

The Review and Prospect of the Acquisition and Teaching Methods of Phrasal Verbs

Liu Wang¹, Songsong Chen^{2*}

¹Postgraduate Student of the School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Hubei, P. R. China.

²Associate Professor of the School of Foreign Studies, Yangtze University, Hubei, P. R. China.

*Corresponding Author

Received: 1 Oct 2020; Received in revised form: 10 Nov 2020; Accepted: 14 Nov 2020; Available online: 21 Nov 2020

©2020 The Author(s). Published by The Shillonga Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract—The phrasal verb (PV) plays an important role in the English output, but the English learners' acquisition and usage situation of PVs is not so optimistic. Thus, phrasal verb has always been the hot research topic for the recent years. The previous researches mainly include the current English learners' usage situation or the avoidance of the phrasal verbs, the factors affecting the acquisition of the phrasal verbs like the social and subjective factors and the linguistic rules, and the different teaching methods of phrasal verbs like the different input and output ways and the combination of input and output ways. All of these aspects are deserved to be studied and concluded to find out more effective methods for phrasal verbs acquisition and teaching. And the combination of cognitive linguistic method and the task-based output method maybe deserved to be tested for the potential advantages of both ways and the research gap.

Keywords—Phrasal Verbs, Avoidance of PV, Factors affecting PV learning, PV Teaching.

I. INTRODUCTION

The phrasal verb consists of verb and particle(s), which usually exists in the forms of verb plus preposition, verb plus adverb or verb plus adverb and preposition. The phrasal verb can act as an independent verb unit in the expression(Quirk et al, 1985). And using the phrasal verbs fluently can make learners' English expression more authentic. While phrasal verbs are extremely difficult, the acquisition and mastery situation of students is not optimistic, and it is easy for them to avoid the phrasal verbs. Thus, phrasal verbs are deserved to be studied to form a relatively standardized and complete learning and teaching paradigm for phrasal verbs which can be used to reduce learning pressure and improve learning efficiency. And this review mainly incorporates the current English

learners' usage situation and the avoidance of the phrasal verbs, the factors affecting the acquisition of the phrasal verbs like the social and subjective factors and the linguistic rules, and the teaching methods of phrasal verbs like the different input and output ways and the combination of input and output ways.

II. THE USAGE SITUATION AND AVOIDANCE OF PHRASAL VERBS

The avoidance in the second language acquisition was firstly put forward by Schachter(1974). Yan Liao and Yoshinori J. Fukuya(2004) did a questionnaire survey and analyzed the results. Then they drew the conclusion that L2 learners will use less phrasal verbs than native English

speakers and the utilization rate of phrase verbs by high level second language learners is much higher than that of medium level language learners, and it is also pointed out that the improvement of second language level will reduce the avoidance rate. Zhang Bin(2007) made the multiple choice tests and interviews for the participants, and found that intermediate level learners generally avoid using English phrasal verbs, while middle and advanced level learners tend to avoid using figurative phrasal verbs. Based on the Chinese oral and written language corpus, YuJue(2011) made the quantitative study and micro-analysis and get the Chinese English majors' usage situation of the phrasal verbs. That is, when the English level increases from low to high, the ability to use phrasal verbs also increases, but when the the English level moving from intermediate to advanced, the ability to use phrasal verbs is stagnant. Guowei(2013) found that Chinese learners did not avoid the tendency to use phrasal verbs through examination papers and questionnaires, but there were significant differences in the usage of phrasal verbs compared with native English speakers. All in all, the usage situation of the English learners is not so optimistic.

III. FACTORS AFFECTING THE ACQUISITION OF PHRASAL VERBS

To answer the question that why the phrasal verbs are acquired difficultly and avoided easily, there are constant researches about the factors that influence the acquisition of phrasal verbs. And the factors include the social and subjective factors and the linguistic rules.

3.1 Social and Subjective Factors Affecting the Acquisition of Phrasal Verbs

First, phrasal verbs are difficult to acquire for some learners because these words do not exist in their languages. Like RA González(2010) found that the transfer of mother tongue and the influence of cross-language will affect the acquisition and usage of phrasal verbs after the examination and analysis. Wei Mei and Wang Lifei(2012) combining the quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the influence of transparency and English

proficiency on learning idiomatic phrases in college students. The results showed that both transparency and English proficiency had significant effects on phrase learning. Meng Nan(2016) set up the experimental group and the control group and reached the followed conclusion: different coding and extraction methods affected the storage effect and memory intensity of the second language phrasal verbs. And the higher the learners' second language level is, the greater the effect of extraction exercises will have on the acquisition and memory retention of second language phrasal verbs. Qin Qin and Liu Wei(2016) let learners imitate the recording of phrasal verbs to judge that their speech coding ability, syllable decomposition ability, short sentence rhythm recognition ability will have a significant impact on the accuracy of imitation, which is an important factor affecting learners' success in acquiring target structure. Through comparative experiments, Omidian T(2019) concluded that increasing the input of extracurricular activities such as reading, watching English movies and TV can improve the receptive and productive capacity of PVs for the English learners. This result is consistent with the rule that high frequency and English environment would promote the acquisition effects of phrasal verbs.

These above are the social and subjective factors. Of course, the impact of linguistic rules on the phrasal verbs acquisition is also a hot topic.

3.2 Linguistic Rules Affecting the Acquisition of Phrasal Verbs

From the previous researches, the studies of linguistic rules are mainly about the separability of phrasal verbs and semantic complexity.

3.2.1 The Problem of the Separability of Phrasal Verbs

L2 learners are particularly troubled by the elusive problem of the location of the particles. Therefore, the rule of the position of particles has been studied and its research scope has been broadened. In China, Fan Zhaochang(1995) made a preliminary discussion on the shift rules of particles, and summed up the following conversion rules. when the object of the phrasal verb is a complex noun phrase or with a postmodifier, the particles

should follow the verb directly; In a few phrasal verbs or some exaggerated idioms, the particles will be separated forcibly from the verbs to achieve the exaggeration purpose; In the double object construction, the particles can follow the direct object and the indirect object, and the position can decide the two objects' ascendancy. Fan Zhaochang's summary opens the way for us to study the particles' position, but it has its own limitations. As it only studied several typical sentence patterns, does not specifically conclude the widely applicable influencing factors. Wang Rongpei (1997) also pointed out that longer nouns, noun phrases or noun clauses are placed after particles, shorter nouns and pronouns are generally placed before particles. Cheng Jie (2010) put forward a VCP analysis method for syntactic generation of phrasal verbs based on the analysis of previous methods. The alternation of verb object and particle word order is related to the shift of verb in the process of derivation. And Tian Zhen(2019) pointed that the phrasal verbs can not be separated when they are changed into the passive voice. Through relevant experiments and regression analysis, Wulff and Gries S(2019) also concluded that the position of particles is affected by many aspects such as phoneme problem, semantic information, information status and etc. But the fact is that most middle and high level English learners and native speakers tend to use VPO construction in order to reduce the complexity of cognitive processing. Jason Grafmiller(2018) used corpus and quantitative analysis and concluded that the displacement rules of particles in nine kinds of English are similar, with similar phrasal verb grammar and variable constraints. The above research establishes the rules of the position of many phrasal verbs. The English learners must master these rules for learning these phrasal verbs.

3.2.2 Semantic Composition and Understanding of Phrasal Verbs

The meaning of phrasal verbs can be divided into three types: transparent, translucent, and figurative (opaque)(Laufer & Eliasson, 1993). When we use phrasal verbs, their semantics are difficult to understand for that the meaning of a phrasal verb is not a simple addition of verb meaning and particle meaning. Among the semantic

composition of phrasal verbs, the semantics of verbs and that of particles will play the different roles(Quirk et al, 1985). RA Gonzalez(2010) pointed that the semantics of phrasal verbs lies in the metaphorical meaning of prepositions or particles, and the cognitive framework should be used to distinguish semantics in the context of phrasal verbs. And Wang Chaopei also pointed that in some phrasal verbs, it is difficult to determine the role of verbs in the highly idiomatic semantics of phrasal verbs sometimes, but the particles in them are decisive for the meanings. Wang used cognitive linguistics to analyze the particles-over and at, and pointed out that the semantic composition of phrasal verbs went through metaphorical process, meaning matching process, selection projection process and meaning integration process. Based on perceptual experience and encyclopedic knowledge, the phrasal verb gradually formed its relatively fixed and highly idiomatic semantics in the process of continuous use and development of language, and finally solidified in language(Wang Chaopei, 2006).

These influencing factors were also proved in the case studies. The interviewees expressed that the semantic vagueness, unfamiliarity of phrasal verb usage, low English frequency and the difference between their native language and English all lead to their avoidance of phrasal verbs. (Guowei,2013; Zhang Bin,2007; Wu Hui,2011)

IV. ACQUISITION AND TEACHING METHODS OF PHRASAL VERBS

In order to solve the problem that phrasal verbs are difficult to acquire or easy to be avoided, researchers have discussed the acquisition and teaching methods of phrasal verbs many times. Except for the traditional translation method, the new teaching methods like input-based teaching, output-based teaching and the Combination of input-based and output-based teaching methods, which are based on the cognitive linguistics, contextualization and usage-based concept are also adopted by the teachers and language researchers.

4.1 Input-based Teaching Methods of Phrasal Verbs

From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, in order

to solve the semantic problem of phrasal verbs, teaching and learning the phrasal verbs by using conceptual metaphor to input the language knowledge have become the hot research topics. Yasuda S(2010) set the experimental class and control class, and choose Japanese as the participants. The orientational metaphor method and the traditional method are used respectively for the two class. The test results of the experimental class students are better than those of the control class students, and the learners with conceptual metaphorical consciousness may rely on metaphorical thinking to judge the phrasal verbs' meaning when the target idiom is not stored as a unit in the learner's psychological dictionary. However, metaphorical consciousness has no statistical difference in the acquisition of contact phrasal verbs. Ansari MJ(2016) also compared the results of the control group and the experimental group. The test results show that the learning effects of the experimental class with metaphorical learning are better than those of the control class with traditional translation method when the students do the test about the exposed and unexposed phrasal verbs. And metaphorical consciousness has statistical difference in the acquisition of exposed phrasal verbs. Thus, he got the conclusion that the method of cognitive linguistics is the most important means to influence the internalization of students' cognitive ability and it will make students master the phrasal verb easily and memorize them in long term. In the studies of China, Shen Yugang(2002) and Wei Mei(2014) also confirmed the effectiveness of conceptual teaching in learning phrasal verbs, indicating that learners stimulate their understanding and deepening their internalization and memory of phrasal verbs in the process of using conceptual tools such as diagrams and languages. Then paying attention to the core meaning, metaphorical extension meaning and activity area will make learners better realize the systematicness and relevance of phrasal verbs.

The second input way is based on the contextualization, which can be achieved by data-driven learning (DDL) and incidental learning through reading English text. Applying DDL teaching mode to guide students to acquire phrasal verb verbs can also achieve

good results. According to the experiment of Lv Xiaoqiong (2015), it is proved that the DDL teaching mode can guide students to learn phrasal verbs through the concordance input and acquire polysemous phrasal verbs more effectively than the traditional teaching mode, especially in improving the acquisition effect of controlling output knowledge. As the concordance can make students understand the polysemous phrasal verbs in real used sentences. And it is well accepted by the students. Khatereh Behzadian(2016) made a research to investigate the effectiveness of using reading with input enhancement and concordance-based materials on 60 Iranian EFL learners' acquisition and retention of phrasal verbs. And the result showed that the former is better than the latter, which also means learning PVs incidentally through reading comprehension texts can help to master the meaning and the usage of PVs.

Zhang Ping and Chen Hewen(2019) studied and compared the acceptance and output effects of phrasal verbs among 270 high school students under three input frequencies and three input intervals. On the input frequency, 6 times can bring better acquisition effect of phrasal verbs than 4 times and 2 times. On the input interval, interval 1 day can bring better learning effect than interval 0.5 days and interval 3 days. According to the theory of frequency and memory, the conclusion of this study has some enlightenment on how to improve the teaching efficiency of English phrasal verbs at the basic stage. After all, this fits the theory that the accumulative frequency of tokens and types will make learners acquire the language unconsciously, which was pointed out by Ellis(2002).

4.2 Output-based Teaching Methods of Phrasal Verbs

The task-based method or the usage-based method are also effective for language acquisition, as they let the learners understand and memorize them in their own using context. Li Ying and Xu Yuanyuan(2011) studied the acquisition of an English phrasal verb structure with different concepts by middle-level adult foreign language learners from a usage-based perspective. The foreign language learners using the usage-based method rather than the cognitive linguistic method can also generalize the

concept of "V+ down" construction, and the learning effects of which is not significantly different from those who explicitly adopt cognitive teaching method. The research means that learning phrasal verbs by using is also effective.

After verifying the necessity of output, the researchers also explored which type of task output is most effective in the acquisition of phrasal verbs. Shaban najafi karimi(2017) use contrast experiments to detect the effectiveness of cooperation and personal cloze task, cooperation and personal error correction task on phrasal verb acquisition. The results showed that compared with the cloze task, using the error correction task had a slight improvement in the cognition of verb phrases, but the difference was not statistically significant. And the cooperative output is greater than the result of the individual output. Teng MF(2020) also use comparative experiments to detect which output types are more effective. And the results show that the group learning outcomes are greater than the pairs learning outcomes and than the individual learning outcomes, and the acquisition results by using the writing output are better than using the correction output acquisition results and than using the cloze output acquisition results. The difference in the results of this study is statistically significant.

4.3 The Combination of Input-based and Output-based Teaching Methods of Phrasal Verbs

According to the output hypothesis, learning by input is not enough. Therefore, according to this view, the researchers have also explored whether the acquisition of phrasal verbs is feasible only by input, or whether it is necessary to add some output activities to bring better effect. Just as Cai Yun(2009) said the semantic understanding is not sufficient for learners to acquire the complex language forms and using it is a more important contributor to its acquisition. Thus, designing the proper input and output task can improve the acquisition efficiency. Mohammad K and Ghannadi M(2011) made a group comparison experiment, its result showing that adding some annotations for the phrasal verbs in the reading materials will improve the effects of the incidental learning, and adding certain output activities is better than

the acquisition effect of phrase verbs only by input. Farida Badri Ahmadi and Essa Panahandeh(2016) also proved that adding output tasks to the traditional teaching method is more effective for the acquisition of phrasal verbs than just input-based language teaching. And Chou(2019) also held the idea that the meaning-focused reading input (presentation) and tasks based on writing output (practice and production) were considered more practical and efficient in learning English PVs than mere rote memorization or repetition.

Indeed, previous input-based or output-based teaching methods or the methods combining the input and output teaching of phrase verbs can help students to decrease the difficulty of leaning the phrasal verbs in some degree. But the avoidance situation still exists more or less. And the previous studies have only studied the acquisition of phrasal verbs by cognitive linguistics input or task-based output separately and rarely combined the two ways. Thus, the method combining the cognitive linguistic method and the task-based output method maybe deserved to be tested for their potential benefits and the research gap, which may be more effective for the acquisition and teaching of phrasal verbs and be helpful to establish a stable acquisition and teaching method.

V. CONCLUSION

In general, the usage, acquisition and teaching of phrasal verbs are briefly described above. From the social and subjective aspects, the mother tongue, transparency, English proficiency, coding and extraction methods, phonetic processing ability, frequency effect and cognitive linguistics methods all affect the acquisition of phrasal verbs. From the point of view of language rules, the displacement of phrasal verbs and the diversity of semantics will affect learners' mastery of phrasal verbs. Thus, learners must master their language rules as much as possible to master the position of phrasal verbs. And as for handling the problem of opaque meaning, previous studies have also put forward many useful methods for the teaching and acquisition of phrasal verbs like adjusting traditional teaching methods, that is, adjusting traditional translation input methods, carrying out incidental learning,

increasing input frequency, increasing metaphorical input and adding output activities such as group, pairs and individual activities and output tasks like writing, error correction and cloze task. These ways indeed help English learners to help the phrasal verbs. But a relatively standardized and complete learning paradigm of phrasal verbs which can be used to reduce learning pressure and improve learning efficiency was not formed .

Therefore, learners can adopt fixed input or output collocation method according to the above summary to improve their acquisition ability of phrasal verbs. Teachers can also use cognitive linguistics methods and collocate with certain output activities and tasks to find out the teaching methods suitable for their own class and to help students to improve the acquisition efficiency of phrasal verbs effectively. Of course, the foreign language researchers can also study and compare the different matching patterns of input and output methods to compile the proper textbooks and exercises for different students.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ansari MJ. The Acquisition of Phrasal Verbs Through Cognitive Linguistic Approach: the Case of Iranian Efl Learners[J]. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 2016, 7(1): 185-194
- [2] Behzadian K. The Effect of Input Enhancement and Concordance-based Activities on Iranian Efl Learners' Acquisition and Retention of Phrasal Verbs.[J]. *Michigan Academician*, 2016, 44(1): 29-50.
- [3] Cheng Jie. A Study on Syntactic Generation of Phrasal Verbs in English [J]. *Journal of PLA Foreign languages Institute* ,2010,33(5):18-23, 65, 127.
- [4] Ellis NC. Frequency Effects in Language Processing: a Review with Implications for Theories of Implicit and Explicit Language Acquisition[J]. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 2002, 24(2): 143-188.
- [5] Fan Zhaochang. A New Approach to the Transformation of Particles[J]. *Foreign Language Teaching*, 1995, 16(4):48-50, 61.
- [6] Farida Badri Ahmadi & Essa Panahandeh. The Role of Input-based and Output-based Language Teaching in Learning English Phrasal Verbs By Upper-intermediate Iranian Efl Learners[J]. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 2016, 10(1): 22-33.
- [7] Grafmiller J & Szmrecsanyi B. Mapping Out Particle Placement in Englishes Around the World: a Study in Comparative Sociolinguistic Analysis[J]. *Language Variation and Change*, 2018, 30(3): 385-412.
- [8] Guowei. An Empirical Study on the Avoidance Tendency of Phrasal Verbs in Chinese Learners [J]. *Journal of PLA Foreign languages Institute* , 2013, 36(4):73-77.
- [9] Laufer B. & Eliasson S. What Causes Avoidance in L2 Learning: L1-L2 Difference, L1-L2 Similarity, Or L2 Complexity?[J]. *Studies in Second Language acquisition*, 1993, 15(1): 35-48
- [10] Liao Y & Fukuya YJ. Avoidance of Phrasal Verbs: the Case of Chinese Learners of English[J]. *Language Learning*, 2004, 54(2): 193-226.
- [11] Li Ying & Xu Yuanyuan. Learning English Phrasal Verbs: From a Use-based Perspective--Take "V+down" Construction as an Example[J]. *Journal of Xihua University (philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2011, 30(3):109-111.
- [12] Lu Z & Sun J. Presenting English Polysemous Phrasal Verbs with Two Metaphor-based Cognitive Methods to Chinese Efl Learners[J]. *System*, 2017, 69: 153-161.
- [13] Lu Xiaoqiong. Study on the acquisition of polysemous Phrasal Verbs by DDL teaching model [J]. *Journal of Suzhou Institute of Education* ,2015(1):94-96.
- [14] Meng Nan. A Study on the Influence of Different Information Processing Methods Based on Coding and Extraction on the Acquisition of L2 Phrasal Verbs [D]. Jiangsu: Jiangnan University.
- [15] Mohammad K & Ghannadi M. Interventionist (explicit and Implicit) Versus Non-interventionist (incidental) Learning of Phrasal Verbs By Iranian Efl Learners[J]. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2011, 2: 536-546.
- [16] Mu-Hsuan Chou. Task-supported Language Teaching to Enhance Young EFL Adolescent Learners' Comprehension and Production of English Phrasal Verbs in Taiwan[J]. *Education 3-13*, 2019, 48(4), 455-470.
- [17] Omidian T & Akbary M & Shahriari H. Exploring Factors Contributing to the Receptive and Productive Knowledge of Phrasal Verbs in the Efl Context[J]. *Word*, 2019, 65(1): 1-24.

- [18] Qin Qin & Liu Wei. Effects of Speech Processing Ability on Implicit Acquisition of L2 Phrasal Verbs [J]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2016,48(2):261-273, 321.
- [19] Quirk, R. et al. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*[M]. London:Longman, 1985, 1155-1170.
- [20] RA. González. L2 Spanish Acquisition of English Phrasal Verbs: A Cognitive Linguistic Analysis of L1 Influence[A].In:Campoy M,Belles-fortuno B,Gea-valor MCorpus-Based. Approaches to English Language[C].Spain: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010.149-166.
- [21] RA.González. Making Sense of Phrasal Verbs-A Cognitive Linguistic Account of L2 Learning[J]. *AILA Review*, 2010, 201(3): 50-71.
- [22] Shaban najafi karimi. Effects of Output Task Types on The Acquisition of English Phrasal Verbs[J]. *MJAL*, 2017, 9(2): 123-150.
- [23] Teng MF. The Effectiveness of Group, Pair and Individual Output Tasks on Learning Phrasal Verbs[J]. *The Language Learning Journal*, 2020, 48(2): 187-200.
- [24] Wang Chaopei. A Cognitive Exploration of the Semantic Composition of English Phrasal Verbs[J]. *Journal of Southwest University for nationalities (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*,2006, 181(9):219-223.
- [25] Wang Rongpei. English Phrasal Verbs [J]. *Foreign Language and Foreign Language Teaching*, 1997(04):16-21, 55.
- [26] Wang Yue & Sun Erhong & Zhang Jijia. Sentence Context Affects Semantic Processing of English Phrasal Verbs in Chinese-English Bilinguals-- Evidence From Eye Movement Studies[J]. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 2016,48(2):249-260,321.
- [27] Wei Mei &Wang Lifei. Effects of Transparency and English Proficiency on the Learning of Idiomatic Phrases in College Students [J]. *Journal of PLA Foreign languages Institute*. 2012, 35(4): 51-55, 127-128.
- [28] White BJ. A Conceptual Approach to the Instruction of Phrasal Verbs[J]. *The Modern Language Journal*, 2012, 96(3): 419-438.
- [29] Wu Hui. A Study on the Avoidance of Phrasal Verbs by Chinese College English Learners [D]. Nanchang University ,2011.
- [30] Wulff S & Gries ST. Particle Placement in Learner Language[J]. *Language Learning*, 2019, 69(4): 873-910.
- [31] Yasuda S. Learning Phrasal Verbs Through Conceptual Metaphors: a Case of Japanese Efl Learners[J]. *Tesol Quarterly*, 2010, 44(2): 250-273.
- [32] Yu Jue. A Study on the Use of Spoken Phrasal Verbs in English Based on Chinese Students'oral and written English Language Corpus [J]. *Foreign language World*, 2011, 146(5):24-30.
- [33] Zhang Bin. A Study on English Learners' Avoidance of Phrasal Verbs[J]. *Journal of PLA Foreign languages Institute*, 2007, 30(6):60-64.
- [34] Zhang Ping & Chen Hewen. Effects of Input Frequency and Input Interval on The Acquisition of English Phrasal Verbs [J]. *Journal of PLA Foreign languages Institute*.2019, 42(2): 1-9, 158.