

Phrasal Verbs and Avoidance in SLA: a Study of Advanced Francophone ESL Learners

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Abstract

Avoidance in SLA is defined as the choice to use one language feature over another, in order to avoid producing an error [4], [7]. Studies have shown that learners of English from a variety of language backgrounds tend to avoid phrasal verbs, even at advanced stages of SLA [1], [2], [5]. As Francophone learners have not yet been tested, the present study investigates the use of phrasal verbs in a population of advanced Francophone learners of English.

Firstly, in order to describe the linguistic phenomenon of phrasal verbs, we applied a syntactic and semantic classification proposed by Jackendoff [3]. According to this classification, phrasal verbs have a single syntactic structure; their variation being attributed to the semantic function of the particle in the construction (directional, idiomatic, aspectual or redundant).

Native speaker preference for phrasal verbs in specific contexts was then established through a preference test; participants (n=27) had to choose between a one-word verb and a phrasal verb. Finally, two tests using the same stimuli as with the native speakers were administered to two different groups of learners of the same proficiency in order to measure avoidance: a gap-filling exercise (n=47) with a word bank to choose from and a multiple choice test (n=35). For both tests, avoidance was operationalized by the correct choice of a one-word verb over a phrasal verb.

Our study seems to confirm previous results, by which even advanced learners of English tend to avoid the use of phrasal verbs when compared with native speakers. Notably, results show that Francophone learners of English avoid certain constructions with phrasal verbs, but not phrasal verbs as a class. The role of the particle in the construction (directional, idiomatic, aspectual or redundant) appears not only to be the factor which predicts avoidance, but also that which conditions native speaker preference.

References

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