

## **Phrasal Verbs in Inside Out movie**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to investigate the use of phrasal verbs in the Inside Out movie, focusing on two main objectives: (1) to classify the types of phrasal verbs in terms of idiomatic and non-idiomatic categories, and (2) to explore the meanings of these phrasal verbs. The data of this study were collected from the utterances containing phrasal verbs in the movie script, using document analysis technique. The analysis was conducted utilizing the framework by McCarthy and O'Dell's (2004). The study reveals a total 58 phrasal verbs, with 37 classified as non-idiomatic and 21 as idiomatic. In addition, there are two meanings of the phrasal verbs, some of which are used more than once. The most frequently used phrasal verbs are "look at," which appears eight times, and "get back," which appears six times. The analysis indicates that the use of phrasal verbs in the movie is influenced by the genre of the film, which is a family-friendly, animated comedy. This genre often employs straightforward, non-idiomatic language, making the dialogue accessible to its young audience. The findings of this study also suggest that phrasal verbs play an essential role in cinematic language, whose target audience are children. Where non-idiomatic expressions are more prevalent due to the nature of the genre. The study provides an implication for linguistic studies, particularly in understanding how language is used in cinematic contexts.

**Keywords:** phrasal verbs, idiomatic, non- idiomatic, movie

### **INTRODUCTION**

Movies are interesting sites to investigate how people use language for interaction. Being a rich audiovisual medium, film provides a natural setting in which language is used creatively and functional to represent interpersonal relations, feelings and cultural

conventions. They allow researchers to investigate how characters talk in scripted but apparently spontaneous ways that resemble everyday conversation. More specifically, movie dialogues contain the whole range of formal and informal language, and can be used to study television language and real language in real life. Due to their availability and entertainment values, movies have become a valuable corpus for applied linguistics and language pedagogy.

The words in films possess both unique common across explicit and implicit meanings depending on their context. Explicit language is the type that gives straightforward information, while the implicit meaning needs some puzzle solving through a person's tone, mannerisms, the setting, and their prior understanding of the situation. Take "Inside Out," an animated film that features interactions between the five emotions: Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust where their communication goes beyond the literal meanings of words. When someone says, "She's going to blow up!" They do not mean she will combust literally, rather to rage she is bound to release strong emotion. This figure of speech highlights a context which creates the meaning of the utterance. Such expressions are not, however, only for narrative purposes. Rather, they play a very important role as markers to show emotion intensity, character development, or social tension between the characters. It follows that language of film offers very useful material for the study of pragmatics and sociolinguistic variables, discourse analysis, and animation languages, especially because these films with younger target audience animated elements need to be entertaining while conveying deeper meaning with subtlety.

One of the linguistic units that often carry implicit meaning is the phrasal verb. Phrasal verbs are combinations of a base verb and one or more particles (typically prepositions or adverbs) that, when combined, may produce a meaning that is not directly predictable from the individual words. Phrasal verbs are usually formed by combining a verb with a preposition or adverb (McArthur, 1992). Phrasal verbs can be distinguished into three kinds: intransitive, transitive separable, and transitive inseparable (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Quirk et al., 1985; Thompson, 1996).

McCarthy and O'Dell (2004) propose a widely used classification that divides phrasal verbs into two categories: idiomatic and non-idiomatic. Idiomatic phrasal verbs, such as "break down" meaning to cry or lose control emotionally and "give up" meaning to stop trying, require contextual interpretation and cannot be understood by analysing the verb and particle separately. Their meanings are semantically unclear, making them challenging to

comprehend without prior contextual understanding. Non-idiomatic phrases like “look at,” “get back,” and “come on,” on the other hand, preserve clear meanings and are much simpler to deduce. These phrases are extremely common in informal spoken English, appearing in casual communication, movies, and other forms of media. Of the 58 phrasal verbs analysed from *Inside Out*, 37 were found to be non-idiomatic, which suggests a strong preference for straightforward language. The 21 idiomatic phrases identified, however, are vital in depicting Riley’s emotion-laden struggles, shifts in character behaviours, and significant turning points in the story. For example, Joy’s emotional breakdown or Riley’s slow disintegration into despair contains phrasal verbs that describe important emotional changes central to the storyline. The coexistence of literal and figurative meanings in the film’s language highlights both the use and the interpretive burden, especially for non-native speakers, posed by phrasal verbs. Their diverse forms and curtains of meaning make them difficult yet invaluable in terms of linguistic.

The phenomena of the use of phrasal verbs in movies, particularly children movies, is interesting to explore. Besides, phrasal verbs in the dialogue of animated children's movies give us plenty of valuable sociolinguistic material if we take into the account that they do have a specific objective and the goal is to express feelings in a straightforward and strong language. Language in children's films is constructed and it speaks to something deeper. A case in point occurs in the film *Inside Out* (2015), in conversation depicting social activities and inner turmoil so kids can relate to them without their own feelings being reflected back at them as an adult experience. It does these kinds of phrasal verbs are useful for characterizing a character, for example to examine their state of mind and to construct the narration in this style. Also, they are a wonderful way to let learners to engage with authentic English that has been graded, so the phrasal verb is accessible to teach.

This research investigates phrasal verbs in the animated movie *Inside Out*, produced by Pixar Animation Studios in 2015. The film was selected as the object of study due to its rich emotional content, relatable storyline, and clear yet expressive use of language. *Inside Out* portrays the psychological and emotional journey of an 11 years old girl named Riley through the lens of five personified emotions: Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust. These characters communicate using naturalistic English embedded with numerous phrasal verbs. A total of 58 phrasal verbs were identified in the film’s dialogue, consisting of 37 non-idiomatic and 21 idiomatic expressions. Examples include “look at”, “get back”, and “come on” as non-idiomatic

types, and “break down”, “pop up”, and “give up” as idiomatic forms. Their frequent use shows how even child-friendly narratives rely on complex grammar forms like phrasal verbs to deliver meaning, emotion, and humour.

There have been previous studies exploring expressive speech acts in movies, some of them are Wijayanto & Hilman (2023) who analysed 95 phrasal verbs in the *Coco* movie subtitles using Chesterman’s and Nababan’s frameworks, identifying a dominance of intransitive inseparable types and translation through unit shift. Similarly, (Azzahra & Hilman, 2025) studied the subtitling of *The Devil Wears Prada* using Molina and Albir’s translation techniques and found that strategies like modulation and substitution were essential for preserving meaning across languages. (Evenddy et al., 2020) categorized phrasal verbs in *Sherlock: A Study in Pink* based on semantic transparency, revealing the frequency of highly idiomatic expressions and highlighting the need for context-aware interpretation. Meanwhile, Mahendra (2018) and (Yasin et al., 2021) examined the types and translations of phrasal verbs in *Begin Again* and *Blood Diamond* respectively, both emphasizing the importance of understanding verb-object relationships and idiomaticity to ensure accurate and natural translation outcomes. (Massutti & Fadanelli, 2019) further extended this focus by applying Vinay and Darbelnet’s oblique translation model to subtitling in the series *Bewitched*, demonstrating how phrasal verbs must often be restructured entirely to retain meaning in the target language.

Other studies have explored phrasal verbs from pedagogical and cognitive perspectives. (Nivika et al., 2023) examined phrasal verbs in Coldplay’s album *A Head Full of Dreams*, showing their effectiveness in enriching EFL learners’ vocabulary. Similarly, Pasban et.al., (2015) found that oral enhancement strategies improved Iranian learners’ understanding of phrasal verbs more effectively than textual enhancement. (Sari & Pandiangan, 2021), through Classroom Action Research, demonstrated that the Guessing Strategy significantly boosted students’ vocabulary mastery of phrasal verbs. Additionally, Candra (2016) investigated the translation of phrasal verbs and compounds in literary context, underscoring the challenges of preserving both meaning and nuance in the target language. Lastly, (Al Nasarat, 2018) provided insights into the difficulties faced by EFL learners in acquiring phrasal verbs, concluding that instructional design must address the semantic opacity and contextual dependence of such expressions. Collectively, these studies underline the linguistic, pedagogical, and translational significance of phrasal verbs, while also revealing a gap in research focusing specifically on their

semantic classification and narrative function in children's animated films.

This study also looks at phrasal verbs in the media in another light, i.e., audiovisual media, in this case the film *Inside Out*. But unlike the above research, which focuses on translation strategies, idiomatic classifications or pedagogical implications in songs and in adult-oriented films, this study provides a close interpretation of the meaning of phrasal verbs allotted into idiomatic and non-idiomatic types in a children's animated feature film. By utilizing the classification system introduced by McCarthy and O'Dell (2004), this research examines how phrasal verbs are used when viewers are taught the words contextually and where extra-linguistic cues like the context or plot set up clues the viewer to what kind of emotion is being conveyed, actions, and narrative progression in a linguistically simplified yet emotionally rich setting. The novelty of this study lies in its attention to the intersection of cinematic storytelling, language simplification, and emotional communication for young audiences an area that remains underrepresented in existing literature. Thus, the contribution of this research is twofold: first, it enhances our understanding of how phrasal verbs are employed to support narrative coherence in children's films; and second, it offers pedagogical implications for language learners and educators by presenting authentic, accessible examples of phrasal verb usage in meaningful contexts.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyse the types and contextual meanings of phrasal verbs in the *Inside Out* movie. The data were derived from the characters' utterances containing phrasal verbs, selected due to the film's rich emotional content, child-friendly language, and narrative clarity. Data collection was conducted through document analysis, which involved watching the film, reviewing the script, identifying phrasal verb occurrences, and compiling them into a categorized data table. The data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et.al., (2014), involving stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Phrasal verbs were first classified into idiomatic and non-idiomatic categories using the semantic framework of McCarthy and O'Dell (2004). Each verb was then analysed contextually to determine its function in conveying action, emotion, or interaction, followed by frequency observation and thematic relevance analysis to assess its role in the film's emotional development. To support analytical, each data entry was coded based on its type, function, and scene context. Triangulation was applied through repeated script review, scene re-

watching, and reference to dictionaries and linguistic sources to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The types of phrasal Verbs

The analysis of the Inside Out movie script revealed a total of 58 phrasal verbs, consisting of 21 idiomatic phrasal verbs and 37 non-idiomatic phrasal verbs. The summary is presented in table 1.

Table 1. List of phrasal Verbs in Inside Out Movie

No.	Phrasal verbs	Types	Frequency of occurrence	No.	Phrasal verbs	Types	Frequency of occurrence
1	Look at	Non-idiomatic	8	21	Take out	Non-idiomatic	1
2	Get back	Non-idiomatic	6	22	Run through	Non-idiomatic	1
3	Come on	Non-idiomatic	3	23	Pop up	Idiomatic	1
4	Get out	Non-idiomatic	3	24	Look after	Idiomatic	1
5	Set up	Idiomatic	2	25	Break down	Idiomatic	1
6	Turn on	Non-idiomatic	2	26	Roll up	Idiomatic	1
7	Hang on	Idiomatic	1	27	Step up	Idiomatic	1
8	Run off	Non-idiomatic	1	28	Look out	Idiomatic	1
9	Roll down	Non-idiomatic	1	29	Hold on	Idiomatic	1
10	Turn back	Non-idiomatic	1	30	Get off	Idiomatic	1
11	Wake up	Non-idiomatic	1	31	Watch out	Idiomatic	1
12	Pull away	Idiomatic	1	32	Show up	Non-idiomatic	1
13	Give up	Non-idiomatic	1	33	Figure out	Non-idiomatic	1
14	Run around	Non-idiomatic	1	34	Shut down	Non-idiomatic	1
15	Take off	Idiomatic	1	35	Turn around	Non-idiomatic	1
16	Make off	Idiomatic	1	36	Hold still	Idiomatic	1
17	Head off	Idiomatic	1	37	Stick around	Idiomatic	1
18	Go through	Non-idiomatic	1	38	Hop off	Non-idiomatic	1
19	Run away	Non-idiomatic	1	39	Sleep on	Idiomatic	1
20	Fall apart	Idiomatic	1	40	Punch up	Idiomatic	1

Based on McCarthy and O'Dell's (2004) framework, the data were classified according to their semantic characteristics.

#### **a. Idiomatic**

Idiomatic phrasal verbs carry meanings that cannot be interpreted from the literal meanings of their components. Their interpretation depends heavily on context, making them semantically opaque. Below are some examples identified in the film dialog:

- i. "Joy breaks down in tears.": 'break down' in the utterance means 'cry.'
- ii. "Joy refuses to give up on bringing Riley back.": 'to give up' in the utterance means 'to surrender.'
- iii. "We're falling apart!": 'being fall apart' in the utterance means 'being mentally unstable.'
- iv. "A core memory pops up to Joy's feet.": 'pop up' in the utterance means 'appear.'
- v. "Bing-Bong says he will look after the core memories.": 'look after' in the utterance means 'search.'

#### **b. Non-Idiomatic**

Non-idiomatic phrasal verbs maintain literal meanings that are more transparent and easier to comprehend. Their interpretation typically depends on the main verb. Examples include:

- i. "Look at this, guys!": 'look at' in the utterance means 'see'.
- ii. "We just need to get back to Headquarters.": 'to get back' in the utterance means 'to go back.'
- iii. "Come on, this way!": 'come on' means 'come'.
- iv. "Get out of here!": 'get out' in the utterance means 'go out'.
- v. "Joy runs through the Long-Term Memory stacks.": 'to run through' in the utterance means 'to move.'

The analysis indicates that non-idiomatic phrasal verbs are more dominant, with a total of 37 occurrences compared to 21 idiomatic ones. This pattern aligns with the genre and target audience of the movie. As a children's animated film, *Inside Out* is crafted with clarity and accessibility in mind. The prevalence of non-idiomatic expressions ensures that young viewers can follow the storyline without being confused by figurative language. Furthermore, non-idiomatic phrasal verbs are often action-based and concrete, which suits the film's focus on psychological events being visualized through physical and narrative actions.

## **2. The meaning of phrasal verbs**

The meaning of idiomatic phrasal verbs derives their meanings largely from the context rather than the individual words. The literal



interpretation of the verb alone cannot provide an accurate understanding. For instance:

- i. 'Break down' in "Joy breaks down in tears" does not mean to physically break something, but rather to lose emotional control.
- ii. 'Give up' in "Joy refuses to give up on bringing Riley back" conveys abnonnement or surrender of effort, not merely "give" or "up".
- iii. 'Fall apart' in "We're falling apart!" means to become emotionally or mentally unstable.
- iv. 'Pop up' in "A core memory pops up to Joy's feet" suggests something appearing suddenly, not related to physically popping anything.
- v. 'Look after' in "Bing-Bong says he will look after the core memories" means to take care or be responsible for something or someone.

On the other hand, non-idiomatic phrasal verbs in the movie tend to align closely with the main verbs, with the added particle serving only to complete or slightly specify the action. For example:

- i. 'Look at' in "Look at this, guys!" means to direct one's eyes toward something or to see.
- ii. 'Get back' in "Come on, this way!" means to return to a place.
- iii. 'Get out' in "Get out of here!" means to leave or exit a place.
- iv. 'Run through' in "Joy runs through the Long-Term Memory stacks" means to move quickly through a space or area.

This distinction is crucial, especially in teaching or translating English phrasal verbs. Idiomatic forms require deeper contextual understanding and often present challenges for language learners, particularly when used in metaphorical or emotional contexts as seen in *Inside Out*.

The findings of this study both support and expand upon previous research. Similar to the work of Evvendi (2020), who classified phrasal verbs by types and degrees of idiomaticity in the *Sherlock* series, this study also found a balanced but dominant presence of non-idiomatic forms in cinematic texts. However, unlike Evvendi's focus on adult-oriented drama, this study emphasizes a children's animated film, where language use is tailored for younger audiences. This explains the heavier use of non-idiomatic phrasal verbs that are more transparent and action-oriented. Furthermore, the study echoes insights from Nivika (2023), who found that exposure to phrasal verbs in song lyrics enhanced vocabulary



acquisition due to the contextual nature of language. Likewise, Inside Out provides contextualized input, allowing phrasal verbs to be understood through visual and emotional cues. Additionally, the emphasis on emotional expression through language, especially in idiomatic forms like break down or fall apart, aligns with the movie's psychological theme, which distinguishes this study from others that mainly examine phrasal verbs as grammatical units. By applying McCarthy and O'Dell's (2004) classification, the study offers a systematic lens through which phrasal verbs can be interpreted in terms of form and function. It also contributes to media-based language teaching, showing how phrasal verbs in child-friendly media can support both linguistic clarity and emotional depth. This dual function semantic accessibility and affective expression reinforces the idea that even simplified cinematic language retains richness and pedagogical value.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyse the types and meanings of phrasal verbs found in the Inside Out movie, focusing on their classification into idiomatic and non-idiomatic forms based on McCarthy and O'Dell's (2004) framework. The findings revealed that non-idiomatic phrasal verbs were more dominant, aligning with the film's target audience and its need for linguistic clarity. Idiomatic phrasal verbs, while fewer in number, played a significant role in conveying emotional depth and narrative progression. These results suggest that phrasal verbs in animated films serve not only as grammatical structures but also as tools for emotional storytelling and character development. Pedagogically, this study implies that children's movies can be effective resources for teaching context-based English expressions, especially to beginner and intermediate learners. It is recommended that future research explore the use of phrasal verbs in a wider range of animated films or compare different genres to gain broader insights into their narrative and linguistic functions.

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