

SEPARABLE ENGLISH PHRASAL VERBS: A COMPARISON OF L1 ENGLISH  
SPEAKERS AND L1 SPANISH SPEAKERS OF L2 ENGLISH

by

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## **Abstract**

How to teach phrasal verbs to L2 learners of English has been the subject of debate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) courses and materials alike. These multi-part verbs, consisting of a verb and one or more particles, convey a new lexical meaning different from their individual parts. Further complicating this is the fact that some transitive phrasal verbs can be separated from their particles to varying degrees by a direct object. Though variables affecting verb-particle separation lie below the level of consciousness for most native speakers, they make the acquisition of particle placement difficult for L2 English language learners. Additionally, the presentation of these verbs in EFL textbooks and university English language programs (ELPs) is inadequate. TEFL textbooks tend to place emphasis on the lexical acquisition of phrasal verbs, ignoring separable versus non-separable distinctions. However, native English speakers separate phrasal verbs from their particles about 66.5% of the time in spoken conversation.

In order to determine whether traditional textbook problems associated with phrasal verb presentation persist, I analyzed eleven TEFL textbooks used in Kansas State University's ELP. I also administered a grammaticality judgment survey in order to find out whether L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English view separation of transitive phrasal verbs and their particles to be grammatical. L1 Spanish Speakers of L2 English are disadvantaged by the fact that their native language is verb-framed, meaning that it does not make use of particles in the same way that English does. It is for this reason that native Spanish-speakers of L2 English constitute the experimental group in this study.

The results of the TEFL textbook analysis reveal that none of the eleven textbooks analyzed could stand alone in the classroom to effectively teach phrasal verbs. The results of the grammaticality judgment survey show that L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English differ at a statistically significant level from L1 American English speakers in their acceptability of phrasal verb-particle separation. These findings have pedagogical implications for TEFL instructors, textbook writers, and English language programs, and demonstrate the need for more extensive and authentic phrasal verb instruction.

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# Separable English phrasal verbs: A comparison of L1 English speakers and L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 General Introduction

English phrasal verbs contain a verb and particle(s) (a preposition, an adverb, or both), making them verbs that consist of two to three parts. This is exemplified in the English phrasal verb *point out*. The addition of the particle gives the verb a new meaning that is different from the individual meanings of each separate word; thus, the verb and its particle(s) function together as one lexical item. Phrasal verbs can be intransitive, meaning they do not take a direct object, as with the phrasal verb *sat down* in example 1. However, they can also be transitive, meaning that they can take a direct object, as with the phrasal verb *call off* in example 2.

(1) *I sat down.*

(2) *Her fiancé called off the engagement.*

Further complicating this paradigm is the fact that some transitive phrasal verbs can be separated from their particles to varying degrees by a direct object (britishcouncil.org, 2015; Brizee, 2010; Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2015; COCA; Davies, 2008-; Sansome, 2000). Considering again the transitive phrasal verb *call off* in example 2 above, this principle of separability is demonstrated. *Call off* is not separated in example 2: the verb is followed by its particle, which is subsequently followed by the direct object *engagement*. Now consider the subsequent example from the Corpus of Contemporary American English, or COCA (Davies 2008-):

(3) *Let's call the war off.*

Here *call* is separated from its particle by the direct object *the war*, which is also grammatically acceptable.

Native speakers of English use both separated and non-separated phrasal verb constructions in spoken language, but sometimes do not separate transitive phrasal verbs in written language due to prescriptive notions taught in schools; for example, the long-held belief that one should not end a sentence in a preposition. However, this does not change the fact that native speakers of English are able to appropriately separate particles from phrasal verbs; that is, they are able to effectively separate the right transitive phrasal verbs with objects consisting of several different words or morphemes with the result that the communication is still “natural.” They are able to do this without conscious or explicit knowledge of the different conditions affecting verb-particle separation. The same cannot be said for L2 learners of English, for whom the acquisition of separable phrasal verbs is fraught with difficulty: not only are the meanings of separable phrasal verbs and degrees of acceptable separation complex and not easily intuited, but they are also inadequately addressed in TEFL textbooks and classes. L2 English learners who speak satellite-framed L1s, especially Germanic languages, seem to struggle less due to the fact that particle usage is fundamental to their native languages. However, learners from verb-framed L1 backgrounds do not make use of particles in the same way and thus experience less positive L1 transfer. Spanish belongs to the latter camp, and also constitutes a significant language group represented in American university English language programs. It is for these reasons that the comparison of separable transitive phrasal verbs between L1 American English speakers and L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English will be the specific object of this study.

## 1.2 Previous Studies

English is a satellite-framed language, meaning that it includes manner of motion in the verb itself and encodes path of motion separately in the form of a “satellite” or particle. Conversely, verb-framed languages such as Spanish encode path into verbs themselves and do not need an extra particle to form new lexical meaning (Rojo and Valenzuela, 2005; Slobin, 1996). Though particle verb construction (PVC) is typical of Germanic languages and other satellite-framed languages, Dehé (2005) points out that English’s allowance of multiple different particle placement orders is relatively unique. In German, the particle is obligatorily separated from its phrasal verb, meaning that there is no German equivalent for the continuous verb-particle-object (VPO) order found in English. This means that the word ordering found in example 4 would be acceptable in German because the phrasal verb *look* is separated from its particle *up*. However, example 5 would not be grammatically permitted because *look up* is not separated.

(4) *Ich schlage das Wort nach.*

[I (‘ll) look the word up.]

(5) \**Ich schlage nach das (dem) Wort.*

[I (‘ll) look up the word.]

Why do native English speakers make use of two acceptable verb-particle orders, VPO as well as VOP, while other Germanic languages do not? And are these two variants interchangeable or up to personal choice?

Dehé (2002) argues that they are not, stating that prosodic, syntactic, and morphosyntactic conditions all play a crucial role in the placement of an object either before or after the particle in a phrasal verb (De Cesare, 2005; Dehé, 2005). More

specifically, these conditions include whether the complement represents new information or if it refers to something that the speaker or writer already knows. Continuous word order is more often realized when the complement represents new information and discontinuous order, i.e. separation, is typically used when the object is known. Additionally, whether the particle or the object constitutes the focus domain will affect subsequent placement. The focus domain receives intonational or phonological stress, i.e. the syntactic focus feature corresponds to phonological prominence at the end of the sentence or phrase. This affects whether the particle or the object will be in sentence- or phrase-final position depending upon which the speaker/writer wants to stress (Dehé, 2000; 2002).

Gries (2003, 2011) too demonstrates that there are contextually dependent factors that influence particle placement. He found that the likelihood of VPO word order increases with phonologically long or contrastively stressed direct objects (similar to Dehé's [2000, 2002] findings), syntactically complex variables and indefinite determiners, non-spatial verb-particle meanings, new direct object referents (again supporting Dehé [2000, 2002]), and abstract object referents. Thus, we would imagine that native English speakers would find example sentence 6 to be more acceptable than example sentence 7 due to the syntactic complexity and phonological length of the given object, the non-spatial quality of the phrasal verb *give up*, and other contextual factors that are not present here. That is to say, these sentences would naturally be produced in a given context rather than in isolation, and so would accrue other contextually based variables affecting the acceptability of verb-particle separation.

(6) *Elena gave up trying to learn Russian in the classroom.*

(7) *Elena gave trying to learn Russian in the classroom up.*

Other researchers have found additional factors to be significant predictors of particle placement, such as rhythmic alternation, which posits that language users create strong and weak beats by adjusting stress patterns on words (Kelly, 1998; Schlüter, 2003), and discourse priming, which states that the occurrence of a given structure increases the likelihood of that structure later on in the discourse (Gries, 2005). However, these are not central to the foci of this study.

It is thus clear that verb-particle placement is not arbitrary. However, the linguistic factors affecting VPO or VOP word order lie below the level of consciousness for the average English speaker. Dehé (2000) and Peters (2001) found that adult native speakers more frequently produce continuous VPO word order when asked to create phrasal verb constructions, i.e. they do not separate the verb and its particle. This can easily be corroborated by a simple frequency search in Davies's (2008-) COCA, with the caveat that much of the COCA's natural data consists of written sources and not spoken/conversational language. For example: a COCA search of non-separated [*call*] *off*, accounting for all tenses of the lemma *call* (*called*, *calling*, etc.) by way of brackets, yields 776 tokens. The summation of separated constructions [*call*] \* *off*, [*call*] \* \* *off*, and [*call*] \* \* \* *off*, with each asterisk representing one word or degree of verb-particle separation, is 482 tokens. Thus, the tokens of these three separated versions combined are still less than two thirds of the instances of non-separated [*call*] *off*, which suggests VPO preference among adult speakers. However, Dehé's (2001, 2002) claim that English VOP word order is derived from VPO word order, which she calls the "neutral" or unmarked order, must be considered somewhat problematic. This is because subjects were asked to

make phrasal verb constructions in essentially context-free situations. The frequencies of those results were then said to be representative of naturally produced language, which is never devoid of context (De Cesare, 2005).

Gries (2011) also acknowledges the tendency for adults to construct continuous VPO word order more frequently in experimental studies. However, this too is complicated because these studies largely involve written language. In his corpus-based approach, Gries (2003) shows that while continuous VPO order is preferred in written language 62.56% of the time, the opposite is true of spoken language. Here discontinuous VOP order is preferred 66.5% of the time. This is corroborated by Diessel and Tomasello (2005). Thus, register plays an important role in the separation of transitive phrasal verbs.

Interestingly enough, the idea that adults prefer continuous VPO word order contrasts with results on L1 child acquisition of English phrasal verbs. The children in Diessel and Tomasello's (2005) study separated phrasal verbs and their particles 93.5% of the time, data that was reanalyzed by Gries (2011) who found this number to account for 95% of all of the children's constructions. Diessel and Tomasello (2005) coded all verb particle constructions (VPCs) for six different variables: complexity, noun phrase (NP) type, length, and definiteness of the object, as well as the presence of a directional adverbial and the particle's meaning. They found that verb-particle separation prefers "short, simple, pronominal, or definite direct objects in constructions with spatial meanings" (Gries, 2011, p. 238).

Though similar to Gries's (2003) findings, Diessel and Tomasello's (2005) results differ slightly. While a wide variety of factors are associated with particle positioning for adults, just two were statistically significant in their findings on early child language: NP

type of the direct object (definite, pronominal and short objects favor separation) and particle meaning (spatial meanings prefer separation). This is not surprising considering children's tendency to talk about things that are cognitively imaginable, highly salient, and relevant to them, something shown empirically by Gries (2011). He states that this also makes sense due to the fact that the majority of a child's input is in the form of spoken language, and spoken language prefers discontinuous VOP word order. However, Diessel and Tomasello (2005) caution against the interpretation of this fact as evidence of simple rote-learning: though an analysis of the children's mothers' VPC constructions yielded similar results to the children's, they did not find one instance of direct or rote imitation. So exactly when and how does a child realize that a given phrasal verb can be used in both separated and non-separated constructions? This is a question for longitudinal research on child L1 acquisition and, though interesting, will not be the focus of this study.

Previous research thus demonstrates that descriptive analysis of the use of separable phrasal verbs by native English speakers and the linguistic factors governing this usage have been well documented. Native L1 acquisition of particle usage has also been studied, but to a far lesser degree. Evidence suggests that children's L1 particle ordering is primarily a lexically-based process that eventually develops to account for higher processing strategies and cognitive abilities: in other words, as cognition develops, the ability to comprehend and map more abstract or complex object variables increases (Molineaux, 2011). Neurophysiological evidence also supports the idea that phrasal verbs are acquired and function as lexical items rather than syntactic items: though they are

multi-word in nature and can be separated, they are stored as lexical chunks and are retrieved as wholes rather than discontinuous syntactic elements (Cappelle et al., 2010).

In contrast to L1 acquisition, L2 learners of English, especially teenage and adult language learners, acquire phrasal verbs in a very different manner than English-speaking children. However, very little research has been conducted in regards to L2 acquisition of English particle placement (Gries, 2011). Rong-Rong (2001) found that Japanese university EFL students had trouble distinguishing prepositional verbs, as found in example 8, from phrasal verbs, as found in example 9.

(8) *He* [<sub>vp</sub> *ran*] [<sub>pp</sub> *up the hill*].

(9) *He* [<sub>vp</sub> *ran up*] [<sub>np</sub> *the bill*].

In example 8, *up* functions as a preposition separate from the verb. *Ran* stands on its own to describe what *he* did, and *up* tells listeners that he physically moved up a hill (*hill* being the object of the preposition). Though *up the hill* provides more detail as to where he ran, it is not grammatically necessary: the sentence could stand as *He ran*. On the other hand, phrasal verbs cannot be separated if the sentence is to retain the same lexical meaning. In example 9, the subject is not actually running nor is he physically moving upward. Rather, *ran up* functions as a phrasal verb to mean something entirely different: that he spent a lot of money quickly. *The bill* is not the object of the preposition: there is no prepositional phrase in this sentence. Instead, it is the complement or direct object of the verb *ran up*. *Ran* cannot stand alone in this sentence if it is to retain its new phrasal verb meaning: it must co-occur with *up*.

In the case of Rong-Rong's (2001) study, it is not entirely surprising that Japanese students struggled with this distinction due to the fact that, as reported by the author,



many of their grammar books lump prepositional and phrasal verbs together into one category called “group verbs.” They also encourage students to “leave the preposition at the end of the sentence” in the case of these verbs (Rong-Rong, 2001), which interestingly contrasts with the prescriptive rule often given to L1 speakers that a sentence should not end in a preposition. Rong-Rong’s (2001) findings are particularly relevant because the current study compares native English speakers with L1 Spanish speakers. Japanese, while not a romance language, shares with Spanish the quality of being a verb-framed language (Alejo-González, 2010). Other studies have shown that L2 English learners with incongruent L1 systems underuse phrasal verbs in comparison to native speakers or avoid them altogether for fear of making errors, even at more advanced levels of language learning (Alejo-González, 2010; Laufer and Eliasson, 1993). It is safe to suggest that Spanish belongs to this group of incongruent L1 systems due to the fact that it is a verb-framed language, whereas English is a satellite-framed language. As previously stated, satellite-framed languages incorporate manner of motion into the verb and encode path separately in the form of a satellite. Conversely, verb-framed languages encode path into verbs themselves and do not need an extra particle to form new lexical meaning (Rojo and Valenzuela, 2005; Slobin, 1996). Spanish EFL students, like Rong-Rong’s (2001) Japanese EFL students, might then experience negative transfer when learning the satellite-framed language system of English.

For example, *to look for* in Spanish is just one word: *buscar*. To add a preposition after the verb *buscar* would be ungrammatical in Spanish because it already includes “for” in its meaning. However, the omission of the particle *for* after *look* in English would result in the possible sentence found in example 10.

(10) \**I looked the student.*

Native English speakers would be confused by this, wondering whether their interlocutor meant that he/she looked up the student (in a directory, perhaps), at the student, or for the student. Without the inclusion of the particle *for*, example 10 is both ungrammatical and ambiguous. Another example can be seen in the English phrasal verb *go up*, as in *go up the stairs*. To *go up* is just one word in Spanish: *subir*. Thus, the Spanish translation of the English phrase *go up the stairs* would be *subir las escaleras*, which is one word less than its English equivalent. These examples demonstrate that phrasal verbs do not translate in the exact same way from English to Spanish.

Alejo-González (2010) compared the use of *out*-phrasal verbs by English language learners of verb-framed L1s and satellite-framed L1s (both Germanic and non-Germanic satellite-framed languages). He found that EFL students with satellite-framed L1s used more English *out*-PV tokens than did the students with verb-framed L1s. More specifically, Germanic languages used 60% more *out*-PV tokens while non-Germanic languages used 30% more *out*-PV tokens. Additionally, native speakers used double the amount of *out*-PV tokens and triple the amount *out*-PV types than did learners with verb-framed L1s. Though this study examined just one group of phrasal verbs, it demonstrates the disadvantage for L1 Spanish speakers (and speakers of verb-framed L1s in general) trying to acquire English phrasal verbs, especially in comparison to learners with satellite-framed L1s. In addition to the acquisition of these new English particles themselves, L1 Spanish speakers face the task of deciding whether to place them before or after the object. Part of the problem in acquiring “native-like” phrasal verb particle placement lies in the fact that the presentation of phrasal verbs in EFL textbooks is

simply inadequate, according to Sansome (2000) and Side (1990). If they are introduced at all, separable versus non-separable distinctions are rarely explored. Moreover, the subject of how best to teach them is still debated (Mart, 2012; Sansome, 2000).

Part of what makes this teaching challenging is that the meanings of phrasal verbs often cannot be understood from the separate definitions of the verb and particle (prepositions are incredibly polysemous in and of themselves). Thus, EFL programs tend to place emphasis on the lexical acquisition of phrasal verbs, ignoring separable versus non-separable and even transitive versus intransitive distinctions in order to avoid further complicating this already difficult language-learning task. Textbooks too reflect this ideology: even if phrasal verbs are explicitly presented, separable versus non-separable distinctions are rarely explored, probably in part due to the fact that there still exists debate surrounding how best to teach them (Mart, 2012). Though separable phrasal verbs can but do not necessarily have to be separated, non-separable phrasal verbs can never be separated by an object. Consider the non-separable phrasal verb *care for* in examples 11 and 12:

(11) *I care for my brother a lot.*

(12) *\*I care my brother a lot for.*

Example 12 is ungrammatical because *care for* belongs to a group of phrasal verbs that can never be separated by a complement.

Side (1990) perfectly summarizes the traditional approach to teaching phrasal verbs for those with little exposure to an EFL classroom or textbooks:

The traditional treatment of phrasal verbs in course books is exemplified in Sue O'Connell's 'Focus on First Certificate' (1987: 27), where a list of phrasal verbs

using 'put' is given, together with a definition and an example for each one. Students are recommended to learn this by heart. In Coles and Lord's 'Open Road' (1978: 66) students have to match the phrasal verbs with the definitions at the beginning of the exercise... Again, the phrasal verbs are listed according to the verb – eight examples with 'pick,' eight with 'look,' etc.

(Side, 1990, p.144)

One problem with this approach (in addition to many others) is that there often exists confusion among learners as to whether verbs are transitive or intransitive and, if they are transitive, whether or not the particles can be separated from their verbs. This is a distinction that Side (1990) maintains is necessary to make.

Sansome (2000) too echoes frustration with the lack of phrasal verb patterns presented in EFL textbooks, a concept that applies not only to verb-particle combinations but also to the idea that patterns underlie verb-particle separation, too. In analyzing Acklam's Help with Phrasal Verbs (1992) textbook, she specifically states: "the great pity is that each phrasal verb is glossed and treated in isolation so that any systematicity is completely concealed" (para. 15). Though there now exist dictionaries that include phrasal verb lists and present sample sentences (*Longman, Collins, and Oxford* to name a few), these too lack patterns and contextualization outside of a couple of key examples, and are supplementary resources for students rather than required class textbooks (Yorkey, 1997).

Prosser (2010) predicts that part of students' confusion with phrasal verbs has to do with transitive versus intransitive and separable versus non-separable categorizations. EFL textbook activities do little to elucidate these groupings because they typically

consist of mechanical fill-in-the-gap sentences and definition matching tasks that control for much variation. He goes on to say that instructors should create dialogues and stories for students to use if the course textbook lacks valuable content, which is echoed by many instructors and EFL websites, blogs, and articles (Sansome (2000), [www.teach-this.com](http://www.teach-this.com), and [www.teachingenglish.org](http://www.teachingenglish.org), just to name a few). This suggests that a lack of beneficial phrasal verb content in course texts is a prevalent challenge faced by EFL teachers. Because of traditional yet insufficient ways of presenting phrasal verbs, students may be able to detect PV items from a list but are unable to use or recognize these same phrasal verbs in actual interactions with native speakers (Mart, 2012).

Thus, the previous literature begs several questions:

R1: Do traditional problems associated with phrasal verb presentation persist in contemporary TEFL textbooks used by university English language programs?

R2: Do L1 Spanish speakers learning English as an L2 view separation of the verb and particle in transitive phrasal verbs to be grammatical?

R3: Do their grammaticality judgments mimic what is frequently modeled in TEFL textbooks, which almost always present phrasal verbs as non-separable or in non-separated contexts? Or do they mimic native English speakers to whom they have exposure (usage is variable, but VOP discontinuous constructions are more frequent in spoken contexts)?

These are the research questions, left largely untouched in previous literature, that this study aims to address.

## **2 Data and Methods**

### **2.1 TEFL Textbook Analysis**

In order to verify whether traditionally problematic phrasal verb instruction is still present among contemporary Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) textbooks, I examined eleven textbooks that are used or have been used in the Kansas State University (K-State) English Language Program (ELP) within the past year. This textbook analysis was necessary in order to verify the types of academic instruction L1 Spanish speakers are receiving so that comparisons between their formal input and grammaticality judgments can be made. Not only was K-State's program selected due to the fact that I have direct access to ELP staff and materials as a current student, but it was also recognized in 2013 as the only university English language program in the nation to be granted a 10-year accreditation by the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation, or CEA (Pyle, 2013). This is the longest accreditation period available and is reserved for the best programs in the country. Thus, the textbook selections, staffing, and program structure of Kansas State University's ELP can be said to be representative of the best types of U.S. English language programs with the longest national accreditations.

The eleven textbooks reviewed were selected after interviewing the Curriculum and Assessment Director of Kansas State's ELP. Because the ELP does not explicitly introduce phrasal verbs until the lower intermediate levels (DAS sections 138-140), touching on them intermittently throughout the intermediate-upper intermediate levels (DAS 142-152), she recommended that I examine the textbooks applicable to these levels

because they would most likely contain phrasal verb instruction. These texts, which I analyzed for this study, are as follows:

1. Azar and Hagen's (2002) Fundamentals of English Grammar: Workbook (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)
2. Azar and Hagen's (2009) Understanding and Using English Grammar (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.)
3. Bland's (2012) Grammar Sense 4: Student Book with Online Practice Access Code Card (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)
4. Blass et al.'s (2012) Grammar and Beyond 3: Student's Book
5. Bunting and Diniz's (2012) Grammar and Beyond 4: Student's Book B
6. Folse et al.'s (2007) Top 20: Great Grammar for Great Writing (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)
7. Jeffries and Mikulecky's (2009) Reading Power 2: Student Book (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.)
8. Jeffries and Mikulecky's (2009) Basic Reading Power 1: Extensive Reading, Vocabulary Building, Comprehension Skills, Thinking Skills (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.)
9. Jeffries and Mikulecky's (2011) More Reading Power 3: Student Book
10. Mikulecky and Jeffries's (2007) Advanced Reading Power: Extensive Reading, Vocabulary Building, Comprehension Skills, Reading Faster
11. Williams's (2007) Academic Encounters: American Studies Student's Book: Reading, Study Skills, and Writing

(A. Franchitti, personal communication, Oct 29, 2014).

In these textbooks, I looked for any mention of phrasal verbs explicitly. Even if there was not a "phrasal verb" section listed in the table of contents, I searched any related sections, including units on collocations, common phrases and idioms, and

prepositions, to find presentations of phrasal verbs. Once found, I examined the ways in which phrasal verbs were explained, where they were located within the textbook as well as within the unit or chapter, what examples were given, what practice activities followed and the ways in which these activities were sequenced, and whether or not separable versus non-separable phrasal verb distinctions were made.

## 2.2 Grammaticality Judgment Survey

In addition to the TEFL textbook review, I devised a grammaticality judgment survey to be taken by L1 American English speakers and L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English. This survey was made and distributed via Kansas State University Qualtrics, LLC. The survey consisted of 60 questions, 30 of which were test questions containing separable phrasal verbs. Gries (2011) reports that the inclusion of only separable phrasal verbs (and not all phrasal verbs, as in Diessel and Tomasello (2005)) is the most common practice among sociolinguistic circles when testing for non-phonological determinants. Thus, non-separable phrasal verbs were not included in test questions of this survey but were present in distractor questions. Distractors were included to prevent subjects from detecting test variables and regularities, and accounted for the other 30 questions or 50% of the survey. Examples 13 and 14 contain two distractor sentences used in the grammaticality judgment test.

(13) *“It’s great about Cathy being pregnant,” he said. “Jack’s over the moon about it.”*

(14) *I’ve never been one to stay out of other people’s affairs. I take my mother after in that way, I suppose.*



Tarone et al. (1994) state that there should be an equal amount of distractor items to test items in a good grammaticality judgment test, but also discuss example studies featuring 66.67% distractors (six distractor items for every four test items). Cook (1994) also used 50% distractors in one of her timed grammaticality judgment tests, but utilized just 33.33% distractor sentences in another. This type of variation is common: some studies include just 25% distractors in order to keep survey length short while others use upwards of 70-75% distractors, risking possible fatigue of participants but increasing survey strength. Similarly to Tarone (1994), Gordon (1996) and Pérez-Tattam (2011) advise an equal number of test and control or distractor items if possible. Along this same vein, I included no fewer than 50% distractors in order to avoid answer bias and pattern detection, but did not exceed this 50% in order to minimize participant fatigue that can arise from a lengthy survey. Distractor questions contained non-separable phrasal verbs and other common collocational phrases so as to seem related to the rest of the survey, but were either very obviously grammatical or very obviously ungrammatical (see examples 13 and 14).

All of the questions in the grammaticality judgment survey, whether test or distractor questions, were naturalistic. By this I mean that each was produced in a natural communicative setting and was taken from the COCA (Davies 2008-), but additional words were either added to make phrasal verb objects longer, more complex, etc. or removed to make survey questions shorter in length. Additionally, one or two words were added to the conclusion of COCA sentences ending in a particle. This was done to eliminate the probability that some participants, namely the native English speakers, might give the question a lower acceptability ranking solely due to the long-held notion

that one must not end a sentence with a preposition (the irony here being that the verb phrase particle is not acting as a preposition at all). This can be seen from survey question #12 listed in example 15 below. The underlined portion represents my addition.

(15) *He forgot to put the lid on that day.*

From an initial list of thirty-three PVs found in the TEFL textbooks analyzed in this study, the ten most frequent PVs in the COCA were selected for testing. This frequency count represented all forms or tenses of a given verb lemma (*picked, pick, and picking* from lemma [*pick*], for example). The ten separable phrasal verbs selected in this way are:

1. *give up*
2. *look up*
3. *make up*
4. *pick up*
5. *point out*
6. *put on*
7. *set up*
8. *turn around*
9. *turn on*
10. *wake up*

The phrasal verbs on the initial list, from which these most frequent ten were selected, were taken from the Kansas State ELP textbooks analyzed in this study to increase the likelihood that L2 Spanish-speaking participants would have seen the PVs before or would generally know what they mean. The aim of this study is to compare L2

Spanish speakers' acceptability rankings of different verb-particle separations with those of L1 American English speakers, not to compare whether Spanish speaking learners "know" as many phrasal verb meanings as do native English speakers. Thus, it was important to include phrasal verbs that L2 learners were more likely to have seen or heard before so that the basic lexical content of the questions might be understood by all. Three test questions were constructed for each of the ten phrasal verbs in the survey: one in which continuous VPO order was realized and two more that contained discontinuous VOP word order with varying degrees of object length, complexity, or abstractness. Some sentences with VOP realizations were made to contain objects that native speakers might deem more "awkward" or "wrong," such as in survey question #23 listed as example 16 below.

- (16) *He gave everything that his parents had worked so hard to achieve up to live like some college kid, clerking at a store, and reading his philosophy books.*

This was done purposefully in order to see whether or not L2 English speakers of L1 Spanish were as sensitive to the aforementioned factors governing verb-particle separation (object length, complexity, etc.) as one might expect the L1 English speakers to be. It also ensured that a variety of different VOP constructions were tested.

L1 American English speakers solicited to take the survey were selected as personal contacts whose phone numbers and email addresses I already possessed. However, the survey was open to the public and completely anonymous. Thus, there is no way of verifying which of these personal contacts actually took the survey or of linking any specific name with a given survey time or results. L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English

were solicited as personal contacts, as contacts of personal friends or coworkers (for example, a co-worker's boyfriend from Ecuador), and as members of the Go Teacher scholarship program at Kansas State University. This program is a partnership between Kansas State University and the Ecuadorian Government in which Ecuadorian English teachers spend one-two years on campus taking English language development and pedagogy classes. Upon completion of the Go Teacher program, they return to Ecuador to teach English. Go Teachers are native Spanish speakers who learned English as a foreign or second language, but did not grow up bilingually. This is an important distinction to make because bilinguals who acquire Spanish and English simultaneously or nearly simultaneously (before the age of three, as proposed by Montrul (2013)) actually have two L1s. Because of this, English was not acquired in the more difficult and formal classroom manner that is typically associated with older learners past the critical age of acquisition, and does not represent an L2. For this reason, simultaneous Spanish-English bilinguals were not solicited to take the grammaticality judgment test. Though the survey was public so that personal contacts could forward the link to their L2 Spanish speaking contacts (if applicable), it was set up in Qualtrics so as not to be searchable via Google or to pop up as a result of related searches. Thus, the soliciting process was highly controlled.

The grammaticality judgment survey was accessible via any wireless laptop, computer, or mobile device and could be saved and re-accessed after having been started. However, participants could not go back and change previous rankings once they clicked to progress to the next question. The first slide of the survey contained the following instructions:

*This survey takes 10-12 minutes to complete and contains 60 sentences. The purpose of this survey is to measure how acceptable the sentences sound to you. Based on your immediate reaction, indicate how acceptable each sentence sounds to you on a scale of 1 - 5 (unacceptable - very acceptable). Don't base your choice on the message of the sentence, but rather on how acceptable it is as a sentence in English.*

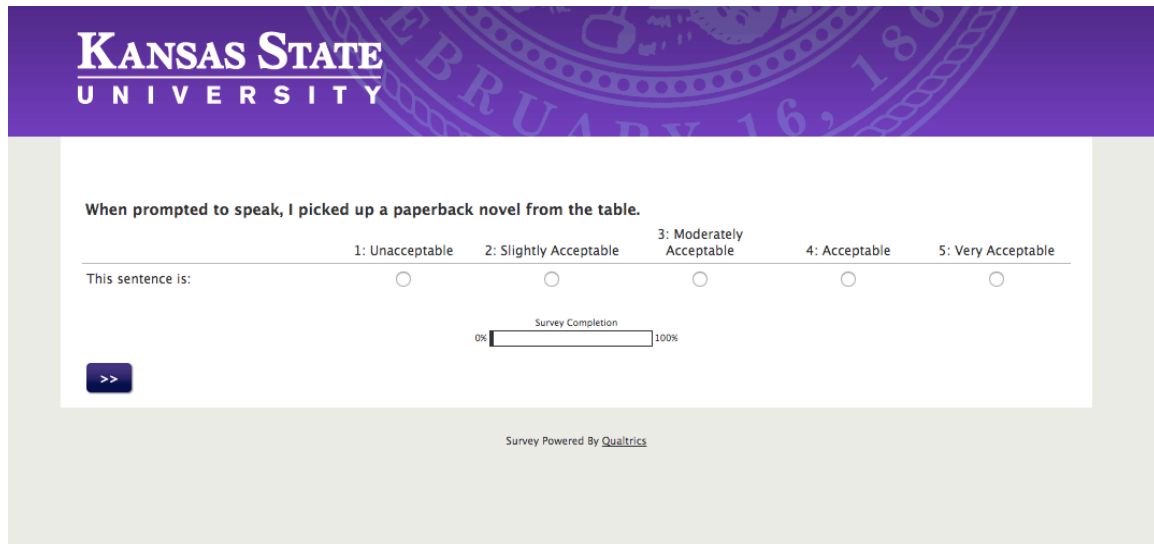
*Thank you for your time and participation.*

The second slide of the survey featured the first question, the third slide the second question, and so on until the very last slide that asked speakers to type their first or native language in a word box. This was the only way from which to distinguish the results of native Spanish speakers from native English speakers since the survey was otherwise anonymous. All of the survey questions in between the instructional slide and the final slide asking for the participant's L1 were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Participants could not select more than one acceptability rating for a given question.

Figure 1 below contains a screen shot of question #1 after having entered the survey, and is representative of the same format and Likert options of the other 59 questions.

**Figure 1. Grammaticality Judgment Survey: Question 1**



The survey was designed to take approximately 10-12 minutes to complete. This was so that respondents would not become disinterested or fatigued toward the end, which could tempt them to hurriedly click a series of answers so as to be done (resulting in less accurate or skewed results). To ensure that the survey actually reflected a 10-12 minute time commitment, I took into account predominant research showing that adults read prose text at approximately 250-300 words per minute, but proofread at 200 words per minute on paper and 180 words per minute on a computer screen (Ziefle, 1998). Assuming that the reading speed of survey participants sits at the bottom of this spectrum due to the fact that question sentences are decontextualized rather than in discourse format, are on a computer screen, and are separated by the second or two that it takes to advance slides, the survey should contain no more than 1,800 words. Even though the instructional slide poses just 79 words to subtract from this number, I wanted to air on the side of caution and placed a cap of 1,500 words on the survey. The thirty test questions total 601 words while the thirty distractor questions total 704 words, and these counts along with the instructional and final slides make the survey 1,389 words overall. These

reflect the survey's current numbers, though: prior to the final version upon which the results are based, I asked a couple of co-workers whose results I would not record to take a first version of the survey for timing purposes. This first version had a slightly higher word count and contained 62 rather than 60 questions. Both individuals took nine-eleven minutes to complete it, but I decided to omit two more questions anyway to bring the total number down to an even sixty. Based upon previous research about average reading speeds, the total word count of the revised survey (1, 389), and the completion times of the initial two pilot participants, I felt fairly confident that the grammaticality judgment survey would take 10-12 minutes on average and marketed it as such when soliciting participants.

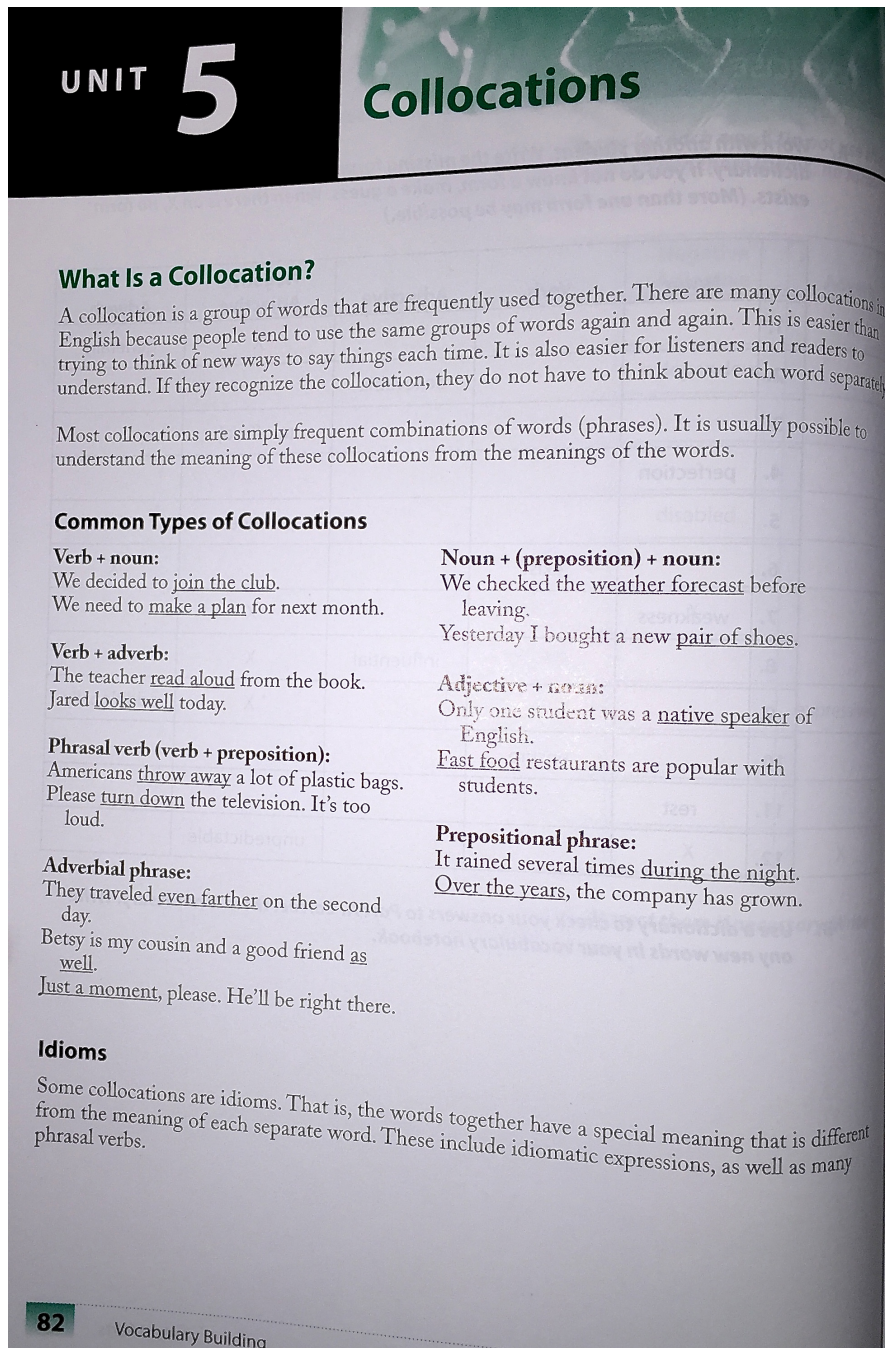
## 3 Results

### 3.1 TEFL Textbook Analysis

The analysis of the eleven TEFL textbooks used in lower intermediate, intermediate, and upper intermediate ELP course sections, i.e. at the levels in which phrasal verbs are taught or explicitly touched upon, demonstrated an overall lack of phrasal verb instruction. Only four out of the eleven textbooks analyzed explicitly addressed phrasal verbs, and just one of these four presents students with the idea that verbs and particles can be separated. Of the four that explicitly included phrasal verb sections (Azar and Hagen's (2002) Fundamentals of English Grammar: Workbook (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.) and Jeffries and Mikulecky's (2009) Reading Power 2: Student Book (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.), (2009) Basic Reading Power 1: Extensive Reading, Vocabulary Building, Comprehension Skills, Thinking Skills (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.), and (2011) More Reading Power 3: Student Book), the three by Jeffries and Mikulecky (2009, 2011) are unsurprisingly very similar. These authors present phrasal verbs within units entitled "How Words Are Used Together" or "Collocations" under further sub-headings of "Common Types of Phrases" and "Common Types of Collocations," respectively. Below these sub-headings denoting common types of phrases, the authors provide a list of between four and seven types or groups across all three of their textbooks. These include categorical types entitled "prepositional phrase" and "adverbial phrase," for example, as well as phrasal verbs under the specific title of "phrasal verb (verb + preposition)." This can be seen and better understood in Figures 2 and 3 below.

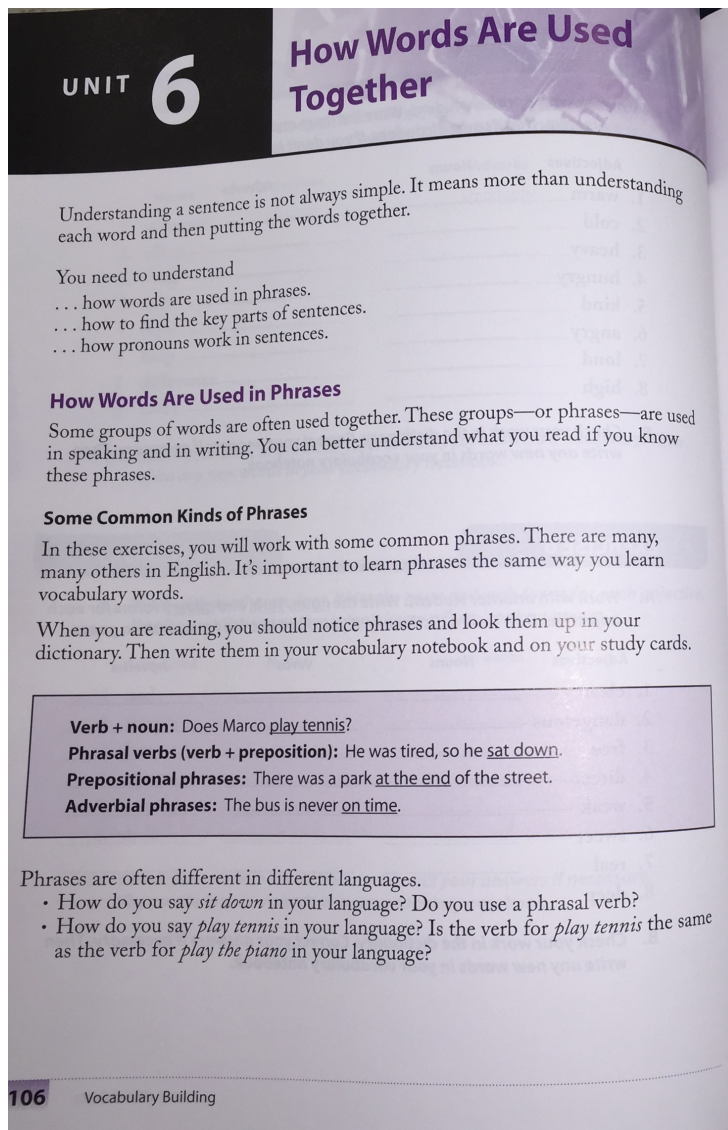


Figure 2. More Reading Power 3: Student Book



(Jeffries and Mikulecky, 2011, p.82)

**Figure 3. Basic Reading Power 1: Extensive Reading, Vocabulary Building, Comprehension Skills, Thinking Skills (3rd Ed.)**



(Jeffries and Mikulecky, 2009, p. 106)

Though Jeffries and Mikulecky (2009, 2011) present phrasal verbs as a separate sub-category in their three texts, traditional follies immediately present themselves. First, the only explanation provided is that phrasal verbs consist of a verb and a preposition. This echoes Rong-Rong's (2001) concerns about students not being able to distinguish prepositional verbs, followed by prepositional phrases, from phrasal verbs (as seen in

examples 8 and 9). This is due to the fact that textbooks commonly lump them together into one group. Her (2001) results confirmed that Japanese university EFL students struggled with this distinction, something that would not be surprising to find among K-State's ELP students based upon the way that these textbooks present phrasal verbs. This is problematic due to the fact that the lexical meanings of phrasal verbs are generally different than the sum of their parts, making them entirely distinct from prepositional verbs. Additionally, prepositional verbs separate in syntactically different ways than do separable phrasal verbs.

Second, the traditional sort of "list" of phrasal verbs described by Side (1990), consisting of verbs listed alphabetically with their different particles and corresponding definitions, is not provided in any of Jeffries and Mikulecky's (2009, 2011) three textbooks. Thus, there is no way for students to know what the most frequent phrasal verbs are or to gain access to their corresponding lexical meanings (at least not by way of the textbook). Third, one or two example sentences are listed below the aforementioned quasi-definition of a phrasal verb in each of the three textbooks. These are presented as being sufficient in representing and exemplifying phrasal verbs as a whole, and therein lies the problem. The single phrasal verb example sentence of *He was tired, so he sat down*, shown in Figure 3 (Jeffries and Mikulecky, 2009, p. 106), essentially presents PVs devoid of context altogether. This one example is not nearly enough to provide students with any solid benchmark for pattern making or systematicity, echoing Sansome's (2000) frustrations. Fourth, transitive versus intransitive and separable versus non-separable distinctions are completely ignored.

The phrasal verb practice activities following these introductions described above are also problematic for similar reasons. There was just one page of activities devoted specifically to phrasal verbs in each textbook, and the bulk of these activities were mechanical (instructing students to underline the phrasal verbs in given sentences or to “fill in the blanks” with phrasal verbs from a word-bank box). Though these activities provided more context and practice than did the initial input section, they were highly controlled. The verb form was not always the same from the word box to a given sentence (*bring up* and *brought up*, for example), but phrasal verbs were never separated and fill-in-the-blank activities did not allow for anything but continuous VPO word order. Sometimes the texts ask students to underline collocations from a word box in a given group of sentences. Afterwards students are instructed: “Discuss the meanings of the collocations in the box. Look up any you are not sure about... Write the collocations you want to learn in your vocabulary notebook” (Jeffries and Mikulecky, 2011, p.91). These collocations include phrasal verbs as well as nouns + prepositions, verbs + adverbs, and several other types of groupings. By asking students to discuss, look up, and write down all of these different collocational meanings in their vocabulary notebooks, the book reinforces the misconception that there exists some single, cohesive group containing any and all two- or three-part word groupings in the English language, regardless of their function or lexical class. In reality, “them” represents an incredibly wide variety of collocations that do not share the same or even similar characteristics. This lumping of nouns, prepositional phrases, adverbs, and phrasal verbs (among other items) into one group is a misrepresentation made even larger by the fact that students are never asked to actually identify the type of collocation present in each sentence. Not only does this fail

to increase metalinguistic awareness and appropriate association formation, but it also further reinforces, whether intentionally or not, the flawed idea that all of these different collocations are alike and belong to one group.

Following these mechanical activities, Jeffries and Mikulecky (2009, 2011) provide additional activity suggestions that are more communicative in nature. These include: “Work with another student to discuss the meanings of the phrasal verbs in the box” and “Make up a story with your partner using at least four of the phrasal verbs in the box. Then tell your story to another pair of students and listen to theirs” (Jeffries and Mikulecky, 2011, p.86). Reading Power 2: Student Book (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.) included a similar activity that instructed students to “choose five phrasal verbs to learn from part A. Write them in your vocabulary notebook...choose the meaning that best fits the sentence” (Jeffries and Mikulecky, 2009, p.74). Though these activities are beneficial in terms of inductive learning, collaboration, creativity, and communicativeness, they would have to be greatly assisted by the instructor in order to be successful. This is due to the fact that students are provided no textual support in regard to phrasal verb meanings, syntactic placement, or frequency prior to and/or during the very activities in which they are supposed to be able to navigate all three of these concepts.

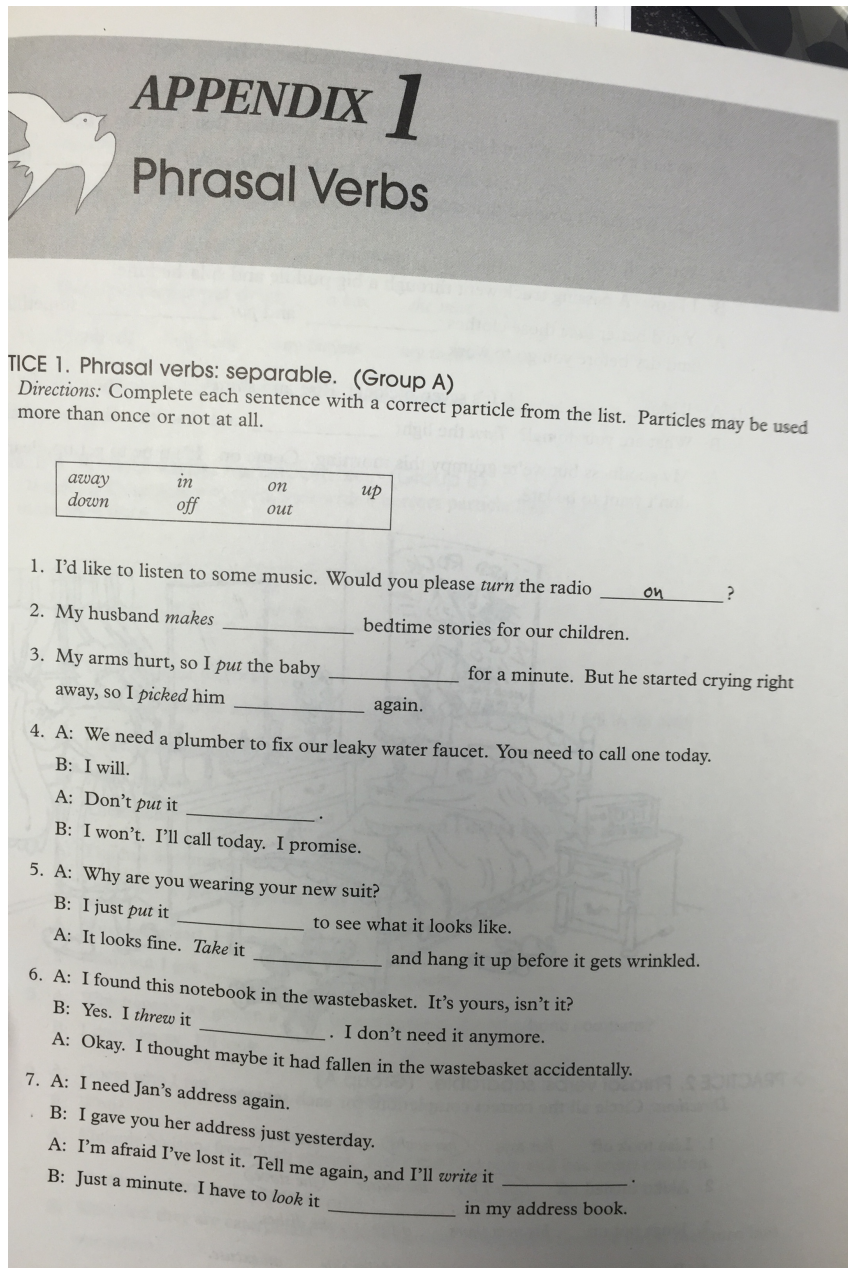
Lastly, in Reading Power 2: Student Book (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.) and More Reading Power 3: Student Book, Jeffries and Mikulecky (2009, 2011) include similar sections about how to select the phrases and collocations that should be learned. The authors of the former tell students to “learn the phrases that are most common” and to “look it [a phrase] up in the dictionary” to determine if it is common. In this same section, though, students are warned: “You won’t find all common phrases in the dictionary. If you don’t find one,

look for one that is similar” (Jeffries and Mikulecky, 2009, p.72). These tips are contradictory and presume that students inherently know and can provide a given phrasal verb’s synonym(s) of their own accord: if this were really the case, students would have no need to look up the definitions in the first place. Additionally, they fail to suggest corpora as a reliable tool for obtaining accurate frequencies and naturally produced data. Though utilizing a corpus would require an instructor’s aid or preliminary demonstration, there is no reason that it could not have been suggested with this type of warning attached. After all, students are already advised in this section to “check with your teacher” if unsure about phrasal verb meanings or dictionary usage. Thus, Jeffries and Mikulecky (2009) could have easily adhered similar advise to a section suggesting the use of the COCA to help decide which phrases or collocations should be learned.

The last of the four textbooks to explicitly discuss phrasal verbs, and the only textbook overall that presented them as being both separable and non-separable, was Azar and Hagen’s (2002) Fundamentals of English Grammar: Workbook (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). Because this text is actually a workbook required as part of the course materials for the lower-intermediate section of DAS 140, it would not be surprising if it lacked explicit instructional sections. This is not the case, though: the book does include forms of input in its chaptered sections. After these conventionally styled chapters, the authors include a “practices” section as well as appendices containing even more practice. Appendix 1 is dedicated solely to phrasal verbs and consists of fifteen pages of related mechanical activities. This section’s biggest strength is that it breaks activities into separable, non-separable, intransitive, and three-word phrasal verb categories. Within the “separable” activity sections specifically, students are exposed to varying types of formats and

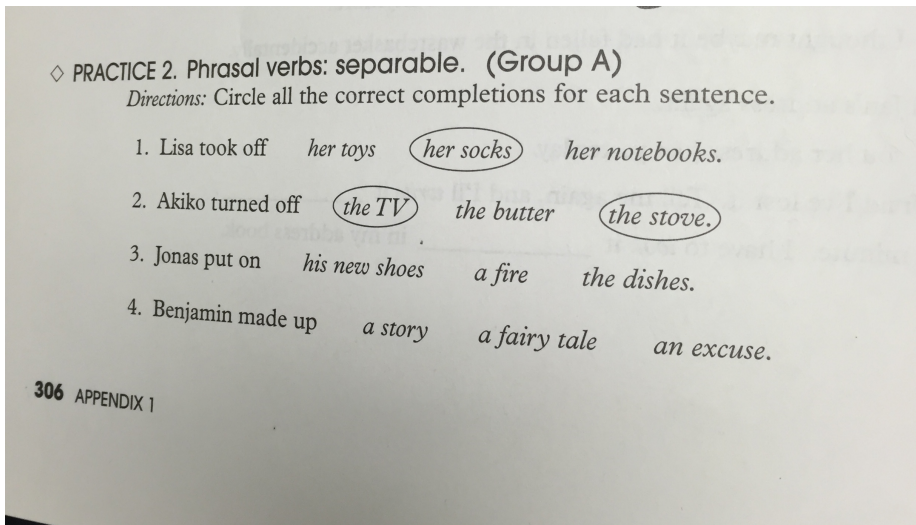
degrees of verb-particle separation. The activities unfold nicely, progressively becoming more difficult with each page. These activity formats and sequencing can be observed in more detail in Figures 4-7 below.

**Figure 4. Fundamentals of English Grammar: Workbook (3rd Ed.)**



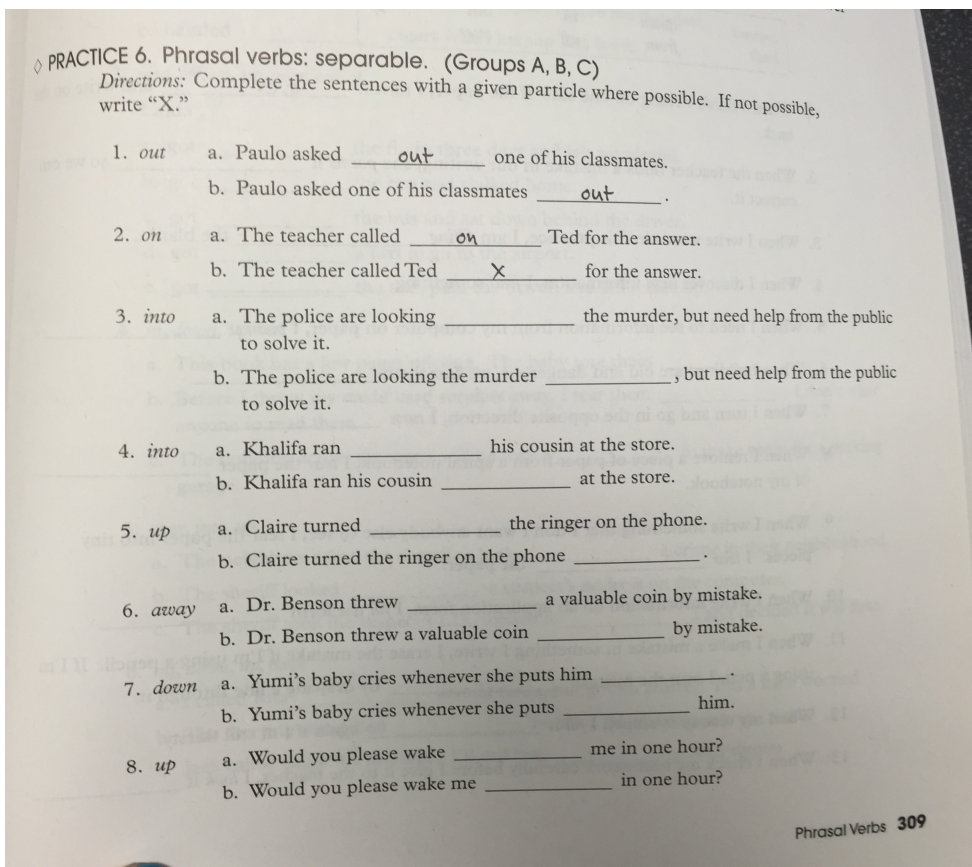
(Azar and Hagen, 2002, p. 305)

**Figure 5. Fundamentals of English Grammar: Workbook (3rd Ed.)**



(Azar and Hagen, 2002, p. 306)

**Figure 6. Fundamentals of English Grammar: Workbook (3rd Ed.)**



(Azar and Hagen, 2002, p. 309)



**Figure 7. Fundamentals of English Grammar: Workbook (3rd Ed.)**

◇ PRACTICE 10. Phrasal verbs: separable. (Group E)  
Directions: Complete the sentences with a phrasal verb from the list.

<i>blow out</i>	<i>cheer up</i>	<i>give away</i>	<i>take back</i>	<i>think over</i>
<i>bring up</i>	<i>clean up</i>	<i>✓ lay off</i>	<i>take out</i>	<i>work out</i>

1. Michael is worried. His company is planning to lay 20% of its workforce off, and he doesn't have much seniority.
2. If you decide these shoes won't work for you, you can \_\_\_\_\_ them \_\_\_\_\_ within seven days.
3. That was so nice of you to water my plants while I was gone. I'd like to \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_ to dinner to thank you.
4. There are ten candles on this cake, Jenny. Can you \_\_\_\_\_ them all \_\_\_\_\_?
5. Pauline has many clothes in her closet that she doesn't wear. Why doesn't she \_\_\_\_\_ them \_\_\_\_\_?

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(Azar and Hagen, 2002, p. 313)

However, the fact that Azar and Hagen's (2002) text provides only practice activities and not any form of input on phrasal verbs, i.e. explanations to accompany separable, non-separable, and intransitive categories as well as patterns for when or why separation can occur, is its biggest disadvantage. Though technically a workbook, it does include forms of input in its other chaptered sections. Thus, it would have been nice if these types of instructional sections were included for phrasal verbs, too. Additionally, the PV activities themselves are purely mechanical, never becoming more communicative or creative in nature. In Kansas State's ELP, it is assumed that teachers supplement activities with their own instructional materials on phrasal verbs; however, there is no clear-cut idea or model of what this looks like, nor is there any measure in place to assess the extent of instruction that takes place across sections. Additionally, the

total time spent on phrasal verbs or the amount of activities completed in Azar and Hagen's (2002) phrasal verb appendix, as a part of the DAS 140 course that uses this textbook, remains unknown and is assumed to be somewhat variable across ELP sections.

Based upon this analysis, none of the four textbooks containing phrasal verb sections could effectively stand alone in the classroom: they all require additional support materials in order to sufficiently teach this concept to students. The other seven textbooks do not contain any explicit phrasal verb instruction, and must be completely supplemented by the instructor in this regard. ELP teachers who choose to enhance course textbooks must develop additional resources, and these are not consistent across sections. The Kansas State ELP Curriculum and Assessment Director informed me that instructors are supposed to warn students that phrasal verbs can be separated, with the hope that students are able to recognize and track particles in different forms of input (listening and reading exercises). However, students are not asked or required to produce separated phrasal verbs in naturalistic output, i.e. their own speech and writing. Because of this program practice, phrasal verbs are one of the student learning outcomes (SLOs) for ELP reading courses but are not a part of the SLOs in ELP writing, speaking, or listening sections (A. Franchitti, personal communication, Oct 29, 2014).

To this effect, Curriculum and Assessment Director Dr. Franchitti stated: "Students have a terrible time learning phrasal verbs. They try to make meaning of every separate little word and not of the meaning as a whole." Thus, ELP instructors are told to keep phrasal verb instruction uniform and not to focus on verb-particle separation because "a million options would stress them [the students] out" (A. Franchitti, personal communication, Oct 29, 2014). She went on to say that in her experience, students

become confused when the particle is separated from its verb. Thus, this idea is not explored until upper-intermediate or advanced levels. In intermediate and lower intermediate levels, phrasal verbs are taught as being one verbal unit consisting of multiple parts; that is to say, the idea that these multi-word segments equate to just one lexical meaning is highly emphasized. Students learn phrasal verbs in context and prescriptive notions that a sentence “cannot end in a preposition” are not stressed; however, separated versus non-separated groupings are not explored unless a student asks about them (A. Franchitti, personal communication, Oct 29, 2014).

Based upon this information, it is safe to suggest that the aforementioned separable phrasal verb activities in Azar and Hagen’s (2002) workbook, the best in this regard due to the fact that they constituted the *only* contextualized practice of discontinuous VOP word order across all eleven textbooks analyzed, are used only minimally if at all by ELP instructors. This is highly problematic, and would suggest that what is being modeled to students in Kansas State’s ELP classrooms and textbooks is that phrasal verbs are almost always non-separable or are experienced most often in non-separated contexts. As we know from previous research, this is simply not the case: VOP discontinuous word order is preferred about two thirds of the time in spoken language (Gries, 2003).

### **3.2 Grammaticality Judgment Survey**

As survey data was measured on an ordinal five-point Likert scale and because both L1 language groups performed under the exact same study conditions, meaning they represent two independent groups, a Mann-Whitney or U-test was selected as most appropriate to analyze the results of the grammaticality judgment survey (cf. Gries, 2013:

227-233). Twenty-seven L1 American English speakers and nineteen L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English completed the survey, meaning total  $n = 46$ . The mean acceptability score among native English speakers was 3.37 ( $sd = 1.27$ ), while the mean acceptability score among L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English was 3.67 ( $sd = 1.26$ ). According to the U-test, this demonstrates that the two groups of speaker responses are different at a statistically significant level:  $W = 191,056$ ,  $p = 0.00001$ . Overall, L1 English speakers ranked test questions as less acceptable than did the L1 Spanish speakers.

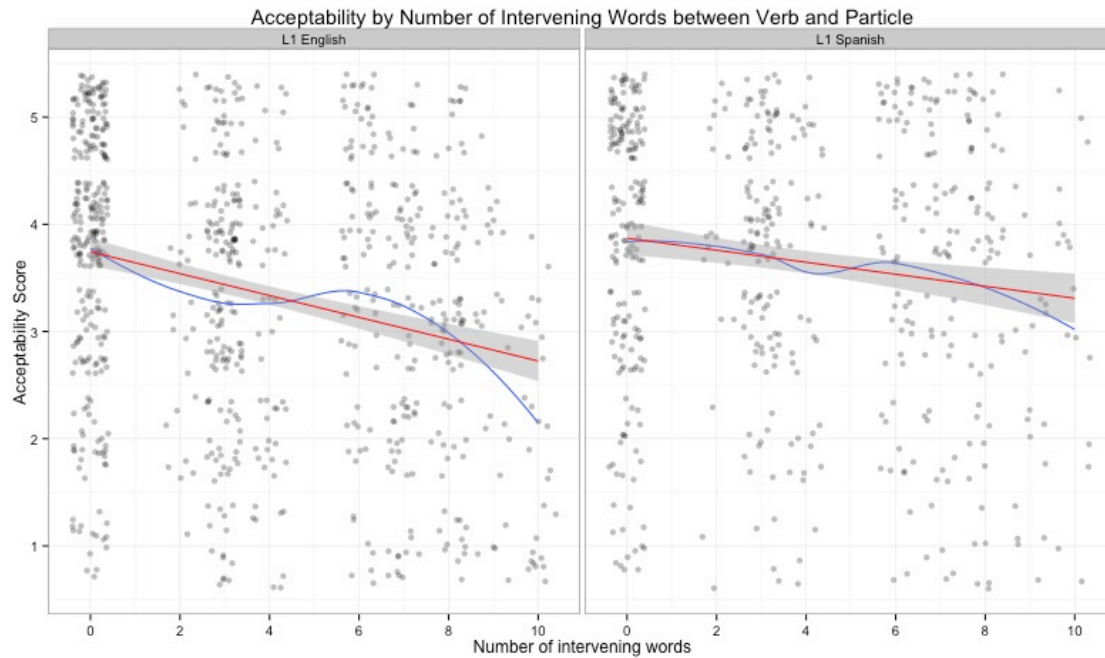
In order to investigate the ways in which acceptability rankings interact with conditions affecting verb-particle separation, several factors were analyzed. I annotated each test question for a series of variables: number of words separating the phrasal verb and its particle, number of morphemes (derivational and inflectional) separating the phrasal verb and its particle, object complexity, and object concreteness. These are all key variables shown to affect native speaker verb-particle placement (Gries, 2003; 2011). Though particle placement is also affected by whether the complement represents new information or information that is already known, as well as whether it constitutes the focus domain receiving phonological prominence at the end of the sentence or phrase (Dehé (2002) and Gries (2003, 2011)), these variables were not included in this analysis. This is due to the fact that they are dependent on discourse context, which is not relevant to this survey.

### **3.2.1 The effect of Number of Words**

Figure 8 contains the results for L1 English speakers on the left, while the results for L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English are on the right. This figure shows that as the

number of words separating a phrasal verb from its particle increases, both groups of speakers assign a lower acceptability score to the sentence. However, the negative correlation corresponding to the L1 English speaker regression line is steeper than the L1 Spanish speaker regression line. This demonstrates that native English speakers are more sensitive to the number of words separating phrasal verbs and their particles than are L1 Spanish speakers, whose acceptability scores were higher overall and whose regression line is more flat. The blue loess lines show sensitivity to the data points closest to them, i.e. the variability that exists in the data. They also demonstrate that native English speakers begin to noticeably differ from L2 speakers at approximately six words, or when the object separating the phrasal verb and its particle is six words or more in length. It is at this point on the x-Axis that the L1 English speaker loess line dips down more sharply than does the L1 Spanish speaker loess line. Overall, both loess lines mirror their regression lines and reinforce that English speakers are more sensitive to the number of words between phrasal verbs and particles than are Spanish speakers, especially when this number is greater than or equal to six words in length.

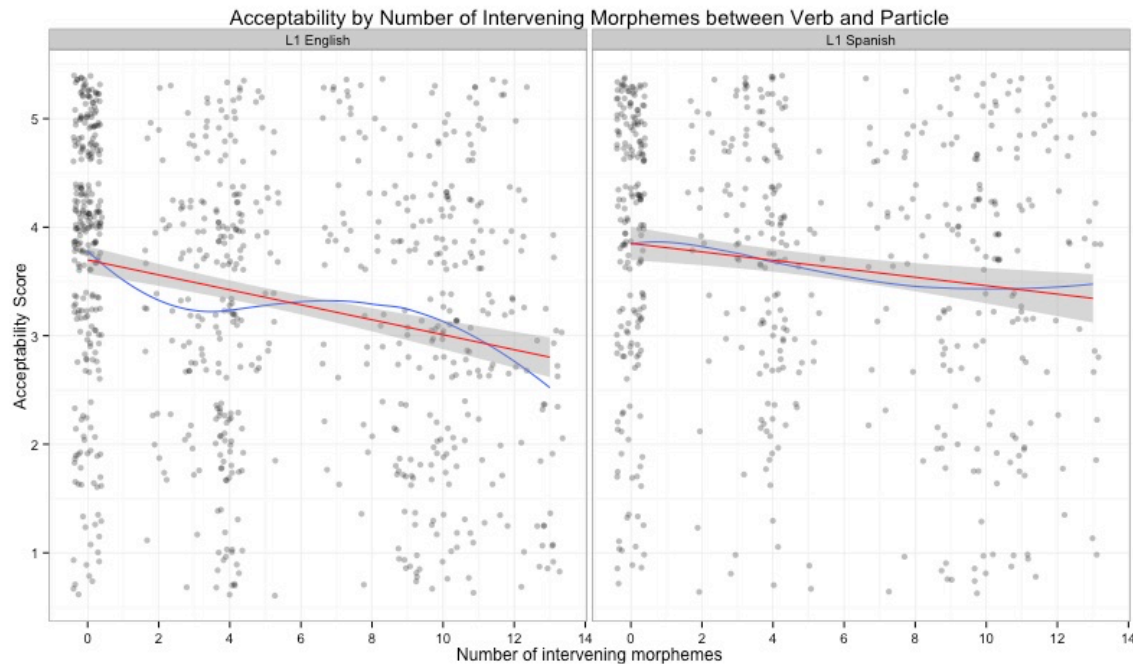
**Figure 8. Jitter Scatterplot: Number of Words**



### 3.2.2 The effect of Number of Morphemes

Figure 9 yields very similar results to Figure 8: a negative correlation exists between the number of morphemes separating phrasal verbs from their particles and the acceptability scores given by both language groups. Once again, L1 English speakers are more sensitive to the number of intervening morphemes present, while L1 Spanish speakers' regression lines and loess lines are more flat, indicating less of an ability to distinguish morphological degrees of separation. In the case of both language groups, separation measured in morphemes does not seem to play a significantly different role than separation measured in words. It appears that the scatterplots of number of words and number of morphemes have similar acceptability distributions within L1 English speaking groups as well as within L1 Spanish speaking groups.

**Figure 9. Jitter Scatterplot: Number of Morphemes**



### 3.2.3 The effect of Object Complexity

The variable of object complexity is classified here in three different ways: simple, phrasally-modified, and clausally-modified. Simple objects consist of either a noun or a noun and its determiner or possessive adjective. The underlined complement in survey question #42, example 17, represents simple object complexity.

- (17) *The nurse turned on the radio, and a moment later there resounded the first notes of a familiar symphony.*

Phrasally-modified objects perform a syntactically grammatical function and consist of anywhere from two-three words to long strings of words. In general, a phrase expresses a certain meaning but cannot stand alone as a complete sentence. This specific complexity categorization is the largest due to the wide range of phrasally-modified variations possible. For example, survey question #16 in example 18 features a short object phrase

consisting of a determiner, an adjective, and a noun. Survey question #8 in example 19 too contains a phrasally-modified object, but one that is much longer.

(18) *I looked up the online manual and followed the procedure for turning off the AR function, but nothing happened.*

(19) *When my friend and I were finally able to locate the switch and turn the lights in the huge school auditorium back on, all eyes were on us -- I don't think I've ever been more mortified!*

Thus, there are varying degrees of complexity within the subgroup of phrasally-modified objects. The key here is that none of these phrases contain a subject and a predicate, though.

In contrast, clausally-modified objects contain both a subject and a predicate, representing the most complex of the three types. Clauses can be dependent or independent, but must include a subject performing a verb. Survey question #23 in example sentence 20 contains a clausally-modified object. As is evident in this example, clausally-modified objects are quite complex and do not favor verb-particle separation.

(20) *He gave everything that his parents had worked so hard to achieve up to live like some college kid, clerking at a store, and reading his philosophy books.*

Table 1 contains the means of participants' overall acceptability rankings as they relate to object complexity. Both groups ranked simple objects as being most acceptable, phrasally-modified objects as moderately acceptable, and clausally-modified objects as least acceptable. However, L1 Spanish speaker acceptability rankings were once again significantly higher overall than scores from L1 English speakers. Though both groups



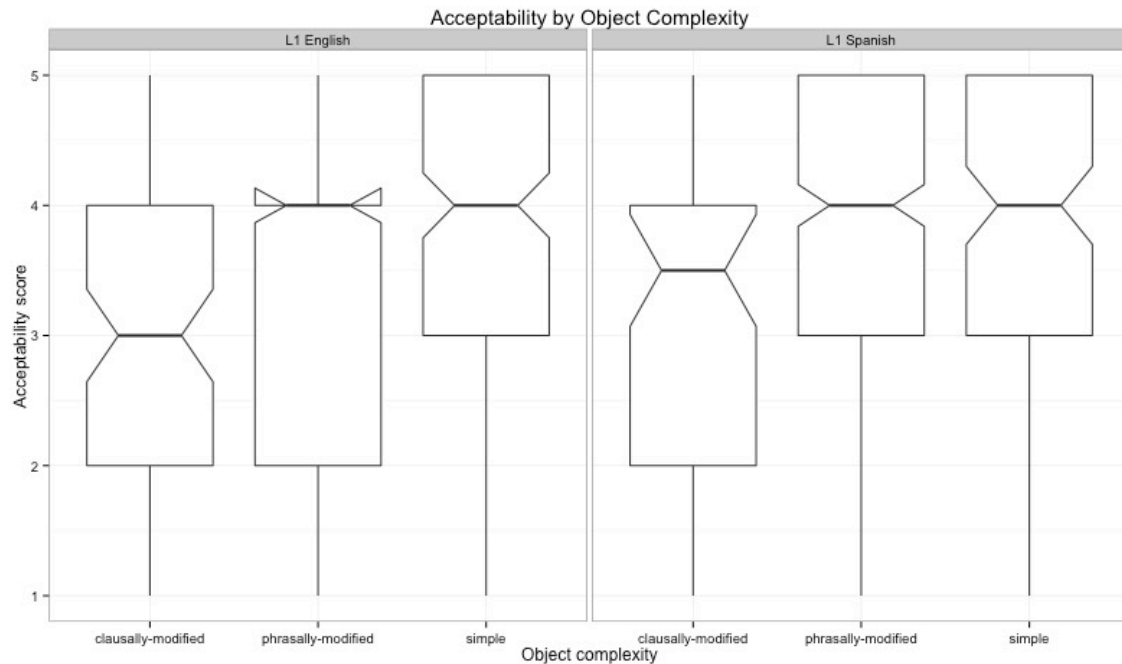
had similar differences in rankings from simple objects to phrasally-modified objects (a difference of -0.19 among L1 Spanish speakers and -0.12 among L1 English speakers), L1 English speakers ranked clausally-modified objects lower to a far greater degree (a -0.65 drop from the previous phrasally-modified mean value) than did Spanish speakers (a -0.43 drop from the previous phrasally-modified mean). This demonstrates that native English speakers view clausally-modified objects to be much more unacceptable when in VOP position than do L1 Spanish speakers. Overall, object complexity seems to play a large role in VOP acceptability for L1 English speakers: their mean score for simple objects, also this group's highest mean, is still lower than the phrasally-modified mean value of L1 Spanish speakers.

**Table 1. Mean Acceptability Score by Object Complexity**

<b>Object Complexity</b>	<b>L1 English</b>	<b>L1 Spanish</b>
<b>Simple</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>3.86</b>
<b>Phrasally-modified</b>	<b>3.41</b>	<b>3.67</b>
<b>Clausally-modified</b>	<b>2.76</b>	<b>3.24</b>

Figure 10 contains boxplots for all of the data relating to object complexity, including medians and the central 50% of the data surrounding these medians (represented by boxes). Here we can see that even though the phrasally-modified medians are the same for L1 Spanish and L1 English speakers, the entire box representing 50% of the data around the median falls below the median line on the L1 English speakers' plot. It is again evident in examining these boxplots that L1 Spanish speakers give significantly higher verb-particle acceptability rankings than do English speakers across all three measures of complexity.

**Figure 10. Boxplot of Acceptability by Object Complexity**



### 3.2.4 The effect of Object Concreteness

Figure 12 contains the mean acceptability rankings of both language groups as they relate to object concreteness. Figure 11, similarly to Figure 10, contains boxplots of acceptability by object concreteness. Within this variable there are just two object measures: concrete and abstract. Though the distinction between these two is not always straightforward, concrete objects have tangible or specific referents in the world while abstract objects are not situated in an exact time or place, instead existing as ideas or types of things. Thus, *a soccer game* is concrete but the abstract idea of *soccer* as a sport or a thing is not. Specific examples from the grammaticality judgment survey include the concrete object in question #38 as well as the abstract object in question #27, examples 21 and 22 respectively.

(21) *I woke up my cabinmate, said good night to my friend, and left.*

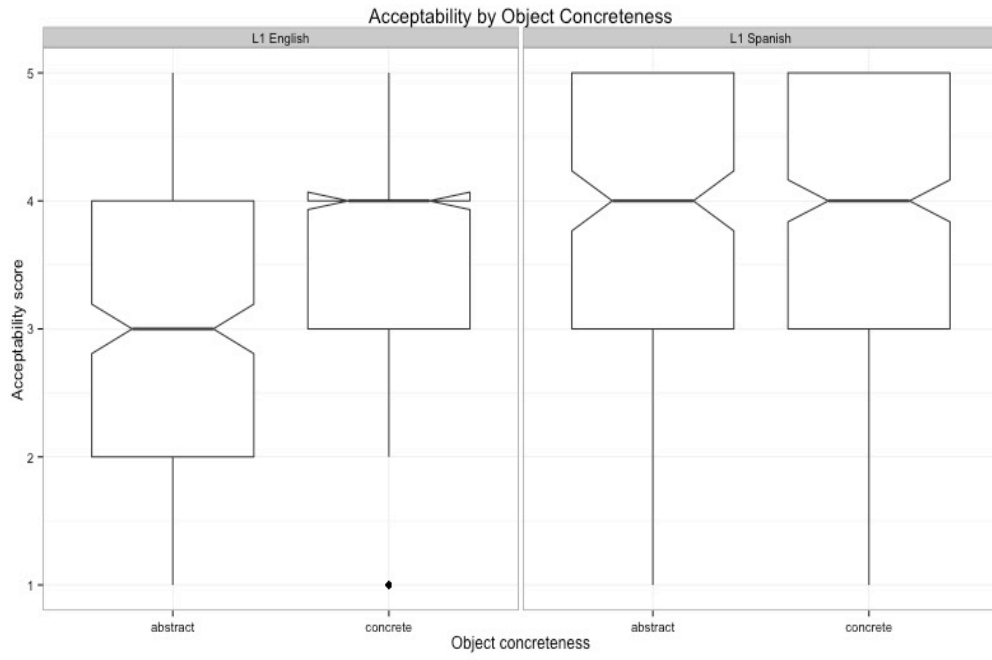
(22) *Jessica would survive, not just because her mother was there to take care of her, but because a lucky charm that Jessica had been carrying for years would turn all of her bad luck and misfortune around and save her life.*

Mean values belonging to L1 English speakers in our results are congruent with previous literature. Since concrete objects favor VOP word order while abstract objects do not, it is not surprising that English speakers ranked questions containing concrete objects and verb-particle separation as higher than they did abstract objects separating the verb and its particle. However, L1 Spanish speakers ranked concrete and abstract objects in nearly the exact same way: their mean scores differ by only 0.01 and their box plots appear identical. This suggests that concrete versus abstract objects do not constitute a salient factor governing verb-particle separation for L1 Spanish speakers, i.e. they are not sensitive to this distinction.

**Table 2. Mean Acceptability Score by Object Concreteness**

<b>Object Concreteness</b>	<b>L1 English</b>	<b>L1 Spanish</b>
<b>Concrete</b>	<b>3.48</b>	<b>3.67</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>3.66</b>

**Figure 11. Boxplot of Acceptability by Object Concreteness**



## 4 Discussion

The analysis of the survey responses from L1 American English speakers reinforces previous findings regarding verb-particle usage: that concrete objects favor VOP separation while abstract objects do not and that more syntactically and morphologically complex object variables (clauses and some phrases) favor continuous VPO word order. Additionally, the more words or morphemes there are separating a phrasal verb from its particle, i.e. the longer the object becomes, the less acceptable native speakers deem the utterance. I can now compare these findings with the results obtained from L1 Spanish speakers. This, combined with the findings from my TEFL textbook analysis, should finally shed some light on L2 acquisition of English particle placement by native Spanish speakers.

As the U-test presented above shows, the acceptability scores of the two groups of speakers are different at a statistically significant level ( $W = 191,056$ ,  $p = 0.00001$ ): L1 English speakers consistently ranked test questions as less acceptable than did L1 Spanish speakers. This is somewhat surprising after having confirmed that L1 Spanish speakers do not receive sufficient input regarding verb-particle separability in TEFL textbooks or classes. Part of this study's R3 asks whether or not L1 Spanish speakers judge separated verb-particle constructions more harshly, since phrasal verbs are almost always modeled as non-separable in TEFL textbooks and classroom contexts. After analyzing the results of the grammaticality judgment survey, it is clear that this is not the case.

Addressing this study's R2 proves to be a bit more complicated. L1 Spanish speakers consistently ranked questions as being more acceptable than native speakers of English did. Though this gives the overall impression that they do not view verb-particle

separation to be ungrammatical, a closer look at their individual means and graph plots shows that responses were often too shallow to definitively suggest that L1 Spanish speakers can clearly distinguish between their own selected rankings. Though Figures 8 and 9 indicate that both groups gave lower acceptability scores as the number of words and morphemes separating the verb and particle increased, the negative correlation corresponding to the L1 English speaker regression line is steeper than the L1 Spanish speaker regression line. The acceptability scores of L1 Spanish speakers are higher overall in these figures, and their regression lines are gentle enough to raise the question: are L1 Spanish speakers actually sensitive to these types of variations, or did they rank questions similarly because they could not tease out any differences?

L1 Spanish speaker rankings for the variable of object concreteness might certainly reinforce the strength of this question. It was in this category that L1 Spanish speakers' mean scores for concrete objects and abstract objects differed by only 0.01, with their box plots for these two types of objects appearing nearly identical. This implies that object concreteness does not constitute a salient factor governing verb-particle separation for L1 Spanish speakers. In fact, their acceptability rankings for both realizations of this variable (concrete and abstract) were so similar that it can be safely suggested that L1 Spanish speakers are not sensitive to this concrete-abstract distinction.

L1 Spanish speakers in this study did seem to be more finely tuned to one variable, though: object complexity. After analyzing the mean values for this variable set, one can easily see that both language groups ranked simple objects as being most acceptable, phrasally-modified objects as moderately acceptable, and clausally-modified objects as least acceptable (this order corresponds to their increasing levels of

complexity). However, the acceptability rankings of L1 Spanish speakers were once again higher than scores from L1 English speakers. More specifically, clausally-modified objects, though given the lowest ranking, were not perceived as poorly by L1 Spanish speakers as they were among L1 English speakers. This again debunks any hypothesis that L1 Spanish speakers view verb-particle separation to be ungrammatical: on the contrary, it was the native English speakers who consistently ranked these sentences as less acceptable. This shows that English speakers are more sensitive to object complexity than are Spanish speakers of L2 English. Though L1 Spanish speakers do not seem to view verb-particle separation as ungrammatical, they are not sensitive to the factors that make it grammatical, either. In response to this study's R1, findings from the TEFL textbook analysis confirm that traditional problems associated with phrasal verb presentation do persist in contemporarily used textbooks. Considering this, it is not surprising that L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English are not sensitive to the factors affecting the grammaticality of verb-particle placement; after all, the subject is almost never addressed in their EFL textbooks.

Perhaps turning to the second half of this study's R3 will provide more clarity. If L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English do not view verb-particle separation to be ungrammatical and do not seem to make grammaticality judgments that mimic input in their TEFL textbooks, do they instead try to imitate native English speakers and the auditory input they receive in real-life conversations? Though there is not sufficient evidence to rule this out entirely, I would venture to say no: if L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English modeled their grammaticality judgments on the naturalistic input they received from interaction with native English speakers, the two groups' responses to the

grammaticality judgment survey should have been more similar. Additionally, the challenging grammatical and lexical nature of phrasal verbs, especially for Spanish speakers of a verb-framed L1 system, would make acquiring them without any explicit focus on form a rare feat. As we have seen, discontinuous VOP word order is more frequent in spoken speech. However, L1 Spanish speakers did not rate a significant number of separated phrasal verbs as more highly acceptable than non-separated constructions. Thus, there is no reason for us to believe that VOP exemplars typically found in conversational or casual speech have been processed as intake and proceduralized by L1 Spanish speakers.

Therefore, it is clear that L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English do not possess the same linguistic knowledge or sensitivity toward verb-particle separation as do L1 American English speakers. The type and extent of their linguistic competence in this regard remains vague, since the data suggests that L1 Spanish speakers struggled to make distinctions across test questions overall. The only distinguishable survey variable in which L1 Spanish speakers more closely aligned with native English speakers was that of object complexity. L1 Spanish speakers ranked simple and phrasally-modified objects as significantly more acceptable than clausally-modified ones, suggesting that this variable is the most perceptually salient factor influencing particle placement for this group. Let us again consider Diessel and Tomasello's (2005) findings that discontinuous VOP word ordering is preferred in child L1 English speech, but with the caveat that objects are much simpler, spatially oriented, and concrete. Because I did not test for spatial meaning as a variable in this study, I cannot safely suggest that L1 Spanish speakers share similarities with Diessel and Tomasello's (2005) finding that L1 children use more spatially oriented



phrasal verbs in conjunction with VOP separation. However, this is an area that should be re-visited in future research. It is possible that L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English acquire separable phrasal verbs in a way that is similar to L1 acquisition by English-speaking children, and that this accounts for their inability to tease out differences in objects that are not definite, pronominal, and used in spatial contexts (the idea that beyond these perceived factors, all others appear equally indeterminable). However, this cannot be safely suggested from the results of this study alone.

One critique of this study is that its results could have been bolstered with a larger *n* value, i.e. more survey participants to strengthen U-test results. As previously stated, twenty-seven L1 American English speakers and nineteen L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English completed the survey. My original goal was to obtain twenty-five completed surveys from each language group. Procuring results from native English speakers did not pose an issue; however, this was a challenge with L1 Spanish speakers. Well over twenty-five Spanish speakers started the survey and then never completed it due to its length and perceived difficulty. This was reported by personal contacts of myself and of my co-workers, who stated that they could not complete the survey because it was “too hard” or because they “didn’t know what to look for.” Even after explaining that to reveal the object under study would skew results and would defeat the point of the survey’s distractors, many L1 Spanish speakers insisted that they could have given better rankings if only they knew what it was that they were supposed to be looking at. Based upon oral feedback from L1 Spanish speakers after having completed the survey, it seems that part of what made the survey so “hard” was that they could not distinguish or identify differences between test sentences, reinforcing findings from the U-test. Even after

soliciting more L1 Spanish speakers on multiple different occasions, and after leaving the survey open a week longer than originally planned, I was left with nineteen completed surveys from L1 Spanish speakers. Though this number did not reach the original goal, U-tests can and have been performed with smaller sample sizes. Thus, survey results are not shown to be insignificant. However, the survey could have been shorter to try to make up for its perceived difficulty among non-native speakers. The fact that many L1 Spanish speakers could not complete the survey also suggests that separable phrasal verbs as a whole are “too difficult” for many to evaluate, reinforcing the results from this study’s TEFL textbook analysis that they are not adequately presented and explored with English language learners.

## 5 Concluding Remarks

The present study has shown, by way of a grammaticality judgment survey, that L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English differ from L1 American English speakers in their acceptability of phrasal verb-particle separation at a statistically significant level. Overall, L1 English speakers ranked test questions as less acceptable than did L1 Spanish speakers. This study has also confirmed that contemporary TEFL textbooks fail to adequately introduce separable phrasal verbs, leading to their de-emphasis in ELP classrooms. Considering this dual-part methodology, L1 Spanish speakers' grammaticality judgments do not mimic what is frequently modeled in TEFL textbooks, nor do they mimic native English speakers to whom they have exposure. Rather, their grammaticality judgments demonstrate a lack of ability to distinguish different variables affecting phrasal verb-particle separation altogether. Though they do not seem to view verb-particle separation as ungrammatical, they are not sensitive to the factors that make it grammatical, either. This suggests a lack of understanding of separable phrasal verbs as a whole: L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English simply do not have enough linguistic competence to interpret separable phrasal verbs in contextually meaningful ways.

We would expect this to have implications for communicative competence in L2 English: if L1 Spanish speakers consistently rank sentences that native English speakers view to be unacceptable as acceptable, we would imagine that they would similarly use separable phrasal verbs in ways that native English speakers view to be unacceptable or cannot understand. The inability to distinguish grammatical verb-particle separation from ungrammatical separation might also lead L1 Spanish speakers to avoid phrasal verb usage altogether. Though this form of circumlocution might be possible in output, it

would not minimize the likelihood of learners having to process and track these types of verbs in input from native English speakers. In order to better aid L1 Spanish speakers of L2 English, as well as second language learners of English as a whole, TEFL textbook writers, instructors, and ELP programs as a whole must make pedagogical improvements to the way that phrasal verbs are taught. Mart (2012) points out, “since phrasal verbs are frequently used by native speakers both in written and spoken English, students need to be encouraged to learn them” (p.114). This encouragement must come from TEFL teachers and resources in the form of contextualized materials that expose learners to the real ways in which they will encounter phrasal verbs in authentic communication, rather than artificial or incomplete input that perpetuates a lack of phrasal verb understanding.

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