

CASE STUDY

Vol. 11. Issue.1. 2024 (Jan-March)

INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA  
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

Investigating EFL Saudi Learners' Avoidance of Using Multi-Word Verbs  
A Case Study of EFL Learners at University College of Haql

Ali Abdalla Nour

English Language Department, University College of Haql, Tabuk University, Saudi Arabia  
doi: [10.33329/ijelr.11.1.70](https://doi.org/10.33329/ijelr.11.1.70)



Ali Abdalla Nour

Article information

Article Received:13/1/2024  
Article Accepted:15/02/2024  
Published online:21/02/2024

ABSTRACT

The study aims at: investigating the causes of EFL learners' avoidance of phrasal verbs and suggesting some teaching techniques that enable learners to use phrasal verbs. The study adopted the descriptive analytical methods. The participants of the study were fifty (50) of EFL learners from University College of Haql. A questionnaire was distributed to them for data collection. Then the collected data were analyzed with Statistical Packages for Social Sciences program (SPSS). The results indicated that: the lack of similar equivalence in learners' L1 affects their understanding of L2 phrasal verbs, learners' avoidance of phrasal verbs is partly related to the teaching instruction in EFL classes and the avoidance of phrasal verbs by EFL learners is resulted from the differences between L1 and L2 structures. The study recommends that: EFL learners should practice activities of idiomatic phrasal verbs in the English language classroom and develop at least a receptive awareness, which will help them decode the phrasal verbs that they encounter in spoken and written texts.

**Keywords:** EFL learners' avoidance, phrasal verbs, teaching techniques, similar equivalence.

1. Introduction

Phrasal verbs are known as multiword expressions that consists of two or three words to give full meaning instead of one-word verbs (Wahl and Gries, 2020). EFL learners need to use them in the academic spoken and written discourse and also in formal and informal communication. However, many of EFL students could not able to learn English language without understanding the meaning of phrasal verbs as clearly. Thus, many of EFL Sudanese learners at secondary schools and universities avoid to use phrasal verbs in their English language performance.

1.1 The Statement of the Problem:

Many of EFL learners are suffering from the use of phrasal verbs in their academic discourse and in general interaction. They find difficulties in dealing with them in situations which have no direct translation in their own language. In this regard, this study will attempt to investigate EFL Haql College University students' avoidance of phrasal verbs.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study aims at:

1. Investigating the causes of EFL learners' avoidance of phrasal verbs.
2. Suggesting some teaching techniques that enable learners to use phrasal verbs.

## 1.3 Questions of the Study

The study tries to answer following questions

1. What are the causes of phrasal verbs avoidance by EFL learners?
2. To what extent are EFL learners enabled to use phrasal verbs?

## 1.4 Hypotheses of the Study

The study has the following hypotheses:

1. There are many causes of learners' avoidance of phrasal.
2. EFL learners requires practical activities of idiomatic phrasal verbs to master the English language.

## 1.5 Significance of the Study:

The importance of this study comes from trying to find possible solutions to the problems of learners' avoidance of phrasal verbs. Explaining the role of the teaching techniques in enhancing learners' interpretation of phrasal verbs.

## 1.6 Research Methodology

The study adopts the descriptive analytical method. The researcher will use a questionnaire as a tool to collect the data from the EFL students at university level. Then it will be analyzed statistically with SPSS Program.

## 1.7 Limits of the Study

This study is limited to:

Investigating causes of EFL learners' Avoidance of Using Phrasal Verbs, EFL Saudi learners at the University College of Haql.

## 2. Literature Review

Phrasal verbs generally are difficult to be understood by EFL learners. That is because they refer to different meanings. Moreover, phrasal verbs in some contexts seem to be ambiguous and difficult. However, EFL students face difficulties in understanding the meaning of phrasal verbs because of their idiomaticity. Because of non-existence of similar structures in learners' L1s may affect their understanding of PVs, and several studies show that this may result in the avoidance of PVs, (Sonbul et al., 2020)

It is believed that, for EFL learners to understand the meaning of phrasal verbs, they need to focus on the general meaning of the contexts that expressed in writing. Phrasal verbs are also difficult because the meanings can sometimes be literal, (Zhang and Wen, 2019)

It is clear that the meaning of phrasal verbs needs a careful focus on the contexts because many of them refer to more than one meaning. That is to say, it is not easy to find an equivalent in the target language that corresponds to the idiom in the source language in both form and meaning. This means that phrasal verbs refer to different meanings, but it can be understood from the general meaning of the contexts in which it is used (Gantar *et al.*, 2019). Phrasal verbs are generally difficult to be used in EFL setting as the teaching of these groups require effective techniques. In addition, differences between two languages (Arabic and English) and cultures causes' problem pose by idiomatic English. However, these difficulties lead learners to use only fewer phrasal verbs in their writing. So,, most EFL learners avoid using idiomatic PVs and used one word verb instead. (Demetriou, 2020) argues that the avoidance indicates that learners can recognize structure, but cannot use

them freely.. However, fewer learners have adequate receptive and productive knowledge of the target polysemous phrasal verbs ((Sonbul, etal,2020).

### 3.0 Material and Method

The study adopted the descriptive analytical methods. The population of the study were the EFL learners of University College of Haql. The participants of the study were fifty (50) of EFL learners who were chosen randomly from the College. A questionnaire was distributed to them for data collection. Then the collected data were analyzed with Statistical Packages for Social Science program (SPSS).

### 4.0 Data Analyses and Discussion

#### Statement (1) The absence of similar structures in learners' L1 may affect their understanding of phrasal verbs.

Table (4.1) The absence of similar structures in learners' L1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Neutral	6	12.0	12.0	20.0
	Agree	40	80.0	80.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

According to the statistical analysis of table (4.1) most respondents (80 %) agree, (12%) are neutral and (8%) disagree that, the absence of similar structures in learners' L1 may affect their understanding of phrasal verbs and this may result in the avoidance of phrasal verbs.

#### Statement (2) some causes of learners' avoidance of phrasal verbs related to the teaching instruction at secondary schools

Table (4.2) avoidance related to the teaching instruction at secondary schools

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	Neutral	2	4.0	4.0	10.0
	Agree	45	90.0	90.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The statistical analysis of table (4.2) shows that, some causes of learners' avoidance related to the teaching instruction at secondary schools, most respondent (90%) agree with the statement, (6%) disagree and (4%) are neutral with the statement.

**Statement (3) EFL learners avoidance of phrasal verbs is caused as a result of the differences between L1 and L2 structures**

Table (4.3) phrasal verbs avoidance as a result of differences between L1 and L2 structures

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Neutral	5	10.0	10.0	20.0
	Agree	40	80.0	80.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table (4.3) shows that EFL learners avoidance is caused as a result of the differences between L1 and L2 structures. According to the statistical analysis of statement (4.3) most respondents (80%) agree, (10%) are neutral and (10%) disagree with the statement. Therefore, the statement is justified.

**Statement (4) This avoidance of phrasal verbs prevents learners from mastering English language .**

Table (4.4) The avoidance of phrasal verbs prevents mastering English language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Neutral	6	12.0	12.0	20.0
	Agree	40	80.0	80.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The statistical analysis in table (4.4) shows that ,(80%) of the sample agree that, the avoidance of phrasal verbs prevents learning EFL. Only (12%) of them are neutral and (8%) disagree with the statement.

**Statement (5) The level of difficulty that faces EFL learners correlates with their avoidance behavior in L2 learning**

Table (4.5) The level of difficulty that faces EFL learners in PVs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neutral	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Agree	46	92.0	92.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table (4.5) shows that most respondents ( 92%) agree that the level of difficulty that faces EFL learners correlates with their avoidance behavior in L2 learning. According to the statistical analysis (8%) of respondents are neutral (8%) disagree with the statement. The statement is justified.

**Statement (6) Idiomatic phrasal verbs are used as essential part of courses` syllabus**

Table (4.6) phrasal verbs are used as essential part of EFL syllabus

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Neutral	6	12.0	12.0	22.0
	Agree	39	78.0	78.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The statistical analysis in table (4.6) shows that most of the sample (78%) agree with the statement ,(10% disagree and (12%) are neutral that idiomatic phrasal verbs are used as essential part of courses` syllabus. Therefore, the statement is justified.

**Statement (7) Sufficient practical activities of idiomatic phrasal verbs are required in the English language classroom**

Table (4.7) practical activities of phrasal verbs are required in EFL classes

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	Neutral	10	20.0	20.0	24.0
	Agree	38	76.0	76.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The statistical analysis in table (4.7) shows that sufficient practical activities of idiomatic phrasal verbs are required in the English language classroom. According to the statistical analysis of table (4.7) most respondents (76%) agree with the statement, (20%) are neutral and (4%) of them disagree with the statement.

**Statement (8) Learners` lack of awareness of common collocates, regular patterns and usage, lead to deviant or nonstandard use of PVs**

Table (4.8) Learners` lack of awareness of common collocates

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Neutral	4	8.0	8.0	16.0
	Agree	42	84.0	84.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The statistical results in table (4.8) show that, most respondents (84%) agree, (8%) are neutral to and (8%) disagree that learners` lack of awareness of common collocates, regular patterns and usage, lead to deviant or nonstandard use of PVs. Therefore, the statement is justified.

**Statement (9) Single-word verbs are commonly used rather than multiword verbs.**

Table (4.9) Single-word verbs are commonly used rather than (PVs)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	Neutral	10	20.0	20.0	24.0
	Agree	38	76.0	76.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

According to the statistical analysis in table (4.9) (76%) of the sample agree, (20%) of them are neutral and (6%) disagree that Single-word verbs are commonly used rather than PVs. The statement is proved.

**Statement( 10) Idiomatic phrasal verbs are normally used outside classroom contexts**

Table (4.10) Idiomatic phrasal verbs are used outside classroom contexts

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	Neutral	6	12.0	12.0	18.0
	Agree	41	82.0	82.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The statistical analysis in diagram and table (4.10) shows that most respondents ( 82%) agree, (12%) of them are neutral and (6%) of them disagree that idiomatic phrasal verbs are normally used outside classroom contexts.

**5. Conclusion, Findings and Recommendations****Conclusion**

This study is an attempt to explore the causes of EFL learners' avoidance of phrasal verbs and to suggest some teaching techniques that enable teachers to teach phrasal verbs effectively in EFL classes. To fulfill these aims at this study, fifty (50) of EFL learners at the University College of Haql were taken as a sample of the study. A questionnaire was distributed to them for collecting the required data for the study. After data collection, the researchers has analyzed the data with the (SPSS) program.

**Findings:**

After the data analysis, the study came out with the following findings:

1. The absence of similar equivalence in learners' L1 affects their understanding of L2 phrasal verbs.
2. Learners' avoidance of phrasal verbs is partly related to the teaching instruction in EFL classes.
3. The avoidance of phrasal verbs by EFL learners is resulted from the differences between L1 and L2 structures
4. The level of difficulty that faces EFL learners correlates with their avoidance behavior in L2 learning

5. Mastering English language, requires effective use of Idiomatic phrasal verbs as essential part of courses` syllabus
6. Practicing the use of idiomatic phrasal verbs is required in the English language classroom
7. Most of EFL learners prefer to use single-word verbs rather than multiword verbs.

### Recommendations

The study has the following recommendations:

1. EFL learners should practice activities of idiomatic phrasal verbs in the English language classroom
2. EFL learners should develop at least a receptive awareness, which will help them decode the PVs that they encounter in spoken and written texts.
3. The teaching syllabus should be modified to match the learners` needs.
4. EFL teachers should work hard to enhancing learners` attitudes towards using phrasal verbs in written or spoken form of language.

### References

- Demetriou, L. (2020). Polysemous English phrasal verbs: EFL textbook distribution, students` receptive and productive knowledge and teachers` beliefs in the Greek Cypriot context. Doctoral dissertation, University of Essex
- Gantar Polona, COLMAN Lut, PARRA ESCARTAN Carla & MARTANEZ ALONSO Héctor, 2019, "Multiword expressions: Between lexicography and NLP", *International Journal of Lexicography* 32(2), 138-162.
- Sonbul, S., El-dakhs, D. A. S., & Al-otaibi, H. (2020). Productive versus receptive L2 knowledge of polysemous phrasal verbs: A comparison of determining factors. *System*, 95. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102361>
- Wahl Alexander & GRIES Stefan, 2020, "Computational extraction of formulaic sequences from corpora: Two case studies of a new extraction algorithm", in CORPAS PASTOR Gloria & COLSON Jean-Pierre (Eds.), *Computational Phraseology*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 83-110.
- Zhang, X., & Wen, J. (2019). Exploring multiple constraints on second language development of English polysemous phrasal verbs. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 40(5), 1073-1101. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716419000146>