تجنب طلاب المرحلة الثانوية السعوديين استخدام أفعال اللغة الإنجليزية المركبة

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ملخص الدراسة:

بُحث موضوع استخدام متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية للأفعال المركبة على نطاق واسع ولكن لا يزال هناك ندرة في الأبحاث التي تتناول تجنب اســـتخدام هذه الأفعال فيما يتعلق بالمعرفة الاســـتقبالية والإنتاجية. تناولت هذه الدراسة تجنب ١٠٠ طالب ســعودي من طلاب المرحلة الثانوية لهذه الأفعال وذلك باستخدام اختبارات استقبالية وإنتاجية لجمع البيانات. كما بحثت الدراسة الفرق بين تجنب الطلاب للأفعال المركبة في المعرفة الاستقبالية والإنتاجية. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة تجنب المشاركين استخدام الأفعال المركبة كما أن مســتوى تجنبهم في الاختبار الإنتاجي كان أعلى إحصائيًا من تجنبهم لهذه الأفعال في الاختبار الاســتقبالي. اختتمت هذه الدراسة ببعض التوصيات التي تؤكد على أهمية التدريس المباشر للأفعال المركبة في دروس اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تجنب، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الفعل المركب، إنتاجي، استقبالي.

Phrasal verb avoidance among Saudi secondary school students

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Abstract:

The use of phrasal verbs (PVs) by learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) has been researched widely, yet there is a dearth of research on how EFL learners' avoidance of PVs in relation to receptive and productive knowledge. This study explored the avoidance of PVs by 100 Saudi secondary school students, using receptive and productive tests for data collection. It also examined whether there was a difference between the students' avoidance with respect to receptive and productive knowledge. The findings revealed that the participants avoided using PVs and their level of avoidance in the productive test was significantly higher than in the receptive test. This study concludes with pedagogical implications recommending explicit teaching of PVs in EFL classrooms.

key words: avoidance, EFL, phrasal verb, productive, receptive>

Introduction:

One notable aspect of the English language's vocabulary is the presence of PVs, which combine a verb with a particle (either an adverb or a preposition) and operate semantically as a single entity (e.g., "show off") (Liao & Fukuya, 2004). Within the lexicon, PVs stand out as particularly abundant, productive, and challenging structures among multiword expressions (Zarifi & Mukundan, 2013, p. 212). Previous studies have underscored the significance and versatility of PVs in English, identifying them as a particularly tricky aspect of English language instruction (Alangari et al., 2020). This observation aligns with other research indicating that multiword verbs are often avoided or misused by second language (L2) learners whose native language (L1) is not from the Germanic language family (Alejo-Gonzalez, 2010). Therefore, they are considered 'one of the most notoriously challenging aspects of the English language' (Gardner & Davies, 2007, p. 339). For this reason, diverse English language learners face difficulty with PVs and avoid using them in language production, which is usually a result of learners' inability to recognise that even though multi-word verbs function as single semantic units, their meanings cannot always be predicted from the words of which they are comprised (Siyanova & Schmitt, 2007). That is, they are semantically non-compositional, as their meaning does not follow straight from the meanings of the constituent words (Strong & Boers, 2019). The variety in both form and meaning presents a notable difficulty for L2 to achieve proficiency in utilising

these elements, particularly in generating their own language (Omidian et al., 2019).

EFL Learners face challenges with PVs, leading them to avoid using these expressions in their language as will be discussed in the literature review section. These challenges are primarily related to the nature of PVSs as multi-word verbs that act as unified semantic entities, their meanings may be different from the individual words that form them (Siyanova & Schmitt, 2007). Also, learners' L1 might play a key role in facing these challenges, for example Saudi EFL leaners would encounter such challenges since the existence and status of PVs are not as clear as in English (Algethami & Almalki, 2016). Although several studies have examined PVs learning and avoidance, limited research has considered PVs avoidance in terms of receptive and productive knowledge.

Research objectives:

The present study aims to:

Explore whether Saudi EFL students avoid PVs. This will highlight any challenges that the Saudi EFL students face when using PVs.

Examine differences between Saudi EFL students' avoidance of PVs in language receptive and productive knowledge.

Research questions:

The current research examines the following question:

- Do Saudi EFL students avoid PVs? If so, is there a significant difference between Saudi EFL students' avoidance of PVs in receptive and productive tests?

The significance of the study:

While numerous investigations have explored the utilisation of PVs by English learners (e.g., Liao & Fukuya, 2004; Siyanova & Schmitt, 2007), additional research is necessary to ascertain how individuals with different linguistic backgrounds who are non-native speakers of English manage to either employ or circumvent PVs in both receptive and productive knowledge. It is hoped that the current study would provide valuable insights to language education, informing teachers and curriculum developers about the challenges that leaners encounter when they use PVs.

Study terminology:

Avoidance: 'it implies that the structure in question is known to (i.e., can be passively recognized by) the learners, but not freely used by them; failure to use a structure or word that is unknown to the learners is an indication merely of ignorance, not of learning difficulty' (Kleinmann, 1977, cited in Dagut & Laufer, 1985, p.73).

Phrasal verbs: they are defined as any two-part verbs consisting of a lexical verb followed (continuously or discontinuously) by an adverbial particle, which 'behaves to some extent either lexically or syntactically as a single verb' (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 1150).

Receptive knowledge and productive knowledge: 'receptive knowledge is learning vocabulary through listening or reading and recalling its meaning while productive knowledge is producing the meaning through speaking or writing and recalling its meaning' (Nation, 2001, p.24).

Literature Review:

English phrasal verbs are combinations of verbs and one or more particles (prepositions or adverbs) that together form a single semantic unit. These particles can change the meaning of the main verb, often adding nuances related to direction, intensity, completion, or other aspects of the action. Phrasal verbs are common in English and are used in both informal and formal contexts.

Avoidance as a strategy in second language learning:

The beginning of research on avoidance can be traced back to Schachter's (1974) renowned investigation, which analysed errors in relative clauses among L2 writers of English. (Becker, 2014). The use of avoidance strategies by L2 learners has attracted the attention of linguists for several decades. It is a vocabulary strategy in the taxonomies proposed by Schmitt (1997) and Nation (2001). According to Ellis (2008), 'Avoidance is said to take place when specific target-language features are under-represented in the learner's production in comparison to native-speaker production' (p. 954). Avoidance is conceptualised as the situation where a person possesses passive understanding of a particular L2 structure but chooses not to employ it in situations where it would be appropriate based on the norms of their L1 (VanPatten & Benati, 2015). Brown (2014) described two types of strategies that L2 learners utilise to avoid a particular syntactic or lexical item in the target language: (i) 'message abandonment' (leaving a message unfinished because of

language difficulty) and (ii) 'topic avoidance' (avoiding topic areas or concepts that pose language difficulties) (p. 138).

Previous research has shown that learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) prefer to use one-word verbs over PVs and that avoidance of PVs can be attributed to their semantic nature, syntactic structure and the differences between the learners' L1 and L2 (Ghabanchi & Goudarzi, 2012). That is, because some lexical or syntactic forms may be especially difficult for L2 learners to acquire, they may either avoid using them or instead replace difficult items with easier ones.

There is still debate about whether PVs exist in Arabic (Aldahesh, 2008). Due to scant research examining multi-word verbs in Arabic, the presence and status of PVs are not as transparent as they are in English (Algethami & Almalki, 2016). This view agrees with research on the utilisation of phrasal verbs (PVs) among learners, indicating that PVs tend to be prone to errors, particularly when learners don't have access to them in their native language (Paquot & Granger, 2012, p. 133). Additionally, the literature points out various other factors that can impact learners' understanding and usage of PVs, such as their proficiency level, the type of PV (Liao & Fukuya, 2004), its frequency of occurrence (Schmitt & Redwood, 2011), and the amount of exposure to English (Aldukhayel, 2014).

Avoidance of phrasal verbs:

Robust research has investigated the avoidance of PVs. One key study (Siyanova & Schmitt, 2007) compared the likelihood of

using multi-word vs. one-word verbs by both native speakers and advanced non-native speakers. A survey comprising 26 pairs of multi-word and one-word verbs revealed that non-native speakers were less inclined to employ multi-word verbs compared to native speakers in casual spoken situations. Moreover, the frequency of exposure to native-speaking environments didn't impact the probability of using multi-word verbs. Yet, when examining the same verb pairs in a corpus, it was observed that single-word verbs are commonly more prevalent in both written and spoken communication.

Becker (2014) explored the potential causes of avoidance among 52 Chinese learners. Three tasks were used over a one-hour period, which included multiple-choice, translation and story-retell exercises. Each had 10 literal and 10 figurative PVs chosen from a corpus. The findings showed that factors such as learning context, task type and PV type influence the extent to which learners avoid English PVs.

El-Dakhs (2016) examined this difficulty among 407 Egyptian EFL university students. The participants completed a paraphrase task, two gap-filling tasks and a questionnaire. The findings revealed that the avoidance of PVs in the students' production could be due to cross-linguistic differences, passive learning for comprehension and limited language exposure. These findings support a multi-faceted model for explaining learners' limited use of PVs.

Similar factors were found in Sonbul et al. (2020), who examined factors that might determine Saudi EFL learners' receptive and productive knowledge of polysemous PVs. The factors included '(1) raw PV frequency, (2) sense-based PV frequency, (3) entrenchment or individual word frequency, (4) sense opacity, (5) L2 estimated proficiency and (6) the amount and type of L2 exposure' (Sonbul et al., 2020, p. 1). The sixth factor was examined by Albaqami (2021), in which the frequency of occurrence might have accounted for EFL learners' receptive and productive knowledge of PVs. A total of 37 female Saudi secondary school students participated in the study by answering a receptive and productive test comprising 20 items with a random selection of two forms: PVs and their alternative single-word verbs. Participants were tasked with understanding the meanings of specific forms provided in a series of movie title posters (receptive knowledge). Subsequently, they were directed to incorporate these forms into suitable contexts of their own creation (productive knowledge). The findings showed that the participants found PVs challenging to comprehend and produce appropriately, but they performed significantly better on single-word verbs.

In terms of the role of avoidance in certain language skill abilities, Barekat and Baniasady (2014) examined how avoiding PV affected the writing skills of Persian English learners. They conducted three tests where participants had to choose between a PV and a one-word verb. Participants' mean scores determined their grouping: Group A had scores below the mean (higher avoidance),

and Group B had scores above (lower avoidance). Both groups then completed a writing task, with Group B outperforming Group A. Thus, this finding highlights the existence of PV avoidance in writing by EFL learners.

In the Saudi context, Algethami and Almalki (2016) investigated how EFL learners avoid using English PVs, considering the impact of PV types (literal versus figurative) and the duration of English language learning in a foreign context. They involved a varied group of Saudi EFL learners (30 participants, divided into first-year and third-year groups) in a PV multiple-choice test, comparing their performance with that of six native English speakers. The findings revealed that both groups of learners used fewer figurative PVs compared to the native English speakers. However, in the usage of literal PVs, the learner groups were comparable to the native speakers. Interestingly, the duration of English language learning did not influence the avoidance or usage of PVs, as both learner groups exhibited similar patterns in their PV usage regardless of the number of years spent learning English.

Several studies have suggested that assigning explicit tasks could positively affect PV learning outcomes. Almegren (2021) investigated the impact of using corpus-based activities on learning certain PVs among 49 female Saudi university EFL students. The study aimed to understand whether six hours of instruction using corpus-based activities was effective in teaching the forms of 40 PVs using an indirect method comprising corpus-based activities

conducted over six hours. The findings revealed that the method and timeframe employed had a positive effect on the form and use of PVs among Saudi EFL learners. It also presented significant results regarding learners' understanding of the metaphorical meaning of the PVs used.

Strong and Leeming (2023) examined the influence of a particular type of exercise on the acquisition of PVs by 118 learners of EFL. Participants were divided into two groups: one completed a gap-fill exercise with access to the answer key, while the other group received the answer key after completing the exercise. Their learning outcomes were evaluated through tests assessing both productive and receptive knowledge at two different time points. The findings from mixed-effects logistic regression analysis indicated that both approaches to the gap-fill exercise resulted in comparable levels of retention.

Methodology:

The current study adopted the quantitative research approach by collecting data using two tests as will be explained.

Participants:

One hundred secondary school students (Grade 12) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, participated in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, all of whom were males, 19 years old and native speakers of Arabic who began learning English in Grade 4 of primary school. The timetable allowed for four English classes in this secondary school, and each class duration was 45

minutes. Before the data collection, consent was first obtained from the students and they were provided with an overview of the study.

Study instruments:

The study applied two tests for data generation. The first test focused on receptive knowledge, while the second focused on productive knowledge. Test 1 (receptive) was adapted from Becker's (2014) research. Both tests comprised 20 items, and each one included two options: single-word and PV equivalent options (see Appendixes 1 and 2). The participants in Test 1 were asked to choose one answer to complete the blanks in sentences, while in Test 2, they were asked to choose one item to be used in writing one complete sentence.

Data analysis:

The data collected through the tests were processed and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 28. Descriptive statistics, such as percentages, means, standard deviations (SD) and t-tests, were conducted to identify variable frequencies and categories.

Results and discussion:

The results showed avoidance of PVs among the participants, with 75 participants (75%) achieving a score over 50% on Test 1 (receptive). Only 28 participants (28%) achieved a score over 50% on Test 2 (productive), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Number of participants who achieved over 50% on receptive and productive tests

Test	N	%
Receptive	75	75%
Productive	28	28%

There was an obvious disparity between the receptive and productive knowledge of PVs among the participants. Although most of the participants achieved a score over 50% on Test 1, the mean of their score is still considered average at slightly above 50% (11.53 out of 20), as shown in Table 2.

The results of Test 1 also revealed an average score of 11.53, with an SD of 2.75. In contrast, Test 2 (Table 2) yielded a lower average score of 7.95, with an SD of 2.32. These results indicate a moderate level of understanding of PVs (as shown in Test 1) but a significantly lower ability in their active use (as evidenced by Test 2). The higher average score on the receptive test suggests that students are somewhat familiar with PVs when they encounter them in context. However, the lower average on the productive test highlights a challenge in actively using these verbs in written English. The difference in scores between the two tests points to a notable discrepancy between passive recognition and active use of PVs by Saudi EFL learners. This discrepancy could be attributed to various factors, including learners' exposure to PVs and the inherently complex nature of PVs in English.

Table 2

***The mean and standard deviation of the results of Test 1
(receptive) and Test 2 (productive)***

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Receptive	100	11.53	2.75
Productive	100	7.95	2.32

The independent sample t-test was used to examine whether there was a difference in learners' results in receptive and productive tests. Table 3 indicates that on the productive tests, students showed higher avoidance concerning PVs, with a mean score of 7.95 out of 20. They showed lower avoidance in the receptive use of PVS, at an average of 11.53 out of 20. Table 3 indicates that there was a significant difference in Saudi EFL learners' knowledge of receptive and productive use of PVs, as the t-value amounted to 9.991 and the degree of freedom of 200 was significant (Sig. = 0.000).

Table 3

***Difference between Saudi EFL learners' results in receptive and
productive tests***

Skills	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T-value	Degree of Freedom	Sig. (two-tailed)
Receptive	100	11.53	2.75	9.991	200	0.000
Productive	100	7.95	2.32			

In general, the results of this study showed that Saudi secondary school students avoid PVs, especially in terms of productive knowledge. These results are consistent with and build upon prior studies in the field of EFL research. Moreover, the findings regarding the differentiation between receptive and productive knowledge of PVs are consistent with those of Liao and

Fukuya (2004), Siyanova and Schmitt (2007) and Alangari et al. (2020), who emphasised a prevalent obstacle encountered by EFL learners worldwide in using PVs productively. The results also align with the findings of Gardner and Davies (2007) and Strong and Boers (2019), who highlighted the complexities of PVs as one of the most difficult facets of the English language for non-native learners. The aforementioned challenges are compounded for Saudi students due to the substantial syntactic and linguistic distinctions between English and Arabic (Alejo-Gonzalez, 2010). Due to these obstacles, the avoidance behaviour observed in this study can be interpreted as a natural consequence. This finding was confirmed by Schachter (1974), Ellis (2008) and VanPatten and Benati (2015), who reported that the notion of avoidance is manifested unmistakably in the participants' propensity to abstain from using PVs, especially for productive tasks. This avoidance is possibly a tactic employed to bypass the intricacies and possible mistakes linked to the utilisation of PVs. The results can be attributed to the mismatch between Arabic and English (Aldahesh, 2008; Algethami & Almalki, 2016) and Saudi secondary school students' limited exposure to English PVs (Aldukhayel, 2014; Sonbul et al., 2020). Opportunities for naturalistic language acquisition, which are essential for mastering complex linguistic structures, such as PVs, are severely restricted by this lack of exposure.

Insights into the avoidance of PVs by Saudi EFL students are illuminated by this study, which also reveals a difference between

receptive and productive knowledge. The discrepancy between receptive and productive knowledge of PVs implies that although students are instructed in English beginning in Grade 4, they still encounter challenges in using PVs. This discrepancy holds significant ramifications for the importance of considering explicit PV instruction in classrooms.

Limitations:

The sample size and all participants being from one school limit the application of the results of the current study. Moreover, given its scope, the study does not consider qualitative inputs, a limitation that may be rectified by future endeavours. Longitudinal studies may be useful for observing the evolution of students' mastery of PVs in response to various instructional interventions. Conducting research on the efficacy of distinct pedagogical methodologies, including corpus-based learning, blended learning and gamification, to augment the productive utilisation of PVs would yield significant insights. Finally, comparative research involving students of various linguistic backgrounds may provide a more comprehensive outlook on the difficulties and approaches associated with learning PVs in EFL contexts.

Conclusion:

This study unveiled the avoidance of PVs by Saudi secondary students as well as the difference between their avoidance in receptive and productive knowledge, wherein productive testing showed a greater degree of avoidance. This result not only

corroborates prior research but also underscores the particular obstacles encountered by EFL learners who speak Arabic. The findings highlight the cognitive and linguistic challenges that learners face when using PVs, especially in situations in which the structure and meaning of the learners' native language deviate significantly from English. This highlights the necessity of considering explicit PV instruction in classrooms.

Recommendations and suggestions:

The prevalent PV use deficit can be corrected by enhanced pedagogical approaches, as Almegren (2021) and Strong and Leeming (2023) noted. These studies suggest that integrating corpus-based activities and gap-fill exercises could potentially improve learners' comprehension and application of PVs. Greater emphasis must be placed on the fruitful use of language in educational approaches. The curriculum's current emphasis on receptive skills should be counterbalanced with an equivalent emphasis on productive skills. PVs should be taught explicitly, which can be accomplished by employing interactive pedagogical tasks that promote active language utilisation, including role-plays, discussions and writing exercises that centre on the contextual application of PVs. Furthermore, the findings underscore the imperative for curriculum designers to produce resources that address the development of both communicative and receptive language abilities. The research also underscores the necessity for additional investigations to examine the distinct obstacles

encountered by Saudi students when using PVs. Future research could examine the efficacy of various instructional approaches in enhancing EFL students' productive use of PVs. Finally, longitudinal research may yield valuable insights into the long-term effects of consistent exposure and practise on the acquisition of proficiency in PVs.

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Appendix 1:

Test 1 – Receptive

Read the following dialogues below and then circle the letter (A or B) of the word that best completes the blank space:

1. I can't stand it when we're late. Would you please ………… !

    Alright, I'm coming. Just wait a minute!

    a. come in   b. hurry

2. He's so lazy. He would ………… at noon every day.

    Why don't you ask him to find a job then?

    a. awake   b. get up

3. So, how did things go at the doctor's office today.

    Well, she was shy, so he wouldn't ………… her clothes in front of the doctor.

    a. remove   b. take off

4. What are you doing here? I thought I told you to ………… here!

    Okay, okay. I'm leaving. Calm down.

    a. leave   b. get off

5. Why didn't you ………… last night?

    I know, I'm sorry. I just got so busy with my work.

    a. come over   b. visit

6. He always yells at her about the work she does or doesn't do around the house.

    She should just learn to him ………… sometimes.

    a. stand up to   b. confront

7. So, when did this actually happen last night?

The alarm ………… sometimes after midnight.

  a. went off   b. sounded

8. We ………… the car just before it started raining.

  Wow! You were lucky because we got soaked.

  a. enter   b. got in

9. We need to buy a garbage can, because the neighbor don't like to ………… our trash.

  Yeah, they seemed upset about our trash always blowing into their yard.

  a. pick up   b. collect

10. Did you ………… some weight recently?

  Actually, I gained a couple pounds because I stopped jogging in the morning.

  a. put on   b. gain

11. Did you see all the changes that bill made in the store?

  Yeah, I can't believe what's ………… at that place.

  a. happening   b. going on

12. Someone's got to tell Andy what happened.

  Let's not tell him now. I don't want him to ………… the terrible news just yet.

  a. discover   b. find out

13. Her parent ………… the car because she was caught driving after she was drinking.

  It sounds like it was her own fault then. I don't feel bad for her.

  a. remove   b. took away

14. Was he mad about the missing money?

He didn't care about losing the money. He just wanted to ………… credit cards.

a. recover   b. get back

15. The dunk man wouldn't the bus.

So, what did the driver do? Did he stop ………… the bus?

a. remove   b. took away

16. Hey, good to see you back. How was the trip to Vegas?

The trip to Las Vegas ………… as scheduled.

a. occurred   b. came off

17. What happened to all the magazines you were getting?

My subscription ………… last month.

a. ran out   b. expired

18. I don't care who it is. I'll date anyone at the moment.

Come on don't take the first girl that ………… either.

a. comes along   b. appears

19. My student always ………… excuses for not attending the class.

Do you believe what she says?

a. invents   b. makes up

20. They ………… the idea to travel to Beijing this summer.

But that's all they used to talk about. Was the money tight?

a. gave up   b. stopped

Appendix 2:

Test 2 - Productive

Choose one of the verbs in each item and use it in a meaningful sentence.

1. come on   hurry

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2. get up   awake

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3. take off   remove

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4. get out of   leave

----

5. come over   visit

----

6. sand up for   confront

----

7. went off   sounded

----

8. got in   entered

----

9. pick up   collect

----

10. put on   gain

----

11. going on   happing

----

12. find out   discover

----

13. took away   removed

----

14. get back   recover

----

15. get off   exist

----

16. came off   occurred

----

17. ran out   expired

----

18. come along   appear

----

19. makes up   invents

----

20. gave up   stopped