

# Recognition and Use Of Phrasal Verbs by EFL Learners

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J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major MA Study Programme in English Language and  
Literature – Teaching English as a Foreign Language and History

Nikolina Radišić

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Supervisor: Dr. Višnja Pavičić Takač, Full Professor

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## Summary

The present study focuses on recognition and use of phrasal verbs by Croatian EFL learners. The first part of this study focuses on the theoretical background and literature review. Phrasal verbs are defined, their characteristics are named and explained. Their role in EFL is outlined and studies on use and avoidance by EFL learners are reported. The second part of this study focuses on research conducted in two grammar schools in Osijek, whose participants were upper-intermediate Croatian learners of English. The research analysed the level of receptive and productive knowledge of phrasal verbs Croatian students possess by means of two translation tests (Croatian to English; English to Croatian). Results of the reception test showed that Croatian students have a high level of recognition of phrasal verbs, however, results of the production test showed that Croatian learners have difficulties with the practical use of phrasal verbs. The research suggests that Croatian learners avoid using phrasal verbs, especially those with idiomatic meaning.

*Key words:* multi-word verbs, phrasal verbs, EFL (English as a foreign language), recognition, production

## Sažetak

Ovaj rad bavi se prepoznavanjem i korištenjem frazalnih glagola od strane hrvatskih učenika. Prvi dio rada usredotočen je na teoriju i pregled literature. Dana je definicija frazalnih glagola i pojašnjenje njihovih osobina. Također, raspravlja se o njihovoj ulozi u učenju i nastavi engleskog kao stranog jezika te su prikazana druga istraživanja koja su se bavila korištenjem i izbjegavanjem frazalnih glagola. Drugi dio rada bavi se istraživanjem provedenim u dvije osječke gimnazije u kojem su sudjelovali učenici engleskog jezika na B2 razini znanja. Istraživanje je testiralo razinu receptivnog i produktivnog znanja hrvatskih učenika pomoću dvaju testova prevođenja (s hrvatskog na engleski jezik; s engleskog na hrvatski jezik). Rezultati receptivnog testa pokazali su da hrvatski učenici nemaju problema s prepoznavanjem frazalnih glagola, međutim rezultati produktivnog testa pokazali su kako se hrvatski učenici ne koriste frazalnim glagolima. Hrvatski učenici, dakle, izbjegavaju korištenje frazalnih glagola, pogotovo onih koji imaju metaforičko značenje.

*Ključne riječi:* višerječni glagoli, frazalni glagoli, engleski kao strani jezik, prepoznavanje, proizvodnja

# **1. Introduction**

This study focuses on phrasal verbs and their place in English as a foreign language (hereafter EFL). Phrasal verbs are, as many writers claim, an important part of the English lexicon. Native speakers regularly use phrasal verbs in speech and in writing. Research has shown that phrasal verbs are more common in informal than formal speech and writing, meaning that phrasal verbs are often found in everyday speech. Corpora analyses (Darwin and Gray, 1999; Liu, 2011) have shown that learners will encounter phrasal verbs in authentic materials, which means that without the knowledge of phrasal verbs, learners of English may not fully understand the message being conveyed. Thus, if learners wish to reach native-like fluency, they must not disregard learning phrasal verbs.

The number of phrasal verbs in use cannot be counted and newly coined phrasal verbs constantly enter the lexicon. It is not enough, then, to learn phrasal verbs by heart. To learn phrasal verbs, one must observe and learn patterns underlying them, which may cause difficulties. Several studies (Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Liao and Fukuya, 2004; Wierszycka, 2013) showed that learners of English have difficulties understanding and using phrasal verbs. The difficulties are the result of the syntactic and semantic characteristics of phrasal verbs. Semantic characteristics are especially troublesome because of their non-compositionality and polysemy. Syntactic characteristics also present problems because of transitivity and separability. Because of their difficulty, it is generally regarded that learners acquire knowledge of phrasal verbs only when they have reached a higher level of general English knowledge.

The conducted research aims to investigate the extent to which Croatian upper-intermediate students are able to acquire knowledge of phrasal verbs through EFL classes.



## 2. The phrasal verb in English

### 2. 1. Multi-word items

The superordinate term multi-word items refers to vocabulary items consisting of a sequence of two or more words. These items semantically and/or syntactically form meaningful and inseparable units. They are the results of lexical and semantic processes of fossilization and word-formation, rather than results of the operation of grammatical rules. There are several different types of multi-word items: compounds, idioms, fixed phrases, prefabs, and finally, **multi-word verbs** (Moon, 1997).

According to Greenbaum and Quirk (1990), multi-word verbs consist of a verb and a particle. They give two main categories of multi-word verbs:

- 1) **Phrasal verbs**, where the particle is an *adverb* (e.g. ‘drink up’, ‘find out’)
- 2) **Prepositional verbs**, where the particle is a *preposition* (e.g. ‘dispose of’, ‘cope with’).

Greenbaum and Quirk add one more category that connects the two categories previously mentioned:

- 3) **Phrasal-prepositional verbs**, which consist of two particles, *an adverb followed by a preposition* (e.g. ‘put up with’, ‘look forward to’).

Even though *phrasal verbs* and *prepositional verbs* are two distinct categories, Thim (2012: 2) states that the term ‘phrasal verb’ is “sometimes applied not only to phrasal verbs, but also to other verbal constructs, most notably prepositional verbs.” Rudzka-Ostyn (2003) refers to phrasal verbs as (idiomatic) multi-word verbs. Therefore, the term ‘phrasal verbs’ is used in many works as an umbrella-term for all multi-word verb categories. This can, for example, be seen in McCarthy and O’Dell (2004), who define phrasal verbs as verbs that consist of a verb and a particle, with that particle being either a preposition or an adverb, or in Courtney (1983), where phrasal verbs are defined as idiomatic combinations of a verb and an adverb, a verb and a preposition, or a verb with both an adverb and a preposition.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) note that some particles can behave as adverbs in some contexts and as prepositions in other contexts. To help distinguish if a multi-word verb is a phrasal verb or a prepositional verb, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman present several syntactic tests: *adverb insertion*, *phrase fronting*, and *Wh-fronting* (associated with prepositions and prepositional verbs); *passivization*, *verb substitution*, and *noun phrase insertion* (associated with adverbs and phrasal verbs). Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman also explain these tests and give examples, as seen in table 1.

**Table 1.** Syntactic tests used to distinguish if the particle is an adverb or a preposition (source: Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 430)

Allowed by prepositions	Example	Allowed by adverbs	Example
Adverb insertion	We <i>turned</i> quickly <i>off</i> the road. *We <i>turned</i> quickly <i>off</i> the light.	Passivization	The light was <i>turned off</i> . *The road was <i>turned off</i> .
Phrase fronting	<i>Up</i> the hill John <i>ran</i> . * <i>Up</i> the bill John <i>ran</i> .	Verb substitution	The light was extinguished. (= The light was <i>turned off</i> .)
<i>Wh-</i> fronting	<i>About</i> what does he <i>write</i> ? * <i>Up</i> what does he <i>write</i> ?	NP insertion	We <i>turned</i> the light <i>off</i> . *We <i>turned</i> the road <i>off</i> .

It is important not to confuse phrasal verbs with free combinations. According to Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985), free combinations also consist of a verb and a particle. However, in free combinations both the verb and the particle have distinct meanings, unlike phrasal verbs. In free combinations, the verb acts as an intransitive verb and the adverb has its own meaning. Quirk et al. (1985: 1152) then give examples of free combinations, where the nature of the two constituents is shown:

He walked past. [= 'past the object/place']

I waded across. [= 'across the river/water/etc.']”

Quirk et al. contrast these examples with the examples of phrasal verbs, such as ‘give in’ [= surrender] or ‘blow up’ [= explode], where the meaning of the combination cannot be predicted from the meanings of individual parts in isolation.

Finally, it is worth noting that the term ‘phrasal verb’ is rarely used in respect to any language except the English. Thim (2012: 45) states that “from the very beginning the use of the term phrasal verb implies that the construction is distinctively English,” but adds that “there are comparable verbal constructions in other languages. The most obvious parallels can be found in other Germanic languages.” In fact, similar verb-particle constructions can be found in all present-day Germanic languages. This may be the reason why the majority of verbs that qualify for phrasal verb combinations are from the Germanic lexicon, as Armstrong (2004) suggests. The same author also presents the fact that most of the verbs constituting phrasal verbs are monosyllabic.

## **2. 2. Characteristics of phrasal verbs**

### *2. 2. 1. Syntactic characteristics*

The previous section showed that phrasal verbs are just one of the multi-word verbs types, but they too can be divided further. Many authors divide phrasal verbs into two categories: *intransitive* and *transitive*. Britten and Dellar (1989: 129) give examples:

1. **Intransitive phrasal verbs:** verb + adverb particle (without a noun or pronoun),

e.g. *She rang up.*

2. **Transitive phrasal verbs:** verb + adverb particle (with a noun or a pronoun),

e.g. *She rang up the Browns.*

In the example the difference between intransitive and transitive phrasal verbs is demonstrated as the ability to form a sentence with or without a noun or a pronoun, with those nouns and pronouns functioning in the sentences as direct objects. Therefore, those phrasal verbs that take a direct object are called *transitive phrasal verbs*, and those that do not take a direct object are called *intransitive phrasal verbs*. Many authors, such as Quirk et al. (1985), call intransitive phrasal verbs *Type I phrasal verbs* and transitive phrasal verbs *Type II phrasal verbs*. Darwin and Gray (1999) and Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) also mention **ergative phrasal verbs**, identifying them as multi-word verbs that can function as both transitive and intransitive phrasal verbs.

When it comes to transitive phrasal verbs, many authors note that one of their syntactic characteristics is separability. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) comment that this characteristic is a peculiarity of transitive phrasal verbs and that it means the particle of a phrasal verb can be separated from its lexical verb by a direct object. Darwin and Gray (1999: 69) remark that the speaker has a choice of where the particle will appear, giving examples:

→ I *looked up* his name in the phone book. OR

→ I *looked* his name *up* in the phone book.

The choice, however, is only possible when the direct object is a noun. McArthur (1989: 39) points out that when the direct object is a pronoun, that pronoun must be placed between the verb and the particle, giving an example:

→ She *put* it *down*. BUT NOT \*She *put down* it.

Some phrasal verbs can be separated by specifiers, as seen in Jackendoff (2002: 71):

→ I'll *look* the answer **right up**.

→ Bill *brought* the wagon **right back**.

The word 'right' is the specifier in these sentences. Jackendoff, however, notes that specifiers can only be used in what he calls a 'right-hand position'. This means that using specifiers is only possible when the direct object comes between the lexical verb and the particle of the phrasal verb, i.e. when the direct object precedes the particle.

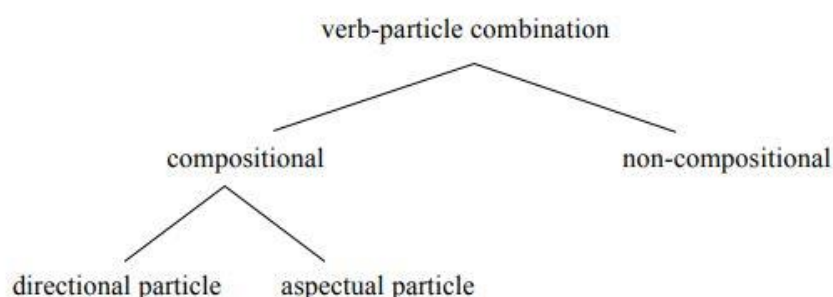
Greenbaum and Quirk (1990) use the term 'intensifiers' instead of 'specifiers'. They agree that intensifiers cannot be used in every case, adding that if the transitive phrasal verb is fully idiomatic, intensifiers cannot separate the verb and the particle. To express this, they give an example using the phrasal verb 'bring up'. The meaning of the phrasal verb in this sentence is 'to rear'. Because this meaning is idiomatic, the example sentence is not possible.

→ \*She *brought* the girls right up"

### 2. 2. 2. Semantic characteristics

Several authors have tried to organize phrasal verbs into categories according to their semantic characteristics.

Thim (2012) acknowledges that it is not always possible to draw clear-cut distinctions between different semantic types, yet he divides phrasal verbs into two categories: compositional and non-compositional. In the non-compositional combinations, it is not possible to assign particular meanings to the particles, while the compositional category can be subdivided into combinations with directional particles and with aspectual particles, as seen in figure 1. Thus, he gives three semantic categories of phrasal verbs: *literal*, *aspectual*, and *non-compositional*. Phrasal verbs in the literal semantic category are those who contain the directional particle and later in his work these constructions are referred to as compositional constructions.



**Figure 1.** Semantic classification of phrasal verbs (source: Thim, 2012: 13)

As for **compositional constructions**, they are transparent from the meaning of their constituents. Since the particles used in constituting compositional phrasal verbs are directional, i.e. they express direction, those phrasal verbs give a perception of motion through space. Examples of this construction are the following (Thim, 2012: 14):

- “...a little boy and girl *came in* with a, with an Alsatian dog, a puppy.”
- “George *put* the food *away*.”

Following this, Thim (2012: 16) explains that the meaning of **aspectual constructions** “is usually fully transparent and readily understandable and ad hoc formations are possible, e.g. “And having another baby to *use* the clothes *up* seems a little extravagant.””. The aspectual particle is defined as “the particle [which] introduces the concept of a goal or an endpoint to durative situations which

otherwise have no necessary terminus”, backing this with another example: “He *used* our supplies completely *up*” (Brinton 1985, as cited in Thim, 2012: 17).

Finally, Thim refers to non-compositional structures as ‘**idiomatic constructions**’. He contrasts these constructions with compositional ones, saying that their meaning cannot be inferred from the meaning of their elements. He also observes that this type has attracted the most attention in EFL. Examples of idiomatic constructions are the following (Thim 2012: 19):

- “My husband actually said to me that *giving up* smoking was easy...”
- “He could not *make it out*, nor could he trust his own memory.”

Fraser (1976, as cited in Dagut and Laufer, 1985: 74)) also divides semantic properties of phrasal verbs into three categories. The categories have the same concept as the ones in Thim (2012), but are differently named:

- a) **literal phrasal verbs** (Thim calls them compositional) - their meaning is a straightforward product of their components, e.g. ‘go out’, ‘come in’, ‘take away’;
- b) **figurative phrasal verbs** (Thim calls them idiomatic) - their meaning is a result of a metaphorical shift of meaning and the semantic fusion of the individual components, e.g. ‘turn up’, ‘let down’, ‘show off’;
- c) **completive phrasal verbs** (Thim calls them aspectual) - their particle describes the result of the action, e.g. ‘cut off’, ‘burn down’, ‘shoot down’.

As opposed to previous categorizations, McArthur (1989: 39) divides phrasal verbs into only two categories:

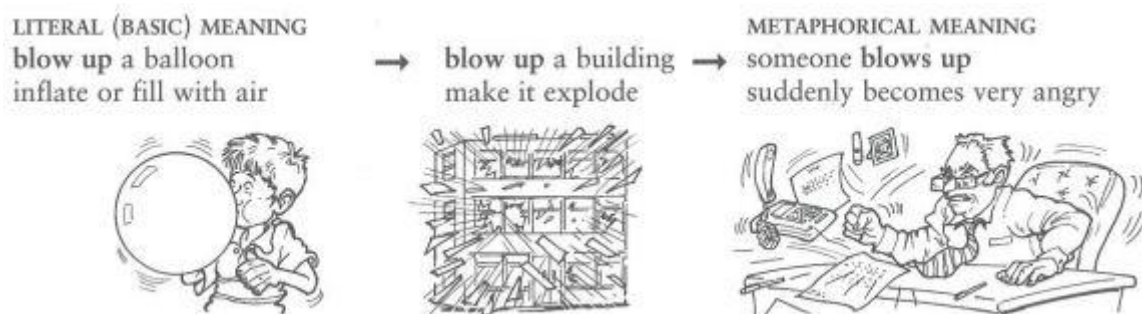
- **conventional and literal**, for which he writes that the whole is the sum of the parts, e.g. “They were all in the house and when we arrived their leader *came out*.”
- **idiomatic and figurative**, for which he writes that the whole is more than or different from the sum of the parts, e.g. “They were all in the house and when we arrived the truth *came out*.”

Phrasal verbs can be **polysemous**, meaning that they can have more than one meaning (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Rudzka-Ostyn (2003) illustrates polysemy with the example of the phrasal verb ‘pick up’ and its several meanings, as seen in table 2. Gardner and Davies (2007) report that, on average, one phrasal verb has 5.6 meanings. Table 2 is a great example of this, showing ‘pick up’ has six different meanings, from literal to idiomatic.

**Table 2.** Several meanings of the phrasal verb ‘pick up’ (source: Rudzka-Ostyn, 2003: 6)

#	Example sentence	Meaning of phrasal verb
1	Could you pick up the spoon the baby has dropped?	to lift from the floor
2	The beggar was picked up from the street.	he was taken by the police
3	Can you pick me up at 6:30 at the station?	fetch, collect me by car
4	I don’t know where I picked up this cold/flu.	caught < catch, got
5	She picks up foreign languages in no time.	she learns, very fast
6	Trade has picked up over the last few months	has increased, is higher (figurative)

McCarthy and O’Dell (2004) add that there is often no direct connection between the different meanings of one phrasal verb. However, these authors further add that sometimes the basic meanings of phrasal verbs are clearly linked with their additional meanings. This happens when additional meanings are based on a metaphor that has a direct connection with its literal meaning. They also give an illustrated example of this, using the phrasal verb ‘blow up’, which can be seen in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Linked meanings of phrasal verb ‘blow up’ (source: McCarthy and O’Dell, 2004: 14)

#### 2. 2. 4. Frequency and use of phrasal verbs

Several studies investigating the frequency of phrasal verbs have been conducted. Wierszycka (2013:84) notes that it is impossible to count all phrasal verb in the English language because new ones are constantly being added, and at the same time some old ones are dying out. She also notes that there are coinages used by native speakers in everyday life that cannot be found in dictionaries

and gives the example of a coinage coming from the movie *Elmo saves Christmas*: “*I am all Christmased out*”, meaning that one is sick of Christmas. This interesting example serves the purpose of showing that some phrasal verbs that are colloquially used are not recorded, making the job of counting (as well as learning) phrasal verbs in use that much more difficult. Nevertheless, some authors have attempted to give the exact number of phrasal verbs. Wierszycka compares Bywater (1969) who estimates that there are seven hundred phrasal verbs in everyday use in English to Courtney's (1983) who estimates the number of phrasal verbs to be as high as twelve thousand.

It seems to be impossible to give an exact number of all phrasal verbs in use in English, but what is possible is to point out the most frequent ones. Darwin and Gray (1999) believe that determining the frequency of phrasal verb is important in EFL teaching. If there is not a list of frequent phrasal verbs, teachers, curriculum designers, and textbook writers are left to determine the most common or the most needed phrasal verbs by themselves. They may do that following their intuition, which may not be correct, thus impeding the learning of phrasal verbs. Even though teachers have the best intentions, they “may be presenting the student with a list of terribly difficult phrasal verbs that have very little use in the world outside the classroom” (Darwin and Gray: 1999: 67). Liu (2011) agrees with this opinion, adding that students are overwhelmed by the enormous amount of phrasal verbs. Students do not know which phrasal verbs to learn, causing avoidance in speaking and writing. Liu points out that identifying the most useful phrasal verbs is a must in language instruction and that frequency is a good criterion for identifying their usefulness. Thus, the importance of pointing out frequent phrasal verbs is evident.

To tackle this topic, Gardner and Davies (2007) conducted a corpus analysis. Their intention was to aid EFL teaching by giving a reference point based on frequencies of actual phrasal verb occurrences in English. The corpus they analysed was the British National Corpus (hereafter BNC). In it, they tagged “all two-part verbs consisting of a lexical verb (LV) followed by an adverbial particle (tagged as AVP) that is either contiguous (adjacent) to that verb or non-contiguous (i.e., separated by one or more intervening words)” (Gardner and Davies 2007: 341). The result was the list of top one hundred most frequent phrasal verbs. However, this list is not the most interesting part of their research. Gardner and Davies (2007: 347) have also found out that 15.6% of all particles function as adverbial particles, further hypothesizing that “learners will encounter, on average, one [phrasal verb] in every 150 words of English they are exposed to, or roughly 2 per average page of written text (i.e., assuming 300 words per page)”. The authors,



however, warn that this estimate may vary depending on the type of register, i.e. if the style is formal or informal.

Using the previous research as a starting point and reference, Liu (2011) analysed phrasal verbs in COCA, or the Corpus of Contemporary American English and made a list of top 150 most frequent phrasal verbs. Table 3 lists and compares top ten most frequent phrasal verbs given in Gardner and Davies (2007) and Liu (2001).

**Table 3.** Ten most frequent phrasal verbs in BNC and COCA

<b>BNC</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>COCA</b>
Go on	1.	Go on
<i>Carry out</i>	2.	Pick up
<i>Set up</i>	3.	Come back
Pick up	4.	Come up
Go back	5.	Go back
Come back	6.	Find out
Go out	7.	<i>Come out</i>
Point out	8.	Go out
Find out	9.	Point out
Come up	10.	<i>Grow up</i>

This table shows that most of the phrasal verbs in the top ten most frequent ones in both corpora are the same. The only exceptions are ‘carry out’ and ‘set up’, found only in the top ten of BNC, and ‘come out’ and ‘grow up’, found only in the top ten of COCA. The most frequent phrasal verb is the same in both corpora: ‘go on’. The frequency of other phrasal verbs varies. All these differences, however, are not important. What is important is that, despite slight frequency variation, most frequent and therefore most useful phrasal verbs are rather similar, which is important information for English language teachers and learners.

Besides giving the list of most frequent phrasal verbs in American English, Liu (2011: 673) analysed phrasal verb distribution across the registers in COCA, comparing frequency in spoken and academic English, in newspapers, magazines, and fiction. The results showed that phrasal verbs are “much more common in fiction and spoken English than in magazines, newspapers, and,

especially, academic writing”. Liu notes, however, that despite the low frequency of phrasal verb use in academic writing, there are some phrasal verbs, such as ‘carry out’ and ‘point out’, that are useful in formal writing and should not be avoided, but purposely included in writing instruction.

In Liu’s work, differences across the registers have been established. However, Darwin and Gray (1999: 66) note that Lincoln himself used ‘brought forth’ in the first line of the Gettysburg Address. Even the King James Version of the Bible contains phrasal verbs, such as ‘lie down’ in the Twenty-Third Psalm. They ascribe this to the fact that “the phrasal verb is virtually unavoidable without lengthy and often pretentious circumlocutions”. McCarthy and O’Dell (2004) agree that phrasal verbs can often be replaced with single verbs that have the same or almost the same meaning, pointing out that those synonyms are often more formal in nature. They give an example to illustrate this, writing that the phrasal verb ‘put off’ can be exchanged with a more formal verb ‘postpone’. Often those synonyms come from the Latin dictionary, giving more synonymic parallels, such as in “*driving back* enemy forces and *repelling* them, *putting out* a fire and *extinguishing* it, *bringing back* the death penalty and *restoring* it” (McArthur, 1989: 40). To sum up these opinions, it can be said that phrasal verbs are used in almost every aspect of English language. In most of the cases, they can be replaced, but that replacement brings a formal tone to what is being said.

Ultimately, these corpora analyses help affirm phrasal verbs as a major word class which cannot be ignored in EFL. They also help in choosing which phrasal verbs to include in EFL classes, by showing the most useful phrasal verbs in the English language, verbs that students of English are bound to encounter. Besides that, they show the most frequent lexical verbs and adverbial particles that constitute phrasal verbs. Building on this, Gardner and Davies (2007) have given their own suggestions for learning phrasal verbs. They advise learners to use the knowledge of the most frequent adverbial particles and commit them to memory, as well as look for corresponding lexical verbs, keeping in mind that they can be separated by intervening words. The idea behind this suggestion is that this may allow learners to identify many phrasal verbs that occur less frequently in English. Thus, corpora analyses aid teachers and learners in multiple ways, and are important for more than just confirming phrasal verbs as a part of speech needed to be able to effectively communicate in English.

### 3. Learning and teaching phrasal verbs

The necessity of teaching and learning phrasal verbs is summed up perfectly in Bywater (1982: 97):

“The plain fact is that what distinguishes the writing and, above all, the speech of a good foreign student from those of an Englishman is that what an Englishman writes or says is full of these expressions, whereas most foreigners are frightened of them, carefully avoid them, and sound stilted in consequence. *Foreign students who enjoy being flattered on their English can best achieve this by correctly using masses of these compound verbs.*”

Despite the obvious importance of phrasal verbs in EFL, Baker (1975) claims that phrasal verbs form a small part of English courses. She adds that phrasal verbs form a large part of conversational English, thus making EFL learners confused when they cannot understand sentences containing them. As a result, EFL learners can get frustrated and feel they are not making progress.

Armstrong (2014) suggests that all learners should develop at least receptive knowledge of phrasal verbs, which will help them decode those phrasal verbs they encounter later. Those learners that wish to have expert knowledge of English should be able to produce at least the most common phrasal verbs appropriately. This notion can also be seen in other works, like in Britten and Dellar (1989: 5), who argue that “A receptive knowledge of a lot of phrasal verbs seems more important for intermediate students than an active knowledge of a smaller number learnt individually.” They advocate the view that the chief merit of the teaching approach is the extensive receptive practice that precedes production.

From her research with Japanese and Korean undergraduates Sansome (2000) concluded that learners fail to acquire the pattern underlying the making of phrasal verbs. This, she argues, has worrisome implications for both comprehension and production, adding that if learners are not aware of any underlying pattern, it is unlikely that they will be able to use phrasal verbs. The above mentioned Wierszycka’s example of the phrasal verb ‘Christmased out’ perfectly illustrates Sansome’s point. The phrasal verb ‘Christmased out’ is neither common in speech nor is found in dictionaries, but can be understood if one has acquired the knowledge of patterns underlying phrasal verbs. By acquiring the pattern, learners will be able to understand almost every phrasal verb.

Concerning patterns underlying phrasal verbs, Armstrong (2004) indicates that it is of great importance for teachers to be consciously aware of them. If the teacher is not aware of the patterns, he/she may impair the teaching and learning of phrasal verbs.

### 3. 1. Studies on avoidance of phrasal verbs

In the previous chapter, it has been established that phrasal verbs are common in spoken and written English. However, to foreign language learners they are a difficult part of the lexicon. Rudzka-Ostyn (2003) mentions that it is difficult for learners to understand phrasal verbs even if they know the form and the meaning of the individual parts of a phrasal verb. Research has shown that even advanced learners have difficulties with phrasal verbs and use them sparingly. Difficulties appear because phrasal verbs can go from concrete to abstract, a path which foreign language learners cannot see. Thim (2012: 123) observes a paradoxical situation: “**phrasal verbs** are at the same time ‘**simple**’ (when used by native speakers) and ‘**difficult**’ (when acquired by learners of English as a foreign language)”. In what follows, studies on use and avoidance of phrasal verbs concerning learners from different groups of languages will be presented and compared.

One of the first studies concerning avoidance of phrasal verbs was conducted by Dagut and Laufer (1985). Participants were Hebrew-speaking students of English. To find out if Hebrew students avoid using phrasal verbs, the authors administered a multiple choice test, in which the participants needed to fill the blanks with one of the four possible answers, only one of those being a phrasal verb. Phrasal verbs that were chosen to be in this test were gathered by administering a similar test to native speakers, using those phrasal verbs that native speakers preferred over one-verb synonyms. The results showed that participants preferred synonyms (45%) to phrasal verbs (42%). Next, the authors tried to see if there was a difference according to semantic categories. They used Fraser’s categorisation. The results showed that, out of all possible phrasal verbs in their respective categories, participants used 72% of literal phrasal verbs, 48% of completive phrasal verbs, and only 27% of the figurative phrasal verbs. When all is taken into account, even though phrasal verbs were given as one of the four possible choices, participants avoided using them in 58% of the cases. Next, Dagut and Laufer administered a translation test to a different set of participants, half of which were EFL students, and the other half English majors who had a higher level of

knowledge. In the translation test, students needed to fill in the blanks by translating the given Hebrew word into English. The results showed that English majors used phrasal verbs in 32% of the cases, while EFL students used them in only 15% of the cases, confirming that advanced students are more familiar with this construction. Taking all the results into account, it is obvious the participants avoided using phrasal verbs. However, all the phrasal verbs tested were confirmed to be a part of participants' high school curriculum. The final conclusion was that "the non-use of phrasal was a result of genuine avoidance rather than of ignorance" (Dagut and Laufer, 1985: 78). The authors also concluded that, since phrasal verbs are found only in Germanic languages, these results may be applied to other learners of English who are native speakers of non-Germanic languages.

Following this research, Hulstijn and Marchena (1989) conducted their own analysis of phrasal verb use by Dutch learners of English. This research references the study of Dagut and Laufer (1985) as a starting point, analysing use and avoidance of phrasal verbs in English by students who are native speakers of a Germanic language, which also contains phrasal verbs. Participants in this study were intermediate, secondary school learners and advanced, first-year students of English. Both intermediate and advanced learners were divided into three sub-groups, each of them given one of the three different tests: the multiple-choice test, the translation test, or the memorization test. The tests were similar to those in Dagut and Laufer study. Phrasal verbs used in these test were confirmed to be taught in high schools, therefore they have been taught to all of the participants, ruling out ignorance as one of the possible problems. The results of these test showed that, as expected, intermediate learners performed significantly more poorly than advanced learners on all three tests. Results also showed that advanced learners did not avoid phrasal verbs as a form class. Even though having poorer results than advanced learners, intermediate learners are found not to categorically avoid phrasal verbs. It can be concluded that for Dutch learners of English, English phrasal verbs do not present a learning problem. In the end, Hulstijn and Marchena compared the results of their study with the results of the Dagut and Laufer's study and came to a conclusion that Hebrew learners provided fewer phrasal-verb responses in tests than the Dutch subjects, which may mean that Hebrew learners do tend to avoid phrasal verbs, and Dutch learners do not.. This conclusion can be broadened to confirm that native speakers of Germanic languages do not have problems with learning and using phrasal verbs, while native speakers of non-Germanic languages do.

Liao and Fukuya (2004) analysed avoidance in Chinese learners of English and gave a perspective of phrasal verbs in English used by native speakers of an Asian language, which does not contain the structure of phrasal verbs. Participants of this study were intermediate and advanced EFL learners. Similarly to the previous research, the authors administered multiple-choice, translation, and recall tests to conduct the research. Same tests were administered to native speakers, to enable a comparison between their results and the results of Chinese participants. The results of this study support previous findings. Intermediate learners have significantly lower results than advanced learners, with advanced learners performing similarly to native speakers. For example, in the multiple-choice test, native speakers used phrasal verbs 84% of the time, advanced users 75% of the time, and intermediate students 45% of the time. Compared to previous studies, the results of advanced learners whose native language is non-Germanic seems high. This may be explained by the fact that advanced learners in this study had been in a native English environment for at least nine months, and have probably had plenty of interactions with native speakers.

In one of the newest studies, Wierszycka (2013) has examined the use of phrasal verbs by Polish advanced learners of English, giving a perspective of phrasal verbs use by native speakers of a Slavic language. This study was actually a corpus analysis, analysing a POS (part of speech)-tagged non-native speaker corpus of oral English and comparing it to the Louvain Corpus of Native English Conversation (LOCNEC). The results of the analysis showed that Polish advanced users substantially underuse phrasal verbs compared to the native speaker, as native speakers tend to use them up to four more times more than non-native speakers. It was also found that Polish advanced users underuse phrasal verbs in all semantic categories, but the most neglected category is the one of idiomatic phrasal verbs. These results coincide with the results of all previous studies.

Ultimately, these studies can be summarized to a conclusion that native speakers of non-Germanic languages tend to avoid using phrasal verbs more than native speakers of Germanic languages, who may not show avoidance at all. Furthermore, these studies show that advanced EFL learners avoid using phrasal verbs significantly less than EFL learners at a lower level, which may confirm notions that phrasal verbs prove difficult for learners and are only mastered at a high level of English knowledge. In other words, the use of phrasal verbs is parallel to proficiency in English. One other fact that can influence use of phrasal verbs is the level of exposure to English in native environment, as seen in Liao and Fukuya (2004).

### 3. 2. Studies on teaching phrasal verbs

A number of studies have been conducted with the goal of examining different approaches to determine the best ways of teaching phrasal verbs in EFL.

One of the latest studies was conducted by Behzadian (2016), who contrasted the effects of *input enhancement* and *concordance-based activities* on phrasal verb learning. The idea behind textual input enhancement is that the manipulation of the texts through different typographical changes, such as boldfacing, italicizing, underlining, or capitalizing, increases the chance of target structures being noticed. Concordance-based materials present a word or a phrase in different contexts, putting the target item in the centre of the page, with the context sorted on the left and the right of the target item. Concordancing is usually done by corpus analysis, from where the example sentences are taken out. These sentences are written under each other and shortened if needed, for the purpose of centralizing the target item in the middle of each line. There are several benefits to this approach. It helps learners to determine the different meanings of the target item, they make learners aware of the typical collocations connected to the target item, and they represent certain language features typical of some kind of register. Participants of this study were upper-intermediate Iranian learners of English, who were divided into three groups: experimental group 1 (EG1 = reading with input enhancement), experimental group two (EG2 = concordance-based materials), and control group. The results of the study showed that only input enhancement had an effect on the students' acquisition and retention of phrasal verbs. While the EG2 did not perform differently from the control group, the EG1 outperformed both of those groups. Thus, input enhancement proved to be considerably effective in teaching and learning phrasal verbs, affirming the notion that target items needed to be noticed to be processed for acquisition.

Three other approaches were contrasted in a study conducted by Ganji (2011): *translation*, *sentential contextualization*, and *metaphorical conceptualization*. Participants of this study were also Iranian learners of English divided into three groups according to the method they were subjected to. Participants' proficiency level was not explicitly stated, but as they were university students it can be assumed that, their level was either upper-intermediate or advanced. In each group, twenty phrasal verbs were taught in two sessions. In the Translation Group, those phrasal verbs were written on the board, along with their translation in participants' first language, Farsi. The meanings of the phrasal verbs were explained. Participants had to memorize the target items on their own. In the Sentential Contextualization Group, participants received target phrasal verbs

in the context of a sentence and their meanings were explained. At the end of the class, the participants were asked to make their own sentences with those phrasal verbs, which were checked to assure that participants understood the meanings correctly. In the Metaphorical Contextualization Group, the twenty target phrasal verbs were explained through orientational metaphors of their particles. There were four particles (up, down, off, out), each of them having five orientational meanings. For example, the particle 'up' had the meanings *completion* (e.g. 'chew up', 'use up'), *more* (e.g. 'turn up', 'play up'), *happy* (e.g. 'cheer up', 'feel up'), *approach* (e.g. 'bump up', 'cuddle up'), and *out of bed* (e.g. 'stay up', 'get up'). After the sessions, the participants were first tested immediately and then again after five weeks, both times by means of the same tests. The results of the immediate post-test showed no significant difference between the mean scores of all three groups, i.e. they showed that these methods did not have any influence on the performances of the participants in this test. The delayed post-test, however, showed that the Translation group performed poorly compared to two other groups. There is an interesting result of this test: the mean of the Translation group from the delayed post-test was lower than the mean from the immediate post-test, while the means from the delayed post-test of the two other groups were higher than their means from the immediate post-test. It can be concluded that the use of sentential contextualization and metaphorical conceptualization in class yields long-term results and aids retention of phrasal verbs. One more test was administered after the delayed post-test, the test of untaught verbs. This test consisted of another twenty phrasal verbs not mentioned in the sessions, but with the same particles as the taught ones. The results of this test showed that the metaphorical conceptualization method yielded the best results. This means that the participants in that group had less problems understanding phrasal verbs they had not encountered before compared to other group. The use of the metaphorical conceptualization method in EFL was found to yield best results in the long run. This approach will be further elaborated on in the following section.

### **3. 2. A cognitive linguistics view of phrasal verbs in EFL**

Without the understanding of metaphor based on cognitive linguistic conceptualisation, teachers present phrasal verbs by flawed concepts of organizing phrasal verbs by semantic or syntactic characteristics (Thom, 2017). When organized semantically, phrasal verbs are categorised according to topic, i.e. around themes such as Family, Work, Travel, etc. This approach is flawed because phrasal verbs presented in this way are not necessarily related to each other. When

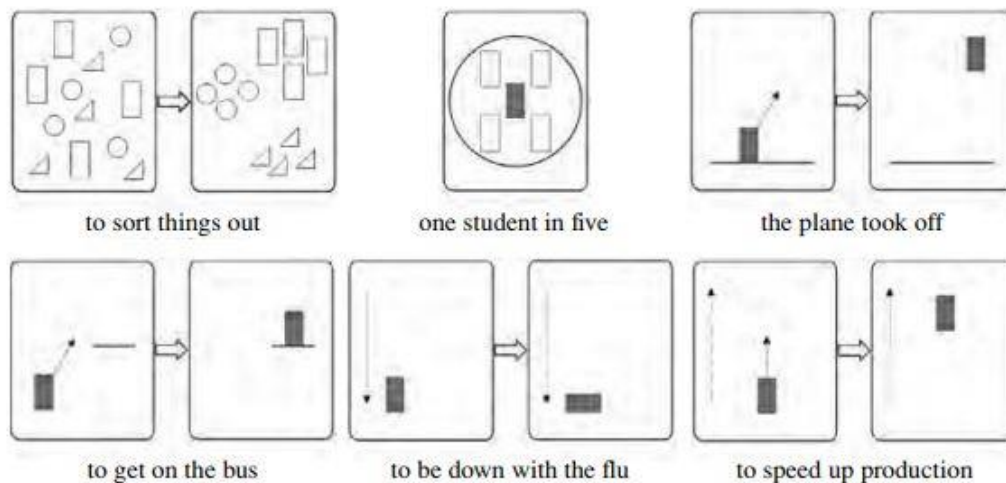


organized syntactically, phrasal verbs are categorised according to their syntactic elements, verbs and particles. An example for this would be teaching a list of all phrasal verbs containing the lexical verb *take* ('take down', 'take over', 'take up', etc.). This approach is also flawed because it fails to identify the motivations behind the meaning. These ways of organising may lead to students getting lists of phrasal verbs they only need to memorize, which does not help learning and retention of phrasal verbs in the long run.

Cognitive linguists have proposed a new approach to teaching phrasal verbs that relies on visualization. This type of visualization is not connected to drawing images for each individual phrasal verb and context, but is rather a cognitively-based image. This visualization approach is based on two cognitive linguistic concepts: *landmark* and *trajector* (cf. Thom, 2017; Rudza-Ostyn, 2003).

Rudzka-Ostyn (2003) advocates that the in-depth insight into particles aids mastering even difficult or abstract phrasal verbs. To gain that insight, learners need to be familiar with aforementioned notions of landmark and trajector. **Trajector** is defined as a *moving entity* we focus on, and **landmark** as *a container or a surface* which serves as a background for the trajector. For example, in the sentence "John went home," the trajector or the moving entity is 'John', while the landmark is 'home'. This approach also uses drawings with several established symbols to aid visualization. Examples of those drawings can be seen in Figure 3.

Rudzka-Ostyn expands this theory to phrasal verbs by giving several motivations behind different particles, completing them with visualisations. For example, the particle '*out*' is used when the trajector is leaving a container, the particle '*into*' is used when the trajector is entering a container, the particle '*away*' is used when the trajector is disappearing, etc. Those particles are further divided into different motivations, for example the particle *away* can mean that the trajector is leaving a place (e.g. 'fly away', 'run away', 'go away'), or is gradually and continuously growing distance (e.g. 'fade away', 'rot away', 'dwindle away'), etc.



**Figure 3.** Visualizations of landmark and trajector in abstract phrases (source: Rudzka-Ostyn, 2003: 9)

Condon (2008) conducted a study investigating if cognitive linguistic motivations can influence phrasal verb learning. Participants in the research were native speakers of French and of intermediate level of English. A semi-productive pre-test was administered in which participants had to choose the correct phrasal verb from a list of 48 phrasal verbs in order to fill in the blanks in 30 sentences. A translation in French was given beneath each sentence, so students also had the translated phrasal verb as a reference point. This was done to ensure participants were at the same level. After the pre-test, students were divided into four groups, two experimental and two control groups. During eight weeks, they were instructed in phrasal verbs alongside their usual curriculum. The control groups were presented with the translations and paraphrases of phrasal verbs, while the experimental groups were presented with cognitive linguistic motivations behind phrasal verbs. Those motivations were actually different meanings of particles, taken from Rudzka-Ostyn's work. After the eight-week instruction, an immediate post-test was administered, followed by a delayed post-test a month later. They were the same as the pre-test. Results of the study showed that experimental group A significantly outperformed their control group, however, results of the experimental group B showed that there was no significant difference between that group and their control group. Condon concluded that the differences between experimental groups A and B were the result of scheduling problems. Experimental group A was given cognitive linguistic motivations before extensive oral practice, while experimental group B had extensive oral practice before being given the cognitive linguistic motivations. Experimental group B also had this instruction as their last period of the day. The conclusion Condon reached was that cognitive linguistics insights can benefit learning of phrasal verbs, however, a certain level of cognitive investment by the learners is required for them to be successful.

## 4. The present study

### 4. 1. Aims and research questions

Literature overview showed that phrasal verbs are a difficult part of the English language, proving problematic for EFL learners. Previous studies proved this by low results on tests of the phrasal verb knowledge achieved by EFL learners from various first language backgrounds, especially from learners whose first language is not a Germanic language. Inspired by previous studies, the present study aims to find out if Croatian students have problems with phrasal verbs, too.

In this research, compositional phrasal verbs are referred to as **literal phrasal verbs** and non-compositional phrasal verbs are referred to as **idiomatic phrasal verbs**. Phrasal verbs are used to refer to each type of multi-word verbs.

The research addresses the following **research questions**:

1. What is the level of Croatian EFL learners' productive knowledge of phrasal verbs:
  - a) with literal meaning;
  - b) with idiomatic meaning?
2. What is the level of Croatian EFL learners' receptive knowledge of phrasal verbs:
  - a) with literal meaning;
  - b) with idiomatic meaning?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between receptive and productive knowledge of phrasal verbs, and between learners' knowledge of literal and idiomatic phrasal verbs?
4. Is there a difference between the results of learners attending the General Grammar School and the Language Grammar School?

## 4. 2. Participants

There were 192 participants in this research, 126 of which were female, and 66 of which were male. The participants were upper-intermediate Croatian students from two grammar schools, enrolled into 4th grade. These participants were chosen because their general level of English language knowledge is high, as phrasal verbs are mostly associated with upper-intermediate and advanced learners. Most of the participants had been learning English for 12 years at the time the tests were given to them.

Out of the 192 participants, 92 were enrolled into General Grammar School in Osijek and 100 were enrolled into Language Grammar School in Osijek. The General Grammar School is oriented towards general knowledge, while the Language Grammar School is oriented towards foreign languages. Thus, in the General Grammar School, students have three English classes per week or 105 English classes per school year, while in the Language Grammar School students have four English classes per week or 140 English classes per school year.

## 4. 3. Instruments and procedure

### 4. 3. 1. Textbook analysis

The process of creating the instrument for this research started by analysing textbooks used in schools attended by the participants of the study. This was done to point out which phrasal verbs were taught in class. During their secondary education, participants attending General Grammar School have encountered the series of textbooks called *Solutions* which is published by Oxford: *Solutions Pre-intermediate*, *Solutions Intermediate*, *Solutions Upper-intermediate*, and *Solutions Advanced*. Participants attending Language Grammar School have encountered three different textbooks during their secondary education: Profil's *Tune up 1* and 2 and Pearson's *New Success: Upper-intermediate*. All phrasal verbs that appear in the textbooks are listed in Appendix 1.

In all *Solutions* textbooks, there were more than one hundred individual phrasal verbs mentioned. The textbooks give examples of phrasal, prepositional, and phrasal-prepositional verbs under the term 'phrasal verbs'. All textbooks followed the same pattern: the phrasal verbs appeared a few times in the main part, and then were further discussed in other sections, either *Vocabulary* or

*Grammar Builder*. Depending on the decision of the teacher, this builder may but does not have to be used in class. The only exception to this pattern is the last textbook, *Solutions Advanced*, where a part of a unit is dedicated to phrasal verbs. In *Solutions Advanced*, phrasal verbs are divided into four main types: intransitive phrasal verbs, transitive separable phrasal verbs, transitive inseparable phrasal verbs, and phrasal-prepositional verbs. These types are not specifically named, but their construction is described. It could be said that, to a certain degree, *Solutions Upper-intermediate* and *Solutions Advanced* base their presentation on cognitive linguistics approach, because it is explained that the meanings of particles can influence the meanings of phrasal verbs. As the target level of knowledge rises, so does the number of phrasal verbs mentioned in the textbooks.

In the textbooks used in the Language Grammar School, there are 62 individual phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs are also mentioned in only a few places in these textbooks. The term phrasal verbs is used to refer to all types of multi-word verbs in the textbooks. Just like in the *Solutions* series, the number of phrasal verbs rises as the students' level of knowledge advances. Phrasal verbs are also divided into the same four types as in *Solutions Advanced* and are also used as a term covering all multi-word verb types.

To sum up the textbook analysis, it can be said that phrasal verbs are underrepresented in Croatian schools and textbooks. When phrasal verbs appear, they are mentioned in only one or two units of the textbook and superficially touched upon. More can be read in vocabulary builders found at the end of the textbooks, which may or may not be used in class, depending on the curriculum and the teacher. When comparing textbooks of the two schools, General Grammar School textbooks have a great quantity of phrasal verbs mentioned, while Language Grammar School textbooks have fewer phrasal verbs, but those that are mentioned are more frequent in use.

Finally, seven phrasal verbs were chosen for the tests: ***take off***, ***turn down***, ***bring out***, ***turn up***, ***come across***, ***work out***, and ***break down***. They were taken mainly from *Oxford's Solutions* textbooks. In these textbooks, each of the chosen phrasal verbs were mentioned at least once having literal meaning and once having idiomatic meaning. This means that all phrasal verbs used in the test have been taught in both meanings, so ignorance can be discarded as one of the problems. In one special case, phrasal verb *come across* was used for literal meaning, while phrasal-prepositional verb *come across as* was used for idiomatic meaning. Only three out of seven phrasal verbs chosen for the tests are mentioned in Language Grammar School's textbooks, and they are

*work out*, *turn up*, and *break down*. Although this seems to favour participants attending General Grammar School, it was done with the purpose of testing if exposure to phrasal verbs in EFL classes plays a role in their acquisition.

The list of the seven phrasal verbs chosen for the tests was compared to lists of most frequently used phrasal verbs taken from COCA and BNC. The results, which can be seen in table 4, show that all phrasal verbs, except *come across*, are found in the lists of most frequently used phrasal verbs. In the table phrasal verbs are arranged by frequency, i.e. according to their position in the lists of one hundred most frequent phrasal verbs by Gardner and David (2007) and Liu (2011).

**Table 4.** Phrasal verbs included in the study and their position in the top 100 phrasal verbs in COCA and BNC

#	Phrasal verb	Position in COCA	Position in BNC
1	Take off	28	6
2	Work out	29	16
3	Break down	55	45
4	Turn up	70	38
5	Bring out	81	71
6	Turn down	94	94
7	Come across	/	/

#### 4. 3. 2. Tests

After the phrasal verbs were chosen, two tests were created. The purpose of the first one was to test production, i.e. if participants use phrasal verbs in translating Croatian sentences into English. The second test aimed at testing participants' receptive knowledge, i.e. if participants recognize phrasal verbs and know how to translate them from English to Croatian. To avoid influencing the results, participants were not aware which construction was tested. Each test had twenty sentences. Fourteen sentences tested phrasal verbs, with seven sentences testing phrasal verbs with literal meaning and seven sentences testing phrasal verbs with idiomatic meaning. Six sentences in each test functioned as distractors, having no phrasal verbs in them. Overall, 28 sentences contained phrasal verbs. In addition, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire, where they

had to answer which school they are enrolled to, what was their grade in English, how many years have they been learning English, etc. The demographic questionnaire and the two tests are to be found in the Appendix 2.

#### 4. 3. 3. Procedure

The tests were administered during participants' regular classes. Each test had to be finished in twenty minutes. First, participants completed the Test 1 and when a participant finished, he or she handed it in and received the Test 2. This was done to avoid additional corrections in Test 1, since the correct answers could be seen in Test 2. That way the validity of the results was not endangered.

As for the analysis, all correct phrasal verbs were considered, not just the targeted ones. This means that, in some cases, participants have not used the phrasal verb which was targeted, but have used another phrasal verb which is also correct in the given context, e.g. instead of the targeted phrasal verb *turn up* with the meaning ‘to appear’, phrasal verb *show up* was used. Spelling errors were disregarded, if the error did not change the meaning of the phrasal verb, e.g. *of* used instead of *off* was accepted as a particle.

Overall, in both tests, participants could score a maximum of 28 points. In the productive test, as well as in the receptive test, participants could score a maximum of 14 points, 7 points for literal phrasal verbs and 7 points for idiomatic phrasal verbs.

#### 4. 4. Results

Results of the production test are shown in table 5.

**Table 5.** Test 1 results

<b>PRODUCTIVE TEST RESULTS</b>				
	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. deviation</b>
<b>Overall results</b>	0	12	5	2.70
<b>Literal meaning</b>	0	7	3.21	1.70
<b>Idiomatic meaning</b>	0	5	1.78	1.32

Table 5 shows that, on average, participants used phrasal verbs correctly in five out of fourteen sentences. No participant scored the maximum number of points and the best score was twelve correct phrasal verbs. Eight participants have not used any correct phrasal verbs. This overall result was further divided into two variables. The results showed that, on average, in seven sentences participants correctly used 3.2 phrasal verbs with literal meaning and 1.78 phrasal verbs with idiomatic meaning. Out of 192 participants, only six have used all phrasal verbs with literal meaning correctly. No participant had a maximum number of points for phrasal verbs with idiomatic meaning. The overall results clearly show that participants in this study do not have a high level of phrasal verb use and that they have better results regarding literal phrasal verbs than idiomatic phrasal verbs.

Next, the results of the reception test are shown in table 6. Contrary to the results of the production test, participants have achieved maximum points in each variable of the reception test. Out of 192 participants, 63 achieved the maximum score of 14 correct phrasal verbs, meaning that one third of the participants managed to give all correct answers. Table 6 shows that, on average, participants correctly translated 12.06 phrasal verbs from English to Croatian.

**Table 6.** Test 2 results

<b>RECEPTIVE TEST RESULTS</b>				
	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. deviation</b>
<b>Overall results</b>	4	14	12.06	2.16
<b>Literal meaning</b>	2	7	6.28	1.00
<b>Idiomatic meaning</b>	2	7	5.79	1.39

When it comes to literal phrasal verbs, 105 out of 192 participants achieved a perfect score. On average, participants correctly translated 6.28 out of seven literal phrasal verbs. When it comes to idiomatic phrasal verbs, 79 out of 192 participants had all correct answers. On average, participants correctly translated 5.79 out of seven idiomatic phrasal verbs. These results show that participants achieved better results regarding phrasal verbs with literal meaning than phrasal verbs with idiomatic meaning when it comes to both production and reception. Comparing the results of both tests, it is evident that participants have higher receptive than productive knowledge of phrasal verbs. In fact, in all variables, the results of reception test are at least two times better than in the



production test. It is interesting to note that the results of idiomatic phrasal verbs are three times better on the reception than the production test. Participants' receptive knowledge seems to be at a high level, with means of all variables close to the perfect score.

To test whether the differences in test scores showed in tables 5 and 6 are statistically significant, paired-samples t-test was carried out. The results are presented in table 7. All tested variables were statistically significant at a  $p < .001$  level.

**Table 7.** Differences between receptive and productive knowledge, and literal and idiomatic phrasal verbs (paired-samples t-test)

	t	df	Sig.
Overall productive knowledge - overall receptive knowledge	-40.93	191	.000
Productive knowledge of literal PVs - receptive knowledge of literal PVs	-27.92	191	.000
Productive knowledge of idiomatic PVs - receptive knowledge of idiomatic PVs	-37.75	191	.000
Overall correct literal PVs - overall correct idiomatic PVs	14.46	191	.000
Correct literal PVs in productive test - correct idiomatic PVs in productive test	13.78	191	.000
Correct literal PVs in receptive test - correct idiomatic PVs in receptive test	6.13	191	.000

Finally, to answer the fourth research question, an independent t-test was conducted to compare overall test results between participants attending General Grammar School and participants attending Language Grammar School. The results showed that there was a significant difference in the scores for participants attending General Grammar School ( $M=15.35$ ,  $SD=4.23$ ) and participants attending Language Grammar School ( $M=18.62$ ,  $SD=3.66$ );  $t(190) = 5.75$ ,  $p < .001$ . These results show that participants attending Language Grammar School achieved better results overall in the tests than the participants attending General Grammar School.

## 5. Discussion

The results of this study seem to match the results from previous similar studies (Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Liao and Fukuya, 2004; Wierszycka, 2013). Native speakers of Croatian appear to have difficulties with phrasal verbs, even when their knowledge of English is at a higher level. Participants of this study achieved better results on test items probing literal phrasal verbs than those probing idiomatic phrasal verbs. This is because the meaning of literal phrasal verbs is usually transparent from the meaning of their constituents, while the meaning of idiomatic phrasal verbs is not (cf. Thim, 2012).

Out of the two tests, participants of this study have significantly better results on the reception test, where they had to translate sentences from English to Croatian. This corroborates Dagut and Laufer's (1985) conclusion that the non-use of phrasal verbs is a result of genuine avoidance rather than of ignorance. One other factor that may have influenced the results of the reception test is that participants may guess the meaning of the targeted phrasal verb from the context of the sentence, correctly translating sentences in some cases without actually knowing the phrasal verb. Some attempts, however, were not successful. For example, one participant translated the sentence "I am sad she decided to *turn down* my business proposal" as "Tužan sam jer je odlučila *odgoditi* sastanak". It is evident that the participant did not know the meaning of the phrasal verb and the noun 'proposal', and tried to guess the meaning from context. This example suggests that participants have used guessing from context for translation.

In regards to the productive test, some participants did not use phrasal verbs in their translations from Croatian to English which points to avoidance. Some were able to translate correctly, while others were not, struggling with the lack of vocabulary needed to replace phrasal verbs, as synonyms used to replace them are more formal (McCarthy and O'Dell, 2004; McArthur, 1989) and therefore also difficult for students. Some participants were not able to translate the whole sentence, while others translated everything except the phrasal verb, leaving a blank space in the middle of the sentence. Participants left blank spaces instead of phrasal verbs in 17.2% of all cases.

There were some participants who tried to use phrasal verbs in translation, but made interlingual and/or intralingual errors. In some sentences, participants used phrasal verbs that do exist in the language, but could not be used in the given context. This was especially seen in attempts to use phrasal verbs 'turn up' and 'turn down', where participants incorrectly used 'turn on' and 'turn

off' instead. Some tests contained phrasal verbs students coined themselves, e.g. 'low down' (music), 'volume up' (music), 'left off' (plane), etc. Out of all participants, 21.9% attempted to coin their own phrasal verbs at least once in the test. This was seen especially in attempts to translate idiomatic phrasal verbs. These errors suggest that participants are aware that there should be a phrasal verb involved, i.e. a construction containing a verb and a preposition, but cannot think of or do not know the specific phrasal verb. Some cases of interlingual errors were also found, especially in the idiomatic use of the phrasal verb 'bring out'. The sentence in the test eliciting that phrasal verb was "Moj trener *izvlači* ono najbolje iz mene." In Croatian, the word 'izvlačiti' means 'to pull', therefore, a large amount of participants incorrectly used the phrasal verb 'pull out' instead of the targeted phrasal verb.

Even though errors in the reception test were fewer than in the production test, they were also interesting to observe. They showed that, if the participants were not familiar with the phrasal verb, they focused on just the lexical verb. For example, in the sentence "You can *bring out* your gifts now," one participant translated the sentence "Možeš *ponijeti* darove," with 'ponijeti' being a direct translation of the verb 'bring'.

Looking at results of individual phrasal verbs in the production test, it can be seen that participants had the best results in sentences containing phrasal verbs *turn off*, and the worst results in sentences containing phrasal verbs *come across (as)*. This coincides with the results of corpora analysis seen in table 4 and the hypothesis that frequency plays a role in vocabulary acquisition. Thus, learners have better knowledge of those phrasal verbs that are commonly used because they have probably encountered them in a variety of sources, including those sources encountered out of the classroom. One other indication that participants have encountered and acquired phrasal verbs out of the classroom is the use of phrasal verbs where they were not elicited and which were not taught in schools. For example, for the translation of the sentence "Pozvao sam ju na spoj, ali me odbila." several students used the phrasal verb 'ask out', translating the sentence "I *asked* her *out*, but she *turned me down*."

Finally, the last research question yielded surprising results. Since the tested phrasal verbs were taken from the textbooks of the General Grammar school, it was expected that participants attending that school would have better results. However, participants of the Language Grammar School significantly outperformed them. Several factors may have influenced this result. Firstly, the difference in the number of classes must be mentioned again. Learners in the Language

Grammar School have one English class more per week, which amounts to 35 more classes per school year. When looking at the whole secondary education, learners in the Language Grammar School attend 140 more classes in four years. This allows more content to be learnt and means that the students are more exposed to the English language in a school setting. Secondly, there is a difference between the presentations of phrasal verbs in the textbooks. While the textbooks of the General Grammar School lean more towards quantity, textbooks of the Language Grammar School lean more towards quality. It can be assumed that students of General Grammar School are overwhelmed by the sheer amount of phrasal verbs presented, a lot of which are difficult and probably have very little use outside the classroom. Darwin and Gray (1999) and Liu (2011) warned against such approach, as students cannot identify which phrasal verbs to learn, causing avoidance. Finally, the influence of language aptitude must not be disregarded. As can be seen in the name, the curriculum of the Language Grammar School is oriented towards learning foreign languages. It can be assumed that learners who attend the Language Grammar School have a higher aptitude for English compared to the learners attending the General Grammar School, just by the choice of the school they enrolled into.

One problem concerning the textbooks from both schools is that phrasal verbs were hard to notice. The majority of definitions and tasks were presented in various builders at the end of the textbooks, which students probably tend to ignore. When phrasal verbs are present in the main part, they are mostly used in one task out of several connected to a text, but no special attention is given to them. They are not standing out in any way. Behzadian (2016) has found that target items need to be noticed with the help of input enhancement to be acquired, and students using these books are not given enough opportunities to notice phrasal verbs.

## **6. Implications for teaching and learning**

The results of this research show that the presentation of phrasal verbs in Croatian textbooks and, therefore, in EFL classes is insufficient. Phrasal verbs are generally underrepresented, which caused participants of this research to achieve low scores on the productive test. Therefore, if phrasal verbs acquisition by Croatian learners is to be enhanced in the future, some changes in the EFL classes need to be made.

Literature overview and results of the present study have shown that merely giving learners lists of phrasal verbs that are not connected in any way is not useful and does not aid acquisition. Therefore, a new approach must be considered. Research has shown that cognitive linguistics approach seems to be helpful in acquiring phrasal verbs. To implement this approach in phrasal verb learning, teachers may choose few particles most frequently found in phrasal verbs and present motivations behind them. This way students would not be overwhelmed, but would be able to understand a great deal of phrasal verbs they encounter in the future. Teachers may also consult corpora analyses to discern which phrasal verbs would be most useful for their learners and incorporate them in their lessons.

The results also showed that in some cases students do not notice a presence of a phrasal verbs, focusing only on the lexical verb and ignoring the particle. Thus, students must be exposed to materials in which phrasal verbs as well as their constructions are more noticeable. Students need to be able to notice and study patterns underlying phrasal verbs to be able to think about them as single and inseparable units.

Ultimately, since the time and the materials are limited and teachers can only do so much, learners need to take responsibility for their own progress if they wish to improve their knowledge of phrasal verbs. Since phrasal verbs are not prominent in textbooks, Flockhart and Pelteret (2012) advise learners to look for phrasal verbs out of the classroom, for example while reading a book, watching movies, or browsing the Internet. Learners are advised pay attention to how phrasal verbs are used in those sources, making notes to remember in which context to use those phrasal verbs. Finally, students are advised to constantly go back to the phrasal verbs they recorded, as familiarity and repetition help to learn more effectively.

## **7. Conclusion**

This research analysed the level of receptive and productive knowledge of phrasal verbs in upper-intermediate Croatian secondary school students. The research was inspired by previous studies, whose results showed that EFL learners have problems learning and retaining phrasal verbs. The results of this research correspond with the results of those studies, as it has shown that Croatian students have a low level of knowledge regarding phrasal verbs. They showed that participants generally have a low level of productive knowledge, but that the most problematic area are idiomatic phrasal verbs. However, even though participants avoided using phrasal verbs, the results showed that they are able to recognize and translate phrasal verbs into Croatian. These results may indicate that Croatian students lack production exercises.

In conclusion, even though a higher level of knowledge of phrasal verbs should be attained by upper-intermediate students, this is not the case. Croatian students have problems with every aspect of phrasal verbs, particularly with their non-compositionality. Language instructors should take this into account when designing lesson plans, making adjustments to supplement textbooks, which do not present phrasal verbs properly. Further studies may investigate how the change of the way phrasal verbs are presented in class influence their retention.

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## APPENDIX 1: Phrasal verbs found in textbooks

\* Phrasal verbs in bold are the ones used in the tests.

\*\* When there is a number next to a phrasal verb, it shows that the phrasal verb was used that many times in the textbook, e.g. “get on (3x)” shows that the phrasal verb ‘get on’ has appeared three times in that textbook.

The following phrasal verbs appear in *Solutions Pre-intermediate*:

*plug in, run out, get off, heat up, wash up, clear up, drop off, pick up; **turn on**, switch on, put away, **turn up**, take out, put on, **turn off**, switch off, **take off**, turn down, pull out, pick up, take away, bend down, hold out, lie down, lift up, put up, sit down, sit up, stand up, turn over, turn round.*

The following phrasal verbs appear in *Solutions Intermediate*:

*get on (3x), **take off**, put down, **break down**, go off, **come across** (2x), call on (2x), look after, look for, look into; **turn off**, stand up, take on, bring up, give away, put on, **turn up**, give up (2x), set up, close down, fill in, give out, lay off, put away, **work out**, do without, get in, get off, stick to, call for, count on, deal with, break into, fall out with, carry on with, put up with, look down on, walk in on, look up to (2x), go on with, set off, date back, get about, end up.*

The following phrasal verbs appear in *Solutions Upper-intermediate*:

*storm out, turn into, answer back, **bring out**, come down to, grow up, end up, get on with, set up, put up with, drag on, come up with, settle on, catch on; put up, show up, take up, **turn down**, wind up, back down, die down, do up, hold up, play down, **take off**, lift off, clear off, kick off, set off, spark off, wear off, die off, cool off, fight off, fend off, hold off, carry on, go on, stay on, log off, ring off, call off, **work out**, find out, sort out, pull in, get in, check in, sit down, put down, cut down.*

The following phrasal verbs appear in *Solutions Advanced*:

*touch up, see off, stop by, back down, see through, look up, pass on, account for, grow up, make up, kick out, hang out with, put on, get on with, get up, **turn up**, **take off**, put up with (2x), think over, look after (2x), look into, make up, put on, stand up to, think over, check into, show around, get away (2x), hold up, drop off, stop over, break out, rise up, take over,*

*come back, fall down; **break down, turn down** (3x), allow for, put up with, cheer up, get away with, go for, pass out, set off, tear up, **come across**, fall out with, do away with, go through, let down, run into, switch off, get through to (2x), beat up, call off, carry out, lay off, break up, hold up, give up, go with , put up.*

The following phrasal verbs appear in *Tune up 1*:

*mess around, work out, bump into, bring along, set up with, turn off, break into, breakup with, sit down, fall down, **work out**, get rid of.*

The following phrasal verbs appear in *Tune up 2*:

*act up, **break down**, call off, drop off, eat up, fall through, get in, hand out, jump (all) over (someone), keep from, look (it) up, nod off, pull over, run into, stand out, **turn up**, use up, **work out** (2x), count on, go out with, switch on, fill in, take after.*

The following phrasal verbs appear in *New Success*:

*keep back, let out, confide in, make up, see through, take in, let in on, clear up, turn out, run out, wear off, end up, take over, stick to, sort out, do without, miss out on, let down, try on, splash out, put together, keep on, pay back, wake up to, run up, cut up, throw away, give up.*

## APPENDIX 2: Demographic questionnaire and tests

### ISTRAŽIVANJE

Poštovani,

ispred sebe imate TEST 1. i TEST 2., pomoću kojih provodim istraživanje za izradu diplomskog rada na Filozofskom fakultetu u Osijeku.

Molim vas da pažljivo ispunite test i odgovorite na sva pitanja. Ako niste u potpunosti sigurni, pokušajte odgovoriti onako kako mislite da je najbolje. Ovaj test u potpunosti je anonimn i neće utjecati na vašu ocjenu iz engleskog jezika..

Na početku odredite svoju lozinku i napišite ju na oba papira (oba testa). Lozinka treba sadržavati vaše inicijale, mjesec u kojem ste rođeni (brojkom) i kućni broj, npr. NR.11.50.

**LOZINKA:** \_\_\_\_\_

Prije odgovaranja na pitanja u testu, molim vas da odgovorite na ovih par pitanja:

1. SPOL                      M                      Ž                      (zaokruži)
2. DOB                      \_\_\_\_\_                      (upiši broj godina)
3. RAZRED                      \_\_\_\_\_                      (godina, razredni odjeljak)
4. OCJENA                      \_\_\_\_\_                      (zaključna ocjena iz engleskog iz prethodnog razreda)
5. Je li vam engleski 1. strani jezik?                      DA                      NE                      (zaokruži)
6. Koliko godina učite engleski jezik?                      \_\_\_\_\_                      (upiši broj godina)
8. Ime vašeg udžbenika?                      \_\_\_\_\_

**TEST 1. Prevedi ove rečenice na engleski jezik.**

1. Avion će poletjeti čim magla nestane.

\_\_\_\_\_.

2. Čokolade su bile na sniženju, pa sam odmah kupila njih 10.

\_\_\_\_\_.

3. Danas idem gledati novi film u kino, nadam se da će mi se svidjeti.

\_\_\_\_\_.

4. Glazba mi je malo preglasna, možeš li ju stišati?

\_\_\_\_\_.

5. I prije smo imali problema, ali uvijek se sve dobro razriješilo.

\_\_\_\_\_.

6. Jako sam umorna, morat ću otkazati naše druženje.

\_\_\_\_\_.

7. John se slomio kada je čuo loše vijesti.

\_\_\_\_\_.

8. Mislim da je vrijeme da donesemo rođendansku tortu.

\_\_\_\_\_.

9. Moj trener izvlači ono najbolje iz mene.

\_\_\_\_\_.

10. Možeš li pojačati TV? Ne čujem ništa.

\_\_\_\_\_.

11. Ostavlja dojam vrlo samopouzdanе osobe.

\_\_\_\_\_.

12. Ove fotografije su odlične, zbilja si talentiran!

\_\_\_\_\_.

13. Pokvarila nam se perilica rublja pa smo morali pozvati majstora.

\_\_\_\_\_.

14. Pozvao sam ju na spoj, ali me odbila.

\_\_\_\_\_.

15. Skinuo je jaknu kada je ušao unutra.

---

16. Spremala sam i nabasala na neke tvoje stare fotografije.

---

17. Trebaš vježbati dva puta tjedno u teretani.

---

18. U zadnje se vrijeme pojavio veliki broj lažnih dokumenata.

---

19. Nisam učila za test, tako da sam sretna i sa ocjenom 2.

---

20. Ne smijem više ići kupovati, moram štedjeti novac.

---

**TEST 2. Prevedi ove rečenice na hrvatski. Obrati posebnu pažnju na prijevod glagola.**

1. Anything I lose usually turns up under the couch.

\_\_\_\_\_.

2. The witness broke down while explaining the terrible things she's seen.

\_\_\_\_\_.

3. She should stop singing, it is hurting my ears.

\_\_\_\_\_.

4. I always take off my shoes when I come home.

\_\_\_\_\_.

5. He should be a professional basketball player, he sure has talent.

\_\_\_\_\_.

6. I came across my high school uniform. Can you believe it still fits?

\_\_\_\_\_.

7. Don't worry, I'm sure we can work out something so that everyone is happy.

\_\_\_\_\_.

8. They say they didn't know there was a problem before the plane took off.

\_\_\_\_\_.

9. He is feeling very sick and cannot come to school.

\_\_\_\_\_.

10. You can bring out your gifts now and give them to the birthday boy.

\_\_\_\_\_.

11. I am sad she decided to turn down my business proposal.

\_\_\_\_\_.

12. I work out every morning, but I have to drink my coffee before.

\_\_\_\_\_.

13. While I was walking, I felt a sharp pain in my chest.

\_\_\_\_\_.

14. The bus broke down so I was late to work.

\_\_\_\_\_.

15. The teacher should turn down the music, it is too loud.

\_\_\_\_\_.

16. The test was too hard, I had problems with it even though I studied.

\_\_\_\_\_.

17. Buying that dress was an excellent idea because it brings out the color of your eyes.

\_\_\_\_\_.

18. The boss said he came across as a boring person in his job interview.

\_\_\_\_\_.

19. I am only studying so I can get a good grade.

\_\_\_\_\_.

20. If only I could turn up the sound, I cannot understand anything.

\_\_\_\_\_.