

Getting along with phrasal verbs



BESIG POZNAN 2009

Definition

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- A phrasal verb is a combination of a verb and an adverb or preposition, for example 'shut up' or 'look after', which together have a particular meaning.
- Source: dictionary.reverso.net/english-cobuild

“English people use them all the time”

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‘informal, slangy and emotive’

‘daunting’

‘tedious’

‘notoriously difficult’

‘horrible’

‘hard’

‘challenging’

‘overwhelming’

‘persistent problem area’

difficult to learn’

Phrasal verbs

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Is the use of phrasal verbs acceptable?

It is perfectly acceptable to use phrasal verbs in Cambridge ESOL examinations, providing that they are suitable in register to the context and that they are not used as responses where a single word answer is required.

<http://www.cambridgeesol.org/exams/exams-info/faqs/main-suite.html#12>

Why are **some** phrasal verbs so challenging?

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- Definition
- Grammar
- Register
- Multiple meanings
- Uncommon or non-existent in learners' own language
- Hard to understand
- Difficult to memorise

AVOIDANCE

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**YOU CAN ONLY AVOID WHAT
YOU KNOW**

Why do learners avoid what they 'know'?

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- General wariness about idioms
- Register and appropriacy
- Why use two/three words when one will do?
- Better to be too formal than too informal
- Fear of making mistakes / anxiety
- Laziness
- Teaching methods & teaching materials

Corpus: Research Questions

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- How widespread is the use of phrasal verbs in business journalism?
- Which phrasal verbs are used most frequently?
- Which particles recur most frequently

The Corpus

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- Source: FT 'Companies & Markets' section
- Time frame: March-June 2007 (ten weeks)
- Compilation: manual
- Compilation: sentences / 'strings'

Numbers

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- Total: 363 phrasal verbs
- With ≥ 2 occurrences: 209
- Used only once: 154 (42.42%)

FREQUENCY ≥ 10

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- set up (46)
- account for (40)
- look at (29)
- look for (19)
- step down (19)
- take over (19)
- build up (17)
- take on (15)
- break up (14)
- call for (14)
- rule out (12)
- buy out (12)
- turn into (11)
- make up (11)
- pick up (10)
- play down (10)
- push through (10)
- roll out (10)

Particles

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- UP (76)
- OUT (61)
- OFF (34)
- ON (22)
- INTO (21)
- DOWN (20)
- IN (19)
- BACK (14)
- AWAY (13)
- OVER (9)

Verbs with greatest variety of particles

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- come (14)
- put (10)
- go (9)
- push (8)
- take (7)
- turn (7)
- break (6)
- look (6)
- hold (5)
- get (5)
- buy (5)
- move (4)

Metaphor

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BUSINESS IS WAR

THE MARKET IS A BATTLEGROUND

Territory: Attack & Defence

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- break into / through
- muscle into
- hit out at
- push out /through
- lash out at
- force out
- carve up
- tear apart
- wipe out
- kill off
- shore up
- seal off
- shake off
- head off
- hold off
- stave off
- fend off
- fight off

MOVING ON...

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- Concentrate more on the meaning of particles
- Exploit metaphors
- Present phrasal verbs in context
- Avoid lists!
- Encourage learners to infer meaning
- Use visual aids wherever possible
- Present phrasal verbs in a positive light
- Learn from your own and your learners' mistakes

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