Enhancing the collocative competence of ESL learners using Word Forks

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Abstract

Phrasal verbs are the most difficult aspect of the English language to any ESL learner. And phrasal verbs are most hated by an ESL learner of Indian origin. For, it is an aspect which is peculiar to people who speak different languages in India. To teach phrasal verbs is a horrendous task for any teacher teaching English from this part of the globe. Word forks come to the rescue of such a teacher. In the present study, the researcher taught phrasal verbs using word forks to a set of 20 students to boost their usage of phrasal verbs. The students found the above method to be very impressive. A pre-test was conducted before teaching the lay-out module. The module was administered for three months. The very same set of students was made to do an exit test to assess their performance in the usage of phrasal verbs after training. The marks in the pre-test and exit test were taken into consideration and t-test was done to assess the efficacy of the training.

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1. Introduction

Phrasal verbs are the most difficult aspect of the English language to any ESL learner. And phrasal verbs are most hated by an ESL learner of Indian origin. For, it is an aspect which is peculiar to people who speak different languages in India. Since their mother tongue is devoid of such an aspect, they find it very difficult to incorporate the usage of phrasal verbs either in their speech or in their writings. As a result, the usage of phrasal verbs is avoided by the ESL learners at any context.

Vigorous practice is needed, if at all, the ESL learners want to be well versed in the usage of phrasal verbs. It is not an ESL learner's cup of tea but a bitter pill devoid of sugar coating. If an ESL learner gets accustomed to the usage of phrasal verbs, then his fluency in any linguistic activity of English will dramatically increase.

2. Proficiency in the Acquisition of Phrasal Verbs

The PV structure is a peculiarity of the family of Germanic languages (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Darwin & Gray, 1999), and on the whole occurs more frequently in spoken than in written language (Cornell, 1985; Dixon, 1982; Side, 1990). A PV is usually defined as a

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structure that consists of a verb proper and a morphologically invariable particle that function as a single unit both lexically and syntactically (Darwin & Gray, 1999; Quirk et al., 1985). Acquisition of phrasal verbs is, indeed a tall task for any ESL learner.

As early as 250 years ago, Dr.Samuel Johnson wrote in his Preface to A Dictionary of English Language:

There is another kind of composition more frequent in our language than perhaps in any other, from which arises to foreigners the greatest difficulty. We modify the signification of many verbs by a particle subjoined; as to come off, to escape by a fetch; to fall on, to attack; to fall off, to apostatize; to break off, to stop abruptly; to bear out, to justify; to fall in, to comply; to give over, to cease; to set off, to embellish; to set in, to begin a continual tenour; to set out, to begin a course or journey; to take off, to copy; with innumerable expressions of the same kind, of which some appear wildly irregular, being so far distant from the sense of the simple words, that no sagacity will be able to trace the steps by which they arrived at the present use.

In more recent times, many researchers have voiced the same opinion. Gairns and Redman for example, write of "the mystique which surrounds multi-word verbs for many foreign learners."In any case, acquisition of phrasal verbs is not so easy for any ESL learner.

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3. Definition of Word Forks

Many methods of teaching phrasal verbs can be followed in different ways. Methodologies like substituting a phrasal verb for a single word, rewriting the phrasal verb with a single word substitute, are all available. Even songs can be used to teach phrasal verbs. (Upendran, 2001).To teach phrasal verbs are a horrendous task for any teacher, teaching English from this part of the globe. Word forks come to the rescue of such a teacher. Word forks are indeed a remarkable way to teach phrasal verbs to any ESL learner. Since Word forks give an idea of all the objects that goes along with a particular phrasal verb, the ESL learners will be able to have a wide and comprehensive view of the usage of phrasal verbs under study.

Word forks indirectly help to enhance the collocative competence of the ESL learners as the exercises help them to remember the collocation meticulously. As a part of the regular exercise, continuous re-cycling and revising may be envisaged upon; it will then indirectly lead to the accumulation of the usage in the long –term memory. And in due course of time, it will help the learners to make use of the usage actively by forming a part of their active vocabulary. Once the ESL learners are accustomed with the usage of phrasal verbs in this manner using word forks, they will be in a condition to use them freely in all their linguistic activities. Such a usage will definitely enhance the fluency of the ESL learner. Word forks emerge as indispensable tools that help the ESL learners to master phrasal verbs effectively .They are, in particular, very useful for teaching phrasal verbs that have a common subject. The stem of the fork is meant for the

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particular phrasal verb which ought to be taught to the ESL learners. The prongs of the word fork are meant for the various words that can be used with that particular phrasal verb.

ESL learners, who have greater exposure to comprehensible input, are naturally aware of the usage of phrasal verbs. If a class consists of a heterogeneous pack of students, the training using word fork exercises will be more advantageous to the average and below average students. Students may be insisted to maintain paper or electronic vocabulary records for word forks' exercises. Word forks help the students to learn phrasal verbs as vocabulary units as if they are single words. Word forks will definitely help to boost the usage of phrasal verbs by an ESL learner. The students will find the method to be very impressive and they will surely enjoy the learning experience

4. Usage of Word Forks as a Teaching Methodology

Word forks can be used in many ways. At first, ESL learners may be encouraged to memorize the filled –in word forks. In the next exercise, two or three prongs of the fork may be left blank and the students can be instructed to fill the same according to their own ideas. In this way, the creative acumen of the student will get tuned up. Or else, a number of options may be given and the student can be left to fill the prongs with the options that will be more suitable for a particular phrasal verb. In this way, the ESL learners will hone their ability to fix the collocation properly. The more the student has exposure to comprehensible input, the more will be his score in the above exercises. Some examples of completed word forks are given below:

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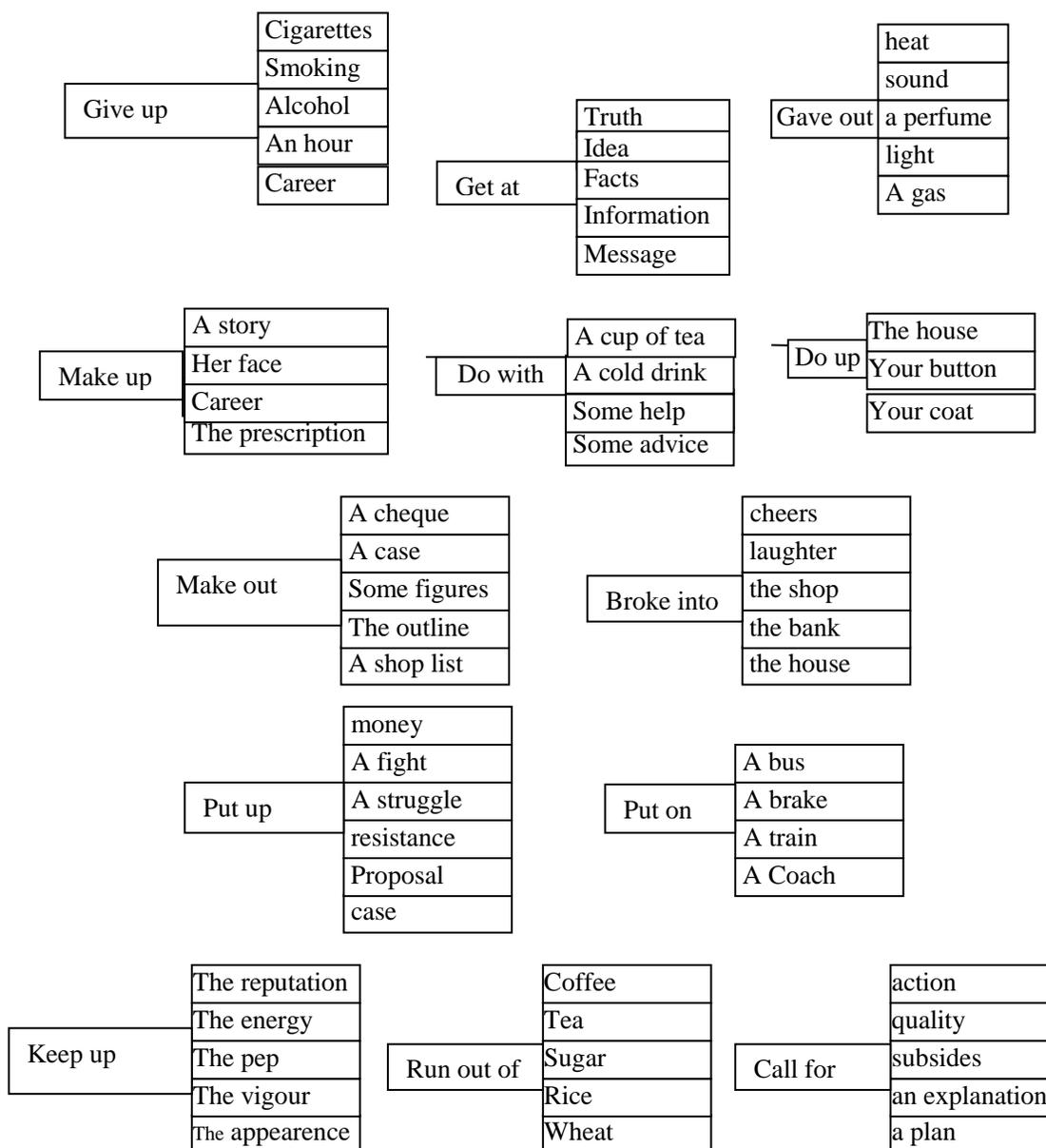
Give up
- Cigarettes
- Smoking
- Alcohol
- An hour
- Career

Get at
- Truth
- Idea
- Facts
- Information
- Message

Gave out
- heat
- sound
- a perfume
- light
- A gas

Make up
- A story
- Her face
- Career
- The prescription

Do with
- A cup of tea
- A cold drink
- Some help
- Some advice

Do up
- The house
- Your button
- Your coat

Make out
- A cheque
- A case
- Some figures
- The outline
- A shop list

Broke into
- cheers
- laughter
- the shop
- the bank
- the house

Put up
- money
- A fight
- A struggle
- resistance
- Proposal
- case

Put on
- A bus
- A brake
- A train
- A Coach

Keep up
- The reputation
- The energy
- The pep
- The vigour
- The appearence

Run out of
- Coffee
- Tea
- Sugar
- Rice
- Wheat

Call for
- action
- quality
- subsides
- an explanation
- a plan

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Fig.1.List of completed word forks

5. Participants

The proficiency of ESL students in India is much diversified in the sense that some of them have access to the language right from their kindergarten. But some students learn English as their second language only from third grade. The medium of instruction for the other subjects in their school curricula is their mother tongue. Yet there is another batch of students who switch over to the medium of instruction in English from grade six though they have studied English as their second language from grade three. The researcher had chosen a heterogeneous pack of thirty students coming from the above discussed backgrounds as the participants of the present study. The participants can be considered as advanced ESL learners as they have finished twelve years of schooling and enrolled themselves as first year engineering students. They are required to complete a paper entitled 'Technical English' in their first semester

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6. Mode of Training

Some students who had greater exposure to comprehensible input, were naturally aware of the usage of phrasal verbs and excelled in collocative competence.The students who had less exposure to comprehensible input lacked collocative competence. Since the class consisted of a heterogeneous pack of students, the training was more advantageous to the average and below average students. The researcher took the specific method of teaching phrasal verbs using word forks to boost the usage of phrasal verbs. The students found the above method to be very impressive. A pre-test was conducted before teaching the lay-out module. The module was administered for three months. The very same set of students was made to do an exit test to assess their performance based on the training given to them in the usage of phrasal verbs.

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Since word forks give an idea of all the objects that goes along with a particular phrasal verb, the student is able to have a wide and comprehensive view of the usage of phrasal verbs under study. Word forks also help a student to remember the collocation meticulously. Since the students were allowed to frame their own sentences, using the given phrasal verbs, they had developed the skill of using the same, whenever the situation demanded. As a part of the study, continuous re-cycling and revising was envisaged upon; this indirectly led to the accumulation of the usage in the long –term memory of the concerned participants. This was a major advantage as it helped them to enhance their fluency in the right path.

7. Assessment of Students' Performance

The concerned students were assessed based on their performance in the pre-test conducted before the training period and exit test conducted after the training period. To increase the validity of the tests, the very same questions were asked in both the pre-test and the exit test.   The questions were as follows:

1) Write a dialogue between your favourite cartoon characters with as many phrasal verbs as possible.

2) Write a paragraph describing your daily routine with phrasal verbs of your choice.

In order to create an interest in the usage of phrasal verbs, the researcher had particularly chosen questions concerned personally with the fellow students. As the first question was open-ended,

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the students had a wide variety in the choice of their cartoon characters. Regarding the second

question, the students were very much interested in describing their daily chores elaborately. The

papers were evaluated giving prime importance to the usage of phrasal verbs. The students were

instructed to underline all the phrasal verbs used by them. The pre –test and exit test marks were

compared to find out, if at all the training has contributed any change to the collocative

competence of the ESL learners under study.

8. Findings and Inferences

The objective of this research work is to develop an analysis that would analyze the relationship

between the marks in the pre-test and exit test which are the two variables under consideration in

order to predict or estimate the extent to which the training undergone by the participants was

effective. t-test was done to assess the efficacy of the training. Taking the score before training

as X and the score after training as Y, and then taking the null hypothesis that the mean of

difference is zero, it can be written as $H_o : \mu_1 = \mu_2$ which is equivalent to test $H_o : D = 0$ $H_a : \mu_1 <$

μ_2. As we are having matched pairs, paired t-test, has been used and the test statistic 't' has been

calculated using the formula $t = (\bar{D} - 0) / \sigma_{diff} / \sqrt{n}$

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To find the value of t, the mean and standard deviation of differences has been worked out. As H_a is one sided, a one-tailed test has been applied (in the left tail because H_a is of less than type) for determining the rejection region at 5% level of significance using the table of t-distribution for 19 degrees of freedom. R: t < - 1.729. The observed value of t is 1.018 which is in the acceptance region and so we reject the null hypothesis. It can be stated that the difference in score before and after training is significant and not due to sampling fluctuations. Hence it can be inferred that the training was efficient. The calculated value of t is much greater than the table value of t and hence the difference is statistically significant.

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9. Conclusion

From the above study, it is inferred that WORD FORKS can very well be used to enhance the communicative as well as the collocative competence of the ESL learners. A comparison of the marks of the students in the pre-test and the exit test showed that the participants were able to enliven their usage of phrasal verbs in a convincing way On the other hand, the training was indeed effective. Or in other words, it can very well be concluded that a training session of this kind which makes use of word forks can be adapted to enhance the communicative as well as the collocative competence of any ESL learner across the globe.

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