

ARE *TURN OFF THE MUSIC* AND *TURN THE MUSIC OFF* TWO DIFFERENT SIGNS? A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF THE 'PARTICLE SHIFT'

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This paper is discussing the semantic distinction between the two configurations of verb-particle constructions applying the sign-oriented method of analysis. The traditional descriptive explanations of the difference between the continuous and discontinuous position of the particle draw on multiple factors, such as the length of the object, prosody, or even individual preference. The prescriptive approach dismisses the discontinuous word order as non-standard. This paper will show how the semiotic approach provides new insights for the study of variation and change in the English language. The data analysis provides evidence that the two positional variants reflect a semantic difference underlying their non-random distribution.

From the semiotic point of view, the two positional variants are regarded as two different signs, where the distinction in form necessarily brings about some difference in meaning (Bolinger). Iconically, the discontinuous word order shares the syntactic configuration with the resultative construction that includes an agent, a patient, and the result the agent's action on the patient engenders (Goldberg):

She turned the music off.

He watered the tulips flat.

Let's caffeine our problems away.

If we consider the discontinuous verb-particle construction to be a subtype of the resultative construction based on the iconicity of the signal, its semantic contribution should be different and marked for result, where result implies such aspectual meanings as completion, endpoint, telic goal, and others. The analysis of the data confirms this hypothesis. The continuous construction is chosen to reflect the process:

*How you **turn down** a job offer depends on your reasons for rejecting the offer.*

(Doyle, About.com)

The discontinuous construction makes a claim for the result:

*It is said he **turned** the offer **down** in a brief telegram, "Have already deserted sinking ship. Craig."*

(Shaw 1973:28)

My data culled from numerous literary texts and written and spoken corpora contrast the two types of the verb-particle construction and show how the semiotic principle of iconicity can be responsible for the semantic distinction between the two constructions. The non-random distribution of the forms is explained by the subtle difference in their meaning: the action is reported as marked for its outcome/endpoint/result when the discontinuous sign is used and as unmarked/neutral for this semantic feature when the continuous variant is preferred. This hypothesis is validated further by comparing the translation of the two variants into Russian, where the meaning of result has a mandatory morphological expression.

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