

# Real Teaching Practices of English Phrasal Verbs to University EFL Students

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**Abstract**—The study aimed to review the syntactical obstacles of teaching the use of English language phrasal verbs, explore the semantic challenges of teaching English language phrasal verbs and suggest possible solutions to overcome the obstacles and challenges of teaching English language phrasal verbs. (10) English language instructors were observed inside classes to see the real practices of teaching English language phrasal verbs at the university level. The observation tool was analysed qualitatively. The Findings indicated that, teaching phrasal verbs was regarded important to the lesson for it was a new vocabulary. Also, there were syntactical obstacles for teaching phrasal verbs because it was hard to be formed and mater the usage and governed by standardization. In addition, it was difficult to teach the grammar of phrasal verbs. Moreover, textbooks didn't pay careful attention for teaching phrasal verbs. Nevertheless, it was observed that there were semantic obstacles because meaning is governed by standardization; in such cases as transparent, semitransparent and opaque. Finally, the challenges of teaching phrasal verbs were regarded in distinguishing between separable and inseparable phrasal verbs.

**Indexed Terms:** *obstacles, challenges, teaching English phrasal verbs, solutions*

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## I. Introduction

English language is very crucial to convey the meaning punctually in both forms; order and meaning. Teaching vocabulary is also very essential to the understanding of the learners.

Teaching English phrasal verbs are not an easy task inside classes because they need special techniques to make their teaching successful and meaningful to the learners.

In relevance to semantic, teaching English phrasal verbs can be challenging due to their idiomatic nature and varying meanings and usages. Traditional methods often involve rote memorization, but more effective approaches include contextual learning, interactive exercises and real life usage examples.

Most of English language instructors face many obstacles in using the appropriate form of English language phrasal verbs due to many complications in selecting the suitable particle(s) related to the first head word. It is also a challenge for many English language instructors to be sure about the meaning of English language phrasal verbs and to be able to teach confidently and that is due to their idiomatic nature and varying meanings. The above mentioned obstacles and challenges in relation to teaching English language phrasal verbs lead to many complications to learners to understand the usage and meanings. For the above reasons, the present study seeks to find answers to investigate the complicated issues related to teaching English language phrasal verbs at the university level to the (EFL) students of English language first year at the Preparatory Unit.

### 1.1 Aims of the Present Paper

1. To review the syntactical obstacles of teaching the use of English language phrasal verbs.
2. To explore the semantic challenges of teaching English language phrasal verbs.
3. To suggest possible solutions to overcome the obstacles and challenges of teaching English language phrasal verbs.

### 1.2 Questions of the Study

Q1: What obstacles do English language instructors face while teaching English language phrasal verbs?

Q2: What challenges do English language instructors encounter while teaching English language phrasal verbs?

Q3: What are English language instructors be aware of to overcome a misunderstanding while teaching English language phrasal verbs?

### **1.3 The Hypotheses of the Study**

H1: English language instructors face many Syntactical obstacles in teaching English language phrasal verbs.

H2: English language instructors encounter many semantic challenges in teaching English language phrasal verbs.

H3: English language instructors are to be aware of the methods of meaning and usage to deal with teaching phrasal verbs to overcome a misunderstanding.

### **1.4 Delimitation of the Study**

The study is limited to the teaching of English language phrasal verbs in English language education.

The subjects of the study are instructors of English; (EFL); male, at Preparatory Year Unit Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University in Riyadh, Kharj town, in the university years (2022-2024).

## **II. Literature Review**

Van Dongen traces the elements of the English phrasal verb back as far as old English, in which adverbs (i.e., the particles) occurred by default as post- position, but could also occur in other positions in the sentences. (Rodríguez-Puente,2019).

English phrasal verbs have varied in productivity over the centuries, but the number and usage of phrasal verbs has been increasing since the nineteenth century and especially during the last fifty years. This development has been most notable in American English (Mc Arthur,). Mc Arthur notes that Samuel Johnson was the first to describe phrasal verb in 1775, but Walker (1655), a century earlier, considered some particles as words which could be included as 'part' of the significance of the forgoing verb that the verb-particles combination was semantically unified (Zarifi & Mukundan, 2018).

The online Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English ("phrasal verb", n.d.) defines a phrasal verb as the following:

"a group of words that is used like a verb and consists of a verb with an adverb or preposition after it."

According to (Litvinov et al., 2017) a phrasal verb is a combination of a verb and a preposition, a verb and an adverb, or both.

Liu and Jiang (2009) argue that learning of the lexical and grammatical aspects of these phrasal verbs should take place simultaneously.

There are four types of phrasal verbs according to (Siregar,2020)

1. Transitive phrasal verb
2. Intransitive phrasal verb
3. Separable phrasal verb
4. Inseparable phrasal verb

Semantic phrasal verbs were explained by (Muthmainnah et al.,2019) who mentioned that sometimes the meaning of a phrasal verb was very similar to the base verb, and the adverb just emphasizes the meaning of the base verb, e.g. stand up, wake up, save up, hurry up, sit down and send off.

As mentioned by Turton and Manser's (1986) in their work, if we wanted to speak English effectively, an individual had to know and used phrasal verbs, which were difficult for nonnative English speakers, and an individual had to had a high understanding and proficiency in the language. According to Kolln & Funk (2012), Only those combinations that made up an idiom, or a phrase whose meaning could not be inferred from the meaning of its component words or phrases, were described by English phrasal verbs; however, many other grammarians disagree.

Further Fraser (1970) asserted that the semantic properties of the prenasalized verbs could be classified into separate classes.

There was a similarity between verbs like "nail up," "cement in," and "clamp, down" since all of these verbs were used to link materials

Meyer (2001) confirmed that it had a semantic effect on the verb's meaning.

Semantic difficulties of phrasal verbs were classified by (Azmar,2019) into

1. Literal
2. Semi- idiomatic
3. Idiomatic

The literature on teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) indicates that phrasal verbs have a reputation of being problematic for the students around the world. Over years, researchers have been stressing the importance of these verbs in communication in EFL (e.g. Khatib and Ghannadi, 2011; Kharitonova, 2013; Marks, 2005). However, the findings of their studies show that EFL learners face difficulties in using such verbs variously known as multi- word verbs, group verbs, merged verbs, poly-word verbs, compound verbs, two-part and three-part word verbs, verb-particle combinations, discontinuous verbs, and verb and adverb combinations, (Ayadi, 2010; Saiya, 2011).

The following main problems had been highlighted by Bywater (1969) in relation to phrasal verbs of this type:

1. Avoidance
2. Style deficiency
3. Semantic confusion
4. Lack of collocational awareness
5. Using idiosyncratic phrasal verbs
6. Syntactic errors

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. Ussher (1785) is the first grammar in the precept corpus to mention that phrasal verbs can be separable: „the Preposition may stand sometimes at a distance from its Verb“; similarly, Parminter (1856:155) observes that they 54 „are separable in the active form of voice, i.e. many words may intervene between the simple verb and its annexed preposition“. However, neither Ussher nor Parminter distinguish between separable phrasal verbs and inseparable prepositional verbs.

## **2.1 Previous Studies**

Yaghdan (20124) found that the experimental group outperformed the control group. In addition, phrasal verb production and recognition posed significant challenges for Iraqi English language learners, particularly those who were not specialists. Conventional methods of instruction were partially to blame for this issue. Due to the idiomatic meaning of phrasal verbs being hazier than the literal one, it was crucial to comprehend the context in which such verbs got used. As a result, more work needed to be put into helping EFL learners produced phrasal verbs than recognizing them.

Kamarudin's (2013) Results indicated that, in addition to learners’ proficiency level and gender, the nature of PVs and crosslinguistic factors, particularly the learners’ L1, played a significant role in Malaysian learners’ understanding and used of PVs. Their difficulties with PVs were further compounded as textbooks and dictionaries were also found to provide insufficient and inappropriate information with respect to PVs.

This thesis made a number of suggestions to further improve the present scenario of PVs teaching and learning.

Osman (2018) revealed the inability of students to understanding and using English phrasal verbs and also lack of knowledge about the phrasal verbs. The study offered some recommendations that encourage EFL learners and to give them better understanding.

White (2012) explained that the study reports “modest” results, yet the scores did increase for more than half of the participants, even though it seemed that some of the phrasal verbs tested were not part of the exercise. Obviously this could be addressed in a further study. Phrasal verbs presented a challenge for language teachers and students, as evidenced by the amount of research that had been done to understand, classify, and teach them.

Bronshteyn and Gustafson (2015) concluded that there is promise that some of these techniques can assist students to master phrasal verbs, and that more research is necessary to determine the most effective approaches.

## **III. Methodology of the Study**

The researcher uses the descriptive and analytical research method. An observation tool is also used as a tool to show what is going on in English classes to reveal the practices of teaching English language phrasal verbs. The observation is made to (10) qualified, experienced instructors of English language and at the Preparatory Year Unit at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University in Riyadh, Kharj town. It is believed that the observed items at the English classes reflect the real practical practices of teaching English language phrasal verbs at Preparatory Year Unit at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University.

## **IV. Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of the Observation Data**

The researcher focuses on six axes for the field of observation. The researcher visited 10 instructors of English language at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University to see the strategies which were made in teaching phrasal verbs. The below axes represent the most essential elements in handling the problems of teaching phrasal

verbs. Teaching; presenting phrasal verbs, syntactical of phrasal verbs, grammatical for teaching phrasal verbs, semantic for teaching phrasal verbs and obstacles for teaching phrasal verbs.

#### **4.1 Presenting phrasal verbs**

The above axis of teaching phrasal verbs relies on certain issues in regard to teaching and presenting vocabulary items. The lesson observed was a lesson of reading and the instructor presented about 7 words of which three phrasal verbs that were explained in the first five minutes at the beginning of the lesson. Some steps of teaching vocabulary are the pronunciation of the phrasal verbs, the choring and repetition of the phrasal verbs by the students, the meaning conveyed and the meaning presented in context by the instructor to the students.

The majority of the instructors don't pay attention to most of the above steps done in regard to teaching phrasal verbs. They neglect pronunciation and repetition of phrasal verbs and presenting meaning in context. Some of the respondents pay much regard to the above steps of teaching vocabulary. On the other hand, few of the respondents lack even basic knowledge in teaching phrasal verbs.

The researcher thinks that the performance of the English language instructors is not satisfying in improving the process of teaching English for the phrasal verbs that represent an important part of English language learning because the word represents the centre of learning languages.

#### **4.2 Teaching syntactical structure of phrasal verbs**

The researcher noticed that the majority of instructors didn't pay good attention to teach phrasal verbs in regard to syntactical aspect of the sentences. It was true that teaching phrasal verbs patterns needed to equip the instructors with different methods of different uses of the phrasal verbs, for that it was hard to teach phrasal verbs for the complications of different usages in different situations even it was noticed that the standardization which governed the use of phrasal made it hard to be taught and learned. Teaching phrasal verbs needed efficient teaching and provide frequent feedback to consolidate both teaching and then the learning of students.

Some of the instructors explain some syntactical aspect as the standardization which helped learners to form the prefixes easily as a form of memorization. Hence, it is observed by the researcher that the syntactical structure of the phrasal verbs needed a lot of efforts to be exerted for the sake of teaching and vivid learning of students.

#### **4.3 Teaching the grammatical structure of phrasal verbs**

It was observed by the researcher that teaching of grammatical structure of the phrasal verbs was hard for many common mistakes were committed by learners while, after the teaching of the majority of English instructors. Some of students suffered to correct the form of phrasal verbs for some of the parts of the phrasal verbs which were seen as confusing to them. Some instructors suffered to make the students master the separable and inseparable phrasal verbs. It was also notice by the researcher that ample examples inside the textbook were not available to enhance both teaching and then learning of the students. It was also worth mentioning that it was hard to teach transitive and intransitive forms of phrasal verbs because of lack of different examples provided and time for teaching phrasal verbs was not enough to enhance learning.

#### **4.4 Teaching the semantic meaning of phrasal verbs**

The researcher noticed the defects and deficiencies of handling the syntactical and grammatical structures of phrasal verbs that caused misleading to better performance and understanding. It was also noticed that the majority of English language instructors ignore teaching the semantic insights of phrasal verbs. Such instructors ignored items which were represented in the nature of meaning that governed by standardization and to that most of the cases the phrasal verbs represented one semantic units of meanings. In addition, some ignored presenting the three sets of meaning of phrasal verbs that were gradually meant transparent, semitransparent and opaque. It was also noticed that providing ample examples to the learners was not regarded by most of the instructors. The transparent forms of teaching of course would lead to better performance and efficient learning procedures that yield better teaching and learning outcomes.

#### **4.5 The obstacles of teaching phrasal verbs**

From the above teaching axes that dealt with phrasal verbs, it was observed that such obstacles could be the students would have difficulties to distinguish between separable and inseparable uses of phrasal verbs. Lack of good teaching textbooks and workbooks would lead to misleading in the area of enhancing learning in the field of phrasal verbs. It was also noticed that the difficulties of teaching lead to complications in learning that produced problems in learning such of skills of English language such as speaking and writing. It was also traced that ignoring using different types of tools would not enhance learning of English language and authentic materials. The above results would definitely cause hindering in oral and written communication skills.

In conclusion, teaching English phrasal verbs presents both challenges and opportunities for language learners and instructors alike. The observation of teaching practices reveals several critical axes that influence the effectiveness of phrasal verb instruction. First, the contextualization of phrasal verbs in meaningful and relatable situations is essential for enhancing comprehension and retention. Phrasal verbs, by nature, are often idiomatic, and when students can connect them to real-life scenarios or personal experiences, they are more likely to internalize their usage.

Second, the balance between explicit instruction and incidental learning plays a crucial role. While direct teaching of phrasal verb meanings, forms, and patterns is necessary, opportunities for learners to encounter phrasal verbs in authentic contexts—such as through listening, reading, and interactive communication—further supports their acquisition. Observations also highlight the importance of spaced repetition and practice in helping students move from passive recognition to active production.

Furthermore, a variety of instructional techniques—ranging from visual aids and mnemonic devices to role-playing and real-world dialogues—can significantly enhance student engagement and comprehension. Teachers who demonstrate flexibility and creativity in adapting their strategies based on student needs and the complexity of the phrasal verbs are often more successful in fostering a deeper understanding.

Finally, ongoing assessment and feedback are vital for monitoring learner progress, addressing misconceptions, and reinforcing correct usage. By continuously observing student performance, instructors can identify areas that require further focus and tailor their approaches accordingly.

In sum, the observation of teaching practices surrounding English phrasal verbs underscores the importance of a dynamic, context-driven approach that integrates explicit instruction with immersive, communicative practice. Through these methods, learners can develop a more nuanced and confident grasp of phrasal verbs, facilitating their overall fluency in English.

## V. Conclusion

The researcher found the following results:

1. Teaching phrasal verbs was regarded important to the lesson for it was a new vocabulary.
2. There were syntactical obstacles for teaching phrasal verbs because it was hard to be formed and mater the usage and governed by standardization.
3. It was difficult to teach the grammar of phrasal verbs.
4. Textbooks didn't pay careful attention for teaching phrasal verbs.
5. There were semantic obstacles because meaning is governed by standardization; in such cases as transparent, semitransparent and opaque.
6. The challenges of teaching phrasal verbs were regarded in distinguishing between separable and inseparable phrasal verbs.

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