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## The Problems Encountered in Translating English Phrasal Verbs into Arabic by Faculty of Education Students In Misurata.

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### 1- Introduction

A phrasal verb is a verb that consists of two or three words. Its meaning is different from the meaning of those words would which have if we considered each one separately. For example, the meaning of carry out (= Do) in the sentence 'Scientists carried out an experiment' is not related to the normal meaning of 'carry' or the normal meaning of 'out'. Some students cannot guess the meaning of pull up (= stop) in the sentence 'A car pulled up outside the house' even if they know what 'pull' and 'up' mean.

Most phrasal verbs consist of two words; get up, go off, turn on, make out, etc. The first word is a verb, the second one is called a particle, which is either an adverb (such as 'out') or a preposition (such as 'with'). There are also some three-word phrasal verbs. For example, catch up with, look forward to. ( Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs, 2001 ).

Phrasal verbs are generally considered to be idiomatic combinations of a verb and an adverbial particle. One of the problems that some university students encounter is the translation of English phrasal verbs into Arabic. This is because the proper translation of English phrasal verbs depends on the context in which they are used, which suggests the appropriate interpretation of the described action to render the same idea and meets the requirements of translation into the target language.

This paper is an attempt to discuss the use of some of phrasal verbs in English and how they can be understood and translated into Arabic.

Accordingly, it aims to investigate phrasal verbs in English to find out the solutions for such problems and introduce some methods which may affect the use as well as the translation of those phrasal verbs by some university students.

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### 1.1 Review of literature

One of the common beliefs about lexical acquisition is that using context clues to guess meaning of words is a good strategy.

Cooper (1999) examined what is the most and common strategy to learn and understand idioms by using a 'Think- Aloud' protocol. His study shows that successful learners use an inferring strategy to learn idioms. The findings of this study show that using context can be a successful strategy in the teaching and learning of multiword expressions, Prince (1996) compared the use of context and translation in learning words from French EFL learners. He compared these two conditions in the learning phase as well as in the recall phase for two groups of learners, the advanced and the weak learners.

For the context learning group, isolated sentences, including the target words, were given, and the subjects of the translation learning group were asked to write down the meaning of target words.

After the treatment, he splits each learning group into two recall conditions respectively and conducts an immediate post-test. He found that the advanced learners in the translation learning condition achieved more than those in the context learning condition.

Another study by Aldahesh (2007) who looked at the English phrasal verbs in general English-Arabic dictionaries stating that English-Arabic dictionaries dedicated to EPVs (English Phrasal Verbs) are much lower than their counterparts of English-English dictionaries of PVs. In fact there are three bilingual English Arabic dictionaries of PVs namely Al-Mawrid, AL-Mughni Al-Akbar and The Oxford English Arabic Dictionary of Current Usage.

It is worth mentioning that Al-Mawrid is by no means comprehensive in terms of covering EPVs, as Aldahesh said.

In conclusion, as inferring from context is one of the common strategies in vocabulary, it will be meaningful to investigate the effect of the context in translating phrasal verbs from English into Arabic, and if the phrasal verb meaning is unpredictable from the context, here the translator has to consult bilingual dictionaries.

It is generally admitted that phrasal verbs are thought to be one of the difficult items for translators and learners of English as a second language.

The reason is that some phrasal verbs have an idiomatic meanings which is usually defined as the fact that " the meaning of the complex unit does not result from simple combination of these of its consistency" Arnaud and Sauvignon (1997:161).

With regard to the meaning of idiomatic phrasal verbs, Liao and Fukuya (2004) found that the learners chose fewer figurative phrasal verbs than literal phrasal verbs on multiple – choice test. They explained that this avoidance is due to the semantic difficulty of figurative phrasal verbs.

Finally, the previous studies indicate that idiomatic phrasal verbs might be harder to translate than transparent phrasal verbs for translators and ESL learners. Therefore, it will be necessary to investigate the effect of semantic properties of phrasal verbs and to examine the effective translating conditions for idiomatic phrasal verbs.

## **2.0 Phrasal Verbs in English**

This section deals with the definition, use and structure of phrasal verbs as well as their types.

### **2.1 Definition and structure of phrasal verbs**

According to Ton McArthur and Beryl Atkins ( 1995 ), phrasal verbs are mainly colloquial. They are used casually, in everyday speech, or in order to express vivid, emotional and frequently slangy points to conjure up special metaphoric relationship and jokes and to label actions in such everyday areas as cooking, gardening maintaining the car, repairing things and shopping. They are usually combination of simple, monosyllabic verbs ( put, take, get etc. ) and members of set of particles ( on, up, out etc.).The combination is nowadays called phrasal because, on paper, it presents the appearance of a two – word rather than a single item. Although it looks like a phrase, it functions in many respects like a single word, though under certain condition other items ( director objects, adverbs ) can come between verb and particle. Many phrasal verbs do not have transparent meaning, so it is hard to know the whole meaning by combining the meaning of the components, verbs and particles. Such idiomatic meanings make learners feel that they are difficult to learn, to use and even to translate although learners of English recognize their importance.

Even though the main difficulty of learning phrasal verbs is recognized, there is a progressive research on testing factors that affect learning and understanding phrasal verbs so far.

It goes without saying that English Phrasal Verbs constitute one of the major difficulties learners of English language as well as translators and interpreters encounter when rendering this type of idiomatic expressions into their own language.

"This is due to the syntactic and semantic complexity of such problematic phrases." (Aldahesh: 2009)

Although defining the phenomenon of (EPVs) is still controversial among researchers in such domains as grammar, linguistics, pedagogy and lexicography, scholars have come up with rather comprehensive definitions on this phenomenon. But studying the essence of several definitions proposed by scholars in such disciplines as grammar, linguistics, lexicography, pedagogy and EPVs can be generally defined as " a combination of two or three items ( a verb + a proposition + a verb + an adverb, or a verb + an adverb + a proposition ) it functions as a single unit of meaning in the sense that its meaning cannot be deduced from the total sum of the meanings of its separate elements (Aldahesh, 2007: 1).

Some examples are:

to bring up / to bring down

to turn on / to turn off

to knock down / to knock off

to take in / to take off

to give up / to give in

to black out / to tip off

to get away with / to put up with

According to George Yule (1998: 167 - 168 ), these combination can be used without direct object as :

a) come in!

b) get off!

c) go away!

Or with a direct object require after a particle as in:

- a) I came across an old photo of you.
- b) we can get round that problem.
- c) she ran into a friend of a store.

Or with a direct object required before the particle, as in:

- a) They won't ask us back.
- b) This weather gets me down.
- c) I wonder if you me help me up.

And with the option of placing the object before or after the particle, as in:

- a) Turn off the radio! turn that radio off !
- b) He chopped down the tree. He chopped the tree down.
- c) Hold up your hands! hold your hands up!

According to Quirk in comprehensive grammar of English language, a phrasal verb is defined as a mixture of a " lexical verb and particle that form a whole unit ", they are sums of meaning e. g . " Woody passed out yesterday while working in his film studio but soon he came round " ( cited in www. e. ducalia. com )

## 2.2 Types of phrasal verbs

Grammatically there are three types of phrasal verbs. (Norman Coe, Mark Harrison and Ken Paterson 2006: 190 )

1 – The first type consists of verb + adverb and they have an object.

ex . 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.

ex. I usually get up at seven o'clock.

3 – The third type consists of ( verb + adverb + preposition ) and they have an object.

ex. We are looking forward to your news

Some common verbs of this type are:

Do away with, face up with, run out of and look up to.

## 2.3 Characteristics of phrasal verbs

Phrasal verbs accept the following conditions:

1- Phrasal verbs can be intransitive verbs without object – like in:

Woody passed out yesterday while working in his film studio but soon he came round.

2 – They can also be transitive with an object which occupies an order according to its nature.

3 –Object inversion is possible, if it is a noun, it can be both before and after the adverb. For instance, we can say:

The doctor will write out a prescription for Woody or the doctor will write a prescription out to him.

+ when the noun is long it is preferred after the adverb.

e . g. He will write out a prescription that include extra iron and vitamins.

+ On the contrary if the object is a pronoun it is always placed before the adverb e . g. The doctor will write it out Cited from the internet (e.ducalia.com )

#### 2. 4 Synonyms of phrasal verbs

A phrasal verb can often be replaced by a single verb will more or less the same meaning. The single – verb Synonyms are often, but not always more formal.

Phrasal verbs	Single – verb synonyms
put off	postpone
take off	remove
turn off	arrive

Example: Everyone **turned up** on time for the meeting. ( less formal )

Everyone **arrived on** time for the meeting. ( more formal )

#### 2. 4. 1 Particles in phrasal verbs

A particle is either a proposition(e.g. from, to with) or an adverb (e. g. out, up, about).You can create phrasal verbs by adding different particles to a basic verb. McCarthy (2004:8).

#### 2. 4. 2 What does the particle mean?

In phrasal verbs the particle has a clear basic meaning. Look at the examples of different particles used with the verb invite. On the right of the arrows, you can see what the original speaker probably said.

Examples: McCarthy(2004:10)

Jack invited me out .	⇒	Let's go together.
Rosie invited me in.	⇒	Please come in!
Jill invited me over.	⇒	Come to your place.
Paul invited me round.	⇒	Come to my house for dinner or a drink.
Mark invited me round.	⇒	Come upstairs to my flat.
Susie invited me along.	⇒	Come with us!
Bill invited me back.	⇒	Come back home with me.

### 2. 4. 3 What other meanings can particles have ?

Most particles convey a number of difficult senses. For example, **over** can have various meanings, including:

- a) changing position, e. g. in fall over( fall to the ground ) or move over (change the place where you are sitting or standing to make room for someone else )
- b) an idea of thoroughness, e. g. in read over ( read thoroughly )  
talk over( discuss something thoroughly before making a decision).

### 2. 4.4 Where does the particle go?

With verbs that have an object :

- Sometimes the particle has to go before the object of the verb, e. g. I am looking for my keys, not \* I am looking my keys for.
- Sometimes it must go after the object, e. g. I have a lot of work on not \* I have on a lot of work.
- Sometimes the particle may go either before or after the object, e. g. the thunder woke up the children or the thunder woke the children up.

Notice that if the object is a pronoun e, g. him, them, then the particle must go after it, e. g. The thunder **woke** them **up** not \* the thunder **woke up** them.

#### 2. 4. 5 The particle up and down

The normal distinction made between **up** and **down** in English is between a physically higher and a physically lower location. This physical distinction is clearly part of the functional difference between asking someone to **jump up** versus **jump down**. Indeed most verbs denoting physical action can combine with these "directional movement" particles to produce combinations with fairly clear literal meanings as illustrated in the following examples: Yule (1989: 171 )

##### Up

- a) Can you lift up the cover?
- b) He told them all to stand up.
- c) We'll come up when we're finished.

##### Down

- a) Can you climb down?
- b) I'll walk down the other said.
- c) We didn't see him fall down.

In the case of **up**, the sense of "increase" can extend into the number of different conceptual domains. The previous examples for the particle up convey a sense of " increase in level" on some kind of vertical scale .

In the case of **down** as a particle, the sense of "decrease" can also be found in term of "level"(his temperature has gone down).

With **up** there is a sense of an action being goal – oriented and reaching a state of completion which does not have possible negative implications of **down**.

These distinction in the conceptual domains of **up** and **down** are summarized in the following box:

Summary box: the particles **up** and **down**

<p><b>Up = increase in</b> level</p>	<p>things are heating up.</p>
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size	fill it up.
activity	we will stir things up.
readiness	they're all fired up.
awareness	he will soon sober up.
visibility	I was glad when he turned up.
<b>Up = completion:</b> he cleaned up his room.	
<b>Down =decrease in:</b>	
Level	prices have come down.
size	the swelling has gone down.
activity	we asked them to quite down.
readiness	the troops were told to stand down.
Down = completion:	all operations have been shut down.

As illustrated in the following example, there are other examples in English of a very clear distinction between the positive and negative implications of (up↑) and (down↓).

Examples : a) When I'm **down**, evrything seems hopeless.  
 b) but when I'm **up**, evrythings seems just fine.

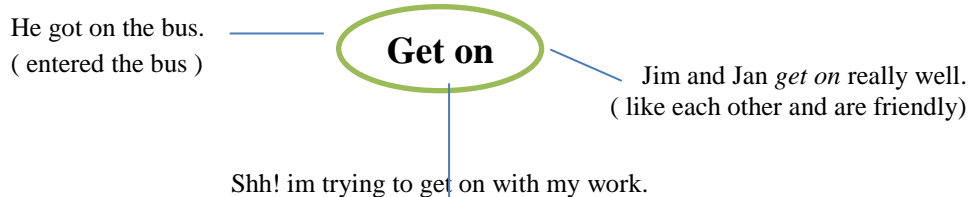
Or : in feelings ; they go up and down, e. g.

- a) The film cheered us up considerably  
 = made us start to feel happier. ( positive )  
 b) Calm down ! losing your temper won't solve the  
 problem  
 = stop feeling angry, upset or exited. ( negative )

### 2. 5. 1 Metaphor and register

Multiple meanings of phrasal verbs

A phrasal verb can have a number of different meanings, e. g.



( continued doing my work )

Often there is no direct connection between the various meanings and you have just to learn each different meaning of the phrasal verb.

The best way to do this by trying to remember a sentence using the phrasal verb. McCarthy ( 2004:14 )

### 2. 5. 2 Literal and metaphorical meaning

Sometimes the basic meaning of a phrasal verb and the additional meanings are clearly linked.

This is because some additional meanings are based on a metaphor or an image which may have a direct connection with its literal or basic meaning.

A metaphor is a way of expressing something by comparing with something else that has similar characteristics. Here is an example:

LITERAL { BASIC } MEANING		METAPHORICAL MEANING
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Blow up a balloon	→	blow up a building	→	someone blows up
Inflate or fill with air		make it explode		suddenly becomes very angry

Sometimes a phrasal verb only exists as a phrasal verb in the metaphorical meaning, but you can guess what it means from the meaning of the basic verb without the particle. For example:

These statistics look strange. Have we slipped up somewhere?

He slips up ( make a mistake ) clearly comes from slip (fall usually because the floor is wet or the ground is icy). (McCarthy : 2004:14).

### 2.5.3 Register

Another important aspect of a phrasal verbs is register . phrasal verbs are typical of spoken English or informal writing, e.g. letters to friends and articles in popular journalism. There are often one – word equivalents, synonyms, for use in a more formal spoken or written style.

For example: miss out a question or omit a question.

As with all English vocabulary , there are some different uses from one geographical area to another. For example, British , American and Australian speakers would use tidy up as a synonym.

### 2.6.1 Semantics

According to Palmer ( 1988: 224 ), in all the phrasal verbs with a literal meaning there is a verb of motion and the particle indicates the direction of the motion. There is a further semantic feature of the phrasal verb as a whole, that of indicating a final resultant position. Consider:

He ran the flag up.

The pilot flew the plane in.

The operations completed: the flag was up ( up the pole ), and the plane was in ( in the port ). These accounts for the difference between:

- He pulled up the rope.

- He pulled upwards the rope.

To pull up means to final up position; to pull upwards does not.

Hence the first, but not the second, is semantically ( as well as formally ) a phrasal verb.

This is a natural consequence of the relationship between adverb and preposition and supports the suggestion that phrasal verbs always contain an adverb that may also be a preposition.

Yet there are problems with some phrasal verbs that seem to be non – idiomatic. For consider the difference between the following pairs:

She washed out the stain.

She washed out the colthes.

She wiped out the dirt.

She wiped out the sink.

In the first of each pair there is the normal relationship – the adverb can be replaced by a preposition plus noun phrase:

She washed the stain out of the clothes.

She wiped the dirt out of the sink.

In the second of each pair, however, the noun phrase that follow the preposition in this extended version (the colthes, the sink) actually occurs. It might seem that out is here a preposition ( out,( of ) the clothes, out(of) the sink) and that is the object of the verb (the stain, the dirt) that has been omitted. But it is clearly wrong – out even here is adverb as shown by the pronoun test:

She washed it out.

She wiped it out.

**A simplar pair is:**

She tidied up the room.

She tidied up the mess.

There is a difference, in that niether case can the adverb be replaced by a preposition plus a noun phrase. But the semantic relation of room and mess is like that of clothes and stain, sink and dirt.

**3. 0 The translation problems encountered by students under investigation**

This section investigates the types of errors made by some Libyan students in translating phrasal verbs from English into Arabic based on their answers in a test given to them.

The sample used is chosen randomly from the students of English at Misurata Univeristy – Faculty of Education.

**3. 1 Subject of the study**

The subjects of this study were native speakers of Arabic, studying English as a major subject of specialisation in the department of English, Faculty of Education University of Misurata. They were fourth year univesity students of the academic year (2011 – 2012).

The total number of the subjects was 20 female students and their ages ranged between 20 – 24.

The reason behind choosing students at this level was based on the assumption that students of this age and level were expected to have been exposed to use the phrasal verbs in English during their study of the university. Therefore, they are expected to be able to translate Englishphrasal verbs into Arabic. At the University stage, the subjects studied specialized courses for four years.

In the first year, they studied:

Grammar, Reading Comprehension, WritingSkills, Conversation Practice and Listening and Speaking.

In the second year, besides the previous subjects, they studied Phonetics, Introduction to Literature, Introduction to Linguistics, Teaching Methodology and Vocabulary and Spelling.

In the third year, they studied Grammatical structure, Translation I. Vocabulary VI Advanced Reading, Academic Writing, Poetry, Short Story, French Language and Morphology. And in the fourth year, they studied, ESP, Teaching Practice, Language Testing, Translation II, Novel, Drama, semantics, Syntax and Research Project.

### 3.2 The test

The test comprised two sets of sentences.

Students were given two hours to translate them and were allowed to use dictionaries.

The test included 20 sentences in English to be translated into Arabic.

Each sentence included a different phrasal verb.

The purpose of this test is to measure the students' ability to translate phrasal verbs from English into Arabic through sentences.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The main purpose of data analysis is to investigate the types of errors made by some Libyan university students, in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic, and find out the main reasons behind making such errors.

As mentioned before, the number of involved students was 20 and the method used in calculating data was numerating the correct and incorrect translations for each sentence dividing them to the whole number of the answers and finding out the percentage of the correct and incorrect answers. But before embarking upon explaining the students' errors in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic.

It is worth mentioning that some students made some errors in the Arabic version but such errors are not discussed in this paper.

The following table illustrates the results of the test of the translation test.

These results were tabulated showing the correct and incorrect translations and their percentages for each sentence as mentioned above.

**Table 1**  
**Results of the translation test**  
**No. of students 20**

No	The sentences	Correct.	%	Incorrect.	%
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		<b>Tra</b>		<b>Tra</b>	
1	It's a lovely dress , but you'll need to turn it up an inch or two.	12	60 %	8	40 %
2	I didn't want to do it, but the other boys egged me on	16	80 %	4	20 %
3	May I ask a question ? " firea way "	0	0 %	20	100 %
4	It was gitting late so I decided to turn in.	0	0 %	20	100 %
5	I can't shake off this cold.	16	80 %	4	20 %
6	My father told me off because I used his electric raxor.	18	90 %	2	10 %
7	The police officer shot off before anyone could stop her.	2	10 %	18	90 %
8	It was so hot in the examination room that several students nodded off.	8	40 %	12	60 %
9	These statistics look strange. Have we slipped up somewhere.	17	85 %	3	15 %
10	We treated up the house in order to be able to sell it quickly.	10	50 %	10	50 %
11	In london this morning, people wearing masks held up a van carrying gold.	8	40 %	12	60 %
12	I've passed out a couple of times recently.	10	50 %	10	50 %
13	Joanna managed to scrapethrough her final examinations.	14	70 %	6	60 %
14	Chill out! life's too short to get so stressed !	8	40 %	12	60 %

15	It's time he woke up to what's happening.	20	100 %	0	0 %
16	He went round the room topping up glasses whenever he noticed that anyone needed a top – up.	14	70 %	6	30 %
17	My parents broke up last year and I've been depressed ever since.	16	80 %	4	20 %
18	Jim and Ian get on really well.	8	40 %	12	60 %
19	He liked to break in his assistants slowly.	0	0 %	20	100 %
20	Someone blows up!	14	70 %	6	30 %

Before starting to analyze the students' errors in this test, it can be said that the students made errors in translating the same sentences. The analysis below deals with the repeated errors that were made by students either in the same sentence or in different sentences. The common errors made by some Libyan students under investigation and some samples of their translations are as follows:

**1. Adopting literal translation technique**, i.e. Some students adopted literal translation technique as a procedure in translation which sometimes leads to incorrect results. This error is repeated in four sentences ( 9. 17. 19 and 20), as in:

- These statistics look strange. Have we slipped up somewhere?

\* تبدو هذه الإحصائيات غريبة. هل تعثرنا أحيانا؟

- My parents broke up last year and I've been depressed ever since.

\* والداي تحطموا السنة الفائتة ، وأنا ضغطت منذ ذلك الوقت.

- He liked to break in his assistants slowly.

\* هو احب ان يقاطع مساعدي ببطء .

-Someone blows up!

\* شخص ما ينفجر.

**2. Overgeneralization of rules:**

Some students thought that phrasal verbs are translated easily by taking the meaning of the basic verb alone ; in some cases this is all right, as in come in or sit down but in others it does not as in sentences (7, 12, 13 and 17 ).

- The police officer shot off before anyone could stop her.

\* الشرطة اطلقت النار قبل ان ياتي أي احد ويوقفها.

- I've passed out a couple of times recently.

\* مررت عدة مرات مؤخرًا.

- Joanna managed to scrape through her final examinations.

\* جوانا قررت ان تكشط خلال امتحاناتها النهائية.

- My parents broke up last year and I've been depressed ever since.

\* والذي انكسر السنة الماضية وانا مستاءة منذ ذلك الوقت.

Selecting the right meaning of the word is not usually easy for English language learners and it is a fatal mistake to select the first of several. This is clear in sentence No. 7 with the word **shot**, the student chose the first meaning " اطلقت " and does not care with other meanings. ( Al – Mawrid 2000: 850 ).

**3. Difficulties** in translating some idiomatic phrasal verbs especially when they come

a lone not in a sentences or a text, because of the difference between the two languages in this respect. This error is repeated in sentences ( 3.10.19 and 20 ).

- May I ask a question? "Fire a way " .

\* هل لي بسؤال ؟ أغرب عن هنا .

This is completely wrong because fire away here means to tell someone that you are ready for them to begin asking you questions or speaking about something, e.g. Do you mind if I ask you something, Woody? "Fire a way " .

( longman Phrasal Verbs Dictionary, 2000:167 ).

- We treated up the house in order to be able to sell it quickly.

\* لقد قمنا بمعالجة المنزل حتي تتمكن من بيعه بسرعة .

In this sentence the phrasal verb is not founded in the dictionaries, but according to Jak Allsop 2002: 100 the phrasal verb treated up means decorated it cheaply and quickly.

Here, neither the context, nor the adverbial element of the phrasal verb hint at the real meaning of the combination treated up.



- He liked to break in his assistants slowly.

\* هو احب ان يقاطع مساعديه ببطء.

In this sentence, again neither the context, nor the adverbial element of the phrasal verb hint at the real meaning of the combination break in.

According to the Longman Dictionary of phrasal verbs ( 2001 ), the phrasal verb break has the following ' unexpected ' meaning : to help ( smb)to become accustomed ( to work, etc. )

- Someone blows up !

\* شخص ما ينفجر !

In this sentence, blow up means suddenly becomes very angry. But some students translate it without knowing its metaphorical meaning.

#### 4.1 Conclusion

This study has investigated the written errors made by some university students in translating phrasal verbs from English into Arabic.

The finding of this paper showed that some Libyan university students encountered a reasonable degree of difficulty in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic.

Such difficulties were attributed to some problems such as, adopting literal translation, Overgeneralization of rules and other problems that encountered some students in the university.

#### 4.2 Recommendations

Having obtained data from the study, I can recommended the following:

- 1- Translation should be taught from the first year of the university to the students of English to help them find out the suitable equivalence between English and Arabic depending on the context.
- 2- Teachers of translation must clarify the difference among the different kinds of phrasal verbs.
- 3- Students should concentrate on the structure of phrasal verbs in English especially the idiomatic ones.
- 4- Students should avoid adopting literal translation unless when it is necessary.
- 5- Teachers of translation should encourage the intelligent and self – guided use of specific dictionaries.

6 Teachers of translation should encourage the students to guess the meanings of phrasal verbs from a context, because the next step is to move from recognition to production.

7- Teachers of translation should clarify the effect of the context as a good strategy in both learning and translating phrasal verbs.

8- Consulting specific dictionaries as Longman Phrasal Verbs Dictionary, York Dictionary of English Phrasal Verbs and Their Idioms, Cambridge Phrasal Verbs Dictionary and other Dictionary for English Idioms.

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