

A Comparative Corpus Based Study in the Use of Verb Particle Construction

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Abstract

The current study is aimed at exploring a highly creative yet challenging aspect of English language grammar, which is phrasal verbs (PV) in connection with particles and its construction, in a comparative manner among four corpora, in order to develop a clear understanding of how language users of different backgrounds and proficiency level deal with them. Since a language user-usage based perspective was employed for this study, with a particular interest in comparison of PWE with learner corpus (ICLE-Pakistani Content), the most frequently occurring hundred PV's were extracted from PWE and then compared their occurrence in other three corpora (namely, BF, LF and ICLE-Pk). POS tagging was used to sort particles from prepositions and software AntConc was employed to extract total number of instances for each PV. The results showed that the among the three varieties (PWE, BF, LF) the most productive top three particle were similar, however, when it came to learner corpus results varied drastically, displaying that non-native learners avoid the use of PV in association with particles due to their confusing nature. It was also revealed in the research that internal variation occurred in three varieties with the exception of PWE only. Thus, the study concludes with pedagogical implications for teachers and learners for the use of PV.

Keywords: phrasal verbs, lexical verbs, adverbial particles, usage-based approach

1. Introduction

In Pakistan, vocabulary is regarded as one of the most critical components of language learning within curricular schemes and syllabi. However, it is generally observed that traditional teaching practices and classroom instruction place greater emphasis on single-word items than on multi-word units. Previous studies have demonstrated that multi-word units hold integral importance in the language learning process. Despite their significance, past research has revealed that many learners

frequently struggle with word combinations (Channell, 1988; Nattinger & DeCarrico, 1992; Lewis, 1993, 1997; Hunston, 2002).

Recognizing that multi-word units (MWUs) are central to how we learn and use language, this study shares early insights from ongoing research on their use in Pakistan. More specifically, it investigates how phrasal verbs are used by both proficient users and learners of English, with a special focus on how verb–particle combinations behave differently in various contexts. To explore this, the study looks closely at the lexico-grammatical patterns of selected phrasal verbs across four English corpora: the Pakistani Written English Corpus (PWE), the Brown and Frown Corpus (BF), the LOB and FLOB Corpus (LF), and the Pakistani section of the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE-Pk). By comparing these sources, the research aims to highlight how users in Pakistan engage with phrasal verbs, and how this differs from native usage. The paper concludes by offering practical suggestions for teachers and learners that may support more effective teaching and learning of phrasal verbs in Pakistani classrooms.

The multi-word structures at the heart of this study are verb–particle combinations. These constructions pair a lexical verb with a particle that is essential to its overall meaning. The particle may take different forms: sometimes it looks like a preposition, sometimes like an adjective, and sometimes even like a verb used in a different way. For example, in *cut off* the particle functions like an adjective, while in *let go* it behaves like a verb. Much of the existing research on these structures has focused on those that include prepositional particles (e.g., Baldwin & Villavicencio, 2002; Blaheta & Johnson, 2001), and the present study also places its emphasis on these types. Common examples include *set up*, *wrap up*, *gun down*, and *make out*, each producing different shades of meaning depending on how they appear in sentences.

- (1) Ali put the vase **up**.
- (2) Rahman finished **up** his exam paper.
- (3) Police gunned **down** the criminal.
- (4) Babar and Sanam made **out**.

VPCs create real challenges for many Natural Language Processing (NLP) systems. Like other multi-word expressions, they do not always follow straightforward rules of meaning. One of the biggest hurdles lies in their unpredictable semantics: the meaning of a VPC is often more than the sum of its parts. For example, when we look at sentences (1) and (4), the particle *up* has two very different roles. In (1), it clearly refers to a physical direction. In (4), however, *make out* conveys an entirely idiomatic meaning that cannot be guessed simply by combining *make* and *out*. It is precisely this kind of semantic unpredictability that complicates their treatment in computational systems.

The term *multi-word expression* is often used to describe word combinations that appear together more often than would be expected by chance. Frequency, however, is only part of the picture. Not all frequently occurring word combinations behave in the same way, so it is important to distinguish those that are simply common from those that also have unusual grammatical or semantic properties. Scholars have approached this distinction in different ways. Bauer (1983), for example, separates *lexicalised* expressions from *institutionalised* ones. Institutionalised expressions are widely used, yet they remain grammatically regular and their meanings are still fully interpretable. Take *strong tea*: the phrase appears far more often than other possible combinations, but both *strong* and *tea* keep their usual meanings, and the expression as a whole is completely transparent. In such cases, high frequency does not necessarily lead to semantic complexity.

Lexicalisation, in contrast, refers to expressions that cannot be interpreted through the regular grammatical or semantic rules of the language. Their irregularity may be either syntactic or semantic. In NLP research, institutionalised expressions are often classified as *collocations*, while lexicalised items are described as *non-compositional compounds*. However, considerable ambiguity persists across studies regarding the treatment and classification of these two categories.

This study explores phrasal verbs—two-part combinations made up of a main verb and an adverbial particle—and investigates how the particle can subtly alter the meaning and behavior of the verb it accompanies. The idea of lexical aspect, which lies at the heart of this investigation, is broadly described by Comrie (1976, p. 3) as “different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation.”

2. Literature Review

2.1 To be or not to be a phrasal verb: that is the question

Studying phrasal verbs has long been a complex task, largely because scholars disagree on what precisely counts as a phrasal verb. Bolinger (1971) pointed out this challenge early on, noting that the very question of whether a combination *is* or *is not* a phrasal verb complicates the field (p. 6). Decades later, Gardner and Davies (2007, p. 341) echoed this concern, explaining that even experienced linguists struggle to pin down the finer distinctions involved in defining phrasal verbs.

To steer clear of this ambiguity, the present study adopts the definition proposed by Quirk et al. (1985). Their approach identifies two core criteria—lexical and syntactic—that help determine whether a verb-particle combination should be treated as a phrasal verb. According to them, a phrasal verb consists of a lexical verb and a particle that work together as a single unit (p. 1150). Crucially, the meaning that emerges from

this pairing is not easily predicted from the meanings of the individual elements alone (p. 1152). For example, in the sentence *The plane touched down*, the sense of “landing” cannot be derived from either *touch* or *down* separately. This differs from sentences such as *The plane touched* or *The plane touched downward*, where the meanings remain transparent. It is this non-compositional quality that distinguishes phrasal verbs from ordinary verb-adverb combinations like *They walked past the store*, where both elements preserve their independent meanings.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) further refine our understanding by grouping phrasal verbs into three semantic categories: literal, idiomatic, and aspectual. Literal phrasal verbs are the most straightforward because the meanings of both components remain clear—for instance, *put down* in *Put the gun down!* Idiomatic phrasal verbs are much less transparent; their meanings cannot be inferred from the verb and particle individually, as in *make up* meaning “to reconcile.” Aspectual phrasal verbs lie somewhere between the two: the verb retains its literal meaning, but the particle adds a subtle layer of aspectual meaning. In *He finished up the paperwork*, for example, *up* conveys the sense of completion.

2.2 Defining Phrasal Verbs

It has always been deemed as a topic of controversy as to what can be set as the criteria of qualification of phrasal verbs? This conflict of opinions among linguists was reflected by Bolinger (1971, p. 6), where he points out that it is only a matter of degree for a verb to qualify as being or not being a phrasal verb. On the same pattern of thinking, Gardner and Davies (2007, p. 341) are of the viewpoint that both language experts and grammarians are faced with this hard task of pointing out the slight differences found in verbs which make them phrasal verbs, also these subtle differences have low weightage in terms of its instructional value and thus, hold minor importance for the mediocre language learner. Majority of the English Language Grammars have developed this consensus over the idea that idiomatic expressions with verb feature in them are most of the time phrasal verbs in isolation, and if attached to either a preposition or a particle upon the given condition that its meaning will not alter in a predictable manner from its attached component parts. Since the meanings of the verb seem to draw less of a conflict, it can be assumed that it is the attachment of the particles that make the phrasal verb’s meanings unpredictable. This research makes use of perspective given by Cognitive Linguistics, which employs the idea of attachment of particles to verbs making them phrasal verbs, indicating that the meanings of phrasal verbs with attached particles have radial network of relevant senses which extend from literal to metaphorical. In other words, it can also be said that a shift from central to peripheral meanings takes place for meanings of particles. (cf. Lindner, 1981; Lakoff, 1987; Rudzka-Ostyn, 2003). The focal importance of a relational word/particle alludes to spatial areas or developments while the

fringe detects which are dynamic are typically acquired from the solid, spatial sense "by methods for speculation or specialization of significance or by metonymic or allegorical exchange" (Cuyckens & Radden, 2002, xiii) For instance, the links between the spatial and metaphorical meanings and their extensions of meanings were analyzed by Lakoff (1987), where he specifically studied the preposition *over*. Taking his analysis as a model, some of those spatial and metaphorical senses have been derived for the case of particle *up*.

The particle *up* has been identified with five distinct spatial senses. First, it can indicate the sense of "above and across," as in *The plane flew up the city*. Second, it can simply mean "above," as in *The helicopter is hovering up the hill*. Third, it conveys a sense of "covering," for example, *The board is up the hole*. Fourth, it can have a reflexive sense, as in *Roll up the log over there*. Fifth, it can express "excess," such as in *The bathtub flowed up*.

Beyond its basic spatial role, *up* also develops a range of metaphorical meanings. For instance, the sense of "above and across" can be extended metaphorically, as in *He jumped up the topic of redundancies*. The notion of "above" similarly appears in expressions like *I had the university exam hanging upon my head*, where the particle conveys the sense of something looming overhead. The "covering" meaning becomes figurative in *They tried to cover up the crime*, and the reflexive sense is reflected in combinations such as *override a decision* or *override an order*. The idea of "excess" is also used metaphorically, as in *He was bubbling up with enthusiasm*, where *up* highlights overflowing intensity.

Rudzka-Ostyn (2003) further points out that some static verbs—such as *be*, *sit*, and *hold*—take on an element of motion when paired with *up*. This can signal literal movement, as in *run up*, *break up*, or *throw up*, or it can suggest abstract processes, as seen in *think up*, *sell up*, *buy up*, and *refer up*. Even verbs that typically denote physical movement can acquire non-literal senses when combined with *up*. For example, compare *run up a hill* with *run up expenses*, or *throw up old clothes* with *throw up a person out of a club*. In these instances, familiar verbs use *up* to express shifts in meaning that go beyond simple spatial movement, underscoring the particle's remarkable semantic flexibility.

All the examples given for the derivation of senses of phrasal verbs with attached particle *up* are specifically selected for this study to strengthen the case of particle *up* in this corpus based study.

It is also crucial for this study to explain the motivational drive for two basic reasons for the choice of Cognitive Linguistics' dimension upon phrasal verbs; first and

foremost reason for this CL Perspective is the great facilitation for a second language learner in terms of developing comprehension of phrasal verbs with attachment of particles and it also contributes vastly to the systematicity of the language.

By “the revelation of notable language structures” (Pütz, 2007, p. 1145) CL has raised the consciousness of second language learners with the associations of implications of various nature of particles and how, in different settings these particles can be extrapolated. For instance, mapping personalities, or using cognitive linguistics which makes use of spiral systems, which in turn depend upon the suspicion that our memories aren’t linear but rather acquainted with the contexts. The mind recollects catchphrases and pictures more effectively than sentences.

The second reason for adopting this perspective lies in previous empirical studies, which have demonstrated the effectiveness of didactic applications of Cognitive Linguistics in teaching phrasal verbs (Boers, 2000; Kövecses & Szabó, 1996; Condon, 2008). In summary, the discussion on defining and identifying phrasal verbs shows that literal meanings of verbs, when combined with the often idiomatic meanings of particles, create forms that are particularly helpful for language learners. These combinations tend to be more memorable and easier to acquire, making them a valuable tool for effective language learning.

2.3 Multi-Word Verbs and Tests for Phrasal Verbs

Quirk et al. (1985) and Biber et al. (1999) both outline four major categories of multi-word verbs: phrasal verbs (a verb combined with a particle, as in *get up*), prepositional verbs (a verb followed by a relational word, as in *discuss*), phrasal-prepositional verbs (a verb followed by both a particle and a relational word, as in *escape with*), and a broader group of multi-word constructions. This final group includes forms such as verb + noun phrase + relational word (*investigate the issue*), verb + adjective (*concede*), verb + verb (*let go*), and verb + prepositional expression (*consider*).

The first three types can also occur as free combinations in which the verb and the particle or prepositional phrase maintain their own meanings rather than forming a single semantic unit. Within phrasal verbs specifically, there is an important distinction between intransitive forms, which do not take a direct object (e.g., *When will they give in?*), and transitive forms, which do (e.g., *See whether they are coming*). Many phrasal verbs can operate in both roles, and their meaning may shift depending on how they are used, as seen in contrasts such as *give up* versus *blow up*.

Prepositional verbs consist of a lexical verb closely followed—both grammatically and semantically—by a relational word. They generally follow two major

complementation patterns: verb + relational word + noun phrase (e.g., *We should go into the issue*) and verb + noun phrase + relational word + noun phrase (e.g., *I blamed him for the mistake*). Phrasal-prepositional verbs combine the characteristics of both forms and typically occur in patterns such as verb + particle + relational word + noun phrase (e.g., *He had to endure a lot of teasing in school*) or verb + noun phrase + particle + relational word + noun phrase (e.g., *The director palmed me off with a faulty camera*).

The remainder of this study focuses on the distinctions among these first three categories, as they serve as the foundation for identifying phrasal verbs in the corpus. Following the criteria proposed in four influential syntactic references—Bolinger (1971), Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999), and Huddleston and Pullum (2002)—the analysis incorporates a range of diagnostic tests for multi-word verbs, including phonological, syntactic, and semantic criteria. To remain concise, this summary highlights only the most commonly used tests: substitution, particle movement, the addition of intensifiers, passive-voice formation, wh-question formation, and stress patterns.

1) Replacement

Bolinger (1971) proposed that one way to identify a phrasal verb is to see whether the verb–particle combination can be replaced by a single lexical verb—for example, *discover* can substitute for *find out*. However, Biber et al. (1999) noted that this feature is not exclusive to phrasal verbs. Prepositional and phrasal-prepositional verbs may also have single-verb equivalents, such as *discuss* for *examine* or *endure such treatment* for *undergo such treatment*. At the same time, Darwin and Gray (1999) observed that many phrasal verbs cannot be substituted in this way because no single verb fully conveys their meaning. Expressions like *take over* (“assume control”) and *pay off* (“be worthwhile”) illustrate this limitation.

2) Particle movement

Unlike prepositional verbs—typically seen as free combinations—phrasal verbs allow the particle to shift position. This flexibility enables the particle to appear either before or after the object, and even to follow a wh-phrase in some cases. For example, *She removed the mark* and *She took the name off* are both acceptable, as are *She bounced off the wall* and *She hopped the wall off*. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) pointed out, however, that not all transitive phrasal verbs permit such movement; *They came a problem over* is ungrammatical. Darwin and Gray (1999) also emphasized that shifting the particle can change the verb’s meaning. For instance, *go up against Jill* (meaning “enlist”) differs from *take Jill on* (meaning “challenge”).

3) Adverbial insertion

Researchers generally argue that phrasal verbs resist the insertion of an adverb between the verb and particle, unlike prepositional verbs. We can say *She bounced boldly off the wall*, but *She took painstakingly off the mark* sounds unnatural. Nevertheless, phrasal verbs may accept certain intensifiers such as *right*, *straight*, or *all*, as in *Drink straight up* or *He messed everything up*. Darwin and Gray (1999) explained this flexibility by noting that some phrasal verbs can accommodate modifiers ending in *-ly*, as seen in *They crawled slowly and quietly down the hallway* or *I came all of a sudden and out of the blue over an old photo*.

4) Passive formation

Palmer (1968) argued that transitive phrasal verbs can generally be converted into passive constructions. Quirk et al. (1985, p. 1155), however, showed that this is not always true. For instance, while *The train got speed* is acceptable, *Speed was grabbed (by the train)* is not. Likewise, *Jill and her manager don't become friends* is natural, but *It isn't hit off (by Jill and her boss)* is not. Some prepositional and phrasal verbs do allow passive forms even when the verb seems less central, such as *She was burglarized of her neckband (by the pack)* or *Capital punishment has recently been done away with*.

5) Wh-question formation

Wh-questions offer another diagnostic tool for distinguishing phrasal verbs from prepositional verbs and free combinations. Prepositional verbs typically take *what* or *who* in such questions, as in *What/Who are you waiting for?* Free combinations, in contrast, more often take *when* or *where*, as in *Where did he run? Up the hill*. The test also identifies cases where phrasal verbs cannot form acceptable *where* or *which* questions. For instance, with *I looked up the lexical item*, the question *In which place did you look?* does not yield a natural response like *Up the word*.

(6) Stress patterns

On account of verbs of phrasal combinations the pressure is exerted on the particle though on account of verbs of prepositional combination where the pressure is not put upon the relational word, but rather on the verb of lexical nature which in turn is the substance word (e.g. *He resolved out the issue the issue versus he cracked up the issue*). This test is not without issues as Bolinger (1971, p. 14) features that any lexical item can get troubled in a setting where it is either underlined or stood out from another (*I stated, "What are you gazing Upward, not what are you taking a gander AT"*). Quirk et al. (1985, p. 1157) additionally noticed that polysyllabic relational words like *over*,

finished, and without are normally pushed (*e.g. I might have been able to manage without that help*).

2.4 Approaches to phrasal verbs

This section discusses the contrast between traditional and cognitive approaches to phrasal verbs. It first highlights the limitations of earlier frameworks and then explains why the present study adopts a Cognitive Linguistics (CL) perspective as a more suitable and systematic approach.

Traditional research on phrasal verbs, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, focused largely on lexico-semantic analysis (Bolinger, 1971; Lipka, 1972; Fraser, 1976). Kovács (2011) later affirmed this historical trend. These earlier studies, however, stand in sharp contrast to later cognitive accounts (Lindner, 1981; Lakoff, 1987; Rudzka-Ostyn, 2003; Tyler & Evans, 2002), which argue that phrasal verbs cannot be fully explained through lexical and syntactic features alone. Traditional grammarians often viewed phrasal verbs as ambiguous constructions made up of arbitrary verb-particle combinations. Their focus was largely on syntactic constraints and spatial or aspectual meanings, while the semantic contribution of the particle was frequently downplayed. Fraser (1976), for example, argued that phrasal verbs possess only syntactic or phonological features, implying that particles add little or no semantic value. Lipka (1972) likewise suggested that particles become meaningful mainly when paired with semantically weak verbs such as *make*, *get*, *give*, or *put*, and that their role is negligible in “dead-adjectival” forms like *pass out*.

Cognitive linguists, however, propose a more systematic and meaningful interpretation of phrasal verbs. They argue that particles form coherent networks of meaning that extend from concrete spatial senses to more abstract figurative uses (Cuyckens & Radden, 2002). Unlike traditional syntax, which often treats these combinations as arbitrary, CL approaches analyze phrasal verbs by grouping them according to the particle rather than the verb itself—for instance, examining *up* across *get up*, *cut up*, and *bring up*.

Tyler and Evans (2002) illustrate this approach through their semantic analysis of *over*, identifying five primary categories:

- 1) **Above-and-Beyond Orientation**, as in *Sally turned the keys over to the janitor* (transfer/exchange);
- 2) **Coverage**, as in *The tablecloth is over the table*;
- 3) **Verticality**, as in *Mary glanced over the manuscript* (scanning);
- 4) **Upward Control**, as in *She has a strange control over me*; and

5) **Reflexive/Repetition**, as in *They began the race over again*.

The current study adopts a qualitative approach and draws particularly on Rudzka-Ostyn (2003) to analyze the extended meanings of the particle *up*. Although some of her teaching techniques remain rooted in traditional methods, her work is distinctive in its use of imagery and cognitive mapping to help learners make sense of phrasal verbs. Research indicates that combining verbal explanations with visual representations can enhance understanding and memory (Gehring & Toggia, 1989; Stevick, 1996). Additionally, empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of cognitively oriented methods in improving learners' comprehension and retention of phrasal verbs (Boers, 2000; Condon, 2008; Condon & Kelly, 2002).

By drawing on this body of work, the present study supports the view that Cognitive Linguistics offers a more systematic and meaningful framework for explaining phrasal verbs than traditional approaches.

2.5 Theoretical framework of phrasal verbs

The English verb system contains a wide range of verb forms and combinations, and among these are multi-word verbs. This term refers to verb constructions made up of more than one word. However, it is important to note that not every pairing of a verb and particle qualifies as a true multi-word verb. Only those combinations that function as a single semantic unit and express a unified meaning fall into this category (Novakov, 2005, p. 73).

Multi-word verbs are generally classified into three main types, depending on the particle they contain: phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, and phrasal-prepositional verbs (Palmer, 1987). Many scholars have attempted to define these combinations. A phrasal verb, for example, is commonly understood as a verb followed by a particle—either prepositional or intensifying—whose overall meaning cannot always be predicted from the meanings of its individual components, as illustrated by *turn up* meaning *show up* (Olteanu, 2012, p. 15). The *Longman Phrasal Verbs Dictionary* describes phrasal verbs as “a colloquial combination of a verb and a particle, or a lexical verb combined with a relational word—or a verb that includes both a modifier and a relational word” (LPVD, 1991, xv). Vlad (1998, p. 93) similarly defines them as combinations of a lexical verb and an intensifying particle. Examples such as *surrender*, *drop out*, and *take in* demonstrate how multi-word verbs can function as cohesive lexical units (Olteanu, 2012, p. 15). Heaton (1985, p. 103) adds that phrasal verbs often operate as informal compound verbs formed by pairing a verb with a relational or intensifying particle.

In short, phrasal verbs consist of a verb plus an intensifying particle (e.g., *surrender*, *bring up*); prepositional verbs pair a verb with a prepositional particle (e.g., *run over*); and phrasal-prepositional verbs contain both an intensifying and a prepositional particle (e.g., *escape with*). The present study focuses specifically on phrasal verbs.

2.6 Semantic features of phrasal verbs

Beyond their syntactic structure, phrasal verbs can also be classified semantically, particularly in terms of compositionality (Talmy, 1985, p. 124). In compositional phrasal verbs, both the verb and the particle maintain their core meanings, allowing the meaning of the whole expression to be inferred from its parts—for example, *run out*. These combinations are considered semantically transparent (Præia, 2008, p. 91). In contrast, non-compositional phrasal verbs such as *clean up* are semantically opaque; their meanings cannot be predicted from the meanings of the individual components (Præia, 2008, p. 93).

Idiomaticity offers another important semantic dimension. Based on their degree of idiomaticity, phrasal verbs may be divided into three subtypes: semantically transparent verbs, which preserve the literal meanings of both verb and particle (e.g., *run out*, *take a gander at*); semi-idiomatic verbs, in which the particle takes on a more abstract interpretation (e.g., *drink up*, *come into*); and fully idiomatic verbs, where the meanings of both elements are extended or altered, as in *surrender* or *take care of*. This study uses contrastive analysis to investigate how the particle *up* influences meaning and contributes to shifts from literal to figurative interpretations.

To understand these semantic shifts, it is essential to distinguish between the traditional and cognitive approaches to phrasal verbs. Traditional studies view phrasal verbs as largely arbitrary combinations of a verb and one or more particles, with meanings learned and stored separately and later combined at the expression level. Conventional grammarians—such as Bolinger (1971), Lipka (1972), Sroka (1972), and Fraser (1976)—tend to treat phrasal verbs mainly as creative linguistic constructions, focusing on their syntactic behavior. When they do discuss meaning, traditional scholars typically limit their analysis to spatial and aspectual interpretations of particles. In this framework, semantic meaning is examined apart from cognitive systems of understanding (Kovács, 2011, p. 3).

Cognitive linguists, on the other hand, argue that meaning is grounded in human cognitive processes, including metaphorical extension. A core assumption across cognitive research is that meaning plays a central role in language and therefore must be at the forefront of analysis. Cognitive theory proposes that our conceptual system—the

way we think and reason—is fundamentally metaphorical. Scholars such as Lindner (1981), Lakoff (1987), Rudzka-Ostyn (2003), and Tyler and Evans (2003) have demonstrated that particles within phrasal verbs form coherent networks of related senses, which makes their meanings systematic and at least partially analyzable (Kovács, 2011, p. 4).

This study adopts the cognitive perspective, as it offers a more comprehensive and explanatory framework for analyzing the semantic development of phrasal verbs.

2.7 Vocabulary and MWUs in language teaching and learning

For many years, vocabulary instruction received far less attention in language classrooms than grammar teaching. Grammar was traditionally seen as the cornerstone of language learning, under the assumption that learners needed to master syntactic structures before they could use the language effectively. This strong focus on grammar shaped teaching practices, syllabus design, and the creation of instructional materials. Over time, however, research in language teaching and learning has shifted this perspective, emphasizing that both grammatical knowledge and vocabulary are crucial for developing true proficiency in a target language.

To the extent, where Phrasal Verbs are concerned, they are considered kind of universal in English. It is by and large accepted that PVs are predominantly utilized in informal communication instead of composed talk and they are extremely basic in their feature of being casual as opposed to of formal language, whereas their single word counterparts are all the more frequently utilized in more formal settings.

2.8 The Context of Pakistani Setting

To gain a broader understanding of the status of the English language in Pakistan, it is important to provide a contextual background, particularly regarding the teaching and learning of vocabulary among English learners in the country. In Pakistan, English is taught compulsorily at all levels of formal education, across both public and private sectors, amounting to at least eleven years of formal instruction in English at the school level alone. Moreover, English is widely employed as the medium of instruction for key subjects such as Mathematics and Science in schools.

At the tertiary level, including undergraduate programs in most public universities, the majority of courses are conducted in English, with the exception of subjects such as regional languages (Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Persian, Pashto) or religious courses like Islamic Studies, which primarily use Arabic. Private-sector universities

follow a similar approach, employing English as the primary medium of communication in classrooms.

Consequently, it can be asserted that English language syllabi in Pakistan generally follow a consistent pattern that aligns with progressive developments in the teaching and learning of vocabulary. The implementation of the 'auxiliary schedule' has also significantly influenced English language education in Pakistani schools, particularly by emphasizing the syntactic components of the language.

2.9 Research Questions

1. What is the general comprehension of PVs of Pakistani English Language students vs. Pakistani users of World Englishes and in a broader spectrum what is the comparison of Pakistani variety with BF and LF?
2. What is the recurrence of utilization of PV with particles in four corpora?

3. Methodology

Now that the key terms used in this study have been defined and an overview of recent research in the same area has been provided, the main objective of this paper can be addressed: examining the effect of adding a particle to a verb, and determining which properties of the verb change or remain unchanged in terms of lexical aspects when a particle is absent. The general categories of lexical verbs proposed by Vendler—activity (V_act), state (V_st), accomplishment (V_acc), achievement (V_ach), and semelfactive (V_sem)—were discussed in the previous section.

The procedural analysis involved classifying each verb with its particle according to its aspectual and lexical properties, based on the diagnostics described above. This categorization was conducted within a minimalist syntactic framework to minimize the influence of other sentence components on the lexical aspects of verbs. Through this process, a general pattern emerged: certain verbs exhibit different interpretations of lexical aspects depending on the context. Specifically, the verbs *bring*, *get*, *put*, *set*, and *take* were identified as ambiguous (V_amb) within the minimalist syntactic framework.

Following this classification of phrasal verbs by lexical type, each verb was analyzed in connection with other sentence elements in examples drawn from the corpus. A comparative study of these sentences was then conducted to assess the impact of the particle *up* on sentence structure and the properties of lexical aspects.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Verb + Particle in 4 Corpora

The present research is aimed at studying the comparative use of particles in four different corpora, with a particular interest in finding how the Pakistani users and Pakistani English Learners employ the use of particles in their language. For this purpose, the most frequently used one hundred verb + particles were selected from PWE corpus and then those same particles were studied in the other corpora in order to draw a distinctive comparison.

The three corpora namely, PWE, BF, LF were previously tagged by Dr. Asim Mahmood with the online freely available tagger named CLAWS 7 Tagger, however, the ICLE corpus was tagged with the help of “A web-based interface to the Stanford Part-of-Speech Tagger (Batch Mode)” since CLAWS Tagger is not available in Pakistan anymore, which helped in sorting out all the occurrences instances of particles. The tagger differentiates between preposition and particle and all the instances tagged as particle.

All the instances where particles occur after verbs have been included in this study.

Table 1

No of Verbs per Particle (Total No Verbs 100)

Pattern	PWE	BF	LF	ICLE-Pk
V about	9	22	27	58
V along	15	20	16	1
V around	18	32	22	3
V back	38	43	47	9
V by	10	13	9	15
V down	30	39	37	11
V in	42	49	50	211
V off	25	36	37	7
V on	32	38	39	63
V out	52	55	57	32
V over	28	46	36	10
V round	9	6	22	0
V through	14	15	21	10
V under	5	5	3	3
V up	44	50	49	49

Fifteen different prepositions have been identified in the current study, which are functioning as particles. Those 15 particles are enlisted with the comparative frequencies in table 1 above. The results seem quite contrastive in nature as it shows that the three varieties namely PWE, BF, LF may have some common features while the ICLE component shows a drastic difference in the usage of language, for example for three varieties, particle “out” was most productive with more than fifty hits, however, when it comes to ICLE, the same particle ranks at number 05 in terms of productivity and only 32 occurrences.

In contrast, the most productive particle in the corpus ICLE is “in” with 211 instances, whereas the same particle ranks at number 02, with 42, 49 and 50 hits.

The particle *up* ranks as the second most productive, appearing with 44 verbs in PWE, 49 in LF, and 50 in BF. Following closely, the particle *in* is the third most productive, occurring with 42 verbs in PWE, 49 in BF, and 50 in LF. While there is some minor variation across the three corpora, these three particles consistently stand out as the most frequently used.

It is clearly showcased in table 1 that the second least productive particle in ICLE is also the most less used particle in other three corpora, that is “under” occurs with only 03 verbs in ICLE and whereas, in PWE its number of instances stand at 05, the same number of instances occur in BF. However, in ICLE the least productive particle is “along” with only one occurrence, whereas the same particle has a fair amount of occurrences in PWE, BF, LF with number of occurrences at 15, 20 and 16 respectively.

A strange observation can be made in table 1, that particle “round” has about 9 occurrences in PWE, but there has not been a single instance of its usage ‘Round’ in ICLE-PK, but in LF, the same particle ‘have been more productive with 22 occurrences.

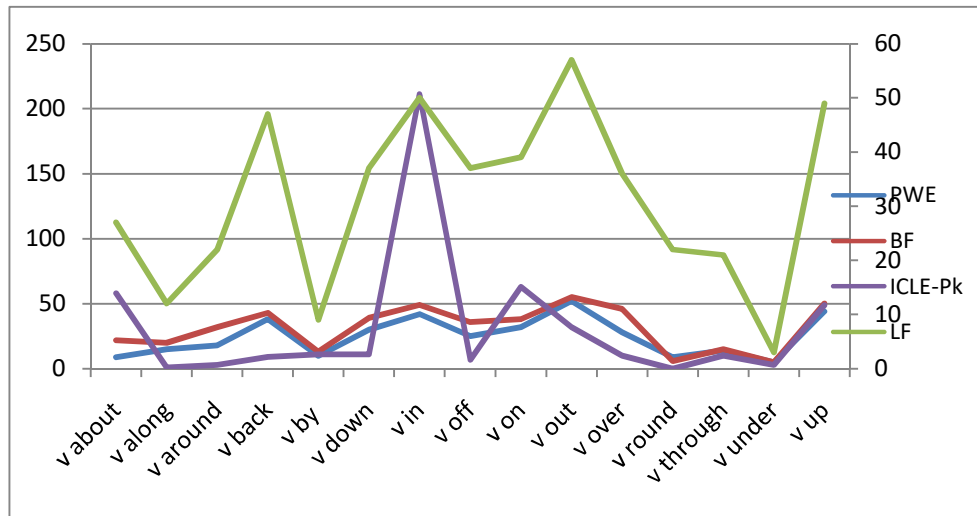
When it comes to studying the verbs with attachment of particles, it has been observed that total only a few particles were used with the verb “go” in ICLE, they are namely: ‘go away’, ‘go on’, ‘go through’, ‘go near’, while on the other hand the same verb was attached with maximum number of particles in the PWE.

For example,

- a) It shines our imagination so much that we *go away* from hard and tough routines of life. (PAAO 1023 ICLE PK)
- b) Once they are, you will see the birth rate come down, productivity *go up* and quality of output improve. (PWE)

- c) “With this kind of new product log-jam, the premium for brilliant product planning will obviously *go up* geometrically” (BF).
- d) The lighting trusses, the first thing to *go up*, should have been the last thing to come out (LF).

Figure 1: No of Verbs per Particle (Total No Verbs 100)



The graph indicates that Pakistani English exhibits relatively low internal variation, whereas the Pakistani learner corpus shows considerably greater internal fluctuation. A slight degree of internal variation is observed in the British and American varieties; however, Pakistani English displays a more stable pattern with minimal internal variation. This suggests that ICLE-Pk aligns more closely with native varieties in terms of internal variation, as its overall pattern resembles theirs to some extent.

After establishing that particles are used less frequently in the Pakistani variety, the study examined the reasons and alternative linguistic choices employed to convey similar meanings. The literature (Schneider, 2004) generally proposes two explanations:

1. The particle is sometimes regarded as redundant, and the meanings typically expressed through verb–particle combinations in inner-circle varieties are conveyed without the particle in outer-circle varieties.
2. Instead of using verb + particle constructions, speakers tend to select alternative synonymous verbs to express the meanings normally conveyed by phrasal verbs.

Table 2

No of Particles per Verb (Total No of Particles 15)

Verb	PWE	BF	LF	ICLE Pk	Verb	PWE	BF	LF	ICLE Pk
Accept	1	0	1	0	Mean	0	2	3	0
Achieve	1	1	0	0	Meet	2	3	6	0
Add	2	3	4	1	Mention	4	1	0	0
Allow	2	2	2	0	Move	11	11	12	0
Appear	2	6	3	0	Need	3	3	3	0
Ask	1	3	4	0	Observe	0	1	0	0
Become	4	1	2	0	Offer	2	3	4	0
Begin	0	3	3	0	Open	3	5	4	1
Believe	1	1	2	0	Pass	7	12	10	0
Bring	10	14	12	3	Pay	3	3	4	0
Call	6	9	8	0	Play	5	8	9	0
Carry	6	9	11	2	Prepare	0	0	1	0
Cause	4	2	0	0	Present	3	0	2	0
Change	0	3	2	0	Produce	0	0	0	0
Consider	1	0	1	0	Provide	3	2	1	0
Continue	1	4	3	0	Put	8	10	11	1
Create	2	1	1	0	Raise	4	2	1	0
Date	1	1	1	0	Reach	4	6	6	1
Decide	2	1	0	0	Read	3	2	7	0
Eat	2	3	5	0	Receive	1	2	0	0
Enjoy	1	0	2	0	Refer	1	0	3	0
Ensure	0	1	0	0	Relate	0	0	0	0
Establish	2	1	2	0	Remain	7	6	3	0
Express	1	1	0	0	Require	1	1	1	0
Feel	2	6	2	0	Run	10	12	13	1
Find	4	4	7	1	Say	2	4	5	0
Follow	3	9	9	0	See	8	11	8	0
Form	2	0	2	0	Seek	1	3	1	0
Get	11	14	14	0	Seem	2	2	3	0
Give	7	8	10	0	Send	7	9	9	0
Make	9	9	9	0	Write	7	7	8	0

Table 3

Verbs Having Zero Frequency with Particles in All Corpora

Verb	PWE	BF	LF	ICLE Pk
Produce	0	0	0	0
Relate	0	0	0	0
Understand	0	0	0	0

‘Produce’, ‘Relate’ and ‘Understand’ are the three verbs which do not occur with any particle in any of the corpora.

Micro-level differences were found in the current study upon a minute level analysis. It was found that the frequencies of combinations of particles in association with verbs varied in all four corpora. For example, study has shown that four particles which are extensively exhausted in PWE are linked with eight particular verbs while they are not frequently employed in BF, LF; however, in ICLE-Pk, they occur only a few times.

For example, carry out has 44% occurrence in PWE, which means that out of all instances of the verb ‘carry’ 44% of the time it comes in the company of ‘out’, whereas in ICLE-Pk it occurs only three times.

5. Conclusion

This study addresses the following question: *What generalizations can be drawn about the impact of particles on the aspectual and lexical aspect structure of the verbs with which they combine?* The scope of this investigation also includes the systematic examination of syntactic conditions that influence the particle’s effect on lexical verbs.

The study arrives at the following conclusions:

1. Most lexical verbs examined belong to the category of activities, and in the majority of these cases the particle adds an endpoint to otherwise atelic verb phrases—changing their feature from –telic to +telic. Thus, the semantic contribution of the particle was observed, and it was concluded that the particle frequently functions as a marker of telic lexical aspect.
2. A small number of activity verbs do not undergo a change in lexical aspect category when the particle is added; that is, they retain their –telic feature. In these cases, the following tendencies were identified:
 - a) Most verbs in sentences where telicity is neutralized belong to the progressive aspect. The temporal features of the activity aspect (dynamicity and duration) align naturally with the progressive viewpoint. Telicity cancellation in phrasal verbs is also observed when they occur in the progressive form and are followed by an unspecified plural or mass object, indicating sensitivity to specific syntactic conditions.
 - b) Some phrasal verbs in which the particle does not alter the activity aspect occur in a non-progressive viewpoint. The particle does not effect a

change in lexical aspect when both the verb and the particle share compatible semantic components (e.g., *sum up*, *bring up*, *build up*).

- c) Adverbials of the *for X time* type (e.g., *for an hour*, *for a few seconds*) occurring with the non-progressive viewpoint account for the remaining particle–verb combinations that yield an atelic event.
3. The corpus analysis further showed that particles rarely combine with stative verbs, except when these verbs are used with a non-stative interpretation.
4. When particles co-occur with achievement and accomplishment verbs, the particle highlights the end-state of the event but does not alter the verb’s lexical aspect category.
5. The investigation suggests that the analysis of particle function in phrasal verbs must include a syntactic-aspectual perspective. Aspectual interpretation is affected by whether the particle contributes inherent telicity—signalling completion with perfective aspect—or indicates ongoing or incomplete situations with imperfective aspect.
6. In the case of verbs with ambiguous lexical aspect (e.g., *bring out*, *get away*, *put up*, *set down*, *take up*), the particle functions similarly to its role with other lexical verbs—serving as an indicator of telic lexical aspect.

Overall, this study only partially addresses the complex issue of how particle properties interact with the aspectual and lexical structure of phrasal verbs. This semantic domain offers a wide range of research possibilities, and several of the theoretical implications discussed here remain open for further investigation.

Source

Pakistani Corpus for Learner English –; compiled by Mahmood and Mahmood. Courtesy of Dr. Asim Mahmood

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