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**Rethinking the labels *phrasal verb* and *verb-preposition combination*  
applied to “bamboozle type” multi-word verbs  
Ashlyn MOEHLE**

## **1. Introduction**

This paper presents and discusses a semantic class of multi-word verb in English of the form *V+out of* that I term the “bamboozle type.” After reviewing several syntactic and semantic criteria used to classify multi-word verbs in English, I establish that according to these traditional classifications, bamboozle type verbs constitute verb-preposition combinations; therefore, they are generally ignored in analyses of English phrasal verbs. However, I point to two specific cases where bamboozle type verbs exhibit syntactic characteristics ordinarily attributed to phrasal verbs (in the classic sense) and suggest that perhaps, for some combinations, the bamboozle type verb-preposition combination is on its way to becoming a full-fledged phrasal verb. This proposal is rendered support by Dirven’s (2001) analysis of phrasal verbs and in particular his discussion of the status of the particle (e.g., *off* in *brush the crumbs off*). This evidence in turn corroborates the decision to include bamboozle type verbs, along with more prototypical phrasal verbs, in a broader category of multi-word verb that may be used in contrastive analyses with Japanese compound verbs.

The impetus for this paper arises from one of the key findings in a comprehensive analysis of English phrasal verbs with *out* and Japanese lexical compound verbs with *deru/dasu*, an intransitive/transitive pair that roughly translate to “go out” and “put out,” respectively. An analysis of 1,957 correspondence pairs, which consist of an English phrasal verb with *out* and a Japanese predicate used in its translation or definition, revealed several systematic differences in terms of the diverging patterns of semantic extension exhibited by *out* and *deru/dasu*, both polysemous lexical items that share the basic, spatial sense of “removal from a bounded region.” In this paper I will present one of the domains to which *out*’s meaning (as a component of a multi-word verb) has been extended but *deru/dasu*’s has not, thereby resulting in a conspicuous and uniform absence of *deru/dasu* among the predicates used to translate and define multi-word verbs of this kind—what I call the bamboozle type.

Section 2 provides a brief overview of several syntactic and semantic criteria used to classify multi-word verbs, where “multi-word verb” is used loosely to designate a predicate consisting of a verb and a non-verbal element. Section 3 examines bamboozle type verbs in detail, utilizing the conceptual framework of Cognitive Grammar to analyze the configurations of landmark and trajector that lead to two possible construals and, consequently, two structural possibilities, which I label Pattern 1 and Pattern 2, to encode the “Bamboozle Sense” of *out* (or more technically, *out of*). Section 4 adds another dimension to the analysis by identifying two cases where bamboozle type verbs appear to be in the process of lexicalization to full phrasal verbs in the classic sense. I end by

emphasizing the need for a re-thinking of the classification of bamboozle type multi-word verbs in hopes that a broader interpretation of the category “phrasal verb” will lead to greater insights in contrastive analyses with Japanese compound verbs.

## 2. English multi-word verbs

### 2.1 Particle vs. preposition status of the non-verbal element

What have traditionally been referred to as “phrasal verbs” in the literature in fact constitute only a subset of the range of multi-word verbs that I included in my prior contrastive analysis with Japanese lexical compound verbs, from which the present paper emerged. In the past, different researchers have employed different labels (e.g., phrasal verb, verbparticle construction, verb-particle combination) to denote a distinct class of multi-word verb associated with specific syntactic and phonological criteria. Take, for example, the multi-word verbs in (1)–(2), which, on the surface, are indistinguishable. Each contains a verb and a non-verbal element—*up*, *over*, or *off*—emphasized in italics.

- (1) a. He sped *up* the process.  
b. He sped *up* the pole.
- (2) a. Harry will look *over* the client.  
b. Harry will look *over* the fence.
- (3) a. She ran *off* the pamphlets.  
b. She ran *off* the stage. (Fraser 1974: 1–2)

However, only the (a) examples above allow the word order of the non-verbal element and the noun phrase (NP) that follows to be reversed.

- (4) a. He *sped* the process *up*.  
b. \*He *sped* the pole *up*.
- (5) a. Harry will *look* the client *over*.  
b. \*Harry will *look* the fence *over*.
- (6) a. She *ran* the pamphlets *off*.  
b. \*She *ran* the stage *off*. (Fraser 1974: 2)

The possibility of alternate word order serves as widely accepted evidence for the claim that the non-verbal elements *up*, *over*, and *off* in (1–3a) belong to a different word class than their formerly identical counterparts in (1–3b). The (a) items exhibit adverbial function and are often referred to as “particles,” while the (b) items are labeled “prepositions.” The result is that the verbal constructions in which they participate are also differentiated: the particles in (a) serve as constituents in verb-particle constructions, or phrasal verbs, while the prepositions in (b) form prepositional phrases that are incorporated into verb-preposition combinations.

Additionally, Fraser (1974) posits a third category of multi-word verb, what he calls “verb-adverbial combinations,” illustrated in (7b), (8b), which contrast with the verb-particle combinations of the (a) sentences.

- (7) a. The car slowed up.  
b. The man climbed up.
- (8) a. The mine caved in.  
b. All the dogs ran in. (Fraser 1974: 4)

Fraser’s classification, which makes a three-way distinction between verb-particle, verb-preposition, and verb-adverbial combinations, constitutes one of the finer-grained classifications of English multi-word verbs. Not all researchers adopt such a specific classification though, and as a result, categories of multi-word verb differ across individual researchers’ analyses. For example, Fraser’s verb-particle combination differs significantly from the verb particle construction (VPC) of Lindner (1983). One of the primary differences between Lindner’s and Fraser’s classifications is that Lindner includes “literal” verb-adverbial combinations in her treatment of VPCs, which she describes as “complex verbs consisting (typically) of motion verbs with particles denoting paths in space” (1983: 2). For example, Lindner considers (9) a VPC, which according to Fraser’s classification is a verb-adverbial combination.

- (9) The kite floated up. (Lindner 1983: 1)

Lindner also includes as VPCs instances of what Fraser calls “prepositional phrase reduction” (1974: 46), which can be paraphrased using a full prepositional phrase.

- (10) John tossed the cat out (of the house) before going to bed. (Lindner 1983: 2)

Talmy (2000) coins the term “satellite” to denote “the grammatical category of any constituent other than a noun-phrase or prepositional-phrase complement that is in a sister relation to the verb” (102), which includes “verb particles” in the sense of Fraser (1974). Talmy argues that satellites encode path, while prepositional phrases specify ground, which consists of source, medium, and goal. However, Talmy cautions, “a set of forms that can function as satellites in a language often overlaps partially, but not wholly, with a set of forms in another grammatical category in that language, generally the category of prepositions, verbs, or nouns. Thus, English satellites largely overlap with prepositions” (102). This is precisely what we observe in (1)–(6) above, where a formerly identical lexical item (e.g., *up*, *over*) functions dually as a particle (or in Talmy’s terms, a satellite), as in the (a) sentences, and a preposition, as in the (b) sentences. To add to the complexity, a satellite may appear in combination with a preposition, like in (10) above. Talmy points out that in cases such as these, the prepositional phrase is often omitted, particularly when its nominal is either a deictic or an anaphoric pronoun, meaning that the ground object, which is expressed via the nominal head of the prepositional phrase, is easily inferred by the hearer.

- (11) a. I ran *out of* the house.

- b. (After rifling through the house,) I ran *out* [i.e., ...of it]. (Talmy 2000: 104)

Thus we have dynamic non-verbal elements that can function as any one of the following: a satellite in combination with a ground-specifying preposition (i.e., (12a) below); a satellite which specifies path (i.e., (12b)); or a preposition which specifies ground along with the nominal head of the prepositional phrase (i.e., (12c)).

- (12) a. She drove *into* the garage. (path+ground)  
b. She drove *in*. (path)  
c. She drove *in* traffic. (ground)

## 2.2 English phrasal verbs with *out* and the syntactic status of *out of*

Although we may think of *in* and *out* as opposites, as Tyler and Evans (2003) observe, “...the relation designated by *out* does not sit in ‘simple’ opposition with respect to *in*” (200). Tyler and Evans (ibid.) elaborate on this point, saying that *out* most often occurs in a verb-particle construction, like in (13a), or in conjunction with *of*, like in (13b); rarely does *out* ever function as a preposition.

- (13) a. He **took out** the trash.  
b. He took the lighter **out of** his pocket.

(Tyler and Evans 2003: 200) [emphasis in the original]

Here we are faced with multiple possible interpretations of multi-word verbs containing the sequence *out of*. Tyler and Evans (ibid.) consider *out of* in (13b) a separate preposition in and of itself, distinct from *out*. Comparing (13b) with (10) above, however, we can imagine a context where *of his pocket* in (13b) were omitted without affecting the overall grammaticality of the sentence.

- (14) (After rummaging through his pocket,) he took the lighter out.

(14) appears to fit the characterization of “prepositional phrase reduction,” in Fraser’s (1974) terms, or, alternatively, an instance where the ground-specifying preposition in a path+ground expression is omitted, as per Talmy (2000). However, in the discussion of bamboozle type verbs that follows, I tentatively adopt Tyler and Evans’ position that *out of* functions as a distinct preposition. Part of the reason for doing so, as we will see shortly, is that in standard varieties of American English, the *of*+NP phrase cannot be omitted. Thus, according to Fraser’s (1974) as well as Lindner’s (1983) classification outlined above, bamboozle type multi-word verbs are in fact verb-preposition combinations. However, I will also present examples that demonstrate the blurring of these categorical lines and suggest that at least some instantiations of bamboozle type multi-word verbs are on their way to full phrasal verb-hood.

## 3 Bamboozle type verbs

### 3.1 Syntactic patterns

The multi-word verbs with *out of* treated below express a change in possession of an object, not by ready, willful intention of the initial possessor, but through some means of persuasion, trickery, coercion, or force. These verbs, which I term the bamboozle type, appear in the following construction:

(15) NP1 V NP2 *out of* NP3

The examples in (16)–(18) below adhere to the formulation “V *someone* out of *something*” and are instances of what will herein be referred to as Pattern 1. In this case, we are dealing not with *out* but with the unit *out of*; thus, the landmark (LM) with reference to which a trajector (TR) moves *out* is made explicit and surfaces as the object NP following *of*.

(16) You intend to bamboozle me out of a beefsteak.

(17) He beat her out of a hundred dollars.

(18) He coaxed her out of her watch. (*Sanseido*)<sup>1</sup>

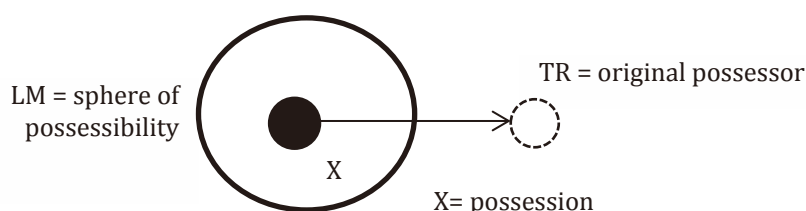
Bamboozle type verbs may alternatively appear in a construction where the syntactic positions of the initial possessor and possession are switched, resulting in the formulation “V *something* out of *someone*.” This will be referred to as Pattern 2 and is illustrated in (19)–(20).

(19) He cajoled a knife out of the boy.

(20) He ground money out of the poor. (*Sanseido*)

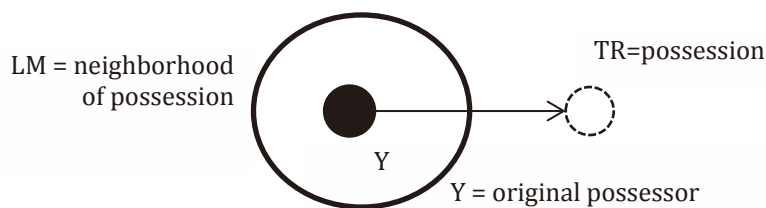
Instances of Pattern 1 (“V *someone* out of *something*”) occur with greater frequency,<sup>2</sup> but interestingly it is Pattern 2 that reflects a more intuitive trajector-landmark orientation: an “abstract neighborhood of possession” is construed as a bounded landmark, and *out* encodes the path of an object or possession serving as the trajector to the exterior of that bounded landmark. In this configuration, the trajector’s change in location from inside to outside the boundary of the landmark equates to a change in possession. Pattern 1, on the other hand, reflects the converse: the object changing possession (or its “sphere of possessibility”) is construed as a bounded landmark and appears as the object NP following *out of*. That is, the previous owner (presumably, a person) is the trajector (TR)<sup>3</sup> who moves to the exterior of the bounded landmark (LM), or “sphere of possessibility.”

Figure 1. Bamboozle type Pattern 1



*He coaxed her out of her watch.*

Figure 2. Bamboozle type Pattern 2



*He cajoled a knife out of the boy.*

In other words, in the actual event expressed by bamboozle type verbs, it is the *something*, not the *someone*, which changes possession (and often, as a consequence thereof, physical location). This is consistent with the schematic configuration diagrammed in Figure 2 for Pattern 2. However, it is apparent that “change in possession” may be construed in more than one way, resulting in the two patterns observed. Moreover, and perhaps counter-intuitively, Pattern 1 bamboozle type verbs occur with greater frequency. A more thorough historical analysis of this construction could shed light on the precise nature of the relation between Pattern 1 and Pattern 2 and whether or not one is derived from the other, and if so, by what mechanism. This is an intriguing question set aside for future research.

### 3.2 Bamboozle Sense of *out of* vs. No More Sense of *out*

As mentioned above, the reason for positing a semantic class of bamboozle type multi-word verbs with *out* (i.e., a “Bamboozle Sense”) in the first place derives from a comparison of phrasal verbs with *out* and Japanese predicates used in their definition and translation, and in particular those Japanese predicates involving *deru/dasu*. It was precisely the conspicuous absence of Japanese predicates with *deru/dasu* among correspondence pairs with bamboozle type verbs that led to the conclusion that the bamboozle sense has not developed within the polysemous network of either *deru* or *dasu*. Neither has the bamboozle sense, to my knowledge, been systematically discussed in comprehensive analyses of the semantics of *out*. This may be due to the fact that in the overwhelming majority of cases, bamboozle type multi-word verbs require the combination *out of* rather than *out* alone. However, in what follows I identify several parallels between the Bamboozle Sense described in 3.1 above and Tyler and Evans’ (2003) No More Sense attributed to *out*. Then, in Section 4 I suggest that although the examples presented thus far illustrate *out of*’s functional role as a preposition, more than one specific instance of a bamboozle type verb may be on its way to becoming a bona fide phrasal verb.

Tyler and Evans (2003) posit a No More Sense for *out* exemplified by the following:

(21) A: Have we got any milk left?

B: No, we’re (all) out (of milk)!

(modified from Tyler and Evans 2003: 203)

Notice that the expected TR–LM configuration is no longer apparent in this use; the elements we normally think of as the TR, *the milk*, show up linguistically in the LM position. We hypothesize that this use parallels the State Sense with *in*, for example *We're in the money*, where the money is metonymic for a state holding such that money is available. While the State Sense for *in* relates to a 'moneyful' state, the No More Sense with *out* relates here to a 'milk-less' state. (Tyler and Evans *ibid.*:203)

- (22) a. We're in luck/business/sync/love  
 b. We're out of luck/business/sync/love (Tyler and Evans 2003: 203)

Tyler and Evans rightly point out that (22b) requires the combination *out of* and omitting *of* is not permissible.

The situation described in the above quotation regarding *out*'s No More Sense parallels that of Pattern 1 bamboozle type verbs, in which the trajector moves outside the boundary of a landmark that surfaces linguistically as the object NP of *out of* but functions semantically as the object changing possession. In other words, the possessor (TR) moves outside the sphere of possessibility (LM) of the possession in question. Thus, much like the No More Sense of *out* illustrated in (21)–(22), *out* in (16)–(18) indicates a state of beefsteak-less-ness, hundred-dollar-less-ness, and watch-less-ness, respectively. In this way, the *out* of bamboozle type verbs shares aspects of its meaning with the No More Sense of *out* used in phrasal verbs like *run out*, such as (23) below.

- (23) A: Do you have any beer left?  
 B: We ran out (of beer)!

## 4 Transition from verb-preposition combination to phrasal verb

### 4.1 Bridging contexts

One interesting trend I would like to discuss in this final section is the possibility for a bamboozle type verb to appear with *out* alone—that is, for *of* (and possibly the following object NP) to be omitted. I present two cases below.

The first case, shown in (25), involves a slight variation on the multi-word verb *beat...out of* as seen in (24) (see also (17) above) but in which *out* precedes NP2.

- (24) He also performed on the hit series *Two and a Half Men* singing "We Are the Orphans" and beat Charlie (Charlie Sheen) out of the award for best jingle writer.  
[\[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jon\\_Lovitz\]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jon_Lovitz)
- (25) Can Tom Brady beat out Matt Ryan for the 2016 NFL MVP Award?  
[\[http://blog.masslive.com/patriots/2017/01/tom\\_brady\\_mvp\\_patriots\\_matt\\_ry.html\]](http://blog.masslive.com/patriots/2017/01/tom_brady_mvp_patriots_matt_ry.html)

*Beat...out of* in (24) adheres to the formulation NP1 V NP2 *out of* NP3 ascribed to Pattern 1 bamboozle type verbs. In (25), however, *out* directly follows the verb *beat* and *of*+NP3 is replaced



by *for*+NP3. Nevertheless, the situations expressed by each of these two sentences are virtually the same: Person A (NP1) triumphs over Person B (NP2) in a contest for an award (NP3). Furthermore, given sufficient context, it is conceivable that *for*+NP3 in (25) be omitted entirely.

The second case where *of* is omitted from a bamboozle type multi-word verb leaving *out* in combination with the verb alone appears in the lyrics of a song titled “Cartel Talk” by the artist Gucci Mane. In his rap, Gucci Mane brags about how much money and status he has acquired through illegal drug dealing. The couplet in (26) below refers to the plug, or dealer, whom Gucci Mane has tricked into selling him product at an unfair price.

- (26) Cartel talkin', I'm on the phone with the plug/ Finesse often, I tricked them out a lot of drugs [<https://genius.com/Gucci-mane-cartel-talk-lyrics>]

Here, again, we find an instance of a bamboozle type verb that appears with *out* only—not *out of*—contrary to the examples presented in Section 3. Like *beat...out of*, ordinarily *trick...out of* adheres to the Pattern 1 formulation represented in (27) below.

- (27) [He]<sub>NP1</sub> tricked [me]<sub>NP2</sub> out of [my savings]<sub>NP3</sub>. (*Sanseido*)  
 (28) [I]<sub>NP1</sub> tricked [them]<sub>NP2</sub> out [a lot of drugs]<sub>NP3</sub>

Although (27) is a peripheral example of non-standard speech, I hypothesize it represents an intermediary step or “bridging context” (see Evans and Wilkins (2000)) in the transition from a verb-preposition combination of the form NP1 V NP2 *out of* NP3 to a phrasal verb in the classic sense of Lindner’s (1983) VPC. In what follows, I draw on Dirven’s (2001) analysis of the sometimes ambiguous status of the particle within multi-word verbs and suggest that this may be applied to our understanding of examples like (25) and (26).

#### 4.2 Dirven’s account

Generally speaking, multifunctional items like *in*, *out*, *up*, *down*, *over*, and *across* express path when they appear with a motion verb. Dirven (2001: 6–7) provides examples of multifunctional *off*, which profiles the end point of an A/B trajectory starting at point A and ending at point B.

- (29) a. She brushed the crumbs off the table.  
       b. She brushed the crumbs off (of the table/\*from the table).  
       c. She brushed off the crumbs (from the table).

In (29a), *off* invokes the entire A/B trajectory, and the point of origin (point A) is made explicit in *the table*. (29b) is a blend of two scenes: the action expressed by the verb *brush* and the resultant state as a consequence of that action ([the crumbs are] *off*). Dirven claims that explicit mention of the point of origin (i.e., *from the table*) is incompatible with *off*’s emphasis on the resultant state, hence the ungrammatical reading of (29b) in which *from the table* is overt. (I find *She brushed the crumbs off of the table* perfectly acceptable and have thus included it here for comparison.)

According to Dirven, (29c) represents the final stage of semantic extension in which *off* has been lexicalized along with the verb *brush* into a single, integrated form.

Temporarily setting the issue of grammaticality judgments aside, I would like to point out the parallels between (29b–c) and (24)–(25). Dirven argues that (29b) is a blend of two scenes and serves to bridge the prepositional function of *off* in (29a) and the particle function of *off* in (29c). So far, we have analyzed *out of* like that in (24) as a preposition. However, in (25), like in (29c), the particle moves to a position directly following the verb and is interpreted as participating in a single integrated form—a phrasal verb. What is unfortunately missing in my data for *beat...out of* is a bridging context where *of*+NP has been omitted but *out* remains in a position following the direct object NP (analogous to the reading of (29b) where {*off*\*from} *the table* is covert). Should such data be discovered it would lend significant support to Dirven’s original analysis as well as its application here.

To sum up, one of the most salient differences said to distinguish transitive verbal constructions in which a lexical item like *up*, *over*, or *out* functions as a particle versus a preposition is whether or not the construction allows for variable word order. In cases where the lexical item functions as a particle, it may appear either directly following the verb or directly following the object NP. Prepositions, on the other hand, allow only post-verb order, in which an object NP follows the preposition. This alternation in word order has often been referred to as particle movement, a term suggestive of the theoretical framework from which it emerged. Dirven (2001) takes a different approach, arguing that the preference of post-verb over post-direct object word order reflects a “gradual abstracting process” by which the adverbial status of multi-functional items like *off* is reinterpreted, resulting in a conceptually integrated, lexically autonomous phrasal verb (2001: 7).

Similar to the transition from *beat* NP2 *out of* NP3 to *beat out* NP2 (*for* NP3), I suggest that what we are seeing with *trick* NP2 *out* NP3 in (26) is one step in a similar abstracting process. However, these processes are not entirely congruous. That is, in the case of *beat...out of*, when *out* directly follows the verb (as in (25)), *of*+NP3 is replaced with *for*+NP3; hypothetically speaking, the prepositional phrase *for*+NP3 is then optionally omitted. In the case of *trick...out of*, however, NP3 remains in tact while only *of* is omitted. This results in what may be characterized as a rare instance of *out* functioning as a preposition. Were *trick...out of* to go the way of *beat...out of*, we would next expect NP3 to be omitted (i.e., *tricked them out*), much like *brush the crumbs off* in (27b). This hypothetical case of *trick* NP2 *out* would present a bridging context possibly leading to the subsequent lexicalization of an integrated phrasal verb *trick out*.<sup>4</sup>

I have so far attempted to demonstrate that although bamboozle type multi-word verbs fit the bill of verb-preposition combinations according to traditional classifications and have therefore been generally ignored in analyses of English phrasal verbs, they resemble phrasal verbs with *out* in terms of meaning (i.e., the No More Sense of Tyler and Evans (2003)), and some participate in

syntactic structures similar to that of phrasal verbs that have been lexicalized through a “general abstracting process,” to use Dirven’s (2001) *brush off* example. I have aimed to show that these facts require a reconsideration of the boundaries of the category “phrasal verb.” Furthermore, I expect that a broader rather than narrower view of what constitutes a phrasal verb will yield further fruitful insights in contrastive analyses with Japanese compound verbs.

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## Dictionaries

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<sup>1</sup> Examples followed by *Sanseido* in parentheses derive from *Sanseido Comprehensive Dictionary of English Idioms and Phrasal Verbs*, which served as the primary source of data in my original comparison of English phrasal verbs and Japanese compound verbs upon which this paper is based.

<sup>2</sup> This claim is based on data gathered from *Sanseido Comprehensive Dictionary of English Idioms and Phrasal Verbs*, which featured 374 individual English phrasal verbs (including, but not limited to, bamboozle type verbs).

<sup>3</sup> Here, TR technically stands for the subtrajector that is set in motion by the primary trajector, which corresponds to NP1.

<sup>4</sup> This is, however, highly unlikely in this particular case, as the phrasal verb *trick out* meaning “to decorate something in a particular way” (i.e., *trick out a car/trick a car out*) is already in use. I maintain that the hypothetical arc of *trick...out of* to *trick out* is nevertheless justified based on the data observed for *beat...out of* and Dirven’s 2001 analysis.