## Iraqi EFL University Learners' Use of Phrasal Verbs in English

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1. **Introduction**

Richards et al. (1992: 275) mention that the phrasal verb is a verbal construction which consists of a verb and an adverb particle. Verbs in English can combine with prepositions and adverb particles to give phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, and phrasal-prepositional verbs.

These constructions are widely used in everyday English. Therefore, they are of value for increasing vocabulary by producing new verbs with new meanings. The problem arises from the state that most Iraqi EFL university learners find difficulty in dealing with phrasal verbs in English because of the great number of these verbs in English and the method these verbs are presented in their textbooks where a verb may combine with one or more particle or preposition resulting in a phrasal verb, prepositional verb, and phrasal-prepositional verb.

The study aims at:

1. Identifying the performance of Iraqi EFL university students in using phrasal verbs in English.
2. Identifying the sources of students' errors and their types in using phrasal verbs so that remedies can be suggested in this regard .
3. Introducing some suggestions which can help the learners overcome the difficulties they may face in using the topic under investigation.

It is hypothesized that most Iraqi EFL university learners do not have the mastery of phrasal verbs in English and they encounter difficulty in using them.

The following steps will be followed in the course of fulfilling the aims of this study:

1. Presenting, as far as possible, a comprehensive study about phrasal verbs in English.
2. Selecting a random sample of Iraqi EFL university students as subjects for administrating a test to find out the difficulties they may face in using phrasal verbs.
3. Analysing the findings of the test which will be of use to introduce some conclusions and recommendations.

The study limits one word to phrasal verbs in English and the sample of the test will be taken from Iraqi EFL learners af their fourth stage in the Department of English/ College of Education for Human sciences/ University of Babylon during the academic year 2011-2012.

2. **A General Idea about Ph. Vs, Pre. Vs, and Ph. Pre. Vs**

Quirk et al. (1985: 1150) denote that adverbs and prepositions may appear after certain verbs to form new verbs of different meanings such as look after, make up, give in, turn on, etc.

Richards et al. (1992: 275-76) denote that a distinction can be done among phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, and phrasal prepositional verbs, according to the different patterns in which they occur:

1. <u>Turn off</u> the light.                    ( phrasal verb)
2. She will <u>apply for </u>the job.            ( prepositional verb)
3. We must <u>cut down on</u> expenses.        (phrasal-prepositional verb)

Nowadays, the term 'phrasal verb' is used to encompass phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, and phrasal-prepositional verbs.

3. **Phrasal Verbs**

Singh (1997: 1) states that a phrasal verb is a verb that combine with a preposition or an adverb particle, to make a phrase which conveys a meaning distinct from that of its constituents, because the whole meaning of the combination between the verb and particle may have no relation to the meaning of the words of the combination in isolation. Parrot (2000: 108) mentions that a phrasal verb is a single unit of meaning which is made up of a verb plus a particle. He defines particles as words that the one may use as an adverb and/ or preposition.

MeCarthy and O'Dell (2004: 6) state that the phrasal verb is the suitable technical term used to refer to a verb and particle. Particles are small words known as prepositions or adverbs.

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 347) regard the phrasal verbs as a combination of a verb and adverbial particle, some of which are intransitive:

4. His car broke down.

Quirk et al. (1985: 452) show that some verbs with adverbial particle combinations are followed by objects to be considered as transitive:

5. He will find out the secret .     (discover)

But, some combinations of verbs and adverbials can be either transitive or intransitive:

6. The bomb blew up.                 (exploded)-intransitive.

7. They blew up the station.         transitive.

Stageberg (1977: 226) states that a distinction should be made between the combinations of transitive verbs with adverbials and regular verbs followed by prepositional phrases:

8. The wind blew down the valley.

9. The storm blew down the chimneys.

Vestergaard (1975: 151) denotes that phrasal verbs are often called two-word verbs because they have a verb and another word which is a particle that has a close relation with the verb.

4. **Prepositional Verbs**

Adams (1973: 9) defines the prepositional verb as the combination          of a verb and a preposition. Sometimes, this combination is called (inseparable phrasal verb) because the particle always precedes its object whether a noun or pronoun:

10. He takes after his brother.    (resemble)

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 349) mention that in this construction , the preposition precedes its complement and the noun phrases are allowed to be the subject of a passive transformation of the sentence.

11. She called on the patient.     (visited)- The patient was called on.

12. He looked at the picture.              –The picture was looked at.

Other examples of prepositional verbs: refer to, long for, believe in, live on, deal with, ask for, care for, long for, part with, write about, object to. (Ibid: 350).

5. **Phrasal- Prepositional Verbs**

Quirk et al.(1985: 1160) state that the phrasal-prepositional verb is called so because it consists of a verb with an adverb and a preposition as a particle. There are two types of this construction. The first one consists of a verb, an adverb, a preposition, and a noun phrase:

13. Ann thinks that she can get away with everything.

The second construction requires a direct object and it consists of a verb, a noun phrase, an adverb, and a preposition plus a noun phrase:

14. My father fobbed me off with a present.

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 351) mention that some multi-word verbs have two particles which follow the verb:

15. He puts up with a lot of teasing.     (tolerates)

In this combination, it is not possible to insert an adverb immediately before the object except when it is put between the particles:

16. *He puts up with willingly that secretary of his.

       He puts up willingly with that secretary of his.

In questions and relative clauses, the particles come after the verb:

17. Who(m) does he put up with willingly?

18. The party was were looking forward to do eagerly.

Other  examples of phrasal-prepositional verbs: get away with, look up to, walk out on, cut down on, look down on, look in on. (Ibid: 252)

6.The Distinction Between Phrasal Verbs and Preposition Verbs

Richard et al. (1992: 275) state that a distinction can be made between phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs according to their different grammatical patterns:

In phrasal verbs

a. The particle may be stressed:

19. Turn off the light

b. The particle can be put after the object:

20. Turn the light off

c.  Short pronouns occur between the verb and the particle:

21.Turn it off

*Turn off it

In prepositional verbs

a. The verb may be stressed:

22. I'll Apply for the job

b.  The particle cannot occur after the object:

23.*I'll apply the job for

c. Pronouns can be put after the verb and article:

24. I'll apply for it

*I'll apply it for

## 7.The Test

Bachman (1990: 20) defines the test as a means or systematic method of checking students' performance through the elicitation of certain behaviour to make inferences about certain characteristics of an individual.

In order to fulfil the aims of the present study, a test has been designed to measure the students' performance in using phrasal verbs in English and to locate the precise area of difficulty encountered by Iraqi EFL university students in using the topic under investigation.

The test consists of two questions and each question consists of fifteen items. The first question is designed to measure the students' performance at the recognition level in which they are given different sentences and their task is to indicate whether each of these sentences contains a phrasal verb (ph-v) or prepositional verb (pre-v) or phrasal-prepositional verb (ph-pre-v). They can mention this in the given blanks in front of each sentence. The second question is designed to measure the students' performance at the production level. In this question, the students are given sentences with blanks and they have to fill in these blanks with the suitable particles or prepositions to form the suitable constructions.

Most Items of the test are taken from  Grammar books mentioned previously and from "A University Grammar of English-Workbook", 1974, by R. A. Close.

### 7.1.1 Item Analysis

According to Heaton (1988: 178), the most widely used types of item analysis are:

a. Discrimination index which indicates to what extent the high- scores on the test as a whole do better on the item than the low-score.

b. Facility value which shows which proportion of the students responds correctly to the item.

### 7.1.2 Item Discrimination Index (DI)

The essential concept of testing is that the correct answers of the students to the most difficult items are related to the students with highest scores while the incorrect responses of the students to the same items are of those students with lower scores. Discrimination index (DI) can be calculated by subtracting the number of correct responses in the low group from that of the high group and dividing the difference by half the number of testees. (Al-Juboury: 111)

The following two tables show the discrimination index (DI) of the test item in question one and two, respectively:

Q1

| Items | DI | Items | DI | Items | DI |
|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|
| 1 | 0.   54 | 6 | 0.   57 | 11 | 0.   28 |
| 2 | 0.40 | 7 | 0.20 | 13 | 0.37 |
| 3 | 0.65 | 8 | 0.34 | 13 | 0.08 |
| 4 | 0.34 | 9 | 0.60 | 14 | 0.62 |
| 5 | 0.48 | 10 | 0.62 | 15 | 0.34 |
| Mean | 0.42 | | | | |

Q 2

| Items | DI | Items | DI | Items | DI |
|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|
| 1 | 0.14 | 6 | 0.11 | 11 | 0.11 |
| 2 | 0.20 | 7 | 0.08 | 12 | 0.34 |
| 3 | 0.31 | 8 | 0.0 | 13 | 0.62 |
| 4 | 0.42 | 9 | 0.62 | 14 | 0.51 |
| 5 | 0.40 | 1o | 0.14 | 15 | 0.28 |
| Mean | 0.28 | | | | |

The two tables show that all items of the test in both questions one and two have positively valued discrimination indices since no negative (DI) is mentioned for any of the test items. Each item of the test has a certain (DI) which ranges from the lowest rate of (0.0) to the highest rate of (0.65). This indicates that there are individual differences among the students. The mean of discrimination index of question one is (0.42) and of question two is (0.28) which are quite acceptable because according to Mousavi (1997: 69), the acceptable range for the (DI) lies between (0.20 and 0.90) and this in turn shows that all items of the whole test discriminate well.

According to Richards et al. (1992: 192), the facility value (FV) of a test item refers to the percentage of students who respond to the item correctly showing how easy or difficult the item is. It can be calculated by dividing the number of correct responses by the number of students.

The following two tables show the facility value (FV) of the items in question one and two, respectively:

Q 1

| Items | F.V | Items | F.V | Items | F.V |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.32 | 6 | 0.58 | 11 | 0.17 |
| 2 | 0.40 | 7 | 0.74 | 12 | 0.78 |
| 3 | 0.44 | 8 | 0.20 | 13 | 0.24 |
| 4 | 0.77 | 9 | 0.61 | 14 | 0.54 |
| 5 | 0.30 | 10 | 0.45 | 15 | 0.51 |
| Mean | 0.47 | | | | |

Q 2

| Items | F.V | Items | F.V | Items | F.V |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.90 | 6 | 0.05 | 11 | 0.05 |
| 2 | 0.12 | 7 | 0.04 | 12 | 0.17 |
| 3 | 0.15 | 8 | 0.00 | 13 | 0.60 |
| 4 | 0.27 | 9 | 0.51 | 14 | 0.31 |
| 5 | 0.22 | 10 | 0.07 | 15 | 0.10 |
| Mean | 0.23 | | | | |

The two tables present the facility values of test items in both questions one and two. The facility values range between (0.00 and .90) which are very apart because students face difficulty in question two. The mean of (F.V) for question one is (0.47) and for question two is (0.23) which are acceptable.

**7.2 The Findings of the Test**

The results of the test of question one and two are shown in the following table, respectively:

Q 1

| Items | No.of correct responses | Percentage % | No.of Incorrect responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 23 | 32.8 | 47 | 67.2 |
| 2 | 28 | 40 | 42 | 60 |
| 3 | 31 | 44.2 | 39 | 55.8 |
| 4 | 54 | 77.1 | 16 | 32.9 |
| 5 | 21 | 30 | 49 | 70 |
| 6 | 41 | 58.8 | 29 | 41 |
| 7 | 52 | 74.2 | 18 | 25.8 |
| 8 | 14 | 20 | 56 | 80 |
| 9 | 43 | 61.4 | 27 | 38.6 |
| 10 | 32 | 45.7 | 38 | 54.3 |
| 11 | 12 | 17.2 | 58 | 82.8 |
| 12 | 55 | 78.5 | 15 | 21.5 |
| 13 | 17 | 24.2 | 53 | 75.8 |
| 14 | 38 | 54.2 | 32 | 45.8 |
| 15 | 36 | 51.4 | 34 | 48.6 |
| Total | 497 | 40.6 | 553 | 59.4 |

Q 2

| Items | N0.of Correct Responses | Percentage % | No.of Correct Responses | Percentage % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 63 | 90 | 7 | 10 |
| 2 | 9 | 12.8 | 61 | 87.2 |
| 3 | 11 | 15.7 | 59 | 84.3 |
| 4 | 19 | 57.1 | 51 | 42.9 |
| 5 | 16 | 22.8 | 54 | 77.2 |

| 6 | 4 | 5.7 | 66 | 94.3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | 3 | 4.2 | 76 | 95.8 |
| 8 | 0 | 0.0 | 70 | 100 |
| 9 | 36 | 51.4 | 34 | 48.6 |
| 10 | 5 | 7.1 | 65 | 92.9 |
| 11 | 4 | 5.7 | 66 | 94.3 |
| 12 | 12 | 17.1 | 58 | 82.9 |
| 13 | 42 | 60 | 28 | 40 |
| 14 | 22 | 31.4 | 48 | 68.6 |
| 15 | 7 | 10 | 63 | 90 |
| Total | 253 | 26.1 | 797 | 73.9 |

These two tables show the following:

1. In question one, the number and the percentage of the incorrect responses (553, 59.4 %) are more than those of correct responses (497, 40.6 %).
2. As for question two, the number of percentage and the incorrect responses (797, 73.9 %) are more than those of correct responses (253, 26.1%)
3. The number and percentage of the incorrect responses for the whole test (1152, 66.65 %) are more than those of correct responses (750, 33.35 %)
4. From the results above, it is concluded that Iraqi EFL university students encounter difficulty in using phrasal verbs in English which in turn verifies the hypothesis of the study.

The following table shows the results of the whole test:

| Question | No.of Correct Responses | Percentage% | No.of Incorrect Responses | Percentage% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| One | 497 | 40.6 | 553 | 59.4 |
| two | 253 | 26.1 | 797 | 73.9 |
| Total | 750 | 33.35% | 1152 | 66.65 |

## 8.Error Analysis
### 8.1 Sources of Errors

Brown (1987: 177) states that students' errors can be attributed to four factors: interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, context of learning, and communication strategies.

### 8.1.1 Interlingual Transfer

Ellis (1994: 48) mentions that this type of errors occurs as a result of the interference of the mother tongue with the foreign language . This influence takes place when the patterns of the two languages are different.

The interlingual transfer appears through the students' errors in their responses at the production level to items (4), (6), (9) and (15) in question two:

Item (4) The teacher approves of their performance.
      * The teacher approves on their performance.
Item (6) You can count him out.
        * You can count him off.
Item (9) They have looked into the difficulty.
       * They have looked at the difficulty.
Item (15) Their success can be put down to careful planning.
        * Their success can be put to careful planning.

This source of errors accounts for (21 %) of all errors.

### 8.1.2 Intralingual Transfer

Richards (1974: 6) mentions that in this source of errors, the students produce items which do not reflect the structure of the mother tongue. This type of errors may be related to one of the four factors such as **overgeneralization** which is the wrong application of the previously learned material to a present foreign language context. The example of overgeneralization can be found in items (1), (5), and (11) of question one:

Item (1) A mess has been made of the house.   (pre v)
        * ph v
Item  (5) We must call in the police.  (ph v)
        * pre v

Item  (11) He fobbed her with a good pen.  (ph-pre v)
    *ph v

The second factor is the **incomplete application of rules** in which the learners resort to use simple rules to achieve communication as appears in items (2), (3), and (7) of question two:

Item (2) He look down on her because of her humble    background.
    *he look down to her because of her humble background.

Item (3) She must make up for lost time.
    *She must make for lost time.

 Item (7) He takes after his father.
    *He takes to his father.

The third factor is the **ignorance of rule restrictions** in which the learners may apply some rule which is not applicable to a certain category. The example of this factor can be found in items (3), (8), and (9) of question one:

Item (3) That is exactly what I'm hoping for.   (pre v)
    *ph v

Item (8) He turned down my offer. (ph v)
    *pre v

Item (9) On whom did he call?  (pre v)
    *ph v

The fourth factor is the **false concepts hypothesized** that may derive from faulty comprehension of a distinction in the target language. The example of this factor appears in items (8), (11), and (14) of question two:

Item (8) He can't put up with her interference.
    *He can't put off her interference.

Item (11) He must cut down on cigarettes.
    *He must cut off cigarettes.

Item (14) She can't make out my writing.
    *She can't make of my writing.

Intralingual transfer account for (59%) of all errors in the students' responses.

## 8.3 Context of Learning

Context is the settings in which a person uses language (Buck et al., 1989:3). According to Richards (1974: 178), errors may result from the influence of the situation of learning, the textbook writers who focus on some aspects of the foreign language rather than others, or the misleading explanation by the teacher. The example of this type of errors can be found in items (5), (12), and (13) of question two:

Item (5) Don't let him down.
    *Don't let him out.

Item (12) I can't make up what you mean.
    *I can make out what you mean.

Item (13) I told him to call his father up.
    *I told him to call his father on.

The negative effect of context of learning accounts for (11%) of all students' errors.


## 8.1.4    Communication Strategies

Ellis (1994: 340) denotes that the students use this kind of strategy to overcome the problem in communication to cope with the difficulties they may encounter. One of the strategies which has been used by the students is "guessing" the example of which can be found in items (2), (6), and (13) of question one :

Item (2) Has anyone rung me up?   (ph v)
    * pre v

Item (6) You must face up to your responsibilities.   (ph-pre v)
    * ph v

Item (13) The selection committee has passed you over. (ph v)

* Pre v

This source of errors account for (9%) of all errors in the students'
responses.

## 9. Conclusions

In English, phrasal verbs are those verbs which combine with prepositions or adverb particles.

A diagnostic test has been applied to a random sample of Iraqi EFL university students (70 students) taken from the Department of English/ College of Education for human Sciences/ University of Babylon . According to the results of the test, the total number and percentage of the incorrect responses (1152, 66.65%)                are more than those of correct responses (750, 33.35%).                These results indicate that the students encounter difficulty in using phrasal verbs in English and this verifies the hypothesis of the study.

The following sources of errors are behind the poor performance of the students according to the errors ascribed to each:

a.       Intralingual transfer accounts for ( 59%) of the total errors. It has the majority of the learners' errors.

b.       Intralingual transfer constitutes ( 21%) of the total errors of the students.

c.       The effect of context of learning constitutes(11%) which is the fourth rate of errors.

d.       The students' use of communicative strategies is the third rate of errors  ( 9%).

The following points can be suggested as remedies to overcome the difficulties encountered by the students in using phrasal verbs in English:

1.More attention should be given to phrasal verbs in English because of their great number.

2. Sufficient exercises should be provided which play a great role in developing the students' ability in using phrasal verbs.

3.The learners should learn the phrasal verbs in English through     developing awareness of the use of these verbs within communicative contexts.

4. Developing teaching programs that can enhance the students' competence in using the phrasal verbs in English and help them overcome the difficulties they may encounter in using this topic.

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Appendix I

**The Test**

Q 1/ Indicate whether each of the following sentences consisits of a phrasal verb(Ph V) or prepositional verb ( Pre V) or phrasal-prepositional verb (Ph-Pre V):

1. A mess has been made of the house…………………………..
2. Has any one  rung me up?                            ……………………....
3. That is exactly what I'm hoping for ……………………………
4. She expects you to stand up for her at the meeting………………………
5. We must call in the police.                  …………………………………
6. You must face up to your responsibilities ………………………
7. You should go into the problem        ………………………………….
8. She turned down my offer                 …………………………………
9. On whom did he call?                        …………………………………....
10. How long can one do without water?              ………………………….
11.   ………………………………
12. They think that they can get a way with every think. …………………….
13. The selection committee has passed you over…………………………….
14.   ……………………………..
15. The actor took the president off beautifully  …………………………………..

Q 2/ Complete the following sentences by filling the blanks with the suitable particles or prepositions to form suitable phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs, and phrasal-prepositional verbs that suits the meanings mentioned below:

1. He looked……………the picture.              (paid attention to see)
2. He look…………………...her because of her humble background. (regard with contempt0
3. She maust make……………………..lost time.   (comensate)
4. The teacher approves……………… their performance.  (accepts)
5. Don't let him……………………                (make him disappointed)
6. You can count him………………..         (exclude)
7. He takes……………… his father.          (resemble)
8. He cannot put…………………….. her interference.     (tolerate)
9. They have looked………………. The difficulty.           (investigated)
10. He likes to show……………….          (boast)
11. He must cut………………… cigarettes. (reduce)
12. I can't make…………….. What you mean. (understand)
13. I told him to call his father ………….…         (telephone)
14. She can't make …………….. my writing .    (read)
15. Their success can be put………………. Careful planning. (attribute)

**Appendix II**

### The Answers of the Test

Q1

1. Pre v
2. Ph v
3. Pre v
4. Ph-pre v
5. Ph v
6. Ph-pre v
7. Pre v
8. Ph v
9. Pre v
10. Pre v
11. Ph-pre v
12. Ph-pre v
13. Ph v
14. Ph-pre v
15. Ph v

Q2

1. At
2. Down on
3. Up for
4. Of
5. Down
6. Out
7. After
8. Up with
9. Into
10. Off
11. Down on
12. Up

13. Up
14. Out
15. Down to