

# Techniques for Interpreting Abstruse English Phrasal Verbs into Arabic

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**Abstract:** Thrush (2001) in her article *Plain English: A study of plain English vocabulary and international audiences points out that "a China Airline flight, flying in zero visibility, crashed into the side of a mountain shortly after takeoff. On the voice recorder, the last words of the Chinese pilot to the co-pilot were "What does pull up mean?" (p. 289). Likewise, Palmer (1968) indicates "the famous story of the foreigner in the train who was told to look out. Instead of realizing that LOOK OUT was a phrasal verb meaning TAKE CARE, he took it as a literal combination of LOOK+OUT and put his head further out of the window with disastrous consequences" (p. 185). These two tragic examples highlight the fact that the lack of comprehending English phrasal verbs and consequently interpreting them into other languages may lead to a painful disaster. As I already promised you, this study is considered part four and follows the other three previous published parts of the project. Since part one of the study that was entitled *Techniques for Interpreting English Proverbs into Arabic* and was published in *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies, IJLLS, Volume 1, Issue 1, 2019*, part two of the study was entitled *Techniques for Interpreting Abstruse English Idioms into Arabic* and was published in this honorable peer-reviewed journal, *Volume 8 Issue 12, December 2019*. And part three of the study was entitled *Techniques for Interpreting Abstruse English Collocations into Arabic* and was published again in this honorable peer-reviewed journal, *Volume 9 Issue 11, November 2020*. And now this is part four which is entitled *Techniques for Interpreting Abstruse English Phrasal Verbs into Arabic* published in this honorable peer-reviewed journal. Part five is going to be entitled *Techniques for Interpreting Abstruse English Fixed Expressions into Arabic* which is going to be the final part to complete the whole series. In English traditional grammar, phrasal verbs might be defined as a combination of two or three words from different grammatical categories — a verb and a particle, such as an adverb or a preposition—to form a single semantic unit on a lexical or syntactic level. Examples: *turn down, run into, sit up*. There are tens of thousands of them, and they are in everyday constant use. These semantic units cannot be understood based upon the meanings of the individual parts alone, but must be taken as a whole. In other words, the meaning is non-compositional and thus unpredictable. This study is an attempt to supply professional interpreters with the necessary techniques that can help them while doing the process of interpreting English phrasal verbs, viz. the abstruse ones, into Arabic. The data of the study are collected and analyzed from a number of well-known specific mono-lingual and bi-lingual dictionaries. They are : *Practical Everyday English: Advanced Vocabulary, Phrasal Verbs, Idioms and Expressions, Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied linguistics, Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs, Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and AL-Mawrid AL-Hadeeth : A Modern English-Arabic Dictionary*. The data analysis of this study reveals that there are many techniques can be used to help interpreters while interpreting abstruse English phrasal verbs into Arabic. These techniques are selected and graded according their own priorities.*

**Keywords:** Technique, Interpreter, Equivalence, Phrasal Verb

## 1. Introduction

Whereas Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines Phrasal verb as a group of words that is used like a verb and consists of a verb with an adverb or preposition such as *Set off, look after* and *put up with* (1995, p.1059), likewise Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture (1992, p.990) refers to the term as a group of words that acts like a verb and consists usually of a verb with an adverb and / or a preposition. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the 7<sup>th</sup> edition, points out to the term as a verb combined with an adverb or a preposition, or sometimes both, to give a new meaning (2005, p.1092). But Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied linguistics (1992, Pp. 275-76) is much more specific and indicates to the term as a verbal construction consisting of a verb plus an adverb particle. The dictionary refers to a distinction that is made between three categories of the term. They are phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs and phrasal prepositional verbs. In case the particle is stressed and can occur after the object, then it is a phrasal verb. For example, *Turn off* the light, can also be *Turn* the light *off*. But in case the particle cannot occur after the object then it is a prepositional phrase. For example, I'll *apply for* the job, cannot be \*I'll *apply* the job *for*. The third one is called phrasal-prepositional verb

consists of a verb, an adverb particle and a preposition. For example, we must *cut down on* expenses. But the dictionary denies that categorization and comes back again to assure that nowadays the term phrasal verb is often used to include all of the three categories, phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs and phrasal-prepositional verbs. According Live (1965, p. 428) phrasal verbs are "a considerable group of basic verbs, each of which, in certain of its occurrences is closely linked with a particle-adverbial or prepositional- in such a manner as to justify considering the two elements as constituting one discontinuous verb". But Shovel (1992) refers to the difficulty of comprehending the exact sense of phrasal verbs in case its elements are regarded as one unite. To quote him "a compound verb formed by one of the following combinations: (1) verb and adverb; or (2) verb and preposition; or (3) verb with both adverb and preposition. Simple combinations like *sit down* and *stand up* cause the learner fewer problems. The difficulties begin when the combination is 'Idiomatic': that is, when the meaning of combination as a whole (i.e. the phrasal verb) is different from the meanings of its separate parts (p. 5). The phenomenon has been defined in the *Dictionary of English Phrasal Verbs and their Idioms*, by McArthur and Atkins (1974) as " combinations of simple, monosyllabic verbs (*put, take, get, etc.*) and members of a set of particles (*on,*

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up, out, etc.)" (p. 5). Along these lines, McArthur (1975) points out that "a phrasal verb is formed by combining a simple verb and one of a number of particles. The result is called 'phrasal' because it looks like a phrase rather than a single word. Although it looks like a phrase, it functions as a single word. It is a unit" (p. 9). Similarly, in *The Student's Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*, Turton and Manser (1985) define a phrasal verb as "a verb which consists of two or three separate parts: *come in, run away, look forward to*, etc. With an idiomatic phrasal verb, the meanings of the separate parts tell us little or nothing about the meaning of the whole" (p. iv). By the same token, Dixon (1991) defines phrasal verbs as "a combination of verb plus preposition(s) that has a meaning not inferable from the individual meanings of verb and preposition(s), so that it must be regarded as an independent lexical item, and accorded a dictionary entry of its own" (p. 274).

#### Types of English Phrasal Verbs

There are four basic types of phrasal verbs. They are as follows:

- 1) Intransitive Phrasal Verbs.
- 2) Transitive Phrasal Verbs.
- 3) Separable Phrasal Verbs.
- 4) Non-Separable Phrasal Verbs.

Let us now discuss these four types in some more detail.

The first one goes by the name of intransitive phrasal verbs. This type does not require an object in a sentence. Without the object, the sentence still can have a complete sense. The following sentences do not require an object in them but still express a complete meaning:

- The patient *passed away*.
- When do you *get up*?
- The thief *ran away*.
- The kid is *growing up*.
- The car *broke down*.

The second type goes by the name of transitive phrasal verbs. Unlike the previous one, this type requires an object in the sentence that makes a complete meaning. For example :

- She *looks after* the child.
- They *carried on* their work.
- Please, *switch on* the light.
- They are trying to *give up* smoking.
- He *called off* the meeting.

The third one is called separable phrasal verbs whose words can be separated. For instance,

- Please *turn on* the light.
- Please *turn* the light *on*.
- I will *pick up* you from the bus-stop.
- I will *pick* you *up* from the bus-stop.
- The people requested to *cut down* the prices.
- The people requested to *cut* the prices *down*.

Finally, the fourth type is known non-separable phrasal verbs whose parts cannot be separated from one another. For example,

- They *look after* their children. Cannot be \* They *look* their children *after*.
- The flood *brought about* a huge disaster. Cannot be \* The flood *brought* a huge disaster *about*.
- I can't go out tonight because I'm *looking after* my sister's children. Cannot be \* I can't go out tonight because I'm *looking* my sister's children *after*.

## 2. Problem Statement

The problem of this paper is to find a clear-cut solution to the following question: What are the suggested applicable techniques which might help professional interpreters in interpreting abstruse English phrasal verbs into Arabic? This paper tries to investigate an answer for this problem.

Four applicable techniques have been suggested by the researcher in order to help professional interpreters to interpret English phrasal verbs into Arabic. These techniques are selected and graded according to their own priorities. They are listed as follows:

- 1) The technique of finding a formal ready-made TL equivalence.
- 2) The technique of finding a semi-formal ready-made TL equivalence.
- 3) The technique of reproduction of SL English phrasal verb.
- 4) The technique of literal simultaneous interpreting of SL English phrasal verbs into TL Arabic. This final one is better to be avoided but can be taken into consideration as a last resort.

Two basic points should be taken into consideration : firstly, these proposed techniques should be selectively graded, in other words: the first technique should be given a priority. In case it does not work, then the second one, if the second one does not work, the third one has to be applied and so on. Secondly, since the process of rendering here is interpreting, not translating, in which the former is much more difficult than the latter, all these proposed techniques should be worked out in the fastest speed and the interpreter should apply the alternatives above so quickly in his / her mind.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Data Collection

This research follows the qualitative approach for collecting and analyzing data. It investigates the techniques of interpreting abstruse English phrasal verbs into Arabic. The data of the study are collected and analyzed from a number of specific and well-known accredited mono-lingual and bi-lingual dictionaries. They are : Practical Everyday English: Advanced Vocabulary, Phrasal Verbs, Idioms and Expressions, Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs, Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English and AL-Mawrid AL-Hadeeth : A Modern English-Arabic Dictionary. The data analysis of this study reveals that there are many techniques can be applied to help professional interpreters for interpreting English phrasal verbs into Arabic. These

techniques are selected and graded according their own priorities.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

It is of paramount significance to indicate that one English phrasal verb might contain many meanings. In addition, These various meanings of one phrasal verb may sometimes contradict with each other. In such a case, this means that an interpreter may choose more than one of the suggested techniques for the required meaning of the required SL English phrasal verb and this could be carried out by comprehending the context of the required SL English phrasal verb.

As previously mentioned, the first technique suggested by the researcher in order to interpret an English phrasal verb into Arabic is bringing a formal ready-made equivalence in Arabic. For example, the English phrasal verb *Hear about* which means to hear or find out what has happened to someone. (Collins, 2016, p.2) as in following short dialogue:

A. Have you *heard about* John?  
B. No, tell me.

#### A. Unfortunately he has lost his job.

Its formal ready-made equivalence in Arabic is *سمعت عن* (same'tan) means also heard about. Another example, *look forward to* which means to wait with pleasure. (Collins, 2016, p.9) as in the following example: I am really *looking forward to* seeing Alice. Its Arabic counterpart is *يتطلع إلى* (yatatala'El).

But in case the first technique does not work or the interpreter forgets it, then he / she can go to the second technique which is finding a semi-formal ready-made TL equivalence for the required English phrasal verb. This means to bring an Arabic equivalence having the same meaning but slightly different in form and this process could be carried out in two sub-techniques: a) by deletion or b) by addition. For example, I am going to *call you up* tomorrow morning at 6 AM. Here the English phrasal verb *call up* means to telephone someone (Baalbaki, 2009, p.181) , its Arabic equivalence is *يتصل* (yatasel) means to call someone. Notice the adverbial particle *up* is deleted in TL Arabic but the meaning is still conveyed. Another example, Would you like to *come over* tomorrow, as you have got the day off? Note that it is not necessary to mention the word house here in English after the phrasal verb *come over* (Collins, 2016, p. 12), but you should do that in Arabic. That means in interpreting that sentence into Arabic, the process of addition of the word house should take place and be like this *تأتي إلى بيتي* ( ta'tielabaytee) come into my house.

In case the second technique does not work or the interpreter forgets it, then the third technique which is the process of reproduction of SL English phrasal verb can be applied. For example, the SL English phrasal verb *put off* in the following example: The match has been *put off* until next Tuesday. *Put off* in the previous example means postponed. It can be formally reproduced and interpreted into the following Arabic verb *تأجل* ( ta'jal) means delayed in Arabic. Another example, *show off* which means to show that one is very proud of one's abilities, achievements or

possessions (Collins, 2016, p.10) as in the following example: He keeps *showing off* his new car. Its Arabic equivalence is *يتباهى / يفتخر* ( yatabaha / yagtar) means to be proud. Notice the two SL English phrasal verbs: *put off* & *show off* have been reproduced formally into the Arabic equivalences delayed and be proud respectively.

In case the third suggested technique cannot be applied, the fourth and the final technique can be used but this technique have to be avoided by interpreters and be applied only as a last resort and in case it is unworkable, it is suggested not to be applied at all. For example, the following two SL English phrasal verbs *go up* and *go down* can be literally interpreted into Arabic in the following Sentence: The world is a ladder for some to *go up* and others to *go down*. Of course the phrasal verbs *go up* and *go down* in this sentence can be formally reproduced into TL Arabic *يصعد* (yaso'd) arise and *يهبط* ( yahbot) fall, i.e. applying the third technique, but they can also be literally interpreted into Arabic like: move upwards and move downwards respectively. But in case meaning is not conveyed through this final technique, then it is better be avoided.

### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that there are four suggested applicable techniques that can be used in interpreting abstruse English phrasal verbs into Arabic. These techniques are as follows:

- 1) The technique of finding a formal ready-made TL equivalence.
- 2) The technique of finding a semi-formal ready-made TL equivalence.
- 3) The technique of reproduction of SL English phrasal verb.
- 4) The technique of literal simultaneous interpreting of SL English phrasal verbs into TL Arabic. This final technique should be applied as a last resort and if meaning is not conveyed through it, it is better be avoided.

It must be noted that all these suggested applicable techniques are systematically selected and graded according their own priorities.

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