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Title: Please wait until the very end. Split particle verbs in German sentence comprehension

Abstract: During sentence comprehension, most words we encounter correspond to one lexical unit, and in general, one lexical unit is represented by one word. One interesting exception are discontinuous words, multiple words that share one lexical entry. Particle verbs are one prominent example. These are verbal compounds like *anhören*, which are especially common in Dutch and German. Unlike simple verbs, particle verbs are split in main clauses, with the verbal base in V2 and the particle at the clause-final position (*Ich höre ein Lied auf dem Kassettenrekorder an*).

Clause-final particles can change the meaning of the sentences verb, but also its argument structure or case assignment, and can even turn it into a nonexistent word. Although split particle verbs represent an (uncertain) long-distance dependency, the question remains whether their combination in sentence comprehension is a syntactic process or rather purely lexical.

While the semantic uncertainty introduced by particle verbs has been investigated in a small number of studies, so far there is little research on the syntactic changes introduced by clause-final particles. I present data from acceptability ratings, self-paced reading times and EEG measurements monitoring the comprehension of German main clauses with split particle verbs. The clause-final particles turn the verb into either transitive nominative-accusative assigning verbs (*anhören*), transitive nominative-dative assigning verbs (*zuhören*), intransitive verbs (*aufhören*) or nonexistent base-particle combinations (*draufhören*). Our findings show N400 effects for intransitive and nonexistent base-particle verbs, followed by P600 effects. While the former have been reported for particles introducing other types of violation, the P600 effect has so far not been shown in the literature on split particle verbs. I will discuss potential reasons for this new finding, and will also discuss whether our findings can resolve the question whether base-particle combination should be described as a syntactic or lexical process.

In addition, there were no differences between particle verbs assigning accusative or dative. I will discuss the implications of this negative result in the context of current theories of lexical case marking in sentence comprehension.