Making Sense of Phrasal Verbs:
A Case Study of EFL Learners in Taiwan

Ying-hsueh Hu & Pei-wen Luo
Tamkang University

Mastering phrasal verbs (PVs) has been a critical issue for learners in EFL environment for many years. PVs are often observed in satellite-framed language (S-language), such as English and German, which express the path of a motion by a main verb accompanied by a particle, while languages such as Spanish and French are referred to as verb-framed language (V-language), since their verbs alone convey both path and motion information (Talmy, 1988,2000). Mandarin Chinese, which is spoken by the majority of EFL learners in Taiwan belongs to S-language (Talmy, 2000, 2008). Arguably, Taiwanese learners should have relatively less difficulties in understanding the path trajectories depicted by various particles such as *in*, *out*, *on*, etc. in English than, let say, Japanese EFL learners whose first language, Japanese, is V-language (Yasuda, 2010). It has been thus argued that languages of different typology from English could benefit from the conceptual metaphor approach (CMA) in learning PVs by explicitly teaching the fact that they converge on orientational metaphors that are extended from spatial orientations grounded in the experiences of human body. This was true for adult subjects in a Japanese EFL study (Yasuda, 2010), but not so for Taiwanese teenagers of basic English level who did not respond positively to this approach (Yang and Hsieh, 2010).

In view of this, this present study is designed to investigate whether CMA 1) correlates positively with a threshold level in cognitive maturity and language proficiency, 2) enhances the understanding of extended senses of PVS, 3) improves understanding of abstracts senses of PVs, and 4) when connected with similar schemas in L1, could aid or hamper the learning of PVs. Approximately 90 subjects in a university in northern Taiwan had been recruited, and divided into two groups (control and experimental), which were again divided into a pre-intermediate and intermediate group respectively. The two control groups received a traditional approach, which in Taiwanese context is providing idiomatic Chinese translation, while the two experimental groups were given CMA with image schemas and polysemy networks linking all the senses of tested PVs. The PVs chosen for the study consist of 45 most frequent verbs in COCA (http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/) combining with three most frequent orientational particles, *out*, *up*, and *off*. A validity and reliability test eliminated 200 combinations to 80 PVs of 14 different senses (5 of *out*, 5 of *up*, and 4 of *off*) with a comparable distribution of concreteness and abstractness in usage to form an item bank for teaching (50 mins per treatment) and testing over a period of 12 weeks. All groups were given comprehension and production pretests, post- and delayed post-tests.

Initial analysis shows that subjects of the experimental groups responded fairly positively to the schemas encoded in the target PVs. As Mandarin Chinese is as some linguists argue an equipollently-framed language (Chen and Guo, 2008), where the concepts of manner and path are expressed in a serial of verbs, the path movement encoded in English particles should not be entirely alien to Mandarin speakers. These important parallels and differences had been highlighted and incorporated into treatment to exam L1 influence. Further analyses such as subjects' verbal protocols and interviews are being carried out to establish learning outcome and the efficacy of CMA.