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How L2 English children deal with the semantic and syntactic dimension of phrasal verbs

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ABSTRACT

English phrasal verbs pose a problem for L2 English learners. This study focuses on how L1 Spanish children deal with the use of phrasal verbs through the analysis of data collected from three different tasks and presented to two different groups of child learners. Both groups belong to the CLIL educational program and differ from each other because Group 1 has received extracurricular English classes while Group 2 has not. Results show that no meaningful differences appear across the two participants groups despite the greater exposure to English in the case of Group 1. After analyzing the results of both groups, it can be said that they have more problems with the syntactic dimension of phrasal verbs than with the semantic dimension since it is less difficult for them to guess the correct meaning of a phrasal verb, than detecting the change of order of the particle.

Keywords: Phrasal verbs, L1 Spanish children, L2 English learners, difficulty, semantic dimension, syntactic dimension.

RESUMEN

Los verbos frasales ingleses suponen un problema para los estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua. Este estudio se centra en cómo estos niños nativos de español se enfrentan a la utilización de los verbos frasales a través del análisis de los datos recogidos de tres tareas diferentes y presentadas a dos grupos distintos de alumnos. Ambos grupos pertenecen al programa educativo AICLE y se diferencian entre sí porque el Grupo 1 ha recibido clases de inglés extraescolares mientras que el Grupo 2 no. Se ha demostrado que los resultados no han sido demasiado significativos a pesar de la mayor exposición al inglés del Grupo 1. Después de analizar los resultados de ambos grupos, se puede decir que ellos muestran más problemas con la dimensión sintáctica de los verbos frasales que con la

dimensión semántica ya que les resulta menos complicado adivinar el significado correcto de un verbo frasal, que detectar el cambio de orden de la partícula.

Palabras clave: Verbos frasales, niños nativos de español, estudiantes de inglés como segunda lengua, dificultad, dimensión semántica, dimensión sintáctica.

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1. Introduction

The present research focuses on how English learners acquire and recognize phrasal verbs. According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary (1999), a phrasal verb is an idiomatic phrase that consists of a verb with a particle, the meaning of which is different from the meaning of its separate parts.

The reasons for selecting this grammatical construction are the following: phrasal verbs can be considered a challenge for learners of English as a second language (L2) when these verb types do not appear in the leaners' first language (L1) and so positive transfer from their L1 is not possible; furthermore, these constructions are frequently used in English, so it is virtually impossible to avoid them. It can be said that there is not a specific technique to study phrasal verbs and, because there is a long list of them, their study is much more complex than that of any other grammatical structure. When verbs, prepositions or adverbs are studied in isolation, they do not pose great difficulties. The problem comes when verbs are combined with prepositional or adverbial particles since these new grammatical structures can have several meanings and sometimes it is difficult to find a logical transparency that does not cause learning problems.

In addition to the difficulty that phrasal verbs present for English learners, another reason for choosing this topic is that today, most English speakers use these verbs instead of others that would be easier to understand by English learners. For example, English speakers prefer to use "make up" instead of the single verb "invent" even though both have a very similar meaning and even is "invent" is certainly more transparent for L1 Spanish L2 English speakers.

The main objective of this study is to analyze how L1 Spanish L2 English students comprehend and use English phrasal verbs. More specifically, the focus is placed on how these learners who participate in a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) program, are able to identify the correct order of the different components of phrasal verbs (verb and particle) and the correct meaning of phrasal verbs. Furthermore, the focus is also

on seeing if they tend to use phrasal verbs instead of single verbs. Both issues will allow us to determine the degree of familiarity and the knowledge the L2 learners have of English phrasal verbs.

This research is organized into different sections. Following section 1 (the introduction), section 2 focuses on the description of the grammatical constructions into consideration (i.e., phrasal verbs). Section 3 presents the research questions and hypotheses that have guided the study. Section 4 includes the methodology, that is, the description of the tests that have been designed to collect the data and the participants who have taken the tests and whose data are analyzed. Section 5 contains the analysis of the data collected. The ultimate sections of this study (part 6, 7 and 8) focus on the discussion of the research questions and hypotheses, on the conclusions obtained after performing the tests and analyzing the results, and the references used to carry out this research. Finally, the last section of this study is section 9 which contains the three different tasks that the participants of this study have performed.

2. A formal description of phrasal verbs

Before facing the different difficulties, phrasal verbs pose for students of English as L2, it is important to identify firstly what type of verbs phrasal verbs are and which of them can actually be framed within this grammatical category.

Nowadays, there is a great debate about phrasal verbs and in particular about two issues: what a phrasal verb is and the nature of the particle. With regards to the first issue, the Collins Cobuild Phrasal Verbs Dictionary (1990) defines phrasal verbs as "combinations of verbs with adverbial or prepositional particles". In fact, phrasal verbs can contain more than one element and, more specifically, they are made up of a lexical verb and one or more particles. This particle may be a preposition, as in (1), an adverb, as in (2), or a combination of the two, as in (3).

(1) The babysitter **looks after** our children while we work.   (Prepositional particle)

(2) I **got up** early to see the sunrise.   (Adverbial particle)

(3) I **look forward to** seeing you again soon.   (Adverbial and prepositional particle)

The Cambridge Online Dictionary (1999), on the other hand, defines that multi-word verbs are made up of a verb and one or two particles or prepositions. In this sense, unlike the Collins Cobuild Phrasal Verbs Dictionary (1990), it classifies these verbs into three types: prepositional verbs, phrasal verbs, and prepositional phrasal verbs. Prepositional verbs are also called non-separable verbs and they combined a verb and a prepositional particle. Phrasal verbs are also called separable verbs and they include a verb and a adverbial particle. Within these separable verbs, two subtypes can be found depending on whether they carry a direct object or not: separable transitive phrasal verbs in which the particle precede or follow the direct object although this word order may be different depending on the nature of the direct object (pronoun or DP) and on the length of the DP direct object; and inseparable intransitive phrasal verbs. Finally, prepositional phrasal verbs, also called phrasal prepositional verbs and three-word verbs, are formed by a verb, an adverbial particle, and a prepositional particle.

Table 1: Traditional classification of phrasal verbs.

Prepositional verbs	Believe in (W*e believe in its future*)	
Phrasal verbs	**Separable transitive phrasal verbs**	Turn on *(Turn on the light/ Turn the light on)*
	Inseparable intransitive phrasal verbs	Drink up (D*rink up quickly/ * Drink quickly u*p)
Prepositional phrasal verbs	Get on with *(We should get on with the program)*	

In the light of the above, it can be said that in English; the term "verb + particle" may be ambiguous. For instance, "look up" can appear as the combination of a lexical verb plus a preposition that is, a prepositional verb, leading to the literal interpretation of looking in an upward direction, as in (4); or as the combination of a lexical verb plus an adverb, that is a phrasal verb, which results in the figurative interpretation of searching for something, as in (5).

(4) He **looked up** the chimney.
(5) He **looked up** the number.

With regards to the nature of the particle, while the Collins Cobuild Phrasal Verbs Dictionary (1990) refers to it as an adverbial particle, Crutchley (2007) and Capelle, Shtyrov and Pulvermuller (2010) refer to it simply as a particle. Other authors also refer to it a preposition.

In this study we are going to use Crutchley's (2007) definition, that is, particle, considering that the grammatical structure of phrasal verbs is the union of a verb and a particle thus creating a simple unit of meaning.

Phrasal verbs have been formally described using a double dimension: syntactic and semantic. Each is discussed in the subsequent sections.

2.1. The syntactic dimension of phrasal verbs

Regarding the syntactic dimension, Bradley (1991) argued that these verbs can be classified into two types according to their transitivity, that is, like single verbs: transitive phrasal verbs and intransitive phrasal verbs.

The word order difference exemplified in (4) and (5) is sometimes optional and sometimes is mandatory. Normally, the most used sequence of elements that make up a transitive phrasal verb is V+ Particle +DP (direct object), but when the direct object is a pronoun, it is placed between the verb and the particle as it is mandatory as in (6). On the other hand, if a short DP works as a direct object of a transitive phrasal verb, the change of the particle is optional and not mandatory as occurs with pronouns, When the direct object is a long DP, the change of the order of the particle of the phrasal verb cannot be performed.

(6) How can I **get** my message **through** to him?

*How can I **get through** my message to him?

Intransitive phrasal verbs show no word order difference as there is no object involved,as in (7).

(7) The patient **passed away**.

Therefore, and as a summary of the syntactic dimension of phrasal verbs, these can be classified as transitive or intransitive, and separable or inseparable depending on whether they are accompanied by a direct object and, if so, on the formal type of direct object.

2.2. The semantic dimension of phrasal verbs

Regarding the semantic dimension, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) following Fraser (1976) classify phrasal verbs in three semantic levels: literal, completive and figurative.

Literal phrasal verbs are those where the meaning of each constituent retains its literal sense. In other words, this type of phrasal verb has an obvious meaning that can guessed from the two parts (i.e., the verb and the particle). Two examples appear in (8).

(8) I **put** my keys **in** my bag. Then I **took** them **out** again.

Completive phrasal verbs are those where the particle indicates a complete action. Typical participles that contribute the complete meaning include u*p, out, off,* and *down*. An example appears in (9).

(9) I **tore up** the paper.

Figurative phrasal verbs are those where there are no systematic semantic criteria associating the verb and the particle; that is, the meaning of the phrasal verb cannot be guessed from its two parts, as opposed to literal phrasal verbs. Due to this, figurative phrasal verbs could be considered as the most problematic for non- native speakers to understand. An example appears in (10).

(10) I had to **take out** a loan to pay for my new car.

The Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs (1990) presents a scale of opacity and transparency for phrasal verbs that partially resembles Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman´s (1999) classification. According to this scale, phrasal verbs can be classified into three types according to the semantic relations established between the verb and the particle: opaque, translucent, and transparent.

Opaque phrasal verbs are those whose meaning is not easily understood from the meaning of its constituents in isolation, as in (11). Phrasal verbs constituted by light verbs like *make*, *do*, *go* or *take*, are usually considered opaque due to the polysemous nature of these verbs.

(11) The enemy **gave up**.

Translucent phrasal verbs are those verbs whose meaning is closely related to the meaning of the verb, but the particle gives it a different nuance. These phrasal verbs thus differ from opaque phrasal verbs, where it is impossible to decipher the real meaning of it from looking at the verb or the particle in isolation. In the case of translucent phrasal verbs, as in (12), meaning can be deduced by focusing on the verb although the particle changes it partially giving the phrasal verb a less literal but still closely related meaning.

(12) Oxygen is **used up** by organisms faster than it can be replaced.

Transparent phrasal verbs are those verbs whose meaning is easily understood by combining at the meaning of the verb and the particle in isolation. These phrasal verbs have a literal meaning as in (13).

(13) Sally **went out**.

Other grammarians such as Wumbrand (2000) have a more restricted view on these structures and consider phrasal verbs to be those structures that do not offer any clue about the real meaning of the phrasal verb. In this way, only the opaque ones would be phrasal verbs proper, according to the scale of the Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs (1990) and only the figurative ones according to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999).

Table 3 shows phrasal verbs' classification according to their degree of idiomaticity, while Table 4 presents a summary of the typology under consideration in the present study.

Table 3. Degree of idiomaticity.

AUTHORS	DEGREE OF IDIOMATICITY FROM HIGH TO LOW		
Armstrong	Idiomatic=opaque	Aspectual= semi-transparent	Directional= transparent

Celce-Murcia and Larsen- Freeman	Idiomatic	Semi-transparent	Literal
Jackendoff	Idiomatic= non compositional meaning	Aspectual	Directional= compositional meaning
Quirk et al.	Highly idiomatic	Semi-idiomatic	Non idiomatic

Table 4. Scale of opacity and transparency of phrasal verbs.

	Scale of opacity and transparency
Opaque	*Go off* (The jury was told the event went off well.)
Translucent	*Read out* (I should now like to read out a quote.)
Transparent	*Put on* (I put on the radio to listen the news.)

3. Research questions and hypotheses

Phrasal verbs are considered one of the most complicated and problematic topics for English language learners. Taking as a point of departure the syntactic and semantic dimension of these verbs as presented in section 2, four research questions and their corresponding hypotheses are put forward.

Research question 1. When choosing between using a phrasal verb or a single verb to complete a sentence, will participants lean more toward a single verb or phrasal verb?

Hypothesis 1. In most cases, participants will choose a single verb instead of a phrasal verb as an option to complete a sentence, because they are more used to using and working with single verbs in their L1.

Research question 2. Given the syntactic dimension of phrasal verbs, as summarized in Table 1, will participants be aware of the word order differences that appear in the case of transitive phrasal verbs?

Hypothesis 2. Participants will treat transitive phrasal verbs differently depending on the nature of the direct object. In the case of, direct object pronouns, less problems are expected as participants are more familiar with expressions consisting of a phrasal verb followed by a pronoun as a direct object. These expressions are very much emphasized in the English language classroom. However, in the case of both short and long DPs functioning as direct objects, participants are expected to have more problems in detecting that the first ones can intervene between the verb and the adverbial particle while the second ones cannot.

Research question 3. As far as the semantic dimension of phrasal verbs is concerned, as in Table 4 above, will participants use the meaning of phrasal verbs' constituents in isolation to give a correct meaning to the phrasal verb as a whole?

Hypothesis 3. Participants may use the semantic information of both the verb and the particle individually in order to grasp the meaning of the phrasal verb instead of giving a combined meaning of the phrasal verb. For this reason, it may be easier for them to give the correct meaning of transparent and translucent phrasal verbs than the meaning of opaque phrasal verbs. This will be so since, in the case of opaque phrasal verbs, the meaning of the verb in isolation is not related to the meaning of the phrasal verb.

Research question 4. As far as both dimensions (syntactic and semantic) is concerned, will the participants in Group 1 perform better in the three tasks than those in Group 2 who received less input?

Hypothesis 4. The more exposure to English by participants in Group 1 may provide them with an advantage over the participants in Group 2 who only received input at school. They will have an advantage both in the semantic dimension as well as in the syntactic one as they may have developed and learned new techniques to detect, for example, the change of

order of the particle of a phrasal verb when it is followed by a pronoun. Also, as Group 1 received more input, they may become more familiar with some phrasal verbs, so it may be easier for them to identify their correct meaning regardless of whether the phrasal verb is transparent, translucent, or opaque. In addition to this, Group 1 may tend to use phrasal verbs instead of single verbs on certain occasions since they are much more exposed to seeing these types of verbs than the participants in Group 2.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

In order to carry out this study on the understanding and use of phrasal verbs, a group of primary school students have participated. All participants have Spanish as their L1 and are also learning English as an L2 in an institutional context in Spain. Therefore, the participants tested in this study are Spanish/English L2 bilingual students that have learned English as an L2 in an educational context.

The participants are studying 4 th grade of primary education in the state-funded school of Nuestra Señora del Carmen (Valladolid). A total of 19 participants aged between 9 and 10 years old have been considered. These participants follow a CLIL[1] program, that is, they receive a partially bilingual education. The objective of the CLIL methodology is to place the participants in a favorable environment to practice English both orally and in writing. Thanks to this methodology, the participants not only learn subjects such as arts & crafts or physical education, but also reinforce the English language since it is the language always used in the classroom in these subjects.

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[1] CLIL or Content and Language Integrated Language program is defined by Marsh (1994) as the "situations where subjects, or part of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content, and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language".

In the specific case of these groups of participants, three of their subjects (i.e., plastic, music, and physical education) are taught entirely in English, together with the English subject. In total, therefore, they have four subjects taught in English which means that they are exposed to 7 hours a week of instruction in English. The rest of the subjects are taught exclusively in Spanish. In addition to the English classes at school, some participants go to English private lessons outside of school hours. These classes can contribute to a better understanding and use of phrasal verbs by them. In Table 5, the participants have been classified depending on whether they attend extracurricular English classes (Group 1) or not (Group 2).

Table 5. Classification of the participants.

Group	Number of participants
Group 1	10
Group 2	9
Total	19

4.2 Procedure

The participants in this research completed three different tasks: a lexical task with pictures, a word order task and an multiple-choice task. These three tasks address the learning of English phrasal verbs by L1 Spanish L2 English learners, but they target different issues. The first task that participants have to face is a lexical task with pictures in which the participants have to choose the most suitable verb between single verbs and phrasal verbs, both transitive and intransitive. The second one is the word order task which is focused on transitive phrasal verbs and on how the nature of the direct object allows or disallows the separation of the verb and particle. The last task consists of a multiple-choice task in which the participants have to choose the sentence that is closest in meaning to the given sentence.

Before doing the tasks, the participants completed a questionnaire in which they have to include their age, grade, number of years studying English and if they attend extracurricular English classes.

In the design of the three tasks, the vocabulary used has been drawn from the school textbooks and sources that participants used in class. This ensures that the vocabulary in the sentences of the tasks is adequate to the students' proficiency level. The idea is, therefore, to place the focus on phrasal verbs so that the choices made by the participants could only be attributed to the structure under investigation (i.e., phrasal verbs) and not to some other elements presented in the sentences. It is important to point out that, a series of guidelines and instructions in Spanish were given to the participants before carrying out the tasks and that each task was preceded by examples that made the participants be familiarized with what they had to do in each task.

There are twelve sentences in the first and second task while the last task contains six sentences. As for the lexical task with pictures, transitive and intransitive simple verbs and phrasal verbs are used. The aim of this first task is to detect whether participants show a preference for a simple verb or for a phrasal verb when filling in the proposed sentences.

In the twelve experimental sentences that make up this task, the participants had to choose between two single verbs and two phrasal verbs. There are two possible correct answers: one of them is a simple verb and the other a phrasal verb. The choice by the participants of one or the other option allows us to assess the participants' inclination for the simple verb, which is more Spanish-like, or for the phrasal verb, which is more English-like. An example of an experimental item from this task appears in (14).

(14) My father _____ his journal.

a. **Fills in**	b. Deletes
c. Completes	d. Crosses out

As in (14), both (14a) and (14c) are potential options, but, while the one with a phrasal verb (14a) sounds more natural, the one with a single verb (14c) sounds closer to what a Spanish speaker would say in Spanish. The other two options represent a single verb and a phrasal verb which do not fit the context. As in the word-order task, these four options were randomized for the twelve experimental sentences.

Out of the twelve sentences in the lexical task, six correspond to intransitive sentences, as in (15), while the remaining six sentences include transitive phrasal verbs, as in (16).

(15) What time do you usually _____?

a. Awake	b. **Get up**
c. Stand up	d. Sleep

(16) He _____ the balloon.

a. Inflates	b. Exploits
c. Blows up	d. Blows down

An image appeared at the beginning of each sentence to help the participants better understand the meaning of these sentences.

The main objective of the second task is to find out if the participants know when the particle of a phrasal verb can be separated from the verb or not, that is, when the direct object can intervene between the verb and particle. Participants are given three options for each of the twelve sentences, and they had to choose the one they considered correct. One of the options includes the structure: verb + particle + direct object. Another option includes the structure: verb + direct object + particle. And the last option refers to both previous options as being correct. This is illustrated in example (17) where the phrasal verb appears in bold type. In the task the participants took no bold type was used at all.

(17) a. Give back the book.

b. Give the book back.

c. Both are correct.   → **expected answer.**

As in (17), participants have to choose the correct option out of the three provided, only one of them being the correct one (17c). These options were randomized so that, for instance, the both-correct option sometimes appears as the first option, sometimes as the second option and sometimes as the third option (compare example 16 above and 17 below).

To analyze word order, the twelve sentences in the word order task are equally distributed in the three direct object forms: pronouns (four instances), short DPs (five instances) and long DPs (three instances). When the direct object that accompanies the

transitive phrasal verb is a pronoun, it must always appear between the verb and the particle. This is shown in (18) where the correct answer expected is (18a).

(18) a. I can't take it off.   → **expected answer.**

b. Both are correct.

c. I can't take off it.

If a short DP works as the direct object of a phrasal verb, the DP may appear between the verb and the particle that make up the phrasal verb or it may appear after the phrasal verb, as in (19):

(19) a. She puts on a red hat to go to the party.

b. She puts a red hat to go to the party on.

c. Both are correct.   → **expected answer.**

In this case, the participants are expected to choose the option "both are correct" (19c) since the short DP can appear between the elements making up the phrasal verb or after them.

When a long DP direct object was present, it needs to be placed after the phrasal verb, as in (20), where the expected answer is (20b).

(20) a. Both are correct.

b. I need to pick up my friend from summer camp.   → **expected answer.**

c. I need to pick a friend of mine from summer camp up.

The third task presented to the participants is adapted from Crutchley's (2007) verb-particle comprehension test. It is a multiple-choice task which includes six stimulus

sentences with phrasal verbs, and three possible interpretations that participants had to choose from.

This task includes: two transparent phrasal verbs, two translucent phrasal verbs and two opaque phrasal verbs. That is, through this task, the semantic dimension of phrasal verbs is tested. One of the interpretations focuses on the verb's meaning in isolation, while the other focuses on the particle's meaning in isolation. The last option represents the same meaning as the stimulus sentence, and is, therefore, the only correct interpretation. An example of an experimental item appears in (21):

    (21)   Billy started to work out in the gym.

        a. He started to train. → **expected answer.**

        b. He started to work in the gym.

        c. He was out of the gym.

In the case of this example (21), participants must choose option (21a) as the correct answer as it is the only one that has the same meaning as the stimulus sentence. The meanings of the other options are close to one of the elements (verb or particle) that are part of the phrasal verb.

The three tasks are included in the appendix.

5. Data analysis

Just as the tasks have been classified according to their semantic and syntactic dimension, the results obtained from these tasks have followed the same process. In each task, the results of the participants in Group 1 and Group 2 have also been analyzed and subsequently compared to see the differences between both groups. For the data analysis presented next, an excel database has been created. As per the English department

indications, the link to the database has been sent to the president of the Undergraduate Dissertation Examining Board.

The lexical task with pictures is presented first. In this task, the participants had to choose which of the four options presented was the correct option to complete the given sentence. Of the four possible answers, only one of them was correct, that of the phrasal verb whose meaning fitted the sentence. The other three options consisted of (1) a single verb with a meaning very similar to that of the phrasal verb marked correct, (2) a phrasal verb whose meaning did not fit the given sentence, and (3) a single verb whose meaning was different from the phrasal verb chosen as the correct option.

Table 6 deals with all the expected or non-expected answers given by the participants of both groups in this first task. Both percentages and number of cases are indicated in this table and in the subsequently tables.

Table 6. Expected and non-expected answers in the lexical task.

Expected answer	Non- expected answer	
Phrasal verbs	**Single verbs**	**Others**
99 (43,42%)	71 (31,14%)	58 (25,44%)

As can be seen in Table 6, the participants are inclined towards the option of the phrasal verb whose meaning fits in the given sentence, except in some cases (experimental sentences 8 and 12), in which the participants have shown a preference for the option of the single verb with a similar meaning, instead of choosing the option of the phrasal verb.

Regarding hypothesis 4 that the results of Group 1 would be better than those of Group 2 since they receive more instruction in English, Table 7 reflects that the results of Group 1 are better. This means that the differences between the groups are not significant, since in Group 1, out of a total of 120 responses, 49 were correct (40,83%), while in the Group 2, out of a total of 108 responses, 41 are correct (37,96%). Perhaps the slightly

higher use of phrasal verbs by Group 1 may be attributed to certain phrasal verbs being more familiar to them than to Group 2, because of their greater exposure to English.

Table 7. Expected and non-expected answers in the lexical task: group differences.

	Group 1	**Group 2**
Expected answer	49 (40,83%)	41 (37,96%)
Unexpected answer	71 (59,17%)	67 (62,04%)

The word order task is the second task that the participants have carried out and the results appear on Table 8 where, expected answers are marked in blue. With this task, the focus is placed on the syntactic dimension of phrasal verbs.

Table 8. Expected and non-expected answers in the word order task.

Pronoun	**V + Pronoun + Particle**	40 (52,63%)
	V + Particle + Pronoun	23 (30,26%)
	Both are correct	13 (17,11%)
Short DP	**V + DP+ Particle**	28 (29,47%)
	V + Particle + DP	40 (42,11%)
	Both are correct	27 (28,42%)
Long DP	**V + DP + Particle**	13 (22,81%)
	V + Particle + DP	32 (56,14%)
	Both are correct	12 (21,05%)

In the case of sentences with a pronoun as a direct object, more than half of the participants chose as the correct option the one that had the structure "verb + pronoun + particle", recognizing the change in position of the direct object as correct, since out of a total of 76 answers, 40 are correct (52,63%).

In the case of sentences with a short DP as direct object, it is seen that the participants do not recognize the change of order of the particle, so they do not consider the structure "verb + DP + particle" as grammatically correct, since out of a total of 95 responses, only 27 are correct (28,42%).

In the rest of the sentences of this second task they have a long PD as a direct object, more than half of the participants have responded favorably, in the sense that they have marked as the correct option the sentence that has the structure of " verb + particle + DP " since out of a total of 57 responses, 32 are correct (56,14%).

Regarding the differences between group 1 and group 2 in this task, they are not significant as seen in Table 9. In Group 1, in the case of sentences with pronouns as direct object, of a total of 40 responses, 22 are correct (55%). In the sentences with short DP as direct object, out of 50 answers, 14 are correct (28%). Finally, in the case of the sentences with a long DP as direct object, of a total of 30 answers, 18 are correct (60%). On the other hand, in Group 2, in the case of the sentences with pronouns as direct object, out of a total of 36 answers, 18 are correct (50%). In the case of the sentences with a short DP as a direct object, out of a total of 45 answers, 13 are correct (28,89%). Finally, in the case of the sentences with a long DP as a direct object, out of 29 answers, 14 are correct (51,85%).

Table 9. Expected answers of Group 1 and Group 2 in the second task.

	Group 1	Group 2
Pronoun	22 (55%)	18 (50%)
Short DP	14 (28%)	13 (28,89%)
Long DP	18 (60%)	14 (51,85%)

Through the last task that was proposed to the participants, the multiple-choice task, it is possible to analyze the degree of knowledge and familiarity they have with phrasal verbs from the semantic point of view. The results in Table 10 show that the participants have more easily recognized the meaning of the opaque phrasal verbs than the meaning of

the transparent and translucent phrasal verbs, even though they maintain a meaning similar to that of the verb in isolation.

In the case of transparent phrasal verbs, out of a total of 38 responses, 11 are correct (28,95%), as in the case of translucent phrasal verbs. In the case of opaque phrasal verbs, 20 answers out of 38 are correct (52,63%).

Table 10. Expected and non-expected answers of both groups in the third task.

	Expected answer	Non-expected answer
Transparent Ph. Vb	11 (28,95%)	27 (71,05%)
Translucent Ph. Vb	11 (28,95%)	27 (71,05%)
Opaque Ph. Vb	20 (52,63%)	18 (47,37%)

The results in Table 11 show differences between Group 1 and Group 2. On this occasion, despite the greater exposure to the English language in Group 1, the percentage of correct answers has been higher in Group 2, especially in the case of opaque phrasal verbs whose percentage is notably higher ((13,33% vs. 22,22%).

Table 11. Expected answers of Group 1 and Group 2 in the third task.

	Group 1	Group 2
Transparent Ph. Vb	7 (11,67%)	4 (7,49%)
Translucent Ph. Vb	6 (10%)	5 (9,26%)
Opaque Ph. Vb	8 (13,33%)	12 (22,22%)

6. General discussion

After presenting the results of each of the tasks, these are next discussed in relation to the research questions and hypotheses proposed in section 4.

In the first research question, it was asked whether the participants would prefer a single verb instead of a phrasal verb, when given a choice. For this reason, in the first task, single verbs and phrasal verbs appeared. The first hypothesis presented is rejected since, contrary to what was initially predicted, the participants of both groups have opted in most cases for the use of a phrasal verb instead of a single verb to complete the sentence.

The second research question, which deals with the syntactic dimension of phrasal verbs, focused on the change of position of the particle of transitive phrasal verbs. In this case, the hypothesis based on the fact that the participants would show fewer problems when the direct object is a pronoun than when it is a short or long DP. This is so because the participants could be more exposed to transitive sentences with phrasal verbs accompanied by a pronoun as a direct object, and hence, they could be more familiar with the change of position of the particle.

This second hypothesis is partially rejected. Firstly, the participants have shown fewer problems with those sentences that had a pronoun as a direct object, correctly understanding the change of order of the particle. So, at this point, this hypothesis could be confirmed. In the case of sentences with short DPs as a direct object, as it was previously predicted, many participants have not been able to recognize the possible change of the position of the particle, so, the hypothesis could also be confirmed as it was thought that they would present more difficulties than in the case of pronouns. On the other hand, and contrary to prediction, the sentences with long DPs as direct objects have been solved more easily by the participants so at this point, the second hypothesis could be said to be rejected.

The third research question which deals with the semantic dimension of phrasal verbs dealt with whether the participants would recognize the meaning of the phrasal verb by looking at the verb or the particle that conforms the phrasal verb instead of looking for the meaning of the phrasal verb as a unit. Due to this, the third hypothesis supported the idea that participants would find much easier to give a correct meaning to transparent and translucent phrasal verbs as they have a meaning similar to that of the verb in isolation. After analyzing the results, it can be said that this hypothesis is rejected since the

participants have more easily recognized the meaning of the opaque phrasal verbs than the transparent and translucent phrasal verbs. For this reason, it could be said that the participants have not looked at either the verb or the particle in isolation, but rather as a have perceived them as a unit.

The last research question is concerned with differences across the two participants groups. In particular, it dealt with whether the participants in Group 1, who receive more hours of instruction in English, would perform the three tasks better than the participants in Group 2. In this case, the fourth and last hypothesis predicted that the participants of Group 1, who receive more input, would outperform participants in Group 2 in the three tasks. It could be said that this hypothesis is partially rejected. In task 1 and task 2, the differences between Group 1 and Group 2 are not too significant, while in the last task, Group 2, despite receiving less exposure, reacted more favorably than those of Group 1.

7. Conclusions

The present study aimed to explore how L2 English children deal with the semantic and syntactic properties of phrasal verbs. In particular, we aimed to analyze whether L1 Spanish English learners are able to distinguish the possible syntactic word order between verbs and particles, and also whether they are able to recognize the meaning of a phrasal verb as if it were a unit or as a sum of the meanings of the verb and the particle. To carry out this research, three different tasks were designed whose results were subsequently analyzed and compared to confirm or reject the initial hypotheses.

Results show that phrasal verbs are one of the most problematic and difficult topics for English learners. The logical hypothesis, that the greater the exposure to the language by Group 1, the better results would be obtained in terms of mastery and knowledge of the English language, has not been confirmed in a very significant way. This may be due to several factors such as the absence of these grammatical structures in Spanish or the need

for a longer exposure to the L2 given the difficulty these structures present. As for the two dimensions explored, it seems that the most problematic one is the syntactic dimension because the participants do not recognize when the particle of a phrasal verb can be separated or not. On the contrary, the semantic dimension is less problematic, although it still poses some difficulties for the participants when they have to identify the correct meaning of a transparent, translucent or opaque phrasal verb.

After having reached several conclusions, it is important to say that this study has been carried out using a small group of participants, so this analysis could continue with different profiles of participants and other tasks in order to continue with the analysis of phrasal verbs and, thus, look for possible alternatives to facilitate the learning phrasal verbs.

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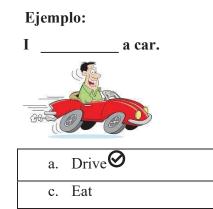
9. Appendix

1. <u>**Completa el siguiente cuestionario.**</u>
   a. **Nombre:**
   b. **Edad:**
   c. **Curso:**
   d. **Clases extraescolares:**

2. <u>**Experimento 1.**</u>

   Completa la oración con el verbo que creas que mejor se corresponde con el dibujo. Verás primero un ejemplo.

   Ejemplo:

   I _____ a car.

a. Drive ✅	b. Am
c. Eat	d. Drink

   1. _____ ! We are going to be late.

a. Come on	b. Run
c. Go	d. Come in

2. Please, _____! The teacher can´t hear you.

a. Count	b. Shout
c. Speak up	d. Slow down

3. What time do you usually _____?

a. Awake	b. Get up
c. Stand up	d. Sleep

4. He is _____ his little sister.

a. Looking after	b. Guarding
c. Looking	d. Cleaning up

5. Please, _____ your bedroom.

a. Soil	b. Clean up
c. Tidy	d. Give up

6. I _____ taking an English course this year.

a. Design	b. Plan on
c. Map out	d. Think

7. _____ your phone.

a. Turn on	b. Leave
c. Turn off	d. Close

8. He _____ the balloon.

a. Inflates	b. Exploits
c. Blows up	d. Blows down

9. I'm not afraid! Monster, _____.

a. Go away	b. Appear
c. Disappear	d. Turn up

10. Let's make a cake. _____ yoghurt, eggs, chocolate, and sugar.

a. Add	b. Take away
c. Remove	d. Put in

11. In Spring, plants and flowers start to _____.

a. Develop	b. Die
c. Grow up	d. Go off

12. Paul _____ and hurt his leg.

a. Fell	b. Got up
c. Fell over	d. Stood

3. **Experimento 2.**

   Elige cuál de las tres opciones es la correcta para cada oración. Verás primero dos ejemplos de práctica.

   Ejemplo 1:

   a) Sometimes I go swimming.

   b) I sometimes go swimming.

   c) <u>Both are correct</u>. ✓

   Ejemplo 2:

   a) <u>Sara is a good dancer</u>. ✓

b) Sara is a dancer good.

c) Both are correct.

- **Set 1:**

    a) Please put on your coat.

    b) Please put your coat on.

    c) Both are correct.

- **Set 2:**

    a) He turned on the light.

    b) Both are correct.

    c) He turned the light on.

- **Set 3:**

    a) Both are correct.

    b) My mother turns off the computer.

    c) My mother turns the computer off.

- **Set 4:**

    a) John takes out the fish.

    b) John takes the fish out.

    c) Both are correct.

- **Set 5:**

    a) Write it down.

    b) Both are correct.

    c) Write down it.

- **Set 6:**

    a) Wake her up.

b) Wakes up her.

c) Both are correct.

- **Set 7:**

  a) Call him back.

  b) Both are correct.

  c) Call back him.

- **Set 8:**

  a) I can't take it off.

  b) I can't take off it.

  c) Both are correct.

- **Set 9:**

  a) Both are correct.

  b) I pick up my friend from summer camp.

  c) I pick my friend from summer camp up.

- **Set 10:**

  a) She puts on a red hat.

  b) She puts a red hat on.

  c) Both are correct.

- **Set 11:**

  a) The students write down their names.

  b) Both are correct.

  c) The students write their names down.

- **Set 12:**

  a) My father makes up the best stories in the world.

b) My father makes the best stories in the world up.

c) Both are correct.

4. **Experimento 3.**

Elige cuál de las tres opciones tiene el mismo significado que la oración que aparece en cada enunciado. Verás primero un ejemplo.

Ejemplo:

I go to school after breakfast.

a) I eat my breakfast before going to school. ⊘

b) I eat my breakfast at school.

c) I don't eat my breakfast because I go to school.

1. **He is looking for the dog.**
   a) He was watching the dog through the window.
   b) He is with the dog and he must give the dog food and water.
   c) He is searching for the dog.

2. **Turn off the computer when you finish the project.**
   a) You have to power down the machine.
   b) You have to leave the computer.
   c) You have to break the computer when you finish the project.

3. **Billy started to work out in the gym.**
   a) He started to train.
   b) He started to work in the gym.
   c) He was out of the gym.

4. **David decided to join up the Army.**
   a) He decided to go with the Army.
   b) He decided to leave the Army.

c) He decided to work in the Army.

5. The flight was put off.

    a) The flight will depart later.

    b) The flight was cancelled.

    c) The flight was overbooked.

6. The thief got away.

    a) The thief was imprisoned.

    b) The thief escaped.

    c) The thief was killed.