UP THE PHRASAL VERB LADDER: A CORPUS LINGUISTICS STUDY ON PRODUCTION OF METAPHORICAL PHRASAL VERBS BY BRAZILIAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Abstract: Classroom experience and examination of Brazilian learners` relatively low production of English Phrasal Verbs in general brings to language teachers the impression that these constructions are regarded by learners as highly idiomatic and very difficult to acquire. This paper investigates production of metaphorical phrasal verbs with the particle 'up' by Brazilian Upper-Intermediate students through research in a learner corpus; results point out to seeming dominance of metaphorical phrasal verbs in the corpus, a feature passive of further discussion.

Key-words: learner corpus, phrasal verb, metaphorical, production

The amount of difficulty experienced by Brazilians in learning English is sometimes increased by the degree of difference between both learners` L1 (mother tongue) and target language. One example is that languages like Spanish and Portuguese are verb-framed languages, which provide the path in the verb, and usually do not provide information on the manner unless relevant. English, on the other hand, is a satellite-framed language, which provides the information of how the motion event was realized (manner) through the verb, and the direction or location (path) of the motion is provided by another element in the sentence (Slobin, 1996. In: Littlemore 2009:17).

Vázquez (2008), when analyzing verbs of motion in an English learner corpus of L1 speakers of satellite and verb-framed languages has shown that learners whose mother tongue is verb-framed tend to transfer this feature to the target language when writing in English. Considering that the core of verbal structure between Spanish/Portuguese and English differs considerably, it is likely that one of the most unpopular language structures among English language learners in Brazil are multi-word constructions such as phrasal verbs, combinations of a verb and a particle that seem to behave arbitrarily.

Relevant research in Cognitive Linguistics regarding the behavior of particles includes the work by Rudzka-Ostyn (1988, 2003), Boers (1996), and Tyler and Evans (2004), who provide a syntactic/semantic analysis of particles and prepositions based on mental concepts of spatial notion that extend to the field of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson,1980, 2003). In the case of phrasal verbs, the particles would go beyond their literal meaning and extend to conceptual metaphor in order to create another possible meaning. In addition, Dirven (2001b) and Kurtyka (2001) discuss how the combination conceptual metaphor and particles/prepositions can be applied to the didactic environment. On the practical side of the matter the study by Yasuda (2010) can be

pointed out as a successful attempt to investigate whether approaching the teaching of phrasal verbs through conceptual metaphors improves Japanese learners` acquisition.

Corpus Linguistics researchers have also attempted to direct studies towards phrasal verbs, metaphor and cognitive linguistics issues. Gries (1999) explores a corpus to support his argument that constructions involving verb + particle are built differently according to the degree of consciousness the user attributes to the entities in the process, an idea challenged by Dirven (2001a), who argues that constructions of literal phrasal verbs may behave according to Gries` theory but more metaphorical phrasal verbs do not.

Other studies that are worth mentioning include the publication by Deignan (2005) of a volume that presents an account of Corpus Linguistics` contribution to cognitive metaphor theory; as well as a particular piece of research by Alejo-González (2010), identifying that speakers of satellite-framed languages use phrasal verbs with the particle "out" more frequently than speakers of verb-framed languages. He reached these results through the use of Corpus Linguistics, more specifically the learner corpora ICLE (The International Corpus of Learner English) developed by the Université Catholique de Louvain. Considering that research on Brazilian learners` production of metaphorical phrasal verbs seems to be quite relevant for the teaching and acquisition of such structures, this study firstly attempts at investigating the following question:

1- Do Brazilian Upper-Intermediate learners of English produce more literal or more metaphorical meanings of phrasal verbs (PVs) with the particle 'up' in their writing?

The attempt to answer this question required the establishment of a continuum that would classify PVs ` meanings from the most metaphorical to the most literal. Dirven (2001a:10-14) proposes a network that is based on the analysis of the verb and/or the particle being literal or figurative: Verb Literal and Particle Literal (VLPL); Verb Literal and Particle Figurative (VLPF); and Verb Figurative and Particle Figurative (VFPF).

The methodology used

The search for the learners` texts was carried out in the CoMAprend learner corpus, a project developed by the University in São Paulo (USP), under the supervision of Professor Stella Tagnin and in partnership with another learner corpus in Brazil, the BrICLE from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP). CoMAprend is a compilation of narrative, descriptive and argumentative texts mostly in English; there are instances of German, French, Italian and Spanish texts as well, with

student production from regular undergraduate courses and extracurricular on campus courses at USP (Tagnin and Fromm, 2008).

The second tool to be used in this study was AntConc, a corpus analysis toolkit designed by Laurence Anthony (Anthony, 2004) that is equipped with a concordancer, frequency generators for words and keywords, tools for cluster and lexical bundle analysis, as well as a word distribution plot.

The chosen text genres in this study were the narrative and the argumentative ones, for the reason that they appeared to be the most representative for learners of English given the higher quantity of words (almost 100,000 word tokens). The procedure involved downloading all the argumentative and narrative texts in the CoMAprend corpus to a txt format, and transferring the files to AntConc. In previous research done with the CoMAprend corpus (Fadanelli, 2011), the particle 'up' appeared as the most frequently used by the corpus participants, and since it figured among the most common particles found in the BNC (British National Corpus) according to Gardner and Davies (2007:350), this particle was chosen for this study. During the analysis, every hit had to be examined to check whether it really belonged to the category of PV or if it was part of another category of words (like the noun 'make up').

Only the PVs with the particle 'up' under the following criteria were selected for analysis:

1- The PV had to present at least one literal feature and one metaphorical feature in the continuum proposed by Dirven (2001a).
2- The PV had to have been originally produced by a participant of the corpus, instead of citing a piece of literature or a TV program.

After that, all the instances containing PV + up particles that agreed with the previous criteria were analyzed and separated into a table with the PV continuum established by Dirven (2001a).The last step was to count how many instances of each category occurred.

Results

27 verb + up combinations were found in the corpus. Out of these, 6 PVs were eliminated from the selection, because they were not in accord with the criteria mentioned in section 5.4.2 in chapter 5, leaving 21 PVs to be analyzed. Table 1 displays the separation of the found PVs according to the most and less metaphorical categories .

Concerning the number of PV tokens, results show PVs with the particle 'up' appearing about 45% of times in their fully metaphorical meaning, and about 32% with the verb in a more literal meaning and the particle in a more metaphorical meaning; fully literal meanings accounted for about 23% of occurrences in the learner corpus. Regarding the number of PV types, fully metaphorical meanings (VFPF) account for over 60% of

occurrences, with VLPL and VLPF`s types rate equally distributed at around 18% each. However, when looking into frequency of occurrence of each PV type within its VLPL, VLPF and VFPF group of meanings, it is tentative to affirm that 66% of VLPL and VLPF meanings occur twice or more in the corpus (4 PVs occurring twice or more divided by the total of PV types for each meaning, 6, multiplied by 100) and only 25% of VFPF meanings occur more than twice (5 PVs occurring twice or more divided by the total of PV types for each meaning, 20, multiplied by 100).

Considering PV types produced by corpus writers, the majority was found to be VFPF meanings (60%) with VLPF and VLPL meanings equally distributed roughly around 18% each. This data points to a much more massive production of PV types in their fully metaphorical meanings, a rather positively surprising result considering speakers of English as a Foreign Language whose L1 is verb-framed, contrasting with results found by Alejo-González (2010).

On the other hand, this outcome might be challenged by observing that even though PV types with metaphorical meanings were found more often, the greater majority of them occurred only once in the whole corpus. Could one generalize the production of a PV type to a larger group when it appears only once in the corpus? The frequency of occurrence of some PV types with VLPL and VLPF meanings appears to be higher than PV types with VFPF meanings when analyzing the total of each group: 1/3 versus 1/4.

The second and certainly more polemic possibility would refer to a point to be discussed: can we consider the production of VLPF meanings more stimulated by the literal piece of the PV? If that were the case, the scenario would slightly change in favor of more literal meanings: they would represent 55% of occurrences in the corpus against 45 % of metaphorical ones; a feeble difference of usage, though.

Table 1: PVs separation into Dirven`s (2001a) continuum

Verb lit + Particle lit	Verb lit + Particle fig	Verb fig + Particle fig
Pick up = lift sth up from a particular place with your hands- 1 Go up = vertical movement – 4 Put up = place in higher position - 1 Get up = get from a down to an upright position - 9 Grow up = become an adult – 6 Stand up = be in an upright position-2 **Total of PV tokens =23** **Total of PV types = 6**	Made up = form or constitute - 3 Wake up = become conscious again – 23 Sum up= briefly state what has been said - 3 Clear up = tidy or put something away – 1 Keep up= continue increasing at the same speed - 1 Start up=organize or arrange a business - 3 **Total of PV tokens =34** **Total of PV types = 6**	Make up one`s mind - 16 Wake up = become aware – 1 Give up= stop doing or believing in something – 5 Pick up = collect someone from a particular place - 1 Pick up = get better - 1 Go up=extend to a particular point – 1 Put up = stick or fasten to a wall – 1 Bring up = mention - 1 Hold up = continue doing something – 1 Take up = use an amount of time - 1 End up = do something unintentionally – 7 End up = be in a particular place unintentionally – 2 Sum up = represent - 1 Clear up = give a satisfactory explanation to something – 1 Cover up = hide the truth from others - 1 Screw up = cause something to fail or go wrong – 2 Come up = about to happen or take place – 1 Crack up = laugh - 1 Show up = arrive at a place - 1 Stand up (for) = defend - 1 **Total of PV tokens = 47** **Total of PV types = 20**

Total of selected PV token instances: 104 Total of selected PV types: 42

Total of word types in the corpus: 1008   Total of word tokens in the corpus: 99561

All in all, neither of the interpretations was able to reveal weighty discrepancies between the production of PV tokens and PV types with more literal or more metaphorical meanings; on the contrary, the majority of possible interpretations point to larger incidence of more literal meanings. This characteristic found may generate fuel for more research, perhaps using a combination of different corpus with a higher number of words. The production in the corpus was strictly related to the themes imposed to writers of the texts in CoMAprend; investigating the production of PVs with the particle 'up' and other particles in different contexts could prove a fruitful study. The importance of discovering whether learners show a balanced production of literal and metaphorical PVs in different contexts justifies itself by how useful for teachers this information may be, whether to prepare lessons or to design and select PV teaching materials specific for the needs of Brazilian learners.

References

- Alejo-González, R. (2010). 'Making sense of phrasal verbs: A cognitive linguistic account of L2 learning'. **AILA Review** 23 (1) 50-71

- Ant Conc toolkit available at Laurence Anthont`s homepage: http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/software.html Last access April 2011

- Boers, F. (1996). *Spatial prepositions and metaphor: a cognitive semantic journey along the up-down and the front-back dimensions.* Tübingen: Narr.

- British National Corpus (BNC). Available at http://bncweb.lancs.ac.uk Last access April 2011.

- CoMAprend Learner Corpus. Available at http://www.fflch.usp.br/dlm/comet/comaprend.html Last access April 2011

- Deignan, A. (2005). *Metaphor and Corpus Linguistics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins B. V.

- Dirven, R. (2001a). 'English Phrasal Verbs. Theory and didactic application.' In: Pütz, M., Niemeier, S. & Dirven, R. (eds). *Applied Cognitive Linguistics II: Language Pedagogy.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

- Dirven, R. (2001b) 'The metaphoric in recent cognitive approaches to English phrasal verbs'. Metaphorik.de, 1.
  Retrieved from http://www.metaphorik.de/01/dirven.htm

- Fadanelli, S. (2011). *A Corpus Study on Brazilian Learners` Usage of English Phrasal Verbs.* Essay written for the Corpus Linguistics subject in the University of Birmingham.

- Gardner, M. and Davies, D. (2007) 'Pointing out frequent phrasal verbs: a corpus-based analysis.' **TESOL Quarterly** Vol. 41, No. 2

- Gries, S. (1999). 'Particle Movement: a Cognitive and Functional Approach'. **Cognitive Linguistics**, 10 (2), 105-145

- Kovecses, Z., & Szabo, P. (1996). 'Idioms: A view from cognitive semantics'. **Applied Linguistics**, 17, 326–355.

- Kurtyka, A. (2001). 'Teaching English Phrasal Verbs: a cognitive approach.' In: Pütz, M., Niemeier, S., Dirven R. (eds). *Applied Cognitive Linguistics II: Language Pedagogy.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. Pp. 29-54

- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

- Littlemore, J. (2009). *Applying Cognitive Linguistics to Second Language Learning and Teaching.* Basingstoke: Palmgrave Macmillan.

- Rudzka-Ostyn, B. (1988). "Semantic extensions into the domain of verbal communication". In: Rudzka-Ostyn, B. (ed.). *Topics in Cognitive Linguistics*, 507 ff.

- Rudzka-Ostyn, B. (2003). *Word power phrasal verbs and compounds: A cognitive approach.* Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter.

- Tyler, A. and Evans, V. (2004). 'Applying Cognitive Linguistics to Pedagogical Grammar: The Case of Over.' In: Achard, M. and Niemeier, S. (eds.). *SOLA Studies on Language Acquisition.* Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

- Vázquez, M. M. (2008). 'Constructions in Learner language'. **Clac - Círculo de lingüística aplicada a la comunicación**, 36. Available at http://www.ucm.es/info/circulo/no36/marvaz.pdf

- Yasuda, S. (2010). 'Learning Phrasal Verbs Through Conceptual Metaphors: A Case of Japanese EFL Learners.' **TESOL Quarterly**, 44 (2), 250-273.