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## SEMANTIC PECULIARITIES OF PHRASAL VERBS IN ENGLISH

### *Abstract*

English phrasal verbs are one of the key and difficult parts in English learning. Since the traditional linguistics holds that English phrasal verb is an integral thing that cannot be analyzed, learners can only perform rote tasks of memorization which is time-consuming and inefficient. However, cognitive linguistics holds that the semantics of phrasal verbs and their constituents, verbs and particles, are both prescriptive and analytical. These dual attributes of phrasal verbs require researchers using the relevant theories of cognitive linguistics to analyze the semantics of phrasal verbs, so that learners can master phrasal verbs systematically and efficiently. The research deals with classifications of phrasal verbs into lexico-semantic groups and their further division into subgroups. It is concluded that the adverbial element should be brought more into the limelight as shaping the semantic pattern of the phrasal construction and its functioning in speech.

**Keywords:** English, phrasal verbs, semantic, idiomatic, semantic analysis

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## АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІНДЕГІ ФРАЗАЛЫҚ ЕТІСТІКТЕРДІҢ СЕМАНТИКАЛЫҚ ЕРЕШЕЛІКТЕРІ

### Аңдатпа

Ағылшын фразалық етістіктері ағылшын тілін үйренудің негізгі және қиын бөліктерінің бірі болып табылады. Дәстүрлі лингвистика ағылшын фразалық етістігін талдауға болмайтын маңызды нәрсе деп санайтындықтан, студенттер тек уақытты қажет ететін және тиімсіз болатын зубрежкамен айналыса алады. Алайда, когнитивті лингвистика фразалық етістіктердің және олардың құрамдас бөліктерінің, етістіктер мен бөлшектердің семантикасы рецептивті де, аналитикалық да деп санайды. Фразалық етістіктердің бұл қос атрибуттары студенттерге фразалық етістіктерді жүйелі және тиімді игере алатындай етіп, когнитивті лингвистиканың тиісті теорияларын, фразалық етістіктердің семантикасын талдауды қолданатын зерттеушілерден талап етеді.

Мақалада фразалық етістіктердің лексикалық-семантикалық топтарға жіктелуі және оларды одан әрі кіші топтарға бөлу қарастырылады. Адвербиалды элементті фразалық құрылымның семантикалық үлгісін және оның сөйлеудегі қызметін қалыптастырушы ретінде тану туралы қорытынды жасалады.

**Түйін сөздер:** ағылшын тілі, фразалық етістіктер, семантика, идиома, семантикалық талдау

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## СЕМАНТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ФРАЗОВЫХ ГЛАГОЛОВ В АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

### Аннотация

Английские фразовые глаголы являются одной из ключевых и трудных частей в изучении английского языка. Поскольку традиционная лингвистика считает, что английский фразовый глагол—это неотъемлемая вещь, которую нельзя анализировать, учащиеся могут выполнять только зубрежку, что отнимает много времени и неэффективно. Однако когнитивная лингвистика считает, что семантика фразовых глаголов и их составных частей, глаголов и частиц, является как предписывающей, так и аналитической. Эти двойные атрибуты фразовых глаголов требуют от исследователей, использующих соответствующие теории когнитивной лингвистики, анализа семантики фразовых глаголов, чтобы учащиеся могли систематически и эффективно овладеть фразовыми глаголами. В статье рассматриваются классификации фразовых глаголов на лексико-семантические группы и их дальнейшее деление на подгруппы. Делается вывод о том, что адвербиальный элемент должен быть в большей степени привлечен в центр внимания как формирующий семантический паттерн фразовой конструкции и ее функционирование в речи.

**Ключевые слова:** английский язык, фразовые глаголы, семантика, идиоматический, семантический анализ

**Introduction.** Studying English, it is impossible to do without a certain number of phrasal verbs which are frequently used mostly in conversational speech. However, most students consider it quite difficult and avoid using them, which impoverishes their speech significantly. Nevertheless, phrasal verbs make an essential part of informal conversational English that is necessary to learn theoretically and practically in some degree. Studying phrasal verbs is important for grammatically correct speaking. The term “phrasal verbs” first used in print by Logan Pearsall Smith, in Words

and Idioms (1925), in which he states that the Editor Henry Bradley suggested the term to him. Phrasal verbs were found in Middle English, common in Shakespeare, and often used to define verbs of Latin origin. The famous lexicographer of the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson, was one of the first to consider these formations carefully

Dwight Bolinger, in *The Phrasal Verb in English*, answers the question of why there are so many of these formations in English. He states, "They are words. The everyday inventor is not required to reach for elements such as roots and affixes that have no reality for him. It takes only a rough familiarity with other uses of "head" and "off" to make them available for "head off", virtually self-suggesting when the occasion for them comes up, which is not true of learned formations like intercept"[1, 13]

The phrasal verb can be replaced by a "simple" verb. It characterizes a phrasal verb as semantic unity:

*call up – telephone*

*come by – obtain*

*put off – postpone*

*put up with – tolerate.*

But this criterion is not common for all phrasal verbs since the equivalent of many phrasal verbs is a word-combination:

*break down – stop functioning*

*make up – apply cosmetics*

*take off – of a plane – leave the ground.*

The next peculiarity is idiomatic. An idiom is a combination of two or more words, whose meaning does not coincide with the meaning of its components. Many phrasal verbs have meanings which are impossible to deduce from the values of its components.

For example:

*bring up – educate*

*give up – stop doing, using, etc.*

*go off – explode, ring*

*come by – obtain.*

It is difficult to define the meaning of an idiomatic verb.

So, for example the verbs "fall down" and "pull off", on the one hand, don't possess any idiomatic meaning. For example:

*fall down – to fall*

*pull off – to remove, pull down*

But these verbs have also the following dictionary values.

*fall down*– 1) to admire (to someone in power), 2) to fail, unsuccessfully to terminate

*pull off*– 1) to achieve, despite difficulties, 2) to win (a prize, competition)

So, the given property is not the core for phrasal verbs.

Sometimes the value of a verb can be deduced from its components. Some phrasal verbs have two and more meanings, one of which is idiomatic, while the others can be easily deduced from their components.

The next property of a phrasal verb is the possibility to have adverbial postposition before and after a noun used with the given verb. For object the final position bears important semantic loading, therefore if addition does not bear the new or important information, usually it settles down interposition. For example:

*Call him up or call up him (not his sister)*

If the object is expressed by several words, it, most likely, will be taking a final position. For example:

*He put on the coat he had bought in London.*

If the object is expressed by a pronoun, it always is interposition.

For example: *He took his coat and put it on.*

Classifying phrasal verbs in terms of their semantics, which takes into account the initial meaning of the components and the derived meaning that occurs after the combination of the verb and the particle [2, p.302]. It is common to divide phrasal verbs into 2 major semantic categories: compositional and non-compositional or idiomatic.

Non-compositional phrasal verbs are a perfect type of vocabulary items to be included in dictionaries and lexicons. These structures are semantically complete which contributes to their syntactic isolation as phrases. A case in point is ‘phrasal-prepositional’ verbs, which consist of a verb, a phrasal adverb, and a phrasal preposition, e.g., “put up with” (“You see what I have to put up with!”), “get away with” (“I don’t know how they managed to get away with paying such low wages”), ‘walk out on’ (“Her husband walked out on her”) [3, 15].

The feature of compositionality is concerned with the connection between discrete words and meanings within a phrase. Some phrasal items allow for compositional reading, while others (idioms proper) do not. Compositionally built-up language presupposes “alternating grammatical and lexical elements to express meanings and their relationships to one another” [4, 293]. The meaning of compositional phrasal verbs has semantic and syntactic aspects. We speak of syntactic, not phraseological meaning in this case, which is defined as the functional meaning of a given item determined by the parameters of the situation.

Schneider (2004) says that phrasal verbs for example *find out* or *call off*, are verb-particle combinations, which are frequently semantically not transparent at all and strongly idiomatic, so the combination of two words to a new, complex lexical unit is practically complete. Bowen & et al. (1985) state that the phrasal verb is often made up of a content word and one or more particles. Phrasal verbs are especially rich in oral communication. Although native speakers of English have no difficulty with them, the learners of English as a second language find them complicated, difficult and hard to learn or memorize. Wallace (1982) explains a phrasal verb as a verb and a preposition or an adverb creating a meaning different from the original verb. Phrasal verbs are structural units like prepositional phrases. The main difference between them is that prepositional verbs cannot be separated.

**Methods.** Descriptive method helps to present relevant theoretical background. Analytic method provides with the opportunities to analyze the specific examples and the Internet sources, collecting information, sorting out and describing are helpful in our investigation of the problem.

**Research results.** To help students understand better how phrasal verbs function in the modern English language, we give students a short lecture on the semantic analysis of phrasal verbs. The procedure is presented in detail in. The purpose of the lecture is to motivate students to use phrasal verbs more frequently and in the proper context. At the end of the lecture, we present the results of the semantic analysis of phrasal verbs randomly selected from some modern novels. All the phrasal verbs have been classified into 5 groups.

*Group 1* contains phrasal verbs that do not have equivalent one-word verbs, for example, *check into*, *get up* etc. It is practically impossible to substitute any of them by one word only.

*Group 2* contains phrasal verbs that have synonyms among one-word verbs, but they cannot be considered closely equivalent. For example, *root out* is synonymous with *destroy*, but they are not equivalent because *root out* means *destroy something unwanted*.

*Group 3* includes phrasal verbs which have one-word equivalents, for example, *find out* (the equivalent is *discover*).

*Group 4* contains phrasal verbs which have equivalent phrasal verbs or idiomatic expressions, for example, *put down* in the meaning *record in writing* (the equivalents are *jot down*, *note down*, *take down*, *write down*)

*Group 5* contains new phrasal verbs or phrasal verbs with a new meaning or combination of two meanings.

The distribution of phrasal verbs among these groups is shown in the diagram (Figure 1), phrasal verbs being selected from the novel ‘The Hours’ by Michael Cunningham:

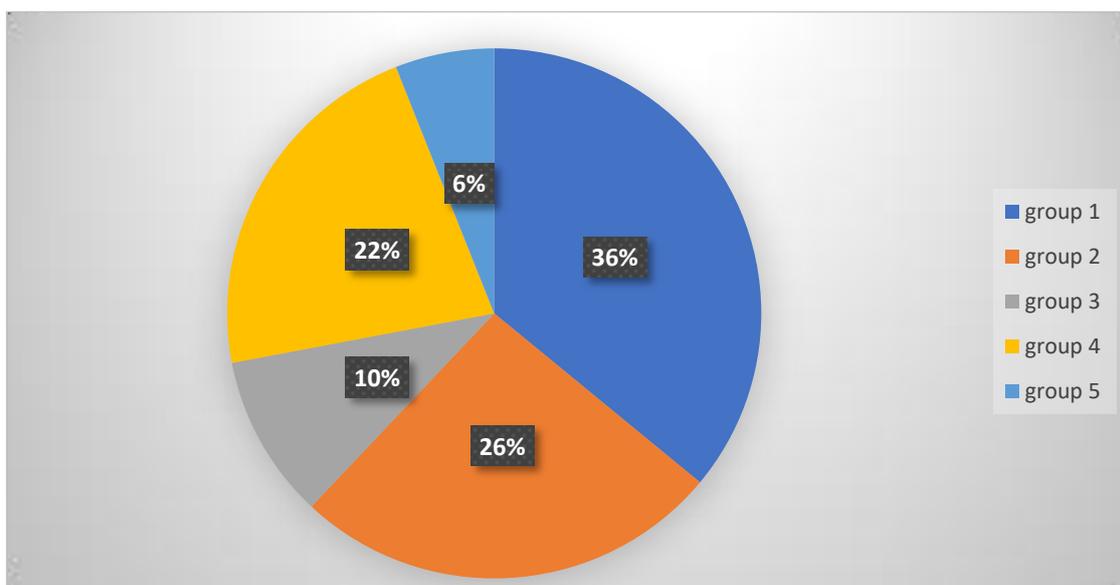


Figure 1: Phrasal verbs distribution in the novel 'The Hours'

Group 1 being the largest one refutes the popular belief that it is possible to do without phrasal verbs by replacing them with their single-word alternatives. I suppose that this fact can be a good incentive for students to make more efforts to learn phrasal verbs. The fact that the second largest group is Group 2 also can be a motivational factor for students to get more interested in phrasal verbs. Although phrasal verbs from Group 2 have synonyms among one-word verbs, native speakers of English quite often opt for a phrasal verb to be more precise. It has been stated by a number of linguists that teaching pragmatics is of great importance in the second language acquisition. It is necessary for non-native speakers to understand whether the phrasal verb is appropriate for the context or not, and in-depth analysis of the phrasal verb helps them make the right choice. The existence of Group 5 should also inspire students to study phrasal verbs in a more comprehensive way because it shows that “phrasal verbs are an important, if sometimes obscure, trace of the interaction between the material world and language change”.

**Discussion.** English phrasal verbs are rather complicated linguistic structures consisting of verbs and prepositions or adverbs. They represent some inseparable semantic units and cause certain difficulties in understanding and acquisition. Firstly, all constituents have a single meaning. Secondly, they have different meaning in different contexts (take off - depart, take off - remove). Thirdly, the number of meanings of the same verbs is unavoidably increasing.

According to generally accepted classifications, these tricky combinations are divided into:

- 1) Transitive (put off) and intransitive (break down).
- 2) Separable (turn off) and inseparable (run into).
- 3) Phrasal (give up), prepositional (go on) and phrasal-prepositional (put up with).

If the verb is separable, then the complement can stand either after it or between its parts. For example:

*His mother brought up his son with great difficulties.*

*His mother brought his son up with great difficulties.*

However, if the direct complement is a pronoun, then we should definitely separate these two parts and put a pronoun between them. For example:

*My father turned on the radio.*

*My father turned it on.*

*I picked up Ahmet.*

*I picked him up.*

Many transitive verbs are separable. Meanwhile, the complement, whether a noun or a pronoun, can be after an adverb or between a verb and an adverb. For example:

*I talked into my father letting me borrow the car* или *I talked my father into letting me borrowing the car.*

*I looked the phone number up* или *I looked up the phone number.*

*They really have very difficult problems among themselves. They need to talk them over like adults.*

The last type of phrasal verbs is intransitive phrasal verbs. Intransitive phrasal verbs are by definition inseparable-since they do not have a complement at all. For example:

*When we were in Antalya, we loved to eat out in sidewalk cafes.*

*After this chapter, I went on to the next one.*

*I woke up with a loud baby cry.*

Phrasal verbs are considered as “semicompounds” or sometimes even as “single units in the grammar”. There are several reasons for naming them like that by saying that there are severe collocational restrictions: one can give in but not give down. One can look after someone but not look before him or her. It means that that phrasal verbs are obviously semantic units because “give in” equals “yield”, “look after” may be replaced by the literary “tend”, “put up” has the meaning of “invent”, and “put up with” means “tolerate”. The treatment of phrasal verbs as single units is quite true and has a solid basis simply because one has to place certain prepositions or adverbs after certain verbs in order to convey certain meanings or concepts. Phrasal verbs are of great importance in the English language because they are used in everyday English. Understanding and learning to use phrasal verbs is often pretty problematic. On the other hand, though they are difficult to learn and remember, they colour the speaker’s language and make it richer.

**Conclusion.** Phrasal verbs present a challenge for linguists and language learners because of their polysemy, polyfunctionality, and, last but not least, what has been described as their “convoluted” semantic content. In dealing with phrasal verbs, “the idiom” and “the open choice” principles in constructing speech should be kept clearly apart. Non-compositional phrasal verbs belong to the idiomatic variety as part of the speaker’s mental lexicon. What should be brought more into the limelight in lexicographic descriptions and ELT instruction are compositional (semi-phrasal verbs), which are formed according to semantic patterns. Adverbial particles then occur in variable contexts and add pragmatic refinements to the verb’s meaning, which include continuous action, completion of the action, terminative or perfective meaning, a stronger dynamic component and others. In the case of semi-phrasal verbs, the adverbial element is brought into prominence as realizing its literal or figurative meaning: it plays a significant role in forming a verbal combination and shaping the semantic pattern of its functioning in speech.

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