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An Error Analysis on the Use of Prepositions of Place by Yashwantrao Chavan Polytechnic Students at First Year Diploma Level

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ABSTRACT: The present study focuses the light on the analysis of errors on the use of prepositions of place (in, at and on) by Yashwantrao Chavan Polytechnic Students at First Year Diploma Level. It also sheds lights on the reasons behind the errors in the use of prepositions of place. Fifty students at the Yashwantrao Chavan Polytechnic enrolling First Year Diploma Level were chosen randomly. They were given a ten sentence gap - filling test. Each sentence in the test includes a preposition in which students are likely to misuse. The students were asked to fill the gap with a preposition. Also, the researcher used a questionnaire as a tool of collecting data. To investigate and handle this problem the descriptive analytical method was used. The findings revealed the errors on the use of prepositions of place in a proper way. The errors are due to the interference of mother tongue and careless ness of the students.

KEYWORDS: error analysis, prepositions of place, Yashwantrao Chavan Polytechnic, First Year Diploma

I. INTRODUCTION

Many students are able understand English Language, but most of the students face difficulties while communicating their ideas in writing prepositions. They commit errors while using the prepositions of place (in, at and on). The problem is both the lack of adequate stock of prepositions and the interference of the mother tongue.

Prepositions are always considered as the most crucial elements in teaching English particularly in the teaching of speaking and writing skills (Mukundan & Norwati, 2009).

A preposition expresses a relation between two entities, one being represented by the prepositional complement of the various types of relational meaning (Quirk et al, 1985). These relationships include those of time, place, direction, and various degrees of mental and emotional states. Studies have shown that the preposition is one of the most problematic categories that students encounter in learning English

Researchers on different languages with which English is in contact have attested to learners' difficulty in learning and using prepositions (Al-Marrani, 2009; Tahaimah, 2010; Bukhari et al., 2011; Jalali and Shojaei, 2012). (Grubic, 2004) concluded that speakers of English as a foreign language encounter three problems with prepositions: using the incorrect preposition, or deleting the necessary preposition or using an additional preposition.

Some teachers do not pay much attention to these set of words especially in a second language setting (Delija et al., 2013), because English preposition is just as hard to teach as it is to learn! According to Boquist (2009:5) "one cannot really explain a preposition without using one or two more prepositions in the definition ... soon both the teacher and student are caught in a spiral whirlwind of prepositions and their still vague meaning".

The errors which deal with prepositions are the most common mistakes done by the non-native speakers especially in their writing. This could be due to a wide range of linguistic functions that prepositions serve, hence ESL learners may feel discouraged to learn and master this grammar topic. For example, in choosing the appropriate preposition, one has to know and understand the context as well as "the intended meaning" (Tetreault & Chodorow, 2008).

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study analyses the errors committed by the First Year Diploma Level students while using the prepositions of place in writing. It also focuses light on the reasons behind the errors. Accordingly, the study attempts to:

a) Investigate the writing difficulties in prepositions of place encountered by First Year Diploma Level students.



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- b) Shed light on the reasons behind writing difficulties in prepositions of place.
- c) Suggest different ways that students and teachers can employ to overcome these difficulties.
- d) Propose effective teaching techniques and activities to help students overcome the writing difficulties in prepositions.
- f) Encourage the students to look up at the dictionaries to check the usage of prepositions in the sentences.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study will be of great value to the teachers of English to give prepositions much time, more attention and considerable time for exercises. Syllabus designers are to choose best ways to improve using prepositions through enriching syllabuses with prepositions activities.

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A. SUBJECTS

The subjects of the present study are the fifty students enrolled in First Year Diploma Programme at Yashwantrao Chavan Polytechnic. The targeted sample are the engineering students who will complete their diploma certification in one of the following programmes: Civil Engineering, Computer Science and Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Electronics and Tele-Communication Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. The students attend 3 lecture hours and 2 practical hours per week. The students' age ranged from 17 to 18 and they have been learning English for ten years. The participants were chosen randomly. This study was run in December 2021.

B. INSTRUMENTS

In order to collect reliable and authentic data, the following instruments were employed in this study:

C. STUDENTS' TEST

Calkins (1980) argues that the best way to improve students' grammar is to teach the grammar subjects focusing on the students own piece of writing. The test consists of 20 questions about the prepositions of place (*at*, *in* and *on*) likely to be misused due to the lack of knowledge and mother tongue interference. In addition, Ph. D holders working in English Language departments were asked their opinions on the content of the test as a piloting process. Grabe (2009) believes that gap-filling is a more beneficial question type in measuring the knowledge of some target structures such as prepositions. The questions in the test were designed in a way that the students could write a suitable preposition in the gaps. The purpose here was to make the students produce the answer on their own rather than seeing and remembering it in a choice. The design of the questions can be said to be appropriate to the purpose of the research.

D. TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Oxford (1996) presents some advantages and limitations of questionnaires in general. Questionnaires can give general assessments of across a variety of tasks. They are effective, quick and easy to administer and don't threaten the respondents. Yet questionnaires don't describe the problem in details. Thus they should be supported by other data collection tools.

In order to learn more about writing difficulties with prepositions of place encountered by First Year Diploma Level students', and to gain an accurate understanding of these difficulties, it is critical that we have to learn from teachers about their own point of view. Teachers' perspectives are so important because they are close to their students' needs. Moreover, teachers' perspectives give a considerable reliability to the data collection.



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V. DISCUSSION

This paper mostly focuses on the causes and areas of difficulties that First Year Diploma Level students at Yashwantrao Chavan Polytechnic have with prepositions of place.

According to (Mathews, 1997), prepositions are words or groups of words that typically come before a noun phrase and indicate syntactic relations. Agoi (2003) described prepositions as group of words used with a noun or noun equivalents to show the link between that noun which it governs and another word. Hamdallah and Tushyeh (1988) stated that prepositions are function words that link words, phrases, or clauses to other words in the sentence.

Prepositions as general have always been a challenge not only to ESL learners but also to ESL teachers. (Ellis, 1994) claims that only at higher levels, such as advanced or proficiency level, the transfer can take place. Transfer may be a developmental phenomenon in that it occurs only when the learner reaches a 'natural' stage of acquisition which bears a crucial similarity to some native structure.

VI. CAUSES OF DIFFICULTIES WITH PREPOSITIONS

Lynch (2010) claims that, some basic features of English language grammar structure are illogical or dissimilar to speakers of other languages and do not readily lend them to being well understood, even in context. He sees prepositions as one of these features which offer exceptional challenge to EFL students because they may be radically different from the manner of expression in the student's first language.

VII. THE PROTO TYPE THEORY

The approach taken is subsumed within Lakoff's application of prototype theory to linguistics (as formulated most prominently by, for example, Rosch 1978). A key argument about prepositions is that each one is likely to have a relatively small number of related literal meanings, among which the tendency is for one to be psychologically 'prototypical'. An additional contention is that some of the literal meanings of a preposition, especially its prototypical meaning, are extended by metaphor to create another relatively small set of related meanings.

According to (Lindstromberg, 1991), "the proto type theory contends that the polysemous of prepositions can be explained through analysis of proto type meanings all non-proto typical meanings are thought to be related to the proto type often through metaphorical extension (P. 228)". Looking again at the prepositions on Lindstromberg (1996) explain that non- proto typical meanings like come on can be understood by extending the proto typical meanings. This means that teachers must first teach the proto typical meanings, often through the use of total physical reports (TPR), and only then began to branch out to more abstract meanings. To extend the semantic mapping even further, comparison and contrast to other prepositions can be useful.

VIII. DATA ANALYSIS

After collecting the required data based on the tools mentioned earlier, the researcher conducted the analysis of data for the present study as follows:

IX. STUDENTS' TEST

The students' test consists of twelve sentences based mainly on preposition of place (at, in and on) where the students are asked to write a suitable preposition in the gaps. In general, we use (at) for a point e.g. at the end of the street. We use (in) for an enclosed place e.g. in the garden and we use (on) for a surface e.g. on the wall.



Table1. The frequency distribution for the students' responses about the test

No	Sentences	True	False	Total	Percentage
1-	The shop is at the end of the street.	17 34%	33 66%	50	100%
2-	There was a "no smoking" sign on the wall.	22 44%	28 56%	50	100%
3-	When will you arrive at the office?	19 38%	31 62%	50	100%
4-	Do you work in an office?	28 56%	22 44%	50	100%
5-	There are no prices on this menu.	15 30%	35 70%	50	100%
6-	Do you live in Japan?	26 52%	24 48%	50	100%
7-	Jupiter is in the Solar System.	21 42%	29 58%	50	100%
8-	The author's name is on the cover of the book.	18 36%	32 64%	50	100%
9-	I have a meeting in New York.	23 46%	27 54%	50	100%
10-	You are standing on my foot.	13 26%	37 74%	50	100%
11-	My plane stopped at Dubai.	14 28%	36 72%	50	100%
12-	I live on the 7th floor.	16 32%	34 68%	50	100

Table2. Descriptive Statistics of the students' performance in the test

	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
	Static	Static	Std. Error	Static	Static
item1	3	33.00	9.52774	16.50253	272.333
item2	3	28.00	8.51143	14.74223	217.333
item3	3	31.00	9.02466	15.63117	244.333
item4	3	28.00	8.51143	14.74223	217.333
item5	3	35.00	10.13794	17.55942	308.333
Item6	3	26.00	8.35331	14.46836	209.333
Item7	3	29.00	8.64741	14.97776	224.333
Item8	3	32.00	9.26163	16.04161	257.333
Item9	3	27.00	8.41295	14.57166	212.333
Item10	3	37.00	10.83718	18.77054	352.333
Item11	3	36.00	10.47749	18.14754	329.333
Item12	3	34.00	9.82061	17.00980	289.333
Valid N (list wise)	3				



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Table (1) and (2) show the scores of the students' gap-filling test. Obviously, the participants didn't get high grades in the test, which means that they were unfamiliar with prepositions usage. From the above tables, it appears that the most difficult preposition for the students in this study is 'at'. The preposition 'at' was employed in three sentences, and the mean of the correct usage of the preposition is 16.66% which is considered very poor comparing to the misuses of the preposition which is 33.33%. The highest score that the students achieved in the prepositions' usage was in the preposition 'in'. The preposition 'in' was employed in four sentences, and the mean of the corrected usage is 23.50% comparing to 25.50% of the misuses of the preposition.

X. RESULTS

From the obtained results, it is clear that the First Year Diploma Level students at Yashwantrao Chavan Polytechnic encountered difficulties in prepositions of place. The findings revealed the factors stand behind these difficulties. One of the main factors is the interference of the mother tongue in the usage of prepositions of place. Another reason is that, the students tend to translate the preposition in their L1 which leads definitely to the misuse of prepositions. According to the teachers, the students show carelessness in dealing with prepositions and they were not equipped with appropriate knowledge and background about prepositions usage. The teachers also see that teaching preposition is not an easy task, so they suggest that teaching preposition should be through appropriate teachers' training. The findings of this study match the hypotheses of the research. The research questions in this study are answered clearly and supported by the data analysis. The outcome of this study can be beneficial for syllabus designers who can include sufficient practices in the scope of prepositions in order to encourage the students develop their competence and performance in preposition usage while writing in the target language.

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