A Metaoperational Analysis of *Away* and *Off*

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Abstract*: The particles **away** and **off** are used to form phrasal verbs which are said to be highly elusive due to the abstractness they display. Traditionally, the explanations of these grammatical items have been associated with their relation to the extralinguistic world, which usually ends up in a stalemate. As a result, one unit may be used to account for how the other one functions without showing clear-cut distinction between them. It follows then that all grammatical items have to express something tangible or else they may not be understood by learners. Very often, such extralinguistic-based explanations turn out to be a lot more confusing as they may refer to the same reference indistinctively. This paper, first, takes a completely different stand by analyzing away and off in the light of their systemic invariant values as distance, separation and other semantic realizations seem to be of little help when it comes to telling them apart. Then, it argues that classifying them as synonyms or using one to explain another leads to nothing less than journeying around in circles. Finally, it shows that away gives an assertive status to the verb while off ascribes a non-assertive status to the verb.*

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1. Introduction

In a video posted on the Internet on 3 September 2016, in a teaching programme called "*Learn English with Papa Teach Me*", the teacher (a native speaker) asserted that when you want to leave an unpleasant person, you should say *I walked off* but it is also fine to say *I walked away*. His purpose was to teach his followers (1.5 million) how to better use *off* in English. Does it mean that the particles *off* and *away* are equal in meaning and interchangeable as well? To him, *off* expresses the idea of separation but the verb indicates how that separation is carried out. It is now obvious that teaching phrasal verbs has always been a difficult task for teachers as their meanings do not derive from the association of the verbs and the particles. The combination of particles with verbs will very often generate a completely different meaning from the node (connection between particle and verb). That is why S. Lindstromberg (2010) is of the opinion that the main feature of phrasal verbs is that the whole combination of words should function as a lexical unit that has its own meaning. He also warned of the use of meaning to account for the difference between similar prepositions. In addition, if translators can look up the meanings of phrasal verbs in dictionaries and try to understand the message of the writer, it must be admitted that they pose real challenge to interpreters who have to guess the meaning at the time of speaking as they render. Many studies and linguistic theories have been conducted in order to decipher how phrasal verbs work and 'tame' their fugitive meanings. This paper, first, will not focus on their meanings but take a completely different stand by analysing *away* and *off* in the light of their systemic invariant values as distance, separation and other semantic realisations seem to be of no help when it comes to telling them apart. Then, it argues that classifying them as synonyms or using one to explain another leads up to nothing less than journeying around in circles. It will provide the structural orientation in which lies the difference between these two grammatical items. Finally, it shows that **away** gives an assertive status to the verb while **off** ascribes a non-assertive status to the verb.

2. Lexical Study of *Away* and *Off*

Dictionaries gather virtually all the words of a given language. They are highly important to every learner. Lexical studies involve words classification based on their nature, functions and meanings. We shall look into the use of *away* and *off* in English language in order to determine how far dictionaries have been

helpful to English learners and heightened their awareness of word choices. One dictionary will be used as sample because almost all dictionaries display quite the same presentation. Here is how *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* presents its findings:

Away	1.*to or at a distance from sb/sth* 2.*to a different place or in a different direction* 3 *Not present* 4. *to say that something is done continuously or with a lot of energy* 5.*until disappearing completely*

Off	**Adverb** 1.***Away** from a place; at a distance in space and time* 2.*used to say that something has been removed* 3.*starting a race* 4.*cancelled* 5.*not connected or functioning* 6. *no longer available* 7.***Away** from work or duty* 8.*taken from the price* **Preposition** 1. *Down or **away** from a place or at a distance in space or time* 2. *Leading **away** from sth* 3. ***Away** from work or duty* 4. ***Away** from a price*

The importance of lexicological studies of grammatical units is well established, but it is clear from the tables above that placing side by side meanings deriving from the context of use can hardly help learners distinguish the particular grammatical value each unit carries. In this respect, *away* seems to refer to concrete realities in the extra-linguistic world since lexicologists find no difficulties listing down its meanings. In contrast, *off* seems to be a lot more elusive as *away* has frequently been used to account for the meaning of *off*. The underlying idea is that these two units are synonymous. If they are truly synonym it will also imply that they can be interchanged without short-circuiting the meaning. One thing is however quite clear; all the meanings displayed in the tables above are not discriminative enough to tell these two units apart in terms of functioning. Also, using distance as discriminative feature between such units seems to be of very little help when it comes to teaching. Furthermore, their categorisation as adverbs, preposition, adjective or whatever is not capable of exposing the reasons why a speaker of English would choose *away* in lieu of *off*. Besides, teaching these particles based on a dictionary as the only material would definitely results in an absolute confusion as at the end of the day the learner will not see any distinction. In the subsequent lines, we shall see what grammar books propose for teaching and explaining the working of these two units.

3. Previous Grammatical Study of Particles *Away* and *Off*

According to N. Chomsky (2022), the goal of any grammatical study is to make known the nature of language. Grammar, therefore, appears to be the subject that looks into the constituent elements of a given language as regards its components and functioning. That is why this paper will examine how *away* and *off* are dealt with in some grammar books with a view of grasping their working and differences, for in language it is all about differences according to F. de Saussure (1916). First, we shall refer to one of the most prominent Grammar book of all time by R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech and J. Svartvik (1985). The table below was cut off from a larger one which includes the analysis of *out of*, *to*, *at*, *on* and *into* and such features as destination and position.

According to the above-mentioned grammarians, ''*'destination' generally accompanies a verb of dynamic 'motional' meaning, such as **go, move, fly,** etc.*'' while '''*position' can accompany most verbs, although this meaning is particularly associated with verbs of stative meaning such as **be, stand, live''*** (R. Quirk et al.1985, p.674). Based on what this table presents, only the literal meanings of the operators are taken into account while it is an open secret that the particles *away* and *off* are endowed with both literal and idiomatic meanings. Furthermore, these particles are analysed on the grounds of their experience in the world. The table shows that the distinctive feature used by the authors is distance. If, indeed, distance can help, then what is the difference between the distance expressed by *away* and the distance displayed by *off*? Can this table aid in knowing the distinction between for example *he drive away* and *he drove off*?

Additionally, the lengthy book of Serge B. Delepine (2000) which made a comprehensive study of English grammar did not conduct a thorough study on the operators *away* and *off*. It only asserts that *away* is used before an object if that object is a personal pronoun or a deictic. For example

  *1. He gave **away** all the money he had won*

while *off* is used before an object if it is a noun as in:

  *2. He took **off** his hat*

Besides, particles are believed to narrow down the broad meanings of verbs in order to turn them into a more concise meaning to be used in a specific context. Eventually, this book recommends learning the meanings of such tricky words along with the verbs they are attached to as they are frequently used in the English language. The grammarian explains the functioning of particles based on how often they are used which he confirmed in this statement "*Ces expressions idiomatiques, qu'il faut apprendre avec soin, sont plus courantes encore dans la langue parlée que dans la prose soignée*"[1] (B. Delepine, 2000, p 92).

This grammar book lays much emphasis on grammatical categories without attempting to explain why a speaker of English would choose *away* to express distance instead of its close counterpart which is *off*. The common point between virtually all the grammar books is that they never analyse both units contrastingly. We shall therefore see how Cognitive Linguistics and Lexicon -Grammar Approach analyse these two units in the English language.

4. *Away* and *Off* from the Standpoint of Linguistic Approaches

Two linguistic approaches that have analysed particle-verbs *away* and *off* will be called upon in this section; Cognitive Linguistics approach and Lexicon-Grammar Approach. As far as Cognitive Linguistics

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[1] *These idiomatic expressions, which have to be learned diligently, are more common in spoken language than in carefully crafted language written in prose (My translation)*

is concerned it *"originated in the late 1970 and early 1980s in the work of George Lakoff, Ron Langacker, and Len Talmy and that focuses on language as an instrument for organising, processing and conveying information"* (G. Dirk and H. Cuyckens 2012, p.3). Cognitive linguistics was also developed with a view of accounting for the functioning of verb-particles in the English language.

It was believed to offer an opposite view to what traditional approach used to present. This approach therefore, "*suggests a cognitive mechanism of learning PVs without relying on tedious memorisation and repetition*" (S. Nedelcheva, 2016, p.2). But, the study conducted as part of that approach focuses on the meaning of grammatical units to the extent that it ended up in using *away* to explain *off*. Even though, it broke up from the traditional stand which suggests rote memorisation of all the meanings deriving from their contextual uses. In addition, the invariant which that study came up with is semantic one as it is clearly said "*As the semantic network of OFF shows, it has an invariant spatial meaning (AWAY, separated) and a number of non-spatial meaning*" (S. Nedelcheva, 2016, p.14). The idea of analysing *off* based on one particular invariant value is commendable but we believe that such invariant should be systemic in order to avoid using one unit to explain the other.

The second linguistic approach is Lexicon-grammar approach which was initially designed to obtain a large coverage of French language but many languages have been explained based on the principles put forth by that approach. Generally speaking, "*the major principle is that the unit of meaning is not located at the level of the word, but at the level of elementary sentences*" (Maurice Gross, 1994, p.2196). Its duty consisted mainly in collecting and categorising linguistic phenomena with the purpose of finding out classes and patterns of usage as developed by Sydney G. La Valey (2020). Meaning, therefore, lies at the phrase-level. The study of *away* as part of this approach was able to disclose only the entries of *away* expressions arranged in tables and their synonyms or definition. The purpose pursued by this paper was not attained in those two theories, it is therefore necessary for us to turn to Metaoperational Grammar with the goal of bringing out the invariant systemic values of *away* and *off*.

5. Metaoperational Grammar and Methodology

Metaoperational grammar is a discourse analysis theory founded by the French linguist called H. Adamczewski in 1976 while he was writing his groundbreaking thesis on **be + ing** in which he took a brand new stand by stating that **be+ing** utterances do not refer to ongoing actions that the role of *-ing* is rather to point to an already introduced segment. Initially, the purpose was to come up with a far more iconic analysis of **be +ing** that reflects its actual functioning by reaching far into the underlined structuring process. Such ambitious grammar would not only uncover but also explain why a speaker chooses, for example, *away* instead of *off*.

The philosophy underlying such research aims at setting up a new era of doing grammar. He, therefore, proclaimed the inefficacy of descriptive grammar as follows: "*Descriptive grammar has been succeeded by a more ambitious type of grammar, a grammar which aims **at explaining the grammatical** data, not only **at describing** them (one has realised that it is impossible to describe the grammatical phenomena unless one was able to explain them*.)" (H. Adamczewski 2003, p.6). The ultimate purpose is to state the reasons why a speaker will choose a grammatical item to the detriment of another one close to the first in terms of meaning. For that purpose to be achieved, it would appear important to the linguist to develop linguistic concepts capable of going beyond the surface. The metalanguage for such an ambitious work should be able to bring forth the underlying operations performed by the surface tracers.

All grammar units are considered to be both operator and metaoperator, as they enable the speaker to structure utterances by taking into account the arrangement allowed by the language concerned. Again, once the work of structuration is over that same unit comments on the status of the 'montage' of the utterance. C.Delmas once defined operator and metaoperator as follows '' ***Opérateur*** *dans la mesure où il n'est plus un simple mot mais un outil qui permet le travail de structuration du sens (cf. opérer, cheville*

*ouvrière, etc.) et **méta-opérateur** dans la mesure où il permet non seulement de construire du sens, mais aussi de renseigner sur la structure en question''.*[2] (C. Delmas,1983, p.85).

It is therefore obvious that *away* and *off* are regarded as operators because they help construct the phrasal verbs, but once the phrasal verb is built, they perform another operation on the verbs they are attached to. In addition, they display a metalinguistic value as they allow the speaker to make comment on the relation between the particle and the verb by stating whether the relation is new or already introduced. That principle was further explicated as follows:''*Quand les mots parlent de la texture du linéaire, de l'agencement des autres mots, on dit qu'ils ont une fonction métalinguistique (naturelle).« Meta » veut dire « à côté », « après », il s'agit donc de mots qui se trouvent à côté d'autres mots pour mieux les commenter.*''[3] (C. Delmas et al. 1993 p.6).The metalinguistic value of a given element enables the speaker to comment on the relation between the operator and the rest of the utterance.

The methodology in Metaoperational Grammar consists mainly in collecting utterances from natural context of communication and analyse them by going beyond the observable surface. When analysing these units, they are often commutated, permutated and sometimes deleted in order to gauge the systemic invariant value that guide the choice of such elements. It is worth noting that the choice of a given operator is informed by the type of structuration it permits to build.

6. Invariant Values of *Away* and *Off*

Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), the forerunner of modern linguistics, discovered long ago that linguistic units are organized systemically in "langue" (as opposed to "parole"). If language is actually organised that way, then one should be overtly interested to know how *away* and *off*, close in meaning and sharing the same paradigmatic axis, are structured in the system of the English language. In addition, when elements are arranged systematically that supposes that each element has a particular value that makes it different from its counterparts in the language. It is that value that is called *invariant value* (H. Adamczewski, 1982) or *fundamental value* (Gustave Guillaume, 1971). It does not change depending on the context. The concept of invariant value is one of the most prominent tenets developed by Adamczewski and *LES AMIS DU CRELINGUA* as part of that discourse analysis theory. He analysed the particle *UP* and present its contextual values (speech effects) as follows:

Operator	Speech Effects
UP	*Perfectivity* *Completeness* *featuring* *Resultativity*

One operator may have a lot of contextual values or speech effects because such are derived from their context of use and they are as limitless as the contexts. Particles have plenty meanings but they only allow the speaker to perform only one particular function on the verb. The particle *UP* makes a comment by granting the verb to which it has been attached a particular status. He came to the following conclusion on the invariant value of *UP*:

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[2] ***Operator*** *in so far as it is not just a word but rather a tool that makes the work of meaning structuration possible (to operate here means linchpin , etc) and **metaoperato**r in the sense that it allows not only to construct meaning, but also make inquiries about the structure at stake.* (my translation)

[3] *When words refer to the linear structure, combine with other words, they are said to have a metalinguistic function (natural). ''meta'' means ''next to'', ''after''it is therefore about words that are next to other words to be able to comment on them. (my translation)*

1. Mainly devoted to the particle UP[…]whose raison d'être is to signal that the verb situated on its left has undergone a change of status.

2. Far from introducing a meaning which would simply add up to the meaning of the verb, the role of the particle UP is to achieve the semantic cohesion of the whole utterance. (H. Adamczewski 2003, p.7)

This paper focuses only on two particles with the goal of bringing out their invariant value in the system of the English language. It will not come up with another meaning; rather it will help decipher the function each operator performs on the verbs they come in contact with. We shall look into this utterance:

3a. Christmas is around the corner and everybody needs more money, I have decided to give *away* N10,000 cash each per question you answer correctly. (Zara Onyinye, 21/12/2022, facebook)

In utterance (3), *away* grants an assertive status to the verb *give* as it does not change its semic content. That is to say, *away* bears on the meaning of the verb *give* without ascribing metaphorical or abstract meaning to it. Besides, the amount of money the writer is talking about is a piece of information to all her followers on facebook. If we commutate the particle *away* with *off*, it will not correspond to the message Zara wants to convey which is to hand over money to someone. Here is what *off* would have suggested:

3b. Christmas is around the corner and everybody needs more money, I have decided to give *off* **(??)** N10,000 cash each per question you answer correctly.

The use of *off* in this utterance depicts a completely different meaning and it is not genuine English simply because *off* does not bear on the meaning of the verb it is attached to, it rather comments on the structural process. A speaker uses *off* when his message is tinged with his own view. That is why *off* is equally required when it comes to giving instructions tinged with subtitle warnings from the writer or speaker. Let's look into this example:

4a. Keep *off* the grass

One could ask why *off* has been used in this warning message. If we commutate *off* with the operator *away*, it will not work simply because the idea of warning the message wants to convey will be cut off. Plus, *off* appears in a context when everything is known or presupposed, that is the segment "the grass" having the article "the" signifies that "grass" is not new both to the writer and the person concerned whereas *away* would have simply been awkward as in:

4b. Keep *away* the grass **(??)**

This utterance is not genuine English sentence because the context where this message will appear should be predetermined. For *away* to work in this utterance it requires "from" as in *keep away from the grass* but with a different context and a new meaning. It would have implied that people should refrain from coming near the place without the speaker intruding on his message. The operators *away* and *off* are used with the verb *drive* as well with different structuration for speakers choose units based on their structural arrangement not on the meaning. C. Delmas (1987)

5. Mari drove *away* from the interview feeling defeated and nauseated, the smell of blood in her nostrils and the image of a German shepherd trotting across the ranch yard with discarded. (Tami Hoag, P 274)

6. They stood and waved as we drove *off* (dictionary online)

Distance has always been used to account for the difference between *drive away* and *drive off* (a car) but as to when to use one instead of the other still remains unanswered. In (5), the speaker signals that Mari just took her leave from the place where she was by means of a car while in (6), though they also departed by car, the speaker makes a metalinguistic comment on the departure. It could be that they will never come back again or with speed. In (6) it not just about a car leaving a place, but rather people who are

close get separated. The operator *off* allows the speaker to intrude in the message and say something that *away* wouldn't have been able to signify. Such value of *off* is also present in the following usages:

> 7. From January to early December 2022, his business brought in roughly $190,000 in sales. From that, Carvajal lives **off** a $ 25,000 salary (CNBC, 20/12/2022)

> 8. I knew everything that needed to be done in order to get the business **off** the ground. (Lubarskyon on the CNBC)

> 9. She could not tear he eyes **away** from the bay stallion, his front legs up on Whinney's back (Jean M. Auel, 1982 p 302)

The utterance (7) is highly significant insofar as *away* would have been utterly awkward and semantically unacceptable as shown below.

> (7) From January to early December 2022, his business brought in roughly $190,000 in sales. From that, Carvajal lives **away** a $ 25,000 salary. **(??)**

What is apparent in this sentence is that the semantic content of the verb *live* is put on the back burner to the benefit of the speaker's own comment. *Off* changes the status of the verb *live* to which it is attached. The verb *live* is not regarded as the opposite of *die*. By joining both terms, speakers secure a new entity that became the basis for them to express their own view on the structure. The context before set the scene as it says that there was an increase but Carvajal relied only on $25,000.

In (8) again, *off* is used as a metalinguistic tool because "*get the business off the ground*" sounds like a start but not just a mere start but the one that will take the business higher. That is the message *off* is conveying; to help the speaker say something on the combination made up of verb and particle. In this utterance, the speaker is making comment on the type of start his business is about to achieve. Once again*, away* and *off* are not equal and thus cannot be interchanged in all instances. *Away* would be ungrammatical and a semantic here. Let's swap *off* for *away*

> (8) I knew everything that needed to be done in order to get the business **away (??)** the ground

In most cases, *away* needs to be aided by *from* in order to start constructing the idea of separation. *Get away* does not refer to the idea of beginning with a greater ambition. In (9), the speaker chose *away* because he is making a description of what is going on before his eye without tinging it with his own view. On the contrary the utterance below points to the non-assertive status of off compared to *away* which indicates an assistive status.

> 10. For when she looked at her feet, they seemed to be almost out of sight, they were getting so far **off**. (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, p.15)

This utterance (10) shows that *off* belongs to a presupposed segment in that the use of -*in*g in "*they were getting so far*" turns it into a compact and unified grammatical entity. Right from 1976, H. Adamczewski demonstrated that all the utterances with -*ing* have a non-assertive status, that is to say they are used to comment on the structural process. In like manner, the choice of *off* instead of *away* in the utterance (10) enables the speaker to comment on the distance expressed by *far*. *Off* is just not expressing distance, it is rather being used to talk about the distance, because when the speaker says "*they seem to be out of sight*", it is not only the distance that is at stake. He is saying that he is not seeing them anymore, they are already gone. Such a distance or separation is subjective. If he had chosen *away*, he would have stated just a distance or separation without any other message in the background. The values provided so far are the invariant values of *away* and *off* in the English Language. That is why two similar units expressing almost the same meaning will always stand because one would be at the disposal of the speaker to express his own and subjective view. These values govern also the difference between *small* and *little*, *large* and *big* etc.in English grammar.

7. Structural Orientation of *Away* and *Off*

Language does not describe only the extralinguistic world, that is to say, linguistic units' role is not always to refer to tangible things, though it seems to be the primary role of language to do that. It is good to admit that language is an autonomous entity able to describe its own internal functioning by indicating the status of its constituent elements. There are units in language whose role is to refer to tangible realities. In Metaoperational Grammar, such units are given assertive status as they bear on the dynamism of the elements making up the sentence. they are therefore first in the structuration process. The opposite elements are given non-assertive status because they are around to signal discourse construction operations. In the English language, for example the article *a/an* and *the* are not orientated in the same direction as *a/an* introduces here and now the noun whereas *the* makes a metalinguistic comment on the noun by saying that the noun on which it bears is not new, thus known by both parties involved in the communication.

The analysis conducted above shows quite clearly that *away* and *off* work exactly according the principle laid down by Metaoperational Grammar as shown again by these examples.

11. But "When I picked up a product and saw that, ' hey, I can buy this for $ 10 and can sell it on Amazon for $ 20 and make 20 bucks in the process, and it's selling five[or] six times a day' that's when the light bulb went *off* for me. (Lubarskyon on the CNBC)

12. How I paid *off* my $400,000 mortgage in 7.5 years, Before I was 32 (makingsenseofcents.com)

13. Should I walk *away* from the person I love if they no longer respond to my texts? It has been weeks and heart is breaking.

In utterance (11), the choice of *be+ ing* speaks volume. In fact, when the speaker say *''it's selling five[or] six times a day''*, that means the following segment will be presupposed because *ing* does not bear on the verb *sell* alone but the whole object is involved. Moreover, the verb *go* here loses its literal meaning through its combination with *off*. In this context, it is *off* that makes comment on the verb *go* and definitely give rise to the idea of "*having a great idea*". So*, off* is orientated towards the left-hand. That is why *away* cannot work in this sentence though they both display the meaning of distance and separation. It would have orientated the sentence to the right hand and won't be able to comment on the structuration process. *Off* plays the same role on the verb in utterance (12).

However, in (13), the choice of *away* is explained by the fact that the speaker wants to perform an action in real life. It is about a concrete fact without emotions involved. The difference between *walk away* ad *walk off* is explained naturally at this level of the explanation. *Walk off* is the opposite of *walk away* in that, the first is making comment on the way of going. The translation could be "*se barrer*". It goes along with the speaker's sentiments and views.

We shall now draw the structural orientation of both units. But these orientations are not extralinguistic, they rather pertain to what goes on at the time of structuring the utterance. *Away* indicates a primary structuration process that which takes into account the dynamism of the verb it combines with. Off is, on the contrary, orientated to the right hand, geared towards what has already been introduced in the context as follows:
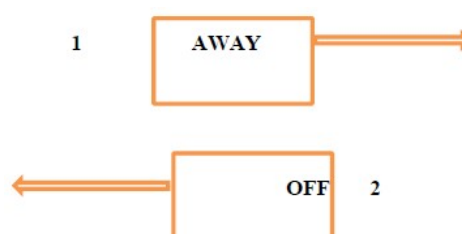
One more example that show that *away* is first compared to *off* is this:

14. Far ***away*** in a far ***off*** land lives a child who loves to sing (Amy F. Berson)

If we permutate *off* with *away* the sentence will not be semantically acceptable simply because of the structural orientation displayed by these two operators. Let's interchange their position as follows:

(14) Far ***off*** in a far ***away*** land lives a child who loves to sing (Amy F. Berson)

Away performs a grammatical role on *far* by just initiating or introducing the adjective "*far*" without any personal comment by the speaker or writer as it is in the sentence above. When the speaker wants to retake the adjective "*far*" for other purposes, then he will move up a peg in terms of structural operations. At this level, *away* is not qualified to help the speaker build a second operations upon the first one for H Adamczewski (1982)once observed that " *la cause des échecs des tentatives dont il a été rendu compte plus haut réside dans la meconnaissnce du fait fondamental que la grammaire d'une langue est affaire d'opérations et d'opératios sur des operations*"[4](p.121). In this regard, the speaker will resort to *off* to comment on the distance since if *away* had been able to provide all the message he wanted to convey, the speaker wouldn't have needed *off*. Again, the way in which *away* and *off* are used here shows that they do not perform the same grammatical function on the adjective *far*. Therefore, failure to understand that *away* and *off* perform completely different functions will result in using one to explain another by making the teaching of these units a very big deal. Teaching students to understand how these operators function based on their invariant values is more advantageous than feeding them with contextual meanings which, very often, do not reflect the genuine working of linguistic units.

Conclusion

This paper suggests a new approach to the analysis of phrasal verbs by placing the speaker or learner at the centre of the analysis, for every linguistic unit is chosen based on the message the utterer wants to get across. It does not suggest a total reliance on meaning nor synonymy. A speaker would choose *away* to indicate an open paradigmatic choice, that is to say, the verb to which it is attached is introduced here and now. In this regard, the combination of *away* with the verb does not lend itself to metalinguistic interpretation. The result of the combination stays close to the extralinguistic world. That justifies the reason why when someone wishes to announce the death of a prominent person they will use *pass away* in order to look polite but politeness is just the result of the psychological distance between the deceased and the speaker. In such circumstances, the speaker is solely concerned with passing on an information. However, the operator *off* performs a completely different function as it is chosen to indicate a closed paradigmatic choice, that is, the context has already determined the combination of both units. In this case, the speaker uses the phrasal verb as a platform for conveying his own view and stating that *off* confers a non-assertive status to the verb. *Off,* therefore, allows the speaker to make metalinguistic comments which results in expressing subjective meanings. These conclusions can prevent learners from making mistakes when it comes to choosing *away* or *off* by heightening awareness of the structural processes at stake since meaning is unstable and can be misleading.

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[4] *The reason why the previous attempts failed is because of the ignorance of the fundamental truth that the grammar of any language is a matter of operations built upon operations* (My translation)

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