

## Phrasal Verbs in English as a Second/Foreign Language

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### Abstract:

Phrasal verbs are used very regularly in the English language, and native English speakers are found to use phrasal verbs on a daily basis and cannot do without the use of phrasal verbs in everyday communicative situations. However, phrasal verbs in English language teaching as a second/foreign language is almost non-existent. That is, English as a second language (ESL)/English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching environments, in the Arab world, and specifically in Iraq, hardly teach the meaning of phrasal verbs to students, and neglect teaching the correct ways of using them, despite the fact that they are an essential part of daily native English communication. Therefore, and due to the vitality of phrasal verbs to native speakers of English, ESL/EFL students should be taught and educated to be capable of understanding and using phrasal verbs when interacting in English because knowledge of phrasal verbs would normally lead to better English language proficiency and more native-like communication. Nonetheless, phrasal verbs are not easy, and students often find them difficult, because phrasal verbs carry a specific meaning which is not inferable from the meaning of its composing words inseparable form as well as other reasons which have been explained within this paper. Hence, this paper points to the necessity of including phrasal verbs in English language teaching. Through implementing a qualitative approach, the aim, within this paper, is to identify and list causes of difficulty that learners of the English language may face when it comes to knowledge of English phrasal verbs, with regard to the spontaneous and fluent use of phrasal verbs by native English speakers. The significance, here, is to point out the need of taking this matter into serious concern and to offer suggestions and recommendations for better English as a second/foreign language learning and teaching, all in hope of better English language proficiency and ability.

*Keywords:* English as a foreign/second language, phrasal verbs

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## Introduction

Learning English as a second/foreign language, in the Arab world, is a requisite and undisputable part of its educational system from primary school to upper levels such as higher university education. Yet, teaching phrasal verbs and the correct use of them in English communication and their necessity is poor and underprovided in English as a second/foreign language teaching classrooms and ESL/EFL environments, specifically in Iraq. Nonparallel to native counterparts, the use of phrasal verbs is found to be hard and difficult for non-native English language learners, especially Arabic mother-tongue students who study English as ESL/EFL.

Phrasal verbs, are verbs which carry a specific meaning that cannot be referred to by analyzing the meaning of its constituent words. Phrasal verbs, furthermore, are rarely found in the Arabic language. Nevertheless, phrasal verbs are a vital part of English language vocabulary and is a basic part of this language's history, heritage and culture. Phrasal verbs are extremely important in English verbal communication, therefore English native speakers use phrasal verbs when they communicate spontaneously and daily. In linguistic studies, it is said that phrasal verbs add flavor to communication and speech. Thus, learning to use phrasal verbs is necessary in order to achieve native-like English language communication. Nevertheless, learning the meaning of phrasal verbs and proper use of them is not as easy as one might think. English EFL/ESL students and learners usually lack the ability to understand the meaning of phrasal verbs when communicating in the English language and lack the ability to communicate using phrasal verbs properly and efficiently. Most English language learners, especially Arabic mother-tongue speakers find using phrasal verbs to be extremely difficult and uneasy, unlike native English speakers, who use them subconsciously and almost every day. Recognizing the meaning of phrasal verbs which are commonly-used in the English language as well as being capable of using phrasal verbs should be regarded an essential part of English learning as a second/foreign language. Despite this, however, phrasal verbs are found to be uninclined in most English second/foreign language learning classrooms and materials. ESL/EFL environments pay very little attention to such an important feature of the English language and necessary part of everyday vocabulary. This is the reason behind this research paper with the aim to emphasize the importance of phrasal verbs through clarifying the necessity of understanding and using phrasal verbs in ESL/EFL educational systems. The aim of this paper is to stress on the fact that using English phrasal is an obligatory part of English vocabulary and native/native-like communication in English. This research suggests reasons why such an important language skill is lacking in ESL/EFL classrooms, dissimilar to native English colleagues. Possible reasons behind the nonexistence of phrasal verbs are explained within this paper, as well as listing explanations of why ESL/EFL learners face difficulties in the ability to comprehend phrasal verbs, their meaning and aptitude to communicate confidently using phrasal verbs. Here, suggestions have been given in the hope of arriving at a clear analysis of the causes of such a problem and possible solutions to overcome stated difficulties.

## Literature Review

Phrasal verbs are abundantly used by native English speakers in both formal and informal communication. Phrasal verbs are highly important and are considered a basic part of the English language. There are more than 5,000 different phrasal verbs used in English. (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004 : 4)

However, it is necessary to explain what is meant by "phrasal verbs". First of all, phrasal verbs are verbs which are composed of both a verb and a particle. For example, the phrasal verb "look up" is a phrasal verb which has the verb "look" and the particle "up" as its constituent words. Similarly, the phrasal verb "get through" consists of the verb "get" and the particle "through" as its component parts also.

Nonetheless, ESL/EFL students and learners, of different backgrounds, are found incapable of using phrasal verbs. Non-native speakers, unlike natives, lack the ability to use phrasal verbs effectively and also lack the ability to understand their meaning. This is considered a problem in non-native speakers' knowledge and proficiency of the English language and a gap in English language learning attempts. One possible explanation to the fact that ESL/EFL students and learners lack the ability to comprehend the meaning of phrasal verbs and are incapable of using them in communication is due to the fact that phrasal verbs in English language carry a meaning that is different from the meaning of the constituent words of a phrasal verb. As such, learners must know the meaning of the phrasal verb as one whole unit and not to be inferred by analyzing the meaning of its words (verb/particle) separately. Therefore, the phrasal verb "look up" is composed of the verb "look" which means "to see" and the particle "up" which is the opposite of "down". For example, the phrasal verb "look up" carries a meaning as one whole unit and not separable meanings of its constituents. The phrasal verb "look up" may mean "search for information in a book or computer" as in the sentence "I will look up for the meaning of this word in the dictionary. The phrasal verb "look up" may also mean "visiting someone you have not visited for a long period" as in the example "I will look her up next time I am in Egypt". The phrasal verb "look up" may have a third different meaning which differs according to the context it is used in. This phrasal verb also, for instance, mean that "things are improving" as when saying "things seem to be looking up" carrying an non-ordinary meaning which is "things seem to be improving or getting better." (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004, p. 6)

Notwithstanding, most ESL/EFL students lack the ability to understand and use phrasal verbs. This, in turn, distinguishes English language learners from native English speakers. For, as stated above, English speakers, of native origins, are found to use phrasal verbs plentifully, daily and spontaneously unlike ESL/EFL students and learners. As such, there is a "need to focus on phrasal verbs in English". (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004,p.6)

Lack of exposure to phrasal verbs in ESL/EFL settings makes it hard for English language learners to process the meaning of phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs, despite being essential in everyday English language communication, are not included in most English language learning environments and are unenclosed in almost all ESL/EFL books and materials that are used for teaching English as a second language in the Arab world, in general, and in Iraq, in particular.

English phrasal verbs should be required and a must. Phrasal verbs need to be included in EFL/ESL teaching materials and in EFL/ESL classrooms. Taking these facts into consideration will help non-natives of English improve their English language skills.

A phrasal verb, is a verb that is made up of a verb and a particle. As well, a particle means that it is either an adverb or a preposition or both. I.e., sometimes, a phrasal verb may contain two

particles and not just one, such as "put up with", "look forward to" and "catch up with". Common phrasal verbs, for instance, include "get up", "deal with" and "turn off". (Anonymous, 2016, p.1)

A phrasal verb entails a preposition or an adverbial particle. A phrasal verb is, most often, composed of either one of the following particles: back, up, down, round, around, away, at, about, for, in, into, off, on, out, over, through, to. (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004. 9)

As mentioned earlier also, we need to know the meaning of the phrasal verbs as a complete unit and not the meaning of its verb and particle in a separable form. So, "look up" is a phrasal verb that as one whole unit has a different meaning than the meaning of its constituent verb "look" which means "to see" and its particle "up" which means the opposite of "down". . (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004, p.9)

Therefore, the meaning of phrasal verbs is not related to the ordinary meaning of its components. That is, the meaning of the phrasal verb "carry out" which means "to do" or "to conduct" does not carry the common ordinary meaning of its constituents. So, "carry" which means "to lift" and the preposition "out" which means the opposite of "inside" is not similar to the meaning of the phrasal verb "carry out" as one whole unit. (Anonymous, 2016, p.1)

Nonetheless, it is also important to be aware of the grammar pattern of a phrasal verb. A phrasal verb may follow either one of the beneath grammar patterns. A phrasal verb may consist of a verb with no following object as in "We finished the meeting late so we decided to eat out" in which the phrasal verb "eat out" has no following object as, for instance, "eat out the meal" which is incorrect. (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004, p. 9)

A phrasal verb may consist of a verb which must have a non-human object. For example, "This photo brings back happy memories" or "This photo brings happy memories back" in which the phrasal verb grammar pattern is "brings back something" or "brings something back" and not "brings back my sister". (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004, p. 9)

A phrasal verb may have a grammar pattern wherein the verb must be followed by a human object as in "ask somebody out" or "ask out somebody" as in the sentence "I really want to ask Ann out" and not "ask my cat out" which is illogical and incorrect. (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004, p. 9)

Some phrasal verbs may entail either a human or non-human object. So, for example, "look after somebody" or "look after something". For example, we can say either "Please look after my baby while I'm cooking" or "Please look after my cat while I'm away". (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004, p.9)

Some phrasal verbs must have an object, and the object can come either before or after the verb, according to the sentence used and according to the context. These types of phrasal verbs are called "separable" phrasal verbs as in the separable phrasal verb "turn off" which means "stop working" which may be used in a sentence in two ways: "I turned off the light" or "I turned the light off." (Anonymous, 2016, p.2)

Some phrasal verbs must follow either the grammar pattern wherein the particle must come after the object as in "I will ring her back later" not "I will ring back her" and "Please, look after my cat while I'm away" and not "Please, look my cat after while I'm away". (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004, p. 9)

The final grammar pattern, a phrasal verb may consist of, is the pattern wherein the object can be before or after the particle. So, one may say "drop off somebody/something" or "drop somebody/something off". As in the example "I dropped off the delivery at his house" or "I dropped the delivery off at his house". (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004, p. 11)

Nevertheless, it must be realized that a verb that is followed by a number of prepositions or adverbs and does not change its meaning, but keeps its ordinary meaning, is not a phrasal verb. I.e., the verb "run up" is not a phrasal verb because "run up" which means "to move quickly" as in the sentence "The child ran up the hill" keeps its ordinary meaning "to move by foot" despite being followed by a number of different particles, such as "across", "away", etc. And, therefore, all the above are ordinary verbs that have a normally predictable meaning and do not carry an abstract or different meaning. Thus, the above examples are, despite being similar in shape and form to a phrasal verb, are not phrasal verbs. (Anonymous, 2016, p.1)

There are several verbs, which make up a large number of useful everyday phrasal verbs. These verbs are break, bring, call, come, get, give, go, look, make, pass, keep, knock, pick, put, pull, run, set, take, turn.

These verbs form parts of a huge number of the most common used phrasal verbs. Verbs can have a concrete meaning in which the verbs refer to a concrete action as in "break" which means "put into pieces or parts" but more often has an abstract meaning too. As in "Look back on your past memories" which has an abstract meaning that is "to recall" or "to remember."

Notwithstanding, the verb "look back" has a concrete meaning as in "As she was walking she looked back at her crying child" meaning "she turned back to see her child as she was walking away". So, the verb "look back" can be both a regular verb, with an ordinary meaning, or a phrasal verb, with its own special meaning. (McCarthy & O'Dell, 2004, p. 11)

Likewise, the verb "ran away" in the sentence "I ran away from the large dog" is not a phrasal verb because it carries an ordinary meaning which is "move quickly by foot". While, the same verb in the sentence "you shouldn't run away from your responsibilities" is a phrasal verb because its meaning, in this sentence, is abstract. By an "abstract" meaning, we mean something different, and not ordinary. Also, the verb "ran across" in the example "I ran across the green field" has an ordinary meaning which is also "to move by foot" while "ran across" is considered to be an example of a phrasal verb in the sentence "I ran across my school teacher last week" because it carries an abstract meaning, that is different from the meaning of its composing verb and particle when separated. Hence, the phrasal verb "ran across" in this example means "to meet by chance", which has an abstract and figurative meaning, not an ordinary, unchangeable, normal, and predictable meaning. (Anonymous, 2016, p.1)

Phrasal verbs are used in both written and spoken English and are part of everyday vocabulary, especially common native and native-like communication. Native English speakers do not do without phrasal verbs when speaking and communicating in typical, day to day, communicative situations and settings. Nevertheless, in formal communicative situations, usually a phrasal verb could be replaced by a single verb which carries the same meaning of a phrasal verb. So, for instance, the sentence "I got up at 8 o'clock" consists of the phrasal verb "got up" which could be replaced by the single word "rose" as in "I rose at 8 o'clock" and, therefore, sounds more formal and technical. . (Anonymous, 2016:1)

## Methods

The methodology this paper follows is a qualitative one. By teaching English as a second language, in and outside Iraq, it has been noticed that ESL/EFL students and English language teaching materials, as well as other ESL/EFL environments and settings lack the presence of English phrasal verbs and hardly even implement them in ELT (English Language Teaching). Therefore being dissimilar to native English speakers and native English situations and circumstances. Hence, and by relying on the analysis and description of previous studies of phrasal verbs, their requirements and their importance, results and data within this paper have been thoroughly reached.

## Discussion and Results

Despite the necessity and requirement of phrasal verbs in everyday native communication, they should not be attempted to be taught all at once as a list of vocabulary. English as a second/foreign language students should try to learn phrasal verbs as they come across them and should not attempt to memorize too many all at once. Giving examples of phrasal verbs will usually help learners of English to remember their meanings and understand ways they are used.

Nonetheless, and as explained earlier, phrasal verbs have certain grammar patterns that differ from one phrasal verb to another, for instance, some must have an object (someone/something) while others do not. Some phrasal verbs, in addition, may be separated by the object and are known as "separable" phrasal verbs, while others are otherwise. Therefore, grammar lessons on ways to correctly use phrasal verbs should be given, from time to time, in order to familiarize ESL/EFL students and English language learners of the proper ways to communicate using phrasal verbs, similar to natives. (Anonymous, 2019, p. 1)

Natives of English, unlike non-native speakers, especially in Iraq, grow up and are nurtured in an environment where phrasal verbs are used daily, subconsciously and spontaneously. Therefore, Phrasal verbs are used by native speakers habitually and frequently because native English speakers are raised capable of understanding and using phrasal verbs without any difficulty or strain.

Non-native English speakers, especially ESL/EFL students with an Arabic mother-tongue, are not accustomed to using phrasal verbs and are unaware of their necessity and importance because, for one reason, phrasal verbs rarely exist in Arabic language. Thus, ESL/EFL students of an Arabic mother-tongue, particularly in Iraq, are ignorant of the need for phrasal verbs' knowledge, their meaning and ways of using them. Because ESL/EFL students, especially in the

Arab countries, are unexposed to phrasal verbs and ways of communicating applying phrasal verbs accurately.

Another reason of difficulty in learning meanings and use of phrasal verbs is that one phrasal verb may have a number of different meanings. As exemplified earlier with the phrasal verb "look up" which has a number of different meanings and not just one or two. This, therefore, could confuse non-native English students and learners, especially if not brought up to be accustomed to phrasal verb use and are unfamiliar with this native speakers' skill.

A third reason for the difficulty that students of English as a second/foreign language may encounter when trying to learn the proper ways in using and producing phrasal verbs when communicating in English, is the various ways that phrasal verbs may be formed according to. As known earlier, there are various grammar patterns in which phrasal verbs may be formed into. So, a grammar pattern for one phrasal verb may or may not be the grammar pattern for another phrasal verb. This, accordingly, may be confusing for English language students and learners, especially if not being taught or acquainted to these points and matters.

A fourth reason in why it is difficult for ESL/EFL students to understand and use phrasal verbs well enough is that some verbs are similar to a phrasal verb but are, in fact, not phrasal verbs. This could be something well distinguished and realizable by native English speakers but a major source of confusion for non-native English speakers, especially if these non-native English speakers are not used to dealing with phrasal verbs and are not aware of differences between phrasal verbs and non-phrasal verbs. For instance, the verb "look across" mentioned above, has both an abstract meaning (meaning something different) and is, therefore, considered a phrasal verb as in the sentence "I ran across my school teacher last Friday" meaning "met by chance and coincidentally". While the same verb and similar in shape and form, as in the sentence "I ran across the green field" is an ordinary verb and is not a phrasal verb because it has a non-abstract meaning but an ordinary meaning instead. This is a major source of mix-up and confusion for non-natives of English.

A fourth possible explanation for ESL/EFL students' ignorance and incapacity regarding knowledge of the meaning of phrasal verbs and how to be capable of using them appropriately is that phrasal verbs are almost non-existent in EFL/ESL classrooms and English language teaching environments and materials. For example, As an English language teacher, it has been noticed that educational systems regarding the teaching and study of English as a second/foreign language lack the presence of exercises, drills, grammar lessons, speaking and listening audio practices which involve English language phrasal verbs. Another possible explanation of ESL/EFL students' weakness regarding phrasal verbs is that phrasal verbs also have a meaning which cannot be known from the meaning of the words that it is made up of. Therefore, it is usually difficult for non-native speakers of English to reach and realize the meaning of a phrasal verb without previous knowledge of its meaning and it is normally hard for a non-native speaker to arrive at the correct meaning and use of a phrasal verb without being taught. This, as a result, distinguishes non-native speakers of English, from native speakers, who conventionally understand the meaning of phrasal verbs.

Teaching phrasal verbs in EFL/ESL classrooms should be required because learning the meaning of phrasal verbs and how to use them will help ESL/EFL students and speakers of English, of a non-native origin, to attain better English language proficiency. Lacking the skill to understand and use English phrasal verbs is a lapse in that learner's knowledge of proper English.

The inability to communicate properly and native-like by learners of English as a second/foreign language, regardless of their backgrounds, could be for one reason, a result of their incompetence to understand phrasal verbs whether misunderstanding their meaning when listening to natural native English or misunderstanding ways to properly use them when speaking English.

Uncovering English phrasal verbs in ESL/EFL teaching is a main source of difficulty and a likely source of learning incapability. Failure to adequately learn, use and understand phrasal verbs is due to lack of exposure. English language teaching environments, classrooms, and materials lack phrasal verbs as a part of common vocabulary, do not include such a necessary language skill and lack teaching knowledge of them well enough.

Inability of ESL/EFL students to correctly understand and use phrasal verbs in the English language could be a source of mistakes and errors in students' performance. This, in turn, results to ESL/EFL students' language incompetence. Phrasal verbs being large part of the English language's vocabulary is based upon that language's history, heritage, and culture. Accordingly, phrasal verbs should be taken into consideration and not to be overlooked.

ESL/EFL students should be given chances to try and exercise using and communicating with phrasal verbs through class exercises, tests, workouts and drills as well as listening and audio lessons that show ways native speakers use phrasal verbs and ways phrasal verbs are pronounced through in-class listening practices. Students need to be familiar with phrasal verbs by hearing native-speakers' daily speech in English with phrasal verbs use as part of the lexis.

Phrasal verbs are very important and necessary in English teaching as a second/foreign language because phrasal verbs are used in formal and non-formal speech, and are a large part of English vocabulary. Phrasal verbs are found a part of standard business, media, and everyday life.

Therefore, phrasal verbs that are frequently used in English should be taught the most, so, for instance, phrasal verbs that come about while watching T.V. programs, listening to music, reading books, surfing the internet and so on, ought to be taught to ESL/EFL students and learners. Listening and speaking courses, should include phrasal verbs, as a part of English vocabulary, especially in college education wherein English language is taught as a second/foreign language.

Non-native speakers of English, who use and understand Phrasal verbs, become more fluent and sound more native-like. Additionally, learning phrasal verbs will increase ESL/EFL students' and learners' vocabulary and lexicon of the language.

The more ESL/EFL students learn about phrasal verbs and apply them, the more creative and natural their English language shall seem. As such, the more ESL/EFL students become capable of understanding and using phrasal verbs, the more profound.

## Conclusions

To conclude, phrasal verbs are used on a daily basis by native speakers, unlike non-native English speakers who lack understanding and communicating using this essential and important skill in English language.

There is a need to include phrasal verbs in English as a second/foreign language teaching. It is also crucial in ESL/EFL environments and materials to clarify grammar patterns of phrasal verbs, their meanings and how to properly use them in English. English language teachers and ESL/EFL students should be capable of understanding and using phrasal verbs when speaking in English and when dealing with the English language and its native users.

Last but not least, English as a second/foreign language teachers should highlight, to their students, the importance of using phrasal verbs and the importance of recognizing their meanings. Likewise, teachers should be familiar with commonly-used phrasal verbs and teach them, in order to help and make it easier for their students. Teaching phrasal verbs should be taken into serious concern in English second/foreign language teaching classrooms and materials, which should include phrasal verbs as a part of vocabulary, listening and speaking drills and classroom exercises.

Learning English language, native-like, requires that students of English as a second/foreign language and non-native English language learners, practice using English phrasal verbs and become more knowledgeable about the meaning of, at least, the most common-used phrasal verbs. The more, the better.

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