



## Explanation of English verbal groups

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**Abstract** This paper provides a detailed description and explanation of the English verbal group element and their systems in English language. First, we start by introducing the field of linguistics and syntactic studies with a brief outline of the relevant grammatical theories. The syntactic structure of certain verbal units will also be explained. Second, the predicator in terms of its role, position, characteristics and representatives will be considered and explained in terms of its syntactic relations. Third, the verbal group will be analysed in terms of its elements and expounded in relation to its syntactic systems. The goal of this paper is to provide a classification of the verbs and verbal group of English for readers of comparative linguistics. It details the issue of verbs so that it is understood in relation to analysis or comparison.

**Key Words:** Syntax – Verb – Word order – comparative linguistics –verb classification.

## شرح المجموعة في اللغة الإنجليزية

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**المخلص** تقدم هذه الورقة وصفاً مفصلاً وشرحاً لعنصر الفعل باللغة الإنجليزية وأنظمتها في اللغة الإنجليزية. أولاً، نبدأ بتقديم علم اللغويات والدراسات النحوية مع توضيح موجز للنظريات النحوية ذات الصلة. كما سيتم شرح التركيب النحوي لبعض الأفعال. ثانياً، سيتم النظر في المسند من حيث دوره وموقعه وخصائصه وممثليه من حيث العلاقات النحوية. ثالثاً، سيتم تحليل المجموعة الفعلية من حيث عناصرها وتوضيحها فيما يتعلق بأنظمتها النحوية. الهدف من هذه الورقة هو توفير تصنيف للأفعال والمجموعة الفعلية من اللغة الإنجليزية لقراء اللغويات المقارنة. إنه يفصل قضية الأفعال بحيث يتم فهمها فيما يتعلق بالتحليل أو المقارن.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** النحو – الفعل – ترتيب الكلمات – علم اللغة المقارن – تصنيف الفعل.

### I-Introduction:

Language as human behaviour has been studied ever since man appeared on earth within large groups and communities. However, the necessity for knowing this complex system arose as man started to establish different aspects in his life. The fact that no one knows when language has first been used is related to the creation of man himself. As human societies developed and emerged out of their primitiveness, sciences were studied more widely and accurately. Linguistics as a science is one of those fields which have developed unsteadily. It deals with language as its main area and raw material.

Language itself is related with its nature to many sciences if not all. Thus, to narrow the gap or to be more accurate, linguists have established different fields of studies which deal with various aspects in language and linguistic work as a chain for its multi-systems. Syntax, the study of language patterns, is the field of linguistics which has to master the most important part of a language. That is by describing fully the system which is used by its speakers according to the situation. That leads the speaker to clear access to choices with no ambiguity at all. The explicit description comes only by generalisation and with powerful systemic explanations. These patterns of systems are represented by grammar of language,

which is usually described by grammarians in terms of powerful theories. These theories have to cover different levels and ranks by using explicit systems and structures. Those systems compose a native speaker of language's knowledge, where he can choose, whenever he wants to express himself.

English language has passed by traditional grammatical theories which are prescriptive from the point views of their leaders. Those who used to describe the way how should we speak which is not the case in modern views. Nixon (19 93) mentions, in one of his lectures on syntax that the test of any grammatical theory is how long can it go before it comes to a place where it cannot explain itself. The most powerful theory nowadays is the systemic one which yielded its fruit the systemic grammar as a result of Firth and Halliday's studies. This theory explains grammar in terms of systems and choices which could be used by speaker in the appropriate situation. Moreover grammar is represented by different structure of units, groups, and words, which are categorised in terms of a hierarchy rank scale. The most higher in rank is the clause unit which consists of groups and is usually a combination of nominal group, verbal group, prepositional group, adjectival group, and adverbial group.

They are usually consist of word. The clause elements are usually subject (S), predicator (P), complement (C), and adjunct (A) . They are represented by the groups mentioned above. We would try to explain fully the subject matter of the predicator in terms of verbal group structure, functions and systems.

## 2- The predicator:

The predicator is usually represented by verbal group, the element of clause that carries action and realization. Its position is normally the second in the structure of a clause. Nixon (1993) points out that the essential role of the predicator is to relate the subject to a particular action or state of affairs. Thus the predicator plays an important role in the structure of any clause. As mentioned above, the clause structure is always subject, predicator, complement, and adjunct. We can notice that no clause should exist regularly without predicator except in some unusual conditions. Though the importance of the predicator as a most needed one appears in its use indifferent kinds of clauses. If we take some examples of clauses as declarative, interrogative or imperative: /-,~

- i. Dog parks-
- ii Lorries are not fast.
- iii Do you smoke?
- iv Come here.

we realise that the predicator is as important as the subject. It is effected by the number concord whether the subject is singular or plural. Moreover, it represents multi-choices and could be used in different positions in the constructions. The matter which makes a clause a unit is the flexibility of gaining many different choices. They could be used by the speaker of language easily. Thus, both subject and predicator give clause the characteristics of being distinguished in terms of mood in its different aspects. This feature is gained as a result of the relation between both of them and their relation with other groups of a clause. However, subject and predicator could be sometimes obligatory elements of a clause. Whereas sometimes we can omit one of them and could be interpreted according to the situation.

## 3- The verbal group:

### 3.1- Types of verbal group

Generally, the verbal group is the element that explains the predicator in clause structure. It is always expressed by one word or more as *take, was taking, will take, might take* ,etc. Its importance appears in clause as a group in the constituents. As we know, the clause consists of different groups which give meaning by their relation to each other. For example: *Bill has bought a new car*. The relation between Bill and a new car will not be clear enough unless has bought is used. We might think that the verb is has seen. "It is preferable, therefore, to view the relationship between classes of verb group and clause elements as a continuum ranging from 'unique association' to 'fairly infrequent'

association. In such case, there should be nothing surprising about the fact that the more basic clause elements (p,s) should be nearer the unique end" Nixon(1993). Such group must be considered as one of the most complex systems of English language due to its different choices and constructions.

Sometimes we pass by complicated ones which are rarely in spoken situation or written form. In fact there is no harm of storing them for use in need, but they might cause a confusion somehow. It is mentioned by Kress (1976) that:

'ALL the highly complex verb forms are built up out of very simple resources; the complexity, which involves only the system of tense, results from the fact that selection for tense may be made more than once in one verbal group.' (1976:76)

*If we adapt these examples from Kress 's book:*

*'Can I use that machine when I come in at this time tomorrow?'*

*'No ---- it's going to be being tested .'*

*'It'll have been going to be being tested everyday for a fortnight.'*

(1976:78)

we find out that the use of tenses is very complex and seems to be rare in use. Moreover, the verbal group is a raw material which could be used in different aspects and tenses to express different periods and categories . On the other words it can be related to actions in different ways.

However such discussed feature makes it an open class since most systems are open ended ones. Its position in clause structure is normally the second, after the subject. Though it is effected by number concord most times. This means if the subject is singular the verb group will carry its feature as though and it is also the same if the subject is plural. In he following examples:

- i. Marry likes dancing.
- ii. Cats drink milk.
- iii. Bill and Marry are good friends.
- iv. She is the boss.

We notice that in the singular we use suffix s with the verb where we do not do in the case of plural. This is due to a system, but this rule does not apply when it comes to past tense or modals. The most unique feature of this group is carrying action and realization where we realize its use with different tenses according to time. However, this group will be meaningless without them. The matter which makes it very useful and common in language, is its various aspects and systems with different categories of past, present, and future tense. In the following examples.

- i. Marry is going home.
- ii. They were coming to see you.
- iii. I am leaving tomorrow.

we notice that the three actions are very clear although they express sub-categories of main tenses. Moreover, the realization is carried by the first part of the group.

### 3.2. Systems of elements and constructions:

Elements are different members of a group whereas structures are ways of combining those

elements to make a form. Applying this rule to our group we find out that its elements are verb, auxiliary, modal, and extension. From these examples,

- i. She goes home early.
- ii. Bill is driving to fast.
- iii. You may work hard
- iv. Bill might have gone.
- v. They put it off.

we notice that the verbal group could be one word as a main verb or more as aux + verb , modaux + verb . The extension which is part of the group's elements could be used with all constructions. It is very helpful to adapt this figure which is taken from Nixon's book (1993) 'Patterns in English syntax' which illustrates clearly the system of the verbal group construction,

Figure (1)

Maux	Aux	V
		Goes
	Has/had	Gone
	Is/was	Going
	Does/did	Go
Might		Go
Might	have	Gone
Might	Be	Going

The fact about this group is that the lexical verb works as an obligatory element which is always as a final one. Whereas other elements are options. If we go back to figure one we notice that the verbs goes, gone, going, and go appear in each construction but auxiliaries and modals do not. The lexical verb (V) takes different forms in English according to tense. Since we have past and non-past this verb will be either past with its different forms or non-past which is present or future will try to explain them fully later. The auxiliary (aux) element always precedes the lexical verb and is represented by primary auxiliary verbs .They are not that much in English language but their use is quite common and regular. They may be listed as be, have, and do. These elements have different shapes as am, is, are, was, were, has, have, had, do, does, and did. Thus, they differ morphologically from the lexical verb by having more or less forms and syntactically by their ability of carrying and explaining different features as negation, inversion, and substitution. Moreover they can occur as lexical verbs e.g.,

- i. She is the boss.
- ii. Bill has a large house.
- iii. They do yoga.

Modals (maux) are another kind of auxiliaries which appear as a first element of the group if used. They are a small set in English language and could be listed as will, would, shall, should, can, could, may, might, and must. This kind of auxiliary has a similarity with primary ones but may not occur as lexical verbs. There are a few other verbs which are regarded as modals. They are dare, ought, need, and used. But they may carry some characteristics of lexical verbs e.g.,

- i. He used to teach English.
- ii. They ought to go .
- iii. I dared to touch her.
- iv. She needed more lessons.

In fact, some verbs are difficult to be classified because they share some characters with others. But this feature works in favour of language. Nixon states that the fact that there are a number of verbs which are not easily categorized absolutely as modal, primary auxiliary or lexical need not be an ambarrasment, since such a situation is to be expected within a system capable of a change . Indeed, it is something without which any language would rapidly become stable, and the only truly stable languages are the dead ones. '(1993:55)

Another element in the structure of the verbal group is the extension (e) which is normally at the end. It is usually represented with a proposition such as in, out, on, over, under, through, off , etc. or an adverb particles .The fact that it must be considered as an element of the verbal group is, its strong syntactic relation with the verb. Moreover its semantic value which is very important. If we look at the following examples:

- i. He turned on the light.
- ii. They put off the meeting.
- iii. Yesterday he travelled hopefully.

we realize that, in the first two examples the proposition dresses a new feature upon the verb, and changes its meaning . Thus the verb 'turned' has entirely different meaning from 'turned on' ; the verb 'put' has a different meaning from 'put off. In the last example the adverb 'hopefully' gains a new semantic feature to the verb 'travelled'. So both cases of prepositional and adverbial must be regarded as highly important elements of verbal group. There are some particles of the above mentioned classes which cannot be used with a verb; some could also be used with other groups of clause as in adjunct or complement e.g.

- i. He came in his car.
- ii. Hopefully travelled yesterday.

Thus we can summarise that the verbal group system allows the following constructions:

- i. A verb as in (He goes home late).
- ii. Auxiliary + verb as in (He has gone home) .
- iii. Modal + verb as in ( He may come back) .
- iv. Modal + auxiliary + verb as in (He might have gone home).
- v. The extension could be used with most of them.

**3.3 Systems of forms and sequence:**

English verb must be able of taking at least four forms of the following:

- i. Base form. ii. -s form. iii. -ed form. vi. -in~ form. v. to form. Both base form and -s form

could be used as a lexical verb effected by number concord as walk, walks. The -ed form is used in past linked with the base as walked. The en form is used in sequence with have as

written. The two form is used with a lexical verb in non-finite form as to walk. The examples are of some English verbs and apply them as if we take

The verb	Base	-s-form	-ed form	En- form	Ing- form	to form
Put	<i>Put</i>	<i>Puts</i>	<i>put</i>	<i>put</i>	<i>putting</i>	<i>to put</i>
Walk	<i>Walk</i>	<i>walks</i>	<i>walked</i>	<i>walked</i>	<i>walking</i>	<i>to walk</i>
Read	<i>Read</i>	<i>Reads</i>	<i>read</i>	<i>read</i>	<i>reading</i>	<i>to read</i>
Write	<i>Write</i>	<i>writes</i>	<i>wrote</i>	<i>written</i>	<i>writing</i>	<i>to write</i>

We notice, first the verbs put and read follow the same system in base form, -ed. form and-en form; the verb walk follows the same system in -ed. form and--en-form whereas the verb write follows different systems in all forms . Second all verbs take base form, -s form, -ing form and to form. So we can postulate that the base, -s,-ing , to forms are obligatory ones and all verbs must have them. On the other hand the other forms , -ed. and en are not. But it must be born in mind that the primary auxiliaries and modals are exceptions . Since some of them have more than 6 forms; modals could not be used with to form.

If we examine the following examples:

i. I walk to school	<i>I read aloud</i>
ii. He walks to school	<i>He reads aloud.</i>
iii. He walked to school.	<i>He read aloud</i>
iv. He has walked there	<i>He has read it</i>
v. He is walking home.	<i>He is reading it aloud.</i>
vi. He wants to walk.	<i>He wants to read</i>

syntactically in all different six categories but it has to take different forms morphologically. The form takes its shape according to tense and effected by subject number sometimes . The system allows two possibilities as mentioned above past and non-past. Diver (1964) points out that a past event is one said to occur before the moment of speaking. A non-past event is one said occur not before the moment of speaking; this is, at time either including the moment of speaking or after the moment of speaking . The past is usually formed by adding -d or -ed to the base in a regular way as in moved, walked, talked. Or by changing the vowel in the word as in wrote, sang, thought, was, in irregular way. The non-past could be present or future : the present is usually formed with the base form of the verb and effected by subject number. Whereas future is expressed with present or modals .There are also some other forms for use within or outside the verbal group that are past participle, present participle, and infinitive. If we adapt this table from Nixon's book(1993) :

We realize that the verb could be expressed Figure (2)

1	drive	walk	have	are/am	get
2	drives	walks	has	is	gets
3	drove	walked	had	was/were	got
4	driven	walked	had	been	got(en)
5	<i>driving</i>	<i>walking</i>	<i>having</i>	<i>being</i>	<i>getting</i>
6	<i>(to) drive</i>	<i>(to) walk</i>	<i>(to) have</i>	<i>(to) be</i>	<i>(to) get</i>

Form We notice that the forms 1-3 may carry finite tude as present or past and the last three forms could be regarded as non-finite forms. If we examine these examples:

- i. I saw him take it .
- ii. I want him to take it .
- iii. I saw him reading it .
- iv. I want them taking.

we realize that the second part is non-finite in each one.

Primary auxiliaries and modals could be considered as operators we have mentioned some of their functions above. They are usually at the first part of the group. But there are some constraints on them. So if the primary verb is (have) it must be followed with n form, if it is (do) it must be followed with to form, and if it is (be) it must be followed with -ing form. For example:

- i. I have written two pages.
- ii. She has fone home.
- iii. I do love you.
- iv. She does like you.

v. They were writinf very fast

vi. He is havinf dinner.

The modal operators which are will , would, shall, should, can , could, may, might and must, may occur as initials if used in verbal group. Although they could carry finitude , they can not exist by themselves. This means they are not used as infinitive moreover they must be followed with it e.g.

He may come tomorrow.

I would like to go .

iii. They must be here by now.

We have mentioned some exceptions forms that are dare, ought, and used to, which may be regarded as modals (marginals) somehow.

### 3.4 Some verbal systems :

The verbal group system is a very complex one in English due to its different environmental choices. Moreover its morphology does not express the syntactic rules directly. We may miss generalization with this system in some choices. However most systems are binary that speaker could choose of . In fact all systems are

needed and as important as others. But the most important ones ,those which used widely such as tense, polarity, finiteness. Other systems could be sub-categorized under tense aspect, since they share common characteristics with each other. We mentioned some of them urgently above and we would try to explain them briefly.

**3.4.1. Finiteness :**

This system is very important feature of verbal group that could be used as primary distinction for it . Though this feature could be used in clause distinction too. We could sub-divided this system as finite and non-finite. The term finite is tensed and realized by the base form, -s form, -ed form of the verb or modal. Whereas the non-finite is realized by to form, -ing form, or en form of the verb. According to Berry 'The terms finite and non- finite are being used here with the same meanings so as they have in traditional grammars ... it may necessary to explain that finite means 'being limited in respect of such properties as person and number' while non-finite means 'not being limited in respect of such properties as person and number'. The choice between finite and non-finite applies to the verbal group ( as opposed to nominal groups or adverbial groups.

(Berry 1975:23)

Thus, we recognise the verb as a finite if the person and number is mentioned or if it is effected by the subject. On the other hand , the non-finite verb could be recognised with lack of number and person. Thus we can say that finiteness is related to tense system and could be figured as :



**3.4.2. Modality:**

It is the system where a modal verb is used within a verbal group . The most agreed upon modals are will , would, shall, should, can, could, may, might and must . They look in pairs as to express present and past but the fact they don't, since we can express different situations by using the same system e.g.

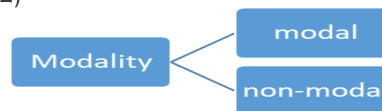
- i. I can come tomorrow.
- ii. I could come tomorrow.
- iii. I may see you later.
- iv. I might see you later.

If we examine the above examples we realize that, regardless their forms they could be used in the same environment. Modals usually appear as initial and precede another element in the verbal group. The element is an auxiliary or a main verb. They may not be effected with number concord. Moreover they have the characteristics of auxiliaries in negation and inversion. They also address the feature of modality upon the whole clause. Though modality becomes as a feature of clause rather than verb. It is mentioned above that groups appear in relation with each other rather than

separate. Modality systems were mentioned by Berry not to be concerned with the speaker in relation to his hearer so much as the speaker attitude towards his message . They are concerned with the speaker's assessment of the probability of the truth of his message.

Thus the system modality allows two possibilities : modal or non-modal where the non-modal could be expressed by any verb which is not modal. It could be

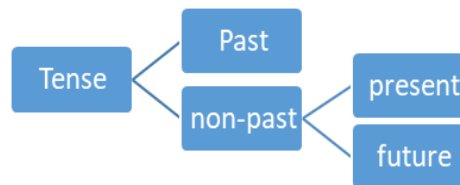
Figure (2)



**3.4.3. Tense:**

This system must be considered as the most important of all. It is realized with the first word of the verbal group in the first position. The English tense allows two possibilities with three choices. They are past and non-past ; the non-past could be sub-divided into present and future. If the tense is expressed with one word. Then the verb will follow either the system of base form or s form in present, or the -ed form in the past. If it is represented by more than a word.

The first part usually carries the tense as in (I was going home . I have seen him twice). Here we can limit the choices of speaker, so he can choose out of those three choices first. Then he can choose from other sub-categories. We have mentioned some examples above. Thus we can figure tense system as :

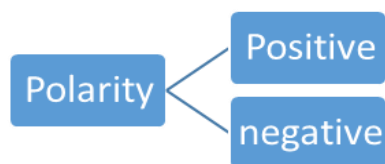


**3.4.4. Polarity:**

It is the system of the verb where the speaker could choose from two choices. They are positive and negative. This system is simply expressed with not (-n't) as negative or without not in positive. If we look at the following examples:

- i. They don't come here every week.
- ii. He didn't like ice cream
- iii: She is not the boss.
- iv. He may not come.

we notice that the auxiliary is responsible of carrying this feature. Though we cannot use a main verb as take with not \*taken't or =take not. If the main verb is lexical we have to bring an auxiliary verb to carry the negation as in the first three examples. The positive is always expressed by verbs without not. There are some exceptions such as double negative express positive. But this is not common in languages. So we can figure this system as :



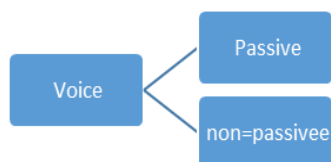
### 3.4.5. Voice:

The system of voice is explained in English in terms of passive and non-passive. Beetham (1989) mentions that the ability of verb to form a passive is determined by the verb's lexical aspect. Traditionally the term passive is expressed in clause with any part of verb be + n form. The non-passive (active) is the active form of the verb which could be transferred to passive system. Some verbs do not allow passive system thus they must not be regarded as passives.

If we examine these examples:

- i. Bill was happy.
- ii. The mug is broken.
- iii. This coat buttons easily.
- iv. The ball was rounded

we notice that the system of passive may not be considered as a verbal group, especially if we try to find out the meaning in relation to clause elements. (i) cannot be transferred to passive. In (ii) the action is not clear whether the mug is described as broken or someone breaks it. In (iii) we cannot consider it as a passive although it has passive meaning. Whatever the case 'is', the passive allows two choices. They are passive and non-passive. It also expresses different systems in relation to clause elements. We can figure it as :



### Conclusion:

We may conclude that the verbal group is considered one of the most complex constructions in clause unit. But if we regard its system and elements as described above, we find out that it is very simple and powerful. Though the verbal group has modal, auxiliary, main verb, extension, there should be an obligatory part or parts in each sentence construction. Other elements are options. Thus, the speaker could choose from different choices according to the context and situation and the sentence structure required to them.

We, then, can conclude that this group represents many systems in English language as finiteness, tense, polarity, voice, modality, etc. Moreover, this group addresses these features upon clause in general. But we have to bear in mind some points that should be stated out; first, that the use of -ed form in both past simple and perfect is not clear enough in terms of use and shape. The second is the distinction between auxiliary and main verb is not clear too. And the use of passive voice system has an ambiguity. Whether that was to consider the

second part as past participle or as adjective. The third is the future tense and how it is explained as its could be expressed with different systems. The fourth point is that auxiliaries must be sub-categorised to primary modals and marginal. Although this classification is limited in number, its use is of highly importance. And lastly, the sequence of forms usually expresses a single meaning since the verb be formed with more than a word; the use of concord system shows the common relation between predicator and subject. I hope I have explained with the citations some systems of English verbal group that native and non-native speakers would use to understand how verbs in English language works.

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