

Unveiling EFL Students Weakness in Phrasal Verbs: The Case of Students of English at Barika University Center

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Abstract

This study attempts to investigate EFL learners' views and attitudes towards the use of phrasal verbs with the aim of identifying their receptive and productive weaknesses in phrasal verbs. To collect the required data, a questionnaire was distributed to a randomly selected sample of 52 advanced EFL students at the English Department at Barika University Center. Using the descriptive statistics in SPSS to analysis the data, the results show that EFL students are unaware of the varying degrees of figurativeness that determine the context of phrasal verbs use. Correspondingly, this study concludes with certain pedagogical implications.

Keywords: advanced students, degree of figurativeness, EFL, phrasal verbs, unaware.

Introduction

Phrasal verbs as a specific category of multi-word units are one of the significant components of English language. They are a common feature of English language and are said to be frequently used by native speakers of English and prevalent in everyday life situations. Their unity appears in different contexts and various situations in which they are used. Since these multi-lexical verbs are widely used by native speakers in both written and spoken English, phrasal verbs are one of the major sources of frustration and confusion in the process of learning English as a foreign language. Learners infrequently use phrasal verbs due to the difficulties they have in understanding the particularities of phrasal verbs. In other words, third year students of English at Barika University Centre have perplexities in understanding the different meanings (polysemy) of phrasal verbs as they find it

a daunting task to use the pertinent verb-particle combination that fits most a given context .Therefore, they avoid using such kind verbs and ,if any, they use inappropriate verb-particle combinations instead. As a result, their performances in English are not proficient and full of mis-phrasal verbs which make their output sound unnatural and not native like.

Aims of the study

Through the investigation of the perception and attitudes towards phrasal verbs, this study aims at probing EFL learners' weaknesses in mastering phrasal verbs in an attempt to unveil the causes which lead to the deficiency and incorrect use of phrasal verbs by these students at the aforementioned department of English. Furthermore, this research also aims at identifying the problems these students encounter in learning phrasal verbs, so that we can help these EFL learners understand how phrasal verbs work.

Research questions and hypotheses

The motive behind undertaking this research is to find answers to the following questions:

1-How can learners perceive the phrasal verbs whose meaning is different from the meaning of its individual separate constituents? Correspondingly we hypothesize that if learners of English are familiar with the particularity of restrictions on the verb-particle co-occurrence they may use phrasal verbs correctly.

2- Are EFL learners aware only of the non-literal meaning of phrasal verbs? In this respect we hypothesize that if learners of English are enough aware of the degree of the figurativeness of phrasal verbs they may manage to grasp the different meanings of phrasal verbs.

THE FIRST TOPIC: OVERVIEW OF PHRASAL VERBS

Phrasal verbs as a specific category of multi-word units are one of the significant components of English language. Their unity appears in different contexts and various situations in which they are used. Under this heading we try to provide some insights into the nature of phrasal verbs by giving various definitions of phrasal verbs and we also present the different characteristics of phrasal verbs and their relations to particles.

FIRST REQUIREMENT: MAKING SENSE OF PHRASAL VERBS

1. Definition of phrasal verbs

The expression phrasal verb in English grammar refers to a combination of a verb and a prepositional or adverbial particle, in which the combination often takes on a meaning which is apparently not the simple sum of its parts. For example, *turn up* means “to appear”(Olteanu,2012). Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary(8th edition) defines phrasal verbs as multi-word verbs having two or three words . Either a verb with an adverb, a verb with a preposition or a verb with both an adverb and a preposition .These adverbs and prepositions are called particles. We need not try to decide whether the combination is verb+ preposition or verb + adverb, but instead we have to consider the expression as a whole and decide whether it is transitive or intransitive . A combination may have two or more different meanings ,and it can be transitive in one case and intransitive in another case. For example, *take off* can mean “remove” and then it is a transitive phrasal verb as in the sentence:“he *took* his scarf *off* “.It can also mean “to rise” from the ground and thus it is intransitive as the sentence: “the plane *took off* in due time” (Thomson & Martinet,1986).

The extent to which the verb-particle combination preserves the individual meanings of its parts varies in instances like *give in* (surrender), *catch on* (understand) .Besides, multi-word combinations vary in the degree of their idiomacity, as the combination *stay away from* (avoid) can easily be understood on the basis of the meanings of its individual elements. Other combinations are confusing and it is difficult if not impossible to attribute the meanings to any of the parts. For example, *put up with* (to tolerate). Most of the particles serve as adjuncts or can function as such. Normally ,the particle cannot be separated from its verb, though they are used as intensifiers and perfectives like in: *drink* your juice *up*, or in some cases as direction references like in *go up* the stairs (Quirk & Greenbaum,1976).

2. The Semantics of phrasal verbs

In pursuing the different mentioned definitions of phrasal verbs, we notice that the meanings of verb-particle combinations cannot be always obtained by knowing the meanings of verbs separated from the meanings of their accompanying particles .Therefore, phrasal verbs can be understood from one of the three main kinds of meanings.

2.1 The literal meaning

This kind of meaning is obvious and transparent in the sense that the verb and the particle maintain their logical concept such as *sit down* and *stand up* (Ketteman & Wieden, 1993). In other words, the meaning of a phrasal verb in this case can be guessed from the whole meaning of its parts. To illustrate, when something is *lifted up*, it is both raised and it moves upward (Schnoebelen, 2008).

2.2 The semi-literal and opaque meaning

Some phrasal verbs have meaning that is not exactly the total meaning of their parts, but still it can be understood and guessed correctly. Thus, the particle is added to emphasize a particular meaning. To illustrate, let us consider the following sentences :

1- They *walked on*. *On* here has a sense of continuation, which means they continued walking

2- He *fixed up* the toys. *Up* here has a sense of completion, which means he fixed them till they were completely fixed (Olteanu, 2012).

Likewise, Workman (1996) points out that the semi-literal meaning of phrasal verbs is the natural meaning kept by the verb plus the extra meaning which is added by the accompanying particle. For example, after stopping for fuel in New York, the plane *flew on* to Los Angeles. Thus, the verb *flew* indicates its natural meaning (to move through the air), however the particle *on* adds a further concept of continuing the flight.

Not much different from the semi-literal meaning of phrasal verbs, opaque phrasal verbs are those verbs whose meaning is not the total meaning of their components and it is not easy to guess unless the context makes it clear. In other words, opaque phrasal verbs do not really behave like idioms. They have some characteristics of opacity in common but they are not idioms themselves. Therefore, they get some meaning from the verb and the particle but not as much as the literal ones do. For example, the sentence: he *played down* his illness because he did not want anybody thinking he was not up to the job; means that he made his illness seem less important than it really is. Another example is the sentence: they *wiped out* the invading army, meaning they destroyed it completely. (Schnoebelen, 2008)

2.3 The figurative meaning

Phrasal verbs are the most common type of idioms in English. Many of them have metaphoric or figurative meaning which is used to give imaginative

descriptions or special effects. For this reason, the meaning of these verb-particle combinations cannot be inferred from their components , unless the phrase is already known (Leah). According to Olteanu (2012) , " an idiomatic phrasal verbs too, like any other grammatical constructs becomes fixed and authentic enough in time by being used frequently ". He goes on to give the following example: "a mother may have taken a last look at her child going off to school or may have *looked after* the child. Hence , the meaning has changed to describe an entirely different activity in the modern context so that the phrasal verb to *look after* someone means now to care for someone"(p.66).

In this respect, figurativeness is a paramount feature in the lexical nature of phrasal verbs and it is worthy of being widely dealt with in the lexicon or a dictionary rather than in grammar (Palmer, 1974) .In other words, the idiomatic meaning of phrasal verbs is a special meaning and bears no relationship to the individual parts .For instance, the sentence: the ice was thin and they *fell through*; means that they *fell through* the ice into the water. This is a non-idiomatic meaning. But, in the sentence: Sue had plans to go to Africa, but they all *fell through* .Here, the morphemes *fall* and *through* form an idiomatic phrasal verb which means "to fail"(Seidl,1990).

SECOND REQUIREMENT: THE NATURE OF THE CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS OF PHRASAL VERBS

The relationship between the verb and the particle

A verb and a particle may combine in more than one way. As a result, they cause a consistent change in the meaning of the verb stem .For example, The boy *bolted* his food is different from the boy *bolted down* his food ,because to *bold down* means to eat quickly .This change in meaning occurs due to the presence of the particle *down* .Hence, we shall call these verb-particle combinations "systematic combinations" . Combinations like *figure out*(to find out), *auction off* (to sell something at an auction) and *jot down* (to write something quickly) are said to be frozen forms, and thus they are called" figurative combinations"

Whorf (1956) in Fraser (1976,P.6) argues that systematic verb-particle combinations seem to have retained an adverbial force .For instance, if one *hangs up* a picture then the picture is *up* on a wall or whatever .Likewise, the particle *over* may have less adverbial force but still conveys the feeling of passing across . Whorf goes on to say that some particles such as *up* and *out* appear to modify the meaning of a verb by conveying a sense of completion . For example, if we say *eat*

up your meal, it means finish it and do not leave anything over. The same thing goes for the phrasal verb *to broaden out* (to become entirely wide) which also conveys a completive sense.

As a matter of fact, the systematic cases amount only to a small number of the total verb-particle combinations in English, because in combinations such as *to bolster up* and *to auction off* the effect that the addition of the particle has on the interpretation of the verb is not clear. Moreover, there are a number of verb-particle combinations whose verbs never function as verbs without the accompanied particles. For instance, verbs like *to keel over* (to fall down because you feel sick), *to jot down* (to write quickly), *to balloon up* (to get bigger suddenly), *to mull over* (to think carefully about something), *to horse around* (to play in a noisy and careless way), *to chicken out* (to decide not to do something because you are afraid), *to auction off* (to sell something at an auction), *to while away* (to spend time in pleasant lazy way). Additionally, not all verbs in English occur with only one particle. Some verbs might be combined with only one particle, whereas other verbs can form a verb-particle combination with almost every particle. Besides, the verb *to get* combines with most of particles. For example, *get across*, *get about*, *get along*, *get around*, *get away*, *get up*, *get down*, *get in*, *get out*, *get on*, *get off* and *get through*.

There are many verb-particle combinations in which the verb has a radically different interpretation when it occurs alone as in the following pairs of sentences:

1- They usually *box* his ears as a punishment. (hit) / Please *box up* my gift. (put in a box)

2- They cracked the case with a hammer. (broke it open) / She cracked up at my joke. (laughed)

Moreover, it is noticed that in English verbs like *eat*, *drink*, *read* and *write* receive a more general meaning in the absence of a direct object noun phrase. For example, if we say that someone is *reading*, it refers to the general nature of his/her activity but leaves unspecified the material being read. Furthermore, only a couple of verbs are found such *clean up* and *wash up* which may take an object, but the presence of the object seems to be less necessary in the imperative form like: *Eat up*, *wash up*, and *swallow up* (Fraser, 1976).

Finally, it is obvious that there are a limited number of verbs or particles that can rightly form combinations, however this latter is not all randomly formed since there are strict collocational restrictions. Clearly enough, if we substitute a

particle for what would seem as its opposite , we would then end up with a very different if not odd meaning ;or we would have a sequence of a verb and a particle that can hardly be interpreted as a combination at all. For instance, we can *look after* somebody but we cannot similarly *look before* him (Palmer,1974).

THE SECOND TOPIC : EFL STUDNETS WEAKNESS IN PHRASAL VERBS

Methodology:

1.Participants

This study is conducted on a population of about 121 third year EFL students at the Department of English at Barika University Center during the academic year 2024-2025. These students are divided into 3 groups and each group contains at least 40 students. In this respect, a sample of 52 students was randomly chosen and meant for the current investigation. The subjects' age ranges from 20 to 43 years old with the average age of 20. Since all the participants are Algerian, they speak English as a mother tongue and French as a second language. In this case, English is spoken as a foreign language. Third year students of English are chosen as a case of study due to the fact that our subjects are adult learners who have been substantially exposed to English and have fair knowledge of this language . Besides, they are also expected to be future EFL teachers as they graduate soon (after they successfully complete this final year of the Bachelor course) and therefore this research investigates the obstacles that phrasal verbs still constitute, in the process of learning English, to even English advanced learners as such.

2.Data collection

To illicit the required information from the participants a questionnaire is adopted. It was designed by the researcher himself in order to probe the subjects 'views and attitudes towards the use of phrasal verbs. The questionnaire encompasses 14 questions which are arranged in a logical way. The questionnaire is comprised of both close questions that require yes/ no answers or necessitate the respondents to choose the appropriate answer(s) from a given list of options and open-ended questions as well (see appendix). The latter require the respondents to freely express or explain their points of view. The questionnaire is also divided into four sections. Each section serves a particular aim.

Out of 60 administrated questionnaires, 52 were fully completed by the respondents. The eight remaining questionnaires were incomplete and thus

excluded from this study. The questionnaires were self-administrated and all in print .None of them was emailed.

3.Procedure

The questionnaire was anonymously filled in by the respondents in the presence of the researcher and with some instructions he gave. In so doing, we help making data collection more accurate, standard and more importantly reliable. Our presence in the process of filling in the questionnaires was of prime importance; to ensure that the students clearly understood the questions on the one hand, and to enthuse these participants to answer all the questions on the other hand. No visual or verbal clues were made which would affect the respondents' desired answers. The questionnaires were administered and retrieved from the respondents the same day in December 2024.

To ensure the reliability of the analysis of the questionnaire we applied the coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha. Using the 26th version of SPSS, the data obtained from the questionnaire were processed and tabulated accordingly.

4.Results

The process of analyzing the different answers that we obtained from the current study participants reveals a lot as to how these EFL advanced learners perceive and produce phrasal verbs. The following is an-in-depth account of the findings.

Table 01. Duration of studying English

Number of Years	Number of Respondents	Percentage
8 Years	05	09.61 %
9 Years	03	05.76 %
10 Years	36	69.23 %
11 Years	03	05.76 %
14 Years	01	01.92 %
No Answer	04	07.69 %
Total	52	100 %

According to the results shown in above table, more than half of the respondents (69.23 %) have been studying English for 10 years. That is to say, they

had started studying it since they were in the middle school but they have failed twice in there scholastic cycle

Table 02. Students' knowledge of Phrasal verbs

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	52	100 %
No	0	00 %
Total	52	100 %

Table 2 shows that all the respondents 100 % know some phrasal verbs in English. This is an index of these subjects' familiarity with phrasal verbs. They are aware of the fact that phrasal verbs are a frequently used kind of verbs in English.

Table03. Students' formation phrasal verbs

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	33	63.46 %
No	18	34.61 %
No Answer	01	01.92 %
Total	52	100 %

Following the above results, more than half of the respondents 63.46 % admit that they form phrasal verbs of their own just by adding a particle to a verb. This reveals the fact that these subjects coin phrasal verbs unknowingly and mistakenly, since the combination verb particle is not randomly formed.

Table04. Students being taught phrasal verbs

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	33	63.46 %
No	19	36.53 %
Total	52	100 %

As it is displayed in table 4, 63.46 % of the respondents mention that they have been taught phrasal verbs at one point of their academic path. This statement indicates that our subjects are supposed to have fair understanding of phrasal verbs and familiarity with some issues related to these verbs.

Table05. Students' interest in learning phrasal verbs

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	48	92.30 %
No	04	07.69 %
Total	52	100 %

Statistics in the above table show that the vast majority of the respondents 92.30% are interested in learning phrasal verbs. They justified that most of them consider learning phrasal verbs as a contributing factor to speaking English as fluently as native speakers do. Since English native speakers use phrasal verbs a lot, these respondents find it necessary to learn phrasal verbs to understand native speakers' speech easily. In addition, a significant portion of these respondents express their interest in learning phrasal verbs because this latter enriches their vocabulary and enables them to speak English well and native-like. Some of the respondents state that as they learn phrasal verbs they can sum up a lot of what they want to say in few words. Besides, phrasal verbs are expressive according to these participants because phrasal verbs enable them to speak English coherently. They are also interested in learning phrasal verbs because they seek to get familiar with different aspects of English language. The minority of the respondents 07.69 % who are not interested in learning phrasal verbs justify their claims stating that phrasal verbs are somewhat difficult to learn and practice. Furthermore, phrasal verbs are not recommended to be used in formal discourse therefore these respondents need not learn them.

Table06. Students' use of phrasal verbs inside the classroom

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	31	59.06 %

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No	21	40.38 %
Total	52	100 %

As the above table shows, a percentage of 59.06 % represents the respondents who use phrasal verbs inside the classroom. Whereas, a percentage of 40.38% represents the respondents who do not use phrasal verbs inside the classroom, and they have reasons which are shown in the following table.

Table07. Students' reasons of not using Phrasal verbs inside the classroom

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
A	16	76.19 %
B	02	09.52 %
C	00	00 %
D	03	14.28 %
Total	21	100 %

According to the statistics shown in table 7, we notice that out of the twenty one respondents who in table 6 say No, sixteen of them 76.19 % choose the option (a) to justify their answers .That is to say, they do not use phrasal verbs inside the classroom because they know very few phrasal verbs.The rest (14.28 % and 09.52 %) do not use phrasal verbs inside the classroom because they either do not know how and when to use them or they prefer to use more formal single-word verbs over phrasal verbs.

Table 08. Students frequency of using Phrasal verbs when they are speaking

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Always	07	13.46 %
Sometimes	29	55.76 %
Rarely	15	28.84 %
Never	01	01.92 %
Total	52	100 %

It is clearly noticed in table 8 that a big portion of our respondents (55.76 %) acknowledge that they sometimes use phrasal verbs when they are speaking English. Only one respondent 01.92 % reveals that s/he never uses phrasal verbs when s/he is speaking English.

Table 09.Students' attentiveness to the different uses and meanings of Phrasal verbs when listening to English

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	38	73.07 %
No	14	26.92 %
Total	52	100 %

The tabulated results show that the majority of the respondents (73.07 %) pay attention to the various uses and different meanings of phrasal verbs when they are listening to English. By contrast, few of them (26.92%) do not use phrasal verbs when they are listening to English and they justify so as demonstrated in the table below.

Table 10.Students' reasons for not paying attention to the different uses and meanings of phrasal verbs when listening to English

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
A	05	35.71 %
B	01	07.14 %
C	06	42.28 %
D	02	14.28 %
Total	14	100 %

Considering the statistics shown in table (10), we clearly notice that out of the fourteen respondents who answer question (8) by No, five of them justify that they cannot distinguish between phrasal verbs and other kinds of verbs like prepositional verbs. Only one respondent justify that s/he cannot recognise the

verbs and their accompanying particles (adv/prep). On the other hand, most of the respondents (06 students) justify that they cannot distinguish between the meanings of particles (adv/prep) in isolation and the meanings of particles that combine to phrasal verbs. As for as the two remaining respondents, one of them claims that s/he has problems in the listening skills in general. The other one contends that phrasal verbs, according to him/her, are not an important lexical element in speech and therefore s/he can take them for granted !

Table 11. Students' most used Phrasal verbs in conversation

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
a	33	63.46 %
b	13	25 %
c	06	11.54%
Total	52	100 %

As the results in table 11 reveal, the vast majority of the respondents (63.46 %) admit that they mostly use phrasal verbs whose only literal meanings are known to them whenever they engage in any conversation in English. A quarter of the respondents 25 % recount that they mostly use phrasal verbs whose meanings can be guessed from the meanings of their verbs and particles in isolation. Only few respondents (11.54%) acknowledge that they mostly use phrasal verbs whose verbs and particles (adv/perp) form a kind of collocations.

Table 12. Students' difficulties in phrasal verbs in spoken English

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
a	09	17.30 %
b	15	28.84 %
c	25	48.07 %
d	01	01.92 %

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a+c	01	01.92 %
b+c	01	01.92 %
Total	52	100 %

The tabulated data in table 12 indicate that the difficulties our subjects have in phrasal verbs in spoken English can mostly be categorized into two main issues: Either learners' confusion of the non-literal meanings of some phrasal verbs or their doubt as to which verb combines with which particle. Only in few cases learners do not know in which style of spoken English phrasal verbs are used.

Table 13. Students frequency of using phrasal verbs when they are writing

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Always	03	05.76 %
Sometimes	25	48.07 %
Rarely	24	46.15 %
Never	00	00 %
Total	52	100 %

It is visibly shown in the above table that only few respondents always use phrasal verbs when they are writing in English .However, nearly half of our respondents acknowledge that they sometimes use phrasal verbs when they are writing in English.

Table 14. Students' attentiveness to different uses and meanings of phrasal verbs when reading

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	41	78.84 %
No	10	19.23 %
No answer	01	01.92 %

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Total	52	100 %
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As the tabulated data show, the vast majority of the respondents pay attention to the various uses and different meanings of phrasal verbs when they are reading in English.

Table 15. Students' reasons for not paying attention to different uses and meanings of phrasal verbs when reading

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
a	02	20 %
b	00	00 %
c	05	50 %
d	00	00 %
a+c	02	20 %
b+c	01	10 %
Total	10	100 %

Following the statistics demonstrated in table 15, we clearly notice that out of the ten respondents who answer question 12 by No, half of these respondents justify that they do not pay attention to the various uses and different meanings of phrasal verbs when they are reading in English, because these subjects confuse between the particles of phrasal verbs and the rest of the ordinary prepositions and adverbs. On the other hand, the rest of the respondents justify that they either do not distinguish between phrasal verbs and any other kind of compound verbs or they also get confused between the particles of phrasal verbs and the rest of the ordinary prepositions and adverbs.

Table 16. Students' most used phrasal verbs in writing

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
a	33	63.46 %
b	12	23.07 %

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c	07	13.46 %
Total	52	100 %

As the results in table 16 clarify, it is visibly noticed that the majority of the respondents hold that whenever they are writing in English, they mostly use phrasal verbs whose only literal meanings are known to them.

Table 17. Students' difficulties in phrasal verbs in written English

Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
a	15	28.84 %
b	26	50 %
c	06	11.53 %
d	00	00 %
b+c	03	05.76 %
a+b+c	02	03.84 %
Total	52	100 %

Statistics in the table above indicate that the difficulties our subjects have in phrasal verbs in written English are mostly as follows. First, according to half of the respondents, confusion occurs when the meaning of the verb completely changes by adding a particle. Second, many respondents report that do not know in which style of written English phrasal verbs are used and they are also unsure of whether the verb and the accompanying particle can be separated.

Discussion

The findings obtained from this research have enlightened us about the weaknesses and the problems that these students encounter in learning phrasal verbs. In this regard, we notice that our subjects' duration of studying English ranges from 8 to 14 years, with the vast majority have been studying English for 10 years .However. It can be said that these students have been enough exposed to practicing English, which increases the likelihood that these subjects are much more familiar with phrasal verbs. It is also obvious that all the subjects 100% are

knowledgeable about some phrasal verbs in English. This indicates that these students are truly familiar with different kinds of phrasal verbs and they are also aware of the importance of phrasal verbs as an integral part of learning English as a foreign language. More than half of our subjects form phrasal verbs of their own, just by adding a particle to a verb. This evidences that these students are ignorant of the fact that verb-particle combinations are not randomly formed. Such finding goes hand in hand with what Garnier and Schmitt (2016) ,Kubota (1997) and Strong and Boers (2019) argue concerning the fact that phrasal verbs are one of the main areas of difficulties for many learners who mistake the formation of phrasal verbs with the formation of free prepositional verbs. Consequently, these subjects unknowingly and mistakenly coin wrong if not odd phrasal verbs. In this regard, our first hypothesis which states “ if learners of English are familiar with the particularity of restrictions on the verb-particle co-occurrence they may use phrasal verbs correctly” is to a great extent confirmed.

What we also know about our subjects is that the majority of them have been taught English at one point of their academic pursuit. In other words, they are supposed to have a fair understanding of phrasal verbs and familiarity with certain issues related to learning phrasal verbs. This may seem contradictory to what we have said earlier concerning the subjects ignorance of the particularity of restrictions, but in question four a significant portion of our subjects (36.53%) report that they have never been taught phrasal verbs. Therefore, we can say that they are not knowledgeable enough about phrasal verbs. As a result, they are very likely to use phrasal verbs wrongly. This is in fact echoed in a study conducted by Omidian, Akbary and Shahriari (2019) who concluded that EFL learners have limited knowledge of phrasal verbs and thus these researchers recommend explicit exposure to phrasal verbs to enrich EFL learners’ knowledge of this area of vocabulary.

It is clearly noticed that the vast majority of the subjects (92.30%) are interested in learning phrasal verbs for the common purpose of getting native-like fluency in English. This hints at the fact these students to some extent; believe that acquiring phrasal verbs equal being fluent in English. We also notice that more than half of our subjects 59.06% use phrasal verbs inside the classroom, but the remaining ones prove to be not doing so for different reasons; on top of them is their limited knowledge of phrasal verbs. This suggests that these students have poor

vocabulary since they have earlier justified that they seek to enrich their vocabulary by learning phrasal verbs.

Concerning the learners' attitude towards phrasal verbs in spoken English, more than half of the students sometimes use phrasal verbs when they are speaking in English. This again means that these subjects compared to the remaining ones are aware of the importance of phrasal verbs in making one's speech sounds native-like. Besides, the vast majority of the subjects (73.07%) pay attention to the various uses and different meanings of phrasal when listening to English. This is an index of the subjects' realisation of the importance of phrasal verbs that contribute a lot in making one's speech seems eloquent. Thus, honing the speaking skills of EFL learners is based on good listening skills. In addition, only few of our subjects who do not pay attention to the various uses and different meanings of phrasal verbs when listening to English, due to the fact that these students cannot distinguish between the meanings of particles (prep/adv) in isolation and the meanings of the particles that combine to verbs. In other words, they have problems in some prepositions and adverbs in general. Along the same lines Schmitt (2000) and Verstraten, (1992) argue that the nature of phrasal verbs poses certain challenges to EFL students, given that the meaning of a particular preposition or adverb in isolation confuses such learners when this preposition or adverb combines with a verb to form a phrasal verb.

Another point to consider is that more than half of the subjects use mostly the phrasal verbs whose only literal meanings are known to them when engaging in any conversation in English. This means that these students grasp only the literal meaning of phrasal verbs, and therefore they have a fair command of this kind of phrasal verbs only. Recently, similar findings were reported in a study by Haugh and Takeuchi (2024) in which they examined the knowledge of English phrasal verbs among Japanese university students. Accordingly, these researchers concluded that learners of English avoid the use of phrasal verbs because they can only acquire phrasal verbs whose meaning is literal and non-idiomatic. In this respect, almost half of the subjects prove to get confused of the non-literal meaning of some phrasal verbs as their major difficulty in phrasal verbs in spoken English. Hence, this students' common difficulty and jointly with what we have said concerning the students' most used phrasal verbs, confirm to a great extent our second hypothesis which states that if learners of English are enough aware of the

degree of the figurativeness of phrasal verbs they may manage to grasp the different meanings of phrasal verbs.

Regarding the students' attitude towards phrasal verbs in written English, almost half of the students sometimes use phrasal verbs when writing in English. We can say that these subjects are aware of the importance of phrasal verbs and they also know when to use them appropriately in the written form of English. By contrast nearly half of the remaining students rarely use phrasal verbs when writing in English, which means that either they do not know in which style phrasal verbs should be used in written English, or as we have said concerning question six: they know very few phrasal verbs. It is also observed that the vast majority of our subjects (78.84%) pay attention to the various uses and different meanings of phrasal verbs when reading in English. This implies that these students are acutely aware of the importance of phrasal verbs in making good compositions, since developing the writing skills is built upon good reading skills. In this context, more than half of our subjects are noticed to mostly use phrasal verbs whose only literal meanings are known to them. This testifies that these students are ignorant of the figurative meanings that phrasal verbs can convey, in which the combination as a whole (particle and verb) bears an idiomatic meaning. This statement reinforces again the second hypothesis which we have already confirmed and answers our second question that EFL learners' knowledge of phrasal verbs is only limited to the literal meaning. Additionally, as their major difficulty in the written form of English, half of our subjects are observed to get confused when the meaning of a verb completely changes by adding a particle. In other words, when a particle combines to a verb a new meaning is created, which is different from the meanings of the particle and the verb in isolation. Consequently, the students get confused and they cannot manage to grasp such phrasal verbs. This confirms our first hypothesis that EFL students are unfamiliar with the particularity of restrictions on the verb particular pairing.

Arguably at this point, it is safe to say that, as a definitive answer to our first question, EFL learners perceive phrasal verbs whose meaning is different from the meaning of its individual parts in a non-holistic way. In other words, such learners mistakenly process the meaning of a verb and that of the accompanying particle separately and try to guess the whole meaning accordingly. As a result, EFL learners fail to grasp the exact intended meaning. Along the same lines Al Nasarat (2018), Abid Thyab (2019) and Amret and Yousif (2018) concluded that EFL

learners fail to recognize phrasal verbs as a unique multi-word unit due to the fact that these learners perceive the components of phrasal verbs as isolated bits of meaning rather than a lexical chunk .

Conclusion and pedagogical recommendations

Multi-word units are characterized by a certain level of opacity of meaning. EFL students, though advanced, are likely to fail to notice them and mistakenly assume that the meaning of each part is literal. Therefore, failure to master phrasal verbs is attributed to these students' deficiency in the perception and treatment of phrasal verbs in the four skills of the language.

According to the present study findings it is obvious that phrasal verbs are, to some extent , a daunting aspect of reaching proficiency and fluency in English even for advanced learners of English as such . Although our students are somewhat knowledgeable about some phrasal verbs and they have been enough exposed to English, they still have undeniable difficulties and incomplete understanding of the particularities of phrasal verbs, chiefly the polysemy and figurativeness of verb-particle combinations. We should not also lose sight of the fact that the degree of figurativeness as the main trait of the semantic nature of phrasal verbs is what misleads these EFL students to grasp the different meanings of phrasal verbs, and this goes hand in hand with the hypotheses of our study. Thus, failure to master phrasal verbs is attributed to the students' deficiency in the perception and treatment of phrasal verbs in both spoken and written English.

It is commonly known that phrasal verbs are one of the most noticeable indicators of linguistic competence of EFL learners. Incomplete mastery of phrasal verbs or tendency to avoid using them can result in deficiency in fluency and communicative competence. Hence, in the light of our aforementioned findings we can draw some pedagogical implications.

Since phrasal verbs in most cases have certain degree of figurativeness and learners fail to notice that polysemy, it is worthwhile introducing the idea of lexis appearing as 'chunks' rather than individual words. In other words, building a lexical competence entails recognizing and recording lexis in chunks. Due to the fact that the most common difficulty in phrasal verbs among our participants is their unawareness of the degree of figurativeness of phrasal verbs, we would strongly recommend that students need to be aware that phrasal verbs, as well as having more than one part can have more than one meaning. This can be done through introducing a text in which the same phrasal verbs are used multiply and

students are encouraged to replace the phrasal verbs with synonyms or match their definitions. Because of the students' needs to enrich their vocabulary by learning phrasal verbs, lexis should become the primary focus of any lesson. Bearing this in mind, it is important to group lexical chunks into contexts, situations and themes. Focusing on recording larger chunks can direct the students' attention to focusing more on the variety of words that co-occur with phrasal verbs.

In terms of the teaching material, an effective way of introducing new phrasal verbs to be used in writing could be done by presenting language authentically and thus teaching phrasal verbs in real and natural contexts. It is also an inductive method which allows students to notice new phrasal verbs and their different forms. Presenting a text with sentences containing highlighted phrasal verbs encourages students to recognize the form and deduce the meaning . A useful exercise for that could be presenting phrasal verbs through visual means like cartoons which attract the students' attention to whether or not phrasal verbs are more typical of speech or writing, as it can also reduce the dull atmosphere of teaching and learning .Additionally , checking the meaning of phrasal verbs can be desirably done though definition matching exercises and forms of phrasal verbs can be checked though questions asked about the distinction between transitive and intransitive phrasal verbs.

A good practice of phrasal verbs involves some classroom activities like sentence completion exercises , filling the gap activities and multiple-choice questions based activities. Keeping in mind that phrasal verbs should be viewed as part of longer lexical units, this can present significant information about the meaning and use, as it can also display the appropriateness and formality of the item . As a result , students' attention is drawn to some syntactic environment of phrasal verbs . This latter is best done by raising students' awareness of any difference between verbs with prepositional particle in the mother tongue of the students “ Arabic” and similar combinations in English , for the purpose of preventing the negative transfer of such kinds of verbs.

Additionally, when it comes to the pronunciation of phrasal verbs, students may have difficulties placing and producing correct stress on phrasal verbs, but if the teaching of stress placement is in general more important than at the level of words, then it would be worthwhile to make sure that students are aware of the fact that phrasal verbs always carry stress within a sentence and this is a useful starting point. A helpful exercise for that would be rhythmic pronunciation drills, in which

the students tap as they read sentences aloud. This encourages the students to notice the stress patterns of separable and inseparable phrasal verbs.

Appendix

Please answer by ticking (✓) the appropriate box or making full statement(s) when necessary

Section One: General information

1- How long have you been studying English?

2- Do you know some phrasal verbs in English? Yes ☐ No ☐

3-Do you sometimes form a phrasal verb by just adding a particle (adverb /preposition) to a verb? Yes ☐ No ☐

4-Have you ever been taught phrasal verbs? Yes ☐ No ☐

Section Two: Students' interest and use of phrasal verbs

5- Are you interested in learning phrasal verbs? Yes ☐ No ☐ why?

.....
6- Do you use phrasal verbs inside the classroom? Yes ☐ No ☐. If No, it is because :

a- You just know very few phrasal verbs ☐

b- You do not know when and how to use them ☐

c- Most of your teachers do not use them inside the classroom ☐

d-Other(s),please specify?

Section Three : Learners attitude towards phrasal verbs in spoken English

7- How often do you use phrasal verbs when you are speaking English ?

a- Always ☐

b- Sometimes ☐

C-Rarely ☐

D-Never ☐

8-When you are listening to English, do you pay attention to the various uses and different meanings of phrasal verbs? Yes ☐ No ☐ . If No ,is it because :

a-You cannot distinguish between phrasal verbs and other kinds of verbs like prepositional verbs? ☐

b-You cannot recognise the verbs and their accompanying particles (prepositions/adverbs)? ☐

c-You cannot distinguish between the meanings of particles (prepositions/adverbs) in isolation and the meanings of particles (prepositions/adverbs) that combine to phrasal verbs? ☐

d-Other(s) please specify?.....

9- When you engage in any conversation in English and you happen to use some phrasal verbs, do you mostly use:

a- Phrasal verbs whose only literal meanings are known to you? ☐

b- Phrasal verbs whose meanings can be guessed from the meanings of their verbs and particles in isolation? ☐

c - Phrasal verbs whose verbs and particles (preposition/adverb) form a kind of lexical bundle? ☐

10- If you ever have any difficulty(s) in phrasal verbs in spoken English, would it/they be:

a-You do not know in which form (formal/informal) of spoken English they are used? ☐

b-You are not sure of which verb combines with which particle? ☐

c-You get confused of the non-literal meanings of some phrasal verbs? ☐

d-Others, please specify

Section Four: Students attitude towards phrasal verbs in written English

11-How often do you use phrasal verbs when you are writing in English?

a- Always ☐

b- Sometimes ☐

c-Rarely ☐

d-Never ☐

12-When you are reading in English, do you pay attention to the various uses and different meanings of phrasal verbs? Yes☐ No☐ . If No, it is because:

a- You do not distinguish between phrasal verbs and any other kind of compound verbs? ☐

b- The verbs are separated from the particles ? ☐

c-You confuse between the particles of the phrasal verbs and the rest of the ordinary prepositions and adverbs? ☐

d-Other(s) Please specify.....

13-When you are writing in English and you happen to use some phrasal verbs, do you mostly use:

- a- Phrasal verbs whose only literal meanings are known to you ? ☐
- b- Phrasal verbs whose meanings can be guessed from the meanings of their verbs and particles in isolation? ☐
- c- Phrasal verbs whose verbs and particles (preposition/adverb) form a kind lexical bundle? ☐

14-If you ever have any difficulty(s) in phrasal verbs in written English, and then would it/they be:

- a- You do not know in which form (formal/informal) of written English they are used? ☐
- b-You get confused when the meaning of the verb completely changes by adding a particle? ☐
- c- You do not know where the verbs and the particles of phrasal verbs can be separated or not☐
- d-Others, please specify.....

Thank you for your cooperation

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