

California State University, San Bernardino

CSUSB ScholarWorks

---

Theses Digitization Project

John M. Pfau Library

---

2003

## Looking into phrasal verbs

David Immanuel Kovitz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project>



Part of the [Linguistics Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Kovitz, David Immanuel, "Looking into phrasal verbs" (2003). *Theses Digitization Project*. 2362.  
<https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/2362>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@csusb.edu](mailto:scholarworks@csusb.edu).

LOOKING INTO PHRASAL VERBS

---

A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition

---

by  
David Immanuel Kovitz

June 2003

LOOKING INTO PHRASAL VERBS

---

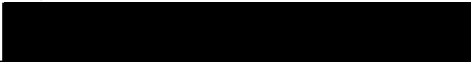
A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

by  
David Immanuel Kovitz

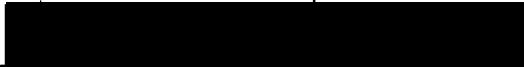
June 2003


Approved by:

  
Dr. Rong Chen, English Department

5-07-03

Date

  
Dr. Sunny Hyon, Professor

  
Dr. Wendy Smith, Professor

## ABSTRACT

The phrasal verb is a unique type of verb phrase that consists of a main verb, most always of only one or two syllables, followed by a particle, that together work as a single semantic unit. Such meaning, however, is characteristically expressed in idiomatic terms, which poses a formidable problem for students of English as a second language in that, to be understood, the meaning must be figuratively interpreted as well as literally translated.

Consider the phrase *chew out*. Newcomers to English likely know *chew* firsthand as the verb meaning "a process of ingesting food." The particle *out*, taken at face value, can apply spatially (e.g., *outside*), operationally (e.g., *lights out*), or quantitatively (e.g., *out of time*). But how is one to guess that, as a combined form, *chew out* means *to scold*? In the minds of newcomers, the resultant meaning is unpredictable given the words used to express it.

The semantic ambiguity of phrasal verbs presents a pedagogical problem that can be tackled from the premise that phrasal verbs are in fact systematically coherent in

terms of perceptual underpinnings to the words at play. The premise continues in that since phrasal verbs are so often figurative in nature, the explication of metaphor should be factored into their instruction. I argue accordingly that George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's theory, that metaphor is integral to how we instinctively use common words in everyday expressions, can prove instrumental in devising a better way of teaching phrasal verbs.

The semantic capacity of a simple word, in terms of metaphor, context, and conventional usage, can extend to include a variety of meanings. The purpose here is to draw upon Lakoff and Johnson's theory as a way to help students to appreciate the expressive potential of such words. This thesis thus details how metaphor, linguistically evident in so many ways, and especially so in phrasal verbs, can be exploited as a means of explaining how and why phrasal verbs act as they do.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Without the spirit and support of those acknowledged here, this project could never have come to fruition. My parents, above all, motivated me from the beginning by teaching me to appreciate language in its nuance, whether structural, pragmatic, humorous, aesthetic, or any combination thereof.

My readers, Dr. Chen, Dr. Hyon, and Dr. Smith, have motivated me as well through their approach to the discipline of linguistics, and through their readiness, and willingness, to extend their talent and skill on behalf of their students.

Without my sister Johanna's unflinching emotional (and technical) support, I would have been incapacitated on a number of occasions. Gratitude as well to Michael Blind, who through his empathy and generosity, provided sanctuary indispensable to the completion of this project.

To all, I am deeply indebted.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER TWO: THE PROBLEM	
Syntactic Properties .....	12
Lexicon .....	16
Idiomaticity .....	22
Textbook Treatment .....	29
CHAPTER THREE: THE ROLE OF METAPHOR .....	41
Lakoff and Johnson's Theory .....	43
Metaphoric Aspects to Phrasal Verbs .....	50
Plugging Into Lakoff and Johnson's Categories ...	70
CHAPTER FOUR: SOME TEACHING SUGGESTIONS .....	92
A Possible Lesson .....	101
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION .....	113
APPENDIX A: ACTIVE IS UP .....	118
APPENDIX B: MORE IS UP .....	121
APPENDIX C: ACTIVITIES ARE SUBSTANCES .....	123
REFERENCES .....	125

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Versions of <i>run</i> .....	7
Table 2.	Prevalent Particles .....	52
Table 3.	Main Verbs Derived from Nouns .....	57
Table 4.	Narrowly-defined Main Verbs .....	60
Table 5.	Open-ended Main Verbs .....	64
Table 6.	Metaphoric Categories .....	71
Table 7.	"Communication is Sending" .....	84



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Consider the following hypothetical exchange between non-native speaker of English (X) and native speaker (Y).

(X): I hear you are 50 today. Happy Birthday!

(Y): Don't bring it up.

Failing to understand the phrase *bring it up* as an idiom, (X) is taken aback, not only by the abruptness of the response, but also because the phrase itself has no apparent link to the gambit.

Too inexperienced both in English and in the cultural background that English entails, (X) is unable to infer that (Y) might not welcome his own fiftieth birthday. (X) is thus unable to venture an appropriate answer. If (X) knows that *bring up*, in addition to meaning physically *carry to a higher elevation*, can also mean *bring attention to*, then this awkward conversational moment is avoided. But if not, then how is (X) to guess the alternative definition?

The expression *bring up*, used here in its figurative sense, is a grammatical structure commonly known as the phrasal verb, a verb + particle combination that functions

as a single semantic unit. The term "particle" refers to the adverb or preposition (in this case, *up*) as a phrasal verb component. Thus we have expressions such as *give up* (quit), *tell on* (inform on someone), and *wig out* (lose control), whereby the meaning is often not readily ascertained from the literal meanings of the component words. The verb and its companion particle fuse semantically to produce a hybrid meaning that emerges unpredictably from the constituents. The idiomatic meanings of phrasal verbs are thus embedded in other terms.

As such, the phrasal verb poses a frustrating problem for learners of English as a second or foreign language. To pursue this point in detail, consider the three forms in list 1.

- (1) *bring (it) up*
- (2) *turn (it) over to*
- (3) *run into*

Each of these phrases can be construed at least two ways, as exemplified below.

- (1a) *bring* (deliver) pizza *up* to the campsite.
- (1b) *bring* (mention) pizza *up* as a suggestion.
- (2a) *turn over* (flip upside down) a stone.

(2b) *turn over* (give opportunity to speak) to  
*someone else.*

(3a) *run into* (enter) *the building.*

(3b) *run into* (encounter) *a friend at the store.*

The optional meanings of each pair, listed as (a) and (b), are instinctively known by native speakers, but newcomers to English are likely hard-pressed to make sense of the idiomatic versions (1b, 2b, and 3b).

To a native speaker, each of the phrasal verbs in List 1 is understandable. In *bring up*, the idea of procurement is consistent, whether as a physical act (1a) or in terms of discourse (1b); *to bring something up in conversation* is close conceptually to the act of something 'appearing' (*bring*) 'from a submerged state' (*up*). *Turn over*, as an idiom alluding to a social act in (2b), similarly derives from a physical basis, in this case the changing of position or direction in (2a). When we say "turn over the microphone," we more often mean *relinquish its use to another person* than *position it upside down*. And *run into* is, in effect, synonymous as a verb phrase in (3a, 3b), no matter whom or what encountered. The interpersonal aspect of *run into* in (3b) logically derives from the kinetic aspect of *run* in (3a). A native speaker of English knows

that *running into someone* only means that one person actually crashes into another if so specified; it can just as easily mean that *one encounters someone or something by chance*. We can physically *run into someone on the football field*, or, we can socially *run into someone at the football game*. As an idiom, *run into* transposes the physical essence of *run* to another context. In all of the examples above, we can see how the meaning of the phrasal verb extends figuratively from a literal origin.

In addition to having idiomatic quality, phrasal verbs have pragmatic value as well. Again, consider *turn over*. Imagine speaking at an informal meeting and the time has come to introduce another speaker. Unless protocol requires specialized discourse, one would probably say *Now let's turn it over to . . .*," rather than putting it some other way, such as the options in list 2:

- (1) *Now I will ask . . . to speak.*
- (2) *Now . . . will begin speaking.*
- (3) *Now let me introduce . . .*
- (4) *Now it's . . . turn to speak.*

In (1, 2, 3), the register is so formal that the speaker sounds stilted. To say (4) is to over-explicate, as if the message needs to be spelled out in the plainest of

terms. The expression *turn it over to*, here as a succinct and unpretentious shift from one person to another, is thereby the preferred choice.

While this choice is made automatically by native speakers, non-native speakers must reckon with such a choice consciously, or even self-consciously, during the course of conversation. If not privy, either to the semantic potential of such 'simple' words and phrases or to their pragmatic value, the non-native speaker is left puzzled. Moreover, consider that the examples in List 1 are among the simplest of innumerable common phrasal verbs that permeate the English language across virtually all boundaries of dialect.

As newcomers become increasingly exposed to English, they cannot help but encounter such verb forms because English is laden with them. Paying only cursory curricular attention to these verb phrases would shortchange a student's chance to better appreciate expressive options in the English language. Phrasal verbs enable one to fine-tune a message using the simplest of words. Conversing without them would be like playing a piano with too many keys missing.

This brings us to the focus of this thesis: How can we help ESL students to unravel the meanings of phrasal verbs? I contend that through an instructional approach that emphasizes the figurative capacity of words, we can engender in such students an appreciation for phrasal verbs as systematically meaningful, not arbitrary. After all, how is one to know that *give it up* has currently come to mean *let's applause* and *spice it up* now means *to fight*? This is both the fun and the difficulty in phrasal verbs as a target form in English for newcomers. But learning phrasal verbs can offer more than an avenue into the vernacular; it can as well be orientation to the way idioms generate from a literal basis through semantic flexibility. Such flexibility, arguably, is what gives life to the phrasal verb as an organic and pliable form of expression.

But semantic flexibility poses for students a lot of cognitive territory to deal with, even within the scope of a single, common word. To elaborate, we can draw upon an example in List 1, *run into*, which builds from the main verb *run*. In contrast to the more confined range of *bring*, we use *run* in a much wider variety of expressions, as listed in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Versions of *run*.

---

<i>run a business</i>	<i>run out on someone</i>
<i>run for office</i>	<i>run up a tab</i>
<i>run water</i>	<i>run on empty</i>
<i>run from the law</i>	<i>run up a flag</i>
<i>run out of time</i>	<i>run in the family</i>
<i>run down a friend</i>	<i>run an ad</i>
<i>run the pool table</i>	<i>run into money</i>
<i>run with the wrong crowd</i>	<i>run into trouble</i>

---

The list could go on. The point is that the verb *run*, known primarily to mean, in Merriam Webster's (1995) definition, "to go steadily by springing steps so that both feet leave the ground for an instant in each step," applies differently when used in the ways shown above. But in all of the entries listed in Table 1, *run* fits because native speakers know the figurative extensions of *run* without even stopping to think about it. The way *run* works in *a person running* and *an engine running* seems synonymous because both expressions allude to continuous action. The idea of *run* applies differently, through metaphor, according to circumstances.

To imagine *run* in its various dimensions, one needs to consider that *the act of running* as a concept can relate through metaphoric continuity to other contexts. When we

say that a trait *runs in the family*, for instance, we refer to an action similar to *running water*, in that both 'flow' through on-going motion, whether as genetic transfer or as a liquid. Thus the figurative dimensions of *run* are various: operational (*run a motor, run a store, run an ad*), directional (*run into someone, run for president, run into trouble*), and as characterization (*it runs in the family, run with the wrong crowd, run wild*).

As mentioned, *run's* literal definition lends itself to this flexibility; most verbs are too specific to allow such semantic range, though even narrowly-defined verbs are still open to figurative interpretation. But many, such as *make, put, take, and turn*, are similar to *run* as flexible agents of metaphor that, despite their seeming simplicity, assume various specific meanings.

Stepping back, we can view phrasal verbs in general as a linguistic entity based on metaphor, whereby idiomatic meanings must be inferred from the literal meanings of the words at play. From this premise, we can devise a teaching strategy, also based on metaphor, which should help make phrasal verbs more sensible to students. To this end, I draw upon linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's theory that metaphor, as an operant of linguistic transfer from



one concept to another, is intrinsic to the connection between language and cognition at the most fundamental level.

In Metaphors We Live By (1980), Lakoff and Johnson substantiate a rationale behind how words semantically extend from their original meanings, whereby, for instance, *up* as a vertical orientation alludes to 'the positive' in such expressions as *live it up* (have a good time) and *live up to* (meet expectations). They thus go on to show that spatial orientations in general provide a cognitive basis for how we associate literal meanings of words with other dimensions of experience.

There are, as well, other recent studies devoted to teaching phrasal verbs through this cognitive and sensory association. One such study, by Andrzej Kurtyka (2001), focuses on *visualization* as a key to making phrasal verbs comprehensible to students. As he contends,

visualization is the most general model of the cosmos, present in the traditions of the majority of cultures, and a reflection of the mental organization in semiotic material. (p. 35)

By "semiotic," he means there are visually understood 'signs' (e.g., vertical orientation) that symbolically

correlate to the semantic value of words which, as he says, are "in terms of kinesthetic image schemas" (p. 35), or, put differently, in the way we see and experience physical things. Kurtkyka's approach to teaching phrasal verbs thus complements Lakoff and Johnson's theory, by recognizing how sensory perception underlies language at a fundamental level.

Accordingly, the pedagogical concern here is, through the insight of Lakoff and Johnson, to show how words we think of as essentially literal, can be taught as having semantic value metaphorically as well. Such semantic flexibility gives rise to phrasal verbs, which draw upon common words of only one or two syllables to express a wide spectrum of meanings. It follows that this quality of phrasal verbs, having certain meanings tucked into simple terms, is a linguistic property that invites investigation as an avenue to a teaching strategy.

To look into this, I have divided the overall concern of teaching phrasal verbs into three areas. Chapter Two discusses some key facets to the pedagogical problems that phrasal verbs pose: syntactic properties, lexical concerns, idiomaticity, and current treatment of phrasal verbs in ESL textbooks. Chapter Three is analysis of the

phrasal verb itself through the exploration and application of Lakoff and Johnson's theory that metaphor, evoked through simple words, is integral to how we instinctively connect experience and language. In Chapter Four, this theory is incorporated into a teaching approach to make phrasal verbs conceptually if not systematically plausible to ESL students. As an exercise in practice, I then devise a lesson that introduces metaphoric aspects of phrasal verbs as a way for students to gain insight into why, in as much as how, such structures act as they do idiomatically.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PROBLEM

To better appreciate the phrasal verb problem, we can break it down into separate, though overlapping areas of concern in terms of syntactic properties, lexicon, idiomaticity, and current treatment of phrasal verbs by ESL textbooks.

Though our purpose here is to investigate the metaphoric aspect of phrasal verbs as a key to understanding them as idioms, we must acknowledge the fact that phrasal verbs are characterized by certain syntactic properties. Not only do these properties help distinguish the phrasal verb as a distinct form, but by so doing, they impart the idiomatic quality of the phrasal verb as well.

#### Syntactic Properties

To more fully assess the complexity of the phrasal verb problem, we must acknowledge how syntactic properties factor in. However, given that this thesis is essentially concerned with semantic dimensions of phrasal verbs, I offer only a brief overview of their syntactic behavior.

Learning the meanings of phrasal verbs is one matter, but it is quite another to use phrasal verbs as they

naturally occur. They follow expected patterns in word arrangement, and orientation to these patterns is unavoidable if one hopes to avoid misplay in usage. We should thus look at some of the most obvious syntactic properties of phrasal verbs, to more fully appreciate the problem phrasal verbs pose as a whole.

The phrasal verb is semantically a self-contained entity, as opposed to other verb + (prepositional or adverbial phrase) constructions. But, despite its function as a single semantic unit, it is syntactically complex because it consists of two or three words. As a multi-word construction, it is thus subject to some extenuating syntactic rules that apply both within the structure itself, and with other sentence components.

When a phrasal verb is identical or similar in form to other grammatical structures, a word can either bind as a particle to the main verb (thus enjoining a phrasal verb), or it can belong to an adjacent prepositional or adverbial phrase. *Run into*, in the examples below, illustrates this grammatical option of how adverbs or prepositions such as *into* can become a phrasal verb constituent.

- (1) We ran into the street.
- (2) We ran into an old friend.

In (1), *ran into the street* is a verb + prepositional phrase construction, meaning *we entered the street*. In (2), however, *ran into* is a phrasal verb, whereby *into* binds as a particle with *ran*. As such, *ran into* is an idiom, using the same words that can as well be taken literally.

Furthermore, word order can be obligatory, in that viability of adverb placement identifies a phrasal verb apart from other verb phrases. The fact that we say *quickly turn on the light*, but not *turn quickly on the light*, shows how the phrasal verb as a bound form resists separation by an adverb.

The phrasal verb also has other internal structural rules related to word order. Consider *set up* in the following four phrases:

- (3) *set up* the microphone.
- (4) *set* the microphone *up*.
- (5) *set* it *up*.
- (6) \**set up* it.

In (3), the common subject-verb-object word order is clear. The phrasal verb *set up* in (4) has the same grammatical function, though here allowing its constituents to be separated by the noun object. In (5), however, object

placement between *set* and *up* is obligatory because the object is a pronoun, as we can see by comparison with (6). Since this characteristic of separability is grammatically conditional, it poses yet more problems for students.

Moreover, there is inevitable interplay between syntax and semantics. When both options are viable within a same context, a double-entendre can emerge. Does *throwing up in the bullpen* mean a pitcher is *practicing the act of throwing* in the designated area, or is that pitcher *vomiting* there? If *up in the bullpen* is taken as an adverbial phrase, the expression is literal. Taken idiomatically (in this case, *up* as particle, fused with *throw* to form a phrasal verb), it construes another meaning (vomiting). So, apart from any coincidental confusion of a word's grammatical alliance, as contexts can overlap, many verb phrase constructions are open to different interpretations.

The way in which phrasal verbs operate syntactically is thus intertwined with how they express meaning. This poses an unavoidable problem for both ESL teachers and students: How much attention should be paid to syntax with regard to phrasal verbs in general? The meaning of a phrasal verb often becomes evident through its syntactic

involvement with other sentence components. To downplay the importance of this involvement would limit one's facility to use phrasal verbs correctly. But when we consider other aspects to phrasal verbs as well, we will have to determine an appropriate instructional balance among all of the concerns involved.

### Lexicon

Phrasal verbs have evolved, and continue to do so, as an organic process of semantic extension, whereby words take on new meanings by virtue of their inclusion in a phrasal verb. A known authority on phrasal verbs, linguist Dwight Bolinger, in The Phrasal Verb in English (1971) states that "every language provides a means to coin out of its own substance" (p. xi). Over time, phrasal verbs have done exactly this. In his words,

The phrasal verb is a floodgate of metaphor.

Words from other sources are sharply

differentiated--one does not nowadays think of

the verb *to insult* as being once a literal

equivalent of *to jump on*; and similarly *to exult*

"to jump up and down for joy" and *to assault* "to

jump at" come sealed in tight capsules of



meaning. But with the phrasal verb this contact with original metaphor is maintained and gives rise to extensions that are as colorful as they are numerous. (p. xii)

But not only are phrasal verbs pervasive; they exist across such a wide spectrum of usage that while some are ensconced in our lexicon, others are by varying degrees temporary. Phrasal verbs may be especially liable to change given that they can be spontaneously and creatively composed, but in an established form (i.e., verbs bound with particles to form a hybrid meaning). Bolinger's work cited here was published in 1971, yet many of his examples are already out of fashion. In his Forward, he uses *step out* to show that phrasal verbs grow metaphorically from literal meanings.

Take the phrasal verb *to step out*. In all its meanings the metaphorical core lies bare, though of course we are free to ignore it:

I'm stepping out for a few minutes.

(absenting myself)

We're stepping out tonight. (celebrating)

She's stepping out on him. (two-timing him)

(pp. xii-xiii)

His first example is common usage, but the other two are no longer current. Rather than saying *stepping out*, we would say *We're going out tonight* and *She's going out on him*, with Bolinger's given meanings now expressed differently. The phrasal verb form itself is a constant, but the main verbs have changed. This is a problem not only for educators and publishers who need to keep up with contemporary usage, but for those in general who like to keep socio-linguistically attuned. An intrinsic quality of phrasal verbs, that they consist of short and simple words, allows new versions to easily emerge from a given theme. As we will see, this pliability can both help and hinder gaining a handle on them.

Aside from main verb semantic flexibility, the seeming simplicity of particles in and of themselves can be deceiving in how they play a role in the meaning of a phrasal verb. Looking again at *step out* compared with *go out*, the difference in meaning between main verbs *step* and *go* is marginal. But change the particle *out* to *up* and meanings change drastically in other directions. In addition to its literal interpretation (as in *step up to the stage*), *step up* has other meanings as well (e.g., accelerate, as in *step up the pace*, or to make one's

presence known, as in *step up* and *speak your mind*). The shift from *out* to *up* changes the whole idea.

This leads to a basic two-fold problem inherent to student acquisition of phrasal verbs. One is that surface similarity between main verbs is no guarantee that two such related phrasal verbs mean close to the same thing. The other is that particles can each entail distinct and yet varying realms of meaning.

Combinations of main verbs and particles thus create an exponentially widening realm of possibilities in usage. As noted above, when we change particles, we change meaning, as in *step out* (absent one's self), *step in* (join a conversation or action), *step on* (take advantage of someone), and *step down* (vacate a higher social position). If we then change *step* to *go*, we have all kinds of new possibilities, such as *go out* (as in *go out of style*, or, as in *go out on the town*), *go out with* (be romantically involved), *go into* (as in *go into music as a profession*), and *go in on* (share expense). More recently, *go there*, in its idiomatic sense, has come to mean *talk about*. So out of the two main verbs *step* and *go*, we can easily conjure a wide variety of meanings. Multiply this by even a handful

of other verb and particle combinations, and one begins to appreciate the amount of lexical possibilities that exist.

Overlap of literal and idiomatic versions of phrasal verbs can lead to some interesting puns as well, such as a clever announcement on the television show People's Court (19 Dec. 02), that "The landlord is charged with turning on his tenants." In addition to its literal meaning, as in *turn on the light*, *turn on* also has other optional meanings, such as *to give pleasure* or *to attack*.

The overall point here is that phrasal verbs are lexically diverse within their internal structure. Moreover, their lexical aspect also overlaps with meanings of words in general. To define the phrasal verb as a linguistic entity, one of Bolinger's criteria, which he calls "the most general of all," is based on "replaceability," that is, that phrasal verbs should have single word equivalents in meaning. He cites such comparisons as *count out* to *exclude*, *look into* to *investigate*, *egg on* to *incite*, and *get around* to *circumvent*. But Bolinger admonishes that this criteria "includes both too little and too much," and he gives three instances that show how some phrasal verbs resist such a simple rule.

The plane took off. ("departed" is not specific)

He broke out with a rash. ("erupted" is  
ludicrous)

He hauled off and hit me. (no synonym that I am  
aware of, unless we admit "He upped and hit me.")

(p. 6)

Though Bolinger contends "'erupted' is ludicrous," it  
may at times be a better option given the context. *Break  
out* is a term loose enough to cover varying circumstances,  
but a certain word such as *erupt* might work better. In any  
case, phrasal verbs in general offer lexical options that  
may or may not be appropriate.

Even when phrasal verbs do have precise one-word  
equivalents, the phrasal verb may be preferred. Sitting  
around a campfire, for instance, one would more likely say  
*put out the fire* than *extinguish the fire*. This preference  
is key, in that phrasal verbs are simple and unpretentious  
expressions. Conversely, when the phrasal verb version is  
the usual choice, a single-word alternative may have a more  
emphatic or aesthetic effect. Again as an example, *erupt*  
is more forceful compared with the neutral *break out*. So,  
in addition to being expedient through their simplicity,

phrasal verbs can also serve as a norm against which other word choices become more eloquent.

But finding suitable semantic equivalents and alternatives leads to another question: How can one ascertain the idiomatic extension from a phrasal verb's literal construct? Herein lies an aspect of phrasal verbs that helps describe them: they build metaphorically from their surface components to assume seemingly unpredictable meanings. This unpredictability, resultant from metaphoric extension, leads to our next area of concern.

#### Idiomaticity

Phrasal verbs can be viewed as following a semantic continuum from the most literally transparent to the most figuratively opaque. And often there are those that can be taken optionally, with context bringing the idiomatic versions to life. We can *fall into a hole* or we can *fall into politics as a career*. Such idiomatic potential makes phrasal verbs fun to learn because students thereby gain widening access to the English vernacular. Yet, at the same time, phrasal verbs are conceptually puzzling because they so often mean something different than what they say when taken literally. To investigate, we will review how

idiomatic usage ranges from the obvious to the perplexing, all within the influence of metaphor as the operative.

Idiomaticity occurs in a variety of ways among phrasal verbs, evident through context and interpretation, not just form. To get an idea of the range and depth of the idiomatic potential that characterizes phrasal verbs, we could begin with those most readily understandable through literal association.

The transparent *move out* takes little effort to understand; the respective literal values of main verb and particle are both expressive of motion. By itself, the verb *move* does not specifically intimate "changing residence," but its core meaning fits the context. Alluding to a change of residence, there is little difference in meaning between *I have to move* and *I have to move out*. The particle *out* serves to intensify the action, but it is not needed to convey the idea. Another possible use of *move out* could be a soldier entreating fellow soldiers to begin and follow a course of action. Again, either *move* and *move out* works. But as a phrasal verb, *move out* only works under certain conditions. One would not normally say, when asking someone to vacate a seat, *Can you move out, please?* In other words, *move* and *move out*

are not synonymous; the phrasal verb form has its own purpose.

*Move out* is at the most literal end of the idiomatic continuum because it means what it says at face value. *Move on* is similar in that *on* augments the core meaning of *move* to convey furtherance. Rosemary Courtney, in her comprehensive Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs (1983), defines *move on* in an idiomatic sense, "to advance in one's way of life, work, etc." (p. 395) In fact, we also say *move on it* (initiate action), *move on to* (change direction in discourse), and *move on* (leave a relationship). The literal meaning of *move* is still a main part of the idea.

But what about phrasal verbs such as *choose off*, *make out*, or *make up*? These typify the other extreme. The meanings of the main verbs are apparent, but when these verbs pair up with particles, they only play a supporting role in the phrases. Furthermore, as phrases, they take on completely definitions in the process. How can one guess, from knowing the meaning of *choose*, that *choose off* means to challenge someone to fight? It could stem from *pick a fight*, in that *pick* and *choose* are so close. But *choose*, by definition, has no semantic connection to the notion of conflict. (*Pick*, similar to *choose*, assumes its own



reference to conflict by adding *off*; *pick off* can mean "shooting a person or animal one by one, taking careful aim" [Courtney, p. 417].) In *choose off*, the literal meaning of the main verb *choose* defers to another meaning through its companion particle. So, in *I chose him off*, we have an idiomatic expression that has more dynamic, 'street' value than *I challenged him*.

*Make out* and *make up* present other problems. For one, *make* is a general term, used in a wide assortment of ways. Thus, in phrasal verbs that build around *make*, the word *make* acts generically to carry the message while the particles do the specifying. Thus we have *make do*, *make out*, *make up*, *make up to*, *make up with*, *make up for*, *make off with*, etc. (Courtney lists 36 phrasal verbs derived from *make*, and there are undoubtedly more in use.)

But can we infer how particles generate idiomaticity? Why for instance would *make out with someone* mean to passionately embrace and kiss, and *make up with someone* mean to reconcile? Furthermore, *make out* also means *discern*, as in *making out what someone is saying*. Is there some inherent quality to *out* and *up* respectively that generates these meanings? In *make out* as *discern*, the particle *out* makes sense if one imagines the physical

action of pulling something (a truth or perception) out of an unknown. But why does *out* bind with *make* to assume another meaning in *I'd like to make out with her*?

Perhaps the expression evolved from original usage as a verb + prepositional phrase. The generic quality of *make* as a main verb allows it to semantically extend to amorous activity, and *out* could have been intended literally, as a preposition of location, as in *out in the car*. Over time, the preposition *out* could have consolidated with *make* to engender a new phrasal verb that expresses the act itself.

Clinical as it may sound, *out* in a metaphoric sense can also be construed as a physical realization, or emergence, of another state of being. This could account for the emergence of *make out* as a common idiom, in that *out* is an intimation of transformation. *Freak out* and *flip out* have a similar aspect, as do *pass out* and *black out*.

Furthermore, when things *pan out*, they assume a new status that has been realized from a previous state. Again, *out* is operative; it both specifies and intensifies. Even the common *find out* (learn, discover) implies closure of a preexisting uncertainty; it is complete in nature. But then again, so does *up* express completion, as in *drink*

*up* or *clean up*. Particles in general thus have conceptual overlap in how they operate.

But particles are only part of the semantic equation. Main verbs have their own peculiar qualities, that, when paired with a particle, create a different set of problems. Consider the difference between *clean up* and *make up*. *Clean up* is comparatively self-explanatory; it falls here at the literal end of the continuum while the idiomatic *make up* leaves its meaning open to interpretation. What they do have in common is that in each case, *up* entails the same sense of completion. *Clean up* emphasizes more the idea of finishing a task than does *clean* by itself (recall *move out* compared with *move*), as does *make up* include the idea of something realized, as in *to make up a story*. But *make up* extends even further, as in *make up with someone* (reconcile). It still includes completion, but here in the sense of resolution of a problem. So *make up* is more semantically flexible.

This reflects a characteristic difference between the verbs *clean* and *make*. The metaphoric extension from *clean* to *clean up* is minimal; the original meaning of *clean* is preserved in the phrasal verb version. The resultant meaning of *make up*, however, is semantically distant from

the original meaning of *make*, insofar as reconciliation is thematically distant from the physical act of *making something*. Such variance in distance of metaphoric extension is evident among phrasal verbs in general. There may be some continuity in the figurative value of particles (e.g., sense of completion), but variance in metaphoric potential of main verbs renders the phrasal verb domain itself more problematic.

Metaphor also emerges in the form of personification, which is the manner of expressing human experience through non-human terms. In phrasal verbs, personification frequently arises from the simple inclusion of a particle. We *butter the toast*, but we *butter up the boss*. The act of currying favor, metaphorically expressed as *buttering up*, derives from the act of enhancing flavor, but the idiom only emerges when put in phrasal verb form. We cannot say *butter the boss* without intimating the literal action; the particle *up* is what extends the meaning.

Personification itself, however, in the realm of phrasal verbs, operates as the main verb is redefined as it alludes to human behavior. We thus have *chicken out* (refrain out of fear), *clam up*, (be silent), *egg on* (urge; incite), and *pig out* (eat voraciously), to name a few.

But how readily can one ascertain the link between literal quality of the main verb and figurative value of the phrasal verb? As a case in point, how can we relate *egg* to the idiom *egg on*? While personification is visually and hence cognitively clear in some phrasal verbs, it works idiosyncratically, if not mysteriously, in others. And so overall, personification, as an aspect of idiomaticity in phrasal verbs, is pedagogically problematic in and of itself.

So far, we have seen how phrasal verbs grammatically and lexically coincide with other verb phrases, and how they range from plainly literal to highly idiomatic. Given then that phrasal verbs are so multi-faceted in nature, we now turn to see how they are approached in currently published teaching materials.

#### Textbook Treatment

Since my main purpose is to improve upon existing conventions in teaching phrasal verbs, in this section I examine published ESL textbooks to find out how phrasal verbs are treated. For scrutiny, I will look at five textbooks currently in use, four of which are comprehensive

grammar texts, and one devoted specifically to phrasal verbs and other two-word verb combinations.

One of the aforementioned four, Susan Bland's 500 page Intermediate Grammar: From Form to Meaning and Use (1996), does not include phrasal verbs as a target form. Nor does her text touch on verb + prepositional phrases, which are themselves idiosyncratic in how certain verbs characteristically pair up with certain prepositions (e.g., *wait for*; *look at*). Perhaps Bland considers such verb phrases more a lexical than structural matter and thus beyond her scope of concern.

The other grammar texts each include at least one unit devoted to phrasal verbs, backed up with an appendix. In Marjorie Fuchs, Margaret Bonner, and Miriam Westheimer's Focus on Grammar: An Intermediate Course for Reference and Practice (2000), thirteen phrasal verbs are presented in context, followed by a grammatical analysis of phrasal verbs in general, and with a total of 140 entries in the appendix. Fuchs and Bonner's "High-Intermediate" companion text of the same edition offers two units, with 34 phrasal verbs treated in context, and a total of 200 entries in its appendix. Betty Schramper Azar's Fundamentals of English Grammar (1992) offers a total of 58 target forms, all of

which are incorporated into the exercises. And so in terms of volume alone, these texts recognize the phrasal verb as an important variation of the English verb in general.

But textbook authors face the problem of deciding which definitions to present when a phrasal verb has multiple meanings. (Recall, for instance, the various meanings of *make out*.) Granted, we should not overburden students with too much too soon. But variations in meanings of phrasal verbs should not be downplayed; to the contrary, such variation should be explored as a window into how words behave differently as idioms.

To define a specific phrasal verb, instructional texts necessarily offer single-word and phrasal 'equivalents.' Fuchs, Bonner, and Westheimer's intermediate text addresses this point with a "Usage Note" that "Many phrasal verbs and one-word verbs have similar meanings. The phrasal verbs are more informal and much more common in everyday speech" (p. 97). (Underlining is as appears in text.) *Bring up* is accordingly equated with *raise*, *figure out* with *solve*, and so forth.

The authors' idea is to keep things simple at this introductory stage, so there is no mention of optional meanings. However, in addition to *solve*, the appendix does

define *bring up* as "bring attention to" (A-3). So the student may still encounter an optional meaning, though the fact that multiple meanings commonly occur is omitted from the heart of the lesson. Only in the high-intermediate text do the authors make mention of this property, though in a cursory manner: "BE CAREFUL! Like other words, phrasal verbs often have more than one meaning." The single example offered is the contrast between *turn down the radio* (lower volume), and *turn down an application* (reject). (p. 158)

Azar's Fundamentals of English Grammar neglects alternative meanings completely; not one phrasal verb is assigned more than one definition. Some of the obvious examples are *take off*, listed as "remove clothes from one's body," *turn up* as "increase the volume," and *turn down* as "decrease the volume" (A-5); common alternative meanings, such as *depart*, *appear*, and *reject*, respectively, are left out.

Azar limits her lexical treatment to avoid overwhelming the student, but she could at least warn that often there are other meanings beyond the selected definitions. As with *bring up* and *take off*, many common phrasal verbs have considerable range in meaning. I argue



that these texts tend to lexically over-simplify phrasal verbs, choosing only a narrow version when there are others that equally apply. Overall, there needs to be a balance between what students are taught, what they can be expected to absorb, and the reality of what they are up against.

Aside from variations and differences in meanings of a phrasal verb as a unit, inconsistency in what particles mean in and of themselves becomes apparent through inconsistencies in how textbooks choose to present them as phrasal verb constituents. To illustrate, consider how some phrasal verbs are featured in J. N. Hook's Two-Word Verbs in English (2002).

To provide context, Hook embeds phrasal verbs in stories, which is a useful and engaging way to present the target forms. And, to show that phrasal verbs are not one-dimensional, he explains at the beginning of his first chapter's glossary that "the definitions given here are those you need for the story you are reading in this chapter. The same verb may also have other, somewhat different meanings" (p. 6). He then begins one story with "the alarm clock . . . goes off at 6:30 A.M. Sleepily, Mr. Jackson reaches toward it to *turn it off*" (p. 17). But

here, within one sentence, we have contrastive effects of *off*.

In the chapter's glossary, Hook defines *turn off* as "stop (the water, light, clock, television, etc)" (p. 20). But in the same glossary, he lists *go off* as "ring, sound (an alarm clock or a similar device)" (p. 18). So the student may wonder why the choice between *go* and *turn*, both of which express 'movement' or 'change' in their literal sense, calls into question such a semantic distinction between *go off* (activate) and *turn off* (deactivate) respectively.

Such a random manner of presentation can confuse students, in this case with the different ways that *off* works in phrasal verbs. But such inconsistency is not limited to Hook's exercise; it pervades published material in general. In fact, Hook's first choice of meaning for *go off* is not even listed in Courtney's dictionary. Courtney's first listed definition is "to leave, esp. suddenly." The second meaning follows suit, citing the context of an actor 'going off stage.' Her third and fourth definitions are also conceptually contrastive in meaning to Hook's alarm clock context:

3. to cease: *The pain went off after three treatments.*

4. to be switched off; not be supplied: . . . .  
*The power went off in several parts of the country during the high wind. (p. 261)*

The idea of *pain going off* is consistent with *power going off* (though from my experience, the idea of 'pain going off' has never been expressed that way; we usually say "pain going away," which shows how usage varies). But in both 3 and 4 above, as an allusion to deactivation, *off* conflicts conceptually with the activation of a sounding alarm. So we have yet another dimension of ambiguity that contributes to the problem for students. The particle *off* can just as easily connote the idea of activation (e.g., *blast off*) as it can deactivation (e.g., *turn off the light*).

So even dictionaries send mixed signals. Cobuild's English Learner's Dictionary (1990), designed especially for intermediate to advanced ESL students, defines *off* initially as

1. When something is taken off something else or when it moves or comes off, it is taken away or moves away so that it is no longer on the other

thing or attached to it. *He took his hand off her arm . . .* (p. 667)

This definition reflects the assumption that *off* essentially means some kind of *distancing, removal, or deactivation*. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary puts it this way: "1. from a place or position . . . at a distance in space or time." But the use of *off* varies; it applies differently even within the lexical domain of a single phrasal verb, as in an *alarm clock going off* as opposed to a *worker off the clock*. So is it fair to expect dictionaries such as Cobuild's, aimed at ESL students, to acknowledge such a distinction? We might want to play it safe by keeping things simple, but I argue that it would be prudent to forewarn students of flexibility in usage.

The fact is that the semantic range of a word as simple as *off* is considerably wide. As discussed, though both Cobuild and Webster's categorical definitions all fall within the framework of *off* giving a sense of separation or discontinuance, the *off* in Hook's alarm clock "going off" has a different bent (in this case activation). But *off* semantically extends even further in other phrasal verbs.

*Come off as*, for instance, idiomatically means having a certain impression on someone (similar to *come*

across), as in *He came off as a really nice guy.*

Similarly, the figurative sense of *pull off* means *succeed at completing a difficult task*. Yet another example is *face off* or *square off*, meaning to initially confront an adversary in a competitive or contentious challenge.

All of these expressions emanate from the semantic core of *off*, yet they allude to some form of positive action or realization rather than to removal or distancing. Along this same vein, *go off on someone* is another semantic extension that relates to an alarm clock *going off* in that both express an action, or more precisely a reaction as in *She was mad; she really went off on me*. Interestingly, Courtney's dictionary excludes the frequently used *go off on*, but at least her fifth definition of *go off*, "to explode; make a sudden noise," comes close contextually to Hook's alarm clock. Fuchs and Bonner's high-intermediate Focus on Grammar lists *go off* simply as "explode (a gun/fireworks/a rocket)" (A-7), which contrasts with the sense of deactivation expressed by *off*, as in the *power went off*. Their choice may help students entertain a figurative alternative in usage, but by limiting the definition, it can also raise questions in a student's mind about other common semantic applications.

This hints at what a vast scope of meanings and applications we are faced with, an array that is constantly evolving. As said before, phrasal verbs are by their very nature prone to change over time, especially given our inclination to tinker with language as we use it. So it is not surprising that any textbook's definitions are incomplete. But should it be surprising how such an authoritative dictionary as Courtney's could give short shrift to the meaning that Hook chooses to present up front? Again, it shows the difficulty of reining in all the meanings of many phrasal verbs given the diversity of possibilities involved.

There has to be a reasonable number of phrasal verbs in any ESL textbook, so the problem is not only which ones to choose, but how idiomatic should they be? In the interest of student comprehension, Azar keeps her selection limited to those at the literal end of the semantic spectrum. This way, students can get a feel for how phrasal verbs work as single units of meaning without having to worry too much about semantic extension. But so far, we have found idiomatic variations in all of the examples featured above. I contend, rather than to sidestep such variation, it should be highlighted.

All three of the grammar texts do well to delineate syntactic rules of separability, and how such rules relate to transitivity. They also include an index of verb + preposition combinations, which, at its very least, informs students that verbs and their companion particles or prepositions need to work together properly, whether as phrasal verbs or not.

But when it comes to *why* these verb-particle combinations act as they do, students are left in the dark. Particles by themselves have their own metaphoric qualities that remain ignored, by all four textbooks, as having any conceptual framework that could prove useful. Of course, since each constituent of a phrasal verb contributes its own idiomatic value, students must contend with more than just one aspect at a time.

In light of the complexity that phrasal verbs incur, ESL professionals tend to group them simply in terms of syntactic structure, and otherwise randomly. But there is, as I propose, metaphoric continuity that can be exploited as a way of understanding how and why phrasal verbs use the words that they do. As Lakoff and Johnson show us, the cognitive extensions of words have an experiential basis. If, in the course of instruction, we group phrasal verbs

initially in terms of sensory experience and perception, then we let students know firsthand that phrasal verbs are not random, but in fact conform to a natural system of usage. This leads us to the next step, where we look at ways that metaphor is intrinsic to how phrasal verbs work.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ROLE OF METAPHOR

In this chapter, to investigate metaphor as a conceptual basis in teaching phrasal verbs, I will first introduce Lakoff and Johnson's claim that metaphor is woven into the fabric of the English language at a fundamental level. Then, I will detail how main verbs and particles, as phrasal verb constituents, can be conceived as idiomatically operable according to this claim. To conclude, I will examine how phrasal verbs exemplify Lakoff and Johnson's principles, by typecasting selected phrasal verbs according to the authors' proposed metaphoric categories. But let us begin by clarifying metaphor itself as a linguistic entity.

Put in formal terms, Merriam Webster defines metaphor as:

1. . . . a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (as in *drowning in money*); *broadly* ; figurative language -

compare SIMILE 2. an object, activity, or idea treated as a metaphor.

David Crystal's The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language (1987) succinctly defines metaphor as "two unlike notions . . . implicitly related, to suggest an identity between them" (p. 70). Lakoff and Johnson also put it simply, that "the essence of metaphor is understanding one thing in terms of another" (p. 5). Accordingly, metaphor is a means of expression that opens words up to interpretation beyond their original meaning.

As a linguistic device, metaphor gives original flair and texture to expressions that would otherwise remain flat or uninteresting. In other words, metaphor can fine-tune how one chooses to express one's self, by putting things in certain terms to make a point. It may, for instance, be more effective to say *this is hell* than *this is horrible*, in that *hell* as a metaphor infuses emotional color into the utterance. Given the situation, the adjective *horrible* may be accurate, though it may not suffice expressively.

Lakoff and Johnson contend, however, that more than operating as a consciously applied expressive device, metaphor is in fact subconsciously embedded in our everyday

use of language. To pursue Lakoff and Johnson's premise, I now turn to their theory in detail.

### Lakoff and Johnson's Theory

In Metaphors We Live By, Lakoff and Johnson posit that the English language is intuitively "grounded" in metaphor. At a basic level of usage, for instance, we use terms that refer to spatial dimensions when talking about yet other dimensions of experience. The authors accordingly identify these terms as "orientational" and "ontological" metaphors, evident in phrases that use prepositions and adverbs of direction and location, as well as certain verbs, to signify concepts that extend beyond what such words literally mean.

To clarify through example, consider the use of *up* as a basic orientational metaphor. Lakoff and Johnson point out that the vertical orientation *up* connotes a positive aspect, given that *standing up* is active as opposed to *lying down* being inactive. By positive, we presume that *standing up* signifies a 'live' state while *lying down* might not. The use of *up* thus extends to assume an array of other semantic applications that fall within the framework

of positive experience. Hence, we have *live it up*, *cheer up*, and *live up to one's expectations*.

The authors caution that making such an association may be a cultural presumption, but as far as innumerable expressions are concerned, for native speakers of English the distinction between *up* and *down* directly correlates to *good* and *bad* respectively; *feeling down* means just what it says. After all, when people are unhappy, they tend to lower their glance, not lift their heads high. We thus have an empirical basis for how notions of *up* and *down* semantically extend through metaphor.

It follows that a wide variety of words and expressions systematically derive from this *up/down* spatial orientation when referring to other dimensions of experience. The authors lay out the following categories and examples that apply:

(1) HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN

I'm feeling *up*. My spirits *sank*.

(2) CONSCIOUS IS UP; UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN

Get *up*. He *dropped off* to sleep.

(3) HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP; SICKNESS AND DEATH  
ARE DOWN

He's at the *peak* of health. He *fell* ill.

(4) HAVING CONTROL OF FORCE IS UP; BEING SUBJECT  
TO CONTROL OR FORCE IS DOWN

I am *on top* of the situation. He is *under* my  
control.

(5) MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN

My income *rose* last year. If you're too hot,  
turn the heat *down*.

(6) FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP (and AHEAD)

What's coming *up* this week?

(7) HIGH STATUS IS UP; LOW STATUS IS DOWN

He has a *lofty* position. She *fell* in status.

(8) VIRTUE IS UP; DEPRAVITY IS DOWN

She has *high* standards. That was a *low-down*  
thing to do.

(9) RATIONAL IS UP; EMOTIONAL IS DOWN

The discussion *fell to the emotional* level, but I  
*raised* it back *up to the rational* plane. (pp. 15-

17)

Above, we can see here how the *up/down* distinction is  
integral to how we refer to things; it seems as if there is  
no other way for us to put it.

Furthermore, *up* has another sense that can be  
attributed to the MORE IS UP axiom, as such expressions as

*finishing up a job* and *all used up* figuratively derive the idea of completion from vertical orientation (e.g., *filling up a glass*). *Up* also intimates bringing more out of less, as in *thinking up a plan* or *making up a story*. Through all these examples, we can see how a word as rudimentary as *up*, expediently associates with verbs to effect a variety of meanings.

Other orientational metaphors derive from a different sense of spatialization. What Lakoff and Johnson term "conduit metaphors" are ways in which we refer to communication as a process of spatial transfer. Here are some of their examples:

It's hard to *get* that idea *across* to him.

It's difficult to *put* my ideas *into* words.

The meaning is right there *in* the words.

Don't *force* your meanings *into* the wrong words.

(p. 11)

To talk about the act of expression itself, we infuse additional meaning into common words most readily at our disposal, namely here prepositions of direction or location. Thus spatially-referenced words such as *across*, *in*, and *into*, convey (or act as a "conduit" sending) ideas or messages. In fact, as Lakoff and Johnson exemplify

above, words themselves can be thought of as containers into which ideas, as physical entities, can be moved or placed. Again, it is a physical basis for talking about quasi-dimensional things.

As Lakoff and Johnson go on to demonstrate, this viewpoint accounts for yet other ways in which language operates. Just as "human spatial orientations give rise to orientational metaphors," in their words,

so our experiences with physical objects  
(especially our own bodies) provide the basis for  
an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological  
metaphors, that is, ways of viewing events,  
activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities  
and substances. (p. 25)

Merriam Webster defines "ontology" as "a branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relations of being." Lakoff and Johnson use this term as a classification because it regards "events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc" as all having an essence (or "being") which, in order to acknowledge in words, we refer to metaphorically as having physical characteristics or boundaries. Ontological metaphors are accordingly broken down into sub-categories as "Entity and Substance

Metaphors," and "Container Metaphors." First, consider 'the mind' as an entity or substance, through their examples.

THE MIND IS A MACHINE

We're still trying to *grind out* the solution to this equation.

Boy, the *wheels are turning* now!

THE MIND IS A BRITTLE OBJECT

Her ego is very *fragile*.

The experience *shattered* him. (pp. 27-28)

This figurative way of referring to our mental experience has naturally evolved to where our most accessible way of describing something is in terms of what we know about the physical characteristics of objects.

Just as the idea of one's mind is here transposed metaphorically into a physical entity or substance, so do container metaphors envision "events, activities, emotions, and ideas, etc" as physical domains that can be entered, inhabited, exited, or be outside of. Again, prepositions of location are operative. Consider these of Lakoff and Johnson's examples:

(1) How did you get *into* window-washing as a profession?



(2) How did Jerry *get out of* washing the windows?

(3) He's *in* love.

(4) He *entered* a state of euphoria. (pp. 31-32)

The physical correlation to such kinds of experience enables us to grasp these experiences verbally. Even the word *grasp* as used here is, as Lakoff and Johnson point out, another metaphor that has an experiential basis. They qualify "UNDERSTANDING IS GRASPING" by noting that

with physical objects, if you can grasp something and hold it in your hands, you can look it over carefully and get a reasonably good understanding of it. (p. 20)

So, though an idea is ethereal in nature, it can still be grasped as if it were held in one's hand. To reiterate, overall we use figurative language rooted in tangible terms not only to convey things that are not tangible, but we do so without forethought.

This thematically underscores Lakoff and Johnson's theory, whereby they remind us that "our conceptual system is not something we are normally aware of" (p. 3). The intent here is to show that such a conceptual system indeed underlies the figurative nature of phrasal verbs, and that in the interests of teaching, we should uncover and use

this system to some pedagogical advantage. Lakoff and Johnson offer an opportunity to do so by examining how we analogously extend meanings of simple words without even knowing that we do.

#### Metaphoric Aspects to Phrasal Verbs

Having examined Lakoff and Johnson's theory, we can now use it as a conceptual springboard to assess how phrasal verbs act metaphorically to mean what they do. Accordingly, in this section, I dissect selected phrasal verbs in terms of their constituents' characteristics. The overall objective is to envision phrasal verbs in a way that they can be thematically taught. In the next chapter, I thus apply this investigative process toward the development of a teaching strategy.

I focus here on particles and main verbs as separate entities, but since phrasal verbs constitute interplay between constituents, discussion of one inevitably involves the other. In any case, the role of each can be isolated to an extent, in the interest of understanding its particular quality. The process of investigating phrasal verbs in this manner can help the teacher to make them more conceptually manageable for students.

As we have seen, phrasal verbs express notions in terms that may not appear to relate to the literal meanings of the component words themselves, which is why they can be puzzling to students. Bolinger (1971) points out that phrasal verbs are popular because,

as a lexical unit . . . their success must lie in the familiarity and management of the elements. . . . It also lies in imagery. The phrasal verb is a floodgate of metaphor. (p. xii)

Here Bolinger recognizes that the metaphoric quality of phrasal verbs factors into their proliferation in usage. But while some phrasal verbs incorporate metaphor in obvious ways, others may not. As said, there are terms in phrasal verbs that *may not appear* to relate, which is to acknowledge that there may well be some logical association among seemingly unrelated words. The question now is how does metaphor play into this association?

To investigate, I draw upon a database of phrasal verbs to illustrate how they idiomatically operate according to characteristics of the constituents. To establish a database, I have selected from Courtney's dictionary some 200 entries whose meanings I judge not to be transparent, given that the more idiomatic entries are

especially pertinent to this study. I also contribute several entries of my own.

To begin, with regard to particles, we will see that there are obvious patterns in how phrasal verbs use particles metaphorically. But as we shall also see, there is considerable diversity as well in how each particle behaves semantically. As it is, the range of particles is limited to begin with. Bolinger cites the seventeen "most productive" (p. 18), which I call "prevalent," as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Prevalent Particles

---

about	aside	down	out	up
across	away	in	over	
along	back	off	through	
around	by	on	under	

---

Interestingly, Bolinger excludes *into*, perhaps because it is not commonly used as a particle, though I question why he includes *aside* and *under*, which are rarely used. Nevertheless, of Bolinger's seventeen "most productive," there are only twelve particles used among the phrasal

verbs in our database, with an added four that occur infrequently: *for*, *into*, *low*, and *to*.

The twelve particles constituent in the phrasal verbs from the database are shown here in list (1): *across*, *ahead*, *around*, *away*, *back*, *down*, *in*, *off*, *on*, *out*, *through*, *up*.

These twelve share a significant trait in that they are the most cognitively simplistic. That is, they represent spatial orientations that we learn as infants, and as words we learn them early on. Particles such as *about*, *along*, and *aside* are more complex in that they require more cognition of dimension. Thus simplicity gives rise to metaphoric flexibility. (Remember how such a simple word as *off* applies conceptually in different ways.) In other words, we can play with the simplest particles more easily because they express experience in such basic terms.

If we accept Lakoff and Johnson's premise that orientational (e.g., *up*) and ontological (e.g., *out*) metaphors underlie the semantic potential of words, then we can premise a relationship between particles and the meanings of the phrasal verbs that use them. We have seen how *up*, *down*, *in*, and *out* each signifies a related manner

or condition in some other sense metaphorically, whether through spatial orientation or ontological association. It follows then that *up* and *down* naturally occur more among phrasal verbs that fit into the orientational metaphors of more/less, happy/sad, high status/low status, and so on. In ontological metaphors, the *in/out* distinction more often applies, as it refers to ideas and activities in terms of a domain; hence such expressions as *going into law* and *getting out of music (as a profession)*.

The metaphoric qualities of particles can thus be unveiled to reveal a pattern in how certain particles fit certain expressions. The vertical sense of *up*, for instance, semantically extends from the physically-based MORE IS UP concept, to assume social and psychological aspects as well, as in *moving up in the world*, or *feeling up*.

*Up* has its own dynamic quality as well, as in *shut up!* But overall, *up* is frequent because it applies in so many ways. Consequentially, it is this very contrast between *up* and its action-referenced counterparts *off* and *out* that, when contextually called for, gives *off* and *out* their own semantic force, as in *pull off* (accomplish) and *make out* (kiss passionately). There is thus semantic diversity in

how the particle metaphorically consolidates the specific meanings of phrasal verbs.

In some cases, particles at face value may not seem congruent with the figurative meaning of the phrasal verb that employs it. *Pull off*, for example, in its idiomatic sense, means to accomplish something difficult, an active concept. But *off*, held to its primary dictionary definition, means either being inactive or being spatially removed; there is no apparent logical connection to the concept of production or accomplishment. Imagine, however, that the physical act of *pulling something tightly anchored off its moorings* as idiomatically analogous if *off* is taken in its sense of activation, similar conceptually to Hook's alarm clock. After all, if one wants something *off* (physically removed) of something else, then the result of literally *pulling it off* conveys the idea of *accomplishment*, hence conceptually "active." *Pull off* here is an example, then, of varying conceptual patterns in how particles behave.

Despite variance in meaning, however, metaphoric patterns that emerge in particle usage should be helpful in making phrasal verbs understandable to non-native speakers. The concepts of action, completion, and realization, for

instance, are metaphorically intimated through the particles *up*, *off*, and *out*. Main verbs steer the phrases' semantic intent, but the particles themselves determine specific meanings. Particles, after all, are the constituents that transform main verbs into phrasal verbs *per se*.

But sometimes the significance of the particle is overshadowed by the main verb. In other words, we must always be ready to consider how the main verb itself plays into a phrasal verb's idiomatic quality, for such is characteristic of phrasal verbs in general, that main verbs, as constituents, can be reenacted in a new sense.

Of the phrasal verbs singled out for this study, some of the main verbs derive from nouns because those nouns contain some inherent aspect that figuratively shapes the meaning both of and as a verb. The property of a certain noun can thus work as an ontological metaphor that drives its meaning as a phrasal verb constituent.

Many words work as nouns or as verbs with no primary alliance to either function, such as *iron* (e.g., *I need to iron my shirt but I can't find the iron*). But the following nouns, in Table 3, that assume the role of main verb, are generally regarded as pure nouns until they bind



with a particle. (Those with asterisks are not as pure, but are still commonly used as nouns.) Parenthesized words and phrases clarify the verb aspect through example.

Table 3. Main Verbs Derived from Nouns

---

<i>beef</i> (up)	<i>farm</i> (out the work)*
<i>belt</i> (out a tune)	<i>fire</i> (up the motor)*
<i>black</i> (out)	<i>gang</i> (up on)
<i>bog</i> (down)	<i>gum</i> (up)
<i>book</i> (up)	<i>head</i> (out)
<i>bug</i> (off)	<i>monkey</i> (around)
<i>butter</i> (up)	<i>peter</i> (out)
<i>chicken</i> (out)	<i>pipe</i> (down)
<i>clam</i> (up)	<i>rack</i> (up)
<i>crap</i> (out)	<i>sack</i> (out)
<i>crop</i> (up)	<i>spout</i> (off)
<i>dawn</i> (on)	<i>zero</i> (in)
<i>egg</i> (on)	<i>zone</i> (out)

---

Here we can see ontological connections between the literal meaning of the main verbs and the import of the phrasal verbs that the main verb determines. But some noun-based verb phrases are perplexing. *Peter out* (come gradually to an end), for instance, must have some arcane etymology, as we think of *Peter* first as a proper noun. And *belt out* is not clear in that a belt has no obvious connection to the act of singing, though if we consider *belly up to the bar*, we can see an association with one's

stomach to the implied action. *Pipe down* is another whose meaning is more deeply embedded. Perhaps a pipe as an instrument of sound (as in bagpipes or organ pipes) has something to do with the etymology, but the phrase *pipe down* cannot be assumed by a non-native speaker to literally connect with the idea of lowering one's voice. Such highly idiomatic phrases as these require extra information to explain. The challenge then is to associate a known quality of the noun as main verb constituent, with how it works to drive the meaning of the phrasal verb in which it operates.

Given that the meaning of a noun-based phrasal verb can be, at some level, logically gleaned from its noun's quality, we can see how phrasal verbs employ nouns metaphorically to become vehicles of idiomatic expression. In other words, *bog down* (become impeded) derives from the gooey nature of a bog, and *clam up* (not make a sound) from the tightness of a closed clam. The particles, here *down* and *up* expressing manner of action, transfer noun meanings figuratively into verbs. The metaphoric potential of the particle complements the essence of the noun. But is the nature of the particle always so conceptually consistent?

When the main verb is commonly used as a verb in general (as opposed to being derived from a pure noun), the problem of deciphering is different; the particle likely contributes more weight to the semantic intent. The metaphoric value of the particle is then tantamount to the meaning of the verb phrase itself. The difference between *make up* (reconcile) and *make out* (kiss passionately), for instance, is determined solely by the particle. We could infer accordingly that *up* is completive because *making up* completes the process of repairing a relationship, whereas *out* is active in that one's sexual excitement 'actualizes' *out of* a 'dormant' state *into* realization. In each case, a specific meaning derives from the particle, more than *make*, as a metaphor.

But as said, particles are small in number compared with the range of main verbs that use them. To more fully appreciate this range, we can break main verbs down into two categories, those "narrowly-defined", and those otherwise "open-ended." Aside from the noun-based variety, many main verbs used primarily as verbs in general offer 'tangible' clues as well in deciphering their meaning, as opposed to those that are open-ended, which require more contextual information to be clear. We can compare these

two basic categories through a handful of examples, to demonstrate how we can surmise the meaning of these phrasal verbs given the essence of the main verb in question.

First consider the "narrowly-defined," shown here in Table 4.

Table 4: Narrowly-defined Main Verbs

---

chip away/in	jerk around
crack up	knock it off
farm out	pan out
figure out	screw around/off
fool around	string along
hammer out	weed out

---

Some of these may require more explication than others, depending on one's familiarity with the vernacular. *Jerk around* (be evasive, not be forthcoming), for instance, may not have a purely logical explanation, though it could be surmised as evolving from the action of jerking a dog on a leash against its will. *Chip away* and *chip in*, however, lend themselves to explanation without such speculation.

If an activity is thought of as a substance, both *chip away* (do something a little at a time) and *chip in* (contribute) make sense because they build from the face

value of *chip*, that is, a small piece off of a much larger entity. One can apply this lexically to the meaning of *chip away* and *chip in* without too much stretch of imagination. When we literally *chip away*, we reduce something in size and shape by a chip at a time. Accordingly, we can associate this same 'sculpting' approach to labor with the physical act of chipping. And *chip in* can be thought of in a reverse capacity, as that of reducing a demand, whether for labor or material, through an individual's offering. In either case, the physical, hence ontological, aspect of *chip* transfers idiomatically into these phrasal verbs.

*Fool around* (play; not be serious) is similarly 'literal' in that *fool* as a verb coincides closely enough with its noun aspect. The tricky part here is that *fool around* can be applied generally without insinuating that the one *fooling around* is actually a *fool per se*. Furthermore, as a verb by itself, *fool* means to deceive as often as it means to behave in a silly manner. So the different angles to this single word complicate the problem of deducing its meaning.

But *weed out*, even more so than *chip away*, is plain enough from the definition of *weed* to deduce figurative

extension without much stretch of the imagination. The process of physically sorting through an area in order to pull out the weeds correlates closely to the process of singling out other kinds of problems as well. The surface meaning of the main verb, in this case *weed*, by virtue of its own definition clearly steers the meaning when paired with *out*, conveying here *extraction*.

The particles *away* and *in* paired with *chip*, and *around* paired with *fool*, are not as literally apparent as is *out* with *weed*. But *farm out* (delegate work) poses an interesting counterpoint to *weed out* in that the main verb *farm* must be interpreted figuratively from the start, that of 'planting' work assignments extending from 'planting crops in other areas.' And to complete the phrasal verb aspect, *out* needs to be understood as *dissemination*, not *extraction*.

So while *weed out* is in comparatively plain terms, *chip away*, *fool around*, and *farm out* require more interpretation because they must be imagined holistically in order to make sense. *Pan out* (to result; develop; succeed), may not be obvious either, but if we think of *pan* as a derivative of *panorama*, we can derive it from the act of widening one's view, to encompass a resultant overall

picture. From its origin as a visual reference, *pan out* figuratively extends to acquire its temporal aspect.

In all of these phrasal verbs, the main verb suggests their meaning more so than does the particle. As shown, the problem is to make sense of the main verb in order to interpret the verb phrase itself. The nature of the problem changes, however, when we consider phrasal verbs that incorporate main verbs of the open-ended variety.

Compared with the above main verbs whose definitions are literally apparent, there are others so general that they can be construed in any number of ways. These verbs, listed in Table 5, are learned early on as basic and simply defined, but used as phrasal verb constituents, their range in interpretation widens considerably. Other verbs such as *make*, *run*, and *see* are similarly flexible, but are still more visually specific than the ones listed below. Not surprisingly, open-ended verbs characterize the ontological categories, which concern domains of activity, mental or physical.

Table 5. Open-ended Main Verbs

be in on	get out of	go into
be on to	get into	going out with
	get through	go through with

In these case, the particle plays a leading role in what the verb phrases mean as a unit. To clarify, in the first one listed, *be in on*, we can understand the metaphorical extension of *be in* as inhabiting a mental space. Just as when we say *be in love*; we express *love* figuratively as a metaphysical space that contains us. But the appended *on* adds another dimension of spatial orientation. The word *on* by itself can be taken either in its active sense (*turn on the light*), or in its spatial sense (*on the table*). In *be in on*, it seems that spatial sense applies, as if one is physically *on top of* a situation. Thus the tandem *in on* is a means of accentuating the essence of *being in*, because when we say *we are in on something*, we emphasize our inclusion in some area that is itself exclusive. It is similar to the expression *being on to something*, meaning that there is an emerging awareness. But of the eight entries above, *be in on* and *be on to* offer the least 'tangible' information from



which we can venture an explanation. They do, however, fit into the idiomatic system of using spatial reference to describe other dimensions of experience.

The entries using *get* work this same way. When we *get into* our clothes, we literally enter a neatly defined space, and the particle *into* is what puts us there. We can easily transfer the idea of this same action, of moving into another space, into how we refer to engaging in an activity or experience. When we *get into* water, we become immersed, just as when we say, for instance, *I'm into Mozart*, we mean that our sensibility can be absorbed by what Mozart has to offer. It applies literally when we say *get into shape*, but it applies figuratively when we say *get into someone's head*. In the latter, we mean that we enter by understanding the mind-set of another person, hopefully resulting in some kind of enlightenment or effect.

This leads to those phrasal verbs here that build around the main verb *go*. One characteristic of both *getting into* and *going into* is that they can range figuratively to accommodate a wide variety of contexts, such as from the general *getting into trouble*, to the specific *getting into reading*, to the even more specific *getting into Mark Twain*. Much as *getting into something*

can emphasize one's mental investment, so *can go into* emphasizes the aspect of decision or change regarding one's livelihood.

A native speaker may not think of the expression *going into politics* as being idiomatic at all, because fluent speakers automatically express this figuratively, as entering a defined space. It would follow then that this spatial correlation should be viable to consider for a newcomer to the language as well. The fact is that *go* as the main verb constituent is flexible enough to apply in a diversity of contexts (e.g., *go off* [activate]; *go out with someone* [be romantically involved]; *go over* [review]). Furthermore, there is the difference between literally *going into surgery as a patient* and figuratively *going into surgery as a doctor starting to specialize in surgery*. With *get* and *go*, the line between literal and figurative usage is blurry and debatable at least.

If we step back to view the metaphoric quality of phrasal verbs in general, we can see that in some, the particle plays only a supporting role; it provides direction but the main verb tells the story. And if the main verb is a noun, we can analyze the quality of that noun to deduce its semantic import in the verb phrase. The

same holds true if the main verb is exclusively a verb. In any case, depending upon how the particle plays into the equation, a judgment can be made accordingly as to what hybrid meaning results, which may or may not be obvious given the literal value of the constituents.

Overall, the quality of having obvious meaning entails a continuum. Consider, for example, the difference between the easily understandable *dress up*, the questionable *clam up*, and the perplexing *choose off*.

If one knows the meaning of *dress*, whether as noun or verb, one can still guess that the word pair *dress up* conveys the notion of formality in terms of what one wears, compared with the neutral *get dressed*. The inclusion of *up* not only manifests a verb function; the literalness of *up*, consistent metaphorically with MORE IS UP, conceptually shapes the idiom.

With *clam up*, the dependence on its noun aspect can both help and hinder understanding. The known quality of a clam as a tightly closed entity is operative, but *up* must be taken a certain way in order to render the expression understandable. *Up* as a spatial orientation has no literal connection to the context of keeping one's mouth shut. Nor does *up* fit here as a completive particle in the sense of

creation or procurement, as in *think up* and *scare up*, where something is 'brought out of' some potential or source. But *up* can render another aspect of completion, which, in this case associated with the essence of a clam, makes sense because the halves of a clam are held tightly together and are thus complete. Used as an imperative, *clam up* conveys intended completion, the same as *Shut up!* It reveals a metaphoric level of *up* that could be denoted as COMPLETION IS UP; CONTINUANCE IS DOWN. In other words, one is in effect saying "Complete the act of discontinuing your talking."

*Choose off* is even more enigmatic in that *choose* seems arbitrary taken at its face value, yet it makes sense if one considers that singling out an adversary is necessarily a condition of combat. The fact that *off* is the particle here affirms its metaphorical aspect as that of being proactive, as in Hook's alarm clock context. But *off* in *choose off* goes a step further, entailing a dynamic quality similar to *up* in *Shut up!* This shows again that particles have varying unique if not idiosyncratic qualities that give each phrasal verb its specific import.

Sometimes phrasal verbs stretch the limits of idiomaticity. Why, for instance, would *shine on*, as in *I*

tried talking to her but she just shined me on, mean ignore or not pay attention? There must be some aspect to *shine* rooted in the idea. This may be over-reaching, but perhaps it derives from the fact that the sun continues to shine despite (i.e., ignore) any clouds that might interfere. To *shine* has no literal connection to the mental aspect of not paying attention, but the expression *shine on* has to have some rational explanation.

One might wonder why not *shine off*, in that the idea of ignoring someone or something would more likely use *off* in its dismissive sense, as in *wave somebody off*. But the particle *on* instills a sense of uninterrupted continuance, which is at the core of this idiom's meaning. The problem for a non-native speaker is that the literal (verb + preposition) construction *shine on*, meaning *to illuminate*, fails to fit the idiomatic version at all. But by using some imagination to show how the value of each phrasal verb constituent can extend figuratively to assume some other aspect, we can encourage students' capacity to entertain words as semantically pliable.

## Plugging Into Lakoff and Johnson's Categories

Now we turn to see how phrasal verbs play out in terms of Lakoff and Johnson's categories. Sorting through the database, I find that many entries can fit into more than one category, so I place them in the category I judge most salient to their meaning. Others simply fall within the general category that I call ACTIVE IS UP (see Appendix A). As it turns out, this is the category that accepts the largest group. There are also some entries that resist alliance to any category, but still deserve attention. Even these unique forms can reveal some adherence to pattern, as we shall see.

The metaphoric categories that Lakoff and Johnson identify (other than "Active is Up") are listed here in Table 6.

Table 6. Metaphoric Categories

---

Active is Up  
More is Up; Less is Down  
Happy is Up; Sad is Down  
Conscious is Up; Unconscious is Down  
High Status is Up; Low Status is Down  
Having Control of Force is Up; Being Subject to  
Control is Down  
Virtue is Up; Depravity is Down  
Rational is Up; Emotional is Down  
Activities are Substances or Containers  
Ideas are Objects, People, Resources, Products,  
Commodities, Money  
Communication is Sending  
Foreseeable Events in the Future are Up (or Ahead)

---

We begin with the relatively clear categories MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN (see Appendix B), and HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN, shown here in List (2): *cheer up, cutting up, lighten up, live it up, make up, and put down*. The phrasal verbs categorized as such are comparatively self-evident in how they exemplify Lakoff and Johnson's axiom. The predominance of *up* in List (2), for instance, equates skyward orientation with positive feeling or experience. And, when we *put someone down*, though it may incur animosity rather than sadness, the downward orientation denotes the negative nonetheless. Overall, the HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN category is straightforward in its singular sense of *up* and *down* as an orientational metaphors.

In that the MORE IS UP category includes a comparatively sizeable proportion of the database (32 entries), there is considerable variation in degree of idiomaticity, whether by one or both constituents. In terms of the particle, *up*, predominant as it is in this category as well, can either be envisioned as a semantic agent of action or completion, or, as in the HAPPY IS UP group, indicative of one's feelings or outlook.

Main verbs in the MORE IS UP category are yet more diverse in degree of idiomaticity; some are self-evident (e.g., *finish up*), while others are not (e.g., *cough up*). There are also many entries in this group that provide a visual clue to their meaning, such as *bog down* (become slowed) and *book up* (fill reservations). To get an idea of how we can interpret the more highly idiomatic entries, we can look at a few in detail.

As said, some of the expressions in the MORE IS UP category are more transparent than others. We can easily ascertain *finish up* because both constituents semantically complement each other. But *cough up* (give away something unwillingly) requires more interpretation. It likely derives from the idea of withholding something of such value that it is (viscerally) held in one's body and thus



needs a (physiologically) violent action to procure it. *Up* again affirms production or completion, thus adhering to the MORE IS UP concept.

Recognizing the metaphoric potential of words can help us explain concepts underlying the figurative nature of such phrases as *scare up* (procure) and *stir up* (cause trouble). When we think of *scare*, we can imagine that *scaring someone* would likely cause someone to *rise* from an otherwise undisturbed state. It is, in effect, yanking an action or response (fear, increased heart-rate) out of prior inactivity. But transferring this notion into the idea of *finding something* would require some pedagogical handholding in order to explain.

*Stir up* (cause trouble) is similar to *cough up* in that its meaning, in varying contexts, still derives from the physical act of stirring. Accordingly, the connection of *stirring* with *trouble* is given life in the idiom *stirring up a hornets' nest*. In any case, despite variance in idiomaticity within the MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN category, overall the metaphoric aspect to the phrasal verbs that fit is consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's straightforward *up/down* orientation, as *up* can intimate a sense of production or creation.

The next category displays more diverse patterns of particle use, as ontological metaphors come into play. The eight entries below that fall in the CONSCIOUS IS UP; UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN category, use five different particles, as shown below in list (3): *black out, come to, doze off, get up, block out, dawn on, drift off, pass out.*

Idiomatically, *out* and *off* derive from domain in how they allude to awareness. Lakoff and Johnson's *up/down* distinction draws upon the way we naturally refer to our experience of both physical condition and consciousness in general, as the *up/down* metaphor occurs in such expressions as *top shape* and *get up* vs. *fall ill* and *drop dead*. But within the realm of phrasal verbs, particles, as said before, are flexible; in fact, they often coincide conceptually with each other (e.g., *out* with *up*), but in so doing they 'speak' through their own dimensions.

In other words, *on* and *to* can connote *up* in CONSCIOUS IS UP, as can *off* and *out* connote *up* in UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN. For example, *dawn on* means *become aware* and *come to* means *awaken*; both are consistent with *up* as a measurement of consciousness. Furthermore, as said, *off* and *out* can mean deactivation or removal, ideas expressed in literal terms that coincide conceptually with Lakoff and Johnson's

metaphorically generic *down* as an allusion to lack of consciousness.

Notice the conceptual difference in how the particles in this category work metaphorically; such phrases as *drift off* and *black out* refer to consciousness ontologically, not quantitatively through vertical orientation. But the particles *off*, *on*, *out* and *up* in this category are all consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's premise; no matter how they refer to spatial orientation, they still logically fit the semantic import of the verb phrases in question.

The phenomenon of varying particles within a conceptual category occurs in other categories as well. The HIGH STATUS IS UP; LOW STATUS IS DOWN metaphor applies to only five phrasal verbs that I found, shown here in list (4): *drop out*, *flunk out*, *work up to [a higher position]*, *stuck up*, and *talk down to someone*. (Though *stuck up* is actually an adjective phrase, it works similarly as an idiomatic phrasal verb because each component is obligatory to its meaning as a whole.)

Notice that *out* claims practically half of the entries here. With regard to *drop out* and *flunk out*, given that in the educational community, inclusion is positive as opposed to exclusion, *out* in its spatial sense works in place of

the negative *down* to convey the idea of quitting and expulsion respectively. Of course *work up to*, meaning to *rise in terms of status by virtue of effort*, is consistent metaphorically with the *up/down* distinction. And in its own way, *up* in *stuck up* alludes to higher status as well, in that the one referred to considers himself (stationed) *higher* (in status) than others. *Talking down to someone*, meaning to condescend, is clear enough figuratively as one in a loftier position both aiming and shaping his verbal demeanor downward 'at' someone 'lower.' It thus fits neatly into the vertically-oriented metaphor.

The category HAVING CONTROL OF FORCE IS UP; BEING SUBJECT TO CONTROL IS DOWN lends itself more distinctively to the use of certain orientational particles. This area of concern accepts only four phrasal verbs out of the data pool. But that is not to devalue the entries, shown here in list (5): *get over on someone*, *give up*, *pick on*, *walk all over (someone)*.

Spatial orientations here by use of *up*, *over*, and *on* clearly manifest their own semantic dimensions. Naturally, spatial orientations apply in this case as they do in the other categories. When one is physically *down*, one is subject to the power of whoever is *on top*. So it follows

that *getting over on someone* puts in literal terms whatever the interpersonal context may be. *Get* is 'obtaining position,' and *over on* indicates a physical position of superiority and control.

One may wonder why the negative notion of *give up* (quit; surrender) uses the *up* orientation, but it makes sense in two ways. First, in the idea of *quit*, *up* can be taken as complete, in that a given activity comes to a halt. And, in the idea of *surrender*, consider that one defeated (metaphorically) relinquishes something from a lower position upward to whomever or whatever is the victor. The orientational *up/down* metaphor is operative in either case. And *pick on* (intimidate) as well can originate from the idea of one in power who finds fault from a superior viewpoint, thus the downward impact of *on*.

The VIRTUE IS UP; DEPRAVITY IS DOWN category follows this same vein. We measure behavior from inferior to superior, thus applying the *up/down* distinction in the same way as status and control. This group includes the following in list (6): *look up to*, *measure up*, *own up to*, *live up to*, *look down on*.

All of the particles follow suit, as *up* and *down* are used exclusively, while the main verbs' face value leaves

little question about the meaning of the verb phrases as a whole. *Live up to* and *look up to* are feasible to grasp figuratively; *live* alludes to one's behavior, and *look* implies the viewer's appraisal. Since *up* metaphorically recognizes one type of behavior as superior to another, its connection with *live* and *look* is consistent with the *up/down* distinction.

By contrast, *to live down* (atone for wrongdoing) is reversed in that *down* is meant to soften the impact of whatever wrongdoing has occurred; by using *down*, it uses a 'negative' to effect a positive aspect. But *down* as used here is distinctive because, though common metaphorically as denoting the negative, it is used here in response to a preexisting negative situation, thus effecting the positive. The more literally apparent *measure up*, however, can be easily ascertained from the main verb.

On the other hand, *own up* (be responsible) is highly idiomatic in that *own*, by definition a stative verb, must be taken in an active sense (much as *have* is proactive in *have at it*). In each case, however, *up* intuitively implies that desirable behavior is *above* the undesirable. So the problem here for non-native speakers is that the main verb's behavior needs to be clarified.

Another category that includes a variety of particles is RATIONAL IS UP; EMOTIONAL IS DOWN. Such variety is consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's contention that our mental state can be envisioned ontologically (e.g., as a container, a machine, or a brittle object) as well as in terms of orientation. (Recall the same concepts at play in CONSCIOUS IS UP; UNCONSCIOUS IS DOWN.) The authors' *up/down* characterization of the RATIONAL IS UP category stems more from vernacular in general rather than from the phrasal verb domain. But, among phrasal verbs, the ways in which we use particles is significant in how we refer to mental states. The nine phrasal verbs that exemplify the RATIONAL IS UP; EMOTIONAL IS DOWN category follow in list (7): *cool down, cool off, freak out, trip out, space out, have it out, psych out, wise up, zone out* *Cool off* and *cool down* are synonymous; both particles are taken in the same spirit of downplaying a 'heated' emotional state. One can imagine *off* as deactivation, and *down* metaphorically as lowering temperature. The fact is, we often describe emotion in terms of temperature, and understandably, given that cold-blooded animals have, by human standards, no capacity for such 'warm' emotional states as love, empathy, or sympathy. So, imagining this metaphoric connection of

cooler temperature with controlled emotion is requisite to understanding the idiomatic sense of *cool down*.

Semantically, *cool* is driven by *down* or *off* to engender the hybrid meaning, *to contain one's display of anger*.

Among the phrasal verbs in the RATIONAL IS UP category, the main verbs supply the weight of the meaning, while the particles serve more to direct impetus. *Freak, trip, psych, space, and zone* all figuratively signify some abnormal state of mind, so when coupled with *out* they emphasize the action of entering the condition of being in that state. Taken literally, *out* can be imagined as being either inhabiting some other place (beyond), or as moving *from* one domain *into* some other. This is why we figuratively refer to someone being *distant*, or *way out there*, or, in other words, not close to where we are mentally.

The two remaining phrasal verbs, *have it out* and *wise up*, are at opposite ends of the idiomatic spectrum. *Wise up* is comparatively self-evident; if we know *wise*, then we can infer that its link with *up* means to increase the wisdom, according to the MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN axiom.

But *have it out* is more problematic. The word *have* is so general that we need to look closer at the phrase as a



whole to guess the meaning. The definite *it* tells us that something already known plays into the idea. But then *out* can only be reduced to its bare meaning of *beyond some boundary* because we have nothing else to go on. As a result, built only from such general components, *have it out* relies heavily on context to be deciphered. As noted, *have* can be taken proactively, as in *have at it*, whereby *having* is producing action or energy from a circumstance mutually understood by the interlocutors. I include *have it out* here because it presumes an emotional outburst resulting from such circumstance.

We could thus rephrase the category RATIONAL IS UP; EMOTIONAL IS DOWN as RATIONAL IS RIGHT HERE; EMOTIONAL IS OUT THERE, because *out* is the most common particle among these verb phrases. But this does not preclude Lakoff and Johnson's *up/down* manner of classification. Rather, it shows that rationality, in addition to being perceived as measurable in terms of vertical orientation (as in *highly rational*), can be thought of as well as a bounded area from which we enter or depart. Overall, this category exemplifies through variance in particle usage how ontological and orientational metaphors can overlap.

A considerable number (approx. 50) of the phrasal verbs in our database derive from ontological metaphors that comprise the ACTIVITIES ARE SUBSTANCES OR CONTAINERS; IDEAS ARE OBJECTS, PEOPLE, [ETC.] category. (See Appendix C) This category idiomatically poses objects, substances, and domains as metaphors for talking about activities and ideas. As such, this system directly relates to our earlier discussion of main verbs. Recall, for example, how *butter up* draws its idiomaticity from the noun's specific quality, while *going into law* figuratively applies the general term *go*, paired with *into*, as an allusion to one's professional direction as a spatial domain. Such diversity in how metaphor operates is readily apparent through the diversity among the entries here.

There is, in fact, so much semantic variation among entries here, that to classify them according to any similarity among their respective meanings would be to miss the point of the category. More significant is the ontological nature of the connection between the literal and figurative meanings of the constituents.

As a case in point, consider the highly idiomatic entry *chew out*, meaning to scold harshly. When we chew something, we don't necessarily ingest it; rather, the

action itself entails a disfigurement of whatever gets worked between the jaws. If something gets *chewed up*, it is violently rendered useless. Thus the visceral aspect of the main verb *chew* powers the expression through its own ontological association.

Also by figurative extension, the particle *out* delivers an emotional parallel, of the literal essence of chewing with the 'trauma' of a good scolding. The particle *out* could be taken metaphorically here as I propose it could in the amorous context of *making out*, in that a new state of mind, or being, is actualized from preexisting dormancy.

By contrast, *think through* poses mental activity in terms of physically following a trajectory, an essentially spatial metaphor. When something literally *goes through* something else, it in effect moves from one place to another. Accordingly, when we say *think it through*, we figuratively intimate that *it* (some problem or dilemma) is an area or container that can be methodically explored or probed. The particle *through* then expresses the sense of completing a mental trajectory, which here is a coalescence of Lakoff and Johnson's "conduit" and "container" metaphors.

This leaves us two other categories that Lakoff and Johnson submit, COMMUNICATION IS SENDING and FORESEEABLE FUTURE EVENTS ARE UP (AND AHEAD), which together use a variety of main verb types (general to specific) and a wide variety of particles: *about, across, ahead, around, for, forward, to, in, on, out, up, and through.*

The COMMUNICATION IS SENDING category (see Table 7) utilizes prepositions that focus on lateral movement (e.g., *get it across; get through to someone*) rather than vertical or domain orientation. And this is understandable; when we talk to each other, we view each other more or less from different points on the same plane; the relationship between us is linear. In other words, at its most fundamental level, speaking is as well an eye-to-eye proposition. If an *up/down* distinction is pertinent, it becomes operative, as in the status and control angles to *talking down to someone*. But aside from the particle's emphasis, the main verbs in this category range from arcane to generic.

Table 7. "Communication is Sending"

---

*bandy about* (talk about)  
*bat around* (talk about)

*bawl out* (scold)  
*come across* (convey)  
*get across* (convey)  
*get through to* (convey) *tune in* (focus)  
*jack around* (not be forthcoming)  
*let on* (reveal)  
*pass off* (dismiss)  
*put across* (convey forcefully)  
*reach out* (attempt to communicate)  
*talk out* (resolve)  
*touch on* (briefly remark)  
*tune out* (dismiss; ignore)

---

To address the arcane, there may not be a phrasal verb in this entire venue as unusual in usage as *bandy about* (spread [esp. unfavorable] ideas by talking), which logically derives from the literal *bandy*, "to bat, to and fro" (Merriam Webster). It means, according to Webster, "b: EXCHANGE; esp.: to exchange (words) argumentatively c: to discuss lightly or banteringly d: to use in a glib or offhand manner." So when we say *we bandied it about*, (similar to *batted it around*), we mean that we discussed something in an informal matter, or by figurative extension, *we tossed it around*. But *bandy about* is rare; its use hails back to the vernacular of an earlier era. The other entries here are more commonly used, and, as do phrasal verbs in general, they range from highly idiomatic to literally apparent.

While *jack around* borders on the colloquial to mean *circumvent truth*, the phrase *reach out*, literally a gesture of extending one's arms, clearly expresses in physical terms that the speaker is open and willing to communicate. *Touch on* should also be self-evident through its allusion to minimal contact, extending figuratively as it refers to discourse. All of these examples put communicative acts into physical terms that Lakoff and Johnson characterize as the act of "sending," a spatially-based concept.

*Talking out* (discussing to solve) and *tuning out* and *in* (filtering attention) are similarly understandable in that the respective literal meanings of the main verbs *talk* and *tune* direct attention to a main idea while the particle shapes the focus. The problem with particles is that they must be taken flexibly. To *talk something out* is to pull some understanding *out into* the open, but to *tune out* is to exclude. So we find a divergence here between semantic applications of *out*. In general, if the main verb is nebulous, then the particle must work to isolate the specific meaning.

As it is, some main verbs in this group, *come*, *get*, and *put*, or so general that they lean heavily on the particle, such as *across* and *through*, to make the phrase

semantically complete. The particles give impetus, metaphorically, to the phrasal verbs *come across*, *get across*, *get through to (someone)*, and *put across*, as these examples all derive from the physical act of *moving through space*, consistent with Lakoff and Johnson's "conduit" metaphor. It is as if words depart from one entity to arrive at another. Their main verbs give us shades of difference, however, in that *come across* is involuntary conveyance on the part of the subject, compared with the overtly intentional *get across* and *put across*.

The remaining entries in this group, *let on* (reveal) and *pass off* (dismiss), also use main verbs that depend on the particle to give their respective phrases their meaning. The underlying idea of *let* is *allow*, or *yield*, as in *let go*. So when we *let on*, we allow a truth to become known, as if revealed by a prevailing force. Furthermore, the particle *on*, whether taken in its active or locational sense, complements the main verb *let* to give the phrase its impetus; that is, that by *letting on*, one actually *enlightens*. And *pass off* can be as well envisioned metaphorically because *passing* is a continuing motion, the same communicatively as not pausing to become preoccupied with whatever is being said. When we *pass something off*,

we account for it easily, or dismiss it as not having much importance. *Off* as the particle is conceptually consistent, used here in its literal sense of removal or distancing. We can thus explain all of the entries in this category as referent to discursive action or behavior by correlating them with spatial orientations.

To complete our review of Lakoff and Johnson's categories, we turn to the phrasal verbs that exemplify FORESEEABLE EVENTS ARE UP (AND AHEAD), shown here in list (9): *come up* (happen), *look ahead* (anticipate), *end up* (result), *look back on* (recall), *look forward to* (expect and hope to enjoy).

The five entries in this group conceptually derive from a confluence of both spatial and temporal orientation. To explain their "physical basis" for this kind of metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson contend that

normally our eyes look in the direction in which we typically move (ahead, forward). As an object approaches a person (or the person approaches the object), the object appears larger. Since the ground is perceived as being fixed, the top of the object appears to be moving upward in the person's field of vision. (p. 16)



This idea is consistent with another of their observations, that

time in English is structured in terms of the TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT metaphor, with the future moving toward us:

The time will come when . . .

The time has long since gone when . . .

The time for action has arrived. (p. 42)

Though the authors caution that this metaphor is culture-specific, the English metaphoric extension is so ingrained that we would be hard-pressed to think of any other way to express these things. Two of the five phrasal verbs exemplify this metaphor, as noted by Lakoff and Johnson: "since we are facing toward the future, we get: '*Coming up* in the weeks ahead;' '*I look forward to the arrival of Christmas*'" (p. 42). In general, since we conceive of the future figuratively as visually moving toward us, we naturally phrase anticipated events as *upcoming* or *approaching*.

Again, this is how our perception of spatial orientation influences how we extend meanings of words. The particle *up*, as a vertical orientation to *come up* and *end up*, conforms to Lakoff and Johnson's "Time as a Moving

Object" metaphor, though they could each fit as well into the ACTIVE IS UP category. *End up*, taken as a semantic agent of completion, means here a consummation of events or conditions. But I include it here because of its temporal reference. Since *come up* here means *appear in time*, much as *show up* means *appear in space*, it clearly fits Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor as something rising within our visual field. But *come up* is another phrasal verb that has multi-dimensional aspects, such as *come up* (emerging topic) in conversation, *come up with* (conjure) an idea, and *come up* (increase status) in the world. So, lacking anything else to go on, we are left with context as the guiding factor in figuring out when *coming up* refers to a future event.

This in fact leads to a concluding point. We have seen how, in all categories, phrasal verb constituents coalesce to convey a specific meaning that can be metaphorically explained through Lakoff and Johnson's empirical approach. So, despite their apparent ambiguity, phrasal verbs, as composite constructions, emerge systematically from the properties of main verb, particle, and context. Therefore, by designing an instructional approach geared to revealing the nature and interaction of

these properties, we can help ESL students find order to what initially seems arbitrary. But we accordingly face the pedagogical question: How can we approach teaching these verb phrases in a thematic manner, as opposed to just tossing them out there for students to sort out? In the interest of putting these verb forms in plain enough terms for ESL students to understand, I argue that we should capitalize on the insight that Lakoff and Johnson have to offer.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SOME TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

When we factor Lakoff and Johnson's categories into the meanings of the phrasal verbs in our database, we can recognize some patterns in metaphoric behavior of main verbs and particles. There are, of course, exceptions to how some phrasal verbs fit into these categories, but even a semblance of order can help ESL students apply their existing knowledge of English to make informed inferences as they learn these verb constructions.

So far, our view of phrasal verbs has been from the inside out; that is, we have dissected them to closely examine their components' specific behavior. By doing so, we can see how their meaning sometimes leans more on the main verb, sometimes more on the particle. Now we can step back to see what kinds of concerns we should address as we design a teaching strategy. I have accordingly arranged these concerns into three areas:

- 1) How to decide if the meaning is literal or idiomatic?
- 2) How to glean new meaning from the original meaning of the main verb.

3) How to glean meaning from the literal value of the particle.

All of these concerns overlap, but by isolating key aspects, we can better prepare students to approach the problem methodically, instead of relying on hit or miss memorization.

Previously, we have seen how textbooks demonstrate phrasal verbs grammatically in sentences and lexically in context, but present them semantically in haphazard arrangement. Given the evidence of underlying semantic connections among phrasal verbs, we should use this evidence to clarify how phrasal verbs operate.

But we need to start somewhere, which brings us back to the question: How should we break down the vast array of phrasal verbs in terms of their conceptual characteristics? As discussed throughout, idiomatic phrasal verbs are more problematic compared with those that can be understood at face value, so I would begin by differentiating the idiomatic from the literally transparent.

Semantic extension can be shown, for example, from the literal *making up a story* to the figurative *making up after arguing*. And while we can literally *use fire to burn out*

*the enemy*, we can also figuratively *burn out from working so hard*. Each phrasal verb selected as a target form should accordingly have enough semantic range to illustrate the difference.

Once the target phrasal verbs are explained in context, then they can be parsed out further to show how main verbs and particles play their respective roles. But what criteria should we use to this end? Here is how Lakoff and Johnson's categories can help us.

If we borrow from Lakoff and Johnson's metaphoric categories, and boil them down to the essentials that apply here, we can lay them out as a conceptual framework into which the phrasal verbs find themselves.

- (1) ACTIVE IS UP and GOOD IS UP
- (2) BAD IS DOWN and LESS IS DOWN
- (3) IRRATIONAL IS OUT THERE
- (4) FUTURE IS UP AND APPROACHING
- (5) SEND COMMUNICATION

Inevitably, however, some phrasal verbs resist obvious categorization. One example is *tell on*, meaning *inform against someone*. We could force it into the SEND COMMUNICATION category because it is communicative in

nature, but the import of the phrase has a behavioral aspect more central to its meaning.

The point is that there are bound to be some phrasal verbs that are uniquely problematic, but we should confront them head on. Assessing such idiosyncratic qualities of phrasal verbs, as practiced in the previous chapter, can help us choose target forms that reinforce student ability to evaluate and discern, thus helping students to better understand, not only the phrasal verb in question, but the cognitive dynamics behind why such a phrasal verb acts as it does.

So, from exploring the entity of phrasal verbs, we come down to teaching them. Now we can put into practice an approach that explicitly integrates metaphoric behavior of words into an instructional format. To demonstrate, I will present a one-hour lesson, aimed at adults with intermediate proficiency in English.

Assuming that our hypothetical students have had no formal instruction in phrasal verbs, we should first introduce and clarify the phrasal verb itself as a unique structure, symbiotic in how the main verb and particle fuse to become a structure with its own meaning. We can then use one of the metaphoric categories as a focal point,

which is how each category should serve, to focus on how metaphoric aspects to words semantically direct the phrases in question.

But I believe that the process of student discovery here should be an unfolding, so to speak, rather than having attention being initially drawn to some all-inclusive schema. By seeing in a lesson how things unfold, students anticipate and predict how subsequent material might unfold as well. If taught effectively, the schema will naturally emerge in a student's imagination.

Once an example of a phrasal verb has been illustrated, the conceptual category is revealed through a small group of related forms. As each subsequent verb phrase is featured, the nature of the category should become apparent. The idea here is to include enough diversity within the group without spilling over into too many tangential issues. So this first group of phrasal verbs needs to be conceptually cohesive. As students later become familiar with the material, they can better explore interplay between other forms and categories. So now, what phrasal verbs should we choose to begin with?

The main verbs should be general, common, and simple. Both generality and familiarity give students fair warning



that such characteristics breed flexibility in interpretation. Consider *bring*, *come*, *look*, *make*, *put*, and *pull*.

*Pull* is infrequent as a phrasal verb constituent; usually it works in a verb + prepositional phrase structure. But it serves its purpose here not only through its visually kinetic quality, but also because it uses *off* in *pull off* as an example of a particle contrastive but conceptually similar to *up*. If all of the introductory forms use the same particle, then we risk student presupposition of a strict set of rules. The fact is that particles do overlap in terms of semantic capacity, and as said before, we need to let students know this from the beginning.

Most of the main verbs proposed above should work because they are primarily understood as literal expressions of movement, which can be easily visualized; such quality will help substantiate the metaphor. *Make*, however, emphasizes creative action, but we should not discount it; though it is semantically pliable, *make* still has 'tangible' surface meaning. Nor does *look* signify movement, though it is useful as a basic term that lends itself to depth in figurative interpretation.

At this point of initial instruction, main verbs that are semantically clear-cut should work better as a cognitive springboard from which more involved forms can be understood later. But we must also recognize the importance of starting with main verbs that clearly demonstrate how idiomatic potential logically (albeit in American culture) builds from their respective visually-perceived literal definitions.

Since the *up/down* distinction should be clearly understood in terms of its figurative extensions, a natural choice would be to begin with MORE IS UP as the conceptual focus; it is, after all, among the first of Lakoff and Johnson's metaphors derived from orientation. With this in mind, the following phrasal verbs will be the first offering.

- (1) *come up with* (produce or conjure)
- (2) *look up* (seek information, or, seek a person)
- (3) *make up* (create idea)
- (4) *put up with* (endure; suffer)
- (5) *bring up* (introduce to conversation)
- (6) *pull off* (succeed despite difficulty)

Notice that *up* is used differently in *put up with* than in the other examples because, in this case, it is not

plainly consistent conceptually with the visual *up/down* orientation. Even so, we can ask students to compare *up* literally in *holding up something heavy*, with its metaphoric extension as *acceptance and endurance of some condition*.

Notice further that *put up with* is conceptually different in this group because it alludes to a *mental outlook* whereas the others imply some kind of movement or process, whether purely creative in nature (e.g., *making up an excuse*) or otherwise experienced in some physical form (e.g., *looking up a word*). But the metaphoric sense of *up* in *putting up with something* could be grounded in the same basis as *making up an excuse* in that both are manifestations that *emerge* from some condition or situation.

The idea is to lay groundwork for a conceptual category; whether classified as MORE IS UP or ACTIVE IS UP is immaterial at this introductory stage. Categories overlap anyway, but again, we should not burden students with worrying about theory. They will not only get the idea themselves with more in-depth instruction; it should also be more fun for them to explore this new form without

having to intellectualize. Learning a new language is encumbrance enough.

Looking beyond this initial session, we must consider which forms to present in successive lessons. Imagine that we start from this central idea, that MORE IS UP, and then spiral outward to include related but more specific applications. Subsequent target forms would then emanate from such differentiations as HAPPY IS UP, HIGH STATUS IS UP, VIRTUE IS UP, and so on. We could then continue on to address RATIONAL IS RIGHT HERE, IRRATIONAL IS OUT THERE, and so forth.

As we follow the spiral outward, students will encounter more narrowly-defined main verbs. Accordingly, the more specific the main verb, the more carefully we need to decipher how its meaning plays into the phrasal verb that contains it. If students already have a feel for the metaphoric quality of a particle at play, then its role in tandem with the main verb should make sense rather than seem arbitrary. This should help enhance in students an ability to predict meanings of other unexpected phrasal verbs encountered later.

This hypothetical lesson consists of more lecture than student response; projecting more interaction than

necessary would be excessively speculative. In reality, however, a teacher needs the ability to expand upon relevant tangential issues that arise spontaneously during the course of instruction; it helps keep student interest alive and validates student input as an important resource. The more poignantly the teacher connects target material to students' particular concerns, the more teaching and learning processes effectively combine for the students' benefit.

#### A Possible Lesson

Now we turn to the lesson itself, which suggests innumerable possibilities in expansion. The students are adults at an intermediate level of English language proficiency. For clarification, the hypothetical teacher's approach is in brackets. In the dialogue, the teacher is signified as "T," multiple students as "Ss," and an individual student as "S." Our class begins at 8:00 in the morning.

[Since context is conducive to engagement of student attention, the teacher scans the audience for an opening gambit.]

T: You guys look tired this morning.

S: Yeah, because we had so much homework last night!

T: So, what time did you get *up*, anyway?

S: Six-thirty! How about you, teacher?

T: I'm not on trial here. But keep that word *up* in mind this morning. *Up* has a lot to do with our lesson today. You need to be *up* and *awake* to pay attention.

[Writes *look* on the board.]

T: Look at this. We all know what *look* means, but when we say *look it up* [adds *it up* to *look*], we mean something new and different. These words, when put together, represent a certain single idea. [Circles the entire verb phrase.] Now what does this mean? Anybody know?

[If so, elaborates. If not, explains as follows:]

We say *look it up*, whatever *it* is, when we mean *look for information in a book*, like a dictionary, or even the Internet. And, we can mean it as searching for a person, as in "I plan to *look up* an old friend in Chicago," which is another way of saying, "I plan to seek and find an old friend in Chicago." They're similar, finding information and finding a person. It's a matter of looking for something specific,

whether it's seeking information in a book, or finding a person someplace. This is an example of a phrasal verb. It's when two words, in this case *look* and *up*, combine to have a certain single meaning. Now, look at these verbs.

[Writes the following main verbs on the board:

*bring, come, make, pull, and put.* Asks students to orally respond using these verbs in their own sentences.] Ss:

Bring pizza. Come to school. Make money.

Pull open the door. Put it in my wallet.

[Adds the particles to the main verbs on the board to make:

*bring up, come up with, make up, put up with, pull off.*]

T: You already know what these verbs mean, but you're thinking of their *literal* meaning. That is, you're thinking of how we use these verbs the way we first learn them. But now we'll see how they become idioms.

When we add these prepositions to these verbs, they become phrases that have new meaning. *Look* means what it does generally, until we add *up*; then it has a new, specific meaning. [Points to the target phrases and underscores *bring up, put up with, and make up.*]

What do you think these phrases mean?

Ss: Bring up what? Come up with me. Put on make up.

T: You're correct. But just like with *look it up*, these phrases can mean even more. Think about what they mean this way, as idioms. [Adds the following phrases to the three phrasal verbs in question to make: *bring up a bad subject, come up with a good idea, make up a story.*] Can you tell what they mean now?

Ss: Bring up English. Think a good idea. Write a story.

[Affirm and embellish these responses with related ideas, such as: "I want to bring something up that we haven't talked about yet," "Coming up with a plan," "Coming up with an excuse," "Coming up with some cash," "Making up an excuse," or "Making up your mind."]

S: Can we say "come up with a story" and "make up an idea"?

[Takes advantage of this opportunity to discriminate, by exemplifying the difference. *Come up with* is more flexible, and this needs to be pointed out.]

T: Good question! Yes, we can say it either way. *Come up with* is similar to *make up* because they can both mean to create or produce something. *Making up an excuse* and *coming up with an excuse* are two ways of



saying the same thing, but *make up* only works when we're talking about ideas, and an excuse is an idea. But we don't say *making up money*. We can say *coming up with money*, or food, or even someone to take to the dance. If we say *make up someone to take to the dance*, we're only imagining that person, but to *come up with someone* means actually finding someone.

*Coming up with* something can mean "finding or creating it," but *making up* here means making ideas or stories in your mind. It's similar to actually making something, like making a salad. So now, can you put these phrasal verbs into sentences to show me how you can use them in your own words?

Ss: We come up with good grades. You're making up false story. Don't bring up bad memory.

[The students now have the idea, so the teacher reiterates and reinforces.]

T: If you *come up with* something, it means you find something you need that you had to go somewhere to get, whether it was going into your mind to find an idea, or going to the bank to get some money. Think of it this way: You go somewhere to get it, and you

come back with it. Think of *up* as something appearing or happening out of what was missing before. [Uses hand gesture in upward and outward motion.] *Up* in these cases means "production," getting something done or making something happen.

When you *bring up* something in conversation, you introduce it as a new topic.

If you *come up with* something, you find or produce it, whether it's a material or an idea.

When you *make up* something, it's something imagined.

When you *look up* a word in the dictionary, you search for it and find it.

Whether talking about finding a phone number, creating an excuse, or introducing a topic to a conversation, the point is, these verbs followed by *up* become idiomatic phrases; they now have a new meaning. In other words, when you "come up with something," it doesn't necessarily mean that you're coming upstairs with a pizza.

Now, here's two more. How can you use these phrases?

[Writes on the board *pull off* and *put up with*.]

Ss: Pull off the blanket. Put up with pictures.

T: Okay. You could say them that way. But again, these are phrasal verbs that have their own meaning. What would it mean to . . . ?

[Adds the following so that the phrases on the board read: *pull off a bank robbery, put up with the barking dog.*]

Ss: Rob a bank? Put the dog in the house?

T: Close but not quite with the first answer. When we say we can *pull it off*, we mean that we can do something difficult, like getting an A on the final exam without studying. Can you think of some other examples?

Ss: Pull off building house. Pull off running to class. Pull off making money.

T: Good! You can *pull off* building a house, especially if you've never built one before. It would be much more difficult the first time. The same with making a lot of money; it's not easy to do. But pulling off running to class wouldn't work, because running to class isn't really hard to do, unless your legs are almost paralyzed. Then, running to class would be a great accomplishment.

Now, what about *put up with*? Have you heard the expression "can't stand," as in "I can't stand this music," which means "I don't like this music at all"? Sometimes, even if you can't stand something, you have no choice. You might not like it, but you have to accept it and live with it. Like living in an apartment you don't like. Until you find a better place, you have to *put up with it*. That is, you suffer through it. Now do you understand *put up with the barking dog*?

[Too much lecture lulls the students to inattention, so the teacher now introduces the worksheet.]

Okay, let's see how you do on this worksheet. Choose from these six phrasal verbs to fill in the blanks. But here's the thing: some of the sentences have more than one answer that works. If so, write in All of these phrasal verbs you can use.

[The handout is as follows:]

---

Choose from the phrasal verbs below to complete the following sentences. If a sentence can use more than one, enter both forms.

BRING UP

COME UP WITH

LOOK UP

PULL OFF

PUT UP WITH

MAKE UP

- 1) I know you don't want to hear this, but I have to \_\_\_\_\_ the time you lied to me.
- 2) I'm starving! Can you \_\_\_\_\_ something to cook for dinner?
- 3) If you want to know what it costs to fly somewhere, just \_\_\_\_\_ the fare on the Internet.
- 4) Don't worry so much about passing the test.  
I know you can \_\_\_\_\_ a good result.
- 5) You shouldn't have to \_\_\_\_\_ that old car.  
Why don't you buy a better one?
- 6) I tried to bake a cake by myself, but I couldn't \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7) I'm going to \_\_\_\_\_ something that no one in this meeting has talked about yet.
- 8) If you don't want to attend the wedding, just \_\_\_\_\_ a good reason why you can't go.
- 9) Let's not work outside today. I don't think I can \_\_\_\_\_ the bad weather.
- 10) When we go to Hawaii, I plan to \_\_\_\_\_ some old friends who live there.
- 11) I hope you can \_\_\_\_\_ a way to pay for dinner tonight. I don't have any money!

12) We'd like to \_\_\_\_\_ a trip to Europe.

---

[Once students have completed the handout, the teacher review their answers. This leads to some humor, which helps elucidate the meanings of the target forms.]

T: So, what do you think is the answer to the first one.  
What did you come up with?

S: "I have to look up the time you lied to me."

T: In a diary?

[Or, in response to Question 10, a student answers:]

S: "I plan to put up with some friends who live there."

[Overall, the variation in possible correct responses opens up an opportunity to discuss how context determines the proper choice. Question 4, for instance, allows *pull off* and *come up with*, but not *make up*. The teacher explains that *teachers* make up (design) tests, students don't. Here is an opportunity to introduce another meaning of *make up*, (e.g., *to take at a later time*). Yet more alternative meanings can be introduced, such as *make up with someone you argued with*, but the teacher's discretion to introduce any more options is guided by the level of student proficiency and interest.]

Now the teacher reinforces the idea that all of these forms have a quality in common. Without 'laying it on too thick,' this at least cracks open the door to metaphoric interpretation.]

T: Do you notice anything that these phrasal verbs have in common?

S: Most of them use *up*.

T: Precisely! But why *up*?

S: You said something about making something happen.

T: Right. Something happens, whether it's finding information, making a story or excuse, saying something, or doing something. Even *put up with* is something happening because you're creating a state of mind.

S: What about *pull off*?

T: Thank you for asking that question. Remember that to *pull off* something means here to get something done. Accomplishing something is definitely something happening, isn't it? If you pull off a successful job interview, or pull off passing your driver's test, you've accomplished something that wasn't too easy. *Off* works like *up* here. It also expresses action,

which is what *pull off* is all about, doing something that isn't easy to do.

[The students are eyeing the clock and putting away their notes, but a minute remains.]

T: Now hold on a second. I have a homework assignment for you. Write a paragraph that includes these six phrasal verbs. Use them as many times as you reasonably can, but use each of them at least once. You can write about anything you want. Just make it fun for me to read. Make sure it's double-spaced. Due tomorrow.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Though we have only scratched the surface of using metaphor as basis for a teaching strategy, at least we have taken steps in a direction that should help students to see how a phrasal verb's meaning is forged from the quality and interaction of its constituents. Accordingly, our hypothetical lesson was framed by how phrasal verbs follow some continuity in how certain words as constituents semantically apply to the contexts from which they emerge.

While *up/down* or *in/out* distinctions as metaphors for a wide range of experience may be obviously known to native speakers, such distinctions may not be so sensible to those who are still struggling with how words in English are used in general. To cite one aspect of phrasal verbs for example, we should clarify how we use prepositions in different ways. Comparing phrasal verbs structurally with verb + prepositional phrase combinations lays groundwork for understanding how the particle works as a phrasal verb constituent. Main verbs as well can be clarified through their own role as metaphors. The idea is that throughout the process of instruction, we should explain through

illustration the idiomatic territory of these 'short and simple' words whenever a good opportunity presents itself.

As the figurative extensions of main verbs play into the phrasal verb equation with increasing depth, students should practice and refine the process of drawing analogies. Devising an interpretive system for understanding particles, together with the ability to ascertain figurative meaning from a main verb's face value, will ultimately enable students to become more comfortable with phrasal verbs as a target form in general.

We have discussed how we can entertain variations in word meaning, and how we can rationally derive such variations from context. Furthermore, we have seen how structural rules complicate the matter; if such rules are broken, the phrasal verb's effect is lost. But the pragmatic value of phrasal verbs is something that we have not discussed, and this is a quality that makes phrasal verbs so attractive to students who want to learn English in its nuance. Recall the difference between *extinguish the fire* and *put out the fire*. The phrasal verb version engenders English as it is naturally spoken; sometimes things put any other way indicates, on behalf of the speaker, either a limited lexical choice, or an emphasis

that the phrasal verb version would inadequately express. The choice thus evidences fluency or lack thereof.

But the value in learning how the English language metaphorically operates in phrasal verbs is not limited to the phrasal verb domain. Idiomatic extensions apparent in phrasal verbs apply in varying degrees to countless other expressions as well. A student might wonder, for instance, why *clam up* means *keep one's mouth shut*, while *happy as a clam* uses the same noun to signify *contentedness*. The teacher should explain, then, that a clam has different qualities, each of which serves to express something specific idiomatically, and that there is a different pragmatic impetus to each. It might even be that in a student's mind, *keeping one's mouth shut* and *being content* are not contradictory in value. In any case, innumerable common idioms are expressed in phrasal verb form. For one, *chickening out* and *being chicken* are two grammatical ways of alluding to the same characteristic.

Time spent untangling phrasal verbs can be thus considered an investment in learning idiomatic meanings throughout the language. And, in terms of syntax, this same principle applies. Learning about object placement in phrasal verb structure, for instance, can reinforce similar

grammatical rules pertinent to proper word order and sentence structure in general.

All in all, the fun in using phrasal verbs should be emphasized, to ESL professionals and students alike. Put into context, one construction worker to another may sound more in tune to say *knock it out* than *get it done* if personality and situation call for such. Tone of voice aside, *get it done* has an imperative if not abrasive quality, while *knock it out* implicitly expresses a more congenial attitude. To have the phrasal verb as an option is here a matter of pragmatic facility.

The phrasal verb is valuable in this regard, as a language form that invites innovation. It conveys meaning in neat and clever ways, idiosyncratic as they may be. And stepping back to view phrasal verbs in general, their use reflects the diversity that exists among the people who use them. Phrasal verbs are a life-blood of the vernacular; in terms of curricular development, to dilute their instruction would be to shortchange the unsuspecting student.

I further contend that the phrasal verb, though structurally a sum of its parts, is best mastered as a holistic entity. With this in mind, it would behoove ESL

instructors to teach phrasal verbs not only as a common mode of expression, but to teach them conceptually rather than simply in rote manner.

Again, the use of phrasal verbs is a measure of fluency. Without meaning to sound harsh, if phrasal verbs are given minimal instructional emphasis, then students will more likely suffer the disdain that inevitably results from inadequate communicative ability. As is true for those learning any new language, gratification is awarded when one confidently verbalizes in a style second nature to native speakers.

APPENDIX A  
ACTIVE IS UP

*act up* (misbehave)  
*back up* (to support)  
*bang up* (to damage)  
*be up to* (doing, e.g., "what are you up to?")  
*be up to* (be able, e.g., "are you up to it?")  
*beat up* (physically hurt someone)  
*blast off* (e.g., rocket departing)  
*brace up* (prepare to face trouble)  
*bring on* (to cause)  
*brush up [on]* (review)  
*bug off* (leave alone)  
*build up* (make bigger)  
*call up* (to telephone)  
*catch up* (to reach someone who is ahead)  
*charge up* (to fill with electric power)  
*chill out* (not be so

intense)  
*come down* (be less under drugged state)  
*come up* (appear)  
*dress up* (dress formally make more attractive)  
*drum up* (conjure)  
*duke out* (fight with fists)  
*face up to* (confront)  
*feel up* (fondle)  
*fire up* (to start [usually an engine])  
*fire off* (shoot a gun/speak quickly in quantity)  
*fluff up* (improve [pillow]shape by beating it)  
*follow up* (act further on something)  
*gang up on* (attack as a group)  
*get off* (be satisfied)  
*give it up* (perform sexual favor) (applaud)  
*go off* (activate [e.g., alarm sounding])  
*jam up* (cause problem)  
*kick in* (start [e.g., an engine])  
*kiss off* (dismiss)  
*kiss up* (behave to gain one's favor)  
*knock up* (impregnate)  
*knock yourself out* (proceed to do something)  
*knock it off* (stop it)  
*mess up* (make mistake, do poorly)  
*peel out* (depart very quickly in a car)

*peter out* (come gradually to an end)  
*piss off* (make someone angry)  
*put out* (engage in sexual behavior)  
*run out on [someone]* (leave)  
*screw up* (make a mistake)  
*set [someone] off* (make someone angry)  
*settle down* (relax, become calm)  
*shape up* (improve performance)  
*show off* (draw attention to one's own ability)  
*shut up* ([usually imperative] be quiet)  
*size up* (estimate, evaluate)  
*slip up* (make mistake)  
*stick "em" up* ([imperative "raise your hands"] to rob)  
*suck up [to]* (behave to gain one's favor)  
*suck [it] up* (endure)

*take off* (depart)  
*take [someone] up on* (accept an offer)  
*take up with* (become friendly with someone)  
*throw up* (vomit)  
*tip off* (give a clue; give needed information)  
*top off* (complete with a final act)  
*touch off* (cause something [bad] to happen)  
*tune up* (make [e.g., an engine] run better)  
*turn on* (give pleasure)  
*wave off* (dismiss)  
*zero in [on]* (put in focus)



APPENDIX B

MORE IS UP

*add up* (make sense)  
*beef up* (increase in number or amount)  
*book up* (fill all potential spaces, reservations)  
*bog down* (become impeded)  
*bring up* (introduce to conversation)  
*burn up* (be consumed by heat)  
*burn down* (be destroyed by fire)  
*call off* (stop an activity or event)  
*come up with* (produce, create)  
*cook up* (devise plan or idea)  
*cough up* (produce [money,

info.] unwillingly)  
*divvy up* (divide something to share equitably)  
*even up* (make equal)  
*finish up* (complete a task)  
*fix up* (improve)  
*gum up* (cause trouble, spoil)  
*hang [it] up* (quit)  
*look up* (find information in a reference)  
*make up* (create, devise)  
*open up* (be forthcoming, share feelings)  
*pipe down* (suppress anger)  
*pull off* (accomplish)  
*put up with* (endure)  
*scare up* (procure)  
*settle down* (relax)  
*show up* (arrive, appear)  
*shut down* (refuse someone romantically)  
*stir up* (cause trouble)  
*turn down* (decline offer or invitation)  
*warm up* (become more friendly)  
*wind up* (complete an activity)  
*wind down* (start to finish an activity)

APPENDIX C  
ACTIVITIES ARE SUBSTANCES

*bang out* (complete something quickly)  
*be in on* (be included; be privy)  
*beg off* (excuse oneself from an activity)  
*belt out* [*a tune*] (sing loudly)  
*burn out* (become exhausted from an activity)C]  
*butter up* (pay false respect for one's own gain)  
*catch on* (learn; understand)  
*chew out* (scold severely)  
*chicken out* (refrain out of fear)  
*chip away* (do something a little at a time)  
*chip in* (contribute)  
*clam up* (be absolutely quiet)  
*come into* [*money*] (acquire)  
*crack up* (lose mental control; laugh)  
*crap out* (quit)  
*dig in* (put forth effort)  
*egg on* (encourage; urge; incite)  
*fall into* (become involved in something)  
*farm out* (delegate tasks)  
*get into* (enter field of work or study)  
*get out of* (exit field of work or study; escape an unwanted activity)  
*get through* [*something*] (complete an activity; endure)  
*go through with* (do what was proposed)  
*go into* (pursue field of work or study)  
*grind out* (produce with sustained effort)  
*hammer out* (produce quickly)  
*knock* [*it*] *off* (stop doing something)  
*make do* (suffice)

## REFERENCES

- Azar, Betty Schramper. Fundamentals of English Grammar. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice, 1992.
- Bland, Susan Kesner. Intermediate Grammar: From Form to Meaning and Use. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.
- Bolinger, Dwight. The Phrasal Verb in English. London: Harvard UP, 1971.
- Courtney, Rosemary. Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs. Essex, Eng.: Longman Group UK, 1983.
- Crystal, David. The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Fuchs, Marjorie, Bonner, Margaret, and Westheimer, Miriam. Focus on Grammar: An Intermediate Course for Reference and Practice. White Plains: Longman, 2000.
- Fuchs, Marjorie, and Margaret Bonner. Focus on Grammar: A High Intermediate Course for Reference and Practice. White Plains: Longman, 2000.
- Hook, J. N. Two-Word Verbs in English. Boston: Thompson Group, 2002.
- Kurtyka, Andrzej. "Teaching English Phrasal Verbs: A Cognitive Approach." Cognitive Linguistics Research 19.2 (2001): 29-54.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. Metaphors We Live By.

Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.

"Metaphor." Def. 1. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. 1995.

"Off." Def. 1. Cobuild English Learners Dictionary.  
London: Collins, 1990.

People's Court. KCAL, Los Angeles. 19 Dec. 2002

Quirk, Randolf and Sidney Greenbaum. A Concise Grammar Of Contemporary English. New York: Harcourt, 1973.