The Effect of Context on Understanding Phrasal Verbs and their Avoidance by Students of University of Anbar

Imad Hayif Sameer and Ghassan Mohammed Abd-Razaq

Abstract--- Schachter (1974) focuses on the importance of error analysis for examining not only to find out the most common errors committed by learners of foreign language but to circle the items or expressions avoided by them. This avoidance is due in most cases because the close interrelation between such avoidance phenomena and the Contrastive Analysis approach between mother tongue and the target. Kleinmann (1977) assures that "avoidance" means that the learners have an idea about the structure in question but they do not have the ability to use it actively and correctly. Phrasal verbs which are part of multiword expressions form a difficulty to Iraqi learners; especially to students of University of Anbar/ Department of English/ College of Education for Humanities. This difficulty is logical because most of Iraqi speakers avoid dealing with the components of this category. Most of students who form the sample of the study which consists of (30 students) (15 males and 15 females) have an idea about the meaning of the phrasal verbs (give up, switch off and switch on) because they are highly used in Iraqi culture. The study shows that the sample in the question faces difficulty to use this category. The aim of this article is to clarify the factors that have an effect on understanding the components of this category. It hypothesizes that the members of the sample can depend on the context to extract the correct meaning of phrasal verbs and without it they cannot understand their meaning. They, in most cases, avoid using them and resort to single words. Three tests are conducted to achieve the aim and prove the hypotheses. The first one clarifies the role of the context in determining the exact meaning of phrasal verbs while the second shows the difficulties that face students in dealing with this category. The third test manifests the avoidance of students to use them.

Keywords: Multiword Expressions, Context, Avoidance and Phrasal Verbs

I. INTRODUCTION

Multiword expressions have an importance to gain or achieve fluency in language learning. Many researchers focus on this importance saying that mastering the components of this category forms an essential or crucial factor in speaking skills (Wood, 2004; Folse, 2004). In addition to that, having an idea about the meaning of these items is required not only in productive or speaking skills but also in listening skills. The variation of this category into idioms, fixed expressions and prefabs, phrasal verbs etc. gives this category more importance (Moon, 1997; Wray, 2002). The focus of this paper is on phrasal verb which is considered as a proper feature. This category is one aspect of grammar which forms one of the main components that are taught in the ESL/EFL curriculum. They may be found in dictionaries because they are formed from the content words and function words which are called particle. This paper focuses on the lexical aspects and the semantic properties of phrasal verbs. The components of

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this category do not have transparent meanings which make them an obstacle in front of the new learners. In spite of the importance of phrasal verbs, there are little researches on studying this category. The present paper aims at investigating the effect of the learning conditions on controlling and learning phrasal verbs. The semantic properties of them are tackled. To achieve these two aims two conditions of learning are presented which are the context and the translation learning. This paper hypothesizes that students of the fourth stage at University of Anbar in the Department of English face difficulty in dealing with this category. Conclusion and suggestions for further studies are designed at the end of the study.

II. CONTEXT AND VOCABULARY LEARNING

The strategy of using context clues to estimate the meaning of words is one of the common ways to acquire lexicon. According to Cooper (1999), 'think aloud' protocol is the most successful strategy to learn idioms. This means that the learners can depend on the inference to learn new vocabularies. Hulstijn (1992) assures that learners who acquire the meaning of new words depending on the inference are able to remember the meaning better than those who memorize them. His study emphasizes that inference helps students retain the meaning of new words depending on context clues. Prince (1996), depending on the results of empirical studies, say that the opinions of Hulstijn (1992) are not right. He affirms that memorization of new vocabularies in isolation is the best way to acquire them. He (1996) compares the use of context and translation in learning words for French EFL learners. These two conditions are compared in the recall phase for two groups of learners, the advanced and the weak learners. For the context learning group, isolated sentences, including the target words, are given, and the members of the translation learning group are asked to write down the meaning of target words. The scale is on behalf of the advanced learners in the translation learning group.

Qian (1996), after doing empirical studies, stands beside Prince. He does not accept the idea that the effect of inferring from context helps to retain knowledge. Mondria and Wit-de Boer (1991), making their test on French learners, investigate whether contextual richness has influence on the predictability and retention of words based on Schouten-van Parreren's claim or not. The claim is that words can be acquired easily when the meaning is inferred from the context which has a clearly positive effect on retention. They give the participants of their test eight types of contexts including the target words. The results of their test show that there is no correlation between inferring and retention of meaning. Previous studies show that the dependence on context to learn vocabularies cannot guarantee its acquisition.

III. MULTIWORD EXPRESSIONS

A multiword expression generally refers to a multiword unit or a combination of a word with preposition. This term covers different types of collocations which vary in their transparency and fixedness. The learners should be familiar and understand the components of this term because they have a crucial importance for any Natural Language Processing.

Sag et al (2002) refer to this problem because most of the foreign learners cannot master the components of this category easily. Sometimes, They can avoid them resorting to single words but using the components of this category reflects high and advance level in using language.

Villavicencio et al (2005) introduce Machine Translation as an important tool which has a particular interest since "recognition of MWEs is necessary for systems to preserve the meaning and produce appropriate translations and avoid the generation of unnatural or nonsensical sentences in the target language." Statistical machine translation (SMT) typically does not model MWEs explicitly.

A MWE varies in compositionality and predictability depending on the composition of its components. For example: 'make a decision' has a clear meaning which is 'decide' while the situation is different with 'kick the bucket' which means 'die' because the components of 'kick the bucket' have nothing in common with the literal meaning of these two components.

IV. PHRASAL VERBS

Cheon (2002, p.1) states that in every conversation, native speakers frequently use phrasal verbs and reserve one-word verb for more formal occasions. They are defined as a structure that consists of a verb unit and a particle and both of them form a single verb. This combination is problematic especially for foreign learners because they do not have transparent meanings. The whole meaning is not always derived from the meaning of the components.

Liao and fukuya (2004) divide phrasal verbs into two groups: 1. Literal- phrasal verbs whose meanings can be estimated from the meaning of the components such as 'wake up' and 'come in'. 2. Figurative phrasal verbs whose meanings cannot be understood from the combination of the two parts because they are idiomatic such as 'give up' and 'ran up'.

V. DIFFICULTY OF PHRASAL VERBS

Arnaud & Savignon (1997, p.161) state that phrasal verb is one of the difficult items for learners of English as a second or foreign language. This difficulty is derived from the fact that the items of this category have an idiomatic meaning which does not result from the simple combination of those of its constituents.

Dagut and Laufer (1985) clarify that Hebrew learners of English significantly prefer one-word expressions to phrasal verbs, while English native speakers do the opposite. This fact is logical because the meaning of single words is easier than the meaning of phrasal verbs because of their idiomatic meaning. Liao and Fukuya (2004) find that learners choose fewer figurative phrasal verbs than literal phrasal verbs on a multiple-choice test. They justify this avoidance to the semantic difficulty of figurative phrasal verbs. This means that semantic properties of transparent (or literal) versus idiomatic (or figurative), should be considered in the learning conditions. The previous studies show that idiomatic phrasal verbs might be harder to learn than transparent phrasal verbs for ESL learners.

VI. STUDY DESIGN

The idea of this study rooted back to 2009 when the researcher did the exam of MA studies. He could answer all the questions except that of phrasal verbs. In this question, there are six items of multiple choices and the examinee must choose five only. The examinee depends on inference and answers the items. After checking the dictionary, the examinee found out that he answered two correctly and three wrongly. This question motivates the researcher to design this experimental study. It is designed to test the effectiveness of learning conditions by inferring the

meaning of targeted phrasal verbs from context. For this reason, the researcher presents three tests. In the first one, he presents fifteen sentences containing phrasal verbs and asks the students to translate them depending on the context. In the second test, the researcher wants to ask the same question which was asked in 2009 MA placement (Choose the appropriate preposition to form the correct phrasal verbs) but he changes his mind because the students may choose the right answer by chance. Instead of that, he presents fifteen phrasal verbs (five of them are distractor) and asks the students to write meaningful sentences containing them. In the third test, they are asked to write an essay about smoking. This study is conducted in the class of fourth stage at University of Anbar/ Department of English to check or make a statistical account to measure the frequency of phrasal verbs.

VII. SUBJECTS AND SETTING

The researcher asks his students to access to internet and have an idea about phrasal verbs and their use. He also explains the components of this category in front of his students' eyes. The participants of this study are student at University Of Anbar/ College of Education for Humanities/ Department of English. The students are in the fourth stage. Their total number is seventy but the sample consists of thirty who have good level in English language. This sample is divided into two groups (males and females). It is divided equally. The test is conducted in two stages during the year (2019). The first stage took place before spring holiday in which the author asked his students to read about phrasal verbs by accessing internet. The second stage held after the holiday which extended three weeks.

VIII. MATERIALS

In spite of the fact that researches that tackle multiword expressions have increased especially in the second language acquisition but few previous studies deal with the difficulty of this category and the frequency of the items of this category. For this reason, this study presents three tests to the students. In the first test, they are asked to translate the sentences that contain phrasal verbs depending on the context. In the second one, they are asked to write meaningful sentences containing the given phrasal verbs while in the third the students are asked to write an essay of 100 words about the disadvantages of smoking to check students' frequency of using phrasal verbs. In the first test, the students are asked to translate the sentences and the meaning of phrasal verbs by inferring their meaning through the text. In the second test, they are asked to write sentences which contain given words. In the third test, they are asked to write an essay about the disadvantages of smoking because the researcher is sure that the students will use the phrasal verb (give up) and this may motivates them to use other phrasal verbs.

IX. SCORING AND DATA ANALYSIS

The results of the first test shows that more than twenty five students of the total number answer it correctly because they depend on the context to find out the real meaning of phrasal verbs while the answers of the second test are frustrated because the students answer all the phrasal verbs even those which are distractor badly. They do not have an idea about the components of this category. The results of the third test show that the students avoid using the elements of this category and their answers contain only one phrasal verb which is (give up) and this use is due for two reasons: 1- most students are familiar with this phrasal verb because they tackle the topic of the disadvantages of cigarette in the sixth secondary school. 2- This phrasal verb can be seen everywhere especially on the walls of high buildings to prevent teenagers from smoking.

X. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The author proposes the following questions:

1. What is the effect of the different learning conditions on learning and retention of phrasal verbs?

2. What is the effect of the previous knowledge on controlling and mastering the components of this category?

3. What is the rate of frequency of phrasal verbs in the selected sample?

4. Are female's answers better than those of males or there is no difference.

Hypothesis

1. The results of the previous studies show that the learners in the translation condition learns more than the same sample who depends on context condition but the researcher hypothesizes the opposite.

2. The previous knowledge has no effect on mastering this category because the students are not familiar with this kind of verbs.

3. The frequency of phrasal verbs is nearly null and this is due to the fact that these verbs are idiomatic in their nature.

4. This study hypothesizes that males and females answer the questions in the same way.

XI. FIRST TEST

The answers of the first test are expected and most of them are approximately correct. The students depend totally on the context to translate the sentences. The total number of students is thirty and six of them have bad translation while the others are correct. There is no difference between the answers of males and females. The bad translations will be presented here but only one of the correct answers will be chosen. Some sentences are answered correctly by all students; therefore the researcher chooses only one of them. The results prove the first question and support the first hypothesis and the fourth hypothesis.

1. Ella **tore up** the letter after she read it.

2. Their car **broke down** two miles out of town.

3. Be sure to **put on** a life jacket before getting into the boat.

4. We **left out** the trash for pickup.

5. It's time to **get on** the plane.

6. What will she **think up** next?

7. I'm having some trouble **working out** the solution to this equation.

8. We're going to have to **put off** our vacation until next year.

9. **Stand up** when speaking in class, please.

10. We'll have to **wake up** early if we want breakfast.

11. **Take off** your shoes before you walk on the carpet.

12. My dog likes to **break out** of his kennel to chase squirrels.

13. Did the manager **deal with** that customer's complaint.

14. I just can't seem to **get into** this book.

15. The plane **took off** from the airport.

1 -   خبئت ايلا الرسالة بعد قراءتها

احتفظت ايلا بالرسالة بعد قراءتها

طوت ايلا الرسالة بعد قراءتها

مزقت ايلا الرسالة بعد قراءتها

2 -   اصطدمت سيارتهم على بعد ميلين عن المدينة

انحدرت سيارتهم عل بعد ميلين عن المدينة

غرقت سيارتهم على بعد ميلين عن المدينة

تعطلت سيارتهم على بعد ميلين من المدينه

3 -   تأكد من اخذ سترة النجاة قبل الصعود للقارب

تأكد من نفخ سترة النجاة قبل الصعود للقارب

تأكد من عمل سترة النجاة قبل الصعود للقارب

تأكد من وضع سترة النجاة قبل الدخول إلى القارب.

4 -   **تركنا القمامة للالتقاط**

تركنا القمامة للرمي

تركنا القمامة للالتقاط

عزلنا القمامة اي فصلناها لعادة تدويرها

5 -   **حان وقت الحصول على الطائرة**

حان وقت الدخول الى الطائرة

حان وقت الحصول على الطائرة

حان وقت الصعود الى الطائرة

6 -   **بماذا ستفكر بعد ذلك**

7 -   **اواجه بعض المشاكل عاملا جهدي لحل المشكلة**

اواجه بعض المشاكل للعمل على حل المشكلة

واجهتني بعض المشاكل واعمل على حلها

اواجه بعض المشاكل   لايجاد حل لهذه المشكلة

8 - **يجب ان تستمر اجازتنا حتى العام القادم**

يجب ان ناخذ اجازتنا الان والعام القادم

يجب ان نلغي اجازتنا العام القادم

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يتعين علينا تأجيل اجازتنا حتى العام القادم

9 - قف عند التكلم في الصف رجاءا

10 - يجب ان نستيقظ مبكرا اذا كنا نريد الافطار

11 - اخلع حذاءك قبل المشي على السجادة

12 - كلبي يحب الخروج م بيته لمطاردة السناجب

13 - هل تعامل المدير مع شكوى الزبون

هل استجاب المدير لشكوى الزبون

هل استمع المدير لشكوى الزبون

هل درس المدير شكوى الزبون

14 - يبدو انني لااستطيع فهم الكتاب

يبدو انني لا استطيع الحصول على هذا الكتاب

يبدو انني لا استطيع شراء هذا الكتاب

يبدو انني لا استطيع التمتع بهذا الكتاب

15 - اقلعت الطائرة من المطار

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XII.   SECOND TEST

Most of students' answers of the second test are incorrect because most of them do not have an idea about multiple word expressions. They answer the distractor expressions. Both two sexes answer them wrongly. Two wrong answers are selected and the best answer will be showed in the table below. These answers support the second and the fourth hypotheses.

1- Ali's car broke into pieces in the accident.

2- Ahmed's mobile broke into two parts.

1- I get by the taxi to school.

2- Ali gets by the plane to Erbil.

1- Ali looks down on the floor to find the key.

2- Ahmed looks down on stairs to see his little sister.

1- You must hand in the box to Ali.

2- She hands in the letter to her.

1- They ran into the valley.

2- The car ran into the street.

1- They ran on the high mountains.

2- She ran on the hill to see the sunset.

	Phrasal verbs	Sentences
1	Break into	Someone broke into my car last night and stole the stereo.
2	Get by	Will you be able to get by this month with the little you have?
3	Look down on	His father always taught him not to look down on those people with less.
4	Get on with	Stop complaining and get on with your work!
5	Hand in	The boss wants you to hand in your figures for this month to him.
6	Put off	We're going to have to put off our trip to Spain until September.
7	Run into	I ran into Amir today at the supermarket. It was great to see him.
8	Showing off	I'm so tired of Sophie showing off her engagement ring all the time.
9	Give in	The police would not give in to the kidnapper's demands.
10	Drop in	I thought I would drop in for a cup of coffee. Is that okay?
11	Come across	Have you ever come across such an unusual piece of art?
12	Show up	It's important to show up on time.
13	Lift up	Lift up your feet when walking; you don't want to trip!
14	Blown over	The tree was blown over by the wind.
15	took off	He took off his hat to show me his new haircut.
16	get into	Distractor
17	Get about	Distractor
18	Run on	Distractor
19	Look in	Distractor
20	Show in	Distractor

XIII. THIRD TEST

The researcher had explained the topic of phrasal verbs and motivated them to use them in their answers. After doing that, he is frustrated because their answers do not contain any item of phrasal verbs except 'give up' which must be used in such situation. He selects two answers from the samples of the third test. The answers of this test support the third and fourth hypotheses.

First Answer

Smoking is one of the most common diseases in these days and is considered a disease that isn't controlled. Smoking harms the smoker and harms people who are near the original smokers. Smoking has become widespread because of local and global advertising that promote smoking, where we see celebrities and businessmen advertising to promote it.

Smoking causes cancer, lung disease, tracheal disease and also damage to teeth. So you should stay away from the smokers 15 meters at least. Government must give up smoking in the public places.

Second Answer

Smoking is a bad and dangerous habit; it causes serious diseases in the hearts and lungs of both smokers and passive ones. People must give up smoking; children as well as adults can be affected by this hateful habit. Non-smokers shouldn't be mixed with smokers.

The government should look to this case and give up smoking everywhere and consider that smoking is a crime and any person who smokes in the public places must be punished.

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