Particles in English phrasal verbs: The case of up

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to analyze the potential effect of the most frequent particle up on the aspect and aktionsart categories of the verbs. We will explore at which percentage the main verb suffers the aspeccual and/or aktionsart change induced by this particle. The (statistical) analysis will be performed on the corpus provided from the modern British literature so that it can reflect the contemporary state in this field.

Keywords: adverbial particle, phrasal verb, aspect, aktionsart, telicity

1. Introduction
The aim of the paper is to illustrate the impact that particle up has on lexical verbs in different sentential contexts. The (statistical) analysis will be performed on the corpus provided from the modern British novels by Julian Barnes. A corpus database includes six novels by the author and it consists of 218 examples of the sentences having the finite verbal forms with particle up.

This study focuses on phrasal verbs (two-part combinations of a lexical verb and an adverbial particle) investigating some significant issues related to the various ways in which the particle up can influence the aspeccual and aktionsart properties of the verb to which it is added. For this purpose we used the general definition of aspect given by Comrie (1976: 3) stating that “aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation”. According to Comrie perfectivity “indicates the view of a situation as a single whole, without distinction of the various separate phases that make up the situation” (ibid.: 16), while imperfectivity “looks at the situation from inside, and as such is crucially concerned with the internal structure of the situation” (ibid.: 4).

The particle itself can also affect the character of the verbal situation referred to as aktionsart. According to Comrie (1976), the distinction between aspect and aktionsart is
drawn in at least the following two quite different ways. The first distinction is in the fact that aspect is the “grammaticalisation of the relevant semantic distinctions, while aktionsart represents lexicalisation of the distinctions, irrespective of how these distinctions are lexicalised; this use of aktionsart is similar to the notion of inherent meaning” (ibid.: 6-7). The second distinction, which is that used by most Slavists, is “between aspect as grammaticalisation of the semantic distinction, and aktionsart as lexicalisation of the distinction provided that the lexicalisation is by means of derivational morphology”.

Telicity, stativity and duration are the features on the basis of which Vendler (1967) formulated his best known and widely used classification of aktionsart categories into states, activities, accomplishments and achievements (widen by a class of semelfactives (Smith 1991). The particles’ impact on lexical verbs’ aktionsart has been connected mainly to the feature of telicity (the existence of a goal). As Novakov implied, “this goal could be indicated by the presence of the direct object, adverbial particle or other syntactic elements” (Novakov 2008: 52). The telicity of particles can be diagnosed in several ways, thanks to Verkuyl’s (1972) and Brinton’s (1988) work on telic aspect (for example, for X time/ in X time test; the adverbial phrase for X time expresses duration (atelic), whereas in X time indicates that the action or event has an endpoint (telic)).

Now we will mention some crucial hypotheses that will be checked further in the text. One of the popular hypotheses about the function of particles is whether the particles function as markers of perfective aspect or as modifiers of the lexical meaning of main verbs.

Regarding the resultative meaning of phrasal verbs Brinton distinguishes the notion of result 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). Brinton also claims that “verb particles in Modern English function as markers of telic aktionsart” (Brinton 1985: 158), i.e., that “an atelic situation can be made telic by means of verbal particles such as out, off, about, etc.” (Kardela 1997: 1483).

Cappelle (2005 underlined and supported Brinton’s claim that not all particles are markers of telicity. Several particles (on, along, and away, for instance) can express iterative aspect or continuative aspect. Moreover, some typically telic particles (down, off,
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(out and up) do not always yield a telic event, depending on the possible addition of adverbials of the for X time type.

State verbs like know, hope and resemble are not usually followed by the particles, as Fraser (1976, Bolinger (1971 and Brinton (1985) observed proving particles’ telic nature. Bolinger observes that particles may occur with be, have, and other normally stative verbs when they are in fact non-stative or when the particles refer to a resultant condition. “In general, the aktionsart category of state is incompatible with the notion of goal inherent in particles. States are durative and begin and end, but they cannot lead up to a conclusion or climax; they involve no change or progression” (Brinton 1985: 165).

Finally, I should also mention that the countable/uncountable qualities of subjects or objects have long been recognized to influence verbs’ aspectual meaning. Brinton claims that “if the argument of the phrasal verb is either a mass noun, a collective noun, or a plural count noun, the particle may contribute a distributive or iterative aspectual meaning to an achievement verb” (Brinton 1985: 165).

1.1 Methodology

Now that we have defined all the key terms in this study and that we have summarized the recent research in this field, we will deal with the aim of the paper: how a particle may change the aspectual and aktionsart properties of the verb that does not contain the particle in question.

To discuss these categories, we used a general classification of lexical verbs by Vendler explained above (activity-Vact, state-Vst, accomplishment-Vacc, achievement-Vach, semelfactive-Vsem). The analytical procedure started by classifying every verb with the particle up according to its aspectual and aktionsart type based on the above mentioned diagnostics. That classification was performed by placing each verb in the minimal syntactic frame in order to minimize the effect that other sentential components could have on the aspect of the sentence. However, this procedure induced the observation that some verbs can take different aspectual interpretations when they are found in different contexts. The verbs of this kind (bring, get, put, set and take) observed

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1 See Mourelatos 1978: 424-431.
in the corpus were classified as ambiguous (Vamb) stating that in that minimal syntactic frame it is indecisive which aktionsart group these verbs belong to.

Having been classified according to their aspectual and aktionsart type, each isolated verb phrase was then surveyed together with the other sentential elements in the examples. The comparison of aspectual and aktionsart properties of each sentence was performed in order to estimate how the presence of particle \textit{up} affected the structure of the sentence.

2. Discussion
In this section we will present the results of our analysis.

2.1 Telicity of phrasal verbs with particle \textit{up}
Firstly, we investigate the impact that this particle has on the nature of a situation and we conclude that the majority of phrasal verbs from the corpus belong to a different aktionsart category from the lexical verbs without the particles (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexical verbs $\rightarrow$ Phrasal verbs with particle UP</th>
<th>Number of examples</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity $\rightarrow$ Achievement</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity $\rightarrow$ Accomplishment</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement $\rightarrow$ Achievement</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambiguous $\rightarrow$ Accomplishment / Achievement</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semelfactive $\rightarrow$ Achievement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity $\rightarrow$ Activity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishment $\rightarrow$ Accomplishment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State $\rightarrow$ Achievement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Table 1. Aktionsart category of verbs combined with UP}

As we suspected, most of the lexical verbs belong to activities and they keep their aktionsart category in only 5.2% of examples retaining their activity features (+duration, -stativity, -telicity). Mostly, these activity verbs become achievements (57.8%) or accomplishments (37%), as we can see in Table 2.
Table 2. Activity verbs combined with UP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity lexical verbs → Phrasal verbs with particle UP</th>
<th>Number of examples</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>57.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity → Accomplishment</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity → Activity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It means that in 94.8% of the examples with originally activity lexical verbs, the particle up adds an endpoint to an atelic verb phrases, i.e. changes the feature /-telicity/ into /+telicity/. These data (including examples of perfective, imperfective and perfect aspect) contribute the Brinton’s claim that particles function as markers of telic aktionsart (the numbers in brackets refer to the novel numbered in SOURCES and to the page respectively):

(1) And then he would leave an extra big tip because he’d left his indelible mark, this was what he’d been saving up for and he’d had it and the girl hadn’t actually gone psychotic on him. (1: 173)

(2) I cut them down to the ground and then dug up the roots. (4: 119)

(3) Christianity, which cleared up the old Jewish doctrinal dispute about whether or not there was life after death... (6: 130)

However there are still 5.2% of activity verbs that do not change aktionsart category when the particle up is added, i.e. they retain the feature /-telicity/:

(4) If he was chatting up a girl at a party, he’d go off to fetch some drinks and free his hands by tucking his lighted cigarette into his beard. (1: 39)

(5) You feel you are standing up straight for the first time in your life; (3: 233)

(6) She was, as the phrase goes, trading up. (4: 15)

(7) She had turned her whole body in his direction and was gazing up towards him, gravely, lovingly. (5: 200)

So it was necessary to examine these verbs and their sentential context in order to deduce why they do not conform to the pattern of behaviour shown by most of the verbs.
Having surveyed the examples we concluded that most of the verbs in the sentences with neutralized telicity belong to progressive aspect. The compatibility between progressive aspect and activity aktionsart (dynamicity and duration) is best explained by the Brinton’s claim (1988: 39) that “the progressive aspect views a situation as ongoing or developing and as being continuous and incomplete in the time frame considered”.

For instance, in example (7) the endpoint condition supplied by the particle up should represent the completion of an action, i.e. up adds the feature of telicity to the verb gaze. But, in this example gaze up is an activity since the progressive aspect expresses an ongoing action within the given frame. Or, in example (4) the particle up should establish the endpoint or the goal for the activity chat. But in this example, the progressive indicates that the action is ongoing and that the goal is not reached; therefore, the action in this example is incomplete, and in progress at the point of speech. Finally, with the progressive aspect, atelic situations are seen as ongoing and phrasal verbs that express activities present the situation as a structure.

The neutralization of telicity is also observed under the specific syntactic conditions in the progressive aspect. The action of durative phrasal verbs with plural subjects may be seen as iterative or in the case of an unspecified plural/mass object, the goal is neutralized. The following examples illustrate progressive aspect combined with unspecified plural object causing the action in the progressive to be seen as progressing towards its goal, without having reached it, i.e. the goal is neutralized:

(8) And while we’re clearing things up: Terri. (4: 114)
(9) Mummy’s out and Daddy’s digging up carrots in Lincolnshire. (4: 152)

Example (8) illustrates activity verb clear converted into accomplishment by the particle up. But in this example, the feature of goal is neutralized by the unspecified plural noun phrase things. In that respect, clear up is an accomplishment whose feature of telicity is neutralized by the progressive aspect.

A further 16.6% of phrasal verbs in which the particle up does not change activity aktionsart are in non-progressive aspect. The lexical verbs in these examples were thus investigated semantically. It was deduced that they all convey the meaning of maintaining a situation or body position through/in space (hover). The particle up appears merely to
makes explicit what is already lexically stated in the verb (hover up) inducing that semantics of the lexical verbs significantly influences these phenomena. For example:

(10) The hungry eye **hovers up** her stout jugful of brushes, her bottled solvents – xylene, propanol, acetone – her jars of vivacious pigment, her special picture restorers cotton wool which with teasing banality turns out to be mere Economy Pleat from Pretty. (2: 113)

An atelic interpretation of the rest of the examples is explained by the combination of non-progressive aspect of phrasal verbs and the adverbials of the *for X time*:

(11) He said OK rewrite them, so I **held** things **up** for an hour and at the end of it he said he wasn’t convinced. (3: 208)

### 2.2 Particle up with state verbs

The corpus also proved Brinton’s claim related to the particles’ non-occurrence with state verbs confirming that the particles do not mark perfective aspect. The explanation of the only state verb combined with particle *up* observed in the corpus tells in favor of particle’s telic nature.

(12) Still, if he **didn’t own up**, at least put stop to it. (5: 123)

The state verb *own* has its basic meaning *possess*, but it was not the meaning used in the example (12). Manifesting the semantic notion of *confess* in this particular example, it implies the change of state or motion so the lexical verb *own* demonstrates the dynamic interpretation (activity) providing the compatibility with the particle *up*.

### 2.3 Particle up with accomplishment and achievement verbs

Sometimes the basic lexical verbs share the matching semantic element with the particle *up* they combine with, as is the case in *straighten up*, making the particle seemingly redundant. Following inherently telic events, the particle *up* in these cases, however, is not redundant considering its function of stressing the endstate of that telic event and accentuating the effectiveness of the action. Regardless of whether the basic lexical verbs are accomplishments or achievements i.e. */+telic/* (total 29.8%), our research results
(Table 1) prove that the particle *up* does not have any impact on the aktionsart category of these verbs.

(13) They kissed a little awkwardly, as if neither of them had expected to kiss; and then Ann firmly *folded up* the map. (1: 61)

(14) The Argus *clewed up* her sails and lay on to their starboard, half a pistol shot away. (3: 126)

The majority of these *up* combinations convey the notion of completion and finishing.

In cases when achievements are used progressively, the action is perceived as progressing towards its goal, without having reached it. Moreover, followed by an unspecified plural/mass object, the goal of these achievements is neutralized, or these achievements may be seen as iterative if preceded by plural subject (or followed by a specified plural object) as in this example:

(15) One she *was* taking me to school each morning and *picking* me *up* each afternoon, and the next she was being lowered into the ground. (4: 200)

### 2.4 Phrasal verbs with particle *up*, aspect and telicity

As we can see in Table 3, phrasal verbs with particle *up* are mostly telic (96.9%). That feature is obtained by adding the particle *up* to atelic verbs (63%) or it is retained and intensified by adding the particle *up* to telic verbs (33.9%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Act→Acc</th>
<th>Act→Act</th>
<th>Ach→Ach</th>
<th>Sem→Ach</th>
<th>St→Ach</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atelic→Atelic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telic→Telic</td>
<td></td>
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<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atelic→Telic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63%</td>
<td>110</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Phrasal verbs with particle *up* and telicity*
As we know, the description of verbal situations is comprehensive provided the influence of verbs’ arguments is included. In addition to that, (grammatical) aspect significantly influences the interpretation of particle’s function in phrasal verbs. Except for above mentioned interaction with progressive aspect, phrasal verbs also interact with the perfect or perfective aspects. Viewing a situation as a single whole, perfective aspect with telic phrasal verbs expresses the attainment of the endpoint. Imperfective aspect, however, expressing the internal structure of the situation views telic phrasal verb situations as ongoing and incomplete:

(16) The little one – Sophie – was growing up, she was asking all the questions little ones ask. (4: 98)
(17) This chap grew up, tried to forget it, couldn’t, and twenty years later tracked down the ... carer who’d done it to him. (4: 182)

A perfective telic situation in example (17) implies attainment of the terminal point of that situation – the repeating actions of growing up were completed at the specific time. The imperfective form (example (16)), however, carries no such implication denoting that Sophie had not completely grown up at the time referred to.

The perfect aspect perceives a situation in respect to its resultant state. Regarding phrasal verbs’ telicity, the perfect aspect, therefore, expresses the realization of the endpoint, i.e., the situation is completed in the past and is not currently going on, though it has some current relevance, as in the following examples:

(18) I had opened up on the course with a 67, and gradually my score was coming down. (3: 297)
(19) I think it’s a fine thing the two of you have cooked up together, that’s what I think. (4: 177)

Therefore, the interpretation of particles’ impact on lexical verbs should inevitably include grammatical aspect. Particle *up* mostly marks telicity (stating only the presence of goal as a part of the lexical meaning) but aspect further proceeds to that feature claiming that the goal is attained (with perfect or perfective aspect) or denoting ongoing and incomplete situations (with imperfective aspect).
2.5 Particle *up* with verbs of ambiguous aktionsart

While analyzing aktionsart of lexical verbs, we confronted the group of verbs (*bring, get, put, set* and *take*) whose aktionsart interpretation considerably varied in different syntactic frames, i.e., in minimal syntactic frame their aktionsart categorization is elusive.

Accompanying the verbs with ambiguous aktionsart, particle *up* manifests the same general function as with other verbs being a marker of telic aktionsart. For example:

(20) We *got up* a petition and explained certain things... (3: 18)

(21) The owner of 2041 must at some point have sold off a little plot, and this half-numbered, half-acknowledged house *was put up*. (3: 236)

(22) They haven’t been *put up* this time, and they’re not the only ones. (4: 173)

Particle *up* in example (21) functions as a marker of telicity providing the activity verb *put* with the endpoint and lexical meaning of building something in place. The features of the achievement verb *put* in example (22) have not been changed by the particle *up*; the particle only stressed the final attainment of the goal.

3. Conclusion

This study deals with the question: Which are the generalizations we can draw about the impact that the particle *up* can have on the aspectual and aktionsart structure of the verbs it combines with? The scope of this research also includes the systematic checking of (syntactic) conditions that can influence the particle’s impact on the lexical verbs. We came to the following conclusions:

1. Most of the lexical verbs belong to activities and in 94.8% of these examples the particle *up* adds an endpoint to atelic verb phrases, i.e. changes the feature /-telicity/ into /+telicity/. So, the semantic features of the particle *up* were considered, and the general conclusion that this particle marks telic aktionsart was reached.

2. Only 5.2% of activity verbs do not change aktionsart category when the particle *up* is added, i.e. they retain the feature /-telicity/ and in these examples we noticed the following:

   a) Most of the verbs in sentences with neutralized telicity belong to the progressive aspect. The temporal features of the activity aktionsart (dynamicity and duration) are naturally compatible with the progressive aspect. The neutralization of phrasal verbs’
telicity is also perceived when they are in progressive and followed by an unspecified plural/mass object, i.e., under the specific syntactic conditions.

b) A further 16.6% of phrasal verbs in which the particle up does not change activity aktionsart are in non-progressive aspect. Particle up does not bring about any aktionsart change to activity verbs if that activity verb and the particle have the matching semantic component (hover up, stake out, stare out).

c) The adverbials of the ‘for X time’ type (for an hour, for a few seconds...) combined with non-progressive aspect accounts for the rest of activity phrasal verbs with particle up yielding an atelic event.

3. The corpus also indicated that particles do not occur with state verbs except when they are used in non-stative meaning.

4. Particle up combined with accomplishment and achievement verbs stresses the endstate of these verbs, i.e. it does not affect their aktionsart category.

5. The analysis of the particles’ function in phrasal verbs should necessarily comprise grammatical aspect since the aspect proceeds to the particle’s inherent telicity claiming that the goal is attained (with perfect or perfective aspect) or denoting ongoing and incomplete situations (with imperfective aspect).

6. Following the verbs with ambiguous aktionsart (bring, get, put, set and take), particle up functions as a marker of telic aktionsart (as with other lexical verbs).

This study only partially addresses the complex issue of how the properties of the particle up are linked to the aspectual and aktionsart structure of the phrasal verbs. This linguistic field offers a wide variety of research possibilities and some of the mentioned theoretical implications are yet to be subjected to close scrutiny.

Sources


References


