Promoting Vietnamese Learners' Knowledge of English Phrasal Verbs: An Action Research Study

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Abstract

This study aims to promote the learning of phrasal verbs (PVs) of Vietnamese low-intermediate adult English-as-a-foreign language (EFL) learners. Thirty-one students were involved in the study over an eleven-week span. In this study we adopted an action research design with a four-stage procedure, including planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The planning stage starts with exploring how PVs are introduced in the textbooks through document analysis and investigating the students' current knowledge of PVs thorough diagnose text. The acting stage goes with implementing some measures to raise the students' awareness of the syntactic and semantic features of this lexico-grammatical area and to increase their uptake of PVs through both incidental and intentional learning. The observing phase works on systematically and continually evaluating the effectiveness of the action taken through regular, progressive tests and in-class discussion. The effectiveness of the treatment was measured with pre-, immediate post-, and delayed post-tests in a form of gap filling multiple choice individual sentences. The final stage is reflecting - mirroring the gains and limitations of the teaching and testing techniques implemented. The results of this study reveal a constrained depiction of the PVs in certain aspects, echoing concerns highlighted in prior research. The findings propose that the integration of PV instruction into the comprehensive enhancement of language proficiency for A1-B1 proficiency levels, coupled with a targeted cognitive approach to PVs at the A2-B1 levels, can result in enhanced, enduring retention of PV knowledge. This study deliberates on pragmatic implications for the efficacious advancement of EFL learners' comprehension and utilization of PVs.

Keywords: English phrasal verbs, action research, incidental learning, cognitive linguistics

1. Introduction

English phrasal verbs (PVs) are not only semantically and syntactically complex but also 'ubiquitous' (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 425), often polysemous, and continually coined by native speakers. These multiple-words lexical items are thus very important, but also challenging for ESL/EFL learners.

There is no clear consensus on the definition of the PV. Some scholars confine their definition of PVs to a construction which consist of a lexical verb and a particle (e.g., Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Gardner & Davies, 2007). According to Torres-Martinez (2018), a PV is a single syntactic structure which combines a lexical verb and an adverbial particle to express a lexical concept. Some scholars focus on a semantic criterion. For example, Biber et al. (1999) define PVs as constructions which 'have meanings beyond the separate meanings of the two parts' (p. 404). In contrast, others do not consider meaning, but focus on only syntactic behaviour. Gardner and Davies' (2007) definition portrays PVs just as a lexical unit which consists of a lexical verb followed by a particle without any semantic criterion. This straightforward definition was adopted in Liu (2011) and Garnier and Schmitt (2015) and others. In this present study, this definition will be used.

A plethora of research on various aspects concerning English PVs has already been conducted. Previous studies can be broadly categorized into analysis of the syntactic and semantic properties of PVs (e.g., Neagu, 2007; Tsaroucha, 2018), learners' issues, such as difficulties or avoidance (Armstrong, 2004; Barekat & Baniasady, 2014; Ghabanchi & Goudarzi, 2012;; Tran & Pham, 2023; Tran & Tran, 2019), development of lists of common PVs (Gardner & Davies, 2007; Garnier & Schmitt, 2015; Liu, 2011; Liu & Mayers, 2018; etc.), analysis of PVs in language teaching materials, and pedagogical innovations in PVs instruction.

A countless number of papers published address the semantic and syntactic intricacies of the English PVs (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Cornell, 1985; Mohammed, 2019; Moon, 1997). The absence of PVs in the first language (L1) or incongruences between L1 and the second language (L2) have been found to be the major cause of difficulty and avoidance in the use of PVs in EFL/ESL. Learners may not consider PVs as a single lexical unit, and they may overlook the constituent particle of the PVs. The idiomatic and polysemous in nature of the PVs presents another huddle to the learners. It is not always easy to decode the meaning of the PVs by combining the meaning of the constituent parts (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Schmitt & Siyanova, 2007; Side, 1990; Wyss, 2003). The learners generally have difficulty and tend to avoid non-transparent PVs (Barekat & Baniasady, 2014; Ghabanchi &

Goudarzi, 2012; Liao & Fukuya, 2004). In addition, PVs are often polysemous and give a new meaning each time they are used in a different context, as indicated in Conroy's (2016) study. Gardner and Davies (2007) identified about five meanings for each frequently used PV. Furthermore, they are also very common and native speakers continue to coin more PVs with ease (Zareva, 2016). According to Gardner and Davies (2007), learners may encounter one PV in every 150 words of an English text. Learners' difficulties are also argued to come from PV instructions and EFL materials. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) maintain that instructors and teaching materials sometimes overburden students in learning PVs. Studies concerning the syntactic and semantic behaviours of the PVs, along with those discussing the challenges faced by the EFL learners inform the stakeholders of the factors to consider in their endeavours not only to reduce the learning and teaching load but also to enhance effectiveness.

Another strand of research has focused on building corpus-based lists of the most common, and thus useful, PVs in English (Gardner & Davies, 2007; Garnier & Schmitt, 2015; Liu, 2011; Liu & Myers, 2018). These lists serve as guidance to practitioners and learners about which PVs and which senses of each PV merit prioritization in teaching and learning. Gardner and Davies' (2007) inventory of the most frequent 100 PVs, as noted by Liu (2011), has some shortcomings. First, it contains only PVs of the top 20 PV-producing lexical verbs, so this list potentially disregards other highly frequent PVs. Then, because the list was based on the BNC as the only data source, the PVs in this list may be frequent in only British English. Liu's (2011) list was derived from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and the British National Corpus (BNC). The list consists of 150 frequently used PVs and their frequent senses. Garnier and Schmitt (2015) systematically examined the key meanings of the most common PVs from Liu's (2011) list and contributed a very useful list of the 150 PVs' key meanings. Extending Garnier and Schmitt's (2015), Liu and Myers (2018) examined and compared the meaning distributions of the 150 most common PVs in spoken English and in academic writing. This list sheds light on the proportional frequencies of PVs' meanings across the two registers. In the present study, we use this most comprehensive list, commonly referred to as Liu and Myers (2018)'s Spoken and Academic Writing Phrasal Verb Pedagogical List, or The S&AW PHaVE List for short.

A limited number of studies have been done in analyzing PVs in teaching materials (Akbari et al., 2021; Koprowski, 2005; Strong & Boers, 2019; Zarifi, 2013). Several educators and linguists (e.g., Cornell, 1985; Darwin & Gray, 1999; Gardner & Davies, 2007; Moon, 1997; Strong & Boers, 2019) criticized the approach PVs are presented in textbooks. The PVs are usually listed in individual sentences with their definitions or translations in parentheses and are followed by gap-fill exercises. As stated by Moon (1997), "PVs are often presented as arbitrary combinations which cannot be analyzed and rationalized" (p. 46). Such a way of presentation expects memorization rather than any semantic analysis. Grouping PVs together according to the lexical verb is also criticized by Darwin and Gray (1999), who pointed this out as 'one reason for a limited understanding of phrasal verbs' (p. 67). The researchers stated, 'Although this method may help a student become aware of the idiomatic nature of these combinations, one would speculate that it does little to promote their use.' (ibid) Strong and Boers (2019) analyzed 44 internationally well-established EFL textbooks published by Oxford University Press, MacMillan, and Pearson Education. Each book was manually screened for sections containing exercises on PVs and preceding texts to estimate how common the two approaches to exercises, retrieval exercise or trial-and-error, are and to determine what exercise formats they typically use. The analysis revealed that the trial-and-error exercises are more common. The textbooks tend to present learners with exercises on PVs without first providing relevant input to help them. He argued that in these cases, the learners are likely to resort to trial-and-error. From their review of studies on PVs spanning three decades, Jahedi and Mukundan (2015) maintained that the number of research on the use of PVs in ESL textbooks were limited and called for further research on how PVs are treated in textbooks to help ELT materials developers provide learners with adequate PVs needed to gain the mastery of them.

Drawing on cognitive linguistics-inspired instruction of PVs, many studies reported EFL experiments about exploring the effect of raising learners' awareness of the underlying conceptual motivation of the verbs and the particles on ability in understanding and recalling PVs of EFL learners from various L1, such as Hungarian (Kövecses & Szabo, 1996), French (Boers, 2000), Japanese (Spring, 2018; Yasuda, 2010), Turkish (Karahan, 2015), Germany (Kohl-Dietrich et al., 2016), Vietnamese (Huynh & Vo, 2015), Iranian (Talebinejad & Sadri, 2013), Chinese (Liu & Myers, 2018; Lu & Sun, 2017; Teng, 2018), or Arab (Mohammed, 2019). Most of these studies report positive effects on learners' retention of the meaning of explicitly taught PVs and their successful transference of their cognitive knowledge of learnt PVs to uncommon, novel ones (Al-Otaibi, 2019; Boers, 2000; Huynh & Vo, 2015; Karahan, 2015; Kövecses & Szabó, 1996; Lee, 2012; Lu & Sun, 2017; Spring, 2018; Talebinejad & Sadri, 2013; Tkahashi & Matsuya, 2012); White, 2012; Yasuda, 2010). The cognitive-informed studies confirm the relationship between improvement and teaching style. For example, guided analysis of the orientational metaphors of the particles helps learners process PVs more effectively than by blind memorization or translation. However, some other studies reveal that the cognitive approach to PVs teaching does not necessarily lead to any improvement in the learners' performance or significant differences between the control group and the cognitive group (Karahan, 2015; Mohammed, 2019; White, 2012). The unsatisfactory outcomes were attributed to a few problems such as the materials used, the analytical procedure followed by learners to cognitively understand PVs, or insufficient classroom instruction time. Among the previous studies, White's (2012) research was likely to be most innovative. He used the cognitive approach along with sociocultural theory to enrich learners' cognition and creativity. In this study, the students were exposed to PVs as structures that can be "conceptually motivated" (p. 422), prompted to create their own image schemas, collected PVs and discussed their meanings in small groups, conceptualizing how particles contribute to the meanings of given PVs, drew and shared PVs meanings. However, the T-test results showed that students' performance on the post-test was modest and not significant.

Although potentially efficient, the cognitive studies presented two main limitations. The first limitation, as pointed out by White (2012), was time constraint. The treatments, when the learners received extra, explicit explanations on metaphorical senses of the focused PVs, tended to be within 10 minutes (Boers, 2000; Yasuda, 2010), 15 minutes (Kövecses & Szabó 1996), or 25 mins (White, 2012), spanning over 2, 4, 6, or 7 weeks. Accordingly, it seemed impossible for the instructors to present the learners a comprehensive list of PVs or particles. The supplementary materials do not cover a wide variety of PVs or particles. The number of PVs ranges from 10 (e.g., Kövecses & Szabó, 1996) to 20 (e.g., Huynh & Vo, 2015; Talebinejad & Sadri, 2013; Yasuda, 2010), or 26 (Boers, 2000), being highest at 30 (Lin, 2018). The PVs were selected because they were frequently used in textbooks (Yasuda, 2010) or intuitively considered as most frequent verbs. Equally limited is the number of the particles, which may be only two (Kövecses & Szabo, 1996; Talebinejad & Sadri, 2013), three (Kohl-Dietrich et al., 2016; Lee, 2012; Side, 1990), five (Huynh & Vo, 2015; Karahan, 2015; Yasuda, 2010), six (Lin, 2018; White, 2012), or seven (Boers, 2000). The more recent studies advanced the ideas of the corpus-based studies to create more comprehensive list of PV particles, such as 12 in Mohammed (2019) or 17 in Spring (2018).

To the best of our knowledge, there are few studies that attempt to straddle these different areas of research to offer a more practical guide to learning and teaching PVs. This study is aimed to contribute to the literature of PVs instruction in general by focusing on the teaching and learning PVs in the Vietnamese context. In this study, an inductive approach was taken to raise the learners' awareness of the semantic and syntactic nature of PVs and to give them a more active role in identifying and figuring out the meanings of these lexical multi-word units. Such an approach may facilitate attempts to make sense of novel PVs that learners are sure to encounter continually in their learning process. In this study, we tried to narrow the gap in the literature by addressing the following research questions: *1) What and how are PVs introduced in the textbooks: to what extent the PVs used in the textbooks match Liu and Myers (2018)'s Spoken and Academic Writing Phrasal Verb Pedagogical List (The S&AW PHaVE List);(2) To what extent can the learners retain knowledge of PVs presented in the learning material across two levels? (3) What factors may positively impact students' knowledge on PVs?*

2. Method

2.1 Research Setting and Participants

This study was carried out at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, where two of the researchers have been working. We first requested the permission from the university's rector to carry out research with one group of learners who were learning general English at pre-intermediate level. Upon being granted the permission, one of the researchers was assigned as the course instructor of one class of B1 level. To be able to register a B1 class, the learners had finished Life A1-A2 (Huges et al., 2019a) (*Life 1*, henceforth). They were homogenized through an A2-level proficiency test.

The assigned class was due to span over 11 weeks, meeting weekly, from March to May 2023. The teaching material was *Life* A2-B1 (Huges et al., 2019b) units 1-6 (*Life 2*, henceforth). To guarantee teaching and learning effectiveness, the class size was limited to below 40. There were 36 students; however, five did not participate, so the number of student participants was 31.

2.2 Research Design

To address the aims put forward, we adopted an action research design of cycled stages of planning, action, observation, reflection to collect and analyze data.

2.2.1 Identification of PVs in Life 1 and Life 2

The identification of what and how PVs are introduced in the teaching materials was manually carried out by two independent discourse analysts, both of whom hold a PhD degree in English linguistics. To record the PVs, the procedure was as follows:

(1) Each textbook was closely read to identify the PVs. Darwin and Gray's (1999) five semantic and syntactic tests - particle repetition, where question, fronting, verb insertion, adverb insertion - and Armstrong's (2004) separability and bare pronoun tests were consistently followed in differentiating PVs from prepositional verbs.

(2) Along with being highlighted in the hard copy, each PV was recorded in terms of the following information, displayed in a word file: (a) form (lexical verb + particle), (b) meaning, (c) whole context/sentence in which it was used, (d) page number, (e) section (Grammar, Vocabulary, Functions, Pronunciation, Listening, Reading, Critical thinking, Speaking, or Writing); some PVs were also marked if they were introduced in Vocabulary as *Word Focus*.

(3) The two analysts exchanged the recorded Microsoft Word files. We cross-checked to ensure no PV was missed out and no prepositional verb was mistakenly included in the final lists of PVs in *Life 1* and *Life 2*.

(4) Each PV was identified as being used once or repeatedly, based on a number of occurrences throughout each textbook.

(5) Each list was mapped onto Liu and Myers (2018)'s list to record and count the PVs belonging to or not belonging to the list of common speaking and academic writing PV pedagogical list.

2.2.2 Implementation

The underlying tenets of the implementation were as follows. We provided the learners with multiple contacts of long duration to enhance effective learning and recalling of learnt PVs (Nation & Nation, 2001). The 'input hypothesis' (Krashen, 1989) emphasizes the importance of vocabulary acquisition through the unconscious process of language acquisition. Krashen (1989) remarked that we acquire vocabulary through exposure to comprehensible input. Incidental learning is defined as 'learning without the intent to learn or the learning of one

thing (e.g., grammar) when the learner's primary objective is to do something else (e.g., communicate)' (Schmidt, 1990, as cited in Akbary et al., 2018, p.2). Research has shown that unintended exposure to foreign vocabulary, especially in multimodal form, plays a role in how words are learned. Such learning significantly improves the likelihood of the success in subsequent explicit instruction (Bisson et al., 2013, as cited in Akbary et al., 2018; Khatib & Ghannadi, 2011). To facilitate understanding and retention of the PVs, the cognitive-inspired measures were taken with a focus on the metaphor-motivated senses of the particles, as the more important constituent in the PVs. Lu and Sun (2017) confirms, 'Cognitive linguistics has shown that polysemies are cognitively motivated and emphasizes that prepositions in PVs have much to do with metaphors. Thus, the in-depth understanding of connections of the particles assists and facilitates the acquisition of PVs.' (p.159)

Throughout the weeks of teaching and learning Units 1-6 (Weeks 1-10), the instructors implemented some measures to teach PVs to learners: (1) In teaching vocabulary prior each new unit, PVs were focused as an essential part of learners' vocabulary, along with other new words; (2) Explicit instruction of the PVs regarding structure, syntactic characteristics and meanings by raising their awareness of the semantic unpredictability and cognitive-based senses of prepositions of the PVs under focus while providing the class with further similar examples; (3) During consolidation of vocabulary and grammar after each unit, PVs were always included in regular tests.

2.3 Pretests and Posttests

All the texts were constructed in the form of gap-fill of missing PVs in individual sentences. They were piloted with another group of learners who were at the same level to ensure clarity. Technical errors were revised, and the ambiguous items were replaced with items that could have only single definite answers.

2.3.1 Pre-testing

During Week 1, two tests were consecutively administered online through Google Forms stored in Google Classroom. They were aimed to compare the students' knowledge of grammar points and their knowledge of PVs introduced in *Life* 1. Test 1 focused on the grammatical points covered in *Life* 1, namely tenses, adverbs of frequency, articles, quantifiers, to + *infinitive*, *-ing* form, comparatives and superlatives, prepositions of place and movement, conditional, defining relative clause, and reported speech. Test 2 focused on only the PVs used in Life 1. It was a multiple-choice gap-filling test of 30 individual sentences. To facilitate and consolidate retention, Test 2 made use of the original sentences which consist of the PVs in *Life* 1.

2.3.2 Post-testing

By the closing of the course, two post-tests were administered to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures undertaken (Week 10 and 11). Again, the tests were assigned online through Google Forms during class time. The immediate posttest, Test 3, was to test students' ability to retain knowledge of PVs in six units 1-6 of *Life 2*, so it was constructed with the original sentences in *Life 2*. One week later, the students took the delayed posttest, Test 4, which was aimed to test students' overall knowledge of the PVs used in both *Life 1* and *Life 2*. Different from Test 2 and Test 3, Test 4 did not make use of the original sentences in the textbooks; rather, the learnt PVs were used in completely novel co-text.

2.4 Data collection and data analysis

All the tests were automatically graded by Google Forms. We downloaded, analyzed, and stored the grades and the percentage of correct answers of each test in Excel files. The quantitative data were statistically analyzed by SPSS to identify the following features: (1) if there was *statistically significant difference in grades* between (1a) Test 1 and Test 2, (1b) between Test 2 and Test 3; (1c) between Test 2 and Test 4; and (1d) between Test 3 and Test 4; and (2) if there is a *correlation* (2a) between occurrence rate of the PVs in the textbooks and correct rate in the tests, and (2b) between S&AW PHaVE List membership and correct rate in the tests.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 To What Extent the PVs Used in the Textbooks Match Liu and Myers' (2018) S&AW PHaVE List?

The analysis of the textbooks under focus was to investigate how PVs are incorporated into the teaching materials. The PVs in two textbooks *Life 1* and *Life 2* were identified, studied if each was repeatedly used, and then compared with Liu and Myers' (2018) Spoken and Academic Writing Phrasal Verb Pedagogical List. The analysis also examined the degree to which the PVs were presented as the main focus in the "Word Focus" section of the textbooks. The result is summarized in Table 1 (see Appendix 2 for the complete lists).

It was seen that in *Life 1* (A1-A2) there were a total of 43 PVs, while the number of PVs in *Life 2* (A2-B1) was 44. Of these, nearly 50% in both textbooks are repeatedly used (41, 86% 43.18%), ranging from twice to three or four times. These figures indicate a rather limited presence of PVs in the textbooks. It should be noted that some PVs in *Life 2* are also present in *Life 1*.

As regard the comparison with Liu and Myers' (2018) list, the analysis unfolds approximately a half of the PVs in both textbooks are from S&AWE PHaVE list. In *Life 1*, 41.86% were mapped onto Liu and Myers' list and 58.13% did not belong to this pedagogical list. Similarly, in *Life 2*, 43.18% were mapped onto Liu and Myers' list and 56.81% did not belong to the pedagogical list. In both *Life 1* and *Life 2*.

Finally, most PVs were not primarily introduced as 'Word Focus' but appeared incidentally in several sections, such as Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Grammar. In *Life 1,* only five PVs are focused on in Vocabulary section, all having 'up' as the particle (*dress up, give up, go up, get up, wake up).* In *Life 2,* only two PVs are presented in this section, both having 'get' as the lexical verb (*get back, get up).*

These findings point out limitations in the coverage and emphasis placed on PVs within the textbooks. While some PVs align with Liu and Myers's pedagogical list, a significant number do not. Moreover, the lack of dedicated attention to PVs in the "Word Focus" section raises concerns regarding the comprehensiveness of PV education.

The finding confirms the limitations indicated in the previous studies. EFL textbooks of course contain texts that include instances of phrasal verbs, but hardly in sufficient numbers to make acquisition likely (AlejoGonzález, Piquer-Píriz, & Reveriego-Sierra, 2010, as cited in Strong & Boers, 2019). Koprowski (2005, as cited in Jahedi & Mukundan, 2015) study investigated the usefulness of PVs and other multi-word items in three contemporary course books: *New Headway Upper-Intermediate*, *Innovations*, and *Inside Out Intermediate*.

Table 1. Comparison of PVs in Textbooks and Liu and Myers' (2018) Phrasal Verbs

Textbook (No. of PVs)	Occurrence rate		Mapped onto Liu & Myers (2018)		Word focus
	Once	Repeated	Belong to list	Not belong to list	
A1-A2 (No. of PVs = 43)	25 (58.13%)	18 (41.86%)	18 (41.86%)	25 (58.13%)	05
A2-B1 (No. of PVs = 44)	25 (56.81%)	19 (43.18%)	25 (56.81%)	19 (43.18%)	02

The results showed that no standardized criteria were set for choosing the lexical items and the large proportion of the chosen items had low frequency. The researcher also claimed that selection of items was subjective and based on the materials developers' intuition and suggested that the ELT materials have limited pedagogical values to the learners in this regard. A similar evaluation was made in Zarifi's (2013) analysis of ESL textbooks for Malaysian school learners. The study found that the selection and presentation of PVs are based on developers' intuition rather than informed by research results and pedagogical principles. McAleese's (2013) investigation of only one course book, *English Firsthand 1*, used for Japanese learners. McAleese (2013) found that a large proportion of multi-word items used in the course book "may be unrepresentative of authentic language and therefore have limited value to the learners" (p. 321).

The proportion of the PVs identified in *Life 1* and *Life 2* which are present in the *S&AW PHaVE List* is smaller than that found in Akbary et al.'s (2016) investigation of the high-frequency PVs in song lyrics. In Akbary et al.'s (2016) study, a corpus of 400 song lyrics from four genres (i.e., Pop, Rock, Hip-hop and Metal) was searched for all existing phrasal verbs. The resulting list of PVs was compared to Garnier and Schmitt's (2015) Phrasal Verb Pedagogical List to determine their value for learners. The results revealed that over 67% of the phrasal verb types found were covered by the PHaVE List, and only 32.14% phrasal verb types were not absent from that list.

The low proportion of the common verbs in the material analyzed may be attributed to the general purpose for which the list was developed, i.e., it 'aims to be of general usefulness for people using English for a variety of reasons and through exposure to various media' (Garnier & Schmitt, 2015, p. 655). So, as emphasized by White (2012), instructors should focus on frequent PVs that have been emphasized in corpus-based studies or include those found in course books.

Pedagogically, the study suggests several implications for curriculum designers, textbook authors, and English language instructors. It emphasizes that PV instruction should be aligned with established pedagogical resources to ensure comprehensive coverage. Introducing PVs and explicitly teaching them in special sections, such as the "Word Focus" component, can improve learners' understanding and use of PVs. Instructors are recommended to supplement textbook materials with additional resources that include PVs. Online learning platforms, authentic materials, and corpus-based resources can provide learners with exposure to a wider range of PVs, including those that may not be covered in depth in textbooks. By diversifying the resources available to learners, instructors can improve their PV proficiency and help them navigate the complexities of using PVs in different contexts. Literature shows learners who are exposed to a wider range of PVs in context are more likely to be confident in their use of PVs.

3.2 To What Extent Can the Learners Retain the Knowledge of PVs Introduced in Two Levels?

As described in Methodology, initially, we compared the students' knowledge of general grammar in *Life 1* and their knowledge of PVs in the same textbook. The statistical analysis indicated a significant difference in the average scores of the two tests. The average score for Test 1 (General Grammar Pretest) was 6.27, while the average score for Test 2 (Revision of PVs in A1-A2) was 4.37. This indicates that the learners performed better on general grammar than on PVs. In other words, learners may have had more difficulty with PVs than with the other general grammar points (*see* Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of Scores between Test 1 and Test 2

Groups	*Count*	*Sum*	*Average*	*Variance*
Test 1 - General Grammar Pretest	31	194.5	6.274194	7.845016
Test 2 - Revision of PVs in A1-A2	31	135.4333	4.368817	3.257551

An expanded range of performance levels appears to exist amidst participants on the general grammar pretest, as certain participants scored

well above or below the average. Conversely, the PV revision test exhibited fewer disparities. The revision test on PVs reveals a lower average score and narrowed score range, revealing a more uniform level of performance and fewer score deviations among all participants. The modest score on the PV revision test may indicate a feeble grasp or retention of PVs by the participants. This result necessitated effective instruction, further practice, and support in order to enhance the students' grasp and retention of PVs.

Starting with an ANOVA, a comparison of test scores among various groups began. This led to the discovery of a significant statistical variance between groups ($F(1, 60) = 10.14$, $p = 0.002$). Thus, there is an apparent distinction in the participants' abilities across all administered evaluations. A follow-up investigation unveiled the precise disparities among the tests (*see* Table 3).

Table 3. Results for Retention of PV Knowledge in Two Levels

Source of Variation	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P-value*	*F crit*
Between Groups	56.27211	1	56.27211	10.13678	0.002305	4.001191
Within Groups	333.077	60	5.551283			
Total	389.3491	61				

Table 3 presents the results of the analysis of variance conducted to examine the differences in test scores between groups. The total sum of squares (SS) was 389.3491, with a total degree of freedom (df) of 61. The between-groups sum of squares was 56.27211, corresponding to 1 df, and the within-groups sum of squares was 333.077, with 60 df. The mean squares (MS) for the between-groups and within-groups were 56.27211 and 5.551283, respectively. The F-value for the between-groups variation was 10.13678, and the associated p-value was 0.002305. The critical F-value at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, with 1 df for the numerator and 60 df for the denominator, was 4.001191. The results of the ANOVA indicate that there is a statistically significant difference in the test scores between groups, suggesting variations in the retention of PV knowledge across the different tests administered.

Table 4. Test 2 vs Test 3 - Paired Two Samples for Mean

	Test 2 - Revision of PVs in A1-A2	*Test 3 Test on PVs in A2- B1*
Mean	4.368817204	5.903225806
Variance	3.257550777	4.586618877
Observations	31	31
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000704201	

The analysis indicated the significant difference between scores on Test 2 and Test 3 (Table 4), suggesting that the learners had an improvement in retaining the PVs presented in *Life 2*. In addition, Table 5 presents the comparison of Test 3 and Test 4. The absence of a significant difference between Test 3 and Test 4 scores suggests that the learners were able to retain the PVs introduced in both *Life 1* and *Life 2*, even when tested with novel sentences. This finding indicates that the learners' retention extended beyond familiarity with specific contexts and allowed them to apply their knowledge to new contexts.

Table 5. Test Scores for PV Retention in Different Levels of Test 3 and Test 4

Groups	*Count*	*Sum*	*Average*	*Variance*
Test 3 Test on PVs in A2- B1	31	183	5.903226	4.586619
Test 4 - Test on PVs in A1-A2-B1	31	201.3	6.493548	5.206846

This finding implies that explicit instruction, vocabulary consolidation, and regular testing positively impacted the learners' retention of PVs. The learners' performance appeared to have benefitted from increased and varied exposure to and utilization of PVs, as evidenced by a positive correlation between the correct test rate and the frequency of PVs in the textbooks. It would seem, then, that repeated and contextualized exposure to PVs is key to retention.

Different tests showed varying degrees of retention of PV knowledge among the learners, and explicit instruction, vocabulary consolidation, and regular testing effectively enhanced students' retention of PVs in both *Life 1* and *Life 2*. Overall, these findings highlight the importance of tailored instruction for mastering PVs. The positive results may be determined by the interplay of the various pedagogical measures taken, underpinned in long-established tenets in ELT methodology and informed by cognitive-based experiential research. First, learners' knowledge may benefit from an enhanced metaphor awareness. Rudzka-Ostyn (2003) argued that advanced students will learn metaphorical PVs if they are focused upon explicitly (i.e., through tests and exercises) and their instruction is systematized. Huynh and Vo (2015, p.188)

confirmed, ‘using conceptual metaphor to teach English phrasal verbs may bring about positive outcomes of the teaching and learning English phrasal verbs to Vietnamese student at tertiary education.’ Then, the use of L1 in both gloss and in-class instruction of PVs must have played an important role. Lu and Sun (2017) pointed out that by focusing on translations, the meanings of the verb were considered.

Another reason may be attributed to the repeated exposure to the PVs via presentation, discussion, and consolidation tests. The positive findings of the immediate Test 3 could arguably have benefited from feedback on the regular exercises. In this regard, the finding is in line with Strong and Boers’ (2019) experiment conducted with Japanese EFL students. In this study, the researchers found the scores on both an immediate and a one-week delayed post-test suggest superiority of retrieval over the trial-and-error procedure. The final reason may be the learners’deliberate and conscious effort motivated by the regular in-class tasks. As emphasized by Akbary et al. (2016), learners cannot expect to learn from these sources if they fail to pay sufficient attention to what they are being exposed to.

These generally positive findings, nonetheless, need to be interpreted within the confines of this study, of course. Firstly, all the PVs used in the tests were encountered by the learners repeatedly via presentation and consolidation, progressive tests. Second, the results of the treatment pertain to participants whose level of English was pre-intermediate.

3.3 What Factors May Positively Impact Students’ Knowledge on PVs?

In this study, we delved into the possible factors that could affect students' grasp of PVs. Through analyzing the correct answers in Test 2, Test 3, and Test 4, we gained some insights into how various factors could impact students’ understanding and retention of PV knowledge. Our analytical decision was that: if the proportion of correct answers to a certain PV was above 50%, that PV was counted as having been successful recalled. We then explored the correlation between this variable and the others – repetition in the textbooks, being presented as ‘word focus’, and belonging to Liu and Meyers’ (2018) 150 most common PVs. The results from Test 2, Test 3, and Test 4 are presented in Table 6, 7 and 8, respectively. As can been seen from the tables, the data revealed significant correlations between the percentage of correct responses and the variables under focus.

Concerning Test 2, a beneficial link was found between students' understanding of PVs and PVs being focused as new vocabulary. Directing attention to PVs during lessons, offering clear descriptions and examples, can boost comprehension and memory. Furthermore, the study discovered a meaningful correlation between PVs that belong to the Liu & Meyers’ (20188) basic PV list and students' grasp of them. This indicates that when PVs are commonly used, learners are more likely to acquire and retain them proficiently, leading to enhanced language skills.

Moving on to Test 3, the data revealed a positive correlation (0.166848) between the PVs as among the 150 most common PVs and students' PV knowledge. This indicates that when PVs are part of the S&AW PHaVa list, students are more likely to have better knowledge and to use them correctly. However, no significant correlation was detected between the repeated PVs and PVs in Word Focus and students' PV knowledge in Test 3.

Regarding Test 4, the positive correlation (0.1703463) indicates that learners were more likely to use PVs correctly when they were familiar with the PVs. The correlation between that a PV was repeated and students' knowledge of PVs was also positive, but relatively weaker (0.0800641). The results of these administered tests suggest that the factors of PVs belonging to the L&M list of common PVs reflected a positive influence on students' knowledge of PVs. This means students’ comprehension and use of PVs was better with common PVs than with PVs outside this common list. Being repeatedly used in the textbooks and being focused as new vocabulary, however, did not have correlation with students' PV knowledge in the given tests.

Table 6. Correlation Matrix of Factors Affecting Students' Knowledge on PVs in Test 2

	> 50%	*Repeated*	*Word focus*	*Belong to Liu & Meyers’ list*
> 50%	1			
repeated	0.071429	1		
Word focus	0.119523	0.059761	1	
Belong to L&M common PVs	-0.14382	0.278658	0.330911	1

Table 7. Correlation Matrix of Factors Affecting Students' Knowledge on PVs in Test 3

	> 50%	*Repeated*	*Word focus*	*Belong to L&M common PVs*
> 50%	1			
repeated	0.213201	1		
Word focus	0.201008	0.235702	1	
Belong to L&M common PVs	0.166848	-0.09782	0.253629	1

Table 8. Correlation Matrix of Factors Affecting Students' Knowledge on PVs in Test 4

	>50%	*Repeated*	*Belong to L&M common PVs*
>50%	1		
Repeated	0.0800641	1	
Belong to L&M common PVs	0.1703463	0.081831709	1

The results emphasize the importance of targeted teaching with explicit explanations when teaching PVs to students, particularly those that are commonly used and have simple and clear lexical and grammatical features. There is a strong chance that by emphasizing these characteristics, teachers can effectively promote students' comprehension and use of PVs, and this will contribute to a more increased language proficiency in this area of grammar. Consistently, the results of this study are in line with previous research studies that emphasize the importance of context and regular exposure in acquiring PVs (Akbari et al., 2021; Mart, 2012; Tran & Pham, 2023)

In Garnier and Schmitt's (2015) study, previous L2 instruction did not influence knowledge of PVs, the other factors being semantic opacity, immersion in L2 environment and years of BA study. Conversely, corpus frequency was found to impact knowledge, along with time spent on reading and social networking per week. Schmitt and Redwood (2011) found significant positive correlations between mean scores of 68 students on productive and receptive tests and PV frequency rankings from four corpus (BNC complete, BNC written, BNC spoken, and COCA). Chen (2013) also found a positive correlation between her Chinese participants' production of PVs and the PV frequency rankings of the 50 most frequent PVs in the BNC and the COCA.

It is reasonable to assume that teaching commonly used PVs and PVs with grammatical patterns will probably help students to understand PVs better and use them more effectively. L&M common list of PVs has been found to have a stronger influence on students' knowledge than PVs without focus or being repeated. The positive correlation between L&M common PVs and PV knowledge suggests that PVs are more common in everyday communication, so they are more important. However, students' understanding and use of PVs may not improve significantly through mere repetition or exposure without specific attention or focus. As shown in this study, there was no significant correlation found between repeated PVs and PVs without focus. Therefore, to achieve student improvement in PVs, it needs targeted instruction and explicit teaching strategies, as well as highlights the key features and patterns of use of PVs to achieve improvement.

In other words, understanding the factors that contribute to PV acquisition enables teachers work on PVs with students more effectively. This is especially important in English as a foreign language (EFL) setting, where students have little if not no exposure to PVs. By bringing more real-world situations to the classroom, diversifying the teaching methods, and tailoring the teaching materials, teachers can help their students grasp and develop the proficiency in PVs so that they can communicate in English more effectively.

4. Conclusion

Given the fact that PVs are generally ubiquitous, highly frequent, semantically unpredictable, and constantly and creatively coined by native speakers, EFL learners are bound to be continually confronted with these muti-word lexical items PVs at various stages of the learning journey. Therefore, equipping the EFL learners, ideally at early stages of the learning process, with measures to effectively learn PVs must be among the priorities of the practitioners. This study was aimed to contribute to such an endeavor. As pointed out by Darwin and Gray (1999):

> to alleviate the difficulties phrasal verbs present, ESL teachers and material writers need to approach the problematic areas of phrasal-verb pedagogy systematically, developing and presenting material in a manner that avoids unnecessary confusion and loss of time for both student and instructor. This, however, is not the practice. In research and pedagogy, approaches to the phrasal verb have been, and still are, rather arbitrary. (p. 66)

This study investigates the alignment between PVs found in textbooks and an established PV list, delves into learners' retention of PV knowledge, and examines the factors influencing students' grasp of PVs. First, The investigation into the alignment between PVs used in

textbooks and Liu and Myers' (2018) S&AW PHaVE List reveals limitations in PV coverage and emphasis within the textbooks. The lack of dedicated attention to PVs in the "Word Focus" section raises concerns about comprehensive PV education. This study confirms prior indications of these limitations. While EFL textbooks contain some instances of PVs, they are insufficient for effective acquisition due to low frequency and the absence of standardized criteria for lexical item selection. Secondly, the study on learners' retention of PV knowledge across two levels demonstrates that PVs pose greater difficulty than other grammar points. The findings suggest that retention extends beyond contextual familiarity, enabling learners to apply PV knowledge to new situations. Explicit instruction, vocabulary consolidation, and regular testing positively impact retention. Learners benefit from increased exposure to and use of PVs, as shown by the correlation between correct test rates and PV frequency. The research underscores tailored instruction's importance, drawing on established ELT methodology and cognitive-based experiential research. Finally, as regards the factors enhancing students' PV knowledge, understanding PVs as new vocabulary and offering clear descriptions and examples during lessons can boost comprehension and memory. A positive correlation exists between students' grasp of common PVs from Liu & Myers' list and their proficiency. Repeated usage and inclusion in "Word Focus" have no significant correlation with students' PV knowledge, while familiarity with PVs positively impacts their correct usage.

The findings of the present study point to the potential value of incorporating research findings into classroom activities and EFL teaching materials. The findings from the textbooks analysis served to ensure that the classroom activities and the test bore a reasonable resemblance to materials to which the learners were exposed. This study provides a method and data for the systematic analysis of ELT textbooks regarding the presentation of PVs. However, the PVs focused on in this study were far from a large corpus extracted from a range of available textbooks; thus, we need to be cautious not to generalize the findings to different levels of learners' proficiency. The measures taken in this study do not constitute a separate program but should be conceived as being integrated with various other approaches to language teaching and learning.

This study also points the way to further studies. Further empirical research is needed to find out how classroom activities could be designed or implemented more effectively. The literature has indicated the potential role of collaborative output tasks in enhancing the effectiveness of understanding and recalling PVs (Nassaji & Tian, 2010; White, 2012), or e-portfolio in assessing vocabulary (Nourdad & Banagozar, 2022). Given the context of ELT in Vietnam, the findings of this this study strong support Tran and Pham's (2023, p. 8) suggestion that 'lecturers should instruct students on how to use phrasal verbs in academic writing and motivate them to use phrasal verbs not only in writing but also speaking. Lecturers should highlight phrasal verbs in other language skills such as reading and listening'. Another strand of research could address the teaching materials. In this study, the PVs were identified, explained, and tested based on the meanings used in the textbooks. Therefore, further studies should focus on the most common senses and/or senses across the two registers.

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