



# Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English

Volume 1: Verbs with  
Prepositions & Particles

牛津当代英语成语词典

第 1 卷



牛津大学出版社  
外语教学与研究出版社

★学生英语文库★

# 牛津当代英语成语词典

第1卷

动词加介词和小词

A.P.考依 R.麦金 编

牛津大学出版社  
外语教学与研究出版社

**OXFORD  
DICTIONARY  
OF CURRENT  
IDIOMATIC  
ENGLISH**

Volume 1:  
Verbs with Prepositions & Particles

A P COWIE  
R MACKIN

Oxford University Press

*Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP*

OXFORD NEW YORK TORONTO  
DELHI BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI  
PETALING JAYA SINGAPORE HONG KONG TOKYO  
NAIROBI DARGES SALAAM CAPE TOWN  
MELBOURNE AUCKLAND

and associated companies in

BEIRUT BERLIN IBADAN NICOSIA

ISBN 0 19 431145 7 hardback edition

ISBN 0 19 431146 5 paperback edition

OXFORD is a trade mark of Oxford University Press

© Oxford University Press 1975

First paperback edition published 1985

Third impression 1987

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Oxford University Press*

*This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.*

*This book includes some words which are or are asserted to be proprietary names. The presence or absence of such assertion should not be regarded as affecting the legal status of any proprietary name or trademark.*

Computer typeset in Times and Univers by  
George Overs Ltd., Oxford University Press,  
Unwin Brothers Ltd and Tradespools Ltd.

Printed in Hong Kong

本书经英国牛津大学出版社授权翻印

限在中华人民共和国发行

不 供 出 口

牛津大学出版社版权所有 1984

Oxford 为牛津大学出版社商标

This reprint has been authorized by

Oxford University Press

for sale in the People's Republic of China only

and not for export therefrom

© Oxford University Press 1984

Oxford is a trademark of Oxford University Press

牛津大学出版社

1984年10月第1版

牛津大学出版社

1984年10月第1版

牛津大学出版社

1984年10月第1版

## 学生英语文库出版说明

中国人学英语的进程，可以说大致有三个境界。第一个境界是要依靠本族语（对大多数人来说是汉语）明的或暗的帮助来学习英语，如依靠汉语讲解、注释，口头、笔头、心头的翻译，英汉词典以及其他用中文编写的参考书等等来领会英语。第二个境界是能够通过英语学习英语，如读英文注释，听英语讲解，使用英英词典，阅读英文原著参考书等等，亦即能借助浅近的英语学习艰深的英语，并进而直接从英文书刊、英语讲话中吸收英语知识，掌握英语规律。第三个境界是能在英汉两种语言系统之间建立联系（不是个别孤立词语的对号），最后达到能在两种语言中间自如地来回转换的境地。

以上三种境界，虽然可能有交叉或平行，但是大体上可以代表由低到高的三个阶段。代表第一个境界的阶段，可以尽量缩短，有人甚至主张跳过或绕开。第三个境界严格说已经属于翻译专业修养的范围。唯有第二个境界是英语学习的中心。尽早达到这一境界，是学习成功的要诀。英语学习者在入门阶段结束之后，就应当逐步学会读原文著作，听原声讲话，使用英英词典，阅读原著参考书，敢看爱看原版书刊。一句话，要日夕涵泳于英语之中，养成通过英语学英语的能力、爱好、信心和习惯。

经验证明，阅读译本看似省力，实际常有雾里看花之憾；钻研原著，起初不免吃力，但是唯有如此，才能识得庐山真面目。文学作品是这样，一般语文参考书也是这样。从研究外

国文化的目标着想,必须立志精通外语;从学习外语的方法着眼,应当早读多读原文著作。

因此,多读精选的英语原著,是精通英语的一个最重要的途径。**学生英语文库**的出版,就是为了给中级以上的学习者提供一部分这样的基本书籍。

收入**学生英语文库**的都是英语国家著名出版社所出的有价值著作,在世界上享有盛誉。其中有关于语言的,也有关于文学的;有教程和读物,也有参考书和工具书。每一种都是针对我国学习者的需要精选,并根据最新版本影印的。

**文库**中的书籍,除一两种教程酌加中文注释和参考译文外,其余都是英语原著的翻版。这些著作,绝大多数都是屡经修订再版,或年复一年地重印,成了各国英语学习者和使用者案头、架上常备之物。所收文学作品,都是名著杰作;在英语国家是家弦户诵,在其他国家是一切英语和文学爱好者所不可不读的。熟读这些作品,既有助于掌握英语的精髓,又可深入了解英语国家的社会历史文化背景。

**学生英语文库**计划分辑出版。第一辑约 20 种,定于近期陆续和读者见面。以后还将逐步扩充选目。我们希望这个小小文库能成为我国广大英语学习者的良师益友。

## 本书内容介绍

英语成语是英语词汇的重要组成部分，是鲜明有力的表达手段。如果使用得当，常可为说话作文增添色彩。但是成语也是英语学习者最感困难的一个方面。难在正确理解，也难在适当运用。成语的特点是不能照字面理解，初学者遇到成语，往往无从索解。更危险的是由于“望文生义”而造成误解。领会不易，使用尤难。成语在搭配上常比一般词语有更多的限制，不同的成语又常常有雅俗、褒贬各异的修辞色彩。滥用、误用成语，不免产生不好甚至可笑的效果。

一般的英语词典和许多专门的英语成语词典，对于成语至多作些简单的解释，加上一两个编造的例句，常常解决不了学习和使用成语的特殊困难。

《牛津当代英语成语词典》是迄今为止英国出版的取材最精审、解释最详明、例证最丰富、体例最严密的一部英语成语词典。此书是专为非本族的学习者编写的，不仅教人正确理解成语，而且教人恰当地使用成语。

全书分为两卷，收入二次大战结束以来英语中通行的各类成语一万五千余条。第1卷收入由动词加介词、小词(副词)构成的成语(即一般所谓的短语动词)，共约八千条。第2卷收入由一般短语、子句和整句构成的成语，共约七千条。

总括起来，本书具有以下特色：(1)用浅易的文字解释成语的意义；(2)用简明的代码和句型表说明成语的用法；(3)列举每个成语的常见搭配格式和具体词语；(4)标注成语的语体、语域(使用场合)，点明各个成语的修辞色彩；(5)用丰富的例证说明实际用法；例句有编者自造的，也有大量引自1948—1983年间出版的小说、戏剧、传记以及报刊、广播和电视的实例；引文均注明出处；(6)有详密的互见指示，第1,2两卷之



间和各卷内部的相关条目(同义、反义、衍义等),均可互相参见;(7)同形异义成语分别立条;(8)对某些成语另加语法和惯用法说明,对易于误用的成语一一提醒读者注意;(9)书末附有详细的索引,书中所收的每一个成语,都可以通过其中所含的任何一个实词(名词、动词、形容词等)查得;(10)另有附表列举成语的各种变体及其派生形式。

可以说,本书不愧是打开英语成语宝库的一把钥匙,凡是理解和使用英语成语的各种问题差不多都可以从书中找到答案。由于各册书前有关于英语成语特点和分类的长篇论述,书中相关条目有周密的互见提示,书末附有详细的索引,本书不仅便于随时翻查,而且也是系统地学习和研究成语的良好参考书。

OXFORD  
DICTIONARY  
OF CURRENT  
IDIOMATIC  
ENGLISH

Volume 1:  
Verbs with Prepositions & Particles

## General Introduction

Familiarity with a wide range of idiomatic expressions, and the ability to use them appropriately in context, are among the distinguishing marks of a native-like command of English. Expressions such as **step up** (supplies), **lay on** (transport) and **take up** (the story) are part of the common coin of everyday colloquial exchange, and the tendency, especially in casual or informal contexts, to prefer the Anglo-Saxon combination to its single Romance equivalent – **increase, provide, continue** – helps to explain the widely-held view that idioms such as these are among the most characteristically 'English' elements in the general vocabulary.

To say that such expressions are in common use is not however to say that their meanings are always self-evident: a French speaker would surely understand **continue** more readily than **take up**, while a native speaker might have difficulty in explaining the sense of the combination in terms of its constituent parts. In fact, a close study of various kinds of idiomatic items brings to light many curious anomalies of form and meaning. While we can equally well talk of **angling for** or **fishing for** compliments, where the verbs are as freely interchangeable as when they are used in a literal sense, we should not say of a friend that he had difficulty in **making up his thoughts** (as distinct from **his mind**). And while we might want to say of him that he found it hard to **hit the nail on the head**, we should not substitute **strike** for **hit** unless we were thinking literally of his skill with the hammer rather than figuratively of his inability to say precisely what he meant. Among collocational pitfalls of this kind the mature speaker of the language picks his way with unconscious ease. The foreign student, however, or the native speaker of English whose control of idiom is not yet sure, looks for explicit guidance on a wide variety of expressions in current use, and often to a considerable depth of detail. As far as we are aware, no specialized dictionary of idiomatic usage at present exists which is sufficiently broad in scope to answer the various practical requirements of the learner, and it is chiefly with a view to meeting this need that the *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English* has been designed and compiled in two volumes. The present volume deals with only part of the total range of idiomatic expressions in English; other types of idiom are treated in the second volume. An important feature of the whole Dictionary is that the grammatical and semantic treatment of headphrases is supported by citations from a variety of contemporary sources, both written and spoken. Most of the quotations are drawn from an analysis of works of fiction, biography, history etc which was specially undertaken to provide illustrative material for the Dictionary. As the drafting of entries proceeded this archive of upwards of 30,000 recorded excerpts was added to from time to time, especially from such sources as the daily and weekly press and radio and television broadcasts.

The scope of the present volume is explained in some detail below (0.1). We set out the main idiom patterns represented here, discuss the problem of idiomaticity as it affects the question of what to include and what to exclude, and outline our reasons for adopting the particular grammatical framework used in the entries. The second part of the Introduction (0.2) touches upon some features of the entries which are specifically designed to encourage the use of the dictionary as a learning and teaching aid.

## The scope of the dictionary

- 0.1 One feature of idiomatic usage in English which complicates the task both of the lexicographer and of the student is that idioms correspond to a wide range of grammatical types, or patterns. Idioms are found for example in the phrase patterns 'article + adj + noun' – *the last straw, a live wire, a lame duck*; 'article + present participle + noun' – *a parting shot, a sitting duck*; and 'article + past participle + noun' – *a foregone conclusion, a close-run thing*. Idiomatic expressions also span sentences of various structural types, as in *break the bank, fill the bill, make sb's day, jump the gun; give him an inch and he'll take a mile, spare the rod and spoil the child*. This is but a small sample of the great diversity of grammatical patterns in which idiomatic expressions may occur. The spread is enormous but there is one outstandingly large category that does permit coverage in depth and uniformity of treatment within a single volume, and that is the subject of this part of the dictionary.

The basic requirement that expressions have to meet for inclusion in the present volume is a simple one: all consist of, or include, a verb and a particle or preposition (i.e. one of the words **down, for, in, off, on, up, with** etc). This restriction explains the 'verbs with prepositions and particles' of the subtitle. The simple combinations of verb + particle (or verb + preposition) – **back away, fall through, size up, abide by, run into, take to** – account for the bulk of the entries, but there is an important sub-type containing both a particle and a preposition – **put up with, set up as, take out on**. A considerable number of entries, too, are devoted to more complex types, many having nouns (and sometimes also adjectives) as fixed elements in addition to the verb and preposition or particle: **lose track of, make a mental note of, put one's best foot forward, take to one's heels**.

In this brief survey of the grammatical types represented in the dictionary the question of idiomaticity has not been directly raised. Though various expressions have been cited as examples of each type, we have yet to say what it is that entitles us to refer to them as idioms. In turning now to consider this central question of idiomaticity it will be best to break down under separate heads the rather complex issues that are raised.

1 How in practice do we determine whether a given expression is idiomatic or not? We may sense for example that **put up** as used in the sentence

*They're having a memorial **put up** to him by public subscription.*

is not idiomatic, whereas **put up in**

*A well-wisher had **put up** the money (for the scheme).*

is idiomatic. What kinds of criteria can we call upon in support of our intuitions?

2 Is the distinction between non-idioms and idioms clear-cut, or does the one type shade off gradually into the other?

3 What criteria in particular determine the inclusion of some items in the dictionary and the exclusion of others?

4 Finally, what is the bearing of the conclusions we reach upon the grammatical labels we attach to idioms? If an expression such as **put up** (in the second example) is shown to be a unit of *meaning*, should we not describe it as a grammatical unit also, and generally abandon the 'verb + particle' labelling in idiomatic cases?

In considering these questions, unnecessary complications will be avoided if the complex items (e.g. **turn one's back on**) are considered separately from the simple two-word combinations (e.g. **turn on**). The immediate discussion

## the scope of the dictionary

will centre particularly on combinations of transitive verb + particle; we shall return later to the more complex cases.

Discussions of idiomaticity are sometimes confused by introducing inappropriate grammatical criteria into an area where considerations of meaning carry particular weight. A question which is often raised in treatments of the verb + particle combination, but from the discussion of which the wrong conclusions are sometimes drawn, has to do with the different grammatical functions of **on** in such pairs of sentences as

*The machine **turns** (= rotates) **on** a central pivot.*

*Pop music **turns on** (= stimulates, excites) many young people.*

There is certainly a difference of function here: we cannot shift the final noun phrase to precede **on** in the first sentence, but we can in the second:

\**The machine **turns** a central pivot **on**.*

*Pop music **turns** many young people **on**.*

Further evidence of the difference is the contrastive positioning of 'it' and 'them' (as replacements for the noun phrases) in the two sentences

*The machine **turns on** it.*

*Pop music **turns** them **on**.*

It is on the basis of such criteria that **on** can be said to function as a *preposition* in the first example and as a *particle* (or adverbial particle) in the second. At the same time, we cannot use this grammatical evidence of contrastiveness in support of a claim that **turn on** (= 'excite') is a unit of meaning, and thus an idiom. If we did, we should have to explain why it is that **turn on** as used in the sentence

*The caretaker **turns on** the hall lights:*

appears, and can be shown to be, *less* idiomatic, while at the same time displaying the *same* characteristics with regard to the particle. Compare:

*The caretaker **turns** the hall lights **on**.*

*The caretaker **turns** them **on**.*

We should also have to account for the fact that, whereas **turn on** (verb + preposition) in

*The machine **turns on** a central pivot.*

is intuitively less idiomatic than its homonym in the following sentence. **on** is equally 'prepositional' in both cases:

*Our conversation **turned on** (= had as its main topic) what was to be done when the battle was over.*

The evidence of such examples points to the conclusion that whereas the particle/preposition contrast is a valid and important one, it has no bearing on whether expressions are idiomatic or not. The idiom/non-idiom contrast is different in kind and must be established by different means. Having said that, it is true that grammatical support of another type can sometimes be found for treating items such as **turn on** (in the sense of 'excite') as units of meaning. Whether we shall wish to argue from this that such expressions should be described as *grammatical* units (i.e. words) in the dictionary is a question we shall take up again when various (largely semantic) criteria of idiomaticity have been examined.

We can begin the discussion of idiomaticity with a simple and familiar assumption: an idiom is a combination of two or more words which function as a unit

\* marks sentences that are considered unacceptable

of meaning. This assumption can be tested: if a verb + particle expression (for instance) is a semantic unit we should be able to substitute for it a number of single words (in this case verbs) of equivalent meaning. By this criterion, **step up** as used in the sentence

*His promotion has **stepped up** their social status.*

is clearly idiomatic, since it is synonymous with 'improve', 'enhance'. By the same token, **take off** is an idiom in the sentence

*Bill **took off** Winston Churchill to perfection.*

since it is equivalent in meaning to 'mimic', 'imitate'.

We can test our intuitions about idiomaticity in another way. If **step up** and **take off** are units of meaning, it should not be possible to break that unity either by removing the particle component or by replacing the verb component with other verbs of like meaning. The 'particle deletion' test shows both expressions to be idiomatic: the effect of applying it is to make nonsense of the example sentences:

\**His promotion has **stepped** their social status.*

\**Bill **took** Winston Churchill to perfection.*

'Verb replacement' also applies negatively in both cases: there are no precise equivalents to **step** and **take** as they are used here:

*His promotion has **stepped up** their social status.*

? *pushed*

? *bumped*

*Bill **took off** Winston Churchill to perfection.*

\* *grabbed*

\* *snatched*

(? marks choices which are acceptable in the context but doubtful synonyms, and \* marks choices that are totally unacceptable.)

The semantic unity which is characteristic of idioms tends to make them behave as single *grammatical* words also. This tendency is reflected for example in the fact that some verb + particle expressions which are idiomatic can be converted into *nouns*. So **to make up** (one's face) has a corresponding noun **make-up**, and **to break down** (the accounts, the figures) has the corresponding form **breakdown**. This characteristic suggests a further test - of 'noun formation' - which applies positively to both our examples. In parallel with the cases just cited, we find that **to step up** (someone's status) can be changed into **a step-up** (in someone's status) and **to take off** (Churchill) into **a take-off** (of Churchill).

Idiomatic expressions are units of meaning; non-idiomatic expressions, conversely, are made up of distinct meaningful parts. We should expect this assumption about non-idioms to be borne out when they are tested in the same ways as idioms. This time however the tests should apply in reverse. Consider the item **draw out**, as in the example

*Robert **drew out** twenty pounds from his savings account.*

We note first that there is no corresponding noun in this case: we shall not attest \***a draw-out** (of twenty pounds) to parallel **a step-up** (in status). We find too that we can equally well use **take** or **draw** in this context: the verbs are synonymous here. Again, the particle **out** can be deleted without affecting sense or acceptability:

*Robert **draw** twenty pounds from his savings account.*

### the scope of the dictionary

The examples we have been looking at tend to suggest that there is a sharp contrast between idioms and non-idioms – that there are items like **take off** (a politician) to which all the tests apply, positively or negatively as appropriate, and other combinations like **draw out** (money) to which the same tests apply in reverse. In reality, the picture is not so clear-cut: even **draw out**, which on most counts seems unidiomatic enough, has a one-word equivalent in **withdraw** (suggesting semantic unity):

Robert **withdrew** twenty pounds from his savings account.

In fact, the more individual cases that we examine the more does it appear that the boundary between highly idiomatic items and the rest is not sharply drawn but hazy and imprecise. We shall do better to think in terms of a *scale* of idiomaticity, with the 'true' idioms (**step up**, **take off**) clearly established at the upper end and **draw out** appearing near the bottom, but with many items representing varying degrees of semantic and grammatical unity spaced out in between. Among the intermediate types, or 'semi-idioms', we find items like **put up**, as used in the sentence

Increased transport costs will **put up** the prices.

and **muck up**, as in the example

The weather really **mucked up** our weekend.

What gives such items their special status is that when the tests used to identify idioms (or non-idioms) are applied, the results are not conclusive either way. We find for example that whereas **put up** and **muck up** are unitary according to one criterion ('raise' or 'increase' can be substituted for the first expression and 'spoil' or 'ruin' for the second), they are separable according to another criterion (replacement of the verb component by a verb, or verbs, of equivalent meaning). Thus we can say

Increased transport costs will **send up** the prices (or: *cause the prices to go up*).

where **send** and **go** replace **put** in the original sentence; and we can also say

The weather really **messed up** our weekend.

where the synonymous **mess** has replaced **muck**.

What has been said about the nature of the relationship between idioms and non-idioms applies also to more complex expressions – those containing a noun and an adjective, for example. Here too there is a gradual shading-off from absolutely fixed expressions, such as **make an honest woman of** or **make a clean breast of**, through those which allow the replacement of certain words by others of related meaning – **make effective/good use of**, **put a bold/brave/good face on it/ things** – down to expressions of which an adjective (etc) is not an essential part – **keep a (careful, close, watchful etc) eye on**, **take (strong, instant, particular etc) exception to**. As these examples suggest, the distinctive character of each complex expression (as more or less idiomatic) is brought out by applying the same simple tests of replacement and deletion that were demonstrated earlier.

We have discussed at some length the nature of idiomaticity chiefly to throw light on the special problems raised when deciding what to include in a dictionary which has 'idiomatic' as part of its title. Clearly all those items which are demonstrably units of form and meaning must be recorded. Equally, there are expressions at the lower end of the scale for which an adequate case cannot be made. But as regards the central area – the semi-idioms – where is the line to be drawn? On the whole we have tended to be accommodating to marginal cases, drawing the line low rather than high. There are certain criteria, too, to



which we have given special weight. These we explain below with reference to a number of recurrent types of semi-idiom.

1 We have tended on the whole to include any expression, simple or complex, from which the preposition(s) or particle(s) cannot be deleted (ie without making nonsense of, or changing the sense of, the wider context in which the expression is used). This tendency explains the inclusion of pairs such as the following, which in terms of meaningful links between their verbs are less than idiomatic:

<b>angle for</b>	<b>fasten on/upon</b>	<b>jack in (= abandon)</b>
<b>fish for</b>	<b>seize on/upon</b>	<b>pack in</b>

2 The weighting given to this criterion also in part explains the inclusion of many semi-idiomatic expressions containing one of the major verbs **come**, **go**, **put**, **take** etc. Because of the relationship of 'intransitive' to 'transitive' which exists between **come down** (for example) in certain of its senses and **bring down**, these expressions are often not full idioms. The fixity of the particle ensures their inclusion. In many such cases, we have also been guided by the need to include items which, while not idioms themselves, may throw light on the meanings of items which are. So **put aside** (a book, one's knitting) is included because it is related in sense to **put aside** (money, cash) and **put aside** (a grievance, one's differences).

3 Even when an expression contains a preposition which can be removed without affecting the meaning of the sentence in which the whole item appears, it may none the less be recorded, provided that the preposition has a strong tendency to co-occur with the verb. Similarly, if a verb combines in a predictable way with two particles (or prepositions), such a combination is also included. The decision to deal with such expressions in the dictionary explains the presence of many verbs of Romance origin, whose meanings are often understood in isolation:

<b>abstain (from)</b>	<b>develop (from) (into)</b>
<b>agitate (for)</b>	<b>transfer (from) (to)</b>

4 Verbs of motion such as **march**, **run**, **walk** combine with a wide range of particles and prepositions of direction to form sets of expressions – **march through**, **march up**, **run across**, **run back**, **walk away**, **walk in**, **walk out** – whose meanings can be easily grasped. We have not attempted to account for these many possibilities in the dictionary. But when any such combination is used in a specialized way – as **march past** is when it means 'move ceremonially past sb' (ie on parade), or as **walk on** is when it means 'have a small part, appear briefly, in a play' – then that expression is recorded, even though the specialized meaning may sometimes be readily understood.

5 Verbs such as **puff**, **steam** and **zoom** also combine freely with particles and prepositions to give such expressions as **puff across**, **puff past**, **steam along**, **steam into**, **zoom down**, **zoom out** etc. Such combinations have a different status from those containing **walk**, **run** or **march**, however. Since **steam**, for example, in combination with a particle of direction is interpreted as a verb of motion (**steam across** = 'move across under steam power' etc) the particle cannot be removed without changing the sense of the verb. Compare:

*The train **steamed out** noisily.*

*The train **steamed** noisily.*

It is for this reason that we have indicated in the dictionary the possible combinations in which verbs such as **steam** can occur (though in a special kind of entry: ⇨ *The headphrase*, 1.5, for fuller details).



### the scope of the dictionary

Finally, we can take up again the grammatical questions raised earlier. We have seen that items that are highly idiomatic tend to function in certain ways as grammatical units (i.e. as single words). Should this kind of unity be reflected in the way items are grammatically described in the dictionary?

One approach would be to say that it should, and to use the familiar term 'phrasal verb' (in itself indicative of unity) when referring to idiomatic expressions of the verb + particle type, and the rather less familiar 'prepositional verb' to designate idioms of the verb + preposition type. Dividing the 'phrasal' category to take account of the difference between transitive and intransitive would give the following general scheme:

<i>phrasal verb</i> (transitive)	<i>phrasal verb</i> (intransitive)
<b>make up</b> (one's face)	(of a witness) <b>come forward</b>
<b>take off</b> (a politician)	(of an actor) <b>walk on</b>
<i>prepositional verb</i>	
<b>run into</b> (difficulties)	

This scheme of three unitary 'verbs' will be familiar to many users of this dictionary; there are however serious criticisms to be made of it. We shall not go into the linguistic questions that are raised, but confine ourselves to practical arguments for not adopting it as a descriptive framework for the dictionary. As we have seen, there is no clear dividing line between idioms and non-idioms: they are the end points of a scale. This being so, the question is raised of how 'semi-idioms' are to be described in terms of the above scheme. To call such expressions 'phrasal verbs' or 'prepositional verbs' would imply that they are unities, which is inconsistent with the facts. A second practical objection is that the dictionary contains many complex items - **push the boat out** and **bring the house down** for example - which the scheme does not provide for. While both these expressions contain a verb and a particle it would not make sense to speak of them as 'phrasal verbs'. Finally, if we were to adapt and enlarge the scheme so that it took account both of the scale of idiomaticity and of the difference between simple and complex expressions we should end up with a system that was both cumbersome to operate and difficult to interpret. These considerations have led us to look elsewhere for a grammatical framework of reference for the dictionary.

Throughout the Introduction we have referred *separately* to the grammatical structure of expressions (i.e. in such terms as 'verb + particle', 'verb + preposition') and to their idiomatic status (as 'idioms', 'semi-idioms' etc). This separation is in line with our view that idiomaticity is largely, though not wholly, a question of meaning. This approach has the descriptive advantage of enabling us to speak of **make up** (one's face) etc as a unit of meaning while at the same time leaving us free to speak of the grammatical separability, or mobility, of its parts (as in **make up** one's face/**make** one's face **up**).

This general view governs the way expressions are described in the entries. Whether idioms or not, they are treated *grammatically* as combinations of verb + particle etc functioning in sentence patterns. The item **make up** (one's face) for instance is identified as 'verb + particle in a transitive sentence pattern'. In practice, the identification is by means of a simple code - here [B1i] - which refers the user to a full treatment of the pattern in tabular form (⇒ *Content and arrangement of the entries*, 3.4).

When in addition to being verb + particle etc an expression is *also* idiomatic, this information is conveyed separately. Idiomaticity may be reflected by the definition (⇒ 5.2), or shown by cross-referencing the expression to its synonyms