

# PHRASAL VERBS IN LEARNER ENGLISH: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF LITHUANIAN AND POLISH LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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**Abstract.** Phrasal verbs, though very common in the English language, are acknowledged as difficult to acquire by non-native learners of English. The present study examines this issue focusing on two learner groups from different mother tongue backgrounds, i.e. Lithuanian and Polish advanced students of English. The analysis is conducted based on Granger's (1996) Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis methodology, investigating the Lithuanian and Polish components of the International Corpus of Learner English, as well as the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays. The results obtained in the study prove that both learner groups underuse phrasal verbs compared with native English speakers. It is concluded that this could be due to the learners' limited repertoire of phrasal verbs as they employ significantly fewer phrasal-verb types than native speakers. Furthermore, it is noticed that learners face similar stylistic, semantic and syntactic difficulties in the use of this language feature. In particular, the analysis shows that such errors might be caused by native language interference, as well as the inherent complexity of phrasal verbs. The present study not only helps to account for the challenges that are common to those language groups which lack phrasal verbs in their linguistic repository, but also provides insights into the understanding of advanced learner language.

**Key words:** phrasal verbs, learner language, corpus linguistics, contrastive interlanguage analysis

## INTRODUCTION

With recent studies in applied linguistics highlighting the importance of vocabulary in second language acquisition, more researchers have begun to shift their attention from syntax and phonology to the neglected areas of the lexicon and multi-word units (Zarifi and Mukundan, 2013). The study of lexicon, which was once considered 'an inherently messy part of our linguistic competence' (Meara, 1984: 230), is now recognized as central to native and non-native language acquisition process.

Phrasal verbs as an aspect of the lexicon are one of the most distinctive and productive structures among multi-word units. They are typical of spoken and informal English, but also widely used in all registers – from comic books to the most academic forms of the language (Biber et al., 1999; Darwin and Gray, 1999). When it comes down to non-native learners of English, particularly

learners with non-Germanic first languages, phrasal verbs are considered notoriously difficult to learn due to their syntactic and semantic complexity. This issue is further complicated by the fact that many non-native English learners avoid using phrasal verbs and rather choose single-word verbs. As Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999: 425) state:

Most students [...] will find such verbs strange and difficult. Yet they are ubiquitous in English; no one can speak or understand English [...] without a knowledge of phrasal verbs. Because they don't realize this, some non-native speakers of English have a tendency to overuse single lexical items where a phrasal verb would be much more appropriate [...].

Although linguists have long been investigating the difficulties that lie behind the usage of phrasal verbs, the interest in this field gained momentum only in the 1990s, when the first learner corpora were compiled and corpus-linguistic methodology emerged. With electronic collections of authentic learner texts at hand, a number of detailed corpus-based studies into the use of phrasal verbs by learners with different mother tongue backgrounds (De Cock, 2005; Waibel, 2007; Mandor, 2008; Chen, 2013; Wierszycka, 2015) were carried out. None of them, however, focused specifically on the use of phrasal verbs in the writing of Lithuanian and Polish learners of English – the two non-Germanic language groups that do not have such a grammatical feature in their native languages.

The present study thus aims at highlighting specific aspects that are characteristic of Lithuanian and Polish learners in the use of phrasal verbs. With its detailed analysis of Lithuanian and Polish written English gathered in the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE), the study seeks to offer some insights into the understanding of non-native advanced learner language, as well as contributing to further research in this field.

## LITERATURE REVIEW ON STUDIES OF PHRASAL VERBS

The syntactic and semantic complexity of phrasal verbs has long been drawing linguists' attention. Even though the body of literature dealing with these constructions is extensive and multifaceted, research into this field is still impeded by endless discussions on how to define and classify them.

In fact, the very name for this particular language feature is controversial. Various terms have been proposed to refer to it, such as 'discontinuous verb' (Live, 1965), 'verb-particle construction' (Lipka, 1972), 'verb-particle combination' (Fraser, 1974), 'phrasal verb' (Potter, 1965; Bolinger, 1971; Sroka, 1972; Palmer, 1974; Quirk et al., 1985; Biber et al., 1999) or 'two-word verb' (Taha, 1960; Meyer, 1975; Siyanova and Schmitt, 2007). As the term 'phrasal verb' predominates in most studies, as well as in dictionaries and grammars, it is also used in the present paper.

The inconsistent terminology has not been the only source of discussion. Researchers also seem to be concerned with the very structure of the phrasal verb, or, to be more precise, with its non-verbal component. It is generally held that the first part of the phrasal verb constitutes a lexical verb. Yet when it comes to the second component, i.e. the particle, disagreements arise over whether to include a preposition as the non-verbal component and if a three-word verb, which is composed of a verb, a preposition and an adverb, should be treated as a phrasal verb.

Most scholars (Lipka, 1972; Palmer, 1974; Quirk et al., 1985; McArthur, 1989; Downing and Locke, 1992; Greenbaum, 1996; Biber et al., 1999) make a sharp distinction between combinations with adverbial particles and combinations with prepositional particles. For instance, in *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, Quirk et al. (1985) define a phrasal verb as a unit which acts to some extent either syntactically or lexically like a single verb. It is treated by them as a 'multi-word verb', which consists of a single verb combined with a 'morphologically invariable particle'. More precisely, with regard to the nature of the particle, three different types of multi-word verbs are distinguished by Quirk et al. (*ibid.*: 1161): 'phrasal verbs', 'prepositional verbs' and 'phrasal-prepositional verbs'. As explained by them, in phrasal verbs it is an adverbial particle that follows a verb, in prepositional verbs – a preposition, while in phrasal-prepositional verbs – an adverb and a preposition.

Some scholars, on the other hand, take the opposite stance and do not draw the line so rigidly. For example, in *Oxford Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*, Cowie (1993: 39) defines phrasal verbs as 'idiomatic combinations, whether of verb + adverb or verb + preposition'. There are also those who adopt an even broader definition of phrasal verbs, treating not only verb + adverbial particle and verb + preposition but also verb + preposition + adverbial particle combinations as phrasal verbs. For instance, in *Longman Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs*, Courtney (1983: 1) describes phrasal verbs as 'idiomatic combinations of a verb and adverb, or a verb and preposition, or verb with both adverb and preposition'.

The structure of phrasal verbs, however, is not the only source of confusion. The subject is further complicated by the way idiomaticity is dealt with. It is commonly held that based on the degrees of idiomaticity of phrasal verbs the following three categories can be distinguished: non-idiomatic, semi-idiomatic and idiomatic phrasal verbs (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999). While in idiomatic phrasal verbs both the verb and the particle are opaque (e.g. *to count on*), in semi-idiomatic combinations the verb retains its lexical meaning, while the particle does not, adding a certain nuance to the meaning of the verb (e.g. *to write out*). In non-idiomatic phrasal verbs, on the contrary, both components retain their original meaning that generally expresses direction and movement (e.g. *to walk out*).

Even though it seems that this classification is quite straightforward, some linguists claim that there is no such direct endpoint to either of the categories.

The reason for this is that phrasal verbs have polysemous meanings that often fade into one another. As Waibel (2007: 19) points out, intermediate stages of such classification consist of 'too many shades of grey which are impossible to define clearly'. When considering such polysemous phrasal verbs as *to take in*, it is difficult to distinguish at which point the meaning is still literal, and at which it becomes idiomatic.

Another issue arising from the debate about idiomaticity of phrasal verbs is whether to consider both literal and idiomatic verb-adverb combinations as phrasal verbs, or whether to include only truly idiomatic multi-word verbs. Cowie and Mackin (1993), for instance, exclude non-idiomatic phrasal verbs from their dictionary while most other phrasal-verb dictionaries include both literal and idiomatic phrasal verbs (e.g. Courtney, 1983; Sinclair and Moon, 1989; Cullen and Sargeant, 1996). Quirk et al. (1985: 1152) claim that non-idiomatic combinations should not be called 'phrasal verbs' but 'free combinations'. According to them, only combinations in which each element carries a certain idiomatic meaning can be regarded as 'proper' phrasal verbs. The authors state that the two are often confused because the structure of free combinations is similar to that of phrasal verbs. They list three different methods for distinguishing phrasal verbs from free combinations. Firstly, Quirk et al. (ibid.) claim that the meanings of phrasal verbs cannot manifestly be predicted from the verb and the particle in isolation, for instance, *give in* ('surrender'), *catch on* ('understand') or *blow up* ('explode'). In free combinations, however, the meanings can be inferred from the verb or the adverb. Secondly, the verb or the adverb in free combinations can be substituted by other lexical items, for example, *put + down/outside/away; take/bring + out*. Thirdly, it is also possible to insert an adverb between the particle and the verb in free combinations, e.g. *walk straight in*, but this is unacceptable for phrasal verbs.

These methods, however, are not without their flaws. Although Quirk et al. (ibid.) state that the elements of a phrasal verb cannot be substituted by other lexical items, there are some semi-idiomatic phrasal verbs, such as *turn out* (the light), in which both the verb and the particle can be replaced, e.g. *turn off, switch out, put out*. Furthermore, with the same form, some phrasal verbs can act transitively or intransitively in different meanings, for example, *give in* ('yield') but *give something in* ('hand in'). This further complicates the judgment of phrasal verbs and free combinations.

Biber et al. (1999: 403), in turn, argue that in different contexts free combinations can function as phrasal verbs, and therefore can belong to one category, e.g. *go back, come down*, where both the verb and the particle have distinct meanings and 'represent single semantic units' that cannot be understood from the individual meaning of the components. According to Biber et al. (ibid.), in practice, it is problematic to isolate phrasal verbs and free combinations because the fixedness of such combinations is graded and not discrete.

It is evident from the discussion above that there is some dispute regarding the idiomaticity, the definition and the very structure of phrasal verbs. All

of the scholars, however, unanimously agree that multi-word combinations consisting of a lexical verb and an adverbial particle are to be called 'phrasal verbs'. The present paper will thus follow this view and adopt Quirk et al.'s (1985) division of multi-word verbs into phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs and phrasal-prepositional verbs, extracting only those two-word items from the Lithuanian Component of the International Corpus of Learner English (LICLE) and Polish Component of the International Corpus of Learner English (PICLE) that consist of a lexical verb and an adverbial particle. As regards the level of idiomaticity of phrasal verbs, due to the fact that a straightforward differentiation between free combinations and phrasal verbs in many cases is not possible, the present paper investigates verb-particle combinations with both non-idiomatic and idiomatic meanings.

## PHRASAL VERBS AND LEARNERS

Mastering the use of phrasal verbs is a notoriously difficult challenge for non-native learners of English. The previous corpus-based studies with regard to phrasal verbs highlight this issue, suggesting that non-native learners of English who lack phrasal verbs in their mother tongue (such as Hebrew-speaking, Italian-speaking or Polish-speaking learners) tend to underuse phrasal verbs, preferring their one-word verb equivalents (Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Waibel, 2007; Wierszycka, 2015). Learners with Germanic first languages (such as German-speaking or Dutch-speaking learners), on the other hand, use these combinations more confidently as they are more familiar with this verb type from their native languages (Hulstijn and Marchena, 1989; Waibel, 2007). In fact, through a corpus-based analysis of Italian and German components of the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE), Waibel (*ibid.*) has revealed that advanced German learners of English use even more phrasal verbs in written English than native speakers.

Furthermore, learner-related research has shown that non-native speakers of English tend to be somewhat 'stylistically deficient' when using phrasal verbs: that is, they appear to be largely unaware of the differences between colloquial speech and formal writing. Working on the data from ICLE and its spoken counterpart, the Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage (LINDSEI), De Cock (2005) has discovered that learners' formal writing often contains speech-like features, such as overuse of colloquial phrasal verbs, whereas their spoken language sometimes sounds rather 'formal and bookish'. Interestingly, she claims that learners' overreliance on colloquial phrasal verbs in academic writing can be traced to the interference of learner's mother tongue, and more specifically to the fact that in some Germanic languages (for instance, Dutch, German or Swedish), phrasal-verb constructions 'are not marked for style' and can be used equally in academic writing and informal speech.

Learners' stylistic knowledge of phrasal verbs has also been analysed in Chen's (2013) corpus-based study of the Chinese learners' use of phrasal verbs.

The findings of the research indicate that British novice writers employ a higher number of phrasal verbs that are found to be most frequent in academic written English in general, while Chinese learners lack such a good command of stylistic knowledge of phrasal verbs. Chen (*ibid.*: 97) states that ‘sixty per cent of the highly frequently used phrasal verbs in the learner writing turn out to be less frequently used in academic writing’.

Another major finding that emerges from the previous studies is that foreign language learners tend to misuse phrasal verbs. As demonstrated in Mandor’s (2008) analysis of verb-particle constructions in Swedish argumentative writing, learners often use particles for emphasis in inappropriate contexts, e.g. *end up his life* instead of *end his life*. In addition, they have problems with collocational restrictions, e.g. *rub out thoughts* instead of *rub out pencil marks*. Such errors have also been outlined in the previously mentioned Waibel’s (2007) and De Cock’s (2005) studies. The latter has indeed established that the most typical errors made by learners are semantic errors, demonstrating an incomplete understanding of the meaning of phrasal verbs.

Overall, the findings from these studies can be summarized to a conclusion that non-Germanic learners of English who do not have phrasal verbs in their mother tongue tend to avoid using these combinations. As regards the quality of use, it is noticed that both learners with non-Germanic and Germanic first languages face certain difficulties which involve stylistic, semantic and syntactic confusion over phrasal verbs. Some linguists (Dagut and Laufer, 1985) attribute this to the structural differences between the learners’ native and the target language that interfere with the correct use of this language feature, others (Hulstin and Marchena, 1989; Waibel, 2007) stress that this is also due to the inherent complexity of phrasal verbs and can often depend on the student’s proficiency level of English.

Bearing these observations in mind, the present study sets out a hypothesis that Lithuanian and Polish learners of English underuse phrasal verbs in comparison with native language speakers. Furthermore, it is predicted that both learner groups face difficulties in the use of this language feature. For this reason, a qualitative analysis of the most common errors is also performed in this study.

## DATA AND METHODS

The study was conducted according to Granger’s (1996) Contrastive Inter-language Analysis with the aim to highlight specific aspects characteristic of Lithuanian and Polish learners in the use of phrasal verbs. In order to analyse their written English, two components of ICLE were used: a subcorpus of Polish learner English (PICLE) from the second version of ICLE (Granger et al., 2009) and a subcorpus of Lithuanian learner English (LICLE, Grigaliūnienė and Juknevičienė, 2012) which is a new addition to the currently developed version of ICLE. Both subcorpora represent written English of senior undergraduate

university students whose first languages are Lithuanian and Polish. As a reference corpus, the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essays (LOCNESS, CECL, 1998) consisting of argumentative and literary essays written by British and American students (excluding A-levels examination essays) was also employed.

The detailed information about the Polish and Lithuanian components of ICLE, as well as the LOCNESS control corpus, is presented in the table below:

*Table 1 Corpora used in the research*

Subcorpus	Number of essays	Size (in words)	Average length of essays
LICLE	415	248,489	598
PICLE	365	234,702	643
LOCNESS	298	262,339	886

The research was carried out in several stages. First of all, in accordance with Quirk et. al's definition of phrasal verbs, every occurrence of a multi-word item consisting of a lexical verb and an adverbial particle were extracted from LICLE and PICLE. The subcorpora were analysed with the use of AntConc, a corpus-analysis toolkit, developed by Laurence Anthony (2004). As neither LICLE, nor PICLE are morphologically annotated with respect to parts of speech, the search for phrasal verbs was carried out on the basis of a list of adverbial particles proposed by Fraser (1976) and Quirk et al. (1985).

Further on, the data were analysed following a 'hypothesis-based' approach (Granger, 1998: 15). Based on the knowledge derived from the previous phrasal verb studies, a hypothesis was set forth that Lithuanian and Polish learners of English underuse phrasal verbs in comparison with native English speakers. In order to test the validity of this hypothesis, the data were first approached from the quantitative point of view. Subsequently, an in-depth qualitative analysis with respect to phrasal-verb use was carried out. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis will be presented in the following section.

## PHRASAL VERBS IN LEARNER LANGUAGE: A QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

The extraction of all verb-adverbial particle combinations has revealed that, overall, 559 phrasal verbs are used in the Lithuanian component of ICLE. As regards the PICLE subcorpus, the estimated overall number of phrasal verbs used by Polish learners is 819. Although it is evident at this point that Polish learners employ more phrasal verbs than Lithuanian learners do, in order to draw conclusions on whether the two learner groups underuse or overuse phrasal verbs

it is necessary to compare the obtained results with the quantitative findings from LOCNESS. The comparison of the three corpora is therefore presented in the figure below.

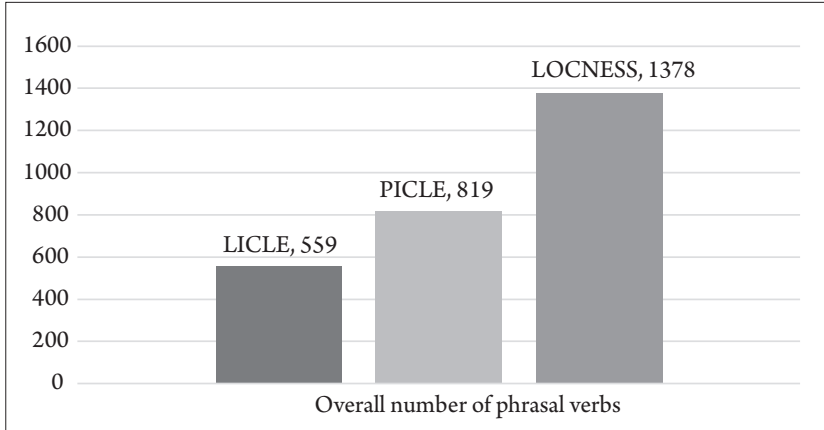


Figure 1 Overall number of phrasal verbs in the three corpora

What follows from the analysis summed up in Figure 1 is that native speakers tend to use about three times as many phrasal verbs as Lithuanian learners and about twice as many phrasal verbs as Polish learners of English. In terms of percentages, Lithuanian and Polish learners use 59.4 per cent and 40.5 per cent less verb-adverbial constructions than native speakers. Such findings, in fact, correspond with the observations reported in the previous studies on the avoidance of phrasal verbs conducted by Dagut and Laufer (1985), Waibel (2007), Wierszycka (2015) and prove that Lithuanian and Polish learners of English underuse phrasal verbs in comparison with native speakers. In addition, it has been identified that learners not only use significantly fewer phrasal verbs than native speakers, but also employ a smaller variety of these constructions (cf. Table 2). This leads to a conclusion that learner writing is lexically less varied with respect to phrasal verbs than that of native speakers.

Table 2 Number of different phrasal verbs in each corpus

	Number of different phrasal verbs
LICLE	183
PICLE	243
LOCNESS	422

Taking into consideration the number of occurrences of each phrasal verb, ten most frequent verb-adverbial particle combinations in the LICLE, PICLE and LOCNESS corpora can be presented:



Table 3 Top 10 most frequent phrasal verbs

	LICLE	PICLE	LOCNESS
1	to sum up	to bring up	to go on
2	to come back	to turn out	to carry out
3	to find out	to give up	to point out
4	to pay back	to find out	to take away
5	to carry out	to go on	to bring up
6	to grow up	to carry out	to take on
7	to point out	to grow up	to end up
8	to go on	to sum up	to grow up
9	to write down	to bring about	to give up
10	to come out	to point out	to bring about

Although a more comprehensive analysis of the qualitative use of phrasal verbs will be presented in the following section, some interesting facts from Table 3 will be highlighted at this point.

*To go on*, a phrasal verb that is very common in fiction, news and colloquial speech, but less frequent in academic prose (cf. Biber et al., 1999: 410), is at the top of the list in the native control corpus LOCNESS. Such a finding corresponds with Biber et al.'s observation that *to go on* is 'the most common phrasal verb overall in the LGSWE [Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English] Corpus' (1999: 411). While *to go on* is not the most frequent phrasal verb in either LICLE or PICLE, it nevertheless is among the top ten most frequent phrasal verbs. This might indicate that the argumentative essays included in the corpora are written in a semi-formal rather than academic style. However, it is worth contrasting the number of occurrences of *to go on* with the frequencies for *to continue*, one of the one-word equivalents of *to go on*, which is considered more suitable in academic pieces of writing. The frequency of use of the two is presented in the table below.

Table 4 *To go on versus to continue*

	LICLE	PICLE	LOCNESS
to go on	14	28	53
to continue	49	22	146

Looking at Table 4, it is obvious that while in the native students' and Lithuanian learners' essays the more formal alternative outnumbers the less formal one by far, Polish learners of English opt for the more colloquial *to go on*, for instance:

- (1) *However, if women go on accepting their position within imposed frames, they will remain second-class citizens forever.* (ICLE-POL-POZ-0036.1)

- (2) *The war between the former Yugoslavia republics was at first extremely appalling with all its atrocities, but as it **went on** people got used to seeing dead bodies on the streets, no matter young or old.* (ICLE-POL-SUS-0067.2)

Considering the fact that in the Polish language the verb *to continue* has a direct translation equivalent *kontynuować*, this finding is quite striking. Although some linguists (Bywater, 1969; Side, 1990) claim that native language plays an important part in the choice of phrasal verbs and foreign learners of English mostly prefer using a single-word verb of Latin origin over an equivalent phrasal verb, this does not seem to be the case in the current context.

Even though in LOCNESS the list of the most frequent phrasal verbs is headed by the colloquial *to go on*, two phrasal verbs follow immediately which are reported by Biber et al. (1999: 410) to be common in academic prose, i.e. *to carry out* and *to point out*. These two phrasal verbs are among the 10 most frequent phrasal verbs in the learner subcorpora as well, but they are not used as frequently by the learners as by the native students:

Table 5 *To carry out and to point out*

	LICLE	PICLE	LOCNESS
to carry out	19	27	48
to point out	14	20	41

One more phrasal verb that is worth mentioning in the context of academic prose is *to sum up*. As can be seen from Table 3, in both learner subcorpora *to sum up* is among the 10 most frequent phrasal verbs (62 occurrences in LICLE, 24 occurrences in PICLE). Having in mind that this phrasal verb is a common text-structuring device in the domain of academic language, it is not striking that it occurs frequently in learner writing. In the native control corpus, on the other hand, *to sum up* is used only once in 298 essays, and it is not employed as a means of structuring the text but rather as a simple lexical verb:

- (3) *I contend that the saying is meaningless-or a least impractical – for **summing up** the woes and corruption of humanity since desire-much less evil – cannot be appropriated objectively and weighed against financial aptitude.* (ICLE-US-IND-0005.1)

In the LICLE subcorpus, by contrast, *to sum up* is used in the following way in only two instances:

- (4) a. *The issue under consideration can be **summed up** thus: despite trying to deny negative effects of emigration it is obvious that many problems arise from it, such as demographic crisis and loss of cultural identity.* (ICLE-LT-VI-0231.5)

b. *This quotation **sums up** every point discussed.* (ICLE-LT-VI-0293.7)

Meanwhile, in PICLE, *to sum up* serves only as a text-structuring device. Interestingly, in almost all the instances in the LICLE and PICLE subcorpora, this phrasal verb is found sentence-initially, for example:

(5) a. ***To sum up**, writing is a challenge for writers rather than adventure.* (ICLE-LT-VU-049.1)

b. ***To sum up**, it is possible to prevent the spread of the plague or even to nip it in the bud.* (ICLE-POL-0194)

The strikingly frequent use of *sum up* at the beginning of a sentence might be explained as the learners' intention to make the structure of their essays more obvious. By using *to sum up*, Lithuanian and Polish learners of English not only demonstrate their awareness of text cohesion but also ensure that the reader is able to follow the line of argumentation more easily. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that such over-reliance on one particular discourse organizer is also indicative of the learners' limited lexical repertoire.

Overall, the quantitative analysis of phrasal verbs in native and learner writing yielded several insightful results. Based on the overall number of phrasal verbs extracted from the LICLE, PICLE and LOCNESS corpora, the hypothesis was confirmed that both Lithuanian and Polish learners underuse phrasal verbs in comparison with native English speakers. It was concluded that this could be due to the learners' limited repertoire of phrasal verbs as they used significantly fewer phrasal-verb types than native speakers. In the further analysis, certain phrasal verbs were identified that were underused (e.g. *to take away*) or overused (e.g. *to sum up*) in both PICLE and LICLE. The analysis of the most frequent phrasal verbs also revealed that formal phrasal verbs like *to point out*, *to carry out* and *to sum up* are used together with more informal ones like *to go on* or *to come back*. This style deficiency leads to an assumption that in certain cases learners might not be fully aware of the stylistic restrictions of phrasal verbs. In order to draw conclusions, it is important to analyse in which contexts informal phrasal verbs are used; therefore, style deficiency will also be investigated in the qualitative part of the study.

## PHRASAL VERBS IN LEARNER LANGUAGE: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

At various points of the research, it became evident that Lithuanian and Polish learners of English face certain difficulties in the use of phrasal verbs. The investigation of the examples gathered from LICLE and PICLE has revealed that both learner groups have a tendency to use highly colloquial phrasal verbs that are not typically associated with formal writing. Such instances include:

- (6) *People do not **go out**, do not communicate with their friends and relatives. (ICLE-LT-VY-1004.1)*
- (7) *The easiest way of appeasing one's hunger is to **pop in** for a hamburger or pizza. (ICLE-POL-UCS-0008.1)*

As the content of these essays might, indeed, not intend to convey seriousness, the use of such highly colloquial phrasal verbs as an expressive device is by all means justified. However, not in all cases the mixture of informal and formal styles is appropriate in academic writing, for instance:

- (8) *We all know that there is a lot of corruption and shadows in the overall circulation of money in the world, but it has not just **popped up** recently. (ICLE-LT-VI-0281.7)*
- (9) *What if some factor which was hidden or simply overlooked **croops up** and alters the entire situation? (ICLE-POL-UCS-0006.1)*

In examples (8) and (9), the essays are concerned with such serious topics as the financial crisis of 2008 and capital punishment. Therefore, using *to pop up* or *to crop up* instead of a much more neutral verb as *to emerge* might be considered inappropriate and demonstrate that in some cases learners are not fully aware of the stylistic restrictions of multi-word verbs.

Another common issue that appears in both subcorpora is the misuse of certain phrasal verbs. In contrast to examples (8) to (9) above, which demonstrate style deficiency, examples (10) to (17) below involve inappropriate selection of either the verb or the particle. The first two instances evidence the particle mistakes:

- (10) *So to start with, at the very beginning a person who is due to **take over** a new writing adventure (either a new book, article or even a poem is usually amused and interested about the idea and prepares for it intensively: thinks about the structure, chops down the ideas for the content. (ICLE-LT-VI-0172.4)*
- (11) *And suddenly the public opinion is acquainted with the fact that gays are human beings as well and that they want to lead normal (!) lives, with a spouse and a couple of children **running about** the house. (ICLE-POL-POZ-0026.4)*

As seen from the examples above, the selected particles are not suitable in the intended context. In (10), *to take up* would be the appropriate phrasal verb, meaning 'to start to do a new activity', whereas the actually employed phrasal verb *to take over* means 'to do something instead of someone else' or 'to gain control over something' (the phrasal verb meanings given in this section are taken from *Oxford Phrasal Verbs Dictionary for Learners of English* (2006)). *To run around*, meaning 'to run in different directions, especially in an excited way', would be the correct option in example (11). The learners producing the above-mentioned

examples are evidently familiar with the verb part of the phrasal verb but they do not know the particle that is necessary to complement the verb in order to convey the relevant meaning.

There is, however, a number of instances in LICLE and PICLE where errors occur not due to the inappropriate selection of the particle but, on the contrary, because of the superfluous use of it, for instance:

- (12) *To **summarize up**, W. Churchill was right when comparing writing with an adventure. (ICLE-LT-VI-0183.4)*
- (13) *But not only is there a tendency in art to escape into the world of dreams but also in architecture. People get and tired of concrete and iron and they **seek after** solitude in the countryside. (ICLE-POL-POZ-0044.1)*

In the instances above, *to summarize up* and *to seek after* are used although the verb-part of each combination already conveys the intended meaning on its own. Therefore, single-word verbs would be the more appropriate choice.

While in examples (10) to (13) the particle proves to be problematic, in the following instances it is the verb that provokes errors:

- (14) *To **round up**, one should understand that even if not legalized homosexual families do exist and they are struggling for their survivor. (ICLE-LT-VY-0019.2)*
- (15) *However, there is little hope that those criminals will be **stacked away** forever. (ICLE-POL-POZ-0003.1)*

In (14) and (15), *to round up* and *to stack away* should be replaced with *to sum up* and *to lock away*, respectively. Although the phrasal verbs used in these examples do exist as such, they have meanings different from the ones assumed by the learners. *To round up* does not actually imply 'to give the main points of something in a few words' but carries the meaning of 'to bring together a number of people, animals or objects in one place'. And *to stack away* carries only one meaning which is 'to keep or lay aside for future use'.

Examples (16) and (17), in turn, are erroneous due to the confusion of the verb-part of a phrasal verb with a phonetically similar verb:

- (16) *He says that even Lithuanians earn more, they still **lack behind**. (ICLE-LT-VI-0103.2)*
- (17) *Besides, the decision to stay together 'till death **tells us apart**' involves taking up serious obligations and duties. (ICLE-POL-POZ-0020.3)*

*To lack behind* in (16) is a result of confusion with *to lag behind* ('to progress or develop more slowly than others'). In (17), *to tell apart* is confused with *to tear*

*apart* ('to separate people in a family, an organization, a country, etc.) which would be the correct option in this case.

Apart from examples (8) to (17), which demonstrate learners' stylistic and semantic confusion over phrasal verbs, there are also a number of instances in the LICLE subcorpus that are marked by syntactic errors, such as using transitive phrasal verbs intransitively or vice versa, for instance:

- (18) *Firstly, the children left by one or both of their parents tend to be more easily affected which means we are **growing up** a generation having an unstable basis.* (ICLE-LT-VI-0218.5)
- (19) *Then, the hormones having ceased to be excessively produced, which is only after two or three years, he or she begins to look for another love, **splitting up** the relationship.* (ICLE-POL-POZ-0031.5)

In examples (18) and (19), it can be observed that the intransitive *to grow up* and *to split up* is used transitively. Intransitive phrasal verbs, however, do not and cannot take objects as they function separately in a sentence. The correct alternatives in these instances would be the transitive phrasal verbs *to bring up* and *to break off* or the single-word verbs *to raise* or *to end*. As noticed in the previous studies with regard to phrasal verbs, such errors often stem from native language interference. Indeed, in Lithuanian, the construction corresponding to *raise a generation* is *užauginti kartą*. The verb (*už*)*auginti* translates directly as *to grow* and is transitive in the Lithuanian language. Learners that use *to grow up* in such contexts are, apparently, familiar with the semantics of this phrasal verb in that they use it in connection with children and education; they are, however, unaware of its syntactic restrictions or, more precisely, of the fact that this phrasal verb is intransitive in English.

Another example of an error that can be traced back to the mother tongue of the learner is displayed below:

- (20) *Lecturers do not have time to provide students with proper information and explain their subjects as they have to work two or more extra jobs in order to **live by**.* (ICLE-LT-VI-0149.3)

The correct phrasal verb intended by the student is *to get by*. The actually used phrasal verb, *to live by*, can be related to the Lithuanian verb *pragyventi*, meaning 'have the means to meet your daily needs' (the meanings of the Lithuanian and Polish verbs provided in this section are based on *Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas* and *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*, respectively). *Gyventi* is the Lithuanian equivalent of *to live*, and the prefix *pra-* serves a similar function as the adverbial particle *by*.

Native language interference is also discernible in Polish learner writing. In several examples in PICLE, the selection of the verb-part of a phrasal verb is due to direct transfer from native language, resulting in the production of multi-word

verbs that exist as such in English, yet take on meanings diverging from their dictionary meanings, for instance:

- (21) *If a social point of view is considered, those who are in favour of the present situation, believe that the modern human being lives in a natural social environment he has managed to **work out** throughout the past centuries.* (ICLE-POL-POZ-0005.2)
- (22) *Denominational scouting means **crossing out** tolerance from the list of its principles.* (ICLE-POL-POZ-0005.2)

In examples (21) and (22), learners used the English verb that is closest to their mother tongue: *wypracować*, meaning ‘to gain effect by effort or work’, is translated literally as *to work out* (*wy* + *pracować* → *out* + *work*), and *wykreślić*, meaning ‘remove sth from a list’ is translated as *to cross out* (*wy* + *kreślić* → *out* + *cross*). Although the Polish verbs do convey the suitable meaning, the produced phrasal verbs do not apply to the context. It thus may be assumed that the learners producing these sentences lack the necessary vocabulary skills to find suitable English equivalents for their Polish thoughts and employ expressions that are a result of direct transfer from their native language.

## CONCLUSIONS

The extraction of phrasal verbs and comparison of the three corpora revealed that Lithuanian and Polish learners used significantly fewer verb-adverbial constructions than native speakers. Such findings corresponded with the observations reported in the previous studies on avoidance of phrasal verbs conducted by Dagut and Laufer (1985), Waibel (2007), Wierszycka (2015) and verified the set out hypothesis that Lithuanian and Polish learners of English underuse phrasal verbs in comparison with native speakers. It was discovered that learners not only used significantly fewer phrasal verbs than native speakers, but also employed a smaller variety of these constructions. The quantitative data demonstrated that nearly twice as many phrasal verb types were used in LOCNESS as in PICLE and LICLE. This led to a conclusion that the writing of Lithuanian and Polish learners is less diverse lexically than that of native speakers. The limited repertoire of phrasal verbs was also outlined as one of the reasons learners underused these combinations in their writing.

Further analysis of the most common phrasal verbs revealed that both Lithuanian and Polish learners were more focused on the use of phrasal verbs associated with a discourse organization function. Although the extensive use of text-structuring devices was attributed to learners’ awareness of text cohesion and discourse organization, this also indicated the more varied repertoire of the native speakers who created cohesion by other lexical means than the overt discourse organizers and avoided using such phrasal verb as *to sum up* in their essays.

Finally, a qualitative analysis of phrasal verb use in the writing of Lithuanian and Polish learners was performed. As predicted, both learner groups faced similar difficulties in the use of this language feature. In particular, the investigation of the gathered examples has revealed that learners tend to use highly colloquial phrasal verbs which are not typically suitable in the context of academic writing. Not only are learners unaware of stylistic restrictions in certain cases, they also lack relevant vocabulary knowledge and tend to choose phrasal verbs that convey different meanings from the ones assumed.

The qualitative analysis has also demonstrated that the inherent complexity of phrasal verbs is not the only source of difficulty for Lithuanian and Polish learners of English. Errors in the use of phrasal verbs are also caused by native language interference or, more particularly, by direct transfer from either Lithuanian or Polish. During the analysis of the instances from the subcorpora, it has been noticed that in certain cases learners fail to recognize the appropriate phrasal verbs in English and employ expressions that are a result of erroneous transfer from their mother tongue. This conclusion, in fact, supports Dagut and Laufer's (1985) claim that structural differences between the native and the target language impede successful learning of phrasal verbs.

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative analyses have showed that, apart from the great numerical difference in the use of phrasal verbs, Lithuanian and Polish learners of English share a number of similarities. The present study has helped to account for the challenges that are common to those language groups which do not have phrasal verbs in their linguistic repository. The findings from the present research can not only be employed to draw further conclusions concerning learner language universals in future studies of different language groups, but also can be used to expand the knowledge of phrasal verbs and provide insights into the general understanding of advanced learner language.

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