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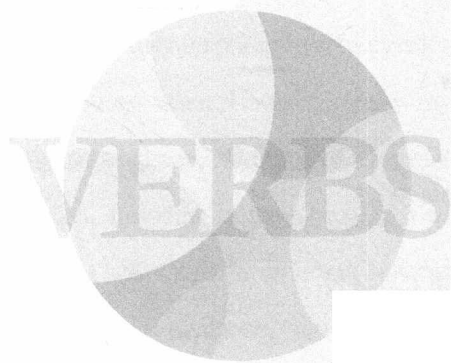
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Preface

The study on phrasal verbs struck me as an interesting and promising field for explorations when I was planning my dissertation about seven years ago. In English language, this type of constructions have been extensively and profoundly studied, including historical research which meant to demonstrate their diachronic changes and states in different historical periods, the concurrent descriptions of the semantic, syntactic, and morphological particularities they display, and the vastly different theoretical accounts offered by linguists from different camps of research.

Yet compared with the heated discussion in international linguistic communities, the domestic research on phrasal verbs was sporadic and scarce. This inspired me to conduct a research aiming at a comprehensive and systematic study on this type of constructions. Another factor that motivated the research was that phrasal verbs were difficult for Chinese learners of English. We hoped that our analysis would be a little helpful to them in mastering and using these constructions.

As a follower of cognitive linguistics, we intended to approach phrasal verbs with Image Schema theory and Construction Grammar theory as the theoretical framework. Abiding by the two commitments (generalization commitment and the cognitive commitment), which was proposed by

Lakoff, and which now have become the cornerstone of cognitive linguistics, we also planned to design a behavioral experiment to testify out analysis.

As a native of Chinese, with English being the foreign language, we found these tasks extremely challenging. The main problem was that we lacked the resources and the intuition that a native speaker was naturally endowed with about the use of English phrasal verbs, which would make our analysis less trustable. Therefore, we turned to authoritative dictionaries (*Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* and *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary for Learners of English*). All the examples in this book were from these two dictionaries. We hoped that this would alleviate this concern a bit. This is also the reason why we wanted to conduct a behavioral experiment. We hoped that the worry would be further minimized with the empirical evidence presented after the theoretical analysis.

We want to remind the readers that, though the book is entitled *A Cognitive Research on English Phrasal Verbs*, we actually focused on the particles only, with the analysis on verbs left out. In fact, we analyzed only two pairs of particles (*in* vs. *out*, *up* vs. *down*) for practical purpose. We hope that the case studies on these two pairs of particles will shed some lights on the analysis of these types of constructions as a whole.

I would like to thank Prof. Shu Dingfang, my doctoral supervisor, and Prof. He Zhaoxiong, my master supervisor. Under their guidance, I started my journey into cognitive linguistics, and came to know the vastness of linguistic research as well as the diversities of research methods. I am grateful to Prof. Wu Fuyun (Shanghai International Studies University), who kindly spared her valuable time to read my experiment design and discuss with me about many details; Mrs. Elizabeth Mollica, the former foreign teachers in Donghua University, and Mr. Naphtali Kerr, an

International student in Shanghai Jiaotong University then, who helped to check the language materials used in the experiment and gave suggestions for improvement.

My sincere thanks also go to my dear colleagues in Donghua University, particularly Professor Zhao Xiaolin, Professor Yang Lingui, Ms. Lin Rong (Secretary of CPC, Foreign languages College). I got immense support from them, without which the work would have been much delayed if not have been impossible at all.

Finally, I'd like to thank my wife, Dr. Zhang Qiuhang. She was the first listener whenever I came up with some new ideas in the whole process of research. I thank her for her patience and support when I murmured out my turbid thoughts. To her, I'm infinitely indebted and wish to return what she has done to me with all my love.

Yang Tangfeng

Contents

Chapter *1*
Introduction

1.1   A cognitive approach to language

In the last few decades of the 20th century, departing from the groundbreaking works of Lakoff & Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1987), Johnson (1987), and Langacker (1987), a cognitive approach of linguistic research, which was characterized by an open rejection of modular language mechanism as endorsed by Chomskyans, started to arouse considerable interest from linguistic community. The result of this research orientation is the establishment of cognitive linguistics as a new and appealing branch with the looming hope that all aspects of language—including language structure, language use, as well as language faculty—could be given a unified account in the framework of one fundamental process, a process that human beings are so adroit at because of lifelong engagement that they can carry it out without much conscious effort for most of the time. That process is called conceptualization.

Conceptualization in this sense can be vaguely defined as the mental activities that take place in the brain when people interact with the environment. Concepts thus obtained are the mental traces left over from this process. It should be noted that the notion of concept or conceptualization in this

context differs sharply from what they refer to in Descartes' dualism. In the dualist view, concept or conceptualization is a kind of pure mental work without the involvement of physical matter such as the body and the brain, or even the physical world. Concepts are the stuff that stands on its own in contrast to the physical matter, and the process of conceptualization takes place within the conceptual system itself which is independent of the outside world. According to cognitive linguists, however, concepts reside in the brain, which in turn resides in the body. Therefore, conceptualization has everything to do with the physical brain and the physical body. The development of concepts and conceptual structures fundamentally relies on our perception and conceptualization of our body and the way the brain and the body interacts with the outside world. In the process of conceptualization, the body fulfills two functions: firstly it provides the material basis for thought to reside in; and secondly—also more importantly— it is the starting point and the primary bench mark that is referred to constantly in the development of other concepts. Body in this sense shapes thought (Lakoff & Johnson 1999). Because of the importance attached to the body and the interactions of the body with the environment, this view of conceptualization is termed as *embodied*, and perception and conception in this theoretical framework cannot be separated apart as they were assumed to be by Descartes.

Emphasizing the determinant role of conceptualization in shaping language has also distinctively differentiated this new linguistic approach from Chomsky's Universal Grammar, which is also "cognitive" in a broad sense. Although Universal Grammar approaches language from a mental perspective, it views the abstract syntax as an intrinsic mechanism in the acquisition and development of linguistic competence, and advocates formalism in the account of language phenomena. On the other hand, as concept or conceptualization is related to meaning rather than syntax, this new school of cognitive linguistics insists on taking meaning as the starting point for all linguistic analysis. By openly claiming that meaning is

conceptualization, they find a way that connects the linguistic mechanism with other cognitive abilities, challenging the modular and formalist view of language in Universal Grammar.

Cognitive linguistics also differs sharply from the traditional linguistic analysis or generative grammar regarding the nature of language. In traditional linguistic analysis, language is regarded as a multi-level system of lexicon, phonology, syntax, semantics, etc.; and in generative grammar, language is the manipulation of lexical items governed by a set of rules. Cognitive linguists hold that language is symbolic, and each construction (or symbolic unit) is the combination of form and meaning. Language in this sense is but a systematic and dynamic cluster of such constructions, the internal structure of which is constrained by the process of cognitive activities, namely the process of conceptualization.

The systematic cluster of constructions of a language is dynamic in that modifications of the cluster have been taking place all the time. From a cognitive and psychological perspective, a lexical chunk of a few words which is originally compositional might condense into a construction after frequent uses for the sake of economy in processing. Besides, the figurative extension of some expressions from concrete domains into abstract domains also provides a source for new constructions when the relationship between the abstract sense and the form becomes entrenched (cf. Langacker 1987). The newly-emerged constructions become part of the overall cognitive network and are related to other constructions through semantic or formal links[1]. (cf. Goldberg 1995)

The relationship between form, meaning, and cognition from the perspective

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[1] This construction view of language is supported by evidence from first language acquisition reported by Tomasello (2000, 2003). According to Tomasello, child language in early stage is centered around some specific words or expressions, and is therefore fragmental, and non-systematic. It takes quite some time before a child starts to develop the syntactic ability (the formation of abstract constructions) and realize the relationship between constructions. Therefore he proposes that the acquisition of language is item-based or usage-based.

of cognitive linguistics can be summarized as follows:

(1) Meaning motivates the form. The matching of form and meaning is not arbitrary. Although grammatical forms, namely rules in phonology and syntax, can be justifiably described or classified as independent systems, there are hidden semantic factors that are responsible for why they are what they are.

(2) The cognitive system constrains the semantic system. The mental construct of linguistic meaning overlaps with the mental construct that is formed through the interaction with the outside world (namely the conceptual system). The mechanisms that guide other cognitive activities also guide the use of language.

1.2　Phrasal verbs as the research target

We endorse the viewpoint of cognitive linguistics that relates language faculty to the general cognitive mechanism, and aim to provide an account of the target language structure (phrasal verbs) through the intermediation of conceptualization, categorization and other cognitive activities.

1.2.1　Why phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs are pervasive in English language. Because of their peculiarities in morphological structure, syntactic behavior, and semantic features, they have been widely and continually discussed by scholars from various fields, including theoretical linguistics, psycho-linguistics, corpus linguistics, language acquisition (of both first language and second language), and even the field of speech recognition in computer science.

We choose phrasal verbs as the research object mainly because of their double status in the continuum of linguistic constructions. Phrasal verbs can be appropriately regarded as both phrasal structures and lexical items. On

the one hand, they can be regarded as phrasal structures because both the verbs and the particles are separate lexical items and each can function independently in syntax①. This is evidenced by the fact that some phrasal verbs can be used in a discontinuous form without obvious differences (for example *run up the flag* and *run the flag up* are both acceptable). On the other hand, they can be regarded as lexical items, because in some cases the entire meanings of the phrasal verb do not have much to do with the components (for example *look up* in *look up the word in a dictionary* seems to have nothing to do with the literal meaning of *look* and *up*). Therefore, it also seems appropriate to take them as inseparable units similar to common lexical items.

The blurred status makes phrasal verbs a privileged domain for the study of the relationship between syntax proper (intended as free combinations of words) and lexicon (Masini 2005), and "promises to provide valuable insights into what many linguists and applied linguists have begun to recognize as a multiword middle ground between ' syntax and lexis '" (Gardner & Davies 2007: 340).

However, we do not intend to proceed in this direction, though study of this kind—what is the relationship between syntax proper and lexicon, whether there is such a multiword middle ground between "syntax and lexis", and how such a middle level functions in the scientific account of language —perhaps is equally or even more interesting and important. Instead, we intend to address a small yet important aspect concerning the research of this type of constructions, namely whether the particles contributes meaning to the entire constructions in all cases, and whether the different meanings of a certain particle is related to each other.

These questions have been the topic of constant argument in linguistic

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① There are exceptions, however, for example the phrasal verb of *refer to*. In this construction, the verb and particle always appear together in order to function as a unit in syntax. It should be noted that such exceptions are very few in number.

circles (see Chapter 2 for details). To clarify our standpoint, our answer to this question is yes, and the purposes of our research are to present an account from the cognitive perspective and to provide empirical evidence for the analysis.

1.2.2 Defining phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs are also called *particle verbs*, *verb-particle constructions*, *verb-particle combinations*, or *multi-word verbs* by other scholars. A phrasal verb is made up of two components (a verb plus a particle). Due to the difference in the understanding of what can be regarded as a "particle", the coverage of this term varies. The widest scope that this term applies includes all the following structures (see, for example, Bannard 2005):

[1] a) George grew up. (Verb + Adv.)

    b) Bill blew up the house. (Verb + Adv., followed by an object)

    c) The police looked into the matter. (Verb + Prep., the combination inseparable)

    d) He came up with a good idea. (Verb + Adv. + Prep.)

    e) Please cut the long story short. (Verb + Adj.)

    f) Don't let go of the rope. (Verb + Verb)

We take only types (1a – c) as our research object and leave out other types (1d – f) for practical purposes. Type (1d) can be justifiably left out because in a sense it is the combination of type (1a) and type (1c), and the account applicable to type (1a) and type (1c) can be used to explain type (1d). Type (1e) and (1f) are also excluded because the internal structures of these types are different from the structures we are discussing here.

We define phrasal verbs in this book as follows:

A phrasal verb is a structure that consists of a verb proper and a particle (either a preposition or an adverb), which functions as a single unit syntactically, and whose meaning cannot be predicted by the mere combination of the literal meaning of the verb and the particle.

A combination of such will be regarded as a phrasal verb regardless of whether the particle being adverbial or prepositional. In other words, we do not try to distinguish particles from either the homomorphic adverbs or the homomorphic prepositions as some researchers do (for example Bolinger 1971; Quirk 1985; Dehe 2002; etc). Instead we take Goldberg's constructionist approach to this term (see section 3.1.5 in Chapter 3), and regard such combinations as phrasal verbs as long as their meanings cannot be fully predicted from the combination of the components; or even if they are predictable, as long as they occur with sufficient frequency, they can still be stored as phrasal verbs (Goldberg 2005, 2006).

To make a comparison with other literature, the coverage of phrasal verbs in our research is the same as the term refers to in Smith (1925), Joweltt (1951), Stroka (1962), and Potter (1965), "discontinuous verbs" in Live (1965), or "group verbs" in Sweet (1955).

Yet this is still not enough to avoid uncertainty in determining whether a combination should be regarded as a phrasal verb or not, for in most cases, "being or not being a phrasal verb is a matter of degree" (Bolinger 1971: 6), and sometimes it is still hard to draw a distinct line between this type of constructions and similar free syntactic combinations.

To solve this problem, we decide to turn to dictionaries, because the authoritative positions of dictionaries in language use may simplify the problem. The widely-acknowledged dictionaries on phrasal verbs are *Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*, *Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*, and *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary for Learners of English*. Therefore, to avoid the task of justifying for ourselves, we include as examples for our analysis only those that are listed in these three dictionaries in the rest part of this book.

1.2.3   The linguistic features of phrasal verbs

Based on the literature we have on phrasal verbs, the social, stylistic

and semantic features of phrasal verbs can be summarized as follows:

Pervasiveness. Phrasal verbs are "extremely common in English", and the number of them are "constantly growing and changing." (Collins COBUILD 1989: iv). It is estimated that in an average native speaker's vocabulary, the size of phrasal verbs is similar to that of single-word lexical items (Jackendoff 1997), or even higher (Mel'cuk 1995). According to Crutchley (2007) and Yasuda (2010: 250), they are "the most frequently occurring idiomatic strings of language in both spoken and written English", and are now found "in all registers, ranging from comic books, street slangs to the most academic forms of the language". (Cornell 1985, cf. Darwin & Gray 1999)

Colloquialism. Phrasal verbs are usually labeled as "colloquial" or "informal" (Collins COBUILD 1989: iv) because they appear more frequently in daily communication. The head verbs (for example *do*, *make*, *take*, *go*, etc.) in phrasal verbs are almost all core native lexical items in English, many of which have been described as "light" or "semantically general" (Pinker 1989, Theakston et al. 2004). Historically, "They constituted an unmarked, native alternative to the exploding number of Latinisms, allowing less educated speakers an encoding of subtle semantic nuances for which the educated classes had Latinisms at their disposal" (Cowie & Mackin 1975: vi; Leisi & Mair 1999; cf. Claridge 2000; Schneider 2004: 229). This distribution still holds true even today. According to a socio-linguistic study conducted by Krezschmar & Schneider (1996), speakers of higher social status tends to say *it's clearing/fairing*, while speakers of less education and lower status prefer *it's clearing up/fairing off*, to mean the weather is improving.

Productiveness. Phrasal verbs are highly productive. They are "the most prolific source" of new words (Bolinger 1971: xiii). Unlike the idioms (for example *kick the bucket*) which are highly frozen, most phrasal verbs enjoy a certain degree of compositionality and are subject to flexible and creative

uses. " Native speakers of English have an understanding, albeit unconscious, of the meaning and the use of particles that allows them to create, almost at will, new phrasal verbs (Darwin & Gray 1999: 66)". Or as Villavicencio (2005, cf. Kim & Baldwin 2007: 40) put it, "given a compositional VPC, it is often possible to predict novel verb-particle combinations from semantically-homogeneous verbs and particles with similar semantics". In other words, the verb in a phrasal verb can often be replaced by a word of similar meaning without radically changing the meaning of the whole construction. For example, *bolt/cement/clamp/ glue/paste/nail* can all combine with *down* to mean objects represented by the verbs are used to join materials (Fraser 1976). This is also true with the particle. "In many cases, the particle seems to be compositionally adding a specific meaning to the construction and following a productive pattern... similar particles from a given semantic class can be replaced by other particles from the same class in compositional combinations: *send up/in/back/away* (Wurmbrand 2000)" (Ramisch et al. 2008: 51).

Polysemy. Although phrasal verbs are pervasive in English language, the words that go into this type of constructions are very limited in number. To illustrate, of the phrasal verbs listed in Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs (1989), which total more than 3,000, there are only 38 head verbs and 18 particles. This results in the fact that " the very same combination of verb and particle seems to mean different things in different contexts" (Porto Requejo & Pena Diaz 2008). Gardner & Davies (2007) reports that the top 25 phrasal verbs account for nearly one third of all phrasal verb occurrences in the British National Corpus, and the top 100 more than half of the total. Besides, the 100 high-frequency phrasal verbs have "559 variant-meaning senses".

Idiosyncrasy. Phrasal verbs are idiosyncratic in that their meanings often cannot be predicted from the meanings of the verbs and the particles (for example, the combination of "*look*" and "*up*" on the basis of grammatical rules