Research Article

SUDANESE EFL UNDERGRADUATES` CHALLENGES TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING IDIOMATIC ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The study aims to investigate the challenges hindering an understanding of IPVs in EFL university context. The subjects were 42 male and female Sudanese English language major university students at the Department of English Language in Al-Butana University. A questionnaire and achievement test were employed as instruments for data collection. The results showed that students face many challenges in understanding IPVs as follows: practically, there is no intended focus of the area of IPVs as an important part of language, general overuse of single word verbs instead of multi word verbs and adopting not more appropriate contexts in for practicing IPVs. Moreover, the findings revealed that teaching and learning contexts are not varied accordingly. Based on these findings, the study recommends that IPVs are important area of language that should increase focus on this area by as follows: creating more appropriate contexts and situations for the most common IPVs, increasing chances for practicing IPVs in different contexts, adapting teaching and learning techniques accordingly and making use of common IPVs parallel to single word verbs in the classroom interaction.

INTRODUCTION

Phrasal verbs (PVs) as general and idiomatic type in particular are becoming increasingly prominent with increasing influence of English language. They are in very common use in spoken and colloquial English as they are essential part of everyday communication. Phrasal verbs are said to be used more often in spoken than in written language and to be more frequent in informal than in formal registers. However, they are also found in more formal registers (Darwin & Gray 1999: 66). Thus, "no one can speak or understand English without a knowledge of phrasal verbs" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen Freeman 1999: 425). The importance of phrasal verbs is underpinned by the fact that they are so productive and used very frequently Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999: 431). In many cases the meaning of the phrasal verb cannot be deduced from its elements, i.e., it is being used idiomatically. For example: a learner who knows that *to tick* is to make a checkmark may have difficulty in understanding the sentence *The teacher ticked off the student for being late*, in which the phrasal verb *to tick off* means *to reprimand* or *to express disapproval*.

Statement of the Problem

In various occasions, it is noted that Sudanese EFL undergraduates often fail in figuring out meaning of idiomatic phrasal verbs (IPVs). This study investigates teaching and learning practices` challenges that hinder students` understanding of IPVs. The focus would be only on idiomatic phrasal verb category of the categories of semantic difficulty of phrasal verbs and not on the structural characteristic of IPVs.

Objectives

The study mainly aim to identify teaching and learning`s challenges that affect Sudanese EFL undergraduates` attitudes toward understanding IPVs.

Questions

- To what extent are Sudanese EFL undergraduates able to deduce meaning of IPVs?
- What are the challenges that undergraduates encounter to figure out IPVs?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Phrasal verbs were found in Middle English, common in Shakespeare, and often used to define verbs of Latin origin.

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Hornby (2004:B10) defines PVs (sometimes called multi-word verbs) as they are verbs that consist of two, or sometimes three, words to give a new meaning. The first word is the a verb and it is followed by an adverb (turn down) or a preposition (eat into) or both (put up with). These adverbs or prepositions are sometimes called particles". When the particle is a preposition, the combination is called a prepositional phrase. When the particle is an adverb and a preposition, the combination is called a phrasal prepositional phrase. The name multiword verb seems the best name since it covers all these forms. He also defines an idiom as it is a group of words whose meaning is different from the meaning of the individual words.

Based on the classification of PVs, cited from Kamarudin (2013) that, idiomaticity is an issue frequently discussed with respect to PVs. Various terms have been used in discussing the issue of idiomaticity, such as 'literal', 'transparent', 'non-literal', 'figurative', 'opaque' and 'idiomatic', to name some commonly used terms. The term 'literal' is usually equivalent to 'transparent', while 'non-literal', is equivalent to 'figurative' and 'idiomatic'. Both 'literal' and 'transparent' are frequently used in opposition to 'figurative' and 'idiomatic' (Dagut and Laufer 1985; Laufer and Eliasson 1993; Liao and Fukuya 2004). IPVs are not easy, and sometimes impossible, to interpret the meaning of the verb by combining the meaning of each parts for example, chew out, tune out, catch up, and put off (Celce-Murcia & LarsenFreeman, 1999; Schmitt & Siyanova, 2007; Side, 1990). Furthermore, idiomatic multi-word verbs seem more complex than their non-idiomatic counterparts (Moon, 1997; Wray, 2000).

According to semantic difficulties, PVs are categoried into three as follows: Frazer (1976) points out that, first, Literal (The transparent type) in which he states out that the verb retains its basic concrete meaning while the short adverb or preposition maintains a literal meaning that easy to understand. Fore example, *take down* the picture, *stay in* the car, *come into* the house, stand up ….est.). Second, Semi-Idiomatic **(**The semi-transparent (or semi-opaque) type), in this category, the verb retains its concrete meaning, but the short adverb or preposition adds a nuance that would not be discernible from its basic meaning. Even though the exact meaning of these PVs might not be clear, an approximate meaning might be grasped by a language learner. In other words, the phrasal verbs meaning is not exactly the total meaning of its components, but it can be understood or guessed correct in most cases. For example, *write up, write down*, write out. The basic notion of the three PVs above is the activity of writing, but each of the short adverbs conveys a different nuance to that activity of writing. Other examples include *wash up, wash off, wash down, read over, read through, read off, hand over, hand in, hand out, dry up, dry off, dry out, pay up, pay off, pay out, drive up, drive off, drive on.* Third category is idiomatic (The opaque or (non transparent) type). The combinations of this category are fully idiomatic. No part of the meaning of the combination is predictable from the meanings of the verb and the short adverb or the preposition. In other words, the meaning of the PV is not the total meaning of its components, and it is usually very difficult to be guessed unless the context makes it clear. For example, bring up (raise children), do away with (kill), count on (depend on), carry on (continue) ….est.

Cornell (1985: 270) reminds us, dealing with PVs turns out to be problematic owing to the phenomenon of polysemy. He further describes that a combination of a particular verb and particle may be polysemic in having both an idiomatic and a non-idiomatic use as well as having more than one idiomatic use. Illustrated below, an idiomatic phrasal verb *put up* can be used in different meanings: He *put* us *up* for the night. Who *put* you *up* to this? He *put up* a good fight.

Study conducted on use of phrasal verbs by Kamarudin (2013), showed that, the nature of phrasal verbs and cross linguistic factors, particularly the learners' L1, play a significant role in Malaysian learners' understanding and use of phrasal verbs. Their difficulties with PVs are further compounded as textbooks and dictionaries were also found to provide insufficient and inappropriate information with respect to PVs.

It means that that most studies that are carried out on phrasal verbs showed that IPVs are avoided and used one word instead so lack of practice and then little chance of understanding them.

Most of the studies conducted on IPVs proved the their difficulty and avoidance of using them. For example, Study conducted on difficulties of understanding opaque phrasal verbs by Abdelrahaman (2010) showed that, The differences between English and Arabic language is one of the reasons that cause the difficulties of understanding them. Moreover, negligence of English opaque phrasal verb in the syllabus. Also, study conducted on using multi-word units by Abd Elbagi (2001), revealed that employing ineffective techniques in teaching idioms and using inadequate material cause difficulties in understanding IPVs. In addition, differences between two languages (Arabic & English) and cultures causes problem pose by idiomatic English. In addition, study conducted by Liao and Fukuya (2004) found that Chinese learners only used fewer IPVs than literal ones, particularly idioms, in learners' writing. Also, study conducted on use of phrasal verbs by Kamarudin (2013), showed that, Malaysian learners avoid using idiomatic PVs and used one word verb instead.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative method was adopted to gather data from Sudanese EFL students through two instruments namely achievement test and questionnaire. The population of this study is EFL undergraduate students of third level specializing English language at faculty of education, University of Al-Butana, Sudan. Forty two students were randomly selected as sample to answer diagnostic test questions and to answer questionnaire questions. The samples are aged between 19 to 22. Their level in English language was estimated to be between high intermediate and advanced. Before entering university, the participants had previous knowledge of IPVs however in a very limited aspect.

Instruments

Test

The test is developed by the researcher and some of its dialogues and situations are taken from a test developed by Liao and Fukuya (2004) cited from Saiya (2011). Seven

selected idiomatic PVs (e.g. *hold on, go off, show up, turn down, run into, make up, show off*) are used in the test. These idiomatic PVs are selected because they are commonly used in spoken and written English. The test is divided into three parts; each part investigates particular aspect of using idiomatic PVs. Part one is in form of match 'A' with 'B' and the other two parts are multi choice questions. It is worth mention that

3ach part of the test is taken separately from another, starting with the part one successively end with part third. This because that the same IPVs are common in the three parts of the test.

Test Design

The test is divided into three parts as follows: Part one include four IPVs in which participants are asked to the match these IPVs with their meanings of given single-word verbs. This part of the test is mainly intend to investigates whether the students are able to deduce meaning of IPV sout of context.

Part two contains four questions to investigate whether the students are able to deduce meanings of IPVs within contexts or situations. By the way, it deals with the same idiomatic PVs that are used in the part one. Participants are asked to answer any question by selecting only one single-word verb from given options that to conform to the meaning of underlined IPVs used in the dialogue or situation.

Part three made up of three questions; each one with four options as two IPVs and two single-word verbs. These options contain two right answers one is an IPV and another a single-word verb option. The participants are asked to select only one from the four options to complete the meaning of the dialogue. This part is to finds out whether students are more familiar with using multiword verbs (PVs) or single-word verbs (e.g. she *made up* new stories) or single-word verbs (e.g. she *invented* new stories).

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire is designed to distributed to same students who are subjected to the test. The questionnaire consists of eight statements which try to reflect Sudanese EFL undergraduates` attitudes toward teaching and learning practices of IPVs as an important area of language. It was distributed to be answered after the test carried out.
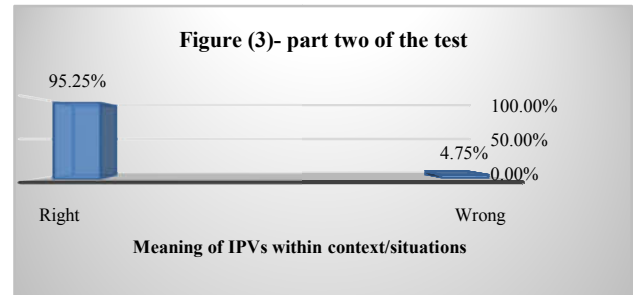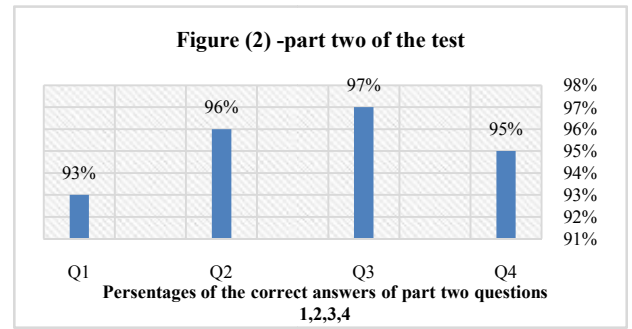
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Achievement test

Figure (1)- Part one of the test
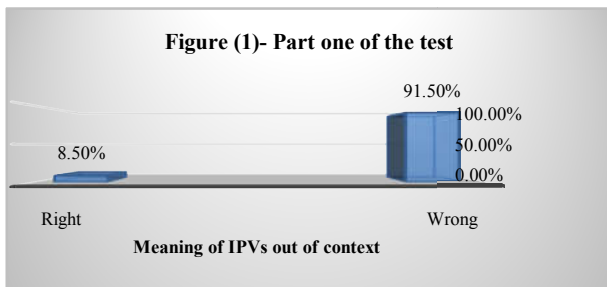
From the above figure(1) the result shows that the majority of the students reflect their inability of figuring out meaning of IPVswhen they are out of context/s. It means that lack of context is a big challenge for students to understand these type of verbs. Palmar, (1974) has shown that, the difficulty of IPVs

come from that its meaning cannot be deduced from the elements of the verb. So, lack of context of IPVs complicated the task of understanding them.

Figure (2) -part two of the test

Persentages of the correct answers of part two questions 1,2,3,4

Figure (3)- part two of the test

Meaning of IPVs within context/situations

In addition, the obtained results from both figures (4&5) show the majority of students' success in deducing meaning of PVs due to the contexts/situations in which they are engaged. This means that meaning of idiomatic PVs can be understood and correctly interpreted if they are occurred in appropriate context/situations. Abd Elbagi (2001), one of the reasons that cause difficulties in understanding IPVs that employing ineffective techniques in teaching idioms and using inadequate material. Waibel (2007) pointed out that, meaning of a IPVs depends on the context in which it is being used. So, lack of context and/or inappropriate context/situations of IPVs causes big challenge of understanding them. Thus, figuring out meaning of IPVs out of context/situations is very difficult task for EFL students. However, existence of IPVS in an adequate context/situation is very helpful for EFL student to understanding the intended meaning of IPVs.

Figure (4)- part three of the test

Percentages of using I PVs Vs single-word verb
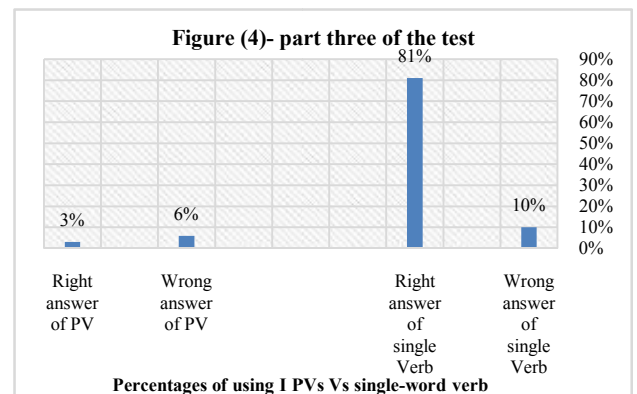
The results obtained from both figures (2&3) showed that the majority of the students tend to use single-word verb more much than multi-word verbs (PVs). It means that students are more familiar with dealing with single-word verbs and avoid using multi-words verbs (PVs).

Figure (5)- test- Part three

Single-word verbs Vs multi-word verbs
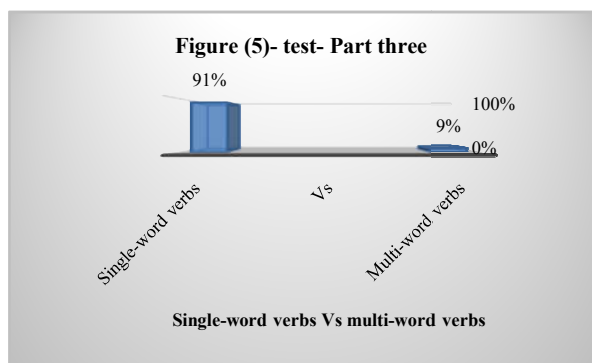
This may be as proved below for lack of practicing multi-words verbs in their spoken and written language. Abd Elbagi (2001) pointed out that most Sudanese students at the university level do not exploit multi expression when speaking or writing English themselves.

A questionnaire

Table 1

No.	Statement	Frequencies and percentage		
		Agree	Neutral	disagree
1	Idiomatic phrasal verbs are used as essential part of courses` syllabi.	7 16.7%	0 00.0 %	35 83.3 %
2	Sufficient practical activities of idiomatic phrasal verbs are achieved in the English language classroom.	5 11.9%	4 9.5%	33 78.6%
3	Single-word verbs are commonly used rather than multiword verbs (PVs), e.g. overuse verb '*refuse*' instead of phrasal verbs '*turn down'*.	36 85.7%	3 7.1%	3 7.1%
4	Idiomatic phrasal verbs are normally used outside classroom contexts.	2 4.8%	5 11.9%	35 83.3%
5	Idiomatic phrasal verbs have no analogue in Arabic language.	36 85.7%	6 14.3%	0 00.0
6	Idiomatic phrasal verbs are usually presented within inappropriate contexts.	40 95.2%	1 2.4%	1 2.42%
7	Lack competence of idiomatic phrasal verbs is a common sense among students.	29 69%	6 14.3%	7 16.7%
8	Various teaching and learning contexts are adopted in the idiomatic phrasal verbs` class accordingly.	6 14.3%	8 19%	28 66.7%

From the above table (1), the obtained results from the first statement showed that the majority of the respondents 83% that IPVs are not essentially establish as fundamental part of the courses that they have been taught. So, there is no intended focus on this area of language. Whereas 16% of respondents thought that IPVs are essential parts. According to the second statement that 78% of the respondents agree that there is no sufficient practical activities of IPVs in the English class. It means that there is no enough chances to master this area of language. However, 11% of the respondents agree with that there are sufficient practical activities. Third statement showed that 85% of the respondents tend to use single-word verbs instead of multi-word verbs (PVs). It means that there is more much stress on single-word verbs so single-word verbs are more practiced and more commonly used comparing to PVs. So, most of the students avoid using multi-word verbs where single-word verb available. Sara & Mohammadreza (2013) showed that Iranian learners of English at both advanced and intermediate levels avoided using phrasal verbs. They added that semantic complexity of phrasal verbs played an important role in the avoidance behaviour of learners as they avoided using figurative phrasal verbs more than literal ones. In the fourth statement the majority of the respondents 83% disagree

with that IPVs are normally used outside classroom context. This statement confirm the above claim of third statement that the majority of the students prefer using single word-verbs in their causal interactions. 84% of the respondents in the fifth statement agree with that IPVs have no analogue in Arabic language. So, differences cause difficulty. Laufer & Eliasson (1993) and Dagut & Laufer's (1985) cited from Sara & Mohammadreza (2013), came to conclusion the differences between the first and second languages play a major role in avoidance of using PVs for second language learners. A majority of the learners preferring the one-word verbs instead of phrasal verbs, and the avoidance was obvious with IPVs. In addition, Abd Elbagi (2001), stated that, differences between two languages (Arabic & English) and cultures causes problem pose by idiomatic English. The results of the sixth statement showed that the majority of the respondents 95% agree with that IPVs are not presented in more adequate context/situation. So, the results of the above test proved that majority of the participants were successfully able to interpret meaning of the IPVs used in context and the majority of the same participants failed in deducing meaning of the idiomatic PVs. Waibel (2007) pointed out that, meaning of a IPVs depends on the context in which it is being used. Therefore, creating appropriate context and/or situations for IPVs can be an effective teaching and learning strategies in understanding idiomatic PVs. The result of the seventh statement showed that 69% of the respondents agree with that lack competence of IPVs is a common sense among students, 16% of the respondents disagree and 14% of the respondents neutral. The results of the last statement namely eighth one, showed that 66% of the respondents that disagree with that various teaching and learning contexts are adopted in the IPVs` class, 14% of the respondents agree and 19% of the respondents answer to the neutral. Abd Elbagi (2001), stated that employing ineffective techniques in teaching idioms and using inadequate material cause difficulties in understanding IPVs. Thus, that depending on particular teaching and learning strategies create contexts that surely wouldn`t be appropriate for different IPVs.

CONCLUSION

The study in hand was in an attempt to shed light on the challenges that Sudanese EFL undergraduates encounter when understanding IPVs. The study focuses on the challenges of

IPVs` teaching and learning practices. The study has come with that much stress is given to single-word verbs and avoidance of using multi-word verb (PVs). Lack of practice of this area of language inside and outside classroom context. The study also revealed that students are able to deduce meaning of IPVs when in the context/situation on the contrary to those ones appeared out of context/situation. Depending on the obtained results, the study recommends adapting much more practical activities for the most common IPVs inside and outside classroom contexts. Vary teaching and learning techniques accordingly based on creating an adequate context/situation to each IPV.

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