Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)
CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication
Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, 2016
ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4
Section: Language and Discourse

FROM PREPOSITIONS TO ADVERBIAL PARTICLES

Claudia Leah

Assist. Prof., PhD, University of Oradea

Abstract: Verbs in English, as in any other language, are of utmost importance, since they represent the core of the sentence. Among different types of verbs, those which raise understanding and employment problems are the so-called multi-word verbs: prepositional verbs and phrasal verbs, which include in their forms either a preposition, or an adverb, or an adverbial particle.
This article aims at highlighting the thin border between prepositions and adverbial particles, trying to show that each of them has its own relevance in certain structures and each is worth studying.

Keywords: adverb, adverbial particle, phrasal verbs, preposition, prepositional verbs.

Starting from the widely accepted idea that, in any language, verbs are of utmost importance, since they represent the core of the sentence, and being aware of their complexity, we decided to focus on one distinct and difficult kind of verbs; among different types of verbs, those which raise understanding and employment problems are the so-called multi-word verbs: prepositional verbs and phrasal verbs, which include in their forms either a preposition, or an adverb, or an adverbial particle.

The multi-word verbs are generally considered to be combinations of words that work like independent units and function like one-word verbs.

Although most grammarians consider that multi-word verbs fall into three main categories:

- phrasal verbs, consisting of : verb + adverb(ial) particle
  e.g. *I **wake up** at 7 :30.*
- prepositional verbs, consisting of: verb + preposition
  e.g. *Everything **depends on** your decision.*
- phrasal-prepositional verbs, consisting of : verb +particle + preposition
  e.g. *My cousin **came up with** a great idea.*

some of them do not make such a distinction and use the same term *phrasal verb* to refer to combinations of verb and preposition. Moreover, although an overdiscussed issue, grammarians still have different ideas regarding the definition of a phrasal verb or use different terms to name it. Thus, some make a distinction between *phrasal verbs* and *prepositional verbs* and consider that both are sub-types of *multi-word verbs*; some others present *prepositional verbs* as a sub-type of *phrasal verbs*, while others simply use completely different notions. The consequence of this disagreement is that the three types of multi-word or multi-part verbs may be confused. For instance, to Huddleston and Pullum (2002), a word like *off*, in examples such as :

*The plane couldn't take **off** because of the bad weather.* and
*I took **off** my shoes.*

could be considered preposition in both cases.

BDD-A25374 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:45 UTC)

Creating confusion, t**he term *phrasal verbs*** presents understanding problems for those who study English, no matter whether they are native speakers or just foreign language learners. In spite of these disagreements, most of the given examples are relevant enough to distinguish a phrasal verb form a prepositional verb:

*e.g. The little girl was **looking up** the tall buildings.*

*The little girl was **looking up** 'building' in in her English-Romanian dictionary?*

Therefore, a clear distinction between prepositions, adverbs and adverbial particles is perforce required.

According to Cambridge English dictionary, a simple definition of the preposition is: a word or group of words that is used with a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase to show direction, location, or time, or to introduce an object, while a complete definition is: function word that typically combines with a noun phrase to form a phrase which usually expresses a modification or predication. (dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/English)

e.g. *He walked **up** and **down** the street.*
*He went **through** the forest.*
*He was congratulated **on** his success.*

The preposition always precedes an object or an adverbial modifier, expressed in most of the cases by a noun phrase or by a gerund. Therefore, an example like:

*He walked the street **up** and **down**.*

is far from being acceptable.

Moreover, preceding an object or an adverbial modifier, we come across two distinct situations of preposition occurrance:

- the preposition is required by the verb, and in this case we deal with a prepositional verb, followed by a prepositional structure that functions as a prepositional object; the verb and the preposition which form a prepositional verb cannot be separated. For this reason in some opinions, this is called **(inseparable) phrasal verb, but we consider that the term *prepositional verb* is more appropriate**; the required preposition cannot be replaced by another, unrequired preposition;
  e.g. *It depends **on your decision**.*
  *I'm thinking **of my family** all the time.*

(the verbs are *to depend on something/ somebody* and *to think of* whereas *on your decision* and *of my family*, the prepositional structures, are Prepositional objects).

There are prepositional verbs that require a direct object before the preposition and a prepositional object after it:

e.g. *They **blamed John for their failure*** (*to blame someone for something*)
*She **accused you of infidelity.*** (*to accuse someone of something*)

- the preposition is not required by the verb, and in this case we deal with a common verb, followed by a prepositional structure that usually functions as an adverbial and the preposition that follows the verb can be replaced by other prepositions.
  e.g. *The book is **on the desk***. (*The book is **under/above/near/in** the desk.)*
  *I saw him **after the show***. (*I saw him **before/in** the show.)*

BDD-A25374 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:45 UTC)

(the verbs *to be* and *to see* do not require a preposition and *on the desk* , the first prepositional structure, is an adverbial of place, while the second prepositional structure, *after the show,* is an adverbial of time; the preposition is interchangeable.

- ❖ it is worth mentioning the special situations in which the preposition may be required by other parts of speech, by the adjective, for example, and in this case we deal with a structure formed of a link verb, and a subject complement expressed by an adjective, followed by a required preposition.

  e..g. *My best friend is always aware* ***of his mistakes***.
  With all his effort, John is not so good ***at maths***.

(the verb *to be* is a link verb here, the subject complements *aware* and *good* are adjectives that require the preposition and *of my mistakes* and *at maths,* the prepositional structures, function as Adjective complements.

According to Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary, the adverb is: a word that describes a verb, an adjective, another adverb, or a sentence and that is often used to show time, manner, place, or degree, or a word belonging to one of the major form classes in any of numerous languages, typically serving as a modifier of a verb, an adjective, another adverb, a preposition, a phrase, a clause, or a sentence, expressing some relation of manner or quality, place, time, degree, number, cause, opposition, affirmation, or denial, and in English also serving to connect and to express comment on clause content (www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary). Levițchi (1970:244) considers that the adverb modifies or determines a verb, an adjective, another adverb and sometimes a whole sentence or clause and that far more unfrequently it may determine a noun, while Quirk (1972:267) states that the adverb is an item that does not fit the definitions for other parts of speech.

e.g. *I saw it* ***down,*** *on the floor****.***
He walked ***up*** *and* ***down****.*

The adverb cannot be followed by an object, and the adverb itself functions mainly as an adverbial modifier (of time, place, manner, a.s.o).

Therefore, an example like:

He walked ***up*** *and* ***down*** *the street.*

shows that *up and down,* followed by an object, is a preposition, not an adverb. The preposition here does not have a syntactic function of its own and goes with the object, preceding it.

On the other hand, in the following example:

He walked ***up*** *and* ***down.***

*up and down****.*** is not a preposition, does not accompany any object and, because it is an adverb, it has a syntactic function of its own, i.e. that of an adverbial modifier of place. Consequently, some words may be classified either as prepositions or as adverbs.

e.g. *I met him* ***before*** *the show*. (preposition)
I haven't met him ***before****.* (adverb)
It is ***inside*** *the box.* (preposition)
Don't put it ***inside***. (adverb)
They found him ***behind*** *the door.* (preposition)
We left him ***behind****.* (adverb)

BDD-A25374 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:45 UTC)

Iulian Boldea, Dumitru-Mircea Buda (Editors)
CONVERGENT DISCOURSES. Exploring the Contexts of Communication
Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, 2016
ISBN: 978-606-8624-17-4
Section: Language and Discourse

The adverbial particle is *In 'come back', 'break down' and 'fall off', 'back', 'down' and 'off' are all adverbial particles.(* https://en.oxforddictionaries.com), in other words, it is a particle with an adverbial function.

e.g. *He **came back** quickly*
*I **picked up** some flowers.*

In these cases, the structure formed of a verb and an adverbial particle is considered to be a phrasal verb. There are phrasal verbs that allow interchangeable adverbial particles, and the result is a change of sentence meaning, as the meaning of the particle changes.

e.g. *They always **looked up** to their parents*.
*They always **look round/away/down***.

An adverb particle has a distinct characteristic when occurs with a transitive verb, i.e. it may change its position. Although an adverbial particle forms a special unit with the verb and together, they have an idiomatic meaning, it may change its position and stay before or after a direct object:

e.g. *I picked **up** some flowers.*
*I picked some flowers **up**.*
*He was told to turn **off** the light.*
*He was told to turn the light **off.***

This change of position is not possible if the object is a pronoun, and in this case the particle always occurs after the pronoun, never before:

e.g. *They told you to turn it **off.***

and not

They told you to turn **off it.*

If tha phrasal verb is not transitive, the adverbial particle stays close to it:

e.g. *My phone **broke down** unexpectedly*.
*You have no reason **to run away***.

It is not always easy to identify the proper meaning of a phrasal verb by combining the meanings of the constituent elements, since the verb and the particle act as a unit with an ideomatic meaning. For instance:

*The plane couldn't take **off** because of the bad weather. (couldn't fly)*
*We **will sort out** this inconvenience. (will solve)*
*She was not able **to go on**. (to continue)*

Some of the Phrasal verbs are used in formal speach:

e.g. *Hopefully, car prices **will even out***.

compared to the less formal:

*Hopefully, car prices **will become steady.***

while some others are used informally:

e.g. ***Is** she **eyeing up** that dress?*

compared to the formal:

***Is** she looking with great interest at that dress?*

When a verb combines with an adverbial particle and meanwhile requires a preposition, we deal with a phrasal-prepositional verb. The basic characteristic of such verbs is that neither the particle, nor the preposition can be separated.

e.g. *I am **looking forward to** meeting you*. (*I gladly anticipate our meeting*)
*I would like to **get on with** my sister-in law*.(*I would like to be in good terms, to have a good relationship with my sister-in –law*.)

BDD-A25374 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:45 UTC)

They always ***looked up to*** *their parents*. (*They always respected their parents*.)

As seen in the given examples, it is difficult to identify the idiomatic meaning of such verbs, if we combine the meanings of the three elements that form the phrasal-prepositional verb.

In conclusion, we can assuredly state that prepositions, adverbs and adverbial particles, although short words, are of high-class significance in the language and should not be confused when used alone or in structures. This is difficult, even for advanced learners because of the numerous and complex multi-word verbs, so frequent in English, which, having a typical grammatical behaviour and allowing meaning changes, may lead to confusions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Alexander, L.G., , 1996, *Longman English Grammar*, Longman Ltd,.London and New York.
- Carter, R.,McCarthy,M.,2006, *Cambridge Grammar of English: a comprehensive guide;spoken and written English grammar and usage*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, R., McCarthy, M., Mark, G., O'Keeffe, A., *English Grammar Today- An A-Z of spoken and written Grammar*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Comisel, Ecaterina, 2010, Gramatica limbii engleze, Bucuresti, Ed. Corint.
- Eastwood, J., 2006, *Oxford Practice Grammar with Answers*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fraser, B.,1976, *The Verb-Particle Combination in English*. New York,Academic Press.
- Greenbaum, S.,1992, *The Oxford English Grammar*, Oxford., Oxford University Press.
- Hart, C. W., 2009, *The Ultimate Phrasal Verb Book*, New York, Barron's Educational Series.
- Herrero, S. F., 2016, *Elements of English Grammar*, Bubok Publishing House.
- Huddleston, R., Pullum, G.K., 2002, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Larreya, P., Riviere, C., Asselineau,R., Gremy, A., (trad. Gojnete Larisa si Sirbulescu Lavinia),2012, *Gramatica limbii engleze*, Pitesti, ed. Nomina.
- McArthur,T.,1992, *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S.,1993, *.A University Grammar of English*, Longman Group: Essex, England.
- Thim, S., 2012, *Phrasal Verbs: The English Verb-Particle Construction and its History*, Berlin & Boston, Walter de Gruter Publishing house.
- Thomson, A.J., Martinet, A.V., 2009, *A Practical English Grammar* ,Oxford, Oxford University Press
- *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language* ,1998, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- *Oxford phrasal verbs dictionary for learners of English*, 2001, Oxford,Oxford University Press.

BDD-A25374 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:45 UTC)

- dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/English
- https://en.oxforddictionaries.com
- https://www.usingenglish.com
- www.englishgrammar.org
- www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary

BDD-A25374 © 2016 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:45 UTC)