

**Errors made by students of Iraqi college level in the area of phrasal verbs**

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**Abstract**

The present study aims at finding out the difference in the number of errors made by the students at the college level in relation to the use of idiomatic and literal phrasal verbs. To achieve this aim, a test of 30 items has been conducted to a sample of 150 students at college of Education, English department, University of Diyala. After analyzing the data statistically, it has been found out that the number of errors committed in the recognition part is nearly similar to that of the production one and the students have committed more errors in the use of the phrasal verbs that have idiomatic meaning.

**Keywords:** errors, phrasal verbs.

**Chapter One**

**1. Introduction**

Phrasal verbs as assured by Grains and Redman (1986: p.35) represent an essential part of the English verb system as they are very useful for expanding learner's vocabulary by forming or shaping new verbs that demonstrate new meanings. Similarly, McArthur (1976: p.5) adds that there can be no fluency in modern English without accurate knowledge of phrasal verbs. He (ibid) states that English people learn those verbs better than any other aspects of the language because they use them more frequently than anything else. Phrasal verbs can also speed the learner on towards his aim of mastery of the foreign language as asserted by Wallace (1987: p.124).

It is worth mentioning that phrasal verbs are also an example of the fuzziness at the border between grammar and words. They constitute a problematic area for most EFL learners due to their lexical meaning which are idiomatic and because of their grammatical form. They often occupy an overlapping area in the English language which

cause a lot of concern to most EFL learners and teachers as indicated by Wallace (1987) and Side (1990). Therefore, they are difficult to master as assured by Deock (2005). This difficulty may be sprung from other factors as the influence of the students L1 as one of the cross-linguistic factors as most students don't have similar structures in their first language and this, in turn will affect their understanding and result in the avoidance of the phrasal verbs (Liao and Fukuya ;2004). Wray (2000) states that lack of awareness of the common regular patterns and collocates can also be regarded as another reason behind the difficulty of the phrasal verbs. It should be noted that there are many research works that have dealt with this topic but from different perspectives as Andrian (1988), Abdul-Hadi (1994) Mayson (2000) and Decock (2005). For these aforementioned reasons, this study has been tackled to provide answers to the following questions;

- 1-Do Iraqi college students face difficulties in using phrasal verbs?
- 2- Which are more difficult for college students the phrasal verbs that have idiomatic meaning or those that have literal meaning?

It is hoped that this study may help the learner overcome some of their learning problem. It is of value to the teachers since it gives feedback on what the learner knows about what (s) he still needs to know; thus, it enables the teacher to predict those areas his/her students face troubles in and to adopt his teaching methods according to the EFL learner's needs.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Definition of the term phrasal verbs**

Generally, phrasal verbs are defined by Sinclair (1972) as a grammatical and semantic association between a verb and adverb. The verb usually precedes its particle. According to linguists as Bolinger, Quirk, Wallace, Grains and Redman, the term "phrasal verbs" refer to verb and adverbial particle combinations. Palmer (1974) regards verb and particle combination as "compound verbs" that can be classified either as "prepositional verb" or "phrasal verb" depending on whether the particle is identified as an adverb or a preposition respectively. Crystal (1985;263) defines phrasal verb as 'a type of verb consisting of a sequence of a lexical element plus one or more particles.

Quirk et.al (1985) on the other hand, put those combinations under the headings "multiword verbs" because they contain combinations of verbs with one and, sometimes more than one particle.

According to McArthur and Beryl (1974) phrasal verbs are combinations of simple, monosyllabic verbs and members of a set of particles. They also state that the same particle can serve as a preposition or adverb. This admittedly justifies the necessity to

include constructions of verb & preposition in the treatment of phrasal verbs.

AbdulHadi (1994) arrives at the findings that the term "phrasal verb" is the most appropriate technical term that can be used to describe the phenomena of verb & particle combinations in English. It accounts for all the characteristics features of these constructions better than all other terms do.

## **2.2 The difference between phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs.**

According to Leech (1975), there are four main differences between phrasal verbs and preposition verbs:

1- The particle (adverb) in a phrasal verb is usually stressed and has nuclear stress in end-position, but the preposition in (a preposition verb) is unstressed e.g.:

a. All young men were called up.

b. Their friends were called on.

2- The preposition in the prepositional verb must come before the prepositional object, e.g.

a. They called on their friends.

b. They called on them.

But in the case of the phrasal verb, the particle may come after the object. This indicates that the verb is often separated from its particle e.g.:

c. They called up all young men.

They called all young men up.

3- The preposition verb permits an adverb to be placed between the verb and the preposition e.g.:

a-They called early on their friend.

But with the phrasal verb, this cannot

\*b-They called early up all young men.

4- There is another difference between phrasal and prepositional verb in that the later accepts a relative pronoun after the preposition while the former cannot, e.g.

a- The friend on whom they called were not at home.

\*b- All young men up whom called were not at home.

## **2.3 The nature of verb & particle combinations.**

It is very familiar in English to put an adverb or a preposition after certain verbs so as to get a new verb with a variety of meanings e.g., put up, turn on, call for, turn off, make up, catch on ..... etc.

Quirk et al (1985) mentions that those constructions contain of two and sometimes three elements and the neutral designation particle is used to refer to the second element which follows the lexical verb particles can be divided in to three interrelated sets:

1- Particles that are always used as prepositions: from, upon, with, of, against, among, ..... etc.

2- Particles that are always used as adverbs: aside, back, away, forward, .....etc.

3- Particles that are always used either as prepositions or adverbs: down in, off, after, in, by, across, along, under, up, though, .....etc.

Concerning the particles included in the third group, Bolinger (1971) asserts that they have the tendency to function as both prepositions and adverb, therefore, they are called "preposition adverbs" for example in the sentence.

a- He put across his message well. (Explained clearly) the particle across has an adverbial function While in:

b- He came across them. (Meet by chance). Across has a prepositional function.

It should be noted that there are four types of verb and particle combinations that can be summarized as follows:

1- Verbs that are linked to certain prepositions such as: depend on, revenge upon, attend to, complete with, think about, .....etc. Those verbs are usually followed by a preposition and its object. The preposition is used to introduce a phrase and it should not be omitted.e.g.

a- The government imposes taxes (place a tax). atax)

b- You must not impose on other people (force yourself on somebody) (wood, 1965)

2- Combinations in which the particle does not change the meaning of the verb i.e., it does not affect the meaning of the verb. So, the function of the particle is to emphasize the completion of the verb meaning

such as: tide up, finish up, eat up, clean up. (Sinclair,1972)

3- There are some combinations which carry the meaning of their individual elements e.g., go away, write down, ask for, point out, call for, ..... etc.

4- There are combinations in which their total meaning may afford no relationship to the meaning of the individual words of the combination e.g., given in, take off, put up, look after, make up, call on, ..... etc. (Seidle and McMordie, 1988)

### **2.5 Teaching phrasal verbs.**

The meaning of the phrasal verbs and the particle can be easily understood e.g., rise up, lift up, take down, ..... etc. The particle on many occasions is understandable in an extended senses e.g., burn down (a house), keep down (prices), wipe off(stain) that can usually be guessed by learners if presented in a context.

Sometimes, the particles of some verbs often develop special meanings e.g., the particle "up" is used with many verbs to give sense of (completeness) as in (fill up, finish up, load up, open up, tear up).

The particle "down" is often used in a similar way, but sometimes with a negative sense e.g., close down, cut down, melt down, (Away) can be used to give the meaning of continuous action: hammer away, work away, write away. (Wallace, 1987)

It is worth mentioning that there are many phrasal verbs which are complete idioms and have to be taught as units e.g., show someone (humiliate), make something up(invent), smoke someone out(expose) and so on.

Thornbuy (2002, p .125) states that ' the modern approaches of teaching phrasal verbs put heavy emphasis on the meanings of the particles. This focus aims to sanities learners to the shared meanings of a group such as: carry on, drive on, bang on, go on, come on.....etc.'

It should be noted that phrasal verbs are more capable of systematic treatment and as in other areas of vocabulary most of the learning should be done in a realistic language context. Drills and Exercises should be limited to those occasions where such systematic treatment can speed the student towards his goal of mastery of the English language. Students also need to understand the basic grammar of phrasal verbs although they are often thought of as part of the vocabulary lesson.

### **3-Methodology and Procedures**

#### **3.1 Participants.**

The sample of this study consists of 150 students of the fourth class at the English department / college of Education for human sciences / University of Diyala / for the academic year 2008 – 2009.

#### **3.2. Instrument**

The test of the present study has been constructed to provide answers to the following question:

1- What errors are made by the sample of the study in using the English phrasal verbs and which types of phrasal verbs are those errors are most frequent in.

All the items of the test have been selected from <sup>1</sup>various grammatical authorities and textbooks.

The test consists of two parts: recognition and production. The total number of items in both questions 1 & 2 is 30. Question number one includes 15 items/it is a recognition one. Question number 2 includes 15 items. It is a production one: (see table 1 and appendix-1)

**Table -1-**

*A table of specification that outlines the behavior and phrasal verbs to be tested.*

<b><i>Phrasal verbs to be tested in the recognition part</i></b>	<b><i>Q no.</i></b>	<b><i>Behavior</i></b>
<b>give up, turn over, sit down, go away, take out, mixed up, Look after, stand for, call for, turn on, take off, give back, died out, settle down, carry out.</b>		<b>Recognition</b>
<b>find out, ran away, shut up, put out, go on, look for, ask for, came back, set out, get over, look out, get up, hurry up, grow up, get on.</b>		<b>Production</b>

In order to discover the weaknesses in the test, check the estimated time required for answering the items and analyzing the test items in terms of their difficulty level and discriminating power, the test has been administered to a sample of 50 students selected from college of Basic Education.

The findings of the pilot test have revealed that most students are able to answer the test. The time computed for answering the test items ranges between 50 -60 minutes.

It has been also noticed that the test items are clear, i.e., having no ambiguity in their vocabulary or instruction

### **3.3 Reliability of the Test.**

Lado (1961: 330) states that reliability means the stability of scores for the same individual. If the scores of the students are stable, the test is reliable, if the scores tend to fluctuate for no apparent reason, the test is un reliable. Kuder – Richardson formula 21 (KR - 21) has used for estimating the reliability coefficient of the present test.

The statistical analysis has been shown that the reliability coefficient is (0.51). In this respect, Nunnally (1967: 226) states that "in the early stages of research on predicator tests or hypothesized measures of a construct one saves time and energy by working with instruments that have only modest reliability for which purpose reliability of (0.50) or (0.60) will suffice". Therefore, the present test reliability coefficient is considered acceptable.

### 3.4 Administration of the test.

The test has been administered empirically on 11<sup>th</sup> April/ 2009 to the fourth- class university students at the department of English college of Education, university of Diyala.

The test lasted 50 minutes. After answering exam sheets completely, the testes were asked to deliver them to the researcher to be corrected and marked after that.

#### *Notes to chapter three*

- 1- Leech & Svartvick (1975)., Quirk & Greenbaum (1973)., Thornbury (2002)., Seidle & McMordie (1988).

### 4-Results and Discussion

After analyzing the responses and counting the number of the errors made by the students on each item in the two parts of the test and calculating their percentage, a general profile of the performance of the students has become evident.

Analysis of the findings of this study proves that there are some difficulties in using phrasal verbs in general faced by the students of the college level. The use of phrasal verbs at both levels, i.e., recognition and production are (4500) and that the grand total scores of errors is (2885). This may be due to:

- 1- The student's lack of knowledge or faulty comprehension of phrasal verbs.
- 2- High degree of idiomaticity of some phrasal verbs.
- 3- The lack of emphasis in the teaching material given to the students on this aspect.

The frequencies and percentage of incorrect responses made by the students at both levels, i.e., recognition and production, are distributed as shown in table 2

*Table 2*

*Frequencies and percentages of student's incorrect responses in the use of phrasal verbs in the test.*

Recognition	Total Responses	Frequency Of incorrect Responses	Percentage
	2250	1420	63.11
Production	2250	1465	65.11
Gross Total	4500	2885	64.11

The findings of table (2) reveal that the total number of incorrect responses in the recognition part is (1420) out of (2250). This means that the percentage of errors made by the students in the

use of phrasal verbs at the recognition level is (63.11). whereas the total number of incorrect responses in the production part (1465) out of (2250), i.e., the percentage of errors made by the same students in the use of phrasal verbs at the production level is (65.11).

In order to determine the statistical significance of differences in student's performance at both levels, chi –square has been used.

The results shows that there is no difference of statistical significance at  $P < (0.05)$  in the number of errors committed in the recognition and production part since the calculated  $\chi^2$ . value is (1.952) which is less than the tabulated  $\chi^2$ . value which is (3.84) at  $df = 1$  This means that the number of errors committed in the recognition part is nearly similar to that of the production as it is shown in table (3).

**Table -3-**  
**Value of Chi- square for the Difference in the number of student's errors at both levels**

<i>Behavior</i>	<i>Frequency of incorrect Responses</i>	<i>Frequency of Correct Responses</i>	<i>V.X2</i>
<i>Recognition</i>	<i>1420</i>	<i>830</i>	<i>1.952</i>
<i>Production</i>	<i>1465</i>	<i>785</i>	

The total number of student's errors regarding the use of phrasal verbs that have idiomatic meanings and those that have literal meanings are distributed as shown in table (4) for the recognition part and table (5) for the production part.

**Table -4-**  
**Frequencies and percentages of students' errors in the use of idiomatic and literal phrasal verbs in the recognition part**

<b>Types of phrasal verbs</b>	<b>Phrasal verbs tested</b>	<b>Frequency of Incorrect responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Idiomatic</b>	give up	80	53.33
	turn over	110	73.33
	go out	100	66.66
	take out	100	66.66
	look after	80	53.33
	turn on	80	53.33
	take off	120	80.00
	died out	120	80.00
	carry out	110	66.66



<b>Total</b>	900		
<b>Literal</b>	sit down	90	
	mixed up	80	53.33
	stands for	70	46.66
	call for	120	80.00
	give back	80	53.33
	settle down	80	53.33
<b>Total</b>	520		

*Table -5-*

*Frequencies and percentages of students' errors in the use of idiomatic and literal phrasal verbs in the production part*

<b>Types of phrasal verbs</b>	<b>Phrasal verbs tested</b>	<b>Frequency of incorrect responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Idiomatic</b>	put out	100	66.0
	go on	120	80
	set out	140	93.33
	get over	135	90
	look out	130	86.66
	get up	80	53.33
	get on	140	93.33
<b>Total</b>	845		
<b>Literal</b>	find out	100	66.66
	ran away	90	60.00
	shut up	70	46.66
	look for	70	46.66
	grow up	80	53.33
	hurry up	70	46.66
	ask for	60	40.00
	come back	80	53.33
<b>Total</b>	620		

The findings of tables (4) and (5) reveal that the total number of answers recorded in the use of phrasal verbs that have idiomatic meanings is (2400) and the number of incorrect responses scored is (1745), i.e. (72.70) percent of the responses are incorrect.

The highest scores of errors in this type have been recorded with the verbs (take off) carry out, turn over, get over, go on, look out, set out, get on and died out). The remarkably high scores of errors may be attributed to the high idiomatic status of these verbs which make it difficult for the students to grasp their meanings. It should be

noted that this difficulty is increased by lack of exposure to such type of these expressions.

The least number of errors have been scored with the verbs (stands for, get up, ask for, shut up). This significantly low score of errors may be due to the students' familiarity with these verbs.

As for phrasal verbs that have literal meanings, it has been found that the total number of answers of these verbs is (2100) and the total number of incorrect responses is (1140), i.e. (54.28) percent of the responses are incorrect.

The highest scores of errors in this type have been recorded with the verbs: (find out and call for).

Whereas the least number of errors has been scored with the verbs (ask for, stands for and look for).

In order to find out whether there is any significant difference between the number of errors committed in idiomatic phrasal verbs with those that are committed in literal phrasal verbs, Chi- square has been employed of as in (table-6- and table -7- )

**Table -6-**

***Value of Chi- square for the difference in number of errors regarding the use of idiomatic and literal phrasal verbs in the recognition part***

Types of phrasal verbs	Frequency of Incorrect responses	Frequency of correct Responses	V.x <sup>2</sup>
Idiomatic	900	450	93.294
Literal	520	380	

**Table -8-**

***Value of Chi- square for the difference in number of errors regarding the use of idiomatic and literal phrasal verbs in the production part***

Types of phrasal verbs	Frequency of Incorrect responses	Frequency of correct Responses	V.x <sup>2</sup>
Idiomatic	845	205	204.921
Literal	620	580	

The findings of table (6) and (7) reveal the followings:

1- The total number of students' errors committed in the recognition part in the use of phrasal verbs that have idiomatic meanings is significantly different from the total number of students' errors committed in the used of phrasal verbs that have literal meanings in

the same part at the  $P < 0.001$  where the calculated  $X^2$  value is (93.294) which is more than the tabulated  $X^2.V$  (7.88) at  $df = 1$ .

There is a statistical difference at the  $P < 0.001$  in the number of students' errors committed in relation to the use of idiomatic and literal phrasal verbs in the production part since the calculated  $X^2$ .value is (204.921) which is more than the tabulated  $X^2$ .value which indicates (7.88) at  $df = 1$ .

As for all phrasal verbs incorporated in the two parts of the test, it has been found that there is a significant statistical difference in the number of students' errors in idiomatic and literal phrasal verbs at  $P < 0.001$  since the calculated  $X^2$  value is (165.205) which is more than the tabulated  $X^2$  value which indicates (7.88) at  $df = 1$  and that the difference is in favor of idiomatic phrasal verbs, i.e. the students have committed more errors in the use of phrasal verbs that have idiomatic meaning. See table (8).

**Table (8)**

***Value of Chi- square for the difference in number of students' errors regarding the use of idiomatic and literal phrasal verbs in the whole test***

<b>Types of phrasal verbs</b>	<b>Frequency of Incorrect responses</b>	<b>Frequency of correct Responses</b>	<b>V.x<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Idiomatic</b>	1745	655	165.205
<b>Literal</b>	<b>1140</b>	<b>960</b>	

### **5-Conclusions**

In the light of the results obtained from the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

- 1- English phrasal verbs, in general, constitute a problem for Iraqi college students.
- 2- The majority of students' errors have recorded with phrasal verbs that have idiomatic meanings.
- 3- The instructors of the department of English are not quite aware of the significance of this kind of English verbs. They do not exert sufficient effort in teaching and explaining the meaning of phrasal verbs incorporated in the syllabus.

In the light of the results and the conclusions, the researcher recommends the following:

- 1- Since phrasal verbs constitute one of the main problems that most college students face in learning English, much emphasis should be given to this an essential part of grammar.
- 2- Instructors should try to include phrasal verbs in their classroom language as much as possible and draw attention to these from time

to time. Common classroom expressions incorporating phrasal verbs are: (sit down, hurry up, calm down, look it up, write this down, etc.).

- 3- In teaching phrasal verbs, the main exercise type that should be used by instructors are:
  - a- sentence- gap – fills.
  - b- re-phrasing.
  - c- matching.
- 4- Encouraging the students to read many of reading passages and short stories in order to learn the phrasal verbs in different contexts and through all the stages in the process of English language teaching.

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### **Appendix- 1-**

#### **The Test:**

**Q1\ Encircle the letter (a, b, c, d) of the most suitable choice:**

**Has your brother given ----- smoking?**

(a- up                      b- off                      c- back                      d- away).

**After being hit by a huge wave, the boat turned -----.**

(a- on                      b-off                      c- cover                      d- out)

**He sat ----- in the most comfortable chair.**

(a- for                      b- at                      c- down                      d- out)

**Please go -----; I can't work unless I am alone.**

(a- over                      b- on                      c-away                      d- back)

**It is necessary to take - ----- a life assurance policy which is a form of sawing.**

(a- out                      b- away                      c- up                      d- off)

**They have mixed ----- the exam papers.**

(a- away                      b- down                      c- up                      d- on)

**Will you look----- my sick sister while I am away?**

(a- for                      b- at                      c- out                      d- after)

**The symbol "X" usually stands ----- an un known quantity in mathematics.**

(a- up                      b- against                      c- with                      d- after)

**Iraq was the first Arab state o call ----- the use of oil.**

(a- off                      b- up                      c- in                      d- for)

**Layla turned ----- radio and listened to the first of the news.**

(a- off                      b- up                      c- over                      d- on)

**Our plane took ----- very smoothly.**

(a- away                      b- over                      c- off                      d- out)

**I must go to the library to give ----- this book.**

(a- in                      b- back                      c- up                      d- to)

**They stood watching the ship until it soon died -----**

- (a- on                      b- out                      c- off                      d- away)  
**My cousin finally settled ----- in the country side.**  
(a- down                      b- up                      c- off                      d- in to)  
**He carried ----- the orders of his teachers.**  
(a- on                      b- of                      c- back                      d- out)

**Q2 \ Replace the underlined words in the following sentence using the verbs indicated at the ends of each sentence together with an adverb or preposition to form a phrasal verb that carries similar meaning:**

- 1- The child discovered the way to open the door. (found)
- 2- The thief escaped and the policeman ran after him. (ran)
- 3- I asked him to stop talking because I didn't want to listen to him. (shut)
- 4- I can't continue alone any longer, I 'll have to get help. (go)
- 5- The firemen extinguished the fire. (put)
- 6- I 've lost my watch. Will you help me to search for it? (look)
- 7- The workers of the sugar will recently demand arise. (asked)
- 8- He turned home after along dark work. (came)
- 9- They have decided to begin their journey early in the morning. (set)
- 10- He has just recovered from a hard heart attack. (got)
- 11- Be careful ! This machine is dangerous. (look)
- 12- I usually rise from bed at 6 o'clock. (get)
- 13- We are late. Don't you think that we should not waste our time? (hurry)
- 14- She looks more like her mother as she gets older. (grows)
- 15- We wondered how was he progressing in his new job. (get)

### أخطاء طلبة الجامعة العراقيين في استخدام الأفعال الاصطلاحية

#### الملخص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى إيجاد الفرق في عدد الأخطاء التي يقع فيها الطلبة في المرحلة الجامعية فيما يخص استخدام الأفعال الاصطلاحية بنوعيتها الظاهري والاصطلاحي. لتحقيق هذا الهدف تم بناء اختبار مكون من ثلاثين فقرة وتطبيقه على عينة مكونة من مئة وخمسين طالبا من جامعة ديالى كلية التربية قسم اللغة الإنكليزية. بعد تحليل النتائج احصائيا، وجد ان عدد الأخطاء التي يقع فيها الطلبة في جزء التمييز هي مشابهة تقريبا للأخطاء في جزء الإنتاج وان الطلبة يقعون بأخطاء أكثر في الأفعال ذات المعنى الاصطلاحي للأفعال الاصطلاحية