

The ambiguity of some semantic, syntactic and phonological classifications with reference to English phrasal verbs

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In his 1976 book on the verb-particle combinations in English Bruce Fraser argues that in the following pairs of sentences it is phonological factors (stress falling on the second syllable) that determine the use of certain phrasal verbs instead of the others, for example:

The chemist mixed up the solutions.

*The chemist *combined up the solutions. And in:*

The man changed over his heating system to gas.

*The man *transformed over his heating system to gas.*

In the first sentence one might deduce, from the very definition of the verb 'combine', that it is the very meaning of the verb *combine* that excludes the usage of *up* in this particular case. There are many other verbs accented on the second syllable that admit of a particle after all, for example, it is grammatically correct to say *collect up, divide up, explain away, etc.*

In the second sentence the very meaning of *over* is sufficient to establish the end of an action.

If there are many exceptions to a rule it ceases to be perceived as a rule. The failure in interpretation of the above mentioned phrasal verbs may result in further misinterpretations. Was then Fraser's phonological classification correct?

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