



IMPORTANT USES OF ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS IN WRITING: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract: *This study analyzed the writing skill of the business students at the undergraduate level with a special focus on the use of prepositions of place, time, and direction in the English language. The subjects of the study comprised 100 writing outputs of students. The grammar and literature outputs of students in the business college are randomly selected as subjects for analysis. The data elicitation instrument was guided cloze test in which the subjects were asked to fill the gaps using appropriate prepositions of place, time, and direction. The descriptive method is used in the analysis of the collected data. The results indicated that the students found difficulties in the use of prepositions of place, direction, and time. The findings imply that teacher facilitators should pay more attention to the teaching of the prepositions of place, time, and direction. On the other hand, while teachers work hard to facilitate learning; the students are urged to take more time in the practice and mastery of rules in the use of prepositions. The teacher facilitators should strategize giving simple and sufficient explanations on the rules and more classroom activities and outputs in the use of prepositions.*

KEYWORDS: *preposition, importance of writing, cloze test*

INTRODUCTION:

The role of the English language in any international undertaking is regarded as the language of understanding wherein people meet and regard one another through effective communication. Learning and developing different skills in the English language is an important phase in students' learning. In application, the students will be able to communicate proficiently both in written and spoken form. The skills in the English language namely listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing when effectively used manifests mastery. Of the five skills, writing is considered as one of the most difficult to master. All the



other skills to learn are offshoot of putting everything in paper. In the global network where people deliver ideas and pieces of information, effective communication is dependent on good writing skills. The second language learners are challenged every time they convey their thoughts because there are many other concerns they need to closely consider the construction of statements in a precise and correct manner. One of the concerns is using correctly placed prepositions in sentences. One small mistake in the use of preposition delivers a different message from what is originally intended to deliver. The difficulties in using prepositions particularly of place, time, and direction oftentimes present confusion to student writers. As Cabuk claimed (2009), one of the reasons why students encounter problems in using appropriate prepositions is that they lack a wide understanding of the context of the use of prepositions.

The numerous small words listed under prepositions are often called the biggest small words in English. Although they are generally short words, they are very important to the meaning of the sentence. They are used to connect nouns, pronouns, or phrases (called the object of the preposition) to other words within a sentence. Those small words act as vital markers to the structure of a sentence; they mark special relationships between persons, objects, and locations. The study of Johansson (2017) investigated how EFL learners use their English preposition with many in the class with different orientation in their L1. The English teachers were interviewed on how students adapt to new situations when other members in the class would adjust because of the intervention of their mother tongue. Also, Onen (2015) studied the variations of how learners in English as Lingua Franca adapts to the use of spoken prepositions in ELF interactions. The interference of the mother tongue in English learning presents a slow pace for learners. Since English fulfilled the connectedness of people worldwide, it is imperative that learners should use definite words to convey messages.

A preposition is an important part of the English language. It is used to show a relationship between the noun and pronoun in a sentence. These are very small words but they play a very important role in the complete thought of a statement. The moment the writer used a preposition word inappropriately, the chance of sending the wrong message is possible.



There are rules to follow to use them in statements correctly. A preposition must always be followed by a noun or pronoun in a sentence. It can never be followed by a verb. As Baskaran (2005) put in his study, the word “grammar” in linguistic can be taken to mean the entire system of describing the structure of a language from its sounds system to its meaning system or just the organizational (form) of words (morphology) and arrangement of these words into sentences (syntax). Thereby, putting even the smallest word in its proper position to deliver an exact and clear message in a sentence. As Yule (2006) stresses that prepositions are quite short and insignificant looking but they play very important functions in expressing the relation between two entities. The same was stressed in the study of Akhtar (2017) when she made analysis on detection errors in the writing of graduate ESL learners of Pakistan. Though how small the words are, the meaning of the whole structure of the sentence changes when there is a mistake in the use of preposition. The investigation in the nature of errors has shown that students’ L1 interference is one problem for students’ difficulty. A synonymous study was done by Castro (2013) in the University of the Philippines that evaluated the extent of Filipino language interference in the use of English prepositions as reflected in the written compositions of students. The study contested that the interference of the Filipino language is minimal as the results show the dominance of intra-lingual over inter-lingual errors.

There are many preposition examples that will make it easy to understand how the parts of a sentence fit together and how the rules apply when it comes to using a preposition in a sentence. Prepositions are words that show relationships. A sentence would not make sense without the use of a preposition. There are different types of prepositions used in the English language that not only add detail but make a sentence complete. Prepositions are used to show location, time, direction, cause and possession.

One of the challenging examinations students take is sentence completion through a cloze test. Another is summarizing by a paragraph wherein they take the preposition words from the word pool. It is not only during examinations that students find using prepositions a problem. They also encounter the same when they are given essay writing tasks.



METHODOLOGY:

There are one hundred (100) samples of students' outputs which were collected to be the subject for analysis. There were fifty (50) cloze tests and fifty (50) summarization tests. The cloze tests comprised of twenty-five (25) items while the summarization tests comprised of 47 items. Five types of prepositions are used to test students' ability in different usage. The words are categorically grouped to identify the most counts of misused prepositions. The descriptive method is used in this study. The total number of occurrences of mistakes is tabulated. There are samples of prepositions in the five types which were listed as choices for the sentence completion tests. The same was done in the summarization tests.

This study specifically answers the following questions:

1. What are the errors and the total number of mistakes incurred by students in the use of preposition words?
2. What are the implications to the readers and writers when there are misused prepositions in sentences?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

After a thorough evaluation of students' outputs, the following are the findings made as presented in the table. The figures are closely interpreted according to the occurrences of mistakes on the use of prepositions. Both the total counts of cloze tests results and the summarization tests are presented in the table.

Table 1 showing the total number of mistakes incurred in cloze test.

| Type of Preposition | Sample words | Total mistakes – cloze test (N=50) | Percentage |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------|
| Simple prepositions | at, for, in, off, on, over, and under | 11 | 22% |
| Double prepositions | into, upon, onto, out of, from within | 13 | 26% |
| Compound prepositions | in addition to, on behalf of, and in the middle of | 19 | 38% |
| Participle prepositions | considering, during, concerning, provided | 17 | 34% |
| Phrase prepositions | on time, at home, before class, and on the floor | 10 | 20% |



***some words are repeatedly used**

The table shows the total number of students who have taken the wrong answers in the questions given for the different types of prepositions. Their common mistakes lie on the use between **in** and **on**. An example for which one student was asked why she had this statement: *My books are neatly arranged **in** the small table*. She insisted that the preposition **in** seemingly sounds correct so it did not matter to her that the word should be **on**. *"There are some apples **in** the fridge"* is a good sentence showing an appropriate example of the use of **in**. It shows that there is a direction for place indicated in the statement. Though there are few of respondents who did not get the correct answer, the figure is still notable. Another troublesome usage is using **of** instead of **off**. In the list of word choices, the single word **of** was given and there were students who have answered using it for sentence completion. *The fish was freed **of/off** the hook because it was too small for grilling*.

The double prepositions presented a notable total of 13 which shows that some students were uncertain when to use them. There is a difference when using **into** and **onto**. Correctly the word **into** signifies a direction towards something like; *"The caterpillar turned **into** a butterfly"*, *"The toddler climbed **onto** the table"*. When students were asked about interchangeably using some prepositions, some said that these words do not have equal words they use in the dialects so they use any without realizing if it is proper or not.

The compound prepositions have the most number for a wrong response of test takers with a total of 19. This explains that students do not have a clear understanding when to use these combinations of words as prepositions. Most of the compound prepositions are used to connect words to form sensible meaning and add clearer descriptions about what is being said. *"I attended the meeting **in/on behalf of** my company"*. Using both **in** or **on** is correct. **In behalf of** is used when representing someone to do something that would result to something good. **On behalf of** is used when one represents someone for a purpose. *"The seminarians were **in the middle of** the storm"*. *"Stephen has music class **in addition to** his regular classes today"*. The students are faced with confusions on how to complete the



sentences correctly. Compound prepositions (or complex prepositions) consist of two or more words, usually a simple preposition and another word, to convey location. The combinations of the words present uncertain choices to which students could not exactly decide especially when the prepositions are not intended for a particular location.

The participle preposition is another problem for students to use with 17 total number of mistakes. Participle prepositions have endings such as -ed and -ing. Examples are words such as **considering, during, concerning, provided.** “She is interested in anything **concerning** horses”.

“He works one job **during** the day and another at night”. “**Considering** his age, he did a great job”. “He was **frustrated** at the situation”. These words are used to connect other parts of the sentence that would deliver clearer meaning.

The Phrase prepositions in the table have the lowest of the students’ mistakes but it is still notable with a total of 10 incorrect responses. The students have considerable knowledge of single word prepositions so they have ideas on how to use them with phrases. It is important that these combinations of words be used appropriately to convey comprehensive messages to be delivered. Phrase prepositions (or prepositional phrases) include a preposition, an object, and the object's modifier. Examples include phrases like **on time, at home, before class, and on the floor.** On the following sentences, the use of prepositional phrases makes the meaning of the statements clearer. *The participants will arrive at the conference **on time.** The basketball game was canceled **after the heavy rain.** John found his homework **under the bed.** The children loved the gifts **from their godparents.***

The overall impressions on the total of mistakes that the students incurred in the cloze test show that the learners have limited knowledge of the uses of the preposition words. They may seem small and unimportant but the slightest mistake one may commit in writing will deliver a vague message to the audience. The relationships of words put together in sentences are connected using prepositions. It is by using prepositions appropriately that statements deliver sensible meanings. The details and complete thought of sentences are



constructed using the different types of prepositions in the English language. The preposition words are used to show location, time, direction, cause and possession.

Table 2 showing the total number of mistakes incurred in the summarization test.

| Type of Preposition | Sample words | Total mistakes – summarization test (N=50) | Percentage |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Simple prepositions | at, for, in, off, on, over, and under | 10 | 20% |
| Double prepositions | into, upon, onto, out of, from within | 16 | 32% |
| Compound prepositions | in addition to, on behalf of, and in the middle of | 21 | 42% |
| Participle prepositions | considering, during, concerning, provided | 27 | 54% |
| Phrase prepositions | on time, at home, before class, and on the floor | 18 | 36% |

***some words are repeatedly used**

Table 2 shows the total number of mistakes incurred by students in a test in summarization. It reflects the total number of mistakes that students committed in the use of prepositions. In the simple prepositions like using the small words **at, for, in, off, on, over, and under**, there is only 10 wrong response taken by students. This shows that the students have a wide knowledge on the use of simple prepositions. There are only lapses though on some students who have used **of** instead of **off**. The double prepositions are two words combined to make one meaning are the following: **into, upon, onto, out of, and from within**. These words present a troublesome concern on the students because there were 16 among the 50 takers who incurred wrong use of the appropriate preposition in the sentence completion.

The compound prepositions like double prepositions are troublesome because there are combinations of words to make one that will definitely mean a particular thing. The only difference between the two is that the compound prepositions are formed with more than two words like the following: **in addition to, on behalf of, and in the middle of**. The total mistakes the students made were 21 out of the 50 test takers. The participle prepositions like the confusing uses in the different functions of participles in sentences had recorded 27



out of 50. This shows that learners have to think it over and analyze how to use them in sentences. So when they are already missing out too much time trying to decipher what to use, they just select what they think is the possible answer. It is sad to note that multiple choices make it more confusing to test takers.

The phrase prepositions like **on time, at home, before class, and on the floor** garnered another high total in the mistakes of students. One reason which leads to students' difficulty in the proper use of prepositional phrases could be the other functions wherein sometimes these are used to function as other parts of speech in a sentence. In a controlled test like giving paragraphs or short selection for completion using prepositions, students still commit mistakes even with choices to use. The preparation to do free writing is a gigantic challenge to do for students to produce good outputs.

SUMMARY:

With the thorough analysis of the 100 samples of students' written outputs in using prepositions in sentences, the tables show that the knowledge of students in the usage of the different types of prepositions is low. The percentages show that out of the fifty (50) respondents in each type of test the highest is 54% which is the participle prepositions. It means that there are more students who have not mastered the rules to apply as to the usage of prepositions. It necessitates an immediate intervention for educators to assist students in their lessons to be able to build the confidence of transmitting messages clearly. The lowest which is 20% from table 1 and 2. In table 1, it is the phrase preposition. The other group of test takers which is on cloze test using the listed prepositions. The 20% under phrase preposition shows that there is a greater number of test takers who responded correctly. It manifests that students have considerable knowledge on the use of phrase prepositions. The other 20% is in table 2 which is the simple preposition. The test takers on the other test which is on summarization have a low percentage of 20% mistakes in simple prepositions. This shows that the examinees are familiar with the uses of the different simple prepositions as listed on the tables.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. The faculty facilitator should give more comprehensive exercises on the different types of prepositions.
2. The students should put more time in analyzing the different usage of the types of prepositions.
3. In a classroom setting, the educators should encourage students to speak the target language and have a grasp at using the different parts of speech.
4. The professors are encouraged to let students work on an output that could be seen or touched using the different types of prepositions.
5. Educators should strategize lessons which are enjoyable for students to do in the application of rules on the use of the preposition.
6. For authentic examples, practical hands-on activities on the use of preposition words are encouraged especially on directions and places.

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