

The role of deixis in multi-verb sequences in English

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of deixis observed in multi-verb sequences in English. It deals with four types of multi-verb sequences: *V-and-V*, *V-to-V*, *V-V*, and *V-Ving*. Multi-verb sequences are divided into two types: regular and irregular. Only the deictic verbs *come* and *go* can occur in all four types of irregular multi-verb sequences. This paper shows that irregular multi-verb sequences have a reduced structure that does not include two verb phrases despite the presence of two verbs, and that there are two constraints on irregular multi-verb sequences: the integrity constraint and the subject constraint. Consequently, one conclusion can be drawn: the deictic verbs *come* and *go* play a vital role in forming irregular multi-verb sequences.

Keywords: multi-verb sequence, deixis, fully syntactic structure, reduced structure

The definition of multi-verb sequence

The term *multi-verb sequence* is defined in four ways: the *V-and-V*, *V-to-V*, *V-V*, and *V-Ving* sequences, where the first verb slot is always a single verb, and the second verb slot can be either a single verb or verb in a verb phrase. In this paper, the first verb is always the deictic verb *come* or *go*, and the second verb can be either intransitive or transitive. The multi-verb sequence always lacks an intervening word or phrase between the first and second verbs. We syntactically categorize the various uses of multi-verb sequences into two types: the regular multi-verb sequences and irregular multi-verb sequences.

Regular and irregular multi-verb sequences

The concepts of ‘regularity’ and ‘irregularity’ are fundamental to understanding the nature of multi-verb sequences. Within these sequences, regularities coexist with irregularities. Nevertheless, previous studies have predominantly focused on what this paper terms regular multi-verb sequences, as exemplified in (1).

- (1) a. I like to put lots of ketchup on my fries.
- b. My father always enjoyed playing golf.
- c. You’ll have to wait and see what happens.
- d. He helped organize the party.

The regular multi-verb sequence comprises two verb phrases due to the presence of two verbs, indicating a fully syntactic structure. In contrast, the

previous studies have scarcely treated what this paper terms irregular multi-verb sequences, as shown in (2).

- (2) a. She came to pick me up.
b. He came bearing gifts.
c. A lot of our friends came and saw me.
d. Come join us.

This paper hypothesizes that irregular multi-verb sequences possess a reduced structure that does not comprise two verb phrases despite the presence of two verbs. Many existing studies overlook the clear distinction between regular and irregular multi-verb sequences. Consequently, this paper focuses on examining the features of irregular multi-verb sequences.

Key features of the irregular multi-verb sequence

This paper shows that the first verbs in irregular multi-verb sequences are limited to the verbs *come*, *go*, *run*, *sit*, *stand*, *start*, *try*, and *up*. The most distinctive feature is that only the deictic verbs *come* and *go* can occur in all four types of multi-verb sequences, as shown in (2) and (3).

- (3) a. He went to see ‘*Twelfth Night*’.
b. She went sobbing up the stairs.
c. He went and bought thirty doughnuts.
d. Go wash your hands.

A sure sign that irregular multi-verb sequences constitute irregularities is that such sequences do not comprise two distinct verb phrases. In other words, an irregular multi-verb sequence functions as a constituent of a single verb phrase.

Regarding (3a) and (3b), semantically, what appears to be the second verb phrases *to see ‘Twelfth Night’* in (3a) and *sobbing up the stairs* in (3b) seem to function as adjunct; however, their status as adjuncts remains unclear. Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1223-1224) note that *in order* cannot be inserted in the (3a), and that (3a) is not interpreted as answering the question *Why did he go?* They also observe that *sobbing up the stairs* in (3b) cannot be omitted. Regarding (3c), syntactically, it does not represent full coordination because it violates the Coordinate Structure Constraint (Ross 1967:161), as defined in (4).

(4) The Coordinate Structure Constraint: In a coordinate structure, no conjunct may be moved, nor may any element contained in a conjunct be moved out of that conjunct.

Specifically, extraction of a noun phrase from what appears to be the second verb phrase of the coordinated structure is possible, as in *What did he go and buy?*

From a phonological standpoint, Carden and Pesetsky (1977) note a difference between the *go-and-V* sequence with a reduced structure and the one with a fully syntactic structure. While the *go-and-V* sequence with a reduced structure represents the reduced pronunciation of *and* when spelled 'n' in phrases like *rock'n'roll*, the *go-and-V* sequence with a fully syntactic structure has a pause before *and*. With respect to (3d), the *V-V* sequence is often regarded as a grammatical exception where the conjunction *and* is left out. Thus, irregularities are initially observed across multiple levels in (3).

Two constraints on the irregular multi-verb sequence

This paper shows that there are two constraints on irregular multi-verb sequences, the integrity constraint in (5) and the subject constraint in (6).

(5) The integrity constraint: No word can be inserted between the first verb and the word following the first verb in the irregular multi-verb sequence.

(6) The subject constraint: The first and second verbs in the irregular multi-verb sequence share the same subject.

As shown in (7), no word or no phrase can be inserted between the first verb and the word immediately following it.

- (7) a. *He went in order to see 'Twelfth Night'.
b. *She went really sobbing up the stairs.
c. *He went at three and bought thirty doughnuts.
d. *Go immediately wash your hands.

This shows that the integrity, or inseparability, is consistently strong in irregular multi-verb sequences. It is therefore reasonable to state that irregular multi-verb sequences function as a single verb phrase despite containing two verbs. Conversely, as shown in (8), one or more words can be inserted between the first verb and the word following the first verb in regular multi-verb sequences.

- (8) a. I like not to put lots of ketchup on my fries.
b. I can remember his reading some of the passages aloud to me.
c. Start slowly and gain some experience directly.
d. He helped her organize the party.

This means that the integrity, or inseparability, of regular multi-verb sequences is consistently weak because such sequences involve two verb phrases. The integrity constraint does not apply to regular multi-verb sequences.

With respect to the subject constraint, as shown in (2) and (3), the first and second verbs in irregular multi-verb sequences share the same subject. This sharing of the subject is closely related to the integrity constraint. In other words, there are no separate slots to express the subject of the second verb because the integrity, or inseparability, is consistently strong in irregular multi-verb sequences. It is therefore reasonable to state that irregular multi-verb sequences function as a single verb phrase despite containing two verbs. Conversely, the first and second verbs do not always share the same subject in regular multi-verb sequences. As shown in (9), the subject constraint does not apply to regular multi-verb sequences.

- (9) a. The accident helped (to) promote gun control.
b. I remember my father bringing home a huge Christmas tree.
c. At school I boxed and I played rugby.

As shown in (9a), the subject of the second verb is generic and distinct from that of the main clause. In (9b) and (9c), the subject of the second verb is positioned between the first and second verbs, reflecting the weak integrity, or inseparability, characteristic of regular multi-verb sequences. The two constraints reveal that the irregularities discussed here are inherent properties of irregular multi-verb sequences.

Concluding remarks

Focusing on irregular multi-verb sequences, this paper has argued that irregularities are not peculiarities, but a normal part of the English Language. It is clear that the deictic verbs *come* and *go* play a vital role in forming irregular multi-verb sequences. It is also reasonable to conclude that deixis is significantly related to irregular multi-verb sequences.

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