THE PHRASAL VERB

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Abstract

This hopefully to be a handy paper deals with the phrasal verb as a grammatical and thematic reality in the sense that its grammatical reality of v + adverbial particle forms a semantic unit. The paper works hard to employ certain tests to establish whether the construction of a verb + particle is a phrasal verb or not. It makes use of T.G. (ie Transformational Grammar) to operate a rule called particle movement that applies to phrasal verbs. The paper also tries to stipulate that topicalisation (= bringing the particle at the beginning of the sentence) is the proper test to isolate a phrasal verb. The paper adroitly makes use of Systematic Grammar to pin down phrasal verbs. It also tries to enlarge on the two types of phrasal verbs and also to distinguish between phrasal verbs and free constructions. The latter show some combinations of verbs and particles that are not phrasal verbs.

Keywords: Phrasal verb, T.G., particle movement, topicalisation, systemic grammar; free constructions.

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THEMATIC CONCERNS

With phrasal verbs, fairly restricted particles (*down, in, off, on, out, up*, etc.) tend to occur with fairly restricted verbs (*put, take, get, give, make*, etc.). One of these seven collocational restrictions can be exemplified by citing that we can *put up with something* but we cannot *put down with it*. Palmer, who likes to examine phrasal verbs, recognises that phrasal verbs have the … characteristics that the particle may take one of two positions, both before and after the object noun phrase(1). He, further, suggests that the occurrence of the particle before the noun phrase is sufficient to distinguish the phrasal verb from the sequence of verb plus adverb:

He **pulled up** the rope (= phrasal verb)

* He **pulled upwards** the rope. (2)

The elements of a phrasal verb form a **semantic unit** (e.g. "make up"). It is usually possible to find another word to substitute for this unit (e.g. "invent"). A non-phrasal structure consists of parts that retain their individual meaning – thus "*He ran up a hill*" can be changed to '*He ran down a hill*'. But *make down a story*, is not possible.

The particle of a phrasal verb can often **go to the end of a clause**

e.g. He <u>ran</u> a hill <u>up.</u> Where the object is a pronoun, this must precede the particle: He made <u>it</u> up but * *He made up* it. Also, "This is the story which he made up" but not * "*This is the story up which* he made."

Phrasal verbs can easily be **passivised**: e.g. *The story was made up.* They cannot be split by **an adverb**: eg * He made quickly up a story. c.f. *Up the hill he ran.* This process is often referred to as "syntactic signs of cohesion".

Nuclear stress falls on the *particle* of a phrasal verb: "That is the story I made úp" cf. "This is the hill I rán up".

To **decide whether a combination of verb + particle** is a phrasal verb or not can be established by these tests. (The answer should be **yes** in each case):

1. Is the combination a *semantic unit*?

Yes, make up = invent

2. Can *particle movement* apply?

Yes, make up a story / make a story up

run up a hill but * run a hill up

3. Does the particle obligatorily follow an object pronoun?

Yes, made it **up** but * made up it.

4. Is it true that the particle cannot move with *wh*? Yes.

* The story up which he made.

 but   The hill up which he ran

5. Is it true that an adverb cannot be inserted? Yes.

* made carefully up a story.

but   Ran quickly up a hill

6. Is it true that the particle cannot be moved away by *topicalisation* (that is *theme*)?

Yes. * Up the story he made.

but   Up the hill he ran

7. Does it *passivise*?

    The story was made up.

but   * The hill was run up.

8. Is *nuclear stress* on the particle in *neutral intonation*?

    The story which he made úp.

but   * The hill which he ran úp.

These tests do not work occasionally for all verbs which seem to be phrasal (a *tick* √ means it works, a *cross* X means it doesn't)

e.g. see about 1.√ 2.X 3.X 4.√ 5.√ 6.√ 7.X 8.X. It is therefore *inconsistent* in four tests.

With '**look after**', three tests apparently do not work smoothly: 1.√ 2.X 3. X 4.√ 5.X 6.√ 7.√ 8.√

The tests are consistent with the *phrasal verb* '**turn down**' an offer (1-8.√), and with the *non-phrasal* verb **turn down** (a lane) (1-8.X).

Thus, the *battery of tests* unfortunately does not work consistently into patterning verbs into phrasal and non-phrasal *verbs*.

Between phrasal and non-phrasal verbs there seem to lie degrees of both categories. The test of passivisation is not a reliable test. A tick (√) in 2 always means a tick in 3. The same goes for a cross (X). A good test is the particle shifting. The particle may be shifted or preposed to the front of the sentence when a question is asked:

    Up what did he ran?

    * Up what did he make a story?

This question test occurs with phrasal verbs in the form of **how**, **where, when**.

In T.G. (Transformational Grammar) **He made up a story** and **He ran up a hill** would be analysed as:
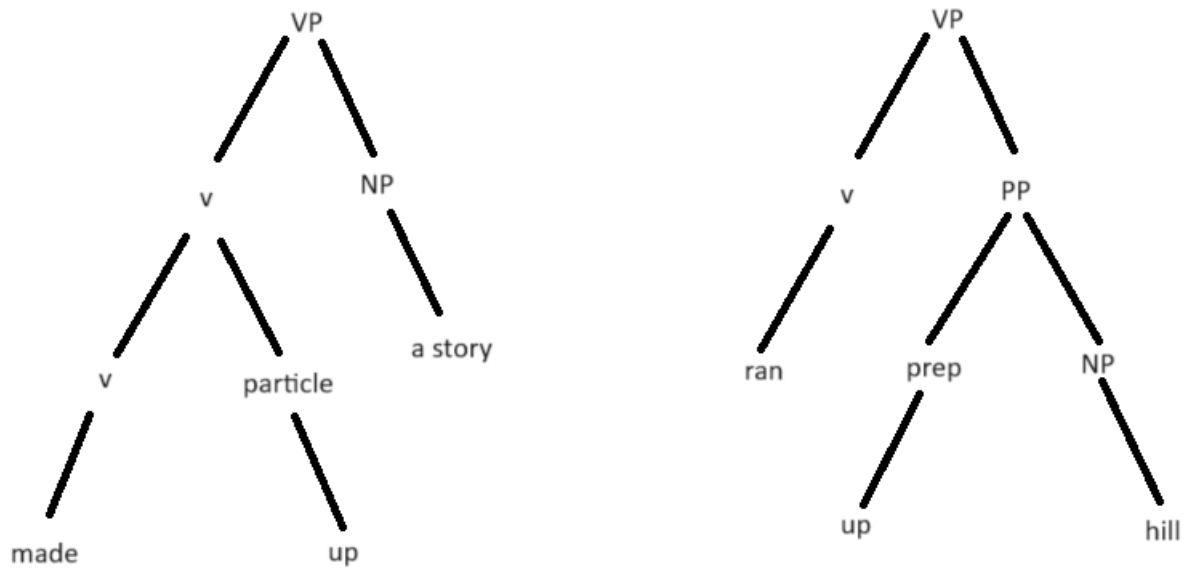
A rule called **particle movement** applies for phrasal verbs:

V + part. + NP ==> V + NP + part. (optional) but

make up + a story ==> make a story up

However, it is obligatory if the NP is an object pronoun (e.g. He made it up.)

This rule only applies to adverbial particles. Thus, the particles are adverbial in 'make up', and 'order about' but 'come in' has a prepositional particle. However, to distinguish between minimal sets of v + adv. and phrasal verbs, **topicalisation** is the best test:

The petrol gave out ==> * out gave the petrol.

The boy ran up ==> up ran the boy.

Another test is that of *the occurrence of a simple object* NP, ie a noun phrase without modifiers. Thus, 'He pulled up the rope' is a phrasal verb but:
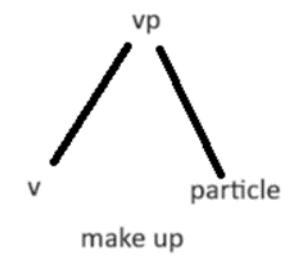
'He pulled upwards the rope' is a verb + adv structure

Palmer who gives the examples above suggests that "the difference between … prepositional and phrasal verbs can be formally established by the fact that the preposition will always precede the noun phrase whereas the adverb may follow it." (3)

Now, can we express any of the tests, already mentioned, in the **form of** regularities. In T.G. (= Transformational Grammar) there is an underlying distinction between a **phrasal verb** (**make up** a story) and a *verb + a prepositional phrase* (run up a hill).

Phrasal verb	Verb + prepositional phrase
'make up a story'	'run up the hill'
1. In a phrase structure rule, we will have a rule that regards it as a simple item	1. 'up' will be in lexicon under preposition, v under a subclass of verbs. They are shown as separate items

vp
v   particle
make up

vp
v   pp
run   up (prep.)   the hill NP
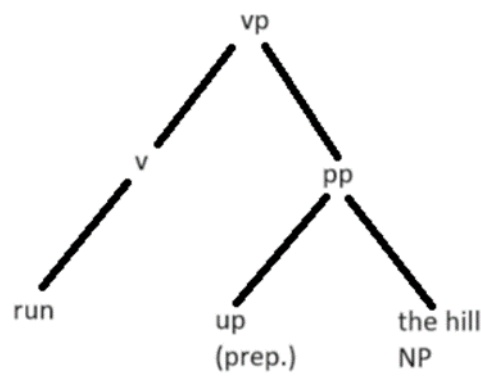
2. *Passivisation* possible but the "passive rule" is not enough to distinguish between a *phrasal* and a *non-phrasal* verb.	2. The *passive rule* does not apply.
3. *No major constituent break* to allow insertion of adverbs.	3. a *major constituent break* between v and pp to allow adv insertion
4. *Topicalisation* does not work with a phrasal verb: * up the story he made. Up does not make a separate constituent	4. *Topicalisation* works with a verb + prepositional phrase "up the hill" because *up* is a separate constituent.
5. *Particle movement* rule applies for phrasal verbs. v + part. + NP ==> v + NP + part.(optional but obligatory if the NP is a pronoun	5. *Particle movement rule* cannot apply.

Palmer, who enlarges on phrasal verbs (4), recognises that "there are many *verb plus particle* combinations that are intransitive, yet seem to belong to the class of phrasal verbs" as shown in the following examples given by him:

The plane **flew in**

The enemy finally **gave in**

He also suggests that "there are ... both *syntactic* and *semantic* reasons for associating these forms with the **transitive phrasal verbs**"

"syntactically, [phrasal] forms can be related to their transitive counterparts."

Palmer, thus, explains that many [verb + particle] combinations that are intransitive belong to the class of phrasal verbs. Thus, 'He turned over', 'The house blew up', 'He brought up' can be related to phrasal verbs in terms of (a) "*deleted*"

or *understood object*: 'He turned over the page', (b) of an **active form**: 'They *blew up* the house' and (c) of *transitivite through using a lexeme*: His *downfall came about.*

Semantically speaking, "there is a verb of motion [and] the particle indicates *the direction of motion*: 'He **ran** the flag **up**'.

Palmer gives more illustrating examples:

He *pulled up* the rope.

* He pulled upwards the rope.

He explains that to **pull up** means to *pull to a final position*; to *pull upwards* does not. Hence, the first but not the second, is **semantically** as well as **formally** a phrasal verb.

He recognises that there are many phrasal verbs which do not have the literal locational meanings, but nevertheless share with the literal ones the notion of final results:

The work piled up.

We cannot just give up.

It is suggested that the adverb in *initial position* is likely only where there is no idiomatic use (ie when there is no phrasal verb)

Down he sat.

In he went.

but,

* Down he broke.

* In he gave.

With **transitive phrasal verbs**, there is a greater likelihood of the particle preceding the noun phrase if idiomatic and of following it, if not

They **covered up** the crime

They covered the body up

It is also suggested that there are some idiomatic forms that permit *no separation* at all (or very rarely):

He put up a good fight

* He put a good fight up

They found out the truth

? They found the truth out

(? = means *dubious*)

Halliday, the exponent of **functional grammar** talks of the merits of *systemic theory* in grammar:

> What distinguishes systemic theory is that its basic form or synoptic representation is not **syntagmatic** but **paradigmatic**; the organizing concept is not *structure* but *system* (5)

In a relevant sense, Scott et. al., who also adhere to **Systemic Grammar**, suggest that S [=subject] and P [=verb] are *obligatory elements* and that very frequently an A [=adjunct] would occur in such sentences as:

>The sirens sang *enchantingly.*

>*Solemnly* Clothilde sang. (6)

Muir, who opts for **Systemic Grammar**, suggests (7) that if the clause: '*He decided on the ship*'. means '*he made up his mind while he was on the ship*', then the structure is SPA

>S   P   A

>He | decided on|the ship.

but if it means 'he chose the ship', then the structure is SPC and the P is realised by a phrasal verb:

> S   P   C

>He | decided on | the ship.

He recognises that there are many instances in English where verb + particle operate[s] as a single unit.

>He **put down** the rebellion: He suppressed the rebellion.

>She **looked after** her mother: She tended her mother.

Muir suggests that in *passive construction* the particle remains with the verb:

>The ship was decided on.

>The mother was looked after.

Muir's systemic version of grammar points out to some reservation:

>The concept of the phrasal verb … is well established in grammatical description, and is a valid concept. But it must be said that the identification of phrasal verbs in particular structures often relies heavily on semantic criteria and there is room for disagreement. Nevertheless, there are many examples where the difference is clear, and many long-established phrasal verbs can be easily recognised as in:

>S   P   A

>We | went | to the place.

>S   P   C

>He | took to | the place.

>   phrasal verb

Quirk et al, who realize a *more pragmatic version* of English grammar suggest (8) that in:

He took **in** the dog

"the *adverbial particle* in such **phrasal verbs** is generally shown by its *mobility*, its ability to follow the noun phrase":

He took the dog **in**.

They turned **on** the light.

They turned the light **on**.

Enlarging on the types of phrasal verb, Quirk et al, point to (9) *intransitive phrasal verbs* as (Type 1). They recognise that intransitive phrasal verbs consist of a verb plus an adverb particle, as exemplified by

The plane **has** just touched down.

The plane **has** now taken off.

Did he **catch on**?

The tank **blew up**.

They also point out to informal phrasal verbs as exemplified by:

The two girls have fallen out [=quarreled]

They significantly try to draw a distinction between **phrasal verbs** and **free combinations** in which the verb and the **adverb** have distinct meanings. "In phrasal verbs like *give in* ['surrender'], *catch on* ['understand'] and *blow up* ['explode']", they argue, the meaning of the combination "manifestly cannot be predicted from the meaning of verb + particle in isolation". But in free combinations, the verb acts as a normal intransitive verb and the adverb has its own meaning [as exemplified by:]

He walked **past** [='past the object/place']

I waded **across** [=across the river/water/etc.]

They argue, however, that "the function is equivalent to that of a prepositional phrase of direction."

Now, when they come to discuss **free combinations**, they maintain the possibility of placing a modifying adverb such as **right** or sometimes **straight** between the adverb particle and the verb as shown in

Drink **right** up

Walk **straight** in

They suggest that the insertion of **up** above is "unacceptable with phrasal verb"

* She turned **right** up at last.

Quirk et al, recognise that "another sign of a **free combination** is the possibility of placing the adverb before the verb" as in

Out came the sun.

Up you **came**.

They argue that placing the adverb before the verb is impossible with phrasal verb as in

* **Up** it **blew** ['exploded']

* **Out** he passed ['fainted']

They, however, point out to the acceptability of inversion with phrasal verbs making metaphorical use of 'spatial adverbs' as exemplified by

Down came the prices, and **up went** the sails.

When Quirk et al. come to the second type of phrasal verbs, Type II – **Transitive Phrasal Verbs,** they exemplify them by the following sentences:

They have **called off** the strike.

He can't **live down** his past.

They maintain that with Type II of phrasal verbs, the particle can precede or follow the direct object as exemplified by the following sentences

They **turned on** the light.

They **turned** the light **on**.

They also point out that we must *lexically distinguish* **phrasal verbs** "from free syntactic combination of verb + prepositional adverb as exemplified by

She took in the box [='brought inside' – free combination]

She took in her parents [='deceived' – phrasal verb]

Quirk et al. Knowingly realise the possibility of turning Type II of phrasal verbs into *the passive* "without stylistic awkwardness" as in

Aunt Ada brought up Roy.

Roy was brought up by Ada.

Conclusion

To recapture things, phrasal verbs are handy constructions in the sense of being often used in daily communication. The paper has isolated two kinds of phrasal verbs for our inspection: transitive phrasal verbs and intransitive ones.

We have also seen that phrasal verbs may be separable (ie) can be broken by other words and inseparable ones (ie) cannot be separated by other words. These constructions may come before or after the NP [=noun phrase in T.G. (Transformational Grammar)]

The paper has shown that the best test to distinguish between a phrasal verb and a non-phrasal verb is **topicalisation** (ie) placing the particle at the beginning of the sentence although the test does not occasionally work for seemingly phrasal verbs.

Notes

1. Palmer, p. 220.

2. Ibid, p. 221

3. Ibid, p. 221

4. Ibid, pp. 223-227

5. Halliday, p. 193

6. Scott et al., p. 149

7. Muir, pp. 48-49

8. Quirk el al, p. 444

9. Ibid, pp. 1152-1154

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