

APPROACHES TO THE CLASSIFICATION OF ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS AND THEIR PEDAGOGICAL RELEVANCE

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Abstract

Phrasal verbs exhibit exceptional complexity and idiosyncratic features that complicate both their classification and the derivation of their context-dependent meanings. These inherent characteristics preclude the categorization of phrasal verbs alongside other phraseological units, serving as a catalyst for ongoing and unresolved debates among linguists. This article aims to provide a comprehensive classification of English phrasal verbs, highlighting their linguistic properties and pedagogical relevance.

Key words: *phrasal verbs, classification, phraseological units, theory, postpositions*

Аннотация

Фразовые глаголы обладают исключительной сложностью, индивидуальными особенностями, затрудняющими их классификацию и значения, которые следует выводить в зависимости от контекста. Данная статья направлена на предоставление всесторонней классификации английских фразовых глаголов, подчеркивая их лингвистические свойства и педагогическую значимость.

Ключевые слова: *фразовые глаголы, классификация, фразеологические единицы, теория, послелого*

Annotatsiya

Frazali fe'llar o'zining favqulodda murakkabligi va idiosinkratik xususiyatlari bilan ajralib turadi, bu esa ularni tasniflashni hamda kontekstga bog'liq ma'nolarini aniqlashni qiyinlashtiradi. Ushbu maqola ingliz tili frazali fe'llarining lisoniy xususiyatlari va pedagogik ahamiyatini yoritib bergan holda, ularning har tomonlama tasnifini taqdim etishni maqsad qilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: frazal glagollar, klassifikatsiya, frazeologik birliklar, nazariya, postpozitsiyalar

Introduction

The study of phrasal verbs occupies a central place in the teaching of English as a foreign language, particularly in higher education contexts where learners are expected to achieve both linguistic accuracy and communicative competence. Phrasal verbs, which consist of a verb combined with one or more particles, often present significant challenges for learners due to their multi-word structure, idiomatic usage, and frequent metaphorical meanings. Effective instruction in phrasal verbs requires not only familiarity with their literal and figurative senses but also a clear

understanding of their grammatical behavior, including transitivity and separability. Furthermore, understanding the semantic and structural patterns of phrasal verbs can enhance learners' ability to infer meaning from context, thereby facilitating more effective communication.

Methods

It should also be noted that the majority of phraseological units lack a precise 'definitional word'—that is, a direct lexical synonym—as they often lose their primary literal meaning. According to Charles Bally's identification theory, the most universal criterion for a phraseological unit is the presence or absence of a single-word substitute. Nevertheless, over 89% of phrasal verbs, for instance, can be replaced by either a single word or an independent phrase.

The table below illustrates a range of classifications proposed by both Russian and foreign linguists, grounded in the most fundamental taxonomies of phraseological units:

E.I. Anichkov (1997)	• A semantic classification of phrasal verbs based on the meanings expressed by postpositives (particles)
J. Povey (2009)	• A classification of phrasal verbs based on the morphological form and type of the postpositive
I.V. Arnold (2012)	• A grammatical and syntactic classification of phrasal verbs.

Table 1.

Results

One approach to classifying the phrasal verb as a distinct phraseological unit is as follows:

Phrasal verbs reducible to a polysemantic single-word equivalent: This category includes units that can be substituted by a single verb without loss of meaning, such as to call off (cancel), and to carry out (execute).

PVs characterized by idiomaticity (semantic opacity): the constituent components merge to form a new, holistic meaning. Individual semantics of verb + particle do not correlate with the resulting conceptual value of the pv, as in leave out (omit), make out (discern/see).

The spatial or directional orientation of the particle, which determines the overall semantic weight of the phrasal verb

Table 2.

The aforementioned partial and non-exhaustive criteria, which highlight the specific attributes and characteristics of phrasal verbs, serve as a basis for their categorization across various hierarchical levels.

Although phrasal verbs share significant commonalities with other classes of phraseological units, they do not belong to any of them; rather, they constitute a distinct and specific linguistic group [3]. Furthermore, the relevance and prevalence of phrasal verbs are attributable to the emergence of novel meanings and expanding domains of application. There are several criteria by which phrasal verbs are classified:

- ✓ Types of phrasal verbs (or Typology of phrasal verbs);
- ✓ Domains of application (or Functional spheres);
- ✓ Structural composition (or Morphosyntactic structure);
- ✓ Stylistic features (or Stylistic properties) [3].

Upon reviewing the classification of phraseological units, it can be concluded that they are primarily categorized according to two principal criteria:

- ✓ Lexico-semantic;
- ✓ Structural-grammatical [5].

In accordance with I. V. Arnold, who originally proposed the structural-grammatical classification, phrasal verbs can be divided into three subgroups:

- ✓ Prepositional verbs constructed according to the [verb + preposition] pattern, which constitutes an inseparable unit within the sentence structure:

He doesn't believe in coincidences.

Their decision will depend on the exam results.

- ✓ Phrasal verbs — these are verbs characterized by the [verb + adverb] pattern, which are categorized as either transitive or intransitive based on the presence of a direct object:

I picked my friend up from the library and gave him a lift home.

Let's meet over coffee soon so that we can catch up!

- ✓ Phrasal-prepositional verbs — these are verbs consisting of three elements: a phrasal verb followed by two postpositives (particles):

She should better come up with a better excuse than that.

We are looking forward to seeing you at the party [1].

Following the approach of I.V. Arnold and J. Povey, we have classified phrasal verbs into three groups based on the forms of their postpositions. Let us analyze J. Povey's sub-categorization in the following table, using specific examples:

PV examples	Particles	
	Adverbial	Prepositional
To hold on	+	
To put on		+
To put up with	+	+
To fall down	+	
To call off		+
To get out of	+	+

Table 3.

J. Povey further emphasizes that the grammatical propriety of phrasal verbs exerts a significant influence not on the semantics themselves, but rather on the 'emotional intensity of the utterance [4].

Another classification based on semantic criteria, proposed by the linguists T.B. Pivonenkova and A.R. Zabolotskaya, offers a more comprehensive and detailed—though not always pragmatic—method for studying phrasal verbs. Pivonenkova categorized phrasal verbs as 'verb-adverbial' units, consisting of a verb and a prepositional adverb. The following factors served as the primary criteria for this classification. Here is the academic translation for the semantic categories proposed by Pivonenkova and Zabolotskaya:

- ✓ Phrasal verbs characterizing personal states (including physical and emotional well-being);
- ✓ Success and failure;
- ✓ Interpersonal relationships;
- ✓ Social behavior;
- ✓ Inception and termination of actions (aspectual characteristics);
- ✓ Mental operations (cognitive processes).

A.R. Zabolotskaya presented a broader classificatory range, distinguishing between composite and non-composite verbs. The category of composite phrasal verbs includes the following types of particles:

- ✓ Directional (directional particles), for example: 'to come out', 'to go away';
- ✓ Aspectual (aspectual particles), for example: 'to cry out', 'to finish up'

Non-composite phrasal verbs possess idiomatic properties, which prevents the meaning from being discerned from their individual components. The aforementioned points allow us to classify phrasal verbs according to semantic factors as follows:

- ✓ Phrasal verbs combining a postpositive with a verb of broad semantic extension (e.g., “give up”, “make out”).
- ✓ Phrasal verbs combining a postpositive with a verb possessing monolexemic features. In such cases, the meaning of the entire unit is predictable from its components (e.g., “to breathe out”, “to go away”, “to get ahead”).
- ✓ Phrasal verbs combining a postpositive with a verb possessing monolexemic features and a metaphorical meaning. This allows the verb to semantically dominate the particle (e.g., “to breeze in”, “to weed out”)
- ✓ Phrasal verbs combining a postpositive with a verb possessing monolexemic features and a metaphorical meaning, which allows the verb to semantically dominate the particle. In this configuration, the meaning of the particle is significantly weakened (e.g., “to chew through/away/into”, “to bubble over/under”).
- ✓ Phrasal verbs combining the particle “up” with a verb possessing monolexemic features. This subcategory is established based on the framework proposed by Smirnitsky, who identified the syntactic pattern of [verb + adverb “up”]. In such units, the meaning of the particle is virtually negligible, resulting in the absolute semantic dominance of the verbal component (e.g., “to bottle up”, “to speak up”, “to bubble up”) [3].

The authors of the well-known Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus dictionary direct the reader's attention to a semantic classification of the most active particles, organizing them into a group of twelve [2]. We present the classification in the following table, accompanied by illustrative sentences, to provide a clearer understanding of these distinctions:

Meaning	Postposition	Example
(Increasing/decreasing)	<i>Up, down, out</i>	<i>Warm up, speak up, slow down</i>
(Happiness and sadness)	<i>Up, down</i>	<i>Get down, weigh down, cheer up</i>
(Completeness)	<i>Up</i>	<i>Clean up, add up, drink up</i>

(Ending)	<i>Down, away, off, out</i>	<i>Fade away, end off</i>
(Time: past, future)	<i>Back, behind, forward, ahead</i>	<i>Bring forward, put back</i>

Table 4

Another general classification of phrasal verbs also drew our attention as a basic introduction to the unit:

I. Transitive phrasal verbs, which require a direct object, for example, “shut down something.”

II. Intransitive phrasal verbs, which do not require a direct object, for example, “break down.”

III. Transitive phrasal verbs are further subdivided into two categories:

1. Inseparable phrasal verbs: the direct object cannot be placed between the elements of the phrasal verb, e.g., come across. This category includes all transitive and some partially intransitive verbs.
2. Separable phrasal verbs: the direct object can be placed between the elements of the separable phrasal verb, e.g., turn up the music – turn the music up. This category includes only transitive verbs.

Another simple but highly important classification of phrasal verb combinations is based on monosemy and polysemy of phrasal verbs.

However, if a phrasal verb is polysemous, it has multiple meanings that can be inferred from the context:

- ✓ They worked out well;
- ✓ They worked out the problem;
- ✓ He worked out in the gym;
- ✓ The final price works out at 20 dollars.

Discussion

Linguistic features can vary and be perceived differently. Some features of the world’s languages are universal or shared and follow similar rules of language use, while other features are individual and rarely occur—or may not exist at all—in other languages due to their specific and unique characteristics. Universal and shared features are the rules of language that govern the grammatical, semantic, and phonetic processes underlying the functioning of the entire linguistic system.

Guessing or memorizing phrasal verbs is often a challenging task. This is because their meanings may seem unrelated to the combination of words that form them. In fact, many phrasal verbs carry a metaphorical meaning, also known as idiomatic or figurative meaning. Understanding and using them becomes easier if one recognizes the connection between the components of the verb and the metaphor they represent. Typically, phrasal verbs that have both literal and metaphorical meanings

are used in specific contexts that help determine the intended sense. For example, the phrasal verb dig up primarily refers to a physical action when used literally, as in: He would dig up the plant himself.

Conclusion

Phrasal verbs represent a complex but essential component of the English lexicon, and their systematic classification has significant implications for language pedagogy. By distinguishing between transitive and intransitive verbs, separable and inseparable forms, and monosemous and polysemous meanings, educators can provide students with clear guidelines for usage and comprehension. Incorporating both literal and metaphorical meanings into instruction allows learners to develop nuanced language skills and apply phrasal verbs appropriately in diverse communicative situations. Ultimately, a structured understanding of phrasal verbs not only aids memorization and contextual usage but also strengthens students' overall linguistic intuition. For pedagogical practice, this means that teaching phrasal verbs should move beyond rote learning to include semantic mapping, contextual exercises, and visual or metaphor-based strategies.

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