

A STUDY ON GRAMMARTICAL STRUCTURE OF ENGLISH VERB PHRASE

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Summary: The paper aims to focus the students of English Language Studies, HUBT on the general perception from the structure of English verb phrase by systemizing structurally and analysing syntactic roles of English verbs.

Key words: grammar, structure, verb phrase.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has been an international language that plays a very important role in every field such as science, technology, business, education, etc. Moreover, English is a bridge to connect the world and help with the transference of any aspects. With an aim to integrate into the world, Vietnam has taken English as a foreign language that has been widely used. However, each language has its own difficulties and English is no exception especially, grammar in English. Grammar plays a very important role in a language.

So, how can the term “grammar” be understood? In the Cambridge Dictionary, grammar is the rules about how words change their form and combine with other words to make sentences. British linguist, academic, and author David Crystal tells us that “grammar is the study of all the contrasts of meaning that it is possible to do within sentences. The ‘rules’ of grammar tell us how. By one count, there are some 3,500 such rules in English.” Language is like a building, we have thousands of bricks, but without knowing

how to build it cannot become a building. Similarly, a person who knows millions of English words, but does not know how to put them together, cannot speak English. In other words, grammar is the system of a language. English grammar consists of many aspects and verb phrases are only a small part of them. It is, however, no less important. For Vietnamese learners, especially beginners, the verb phrase is still an existing difficulty as it has not been systematically introduced. Many of them avoid using verb phrase, and they prefer simple sentences to complex ones formed by the combination between simple sentences and non-finite verb phrase.

Hence, verb are very important for language development because they allow students to start building early sentences. Every sentence needs a verb. And English verbs determine many of the grammatical forms in a sentence. Verbs are words that demonstrate an action, such as sing, dance, smell, talk, and eat. When combined with linking verbs, such as is, must, will, and has, they form predicative including verb phrase. Simply put, this is a word that shows an action (physical or

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mental) or state of being of the subject in a sentence. Verbs are used to express who we are and what we do. Consequently, a verb is a word that says something about a person or a thing. Indicating an action, describing such things as actions, happenings, thoughts, feelings, speech, and relationships.

In linguistics, a verb phrase (VP) is a syntactic unit composed of at least one verb and its dependents—objects, complements, and other modifiers—but not always including the subject. ... A verb phrase is similar to what is considered a predicate in more traditional grammars.

For all the reasons mentioned above, I would like to carry out a research study about verb phrase to get a deeper knowledge of the structures of the English verbs and verb phrase.

2. DEVELOPMENT

2.1. English verb

2.1.1. Definition

Jespersen (1966) and also grammarians are very often saying that “it is practically impossible to give the exact definitions of the parts of speech”. The definitions given to the verb as lexical class vary both from one school of grammar to another and, very often from one linguist to another. Starting from didactical purposes if some definitions given to the verb are interpreted in point of the criterion they are based on, one could distinguish the ontology, the form of the function to have been used as primary criteria. Each of them may stand by itself to constitute the basis of the definition or one of the three may combine with another one. To make a good approach to the English verb some words on the definitions assigned to this lexical class should be considered.

In an attempt to exemplify several

types of definitions, we shall begin with a special version provided by Jespersen (1966), who does not explicitly define verbs but exemplifies them using the terms ‘activity’, ‘state’, and ‘process’. For example, the verbs: go, take, fight, surprise, eat, breathe, speak, walk, clean, play, call express an activity; the verbs like sleep, remain, wait, live, suffer, express a state; the verbs such as become, grow, lose, die, dry, rise, turn to express a process.

Considering simplicity as a feature of the definitions given to the English verb, Alexander’s version (1988) defines: ‘A verb is a word (run) or a phrase (run out of) which expresses the existence of a state (love, seem) or the doing of an action (take, play)’. This is a late 20th-century example of how simple a verb could be defined. According to Knud Schibbye (1970), taking into consideration the function and the content of the verb, in his system of reference, the verb is functionally defined as ‘the sentence forming element of a word group’. Semantically, a definition of the verb in terms of its content ‘is the most comprehensive, but also the vaguest’. Generally, verbs may express an activity (and in this case their denominator is the auxiliary)

In summary, Palmer (1974) gives out a definition that is easy to understand: “A verb is a word or a combination of words that indicates an action or a state of being or condition. A verb is the part of a sentence that tells us what the subject performs. Verbs are the hearts of English sentences”.

2.1.2. Full verbs

The English verbs have been defined considering their form and function. Thus, verbs may have full meaning and

play the key role in the whole sentence, which is the case with the lexical, main, principal, or full verbs. Very numerous, they represent the largest group of verbs in English, and they were denominated differently by the authors dealing with them. These notional, main, lexical, or principal verbs (or full verbs) have an independent meaning and function in the sentence. They are used to forming the simple verbal predicate and express an action, a state, an event of or about the person or the thing denoted by the subject. Palmer (1974) asserts that ‘both modals and main verbs are basically verbs and both cans, in theory, share the same grammatical features’. Nevertheless, things are different with the two groups of verbs. The main verbs are thoroughly described in various books of grammar and because of this reason, they will not be insisted on in this presentation. The aim of this volume is that of spotlighting those features or details not very frequently considered in the specialized literature.

2.1.3. *Types of English verb*

The classification of the verbs in English may prove difficult in that there may be numerous criteria to consider. This presentation does not intend to join together all the possible criteria according to which verbs may be classified with a view to a certain purpose.

2.1.3.1. *Auxiliary verb*

They may be used in different positions, as marks of grammatical categories, as linking verbs, as modals, or as parts of compound predicates. As marks of grammatical categories, they will help the speaker chronologically order the events (s)he is talking about, to describe the phase of a process or activity or even a state, to underline who

is doing something for someone else, to ask questions or to give negative answers. When they play the part of linking verbs they are followed by a predicative to make up the nominal predicate. Out of these linking verbs mention shall be made only of: to be, to become, to get, to remain, to appear, and to grow. The linking verbs may be interpreted as a syntactical category by means of which the subject is connected with the predicative. They may be considered a morphological category similar to but not identical with that of the auxiliary verbs. Unlike auxiliaries, the linking verbs actually represent the tense, and they preserve some of their lexical value. According to Palmer (1974), a special category of verbs that partially play the part of an auxiliary are the catenative verbs and they will be described in the last section dedicated to the auxiliary verb.

Examples:

- Jacob walks in the morning.
- Mike is going to school.
- Albert does not like to walk.
- Anna is a good girl.

Verbs are related to a lot of other factors like the subject, person, number, tense, mood, voice, etc.

2.1.3.1.1. *Operator*

In grammar, an operator is a word that facilitates the expression of negation, interrogation, and emphasis in the English language. The auxiliary verb that can function as the operator is the verb do, which is referred to as the do-operator or the dummy-do.

Examples:

- Do you have the time to listen to me whine?
- Did the purple kitten steal a yellow carrot from the blue rabbit?

2.1.3.1.2. *Modal Verb:*

A modal verb is a kind of an auxiliary verb. It assists the main verb to indicate possibility, potentiality, ability, permission, expectation, and obligation. The modal verbs are can, could, must, may, might, ought to, shall, should, will, would.

Examples:

- I may want to talk to you again.
- They must play their best game to win.

2.1.3.2. *Lexical Verb*

2.1.3.2.1. *Finite Verb*

Finite verb are the actual verb that are called the roots of sentences. It is a form of a verb that is performed by or refers to a subject and uses one of the twelve forms of tense and changes according to the number/person of the subject.

Examples:

- Alex went to school. (Subject – Alex – performed the action in the past. This information is evident only by the verb ‘went’.)

- Robert plays hockey.
 - He is playing for Australia.
 - He is one of the best players.
- (Here, the verb ‘is’ directly refers to the subject itself.)

2.1.3.2.2. *Non-finite Verb*

Non-finite verb are not actual verb. They do not work as verbs in the sentence rather they work as nouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc. The non-finite verbs do not change according to the number/person of the subject because these verbs, also called verbal, do not have any direct relationship to the subject. Sometimes, they become the subject themselves.

The forms of the non-finite verb are – infinitive, gerund, and participle (participles become finite verbs when they take auxiliary verbs).

Examples:

- You need to paint the whole cupbroad, starting from the bottom.
- He tiptoed round the house so as not to wake anyone.
- Being loved can make someone feel safe.

2.1.3.2.3. *Syntactic*

2.1.3.2.3.1. *Linking Verb*

A linking verb adds details about the subject of a sentence. In its simplest form, it connects the subject and the complement - that is, the words that follow the linking verb. It creates a link between them instead of showing action. Often, what is on each side of a linking verb is equivalent; the complement redefines or restates the subject. Generally, linking verbs are called ‘*be*’ verbs which are - *am, is, are, was, were*. However, there are some other verbs that can work as linking verbs. Those verbs are: *act, feel, remain, appear, become, seem, smell, sound, grow, look, prove, stay, taste, and turn*.

Some verbs in this list can also be action verbs. To figure out if they are linking verbs, you should try replacing them with forms of *be verbs*. If the changed sentence makes sense, that verb is a linking verb.

Examples:

- She appears ready for the game. (She is ready for the game.)
- The food seemed delicious. (The food was delicious.)
- You look happy. (You are happy.)

2.1.3.2.3.2. *Intransitive Verb*

Intransitive verb do not act upon anything. They may be followed by an adjective, adverb, preposition, or another part of speech.

Examples:

- She smiled. (The verb ‘smile’

cannot have any object since the action of 'smiling' does not fall upon anything/ anyone)

- I wake up at 6 A.m. (No object is needed for this verb)

2.1.3.2.3.3. Transitive Verb

Transitive verb must have a direct object. A transitive verb demands something/someone to be acted upon.

Examples:

- I painted the car. (The verb 'paint' demands an object to be painted)
- She is reading the newspaper. (The verb 'read' asks "what is she reading?" – the answer is the object)

Note: {Subject + Intransitive verb} is sufficient to make a complete sentence but {Subject + Transitive verb} is not sufficient because transitive verbs demand a direct object.

2.2. English phrase

2.2.1. Definition

A phrase is a group of words used as a functional unit within a sentence, common types of phrases are noun, verb, adjective, and adverbial.

2.2.2. Types of the English phrases

2.2.2.1. Nouns phrase

A noun phrase consists of a noun and all of its modifiers.

Here is an example:

- Saturday became a cool, wet afternoon.

2.2.2.2. Verbs phrase

A Verbs phrase consists of a verb and all of its modifiers.

Here is an example:

- He was waiting for the rain to stop.

2.2.2.3. Adjectives phrase

An adjective phrase is a group of words headed by an adjective that modifies a noun and works as a single adjective in the sentence.

Here are examples:

- She had extremely menacing eyes.
- An overly sensitive heart is an unhappy possession on this shaky earth.

2.2.2.4. Adverbial phrase

Adverbial phrase modifies the verb or the adjective and functions as an adverb in the sentence.

Here are examples:

- I will sit like a monk meditates.
- He plays basketball up to impress his classmates.

2.3. Categories of English Verb Phrase

The verb forms operate in finite and non-finite verb phrase, which are distinguished as follows:

2.3.1. Finite Verb Phrase

(1) Finite verb phrase have tenses distinction:

He studies Vietnamese.

He studied Vietnamese.

(2) Finite verb phrase occur as the verb element of a clause. There are person and number concord between the subject and the finite. Concord is particularly overt with be

I+am You/we/they+are

He/she/it+is

With most lexical verb, concord is restricted to the contrast between 3rd and non-3rd person singular present:

She reads the paper every morning.

We read the paper every morning.

With the modal auxiliaries there is, however, no concord:

I/you/he/we/they can play the guitar.

2.3.2. Non-infinitive Verb Phrase

The non-finite forms of the verb are the infinitive, the -ing participle, and the -ed participle. The non-finite verb phrase consist of one or more such items.

- Compare: Finite verb phrase:
He smokes heavily.

Non – finite verb phrase: To smoke like that must be dangerous.

2.4. Grammatical function of verb phrase

There are various functions verb phrase perform:

2.4.1. Predicate

Verb phrase firstly function as a predicate of the sentence. I have some examples of verb phrase where the verb phrase functions as a predicate of a sentence. Here, the verb phrase comprises the main verb and auxiliary verbs (also known as helping verbs).

- He was walking quickly to the bank.
- He should wait before he can practice driving.

- You must wash your clothes now.
- The graduate is writing a CV.

2.4.2. Subject

Verb phrase secondly function as subjects. A subject is a word, phrase, or clause that performs the action of or acts upon the verb. The following italicized verbs are examples of subjects:

- Reading stimulates the mind.
- To lie about cheating is unforgivable.

Only verbs in the form of present participles and infinitives can perform the nominal function of the subject.

2.4.3. Direct Object

Verb phrase thirdly function as direct objects. A direct object is a word, phrase, or clause that follows a transitive verb and answers the question “who or what” receives the action of the verb. The following italicized verbs are examples of direct objects:

The brothers prefer watching football.
Their sisters prefer to watch dramas.

Only verbs in the form of present participles and infinitives can perform the nominal function of the direct object.

2.4.4. Adjectival Complement

The fourthly grammatical function that verb phrase in the form of infinitives perform is the adjective phrase complement. The adjective phrase complement are defined as phrases and clauses that complete the meaning of an adjective phrase. For example, the following italicized verbs and verb phrase function as adjective phrase complements:

You should be excited to study grammar.

My children are sad to see their grandparents leave.

2.4.5. Adverbial

Verb phrase fifthly function as adverbials. An adverbial is a word, phrase, or clause that modifies an entire clause by providing additional information about time, place, manner, condition, purpose, reason, result, and concession. The following italicized Verbs phrase are examples of adverbials:

- Sam found a lost wallet walking to the store. (present participle)

- She opened the window to let in some fresh air. (infinitive)

2.4.6. Subject Complement

Verb phrase sixthly function as subject complements. A subject complement is a word, phrase, or clause that follows a copular verb or linking verb and describes the subject. The following italicized verbs are examples of subject complements:

- My favorite hobby is learning about grammar.

- Your job duties are to shelve books and to dust shelves.

Only verbs in the form of present participles and infinitives can perform the nominal function of subject complement.

2.4.7. Object Complement

Verb phrase seventhly function as object complements. An object complement is a word, phrase, or clause that directly follows and describes the direct object. The following italicized verbs are examples of object complements:

- I asked him to run.
- My grandmother considered her favorite pastime observing nature.

Only verbs in the form of present participles can perform the nominal function of object complement.

3. CONCLUSION

Verb phrase help to make your text more informative and meaningful. They are essential to clear writing and letting your reader know exactly what you're trying to say.

There are various functions that verb phrase perform. They serve phrase heads, as predicates, modifiers, compliments, and objects. Verb phrase also function as noun phrase modifiers, containing a word and phrase, and describing noun or noun phrase.

Understanding the verb phrase is important when using more than one

action or linking words in a sentence. Verb phrase can be easily identified as they have an auxiliary verb followed by an action or main verb. Using multiple actions or linking words together is the definition of a verb phrase.

A verb phrase is one of the important knowledge areas in English. Knowing how to use verb phrase not only helps you speak English naturally like a native speaker but also increases the effect of the sentence, attracting listeners through a rich vocabulary. But to use verb phrases effectively, you have to learn. Learn how to be effective, remember and use the right context. Try to regularly apply the verbs learned in the article, speech in each specific context to remember and understand more deeply about the use of the verb phrase.

Because of such complexity and variability, the ability to use verbs fluently has become an important scoring criterion in important exams like IELTS (International English Language Testing System). If you know a lot of phrasal verbs, in English tests you will be able to get desirable high scores./.

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NGHIÊN CỨU VỀ CẤU TRÚC NGỮ PHÁP CỦA CỤM ĐỘNG TỪ TIẾNG ANH

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Tóm tắt: Bài báo hướng sinh viên khoa ngôn ngữ Anh, HUBT tập trung vào nhận thức về cấu trúc của cụm động từ tiếng Anh bằng cách hệ thống hóa cấu trúc và phân tích vai trò ngữ đoạn của động từ tiếng Anh.

Từ khóa: ngữ pháp, cấu trúc, cụm động từ.