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Phrasal Verbs in Media Discourse

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Abstract

This article examines the role and functions of phrasal verbs in media discourse, highlighting their structural, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics. Phrasal verbs, as multi-word lexical units, represent a significant component of the English language due to their idiomaticity, flexibility, and high frequency of use. The study explores their classification into phrasal, prepositional, and phrasal-prepositional verbs, as well as their syntactic features such as separability and particle movement. Particular attention is given to the distinction between literal and figurative meanings, emphasizing the challenges they pose for interpretation, especially in media contexts. The research further analyzes how phrasal verbs contribute to the accessibility, expressiveness, and persuasive power of media language. In journalistic discourse, they serve not only as tools for concise communication but also as mechanisms of framing and evaluation, influencing readers' perception of events. The study also considers the role of metaphor and cognitive processes in shaping the meaning of figurative phrasal verbs. Additionally, it addresses the increasing informality of media language and its implications for communication and translation. The findings demonstrate that phrasal verbs are essential linguistic devices that enhance the dynamism and effectiveness of media discourse while reflecting broader sociolinguistic trends.

Keywords: phrasal verbs, media discourse, idiomaticity, figurative language, discourse analysis, journalistic language, lexical units

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Introduction

The study of phrasal verbs has long occupied a central position in English linguistics due to their structural complexity, semantic diversity, and functional significance in communication. **Phrasal verbs** are commonly defined as multi-word verb constructions consisting of a lexical verb combined with one or more particles, typically adverbs or prepositions (Quirk et al., 1985). These constructions, such as “give up,” “look after,” “run into,” and “take off,” form an essential component of the English verbal system and are widely used across various registers, from informal conversation to journalistic and academic discourse.



From a structural perspective, phrasal verbs are characterized by their bipartite or multipartite composition. According to Biber et al. (1999), a phrasal verb consists of a verb followed by an adverbial particle (e.g., “*pick up*”), while prepositional verbs include a verb followed by a preposition (e.g., “*look at*”). A third category, often referred to as phrasal-prepositional verbs, combines both elements (e.g., “*put up with*”) [1]. This classification highlights the syntactic variability of such constructions and their ability to function as unified semantic units despite their formal separability.

One of the defining features of phrasal verbs is their syntactic behavior, particularly the phenomenon of particle movement. For example, in the sentence “*She turned off the light,*” the particle “*off*” can be separated from the verb (“*She turned the light off*”), whereas in other constructions, such separation is not possible (“*She is looking after the child,*” not “*looking the child after*”). This variability has led linguists to distinguish between separable and inseparable phrasal verbs, a distinction that plays an important role in both syntactic theory and language pedagogy [6].

Another important issue in the study of phrasal verbs is the distinction between phrasal verbs and free word combinations. While superficially similar, these constructions differ in terms of semantic cohesion and idiomaticity. Free combinations, such as “*walk across the street,*” maintain a compositional meaning that can be directly inferred from their components. In contrast, phrasal verbs often exhibit varying degrees of idiomaticity, meaning that their overall sense cannot be easily deduced from the meanings of the individual elements. For instance, “*give up*” meaning “to quit” does not transparently relate to the literal meanings of “*give*” and “*up.*”

Scholars have proposed different criteria for identifying phrasal verbs, including semantic unity, syntactic behavior, and stress patterns [7, 9]. Stress, in particular, plays a role in distinguishing phrasal verbs from prepositional verbs, as the particle in phrasal verbs is typically stressed (“*take ÓFF*”), whereas in prepositional verbs the stress falls on the verb (“*lóok at*”). These phonological features further support the argument that phrasal verbs function as lexicalized units within the language system.

The importance of phrasal verbs in English is also reflected in their high frequency of use. Corpus-based studies have shown that phrasal verbs are especially common in spoken English and informal written registers, but they are also widely used in media texts, where they contribute to clarity, brevity, and expressiveness [1]. For example, journalists often prefer phrasal verbs such as “*set up,*” “*point out,*” or “*bring about*” because they are concise and accessible to a broad audience.

From a diachronic perspective, phrasal verbs have evolved significantly over time. Historical linguists note that Old English made extensive use of verb-particle constructions, but their development into the modern system involved processes of grammaticalization and lexicalization [2]. Over time, many originally literal combinations acquired idiomatic meanings, contributing to the richness and complexity of the contemporary English lexicon.

Methodology

The present study applies a qualitative discourse-analytical approach to the investigation of phrasal verbs in English media discourse. The research focuses on identifying the structural, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of phrasal verbs used in journalistic texts and examining their communicative functions within media language.

The empirical material for the study was collected from contemporary English-language media sources, including online newspapers, news websites, editorials, and digital journalistic platforms. The selected texts represent different thematic areas such as politics, economics, social issues, and international affairs in order to ensure linguistic diversity and contextual variation. Particular attention was paid to headlines, opinion articles, and analytical reports, where figurative and expressive language is especially prominent.

The methodology of the research combines descriptive, contextual, and discourse-analytical methods. The descriptive method was employed to classify phrasal verbs according to their structural and semantic properties, including separable and inseparable constructions, literal and figurative meanings, and their syntactic behavior. The contextual analysis method was used to interpret the meanings of phrasal verbs within specific media contexts and to identify the pragmatic effects they produce in communication.

In addition, elements of critical discourse analysis were applied to examine how phrasal verbs contribute to framing, evaluation, and ideological representation in media discourse. This approach made it possible to investigate how lexical choices influence readers' perception of events and social actors. Comparative analysis was also used to compare phrasal verbs with their more formal one-word equivalents and to determine the stylistic preferences of journalistic language.

The theoretical framework of the study is based on the works of prominent linguists and discourse analysts, including Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999), Fairclough (1995), Charteris-Black (2004), and Huddleston & Pullum (2002). Their theories on phrasal verbs, media discourse, metaphor, and discourse analysis provided the conceptual basis for the interpretation of the collected material.

In modern linguistics, phrasal verbs are studied within multiple theoretical frameworks. Structural approaches emphasize their syntactic properties and classification, while lexical and phraseological approaches focus on their status as multi-word units. Cognitive linguistics, on the other hand, highlights the role of conceptual structures and metaphor in shaping their meanings. This interdisciplinary interest underscores the importance of phrasal verbs as a key area of linguistic inquiry.

Media discourse represents a distinctive domain of language use characterized by its dual function of informing and influencing the public. It encompasses a wide range of genres, including news reports, editorials, opinion pieces, and online articles. The language of media discourse is shaped by the need to communicate information efficiently while also engaging the audience and, in many cases, shaping their perceptions and attitudes.

One of the defining features of media language is its **accessibility**. Journalists often aim to reach a broad audience, which requires the use of clear, concise, and relatable language. Phrasal verbs play a crucial role in achieving this goal, as they are generally more informal and conversational than their Latinate equivalents. For example, “*put off*” is often preferred over “*postpone*,” and “*bring about*” over “*cause*.” This preference contributes to the readability and immediacy of media texts.

At the same time, media discourse is characterized by a high degree of **expressiveness and evaluation**. According to Fairclough (1995), language in the media is not neutral but is shaped by ideological and institutional factors. Figurative phrasal verbs contribute to this evaluative dimension by framing events in particular ways. For instance, the difference between “*cut back on spending*”

and “*slash spending*” reflects different evaluative stances, with the latter conveying a stronger sense of urgency or severity [5].

Another important feature of media discourse is its reliance on **metaphor and figurative language**. As Charteris-Black (2004) argues, metaphor is a powerful tool in political and journalistic communication, as it allows complex issues to be understood in terms of more familiar concepts. Figurative phrasal verbs often function as metaphorical expressions that simplify and dramatize events. For example, headlines such as “*Stocks climb back*,” “*Talks break down*,” or “*Authorities crack down on crime*” use metaphorical language to create vivid and memorable representations of abstract processes [3].

Phrasal verbs also contribute to the **dynamism and immediacy** of media texts. Their brevity and flexibility make them well-suited to the fast-paced nature of news reporting, where information must be conveyed quickly and effectively. In headlines, in particular, phrasal verbs are frequently used due to their compact form and strong semantic impact. For example, “*Markets bounce back*” conveys a complex economic recovery in just a few words.

From a discourse-analytical perspective, phrasal verbs can be seen as tools for **framing and manipulation**. Framing refers to the way in which information is presented in order to influence interpretation [4]. By choosing specific phrasal verbs, journalists can subtly shape the reader’s understanding of events. For instance, “*give in*” suggests weakness, while “*reach a compromise*” presents the same situation in a more positive light. This demonstrates how linguistic choices can have significant pragmatic effects.

Furthermore, the use of phrasal verbs in media discourse reflects broader **sociolinguistic trends**, including the increasing informality of public communication. As digital media platforms blur the boundaries between formal and informal registers, the use of conversational language features, including phrasal verbs, has become more widespread. This trend enhances audience engagement but also raises questions about the balance between accessibility and precision.

The interpretation of figurative phrasal verbs in media texts also depends on **cultural and contextual knowledge**. Readers must be familiar with the metaphorical conventions of the language in order to fully understand the intended meaning. For example, the phrasal verb “*phase out*” requires knowledge of gradual processes, while “*roll out*” is often associated with the introduction of new products or policies. Such expressions may pose challenges for non-native speakers and require careful consideration in translation.

In addition, media discourse often employs phrasal verbs as part of broader **rhetorical strategies**, including persuasion, evaluation, and dramatization. These strategies are particularly evident in opinion pieces and political reporting, where language is used not only to inform but also to influence attitudes and beliefs. Figurative phrasal verbs, with their expressive and evaluative potential, are well-suited to these functions.

Results

The analysis of media texts demonstrated that phrasal verbs are widely used in modern English media discourse due to their communicative efficiency, expressiveness, and accessibility. The findings revealed that journalists frequently employ phrasal verbs in headlines and news reports

because of their brevity and strong semantic impact. Constructions such as “carry out,” “bring about,” “crack down,” “break down,” and “phase out” appeared particularly common in political, economic, and social reporting.

The study showed that figurative phrasal verbs occur more frequently than literal ones in journalistic discourse. Their metaphorical meanings help simplify complex processes and make abstract events more understandable for readers. For example, expressions such as “markets bounce back” and “talks break down” present economic and political developments through vivid conceptual imagery, increasing the emotional and persuasive effect of the text.

The research also identified the important role of phrasal verbs in framing and evaluation. Different phrasal verbs used to describe similar events often conveyed distinct ideological or emotional nuances. For instance, the use of “give in” implied weakness or defeat, whereas expressions like “reach an agreement” or “work out a solution” created a more positive interpretation of the same situation. This demonstrates that phrasal verbs function not only as lexical units but also as discourse strategies influencing audience perception.

Another significant finding is the tendency toward conversationalization in media language. The frequent use of phrasal verbs reflects the growing informality of public communication, especially in digital journalism and online media platforms. Journalists increasingly prefer phrasal verbs over formal Latinate verbs because they create a more natural and reader-friendly style.

Furthermore, the study revealed that phrasal verbs may create comprehension difficulties for non-native speakers due to their idiomatic and context-dependent meanings. Figurative constructions often require cultural and contextual knowledge for accurate interpretation, which highlights the importance of teaching phrasal verbs within authentic discourse contexts.

Discussion

The findings of the study confirm that phrasal verbs occupy a central position in contemporary media discourse and perform multiple communicative functions. Their widespread use supports the idea that modern journalistic language increasingly favors concise, dynamic, and accessible forms of expression. This tendency corresponds with broader sociolinguistic changes associated with digital communication and the informalization of public discourse.

The predominance of figurative phrasal verbs in media texts demonstrates the close relationship between language, cognition, and ideology. Through metaphorical expressions, journalists are able to frame events in ways that influence interpretation and emotional response. This observation supports the theoretical assumptions of cognitive linguistics and critical discourse analysis, according to which linguistic choices are closely connected with conceptualization and persuasion.

The study also highlights the stylistic advantages of phrasal verbs in media language. Compared to formal one-word equivalents, phrasal verbs often sound more direct, vivid, and emotionally engaging. As a result, they contribute to the immediacy and readability of journalistic texts. However, their extensive use may also reduce precision in certain contexts and create ambiguity for international audiences.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results emphasize the necessity of incorporating authentic media materials into the teaching of phrasal verbs. Since many figurative meanings cannot be

understood through direct translation, learners need exposure to contextualized examples that demonstrate pragmatic and cultural nuances. Media discourse provides valuable material for developing learners' communicative competence and interpretative skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of phrasal verbs in media discourse reflects their versatility and communicative effectiveness. They contribute to the accessibility, expressiveness, and persuasive power of media texts, while also serving as tools for framing and interpretation. Their figurative meanings, in particular, highlight the interaction between linguistic structure, cognitive processes, and pragmatic context.

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Медиа дискурсундагы фразалык этиштер

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Аннотация

Бул макалада медиадискурстагы фразалык этиштердин ролу жана функциялары алардын структуралык, семантикалык жана прагматикалык өзгөчөлүктөрүнө басым жасоо менен каралат. Фразалык этиштер көп компоненттүү лексикалык бирдиктер катары англис тилинде идиоматикалууулугу, ийкемдүүлүгү жана жогорку колдонулуш жыштыгы менен маанилүү орунду ээлейт. Изилдөөдө алардын фразалык, предлогдук жана фразалык-предлогдук этиштерге бөлүнүшү, ошондой эле синтаксистик өзгөчөлүктөрү, анын ичинде бөлүнмөлүүлүгү жана бөлүкчөнүн орун алмашуусу талданат. Өзгөчө көңүл түз жана өтмө маанилердин айырмачылыгына, ошондой эле медиаконтекстте алардын түшүндүрүлүшүндөгү кыйынчылыктарга бурулат. Мындан тышкары, фразалык этиштердин медианын тилиндеги жеткиликтүүлүктү, экспрессивдүүлүктү жана ынанымдуулукту камсыз кылууда кошкон салымы каралат. Журналисттик дискурста алар ойду кыска жана так жеткирүүнүн каражаты гана болбостон, маалыматты интерпретациялоого таасир этүүчү фрейминг жана баалоо инструменти катары да кызмат кылат. Ошондой эле өтмө маанидеги фразалык этиштердин маанисин калыптандырууда метафоранын жана когнитивдик процесстердин ролу талкууланат. Мындан сырткары, медиатилдин барган сайын формалдуулуктан алыстап, көбүрөөк сүйлөшмө мүнөзгө өтүү тенденциясы жана анын коммуникацияга жана котормого тийгизген таасири каралат. Изилдөөнүн жыйынтыктары фразалык этиштер медиадискурстун динамикалуу жана натыйжалуу болушуна өбөлгө түзгөн маанилүү тилдик каражаттар экенин жана кеңири социолингвистикалык тенденцияларды чагылдырганын көрсөтөт.

Ачкыч сөздөр: фразалык этиштер, медиадискурс, идиоматикалууулук, образдуу тил, дискурстук анализ, журналистика тили, лексикалык бирдиктер

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Фразовые глаголы в медиа дискурсе

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Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается роль и функции фразовых глаголов в медиадискурсе с акцентом на их структурные, семантические и прагматические характеристики. Фразовые глаголы, являясь многокомпонентными лексическими единицами, занимают важное место в английском языке благодаря своей идиоматичности, гибкости и высокой частотности употребления. В работе анализируется их классификация на фразовые, предложные и фразово-предложные глаголы, а также их синтаксические особенности, включая разделяемость и перемещение частицы. Особое внимание уделяется различию между прямыми и переносными значениями, а также трудностям их интерпретации, особенно в медиаконтексте. Кроме того, исследуется вклад фразовых глаголов в обеспечение доступности, выразительности и убедительности языка средств массовой информации. В журналистском дискурсе они выступают не только как средство лаконичного выражения мысли, но и как инструмент фрейминга и оценки, влияющий на восприятие событий аудиторией. Также рассматривается роль метафоры и когнитивных процессов в формировании значений переносных фразовых глаголов. Дополнительно затрагивается тенденция к росту неформальности медиаязыка и её влияние на коммуникацию и перевод. Полученные результаты показывают, что фразовые глаголы являются важными языковыми средствами, усиливающими динамичность и эффективность медиадискурса и отражающими более широкие социолингвистические тенденции.

Ключевые слова: фразовые глаголы, медиадискурс, идиоматичность, образный язык, дискурсивный анализ, язык журналистики, лексические единицы