



COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS IN LITERARY TEXTS

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Abstract: This article is devoted to the cognitive features of phrasal verbs in literary texts in English and it investigates how phrasal verbs are encoded, accessed, and interpreted in human mind. The phrasal verbs in literary works such as “1984” by George Orwell and “Rich Dad and Poor Dad” by Robert Kiyosaki will be analyzed, in particular. Furthermore, conceptual metaphor analysis will be conducted to analyze how phrasal verbs are utilized in the text.

Key words; phrasal verbs, particle, conceptual metaphor analysis.

In the field of English language studies, investigating phrasal verbs stand as a thought-provoking sphere in language comprehension and interpretation. Phrasal verbs are multiword word-groups or multiword verbs which is the combination of a simple verb and a preposition. According to Rudzka-Ostyn, phrasal verbs represent a distinctive peculiarity of the English language and are defined as idiomatic multiword verbs, consist of a verb, an adverb (adverbial particle) and/or a preposition.¹ Cognitive linguist Lakoff points out that linguistic structures are motivated by cognitive processes, metaphorization, and that our conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical.² Many scholars paid attention to distinct aspects of English phrasal verbs. Some researchers focused on the role of preposition and its syntactic aspects. Tyler and Evans (2003) provided a comprehensive model that accounts for the polysemic nature of particles called the Principled Polysemy Model. As noted by Tyler and Evans (2003), meanings of prepositions are closely

¹ Rudzka-Ostyn, B. (2003). *Word power: Phrasal verbs and compounds: A cognitive approach*. Walter de Gruyter. p.

² Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire, and dangerous things*. The University of Chicago Press. p.7.



related to our embodied experience and our spatial conceptualization of the physical world around us.³ According to Rosamund Moon, the meanings of phrasal verbs are difficult to understand, as if there is no connection within the components of phrasal verbs.⁴

Multiple studies have been conducted to explore phrasal verbs from various perspective. Particularly, cognitive semantic aspect of phrasal verbs is becoming one of the most interesting disciplines of investigation in Cognitive Linguistics and a number of scholars have conducted research in this discipline. Andrea Rosca (2021) investigated phrasal verbs in the scope of TV crime series displayed in both American English and British English. Her research was devoted to the Cognitive Linguistics approach to phrasal verbs according to which particles are organized in the network of literal and figurative meanings. According to the scholar, the figurative meanings are extended from the literal one by means of mainly metaphoric processes.⁵ Rudzka-Ostyn investigated meaning extensions of phrasal verbs. Using Langaker's (1987) notions of Figure and Ground, she described the relationship between the components of phrasal verbs. The scholar analyzed a large number of phrasal verbs and her research facilitates the understanding of the meaning of adverbial particles.

This article comprises analysis of phrasal verbs from conceptual metaphor perspective. Phrasal verbs were classified and analyzed in the extracts retrieved from the novels "1984" by George Orwell and "Rich Dad and Poor Dad" by Robert Kiyosaki. Conceptual Metaphor Theory was used to identify phrasal verbs' domains which can explain an addresser's world picture.

Extracts from "1984" by George Orwell

Extract 1:

³ Tyler, A. & V. Evans (2003). *The Semantics of English Prepositions: Spatial Scenes, Embodied Meaning and Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

⁴ Moon, R. (2005). Metaphor and phrasal verbs. *MED Magazine*, 31(06).

⁵ Rosca, A. (2021). *Phrasal verbs through the lens of Cognitive Linguistics*. Universitat de València. p.13.



*“They were talking about the Lottery. Winston looked back when he had gone thirty meters. They were still talking about the Lottery. It was not necessary for more than two or three minutes at a time to listen to them. They **broke off** when the squeak of a boot sole was heard on the pavement.”*⁶

Conceptual Metaphor Analysis of *break off*:

Literal meaning: to suddenly stop talking; to end a relationship⁷

Metaphorical meaning: It signifies a sudden halt in an activity or thought process due to an external disturbance.

Conceptual Metaphors Involved:

CONVERSATION IS A PHYSICAL OBJECT: Here, conversation is treated as something that can be physically broken or interrupted.

The phrasal verb **break off** highlights the fragility and precariousness of Winston and Julia's secret activities. It underscores the constant threat of being overheard or caught, reflecting the oppressive surveillance state.

Extract 2:

*“He remembered long afternoons spent with other boys in scrounging around dustbins and rubbish heaps, picking out the ribs of cabbages, potato peelings, sometimes even scraps of stale breadcrust from which they carefully scraped away the cinders; and then, a little later, when the reality of hunger became too acute, there were fierce, sordid battles at the bakery counters. At the time, the street fighting in London had flared up. Air raids **came up** again after that.”*⁸

Conceptual Metaphor Analysis of *come up*:

Literal Meaning: to occur or happen.⁹

Metaphorical Meaning: It indicates the reoccurrence of events or situations.

⁶ Orwell, G. (2021). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Penguin Classics.

⁷ Retrieved from: Dictionary of Contemporary English | LDOCE <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/break-off>

⁸ Orwell, G. (2021). *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Penguin Classics.

⁹ Retrieved from: Dictionary of Contemporary English | LDOCE <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/come-up>



Conceptual Metaphors Involved:

EVENTS ARE MOVEMENTS: The reoccurrence of air raids is described as something that rises or surfaces again, suggesting a cyclical nature.

DANGER IS UP: The upward movement metaphorically represents the threat or reemergence of danger.

The phrasal verb **come up** emphasizes the unpredictability and recurrence of traumatic events. It suggests that the threat of air raids is a persistent and recurring issue, contributing to the overall atmosphere of fear and instability.

Extracts from "Rich Dad Poor Dad" by Robert Kiyosaki:

Extract 1:

*“The lesson here is that when times are bad, is when the real entrepreneurs emerge. Some people fold when things get tough. But the strong ones, the survivors, are the ones who know how to **cut back**. A lot of people quit looking for work as soon as they find a job. That's because the moment they find one, they cut back. They stop growing. But a rich person would have said, “Okay, I found a job. But now let me look for more opportunities to learn and make more money.””¹⁰*

Conceptual Metaphor Analysis of cut back:

Literal Meaning: to reduce the amount, size, cost of something¹¹

Metaphorical Meaning: It implies reducing efforts or ambitions when faced with challenges.

Conceptual Metaphors Involved:

EFFORT IS A RESOURCE: Reducing effort is likened to reducing the use of a tangible resource.

GROWTH IS MOVEMENT: Cutting back on effort or ambition is seen as halting forward progress.

¹⁰ Kiyosaki, R. T. (2017). Rich dad poor dad (2nd ed.). Plata Publishing.

¹¹ Retrieved from: Dictionary of Contemporary English | LDOCE <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/cut-back>



Cut back highlights the importance of adjusting one's efforts to survive tough times, a critical trait of successful entrepreneurs. It underscores the difference between those who merely survive (by cutting back) and those who thrive by continuously seeking growth opportunities.

Extract 2:

*"Rich Dad believed that the words 'I can't afford it' shut down your brain. 'How can I afford it?' opens up possibilities, excitement, and dreams. 'My poor dad said, 'Go to school, get good grades, and find a safe secure job.' He was recommending a life path that would **give up** on taking risks and exploring opportunities."*¹²

Conceptual Metaphor Analysis of give up:

Literal Meaning: to stop doing something, especially something that you do regularly¹³

Metaphorical Meaning: It signifies abandoning ambition or the pursuit of opportunities.

Conceptual Metaphors Involved:

SURRENDER IS GIVING UP: Surrendering is seen as ceasing effort or resistance.

OPPORTUNITIES ARE ADVENTURES: Pursuing opportunities is metaphorically an adventure, and giving up is abandoning the journey.

Give up highlights the mentality of avoiding risks and the loss of potential opportunities. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining a mindset open to exploration and risk-taking as essential for financial success.

This paper analyzed phrasal verbs in "1984" by George Orwell and "Rich Dad Poor Dad" by Robert Kiyosaki using Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Phrasal verbs like "break off," "come up," "cut back," and "give up" reveal metaphorical

¹² Kiyosaki, R. T. (2017). Rich dad poor dad (2nd ed.). Plata Publishing.

¹³ Retrieved from: Dictionary of Contemporary English | LDOCE <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/give-up>



meanings that reflect cognitive and experiential realities. The study shows that phrasal verbs are essential linguistic tools that encapsulate complex ideas and experiences, highlighting their role in language and cognition. Understanding their metaphorical bases offers deeper insights into how language reflects our worldview. In summary, phrasal verbs are crucial for effective communication, and their analysis enhances our comprehension of cognitive processes in language use. Future research should explore more phrasal verbs across various texts.

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