

CATENATIVE VERBS IN ENGLISH AS A MEANS OF VERB- VERB CONNECTION

Shavkatov Sherzod Shavkatovich

Teacher, Department of Practical English,

Navoi State University

e-mail: sherzodbek.shavkatov.uzb@gmail.com

Abstract: *This article investigates catenative verbs in English as a structural mechanism of hierarchical verb–verb integration within complex predicate constructions. While traditional descriptive grammars have catalogued complement types and control configurations, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to the interpretive architecture generated by recursive non-finite embedding. Drawing on a qualitative corpus sample of contemporary fiction and academic prose (N = 120), this paper analyzes complement selection, control relations, and recursive depth. The findings demonstrate that complement choice is lexically constrained yet semantically motivated, and that catenative constructions instantiate layered event representations in which syntactic embedding mirrors semantic scope. Integrating Anglo-American grammatical tradition with Russian functional-semantic theory and Uzbek valency-based approaches, the study argues that catenative verbs occupy a central position at the interface of lexical subcategorization, clause architecture, and cognitive event structuring.*

Key words: *catenative verbs, non-finite complementation, control, raising, predicate integration, event layering, English syntax, valency theory*

Non-finite complementation constitutes one of the principal mechanisms of predicate expansion in English. Among its realizations, catenative constructions represent a distinct configuration in which a lexical

verb licenses another verbal projection as its complement, forming a hierarchically integrated predicate within a single clause domain.

The term catenative (from Latin *catena* ‘chain’) reflects the sequential linking of verbs. However, structurally, such constructions extend beyond mere linear chaining. As described in *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, catenative verbs select non-finite complements governed by lexical subcategorization, while retaining independent lexical meaning. Unlike auxiliaries, they contribute semantic content while simultaneously functioning as structural integrators.

Although catenative constructions have been extensively described in major reference grammars (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Quirk et al., 1985)¹, much of the existing literature remains primarily taxonomic. That is, it classifies complement types and control patterns but does not fully explore the structural implications of multi-layered predicate formation. In particular, the interaction between lexical subcategorization, semantic interpretation, and recursive embedding deserves further attention.

The present article therefore goes beyond structural description by proposing that catenative constructions should be viewed not merely as verb sequences, but as hierarchically organized predicate structures in which each verb introduces an additional interpretive layer. This perspective allows for a more integrated account of how syntax, semantics, and cognitive processing interact in English predicate formation.

Consider:

- (1) *She decided to leave.*
- (2) *They kept talking.*

¹ Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 352p

(3) *He made her apologize.*

Each example demonstrates predicate expansion via non-finite complementation without overt coordination or finite subordination. Although descriptive grammars provide extensive classification, theoretical interpretation often remains taxonomic. The present study pursues two objectives:

1. To provide a structurally grounded analysis of complement selection and control patterns.
2. To propose an interpretive model of hierarchical event layering, whereby recursive catenative embedding corresponds to semantic scope organization.

Catenative verbs are defined as lexical verbs that select non-finite complements, typically realized as to-infinitive, gerundial (-ing), or bare infinitive forms. According to *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, complement selection is lexically specified and resistant to free alternation.

Corpus evidence from *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* confirms the high frequency of such constructions across registers, particularly in academic and narrative prose.

Within generative syntax (Radford, 2004)², non-finite complementation is analyzed through control and raising configurations. Control involves referential dependency between matrix arguments and understood embedded subjects, whereas raising involves syntactic reanalysis without thematic assignment by the matrix predicate.

Russian Functional-Semantic Perspective

² Radford, A. (2004). *English Syntax: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In Russian linguistics, complex predicates have been examined through valency theory and functional grammar. Viktor Vinogradov³ emphasized the systemic organization of verbal government and hierarchical predicate structuring. Valentin Bondarko⁴ developed the theory of functional-semantic fields, demonstrating how aspectual and modal meanings are distributed across lexical and grammatical domains.

Furthermore, Yuri Apresyan argued that lexical semantics systematically determines syntactic realization patterns. From this perspective, English catenative complement selection reflects lexically encoded semantic properties rather than arbitrary syntactic variation.

Uzbek Linguistic Tradition

In Uzbek linguistics, complex predicate constructions have been studied within Turkic syntactic typology. Shavkat Rahmatullayev⁵ analyzed analytic verb formations and emphasized semantic cohesion between predicate components. Similarly, Abduvali Nurmonov⁶ examined syntactic valency and layered predicate structures in modern Uzbek.

Although Uzbek relies more heavily on converbal and auxiliary strategies than on English-style non-finite embedding, the functional parallels support a cross-linguistic interpretation of hierarchical predicate integration.

Data and Methodology

The empirical material consists of 120 naturally occurring sentences containing catenative constructions, extracted from contemporary English fiction (60 examples) and peer-reviewed academic prose (60 examples).

³ Vinogradov, V. V. (1972). Russian Language: Grammatical Doctrine of the Word. Moscow: Vysshaya Shkola 62p

⁴ Bondarko, A. V. (1991). Functional Grammar Theory. Leningrad: Nauka. 501-502p

⁵ Rahmatullayev, Sh. (2010). Hozirgi o'zbek adabiy tili sintaksisi. Tashkent. 73p

⁶ Nurmonov, A. (2001). O'zbek tilining nazariy grammatikasi. Tashkent: Fan. 245p

Each example was coded according to:

- Complement type
- Control configuration (subject control, object control, raising)
- Semantic contribution of matrix verb
- Recursive depth

Table 1. Distribution of Complement Types (N = 120)

Complement Type	Frequency	Percentage
to-infinitive	68	56.7%
gerund (-ing)	34	28.3%
bare infinitive	18	15%

The predominance of to-infinitive complements confirms their structural versatility and semantic generality.

Complement Selection and Semantic Differentiation

To-infinitive complements commonly encode prospective or modal interpretations:

(4) *She hopes to succeed.*

Gerundial complements tend to express experiential or ongoing processes:

(5) *She enjoys reading.*

Contrastive examples demonstrate semantic divergence:

(6) *She stopped smoking.*

(7) *She stopped to smoke.*

In (6), the gerund denotes termination of an activity; in (7), the infinitive expresses purposive orientation. Complement choice thus functions as a semantic operator.

Bare infinitives occur primarily after causative and perception verbs:

(8) *They made him apologize.*

(9) *She saw him leave.*

These constructions encode direct causation or perception without overt infinitival marking.

Control, Raising, and Recursive Integration

Subject control:

(10) *She promised to return.*

Object control:

(11) He persuaded her to apply.

Raising:

(12) *She seems to understand.*

Recursive chaining illustrates structural productivity:

(13) *She seems to want to try to begin to learn.*

Although syntactic theory allows unlimited recursion, 87% of corpus examples contained no more than two embedded layers, indicating performance-based constraints.

The findings confirm that catenative verbs function as mechanisms of hierarchical predicate integration. Complement selection is lexically governed yet semantically interpretable.

The proposed model of event layering accounts for interpretive structure:

(14) *She tried to begin to explain.*

Here, explain denotes the core event; begin introduces aspectual boundary; try contributes modal-evaluative framing. Syntactic embedding corresponds to nested semantic domains.

This layered organization aligns with functional-semantic theories (Bondarko, 1991) and lexically driven syntactic models (Apresyan, 1992)⁷. The parallel between English catenative constructions and Uzbek analytic

⁷ Apresyan, Y. D. (1992). Lexical Semantics: Synonymous Means of Language. Moscow: Nauka. 179p

predicates further suggests typological generality in hierarchical event structuring.

From a cognitive standpoint, recursive embedding increases processing load due to incremental reinterpretation of event representation. The rarity of deeply nested chains indicates interaction between grammatical potential and communicative economy.

High-frequency catenative verbs such as seem, appear, begin, and start show tendencies toward partial functionalization in academic discourse, suggesting potential diachronic pathways toward auxiliary-like status.

This article has demonstrated that catenative verbs constitute a central mechanism of verb–verb integration in English. The analysis shows that:

- Complement selection is lexically specified and semantically motivated.
- To-infinitives exhibit highest distributional versatility.
- Control and raising configurations determine interpretive structure.
- Recursive embedding reflects syntactic productivity moderated by cognitive constraints.
- Event layering provides a principled explanatory framework.

By integrating Anglo-American descriptive grammar with Russian functional-semantic theory and Uzbek valency-based approaches, this research situates English catenative constructions within a broader cross-linguistic and theoretical perspective. Catenative verbs thus represent a crucial interface between lexicon, syntax, semantics, and cognition, offering fertile ground for further corpus-based and typological investigation. Beyond their descriptive classification, catenative verbs illustrate the dynamic interface between lexicon and grammar. They demonstrate how lexical verbs can extend beyond simple predication to participate in hierarchical structuring of events, evidential framing, and modal evaluation. Their recursive potential further highlights the

productivity of non-finite complementation in English and confirms the central role of predicate chaining in clause architecture.

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