

## Pinning down some facts and nonfacts about phrasal verbs

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There are many truths and falsehoods surrounding combinations such as *cheer up*, *fool around*, *stress out*, etc., known as *verb-particle combinations* or *phrasal verbs*. In this talk I will attempt to separate fact from fiction in some of the grammatical analyses of these fascinating constructions:

- **nonfact:** particles tend to be syntactically superfluous and semantically redundant;
- **fact:** particles play an important grammatical role: they can be expanded into full-fledged particle phrases, can have a significant impact on argument structure, and typically form the semantic centre of gravity;
- **nonfact:** spatial particles differ from full PPs only in that they lack an overt complement NP; all particles can actually be most economically analyzed as intransitive prepositions;
- **fact:** even spatial particles cannot always be 'reconstructed' as full PPs, and they differ from full PPs in their syntactic distribution and, in some cases, in their aspectual effect;
- **nonfact:** the placement of the particle vis-à-vis a direct object ultimately depends on their relative processing cost: whichever is easiest to process (e.g. because of previous mention) comes first;
- **fact:** many other factors play a role in particle placement, including frame-semantic expectedness of the whole event;
- **nonfact:** non-spatial *up* has a telicizing aspectual effect; what's more, *all* particles are telicizers;
- **fact:** particles can have a variety of aspectual meanings, both telic and atelic ones; (a)telicity, however, is never the sole semantic impact of the particle;
- **nonfact:** phrasal verbs are (always) phrasal structures, generated by a syntactic rule;
- **fact:** a recent neurolinguistic study suggests that phrasal verbs, at least frequently used ones, are stored and retrieved as lexical units.

What should emerge from the discussion is not only a picture of phrasal verbs as combinations which require a nuanced and careful grammatical description but also the recognition that we should abandon certain preconceived theoretical views on grammar in general:

- **nonfact:** lexical items cannot be broken up, as per the Lexical Integrity Principle;
- **fact:** some lexical items can frequently be encountered in a discontinuous shape;
- **nonfact:** the distinction between the lexicon and syntax is artificial—there is only a single large "construct-i-con" for words and larger stored units (cf. Construction Grammar);

- **fact:** the above-mentioned neurolinguistic study hinges on the observation that words and syntactic sequences trigger *opposite* different brain responses; a distinction between lexicon and syntax should therefore be maintained, even if some multi-word structures appear to be lexical;
- **nonfact:** the lexicon only contains elements whose form cannot be predicted from their meaning or whose meaning cannot be predicted from their form; put differently, the lexicon is made up of single words and all exceptions to grammar;
- **fact:** the lexicon also contains structures whose form and meaning fully match up.

Note: the talk will be in English, but I will welcome questions asked in French.