English Phrasal Verbs

Areej Sadiq Dawood

University of Diala/College of Engineering

Abstract

The present study is concerned with phrasal verbs . These multi - word verbs are resulted from the combination of a verb with an adverb or preposition . A phrasal verb is either intransitive when there is no following noun phrase , or transitive when there is a following noun phrase . Nearly all transitive phrasal verbs allow adverb movement while such movement is not possible with the preposition .

Phrasal verbs usually represent single semantic units that cannot be derived from the individual meanings of the two parts .

This study focuses on the use of phrasal verbs in two different types of register : Fiction and academic prose . Fiction is considered to be less formal style of writing since it is written for large majority of readers . On the other hand , academic prose is considered to be more formal and specialized style .

الخلاصة

تهتم الدراسة الحالية بالأفعال الاصطلاحية .وتكون هذه الأفعال المتعددة الكلمة حصيلة اتحاد فعل مع ظرف أو حرف جر. إما أن يكون الفعل الاصطلاحي لازم - أي لا تتبعه عبارة اسمية ، أو متعد عندما تتبعه عبارة اسمية . تسمح كل الأفعال الاصطلاحية تقريبا بتحريك موقع الظرف ، بينما تكون هذه الحركة غير مكنة مع حرف الجر .

تتمثل الأفعال الاصطلاحية عادة بوحدات معنى مفردة والتي لا يمكن ان تشتق من المعاني الفردية لجزئي الفعل الاصطلاحي .

تركز هذه الدراسة على استخدام الأفعال الاصطلاحية لنوعين مختلفين من التعبير : القصصي والنثر الأكاديمي . ويعد الأسلوب القصصي هو الأقل رسمية للكتابة وذلك لأنه يكتب لعدد كبير من القراء ، ومن ناحية أخرى يعتبر النثر الأكاديمي الأسلوب المتخصص والأكثر رسمية .

1.Introduction

One of the most common characteristics of the English verb is that is can combine with preposition and adverb particles. These combinations are called phrasal verbs. The resulting combinations creates what amounts to a new verb ,whose meaning can sometimes be puzzling to learners. Phrasal verbs have alternative terms "compound verb" , verb – adverb combination, "two – part word/verb ", three – part word /verb" and multi – word verb. They often arise from casual uses of language use. They can be both transitive and intransitive in meaning. The problem with phrasal verbs is that their meaning is often, obscure , and they mean several different things ,i.e. the meaning of a phrasal verb is very different from the meaning of two words taken separately.

The present study seeks to shed light on two different types of register, i.e. on fiction and prose .Phrasal verbs will be extracted from a text taken from a novel and the other taken from an academic textbook , so as to make a comparison between these two types .

2. Phrasal verb

2.1.Definition:

A phrasal verb is the combination of a verb with an adverb or preposition and occasionally with an adverb and preposition .According to McArthur (1992:72- 6),the term "phrasal verb" was first used by Logan Pearsall Smith , in "words and idioms " (1925) , in which the states that the editor or Henry Bradley Suggested the term to him.

A phrasal verb is defined by Crystal (2003: 352) as a term consisting of a sequence of lexical element plus one or more particles (an adverb, a preposition or an adverb plus a preposition).

Biber et al .(1999:403) defines phrasal as "multi – word units consisting of a verb followed by an adverbial particle. These particles have core spatial or locative meanings".

2.2. Form:

Halliday and Malthiessen (2004:351) illustrate that phrasal verbs have two kinds ,plus a third which is a combination of the other two :

1. verb + adverb : **look out** = 'un earth ,retrieve'

2. verb + preposition : **look for** = 'seek'

3. verb + adverb + preposition : **look out of** = 'watch for the presence of'

While Alexander's classification of phrasal verbs (1988: 153) is regarded to be more comprehensive than the previous one .

He distinguishes four types of combinations with different characteristics :

1.verb + preposition (transitive) = **get over** (an illness)

2. verb + particle (transitive) **bring up** (the children)

3. verb + particle (transitive) **come about** = happen

4. verb + particle+ preposition (transitive) = **run out of** (matches)

These particles often indicate position or direction , such as **along** , **down** , **in** , **off** , **on** , **out** , **over** , **under** , **up** .When a single verb like put combines with a large number of particles or prepositions it forms new verbs (**put off** , **put out** , **put up** , **put up with** , etc.)

Through this combination a new meaning can be created different from the original one . Some phrasal verbs are easy to be understood , but many are more difficult because they have special meanings .

3. **Syntactic Criteria**

There are two major subcategories of phrasal verbs : intransitive and transitive. But a large group of phrasal verbs can be used transitively and intransitively because a phrasal verb has more than one meaning with partially different structural and transformational characteristics.

3.1. Intransitive verbs

3.1.1. verb + particle

There are some characteristics to be noted bellow by Redman (1997: 38) , Quirk and Greenbaum (1973 : 374) and Alexander (1988 : 157) which tend to be common to intransitive phrasal verbs :

1.The verbs in this category cannot be followed by an object :

e.g. The children are **growing up** .

2. The two parts of the phrasal verb are inseparable .Most of the particles are place adjuncts or can function as such. Normally , the particle cannot be separated from its verb:

e. g. **Drink up** quickly .[Not **Drink** quickly **up**] .

3.Since this type does not have an object, passive constructions are not possible.

4.Particles can be used as intensifiers or perfectives or referring to direction can be modified by intensifiers :

e.g. **Go** right **on**

5. A subtype of intransitive phrasal verbs has a prepositional adverb as its particle, the particle behaving as a preposition with some generalized ellipsis of its complement :

e.g. He **walked past** (the object / place)

6. In some instances ,the particles form the first element in a complex preposition: **come along**   (with us / me)

3.2. Transitive Verbs

3.2.1.Verb + particle

Many phrasal verbs are transitive and do need a direct object :

e. g. **put on** your shoes.

Turn on the TV .

This ordering is called by Biber , et al .(1999 : 952) as postparticle position , in other words, the object immediately follows the particle . Sometimes ,the particle can be postpositioned to be placed after the object of the verb , as exemplified in : He **turned** the offer **down**.

The same case can be applied to an object if it is a personal pronoun . Quirk et al . (1985 : 348) and Stageberg (1981 : 242) state that the personal pronoun (me, him, it , etc.) can appear between the verb and the particle , in other words it usually comes before the second word of the phrasal verb :

 Put them **on** [Not **put on** them]

He **turned** it **down** [Not he **turned down** it]

Biber , *et al* ., (1999 : 934 – 35) call this order mid – position in which single

pronouns are almost invariably placed . While end – position does occur exceptionally and the more commonly pronoun category found in this position is indefinite pronouns . In the following examples , these pronouns are used to make a comparison between mid – position and end – position :

I would never **pick** anybody **up** . (mid – position)

He is going to **pick up** somebody somewhere . (end – position)

If the object is a noun , it can be either human or non – human :

1. I'd love to **ask** Sally **out** . [invite Sally to go to a place] , [Not I'd love to **ask** my dog **out**]

2. This photograph **brings back** happy memories . [Make me remember or think about something from the past] [Not this photograph **brings back** my sister] (McCarthy & O'Dell (2004 : 6))

Regarding the position of the object .if it is a short noun group , Collins (1990 : 167) states that it can be placed either after the second word of the phrasal verb or after the first word before the second word ,e.g. :

1. I **filled up** a jar with potassium permanganate .

2. She **filled** my glass **up** .

However , when the object is a long noun group , it is more likely to come after the second word of the phrasal verb , so the two parts of phrasal verb are not separated too widely. In this way , attention is focused on the information contained in the noun group , rather than on the second word of the phrasal verb:

The authorities have **turned down** a request by the Argentine Embassy to examine the wreckage of the plane .

3.2.2. Verb + preposition

Some phrasal verbs consist of a verb followed by a preposition which is very common in English . General characteristics of this type are provided by Alexander (1988 : 154 – 55) and Stageberg (1981 : 242):

1.The object is a noun or a pronoun :

We have launched into **a new project**.

We have launched into **it**.

In the above examples both the noun object and the pronoun object follow the preposition .

2. The preposition cannot be separated by an object, e. g. :

Look at this picture .[Not **look** this picture **at**]

However , this separation is sometimes possible in relative clauses and questions , e. g. :

The picture **at which** you are **looking** was bought at an auction.

At which picture are you **looking** ?

3. This type can come at the end of a sentence or clause :

e.g. : She has got more work than she can **cope with** .

   There's so much to **look at** when you visit the National Gallery .

4. Some combinations can go into the passive :

 e.g. : Every problem that came up **was dealt with** efficiently.

5. A modifier can occur between a verb and a preposition . An adverb of manner may separate the verb and its preposition :

 e.g. : He turned **sharply** up the country road .

      I leafed **quickly** through the book .

3.3. Phrasal Verb Function as Copula

   Copula , as defined by Crystal (2003 : 110) is " a verb which has little independent meaning , and whose main function is to relate subject and complement ".

   Turn out , **end up** , and **wind up** are phrasal verbs used as resulting copula verbs , Biber , et al ., (1999 : 445 – 46) suggest that these verbs are generally rare . **Turn out** is used for emphasizing the end – point of a process, with a simple positive or negative evaluation :

Turn out + good , nasty , nice , all right , wrong

1. A lot of times they **turned out** wrong .
2. The marriage will **turn out** all right .

End up and **wind up** are used for describing an unintended negative event or state resulting from someone doing undesirable thing :

1. I ended **up really** angry .
2. The young bucks invariably **wound up** dead .

3.4 Phrasal verb in questions and relative clauses

A preposition that is part of a phrasal verb can be distinguished from an ordinary preposition in the way illustrated by Collins (1990 : 170 – 71) , when the object of a preposition is put at the beginning of a question or a relative clause , it can be preceded by preposition , especially in formal speech or writing :

From which student did you **get** the book ?

The document **on** which he **put** his signature .

However , if the preposition is a part of a phrasal verb , it cannot be put before its object in such structures . When an object comes at the beginning of a clause i.e. in a question or relative clause , Swan (1995 : 608) states that a two – word verb usually stays together , so that the second word can be separated from its object and at the end of the clause :

What are you **thinking about** ? [Not about what are you thinking ?]

I've found the book which I was **looking for** [Not I've found the book for which I was looking]

In the following relative structure , the preposition is followed by a **which** :
She **ran down** the hill .
Can be transformed into :
The hill **down** which she **ran** .
It can be noted that the preposition **down** is separated from the verb **ran .** But this form of transformation is not possible in the case of when the particle is an adverb, for instance :
She **ran down** (= criticized adversely) her roommate [but not: Her roommate down whom she ran]

Instead , the two parts of the phrasal verb must remain together :
Her roommate whom she **ran down** . Stageberg (1981 : 243)

3.5. **Phrasal – prepositional verbs :**

Another major type of multi – word verb has characteristics of both phrasal and prepositional verbs .This combination consists of a lexical verb combined with an adverbial particle plus a preposition .

Alexander (1988 : 157) , Quirk and Greenbaum (1975 : 351) suggest some general characteristics of these three - part verbs :

a. They end with prepositions and must therefore be followed by an object :
I don't know how you **put up with** these conditions. (impersonal object)
May I take you upon your after to **put** me **up for** the night ? (personal object)
b. Under certain conditions some verbs can occur in the passive and others cannot :
All the old regulations were **done away with** . (passive)
I find it difficult to **keep up with** you . (no passive)
c. These verbs allow pronominal questions :
What can't he **put up with** ?
d. like single word transitive and prepositional verbs , we cannot insert an adverb immediately before the object , though it is possible to do so between the particles :
He **puts up** willingly **with** that secretary of his . [Not he puts up with willingly that secretary of his]

In relative clauses and questions , the particles are positioned after the verb :
The party we were looking forward so eagerly.
Who (m) does he put up with willingly .
e. Two – part nouns can be formed from some three – part verbs :
Someone who stands in for someone is a stand – in .

4. **Semantic Criteria**

Sometimes the meaning of a two – part verb is simply a combination of the meanings of the two words , like **come in** , **run away** , **walk across** , **sit on** . in some cases , the first keeps its meaning , but the second has a special intensifying sense . i. e. , the adverb adds the idea of completing the action of

the verb, like **break up** , **finish off** . But sometimes , a phrasal verb may have lexical meaning quite different from that of its components . Quirk ,et al , (1985 : 348) and Liefrink (1973 : 16) state that the meaning can not be predicted from the two separate parts , like **give up** means **surrender** , and **blow up** means **explodes** .In such constructions , the lexical value of the particle has been lost and entire verb – particle combination has acquired a meaning different from its constituents .

Redman (1997 : 36) provides some more examples about phrasal verbs to show that the meaning of a phrasal verb of a phrasal verb as a unit is different from that of the individual meanings of the two parts added together :

1.   It took her a long time to **get over** (= get better) her illness .
2.   He told me to **carry on** (= continue) as far as the traffic lights .
3.   I can't make any sandwiches because we've **run out** (all used) of bread .

  Besides the changing of meaning , an adverb or preposition can have a strengthening effect on the verb :

Write down their names .

In other cases , Alexander (1988 : 156) points out that the particle can extend the meaning of a verb :

Give out these loaflets. (i. e. distribute)

As a whole , the difficulty arises when meaning can not be deduced from the sum of their parts , because these parts are fused into new idiomatic combinations .

As with phrasal verbs , phrasal prepositional verbs can sometimes be replaced by a single transitive lexical verb with similar meaning as exemplified by Biber et al (1999 : 423) :

Put up with [such treatment] $\rightarrow$ tolerate [such treatment]

Get out of [it] $\rightarrow$ avoid [it]

Look forward to [this] $\rightarrow$ anticipate [this]

4.1**. Multiple Meaning**

     Like single – word lexical verbs , many lexical verbs have multiple meanings . McCarthy &   O'Dell (2004 : 14) illustrate this case by the following examples :

1.   He **got on** bus . [entered the bus]

2. Jim and Ian **get on** really well . [like each other and are friendly]

3. Shh ! I'm trying to **get on** with my work . [continue doing my work]

There is no direct connection between the various meanings , therefore the best way to learn each different meaning of the phrasal verb is by trying to remember a sentence using the phrasal verb.

However , Biber et al , (1999 : 408 – 9) state that most phrasal verbs have core meanings in only one domain , and the following list are organized in these terms :

1. Activity intransitive – get on , look out , move in , step up , walk in ;

2. Activity transitive – bring in , build up , fill in , keep up , pull up , pull down , put in ,put up , set up , set out , take away , take out , turn on , walk up , work out ;

3. Mental transitive – make out ;

4. Occurrence intransitive –break down, grow up , set in;

5. Aspectual intransitive – carry on , go ahead , hang on ;

6.   Aspectual transitive – keep on , start off ;

Redman (1997 : 36) considers the phrasal verb in the following examples as much more natural than the explanation in brackets :

1. It was hot so I decided to **take off** (= remove) my jacket .

    I am always nervous when the plane **take off** (= leave the ground)

2. I don't think I'll **get through** (= finish) this report before five o'clock .

    I think she'll **get through** (= pass) the exam.

Verb combinations , therefore , can have many different meanings , depending on the particles used . Alexander (1988 : 157) illustrates the combinations possible with **bring** in few examples :

Bring **up** the children (= train / educate)

Bring **off** a deal (= complete successfully)

Bring **on** an attack of asthma (= cause)

Bring somebody **round** to our of view (= persuade)

Bring someone **round** (= revive)

Bring **down** the house (= receive enthusiastic applause)

5.Style of Phrasal Verbs

Register is another important aspect of phrasal verbs . Many articles written as guides for using phrasal verbs claim that they should be used mainly in speaking rather writing , and in informal rather formal situations and texts. In informal idiomatic English , for example , Alexander (1988 : 123) states that there is a strong tendency to use phrasal verbs instead of their one - word equivalents . It would be very unusual , for instance , to say **Enter** ! instead of **come in** ! in response to a knock at the door . Whereas , it is often said that in formal contexts , single – word equivalents are more appropriate than phrasal verbs . McCarthy & O'Dell (2004 : 14) and Swan (1995 : 257) make a comparison between less formal and more formal style as shown in table (1) :

Table (1) The formality of phrasal verbs

Less Formal	More Formal
Let's **put off** the meeting until Friday.	Let's **postpone** the meeting until Friday.
Please **take off** your shoes when you enter the temple.	Please **remove** your shoes when you enter the temple.
Everyone **turned up** on time for the meeting.	Everyone **arrived** on time for the meeting.
.Just **keep on** till you get to the crossroads.	**Continue** as far as the crossroads.

Some phrasal verbs can be used equally in written or spoken English . Redman (1997 : 38) argues that "there is no other easy way to express the meaning of the phrasal verb " :

1.The car **broken down** on the motorway . (= went wrong , stopped working)

2.Thieves **broke into** the house and took the money (= entered by force and illegally)

It is noteworthy to state stress has an important role in spoken English . when a phrasal verb consisting of a verb followed by an adverb occurs at the end of a clause , it is usually the adverb which is stressed not the verb :

How did that **come about** ?

But when a phrasal verb consisting of a verb followed by a preposition occurs at end of a clause , it is usually the verb which is stressed not the preposition :

No one like to be **laughed** at .

5.1. Register Categories

This study describes the actual use of grammatical features in two different varieties of English : mainly fiction and academic prose . Each of these varieties is termed a register , and each extended sample of language from a register constitutes a text . This study intends to describe grammatical use of phrasal verbs with respect to a novel and an academic book . These registers have the virtue of being important , highly productive varieties of the language , and different enough from one another to represent a wide range of variation .

Biber , et al , (1999 ; 26) consider these two categories as ' global' register , the language being influenced by authors , editors , and publishing houses often located on different continents , with an eye to an international readership . For this reason , American English versus British English differences have mostly been levelled in fiction and academic prose .

The two written registers differ from each other in many respects . Fiction is intermediate in that it includes the conversational dialogue of fictional characters :

fiction has purposes associated with pleasure reading , while academic prose has a more informational focus . Fiction is usually written for a large majority of public audiences , in contrast to academic prose texts , which are written for more specialized audiences .

5.1.1. Description of register categories

5.1.1.1. Fiction

The fiction subcorpus is composed of a text from American English which is excerpt from a novel for Beth Cutcheon , **Still Missing** (1981)

5.1.1.2. Academic prose

The academic book subcorpus includes extracts from a student textbook . The text is for Eugene J. Hall, <u>The language of Civil Engineering in English</u> (1977)

5.2. Size of the corpus

Fiction and academic texts tend to be very long , with an average of about 35.000 words pretext in fiction and 13.000 words pretext in academic prose .

It is useful to have some concrete bench marks for comparison , In both the academic book and the fiction novel , an average page contains between 300 and 400 words , depending on the size of the page and the print .

The study deals with about 25% of pages from each text in order to show the occurrences of transitive and intransitive phrasal verbs across these two types of register . This figures show the number of times this verb is used in the text .

Table (2) : Phrasal verbs that occur across the fiction novel and the academic book

Transitive phrasal verbs	Fiction	Academic	Transitive phrasal verbs	Fiction	Academic	Transitive phrasal verbs	Fiction	Academic
Sit around	1	-	Put on	3	-	Get around	1	-
Check into	1	-	Held up	5	-	Carry on	1	-
Take out	1	-	Use up	1	-	Work off	1	-
Depend on	-	1	Turn up	1	-	Write out	1	-
Set up	2	-	Bend over	2	-	Count on	1	-
Scare off	1	-	Build up	-	1	Go into	1	-
Line up	1	-	Pull up	2	-	Drop off	1	-
Put down	3	1	Get through	1	-	Press on	1	-
Look for	13	-	Put up	2	-	Keep up	1	-
Put down	3	-	Held back	-	1	Wind up	1	-
Deal with	3	4	Write down	4	-	Pull off	1	-
Get out	1	-	Turn on	1	-	Take down	1	-
Call for	1	-	Size up	2	-	Care for	1	-
Shoo away	1	-	Look into	3	-	Run through	1	-
Switch on	1	-	Bring up	3	-	Curled up	1	-
Call back	2	-	Take in	1	-	Pass on	1	-
Leap at	1	-	Come across	2	-	Look over	1	-
Put out	3	-	Leap at	1	-	Check in	1	-
Check out	2	-	Tune out	1	-	Look around	1	-
Turn off	4	-	Think over	1	-	Go through	1	-
Pick up	16	-	Take up	1	-	Take out	1	-

Table (3) :Intransitive phrasal verbs across the fiction novel and the academic book

Intransitive phrasal verbs	Fiction	Academic	Intransitive phrasal verbs	Fiction	Academic	Intransitive phrasal verbs	Fiction	Academic
Come back	4	-	Move on	1	-	Look up	1	-
show up	1	-	Get up	2	-	Cut off	1	-
Hold on	4	-	Go out	2	-	Speed up	-	1
Come over	5	-	Fall down	2	-	Look around	1	-
Run away	1	-	Hung around	1	-	Bring back	1	-
Find out	8	-	Move out	1	-	Bring in	1	-
Hung up	7	-	Figure out	2	-	Log in	1	-
Stand up	2	-	Get away	1	-	Settle down	1	-
Go over	3	-	Come out	1	-	Work out	1	1
Help out	1	-	Back up	1	-	Fill in up	1	-
Go down	2	-	Get on	1	-	Come on	1	-
Go on	3	-	Go off	1	-	Wear off	2	-
Held of	2	-	Go back	2	-	Point out	1	-
Sit down	1	-	Shoot up	1	-	Stretch out	1	-
Move down	1	-	Come up	5	-	Live through	1	-
Make up	-	1	Wait around	1	-	Come around	2	-
Grow up	3	-	Slow down	1	2	Wrap up	1	-
Move in	1	-	Shook off	1	-	Break out	1	-
Turn out	3	-	Cool down	1	-			

Discussion of Findings

It is noticeable that phrasal verbs are most widely used in the novel , but they are relatively rare in academic prose , in other words , the fiction shows much greater use of most common phrasal verbs than academic prose .

The transitive verb **pick up** in fiction is the single most common phrasal verb , while the verb **find out** is the most common intransitive phrasal verb .

Conclusion

Learning phrasal verbs is very much a part of learning English . To understand when it is appropriate to use a phrasal verb instead of a single word verb , and know which gaps in the language are best covered by phrasal verbs , are two keys to writing and speaking natural English .

Phrasal verbs are the interface of grammar and lexis since they consist of open – class item (the verb) and one closed – class item (the particle) . The meaning of phrasal verbs is in many cases idiomatic thus they have to be learnt as a whole precisely because an idiom's meaning cannot be deduced from the individual items it consists of . As a result , it is suggested to learn about using the context of a phrasal verb to discover its meaning .

Meaning is essential in deciding whether a phrasal verb is transitive or intransitive . Sometimes , the same phrasal verb can be used both transitively and intransitively because it has multiple meanings .

Phrasal verbs are a marked feature of fiction the are preferable to be used in informal contexts . On the other side , academic prose has fewer phrasal verbs than would be expected . They are notably rare in academic prose which shows a much greater reliance on one word equivalents and more specialized verbs .

Prepositions and (adverb) particles do not always have the same place in clauses with objects . Prepositions normally go before noun objects , while particles can go before or after noun objects and only go after pronoun objects thus most transitive phrasal verbs can be used in the passive .

References

Alexander , L. (1988) **Longman English Grammar** . Longman : Longman Group Ltd.

Biber , D. ,S. Johansson , G . Leech , S. Conrad & E. Finegan (1999) **Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English** . Longman : Longman Group Ltd.

Collins , H. (1999) **English Grammar** . Birmingham : Birmingham University Press .

Crystal , D. (2003) **A Dictionary of Linguistics & Phonetics** . (5th ed.) Oxford : Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Halliday M.& C. Malthiessen . (2004) **An Introduction to Functional Grammar** . (2nd ed.) London : Hodder Arnold .

Liefrink ,F. (1973) **Semantico – Syntax** . London : Longman Group Ltd .

McArthur , T. (1992) **The Oxford Companion to the English Language** .Oxford : Oxford University Press.

McCarthy , M. & F. O'Dell (2004) . **English Vocabulary in Use .** Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Quirk , R. & S. Greenbaum (1975) **A University Grammar of English** . London : Longman Group Ltd .

Quirk , R.; Greenbaum , S. ; Leech , G. and Svartvik , J . (1985) . **A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language** . London : Longman .

Redman ,S. (1997) **English Vocabulary in Use** . Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Stageberg , N . (1981) **An Introductory English Grammar** . New York : Holt , Rinehart and Winston , Inc.

Swan , M . (1995) **Practical English Usage** . (2nd ed .) Oxford : Oxford University Press.