



## **DIFFICULTIES FACED BY NON-LINGUISTIC STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS**

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### **Abstract**

Phrasal verbs are common in everyday English, yet many non-linguistic students find them confusing and hard to remember. The difficulty often comes from their idiomatic meanings and the fact that one phrasal verb may carry several different interpretations depending on the context. This small-scale study explores what exactly causes these challenges among non-linguistic learners. The research includes a short diagnostic test, a questionnaire, classroom observation, and informal interviews. The results show that students mainly struggle with literal translation, lack of contextual examples, and limited exposure to spoken English where phrasal verbs naturally appear. The study suggests that teachers should use more context-based explanations, visual support, and communicative tasks to help students learn phrasal verbs more effectively.

**Keywords:** Phrasal verbs, non-linguistic students, idiomatic meaning, contextual learning, teaching strategies, communicative tasks, vocabulary acquisition.

### **Introduction**

For many learners of English, phrasal verbs feel like one of the most unpredictable parts of the language. While native speakers use them naturally, especially in everyday speech, students who do not study linguistics often find them difficult to understand and even harder to use correctly. Non-linguistic students usually



learn English for practical communication, not for deep linguistic analysis. Because of this, they may not receive enough focused instruction on phrasal verbs, and the topic becomes something they try to avoid.

In many Uzbek universities, English lessons still rely on traditional grammar explanations. Students are given lists of phrasal verbs, but they rarely see how these verbs work in real conversations. As a result, most of them learn the meanings only temporarily and forget them quickly. This study aims to identify the specific types of difficulties non-linguistic students experience when learning phrasal verbs and to suggest teaching approaches that might help reduce these problems.

### **Literature Review**

Researchers generally agree that phrasal verbs are challenging for EFL learners because of their structure and idiomatic character. McCarthy and O'Dell (2017) note that phrasal verbs often cannot be understood by translating the verb and the particle separately, which makes them confusing for learners who rely heavily on literal meaning. Another major issue is polysemy. Darwin and Gray (1999) point out that many phrasal verbs have several different meanings, and the correct one depends entirely on the situation in which it is used.

Previous studies also show that learners sometimes avoid using phrasal verbs. Liao and Fukuya (2004) found that students often prefer single-word synonyms because they feel safer. This avoidance happens more among learners whose first language does not contain similar structures. Since Uzbek does not have phrasal verb equivalents, students tend to struggle even with common combinations like “turn on” or “pick up.”

Nation (2013) explains that vocabulary learning becomes harder when learners do not encounter new words repeatedly in different contexts. This idea is especially relevant for non-linguistic students who usually have fewer opportunities to interact with authentic English outside the classroom. Recent teaching approaches encourage teachers to introduce phrasal verbs through stories, dialogues, videos, and everyday communication rather than isolated lists, yet this practice is still not widely used in many educational settings.



## **Methodology**

The study was conducted with a group of non-linguistic students from a university in Tashkent. Their English level ranged from B1 to B2. To understand their difficulties, several tools were used: a short diagnostic test containing common phrasal verbs, a questionnaire asking students what they personally find difficult, classroom observation, and informal interviews with several participants.

The combination of these methods allowed for gathering both numerical and descriptive data, making the results more reliable.

## **Results**

The diagnostic test showed that most students had trouble identifying the correct meaning of phrasal verbs when the context changed. Many students knew “turn off” as switching something off, but failed to understand expressions like “His rude behaviour really turned me off.”

Several recurring problems appeared from the questionnaire and interviews:

1. Students try to translate phrasal verbs word by word.
2. They mix up similar particles such as “in,” “on,” and “up.”
3. They cannot remember multiple meanings of the same verb.
4. They rarely hear phrasal verbs in real conversations.
5. They avoid using them due to fear of mistakes.

Observations confirmed that even when students recognized a phrasal verb, they still avoided using it in speaking tasks.

## **Discussion**

The findings show that phrasal verbs require repeated exposure and meaningful practice, which non-linguistic students do not always receive. Their difficulties are partly linguistic and partly psychological, as they often feel insecure using phrasal verbs. Teaching them through isolated lists is not effective. Instead, phrasal verbs should be shown in real-life contexts—stories, dialogues, role plays, or video clips—to help students understand how they function naturally.



## **Conclusion**

Non-linguistic students face several difficulties when learning phrasal verbs, mainly due to literal translation, multiple meanings, and a lack of authentic exposure. Traditional teaching methods do not fully address these challenges. Teachers should rely more on contextual explanations, visual materials, and communicative tasks to help students use phrasal verbs more confidently.

## **Recommendations**

- Teach phrasal verbs through stories or dialogues instead of lists.
- Use visuals such as pictures and videos.
- Group phrasal verbs by shared meanings.
- Include speaking tasks requiring phrasal verbs.
- Provide regular revision in different contexts.

## **References**

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