

The Phrasal Verb Pedagogical (PHaVE) List Users' Manual

What is the PHaVE List?

The PHaVE List is a listing of the most common meaning senses of the most common phrasal verbs in English, intended to be seen as a complement to previous phrasal verb frequency lists. It was designed to be used as a reference source for practitioners and as a learning guide for learners of English.

What does the list contain?

There are a large number of phrasal verbs in English, perhaps over 8000 (Liu, 2011). Furthermore, a very large proportion of these are polysemous, as in the following example:

WORK OUT

- a) plan, devise or think about STH carefully or in detail (33%)
We still need to work out the details of the procedure.
- b) exercise in order to improve health or strength (23%)
He works out at the gym 5 times a week.
- c) (+ well/badly) happen or develop in a particular way (15%)
Everything worked out well in the end.
- d) prove to be successful (12.5%)
Despite our efforts, it just didn't work out.

This large number of phrasal verbs and meaning senses make the teaching and learning of phrasal verbs extremely challenging. The PHaVE List strives to make phrasal verbs more manageable for pedagogical purposes by including only the very most important ones, thus limiting the number to be addressed, at least in the first instance. The PHaVE List includes only the 150 phrasal verbs which have been identified by previous research as being the most frequent, i.e. having at least 10 tokens per million words in either the COCA or the BNC. It also describes only the most frequent meaning senses for each of those items, giving the percentage of occurrence for each. This approach of including only the most frequent phrasal verbs and their most frequent meaning senses is very efficient; the 288 meaning senses included on the PHaVE List account for a very large proportion of all the phrasal verb occurrences in the BNC.

How was the list made?

The items were extracted by previous studies using various corpora and different searching procedures. For each item, two random samples of 100 concordance lines were analyzed across all sections of the COCA in order to see what meaning senses are the most frequent among all of the possible meaning senses. Each meaning sense in the

list is illustrated by an example sentence which was modelled on either the COCA or various Internet sources.

What are the practical applications of the list?

Just like any existing frequency list, the PHaVE List has a number of practical applications. For language teaching practitioners like teachers and syllabus designers, the PHaVE List provides one means of handling a difficult aspect of one of the most challenging features of the English language. Because many phrasal verbs are polysemous and may have up to 10 or 15 meaning senses, it is impossible to deal with all of them in the classroom or in textbooks. Therefore, the PHaVE List offers the possibility of prioritizing their most frequent, and thus most important, meaning senses, thereby facilitating a more systematic approach to dealing with polysemous phrasal verbs. It is hoped that the PHaVE List will contribute to a more principled integration of phrasal verbs into language instruction and syllabi.

In addition, the PHaVE List can provide useful information for testing and assessment purposes. There may be uncertainty with polysemous items about which meaning sense should be tested. The List presents meaning sense frequency percentages and ranking orders, allowing test-makers to make informed decisions as to which meaning sense(s) should be tested, depending on language proficiency levels.

Finally, the PHaVE List can be used as a learning guide by students who may have noticed the importance of phrasal verbs in informal spoken discourse, but whose language instruction did not equip them with enough knowledge or enough confidence to use them accurately or appropriately.

What are the limitations of the PHaVE List?

The PHaVE List has a number of limitations which users should be aware of. Firstly, the PHaVE List was created with the sole purpose of providing a list of the most frequent meaning senses of the phrasal verbs it includes. No consideration was given to the meaning senses' varying degrees of semantic transparency or difficulty. It may be argued that completely transparent meaning senses (e.g. go out of a building) are rather easy to decode and learn and thus perhaps not worth being given explicit attention or being included in the list. The PHaVE List serves as a meaning sense frequency indicator only, and teachers and learners ultimately retain the power to decide what they want to pay explicit attention to.

Secondly, since the meaning sense frequency percentages were derived from a corpus, it is unlikely that they are 100% reflective of all language use and individual types of exposure. They are inherently an artefact of the various texts which the corpus contains. The PHaVE List is derived from the COCA, which has numerous advantages: it is very large, it is very recent and regularly updated, and it is balanced across several genres and discourse types. However, it is reflective of mostly American English. What has been found as the most common meaning senses for a particular phrasal verb may be different in some other varieties of English, such as British English. Because it combines

several sources (popular magazines, newspapers, fiction, academic texts, TV broadcasts), it will probably not reflect any particular individual's experiences and English exposure. For instance, someone using English for reading finance newspapers may not find the list very reflective of their own use. Users should remain aware that the PHaVE List aims to be of general service and usefulness to a wide range of English language teaching professionals and students, which may limit its usefulness for some specific potential users.

Thirdly, it is not the aim of the PHaVE List to provide an exhaustive listing of common phrasal verbs, like a dictionary. The limited number of phrasal verbs and meaning senses are meant to facilitate practical pedagogic practice, but it should not be seen as being comprehensive. There are many important phrasal verbs not included on the list. Likewise, there are useful meaning senses not included for the phrasal verbs which do appear on the list. The list should be seen as a starting point for instruction and learning, not the end-point.

Reference

Liu, D. (2011). The most frequently used English phrasal verbs in American and British English: A multicorpus examination. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(4), 661-688.