



## Syntactic Structure of English Multi-Words Verbs

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### Abstract

This paper examines the syntactic structure and classification of English multi-word verbs, which constitute an important and frequently used component of everyday English. It aims to clarify their formation, grammatical features, and major categories through a descriptive analysis supported by illustrative examples. The paper identifies three principal categories: phrasal verbs, consisting of a verb and an adverbial particle; prepositional verbs, formed by a verb and a preposition; and phrasal-prepositional verbs, comprising a verb, an adverbial particle, and a preposition. It further classifies phrasal verbs into transitive and intransitive types, while distinguishing separable from inseparable transitive constructions according to the position of the direct object. The analysis demonstrates that multi-word verbs function as unified syntactic and semantic units whose meanings may differ from those of their individual components. The paper concludes with representative examples of each category and their meanings.

**Keywords:** Multi-word verbs; Phrasal verbs; Prepositional verbs; Phrasal-prepositional verbs; Syntactic structure.

### الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث البنية النحوية للأفعال الإنجليزية متعددة الكلمات وتصنيفها، بوصفها مكوناً مهماً وشائع الاستخدام في اللغة الإنجليزية اليومية. ويهدف إلى توضيح تكوينها وخصائصها النحوية وأقسامها الرئيسية، من خلال تحليل وصفي مدعوم بأمثلة توضيحية. وقد حدد البحث ثلاثة أقسام رئيسية، هي: الأفعال المركبة، التي تتكون من فعل وأداة ظرفية؛ والأفعال المتعدية بحرف جر، التي تتكون من فعل وحرف جر؛ والأفعال المركبة المتعدية بحرف جر، التي تتألف من فعل وأداة ظرفية وحرف جر. كما صنّف الأفعال المركبة إلى أفعال متعدية وأخرى لازمة، مع التمييز بين التراكيب المتعدية القابلة للفصل وغير القابلة للفصل وفقاً لموقع المفعول به المباشر. وأظهر التحليل أن الأفعال متعددة الكلمات تعمل بوصفها وحدات نحوية ودلالية متكاملة، وقد تختلف معانيها عن معاني مكوناتها المفردة. واختتم البحث بعرض أمثلة ممثلة لكل قسم وبيان معانيها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأفعال متعددة الكلمات؛ الأفعال المركبة؛ الأفعال المتعدية بحرف جر؛ الأفعال المركبة المتعدية بحرف جر؛ البنية النحوية.

### 1.1-Introduction

Multi-words verbs are alternatively named as particle verbs, compound verbs, phrasal verbs, verb-particle constructions, verb-adverb combinations, discontinuous verbs, and separable (complex) verbs. They are a very important part of the teaching-learning process of English. This is due to the fact that these verbs have traditionally been used extensively in everyday English. Multi-words also have received considerable attention from many old English grammarians and contemporary English grammarians.

This paper deals with a brief overview of multi-word verbs, categories of multi-word, as well as a sample of multi-word verbs and a conclusion.

### 1.2- A brief overview of multi-word verbs.

Multi-word verbs consist of a simple verb and one or more particles (prepositions or adverbs or both).i.e., verbs combine with prepositions (e.g., at, from, for, on) or adverbs (e.g. , down, away, ahead, out, back) or both together to create a new word with a different meaning.

| <i>Verb</i> | <i>Particle</i> | <i>Example</i>                                  | <i>Meaning</i>               |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>hand</i> | <i>in</i>       | <i>we <b>handed in</b> our homework.</i>        | <i>Give paper</i>            |
| <i>Look</i> | <i>after</i>    | <i>She <b>looks after</b> her baby</i>          | <i>to be responsible for</i> |
| <i>Put</i>  | <i>up with</i>  | <i>I won't <b>put up with</b> your attitude</i> | <i>tolerate</i>              |

More precisely, Gairns and Redman(1986:33) summarize the definition and types of multi-word verbs as " a large number of English verbs consisting of two, or sometimes three parts:

- a) A 'base' verb + preposition e.g. look into ( investigate), get over (recover from).
- b) A 'base' verb + adverbial particle (phrasal verb) e.g. break down (collapse), call off (cancel).
- c) A 'base' verb + adverbial particle + preposition e.g. put up with ( tolerate)

This illustrates that multi-word verbs are made of a basic verb + another word or words. The words are a preposition , or an adverb or both. They are classified into three types. Type (a) consists of a verb and a preposition like (believe in) that it is called a prepositional verb. Type (b) contains a combination of a verb and an adverb like (put off) which is commonly referred to as a phrasal verb. Type (c) is made of a verb with both an adverb and a preposition like (put up with)which is known as a phrasal –prepositional verb.

### 1.3- Classification Of Multi-word Verbs

There are three main types of multi-word verbs. They are phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, and phrasal-prepositional verbs.

#### 1.3.1-Phrasal Verbs

According to Carter, McCarthy, Mark, and O'Keeffe (2011: 546) "Phrasal verbs have two parts: a main verb and an adverb particle." i.e., verbs with small adverbs

Examples:

(1.1)- I will have to **put off** the meeting. (postpone)

(1.2) -Muna **gets up** early. (rise from bed)

(1.3) -It is difficult to **make out** what she's saying. (hear/understand)

In the above examples, phrasal verbs contain two words. The first word is a verb itself ( put, gets, make), and the second word is an adverb ( off, up, out). This means that the phrasal verb is a combination of a verb and an adverb that jointly behave as one unit with different meaning from their individual words. The verb PUT refers to moving something into a particular place, but the phrasal verb PUT OFF refers to

postponement of an event.

### 1.3.1.1-Types of phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs come in two basic types. These are as follows:

#### 1-Transitive phrasal verbs

Sarvesh (2024:6) says that "transitive phrasal verbs require a direct object to complete their meaning. The action of the verb is directed towards something or someone." i.e., they must have an object. The object must come immediately after the phrasal verb to convey a full idea.

Examples:

(1.4) She **turns on** the radio. (✓ correct)

She **turns on**.....( incomplete)

(1.5) We **put off** our trip. We 'll go next month instead of this month. (✓correct)(

We **put off**..... We'll go next month instead of this month. (incomplete).

(1.6) He **turns off** the television before leaving the room.(✓ correct)

He **turns off** .....before leaving the room. (incomplete).

In the above examples (1.4)(1.5)(1.6), the phrasal verbs (**turn on, put off, turn off**) are transitive verbs, and therefore have objects( the radio, our trip, the television). Whereas( **Turn on, put off and turn off**) are not complete without their object. They do not express a complete thought.

**Transitive phrasal verbs** are classified into two categories: **separable transitive phrasal verbs** and **inseparable transitive phrasal verbs**. DeCapue (2016:148) says that " inseparable and separable are similar in that, like all transitive verbs, they take an object. They differ in what they do with the object." This means that classification refers to the grammatical connection between a verb and its particles within a sentence.

**1.1-Separable transitive phrasal verbs** mean that phrasal verbs let the object come between the verb and the particle( an adverb and a preposition). Narayanaswamy (2004:207) says that" separable phrasal verbs are those of which the component parts(i.e., the main verb and the particle) can be separated." This means that the direct object appears between the verb and the particle.

More precisely, **a separable transitive phrasal verb** is a verb where the verb and adverb that come together to form phrasal verb may be separated from each other by the object. i.e., the object is inserted between the verb and adverb.

*Examples:*

(1.7)- *Muna picked up her rubber from the floor. Or*

*Muna picked her rubber up from the floor. (both correct)*

(1.8)- *We put off our exam. Or*

*We put our exam off. ( both correct)*

(1.9)- *Hana turns off her computer. Or*

*Hana turns her computer off. ( both correct)*

**1.2-Inseparable transitive phrasal verbs** mean that the phrasal verbs keep the verb and adverb together as single syntactic unit .i.e. the adverb cannot be separated from the verb. Cowan (2008:172) states that" inseparable transitive phrasal verbs do not permit the particle to move over the direct object".

(1.10)-*She looks after her baby.( correct √)*

*She looks her baby after.( incorrect ×)*

(1.11)-*I got off the bus. (correct√)*

*I got the bus off. ( incorrect ×)*

(1.12)- *I got over my cold( correct√)*

*I got my cold over (incorrect ×)*

## 2-Intransitive Phrasal Verbs:

Intransitive and transitive phrasal verbs are different based on the presence of a direct object. Transitive phrasal verbs must have an object, while intransitive phrasal verbs never have an object. According to Sarvesh (2024:) , " Intransitive phrasal verbs do not require a direct object to convey their meaning. The action is complete without the need for an additional element."i.e. they do not need an object to complete their meaning.

*Examples:*

(1.13) *The plane took off.*

(1.14) *I do not like to **get up** at 7o'clock.*

(1.15) *He was late because his car **broke down**.*

In the above examples, intransitive phrasal verbs ( took off, get up, broke down) express full meaning without needing an object and the action is all about the subject.

### 1.3.2- Prepositional verbs

Cowan (2008:151) defines prepositional verbs as " verb+ preposition sequences that function as a single, inseparable unit and typically have the same meaning as a single-word verb". This means that prepositional verbs are a combination of a verb and a preposition that cannot be disconnected from each other. They are also semantically associated.

Examples:

(1.16) *Ali **suffers from** pains in his teeth.*

(1.17) *Muna is **waiting for** Hana.*

(1.18) *Ahmed **sits under** a tree.*

(1.19) *They **arrive on** time.*

In the above examples, prepositional verbs have an object that follow by their prepositions ( i.e. they are transitive verbs). Jackson and Ze Amvela (2000:64)say that" prepositional verbs are always followed by an object". The verb- preposition combination creates another verb with a similar meaning to its original verb meanings

### 1.3.3-Phrasal –prepositional verbs

Phrasal-prepositional verbs are also called three- word phrasal verbs. They consist of a simple verb, an adverb particle, and a preposition. Gablasova and Brezina (2026) state that "phrasal-prepositional verbs combine both a particle and a preposition in a fixed sequence( verb+ particle+preposition), resulting in multi—word expressions that are often idiomatic."

Examples:

(1.20) *My parents are always **checking up on** me.*

(1.21) *I cannot decide for you. It **is up to** you.*

(1.22) *I **broke out in** a rash over my body.*

In the above examples, phrasal-prepositional verbs( **checking up on**, **is up to**, and **broke out in**) contain three words(a verb, an adverb, and a preposition). All phrasal prepositional verbs take an object ( me, you, my body); therefore, they are always transitive verbs. These verbs are also inseparable transitive verbs.

## 1.4- A sample of multi-word verbs:

English has a large number of multi-word verbs including prepositional verbs ( allow for, add to) ), phrasal verbs( break off, bring up ) and phrasal-prepositional verbs

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( come down with, get away with) , so this section provides only a short list for each verb category .The verbs also illustrate their meaning.

### **Phrasal verb**

Bring up =raise (a child)

Break down = stop working

Call off = cancel

Cut off = disconnect

Find out = discover

Give up = stop ( doing)

Look up = research

Make out = understand

Pick up = collect

Set up = arrange or establish

Set off = start ( a journey)

Settle down= live in one place

Turn up =arrive( unexpectedly)

Talk round = persuade

Turn on = start a device

Work out =find the answer

### **Prepositional verbs**

Believe in = have faith in

Belong to = be owned by

Care about = consider important

Deal with =be concerned with

Get over = recover from

Run into = meet ( by chance)

Suffer from = experience illness or pain

### **Phrasal –prepositional verbs**

Come up with = suggest

Come down with = become ill

Cut down on = reduce the amount of

Drop out of = leave school / program

Get along with = have a good relationship

Look up to = Admire someone

Run out of = have no more of

Stand up for = defend

### 1.5- Conclusion

The researcher has argued that multi-word verbs are made of a simple verb and one or more particles( a verb + a preposition or an adverb or both) . They are classified into three types that are phrasal verbs ( a basic verb with an adverb), prepositional verbs ( a basic verb with a preposition) and phrasal-prepositional verbs ( a basic verb with both an adverb and a preposition) . The phrasal verbs fall into two basic types. The first type is called a transitive verb that needs an object to complete its meaning. The transitive verb also subdivides into separable transitive phrasal verbs and inseparable transitive phrasal verbs. The second type is called an intransitive verb that does not need an object to complete its meaning. The prepositional verb is a combination of a verb and a preposition that always stays together as one unit. The preposition must have an object that must follow the preposition. The phrasal- prepositional verbs have three parts that are a basic verb + adverb+ preposition. Finally, the researcher has concluded with a sample of multi-word verbs with their meaning.

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