1. Verb-Particle and Verb-Preposition Constructions

Aim: to consider the syntax of the following two construction types:

(1)  a. John ran up a hill.
     b. John ran up a bill.

Despite their superficial similarities, we will argue that these constructions have two very different structures: (1a) involves a verb with a prepositional phrase complement, whereas (1b) involves a particle verb.

1.1 How to tell them apart

English particles constitute a closed class, which centrally includes up, down, off, in, out, as well as a number of less common items, such as back, along, around and away. Since many of them have the same phonological shape as prepositions, there is the potential for a great deal of syntactic ambiguity between the two construction types. There are, however, various tests for diagnosing the difference.

1.1.1 Constituency tests

These seem to indicate that:

- while PP-complements are constituents, a particle does not form a constituent with the following noun phrase.
- the relationship between the verb and the particle is closer than the relationship between the verb and its PP complement.

Clefting (It is X that Y, where X must be a constituent):

(2)  a. It was up a hill that John ran.
     b. *It was up a bill that John ran.

Topicalisation

(3)  a. Up a hill, John ran.
     b. *Up a bill, John ran.

Locative inversion

(4)  a. Up the hill ran John.
     b. *Up the bill ran John.

Coordination

(5)  a. John ran up a hill and down a mountain.
     b. *John ran up a bill and down his savings.
Proform replacement
(6) a. John ran there (= up the hill)
   b. *John ran there (= up a bill)

VP-adverbs
(7) a. John ran quickly up the hill.
   b. ?*John ran quickly up the bill.

Gapping
(8) a. John ran up a hill and Sam _ up a mountain.
   b. ?John ran up a hill and Sam _ a mountain
   c. *John ran up a bill and Sam _ up a debt.
   d. John ran up a bill and Sam _ a debt.

1.1.2 Further differences

Reversal of word order
(9) a. *John ran a hill up.
   b. John ran a bill up.

Pronoun placement
(10) a. John ran it up (= it replacing the hill)
    b. John ran it up (= it replacing the bill)

Note that, although unstressed pronouns cannot follow a particle, stressed pronouns can:
(11) a. Run up THIS not THAT.
    b. Figure out THESE not THOSE.

2. Prepositional verbs

Prepositional verbs select a PP complement.

- Some select for a particular preposition (the ‘selected’, or ‘specified’ preposition);
- Others select for a complement of a particular thematic type, but are indifferent to the actual preposition used (the ‘unselected’ or ‘unspecified’ preposition):

Specified preposition
(12) a. John referred to her book.
    b. Mary came across some old letters.
    c. John skated over his recent difficulties.
    d. Mary waded through the ironing.

Unspecified preposition
(13) a. John flew to Boston.
    b. Mary swam across the river.
    c. John skated over the frozen lake.
    d. Mary waded through the mud.
2.1 Differences between mobile and fixed PP complements

Within these classes, we need to distinguish two kinds of specified preposition, mobile and fixed. The mobile ones behave much like unspecified prepositions, while the fixed ones are different because they do not allow variation in their position relative to the verb.

2.1.1 Fronting of the PP

Pied-piping is only possible with unselected or mobile prepositional phrases:

(14) a. The city to which I flew (unselected)
   b. The book to which I referred (mobile selected)
   c. *The letters across which I came (fixed selected)
   d. The letters which I came across (fixed selected; only stranding allowed)

2.1.2 Coordination

Coordination is only possible with unselected or mobile prepositional phrases:

(15) a. John flew to LA and to Boston.
   b. Mary referred to her book and to her new article.
   c. *John came across some old letters and across some photographs.

2.1.3 Adjunct placement

Adjuncts (e.g. time adverbs) may intervene between a verb and a PP only if the PP is unselected or mobile:

(16) a. John flew regularly to Boston.
   b. Mary referred repeatedly to her book.
   c. ?*John came regularly across new photographs.

2.2 Constituent structure

Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 277) assume that these types have the same structure:

(17) a. [John [ [ referred ] [ to her book] ] ] (mobile selected complement)
   b. [Mary [ [ came ] [ across some old letters ] ] ] (fixed selected)

But this implies that across some old letters is a constituent. If that is so, why doesn’t it behave as a constituent for movement?

Another possibility would be to suggest that they have different structures:

(18) a. [John [ [ referred ] [ to her book] ]
   b. [Mary [ [ came across ] [ some old letters ] ]]

This captures the differences in their syntactic distribution, but faces problems when dealing with transitive cases of fixed prepositions:
(19) He got me through the biology exam.

In these cases, the preposition has been separated by the verb by the object *me*, and so cannot form a constituent with it, as (18b) would suggest.

3. **Particle verbs**

These are composed of an intransitive particle after the verb. The verb itself may be either transitive or intransitive:

(20) a. You can’t expect a hamster to pick up a newspaper for you.
    b. John should calm down.

Particle verbs pose a challenge to syntactic theory because they have both word-like and phrasal characteristics. For example:

- The ability of the particle to be reversed with the NP suggests it is independent of the verb:
  
(21) a. John tried to cheer his friends up.
    b. Mary’s singing late at night really cheesed the neighbours off.

- The fact that manner adverbs cannot intervene between a verb and a particle suggests that they are one unit:

(22) a. *Mary pulled slowly off the label.
    b. *John looked quickly up the word.

3.1 **Syntactic analyses**

3.1.1 *Small clause analyses (e.g. Kayne 1985)*

These draw a comparison between verb-particle constructions and small clauses:

(23) a. John looked [sc the information up]
    b. John considered [sc Bill honest]

They note a semantic similarity between the two types: the predicate of a small clause typically expresses a result which affects the subject; particles also take an NP subject and typically express a result:

(24) a. Mary drove [sc John crazy]
    b. John threw [sc Mary out]

This approach assumes that the discontinuous order (i.e. the one in which the verb and particle are separated by the NP object) is underlying. To get the other order, it assumes that the object moves to the right of the particle.
Evidence for this approach:

- Small clause and verb particle constructions behave alike in nominalisations:
  
  (25)  
  a.  *John’s consideration of Bill honest. 
  b.  *Their looking of the information up. 

- It is impossible to extract wh-elements from the post-verbal NP of either small clauses or particle verb constructions:
  
  (26)  
  a.  *Who, did they consider the brother of t₁ a fool? 
  b.  *What, did they look the information about t₁ up? 

Arguments against this approach:

- The word order alternation typical of particle verb constructions is not possible with small clauses:
  
  (27)  
  *Mary drove crazy John. 

- Some people consider rightward movement to be theoretically undesirable. 

3.1.2 Complex head analyses (e.g. Johnson 1991)

These approaches treat the verb-particle combination as a single complex verb formed in the lexicon:

(28)  
John [[looked up] [the information]] 

This approach assumes that the continuous order (where the verb and particle are adjacent) is underlying.

Evidence for this approach:

- It captures the fact that selectional properties are those of the verb and the particle, not just of the verb itself. This falls out straightforwardly if these are separate verbs with different subcategorisation frames.

(29)  
  a.  The Prime Minister laughed. 
  b.  *The Prime Minister laughed the speculation. 
  c.  The Prime Minister laughed off the speculation. 

- Assuming that coordination pairs like with like, the fact that particle verbs can coordinate with a simplex verb indicates that they too are verbs:

(30)  
John picked up and threw the ball. 

- Particle verbs can form the input to morphological processes:

(31)  
  a.  John’s looking up of the reference took along time (nominalisation) 
  b.  A badly thought-through plan (adjective formation) 
  c.  These cars break down easily (middles)
Arguments against this approach:

- Word formation processes can sometimes affect phrases:


- If particle verbs are words, they violate the Right-hand Head Rule, which states that English compounds are head-right:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{A} & \text{N} & \text{N} & \text{V} \\
\text{black} & \text{bird} & \text{under} & \text{world} & \text{P} & \text{V} & \text{over} & \text{react}
\end{array}
\]

In the case of particle verbs, the head is the verb, and it is on the left:

(33) try out; brush off; screw up; run up.

- The proposal that the verb and the particle are inserted in the same position, but can later be separated also violates the Principle of Lexical Integrity, the rule that says the internal structure of a word cannot be affected by syntactic processes.

### 3.2 Factors influencing word order choice

#### 3.2.1 Syntactic

If the noun phrase is very heavy (i.e. long), it must follow the particle:

(35) *Lock all the doors on the first and second floors that lead into the rooms with expensive computer equipment in them up.

This effect becomes weaker as the NP gets shorter.

Particles which are modified by elements such as right must follow the NP:

(36) a. *John wrung right out the towel.
    b. John wrung the towel right out.

#### 3.2.2 Semantic

If the verb-particle meaning is compositional, that is, if a verb requires its particle for its own meaning to be processed easily, the continuous order will be preferred; if the verb retains its meaning without its particle, it is more likely that the discontinuous order will be possible:

(37) a. They lifted up the child => They lifted the child.
    b. They carried out a repair ≠> They carried a repair
3.2.3 Pragmatic

Objects containing old (i.e. given) information are background constituents; those referring to new information are focused. In the syntax, this means that the discontinuous order is preferred, if not required, when the entity denoted by the object is given, and the continuous order is favoured when the object refers to a new entity:

(38) We’ll make up a parcel for them ... On the morning of Christmas Eve together we made the parcel up (Dehé 2002: 123)

3.3 Crosslinguistic variation

Particle verbs occur in all Germanic languages:

(39) a. Sie sagten das Konzert ab.
    they said the concert off
    ‘They called the concert off.’ (German, Dehé 2002: 1)

b. Han gav sine studier op.
    he gave his studies up
    ‘He gave up his studies.’ (Danish, Dehé 2002: 1)

The details of their syntax differ significantly between languages; for example, Norwegian and Icelandic have word order alternations like English; Danish allows only the discontinuous order; Swedish allows only the continuous order.

4. References and further reading

Huddleston & Pullum, chapter 4, section 6, 272–90.


Nicole Dehé also has an extensive list of references on her website; see http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~ndehe/bibl/PV.html