
Impact of Unpretending and Using Figurative Language on Improving Learners' Communicative Competence

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Abstract

*This paper explores the effect of understanding and using figurative language with special reference to metaphorical expressions in improving learners' level of communicative competence. **Figurative language** (or non-literal) from other hand, refers to words exaggerate or alter the literal meaning to convey an intended meaning or to achieve a high impression by affecting the senses and feelings of the recipient. In other words, it is the use of words, phrases or sentences in a manner where the literal meaning of the words is not true or does not make sense, but "implies a non-literal meaning which does make sense of that could be true". It can be described as an intentional departure/deviation from ordinary language usage to purposefully emphasizing, clarifying, or decorating the utterance.*

Keywords: figurative language, metaphorical expressions, phrasal verbs communicative competence

1. INTRODUCTION

Figurative language deals with a wide range of figures of speech. In the present study only two these will be considered mostly the phrasal verbs and the metaphor. The term phrasal verb is commonly applied to two or three distinct but related constructions in English: a verb and a particle and/or a preposition co-occur forming a single semantic unit. This semantic unit cannot be understood based upon the

meanings of the individual parts in isolation, but rather it can be taken as a whole. In other words, the meaning is non-compositional and thus unpredictable. Phrasal verbs that include a preposition are known as prepositional verbs and phrasal verbs that include a particle are also known as particle verbs. Additional alternative terms for *phrasal verb* are *compound verb*, *verb-adverb combination*, *verb-particle construction*, *two-part word/verb*, and *three-part word/verb* (depending on the number of particles), and *multi-word verb*.

One can discern at least three main types of phrasal verb constructions depending upon whether the verb combines with a preposition, a particle, or both. The difference between these types of phrasal verbs lies with the status of the element(s) that appear in addition to the verb. When the element is a preposition, it is the head of a full prepositional phrase and the phrasal verb is thus a *prepositional phrasal verb*. When the element is a particle, it cannot (or no longer) be construed as a preposition, but rather is a particle because it does not take a complement. Finally, many phrasal verbs are combined with both a preposition and a particle.

The aspect of these types of phrasal verbs that unifies them under the single banner *phrasal verb* is the fact that their meaning cannot be understood based upon the meaning of their parts taken in isolation. When one picks on someone, one is not selecting that person for something, but rather one is harassing them. When one hangs out, one is in no way actually hanging from anything. The meaning of the two or more words together is often drastically different from what one might guess it to be, based upon the meanings of the individual parts in isolation.

As a class, particle phrasal verbs belong to the same category as the separable verbs of other Germanic languages. They are commonly found in everyday, informal speech as opposed to more formal English and Latinate verbs, such as *to get together* rather than *to congregate*, *to put off* rather than *to postpone* (or *to defer*), or *to do up* rather than *to fasten*. However, a few phrasal verbs exist in some Romance languages such as Italian and Lombard, in both cases due to the influence of ancient Lombardic: for instance *far fuori* (to do in: to eat up; to squander) in Italian and *dà denter* (to trade in; to bump into) in Lombard.

1.2 Statement of the problem

It goes without saying, figurative language and hence phrasal verbs and metaphor pose the greatest difficulty ever for EFL learners. Undoubtedly, the cultural element in this respect is of paramount importance. Some phrasal verbs and metaphor are greatly culture bound which entails good knowledge of the English culture on the part of the learner.

Some learners believe that phrasal verbs and metaphor are a separate set or category of language and hence they can choose to learn it or omit it. It is this untrue belief that causes hurdles to some learners that they give up the sheer attempt to learn. It is important to realize that phrasal verbs are not only colloquial expressions as many people believe. They appear in formal style and in slang, poetry, in the language of Shakespeare and in the Bible. So, simply a phrasal verb can be described as a number of words, which when taken together have a different meaning from the individual meanings of each word.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The most important goal of this research is to find evidence to support whether phrasal verbs can be cautiously selected and be introduced at lower levels of general education stages. The aim is again to facilitate the learning of EFL or not, especially in English reading comprehension and improve writing. The area of figurative language is one which quite often poses ongoing challenges to both tutors and learners. A further aim is whether it is possible to design a syllabus that makes the study of phrasal verbs interesting and rewarding.

1.4 Significance of the study

The significance of this study stems from the very fact that teaching or introducing phrasal verbs is avoided by all tutors. Hence, the researcher hopes to come up with insights that can be useful in this direction. The problem with learning and understanding phrasal verbs is that a great portion of them is culture-bound. Some linguists consider them to be part of figurative language particularly idiomatic expressions.

1.5 Problems posed by Figurative Language in General

Poets are always searching for effective and precise structures to express themselves, their central ideas or their intention to the reader (mostly to remedy corruption in the society or to deal with emotional state). The reader, on the other hand, wants to enjoy the theme of the poem, so he makes his best to interpret the poem for the sake of satisfying the needs of his feelings in terms of sentiments, emotions and romantic senses which can be obtained from the poem.

The precise way to achieve the above mentioned goal is metaphor, but the problem is that the metaphor can take different grammatical structures, not specific form\pattern. On the side of the student, these different structures can be interpreted through various approaches depending on his\her comprehension, which sometimes, hinder a proper understanding of the poets' intention, the poets' proposition or to capture the poem's central idea. In other words, the student, in a way or another, may not be able to get the poet's intention because of the student's confusion among different grammatical structures that are carrying metaphor. To the purpose of the current study, this is the first dimension of the problem.

Furthermore, the researcher acquainted with the students' achievements that are scored out of previous poetic examinations applied on the same students; he recognized their weakness in dealing with the metaphor. Again concerning the metaphor, the researcher applied a certain test on the same students; he found in both cases, that 85% from the students were not able to deal with the items related to metaphor. The students confessed that they face many difficulties in understanding the metaphor because the problem resides in how to recognize it.

The researcher inferred that the students' problem lies in understanding the meaning of metaphor and how to distinguish between literal and literature meaning. It may be said that the students may confuse in dichotomizing between merely expressions to fulfill the poem and metaphorical expressions as a sense device used in poetry for specific purpose.

In other words, the student, in a way or another, may not comprehend the metaphor because of the unconnected relation and even sometimes a contrasted relation between the two described or compared objects. As so, it may be said that comprehension is the second dimension of the problem.

1.6 Problems posed by Phrasal Verbs

One of the main problems that learners are likely to encounter in learning English is the question of the phrasal verbs. Learners around the world tend to panic at the mere mention of their name (phrasal verbs), and to avoid using them for fear of making mistakes. In this article I shall be looking at why this is and how as teachers we can try to encourage students to use them.

Quite a big number of multi-word verbs carry more than one meaning. Thus, learners who are familiar with the meaning of "**turn down**" as in, "**He turned down the radio**", have problems interpreting the meaning of "**He turned her down**" (rejected her). It is best to deal with the meaning of the verb that is salient in the text. If the meaning of the verb in focus is to 'reject', then teach this meaning, without going into the other possible meanings. This approach can be clearer and less confusing for students.

Many multi-word verbs carry a literal meaning, e.g. "**sit down**", "**stand up**", though many have a non-literal meaning, e.g. "**I picked up quite a bit of Spanish on holiday last year**". If presented through texts, learners can sometimes interpret their meanings quite accurately, picking up clues from the theme of the text and the co-text, but isolated or even heard or read at sentence level, they can be very confusing for the learner.

Multi-word verbs present problems in terms of the words with which they collocate. McCarthy says that collocation is "*a marriage contract between words, and some words are more firmly married to each other than others.*" Thus, "**to call off**", for example, collocates strongly with "match", i.e. "**The match was called off due to the rain**", and it also collocates strongly with '*engagement*', '*wedding*', '*meeting*'

Students often understand the meaning, i.e. cancel, and then attempt to apply it to other nouns with which it in fact has no relationship. For example, "**I called off my English class**" sounds strange to L1 speakers, as generally we can only call off events which have been specifically arranged, or that are of a unique, one-off nature. Helping students with collocation can be half way to providing solution. Firstly, students' awareness of collocation should be raised by asking them to underline the nouns which follow certain verbs and then later filling in a collocational grid, matching multi-word verbs to their common collocations, e.g. '*Call off*', '*set up*', '*put off*' = '*a meeting*'.

Alternatively, collocation bingo works well, as learners have a set of nouns on a card, which they cross off according to whether they think they collocate with the phrasal verb which I read out. Odd one out tasks are also very useful as students are involved in a deeper level of processing, discussing why certain words don't combine. Most of all though, it is through the language which occurs in the classroom that students can really see how the relationships between words matter, provided the teacher draws attention to this.

7. Etymology

Harper (2010:137) explains that the word "metaphor" is derived from the old French (*métaphore*) which came from the Latin culture (*metaphora*). It consists of two Latin roots: 'meta' which means over, and 'pherein' means 'to carry, to bear'. As so, its literally meaning is (to carry over). Thus the essence of a metaphor lies in the carryover of meaning, and as we consider the true purport of this 'transfer of meaning' concept we realize that the significance of metaphor underlies much broader areas of life than mere literary effectiveness.

8. Historical Tracing of Metaphor

Bragg (2010:2) argues that metaphor is a technique apparently as old as language itself; it may be manifested in the earliest surviving work of literature "**The Epic of Gilgamesh**". Aristotle (484-322 BC) may be the first person who document about metaphor (see 2-7.1). The clear root of metaphor may relate to the late of thirteenth century where Chaucer's "**The Parson's Tale**" written in about 1390 and then "**Taking Occasion**" which is a text by Cato's Distichs in 1475. Metaphor in English became more visual in its expression over time when William Bonde wrote in "**Pilgrimage of Perfection**" in 1526. The expression "Seizing the occasion" brings up an image of grasping something before it goes. The object of this metaphor is "**Occasio**" which is related to the ancient Roman goddess of chance.

After 1531, the metaphor becomes much more descriptive. Thomas Starkey (In the 1530s) wrote in "**A Dialogue Between Pole and Lupset**", and then Christopher Marlowe wrote in "**The Jew of Malta**" in about 1593. In 1586, Geoffrey Whitney wrote in "**A Choice of Emblemes**" included an English translation of "**Occasio**". Then in 1635 George Wither wrote in "**A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne**" (Ibid).

Sixteenth century was the time of metaphor flourishing by the favor of Shakespeare, Melton, and others. Shakespeare's "**As You Like It**" comprises much examples of metaphors, one of them: "**All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players.**" and "**Juliet is the sun**" from Romeo and Joliet which contains the most common examples of metaphor. In fact it is a celebrated use of metaphor, which is a figure of speech in which one thing is used to describe another (ibid).

Seventeenth century was the wind of metaphor changing to became emotional when Hester Thrall (1773) wrote "**The Island of Skye**". This century was flourished with metaphor by the favor of poets like; Richard Lovelace, William Collins, Robert Herrick, Lord Byron, and others (Ibid).

Whereas Eighteenth century (The Victorian Age or Romantic) came to complete the flourishing of metaphor by the favor of Emily Bronte, S. T. Coleridge, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Tomas Hardy, and others (Sequeira et al.,70-87).

During 20th century (since 1900 and on), sometimes called 'Modern Period', metaphorical studies took off across disciplines like: philosophers, linguists, psychologists, cognitive scientists, and others.

9 Population of the study

For carrying out this study two groups were identified:

- a. The population of English language teachers at Sudanese universities who carry out the task of teaching.
- b. The population of students who are the target of teaching, understanding and using phrasal verbs and metaphorical expression.

The first population group consisted of ELT teachers at faculty of education and faculty of languages at Sudan University of science and technology. The second population group consisted of all 3rd year students majoring in English language at the above mentioned faculties.

10. The teachers' sample of the study

The first population of this study consisted of English language teachers at Sudanese universities and was represented by a sample group consisting of 40 ELT teachers

11. The Students' sample of the Study

The second population of the study was represented by a sample group consisting of 150 students distributed in two faculties, faculty of languages and faculty of education at Sudan University of science and technology. The subject were 3rd year students at majoring in English language at the above mentioned faculties. Most of them had studied English language as a compulsory subject for 10 years from the same school language curriculum approved by the Sudanese ministry of education and ministry of higher education and scientific research. They have the same cultural and language background, with Arabic language as their first language.

Distribution of samples across the University of Sudan

University	Faculty	No.	Total
Sudan University of Science and Technology	Languages	70	70
Sudan University of Science and Technology	Education	50	50

12. Instrumentation:

The instruments that the researcher used for conducting this study are:

- A questionnaire for ELT teachers.
- A test on phrasal verbs and metaphorical expressions for EFL university students majoring in English language.

The questionnaire:

The aim of the questionnaire used in this research was to find out about the teachers' views regarding teaching and learning of idiomatic expressions and collocations, and it is also relevant directly to the questions and hypothesis of the study. It was administered to a total sample of 40 ELT teachers at some Sudanese universities. It consisted of two parts the first part contained personal information about the participant. The second part contained 15 statements related to teachers' views about phrasal verbs and metaphorical expressions, problems of understanding and using them, The scale used in the questionnaire was five-point Likert scale to show the expected

responses from participants, five codes were given to the statement as follows:

- 1=Strongly Agree,
- 2=Agree,
- 3=Neutral,
- 4=Disagree
- 5=Strongly Disagree

13 Students' test:

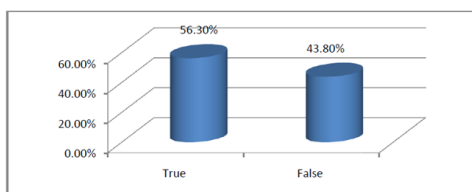
Of the two research instruments, the test of idioms and collocations was given more emphasis because the students were the major target of the study and the investigation of their knowledge, problems of understanding and using idiomatic expressions and collocations were the vocal objectives of the present study. The researcher adapted for this purpose, a 50 item test in which 25 items on phrasal verbs and 25 items on idiomatic expressions. The test was widely selected to assess the student's knowledge of idiomatic expressions and collocation. The questions were meant to cover the different levels of English idioms and collocations such as lexical, semantic and syntactic levels. Some of the tests' questions try to trace the impact of the students' native idiomatic expressions on their understanding of the English idiomatic expressions. The test was given in a form of multiple choice questions. It consisted of two questions. The first question was 25 items (metaphorical expressions) multiple choice questions with one correct answer and two other distracters supplied for each given sentence, students were asked about the meaning of each metaphorical expression. The second question consisted of two parts. Part one consisted of 18 gap filling questions where students were asked to collocate some of the most common verbs (Miss-Get-Do-Make) that goes with other words. The second part of question two was a multiple choice question consisted of 7 items, students were asked for completing the sentence provided through choosing the best answer.

The test was administered to a total of 120 students. Participants were 3rd year English language majors at Sudan University of Science and Technology, faculties of languages and education. The rational for selecting senior students 75 as a sample was that, with regard to the stage they have reached in their study, they should have accumulated a considerable knowledge about language, idiomatic expressions and collocations. They should also have good language

analyzability skills that enable them to deal with the linguistic irregularities of phrasal verbs and metaphorical expressions.

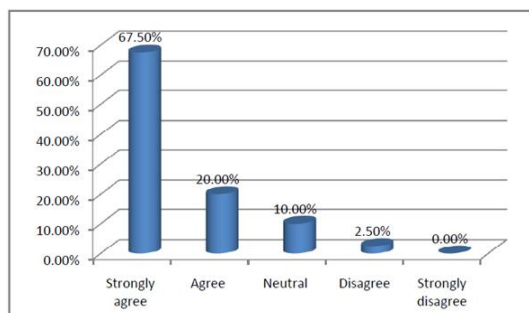
Frequency and percentage

Variables	Frequencies	Percentages %
Succeeded	45	56%
Failure	35	43%
Total	80	100%



Statement 1. *Good knowledge of on the part of the students of metaphorical expressions and phrasal verbs are important for EFL learners in communication context.*

Variables	Frequencies	Percentages
Strongly agree	27	67.5%
Agree	8	20.0%
Neutral	4	10.0%
Disagree	1	2.5%
Strongly disagree	0	0.0%
Total	40	100.0%



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