

## **Delving Into Multi-word Verbs: A Semantic and Syntactic Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on a particular category of verbs known as multi-word verbs, verb combinations or group verbs, which category constitutes a key element of the English lexicon and is characterized by considerable dissensus among linguists. In order to shed some light on this topic, this work examines the concept of multi-word verbs, their main features, and the different subcategories they comprise, adopting a semantic and syntactic approach. For such end, it alludes to the most significant characteristics of each subcategory and provides examples thereof. Furthermore, it points out some of the problems that the lack of recognition of these verbs may pose for the understanding of texts.

**Keywords:** multi-word verbs, semantics, syntax, phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, phrasal prepositional verbs, verb-adjective combinations, verb-nominal combinations, fixed expressions

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## Resumen

El presente trabajo se centra en una categoría particular de verbos: los verbos compuestos (*multi-word verbs*, *verb combinations* o *group verbs*). Esta categoría constituye una parte fundamental del léxico del inglés y es objeto de gran disenso entre los lingüistas. A fin de esclarecer este tema, el presente trabajo examina el concepto de verbos compuestos, sus principales características y las diferentes categorías que comprenden, desde una perspectiva semántica y sintáctica. A tal efecto, hace referencia a las características más importantes de cada subcategoría y proporciona ejemplos de ellas. Asimismo, plantea algunos problemas que la falta de reconocimiento de estos verbos puede suponer para la comprensión de textos.

**Palabras clave:** verbos compuestos, semántica, sintaxis, verbos con partícula adverbial, verbos preposicionales, verbos con partículas adverbiales y prepositivas, combinaciones verbo-adjetivas, combinaciones verbo-nominales, expresiones idiomáticas

## **Introduction**

There is widespread agreement among linguists that some of the most salient features of the English language are its extreme versatility, productivity and richness. One of the key elements that contribute to such productivity and richness is that of multi-word verbs, also referred to as “verb combinations” or “group verbs” by several authors. For the purposes of this work, the expression “multi-word verb” will refer to “a unit which behaves to some extent either lexically or syntactically as a single verb” (Quirk *et. al.* 1985, p. 1150), formed by a verb proper and one or more words, which may be adverbial particles, prepositions, adjectives, nouns or a combination thereof. Therefore, these verbs are characterized by the fact that they convey a unitary meaning, which is different from the independent meaning of each of their constituents. For instance, the verb “give” can combine with multiple elements, resulting in a wide array of multi-word verbs, each of which will have its own unified meaning, such as: give away, give back, give forth, give in, give of, give off, give on to, give onto, give out, give over, give over to, give up, give up on, give up to, give a call, give account of, give assent to, give birth to, give credit to, give occasion to, give rise to, give testimony, etc. If we consider the vast and constantly growing repertoire of English verbs (although not all verbs form verbal combinations), this would account for the remarkable variety of multi-word verbs found in said language.

## **Objectives**

This research seeks to provide an overview of the different categories of multi-word verbs and to examine the importance of recognizing them as units. In order to do so, it will first refer to the relationship between multi-word verbs and meaning, and, then, it will outline each of the

categories subsumed under the broader class of multi-word verbs, providing a definition therefor and referring to some of their most salient and distinctive features. Besides, examples of each category will be provided.

### **The Interplay Between Multi-word Verbs and Meaning**

It is of utmost importance, not only for those who specialize in language, such as translators, teachers, linguists, etc., but also for anyone who speaks the language, to understand and identify multi-word verbs, because they are a crucial part of the language and they are vital to the proper understanding of texts. Failure to recognise them as a unit with its own meaning could result in misunderstanding a given text. This can lead, in turn, to a poor translation or editing. For example, the sentence “He came after Peter” illustrates the ambiguity resulting from two potential interpretations: (i) “He arrived after Peter did” (subject + intransitive verb of complete predication + adverbial adjunct), or (ii) “He chased Peter”, where the second option reflects a multi-word verb interpretation (subject + transitive verb of complete predication [prepositional verb] + direct object). If we consider the translation of this sentence into Spanish, two different verbs would be required depending on the interpretation chosen: (i) “*Llegó después de Peter*”; or (ii) “*Persiguió a Peter*”. Other examples include the following:

- 1) He ran into the telephone booth:
  - a. He entered the telephone booth very quickly: subject + intransitive verb of complete predication + adverbial complement (“*Corrió hacia la cabina telefónica*”).

- b. He accidentally collided with the telephone booth: subject + transitive verb of complete predication [prepositional verb] + direct object (“*Se chocó con la cabina telefónica*”).
- 2) Tom and Clare are going together:
- a. Tom and Clare are going somewhere together: subject + intransitive verb of complete predication + adverbial adjunct (“*Tom y Clare irán juntos*”).
- b. Tom y Clare are in a romantic relationship: subject + intransitive verb of complete predication (phrasal verb) (“*Tom y Clare están saliendo*”).
- 3) We have to put the desks together:
- a. We have to locate the desks so that they are one next to the other: subject + transitive verb of incomplete predication + direct object + objective complement (“*Tenemos que juntar los escritorios*”).
- b. We have to assemble the desks: subject + transitive verb of complete predication (phrasal verb [verb proper]) + direct object + phrasal verb (adverbial particle) (“*Tenemos que armar los escritorios*”).
- 4) She stood by Jeremy the whole time:
- a. She stood next to Jeremy: subject + intransitive verb of complete predication + adverbial adjuncts (“*Ella estuvo junto a Jeremy todo el tiempo*”).
- b. She supported Jeremy or remained loyal to him: subject + transitive verb of complete predication [prepositional verb] + direct object + adverbial adjunct (“*Ella apoyó a Jeremy todo el tiempo*”).

As shown by the examples provided above, in the first interpretation, the adverbial particle or the preposition retains its original meaning (whether locative, temporal or otherwise), whereas, in the second interpretation, the meaning of the adverbial particle or the preposition merges with that of the verb to form a unit. In these cases, context is of crucial importance to disambiguate sentences and discern their meaning. For instance, on the one hand, in the fragment “Didn’t you see Kate at the ceremony? She stood by Jeremy the whole time”, the first interpretation is more reasonable, whereas, on the other hand, the fragment “She stood by Jeremy the whole time. Even when he was accused of murder” points towards the second interpretation. Since meaning is context-bound, the analysis and translation of phrasal verbs must always be carried out considering such context.

In this regard, Blake (2002, p. 38), who explores the use of phrasal verbs and other associated forms in the works of Shakespeare, emphasizes the need for editors to pay attention to these verbal forms:

[...] in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* a line which reads *Stolne some new aire, or at adventure humd on From musicall Coynadge; (1.3.75-6)*, editors do not recognise that *hum on* is a phrasal verb meaning "carry on humming", for *on* in phrasal verbs often has this sense of continuation of action. This phrase has been emended to *hummed one* (Potter 1997) following the reading of a later quarto. Other editors (Tucker Brooke. 1918) interpret *on* as "on and on" without necessarily recognised [sic] that this is a phrasal verb although his interpretation is the same as taking it as such a verb. (Blake, 2002, p. 38)

Further differences in meaning may result from the syntactic category and the type of multi-word verb in question. In this respect, it is worth pointing out that there is a general lack of consensus among linguists with respect to the classification of multi-word verbs. This research work will resort to the classification proposed by Claridge (2000) but introducing some changes. Therefore, in this research, the expression “multi-word verbs” shall be considered to comprise the following categories: phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, phrasal prepositional verbs, verb-adjective combinations, verb-nominal combinations and other fixed expressions. Each of these categories is explored below.

### **Phrasal Verbs**

According to Claridge (2000), phrasal verbs are “relatively unitary combinations of a verb and a particle, which is best of all described as an adverb, but not as a preposition”. For example, the phrasal verb “make up” comprises the verb “make” and the adverbial particle “up”, which form a single unit meaning “invent”, “reconcile”, “constitute”, “compensate”, “prepare or arrange something”, or “apply make-up”. In this case, the word “up” is deprived of its spatial literal meaning in order to convey a different, unified meaning with the verb. This is not to say that, in order for a phrasal verb to be considered as such, its constituents must be deprived of their literal meaning. For instance, in the phrasal verbs “come in” (‘enter’), “go out” (‘leave’) and “sit down” (‘sit’), both elements retain their original meaning, and the meaning of the whole verbal combination is literal. Therefore, phrasal verbs can show varying degrees of compositionality, i.e., the extent to which “the meaning of a complex expression is fully determined by its structure and the meanings of its constituents” (Szabó, 2020). Consequently, phrasal verbs such as “give in”,

“make up” and “take off” would be regarded as non-compositional (i.e., non-transparent), whereas “come in”, “go out” and “sit down” would be considered compositional.

As pointed out by Claridge (2000), compositional phrasal verbs predate non-compositional ones. The author states that, during the Old English period, phrasal verbs could be completely compositional, retaining their literal locational or directional meanings (Hiltunen, 1983; Denison, 1981), or could convey meanings metonymically or metaphorically derived from the literal ones, but preserving part of that literal meaning. Non-compositional or figurative phrasal verbs, on the other hand, could not be retrieved from said period (Hiltunen, 1983). However, this latter kind of phrasal verb can be found in Middle English.

Furthermore, as noted by Thim (2012), in Old English, the adverbial particle could appear either before or after the verb. In Middle English, however, adverbial particles lost their preverbal position while maintaining their postposition. Therefore, Thim claims that “what has traditionally been referred to as the ‘rise’ of the phrasal verb is, syntactically, the loss of positional variability of the particle in relation to the verb” (2012, p. 74). Moreover, the author further argues that the loss of productivity of native prefixes occurred concurrently with the development of aspectual functions by spatial particles, which were in many respects functionally equivalent to prefixes and, thus, “old English prefix verbs are very often best translated with a Modern English phrasal verb” (p. 183). Besides, the author highlights the Germanic etymology from many phrasal verbs, apart from the French and Latin etymology.

It is also worth noting that, despite being frequently associated with informal or colloquial speech, the multiplicity of phrasal verbs cannot be limited to a particular register (Claridge, 2000; Thim, 2012). In fact, phrasal verbs are used throughout a wide range of fields and registers, from



slang (e.g., “butt out”, “fuck off”) and informal speech (e.g., “faff around”, “pig out”) to neutral registers (e.g., “take off”) and formal ones. For instance, some phrasal verbs are commonly used in legal jargon. As an example, the following sentences are taken from the British National Corpus (BNC):

- The following judgment **was handed down**. # FERRIS J. This is an appeal by the third party, an accountant, from an order of Master Munrow made on 3 October 1991 dismissing his application that a third party notice, **served upon** him by the third defendant in the main action, **should be struck out**.
- In the Court of Appeal, the judgment below **was set aside** and judgment was entered for the defendants on their counterclaim.
- He **has to weigh up** the possibility of a conviction for something, as opposed to the accused walking free.
- A corporation can not [sic] be made bankrupt; but a company formed under the Companies Act 1985 or similar earlier Acts **can be wound up**, and its property distributed, according to rules similar to those applicable to bankruptcy.
- But crucially, although oppressive confessions **may be ruled out**, the Act **goes on** to provide that the fact' that a confession is wholly or partly excluded... shall not affect the admissibility in evidence of any facts discovered as a result of the confession'.

In addition to this, as regards its syntactic category, this type of multi-word verb can be either transitive or intransitive. For example, “come in”, “come out” and “look out” are intransitive phrasal verbs, whereas “bring up”, “fill in” and “sort out” require a direct object for the sentence

to be grammatical. Others, however, can function either as transitive or intransitive verbs, with or without a change in meaning.

For example, on the one hand, the phrasal verb “blow out” can be used intransitively, as in “The candles blew out”, meaning “be extinguished by an air current”, or transitively, as in “He blew out the candles”, meaning “extinguish a flame by means of one's breath or an air current” (Oxford University Press, n.d.). In this case, the phrasal verb can be translated into Spanish using the same verb in the pronominal and transitive form respectively (*Se apagaron las velas* vs. *Apagó las velas*) or different verbs (*Se apagaron las velas* vs. *Sopló las velas*).

On the other hand, the meaning of the phrasal verb “burn out” varies significantly depending on whether it is used intransitively, as in “The fire had burnt out before the fire engines arrived” (“to stop burning because there is nothing more to burn”) or transitively, as in “The building was burned out by firebombs” (“to destroy something completely by fire so that only the outer frame remains”) (Oxford University Press, n. d.). As regards its translation, the Spanish verbs “apagarse”, “extinguirse”, “consumirse”, etc. may be used for the intransitive structure, whereas “quemar”, “incendiar”, etc. are possible translations for the transitive structure. Other examples of phrasal verbs that admit both syntactic structures include “blow out”, “break in”, “break off”, “give up”, “take off”, etc.

### **Prepositional Verbs**

Another type of multi-word verb is that of prepositional verbs, which can be defined as “a lexical verb followed by a preposition with which it is semantically and/or syntactically associated” (Quirk *et. al.*, 1985, p. 1155). As in the case of phrasal verbs, both elements form a

unit. This cohesion between the verb proper and the preposition is evidenced, for example, by the stranded position of the preposition when the sentence is turned into the passive voice and the possibility of coordinating a prepositional verb with another verb so that they share the same direct object (Claridge, 2000). For instance:

(i) You can *rely on* him. / He can be *relied on*. / You can *trust and rely on* him.

(ii) They *look after* patients. / Patients are *looked after*. / They *help and look after* patients.

In the case of the verb “look after”, it can even be turned into an adjective, as in “looked-after children”, which further stresses the unity between the verb proper and the preposition. The same occurs with the adjectives “called-for”, “sought-after”, “unheard-of”, “unthought-of”, etc., all of which derive from prepositional verbs.

Moreover, prepositions that make up prepositional verbs are homonymous with adverbial particles. For instance, “on” is an adverbial particle in the phrasal verb “hold on” and a preposition in the prepositional verb “rely on”. Likewise, if we consider the multi-word verb “turn on”, it can have different meanings depending on whether it is used as a phrasal verb (e.g., “*Turn on* your television”) or as a prepositional verb (e.g., “He *turned on* his accomplice” or “The case *turns on* issues of fact rather than issues of law”). Sometimes, this may lead to ambiguity. For example, as noted by Quirk *et. al.*, “He *turned on* his supporters” may mean “He excited them”, in which case “turned on” would be a phrasal verb, or “He attacked them”, if “turned on” is considered as a prepositional verb (1985, p. 1157).

The aforementioned homonymy between adverbial particles and prepositions makes it more difficult to distinguish prepositional verbs from phrasal verbs, a task which has sometimes been completely neglected. In this regard, it should be noted that the expression “phrasal verb” has

been repeatedly used as an umbrella term covering, for example, prepositional and phrasal prepositional verbs. For instance, the prepositional verbs “get over”, “look after” and “run after” are labelled as “phrasal verbs” by the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, Lexico.com, the Macmillan Dictionary, the Cambridge English Dictionary, and the Collins Online English Dictionary. However, the prepositional verb “look for” is only labelled as a phrasal verb by the first three dictionaries mentioned above; the last two dictionaries do not refer to it as a multi-word verb of any kind whatsoever. What is more, the prepositional verbs “abstain from” and “object to” are not labelled as multi-word verbs in any of the aforesaid dictionaries. This evidences the previously mentioned general dissensus regarding the categorization of multi-word verbs, subsuming other forms of verb combinations within the category of phrasal verbs or failing to recognize them as a unit at all. This tendency is observed not only in lexicographers but also in grammarians, and, as indicated by Darwin and Grey (1999, p. 67), it can have serious implications for learning:

The confusion among sources, obviously, leads to confusion for students and instructors. For instance, if students are told that particles in phrasal verbs cannot be fronted yet are given examples like improve on (Cornell, 1985) and go down (McArthur, 1989), which do permit fronting of the particle, one can expect student’s avoidance of phrasal verbs. (Darwin and Grey, 1999, p. 67)

Likewise, if students are told that the direct object can appear between the verb proper and the adverbial particle, the abovementioned categorization of some prepositional verbs as phrasal verbs could result in ungrammatical constructions, such as “get it over”, “look him after” or “run her after”. Consequently, students should be warned about this lack of consistency with regards to

multi-word verb categorization and the need to check the appropriate structure for the verb in question.

Nevertheless, despite the identical form of adverbial particles and prepositions, there are several ways to distinguish phrasal verbs from prepositional verbs. This work will only refer to some of them.

First of all, a major difference between phrasal and prepositional verbs is that, whereas phrasal verbs may be transitive or intransitive, prepositional verbs can only be transitive. As pointed out by Quirk *et al.* (1985) and Claridge (2000), prepositional verbs allow two different analyses, namely either as a prepositional verb followed by a direct object, or as a simplex verb followed by an adverbial phrase. For example, in the sentence “You should deal with this issue as soon as possible”, “deal with” can be a prepositional verb followed by the direct object “this issue”, or, alternatively, “with this issue” can be considered an adverbial adjunct modifying the verb “deal”.

Secondly, in the case of transitive multi-word verbs, the position of the direct object can be used to determine the kind of verb combination: if the direct object can appear between the verb proper and the particle (e.g., “Take your shoes off” or “Take them off”), the multi-word verb is a phrasal verb. Conversely, if the direct object cannot appear in middle position (e.g., \**“get it over”* vs. *“get over it”*), then, the multi-word verb is a prepositional verb (Quirk *et al.*, 1985).

Other tests mentioned by Darwin and Grey (1999) include: (i) adverbial insertion between the verb proper and the preposition, which is not acceptable in the case of phrasal verbs (\**“Pick quickly up the pencil”*); (ii) the lack of stress on the preposition, as opposed to the stress placed on the adverbial particle; (iii) particle repetition, which is not possible with phrasal verbs (\**“I looked*

*up* your name, *up* her name, and *up* his name”) (Fraser, 1976, p. 2); (iv) verb insertion between the verb proper and the preposition, which is not viable in the case of phrasal verbs (\*“I really *messed and fouled up* on my test”) (Darwin & Grey, 1999, p. 80); and (v) fronting of the particle, which is not possible for phrasal verbs (\*“*Up* he *picked* the pencil”) (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), among other tests. However, as shown by these authors, the aforementioned tests have certain exceptions and limitations, so they do not work properly in all cases.

### **Phrasal Prepositional Verbs**

A third category of multi-word verbs is called “phrasal prepositional verbs”. As their name suggests, these verbs “contain, in addition to the verb, both an adverb and a preposition as particles” (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 1160). The three elements, which always appear in the same order (i.e., verb proper + adverbial particle + preposition), form a syntactic and semantic unit with its own meaning. For example: “come down on” (‘criticize’ or ‘punish’), “come up with” (‘produce’), “cut down on” (‘reduce’), “put up with” (‘tolerate’), “look up to” (‘admire’), etc. Sometimes, ambiguity may result from the possibility of analysing a given construction as a phrasal prepositional verb or not. For instance, “He fell down on the job” may be construed as a structure containing a phrasal verb (fell down) and an adverbial adjunct (for example, a person who fell from scaffolding while working) (which can be translated into Spanish as “*Se cayó en el trabajo*”) or as a structure formed by a phrasal prepositional verb meaning “to fail or be unsuccessful at something” (which can be translated into Spanish as “*No hizo bien su trabajo*”). Once again, context is key to identify the relevant meaning.

Besides, phrasal prepositional verbs allow stranding and passivization since they are always transitive. For instance: “He *was looked up to* by his students” or “He is someone I *look up to*”.

### **Verb-adjective Combinations**

A further kind of multi-word verb is that of verb-adjective combinations, defined as “the combination of a verb with an adjective, and an optional or obligatory preposition at the end, in which the adjective carries a prominent, sometimes even the major part of the meaning of the whole verb phrase” (Claridge, 2000). Some examples are: “break loose” (‘escape’), “break open” (‘open’), “fall short of” (‘be insufficient’), “make good” (‘succeed’), “make known” (‘reveal’), “make sure of” (‘ensure’ or ‘verify’), etc. It should be noted that, whereas Claridge (2000) includes verb combinations formed by past participles within this category (e.g., *get rid of*), Quirk *et al.* consider them as “verb-verb combinations” (1985).

Furthermore, these multi-word verbs can be either intransitive, as in “The prisoner *broke loose* before the guards could stop him”, or transitive, as in “You should *get rid of* those incriminating documents”. Besides, some of them admit both syntactic structures: “The pods *broke open* and the seeds scattered on the wind” (intransitive) or “The police *broke open* the door” (transitive) (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In the case of transitive verb-adjective combinations, the direct object may appear either after the adjective, as in the previous example, or between the verb proper and the adjective, as in “The burglars *broke the locked safe open*” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), which resembles the position of the direct object for phrasal verbs (Quirk *et al.*, 1985).

## Verb-nominal Combinations

Another type of multi-word verb is that of verb-nominal combinations, which are formed by a verb proper, a noun (with or without an article) and an optional preposition before or after the noun, all of which form a single unit. For example: “take place”, “bear in mind”, “give birth to”, etc. In these cases, the noun is the element which bears the lexical meaning of the unit (Claridge, 2000). These multi-word verbs may be either intransitive, as in “The ceremony *took place* two days ago”, or transitive, as in “She *give birth to* a beautiful baby girl two days ago”.

These verb combinations exhibit different degrees of compositionality. For instance, “take a look at” is highly compositional, as opposed to “take the floor”, which can be described as non-compositional. As indicated by Martinez (2013), the degree of compositionality of a multi-word verb can impact the level of difficulty that such a verb may pose for a student learning it, although other factors are also significant when assessing this degree of difficulty. The author uses the multi-word verb “take place” to illustrate this point: although this verbal combination is non-transparent, it can be relatively easy to understand for a Spanish-speaking student due to the similarity, both in form and in meaning, with the expression “*tener lugar*” in Spanish.

Other verb-nominal combinations with an equivalent counterpart in Spanish include: make use of (“*hacer uso de*”), put in practice (“*poner en práctica*”), take into account (“*tener en cuenta*”), take a seat (“*tomar asiento*”), take control (“*tomar el control*”), take note (“*tomar nota*”), etc. What is more, there are others which, although not exactly equivalent in form, have a great resemblance to their Spanish translations, such as: bite the bait (“*morder el anzuelo*”), pay attention (“*prestar atención*”), take root (“ *echar raíces*”), take time (“*llevar tiempo*”), etc. According to Negro Alousque (2011), this equivalence may be the result of a shared metaphoric, metonymic or



cultural basis, or a consequence of “interlingual loans”. Therefore, as languages are not isolated from one another, they are subject to cross-linguistic lexical influence, i.e., “the impact that two or more languages have on each other’s vocabulary” (Muñoz-Basols & Salazar, 2016).

### **Other Fixed Expressions**

This category, which is not included in Claridge’s classification, is added in this research in order to cover other verb combinations which cannot be subsumed under any of the aforementioned categories, but nevertheless constitute a syntactic and lexical unit formed by a verb and other elements, such as “come to terms with”, “get out of hand”, and “turn a deaf ear”. These fixed expressions are highly idiomatic and, thus, they are characterized by a lack of flexibility in word-order and a non-compositional nature. In this sense, it is worth noting that some authors regard certain verb-nominal combinations as fixed expressions because of their opaque meaning and fixed word order.

However, the fact that fixed expressions are idiomatic does not necessarily entail that they are exclusive of a particular language. Therefore, although some of these fixed expressions are specific of a given language, others are not. As explained by Negro Alousque (2011), many of these shared expressions are culturally rooted, as in the case of “rest on one’s laurels” (“*dormirse en los laureles*”), which derives from classical mythology. Besides, others have a shared metaphoric or metonymic basis, such as “turn a deaf ear” (“*hacer oídos sordos*”), using the ears to refer to the sense of hearing. The author further alludes to fixed expressions that have a cross-linguistic partial equivalence, which may result from a difference in the syntactic structure or from

the fact that the fixed expression is based on an image that is taken from the same domain, as in “have a screw loose” (“*faltar un tornillo*”).

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, some fixed expressions do not have an equivalent counterpart in other languages. According to Negro Alousque (2011), this lack of equivalence could be the consequence of an unshared symbolic motivation, a culture-specific basis, or the lack of lexicalization of the concept behind the fixed expression. As noted by Solomon (2013, p. 1): “From culture to culture, the communicative tool of language serves as the vehicle of expressive thought within concrete and abstract knowledge, conventions of lexical construction, and concepts specific to each culture’s unique microcosm of communication”. Regardless of whether or not there is a corresponding fixed expression in the target language, it is of utmost importance that the translator be able to identify the compositional nature of the expression so as to convey the same idea in the target text, avoiding a literal translation. As noted by Anthony Burgess, “translation is not a matter of words only; it is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture”.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, this research has explored the topic of multi-word verbs, which constitute an essential part of the English language and make a major contribution to the richness thereof. This topic has been characterized by a general lack of consensus among linguists, not only with respect to the name used to refer to this group, but also with respect to the different categories subsumed under this broader class and even the existence of multi-word verbs as a unified class comprising these subcategories.

In this regard, this work has analysed the common features inherent in multi-word verbs, which features allow for the recognition of such verbs as part of the same class. In particular, it has examined their unity of meaning as a key factor in the recognition of multi-word verbs and in the understanding of the meaning of the text. Furthermore, it has pointed out some relevant characteristics of each class of multi-word verbs, such as their constituents, their syntactic category, some ways to recognise or differentiate them, etc. What is more, this research work has referred to the resemblance of some of these verb combinations to similar structures in other languages, and examples of such resemblance in English and Spanish have been provided. It remains to be explored in further studies the cross-linguistic influence present in other categories of multi-word verbs, as well as the origin of certain verb combinations common to other languages apart from Spanish.

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