

## CHAPTER I

*Introduction***1.1 The English Phrasal Verb**

Phrasal verbs, or particle verbs, are one of the most idiosyncratic features of the English language, as well as of other Germanic languages, such as German and Dutch. They pose multiple problems for non-native speakers, because their meanings must be learned separately from those of their verbal bases (*give* vs. *give up*, *find* vs. *find out*), as the union of two elements of the compound often gives rise to new non-compositional forms outwardly similar to idioms, in which the meaning of the individual elements a priori does not relate to the sense of the compound (e.g. *fall out* ‘argue’, *put down* ‘criticise’). From the point of view of a researcher, phrasal verbs are certainly an interesting and challenging topic of study due to the peculiarities of these combinations, which is reflected in the vast amount of work looking into their nature from synchronic and diachronic perspectives, but also within the fields of translation studies and second-language acquisition, among others. It is widely acknowledged that the frequency of phrasal verbs in English has increased considerably from Early Modern English (EModE) times (see, e.g., Spasov 1966: 125, Pelli 1976: 102, Martin 1990, Wild 2010: 227, Diemer 2014), but what is it that brings a verb and a particle together in an idiomatic construction, and by what means? Why does the union between verb and particle seem stronger in some cases than in others? Why are sometimes other constituents allowed between the verb and the particle (e.g. *They cleaned it all up* vs. \**They found it all out*) or why can the particle occasionally be moved to clause-initial position (e.g. *Out came the sun* vs. \**Up blew the tank*)? Is this linked to their relationship, if any, with the processes of grammaticalisation, lexicalisation, and idiomatisation? What are the defining characteristics of phrasal verbs that distinguish them from other similar structures? Can any verb function as the verbal element of a combination or should it display certain characteristics to make it legible? Moreover,

what is the nature of the particles? Are they adverbs, prepositions, or something different? What is the function, if any, of particles which apparently combine redundantly with some verbs (e.g. *He delivered [up] the certificate; They filled [out] the form*)? Has the range of available particles kept constant over time or have new elements entered the inventory, whereas others have fallen into disuse? Are (and indeed were) phrasal verbs typical of colloquial spoken language, and should they be avoided in formal writing? This monograph addresses these and other questions concerning the nature and development of phrasal verbs from the end of the EModE period to the present day.

The term phrasal verb has been chosen because it is the most common designation of the category and the predominant one in English grammar books,<sup>1</sup> although probably not the most appropriate (see Aarts 1992: 89, Claridge 2000: 46, Cappelle 2007: 41–3). As noted by Huddleston and Pullum et al., the label suggests that the combinations at issue ‘form syntactic constituents belonging to the category verb’, although this is not necessarily so ‘despite their idiomatic interpretations’ (2002: 274). Cappelle (2007: 41) also points out that the term implies that ‘a phrasal verb is in the first place still a verb, seemingly differing only from simplex verbs [...] in having a small added element’. However, the semantic weight of such a small element has proved to be of great importance, and thus the traditional ‘verbo-centric approach’ (Cappelle 2007: 42) needs to be reconsidered. Other labels employed in the literature for the same concept include verb-adverb combination (Kennedy 1920), compound verb (Curme 1931, Krusinga 1931), two-word verb (Anthony 1954, Taha 1960), discontinuous verb (Live 1965), verb-particle construction (Lipka 1972), verb-particle combination (Fraser 1976), particle verbs (Dehé 2002), verbal idiom, and, more specifically, verb + intransitive preposition idiom (Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002).

There is widespread disagreement as to what the concept ‘phrasal verb’ refers to, mainly because it has often been used (and is still used) as a cover term including related but distinct categories, such as the so-called prepositional verbs and phrasal-prepositional verbs.<sup>2</sup> In general terms, I understand phrasal verbs as combinations of a verb and a post-verbal particle,

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Mitchell (1958), Bolinger (1971), Quirk et al. (1985), Alexander (1988), Palmer (1988), McArthur (1989), Greenbaum (1996), Biber et al. (1999), Huddleston and Pullum et al. (2002: 274).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Halliday (1985: 184), and especially most phrasal verb dictionaries, such as the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs (CCDPV)*, *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus (MPVP)*, *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English (ODCIE)*.

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which function as relatively unitary structures lexically and semantically as, for example, *put up* in (1) below.<sup>3</sup>

- (1) More than 70,000 shopkeepers have been forced to **put up** the shutters in the past year. (BNC CH2 W\_newsp\_tabloid)

One of the main distinguishing features of phrasal verbs has to do with the nature of the post-verbal particle, which ‘is best of all described as an adverb, but not as a preposition’ (Claridge 2000: 46; see also Heaton 1965: 45) or, in Huddleston and Pullum et al.’s (2002: 272, 597–661) terminology, an intransitive preposition. Phrasal verbs are thus distinguished from prepositional verbs, whose particle is a preposition (2), and phrasal-prepositional verbs (3), which contain both an adverb and a preposition.

- (2) So, I am **looking after** their interests. (BNC J9M S\_meeting)  
 (3) Menzies was seething and he **broke in on** the last words. (BNC AoN W\_fict\_prose)

Such terminology is based on a rather simplistic characterisation of the type of particle present in each combination, as noted by Mitchell (1958: 106), who distinguishes two main categories: non-phrasal and phrasal. Hence phrasal verbs are classified under the heading ‘phrasal’, indicating the presence of an adverbial element (see Spasov 1966: 11, Claridge 2000: 32), whereas simple verbs and prepositional verbs are classified under the label ‘non-phrasal’ because they do not include any adverbial component. In this way, Mitchell’s classification agrees with one of the most common views: that the particles in phrasal verbs qualify as adverbs and those in prepositional verbs as prepositions, whereas phrasal-prepositional verbs require both an adverb and a preposition (see also Palmer 1988: 216).

A more complex and thorough classification is suggested by Denison (1981: 24–33, 1998: 222), who not only considers the particle-type, but also the object-type of the combinations (see also Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002: 286–90). He divides what he calls group-verbs into eight different categories, whose features are synthesised in Table 1.1.

Denison’s eight categories, though, are not mutually exclusive. A verb-particle combination can be classified within more than one category depending on the elements it combines with. Compare in this respect (4a–b) and (5a–b).

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of this definition, see Chapters 3 and 4 of the present work.

Table 1.1 *Classification of group-verbs (Denison 1981: 24–33)*

Group-verb	Particle	DO	PrepO	Example
Class 1 (intransitive phrasal verbs)	1	∅	∅	<i>back out</i> 'withdraw'
Class 2 (transitive phrasal verbs)	1	+	∅	<i>bear out</i> 'confirm'
Class 3 (prepositional verbs)	1	∅	+	<i>go for</i> 'attack'
Class 4 (phrasal-prepositional verbs)	2	∅	+	<i>look forward to</i> 'anticipate'
Class 5 (idiomatic collocations)	2	+	+	<i>let (sb.) in on</i> (e.g. a secret)
Class 6	1	+	+	<i>foist (sth.) on (sb.)</i> 'fasten or fix unwarrantably'
Class 7	2	∅	∅	<i>come on in</i> 'enter'
Class 8	2	+	∅	<i>put (sth.) back together</i> 'repair'

- (4) a. He was installing a fuel gauge on top of the tank when it **blew up**. (BNC KiL W\_news\_script)  
 b. US troops later **blew up** the radio transmitter to prevent further broadcasts. (BNC AAL W\_newsp\_brdst\_nat\_report)
- (5) a. Meanwhile Mr. Cottle finally **gave in** and took a piece of bread and butter. (BNC ACV W\_fict\_prose)  
 b. Norman Lamont declined the Prime Minister's offer of a move to Environment Secretary and **gave in** his resignation. (BNC KiN W\_news\_script)

As can be seen, both *blow up* and *give in* can be classified within class 1 (see (4a) and (5a)) and class 2 (see (4b) and (5b)). The meaning of the phrasal verb can be the same independently of whether it is used transitively or intransitively, as is the case with *blow up* in (4a) and (4b), where it means 'explode'. However, in other cases the meaning of the combination changes accordingly with transitivity. In (5a) *give in* means 'yield', whereas in (5b) its meaning is 'hand in'. Some combinations, in turn, can also be classified within both class 2 and class 3, as is the case with *get through* in (6a) and (6b), respectively.

- (6) a. You see the message had obviously **got through**. (BNC J8B S\_meeting)  
 b. I doubt that she'll do it until you've **got through** your exams. (BNC KB9 S\_conv)

A ninth category can be added to Denison's list, as discussed by Cappelle (2005: 234–7; see also Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002: 286–7): namely, a ditransitive pattern which contains one particle and two objects, as in *run up* 'make (a garment, etc.) by sewing quickly or simply' (*OED* s.v. *run up* 7.c.(b)) in Cappelle's example in (7).

(7) They **ran** him **up** a new coat.

Whatever the particle or the object, what seems clear is that all eight categories in Denison's classification and the ditransitive pattern described by Cappelle possess a number of common characteristics, which has often led to their classification within the larger group of the so-called multi-word verbs (see, e.g., Biber et al. 1999: 403, Claridge 2000, Gries 2003: 1) or group-verbs (see, e.g., Denison 1981: 9). Multi-word verbs are 'combinations that comprise relatively idiomatic units and function like single verbs' (Biber et al. 1999: 403). They are, then, 'analytic constructions' which 'nevertheless represent a semantic unity that is characteristic of a single word or lexical unit' (Claridge 2000: 26). This definition of phrasal verb as a discontinuous lexical item is one of the most common in the literature,<sup>4</sup> although the question of whether phrasal verbs belong within the lexicon, syntax, or phraseology has been discussed at length in recent years.<sup>5</sup> As pointed out by Nevalainen (1999a: 421), 'cases where phrasal sequences of more than one word are reduced to one-word status fall between grammar and lexis', because multi-word units such as phrasal verbs 'do not always have the grammatical integrity required of words as lexicographical units'. Similarly, Declerck (1991: 11) remarks that phrasal verbs are variously treated as single words (two-part verbs) or as combinations of verbs (two-word verbs), mainly because they present features that favour a morphological analysis (e.g. their ability to be the input for morphological derivation, as in *lookers-on*) and characteristics that lead to their reading as phrasal representations (e.g. the ability of the combination to be split by other syntactic elements such as noun phrases or adverbs).<sup>6</sup>

Although there is significant disagreement as to what structures should be classified as multi-word verbs, or as to the terminology which should be used to refer to them, most works (Quirk et al. 1985: 1150–68, Biber

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Mitchell (1958), Bolinger (1971), Lipka (1972), Declerck (1976), Denison (1981), Quirk et al. (1985), Brinton (1988), McArthur (1989), Claridge (2000), Hampe (2002).

<sup>5</sup> Recent neurolinguistic studies seem to support the idea that phrasal verbs belong to the lexicon, rather than to syntax, since they behave as word-like stored items (see Cappelle et al. 2010, Pulvermüller et al. 2013).

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Los et al. (2012: 14–51).

et al. 1999: 403–28, Claridge 2000: 26–45) seem to agree that sequences of the type illustrated in Table 1.1 must be included in this category.<sup>7</sup> Other subtypes of multi-word verbs are verbo-nominal combinations (8),<sup>8</sup> verb-adjective combinations (9), or verb-verb combinations (see (10) and (11)).<sup>9</sup>

- (8) Where's Daddy's gone to **have a shower**. (BNC KST S\_conv)  
 (9) To that charge Shaun David do you **plead guilty** or not guilty? (BNC F7W S\_courtroom)  
 (10) I **made do with** peripheral vision, which, after all, is the next best thing. (BNC FYV W\_fict\_prose)  
 (11) You know, think it was about ten year old when she **got rid of** it. (BNC KB7 S\_conv)

The subtypes of multi-word verbs shown in (8) to (11) bear certain similarities with the structures in Table 1.1, inasmuch as they are also combinations of a verb and a post-verbal element, which, though differing from particles in their form,<sup>10</sup> behave very much as such in other respects. Brinton and Akimoto (1999: 1–20), in turn, consider phrasal verbs within the group of composite predicates because of the resemblance they bear to the other two subtypes, complex verbs (similar to verbo-nominal combinations as in (8)) and complex prepositions such as (12).

- (12) The work is being carried out **on behalf of** English heritage. (BNC K1F W\_news\_script)

Table 1.2 summarises some of the classifications that have been proposed for phrasal verbs.

Whereas there seems to be general consensus in regarding phrasal verbs as within the larger group of multi-word verbs, distinguishing between them and other members of the class turns out quite problematic, mostly because 'phrasal verb' is also used as a cover term for prepositional and phrasal-prepositional verbs. A common topic of discussion here is precisely where to draw the line between them and different though related multi-word structures. The answer to this question is far from easy, though. It

<sup>7</sup> For a different classification, see Huddleston and Pullum et al. (2002: 283–90), who distinguish several types of 'verbal idioms' with regard to the type of particle but also to the type of object.

<sup>8</sup> Another proof of the current terminological confusion with reference to the various verb-particle combinations is that verbo-nominal combinations are called 'group verbs' by Spasov (1966: 11), a term which overlaps with Denison's (1981) label to refer to his eight classes of verb-particle combinations.

<sup>9</sup> For further details on other subtypes of multi-word verbs, see Claridge (2000: 46–82) and Rodríguez-Puente (2007: 43–61).

<sup>10</sup> The post-verbal elements in verbo-nominal, verb-adjective, and verb-verb combinations are quite often referred to as particles, because they are similar to those in phrasal verbs as regards their syntactic and semantic behaviour.

Table 1.2 Common classifications of phrasal verbs and related structures

Multi-word verbs (Quirk et al. 1985)	Multi-word verbs (Biber et al. 1999)	Multi-word verbs (Claridge 2000)	Composite predicates (Brinton & Akimoto 1999)
phrasal verbs	phrasal verbs	phrasal verbs	phrasal verbs
prepositional verbs	prepositional verbs	prepositional verbs	–
phrasal-prepositional verbs	phrasal- prepositional verbs	phrasal-prepositional verbs	–
verb-adjective combinations	–	verb-adjective combinations	–
verb-verb combinations	verb-verb combinations	–	–
–	verbo-nominal combinations	verbo-nominal combinations types I and II	complex verbs
–	verb + PP combinations	verbo-nominal combinations type III	–
–	–	–	complex prepositions

For a different classification, see Huddleston and Pullum et al. (2002: 272–90). These authors distinguish between prepositional verbs (e.g. *refer to*), which select a specified preposition, and verbal idioms or idioms whose major element is a verb. Transitive, intransitive, and ditransitive phrasal verbs are included within the latter category, along with other multi-word structures or ‘constructions’.

has been addressed in numerous works, which typically seek to delimit the concept by looking at the meaning of combinations and applying a series of syntactic tests. Regarding their semantics, one of the most commonly held views is that the meaning of phrasal verbs ranges on a scale from literal to idiomatic (e.g. Bolinger 1971, Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002, Thim 2012), although some authors employ the idiomaticity criterion to distinguish phrasal verbs from other verb-adverb combinations (e.g. Live 1965: 441, Fraser 1976), while others prefer the term ‘free combination’ (Quirk et al. 1985: 1152, 1162–3, Biber et al. 1999: 403, Huddleston & Pullum et al. 2002: 280) to refer to combinations with a literal meaning. The syntax of phrasal verbs has also received considerable attention. Under the framework of transformational grammar, Fraser (1965, 1970a, 1970b, 1976) was one of the first authors to try to trace a clear line between the syntactic behaviour of verb-adverb combinations and phrasal verbs proper.

However, many of his tests were later refuted (see especially Bolinger 1971, Declerck 1976, Lindner 1983, Darwin & Gray 1999, Cappelle 2005), not least because many notable exceptions could be found.<sup>11</sup> The difficulties in drawing a clear-cut line between phrasal verbs and other related categories, both semantically and syntactically, have led some writers to suggest a ‘fuzzy grammatical category’ (Gardner & Davies 2007: 341), which, for reasons which will become clear over the course of this monograph, seems infinitely more appropriate. As will be argued in Chapters 3 and 4, there is much variability in the semantic and syntactic behaviour of combinations which suggests that, although the verb and the particle seem to form a single lexical unit, the degree of semantic and syntactic bondedness between the two elements differs greatly and ultimately relates to gradualness in change.

The remainder of this chapter deals with the purpose and framework of the current book. Chapter 2 introduces the primary and secondary sources, the methodology used for the extraction of examples, and also explores some of the (diachronic and synchronic) features of the various text types analysed herein. Chapter 3 reviews and assesses the morphosyntactic and semantic features of Present-day English (PDE) phrasal verbs, and Chapter 4 evaluates them from a diachronic perspective in relation to the processes of lexicalisation and idiomatisation. Chapters 5 and 6 present corpus findings on the linguistic features and distribution of phrasal verbs from the end of the EModE period to the present day. More specifically, Chapter 5 looks at the morphosyntactic and semantic properties of these constructions, as well as their diachronic distribution, and Chapter 6 discusses aspects related to the distribution and characteristics of these two-word combinations across ten different genres. Finally, Chapter 7 offers some concluding remarks and some suggestions for further research.

## 1.2 Purpose and Framework

My approach is first and foremost diachronic, focusing primarily on the second half of the seventeenth century to the end of the twentieth century, a period in the history of the English language which is clearly underrepresented in the literature on phrasal verbs. British English is used in the first instance, although frequent comparisons will be drawn with other varieties of English, especially American English. Empirical

<sup>11</sup> These and other questions relating the nature of the combinations to the elements that constitute them will be fully discussed in Chapter 3.



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evidence is drawn from various corpora. The core sources for quantitative and qualitative data were *A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers* (ARCHER) and a sample of the *Old Bailey Corpus* (OBC), although further examples and evidence have been used from the *Helsinki Corpus* (HC), the *Corpus of Late Modern English Texts Extended Version* (CLMETEV), the database of examples of the *Old English Dictionary* (OED), the *British National Corpus* (BNC), a section of the *International Corpus of English, Great Britain* (ICE-GB), the World Wide Web, and several other diachronic and synchronic corpora representing both the American and British varieties of English.<sup>12</sup> Thus, although the primary dataset constitutes over 13,200 instances of phrasal verbs extracted from ARCHER and the OBC, numerous illustrative examples are taken from elsewhere.

In view of the difficulties of classification discussed above, prior to embarking on the task of tracing the recent history of phrasal verbs, one of my first goals was to review and assess the existing definitions and syntactic tests proposed in the literature, so as to arrive at a more solid initial conceptualisation of phrasal verbs. I argue that some traditional tests for the identification of phrasal verbs must be ruled out, whereas others can be employed to test the degree of unity between the verb and the particle, rather than to distinguish phrasal verbs from verb-adverb combinations. To this end, I begin with the premise that in a phrasal verb the verb and the particle function as a single lexical and semantic unit, but that the degree of unity between the two elements differs across combinations. That is, I will view phrasal verbs as a gradable category. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 3, where attention is paid first to the two elements of the compound separately (the verb and the particle) and then to the morpho-syntactic and semantic properties of the combinations themselves. While a large part of Chapter 3 is concerned with a review of general observations as to the status of phrasal verbs in PDE, building on previous research (Rodríguez-Puente 2013) I also argue for a more fine-grained classification of the semantic types of phrasal verbs. Traditionally, phrasal verbs have been ascribed to three, albeit overlapping, semantic groups: literal, aspectual/aktionsart, and idiomatic (see, e.g. Spasov 1966, Bolinger 1971, Fraser 1976, Quirk et al. 1985, Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999). My proposed classification follows previous studies which have suggested that the meanings of phrasal verbs are best understood within a scale ranging from literal to idiomatic, but advocates a more fine-grained characterisation

<sup>12</sup> A full description of all data sources is provided in Chapter 2.

which also includes reiterative, emphatic, and metaphorical combinations. Reiterative combinations, where the particle repeats a semantic element already present in the verb (e.g. *rise up*), have been considered ‘pleonastic’ (Thim 2006a) or ‘redundant’ (e.g. Hampe 2002, Jackendoff 2002: 76, Wild 2010: 235ff), yet both terms are unfortunate in that they seem to suggest that the particle is an unnecessary element. Related to this are emphatic combinations (e.g. *wrap up*), which contain an apparently superfluous particle which alters neither the meaning of the verb it combines with nor its argument structure or aspectual/aktionsart features.<sup>13</sup> As opposed to previous classifications, and based on corpus results, I argue that such particles in fact fulfil several functions in the compound: reinforcing the meaning of the verb, facilitating the division of labour between the verb and the particle, allowing several alternatives in the organisation of the information structure of the clause, and even providing the verb with a more colloquial, familiar tone.<sup>14</sup> Finally, the metaphorical group includes those combinations whose meaning is quite transparent but somehow removed from its original connotation (e.g. *throw away a fortune*).

The view that phrasal verbs are a gradable category is further addressed in Chapter 4 within the framework of lexicalisation. As noted by Brinton and Akimoto, ‘the processes involved in the development of complex verbs, phrasal verbs, and complex prepositions may be variously considered from the perspective of grammaticalization, lexicalization and idiomatization’ (1999: 11–12). The effect of grammaticalisation on the development of phrasal verb particles was amply discussed in Brinton’s (1988) comprehensive work (see also Denison 1985), but whereas phrasal verbs are often defined as lexicalised or institutionalised structures, a full discussion of phrasal combinations from the perspective of lexicalisation has not yet been given. Based on the syntactic characteristics of phrasal verbs as set out in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 aims to establish a cline of lexicalisation for the development of these combinations. Hence, I argue that the varying degrees of bondedness among PDE phrasal verbs relate to their historical development. Moreover, lexicalisation often (though not necessarily) entails idiomatisation, or the acquisition of non-compositional meanings, which accounts for the existence of varying degrees of compositionality in the combinations. Using corpus evidence and also drawing on previous research, Chapter 4 explores some of the ways in which idiomatic, non-compositional meanings are acquired by these combinations over time.

<sup>13</sup> As would be the case with aspectual/aktionsart particles (see Section 3.3.2.2).

<sup>14</sup> See further discussion in Section 3.3.2.3.