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Phrasal Verbs in The Jakarta Post: Types and Functions in Media Discourse

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
  How to cite: 	This study investigates the types and functions of phrasal verbs in five selected articles from The Jakarta Post, published between August and December 2024. A qualitative descriptive approach was applied, following Miles and Huberman's interactive model of analysis: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The theoretical framework combines Michael Lewis's Lexical Approach (1993) with classifications of phrasal verbs into transitive, intransitive, separable, inseparable, literal, and figurative categories. Data were drawn from online newspaper articles, while secondary data consisted of books, journals, and prior studies on phrasal verbs. The findings reveal a dominance of figurative and inseparable phrasal verbs across all articles, highlighting their vital role in journalistic discourse. These verbs simplify complex issues, enhance stylistic impact, and make articles accessible to general readers. The study suggests pedagogical implications for English language teaching, particularly in integrating phrasal verbs into classroom instruction, and calls for further research on phrasal verb usage in broader journalistic and literary contexts. **Keyword:** Phrasal verbs, Media Discourse, Figurative Language, The Jakarta Post

1. Introduction

Nowadays, English has long served as the global lingua franca, facilitating communication across borders in politics, economics, science, education, and culture. In the Indonesian context, where English is learned as a foreign language, newspapers such as The Jakarta Post play a significant role in providing learners with authentic exposure to English. Reading newspapers in English introduces readers to idiomatic expressions, journalistic styles, and vocabulary that may not always appear in textbooks. Among these features, phrasal verbs are particularly noteworthy for their frequency and complexity.

Phrasal verbs are combinations of a main verb with a particle either a preposition, an adverb, or both that create a meaning distinct from the individual words. For example, give up means "to quit," which differs from the literal meaning of give and up. Similarly, carry out means "to perform or conduct," diverging from the separate meanings of carry and out. These structures are not only ubiquitous in English but also highly idiomatic, making them difficult for learners to master.

The challenge of learning phrasal verbs lies in their non-compositionality: learners cannot always infer their meaning by analyzing the components. Furthermore, many phrasal verbs are polysemous, with multiple figurative and literal meanings depending on context. For instance, take off can mean "remove clothing," "become successful," or "depart (for airplanes)." Such variation creates a barrier for learners who rely on direct word-for-word translation.

Despite these challenges, mastery of phrasal verbs is essential for achieving fluency and naturalness in English. Native speakers use them frequently in everyday speech, literature, and journalism. In media, phrasal verbs serve an important stylistic function: they make texts more vivid, dynamic, and relatable. Journalists often prefer phrasal verbs over more formal Latinate verbs because they strike a balance between clarity and engagement. For example, call off talks is shorter and more accessible than cancel negotiations.

In Indonesia, The Jakarta Post stands out as a leading English-language newspaper. Since its founding in 1983, it has provided high-quality journalism in English, targeting both local and international audiences. Its articles often incorporate phrasal verbs as part of natural English journalistic style. For English learners and scholars, the newspaper offers a valuable corpus for studying the distribution and function of phrasal verbs in real-world contexts.

This study is motivated by the need to better understand how phrasal verbs operate in Indonesian English journalism. Previous research has documented their usage in literature (Wulandari, 2015), academic abstracts (Aryani, 2019), and songs (Nurlaila, 2019). However, relatively few studies have systematically analyzed their presence in Indonesian English newspapers. This gap is important, because newspapers like The Jakarta Post not only reflect language use but also influence how English is consumed and learned in Indonesia. Therefore, the research seeks to answer two questions: (1) What types of phrasal verbs occur in selected articles of The Jakarta Post?; (2) What functions do these phrasal verbs serve in journalistic discourse?. Thereby, the objectives of the study are to classify the phrasal verbs into categories (transitive, intransitive, separable, inseparable, literal, figurative) and to interpret their communicative functions. By doing so, the study contributes to both theoretical understanding of phrasal verbs and practical applications in language learning and journalism.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Phrasal Verbs

The concept of phrasal verbs has attracted much scholarly attention because of its complexity and importance in English usage. McArthur and Atkins (1975) define phrasal verbs as idiomatic combinations of a verb and one or more particles, which function as single semantic units. This definition emphasizes idiomaticity, meaning that the overall sense of the phrasal verb often diverges from the literal meanings of its individual parts. According to Quirk et al. (1985) classify phrasal verbs as part of the larger group of multi-word verbs, alongside prepositional verbs and phrasal-prepositional verbs. They point out that phrasal verbs differ from free combinations due to their fixedness and semantic unity. Stress placement is often used as a diagnostic feature: in phrasal verbs, stress usually falls on the particle (e.g., TAKE off), whereas in free combinations stress tends to remain on the verb.

Additonally, the several scholars offer complementary perspectives. Darwin and Gray (1999) emphasize the syntactic properties of phrasal verbs, noting their unique ability to undergo particle movement in separable cases (pick up the phone → pick the phone up). Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) focus on their pedagogical challenges, observing that learners often misinterpret phrasal verbs because they expect meanings to be compositional. Meanwhile, Lewis (1993) argues in his Lexical Approach that phrasal verbs should be treated as lexical chunks rather than syntactic structures, making them units of meaning to be acquired holistically. Thus, two points are obvious from these definitions: (1) phrasal verbs are semantically unpredictable, and (2) they exhibit distinctive syntactic behaviors. These characteristics explain both their high frequency in native usage and their difficulty for learners.

2.2 Types of Phrasal Verbs

Linguists categorize phrasal verbs in different ways, but three main distinctions are widely accepted, are:

1. Transitive vs. Intransitive
Transitive phrasal verbs take objects, such as look up a word or bring about change. Intransitive phrasal verbs occur without objects, e.g., the plane took off or she grew up quickly.

2. Separable vs. Inseparable
In separable phrasal verbs, the object may intervene between the verb and particle, particularly when the object is a pronoun (pick up the book → pick it up). In inseparable phrasal verbs, the object cannot be split from the verb-particle unit (run into a problem, not run a problem into).

3. Literal vs. Figurative

Literal phrasal verbs retain transparent meanings, such as sit down or stand up. Figurative phrasal verbs are idiomatic, e.g., bring up an issue (meaning "raise") or carry on (meaning "continue").

In addition, this typology enables researchers to analyze how phrasal verbs operate structurally and semantically. In journalistic writing, figurative and inseparable types often dominate because they sound natural, direct, and idiomatic, aligning with the communicative style of news discourse.

2.3 Functions of Phrasal Verbs in Discourse

Phrasal verbs are not merely grammatical phenomena but powerful tools for communication. Their functions include: Lexical enrichment is provide alternative expressions to single-word verbs, broadening vocabulary choice. For example, call off and cancel are near synonyms, but the former feels more colloquial and immediate; Stylistic variation is phrasal verbs often mark informal or spoken registers, which journalists may adopt to connect with readers. Expressions such as crack down on or step up carry stronger rhetorical force than their Latinate equivalents; Economy of expression phrasal verbs are shorter and easier to process than longer alternatives (put off vs. postpone, find out vs. discover); Expressiveness are figurative phrasal verbs can dramatize events, making them memorable. For instance, cover up a scandal conveys secrecy more vividly than conceal. Therefore, in journalism these functions of phrasal verb contribute to readability and engagement. News writers must condense complex issues into accessible language, and phrasal verbs help achieve that goal.

2.4 Challenges in Learning Phrasal Verbs

Despite their ubiquity, phrasal verbs pose substantial learning challenges. Gardner and Davies (2007) found that the 100 most frequent phrasal verbs account for more than half of all phrasal verb usage in corpora. This highlights their importance in everyday English, yet learners frequently avoid them.

In Indonesian learners in particular encounter several obstacles are Idiomaticity is one of the challenges faced by leaners in particular. It is impossible to take figurative meanings literally. For instance, bring up a child (raise) confuses learners expecting a spatial meaning; Polysemyis is one of the phrasal verb may have multiple meanings. Take off can mean remove clothing, become successful, or for airplanes, depart; Separation rules are learners often hesitate between look it up and look up it, leading to errors; Perceived informality implies many students believe phrasal verbs are "too casual" for academic contexts, and thus they avoid them. All of these issues suggest that teaching strategies must emphasize context and usage, not just dictionary definitions.

2.5 Previous Studies

In several studies highlight the distribution of phrasal verbs across genres, Wulandari (2015) examined phrasal verbs in the novel Abandon. She found that figurative verbs dominated, adding stylistic richness to narrative writing. Aryani (2019) investigated academic abstracts and concluded that while phrasal verbs appeared less frequently, they played an important role in conciseness. Nurlaila (2019) studied the album Songs About Jane by Maroon 5, showing that phrasal verbs reinforced rhythm and enhanced idiomaticity. Mar'atusolihatin (2020) analyzed The Jakarta Post, discovering that figurative and inseparable phrasal verbs were especially common in journalistic discourse. Comparing these studies reveals clear patterns. Figurative phrasal verbs are pervasive across genres because of their communicative effectiveness. Yet their density differs: high in fiction and journalism, moderate in songs, and relatively low in academic prose. This variation reflects genre conventions and audience expectations.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Lewis's (1993) Lexical Approach as its main theoretical foundation. The Lexical Approach views phrasal verbs as chunks multi-word units that should be learned and processed holistically. Learners are encouraged to notice these chunks in authentic contexts and to practice them in communication, rather than attempt to construct them from rules. Concurrently, the classification system of Quirk et al. (1985) is employed for structural analysis. Their framework distinguishes transitivity, separability, and semantic transparency, enabling systematic categorization of data. By combining these perspectives, the study not only

describes the formal properties of phrasal verbs but also interprets their communicative significance in journalistic discourse.

3. Method

This study applied a qualitative descriptive research design, aimed at describing and interpreting the use of phrasal verbs in authentic media texts, particularly five selected articles from The Jakarta Post. Unlike quantitative approaches, which focus on measurement and statistical generalization, qualitative descriptive research prioritizes rich, detailed accounts of phenomena in their natural settings (Miles & Huberman, 2014). This design was chosen because the study sought to explore the forms, meanings, and functions of phrasal verbs as they appeared in journalistic discourse, rather than to test predetermined hypotheses.

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative descriptive research is particularly suitable for linguistic studies that require close reading and interpretation of texts. According to Sandelowski (2000), descriptive qualitative studies offer a comprehensive summary of events in everyday terms of those events. In this research, the "events" were the occurrences of phrasal verbs in news articles, and the goal was to capture both their structural types and communicative roles. The design allowed the researcher to treat language as data that can be categorized, compared, and interpreted. The reseacher choice of a descriptive approach was motivated by three considerations: (1) Naturalistic orientation in newspaper articles represent real-life language use. A descriptive method preserves the authenticity of these data; (2) Flexibility allows of the method accommodates both structural classification (e.g., separable vs. inseparable) and functional interpretation (e.g., persuasive effect); (3) Pedagogical relevance of descriptive findings can be directly applied in language teaching without the need for statistical generalization.

3.2 Data Sources

The primary data consisted of five articles published in The Jakarta Post between August and December 2024. The articles were selected purposively to represent different domains of journalism are a political article about the Job Creation Law; an economic article on foreign investment and infrastructure; a defense article on military cooperation; an editorial opinion piece about democratic accountability; a policy article concerning environmental regulation. The purposive sampling ensured thematic diversity, enabling comparison of phrasal verb usage across different genres of news writing.

Futhermore, the secondary data included scholarly books, journal articles, and previous theses discussing phrasal verbs. These were used to construct the theoretical framework and to triangulate the findings. Authors such as Lewis (1993), Quirk et al. (1985), and McArthur & Atkins (1975) provided the primary linguistic theories, while studies by Wulandari (2015), Aryani (2019), Nurlaila (2019), and Mar'atusolihatin (2020) offered empirical background.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection followed several systematic steps:
1. Article Selection: Articles were retrieved from the official website of The Jakarta Post. The inclusion criteria were: (a) published within the specified timeframe, (b) containing substantial content rather than short briefs, and (c) representing diverse subject matter.
2. Reading and Identification: Each article was read carefully to identify occurrences of phrasal verbs. Both literal and figurative expressions were considered.
3. Highlighting and Extraction: Sentences containing phrasal verbs were highlighted and recorded in a data sheet. Each entry included the phrasal verb, the sentence, and its immediate context.
4. Preliminary Categorization: Each phrasal verb was provisionally labeled according to type (transitive/intransitive, separable/inseparable, literal/figurative). This provisional stage was subject to later refinement during analysis. Moreover, this procedure ensured systematic and comprehensive coverage of the data while minimizing the risk of overlooking relevant instances.

3.4 Instrumentation

The main instrument in this study was the researcher as the data analyst. In qualitative research, the researcher plays a central role in data identification, categorization, and interpretation. To assist in accuracy, supporting tools are included the data sheet in tabular form for organizing phrasal verbs; Dictionaries (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Cambridge Phrasal Verbs Dictionary) to confirm meanings and classify literal vs. figurative uses. Thus, secondary literature to validate theoretical categorization. In addition, this combination of researcher judgment and authoritative references enhanced the reliability of the findings.

3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, consisting of four stages
1. Data Collection: Gathering all phrasal verbs from the five articles.
2. Data Reduction: Filtering out irrelevant or ambiguous cases. For example, free combinations like walk up the street were excluded because they lacked idiomatic meaning.
3. Data Display: Organizing data into tables, showing phrasal verb, type, sentence context, and meaning. This step facilitated pattern recognition.
4. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Interpreting the functions of phrasal verbs in journalistic discourse and comparing them across articles. Verification was achieved by cross-checking with secondary data and repeated reading. This cyclical process allowed constant refinement of interpretations, ensuring both depth and accuracy.

3.6 Trustworthiness of Data

In qualitative research, trustworthiness replaces the quantitative concepts of validity and reliability. To establish trustworthiness, the study applied four criteria:
1. Credibility: Achieved through triangulation of data sources (primary articles and secondary literature). Member checking was not applicable, as the data were texts rather than human subjects.
2. Transferability: While the findings are not statistically generalizable, they are transferable to similar contexts, such as other English-language newspapers in Indonesia
3. Dependability: Ensured by documenting all research steps clearly, allowing replication by other researchers.
4. Confirmability: The researcher minimized bias by relying on established frameworks and authoritative dictionaries when classifying phrasal verbs.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Although the study did not involve human participants, ethical considerations still applied. All articles were cited properly, and no content was altered. The research respected intellectual property by acknowledging sources of theoretical and empirical background.

3.8 Limitations of the Method

It is important to note some methodological limitations. First, the study was limited to five articles, which restricts the scope of generalization. Second, classification of figurative vs. literal meaning occasionally required subjective judgment, despite reliance on dictionaries. Third, the study focused only on English-language journalism in Indonesia, excluding other media genres. These limitations, however, do not diminish the descriptive value of the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis of phrasal verbs found in five selected articles from The Jakarta Post. Each article represents a different domain: politics, economics, defense, editorial opinion, and public policy. The analysis is divided into three parts: (1) identification and classification of phrasal verbs in each article, (2) functional analysis of their role in journalistic discourse, and (3) cross-article comparison to reveal broader patterns.

4.1 Political Article: Contestation over the Job Creation Law

The political article analyzed deals with debates on the Job Creation Law and its annulment process. Phrasal verbs identified include look into, carry out, result in, bring about, set aside, and strike down.

Data 1: "Look into" was used to indicate investigation by the Constitutional Court. This is a figurative phrasal verb, inseparable, transitive, and functions to simplify the notion of conducting an official inquiry.
Data 2: "Carry out" occurred in the context of government policy implementation. This phrasal verb is literal, transitive, and separable, functioning to highlight execution and action-oriented governance.
Data 3: "Result in" was used to show cause-effect relationships between legal processes and political consequences. This inseparable phrasal-prepositional verb is literal, emphasizing clarity of outcome.
Data 4: "Bring about" appeared in describing the potential for political reform. It is figurative, inseparable, and transitive, showing causation in a more dynamic, idiomatic way.
Data 5: "Set aside" was used figuratively to indicate annulling legal provisions. It functions to communicate technical judicial actions in accessible terms.
Data 6: "Strike down" was similarly figurative, vividly depicting annulment by the court.

Therefore, for the analyzed of the political articles indicate the dominance of figurative, inseparable verbs (bring about, set aside, strike down) indicates that political journalism relies on idiomatic expressions to dramatize abstract legal maneuvers. Instead of heavy Latinate verbs like invalidate or abrogate, phrasal verbs communicate the same idea with immediacy and accessibility.

4.2 Economic Article: Investment and Infrastructure Growth

The economic article focused on foreign investment, infrastructure projects, and government initiatives. Phrasal verbs identified include kick off, scale up, cut back, roll out, turn around, and wind down.

Data 1: "Kick off" described the launch of a national infrastructure project. This is figurative, intransitive, inseparable, creating an image of energetic initiation.
Data 2: "Scale up" referred to increasing investment in renewable energy. It is figurative, inseparable, and transitive, highlighting growth.
Data 3: "Cut back" appeared in the context of government reducing spending. It is figurative, inseparable, and transitive, showing contraction or austerity.
Data 4: "Roll out" was used to describe policy implementation. Figurative, separable, transitive, it conveys structured, planned execution.
Data 5: "Turn around" indicated economic recovery. Figurative, inseparable, intransitive, it provides a strong metaphor of reversal.
Data 6: "Wind down" was used to signal reduction of subsidies. Figurative, intransitive, inseparable, reflecting gradual closure.

Overall, the economic article demonstrates heavy reliance on figurative phrasal verbs that depict expansion, reduction, and transformation. These verbs simplify technical economic processes into vivid, relatable images, thereby bridging expert knowledge and lay understanding.

4.3 Defense Article: Military Exercises and Regional Security

The defense-related article covered joint military training exercises and regional security cooperation. Phrasal verbs identified include carry out, set up, move in, take over, pull out, and step up.

Data 1: "Carry out" was used in the literal sense of performing exercises. Transitive, separable, literal, indicating concrete execution.
Data 2: "Set up" referred to establishing bases or command centers. Literal, transitive, separable.
Data 3: "Move in" described troop deployment. Figurative-literal borderline, intransitive, inseparable, evoking dynamic movement.
Daya 4: "Take over" was used in the sense of assuming responsibility. Figurative, transitive, inseparable.
Data 5: "Pull out" signaled withdrawal of forces. Figurative, intransitive, inseparable, expressing retreat.

Data 6: "Step up" denoted intensifying operations. Figurative, inseparable, intransitive, highlighting escalation.

Based on the analysis above, literal phrasal verbs (carry out, set up) coexist with figurative ones (take over, pull out, step up). This mixture reflects the dual need of defense reporting: factual description of physical actions and rhetorical dramatization of strategy.

4.4 Editorial Opinion: Democratic Accountability

The editorial article reflected on democratic accountability and political scandals. Phrasal verbs included get away with, speak out, come forward, cover up, break down, and point out.

Data 1: "Get away with" was used figuratively to indicate escaping punishment. Inseparable, transitive, idiomatic.
Data 2: "Speak out" described citizens voicing concerns. Figurative, intransitive, inseparable.
Data 3: "Come forward" referred to whistleblowers offering testimony. Figurative, intransitive.
Data 4: "Cover up" indicated concealing corruption. Figurative, transitive, inseparable.
Data 5: "Break down" occurred in describing collapse of trust. Figurative, intransitive.
Data 6: "Point out" was used in its literal-figurative sense of emphasizing facts. Transitive, separable.

Based on the Editorial writing is highly rhetorical. The prevalence of figurative phrasal verbs here indicates their persuasive power in opinion writing. They not only inform but also provoke moral judgment, making the language of accountability more accessible and emotive.

4.5 Policy Article: Environmental Regulation

The policy article dealt with environmental regulation and government measures. Phrasal verbs identified include cut down, phase out, result in, carry on, call for, and bring down.

Data 1: "Cut down" described reduction of emissions. Figurative, transitive, inseparable.
Data 2: "Phase out" indicated gradual elimination of fossil fuel subsidies. Figurative, inseparable, transitive.
Data 3: "Result in" appeared to highlight consequences of pollution. Literal, inseparable.
Data 4: "Carry on" indicated continuation of green policies. Figurative, intransitive.
Data 5: "Call for" described demands from environmental groups. Figurative, transitive, inseparable.
Data 6: "Bring down" was used figuratively in the sense of lowering carbon levels. Transitive, inseparable.

Moreover, the policy reporting shows a balance of figurative and literal phrasal verbs. Figurative ones provide vivid imagery for abstract policy actions, while literal ones maintain precision in technical descriptions.

Based on the analysis of the five articles are compared have dominance of figurative phrasal verbs by across all domains. The figurative phrasal verbs outnumber literal ones. They account for roughly 65–70% of the total. Figurative phrasal verbs are particularly prevalent in editorials and economics, where persuasive or dynamic imagery is crucial. Hence, inseparable phrasal verbs dominate over separable ones. Journalistic writing favors inseparable verbs (bring about, result in, strike down) because they flow naturally and are less syntactically complex. For domain-specific tendencies indicated in the Political articles use phrasal verbs of annulment and causation. In Economic articles highlight expansion, reduction, and transformation. Thus, defense reporting uses both literal (physical) and figurative (strategic) phrasal verbs. In addition, Editorials rely heavily on figurative idioms for moral judgment. In Policy articles combine figurative imagery with literal clarity. From this point, all of these patterns underscore the adaptability of phrasal verbs to different journalistic registers.

The findings resonate with Lewis's Lexical Approach (1993), which argues that phrasal verbs are best treated as lexical chunks. The fact that figurative and inseparable phrasal verbs dominate shows that they cannot be understood by parsing components but must be learned holistically. The data also confirm Quirk et al.'s (1985) typology, where separability and transitivity interact with figurativity. In practice, inseparable figurative verbs prove most effective in journalistic style. From the comparisons with prior studies show consistency: Mar'atusolihatin (2020), who also found figurative dominance in The Jakarta Post; Wulandari (2015), who noted figurative prevalence in literature; Aryani (2019), who saw figurative conciseness even in

academic abstracts. Thus, phrasal verbs represent a cross-genre phenomenon, but their frequency and function align with communicative goals of each genre.

Futhermore, the implications for the teachers should introduce phrasal verbs contextually through authentic media like newspapers. Figurative, inseparable phrasal verbs deserve special focus, as they pose the highest learning barrier. Classroom tasks could include identifying phrasal verbs in media texts and paraphrasing them with single-word verbs to show differences. In addition, for the writers use phrasal verbs to create accessibility without losing credibility. Figurative expressions like kick off or get away with resonate strongly with readers, simplifying complex issues. At the same time, literal phrasal verbs maintain factual clarity.

Therefore, the sum of the findings show that the figurative and inseparable phrasal verbs dominate in The Jakarta Post. From each journalistic domain favors specific sets of phrasal verbs reflecting its communicative goals. In Phrasal verbs enhance journalistic discourse by balancing factual precision with stylistic vividness.

5. Conclusion

This research concludes that phrasal verbs are integral to the linguistic style of The Jakarta Post. Figurative and inseparable phrasal verbs dominate, confirming their idiomatic and stylistic importance. Across five articles representing politics, economics, defense, editorial, and policy, phrasal verbs function to simplify complex issues, enhance expressiveness, and balance formal reporting with accessibility. The study reinforces Lewis's Lexical Approach by demonstrating that phrasal verbs operate as fixed lexical units rather than compositional structures. It also confirms findings from prior research, showing consistent dominance of figurative forms across genres. Thus, the Implications for English learners, mastering phrasal verbs is essential to understanding authentic media. Teachers should integrate them systematically into curricula; journalists in phrasal verbs provide effective tools for engaging readers without compromising clarity; for researchers further work could expand the corpus to include other English-language media in Indonesia or conduct comparative studies with international newspapers. In short, phrasal verbs are not merely stylistic ornaments but central to meaning-making in journalistic discourse. Their mastery contributes to linguistic fluency, pedagogical practice, and media literacy.

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