The Avoidance of Phrasal Verbs: Comparing Korean Learners of English with German English Learners[1]

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Koo, Jungyeon. 2015. The Avoidance of Phrasal Verbs: Comparing Korean Learners of English with German English Learners. *SNU Working Papers in English Linguistics and Language, 165-183* This is a pilot study which compares the avoidance of the use of phrasal verbs (PV) in Korean adult EFL learners with that of in German adult EFL learners. There are three research questions: 1) Do Korean learners and German speakers of English show avoidance in using phrasal verbs? Are there any differences between two groups? 2) Which types of the PVs do participants avoid? Are there differences between two groups? 3) Are there any priming effects in choosing PVs? Are there differences between two groups? Two main tests (multiple choice and prime-recall) were conducted. The findings are different from those of previous studies. First, German avoided more PVs than Koreans did (53% vs. 26%). Second, Germans avoided more literal type of PVs than figurative ones and Koreans did vice versa. Third, among Korean learners, priming has an effect on literal type of PVs. However, in German group, priming has a significant effect on the figurative type of PVs. This study proposes that the avoidance is an interlanguage aspect in L2 learning among EFL learners. The current study also has pedagogical implications in L2 learning. **(Seoul National University)**

 Keywords: phrasal verbs, avoidance, L1-L2 difference, phrasal verb constructions

1. Introduction

Phrasal verbs (PV) are structures consisting of a verb and a morphologically invariable particle (Darwin & Gray, 1999), which are regarded as a type of vocabulary learning. EFL learners feel PVs are difficult to learn because the combination of verb and particle does not

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have any definite rules or patterns. PVs have been semantically divided into two types: transparent/literal structures─such as *go out*─, and opaque/figurative or idiomatic structures as *let down* (Laufer & Eliasson, 1993)**.** Other scholars have classified PVs into three types: literal, figurative, and completive (Dagut & Laufer, 1985: 74)[2].

The term "avoidance" in Second Language (L2) acquisition was first studied by Schachter (1974)[3]. Researcher claimed it is important to investigate not only L2 forms, which were actually produced by the learners of a foreign language, but also the L2 forms they seemed to consistently avoid using. Since then, many L2 researchers have studied the avoidance (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Hulstijin & Marchena, 1989; Kleinmann, 1977, 1978).

In the meantime, other researchers have argued that the underproduction of certain linguistic features did not mean avoidance and that the structural difference between the native language and a target language might not be the only reason for underproduction. Kamimoto et al (1992) indicated that in order to be able to establish whether avoidance is a persuasive explanation for a group of learners' relative underproduction, it is necessary, then, to look at the L1 form, distribution, and function of the entity supposedly being avoided in the L2.

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[2] There are three types of PVs:
   (a) Literal: phrasal verbs whose meaning is a straightforward product of their semantic components: *go out, take away, come in*.
   (b) Figurative: a new meaning has resulted from a metaphorical shift of meaning and the semantic fusion of the individual components: *turn up, let down.*
   (c) Completive: the particle describes the result of the action: *cut off, burn down*.
This study uses Darwin and Gray's framework of the classification.

[3] Schachter compared the errors by native speakers of Chinese, Japanese, Persian, and Arabian learners in English composition works. She found that the difficulty of relative clauses was among Chinese and Japanese speakers based on the contrastive analysis, which showed that the difficulty was not judged in the number of errors,─but in the number of relative clauses produced by two groups of learners. She concluded that "if a student finds a particular construction in the target language difficult to understand, it is very likely that he/she will try to avoid producing it" (Schachter, 1974: 213).

Li (1996) revealed that intermediate and advanced learners did not necessarily show avoidance in using structures that were definitely different from those in their mother tongue. For that reason, he concluded that no difference in structure caused Chinese learners to avoid English relative clauses consciously─, but some subtle pragmatic differences that had them subconsciously underproduce their structures. As for the PVs are structures, which Germanic languages─, such as English, Dutch, German, Swedish, and so on, have, the studies on avoidance in using PVs primarily have focused on non-Germanic languages─, such as Chinese, Hebrew, Arabic, and the like.

This is a pilot study whose purpose is to compare the avoidance of the use of phrasal verbs in Korean adult EFL learners with those of German adult EFL learners. Moreover, this study also examines the relation between the priming effects and the use of PVs then compares the usage of Korean learners with that of German. The present study has importance in comparing Korean and German EFL learners of English on the avoidance of PVs for the first time. In the next chapter, several studies on the avoidance of PVs in L2 speakers of English will be discussed.

2. Previous Studies

Since Schachter's study (1974), there has been some research on avoidance by foreign learners of English. Especially, the avoidance phenomenon of phrasal verbs in L2 speakers' of English actively has been studied.

Dagut and Laufer (1985) researched the avoidance of PVs in Hebrew-speaking ESL speakers. The authors found that these L2 speakers showed avoidance regardless of the type of PVs. The reason was speculated by L1-L2 difference under contrastive analysis.

Hulstijin and Marchena (1989) researched the avoidance of PV in Dutch-speaking learners. The authors revealed that Dutch speakers did not avoid, depending on the type of PVs, but they did figurative PVs which were translation equivalents of Dutch verbs. The Dutch typically avoided *go off*,─which is in the usage of PVs because of L1-L2 similarity/inherent complexity[4]─. On the other hand, Dutch learners did not avoid the figurative type of PVs which did not have translation equivalents in L1, nor did they avoid the use of nonfigurative verbs that were similar to verbs in their mother tongue. This study suggests that L1-L2 difference is not the only reason for avoidance, but the similarity between L1 and L2 is one of the reasons[5].

In Laufer and Eliasson's (1993) study, avoidance of PV in Swedish learners of English revealed that Swedish learners did not avoid PVs. The authors compared Hebrew-speaking ESL speakers, who displayed avoidance using PVs, with Swedish learners. It was assumed that the only factor of avoidance was the L1-L2 difference.

Liao and Fukuya (2004) studied avoidance of PVs in Chinese-speaking EFL learners who do not have these structures in their L1. The researchers compared advanced learners of English in the United States and intermediate learners in China; they conducted three tests (multiple-choice, translation, recall) which included literal and figurative types of PVs. Their finding indicated that Chinese learners avoided PVs in the intermediate level but not in the advanced level (natives as well) and the avoidance phenomenon was caused by L1-L2 difference and inherent semantic difficulty. In particular, the authors argued that developmental process is a clear source of learners' PV avoidance phenomenon.

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[4] For instance, the translation equivalent of Dutch word is *afgaan*. They illustrated that the semantic difficulty, i,e, the idiomatic nature of figurative verbs caused avoidance.

[5] This study is designed based on the idea that similarity between L1-L2 can be a reasonable factor that caused the avoidance of PVs. The current study aims to investigate this result by applying the similar test format to German, which is one of Germanic languages and has many similar linguistic features to English.

Siyanova and Schmitt (2007) compared native and non-natives' use of multi-word with that of one-word comparing two groups, advanced learners of non-native and natives. The authors drew a conclusion that non-native were less likely to use PVs.

Kwon (2006) and Yo (2001)'s studies examined the avoidance of PVs by Korean EFL learners. The former compared the result with that by Liao and Fukuya (2004) and discovered that Korean learners showed avoidance whose main factor might be the exposure of L2 environment, that is, ESL versus EFL including L1-L2 difference or inherent semantic difficulty. The latter investigated the factors that caused avoidance in Korean EFL learners. The researchers noted that age, test type (high frequency of multiple choice test, low frequency elicitation test), the length of stay or the exposure in natural settings (living in English-speaking countries), and the subjects that participants studied might be reasons to avoid PVs.

Concerning priming effects in lexical decision have been studied by several researchers.

Bock (1986) studied lexical priming and sentence production. She found that phonological priming itself had no significant priming effects on word order. In contrast, the semantic priming caused the participants to produce more utterances than the phonological priming did.

Pavio et al (1980) investigated a bilingual version of dual-coding model between language and cognition; they concluded the bilingual's two languages and a third (image) system were specialized for processing information─; that is, visual priming had a role in processing information.

Jin (1989) examined priming of lexical decision in bilinguals focusing on the role of word concreteness. The findings revealed that priming effects were stronger on concrete words than on abstract ones.

3. Method
3.1 Research questions

This study has difference in experiment designs compared with previous ones mentioned in chapter 2. In terms of cognitive perspectives, this study attempt to find priming effects on the usage of PVs.
Thus, in the current study, the research questions are as follows:

Research Question 1: Do Korean learners of English and German speakers of English show avoidance in using phrasal verbs? Are there differences between two groups?

=> Hypothesis 1: Korean learners will show avoidance in using PVs. However, German speakers of English will not display avoidance based on the results in previous studies or only few German will avoid PVs.

Research Question 2: Which type of PVs do participants avoid? Are there differences between two groups?

=>Hypothesis 2: Korean group will avoid using figurative type of PVs and German group will show avoidance on the figurative type of PVs as well.

Research Question 3: Are there priming effects in choosing PVs? Are there differences between two groups?

=>Hypothesis 3: The Korean group will display priming effects on the selection of figurative type of PVs. However, the German group will show little priming effects.

3.2 Participants

Twenty-six participants joined this research: two groups of Korean learners of English (ten in total─, five intermediate and five advanced), another two groups of German speakers of English (eleven in total─, three intermediate and eight advanced), and five native speakers of English who is a control group. The native subjects came from various English-speaking countries, ─such as─, New Zealand, United States, and Canada. Most subjects are students, but some are workers in a variety of fields. Participants majoring in linguistics and English language are eliminated from this study.

The proficiency is determined by a pre-test that consists of fifteen multiple-choice questions on English grammar and vocabulary knowledge. The proficiency group is classified based on the following criteria: advanced level─correct answer is 12 to 15, intermediate level ─correct answer is 7 to 11. Participants who scored less than 7 are eliminated from this research. The mean age of Korean subjects is 33.4 whose range is 19 to 44─, and that of German participants is 24.5 whose range is 22 to 39.

3.3 Materials and data collection

There are two main tests: multiple choice and prime-recall. Before conducting these tasks, a pre-test should be done in order to determine the proficiency of each participant. Two main experiments and a pre-test are paper-based test formats. Fifteen pairs of phrasal and one-word verbs will be chosen and four choices including one-word distracter and another PV type distracter will be given in test 1. Then, before taking test 2, pictures that explain each PVs in fifteen questions in the first tests─, will be used as visual priming and phonological word-choices will be given as auditory priming. Thirty minutes later, a prime-recall test will be given to fill out the appropriate verbs without word choices. This second test is to investigate priming effects on the usage of PVs in learners' working memory after 30 minutes.

Finally, the questionnaire is used to obtain subjects' background information on language learning. The questionnaire includes participants' information such as, age, the exposure of English speaking environment, year of stay in English-speaking countries, other foreign languages except Korean/German and English, the standardized score (TOEFL, TOEIC, TEPS, CFA), and the knowledge of PVs (see Appendix III).

The study is designed along the lines of the previous studies as previously discussed, but it differs in the whole format and question items. The design of two tests is summarized as follows:

First, each test should be completed within ten minutes, and the second experiment will be done thirty minutes later. In the second test, there are two types of primes: auditory/phonological and visual. Four word choices are given as the first prime. The prime comprises one equivalent word, one word distracter, one PV, and one distracter PV (e. g. *rise─ get off ─get up─raise*). Fifteen pictures, which describe the meanings of each PV, will be shown soon after the first prime is given to participants. The target test is to fill in the blank in fifteen questions without the word choices.

Second, the first test is composed of two types of PVs─: literal versus figurative.

Third, a set of fifteen dialogues are used in all two tests.

Last, in the questionnaire, the participants will be asked to answer the knowledge of the PVs and other personal information related to this research.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1 Results
4.1.1 Experiment 1:

The first experiments are related to research questions 1 and 2. The results for the research question 1 are as follows:

RQ1: Avoidance of PVs in Korean, German, and Native groups

The first experiment is to examine the avoidance comparing the Korean and German groups. German learners showed more avoidance in the figurative type of PVs than literal ones. Korean learners also displayed more avoidance in the figurative type of PVs than literal ones. The important finding in the present study is that German learners showed more avoidance of PVs (53%) than Korean learners(26%). The results are shown in Table 1 and Figure 2 compareS the results of avoidance(see below).

Table 1. Correlation of the avoidance and the type of PVs in Korean, German, and native groups (Note: L: Literal F: Figurative)

group	Number of questions (total)	percent of avoidance (%)	items
Natives	3 (15)	20	8(F),11(F),12(F)
Koreans	4 (15)	26	4(L),8(F),11(F),12(F)
Germans	8 (15)	53	2(L),4(L),5(L),6(L),7(L), 8(F),11(F),12(F)

Figure 1. Comparison of avoidance of PVs among Korean, German, and native groups
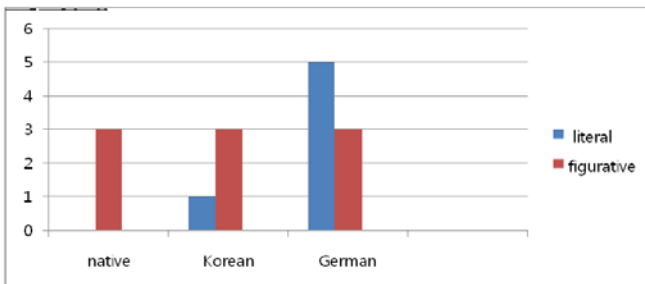
Findings of second research question are shown in table 2 as follows:

Table 2. The avoidance of using PVs and the type of PVs

learner group Type of PV	Koreans total number of usage of PVs (number of items)	Germans total number of usage of PVs (number of items)
Literal =transparent 1-7	4 (1)	2,4,5,6,7 (5)
Figurative =opaque 8-15	8,11,12 (3)	8,11,12 (3)

Note: L: Literal F: Figurative

RQ2: Type of PVs in avoidance among Korean, German, and native groups

The results demonstrate that the Korean group showed less avoidance than the German group (26% versus 53%). The percentage of avoidance in Korean group is close to that of natives (26% versus 20%). This finding is totally different from that of previous studies. Moreover, the PV items on the avoidance are as follows: German learners showed more avoidance in using literal type of PVs (item 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7) than in doing figurative types of PVs (item 8, 11, and 12). On the other hand, Korean displayed more avoidance in selecting figurative types of PVs (item 8, 11, and 12) than in doing literal types of PVs (item 2). This result is same as that of previous research.

4.1.2 Experiment 2: Auditory and visual priming effects on the choice of phrasal verbs

The second experiment is to investigate two kinds of priming effects (auditory and visual) on the choice of PVs. Among Korean learners, priming had an effect on the literal type of phrasal verbs. The result

showed a significance like $t(9) = 2.43$, $p = .04$ (.038). In contrast, in the German group, priming had a significant effect not on the literal type of PVs, but on the figurative type of PVs as $t(10) = 3.98$, $p = .003$. In conclusion, German and Korean groups displayed priming effects on the usage of PVs (Table 4). Table 3 illustrates the means and standard deviations of PV usages in experiments 1 and 2.

Table 3. Means and Standard deviations of Phrasal verb usages in experiments 1 and 2 (Korean and German group)

V2			Mean	N	SD	SE of means
Korean	Type 1	L_T1	1.171429	10	.2213133	.0699854
		L_T2	.928571	10	.4272466	.1351072
	Type 2	P_T1	1.13750	10	.314300	.099391
		P_T2	1.07500	10	.479438	.151612
German	Type 1	L_T1	1.311688	11	.3246234	.0978776
		L_T2	1.168831	11	.4081725	.1230687
	Type 2	P_T1	1.36364	11	.226761	.068371
		P_T2	1.18182	11	.318019	.095886

Note: L: Literal, P: Figurative, SD: Standard Deviation, SE: Standard Error

Table 4. *P*-value (Korean and German group)

		Mean	SD	SE of mean	Level of significance * p upper bound	Level of significance * p lower bound	t	FV	P-value (two-tailed)
Korean	Type 1 L_T1-L_T2	.2428571	.3162278	.1000000	.0166414	.4690729	2.429	9	**.038**
	Type 2 P_T1-P_T2	.062500	.237537	.075116	-.107423	.232423	.832	9	.427
German	Type 1 L_T1-L_T2	.1428571	.3989783	.1202965	-.1251801	.4108944	1.188	10	.262
	Type 2 P_T1-P_T2	.181818	.151695	.045738	.079908	.283728	3.975	10	**.003**

Note: L: Literal, P: Figurative, SD: Standard Deviation, FV: Free Variation, SE: Standard Error, *p < .05

4.2 Discussion

Previous studies revealed that non-native learners of English showed avoidance in the use of PV and that the avoidance was caused by L1-L2 similarity or difference (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Hulstijin & Marchena, 1989; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993; Liao & Fukuya. 2004; Siyanova & Schmitt, 2007). This paper, however, assumes that the avoidance of PV is caused by the following factors: the use of PVs in German is different from that in English, that is, a combination of one-word verb and verb plus particle, which is called separable prefix-verb [6]─ (PVs in English), are used in different ways, even though German has similar PV constructions as English. In contrast, it is assumed that the

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[6] Phrasal verbs is an English verb form that consist of a verb followed by one or more prepositions. For instance, the verb-preposition combinations *throw up* and *lay in on* are phrasal verbs that mean '*vomit'* and '*criticize'*. Phrasal verbs are both periphrastic— phrases of two or more words that perform a single function and idiomatic meanings derived from the whole phrasal verbs, not the individual parts. Depending on the type of phrasal verb, the preposition also may separate from the verb as in "*look up* the information" and "*look* the information *up"*. Concerning separable prefixes, German verbs with separable prefixes consist of a prepositional prefix attached to the front of a verb. For example, the following German verbs are separable prefix verbs:

- ankommen – to arrive
- ausgehen – to go out
- einladen – to invite
- mitfahren – to travel with
- zusammenkommen – to meet

Verbs with separable prefixes are a simple verb with a prefix. Take some examples:

- an + kommen = ankommen
- aus + gehen = ausgehen
- ein + laden = einladen
- mit + fahren = mitfahren
- zusammen + kommen = zusammenkommen

Just as English phrasal verbs combine an existing verb with an existing preposition to create a new verb with a new meaning, German separable prefix verbs combine an existing prepositional suffix with an existing verb to also create a new verb with a new meaning. (http://www.brighthub.com/education/languages/articles/45452.aspx)

avoidance of PVs is caused by L1 (Korean)-L2 (English) differences among Korean learners.

In experiment 1, the German groups showed avoidance in using PVs, unlike Swedish learners whose language is one of the Germanic languages (Laufer & Eliasson, 1993). This finding can be explained as follows: German is one of Germanic languages from which English derives, which also has PV constructions in the verb-formation in German. For example, *auf..geben,* which is   a PV that can be used in two ways: *aufgeben* and *geben* **...** *auf*. The former is a one-word verb whose meaning is literal ('give something upward'); the latter is a phrasal verb whose verb type is figurative, as in the English '*give up*' case ('*abandon*' or '*submit*'). German phrasal verbs are separable unlike those in English.

In experiment 2, transparency (literal) and opaqueness (figurative) of meaning, that is, inherent semantic difficulty might cause learners to experience difficulties. However, after priming, it is speculated that it is easy for learners to combine the whole meaning in one's memory because of priming effects.

Previous studies revealed that non-native learners of English showed avoidance in the use of PV and that the avoidance was caused by L1-L2 similarity or difference (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Hulstijin & Marchena, 1989; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993; Liao & Fukuya. 2004; Siyanova & Schmitt, 2007) or inherent semantic difficulty in the figurative type of PVs and other individual factors,─such as exposure of L2 environment─, and so on (Yo, 2001; Kwon, 2006). This research, however, suggests the reason of the avoidance in terms of typology as follows: the use of PVs in German is different from that in English─; one-word verb and verb plus particle (PVs in English) are used in different ways, even though German has phrasal verb constructions as in English; thus German seems to have similarity in phrasal verb-formation as in English. In fact, the usage of phrasal verbs in German is

somewhat different from that of English. In conclusion, L1 transfer might be the reason for the unexpected results.

In contrast, among Korean learners, it is assumed that the avoidance of using PVs is caused by L1 (Korean) and L2 (English) difference─; that is, Korean does not have phrasal verb-formation. Therefore, Koreans feel difficulties in choosing PVs, and they show avoidance on the usage of PVs.

5. Conclusion
5.1 Summary

The main purpose of this study is to examine the avoidance of the use of PVs in Korean adult EFL learners and German adult EFL learners. There are two experiments: first, avoidance of phrasal verbs; second, auditory (phonological) and visual (picture) priming effects on the choice of phrasal verbs.

This study raised three research questions; the results of which are as follows:

First, German avoided more PVs than did Koreans (53% versus 26%). Moreover, Germans avoided the more literal type of PVs than figurative ones and Koreans did vice versa. My assumption is that result 1 is caused by L1 typological transfer─; that is, the usage of the PVs is different between German and English and German group was influenced by its L1 PV construction in the using PVs in English.

Second, the correlation between avoidance of using PVs and the type of that is schematized in Table 1 and 2.

Third, among Korean learners, priming has an effect on the literal type of phrasal verbs. The result shows a significance like $t(9) = 2.43$, $p = .04$ (.038). In contrast, in the German group, priming has a significant effect, not on the literal type of phrasal verbs, but on the figurative type of phrasal verbs as $t(10) = 3.98$, $p = .003$.

Findings in previous studies indicate that NNSs show avoidance in the use of PVs due mainly to L1-L2 similarity or difference or inherent semantic difficulty in the figurative type of PVs. In Korean research studies, the authors typically added more individual factors,─such as exposure to L2 environment─, and so on.

Results in the current study demonstrate differences comparing findings from previous studies. German learners showed more avoidance than Korean ones, and the avoidance might be because the use of PVs in German (separable) is different from that in English (inseparable), i.e., L1 transfer. For instance, prefix-verbs─PVs in English─, are used in different ways (separable-figurative, inseparable- literal) despite similarity in PV constructions. For Koreans, on the other hand, the avoidance might appear due to L1 (Korean) and L2 (English) difference. This research contributes to a new finding that German, which is a Germanic language, showed avoidance in the usage of PVs, and this group demonstrated more avoidance than Korean, which is a non-Germanic language.

5.2 Limitation and Pedagogical Implications

This study also proposes that avoidance is an interlanguage aspect in L2 learning in EFL learners (Liao & Fukuya, 2004), and it has pedagogical implications in teaching PV in L2 vocabulary learning, considering a typological perspective between two languages. Avoidance is a type of phenomenon in interlanguage stages in L2 learning.

In the next research, more subjects, balancing the number of participants in each proficiency level between two comparable groups, measuring reaction time will be necessary in order to find the relation between types of priming effects and the choice of PVs by computer-based test formats.

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http://www.brighthub.com/education/languages/articles/45452.aspx:
How To Use German Verbs with Separable Prepositional Prefixes

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Appendix I
Multiple choices

1: Multiple-Choice Task (15 Qs/ 10 min)

Directions:

1. Please read the following passage.

2. Based on the reading, choose the appropriate answers in each question.

1.

S1: When the weather is nice I love to _____ early.
S2: Me, too. It's good to enjoy the morning air.

(1) rise   (2) get up   (3) get off   (4) raise

2.

S1: I'm sorry I hurt you. I didn't mean to say those things. I was just angry.

S2: _____. I don't want to see you for a while.

(1) go away   (2) leave   (3) go off   (4) lie

3.

S1: Why are you hurrying up calling your parents?

S2: Because I promised my parents to call them as soon as I _____ from my trip.

(1) get back   (2) return   (3) remove   (4) go on

Appendix II
List of Phrasal verbs

Types of PVs	Examples	8 (F)	go off
1 (L)	get up	9 (F)	hold on
2 (L)	go away	10(F)	run into
3 (L)	get back	11(F)	brush up on
4 (L)	come in	12(F)	put up with
5 (L)	walk off	13(F)	show up
6 (L)	take away	14(F)	show off
7 (L)	throw away	15(F)	turn down

Note: L: Literal, F: Figurative

Appendix III
Pictures as Visual priming
(see the next page)

Picture 6, which was shown above, describes a literal type of verb, '*take away*'

Picture 12, which was shown below, describes a figurative type of verb '*put up with*.'