

VERBLESS PHRASES

عبارات لا فعلية

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ملخص البحث

يتناول هذا البحث موضوع العبارات اللافعلية الدارجة في الحياة اليومية ودراستها لغوياً لمعرفة أصل هذه العبارات هل انها منفردة ام مأخوذة من تركيب اكبر. ان المؤشر الواضح لهذه العبارات المستعملة خاصة في التحية والحوار والمغادرة والامثال والتعجب يبين انها تامة المعنى وكأنها جمل مستقلة كاملة. يقع البحث في ثلاثة اقسام. يبين القسم الاول دراسة عامة عن مفهوم العبارات اللافعلية في المدارس اللغوية الثلاثة. اما القسم الثاني فيتناول العبارات اللافعلية وعلاقتها مع العبارات الطويلة والعبارات المعطوفة عليها. واما القسم الثالث فإنه يتناول الامثال وعبارات التعجب. ثم ينتهي البحث بالنتائج والتوصيات.

1- Introduction

Daily language is full of verbless phrases. They are mainly used in conversations, greetings, leave-taking, proverbs and exclamations. This research tries to find the source of each expression to see what is omitted.

-The Hypothesis: - This study assumes that verbless phrases are not alone by themselves.

-Purpose of the study: - This study tries to find the structure from which verbless phrases are taken. It tries to find for example the full structure of expressions like ‘good morning “good evening”’.

-The technique of the study: - This study will depend on all the literature available taking into consideration the traditional, structural and transformational points of views.

The following study falls into three sections. Section one gives a general survey of the concept of verbless phrases as part of ellipsis with reference to different views of traditional, structural and transformational grammarians. Section two talks about verbless phrases and their connection with non-finite phrases and subordinators that may occur with both. Section three deals with some utterances like proverbs and exclamations and how they are considered as verbless phrases. The findings will conclude the study.

Section One

General Survey of the Concept of Ellipsis

1.1. Traditional Viewpoint:-

Traditional grammarians, owing to their preoccupation with the establishment of the parts of speech and definitions, have offered very little to the study of “ellipsis” as a linguistic phenomenon. They have dealt with language structure on the basis of meaning. Thus, they have considered a certain as elliptical whenever there is an element which is understood but not expressed.

Eckersley and Eckersley (1967:318) define “ellipsis “as the part that “is missed out but is ‘understood’ by the speaker and the listener”, and declare that ‘ellipsis’ is a common feature in English. Mittins (1976:52) mentions that ellipsis is the omission of items that can safely be taken for granted.

On the other hand, Jespersen (1969:153) opposes traditional grammarians who speak of ellipsis”. as a sort of panacea to explain a great many things which either need no explanation or else are not explained, or not sufficiently explained, on the assumption that legitimate use of the term “ellipsis “. On the contrary, Jespersen (1969:154) mentions that “it would generally weaken the force of an utterance if the speaker were to say explicitly everything that the hearer will easily understand.” In this respect, Jespersen agrees with other traditionalists in pointing out the aim of ellipsis, which is brevity and conciseness.

When traditionalists deal with elliptical sentences, their main concern is whether to consider them as complete or incomplete sentences. In this context, Bachelor et al: (1967:76) have come to the conclusion that “an elliptical sentence usually does not have grammatical completeness, but its meaning is always perfectly clear. “They believe that elliptical sentences can be expanded into complete sentences from what precedes them, e.g.:

1-A How do you feel?

(I feel) very well.

1-B.How are you?

(I'm) fine.

1-C.I wish you, good morning?

(I wish you) good morning.

1-D.How old are you?

(I'm) thirty.

Jespersen (1969:151) applies the term “complete sentence” indiscriminately. He uses it to cover those instances of sentences in which something is deleted either at the beginning or at the end, and to other utterances of different kinds which can hardly be considered as involving ellipsis of understood items, e.g.:

2- (It's a)Lovely day!

As for elliptical phrases, they should be analyzed and parsed as they stand, being classified simply as elliptical ones, and in this respect they are similar to elliptical sentences. Rapp, (1936:228) also believes that we should not supply the unexpressed parts for the sake of parsing since “they are not necessary for the expression of thought and are not silently understood in the mind of the speaker or writer who uses the elliptical construction.”Mittins states that adverbial clauses can sometimes be compressed to phrases by ellipsis. For example:-

3-Although (they were) exhausted, they staggered on. (Mittens (1976:106))

1.2. Structural Viewpoint

Structural grammarians tried to analyse grammar according to the form and function of a word in different patterns of structures. They concerned themselves with the structure of the sentence rather than with its meaning. Bloomfield (1961:140) believes that meaning is not so flexible with some methods of analysis. As a result, structuralisms consider ellipsis as “purely a surface phenomenon” in the sense that what is uniquely recoverable can be added or restored to the elliptical sentence. Quirk et al(1972:530).

Sledd (1959:210) points out that ellipsis is a term “used to mean the omission of a word or words, which can be supplied from the context”. Further, he applies the label “sentence fragment” or non-sentence to refer to that utterance which does not contain a complete subject or a predicate. Sledd (1959:277) assumes that sentence fragments should be avoided in exposition and arguments because they violate the convention. In addition, he proposes that they are effectively used in conversation and in serious literature. However, he warns against appealing to ellipsis in describing English unless where there is a clear and satisfactory way used to depict the ellipsis items rather than being “understood”.

Chalker (1984:264) agrees with Sledd that “ellipsis” means “omission”. According to her, the two processes are closely connected, and ellipsis has been described as “substitution by zero”. The omission of words is only to be considered ellipsis when the words omitted are “uniquely recoverable”, i.e. there is no uncertainty about which words have been omitted. This means that, for example, subordinate non-finite phrases with no conjunction like:

4-Sitting in the garden, Tom fell a sleep.

do not illustrate ellipsis, or only weak ellipsis, since one could recover several possible conjunctions, e.g. While, When, etc... But missing words that are clearly recoverable from the text are classified as ellipsis.

Ellipsis is considered as one of the syntactic processes involved in connectivity. Parts of the sentence are often omitted in conversational speech when their meaning is clear from the situation or verbal context (Crystal and Davy 1984:4). Halliday and Hasan (1976:144) claim that where there is ellipsis there is recoverability in the structure that something is to be supplied or “understood”. They also assume that its essential characteristic “is that something, which is present in the selection of underlying options is omitted in the structure-whether or not the resulting structure is in itself incomplete”.

On the other hand, some structuralists warn against the wide use of ellipsis. Sledd (1959:210), for example, states that serious difficulty in using the concept of ellipsis is that native speakers very often do not agree on the omitted words, e.g. to the question:

5-What did you say?

A perfectly normal answer would be:

That I am ill.

But the answer might be expanded to:

I said that I am ill or what I said was that I am ill. (Sledd 1959:210).

1.3. Transformational Viewpoint

Ellipsis is handled by T.G. transformationalists and is considered as one type of deletions. It seems a matter of naming for some transformationalists as Huddleston (1976:29-226) who uses the term ellipsis to refer to deletion of elements under identity condition handled by deletion transformation to achieve syntactic well-formedness, and to deletion of elements where there is no such identity between covert or overt elements in the sentence, especially these are cases of indefinite deletion.

Grosz (1978:337) deals with ellipsis of noun phrases functioning as complete sentences in question and response, asserts that ellipsis is an example of the local influence of an utterance. On the interpretation of the following utterance, and that

two kinds of information; syntactic and semantic are needed to be recovered from one utterance to help in processing the following one.

Liles (1971:60) uses the term deletion saying that “by deletion we remove something from the structure “.Only elements that cause no loss in meaning may be deleted, e.g.

6-Bill couldⁿt hear you, but I could.

In this sentence the M V underlying hear you has been deleted, since it is repetitious.Liles (1971:85) agrees with other transformationalists in stating that “elements deleted by transformationalists are always clearly understood by both speaker and listener. This understanding is possible because deletion can occur only under conditions that are very precisely specified". In accordance with this, Oliphant (1962:63) mentions that the relative pronoun is frequently omitted if it is in the accusative case, e.g.

7-I saw a man (who was) sound a sleep.

Section Two

2. Verbless Phrases

2.1. Verbless Phrases:-

The verbless phrase represents one type or form of the ellipsis found in English. It is discussed by Radford (1988:98) under the term gapping, because as he says, :it has the effect of leaving a “gap” in the middle of some phrases or clauses". He adds that it is quite frequent for the verb of one clause to be gapped when it is identical to the verb of another clause, e.g.

8. John bought an apple and Mary a pear.

However, he admits that there are complex restrictions determining when gapping of the head of V of a VP is and is not permitted.

According to Quirk et al(1985:996) verbless phrases take syntactic compression and they are commonly subjectless.In verbless phrases it is often

possible to postulate a missing form of the verb 'be' and to recover the subject, when omitted from the context, e.g.

9. Whether right or wrong, he always comes off worst in arguments.(Whether he is right or wrong).

Verbless phrases can sometimes be treated as reduction of non-finite clauses, e.g.

10. Too nervous to reply, he stared at the floor.(Being too nervous to reply).

Any verbless phrase may occur in either of the following two phrase-types because it can be interpreted as having an omitted is:

Either Subject-Verb-Complement. (SVC).

11. We can meet again tomorrow, if necessary

Or Subject-Verb-Adverb.(SVA).

12. Mavis sat in the front seat, her hands in her lap.

Quirk (1985:5-844) gives five types of verbless phrases, most of them existential:

1. In one colloquial type, the subject is appended like a noun phrase tag.

13. Just our Luk, Sue finding out.

2. A verbless phrase consists of subject and subject complement, which may be linked by "and" to a preceding phrase with regular phrase structure.

14. How could you be so spiteful and her your best friend? (.....seeing that she is your best friend).

3. A verbless phrase consisting of complement alone. It is usually taken as a comment on the preceding phrase, and is linked to it by 'and'.

15. They are thick as thieves and no mistake. (They are thick as thieves, and that is no mistake).

4. A verbless phrase which represents one literary and some-what archaic type of rhetorical WH-Question. It consists of subject followed by subject complement or subject complement alone. It represents a comparative relationship.

16. What belief so foolish but some will embrace it? (There is no belief so foolish but that there will be some who will embrace it).

5. another verbless phrase representing a rhetorical WH-Question, by less formal, contains a comparative.

17. Who more fitting than you?

Moreover there is what is called by Quirk (1985:1068) the normal verbless phrase. This phrase is required to account for constructions, which although superficially noun phrases, have some of the semantic and structural characteristics of phrases, e.g.

18. Wall-to-Wall carpets in every room are their dream.(Having wall-to-wall carpets in every room is their dream).

2.2. Non-Finite and Verbless Phrases:-

Verbless phrases are usually discussed in association with non-finite phrases because they have similar syntactic structure. They can be recognized as phrases because their internal structure can be analyzed into the same functional elements that are distinguished in finite phrases.

Non-Finite phrase: is a phrase whose verb element is non-finite (such as: to work, having worked, taken), e.g.

19. Knowing my temper, I didn't reply.

Verbless phrase: is a phrase that does not have a verb element, but is nevertheless capable of being analyzed into phrase element, e.g.

20. Although always helpful, he was not much liked.

Quirk (1985:992).

Typically non-finite and verbless phrases lack both subject and operator, and their relation to their main clause can be explained if one postulates an ellipsis of

these elements, the identity of the subject being recoverable from the main clause. Because this implies that subject is normally identical with the subject of the superordinate (main clause).

21. Suzan telephoned before coming over. [...before Suzan came over].

22. Although (he was) exhausted by the climb, he continued his journey.

Although non-finite and verbless phrases can be preceded by some subordinating conjunctions like (as, because, as long as, whether or, while, since ...etc). For example:

23. While traveling last night, I suddenly had a bright idea.

This is not a must, because in such phrases the mere absence of a finite verb is often quite a sufficient signal of subordination.

24. Traveling home last night, I suddenly had a bright idea.

25. Running down the road, I ripped and fell. (Chalker, 1985:239).

2.3. Subordinators for Non-Finite and Verbless Phrases

Some of the subordinators that precede non-finite and verbless phrases appear under more than one heading-so that in some clauses the relationship they bear may be ambiguous, e.g.

As (time, reason, manner, concession).

As long as (time, condition).

If (condition, concession).

In case (purpose in British English), but (condition in American English).

Now that (time, reason).

Since (time, reason).

So that (purpose, result).

When (time, concession). (Chalker, 1985:243).

Accordingly, the structure of phrases varies in the subordinators that they admit. However, all the phrases except for that of the bare infinitive phrases may

be introduced by the subordinators and with such phrases a contingency relationship can be expressed:

26. without you to consult, I would be completely lost.

27. with you as my friend, I don't need enemies.

28. with the audience making so much noise, I couldn't hear the opening of the concerto.

Non-finite phrases (mainly with an-ed participle) and verbless phrases may be introduced by some subordinators that are also used for finite clauses:

Although, as if, as soon as, as though, even if, once, though, until (only-ed participle clauses), when (ever), where (ever), whether...or (conditional, concessive), while.

29. When taken according to the directions, the drug has no side effects. [When the drug is taken].

30. Although not yet six months old, she was able to walk without support. [Although she was not yet].

31. Fill in the application form as instructed.

32. He bent down as if tightening his shoe laces.

(Quirk, 1985:1003-5).

If and unless are also subordinators which are considered specifically conditional, e.g.:

33. The grass will grow more quickly if watered regularly.

34. It has little taste, unless hot.

Moreover, the two subordinators with and without may express conditional relationship.

35. without me to supplement your income, you wouldn't be able to manage.

36. with them on our side, we are secure. (Quirk, 1985:1090)

Section Three

3. Proverbs and Exclamations as Verbless Phrases

3.1. Proverbs as Verbless Phrases

Eckersely and Eckersely (1967:342) talk about one type of comparative phrases, which has the following construction:

“The...comparative...the...comparative”, e.g.

37. the more you work, the more you earn.

They say that this construction can become very elliptical in some proverbial expressions to form verbless phrases such as:

38. The sooner the better.

On the other hand, Quirk et al.(1985:843-4) approach the same subject under the heading “Aphoristic Sentences” saying that such a proverbial expression represents the aphoristic sentence structure. They illustrate that aphoristic sentence such as:

39. the more, the merrier

May be considered elliptical for something like the more there are of us, the merrier we are.

3.2. Exclamations as Verbless phrases

Krapp (29-330) decides that exclamatory utterances may be grouped as:

heading of incomplete sentences, e.g.

40. Six months at sea!

Nevertheless, he considers such an utterance as a sentence because it is capable of expressing a thought that is exceptional since it does not follow the ordinary expressed sentence. It is incapable of grammatical analysis.

Eckersely and Eckersely agree with Krapp in considering exclamation like:

41. Silence! Well done! Goodbye! Farewell!

As elliptical sentences equivalent to something like:

“I want silence “

“You have done well”

“God be with you”

“May you fare = go well”

In this respect Chalker (1967:12) gives another form of exclamation beginning with what or how, e.g.

42. What a strange story!

She states that such kind of exclamation can also be regarded as a verbless utterance implying this sentence:

What a strange story it was!

The Findings

The study has arrived at the following findings:-

- 1- In origin (deep structure) all verbless expressions are parts of full sentences (noun phrase and verb phrase).
- 2- The position of each expression can be either within the compliment (verb phrase) or at the beginning of the sentence standing as sentence modifiers.
- 3- Most of the verbless expressions are found in greetings, leaving, replies, proverbs and exclamations.
- 4- Their use reflects the simplicity of English. It shows brevity and conciseness.
- 5- All the verbless phrases are the outcomes of ellipsis (deletions of some words including the verbs).
- 6- Semantically, their meaning is complete and understood.

Finally, the researchers hope that this research has achieved its purpose through the presentation and discussion of the structure, from which the verbless phrases have been taken. The researchers recommend that other researches may be

undertaken on these expressions and their counterparts in Arabic to increase the student's knowledge.

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