

# Avoidance of L2 English Phrasal Verbs by L1 Thai Learners

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate L1 Thai learners' avoidance behavior with respect to English phrasal verbs. L2 learners are assumed to avoid an L2 feature that is different from or does not exist in their L1 (Schachter 1974; Kleinmann 1978; Liao and Fukuya 2004). It is hypothesized that L1 Thai learners would prefer using single-word equivalents to phrasal verbs, and if an avoidance occurred, they would avoid using figurative phrasal verbs more than literal ones due to their figurative meanings. The research participants were 52 university students of intermediate proficiency level. The data were elicited by administering a comprehension task, followed by a preference assessment task and a translation task. The results showed that the L1 Thai participants preferred using single-word verbs to phrasal verbs due to the non-existence of phrasal verbs in Thai. The avoidance behavior was also more evident with figurative phrasal verbs due to their semantic complexity. The avoidance behavior can be

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attributed to L1-L2 differences and the semantic complexity of phrasal verbs.

**Keywords:** avoidance, English phrasal verbs, literal, figurative, L1 Thai learners

## 1. Introduction

Phrasal verbs are crucial in communicating with native speakers as they are commonly used in both speaking and writing. They are also seen as an important feature of informal spoken discourse (Biber *et al.* 1999 as cited in Phongphio and Schmitt 2006). However, many researchers (Liao and Fukuya 2004; Phongphio and Schmitt 2006; Imrose 2013) have pointed out that phrasal verbs are undeniably troublesome for L2 learners, especially those whose L1 does not have phrasal verbs. Thus, L2 learners tend to underuse phrasal verbs and substitute them with single-word equivalents (Chen 2007; Saiya 2011). This phenomenon of underproduction is described as “avoidance” by Schachter (1974). A low frequency of error production may derive from the fact that the learners avoid using the target language structures that they find difficult. There have been a number of studies on the avoidance behavior phenomenon by L2 learners (Laufer 2000; Liao and Fukuya 2004; Saiya 2011; Ghabanchi and Goudarzi 2012; Chotiros and Pongpairoj 2012; Thiamtawan and Pongpairoj 2013; Rattanasak and Phoocharoensil 2014; Bjers and Massicotte 2015; El-Dakhs 2015; Pawachalotorn 2015).

Previous studies on the avoidance of phrasal verbs employed different tasks such as a multiple choice task (Saiya 2011; Ghabanchi and Goudarzi 2012; Liao and Fukuya 2004; Pawachalotorn 2015), a recall task (Liao and Fukuya 2004; Ghabanchi and Goudarzi 2012), a translation task (Ghabanchi

and Goudarzi 2012; Liao and Fukuya 2004) a paraphrase task (El-Dakhs 2015), and a gap-filling task (El-Dakhs 2015). To the best of my knowledge, there has not been any research that focused on avoidance of the two types of English phrasal verbs among L1 Thai learners using a translation task. To fill this gap, this research explored avoidance of L2 English phrasal verbs with literal and figurative meanings among L1 Thai learners by using both a translation task and a multiple choice task.

## **2. Literature Review**

In this section, discussions on a second language acquisition (SLA) theory, Error Analysis (EA), the avoidance behavior phenomenon, and English phrasal verbs will be provided.

### **2.1 Error Analysis**

This section discusses EA, an SLA theory which this research is based on. A thorough description of EA will be presented. The discussion includes the definition, purposes, as well as strengths and weaknesses of EA.

There are two approaches to identify possible learning problems in SLA, namely Contrastive Analysis (CA) and EA. CA starts with the comparison of two languages. CA claimed that errors made in learning a target language could be attributed to interference, which is the transfer of elements of the native language, such as phonological, grammatical, or lexical, into the acquisition of the target language. CA proponents (Fries 1945; Lado 1957; Di

Pietro 1971) claimed that such a systematic comparison of the mother tongue of the learner and the target language would help predict areas of learning difficulty for second language (L2) learners. While CA focuses on differences between L1 (first language) and L2, EA focuses on the errors made by the learner. Many of the proponents of EA have challenged the usefulness of CA. They claim that the analysis of errors made by the learner shows that not all systematic errors can be attributed to interference from the learner's mother tongue.

According to Corder (1981), EA is a method which aims to describe and explain the systematic nature of errors made by language learners. The procedure involves collecting samples of language in a learners' corpus, identifying errors and classifying them according to their causes. The goals of EA are "to describe, through the evidence contained in errors, the nature of the interlanguage in its developmental stages and to infer from these descriptions the process of second language acquisition" (Hakuta and Cancino 1997, 297).

Richards (1971b) classified the errors made by learners into three types:

- 1) Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors are caused by interference of the learner's mother tongue. The sources of such errors can be traced back to the native language of the learner. It is seen as a process in which the learner uses their knowledge of L1 in L2.

## 2) Intralingual Errors

Intralingual errors originate within the structure of the target language itself. It is assumed that these errors are encouraged by the complexity of the target language. The followings are four types of intralingual errors classified by Richards (1971b):

### 2.1) Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization occurs in situations where the learner creates unacceptable structures based on their experience of other structures in the target language. An example of overgeneralization is the use of \*‘goed’ and \*‘comed’. In such cases, the learner applies the past tense morphemes –d and –ed to irregular verbs that do not follow the application of the –d or –ed past tense morpheme in regular verbs.

### 2.2) Ignorance of rule restrictions

Ignorance of rule restrictions involves the application of rules to contexts where they do not apply. It occurs when the learner fails to observe the restrictions of existing structures. An example is \*‘He made me to rest’ through extension of the pattern found with verbs that take infinitival complements, such as, ‘He asked/wanted/invited me to go’.

### 2.3) Incomplete application of rules

Incomplete application of rules arises when the learner fails to fully develop a certain structure required to produce acceptable sentences in

the target language. An example of the incomplete application of rules is \*‘She talking about London trip last year’, where the learner fails to apply a form of the verb ‘to be’ in the continuous tense structure.

#### 2.4) False concepts hypothesized

False concepts hypothesized are cases where the learner fails to fully comprehend a distinction in the target language and makes false hypotheses about the target language. An example is the use of passive voice for ‘happen’ in \*‘One day it was happened’.

#### 3) Developmental Errors

The third type of errors are the developmental errors, which occur during the acquisition of the target language by the learner. This kind of error “occur[s] when the learner attempts to build up hypotheses about the target language on the basis of limited experience” (Ellis 1994, 58). Developmental errors are similar to errors produced by children acquiring the target language as their mother tongue. Examples of developmental errors are the misuse of the past tense –ed morpheme (i.e. \*He caught the ball) and the negation form (i.e. \*You not like it).

EA researchers claimed that a careful study of a large corpus of errors made by a language learner provides factual empirical data for developing a model of L2 acquisition. The analysis of the production of errors clearly shows that not all systematic errors produced by the learner can be

attributed to interference from the native language (Corder 1967; Richards 1971a).

As analyses of L2 learner's errors can help identify learners' linguistic difficulties and needs at a particular stage of language learning, EA is beneficial in L2 instruction because it reveals to teachers, syllabus designers and textbook writers the problematic areas. It is also useful in designing remedial exercises. Richards and Schmidt (2010) stated that the study of errors is used in order to "(1) identify strategies which learners use in language learning, (2) identify the causes of learners' errors, and finally (3) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid to teaching or in development of teaching materials" (Richards and Schmidt 2010, 201).

EA appears to have been favored by a number of linguists and researchers in the seventies. However, it did not escape criticism by other linguists. Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1977) addressed six weaknesses of EA. Firstly, the analysis of errors in isolation focuses on errors and excludes other elements in the corpus from consideration. To look solely at the learner's errors is not sufficient because non-errors are also important. For example, Anderson's (1977) study of errors in article usage by Spanish learners of English revealed, from only taking errors into consideration, that these learners produced many errors in using the article 'a/an', but few errors in using the article 'the'. Deeper and more interesting findings can be found by focusing the attention on the cases where the learners use the

articles correctly. By looking at non-errors, he found that many of the learners used English articles that were equivalent to the articles required in Spanish, resulting in few 'the' errors and many 'a/an' errors. Secondly, the identified classification of errors is not usually effective because it is difficult to clearly classify errors. Errors can overlap depending on the point of view and analysis of different individuals. Thirdly, statements of error frequency are quite misleading because making an absolute conclusion that some particular errors are the most problematic by looking only at the number of times that such errors occur is not reliable. Only obligatory contexts can supply the researcher with a total number of required occurrences of specific elements in a given corpus. Moreover, ascription of causes to systematic errors may not be right. According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), a large number of the learners' errors are ambiguous as to whether they are interlingual or developmental. The negative construction of the utterance \*'I no have a car' reflects the learner's native Spanish, and at the same time, it is also a characteristic of the speech of children learning English as their native language. Another point of criticism of EA is the biased nature of sampling procedures. The sampling areas that can distort the data are, for example, background languages, subjects and data samples. The researchers tend to work with the available subjects and do research with an existing class of students.

By taking only error frequencies into account, the researchers are still not able to identify the areas of difficulty in the target language since there

may also be points of difficulty that are not revealed by a high frequency of error production. The strongest criticism of EA is that it makes no allowance for the avoidance phenomenon. According to Van Els, Bongaerts, Extra, Van Os, and Janssen-Van Dieten (1984), avoidance behavior is taken as a cognitive strategy implying a choice in which L2 learners can decide whether to use it or not (as cited in Hulstijn and Marchena 1989). It is one of the communicative strategies used by L2 learners in order to cope with communicative difficulties. Schachter (1974) stated that learners may avoid using target language features they are aware that they have difficulty with. Avoidance can lead to absence of errors. However, absence of errors in some cases does not necessarily mean that the learner has no problem with a particular structure. For example, teachers or researchers may find very few errors in relative clauses in a corpus of English learners' language, but it does not always mean that the learners have no difficulty in using relative clauses. They may simply avoid producing relative clauses because they are aware that they may get the structure wrong and they may use simpler structures or those they are certain they are capable of. It is obvious that the analysis of errors alone cannot specify the learner's areas of difficulty. Thus, EA cannot account for avoidance phenomena since it assumes that errors indicate learning difficulties of L2 learners and that the frequency of particular errors is evidence of the difficulty learners have with a particular structure. Since EA fails to account for all areas in which learners can have difficulty, it is unlikely to be considered as an adequate approach for assisting teachers of L2. Other weaknesses of EA, according to Ellis (2008),

are weaknesses in the methodological procedures and limitations. Most of the studies related to EA are cross-sectional in nature, so EA fails to provide a complete picture of learners' L2.

## **2.2 Avoidance Phenomenon**

This section discusses the avoidance phenomenon which is an important issue for SLA research. Schachter (1974) defined avoidance behavior among L2 learners as a behavior in which learners avoid using a certain L2 structure if they find it difficult or that particular structure is non-existent in their L1. A number of SLA researchers (Schachter 1974; Ellis 1994) stated that learners are likely to avoid target language forms they find difficult to avoid producing errors. Kellerman (as cited in Ellis 1994) asserted that avoidance occurs when the learner anticipates that they will have a problem with the target structure; they know what the target form is but find it too difficult to use in a particular circumstance; or they know how to use the target structure but choose not to use it because it will flout their own norms of behavior. Schachter's (1974) classic study on avoidance of English relative clauses (ERCs) revealed that the Chinese and Japanese learners produced fewer errors than Persian or Arabic learners did because Chinese and Japanese learners actually avoided using ERCs. It was assumed that the ERC structure is difficult for Chinese and Japanese learners because nouns in Chinese and Japanese are pre-modified (i.e. nouns follow modifiers) while

English nouns are post-modified (i.e. nouns precede modifiers)<sup>1</sup>. The fact that Persian and Arabic nouns are also post-modified may account for Persian and Arabic learners' non-avoidance of ERCs which led to more errors with ERCs. Schachter (1974) pointed out that CA (Fries 1945; Lado 1957; Di Pietro 1971) which emphasizes systematic comparison between the mother tongue and the target language can help predict the avoidance phenomenon. From the result of Schachter's (1974) study, it is assumed that too much emphasis on errors cannot explain the avoidance behavior of L2 learners. Kleinmann (1978) stated that "error analysis (Corder 1967; Richards 1971a), which requires a corpus of actually observed errors, completely overlooks potential cases of avoidance" (Kleinmann 1978, 157). Kleinmann (1978) also pointed out that the learner can be said to avoid the particular linguistic structure only if the learner has knowledge about that linguistic structure. In other words, the learner cannot be said to avoid a linguistic structure they do not know. Thus, avoidance implies the choice of the learner not to use a particular linguistic feature.

### **2.3 English Phrasal Verbs**

A phrasal verb is a combination of a verb and a particle, i.e. a preposition or an adverb. According to Brinton and Akimoto (1999), phrasal verbs have been variously referred to by a number of scholars in terms such as "verb-adverb combination" (Kennedy 1920), "verb-particle construction" (Lipka

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<sup>1</sup> This applies only to RCs and PPs, not to adjectival modifiers.

1972), “verb-particle combination” (Fraser 1976) and “multi-word verbs” (Schmitt and Siyanova 2007).

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (2016), phrasal verbs can be syntactically classified into four types:

1) Separable transitive phrasal verbs

Separable transitive phrasal verbs take a direct object. The two parts of this kind of phrasal verb can be separated with an object. However, the two parts must be separated if the object is a pronoun. Consider the phrasal verb 'turn off':

- 1 (a) I *turned off* the water.
- (b) I *turned* the water *off*.
- (c) I *turned* it *off*.
- (d) \*I *turned off* it.

2) Inseparable transitive phrasal verbs

Inseparable transitive phrasal verbs take a direct object. However, the two parts of this kind of phrasal verbs cannot be separated. Consider the phrasal verb 'work on':

- 2 (a) I'm *working on* a new project.
- (b) \*I'm *working* a new project *on*.
- (c) I'm *working on* it.
- (d) \*I'm *working* it *on*.

## 3) Intransitive phrasal verbs

Intransitive phrasal verbs do not take a direct object and the two parts of the phrasal verb are never separated. Consider the phrasal verbs 'carry on' and 'run out':

- 3 (a) Tim didn't stop. He *carried on*.
- (b) The water finally *ran out*.

## 4) Transitive phrasal verbs with two particles

Transitive phrasal verbs with two particles are composed of three words. They always carry a direct object, and the phrasal verbs are never separated from the object or the object pronoun. Consider the phrasal verbs 'carry on' and 'check out':

- 4 (a) Even though he was tired, he *carried on*.
- (b) Even though he was tired, he *carried on with* his work.
- (c) She *checked out* at 10 o'clock.
- (d) She *checked out of* the hotel at 10 o'clock.

According to Fraser (as cited in Dagut and Laufer 1985), phrasal verbs can be semantically categorized into three types: literal, figurative and completive. However, this study will focus on only two types of phrasal verbs based on whether the meaning is literal or non-literal.

### 1) Literal phrasal verbs

A literal phrasal verb is a phrasal verb whose meaning is based on its components. The meaning of the whole phrasal verb derives from the meaning of each part, for example, 'go out' which means 'to leave a place', 'take away' which means 'to remove something and place it somewhere else', and 'come in' which means 'to enter a room or a building'.

### 2) Figurative phrasal verbs

A figurative phrasal verb is a phrasal verb whose "meaning has resulted from a metaphoric shift of meaning and the semantic fusion" (Dagut and Laufer 1985, 74) of the individual components. Figurative phrasal verbs have special meanings which cannot be drawn from the meaning of the separate words, such as 'turn up' which means 'appear', and 'let down' which means 'disappoint'. This kind of phrasal verbs are also known as "idiomatic phrasal verbs" according to Siyanova and Schmitt (as cited in Imrose 2013).

## **Are There Phrasal Verbs in Thai?**

While Thai is a monosyllabic language, English is an inflectional language. According to Phraya Anuman Rajadhon (1961), Thai "belongs to a type of language technically called in philology an isolating language" (as cited in Danvivathana 1987). Such a language is a kind of language in which almost every word consists of a single morpheme. In Thai, each word is independent as a unit in a sentence. In terms of verbs, it is plausible to state that the Thai language has transitive, intransitive and ditransitive verbs as

English does (Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom 2005). However, phrasal verbs are non-existent in the Thai language because the phrasal verb structure is a peculiarity of Germanic languages (Liao and Fukuya 2004).

#### **2.4 Previous Studies on L2 Avoidance Behavior**

Several studies have touched upon L2 avoidance behavior. This section reveals L2 learners' avoidance behavior of particular structures in English, including avoidance of English phrasal verbs. As for the use of phrasal verbs, several factors have been proposed to account for the avoidance behavior of the learners including cross-linguistic differences, semantic complexity, limited exposure to L2, and the proficiency level of the learners. The following are studies which illustrate a number of causes that had an impact on the learners' avoidance behavior.

A number of researchers have conducted research about the avoidance behavior of L2 learners. Laufer (2000) carried out a study investigating the avoidance behavior of 56 Hebrew-speaking learners on the use of English idioms. Besides examining whether the participants would avoid the production of idioms and substitute them with their literal equivalents, Laufer investigated whether the degree of similarity between L1-L2 affected the avoidance behavior of the participants. The participants were given a fill-in translation test of 20 idioms. The results indicated that there was an effect of degree of L1-L2 similarity on the production of idioms. English idioms which have exact Hebrew translation equivalents were the least avoided idioms. The participants were likely to avoid the English idioms

which do not have idiomatic counterparts in their L1 Hebrew. The results confirmed the proposal that the major cause of avoidance behavior was L1-L2 differences.

Bjers and Massicotte (2015) conducted a study exploring the use of English relative clauses (ERCs) by L1 Korean learners. 11 student essays written by intermediate-level Korean learners were randomly chosen and were then analyzed to determine the frequency of the production of ERCs. The results showed that the students underproduced ERCs. It was observed that the students whose essays contained only one or no ERCs preferred using multiple sentences instead. Due to the low frequency of ERCs and the uneven distribution of attempts in the paper, it was presumed that the students consciously avoided using ERCs to various degrees. The cause of avoidance of ERCs in this study was L1-L2 structural differences as Korean RCs precede the noun phrase (NP) that they modify while ERCs appear to the right of the NP being modified.

Liao and Fukuya (2004) carried out a study to explore the avoidance of English phrasal verbs by Chinese learners in relation to their proficiency levels, phrasal verb types, and test types. Eighty-five participants, grouped into intermediate and advanced level, were given three types of test which were a multiple-choice task, a translation task, and a recall task. A third group of participants, consisting of 15 native speakers of English, was used as a control group. Results showed that the intermediate learners produced phrasal verbs much less frequently than both the advanced learners and

the native speakers did. Even though the advanced learners did not perform very differently from the native speakers, they showed a slight tendency to use phrasal verbs less than the native speakers. It was concluded that the cause for the avoidance of phrasal verbs by the intermediate Chinese learners may be L1-L2 differences. Because phrasal verb structures are non-existent in a language like Chinese, differences between the mother tongue and the target language may result in the L1 Chinese learners' avoidance of L2 English phrasal verbs.

However, the proficiency level of the learners does not always play an important role in the avoidance behavior. Ghabanchi and Goudarzi (2012) examined the avoidance of English phrasal verbs by 85 Iranians (intermediate and advanced). The findings indicated that the test type and the phrasal verb type had an effect on the learners' avoidance of phrasal verbs. Both intermediate and advanced learners preferred literal phrasal verbs over figurative ones in all the three tests – a multiple-choice test, a translation test, and a recall test. The proficiency level did not seem to affect the learners' performance. The results showed that the intermediate and the advanced students produced phrasal verbs at approximately the same level. However, both groups preferred using literal phrasal verbs to figurative phrasal verbs. It is assumed that since a literal phrasal verb's meaning is derived from the meaning of its two counterparts, it is more comprehensible for the learners. The results indicated that the semantic

complexity of phrasal verbs led to the L1 Iranian students' avoidance behavior.

El-Dakhs (2015) examined the difficulty in producing English phrasal verbs among 407 Egyptian students. The participants were presented with three test types; a paraphrase task, two gap-filling tasks, and a survey to see their use of phrasal verbs and the factors affecting their production which may lead to the avoidance behavior. It was observed that English language learners tended to avoid the use of phrasal verbs in production. The causes noted in this study included a mixture of cross-linguistic differences, poor productive knowledge and limited L2 exposure.

Some previous studies dealt with L1 Thai learners' avoidance behavior. An experiment on the avoidance of the English participial reduced relative clauses (PRRCs) was carried out on L1 Thai learners in 2013 by Thiamtawan and Pongpairoj. It was premised on the assumption that Thai learners would avoid using the reduced adjectival clauses due to L1- L2 differences. However, the assumption was rejected by the results which showed that the participants did not avoid the PRRC structure. It was proposed that the participants did not avoid using PRRCs because the structure of PRRCs is simpler than that of RCs. The nature of the task was also assumed to account for the non-avoidance of the participants. Moreover, it was plausible that the participants were familiar with the structure of PRRCs because they had regularly been exposed to PRRCs in their high school years.

In a study of avoidance of the English passive construction by L1 Thai learners, Chotiros and Pongpairoj (2012) gave 45 Thai high-school students a multiple-choice task and a preference assessment task. Due to some differences between the passive construction in Thai and English, it was predicted that the participants would employ the avoidance strategy when it came to the English passive construction. However, the findings revealed that the participants did not avoid the passive structure on the indirect preference assessment task. Chotiros and Pongpairoj concluded that this non-avoidance was due to some common characteristics of the passive construction in Thai and English as well as an increasing use of the passive structure in Thai.

In their study examining the avoidance strategy applied by L1 Thai high school students' acquisition of English non-restrictive relative clauses (NRCs), Rattanasak and Phoocharoensil (2014) claimed that the major sources of avoidance found in the study seemed to be exposure to L2 and the complexity of L2. Eighty Thai EFL students were grouped according to their English proficiency, high and low levels. Both groups were asked to complete a Thai-English translation task and a sentence combination task. As right-embedded NRCs were considered to be simpler, the participants attempted to avoid producing center-embedded NRCs and substituted the use of them by embedding RCs at the end of the main clause. Moreover, the low proficiency learners applied the avoidance strategy more than the high proficiency learners did.

Saiya (2011) looked at the avoidance behavior of English phrasal verbs in colloquial situations of Thai high school students. The researcher made sure that the participants in the study were familiar with the items being tested before exploring their avoidance behavior by getting a confirmation from the English teacher of those participants that those items had already been taught. It was found that the participants overused single-word verbs where phrasal verbs were much more appropriate in colloquial situations. It was concluded that the underuse of phrasal verbs of the participants in this study might partly be interpreted as avoidance and partly explained as a result of ignorance and incomplete knowledge of phrasal verbs due to the lack of L2 exposure. Moreover, the avoidance behavior was much more obvious among figurative phrasal verbs than literal ones, which supported the influence of semantic complexity on the avoidance behavior. Interestingly, the result was in line with Ghabanchi and Goudarzi (2012) that the proficiency of the participants did not play an important role in the avoidance of phrasal verbs.

Pawachalotorn (2015) conducted a study investigating the avoidance behavior of L1 Thai learners of English regarding English phrasal verbs. The results showed that L1 Thai participants avoided using phrasal verbs in a context where the native speakers of English preferred using them due to their semantic complexity. The participants were divided into 2 groups according to their proficiency level. The native speakers were asked to join the control group to compare the production of phrasal verbs between L2

learners and the owners of the language. Thirty-four university students were asked to complete a comprehension task and a preference assessment task. Besides figurative meanings of phrasal verbs, the findings revealed that Thai learners were likely to avoid using English phrasal verbs due to interlingual factors.

There have been a number of research works on the avoidance of L2 English phrasal verbs among learners of various L1 backgrounds, such as L1 Chinese learners (Liao and Fukuya 2004), L1 Iranian learners (Ghabanchi and Goudarzi 2012), and L1 Egyptian learners (El-Dakhs 2015). There have been some studies on the avoidance of English phrasal verbs with literal and figurative meanings among L1 Thai learners (Saiya 2011; Pawachalotorn 2015). These studies employed a multiple choice task. To the best of my knowledge, there has not been any research that focused on avoidance of the two types of English phrasal verbs among L1 Thai learners using a translation task. To fill this gap, this research will explore the avoidance of L2 English phrasal verbs with literal and figurative meanings among L1 Thai learners by using both a translation task and a multiple choice task.

### **3. Research Hypotheses**

The followings are the research hypotheses:

3.1 L1 Thai learners would prefer using single-word equivalents to phrasal verbs due to the non-existence of phrasal verbs in Thai.

3.2 L1 Thai learners would avoid figurative phrasal verbs more than literal ones due to their figurative meanings.

## 4. Methodology

This section discusses the research methodology. The section starts with information on the participants (4.1), a description of the research instruments (4.2), and data collection (4.3).

### 4.1 Participants

The participants of the study were 52 second-year university students of the Faculty of Social Science at Srinakarinwirot University, enrolled in the course English for Effective Communication. There were 41 females and 11 males. The age range of the participants was between 19-21 years old. They were all of intermediate proficiency level as measured by O-NET (Ordinary National Education Test) scores (See Appendix A). They all had been studying English in formal settings for 13 years.

### 4.2 Instruments

There were three tasks employed in this study; a comprehension task, a preference assessment task, and a translation task. There were 20 phrasal verbs (10 with literal meanings and 10 with figurative meanings) used in this research (see Table 1). All of them were chosen from O-NET which is based on the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008) and English textbooks, Virginia Evans and Jenny Dooley's *Upstream 5* (2010), *Upstream*

6 (2010) and other high school materials. These books were approved by the Ministry of Education of Thailand to be used in high schools across Thailand. To ensure that the phrasal verbs used in the context in each test item were appropriate, all of the test items were checked and approved by a native speaker, a former American lecturer at Silpakorn University.

**Table 1. Phrasal verbs used in the research**

Literal Phrasal Verbs	One-word Equivalents	Figurative Phrasal Verbs	One-word Equivalents
run after	chase	go off	explode
hand over	pass	look into	investigate
get away	leave	give up	quit
hand in	submit	put off	postpone
fill out	complete	call off	cancel
leave out	omit	turn down	refuse
put together	gather	take after	resemble
think back	remember	let down	disappoint
go up	increase	bring up	raise
think over	consider	pass away	die

#### 4.2.1 Comprehension Task

The multiple-choice comprehension task was first administered to the participants in order to ensure that all of them had knowledge of the phrasal verbs used in the research. The comprehension task contained 20 items, each of which consisted of a phrasal verb. The participants were asked to select one of the four choices which was a single-word equivalent

of the phrasal verb in the statement. Examples of the comprehension task are illustrated below (See the comprehension task in Appendix B).

- (1) The police officer **ran after** the shoplifters but he couldn't catch them because they were too fast.  
(A) followed    (B) chased    (C) seized    (D) found
- (2) Due to the flood, we will have to **put off** the meeting until next week.  
(A) prepare    (B) postpone    (C) restrain    (D) rearrange

#### 4.2.2 Preference Assessment Task and Translation Task

A preference assessment task and a translation task were employed to test the degree of avoidance of phrasal verbs with literal and figurative meanings among the participants. The set of phrasal verbs used in the translation and preference assessment task was the same as that of the comprehension task. Five literal phrasal verbs and five figurative phrasal verbs were included in the translation task. The rest of the phrasal verbs were presented in the preference assessment task.

The nature of the preference assessment and the translation task was parallel in that both of the tasks were multiple choice tasks. Both tasks consisted of 10 items. In each test item, there was a gap in the sentence to be filled in with a single-word verb or a phrasal verb. The participants were required to choose the choice they preferred. The following are examples of the preference assessment task (See the preference assessment task in Appendix C).

- (3) My dog is obsessed with squirrels. He \_\_\_\_\_ squirrels every day.  
Yesterday he nearly got hit by a car!  
(A) chases (B) runs after
- (4) My house got robbed last Saturday night. The thief \_\_\_\_\_ with  
two jewelry boxes and a laptop.  
(A) left (B) got away

The characteristics of the translation task were the same as those of the preference assessment task except for the fact that the Thai equivalent of the missing word was given at the end of each item. Examples of the translation task are shown below (See the translation task in Appendix D).

- (5) Shiloh was carrying some powerful fireworks and they suddenly  
\_\_\_\_\_. She got a severe burn on her right hand. (ระเบิด)  
(A) exploded (B) went off
- (6) After the thief had entered the bank, he pointed his gun at the teller  
and told her to \_\_\_\_\_ the money to him. (ยื่นให้)  
(A) pass (B) hand over

It is worth noting that the choices were provided in the translation task in order to control the answer of the participants as well as to prevent potential extraneous variables such as the participants' lack of vocabulary. All of the test items were sentences with the verb left out. Two choices were given below each item. One was a phrasal verb, and the other one was its single-word equivalent. The participants were asked to choose to see whether they preferred to use the phrasal verbs or to avoid them.

### 4.3 Data collection

The quiz day of the course was the day on which the data collecting process took place because all the students were required to attend the class. All three tasks were administered on the same day. The comprehension task was administered first. The participants had 20 minutes to complete the comprehension task. Then, the students were presented with the preference assessment task. They were required to complete the preference assessment task within 10 minutes. Lastly, they were given the translation task. The participants had 10 minutes for the translation task.

## 5. Results and Discussion

This section includes the results, discussion and analysis of the data. The first part discusses the comprehension task (5.1), followed by the preference assessment task and the translation task (5.2) respectively.

### 5.1 Comprehension Task Scores

The phrasal verbs in the study were analyzed individually. To ensure that the participants' preference for single-word verbs over phrasal verbs reflected their avoidance behavior, not ignorance or lack of knowledge, only the phrasal verbs that the participants answered correctly were included in the analysis of results from the production tasks, i.e. the preference assessment task and the translation task (5.2).

Table 2 presents the scores and the percentages of the participants who chose the correct answers on each item of the comprehension task. The total number of participants was 52.

**Table 2. The number of the participants who answered each item correctly.**

Phrasal Verbs	Type of PV	Correct Answer (52)	Percentage
pass away	figurative	45	86.54
get away	literal	44	84.62
think back	literal	41	78.85
call off	figurative	40	76.92
go up	literal	37	71.15
go off	figurative	33	63.46
think over	literal	30	57.69
put off	figurative	28	53.85
let down	figurative	28	53.85
hand in	literal	26	50.00
give up	figurative	20	38.46
turn down	figurative	19	36.54
fill out	literal	16	30.77
look into	figurative	14	26.92
run after	literal	12	23.08
put together	literal	12	23.08
leave out	literal	10	19.23
bring up	figurative	9	17.31
take after	figurative	9	17.31
hand over	literal	6	11.54
		479	

## 5.2 Preference Assessment Task and Translation Task

The findings from the research indicated that the participants preferred using single-word equivalents to phrasal verbs. Out of 479 times of the possibility of using phrasal verbs, the participants chose single-word verbs 256 times, which was calculated as 53.44%. They used phrasal verbs 223 times, which was only 46.56%. The results can be seen from Table 3.

**Table 3. The frequency and percentages that phrasal verbs and single-word verbs were used**

Preference	Frequency	Percentage
Single-word verbs	256/479	53.44
Phrasal verbs	223/479	46.56

Table 4 illustrates the number and the percentages of the participants who tended to avoid using phrasal verbs in the study. The total number of each phrasal verb was different depending on the number of the participants who answered each test item correctly in the comprehension task.

**Table 4. The number and percentages of the most avoided phrasal verbs**

Phrasal Verbs	Type of PV	Number of Items	Percentage
go off	figurative	26/33	78.79
let down	figurative	21/28	75.00
turn down	figurative	14/19	73.68
give up	figurative	14/20	70.00
fill out	literal	11/16	68.75
think back	literal	27/41	65.85

Phrasal Verbs	Type of PV	Number of Items	Percentage
hand in	literal	17/26	65.38
leave out	literal	6/10	60.00
look into	figurative	8/14	57.14
run after	literal	6/12	50.00
go up	literal	18/37	48.65
get away	literal	21/44	47.73
put off	figurative	12/28	42.86
call off	figurative	16/40	40.00
think over	literal	12/30	40.00
pass away	figurative	15/45	33.33
put together	literal	4/12	33.33
bring up	figurative	3/9	33.33
take after	figurative	3/9	33.33
hand over	literal	2/6	33.33

There were 8 phrasal verbs that the participants avoided using by more than 60%. As predicted, the first four phrasal verbs that got the highest rate of avoidance were phrasal verbs with figurative meanings. The most avoided phrasal verb was ‘go off’ at the rate of 78.79%. The second most avoided phrasal verb was ‘let down’, 75%. Thirdly, the phrasal verb ‘turn down’ was avoided at the rate of 73.68%. Fourthly, the phrasal verb ‘give up’ was avoided at the rate of 70%. The other four phrasal verbs were literal phrasal verbs, ‘fill out’, ‘think back’, ‘hand in’, and ‘leave out’, with the rates of 68.75%, 65.85%, 65.38%, and 60% respectively. The rest of the phrasal verbs, both figurative and literal, were avoided at the rate of less than 60% as presented in Table 3.

**Table 5. The number and percentage of the avoidance of literal and figurative phrasal verbs**

Preference	Frequency of avoidance	Percentage of avoidance
Literal phrasal verb	124/234	52.99
Figurative phrasal verb	132/245	53.88

Table 5 shows the frequency of the avoidance of the two types of phrasal verbs. The possibility of using literal phrasal verbs was 234 times whereas that of figurative phrasal verbs was 245 times. As seen in Table 5, the phrasal verbs with figurative meanings were avoided at the rate of 53.88% while the rate of avoidance of the phrasal verbs with literal meanings was 52.99%.

To summarize so far, the findings of the study correlated with Schachter's claim (1974) that avoidance results from the differences between the learner's native language and second language. The results confirmed the first hypothesis that L1 Thai learners would prefer using single-word equivalents to phrasal verbs due to the non-existence of phrasal verbs in the Thai language. As suggested by a number of researchers (Laufer 2000; Liao and Fukuya 2004; Ghabanchi and Goudarzi 2012; Bjers and Massicotte 2015; El-Dakhs 2015; Pawachalotorn 2015), the evidence of this present study pointed to the claim that L2 learners are likely to avoid using the target language structures that do not exist in their mother tongue. The results were also in line with those of the investigation of avoidance of phrasal verbs by learners of various linguistic backgrounds (Liao and Fukuya 2004; Saiya 2011; Ghabanchi and Goudarzi 2012; El-Dakhs 2015; Pawachalotorn 2015).

The evidence from the investigation partially confirmed the second hypothesis that L1 Thai learners would avoid figurative phrasal verbs more than literal ones due to their figurative meanings. Even though the percentages of the avoidance behavior of literal and figurative phrasal verbs were very close (i.e. 52.99% and 53.88%, respectively), as seen in Table 4, the four most avoided phrasal verbs were the figurative ones, starting with ‘go off’, ‘let down’, ‘turn down’, and ‘give up’, respectively. All of them were avoided at quite high rates – between 70% and 78.79%. The next four items were literal phrasal verbs, all of which were avoided at lower rates, i.e. under 70%. This study lent support to previous findings in the literature (Saiya 2011; Ghabanchi and Goudarzi 2012; Pawachalotorn 2015) that the semantic complexity of phrasal verbs plays a vital role in the avoidance behavior (See 2.3 English Phrasal Verbs). All of the aforementioned studies reported that avoidance was more evident with figurative phrasal verbs. It was presumed that the semantic complexity of phrasal verbs led to the avoidance behavior of L2 learners.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study aimed at investigating the avoidance behavior of the use of phrasal verbs by L1 Thai learners. The findings indicated that the differences between the mother tongue and the target language cause the avoidance behavior of L2 learners in using a particular target language structure. In addition, semantic complexity seemed to be one factor that leads to a greater degree of L2 learners’ avoidance.

In this present study, the tasks for the investigation were all written elicitation tasks. Due to the limitations in terms of the nature of the task and the participants' level of proficiency, there is still room for further research. Further studies might include an oral elicitation task and an interview to obtain deeper understanding of the reasons behind the participants' avoidance or the non-avoidance of phrasal verbs. In addition, further studies may compare the performance of participants of different English proficiency levels to see whether the proficiency level has an impact towards the avoidance behavior.

Phrasal verbs are considered to be one of the most problematic features in English. Yet they are important because they are commonly used by English speakers. Phrasal verbs are one of the keys to getting learners to achieve near native-like competence. However, Thai classrooms do not provide much emphasis on phrasal verbs despite their importance. English phrasal verbs are believed to be “an informal register and are colloquial in nature” (Liao and Fukuya 2004, 81). This attitude towards phrasal verbs may lead to the marginalization of lessons on phrasal verbs in Thai classrooms which are known to be traditional, and textbook-reliant. English teachers should put more emphasis on phrasal verbs as it can help improve learners' competence in English. For example, they may set up some activities to point out the meaning of each phrasal verb by grouping phrasal verbs by the participles (i.e. prepositions) or the verbs. The teacher may also introduce to the students some video clips or excerpts from movies that contain the use of phrasal verbs, or some that show how phrasal verbs are used in different contexts.

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The translation of the proficiency scale table is presented in the table below.

National Institute of Educational Testing Service's Ranges of Scores for Grade 12 Academic Year 2014									
Proficiency levels	Scores	Ranges of scores							
		Thai	Math	Science	Social Study	Physical Education	Art	Occupations and Technology	English
High-advanced	4.00	83.50-100.00	85.00-100.00	82.00-100.00	73.00-100.00	82.00-100.00	71.00-100.00	78.00-100.00	85.00-100.00
Advanced	3.50	71.50-83.49	68.00-84.99	70.00-81.99	64.00-72.99	72.00-81.99	62.00-70.99	68.00-77.99	70.00-84.99
Low-advanced	3.00	60.00-71.49	54.00-67.99	59.00-69.99	55.00-63.99	61.00-71.99	53.00-61.99	58.00-67.99	56.00-69.99
High-intermediate	2.50	48.00-59.99	38.00-53.99	47.00-58.99	46.00-54.99	51.00-60.99	45.00-52.99	48.00-57.99	41.00-55.99
Intermediate	2.00	36.00-47.99	24.00-37.99	36.00-46.99	37.00-45.99	40.00-50.99	36.00-44.99	38.00-47.99	27.00-40.99
Low-intermediate	1.50	20.01-35.99	7.00-23.99	24.00-35.99	28.00-36.99	21.00-39.99	27.00-35.99	20.01-37.99	12.00-26.99
High-beginner	1.00	10.01-20.00	4.00-6.99	10.01-23.99	10.01-27.99	10.01-20.99	10.01-26.99	10.01-20.00	6.00-11.99
Beginner	0.00	0.00-10.00	0.00-3.99	0.00-10.00	0.00-10.00	0.00-10.00	0.00-10.00	0.00-10.00	0.00-5.99

\* This infographic was obtained from Miss Saowanit Kittinanon, an officer of measurement and evaluation department, National Institute of Educational Testing Service, Thailand.

## Appendix B

### Comprehension Task

**Directions:** There are 20 items given in the test. Every item contains a phrasal verb in bold. Four answer choices are given below each item. Circle the choice that you think is a synonym (a word that has the same meaning) of the bolded phrasal verb.

1. The police officer **ran after** the shoplifters but he couldn't catch them because they were too fast.

- (A) followed      (B) chased      (C) seized      (D) found

2. Alfred **handed over** the sealed letter to his son and told him to give it to his teacher.

- (A) threw      (B) sent      (C) passed      (D) hid

3. After having gotten into a serious fight with his dad, Mike decided to pack his stuff and **get away** from home.

- (A) hide      (B) leave      (C) move      (D) emigrate

4. If you want to get a UK visa, you'll have to **fill out** an online application form on their website and make an appointment to submit all your documents at the UK embassy.

- (A) write      (B) type      (C) complete      (D) download

5. Yesterday was a tragedy. After the bomb **went off**, we heard lots of people screaming and shouting.

- (A) exploited      (B) extracted      (C) exclaimed      (D) exploded

6. I lost my wallet last week. My sister asked me where I last saw it but I can't **think back** that far.

- (A) reminisce            (B) return            (C) remember    (D) rerun

7. Alan **takes after** his mom in personality, but he looks more like his dad.

- (A) likes                (B) looks            (C) resembles    (D) copies

8. Gilly told her lawyer about how the hotel had overcharged her, and he said he would **look into** her case as soon as possible.

- (A) investigate        (B) check            (C) revise            (D) read

9. I have **put together** the useful comments on the workshop to improve my project.

- (A) used            (B) remembered        (C) gathered        (D) selected

10. Greg didn't get good grades last semester because he didn't **hand in** the assignments on time.

- (A) prepare            (B) submit            (C) restrain            (D) rearrange

11. Due to the flood, we will have to **put off** the meeting until next week.

- (A) prepare            (B) postpone        (C) restrain            (D) rearrange

12. When you write a summary of a newspaper article, you should provide the essential information and **leave out** minor details.

- (A) omit                (B) kill                (C) surrender        (D) dissatisfy

13. Cynthia suffers from obesity because she loves junk food so much that she eats it every day. Her doctor said if she wants to lose weight, she needs to **give up** her eating habit.

- (A) stabilize            (B) diminish        (C) quit                (D) release

14. At the last minute, Jennifer **called off** the wedding. Everybody was shocked. I don't know what was in her mind.

- (A) destroyed            (B) stopped            (C) cancelled            (D) quitted

15. Jack had difficulty adjusting to life on his own after his wife **passed away**.

- (A) left                    (B) died                    (C) moved                    (D) migrated

16. NBA players **turned down** the latest contract from owners because of an unacceptable proposal.

- (A) refused                    (B) cancelled                    (C) tore                    (D) burned

17. I recommend to you the latest book of J.K. Rowling. I enjoyed it so much. I'm sure you won't be **let down** if you read it!

- (A) sad                    (B) bored                    (C) disappointed (D) annoyed

18. If the economy is in a period of inflation, prices and incomes are **going up**.

- (A) inversing                    (B) stabilizing                    (C) decreasing                    (D) increasing

19. Freya is an amazing woman. She **brought up** four children on her own after her husband abandoned them.

- (A) took care of                    (B) raised                    (C) funded                    (D) supported

20. I just got a bachelor's degree last month. My parents want me to continue studying for a master's degree immediately, but I will have to **think over** whether to study in the US or Canada.

- (A) manage                    (B) solve                    (C) consider                    (D) imagine

## Appendix C

### Preference Assessment Task

**Directions:** There are 10 items with a word or a phrase missing. Two choices are given for each item. Please note that both choices are correct. Circle the choice that you prefer. You have 10 minutes to complete the task.

1. My dog is obsessed with squirrels. He \_\_\_\_\_ squirrels every day. Yesterday he nearly got hit by a car!

(A) chases

(B) runs after

2. My van was stolen last month. The police said that they have been \_\_\_\_\_ the matter. I wonder how much longer I have to wait.

(A) investigating

(B) looking into

3. My house got robbed last Saturday night. The thief \_\_\_\_\_ with two jewelry boxes and a laptop.

(A) left

(B) got away

4. A woman may \_\_\_\_\_ work when her children are born and stay at home to take care of them until they are old enough to go to school.

(A) quit

(B) give up

5. I don't like \_\_\_\_\_ questionnaires or survey booklets. Some statements are so long that I don't want to read them.

(A) completing

(B) filling out

6. We'd like to help him with his financial problem, but he always \_\_\_\_\_ our offers of help.



## Appendix D

### Translation Task

**Directions:** There are 10 items with a word or a phrase missing. The Thai translation of the missing word or phrase is presented for each item. Two choices are given below for you to choose one that you think is most appropriate for the sentence.

1. Let's \_\_\_\_\_ our trip to the countryside until the weather improves.

(เลื่อน)

(A) postpone

(B) put off

2. You must \_\_\_\_\_ a report for this experiment at the beginning of your next laboratory meeting. (ส่ง)

(A) submit

(B) hand in

3. In sport games, a referee has sole responsibility for judging whether a pitch is playable. If the weather is foul, the referee may \_\_\_\_\_ the match to ensure the safety of the players. (ยกเลิก)

(A) cancel

(B) call off

4. Shiloh was carrying some powerful fireworks and they suddenly \_\_\_\_\_. She got a severe burn on her right hand. (ระเบิด)

(A) exploded

(B) went off

5. After the thief had entered the bank, he pointed his gun at the teller and told her to \_\_\_\_\_ the money to him. (ยื่นให้)

(A) pass

(B) hand over

6. Today will be the last opportunity for the students to be measured for caps and gowns before the price \_\_\_\_\_. (ขึ้น)  
(A) increases (B) goes up
7. My grandfather was very devoted to my grandmother, and missed her enormously when she \_\_\_\_\_. (เสียชีวิต)  
(A) died (B) passed away
8. The school is over! Mary and I usually go to the beach, but now we are quite bored of simple sun, sea and sand. We have to \_\_\_\_\_ where our destination will be this holiday. (พิจารณา)  
(A) consider (B) think over
9. Phillip was really upset about his last game. He felt that he had \_\_\_\_\_ his teammates when he missed the penalty. (ทำให้ผิดหวัง)  
(A) disappointed (B) let down
10. We got the model of the space shuttle in pieces. We had to \_\_\_\_\_ all pieces and connect them with the special glue they gave us. (รวบรวม)  
(A) gather (B) put together