

## TEACHING PHRASAL VERBS THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

### İletişimsel Yaklaşım ile Deyimsel Fiillerin Öğretilmesi

**Kağan BÜYÜKKARCI**

Arş. Gör. Çukurova Üniversitesi  
Eğitim Fakültesi İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı  
kagan\_fb@hotmail.com

#### **Abstract**

*In our age the necessity of vocabulary teaching, especially phrasal verb teaching, has gained more importance than ever. The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of communicative approach on teaching phrasal verbs to university students. This study gives a chance to understand how phrasal verbs differ from the other words, and moreover it provides us with an opportunity to compare the traditional methods with communicative approach. At the end of the research process, there is a noteworthy difference between the experimental and control groups. When analyzed, it is clearly seen that experimental group students have got a more favorable and higher result than the control group students. In the light of the literature on the methods and approaches that are used to teach phrasal verbs, it is clear that experimental group students who were taught phrasal verbs in communicative approach have shown a better performance and learning process which means that communicative approach is really effective in phrasal verb teaching.*

**Keyword:** Teaching Vocabulary, Phrasal Verb, Communicative approach (CA), Traditional Method

#### **Özet**

*Çağımızda kelime öğretimi, özellikle deyimse fiillerin öğretilmesi daha fazla önem kazanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı iletişimsel yaklaşımın üniversite öğrencilerine deyimse fiillerin öğretimi üzerindeki etkisini araştırmaktır. Bu çalışma deyimse fiillerin diğer kelimelerden nasıl farklılaştığı konusunu anlama şansı vermekle birlikte aynı zamanda geleneksel dil öğretim metotları ve iletişimsel yaklaşımı karşılaştırma fırsatı vermektedir. Araştırma sürecinin sonunda deney ve kontrol grupları arasında kayda değer bir fark bulunmuştur. Deney grubunun, kontrol grubuna göre daha tatminkâr ve yüksek sonuçlara ulaştığı görülmüştür. Deneysel fiillerin kullanılmasına dönük metot ve yaklaşımlar incelendiğinde, iletişimsel yaklaşım ile deneysel fiil öğretilen deney grubu öğrencileri daha iyi bir performans ve öğrenme süreci sergilemiştir ve bu da göstermektedir ki iletişimsel yaklaşım, deyimse fiil öğretiminde oldukça etkilidir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kelime Öğretimi, Deyimsel Fiil, İletişimsel Yaklaşım, Geleneksel Metot.

### **Introduction**

It is impossible to learn a language and communicate accurately without learning the vocabulary in that language. It is the same with learning a foreign language. So it can be said that vocabulary learning is the most necessary part of learning a foreign language. Students' knowledge of vocabulary relates directly to their comprehension. McCarthy (2003) states that no matter how well the students learn the grammar of a language, or no matter how well the sounds of the second language are studied, communication cannot occur in a meaningful way without the words to express a wide range of meanings.

Richards (1976) expresses that vocabulary has characteristically been ignored in foreign or second language instruction. Partly, this may be due to the fact that many teachers assume that vocabulary instruction amounts to telling students to make guesses about the meaning of a word with regard to the grammatical and pragmatic context in which the word is found. However, several recent studies have showed that contextual guessing by second language learners can be very problematic. For example, Huckin and Joady (1999, 181) state some other aspects that have to be considered such as 'the type and size of vocabulary needed for accurate guessing, the degree of exposure to a word needed for successful acquisition, the efficacy of different word-guessing strategies, the value of teaching explicit guessing strategies, the influence of different kinds of reading texts, the effects of input modification, and, more generally, the problems with incidental learning.' Oxford and Scarcella (1994), on the other hand, observe that while decontextualized learning (word lists) may help students memorize vocabulary for tests, students are likely to rapidly forget words memorized from lists. McCarthy (1990) argues that a word learned in a meaningful context is best assimilated and remembered. Armstrong (2004) states that included in the native speaker's linguistic competence is a great deal of information concerning the surface behavior of phrasal verbs in English, behavior that is visible on the written page or audible in the utterances of native speakers. This information includes the transitivity of the particles involved and the possible word order of the elements of the phrasal verbs and their objects.

This information is unconscious and not readily retrievable, except perhaps in grammaticality judgment tests. Such knowledge is part of the linguistic competence of the native speaker of English. Although it is not readily retrievable, the native speaker can, in certain circumstances, be made consciously aware of it. A second language learner, however, can only be aware of these phrasal verbs and their usages by spending more

time on them, and if possible, use these phrasal verbs in their conversations in classroom sessions.

### ***Phrasal Verbs***

Through communicative approach in language teaching, learners are generally exposed to phrasal verbs from a very early stage in their learning. In most of the beginner courses, learners describe their daily routine and are exposed to phrasal verbs such as *wake up*, *get up* as lexical items. Much of classroom language includes phrasal verbs: *listen out* for the expressions, *take out* a pencil and paper, and in these early stages they do not cause many problems because they are relatively straight forward as their meaning is literal or the context in which they are used is very clearly understood. As learning continues learners meet more complex forms: *get on with ...*, *look forward to ...*, which they understand and can use in controlled situations but which they tend to avoid in freer situations.

Schneider (2004) says that phrasal verbs for example *find out* or *call off*, are verb-particle combinations which are frequently semantically not transparent at all and strongly idiomatic, so the combination of two words to a new, complex lexical unit is practically complete. Bowen & et al. (1985) state that the phrasal verb is often made up of a content word and one or more particles. Phrasal verbs are especially rich in oral communication. Although native speakers of English have no difficulty with them, the learners of English as a second language find them complicated, difficult and hard to learn or memorize. Wallace (1982) explains a phrasal verb as a verb and a preposition or an adverb creating a meaning different from the original verb. Phrasal verbs are structural units like prepositional phrases. The main difference between them is that prepositional verbs cannot be separated. For example:

- Jimmy waited for her for two hours.

However, most of the time, we can separate phrasal verbs and put the nouns or pronouns between the main verb and the preposition or adverb. For example:

- He turned on the lights. Or
- He turned the lights on.

Because their meanings are idiomatic, there is no logical pattern or formula for learning phrasal verbs, and what makes it worse is that many phrasal verbs have more than one idiomatic meaning. For instance, *take back* can also mean to return merchandise for a refund. (John went to the mall to *take back* the sweater he bought). Britten and Dellar (1995) state that the same phrasal verb may have several different meanings. This is because each of the commonest adverb particles (such as up, down, on, off,

etc.) has a lot of different meanings apart from its basic position or movement meaning. For example:

- He put down the box.
- This grocery store put down the prices.
- I've put down my name on the list.
- Jerry put down the boy who was bothering him.

Brown (2004) states that students' struggle with phrasal verbs has three main reasons. First, complete numbers: currently there are over 4,000 phrasal verbs, many of which are everywhere in the written and spoken forms, and the formal and informal registers of British, American and Australian English. Knowledge of the most common of these is essential if one wants to understand and speak English well. A second challenge is that their meanings are often totally different to the meanings of the individual words of which they are composed, i.e. many are non-compositional and thus idiomatic.

Moreover, they may have several meanings, e.g. a phrasal verb such as *put out* can have many meanings. A final learning problem is the actually unpredictable grammar of phrasal verbs, mostly the conditions governing the separation of the verb and particle. The rules relating to word order, transitivity, passive constructions, and whether a verb is followed by gerund or infinitive also need to be considered.

#### ***Grammar of Phrasal Verbs***

As stated above, this separation of the verbs and the particles, and the transitivity cause a great problem for the learners. The most important thing to learn about the grammar of phrasal verbs is where to place the object. Should we put it before or after the particle? The first type of phrasal verb is the *separable* ones which can be separated. Then the object may be placed between them. For instance:

- His mother **brought up** his son with great difficulties. Or
- His mother **brought** his son **up** with great difficulties.

However, if the direct object is a pronoun, we must certainly separate these two parts and put the pronoun between them. For example:

- My father turned on the radio.
- My father turned **it** on.
- I picked up Ahmet.
- I picked **him** up.

*Inseparable* phrasal verbs, on the other hand, are the ones whose parts cannot be separated, and always remain together. We cannot put the object between these two parts. It does not matter whether we use a noun or a pronoun. Gilman (1998: 4) shows these kinds of words in a daily context:

*Narrator:* It is night. Pat is under a street lamp looking for his car key. His friend Al sees him.

*Al:* Hi, Pat. What are you doing?

*Pat:* I'm looking for my car key. I can't believe I lost it! I can't do without my car. I've got to have it to go get my mother at the airport in a few hours.

*Al:* Let me help you. I'm usually good at finding things. My family always depends on me to find things they lose.

In this context we can easily see that these underlined phrasal verbs cannot be separated. It makes no difference if a noun or a pronoun is used. It is not possible to put the noun or pronouns between the verb and adverbs or prepositions.

*Transitive* phrasal verbs take a direct object. An object can follow the verb. These types of verbs have two types mentioned before under the name of separable and inseparable phrasal verbs. Meanwhile, the object, whether it is a noun or a pronoun, may be after the adverb or between the verb and the adverb.

- I talked into my father letting me borrow the car. Or I talked my father into letting me borrowing the car.

- I looked the phone number up. Or I looked up the phone number.

- They really have very difficult problems among themselves. They need to talk them over like adults.

The last phrasal verb type is the *intransitive* phrasal verbs. They do not take any object after the adverb or between the verb and the adverb. This makes the structure very simple. There is no passive form with the intransitive phrasal verbs.

- When we were in Antalya, we loved to eat out in sidewalk cafes.

- After this chapter, I went on to the next one.

- I woke up with a loud baby cry.

### ***Communicative Approach and Phrasal Verbs***

Richards and Rogers (2001) state that the origins of Communicative Approach (CA) can be found in the language teaching system of England, which dates from the 1960s. Communicative Approach was an effort to overcome some of the threatening factors in second language learning. The approach seemingly removed the threat of all-knowing teacher, of competing against peers. All these threats may lead to a feeling alienation and inadequacy. Brown (2001) says that the teacher allowed the learner to determine the type of conversation and to analyze the foreign language inductively. In the situations in which explanation or translation was almost

impossible, it was the learner who became a counselor to aid the motivation and capitalize on essential motivation.

In this CA, according to Kiziltan (1988), the teacher and the students have roles different from the other methods. The teacher does not act as an instructor but more like a facilitator of the student's learning. Students can be accepted as communicators. They try to make the others understand by communicating in the target language though they are not competent in the target language. Demirel (1999: 52) also emphasizes some of the special features of Communicative Approach:

- More importance is given to the written and spoken activities that are meaningful for the students.
- Teaching is students-centered.
- Teaching activities are generally based on dialogs, group activities, simulation, problem solving and educational games.
- The aim is to teach the materials that are written and used in daily life.
- The teacher is expected to be adequate in both his native tongue and in the target language.
- The role of the teacher is to help students to communicate.

### **Research Design**

#### ***Participants***

The participants of this study are fifty four freshmen students of Selcuk University English Teaching Department. These participants took the university entrance exam to be a student in this department, which shows that their English level is almost same. The control group of this study, day class, consists of twenty seven students, and night class, experimental group, consists of twenty seven students. The ages of the students' were between 18-20, and most of these students were female. Both classes were used not to disrupt students' regular schedule. The socio-economic status of the students was similar, majority of them coming from middle class families. By attending the classes, all the students took part in the study and completed both pre- and post-test. Both classes were exposed to same content and same duration that was 40 minutes each lesson.

#### ***Treatment***

These have been the steps of the study during the experimental study:

1. First of all, the test questions prepared for the measurement of the students' phrasal verb knowledge have been selected from Flower (1993: 108-112).
2. Forty questions have been selected for the reliability application.

3. Then randomly selected fifty seven freshmen students of day class and night class have been applied to these questions.

4. Ten questions, which almost all students answered correctly and incorrectly, were eliminated. After reliability application to these students, ten questions have been eliminated by using Item and Test Analysis Program—ITEMAN (tm) for Windows Version 3.50.

5. After verification of reliability of the test questions, pre-test consisting of thirty questions has been applied to both classes.

6. The competence levels of these university students were nearly the same because they passed the university entrance exam, which is a standardized, test, and came to this department with very similar scores.

7. Then the four week teaching period has begun, and control group has been taught the phrasal verbs by traditional methods such as just filling in the blanks and explaining the meaning of phrasal verbs. The classroom sessions have been 2 hours for each week.

8. The experimental group has been taught by communicative approach such as discussing the phrasal verbs before telling the meanings of the words.

9. At the end of this one month period, the students have been applied the post-test.

10. The results of the tests then have been analyzed.

The pre and post-tests are used to measure the knowledge of the students. These tests that are multiple choices consist of thirty multiple choice questions. Both the control and the experimental groups have been applied this multiple choice test. The control group was taught by traditional methods such as grammar translation in which the students do not take part in the activities communicatively, or giving the Turkish equivalents of the phrasal verbs. However, the experimental group was taught by communicative approach which enabled them to use the target language as much as possible. The students in the experimental group completed some tasks such as a variety of games, role plays, simulations, and task-based communication activities have been prepared to support communicative learning period. These typically are in the form of one-of-a-kind items: exercise handbooks, cue cards, activity cards, pair-communication practice materials, and student-interaction practice booklets. This helped students take part in the activities because they were interesting and meaningful for them, and this also eased the atmosphere.

In classroom sessions, the use of authentic, from-life materials were used to support communication. These included language-based realia, such as signs, magazines, advertisements, and newspapers, or graphic and visual

sources. The purpose was to measure the possible differences that might occur after these two different methods used to teach phrasal verbs. After this treatment, the post-test has been applied and the results have been analyzed by t-test.

#### **The Analysis and Interpretation of the Experimental Study**

In this part the aim is to present the analysis and interpretation of the collected data about the effects of communicative approach on teaching phrasal verbs in English. The data that have been collected from the students by this experiment will be examined in the parts of this chapter. The analysis and the explanation of this study will be done on the basis of statistical calculations.

	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>PRE-TEST</b>	<b>Experimental</b>	27	20,93	3,700	1,75	0,085
	<b>Control</b>	27	19,30	3,099		

**Table 1. Group Statistics of Pre-test**

The first table shows the pre-test results. The comparison of the phrasal verb knowledge levels of the two group students has been tested by using t-test before the research. According to the analysis results, the mean of experimental group is 20, 93. And the mean of control group is 19, 30. The 't' value that is applied to analyze the difference between the levels of the two groups is 1, 75. According to this value, there is no meaningful difference in the 0, 05 significance level. This means that the group levels are close or almost the same.

	<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
<b>POST-TEST</b>	<b>Experimental</b>	27	22,00	2,689	3,05	0,000
	<b>Control</b>	27	18,93	3,012		

**Table 2. Group Statistics of Post-test**

In the table 2 above, we can see the post-test results of the experimental and control group students. According to table 2, the mean of experimental group students is 22, 00. The mean of the control group students is 18, 93. The 't' value applied to describe the difference between the test results of the two groups is 3, 95.

This finding shows a significant difference. At the end of the research process, there is a noteworthy difference between the two groups.



When analyzed, it is clearly seen that experimental group students have got a more favorable and higher result than the control group students.

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p
<b>OUTCOME</b>	<b>Experimental</b>	27	1,07	2,645	1,96	0,049
	<b>Control</b>	27	-,37	2,789		

**Table 3. Group Statistics of Results**

In the table 3, we see the score attained from the test results of the students. This outcome scores have been calculated by subtracting the result points of the each student' pre-test from the post-test scores. As a result of comparing the outcome results of the students, experimental group students' scores have been found as 1, 07, and the control group students' score is - 0, 37. The average difference of the two group students shows a meaningful difference. Whereas there has been a decrease in the control group students' result, in the experimental group there has been a desired improvement.

This shows that the communicative approach that has been applied to experimental group students can be said to be successful as expected. Meanwhile, the approach has affected the students in learning phrasal verbs in a positive way. However, the control group students, who have been applied traditional methods, have shown a worse result.

### **Conclusion**

Getting students to come to terms with phrasal verbs is a challenge as they are rather difficult to learn. Learning phrasal verbs out of the dictionary can help, but students really need to read and hear phrasal verbs in context for them to be able to truly understand the correct usage of phrasal verbs. In our country, still, the easy way, which is explaining the meaning or just giving the Turkish equivalent of the phrasal verbs, is usually used to teach these verbs or other forms of vocabulary. But, in the light of the literature on the methods and approaches that are used to teach phrasal verbs, it is clear that experimental group students who were taught phrasal verbs in communicative approach have shown a better performance and learning process which means that communicative approach is really effective in phrasal verb teaching.

Another thing to be said is that in teaching phrasal verbs, it would be much better to teach these verbs through discussions and forcing the students to find out their meanings in context. At the beginning giving only the English explanation or denotative meaning would be more useful. Phrasal verbs are problematic for students to learn and use because the meanings of them are much different from the parts that make the phrasal verb. That is to

say, memorizing these verbs and learning the Turkish equivalent of phrasal verbs are just a temporary solution. Instead, teachers should create a classroom atmosphere that makes the students use the language and this vocabulary actively with authentic and real world materials.

---

#### REFERENCES

- ARMSTRONG, K. (2004). Sexing up the Dossier: A Semantic Analysis of Phrasal Verbs for Language Teachers. *Language Awareness*, 13(4), 213-224.
- BRITTEN, D. & G. DELLAR, (1995). *Using Phrasal Verbs*. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall International.
- BOWEN, J.D., H. MADSEN, & A. HILFERTY. (1985). *TESOL Techniques and Procedures*. Rowley: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.
- BROWN, D. H. (2001). *Teaching by Principles An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. Second Edition. New York: Longman.
- BROWN, R. (2004). *Review of Really Learn 100 Phrasal Verbs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- DEMIREL, Ö. (1999). *İlköğretim Okullarında Yabancı Dil Öğretimi*. Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi.
- FLOWER, J. (1993). *Phrasal Verb Organizer*. London: Commercial Color Press.
- GILMAN, C. (1988). *On Stage with English Spotighting Two-word Verb Idioms*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- HUCKIN, T. & J. Joady. (1999). Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition in a Second Language. *SLLA*, 21, 181-193.
- KIZILTAN, N. (1988). *Vocabulary Teaching in Communicative Approach*. Unpublished Master Thesis. Hacettepe University, Ankara: Turkey.
- OXFORD, R.L. & R. C. SCARCELLA. (1994). Second language vocabulary learning among adults: State of the art in vocabulary instruction. *System*, 22 (2), 231-43.
- McCARTHY, M.J. (1990). *Vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McCARTHY, M. (2003). *Vocabulary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- RICHARDS, J. (1976). The Role of Vocabulary Teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 10 (1). 77-89.
- RICHARDS, J. & T. RODGERS. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- SCHNEIDER, E. W. (2004). How to Trace Structural Nativization: particle verbs in the world Englishes. *World Englishes*, 23 (2), 227-249.
- TOZCU, A. and J. Coady. (2004). Successful Learning of Frequent Vocabulary through CALL also Benefits Reading Comprehension and Speed. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 17 (5), 473 – 495.
- WALLACE, M. J. (1982). *Teaching Vocabulary*. Oxford: Heinemann.