Systemic Possibilities of Variable Word Order
and Their Realization in Text
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0. As is well known, the grammatical word order of English allows only few changes in the position of sentence elements. Leaving aside different placement of the same element due to syntactic change or to emotive and/or emphatic factors reflected in the fronting of a normally postverbal element, unmarked alternative word order is found with adverbials, whose position is largely mobile, and some verbs complemented by more than one element. Here the grammatical word order offers more than one choice so that other factors may come into play, notably the functional sentence perspective (FSP); it can be supposed that the position of these systemically mobile elements is connected with their function in FSP.

Of the permissible unmarked changes in the linear arrangement of the clause elements, the present paper is concerned with the mutual position of the two components following a transitive phrasal verb, the object and the particle. Obviously, only substantival objects are taken into account, since pronominal objects allow only one position, that before the particle.

The assumption on which the present paper is based is illustrated by (ex 1):

    (1)   a. He turned down an advantageous offer.
                b. He turned the offer down.
                c. He turned it down.

A context independent object is expected to constitute the rheme proper (or a component of the rheme), and hence to be placed after the particle as in (1) a., whereas a contextually bound object, involving the thematic function, is presumed to precede it,[1] as in (1) b. This assumption is strongly supported by the fact that in the case of pronominal objects, which are largely anaphoric, and hence as a rule thematic, the position of the object before the particle is grammaticalized, cf. (1) c. However, rhythm and prosody also play a role here.

In order to test this assumption I have collected altogether 764 sentences containing a phrasal verb with a substantival object, phrasal verbs being defined as verbs taking an adverbial particle (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 1153-1155). When choosing the sources of examples, I resorted to lighter fiction, which was likely to provide a large number of instances: altogether five books were excerpted, see the Sources. To begin with, the 764 examples were considered with respect to whether or not the alternative word order is possible. Obviously only those examples which allow both linear arrangements, particle + object or object + particle, could be taken as the relevant material on which to study the relation between the position of the respective element and its FSP function. On this basis, several groups could be distinguished.

1. The first group is constituted by what may be called collocations, i.e. more or less fixed phrases, which are hardly conceivable with the alternative word order (43 instances), cf. ex (2):

(2) a. the guests had not yet put in an appearance for the meal

    b.*the guests had not yet put an/the appearance in ...

Put in an/no appearance occurred in 4 instances, the most frequent collocation being *make up one•s mind* (with 17 occurrences), cf. ex (3):

(3) What do you plan to do now? - I can•t make up my mind.

The other collocations found in my material were *get/have the wind up* (6 occurrences), *get someone•s back up* (2), *put on an act* (2), *put on weight* (2), *bite someone•s head off* (2), the rest displaying only one occurrence: *fill in the time, plague someone•s life out, bother someone•s life out, eat one•s heart out, take up the thread, hand out a raspberry, stick in one•s toe.*

The obtained sample of collocations displays both patterns, object + particle, as well as particle + object, on the whole in accordance with the assumption that the two elements will be ordered according to their function in FSP: whichever element comes last completes the meaning, and is hence more dynamic than that which immediately follows the verb: *make up one•s mind, put in an appearance, put on an act, put on weight, hand out a raspberry, take up the thread, fill in the time, stick in one•s toe* x *get/have the wind up, get someone•s back up, bite someone•s head off, plague someone•s life out, bother someone•s life out, eat one•s heart out.*

2. Another, more numerous group of examples hardly conceivable with the alternative word order involves instances in which the object is postmodified. Postmodified objects as a rule constitute the rheme, which is in accordance with the principle of end weight (cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 1361-1362): weighty elements usually carry more information than light ones. Postmodification of the object, especially where realized by a clause, nonfinite verb form or an expanded prepositional phrases, blocks the position of the particle after the object, insofar as the distance between the particle and the verb, whose constitutive semantic component the particle implements, would be too great. The pattern found with postmodified objects is overwhelmingly that of particle - object - postmodification, i.e. a linear arrangement in agreement with a gradual rise in communicative dynamism. Cf. exx (4)-(6).

(4) You•ve thrown out a few hints that he was up to no good,..

(5) The staff has not yet cleared away the refreshments   intended for the party ...

(6) a taxi ... set down a middle-aged gentleman of lean   proportions and expensive tailoring, who said placidly:

As postmodifying prepositional phrases sometimes border on adverbials, in some instances the prepositional phrase remains indeterminate in this respect. Cf. ex (7).

(7) ... took up a stance by the table.

    i. what stance?

    ii. a stance where?

The same ambiguity is sometimes found with postmodifying infinitives, cf. ex (8).

(8) I couldn•t bring forward anything to prove I hadn•t done it

    i. in order to prove

    ii. that could prove

There were altogether 151 instances with postmodified objects, all of which displayed

Libuše Dušková

the order particle + object + postmodification except five. In two of these cases the particle occurs after the object before the postmodification, which is hence discontinuous, cf. ex (9).

(9) Warrenby liked to find things out about people

Here the ordering is presumably due to the low information load of the noun *things* used as a general substitute for more specific meanings. Expectedly, where it occurs with other verbs, it is also found in this pattern, cf. (10)

(10) a. He is coming up to see me - to talk things over a bit.
     b. We want to clear things up.
     c. I haven•t thought things out yet.

In two instances the particle follows after the postmodification, as in ex (11). Here the postmodifying structure is neither weighty, nor semantically very informative. The remaining example contains multiple postmodification of the object with the particle placed between the postmodifying structures (see ex (12)):

(11) Nothing puts the right kind of man off more quickly than a girl who takes too much to drink.

(12) He would be able to put any sort of pressure on that he liked.

In all instances where the particle follows the object, whether before or after the postmodification, this position assigns it a higher degree of communicative dynamism than that carried by the object, even though the latter may itself be a component of the rheme, as in (11) and (12).

In general, the picture presented by postmodified objects supports the assumption of the role of FSP in the ordering of the elements under study. The syntactic structure, notably the principle of end weight, and the information structure here coincide.

3. The next group includes instances in which the object is followed by an adverbial prepositional phrase, or a prepositional phrase realizing an optional actant independent of verbal valency. This configuration was registered in 176 instances, out of which 120 (68.2%) displayed the pattern object + particle + prepositional phrase, and 56 (31.8%) particle + object + prepositional phrase. These quantitative data clearly favour the position of the particle after the object, thus suggesting some connection between this position and the following prepositional phrase.

This is indeed the case where the particle *out* is followed by an *of*-phrase, the two elements, *out* and *of* constituting a compound preposition, whose first component cannot be distanced. Nevertheless, the particle is also a constitutive element of the semantic and formal make-up of the verb. Compare exx (13).

(13) a. He would be likely to weep his eyes out of his head
     b. She wrenched her slim body out of the chair.

This use of the particle *out* as a component of both the verb and the compound preposition *out of* was registered in 24 instances (out of 120, i.e. 20%).

A close connection between the particle and the prepositional phrase was also observed in other cases where the prepositional phrase operates as a locative adverbial. Common combinations appeared to be *down on, down to, up to, back from, back in, back to, away from,* and others, cf. exx (14)-(16).

(14) a. He put his hat down on the table under the gilded mirror.

     b. Presently Marjorie took the tray down to the kitchen.

(15) I went to fetch the cocktail tray up to the drawing-room

(16) a. Then he swept his hostess back to the studio.

     b. He put the receiver back in its cradle.

Within the group of examples with the order object + particle + prepositional phrase (120 instances), locative adjuncts account for 79 cases, i.e. 65.8% of the entire group. Although the combinations of particles and prepositions illustrated in (14) - (16) do not constitute compound prepositions, the position of the particle before the object is more or less unlikely. One of the reasons for the unlikelihood of this position is again the close semantic connection between the particle and the preposition: the two elements together specify the particular locative meaning. Expectedly, another reason is found in the FSP structure of all these examples: although the object is a component of the rheme, it is followed by further specification, implemented by the locative adverbial, which operates as the rheme proper, including the particle and the preposition as relevant components of the locative meaning.

The following example (17) illustrates an instance of a locative adverbial independent of the semantic structure of the verb. Significantly, here the particle can be placed before the object, with the resulting change in the FSP structure, the object thus acquiring the function of the rheme proper.

(17) a. I have to pick my wife up on the way.

     b. I have to pick up my wife on the way.

What has been said largely applies to the examples constituting the smaller group of nonlocative prepositional phrases in the pattern object + particle + prepositional phrase (41, 34.2%) with the exception of adverbials with the semantic roles of goal (9 instances) and attendant circumstances (6). Both these roles are frequently realized by personal nouns or pronouns, and show affinity with locative adjuncts in that the alternative position of the particle is again unlikely (cf. exx (18) and (19). On the other hand, adjuncts with other semantic roles allow it freely: temporal (8 instances, cf. ex (20)), manner (5, ex 21)), means (3, ex 22)), instrument (2, ex 23)) and others.

(18) I sent my resignation in to Dr. Scott.

     *?I sent in my resignation to Dr. Scott.

(19) I brought the parts back with me.

     ?I brought back the parts with me

(20) I beg you will take that brooch off at once.

     I beg you will take off that brooch at once.

(21) she had switched the current off in disgust

     she had switched off the current in disgust

(22) Don•t pick that topee-case up by the handle.

     Don•t pick up that topee-case by the handle.

(23) They cut them bits off with a hacksaw.

     They cut off them bits with a hacksaw.

Although in exx (20)-(23) the particle can be placed before the object, this position

is less likely insofar as the object is contextually bound, which is shown by the determiners, and hence less dynamic than the particle. As they are, i.e. with the particle after the object, they support the assumption made in ex (1).

Proceeding now to the smaller group of examples with the word order particle + object + prepositional phrase (56 instances) we find prepositional phrases with similar syntactic functions and semantic roles as in the previous group: adjuncts of place (20), time (5), means (4), manner (5), attendant circumstances (3), purpose (5), goal (2), source (2), reason (2); beneficiary and recipient (6), apposition (1). Although both positions of the particle are theoretically possible, the placement of the particle after the object mostly appears to be blocked by two factors: besides a change in the FSP, we observe an opposite tendency as compared with the previous group: there, certain particles and prepositions tended to combine to specify a locative meaning, here other particles and prepositions, or other combinations thereof tend to be distanced. This is most noticeable in the case of the particle *up* and prepositional phrases introduced by *from* (5 instances; compare, on the other hand, the frequent occurrence of *back from)*:

(24) He picked up their fishing things from the bank.
?He picked their fishing things up from the bank.

Here the particle appears to be closely connected with the verb, with its lexical directional meaning somewhat weakened, as against the position after the verb, where the directional meaning retains its full force, which does not fit in the particular context. Other instances of avoiding the adjacency of a particle and preposition by the placement of the particle before the object display *down in,* and *up to,* cf. exx (25) and (26).

(25) jotting down another note in his notebook
?jotting another note down in his notebook
(26) She put up a hand to her brow, pressing it.
?She put a hand up to her brow, pressing it.

This tendency is not confined to objects followed by locative adverbials. It is also found with prepositional phrases in other functions and semantic roles, cf. exx (27) and (28).

(27) reaching out his hand for the beer-jug
?reaching his hand out for the beer-jug
(28) to check up his position by a sight of the ground
*?to check his position up by a sight of the ground

In these instances it is not so much the avoidance of the combined meaning of the two elements as the undesirable prominence of the particle, if placed after the object, which falls within the sphere of FSP. This is the main factor in a number of other instances, compare exx (29) and (30):

(29) We shall be turning off the main lights in a minute.
We shall be turning the main lights off in a minute.
(30) I take off my hat to you.
I take my hat off to you.

The types discussed so far appear to offer little ground for the object and the particle to exchange their position: fixed phrases block the exchange altogether, and so

do as a rule objects with postmodification. In clauses with final adverbials or valency-independent participants realized by prepositional phrases the mutual position of the object and the particle is to a large extent influenced by the semantic relations between the particle and the prepositional phrase, especially where the prepositional phrase is locative, which appears to be the most frequent semantic role in this configuration. Nevertheless, the FSP also plays a role insofar as whatever the word order arrangement, it agrees with the gradual increase in communicative dynamism, the final position being occupied by the most dynamic element.

4. The role of FSP as a factor in the placement of the object and the particle is best revealed by the last group of examples, which display the two elements in clause-final position. In general, the pattern Vb - particle - object was found to be about twice as frequent as the pattern Vb - object - particle, namely 266 (67.5%) as against 128 (32.5%) instances, respectively.

Let us start with the larger group Vb - particle - object (266 instances, 67.5%). According to the assumption made in ex (1), the object should be context-independent, hence rhematic, and since it is placed in the final position, it should constitute the rheme proper. Objects whose context independence is indicated by overt grammatical means, the type of determiner, account for about 17% (45 out of 266: 16.9%), cf. ex (31):

   (31) a. ... replied Jim, pulling forward a chair

      b. You•re lazy, that•s all that•s wrong with you. Why don•t take up social work?

      c. They can•t throw off unhealthy influences like we can

A somewhat larger number of objects (57, 21.4%), though context independent, lack an overt indicator of their context independence insofar as they denote unique objects or persons, with no determiner in the case of proper names, and a possessive or the definite article with common nouns. Cf. ex (32):

   (32) a. Why don•t you ring up Betty?

      b. I had to stop at Cliff House to pick up my racket

      c. she never entered her bedroom without turning on the radio

A third group of objects may be regarded as derivable from the situation on the ground of constituting an integral component thereof. However, unless they are explicitly mentioned in the immediately preceding context, they behave as new elements. Since contextual boundness (derivability from the situation) is a matter of degree (opinions often differ in particular instances), the quantitative data for this group are to be regarded as an approximate estimate rather than an exact figure (about 50 examples, i.e. 18.7%). Cf. exx (33).

   (33) a. She came back with his coffee and sandwiches. Later she came back and took away the tray.

      b. He stood smoking for several minutes, then he stubbed out the cigarette and walked upstairs to his wife•s room.

      c. The telephone rang. Grant picked up the receiver. Contextual boundness, whether due to previous mention or derivability from the preceding context, may be counteracted by the presence in the context of a contrasting element (some 20 examples, 7.5%). Cf. exx (34).

(34) a. She raced down the passage to his room, and found to her surprise that is was illuminated only by the moonlight. Switching on the light, ...

b. Setting aside your own future, you ought to consider Mother, and your father a bit.

The most interesting group of the pattern Vb - particle - object includes objects which overtly display contextual boundness in having been mentioned before as well as in being accompanied by anaphoric devices. Some of these objects are thematic, but others appear to operate as the rheme in spite of the absence of a contrasting context. This group accounts for some 30-40 examples (the margin allows for doubtful instances).

Since all objects in this group are overtly context dependent, the position of the intonation centre (IC; intonation nucleus, cf. Quirk et al. 1985: 1356), which signals the rheme, is indicated by capital letters. In all preceding examples the IC automatically falls on whichever element (object or particle) is placed last.

About two-thirds of the objects (i.e. some 25 examples) appear to be thematic, despite their position after the particle, cf. exx (35):

(35) a. Look, I thought you•d shaken OFF that habit.

b. „I looked in the atlas, but the map•s just plain white paper north of Ivanhoe." She pulled OUT the atlas and they studied it together.

c. If only he could clear UP this thing before he was swamped by the demanding life that was waiting for him on Monday.

d. There seemed, however, no immediate prospect of being able to follow UP this advice.

Theoretically, we might postulate the position of the particle after the object, which is indeed possible, cf. (35) b.• and c•.

(35) b.• She pulled the atlas out and ...

c.• If only he could clear this thing up before ...

In (35) a. and d. the placement of the particle after the object is not likely. Presumably two factors play a role here: as an integral component of both the semantic and the formal make-up of the verb the particle tends to be juxtaposed to the verb. The second factor is the tolerance of English as regards thematic elements in postverbal position, which is connected with the primary grammatical function of English word order.[2] Since the particle and the verb tend to form one unit and the postverbal position of thematic elements is a systemic feature, the order particle - thematic object falls within the general picture.

The smaller group of examples (about 10) display an overtly context dependent object as the rheme. Here the position of the particle and the object agrees with their respective degrees of communicative dynamism (CD), but calls for an explanation of the fact why a context dependent element complementing a context independent verb is the rheme in the absence of a contrast. Instances of this kind suggest three factors which presumably come into play. The anaphoric object, though presented as known, is distanced from its antecedent, as in ex (36):

(36) he•s carried on, doing everything he can, like starting up THAT GRAVel pit

The notion of the gravel pit is not sufficiently activated because it has not been

mentioned in the last few pages.

Where the distance between the antecedent and the anaphoric object is quite short, a potential factor is found in an additional feature provided by the modification of the object, which may but need not necessarily convey new information, cf. exx (37) a. and b.

(37) a. [... setting a neat package down on the desk. „I•ll be off," Cathercot said,] picking up his TREASured PACKage

b. [... responded Cynthia, casting off her hat. ... She wrenched her slim body out of the chair] and picked up the disCARDed HAT. A third factor is found in emotive highlighting of an element presented as known, cf. ex (38).

(38) I never shall see why people like you and Trixie have to put on that HOLY, HOLY, HOLY, exPRESSion [when anyone so much as mentions Russia].

The last group of examples including clauses with objects followed by the particle is less numerous than clauses with objects placed after the particle, the ratio being approximately 1:2 (128 : 266 [31.8% : 68.2]%). In this group the FSP structure is unequivocally in agreement with the linear arrangement, the object being invariably less dynamic than the particle, which constitutes the rheme proper and carries the IC. Overtly context dependent objects (33 instances, 25.8%, exx (39)), other context dependent objects (22 instances, 17.2%, exx (40)), and semantically weak objects (*things, something* 14 instances, 10.9%, exx (1O) and (41)) account for over a half of all examples of this group (53.9%).

(39) a. „Perhaps I had better explain it to you." Jim heard the explation out, merely interrupting once or twice to put a question.

b. There was a small rug on the bare boards of the front room ... She took this rug up and fetched a bucket of hot water.

(40) a. [Now you can see what happens if you was to lose the split pin] ... Someone took the split pin out.

b. [I don•t believe that kid•s got any right to take Kane•s boat out]. He is not precisely in the habit of taking speed-boats out, is he?

(41) a. We can•t hide things up.

b. Wait - you•d better put something on.

On the contrary, context independet objects are few (some 8 examples, 6.25%), cf. exx (42).

(42) a. remind him that he is holding everyone up

b. It•s time you took some time off to attend to your own affairs.

c. Let me just slip a few pins in, and you•ll be surprised.

The most interesting examples are objects realized by proper names or determined by possessives, which are frequent in both patterns: Vb - object - particle and Vb - particle - object, since here it is the linear arrangement, reflecting contextual boundness or nonboundness, that unequivocally indicates the rheme proper, which is the element placed last, whichever it may be, cf. exx (43) and (44).

(43) a. If you•re too tired I•ll ring Nest up, and ask her ...

b. I told her how to get to my flat and that I would ring up Shirley

(44) a.i. Timothy drew his knees up and hugged them.

    ii. First I must take my hat off, and have a wash

  b. i. Paul Mansell put up his eyebrows

    ii. he didn•t hurry over putting on his coat

In the case of elements derivable from the situation, especially body parts and personal belongings, there appears to be a possibility of subjective choice as to which element should be made the rheme proper, cf. exx i. in (44) a. and b., and exx ii. in (44) a. and b. Compare also ex (45).

(45) a. Shortly before one o•clock Sir Adrian, whose habit it was to read far into the night, laid down his book, and ...

    b. ... laid his book down, and ...

Similarly in the situation of telephoning and turning on/off the light we find both patterns, but the Vb - particle - object predominates, cf. exx (46) and (47).

(46) a. [I talked to Prendergast for a few minutes more,...] ... I put the telephone down, wondering if ...

    b. He put down the receiver and stayed a moment lost in thought.

(47) a. He went to bed, and lay wide awake staring at the ceiling. He put the light out and resorted to his own cure for insomnia

    b. she had stopped reading and turned out her light

Another instance offering choice is illustrated by exx (48) and (49), although here in the a. versions the same FSP structure as in b. may be achieved by placing the IC on the object.

(48) a. he doesn•t give anything aWAY / ANYthing away

    b. They won•t find out ANYthing.

(49) a. You didn•t take anyone IN / ANYone in.

    b. I am not ruling out ANYone yet.

A comprehensive account of the mutual position of the object and the particle should also pay attention to the semantic structure of the entire construction Vb - particle - object from the aspect of the semantic content conveyed by each of the three components, but this exceeds the space allowed for the present paper and must be left for further study. We may conclude that the results of the foregoing discussion on the whole confirm the assumption made at the beginning, viz. that the order of the object and the particle is governed by the amount of CD carried by these two elements. The high degree of agreement between the linear arrangement and gradual increase in CD, however, is largely due to the fact that the FSP structure coincides with the syntactic structure. This has been shown in particular by instances with postmodification. Where the phrasal verb with its object is followed by an adverbial prepositional phrase, the position of the particle is to a considerable extent determined by the semantic relations between the particle and the adverbial, especially the preposition in the prepositional phrase. Even in this group there is agreement between the linear arrangement and the gradual increase in CD. FSP as the primary factor asserts itself where the particle or the object stands in the clause-final position. Where the particle is placed at the end, the object is almost invariably presentend as less dynamic. In the opposite case of final

objects, we find a majority of examples to conform to the gradual increase in CD, the final object constituting the rheme proper. Nevertheless, a small number of instances have a thematic object at the end. Thematic objects are encountered in English in other instances as well, as a consequence of the grammatical principle of word order, which is in the case of phrasal verbs supported by the semantic unity of the particle and the verb. Objects derivable from the situation of utterance mostly behave as context independent, but in some instances the mutual position of the object and the particle appears to be a matter of subjective choice.

Collocations	43	5.6
Object with postmodification	151	19.8%
Particle - object - prepositional phrase	56	7.3%
Object - particle - prepositional phrase	120	15.8%
Verb - particle - object	266	34.8%
Verb - object - particle	128	16.7%
	764	**100.0%**

Particle - object - prepositional phrase	56	31.8%
Object - particle - prepositional phrase	120	68.2%
	176	**100.0%**

Verb - object - particle	128	32.5%
Verb - particle - object	266	67.5%
	394	**100.0%**

Notes

[1] For the concept of functional sentence perspective applied in this paper, see Firbas 1992.

[2] According to another study (Dušková 1999), postverbal thematic elements (objects and adverbials) account for 13.8%.

References

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