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Digging into the receptive and productive knowledge of phrasal verbs among Arab EFL learners: Evidence of the effect of frequency of occurrence

Rashidah Albaqami

Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language, Turabah University College, Taif University, P.O. Box 11099, Taif 21944, Saudi Arabia

Abstract---Foreign language learners often encounter challenges in understanding and using English phrasal verbs (PVs) due to its idiomaticity and complexity. A phrasal verb typically comprises a verb and a preposition, e.g., pick up, look after, and result in. The study attempts to determine the extent to which frequency of occurrence facilitates or hinders mastering the target forms among English Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This study attempts to examine frequency of occurrence as a factor that might account for EFL learners' receptive and productive knowledge of PVs. English belongs to the Germanic language family and hence it shares some common linguistic features with other members of the language family, e.g., German has detachable prefix verbs (e.g., warten auf) in a way resembling the English phrasal verb (e.g., wait for). On the other hand, other language families such as Semitic languages (e.g., Arabic), rely heavily on single word-verbs (SVs) (e.g., yāntāẓr 'wait' in Arabic). For this purpose, a total of 37 high school female students in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) took part in the current study. To assess their receptive and productive knowledge of English PVs, the researcher developed a receptive and productive test, in which a total of 20 test items were included. The task comprised a random selection of two forms: 1) PVs (n=8), e.g., hold back, and 2) their alternative SVs (n=8), e.g., pause. The participants have to interpret the meanings of the target forms given in a list of movie title posters (i.e. receptive knowledge), and then they were instructed to put them in appropriate contexts of their own (i.e. productive knowledge). The findings showed that Arabic learners of English found English PVs challenging to comprehend as well as to produce appropriately. Arabic-speaking learners of English performed significantly better on SVs owned not only for to their mother tongue

interference but also their high frequency of occurrence according to the British National Corpus. Overall, their receptive knowledge is significantly larger than their productive knowledge. The study concludes with some pedagogical implications.

Keywords---Arabic, English, frequency of occurrence, phrasal verbs, productive knowledge, receptive knowledge, single verbs.

Introduction

More recently, several scholars in the field of second/foreign language development have shifted their attention from grammar to the ignored area of lexicon. Notwithstanding the value of vocabulary learning, it is widely acknowledged that vocabulary is a multifaceted process since there are numerous components of words that learners have to comprehend by listening and reading (receptive knowledge), so that they can be collected, saved and preserved in the learners' mental lexicon and recalled later at the production phase by both writing and speaking (productive knowledge).

The influence of frequency on language development has received extensive consideration (e.g., Gass and Mackey, 2002). Empirical evidence suggests that language development is strongly associated to frequency (e.g. Ellis, 2002a, 2002b). Besides, both experimental and corpus evidence suggest that frequency plays a significant role on second/foreign language development (Kartal and Sarigul, 2017). Ellis (2002a) raised a critical enquiry about the link between frequency and language development: "How exactly does the frequency of patterns in the input affect acquisition?" (p.165). Ellis (2002a, 2002b) claims that there is a robust association between language development and frequency. He assumes, "Humans are sensitive to the frequencies of events in their experience" (2002a, p.145).

A number of studies examined the relationship between frequency and multi-word representations. Learning vocabulary such as Multi-Word Units (henceforth MWUs) including phrasal verbs is quite challenging for English Foreign Language (EFL) learners (Zari and Mukundan, 2013). Phrasal verbs (henceforth PVs) are a property of lexicon and one of the most unique and fruitful constructions among MWUs in English. PVs are idiomatic phrases that vary from typical verbs in that it comprises numerous lexical components, typically the head verb and at least one additional word (e.g., a preposition, an adverb or both) enclosed to it to form a phrase that, all together, generates a different meaning distinctive from the verb alone (Bolinger, 1971; Dixon, 1982). Consider the following English PVs: *get away* 'escape', *come up with* 'invent', and *fall apart* 'disintegrate'. The use of PVs in some incidents is assumed to be more suitable and more typical in articulating some thoughts as Fletcher (2005) suggests.

It is worth noting that one main verb may form up to thirty PVs by attaching a different proposition each time due to the generative nature of English. Consider, for instance, the verb *hold* may create several PVs with different meanings based on the particle that is attached to, e.g., *hold on*, *hold back*, *hold up*, *hold out*, *hold*

*against, hold over, hold together...*etc. Besides, a large number of PVs are metaphorical with manifold meanings which can be literal or non-literal (e.g., *get on* which may mean to board a bus, for instance, or to have a good relationship with someone, e.g., a boss). This polysemous nature increases the complexity and the difficulty of PVs for EFL learners (Littlemore and Low, 2006). Having said that PVs differ in their degrees of semantic transparency, Ellis (2015) claims that learners are likely to observe linguistic forms whose meanings are more transparent.

PVs are ancient and originated from Old English, whereas SVs typically are Latin or Romance (e.g., French) lexical borrowings. Other Germanic languages share corresponding patterns to the English PVs. With regards to the degree of formality, Latin and French loanwords of English typically are considered more formal than Old English forms including PVs. However, not all PVs are preferable in English and countless PVs are considered informal in written contexts, e.g., *hang out*. Nevertheless, this does not suggest that all of them are informal. They are sometimes the typical means of communicating a certain meaning especially in academic contexts, e.g., *carry out, point out, account for, brought about, result in...*etc. Nevertheless, using, for instance, *pop up* in a place of a more formal SV such as *emerge* may appear inappropriate. It is worthy to note that learners are not entirely familiar with the stylistic constraints of MWUs in certain circumstances. Some non-target like usage may occur not as a result of the inappropriate selection of the essential particle, but, instead, owing to the redundant use of it, e.g., **to summarize up*. In this case, the particle is used even though the verb already delivers the relevant meaning by itself. Instead, SVs would be the best appropriate form in this case.

Previous research has largely established that the challenges of mastering PVs amongst EFL learners from a wide range of different mother tongues (e.g., Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Koo, 2015; Shareef, 2018; Omidian et al., 2019), including Arab-speaking learners of English (e.g., Abdul Rahman and Abid, 2014; El-Dakhs, 2016). Evidence of avoidance of using PVs among EFL learners is evident. Empirical evidence suggests that EFL learners often avoid or use fewer PVs in comparison to native speakers. Foreign language learners of English may prefer to use the SV *reject* rather than its PVs counterpart *turn down*. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999: 425) pointed out that “....some non-native speakers of English tend to overuse single lexical items where PVs would be much more appropriate”.

Empirical evidence (e.g., Moore Hanna, 2012) suggests that EFL learners often avoid PVs and use single-word verbs (SVs) instead especially when their mother tongue extensively uses them, e.g., Spanish-speaking learners tend to avoid English PVs using their single-word counterparts such as *extinguish* from the Spanish verb ‘extinguir’ instead of *put out*. It is worth mentioning that overreliance on one specific form is suggestive of the learners’ inadequate lexical familiarity (Garbatović and Grigaliūnienė, 2020) and also a sign of their foreignness. Several lines of evidence suggest that foreign/second learners whose native language lacks or relies heavily on SVs in prefer to avoid using English PVs. This does not suggest that learners do not use PVs in any case, but instead they relatively prefer using fewer PVs and more one-word counterparts in

comparison with native speakers. Learners who are familiar with PVs in their native languages, instead, do not tend to avoid English PVs. For instance, speakers of Germanic languages such as Dutch and German EFL learners often prefer to use more PVs than native speakers of English in written texts. It is worth noting that in certain circumstances, learners' overreliance on PVs in formal written communication can be attributed to the effect of their first language (L1), and in particular, in a number of Germanic languages (e.g. German, Dutch, and Swedish), PVs are not manifest for style and they can be used correspondingly in both informal verbal and formal written communication.

Foreign language learners, especially EFL learners with non-Germanic L1s, often encounter challenges in mastering English PVs because of their semantic and syntactic multiplicity (i.e. idiomaticity). Sonbul et al. (2020) attributed the challenge of mastering English PVs to numerous cross-linguistic reasons. Initially, the number of English PVs is vast as it comprises roughly 5000 PVs (McCarthy and O'Dell, 2007). This huge number with diverse form-meaning associations is anticipated to be confusing for EFL learners who often prefer to use single-word equivalents (Siyanova and Schmitt, 2007). Furthermore, PVs are a restricted linguistic feature of some languages, embracing English. The influence of learners' mother tongue particularly the lack of PVs in their L1s may negatively influence learners' understanding and using of PVs. Therefore, EFL learners whose L1s lack the verb-particle composition habitually avoid using PVs (Hulstijn and Marchena, 1989; Laufer and Eliasson, 1993; Kamarudin, 2013a, 2013b; El-Dakhs, 2016; Kamarudin et. al, 2019).

Apart from that, 'transitivity' and 'separability' of PVs constituents also result in further puzzlement for EFL learners. PVs are made up of two or even more entities that are interpreted as separate entities in meaning. This representation enables learners to infer the meaning of the distinctive constituents of PVs and hence misunderstand their inclusive meaning (Garnier and Schmitt, 2016). Besides, PVs are irregular in form and multifaceted in meaning as a large number of PVs convey manifold meanings which can be literal or non-literal (Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Laufer and Eliasson, 1993; Houshyar and Talebinezhad, 2012; Kamarudin et. al, 2019). That is, they are extremely polysemous, with a huge number of PVs conveying several meanings (Garnier and Schmitt, 2016). As far as forms are concerned, PVs vary in terms of whether they permit allotting entities between verbs and particles and, in such a case, how many they may permit (Gardner and Davies, 2018). As far as meanings are concerned, PVs differ in the levels of idiomaticity, since they may have additional transparent or non-transparent 'opaque' meanings. Empirical evidence suggests that that EFL learners at all proficiency levels use fewer non-literal PVs (Akbari, 2009; Kamarudin et. al, 2019). Lastly, learners' poor or lack of awareness of common MWUs including PVs, is also claimed to result in deviant or non-target like knowledge of PVs (Littlemore and Low, 2006; Zari and Mukundan, 2014; Kamarudin et. al, 2019). PVs seem more problematic for EFL learners to comprehend also because they are less frequent and less transparent in meaning in comparison with their counterparts. Therefore, learners are likely to avoid or use fewer English PVs.

The majority of the previously published studies on PVs are corpus-based studies (e.g., De Cock, 2005; Waibel, 2007; Wierszycka, 2015; Garbatovič and

Grigaliūnienė, 2020). Although extensive investigation has been done on PVs, the majority of them mainly focuses on the influence of the learners' L1. No single study examines whether the frequency of occurrence plays a role in mastering PVs among EFL learners in Arabic-English context. None of them, nevertheless, paid attention to particularly the receptive and the productive knowledge of PVs by Arabic learners of English – a non-Germanic language group that do not have such a structural feature dominated in their mother tongue which, in contrast to English, relays heavily on SVs. The study attempts to determine the extent to which frequency of occurrence in the input facilitates or hinders mastering the target forms. The experimental work presented here provides one of the first investigations of the performance of a group of EFL learners with regard to the receptive and the productive knowledge of PVs vs. SVs using a corpus-based frequency. It explores into the issue by examining whether frequency of occurrence plays a role in making SVs less problematic than PVs for Arab EFL learners.

PVs and their SV alternatives across different languages

English PVs can be classified into two grammatical classes: intransitive and transitive verbs. An intransitive PV does not require a direct object (e.g., *I got up at 5:00 a.m.*). Whereas, a transitive PV takes a direct object (e.g., *I looked for my diamond ring*). Transitive PVs can be separable (e.g., *Daddy, can you pick me up?*) or inseparable (e.g., *she looked after her mother*).

A number of languages have complex verb structures with very analogous features of compositions and meanings of English PVs while others relay heavily on SVs. Having said that this linguistic feature predominantly appears in English comparably in other Indo-European languages, i.e. Germanic languages: West Germanic (e.g., German, Dutch) and North German (e.g., Swedish, Danish, Norwegian). Other Germanic languages, such as German often label these constructions *TRENNBARE VERBEN* 'separable prefix verbs' in place of PVs since the prefix 'particle' takes place preceding the verb in infinitives. The meaning of the head verb varies whenever it maps onto a new particle and it is no longer labelled a typical verb, but a PV due to the fact that it is an expression. However, roughly only English labels them 'phrasal verbs'. That is, comparable constructions with the same principle are found in other Indo-European languages, e.g., Germanic languages and Slavonic languages. For instance, Slavic languages (e.g., Polish, Russian) have analogous constructions (i.e., a particle appears as a component of a verb), although they are attached as prefixes and cannot change their position in a sentence.

The English PV *wait for* similarly corresponds to *warten auf* in German, *várni rá* in Hungarian, *wachten op* in Dutch, *vent for* in Norwegian, and *vänta på* in Swedish, *Esperar por* in Portuguese, *asteapta pentru* in Romanian, *Poczekaj na* in Polish, among many others. On the other hand, the same meaning may be expressed by other constructions in other languages. Some languages roughly prefer SVs such as *aspettare* in Italian, *esperar* in Spanish, *attendre* in French, *yāntāẓr* in Arabic, *מחכה* in Hebrew, and *Bekle* in Turkish, among many others.

Semitic languages such as Arabic largely select SVs. Arabic largely uses auxiliary verbs with the ‘masdar’ of the head verb, typically in the accusative case. This does not suggest that PVs do not exist in Arabic, yet this linguistic feature is not dominant as it is in English. Nevertheless, Arabic shares some features of English PVs (called prepositional verbs or transitive verbs). Arabic PVs are MWUs contain a verb and adverb, preposition, or adverb and preposition that function resembling SVs. Arabic PVs are categorized as a subtype of transitive verbs. Arabic Transitive verbs are categorised into two categories: transitive on its own such as the SV *yālataqt* which means ‘to pick up’ and transitive throughout a preposition such as *yāḡhab ‘iīlāa* ‘go to’. The latter is relatively comparable to English PVs. For a detail account for Arabic and English phrasal system refer to Dhayf (2019).

To summarise, both Arabic and English have PVs. They are called phrasal verbs in English while are called transitive verbs in Arabic. English PVs are categorized into transitive (separable and inseparable) and intransitive. While PVs are called transitive verbs in Arabic which are categorized into transitive on its own itself and transitive by particles, e.g., prepositions and adverbs. English PVs are defined as a connection between a verb heads a preposition or an adverb. Whereas, Arabic PVs are defined as verbs that has an impact on one or more objects with or without prepositions and, hence, cause transitivity. PVs can be literal or non-literal ‘metaphorical’ in both languages. However, English PVs may have meanings that are totally different from the meanings of their components. Whereas, in Arabic the meaning is somehow straightforwardly anticipated from the meanings of both the verb and the preposition . Table 1 captures some lack of parallelism in delivering the same meaning between the two languages using two different forms; PVs in one language and SVs in another.

Table 1
A comparison between Arabic and English PVs/SVs

<i>Language Family</i>	<i>e.g.,</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Example</i>
Germanic	English	<i>wait for</i> PV	to wait for	<i>He waited for the bus</i>
Semitic	Arabic	<i>yāntāzr</i> ‘wait’ SV	to wait for	<i>āntzr ālhāflī</i> ‘He waited the bus’

This variation raises the question whether the learners’ mother language is the only or the most dominant source for this learnability problem. That is, whether other variables such as *frequency of occurrence in the input* may or may not improve the *receptive and the productive knowledge of PVs by Arab EFL learners*. The current study is intended based on the idea that not only (dis)similarity between the learners’ L1 and the target language can be a rational factor that results in avoidance of PVs and over-reliance on SVs or the non-target-like performance on PVs. But also frequency of occurrence may play a role in increasing this difficulty. The study attempts to closely examine this issue by observing the receptive and productive knowledge of PVs compared to their SV counterparts among Arab EFL learners.

The influence of frequency of occurrence on learners' knowledge of MWUs knowledge (receptive vs. productive knowledge)

Usage-based accounts of language learning assume that vocabulary knowledge is firmly associated to frequency of exposure (e.g., Ellis, 2002a, 2002b; Tomasello, 2003). Frequency of occurrence stands for the number of times a word or an expression emerges in the input. According to Webb (2020), frequency of occurrence is a key factor prompting the development of vocabulary knowledge (both receptive and productive). Receptive vocabulary knowledge 'recognition' stands for the ability to recognise and understand words when the learners hear (i.e., listening) or see them (i.e., reading). On the other hand, productive vocabulary knowledge 'recall' stands for the knowledge to recall and produce words when the learner can use them in writing or speaking. The productive skills (i.e., writing and speaking) require some kind of input and usually referred to as active skills, whereas the receptive skills (i.e., listening and reading), require some kind of input and usually referred to as passive skills (Webb, 2008; Schmitt, 2010).

Frequency in the input stands for the frequency of linguistic features that individuals may read or/and hear (Vanpatten and Benati, 2010). A number of scholars (e.g., Ellis, 2008; Larsen-Freeman, 1997, 2002; Schwartz and Causarano, 2007) argue that frequency has a significant impact in second/foreign language development. Ellis (2002a, 2002b, 2008) argues that language development is 'input driven'. Frequency is required to function memory for data to be stored and retrieved later. Ellis (1994: p. 273) claims that "Overall there is very little evidence to support the claim that input frequency affects L2 acquisition but there is also very little evidence to refute it. Perhaps the safest conclusion is that input frequency serves as one of the factors influencing development, often in association with other factors such as L1 transfer and communicative need".

Ellis and Collins (2009) listed a number of the factors of language development including frequency. Two forms of frequency are identified (sometimes are referred to as 'input frequency'): token and type. According to Ellis (2002a), token is how frequently a certain lexical item emerges in the input whereas type is how many dissimilar lexical entries can function in a certain representation. Apart from that, a huge amount of vocabulary is mastered receptively and hence it is assumed that learners' receptive knowledge is argued to be greater than their productive knowledge (Webb, 2008; Schmitt, 2010). Webb (2008) found that learners who have a rich receptive vocabulary knowledge are likely to recognise more of those words productively than learners who have a minor knowledge of receptive vocabulary. Schmitt (2010) claims that receptive and productive knowledge are both essential constituents of general knowledge of vocabulary. Following this line of thought, and as far as the target forms are concerned, it is crystal clear that learners demand equally receptive and productive knowledge of PVs, not only to signify their command of the target language, but most prominently for them to communicate appropriately in the real world.

Previous research

A considerable amount of research has been done on the impact of frequency of occurrence on the MWUs. Following Ellis's (2002a, 2002b, 2008) prominence about the significance of frequency on language development, several empirical investigations have been carried out to examine the effect of frequency and to particularly identify the frequencies of a number of MWUs (e.g., Gardner and Davies, 2007; Arnon and Snider, 2010; Durrant and Doherty, 2010; Sonbul et. al, 2020). Arnon and Snider (2010) examined the L2 learners' sensitivity to frequency effects. The findings suggest that participants were quicker to react to high frequent forms than low frequent forms. Durrant and Doherty (2010) examined the collocations, one of the challenging MWU forms for EFL learners. They attempted to establish whether the corpus-based frequency of occurrence is a consistent indicator of inner priming between forms.

Sonbul et. al (2020) explored into the factors that establish Arab EFL learners' ($n=60$) receptive and productive knowledge of PVs in Saudi Arabia, including the amount and type of exposure and frequency. The researchers used receptive (i.e., multiple-choice) and productive (i.e., gap-fill) tests to measure their knowledge of one-hundred PVs. The findings suggested the participants have a good command of roughly a third of the 100 meanings productively but half of them comprehensively. The findings suggest that corpus-derived frequency was the strongest predictor for their knowledge, particularly their productive knowledge.

In order to establish the 'usefulness' of an expression, certain criteria were established, including range and frequency, among others (White, 1988). Nevertheless, range and frequency are considered as the greatest prominent standards for establishing the effectiveness of an expression (Koprowski, 2005). Koprowski (2005) analysed MWUs and the usefulness of lexical units including PVs used in three up-to-date textbooks in England. Frequency was one of the greatest important predictors for establishing the effectiveness of a lexical unit. While a small number of studies (e.g., Year and Gordon, 2009) found that frequency has a small effect on mastering a number of certain forms, both experimental and corpus studies provide evidence that frequency plays a significant role on language development. The findings suggest that higher vocabulary knowledge is achieved by more exposure frequency and learners are more sensitive to relatively high frequent lexical items than low frequent items (Rott, 1999; Arnon and Snider, 2010).

There is a growing body of literature that recognises the challenges of mastering PVs. Empirical evidence suggests that since English PVs are polysemous and idiomatic, they are challenging for EFL learners to master indicating an insufficient knowledge of the meaning and usage of English PVs (Cowie, 1993; De Cock, 2005; Waibel, 2007; Moore Hanna, 2012; Garnier and Schmitt, 2016; Shareef, 2018; Omidian et al., 2019). The findings established that EFL learners often avoid PVs or use them with low variety and frequency than native speakers. Siyanova and Schmitt (2007) compared the performance of native speakers with learners' use of multi-word verbs with that of SVs comparing advanced learners and native speakers. They found that learners were less likely to produce PVs. Furthermore, a number of scholars examined avoidance and overreliance patterns

of PVs among different EFL learners, e.g., Spanish (e.g., Moore Hanna, 2012; Garnier and Schmitt, 2016), Dutch (e.g., Hulstijn and Marchena, 1989), Hebrew (e.g., Dagut and Laufer, 1985), Chinese (e.g., Liao and Fukuya, 2004), Arabic (e.g., Abu Jamil, 2010; Alshayban, 2018), Swedish vs. Hebrew (e.g., Laufer and Eliasson, 1993), German vs. Italian (e.g., Waibel, 2007) and Koran vs. German (Koo, 2015).

The majority of the studies have attempted to explore into some potential factors which may contribute to the challenges the EFL learners often counter with PVs. A large volume of the corpus-based research emphasises the role of the mother tongue on mastering English PVs and mostly focused on avoidance patterns. A great deal of previous research into PVs has focused on avoidance by EFL learners from different L1 backgrounds including Germanic, Romance and Semitic-speaking learners of English, among many others. The majority of studies on PVs are corpus-based and were restricted to limited comparisons to determine the influence the learners' L1.

Empirical evidence suggests that speakers from the same language family perform similarly. A huge number of studies on PVs emphasises this concern, concluding that EFL learners whose L1s lack PVs (e.g., non-Germanic learners such as Romance learners, e.g., Italian-speaking and Spanish-speaking learners or Semitic learners such as Hebrew-speaking and Arabic-speaking learners of English) tend to underuse/avoid PVs, favouring their SV counterparts compared with native speakers of English (Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Waibel, 2007; Wierszycka, 2015). On the other hand, learners with Germanic L1s (e.g., German-speaking and Dutch-speaking learners) are more confident using PVs due to the fact that they are more familiar with these verb-particle constructions from L1s (Hulstijn and Marchena, 1989; Waibel, 2007). Waibel (2007) found that Germanic learners of English often overuse PVs in comparison to native speakers due to the fact that their L1s share similar fundamental 'phrasal' principles.

For example, the over-representations of PVs by German-speaking learners of English corresponds with the enlarged use of Germanic verbs while Italian learners' underuse of PVs is attributed to the greater number of Latinate verbs (i.e., SVs) as Waibel (2007) suggests. Moreover, De Cock (2005) found that learners' academic writing comprises verbal-like features, for example, the overuse of colloquial and informal PVs, while their verbal production occasionally appears rather formal and academic. Remarkably, she argues that learners' overreliance on colloquial and informal PVs in academic writing can be attributed to their L1 interference, and more particularly in a number of Germanic languages (e.g., German, Dutch, or Swedish), PVs 'are not marked for style' and allow it evenly in formal writing as well as informal speech.

Taken together, the conclusion drawn from the aforementioned studies is that non-Germanic learners of English whose L1s lack phrasal feature tend to misuse, underuse or avoid using PVs. In terms of the quality of using English PVs, it is evident that both EFL learners with Germanic and non-Germanic L1s encounter some challenges which comprise semantic, stylistic, and syntactic puzzlement with respect to using English PVs. Large and growing body of literature

emphasised the role of the L1. Avoidance or overreliance patterns were attributed to the structural dissimilarity between the target language and their mother tongue interference that hinder the use of this linguistic feature (Dagut and Laufer, 1985). This raises the question whether the learners' L1 is the only key source for this learnability problem and whether the frequency of occurrence may play a role in better understanding and using English PVs.

To conclude, research on PVs has been mostly corpus-based with limited comparisons of languages. Although extensive research has been carried out on PVs, no single study exists which examines EFL learners' knowledge of PVs both receptively and productively and explores the role of frequency of occurrence. Taking these observations into consideration, the purpose of the study is to address several drawbacks of previous research and combines both productive and receptive measures in a single test. The current study compares Arab EFL learners' productive and receptive knowledge of PVs which appear to be less frequent than their SV counterparts and determine whether frequency of occurrence has an impact on Arab EFL learners' receptive and productive knowledge of PVs.

The Experimental Study

Research Questions and predictions

The current study is planned to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Does frequency of occurrence influence Arab EFL learners' receptive and productive knowledge of PVs in comparison with their SVs counterparts?

Based on the research question, the following null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis were formulated:

Null Hypothesis

H₀: Frequency of occurrence does not influence Arab EFL learners' receptive and productive knowledge of PVs in comparison with their SVs counterparts.

Alternative Hypothesis

H₁: Frequency of occurrence influences Arab EFL learners' receptive and productive knowledge of PVs in comparison with their SVs counterparts.

Research Methodology

A case-study approach was adopted to allow deeper insights into the role of frequency of occurrence in facilitating mastering the target forms. For this purpose, a total of 37 female Arabic students took part in the current study. The first part of the task intended to gather information about the participants including age, length of studying English,etc. Their ages ranged between 17-19 years old ($M = 17.60$, $SD = 0.49$). The participants are originally from different Arabic-speaking countries including Saudi Arabia ($n = 15$), Yemen ($n = 5$), Egypt ($n = 5$), Sudan ($n = 8$), and Palestine ($n = 4$). To determine homogeneity among the participants with respect to their proficiency levels, the Oxford Placement Test

(OPT) was used. Initially 44 students participated in this study, however after the homogeneity procedure, 6 students were excluded because their OPT scores were too low or too high, since it appeared they exposed heterogeneity compared to the whole sample. The final sample size was 37 participants.

The main task was given in the second section. To elicit the learners' knowledge at two levels (i.e., receptive and productive), the researcher developed a task in which a total of 20 test items were included: a. PVs ($n=8$), e.g., *hold back*, b. their alternatives, i.e. SVs ($n=8$), e.g., *pause*, and c. fillers ($n=4$). In the design, the researcher preferred including forms taken from authentic resources, i.e. movie posters from different genres (e.g., action, horror, mystery) to attract the participants' attention and stimulate their knowledge. The researcher included a random selection of movie posters with titles comprising PVs and then looked for other movie posters with their synonyms (only SVs) as alternatives. The participants were initially instructed to read and write a short interpretation for the meaning of the posters' titles (i.e. receptive knowledge) and then they have to put the given form in a sentence of their own by writing (i.e. productive knowledge) to make sure they can use the target forms appropriately. For example, the participant has to write a short explanation for the meaning of the PV *hold back* and then she has to write another short explanation for the meaning of its alternative the SVs, i.e. *pause*. Then, the participant has to put both forms in appropriate contexts of their own (See Figure 1 and Appendix A).



Figure 1. Examples of the task items; PV vs. SV.

The test items were randomly ordered and a number of distractors, i.e., nouns ($n=4$), were included to minimise the participants' attentiveness towards the purpose of the study. The test items were displayed one by one on an overhead projector for all of the participants in a large classroom. The participants were asked to watch the screen and write in English an interpretation on a sheet of paper for every appearing form, then they were requested to put it in a proper

short and simple context later. The researcher also read loudly each appearing form to make sure the movies' titles are clear for all of them since they are in different fonts, sizes and colors. The task took approximately 20 minutes.

The frequency of occurrence of the target forms in this study was calculated by the British National Corpus (BNC) as shown in Table 2. The BNC is a one hundred-million-word assortment of samples of written and spoken English from extensive sources, devised to signify a wide-ranging representation of British English from the late of the twentieth century. Thus, it is considered a high reliable source for measuring frequency of occurrence and it was used by a number of scholars (e.g., Schwartz and Causarano, 2007; Durrant and Doherty, 2010) for its reliable size, range, and up-to-dateness. The researcher used the following query syntax to determine frequency: for the SVs, e.g., {hide/V}→*hide, hides, hided, hiding* (tagged as verb) and for the PVs, e.g., {run}* over → *run over, ran over, run it over, run all over...*etc. So, all possibilities of the form were calculated including all the separable and inseparable units. By looking at the frequency of the given forms, we can evidently see that the PVs are relatively less frequent than their SVs counterparts according to the BNC.

Table 2
The test items' frequency of occurrence according to the BNC

no.	PVs	Frequency	Their counterparts	SV	Frequency
1	hold out	14.17	survive		71.8
2	hold back	6.2	pause		30.33
3	cover up	4.56	hide		60.62
4	make off	2.66	escape		53.49
5	track down	3.42	find		972.61
6	carry on	40.04	continue		281.25
7	hold up	14.28	wait		201
8	run over	4.9	hit		105.47

The researcher also consulted four teachers of English language with a very long experience of teaching EFL in Saudi Arabia. All of them agreed that the frequency of occurrence of the given forms sound reasonable and the given SVs are quite common in English classrooms and textbooks, whereas the PVs are infrequently mentioned in English classrooms and textbooks. They attribute the low frequency of PVs to their low degree of formality. The SVs seem more formal and hence they are more frequently used according to their points of views. Nevertheless, they emphasised that a large number of the PVs (e.g. *come on, get out, and end up*) in general are frequently used in daily communication and EFL learners may hear a great deal of them while watching movies, for instance. Nevertheless, their SVs counterparts are still more frequent in most cases according to the BNC.

Ethical considerations were taken into account when the study was conducted (See Ethical considerations section). The study was piloted three times to assess feasibility. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the 20-item of the respective and productive test was 0.81, which was greater than 0.7, denoting that the test has

'good' level of internal consistency reliability, and, hence, seems satisfactory for the current study. The data was statistically analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Results

The study compares Arab EFL learners' receptive and the productive knowledge of PVs with respect to their frequency of occurrence.

RQ1: Does frequency of occurrence influence Arab EFL learners' receptive and productive knowledge of PVs?

To answer the research question, the independent samples t-test is was used after making sure that the data of the two samples follow a normal distribution and that the variance of the two samples is constant.

Table 3
Independent Samples t-test of the learners' PVs vs. SVs knowledge (both respective and productive)

Group Statistics						Independent Samples Test		
Forms	Knowledge	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	t-test	df	sig
SVs	Receptive	37	7.78	.48	.08	3.72	72	0.000
	Productive	37	7.14	.95	.16			
PVs	Receptive	37	1.78	1.57	.26	3.77	72	0.000
	Productive	37	.65	.95	.16			
Both	SVs	37	14.91	1.14	.19	37.99	72	0.000
	PVs	37	2.43	1.64	.27			

By comparing the value of the statistical significance of the t-test with the value of the significance level (0.05), we can reject or accept the null hypothesis. If the significance value is larger than the value of the significance level (0.05), the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, which indicates that the difference between the two variables is not significant, and vice versa. Table 3 demonstrates the results of the independent samples t-test of the learners' PVs vs. SVs knowledge (both respective and productive). The results showed that the mean value of the learners' receptive knowledge of SVs ($M = 7.78$, $SD = .48$) was significantly higher than the learners' productive knowledge of SVs ($M = 7.14$, $SD = .95$); $t(72, 0.05) = 3.716$, $p < .001$. Similarly, the mean value of the learners' receptive knowledge of PVs ($M = 1.78$, $SD = 1.57$) was significantly higher than the learners' productive knowledge of PVs ($M = .65$, $SD = .95$); $t(72, 0.05) = 3.771$, $p < .001$. This suggests that the learners' receptive knowledge was significantly higher than their productive knowledge on both forms.

Also, the mean value of the learners' receptive knowledge of SVs ($M = 7.78$, $SD = .48$) was significantly higher than the learners' receptive knowledge of PVs ($M = 1.78$, $SD = 1.57$); $t(72, 0.05) = 22.287$, $p < .001$. The mean value of the

learners' productive knowledge of SVs ($M=77.14$, $SD=.95$) was significantly higher than the learners' productive knowledge of PVs ($M=.65$, $SD=.95$); $t(72, 0.05) = 29.418$, $p < .001$. That is, the mean value of the learners' knowledge of SVs ($M=14$, $92 SD=1.14$) was significantly higher than the learners' knowledge of PVs ($M =2.43$, $SD =1.64$); $t(72, 0.05) = 37.99$, $p < .001$. This suggests that the learners' knowledge of SVs is significantly higher than their knowledge of PVs (both receptive and productive knowledge) as figure 2. shows. Taken into consideration that PVs are less frequent than SVs, the findings support the claim that high frequent forms are easier to master than less frequent forms. Thus, frequency of occurrence in the input are more likely to influence mastering the target forms.

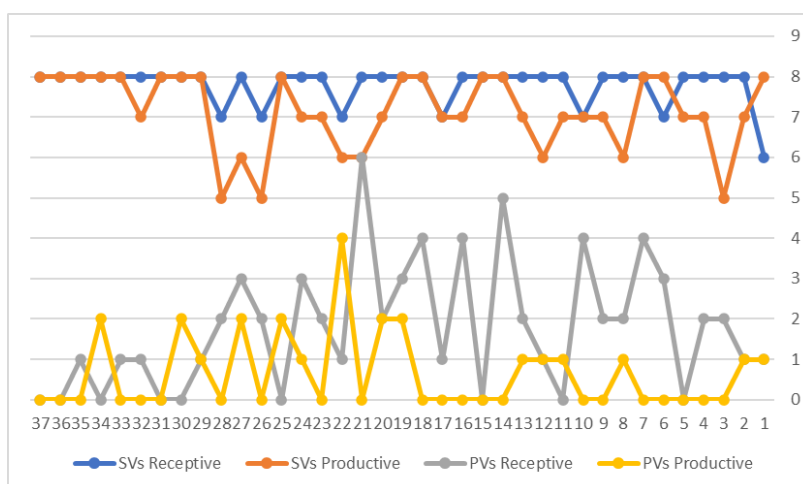


Figure 2. The group performance on PVs vs. SVs (both receptive vs. productive knowledge).

Taken together, by comparing the value of the statistical significance of the t-test for SVs and PVs (0.000) less than the level of significance (0.05), thus, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, which denotes that the learners' knowledge are more target-like on SVs than PVs, and this is obvious, as the average of target-like responses is 7.8 for the learners' receptive knowledge of SVs and 7.1 for the learners' productive knowledge of SVs, while the average of accurate responses is 1.8 for learners' receptive knowledge of PVs and 0.6 for the learners' productive knowledge of PVs.

Discussion

RQ1: Does frequency of occurrence influence Arab EFL learners' receptive and productive knowledge of PVs?

The results suggest that Arabic-speaking learners of English encounter comparable challenges with PVs as expected. The results show that the learners' receptive knowledge of SVs was significantly higher than the learners' productive knowledge of SVs. Similarly, the learners' receptive knowledge of PVs was significantly higher than the learners' productive knowledge of PVs. This suggests that the learners' receptive knowledge was significantly higher than their

productive knowledge on both forms. Moreover, the learners' receptive knowledge of SVs was significantly higher than the learners' receptive knowledge of PVs. Also, The learners' productive knowledge of SVs was significantly higher than the learners' productive knowledge of PVs. Explicitly, the learners' overall knowledge of SVs was significantly higher than the learners' overall knowledge of PVs (both respective and productive knowledge).

The results showed that Arab EFL learners significantly performed much better on SVs rather than on PVs owned to not only their mother tongue interference but also frequency of occurrence at both levels of comprehension and production. The results found Arab EFL learners' productive ability to be stronger for SVs which are highly frequent than VPs but also more transparent. The findings show a number of difficulties encountered by the learners in the actual production of PVs. The majority of the participants tended to treat PVs as two constituents rather than a single lexical unit. The results clearly revealed that apart from the influence of the learners' L1, unawareness with many of the meanings PVs, together with the fact that the learners' tend to chain meanings of each component in PV representations may have resulted in to the non-target like use of PVs. Lack of familiarity regarding common PVs was another reason resulted in misunderstanding and inappropriate use of PVs. Due to the fact that PVs were less frequent, less formal, less transparent than SVs, the learners found them less straightforward.

As far as SVs were concerned, the learners showed a better understanding of SVs and found the eight SVs (e.g., *find*, *hide*, *escape*...etc) more straightforward in comparison with PVs (e.g., *track down*, *cover up*, *make off*...etc). The results also have revealed that Arabic-speaking learners of English obviously are not acquainted with not the verb part of the PVs but they also do not distinguish the preposition that is essential to match the verb so as to carry the relevant meaning. As far as the production task was concerned, the learners generated inaccurate production of PVs because of the confusion of the 'transitivity' and 'separability' of PVs constituents. They seem unfamiliar with a number of the 'phrasal' restrictions in English. On the other hand, they found generating sentences with SVs less problematic. Based on the achieved results, EFL learners are also more likely to experience challenge with PVs whose meanings are non-transparent.

The participants' L1 was also found to play a major role in their understanding and usage of PVs. Despite the fact that some traces of the influence of the learners' mother tongue were found in the data which resulted in the generated non-target like representations of PVs, these cases could be absconded if they were received sufficient input to the target forms. It hence may be anticipated that the learners generating these sentences lack the basic vocabulary skills to the appropriate English counterparts for their Arabic representations and hence use forms that are triggered by direct transfer from their L1. This supports the conclusion that non-target like representations could be attributed to the non-Germanic learners' inadequate inventory of PVs. It seems that the learners fail to adjust their L1 system to better accommodate the target systems due to lack of sufficient evidence available via the input that triggers adjustments.

The results accord with earlier observations reported in the previous research on PVs (e.g., Abu Jamil, 2010; Alshayban, 2018; Shareef, 2018; Omidian et al., 2019) which showed that Arab EFL learners misunderstand and misuse of PVs in comparison with their knowledge with SVs. These results also corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work (e.g., Gardner and Davies, 2007; Arnon and Snider, 2010; Durrant and Doherty, 2010; Sonbul et. al, 2020) which conclude that frequency of occurrence has significant effect on language development.

In brief, the findings provide empirical evidence regarding the receptive and productive knowledge of PVs amongst Arab EFL learners and its relationship with frequency. The findings can enlighten relevant parties for further actions related to pedagogy.

Limitations, Implications and Directions for Future Research

Grammar has extensively been considered as the core of any language, whereas vocabulary including MWUs like PVs were inadequately considered in language classrooms context. Nevertheless, it is currently well recognised that it is lexical familiarity and not only grammatical familiarity that can guarantee learners' abundant competence in the target language and lexis is considered as "an essential part of mastering a second language" (Schmitt, 2008: 329). This obviously implies the status of PVs in language learning and without having sufficient command of PVs and an ability to infer and use them fittingly, it is roughly impractical for learners to attain better fluency and higher accuracy in English and approach the target system successfully.

Nevertheless, the generalisability of the study results is subject to certain limitations. The most important limitation lies in the fact that the sample size is relatively small due to some reasons including maintaining homogeneity among the sample, such as participants' level of proficiency. Moreover, this study examined EFL learners' knowledge from the same L1 background. Hence, to develop a full picture, additional research is needed to better understand the effects of frequency on mastering PVs by including a larger group of EFL learners from different L1 backgrounds. This might be a critical footstep in offering a blueprint for boosting EFL learners' PVs knowledge. Further studies may attempt to determine the usefulness of PVs development by means of extensive reading on the learners' receptive and productive knowledge.

The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature. First, the present study has been one of the first attempts to thoroughly examine PVs' productive and perceptive knowledge among EFL learners with special reverence to frequency. The findings have several important implications for future practice. Despite the fact that this study is based on a minor sample, the results bring further evidence that supports the conclusion of previous research that frequency of occurrence in the input must be considered when introducing PVs. Despite its exploratory nature, this study offers some insight into EFL pedagogy for the stakeholders including learners, language instructors, and materials developers (e.g. curriculum designers and textbook writers) might employ the findings of the present study to better advance learning and teaching

of PVs in English classroom. PVs should be given priority in English classrooms and be targeted as an essential part of EFL teaching.

Apart from that, materials developers should make use of corpus findings to make the relevant language teaching and learning simpler and convenient. Likewise, teachers must be attentive of the fact that frequency has a significant effect in language development and hence they are highly encouraged to incorporate more frequent MWUs in English classrooms. As far as learners are concerned, to advance their language development, they should bear in mind that some lexical items have more frequent usage than others. Diependaele et al. (2013) found frequency effects negative correlates with language proficiency; less proficient learners were highly sensitive to frequency effects. Thus, using frequency effects with less proficient learners might be more beneficial. This can be achieved by employing frequency with operating corpus data.

Johns (1994) claims that authentic forms are more advantageous to be taught than the artificial ones. One may wonder how can teachers support EFL learners in reaching more authentic usage of lexical items even outside classroom context. Corpora is the answer according to some recent research. The corpora have supported teachers as well as learners to attain naturally emerging authentic data. Due to the fact that exposure to authentic linguistic forms in EFL contexts is very small even outside the classroom contexts, corpora has received extensive attention recently.

The BNC is one of many mega corpora that are freely accessible to EFL learners. This wide-ranging corpus delivers a very all-inclusive and representative data. Hence, it can be utilised suitably by EFL teachers particularly while introducing vocabulary. Moreover, teachers are highly encouraged to offer some hints to the learners about the meanings and forms for introducing vocabulary including PVs. Teachers should increase learners' understanding to the role of frequency by increasing repeated language exposure though providing ample meaningful activities and incidental learning (e.g., extensive reading, social networking and edutainment).

Further enquiry is needed to understand the relationship between frequency with other variables on mastering PVs such as studying abroad. More research should be planned on how best to teach PVs in foreign language context. Considerably more work will need to be done to determine the role of frequency of occurrence on the knowledge of learners from different L1s.

Conclusion

To date, a great deal of previous research on PVs has largely paid extensive attention to avoidance patterns and has paid more precise elicitation measures to determine factors that impact the learners' knowledge of PVs with a special focus on the influence of the learners' L1. The current study included receptive and productive measures and considered some of the drawbacks of prior research. Despite the fact that this study is based on a minor sample, the results suggest that Arab EFL learners' receptive ability is greater than their productive ability and their knowledge of SVs are greater than their knowledge of PVs. In Arabic-

English context, the correspondences between English and the learners' L1 are not manifest; they are buried below the surface. Arab EFL learners, obviously, must increase their sensitivity against confusing correspondences, but if they advance an awareness of the cross-linguistic similarities they will recognise that reference to their L1s can support them solve the puzzle of English PVs and other related 'phraseological' lexicons. This defiantly can be strongly achieved by increasing repeated exposure and frequency of occurrence to the relevant forms.

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Ethical Approval

This research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Taif University, Saudi Arabia (Application code: 44-059), 19-01- 2021. The author considered all the ethical procedures for involving human participants. All participants agreed to voluntarily participate in the study and signed consent forms.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and publication.

Authors' contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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Availability of data and materials

The data is available upon request by contacting the author.

About the Author

Albaqami, Associate Professor in Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language, Turabah University College, Taif University, Saudi Arabia. She received her PhD in Linguistics from the University of York, UK. She completed an MA in Linguistics from the University of Leeds, UK. She is an FHEA (Fellow of the Higher Education Academy) awarded by Advance HE. Her research is primarily concerned with comparative aspects of lexicon, from both empirical and theoretical standpoints. She works primarily in foreign/ second language

development, with a special interest in lexicon. Her research papers have been published in different international journals.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9659-9756>

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Appendix: A

Section 1: Biographical information

1. How old are you?
2. What is your nationality?
3. Do your parents speak the same language?

4. Do you speak any other languages ? If any, how do you learn them? list them in order.
.....
5. Have you ever attended any English classes outside school? If yes, give some details (where?, when?, why?, and for how long?).....
6. Have you ever spent time in an English-speaking country? If yes, give some details (where?, when?, why?, and for how long?).....

Section 2: Receptive and productive task

Interpret the titles of the movie posters listed below and then put them in appropriate short contexts of your own. You are not permitted to use a dictionary:

		Knowledge	
no.	Posters	Receptive	Productive
		What does it mean?	If you know the meaning, put the form in an appropriate short context!
1			
2			

3



4



5



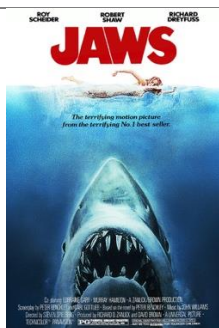
6



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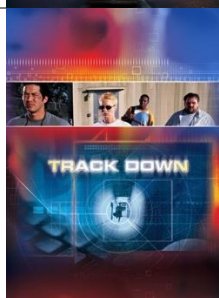
9



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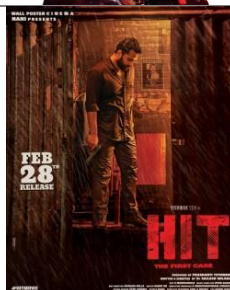
13



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16



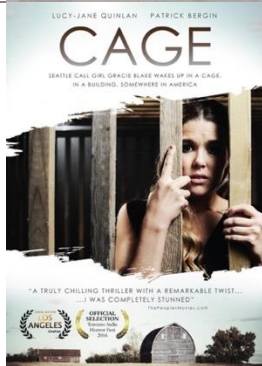
17



18



19



20



Posters Source:

Cinematerial. Retrieved, 15, March, 2021, from <https://www.cinematerial.com>
Movieposterdb. Retrieved, 20, March, 2021, from
<https://www.movieposterdb.com>