Why To Learn Phrasal Verbs? New Approaches

Oksana K. Nazarova[1], Iskander E. Yarmakeev[1], Tatiana S. Pimenova[1], Albina R. Abdrafikova[1]

[1]*Kazan Federal University, Russian Federation*

Abstract

Phrasal verbs make a considerable part of the verbal lexicon of modern English and are very commonly used thanks to great diversity, idiomaticity and heterogeneity of functioning. It is no exaggeration to say that English phrasal verbs are one of the most important issues in theoretical studies and practical mastering of the English language. The need for more efficient ways to learn hundreds of phrasal verbs prompted the authors to face up to this challenge. In this study, the research objective defined by the authors is to prove that gamefication is that very learning method that allows memorizing a massive amount of English phrasal verbs within a rather short period of time. The leading research method was an experiment that was conducted in two high schools to make it sound valid. The obtained results indicated that if there is chosen an appropriate teaching method, any linguistic phenomenon is "well-digested" by students. The authors offer various language games approbated during the experiment for learning 250 English phrasal verbs in EFL class and general recommendations for foreign language instructors.

Introduction

In English, a phrasal verb is a phrase that indicates an action. The term applies to two or three distinct but related constructions, e.g., a verb and a particle and/or a preposition together form a single semantic unit. This semantic unit cannot be understood based upon the meanings of the individual parts, but must be taken as a whole. In other words, the meaning is non-compositional and thus unpredictable [1]. In discourse, phrasal verbs function as a means of revealing language and cultural peculiarities. Phrasal verbs are versatile and describe various actions that can both transfer forms and meanings [2]. This is why the number of phrasal verbs is continuing to grow. It is not surprising that phrasal verbs have started to be used intensively in all speech styles [3]. Therefore, the issue of learning phrasal verbs has remained its significant status in EFL class [4].

A lot of Russian and foreign scholars and educators (Johnson, 1775; Povey, Levitskaya, & Fitterman, 1964; Tagiyev, 1970; Akhmanova, 1982; Povey, 1990; Linder, 2000; Stolyar, 2000; Golubkova, 2002; Adger, 2003; Stolyankov, & Golubeva, 2003; Tarabrina, 2003;

Dixon, 2004; Sizova, 2004; Stolyankov, & Golubeva, 2004; Allerton, 2006; Stolyankov, 2007; Dubenets, 2010) studied the phenomenon of phrasal verbs in different aspects. However, little research devoted to the acquisition of phrasal verbs via gamification has been found out so far.

In this paper, the gamefication method how to acquire, consolidate and implement phrasal verbs in speech was offered. This method was approbated in the experiment conducted in two High schools with the aim in view to demonstrate its efficacy. The experiment consisted of three stages that let the authors get valid results. At the first stage, students' initial knowledge in phrasal verbs was tested. At the second stage, game-based tasks developing students' awareness of phrasal verbs were implemented. At the final stage, students were re-tested. The experiment proved itself positive. The results obtained during the experiment showed the relevance of the selected teaching method. The materials and instruments used in the experiment appealed to students' needs and turned out to be motivating. 250 English phrasal verbs accumulated by students can serve as incontrovertible evidence. Thus, the authors' hypothesis that gamefication is the appropriate teaching method of expanding English phrasal verbs within a semester, was completely proved.

This paper offers general recommendations for EFL teachers how to deal with the vast bulk of phrasal verbs English learners encounter daily.

Metods And Materials

Research method

Teaching and learning phrasal verbs is a step forward as students gain proficiency and aim for a more natural speaking style.

In accordance with the set objective of the study, the experiment was conducted with the aim to monitor, develop, analyze and assess the effectiveness of using language games: bingo, contextual clues, acting out, charades and others in consolidating and implementing phrasal verbs in students' speech.

The experimental training was conducted for students of the 10-th grade (2 control groups – 10 "A" and 2 experimental groups – 10 "B") during one semester of Spring 2017 in Gymnasium (High school) # 122 and Gymnasium (High school) # 19.

86 students took part in the experiment: 2 control groups – 46 students and 2 experimental groups – 40 students.

The experiment consisted of three stages:

1. Ascertaining experiment.
2. Forming experiment.
3. Control experiment.

Research Site

The research sites were two government schools that cooperate with Kazan (Volga region) Federal University.

Students' Background

Number, age and gender characteristics: 86 students, 15-16 years old, mixed, who made up four groups: 2 control and 2 experimental.

Students' status: High school students.

Sample materials

1. Bingo

The phrasal verbs are on the bingo cards and clues about the meaning of each one is given by the teacher. The students have to look at the phrasal verbs on their card and choose the one that they think matches the meaning. For example, if the phrasal verb was run out you could say, "You have no more of something – everything has gone away".

2. Phrasal verbs on the board

To set up this activity, you will have your students brainstorm particles that go with the particular verbs. When in class, stick the papers on the board in the classroom. Stipulate that they cannot write something that someone else has written. You can organize a competition between two teams and set the time to make it more challenging.

3. Finding a pair

All participants have hats on with either a verb or a preposition. The teacher gives the meaning or definition of the phrasal verb and the students are to find their pair as quickly as possible.

4. Phrasal verb acting out

This activity has students acting out a phrasal verb. Their partners have to correctly guess the verbs and particles that they demonstrate.

5. Matching phrasal verb with a picture

Prepare a set of flashcards revising the phrasal verbs. For instance, you can hand out a set of pictures and a phrasal verb, a number of phrasal verbs and mere one picture, suggest a sentence and a picture to get the main idea etc.

6. Word scramble

Form words of three or more letters using the letters given in the table. You will get an extra bonus if you make all the words possible and even more points if you form words very quickly. You must finish making words first, e.g.:

rsokaf	…	…	ask for
toteua	…	…	eat out
muprwa	…	…	warm up

7. Online games with Kahoot

Games are displayed on a shared screen – for example a smart TV, a laptop or an interactive whiteboard. Players join in using their own device – whether that is a smartphone, iPad, laptop, as long as they have a browser and good internet connection. The teacher prepares a number of questions online to play, analyze and assess the students' knowledge on the subject. Students select an answer on their devices by clicking on the appropriate icon. The game becomes more exciting as it is accompanied by dynamic music (as most teenagers are fascinated by), time limit and competition. The result of the best and fastest student is demonstrated on the screen after each question.

Results

At the ascertaining stage the pre-test was used to measure the students' initial knowledge in phrasal verbs. The test contained thirty multiple choice questions. Both the control and the experimental groups in both gymnasiums were engaged and accomplished the given test. The major criterion of students' superiority accounted for the maximum score he/she could achieve. The results of the pre-test in the control and experimental groups are shown in Fig. 1.
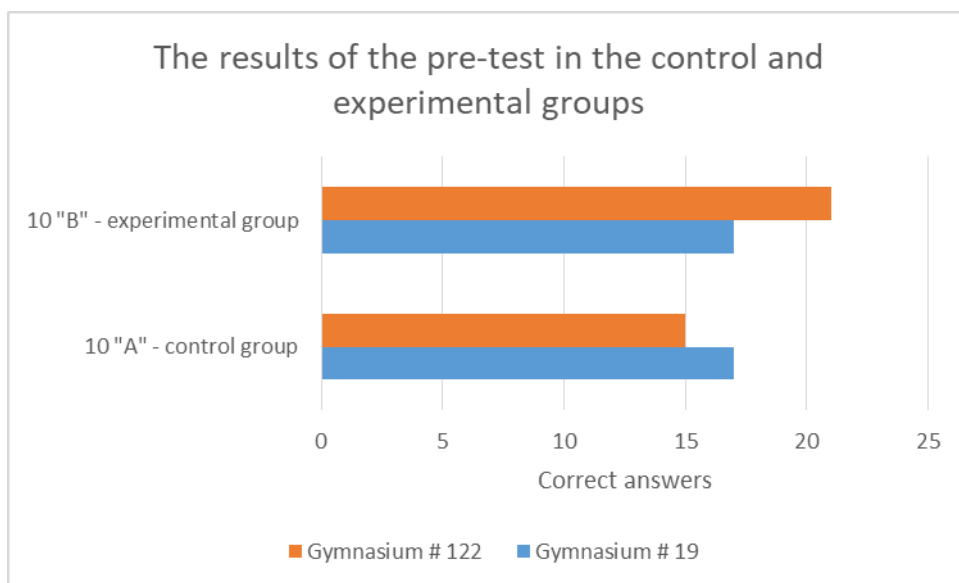

Fig. 1 The results of the pre-test in the control and experimental groups

All these data were taken into account during the formative stage of the experiment for the organization of the educational process where various drilling, game-based and communicative tasks developing students' awareness and professionalism in language were implemented in EFL class.

The control group was taught by traditional methods such as grammar translation, filling in the blanks in which the students did not take part in the activities communicatively, or just gave the Russian equivalents of the phrasal verbs. However, the experimental group was taught by the communicative approach, particularly by resorting to games, which enabled them to use the target language repetitively as much as possible.

The control experiment was carried out to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of educational games in practice as a means of students' language development and mastering students' skills in EFL class. The updated post-test was aimed at revealing students' knowledge on the phrasal verbs. The results of the updated post-test in the control groups and experimental groups are shown in Fig. 2.
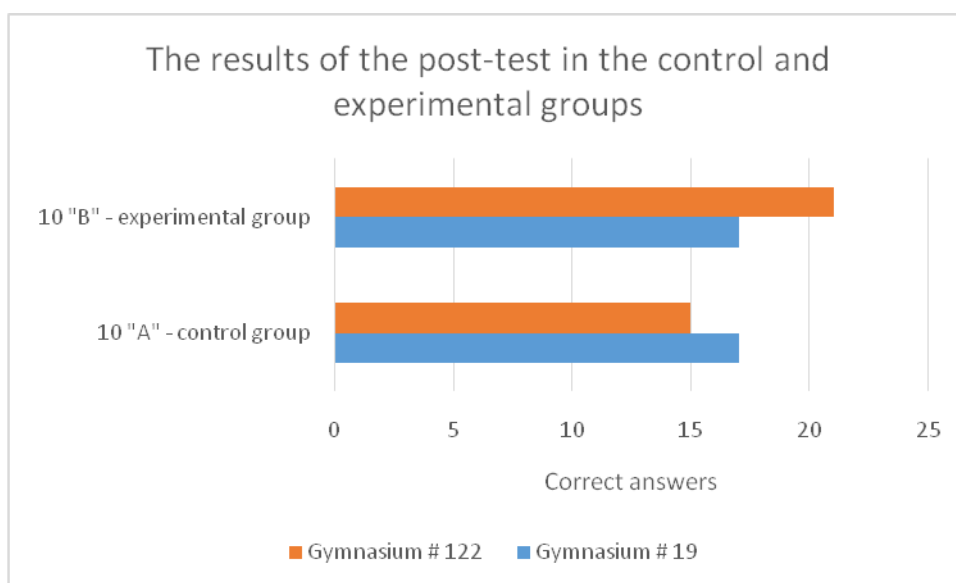

Fig. 1 The results of the post-test in the control and experimental groups

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 the experimental group students 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 the experimental group students who were taught phrasal verbs with the help of games showed a better performance and learning process which means that this approach is really effective in phrasal verb teaching.

Discussion

Why Implement Games for Teaching Phrasal Verbs?

The particular trickiness of phrasal verbs for learners of English was noted at least as early as 250 years ago, when Samuel Johnson wrote, in the Preface to A Dictionary of the English Language (http://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com): *"There is another kind of composition more frequent in our language than perhaps in any other, from which arises to foreigners the greatest difficulty. We modify the signification of many verbs by a particle subjoined; as to come off, to escape by a fetch; to fall on, to attack; to fall off, to apostatize; with innumerable expressions of the same kind, of which some appear wildly irregular, being so far distant from the sense of the simple words, that no sagacity will be able to trace the steps by which they arrived at the present use."*[17]

Teaching phrasal verbs is one of the most difficult aspects of English as it introduces more problems for beginners to differentiate, for example, "to bring" and "to bring up". This obstacle is one of the reasons we love using games to teach phrasal verbs. No doubt, like with prepositions, the best way to learn phrasal verbs is to use them again and again, and this repetition is automatic when playing games. Students have to seek out the verb again and again, committing its new meaning to memory and thus consolidating it. Secondly, games contribute to the simple memorization of the phrasal verbs. Using a game to help memorize these differences is one of the best ways to integrate phrasal verbs into a learner's lexicon.

However, the question arises: How can students deal with a mass of versatile phrasal verbs they have to face daily? The authors of the research tried to find the clue and investigated this phenomenon.

Conclusion

To be in good terms with phrasal verbs is a challenge for students 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. This research proved that methods and approaches that were used to teach phrasal verbs led to students' success and great performance. Moreover, teachers should create a classroom atmosphere that makes the students use the language and this vocabulary actively with authentic and real world materials.

Acknowledgments

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