



DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSLATING ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS INTO ARABIC: A CASE STUDY OF THIRD-LEVEL STUDENTS AT TOOR AL-BAHA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, LAHEJ UNIVERSITY, YEMEN

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the difficulties that encountered the third-level students in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic. A translation test was designed as the main instrument to collect the required data for this study. The participants of the study were 20 students from the Department of Business English at Toor Al-Baha University College, Lahej University, Yemen. The researcher used a quantitative approach to analyze data of this study. The study revealed that the third-level students encountered difficulties in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic. Furthermore, it revealed that students resorted to the literal translation and guessing the meaning of the phrasal verb in their translation. This study recommended that teachers should explain the meaning of English phrasal verbs and provide the students with the appropriate strategies of translating English phrasal into Arabic.

Keywords

Translation, English Phrasal Verbs, Translation of English Phrasal Verbs, Yemen, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

English phrasal verbs are considered one of the most difficult issues for both foreign learners of English and translators. They consist of a verb with one or more particles (an adverb or a preposition or both). The meaning of this combination is different from the individual words. For example, the phrasal verb “call on” means “visit”. Understanding and translating the meaning of this phrasal verb are difficult for EFL learners.

In translating English phrasal verbs from English into another language such as Arabic language, the foreign language learners or the translators usually face some difficulties that are hard to overcome. Sinclair (1989) mentioned that phrasal verbs hold unpredictability both syntactically and semantically. Thus, they are challenging for EFL students. On the other hand, Ghazala (2017) stated that “phrasal verbs are difficult for learners to be translated from English into Arabic because this combination leads to a new combination and a new meaning of the verb concerned that is different from its primary meaning in language, and the preposition, or the proverb which causes the change, is no longer an independent part of meaning. On the other hand, a verb followed by a preposition without having any change in its primary meaning, with the preposition retaining its meaning” (Ghazala, 214). Moreover, other scholars stated some difficulties that face the translators when rendering English phrasal verbs into Arabic. For example, Oualif (2017) stated that “the difficulty to translate those idiomatic expressions lies in two aspects. First, the capability to know those expressions and comprehend their meaning in the source language. Second, the process of transferring their semantic properties in the target language” (Oualif, 26). On the other hand, Ghazala (2012), stated that the difficulties of translating phrasal verbs occur because unpredictable and unfamiliar meaning of phrasal verbs to the students. He mentioned three reasons with some examples. These reasons are as follows:



1. The combination of the same preposition/ adverb with different verbs may result in different meanings. For example, the preposition 'on' implies different meaning when it combines with different verbs (e.g. go on = continue ((يستمر); put on = wear ((يلبس) hang on = wait ((ينتظر). This means that the preposition has no fixed general meaning when it combines with any verb.
2. The second difficulty of translating phrasal verbs is that the same combination of a preposition/adverb and a verb can have different meanings. For example, the phrasal verb 'come off' implies different meanings. This phrasal verb means (leave a place (يغادر مكانا ما), (succeed ((ينجح)), (to have a result (يصل الى نتيجة) and so on.
3. The same meaning can be expressed by different combinations. For example, the meaning of the verb 'visit يزور' can be expressed by different combinations with the verb 'call'. call at / call by / call in/ call into/ call on/ call upon (Ghazala, 135 -137).

Statement of the Problem:

As being a teacher of the translation course for the third-level students, it was observed that some students face problems in translating some phrasal verbs from English into Arabic. They cannot give even a closer meaning for these verbs. The reasons behind this problem are: firstly, the learners face difficulties in understanding the meaning of the phrasal verb. Secondly, dictionaries do not always give the correct translation for some phrasal verbs. Thirdly, the same phrasal verbs can have multiple meanings. For example, some students translate phrasal verb (give up) into the inappropriate translation such as (يعطي فوق). This study aims to explore the difficulties that underlie the students' wrong translation and find solutions to them.

Significance of the Study:

This study aims to explore the difficulties encountered by the third-level students when translating EPVs into Arabic. It is hoped that the study helps students to overcome these difficulties and to find out ways to facilitate the process of translation especially, English phrasal verbs.

Objectives of the Study:

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore to what extent students can translate English phrasal verbs into Arabic.
2. To identify strategies used by the students in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic.

Research Questions of the Study:

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the difficulties encountered by the third -level students in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic?
2. What are strategies used by the students in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic?

Scope and Limitations of the Study:

This study focuses on exploring the difficulties encountered by the third-level students in the Department of Business English in translating EPVs. The participants of the study are 20 of the third-level students at Toor Al-Baha University College, Lahej University, Yemen. This study was carried out and applied in the second semester of the academic year 2025-2026.

Literature Review:

Definitions of Translation:

Translation is a means of communication between people from different cultures around the world. It helps them to communicate and exchange ideas, culture and science from one language to another, especially if there are two different languages like English and Arabic. The term



translation was defined by different scholars in various ways but all the definitions have the same idea that translation is the transmission of a text from one language (SL) to another (TL). Catford (1965) defined translation as “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)” (Catford, 20). This definition means that translation is not only changing the meaning from one language to another but also focusing on finding the equivalent between the two languages. Similarly, Larson (1984) stated that “translation is basically a change of form from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL) that refers

to the actual words, phrases, clauses, sentence and paragraph etc. which is spoken or written” (p.3). In addition, according to Newmark (1981), translation can be defined as & “a craft in the attempt to replace a written message and / or a statement in one language by the same message and / or the same statement in other language” (Newmark, 7). This means that the practice of translation lies on rendering work between two different languages. From the above definitions, it can be concluded that all the three scholars agreed that translation is transmitting the meaning and style of the message while taking into account the equivalence between two languages (the source and target languages).

Definitions of Phrasal Verbs:

Using prepositions or adverbs after some verbs in English is called ‘Phrasal verb’ in linguistics. The phrasal verb refers to a phrase of a verb and a particle. The particle is called a ‘helper’ and it is usually a preposition, an adverb or a combination of both. This combination creates a new meaning which is different from the original verb and the original particle. For example, the verb ‘go’ has its own meaning ‘take care’ but when it combines with the particle ‘on’, they form new form ‘go on’ which means ‘continue’. This new meaning of the phrasal verb ‘go on’ is called idiomatic. Phrasal verbs are very important in English language because they are used in both spoken and written communication. Therefore, the learners should learn and master these verbs. This term is defined by several scholars. For example, Crystal (2008) defined phrasal verb as “A type of verb consisting of a sequence of a lexical element plus one or more particles e.g. come in, get up, look out for” (Crystal, 367). On the other hand, Parrott (2000) defined phrasal verb as “multi word verbs as being made of a verb (e.g. *come, get, give, look, take*) and one or more particles. Particles are words that we use as adverbs and /or prepositions in other contexts (e.g. *away, back, off, on, out*)” (Parrott, 108).

Another definition of phrasal verb was given by Thrush (2001) who noted that a PV is “a verb and a preposition (or two). The meaning is often idiomatic; that is, the meaning of the phrasal verb cannot be derived by looking up the verb and the preposition separately in a dictionary” (Thrush, 292).

Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that the phrasal verb is a combination of two or more than two words. This combination is a verb + prepositions or adverbs which results a new meaning which has a different meaning from both verbs and particles.

Kinds of Phrasal Verbs:

There are many types of phrasal verbs in English language; according to *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (2015), the phrasal verbs can be classified into four types: transitive phrasal verbs, intransitive phrasal verbs, separable phrasal verbs and inseparable phrasal verbs.

1. Transitive phrasal verbs are the verbs that require an object after the verbs.

Example:

She **looks after** the children.



2. Intransitive phrasal verbs are the verbs which do not have an object after the verbs.
Example:
When do you **get up**?
3. In separable phrasal verbs are the verbs in which the words can be separated for using in different places in a sentence. These verbs can be joined form as well as separated form.
Example:
Please **turn on** the light.
Please **turn** the light **on**.
4. Inseparable phrasal verbs are the verbs whose words cannot be separated for using it in different places in a sentence.
Example:
She **looks after** her children
They **carried on** their work.

On the other hand, Coe, Harrison and Paterson (2006) divided phrasal verbs into three types:

1. The first type consists of verb + adverb and they have an object.
She put on the hat
She put the hat on.
2. The second type of phrasal verbs consists of verb + adverb, but there is no object.
I usually get up at seven o'clock.
3. The third type consists of (verb + adverb + preposition) and they have an object.
We are looking forward to your news (Coe, 190).

Strategies in Translating Phrasal Verbs:

The translator should choose the appropriate strategy when he/she translates these phrasal verbs from the SL to the TL. The concept of strategy was defined by Lorsch (1991) as "a potentially conscious procedure for the solution of a problem which an individual is faced with when translating a text segment from one language to another" (Lorsch, 76). These strategies are applied when a translation difficulty occurs and the translator wishes to solve the problem and produce a good translation (Leppihalme, 24).

Baker (1992) suggested four strategies which can be used in translating idiomatic expressions including phrasal verbs. These strategies are as follows:

1. Using an idiom of similar meaning and form: Translation by using an idiom with similar form and meaning in the target language. It must convey roughly the same meaning and be of equivalent lexical items.
2. Using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form: Translation by using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form. In this case the lexical items of an idiom are not preserved; it is translated as a semantic equivalent.
3. Paraphrasing, where the expression is often reduced to sense and translation loss occurs.
4. Omission is allowed only in some cases: First, when there is no close equivalent in the target language; Secondly, when it is difficult to paraphrase; Finally, an idiom may be omitted for stylistic reasons.

Methodology:

This section introduces the methodology used in the current study, the design of the research, the population of the study, the sample of the study, the instrument of the study (students' test) and analysis of students' test.



Design of the Study:

This study employed quantitative approach to explore difficulties in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic faced by the third-level students. This type of research explains phenomena by collecting numerical data that is analyzed by using mathematical and statistical method. Creswell (2009) defined this type of research as “a means of testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured typically on instruments, so that data can be analyzed using statistical procedures” (Creswell, 4).

Population of the Study:

The population of study was the third-level students who study the course of translation in the Department of Business English at Toor Al-Baha University College, Lahej University, Yemen for the academic year 2025- 2026.

Sample of the Study:

The sample of this study was native speakers of Arabic language who study translation as a subject of specialization in the Department of Business English at Toor Al-Baha University College, Lahej University -Yemen. They were third-level university students of the academic year 2025 – 2026. The total number of the subjects was (20) students.

Instrument of the Study:

In the current study, the researcher used a translation test as an instrument to collect data from the participants. The test was given to 20 students of Business English Department at Toor Al-Baha University College. It consists of five sentences in English. Each sentence has a different phrasal verb. The participants were asked to translate the English phrasal verb into Arabic language. The purpose of this test was to measure the students' ability to translate phrasal verbs from English into Arabic within written sentences.

Validity and Reliability of the Test:

Validity is an important tool of measurement. According to Kumar (2011), validity is “the ability of an instrument to measure what it is designed to measure” (Kumar, 166). It helps the researcher to determine what types of test to use and helps to choose a method that truly measures the idea or contract in question.

To check the validity of the test items, copies of the translation test were given to three teachers of translation in Lahej University. All of them hold Ph.D. degree and they have experience in teaching translation. They provided some suggestions and comments that were taken into consideration. Finally, they confirmed that the test items were valid to answer the research questions.

Analysis of Students' Test:

Sentence (1)	Correct	No.	%	Incorrect	No.	%
She <u>called up</u> her manager to discuss the issue.	اتصلت	4	20	دعت	8	40
				نادت	2	10
				اشعرت	6	30

Table 01: Students' translations of the phrasal verb "called up"

The table (01) above shows that the correct and incorrect translations of the phrasal verb “**called up**” in the sentence “She **called up** her manager to discuss the issue”. It is shown that out of 20 participants, only four students (20%) succeeded in giving the exact equivalent in Arabic (اتصلت /

attasalt) of the phrasal verb (call up). This means that the students who gave the appropriate translation are familiar with this combination. On the other hand, 16 students (80%) failed in giving the appropriate translation. Eight students (8.40%) translated the phrasal verb (call up) into (دعت/ daat). It is noticed that the students translated only the base verb (call) which means in English (invite). Two students (10%) translated only the base verb (call) into (نادت/ nadat). Six students (30%) translated the phrasal verb (call up) into (اشعرت/ asharat). These translations were based on literal translation or guessing the meaning of the phrasal verb according to their understanding of the sentence.

Sentence (2)	Correct	No.	%	Incorrect	No.	%
The plane <u>took off</u> yesterday morning.	أقلعت	4	20	هبطت	8	40
	غادرت	6	30	خلعت	2	10

Table 02: Students' translations of the phrasal verb "took off"

Table (02) shows that ten students (50%) translated the phrasal verb “**took off**” correctly while the same number of the students with the same percentage (50%) translated the phrasal verb “**took off**” incorrectly. Four students (20%) translated the phrasal verb “**took off**” into its exact equivalent in Arabic (أقلعت / aqlaat). The other six students (30%) also gave the correct translation, they translated the same phrasal verb into (غادرت / ghadarat) by using similar meaning and form in Arabic. While the same number of students provided incorrect translations to the English phrasal verb. Eight students (40%) translated it into (هبطت / habatat) and two of them (10%) translated it into (خلعت / khalaat).

Sentence (3)	Correct	No.	%	Incorrect	No.	%
He decided to <u>give up</u> smoking.	يمتنع	3	15	يعطي	9	45
	عن	4	20	يستسلم	2	10
	يقنع عن	2	10			
	يوقف					

Table 03: Students' translations of the phrasal verb "give up"

It is clear from table No (03) that nine students (45%) translated the phrasal verb “**give up**” successfully, whereas 11 students (55%) of them could not translate the English phrasal verb correctly. The students who translated this phrasal verb correctly gave three different translations. Three students (15%) provided the exact Arabic equivalent of the English phrasal verb (يقنع عن / yuqli an). Six students (30%) translated it by using the same meaning in Arabic (يتمنع عن / yamtanni an and يوقف / yuwaqqif). These translations are acceptable. The other students translated this phrasal verb incorrectly. Nine students (45%) translated only the base verb (give) into Arabic as (يعطي / yuti). From these translations, it is noticed that the students neglected the particle (up) and translated only the base verb (give) separately. In these translations, they depended on literal translation. Furthermore, two students (10%) translated the above phrasal verb by giving the opposite meaning in Arabic language (يستسلم / yastaslim). This translation is not acceptable because it does not provide the proper equivalent for the English phrasal verb.

Sentence (4)	Correct	No.	%	Incorrect	No.	%
They <u>look after</u> their little sister everyday.	يعتنون ب	3	15	يبحثون عن	10	50
				ينظرون بعد	7	35



Table 04: Students' translations of the phrasal verb "look after"

As it can be seen in table (04), the majority of the students (17) with a percentage (85%) provided inappropriate translation of the phrasal verb “**look after**”. Ten students (50%) translated the phrasal verb “look after” into (يبحثون / yabhathoon an). In these translations, the students mixed between the meaning of the English phrasal verbs “look after” with “look for”. So they translated the meaning of the phrasal verb “look after” as the meaning of the phrasal verb “look for”. While seven students (35%) translated the English phrasal verb “look after” into (ينظرون بعد / yandhuraoon bad). This translation is a literal translation in which the base verb (look) and the particle (after) were translated separately and the students ignored the idiomatic meaning of the phrasal verb. On the other hand, the minority of the students, three students (15%) translated this phrasal verb correctly into its exact Arabic equivalent (يعتنون ب / yatanoon bi).

Sentence (5)	Correct	No.	%	Incorrect	No.	%
Ali <u>called on</u> his friend afterwork.	زار	0	0	اتصل	10	50
				نادى	6	30
				استدعى	4	20

Table 05: Students' translations of the phrasal verb "call on".

The results in table (05) were not satisfactory because all of the students (100%) failed to find the proper translation of the phrasal verb “**call on**”. This means that the phrasal verb “call on” which means (to visit someone) in English is unknown to the majority of the students; therefore, the students did not translate it correctly. Ten students (50%) translated this phrasal verb into (اتصل / ittassil), six (30%) of them translated it into (نادى / nada) and four students (20%) translated it into (استدعى / istada). From these incorrect translations, it can be concluded that the students relied on literal translation when they encountered difficulties in giving the correct equivalent for this phrasal verb. This means that the students are not familiar with the idiomatic meaning of the phrasal verb “call up”.

Discussion:

The following table shows the correct and incorrect translations in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic obtained by the participants in the five sentences.

No. of sentences	No. of Correct translations	Percentage 100%	No. of Incorrect translations	Percentage 100%
1	4	20	16	80
2	10	50	10	50
3	9	45	11	55
4	3	15	17	85
5	0	0	20	100
Total	26	26	74	74

Table (06) reveals that the number of correct translations is (26) with percentage (26%), whereas the number of incorrect translations is (74) with percentage (74%). According to the results in the table above, the largest number of wrong translations is (100) with percentage (100%) found in translating the phrasal verb ‘called on’ in the fifth sentence. The second largest number of wrong translations is (17) with percentage (85%) found in translating the phrasal verb “look after” in the fourth sentence. The third largest number of wrong translations is (16) with percentage (80%)



found in translating the phrasal verb 'called up' in the first sentence. The fourth largest number of wrong translations is (11) with percentage (55%) found in translating the phrasal verb 'give up' in the third sentence. The fifth largest number of wrong translations is (10) with percentage (50%) found in translating the phrasal verb 'took off' in the second sentence. As shown in the table, the results of the study reveal that the third-level students in the Department of Business English had difficulty in translating English phrasal verb into Arabic. This indicates that students faced difficulties in translating phrasal verbs from English into Arabic. The participants' translations also indicate that the literal translation and guessing the meaning of the English phrasal are used as strategies in translation English phrasal verbs into Arabic.

Conclusion:

This study has explored the difficulties faced by the university Business English students in translating phrasal verbs from English into Arabic. The results of this study revealed that the students faced difficulties in finding the appropriate equivalent in Arabic when they translated English phrasal verbs into Arabic. These difficulties were related to misunderstanding the meanings of the English phrasal verbs. In addition, some English phrasal verbs have more than one meaning. These difficulties led the students to the wrong translation in which they resorted to the literal translation or guessing the meaning of the English phrasal verb according to their understanding which is not always acceptable.

Recommendations:

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher proposes some recommendations. These recommendations are as follows:

- ✓ The university should introduce the translation to the students as main course from the first year to the last year.
- ✓ Teachers should explain the meaning of English phrasal verbs and clarify the kinds of phrasal verbs.
- ✓ Teachers should advise their students to use specific dictionaries for English idioms which include phrasal verbs.
- ✓ Students should focus on the meaning of the phrasal verb as one unit.
- ✓ Students should avoid using literal translation which leads them into wrong translation.

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