

Contemporary Grammar of English

Third Year 2020-2021

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First Semester

Week 3:

Lecture 7:

- Verbs and the Verb Phrase



Classification of English Verbs

In terms of their functions in the verb phrase, the English verbs are classified into:

1. **Lexical Verbs** : *walk, talk, speak, break...etc*

2. **Auxiliary Verbs** which are divided into:

a. **Primary Auxiliaries**: *Do, Have, Be*

b. **Modal Auxiliaries**: *can, may, shall, will, could, might, should, would, ought to, must, used to, need, dare.*



Forms of English Verbs

Regular lexical verbs like (call) have four morphological forms. Irregular lexical verbs vary in this respect; a verb like (speak) has five forms, whereas (cut) has only three forms. However, the primary auxiliary verb (be) has eight forms.

Base form	call	speak	cut
-s form	calls	speaks	cuts
-ing participle	calling	speaking	cutting
Past form	called	spoke	cut
-ed participle	called	spoken	cut

These verb forms have different functions in the finite and non-finite verb phrases. On this basis, the *-s form* and the *past form* are called finite, whereas the *-ing participle* and the *-ed participle* are called non-finite. The base verb is sometimes finite, and sometimes non-finite.



Finite Verb Phrases

Finite verb phrases may consist of just a finite verb as in:

- He worked very hard.

In finite verb phrases consisting of more than one verb, the finite verb is the first one:

- He was working for a computer company at that time.
- The enemy's attack had been planned for fifteen years.

The finite verb is the element of the verb phrase which has present or past tense. In the sentences above, the finite verbs are (was & had). The verbs (working) and (been planned) in the same above examples are non-finite verb forms, but they function in finite verb phrases (was working) and (had been planned).

There is usually number concord between the subject and the finite verb. Such concord is restricted to contrast between Third Person Singular and other persons:

I/we	}	read	,	s/he reads
You				
They				



Finite Verb Phrases

Concord of person between the subject and the finite verb is particularly clear with the verbs (to be):

I am..... You are..... he is

Non-finite Verb Phrases

The non-finite forms of the verb are:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------|
| 1. Bare infinitive : | call |
| 2. To-Infinitive : | to call |
| 3. The -ing participle: | calling |
| 4. The -ed participle | called |



Non-finite Verb Phrases

The non-finite verb phrases are mainly used as the verb element in the subordinate clauses:

1. After having spent six hours at the hospital, they eventually came home.
2. He left the party and went home, not having anyone to talk to.
3. To see all the detail, you have to look at the picture really carefully.
4. If accepted by Parliament, the budget will lead to disastrous consequences.

As you may have noticed in the sentences above:

1. The non-finite verb phrases represent the verb element in the subordinate clauses.
2. The subordinate clauses in which they are used are subjectless. This does not mean that all non-finite subordinate clauses are subjectless, some may come with subjects. If it comes with no subject, the subject of the subordinate clause is usually the same as that of the main clause.
3. Some non-finite subordinate clauses come with subordinators like (*after, if*) in sentences (1) and (4), while some of them are subordinator free like sentences (2) and (3).

Combinations of Verbs

The verb element is always a verb phrase. This may be finite (showing tense, mood, aspect and voice) or non-finite (not showing tense or mood but still capable of showing aspect and voice). Whether finite or non-finite, the verb phrase can consist of one word, or of more than one word, in which case the verb phrase consists of a 'head verb' preceded by one or more 'auxiliary verbs' as it is indicated by the Four Basic Verb Combinations Rules below:

- A. Modal + inf. as in: We can do nothing.
- B. Perfect (have+p.p) as in: He had forgotten their wedding anniversary.
- C. Progressive (be+ v+ing) as in: The wind is growing stronger.
- D. Passive (be+p.p) as in: He was challenged rudely.

These four basic verb combination rules may also combine with each other to make up longer strings of verbs in one single verb phrase as illustrated below:

Combinations of Verbs

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- A+B= He must have typed the report himself.
- A+C= He may be typing at the moment.
- A+D= The report could be typed by Jane.
- B+C= He has been typing all morning.
- B+D= The report has been typed already.
- C+D= The report is being sent to the FBI.
- A+B+C= He must have been typing the report himself.
- A+B+D= The reports must have been typed by the secretary.

Combinations of Verbs

As we can see, the verbs in the middle of the phrase serve both as the second part of the previous combination and as the first part of the following combination:

<i>must</i>	<i>have</i>	<i>been</i>	<i>typing</i>
A: Modal +	Infinitive		
	B: <i>Have</i> +	Past participle	
		C: <i>Be</i>	+ <i>-ing</i> form