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Specific Features of Learning English Phrasal Verbs By 8–9th Grade Students

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Abstract: This article discusses the specific features of learning English phrasal verbs by 8–9th grade students in the context of foreign language education. Phrasal verbs represent one of the most challenging lexical-grammatical units for school learners because their meaning often cannot be understood through the separate meanings of the verb and the particle. The article analyzes the linguistic, cognitive, semantic and methodological features that influence students' acquisition of phrasal verbs. Special attention is paid to cross-linguistic interference, literal translation, semantic opacity, polysemy, separability, contextual dependence and age-related learning characteristics. The theoretical basis of the article relies on contrastive analysis, language transfer theory, error analysis, interlanguage theory, lexical approach and communicative language teaching.

Keywords: Phrasal verbs, English language teaching, 8–9th grade students, interference, language transfer, lexical competence, contextual learning, communicative approach.

Introduction: In modern foreign language education, the development of students' lexical competence is considered one of the essential conditions for successful communication. Vocabulary knowledge does not consist of isolated words alone. It includes collocations, idioms, formulaic expressions and multi-word units that function as ready-made elements of speech. English phrasal verbs belong to this group of lexical-grammatical units. They are widely used in everyday communication, school textbooks, fiction, media texts, dialogues and informal written discourse.

For 8–9th grade students, phrasal verbs are especially important because this stage of learning is connected with the gradual transition from elementary vocabulary use to more independent and context-based speech production. At this level, learners begin to read longer texts, take part in dialogues, express personal opinions and write short connected passages. In these activities, they often meet such phrasal verbs as get up, put on, take off, look after, find out, give up, turn on, turn off, come across, bring up and look forward to.

However, the acquisition of phrasal verbs is accompanied by several difficulties. The main difficulty lies in the fact that the meaning of a phrasal verb is frequently different from the meaning of its separate components. For example, give means "to hand something to someone", but give up means "to stop doing something" or "to surrender". The verb look means "to direct one's eyes", but look after means "to take care of someone or something". This semantic transformation creates serious learning barriers for students.

Another important problem is interference. Learners often try to understand and use English phrasal verbs through the models of their native language or another language they know. In the Uzbek educational context, students may be influenced by Uzbek and Russian language structures. As a result, they may translate phrasal verbs literally, omit particles, confuse prepositions or use unnatural English expressions. Therefore, the specific features of learning phrasal verbs should be analyzed from linguistic, psychological and methodological points of view.

The aim of this article is to identify and describe the

main features of learning English phrasal verbs by 8–9th grade students and to show how these features should be considered in the process of teaching English as a foreign language.

Theoretical Background

The problem of learning phrasal verbs is closely connected with several important theories in applied linguistics and foreign language teaching methodology. One of the earliest theoretical foundations is contrastive analysis. R. Lado stated that the comparison of the native language and the foreign language helps to predict possible difficulties in language learning [1]. According to this view, if a certain structure exists in the target language but has no direct equivalent in the learner's native language, it may cause errors.

This idea is directly related to the teaching of English phrasal verbs. In Uzbek and Russian, many English phrasal verbs do not have structurally similar equivalents. For example, find out is usually translated into Uzbek as aniqlamoq and into Russian as выяснить. The English structure consists of a verb and a particle, while the Uzbek and Russian equivalents are usually expressed by one verb. This structural difference may lead learners to ignore the particle or misunderstand its function.

T. Odlin developed the theory of language transfer and explained that previously acquired languages may influence the learning of a new language [2]. This influence can be positive when languages have similar structures. It can also be negative when learners transfer unsuitable patterns from one language to another. In the case of phrasal verbs, negative transfer is often seen in literal translation. For example, learners may understand look up a word as "look upwards at a word", while its contextual meaning is "to search for a word in a dictionary".

S.P. Corder's error analysis theory is also significant for this topic. He argued that learner errors are meaningful because they show how learners construct their own language system [3]. From this perspective, errors in phrasal verb usage should not be treated as random mistakes. They reveal the learner's current stage of understanding. For example, if a student says I gave from football instead of I gave up football, the error shows the influence of native-language structure and incomplete understanding of the English phrasal verb.

L. Selinker's interlanguage theory explains that learners develop an intermediate language system between their native language and the target language [4]. This system includes correct forms, transferred forms and learner-created forms. In learning phrasal verbs, 8–9th grade students often produce interlanguage forms such as look for after, turn the computer, give up from, find the answer out it. Such forms show that learners are testing English structures through their own internal rules.

The lexical approach proposed by M. Lewis is also relevant. According to this approach, language learning should focus on lexical chunks, collocations and fixed expressions rather than separate words [5]. Phrasal verbs are typical lexical chunks. They should be taught as meaningful units in context. For example, look after a child, give up smoking, turn off the light, find out the truth are easier to learn when they are presented as complete expressions.

Communicative language teaching also supports contextualized teaching of phrasal verbs. E.I. Passov emphasized the importance of speech activity and communicative situations in foreign language teaching [6]. I.L. Bim and N.D. Galskova also stressed the role of meaningful communication, learner activity and methodological sequencing in the process of foreign language acquisition [7; 8]. These views indicate that phrasal verbs should be practiced through dialogues, role-plays, problem-solving tasks and short written contexts.

English phrasal verbs have several linguistic features that make them difficult for 8–9th grade students. The first feature is their structural composition. A phrasal verb usually consists of a main verb and one or more particles. These particles may look like prepositions or adverbs. Examples include up, down, on, off, out, in, away, over, back and through.

Phrasal verbs can be divided into different types:

Type of phrasal verb	Example	Meaning
Verb + adverbial particle	wake up	stop sleeping
Verb + preposition	look after	take care of

Verb + particle + preposition	put up with	tolerate
Separable phrasal verb	turn off the TV / turn the TV off	switch off
Inseparable phrasal verb	look after a child	take care of

The second feature is semantic opacity. Some phrasal verbs have transparent meanings. For example, sit down and stand up can be understood through their components. Other phrasal verbs are idiomatic. For example, give up, break down, come across and put up with cannot be understood through direct translation. This difference creates an uneven learning process. Students may learn transparent phrasal verbs quickly but struggle with idiomatic ones.

The third feature is polysemy. One phrasal verb may have more than one meaning. For example, take off may mean “to remove clothes” and “for a plane to leave the ground”. Break down may mean “to stop working”, “to lose emotional control” or “to divide into parts”. 8–9th grade students may learn one meaning and then apply it to all contexts. This causes misunderstanding in reading and incorrect use in speaking or writing.

The fourth feature is separability. Some phrasal verbs allow an object between the verb and the particle. For example:

Turn off the light.

Turn the light off.

However, if the object is a pronoun, it usually comes between the verb and the particle:

Turn it off.

Put it on.

This rule is difficult for learners because Uzbek and Russian do not use the same structure. Students may produce forms such as turn off it or put on it, which are grammatically incorrect.

The fifth feature is stylistic and contextual use. Many phrasal verbs are common in spoken and informal English. For example, get up, come in, go out, look for and turn on are common in everyday communication. Some phrasal verbs have more formal equivalents. For example, find out may correspond to discover, give up to abandon, and put off to postpone. Students should understand where and how these forms are used.

The learning of phrasal verbs by 8–9th grade students should be considered in relation to their age, cognitive development and language level. At this stage, students are usually able to understand abstract explanations, but they still need examples, visual support and repeated practice. Their memory works more effectively when language material is connected with situations, images, personal experience and communicative tasks.

One specific feature of this age group is the development of analytical thinking. Students can compare language structures and notice differences between English, Uzbek and Russian. Therefore, contrastive explanation can be useful. For example, the teacher may show that English look after corresponds to Uzbek g‘amxo‘rlik qilmoq and Russian заботиться. This comparison helps students understand that the English expression should be learned as one complete unit.

Another feature is the need for meaningful context. 8–9th grade learners often lose motivation when vocabulary is presented as a long list. Phrasal verbs should be introduced through short stories, dialogues, pictures, classroom instructions, videos and real-life situations. For example, the sequence get up – put on – go out – come back – turn off can be taught through a daily routine text.

A further feature is the gradual expansion of students’ independent speech. At this level, learners begin to express their own opinions and personal experiences. This creates opportunities for using phrasal verbs in meaningful communication. For example:

I gave up eating too much fast food.

I look after my younger brother.

I found out interesting information about London.

I turned off my phone during the lesson.

Such examples connect grammar, vocabulary and personal meaning. They help students move from passive recognition to active usage.

Interference is one of the most important factors influencing the acquisition of phrasal verbs. It appears when students transfer structures, meanings or translation habits from Uzbek or Russian into English.

This process is natural, but it may lead to stable errors if it is not corrected methodically.

The first type is semantic interference. Students may interpret a phrasal verb through the literal meaning of its parts. For example, give up may be understood as "give something upward", look up as "look at the sky", and come across as "cross the road". This happens because students rely on the basic meaning of the verb and particle.

The second type is grammatical interference. Students may place the object incorrectly or omit the particle. For example:

Incorrect form	Correct form	Reason for error
Turn off it.	Turn it off.	Wrong object position
I gave from sport.	I gave up sport.	Native-language transfer
She looks her brother.	She looks after her brother.	Particle omission
I found the answer.	I found out the answer.	Confusion of simple verb and phrasal verb
He put on his jacket it.	He put it on.	Incorrect pronoun placement

The third type is lexical interference. Students may choose a simple verb instead of a phrasal verb because they feel more confident with one-word equivalents. For example, they may use continue instead of go on, discover instead of find out, postpone instead of put off. Such usage is not always wrong, but it may reduce their ability to understand natural English speech.

The fourth type is translation-based interference. Students may translate Uzbek or Russian expressions word by word. This creates artificial forms that do not sound natural in English. For instance, Uzbek telefonni yoqmoq and Russian включить телефон should be expressed as turn on the phone, not open the phone in ordinary contexts.

To reduce interference, learners should be guided to see phrasal verbs as complete semantic units. The teacher should explain that the particle is not an optional element. It changes or specifies the meaning of the verb.

Methodological Features of Teaching Phrasal Verbs

The first methodological feature is contextual presentation. Phrasal verbs should be introduced in sentences, dialogues and short texts. Context helps students understand meaning and usage. For example, the teacher may present the following mini-text:

Yesterday my computer broke down. I tried to turn it on, but it did not work. I asked my brother to look at it. Later, we found out that the battery was damaged.

This text contains several phrasal verbs in a meaningful situation. Students can guess their meanings before receiving direct explanation.

The second methodological feature is semantic grouping. Phrasal verbs should be grouped according to meaning or communicative function. This method supports memory and reduces confusion. For 8–9th grade students, the following groups are suitable:

Semantic group	Phrasal verbs
Daily actions	get up, put on, take off, turn on, turn off
Learning	look up, find out, go over, write down
Communication	speak up, point out, bring up, get along with
Problems	break down, give up, sort out, put up with
Movement	go out, come back, run away, get into

The third methodological feature is the use of visual and situational support. Many phrasal verbs can be taught through pictures, gestures and classroom actions. For example, stand up, sit down, come in, go out, put on and take off are suitable for physical demonstration. More abstract phrasal verbs, such as give up, find out and look forward to, require stories, problem situations and guided questions.

The fourth methodological feature is error analysis. Students should learn to identify and correct their own mistakes. The teacher can give sentences with typical interference errors:

She looks her little sister.

I gave from playing computer games.

Turn off it, please.

We found the truth out it.

Students correct the sentences and explain the reason. This activity develops conscious control over language use.

The fifth methodological feature is communicative practice. Phrasal verbs should be used in speaking and writing tasks. For example:

Task 1. Pair work.

Ask your partner questions using phrasal verbs:

What time do you get up?

Who do you look after at home?

What habit would you like to give up?

How do you find out new information?

Task 2. Mini-dialogue.

Use at least three phrasal verbs in a dialogue about school, family or free time.

Task 3. Short writing.

Write 6–8 sentences about your daily routine using get up, put on, go out, come back, turn on and turn off.

The sixth methodological feature is gradual progression. Phrasal verbs should be taught from simple and transparent forms to more idiomatic and abstract ones. For example, the teacher may begin with stand up, sit down, go out, come in, then move to look after, find out, give up, put off and put up with. This progression corresponds to the principle of accessibility and systematic learning.

Context plays a central role in learning phrasal verbs. Many phrasal verbs cannot be understood correctly without the surrounding words. For example, take off has different meanings in different contexts:

Please take off your shoes.

The plane took off at 8 o'clock.

In the first sentence, take off means "remove". In the second sentence, it means "leave the ground". If students memorize only one meaning, they may misunderstand the second context. Therefore, each phrasal verb should be practiced in several situations.

Context also helps students understand whether the phrasal verb is formal, informal, literal or idiomatic. For example, go on is common in conversation, while continue may be more formal. Students should learn both forms, but they should also know when each form is more appropriate.

Reading tasks are especially useful for contextual learning. When students read short texts containing phrasal verbs, they learn to infer meaning. This develops both vocabulary and reading competence. Listening tasks are also important because phrasal verbs are frequent in spoken English. Students should hear how phrasal verbs are pronounced in connected speech.

A systematic teaching sequence may include the following stages:

1. Recognition stage.

Students identify phrasal verbs in sentences or short texts. They underline the verb and the particle.

2. Meaning discovery stage.

Students guess the meaning from context. The teacher asks guiding questions.

3. Contrastive explanation stage.

The teacher compares the English phrasal verb with Uzbek and Russian equivalents. Literal translation errors are discussed.

4. Controlled practice stage.

Students complete matching, gap-filling and sentence transformation exercises.

5. Communicative practice stage.

Students use phrasal verbs in dialogues, role-plays and short written tasks.

6. Reflection stage.

Students analyze their mistakes and write correct examples.

This sequence helps learners move from recognition to independent use. It also reduces the risk of mechanical memorization.

DISCUSSION

The specific features of learning English phrasal verbs by 8–9th grade students show that this topic should be approached as a lexical, grammatical and communicative problem. Phrasal verbs cannot be taught successfully through translation lists alone. Students need context, comparison, practice and

reflection.

The theoretical works of R. Lado, T. Odlin, S.P. Corder and L. Selinker help explain why learners make errors and how these errors should be interpreted [1; 2; 3; 4]. The lexical approach of M. Lewis shows that phrasal verbs should be learned as lexical units [5]. Communicative and task-based approaches developed by E.I. Passov, D. Nunan and other methodologists show that these units should be practiced in meaningful speech activity [6; 9].

For 8–9th grade learners, the teacher's task is to make phrasal verbs understandable, memorable and usable. This requires several methodological conditions:

phrasal verbs should be presented in context;

meanings should be grouped semantically;

interference should be explained through comparison;

typical errors should be analyzed;

learners should use phrasal verbs in speaking and writing;

assessment should include both understanding and practical use.

When these conditions are observed, students gradually develop lexical awareness and reduce dependence on literal translation. They begin to understand phrasal verbs as natural elements of English communication.

CONCLUSION

English phrasal verbs have specific linguistic and methodological features that make them difficult for 8–9th grade students. Their structural complexity, idiomatic meaning, polysemy, separability and contextual dependence require systematic teaching. In the Uzbek educational context, the learning process is further influenced by Uzbek and Russian language interference.

The analysis shows that effective learning of phrasal verbs requires a combination of contrastive analysis, contextual learning, semantic grouping, error analysis and communicative practice. Students should be guided to understand phrasal verbs as complete lexical-grammatical units. They should also learn to use them in real speech situations.

The specific features of 8–9th grade learners make visual support, personal examples, short dialogues, role-play tasks and reflective correction especially effective. A gradual teaching sequence from recognition to independent use can help learners overcome interference and develop more natural English speech.

Thus, the teaching of English phrasal verbs should be organized as a systematic, context-based and communication-oriented process. This approach contributes to the development of students' lexical competence, reading comprehension, speaking fluency and written accuracy.

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