

APPROACHES TO PHRASAL VERBS IN ROMANIAN ENVIRONMENT

The article shortly defines the essence of English phrasal verbs and their occurrence in Romanian books before and after 1989, a significant turning point in the Romanian recent history. Then some teaching drills to ease their acquisition are mentioned.

What phrasal verbs are

The first stage in studying a language is learning words by oral repetition, and they are usually one-word lexemes. After getting familiar with them, it is very difficult to accept that a combination of words that you know very well might have a totally unexpected meaning, especially when the briefest of words, a preposition, might be added, that is, phrasal verbs.

Phrasal verbs are idiomatic combinations of a verb and adverb (*get by*), or a verb and a preposition (*call for*), or a verb and an adverb and a preposition (*call down on*).

Most of these combinations also have a lexical meaning that can be understood from the component parts: *breathe out*, as a non-idiomatic construction means 'to let out air through the nose or mouth', e.g.

(1) *The doctor asked me to breathe in, then to breathe out with all my might.*

As an idiomatic construction it means 'to express something', e.g.

(2) *She stood with her eyes raised to the sky, breathing out prayers.*

Phrasal verbs raise problems for the foreign students not only because of their meanings, which cannot be predicted from the meaning of the verb and its following particles, but also because of their grammar. Sometimes the parts of the phrasal verbs can be separated:

(3) *Try to blow it up.*

Some phrasal verbs are always used without being split:

(4) *He left off working.*

Others must always be used separated:

(5) *She kept the door open.*

A short history of their use in books and textbooks

To the Romanian student of spoken English phrasal verbs mean uncertainty and fear of misinterpretation. However in literature the scene is a little different. The literature written before 1989 fell into two categories, a) literature written by English or American writers (or writers belonging to the Commonwealth, or other foreign writers translated into English) and b) Romanian literature translated into English. The first group was intended mainly for pupils and undergraduates. Until 1989 you could hardly find an unadulterated and unabridged English book; what you could buy were books in English printed in Russia. Those published in Romania followed the Russian pattern: again they were simplified and abridged. The complex grammar patterns were changed and difficult words replaced or explained in a footnote. For example, *Selected American Short Stories* begins with Jack London's *Love of Life* where all the phrasal verbs are explained in footnotes (*run them down* = capture; *edge away* = tend to go; *she dodged out of reach* = she avoided the blow, etc.). The other multi-word verbs are used in their literal meaning: *call out*, *put together*, *pile over*, *grope about*, *come upon*, *lay off to the left somewhere*, etc.

In the English translation from Romanian of Titus Popovici's *The Stranger* done by Lazar Marinescu in 1962, aimed at a global market, we find 14 phrasal verbs in seven pages (*look like*, *get through*, *lead to*, *watch over*, *hand on*, *pass over*, *look forward to*, *knock off*, *strike up*, *lean against*, *bite off*, *go on*, *move up*, *take off*). In W. Somerset Maugham's *The Outstation* there are 29 phrasal verbs in the same amount of pages. In *Fairy Tales and Legends from Romania*, in seven pages of the tale "Greuceanu", there are, we could say, an excess of 32 phrasal verbs compared with the same number of pages from "The Three Feathers" belonging to *English Fairy Tales*, where there are 25 phrasal verbs. In the play *The Mason* (eleven dramatic versions based upon the myth of Master Manole, translated into English by Dan Brudascu), we find 40 phrasal verbs in the same seven pages. None of these phrasal verbs are explained in a footnote as the audience was not meant to be Romanian.

Again, in Romania we do not find many phrasal verbs in the English language school textbooks before 1989. When original texts were used in literary studies, they carefully got rid of words and phrases thought to be difficult to understand or learn. An example is the passage taken from E. Hemingway's *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*. We shall illustrate this with the same short passage, the former in the original short story and the latter from the textbook.

- (6) *They were behind him and Macomber was filling his rifle, dropping shells onto the ground, **jamming it, clearing the jam**, then they were almost up with the bull when Wilson yelled "Stop," and the car skidded*

so that it almost **swung over** and Macomber fell forward onto his feet, **slammed his bolt forward** and fired as far forward as he could aim into the galloping, rounded black back, aimed and shot again, then again, and the bullets, all of them hitting, had no effect on the buffalo that he could see. (*The American Tradition in Literature* 1957 vol. 2:1099)

(7) They were behind him and Macomber was filling his rifle, dropping shells unto the ground, then they were almost up with the bull when Wilson yelled "Stop", and the car skidded so that it almost **turned over** and Macomber fell forward onto his feet, and fired as far forward as he could aim into the galloping, rounded back, aimed and shot again, then again, then again, all of them hitting, had no effect on the buffalo that he could see. (*Limba engleza*, 1989 cl. a XI-a: 131)

Manipulation of literary texts no longer occurs. Schoolbooks containing language and literature are being adapted to the new methods of teaching and linguistic trends. For example, until 1989 schoolbooks were available for more than 15 years without the slightest change of their content. Nowadays writers submit their work to a board and teachers have the possibility of choosing the book they consider suited to their needs. The schoolbooks written by Romanian authors and published by Oxford University Press are largely used in teaching English in the Romanian schools. The British Council played an advisory and co-ordination role in their creation of the new textbooks and adhere to the principles laid down in methodology textbooks as accepted in today's English Language Teaching environment so the language does not differ too much from the one used by the native speakers of English. Phrasal verbs have their normal place in the lessons. In *Pathway to English-English Scrapbook* for seventh grade students, Units 1 ("Tastes and behavior") and 2 ("A birthday party") contain 13 and 14 phrasal verbs respectively, while Unit 3 ("Museums") contains only 4. The topic under discussion therefore dictates the inclusion or otherwise of phrasal verbs.

In *Pathway to English-English News & Views* for eleventh grade students Unit 1, for example, ("Travelling in Great Britain") there are seven lessons together taking up 23 pages which contain up to 54 phrasal verbs. Unit 4 ("Discoveries and inventions") consists of seven lessons taking 21 pages and contains 55 phrasal verbs, 15 alone found in a fragment from "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" by Mark Twain. Surprisingly, the workbook, which is made up of 64 pages has only one exercise dealing with phrasal verbs (ex. VIII, p.23).

Ways of teaching phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs are now part of the discourse, and many of them are no longer considered as belonging to slang. They are used in everyday speech, in radio and television programs, to make the speech more vivid and colourful. As they are based mainly on words of Anglo-Saxon origin, they do not have a counterpart in languages whose vernaculars are based on Latin and Greek words. Romanian being a Romance language, the student will often resort more to the word he knows better, that is a Latin-based one, than to an Anglo-Saxon one, which can be easily misinterpreted due to its many-folded meanings. Thus, if we want our students to use as many phrasal verbs as the natives do, the only thing to do is to teach them phrasal verbs before their Latin-based synonyms.

Teaching phrasal verbs can imply at least three criteria: one syntactic, one semantic and the third methodological. The syntactic criteria are applied to the word order, that is, by what especially are the verbs from the combinations followed, an adverb, a preposition, an adverb and a preposition, an *-ing* form, an infinitive or a *that*-clause. This is difficult enough as not to form the base for many exercises. Usually, they are mingled through the other types of exercises and criteria. Most exercises are based on semantics and teaching methods.

An example of exercise based on syntactic criteria is the following:

Match each phrasal verb in column A with a word or phrase in column B to give a common phrase. Then find a verb in column C which defines each phrasal verb:

A. *come in for* - B. *a lot of criticism* - C. *receive*.

From a semantic point of view, phrasal verbs can be learned taking into account their three components: the verb, the preposition, the adverb, or adverb and preposition. Thus verbs can be grouped according to their surface structure, the exercises being conceived either around the verb or around the particles. Some types of exercises can take into account the whole combination, some are based on their different constituent parts, i.e. verb, adverb or preposition.

Using various patterns of exercises a teacher can construct his/her lesson on phrasal verbs using different techniques, according to the topic of the lesson, the age of the pupils, their knowledge of English and their interest in the matter. As teaching English has centred upon the student lately and not on the teacher, work can be done individually, with exercises or tests, usually used for a checking up. A better way, in my opinion, is working in pairs, groups or teams. The students are encouraged to talk, to improvise conversations based on a certain topic and making use of phrasal verbs related to it and already explained to them.

Another way of studying phrasal verbs is accessing the Internet where one can find many entries (up to 36,800 in February 2003; 821,000 in May 2010). An interesting fact noticed about these entries is that scores of dictionaries for phrasal verbs are provided by British and American printing houses, while exercises are

mainly provided by people from non-English-speaking countries. Thus we have translations of phrasal verbs in Russian, Spanish, Italian, French, Greek, Polish, German, etc. Many exercises are matching games, quizzes and tests. Phrasal verbs can be found grouped by topic, theme and semantic field, or centred upon one verb or a certain adverb or preposition.

Conclusion

Phrasal verbs together with idioms play an extremely important role in using a more colloquial and colourful language and in making the conversation more friendly and informal. The new teaching methodology, the new textbooks and the possibility of having a native speaker of the English language as a teacher, enables the Romanian learners of English to get closer to English as it is generally spoken in Anglo-Saxon countries and to move away from a more stilted, Latin based language.

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A FRAZÁLIS IGÉK MEGJELENÉSE ROMÁN KÖRNYEZETBEN

A tanulmány célja röviden ismertetni az angol frazális igék lényegét és megjelenésüket a Romániában kiadott könyvekben az 1989-es sorsdöntő történelmi változások előtt és után. Az ismertetés után következik néhány javasolt tanítási gyakorlat bemutatása.