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Phrasal Verbs as a Problem for English Learners

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Dedication

All praise to **Allah**

To the candles that light our life, our Mothers and Fathers, with love and respects....

To our dear brothers and sisters....

To our supervisor....

And to our families and friends.....

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank **Allah** for his guidance and care for our lives.

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1 . Introduction :

Wyatt (2006:3) defines the phrasal verb as a verb that is combined with an adverb, or preposition, or both. Eastwood (1994:303) clarifies that phrasal verbs differ from prepositional verbs (which consist of verb + preposition, as in:

1. I was **looking at** the photo .

The meaning of the verb and particle is different from the base verb on its own, for example: the meaning of “give up” is quite different than “give” on its own. Redman and Gaims (2011:5).

All verbs can be paired up with a preposition or an adverb, but some verbs are more commonly used than others, such as: come, make, look, break,etc. Those are versatile. However some phrasal verbs keep their literal meaning in the sentence Workman (1993:7) , as in:

2. He **looked up** and saw an airplane.

Phrasal verbs are one of the most striking idiosyncrasies of the English language. Smith (1925:172).

2 . The syntactic form of phrasal verbs :

The syntactic frames of phrasal verbs are pointed out by Ostyn (2003:1) phrasal verbs are also called “idiomatic”, and the possible combinations of phrasal verbs are:

- a) verb + particle (Ex. **Slowdown.**)
- b) verb + particle + preposition (Ex. **Face up to.**)
- c) verb + preposition (Ex. **Refer to.**)

Aarts, Chalker, and Weiner (2014:306) suggest that phrasal verbs operate, syntactically and semantically as a unit, in contrast with prepositional verbs and phrasal-prepositional verbs. McCarthy and O'Dell (2004:6) explain that the meaning of phrasal verbs differ than the meaning of the verbs by themselves, as in: Look, meaning use the eyes to gaze in a specific direction, and Look up, meaning to search for. Murphy and Smalzer (2002:268) suggest that the object in the sentence can come between the verb and the particle, which we will be looking into in depth in the coming chapters.

McCarthy and O'Dell (2004:6) said the the grammar patterns of phrasal verbs are:

- a . The verb is used without an object .Foley and Hall (2003:159) ., as in:
 3. We were too tired to cook at home so we decided to **eat out**.
- b . The verb must have a non-human object, as in:
 4. This photograph **brings back** happy memories.
- c . The verb must have a human object, as in:
 5. I'd love to **ask sally out**.
- d . The object can be human or non-human . Alexander (1988:154) as in:
 6. I'm **looking for** my glasses.
 7. I'm **looking for** my brother.
- e . The object must come before the particle, as in:
 8. I'll **ring you back** later.

f . The object must come after the particle, as in:

9. Can you **look after** my dog while I'm away?

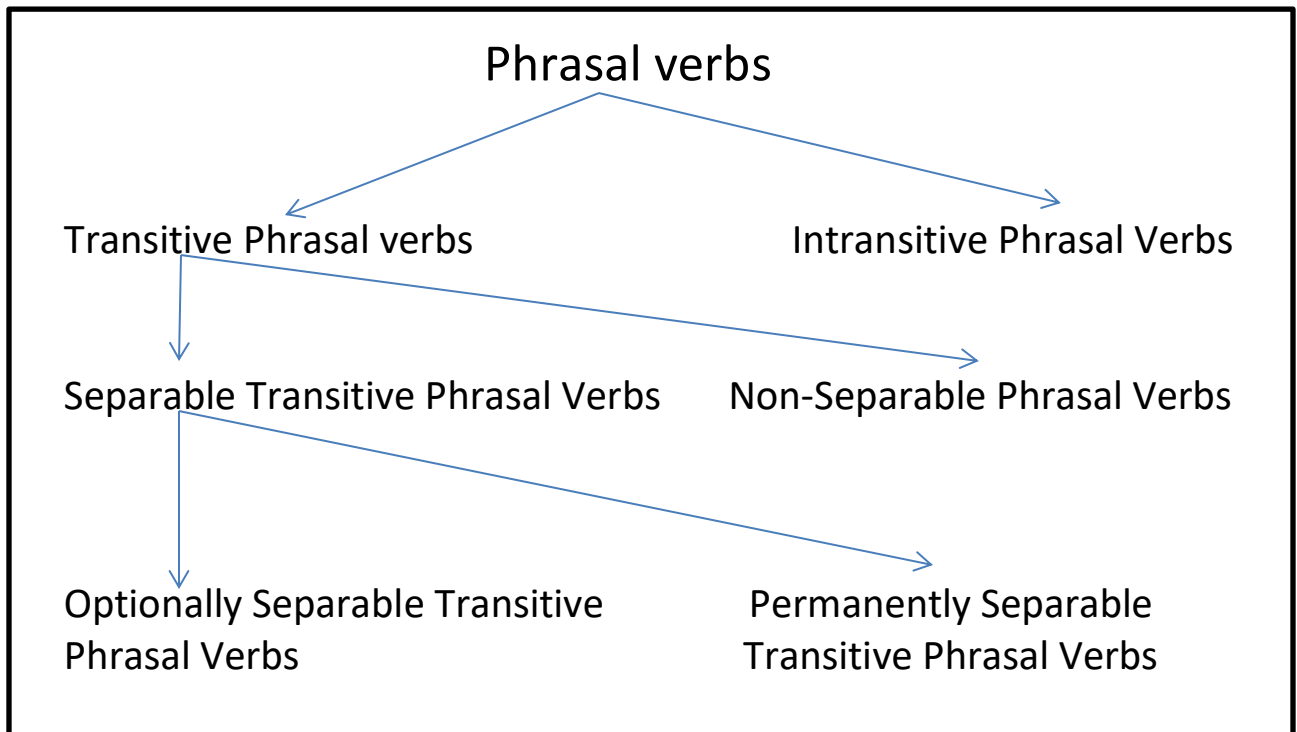
g . Sometimes in phrasal verbs the object can be after or after the particle, Murphy and Smalzer_(2002:268) . as in:

10. I **dropped off** the package at her house.

11. I **dropped** the package **off** at her house

3 . Types of Phrasal Verbs:

Figure (1): Types of Phrasal Verbs



Foley and Hall (2005 : 161)

3 . 1 Intransitive Phrasal Verbs :

Phrasal Verbs, which don't require an object in the sentence, are called intransitive phrasal verbs. Without an object a sentence having a phrasal verbs can make complete sense. Foley and Hall (2003:157) explain that intransitive phrasal verbs cannot be made be made passive. The following sentence doesn't contain an object, but still express perfect sense, McCarthy and O'Dell (2004:6) .

12 . We were to tired to cook at home so we decided to **eat out**.

3 . 2 Transitive Phrasal Verbs:

Phrasal Verbs, that require an object in a sentence, are called transitive phrasal verbs. Without an object, a sentence having a phrasal verbs, cannot make complete sense. A word in some cases function as a preposition in one context and particle in another. Alexander (1988:155). The following sentences having the object express a complete meaning or sense, Murphy and Smalzer (2993:242). as in:

13. Can you **fill out** this form, please?

There are two types of transitive phrasal verbs :

A . Separable Transitive Phrasal Verbs: these phrasal verbs' particles can be separated by the object in the sentence. These phrasal verbs and their particle can be used joined as well as separated, Aarts and Chalker (2014:306)as in:

14 . **Take off** your coat.

15 . **Take** your coat **off**.

These phrasal verbs can be divided into two types:

1 . Optionally Separable Transitive Phrasal Verbs : Hart (2017:7) states that this type of phrasal verbs permit, and sometimes require, particle movement. When the object is a noun phrase, it may appear between or after the particle Hall (2016:108) as in:

16 . I **looked over** the contract before signing.

17 . She **looked** me **over** before driving me to school.

However, when the object is a pronoun, it must come between the verb and the particle Foley and Hall (2003:157), as in:

18. They **made it up**.

Native speakers don't like to separate the verbs and particles, although grammatically correct, the results sometimes can be awkward and unclear.

2 . Permanently Separated Transitive Phrasal Verbs : A small group of transitive phrasal verbs are permanently separated. Among these are: **get down** (depress), **let off** (release),etc, and the direct object must be placed between the verb and the particle McCarthy and O'Dell (2004:144).

If the object of the phrasal verb is an abstract noun, such as hope, confidence,etc, it usually comes between the verb and the particle. Collins (1987:349) .

19. I will **text** you **back** when my meeting is finished.

B . Non-separable Transitive Phrasal Verbs : these are the phrasal verbs whose verbs cannot be separated from its particle. They must remain together, Alexander (1988:154) as in:

20. I'm **looking for** them .

Some multi-word verbs are transitive and it is impossible to separate the verb from the particle by the noun object or the pronoun object, Workman (1993:11) as in:

21. I'm **looking for** my keys.

4 . The Literal and Metaphorical Meaning:

McCarthy and O'Dell (2004:14) state that sometimes the basic meanings of phrasal verbs and the additional meanings of them are clearly linked, this is because some additional meanings are based on a metaphor, or image which has a direct connection with its literal or basic meaning, as in:

a . Literal meaning:

22. **blow up** a ball (fill with air)

b . Metaphorical meaning:

23. Ali **blew up** (became very angry)

It's not surprising that even advanced learners of English often misunderstand many of the phrasal verbs. The difficulties lie in varying levels of, both, form and meaning. Ostin (2003:8).

Sometimes a phrasal verb has only a metaphorical meaning and not literal meaning, and as you can guess, the meaning of the phrasal verb is different from the meaning of the verb by itself ,McCarthy and O'Dell (2004:14) . as in:

24. the statistic looks strange, have **slipped up** somewhere?

Phrasal Verbs are usually used in informal situations, and have a more formal single-word equivalent. Jackson (2005:16) .

The metaphorical use of the particle enable us to conceive of several abstract domains in terms of concrete domains, as in:

25. small shops have been **priced out** by supermarkets .

We can note that the meaning of phrasal verbs are complex, for example, the verb **go** and the particle **out** have various meanings with different particle, as in:

a) Go in: Enter

Go through: Examine

Go at: Attack

Go away: Leave. Wyatt (2006:26)

b) Leave out: Omit

Get out: Exit

Come out: Reveal

Take out: Remove. Hashemi and Thomas (2006:111)

5 . The differences between Phrasal-Prepositional Verbs and Prepositional Verbs:

5 . 1 Phrasal-Prepositional Verbs:

these verbs are formed by combining a verb with an adverb and a preposition. The combination creates a new meaning which usually cannot be understood of the individual parts Foley and Hall (2005:158):

26. we **look forward to** be hearing from you .

We can never use a noun or a pronoun as an object between the particles and we cannot usually put a noun or a pronoun as an object immediately after the verb Alexander (1988:158), as in:

27. I don't know how you **put up with** it .

The exception is when the verb has two objects, for example: 28.

28. we **let James in on** the plan .

Phrasal Verbs which cannot be separated by an object, these may have two objects Gairns and Redman (2011:14), as in:

29 . Tom's **going out with** his friend.

We cannot put an adverb before the first particle or after the final particle, but we can use an adverb between two particles, as in .Foley and Hall (2005:158):

30. Tom **stood up** strongly **for** his principles.

5 . 2 Prepositional Verbs :

they consist of a verb and a preposition, their combination creates new meaning which sometimes, but not always, can be worked out from its parts .Hart (2017:40), for example:

31. I'll **call** you **at** 7:00, and then we'll take a taxi to the concert.

We put the noun or pronoun object after the preposition and between the verb and the preposition, for example:

32. we didn't **fall for** his story.

Foley and Hall (2005:158) suggest that with prepositional verbs, we can put an adverb between the verb and the preposition

Verb + Preposition can come at the end of a sentence, Alexander (1988:155) . for example:

33. she's got more work than she can **cope with**.

Berry (2015:109) suggests that with prepositional verbs (but not phrasal verbs) we can put the preposition in front of relative pronouns, for example:

34. these are the principles for which our party stands.

McCarthy and O'Dell (2004:22) refers that With prepositional verbs, the verb and the preposition should be combined together, as in:

35. will you look after the cat while we're away?

6 . General information about Phrasal Verbs:

- Some phrasal verbs can be transformed into noun phrases by placing the particle before the verb, McCarthy and O'Dell (2004:14) .for example :

36. I knew from the **outset** that there would be problems.

- Also some adjectives based on phrasal verbs, like "break down", Alexander (2002:152,) point out that the combination is essential to the use of the verb. So, for example the verb "listen", must be followed by "to" when it has an object, Kelly (2014:15) .as in :

37. Tom wasn't aware that nobody was **listening to** him.

- Sometimes the combination is not essential, but the addition of a particle can make the verb stronger, for example the verb "drink" can be used differently in similar sentences, as in:

38 . **Drink** your milk!

39 . **Drink up** your milk!

In the second sentence, the suggested meaning is drink all your milk, which is stronger than just “drink” by itself. Celentano (2014:45)

- Sometimes the combination is idiomatic to the use of the verb, and a new verb is formed, which may have a totally different idiomatic meaning or several meanings, for example:
 - a) take off: undress; when a plane pull up from the ground.
 - b) take in: understand; comprehend a situation. Murphy and Smalzer (1985:274)

- All transitive verbs can be used in the passive Alexander (1988:186), as in:

40. all the lights in the house have been **turned off**.

- When the particle comes at the end of the sentence, then it is stressed, as in:

41. He took his **coat off**¹.

- Many prepositional verbs allow the noun phrases to be the subject of a passive transformation of the sentence Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:349), as in:

42. The man was **called on**.

- Some particles can strengthen or extend the effect of the verb, as in:

43. **Write down** their names.

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:348) suggest that sometimes phrasal verbs have literal meanings, for example:

44. she **took in** the box ('brought inside').

And the same phrasal verb can give different meaning in another example:

45. She **took in** her parents ('received') .

7 . Application of Phrasal Verbs in Daily Life:

- a. When someone wants to express the idea of continuation by using the phrasal verb "went on", Murphy and Smalzer (1985:276) .as in:

46. the party **went on** until 4 o'clock in the morning.

- b. When someone wants to express the idea of movement or change of state, they use the phrasal verb "come apart", McCarthy and O'Dell (2004:16) .as in:

47. the antique picture frame just **came apart** in my hands.

- c. When the speaker has health problem that they want to get rid of, they use the phrasal verb "fight off", McCarthy and O'Dell (ibid:116) .for example:

48. I'm **fighting off** lung cancer.

- d. When a person tries to express the idea of seeing, observing, or noticing something, they use "look through" meaning read quickly, Workman (1993:9) like:

49. can you **look through** my homework?.

- e. When someone wants to express the idea of physical actions, like “put up” meaning build in this context , Hart (2017:109) as in:
50. we need to **put up** a fence to keep the rabbits out of our garden.
- f. When a person wants to express the idea of completing or finishing up a business, they use the phrasal verb “sort out”, Errey (2007:119) .for example:

51. they **sorted out** everything before the seminar.

8 . The Use of Phrasal Verbs in context and the meaning of them:

Catherine was holding a dinner party for some friends. A few days earlier she had prepared chicken casserole and put it in the freezer to make sure it didn't **go off**. On the morning of the dinner party she removed it from the freezer and **thawed it out**. Then before her friends arrive, she put the chicken on and then made salad. She **heated up** the casserole making sure that it did not **boil over**. When her friends arrived, Catherine **handed out** olives and other snacks then they sat at the table and had the chicken casserole. Everyone said how well it **went with** the salad and nothing was **left over** at the end if the meal. McCarthy and O'Dell (2004:124)

52 . **Go off**: spoil

53. **Thawed out**: liquefied

54 . **Heated up**: warmed

55 . **Boil over**: over flow

56. **Handed out**: distributed

57 . **Went with**: combines well with

58 . **Left over**: remains.

Hart (2017:135)

It's obvious that phrasal verbs isn't an easy subject for EFL students to learn. That's due plethora of issues that students face ranging from the massive variety of combinations to lack of education in this subject. So in an attempt to understand the problem, we tested the students. We'll discuss the results and the questionnaire in the coming chapter.

9 . Data Analysis:

The researchers tested EFL students of the 2nd and 3rd stages in our college in order to figure out their level of understanding of phrasal verbs. The test is constructed of two questions (recognition and production) to increase the test's reliability. The analysis of was done by applying simple mathematical equations that we'll explain here:

a) Students' success and failure rates:-

$$SR = \frac{SP}{T} * 100\%$$

$$FR = \frac{SF}{T} * 100\%$$

SR: Success Rate/ FR: Failure Rate/ SP: Students who Passed/ SF: Students who Failed/ T: Total number of testees.

b) Students' success rates in each of the two questions: the results for each phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs in each question will be separated. We will count only the correct answers and calculate their percentage using the following equation:

$$\text{PoCA} = \frac{CA}{T} * 100\%$$

PoCA: Percentage of Correct Answers/ CA: Correct Answers/ T: Total number of answers

In the first question there are 3 phrasal verbs, and 2 prepositional verbs. In the second question there are 2 phrasal verbs, and 3 prepositional verbs.

- c) In the third table, we will count the number of correct answers for each point, in each question, and calculate the percentage of correct answers using the same mathematical equation as above.

The tables will be laid out for each of the sections above respectively.

- Success and Failure rates:

$$\text{SR} = \frac{SP}{T} * 100\%$$

$$\text{SR} = \frac{3}{55} * 100\%$$

$$\text{SR} = \frac{300}{55}\%$$

$$\text{SR} = 5.5\%$$

$$\text{FR} = \frac{SF}{T} * 100\%$$

$$\text{FR} = \frac{52}{55} * 100\%$$

$$\text{FR} = 94.5\%$$

Table (1) Students Success Rate in Each Question:

Question Type	Prepositional Verbs	Percentage	Phrasal Verbs	Percentage
Recognition	36	32.7%	77	46.67%
Production	11	6.67%	24	21.8%

Table (2) Students Success Rate in General:

Question Type	Total Correct	Percentage
Recognition	113	41.01%
Production	35	12.72%

Table (3) Students Correct Answers in Each Point, in Each Question:

Prepositional/ Phrasal Verbs	Correct	Percentage	
1) Blame on	27	49.09%	Recognition
2) Gather up	32	58.18%	
3) Insisted on	17	30.9%	
4) Trick into	13	23.6%	
5) Ran into	20	36.36%	
1) Pick up	20	36.36%	Production
2) Count on	8	14.54%	
3) Look into	3	5.45%	
4) Go about	0	0%	
5) Took in	5	9.09%	

10 . Discussion the results :

It's clear that students face a great deal of difficulty in dealing with phrasal verbs in the English language. In the production question, students were particularly weak, because the results for it are drastically worse than those for the recognition question, which is not to say are good by any means, but the results for the first question fared better than the second. Still, the results for the first question are below average.

Looking at the results of the production question lets us know that students don't know the difference between prepositional verbs and phrasal verbs, or even what the correct particles are, and that's a major problem for the students.

11. Conclusion and Recommendations:

Students confuse phrasal verbs with prepositional verbs for two reasons: first, the obvious similarities between the two in terms of structure, second, lack of general knowledge in this particular area of the language.

Phrasal verbs can be difficult for students of EFL, so we recommend including more of the subject in the curriculum, and constant use of phrasal verbs in authentic contexts.

Students should try to notice phrasal verbs when they occur in different place. Students should try and learn the differences in meaning and structure between phrasal and prepositional verbs.

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Appendix

1) Choose the correct answer:

I. Don't blame ither.

a-on b-for c-at d-off

II. Let's gather..... our things and leave.

a-for b-in c-up d-at

III. The doctor insisted several tests.

a-about b-at c-with d-on

IV. He tried to trick her doing it his way.

a-into b-at c-with d-away

V. I ran an old friend yesterday.

a-in b-at c-up d-into

2) Fill in the blanks with the appropriate particle or preposition:

i. I will pick her..... from school.

ii. Can we count you?

iii. I'll look..... the matter as soon as possible.

iv. I will go my business.

v. I took an astray cat.