

BOOK REVIEW

Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus

Michael Rundell (Editor-in-Chief)

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Phrasal verb” is a term that refers to those units of verbs and particles, i.e. prepositions and adverbs, that have more or less different meanings from those of the verbs alone. Phrasal verbs are extremely significant in the English language. According to Biber et al. (1999: 408-409, 415), more than 2,000 phrasal verbs, items consisting of a verb (and a complement) followed by an adverb in their definition, and over 5,000 prepositional verbs, items consisting of a verb followed by a preposition in their definition, are used in every one million words in fiction and conversations.

Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus is a specialized dictionary of English phrasal verbs (“PVs”, henceforth) and other structurally similar phrases of verbs and particles. This dictionary is “specially designed to help learners of English deal confidently with phrasal verbs” (page vi). In this review, we will concentrate on three aspects of this dictionary: the coverage of its entry items, the effectiveness and uniqueness of the characteristic features adopted in this dictionary, and a problematic strategy found in the macrostructure of headword PV items. By considering these aspects, we will be able to see whether it is really an effective learning tool for learners.

II. COVERAGE OF PV ITEMS

The reviewer compared the headword items in five PV dictionaries published by the “Big Five” EFL dictionary publishers (Ishii 2009). The targets of this survey were

Cambridge Phrasal Verbs Dictionary covering about 3,300 items, *Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* covering around 3,300 PVs, *Longman Phrasal Verbs Dictionary* covering some 3,800 entry items, *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* covering approximately 4,000 items, and *Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* covering about 5,000 PV items.

This survey found that about 7,000 types of PV items are covered in the five dictionaries, around 2,000 of which are covered in all five dictionaries, about 800 PVs are covered in four dictionaries, approximately 700 in three, another roughly 700 in two, and the remainder of some 2,700 are in only one. One reason why these dictionaries differ considerably in their coverage is the difficulty in defining PVs; we often have difficulty in deciding whether or not a unit of a verb and particle is a PV. PV dictionaries have their own criteria to distinguish PVs for inclusion from other units, which makes a big difference in the coverage of items.

In order to look at the difference in more detail, the reviewer made a list of those PVs that are covered as headword items only in *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus*. It contains about 400 PV items: **absolve of**, **accommodate to**, **acknowledge as**, **act as**, **add on to**, **address as**, **address by**, **advise against**, **agonize about**, and **agonize over**, to give the first ten items. Some of the items listed here are given three stars, which means that they are among the most frequent PVs (see below). They are **act as**, **combine with**, **connect to**, **do to**, **end with**, and **be known for**.

On the other hand, there are also some items that are covered as headword items in the other four dictionaries, but not in this dictionary: **break in on**, **cast round** (**cast round for** is included), **catch up on**, **come forth**, and **dawn upon** (**dawn on** is included), to give the first five items. Although many of them are included as variant forms in *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus*, it is true that some important items are missing altogether. There are also some highly frequent items that may well be covered in PV dictionaries, but not included in many dictionaries: **adapt to**, for example, is covered in *Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* alone. This may be because the other dictionaries deem this item just a prepositional verb, not a PV. Likewise, “be constituted of” (cf. **consist of** is covered in four dictionaries) and “start with” (cf. **begin with** is also covered in four) are not covered at all, although they are in the top 200 items of verb (+

complement) + particle in Web 1T 5-gram Version 1¹, a huge collection of n-gram data offered by Google.

It is considerably difficult to rigidly and objectively distinguish among PVs, prepositional verbs, idioms, and mere combinations of verbs and particles, but all highly frequent composite phrases are important for learners irrespective of whether they are PVs or not. *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus*'s claim that it "provides all the information that is needed to *understand* phrasal verbs and to *use* them well" (page vi) can well be justified in that it covers not only a fairly wide range of PV items, but also some frequent items that are usually classified as collocations. At the same time, however, it also has some room for improvement in terms of usefulness for learners; all highly frequent PV candidates should be considered for inclusion from the viewpoint of learners that would use this dictionary.

III. CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

There are a number of key features touted in the front matter and on the back cover of this dictionary. We will focus on some of them below: frequency markings, "menus", collocations, special entries on the 12 most common particles, the index of single-word equivalents, and "Language Study" pages on metaphors.

As frequency markings, three stars are given to "the most common and basic phrasal verbs", two stars are for "very common" items, and one star for "fairly common" ones (inside back cover). Each frequency band consists of about 350 verbs (the website for *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus*²). This is unique to this dictionary; *Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* and *Longman Phrasal Verbs Dictionary* also have markings for frequent items, but they do not show more than one frequency band.

When an entry has five or more senses, this dictionary gives a "menu" before the first sense; for instance, the entry for **come over** has a box giving brief summaries for each sense as follows: "1 be affected by a strong feeling, 2 react, 3 visit sb's house, 4 travel to a place far away, 5 have a particular opinion of sb/sth, + PHRASE". This feature is surely useful when searching through long entries, and this is also unique to this dictionary.

Another feature of *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* is collocation boxes, which show frequent objects and subjects of PVs. It is surely of value, but the problem is that the number of the boxes is too small; *Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* and Oxford's other, more learner-friendly reference work, *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary for Learners of English*, provide many more entries with collocations.

At the end of the dictionary, *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* has a 7.5-page-long single-word index with PV equivalents. This is useful when we want to know synonymous PVs of single-word verbs. The number of verbs given in this list is about 550, which cannot be said to be sufficient for encoding purposes, but much more useful than *Cambridge Phrasal Verbs Dictionary*'s similar list of about 80 single-word verbs.

One of the most effective features unique to this dictionary is special entries on the 12 most common particles (**around**, **away**, **back**, **down**, **in**, **into**, **off**, **on**, **out**, **over**, **through**, and **up**). Although *Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* and *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary for Learners of English* also contain special articles on various senses of common particles and give PVs based on each sense of the particles, only *Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus* depicts the development of figurative senses from the core literal meaning, which would help the users get overviews of each particle. This feature can be valuable especially for advanced learners.

Still another interesting feature of this dictionary is a special article on metaphors, which is closely related to the above-mentioned special entries on particles. This article by Dr. Rosamund Moon is based on Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live by* (1980), and gives an essence of metaphors found in the meanings of particles. For example, the reason why **up** means 'powerful' is explained as follows: "... if two people fight and one of them is physically on top of the other, that person usually wins" (page LS6). This article would help learners understand the nuances underlying the particles in PVs.

IV. PROBLEMATIC FEATURE CONCERNING HEADWORD ITEMS

On the macrostructure concerning the headword items, there is a potential problem. When there is more than one stress pattern for a PV item, it is divided into different entries; for example, '**come to**' is followed by '**come 'to**'. This is not user-friendly in

terms of accessibility; users might overlook the correct entry if it follows a different entry of the same form. Giving numbers to those items, as in 'come to'¹ and 'come to'², for example, would solve this problem.

V. OVERALL EVALUATION

Macmillan Phrasal Verbs Plus is a good dictionary containing a wealth of essential and useful information not only on phrasal verbs but also on other verb-particle phrases, polysemy of particles, and metaphors found in phrasal verbs. It is also handy and easy to scan due to its two-color printing. Although there is some room for improvement as described above, this dictionary is recommendable to all learners of English at intermediate and upper levels.

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¹ 30 Nov. 2011 <<http://www ldc.upenn.edu/Catalog/CatalogEntry.jsp?catalogId=LDC2006T13>>

² 30 Nov. 2011 <<http://www.macmillandictionaries.com/about/phrasal-verbs-plus/>>

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