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# The importance of lexical acquisition in SLA: A case study on phrasal verbs

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*Language is the infinite use of finite means.*

Wilhelm von Humboldt

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## Abstract

The acquisition of vocabulary has often been neglected in the field of linguistics. Only in the last decades the acquisition of new words has become a new branch in SLA studies supported by theories and approaches for the teaching of vocabulary to EFL students.

The aim of my final work is to point out the strategies of teaching English lexis to Italian students with a B1/B2 level. The theoretical findings will be tested in a real case study in relation to the effectiveness of some selected methods of lexis teaching.

Learning the lexis is one of the hardest challenges that students have to face in order to master a foreign language. At the same time it is the crucial basis for building a personal vocabulary. Thus the importance of lexis has pushed me to focus my attention on this topic and particularly on the strategies that permit learners to improve their knowledge of phrasal verbs.

In the first two chapters I describe the process of lexis and, in particular, phrasal verbs acquisition through the literature review.

In the third chapter a short comparative study of the lexis teaching methods is conducted, based on the selection of the most commonly used textbooks in Italy.

A personal case study on phrasal verbs teaching and assessment completes the entire research project in order to verify the success of the approaches and methods applied to a group of Italian students. The final chapter summarises the results of the case study, points out its limitations and makes some proposals for further research.

## Acknowledgements

This work is the result of a great interest in learning and teaching foreign languages. Considering my personal experience I have found out that although grammar is the structure of our languages, words are the basis of it.

Living in Ireland first and then in other countries I have realised that learning vocabulary needs a special treatment. The teaching of new words needs to be supported and carried out by teachers during the English courses in order to facilitate students in their communication.

This dissertation wouldn't have been possible without my supervisor Geraldine Ludbrook for giving me always interesting ideas, great support and endless patience.

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# 1. Introduction

Learning lexis is one of the hardest challenges that students have to face in order to master a foreign language. At the same time it is the crucial basis for building a personal vocabulary. Thus the importance of lexis has led me to focus my attention on this topic, and particularly on the strategies that permit learners to improve their knowledge of phrasal verbs.

The aim of my final work is to point out the approaches of teaching English lexis to Italian students with a B1/B2 level. The theoretical findings will be tested in a real case study in relation to the effectiveness of some selected methods of lexis teaching.

## 1.1. Background to the study

In this chapter I set out to explain why I see a need to investigate the English language proficiency of Italian students. I will provide some hypotheses on the possible causes for the present situation among Italian students. Then I will introduce the aims of my research project, and finally I will show how my research project, in particular the case study, will support my hypotheses.

Law 53/2003<sup>1</sup> introduced the teaching of English as a compulsory subject starting from the first year of primary school (children about 6 or 7 years old) to bring Italy into line with the majority of European countries. The Italian Ministry of Education (MIUR, Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca) drew up a document that gives direction concerning the level of English language which students are supposed to reach in order to leave secondary education: the levels range from B1 to C1+, depending on the type of school and whether English is the first or second language studied<sup>2</sup>.

However, it appears that Italian students do not achieve a good level of proficiency in the English language. A survey carried out by Farahnaz Faez (2011), from the University of Western Ontario, examined the role of English education in the Italian school system, focusing on the discrepancies between educational policy and practice and English proficiency, using data collected from educators. The study concluded that, despite the high number of hours dedicated to foreign language learning, about 17.2% of total lesson time, the

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<sup>1</sup> [https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/mpi/progettoscuola/allegati/legge53\\_03.pdf](https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/mpi/progettoscuola/allegati/legge53_03.pdf), Accessed 3 April 2018.

<sup>2</sup> [https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2005/allegati/dlgs\\_secondo\\_ciclo\\_all\\_d\\_bis.pdf](https://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/normativa/2005/allegati/dlgs_secondo_ciclo_all_d_bis.pdf), Accessed 3 April 2018.

educators interviewed felt that the level of proficiency reached was insufficient (Faez 2011, p. 37).

Other studies have produced similar findings. Although Italy is one of the countries (after Spain) in which English is introduced earliest in the curriculum, a survey reported by Europa (2009) shows that 38.6% of Italians did not speak any foreign language. Despite the introduction of English in the first classes of the school system and the increase in the number of hours dedicated to language instruction in lower secondary school, “Italy is one of the countries that has the lowest levels of English proficiency in Europe” (Faez, 2011, p. 41). Pulcini (1997), examining attitudes to the spread of English in Italy during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, also noted that “Italians are renowned for being poor at foreign languages” (Pulcini 1997, p. 82).

According to some studies there seems to be no real advantage in anticipating the age of L2 acquisition. In fact Shin (2006) claims that “there is no empirical evidence supporting the idea that an early start in English language learning produces better English speakers” (Shin, 2006, p. 2) moreover Pinter (2012) asserts that “studies that explored age differences in relation to the speed L2 acquisition clearly show that older learners have an advantage as they progress faster in all areas of learning (...)” (Pinter 2012).

Nevertheless, it seems that the type of program and curriculum, the number of hours spent in English classes and techniques and activities used in teaching are important factors in reaching a good level of proficiency of the EFL (Shin, 2006, p. 2.).

The approach to foreign language teaching is also important. In a study by EF Education First (2017)<sup>3</sup>, concerning the index of proficiency in the English language, Italy holds the 24<sup>th</sup> position among the 28 European countries followed only by Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and Azerbaijan. The research points out the need for Italy to implement the curriculum of the public schools with the teaching of communication skills which will be much more practical and useful for the students than merely knowledge of English grammar. It further points out that Italy needs to offer courses at state and private universities that are taught using the English language in a good number of courses. Besides adults should be helped to develop increased language competences aiding them in their job positions.

It is little wonder then, that there has traditionally been the widespread common perception that foreign languages could only be learnt abroad or in the many private language

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ef-italia.it/epi/regions/europe/>, Accessed 3 July 2018.

schools spread all over Italy, but certainly not in the school system where Italian native speakers teach. "Italians can't speak foreign languages", "Results of Italian students in foreign languages are very poor", "Italian foreign language teachers can't teach foreign languages because they themselves can't speak them well" (Lopriore 2002, p. 206). These statements in part truly represent the situation and the many different reasons are unknown to the general public.

Students receive up to thirteen years of language teaching by the time they graduate from secondary school and the length of preliminary teacher education in Italy is also among the highest in Europe. This shows that while policies and practices in Italy promote the learning and perhaps the use of English, the proficiency of Italian learners does not reflect such emphasis. However, it is important to note that the new policy initiatives in Italy are fairly recent and that with the above discussed changes in policy more desirable outcomes might be underway.

I will now explore some of the possible causes for this lack of proficiency in the English language. The reasons behind this sad situation are manifold; among others there are the high level of illiteracy, the great use of regional dialects, the inadequate teaching methods and the ineffective strategies employed by teachers and by students in either teaching or learning the language. I will deal with each of these issues separately.

### 1.2. Possible causes of low English proficiency

#### 1.2.1. Illiteracy

Pulcini noted that the level of illiteracy was high in Italy up until the middle of the last century (75% in 1861, the year of Italian Unification; 40% in 1911; 14% in 1951; 8.3% in 1961; 5.2% in 1971) (Pulcini 1997, p. 82). Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, corresponding the post-World War II period, Italy was still plagued by a high illiteracy rate. In 1951, nearly 20 million Italians (46.3%) could read and write, but had no formal qualification (so-called literates), about 13 million (30%) had the primary school licence, just over 2.5 million (5.9%) completed the lower secondary school, about 1.4 million (3.3%) took the upper secondary diploma, while only 422,000 (1%) attained a university degree (ISTAT 2011, p. 14).

In 2001, nearly 10% of Italians had no qualifications, 25% had the primary school licence, and 30% obtained a lower secondary diploma while another 25% completed the upper secondary level. Graduates were always a minority, reaching just 7.1% (Ibid, p.15)

Thankfully, primary education made huge strides, and by 1951 the illiteracy rate among the population older than 15 was down to 15 per cent. But the average number of years of schooling – 4.1 years, with large regional disparities – was the lowest among the twelve countries of Western Europe, and, despite great advances, Italy continued to lag behind in education attainments over the next sixty years (Toniolo 2012, p. 26).

Italian is now spoken by almost all Italians (93% of the total population). However, it has been estimated that in 1988 regional dialects were used by about 66% of Italians and 23% made exclusive use of them in all circumstances (ISTAT 2015).

The various dialects that are still being spoken today in Italy do not help to foster an inclination toward foreign languages because for some Italian students at school speaking standard Italian does not come naturally. Teachers might feel the need to dedicate much more effort to building on the national language rather than mastering a new language such as English.

### 1.2.2. A lack of teacher training

Italy does not have a strong tradition in the training of English teachers. The absence of a pre-service training in Italy up to 1999 shows a lack of preparation in the field of modern pedagogy. In addition, at University, courses were mainly focused on the study of foreign literature instead of the language and language teaching methodology. Now the situation has improved since special courses in universities which give instruction in foreign language teaching have been added to the curriculum (Lopriore 2002, p. 206).

Furthermore, Italy has always had a long tradition of dubbing foreign TV programs and movies, reducing the opportunities for teacher language improvement to a minimum. In addition, the high costs of study periods and the lack of careful proficiency monitoring led to a scarce preparation of English teachers (Ibid, p. 207).

However, now things have improved greatly. The OECD, UNESCO and the European Union identified as a priority teachers' professional competences in order to increase the quality of education systems and to raise European competitiveness (Capperucci 2017, p. 205). The quality of teaching turned out to be a strategic factor for education and social growth policies (OECD 2013, in Capperucci p. 205). The availability of modern technology and the use of internet have allowed teachers to have more exposure to English and have given them the possibility to look for teaching materials that can be employed in class.

### 1.2.3. The use of old-fashioned teaching approaches

As already mentioned, Law 53/2003 introduced the teaching of English as a compulsory subject starting from the first year of primary school (6 years of age) in line with most countries in Europe. We assume that one of the trigger problems is the teaching approach of English teachers during English lessons. In fact, in the survey by Faez (2011), mentioned above, only half (51.8%) of the respondents agreed that teaching methods used for English instruction at the primary and secondary levels are effective. Almost all participants (92.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that teaching methods need to be improved or further developed.

Regarding the methods applied during the English lessons, teachers accounted that the teaching of the English language in the Italian classrooms generally uses one of the following traditional ways: grammar proficiency and accuracy in spelling are given prime importance. Moreover, a lot of teaching focuses on preparing students to pass end of term tests and to achieve good grades at the national exams at the end of the year. Kathy, a high school teacher, commented: “Teachers mainly use grammar-translation methods, in which they only teach grammar and how to translate into the second language or from the L2 into L1, but this doesn’t really help people to communicate” (Kathy interview, December 2009 – Faez 2011, p. 40).

Besides, a lack of knowledge of vocabulary leads to the impossibility of language production and language comprehension. Therefore, the acquisition of new words is a fundamental pre-requisite for language acquisition and this knowledge can be implemented only when teachers employ effective vocabulary teaching and learning strategies (Mukuroli 2011).

This brief analysis of possible causes of the low level of English proficiency has pointed to three main issues: serious illiteracy in Italy until the 1950s, the lack of teacher training and the use of old-fashioned teaching approaches.

### 1.3. Aims of the research project

In this section I will set out the main aims of my research project. The ineffectiveness of the grammar-translation methods and the grammar section dedicated to teaching will be an important point of discussion on which the dissertation aims to shed light in the second chapter. Although in schools grammar is emphasised over the acquisition of new words, lexis

is “the basis of accurate and fluent communication” (Rudzka-Ostyn 2003, p. V). In fact, the aim of the paper is to show the importance of lexis in favour of grammar in teaching English.

Widdowson, too, sees lexis as being an essential element of foreign language acquisition: “The more one considers the matter, the more reasonable it seems to suppose that lexis is where we need to start from, the syntax needs to be put to the service of words and not the other way round.” (Widdowson in Lewis 1993, p.115).

One aspect of lexis, phrasal verbs, occupies an important position in the English lexicon due to their great use and frequency in the English language. Phrasal verbs are so important that Bolton (2012) asserted that “no native English speakers would speak even for a few minutes without using one or more of them” (Bolton 2012). Alexander claims that “the use of phrasal verbs is extremely common and a standard feature of good idiomatic English” (1988, p.153).

The textbooks and the material used during teaching lessons, together with the pedagogical approaches adopted, are an important element in the acquisition of a foreign language. I will therefore also investigate the contents, approaches and effectiveness of three English textbooks commonly used in Italian schools in chapter two.

### 1.3.1. Main goals of the research project

Phrasal verbs are used very frequently in spoken English, but many of them are now being used also in more formal registers. That is why I will focus on them during my research project. Phrasal verbs can be classified into two main groups: opaque and transparent. The former are often more difficult to acquire because they are made up of a main verb, which often has more than one meaning, and a preposition. Briefly, a phrasal verb may be said to be transparent if its meaning can be deduced by defining its individual parts. If it cannot, it is opaque. (Wyss, 2002) The following pairs illustrate the distinction:

The enemy gave up. (opaque “surrendered”)

He called off the meeting. (opaque “cancelled”)

The guests came in. (transparent =entered)

She went out. (transparent=left)

In the case study, in chapter 4, I will address two research questions concerning the topic of phrasal verbs.

### 1.3.2. The research questions

The case study is a brief empirical investigation carried out in an English language classroom and consisting of four one-hour lessons. During these lessons, I intended to check the hypothesis that some of the phrasal verbs, the opaque ones, are more difficult to master than the transparent ones. In fact, various studies (Hautte, 2017, p.7) indicate that the L2 learners and speakers tend to avoid the use of phrasal verbs in general and in particular “idiomatic phrasal verbs might be harder to learn than transparent phrasal verbs for ESL learners” (Cheon, 2006, p. 6)

I also tested the students repeatedly in order to explore which testing format might be more effective in evaluating the learners’ progress in lexis acquisition.

Two research questions were formulated for the purpose of this study:

Research question one: Are opaque phrasal verbs truly more difficult for Italian learners than transparent ones?

Research question two: Which vocabulary testing format might be more effective in evaluating the lexical proficiency of students: L1 translation or gap filling testing?

Monitoring the difficulties of the students acquiring the diverse phrasal verbs through the various activities led me to my first research question. The second research question, instead, concerning the more effective testing format, is derived from my own hypothesis. In other words, I compared student results in two different testing formats. I based this approach on an analogous case study carried out by Cheon (2006, p. 7) with Arab and Korean learners.

### 1.3.3. Expected results

My case study will support the claim made in the literature, namely that students find more difficulties in spotting and acquiring opaque than transparent phrasal verbs. Specifically, I expect a predominance of correct answers in testing questions regarding transparent phrasal verb use compared to questions related to opaque ones.

Cheon (2006, p. 21) shows major effectiveness of translation-based testing compared to gap filling testing. Thus, I expect to obtain more reliable results in case study tests based on the translation of phrasal verbs from English to the mother tongue language, Italian.

## 1.4. Structure of the thesis

In the literature review in the second chapter I will describe the different approaches to EFL used in Italian schools, for example how grammar and translation are gradually being

replaced with another method of teaching the language which is the communicative approach. This means that teachers focus on real English, creating situations for students and grammar exercises have been replaced by tasks. Another point of the second chapter is the analysis of some textbooks that can be useful in this study as they show the approaches used in the course books and this can tell us what is lacking.

In chapter three the paper will examine the role of lexis in the English language. In fact, if the grammar approach has always been the basis of teaching in traditional approaches, now I will suggest how essential vocabulary is in the English language as a starting point in building language. For this reason, I chose to describe in detail a part of the English language which has always been neglected: phrasal verbs. Phrasal verbs, described in chapter three, are a good example of the role verbs play in lexis. These verbs are often considered one of the most difficult verbal constructions in the English language; however, they are often a neglected topic during English lessons.

In order to show some evidence of their importance I decided to carry out a case study in a class of a high school in Conegliano Veneto. The fourth chapter will provide further details describing the case study.

Chapter five will draw together my findings, suggesting how the research project can contribute to the teaching of phrasal verbs to Italian learners. I will also indicate some possible future research.

## 2. Literature Review

"One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to look at its use and learn from that. But the difficulty is to remove the prejudice which stands in the way of doing this. It is not a stupid prejudice."

Ludwig Wittgenstein

In this section I will focus the attention on the importance and the role of lexis in English language acquisition. In particular I will examine the phrasal verbs with regard to acquisition and teaching.

### 2.1. The role of lexis

Language acquisition involves different language subsystems such as phonology, morphology, grammar, semantics and pragmatics. Many scholars emphasize the paramount role of vocabulary. In fact, students acquire language through concepts and meanings, in other words as McCarthy (1990, p. viii) clearly claims: "No matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successfully the sounds of L2 are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way".

Wilkins (1972, pp. 111–112) writes that "while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed". Schmitt (2010, p. 4) noted in fact that "learners carry around dictionaries and not grammar books".

Since lexis is so vital for language acquisition, a good amount of time should be dedicated to mastering new words.

#### 2.1.1. Words and lexis. The definition of lexis

"Words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole texts are formed" (Read 2000, p.1). Words are everything and everything is words, but sometimes, it is possible to communicate big ideas with relatively limited language.

Lexis derives from ancient Greek λέξις (léxis, "diction", "word"), from λεγ- (leg-, "to speak") (Lewis & Short 1879), and is the total set of words within a language. Yet lexis is much more than just single words.

Although the terminology used so far made no distinction between lexis and vocabulary, some scholars think that the difference is significant. Talking about the nature of lexis and vocabulary Michael Lewis (1993, p. 89) notes that “the terminology is not a matter of pretention or pedantry, but represents a radical and profound change in the way we see and analyse language”.

According to Lewis’ theory (1993, pp. 89-95), vocabulary is considered to be a collection of individual words and associated meanings. On the other hand, lexis consists of vocabulary (single word lexical items) and “multi-word lexical items” (i.e. polywords, collocations, institutionalised expressions).

Using an example from Schmitt (2000, p. 1), can you infer a common thing related to all sentences?

die

expire

pass away

bite the dust

kick the bucket

give up the ghost

Besides the fact that the words combined in each utterance increase from one to four, the thing that connects all of them is the meaning, as the six expressions convey the same message: “to die”. The first two verbs are single words and slightly differ in meaning. A person dies but a bottle of milk expires. Pass away is a phrasal verb also called a multiword unit which is made up of a verb plus a particle that has an “idiosyncratic meaning compared to the component words” (Schmitt 2000, p.1). Finally the last three idioms refer to a group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word on its own.

Lexis has a central role in language speaking; language itself is made up of words that hold special meanings. However, sometimes it can be complex to classify such a huge and varied linguistic element. If we think of the thousands of words we know, we are not always able to recognise immediately the variety of elements it is composed.

Analysing lexis from a linguistic point of view we can recognise the so-called free morphemes which are the smallest and minimal units that carry a meaning, as Katamba (1994, p. 32) puts it: “Morphemes are the atoms with which words are built”. Bound morphemes, however, are those words which are connected through a meaningless item such as the prefix

(a particle that comes before the root of the word) for example *-un* in “unbelievable” in which *-un* transmits the feature of negation. While, for instance, the suffix *-s* in “schools” occurs for the creation of plural.

Words are found also in fixed expressions (“raise your hands”) and finally words occur in collocations such as “black and white” or “bacon and eggs” (and not the way round). Last but not least lexis is made up of special kinds of collocations called idioms (i.e. *miss the boat*, meaning it’s too late or expressions such as *a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*,

meaning that what you have is worth more than what you might have later). Idioms are usually taught when learners have achieved a high level of the L2. However, these lexical elements are essential means of communication which refer to a precise situation. Idioms reflect something more accurate and traditional.

### 2.1.2. Lexis acquisition

Hill (1999) argues that most learners despite having good vocabularies may have problems with fluency because their collocation competence is limited. Thus it is necessary to suggest better teaching strategies to tackle this problem. Oxford (1990, p. 6) introduces some strategies for teaching vocabulary which have several characteristics like: (a) creating mental linkages such as grouping, associating and finally placing words into context; (b) using different kinds of materials and strategies for associating words, for example, the use of images, maps and audio-visual aids and (c) employing various techniques for creating a long term link: using mechanical techniques. In this way, if we give collocation clues to our students, they could be able to comprehend or at least, guess the meaning of an unknown word.

The role of lexis is pivotal in the discourse of the acquisition of a second language and broadly speaking within the field of linguistics. In the past decades the generative grammar and the translation method were the only approaches used in language learning in order to shape an “abstract language” (Altenberg & Granger 2002, p. 2). Now the priorities have changed according to the fact that lexis and grammar are no longer separated but interdependent, supporting Halliday’s idea of collocations being “combinatory restrictions which are neither grammatical nor semantic but which reflect the habitual or customary places of words” (Firth 1957, p. 12). For example, native speakers order “bacon and eggs” and “a cup of black tea”, however a waiter has surely heard someone ordering “a powerful tea” from non-native speakers instead of a “strong tea”. Collocations are purely a matter of

probabilities, with words having a higher or lower likelihood of occurring together (Altenberg & Granger 2002, p. 1). Collocations seem arbitrary in the English language, for this reason it is suggested that words be learnt in lexical chunks in order to acquire language proficiency and fluency. In addition, strategies such as so-called semantic grouping may also assist acquisition.

Although lexis has a predominant role in mastering a foreign language, it can be perhaps the hardest task in language acquisition. The learning of EFL, indeed, implies the learning of large numbers of words (Avila & Sadoski 1996, Laufer & Hulstijn 2001) and to achieve good results in the acquisition of new words creates a considerable concern to students (Ott, Blake & Butler 1976, p. 37). Therefore, the strategies and the methods used to promote effective acquisition are important issues in the field of SLA (De La Fuente 2002, p. 82).

Building a vocabulary is a long and stumbling process. Ellis, Tanaka & Yamazadi (1994) indicate that acquiring new words is

“the frequency in which the item is used in speech and writing, its situational and functional uses, its syntactic behaviour, its underlying form and the forms that can be derived from it, the network of associations between it and other items, its semantic features and of course, the various meanings associated with the item” (p. 457, as cited in Ahmed, 2013).

Since learning vocabulary in the foreign language is far from being an easy task, teachers are the guide who can make the difference for students who want to acquire a good level in the acquisition of new words. Vocabulary learning strategies are for this reason an important issue when learning a good repertoire of new words. However, vocabulary is often much neglected since teachers often pay much more attention to grammar structures or they simply expect the students to practice new words on their own.

### 2.1.3. Strategies in teaching vocabulary

Schmitt (2010, pp. 3-35) discusses ten issues “which attract the most attention (and thus research) in the field of vocabulary” that are related to lexis use and acquisition. The following is a short list of vocabulary use and acquisition issues extrapolated from the Schmitt’s work (2010).

#### *Vocabulary size*

Firstly, it must be considered the number of words which a learner should acquire in order to speak the second or foreign language. In spite the fact that 98% of the words

contained in a text should be known to the student in order to reach a good level of the text comprehension (Nation, 2001 p. 15), which may be thought as a huge amount of words to learn in a foreign language, most of the texts contain predominantly so-called “high-frequency words”. It means that to understand most of a text a relatively small amount of words is needed. “Usually the 2,000-word level has been set as the most suitable limit for high-frequency words” (ibid. p.14). It means that a relatively small effort in lexis acquisition produces relevant improvements in L2 acquisition. That is why teachers need to foster the acquisition of as much lexicon as possible. The lessons that took place during the case study described in chapter 4 were based on this approach.

The words that need priority in acquisition are probably the more frequent ones. Moreover, Nation (2001, pp. 9-19) indicates different types of words necessary for understanding diverse types of texts: high-frequency, academic, technical and low-frequency words. For each category of words different word frequency lists have been studied such as *A General Service List of English Words*, *The Academic Word List*, *The University Word List*. It is suggested that the teachers should make an extensive use of general or specialised high frequency lists depending on the context of learning. For instance, “learning the meaning of the technical term *morpheme* needs to be done as a part of the study of linguistics, not before the linguistics course begins” (ibid. p.19).

#### *Pronunciation and spelling*

Another important issue is the pronunciation and spelling of words. Although it can be much more difficult to understand the meaning of a word, a lot of misunderstandings often rely on both pronunciation and spelling of the lexical items. Even a simple word such as “poll”, can create problems of learning because of its orthographically similar forms in English (pool, polo, pollen, pole, pall, pill) (example from Schmitt 2010, p. 24). Not to mention homophones, words with different meanings and spellings, but the same pronunciation which occur frequently in English.

#### *Engagement*

“Engagement” (Schmitt 2010, p. 170) defined as “the exposure, attention, manipulation and time spent on lexical items” is a critical factor in the acquisition of new vocabulary.

Hulstijn and Laufer (2001, p. 543) suggest that engagement or “involvement” according to their terminology is based on three elements: “need, search and evaluation”.

“Need” is, for example, the necessity to know the meaning of a word to understand a spoken or written text. “Search” is a process of looking up the word meaning in a dictionary or, nowadays, on the Internet. “Evaluation” is related to the activity of comparing a word meaning or other characteristics with its context of use to understand where it fits the context.

Different activities and tasks are crucial to engagement (Schmitt, 2010, pp.170-171): exposure (i.e. reading or listening), story retelling, assessment or testing, correction or post-testing lead learners of L2 to achieve good results in the retention of new words. Every action related to the usage and the repetition of lexical items is essential according to Hulstijn and Laufer (2001, p. 543).

#### *Acquisition through context*

Whether presentation and usage of words is a key point in the acquisition of new lexical items, it is important not only to present single words but also phrasal vocabulary; words are used in context and rarely in isolation. Celce Murcia (1979, p. 221) points out that language acquisition is “not simply an additive process”. Language is not acquired through the building up of vocabulary word by word, instead language is learnt by “chunks” (ibid.):

“one could imagine it [chunk] to be something like a speech act [...]. In other words, a learner of a second language needs to learn the functions of language: how to make requests, apologize, ask for permission, etc, in the second language.”

Therefore, expressions are more useful if learnt in context, in a range of situations and presenting words in chunks and contextual sentences.

If lessons are well-organized, leveraging the engagement and context learning in all its different aspects, the new vocabulary is acquired more quickly and with less effort, the words meanings acquired are richer and context related, the new words or chunks are acquired in relation to concrete functions of language.

## 2.2. Overview of phrasal verbs

“Why does your house burn up as it burns down? How come you have to fill in a form to fill out a form? Why can you see stars out but not lights out?”

J.A. Wines, Caroline Taggart

In the past few decades many SLA researches shifted their attention from syntax to vocabulary (Folse 2004; Laufer 1997) and a great interest has been focused on phrasal verbs. However these constructions appear to “sit at the borderline between lexicon and syntax” (Li et al. 2003 p. 513), thus it may be complex for researchers, teachers and students to define phrasal verbs (PVs) and in particular to find the right teaching and learning strategies to acquire them. The path seems to be more complicated if textbooks and instructional materials do not give many indications and instructions for the acquisition of PVs (Gardner and Davies 2007; Koprowski 2004; Zarifi & Mukundan 2012). Although PVs are one of the most challenging aspects of English language instruction (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999; Gardner & Davies 2007; Siyanova & Schmitt 2007), they “can be a great asset to learners in acquiring a new language” (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1999).

In this section I will first give a brief description of phrasal verbs in terms of their definition over the past decades, and then I will touch on the delicate argument of the acquisition and use of phrasal verbs referring to L1 interference. To conclude, I will set out the main difficulties encountered in teaching phrasal verbs.

### 2.2.1. Phrasal verbs: definition, meaning and use

According to Dwilight Bolinger, the term "phrasal verb" appeared first in *Words and Idioms: Studies in the English language* (Smith 1933. p. 172).

Gardner & Davies (2007) asserted that “linguists and grammarians struggle with nuances of phrasal verb definitions” (p. 341). Indeed these verbal constructions have been referred to using a variety of terminology: *compound verb* (Kruisinga 1932), *two-word verb* (Abdul Taha 1960), *discontinuous verb* (Live 1965), *verb-adverb compound* (Kennedy 1967), *verb-particle construction* (Fraser 1979). Despite the discontinuous terms, all scholars have agreed on their most central forms: (...) “they consist of a verb proper and an adverbial particle such as *up*, *out*, or *over*, though not necessarily all instances of even these three have been accorded equal status” (Bolinger 1971, p. 4).

Bolinger (1971) himself adopted the definition of phrasal verbs in his main work *The Phrasal Verb in English*, since this term appears “comfortable” and “includes phrases of more than two words” (p. 3). However, not all two-word verbs are phrasal verbs. Verbs such as *to rely on*, *to cope with*, *to feel like* are not phrasal verbs as the particle in those verbs is purely a preposition. Two examples from Bolinger have been taken in order to shed light on the syntactic features of these verbal structures.

I can cope with Jones.

\*I can cope Jones with.

In the second sentence, which is grammatically incorrect, the characteristic of flexible word order of phrasal verbs cannot be followed because *with* is merely a preposition. The verb appears in this case as a one-word verb (Bolinger 1971, p.4).

Let us consider another example (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, p. 281).

1. She took off the label.

2. She jumped off the wall.

1a. She took the label off.

2a. \* She jumped the wall off.

Examining the two sentences the first *off* is a particle, a complement of the verb that is strictly connected to the main verb and *the label* is the object. The fact of being a particle allows *off* following the object as in 1a. However, in the second sentence *off* is a transitive preposition that does not permit a change of word order, the clause is fixed. This means that *off* can either be a particle or a preposition. When *off* behaves as a preposition the object cannot be moved. (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, p. 281)

Phrasal verbs can be described also as multiword units (MWU) and many specific dictionaries and workbooks focusing on this type of lexical items have been published, for example the *Cambridge International Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (1997) and the *Phrasal Verb Organiser* (Flower 1993).

Phrasal verbs have an Anglo-Saxon origin, in other words they existed in the English language before Latin and French words. Phrasal verbs appear to occur only in the Germanic languages (Newmeyer 2005, p. 113). Phrasal verbs are used mainly in speech and in informal writing, but they do occur, with growing frequency, in more formal writing (Chen 2007, p. 350).

In order to better understand the use of phrasal verbs, let us now look at a few examples from Folse, (2009, p. 211):

Assuming someone is smoking and you would like them to stop, you may ask;

1. *Could you put out that cigarette?*

However, on a train you might find a notice saying;

2. *In the event oxygen masks appear, please extinguish all smoking materials.*

The two examples above show the difference in register. While the first sentence is more colloquial and is considered to be informal, the second one is extremely formal hence the choice of the one-word verb *extinguish* instead of *put out*.

Although phrasal verbs are more common in less formal language, it is rarely noted that President Lincoln in 1863 in the first line of the Gettysburg Address pronounced as follows:

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers *brought forth* on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” (Darwin and Gray 1999, p. 66).

Furthermore in the Twenty-Third Psalm of the King James Version of the Bible,

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to *lie down* in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.”

It is not surprising that the translators made use of the phrasal verb *lie down* in order to avoid redundancy and circumlocutions (Ibid. p. 66).

It can also occur that the same verb construed once as particle and once as transitive preposition has a sharp difference in meaning. Let us examine the following examples (Huddleston and Pullum 2002, p. 282):

3a. She *ran off* another copy.

3b. She *ran off* the road.

4a. They *turned in* the fugitives

4b. They *turned in* the wrong

direction.

The verb *run off* has the meaning of print, duplicate in sentence 3a, while the same verb with the preposition means to have an accident leaving the road in 3b. Moreover, phrases 3a and 3b have a high degree of idiomatisation.

For the same reason *turn in* in 4a (to take someone to the police) has a completely different meaning from *turn in* in 4b (to take a wrong direction).

The examples show only some of the difficulties that students may encounter in the study of phrasal verbs.

The meaning of a phrasal verb can be expressed in a pie chart where the entire area of the graph corresponds to the meaning of the phrasal verb. The phrasal verb is then made up of the meaning of the verb (*put, get, look*), the meaning of the particle such as *up, down, off, out*

and finally a phrasal verb includes the meaning of the verb together with the combination of its particle.

Referring to transparent and opaque phrasal verbs, the former get their meaning especially from the verb and the particle, while the latter receive the most meaning from the combination of the two.

According to Schnoebelen (2008, p. 9) the phrasal verb has some meaning  $z$ , which is made up of some amount of meaning from the verb ( $x$ ), some from the particle ( $y$ ), and something extra that just happens by combining them ( $n$ ). ( $z=x+y+n$ )  $Z$  itself should be equivalent for transparent and opaque phrasal verbs, however transparent phrasal verbs should get most of their meaning from  $(x+y)$ , opaque phrasal verbs should get most of their meaning from  $n$ .

Based on phrasal verbs meanings they can be divided in different “semantic classes” such as “spatial or directional, literal or transparent (e.g., *stand up*) to aspectual, completive (e.g., *eat up*) to non-compositional, idiomatic or opaque (e.g., *figure out*)” (Riguel 2014, p. 3). The semantic classes of phrasal verbs are illustrated in the figure below from the most transparent (directional and aspectual) meanings to the most opaque (idiomatic) ones.

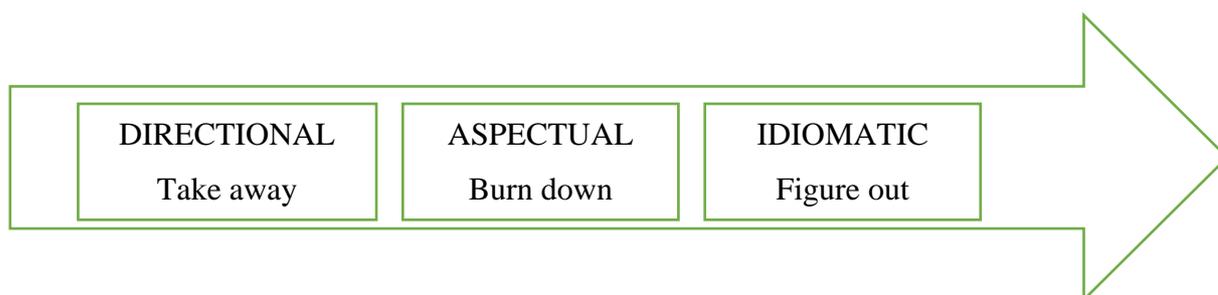


Figure 1 - The semantic classes of phrasal verbs (Riguel 2014)

Machonis describes the more idiomatic phrasal verbs as “frozen verbs”, once the phrasal verbs are at this stage; they become part of the realm of lexicon. Compositional verbs instead behave differently, in other words the particle adds aspect to the verb so they retain the core meaning of the original verb (Machonis, 2009, p 253). The particle *up* for instance takes completion, intensity, direction or a combination of the three (Machonis, 2009, p.264). We can conclude that a compositional verb can change in frozen verb, and at that stage its meaning cannot change anymore, otherwise the compositional verb can remain productive and its meaning can evolve. Jackendoff (2010) comments on this phenomenon thus he asserts: “Some combinations of verb + particle are productive, some are semiproductive, and some are purely idiosyncratic” (p. 228).

This short overview of phrasal verbs helps us to understand the different features of these verbal constructions taking into account the different definitions given by the scholars and considering the special meaning that the phrasal verbs hold. Meanings that can greatly vary from verb to verb.

### 2.2.2. Acquisition and use of phrasal verbs related to L2 proficiency

The role of phrasal verbs is crucial in English, firstly because of their high frequency of usage especially in speaking; secondly they appear to be very idiomatic among native speakers. For this reason the acquisition of these verbal structures appears preponderant, if learners of English want to sound more native-like. Cullen & Sargeant (1996, p. vii), explain indeed that “understanding and being able to use these constructions correctly in spoken and written English is essential if the learner is to develop a complete command of the language”.

The “interference” or “negative transfer” from the mother tongue (L1) to the target language is mainly due to the influence of the student’s native language, but also to the difficulty of the target language.

The ideal environment to **grow up** children is the traditional family made up of mother, father and one or more children (example from Riguel 2014, p.13).

Confusion between the L1 and the target language (English) can occur when translating from one language to another. In fact a phenomenon called “negative interference” occurs in the example above: “raise a child in English is translated into Italian as “crescere un bambino”, and “crescere” in Italian is translated into English as “grow”, hence the incorrect use of the phrasal verb *grow up* in the example” (Riguel 2014, p.14).

Interference and lack of syntactic constructions in the target language lead the Italian learner to an incorrect use of phrasal verbs and at worst to avoid them. The phenomenon of avoidance of phrasal verbs has been the subject of numerous studies as presented by Haute (2016, pp.7-14). It consists in different language strategies like “lengthy circumlocutions” (Jacobsen 2012, p. 3) or Latin verb substitution.

A survey conducted by Riguel (2014) on French-speaking students revealed the avoidance of phrasal verbs and the preference to choose the corresponding Latin verb.

<b>Group</b>	Preference for a phrasal verb	Preference for a single-word verb	Correct answers (phrasal verb)	Correct answers (single-word verb)	Wrong answers (distractors)
<b>Native students</b>	61.28%	38.72%	61.28%	38.72%	0.00%
<b>Non-native students</b>	34.91%	65.09%	25.82%	59.64%	14.54%

Table 1 - Results of multiple-choice tests submitted to native and non-native students (in %) as cited in Riguel 2014

The results of the tests show the highest percentage in the choice of phrasal verbs among native students while the preference for a single-word verb is nearly the same percentage among non-native students. The effect of correct answers for phrasal verbs among native students is higher than the correctness of answers in the choice of single-word verbs among the group of French-speaking students. French students indeed tend to avoid phrasal verbs in favour of the corresponding Latin single-word verb. This is due to the lack of a similar linguistic feature between L1 and L2 (Riguel, 2014).

Vibel (2007) carried out a study among German and Italian learners of English. She discovered that the phenomenon of avoidance is more common in the Italian students. Although phrasal verbs are also present in Italian language they “are only few and are restricted to spoken language” (Hautte 2016, p.12). Thus many Italian learners try the “technique” of avoidance. They skip phrasal verbs in sentences or replace them with the corresponding single Latin verb that comes to their mind, provoking a smile on the lips of their listener at the best case or a terrible misunderstanding at worst.

The little occurrence of phrasal verbs outside the Germanic families causes major problems in learners whose mother tongue is a Romance language (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p.425). However, a study conducted by Hulstijn and Marchena (1989) showed that even among Dutch students, phrasal verbs were avoided and misunderstood, although Dutch and English share the common Germanic root so Dutch speakers are familiar with this kind of verbal construction. The avoidance causes therefore unnatural speech such as *I encountered an old photograph* instead of *I came across an old photograph* (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

To sum up, phrasal verbs are an important part of lexis in terms of frequency; their correct use is strictly related to fluency. However, many scholars highlight widespread difficulties in their acquisition, in particular for non-Germanic L1 speakers. These are the reasons why there are difficulties also in PVs teaching which will be analysed more in detail in the following section.

### 2.2.3. Some main difficulties in teaching phrasal verbs

Due to idiomaticity and polysemy, phrasal verbs are a real challenge for non-English speakers (Riguel 2014, p. 5). Darwin and Gray (1999) discuss three main problems concerning the teaching of phrasal verbs to EFL students. Firstly, the definition of these verbal structures, as pointed out by the two scholars, can create some confusion in the use and production of phrasal verbs. The PV is usually defined as verb plus particle combination acting as a single verb. This definition shows the main feature of PVs that sometimes teachers forget when teaching them (Darwin and Gray 1999, pp.66-67). In fact they are characterized by two components but they appear to ESL students as a unique lexical item, in other words when teaching PVs they need to be learned as having a single meaning.

The major mistake that instructors make is to explain PVs as verb + particle and not to give attention to the meaning as a whole (ibid.). Brinton (1988) admits *drink up* in the classification of phrasal verbs, whereas Quirk and Greenbaum (1990) are not certain whether to classify the verb among phrasal verbs or in the group of free combinations. These doubts in the categorization of phrasal verbs may create confusion in both the learner and the instructor.

Darwin and Gray underline another reason for the “arbitrary” teaching of phrasal verbs namely, their frequency. Teachers and instructors often rely on their intuition for the choice of the most frequent phrasal verbs; however, this feeling is not supported by any certain basis of instruction. Research on the knowledge of phrasal verbs by ESL students has been carried out also by scholars such as Cornell (1985). However, Gray and Darwin (1999, p. 67) note that among the 60 common phrasal verbs chosen by the author, only four were high-frequency PVs.

The third justification of inadequate proficiency of phrasal verbs is the approach of teaching, for example grouping them together according to the verb (Side, 1990, p. 144). If this method could help students to become aware of the idiomatic nature of phrasal verbs, the presentation of PVs with different particles does not really promote their use (ibid.).

The *English Vocabulary Profile* is an innovative and useful source for our discussion on phrasal verbs. The EVP provides “in both British and American English, which words and phrases learners around the world know at each level - A1 to C2 - of the CEFR. Rather than providing a syllabus of the vocabulary that learners should know, the EVP project verifies what they do know at each level”. A study conducted by Negishi, Tono and Fujita (2012) based on the EVP data and independent testing show that Japanese learners found more difficulties with a A2 phrasal verb than a B2 phrasal verb. The reasons can be traced back to the low frequency of some phrasal verbs in the textbooks used. For instance, the verb *leave behind* whose difficulty degree was relatively high, “appears only once in the textbook corpus, which indicates that Japanese students rarely come across this phrasal verb in the classroom (Ibid p. 13).

In the case study set out in the next chapter, the teaching approach of PVs is the real context. Since this verbal construction is used almost in the spoken language, the best way to learn them may be by creating a situation in which students can pick up phrasal verbs and put them in a natural context, as suggested by R.S tenured teacher of the class of *liceo linguistico* in the case study.

Furthermore, many authors claim that the frequency of particular phrasal verbs is important when students have to learn them (Cornell, 1985). Although it can be true that some verbs need to be acknowledged first, because they appear to be more frequent; teachers need to adapt the level of phrasal verbs to the students in order to not overburden them with lists of phrasal verbs.

If the topic is claimed to be complex, everything becomes more difficult when even teaching materials and strategies appear to be obsolete and inadequate. Lists of phrasal verbs with the equivalent meaning at the right side of the page are particularly common. Much space is dedicated to the special topics regarding the environment to literature but special tasks on phrasal verbs are not really the goal of textbooks. Looking at the issue in its whole, it is also true that as phrasal verbs regards the active knowledge (Nation 2000, p 4) in other words the speaking ability, teachers usually do not give much attention on this ability, avoiding phrasal verbs or only presenting them as a secondary argument.

This chapter dealt with the centrality of lexis in second language acquisition and teaching. Lewis' lexical approach has been presented with specific attention to phrasal verbs seen as particular type of “lexical items”. In the next chapter, the teaching method based on

the lexical approach will be compared to some other methods and approaches used in Italian textbooks.

### 3. EFL methods in Italian textbooks

In this chapter I set out to describe the various methods in teaching foreign languages to the EFL students. Some of the approaches described below are considered to be obsolete. The aim of this chapter is to make a short comparative study of the approaches and to understand to which extent they are used in Italian textbooks.

The translation method will be the first approach I will deal with passing through the direct method and finally I will examine the communicative learning approach. The second part of the chapter is dedicated to the analysis of three textbooks commonly used in English courses in Italian schools in order to evaluate the material which is in the hands of the learners of English. Finally, my focus will be how these textbooks manage to teach phrasal verbs.

In recent decades, the necessity of promoting English as a foreign language, has led to the issue of how to teach a second language or more foreign languages effectively. Teachers have indeed an important role to promote the English language; curricula must be treated with methodological rigour. A good and organized design of the curriculum is very important to build a cohesive “path” along the entire language course. The key is to set out the objectives of the course bearing in mind the learning styles of students, their interests, the strengths and limitations of the learners (Capperucci 2017, p. 203).

According to the Italian school legislation, the curriculum design competences must respect the provisions reported in the National Guidelines for the Curriculum published by the Ministry of Education, University and Research. The National Guidelines identify clearly the use of the communicative approach in order to teach English as a foreign language. “From a methodological point of view, the use of a communicative approach to language learning must be favoured, especially in consideration of the different coding systems of phonemes into graphemes which exists between the English and Italian languages” (Ibid. p. 206-207).

In other words the great difference in English and Italian orthography leads the teacher to the use of the spoken language. However, the communicative approach is more than simply spoken language. It considers language as a means of communication. The communicative skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) should be gradually implemented during the course according to the complexity of the language structures presented and the related functional uses. In fact it is “the structure of language [that] reflects its functional and communicative uses” and not vice versa (Richards & Rodgers 2014, p. 89). The speaking part

is one of the most difficult skills for the student, therefore speaking English for the learner should be gradual and the teacher must integrate the activities with nonverbal languages (music, images and movements) in order to facilitate the students' participation and involvement (Capperucci 2017, p. 207).

### 3.1. The methods in teaching of EFL

The methods of teaching vocabulary in the ESL classroom have greatly varied in the last decades. The Grammar-Translation approach, in vogue at the turn of the century, did not allow students to reflect on the language; teachers were rather focused on the recognition of written words and on the attendant inflections. Foreign languages were acquired the way Latin was studied (Celce-Murcia & Rosensweig, 1979). This kind of teaching method may explain the reason why Italian students have such poor proficiency in the English language. Twaddell (1973) in fact points out the need for effective strategies in order to expand the vocabulary of the learners. Celce-Murcia & Rosensweig (1979) explain that following this kind of approach, students were led to an inefficient study of the language, always looking up the word in the dictionary and doing translation of texts from the target language to the L1 or the other way round. Moreover, Henning (1973) indicates an inadequate attention to vocabulary. Not only did this approach end up to be completely obsolete but the importance of the lexis was also much neglected. This area of the language instead should be supported as lack of words lead students to anxiety and a drop in motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield 2000, p. 299).

The approaches to foreign language teaching have changed throughout the last 70 years. The watershed is the end of World War II, when immigration and the internationalization of education brought to a change in approaches to language teaching (Richards & Rodgers 2014, p. 3).

I will now look in more detail at the different teaching approaches starting from the Grammar-Translation method, moving on to the Direct Method, and finally examining the Communicative language approach. I will examine Task-Based language learning and, most importantly for this dissertation, the Lexical Approach. I will also discuss the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and how it has influenced language teaching in recent years.

### 3.1.1. The Grammar-Translation method

The Grammar Translation method has been the first approach in language teaching and has persisted for longer in most developing parts of the world than in more economically developed ones (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011). This approach is based on the translation of sentences into and from the foreign language. The target language is developed only in the corresponding literature, and the main focus is on reading and writing skills, with little attention to listening and speaking skills. Grammar is deductively taught, and the L1 is used for explanations of new items and to make comparisons between the L1 and the target language. “The first language is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language” (Stern 1983, p. 455).

### 3.1.2. The Direct Method

The turning point came when the Direct Method was introduced into the teaching system applied in schools toward the end of the nineteenth century. The language employed in this method is always the target language, grammar is taught inductively, oral skills are implemented and vocabulary is taught through demonstration, pictures and objects. In Berlitz schools the following principles are the basis of this method:

Never translate: demonstrate

Never explain: act

Never make a speech: ask questions

Never imitate mistakes: correct

Never speak with single words: use sentences

Never speak too much: make students speak much

Never use the book: use your lesson plan

Never jump around: follow your plan

Never go too fast: keep the pace of the student

Never speak too slowly: speak normally

Never speak too quickly: speak naturally

Never speak too loudly: speak naturally

Never be impatient: take it easy

(cited in Titone 1968, p. 100)

The Direct Method, however, appears to be a utopic approach since the sole use of the target language could be a time-consuming task for the teacher when explaining new words

that could be easily translated into the L1. Although the listening and speaking part of the language are probably the core skills of the language in the numerous classes of the public secondary school, it was difficult to practise these skills among all students (Richards & Rodgers 2014, p.13). Moreover, the use of the target language forced the teachers to be native speakers or at least instructors who had native-like fluency in the foreign language. Despite the limitations, some principles of the Direct Method are the basis of teaching a foreign language even nowadays (Ibid, p.13).

The predominant approach that is used today in schools and widespread among people who want to acquire a good level of English is the so-called Communicative Language approach which I will describe in the following section.

### 3.1.3. The Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT)

By the end of the 1960s, the communicative language approach was a shift in the field of language teaching for two reasons (Ibid, p. 83). Firstly, the urge of internationalization and the constant need for ESL learners to master a high level in the English language led to a change in approach in language teaching. Secondly some earlier approaches, such as Situational Language Teaching (language teaching based on standard situations such as at the restaurant, at the post-office etc.), were now considered unproductive: “There was no future in continuing to pursue the chimera of predicting language on the basis of situational events” (Howatt 1984, p.280). The British linguist D.A. Wilkins (1972) elaborated a preliminary document with a proposal of the communicative definition of language with the aim to set out a syllabus that teachers could adopt in their language classes. This document was very useful also for the Council of Europe which added the semantic/communicative analysis into a set of specifications for a first-level communicative language syllabus. Even textbooks were influenced by this new set of rules. This change of paradigm was worldwide and it expanded very quickly so that now many English course books follow the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT).

CLT is based on language and communication, and the latter is the consequence of studying the language itself, in other words “language must serve the purpose of communicating the speaker’s objectives” (Richards & Rodgers 2014, p. 90). The four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking must be practised, and “communicative competence” (Hymes 1972) are both goals of the CLT. A change of approach implies also a development in the use of methodology in the assignment of activities and exercises. If earlier repetition

and memorization were the core methods in the language class, now tasks took the place of the obsolete grammar exercises. Negotiation in the target language is the central part of those tasks which are often realized in groups and in a social context. The main characters are the students who need to practise the foreign language; the teacher is only a guide who sets things back on track (Richards & Rodgers 2014, pp. 97-98). Strictly connected with CLT is the task-based language teaching.

#### 3.1.4. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

This approach is based on activities that involve real communication and, as Feez (1998, p.17) pointed out, the focus is on process rather than product. In other words, students are motivated to speak the language in order to convey messages that are useful to solve an issue which was set at the beginning of the task. This means that the language spoken is used for real-life purposes. Furthermore, mistakes and errors are not stigmatized as in more traditional approaches, but are considered a part of the teaching process. Indeed, mistakes are a fundamental part of the acquisition of the second language, without them, learning cannot be possible.

Attention is given also to the difficulty of the activities; in fact the latter are sequenced according to difficulty in order to allow the students to reach the solution of the tasks with the appropriate abilities that they have achieved until that moment. This point of discussion means that the success of reaching a good level in the English language is due to the organized program set out by the teacher who divides the lessons according to the difficulty. The task is “a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form” (Nunan 1989, p. 10). This definition includes the development of the four skills of language (Edwards and Willis 2005, p. 3). The great innovation of task-based learning is that the outcome of the completed task can be shared with others (*ibidem*). In other words, students work together in order to complete the task, and observations and comments shared among the whole group of learners produce an enrichment of notions, contents and of course an improvement of the target language. The use of Internet and technology has now allowed teachers to implement the teaching materials and the input of the nature of tasks and exercises in order to present the students with a great variety of activities which can be used in class. Textbooks and grammar volumes are also an important help for students in order to master the second language.

### 3.1.5. The Lexical Approach

Michael Lewis (1993) in his main volume about the lexical approach points out some key principles in order to shed light on what the lexical approach is. The first principle is that “language consists of grammaticalised lexis, not lexicalised grammar” (Lewis, 1993 p. vii). Two of the main components of language are lexis and grammar: the former carries the meanings which, combined with grammar rules, create meaningful statements. “The building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, functions, notions (...) but lexis that is words and particularly multi-word combinations” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Multi-word combinations namely “chunks” are learned and used as single items (ibid). Schmitt (n.d. as cited in Richards & Rodgers 2014, p. 215) clarifies the use of chunks in the following lines:

The lexical approach can be summarized in a few words: language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks. The lexical approach is a way of analysing and teaching language based on the idea that is made of lexical units rather than grammatical structures. The units are words and chunks formed by collocations and fixed phrases.

In addition, Lewis suggests real practises that the students need to follow in order to put into practice the lexical approach and starting to learn a language:

- Concentrating on what words mean and how words are used
- Participating by listening to the language, noticing and reflecting
- Learning to chunk the language
- Maintaining lexical notebooks to record selected chunks of the language
- Doing the exercises and activities designed in the text
- Using dictionaries as learning resources.

(Lewis 1997, p. 58)

This new shift of paradigm is very pertinent for this dissertation since, later in the thesis, I will write about phrasal verbs.

Although the lexical approach sets out a good basis in the elaboration of learning a language, this approach is not without shortcomings. As Thornbury asserts:

Lexical Approach is not an approach, not in the strict sense, since it lacks a coherent theory of learning and its theory of language is not fully enough elaborated to allow for ready implementation in terms of syllabus specification (Thornbury 1998, p.12).

In other words, the lexical approach presents an extensive theory and sets lexis as paramount in the discourse of learning a language. However, Lewis gives no clear guidelines

for the selection and grading of chunks. In addition, the author makes no suggestions about how the principles of this approach can be translated into a syllabus.

### 3.1.6. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) published by the Council of Europe in 2001 has two aims (Figueras 2016, p. 478):

1. To encourage practitioners of all kinds in the language field, including language learners themselves, to reflect on some questions related to language in itself, language teaching and language learning processes.
2. To make it easier for practitioners to tell each other and their clientele what they wish to help learners to achieve and how they attempt to do so (Council of Europe 2001: xi).

The document introduces a framework for evaluation of foreign language learners' communicative competencies. In particular, CEFR (CEFR 2001, p. 24) introduces the "Common Reference Levels" varying from C2 to A1 (in down-competence scale) "which were described in general terms and in relation to language activities and language tasks in over 50 descriptor scales, commonly referred to as the *vertical dimension*" (Figueras 2016, p. 478).

As CEFR suggests (CEFR 2001, p. 24), "this 'simple' global representation will make it easier to communicate the system to non-specialist users and will also provide teachers and curriculum planners with orientation points". In fact, nowadays I cannot think of any English language school that would not refer to the CEFR levels in its teaching offer.

The CEFR in itself is not a teaching approach, different teaching approaches and methods can be used in order to build a syllabus and the assessment system suitable for a particular teaching and learning context. In fact, "the framework should be open and flexible, so that it can be applied, with such adaptations as prove necessary, to particular situations" (Figueras 2016, p. 479).

The Framework has been translated into all European languages, and its scales are now available in more than 40 languages (ibid., p. 477). The survey on the use of the CEFR at national levels conducted by Martyniuk and Noijons in 2006 "shows that the CEFR is frequently referred to in a variety of official documents at state and regional level", for example: National curricula for foreign languages at Primary and Secondary Level, Language

teacher education curricula, Guidelines for the development of language textbooks etc. (Martyniuk & Noijons 2006, p. 5).

Most of the survey respondents indicate that the Framework is useful for the planning and the development of curricula/syllabi, for the planning and the development of testing / assessment / certification and for the planning and the development of teacher education/training (ibid.).

In general, the CEFR seems to have a major impact on language education. It is used – often as the exclusive neutral reference – in all educational sectors. Its value as a reference tool to coordinate the objectives of education at all levels is widely appreciated (ibid., p.7).

However some respondents indicate that the potential of the Framework has not been yet realised, it is not really *reader-friendly* and there is a need to mediate it with users (ibid., p. 8).

In the case study that follows (chapter 4), the approach I followed in the activities with the class of *liceo linguistico* was mainly the Communicative Language Teaching approach, and within this method, I basically used tasks to convey the meanings of phrasal verbs. Central has been the choice of songs and videos during the procedure and management of the activities.

### 3.2. Analysis of textbooks

In this section I will look at three textbooks to investigate the various approaches that the authors have chosen to follow. The course books are: *New Headway Upper-Intermediate*, *New English File Upper-intermediate* and *Performer B1*. The choice fell on these textbooks since they are the guide books commonly used in English courses in Italian schools. In addition, *Performer B1* will be analysed in order to make a comparison between the two general books and the course book employed in the first two years of high school by the third class of *liceo linguistico* of my research study.

#### 3.2.1. Evaluating textbooks

“The selection of a course book is one of the most important decisions a teacher will make in shaping the content and nature of teaching and learning. It involves matching the material against the context in which it is going to be used, following the aims of the teaching program, as well as fitting the personal methodology of the teacher” (Abbasnezhad & Rahimy 2014, p. 12).

This introductory explanation gives us the idea “that careful selection is made, and that the materials selected closely reflect [the needs of the learners and] the aims, methods, and values of the teaching program.” (Cunningsworth 1995, p.7 in Raghdah 2009). Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) have suggested three different kind of material evaluation. The “predictive” evaluation that studies the future performance of a textbook. Next, the “in-use” evaluation which tends to investigate material that is currently being used. Finally, the “retrospective” evaluation plans to highlight the course books that have been used in any respective institution (Raghdah 2009). For this section, I will analyse the “in use” evaluation in order to shed light on three course books that are currently being used in Italian schools.

### 3.2.2. The level of the selected textbooks

Regarding the books of general English selected, the level is upper intermediate. This level corresponds to the B2 level which is the same level of the students of my case study (chapter 4). Although *New Headway* and *New English File* are B2 level, *Performer B1* (the course book used by the students of the case study in their first two years of high school) is a lower level since they were using the book two grades before their actual level of proficiency.

Level	CEFR Level
Beginner	0
Elementary	A1
Pre-Intermediate	A2
Intermediate	B1
Upper-Intermediate	B2
Advanced	C1
Proficient	C2

Table 2 – English level overview in <https://www.embassyenglish.com/resources/english-levels>

### 3.3. *Headway* Overview

The textbook *New Headway Upper-Intermediate* presents 12 units divided into grammar, vocabulary and postscript. It also contains the four language abilities of reading, speaking, listening and writing.

Each unit is constituted of a title referring to a particular theme or topic. The introductory activity is “test your grammar”; hence, through the inductive model, the grammar structures in the unit are presented in advance. The second exercise is usually a

comprehension text called “language in context” with “grammar questions” at the end to revise the part of grammar mentioned in the unit. Furthermore, grammar exercises are added in order to put into practice the grammatical theory. A pre-reading task completes the unit with a series of questions and a section dedicated to the speaking skill concerning the student and his points of view related to the text. In each unit a listening task is also added. It can be a song, dialogue extracts, interviews, radio programs and so on. Questions related to the listening part can be found, too, in order to give some clues and useful inputs.

### 3.3.1. General organization

The course book has a title that indicates the general theme of the unit. The broad division of “language input” and “skills development” has been given by Ranalli (2002). Within “language input” *Grammar* appears in the second column, followed by *Vocabulary* and “*Postscript*”.

Unit	Language Input			Skills Development			
	Grammar	Vocabulary	Postscript	Reading	Speaking	Listening	Writing
6 – People, places and things	Relative clauses	-ed/-ing adjectives  Synonyms in context	English signs	The man who could buy anything – a gap- fill exercise about Bill Gates  I’ve never seen anything like it’ – a strange person, place, and a thing	Describing a picture  Exchanging information about a strange person, place and thing  Group work – devising an advert	Seven radio ads	Describing your favourite part of town
7 – Doing without	Verb patterns  Reduced infinitives	Consumer durables  Hot verbs (with <i>get</i> )	Soundbites	Letters between Sean and his grandmother – an exercise on verb patterns  The family who turned back the clock’ – a family who give up all domestic appliances for three days	Discussion – domestic life fifty years ago things you couldn’t live without  Discussion – the pros and cons of television	A song – Fast Car, by Tracy Chapman	Contrasting Ideas  Writing about an invention you couldn’t live without

Table 3 – Two sample units from New Headway Upper-Intermediate’s contents table (Soars and Soars 1998), in Ranalli, James (2002) An Evaluation of New Headway Upper-Intermediate. University of Birmingham, March (2002)

The contents of *New Headway Upper-Intermediate* are represented in Table 1 which shows the division of the section “language input” (Ranalli 2002) with the subcategories of Grammar, Vocabulary and “Postscript”.

Unit	Grammar	Vocabulary	Postscript
1	overview of tense system active and passive auxiliary verbs	compound nouns word formation	dates, numbers and spelling
2	present perfect simple and continuous	guessing meaning synonyms 'hot' verbs: <i>take</i> and <i>put</i>	exclamations (including countable and uncountable)
3	narrative tenses (past simple, past continuous and past perfect	adjectives that describe character word formation with suffixes and prefixes	expressing interest and surprise (reply questions and echoes)
4	quantity expressions countable and uncountable nouns	lexical set: exports and imports words with variable stress	social expressions
5	future forms tense usage in clauses	word pairs (binomials) 'hot' verbs: <i>be</i> + adverb or preposition	telephone conversations (beginning and ending)
6	relative clauses participles infinitives	<i>-ed / -ing</i> adjectives synonyms in context	English signs
7	verb patterns reduced infinitives	lexical set: consumer durables 'hot' verbs: <i>get</i>	'soundbites'
8	modal auxiliary verbs (for expressing probability) (for other uses)	collocations: 'making sentences stronger' adverbs and adjectives adverbs and verbs	exaggeration and understatement (idioms, expressions and discourse)
9	questions and negatives	groups antonyms in context	being polite (requests and refusals)
10	expressing habit (present and past)	lexical set: words and phrases related to money	time expressions
11	hypothesizing (about the present and past)	idioms	moans and groans
12	noun phrases articles and determiners adding emphasis	homophones homonyms	linking and commenting (adverbials)

Table 4 – New Headway Upper-Intermediate’s language input syllabus (Soars and Soars 1998) in “An Evaluation of New Headway Upper-Intermediate” Ranalli James M., University of Birmingham, March 2002.

### 3.3.2. Grammar

As stated in Ranalli (2002) “approximately one-fourth to one-third of the material in each unit is given over to grammar-related presentation and practice material” (Ranalli 2002,

p. 8). Verb tenses are often presented in each unit with their related contrast, for example the tense chart of the active and passive tenses in unit 1 or the present perfect simple versus the present perfect continuous in unit 2. The noun phrase is also mentioned in units 4, 6 and 12. Many examples and sentences are given in the grammar section together with a reflection part and grammar reviews.

### 3.3.3. Vocabulary

The vocabulary section plays an important role in *New Headway*. This section, indeed is present in each teaching unit. I am going to describe now some examples of exercises taken from the student's book. The vocabulary section includes the title called *Hot verbs*, these are usually examples of confusing verbs that challenge the learner. "Take" and "put", the verb "to be" plus adverb or preposition, the meaningful verb "get" and finally both verbs "come" and "go". The *Hot verbs* are implemented with common expressions taken from spoken English language. On page 104 the difference between "come" and "go" is followed by an exercise in which the learner has to decide the correct verb within the two in different contexts and situations.

Moreover, activities about "word formation" are added in the vocabulary part. For example, the formation of nouns from verbs, the construction of adjectives with suffixes and prefixes (unit 3). Synonyms and antonyms of words, homophones and homonyms are also added to the section. An activity that shows the cohesion of the lexical approach is "word pairs". This activity lists some collocations (neat and tidy, now and again, up and down, all or nothing) taken from the English language. These lexical items are presented not as single words, but as chunks that need to be taught and learnt together.

The section "Postscript" is also an example of vocabulary taught through the lexical approach. Lexical items or whole phrases that should be learnt in their entirety. Examples such as "Hang on a sec", "There's no point", "I'm sorry to bother you, but..." These sentences indeed are useful expressions in the spoken language that can be used with native English speakers.

The language in the Postscript section is very useful to Italian learners as it represents "particular features of vocabulary use which mark it out as belonging to spoken rather than written domains" (McCarthy and Carter 1995, p. 214, in Ranalli 2002).

#### 3.3.4. Pronunciation

New Headway provides some exercises on pronunciation, but it seems to focus on other sections such as grammar and vocabulary instead of giving suggestions on how to produce the sounds of English.

#### 3.3.5. Case study: a sample unit

I will now examine a sample unit of the course book. I have decided to choose Unit 11 titled “If only things were different”. Firstly, the title gives the students some clues regarding what the unit is going to talk about. It is fundamental to draw attention on that and make the students guess and hypothesize the contents of the unit by looking at the title. However not too much time needs to be spent on this activity. The first exercise, “test your grammar”, is an illustrated quiz where the students have to match the first column with the corresponding desires. Finally an exercise of filling the gaps completes the first grammar topic namely the conditionals.

The second part “language in context” brings the student more deeply inside the “Conditionals”; eight pictures illustrate someone’s wish and working in pairs, the student has to guess what the wish is. Other two exercises consolidate the grammar subject. Next, two reading passages accompany unit 11 with the revision of the use of the conditional. The part of grammar is completed by two activities related to the student’s wishes concerning himself, in addition, the “language review” summarizes the conditional together with the indication of the “Grammar Reference” at the end of the book.

The unit goes on with a listening exercise concerning a short radio play and some guiding questions at the end of the exercise. This is followed by a reading passage titled “Things we never said”. As I am going then to write about phrasal verbs, this text is particularly rich in them as seventeen of them are included. Going back to the description of the text, some personal questions are given to students in order to express their feelings concerning the story. Finally a comprehension task, a role play and a vocabulary exercise are dedicated to a deeper analysis and reflection of the reading section.

Now it is the turn to the vocabulary section, in particular unit 11 gives some examples of common expressions used in spoken language, namely idioms. Idioms are presented in the course book such as “get cold feet”, “have butterflies in your stomach”, “be over the moon”, just to mention the most common ones. In this part of the unit a funny exercise is given, in other words some idioms are illustrated literally in column A and idiomatically in column B.

The student has to work out the meanings of the idioms. In addition in a sentence the students have to choose the explanation of the idiom which is given through a multiple choice exercise.

In order to develop the four language skills, the listening and writing parts appear here in the unit in order to satisfy the needs of the students. Some questions are added in order to comprehend the dialogue.

The “Postscript” section in unit 11 is titled “moans and groans”, expressions of complaint are listed in a box in two columns and the learner has to decide which complaint goes with which response. Finally, some colourful pictures of the complaints complete the unit. The “Postscript” section is a good example of the lexical approach, where entire lexical items formed by multi-words or chunks need to be learnt in group in order to learn them better. Expressions such as “it’s the last time I’ll eat here”, “How many times do I have to tell you?”, “So why didn’t you send it in on time?”, “This has gone beyond a joke”. These phrases, presented in their entirety, convey a special meaning to the interlocutor, hence their explanation needs to be done through chunks.

### *3.4. New English File Upper-Intermediate*

#### 3.4.1. General organization

*New English File Upper-Intermediate* presents its contents in three main categories: grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Each unit is completed with *Colloquial English*, *Writing* and *Revise and Check*. The exercises of the four abilities (reading, listening, speaking and writing) are scattered across the three main categories; hence they are not presented separately in the contents as in *New Headway*.

Colloquial English is usually made up of two or three listening exercises where real situations are described. Unit 1 gives an example of an interview and a discourse in the street. Listening exercises help the student to comprehend the contents of the two oral dialogues.

The Writing part in unit 1 gives advice concerning the structure of an email and a letter. The last section “Revise and check” is a summary of “what do you remember”; divided into grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Here exercises verify the knowledge of the student whereas the competence of the learner is presented in the section “What can you do”.

3.4.2. Grammar

The section of grammar in New English File follows the communicative approach. The exercises lead the student to understand grammar in a deductive way. Despite showing the bare rule of grammar, the book provides activities to let the student think of the correspondent argument of the grammar bank. Effective aids are also pictures displaying a dialogue or a dramatization. I decided to give an example of the section choosing the difference between the present perfect simple and the continuous.

The student at the start of the exercise has to decide whether the sentences proposed are right or wrong. Then three jokes are provided in the follow up exercise so the student has to decide which tense is better for the completion of the sentence. The last part of the activity is based on some prompts that are presented to the student in order to formulate a phrase. This exercise can also be performed in pairs as a speaking activity.

**5 GRAMMAR** present perfect (simple and continuous)

a Check what you know: present perfect / past simple. Right (✓) or wrong (✗)? Correct the wrong **highlighted** phrases.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 A <b>Have you ever had</b> an operation?       | 4 A <b>Have you gone</b> to see the doctor?                |
| B Yes, I've broken <b>my leg</b> two years ago.  | B Not yet. I'm going this afternoon.                       |
| 2 A <b>How long was</b> your uncle in hospital?  | 5 Ouch! <b>I cut</b> my finger! Have you got a plaster?    |
| B Since last Tuesday. He's coming home tomorrow. | 6 <b>I know my doctor for ten years</b> . She's very good. |
| 3 <b>You haven't taken</b> your medicine yet.    |  |

Any problems? ➔ [Workbook p.10](#)

b (L17) New grammar. Read the jokes and use your instinct to cross out the wrong form (present perfect simple or continuous). Listen and check.

Patient Doctor, my son *has swallowed / has been swallowing* my pen, what should I do?  
 Doctor Use a pencil until I get there.



Doctor You look exhausted!  
 Patient Yes. *I've run / I've been running* after a cat.  
 Doctor After a cat?  
 Patient Yes, I think I'm a dog, doctor.  
 Doctor I see. How long *has this gone on / has this been going on for*?  
 Patient Since I was a little puppy.  
 Doctor OK. Just lie down here on the couch and we'll talk about it.  
 Patient I can't!  
 Doctor Why not?  
 Patient I'm not allowed on the furniture.



Patient *Have they sent / Have they been sending* you the results of my tests yet?  
 Doctor Yes. The news isn't good, I'm afraid.  
 Patient How long have I got to live, doctor?  
 Doctor Ten...  
 Patient Ten WHAT? Months? Weeks?  
 Doctor Nine, eight, seven, six...



c ➔ [p.132 Grammar Bank 1C](#). Read the rules and do the exercises.

d In pairs, use the prompts to ask and answer the questions. Is there anything you could do to improve your health?



- 1 / drink much water? How many glasses / drink today?
- 2 / do any physical exercise? What? How long / do it?
- 3 / eat a lot of fruit and vegetables? How many portions / have today?
- 4 / walk to school/work/university? How far / walked today?
- 5 / smoke? How long / smoke? How many cigarettes / have today?
- 6 / take any vitamins at the moment? How long / take them?
- 7 How many hours / sleep a night? / sleep well recently?
- 8 / allergic anything? / ever have a serious allergic reaction?

Figure 2 – Excerpt from *New English File Upper-Intermediate* p. 14.

### 3.4.3. Vocabulary

Lots of occasions are dedicated to the acquisition of new words, namely vocabulary. The type of activities proposed by the textbook are heterogeneous. The book provides fill the gap exercises, matching activities. In addition, the reading passages encountered throughout the units are always provided with a useful glossary that explains the most difficult words found in the texts.

For this section I decided to choose a matching exercise on confusing adverbs and adverbial phrases. Eight pairs of sentences have been given and the students have to decide which of the confusing adverbs match with the relative sentence. The activity is followed by the discussion with a partner concerning the difference between the two adverbs. Finally, an activity of memorization completes the vocabulary section.

#### 2 VOCABULARY confusing adverbs and adverbial phrases

- a Match each pair of adverbs with a pair of sentences.
- |                          |                                     |                         |                          |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| at the moment / actually | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | in the end / at the end | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| especially / specially   | <input type="checkbox"/>            | late / lately           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ever / even              | <input type="checkbox"/>            | near / nearly           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| hard / hardly            | <input type="checkbox"/>            | still / yet             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- Adverb
- 1 a Her French isn't very good. She can  say anything. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b He works very  – at least ten hours a day. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2 a My boss always arrives  for meetings. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b We haven't seen Mary . She's been very busy. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3 a  of the concert, everybody applauded. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b I didn't want to go, but  they persuaded me. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 4 a I love all sports, but  basketball. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b All her clothes are  made for her in Paris. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 5 a She looks younger than me, but  she's two years older. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b He's unemployed , but he's looking for a job. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 6 a It's  stopped raining. We'll be able to leave soon. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b Does your boyfriend live  here? \_\_\_\_\_
  - 7 a Have you found a flat ? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b No, we're  looking. \_\_\_\_\_
  - 8 a Have you  been to Texas? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b I've been all over the USA – I've  been to Alaska! \_\_\_\_\_
- b Now decide which adverb goes where and write it in the adverb column. Compare with a partner, and say what you think the difference is between the two adverbs.
- c Cover the adverb column and look only at sentences 1–8. Try to remember the adverbs.

Figure 3 – Excerpt from *New English File Upper-Intermediate*, p. 29.

### 3.4.4. Pronunciation

The pronunciation bank is a section which was considered important to the authors of *New English File*. It shows the various sounds of the English language in order to understand better the phonemes of the words encountered throughout the book. For the pronunciation section I decided to give an example of the letter *u*.

The letter *u* can be pronounced in many different ways, for this reason the exercise makes use of the IPA sounds and spelling. The activity focuses on the pronunciation of the letter *u* in different words. Firstly, a table should be entered with the different words proposed

with the letter *u*, in addition some phrases are given in order to practice the spelling. A pair work with some questions regarding the words practiced beforehand closes the activity.

**3 PRONUNCIATION** the letter *u*

a Look at the words in the list, which all have the letter *u* in them. Put them in the right column below according to how the vowel sound is pronounced.

accuse burglar caught community court drugs fraud guilty  
judge jury manslaughter mugger murderer punishment smuggling

b **3.3** Listen and check. Which two words are pronounced exactly the same? What happens to the pronunciation of *u* in *guilty*?

c Practise saying the sentences.

- 1 He was accused of smuggling drugs.
- 2 'Murderers must be punished,' said the judge.
- 3 The burglar is doing community service.
- 4 It wasn't murder, it was manslaughter.
- 5 The jury said he was guilty of fraud.
- 6 The mugger was caught and taken to court.

d Talk to a partner. Find out as much information as possible.

- What are the most common crimes in your town or city?
- What crimes have been in the news recently?
- Do you have trial by jury in your country? Do you think it's a good system?
- Do you know anyone...?
  - who has been burgled
  - who has been mugged
  - whose car has been stolen
  - who has been unfairly accused of shoplifting
  - who has been stopped by the police while driving
  - who has been robbed while on holiday
  - who has been offered a bribe
  - who has been kidnapped

Figure 4 – Excerpt from *New English File Upper-Intermediate*, p.37

3.4.5. Case study: a sample unit

Let us now look at a sample unit in *New English File*. I decided in this section to describe unit 4. The fourth unit of *New English File* has three sub-units. Each sub-unit contains Grammar, Vocabulary and Pronunciation and then three abilities: reading, speaking and listening. At the end of the unit students find the section of Colloquial English, Writing and Revise & Check.

4A Would you get out alive?	4B How I trained my husband	4C Let your body do the talking
1. Speaking & Reading	1. Grammar	1. Grammar
2. Vocabulary	2. Pronunciation	2. Listening
3. Grammar	3. Reading	3. Vocabulary
4. Pronunciation	5. Listening	4. Pronunciation
6. Reading & Listening	4. Speaking	5. Reading
	5. Vocabulary	6. Speaking
	Mini Grammar	
Colloquial English		
Writing		
Revise & Check		

Table 5 – Extract from *New English File Upper-Intermediate*, Oxeden, C., Latham-Koenig C., & Seligson, P. (1998) Student's book. Oxford University Press.

As summarized in the table, *New English File* appears to be very clear when referring to the corresponding section of the contents. This can be an advantage for students to better organize their study plan.

### 3.5. *Performer B1*

*Performer B1* is the course book used by the students of the class where I conducted my research on phrasal verbs. The book is divided into 12 units and it is formed by the student's book and the workbook. Each unit contains the part concerning grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, communication, PET tutor, culture and skills, approaching literature and a final part with grammar reference and language practice which can be found in the workbook. At first glance the structure of *Performer B1* appears to be different from *New Headway* and *New English File*.

## 3.5.1. General Organization

Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Communication	PET tutor	<b>Culture &amp; Skills</b>	Approaching <b>Literature</b>	Workbook Grammar reference  Language practice
---------	------------	---------------	---------------	--------------	---------------------------------	----------------------------------	--

Table 6 – Contents' sections of *Performer B1*, Spiazzi, Tavella, Layton. 2014. Zanichelli

Compared to the previous textbooks, *Performer B1* contains three extra sections as showed in red in the table of contents. The *Culture* and *Literature* parts are two distinctive sections that implement the syllabus of the high school program. Moreover, sample exercises taken from the PET exam certification together with the exam description complete each unit.

Grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation remain the core sections of every book analysed so far and *Performer B1* is no exception.

## 3.5.2. Grammar

The grammar bank in *Performer B1* is slightly different from the textbooks described so far. The basic grammatical rule is usually explained and exercises in the form of drills are often presented. The inductive method does not permit the students to think about their capacity of inferring the rule thus it can be a disadvantage for the student.

The presentation of the present simple, for example, is given through the direct grammatical rule of the use and formation of the tense, so a theoretical explanation first and then some drills in order to put into practice the theory described beforehand.

Extract of the present simple explanation.

We use the present simple to talk about facts and habitual actions.

Affirmative

I/you/we/they work hard.

He/she/it works hard

Negative

I/you/we/they do not (don't) work hard.

He/she/it does not (doesn't) work hard.

This approach to tenses is fundamentally inductive, which is characteristic of the Grammar-Translation Method. Therefore, the lesson doesn't provide good motivation to students.

### 3.5.1. Vocabulary

The vocabulary section is presented with a pre-lesson video that anticipates the contents of the exercise vocabulary, a matching exercise usually follows the video and afterwards some images help the students to re-elaborate the words presented by putting the images with the corresponding sentence. This kind of approach involves different types of language skills, stimulates the inference capacity of the students, presents words in a context in other words the engagement of the students in this exercise is high.

### 3.5.2. Pronunciation

*Performer B1* also gives importance to pronunciation and through listening exercises, the authors of the book want to show the different spelling and sounds of words.

Listen and repeat the verbs

Gets – goes – does – washes – stops – reads – comes – crosses – matches – listens – leaves – cooks

This exercise seems mechanic, doesn't provide good motivation, doesn't present these words in a context therefore it may result a waste of time.

### 3.5.3. Case study: a sample unit

The theme of chapter 8 is dedicated to personality and clothes. A starting exercise concerning personality adjectives is presented for the vocabulary section. This is about matching the words definitions of different character adjectives. The unit goes on with a text titled "What does your profile picture say about you? And a comprehension section related to the passage. The grammar bank in section 8 is devoted to the comparative adjectives and a clear table explains the grammatical rule. Now it's the turn of the communication section which is about shopping. A dialogue and a role-play complete the page. As mentioned before, the PET Tutor gives some information regarding the speaking part and a simulated situation concerning a speaking task completes the section. Finally, the Culture and Skills section and the literature corner integrate unit 8.

As showed in the sample unit, *Performer B1* contains much more material than the previous books. There are sections such as Communication, PET Tutor, Culture and skills and the literature. Let's now look in more details.

The communication section contains real situations of everyday conversations displayed in the form of dialogue or role-plays. The Key language is a part of the book that can be used in specific communicative situations (e.g. shopping, booking tickets to travel, applying for a job and the relative interview, order in a restaurant and so on).

PET Tutor is a very important part of the book since it has the aim to prepare the students for the PET certification. It therefore offers simulations of the different parts of the exam and a further description of them.

EXAM DESCRIPTION	
What is there in Reading Part?	Five <b>short texts</b> (a sign, a notice, a label, a message, a note, an email or a postcard). Each has got three multiple choice possibilities (A, B or C)
What do I have to focus on?	Focus on the grammar of the texts and ask yourself wh-questions: Who? → Who is the text for? Who is the writer? What? → What is about? Where/When → Where/When do you see similar texts? Why? → What is the aim of the text?
How many questions are there?	There are five multiple- choice questions.
How many marks do I get?	One mark for each correct answer. (Total: five marks)

Through the development of the four language abilities, the cultures of the Anglo-Saxon countries are introduced. Across Cultures and Internet Lab complete this section, together with Study Skills. For example, a reading text about London and New York: fashion capitals is introduced and follow up exercises regarding the topic finalized the section. Matching exercises, comprehension answers, a listening and a speaking exercise focus the student's attention on the different topics.

Since the textbook is addressed to students of a language school, literature plays an important role in the school curriculum. For this reason the English language can be linked to the English literature. Excerpts of books, novels and short stories are presented to the students in order to develop the literature of the Anglo-Saxon countries. This section is strictly connected with the vocabulary that needs to be developed also in this particular field.

## 3.6. Comparing the three course books

Section										
Textbook	Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking	PET tutor	Culture	Literature
New Headway	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x
New English File	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x
Performer B1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 7 – Comparing contents' sections of *New Headway*, *New English File* and *Performer B1*

The grammar and vocabulary banks are the first sections presented in each textbook. The role played by grammar and vocabulary is preponderant compared to the other sections. The pronunciation bank is displayed in *New English File* and in *Performer B1* while *New Headway* does not give any indication regarding the sound of words.

The four abilities (reading, listening, writing and speaking) are all developed in the three course books. Since the development of the CEFR in 2001, indeed, a grid containing the four descriptors is a key element for every English course and as a consequence for each English textbook.

The sections of literature, culture and “PET tutor” are only presented in *Performer B1* which is used by the first two years of high school in *liceo linguistico*. This can be due because the language school has the aim to give the students culture and literature hints, since these subjects, and literature in particular, are part of the school curriculum. PET exercises are useful for the students who want to reach the B1 level and prepare for certification.

## 3.7. Phrasal verbs contained in the course books

In *New English File* some exercises on phrasal verbs can be found on page 157 (Figure 5). In each unit a text full of phrasal verbs is selected and then at the end of the book in the section “*Phrasal verbs in context*” some exercises are given to revise the phrasal verbs encountered in the texts throughout the seven units. However, no explanations or discussion activities are given to reinforce the knowledge and the competence of these verbal structures.

## Phrasal verbs in context

### FILE 1

Complete the phrasal verbs from File 1 with the correct particle.

back    down (x2)    up (x3)

- 1 My brother and his girlfriend **broke** \_\_\_\_\_ last month.
- 2 I can't talk now, I'm driving. I'll **call** you \_\_\_\_\_ in fifteen minutes.
- 3 This club isn't a very good place to **chat** \_\_\_\_\_ girls. The music is too loud.
- 4 The doctor said that I had to **cut** \_\_\_\_\_ to one cup of coffee a day.
- 5 Don't **give** \_\_\_\_\_. If you keep trying, I'm sure find a good job soon.
- 6 **Slow** \_\_\_\_\_! There are speed cameras on this road.

Figure 6 – Exercise on page 157 taken from *New English File Upper-Intermediate*, Oxeden, C., Latham-Koenig, C., & Seligson, P. (1998) Student's book. Oxford University Press.

In *New Headway* phrasal verbs are not mentioned in the contents and they only appear on two pages namely page 74 and 107. On page 74, there is an exercise of matching phrasal verbs with “get”. In addition, on page 75 a listening exercise, a song by a famous singer, should be completed with the verb “get”. This last exercise shows the importance of phrasal verbs used in different situations and contexts. This listening activity is a good example of the communicative approach and it also shows some similarities of the lexical approach theorised by Lewis in which “chunks” are strictly taught and learned in multi-word combinations in order to be better retained (Lewis, 1993). Although no unit is dedicated to phrasal verbs, they are found in each written text. The frequency of usage and their high productiveness led the authors to scatter phrasal verbs in the texts, however the space dedicated only to these verbal structures is missing in the student's book.

Phrasal verbs with get

Get can combine with particles to make phrasal verbs

Complete each group of sentences with one of the particles from the box below.

(Careful, only six of the particles are used)

**At      away      into      off      on      out      over      round      through      up**

You always get	of doing the washing-up. It's not fair.
How did your secret get	? Everyone knows now!
I got a great book	of the library. You can borrow it.
You're always getting	me! Leave me alone!
The detective got	the truth through careful questioning.
I can't get	the sugar. It's right at the back
(...)	

There are four more particles in the box. All of them combine with get. Choose one of them, and research the meanings in your dictionary. Tell the rest of the class what you find out.

Table 8 – Exercise on page 74 taken from *New Headway Upper-Intermediate*, Soars & Soars, 1998, Oxford University Press.

Finally, *Performer B1* does not mention any phrasal verbs.

In chapter 3 methods and approaches have been described in order to evaluate the selected textbooks. Although the three textbooks show differences in the way they present the various sections (grammar, vocabulary etc.) each course book can be considered appropriate for the acquisition of English. The goals of the three course books are different: one focuses more on grammar, another one on vocabulary. However all three textbooks are used in English courses in various Italian schools, thus we may suppose they satisfy the expectations of both teachers and students. Considering high idiomaticity of phrasal verbs and the impact

of their knowledge on fluency, the limit of the textbooks may consist in rather little or no attention dedicated to PVs explanations and assessment.

## 4. Case study

In this chapter I will first provide the research questions of the case study. Then I will describe the entire procedure consisting of four lessons which took place in the third class of a *liceo linguistico* (a high school focused on foreign languages) in Conegliano Veneto in March and April 2018. The students study English, Russian and French. Due to partial absences of some students the study began with 16 students at the first lesson, at the lessons two and three 18 students were present and at the last lesson the whole class of 19 was present.

All students are native Italian speakers; their English language proficiency level is B1-B2 according to the CEFR framework. The students are 17 girls and two boys ranging in age from 16 to 18 years old. They have been learning English as a second language mostly since the age of five, although two students claimed to have been studying English since they were nine years old.

The tenured teacher R.S. advised me to work with the third class, for the reason that during the previous two school years, students had discussed phrasal verbs during the lessons so it was logical to assume a lot of PVs were still fresh in their memory.

The students were informed about the purpose and procedures of the research. Although they knew that the test scores would not be evaluated for personal grades, but only used for the aims of the experimental study, they acted as they were part of the school program. For this reason, the students were really eager to learn and participate, as also shown in the questionnaire in the Appendix.

Finally, I will describe the testing procedure and discuss the obtained results.

### 4.1. Research questions

At this stage, the research questions that need to be investigated are as follows:

1. Are opaque phrasal verbs truly more difficult for Italian learners than the transparent ones?
2. Which vocabulary testing format might be more effective in evaluating the lexis proficiency of students: L1 translation or gap filling test?

Regarding the first research question, scholars such as Liao & Fukuya (2004) claim that second language learners struggle more with idiomatic (opaque) phrasal verbs than literal (transparent) phrasal verbs. I expect these Italian learners have greater difficulties with opaque phrasal verbs.

The hypothesis related to the second question is that, L1 translation testing format can be a more accurate test of knowledge, because of its unambiguity, whereas the gap filling test could create confusion among the students due to the possible unknown words present in the test questions.

#### 4.2. Procedure

The case study is divided into four lessons that took place every two weeks in the *liceo linguistico* in Conegliano Veneto. Many tasks and activities have the aim to show how students can learn in a more communicative setting and with a cultural approach. Showing videos of movies, songs and the speech of Steve Jobs at Stanford University the students were plunged deep into the culture of the English language and this is an important element to convey idiomatic expressions such as phrasal verbs.

The teaching approach adopted is based on TBLT (Task-based language teaching). This approach leverages the use of authentic language and is based on asking students to do meaningful tasks using the target language. In fact, it has been defined

“as an approach to language education in which students are given functional tasks that invite them to focus primarily on meaning exchange and to use language for real-world, non-linguistic purposes” (Van den Branden 2006, p. 3).

In fact, the lessons were divided into tasks: a pre-task, the actual task and the post-task. In order to answer the research questions, tests were handed out to the students during the lessons.

##### 4.2.1. First lesson

In the first lesson, after a brief introduction and some examples of what phrasal verbs are, I handed out the pre-test with 26 sentences in context learning environment with phrasal verbs to put in the missing gap (see the pre-test in the Appendix). This series of phrasal verbs were all verbs that I was going to teach in my activities with the students, so I wanted to test their acquired knowledge.

In the pre-test the students also had to answer the following background questions: What is your native language, your age, how many years have you been studying English, have you ever been to an English-speaking country and if so, for how long.

Then students were presented with a box containing 26 phrasal verbs, eight of which transparent and 18 of which opaque. The test consisted of 26 sentences where the correct phrasal verb was to be filled into the blanks.

There were two weaknesses in the pre-test. Firstly, the limited time for each sentence: students had only 23 seconds to spot the correct phrasal verb in the list for each sentence. Secondly, the sentences did not appear on the same page, but the page needed to be turned, causing students problems of wasting time in completing the test.

After this introductory pre-test I showed the students a 2-minute video with 8 excerpts from movies. The video is available at the Piece of Cake Conversational English YouTube channel<sup>4</sup>.

They had to spot the phrasal verbs while listening and watching the video and write them down. Then I handed out a sheet of paper with 12 phrases extrapolated from the movie excerpts that the students had to fill in with the correct phrasal verb that they had heard. The last test of the day was a L1 translation with the same twelve phrasal verbs of the previous gap filling test.

#### 4.2.2. Second lesson

The second lesson was dedicated to the listening of Steve Jobs' speech at the graduation day of the Stanford University<sup>5</sup>. The video was shown twice and at the end the students had to recognise six phrasal verbs. Then the class was divided into four groups, and each group had to simulate a brief dialogue with the six phrasal verbs of the video. Afterwards the four groups were asked to present their dialogue, which was an occasion to use the phrasal verbs in the "real world" and in the specific context.

Examples of sentences taken from the student dialogues:

S. Next year I am going to drop out school, no matter what my parents say...I just don't see the point in studying...

V. Are you crazy? I don't think it is a good idea, finish the school, and then you will figure it out what you want to do...

M. I think S. is right, find out what you want from life it is never easy.

D. I think I will pop out to Mark and watch the football match

V. No you can't. You need to stay around until mum comes home.

E. I am going to drop out from university, I am sick of it and then it is too much pressure.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0S-31Z1YHc>, Accessed 2 March 2018

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLc>, Accessed 3 March 2018

G. What are you talking about E.? You can't drop out from university. What will your father say?

E. For the moment this is what I want. Then I will figure out another solution.

After the role-plays we spent 10 minutes discussing the meanings of the phrasal verbs.

#### 4.2.3. Third lesson

In the third lesson, the activity proposed to the students was a miming game. The class was divided into two groups and in turn, students were invited to come to the front of the class and mime the sentence which had the phrasal verbs in it<sup>6</sup>. Group A recognised 14 phrasal verbs out of the 20 mimed, and group B recognised 17 out of 20 phrasal verbs.

During the task, the students were enjoying the activity and took it as a real competition.

Afterwards the students were asked to divide into four groups and discuss the meaning of the phrasal verb trying to focus on the particle in which the phrasal verb was made.

#### 4.2.4. Fourth lesson

In the fourth and final lesson I handed out the L1 translation test. The students had to give a translation into Italian of the same 26 phrasal verbs which had been tested during the first lesson in the gap filling test. Afterwards a questionnaire was given to the class where the students could give their opinion of the teaching methods employed during the case study.

### 4.3. Testing procedure

In Test 1, during lesson one, 16 students participated. 26 phrasal verbs had to be inserted into 26 sentences. Of these 26 phrasal verbs, 18 were opaque in meaning and 8 were transparent. The answers were coded as correct, incorrect and no answer. 64% of the transparent verbs were correctly entered into the 26 sentences, 56% of the opaque phrasal verbs were scored correctly.

In Test 2, 18 students participated during lesson number three. The test was composed of 12 phrasal verbs that had to be entered into 12 sentences. Of these 12 phrasal verbs, 6 were opaque in meaning and 6 were transparent. The answers were coded as correct, incorrect and no answer. 80% of the transparent verbs were correctly entered into the 12 sentences. 50% of the opaque phrasal verbs were scored precisely.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.teach-this.com/images/resources/acting-out.pdf>, Accessed 3 March 2018

In Test 3, 18 students participated in the third lesson. The same 12 phrasal verbs of Test 2 had to be translated into an L1 testing. The answers were coded as correct, incorrect and no answer. 77% of the transparent verbs were translated correctly into L1, 62% of the opaque PVs were scored properly.

All 19 students participated in Test 4 during the fourth lesson. The same 26 phrasal verbs of Test 1 had to be translated into L1. The answers were coded as correct, incorrect and no answer. 90% of the transparent verbs were translated correctly into L1, 70% of the opaque phrasal verbs were scored accurately.

The 26 phrasal verbs that were tested in Test 1 and Test 4 had been memorized by students during previous school years. Comparing Test 1 with Test 4, gives information about which format for testing phrasal verbs is more effective for Italian students, L1 translation or sentence context testing.

The twelve phrasal verbs that were tested in Tests 2 and 3 might not have been known to the students but they were taught during the experimental teaching, by means of movies, books and songs excerpts. Comparing Test 2 with Test 3 gives information about which format for testing phrasal verbs is more effective for Italian students, L1 translation or sentence context testing.

After the completion of the tests, the correct, incorrect and missing responses were counted. The table below shows the obtained results. Four tests have been handed out during the lessons. The table shows separate results for opaque and transparent phrasal verbs. For each test the percentage for each type of response was also calculated. Finally, the total represents the number of opaque and transparent phrasal verbs multiplied by the number of students that took part in the test.

	Transparent				Opaque			
	Correct	Incorrect	No resp.	Total	Correct	Incorrect	No resp.	Total
Test 1	50	21	57	128	164	36	88	288
Test 1%	39%	16%	45%	100%	57%	13%	31%	100%
Test 2	74	15	19	108	46	28	34	108
Test 2%	69%	14%	18%	100%	43%	26%	31%	100%
Test 3	84	19	5	108	68	32	8	108
Test 3%	78%	18%	5%	100%	63%	30%	7%	100%
Test 4	118	15	19	152	208	79	55	342
Test 4%	78%	10%	13%	100%	61%	23%	16%	100%

Table 9 – Transparent and opaque test answers and the corresponding percentages.

#### 4.4. Results

The first research question was about which English phrasal verbs are more difficult for Italian students, the opaque or the transparent phrasal verbs.

Test # and type	Transparent	Opaque	Difference
Test 1 – Gap filling	39%	57%	-32%
Test 2 – Gap filling	69%	43%	60%
Test 3 – Translation	78%	63%	24%
Test 4 – Translation	78%	61%	28%

Table 10 – Transparent and opaque correct answers.

Table 5 reports the correct answers percentages and the relative percentage difference. I decided to extrapolate only the data regarding correct answers in order to make the results more readable (however, “no response” and “incorrect” data are coherent with the conclusions made). The data show the students had more difficulty understanding opaque phrasal verbs in most of the tests. It seems to confirm that Liao and Fukuya’s hypothesis that L2 learners encounter major difficulty in idiomatic phrasal verbs acquisition can also be applied to Italian learners.

Figure 8 clearly illustrates the above conclusions and also shows a positive trend in correct responses that may indicate that the students achieved better results in phrasal verbs acquisition over time. This trend is evident for both transparent and opaque phrasal verbs except for Test 1 (this anomaly will be discussed in relation to the second research question).

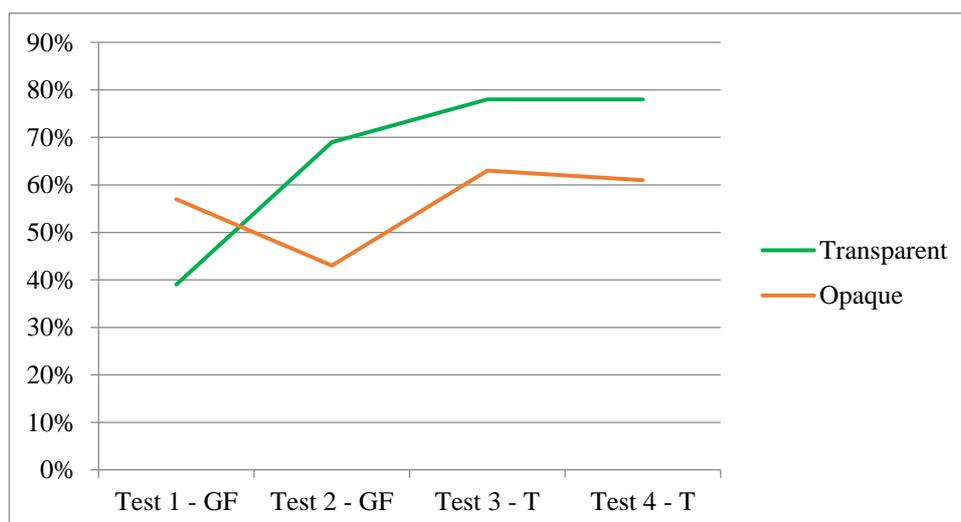


Figure 7 – Transparent and opaque correct answers.

The second research question dealt with which testing format permits a better understanding of the real knowledge of phrasal verbs: translation into L1 (T) or gap filling (GF). As mentioned before the results of the first GF test were significantly different from other tests results. On the other hand, both GF tests, differently from T tests, showed great discrepancy between transparent and opaque PVs test scores (-32% in Test 1 and 60% in Test 2). These findings led to the conclusion that GF testing is less accurate or effective in evaluating PVs knowledge.

With the data collected we can claim that specifically in this class, an L1 translation gives students a better chance to show their teacher their actual knowledge of the meaning of phrasal verbs.

The words in the sentences of the gap filling test have to be translated correctly by students before they can decide which is the correct phrasal verb to put into the blanks. Those additional words might be known or unknown to the students; hence they constitute a potential distractor during the test which could amount to a disadvantage for the student (Nation 2000, p. 350).

“There is a general feeling that first language translations should not be used in the teaching and testing vocabulary. (...) However, the use of the first language to convey and test word meaning is very efficient” (Nation 2000, p. 351). The experiment proved this view to be correct, specifically with the class of Italian students.

The graphs below show that the results of the students in the very first test of the post-testing with the L1 translation type are better than the pre-test with a gap filling type. The most effective format in order to evaluate students appear to be the L1 translation testing.

However, the incidence of missing sentences in the pre-test stops more above than in the graphics of the post-test. In other words, students are more likely to leave a blank space in a gap filling test instead than in a L1 translation test.

The graph in figure 9 shows the correct, incorrect and no responses the students scored in the transparent phrasal verbs. Figure 10 shows instead the responses of the opaque phrasal verbs. Comparing the two graphs we can conclude that the percentage of no responses in Test 1 of both transparent and opaque phrasal verbs is very high. Since it was the very first test, the students may not have understood the explanation and what they had to do. In Test 2 in fact the percentage of correct answers to the questions containing transparent phrasal verbs increased. In Tests 3 and 4 “no responses” were very low for both transparent and opaque PVs. The translation test is for this reason more reliable than the gap filling test.

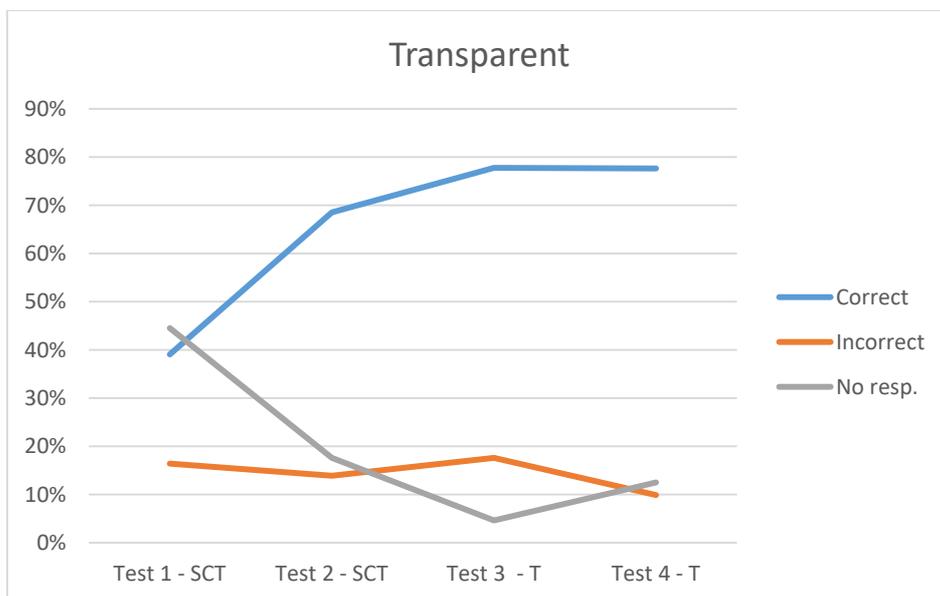


Figure 8 – Percentage of correct, incorrect and no answer responses for transparent PVs.

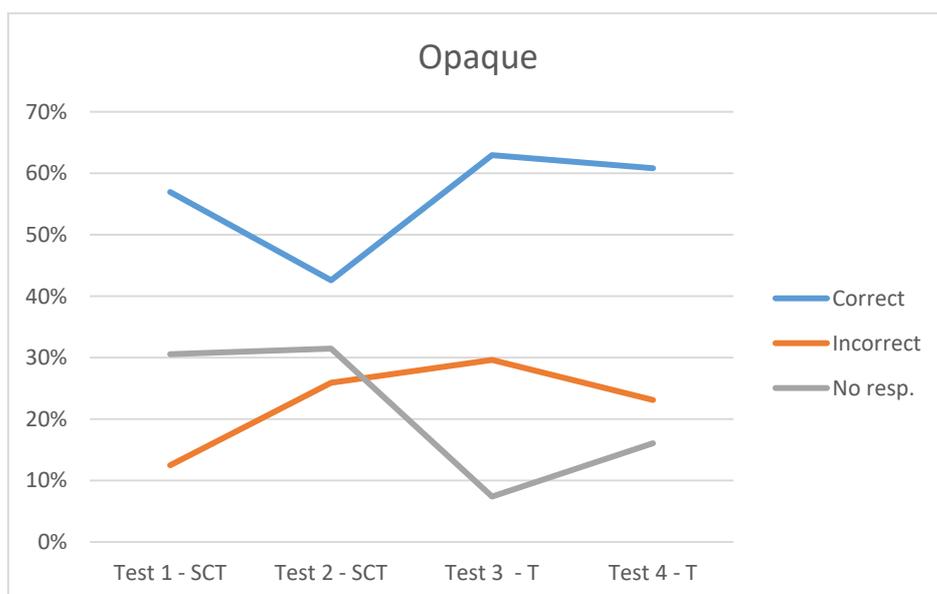


Figure 9 – Percentage of correct, incorrect and no answer responses for opaque PVs.

#### 4.5. Discussion

In the four tests, except for the first gap filling test, the students had more difficulty answering questions containing opaque phrasal verbs which seems to confirm my first hypothesis.

The high discrepancy in gap filling test results leads to the conclusion that the most effective testing format appears to be L1 translation test.

However, the case study presents some evident limitations. Firstly, to obtain more significant results, it would be advisable to conduct similar tests with a higher number of students, a higher number of tests, and more classes.

Secondly, lexis acquisition depends on many different factors such as age, motivation, styles of acquisition, cultural background and learning context. It would be very interesting to conduct similar experiments with different age groups and in different learning environments. Different audience and different learning conditions may lead to diverse results.

Moreover, knowing the meaning of the phrasal verbs and the ability to use them in context are two different competences, so the use of L1 translation testing may be more appropriate to assess the former competence whereas using gap filling test might be more appropriate for testing the latter one.

Finally, the data collected show a positive trend in phrasal verb acquisition, which means that the approaches used in class appear to be effective for the good success of teaching that I personally conducted.

## 5. Conclusions

One of the aims of this dissertation was to explore the importance of lexis in second language acquisition. In fact, in the second chapter of the work I present a literature review that focuses on the role of vocabulary in general and specifically on the centrality of lexis in the acquisition of English as second language. The main theory considered for the analysis of the role of vocabulary was the Lexical Approach theorized by Michael Lewis (1993). Some strategies of vocabulary teaching and the related issues were highlighted (Schmitt 2010, Nation 2001, Hulstijn and Laufer 2001, and others).

A short study of the phrasal verb as a particular category of lexical items was carried out. It emerges that phrasal verbs are fundamental to achieve fluency in English due their high frequency in usage; their understanding and the ability to use them is essential in spoken and written English (Cullen & Sargeant (1996, p. vii)). However most non-native learners of English tend to show a great difficulty in using phrasal verbs and, in particular, they often develop the so-called *avoidance* mechanism (Hautte 2016).

Another aim of the dissertation was to find out the possible reasons for the low English language proficiency among Italian students (see EF Education First 2017). The dissertation therefore has the aim of rethinking the teaching of the English language. In fact, chapter 3 is dedicated to the analysis of most common EFL teaching approaches

The described approaches were useful to evaluate the three selected course books (*New Headway Upper-Intermediate*, *New English File Upper-Intermediate* and *Performer B1*) in chapter 3. The evaluation revealed that all course books present articulated sections dedicated to grammar and vocabulary. The exercises and activity supporting materials contained in the books are aimed to develop all four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). In this aspect all textbooks seem to be coherent with CEFR descriptors.

Although the crucial importance of phrasal verbs in the English language, the textbooks evaluated revealed a scarce attention on their presentation and usage.

Finally, the dissertation described a teaching project carried out at the *liceo linguistico* in Conegliano Veneto. The project consisted of four lessons dedicated to phrasal verbs teaching and testing. I followed a mix of lexical and TBLT teaching approaches making an extensive use of songs and videos which resulted to be enjoyable to the students as the satisfaction questionnaire revealed. The lessons were focused on phrasal verbs; however a

global attention was given to the oral and written expression and to the relative difficulties encountered by the students.

Moreover, during the lessons I collected data of four tests on phrasal verbs among 19 learners. The analysis of the data showed that the students had more difficulty to comprehend and use opaque phrasal verbs compared to transparent phrasal verbs. In addition, a comparison between two testing methods, L1 translation vs. gap filling, was attempted based on the same data. The L1 translation testing format showed its major effectiveness among the attendants. In the discussion of the case study some limits, mostly related to scarcity of the collected data, were highlighted.

This was an interesting experience for two reasons: firstly, I was able to investigate the topic of phrasal verbs among students of a high school class and, secondly, it was a good opportunity for me to experiment my own approach of teaching with a real class.

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# Appendix

## TEST 1

1. Native language: \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Gender: Male/Female
4. How many years have you studied English?
5. Have you ever been in English speaking countries, 6. For how long?

Please choose the proper phrasal verb in the box and complete the sentences.

break up, pick up, get out, watch out, give up, turn down, find out, lift up, get in, get rid of, go back, end up, count on, get up, put up with, look into, turn up, push back, stand up, get away, take off, pass by, go out, look after, put off, call out

1. The phone is ringing. \_\_\_\_\_ it \_\_\_\_\_!
2. \_\_\_\_\_ for the truck!
3. \_\_\_\_\_ from here, it's too dangerous
4. I \_\_\_\_\_ with Mark last month. We were too different.
5. I've just \_\_\_\_\_ that I won 12.000 euro at the lottery.
6. It's freezing outside! " \_\_\_\_\_!"
7. It's good manners for men to \_\_\_\_\_ the hat inside the public places.
8. I have to \_\_\_\_\_ this old dress. I don't wear it anymore.
9. The house is on fire! \_\_\_\_\_ of here.
10. I wish to \_\_\_\_\_ to university and study more than I used to.
11. We couldn't get tickets for Egypt so we \_\_\_\_\_ going to Turkey instead.
12. You can \_\_\_\_\_ them; if they have promised to do something, they'll do it.
13. I don't need to \_\_\_\_\_ at seven tomorrow, because it's Sunday.
14. I need to concentrate, please \_\_\_\_\_ the music!
15. We'll \_\_\_\_\_ the problem and let you know the solution.
16. She didn't \_\_\_\_\_ for class today. She missed her bus.
17. Hands up, – don't \_\_\_\_\_.
18. She \_\_\_\_\_ the chair in order to move his legs
- 19 \_\_\_\_\_ straight and take your hands out of your pockets.
20. He \_\_\_\_\_ the heavy bags and put them in the car.
21. Three buses \_\_\_\_\_, but none of them was the right one.
22. He \_\_\_\_\_ of the office without saying bye to his colleagues.

## Appendix

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23. I \_\_\_\_\_ smoking. Now I feel much better than before.
24. I have to \_\_\_\_\_ my little sister tonight, so I'm not coming to the cinema.
25. I will not \_\_\_\_\_ your bad behaviour any longer!
26. They had to \_\_\_\_\_ the wedding \_\_\_\_\_ because the bride's mother had an accident.

TEST 2

Choose the correct phrasal verb in the box to complete the sentences below.

Watch out, turn up, look into, end up, go back, call out, push back, lift up, stand up, go out, pass by, put off

1. Of course we want to \_\_\_\_\_ someday -it's our country, our real home.
2. My colleague was not in the office this morning, so I \_\_\_\_\_ doing all the work myself.
3. I wrote a letter of complaint, and the airline have promised to \_\_\_\_\_ the matter.
4. She failed to \_\_\_\_\_ for work on Monday. Probably she was sick.
5. I tried to \_\_\_\_\_ to him through the window.
6. When the teacher comes in we have to \_\_\_\_\_.
7. We could hear the gospel groups \_\_\_\_\_ their voices.
8. A car slowly \_\_\_\_\_ the front of the house.
9. Let's \_\_\_\_\_ to eat tonight.
10. I'll \_\_\_\_\_ going to Scotland until you're well enough to look after yourself again.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ – you're going to hit that car!
12. \_\_\_\_\_ the chair, so I can move, thanks!

TEST 3

Translate the following phrasal verbs

Verbs in English	Translation
Watch out	
Go back	
End up	
Look into	
Turn up	
Call out	
Push back	
Stand up	
Lift up	
Pass by	
Go out	
Put off	

TEST 4

See below an L1 translation that tests exactly the same verbs, allowing the students to show that they understood the meaning of these 26 phrasal verbs.

Verbs in English	Translation
put something off	
put up with something	
pick up someone or something	
give up something	
go out	
something or someone passes by	
lift up something or someone	
stand up	
push something back	
call out to someone	
turn up somewhere	
look into something	
turn down something	
get up	
count on someone or something	
end up somewhere	
go back to something or someone	
get out	
get rid of something	

## Appendix

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<b>Verbs in English</b>	<b>Translation</b>
take off something	
get in	
find out	
break up something	
get away from something	
watch out for something	
pick up something	