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Challenges in Translating English Phrasal Verbs: A gender case of EFL undergraduate students at Saudi Electronic University

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ABSTRACT

A review of existing literature reveals that phrasal verbs are inherently polysemous, possessing multiple inter-related meanings. Despite this well-documented characteristic, few studies have systematically explored how such polysemy influences second language learners' comprehension and translation of phrasal verbs. Also, the current paper tackled the influence of gender, addressing a previously unexplored area. To bridge this research gap, the present study seeks to analyze the specific difficulties EFL learners encounter when translating polysemous phrasal verbs and determine whether gender significantly correlates with performance differences in semantic translation accuracy. This study used a quantitative research method and data were statistically analyzed. A total of 66 EFL student participants were given a test containing ten phrasal verbs that needed to be translated into the Arabic language. The results showed that 73.7% of EFL students do not struggle with translating English phrasal verbs and a small number of them (28.5%) experience semantic problems. In addition, the study concluded that there is a significant difference between EFL students' scores of correct answers of semantic translation test and their gender. Such significance goes in favor of female participants. Future research involving other aspects of translation, such as pragmatic understanding, could provide deeper insights into translation difficulties pertaining to English phrasal verbs.

Keywords: EFL Undergraduate Students; Gender; Phrasal Verbs; Translation; Saudi Electronic University

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1. Introduction

The necessity for communication and mutual understanding among speakers of diverse languages prompted the development of translation centuries ago. Acting as a bridge between languages and cultures, translation effectively closes linguistic and cultural divides. Moreover, it functions as a communicative process, conveying the meaning of a source text into the target language [1]. In relation to linguistic standpoints, the direction of translation is an important area that affects the understanding and production of phrasal verbs. The focus is usually on translating from English into the native language of the learner and it is this type of translation that causes the most difficulty for learners and tends to result in wrong understanding of phrasal verbs [2]. This might be the case for Saudi EFL undergraduates at Saudi Electronic University. This study therefore focuses on translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic and understanding the challenges faced by EFL students at Saudi Electronic University.

Phrasal verbs have long been regarded as problematic in academic writing. While they are perfectly acceptable in informal communication, they are conventionally avoided in formal scholarly texts [3]. They have also been described as one of the most difficult and challenging aspects in the process of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and/or second language (ESL) and have presented both learners and teachers with several difficulties and challenges [4]. This is especially the case for most language learners, including Arabic students, who tend to avoid using phrasal verbs as they view them as unnecessary, and the fundamental meaning of the verb can be expressed using a single verb translated into Arabic. This leads to communicative problems in their target language [5].

Mastering phrasal verbs is crucial for effective English comprehension and communication [6]. However, these verb-particle combinations present particular challenges for EFL learners due to their idiomatic nature and semantic complexity [7]. As a result, many language learners tend to avoid or struggle with this essential aspect of English proficiency. For example, this difficulty is compounded when attempting to provide equivalence in the source language, as illustrated in an empirical study on phrasal verbs in the context of translation to Arabic conducted at the University of Benghazi [1].

It is important that this research has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the development of linguistic and lexical theories related to phrasal verbs [8]. In addition, EFL learners' ability to understand and apply phrasal verbs is greatly impacted by the distinctions between their native tongues and English [9]. Interestingly, phrasal verbs are special types of verbs in language. This indicates that phrasal verb formation is present in a few languages. If the grammatical structures of the source and destination languages differ, it will be challenging. Therefore, when phrasal verbs are translated into a target language that lacks phrasal verb structure, it could result in a meaning gap [10]. This is why EFL students' translation must be assessed. Also, Tran and Pham argued that the incorrect usage of phrasal verbs was a common problem in the academic work of English majors [7]. As such, a formal investigation into the challenges associated with phrasal verb usage in academic writing is warranted. In addition, current research widely supports the idea that language shapes cognition [11,12], with grammatical gender being one of the key factors [11,13,14]. The linguistic relativity hypothesis exists in two forms: a strong version, which claims that language rigidly dictates thought by constraining cognitive categories, and a weaker version, suggesting that language affects cognition only in specific contexts—particularly in tasks requiring grammatical encoding [15]. Both perspectives are relevant when examining how grammatical gender influences cognitive processes [13,15,16]. This explains that phrasal verbs are not only grammatical constructions but also reflect interpretative processes shaped by cognitive and social factors.

It is crucial to note that phrasal verbs exhibit significant polysemy, and while examining L2 learners' comprehension of phrasal verbs, few studies have included this polysemy thus far [17]. When translating phrasal verbs, a key research gap exists; descriptive translation studies haven't sufficiently explored how they affect the qualities of translated works [18]. Also, there is limited research addressing translation challenges, especially regarding phrasal verbs [19]. Hence, the aim of this research is to identify students' challenges of phrasal verb translation and to investigate whether there is a significant difference between EFL students' scores of correct answers of semantic translation test and their gender.

1.1. Phrasal Verbs

According to Quirk et al. [20], phrasal verbs are any two-part verbs that "behave to some extent either lexically or syntactically as a single verb" and are composed of a lexical verb followed—frequently or infrequently—by an adverbial particle. Phrasal Verbs can be distinguished from other types of multi-word verbs and free combinations using a variety of semantic and syntactic features based on Quirk et al.'s theory [20]. Thus, a phrasal verb can be known as a construction made up of a proper verb and a morphologically invariant particle that together serve as a single lexical and syntactic unit [18,21]. Phrasal verbs can be transitive or intransitive, and separable or inseparable, depending on whether they take an object and whether the object can be placed between the verb and the particle [22]. For example, in the phrasal verb "pick up," the verb "pick" is combined with the particle "up" to create a new verb with the meaning of grabbing or lifting [22]. In the sentence "She picked up her keys," the verb "picked up" is transitive and separable, as the object "her keys" can be placed between the verb "picked" and the particle "up."

Based on a comprehensive review of phrasal verb research, it became clear that they are numerous and diverse due to the special interest in this type of constructions in the English language. What draws attention in all these studies is the emphasis that they are constructions that impose many restrictions and problems on EFL learners around the globe [7]. It is important to note that the analysis of the current study was theoretically supported by the translation strategies provided by Baker [23], which include paraphrasing, omission, similar meaning and form, and contrasting meaning and form. Moreover, in order to distinguish phrasal verbs from other verb categories, a syntactic framework based on Quirkian clause structures was employed, taking into account pertinent syntactic and semantic characteristics [3].

Alangari et al. argued that phrasal verbs are often considered informal and less appropriate in formal language [3], such as academic writing or formal documents. However, the same researchers pointed out that "this does not mean that they are absent from other more formal genres and registers". Research on the acquisition of second languages has shown that L2 English language users encounter considerable difficulties when it comes to using phrasal verbs. This is mainly because these formulations have been described as polysemy and idiomaticity, causing confusion to most non-English learners [18,24]. Additionally, previous studies have revealed that learners of English as a second language frequently demonstrate a predilection for single-word verbs rather than phrasal verbs [18,25].

1.2. Challenges in Translating Phrasal Verbs

Translating phrasal verbs involves many linguistic and semantic challenges. This is due to their specific structure in the English language, which often leads to figurative, allegorical, and idiomatic meanings, and this is what almost all previous studies have agreed upon [10]. The numerous prior studies that have used the word "avoidance" in a variety of foreign EFL contexts pertaining to the subject of phrasal verbs serve as confirmation for the term "challenge." Although an enhancement in the usage of phrasal verbs has been reported from intermediate to advanced competence ranks [26], the preference of using single-word verbs is seen across all proficiency levels, including the most advanced learners [18,27]. According to Kleinmann [28], such preference is known as "avoidance behavior", and researchers propose that learners intentionally avoid using phrasal verbs in order to reduce mistakes and preserve language safety [18]. Significantly, learners of English whose native tongue does not include analogous phrasal verb forms are more likely to exhibit this preference [24,29].

Moreover, phrasal verbs pose significant challenges for L2 learners. Their multiple meanings, non-literal interpretations, and flexible structures make them hard to master. The separable/inseparable distinction also leads to word order errors. Without adequate exposure to real-world usage, learners miss contextual nuances, limiting their language development [30]. Thus, studies confirm that L2 learners often avoid phrasal verbs due to their complexity [29]. White attributed this to their unpredictability, frequency, and polysemy [31]. Learners face challenges because these verbs combine literal and figurative meanings, and a single phrasal verb can have multiple interpretations [30]. As a result, proficiency in recognizing and using them is essential for English fluency.

1.3. Previous Studies on Translating Phrasal Verbs

Research on phrasal verbs has been conducted from various perspectives, including theoretical studies and empirical research. Theoretical studies concerning phrasal verbs often focus on syntactic, semantic, and cognitive approaches [32]. Syntactic approaches examine the structure of phrasal verbs, while semantic approaches analyze the meanings of these verbs. Cognitive approaches, on the other hand, explore how learners process and understand phrasal verbs [33]. Empirical research on phrasal verbs often focuses on the challenges faced by learners, particularly EFL learners, in understanding and using these verbs. For example, a study explored the difficulties faced by Iranian students in using phrasal verbs [34]. The findings of their research revealed that avoidance of phrasal verbs is a common issue among these learners. Another finding was that learners often have a lack of awareness of phrasal verbs and their meanings, which can lead to difficulties in using them correctly. Another study carried out by Rafah and Elraggas investigated the challenges graduate translation students studying English as a foreign language at the Libyan Academy face when translating phrasal verbs into Arabic [35]. In their findings, the researchers found that the majority of participants had little trouble in translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic, especially the idiomatic ones, as the context usually gave clues regarding their meanings.

In the context of academic writing, phrasal verbs are often considered informal and inappropriate for formal or academic settings. However, research has shown that phrasal verbs can be used in academic writing and are in fact widely used in academic and research contexts [36]. Abdul Rahman and Abid conducted a study among non-native business students in Oman and they found that phrasal verbs can enhance the quality of writing and improve expression [37], making them an important tool for academic and business communication.

There has been a lot of research on phrasal verbs in interrupting and ELT learning, a study conducted on the use of phrasal verbs by Malaysian learners of English Through examples of students' writings in academic writing tests, it became clear that many of them fluctuated in placing phrasal verbs according to their intended meaning [38]. For example, a study carried out by Subramaniam investigated whether exposing Malaysian learners to the fundamental meanings of the constituent parts of a phrasal verb—that is, the verb and particle—assists them in utilizing phrasal verbs correctly in English writing [39]. The findings of her study revealed that it is crucial to identify the verbs' and particles' single invariant meanings because they help to realize the various senses that phrasal verbs can have. Using a corpus of writing from Korean EFL students, Ryoo clarified that phrasal verbs are considered as one of the most inventive and hence difficult grammatical categories in the English language [40]. as for the Saudi context, Algethami and Almalki investigated whether Saudi English as a foreign language (EFL) learners avoid using English phrasal verbs [41]. They also searched how long Saudi EFL learners had been studying English in a foreign language environment and the kind of phrasal verbs they used—literal vs. figurative—affected how often they avoided using phrasal verbs. In their study, the researchers made a phrasal verb multiple-choice test and submitted it to a set of thirty Saudi EFL learners participating in the research study. To serve as a comparison group, six native English speakers were also enlisted to take the same test. The findings demonstrated that compared to the native English group, both learner groups significantly employed fewer metaphorical phrasal verbs. Within the same context, in her research, Al-Otaibi examined how Saudi EFL students use and avoid English phrasal verbs [5]. She also examined teachers' attitudes toward teaching and the insertion of English phrasal verbs in the current textbooks. Her study's findings showed that Saudi EFL students tended to shun using phrasal verbs and showed a strong preference for their one-word equivalents. In addition, the results of the questionnaire showed that instructors' perceptions and awareness of the significance of teaching phrasal verbs were, for the most part, negative.

In conclusion, research on phrasal verbs has explored various aspects of these verbs, including their structure, meaning, and use in different contexts. Theoretical studies have examined the syntactic, semantic, and cognitive aspects of phrasal verbs, while empirical research has focused on the challenges faced by learners in understanding and using these verbs. The findings of these studies highlight the importance of addressing the difficulties faced by learners in using phrasal verbs and the potential benefits of using these verbs in academic and business communi-

cation. However, to the researcher's best knowledge, the previous studies conducted on English phrasal verbs did not address the variable gender in any educational context. Thus, this paper aims to identify students' challenges of phrasal verb translation as well as to investigate whether there is a significant difference between EFL students' scores of correct answers of semantic translation test and their gender. To get more enlightenment about the aims of this research, the research questions are as follows: 1- What are students' challenges while translating English phrasal verbs into Arabic language? 2- Are there significant differences between male and female students' scores of correct semantic translations?

2. Materials and Methods

This research used a quantitative research method. Creswell asserted that gathering data is a necessary component in research methodology and the researcher adopted the quantitative approach so that data can be quantified and statistically analyzed [42]. For the current paper, the test results were quantitively analyzed to explain the challenges of the tested phrasal verbs, highlighting participants correct answers, semantic and syntactic problems.

The participants selected for this study were 66 EFL participant students (male=42 and female=24) aged between 18 and 45 years old from English language and translation department officially enrolled in their third academic year at Saudi Electronic university. Most of them have a job. In Saudi Electronic University (SEU), established in 2011, all content instructions are taught through the medium of English language. It can be safely assumed that today, the average EFL learners in Saudi Arabia (KSA) are studying in an environment where a working knowledge of the English language will be essential to their educational success [43]. Such context makes the issue of finding effective means to teach and develop student competency in English more relevant than it has ever been. Interestingly, the purposive sampling was chosen as the participants started learning courses and skills of translation. The purposive sampling criteria were designed to select participants who not only were enrolled in their third academic year but were also actively engaged in translation courses and skills training during the study period. This dual criterion ensured that participants had both the

foundational knowledge and current hands-on experience relevant to the research focus. To launch the process of research procedures, participants were given a test adopted from Qarani as part of the data collection process [44]. The written test contained ten sentences, each of which had one phrasal verb, needed to be translated from English to Arabic language. To ensure a manageable sample size that allows for thorough analysis while keeping the study focused, ten items were selected for a phrasal verb study. This selection provides a diverse representation of phrasal verbs, offering enough variation to facilitate detailed exploration and meaningful conclusions. A sample size of small items of phrasal verbs is used in research to enable a deep dive into each item since this may lead to better retention of phrasal verbs among students [29,45].

It should be noted that there were two sections of the test; general participant information was covered in the first section, whereas the second tackled translating the sentences into Arabic language. Specifically, the study employed a written translation test consisting of ten English sentences containing target phrasal verbs, which participants translated into Arabic. The test was administered in person during the second semester of 2024 under controlled conditions: participants received identical printed test sheets with clear instructions and were allotted a fixed time to complete the task. No additional tools (e.g., dictionaries or digital devices) were permitted to ensure authentic assessment of their translation competence. Data was gathered once the test was completed. More specifically, a descriptive analysis method to analyze the data was employed in this study, providing accurate and concise reliable data from which all data including the features of the tested phrasal verbs such the correct semantic translation as well as semantic problems were generated. Thus, the analysis of ten phrasal verbs in the ten sentences was conducted for the sake of data analysis.

From the outset, the basic goal of the study, the type of test (translating sentences with ten phrasal verbs) and the significance of their contribution to the study were explained to the students. Additionally, they were told that their responses would be handled in an anonymous manner. An informed consent form was given to participants together with the written test. It is important to highlight that the research process has been approved by

the Research Ethics Committee (SEUREC-4511) at Saudi Electronic University, and that the research ethics issue has been carefully given careful attention. The test took around 30 minutes in one session. Each student's proper responses were verified once the data was gathered. For every accurate response, one point was awarded, and a zero for an inaccurate one. The SPSS software was used for statistical data analysis. For reliability reasons, it should be mentioned that the alpha coefficient for the entire phrasal verb test was determined to be 0.942, as shown in **Table 1**. According to Creswell [46], the reliability result for this article is considered extremely reliable. Regarding the validity check, a group of university academics and educators with expertise in linguistics examines the test items related to phrasal verbs. The specialists' suggestions and observations were carefully taken into consideration.

Table 1. Reliability Check of the Question's Items Containing Phrasal Verbs.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
0.942	**0.944**	**10**

3. Results

This section presents the quantitative results of a study examining EFL students' challenges of phrasal verb translation and to investigate whether there is a significant difference between EFL students' scores of correct answers of semantic translation test and their gender. The analysis involves a test presented to 66 EFL student participants and containing ten phrasal verbs needed to be translated into Arabic language.

3.1. Students' Challenges of Phrasal Verb Translation

To identify students' challenges of phrasal verb translation, ten sentences containing one phrasal verb for each were translated from English to Arabic language, **Table 2** shows EFL students' scores of phrasal verb test. Specifically, it compares male and female students' scores in terms of correct semantic translation of phrasal verbs, semantic problems, and syntactic problems.

Table 2. Students' Scores of the Phrasal Verb Test.

Question Items to be Translated	Correct Semantic Translation of PV		Semantic Problems		Syntactic Problems	
	M(n = 42)	F(n = 24)	M(n = 42)	F(n = 24)	M (n = 42)	F(n = 24)
1-Where is the jumper I lent you? I need to take it back.	26 (61.9%)	20 (83.3%)	16 (38.1%)	4 (16.7%)	4 (9.5%)	2 (8.4%)
(Total average of M & F for Item 1)	(72.6%)		(27.4%)		(8.9%)	
2- Could you help me with this assignment? I can't figure it out.	24 (57.1%)	10 (41.6%)	18 (42.9%)	14 (58.4%)	4 (9.5%)	0 (0%)
(Total average of M & F for Item 2)	(49.4%)		(50.6%)		4.75%	
3- Could you tell me your next destination once again? I didn't write it down.	36 (85.7%)	24 (100%)	6 (14.3%)	0 (0%)	3 (7.1%)	2 (8.4%)
(Total average of M & F for Item 3)	92.8%		7.2%		7.7%	
4- He came across as a nice person in the meeting.	30 (71.4%)	22 (91.6%)	12 (28.6%)	2 (8.4%)	6 (14.3%)	5 (20.8%)
(Total average of M & F for Item 4)	81.5%		18.5%		17.5%	
5- My uncle passed out last month.	20 (47.6%)	14 (58.4%)	30 (71.5%)	16 (66.7%)	5 (11.9%)	2 (8.4%)
(Total average of M & F for Item 5)	53%		69.1%		10.2%	
6- Get a relative to look after the kids.	36 (85.7%)	20 (83.3%)	6 (14.3%)	4 (16.7%)	4 (9.5%)	4 (16.7%)
(Total average of M & F for Item 6)	84.5%		15.5%		13.1%	
7- She is going back to Italy next year.	42 (100%)	24 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
(Total average of M & F for Item 7)	100%		0%		0%	

Table 2. *Cont.*

Question Items to be Translated	Correct Semantic Translation of PV		Semantic Problems		Syntactic Problems	
	M(n = 42)	**F(n = 24)**	**M (n = 42)**	**F(n = 24)**	**M (n = 42)**	**F(n = 24)**
8- Check out that location! It is really awesome.	26	10	16	14	4	3
	(61.9%)	(41.6%)	(38.1%)	(58.4%)	(9.5%)	(12.5%)
(Total average of M & F for Item 8)	51.8%		48.2%		11%	
9- The instructor passed out the test booklets to his students.	36	22	6	2	6	3
	(85.7%)	(91.6%)	(14.3%)	(8.4%)	(14.3%)	(12.5%)
(Total average of M & F for Item 9)	88.7%		11.3%		13.4%	
10-I came across my college reports when I was cleaning my office.	18	20	24	4	4	2
	(42.8%)	(83.3%)	(57.2%)	(16.7%)	(9.5%)	(8.4%)
(Total average of M & F for Item 10)	63.1%		36.9%		8.9%	
Total Average of M & F for Items (1–10)	**73.7%**		**28.5%**		**9.5%**	

In terms of correct semantic translation of phrasal verbs, item 1 (Where is the jumper I lent you? I need to take it back.) showed that female students (83.3%) gained more than males (61.9%). This indicates that the phrase "take it back" is more familiar to females, suggesting that they may have had more exposure or practice with similar contexts. Despite the lower performance of males when compared to females, more than half of male students gained pass scores. Item 2 (Could you help me with this assignment? I can't figure it out.) expressed that male students (57.1%) gained more than females (41.6%). For this item, males performed better; this could indicate that the context of seeking help might resonate more with their experiences or familiarity with the phrase "figure it out". Item 3 (Could you tell me your next destination once again? I didn't write it down.) signified that both male and female (85.7% and 100% respectively) performed well, highlighting the perfect score in favor of females. This may suggest they might have a strong grasp of logistical or travel-related language. As for item 4 (He came across as a nice person in the meeting.), the results showed that female students (91.6%) gained more scores than males (71.4%). This suggests that the phrase "came across" can be nuanced, indicating perception or impression about behavior. The higher success rate among females implies that they might be more attuned to such expressions. Item 5 (My uncle passed out last month.) demonstrated that female students (58.4%) recorded more scores than male students (47.6%) who did not achieve the pass scores. Most male students got confused between the two phrases "pass out" and "pass away", reflecting the latter in their translations as indicated in the following Arabic sentence provided by one of the students: "Ammi matt ashahar al-madhi". The phrasal verb means "pass away".

In addition, this item showed significant difficulty, especially for males. This phrasal verb "passed out" can mean both losing consciousness and distributing materials, which may confuse learners. For item 6 (Get a relative to look after the kids.), both male (85.7%) and female (83.3%) students did well, gaining very close results. This indicates a common understanding of the phrasal verb "look after" which is often used in everyday contexts. Item 7 (She is going back to Italy next year.) showed that both students gain the best score (100% for each). It is interesting to note that this straightforward statement with the common phrasal verb "go back" signifies perfect comprehension, highlighting its familiarity. As for item 8 (Check out that location! It is really awesome.), the findings indicated that male students (61.9%) did better than females (41.6%) who did not gain the pass score. The lower female score suggests that the colloquial use of the phrasal verb "check out" may not be as familiar to them, while males found it easier to translate. Moreover, this phrasal verb "check out" can mean both examining and going to see, which may lead to confusion for female students. For item 9 (The instructor passed out the test booklets to his students.), both male and female students (85.7% and 91.6%, respectively) did understand the context of distributing materials well, suggesting familiarity with classroom language. Lastly, item 10 (I came across my college reports when I was cleaning my office.) showed that female students (83.3%) gained higher scores than males (42.8%), who did not reach the pass score. In this case, the disparity indicates that females may have a better understanding of the phrasal verb "came across" in a more personal context. In general, while females demonstrated

superior performance in many cases, males had notable strengths in specific items.

Regarding semantic problems during the translation process, the findings expressed varying levels of semantic problems between males and females across different items. Males generally experienced higher rates of semantic difficulties compared to females. For example, phrasal verbs such as ('take back', 'write down', 'came across', 'passed out', and 'came across') appear to be more challenging for males, indicating a potential gap in understanding expressions that convey the message. However, it should be noted that the minority of male and female students struggle with such phrasal verbs based on the data presented in **Table 2**. Almost more than the half percentage of females (58.4%) struggled with the phrasal verb" figure out" compared to males (42.9%), indicating that the nuances of this phrasal verb might be less clear to them, potentially due to less exposure to such phrases. Also, there were low percentages representing both genders having relatively low semantic issues with the phrasal verb "look after", indicating a good grasp of common caregiving vocabulary. Not surprisingly, the straightforward phrase "go back" posed no challenges, suggesting that this phrasal verb is a well-understood concept for both genders. Nevertheless, more than the half percentages of females (58.4%) struggled with the phrasal verb "check out", signifying that it might be less familiar or understood informal contexts. Overall, male students generally encountered more semantic problems than females across most items.

As for problems of the syntactic structure representing the Arabic sentence structure (a verb + a noun/ pronoun + an object), the results relatively revealed low rates of problems related to Arabic syntax for both males and females across the ten items, suggesting that students generally understand the grammatical structures involved in these sentences containing phrasal verbs. Interestingly, males showed slightly more syntactic challenges in certain

phrasal verbs such as 'take back', 'figure out', 'pass out', 'came across', and 'passed out', while females had fewer issues overall. For instance, one of the students' syntactic problems of translating item 5 (My uncle passed out last month) was like this: "Ammi ugmeya alaih ashahar almadhi". The student in the above Arabic structure started with a noun followed by a verb expressing the passive voice. This could also relate to syntactic problems with separable and inseparable phrasal verbs.

Furthermore, in relation to the phrasal verbs including 'write down', 'came across', 'look after', and 'check out', it has been found that both genders had low percentages, but the slight difference indicates that females faced slightly more syntactic challenges, which could relate to the complex structure of the phrasal verbs that did not exist in the students' native language system.

3.2. The Effect of Gender on Students' Scores of Correct Responses of Semantic Translation

The second research question examined any associations between students' scores of correct answers of semantic translation test and their gender. To answer this question, an independent sample T-test analysis for gender was carried out to see if there were any statistically significant discrepancies between the study's gender variable and the test results of the students. Using an independent sample t-test, **Table 3** presents the impact of gender on EFL students' scores of correct responses of semantic translation test. The outputs of male and female EFL students were found to differ significantly based on the results of the t-test. Therefore, as evidenced by the substantial p-value = 0.00, gender has a discernible effect on EFL students' scores of correct answers of semantic translation test. Hence, as the mean score of female participants (M=15.00) is higher than that of male respondents, female participants had an impact on the results of the correct answers of semantic translation test of items containing phrasal verbs.

Table 3. The Effect of Gender.

Items (1–10)	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
EFL students' scores of correct semantic translation test of items containing phrasal verbs	Male	42	6.81	3.210	−8.136	0.000
	Female	24	15.00	4.969		

4. Discussion

EFL male and female students generally performed well in semantic translation test of items containing phrasal verbs. However, they struggle with a few phrasal verbs such as 'pass out', 'came across', and 'figure out'. This result goes in line with studies like Rafah and Elraggas and Su'ud [10,35]. In her study, Su'ud revealed that "students' translation quality was found accurate, natural, and clear" [10]. In contrast, this finding is inconsistent with the studies conducted by Al Nasarat and Qarani [2,44]. For example, Qarani found that many challenges students faced exist while translating items having phrasal verbs from English to Kurdish [38]. Specifically, Qarani revealed that "The most important aspect in the difficulties is the failure to find the correct meaning for the same phrasal verbs in different context" [44]. Overall, male students generally encountered more semantic problems than females across most items. Though the percentages seem low, one cannot deny that semantic problems exist. Such a result is consistent with studies conducted by Qarani and Mohammed et al. [4,44]. Concerning syntactic problems, both male and female students encountered some syntactic issues, but they were still low overall. The informal nature of 'check out'—for example—might contribute to confusion in structure for some students. It is critical that item 7 (She is going back to Italy next year.) containing the phrasal verb 'go back' had no syntactic problems, indicating that the sentence structure is straightforward and easily understood by male and female students. In general, the incidence of syntactic problems was relatively low for both genders, with no item showing overwhelming difficulties. This finding goes in line with Su'ud's research [10].

With respect to the effect of gender, it has been found that females generally performed better in semantic translation test of items containing phrasal verbs compared to males. This could be attributed to the idea that females may have a better understanding of the phrasal verb and know how to use them in real contexts. To the researcher's best knowledge, it should be noted that the variable gender has not been studied before in relation to studies conducted on English phrasal verbs. Therefore, the significant difference goes in line with other studies such as Alhumsi [47] and Eslick et al. [48].

5. Conclusions

The aim of this research is to identify students' challenges of phrasal verb translation and to investigate whether there is a significant difference between EFL students' scores of correct answers of semantic translation test and their gender. To achieve the intended purpose, ten sentences containing one phrasal verb for each were translated from English to Arabic language. To be more specific, this paper focuses on correct semantic translation of phrasal verbs, semantic problems, and syntactic problems. Literature asserted that English phrasal verbs form a critical challenge for EFL students [4]. However, the results are surprising, it has been revealed that most EFL students do not struggle with comprehending and translating English phrasal verbs. Moreover, a small number of them experience semantic problems such as the meaning of 'passed out' and 'came across' and the syntactic problems such as separable and inseparable phrasal verbs. Thus, females tend to excel in semantic translation accuracy compared to males, while both genders experience minimal syntactic problems overall. However, certain items highlight specific areas where males struggle more with semantic comprehension, while females occasionally face challenges with syntactic structure. Furthermore, the study concluded that there is a significant difference between EFL students' scores of correct answers on semantic translation test and their gender. Particularly, female participants had an impact on the results of semantic translation test of items containing phrasal verbs.

It should be noted that the relatively small sample size limits the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population. In addition, the study did not consider factors such as participants' prior translation experience or cultural background, which could influence results. Nevertheless, future research should include a larger and more diverse participant pool to enhance the reliability of the findings. To further explore the observed gender disparities, future studies could investigate the role of prior L2 exposure, general language proficiency, and sociocultural factors. Additionally, examining how these findings translate into practical pedagogical strategies, particularly in gender-diverse EFL classrooms, would strengthen the study's real-world applicability. Additionally, investigating other aspects of translation, such as pragmatic under-

standing or cultural context could provide deeper insights into translation difficulties pertaining to English phrasal verbs. By addressing these limitations and pursuing the recommendations, future research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of translation challenges and inform educational practices in language acquisition and translation studies.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.M. and B.S.; methodology, A.M.; software, A.M.; validation, A.M. and B.S.; formal analysis, A.M. and A.S.; investigation, B.S.; resources, B.S. and A.S.; data curation, A.M.; writing—original draft preparation, A.M.; writing—review and editing, H.A.; visualization, A.M.; supervision, A.M.; project administration, A.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Research Ethics Committee at Saudi Electronic University (SEU-REC-4511) in 2024.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request. Please contact Mohammad Husam at Husam101010@gmail.com for access to the data.

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