

Sorting it right out: Degree modification and movement in English particle-verb constructions

Particle-verbs are combinations of a verb and prepositional particle (Prt) like *eat up* (e.g. Haiden 2006). Verb+Prt stay together in the continuous word order (*He ate up the spinach*), but they separate in the discontinuous order (*He ate the spinach up*). Here, we use the facts that (i) Prt can be modified in the discontinuous order (*He ate the spinach right up*), even by a phrasal modifier (*He ate the spinach pretty much right up*), and (ii) modification is not possible in the continuous order (**He ate right up the spinach*) to argue for an analysis of Prt modifiers as generated in Spec-PrtP and for verb rather than object movement to account for the ordering alternation.

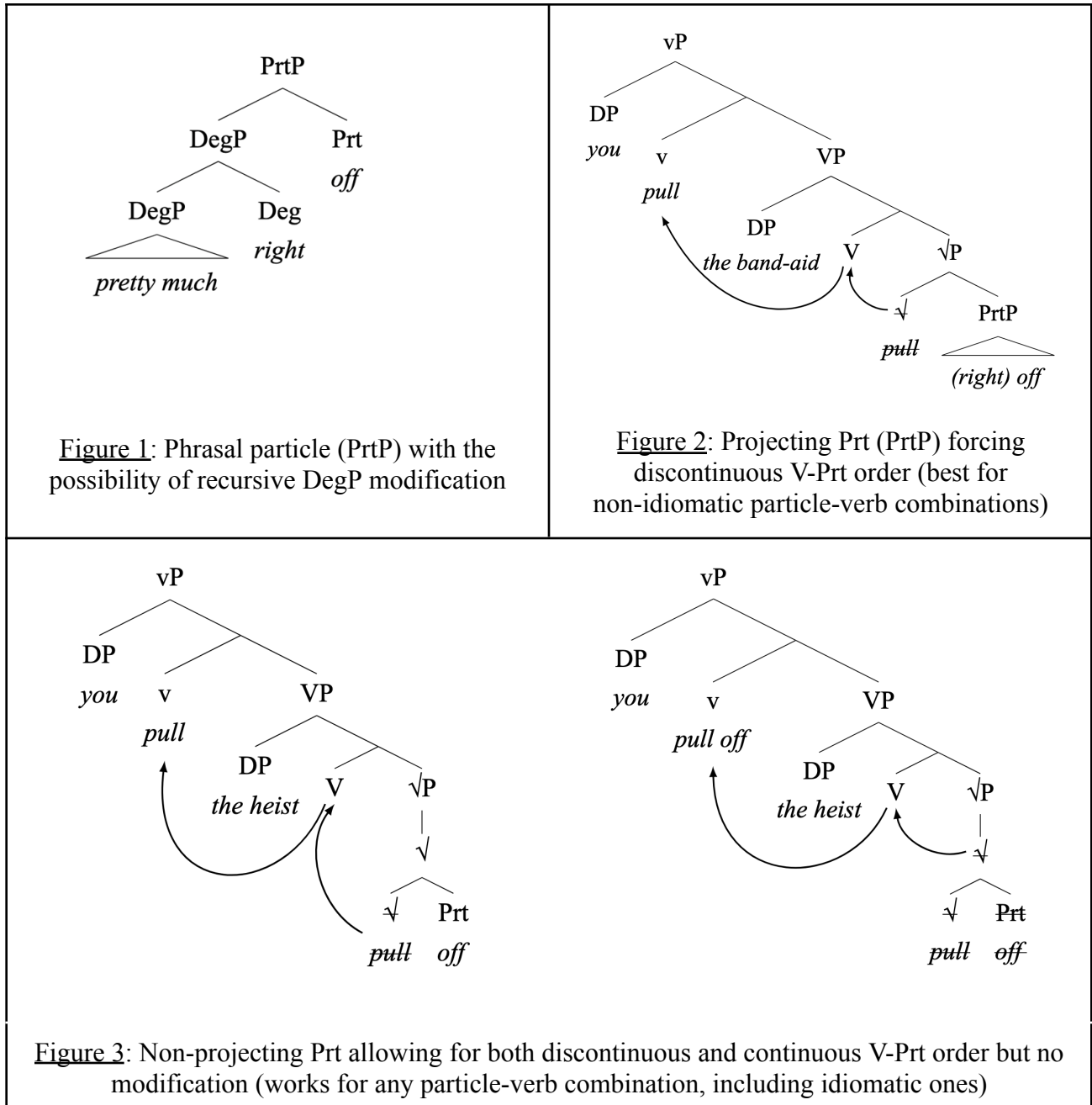
Prt modification has been noted in the literature, but previous treatments fall short. Analyzing modifiers as heads adjoined to the particle (Larsen 2014) fails to account for the possibility of phrasal modification, and analyzing them as phrasal adjuncts (Basilico 2008) incorrectly predicts unconstrained recursive modification of Prt (**He ate the spinach right straight all the way up*). Furthermore, assuming that Prt has the same phrase-structural representation in continuous and discontinuous orders (Ramchand 2008) leaves no way to account for the modification asymmetry. Therefore, we take Prt modifiers to be generated in Spec-PrtP, allowing for grammatical recursion possibilities (Figures 1-2). That position (Spec-PrtP) is only available in the discontinuous order. For the continuous order, we take Prt to be a non-projecting head adjoined to the verb (Figure 3), in line with Basilico (2008) and Larsen (2014).

Further, we eliminate the need for ad-hoc functional projections (FP), as the object of the particle-verb does not need to move. While Basilico and Larsen derive the discontinuous order by generating the object within the particle phrase (PrtP) and move it to Spec-FP for case-licensing, we maintain that the object originates as an argument of the verb, regardless of continuous or discontinuous ordering. Like Basilico, we assume the verb starts as a root ($\sqrt{\text{v}}$) that combines with a verbalizing head (V), as in Figures 2-3).

Finally, note that particle-verb combinations that are interpreted compositionally (non-idiomatically) can readily take degree modification, but idiomatic ones resist it (cf. *You pulled the band-aid right off* vs. *?You pulled the heist right off*). Adopting a phase-by-phase model of incremental interpretation (Arad 2003, et seq.), the asymmetry follows if a projecting particle (PrtP, assumed to be a phase) has its literal meaning fixed before combining with the root. In contrast, non-projecting particles (Figure 3: Prt adjoined to $\sqrt{\text{v}}$) can be interpreted idiomatically when the $\sqrt{\text{v}}$ +Prt meaning is computed at the next higher phase. We assume for non-projecting particles that the minimal $\sqrt{\text{v}}$ segment can head-move to V and on to v (stranding Prt for the discontinuous order), or the maximal $\sqrt{\text{v}}$ segment including Prt can move (yielding the continuous order). Together, this accounts for a previously unnoticed interaction between Prt modification and $\sqrt{\text{v}}$ +Prt interpretation, suggesting a condition on the syntax-semantics interface to explore in other constructions and languages.

Word Count: 498

Figures



References

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