ALL SYNTAXED OUT: THE EXHAUSTIVE VERB-PARTICLE CONSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH

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1. Introduction

Examining verb-particle constructions in English, Jackendoff (2002) enumerates the following six kinds:

1. idiomatic verb-particle combinations (e.g., *throw up* {vomit})
2. directional particle constructions (e.g., *toss out*)
3. aspectual particle constructions (e.g., *wipe up*)
4. time-*away* construction (e.g., *read* [the night] *away*)
5. V/N-d *out* construction (e.g., *I'm (all) knitted out* {I'm tired of knitting})
6. *his heart out* constructions (e.g., *sing his heart out* {sing to the best of his ability, to his heart's content, etc.})

This squib concerns the fifth kind, the V/N-d *out* construction, which has the general meaning of action done in excess to an endpoint. In light of these semantics, this kind of verb-particle construction (henceforth, VPC) shall be referred to as "exhaustive."

2. The Meaning and Usage of the Exhaustive VPC

The exhaustive VPC is formed by taking a verb (V) or a noun (N), suffixing it with past tense/perfective verbal morphology -(*e*)*d*, and combining the resulting verb form with the particle *out*. The meaning of this productive VPC is summarized by Jackendoff as "worn out from too much V-ing/too much N." He further suggests that when this VPC takes a noun, it is confined to the passive participial version (e.g., *I'm all coffeed out*); however, the active, verbal version (e.g., *I coffeed myself out*, *I've coffeed myself out*) appears to be acceptable to most speakers. The construction may thus occur in both passive participial and active forms, as seen in the following examples in which the context has been put in brackets.[1]

(1)　　[*After dancing for several hours at a nightclub*:]
　　　　a.　I've danced myself out.
　　　　b.　I'm (all) danced out.
　　　　[*After dancing with a guy she met at a nightclub for several hours*:]
　　　　c.　She danced out the guy she met at the club.
　　　　d.　*She danced out him.
　　　　e.　??She danced the guy she met at the club out.

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[1] Note that this VPC is different from a semiproductive subclass of idiomatic VPCs with the particle *out* (e.g., *space out*, *creep out*, *stress out*, etc.) to which Jackendoff attributes the meaning "go into an unusual mental state"—i.e., go **out** of (=leave) one's usual/normal mental state: sanity, consciousness, etc. The simultaneous existence of semantically analogous prepositional idioms such as *go out of one's mind* suggests that this class of VPCs probably developed diachronically from a truncation of these longer idioms. In any case, Jackendoff posits that the exhaustive VPC is a (presumably diachronic) extension of this *out* idiom class, which is only semiproductive because although the verb slot in the construction may be filled by elements of all different categories, each instance of the construction must be individually listed in the lexicon due to the often unpredictable meaning.

     f.   She danced him out.
(2)   [*After watching a re-run marathon of the television program "Survivor":*]
     a.   I've "Survivor"-ed myself out.
     b.   I'm (all) "Survivor"-ed out.
    [*After watching or talking about "Survivor" with a guy she met at a nightclub for several hours:*]
     c.   She "Survivor"-ed out the guy she met at the club.
     d.   *She "Survivor"-ed out him.
     e.   ??She "Survivor"-ed the guy she met at the club out.
     f.   She "Survivor"-ed him out.

Rules regarding the position of pronouns and heavy NPs with respect to particles account for the data in (1c-e, 2c-e) rather straightforwardly: it is preferred for a heavy NP to follow a particle (e.g., grammatical 1c, 2c; severely degraded 1e, 2e), while it is ungrammatical for a comparatively light pronoun to follow a particle (e.g., 1d, 2d). This is also the case for the "fake reflexive" pronouns present in (1a, 2a), which are not truly objects of the verb but part of an idiomatic use of the resultative (Jackendoff 2002) also present in (1c-f, 2c-f); the "fake reflexive" pronoun thus refers to the agent of the action in an event caused by the subject.

These rules governing the position of pronouns and heavy NPs with respect to particles may be subsumed under a more general semantic weight principle stating that semantically heavier elements should follow semantically lighter elements, with object pronouns being defined as relatively light because the content that they refer to has already been mentioned in a previous part of the sentence or discourse. An alternative is to subsume these rules under a prosodic weight principle stating that prosodically heavier elements should follow prosodically lighter elements. In the context of the exhaustive VPC, there appears to be no empirical difference between these two accounts of the ordering of pronouns and heavy NPs with respect to the particle.

3.   The V/N Slot

But the question remains: what sort of element can go into the V/N slot? It appears that the V/N slot is limited to verbal or nominal heads (i.e., V^0/N^0). Phrases (i.e., maximal projections in X-bar terms: VP/NP) cannot be inserted grammatically, as seen below.

(3)   [*After shopping all day:*]
     a.   I'm (all) shopped out.
    [*After making multiple trips to the store for groceries:*]
     b.   *I'm (all) [$_{VP}$ go to the store]-d out.
     c.   *I'm (all) gone/goed to the store out.
(4)   [*After practicing slam dunks on the basketball court all day:*]
     a.   I'm (all) dunked out.
     b.   *I'm (all) [$_{VP}$ dunk the ball]-ed out.
     c.   *I'm (all) dunked the ball out.
(5)   [*After giving thousands of dollars to worthy causes:*]
     a.   I'm (all) donated out.
     b.   *I'm (all) [$_{VP}$ donate money to charity]-ed out.
     c.   *I'm (all) donated money to charity out.
(6)   [*After gorging on candy:*]
     a.   I'm (all) candied out.
     b.   *I'm (all) [$_{NP}$ candy from Italy]-ed out.
     c.   *I'm (all) candied from Italy out.

(7)   [*After having ten cups of coffee:*]
    a.   I'm (all) coffeed out.
    b.   *I'm (all) [NP coffee with cream and sugar]-ed out.
    c.   *I'm (all) coffeed with cream and sugar out.

(8)   [*After wearing clothes previously worn by an older sibling from kindergarten until college:*]
    a.   I'm (all) hand-me-down-ed out.
    b.   *I'm (all) [VP clothing that my brother gave me]-ed out.
    c.   *I'm (all) clothing-ed that my brother gave me out.

In (3a, 4a, 5a), the verbal heads *shop*, *dunk*, and *donate* may be inserted into the V/N slot grammatically, while in (3b, 4b, 5b), the insertion of verb phrases with a variety of complements results in ungrammaticality. Similarly, in (6a, 7a, 8a), the nominal heads *candy*, *coffee*, and *hand-me-down* occupy the V/N slot with no problem, but in (6b, 7b, 8b), the insertion of noun phrases again results in ungrammaticality, and the ungrammaticality persists even when the perfective verbal morphology is suffixed onto the head element in the phrase instead of the end of the phrase (e.g., 3c, 4c, 5c, 6c, 7c, 8c).

The limitation of the V/N slot in the exhaustive VPC to heads thus appears to be a robust restriction. Consequently, it may serve as a useful diagnostic in assessing elements of potentially complex syntactic structure. The grammatical insertion of elements into the V/N slot of the exhaustive VPC would suggest that such elements should be analyzed as heads, whereas the ungrammatical insertion of elements into the V/N slot would suggest that such elements are not heads, but have further internal structure. The application of this diagnostic will be shown with regard to two cases of ambiguous internal structure: VPCs and compound nouns.

4.   The Application of the Exhaustive VPC Diagnostic

4.1. VPCs

VPCs might be analyzed as compound verbal heads of the form [V V Prt], as in *The demolition team* [V *blew up*] *the building*, since they must be listed in the lexicon as a unit due to often noncompositional, idiomatic meanings. However, Jackendoff (2002) notes that having to list idiomatic VPCs in the lexicon due to their noncompositional meanings does not mean that they have to be listed as grammatical words or constituents, giving the examples of idioms such as *kick the bucket* and *spill the beans*. He also gives examples of other idioms such as *take* NP *to task* and *give* NP *the slip* for which the underlying structure contains a discontinuity, saying that we should thus allow for the possibility that VPCs are discontinuous in their structure. This is indeed likely to be the case, since the structure of VPCs appears to be more complex than [V V Prt], as shown by the behavior of VPCs inserted into the V/N slot of the exhaustive VPC. When a VPC is inserted as the V in the exhaustive VPC, robust ungrammaticality results.

(9)   [*After exercising for hours:*]
    a.   *I've [work out]-ed myself out.
    b.   *I'm (all) [work out]-ed out.
    [*After training someone for hours:*]
    c.   *I [work out]-ed out that guy.
    d.   *I [work out]-ed that guy out.
    e.   *I worked that guy out out.
    f.   *I [work out]-ed out him.
    g.   *I [work out]-ed him out.

h.   *I worked him out out.

In (9), all occurrences of the idiomatic VPC *work out* as the V in the exhaustive VPC are ungrammatical, regardless of whether the object is a full noun phrase or pronoun or where it is placed with respect to the *out* particle of the exhaustive VPC.   Ungrammaticality persists even when the perfective verbal morphology is made to sneak into the V slot and suffix directly onto the verb (e.g., 9e, 9h).   This effect cannot be due to a general ban on nesting like elements since English freely allows many types of nesting, such as CP-in-CP (e.g., *I said that Mary said that George said…*) and DP-in-DP (e.g., *Mary's brother's friend's…*NP).

   The ungrammaticality in (9) could potentially be caused by identity between the particle in the inner VPC and the particle in the outer, exhaustive VPC.   However, VPCs containing a particle other than *out* do not fare much better.   In (10)-(13), ungrammaticality or marginality results with VPCs containing the particles *off*, *over*, *through*, and *down* as well.

(10)   [*After checking the same names off a list seven times and being asked to check them off again*:]
   a.   *I've [check off]-ed myself out.
   b.   *I'm (all) [check off]-ed out.
   c.   *I've [check off]-ed out these names.
   d.   *I've [check off]-ed these names out.
   e.   ??I've checked off these names out.
   f.   *I've checked off out these names.

(11)   [*After reading over grant proposals for hours*:]
   a.   *I've [read over]-ed myself out.
   b.   *I'm (all) [read over]-ed out.
   c.   *I've [read over]-ed out these proposals.
   d.   *I've [read over]-ed these proposals out.
   e.   ??I've read over these proposals out.[2]
   f.   *I've read over out these proposals.

(12)   [*After talking through a linguistics problem on an oral exam in three different ways and coming up with no solution*:]
   a.   *I've [talk through]-ed myself out.
   b.   *I'm (all) [talk through]-ed out.
   c.   *I've [talk through]-ed out this problem.
   d.   *I've [talk through]-ed this problem out.
   e.   ??I've talked through this problem out.
   f.   *I've talked through out this problem.

(13)   [*After pushing down the top flaps of a box for several minutes while someone else carefully tapes the box shut*:]
   a.   *I've [push down]-ed myself out.
   b.   *I'm (all) [push down]-ed out.
   c.   *I've [push down]-ed out the top of this box.
   d.   *I've [push down]-ed the top of this box out.
   e.   ??I've pushed down the top of this box out.
   f.   *I've pushed down out the top of this box.

It might be pointed out that the irregularity of the past participle of *read* in (11) could be causing the ungrammaticalities there; however, this argument does not go very far when one observes the regularity of the verbs in (10), (12), and (13).   One should also note the parallel pattern of slightly

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[2] In both (11e) and (11f), *read* is the irregular past participial form *r*[ɛ]*d*.

improved grammaticality in (10e, 11e, 12e, 13e) vis-à-vis the other sentences in their respective paradigms.   This pattern will be addressed in more detail later.

4.2. Compound Nouns

If a VPC is better classified as a VP than a V^0 (see Ramchand and Svenonius 2002 for a structural account), it is worth asking whether a compound noun is in a parallel way better classified as an NP than an N^0.   One might expect a compound noun to act as an NP by virtue of the fact that a compound by nature combines two elements, but on the contrary, the exhaustive VPC diagnostic indicates that a compound noun behaves like an N^0, not an NP.

(14)   [*After teaching twenty classes as a student teacher:*]
    a.   I've [student teacher]-ed myself out.
    b.   I'm (all) [student teacher]-ed out.
    [*After teaching fifteen extra classes the principal added to the schedule last-minute:*]
    c.   The principal [student teacher]-ed me out.

(15)   [*After too many trips to the café for the same beverage:*]
    a.   I've [mocha latté]-ed myself out.
    b.   I'm (all) [mocha latté]-ed out.
    [*After taking a friend to the café one too many times for the same beverage:*]
    c.   I've [mocha latté]-ed her out.

(16)   [*After having goat soup for three days in a row:*]
    a.   I've [goat soup]-ed myself out.
    b.   I'm (all) [goat soup]-ed out.
    [*After feeding a child goat soup for three days in a row and making him sick of it:*]
    c.   I've [goat soup]-ed him out.

(17)   [*After riding ten different roller coasters at Six Flags:*]
    a.   I've [roller coaster]-ed myself out.
    b.   I'm (all) [roller coaster]-ed out.
    [*After dragging a friend on these ten roller coasters:*]
    c.   I've [roller coaster]-ed her out.

In (14)-(17), compound nouns are allowed to sit in the V/N slot of the exhaustive VPC grammatically.   It could be argued that a common compound noun like *roller coaster* has been integrated into the lexicon as an inseparable unit; however, such a line of argument has difficulty accounting for much less common compound nouns (e.g., *goat soup* in (16)) which are most likely constructed online.

The exhaustive VPC diagnostic, then, suggests that compound nouns are of the category N^0. This line of reasoning may be extended to show that a nominalized form of a VPC also acts like an N^0 in the exhaustive VPC.

(18)   [*After attending the umpteenth family reunion:*]
    a.   I've [get-together]-ed myself out.
    b.   I'm (all) [get-together]-ed out.
    [*After forcing friends to hang out for the umpteenth time:*]
    c.   I've [get-together]-ed them out.

(19)   [*After wearing only buttonless shirts for a year:*]
    a.   I've [pullover]-ed myself out.
    b.   I'm (all) [pullover]-ed out.
    [*After buying a friend only buttonless shirts as gifts for several years:*]

      c.   I've [pullover]-ed her out.

(20)   [*After pitching as many extra automobile features as possible to prospective buyers*:]
      a.   I've [add-on]-ed myself out.
      b.   I'm (all) [add-on]-ed out.
      [*After confusing one couple with all the extra automobile features they could and should purchase*:]
      c.   I've [add-on]-ed you out, I see.

The grammatical insertion of these nominalized VPCs into the exhaustive VPC implies that a VPC loses its internal structure when it is nominalized or otherwise that its internal structure becomes inaccessible to syntax such that it behaves like any other N^0.

At this point, it should be observed that finding examples of ungrammatical VPC insertion into the exhaustive VPC is quite difficult precisely because so many VPCs have common nominalized counterparts. Thus, many VPCs can be inserted into the exhaustive VPC seemingly grammatically. However, one has to remember that the nominalized counterparts of these VPCs are likely to be interfering with the grammaticality judgments and that these are not true instances of grammatical VPC-insertion into the exhaustive VPC. Even the examples given in (10)-(13) above, in which the nested VPCs do not really have nominalized counterparts, are drastically improved if one tries to impose a nominalized reading on the nested VPC (e.g., taking the hypothetical nominalization *check-off* to mean an instance of checking something off a list). Thus, it is important to be aware of the distinction between the insertion of a nominalized VPC and the insertion of a truly verbal VPC into the exhaustive VPC, as these result in very different grammaticality judgments. Although compound nouns and nominalized VPCs could be seen as having complex internal structure, as far as syntax is concerned, they count as one word—an N^0.[3]

5. The Case of Affixed Nouns

Whether or not they have complex internal structure, proper place names might also be expected to act as simple nouns. The name of the supermarket *Shop Rite* contains a verb and an adverb, but this internal structure does not seem to be active in syntax; the name instead acts like a noun in taking the plural suffix, for example.

(21)   There are three Shop Rites in San Francisco.

As nominal heads, place names are then expected to be able to occur in the exhaustive VPC grammatically, and they do in most cases, such as the following.

(22)   [*After spending all day buying Thanksgiving dinner materials at Shop Rite*:]
      a.   I've [Shop Rite]-d myself out.
      b.   I'm (all) [Shop Rite]-d out.
      [*After dragging a friend on the day long supermarket trip*:]
      c.   I've [Shop Rite]-d her out.

However, note the following examples in which place names cannot occur in the exhaustive VPC grammatically.

(23)   [*After spending all day buying Thanksgiving dinner materials at Andronico's*:]

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[3] And this analysis agrees with other independent evidence such as the external, and not internal, pluralization of compounds (e.g., *goat soups*, **goats soup*, **goats soups*).

      a.   ??I've Andronico's-ed myself out.
      b.   ??I'm (all) Andronico's-ed out.
      [*After dragging a friend on the day long supermarket trip*:]
      c.   ??I've Andronico's-ed her out.

(24) [*After spending all day buying Thanksgiving dinner materials at Trader Joe's*:]
      a.   ??I've [Trader Joe's]-ed myself out.
      b.   ??I'm (all) [Trader Joe's]-ed out.
      [*After dragging a friend on the day long supermarket trip*:]
      c.   ??I've [Trader Joe's]-ed her out.

It appears that while syntax normally does not have access to the internal structure of place names, it does recognize the possessive suffix commonly present in place names. This would explain why possessive place names result in marginality when inserted into the exhaustive VPC: for the purposes of the exhaustive VPC, they are being analyzed as Ds[4], not Ns. An alternative attempt to explain away the ungrammaticality due to phonotactic violations incurred by the possessive suffix coming together with the perfective verbal morphology is untenable, as the [-**zd**-] sequence appears widely in such other VPCs as *phased out*, *spazzed out*, *dozed off*, etc.

      When the possessive suffix is dropped, the place name can be analyzed as an N^0 and inserted into the exhaustive VPC grammatically. Note the clear difference between (23) and (25) and between (24) and (26).

(25) [*After spending all day buying Thanksgiving dinner materials at Andronico's*:]
      a.   I've Andronico-ed myself out.
      b.   I'm (all) Andronico-ed out.
      [*After dragging a friend on the day long supermarket trip*:]
      c.   I've Andronico-ed her out.

(26) [*After spending all day buying Thanksgiving dinner materials at Trader Joe's*:]
      a.   I've [Trader Joe]-d myself out.
      b.   I'm (all) [Trader Joe]-d out.
      [*After dragging a friend on the day long supermarket trip*:]
      c.   I've [Trader Joe]-d her out.

      However, possessive place names are not the only proper nouns that run into problems with the exhaustive VPC. Proper nouns that bear the plural affix cannot be grammatically put into the exhaustive VPC diagnostic, either.

(27) [*After playing the game Shoots and Ladders all day*:]
      a.   ??I've [Shoots and Ladders]-ed myself out.
      b.   ??I'm (all) [Shoots and Ladders]-ed out.
      [*After playing Shoots and Ladders with a friend all day*:]
      c.   ??I've [Shoots and Ladders]-ed her out.

But dropping the plural affix improves the grammaticality significantly.

(28) [*After playing the game Shoots and Ladders all day*:]

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[4] Whether possessives are analyzed as D^0 heads, intermediate D' projections, or maximal DP projections partly depends on what theory of noun phrases is adopted. In any case, the point remains that possessives are not analyzed as Ns here.

a. I've [Shoots and Ladder]-ed myself out.[5]
b. I'm (all) [Shoots and Ladder]-ed out.
[*After playing Shoots and Ladders with a friend all day*:]
c. I've [Shoots and Ladder]-ed her out.

The trouble with the plural suffix extends to grammatically singular common nouns that bear what looks like the plural suffix.   *Checkers* is one example of these "pseudo-plural" nouns.

(29) a. Checkers is a fun game.
      b. *Checkers are a fun game.
      c. *Checker is a fun game.

As seen in (29), *checkers* must occur in this "pseudo-plural", but cannot act like a plural grammatically in such processes as subject-verb agreement.   It cannot be grammatically put into the exhaustive VPC diagnostic, either.

(30) [*After playing checkers for the whole day*:]
      a. ??I've checkers-ed myself out.
      b. ??I'm (all) checkers-ed out.
      [*After playing checkers with a friend all day and making her sick of the game*:]
      b. ??I've checkers-ed her out.

Again, the grammaticality is drastically improved when the plural ending is dropped.

(31) [*After playing checkers for the whole day*:]
      a. I've checkered myself out.
      b. I'm (all) checkered out.
      [*After playing checkers with a friend all day and making her sick of the game*:]
      c. I've checkered her out.

These facts have interesting implications for the status of plural nouns.   It may be the case that plurals are default specified as D.   The fact that they can occur grammatically without a determiner unlike singular count nouns provides some support for this view.   If this were the case, it would explain why a plural noun results in marginality in the exhaustive VPC: a plural cannot play the role of N in the V/N slot because it is analyzed as a D, not an N.

6. "Exhaustive" Semantics and the Exhaustive VPC
Note the following contrast between the semantically similar verbs *tired* and *exhausted*.

(32) a. I tired myself.
      b. She tired me.
      c. I tired myself out.
      d. She tired me out.
(33) a. I exhausted myself.
      b. She exhausted me.

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[5] Note that the paradigm dropping both plural affixes (e.g., ?*I'm all* [*Shoot-and-Ladder*]*-ed out*) is degraded, but still better than the paradigm keeping both plural affixes in (27).

c. ??I exhausted myself out.

d. ??She exhausted me out.

There seems to be an additional constraint on the exhaustive VPC related to semantics. As the construction itself has "exhaustive" semantics (the meaning of action done in excess to an endpoint, as mentioned in §1 above), the V/N slot appears to be limited to verbs that cannot be compositionally decomposed into the superlative degree of another verb (i.e., "to V to a great extent"). The verb *exhaust* does have such superlative semantics, implying a state of being very tired ("tired out" already) and so results in marginality when inserted into the V/N-d *out* construction. The verb *starve* appears to have a similar result.

7. Conclusion

The exhaustive VPC is thus a powerful grammatical construction. The V/N slot is strictly limited to verbal and nominal heads, and this allows the exhaustive VPC to serve as something of a diagnostic tool in assessing the grammatical status of strings that can and have been accounted for structurally in multiple ways. The application of the exhaustive VPC diagnostic has shown that VPCs have internal structure that is more complicated than a V^0, that compound nouns on the other hand do not generally have internal structure accessible to syntax, and that possessivized and pluralized nouns both appear to function as Ds rather than Ns. Finally, restrictions against verbs with superlative semantics also seem to militate against certain verbs that could be inserted into the exhaustive VPC.

At this point, the interesting pattern of parallel improvements in grammaticality of (10e, 11e, 12e, 13e) in §4.1 should be more fully explained. It seems that to some extent the *out* particle of the exhaustive VPC can have a life of its own as an adverbial with a meaning similar to that of the exhaustive VPC as a whole. An otherwise ungrammatical instance of the exhaustive VPC is improved when the *out* particle is stressed. Thus, it may be the availability of this emphatic interpretation of (10e, 11e, 12e, 13e) that results in the slightly improved grammaticality of these examples. This sort of account also seems to explain the grammaticality of sentences like *(Man,) I'm worked out OUT*, which would normally be ungrammatical due to the insertion of a VPC into the V/N slot of the exhaustive VPC. The nature of independent *out* is left as a question for future research.

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