PHRASAL VERBS AND PROGRESSIVE ASPECT

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Abstract. *This paper deals with the specific combinations of verbs and particles known as phrasal verbs, analyzing them with regards to the progressive aspect. The analysis is based on a corpus containing frequent and illustrative examples of phrasal verbs with particles down, out and on. The author considers the interaction between the semantic features and the progressive aspect markers of verbs in various sentential contexts, as well as the effect of the particles on the aktionsart category of the verbs. Three English informants gave their opinion on the grammaticality of the examples and offered their interpretation. The paper concludes with some general remarks concerning the findings on possible interpretations of the progressive.*

Key words: *English, phrasal verbs, progressive aspect, aktionsart, telicity*

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the paper is to illustrate the use of the progressive aspect with regard to phrasal verbs, and to offer an interpretation of the meanings of the progressive in different sentential contexts.

The research is based on a corpus containing 30 phrasal verbs, which include combinations of verbs and particles *down*, *out* and *on*. The author's goal was not to give a comprehensive survey, but simply to indicate some issues and problems that might be encountered in the analysis of this complex matter. Given the scope of the paper outlined in this manner, the number of phrasal verbs chosen for the corpus should provide relatively fair grounds for investigation. The corpus is composed of the frequent and illustrative examples of phrasal verbs. It includes only clear cases – those that meet most of the syntactic and semantic requirements proposed by Anastasijević (1968: 58-63) and Bolinger (1971: 4-22). The sources of the examples containing phrasal verbs are various monolingual dictionaries of phrasal verbs (mainly *Cambridge Phrasal Verbs Dictionary*), different online sources (mainly the *British National Corpus* web-site) and literature on phrasal verbs and on aspect. Three native speakers of English (an English high school teacher

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and a journalist, both from Sydney, Australia, and a foreign language instructor, working at the Department of English Language, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad) gave their judgment on the grammaticality of examples and offered their interpretation.

1.1. The progressive aspect in English

According to Comrie (1976:3) "aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation". He defines perfectivity as an aspectual category which "indicates the view of a situation as a single whole, without distinction of the various separate phases that make up the situation" (Comrie 1976: 16), and imperfectivity as an aspectual category which "looks at the situation from inside, and as such is crucially concerned with the internal structure of the situation" (Comrie 1976: 4). Progressiveness implies the combination of progressive meaning and nonstative meaning. More specifically, the English progressive indicates a contingent situation: "this would subsume progressive meaning itself, and also the use of the Progressive to indicate a temporary (contingent) state, and its use to indicate a contingent habitual situation" (Comrie 1976: 38). However, as any account of the progressive aspect shows, not every verb in English can be used with the progressive – "the interaction of verb semantics and aspect markers is clearly central to overall aspectual meaning" (Brinton 1988: 38). The analysis of the progressive aspect would, thus, have to include both the syntactic and the lexical features of the verb, as well as the interaction between these two features.

Since "the progressive aspect views a situation as ongoing or developing and as being continuous and incomplete in the time frame considered" (Brinton 1988: 39), such intrinsic temporal features of a situation as non-dynamicity and punctuality (aktionsart[1] qualities) are incompatible with the progressive. In other words, states and achievements do not normally occur in the progressive.[2]

With regards to the opposition of telicity/atelicity, the /+telic/ feature is not always a part of the lexical meaning of the verb in English, but is introduced at the level of phrase. With the progressive aspect, atelic and telic situations are seen as ongoing and incomplete respectively.

1.2. Semantic features of particles – particles as /+telic/ markers

Since an adverbial particle and a verb proper form semantically and functionally a single unit, it is important, from the point of view of aspectual analysis, to take into account the effect of the particle on the character of the situation referred to by the verb. According to Bolinger (1971: 85-7), any phrasal verb particle, in its basic meaning, must contain two features: motion-through-location and terminus or result. This provision imposes a constraint on the compatibility of certain verbs with particles that meet these two requirements. Namely, while verbs such as *go*, *build*, *eat*, that imply change of state or motion, can combine freely, phrasal verbs are not found with stative verbs such as *know*, *hope*, *resemble*, which are not compatible with the notion of motion.

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[1] Zeno Vendler's classification (Vendler 1967, in: Novakov 2002: 15-23) of aktionsart categories into states, activities, accomplishments and achievements is one of the best known and most widely used.
[2] There are occasions when states and achievements are used progressively. In such cases, there is a shift in the perception of the situation – non-dynamic states are referred to as if dynamic, whereas punctual achievements are interpreted either as repeating themselves, or as a preparation for the realization of a permanent situation.

With regards to the "resultative" meaning of phrasal verbs, Brinton (1988: 182) argues that it derives from a combination of semantic focus and aspect under which the situation is viewed and is not an intrinsic part of the phrasal verb. She believes that the notion of result must be distinguished from that of telicity, noting that particles "may add the concept of a goal or an endpoint to durative situations which otherwise have no necessary terminus" (Brinton 1988: 168). In this respect, the particles are responsible for the change in the intrinsic nature of a situation and, as a result, the phrasal verb is seen as belonging to a different aktionsart category than that of the verb proper: *climb* (Activity: +dynamic, +durative, -telic) → *climb down* (Accomplishment: +dynamic, +durative, +telic). In cases where the verb proper is punctual, rather than durative, and /+ telic/, the particle re-emphasizes the endpoint, without affecting the aktionsart category: *find* (Achievement: +dynamic, -durative, +telic) → *find out* (Achievement: +dynamic, -durative, +telic).

Although particles contribute to the notion of an endpoint or a goal, they do not give any information about the attainment of the endpoint or the realization of the goal.

2. PHRASAL VERBS WITH DOWN

The first group of phrasal verbs that is analyzed consists of a verb proper and the particle *down*. This particle is highly productive and has a number of additional meanings, other than the two basic ones (the motion-through-location and the goal).

Break down

(1) a) The growing co-operation between tax authorities in recent years, made easier by a web of international treaties, hardly suggests the arm's length system is breaking down.
  b) Our second-hand motor bike was always breaking down.

With both *break down* and especially with *burn down*, the particle contributes, besides the endpoint, to the negative, destructive point of view (cf. Live, as cited in Brinton 1988: 244). In the example 1a, the focus is on the process, the progressive depicts action as ongoing, with the goal not realized. In the example 1b, the action in the progressive has an iterative reading, in which the goal is reached on numerous, sporadic occasions. This interpretation is permitted by the frequency adverb *always*. There is also a hint of speaker's disapproval.

Burn down

(2) a) A house is burning down; it contains an intellectual and a chambermaid which one should we save first?
  b) They were burning down their own community.

Burn is an activity verb converted into an accomplishment by the particle *down*. In the example 2a, the action expressed in the progressive is ongoing and incomplete. In the example 2b, without any additional information (a reference point – time adverb, another action), the native speakers feel that the possible interpretation is twofold. The action could be, on the one hand, seen as ongoing, progressing towards its goal, but not reaching it, if the plural subject implies that each individual is in the process of performing the action simultaneously with others. Or it could, on the other hand, be seen as repeated and

completed, if the plural subject implies that each person, individually, completed the goal of burning down his or her own community.

Chase down

(3) a) FBI are chasing down information in a number of states in new enquiries.
     b) In my dream last night Freddy Krueger was chasing me down, his knives raised menacingly.

Chase down is an accomplishment (durative *chase* is attributed the feature of goal). In the example 3a, the native speakers' interpretation is that the action denoted by the progressive verb is iterative: several agents complete the task of chasing down different information in numerous states. The action in the example 3b is incomplete and ongoing in the given time frame (the ongoing process which was progressing towards the goal, but did not reach it).

Close down

(4) a) On the grimmer side, the national health service, which only weeks ago was apparently closing down vital wards, said this week that it was fully prepared to look after thousands of war casualties.
     b) Museum Overholland is closing down as we speak.

Down adds the feature of telicity to the verb *close*. In the example 4a, the feature of goal is neutralized by the unspecified plural noun phrase *vital wards* (c.f. Novakov 2005: 102-106). In that respect, *close down* is an activity and the progressive aspect expresses an ongoing action within the given time frame. In the example 4b, the progressive indicates that the action is ongoing in the point of speech and that the goal is not reached.

Hand down

(5) As he was handing down the sentence, Judge Faulkner noted Mr. Stout admitted to driving an unmarked sheriff's car at an unsafe speed placing Stacy Moody, then 15, in a potentially dangerous situation.

Hand down is an achievement. In the example 5, the native speakers' interpretation is that the construction is used to indicate that the situation in the non-progressive (*note*) took place simultaneously with the action in the progressive (*hand down*). In examples similar to this one (achievement in the progressive), as Novakov (2005: 114) argues, the situation is not presented as a structure but as a preparation for the realization of a permanent situation.

Put down

(6) a) Hopefully, however, the Full Moon in Aries on the 14th will bring this dreary little phase or cycle to an end and many a Leo will be moving in, moving out and putting down new roots elsewhere.
     b) Her glance travelled to Hawkins who was putting down his mug and standing up.

Down directs the attention to the final point of the punctual action *put*. In the example 6a, the action in the progressive has an iterative meaning, made possible by the plural subject; the action is completed. In the example 6b, the native speakers feel that the focus

is on the process, not on the attainment of the goal of the action; there are three simultaneous actions (*travel*, *put down* and *sit up*).

Settle down

(7) a) Her husband had just finished the day's work at his butcher's shop and they were settling down to supper.
   b) The kids were so excited – I was settling them down again for over an hour.

In this phrasal verb, the endpoint condition supplied by the particle *down* is a decrease and complete cessation of the action. The action in the example 7a is incomplete and in the process of diminution. The action in the example 7b is iterative (this reading is permitted by the plural object *them*).

Slow down

(8) a) The other point is that Japan has, for the next decade anyway, an easy way of expanding its labour force even though population growth is slowing down.
   b) The horses were slowing down.

Similar to the effect the particle *down* has in the previous set of examples (*settle down*), the meaning of *down* is that of a decrease of the rate of action, but without the implication of eventual termination. In examples 8a and b the progressive is used to suggest that this process is ongoing within the given time frame.

Stand down

(9) a) The Conservative MP announced that he would be standing down at the next election.
   b) After 14 years in office the state's Republican governor, Mr Jim Thompson, is standing down.

Poutsma (as cited in Brinton 1988: 244) argues that *down* in *stand down* focuses on the initial point of the action. In examples 9a and b, *stand down* is highly idiomatic (*resign a position in favour of someone else*). The native speakers' interpretation is that the progressive in both sentences refers to an action that is ongoing and incomplete within a particular time frame.

Write down

(10) a) And then, there were those small, folded sheets on which he was writing down the things he knew about himself.
    b) He was writing down the name of the next week's guest star, when they made the announcement.

In the example 10a, the accomplishment *write down* in the progressive is repeated, the endpoint is attained (this interpretation is permitted by the specified plural object). In the example 10b, the action is incomplete and simultaneous with the action in the non-progressive.

3. PHRASAL VERBS WITH OUT

Combinations of a verb proper and the particle *out* comprise the second set analyzed. According to Anastasijević (1968: 109), *out* usually has an effective, or a resultant meaning, directing the attention to the final point of the activity, or to the goal that is to be realized. It can also, to a lesser degree, indicate duration or continuation.

Carry out

(11) a) He claimed that he was blameless because he was merely carrying out instructions.
       b) The agency is carrying out a survey of people's attitudes to the disabled.

Out represents the endpoint of the action – *carry out* is an accomplishment. In the example 11a, the native speakers' interpretation is that the unspecified plural object, in a combination with the progressive aspect, neutralizes the endpoint of the action, which is, thus, seen as ongoing and in progress in the given time frame. In the example 11b, the action is ongoing and incomplete.

Cry out

(12) a) Attending on the battlefield to a wounded soldier who was crying out with pain, he took the soldier's hand in his.
       b) You know you were crying out in your sleep?, he asked.

Out draws attention to the endpoint of the activity *cry*. The native speakers feel that the result of the combination is a punctual, dynamic and telic phrasal verb. In this respect, the progressive in examples 12a and b refers to a repeated situation (a series of repeated cries of pain and several outbursts, respectively).

Die out

(13) a) Traditional grocers' shops are dying out fast.
       b) *That woman is dying out fast.

Die is an achievement, and so is *die out*. In this phrasal verb, *out* contributes to the meaning of "gradability": to *die out* is to die completely, which is only possible if the subject is a plural count noun, a mass noun or a collective noun. In the example 13a, it is, thus, possible to express an ongoing action which did not reach its resultant condition within the time frame indicated. The native speakers' interpretation of the example 13b is that it is ungrammatical because an individual's dying is not gradable.

Fade out

(14) The lights are fading out.

In the example 14, the action in the progressive is seen as not having reached its endpoint *out*, and is, therefore, incomplete, and in progress at the point of speech.

Fill out

(15) For example, you're filling out a questionnaire in a magazine and one question is…

Fill out is an accomplishment. The action expressed in the progressive in the example 15 is incomplete and ongoing.

Find out

(16) a) She was finding out many new things that Baby would never know of.
   b) *She was finding it out.
   c) Importers are finding out that the construction of the tariff law is not as liberal as they hoped for.

Find out is an achievement verb (it is punctual, dynamic and telic; the punctual nature of the verb is re-emphasized by the particle). Because of the specified plural object in the example 16a, the native speakers' interpretation is that the action expressed in the progressive is iterative. Otherwise, the sentence is ungrammatical (the example 16b) –the singular object prevents iterative meaning. In the example 16c, there is also a reading of iterativity (because of the plural subject).

Give out

(17) a) His strength was giving out.
   b) He let the bike ride, face lifted, up to the sky that was giving out stars as the earth put on flowers.
   c) Is that radiator giving out any heat?

In the example 17a, the particle *out* establishes the endpoint or the goal for the activity *give*. In this example, once his strength gives out, there will be none left (in this respect, the progressive indicates that the action is ongoing and that the goal is not reached). In the example 17b, taking into account the unspecified plural object, the goal of the action in the progressive is neutralized, the activity is in progress. In the example 17c, *give out* is idiomatic, and has the meaning *to produce*. Because of the unspecified mass noun *heat*, the goal is, again, neutralized, and *give out* is an activity. The progressive expresses that the action is ongoing and continuing.

Go out

(18) a) The fire is going out.
   b) A spokeswoman said the letters were going out, inviting people to apply for voluntary redundancies, although the exact number was not yet known.
   c) We had been going out for years; he was more like a brother, than a boyfriend.

In examples 18a and b, *out* represents the endpoint of the activity *go*, turning it into an accomplishment. In the example 18a, once the fire goes out, it will stop burning; accordingly, the progressive aspect indicates that the action is incomplete. In the example 18b, the plural specified subject allows the iterative reading – the action is completed and repeated. In the example 18c, *go out* is highly idiomatic and means *to have a romantic relationship*; the progressive is used to imply a habitual activity within a limited period of time.

Set out

(19) a) As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
   b) Elsewhere, friends and foes alike were setting out into the great world to win a name and place for themselves.

In examples 19a and b, *out* has a literal resultant condition meaning (*He set out and he was out*). In the example 19a, the action in the progressive was developing towards its goal until it was interrupted by the action in the non-progressive. In the example 19b, the action in the progressive is completed and repeated (permitted by the plural subject).

Work out

(20) a) How do you think the system is working out at present?
     b) Nowadays, it's as if she is always working out in the gym.

Out establishes the endpoint for the activity *work*, turning it into an accomplishment. In examples 20a and b, the action in the progressive is ongoing and incomplete. In the example 20c, the action in the progressive refers to a habitual activity, which is ongoing within the given time frame. There is also some emotional colouring because of the frequency adverb *always* – a hint of speaker's disapproval.

4. PHRASAL VERBS WITH ON

The third set of phrasal verbs is composed of the combinations of a verb proper and the particle *on*. Bolinger (1971: 107) remarks that *on* has a specific meaning of motion, namely that of "remaining in view" and being "horizontal", differing from the previous two particles by expressing "continuation" or duration. He notes that *on* cannot occur with *be,* nor can it have the same resultant feature as other particles (*off*, *up* and *over*, for example).

(21) I spurred them on, *and they were on. (Bolinger 1971: 89)

Be requires a complement which refers to a resultant state, whereas the particle *on* refers to a "condition of steady motion" (Bolinger 1971: 89). In that respect Brinton (1989: 175) argues that *on* makes an aspectual distinction, rather than an aktionsart distinction – it portrays "a situation which may otherwise have stopped as continuing, or it portrays the situation as repeated". As evidence for this claim, she notes the restriction of this particle with states (as in the example 21), and the fact that two continuative/iterative aspect periphrases themselves contain the particle *on*: *go on* V-*ing* and *keep on* V-*ing*. "Phrasal verbs with *on* are often interchangeable with such periphrasis and the corresponding simple verb" (Brinton 1988: 175).

However, if *on*, as Brinton believes, does make an aspectual distinction, it would, consequently, affect the speaker's view of the internal temporal constituency of a situation (c.f. Comrie 1976). In terms of Comrie's definition this does not happen – *on* does not focus the speaker's consideration of the situation on the internal structure. On the contrary, the particle *on* seems to be more concerned with the given nature of the event and should perhaps be analyzed as an element which adds the feature of duration or iterativity to the inherent meaning of the event. Finally, if the /+telic/ feature is present with phrasal verbs with the particle *on*, it is added at the level of clause.

Babble on

(22) a) In that second, while Jinny was babbling on about Joe, the boy looked her straight in the eyes and spoke soundlessly, his lips shaping a single word.

    b) The conductor was babbling on good-naturedly about long train   journeys but Donna scarcely heard what he said.

Babble is a punctual verb and as such cannot be continued (cf. Brinton 1988: 175), so the function of *on* is to express an iterative situation. In examples 22a and b, verbs are atelic and the progressive denotes that the action is in progress and simultaneous with the verb in the non-progressive.

Carry on

(23) a) Sensationally, The Smiths would not be carrying on as a band at all.
       b) And all that time her husband was carrying on with Olga Jones next door!
       c) The children have been carrying on all day.

The example 23a is the least idiomatic – *on* contributes to the interpretation of the action as continuing. The examples 23b and c are idiomatic, the meaning of *on* is no longer semantically additive to the verb proper: in the example 23b, *carry on* means *to have an affair*, in the example 23c, *carry on* means *to behave in an excited and uncontrolled way*. It is the native speakers' belief that the progressive in all three examples conveys that the action is ongoing, developing, that there is a focus on the situation as a structure.

Come on

(24) a) Meanwhile Nigel's installations were coming on apace.
       b) How's your new novel coming on?

In examples 24a and b, the native speakers feel that *on* strongly contributes to the notion of improvement, besides the general notion of continuation. In both examples, the action in the progressive is ongoing.

Get on

(25) a) She was getting on with her work, and doing fine.
       b) How are you getting on with the painting?
       c) Kate and I were getting on great.

In this set of examples, there is a difference in the semantic opacity of the phrasal verb: the example 25a is the least idiomatic and means *continue doing something*. Examples 25b and c are more idiomatic (25b – *to deal with a situation, esp. successfully*, 25c – *be friendly*). Regardless of the idiomaticity, the progressive is used to express an ongoing action in all three cases.

Hang on

(26) a) Later, they told me my body just went up in the air and I was hanging on by one hand.
       b) Before his last throw of the dice he had been hanging on at Etten in hopes of a visit from Mauve, who had half promised to come.

In the example 26a, the particle *on* is literal, whereas the combination in the example 26b is more idiomatic and *on* implies the notion of "continuation" (*not leaving, remaining*). In both cases, the native speakers' interpretation is that the progressive depicts an ongoing action.

Hurry on

(27) a) He looked down at the two hands locked onto his arm and then at the small
         man who was hurrying on ahead, and realized …
     b) On no account should it be regarded as something through which the travel-
         lers pass quickly while they are hurrying on to the next destination.

Hurry is an activity verb. The particle *on* contributes to the "continuing" meaning of
the phrasal verb. In examples 27a and b, the action in the progressive is ongoing and si-
multaneous with the action in the non-progressive.

Live on

(28) For grandparents, a grandchild is a continuing dividend from their original
investment of love, as well as a stake in the future: a part of them that will be living on,
long after they are gone.

On contributes to the meaning of continuation. In the example 28, the action in the
progressive is in progress during and around a particular point in time (in this case, a par-
ticular point in the future).

Move on

(29) a) At the beginning of the twentieth century, the fashion photography was
         really moving on.
     b) Phrases such as "out of date" and "old fashioned" suggest that we are always
         moving on to better things.

In the example 29a, *on* has an additional meaning to that of "continuation" – it also
implies the notion of positive progress; the progressive depicts the action in progress at a
specified point in the past. In the example 29b, *on* has a clear meaning of continuation –
the native speakers' interpretation is that the progressive, together with the frequency ad-
verb *always*, implies a habitual activity that is repeated or sporadic.

Push on

(30) a) They are pushing on with their campaign for improved childcare facilities.
     b) Miss Logan did not break her alarmed silence; she merely followed her em-
         ployer who was pushing on ahead up a gully of rock.

In this phrasal verb, *on* emphasizes the continuative meaning of the activity *push*. In
the example 30a, the action in the progressive is ongoing at the point of speech. In the
example 30b, the action in the progressive is ongoing and simultaneous with the verb in
the non-progressive.

Tick on

(31) a) Let me remind you that the clock is ticking on.
     b) Yet as the mind and heart are ticking on, we remember those that are gone.

Tick is a punctual verb. The result of its combination with the particle *on* is a phrasal verb
which expresses an iterative situation. In the example 31a, the native speakers' interpretation
is that the action in the progressive denotes iterativity, as well. In the example 31b, the verb
in the progressive is ongoing and simultaneous with the verb in the non-progressive.

5. CONCLUSION

The goal of the paper was to analyze phrasal verbs, a highly productive occurrence in the English language, with respect to the progressive aspect. The conclusion based on the analysis of phrasal verbs in the progressive, given in context, is that the progressive aspect is not incompatible with phrasal verbs.

The paper included a research on phrasal verbs with the particles *down*, *out* and *on*. Semantic features of the particles were considered, and the general conclusion that particles mark telic aktionsart was noted. This provision proved crucial in the aspectual analysis of phrasal verbs. It was also noted that *on* contributes to the specific meaning of motion and does not mark telic aktionsart. With durative situations which would otherwise have stopped, *on* denotes continuation, and with punctual situations which are incapable of continuing, *on* denotes iterativity.

In cases of durative phrasal verbs where the /+telic/ feature is present, the action in the progressive is seen as progressing towards its goal, without having reached it, or, with plural subjects, the action may be seen as iterative. In the case of an unspecified plural/mass object, the goal is neutralized. With achievements, the use of the progressive is either to imply simultaneity with another, non-progressive action, or to indicate an iterative situation (with a plural subject, or a specified plural object).

With respect to the statement that the progressive implies a combination of progressive meaning and nonstative meaning, there is a restriction of the progressive aspect with aktionsart categories of achievement and state, since they cannot be presented as a structure. Phrasal verbs that express achievements have a specific interpretation in the progressive – they either present a situation as repeating, or they denote a preparation for the realization of a permanent situation. Since phrasal verbs do not appear with states, the restriction of the progressive cannot be analyzed. Finally, phrasal verbs that express accomplishments and activities have no restrictions – the situation in the progressive is presented as a structure.

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FRAZNI GLAGOLI I PROGRESIVNI VID

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Rad se bavi naročitim kombinacijama glagola i partikule, poznatim pod nazivom frazni glagoli, i analizom njihovog značenja u progresivnom vidu. Analiza se zasniva na korpusu koji obuhvata frazne glagole s partikulama down, out i on. Autorka razmatra interakciju semantičkih odlika fraznih glagola i markera progresivnog vida u raznim rečeničnim kontekstima, kao i uticaj partikula na tip glagolske situacije. Gramatičnost primera je proveravana s engleskim informantima, koji su ponudili i objašnjenje značenja. Rad se završava navođenjem opštih zaključaka po pitanju moguće interpretacije fraznih glagola u progresivnom vidu.

Ključne reči: *, frazni glagoli, progresivni vid, tip glagolske situacije, obeležje cilj.*