

Null pronouns in English particle verb constructions

Daniel Milway – University of Toronto

Outline

- Figure retention particle verb constructions in English show evidence of null pronouns.
- These null pronouns are predicted by a small-clause-type analysis of particle verbs.
- The restricted distribution of null pronouns in English gives us an avenue to better understand null pronouns in general.

Background

- Particle Verbs (PVs) are common within Germanic languages.
- English PV Have the form **V P_{rt}** and undergo particle shift.

- (1) Particle Shift
- Declan **turned down** the music.
 - Declan **turned** the music **down**.

- PVs have two competing analyses

- (2) Complex Head VP
- ```
graph TD
 VP[VP] --- V[V]
 VP --- Obj[Obj]
 V --- VPrt[V Prt]
```
- (3) Small Clause VP
- ```
graph TD
    VP[VP] --- V[V]
    VP --- SC[SC]
    V --- VPrt[V Prt]
    SC --- Prt[Prt]
    SC --- Obj[Obj]
```

Ground Promotion and Figure Retention

- GROUND PROMOTION(McIntyre, 2007)/FIGURE RETENTION(Milway, 2013) PVs comprise a small class based on the argument structure alternation they exhibit.

- These PVs are related to Verb + Spatial PP constructions.

- (4) **V + Full PP**
Alex *rinsed* [_{Figure}the dust] *out of* [_{Ground}the pot].
- (5) **Ground Promotion**
Alex *rinsed out* [_{Ground}the pot].
Alex *rinsed* [_{Ground}the pot] *out*.
- (6) **Figure Retention**
Alex *rinsed out* [_{Figure}the dust].
Alex *rinsed* [_{Figure}the dust] *out*.

Null Grounds vs Absent Figures

- (7) Figure retention – Null ground
- Whenever Jim wears his blazer, [he wipes the fingerprints off.]
Interpretation: He wipes the fingerprints off **his blazer**.
 - Whenever Karen uses the carafe, [she rinses the oatmeal out.]
Interpretation: She rinses the oatmeal out of **the carafe**.
- (8) Ground promotion – Absent figure
- Whenever Sheila sees fingerprints, [she brushes her blazer off.]
Interpretation: She brushes something off her blazer.
Not:She brushes **fingerprints** off her blazer.
 - Whenever Tom finds oatmeal, [he rinses the coffee pot out]
Interpretation:He rinses something out of the coffee pot.
Not: He rinses **oatmeal** out of the coffee pot.

- Compare this to the interpretation of pronouns.

- (9) Pronoun object – Corefers with antecedent
- Whenever Ellie sees a chair, she fights it.
Interpretation: She fights the chair.
 - Whenever Oliver sees a plant, he eats it.
Interpretation: He eats the plant.
- (10) No Object – Stereotypical reading
- Whenever Ellie sees a chair, she fights.
Interpretation: She fights
Not: *She fights the chair.
 - Whenever Oliver sees a plant, he eats.
Interpretation: He eats (something)
Not: *He eats the plant.

- Null grounds can also be *donkey*-anaphors

- (11) Every butler holding a glass is wiping off the fingerprints.

- The null ground is predicted by a small clause analysis. (modified from Svenonius, 2003)

- (12) a. **Ground Promotion**
- ```
graph TD
 VP[VP] --- V[V]
 VP --- PP[PP]
 V --- wipe[wipe]
 PP --- P[P]
 PP --- DP[DP]
 P --- off[off]
 DP --- her[her]
 DP --- blazer[blazer]
```
- b. **Figure Retention**
- ```
graph TD
    VP[VP] --- V[V]
    VP --- pP[pP]
    V --- wipe[wipe]
    pP --- DP[DP]
    pP --- p[P]
    pP --- PP[PP]
    DP --- fingerprints[fingerprints]
    p --- off[off]
    PP --- ec[ec]
```

Why Null Grounds?

- The structure assumed here and shown in (12-b) predicts that ground arguments are obligatory.
- It offers no particular insight into why the null ground correlates with a PV construction.
- There are no apparent restrictions on the types of ground arguments can be elided.
- There seems to be no difference in the contextual/pragmatic requirements of null grounds compared to pronouns.
- Particle shift and the null object, then, must depend on properties of the particles/prepositions *off* and *out*.
 - off* and *out* are the only prepositional words in English that encode a SOURCEPATH

- (13) [off] = SOURCE(ON(x))

- Ground argument DPs require additional functional structure to be interpreted (K) spatially (Svenonius, 2010; Zwarts and Winter, 2000).

- (14) a. $K \leftrightarrow of$
b. $KP \leftrightarrow there$

- K may play some part in the presence of null grounds.
- Null arguments are not restricted to grounds cross-linguistically. How can the English phenomenon generalize?

References

- Levin, Beth and Peter Sells (2007). "Unpredicated particles". In: *REDPILL*. Ed. by Lian Hee Wee and Uyechi Linda. CSLI Publications.
- McIntyre, Andrew (2007). "Particle verbs and argument structure". In: *Language and Linguistics Compass* 1.4, pp. 350–367.
- Milway, Daniel (2013). "Pulling up grounds and holding figures back: On the syntax and semantics of ground promotion and figure retention particle verbs". MA thesis. University of Toronto.
- Svenonius, Peter (2003). "Limits on P: filling in holes vs. falling in holes". In: *Nordlyd* 31.2. Ed. by Anne Dahl, Kristine Bentzen, and Peter Svenonius. University of Tromsø, pp. 431–445.
- (2010). "Spatial P in English". In: *Cartography of Syntactic Structures*. Ed. by Guglielmo Cinque and Luigi Rizzi. Vol. 6. Oxford University Press.
- Zwarts, Joost and Yoad Winter (2000). "Vector Space Semantics: A Model-Theoretic Analysis of Locative Prepositions". In: *Journal of Logic, Language, and Information* 9, pp. 169–211.