# COMPLEXITY OF PHRASES, MULTIPLICITY OF MEANINGS, FLEXIBILITY OF FORMS

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Complexity of phrases distill three main concluding remarks: First, particles, defined as basically spatial elements which can occur between a verb and an object and which do not directly govern this or any other object, can head full-fledged semantic phrases which contain a multiplicity of structural positions. In a particle phrase, there is a position for: one or two pre-modifying particles - back, on and along; a post-modifier or complement;one or more peripheral modifiers to the left: onomatopoeias like bang and plumb, intensifying adjectives like right and straight and, most exterior, quantifying expressions like completely, high, and several inches; some of these peripheral modifiers can also occur to the right. Second, for any string of multiple particles, especially when this string is followed by a PP, it is usually possible to propose a multiplicity of valid structural analyses which do not correspond to obvious differences in meaning. For example, whether the phrases are parsed as being part of the sentence made up of the particles or as forming a combination constituent to that sentence on its own does not affect the interpretation of the whole sequence. We have therefore called this phenomenon structural indeterminacy as opposed to structural ambiguity. Third, and most relevant to the dominant theme of this volume i.e., the interface between the syntax and the semantics of spatial items, we have seen that there is also a multiplicity of ways a single structure can be put to communicative use. One such case that we have encountered in the course of our discussion is the use of measure NPs before particles. We have seen that measure NPs can either express a distance in space or a distance in time. We can keep syntax relatively simple if we assume that all it has to do in connection with such objects is state their position within the particle phrase. Although we might think that spatial phrases with a spatial measure phrases are somehow more 'basic' than spatial phrases with a temporal phrases, the syntactic component of language remains much leaner if it does not have to handle any derivation from spatial measure phrases to temporal measure phrases. Indeed, syntax should not have to handle this at all, since the inextricable relationship between movement on the one hand and time consumed whilst moving on the other is something that is part of speakers' non-syntactic cognition. In the previous section, we more explicitly defended the view that the grammar of English may consist of several conventionalized pieces of linguistic organization whose syntax has some degree of autonomy over semantics broadly defined. For example, it is likely to assume that speakers have direct access to a phrasal pattern containing a slot for a particle which is syntactically modified by right, since this is a configuration that has considerable token frequency. For some of these tokens, the word right also semantically modifies in accordance with its semantic position the item plugged into the particle slot, but for other tokens, it rather modifies the entire sentence, or it seems to modify both the particle and

the phrases at the same time. What is crucial, though, is that whatever is meant to be modified semantically, the same syntactic structure can be used in each case. In other words, we have shown that one structure can map onto multiple meanings. It is claimed that a strictly isomorphic syntax-semantic interface has to be abandoned. Rather than inventing new structures for each different communicative purpose, speakers appear to make do with the existing structures they find in their grammatical "toolbox", adopting them for diverse communicative needs.Consider the sentence with the unadorned particle off as a complement of the verb rip: A violent gust of wind ripped the roof off.

The particle in this sentence is in fact the head of a phrasal category, which happens to consist of only one word here but which can be expanded into a multiword sequence. This is clear from sentences like the following, which illustrate that the particle can be preceded by an intensifying adjective like right or by another particle like back: 1. A violent gust of wind ripped the roof right off. 2.

I'd only just nailed the roof of the garden shed in place when a violent gust of wind ripped it back off.

Finally, observe that the particle can even be preceded by both right and back, in that order: 3. I'd only just nailed the roof of the garden shed in place when a violent gust of wind ripped it (right back / back right)off.

The italicized sequences in the second and third sentences are complex particle phrases. In this study, I will dissect the internal structure of such phrases. Let's see another example. The interpretation of the preposition "for" is highly polysemous, ambiguous and/or underspecified. This is about for phrases co-occurring with gradable predicates, as in the following sentences:

a. John is tall for a three year old.

b. He's a tall boy for his age and thank goodness he is.

c. Mia wants an expensive hat for a three year old

d. This book is fun, difficult, sophisticated, violent for a 3-year old child.

e. The store is crowded for a Tuesday

f. John wants me to talk loud for a vocal coach.

What does the for phrase in the first sentence contribute? First, for phrases set out a constraint on the comparison class, e.g. in the first sentence only three year olds compare. Heights of other age groups are excluded from the discussion. Second, for phrases help fix standards of membership of gradable adjectives. The

standard is determined based on the comparison class and conveys that John"s height exceeds the standard height of three year olds, not that of individuals in general. Third, for phrases trigger a presupposition. In many, but not all cases, they trigger the.presupposition that the adjective"s subject argument belongs to the comparison class; e.g. the first sentence is judged to presuppose that John is a three year old .

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