A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CONSTRICTIONS ON THE USE OF VERB PHRASE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically analysed the constrictions on the use of verb phrases in English language. In any sentence, the verb phrase is the portion that contains the verb and words that modify it, but not the subject of the sentence. Verb phrases might include only one word—the verb itself—or they might include several. The study concluded that students who understand what verb phrases are can speak, read, and write in more complex and nuanced ways. Verb phrases are common in the English language, and their word order is key to ensuring a sentence is grammatically correct. Finally, phrasal verbs are verb phrases (they contain more than one word and represent a single action), but not all verb phrases are phrasal verbs. One of the recommendations made in the study was that academic instructors and lecturers can help students understand verb phrases by offering visual activities, like art and images, to associate with ideas or organize their thoughts and concepts graphically.

KEYWORDS: Verb Phrase, Constrictions, English Language

Introduction

Verb phrases in the English language play an important role in communication. The English language develops with the changing times using verb phrases. Verb Phrases (abbreviated as VP) are constituents built around a verb head. They typically include the verb, the direct object, indirect object, and other verbal modifiers (such as adverbs). In the English language, the verb phrase is the locus of a wealth of information about the events, states, processes, etc. that a clause or sentence denotes (Lund University, 2021). The more the English language is used, the faster its development. According to Ekasani, Artawa, Putra Yadnya, and Mas Indrawati (2018), the verb phrase in the English language is divided into two types: simple verb phrases and

complex verb phrases. The simple verb phrase consists of only one verb element, whereas the complex verb phrase consists of a core verb with all the complementary elements, such as auxiliary, complement, and modifier, consisting of adjective phrases (AdjP), noun phrases (NPs), and adverbial phrases (AdvP), such as the following pattern: VP → V (AdjP) (NP) (AdvP) (Quirk, 2005). The complexity of the structure of the verb phrase in question is a complex verb phrase where the verb phrase consists not only of a single head verb but may comprise a verb (V) element along with all the complementary elements, such as auxiliary, complement, and modifier, consisting of an adjective phrase (AdjP), noun phrase (NP), and adverbial phrase (AdvP). The use of verb phrases in procedural texts such as recipes is very common, and verb phrases are more likely to dominate their use in the way they are made.

Concept of English Language

The English language is an Indo-European language in the West Germanic language group. According to Wardhaugh (2010) and Crystal (2003), the English language was originally spoken by the inhabitants of early medieval England. English has developed over the course of more than 1,400 years. The earliest forms of English, a group of West Germanic (Ingvaeonic) dialects brought to Great Britain by Anglo-Saxon settlers in the 5th century and further mutated by Norse-speaking Viking settlers starting in the 8th and 9th centuries, are collectively called Old English. Jan and Geoffrey (2006) postulated that while English is genealogically a Germanic language, its vocabulary has been hugely influenced by Old Norman French and Latin, as well as by Old Norse (a North Germanic language). Middle English began in the late 11th century with the Norman conquest of England, this was a period in which English absorbed abundant French and Latin vocabulary through Old French, in particular, its Old Norman dialect (Crystal, 2003). Modern English has been spreading around the world since the 17th century thanks to the worldwide influence of the British Empire and the United States.

Early Modern English, according to the BBC (2020), began in the late 15th century with the introduction of the printing press to London, the printing of the King James Bible, and the beginning of the Great Vowel Shift. Through all types of printed and electronic media in these countries, English has become the leading language of international discourse and the lingua franca in many regions and professional contexts such as science, navigation, and law. König (2015) stressed

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that Modern English grammar is the result of a gradual change from a typical Indo-European dependent-marking pattern with a rich inflectional morphology and relatively free word order to a mostly analytic pattern with little inflection and a fairly fixed subject–verb–object word order.

Concept of Verb

Almost every sentence requires a verb. Verbs are words that show an action (sing), occurrence (develop), or state of being (exist). Verbs can be expressed in different tenses depending on when the action is being performed. In other words, a verb is a word that describes an action, the existence of something, or an occurrence (Idioms 2021). A verb is a word that is characteristically the grammatical centre of a predicate and expresses an act, occurrence, or mode of being that in various languages is inflected for agreement with the subject, for tense, for voice, for mood, or for aspect, and that typically has rather full descriptive meaning and characterising quality, but is sometimes nearly devoid of these, especially when used as an auxiliary or linking verb (Merriam-Webster 2021). Verbs vary by type, and each type is determined by the kinds of words that accompany it and the relationship those words have with the verb itself. Verbs are words that express action or a state of being. There are three types of verbs: action verbs, linking verbs, and helping verbs.

✦ Action Verbs

Action verbs are words that express action (give, eat, walk, etc.) or possession (have, own, etc.). Action verbs can be either transitive or intransitive.

- **Transitive Verbs**

A transitive verb always has a noun that receives the action of the verb, called the direct object.

Example: Laurissa **raises** her hand.

The verb is *raises*. *Her hand* is the object receiving the verb's action. Therefore, *raises* is a transitive verb.

Transitive verbs sometimes have **indirect objects**, which name the object to whom or for whom the action was done.

Example: Abdus **gave** Becky the pencil.

The verb is *gave*. The direct object is *the pencil*. (What did he give? *The pencil*.)

The indirect object is *Becky*. (To whom did he give it? To *Becky*.)

- **Intransitive Verbs**

An intransitive verb never has a direct or indirect object. Although an intransitive verb may be followed by an adverb or adverbial phrase, there is no object to receive its action.

Example: Laurissa **rises** slowly from her seat.

The verb is *rises*. The phrase, *slowly from her seat*, modifies the verb, but no object receives the action.

Transitive or Intransitive?

To determine whether a verb is transitive or intransitive, follow these two steps:

1. Find the verb in the sentence.

E.g 1: | Dustin will lay down his book. | → | What is the action? | → | will lay |

E.g 2: | His book will lie there all day. | → | What is the action? | → | will lie |

2. Ask yourself, "What is receiving the action of the verb?" If there is a noun receiving the action of the verb, then the verb is transitive. If there is no direct object to receive the action, and if the verb does not make sense with a direct object, then it is intransitive.

E.g 1: | Dustin will lay down his book. | → | Dustin will lay down *what?* | → | His book | → | Since the verb can take a direct object, it is transitive. |

E.g 2: | His book will lie there all day. | → | His book will lie *what?* | → | nothing. | → | It does not make sense to "lie something." Since the verb has no direct object, it is intransitive. |

🞣 Linking Verbs

A linking verb connects the subject of a sentence to a noun or adjective that renames or describes the subject. This noun or adjective is called the subject complement.

Example: Jason became **a business major**.

The verb, *became*, links the subject, *Jason*, to its complement, *a business major*.

Lisa is **in love with Jason**.

The verb, *is*, links the subject, *Lisa*, to the subject complement, *in love with Jason* (describing Lisa).

The most common linking verb is the verb to be in all of its forms (am, are, is, was, were, etc.). This verb may also be used as a helping verb (see next section). To become and to seem are always linking verbs.

Other verbs may be linking verbs in some cases and action verbs in others:

to appear	to feel	to look	to remain	to stay	to taste
to	to grow	to prove	to sound	to smell	to turn

Linking: Libby **appeared** happy. (*Appeared* links *Libby* to the subject complement, *happy*.) **Action:** Deon suddenly **appeared**. (Here, *appeared* is an intransitive action verb.)

🞣 Helping Verbs

Helping verbs are used before action or linking verbs to convey additional information regarding aspects of possibility (can, could, etc.) or time (was, did, has, etc.). The main verb with its accompanying helping verb is called a verb phrase.

Examples: Teju **is** (helping verb) **going** (main verb) to Florida.

The trip **might** (helping verb) **be** (main verb) dangerous.

The following words, called **modals**, always function as helping verbs:

can	may	Must	shall	Will
could	might	ought to	should	Would

Examples: Tanya **could learn** to fly helicopters. (*Could* helps the main verb, *learn*.)

Janine **will drive** to Idaho tomorrow. (*Will* helps the main verb, *drive*.)

In addition, the following forms of the verbs *to be*, *to do*, and *to have* sometimes serve as helping verbs. (Note: In other cases, they may serve as action or linking verbs.)

am	be	being	Do	had	have	was
are	been	did	Does	has	is	were

HELPING: Jana **is moving** to a new house.

LINKING: Jana **is** ready to go.

HELPING: Dustin **did eat** his vegetables!

ACTION: Dustin **did** his homework last night.

Concept of Verb Phrase

A verb phrase consists of a verb plus another word that further illustrates the verb tense, action, and tone. The other word or words tied to a verb in a verb phrase are its dependents, which can be adverbs, prepositional phrases, helping verbs, or other modifiers. Together, this group of words defines the intention and timing of the action of the verb. Verb Phrases (abbreviated as VP) are constituents built around a verb head. They typically include the verb, the direct object, indirect object, and other verbal modifiers (such as adverbs). According to MasterClass (2021), in English grammar, common verb phrases consist of a main verb and a helping verb, as in the sentence, "She is going to class." Here, "going" is the main verb, while "is" operates as a helping verb to define the tense of the sentence.

Examples of Verb Phrases

Verb phrases are common in the English language, and their word order is key to ensuring a sentence is grammatically correct:

Example 1:   "He has lived in New York for two years."

This sentence makes use of the present perfect tense, and the word "has" functions as the helping verb to the main verb "lived." According

to MasterClass (2021) in a statement, a helping verb should always precede the main verb. In interrogative sentences, helping verbs may come before and after the subject, as in, "How long has he lived in New York?"

Example 2:   "I might apply to grad school."

The use of "might apply" here exemplifies a modal verb phrase, where words like "might" show possibility (MasterClass, 2021).

Example 3:   "We will go to America to learn English."

Verbs outside of the past or present tense, as in this sentence's use of future tense, require an auxiliary verb like "will" to describe the timing of the action (MasterClass 2021).

Structure of a Verb Phrase

Verbs in the past or present tense do not rely on verb phrases. Simple sentences in the present ("He runs.") or past tense ("They lied.") only need a subject and verb. Sentences in other tenses or that are more dynamic necessitate a verb phrase that features different parts of speech or elements, including:

❖ ***Adverbs***: Adverbs modify verbs and, when paired with them, create a verb phrase. The use of "reads" and "quickly" create a verb phrase in the sentence, "For a second-grader, he reads quickly."

❖ ***Prepositional phrases***: Prepositional phrases can further qualify the action of a verb, as in "The scared couple hiked the trail in the dark and through the snow." In this sentence, two prepositional phrases, "in the dark" and "through the snow," modify the single verb ("hiked") that belongs to the noun phrase ("the scared couple").

❖ ***Helping verbs***: The structure of verb phrases is often dependent on helping verbs, also called linking verbs or auxiliary verbs. These helping verbs take on different forms of "to have" ("She has eaten."), "to be" ("They are waiting."), and "to do" ("She does think flamingos are pretty.").

❖ ***Modal verbs***: Another kind of helping verb, modal verbs dictate conditionality. Words like "ought," "should," and "may" are examples of modal auxiliary verbs, as in the sentence "My grandmother ought to take her medicine."

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Problems with Verbs

Writers sometimes use the incorrect tense or don't know how to use the past participle forms of irregular verbs. Using verb tenses imprecisely or inconsistently can also distract a reader and block communication (CliffsNotes, 2021).

- **Irregular verbs:** Even when you understand the correct uses of verb tenses, you can run into trouble with irregular verbs. Irregular verbs form the past tense and past participle in a variety of ways, not by adding -d or -ed as regular verbs do. Irregular verbs cause errors because people aren't sure about the correct past and past participle forms. Which is it: "I drunk the beer" or "I drank the beer"?

- **Inconsistency in tenses:** Another common error is illogically mixing tenses in a sentence or in a piece of writing. Choose the verb tense you want to use in your sentence or in your essay. Then make sure that all verbs are consistent, either by being in the same tense or by reflecting past and future times in relation to your main tense.

> Roberto **went** into the market, **walks** over to the produce section, and **picks** through the tomatoes. (inconsistent tenses)

In the preceding sentence there is no logical reason to move from the past tense (went) to the present tense (walks, picks). Use the past tense or the present tense—not both. Rewrite the sentence using consistent tenses (CliffsNotes 2021).

> Roberto **went** into the market, **walked** over to the produce section, and **picked** through the tomatoes. (consistent tenses)

- **Faulty *if* clauses:** The past perfect tense should also be used in a subjunctive past tense "*if* clause."

> If she **had thought** of it, she would have called you.

A common error is to use the conditional **would have** or **could have** in both clauses. **Would have** and **could have** should be used *only* in the clause that states the consequences.

If I ***had wanted*** to, I ***would have*** made cookies.   ✓

If I ***would have*** wanted to, I ***would have*** made cookies.   ✗

If we ***had brought*** matches, we ***could have*** made a bonfire.   ✓

If we ***would have*** brought matches, we ***could have*** made a bonfire.   ✗

✚ When to use the perfect tense

Learn to use the perfect tenses when they are appropriate to your meaning. Don't limit yourself to the simple past tense when writing about past action (CliffsNotes 2021). In the following sentences, a perfect tense should have been used to establish a clear time sequence.

> The car wash ***stood*** where the sandwich shop ***was***. **(no)**
> All the things you ***told*** me, I ***heard*** before. **(no)**

In the first sentence, since the sandwich shop was in the location before the car wash—they can't occupy the same space at the same time—past perfect should be used for the second verb.

> The car wash ***stood*** where the sandwich shop ***had been***. **(yes)**

The logic of the second sentence dictates that heard should be in the past perfect tense. The word before is an obvious clue that the hearing took place before the telling, even though both actions were completed in the past.

> All the things you ***told*** me, I ***had heard*** before. **(yes)**

✚ Illogical Time Sequence

Recognize time sequences in your writing and choose verb tenses that logically reflect that sequence. Sometimes the choice of a verb tense affects your meaning.

> Kelsey ***worked*** at the library for a year. **(no)**

As the previous sentence shows, the past tense indicates a completed action. Kelsey no longer works at the library.

> Kelsey ***has worked*** at the library for a year. **(yes)**

Here, the present perfect tense indicates that a past action is continuing in the present. Kelsey is still working at the library.

> Kelsey ***had worked*** at the library for a year.

In this sentence, the past perfect tense indicates that something else happened after Kelsey's year at the library. For example, Kelsey **had worked** at the library for a year when she was asked to take over technology development.

Analysis of Verbs

The verb is the basic word in a sentence. It is the key word that gives meaning to a concept. These verbs will be especially effective when the subject is a character. They are excellent replacements for "be" verbs and are instrumental in the formulation of thesis and theme statements. Careful use of these verbs can result in precise identification and characterization of the verbs as positive, negative, or neutral.

Verbs for Literary Analysis

accentuates	accepts	achieves	adopts	advocates
affects	alleviates	allows	alludes	alters
analyzes	approaches	argues	ascertains	assesses
assumes	attacks	attempts	attributes	avoids
bases	believes	challenges	changes	characterizes
chooses	chronicles	claims	comments	compares
compels	completes	concerns	concludes	condescends
conducts	conforms	confronts	considers	contends
contests	contrasts	contributes	conveys	convinces
defines	defies	demonstrates	depicts	disappoints
discovers	discusses	displays	disputes	disrupts
distinguishes	distorts	downplays	dramatizes	elevates
elicits	emphasizes	encounters	enhances	enriches
enumerates	envisions	evokes	excludes	expands
experiences	explains	expresses	extends	extrapolates
fantasizes	focuses	forces	foreshadows	functions

generalizes	guides	heightens	highlights	hints
holds	honors	identifies	illustrates	illuminates
imagines	impels	implies	includes	indicates
infers	inspires	intends	interprets	interrupts
inundates	justifies	juxtaposes	lambasts	laments
lampoons	lists	maintains	makes	manages
manipulates	minimizes	moralizes	muses	notes
observes	opposes	organizes	overstates	outlines
patronizes	performs	permits	personifies	persuades
ponders	portrays	postulates	prepares	presents
presumes	produces	projects	promotes	proposes
provides	qualifies	questions	rationalizes	reasons
recalls	recites	recollects	records	recounts
reflects	refers	regards	regrets	rejects
represents	results	reveals	ridicules	satirizes
seems	sees	selects	specifies	speculates
states	strives	suggests	summarizes	supplies
supports	suppresses	symbolizes	sympathizes	traces
understands	vacillates	values	verifies	

Verbs to Use Instead of "Exemplifies" or "Shows"

appears	asserts	attests to	certifies	confirms
connotes	corroborates	defines	demonstrates	denotes
depicts	discloses	elucidates	endorses	establishes
evinces	exhibits	expounds	exposes	intimates

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manifests	points to	proves	ratifies	relates
substantiates	suggests	typifies	upholds	validates
illustrates	explains	represents	indicates	displays
explains	delineates	reveals	verifies	

Verbs to Use Instead of "Says"

In an ACCUSING or ARGUMENTATIVE way:

abjures	admonishes	alleges	argues	assumes
baits	belittles	condescends	criticizes	challenges
charges	chides	counters	disagrees	examines
jeers	justifies	objects	scorns	taunts

In an AGREEABLE way

acquiesces	acknowledges	advocates	affirms	agrees
appeases	approves	assents	bargains	campaigns
compliments	concurs	consents	praises	promotes

In a BEGGING way

appeals	cajoles	coaxes	craves	begs
beseeches	besieges	bemoans	entreats	expiates
implores	nags	pleads	repents	urges

In a HAPPY way

cackles	coos	cheers	chirps	chortles
chuckles	giggles	grins	jokes	laughs
lilts	rejoices	sings	squeals	twitters

In a QUIET way

breathes	confides	gasps	intimates	mumbles
murmurs	mutters	whispers		

As an ANSWER

answers	acknowledges	addresses	explains	recalls
rejoins	reminisces	replies	responds	retorts

As a QUESTION

asks	appeals	challenges	cross-examines	demands
enjoins	examines	grills	inquires	interrogates
proposes	propositions	queries	questions	quizzes
requests	requisitions	scrutinizes		

Grammatical Barriers in Verb Phrase

According to Tom (2021), English grammar is a tricky beast. The many overlaps between spellings, word classes, meanings, and functions mean that even the smallest parts of structure can be confusing for teachers and students alike. Here are three common misconceptions about grammar that cause issues, and some ways to clarify them for your teaching and for your students when they come to study them. Verbs in English can be distinguished by the kinds of marking they can take and by what they can co-occur with. English verbs all function inside verb phrases (VPs). A simple VP consists of a lexical verb acting as the main verb of the VP and anywhere from zero to four auxiliary verbs, which are used to mark modality, aspect, and voice. (A compound VP consists of the conjunction of two or more simple VPs.

Verbal Phrases can be finite or non-finite. A finite verb phrases

- marks tense and agreement where appropriate, and
- has a subject which must be in the subject case if it is a pronoun

A non-finite verb phrases

- never marks tense or agreement;

- has a subject which can never be in the subject case if it is a pronoun.

Being one of the most variable forms in English, verbs have taken on a lot of the diversity of this linguistic history, and one commonly studied (and commonly misunderstood) class of verbs is represented by phrasal verbs, not to be confused with verb phrases.

A verb phrase is simply more than one word which represents a verb, for example:

'*looked carefully at*' – in the sentence

'*he looked carefully at the painting to find the artist's signature*'.

Many tenses use auxiliaries and main verbs in their structure, for example:

'*had been looking*' – in the sentence

'*he had been looking for his keys for thirty minutes when he realised they were in his pocket*'.

Many classes of word (adverbs, prepositions, auxiliaries) can go together with verbs to change their meaning slightly, combining to form verb phrases. Phrasal verbs, on the other hand, are a specific type of verb phrase which use a verb and one or two adverbs to change the meaning of the main verb significantly.

Compare the meanings of the verbs '*look*', '*think*' and '*come*', and the meanings of the phrasal verbs '*look into*' (as in 'the inspector looked into the history of the suspect'), '*think through*' and '*come up with*' (as in '*come up with a solution*'. You will feel that the meanings carried by the phrasal verbs are quite different from those of the single verbs.

In summary, remember that all phrasal verbs are verb phrases (they contain more than one word, and represent a single action), but not all verb phrases are phrasal verbs.

Grammatical Barriers in Verb Phrase include the ability to:

♣ Linking prepositions and adverbs in phrasal verbs

Adverbs in phrasal verbs such as '*look into*', '*think through*' and '*come up with*' very often look like prepositions, but are in fact adverbs. This is one reason why phrasal verbs are a challenge to teach and to learn.

Let's take a step back and think about the role of prepositions and adverbs in sentences. Prepositions have a linking function between nouns and verbs Tom (2021). They are always followed by nouns (except when they controversially end sentences), and they usually communicate where or when the verb happens. One function of adverbs, on the other hand, is to modify or describe verbs, usually adding information about how the verb was performed by the subject. Look at the following examples:

a) The inspector looked into the murder

b) The inspector looked into the room

In sentence a), '*into*' is modifying the type of looking that the inspector performed: not the type of looking we do with our eyes, but looking into meaning investigating more closely Tom (2021). In this sentence, '*into*' changes the meaning of '*looking*' in this way; a significant change in meaning. Because '*into*' modifies '*look*', we can show the sentence as being broken down as follows:

"The inspector" – "**looked into**" – "the murder"

In sentence b), the meaning of looking is not changed – the inspector is looking at something with his eyes, so '*into*' describes where he was looking: inside the room through the door or window. This means that the '*into*' in this sentence is a preposition, showing where, not changing the meaning of the verb, so the sentence can be broken down as:

"The inspector" – "**looked**" – "into the room"

Thus, the '***looked into***' in a) is a phrasal verb, whereas the looked+into of b) is a verb and a preposition.

🔸 Splitting phrasal verbs with an object pronoun

Another tricky point about phrasal verbs is their ability to be split by an object pronoun (me / you / him / her / it / them / us). This is another good way to determine whether you are looking at a simple verb phrase or a more complex phrasal verb. Think about the following phrasal verbs:

look up (a word)   think about (an idea)   talk about (some news)

look into (a mystery)   think through (a plan)   talk through (a plan)

All of these are phrasal verbs, which use adverbs to change the meaning of the verb in each case. However, there is a key difference in how they can be structured Tom (2021). In each pair of phrasal verbs, how many ways are there of including the object (in brackets) along with the phrasal verb in a sentence?

Unfortunately, there is no easy fix to help students remember which phrasal verbs can or cannot be split by a direct object, but categorising them by which adverb is used (as in the two '*through*' examples, above, which can both be split as '*think it through*' and '*talk it through*') can offer clues to meaning ('*through*' here meaning '*from beginning to end*') Tom (2021). Similarly, the phrasal verbs using '*about*', above, cannot be split. Finding groups of phrasal verbs which are linked by one of their features, or by a strong context, can help learners to remember them more easily.

Conclusion

Using verb tenses imprecisely or inconsistently can distract a reader and block communication. Writers sometimes use the incorrect tense or don't know how to use the past participle forms of irregular verbs. Verbs vary by type, and each type is determined by the kinds of words that accompany it and the relationship those words have with the verb itself. The study concludes that students who understand what verb phrases are can speak, read, and write in more complex and nuanced ways. Verb phrases are common in the English language, and their word order is key to ensuring a sentence is grammatically correct. Finally, phrasal verbs are verb phrases (they contain more than one word and represent a single action), but not all verb phrases are phrasal verbs.

Recommendations

1.   Academic instructors and lecturers can help students understand verb phrases by offering visual activities, like art and images, to associate with ideas or organize their thoughts and concepts graphically.

2.   Some learners really like to work with their hands and bodies and do their best learning when they are moving or touching things. These activities will help such students understand verb phrases.

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