Study on Avoidance Behaviour among Persian EFL Learners: Phrasal Verbs in Focus

By

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

This survey was an attempt to study the avoidance behaviour of Persian learners of English in using phrasal verbs and its relationship, if any, with learners’ proficiency level (advanced, intermediate), test types (multiple-choice, translation) and phrasal verb types (literal, figurative). Seventy participants, either at intermediate or advanced level, took one of the two test types. In addition to that, to identify native speakers’ choices and preferences over each item of the test fifteen native speakers of English took the multiple-choice test via internet. The ANOVA results showed the existence of phrasal verb avoidance among Iranian learners of English at both advanced and intermediate levels and the results demonstrated that less proficient Iranian students avoided using phrasal verbs more frequently than proficient Iranian learners of English. In addition, the results revealed that the semantic complexity of phrasal verbs played an important role in the avoidance behaviour of learners as they avoided using figurative phrasal verbs more than literal ones. Finally, the outcome of this research showed that there is no relationship between avoidance behaviour of participants and the test types (translation, multiple-choice).

Keywords: Avoidance strategy, phrasal verbs, figurative phrasal verbs and literal phrasal verbs.

INTRODUCTION

Second or foreign language learners resort to avoidance strategy when they confront a communicative difficulty to prevail over this communicative problem. Typically, a target language word, structure, or sometimes a sound thought to be difficult to learners is avoided; instead learners will use an expression or a structure which they find easier. They resort to avoidance strategy to feel secure from error (Brown, 2000; Cook, 1993; Dagut&Lafer, 1985; Dobao, 2002; Ellis, 1989, 2003; Faerch& Kasper, 1984). Laufer and Eliasson (1993) claim that avoidance presumes awareness, however faint, of a given target language feature and it always involves a quasi-intentional or intentional choice to replace the feature by something else. Avoidance does not necessarily or even normally result in error, but in the under-representation of certain traits in the learner’s performance in a second language.

Richards et al. (1998) described avoidance strategy as follows: “When speaking or writing a second or foreign language, a speaker will often try to avoid using a difficult word or structure and will use a simpler word or structure instead.” Kellerman (1992) asserts that avoidance is a complex phenomenon and classified the complexity into three types. Avoidance (1) happens when learners know or expect the existence of a problem and at least have some truncated idea of what the target form is like. Avoidance (2) arises when learners know what the target form is like but find it too difficult to be used.

Avoidance (3) is apparent when learners know what to say and how to say it but are unwilling to express it since it yields to flouting their norms of behavior. Seliger (1989) claims that the identification of avoidance is not easy and it only makes sense to talk of avoidance if learners are aware of what they are avoiding.

The research on avoidance strategy began by Schachter (1974) when she pointed out that second language forms which are avoided to be used by foreign language learners should be examined as well as second language forms that are produced by these learners. Kleinmann (1977) also demonstrated that learners from particular first language backgrounds tend not to use certain syntactic structures in English. Since then, the study of avoidance strategy became the aim of many researchers.

Kleinmann (1977a) claimed that talking about avoidance of some linguistic features makes sense when the learner has the ability to use that linguistic feature which wasn’t considered in
Schachter’s study. He found out that the participants resort to avoidance strategy which was in accordance with contrastive analysis anticipation of difficulty. Some other factors such as facilitating anxiety and confidence were also correlated with the frequent use of the target language structures. He also claimed that avoidance is an indicator of the existence of the structures in question although the learner can’t use it appropriately.

On the other hand, some scholars claimed that the underproduction of specific linguistic structures and enumerating the structural difference between L₁ and L₂ as the only reason for underproduction may not be efficient. According to Kamimoto et al. (1992), to consider relative underproduction of a group of learners as some sort of avoidance behavior, there are some other determinant factors which should be noted. These factors include L₁, form, distribution, function of the linguistic feature considered to be avoided in the L₂ and also, the means being utilized to identify whether and to what extent the entity under consideration is already part of the L₂ knowledge of the learners of that group.

Li (1996) in his research investigating Chinese and English RCs (relative clauses) came to the conclusion that the underlying reason for Chinese learners’ avoidance of English RCs was not apparent structural differences, but the more subtle pragmatic differences which lead them to subconsciously under produce the structure. Some researchers of this field concentrated on the avoidance of phrasal verbs.

A phrase consists of a verb combination with one or more particle(s) (adverb or preposition or both) that functions as one single unit both syntactically and lexically and is usually known as a PV or phrasal verb which is considered to be a peculiarity of the family of Germanic language (Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Gray, 1999; Koprowski, 2005; Quirk et al., 1985).

Dagut and Laufer (1985) classified the 15 PVs utilized in their studies into three categories: (a) literal – phrasal verbs in which the meaning in directly infe rable from their semantic component: go out, (b) Figurative – phrasal verbs whose meaning has resulted from a metaphorical shift of meaning and the semantic insertion of individual constituent: turn up (c) Completive – phrasal verbs in which the particle qualifies the result of the process: cut off, burn down. Similarly, Laufer and Eliasson (1993) made use of three PV types:

Semantically transparent (the meaning of the verb – particle structure can be inferred from the meaning of it components), semitransparent (which become transparent when put into context), and figurative or "semantically opaque" (p.37), which has lexicalized interpretation. The figurative or idiomatic PVs are semantically more difficult than other types of PVs and are considered to be avoided more frequently.

Laufer and Eliasson (1993) examined avoidance of phrasal verbs and consider proficiency level of participants an important factor in research regarding avoidance. They claimed the best predictor of avoidance is differences between the first and second languages. They compared their findings to those of Dagut and Laufer’s (1985) which led to the following conclusions. I. Learners whose first language lacked phrasal verbs (Hebrew native speakers) avoided using phrasal verbs. II. Complexity cannot play a major role in avoidance for second language learners, although a complex structure which is absent in first language is a more acceptable candidate for avoidance than a simple structure that the first language lacks it. On the other hand, the difficulty of a complex structure which is familiar to a learner from his first language is not enough for avoidance. III. Idiomatic meaning similarity between first and second language did not necessarily lead to learners’ avoidance.

A more recent study by Liao and Fukuya (2004) investigated avoidance of phrasal verbs among native speakers of English, Chinese advanced learners of English, and Chinese intermediate learners of English. Liao and Fukuya (2004) investigated avoidance of phrasal verbs in relation to the participants’ proficiency level. They concluded that the intermediate learners avoid using phrasal verbs, while the advanced participants did not. Considering the finding of three previous studies (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Hulstijn & Marchena, 1989; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993), Liao and Fukuya (2004) pointed to learners’ interlanguage development rather than to the differences or similarities between first language and second language in their avoidance or non-avoidance behavior. They claimed that: whether the learners have phrasal verb structure in their first language or not, they tend to avoid using phrasal verbs at the intermediate proficiency level. However, as they proceed in their interlanguage development, this avoidance tendency diminishes and their usage of phrasal verbs approaches that of native speakers. The fact that they didn’t mention the underlying reason for such behaviour is the noticeable shortcoming of this research.

One other survey conducted by Anna Siyanova and Norbert Schmitt (2007), they studied the native and nonnative use of multi-word vs. one-word verbs among native speakers of English and advanced learners of English whose mother tongue were out of Germanic group of languages. The results showed that learners’ use of one-word verbs is more frequent. Native speakers frequently use multi-word verbs, especially in informal contexts, while nonnative speakers tend to avoid using them. However, generally speaking native speakers prefer one-word verbs over multi-word verbs in majority of cases. They pointed out to the complex tricky nature of multi-word verbs which make them difficult to learn. Furthermore, idiomatic multi-word verbs seem more complex than their non-idiomatic counterparts (Moon, 1997; Wray, 2000). This may account for more frequent avoidance of such type of structures.
They claimed that the other underlying reason is that one-word verbs are more frequent than their multi-word verbs counterparts. So learners use fewer multi-word verbs since it demonstrates the input they are receiving, rather than because they are intentionally avoiding them.

According to the above literature review and based on the Iranian EFL learners encounter problems in learning English, in this research, the effect of English as a second language (in Persian learners) on using phrasal verbs and the correlation between the English proficiency level and avoidance behaviour were investigated. Moreover, the relation between the semantic complexity of phrasal verbs and avoidance and the methods of measurement were discussed. Four hypotheses that were considered to understand these relations will be described in the result and discussion section.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

One-hundred and ten university students who were either EFL undergraduate or M.A. students studying at Azad University of Shahreza participated in the Quick Placement Test (version 1) in order for the researcher to select the students who were either at the pre-intermediate level or the advanced level. From these 110 students, 40 were excluded because of insufficient language proficiency or not writing their names on the test paper. Of the remaining 70 students, according to the QPT level chart, 37 were advanced (scores between 48 and 55) and 33 were pre-intermediate (scores between 28 and 36).

By following the matched-pair technique, the advanced students were divided into 2 groups of multiple-choice, 18 students, and translation, 19 students; and the pre-intermediate students, too, were divided into two groups of multiple-choice, 16 students, and translation, 17 students. The students were of both sexes and they ranged in age between 21 and 32.

In addition to the above groups, a group of 15 native speakers of English participated in the experiment via the Internet, specifically through email. They were all university students at M.A. level studying in universities in the USA. They were contacted and asked to take part in the experiment by one of the relatives of the present researcher. They were also both male and female and ranged in age from 25 to 37. The results were used as a reference. The Persian participants' scores were compared to native speakers' ones in order to find out the avoidance behavior of Iranian participants and the relationship of this avoidance behavior, if any, with students' proficiency levels, method of measurement and the complexity of PVs.

Proficiency Test

Quick Placement Test (QPT, version 1) was used to identify the proficiency level of the participants and select two required groups of Persian pre-intermediate and advanced learners of English. It consisted of 25 items of general English knowledge (grammar, vocabulary). In each item, the part in question was left blank and four alternatives were provided (See appendix B).

The Phrasal Verbs

15 phrasal verbs along with their single-word synonyms according to native-speaker preference (selected from previous studies on PV avoidance), were chosen. Their Persian translation were also used in this study. Of these 15 PVs, four were literal and 11 were figurative. These phrasal verbs were taken from Liao and Fukuya (2004) study (See appendix A). These PVs were used in contexts in the form of short dialogues (See appendix C).

Test Method

Tests of PVs used in this study were taken from Liao and Fukuya (2004) study. They were a multiple-choice (MC) and a translation test. The MC consisted of fifteen pairs of phrasal and one-word verbs in the context of short dialogues. In each dialogue, the verb in question was left blank. The participants were asked to fill in the blank with one of the four verbs presented below the dialogue: the PV, the equivalent one-word verb, and two distracter verbs. Due to the fact that each item actually contained two correct answers, the participants received special instructions to choose the one that they considered most suitable to complete the dialogue (See Appendix A for the MC test).

The translation test had the same 15 dialogues as in the multiple-choice test, with the verbs left out. At the end of each dialogue, the Persian equivalent of the missing verb was given. The participants were required to translate them into English in order to answer the questions.
Procedures

A 60-item test of proficiency (namely, the QPT) was given to 110 students to identify their level of proficiency and to select the required number of participants. Then 70 students, 37 advanced and 33 intermediate were selected to participate in the study. The advanced students were assigned to two groups of MC, 18, and translation, 19. The pre-intermediate students were similarly divided into two groups of MC, 16, and translation, 17. Moreover, 15 native speakers of English were also asked to take part in the experiment.

In the next stage, the existence of avoidance behavior (in relation to phrasal verbs) among the participants was identified with the test chosen from Liao and Fukuya (2004) consisting of 15 items. In the multiple-choice test, each item was represented in the form of a short dialogue including a phrasal verb which was omitted. Alternatives consisted of the desired phrasal verb, its one-word equivalent and two distracters. The performance of the participants on this test was compared to that of the native speakers. In order to recognize if there was a relationship between the type of tests and the learners' refusal of using phrasal verbs, a test of translation was employed. The translation test was similar to multiple-choice test in items, but in this test the answers were written in Persian in parentheses at the end of each dialogue and the participants were required to provide the English equivalent. Three types of scores were assigned to each test: first is related to all correct choices of PVs, second is related to correct choices of figurative PVs (11 existing figurative PVs) and the third one is assigned to correct choices of literal PVs (four existing literal PVs). These scores were calculated in percentage.

Data Analysis

An alpha level of 0.05 was used for both statistical tests. In order to have unified sets of scores, raw scores were converted into ratios. That is, both tests consisted of 15 items. If a participant selected 10 PVs, the raw score was converted to the ratio of 10/15 = 0.75; hence, the score for that participant was 0.75 for all PVs. Furthermore, among the 15 PV items, 11 were figurative and four were literal. If out of the 11 figurative PVs, a participant chose six correct ones, the raw score for figurative PVs was converted into the ratio of 6/11 = 0.54, and the participant's score was 0.54 for figurative PVs. On the other hand, if out of the four literal PVs, a participant chose three, the raw score for literal PVs was converted into the ratio of 3/4 = 0.75, and the participant's score for literal PVs was 0.75.

The collected data were analyzed by employing an ANOVA and t-test in order to examine the relevant hypotheses. Furthermore, the descriptive statistics for each calculation was provided.

RESULTS

Four hypotheses were considered in this study as follows:

H_o (1): Persian learners of English tend to avoid using English phrasal verbs.
H_o (2): The participants' English proficiency level is not related to their avoidance behaviour.
H_o (3): The semantic complexity of the phrasal verbs is not related to their avoidance behaviour.
H_o (4): The method of measurement of the phrasal verbs is not related to their avoidance behaviour.

The results of analyzing the data were presented separately with regard to each hypothesis.

Addressing Hypothesis One

For the first hypothesis the performances of the five groups:, native speakers (NS), advanced MC (Adv-MC), advanced translation (Adv-T), intermediate MC (Int-MC), and intermediate translation (Int-T) had to be compared with regard to PVs. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for this comparison and Figure 1 illustrates the means graphically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.804</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv_MC</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.662</td>
<td>.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv_T</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.547</td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int_MC</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.416</td>
<td>.083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int_T</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.390</td>
<td>.114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1, Descriptive Statistics for the Comparison of Phrasal Verbs
One can clearly see that in this figure the means were not the same. In order to find out whether or not these differences were statistically significant, a one-way ANOVA was implemented. Table 2 shows the results of the ANOVA. According to Table 2, the amount of F-observed ($F_{(4, 80)} = 45.535$) was significant at the probability level of $p = 0.000$ which denotes a statistically significant amount. In order to locate the exact place(s) of difference(s), a Scheffe post hoc test was run and the results listed in Table 3.

### Table 2, Results of the One-way ANOVA for Phrasal Verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1.902</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.476</td>
<td>45.535</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>.836</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.741</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3, Results of the Scheffe Post hoc Test for Phrasal Verbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>Adv_MC</td>
<td>.142*</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adv_T</td>
<td>.257*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Int_MC</td>
<td>.388*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Int_T</td>
<td>.414*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-.142*</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv_MC</td>
<td>Adv_T</td>
<td>.115*</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Int_MC</td>
<td>.245*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Int_T</td>
<td>.272*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NS</td>
<td>-.257*</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv_T</td>
<td>Adv_MC</td>
<td>-.115*</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Int_MC</td>
<td>.131*</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Int_T</td>
<td>.157*</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Graphical representation of the means for phrasal verbs
By studying Table 3, one can draw the following conclusions:

1. All the Persian students in the four groups used fewer PVs than NS.
2. Adv-MC group used more PVs than the other three groups, that was, Adv-T, Int-MC and Int-T.
4. There was no significant difference between the performances of the two pre-intermediate groups.

From the above statements, it can be concluded that the avoidance was available in the case of the Persian speakers at both proficiency levels as compared with native speakers of English. Therefore, the first hypothesis which states that “Persian learners of English tend to avoid using English phrasal verbs” was retained.

Addressing Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis was proposed to see if the proficiency level of the participants played a role in the degree of their avoidance of using PVs. Therefore, the performance of the participants in both advanced groups was compared to that of the participants in both pre-intermediate groups. Table 4 depicts the descriptive statistics for this comparison and Figure 2 shows the means graphically.

### Table 4, Descriptive Statistics for Proficiency Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>.602</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>.322</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Graphical representation of the means for proficiency level.
As it can be seen in Table 4, the mean score of the advanced group was different from that of the pre-intermediate group. In order to understand if the difference was significant or not, an independent-sample t-test was employed and the results are shown in Table 5

| Table 5, Results of the Independent-Sample t-test for Proficiency Level |
|-----------------|-----|----------------|----------|
| t               | df  | Sig. (2-tailed)| Mean Difference |
| 9.979           | 68  | .000           | .28058    |

It can be seen in Table 5 that the amount of t-observed (9.979) is significant at the probability level of \( p = 0.000 \). As a result, the second hypothesis stating that, “the participants' English proficiency level is not related to their avoidance behaviour” can safely be rejected, and it can be claimed that the students with better knowledge of English used PVs more than less proficient students.

**Addressing Hypothesis Three**

The third hypothesis intended to compare the two types of PVs— more specifically, figurative and literal PVs. For this purpose, the performance of all 70 participants in literal PVs was compared to their performance in figurative PVs. Table 6 reveals the descriptive statistics for this comparison, and Figure 3 indicates the means in the form of bar charts.

| Table 6, Descriptive Statistics for Semantic Complexity |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-------|-----|
| Group           | N   | Mean| SD    | SEM |
| Figurative      | 70  | .441| .178  | .021|
| Literal         | 70  | .654| .218  | .026|

![Figure 3. Graphical representation of the means for semantic complexity](image)

According to Table 6 and Figure 3, the two obtained means were different. A paired-sample t-test was employed to find out if the difference is meaningful. Table 7 presents the results of the paired-sample t-test.
Table 7, Results of Paired-Sample t-test for Semantic Complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-.213</td>
<td>.269</td>
<td>6.626</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 clearly shows that the amount of t-observed (6.262) was high enough to be significant (p=0.000); therefore, the participants avoided the two types of PVs under investigation differently. In other words, they used literal PVs more than figurative PVs. As a result, the third hypothesis which stated that, “the semantic complexity of the phrasal verbs is not related to their avoidance behaviour” can be rejected.

**Addressing Hypothesis Four**

Regarding hypothesis four, the researcher intended to see if the type of test administered made a difference in students’ avoidance in using PVs. To this end, the performance of the students who took the MC test, both advanced and pre-intermediate was compared to the performance of the students who took the translation test. The results are listed in Table 8 and Figure 4. As it is shown in Table 8, there was a difference between the two means. An independent t-test was required to decide if the difference was significant or not. Table 9 depicts the results of this t-test.

Table 8, Descriptive Statistics for Method of Measurement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple-choice</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>.546</td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>.026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>.473</td>
<td>.142</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Graphical representation of the means for method of measurement](image)

Table 9, Results of Independent-Sample t-test for Method of Measurement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.080</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike the results of the other calculations, the amount of this t-observed (2.080), was not high enough to be considered significant (p= 0.073), Table 9. In other words, the performances of the participants in MC test and in translation test were statistically significant. Therefore, the fourth null hypothesis claiming that “the method of measurement of the phrasal verbs is not related to their
avoidance behaviour” was retained. In other words, the type of test does not affect the students’ avoidance of using PVs.

DISCUSSION

This study was an attempt to find out the validity of the mentioned hypotheses.

Research Hypothesis One

As it was seen previously, it can be concluded that avoidance was present in the production of the Persian speakers at both proficiency levels compared with native speakers of English. Therefore, the first hypothesis which stated that “Persian learners of English tend to avoid using English phrasal verbs” was retained.

This result was not all in line with what Liao et al. (2004), reported in a study they did on some Chinese intermediate and advanced English language learners whose language lacked phrasal verbs. They found that Intermediate learners avoided phrasal verbs especially the idiomatic ones. On the other hand, advanced learners did not avoid phrasal verbs.

But it is in line with the results gained in the study done by Hulstijn et al. (1989), in which the participants were Dutch whose language has phrasal verbs. These Dutch learners of English avoided using figurative phrasal verbs that have literal counterparts in Dutch.

Research Hypothesis Two

Through the investigation of results obtained by the statistical analysis to answer the second research question, it can be concluded that the amount of t-observed (9.979) was significant at the probability level of p= 0.000. As a result, the second hypothesis stating that, “the participants’ English proficiency level is not related to their avoidance behaviour” can safely be rejected, and it can be claimed that the students with better knowledge of English used phrasal verbs more than less proficient students.

The results obtained in answering question 2 of this study were in line with Kellerman (1992) beliefs of avoidance strategy (Type 2 of avoidance behaviour). He mentioned that there are three types of avoidance in language learners. Type 1 occurs when learners know or anticipate that there is a problem and have at least a sketchy idea of what the target form is like. Type 2 can occur when learners know what the target is but find it too difficult to use in the particular circumstances. And finally, type 3 happens when learners know what and how to say, but they don’t show any tendency to use it which is against their own norms of behaviour. He concluded, “the extent of learner's knowledge of the L2 and the attitudes learners hold toward their own and the target language cultures act as factors that interact with L1 knowledge to determine avoidance behaviour.”

The results were also in line with Schachter's (1974) findings who conducted a study with some native speakers of Japanese, Chinese, Arabian and Persian learners of English as a foreign language. His investigation revealed that the difficulty of relative clauses for Chinese and Japanese learners manifested itself not in the number of errors committed by these two groups of learners, but in the number of relative clauses produced. And the number was considerably smaller than that produced by the Arabian and Persian learners. The study concluded that if a learner finds some particular construction in the target language difficult to understand it is likely that he/she tries to avoid using or producing it.

Research Hypothesis Three

Statistical analysis of the results done in chapter 4 to answer the third hypothesis which stated that “Semantic complexity of the phrasal verbs is not related to their avoidance behaviour” clearly showed that the amount of t-observed (6.262) was high enough to be significant (p= 0.000). Therefore, it can be concluded that the participants avoided the two types of phrasal verbs under investigation differently. In other words, they used literal phrasal verbs more than figurative phrasal verbs. As a result the third hypothesis can be rejected.

This claim was also in line with the ideas proposed by EFL scholars like Kellerman (1992) which argued that avoidance happens when learners know or expect the existence of a problem and at least have some truncated idea of what the target form is like. He also concluded that avoidance arises when learners know what the target structure is like but find it too difficult to be used.

Research Hypothesis Four

Regarding hypothesis four, the researcher intended to see if the type of test administered made a difference in students’ avoidance in using phrasal verbs. As the statistical analysis showed, the amount of this t-observed (2.080) was not high enough to be considered significant (p= .073); in other words, the performances of the participants in MC test and in translation test were not statistically significant. Therefore, the fourth null
hypothesis was retained. In other words, the type of test did not affect the students’ avoidance of using phrasal verbs.

The result obtained was not in line with Kleinmann (1977) conclusions. He administered a comprehension test to ensure that the participants comprehend the structures and as a result their non-use of grammatical structures could be attributed to avoidance and not to a lack of knowledge. He found out that the participants resorted to avoidance strategy which was in accordance with contrastive analysis anticipation of difficulty.

CONCLUSION

The study in hand was in fact an attempt to shed light on the points of English proficiency level, semantic complexity and the method of measurement of the phrasal verbs and their relationship with avoidance behavior performance of Iranian 2nd language learners. In addition, the study tried to determine which of the three above-mentioned independent variables have more predictability power as far as avoidance behavior in using semantics in communication performance is concerned. As it was illuminated in the preceding sections of the study, the findings of the study revealed that first; avoidance was available in the case of the Persian speakers at both proficiency levels compared with native speakers of English. Second, Iranian language learners with better knowledge of English used phrasal verbs more than less proficient students. Third, because of semantic complexity, students used literal phrasal verbs more than figurative phrasal verbs. And finally, the type of testing did not affect the students’ avoidance of using phrasal verbs.

This study demonstrated that in some cases Iranian EFL learners avoid using phrasal verbs in their communication because of the aforementioned reasons, considering the review of related literature and the obtained results. The implications of this study were as follows:

- Amid different aspects to be considered while testing a language aspect, avoidance strategies of phrasal verbs as an important part of English lexicon play a significant role. Therefore, language testers need to pay a special attention to this aspect of language.
- Language teachers should also keep in their mind the above-mentioned results obtained through the study; so that, they can utilize the best strategies to overcome the barrier(s) students face in uttering authentic language because of the described reasons in avoiding the usage of phrasal verbs in their language production with the best possible condition for optimal EFL learning.
- The final word here is that mastery and usage of appropriate and enough EFL semantics including phrasal verb especially at intermediate and advanced levels of EFL learning is necessary and should be an essential part of every EFL teaching/learning syllabus.

It should be mentioned that the findings of this study could enrich the literature in the area of second language acquisition development especially Iranian EFL learners’ L2 performance and therefore helps removing the anxieties that prevent EFL learners from better and more efficient EFL performance. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be useful for EFL methodologists, textbook authors, syllabus designers, curriculum developers, language teachers and language test makers.

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