

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND**

Avoidance strategy is one of the communicative strategies employed by learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) when having difficulty in expressing intended meaning. For example, Chinese and Japanese speakers tend to avoid using English relative clauses due to the differences between the structure of relative clause in English and Chinese and Japanese (Li, 1996). According to Schachter's study in 1974 (as cited in Li, 1996, p. 172), avoidance is defined as a situation when ESL/EFL learners face difficulty in producing a certain structure, they will resort to other strategies to serve the same or similar communicative purposes. Avoidance strategies can be further classified into several subtypes, including phonological avoidance, syntactic or lexical avoidance, and topic avoidance (Zhang, 2007, p. 44).

It is important to clarify the conditions for the avoidance phenomenon. Laufer (2000) states that one cannot avoid something s/he does not know. The learner, therefore, is presumed to have some knowledge of a target language feature and s/he will replace it with an alternative which s/he finds easier to communicate with less risk of error.

The issue of avoidance strategies, first raised by Schachter, has been further investigated in various aspects. Many attempts have been made to describe the existence and potential causes of avoidance behavior in ESL/EFL learners (Liao & Fukuya, 2002)

After initially reviewing available literature and previous research in the area of avoidance strategies, it was found that avoidance of phrasal verbs is one of the most interesting aspects and relevant to EFL context in countries such as Thailand. Accordingly this study is carried out with Thai EFL learners, more specifically those of MA TEFL students at Thammasat University, to determine whether they use phrasal verbs in their spoken discourse.

Though definition of the term “a phrasal verb” is still debatable among grammarians and researchers, in this study, it is used broadly to refer to all verb and particle combinations, whether adverb or preposition, that function as a unit both syntactically and lexically (Darwin & Gray, 1999). In-depth discussions about the terminology and identification of phrasal verbs (PVs) can be found in Chapter two.

As proposed by Cornell (1985), phrasal verbs (PVs) are undoubtedly very important to comprehend and communicate with native speakers since they are commonly used in spoken and informal written language. “Come in”, “blow up”, and “give in” would be examples of PVs used in informal and idiomatic English. Indeed, it would be unusual to use their one-word equivalents -- “enter”, “explode” and “surrender” respectively in spoken discourse (Alexander, 1988). As illustrated with an example of PV in (1), an extract from a very formal text, where the writer or speaker can opt to use a single word “raise” or a PV “brought up,” Fletcher (2005) argues that PVs can be used in all types of text, even in formal texts, when they are the most appropriate way of expressing the idea.

(1) Issues *brought up* by the President of the College and by the Board of Regents shall be addressed by the Faculty Senate and, if necessary, by the Association as ... (p. 1)

Widdowson (1989) as cited in Ketko (2002) also mentions the knowledge of multiword chunks which include PVs and the ability to use them in appropriate context as “a sign of communicative competence” (p. 2).

However, PVs can be one of the major sources of frustration and obstacle in the process of learning and teaching English for learners and teachers alike (Fletcher, 2005; Marks, 2005). Furthermore, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) indicate that learning PVs is one of problematic areas for ESL and EFL learners -- they tend to overuse one-word verbs instead of PVs where the latter is much more natural-sounding than the former.

It is, hence, not surprising that much research has been conducted on avoidance of phrasal verbs and it can be claimed from the findings of this research that differences between first and target language plays an important role in avoidance behavior of ESL/EFL learners; for example, avoidance of PVs by native speakers of

Hebrew; avoidance of PVs by advanced Swedish learners of English (Dagut and Laufer, 1985; Laufer and Eliasson, 1993 as cited in Liao and Fukuya, 2002); and avoidance of PVs by Chinese learners of English (Liao & Fukuya, 2002).

The above brief discussion reveals the fact that PVs are one of the most difficult areas of learning English, especially in an EFL context such as in Thailand. It will also be a very fruitful area for future research. However, the study of the avoidance of PVs by Thai EFL learners has hardly received any attention. It was found that no study of avoidance of phrasal verbs of Thai EFL learners has been done in Thailand. The present study is, therefore, derived from the belief that one cannot begin to describe something until one is aware of its existence -- the present study is conducted to investigate whether there is avoidance among Thai EFL learners, specially MA TEFL students at Thammasat University, and if any, whether proficiency levels of the learners play an important role in avoidance behavior.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Based on the above, this study aims to investigate the following questions:

1.2.1 Do Thai EFL learners avoid using PVs?

1.2.2 If there is avoidance, do proficiency levels of the subjects under the study play an important role in avoidance of PVs?

## **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study can be described as follows:

1.3.1 To investigate whether Thai MA TEFL students at Thammasat University (T.U.) avoid using PVs.

1.3.2 To investigate whether the levels of proficiency of the students under the study play an important role in avoidance of PVs.

## 1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Definitions of the terms of this study are the following:

1.4.1 **ESL** refers to English as a Second Language

1.4.2 **EFL** refers to English as a Foreign Language

1.4.3 **Avoidance or Avoidance phenomenon/strategy/behavior** refers to a situation when an ESL/EFL learner faces difficulty in producing a certain target language word or structure or sound, s/he tries resort to other strategies to serve the same or similar communicative purpose.

1.4.4 **A phrasal verb or PV** refers to a verb that consists of two parts – a verb and a particle – but functions as a single verb with its own meaning as a new lexical unit.

1.4.5 **Literal phrasal verb** refers to a phrasal verb whose meaning is a straightforward product of their semantic components e.g. go out and take away.

1.4.6 **Figurative phrasal verb** refers to a phrasal verb whose new meaning has resulted from a metaphorical shift of meaning and the semantic fusion of the individual components e.g. turn up and let down.

1.4.7 **MA TEFL students** refer to students who study for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a foreign language.

1.4.8 **Group I** refers to the MA TEFL students who get TU-GET scores 690 or higher, the so called “better group”.

1.4.9 **Group II** refers to the MA TEFL students who get TU-GET scores less than 690, the so called “lower group”.

## 1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 This study was conducted with the sample randomly selected from the first and second year Thai MA TEFL students at Thammasat University (T.U.) in the academic year 2007. Nine (9) students who got TU-GET scores 690 or higher were assigned to the better group, whereas thirty (30) students who got TU-GET scores less than 690 were assigned to the lower group. The total numbers of subjects was thirty-nine (39) students.

1.5.2 This study investigates the avoidance of both figurative and literal PVs in spoken discourse.

## **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

1.6.1 If it is found that there is avoidance of PVs among Thai EFL learners, this will be useful to EFL teachers in the improvement of EFL learners. The teachers can become aware that any absence of error in PVs does not reflect the mastery of such area. The teachers must emphasize PVs while teaching and use supplements focusing on PVs in order to help the learners to use PVs properly.

1.6.2 If it is found that there is no avoidance of PVs among Thai EFL learners, this will be useful to EFL teachers in their consideration of lesson plans and material development. In teaching and developing material, teachers do not necessarily focus on PVs as it can be implied that there is no difficulty in using PVs among Thai EFL learners and they have already known how to use PVs properly.

1.6.3 If it is found that levels of proficiency play an important role in avoidance of PVs, this will be useful to EFL teachers in the improvement of EFL learners. The teachers should take the levels of proficiency into consideration when designing materials and preparing lesson plans. For example, they have to consider the amount of exercises provided to students in different proficiency levels or they have to emphasis the usage of PVs to the groups of students which have more tendencies to avoid PVs.

1.6.4 If it is found that levels of proficiency do not play an important role in avoidance of PVs, this will be useful to EFL teachers in the improvement of EFL learners. Materials and lesson plans do not necessarily vary according to the levels of proficiency.

## **1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

The study of “The Use of Phrasal Verbs by Thai MA TEFL students of Thammasat University” in this paper is divided into five chapters as follows:

1.7.1 Chapter one includes the introduction, background, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, definitions of terms, scope of the study, and the significance of the study.

1.7.2 Chapter two deals with a review of literature related to the study of the English phrasal verbs.

1.7.3 Chapter three explains the research methodology used in conducting this study. It includes the subjects, materials, procedures, and data analysis.

1.7.4 Chapter four presents the results of the study and the interpretation of the research findings.

1.7.5 Chapter five contains a summary of the study, a summary of the findings, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.