Chapter 4  The Verb Phrase

Verb phrases consist of a verb preceded by its complements. The complements give information about the verb's arguments other than the subject, which appears outside the verb phrase. Complements can consist of a noun phrase, a postpositional phrase, a postpositional enclitic phrase, or a clause. Clausal complements are presented in chapter 9. The others are presented in this chapter. However, the internal structure of noun phrases is discussed in chapter 6, and the internal structure of postpositional phrases and postpositional enclitic phrases are discussed in chapter 7.

Certain kinds of morphological (word formation) processes can change the structure of the verb phrase. These issues are presented at the end of this chapter, except for the inverse construction which is presented in chapter 13.

1 Noun Phrase Complements

A verb can be a verb phrase all by itself, and indeed, it can be an entire sentence. Verbs frequently appear with noun phrases that give information about the object argument beyond the object inflection that appears as a verb prefix. In the example below, the noun phrase complement of the verb *hanishtá* is bracketed:

(1)  [Dibé yóó’ ’íyáa léí’] hanishtá.
    Sheep 3-away 3-go-P comp 3-1-look.I
    I’m looking for a sheep that got lost.

2 Postpositional Complements

Postpositions may be attached to the verb as in (1) or they may be written as separate words as in (2) [See note A].

(1)  Jooł yeini’á.
    ball 3-to-3-3-give.P
    S/he gave the ball to him/her.

(2)  Jáan Mary yá jooł yiní’á.
    John Mary 3-to ball 3IO.3O.3S.Pf.bring
    John brought the ball for Mary.

Two word orders are possible when the subject and indirect object noun phrases are present:
Language teachers prefer (3a) over (3b), but speakers use both forms.

The postposition yaa- is attached to the verb in (1) and (3). Mary, the object of the postposition in (3a & b) can appear before the direct object jooł or immediately before the postposition. This generalization is also true when the postposition is separate from the verb:

(4) a. Jáan Mary jooł yich’i’ ayíìhan.
   ball 3-to 3O.3S.Pf.throw
   John threw the ball to Mary.

b. Jáan jooł Mary yich’i’ ayíìhan.
   ball 3-to 3O.3S.Pf.throw
   John threw the ball to Mary.

When the postposition is separate from the verb an additional order is possible in which the postposition and its object appear together before the direct object:

(5) Jáan Mary yich’i’ jooł ayíìhan.
   3-to ball 3O.3S.Pf.throw
   John threw the ball to Mary.

Moving the postposition and its object in front of the subject results in an awkward sentence:

(6) ?Mary yich’i’ Jáan jooł ayíìhan.
   3-to ball 3O.3S.Pf.throw
   John threw the ball to Mary.

Below is an additional set of sentences that parallel the examples in (4) through (6):

(7) a. Mary Jáan kélchí yá áyiilaa.
    moccasins 3.for 3O.3S.Pf.made
    Mary made moccasins for John.

b. Mary kélchí Jáan yá áyiilaa.
    moccasins 3.for 3O.3S.Pf.made
    Mary made moccasins for John.
c. Mary Ján yá kélchí áyiilaa.
   3.for moccasins 3O.3S.Pf.made
   Mary made moccasins for John.

d. ?Ján yá Mary kélchí áyiilaa.
   3.for moccasins 3O.3S.Pf.made
   Mary made moccasins for John.

Note A

To tell whether a postposition is part of a verb or not see whether the postposition and its object can appear together before the direct object. The verb yeini‘á has the postposition yaa attached to it as seen by the contrast between (i) and (ii):

(i) Ján Mary joö yeini‘á.
   ball 3IO.3O.3S.Pf.give
   John gave the ball to Mary.

(ii) *Ján Mary yaa joö yiní‘á.
   3-to ball 3IO.3O.3S.Pf.give
   John gave the ball to Mary.

In (ii), the postposition is removed from the verb but the result is ungrammatical. To use the verb without yaa-, a different postposition must be used:

(iii) Ján Mary yá joö yiní‘á.
   3-for ball 3IO.3O.3S.Pf.bring
   John brought the ball for Mary.

3. Valence alternations
This chapter includes valence alternations in verbs including how to form causative and passive verbs.

3.1 Transitivity alteration

With a certain class of intransitive verbs (sometimes called “labile” or “causative-inchoative” -HK 106) all of which normally have a Ø classifier, adding -³- in the classifier position results in a making the verb transitive. An intransitive example is shown in (1a) and its transitive counterpart is shown in (1b) [the examples are from Hale & Keyser 2002:107f.]:

(1) a. Tóshjeeh sits’il. (YM 80:804)
   barrel sPf:3-shatter:Pf
‘The barrel shattered, broke to pieces.’

b. Łeets’aa’ sélts’il. (YM80:798)

Dish 3:sPf:1s-l-shatter:Pf

‘I shattered the dish.’

Because the verb in (1b) is transitive, it has an object prefix not present in the intransitive form. The object of the transitive form plays the same role as the object of the intransitive form: in both the examples above, this is the role of the item being shattered. The subject of the transitive verb is interpreted as the entity that brings about the change that the object undergoes. Below are additional examples:

(2) a. Tin yíí’’. (< -ghíí’) (YM 80:794)

ice yPf:3-melt:Pf

‘The ice melted.’

b. Yas yílíí’’. (< -ghíí’) (YM 80:782)

snow 3:yPf:1s-l-melt:Pf

‘I melted the snow.’

(3) a. Kq’ neeztsiz. (YM 80:664)

fire n-sPf-3-extinguish:Pf

‘The fire went out.’

b. Kq’ néltisz. (YM 80:664)

fire 3:n-sPf-1s-l-extinguish:Pf

‘I put the fire out.’

(4) a. Tš’óól k’ínídláád. (YM 80:502)

rope k’í-nPf:3-break:Pf

‘The rope broke.’

b. Tš’óól k’ínídláád. (YM 80:502)

rope k’í-3o-nPf:3-l-break:Pf

‘He broke the rope.’

Hale & Keyser (2002:109) provide the following list of verbs that belong to this class:

(5) ‘i-(l)-’eel ‘float away’ (YMM 1992:177-183)

ii-(l)-gááh ‘whiten’ (195)

(l-)gan ‘dry up’ (199)

‘i-(l)-geeh ‘fall away’ [as person, animal] (214,216)

ii-(l)-kúish ‘become spotted, put spots on’ (329)

ii-(l)-k’is ‘crack’ (351)

(l-)llááh ‘increase’ (369) [[**CHECK THIS**]]
‘i-(l-)l̃j ‘flow away’ (376,377) 
di-(l-)lid ‘be burning’ (371) 
‘i-(l-)máás ‘roll away’ (397,398) 
ii-(l-)táás ‘bend over, double’ (493) 
(l-)t’ees ‘cook, roast, etc.’ (536) 
‘i-(l-)t’ée’ ‘extend away’ [line, fence] (546,547) 
ii-(l-)thíísh ‘darken, turn brown’ (571) 
-(l-)tí’s ‘harden’ [as mud, dough] (580) 
ii-(l-)tsóóh ‘yellow’ (614) 
di-(l-)ts’q̣od ‘stretch’ (643,644) 
di-(l-)zháásh ‘begin to wear away, down’ (767) 
-(l-)zhóóh ‘become gentle, make gentle’ (796)

Not all verbs display this transitivity alternation:

(6) a. ‘Awée’ deez’a.  
    baby d-sPf:3-belch:Pf 
    ‘The baby burped.’

b. ‘Awée’ dés’a. (<…-l-za’)  
    baby d-sPf:1s-l-belch:Pf 
    ‘I burped the baby.’

Section 3.2 shows how this verb can be transitivized.

### 3.2 Causativization

Navajo has a class of verbs that can receive a causative interpretation when marked with particular prefixes. As with the transitivity alternation noted in section 1, the classifier for the causative form of these verbs is -l-. In addition, the position VI prefix -y- appears along with an object prefix in position IV. The object prefixes have the unusual characteristic of being overt rather than null when the subject is first or second person. [the examples are from Hale & Keyser 2002:108f.]

(1) a. ‘Awée’ naaghá.  
    baby na-Imp:3-walk:sg:CI 
    ‘The baby is walking around.’

b. ‘Awée’ nabiishlá. (YM 1980:525)  
    baby na-3-y-Imp:1s-l-walk:sg:CI 
    ‘I am walking the baby around (i.e., making it walk).’

(2) a. ‘Awée’ deez’a.  
    baby d-sPf:3-belch:Pf 
    ‘The baby burped.’
b. ‘Awée’ bidiyésa’.
   baby 3-d-y-sPf:1s-t-belch:Pf
   ‘I burped the baby.’

(3) a. ‘Awée’ yidloh
   baby Prog:3-d:laugh:Prog
   ‘The baby is laughing.’

   b. ‘Awée’ biyeeshdloh
   baby 3-y-Prog:1s-t-d:laugh:Prog
   ‘I am making the baby laugh.’

Hale & Keyser (2002:110) provide the following list of verbs that belong to this class:

(4) na-bé ‘swim, bathe’ (YMM 1992:69)
    -cha ‘cry’ (70)
    di-lish ‘spurt urine’ [as of dog] (375)
    na-né ‘play’ (423)
    ho-taał ‘sing’ (490)
    di-zheeh ‘spit’ (771)
    ‘i-zhił ‘gasp, inhale sharply’ (773)
    di-yih ‘pant, puff’ (702)
    ‘i-yótól ‘inhale’ (723)

Transitive verbs can also undergo the same causativization process:

(5) a. yishdláq ‘I drank it.’
   b. OBJ-’y-l-dlq ‘make OBJ drink something’ (154)

(6) a. ha-l-yeed ‘…run up out’ (653)
   b. ha-OBJ-y-l-yeed ‘run OBJ up out’ (657)

(7) a. ‘-ii-l-haazh ‘go to sleep’
   b. OBJ-’y-l-haazh ‘make OBJ sleep’ (YM 87:215)

These examples have overt classifiers in their non-causativized forms, unlike the examples in (1)-(4).

Hale & Keyser (2002) identify the verbs that can be causitivized (i.e., those discussed in this section) as “unergatives”. None of the verbs that undergo causitivization can undergo the transitivity alternation sketched in x.1 (Hale & Keyser 2002:110).

3.3 Passive

3.4 Another transitivity alternation
In the alternation illustrated here the subject of the intransitive verb has the same role as the subject of the transitive counterpart.

(8) Bilasáana yíyáá’
apple 3-1-eat.Pf
I ate apple

íyáá’
1-eat-Pf
I ate.

(9) tó yishdláá’
water 3-1-drink-Pf
I drank water.

eeshdláá’
3-1-drink-Pf
I drank.