The semantic and syntactic decomposition of get:  
An interaction between verb meaning and particle placement

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Abstract
VPs with get and a PP/particle provide an argument for lexical decomposition in syntax. Get (and German *kriegen*) has a ‘hindrance’ reading, which does not denote causative events and resembles *manage* in that the result is portrayed as hard to achieve, and in that possibility operators do not affect the meaning under negation: I didn’t (= couldn’t) get the key in. These effects surprisingly follow from an analysis where hindrance-get VPs are nothing more than inchoatives of have-VPs of the type have the key in. In get out one’s wallet, we see another reading which is genuinely causative and is not found with German kriegen. Hindrance-get VPs (like VPs with have, *want* and *need*, which decompose with HAVE, and unlike causative get and other causative-agentic verbs) disallow particle-object order (*get*take out your wallet vs. *get*have/ *want*have/ *need*the key). The effects of semantics on word order are shown to be unambiguous only if the HAVE predicate in the meaning of hindrance-get is a syntactic head.

1. Introduction
Many linguists believe that verb meanings (partly) decompose into primitives like *cause* and *become* (e.g. Dowty 1979, Jackendoff 1990, Wunderlich 1997). Some of these linguists assume what I call syntactic decomposition, in that the primitives are treated as morphemes present in the syntax. For instance, Harley (1995) and Richards (2001) express a semantic decomposition of *give* in a syntax like (1). Causative-agentic morphemes like *cause* (also answering to names like v, *voice*) are now common in generative studies (e.g. Baker 1997, Hale & Keyser 1993, Harley 1995, Kratzer 1996, Marantz 1997, Pesetsky 1995, Pylkkänen 2002, Stechow 1996).

1 a. Mary gave John a book; [v Mary[v CAUSE[ref John[v HAVE a book]]]]

The syntactic decomposition hypothesis differs radically from theories decomposing verbs at a lexical-semantic level or not decomposing them. Methodological arguments avail us nothing in choosing between these approaches. Syntactic decomposition simplifies the syntax-semantics mapping, but the received conception of the verb as syntactically atomic, standard outside minimalism, simplifies the mapping between syntax and its audible output. Syntactic decomposition requires an abstract, complex syntax, which many find methodologically repugnant, while a syntax where ‘what you see is what you get’ (Jackendoff 1990:159) entails abstraction and complexity in a lexical/semantic component, which is methodologically unappealing to other linguists. Conceptual arguments are a flimsy basis for deciding the issue, so we need empirical arguments. This study offers a new empirical argument for syntactic decomposition, complementing those in Baker (1997), Hale & Keyser (1993), Stechow (1996).

However the argument is received, I hope it will become clear that there is intrinsic worth in someone’s attempt at understanding the data on which it is based, structures like (2a), where a DP and PP/particle appear in the complement of get. The data have languished in obscurity, despite displaying quirks affording insights into agencytivity, causation, event structure, and the syntax-semantics interface.

2 a. I got the screws out; I got him to the station
   c. The lock is rusty, and I can’t get [*in] the key [in].
   d. I had/wanted/needed [*in] the key [in].

A foretaste of the odd behaviour of get is the puzzle in (2b-d), which involves restrictions on the position of a complementless preposition (‘particle’). Particles can usually appear before or after a direct object, cf. (b). (c) shows that get sometimes disallows particle-object order. Replacing get in (c) with *push* makes both sequences possible. Blockages on particle-object order are observable with *have* (and other verbs argued to have a silent *have* in their complements, e.g. *want* and *need*, cf. (2d) and section 4.4). I argue that the uses of get like that in (2c) which disallow particle-object order are inchoatives of *have*, while those that allow particle-object order like (2b) have a genuinely causal semantics. Independent differences between the use of get in (2c) and that in (2b) are that (2c), but not (2b), can be translated with German *kriegen* or *bekommen* and displays a peculiar form of non-agentivity I call ‘hindrance specialisation’: it suggests that the result is achieved despite resistance. The effect of the meaning of get on word order in (2b,c) is shown to follow naturally only if the elements into which get-VPs decompose semantically (BECOME, HAVE) are present in syntax.

We proceed as follows. Section 2 introduces basic semantic observations about get+PP structures. Section 2.1 discusses the hindrance reading. Section 2.2 discusses what I call the ‘unintentional’ reading (*I got ants in my room*). This is irrelevant to particle verbs but must be mentioned because it helps us to understand the hindrance use. Section 2.3 describes the what I call the ‘(genuinely) causative’ use in (2b), which (like *take* and unlike *put*) entails that the object comes to be possessed or manually controlled by the subject. This requirement suggests that these VPs originated as resultative constructions based on agentive DP complement uses (get/take the book), but some idiosyncrasies speak against the synchronic validity of this analysis for get. A causative semantics is formulated for this reading, supplemented by conditions stipulating the contexts where it may appear. Section 3 gives a more detailed analysis of the hindrance reading, arguing that it is an inchoative of *have*. Surprisingly, this analysis captures (a) the fact that the subject of hindrance-get is invariably seen as responsible for having brought about the result, and (b) hindrance specialisation. Section 4 discusses the particle position facts. After an introduction to the basic facts on particles, differences between speakers in their acceptance of a particle before an object in a given combination are shown to follow from differing degrees of liberalty in the use of causative get. Section 4.3 introduces the light verbs used here. In a framework indebted to Distributed Morphology, I survey most uses of get, concluding that it is a spellout of BECOME in all its uses. Section 4.4 defends what I call a ‘hindrance’ reading, *what I call* a ‘hindrance’ reading, arguing that it is an inchoative of *have*. Surprisingly, this analysis captures (a) the fact that the subject of hindrance-get is invariably seen as responsible for having brought about the result, and (b) hindrance specialisation. Section 4.5 argues that only syntactic lexical decomposition can give a non-arbitrary account of the data. Section 5 summarises the main properties of the readings of get discussed here.

Space permits only a focus on transitive get+PP VPs, with side glances at other uses of get, e.g. possessive uses (*get a book*), unaccusative uses (*get off the boat*), AP uses (*get him drunk*), ‘passive’ uses (*get killed*), ‘inchoative’ uses (*get working*) and ‘causative’ uses like those in *get him to go*, *get him working*. Ditransitive structures like (3a) are irrelevant here, pace a reviewer. Ditransitive get VPs are augmentations by a beneficiary of the agentive DP complement use of get in the sense ‘fetch, buy’. I assume with Pylkkänen (2002) that these are licensed by a benefactive-applicative head below the agent-licensing head. (3a) is interpreted like (3c), not (3b), for (a) and (c), but not (b), are true if I have obtained the book but not yet given it to Ann. Linguists wanting to derive ditransitive get VPs by dative shift would have to start with structures like (c), not (b). It is reasonable to exclude (c) from the purview of this study. The for-PPs are not directional complements like the PPs in (3b) and (2a), but are adjuncts (cf. *do so* ellipses: *I got a book for Ann, then I did so for John*, vs. *I got a book to Ann, then I did so to John*).

   b. I [got/fetched/bought] the book to Ann
   c. I [got/fetched/bought] the book for Ann

The literature on get does not help with the questions discussed here. There are several studies on ‘passive’ uses (e.g. Haegeman 1985). General treatments of get are scarce, although (or
because?) get dwarfs the oft-discussed verb have in the complexity of the issues it raises. Givon & Yang (1994), Kimball (1973) and Tobin (1994) offer worthwhile insights, but do not delve into complexities like those discussed herein.

2. Three readings for get+PP structures

I now introduce the three readings of get+PP structures. Since the empirical terrain covered in this section is substantial, a summary of the main points is provided in section 5.

2.1. The hindrance reading

My introduction to the uses of get+PP structures begins with a use called 'hindrance-get'. It suggests that the result is hard to attain. Put otherwise, this use of get displays 'hindrance specialisation', being specialised to contexts where the subject overcomes some kind of obstacle. Consider (4), where # indicates acceptability contingent on special contextual assumptions. In (a) get is good in a context where the arm-lifting is difficult, for instance if the subject is injured or holding a heavy object. In (b-d), the use of get in describing the physically easy act of carrying a book somewhere is acceptable only if obstacles to the reaching of the goal are either explicit (as in (c,d)) or contextually inferred (for instance if it is known that the book in (b) could be confiscated), (e) is acceptable in any context if the time limit expressions are included, apparently because time is construable as a factor competed against, as an obstacle. (4f) can be reconciled with the above remarks if we extend the notion of hindrance to cover imagined difficulties. Were there no imagined difficulties in (f), there would be no point in denying them with difficulty.

(4) a. She [raised/moved/#got] her arm up to shoulder level.
   b. He [took/carryd/#got] the book through the room.
   c. He got the book through the room [unimpeded by the crowd/unnoticed].
   d. He got the book through [customs/the/narrow opening].
   e. She got me to the station #[in ten minutes/before the train left].
   f. I got the thread through the needle without difficulty.

Hindrance-specialised get+PP structures with goal PPs are achievements, denoting only arrival at the goal, while VPs with other verbs are accomplishments, i.e. also express progress toward the goal. Hindrance-get is not usable if the theme's progress toward the goal is interrupted, as in (5a), while other caused motion verbs pattern with standard accomplishments in permitting the progressive with an uncompleted event (cf. the imperfective paradox, e.g. Dowty 1979:133).

With get in (5b), the assertion is that we will arrive at the station in ten minutes' time, while with take/drive it is that the journey will start in ten minutes' time. In (5c), on the way that the implies that the journey has started. This contradicts the negation of take/drive, but not the negation of get.

(5) a. I was [taking/driving/#getting] them to France, but we never reached the border.
   b. She'll [get/take/drive] us to the station ten minutes from now.
   c. Because the car broke down on the way, she didn’t [get*take*/drive] us to the station.

Another facet of the achievementhood of hindrance-get VPs is that they do not denote causing events or agentive acts. In (6a) and (6c) almost may take scope over the actions causing the results, while (b) and (d) lack wide scope readings denying that the subject acted. This follows if hindrance-get VPs, unlike the causative/resultative VPs, do not denote agentive acts.

(6) a. I almost [put/stamp/blew] the fire out
   b. I almost got the fire out
   c. I almost [put together/assembled] the machine
   d. I almost got the machine together

(7) makes the same point. In the deviant variants, the subordinate VPs have causing events in their denotation. The matrix verbs express acts construed pragmatically as identical to the causing events in the unacceptable subordinate VPs. By consequence, the interval occupied by the main clause actions is a subpart of the interval occupied by the subordinate clause events with the causative verbs. This yields a non sequitur, since the complementiser before indicates that the subordinate clause events occur after (not during) the main clause events. That no such temporal paradox exists with get in (7) is explicable if the get-VPs do not denote causing events.

(7) a. They had to fight the fire for hours before they [got it out/*put it out/*extinguished it/*caused it to go out].
   b. I had to twist the key for ages before I [got/*put/*stuck/*forced] it in the rusty lock.
   c. I had to pull on the boot for ages before I [got/*took/*pulled] it off.

Thus, hindrance-get VPs do not include agents' acts in their denotation (although they presuppose them, see below). They are thus non-agentive. It may be objected that the non-agentivity of hindrance-get is at best weakly supported by judgements with normal agentivity tests like (8) (Cruse 1973, Dowty 1979:112f; the contexts in (8a-c) diagnose volitionality, and the sense of the test in (d) seems to be that no auxiliary do is an underspecified agentive verb).

(8) a. I told him to [drive/get] the car to the top of the hill
   b. He [helped/*got] the old man across the road to court his favour.
   c. Please [bring/*get] him to my office at some stage
   d. What I did was [put/*get] the key in the lock.

However, it has been known (or forgotten) since Cruse (1973) that other non-agentive verbs pass these tests. In (9a) the tests are passed by states (cf. *he's having it ready, *he's being absent). It seems to me that these cases and any structures like (8) where get is judged acceptable involve a metonymy in which the VP with get/have/be does stand for the actions which the subject must perform to bring about the situation named by the VP. With regard to imperative, a further extraneous factor is a possible optative reading. The German imperative seems to lack this reading, and the German equivalents of hindrance-get, kriegen and bekommen, resist imperative strongly, cf. (9b). In sum, I feel justified in upholding the claim that hindrance-get VPs do not include the actions of an agent in their denotation.

(9) a. What you must do is be absent that day; Please have your passports ready; Please [hammer/get] the nail into the wall.
   b. [Hammer/*Kriegen/*Bekommen] bitte den Nagel in die Wand rein!
   c. Please [hammer/get] the nail into the wall.

(10) showcases another oddity of hindrance-get. Under negation, possibility operators do not affect the interpretation of hindrance-get VPs, while negation of causative-agentive VPs without possibility operators is possible if the subject can attain the result but chooses not to, a reading which is unattainable if possibility expressions are present. Hindrance-get behaves as in (10) because it presupposes an attempt at achieving the result. The fact that presuppositions survive under negation (if not explicitly negated: I didn't get the key in because I didn't try) coupled with the non-occurrence of the result trivially suggests that the subject is unable to attain it.1

1 Other effects of the presupposition: Answering 'no' to (i) admits attempted envenomation. In (ii) get suggests that I could not have attained the result unaided (though I would have tried to), but with take I could have refused to act towards attaining the result unaided, though I perhaps could have attained it.
2 The variants with kannst/musst able in structures like (10a,b) sound more natural than those without. The German translations of get show the opposite preference, cf. the literal and idiomatic glosses in (i). I cannot explain this, but an explanation seems unnecessary given that the Anglo-German contrast is not specific to get, cf. the glosses in (ii).
3 Other forms of hindrance-get VPs can mean: 'I find/think/see/hear/feel/taste it not'

I find/understand/see/hear/feel/taste it not
[Note continues]
(10) a. I didn’t get them to the stadium = I was unable to get them to the stadium
b. I didn’t get the key in the lock = I couldn’t get the key in the lock

There are other hindrance-specialised verbs. German *kriegen* and *bekommen* are good translations of *hindrance-get* in all respects, including hindrance specialisation. Unaccusative *get+PP* structures also have a hindrance-specialised use, cf. I got through *[a thick book]*/*hau**half-page abstract*], where the latter variant is odd unless illness or disability make the reading of the abstract difficult. Di Meola (1994: 59-72) sees the overcoming of obstacles as one of the non-deictic meanings of *German kommen*, which normally means ‘come’ but also translates some types of unaccusative *get+PP* structures. *Manage* and *succeed* are also hindrance-specialised: #manage to cross/succeed in crossing the street are odd unless hindrances like disability or traffic are presupposed. It is hard to detect a difference between a *get+PP* structure in the complement of *manage and one which is not (I managed to get the key in the lock vs. I got the key in the lock). The 1995 Oxford English Reference Dictionary defines *get+PP* uses using *succeed* (’succeed or cause to succeed in coming or going’).

I offer a more explicit analysis of *hindrance-get* in section 3. Before doing so, it is necessary to acquaint readers with other uses of *get+PP* structures.

2.2. Unintentional *get*

(11) instantiates *unintentional get*. Here there is no hindrance specialisation. The subject is not responsible for the result. Unintentional *get* does not combine with particles and is not directly relevant to my main argument, but section 3 requires some knowledge of it.

(11) I got ants in my room; She got her hair in a tangle (because the wind blew). The camera, got dust in it; He got blood all over him, and sharpened in his, arm in the explosion; The cat, got paint on the top of its, fender

(11) makes clear that unintentional *get* requires coinherence between the subject and an item somewhere in the complement of *get*, a requirement also known to hold with certain uses of *have* (see section 3). Unintentional *get* disallows unambiguously directional PPs like into: I got ants into my room has a hindrance-specialised, not an unintentional reading. It is clear that (11) involves small clause (predicative) complementation. An analysis where the sole complement is a DP (e.g. *get [I don’t have ants in my room] or [VP get ants] in my room]) is falsified by cases in (11) where the subject does not get the object: *the camera got dust, *she got her hair, etc.

2.3. Genuinely causative *get+PP* structures

I now introduce and analyse the use of *get* in (12a), where *get* is a normal manner-unmarked causative position change verb. It is not hindrance-specialised. In I almost got out my wallet the scope of *almost* may include a causing actions, which is impossible with hindrance-*get*, cf. (6).

The use of *get* in (12a) also fails to display the phenomenon in (10) in that I didn’t get out my wallet suggests not that I was unable to but that I chose not to. I call get in (12a) ‘(genuinely) causative get’. (In this study, ‘causative get’ only refers to the PP complement use relevant to us, not to other causative uses like I got him to sing. Section 3 argues that hindrance-*get* is not genuinely causative.)

(12) a. I got out my wallet; I got the milk out of the fridge; I got the washing out of the dryer
b. So full of money was my wallet that I couldn’t get it in my pocket; I got the milk in the fridge before it went off

If we replace out (of) in (12a) with *into*, we must replace *get* with *put* (unless we want the hindrance reading, as in contexts like (12b)). This is a reflection of a *possession constraint* which affects causative *get* (but not *put* and hindrance and unintentional get), in that the subject must come to possess the object, with ‘possession’ understood as control or access, not just ownership. If I get out my wallet, I do not affect my ownership of it, but I do move it into my hands, where I have more immediate access to and control over it. This is not true of I got the cat *outside*, where get has the hindrance rather than the causative reading, witness e.g. the almost test. Causative *get* is not only found with *out*. Get in the police and get together some money involve bringing the respective objects into a domain where they are accessible to the subject, so they obey the possession constraint, and the constructions do not exhibit hindrance effects.

The possession constraint on causative *get* suggests a connection to the likewise possessive DP complement use: if I get the milk out of the fridge, I in a sense get the milk. That this connection is real is confirmed by other verbs with both a possessive DP complement use and a causative position change use with a possession constraint like that found with causative *get*. Examples are take (take the key [out of] into the lock) and, in some varieties, fetch (witness internet attestations like he fetched it out of his pocket and she fetched it out of her bag), as well as German *nehmen* ‘take’ and *holen* ‘fetch’. (*Holen*, unlike fetch, is in common use, freely allowing constructions like es aus der Tasche holen ‘get it out of one’s pocket’).

Verbs like get, take, fetch, nehmen and holen both with a causative PP complement use and a possessive DP complement use all have in common that the latter is agentive, i.e. requires an act induced by a decision on the part of the subject. Take the book expresses a volitional initiation of manual control of the book, while get the book can express deliberate initiation of possession, such as buying or fetching it. Receive illustrates this phenomenon well. With objects like guests, spiritual influences, receive is agentive, requiring an act of the will, and directional PPs may occur exactly in these cases, cf. (13). German *kriegen/bekommen* PP VPs are never agentive; they have hindrance-specialised and unintentional readings, but not genuinely causative ones. This tallies with the fact that their DP complement uses only express passive receipt.

(13) a. She decided to receive *[guests/Christ/*books]*

b. She received *[guests/*books]* into her home; She received Christ into her life

The above facts initially favour an analysis where the grammar of causative get directly refers to the agentive possessive sense. Earlier versions of this essay therefore treated causative get VPs as resutilative constructions based on the agentive monotransitive use. On this view, get/’s one’s wallet out is grammatically parallel to pull/’s one’s wallet out; both express causation of motion with the verb root identifying the causing event as getting/kriegen (in the monotransitive agentive senses of the verbs) or pulling. That only agentive readings of possession verbs are suitable as the causative in such constructions is falsified by cases in (11) where the subject does not get the object: *the camera got dust, *she got her hair, etc.

3.1. Causative and *get+PP* structures

I take the view that causative *get* is only causative in a sense that is sui generis (cf. I rammell/fell the door open). Wunderlich (1997) and McIntyre (2004) offer different theories of resultatives from which the matters just discussed could be made to follow. An objection to the resutilative analysis is that, context free, (14a) does not seem to entail (14b), but not (a), implies that the subject moves some distance toward the object. (The same holds of German *holen*.) This does not refute the resutilative analysis, for the motion intuition in (b) seems to be an implication. In (14b), where ownership is irrelevant to an event denoted by get VPs, the type of possession initiated must be assumed to be temporary access or control. Object in reach of the subject are liable to be already possessed in this way, so we infer that they are out

1. In Max und Moritz, Erzter Streich (Wilhelm Busch, 1865) we read ...Kriegt sie jetzt das Messer her, literally ‘gets she now the knife lather’. The context suggests that *hervorkriegen* should be glossed with *fetch*, suggesting that a (now impossible) causative use of *kriegen*PP once existed. This exception proves the rule, for *kriegenPP* was formerly agentive, truly to its original meaning ‘obtain by way’.
of reach of the subject, who must thus move towards the object to gain control over it. Like other implications, this inference can be cancelled. (14b) would be possible if it were known that the knife had been within the subject’s reach. PPs like out of my pocket in (14b) are simply another way of cancelling the motion implication.

(14) a. I got my knife out of my pocket  
   b. I got my knife

Unfortunately, other data speak against the resultative analysis. In (15), clothing is the theme and the human body is the implicit ground/reference object of off. In varieties like mine, get in (15a) can only have the hindrance reading: it implies that the subject cannot undress, e.g. due to disability. Other speakers can use (15a) of a situation where the subject decides not to undress, and allow get in clearly agentive contexts like (15b). These speakers have a use of causative get which must be replaced by take in other varieties. The resultative analysis cannot capture varieties which lack a causative use for get off in (15) but use take off in this context.

(15) a. They didn’t get their clothes off  
   b. The band members get their clothes off on stage to attract publicity

Other problems for the resultative analysis concern cases like (16a). Here the subject gets the object, but by the test in (10), (16a) involves the hindrance, not the causative reading, since we do not change the meaning by replacing didn’t with couldn’t. (16b) shows the opposite problem. Get has the genuinely causative reading, although one cannot get the objects, since they cease to exist as soon as they are out/off (stitches become threads once removed).

(16) a. He didn’t get the children home  
   b. I didn’t get {out the stitches / out the stain / off the rust } because that’s not my job

The resultative analysis is thus empirically suspect, but the parallels between get and take, receive and show hold that it is real in some sense. I respond to this paradox by suggesting that the resultative analysis applied to causative get at an earlier stage (as it does to receive+PP VPs currently, cf. (13)), but that causative get has undergone lexical drift. The possessive constraint, when it holds, is a relic from the period when the resultative analysis was valid. Synchronically, it must be stipulated in some way, since a stipulation-free account of it like the resultative analysis would both over- and undergenerate with regard to examples like (15) and (16).

I approach these facts by assuming that causative get and other causative position change verbs like put are semantically identical, but that their lexical entries stipulate different use conditions, constraints on the contexts where the (relevant senses of) the verbs may appear. The proposal is in (17) and (18).

(17) Semantics for [\textit{VP x get y [\textit{PP (z)}]}] with get in the causative use: 
[\textit{\lambda P \{z\} \lambda x \lambda y \lambda z. \textit{CAUSE} (\textit{ACT(x)}, \textit{BECOME} (\textit{PV (z)}, \textit{S}))}

(18) \textit{\lambda x \lambda y \lambda z. \textit{CAUSE} (\textit{ACT(x)}, \textit{BECOME} (\textit{PV (z)}, \textit{S}))}

For expository clarity (17) and other semantic representations before section 4.3 ignore my belief that the decomposition predicates are syntactic heads. These representations can be thought of as interpretations or LF’s of syntactic phrases. I ignore irrelevant matters like tense, focussing on the VP, assuming VP-internal subjects. The syntax in (17) and (18) also ignores finer points about the structure of VP. BECOME is defined more precisely in section 3.4, where it becomes crucial. For now, it suffices to take BECOME as symbolising that what is in its scope changes from being untrue to true. P is a placeholder for the semantics of the preposition. In particle verbs like get out your wallet the preposition’s internal argument z is absent in syntax

(18a) gives variety-specific versions of the possessive constraint. ‘Control’ in (18a1) is prototypically manual control, where the subject holds and may manipulate, the object. Speakers accepting (18b) follow (18a1), not (a2), for people removing clothing gain manual control over it, but are not motivated by a desire to use or otherwise interact with it. More confirmation for (18) is given in section 4.2, where it is discussed with reference to particles, which would have disrupted the exposition here.¹

(18b) is motivated by the causative interpretation of get in (16b). I do not know how this use of get constitutes a natural class with uses of get obeying the possession constraint (including its variants in (18a)), but there is evidence that the two uses are somehow related. The get data in (16b) have parallels in (19) with take. (19b,c) are variety-specific.) Recall that take normally resembles causative get in imposing a possession constraint (take the ball [out of/*off] the box), so the disappearing theme use is somehow connected to the possession constraint.

(19) a. The doctor didn’t take out the stitches
   b. she couldn’t take out the stain
   c. You can take off the rust

3. Hindrance-get as an inchoative of have

I now analyse hindrance-get in detail. I suspect that many linguists would at first glance surmise that (20a) is a causativisation of (b) (cf. Hale & Keyser 1993:86f).

(20) a. John got the lion in the cage.  
    b. The lion got in the cage.

Doubts about an analysis where (20a) differs from (b) in the presence of a causal relation emerge from the discussion of (6)-(10). There it was shown that hindrance-get VPs do not denote causing events and are not agentive, properties which do not hold of genuinely causative get and of other causative verbs. A causal analysis for hindrance-get must give way to a representation which asserts that the subject is the initiator of the result state without referring to causing events. Perhaps unexpectedly, it turns out that the approach in (21) gives us this, since the use of have in question holds the subject responsible for having brought about the state (an example of this use is He had the lion in the cage). I argue that hindrance specialisation should not be stipulated but follows from reasoning based on the use of the BECOME operator, correctly defined, in certain contexts.

¹ (18a2) is attested elsewhere as a direction of semantic specialisation. It is found with some uses of before. I sat in front of the piano entails intent to do something with the piano (e.g. play it, clean it, inspect it), while I sat in front of the piano does not force this entailment (cf. The sofa was taken, so I sat in front of it*.before the piano while watching the film). (18a2) also distinguishes take up from pick up. One can take up a pen or stone if one intends to do something with it (e.g. use it, look at it), but not in the context of street cleaning work, where only pick up is usable. That (18a2) constrains both take up and causative get in some varieties may suggest principled connections between (18a2) and possession, but (18a2) is an idiosyncratic property of take up not found with other uses of take, for (a) entails no intended use of or interaction with the sword. A final note on the bigger context of (18a2) is that it should not be confused with functional specialisations like that in (c), which entails intended canonical use of the sword, while (ib) need not entail this, but (in varieties constrained by (18a2)) does entail intent to do something with it.

a. He [look out/pulled out] the sword in order to clean the sheaf  
   b. He got the sword [to look at it/*to clean the sheaf]
   c. He [brandished/pulled/drew] the sword [*to look at it/*to clean the sheaf]
The BECOME HAVE theory: Hindrance-get VPs are nothing more than inchoatives (embodiments under BECOME) of states expressed overtly by a certain type of have+PP structure.

3.1. Initial plausibility arguments for the BECOME HAVE theory

I firstly indicate why it would even be desirable to argue for (21). German kriegen and bekommen are cognate with neither get nor each other, but display many of the same uses as transitive get, cf. (22). (Bekommen matches kriegen in all uses.) The result states of all these sentences can be expressed by replacing kriegen/get with haben/have. The possessive use in (22a) and the unintentional PP use in (22b) are straightforwardly analysable as inchoatives of the have variants. Besides these uses, we find uses which (i) are hindrance-specialised and (ii) hold the subject responsible for having brought about the result. We find that uses with these properties occur under the same conditions in both languages. AP complement uses like (22d) seem always to be hindrance-specialised in both languages (cf. She didn’t get her hair straight = she couldn’t... and analogously in German). The participial use in (22c) is hindrance-specialised in both languages under the same conditions. If the subject is unconscious while being bandaged (and hence not responsible for the result), there is no hindrance specialisation. The expressions are hindrance-specialised e.g. if they denote bandaging one’s own arm (I didn’t (=couldn’t) get my left arm bandaged because my right hand was injured).

(22) a. Briefe kriegen = get letters (in sense ‘receive’, not ‘fetch’)
   b. einen Kugel in den Arm kriegen = get a bullet in one’s arm
   c. den Arm verbunden kriegen = get one’s arm bandaged
   d. die Haare glatt kriegen = get one’s hair straight
   e. den Löwen in den Käfig kriegen = get the lion in the cage

The coexistence in three historically unrelated verbs of (i) uses which are plausibly inchoatives of have, and (ii) hindrance-specialised uses, is surely not arbitrary. The question is not whether the uses are connected, but how. My proposal is that both types of uses of get are inchoatives of have and that differences them are due to different uses of have. To uphold this proposal, I must show how it captures hindrance specialisation and the concomitant requirement that the subject be interpreted as responsible for having brought about the result. I begin my attempt at this now.

3.2. The responsibility requirement

I firstly discuss the responsibility requirement, the fact that subjects of hindrance VPs are responsible for having initiated the situation: I got the lion into the cage is untrue if I am an inactive beneficiary of a voluntary return of the lion into its cage or of actions performed by people not acting at my behest. The responsibility requirement occurs with some have+PP structures. (23a) is untrue if Cuthbert did nothing to induce the attacker to flee (e.g. if he was tied up and the attacker fled because the police arrived), (23b) entails that Clive had asked someone to put the goods in the warehouse. However, not all have+PP structures exhibit the responsibility requirement, cf. (23c).

(23) a. Cuthbert has the attacker on the run [responsibility]
   b. Clive has the stolen goods in a deserted warehouse [responsibility]
   c. The box has sand in it [unintentional]

My approach to these matters is encapsulated in (24).

(24) a. Semantics for [\textit{get}] \textit{\_PP}, cf. (22). (Bekommen in all uses.) The result states of all these sentences can be expressed by replacing kriegen/get with haben/have. The possessive use in (22a) and the unintentional PP use in (22b) are straightforwardly analysable as inchoatives of the have variants. Besides these uses, we find uses which (i) are hindrance-specialised and (ii) hold the subject responsible for having brought about the result. We find that uses with these properties occur under the same conditions in both languages. AP complement uses like (22d) seem always to be hindrance-specialised in both languages (cf. She didn’t get her hair straight = she couldn’t... and analogously in German). The participial use in (22c) is hindrance-specialised in both languages under the same conditions. If the subject is unconscious while being bandaged (and hence not responsible for the result), there is no hindrance specialisation. The expressions are hindrance-specialised e.g. if they denote bandaging one’s own arm (I didn’t (=couldn’t) get my left arm bandaged because my right hand was injured).

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The coexistence in three historically unrelated verbs of (i) uses which are plausibly inchoatives of have, and (ii) hindrance-specialised uses, is surely not arbitrary. The question is not whether the uses are connected, but how. My proposal is that both types of uses of get are inchoatives of have and that differences them are due to different uses of have. Although it is not crucial to my purposes, I assume that HAVE\textsuperscript{\textit{unint}} and HAVE\textsuperscript{\textit{int}} are two context-specific manifestations of one highly underspecified HAVE relation. If this were not so, the fact noted in section 3.1 that get, kriegen, have and haben all have these readings would be arbitrary. The ensuing sections elaborate on (24a) by defining HAVE\textsuperscript{\textit{experiencer}} explicitly and by showing how (24a) captures hindrance specialisation. (24b) is discussed only insofar as it helps us to understand the hindrance reading. It is not directly relevant to the main argument in this study since unintentional get does not combine with particles.

Extra support for the idea in (24) that the responsibility requirement in hindrance-get is inherited from a predicate overtly expressible by have comes from striking parallels between have and get with respect to the conditions under which the responsibility and unintentional readings are found. Firstly, many studies (e.g. Belvin 1993, 1996, Belvin & den Dikken 1997, Déchaire et al. 1994, den Dikken 1997, Harley 1995, 1998, Ritter & Rosen 1997) note that unintentional have (=‘experiencer have’ in these works) requires coindexation between the subject of have and an item in its complement, unlike responsibility-have (=‘causative have’ in these works). (25) shows that this applies to get as well as have. (25a) holds John responsible for the puncture, while (b), where there is no coindexation, is not. (26) note that covert coindexation suffices for the unintentional reading. Replacing his with the in (25b) allows the unintentional reading provided the tyre is understood as John’s tyre.

(25) a. John got/had a nail in his tyre. [responsibility/unintentional]
   b. John, got/had a nail in his tyre. [responsibility/unintentional]

Secondly, get behaves analogously to have with regard to Harley’s (1998) observation that a reflexive in the complement of have forces a responsibility reading. (26a) attributes the location of the paint to the subject’s carelessness or deliberate self-decoration. In (b), the subject could be the passive victim of someone else’s act. In (26c) the sergeant may be an inconveniently by enemy spies (if the camp is is camp), while (d) forces the responsibility reading where the sergeant had stationed himself in the camp, as opposed to an unintentional reading (e.g. he is imprisoned in the camp).

(26) a. he, had/got paint on himself, [responsibility]
   b. he, had/got paint on him, [unintentional]
   c. The sergeant had/got spies in the camp [unintentional/responsibility]
   d. The sergeant had/got himself in the camp [responsibility/* unintentional]

Thirdly, responsibility readings with both have and get are forced in the presence of exclusively directional prepositions like into and onto. With both get and have, (27a) portrays Smith as a

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selector or captain responsible for Jones' inclusion in the team, while in (b) Smith could be a player in the team who is not responsible for Jones' inclusion. I cannot explain (27)\(^8\), but it is a further case where the responsibility readings with get as with have are sensitive to the same principles, as expected under the BECOME HAVE theory. (27) a. Smith had/got Jones into his team (*due to circumstances beyond Smith's control) b. Smith had/got Jones in his team (due to circumstances beyond Smith's control) 3.3. The semantics of HAVE\(^{\text{op}}\) (24a) decomposes hindrance-get VPs using HAVE\(^{\text{op}}\), which was said to mean whatever the responsibility-have with PP complements (henceforth: have\(^{\text{op}}\)) means. I now analyse have\(^{\text{op}}\) and equivalently HAVE\(^{\text{op}}\). The studies on responsibility-have cited above (25) treat infinitival complements and ignore have\(^{\text{op}}\)+PP structures, so I now conduct my analysis of these. HAVE\(^{\text{op}}\)+PP VPs are states, witness the use of the simple present in contexts like (28), where habitual, generic or historic narrative readings compatible with non-states are unavailable. (28) Egbert has the stolen car on the street now Rough equivalence between (29a) and (29b) should not tempt us to view have\(^{\text{op}}\)+PP VPs as some type of elliptical structure involving the perfect auxiliary have. Have in (a) has the syntax of a lexical verb, not that of the auxiliary in (b), witness e.g. the relative position of have and now, and the fact that the tag question for (a) would be doesn't she while that for (b) would be hasn't she. (29) a. She now has my car in John’s garage b. She has now put my car in John’s garage The state expressed by have\(^{\text{op}}\)+PP VPs and the state expressed by the complement small clause hold during exactly the same interval. Actions performed by the subject before the start of the interval in which the embedded state holds are not included in the interval occupied by either state. Hence, (30a) is true only if the car was on the street when the siren sounded. It is false if Egbert was still moving the car towards the street at that point. The subject may do something to sustain the small clause state during the time that it holds, cf. (30b), but need not, cf. (30a). (30) a. When Egbert heard the police siren, he had the stolen car on the street b. Grandma has her wrestling opponent on the floor c. Egbert didn’t have the car on the street Although subjects of have\(^{\text{op}}\) must have performed actions aimed at bringing about the small clause state before the interval occupied by the have\(^{\text{op}}\) state, these actions are not presuppositional, i.e. need not have occurred if the VP is negated, as in (30c).

The fact that have\(^{\text{op}}\)+PP structures hold an entity responsible for bringing about a situation, yet are states and do not express causing events, may seem strange, but has a precedent in (31).

(31) She is responsible for this situation; This situation is due to him Putting the above observations together, we arrive at the definition in (32) of have\(^{\text{op}}\) (and thus of the HAVE\(^{\text{op}}\) relation with which I decompose hindrance-get VPs).

(32) Interpretation of [\text{\text{VP have [sc y [\text{\text{PP (\_)}]]]}]} have in the responsibility reading:

\[ \text{JP } \{\text{[\_X YX HAVE\(^{\text{op}}\}, \text{[PY\{\_Z\}]]}\} \]

This is true during interval I if (i) the state denoted by the small clause is true at I and (ii) \(x\) had performed actions before I which caused this state to come about.

(32) is provisional. I will not describe uses of HAVE\(\)have other than those manifesting themselves in responsibility have\(\)+PP structures, which I see as part of the meaning of hindrance-get VPs crucial to my main argument. Belvin (1993, 1996), Harley (1998) and Ritter & Rosen (1997) and others may be right in assuming an underspecified semantics covering most uses of have. If this were wrong, the observation in section 3.1 that several unrelated verbs have similar ranges of meanings would be mysterious. However, the literature known to me has not brought forth an underspecified meaning for have which predicts exactly the generalisations captured by (32). Theories claiming that have has next to no semantic content (e.g. Ritter & Rosen 1997) cannot prevent I had the lion in the cage from meaning 'I saw that the lion was in the cage'. The same overgeneration problem attends the claim that have-sentences decompose semantically and, in some theories, syntactically, into a metaphorically construed location of the entity or situation expressed by have’s complement with respect to have’s subject (Benveniste 1966, Belvin 1993, 1996, Belvin & den Dikken 1997, Déchaine et al. 1994, den Dikken 1997, Freeze 1992, Harley 1998). This may be right, but I know no suitably predictive variant of this proposal. I therefore leave (32) as a purely descriptive generalisation, trusting that successful attempts at more general meanings covering more uses of have and further decompositions of it will be able to be brought together with the central aims of this study without spoiling its main message.

3.4. BECOME and the Aktionsart of hindrance-get (33) (cf. (24) and (32)) is the semantics for hindrance-get VPs which I am proposing. (34) introduces the definition for BECOME, based on Bierwisch’s (2004) revision of that in Dowty (1979:141). Bierwisch and Dowty may be right to treat (34c) as an implicature. I state it explicitly since its consequences are important here.

(33) a. Semantics for [\text{\text{VP get y [\text{\text{PP (\_)}]}]} get in the responsibility reading: \(\text{JP } \{\text{[\_X YX BECOME HAVE\(^{\text{op}}\}, \text{[PY\{\_Z\}]]}\} \)

b. \(\text{JP } \{\text{[\_X YX HAVE\(^{\text{op}}\}, \text{[PY\{\_Z\}]]}\} \)

time if (i) the state \([\text{PY\{\_Z\}]}\) is true at K and (ii) \(x\) had performed actions before K which caused this state to come about.

(34) [BECOME \(\phi\)] is true at interval I if

a. there is an interval K containing the final bound of I with \(\phi\) implied to be true at K.

b. there is an interval J containing the initial bound of I with \(\neg\phi\) presupposed to hold at J.

c. there is no interval I’ such that I’ is included in I and conditions (a) and (b) hold for I.’

The definitions capture the Aktionsart properties of hindrance-get VPs. (33b) reflects the finding of section 3.3 that the HAVE\(^{\text{op}}\) relation is temporally coextensive with the small clause state, i.e. the state of a theme at a location. Thus, the only parts of the meaning of hindrance-get VPs relevant to Aktionsart are BECOME and a target state. (34c) ensures that a BECOME transition does not hold until the negation of the small clause proposition ceases to hold. This matches the results of tests like (5) and (6), which showed that hindrance-get VPs are achievements, i.e. are not yet ascertainable if the theme is known to be moving towards the goal or the subject is acting towards realising the result state.

The term ‘achievement’ is sometimes associated with punctuality, but (35) shows that hindrance-get VPs need not be punctual. (34) allows BECOME transitions to be non-punctual if the initial and result states are separated by an interval where the speaker cannot decide whether the result state holds. Such truth value gaps give a plausible account for cases like (35), where...
the goal region (here: at the top of the mountain) has fuzzy boundaries, so that the theme must pass through a state where the theme is neither at the goal but nor at it.\(^7\) The trying presupposition seems to be related to presuppositions triggered in (36c), (b) presuppositions that I had been moving towards the shop, and (c) that I started reading the book. The examples in (36) are all achievements and all express situations which, judged by world knowledge, are ‘(inherently) subeventive’, i.e. are intrinsic final, parts of larger events also comprising characteristic leadup actions (cf. Piñón’s 1997 view that achievements are boundaries of larger situations). (36c) subeventive in this sense because one cannot simply reach a location without prior motion, or finish a book without prior reading. Hindrance-get VPs like (36a) are subeventive in the following sense. Hindrance VPs always show the responsibility requirement (captured in my theory by HAVE\(^8\)), but do not actually denote actions of the subject which lead to the goal state. Yet the subject cannot be responsible for this state without having performed such actions, i.e. without having tried to attain it.\(^8\)

Given this notion of subeventiveness, it is easy to see why, if we reformulate (36) without negation, the subject is inferred to have acted with a view to inserting the screw in (a), to have been moving prior to reaching the goal in (b) and to have been reading in the book in (c). What requires explaining is why these inferences are retained in the negative variants in (36), i.e. why they are presuppositions. I put this down to the following reasoning. Speakers can easily avoid these inferences by replacing the VPs in (36) with accomplishment VPs (e.g. with put/insert in (a), with finish reading in (c)), so that the leadup actions would have fallen under the scope of negation. The choice to bypass these expressions in favour of the relatively marked subeventive ones is therefore plausibly a sign that the leadup actions are to be excluded from negation.

We turn now to hindrance specialisation, the intuition that the result of hindrance-get is hard to attain. My account for this begins with the observation in section 2.1 that hindrance-get VPs are non-agentive. While the BECOME HAVE\(^9\) representation presupposes actions on the part of the subject aimed at bringing about the result, as just noted, it has no causing event or agentive component explicitly attributing the attainment of the result to actions performed by the subject. In choosing such a representation, and in bypassing normal causative-agentive verbs, the speaker downplays the importance of these actions as the cause of the result. A natural conclusion which can be drawn from the failure to credit the attainment of the result to the subject’s actions is that results with hindrance-get are perceived as non-automatic, i.e. are not guaranteed to eventuate just because the subject tries to attain them. By its very nature, a non-automatic result occurs partly due to propitious circumstances such as luck, external help or lack of resistance. One can try to bring about a non-automatic result, but one cannot decide to. Non-automatic results are by definition hard to achieve, which is the intuition we set out to explain.

I do not claim that all hindrance-specialised verbs are to be dealt with in the manner just sketched (though I will show elsewhere the approach extends to unaccusative get and German non-deictic kommen). It is likely that something else must be said about hindrance-specialised verbs with infinitival complements like manage. However, it seems reasonable to conclude that hindrance-specialisation can be inferred from the BECOME HAVE representation. This is fortunate given the observation in section 3.1 that any other approach would be arbitrary.

4. Get with verb particles

4.1. Basic facts about particles

We can now begin explaining the effects of get on particle position. I firstly review some facts about particles. Most English particle verbs (alias ‘phrasal verbs’, ‘verb-particle combinations’) allow either object-particle order or particle-object order:

(37) I carried/book/pushed [out/in/away/down] the box [out/in/away/down].

Particle verbs should not be confused with so-called ‘prepositional verbs’ like (38), where the postverbal DP is complement of the preposition (and semantically its ground/reference object). Prepositional verbs trivially disallow V-DP-P order, since English has prepositions rather than postpositions. Compare this with particle verbs like (37), where the postverbal DP is a theme or figure, whose final/initial location is indicated by the particle, often with respect to an implicit reference object. Thus, the particle verb take in the box entails motion of the box into something, while the prepositional Verb fall in the box expresses motion into a stationary box.

(38) go [in] the house [in]; fall [off] a cliff [off]; look [through] the glass [through].

‘Particle’ is shorthand for ‘complementless preposition which may occur before or after a direct object’.\(^9\) The latter clause is needed because some intransitive prepositions shun the pre-object position. This applies to through and some morphologically complex intransitive prepositions (exceptions: away, aside), cf. (39a). When studying particle verbs with get, we will ignore prepositional elements like those in (39a), since these independently resist particle-object order.

(39) a. *we carried [through/inside/upwards/around] the materials
b. She got/hurt/hit [back] her enemy [back]
c. She got [back] her book [back].

We should also exclude back from the discussion. (39b) involves monotransitive verbs (e.g. get in the sense ‘inflict harm on’) and reciprocal back. This cannot precede an object because it is an

\(^7\)An open (apparently undiscovered) question is how BECOME interacts with PPs. My earlier dealings with motion sentences eschewed BECOME in favour of Jackendoff’s (1990) GO function relating entities to paths. I found the claim of the BECOME analysis that motion sentences like (ia) assert the incipience of states like (ib, c) problematic in view of hostility of the states to directional prepositions found in motion sentences.

\(^8\)The BECOME analysis can be upheld if we assume that directional PPs differ from locational PPs only in that the former must be in the same clause (or subevent) as BECOME. I cannot elaborate on this here. This is a gap in my analysis, but the alternative, the GO analysis, now seems untenable to me. Its non-recognition of result states precludes it from handling restitutive scope (e.g. Stechow 1996) with re- and back in clause like when I left the country for the first time. (I returned/get back in) after a week. Using GO for PPs and BECOME for APs cannot explain the existence of verbs like get taking both types of complements (I got to the shop/I got sick).

\(^9\)One could redefine ‘particle’ to include the few non-prepositions that can separate verbs and objects (let slip a chance, let gov, the rope, set free, the captives, cut short, the meeting), but these are irrelevant to get. The only superficially non-prepositional item relevant to us is home in take home the books, but home distributes like a PP in other contexts like coordination (they went home or to work), use in the complement of way (the way home/down/into the house) and locative inversion (home/into the house/down ran the children).

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adverbial, not a particle, cf. post-PP uses like punch him in the face back. Radford (1997:444-8) and Koizumi (1993:125) note that restitutive back in (39c) shows greater flexibility than normal particles in double object constructions. It can precede objects in have/want/need back the book, though these verbs otherwise disallow particle-object order (cf. (51)). One can receive back a book, although no normal particle combines with receive (*receive in guests)\(^\dagger\). When discussing particle position, we must use examples where objects are not weak pronouns, which insist on object-particle order: I took *orient it [out]. This is due to general information-structural principles, and/or clitic-like properties of weak pronouns (Déhé 2002). One should also be wary of objects consisting of more than a determiner and an article; ‘heavy’ DP’s may appear clause finally due to an extraneous phenomenon known as heavy-NP-shift. (40) shows why heaviness should be controlled for.

(40) a. I threw [the article] in the fire vs. *I threw in the fire [the article].
  b. I threw in the fire [the article about dative-ablative syncretism in phonetically null case
     inflexion in English adjectives].

4.2. Particle-object order with get

While certain particle verbs with get allow particle-object order (get out your wallet), (41) gives cases where get (unlike the verbs given in brackets with each example) disallows particle-object order in varieties like mine. Some speakers allow particle-object order in some cases in (41), but all reject particle-object order in at least some of these cases. I offer an account of speaker variation shortly. Prior to that, all judgements are based on varieties like mine.

(41) a. I wish I could get *{off} that straightjacket {off}.  [take]
  b. I can’t get *{on} the lid {on}, maybe it doesn’t go with this jar.  [screw]
  c. The lock was rusty, but I eventually got *{in} the key {in}.  [push]
  d. I got down the cat *{down}! It wants to stay on the roof, [lure]
  e. You’d better get *{off} that letter {off} soon.  [send]
  f. I’m so sick I can’t get *{down} my food {down}.  [hold]
  g. We eventually got *{out} the fire {out}.  [put]
  h. We got *{home} the children {home} by six.  [take]
  i. I can’t get *{up} the blind {up}; it’s stuck.  [pull]
  j. I can’t get *{on} the heater [on]; I think it’s blown a fuse.  [turn, switch]

We can dismiss an account of (41) which says that e.g. get on the lid in (b) is avoided because it is homophonous with the prepositional verb meaning ‘climb onto the lid’. Apart from doubts about whether weird readings involving climbing onto a lid or e.g. climbing down food in (41f) would really block the desired readings, such an explanation fails in cases like (41g,h) where the particle has no DP complement use (out would require of insertion: get out of the fire).

The vast literature on particle verbs only discusses data like (41) twice. It does not generalise about get. Pesetsky (1992:250, 304) stars *Her remarks really got down Bill and admits to being unable to explain why this is worse than other psyc particle verb structures *(?It pissed off Bill). (The contrast is ignored in the published version, 1995:284.) Harley & Noyer (1998) note the contrast he got out a gun vs. *he got out the drunk sailor without trying to explain it. I now establish the generalisations in (42).

(42) a. Causative get allows both particle-object and object-particle order.
  b. Hindrance-get disallows particle-object order.\(^\dagger\)\(^\dagger\)

In (43) particle-object order is good if the structure fulfils the possessive constraint on causative get noted in section 2.3. The acceptable variants in (43) are not hindrance-specialised, for negation of the sentences does not suggest that the subject was unable to attain the result (recall (10)), and the hindrance-specialised German verbs kriegen and bekommen cannot accurately translate the acceptable sentences.\(^\dagger\)\(^\dagger\) If we put the particles after the objects, the unacceptable variants become acceptable, but have the hindrance reading.

(43) a. I got together *[some money/some friends] an estranged couple /a machine]
  b. She got out *[her wallet/the milk/a shotgun]
  c. I got down the details

Since speakers differ in when they accept get-particle-object order, I solicited judgements and comments on the get sentences in (44) and the corresponding object-particle variants. Eleven informants (five Australian, four American and two British) judged all sentences, and other informants were consulted on a less complete set of data.

(44) a. [The cat is on the roof] How can we get down the cat?
  b. [The lock was rusty, but] I eventually got in the key.
  c. [Said by someone trying to put a lid on a jar:] I can't get on the lid
  d. [The prisoner was handcuffed:] Eventually, he saw a way to get off the handcuffs.
  e. [The boss said] You'd better get off that letter soon
  f. [Maria has trouble swallowing:] She can’t get down her food.
  g. We eventually got out the fire
  h. We got home the children
  i. [A blind often gets stuck, requiring one to pull on it, untangle the cord etc.:] After
    fiddling around with it for five minutes, I finally managed to get down the blind.
  j. [Person talking to neighbours making loud noises:] We’ll get in the police
  k. [The natives were protesting about the conquerors flying the flag of their home
    country, and tried to prevent them from doing this:] The soldiers didn't get up the flag.
  l. I got out the washing.
  m. [People were being held captive in a building:] The police got out the hostages.

In my variety, only (44j) and (l) are acceptable. Some informants remarked that (a), (b) and (k) are legitimate only if they express climbing down a cat, into a key or up a flag. This is irrelevant here because these readings reflect a paradigm in which the V-P-DP strings as prepositional verbs with unaccusative get rather than as particle verbs.

Speaker variation may also stem from different versions of the possession constraint on causative get, described in the different use conditions in (18a). (44a), (d) and (m) enjoyed acceptance by five informants. These speakers follow the use condition in (18a1), for the subject gains (e.g. manual) control over the object. Two of these speakers also accept (44i), but not if down is replaced with up. This is understandable: one momentarily holds a blind after pulling it down, but not after putting it up, and blinds are fixed to window frames, so speakers may differ on whether the subject’s holding the blind constitutes control over it.

The varieties of several informants and myself are less permissive particle-object order with get because they have the strict use condition on causative get given in (45) (from (18a2)).

\(^\dagger\) Had there been an English verb kriegen with the same set of senses as kriegen, I suspect that this verb would always have disallowed particle-object order, since kriegen+PP has hindrance-specialised and unintentional readings, but no genuinely causative use. If kriegen had existed, this essay would have been much shorter, as there would have been no need to distinguish causative from hindrance readings.

\(^\dagger\) (43c) is not an idiom. Combinations like take down, write down, scribble down, note down show that the particle has a semiproductive sense ‘onto paper’.
The subject’s primary motivation in moving the object is to bring it into a position where, after the event, the subject can do something with it (i.e. use it or perform some action involving it). This constraint (call it the purpose constraint) is fulfilled in the acceptable sentences in (43) and (44jij), which are good in all varieties, but not in (44a,d,m), which are good only in varieties with the control constraint just discussed. As the parenthetic disjunction in (45) suggests, purpose constraint varieties allow causative get (and hence particle-object order) in contexts where either the object fulfills some function or the subject performs actions involving it. Neither part of this disjunction subsumes the other. Get in the police involves using the police for some purpose, but the subject need not perform further actions, while get out a knife is suitable if the subject intends to look at or clean the knife without using it.

The purpose constraint is relevant to get out the cork or get off the lid, which are unacceptable to me, but are internet-attested. If I remove a lid or cork from a bottle, I end up with manual control over it, but intend to interact with the bottle, not the lid/cork. Compare this with get on the lid/cork, which is bad to all informants, since the subject neither intends to do something with the lid/cork, nor gains manual control of the lid/cork.

A final example: In varieties with the purpose constraint, (46) does not suggest removal of the objects from their respective canonical interiors (i.e. mouths, wood), although we might have expected the objects to prime this interpretation strongly (as indeed they do if the particle is placed after the object, allowing the hindrance reading, which has no possessive constraint or purpose constraint). What (46) does suggest in varieties with the purpose constraint is that the objects are removed from storage containers (drawers, boxes, pockets etc.). The extraction of teeth or screws from their canonical interiors does not fulfill the purpose constraint (since in this case the objects cease to fulfill any kind of function), while removing them from storage containers is likely to be motivated by the intention to do something with the objects.

(46) The dentist got out my tooth; I got out the screw.

We also find particle-object order in (47), where get fulfills the use condition in (18b) that causative get is possible with disappearing themes. (Cf. the remarks on (16b), (19.).)

(47) a. He split wine on the carpet but didn’t get out the stain
b. I didn’t get off the rust before painting the metal
c. The doctor didn’t get out the stitches. [cf. Harley 2004:266]

I thus conclude that particle-object order with a given sentence is possible when get has the causative reading. Differences between speakers on whether particle-object order is possible in a given case result from differences in the conditions on the use of causative get noted in section 2.3. I now move towards an account for why particle placement should be sensitive to the semantics of get in this fashion.

4.3. Syntactic decomposition and the lexical entry for get

My account of particle placement with get appeals to the idea that semantic decomposition predicates are syntactic heads. For expository convenience, the semantic representations given above ignored this idea. I now integrate it into the picture. The approach below draws partly on Distributed Morphology (DM, e.g. Marantz 1997, Harley & Noyer 1998). A crucial tenet is that VPs are projections not of open class lexical verbs (get, sing etc) but of closed class items roughly corresponding to semantic primitives in lexicalist theories like Wunderlich 1997 or Jackendoff 1990. I now describe the closed-class items (light verbs) used here.

♦ Vbecome is a light verb taking a small clause complement. It is interpreted as in (34), the only additional point to note being that φ is the proposition expressed by the small clause.

♦ Vcause takes a VP as complement and a DP as specifier, and asserts (i) the existence of an event which is the cause of the event named by the inner VP and (ii) that the entity denoted by the specifier of Vcause is the agent of the causing event. Taking (i) and (ii) together, we can say that Vcause introduces the semantic material symbolised by CAUSE and ACT in (17). Pykkänen (2002) argues that separate heads may perform the tasks named in (i) and (ii), but not in English.

♦ Vhave is a polysemous morpheme with the same set of functions as English non-auxiliary have. It takes a DP as specifier and a small clause or DP complement. Since only the responsibility reading found with PP complements defined in (32) is relevant to my main argument, my account could equally well be formulated in terms of a morpheme Vhavealt with the semantics in (32). Although I cannot yet offer a precise semantics for the broader Vhave, I will use this symbol in the belief that some variant of an underspecified semantics for have (and hence Vhavealt) must be correct, as noted in section 3.3. I take Vhave to be of the category V for simplicity. It would not harm my proposal if it is a preposition, as in Harley (1995).

Vbecome, Vcause and Vhave are the only light verbs used here. These (and others irrelevant here) can by hypothesis combine in any permutation observing selection restrictions. To ensure the interpretability of the combination of light verbs, a VP must contain an audible item functioning as a spellout of the light verbs. The spellout is by hypothesis inserted post-syntactically. I now describe how get fits into this scheme of things. (48) gives part of the lexical entry for get (in DM terms, its encyclopaedia entry). I take get to be a spellout of Vbecome. The multiplicity of uses of get and the fact that get cannot be used in all cases where BECOME is present is handled by conditions stipulating its syntactic context.

(48) Excerpt from the lexical entry for get:

a. [get/ spells out Vbecome, It is usable in the following contexts:
   b. [VP Vbecome [PP DP a]] (e.g. I got inside/drank/working/shot)
   c. [VP Vbecome [PRO DP Vhavealt [PP Part]]] (e.g. I got him inside/drank/working/shot)
   d. [VP Vbecome [DP Vhavealt DP]] (e.g. I got a letter, on non-agentive reading))
   e. [VP DP Vbecome Vhavealt VP PRO, Vhavealt DP]] (e.g. I got a book, on agentive reading)
   f. [VP DP Vbecome Vhavealt [PP DP]] under the following conditions, cf. (18):
      i. (some varieties:) DP comes to have control of DP as a result of the event (other varieties:) DP moves DP in order to bring it into a position where, after the event, DP can use or do something with DP.
      ii. DP ceases to exist as a result of the event

I see get as a spellout of Vbecome since it has unaccusative uses where it only spells out Vbecome (I got sick) and since Vbecome is present in all its uses. Approaches not seeing get’s uses as elaborations of BECOME would require several homonymous get’s.

(48) does not mention the ditransitive use noted in connection with (3), since this can reasonably be predicted from general principles. (48) stipulates the existence of other readings of get because this seems necessary in an empirically responsible theory. For instance, opting to capture causative uses of get in (e.f) by productive causativisation processes rather than by lexical stipulation would prevent us from capturing its use conditions and would wrongly predict that all spellouts of Vbecome could be productively causativised (Beard became a bad linguist; *fear went him pale; *it flew him into a rage; *the plague fell him sick). Further work on get would doubtless occasion emendations to (48). It ignores non-semantic small clauses and information reflects some marginal decisions. (b) may need to list the possible categories of small clause heads given that get a nun cannot mean ‘become a nun’, unless a theory of blocking can predict this given the existence of become or the readings in (d) and (e). (c) and (d) could be a single use specifying only that the lower VP is headed by Vhave, (I separated (c) and (d) and listed the SC head categories because VP-headed SCs as in I had him sing are impossible with get.)
Uncertainties notwithstanding, the framework is flexible enough to express subtle constraints on uses of spellouts. The framework is no less flexible than lexicalist theories, for it has a lexicon (encyclopaedia) constraining the contexts where a 'verb' (or, in this theory, a phonological item spelling out a light verb) may be used. We now apply the system to particle verbs with get.

4.4. An explanation for particle position with get

(49) is the syntax. I assume for particle verbs with get. (49a) involves hindrance-get and (b) causative get. V°comp is spelt out as get. In (a) get incorporates into the silent V°ase head.

(49) a. Ann get [‘on’] the lid [‘on’].
   [Pf, Ann, i, PAST] [V get V°comp [sc ‘on’ the lid] [Pf, on]]
   b. (The wailer gave her the bill and) Ann get [‘out’] her wallet [‘out’].
   [Pf, Ann, i, PAST] [V get V°case [sc ‘on’ her wallet] [Pf, on]]

Various linguists (e.g. Haider 1997, Haegeman & Guérin 1999:258, Harley & Noyer 1998, Radford 1997:374) assume that English particle-object order reduces to the ability of particles to incorporate into a verb (e.g. V°comp in (49b)). The now complex verb moves to a verbal head position to the left of the direct object (e.g. V°ase in (49b)) by the short verb movement used in all shell theories. Another approach (Dehé 2002, Johnson 1991, Koizumi 1993, Olsen 2000) initially generates English particle verbs as morphological objects, forming a complex verb which may optionally be treated as a V° for the purposes of short verb movement. The incorporation approach and the morphological one share the idea that the particle-object sequence involves a V° node dominating the particle and a verbal element. The idea that syntactic incorporation produces a configuration which is subject to peculiarly morphological principles (and idiosyncrasies) was endorsed by Baker (1988:68ff). The approaches differ in whether this relationship arises before or during the syntactic derivation. (See Koopman 1995:147, fn. 15 for the suggestion that base generation of particle verbs as morphological objects is not incompatible with assuming that a PP is projected, as in the incorporation approach.)

My account for the blockage on particle-object order in (49a) starts with (50). A standard constraint on head movement, the Head Movement Constraint (e.g. Baker 1988), says that heads may move only to the next highest head position. Thus, if the particle cannot head-move to V°ase, as (50) claims, then it will be unable to move any higher than V°ave, and thus stays after the object. Upholding this account requires us to confirm the empirical and theoretical status of (50).

(50) V°ave cannot incorporate anything, including particles. (Alternative formulation: V°ave cannot head a morphologically complex X°.)

(50) predicts that VP's decomposing with V°ave with audible verbs other than get should disallow particle-object order. We find this with have, want and need, cf. (51a,b). Various writers (Dowty 1979:244-50; 269-71, Fodor & Lepore 1998, Harley 2003, Larson et al. 1997) note that transitive want and need are equivalent to want/need to have. Placing a silent V°ave makes sense of the scope of the italicised adverbials in (c). (d) applies the scope test to show that a silent have is present in particle verbs formed with these verbs. Generative Semanticists worked with 'have deletion' based on want/need to have. An update of this is to assume a silent V°ave in the complement of want/need (as in Harley 2003 and Larson et al. 1997).

(51) a. *He had off his jacket; *I soon had out the splinter; *He was having on the people
   b. *I need off the light; *I need out the fire; *The doctor wants out the stitches.
   c. I need your apartment until next week; Last week Bill wanted your car yesterday
   d. I need that light on until tomorrow; At noon you wanted the heater on tonight.

(50) may not follow from general principles of grammar, but the formation of complex heads, and thus incorporation/head movement, is known to be fraught with idiosyncrasy. We see this in [PV] compounds (downsize, downplay, download vs. *downbring, *downpull, *downtear; overturn vs. *overfall, *overtopple; offload vs. *offcast, *offtake) and in morphologically complex prepositions (into, onto but *underto, *byto). (50) may fall under a larger generalisation, though this is hard to prove. If what I notate as V°ave is (or decomposes with) a preposition (Belvin & den Dikken 1997, Déchaine et al. 1994, den Dikken 1995, 1997, Freeze 1992, Harley 1998, 2003 Richards 2001), then (50) would fall under a larger generalisation about the incomplete productivity of complex preposition formation just noted.

Many analyses of English particle verbs (see Dehé et al. 2002 for an overview) eschew incorporation in the form assumed here. Den Dikken (1995) denies overt particle incorporation, Svenonius (1996) moves particles to a position below the verb and Olsen (2000) rejects incorporation altogether. It is left to proponents of particle verb analyses inimical to mine to check whether these analyses can handle get. For reasons given in section 4.5, I maintain that all principled accounts of these facts will converge on syntactic decomposition.

Here I merely address the fact that the structure [V P V P] used in incorporation analyses of particle-object order in English violates the Right-Hand Head Rule (RHR). Den Dikken (1995:88f) assumes that the RHR rules out an incorporation analysis like mine. His citing Williams (1981) in this connection is unfortunate, because Williams did not intend the RHR to be exceptionless (see p. 249f). I do not find Williams’ exceptions compelling, but the use of double inflection patterns like sisters in laws, hangers-ons, passers-by (attestable under www.google.com) confirms the existence of left-headed X° items. If sister were not the head of sister in law, we would not expect it to host inflection. If sister in law were not a morphological object, one wonders why inflection appears on its outer edge. Thus, the RHR can be violated in English, so it does not argue against the incorporation analysis for particle verbs.

(49) can be altered in various ways without detriment to my proposal. Firstly, SC is often used as an abbreviation for an endocentric structure with a head mediating agreement or predication (e.g. den Dikken 1995:25f, Svenonius 1996). If this is right, 'incorporation of particles' should be understood as shorthand for 'incorporation for functional elements heading an SC which have themselves incorporated a particle'. Secondly, if English objects move to some specifier or adjunction position to receive case, the proposal will not be affected, since all object movement theories move the object to the left to a position just to the right of the spellout position of the verb (with or without an incorporated particle). My own assumption is that V°ave and V°ave, but not V°comp, can assign case to the specifier of their complement. The assignment of case to specifiers of small clauses is seen transparently in With [the psycho in gaol], we could relax. In (49b), I assume that the object adjoins to the lower VP to receive Case from V°ave, roughly as in Johnson (1991) and Kratzer (1996, section 2).

4.5 Alternative accounts

My account of particle verbs with get counts as an argument for syntactic decomposition only if theories doing without it are problematic. I try to show this now.

Construction Grammar (e.g. Goldberg 1995) would see verb-particle constructions as idioms equipped with semantic representations and open slots for verbs, objects and particles. As far as I
can see, this theory could only capture the get-facts by positing a verb+particle+object template which has a causative semantics, with which non-causative verbs like have and hindrance-get would be semantically incompatible, and a semantically broader verb+object+particle template (or several homophonous verb+object+particle templates) with which they are compatible. Nothing predicts that object-particle order should be possible in more cases than the reverse, while theories using head movement predict this automatically, since head movement can be blocked under certain circumstances. While Construction Grammar is able to capture semantic constraints on constructions not yet captured in other theories, the very flexibility which permits this actually drains the theory of the power needed to block hindrance-get from the particle-first construction. The construction's causative semantics does not actually suffice for this, since the responsibility requirement threatens to make hindrance-get close enough to a causative for it to be a viable candidate for insertion in the construction, and since constructions are assumed to be polysemous, so that the particle-first construction could a priori have a hindrance-specialised responsibility reading alongside the causative one. What the theory cannot do is refer to the presence of have in the semantics of hindrance-get in describing the blockage on particle-object order. Apart from forcing learners to rely on negative evidence, admitting this negative generalisation as a possible constraint on constructions begs the question as to whether there are any principled limits on the number and nature of semantic constraints to which any construction could be sensitive. Language learners would need to assess the compatibility of particle-object order with an indeterminable number of semantic verb classes, e.g. inherently punctual acts (spit out the tablet, shoot down the can or knock over the chair), verbs of sustained motion causation (drag/pull/push in the car), etc.

If we assume a non-abstract syntax like (52a) but see the VP as a projection of a lexical verb, the arbitrariness problems just discussed remain. The verb would need to carry a syntactically visible tag indicating some or all of its semantic content, and the sensitivity of the generation of particle-object order to this tag would raise tricky questions about how and why word order should relate to verb semantics.

(52)  a. [vP{v] [Pr] NP [Prt]] b. [vP{v[vP{v[get, get] NP [Prt]] c. [vP{v[vP[vP{v[vP[get]]}...]

Another alternative to syntactic decomposition would be one where causative verbs project a complex predicate as in (52c) while hindrance-get and have take small clauses as in (b). The particle-object order could by hypothesis only be derived from (c) (e.g. because particle-object order requires reanalysis which requires adjacency), but not from (b). This is the best alternative to syntactic decomposition, since a verb's meaning can uncontroversially affect complement selection, which can itself affect word order. This approach would divest itself of the arbitrariness tainting the other approaches, provided it could be supplemented with predictions on the case of a verb which will project a complex clause or a complex predicate.

The latter proviso seems unfulfillable. Take (53), used of inserting a cork in a bottle. In both cases, the particle is a goal and a predicate on the object, so one cannot attribute the putative difference in argument projection to a difference in the particle's semantic role. One might assume that the complex predicate analysis is motivated when the verb and particle share an argument, but if there is argument sharing, one wonders why the get in (53) is less an argument of get than of jam, stick or wedge, which do not select the object: *I wanted to seal the bottle, so I janned/wedged/stuck the cork. Moreover, I see argument sharing with resultatives and particles as questionable. McIntyre (2004) notes that obligatorily transitive verbs need not retain their argument structure in such constructions, witness examples like I lit *(a cigar) vs. I lit up (a cigar). None of the particle constructions supporting the anti-sharing claim shows any tendency towards resisting particle-object order. If the particle's role and the verb-selected status of the object are not enough to predict the distinction between small clauses and complex predicates, then this distinction yields no principled explanation of the particle order facts with get.


With the failure of this initially appealing alternative, we are left with a choice between syntactic lexical decomposition, which leads one to expect interactions between verb meaning with word order like that seen with get, and other theories, where such interactions require mysterious stipulations. To be sure, many linguists may prefer stipulations, however arbitrary, to a syntax replete with invisible, hard-to-detect heads, however closely they match the invisible primitives located in abstract lexical/semantic/conceptual structures in other theories. Or perhaps there is an account I have overlooked which can explain the data naturally without syntactic decomposition. This study will have been worthwhile if it inspires the formulation of viable alternative accounts, or even if it does no more than to encourage linguists of diverse persuasions to include the data it discusses in their deliberations about how syntax and semantics interact.

5. Summary of the main properties of the readings of get+PP structures

A. Hindrance-get: I got the nail in (the wall)

- It disallows particle-object order.
- It can be translated by German kriegen und bekommen.
- It is hindrance-specialised, i.e. suggests that the result is hard to attain (2.1, 3.5).
- It yields achievement VPs (2.1, 3.4).
- It does not denote agitative acts (2.1), although it does show the responsibility requirement, i.e. characterises the subject as responsible for achieving the result (3.2).
- Possibility operators do not effect the interpretation of negated hindrance-get VPs (I didn’t (=couldn’t) get the nail in the wall), due to a presupposition that the subject tried to realise the result (2.1, 3.5).
- It is argued to be nothing more than an inchoative of the responsibility reading of have (e.g. I had the nail in the wall).
- It is decomposed semantically as in (33) (and, assuming syntactic decomposition, as in (49a)).

B. (Genuinely) causative get: I got my wallet out (of my pocket)

- The term causative is used here only of uses with PP/particle complements, not of other causative uses of get.
- It allows particle-object order or object-particle order.
- It does not translate with German kriegen und bekommen.
- It is genuinely causative and agentive (2.3).
- In most uses, it requires that the object come to be possessed or manually controlled by the subject (probably because it was originally used in resultative constructions based on agentive DP complement uses, cf. parallels between get/take out the key and get/take the key). (17) lists the details of the possession constraint for different speakers.
- Its semantic representation is as in (18) (and, assuming syntactic decomposition, as in (49b)).

C. Unintentional get: The camera got dust in it

- It does not seem to combine with verb particles.
- The subject of this use of get is not in any way responsible for the result (2.2).
- It disallows exclusively directional prepositions like into and mostly requires coindexation between the subject and something in its complement (2.2, 3.2).
- It is an inchoative of unintentional have structures like the camera has dust in it (3.2, 3.3).

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