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Learner knowledge of phrasal verbs

A corpus-informed study

Norbert Schmitt and Stephen Redwood

This study analyses whether a group of learners' productive and receptive knowledge of some of the most common phrasal verbs (PVs) is related to the frequency of those PVs. Secondly, we look at factors which may have affected the learners' PV knowledge. The learners completed two tests (productive, receptive) and were also required to complete a biodata questionnaire containing questions about age, gender and nationality, and items relating to the language instruction they received and the incidental exposure they had to English. The analysis of the data shows that there is a relationship between learner knowledge and PV frequency, and that extensive reading and watching English language films and TV programmes appear to have a positive effect on the acquisition of PVs.

1. Introduction

Phrasal verbs are one of the most productive areas of the English language (Konishi 1958, Bolinger 1971), consisting of many thousands of items (Gardner & Davies 2007), and with new ones regularly coming into use (e.g. *chill out*, *freak out*, *log off/on*, *max out*, *scroll up/down*, *sex up*, *space out*). They are a key feature of both spoken and written language, with Gardner & Davies (ibid.: 347) estimating that phrasal verbs occur, on average, every 192 words, that is almost 2 phrasal verbs per page of written text. Language coursebooks are now belatedly giving much more attention to these items, and a growing number of dictionaries and other publications devoted exclusively to phrasal verbs have been published in recent years, for example: *Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (Courtney 1983), *The Ultimate Phrasal Verb Book* (Hart 2009), *English Phrasal Verbs in Use: Advanced* (McCarthy & O'Dell 2007), *Dictionary of English Phrasal Verbs and their Idioms* (McArthur & Atkins 1990), and *Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (Sinclair 2002). Despite their frequency in spoken and written language, phrasal verbs are often perceived as 'difficult' by both English as a Foreign/Second language (EFL/ESL) teachers, and their learners. There appear to be a number of reasons for this. Much of the language that we use is both idiomatic and formulaic and cannot be interpreted simply by looking at the individual

words (Moon 1997). Phrasal verbs as multi-word units are no exception and many are opaque, making them difficult to decipher and understand. They often consist of a high frequency, monosyllabic, delexicalised verb (e.g. *get, give, go, make, take*) and one of a fixed number of particles (e.g. *down, in, off, on, out, over, up*), and the problem for learners is that these frequent and apparently simple components may come together to form units which are specialised, emotive, and idiomatic (e.g. *the situation is really getting her down; I can't make out what this says; don't give up now; it was too much to take in*).

The opaque and idiomatic nature of some phrasal verbs presents obvious difficulties for learners and these problems are compounded when we take into account the significant number of phrasal verbs that are also polysemous. Sometimes there is a degree of transparency, and a semantic link may be made between the different senses (cf. *fill in a hole, fill in a form, fill in somebody on something, fill in for somebody*). However, in other instances the connection is more tenuous (cf. *put up a fence, put up a fight, put somebody up for the night*), and the meanings more difficult to interpret.

In addition to the semantic complexity of phrasal verbs, particle movement can also present difficulties for learners. We may think of phrasal verbs as holistic multi-word units, but with most transitive and a number of intransitive phrasal verbs, particles may be separated from their verbs by pronouns, adverbs or noun phrases (e.g. *she put her new fur coat on; he picked her up from the station; I'll come straight over to see you; we tried to calm the old woman down*). Learners not only have to decide whether a phrasal verb is separable (cf. *I stayed up late last night; *I stayed late up last night*) but also what it can be separated by (adverb, pronoun, short noun phrase, long noun phrase). For example, it is acceptable to say *he gave all of his vast fortune away*, but not **the rebels are putting a huge amount of resistance up*). This decision is not always based on transitivity or other grammatical considerations, but often depends on stylistic and syntactic conventions, context, prosody and intended meaning (see Bolinger 1971).

2. The acquisition of phrasal verbs

The widespread use of phrasal verbs means that learners need to know them, but their semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic complexities lead to learning difficulties. So how can researchers and teachers help learners master this important linguistic feature? One way is to better understand the factors that lead to the learning of phrasal verbs. SLA research has identified a wide range of factors that influence language learning in general (see Dörnyei 2009; and Ellis 2008 for overviews), but recent research and theorizing have highlighted exposure to the target language as the driving force of language learning (e.g. Ellis 2003; Tomasello 2003). This exposure can come from the naturalistic environment, or from classroom input. In both cases, frequency is an

essential factor, because all things being equal, the more frequent an item is, the more a learner will be exposed to it. This is certainly true for vocabulary learning, where frequency is widely accepted as one of the best predictors of whether individual words will be known or not (Nation 2001; Schmitt 2008, 2010). However, phrasal verbs have some important differences from individual words as we have seen above, and it is not obvious whether frequency is such a clear predictor of their learning as it is for individual words. If not, teachers and materials writers will have to look for other characteristics to guide the sequencing of the phrasal verbs they wish to teach. However, if frequency in the learning environment does prove to be predictive, then practitioners could tentatively assume that learners know the highest frequency phrasal verbs from exposure, and would need to focus on teaching the somewhat less frequent ones.

So in a naturalistic environment, frequency is important, because the more frequently items occur, the better they are generally learned. This has been shown in a number of studies into incidental vocabulary learning from reading, perhaps the most important source of outside input (e.g. Horst 2005; Rott 1999). But there are a number of other ways that learners can gain exposure to the target language, including film, television, radio, music, and social networking sites. We do not know yet how much effect these kinds of exposure have on language acquisition, but some believe that they can help significantly in the learning process (e.g. Pemberton & Fallahkair 2008; Sjöholm 2004).

For explicit instruction, frequency is essential for selecting the phrasal verbs that will be the most beneficial for learners. There are many thousands of phrasal verbs (e.g. Gardner & Davies 2007), but as with other vocabulary items, some occur more frequently in language than others. Lexical items that are in common use are more often than not those which are the most useful, and as such their acquisition should be a priority for both teachers and learners (Leech, this volume; Nation 2001; Nation & Waring 1997). Unfortunately, some of the 'most frequent phrasal verb' lists in textbooks and dictionaries appear to be based more on intuition and tradition than on solid corpus data. As a result of this somewhat arbitrary selection process, students may be learning low frequency phrasal verbs which are rarely used in the real world, and worse, not acquiring those which are most frequent and useful (Darwin & Gray 1999: 67). Good frequency information would indicate which phrasal verbs are the most common, and therefore the ones to prioritise.

So frequency is an important factor in learning from both naturalistic environment and formal instruction contexts. For determining the frequency of occurrence of lexical items in both, corpus analysis is the essential tool. Before the advent of corpora, intuition was the only guide to assessing lexical frequency, and while it may be a useful tool, it is not always a reliable guide (Hunston 2002: 20–21; Schmitt 2008: 333). But with the development of large and accessible corpora (multi-million word corpora are now common), it has become possible to determine the most common words and phrases, and their most frequent uses (Biber et al. 1999; Gardner & Davies 2007;

Miller 2005). This is particularly true with formulaic language, which is probably the linguistic category that phrasal verbs can best be conceptualized as belonging to. For example, Sylviane Granger and her research unit (*Centre for English Corpus Linguistics*) at the Université catholique de Louvain have shown how corpus evidence can illustrate L2 learners' acquisition and use of various kinds of formulaic language (see De Cock 2000; De Cock et al. 1998; Granger 1998; Granger & Meunier 2008; *Learner Corpus Bibliography* 2010; Meunier & Granger 2008).

From the above discussion we see that there are good reasons to expect that frequency should be a strong factor in the learning of phrasal verbs. However, there has been little direct research on the relationship between the two. This study will focus on comparing the frequency of phrasal verbs (as determined by corpus evidence) with the degree to which L2 learners know them (receptively and productively), which leads to the first research question:

1. How well do learners know, productively and receptively, some of the most frequently occurring phrasal verbs in the English language?

There are also a number of other factors which may affect how successfully a learner masters common phrasal verbs, and we will also explore a limited number of these:

2. Does overall language proficiency have a significant effect on phrasal verb knowledge?
3. Do gender and age have a significant effect on phrasal verb knowledge?
4. Do the amount and mode of language instruction have a significant effect on phrasal verb knowledge?
5. Does incidental learning through exposure to the target language outside the classroom have a significant effect on phrasal verb knowledge?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

Our participants consisted of 68 EFL/ESL students from three private language schools in the Nottingham and Eastbourne areas; 23 students at intermediate level and 45 at upper intermediate level. Their levels had been assessed initially by their schools' placement tests and confirmed, after a number of lessons and by further progress checks, by their EFL/ESL teachers. The participants were made up of 47 females and 21 males, ranging in age from 14 to 55, from 14 countries, with 10 mother tongues, the largest group being the Italians (32). Table 1 shows a breakdown of the participant's nationalities, genders, ages and language levels.

Table 1. The Participants

Nationality	N	M	F	Age	Intermediate	Upper Intermediate
Italian	32	5	27	14–21	18	14
Columbian	9	6	3	18–26	0	9
Spanish	6	1	5	33–46	0	6
Polish	5	0	5	23–29	5	0
Saudi	5	4	1	20–33	0	5
German	2	0	2	19–55	0	2
Libyan	2	0	2	17–30	0	2
Chilean	1	0	1	31	0	1
Chinese	1	1	0	21	0	1
Kazak	1	0	1	28	0	1
Portuguese	1	1	0	22	0	1
Taiwanese	1	0	1	15	0	1
Turkish	1	0	1	38	0	1
Vietnamese	1	1	0	25	0	1
Totals	68	19	49	–	23	45

3.2 Target phrasal verbs

The study included 60 phrasal verbs. The majority (50) were taken from Gardner & Davies' (2007) list of the 100 most frequently occurring phrasal verbs in the *British National Corpus* (BNC 2007). Because phrasal verbs are considered difficult to acquire, we concentrated on high frequency examples because we wished to see how well our learners knew the type of phrasal verb they would presumably have had the most exposure to. However, we also wished to have a range of frequency on the list, so we included ten less frequent phrasal verbs, which were selected from student course-books and grammar reference books.

In addition to investigating the relationship between overall phrasal verb frequency and learner knowledge, we also wanted to find out whether there were differences in knowledge levels between those phrasal verbs found more often in written language and those more frequent in spoken language. To do this, we consulted the BNC (2007) for phrasal verb frequencies. We chose the BNC because it is one of the largest corpora (100 million words) publicly available, and because it represents a cross-section of written and spoken language from a wide range of late twentieth century sources (BNC Homepage). Another key advantage is that the complete corpus can be bought and downloaded, which made our phrasal verb analysis possible. Gardner & Davies used the following definition as the basis for the identification and tagging of phrasal verbs: "all two-part verbs in the BNC consisting of a lexical verb ... proper ... followed by an adverbial particle ... that is either contiguous ... to that verb or non-contiguous ..."

(ibid.: 341). Our definition of a phrasal verb was rather broader in that we included verbs followed by prepositional as well as adverbial particles (see Biber et al. 1999: 403; Bolinger 1971: 6; *Collins Cobuild English Grammar* 2005; McArthur & Atkins 1990). First we looked up the phrasal verbs' overall frequency in the complete BNC. We then repeated the process using only the spoken section (10 million words). Finally, by subtracting the spoken frequency results from those for the complete BNC we arrived at figures for the written section (90 million words). Each phrasal verb and its inflections (*come off, came off, coming off*) was tagged for contiguous (verb + particle) and non-contiguous (verb + word(s) + particle) occurrences, up to a limit of 4 words separating verb and particle. We found that most phrasal verbs were either contiguous, or separated by a single word. Very few phrasal verbs were separated by 4 words (228 occurrences in the whole of the BNC) and there were many lexical strings that were not phrasal verbs (*the Carry On films; the meeting was held on the 28th of January; pay me when you get back*). The occurrences of phrasal verbs separated by 5 or more words were so infrequent that we did not consider these in the calculations. When we compared our findings for the complete BNC with those of Gardner & Davies (see Appendix A for comparison) we found that the majority of our frequency figures were higher, on occasions significantly so (e.g. *get in, go in, put on*), with a small number lower (e.g. *carry on, carry out*). These differences may be partly due to our use of a broader phrasal verb definition, or the tagging methods used; but we can only speculate as we do not know exactly how Gardner and Davies' figures were calculated. The results showing the frequency figures for the 60 target phrasal verbs are shown in Table 2.

3.3 Receptive and productive measurement instruments

One of the goals of the study was to establish learners' knowledge about the target phrasal verbs, and it seemed important to assess both receptive and productive mastery (Schmitt 2010). The productive test used a cloze technique in which the participants had to produce the target vocabulary themselves, requiring a higher level of mastery than would a receptive word recognition test (Groot 2000: 76). Cloze tests are used extensively as a testing procedure, and are seen, especially in the area of vocabulary, as a good measure of lexical knowledge (Read 1997). An example for *set up* is given below:

The police s_____ u_____ roadblocks to stop people driving into the city centre. (*build, erect*)

To be consistent with the aim of testing both productive and receptive knowledge of the same target language we used similar items in both tests. The differences between the two tests being, the first letter prompts were omitted from the receptive test, multiple-choice options were added to the receptive test, and the items in each test were in different orders. To help reduce guessing, a fifth 'Don't know' option was included in the receptive test. The productive test, being the one in which the participants had to

Table 2. BNC Target Phrasal Verb Frequency

	Phrasal Verb	BNC	Written	Spoken		Phrasal Verb	BNC	Written	Spoken
1	go on	16228	12591	3637	31	get in	4671	3221	1450
2	pick up	10884	10147	737	32	hold on	1797	1493	304
3	come in	9777	7700	2077	33	go over	1732	1173	559
4	take up	9450	6548	2902	34	move in	1377	1134	243
5	go out	7765	5008	2757	35	turn down	1355	1182	173
6	hold on	6977	4444	2533	36	look around	1350	1268	82
7	put on	6760	5484	1276	37	come over	1262	916	346
8	find out	6329	5605	724	38	come off	1191	803	388
9	work out	5257	4732	525	39	sit up	1181	1040	141
10	make up	5231	3369	1862	40	put off	1075	851	224
11	come out	5190	3922	1268	41	make out	1067	937	130
12	sit down	5022	4610	412	42	turn off	1057	650	407
13	take on	4717	3886	831	43	pick out	905	732	173
14	carry on	4695	1994	2701	44	hold back	862	811	51
15	set up	4199	3981	218	45	take down	849	521	328
16	go in	3892	3449	443	46	give back	654	404	250
17	get up	3637	2338	1299	47	move up	616	537	79
18	get on	3441	1949	1492	48	move back	603	527	76
19	carry out	3406	2283	1123	49	move out	594	468	126
20	come down	3083	2301	782	50	give out	550	404	146
21	get out	3010	2367	643	51	dig up	383	318	65
22	get in	2587	2466	121	52	pay back	295	230	65
23	bring in	2565	1928	637	53	pin down	249	229	20
24	put up	2386	2118	268	54	tear up	224	202	22
25	go over	2152	1810	342	55	think over	219	206	13
26	go off	1728	1326	402	56	fall behind	156	145	11
27	break down	1469	1031	438	57	pass away	104	89	15
28	take back	1430	1272	158	58	chat up	100	87	13
29	move on	1415	809	606	59	take after	84	58	26
30	put out	1251	753	498	60	cool off	65	59	6

BNC = token frequency BNC complete

Written = token frequency BNC written

Spoken = token frequency BNC spoken

recall and produce the target language, was to be administered first. If the productive test was given second there would be the possibility of testees remembering some of the multiple-choice answers from the receptive test. Obviously, learners who knew the answer to an item productively would also be likely to know it receptively as receptive knowledge usually precedes productive knowledge (Melka 1997; Schmitt 2010). The receptive version of the above item is illustrated below. See Appendices B & C for the complete productive and receptive tests.

The police _____ roadblocks to stop people driving into the city centre. (*build, erect*)

A. set in B. set up C. set on D. set at E.?

3.4 Biodata questionnaire

In addition to establishing the relationship between frequency and learner knowledge, we were also interested in gathering information about some of the other factors which may have had an effect on phrasal verb acquisition. We already had a rough idea of our participants' language proficiency from the school's in-house assessments, so we produced a 10-item questionnaire which contained items on basic biodata information (age, gender, nationality), and items relating to language exposure through classroom instruction, and exposure through incidental learning, that is, extensive reading, the media and entertainment, and social networking (see Appendix D for the complete questionnaire).

3.5 Procedure

Having written the tests it was essential to thoroughly pilot them to test their validity and reliability (Dörnyei 2007), and importantly, to confirm that they could be completed in the time available (Schmitt 2010). We first asked ten educated native speakers to complete the tests and comment on any difficulties they had with any of the test items. Subsequent feedback showed that most of the native speakers took 15 to 25 minutes to finish the productive test and 10 to 15 minutes for the receptive test. They reported no serious problems with the items, but we listened carefully to the comments they made and as a consequence rewrote several of the items to make them clearer, and modified the definitions/synonyms for others to improve their performance. We repeated the exercise with 8 other native speakers and made further modifications. We were satisfied that the instruments worked well with native speakers but we also required confirmation from non-native speakers. We asked a number of upper-intermediate and advanced level learners to complete the tests, and in response to the feedback received a number of minor alterations were made.

The tests were then given to the participants in a single session in their intact classes with a short break between the tests. Instructions explaining the purpose of the

test, its format, and what the participants had to do were printed at the beginning of each test, together with example items. To make sure the participants knew exactly what to do, they were led through all the instructions, paying particular attention to the example items, and the amount of time they had to complete the test. In addition, we explained that they could answer each question with the base form of the phrasal verb, but that any of its inflections would be accepted as correct (*work out, worked out, working out*). The productive test was given first, then the receptive version after a 10 minute break, and finally the biodata questionnaire. All the participants had sufficient time to complete both tests and fill in the biodata questionnaire.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Phrasal verb frequency and knowledge

The main aim of the study was to explore the link between phrasal verb frequency and how well they are learned by L2 learners. In other words, do learners tend to know more about the most frequently occurring phrasal verbs than the less frequent ones? In addition we wanted to discover whether there was a link between mode (spoken vs. written) and phrasal verb knowledge. That is, do learners know more about those phrasal verbs more frequently found in written language, those used more often in spoken language, or do they have a broad knowledge extending across the two modes?

To explore this link, we first carried out correlations comparing the results of the productive and receptive tests with our phrasal verb frequency rankings from the BNC complete, BNC written, and BNC spoken. The Pearson coefficients indicated a significant positive correlation between mean tests scores and phrasal verb frequencies as shown in Table 3. The strengths of the correlation coefficients were moderate for the productive test, and relatively low for the receptive test. To achieve a better understanding of the strengths of the correlations, the correlation coefficients were squared (r^2), which produced figures which represent the percentage of the variance in the test scores that can be related to frequency. These figures are shown in parentheses, and they indicate that for the BNC complete, 20% of the variance in the productive scores was attributable to frequency, but for the receptive scores only 9% of the variance was related to frequency. Thus we find that the learning of phrasal verbs is related to their frequency of occurrence, just as it is with individual words. However, the strength of relationship is not particularly strong, and varies according to productive and receptive knowledge. As for the difference between phrasal verbs in written and spoken discourse, there was virtually no difference in terms of receptive knowledge, and only a small difference in terms of productive knowledge. These results suggest it is probably sufficient to use overall corpus frequency figures (i.e. combined written and spoken) when thinking about the likely acquisition of phrasal verbs, as there seems to be no real advantage to distinguishing between spoken and written frequencies.

Table 3. Correlations between Tests Scores and Phrasal Verb Frequencies (BNC)

Phrasal Verb frequencies	Productive test	Receptive test
BNC complete	.45** (20.3) ^a	.30* (9.0)
BNC written	.41** (16.8)	.29* (8.4)
BNC spoken	.46** (21.2)	.31* (9.6)

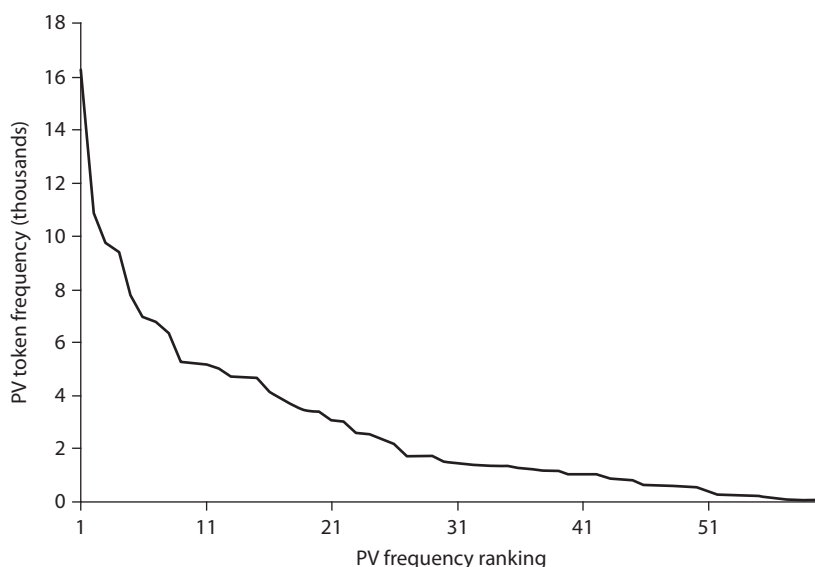
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

a. r^2 reported in percentage

To better understand the frequency-knowledge relationship, it is useful to look at the data in graphic form. Figure 1 shows the frequencies (BNC complete) of the 60 phrasal verbs used in the study. They range from the most frequent, *go on* (16,228 tokens) to the least frequent, *cool off* (65 tokens).

If the participants' phrasal verb knowledge was related closely to phrasal verb frequency, then test results should have shown a similar curve to that in Figure 1. Figures 2 (BNC complete), 3 (BNC written) and 4 (BNC spoken) are graphic representations of the relationship between phrasal verb knowledge and phrasal verb frequency according to the three corpora. The phrasal verbs are arranged in frequency groups of 5 to reduce the effect of individual item variation.

Several points are immediately evident when viewing these curves. First, none of the curves match that in Figure 1 very closely, so learning does not seem to be highly

**Figure 1.** Target Phrasal Verb (PV) Frequency BNC Complete

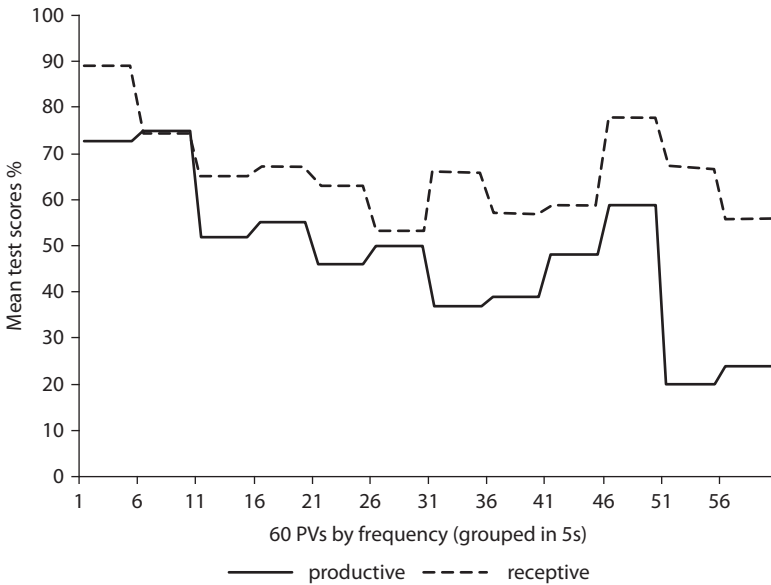


Figure 2. Test Scores BNC Complete

dependent on the *absolute frequency* of a phrasal verb. Second, there is a considerable amount of variation in knowledge of the phrasal verbs (the curves bounce up and down), even though the phrasal verbs have been clustered in groups of five to even out this variation. Thus we find that learning does not smoothly follow *rank order frequency* either. Third, despite the previous two observations, there is clearly some overall relationship between frequency and knowledge. This is most obvious with the productive tests, where there is a clear decline in knowledge as frequency decreases, with the exception of a blip at the 46–50 frequency ranking (see below). The receptive trend is harder to discern, with a fairly clear decline in the first ten or so phrasal verbs, but thereafter a great deal of variation in what is essentially a plateau. Fourth, as might be expected, the receptive scores were usually higher than the productive scores, as recalling language in order to use it productively is more difficult and requires a greater depth of knowledge than being able to recognize it receptively (e.g. Groot 2000; Nation 2001). Overall, the learners scored 17% higher on the receptive test than the productive test on average and this difference was significant (Pearson, $t = 12.01$, $p < .001$, Eta squared = .69).

Overall, the evidence points to a general trend of higher frequency leading to a greater chance of learning phrasal verbs to a productive degree of mastery. The relationship is not strongly linear, but higher frequency phrasal verbs were clearly learned by a greater number of our participants than lower frequency phrasal verbs. Conversely, with the exception of the very highest frequency phrasal verbs, there does not seem to be a very reliable relationship between the frequency of phrasal verbs and

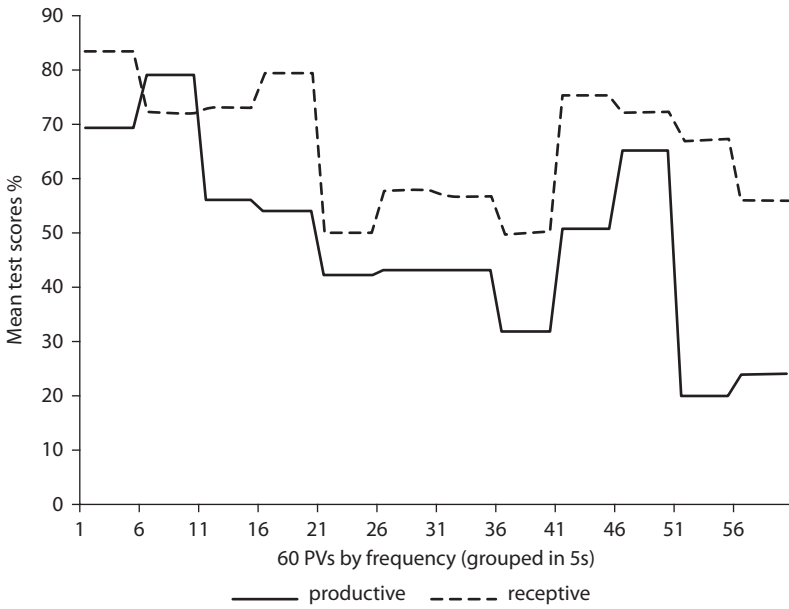


Figure 3. Test Scores BNC Written

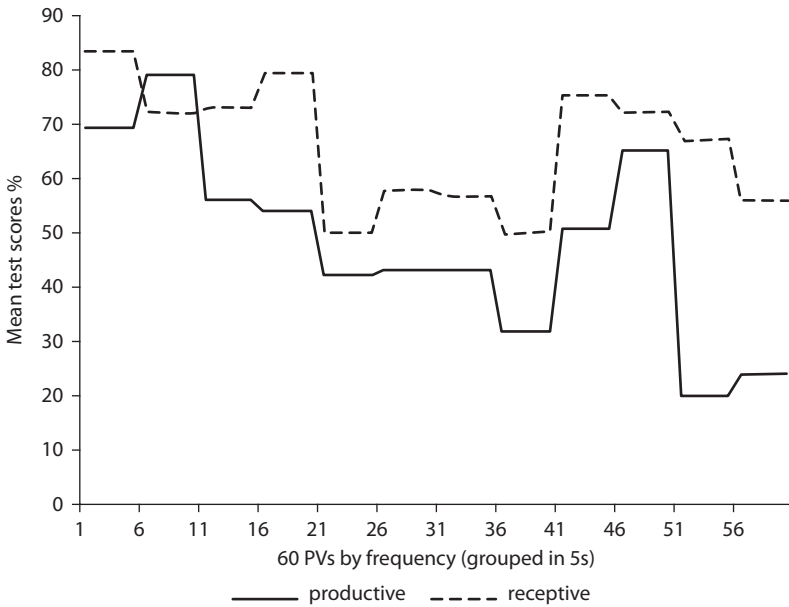


Figure 4. Test Scores BNC Spoken

mastery of receptive knowledge. Thus, it seems that in order to develop the more advanced productive mastery of phrasal verbs, the repeated exposure that comes from higher frequency is necessary. Receptive mastery, which is presumably easier to acquire, does not seem so dependent on this exposure. We might speculate that this is because only a few exposures might lead to receptive mastery. This would be congruent with findings from incidental vocabulary acquisition studies, where it has been found to take something like 8–10 exposures to learn words from reading, but where productive mastery is seldom achieved (Schmitt 2008).

Furthermore, the relationship between frequency and learning may be stronger than demonstrated here. We used mainly the highest frequency phrasal verbs (50/60) in this study to see if our participants knew these high-exposure items. If we had used a group of phrasal verbs with a wider range of frequencies, we may well have found a clearer frequency-knowledge trend.

Another point to keep in mind is that the frequency information was from occurrence in general, as indicated by the sources included in the BNC. We assume that higher frequencies in the BNC also indicate higher levels of exposure among our participants. However, this assumption may be unfounded to some extent. Learners may (probably?) receive quite different exposure to the L2, especially in a classroom, than is indicated by a native corpus. If we were able to use their actual exposure rates as our frequency figures, the correlation would undoubtedly be higher.

This leads to the question of whether other corpora may better predict the learning of phrasal verbs. One suitable candidate is the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA). It has in excess of 400 million words of text and is equally divided between spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, and academic texts (Davies 2008). We did not have the resources to carry out a full lemmatized and non-contiguous analysis as we did with the BNC, but were able to do a simplified analysis based only on the contiguous base forms of the target phrasal verbs as shown in Table 2. The correlations for frequency and productive mastery, using the data from our test results, were very similar to the BNC results, but the correlations for frequency and receptive mastery were marginally higher than the BNC figures (Table 4). The similar results from the two main large-scale, accessible corpora give us confidence in concluding that the frequency of phrasal verbs as shown by large corpora predicts phrasal verb

Table 4. Correlations between Tests Scores and Phrasal Verb Frequencies (COCA)

Phrasal Verb frequencies	Productive test	Receptive test
COCA complete	.42** (17.6) ^a	.36** (13.0)
COCA written	.40** (16.0)	.34** (11.6)
COCA spoken	.42** (17.6)	.38** (14.4)

** $p < .01$

a. r^2 reported in percentage

acquisition (productive mastery) somewhere around the 16–20% covariance level and receptive mastery at around the 8–14% level.

The data also gives us a chance to look at how well our participants knew the phrasal verbs in real terms. The majority of the participants were able to recognize most of the phrasal verbs receptively (average score 65.2%), and were able to produce 48.2% of them on average. Thus we find that despite being a relatively difficult type of lexical item, the participants had a good knowledge of the target phrasal verbs relative to their language levels. However, there were a number (18) of phrasal verbs that less than half of the learners knew either receptively or productively. A number of these were relatively infrequent (*cool off, dig up, pin down*) which we expected would have low scores, but a number were some of the most frequent in the BNC (e.g. *carry out, go in, take up, work out*). The low scores may in part be attributable to learners being unfamiliar with some of the contexts and meaning senses presented in the tests, or the wording of some of the test items themselves, but even if we make some allowance for these anomalies, there would still remain a number of moderately high to high frequency phrasal verbs that were relatively unknown to at least half of the students. There does not appear to be any particular semantic or syntactic features that distinguish these phrasal verbs from others in the tests. In fact, some were relatively transparent (*come off, give out, go in, hold back*), and we can speculate that some students' lack of receptive or productive knowledge of these items was due to the absence or paucity of exposure to these phrasal verbs, even though they occurred relatively frequently in the corpora. One factor that may partly account for this lack of exposure is the fact that often a learner's primary source of exposure to English is in the language classroom, through the medium of student coursebooks, which are frequently the core resource of the language syllabus. Although a number of coursebooks purport to be corpora-based, research shows that often the language presented in these publications appears to have been selected in an intuitive or arbitrary fashion without reference to corpus data (e.g. Koprowski 2005). Furthermore, the phrasal verbs are often presented on a single page in large numbers in test-like formats, which give little or no opportunity for learners to use the target phrasal verbs productively. Additionally, once these phrasal verbs have been 'covered' on these pages, quite frequently no attempt is made to re-cycle these items in subsequent parts of the book. Another factor that may influence phrasal verb exposure is the fact that the majority of learners around the world are taught by non-native teachers who themselves may not use, or even be aware of, those phrasal verbs most commonly used.

Finally we looked at the phrasal verbs at the lower end of the frequency range to see if we could explain the blip which occurred at the 46–50 rank level. The blip is largely a result of the spoken frequency curve, and so we looked at the five phrasal verbs in this cluster in terms of spoken frequency. They include: *carry on, look around, move up, move back, and pay back*. These phrasal verbs were considerably better learned than the phrasal verbs in adjoining frequency clusters (41–45: *break up, give out, sit up, make out, move out*; 51–55: *dig up, hold back, take after, tear up, pin down*). It is difficult to pinpoint the reason for this, although one potential explanation is that

at least four of the phrasal verbs can be interpreted literally (*look around, move up, move back, pay back*), while in the adjoining clusters there are more phrasal verbs which cannot be (*break up* = *breaking something in an upwards direction; *take after* = *taking something subsequently to something else). Regardless of the phrasal verb characteristic(s) at play here, our frequency/knowledge curves suggest that phrasal verbs are idiosyncratic in terms of learning burden, and that a purely frequency-based explanation can never fully explain their acquisition.

4.2 Individual differences factors in the acquisition of phrasal verbs

We have seen that frequency is a factor in the acquisition of phrasal vocabulary, but that it only explains 10–20% of the variance in test scores. Unsurprisingly, other factors must also be at play. One area that has been well documented is that of first language (L1) influence on language acquisition. Phrasal verbs are found predominantly in English and a few other cognate languages. German, for example, whilst not having phrasal verbs as such, does have particle verbs which are superficially similar (see Waibel 2007: 38–40). L1 influence is certainly an important factor in language acquisition, and the absence of a feature, like phrasal verbs, from a learner's L1, can affect the way a second language (L2) is acquired (e.g. Dagut & Laufer 1985; Hulstijn & Marchena 1989; Laufer & Eliasson 1993; Liao & Fukuya 2004; Siyanova & Schmitt 2007; Swan 1997). However, as only 2 of our 68 learners had L1s (German) that contained an equivalent to phrasal verbs we decided not to take this factor into consideration, and concentrated instead on other individual differences to determine if they had any effect on the acquisition of phrasal verbs.

4.2.1 Language proficiency

Does phrasal verb knowledge increase as overall language proficiency rises? To answer this question we compared the scores of the intermediate and upper-intermediate learners to see if there were significant differences.¹ Table 5 shows the results of the independent sample t-tests, indicating that the upper-intermediate learners scored on average higher than their intermediate counterparts. The differences in scores were significant ($p < .05$), and the effect sizes (eta squared)² large, accounting for 20%

1. The proficiency assessments of the different schools involved in the study are idiosyncratic, and so cannot be directly compared. This makes the distinction between intermediate and upper intermediate proficiency levels in the study somewhat tenuous. Although it is difficult to quantify what these proficiency levels mean in absolute terms, we had personal experience of all participants, and feel that the distinction accurately reflects a noticeable difference in relative levels of proficiency.

2. Effect size is a measure of the strength of the relationship between two variables. Eta squared is the proportion (.01 = small effect, .06 = moderate effect, .14 = large effect) of the total variance that is attributed to an effect and is usually expressed as a percentage by multiplying it by 100.

Table 5. Proficiency Level Comparisons (Independent Samples T-Tests)

	M ^a	SD	<i>D</i>	<i>t</i>	Effect size ^b
<i>productive</i>			66	-4.079*	.20
intermediate (<i>n</i> = 23)	22.91	5.15			
upper-intermediate (<i>n</i> = 45)	33.65	10.00			
<i>receptive</i>			66	-4.482*	.23
intermediate (<i>n</i> = 23)	32.00	5.80			
upper-intermediate (<i>n</i> = 45)	41.91	7.79			

**p* < .001

a. Max score = 60

b. Eta squared

(productive) and 23% (receptive) of the differences between the intermediate and upper-intermediate scores, confirming that learners' knowledge of phrasal verbs appears to be related to overall language proficiency.

The differences in the phrasal verb knowledge of intermediate and upper-intermediate students may also be related to the language level at which learners are first exposed to phrasal verbs. Very few coursebooks below intermediate level have any explicit or implicit reference to phrasal verbs, and whilst there may be valid pedagogic reasons for this, it does mean that phrasal verb acquisition may lag behind other areas of language at lower proficiency levels.

4.2.2 Gender

There has been much debate about the role of gender in language learning and acquisition, and research has examined a number of areas such as language proficiency, attitudes, motivation, and learning, cognitive and metacognitive strategies (e.g. Kobayashi 2002; Tercanlioglu 2004). We were interested to know if gender was also a factor in the acquisition of phrasal verbs. The results from our t-tests indicate that, although males scored higher in both tests, the differences in scores were not statistically significant, and for these participants at least, gender did not appear to be a factor in their knowledge of phrasal verbs.

4.2.3 Age

We were also interested in whether age had any influence on the participants' productive and receptive knowledge of phrasal verbs. The ages of the learners ranged between 14 and 55 and for the purpose of the analyses we divided them into 3 age groups (under 18, 18–25, over 25). The results from one-way ANOVAs indicate that the older learners scored higher in both the productive and receptive tests, but the differences in scores were not significant, showing that age was not a causal factor.

4.3 Exposure to target language inside and outside the classroom

The second type of factor we explored was the amount and type of exposure our participants had to English both inside and outside the language classroom.

4.3.1 *Formal language instruction*

Achieving proficiency in a second language is dependent on a number of factors, not least the quantity and quality of language instruction. The biodata questionnaire included items relating to the length of time the participants had been learning English, where they took their lessons, and how many hours of instruction they received each week. The results of the comparison of test scores, perhaps surprisingly, indicated that overall the type of instruction and hours of classroom input that the learners received did not have a significant effect on their test scores.

4.3.2 *Extensive reading*

Research indicates that extensive reading can improve vocabulary knowledge and have a positive effect on language proficiency overall. Using data collected from the biodata questionnaire, we divided students into those who read in English 0–1 hour per week 1–2 hours, and 2+ hours. One-way ANOVAs were significant (productive: $F(2, 65)=4.46, p<.05$; receptive: $F(2, 65)=4.04, p<.05$), and Least Significant Difference (LSD) post-hoc tests showed the difference ($p<.05$) existed between those who read the least (0–1 hour = 27.0 productive and 37.4 receptive) and those who read the most (2+ hours = 36.7 productive and 45.2 receptive). The effect sizes were moderately high (.12 productive, .11 receptive). So while differences in classroom input did not significantly affect acquisition of phrasal verbs, the amount of input from reading did have an effect.

4.3.3 *Watching English language films and television*

As reading had an effect on the acquisition of phrasal verbs, it is interesting to see if other types of non-classroom input did as well. Another way of increasing one's exposure to the target language is through watching English language films and TV shows, and we included an item in the biodata questionnaire asking participants how much time they spent on these activities. Using the same methodology as for reading, we came up with nearly identical findings. The ANOVAs were significant (productive: $F(2, 65)=4.54, p<.05$; receptive: $F(2, 65)=3.83, p<.05$) and the LSD post-hoc tests ($p<.05$) showed that learners who spent more than 2 hours per week watching English language films and TV shows knew more phrasal verbs (33.2 productive, 42.9 receptive) than those who only watched for an hour or less (25.7 productive, 36.7 receptive). The effect sizes are the same as for reading (.12 productive, .11 receptive). These results indicate that this type of exposure is also effective in promoting the acquisition of phrasal vocabulary.

4.3.4 *Listening to English language music*

Another type of input that many learners partake of is listening to English music outside the classroom. English language popular music has a worldwide appeal and some research has indicated that incidental listening can have a positive effect on language acquisition (Sjöholm 2004). We used the same type of analysis as for reading and film/TV watching, but whilst those learners who listened to English language music for 1 to 2 hours per week scored higher than those who listened less, the differences in their scores were not significant. It seems therefore that the amount of listening to English music does not affect the acquisition of phrasal vocabulary. This may be because listening to music requires much less attention and concentration than watching films or TV programmes.

4.3.5 *Social networking*

Social networking sites have become extremely popular in recent years (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, Twitter), and together with other forms of electronic communication (Skype, SMS) have allowed millions to interact and socialise on a global scale. English is often the lingua franca of the Internet and we were interested to see how many of the participants took advantage of these forms of communication to practise their language skills, and whether it had any effect on their vocabulary knowledge. Half of the participants spent more than two hours each week using English as a lingua franca on social networking sites. However, those who used these sites the most did not score significantly higher than those who used these sites the least.

5. Conclusion

Our study set out to explore what ESL/EFL learners knew about relatively frequent phrasal verbs, and how that knowledge was acquired. We found that frequency (as indicated by large General English corpora) predicted phrasal knowledge to a considerable degree in terms of productive mastery ($r^2 \approx 20\%$), but not in terms of receptive mastery ($r^2 \approx 9\%$). Corpus frequency figures will always be useful in identifying the phrasal verbs that need to be known, as high frequency phrasal verbs undoubtedly have great utility for students. However, the same frequency figures seem to have differential ability in predicting whether phrasal verbs are known or not. They produce strong enough correlations to predict productive knowledge to some extent, but seem to lack the capacity to do the same for receptive mastery. Clearly, the acquisition of phrasal verbs relies on more than just frequency of exposure. Interestingly, our results showed no effect for formal-instruction-based variables, but did show that more out-of-class exposure (in the form of outside reading, film/TV watching) facilitated the learning of phrasal verbs. It is interesting to note that not all outside exposure was beneficial though; the amount of listening to English language music and social networking did not have an effect. Perhaps the most encouraging outcome of the study

was the relatively good knowledge our participants demonstrated of the target phrasal verbs. Overall, they knew about two-thirds of them receptively, and about one-half productively. While admittedly the target phrasal verbs were mostly among the most frequent in English, this knowledge is a good start, and the quest continues to find ways of helping students/learners master the rest of the phrasal verb inventory. A better understanding of the ways frequency interacts with learner knowledge and acquisition can only aid this pursuit.

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Appendix A. BNC phrasal verb frequency: Comparison of results

	Phrasal Verb	G & D	S & R		Phrasal Verb	G & D	S & R
1	go on	14903	16228	31	sit up	1158	1181
2	carry out	10798	4199	32	get in	1127	4671
3	set up	10360	10884	33	make out	1105	1067
4	pick up	9037	9777	34	turn down	1051	1355
5	go out	7688	7765	35	come over	1004	1262
6	find out	6619	6760	36	go over	991	1732
7	make up	5469	6329	37	hold on	908	1797
8	come out	5022	5231	38	pick out	856	905
9	come in	4814	9450	39	hold back	823	862
10	work out	4703	5190	40	move in	790	1377
11	take up	4608	5257	41	look around	779	1350
12	sit down	4478	4717	42	take down	775	849
13	take on	4199	5022	43	put off	742	1075
14	get up	3936	3892	44	turn off	594	1057
15	carry on	3869	2587	45	move out	573	594
16	get out	3545	3406	46	move back	566	603
17	come down	3305	3637	47	give out	532	550
18	put up	2835	3083	48	come off	518	1191
19	get on	2696	3441	49	give back	507	654
20	bring in	2505	3010	50	move up	477	616
21	break down	2199	2386	51	dig up	–	383
22	go off	2104	2565	52	pay back	–	295
23	go in	1974	4695	53	pin down	–	249
24	put out	1660	1728	54	tear up	–	224
25	take back	1628	1469	55	think over	–	219
26	get down	1538	1415	56	fall behind	–	156
27	put on	1428	6977	57	pass away	–	104
28	move on	1419	2152	58	chat up	–	100
29	put back	1369	1251	59	take after	–	84
30	break up	1286	1430	60	cool off	–	65

G & D = Gardner & Davies token frequency

S & R = Schmitt & Redwood token frequency

Appendix B. Productive phrasal verb test

Student: _____ Level: _____

We are carrying out a study of students' receptive and productive knowledge of phrasal verbs. To help us in our research please complete this productive knowledge test.

Read each question carefully, and then write what you think the missing words (a phrasal verb) are, in the space next to the question. To help you, the first letter of each word is shown. We have also given a definition for each phrasal verb after every sentence. There are 60 questions and each one uses a different phrasal verb.

You have 40 minutes to finish the test. Good luck!

Example questions:

#	Question	Answer
i	This is a really good piece of work. You must have p_____ i_____ a lot of effort. (<i>make an effort, spend time</i>)	<i>put in</i>
ii	I don't have enough money to pay the tuition fees. I need to ask the bank if I can t_____ o_____ a loan to pay for them. (<i>get, obtain,</i>)	<i>take out</i>
iii	We spent the afternoon at the airport watching the planes t_____ o_____ and land. (<i>leave the ground and fly</i>)	<i>take off</i> <i>taking off</i>

1	Mike needs a lift from the station. Can you go and p_____ him u_____? (<i>collect, give a lift</i>)	
2	I think we've spent enough time talking about this. We should m_____ o_____ to the next item. (<i>continue, proceed</i>)	
3	P_____ the book b_____ on the shelf when you've finished with it. (<i>return, replace</i>)	
4	I don't like that picture on the wall there. I think I'll t_____ it d_____ and hang it somewhere else. (<i>remove, move to a lower position</i>)	
5	I don't want to stay in and cook tonight. Let's g_____ o_____ for a meal. (<i>leave your house for a special reason</i>)	
6	I know you're tired, but we can't stop now. We have to g_____ o_____ until we finish. (<i>continue, proceed</i>)	
7	She was relaxing reading a book when a loud crash made her s_____ u_____ straight in her chair. (<i>seated with a straight back</i>)	
8	It rained all morning, but in the afternoon the sky cleared and the sun c_____ o_____. (<i>appear, become visible</i>)	
9	I can't find my phone anywhere. Please l_____ a_____ the house and see if you can find it. (<i>search, view</i>)	

10	The police s_____ u_____ roadblocks to stop people driving into the city centre. (<i>build, erect</i>)	
11	Derek has got the keys to his new flat and I'm going to help him m_____ i_____ tomorrow. (<i>occupy, start to live in</i>)	
12	I was extremely sorry to hear that John's father p_____ a_____ yesterday. I understand that he had been very ill for a long time. (<i>die</i>)	
13	I wonder where Pete is today. Jim, could you f_____ o_____ what's happened to him? (<i>discover, check</i>)	
14	I have been offered a really good job in London, but I don't want to move, so I'm going to t_____ the offer d_____. (<i>reject, refuse, say no</i>)	
15	Please c_____ i_____, take a seat and make yourself comfortable. (<i>enter</i>)	
16	We heard this really loud explosion, and found out later that a bomb had g_____ o_____ in the city centre. (<i>explode</i>)	
17	I think I t_____ a_____ my mother. We look very similar and we like the same kind of things. (<i>similar to, be like</i>)	
18	As I was running across the field one of my shoes got stuck in the mud and c_____ o_____. (<i>be detached, separate from</i>)	
19	There are plenty of chairs. Let's all s_____ d_____ together and have a nice long chat. (<i>take a chair</i>)	
20	It's a problem finding a job now because companies are just not t_____ o_____ new staff at the moment. (<i>employ, recruit, accept</i>)	
21	Don't let go of the rope. H_____ o_____ tight and I'll try and pull you out. (<i>grasp, grip firmly</i>)	
22	I thought this question was difficult at first but I managed to w_____ o_____ the right answer in the end. (<i>learn, discover, calculate</i>)	
23	What time does this train g_____ i_____ to Manchester? (<i>arrive, enter the station</i>)	
24	I am trying to get Peter to tell me when he wants to go on holiday, but it's very difficult to p_____ him d_____ to an exact date. (<i>make him decide</i>)	
25	There are a lot more girls than boys in the English Department. In fact, they m_____ u_____ 85% of the students. (<i>comprise, form</i>)	
26	There's more milk in the fridge. Can you g_____ some o_____ please? (<i>remove, take from</i>)	

27	We could fit more people on the bus if everybody m_____ u_____ a bit. (<i>change position to make more space</i>)	
28	I should go to bed. I've got to g_____ u_____ early in the morning. (<i>rise from bed</i>)	
29	They c_____ o_____ from Italy every summer to stay with us in London. (<i>travel</i>)	
30	Jean was so angry with Ray that she took all his photos, t_____ them u_____, and threw the pieces on the fire. (<i>rip apart, shred</i>)	
31	Henry has m_____ o_____ of his flat and gone back to live with his parents. (<i>leave, vacate</i>)	
32	I need more time to decide what to do. Can you give me a few days to t_____ it o_____? (<i>consider, contemplate, ponder</i>)	
33	I didn't mean to stop you working. Please c_____ o_____ with what you were doing. (<i>continue</i>)	
34	When searchers saw the floating wreckage they knew the missing plane had c_____ d_____ in the sea. (<i>crash, land, fall</i>)	
35	I have got your new English books here. Maria, can you g_____ them o_____ to the class? (<i>distribute, hand to</i>)	
36	The writing was very difficult to read and it was hard to m_____ o_____ what it said. (<i>see, recognise, distinguish</i>)	
37	When are you going to p_____ me b_____ the money I lent you? (<i>return</i>)	
38	Can you g_____ me b_____ my pen? I need it now. (<i>return</i>)	
39	There's no room for my things on the shelf. Your books t_____ u_____ all the space. (<i>occupy, use, fill</i>)	
40	The doctors aren't sure what's wrong with her and they need to c_____ o_____ more tests. (<i>do, complete</i>)	
41	Don't climb up there. It's dangerous. G_____ d_____ at once before you fall! (<i>move to a lower position, descend</i>)	
42	Let's p_____ u_____ some posters on the notice board to advertise our concert. (<i>fix/attach somewhere they can be seen</i>)	
43	When we first met we didn't like each other much but now we g_____ o_____ really well. (<i>have a good relationship, be friends</i>)	
44	Mary missed a lot of lessons and has f_____ b_____ the rest of the class. She will have to work hard to catch up. (<i>fail to keep level with</i>)	

45	When I have a long piece of writing to do I find it easier if I b_____ it d_____ into small parts. (<i>divide, separate, take apart</i>)	
46	I can't hear what you're saying. Can you t_____ that music o_____? (<i>stop by using a switch</i>)	
47	Trevor was working in his garden the other day, putting in some new plants, when he d_____ u_____ an old box full of silver coins. (<i>remove from the ground</i>)	
48	Do the plates g_____ i_____ this cupboard? I'm not sure where to put them. (<i>be stored, be put</i>)	
49	It's always a good idea to g_____ o_____ your answers to check you haven't made any silly mistakes. (<i>check, examine, survey</i>)	
50	The staff, using buckets of water, managed to p_____ the fire o_____ before the fire crew arrived. (<i>extinguish, stop from burning</i>)	
51	The crowd rushed forward and the riot police were unable to h_____ them b_____. (<i>stop, contain, check</i>)	
52	Mark thinks he is a bit of a romeo. He is always trying to c_____ u_____ the girls. (<i>talk to in a friendly way</i>)	
53	They've p_____ o_____ their trip to Australia until next year to give them more time to save up some money. (<i>postpone, cancel until a later date</i>)	
54	Lots of people applied for the job but Mary was p_____ o_____ as the best candidate. (<i>choose, select</i>)	
55	Quick, p_____ your coat o_____. We're going now. (<i>wear, clothe yourself</i>)	
56	Are you m_____ b_____ to Scotland after you've finished your work here? (<i>return</i>)	
57	When the food and drink ran out the party b_____ u_____ and everyone went home. (<i>come to an end, finish</i>)	
58	It's so hot. Let's go for a swim in the lake to c_____ o_____. (<i>lose heat, get colder</i>)	
59	The football club sacked their manager and b_____ i_____ a new man in the hope of improving results. (<i>introduce, employ</i>)	
60	This phone's still not working properly. I'll have to t_____ it b_____ to the shop where I bought it. (<i>return</i>)	

Thank you very much for completing the first part of the study.

Appendix C. Receptive phrasal verb test

Student: _____ Level: _____

For the second part of our study we would like to know about your receptive knowledge of phrasal verbs. To help us, please complete this multiple choice test.

Read each question carefully, and then choose the best answer (A, B, C, D) to go in the spaces. There is only one correct answer for each question. If you do not know the answer write E. To help you there is a definition for each phrasal verb after every sentence. You have 30 minutes to finish. Good luck!

Example question:

#	Sentence	A	B	C	D	E	Answer
0	When we tried to buy tickets for the concert we were told there they had _____ within a couple of hours. (<i>all had been bought and there were none left</i>)	sold down	sold out	sold up	sold in	?	B
1	We heard this really loud explosion, and found out later that a bomb had _____ in the city centre. (<i>explode</i>)	gone back	gone in	gone off	gone up	?	
2	We could fit more people on the bus if everybody _____ a bit. (<i>change position to make more space</i>)	broke up	looked up	turned up	moved up	?	
3	I am trying to get Peter to tell me when he wants to go on holiday, but it's very difficult to _____ him _____ to an exact date. (<i>make him decide</i>)	pin in	pin on	pin up	pin down	?	
4	I think we've spent enough time talking about this. We should _____ to the next item. (<i>continue, proceed</i>)	move in	move down	move out	move on	?	
5	Mike needs a lift from the station. Can you go and _____ him _____? (<i>collect, give a lift</i>)	pick out	pick up	pick at	pick on	?	

#	Sentence	A	B	C	D	E	Answer
6	I wonder where Pete is today. Jim, could you _____ what's happened to him? (<i>discover, check</i>)	find in	find up	find on	find out	?	
7	I should go. I've got to _____ early in the morning. (<i>rise from my bed</i>)	work up	stand up	get up	take up	?	
8	What time does this train _____ to Manchester? (<i>arrive, enter the station</i>)	take in	give in	get in	bring in	?	
9	I don't like that picture on the wall there. I think I'll _____ it _____ and hang it somewhere else. (<i>remove, move to a lower position</i>)	turn down	stand down	take down	hold down	?	
10	It rained all morning, but in the afternoon the sky cleared and the sun _____ . (<i>appear, become visible</i>)	took out	came out	made out	passed out	?	
11	Henry's _____ of his flat and gone back to live with his parents. (<i>left, vacate</i>)	moved out	moved off	moved back	moved on	?	
12	When searchers saw the floating wreckage they knew the missing plane had _____ in the sea. (<i>crash, land, fall</i>)	come down	come across	come out	come up	?	
13	There's no room for my things on the shelf. Your books _____ all the space. (<i>occupy, use, fill</i>)	take in	take on	take out	take up	?	
14	Can you _____ me _____ my pen? I need it now. (<i>return</i>)	give off	give up	give out	give back	?	
15	It's always a good idea to _____ your answers to check you haven't made any silly mistakes. (<i>check, examine, survey</i>)	show over	take over	go over	give over	?	

#	Sentence	A	B	C	D	E	Answer
16	There are plenty of chairs. Let's all _____ together and have a nice long chat. (<i>take a chair</i>)	sit down	sit on	sit over	sit off	?	
17	The football club sacked their manager and _____ a new man in the hope of improving results. (<i>introduce, employ</i>)	held in	brought in	turned in	came in	?	
18	Lots of people applied for the job, but she was _____ as the best candidate. (<i>choose, select</i>)	picked out	picked back	picked over	picked in	?	
19	The police _____ roadblocks to stop people driving into the city centre. (<i>build, erect</i>)	set in	set up	set on	set at	?	
20	This phone's still not working properly. I'll have to _____ it _____ to the shop where I bought it. (<i>return</i>)	take back	set back	turn back	look back	?	
21	Jean was so angry with Ray that she took all his photos, _____ them _____, and threw the pieces on the fire. (<i>rip apart, shred</i>)	took up	tore up	set up	looked up	?	
22	Let's _____ some posters to advertise our concert. (<i>fix, attach somewhere they can be seen</i>)	go up	put up	give up	sit up	?	
23	When the food and drink ran out the party _____ and everyone went home. (<i>come to an end, finish</i>)	broke up	broke in	broke over	broke out	?	
24	Please _____, take a seat and make yourself comfortable. (<i>enter</i>)	put in	come in	give in	bring in	?	

#	Sentence	A	B	C	D	E	Answer
25	I was extremely sorry to hear that John's father _____ yesterday. I understand that he had been very ill for a long time. (<i>die</i>)	passed about	passed back	passed away	passed up	?	
26	I know you're tired, but we can't stop now. We have to _____ until we finish. (<i>continue, proceed</i>)	put on	look on	go on	take on	?	
27	Do the plates _____ this cupboard? I'm not sure where to put them. (<i>be stored, be put</i>)	come in	give in	take in	go in	?	
28	They _____ from Italy every summer to stay with us in London. (<i>travel</i>)	come about	come on	come off	come over	?	
29	I need more time to decide what to do. Can you give me a few days to _____ it _____? (<i>consider, contemplate, ponder</i>)	think over	think under	think up	think back	?	
30	I can't find my phone anywhere. Please _____ the house and see if you can find it. (<i>search, view</i>)	look across	look down	look on	look around	?	
31	When I have a long piece of writing to do I find it easier if I _____ it _____ into small parts. (<i>divide, separate, take apart</i>)	break back	break off	break out	break down	?	
32	I thought this question was difficult at first but I managed to _____ the right answer in the end. (<i>learn, discover, calculate</i>)	work in	work up	work out	work off	?	
33	Don't let go of the rope. _____ tight and I'll try and pull you out. (<i>grasp, grip firmly</i>)	Hold in	Hold off	Hold on	Hold up	?	

#	Sentence	A	B	C	D	E	Answer
34	I have got your new English books here. Maria, can you _____ them _____ to the class? (<i>distribute, hand to</i>)	give off	give out	give up	give on	?	
35	There's more milk in the fridge. Can you _____ some _____ please? (<i>remove, take from</i>)	go out	hold out	make out	get out	?	
36	I don't want to stay in and cook tonight. Let's _____ _____ for a meal. (<i>leave your house for a special reason</i>)	go under	go out	go up	go in	?	
37	I didn't mean to stop you working. Please _____ _____ with what you were doing. (<i>continue</i>)	carry off	carry back	carry on	carry up	?	
38	It's so hot. Let's go for a swim in the lake to _____ _____. (<i>lose heat, get colder</i>)	cool on	cool in	cool off	cool up	?	
39	There are a lot more girls than boys in the English Department. In fact, they _____ _____ 85% of the students. (<i>comprise, form</i>)	make on	make up	make in	make off	?	
40	_____ the book _____ on the shelf when you've finished with it. (<i>return, replace</i>)	Put off	Put in	Put under	Put back	?	
41	The crowd rushed forward and the riot police were unable to _____ them _____. (<i>stop, contain, check</i>)	hold under	hold back	hold on	hold over	?	
42	The doctors aren't sure what's wrong with her and they need to _____ _____ more tests. (<i>do, complete</i>)	carry down	carry in	carry up	carry out	?	
43	Don't climb up there. It's dangerous. _____ _____ at once before you fall! (<i>move to a lower position, descend</i>)	Get down	Take down	Look down	Put down	?	

#	Sentence	A	B	C	D	E	Answer
44	When are you going to _____ me _____ the money I lent you? (<i>return</i>)	pay back	pay on	pay after	pay down	?	
45	The staff, using buckets of water, managed to _____ the fire _____ before the fire crew arrived. (<i>extinguish, stop from burning</i>)	put out	put up	put off	put in	?	
46	It's a problem finding a job now because companies are just not _____ new staff at the moment. (<i>employ, accept</i>)	taking on	going on	looking on	getting on	?	
47	I can't hear what you're saying. Can you _____ that music _____? (<i>stop by using a switch</i>)	turn out	turn back	turn in	turn off	?	
48	She was relaxing reading a book when a loud crash made her _____ straight in her chair. (<i>seated with a straight back</i>)	sit off	sit over	sit up	sit on	?	
49	I think I _____ my mother. We look very similar and we like the same kind of things. (<i>similar to, be like</i>)	take in	take up	take after	take back	?	
50	Are you _____ to Scotland after you've finished your work here? (<i>return</i>)	stand- ing back	looking back	moving back	bring- ing back	?	
51	Mary missed a lot of lessons and has _____ the rest of the class. She will have to work hard to catch up. (<i>fail to keep level with</i>)	looked behind	turned behind	fallen behind	put behind	?	
52	I have been offered a really good job in London, but I don't want to move, so I'm going to _____ the offer _____. (<i>reject, refuse, say no</i>)	turn over	turn up	turn down	turn off	?	

#	Sentence	A	B	C	D	E	Answer
53	Trevor was working in his garden the other day, putting in some new plants, when he _____ an old box full of silver coins. (<i>remove from the ground</i>)	dug down	dug up	dug off	dug on	?	
54	Derek has got the keys to his new flat and I'm going to help him _____ tomorrow. (<i>occupy, start to live in</i>)	give in	move in	make in	work in	?	
55	When we first met we didn't like each other much but now we _____ really well. (<i>have a good relationship, be friends</i>)	take on	look on	bring on	get on	?	
56	The writing was very difficult to read and it was hard to _____ what it said. (<i>see, recognise, distinguish</i>)	make off	make out	make up	make in	?	
57	They've _____ their trip to Australia until next year to give them more time to save up some money. (<i>postpone, cancel until a later date</i>)	put off	put up	put over	put in	?	
58	As I was running across the field one of my shoes got stuck in the mud and _____ . (<i>be detached, separate from</i>)	took off	came off	turned off	put off	?	
59	Quick, _____ your coat _____. We're going now. (<i>wear, clothe yourself</i>)	look on	put on	hold on	make on	?	
60	Mark thinks he is a bit of a romeo. He is always trying to _____ girls. (<i>talk to in a friendly way</i>)	chat up	chat off	chat in	chat out	?	

Appendix D. Biodata questionnaire

Finally, we would like to know how much exposure you have to English. Please spend a few minutes filling in this brief questionnaire.

How long have you been learning English?	less than 1 year	1 – 2 years	3 – 5 years	over 5 years

Where do you have English lessons? (you can mark more than one box)	school	language school	private lessons

How many hours of English lessons do you have each week?	1 – 2 hours	2 – 4 hours	more than 4 hours

How much time do you spend reading books, magazines and newspapers in English, or visiting English language websites each week?	0 – 1 hour	1 – 2 hours	more than 2 hours

How much time do you spend watching films, videos or TV in English each week?	0 – 1 hour	1 – 2 hours	more than 2 hours

How much time do you spend listening to music in English each week?	0 – 1 hour	1 – 3 hours	more than 3 hours

Do you use English to make new friends and keep in contact with people? (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Skype, email, instant messaging, SMS [texts] etc)	never	1 – 2 hours a week	more than 2 hours a week

Your age		

Your gender	male	female	

Your nationality	country		
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Many thanks for your help. If you would like to know your scores please fill in your email address below.

