

Literality and metaphor: Completive *up* in phrasal verbs

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Summary

This paper focuses on the literal and metaphorical senses of completive *up* in phrasal verbs. It deals with the theories of blending and force dynamics in the creation of metaphors exploring the jump of the particle *up* from concrete to abstract domains.

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Orson Welles: “—Read my future for me.”

Marlene Dietrich: “—You have no future. Your future is all *used up*.”

(in *Touch of Evil*)

Introduction

We rarely become aware of the number of metaphors that have come to make up everyday speech till we pay closer attention to what we say, and how we say it. Lakoff asserts that metaphors permeate daily life, not only language but also our thoughts and actions (Lakoff & Johnson, 2001, p. 39). He even goes further by stating that our “ordinary conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff & Johnson, 2001, p.39). We can only imagine that in the beginning the metaphors of today derived from a source characterized by its literality, thus jumping from a concrete plane to an abstract one. According to Lakoff and Johnson’s theories, we process reality by means of schemes that show how we relate to our surroundings; these schema are based on vertical and horizontal dimensions, among which we find the *up-down* dimension. In those respects, Boers (1996, p.9) follows into the footsteps of the authors of *Metaphors we live by* focusing primarily on the up-down, and front-back dimensions. In turn, Turner and Fauconnier (1995) state that a conceptual metaphor consists of a partial mapping of the basic structure of a conceptual domain (the source) towards another (the target). (Turner & Fauconnier, 1995, p. 1-2), but unlike Lakoff and Johnson (2001) who propose a projection between two mental representations, Turner and

Fauconnier come up with the theory of blending in conceptual metaphors, which enunciates that there could exist more than two representations, and that more metaphors, which they call 'hidden', may get activated in the process. These mental spaces are built while we think and talk (Turner & Fauconnier, 1995, p.2), they are interconnected, and change throughout discourse as it is the case of the particles added to verbs in the form of phrasal verbs. The process of blending allows us to grasp the change in meaning of the base form once the particle is added, especially if we take into account Talmy's theory of force dynamics, which affirms that we may find two opposing forces within a sentence.

The problem

In a phrasal verb such as *lighten up*, that space between the verb and the particle, so to speak, and the hidden metaphors that might get activated are the so-called blending, as mentioned above. The verb *lighten* per se only means 'to clear, or become clearer, to brighten, to be lighted'; *up* in its sense of 'upward' does not give us a clue to say that *lighten up* means 'to animate, brighten, or light up'. That space between the input and output constitutes the blending that results in a new meaning, which an input fed separately cannot account for as mentioned previously. For non-native speakers of English, the use of particles such as *up, down, back, into, from, on, in, out, at, and off* among others, may create a problem when trying to grasp the meaning of the verb if they learn its meaning and that of the particle separately, the latter usually seen as a preposition (Hall, 1982, pp. 34-35) or an adverb (Hall, 1982, p. 82). Understanding the meaning of

the new dimension the particle adds to the verb may be confusing if the learner focuses on the literal aspects of the two components, in other words, the metaphorical sense escapes, or we can put it this other way: the learner fails in creating the mental spaces that give an account of the meaning of the phrasal verb in question. We have chosen *up* to focus on among all of the existing particles because it presents us with multiple possibilities for the analysis of literality and metaphor by means of force dynamics and mental spaces. Boers (1996) asserts that the jump from concept to expression is present in language, and that making a list of abstract notions and relations such as causation, social hierarchies, protection, competition, and cognitive inaccessibility is worth our while, so we can then ask ourselves if they can be conceived based on the *up-down* or *front-back* dimensions (Boers, 1996, p. 9). Some of the examples he provides as evidence are the following: “*The motive behind the crime, He’s moving up the social ladder, Under diplomatic immunity, It’s beyond my understanding, and Our economy is lagging behind.*” In these examples, *behind* is used to express causation, *up* to evidence mobility on a social hierarchy, *beyond* to convey an inability to cognitively access something, and *behind*, in the last context, serves the purpose of enunciating something, in this case, that the economy is not doing as well as others in comparison. Methodologically speaking, it would be nearly impossible to compile a list to explain all the relations and abstract notions considering the thousands of combinations that may exist

between verbs and particles, hence that for the purposes of this article we have chosen *up* in one of its combinations: completive *up*.

This paper first focuses on the literal sense of lexical items utilized to describe *up-down* relations in English, and then on their figurative sense: the polysemic preposition found in phrasal verbs, i.e., *up* in its metaphorical senses. Prepositions as a descriptive tool, not only help us locate the trajector in relation to the landmark (Boers, 1996, p. 57) but also open spaces and redirect the focus of attention to an already existing space (Fauconnier, 1997, pp. 40-41), which is something that *up* can also do in its prepositional and adverbial uses.

Literality of *up*

Hall (1982) explains *up* and *down* in the same entry: “down is used more as a preposition, commonly, with verbs of motion to mean *from a higher to a lower level*” (with emphasis in the original, pp. 34-35); he then exemplifies:

He hurt himself when he fell down the stairs

The children ran down the mountain

The stone rolled down the hill (Hall, 1982, p. 35)

As a matter of fact, we can see that in the three examples when we think of the sentences we move mentally from one higher level to a lower one. Hall then adds that *up* appears more often as an adverb and that it also functions as a preposition with verbs of motion to mean “*from a lower to a higher level*” (in italics in the original, p. 82). *Up* and *down* are commonly used in combination with street directions (*down the street, up Madison Avenue*); in some cases both

particles do indicate a change of level (as it is the case of a hill taken as a reference) or with street numbers, which takes us back to the trajector-landmark relation. The use of *up* and *down* largely depends on the number, local use or the speaker's perception of what up and down are, thus having an indistinct use. To wrap that up, the literal use is seen in relation to topography and geography (*north-south as up-down*):

Up north/ down south

They traveled up north vs. They traveled down south

The example "*I have friends up in California*" makes sense only if when we say it we found ourselves to be at a lower (or southerner) latitude than that of the Golden State. If we are at a northern latitude, say British Columbia, then we use *down* instead of *up*. The use of *down* in "*We're going down to the coast*" and "*We were down at the beach*" can be explained by the fact that both the coast and the beach are located at a lower altitude than the speaker's point of reference: sea level is bound to be lower than most locations, unless we are talking about depressions such as the Death Valley in California or the Dead Sea in West Asia. In the same sense, in the expression *up river*, *up* means towards the river source, naturally located at a higher point than sea level, e.g. *In going up the Nile, they used the sail, whenever the wind was favourable*. The latitude (north-south) is no longer relevant here since *up* and *down* codify the act of moving from one level to another as seen in the following sentence: *After they had reached the southernmost point of their journey up the stream, the sail was no longer*

considered necessary (Wilkinson, 1837, p. 196). *Up* indicates that the sailing is done toward the source of the Nile, which is in fact located south of Egypt, not north.

The *Merriam Webster* (1997) lists four grammatical categories for *up*: adverb, adjective, preposition and noun. For this paper's purpose, we shall continue focusing primarily on *up* as an adverb and as a preposition. As an adverb, the dictionary shows eleven meanings, some of which are subdivided into several others; we chose the following::

(1) : in or into a higher position or level; especially : away from the center of the earth (2) : from beneath the ground or water to the surface (3) : from below the horizon (4) : upstream 1 (5) : in or into an upright position <sit up>; especially : out of bed b : upward from the ground or surface <pull up a daisy> c : so as to expose a particular surface

2 : with greater intensity <speaking up>

3 a : in or into a better or more advanced state b : at an end <your time is up> c : in or into a state of greater intensity or excitement d : to or at a greater speed, rate, or amount <prices went up> e : in a continual sequence : in continuance from a point or to a point <from third grade up> <at prices of \$10 and up> <up until now>

6 a : entirely, completely <button up your coat> b —used as an intensifier <clean up the house>

9 : in or into parts

10 : to a stop —usually used with draw, bring, fetch, or pull

11 : for each side <the score is 15 up>

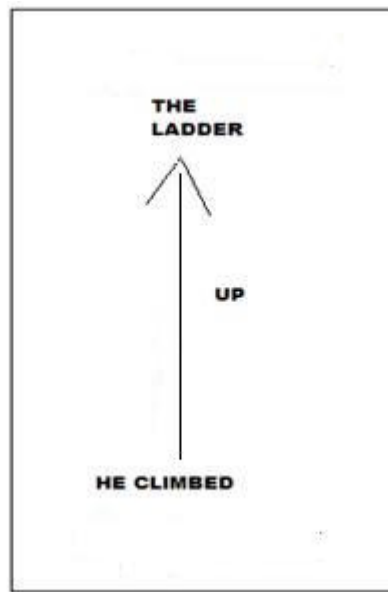
As a preposition *up* has the following meanings:

1 a —used as a function word to indicate motion to or toward or situation at a higher point of <went up the stairs>b : up into or in the <was hid away up garret — Mark Twain>

2 a : in a direction regarded as being toward or near the upper end or part of <lives a few miles up the coast> <walked up the street> b : toward or near a point closer to the source or beginning of <sail up the river>

3 : in the direction opposite to <sailed up the wind>

In some of the examples provided, the schema can be explained with *up* and *down* in their literal senses: gravity causes water to flow downwards, height is implied in *He climbed up the ladder*, in which it is clearly evident that he moved from one level to a higher one. If we consider Johnson and Lakoff's cognitive semantics, a possible scheme of the literality of *up* might look like this:



In the figure, the *ladder* represents the *landmark*, and *he* is the *trajector*.

The schema

The experientialist approach maintains that reason and understanding stem from the way people perceive and interact with their environment (Boers, 1996, p. 12). Lakoff and Johnson claim that we humans need structures based on bodily and physical experience to understand our reality; furthermore, they assert that the way we conceptualize and express that reality influences our daily lives to the minutest details (Lakoff, p. 39). In a similar fashion, Lara (2006) affirms that every human being creates knowledge schema based on his/her actions and experience, and that all information fed to the brain is obtained through the five senses. (Lara, 2006, p. 86); these sensory experiences become more relevant to the point that different knowledge schema are clearly distinguishable; it is then

that we name them in some kind of consensus that allows us to understand each other (Lara, 2006, p. 86).

It is precisely here that schema help us understand and organize our perception as in the examples of the particles *wa* and *ga* in Japanese (Minegishi Cook, *passim*, 1991), depicted as the schema *container* and *part-whole*, proposed by Lakoff. In agreement with that, Langacker (1991) argues that schematization is an abstraction process, reinforced and set by repeated use (p. 2). This seemingly obvious fact leads us to think that every language represents reality in a different way, i.e., subjectively. According to Fauconnier (1997), the original space remains open to be built upon, and then he adds that we have mental spaces, internally structured with frames and cognitive models that are externally linked by connectors that relate elements and structures across spaces (p. 39). Along the same lines, he affirms that sentences contain different kinds of information indicated by several grammatical mechanisms which allow us to build spaces, ergo their name, space builders, among which we find nouns, tense, mood, adverbs, subject-verb compounds, conjunctions, clauses and prepositional phrases (Fauconnier, 1997, pp. 39-41). In view of the above, we can safely say that *up* is indeed, be it as an adverb or preposition, a space builder. With that in mind, it does not seem difficult to understand that if metaphors rule abstract reason (Boers, 1996, p. 13), this is due to the fact that from the physical space we move to the abstract domains of experience, a fact which in turn takes us to the use of *up* in its metaphorical and literal senses.

Vertical *Up* as a prototype

The next examples are prototypical of the expression of verticality of *up* as demonstrated in some of the examples previously given and the ones that follow:

The snow piled up so high that I couldn't open my door

The streamers floated up for a few seconds

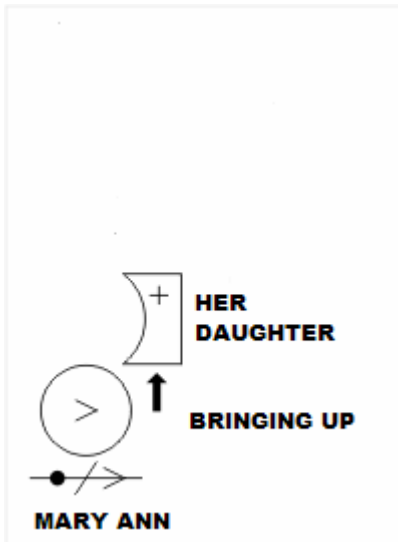
Completive *Up*

In the examples presented below *up* codifies the end of a process or its final stages, while at the same time it may codify a gradual progress or process that culminates in a conclusion with some effort involved. When in the presence of some verbs, *up* places the action at a more elaborate or advanced state, with a varying degree. At this point, *up* can be explained as the overcoming of a resistance, and the ultimate elimination of an obstacle which might prevent the process from being completed. Talmy's force dynamics system analyzes the occurring interaction between two opposing forces (Talmy, 1988, p. 414). In the following example, the entity seeking to manifest its force tendency, namely focal (Talmy, 1988, p. 413), is Mary Ann, and the second entity (*her daughter*), opposes its force to the first one.

Mary Ann is bringing up her daughter properly

In Talmy's terms, Mary Ann is the *agonist* and her daughter the *antagonist*. In layman's terms, bringing up someone involves overcoming opposing forces, for raising a daughter includes providing an education, guiding, instructing, feeding, and caring among so many factors till we find a finished product: polished and

solid to the point that it can take care of itself, a product that in Talmy's words becomes the outcome of the interaction. The verb *bring* as input results in an *output* (final product, end of the process) which in this case is the brought-up daughter, or in other terms it is the *blending* to cite Turner and Fauconnier (1995). In the conceptualization of *bring up* all of the above-mentioned hidden metaphors get activated: from feeding, educating, to caring to the final product. In the following diagram, the opposing forces are represented by Mary Ann, who in Talmy's words is "*towards action*" and by her daughter, who is "*letting*":



Another example of *up* is the one where it serves the purpose of an intensifier: the verbs *clean* and *tidy* by themselves come short of conveying the meaning of *clean up* and *tidy up*, which entail a more elaborate or better done job. *Tidy* means "to put in order" and *clean* means "to make clean," but once *up* is added, the resulting blending renders a completed process, meticulously done which involves opposing forces (disorder, filth on the one hand, and the process of

cleaning and setting in order brought to an end). We find a similar use of *up* to express a bigger extent or intensity, which can be exemplified with *speak up*.

In this case, the opposing force to be vanquished is the tendency to speak in a barely audible way or the tendency to remain quiet. Among the possibilities we find are the applying of a force (the effort to speak loud and clear), being candid, and that of overcoming the obstacle (whatever it is that causes me to speak unintelligibly or in a barely audible way).

Finally, let us analyze *up* in its sense of completion with these two examples:

Fill it up and Button up your coat

In the two previous examples, several metaphors can be activated in the blending: on the one hand it could be the verticality, or the going from a level to a higher one in the process of pouring gas into the tank, or in the case of the coat, the buttoning plus the process as a gradual one, which goes from less to more until reaching a limit, or maximum, which can be the landmark, as in the example “*The prices have gone up*”, in which the limit may not be known for certain. On the other hand, if we take force dynamics into account, opposing forces reveal themselves, namely the rising level of the gasoline vs. the gravitational pull, resulting in a *shift in balance of strength* (Talmy, 1988, pp. 419-420) or the effort to lift your hands while buttoning up the coat vs. gravity; in the last example we can even consider the person’s laziness or unwillingness to perform the task as instructed.

As seen in this brief selection of the metaphorical aspects of *up*, schemes multiply as well as the extensions that may derive from them and combine to assign the verb an infinite number of meanings, if Johnson and Lakoff's do not explain the process, Talmy's theory of force dynamics and Fauconnier and Turner's theory of blending may help us understand better the metaphorical sense of *up* when combined with a number of verbs whose base meanings modifies taking them from literality to metaphor.

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