



EXPLORING THE USE OF PHRASAL VERBS IN CELINE DION'S SONG LYRICS

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the use of phrasal verbs in five selected songs from *The Best of Celine Dion* album. The study focuses on identifying the types of phrasal verbs and interpreting their contextual meanings within the song lyrics. A descriptive qualitative method was applied with purposive sampling, selecting five songs: *The Power of Love*, *To Love You More*, *My Heart Will Go on and on*, *Because You Loved Me*, and *Then You Look at Me*. The collected phrasal verbs were classified based on their structure and grammatical functions, including transitive, intransitive, separable, and inseparable forms. The findings showed a total of 19 phrasal verbs used across the five songs. *The Power of Love* contained the highest number with 6 occurrences, while *My Heart Will Go on and on* had the fewest with only 2 occurrences. The phrasal verbs serve to enrich emotional expression in the lyrics, particularly in conveying themes such as loyalty, hope, love, and emotional support within a relationship. This study is expected to contribute to applied linguistic studies, especially in enhancing learners' understanding of phrasal verb usage in authentic contexts such as song lyrics.

Keywords: Celine Dion, Linguistic, Phrasal Verbs, Semantic, Song Lyrics

A. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in human communication as it allows people to express ideas, emotions, and social intentions in daily interactions. Linguistics, as the scientific study of language, examines how language is structured, used, and understood in different contexts (Yule, 2020). Based on this perspective, language cannot be separated from human interaction because it functions not only as a communication tool but also as a medium for expressing meaning and social relationships.

The scientific study of language, known as linguistics, includes the analysis of meaning, structure, and usage in various communicative contexts. Semantics is concerned with the



study of meaning in language, including how meaning is formed, interpreted, and understood by language users (Saeed, 2016). This view highlights the importance of semantic analysis in understanding linguistic expressions, particularly multi-word constructions whose meanings extend beyond individual words.

Within linguistics, semantics concerns how meaning is conveyed, including through multi-word expressions such as phrasal verbs, which are widely used in spoken and written English. Phrasal verbs often pose challenges for English language learners due to their unique forms and idiomatic meanings that cannot always be understood from the individual components. Therefore, understanding phrasal verbs becomes essential for achieving natural fluency and accurate interpretation in English communication.

Gardner and Davies (2018) explain that phrasal verbs consist of a verb and a particle that function together as a single semantic unit, often expressing meanings that cannot be interpreted literally from their individual components. This definition supports the idea that phrasal verbs should be understood as unified lexical items rather than separate grammatical elements.

According to Darwin and Gray (2019), phrasal verbs often cause difficulties for English learners because their meanings are frequently idiomatic and unpredictable. This difficulty explains why phrasal verbs remain challenging for learners and require contextual exposure to achieve proper understanding.

Liu (2020) states that phrasal verbs are highly productive and commonly used in daily spoken English, media discourse, and popular song lyrics. This frequent usage makes phrasal verbs an essential component of English vocabulary learning and justifies their analysis in authentic texts such as songs.

Murphey (1992) argues that songs provide authentic linguistic input and reflect natural language use in meaningful contexts. Therefore, song lyrics can be considered valuable data sources for linguistic analysis because they present language as it is naturally used.



Millington (2011) suggests that songs are effective learning tools because they enhance learners' motivation and expose them to natural language patterns. This supports the use of song lyrics as an alternative medium for analyzing and learning complex language features such as phrasal verbs.

Popular song lyrics are one of the authentic sources where phrasal verbs frequently appear, making them valuable for linguistic and pedagogical investigation. Songs not only serve as entertainment but also convey emotions, cultural values, and narrative messages through linguistic features. Celine Dion, as a globally recognized artist, uses expressive and emotionally driven lyrics that provide rich examples of natural English, including phrasal verbs. However, studies examining the use of phrasal verbs specifically in Celine Dion's songs remain limited. This creates a gap for further research exploring how these expressions contribute to meaning in song lyrics.

Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the types and meanings of phrasal verbs found in five selected songs from The Best of Celine Dion album: The Power of Love, To Love You More, My Heart Will Go on and on, Because You Loved Me, and Then You Look at Me. The goals of this study are (1) to identify and classify the phrasal verbs used in the selected songs, and (2) to interpret their contextual meanings as part of the emotional and thematic elements in the lyrics. The scope of this study is limited to phrasal verbs that appear in the selected lyrics, analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method.

This research is expected to provide meaningful contributions to applied linguistics and English language learning. By presenting authentic examples of phrasal verbs used in music, this study can help learners better understand and apply phrasal verbs in real communicative contexts, while also enriching linguistic analysis of song lyrics as a form of literary expression.

Traditional grammarians define a phrasal verb as a verb followed by a particle, which may be a preposition, an adverb, or a combination of both, and together they create a single meaning unit. This indicates that the meaning of a phrasal verb often cannot be interpreted from the verb alone because the particle contributes additional semantic value.



According to (Gardner & Davies, 2018), phrasal verbs are verb and particle combinations that function as single semantic units often expressing meaning that cannot be interpreted literally from their components. (Trebits, 2009) also explains that phrasal verbs appear frequently in authentic English communication, making them an essential part of vocabulary learning for students. In addition, (Darwin & Gray, 2019) argue that many phrasal verbs present idiomatic meaning, with causes difficulty for learner because the meaning can not always be predicted from the base vrb and particle. Similarly, (Liu, 2020) state that phrasal verbs are highly productive and commonly used in daily spoken, media, and modern song lyrics. (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2021) also said phrasal verbs must be understood as lexical chunks functioning as unified meaning expressions in communication.

From the definitions above, it can be concluded that phrasal verbs are combinations of a verb and a particle that work as a single semantic unit, where the particle adds additional meaning that expands or even modifies the meaning of the basic verb. These expressions are a crucial part of acquiring vocabulary since they are frequently used in real-world English communication, such as everyday speech, media, and song lyrics. Because of its idiomatic nature, the meaning is frequently unpredictable from the separate pieces, which may cause learners to struggle with comprehension. Therefore, to facilitate successful communication and enhance English language competency, it is essential to comprehend phrasal verbs as cohesive lexical chunks.

Phrasal verbs can be classified based on their grammatical behavior and the presence or absence of an object. Some phrasal verbs require an object to complete their meaning, which makes them transitive, while others function independently without an object and are considered intransitive. In transitive phrasal verbs, the object plays an important role and also determines whether the construction is separable or inseparable. Separable phrasal verbs allow the object to appear between the verb and the particle, particularly when the object is a pronoun, whereas inseparable phrasal verbs require the verb and particle to remain together as a single unit.

In the analysis of Celine Dion's song lyrics, transitive phrasal verbs such as *held me up*, *gave it back*, and *reach for me* are used to describe actions that directly affect an object, often expressing emotional support, attachment, or personal struggle. In contrast, intransitive



phrasal verbs like *go on*, *keep on*, *walk away*, and *rolling by* express ongoing processes, emotional transitions, or movement without requiring an object. These patterns demonstrate how phrasal verbs function as unified semantic units that contribute significantly to the emotional and narrative depth of song lyrics.

The meaning produced by this combination is often idiomatic and cannot always be interpreted literally from individual words. In linguistic contexts such as song lyrics, phrasal verbs play an important role in conveying emotional, functional, and contextual messages that strengthen the thematic expression of the text. Furthermore, the grammatical structure of phrasal verbs can be categorized into four main types, namely transitive separable, transitive inseparable, intransitive separable (which appears less frequently), and intransitive inseparable (which dominates the data in this study). These classifications are applied in this research to identify and analyze how phrasal verbs contribute to the delivery of meaning related to love, loyalty, emotional struggle, and hope throughout the selected Celine Dion song lyrics.

B. METHOD

Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative research focuses on understanding meaning, context, and processes rather than numerical measurement. This approach is suitable for the present study because the data consist of words and meanings found in song lyrics. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) propose that qualitative data analysis involves systematic processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. These stages guide the analysis of phrasal verbs in this study to ensure organized and meaningful interpretation.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method because the data are in the form of words rather than numbers, and the analysis focuses on describing the linguistic characteristics of phrasal verbs. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to interpret the contextual meaning and grammatical functions of phrasal verbs within the song lyrics. The data in this research consist of phrasal verbs found in five selected songs by Celine Dion from *The Best of Celine Dion* album, namely *The Power of Love*, *To Love You More*, *My Heart Will Go on and on*, *Because You Loved Me*, and *Then You Look at Me*.



This study uses a descriptive qualitative research method because the data is in words, and the main goal is to describe and understand the language features found in song lyrics. Qualitative research is about getting a deep understanding, focusing on meaning, context, and detailed analysis. As (Palinkas et al., 2015) explain, qualitative methods aim to get a full picture by continuing to collect data until no new important information is found, showing how important it is to dig deep into the meaning during analysis.

In this research, using a descriptive qualitative approach lets the researcher explain how phrasal verbs work in expressing ideas about love, emotion, and story in chosen Celine Dion songs. The findings are shown in a descriptive way to show how these phrasal verbs shape the style and message of the lyrics.

Patton (2002) states that purposive sampling is used to select data sources that are rich in information and relevant to the research focus. This technique allows the researcher to select song lyrics that contain meaningful phrasal verbs for in-depth analysis. The data selection in this study employs a purposive sampling technique. This technique is used because the research focuses on specific linguistic features, namely English phrasal verbs, which require data that are relevant and suitable for in depth qualitative analysis. The songs were selected based on several criteria. First, the songs are performed by the same artist, Celine Dion, to maintain consistency in language style and thematic expression. Second, the selected songs contain clear verbal constructions and identifiable phrasal verbs that can be analyzed linguistically. Third, the songs are well-known and widely accessible, which ensures the authenticity and reliability of the data sources.

Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize that qualitative analysis involves interpreting patterns of meaning within contextual data. This principle supports the interpretation of phrasal verbs based on their contextual meaning within the song lyrics.

The number of songs is limited to five to allow a focused and detailed analysis of each lyric. As this study applies a descriptive qualitative approach, a smaller and more controlled data set is considered more appropriate to achieve depth of analysis rather than quantity. Limiting



the data also enables the researcher to examine each phrasal verb carefully in terms of its type, particle pattern, and semantic meaning within the lyrical context.

According to Patton (2002), as cited in (Palinkas et al., 2015), purposive sampling is used to find and pick people or groups who have a lot of knowledge or experience about a particular subject. It also notes that purposive sampling is about selecting people or data sources that best help in understanding the research topic thoroughly.

In this study, the songs were picked based on specific rules: they are popular English songs by Celine Dion that clearly use meaningful phrasal verbs. This matches criterion-based sampling, which makes sure the chosen data is relevant to the study's focus.

The data were collected through documentation technique by accessing the official lyrics available in online sources. The researcher then identified every phrasal verb that appears in the selected lyrics and recorded them as the primary data. After the data were collected, they were analyzed based on several stages: (1) identifying the phrasal verbs that appear in the lyrics, (2) classifying them into their structural types such as transitive separable, transitive inseparable, and intransitive forms, and (3) interpreting their contextual meanings in relation to the themes expressed in the songs. The theories of phrasal verbs proposed by linguistic experts serve as the analytical framework to support the classification and interpretation process in this study.

This method ensures that the data analysis is conducted systematically through several stages. First, all identified phrasal verbs in the selected song lyrics are classified based on their types, including transitive, intransitive, separable, and inseparable phrasal verbs. Second, each phrasal verb is analyzed in terms of its particle pattern and contextual meaning within the lyrics. Finally, the interpretation of the data is carried out by relating the findings to relevant theories of phrasal verbs in order to explain how these constructions contribute to the emotional and semantic expression conveyed in Celine Dion's songs.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

According to (McGuire & Mordaunt, 2020), phrasal verbs are combinations of verbs and particles that create specific meanings within the context of a sentence. Their meanings may be literal or idiomatic depending on how the verb and particle interact. Phrasal verbs appear frequently in spoken and written English, including in song lyrics, which makes songs valuable learning media for understanding phrasal verbs in real communication. Quirk et al. (1985) describe phrasal verbs as combinations of verbs and particles that may function as transitive or intransitive constructions. This classification helps identify the grammatical behavior of phrasal verbs found in the selected songs.

Biber et al. (1999) note that phrasal verbs are more commonly used in spoken and informal English than in formal written texts. This explains why phrasal verbs frequently appear in song lyrics, which often reflect spoken language style. Cowie and Mackin (1975) explain that many phrasal verbs function idiomatically and cannot be understood through word-for-word translation. This supports the interpretation of phrasal verbs in song lyrics as expressions of emotional and symbolic meaning.

In this research, the researcher analyzed five selected English songs sung by Celine Dion to identify and classify phrasal verbs. The analysis focuses on determining the meaning and types of phrasal verbs found in the lyrics.

Figure 1. Phrasal Verbs in “The Power of Love” Song Lyrics

Are rolling by like thunder now: The verb “roll” means to move or turn forward. When combined with the particle “by”, it forms the phrasal verb rolling by, which literally describes something passing or moving past. In the song, rolling by refers to the moment or the situation that continues to pass like thunder.

I hold on to your whole body: The verb “hold” basically means to grasp something, but it is followed by the particles “on to” (adverb + preposition). Those combine to form “hold on to,” which literally means to grip tightly or to keep something.

Figure II. Phrasal Verbs in "To Love You More" Song Lyrics

Take me back into the arms I love: The verb “take” means to remove or carry, but it is followed by “back” (adverb). They combine into “take back,” which literally means to return something or to bring someone back. This is a Transitive phrasal verb. In the song, take me back means returning to a former loving situation.

I'm the one who'll stay, when she walks away: The verb “walk” means to move using your feet, but it is followed by “away” (adverb). They form “walk away,” which literally means to leave or depart. This is an Intransitive phrasal verb. In the song, it describes someone leaving a relationship.

Figure III. Phrasal Verbs in "My Heart Will Go On" Song Lyrics

That is how I know you go on: The verb “go” + “on” forms a phrase meaning to continue or to keep happening. It is an Intransitive phrasal verb. In the song, it represents love continuing even after great distance or loss.

And never let go 'til we're gone: The verb “let” + particle “go” form a transitive phrasal verb meaning to release. In this song, never let go symbolizes never giving up on love.

Figure IV. Phrasal Verbs in "Because You Loved Me" Song Lyrics

For all those times you stood by me: The verb “stand” – particle “by” form a transitive phrasal verb that means to stay loyal and support someone during difficult times. In the song, stood by me describes how the loved one always gave loyalty and strength during every challenge in her life.

You're the one who held me up: The verb “hold”, particle “up” form a transitive phrasal verb which means to support someone physically or emotionally. In this song, held me up means the loved one gave her strength and prevented her from falling into hardship.

Figure V. Phrasal Verbs in "Then You Look at Me" Song Lyrics



Day by day, I find my way: The verb “find” + the object expression “my way” is commonly understood as a figurative phrasal expression meaning to discover direction or overcome difficulty in life. Although not a traditional verb–particle phrasal verb, in this song find my way symbolizes the process of finding hope and purpose again.

Look for the soul and the meaning: The verb “look” + particle “for” form a transitive phrasal verb meaning to search or seek something. In this song, look for the soul and the meaning refers to searching for deeper understanding and purpose in life.

Based on the research results, the particles used to form phrasal verbs in the 5 songs are: by, on, for, into, back, away, go, up, through, to, way. All of these are in the form of prepositions and particles.

Discussion

Trebits (2009) emphasizes that phrasal verbs frequently appear in authentic English materials used for language teaching. The findings of this study align with this view, as phrasal verbs are commonly found in popular song lyrics. Sidek et al. (2021) argue that songs create meaningful learning experiences by combining language, emotion, and cultural context. This reinforces the idea that songs are effective media for learning and analyzing phrasal verbs in context. Bolinger (1971) states that the particle in a phrasal verb plays a crucial role in shaping its overall meaning. This explains how changes in particles affect the emotional nuance of phrasal verbs in song lyrics.

The results show that phrasal verbs found in Celine Dion’s song lyrics convey both literal and figurative meanings that support the emotional narratives of the songs. Phrasal verbs such as *go on* and *walk away* reflect continuity and separation, which are common themes in songs about love and loss. Meanwhile, phrasal verbs like *held me up* and *stood by me* emphasize emotional support and loyalty.

The use of transitive phrasal verbs indicates actions that directly affect an object, often symbolizing emotional involvement, while intransitive phrasal verbs tend to describe ongoing



states or movements. These findings support the view that phrasal verbs function as unified meaning units and play an important role in expressing emotions naturally in song lyrics.

Therefore, the presence of phrasal verbs in popular songs highlights their importance in real language use and shows how song lyrics can serve as effective media for learning phrasal verbs in meaningful and contextualized ways.

D. CONCLUSION

Language plays a key role in how we talk and share thoughts, feelings, and ideas. In English, knowing the right words and how to use them properly is important. This includes understanding phrasal verbs, which are common in everyday speech, written texts, and even in songs. These verbs don't always mean what you would expect if you just looked at the individual words, so learning them properly helps better understand what people are saying. Harmer (2007) suggests that authentic materials such as songs can enhance language learning by exposing learners to real-life language use. Therefore, analyzing phrasal verbs through song lyrics can support effective vocabulary learning and improve learners' communicative competence.

In this research, we looked at phrasal verbs in the lyrics of five songs by Celine Dion from her album *"The Best of Celine Dion"*. The songs are "The Power of Love", "To Love You More", "My Heart Will Go On", "Because You Loved Me", and "Then You Look at Me". We found 19 different instances of phrasal verbs in these songs. After examining them, we identified several types, such as transitive, intransitive, separable, and inseparable phrasal verbs.

"The Power of Love" had the most phrasal verbs, making up 31.6% of the total, followed by *Because You Loved Me* with 26.3%. On the other hand, *My Heart Will Go On* had the least, with only 10.5%. This shows that phrasal verbs are used in different ways depending on the message and emotions the songs are trying to express.

The study suggests that phrasal verbs add more depth and feeling to song lyrics, making the language sound more natural and expressive. They help listeners connect more with the songs



and understand the meaning better. Learning phrasal verbs through songs can be a fun and helpful way to improve English skills, especially in vocabulary and understanding how words are used in real situations.

The findings of this research have important implications for English language learning, particularly in vocabulary and grammar instruction. By analyzing phrasal verbs through song lyrics, this study demonstrates that authentic materials such as popular songs can be effective tools for teaching phrasal verbs in meaningful contexts. The results suggest that exposure to phrasal verbs in songs helps learners understand their usage, structure, and meaning more naturally. This research is important because phrasal verbs are often considered difficult by English learners due to their idiomatic meanings, yet they are widely used in real communication. Therefore, this study contributes to English language studies by providing insight into how phrasal verbs function in song lyrics and supports the use of music as an alternative learning resource for improving learners' language competence.

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