

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

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# Focus on three interrelated research questions

- 1) What is the **evidence** for a Preverb-Verb Construction in Indo-European? E.g. Sanskrit *prá bharati* 'brings forth' and cognates.
- 2) Is this construction **reconstructable** for Proto-Indo-European?
- 3) How to account for the **univerbation** of the preverb and verb?

# 1. The evidence for a Preverb-Verb Construction in early Indo-European

## Robust

- Hittite, Rigvedic Sanskrit, Homeric Greek...

## Sporadic, or conditioned

- Archaic Latin, Old Irish, Gothic, Old Lithuanian...

# The Rigveda (Pinault 1995)

**Independent** (main) clauses (V unaccented)

- (1) (...) *prá* (...) *bharati* ‘brings forward, offers’

P V

**Subordinate** clauses (V accented)

- (2a) *prá yás* (...) *bhárati* ‘who brings forward, offers’

P rel V

- (2b) *yás* ... ***prabhárati***

rel P-V

# Earlier work (a very brief selection)

## Indo-European

- **Watkins**, Calvert. 1963. "Preliminaries to a historical and comparative analysis of the syntax of the Old Irish verb." *Celtica* 6:1-49.
- **Pinault**, Georges-Jean. 1995. "Le problème du préverbe en Indo-Européen." *Les Préverbes dans les langues d'Europe*. Introduction à l'étude de la préverbatation, ed. André Rousseau, pp. 35-59. Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, Lille.

## General analyses

- **Ackerman**, Farrell & Philip **LeSourd**. 1997. "Towards a lexical representation of phrasal predicates." *Complex predicates*, ed. Alex Alsina, Joan Bresnan & Peter Sells, pp. 67-106. CSLI, Stanford.
- **Ackerman**, Farrell & Gert **Webelhuth**. 1998. *A theory of predicates*. CSLI: Stanford.
- **Booij**, Geert. 2010. *Construction Morphology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- **Los**, Bettelou, Corrien **Blom**, Geert **Booij**, Marion **Elenbaas** and Ans **van Kemenade**. 2012. *Morphosyntactic change: A comparative study of particles and prefixes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- **Thim**, Stefan. 2012. *Phrasal verbs: The English verb-particle construction and its history*. Berlin: DeGruyter Mouton.

# Tmesis and Univerbation

## Tmesis

- Separation of Preverb and Verb

## Univerbation

- Union of Preverb and Verb

# Preverbs

- What are they?
- What is their function?
- What is the grammatical status of the Preverb-Verb complex?

# What are Preverbs?

- Verbal particles, “adpositions”
  - co-occurring with the verb, either adjacent to or separated from it by one or more elements; forming separable complex verbs (SCVs).

## A crude distinction between Preverbs and Prefixes

- Preverbs behave like prosodic words, with syntactic “mobility” (except when occurring next to a verb)
- Prefixes are affixes on the verb



# The Rigveda (again)

**Independent** (main) clauses (V unaccented)

- (1) (...) *prá* (...) *bharati* 'brings forward, offers'

P V

**Subordinate** clauses (V accented)

- (2a) *prá yás* (...) *bhárati* 'who brings forward, offers'

P rel V

- (2b) *yás* ... ***prabhárati***

rel P-V

# Function of the Preverb

- Spatio-temporal relations, derived, grammatical (aspectual, negative...)...
- Non-compositional meanings, idioms
  - (3a) Skt. *prá bharati* 'brings forth' > 'offers'
  - (3b) Skt. *prá iyarti* 'moves forth' > 'addresses'

# Grammatical status

- Semantic information is **encoded lexically** but **realized syntactically**
- Preverbs form **complex predicates** with the verb
- Analytic word formation, instantiating **periphrastic exponence**
  - Cf. Ackerman & Webelhuth (1998), Booij (2010)
- Pv-V conveniently analyzed as a **Construction**

Working assumption:  
There is a Pv-V Construction  $[Pv^\circ V^\circ]_v$   
in Indo-European

Thereby, it is possible to keep the notions ‘word’  
and ‘lexical unit’ **formally distinct**, and yet to  
look at a syntactically complex structure as a  
**single** lexical and semantic unit

– Cf. Booij (2010)

## 2. Reconstruction of the Pv-V Cx

- The Pv-V Cx is reconstructable for Proto-Indo-European on the basis of the daughter languages
- Tools:
  - Construction Grammar, Pvs as “constructional idioms”
  - The Comparative Method of historical linguistics (Barðdal & Eythórsson 2012)

# Why reconstruction?

- A fundamental part of historical linguistics, as it involves putting forward grounded hypotheses on pre-stages of languages, and hence how language change comes about (cf. Ferraresi & Goldbach 2008).
- Syntactic reconstruction may provide important insights into the development of specific linguistic structures.

# Watkins (1976)

- Morphological clues are instrumental for identifying **cognates**, including cognate syntactic material.
- Work on **poetic formulae** consistently identifies layers of cognate collocations and prefabs across the Indo-European traditions
- This shows how fragments of **earlier syntax** can be determined and, hence, reconstructed.

# The Comparative Method

– applied to the Pv-V Cx

- Pv-V constructions across archaic IE languages
- **Directionality** of the loss of separability of Pv
  - Tmesis in the earliest ones
  - Loss of Tmesis in later languages
- Separability of Pv and V shows **arbitrariness**
- Pv-V complex shows morphosyntactic **form–meaning** correspondences
- Presence of **cognate material** in morphosyntax



# Morphosyntactic Reconstruction

Barðdal & Eythórsson (2012)

Correspondence set – Sanskrit, Greek, Gothic:

(4a) Skt. *prá iyarti* ‘moves forth’ > ‘addresses’

(4b) Greek *pro érkhetai* ‘moves forth’ > ‘advances’

(4c) Gothic *faur rinnan* ‘move forth’ > ‘proceed’

### 3. How to account for the Univerbation of Preverb and Verb?

- In the Pv-V Cx semantic information is encoded lexically but realized syntactically
- Univerbation is motivated by the resolution of the mismatch between the syntax and the semantics of the Pv-V Cx

# Univerbation as syntactic incorporation

- Evidence in support:
  - Mostly **no** Tmesis in later languages
  - The **stress** of the Preverb is **lost**: loss of status as a prosodic word

# A clue to the nature of the incorporation

- “Near-inseparable” prefixes in Gothic, Old Irish, Lithuanian...
  - Only **Wackernagel** clitics can occur between the Prefix and the Verb (when the prefixed verb is fronted)

# A clue to the nature of the incorporation

- “Near-inseparable” prefixes in Gothic
- Wackernagel clitics incorporated between Pv and V

(5) *ga-u-hva-sehvi*  
P-Q-anything-verb  
'if he saw anything'

# A clue to the nature of the incorporation

(6a) \**ga- pana hlaif -sehvi*

P- that bread - verb

'if he saw that bread'

(6b) \**sehvi (...) ga-*

verb      P

# A clue to the nature of the incorporation

- “Near-inseparable” prefixes in Gothic, Old Irish and Lithuanian
  - **Intermediate stage** between archaic Preverbs  $[Pv^\circ V^\circ]_v$  and later Prefixes  $[Pv^\circ [V^\circ]]_v$
  - Strong evidence for **analytic word** formation
  - There is a stage at which the incorporated Preverb has **not fused entirely** with the V  $[[Pv^\circ] [V^\circ]]_v$

# 4. Conclusion

- The Preverb-Verb Construction instantiates periphrastic exponence
- It can be reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European
- Univerbation is motivated by the resolution of the tension between the syntax and the semantics of this analytic construction
- Univerbation proceeds in stages from
  - Separable Preverb > “near-inseparable” Prefix > inseparable Prefix



# 5. Epilogue

- English
  - Preverbs (particles)
  - Prefixes > partly retained, partly lost (*ge-* etc.)
- North Germanic
  - Preverbs (particles)
  - Prefixes > “Füllwort” (*of/um*) > completely lost (but some new ones borrowed)