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## THE ROLE OF PARTICLE IN THE TRANSLATION OF ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS INTO BOSNIAN

### *Abstract*

*The present study investigates whether students' familiarity with the meaning and the most common translation equivalents of phrasal verb particles plays a constructive role in the translation of phrasal verbs. To address this, a survey was conducted to assess the translation proficiency of 40 high school students at the B1 level of English proficiency whose native language is Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. The survey aimed to determine the students' proficiency in translating two distinct sets of phrasal verbs and to identify which of these sets presented greater challenges. The first set comprised ten phrasal verbs which, when translated into BCS, incorporate a preposition in their translation equivalents. In contrast, the second set included ten sentences containing English phrasal verbs that are translated into BCS using a verb without a preposition. The results revealed a higher overall accuracy rate in the translation of the first set of phrasal verbs, thereby confirming the research hypothesis. These findings suggest that BCS ELLs may acquire such phrasal verbs more easily, with potential implications for the teaching, learning and translation of phrasal verbs at the B1 level.*

**Key words:** phrasal verbs, translation, particle, ELL

### INTRODUCTION

Interest in the description of the basic syntactic features of English phrasal verbs has a well-established scholarly tradition (Thim, 2012). Various definitions of phrasal verbs exist within the academic discourse. According to Biber et al. "phrasal verbs are multi-word units consisting of a verb followed by an adverbial particle (e.g. *carry out*, *find out*, or *pick up*) (Biber, Johansson, Geoffrey, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999). Additionally, they are defined as lexical items consisting of a verb and the following particle which serves to modify the meaning of the verb itself (Saleh, 1990).

The fact that phrasal verbs appear so early in the written history of language and its grammar shows that phrasal verbs are an indispensable part of the written and spoken English language (Juniardi, Pahamzah, & Harimurti, 2018). Due to their extensive presence and use both in written and spoken language, phrasal verbs are a necessary segment of language proficiency. However, their non-compositional nature makes them hard to use and understand (Televnaja, Krista, Hempelmann, & Triezenberg, 2004). Mirković (2016) suggests that “*despite the fact that phrasal verbs are used in everyday English, foreign learners avoid learning and using them for their complexity and impossibility to understand the meaning of a phrasal verb from its separate parts*”. In order to understand phrasal verbs, learners must first be capable of identifying them. Taylor (2003) proposes that phrasal verbs can be recognized through the semantic cohesion of the verb and particle they comprise, as well as through their contextual usage and potential for substituting their particle with another particle or lexical unit. Elaborating on this aspect, Geld (2006) contends that second language acquisition is intricately linked to the strategic interpretation of phrasal verb meanings.

The identification and comprehension of phrasal verbs are paramount for their effective translation, as suggested by Katunar et al. (2012). Non-native speakers of English often encounter challenges when translating English phrasal verbs. According to Saleh (1990) there are three types of phrasal verbs – prepositional, figurative, and completive, and each one of them necessitates a distinct translation approach. Research indicates that students primarily employ two techniques when translating phrasal verbs: semantic translation and literal translation (Juniardi, Pahamzah, & Harimurti, 2018). Semantic translation is the more frequently employed technique; however, studies indicate that the accuracy level remains relatively low, hovering around 42% (Juniardi et al., 2018). A significant hurdle for non-native speakers in phrasal verb translation lies in their idiomatic nature. Furthermore, research demonstrates that constant practice can alleviate the usage, translation and comprehension of phrasal verbs among non-native speakers (Aldahesh, 2008). Nevertheless, there is a diverse array of approaches to teaching phrasal verbs (Bureković, M., Rizvić-Eminović, E., & Pilav M. 2023).

Research findings suggest that phrasal verbs, in addition to false friends (Rizvić-Eminović, Bureković & Bujak, 2020), collocations (Rizvić-Eminović & Arnaut-Karović, 2015; Arnaut-Karović & Rizvić-Eminović, 2015), subjunctives (Brdarević-Čeljo, Bećirović, & Bureković, 2018), negative expressions (Bureković, 2019), and rhetorical devices (Bureković & Zolota, 2019), constitute a challenging aspect of lexicon acquisition for non-native English speakers. This challenge is attributed to the fact that the introduction of a particle to a familiar

verb often alters its meaning significantly. Previous investigations into the grammatical competence of B1 level students of English have consistently indicated a lower level of comprehension regarding the meanings of phrasal verbs (Rizvić-Eminović, E., Bujak, A. & Bureković, M., 2018; Rizvić-Eminović & Bujak, 2017, Bureković, M., Perenda, Š. & Rizvić-Eminović, E., 2024).

In light of prior research on the acquisition, usage, and strategies for teaching phrasal verbs (Rizvić-Eminović & Hadžić, 2021; Rizvić-Eminović & Neslanović, 2022), and recognizing the lack of studies investing the underlying factors contributing to the difficulties faced by BCS learners of English in acquiring, utilizing, and translating phrasal verbs, this study delves into the proficiency of B1-level English learners whose native language is BCS when translating English phrasal verbs into their native tongue. Furthermore, it seeks to ascertain whether the congruence between the particles in English and their BCS counterparts influences the accuracy of these translations.

It was postulated that the translation of phrasal verbs would pose a challenge for B1-level English students, despite their familiarity with the meanings of the phrasal verbs surveyed. Additionally, it was assumed that the translation equivalent of the particle which is included in the phrasal verb will affect the accuracy of its translation. Therefore, it was hypothesized that the phrasal verbs whose particle is translated with no preposition in BCS would exhibit a lower accuracy rate in translation compared to those with BCS translations featuring prepositions.

## METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this research, a survey was employed to assess the translation proficiency of 40 high school students at the B1 level of English proficiency, whose native language is Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. The primary objective was to evaluate their proficiency in translating two distinct sets of phrasal verbs and to establish which of these sets presented greater challenges. The phrasal verbs selected for examination were extracted from the students' textbooks. In the survey, participants were tasked with translating twenty sentences containing phrasal verbs from English into BCS without the use of any external aids. The entire task was to be completed within a thirty-minute time frame. The first set comprised ten phrasal verbs that, when translated into BCS, incorporated a preposition in their translation equivalents (e.g. *count on* is translated as *računati na*). The sentences in the first set were as follows:

1. *I can always count on my best friend for support.*
2. *He wanted to make me mad, but I kept it all in.*
3. *She can make any old dress into a stunning costume.*

4. *I tripped as I got off the bus.*
5. *Tom really takes after his grandfather with his love for gardening.*
6. *I need some time to think over your proposal before giving an answer.*
7. *We based our decision on the facts in the report.*
8. *I think we got on the wrong boat.*
9. *They ran across an old photo album while cleaning out the attic.*
10. *When I look back on my childhood, I have fond memories of playing in the park.*

The second set encompassed additional ten sentences containing English phrasal verbs that, in contrast, should be translated into BCS using a verb without the inclusion of any preposition (e.g. *call off* is translated as *otkazati*).

The sentences in the second set were as follows:

1. *They had to call off the event due to bad weather.*
2. *Do not open the window because you will let in the mosquitoes.*
3. *He decided to take out a loan to cover the cost of his education.*
4. *Don't read too much into his comments – he didn't mean to offend you.*
5. *Despite the challenges, we must carry on and complete the project.*
6. *She managed to carry off the difficult presentation in front of a large audience.*
7. *They plan to set up a new business in the heart of the city.*
8. *I think I'll go for the chicken sandwich – it sounds delicious.*
9. *Can we please make up and put this argument behind us?*
10. *I didn't plan to stay out so late, but I ended up having a great time at the party.*

The analysis of survey data began with an assessment of the overall percentage of accurate translations of phrasal verbs from English to BCS. Subsequently, the analysis focused on calculating the percentage of accurate translations for each of the two sets independently. A comparative analysis was then conducted to investigate whether there existed a disparity in the accuracy of translation into BCS between phrasal verbs that necessitate the inclusion of a preposition in their BCS equivalents and those that do not. This examination sought to discern whether certain phrasal verbs, characterized by a higher degree of idiomaticity in translation, posed greater challenges for acquisition at the B1 level.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following table (Table 1) presents the results of the analysis of students' translations of sentences containing phrasal verbs. These phrasal verbs are categorized into two groups:

1. English phrasal verbs whose BCS translation equivalents include prepositions (indicated in Table 1 as "PhrVs with a P in translation").
2. English phrasal verbs whose BCS translation equivalents do not incorporate prepositions (indicated in Table 1 as "PhrVs with no P in translation").

PhrVs with a P in  
translation

|                             | Percentage of<br>inaccurate<br>translation | PhrVs with no P in<br>translation | Percentage of<br>inaccurate<br>translation |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| count on                    | 9%   | call off                          | 73%  |
| keep in                     | 45%  | let in                            | 82%  |
| make into                   | 55%  | take out                          | 27%  |
| get off                     | 55%  | read into                         | 100%                                       |
| take after                  | 91%  | carry on                          | 27%  |
| think over                  | 27%  | carry off                         | 64%  |
| base on                     | 55%  | set up                            | 36%  |
| get on                      | 27%  | go for                            | 64%  |
| run across                  | 18%  | make up                           | 9%   |
| look back                   | 45%  | end up                            | 9%   |
| AVERAGE<br>INACCURATE       | 43%  | AVERAGE<br>INACCURATE             | 49%  |
| AVERAGE<br>ACCURATE         | 57%  | AVERAGE<br>ACCURATE               | 51%  |
| OVERALL AVERAGE<br>ACCURACY |  | 54%                               |  |

Table 1.  
Percentage of

*accuracy of phrasal verbs translations*

A total of 800 translations of phrasal verbs were subject to analysis. As depicted in Table 1, B1-level English Language Learners (ELLs) whose native language is Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian encountered challenges in translating phrasal verbs. Their translations exhibited an accuracy rate of only 54% for phrasal verbs, encompassing both those translated into BCS as single words and those featuring particles translated with prepositions in BCS. This result, albeit below the anticipated level, is noteworthy considering that the surveyed phrasal verbs were sourced from the textbooks they had used, implying some familiarity with their meanings. Comparatively, the overall accuracy rate of 54% in this study exceeds that reported by Juniardi et al. (2018), where the accuracy rate stood at 42%. Furthermore, phrasal

verbs characterized by a higher degree of idiomaticity, such as *read into* and *let in*, which are translated into BCS as verbs without any accompanying preposition, posed greater difficulty for B1-level BCS learners of English, manifesting higher rates of translation inaccuracies. Conversely, the highest accuracy rates were observed for commonly used and early-taught phrasal verbs, such as *make up* and *end up* (91% of accurate translations).

The overall accuracy rate within the set of phrasal verbs whose translation equivalents incorporate a preposition is higher, standing at 57%, thus confirming the research hypothesis. It is worth noting that the highest degree of inaccuracy is observed in instances where the particle does not align with its most common translation equivalent in BCS. For example, *take after* exhibits a significant inaccuracy rate of 91%. In contrast, for *count on*, where *on* is translated as *na* in BCS, aligning with its most common translation equivalent in other contexts as well, the inaccuracy rate is only 9%.

## CONCLUSION

The current study suggests that B1-level students demonstrate a higher degree of accuracy when translating phrasal verbs with particles that align with prepositions in their BCS equivalent. However, it is essential to acknowledge that these results, while indicative, do not provide conclusive evidence. This observation suggests that students' familiarity with the meaning and the most common translation equivalents of phrasal verb particles may indeed serve as a beneficial aid in the translation process, potentially implying that such phrasal verbs are more readily acquired by BCS English Language Learners. It is important to note, however, that this study is constrained to BCS ELLs at the B1 proficiency level. To establish more definitive conclusions and to generalize these findings, further research on a larger scale is warranted. Such future studies could encompass a more diverse range of foreign languages and learners at various levels of English language proficiency.

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## ULOGA PARTIKULE U PREVOĐENJU ENGLSKIH FRAZNIH GLAGOLA NA BOSANSKI JEZIK

### **Sažetak**

*U članku se istražuje da li poznavanje značenja i najčešćeg prijevodnog ekvivalenta partikule engleskog fraznog glagola ima ikakvu ulogu u prevođenju fraznih glagola. Da bi se to ispitalo provedena je anketa među 40 srednjoškolaca čiji je maternji jezik bosanski, hrvatski, srpski, dok je njihovo poznavanje engleskog jezika na B1 nivou. Cilj ankete je bio utvrditi uspješnost srednjoškolaca u prevođenju dvije grupe fraznih glagola, te ustanoviti koja od te dvije grupe ispitanicima predstavlja više poteškoća. Prvu grupu je činilo deset fraznih glagola u čijem se prijevodnom ekvivalentu javlja prepozicija. Druga grupa je uključivala deset rečenica sa engleskim fraznim glagolima u čijem prijevodnom ekvivalentu nema prepozicije. Rezultati su pokazali veći stepen tačnosti pri prevođenju prve grupe fraznih glagola, čime je potvrđena hipoteza navedena u radu. Pored toga, rezultati ukazuju na to da bi se moglo tvrditi da učenici engleskog kao stranog jezika čiji je maternji jezik bosanski, hrvatski, srpski lakše usvajaju ovakve glagole, što može imati implikacije na podučavanje, učenje i prevođenje fraznih glagola na B1 nivou.*

**Ključne riječi:** frazni glagoli, prevođenje, partikula, ELL