

Phrasal Verbs & Other Multi-Word Verbs

by

George TRUSCOTT* and Andrew J. STRAHL**

Department of General Education, Faculty of Engineering

(Manuscript received September 30, 2000)

Abstract

The phrasal verb is a pretty slippery lexical item for Japanese learners of English. These multi-word verbs are perceived as strange and unfamiliar to second language learners since there are very few non-Germanic languages that have them. Yet our students must learn these verbs because they are so commonly used and our students desire so much to sound native-like when communicating in their second tongue.

Yet the teaching of phrasal verbs poses serious problems for the classroom instructor. Where is the logic in *put on clothes*, *put out the cigarette*, *put up with the noise*, and *put off the meeting*? In addition, why is *take off clothes* the opposite of *put on clothes*? For the language learner, *put off* appears to be the more natural opposite to *put on*. Determining which verb can collocate with which particle poses additional problems. And, as we demonstrated from the examples above, the meaning is often impossible to surmise since so many phrasal verbs are used idiomatically. There are further problems relating to and determining transitivity or intransitivity. Is the phrasal verb separable or inseparable? In addition, what are the restrictions governing passivity and what rules apply to object pronouns? In short, we think everyone, teachers and students alike, would agree that phrasal verbs are problematic and difficult.

In this paper, we will present a summary of phrasal verbs from five grammar textbooks, analyzing how different authors address phrasal verbs. It is our hope that this analysis will offer insights into phrasal verbs, especially the problems and difficulties mentioned previously, from both varied and informed points of view.

* Part-time lecturer, Osaka Institute of Technology

** Kwansei Gakuin University