

Unpredicated Particles in English

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In an English example such as *He wiped the table clean*, there is a clear intuition that this sentence implicates that the table is clean. Similarly, in *He (cleaned the mirror and) wiped the fingerprints off*, there is a similar intuition that the fingerprints are *off*. Hence it can be said that the particle *off* is predicated of the object – these are ‘predicated particles’. In this talk I will discuss the phenomenon of ‘unpredicated particles’, such as *off* in the example *He wiped the mirror off*, which is fully acceptable, but where there is no sense in which the mirror is ‘off’.

Not all verbs that resemble *wipe* in allowing location objects allow such unpredicated particles: **load the truck on* (cf. *load the suitcases on*). I draw a parallel between the distribution and function of unpredicated particles and the distribution and function of gradable adjectives in the resultative construction. Work by Wechsler (2005) and Hay (1997) shows that whether an adjective can head a result phrase depends on its potential contribution to the telicity of the resultative construction. Similarly, I show that whether a particle can be found in the unpredicated particle construction depends on its potential contribution to the telicity of the verb-particle construction.

(This talk reports on work carried out jointly with Beth Levin, Stanford University.)