

THE TRADITIONAL VS. COGNITIVE APPROACH TO ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS

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1. Introduction

Phrasal verbs, such as *make up*, *take after*, *do away with* – often called multi-word verbs or verb + particle constructions are a common feature of the English language. Nevertheless, the perception commonly held by learners and often fostered by teachers is that phrasal verbs are one of the major sources of bewilderment and frustration in the process of learning English.

As pointed out by Marks (2005: 1)¹, there are some misunderstandings that make phrasal verbs daunting for learners. These are as follows:

- Phrasal verbs are illogical, or random, or unpredictable
- Phrasal verbs are unique to English
- Phrasal verbs are necessarily informal or colloquial
- Phrasal verbs necessarily have 'proper', non-phrasal equivalents
- Phrasal verbs are a ramified area of English lexis, separate from the rest

These misunderstandings are partly due to the fact that it is hard to see any system in them. Phrasal verbs consist of a 'base verb' such as *go*, *put* or *set* and a particle, such as *down*, *back* or *off*. When a learner encounters an unfamiliar phrasal verb, he/she will often know what the base word means and what the particle means – but put the two together and you get something completely different. Even beginners know what *put* means and what *off* means, but that won't help them much to guess the various meanings of *put off*.

Besides, the fact that multi-word verbs are often polysemous, i.e. they have a number of different meanings also adds to their complexity. The dictionary called *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* (Rundell, 2005: 345)² gives 6 meanings of *put off*, which is a relatively common phrasal verb:

- (1) make sb not want/like sth
Lack of parking space was *putting* potential customers *off*.
- (2) delay sth you do not want to do
You can't *put* the decision *off* any longer.
- (3) make sth happen later

¹ MARKS 2005,1.

² RUNDELL 2005, 345.

They had to *put* their wedding *off* because the bride's mother had an accident.

- (4) arrange to see sb later
We'll have to *put* George *off* if your mother's coming on Thursday.
- (5) prevent sb from concentrating
Stop laughing – you'll *put* her *off*.
- (6) let a passenger get off
I don't *put* *off* any more passengers until I reach Waterloo.

In addition, we can find a phrase with *put off* as well:

put sb off their stride/stroke [often passive] to stop someone from thinking clearly or doing something confidently = Formal DISTRACT: *He was determined not to be **put off** his stroke by her presence.*

What is more, there is a corresponding adjective, i.e. *off-putting* in two different meanings:

- (1) used for describing something that you want to avoid because it is unpleasant and not attractive: *It tasted OK but the smell was a bit **off-putting**.*
- (2) used for describing something that stops you concentrating on what you are doing: *I prefer films that have been dubbed into English. Subtitles are so **off-putting**.*

Besides the above mentioned semantic complexities, their syntax is also governed by complex and unpredictable rules. Consider the following examples (cf. Rundell, 2005: 345):

- (1) You can't *put* the decision *off* any longer.
- (2) You can't *put off* the decision any longer.
- (3) Lack of parking space was *putting* potential customers *off*.
- (4) He was glad to have an excuse to *put off* telling her the news.

As a rule, the NP object either follows or precedes the particle, such as *off* in *put off* in sentence (1) and (2), respectively. In sentence (3), where *put off* means making somebody not want/like something, the only possible order is V+N/Pron+Adv. In contrast, when the object is realised by an *-ing* clause, *off* cannot be separated from the verb.

Due to these difficulties learners often have the feeling that phrasal verbs are an arbitrary combination of a verb and a particle and that – since there don't appear to be any obvious rules – phrasal verbs just have to be individually learnt and remembered. This is what traditional grammarians also assumed, and failed to explain properly why phrasal verbs behave in the way they do.

The primary aim of this paper is to explore this notoriously difficult aspect of the English language, and to show why the traditional lexico-semantic analyses, which appeared mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, didn't prove to be satisfactory to help learners to understand how phrasal verbs work. Furthermore I will attempt to show how cognitive grammar can contribute to making them a more manageable part of the English language, and put an end to learners' fears of learning and using them.

2. Phrasal verbs in traditional grammar

As far as the semantics of phrasal verbs is concerned, traditional grammarians, such as Bolinger (1971)³, Lipka (1972)⁴, Sroka (1972)⁵ and Fraser (1976)⁶ etc. generally assume that phrasal verbs are an arbitrary combination of a verb and one or more particles. They regard them simply as a matter of language, and mainly characterise their syntactic properties. Whenever they characterise their meanings, they usually point out the spatial and aspectual meanings of the particles. In this view, linguistic meaning is divorced from the human conceptual system.

To illustrate this, let us just mention Lipka (1972: 188)⁷, who observes that in a small group of verb-particle constructions (VPC) with *out*, the particle has the meaning 'into society', or 'into public knowledge', e.g. *ask out* (sb) and *invite out* (sb). In another group, *out* has the meaning 'aloud', as in *cry out*, *read out* (a letter) and *speak out* (words). In other functions, the particle is apparently isolated, as in *help out* (sb) 'temporarily', *ride out* (a racehorse) 'to the limit' and *strike out* 'vigorously'. Sometimes, *out* gives a completive sense to the verb, such as, in *fade out* and *die out*.

Similarly to Lipka, Bolinger (1971: 99-104)⁸ also points out that phrasal verbs may – to a limited extent – be placed in a number of sets, each with a common meaning element. Bolinger (1971: 104) gives the following meanings of *out*:

- (1) literal "centrifugal" meaning
- (2) literal resultant condition meaning showing a gradient
I *reached out* for it. My shoes *wore out*. The mine *gave out*. They *lost out*. With that machine it's easy to *dig out* a big hole. They *burned out* the village. He *carved out* a statue. I *figured out* the answer. They *found out* the truth.

³ BOLINGER 1971.

⁴ LIPKA 1972.

⁵ SROKA 1972.

⁶ FRASER 1976.

⁷ LIPKA 1972, 188.

⁸ BOLINGER 1971, 99–104.

- (3) exhaustion
 We *talked* ourselves *out*. We're all *talked out*.
 My energy *played out*. My energy is all *played out*.
- (4) metaphorical meaning
drop out (of school), *fall out* (with a friend), *hold out* (hope of sth, the possibility of sth), *break out* (with measles), *bring out* (a play) and *knock out* (a fighter), etc.

Nevertheless, these traditional semantic analyses seem to be rather unsystematic, and do not reveal much about the complex nature of verb + particle constructions. It was cognitive grammarians, such as Lindner (1981)⁹, Lakoff (1987)¹⁰, Rudzka-Ostyn (2003)¹¹ and Tyler and Evans (2003),¹² who showed that the meanings of particles in phrasal verbs form a network of related senses, and thus they are systematic and are analysable at least to some degree. Before looking at the cognitive semantic analysis of particles in phrasal verbs, let us outline what the major principles and categories cognitive linguistics are.

3. Some features of cognitive grammar

Cognitive grammar grew out of the work of a number of researchers active in the late 1970s who were interested in the relation of language and mind. Its central ideas were developed by Ronald Langacker in his two-volume *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar* (1987 and 1991)¹³, which became a major departure point for the emerging field of cognitive linguistics.

In general, cognitive linguists assume that linguistic structures are motivated by cognitive processes, for example by metaphorisation. One of the most important assumptions shared by all cognitive scholars is that meaning is so central to language that it must be a primary focus of study. A primary tenet of this theory is that our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

In the cognitive view, metaphors are not just superfluous, though pleasant rhetorical devices, but an indispensable property of our thinking and conceptualisation (Kövecses 2005: 14)¹⁴. Thus our language is highly metaphorical, which uses thousands of expressions based on concrete, physical entities in order to express high-level abstractions.

⁹ LINDNER 1981.

¹⁰ LAKOFF – JOHNSON 1980.

¹¹ RUDZKA-OSTYN 2003.

¹² TYLER – EVANS 2003.

¹³ LANGACKER 1987.; LANGACKER 1991.

¹⁴ KÖVECSES 2005, 14.

As claimed by Lakoff (1987)¹⁵, Lakoff-Johnson (1980)¹⁶ and Kövecses (2005), our conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Thus the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is often a matter of metaphor. The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5). Cognitive linguists assume that we structure concepts (e.g. *emotions, ideas, society, politics, economy, human relations, communication, time and events*, etc.) is understood in terms of the source domain (e.g. *the human body, health, illnesses, buildings, machines, animals, plants, sport, games and forces*, etc.) (cf. Kövecses 2005: 32-45)¹⁷.

In cognitive terms, conceptual metaphors always combine two domains: a concrete, well bounded 'source domain' and an abstract, 'target domain'. The mechanism through which this happens is mapping, i.e. the source domain is mapped onto the target domain. To illustrate what kind of correspondences or mappings there are between a source domain and a target domain, let us have a closer look at one of our basic feelings, 'anger' again. In the expression *spit fire*, the domain of fire is used to understand the domain of anger. Thus we conceptualise 'anger' via the metaphor, such as ANGER IS FIRE. Following the conventions of cognitive semantics, we call this the ANGER IS FIRE a conceptual metaphor (cf. Johnson and Lakoff 1980, Lakoff 1987, Kövecses 2005 and Kövecses and Szabó 1996¹⁸).

In the sentence '*The fire between them finally went out*' the conventional metaphor underlying the idiom is LOVE IS FIRE. 'The painting *set fire to* the composer's imagination, it is IMAGINATION IS FIRE; in 'The killing *sparked off* riots', it is CONFLICT IS FIRE; in the case of *burning the candle at both ends*, it is ENERGY IS FUEL FOR THE FIRE; in the case of *fan the flames of*, it is ENTHUSIASM IS FIRE.

As pointed out by Kövecses and Szabó (1996: 334)¹⁹, these conceptual metaphors are, however, not limited to a single linguistic expression but make themselves manifest in a large numbers of expressions.

ANGER IS FIRE

After the row she was *fuming*. He is *smouldering* with anger.

LOVE IS FIRE

I am *burning* with love. She *carries a torch* for him.

IMAGINATION IS FIRE

His imagination *caught fire*. The story *kindled* the boy's imagination.

CONFLICT IS FIRE

¹⁵ LAKOFF 1987.

¹⁶ LAKOFF – JOHNSON 1980, 5.

¹⁷ KÖVECSES 2005, 32–45.

¹⁸ KÖVECSES – SZABÓ 1996.

¹⁹ KÖVECSES – SZABÓ 1996, 334.

The *flames* of war spread quickly. They *extinguished the last spark* of the revolution.

ENERGY IS FUEL FOR THE FIRE

I am *burned out*. I need someone to *stoke my fire*.

ENTHUSIASM IS FIRE

Her enthusiasm was *ignited* by the new teacher.

He was *burning* with excitement.

The above discussion suggests that the meanings of idiomatic expressions are not arbitrary but can be seen as motivated by metaphors that link domains of knowledge to idiomatic meanings. In other words they are not simply a matter of language but products of our conceptual system.

Now let us see how the cognitive approach can be applied to the analysis of the meanings of English phrasal verbs.

4. A cognitive approach to phrasal verbs

One of the most important assumptions shared by all these cognitive scholars, such as by Lindner (1981), Lakoff (1987), Rudzka-Ostyn (2003) and Tyler and Evans (2003) is that the meanings of phrasal verbs also go easily from the concrete to the abstract, and metaphors serve as a link between them. Since foreign learners often do not see this path and do not recognise the metaphor underlying the abstract meanings, they find many phrasal verbs difficult to understand. Consequently, they either use them improperly or they use them rarely.

In fact the meanings of many phrasal verbs are metaphorical, and if you understand the metaphors they use, it will be easier to understand and remember their meanings. Consider the following pairs of examples (cf. Rundell, 2005: LS 5)²⁰:

The dog *dug up* an old bone. We *dug up* some interesting facts.
Two planes were *shot down*. Each proposal was *shot down*.

In each pair, the first phrasal verb has a literal meaning and refers to a physical action, while the second is metaphorical and describes an action that is similar in some way to the first. For example, when someone *digs up* information, they discover it, and the process seems similar to the way in which dogs find bones that have been buried in the ground.

Some phrasal verbs have only metaphorical meanings. For example, *to breeze in* means to enter a place confidently, without seeming to care what other people think: perhaps the attitude and action reminds us of the movement of a breeze. Similarly, *to rope someone in* means to persuade someone to do something that they do not really want to do: perhaps it reminds us of the way in which people use

²⁰ RUNDELL 2005, LS 5

ropes to catch animals or to collect them together.

As pointed out by Rudzka-Ostyn (2003: 2)²¹, understanding the meaning of the verb is important but not always sufficient. In many cases, the major problem with phrasal verbs is gaining insight into the meaning(s) of their particles and understanding why one particle is used and another is not.

Moon in the *Language Study of Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* (2005: LS 5)²² notes that when the verb part of a phrasal verb is used in a metaphorical way, this is usually obvious. But the particles may also be used metaphorically. This is less easy to recognise, but in fact there is often a clear connection between the literal meanings of the particle and its metaphorical extension. For example, *up* literally describes movement towards a higher position, metaphorically it has got to do with increases in size, number or strength (e.g. *Prices went up*), or *down* literally describes movement towards a lower position, its metaphorical meanings have to do with decreases in size, number or strength (e.g. *The children quietened down*). The recognition of the link between the literal and idiomatic of particles via metaphors has been a major contribution of cognitive linguistics to a better understanding of the meanings of phrasal verbs.

Amongst the outstanding contributions to the cognitive semantic analysis of English phrasal verbs is the dissertation by Susan Lindner (1981), who gives a detailed lexico-semantic analysis of English verb-particle constructions with *up* and *out*. Lakoff (1987) and Tyler and Evans (2003) examine the case of *over*, while Rudzka-Ostyn (2003) presents a cognitive analysis of *out*, *in*, *into*, *up*, *down*, *off*, *way*, *on*, *over*, *back*, *about*, *around*, *across*, *through*, *by* and *along*.

Besides referring to such cognitive mechanisms in the analysis of the meanings of particles as metaphors, some cognitive linguists (cf. Lindner 1981, Lakoff 1987 and Rudzka-Ostyn 2003) argue that prepositions/particles in their spatial sense serve to locate one entity with reference to another and therefore they also use the relation of *trajector* and *landmark* in their discussions. Following the terminology introduced by Langacker (1987: 231)²³, the moving entity is referred to as the *trajector* or TR, while the entity which serves as a reference point will be referred to as the *landmark* or LM.

To highlight what are the central cognitive principles involved in the analysis of the meanings of phrasal verbs, let us examine Lakoff's analysis of *over*.

²¹ RUDZKA-OSTYN 2003, 2.

²² MOON 2005, LS5.

²³ LANGACKER 1987, 231.

5. Lakoff's cognitive analysis of *OVER*

In his study published in *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, Lakoff (1987: 418-439)²⁴ showed the precise relations among spatial senses and the metaphorical extensions of some of the spatial senses of *over*.

5.1 The spatial senses

Lakoff (1987) notes that the central sense of *over* combines some elements of both *above* and *across*.

The *above* and *across* sense (Schema 1)

(1) a The plane flew *over*. (Fig. 1)

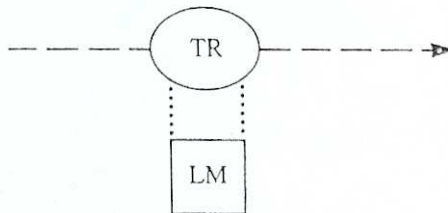


Fig. 1 The plane flew *over*.

In this case the LM (i.e. a reference point which is located) is unspecified. The plane is understood as a TR (i.e. a moving entity) oriented relative to a LM. The LM is what the plane is flying over, and there is no contact between the TR and LM. The arrow in the figure represents the PATH that the TR is moving along. The path is *above* the LM and goes all the way *across* the LM from the boundary on one side to the boundary on the other. Lakoff considers four kinds of landmark specifications:

1. LM is a point
2. LM is extended
3. LM is vertical
4. LM is both extended and vertical.

There can be two further specifications:

1. there is contact between TR and LM
2. there is no contact between the LM and TR

Lakoff refers to other instances of the *above-across* sense:

²⁴ LAKOFF 1987, 418–439.

- (2) a. The bird flew *over* the yard (extended, no contact). (Fig. 2)
 b. The plane flew *over* the hill (vertical, extended, no contact). (Fig. 3)
 c. The bird flew *over* the wall (vertical, no contact). (Fig. 4)
 d. Sam drove *over* the bridge (extended, contact). (Fig. 5)
 e. Sam walked *over* the hill (vertical, extended, contact). (Fig. 6)
 f. Sam climbed *over* the wall (vertical, contact). (Fig. 7)

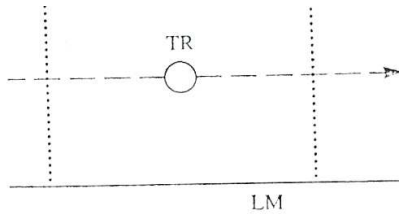


Fig. 2 The bird flew *over* the yard.

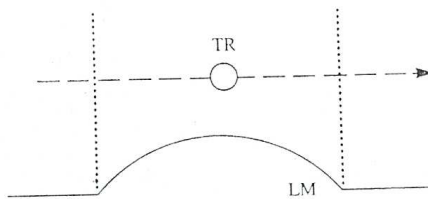


Fig. 3 The plane flew *over* the hill.

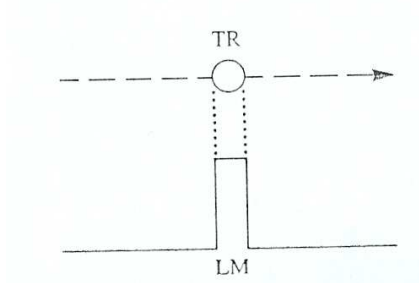


Fig. 4 The bird flew *over* the wall.

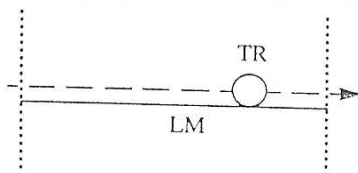


Fig. 5 Sam drove *over* the bridge.

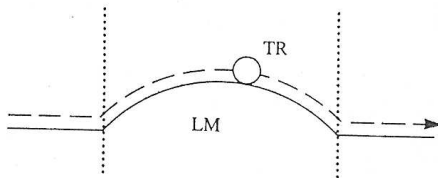


Fig. 6 Sam walked *over* the hill.

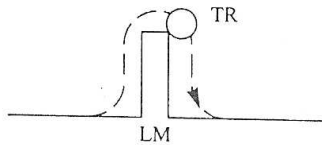


Fig. 7 Sam climbed *over* the wall.

Furthermore, consider the following cases where there is a focus on the end point of the PATH and *over* has the sense of ‘on the other side of’ as a result of end-point focus:

- (3) Sausalito is *over* the bridge (extended, contact, end point). (Fig. 8)

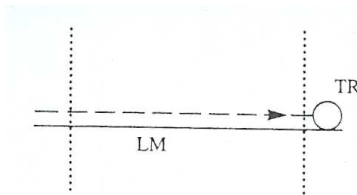


Fig. 8 Sausalito is *over* the bridge.

The *above* sense (Schema 2)

It is linked to schema 1 in two respects: First, it has no PATH and no boundaries; the *across* sense is missing. Second, it does not permit contact between the TR and LM, e.g.:

- (4) The helicopter is hovering *over* the hill.

The *covering* sense (Schema 3)

- (5) a. The board is *over* the hole. (Fig. 9)
 b. The city clouded *over*. (Fig. 10)

It is a variant of the *above* schema, but here the TR must be at least two-dimensional and extends across the boundaries of the LM. Besides, schema 3 is neutral with

respect to contact, allowing either contact or lack of it (Fig. 9). Sometimes the motion of the TR above and across the LM is also included as illustrated by Fig.10.

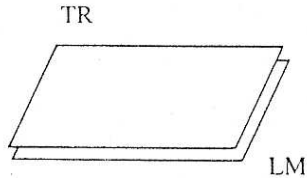


Fig. 9 The board is *over* the hole.

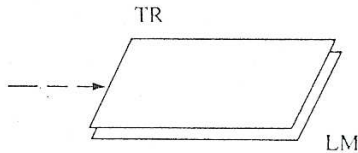


Fig. 10 The city clouded *over*.

The covering schema can also have variants in which the TR needs not be above (that is, higher than) the LM, and there must be an understood viewpoint from which the TR is blocking accessibility of vision to at least some part of the landmark.

- (6) There was a veil *over* her face.

The *reflexive* sense

- (7) Roll the log *over*.
 (8) The fence fell *over*.

Here the TR – the initial upright position of the fence – is distinguished from the final position, in which the fence or a person is lying horizontally on the ground, i. e. the LM. These are the cases when: TR=LM. Such a relation between a LM and TR is called reflexive (cf. Lindner 1981: 122)²⁵. The path of *over* traces a semi-circle above and across other parts of the thing, which is called a reflexive path and the TR is a reflexive trajectory. In (7), the position of an entity, i.e. the log changes so that the part which was facing upwards is now facing downwards. In other words, half of the log is acting as landmark and the rest as trajectory (Fig. 12). In the other case, (8) the TR, i.e. the fence is upright at the beginning, traces a curved path and falls or is pushed to the ground, which is the LM. Thus the TR and the LM become identical (Fig. 13).

²⁵ LINDNER 1981, 122.



Fig. 12 Roll the log *over*.

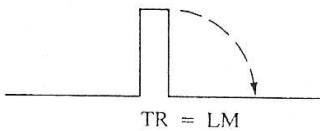


Fig. 13 The fence fell *over*.

The *excess* sense

When *over* is used as a prefix, it can indicate excess as in (9). For overflowing to take place, there must be a fluid in a container, which has vertical sides. The LM is the side of the container, the PATH is the path of the flow, and the TR is the level of the fluid. But as Lakoff (1987: 434)²⁶ notes, overflowing is more than just flowing over the edge of a container. Semantically, it involves excess:

- (9) The bathtub *overflowed*.

Overflow provides a link between the excess schema in general and the schema of Fig. 11, illustrated by the following example:

- (10) The dog jumped *over* the fence.

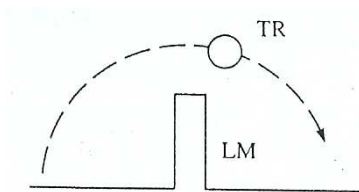


Fig. 11 The dog jumped *over* the fence.

In addition, there are innumerable examples where we can witness a transfer of the above TR-LM relation from the concrete domain of space to the abstract

²⁶ LAKOFF 1987, 434.

domain via metaphorical extensions. Next, let us examine some metaphorical senses of *over*.

5.2 The metaphorical senses

As Lakoff (1987: 435)²⁷ points out, a great many metaphorical models use a spatial domain as their source domain. Among the most common source domains for metaphorical models are containers, orientations, journeys (with paths and goals), vertical impediments, etc, e.g.

The metaphorical extensions of the *above* and *across* sense

Consider the following examples:

- (11) The media *passed over* some of the most disturbing details of the case.
I noticed that he *skated over* the topic of redundancies.

In the above examples in (11) *over* has the meaning of avoiding discussing a subject or problem or not giving it (enough) attention. The problem(s), the topic can be understood metaphorically as a LM.

In another extended meaning of *over* exemplified below in (12), use of *over* is based on the *above* and *across* sense of *over* and two metaphors. In the first metaphor, obstacles are understood in terms of vertical landmarks. The second metaphorical model is one that understands LIFE AS A JOURNEY. In the above use, divorce is an obstacle (metaphorically, a vertical extended landmark) on the path defined by life's journey. The LM is a problem, a difficulty, an illness, an unpleasant experience or a feeling. *Over* denotes the path of the TR surmounting an obstacle. The metaphorization is made possible by the fact that that life is often construed as a path and difficult episodes during one's life as obstacles in the path.

- (12) It took me a very long time to *get over* the shock of her death.
Harry still has not *got over* his divorce.
How would they *get over* the problem, he wondered?
Molly had fought and *overcome* her fear of flying.
Find a way to *overcome* your difficulties.

Consider also the following idiomatic expression which means that somebody has already reached and passed the peak or high point of their career (journey):

- (13) Peter is *over the hill*.

The end-point focus of the path the trajectory follows can also be understood metaphorically as representing the completion of a process, which yields such examples as:

²⁷ LAKOFF 1987, 435.

- (14) The lesson is *over*.
The bad times were *over*.

The metaphorical extensions of the *above* sense

Over in (15) is used metaphorically to indicate that something or someone threatens or worries you. The TR can be understood as a problem that worries you or a person that threatens you on the path defined by life's journey.

- (15) I had the Open University exam *hanging over* me.
He *held* the Will *over* her like a threat.

Another extended meaning of *over* illustrated by (16) is that of control sense, i. e. supervising someone or being in a position of authority over them. The relationship of TR and LM is one of power, authority. Power relations are typically conceptualized in vertical space. Someone with power (TR metaphorically) is higher than someone without power (LM metaphorically). Thus this meaning of *over* is licenced by the metaphor CONTROL IS UP.

- (16) Don't you try to *queen* it *over* me.
Do you have to *lord* it *over* us?
He had *presided over* a seminar for theoretical physicists.
She *stood over* him and made him eat his lunch.

The metaphorical extensions of the *covering* sense

Some combinations are used metaphorically with the meaning of hiding something, for example a situation, an event, an unpleasant, embarrassing subject, a problem which can be understood as the LM, and the TR as an abstract entity as exemplified in:

- (17) He *varnished over* the conflict with polite words.
They tried to *paper over* the crisis.

The metaphorical extension of the *reflexive* sense

An extended meaning of this spatial *over* is its telic, resultative meaning, which is exemplified by 'removal', 'change', 'cancel' in the definitions of the examples given in (18), where *over* is a prefix. For example, first the government is in control (metaphorically upright, and afterwards it is not in control, metaphorically it has fallen over):

- (18) *overturn a government* 'remove a government from power'
overthrow a leader 'remove from power by force'
override a decision/order 'cancel/ ignore a decision'

overrule a decision/order 'change someone's decision/order that you think is wrong'

The metaphorical extension of the *excess* sense

Excess can be interpreted metaphorically as well, where people, situations, quantities, relations, feelings, states can be seen as entities that go beyond their limits or boundaries as illustrated in (19), (20) and (21). It is confirmed by the fact that the definitions given in the dictionary usually contain words like *very* and *so full of it*, etc. For example:

- (19) The argument *boiled over* into a fight (become violent).
 Kenneth *overflowed* with friendliness and hospitality (experience it very strongly).
 He was *bubbling over* with enthusiasm (be so full of it).

In addition, consider also the following examples where the meaning of *over* has another kind of excess meaning, i.e. *beyond* or *more than*, which is reflected by the comparative form such as *more than*, *more/less important/ hotter*, *greater than it really is* etc, in the definitions:

- (20) *overbook* 'sell more tickets than they have places for'
overspend 'spend more money than you can afford'
overact 'exaggerate their emotions and movement'
overdo 'behave in an exaggerated way'
overemphasize 'give it more importance than it deserves'
overestimate 'think it is greater in amount or importance than it is really'
overplay 'make it seem more important than it really is'
oversimplify 'make a situation or problem seem less complicated than it really is'
overuse 'use more of it than necessary'
overvalue 'believe that sth is more valuable or more important than it really is'
- (21) He is *over* forty.
 It lasted *over* two hours.
 Cigarettes kill *over* a hundred thousand Britons every year.

The above analysis is meant to demonstrate how complex *over* is in its semantics. It is true that in verb-particle constructions, such as *get over* or prefixed verbs *overlook* the meaning of the combination cannot be predicted from the meanings of the particle/prefix and the verb. Their meanings, however, are not completely arbitrary but motivated - motivated by one of the spatial schemas for *over* and by

metaphors in the conceptual system.

6. The impact of the cognitive view of phrasal verbs on up-to-date dictionaries of phrasal verbs

The productivity and importance of phrasal verbs in Modern English is also shown by the fact that a number of dictionaries of phrasal verbs started to be published in the 80s, e. g. *Collins Dictionary of English Phrasal Verbs and Their Idioms* (1974),²⁸ *Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English. Volume 1: Verbs with Prepositions and Particles* (1975).²⁹ This process went on with *Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (1983)³⁰; *Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (1995, 2002),³¹ *Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (1993),³² *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary for Learners of English* (2001)³³, *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* (2005)³⁴ and *Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (1997, 2006)³⁵ appearing on the market.

The approach of recently published dictionaries to phrasal verbs, such as that of *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* (2005) reflects the integration of the results of research done by cognitive linguists who took up the challenge of the alleged arbitrariness of particle, prepositional usage and demonstrated that their meanings are highly structured. The dictionary uses diagrams and tables to reveal the relationship between the literal and figurative meanings of particles. From these networks of meanings illustrated in diagrams it becomes clear that in most cases the idiomatic meanings are the metaphorical extensions of the literal ones. In this dictionary we can find a detailed semantic analysis of the most common particles (*around, away, back, down, in, into, off, on, out, over, through* and *up*). Let us take *off*, which has the following 6 main meanings in Rundell's *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* (2005: 288)³⁶:

1. leaving
2. removing
3. starting
4. finishing, stopping
5. preventing, keeping away

²⁸ MC ARTHUR – ATKINS 1974.

²⁹ COWIE – MACKIN 1975.

³⁰ COURTNEY 1983.

³¹ SINCLAIR 1995/2002.

³² COWIE – MACKIN 1993.

³³ COWIE – MACKIN 2001.

³⁴ RUNDELL 2005.

³⁵ PYE 1997, 2006.

³⁶ RUNDELL 2005, 288.

6. getting out

The diagrams and the tables clearly illustrate that the diverse meanings of *off* which are nonetheless unified in a network of semantic extensions. Consider meaning 2 in e. g. *break off, cut off, shave off, tear off; come off, drop off, fall off* = removal, spatial separation, getting rid of something or becoming removed or separated. The spatial meaning of *off* in these examples is related to *lay off, marry off, write off, call off, rip off, siphon off, pay off*, where spatial separation can be extended to any situation in which an object or entity is separated from a given state or in which one element – no matter how abstract – becomes dissociated from some other element. The same connection can be discovered between the above mentioned prototypical spatial meaning and the extended meaning of *off* in *bump off, finish off, knock off, polish off, kill off*, which refer to killing someone, i.e. getting rid of someone.

Even these few examples show that the meaning of particles in phrasal verbs is not at all arbitrary. Most of the common particles in phrasal verbs have literal uses that relate to spatial orientation and there is a metaphorical link between their spatial and figurative uses. Thus metaphors are clearly a powerful tool for helping us to understand a great deal of idiomatic language, so it is reasonable to believe that they also help us to unravel the mysteries of phrasal verbs and their particles.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I have made an attempt to reveal why the traditional lexico-semantic analyses of the phrasal verbs do not seem to give learners enough help to understand and use phrasal verbs properly. Traditional linguists (cf. Bolinger 1971, Sroka 1972, Lipka 1972 and Fraser 1976) have assumed that verb-particle combinations are either fully analysable or opaque, and that the particle has either a literal meaning or probably an aspectual meaning or no meaning at all. In contrast, cognitive linguists, such as Lindner (1981), Lakoff (1987), Rudzka-Ostyn (2003) and Tyler and Evans (2003) demonstrated that the meanings of prepositional/particle usage is highly structured and motivated by metaphors in our conceptual system and thus they are analysable at least to some degree.

That particles contribute special meanings to the verb is shown by the fact that new combinations are rarely made on a random basis, but they form patterns which can, to some extent, be anticipated. Particles often have particular meanings which they contribute to a variety of combinations. These fixed meanings are used in order to create new combinations. For example, the particle *up* has the meaning of completing and finishing in *drink up, eat up, heal up* or *break up*, *off* has the meaning of obstructing and separating in *block off, brick off, cut off* or *wall off* or *down* has the meaning of completing or failing in *break down, close down, hunt down* or *turn down*, etc.

Such kind of regularity can be observed in the meanings of new phrasal verbs. Consider the following examples (cf. *Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*³⁷):

be partied out ‘have had enough of parties because you have been to so many’,
chill out ‘relax completely’,
bliss out ‘become totally happy and relaxed’,
veg out ‘sit and relax and do nothing’,
pig out ‘eat an extremely large amount of food, much more than you need’,
google out ‘discover information by means of a thorough research’,
big up ‘praise something very highly’,
sex up ‘make something seem more exciting as it really is’.

I am convinced that recognising the link between the literal and idiomatic meanings of particles via metaphors can greatly contribute to a better understanding of the meanings of phrasal verbs in English, thus putting an end to learners’ fears of learning and using them. It should, however, be borne in mind that learners often do not recognise the conceptual metaphors underlying linguistic expressions, therefore they might need to be made aware of their existence in our mind in an explicit way. By being provided with such kind of cognitive mechanisms, learners will surely be able to learn phrasal verbs faster and retain them longer in memory (cf. Kövecses & Szabó, 1996: 351).³⁸

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³⁷ COWIE – MACKIN 2007.

³⁸ KÖVECSES – SZABÓ 1996, 351.

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