The diachrony of complex predicates in West Germanic
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In this paper, we trace the divergent syntactic development of the verb-particle (V-prt) construction in the WGmc languages, from an assumed common origin in which the particle is a resultative predicate in a VP-shell construction.

An analysis in which the particle is a predicate is in itself neither new nor very controversial. The semantic structure is still clearly resultative in most cases. We analyse this semantic structure in terms of the LCS formulated by Spencer and Zaretskaya (1998):

(1) John threw the ball up
    [CAUSE[ACT (John), BECOME[UP(ball)], BY[THROW(John)]]

What is striking and interesting about this LCS is that the primary predicate is the end state encoded by the predicate W, and that semantically the verb is secondary to this predicate. Thus, the verb *throw* in (1) expresses the manner in which the end-state *up* is achieved. This LCS approach accounts straightforwardly for a number of peculiarities of the V-prt construction that have been noted in the literature: (i) particles tend to have a transitivizing effect (by licensing a subject); (ii) they add telicity to an event (by defining an end-state reached); (iii) in their presence, a different set of objects is selected than V would on its own (the “object” is the subject of the particle; see van Kemenade and Los 2003). The idea that the predicate is semantically primary leads us to explore an analysis in which this primary status is carried over to the syntax. Such an analysis gives substance to the often made observation that it appears to be the particle that selects the verb, rather than the other way around.

For the syntax we propose an analysis in which the particle is the nonverbal predicate in a VP-shell construction dominated by a light verb: … [vP subject v [XP (pred) …]]. Such an analysis potentially accounts in an interesting way for the effects of composite argument structure implied by the observations (i)-(iii) above.

In such analyses as are available in the literature (eg. Grewendorf 1990, von Stechow 1993, Den Dikken 1995), the particle is usually analysed as a secondary predicate, on the basis of its position and resultative semantics. In a synchronic account of present-day Dutch, German and English, however, an analysis in terms of syntactic secondary predication is no longer fully warranted, as each language has evolved a distinct “particle syntax” which distinguishes particles and other complex predicates from other types of predicate.

The peculiarity of Dutch particle syntax is that particles may remain adjacent to the verb in V-Raising constructions as in (2a), unlike “genuine” secondary predicates (2b):

(2) a. dat Jan zijn moeder (op) heeft (op)gebeld
    that John his mother (up) has (up)-phoned
  b. dat Jan de deur (groen) heeft (*groen) geverfd
    that Jan the door (green) has (green) painted

In contrast, German particles insist on strict adjacency to the verb (as in (3a)), whereas genuine secondary predicates may, but need not, be adjacent (as in (3b)):

(3) a. daß er den Tisch (*ab) wird (ab)-wischen wollen
    that he the table (off) will (off) wipe want
  b. daß er den Tisch (sauber) wird (sauber) wischen wollen
    that he the table (clean) will (clean) wipe want
In English, the object of a particle can precede or follow the particle as a full NP; pronominal objects can only follow the particle if they have heavy stress (4b-c).

(4) a. He threw (away) the remains of his dinner (away).
   b. He threw (*away) them (away).
   c. ‘If you force your confidence upon me, Mr. Headstone, I’ll give up every word of it. Mind! Take notice. I’ll give it up, and I’ll give up you, I will!’ (Dickens. 1919[1865]. *Our Mutual Friend.* London: Dent, p. 673)

Secondary predicate constructions only allow the order as in (4a) when the NP is long or complex, as in (5). The order V-Predicate-NP, then, is the derived, special order for secondary predicates, but the normal order for particles:

(5) She stuffed [ti [PRED into her briefcase]] [NP all the documents containing incriminating evidence,]

The differences between present-day Dutch, English and German cannot be accounted for simply on the grounds of the OV/VO dichotomy (which sets apart German and Dutch from English) in combination with independent differences between the verb clustering properties of Dutch and German. The picture is further complicated by the fact that, modulo independent properties, it can be shown that in all three languages the particle sometimes behaves as an XP, and sometimes as a head. When part of the verb cluster in Dutch and German, the particle cannot be modified, indicating that it is an X0; when object and particle are adjacent, modification is fine:

(6) dat Jan zijn huiswerk wil (*helem aal) afmaken/helemaal af wil maken
    that John his homework wants completely off-make/completely off will make
    ‘that John wants to finish his homework (completely)’

In earlier stages, the particle syntax of the WGmc languages was far more similar than it is in the present-day languages. All the older varieties had basic OV properties (for English, see Fischer et al (2000); for Dutch, see Blom (2002) and refs cited there) and the evidence for verb clusters as attested in present-day Dutch and German is equivocal, as we will show. We demonstrate that the behaviour of particles in the Old WGmc varieties was more XP-like than X0-like. We will formulate a syntactic analysis for this assumed common earlier state in which particle and verb constitute a complex change of state predicate (a VP-shell construction).

    Such an analysis should formulate a stage from which the divergent subsequent developments in the various languages can be accounted for more or less straightforwardly. What the three languages have in common then, is that over time, particles have acquired more head-like properties in certain contexts (which are different per language), and we will trace these developments in conjunction with independent historical developments such as the loss of OV order in English, the development of finite verb movement in English, and the historical development of verb clustering in Dutch and German. The rise of these head-like properties seems to coincide with idiomatization of the V-prt combinations, which suggests that we are looking at cases of grammaticalization.

References: