

The role of phrasal verbs in phraseology

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to supplement existing research on English phraseology and its use in literary works by exploring the behavioural patterns of phrasal verbs, which is a recognized challenge among English language learners. This article contrasts a number of phrasal verbs and highlights their active use among the language speakers. This work includes collocation of phrasal verbs, their semantic preference and sequence. Each idea is supported by a definition and fairly illustrated by examples.

Key words: *idiom, phrasal verbs, context, classification, multi-word verbs*

I. Introduction

Idioms or idiomatic expressions are an important part of a nation's language and its tradition. It represents its culture, richness in language, varieties and ways of using them in their daily life and tell a lot about its history. Besides, they can be viewed as a good foundation for learning a second language since they may indicate one's eloquence in that language, which is why they are worthy of attention. In other words, they play an essential role in any language and, according to McDevitt (1993), may be viewed as an indicator of one's fluency in that language. Their application in everyday speech, newspapers, marketing, literature, politics, etc, indicates that his conclusion is quite valid. However, they present challenges and complexity in comprehension for second language learners. It is fair to admit that little or no serious attention has been paid to the acquisition and comprehension of idioms in English as a foreign language. During many researches on idioms, one special group, phrasal verbs, drew researchers' attention. Although the study of phrasal verbs is one of the most remarkable targets in the study of phraseology, they are so distinct from other phraseological targets that they need "separate and thorough research of their own"¹. This article will provide definitions of phrasal verbs, give an overview of the ways according to which they were classified by various authors, point to the similarities between the same particles with the combination of different verbs, and describe how they are comprehended by second language learners. This will be done by examining secondary texts and using the information from these sources by connecting them into a united whole.

Literature review

Idioms were classified by Ghazala (2003) into five most important types. These are: 1) full/pure idioms, 2) semi-idioms, 3) proverbs, popular sayings and semiproverbial expressions, 4) phrasal verbs, and 5) metaphorical catchphrases and popular expressions. A phrasal verb consists of a verb with a particle. This combination has been named differently by a number of researchers. Examples include

¹ Grant & Bauer, 2004:39

word combinations like verb-particle constructions, multi-word verbs, compound verbs, complex verbs, particle verbs, composite verbal expressions, discontinuous verbs, etc.². For example, in Claridge's research paper (2000) phrasal verbs are conceived as a subtype of multi-word verbs, while other researchers have interpreted phrasal verbs as the combinations of "a head verb and one or more obligatory particles, in the form of intransitive prepositions, adjectives or verbs"³: examples such as *hand in*, *cut short*, *let go* are given in their paper. The common description of phrasal verbs in these definitions is the unity of the verb and its particles.

Moreover, classification and categorization of phrasal verbs have been at the center of several researchers' attention. The following groups of phrasal verbs are a great example of their efforts in helping better understand their meaning: (1) literal: *go out*, *take away*, *come in* (2) figurative: *turn up*, *let down* (3) completive: *cut off*, *burn down* (Dagut & Laufer, 1985). Also, phrasal verbs can be classified as semantically transparent, semi-transparent, and figurative/ semantically opaque according to their semantic transparency (Laufer & Eliasson, 1993). Or they could be simply classified into compositional, idiomatic or aspectual, according to their semantic interpretations⁴.

Materials and methods

The categorisation of phrasal verbs is indeterminate, which is a consequence of their semantic complexities. One particular and ubiquitous type of verb constructions is multi-word verbs. They consist of many different subcategories such as phrasal verbs (e.g. *turn up*), prepositional verbs (e.g. *dispose of*) and phrasal-prepositional verbs (e.g. *get away with*). In this definition, a phrasal verb is made of 'V+adverb', a prepositional verb consists of 'V+preposition', and a phrasal-prepositional verb contains 'V+adverb+preposition', as seen in a table below:

| Multi-word verb types | Subtypes | Examples |
|-----------------------------|------------------|---|
| Phrasal verbs | (a) Intransitive | <i>Blow up</i> , <i>get on</i> |
| Prepositional verbs | (b) transitive | <i>Set up</i> , <i>put off</i> |
| | (a) Type I | <i>Cope with</i> , <i>rely on</i> , <i>loot</i> , <i>approve of</i> |
| | (b) Type II | <i>Confine (noun) to</i> , <i>protect (noun) from</i> |
| Phrasal-prepositional verbs | | <i>Come up with</i> , <i>look forward to</i> |

It is well worth mentioning that Quirk et al. identify the groups of multi-word verbs which have common meanings shared by the same particle⁵. For example: they consider that *away* carries a meaning of 'persistent action', *up* suggests 'completion', *around* implies 'aimless behaviour' and *out* means 'endurance'. Sinclair (1991:68) also advocates the idea of grouping phrasal verbs by their particle in order to make "sense groupings". This idea is a very meaningful and effective approach for teaching English to language learners and foreign students alike. There are two classificatory approaches that distinguish phrasal verbs in literary works: syntactic classification and semantic classification. At the syntactic level, phrasal verbs can be classified as transitive or intransitive, although

² Lam, 2003; Schneider, 2004, see Chapter 2

³ Baldwin & Villavicencio, 2002:98

⁴ Dehé, Jackendoff, McIntyre, & Urban, 2002; Dehé, 2002

⁵ Quirk et al., 1985:1162-1163

some cases can be either transitive or intransitive, for example: *give in*, *blow up*⁶. Besides transitivity, the other syntactic condition is whether the phrasal verb is separable. Examples of inseparable phrasal verbs include *get off* ('descend from; leave'), *turn into* ('become'), etc. Other phrasal verbs such as *cut off* ('interrupt; sever; amputate'), *hand down* ('deliver; pronounce formally; leave as an inheritance') are separable. Since the center of attention of this article is phrasal verbs, let's look at some examples that make up phrasal verb combinations. For convenience, the particles under examination will be limited to five elements: UP, OUT, ON, ABOUT, DOWN.

Phrasal Verbs with 'UP'

There are several verbs that are more frequently used to add a new meaning with a combination of the particle UP. Here are just some examples of verb+particle construction that are used in colloquial, as well as official language: DRAW UP is more strongly associated with *laws*, LOOK UP with *dictionaries/words*, and GROW UP with *becoming an adult / indication of progress*, BRING UP + *a question/issue*, and PICK UP + *the scent*. The following sentences give a clearer understanding of their use in the language:

1. They should **draw up** laws to punish the producer of fake commodities and detect every product.
2. While learning a foreign language, one of the must-have daily habits is **looking up** words in a dictionary from time to time.
3. Many people say that this 'idol' talk sets a bad example for children when **growing up**.
4. They constantly **bring up** the point that coal mining is a very dangerous job
5. After a very hard financial crisis, the economy has finally started **picking up**.

Phrasal Verbs with 'OUT'

The phrasal verb FIND OUT, for example, is followed by a number of *wh*-words. Besides, the phrasal verb is commonly positioned after certain verbs such as TRY, WANT, MUST, NEED, and WOULD LIKE TO, and words like *about* and *oneself*. Let's see some examples here:

1. The quest of **finding out who** one is is the quest that all individuals must embark...
2. We would be able to **find out where** all of the money is going.
3. ...they simply wanted to **find out what** it was all about...

In a similar fashion, we can look at other examples with the participation of a phrasal verb Carry Out:

1. The term executive branch suggests the branch of the federal government that executes or carries out the law.
2. Is Caligula right or wrong in carrying out his reign of terror?
3. ... and the women are prepared for the job, that political violence can be carried out by anyone

Phrasal Verbs with 'ON'

⁶ Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999:266; Quirk et al., 1985:1152-1153

The particle “On”, following a verb, is used mostly to give a sense of a continuous action or idea. Most frequent verbs to give such meaning are GO and MOVE / CARRY:

1. As time went on, I started to master some ideas and I felt I was going into the state.
2. She will have no idea of what's going on except the price in the market.
3. Everything takes on a new look as ...

Phrasal Verbs ‘ABOUT’

This phrasal verb is mostly associated with awareness, population, life, attitude, society, change, result, improvement, trend, justice, revolution, recognition, productivity, etc. on a positive side and problem, mistake, failure, etc. on a negative aspect. Examples below demonstrate the findings:

1. Promises of new reforms and policies outlined by a leading presidential candidate brings about a sense of change and awakening in the country’s fledgling economy.
2. ...of serious unemployments, it brings about other problems at the same time
3. Second, many fake commodities can bring about many difficulties to the factories which make the real commodities.

The closest in meaning of the phrasal verb ‘bring about’ is the phrasal verb ‘come about’. It has a meaning of happening or occurring:

1. And it all came about by sheer luck
2. This remarkable change came about after Ed Roberts gained a success consciousness...

Phrasal verbs with ‘DOWN’

The favorite verbs that come along with the particle ‘down’ are: knock, sit, fall, break, go, cut and look. Examples show these similarities here:

1. When we buy some electronic device, it may break down after a few weeks.
2. After a third-quarter meeting, the board of the company decided to cut down on research and development.
3. “... the industry was almost broken down but also our society will break down”

Results and discussions

Phrasal verbs remain a major challenge for foreign language learners because no really accurate description of them is available to this date. They have been taken as a serious learning hurdle and many researchers have pointed out where the difficulties lie⁷ (McArthur, 1979, 1989). For example, De Cock (2005:16-18) □ summarizes the common problems of PVs for learners: avoidance, semantic confusion, style deficiency, lack of collocational awareness, using idiosyncratic phrasal verbs and syntactic error. For example, avoidance is one of these known challenges that make phrasal verbs quite challenging for foreign language learners. Other observations reveal several general findings. Firstly,

⁷ McArthur, 1979, 1989

literal phrasal verbs are widely preferred to idiomatic phrasal verbs across different language learners' backgrounds. Secondly, learners tend to use phrasal verbs less frequently than do native speakers. Thirdly, the structural difference between native language and foreign language will cause problems for learners. Nevertheless, studies and research works carried out during the past decades lay down a fruitful ground for further exploration and better comprehension of phrasal verbs. This, inevitable will result in a more useful application of such phrasal combinations in a more appropriate context, thereby, showing the level of eloquence and a language possession of a speaker.

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