

SPOTLIGHTING ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS

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Abstract: *Phrasal verbs or multi-word verbs, such as call off, go into and run up against, etc. represent a very interesting and challenging aspect of the English language. In ELT there is a widespread view that familiarity with a wide range of phrasal verbs and the ability to use them appropriately in context are among the distinguishing marks of a native-like command of English. However, it is also generally recognised that these verb+particle combinations pose special difficulties for both learners and teachers of English partly because there are so many of them, partly because they have special semantic, syntactic and stylistic properties. Besides, quite many of them can be used as nouns, e.g. a hideaway, a stowaway and a write-off, etc. and adjectives, e.g. a broken-down car and a knockdown price, etc. What is more, again quite many of them have a single word equivalent of Romance origin, which, however, often differs from them in terms of style, collocation and meaning, e.g. blow up ~ explode, do away with ~ eliminate and put out ~ extinguish, etc. Furthermore, it is a misconception that phrasal verbs are mainly used in informal style and in spoken English. In fact, they can be found in many styles of writing, ranging from highly formal texts to slang, e.g. call forth vs. gobble up, etc. This paper sets out to explore the unique and complex nature of English verb+particle constructions in order to make them a more manageable part of the vocabulary of English.*

Key words: phrasal verbs; semantics; syntax; nominalisations; single-word synonyms; style;

1. Introduction

Phrasal verbs, (often called Multi-Word Verbs), such as *turn down, take after* and *catch up with, etc.* are a common feature of the English language, and knowledge of a wide range of phrasal verbs and the ability to use them appropriately are parts of the native speakers' competence. While native speakers learn them throughout the normal acquisition process, foreign language learners have to train themselves in order to use phrasal verbs in the proper context. Phrasal verbs therefore deserve to be an important part of vocabulary learning. However, as they are a difficult aspect of the English language, they do not enjoy a good reputation in ELT.

In fact, phrasal verbs have always been common in English. They have, however, increased in number since the mid 19c and even more so since the mid-20c, especially in Am. E., and have only recently been described in detail. As some linguists e.g. de la Cruz (1975), Hiltunen (1983) and Brinton (1988) observe, from OE to Early Modern English the language underwent an important structural shift,

from a productive system of verbal prefixes to a new system of post-verbal particles with the phrasal verb becoming more and more common. In the OE period prefixed verbs were predominant, but phrasal verbs also occurred, with the particle both following and preceding the verb. As verbal prefixes continued to be weakened and overgeneralized, the phrasal verb extended its domain in ME and the figurative, idiomatic uses of phrasal verbs began to appear. They were quite common in Chaucer and Shakespeare, but as far as linguists are concerned, it is the 18c lexicographer Samuel Johnson (1755/1963: 5), who was among the first to consider them seriously. This is what he wrote about such formations in the Preface to the Dictionary of the English Language:

“There is another kind of composition more frequent in our language than perhaps in any other, from which arises to foreigners the greatest difficulty. We modify the signification of many words by a particle subjoined; as *to come off*, to escape by a fetch; *to fall on*, to attack; *to fall off*, to apostatise; *to break off*, to stop abruptly..... These I have noted with great care.”

If even scholars are aware of the problems posed by them, no wonder that the mere-mention of phrasal verbs is enough to make the hair stand up on the backs of the necks of most-well-meaning EFL learners.

What is more, even the term itself is identified differently in various grammar books, dictionaries and the special literature. Some linguists use the term in a broader, others in a narrower sense, for example Quirk et al. (1985: 1150-1161) use the term ‘multi-word verbs’, which they divide into phrasal verbs (e.g. *put off*), prepositional verbs (e.g. *look after*) and phrasal prepositional verbs (e.g. *put up with*). Kennedy (1920) and Fraser (1976) call them verb-particle combinations, Live (1965) discontinuous verbs while Lipka (1972) and Lindner (1981) use the term ‘verb-particle constructions’ for them. In fact, the term ‘phrasal verb’ was introduced into the linguistic literature by L. P. Smith (1923: 172), who stated, however, that the OED editor Henry Bradley suggested it him.

Interestingly enough, dictionaries use the term ‘phrasal verb’ in a broader sense covering V+adverb, V+preposition and V+adverb+preposition constructions. Most up-to-date course books tend to use the term ‘phrasal verbs’ primarily for verb+adverb combinations, there are, however, also some which tend to prefer the term ‘multi-word’ verbs.

The primary aim of my paper is to reveal what makes phrasal verbs a much dreaded area of the English language for ELF learners, touching upon on their semantics, syntax, stylistic and register properties, their single-word equivalents and nominalizations.

2. The difficulties involved in learning and teaching phrasal verbs

Several difficulties seem to be involved in teaching and learning phrasal verbs. Consider the rather complex nature of *take off*, a common phrasal verb in English (*Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* 2002: 380-381):

- Remove or separate sth from a place where it was.
V+ADV+N, V+N+ADV, V+PRON+ADV
Without moving the packing case from its position he took off the top.
- Undress or remove your clothes.
V+ADV+N, V+N+ADV, V+PRON+ADV
I had taken my clothes off because of the heat.

- Use force or your authority to get sth from somebody (fairly informal).
V+N+PREP, V+PRON+PREP
They were going to take some money off you.
- Leave the ground and start flying
V+ADV
Takeoff is the beginning of a flight (N UNCOUNT)
A steady stream of aircraft was taking off and landing.
- Suddenly become very successful and popular (a product or activity)
V+ADV
Takeoff is the stage in the development of a product or activity when it begins to be successful (N UNCOUNT)
It will be interesting to see how the campaign takes off.
- Go away often suddenly or unexpectedly ((a fairly informal use)
V+ADV
They took off for the weekend in the country.
- Make sy go with you to a particular place
V+N+ADV, V+PRON+ADV
They took him off to prison.
- Stop sy doing a task or being on a list
V+N+PREP, V+PRON+PREP
The next day, I found Laura had taken me off the list.
- Spend time doing sth different from your normal routine or job
V+N+ADV, V+ADV+N, V+N+PREP
Bill and I took time off from work and flew to France.
- Subtract an amount of money or a mark from a total
V+N+ADV, V+ADV+N, V+PRON+ADV
Your employer will take off some of your wages to pay your national insurance contribution.
- Imitate a person's appearance or behaviour, usually in order to make other people laugh (an informal use)
V+ADV+N, V+N+ADV, V+PRON+ADV
Mimic means almost the same as *take off*
A takeoff of someone is an imitation of their appearance or behaviour.
Mike can take off his father to perfection.
- Stop a particular type of food, medical treatment from being given to you
V+PRON+PREP, V+N+PREP
The doctor took her off insulin.
- Stop operating and is no longer available for people to use (a bus, train or plane service)
V+ADV+N, V+N+ADV, V+PRON+ADV, USUALLY PASSIVE
Be withdrawn is a more formal expression for *be taken off*.
The 7.18 train was taken off for the winter.
- End (the performance of a play/show)
V+ADV+N, V+N+ADV, V+PRON+ADV, USUALLY PASSIVE
'My Fair Lady' was taken off when it was at the peak of its success.

As is evident from the above examples, *take off*, some of the meanings of which EFL learners encounter at the very beginning of a course has enormous semantic, syntactic and stylistic complexity.

These are as follows:

- The majority of difficulties is no doubt caused by the semantics of phrasal verbs. In many cases such as *take off*, even though students may be familiar with both the verb in the phrasal verb and with the particle, they may not understand the meaning of the combination, since it can differ greatly from the meanings of the two words used independently. The fact that phrasal verbs often have a number of different meanings adds to their complexity.
- In some cases, they have a single-word equivalent, such as *take off* in 11, which is *mimic* but there is usually a stylistic difference between the phrasal verb and its single-word equivalent with the phrasal being usually more informal just like *take off*.
- Besides, their syntax is also governed by complex and unpredictable rules as illustrated above by the grammatical patterns they can occur in. The same particle like *off* can serve as a preposition (3, 8, and 12) or an adverb (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 14) and the student can easily confuse these functions. In some of its meanings, *take off* is transitive (1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14), in others it is intransitive (4, 5). In addition, in some of its meanings, it is usually used in the passive (13 and 14).
- Like many phrasal verbs, in some of its meanings, *take off* is also used as a noun (4, 5, and 11).
- Sometimes phrasal verbs are used in very informal style such as *take off* in 3, 6 and 11.
- Finally, learners also have to be aware of the fact that some phrasal verbs may have the same grammatical patterns but their collocations are quite unlike as in:
 - take off*¹.....O: fitting, knob, handle, door, top, paint;
 - take off*².....O: coat, hat;
 - take off*⁴.....S: aeroplane, bird;
 - take off*⁵.....S: product, activity;
 - take off*⁰.....O: a few days, week, fortnight, weekend, Easter;

No wonder many learners tend to avoid phrasal verbs. Thus, instead of using them, they rely on rarer and clumsier words which make their language sound stilted and awkward.

Next let us see in details some of the semantic, syntactic, stylistic and register properties of phrasal verbs. Besides, mention must also be made of their single-word equivalents and their nominalized forms.

2.1. Semantic properties

The meaning of the components in phrasal verbs was regarded to be non-compositional and unanalysable for a long time and was assumed that they 'just have to be learnt.' Traditional linguists, such as Kennedy (1920), Curme (1931), Bolinger (1971), Lipka (1972) and Fraser (1976), etc. generally assumed that particles/prepositions have a literal meaning or no meaning at all although some of them noted the aspectual cast of some particles in phrasal verbs. Let us see what aspectual meanings of the two most common particles, *out* and *up* were identified by traditional linguists:

- OUT completive sense e.g. *die out* and *fade out*, etc. (Kennedy 1920: 24); Lipka 1972: 182), Fraser 1976: 6), ingressive e.g. *set out* and *come out*, etc. (Curme 1931: 379; Lipka 1972: 183), terminative e.g. *burn out* and *starve out*, etc. (Lipka 1972: 183).

- UP perfective value, e.g. *heat up, clean up, light up* (Kennedy 1920: 24-5), 'perfective meaning as manifested in resultant condition', e.g. *shrivel up, break up* and *close up*, etc. 'perfective in the sense of completion or inception', e.g. *let up, give up* and *take up*, etc. (Bolinger 1971: 99-100), 'ingressive' mode of action, e.g. *take up, put up* and *sit up*, etc. (Lipka 1972: 182, 183-4; Curme 1931: 379), 'completive sense', e.g. *mix up, stir up* and *wind up*, etc. Fraser (1976: 6).

By contrast, cognitive linguists took up the challenge of the alleged arbitrariness of prepositional/adverbial particle usage and demonstrated that the meanings of particles are highly structured and analysable at least to some degree. Amongst the most outstanding contributions are the analyses by Lindner (1981), Lakoff (1987) and Rudzka-Ostyn (2003). They showed that particles/prepositions have various central, prototypical meanings, which are their literal meanings, and most of the other meanings depart from these prototypical ones in various ways, typically via metaphorical extensions forming a complex network of related meanings. They assume that the basis of a great many metaphorical senses is space and among these most common source domains are containers, journeys (with path and goal) and vertical obstacles. In numerous meanings of particles we can witness the transfer from the concrete domain of space to the abstract domain via metaphorical extension. We often talk about abstract entities or relations in concrete terms. This applies to the domain of time, emotions, thoughts or social relations. Let us see now how it can be interpreted in the case of the above mentioned *out* (Rudzka-Ostyn 2003: 15-46). The container/landmark may be whatever surrounds a given entity/trajector that moves out of it, note the following:

- An enclosure, a building, a room, a car, a cup, a pot, a nest, a hole, a shell, a tunnel, an outer cover, a field or any other enclosed area;
- A substance (liquid or solid), e.g. water, wood, rock or earth;
- A set of group of objects, animals or people;
- Our body, mind

OUT 1: Entities moving out of containers

He *jumped out of* the train while it was moving.

They decided to *throw out* most of their old clothes.

OUT 2: Eating or inviting to eat away from home

I would like to *ask you out* to lunch.

I might *eat out* with you tonight.

OUT 3: Sets, groups are containers

She *picked out* the most expensive dress in the shop.

Begin to *sort out* the problems you can do something about now.

OUT 4: Bodies, minds, mouths are viewed as containers

He *reached out* his hand to greet us.

Perhaps the best way to deal with one's grief is to *cry it out*.

OUT 5: States, situations are containers

He *dropped out* of school.

She managed to *talk him out of* this stupid project.

OUT 6: Non-existence, ignorance, invisibility also function as containers

Nobody knows how the secret *leaked out*.

The book *came out* yesterday.

OUT 7: Trajectors, i.e. moving entities increasing to maximal boundaries

Please *spread out* the map on the table.

I have been doing this job so long, I feel *burnt out*.

As is evident from the above analysis of *out*, its meanings are analysable at least to some degree. Nevertheless, the recognition of the link between the literal and idiomatic meaning of particles via metaphors has been a major contribution of cognitive linguistics to a better understanding of the meanings of phrasal verbs. More up-to-date dictionaries, such as *MacMillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* (2005) have also attempted to integrate the results of research done by cognitive linguists who took up the challenge of the alleged arbitrariness of particle, prepositional usage and demonstrated that their meanings are highly structured. As a result, we can find a detailed semantic analysis of the most common particles (*around, away, back, down, in, into, off, on, out, over, through* and *up*) in this dictionary. Using diagrams and tables, the dictionary reveals the relationship between the literal and figurative meanings of these particles. From these networks of meanings it becomes clear that in most cases the idiomatic meanings are the metaphorical extensions of the literal ones.

2.2. Syntactic properties

One of the most common errors students make is that of syntax, which is due to the fact that sometimes the same particle functions either as a preposition or an adverbial particle and it has an important significance to the word order. Compare the different grammatical function of *on* in the following pairs of sentences (*Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* 2002: 410-411):

The machine *turns on* a central pivot. (rotates)

Pop music *turns on* many young people. (stimulates, excites)

There is certainly a difference of function here: the NP cannot precede *on* in the first sentence, but it can in the second:

*The machine *turns* a central pivot *on*.

Pop music *turns* many young people *on*.

Further evidence of the difference is the contrastive positioning of the pronouns 'it' and 'them' in the two sentences:

The machine *turns on* it.

Pop music *turns* them *on*.

It is on basis of such criteria that *on* can be said to function as a preposition in the first example and as an adverb (or adverbial particle) in the second.

Consider now the following sentences:

She *turned on* the shower.

She *turned* the shower *on*.

She *turned* it *on*.

Interestingly enough, *turn on* is less idiomatic in the above examples than in *Pop music turns many people on*, nevertheless it has no bearing on the grammatical status of the particle, *on* is also an adverb here.

Consider also examples like:

Amir's dogs *turned on* their master and tore him to pieces. (attack violently)

Danny *turned on* her, accusing her of betraying him. (suddenly start angrily criticizing sy)

The whole issue *turn on* the question of finances. (its success depends on)

For a moment my thoughts *turned on* that gross and stupid man. (be concerned with)

The meanings of *turn on* in the above examples are idiomatic unlike in *The machine turns on a central pivot*, still *on* is also a preposition in all three of them. In fact, the idiomatic/non-idiomatic contrast does not seem to have an impact on whether a preposition or an adverb is in the combination.

Like *on* in the above examples, numerous other particles can function both as an adverb or a preposition, for example: *about, across, along, around, by, down, off, over, through* and *up*. It may be no problem for a native speaker of English but it is really bewildering for an EFL learner. In such cases, course books and grammar books usually recommend them to turn to a good dictionary, which will tell them if a particle is a preposition or an adverb.

In theory, particle movement is allowed only in the case of transitive verb + adverb construction where the particle is an adverb, but even Quirk et al. (1985: 1155) refer to examples when some phrasal verbs do not allow the possibility of placing the adverbial particle after the object NP:

They had *given up* hope. ~ ? They had *given hope up*.

They laid *down* their *arms*? They *laid* their arms *down*.

Conversely, some phrasal verbs do not easily allow the placement of particles before the NP object:

I was *crying* my eyes *out*. *I was *crying out* my eyes.

I was *laughing* my head *off*. *I was *laughing off* my head.

There are several factors that govern the word-order alternation in the case of transitive phrasal verbs when the object is a NP (Chen 1986: 97; Quirk et al. 1985: 1154-55; Gries 1999: 110, etc.):

- Particle movement is not possible with contrastively stressed direct object NPs:
He *bought back* the book. *He *brought* the book *back*.
- The length or complexity of the DO is also an obstacle for particle movement:
No one *brought up* the questions everyone most wanted to hear asked.
*No one *brought* the questions everyone most wanted to hear asked *up*.
- The presence of a directional adverbial after the construction can also be a determining factor of the order of the direct object NP and the particle:
He *put* the bag *down* onto the floor.
*He *put down* the bag onto the floor.
- The co-ordination of particles also requires avoiding the VAO order:
I *switched* the light *on and off*.
? I *switched on and off* the light.
- When the pronouns are coordinated, the particle precedes them:
Bring along him and her.
His scheme was to *show up* you and me as a liar.
- Finally, idiomaticity is also a crucial factor that governs the order of elements:
VAO order tends to occur where there is a strong idiomatic bond between the phrasal verb and the O:
She *eked out* a poor existence/her salary/a living by selling flowers.
*She *eked a poor existence/her salary/ a living out* by selling flowers.

Consider other examples with a fully idiomatic meaning like *bring in a verdict, drum up support, gum up the works, hand in your notice, hold down a job, live out your dreams, put in an appearance, rip up the notebook, shut up the shop, strike up a friendship, turn over a new leaf* and *take up arms*, etc. where the particle is never separated from the verb by an object NP.

2.3. Stylistic and regional varieties

It is often said that phrasal verbs are largely informal or spoken in register. As Live (1965: 429) and Lipka (1972: 161) observe, the word-formative productivity of phrasal verbs is more active in slang than in standard usage, and it seems to be considerably greater in American English.

The authors of the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (1995: iv) also remark in their foreword that phrasal verbs tend to be rather 'colloquial' or 'informal' and more appropriate to spoken than written English. Although many phrasal verbs are used primarily in informal or spoken contexts, it is misleading to emphasise this as one of their most distinctive features. As pointed out by Malcolm Goodale (1993: iv), the author of the *Collins Cobuild Phrasal Verbs Workbook*, it is a common misconception that phrasal verbs are mostly used in the spoken language. They can be found in many styles of writing, including highly formal government reports. Consider the following examples (*Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*, 2002):

- Informal: *gobble up* (use a lot of sth, especially money), *jabber away* (speak quickly in a way that is difficult to understand), *loaf about/around* (spend your time doing very little) and *swill down* (drink a large amount of alcohol quickly), etc.;
- Formal: *call forth* (make sth exist or happen), *rejoice in* (be very happy about sth) and *preside over* (be in charge of and event; a company), etc.;
- Slang: *piss away* (waste a large amount of money), *screw about/around* (treat sy badly by changing your mind a lot) and *squeal on* (tell sy in authority about someone who has done sth wrong), etc.

There are some differences in the set of phrasal verbs in the national standards of English such as British English, American English and Australian English. Consider the following examples (*Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* 2006):

- BrE: *lie up* (hide from people who are looking from you), *parcel up* (wrap and make it into a parcel) and *tail back* (form a long line and move very slowly (traffic), etc.
- AE: *brace up* (feel more hopeful about a situation), *face off* (disagree and start to fight) and *scout up* (try to find sth or sy you need), etc.
- AustE: *bail up* (make sy late) and *belt into* (begin to do sth quickly and with a lot of effort), etc.
- British informal: *bunk off* (stay away from school or work), *crack on* (continue what you are doing with energy and enthusiasm) and *rabbit on* (talk for a long time about things that are not interesting to other people), etc.
- British slang: *Naff off!* (tell sy very rudely to go away), *Leave it out!* (stop doing) and *skin up* (make a cigarette using marijuana), etc.
- American informal: *dummy up* (stay silent and refuse to say anything), *mellow out* (relax and stop worrying) and *pork out* (eat a lot of food), etc.
- American slang: *cat around* (have sex with many different people), *fink on* (give sy secret information about someone else) and *scarf down* (eat or drink very quickly), etc.
- Australian informal: *bugger up* (spoil sth or do it very badly), *Eff off!* (tell sy very rudely to go away) and *goof off* (avoid work), etc.

- Australian slang: *frig around with* (have a sexual relationship with sy who is not your regular sex partner) and *Rack off!* (tell sy very rudely to go away), etc.

As is evident from the above examples, phrasal verbs tend to occur in different styles ranging from formal through informal style to even slang, where they are especially active.

In addition, phrasal verbs are used in various types of text including business, work, study, journalism, sport pop music and even technical language, etc. Consider the following examples related to work and business (English Phrasal Verbs in Use Advanced 2007: 68, 74):

Work

farm out (a task) (give work to other people instead of doing it yourself)

step aside (leave a job or a position especially so that someone else can do it)

slog away (keep working hard especially for a long time)

get passed over for promotion (are not given a higher position because it is given to someone else)

pack this job in (*inf.* stopping doing something, especially a job)

hand in his notice (tell your employer that you will leaving your job soon)

plug away (work hard at something for a long time)

beaver away (*inf.* work hard at something for a long time)

fling yourself into your work (start to spend a lot of time and energy doing something)

cobble something together (make something quickly and not very carefully)

coast along (do only the things that you have to do without trying to go faster or be more successful)

knuckle down (start to work or study hard especially if you have not been working hard before)

cut out for teaching/nursing (have the right qualities for something, especially for a job)

get off (*inf.* leave the place where you work usually at the end of the day)

ease off (start to work less or do things with less energy)

Business

head up a company (be in charge of)

buy out a rival (buy a company so that you own all of it)

hive off its residential department (separate one part of the company from the rest)

set somebody up with restaurants (given them the money to start a business)

break into a new market/work in the media (become involved in a type of business or activity that is difficult to become involved in)

bring in customers, clients (attract people encouraging them to buy products or services)

bring out a new product/a book (produce something to sell to the public)

deal in art/arms/drugs (buy or sell particular goods as a business)

sign up a new employee/ a film star/a basketball player (get someone to sign a document stating they will work for you)

turn out cars/films/computers (make or produce something for sale)

turn over £ 6 million (generate a specific amount of money in a particular time)

Pop music also abounds in phrasal verbs as illustrated by the following examples taken from *Runnin' Down a Dream* by Tom Petty and the Heatbreakers – (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LkaVSVdOD9gyou t>):

It was a beautiful day, the sun *beat down*
I *had* the radio *on*, I was drivin'
Trees *flew by*, me and Del were singin' little *Runaway*
I was flyin'
Yeah *runnin' down* a dream
That never would come to me
Workin' on a mystery, goin' wherever it leads
Runnin' down a dream

As the above examples demonstrate, phrasal verbs are found in all types of text and are essential for expressing many ideas in natural English.

2.4. Single-word equivalents

It is also often stated that phrasal verbs are very frequently synonymous with simple verbs of Romance origin, e.g.; *blow up* ~ *explode*, *cut down* ~ *reduce*, *go in/come in* ~ *enter*, *do away with* ~ *eliminate*, *hand in* ~ *submit*, *put off* ~ *postpone*, *back up* ~ *support*, *put out* ~ *extinguish* and *wipe out* ~ *eradicate*, etc. But in many cases phrasal verbs and their synonyms have different ranges of use, meaning, or collocation, so that a single-word synonym cannot be substituted appropriately for a phrasal verb. Single-word equivalents are often much more formal in style than phrasal verbs, so that they seem out of place in many contexts, e.g.: *retreat* is more formal than *back away*; *protrude* is more formal than *stick out* and *demolish* is more formal than *pull down*, etc.

Recognising the importance of semantic relations between phrasal verbs and their single-word equivalents, up-to-date dictionaries, such as *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* (2005) and *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary for Learners of English* (2006) provide learners with some useful information about it. *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* (2005: 515-522) has an index of single-word equivalents, which lists over 1,000 English verbs and – for each one – gives one or more phrasal verbs that express the same meaning. It, however, pointed out that it is rare for two words to be exact equivalents as the meaning of one word may be more limited than the meaning of the other (e.g. *resemble* ~ *take after*, with the latter being used only to talk about people in the same family who resemble each other) or there is often a difference in register (e.g. *discharge* ~ *carry out*, with the former being a rather formal word meaning 'to do something that you have a responsibility to do').

A unique feature of the *Oxford Phrasal Verbs for Learners of English* dictionary (2006) is that it does not just provide learners with a list of verbs with related meanings as *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* does, but in many cases it also gives a detailed analysis of the difference between them, in terms of meaning, register and collocation. Consider the following example (*Oxford Phrasal Verbs for Learners of English* dictionary 2006: 22):

blow (sth) up ~ to be destroyed by an explosion
burst sth ~ to break open or apart, especially because of pressure from inside
explode sth ~ to burst loudly and violently, causing damage, to make something burst in this way
go off (of a bomb) ~ to explode; (of a gun) to be fired

As far as their meaning and register are concerned, it pointed out that *blow up* has a similar meaning to *explode*, but *explode* is more formal. It is possible to say that *a bomb blows up* but it is more common to say that *it explodes or goes off*. Besides, these verbs with related meanings also have typical patterns and collocations:

- *a bomb* explodes/goes off/bursts
- *a car/plane/vehicle* explodes/blows up
- *a fireworks/rocket* explodes/goes off
- *a shell* explodes/bursts

Interestingly enough, it is sometimes possible to match the elements of phrasal verbs and Latinate verbs with more or less the same meaning (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* 1966):

- *descend from* ~ *climb down*
L. *descendere* formed on DE- (off, from) + *scandere* (climb)
- *insert* ~ *put in*
L. *inserere* formed on IN- (in) + *serere* (plant, put into)
- *interrupt* ~ *break in upon*
L. *interrumpere* formed on INTER- (between) + *rumpere* (break)
- *investigate* ~ *search into*
L. *investigāre* formed on IN- (in) + *vestigāre* (track, trace)
- *repel* ~ *drive, force back*
L. *repellere* formed on RE- (back) + *pellere* (drive)
- *subtract* ~ *take away*
L. *subtrahere* formed on SUB- (from/away) + *trahere* (draw)

In contrast to the large number of phrasal verbs, the number of their single-word equivalents is relatively small, which means that there are a lot of things and concepts in English that cannot be expressed in any other way but by phrasal verbs. Besides, as was pointed out above their single-word equivalents often differ in style, their typical objects and subjects and sometimes even in their meaning.

2.5. Phrasal verbs used as nouns

As is evident from the discussion above, verb + particle constructions create special problems for learners of English, mainly because they have special syntactic, semantic and stylistic properties. To make matters worse, some of them are also used as nouns and even in the functions of adjectives. As for their morphology, four major types of phrasal verbs used as nouns can be distinguished (Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 1652-54):

- Unaffixed verb + particle
breakthrough, drop-out, hang-up, lookout, show-off, singalong, tailback
- Particle + unaffixed verb
downturn, intake, offshoot, overpass, outlet, throughput, upturn
- Verbal element carries the – *er* suffix
 - passer-by, hanger-on, getter-up, runner-up, knocker-up*
 - bystander, onlooker, overseer*
- Verbal element carries – *ing* suffix
 - dressing-down, going-over, phasing-out, telling-off, swearing-in*
 - upbringing, uprising, uprooting, outpouring, outgoings*

Not surprisingly, the meaning of most nominalizations – due to their verbal element – is closely related to activities, processes as illustrated in such examples as (Kovács 2007: 110-113): *blast-off* (the movement when the rocket leaves the ground), *lie-in* (a rest by staying in bed later than usual in the morning), *stopover* (a short stay in a particular place between parts of a long journey), *singalong* (an occasion when a group of people sing song together for pleasure), *sit-in* (an event in which people protest against something by staying in a place until they get what

they want), *splashdown* (the landing of a space vehicle in the sea after a flight), *take-off* (beginning of a flight), *take-over* (act of gaining control of a company by buying it) and *tail-off* (the process of slowly becoming smaller in amount), etc.

A lot of phrasal nouns relate to events, situations, such as: *buy-in* (a situation in which a group of managers get some control over a company that they do not work for by investing a lot of money in the company), *mess-up* (a situation in which something has been done badly or wrongly), *round-up* (an occasion when many people are arrested or captured), *set-up* (a situation in which someone makes it seem as if an innocent person has committed a crime) and *stake-out* (a situation in which someone stays hidden near a building in order to watch anyone who enters or leaves it), etc.

Besides activities and events, deverbal nouns sometimes relate to the object or result of the activity, as is evident from examples like: *a blow-up* (a large copy of a photograph), *a handout* (a paper containing a summary of information, or topics which will be dealt with in a lecture or talk), *a fry-up* (a breakfast food, such as bacon and eggs, etc.), *a pin-up* (a photograph of an attractive person that appears in a magazine and that people often stick on a wall), *printout* (paper printed with information from a computer), *a write-off* (a car so badly damaged that it is written off the books of an insurance company) and *a tip-off* (a warning or secret information about sth), etc.

Furthermore, the ones formed with the *-er* suffix refer to people, such as *passer-by* (someone who is walking past a place), *onlooker* (someone who watches something happen but does not take part in it), *bystander* (someone who is in a particular place by chance when an accident or an unusual event happens), *hanger-on* (someone trying to be friendly with a richer or more important person, especially in order to gain an advantage for themselves), *runner-up* (someone who has finished in second place in a race or competition), *overseer* (someone whose job is to make sure that employees are working properly) and *washer-up* (someone who washes up the dishes), etc.

A lot of such nouns are formed by conversion without a suffix, such as *dropout* (someone who drops out of society or education), *gadabout* (someone who goes from place to place enjoying themselves), *layabout* (someone who lays/lies idly about), *pushover* (someone who is easy to influence or persuade), *stand-in* (someone who takes the place of a main actor in a particular scene of a film, especially a dangerous scene), *runaway* (someone who has left their home or escaped from somewhere), *stowaway* (someone who hides on a ship, plane or other vehicle so that they can travel without permission and without paying), *tearaway* (a young person who behaves badly and often gets into trouble), *show-off* (someone who tries to get attention and praise from other people by showing how clever they are), *castaway* (someone who has been left on an island surrounded by sea and cannot get away) and *outcast* (someone that other people will not accept as a member of society), etc.

Some of them relate to places, for example: *lockup* (a small prison in a village or town, where the police can keep a criminal for a short period of time), *checkout* (the place where you pay in a supermarket or other large shop), *hangout* (a place where a particular group of people like to spend time), *hideaway* (a private place where someone goes to relax or to be away from other people), *lay-by* (a space next to the road where vehicles can stop), *outlet* (a shop, company, or organisation through which products are sold), *pull-in* (a cafe on a main road where you can get

cheap meals) and *take-away* (a shop or restaurant that sells meals to be eaten somewhere else), etc. It is noteworthy, however, that the phrasal nouns that relate to people and places often tend to be dialectical, idiomatic, and slangy.

3. Conclusion

The specific area of phrasal verbs or multi-word verbs within lexis is of particular importance and forms a particular problem for language learners. As we can see above, phrasal verbs or can be problematic for learners in several ways. No doubt their semantics causes the most difficulties as their meanings are not transparent in the majority of cases. The fact that most of them are polysemous also adds to their complexity. However, there is often a connection between the literal and idiomatic meanings of the particles via metaphorization forming a network of related meanings. The recognition of these links can considerably contribute to a better understanding of the meanings of phrasal verbs.

As for their syntax, particle placement is often governed by identifiable factors, such as the length of the NP, co-ordination of the particles or pronouns or idiomaticity, etc. Dictionaries of phrasal verbs are of great help to solve the mystery of both the multiple meanings and the word-order problems of verb+particle constructions.

The conversion possibilities of phrasal verbs into nouns and adjectives also prove that phrasal verbs are very productive in English. From the point of view of meaning, phrasal nouns can relate to actions, situations, the object or result of an activity, places or people.

It is also true that quite many phrasal verbs have a single word equivalent but in most cases they cannot replace each other since they differ considerably in terms of their style, register and collocation. Furthermore, phrasal verbs seem to occur mostly in informal style and in the spoken language, but it does not mean that they are not used in formal writings.

To make things worse, the set of English phrasal verbs is constantly growing and changing. On one hand, some of them become old fashioned just like: *peg away*, *rave it up*, *rig out*, *rub along*, *set to* and *shift for*, etc. On the other hand, new combinations appear and spread, which are particularly common in informal language, just like *big up*, *chill out*, *hype up*, *max out*, *rock up*, *sex up* and *veg out*, etc. The development of computer science has also brought a lot of new phrasal verbs into English, for example: *back up*, *boot up*, *connect up*, *dial into*, *hack into*, *key in/into*, *log in/into*, *log on/onto*, *log off*, *print out*, *power up*, *phish for* and *text back*, etc. In fact, many new combinations of verbs and particles arise from a creative use of English. Interestingly enough, in most cases new phrasal verbs are formed either from new combinations of existing verbs and particles, or through existing phrasal verbs acquiring new meanings. For example, the phrasal verb *bump someone off* originally meant 'to murder someone'. In its new meaning illustrated by 'I was *bumped off* the Net' it refers to the situation where the connection between a person's computer and the Internet is unexpectedly broken. Thus, new phrasal verbs also pose another challenge for not only foreign learners of English but also for lexicographers and course-book writers.

Nevertheless, phrasal verbs were a kind of Cinderella for lexicographers until the 1970s. In fact, the first dictionary of phrasal verbs appeared only in 1974 with the title *Collins Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs and Their Idioms* edited by Tom McArthur

and Beryl Atkins. Since then most important publishers have had their dictionary of phrasal verbs published, such as *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English. Volume 1: Verbs with Prepositions and Particles* (1975). *Longman Phrasal Verbs Dictionary* (1983), *Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (1995, 2002), *Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (1993), *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary for Learners of English* (2001, 2006), *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* (2005) and *Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (1997, 2006). Such a dictionary is an invaluable aid for any learner who wants to use phrasal verbs with confidence.

It is heartening news for both learners and teachers of English that besides the dictionaries of phrasal verbs there are also some useful workbooks available to master phrasal verbs, for example Seidl, J. (1990). *English Idioms: Exercises on Phrasal Verbs*, Allshop, J. (1990) *Test Your Phrasal Verbs*, Gooddale, M. (1993/1995) *Collins Cobuild Phrasal Verbs Workbook*, Workman, G. (1993) *Phrasal Verbs and Idioms*, Milton, J., B. Blake and V. Evans (2000) *A Good Turn of Phrase Advanced Practice in Phrasal Verbs and Prepositional Phrases*, Dilys, P. (2005) *Really learn 100 phrasal verbs*, McCarthy, Michael and Felicity O'Dell (2004) *English Phrasal Verbs in Use Intermediate* and McCarthy and Michael & Felicity O'Dell (2007) *English Phrasal Verbs in Use Advanced*.

Although phrasal verbs pose special problems for both learners and teachers of English, their productivity and complexity makes them a fascinating area for a linguist to study.

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