked word order, whereas Dutch and German are SOV languages with V-movement in root clauses.

The behaviour of SCVs in the West Germanic languages raises some major research questions which will be addressed in this monograph. The first of these questions concerns the synchronic status of VPCs: how can their syntactic, semantic and morphological properties be given a satisfactory account? The paradox between lexical and semantic unity and word-like behaviour on the one hand, and syntactic separability on the other hand (suggesting phrasal status), shows that SCVs/VPCs straddle the boundary between syntax and morphology. Even though the surface reflexes of this differ between English and Dutch and German, the larger question is identical. This suggests that the source of this paradox should be in the nature of the particle rather than its precise morphosyntactic context. We will address this in detail in chapter 2.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01263-9 - Morphosyntactic Change: A Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes

Bettelou Los, Corrien Blom, Geert Booij, Marion Elenbaas and Ans Van Kemenade

Excerpt

[More information](#)6 *Separable complex verbs*

A second question concerns the divergent behaviour of English on the one hand, and Dutch and German on the other hand. Where particles in Dutch and German are always preverbal unless stranded in clause-final position by V2, particles in English are always postverbal, and their separability from the verb is not caused by any productive syntactic processes. Both English and Dutch (and German) developed from historical stages that were substantially SOV with some form of V2. While in Dutch, SOV word order has become stricter since medieval times and V2 is still thriving, English has lost SOV word order as well as V-movement. In spite of these far-reaching developments, the fundamental properties of particles still pose the same challenges, as noted above.

A further striking difference between English and Dutch/German that has been only barely touched on so far is that Dutch and German have a class of inseparable prefixes which show considerable overlap in function and meaning with PV-V combinations. This class of inseparable prefixes existed in early English as well, but is obsolete, apart from a few lexicalized relics. Some examples from Dutch and German are given here:

(8)	<i>prefix</i>	<i>particle</i>	
a.	PDG ver-átmen	PDD úit-blazen	‘to take a breather’
b.	PDD ver-jágen	PDD wég-jagen	‘to chase off’
c.	PDD ver-bánnen	PDD úit-bannen	‘to ban’
d.	PDD be-lópen	PDD áf-lopen	‘to walk down’
e.	PDD vol-hárden	PDD vól-houden	‘to persist, persevere’
f.	PDG er-wáxsen	PDG áus-wachsen	‘to grow up’
g.	PDD ont-kíemen	PDG áus-/áuf-keimen	‘to germinate’

The examples in each case give the bound prefix first, followed by a synonymous or near-synonymous particle variant. Interestingly, this functional overlap also includes identical effects on the valency of the verb, and Aktionsart effects. For example, in (8d), attaching a prefix or a particle to an intransitive verbal base *lopen* ‘walk’ yields a transitive verb in both cases: *het oppervlak belopen* ‘walk the surface’; *de straat aflopen* ‘walk down the street’. The fact of this large functional overlap between verbs with separable and inseparable prefixes raises a further set of interesting research questions: What does the nature of this functional overlap between inseparable and separable prefixes tell us about the status of both elements? Are inseparable and separable prefixes historically related, and if so, do inseparable prefixes represent a particle that has been further grammaticalized to a bound morpheme? And why were inseparable prefixes quite comprehensively lost in the history of English?

These descriptive and analytical questions also bear on a more general theoretical question: How can the architecture of the grammar be conceived of

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01263-9 - Morphosyntactic Change: A Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes

Bettelou Los, Corrien Blom, Geert Booij, Marion Elenbaas and Ans Van Kemenade

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Preverbs, a pervasive phenomenon* 7

in such a way that we can do justice to the complex array of facts concerning particle verbs and prefixed verbs as discussed in the chapters of this book?

1.2 Preverbs, a pervasive phenomenon

The occurrence of preverbs is not restricted to the West Germanic languages, or to the Germanic or Indo-European language family in general. The notion preverb is a traditional descriptive notion in Indo-European linguistics. It refers to morphemes that appear in front of a verb, and which form a close semantic unit with that verb. In many cases the morpheme that functions as a preverb can also function without a preverbal context, often as an adverb or an adposition. Most linguists use the notion preverb as a cover term for preverbal words and preverbal prefixes. The preverb may have the status of an independent word, and in that case it may be separated from the verb, the phenomenon of *tnesis*¹ (Watkins 1964). It may also have developed into a bound morpheme, that is, a prefix that is not separable from the verb, in some cases with a concomitant reduction of its phonological form. If the preverb has become a real prefix, we may use the more specific notion of complex verb, whereas we take the notion complex predicate to refer generally to multi-morphemic expressions with verbal valency. That is, we make a terminological distinction between complex predicates and complex verbs. The latter are multi-morphemic, but behave as single words.

For both complex predicates in general (cf. Spencer 1991; Ackerman and Webelhuth 1998) and complex verbs (cf. Miller 1993) the question has been raised as to how and where in the grammar they should be accounted for. Well-known examples of complex predicates are auxiliary–verb sequences, serial verb constructions, the coverb–verb combinations of Northern Australian languages (Schultze-Berndt 2003), similar light verb constructions in other languages, and verb raising constructions in the Germanic languages. These different types of complex predicates challenge our views of the architecture of the grammar, and the relation between syntax, morphology and the lexicon.

Complex predicates of the PV-V type occur in most European languages, both the Indo-European languages (Watkins 1963, 1964) and those of the Finno-Ugric family (Ackerman and Webelhuth 1998; Ackerman 2003), and in Georgian and Caucasian languages (Harris 2003). A number of mostly descriptive articles on preverbs in the languages of Europe can be found in Rousseau (1995). In particular, particle verbs in Germanic languages have received a lot of attention in the recent literature (Ackerman and Webelhuth 1998; Lüdeling 2001; McIntyre 2001a, 2002, 2003; Booij 2002a; Dehé and

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01263-9 - Morphosyntactic Change: A Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes

Bettelou Los, Corrien Blom, Geert Booij, Marion Elenbaas and Ans Van Kemenade

Excerpt

[More information](#)8 *Separable complex verbs*

Wanner 2001; Dehé *et al.* 2002; Zeller 2001a, 2001b, 2003; van Kemenade and Los 2003; Müller 2002, 2003, 2006; and the references in these publications). The history of particles and prefixes in Latin and French is discussed in Vincent (1999) and Dufresne *et al.* (2003) respectively.

It is indeed striking that the phenomenon of PV-V combinations is not restricted to the Indo-European languages, which suggests that universal mechanisms of reanalysis and language change are at play in the development of the class of preverbs. We hypothesize that the development of preverbs and prefixes is a case of the universal mechanism of grammaticalization.

For the preverb situation in Indo-European, Kuryłowicz (1964) and Watkins (1964) remain the authoritative sources. In the early stages, preverbs seem to have been independent constituents. Kuryłowicz notes that, since in many of the daughter languages preverbs behave both as preverbs and as prepositions, it is thought that the origin of both preverbs and prepositions is adverbial (see also Baldi 1979). The basis for the divergence in word class in the daughter languages is in the potential for variation between various syntactic modification relations. When a particle appeared with a transitive verb, it was ambiguous between a modifier of the verb (in which case it was interpreted as an adverb) and a modifier of the object (and was interpreted as a preposition/predicate). Beside this, the particle could modify other adverbs and be positioned accordingly. For a list of preverbs with cognates in the various languages, the reader is referred to Beekes (1995). Kuryłowicz (1964) gives a brief discussion of some developments in the early Indo-European languages.

According to Watkins (1964), preverbs could appear in two basic positions in Sanskrit: a sentence-final one left of the verb it modifies, which is called the contact position and is exemplified in (9); and a sentence-initial one where it is not adjacent to the verb, which is illustrated in (10). This latter position of the preverb in which it does not precede the verb directly is called *tnesis*. The examples are from Delbrück (1893–1900):

(9) # . . . P V#
 dasvasam upa gachatam
 worshipper to come
 ‘come to the worshipper’ (Rigveda I, 47, 3)

(10) #P . . . V#
 ati tṛstam vavaksita
 beyond the harmful smoke have-grown
 ‘you have grown beyond the harmful smoke’ (Rigveda III, 9, 3)

Preverb and verb are thought to be a kind of syntactic unit. The argument for this comes from the fact that the preverb is stressed only in main clauses (as

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01263-9 - Morphosyntactic Change: A Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes

Bettelou Los, Corrien Blom, Geert Booij, Marion Elenbaas and Ans Van Kemenade

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Preverbs, a pervasive phenomenon* 9

in (11) where stress is marked by an acute accent), while in subclauses, in the position preceding the verb, stress shifts to the verb, as in (12). The examples are again from Sanskrit (from Delbrück 1893–1900: 647):

- (11) prá gachati
(he) forth goes
'he goes forth'
- (12) yáḥ pra gáchatī
who forth goes
'who goes forth'

This stress shift is thought to be the result of what Watkins calls univertation, resulting in a lexical unit. According to Kuryłowicz (1964), a consequence of this univertation was either the enclitic character of the verb (in Sanskrit and Greek), or the proclitic character of the preverb (Old Irish, Germanic and Balto-Slavic). In the daughter families/languages, the preverb maintains in some cases a status as an independent constituent for quite a long time, while others follow various stages in a classical grammaticalization path from preverb > prefix > ultimate disappearance (see also Pinault 1995). Cases in point are developments in Romance and Germanic respectively (see Dufresne *et al.* 2003; van Kemenade and Los 2003).

Vincent (1999) discusses some interesting cases in Latin from which it is clear that, while in the early Latin prayers preverbs/prepositions must be assumed to have independent constituent status, they become members of compound verb stems, later developing into prefixes. This applies to the following words:

- (13) *sub* 'under'; *trans* 'across'; *in* 'in'; *ab* 'from'; *ob* 'against'; *cum* 'with'; *ex* 'out of'; *pro* 'for'

To contrast the two stages, consider the following examples of Latin preverbs (Vincent 1999: 1118): the grammarian Festus makes two remarks on the language of the early prayers:

- (14) a. *Sub vos placo*, in precibus fere cum dicitur, significat id, quod supplico
'when people say, mostly in prayers, *sub vos placo*, it means the same as *supplico*'
- b. *ob vos sacro*, in quibusdam precationibus est, pro vos obsecro, ut sub vos placo, pro supplico
'*ob vos sacro* in certain prayers stands for *vos obsecro*, just as *sub vos placo* stands for *supplico*'

What seems to be the case here is that the preverb in the early prayers is in tmesis, with the personal pronoun encliticized to it by the so-called Wackernagel

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01263-9 - Morphosyntactic Change: A Comparative Study of Particles and Prefixes

Bettelou Los, Corrien Blom, Geert Booij, Marion Elenbaas and Ans Van Kemenade

Excerpt

[More information](#)10 *Separable complex verbs*

effect, by which pronouns and other light elements are encliticized to the first constituent or the first word in the clause. This indicates that the preverb is an independent constituent in first constituent position. The same preverbs form part of compound verb stems in Classical Latin and later become prefixes, as in:

- (15) *submittere* ‘to put underneath’; *permittere* ‘to let through’; *transmittere* ‘to send across’; *transferre* ‘to carry across’; *perferre* ‘to carry through’; *obligare* ‘to bind’

A similar phenomenon can be observed in Gothic, where the aspectual preverb *ga* occurs in first constituent position with sentence particles encliticized to it (Eythórsson 1995):

- (16) *ga-u-hva-schwi*
ga-WH-anything saw
 ‘whether he saw anything’

The preverb *ga-* is attested in the old West Germanic languages as the past participle prefix *ge-*, which disappeared in English but is still widely used in PDD and PDG. It is cognate with Latin *cum*, and thus clearly a locative or circumstantial item in origin. Phenomena parallel to the preverb–enclitic pronoun/particle . . . V pattern in (14) and (16) have been observed in Hittite and Old Irish (Hopper 1975). These patterns represent instances of preverbs that follow a grammaticalization path as in (17):

- (17) independent preverb > left member of verbal compound > prefix > (zero)

A different type of development is represented by the preverb system that is still very productive in the present-day Germanic languages, in particular in West Germanic mentioned in section 1.1. In the older stages of these languages, there is still a clear differentiation of word class status between adverb and preposition, as observed for Indo-European by Kuryłowicz (1964). For instance, Hiltunen (1983: 20–1) makes a distinction for OE between phrasal adverbs, which do not occur as prepositions and include *adun* ‘down’, *aweg* ‘away’, *forð* ‘forth’, *niðer* ‘down’, *up* ‘up’, *ut* ‘out’, and prepositional adverbs, which can be used as either preposition or adverb and include *beforan* ‘before’, *æfter* ‘after’, *to* ‘to’, *ofer* ‘over’, *ongean* ‘towards’. It is probably fair to say that this differentiation lives on to a certain extent into the present-day language. A similar differentiation is suggested by studies on the early stages of other Germanic languages such as Eythórsson (1995) and Ferraresi (2005) on Gothic. The appropriate term for the preverb–verb combination in these languages is SCV, since this term abstracts from the divergent syntactic development