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## 0. INTRODUCTION

This topic number 22 deals with **multi-word verbs** being this important part of the teaching-learning process of English.

Always taking into account this academic knowledge is linked to the didactic aspects found in the curriculum of both the previous educative system LOGSE (*Organic Law for the Quality of Education*) established on March 8<sup>th</sup> 2002 and the current one LOE (*Organic Law of Education*), 2/2006, May 3<sup>rd</sup> BOE n.106 May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006 which regulates our present educative organisation: ESO, Bachillerato and Vocational Training.

The grammar part of a language contains its structure that is the heart of the language so, its knowledge is essential to learn a language. And it is through the acquisition of grammar that our students will be able to achieve a right level of accuracy on the English language.

As we know, the teaching of grammar has undergone a change, and what along ago was considered to be the most important task of our teaching process, nowadays is just consider one part of our teaching-learning task. Before, grammar was thought to be a set of rules and norms which students had to memorise and at the moment there exists funny and motivating ways to introduce those hard grammatical aspects. Thus, we have the task of providing this essential information in contextualised situations to allow our students get some of the basic and indispensable competences such as: **linguistic competence**, **competence to learn how to learn** and **autonomous competence**.

All grammatical topics are interrelated and they will always be treated as a whole. For example, to understand **multi-word verbs** a knowledge of **prepositions** (unit 15, 17), **adverbs** (14) and **structure of sentences** (23), among others, are necessary.

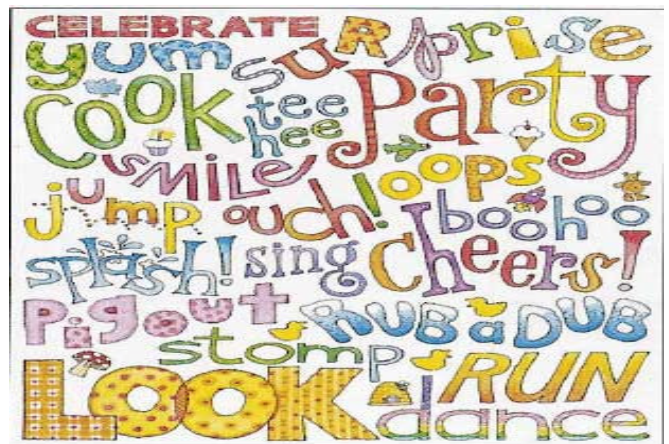
Finally, I am going to divide this topic in four general parts: starting with a description of multi-words verbs regarding both their form and their meaning; Besides, I will also include the differences between prepositional verbs and phrasal verbs; Then, I will analyse phrasal verbs in depth; to finish with other aspects related to verbs, prepositions and adverbs.

## 1. FORM AND MEANING

To start with I would like to define multi-words verbs both regarding their form and meaning.

Regarding their **FORM**, verbs combine with one or two particles: a preposition and /or an adverb as we can appreciate in:

- ✦ **PREPOSITION:** *BBC stands for British Broadcasting Corporation.*
- ✦ **ADVERB:** *The milk tastes awful. He thought it had gone off.*
- ✦ **ADVERB + PREPOSITION:** *He couldn't attend the meeting so his secretary stood in for him.*



Regarding their **MEANING**, multi-word verbs can possess:

- ✦ **NON-LITERARY MEANING:** if the addition of particles changes the meaning of the verb in some way, it is a phrasal verb, because it has an idiomatic meaning. The meaning of phrasal verbs cannot be predicted from its individual parts.

*He usually runs up large telephone bills*

- ✦ **LITERARY MEANING** when the individual meaning of the verb and the adverb or preposition is retained:

*He sat down on the director's chair*

- ✦ **SEMI-LITERARY MEANING:** when the basic meaning of the verb remained the same but the particle adds extra meaning.

*After stopping for fuel in New York, he flew to Los Angeles (here the particle gives idea of continuing to fly)*

### FORM

- ✦ **PREPOSITION:** *he read BBC standing for British Broadcasting Corporation*
- ✦ **ADVERB:** *The milk tastes awful. He thought it had gone off.*
- ✦ **ADVERB + PREPOSITION:** *He couldn't attend the meeting so his secretary stood in for him.*

### MEANING

- ✦ **NON-LITERARY MEANING:** *He usually runs up large telephone bills*
- ✦ **LITERARY MEANING:** *He sat down on the director's chair*
- ✦ **SEMI-LITERARY MEANING:** *After stopping for fuel in New York, he flew to Los Angeles*

## 2. DEFINITION OF PHRASAL AND PREPOSITIONAL VERB

Following the idea that grammar must be taught in context I will use a situation in which Woody Allen, the famous director, visits the doctor as he does not feel very well. From a theoretical point of view I will follow particularly Quirk, Eastwood and Thomson and Martinet's grammatical works.

A verb can combine with one of two particles (adjectives or adverbs) to form "multi-word verbs". **When a verb is followed by a preposition, this combination is called "prepositional verb".**

We can say that:

**PREPOSITIONAL VERBS** verb + preposition

Woody Allen suffers from pains in his chest because he smokes too much. That is why he is waiting for the doctor.

**PHRASAL VERBS** verb + adverb

Woody passed out yesterday while working in his film studio but soon he came round.

Woody Allen suffers from pains in his chest because he smokes too much. That is why he is waiting for the doctor.

In this example, the preposition *from* and *for* follow the verbs *suffer* and *wait* forming prepositional verbs.

On the other hand, **the combination between a verb and an adverb is called phrasal verb** and it is defined by Quirk in *Comprehensive Grammar of English Language* as a mixture of a "lexical verb and a particle that form a whole unit", they are sums of meaning.

## 3. CHARACTERISTICS OF PHRASAL VERBS AND PREPOSITIONAL VERBS

### CHARACTERISTICS OF PHRASAL VERBS

Phrasal verbs accept the following conditions:

- ❖ **Phrasal verbs can be intransitive** -verbs without object - like in:

Woody passed out yesterday while working in his film studio but soon he came round.

- ❖ **And they can also be transitive** -with an object- which occupies an order according to its nature

- ❖ **Object inversion is possible:** If it is a noun, it can be both before and after the adverb. For instance, we can say:



The doctor will write out a prescription for Woody or the doctor will write a prescription out for him.

When the noun is long it is preferred after the adverb:

He will write out a prescription that includes extra iron and vitamins

On the contrary, if the object is a pronoun it is always placed before the adverb.

The doctor will write it out.

- ❖ **An adverb cannot be inserted.**

☒ ...write quietly out a prescription

**CHARACTERISTICS OF PREPOSITIONAL VERBS**

- ❖ **Can only be transitive**  
*Woody Allen suffers from pains in his chest because he smokes too much. That is why he is waiting for the doctor.*
- ❖ **Object inversion is not possible:**  
 *...waiting the doctor for.*
- ❖ **An adverb can be inserted.**  
*...waiting impatiently for the doctor*
- ❖ **A particle can precede a relative pronoun**  
*The doctor for whom he waited*

PHRASAL VERBS	PREPOSITIONAL VERBS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Intransitive</li> <li>❖ transitive</li> <li>❖ <b>Object inversion is possible:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ a noun: before and after the adverb Long nouns: after</li> <li>❖ Pronouns: before</li> </ul> </li> <li>❖ <b>An adverb cannot be inserted.</b></li> <li>❖ <b>The adverb is stressed</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>Always transitive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ <b>Object inversion is not possible:</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>❖ <b>Adverb can be inserted.</b></li> <li>❖ <b>A particle can precede a relative pronoun</b></li> <li>❖ <b>The verb is stressed</b></li> </ul>

According to Eastwood in *Oxford Practise grammar*, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs as although there are some words that are always adverbs like: *away, back* and *out* and other words that are always prepositions: *for* and *from*.

Moreover, there are others that can be both adverbs and prepositions: *down, in, on* or *up*.

**Stress** may be useful to make this distinction as in phrasal verbs it is the adverb the element that receives the stress whereas in prepositional verbs the stressed element is the verbs not he preposition. We can compare the emphasis in:

*Suffers from pains.... and he passed out*

**4. MEANING OF PHRASAL VERBS**

After describing both phrasal and prepositional verbs, I will analyse **the meaning of phrasal verbs** according to *Eastwood*, fact that has become **one major problem for Spanish students of English language** due to its frequency of use and its difficulties as in Spanish there are not verbs made up of two words. For this reason, we must pay attention to them and present them frequently in class in contextualised situations for our students to become familiar with them and selecting them according to our student's level of competence.

Although **some phrasal verbs are easy to understand** if we know the meaning of its elements like in

*The doctor put down his medical instrument*

**Most** of them **possess an idiomatic meaning**. The utterance

*Woody must give up smoking*



It will not be understood even if we know the meaning of give and up separately. We need to know that this combination implies stop.

Sometimes there is one-word verb with the same meaning as the phrasal verb that is normally used in more informal situations. Then we can read in newspapers that

*Woody has to put off or postpone his travel to Spain due to health problems*

**Many phrasal verbs have more than one meaning.** In the sentence

- *Woody has picked up a virus*

It means to catch an illness. But, in other contexts its meaning varies a lot. For instance:

- *Woody picked up some Spanish during his stay in Barcelona.*

That is, he learnt some basic words up to get by.

- *Woody likes to be picked by his friend*

To be collected by a car, or

- *Woody picked up the script from the floors*

Meaning, he recovered it

- *In 1998 Woody was picked up for drink-driving*

Meaning he was arrested

- *He usually writes stories of men who pick some girls up*

Who make acquaintance with a view to having sexual relationships, or

- *Woody's reputation is picking up*

That is, improving.

**Some phrasal verbs can be used both with “someone” or “something” without altering the meaning** like in:

*Penélope Cruz turned down Woody's offer* or

*She turned down Javier Bardem when he asked her to marry him*

In both situations it means *refuse* or *reject*. However, other verbs can change their meaning. This is the case of *offering accommodation* and *put something up* meaning to increase the price or cost.

*Woody enjoys putting his friends up when they come on holidays, and  
Woody's videos have been put up since two years ago.*

**PICK UP:**

- catch an illness.
- learn some basic words up to get by
- be collected by a car
- recover
- was arrested
- make acquaintance with a view to having sexual relationships
- improving

We must also consider that some phrasal verbs can combine with some nouns, this is called **collocation**. For example we can say that *milk, eggs, fish* and *meat* goes off while it is not possible to say that *bead* and *vegetables* go off as they do not collocate.

Good dictionaries help with collocation since they give examples of words that are often used with certain verbs. For example: *run up* (increase the amount of money you give), collocates with: *a bill, a debt, an account, a deficit, an overdraft*.

## 5. MEANING OF PARTICLES

All those features regarding meaning of phrasal verbs are some of the reasons for the necessity to present in class phrasal verbs in context and not in isolation in an attempt to help our students to become familiar with them.

Another important aid will be the learning of the general meaning that some adverbs have.

**Particles often have particular meanings** which they contribute to a variety of combinations, and which are productive. That is, these fixed meanings are used in order to create new combinations.

For instance:

- **OUT**, suggests *something stopping completely*: *this species of bird died out last century* (became extinct, stop existing), *the room was so hot that the actress passed out* (stop being conscious)
- **BACK**, that means *in return* in verbs like *get, invite, phone, go, pay, come...back*
- **ON**, *continuity, movement forward*: *go on, carry, drive on*

But it is very common that the same particle can have different general meaning when used with different groups of verbs. Some examples are:

- **DOWN**, can mean *to the ground* as in *pull down* or *knock down* or *in paper* as in *write, put, copy* or *note down* or *stop completely* as in *close* or *break down*.
- **OFF**, may have the *idea of departure or movement away from somewhere*: *the plane took off, the thieves made off on car*; or *the idea of disconnection or stopping something*: *switch off the lights. I must ring off. I smell something burning.*
- **OVER**, *referring to a destination*: *bring, come over*; or *something falling or being pushed to the ground*: *the wind blew over the garden wall, the cat was run over by a lorry.*
- **UP**, meaning *completely, thoroughly*: *eat up, fill up*; or *into small pieces*: *tear up, cut, break up.*

MEANING OF PARTICLES	
▪ <b>OUT</b>	<i>something stopping completely</i>
▪ <b>BACK</b>	<i>in return</i>
▪ <b>ON</b>	<i>continuity, movement forward</i>
▪ <b>DOW</b>	<i>to the ground</i> <i>in paper</i> <i>stop completely</i>
▪ <b>OFF</b>	<i>idea of departure or movement away from somewhere</i> <i>the idea of disconnection or stopping something</i>
▪ <b>OVER</b>	<i>referring to a destination:</i> <i>something falling or being pushed to the ground:</i>
▪ <b>UP</b>	<i>completely, thoroughly</i> <i>into small pieces.</i>

## 6. PHRASAL-PREPOSITIONAL VERBS

I would like to mention some other aspects related to the combination of prepositions with other elements.

I must point out the existence of what has been called by Quirk and Eastwood **phrasal-prepositional verbs**. As its name implies it is **a combination of a verb and a preposition together with a verb**.

This type of verb can have simple meaning as in

*At the doctor's Woody had to look up a red light to check his vision.*

Its meaning can be deduced from the meaning of its elements alone. But, on the contrary, we may find combinations with an idiomatic meaning like:

*Woody must cut down on the amount of cigarettes he smokes, or*

*He has gone down with a severe virus and he is looking forwards to recovering in order to go on filming.*

## 7. OTHER ASPECTS

On the one hand, we find some **verbs followed by an object that require** to be followed by a **specific preposition**, as in

*The doctors want to prevent Woody Allen from smoking*

On the other, there are some **idiomatic expressions** combining **a verb** plus **a noun** and **a defined preposition** like in

*Woody should take care of his health or  
He pays attention to what the doctors says.*

In addition, according to Eastwood, some **nouns** and **adjectives** are **formed from phrasal verbs**. Joining the verb *break* and the adverb *down* it results in

*Wood may have suffered a breakdown*

Or in doing the reverse with the adverb *out* and the verb *break* we get

*Doctors are worried about the severe outbreak of Asian flu in the city*

Or an **adjective** can also be **formed with a passive participle** plus **and adverb**

*Finally, after leaving the doctor's surgery woody put the folded-up prescription in his pocket*

## 8. STYLE

As far as **style** is concerned, multi-word verbs are frequently used in everyday spoken and written English. It is often said that phrasal verbs tend to be rather colloquial or informal and more appropriate to spoken English than written and even that is better to avoid them and chose single-word equivalents or synonyms instead. But we have to say that in many cases phrasal verbs and

their synonyms have different ranges of use, meaning or location, although single-word synonyms are often much more formal in style than phrasal verbs

*Can we put off the meeting till next Friday?*

Multi-word verbs can be replaced by a Latin-based word. That is, instead of using *put off*, the word *postpone* gives a more formal context; or *tolerate* instead of *put up*.

There are also formal expressions with the same meaning of some multi-word verbs: *provide accommodation* instead of *put somebody up for the night*.

But there are some expressions and verbs which have the same level of formality, for example:

*Woody Allen picked up a cold or He caught a cold*

## 9. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the study of phrasal verbs becomes primary a problem of vocabulary for our Spanish students. Then list of these verbs is quiet long and it is constantly being growing and changing, new combinations appear and spread. Some will disappear after a while from active usage, while others will be retained and become permanent vocabulary items.

Multi-word verbs are a sign of the productivity of the English language and its richness.

After dealing with some of the general features of [multi-word verbs](#) we can conclude it is a basic communicative element in the English language. It is evident that this topic could be treated throughout the teaching-learning process in the English language classroom not only by means of individual activities but also by pair-work and group work always using all four communicative skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

We must not avoid highlighting the most important feature of English as an international language. Thus, we must transmit the idea that English is an instrument of communication necessary for the labour work, business, researches, negotiation, politics, tourism...

Our students will need English at a certain moment of their lives: to read information on the instruction of a machine, to understand any website when surfing the Internet, to communicate with other people either native English speakers or people from other countries who do not speak Spanish, to travel around the world or to understand their favourite English lyrics.

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