

**SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF PHRASAL VERBS FEATURING “UP” IN ROBINSON CRUSOE
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Annotation: This paper delves into the semantic analysis of phrasal verbs with the particle “up” in Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe. Phrasal verbs, known for their versatility, are a key feature of the English language. This study explores both their literal and figurative meanings, as well as their polysemous nature, offering insight into how Defoe skillfully uses these expressions to enhance the narrative. By analyzing selected examples from the novel, the paper highlights the multifaceted nature of “up” particle phrasal verbs, revealing how they convey ideas of completion, direction, emphasis, and multiple meanings in different contexts. The research not only examines the linguistic function of these expressions but also underscores their significance in enriching the thematic depth of the text. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader understanding of language use in literary works, focusing on the nuanced role of phrasal verbs in Robinson Crusoe.

Key words: Phrasal verbs, semantic analysis, Robinson Crusoe, literary studies, English language, figurative meaning, literal meaning, polysemy, phrasal verb usage

INTRODUCTION

As today’s advancements in technology and global connectivity continue to shape our world, English plays an integral role as a bridge for people around the world, giving opportunities to communicate, share cultures and knowledge, while strengthening human bonds. It is also no secret that English is one of the languages that is the central focus of study and research by many linguists and scholars. It stands out with its rich and diverse vocabulary, along with its grammatical structures, phonetic elements, and stylistic devices.

One of English’s distinct and challenging features, which also adds beauty to it, is phrasal verbs. Because of their wide use, they are very important to master when learning the English language. However, they pose a lot of difficulties for language learners due to their connotative meanings. Phrasal verbs consist of a verb and a particle, which can be a preposition or an adverb, and together they create a new semantic unit that differs from the meaning of each separate word. These lexical units can also involve various meanings across different contexts, as they have a polysemous feature. For instance, the phrasal verb “turn down” can be interpreted as “reject,” “reduce,” or “decrease,” depending on the context. This proves that exploring these units, especially their semantics, is one of English’s relevant tasks.

Likewise, this article aims to analyze the semantics of phrasal verbs in a literary context, and the “pearl of 18th-century literature,” Robinson Crusoe by well-known writer Daniel Defoe, has been chosen to conduct this research. The novel stands out for being rich in linguistic elements, especially phrasal verbs. The writer used phrasal verbs skillfully and extensively to describe the character’s adventures, difficulties, inner states, as well as broad themes like isolation, fighting for survival, resilience, and depicting England’s social structures, such as the slave-master relationship and financial matters. It should be noted that only phrasal verbs with the particle “up” have been selected for this study. The phrasal verbs with the “up” particle make up a large portion of the text, and exploring their semantic analysis has been considered the main objective of this research.

Literature Review

Phrasal verbs are a key part of the English language and have attracted considerable interest from researchers and linguists for many years. Numerous studies have been conducted to explore their versatility and significance in English. To understand the term “phrasal verb” and its evolution, it’s useful to briefly examine its origins.

Linguist Stephan Thim notes that phrasal verbs have been the focus of linguistic attention for around three centuries, even though the term itself only emerged in the early 20th century. It first appeared in Smith’s *Words and Idioms* (1925), where Smith mentions that the term was suggested to him by Dr. Bradley (Smith, 1925, p. 172). Looking at their origins, phrasal verbs can actually be traced back to Old English, although they were rare at the time. These early expressions typically appeared as prefixed forms, with the particle attached to the front of the verb, a structure different from today’s usage. For example, “bærnan” (to burn) and “forbærnan” (to completely burn). During this period, the “up” particle was used primarily to indicate “upward movement,” and the meaning of “completion” had yet to develop (G.J.M. Lamont, 2005). As English evolved, a shift occurred from the old word order (Object + Verb) to the modern (Verb + Object). This change facilitated the formation of phrasal verbs. The transition to placing the verb in the second position allowed for the separation of preverbal elements and particles, significantly shaping the form and meaning of phrasal verbs (S. Thim, 2012, p. 316) (B. Capelle, 2017).

Phrasal verbs have also been widely used by writers throughout history. For example, the famous playwright William Shakespeare is estimated to have used over 5,744 phrasal verbs in his works during the Early Modern English period (<https://bit.ly/3Zjabom>). Similarly, the 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe* is noteworthy for its extensive use of phrasal verbs. These expressions not only add depth to the language but also help convey complex ideas and emotions.

Various studies have focused on the syntax and grammatical structures of phrasal verbs, with researchers such as A. Sroka and R. M. W. Dixon contributing significantly to this field. Mélodie Garnier and Norbert Schmitt (2015) further explored the complex semantic nature of phrasal verbs and made important discoveries. As part of the PhaVe List project (Phrasal Verb Pedagogical List), they compiled a list of the 150 most commonly used phrasal verbs and developed strategies to teach them more effectively. Their findings highlight that phrasal verbs are often polysemous, meaning their meanings change depending on context. For example, the phrasal verb “go on” is listed in the *Collins Cobuild Phrasal Verbs Dictionary* (2012) with 22 distinct meanings. This wide range of uses can make phrasal verbs particularly difficult to learn. To address this, Garnier and Schmitt emphasize the importance of mastering the most basic and commonly used meanings of phrasal verbs first, as this can reduce confusion and enhance language learning. Their research also provides valuable linguistic tools to help learners understand the contextual and multifunctional nature of these expressions. In addition to semantic studies, research on the frequency of phrasal verbs in language use has also yielded interesting findings. Linguist Liu (2011) analyzed the most frequently used phrasal verbs in British and American English, while Gardner and Davies (2007) studied the distribution of phrasal verbs across different corpora, achieving noteworthy results. According to their research, phrasal verbs are crucial to both written and spoken language, and understanding their frequent use can significantly improve language proficiency.

While the role of phrasal verbs in language has been extensively studied, their use in literary works remains mostly unexplored. This paper aims to delve into the semantic functions of phrasal verbs, focusing on their usage in *Robinson Crusoe*.

Methodology

This research focuses on analyzing the semantic functions of phrasal verbs with the particle “up” in Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. The study will adopt a qualitative approach, concentrating on how these phrasal verbs contribute to the themes and characters in the novel. First, phrasal verbs containing the particle “up” will be identified through a close reading of the text. Each instance will be examined in its context to understand its meaning, both literal and figurative. Special attention will be given to the polysemy of these verbs, considering how their meanings shift depending on the situation. The analysis will focus on categorizing these phrasal verbs according to their semantic roles and how they express different ideas or emotions, such as action, completion, or intensity. Secondary research on the role of phrasal verbs in literature will be referenced to support the interpretation of these verbs in *Robinson Crusoe*.

Semantic analysis of “Up” particle phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs consist of a verb and a particle, where the particle may be a preposition (e.g., go on), an adverb (e.g., turn up), or both (e.g., put up with). Together, these components create a new meaning that is often distinct from the sum of their individual parts. Phrasal verbs frequently exhibit both literal and figurative meanings. When used in literal sense, their meaning can typically be deduced from the meanings of the verb and particle in isolation. For example, in the phrase stand up, the meaning aligns closely with the physical action of standing in an upright position. However, in their figurative sense, phrasal verbs acquire more abstract or idiomatic meanings, which may not be immediately apparent, such as stand up for, meaning to defend or support a cause or person. This duality of meaning phrasal verbs a particularly rich and complex area of study, especially in terms of their semantic flexibility across different contexts

Literal meaning

The literal meaning of phrasal verbs is usually straightforward and non-idiomatic, where the meanings of the verb and the particle can be interpreted based on their usual definitions. Their involvement in the novel *Robinson Crusoe* adds depth and richness to the narrative, making the novel more dynamic and relatable.

Here are some examples of their usage in the novel: it should also be noted that only phrasal verbs with the up particle have been selected for analysis.

Examples of Literal Usage of “Up” Phrasal Verbs in *Robinson Crusoe*

(a) “.... and I could easily perceive that the goats had gone in and eaten up the corn.”The particle “up” can often indicate the idea of bringing something to completion or finishing it entirely (M. McCarthy, F. O’Dell, 2017, p. 30-200), as it also conveys the idea of consuming completely or finishing off in this context. Here, the novel’s protagonist, Crusoe, describes the goats eating all of the corn.

(b) “... that he could not stand up upon his feet – he tried to do it two or three times, but was really not able, his ankle was so swollen and so painful to him.”The phrasal verb “stand up” means to rise to a vertical position. It should also be noted that here “up” conveys direction. In the context, Crusoe uses it to describe someone who cannot get back on their feet because of injury or pain, expressing how the character is in harsh conditions.

(c) “He did not see the kid I shot at, or perceive I had killed it, but ripped up his waistcoat to feel whether he was not wounded.”In this example, Crusoe describes a character’s reaction to checking for wounds as he rips up his clothing due to urgency and distress in the situation. The phrasal verb “rip up” refers to tearing something open forcefully.

- (d) “Went to the wreck, and with the crow made way into the body of the wreck, and felt several casks, and I loosened them with the crow, but could not break them up.”Phrasal verbs are really intriguing yet complex parts of English. For example, “break up” can have different meanings, such as ending a relationship, etc., but here it is used in its literal sense, meaning to split something into pieces. As can be understood from the context, Crusoe is trying to open the casks to access whatever they might hold.
- (e) “I found three very good Bibles, which came to me in my cargo from England, and which I had packed up among my things.”“Pack up” usually means gathering or organizing belongings, as it describes Crusoe’s reflection on how he had stored these Bibles among his supplies.
- (f) “For example, if I killed a goat abroad, I could hang it up in a tree, flay it, dress it, and cut it in pieces, and bring it home in a basket.”The context gives the thought of Crusoe’s way of slaughtering the animal and preserving meat for survival. “Hang up” means suspending something, typically in a way that keeps it off the ground. McCarthy and O’Dell also include this phrasal verb in the meaning of completing something (2017, p. 30-200).
- (g) “At the same time it happened, after I had laid my scheme for the setting up my tent.”The phrasal verb “set up” is used to indicate organizing or arranging something. Here, in the protagonist’s context, it is used to describe the preparations he makes for putting his tent in a place, setting up a shelter to establish a living space.
- (h) “Beyond where my wall joined to the rock was filled up with the large earthen pots which I have given an account.”The particle “up” here also conveys the idea of completion, referring to completing or occupying a space entirely. In this case, his wall area becoming filled with large pots can be understood.
- (i) “... the trees were torn up by the roots, and a terrible storm it was.”In this example, Crusoe emphasizes the destructive power of the storm, which uprooted the trees by using “tear up,” which means ripping or pulling something apart forcefully.
- (j) “Friday stepped up close to him, clapped the muzzle of his piece into his ear, and shot him dead.”Crusoe portrays Friday’s bold and confident move when confronting an enemy. Here, “step up” means to approach or take decisive action.

So, looking at the above examples, it is clear that it is impossible not to applaud Defoe’s mastery in skillfully using phrasal verbs throughout the novel. However, the phrasal verbs in the context provided above are used in a literal sense, as their meanings can be understood from their separate parts. The particle “up” also conveys and adds various meanings to these phrasal verbs, such as completion, direction, or intensity, enriching the text’s semantics.

Figurative Meaning

As we mentioned above, phrasal verbs can have figurative meanings, and now this is where it starts to become complicated. For instance, if you have no idea what give up means, it is really difficult to guess its meaning—surrender or abandon—just by looking at give and up. These versatile linguistic constructions not only challenge students but also teachers. There have been many studies that help them teach with effective methods (R. Ch. Herra, 2013; A. Kurtyka, 2001; N. Condon, 2008; R. A. Thyab, 2019).

Phrasal verbs are versatile linguistic constructions that combine verbs and particles, where the particle can shift between literal and figurative meanings. Understanding these figurative uses is crucial for grasping the depth and flexibility of the English language. Now, let’s look at how Defoe used them in a figurative sense by analyzing up-particle phrasal verbs in their context in the novel.

Examples of Up Particle Phrasal Verbs in Figurative Meaning:

In the sentence, (1) “I gave him a dram (out of our patron’s case of bottles) to cheer him up,” the phrase cheer up refers to improving someone’s mood or making them feel better. It’s used figuratively to suggest comforting or lifting someone’s spirits.

Similarly, in (2) “to see if there was no creek where I might lay up my frigate in safety,” lay up figuratively means to secure or store something safely, especially when referring to a ship. It is considered figurative because the meaning they convey is far from the meaning lay and up give individually. Here, Crusoe is looking for a safe place to anchor his ship, a metaphor for ensuring security.

(3) “I worked my mind up, not only to a resignation to the will of God,” uses work up figuratively to mean gradually building up one’s thoughts, emotions, or attitude towards something—in this case, reaching a state of acceptance or resignation.

In both (4) “plucking up my courage” and “plucking up my spirits,” pluck up refers to the act of summoning inner strength or determination. Crusoe uses it figuratively to describe how he forces himself to act bravely or regain his composure.

(5) In “at last I began to wake more perfectly...and started up in the utmost consternation,” start up is used figuratively to describe a sudden reaction, in this case, a fearful or startled response to an unexpected sound or realization.

As well as in the next example (6) : “... but now, having cast up the days above, I found I had been there a year;” In this context, the phrasal verb “cast up” is used figuratively. Crusoe is not physically throwing or casting anything upwards; instead, he is “casting up” or calculating the number of days he has spent on the island. The phrase refers to the act of adding up or tallying the days. This use of “cast up” shows how the phrasal verb can convey an abstract action, rather than its literal meaning of physically throwing something upward.

From the examples, you can see that phrasal verbs are really versatile and Defoe used them effectively to portray his characters’ emotions, thoughts, and actions in intricate detail.

Polysemous Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs can indeed be polysemous, meaning they often carry multiple meanings depending on the context in which they are used. This characteristic adds depth and flexibility to the language, but it also presents challenges for learners who must navigate the various interpretations and uses of a single verb phrase. According to research, the most frequent phrasal verbs can have an average of 5.6 different meanings (Gardner & Davies). This high degree of polysemy underscores the versatility of phrasal verbs in English.

However, this also means that mastering phrasal verbs involves more than simply learning fixed word combinations; learners must understand the range of meanings a phrasal verb can take, from literal to figurative interpretations. For example, clear up can refer to both physical cleaning or organizing (literal) and the figurative act of explaining or resolving a situation. The polysemy of phrasal verbs enriches communication but also demands careful attention to context to grasp the intended meaning. Defoe, in his novel Robinson Crusoe, utilized this feature extensively. Here are some examples:

(a) “I endeavoured to clear up this fraud to my man Friday”: In this context, “clear up” means to explain or clarify something. This is a figurative use because it refers to making a situation or understanding clearer, not a physical act of cleaning or removing something. However, in (b) “But

towards night the weather cleared up”: Here, “cleared up” refers to improving or becoming clearer (in terms of the weather). This is also figurative, but in a more literal sense, as it describes the weather changing for the better. However, “clearing up” can also be used figuratively in other contexts, such as resolving a situation.

(a) “I wanted nothing that he could fetch me, nor any company that he could make up to me...”: Here, “make up to me” refers to the action of offering or providing companionship. It’s not about physically “making” something but offering social or emotional fulfillment. Also, in(b) “Into this tent I brought all my provisions, and everything that would spoil by the wet; and having thus enclosed all my goods, I made up the entrance, which till now I had left open...”: In this case, “made up” refers to the physical act of closing or sealing something, specifically the entrance of the tent. It is understood from the context that Crusoe is closing the entrance. But in the next example(c) “Seignior,” said I, with as much Spanish as I could make up, “we will talk afterwards, but we must fight now...”: “Make up” refers to the protagonist’s action of formulating or assembling the ability to speak Spanish, not physically making something.(d) “That He could fully make up to me the deficiencies of my solitary state, and the want of human society...”: “Make up to me” here means compensating or fulfilling the emotional or social needs, rather than a physical creation.

Here are more examples:

(a) “In the meantime I fitted myself up for a battle as before”: In this context, “fitted up” means preparing or equipping oneself, likely by donning protective gear or gathering weapons for a battle. It suggests Crusoe’s physical readiness for action.(b) “For this purpose, that I might do everything with discretion and consideration, I fitted up a little mast in my boat, and made a sail too out of some of the pieces of the ship’s sails which lay in store...”: Here, “fitted up” refers to assembling or constructing something. Crusoe is setting up his boat by installing a mast and making a sail, which is an act of preparing or equipping the boat for a journey or use.In both examples, “fitted up” refers to the act of preparing, equipping, or setting something up, whether it is for a physical battle or for practical use in the form of a boat’s sail and mast. The phrase can imply either the process of arranging equipment or the act of getting oneself ready for an undertaking.

The next example:

(a) “We had not gone half over the plain when we began to hear the wolves howl... as regularly as an army drawn up by experienced officers.”: In this context, “drawn up” describes the wolves being positioned in an organized formation, similar to how military officers arrange soldiers in a line. It refers to the visual image of the wolves being aligned or arranged deliberately. But in(b) “Then I sent for a notary, and caused him to draw up a general release or discharge...”: Here, “draw up” means to compose or prepare a formal document. The notary is tasked with creating an official and detailed legal agreement. Similarly,(c) “And I drew up the state of my affairs in writing.”: In this example, “draw up” refers to Crusoe writing or summarizing the details of his situation in a formal and organized manner, likely for record-keeping or communication purposes.

In all three cases, “draw up” implies an act of arrangement or formal preparation. While the first is about physical positioning (of wolves), the second and third are about drafting or organizing written content. The meanings align with the phrasal verb’s common uses but differ slightly in application based on context.

Context plays an integral role in showcasing the diverse meanings of phrasal verbs. Their polysemous nature enriches the language, offering a range of interpretations that depend heavily on the situation in which they are used.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the semantic analysis of “up” particle phrasal verbs as they appear in Robinson Crusoe, highlighting their dual role in literal and figurative meanings, as well as their polysemous nature. The findings reveal the significant contribution of phrasal verbs to the novel’s richness and linguistic complexity, with several key insights emerging from the analysis: The literal meanings of phrasal verbs are often straightforward and easy to deduce from their individual components. The particle “up” frequently conveys the ideas of “completion” or “direction.” For instance, “eat up” implies consuming something completely, while “stand up” refers to rising to a vertical position. The figurative meanings of phrasal verbs in the novel add depth and layers to the text, with context playing a crucial role in interpreting their abstract or idiomatic nuances. For example, “tear up” does not only refer to ripping something apart but also evokes the destructive force of storms or emotional devastation. This polysemous nature showcases the flexibility of phrasal verbs and Defoe’s skill in using them effectively.

This study has not only shed light on Defoe’s mastery of phrasal verbs but also underscored their semantic adaptability within literary contexts. Future research could build on this work by examining other particles or exploring the use of phrasal verbs in literature beyond Defoe’s works, offering a broader perspective on their role in language and narrative.

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