

**The Preverb-Verb Construction in Indo-European:
Synchronic analysis and diachronic development**

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In archaic Indo-European languages like Hittite, Vedic Sanskrit and Homeric Greek preverbs are separate adverbial particles with various types of function (spatial, aspectual etc.). An example from Vedic (Rigveda) is *prá ... bharati* ‘brings forward, offers’, where the preverb (*prá* ‘forward’) and the finite verb (*bharati* ‘brings’) can be separated (Pinault 1995). In this example, from a main clause, the stress is on the preverb and not the verb. However, already in post-Rigvedic Sanskrit, post-Homeric Greek and Classical Latin, and in modern Russian, Latvian and German, univerbation of the preverb and verb is widely attested. For instance, in German we find verbs with (unstressed) “inseparable prefixes” like *gehörchen* ‘obey’.

This paper focuses on three interrelated research questions. I explore, first, the evidence for a Preverb-Verb Construction in Indo-European, following the tenets of Construction Grammar that there is no strict distinction between lexical units and syntactic structures (Goldberg 1995, Booij 2010). Second, I examine, on the basis of the comparative evidence in Indo-European languages, whether this construction is reconstructable for Proto-Indo-European. Third, I test an account of the univerbation of the preverb and verb as syntactic incorporation.

The analysis of the Preverb-Verb Construction is based on an extensive investigation of Indo-European languages and modeled within Construction Grammar. Moreover, following Ackerman & Webelhuth (1998), I argue that the Preverb-Verb Construction involves analytic word formation (“periphrastic exponence”), with semantic information being encoded lexically but realized syntactically.

I propose that this construction is reconstructable for Proto-Indo-European on the basis of the daughter languages. This proposal is again couched within Construction Grammar, in combination with the Comparative Method of historical linguistics (Barðdal & Eythórsson 2012).

Finally, I adopt an analysis of the univerbation of the preverb and verb as syntactic incorporation. Concomitantly with this incorporation, the stress of the preverb is lost, and it thus becomes dependent on verb. The univerbation proceeds at a different rate for different verbs in individual languages; in some cases it is evidently very early, as in Rigvedic *yás ... prabháratī* ‘who brings forward, offers’ (where *pra* is unstressed and attached to *bhárati*, which is stressed in a dependent clause introduced by a relative *yás* ‘who’). In the spirit of Ackerman & Webelhuth (1998), I argue that the univerbation is motivated by the resolution of the mismatch between the syntax and the semantics of the Preverb-Verb Construction. A clue to the nature of the incorporation is given by the existence of “near-inseparable” prefixes in Gothic, Old Irish and Lithuanian, representing an intermediate stage between archaic preverbs and later prefixes. For example, in the Gothic string *ga-u-hva-sehvi* (preverb-question.particle-clitic.pronoun-verb) ‘if he saw anything’, only clitics can break up the prefix-verb cluster in a particular clause position. This clearly constitutes strong evidence for analytic word formation.

In summary, the Preverb-Verb Construction, instantiating periphrastic exponence, can be reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European. Univerbation in the daughter languages is motivated by the resolution of the tension between the syntax and the semantics of this analytic construction.

References

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