

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEACHERS' DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING PREPOSITIONS

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Abstract

This study discusses the issues that teachers experience while teaching English prepositions to ELLs (English language Learners). This paper also emphasizes on enhancements of skills required for English teachers by providing better preposition explanations. Participants in this study were 30 teachers who taught English to college undergraduate students in the Avadi area. Questionnaires were created to collect data from instructors to determine whether or not prepositions were taught in schools. According to these research findings, the majority of these teachers taught based on relevant text books and were unable to explain prepositions owing to a variety of challenges: co-existence of many possible prepositional meanings based on the contexts of usage; absence of written guides on using prepositions and native language interferences.

Keywords: Prepositions, English Language Learners, Native Language Interference, Language Acquisitions

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that prepositions in English can be a difficult subject for English language teachers (Lindstromberg, 1991; Capel, 1993). In English, prepositions describe the relationship between nouns and other words (Collins Cobuild English guides, 1998). In addition to native speakers finding prepositions confusing and difficult, English Language Learners (ELLs) face even greater challenges because they must learn all the intricacies of English prepositions, memorize them, and use them properly.

Despite these difficulties, prepositions are rarely addressed in modern classroom instruction. The teaching of prepositions can be challenging for teachers. To explain a preposition, they may use one or two additional prepositions. As a result, teachers must define other prepositions utilized. The aforementioned scenarios perplex both teachers and students alike since they encounter prepositional meaning pools. Most English texts describe only prepositional overviews in place of their specific rules of usage. Most of the time, essential parts of preposition acquisitions are overlooked, for example, contextual meaning of prepositions. Information on verbs or nouns that require prepositions is also scarce and is mostly dealt with in isolation with examples on broader concepts. Prepositions in English serve as adjuncts that indicate arguments to the predicates and convey new meanings when coupled with other words (Schrapfer Azar, 1989). This study discusses the issues that teachers experience while teaching English prepositions to ELLs.

This study aims to determine the demands and issues that English instructors face when teaching or explaining English prepositions to ELLs. Using various examples of prepositional use, this study aims to assist instructors in understanding the benefits of teaching prepositions. It emphasizes the necessity of exposing ELLs to prepositions since they can learn common or fine meaning shades based on their exposures to prepositional usages.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following study questions are addressed in this work:

1. How comfortable are English Language teachers while teaching prepositions to ELLs?
2. To what extent do ELLs get affected by their mother tongue while learning prepositions?
3. Ways of improving teaching of prepositions by English language Teachers?

This research, although not claiming to be thorough, seeks to examine the problems that students have when learning English prepositions. Quirk et al. (1993) suggested relationships between objects (locations), occurrences (time), instruments (others), and causes. Prepositions can be grouped according to their forms, functions, and meanings (Celce-Murcia, M. & Larsen-Freeman, D., 1999). They can take either straightforward (one-word prepositions) or intricate (two-, three-, or compound prepositions) forms. Simple prepositions are closed classes, hence it is impossible to generate new prepositions with solitary terms. However, since new combinations can be made, complex prepositions are a class that is open (Yates. 1991). There are roughly 70 simple prepositions in English, with the following being the most frequently used ones: at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to, and with (Grubic, 2004). ELLs find learning English prepositions difficult and time-consuming for a variety of reasons. Small, one- or two-syllable syllables are frequently found in English prepositions, but they are rarely stressed when spoken. They are typically written in lower case and are frequently not spoken or understood clearly. Prepositions can differ conceptually from language to language, which complicates translation for ELLs. For instance, in Tamilnadu, we say "go to work with a car," as opposed to the English phrase "go to work by car." Both sentences use various prepositions to convey the same concept. When learning a second language, there will be areas of dispute because each language has its own set of grammatical rules (James, 2007; Jie, 2008). Prepositions frequently cause conflicts with the most crucial components. In languages other than English, they frequently come before nouns and aid in the interpretation of meanings through inflections (Demiraj. Sh., 1964). Prepositions therefore do not have the same linguistic purpose across all languages. Another problem is the incompatibility between the linguistics of English and other languages (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Learners of a new language, frequently refer to their native counterparts to clarify English terms. Students try to match prepositions with their counterpart tongue in prepositional usage. As a result, ELLs are more likely to use incorrect prepositions that they have translated from their native tongue (English). The right counterpart of function words like prepositions is difficult for students to identify, although they can

comprehend content phrases with ease. ELLs learn several interpretations of prepositions based on contexts while translating sentences. The eliminations of prepositions in texts result mainly from mother tongue influences. English prepositions also provide a challenging problem in terms of how they are taught in textbooks—or rather, how they are not. Prepositions are only briefly explained in most English textbooks for ELLs and are only ever followed by one or two examples when they are explained at all. Numerous texts only cover the two most common applications of prepositions—spatial and temporal—at particular levels.

CASE STUDY IN RESEARCH

A training seminar was organized for English language teachers of Tiruvallur District and questionnaires distributed to 50 Teachers. A random sample of 30 teachers was selected as this study's participants. The teachers belonging to different cultural and linguistic backgrounds teach English language to University students and hence belong to multiple groups.

INSTRUMENT AND PROCEDURES

Quantitative research methods were mostly used in this work. Out of the 50 instructors that attended the session, the professors were selected at random. They considered the inquiries to be stimulating and difficult. A study of all the questionnaire responses revealed that almost all of the teachers believed it was essential to emphasise grammar more while discussing prepositions. They said that prepositions used in a variety of settings should be covered more in English curricula. The questionnaire was produced using Questionnaire Design (Siniscalco, 2005). It was made up of open-ended questions that considered the perspectives and interests of the chosen instructors. These open-ended questions were intended to highlight the difficulties people encounter while discussing prepositions as well as the causes and justifications for these errors. It also included generic questions regarding instructors' academic backgrounds and prepositional understanding. The inclusion of instructors in this study via a structured questionnaire was done to provide a new perspective on the subject of this investigation. The last questions centred on the prepositional explanation techniques they employed in class, their teaching resources, and the workshops they intended to attend in the future.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

In this section, the study's findings are presented and discussed in relation to the questionnaire's questions. The answers to the first query regarding the instructors' academic backgrounds are displayed in Figure 1.

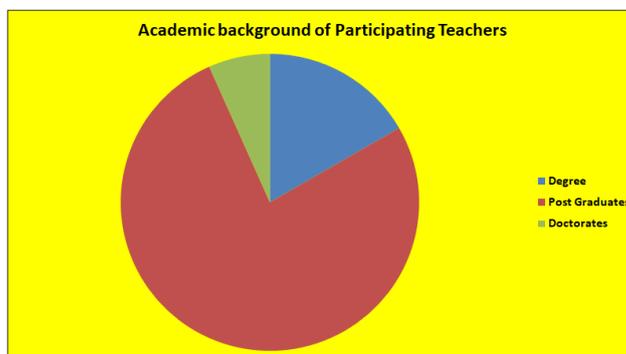


Figure 1 – Academic backgrounds

Only two of the thirty professors had doctoral degrees, while 23 had master's degrees in English and five had bachelor's degrees. The majority of the randomly selected teachers had relatively little experience, with a knowledge range of 10 to 15 years, according to the results of the inquiry on the number of years of teaching experience. (Figure 2.).

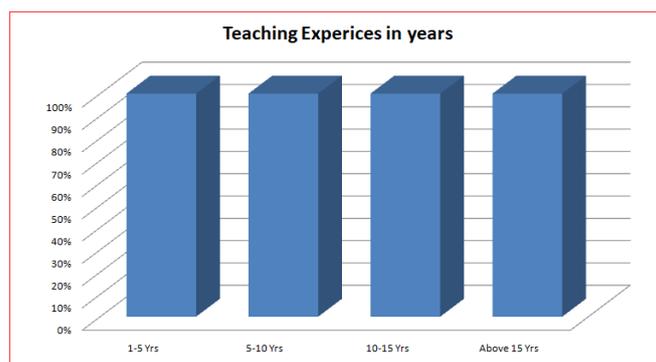


Figure 2 – Experience of Teachers

Majority of teachers were questioned if prepositions were comprised in the grammar portions of English textbooks, replied in the yes. They also concurred (by a margin of 90%) that pupils had trouble learning prepositions. Below are some of the results of a question on the many mistakes students make while using particular prepositions:

- The learner replaces a specific preposition in English with one from their home tongue;
- The student uses a preposition (addition) when it is improper to do so;
- In certain instances, an essential preposition is left out (omission)..

Also the following factors were considered namely Interference of mother tongue, multiple meanings of English prepositions, Inadequate Explanations in Text and Lack of Teacher's Explanations. The results are depicted graphically as Figure 3

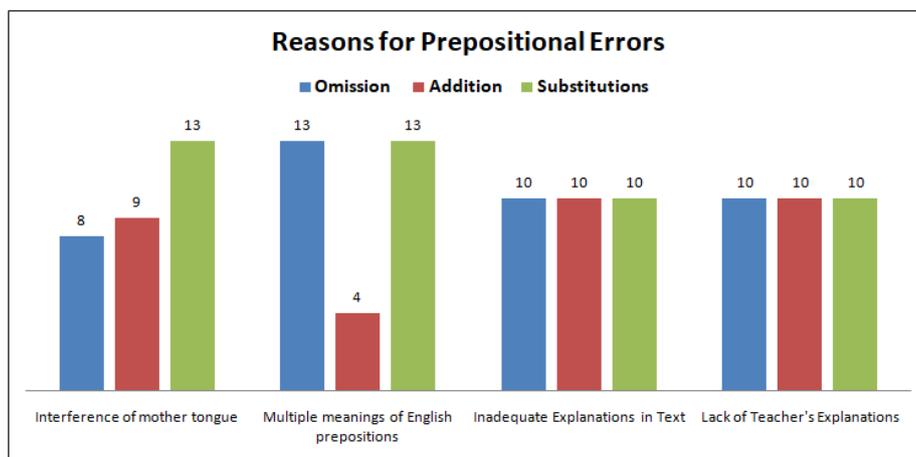


Figure 3 – Results of Prepositional Error reasons

DISCUSSION

The way prepositions were taught were one of the survey's most important questions. Giving examples, translating into the student's mother tongue, making comparisons with examples from the student's mother tongue, utilising objects, drawings, cards, charts, etc., and encouraging students to construct sentences can all be considered successful methods. Non-native English speakers, according to Celcia Murcia (2001), have three different prepositional issues: choosing the incorrect prepositions, removing a preposition that is necessary, and adding a preposition when one is not necessary. The next section provides a list of potential causes of preposition usage errors in light of the survey results and the fact that English prepositions are challenging for non-native speakers to acquire. The following factors are connected to these error causes:

- **Interlingual transfers:** Brown defines interlingual transfer as "the interference of the mother tongue to the target language" (Brown, 1987).
- **Intralingual transfers:** This can take place when learning the target language is incomplete. Brown (Brown, 1987) gives the erroneous assimilation of earlier learned second-language material into a current second-language environment as an example of an overgeneralization error. We might also attribute the absence of intralingual transmission to rule restriction, which Richards and Sampson define as "applying rules in situations where they do not apply" (Richards and Sampson, 1974).
- **Educational Contexts:** Poor prepositional presentation in texts, which practically ever utilize prepositions, is blamed for these kinds of mistakes. Some textbook authors, in their opinions or experiences, "focus on some areas of the language and disregard others" (Brown, 1987). Since simple prepositions are easier for children to understand than more sophisticated prepositions, simple prepositions are rarely discussed in grammar textbooks or other educational textbooks. Since simple prepositions are easier for children to understand than more sophisticated prepositions, simple prepositions are

rarely discussed in grammar textbooks and other educational textbooks. Teachers don't concentrate on or frequently use this particular category of prepositions with their students because there aren't many activities or examples for it.

- **Evasions:** Some ELLs disregard words or word groups that they find challenging to learn (Lightbown and Spada, 2003)
- **Making Guesses:** ELLs make an effort to predict the right preposition when they are unclear or unfamiliar with one (Herskovits, Annette, 1998)

CONCLUSIONS

We can infer from the results of the questionnaires given to 30 instructors that students have a very difficult time understanding how to use prepositions correctly in different contexts. What's more, this study highlights how difficult it is for English language instructors to deal with or even attempt to teach English prepositions. We must prioritize practical work rather than giving our kids pages of academic explanations of English prepositions. English prepositions seem challenging, especially since they all seem to have many purposes. Prepositional memory in two languages is challenging, but it is possible with time and effort. The conclusions of this investigation indicated three major discoveries:

- Errors committed by pupils when learning English prepositions
- Error-causing factors
- Methods for teaching prepositions

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