

# Disruption of the English Verbal Group Structure

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## Abstract

Although disruption of the English verbal group (VBG) structure has long been acknowledged, it has not been systematically described as a syntactic occurrence in its own right. This study describes structural disruption and proposes a framework for its description. The data comprises 3,069 VBGs sourced from spoken instructional texts and analysed using the scale-and-category version of the systemic grammatical model. Ten per cent (308) of the VBGs were structurally disrupted, occasioned more by grammatical necessity (72 per cent) than stylistic motivation (28 per cent). The nominal (67 per cent) and adverbial (33 per cent) groups, dominated respectively by personal pronouns and time adverbs, were the disrupting agents. *You* (76), *us* (57), and *now* (30) were the most recurring disruptors, while the MH-Type VBG (71 per cent) was the most disrupted structural variant. Disruption after the first auxiliary modifier was dominant. Dual disruption occurred. The disruptors complemented the VBGs' meaning, enhanced textual cohesion, and facilitated the attainment of pedagogic goals.

**Keywords:** verbal group, structural disruption, grammatically necessitated disruption, stylistically motivated disruption, disrupting agent, disruptor

## 1. Introduction

Structural disruption is an interruption of, a split or discontinuity in, the sequential order of occurrence of elements of structure of a grammatical unit above the word. It affects the clause (Quirk *et al.* 1985) and the group, mainly the verbal group (VBG), though Huddleston (1984) suggests that the adjectival group may also have its structure disrupted. Disruption of the VBG structure has attracted only incidental mention in existing descriptions (Scott *et al.* 1968; Quirk *et al.* 1985), and has therefore not been systematically and accurately described. Even though it has long been acknowledged (Jespersen 1933), it has not been studied as a single research focus with the aim of characterising it in the grammar and has therefore not received the attention it deserves. What exists as description are fragments of statements made in relation to the clause, the adverbial group, and the auxiliary verb. There does not appear to exist a framework for its description either. The near neglect of structure in existing descriptions of the VBG (Adejare 2010; 2012) partly explains why the subject hardly attracts a space even in major works on the English verb (Palmer 1987).

The failure to descriptively account for disruption of the VBG structure as a syntactic occurrence in its own right leaves a gap in the description of the VBG, especially its structure. Granted that disruption of the VBG structure cannot be adequately described without reference to the clause, tying its description to that of the clause (or any other grammatical unit) is inappropriate and limiting. It obscures some of its characterising features and gives no room for a proper consideration of its semantic implications, among other shortcomings. A detailed, single-minded, corpus-based description aimed at its characterisation is therefore essential and desirable. Structural disruption impacts on the VBG's form and meaning. Moreover, existing descriptions are inadequate. For instance, the disrupting adjunct seems to be generally poorly handled, sometimes classified as an element of structure of the VBG and even assigned a functional label. Recognising that the disruptor is not a constituent of the VBG, but not knowing how best to handle it descriptively, some analysts leave it "hanging", even in tree diagrams (Nixon 1979). Some undergraduates particularly experience difficulty recognising the split halves of the disrupted VBG as components of the same syntactic whole. Describing disruption of the VBG structure would deepen existing syntactic knowledge and enhance grammatical pedagogy at the VBG level.

Against the foregoing background, this study describes structural disruption as a syntactic phenomenon of the English VBG. It proposes a framework for its description and examines its manifestation in a corpus. The impetus for this study derives from Adejare (2010; 2012), where structurally disrupted VBGs were only partially accounted for as an appendage to the VBG structure.

## 2. Descriptive Viewpoints on Structural Disruption

The near absence of studies on disruption of the English VBG structure (none known to us) leaves little or no precedent. Much of what is presented as review of existing descriptions in the paragraphs that follow is what can be extracted from the description of the clause, the adverbial group, and the auxiliary verb. The review begins with its conceptualisation.

It has since been acknowledged that the VBG in declarative and interrogative clauses can have its elements of structure disrupted. This disruption, its precipitating item, or both, has variously been referred to "discontinuous"

element (Scott *et al.* 1968; Nixon 1979), “interrupting” element (Bloor & Bloor 1995), “split infinitive”, and “intervening” element (Quirk *et al.* 1985). Because the VBG realises the obligatory predicator element of clause structure, and because most existing descriptions of structural disruption are invariably extensions of the description of clause structure, it is sometimes stated that the predicator is “discontinuous” (Nixon 1979). However, it is descriptively more accurate to regard the VBG as what is disrupted rather than its syntactic realisation, the predicator. Not being a grammatical unit and therefore lacking a structure, the predicator cannot, strictly speaking, be structurally disrupted. This is why the description of structural disruption must be separated from that of the clause.

As Quirk *et al.* (1985) note, only in the “canonical declarative clause” do clausal elements occur in a sequence; interrogative clauses and others involving inversion necessarily entail rearrangement, such as that of the subject and operator. Two of their examples illustrating disruption of the VBG structure in polar and non-polar interrogative clauses respectively are analysed as follows:

- P- S P A  
 (1) || **Have** |you| |**heard** |from Roger?||  
 C<sub>1</sub> P- S -P C<sub>2</sub>  
 (2) ||What |**did** |they| |**tell** |you?||

Structural disruption has also been linked to mobility of the adjunct. The excessively mobile adjunct splits the VBG in predicator function into two (see (3) below), causing Quirk *et al.* (1985) to “refine the definition” of medial with respect to the clause as “the position immediately after the subject and (where there is one) the operator”. The adjunct can indeed split a three-item VBG, follow the subject in an interrogative clause, precede it in an inverted declarative clause, and occur twice in a sequence, as (4) – (7) respectively show.

- S P- A<sub>1</sub> -P A<sub>2</sub>  
 (3) ||He | **is** |*probably* |**going** |by car|| (Nixon 1979: 10)  
 S P- A -P  
 (4) ||This |**should be** |*briefly* |**pointed out** || (Christophersen & Sandved 1969: 164)  
 P- S A -P C  
 (5) || **Did** |*the driver* | **suddenly** | **start** |the engine? || (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 492)  
 A<sub>1</sub> P- S -P C A<sub>2</sub>  
 (6) ||**Hardly** |**had** | *I* |**taken** |my seat| [[when the concert began]]||. (Scott *et al.* 1968: 107)  
 ℓ S P A C S P- A<sub>1</sub> A<sub>2</sub> -P  
 (7) || (β) If he |were |still |alive,|| (α) he |**would,** |*at the very least,* | **now** | **be being questioned** |  
 A<sub>3</sub> A<sub>4</sub>

very searchingly | by Scotland Yard || (Greenbaum 1996: 247) (All analyses ours)

Though not overtly stated, only structurally compound and complex VBGs may be disrupted. Moreover, the disruptor, which can occur even after the third auxiliary as in (8) below, or after the preposition *to* in catenated VBGs as in (9), could be a pronoun, an adverb, or a prepositional group (see (7) above)). Consider these examples of Quirk *et al.*'s (1985), analysed to highlight the point of disruption thus:

- S P- A<sub>1</sub> -P A<sub>2</sub>  
 (8) ||The car | **may have been** | *indeed* | **being used** |without permission ||  
 S P- A -P + P A  
 (9) ||(α) We | **tended to** | *rather* | **sit back** ||and || (α) wait |for developments||

The syntactic status of the disruptor is a subject of controversy: Is it an element of structure of the clause or the VBG or both? For Quirk *et al.* (1985) the disruptor is an element of structure of both the clause (adjunct) and the VBG. Two of the examples cited, *rather* in “I would rather go” and *really* in “Freda is really able to address the meeting”, which support this interpretation, are closely examined as follows. *Rather* is an integral part of the semi auxiliary verb with quasi modal functions *WOULD RATHER*, and is therefore a part of the optional modifier element of the VBG structure. It is also a secondary element of clause structure since the VBG functions primarily as predicator, but it is neither an adjunct nor a disruptor. In contrast, *really* is an adjunct functioning independently of the VBG *is able to address*. It indeed splits *BE ABLE TO* (the semi auxiliary verb in modifier function) into two halves. Compare the pairs of analyses in (10a,b) and (11a,b) below:

- S P M H  
 (10a) || I | **rather** go || (10b) would **rather**  
 go  
 S P- A -P C M H  
 (11a) || Freda | **is** | *really* | **able to address** |the meeting|| (11b) is able to address

Scott *et al.*'s (1968) analysis reproduced as (12) below suggests uncertainty about the syntactic status of the disruptor, despite the angle brackets and the sign of “split predicator”. This interpretation gains further support in

their analysis of the disrupted VBG reproduced as (13) below.

S P- A -P C  
(12) "He | was < *anxiously* > awaiting | news"  
M H

(13) "Has < *the march* > started?"

Bloor & Bloor's (1995) incidental examples are from model answers to an end-of-chapter exercise on "Subject and Related Functions". While Figure 1 below clearly identifies and marks off the disruptor, Figure 2 fails to acknowledge it probably because the single auxiliary modifier is FINITE. The inadequacy of the systemic functional model for the description of the VBG structure has been demonstrated elsewhere ( Adejare 2010; 2012).

The foregoing shows that the disruptor is not an element of structure of the VBG; rather, it is an element of structure of the clause, which just happens to split the VBG. This agrees with Halliday & Matthiessen's (2004) statement that a unit can " be enclosed within another; not as a constituent of it, but simply in such a way as to split the other one into two discrete parts". Finally, it needs be remarked that, with the notable exception of the distinction between *let us go* and *let's go* ( Jespersen 1933; Palmer 1987), meaning appears to be completely ignored in existing descriptions. An adequate description of disruption of the VBG structure ought also to account for the disruptor in this regard.

### 3. A Descriptive Framework for Structural Disruption

This descriptive framework hereby proposed for disruption of the VBG structure is predicated upon the scale-and-category version of the systemic grammatical model (Halliday 1961). The (M) H (Q) and (S) P (C) (A) structural formulae for the group and the clause respectively, among other features of the model, are therefore taken as given. Having said that, the framework can be articulated as follows.

It shall be recognised as disrupted any VBG that has a non-constituent member of its structure occurring in-between its elements of structure. For example, *will be born* in (i) *Babies will always be born on New Year's Day* is structurally disrupted, whereas it is not disrupted in (ii) *Babies will be born on New Year's Day*. This is accounted for by the presence of *always* in (i) and its absence in (ii). Such an intervening item shall be called a disruptor (This is already clear from the preceding paragraphs ), and a grouping of similar items shall be referred to as a disrupting agent. The disruptor must be clearly and unambiguously marked off using the conventional group boundary marker (|) and the minus sign (-). Probably first used by Scott *et al.* (1968) to underline the singularity of the predicator, P- indicates that the second part of the predicator is ahead while -P shows that the first part is at the back. However, these are not sufficiently informative on the status of the disruptor. Since it has now been established as an independent grammatical unit, its function as subject, complement, or adjunct in the clause structure should be appropriately indicated, even in glosses of truncated VBGs. And, unless to demonstrate the syntactic incidence of disruption itself as in (27) below, any listing or analysis of the disrupted VBG must exclude the disruptor.

Two types of disruption of the VBG structure shall be distinguished according to the causative factors thus: grammatically necessitated disruption and stylistically motivated disruption. Verbal groups disrupted due to grammatical necessity are those indicating interrogative mood and those marked for imperative mood ( *let*-imperative only). In contrast, stylistically motivated disruption strictly involves mobility of adjunct and the VBGs are of the indicative declarative mood type. Thus whereas grammatically necessitated disruption is associated with both interrogative and imperative clauses, stylistically motivated disruption occurs in declarative clauses only. The exact point in the VBG structure at which the disruption occurs shall be identified by examining the VBG in the context of its clause. This would generate information on the pattern of disruption in a corpus, for instance. An account must particularly be made of meaning in the global context of the text being analysed, since the disruptor is not a mere syntactic nuisance. The description of structural disruption would benefit from some statistics in the form of simple percentages.

### 4. The Data

Comprising 3, 069 VBGs, the data derives from a 17,600-word corpus of spoken instructional texts. The texts, which also serve to demonstrate the manifestation of structural disruption in natural language, are tape recorded and orthographically transcribed lessons on Christian Religious Knowledge(R),Geography(G),Physics(P),and Chemistry

(C). The topics taught were respectively *The Mission of the Church*, *The Drainage system*, *Electric Field*, and *Nitrogen* (Adejare 2010). The clauses and VBGs were identified and marked. Each VBG was examined in the context of its clause to determine whether or not it was structurally disrupted. Each structurally disrupted VBG was similarly examined to ascertain the type of disruption and disrupting agent involved, the structural variant affected, the disruptor, its position, and its impacts on meaning and comprehension.

## 5. A Description of Structural Disruption

This description of disruption of the VBG structure covers typology of structural disruption, disrupting agents, disruptors, syntactic position, and meaning. Sample disrupted VBGs are listed or shown in context, with the letter code for the source text, the letter K for clause, and the clause's number, preceding in that order. The VBG's number is enclosed in brackets and the disruptor is italicised.

### 5.1 Types of Structural Disruption

There were 3,069 VBGs constituting the data as earlier stated. Ten per cent (308) of this was structurally disrupted. More disruption occasioned by grammatical necessity (220 or 72 per cent) than stylistic motivation (88 or 28 per cent) occurred. For the sake of clarity each type will be considered separately.

#### 5.1.1 Grammatically Necessitated Disruption

Grammatically necessitated disruption was more of the interrogative (150 or 68 per cent) than the *let* imperative (70 or 32 per cent) subtype. More non-polar (95) than polar (55) indicative interrogative VBGs were disrupted. Here are examples.

(14) PK40 ||  $\begin{matrix} P- & C_1 & -P & & C_2 \\ \text{Let} & \textit{me} & \textit{repeat} & (52) & \text{the questions} \end{matrix}$  ||

(15) CK614 ||  $\begin{matrix} P- & C_1 & -P & & C_2 \\ \text{Let} & \textit{us} & \textit{use} & (669) & \text{the metals} \end{matrix}$  ||

(16) RK567 ||  $\begin{matrix} P- & S & -P & & C \\ \text{Did} & \textit{Jesus} & \textit{open} & (706) & \text{his mouth ?} \end{matrix}$  ||

(17) GK 190 ||  $\begin{matrix} A & P- & S & -P & C \\ \text{Why} & \textit{do} & \textit{we} & \textit{have} & (206) \text{ lateral erosion?} \end{matrix}$  ||

#### 5.1.2 Stylistically Motivated Disruption

Disruption of the stylistic type caused by mobility of adjunct accounted for 28 per cent (88), and all the disrupted VBG were of the indicative declarative mood type. They were more syntactically diversified, as the following excerpts show.

(18) RK496 ||  $\begin{matrix} + & S & P- & A_1 & -P & & A_2 \\ \text{And} & \text{Philip} & \textit{was} & \textit{just} & \textit{walking} & (614) & \text{along} \end{matrix}$  ||

(19) GK392a ||  $\begin{matrix} & S & P- & A & & -P \\ \text{Many people} & \textit{will} & \textit{now} & \textit{decide to complain} & (431) \end{matrix}$  ||

(20) PK477a ||  $\begin{matrix} & S & P- & A & -P & C \\ \text{You} & \textit{have} & \textit{already} & \textit{removed} & (511) & \text{the squared} \end{matrix}$  ||

(21) CK96 ||  $\begin{matrix} & S & P- & A & -P & & C \\ \text{It} & \textit{can} & \textit{also} & \textit{form} & (113) & \text{another type of bonding} \end{matrix}$  ||

#### 5.1.3 Dual Disruption

It was proposed in 3 above that there shall be recognised two types of structural disruption. Both types--- grammatically necessitated disruption and stylistically motivated disruption--- were reflected in the data as already seen. However, there also occurred dual disruption, where two disruptors featured within the span of the same VBG. This makes it tempting to call for a revision of the types of disruption. But that is unnecessary, as the following analysis shows.

Twelve VBGs (4 per cent) manifested dual disruption, and all were intrinsically grammatically necessitated. No VBG disrupted as a result of stylistic motivation involving mobility of adjunct manifested dual disruption. However, each set of disruptors was associated both with grammatical necessity and stylistic motivation. Thus the nominal group and the adverbial group were joint disrupting agents, with the former (associated with grammatically necessitated disruption) invariably preceding the latter (linked with stylistically motivated disruption) in a sequence. Here are excerpts.

(22) RK531 ||  $\begin{matrix} + & C & P- & S & A & -P \\ \text{But} & \text{what} & \textit{was} & \textit{he} & \textit{actually} & \textit{reading} & (658)? \end{matrix}$  ||

(23) CK365 ||  $\begin{matrix} A_1 & P- & C & A_2 & -P & C_1 & C_2 \\ \text{Yes} & \textit{let} & \textit{me} & \textit{quickly} & \textit{ask} & (399) & \text{you} & \text{a question} \end{matrix}$  ||

### 5.2 Disrupting Agents

Agents of structural disruption were syntactically the adverbial group (23) and the nominal group (20), and they were 98 per cent structurally H-Type. No prepositional group, adjectival group, or rankshifted clause was found. The adverbial group disrupted 101 VBGs (33 per cent), and was 60 per cent morphologically marked. Semantically, it presented six subtypes as follows: time (6 in 49), manner (7 in 20), emphasizer (4 in 17), focusing (3 in 10), intensifier (2 in 4), and enumerative conjunct (1 in 1). Time adjuncts thus accounted for approximately half the disruption occasioned by the adverbial group. The nominal group as disrupting agent accounted for 67 per cent (207) of all structural disruption, and it was dominated by pronouns (15 in 214), mainly

personal pronouns (10 in 203). Assertive (1 in 7), non-assertive (2 in 2), demonstrative (1 in 1), and universal (1 in 1) pronouns were rare as disrupting agents. The MHQ-Type (2 in 3), MH-Type (2 in 2), and H-Type (proper noun: 1 in 1) nominal groups featured as indicated in brackets. There were thus 43 disrupting agents, with a combined frequency of 321. The disparity between the number of disrupted VBGs and frequency of disrupting agents is accounted for by the 12 VBGs manifesting dual disruption and the occurrence of one item (*ever*: see (37)-(38)) in dual disruption only. A pattern of occurrence of the disrupting agents has thus emerged. The nominal group occurred in grammatically necessitated disruption; the adverbial group featured in stylistically motivated disruption; and, while both co-occurred as dual agents in strictly grammatically necessitated disruption, only personal pronouns disrupted the *let*-headed VBG.

### 5.3 Disruptors

There were formally 50 disruptors, although there occurred 43 disrupting agents as earlier seen. The disruptors are listed with their frequency enclosed in brackets as follows: *you* (73), *us* (53), *now* (30), *we* (23), *it* (13), *me* (1), *just* (12), *he* (12), *somebody* (6), *quickly* (6), *easily* (6), *also* (5), *really* (4), *us + quickly* (4), *confidently* (3), *simply* (3),

*either* (3), *only* (3), *they* (2), *the activities of the Holy Spirit* (2), *still* (2), *actually* (2), *you + ever* (2), and *I* (2). The rest are the 26 with a single occurrence only: *her*, *them*, *anything*, *anybody*, *that*, *all*, *the great commission*, *the Holy Spirit*, *Jesus*, *the volume of water*, *yet*, *already*, *directly*, *evenly*, *properly*, *loosely*, *somehow*, *rather*, *even*, *we + even*, *we + simply*, *he + actually*, *me + quickly*, *you + just*, *somebody + quickly*, and *first of all*. The personal pronouns *you* and *us*, and the time adverb *now*, were the most recurring disruptors as the list shows. The occurrence of *first of all*, *either*, and *all*, respectively an enumerative conjunct, a correlative conjunct, and a universal pronoun, shows that adjunct adverbials are by no means the only syntactically mobile items capable of disrupting the structure of the English VBG. Excerpts (24)--(26) illustrate.

- (24) PK559 || We | **need to**, | **first of all**, | **find** (623) | the electric field of q on p||  
 S P- A -P C
- (25) PK10 || This electric force| **can** | **either** | **be** (14)| a positive force | or | a negative force ||  
 S P- A -P C<sub>1</sub> + C<sub>2</sub>
- (26) CK29 || From the atomic number of nitrogen | we | **will** | **all** | **know** (34) | [[that nitrogen  
 A S P- C<sub>1</sub> -P  
 C<sub>2</sub>  
 has... will belong to that group ||

### 5.4 Position of the Disruptor

To determine the position of the disruptor, the 308 structurally disrupted VBG were first classified into two subsets using the split-able structural variants and complexity as criteria. There were thus 217, 72 and 19 structurally disrupted MH-Type, HQ-Type and MHQ-Type VBGs, which respectively translates to 71, 23 and 6 per cent. There were similarly 230 (75 per cent) structurally compound and 78 (25 per cent) structurally complex, catenated VBGs that were disrupted. Since the data comprises 941 MH-Type, 219 HQ-Type and 87 MHQ-Type VBGs, it follows that 23, 33 and 22 per cent of these structural variants were respectively disrupted. Again, 21 and 49 per cent respectively of the 1,086 compound and 161 complex VBGs were disrupted. The disrupted complex, catenated VBG comprises 72 HQ-Type and 6 MHQ-Type variants. The *let* imperative subtype was dominant; it accounted for 23 per cent of total disruption, 90 per cent of disrupted complex VBGs, and 97 per cent of disrupted HQ-Type VBGs.

A total of 236 (77 per cent) structurally disrupted VBGs had modifiers, and 98 per cent (231) of this was single auxiliary modifier. Only 2 per cent (5) had double auxiliary modifier and all were disrupted after the first auxiliary (e.g., *is* | *now* | *being gathered* (G323)|). Except for 4 cases (1.73 per cent) of disruption after the initial *BE* in a semi auxiliary (e.g., *is* | *it* | *going to be* (P199)|), all the VBGs manifesting single auxiliary modifier (including 5 more with semi auxiliaries, e.g., *are going to* | *quickly* | *study* (C235)|), were expectedly disrupted after the auxiliary (227 or 98 per cent). Structurally disrupted MH-Type and MHQ-Type VBGs are listed, analysed and shown in context as follows:

- M (S) H M (S) H M (S) H M (S) H  
 (27) |do |you | know (R74)|, |can |somebody |explain (C449)|, |do |we |distinguish (G57)|, |does |it | mean (G137)|
- M (A) H M (A) H M (S) H M (A)  
 |are not |yet| given (P433)|, |will |simply| add (P719)|, |do |you |understand (C91)|, |was |directly| working  
 M (S) H M (S) H Q M (A) H Q  
 (R598)|, |must |you | have added (C811)|, |did |they | stay on to do (R430, 431)|, |'ve |just | talked about (C584)|
- M- (A) -M H Q M- (A) M H Q  
 | can | easily | be washed off (G461)|, |was | now | going to be taken out (R38)|  
 + S P- A<sub>1</sub> -P A<sub>2</sub>

(28) RK237 ||And |the people |**were** | *evenly* | **baptised** (303) |of the Holy Spirit||

C P- S -P

(29) CK764|| What | **have** | *you* | **added** (810) ? ||

S P- A -P

(30) CK39 ||Nitrogen| **can**| *either*| **give out** (46) ||or what?||

All the catenated MHQ-Type VBGs were disrupted after the single auxiliary modifier as shown in (19) above. However, while the non-*let* catenated HQ-Type variant was disrupted after the preposition *to* initiating the rankshifted non-finite VBG at Q (e.g., (24)), the *let*-headed subtype was naturally disrupted between the headword and the qualifier. Here are examples.

H (C) Q H (C) (A) Q H Q- (A) -Q  
 (31) **let** |'s | **talk about** (P411), **let** | *me* | *quickly* | **ask** (C399), | **want to** | *really* | **look at** (R2)|

P- C<sub>1</sub> -P C<sub>2</sub>

(32) CK576|| **Let** |'s | **look for** (628) |a way of removing the oxygen totally||

The points in the VBG structure where disruption occurred can now be identified. These are after the (1) single auxiliary modifier (227 or 74), (2) *let* headword (70 or 23), (3) first auxiliary in double auxiliary modifier (5 or 1.62), (4) initial *BE* in a semi auxiliary (4 or 1.3), and (5) preposition *to* in the catenated HQ-Type VBG (2 or 0.7) (The enclosed figures represent the frequency and percentage of each position respectively). No triple modifier occurred; so disruption after the second or third auxiliary, such as Quirk *et al.*'s (1985) example reproduced as (8) above, was absent. The dominant position of the disruptor was therefore that after the single auxiliary modifier.

### 5.5 Impacts of Structural Disruption

The disruptors positively impacted on the texts by complementing the meanings denoted by the split VBGs, enhancing textual cohesion, and generally facilitating the attainment of pedagogic goals. The time adverbs --- *now*, *just*, *still*, *already*, *yet*, and *ever*--- made references to time in ways that enabled the actions, events, processes, states or results depicted by the VBGs to be related to the time of occurrence. In Geography where it was most prominent even as a transitional conjunct, *now* particularly aided the description of current states or actions of the river and its tributaries as well as results of such actions thus:

A<sub>1</sub> S P- A<sub>2</sub> -P C  
 (33) GK138 || Then | we | **are** | *now* | **seeing** (159) || [ that | a new feature | **is** | *now* | **created**(160) || K190 || The

S P- A S P- A -P

A<sub>1</sub>

tributaries | **are** | *now* | **joining** (215) || ...K281 || The river | **is** | *now* | **meandering** (331) || ...K515 ||  
 Yes |

S P-A<sub>2</sub> -P A<sub>3</sub>

| the river | **is** | *now* | **born** (564) | again ||

In (20) above *already* reinforces the anteriority of the time of completion of the action denoted by the present perfective aspectual form it splits, while *just* focuses on a recently concluded Bible reading session in (34) below. (Contrast this with the non-temporal, down-toner role in (18) above.) In sharp contrast, the characteristically non-assertive *yet* refers to un-actualised time in (35), underscoring the necessity for the action depicted in K408.

S P C<sub>1</sub> C<sub>2</sub>  
 (34) RK486 You listened when she was reading. K487 || You | are to tell | me | | [[what you've **just enjoyed** (604)]|

ℓ S P- A -P  
 (35) PK406 || Since |...K407 the values of the charge | **are not** | *yet* | **given** (433) , || K408 q should cancel out q ||

Typically occurring with modals and indicating meaning that includes the present time, *still*'s collocation with the present progressive aspect in a contrastive clause in (36) below most effectively explains the rationale for the movement of the test charge towards the direction of the negative charge. (The test charge is positive, and opposite charges attract while similar charges repel.) The two occurrences of *ever* in identical interrogative clauses in (37) and (38) below served as prompts for the explication of the benefits of the "denied time". Here are the excerpts.

S P A + S P- A<sub>1</sub> P  
 (36) PK671 || The positive | will be moving | this way || K672 || but | the test charge | **will** | *still* | **be going** (743) |  
 A<sub>2</sub>  
 towards the negative q || .  
 P- S A<sub>1</sub> -P A<sub>2</sub> A<sub>3</sub>

(37) GK362 || **Have** | *you* | *ever* | **been** (407) | to Owesere | before? ||  
 P- S A<sub>1</sub> -P C A<sub>2</sub>

(38) CK449 || **Have** | *you* | *ever* | **seen** (491) | (sic) nitrogen cylinder | before? ||

In addition to indicating the general meaning “at a fast rate”, *quickly* functioned in the context of transiting from one segment of the lesson to another (*let quickly look at* (563)) and enumerating points (*have quickly looked at* (560)), among others. Its idiosyncratic use in Chemistry (92 per cent of *quickly* occurred here) provides evidence of how social factors bear on grammatical structure (The teacher was truly in a hurry to finish what he had to do: He resigned his part-time appointment literally after the recording). *Either* suggests an alternative, which makes (25) above paraphrase-able as “It is possible for the electric force to be a positive force; it is also possible for the electric force to be a negative force”. *Easily*, meaning “without difficulty”, has a reinforcing and reassuring effect on the process depicted by the VBG in (39) thus:

(39) PK172 Now if you look at this diagram, K173 || you | **can** | *easily* | **form** | a triangle ||  
 S P- A -P C

The more specific functions of some of the other non-temporal adverbs are as follows: highlighting relationships (e.g., *also* in (21)); reinforcing a state ( e.g., CK160 *It is loosely attached* (185)), a process ( e.g., *evenly*, meaning “without discrimination”, in (28)), or factuality (e.g., RK1 || [[ What |we |want to| really |do (2)| this morning ] | is... ] ||); restricting the action ( e.g., RK212 || They | were | only | put (270)| into water ||: “not sufficient”; PK645 || So | the resultant | will | simply | be (715) | the addition of e<sub>1</sub> and e<sub>2</sub> ||: “nothing more” ), or referent (e.g., CK694 || Noble gases | will | only | react (738) | at extreme conditions ||: “a rarity” ). Some more are ascertaining pupils’ level of comprehension (RK618 || How | many of us | can | confidently | say (772) || [ [that he has an understanding of the topic... ] ? ] ||) and urging the adoption of order of precedence to a worked a problem (*first of all* in (24)).

Personal pronouns generally specified the referent in a question, but the presence of an indefinite pronoun was an indication that the referent was unspecified. The use of *us* in *let* imperative enabled the teacher to theoretically carry his pupils along, while *me* suggests the teacher would carry out the order alone. In contrast, *we* semantically identifies the teacher with his pupils as co-seekers of knowledge. These are respectively illustrated as (40)--(44).

(40) RK120 || **Did** | *you* | **hear** (153) | my question? || ...|| K453 Immediately Philip left there, ||  
 P- S -P C  
 A P- S -P

K454 || | where | **did** | *he* | **go** (569)? ||

(41) CK 462 || **Can** | *somebody* | *quickly* | **tell** (503)? | me | [[what we use the noble]]? ||  
 P- S A -P C<sub>1</sub> C<sub>2</sub>  
 A<sub>1</sub> P- C<sub>1</sub> -P C<sub>2</sub> A<sub>2</sub>

(42) PK 33 || So | **let** | 's | **take** (44) | an example | under Coulomb’s law ||  
 P- C -P

(43) GK 219 || **Let** | *me* | **demonstrate** (252) || (The teacher did demonstrate.)  
 A<sub>1</sub> C P- S -P A<sub>2</sub>

(44) CK89 || How | many hydrogen | **do** | *we* | **have** (106) | here? ||

Because pupils responses were few and far between, it was difficult to determine the negative impacts of structural disruption. However, there was one clear incident of difficulty in comprehension caused by disruption-induced syntactic complexity and possible lexical difficulty. Pupils might have had difficulty recognising *was* and *manifested* as split halves of the same syntactic whole (*was manifested*: an MH-Type VBG marked for passive voice) due to the intervening MHQ-Type nominal group (*the activities of the Holy Spirit*). Not until the question was reframed was the appropriate response elicited, as the context shows in (45):

(45) RK333 But I want to ask a question now...K336 I want to see how you’ll answer it. K337 How **was** (sic) *the*

*activities of the Holy Spirit manifested* (439) in Samaria?...K340 Just tell me some of the things that happened

that you could see that it was the Holy Spirit that was going on (R. Signs and ). K341 Signs and wonders.

Excerpt (46) below is an analysis of the disrupted VBG (with the disruptor ) while (47) is that of its clause context. The syntactic complexity introduced by disruption is best appreciated when the structure is presented graphically; so the clause analysed linearly as (47) is further analysed using a tree diagram as shown in Figure 3 below.

(46) |**was** (sic)| *the activities of the Holy Spirit* | **manifested** (R439) |  
 M (S) H  
 A<sub>1</sub> P- S -P A<sub>2</sub>

(47) RK337|| How |was (sic)| *the activities of the Holy Spirit*| manifested (439) |in Samaria?||

## 6. Conclusion

This study described disruption of the English VBG structure using data from spoken instructional texts. It also proposed a framework for its description. The major findings and their implications are highlighted here as concluding remarks. Ten per cent of the VBGs in the corpus was structurally disrupted, and far more disruption occasioned by grammatical necessity than stylistic motivation occurred. The nominal group and the adverbial group, respectively dominated by personal pronouns and time adverbs, were the disrupting agents. Fifty disruptors occurred and *you*, *us*, and *now* were the most recurring. The MH-Type structural variant was the most disrupted, followed by the HQ-Type. Probably because of the *let* imperative which accounted respectively for 23 per cent of all disruption and 90 per cent of disrupted, catenated VBGs, 49 per cent of the structurally complex VBG in the data was disrupted. In contrast, only 21 per cent of the structurally compound VBG was disrupted.

The dominant position of the disruptor was that after the single auxiliary modifier (227 or 74 per cent), followed by that after *let* (70 or 23 per cent). Disruption after the first auxiliary in double auxiliary modifier (5 or 1.62 per cent), the initial *BE* in a semi auxiliary (4 or 1.3 per cent), and the preposition *to* in the catenated HQ-Type VBG (2 or 0.7 per cent) was rare. The relative simplicity of the modifier structure (No VBG with three or more auxiliary modifiers featured) could explain the absence of disruption after the second or third auxiliary. There was dual disruption. Although structural disruption posed a real comprehension problem due to syntactic complexity, the disruptors were not mere syntactic nuisances. They complemented the meaning denoted by the VBG, enhanced textual cohesion, and generally facilitated the attainment of pedagogic goals. For instance, personal pronouns specified the referent in a question while time adverbs related the actions, events, processes, states, or results depicted by the VBG to the time of occurrence.

The foregoing shows that a rigorous description of structural disruption of the English VBG as a syntactic occurrence in its own right is fruitful. Exciting features of grammar at the VBG level have been revealed through this single-minded study, and more will manifest with further studies. For example, the nature of the texts analysed and the L<sub>2</sub> background of its producers might have combined to inform a text characterised by relative syntactic simplicity with respect to the VBG structure. A different set of texts and English users would certainly yield slightly different results. However, one incontrovertible implication of this study is that improved grammatical knowledge will generally enhance grammatical pedagogy. Undergraduates will generally benefit from the knowledge that the English VBG can have its structure disrupted at different points by a non-constituent member of its structure and that the disruptor can impact positively or otherwise on both its form and meaning. Furthermore, the realisation that the disruptor is an independent grammatical unit functioning as an element of clause structure will facilitate proper identification of the VBG and ensure accurate description of its structure. It will similarly enhance descriptive accuracy at the clause level, particularly where clauses with disrupted VBGs in predicator position are involved.

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No words	may	be	carelessly	spoken	in front of children
S	F	P	<A <sup>cir</sup> >	P <i>continued</i>	A <sup>cir</sup>

Figure 1: Bloor & Bloor's Analysis

The disciplines	are	never	obliterated
S	F	A <sup>mod</sup>	P

Figure 2: Bloor & Bloor's Analysis

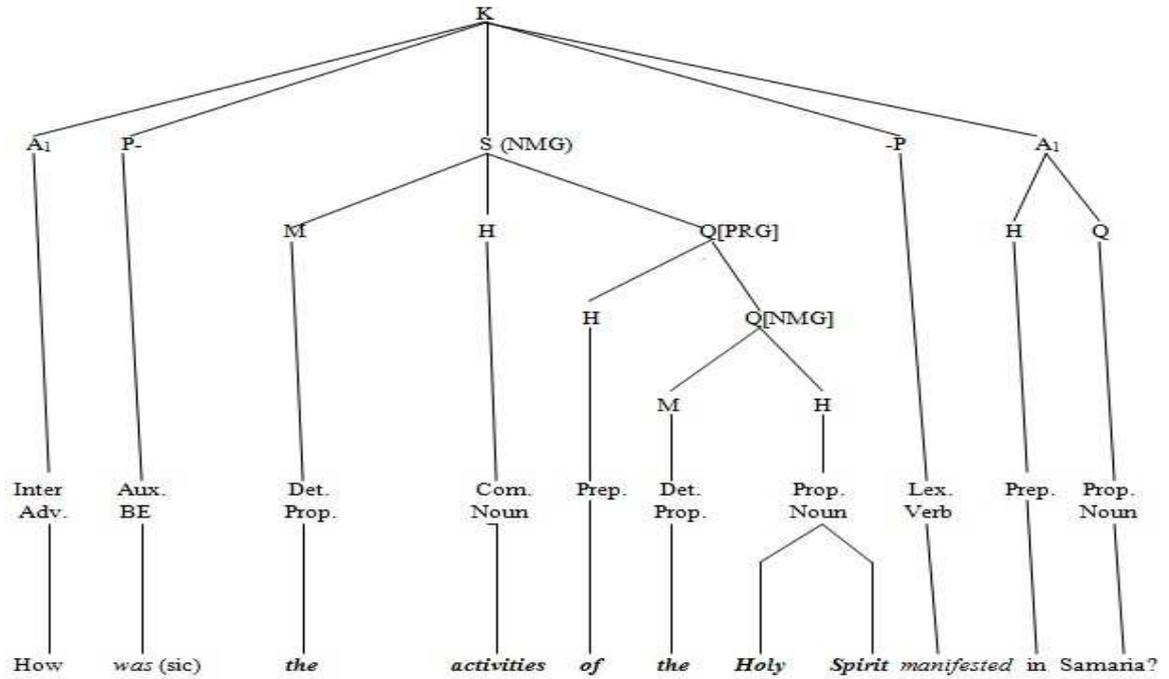


Figure 3: Tree Diagram

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