

# 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 environment, 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, news, innovative ideas, miracles of the language, new technology

## 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 a 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, though, too. (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)

## 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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