

Improving the teaching and learning of phrasal verbs

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Received: 6/11/2023; Accepted: 16/12/2023; Published: 5/2/2024

Abstract: *Phrasal verbs have always caused frustration to English learners who often talk about phrasal verbs as big obstacles that hinders their further improvement of using English. Teaching phrasal verbs is, therefore, considered a difficult area. However, phrasal verbs are daily used by native speakers English, and teachers and learners, therefore cannot avoid teaching and learning them. In this paper, the author tries to identify the reasons behind those challenges and gives some suggestions to facilitate the instruction giving of English teachers and the language acquisition of English learners.*

Keywords: *Phrasal verbs, Context, idiomatic*

Introduction

Phrasal verbs are one of the most difficult and important part for EFL and ESL acquisition as they are highly frequently used. They, however, are tricky for learners due to their large number and polysemy. There have been, though, a lot of studies looking into this issue, the subject of how best to teach phrasal verbs is still quite an endless debate. This article focuses on the structure of phrasal verbs which may lead to the challenges faced with by English teachers and learners and then gives some suggestions with the hope to better the acquisition of phrasal verbs for English learners.

2. Research content

2.1. Phrasal verbs and their structure?

2.1.1. What is a phrasal verb?

There has been an endless arguments about the definition of the term “a phrasal verb” among grammarians and researchers. A verb with particle combination functioning as a single unit is commonly viewed as “a phrasal verb”. Sometimes, such combination is called “a multi-word verb” by linguists. (Schmitt & Siyanova, 2007). In his study, Hornby (2003, p. 865) stated that “Phrasal Verb is (abbreviated as phrase verb) a simple verb combining an adverb or a preposition or sometimes both, to make a new verb with a meaning that is different from that of simple verbs e.g. go in for, win over, blow up”. Then, Redman (2003) added that a phrasal verb is a combination of a verb with an adverb and preposition and occasionally with an adverb and preposition. Darwin and Gray (2000), defined phrasal verbs as all verbs and particle combinations that function as a unit both lexically and syntactically such as “bring about”, “take on”, and “give up”.

Whatever definitions of phrasal verbs are, they can be referred to as a linguistic phrase consisting of a verb in combination with a preposition or adverb or both, whose meaning is different from the meaning of its separate words.

2.1.2. Structure of phrasal verbs

A phrasal verb typically consists of a verb followed by one or more particles (prepositions or adverbs). Different particles can change the meaning of the verb, creating an idiomatic expression which is different from the separate meaning of the verb and the particles. DeCapua (2008: 150) gives a clear classification of phrasal verb as following: intransitive and transitive and inseparable, separable prepositions, and inseparable prepositions

2.1.3. Types of phrasal verbs

Intransitive phrasal verbs are those not requiring an object and consist of a verb and a particle. For example, “You can wear this T – shirt for years and it will not wear out”, or “John is the sort of people who never turns up on time.”

Transitive phrasal verbs are those requiring an object and consist of a verb, a particle, and sometimes a preposition. For example, “She turned down the company’s offer” or “He never looks down on those who are disadvantaged.”

Separable phrasal verbs are the ones in which the object can come between the verb and the particle or after the particle. For example, “She took the bag back to the shop” or “She took back the bag to the shop.”

Inseparable phrasal verbs are those of transitive and there is no insert of the object into the middle of the phrasal verb. For example, “Finally, the boy came up with the idea of leaving the nest open.”

However, Laurel Brinton (2000) defines underlying structure as a linear order of words in sentences and surface structure as a concrete realization of the previous structure (163-164). That is, the meaning of phrasal verbs can often be idiomatic and not directly related to the individual words in the phrase. Therefore, understanding the context and usage of phrasal verbs is crucial for effective communication.

2.2. Major problems in teaching an learning phrasal verbs

It is well known that *phrasal verbs* are a challenging area of English- language learning and teaching. Some problems encountered by learners when they try to use *phrasal verbs* in their own speech and writing, as stated by Bywater (1969, as cited in Folse, 2004) include avoidance, style deficiency, semantic confusion, lack of collocational awareness, using idiosyncratic phrasal verbs, syntactic errors. These problems are majorly brought about by the features of phrasal verbs.

2.2.1. Multiple meanings

Phrasal verbs often have more than one meaning, and these meanings can sometimes be idiomatic or context- dependent. This makes it difficult for learners to understand, memorize and use them correctly.

2.2.2. Separable vs. inseparable

Phrasal verbs can be separable or inseparable, (like sated above) and this causes confusion to learners as the different placement of the particle may produce different meanings of the phrasal verb.

2.2.3. Verb + particle combinations

A phrasal verbs are the combination of a verb with a particle (preposition or adverb) and there are a large numer of those combination which lead to challenges for learners to memorize and understand the meanings of these combinations.

2.2.4. Collocations

Phrasal verbs often have specific collocations, that is, they are commonly used with certain nouns or adjectives which requires those wishing to use phrasal verbs appropriately to learn and understand these collocations by heart.

2.2.5. Idiomatic expressions

Phrasal verbs are ôften idiomatic expressions, ie. their meanings cannot be easily deduced from the individual words that make them up. This can make it difficult for learners to grasp their meanings and use them appropriately.

2.2.6. Lack of exposure

Phrasal verbs are commonly used in spoken English and informal writing, and not be as prevalent in formal writing or textbooks, which are designed for English learners who are not native English speakers and who do not have frequent opportunities to expose to daily English expressions. This lack of exposure can make it challenging for learners to get full understanding, acquire and practice phrasal verbs.

2.3. Some suggestions to better the teaching and learning phrasal verbs

It is necessary for teachers to highlight the connections between the learners' first and target languages, because the students will rely on their first language when trying to understand phrasal verbs in a foreign language. Students often may not consider the two- or three-word verb as a lexical unit with a special meaning. This is more precise when there are no phrasal verbs the student's first language. Students also overlook the importance of the particle in phrasal verbs, especially when a single word in their mother tongue can convey the meaning. So that they can make proper preparation for their lectures. Following are some of suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the phrasal verb teaching and learning.

2.3.1. For the teachers

a) Contextualize

As stated above, a phrasal verb may convey more than one meaning due to its feature of idiomaticity, separability or inseparability or collocations, it is advisable to teach and learn phrasal verbs in a context. Many studies have proved that contextualization has an important positive effect on the ability of the students to decipher the correct meaning of a phrasal verb. Therefore, English teacher should prepare the presentation of phrasal verbs through context to improve their students' level of understanding by providing meaningful contexts and examples to help learners understand the different meanings and usage of phrasal verbs or by providing visual aids like pictures, diagrams, or videos to illustrate the meanings of phrasal verbs to help their students acquire them.

b) Practice activities

These are requirement to master any phrasal verb. Teacher should have a preparation of for exercises and activities, and encouraging students to use phrasal verbs in their own writing and speaking.

Activities suggested can be role-plays, discussions, or games to reinforce the understanding and usage of phrasal verbs.

c) Chunking

The teaching of phrasal verbs in chunks or groups based on common themes or meanings can help learners organize and remember the phrasal verbs more effectively.

d) Resources

It is advisable to offer learners additional resources such as phrasal verb dictionaries, online exercises, or authentic materials to further practice and expand their knowledge of phrasal verbs.

Overall, teaching phrasal verbs requires a combination of explicit instruction, meaningful practice, and exposure to authentic use to help learners overcome the difficulties and become proficient in using phrasal verbs.

2.3.2. For the students

a) English grammar knowledge mastery

Learner should take advantages on the study of English grammar especially about phrasal verbs. They could use it as an additional knowledge to improve their mastery of vocabulary of phrasal verbs. With the mastery of the phrasal verbs, they could implement them in daily conversation.

b) Regular practice

Learners can also develop their mastery of phrasal verbs in speaking, listening, reading and writing. By using more than one expression, learners can say one idea in various ways.

3. Conclusion

Phrasal verbs are part of English knowledge, which EFL learners should master. The mastery of phrasal verb is very important as they are frequently used in daily communication. Good command of using phrasal verbs is very helpful for EFL learners to get the message that a material conveys. A better acquisition of phrasal verbs shows a greater linguistic competence. However, phrasal verbs are never considered easy to acquire for their specific features to the extent of structure and lexical meaning: multiword verbs, multiple meaning, transitive, intransitive, separable, inseparable, idiomatic... All these may be overcome by English teachers' serious consideration and thorough preparation for their lectures as well as their learners' industriousness.

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