A Syntactic Analysis of Delexical verbs in English

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Article Information	Abstract
	Verbs are words that describe actions .They tell us what someone is doing. In cases where verbs depend on the nouns they are paired with to convey their meaning, we refer to these verbs as 'delexical weak verbs. This means that the verbs lose their traditional meaning, and instead form a collocation with the following noun. The term 'delexical verbs' implies that the verb primarily serves as a functionally empty auxiliary, with the majority of semantic meaning conveyed by the deverbal noun. This study assumes that university students face difficulties in recognizing and using delexical verbs. To prove this assumption a test has been given to a group of (60) students in their third year, English department, college of Basic Education, University of Mosul (20-23-2024). The results then have been collected and analyzed.

المستخلص:

الافعال هي كلمات تستخدم لوصف حدث معين. هذه الافعال تخبرنا بان شخص ما يقوم بعمل معين.على الرغم من ذلك هنالك بعض الافعال التي تعتمد على الاسماء التي تاتي بعدها لاكتمال معناها تعتبر هذه الافعال مشابهة للافعال المساعدة. تسمى مثل هذه الافعال بالافعال الضعيفة او الافعال الخفيفة. في اللغة الانكليزية .

تفترض هذه الدراسة بان طلبة كلية التربية الاساسية المرحلة الثالثة لقسم اللغة الانكليزية يواجهون بعض الصعوبات في استخدام الافعال الضعيفة في اللغة الانكليزية. لاثبات صحة الفرضية تم اختبار عينة من الطلاب تتكون من ٦٠ طالبا ومن ثم تم تحليل النتائج وقدمت بعدها الاستنتاجات والتوصيات.

1-Introduction:

English has several highly frequent verbs that possess very little meaning. They are usually used with nouns as their objects. Those verbs simply imply that a person acts. They are called delexical verbs and even sometimes called weak verbs, empty verbs, and support verbs. The most frequently used are: *give, get, keep, have, make, take, do,* and *set* (Cobuild,1990:147). The verb with the following noun is usually called the lexical structure. The transition of meaning from the verb to the subsequent noun is termed 'delexicalization'.For instance in the expression 'have a look', the verb <u>have</u> undergoes semantic reduction or delexicalization, and the noun phrase <u>a look</u> carries the fundamental meaning of the entire structure. Below are various examples of delexical verbs:

-She <u>gave</u> a speech at the conference.

-He <u>gets</u> a paycheck every month.

-I will <u>keep</u> a close eye on the situation.

-We <u>had</u> a picnic in the park.

-She will <u>make</u> a cake.

-He <u>took</u> a bath before going to bed.

-Can you <u>do</u> the dishes after dinner?

-He <u>did</u> a great job on the project.

2-Aims of the Study:

The current study aims at:

1-analyzing syntactically delexical verbs in English,

2-showing the different characteristics of those verbs,

3-and examining students' problems in recognizing and using delexical verbs.

3-The Hypotheses:

This study hypothesizes that :

1-University students are incapable of identifying delexical verbs. This is mainly because the English language system is different from their mother tongue.

2-Such learners are unable to use delexical verbs correctly.

4-Procedures

The procedures followed in carrying out this research include:

1-Giving a brief syntactic account of delexical verbs in English.

2-A diagnostic test focusing on delexical verbs will be conducted as part of this study. This test will be given to a restricted group of third–year students in the English Department/College of Basic Education/ University of Mosul.

3-Analyzing the test results on the two levels of recognition and production.

5-Limitation of the Study:

This study is limited to :

1- 60 Iraqi male and female students in the third –year, English Department, College of Basic Education, University of Mosul.

2-Identifying, classifying, and analyzing the test results.

6-Delexical Verbs:

Many grammarians state that there is a group of verbs with nouns as their objects used mainly to say that someone does an action without affecting or creating something. Quirk et al.(1985:750) state that the objects of such verbs bear the major part of the meaning. Their claim depends on the fact that those verbs have little or no meaning by themselves. They add that the nouns within the object are derived from verbs. This construction involving the object carries more significance than the equivalent SV. Structure.

Unlike other verbs that carry a strong action or meaning, delexical verbs serve primarily as placeholders, relying on accompanying nouns to convey the full sense of the action. At their core, delexical verbs are verbs that lack a substantial meaning when used in isolation. They are often followed by a noun or adjective, which provides context and depth to the sentence. One of the key roles of delexical verbs is to convey routine actions, processes, or everyday activities. For example, the verb 'make' can be paired with various nouns to describe common actions such as 'make breakfast', 'make a decision', or 'make an effort'. In such cases the noun complements the verb, giving it a specific purpose and meaning. This usage allows English speakers to express a wide range of activities concisely and efficiently.

In short, this term describes a limited set of highly prevalent transitive verbs that use nouns as their objects, which can also function as verbs as in (make a decision) <u>make</u> is the delexical verb and <u>a decision</u> is the deverbal noun.

Lock (1996:82) and Eastwood (2006:110) state that these verbs have a variety of meanings and combine with nouns that carry the entire meaning of the process. This means that semantically the object is the most important part of the delexical construction.

Minoji (1989) says that 'Because of their low lexical content and the fact that their meanings in the context are conditioned by words they co-occur with" they are called weak verbs.

Some other grammarians claim that delexical verbs are somehow similar to auxiliary verbs due to their weak contribution to the meaning of the whole clause in which they appear(**www.eoisabi. Org.).**

7-Characteristics of Delexical Verbs

Cobuild (1990:147) states that a political structure consists of a delexical verb followed by a noun group. Although the number of delexical verbs in English is very small, the delexical structures are very common. For example:

-She made a signal.

-He gave a vague reply.

-Janet took a photo of the bird.

Leonard (2009:4) and Koya(2005:189) state that there are some important characteristics of delexical verbs :

1-Minimal Meaning: delexical verbs have limited semantic content when used in isolation. They serve as structural elements in a sentence rather than carrying significant meaning.

2-Noun or Adjective dependency: these verbs typically require a noun or an adjective (often referred to as a complement) to complete their meaning. The complement provides the specific action or context. For instance, in the phrase 'make a decision', 'make' is a delexical verb, and a decision is a complement.

3-Frequent Use in Collocations: delexical verbs are often used in fixed or common combinations with specific nouns or adjectives. These combinations are known as collocations. For instance, 'have a conversation,' 'take a shower', or 'make an effort' represent examples of collocations relying on delexical verbs.

4-Syntactic flexibility: delexical verbs may be used in a variety of forms and tenses, which makes them versatile in various grammatical structures. Such as, 'She will make a decision' (future tense), 'I had dinner' (past tense), or 'They're having a good time' (present continuous).

5-Reduced Emphases on Verbs: in sentences that include delexical verbs, the focus is usually shifted away from the actual verb to the complement carrying the primary meaning. That makes delexical verbs proper for emphasizing the state or action that is described by complement.

6-Common in English phrasal verbs: numerous phrasal in English include delexical verbs. Those verbs are combined with the adverbs or prepositions for the creation of the idiomatic expressions. For instance, 'give up' (which means quitting), 'take off' (which means removing), or 'makeup' (which means inventing).

7-Contextual Interpretation: the meaning of a delexical verb is often determined by the context in which it is used. Different complements can result in different interpretations of the same delexical verb. For example, 'take' consume' in 'take a pill' or 'adopt' in 'take a stance'.

8- An important feature of such verbs is that they are always transitive while the corresponding verbs are usually intransitive (Palmer1987:23), for example:

-She gave a strange reply.

-I replied to her letter.

-She made a signal.

-He signaled for the strange man.

9-The final feature of delexical verbs that makes them different from other verbs is that they always give the impression that the action is brief (Gunkova, 2011:13-14), for example:

-She screamed.

-She screamed.

In the first example (the impression given is that the scream was quick while the second one gives the impression that the action was not brief).

8-Lexical Verbs VS. Delexical Verbs :

It has been mentioned previously that delexical verbs are known as light or empty verbs which can carry little meaning on their own and often need another word, typically a noun or an adjective, to complete their meaning. They are commonly used in phrases and expressions().**Wikipedia .Org\Wiki\Light-Verb.http:\\en**).

Lexical verbs, on the other hand, carry specific and meaningful actions or states. They can stand alone in a sentence and convey a clear action or meaning on their own (run, eat, sleep, study,……….etc.) (Huddeston & Pulum,(2006:78). Examples of delexical verbs VS. lexical verbs :

-She made a decision.(delexical and the meaning comes from 'decision')

-She ran quickly .(lexical the verb 'ran' carries its own meaning)

-He did his homework. (delexical and the meaning comes from 'homework')

-He ate dinner. (lexical the verb 'ate' carries its meaning)

-They had a chat. (delexical and the meaning comes from 'chat')

-They wrote a letter.(lexical and the verb 'wrote' carries its meaning)

9-Data Analysis

9.1 Analyzing Students' Responses Related to Question One

Table (1) below shows the results of the students' tests at both levels of performance and recognition.

Table (1) Students'

Performance at the Recognition

Level in Question One

No. of items	No. of correct responses	%	No. of incorrect responses	%
1	30	50	30	50

2	36	60	24	40
3	35	58	25	42
4	14	23	46	77
5	21	35	39	65
6	34	57	26	43
7	40	67	20	33
8	45	75	15	25
9	12	20	48	80
10	44	73	16	27
11	37	62	23	38
12	45	75	15	25
13	22	37	38	63
14	36	60	24	40
15	10	17	50	83
Total	461	51.22	439	48.77

Table(1) summarizes the findings of the test as follows :

1-The total count and ratio of accurate replies are (497, and 55٪), respectively.

2-The total count and ratio of incorrect replies are (439, and 45٪), respectively.

9.2-Analyzing the Students' Responses Related to Question Two

After analyzing the results of the test, the table below illustrates the students' performance at both levels of performance and production.

Table (2)

Students' Performance at the Production

Level in

Question Two

No. of items	No. of correct responses	٪	No. of incorrect responses	٪
1	10	17	50	83
2	12	20	48	80
3	16	27	44	73
4	21	35	39	65
5	18	30	42	70
6	25	4	35	5

		2		8
7	12	20	48	80
8	23	38	37	62
9	15	25	45	75
10	28	47	32	53
11	30	50	30	50
12	16	27	44	73
13	23	38	37	62
14	20	33	40	67
15	19	32	41	68
Total	288	47	612	53

The table above represents the following results:

1-The total number of correct answers, along with their corresponding percentage are (288, and 46٪), respectively.

2-The total number of incorrect answers along with their corresponding percentage are (612, and 53٪), respectively.

Table (3) Students' Total Performance at Recognition

and Production Levels

Level	No. of correct responses	%	No. of incorrect responses	%
Recognition	497	55	439	45

Production	288	47	612	53
Total	785	42	1051	58

Table 3 above displays that the maximum number of students' incorrect responses is (1051, 58٪). This indicates that university students encounter difficulties in mastering delexical verbs at both recognition and production levels. Nevertheless, they encounter greater difficulty at the production level since the total number of their incorrect responses is (288, 47٪) which is lower than their correct responses at the recognition level which is (497, 55٪).

The students' productive proficiency (1051, 58%) is lower than their recognition knowledge (785, 42%). These findings demonstrate that university students face difficulties in using delexical verbs.

Conclusions

In conclusion, delexical verbs play a significant role in English language construction by allowing for concise expression of routine actions. They serve as linguistic tools which when combined with appropriate nouns and adjectives give depth and specificity to the sentences. Understanding how delexical verbs

function is essential for effective communication and mastering the nuances of the English language.

1-Many university students lack the proficiency to use delexical verbs effectively at both recognition and production levels.

2-The test results indicate that students face greater challenges in using delexical verbs at the production level compared to the recognition level. This is quite obvious from the total number and percentage of the correct responses at the production level (288, 47٪) which are lower than those of the correct responses at the recognition level (497, 55٪).

Appendix

The Test

Q/1-Underline the delexical verb in each of the following sentences:

1-Would you do a favor and post this letter for me?

2-He gave a jump suddenly.

3-I suggested to solve the problem.

4-Who asked a question about what I had said?

5-He made a quick decision.

6-We should have a meeting to discuss our projects.

7-He couldn't decide what he wanted to buy.

8-She decided to take a break from all her business and just try to relax for some time.

9-We must do some research before beginning to issue any reports.

10-My mom needs to do some shopping before coming back from the parent-teacher meeting.

11-Could please you give me a hand with moving these heavy boxes?

12-Every member of the family should keep their promises if they want to maintain trust.

13-He made an effort to understand the many complex directions that have been given to him.

14-My friend plans to have a little cute party for her girl's birthday next week.

15-The boss was busy, so he asked his employees to take notes during the meeting.

Q/2-Fill in the blanks with the suitable delexical verbs to complete sentences:

1-They ……….. an emphasis on getting the delivery on time.

2-He wanted to clear his head, so he ………a walk in the park this evening after dinner.

3-Tom's sister forgot to ……….the laundry.

4-He is a very busy man, so he ……..his time wisely.

5-She was a little nervous, so ……….a deep breath before the interview.

6-She ……...her best to solve this task and complete what was asked of her.

7-They are very eager to excel at their work and they always ……… the chance to learn new skills.

8-I got tired when I came back, so I ……… a nap after a long day at school.

9-He gets busy during the day and always……… his homework in the evenings.

10-The seller is waiting for our call, so we need to …… a decision as soon as possible.

11-I always ……. A cup of tea in the afternoon.

12-We should ……. plans for the holidays.

13-He wants to ………. a drink.

14-She …….. a wish.

15-She was busy when I called, and she promised me she'd ………me a call in an hour.

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