



وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي
جامعة ديالى
كلية التربية
قسم العلوم التربوية والنفسية

أداء المتعلمين العراقيين الجامعيين دارسي اللغة
الانكليزية - لغة أجنبية - في استخدام حروف الجر
الانكليزية الشائعة

رسالة مقدمة

إلى مجلس كلية التربية - جامعة ديالى
وهي جزء من متطلبات نيل درجة ماجستير
في التربية / طرائق تدريس اللغة الانكليزية لغة اجنبية

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem and its Significance

Prepositions are very common words in English sentences. Using prepositions is one of the important means to make sentences more agreeable. Prepositions are function words that have several functions depending on the context in which they occur and they may change the meaning of the sentence.

A preposition is an important part of speech in English that links a noun, pronoun or phrase to another part of a sentence. They lead to an object, which is the part of the sentence that receives the action of the verb. Prepositions can help show not just where something took place but how and when (Hoeppe, 2002: Int.) .

The correct use of prepositions is one of the most serious problems faced by learners of English especially those learning it as a foreign language as is the case with Iraqi students. Celce-Murcia and Freeman (1999:401) identify these problems in accordance with three dimensions of form, meaning and use and put forwards reasons for their existence. First, the work of prepositions in other languages, as German and Russian, is performed through inflections. ESL/EFL students have to learn new forms for familiar functions. Second, prepositions do not always match well from one language to another in their spatial meaning; for example, English 'at' equals German 'on'. Third, even the proficient English speakers seem to have variable levels of performance regarding which prepositions they use for a particular meaning. This variation in

the input data can cause much confusion on the part of the ESL/EFL students, especially when the use of prepositions by native speakers departs from what the prescriptive rules dictate.

Fitikides (2002:83-9) holds that one of the problems of misuse of prepositions is that foreign students confuse their meaning by using one preposition instead of another.

Swan (2005:483) relates the difficulty in the correct use of prepositions to the fact that "**most of them have several different functions; for instance, the dictionary lists eighteen main uses of 'at' . At the same time, different prepositions can have very similar uses (in the morning, on Monday morning, at night), so it is easy to make mistakes."**

Schindler (2006:7)points out that another confusion in understanding English prepositions is that they can be used as particles (i.e., words of two-word verbs) which should not be understood as prepositions such as *catch on, keep on, take off*, etc.

Hence, the correct use of prepositions constitutes a problematic linguistic area for Iraqi EFL learners as proved by researchers like Kassim (1978), Ali (1983), Abdul-Hameed (2001), Yousif (2007), and as supported by consulting several EFL college instructors and specialists in the field. This state of affairs has urged the researcher to investigate EFL college students' performance in the commonest English prepositions.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The study aims at :

1. assessing the ability of EFL undergraduate learners in recognizing and producing prepositions, and
2. identifying areas of potential difficulty and suggesting certain pedagogical activities to surmount these difficulties.

1.3 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

1. in general, EFL university learners' performance in the commonest English prepositions is inadequate.
2. Iraqi EFL university learners find difficulty both in recognizing and using the common English prepositions.
3. EFL learners face more difficulties at the production level than at the recognition level.

1.4 Limits of the Study

The present study is limited to the 3rd year EFL students of the College of Education/ Ibn- Rushd, University of Baghdad for the academic year 2006 – 2007. It is also limited to the commonest English prepositions: '*about, above, across, after, against, along, among, at, because of, before, behind, below, beneath, beside or besides, between, but, by, despite, down, during, except for, for, from, in, in addition to, inside, in spite of, like, near, of, off, on top of, out, outside, over, past, through, throughout, till, to, toward, under, underneath, until, unto, up, upon, with, without*'.

1.5 Procedures

The steps followed in carrying out the research include:

1. identifying the concept of preposition and other related aspects through surveying literature.
2. constructing and administering a proficiency test for diagnostic purposes to assess undergraduate students ability in recognizing and using common prepositions.
3. identifying and describing the errors made by the students and suggesting proper remedies for them.
4. adopting appropriate statistical means to arrive at the results of the study.
5. Drawing conclusions, putting forward some recommendations and suggestions in the light of the results.

1.6 Value of the Study

Being a pedagogical study, it is hoped that the study can be beneficial at all levels of EFL teaching English. On the practical side, the study may familiarize teachers and learners with the proper usage of English prepositions. Thus, syllabus designers as well as practicing teachers may make use of this kind of study for various pedagogical implications for attaining a better mastery of these prepositions.

1.7 Definition of Basic Terms

1.7.1 Performance

Page et al.(1979:261-2) define performance as " actions of a person or group when given a learning task", whereas Ehrlich (2002:Int.)

explains it as “the accomplishment of a task in accordance with a set standard of completeness and accuracy.”

In this study, performance refers to the achievement of EFL learners in the recognition and production test of commonest English prepositions.

1.7.2 Prepositions

Quirk (1988 : 813) defines a preposition as a word used with a noun, pronoun or -ing form to show its connection with another word. Similarly, Devlin (2007:210) states that prepositions connect words, clauses, and sentences together and show the relation between them.

1.7.3 Recognition

In psychology, recognition is a form of remembering characterized by a feeling of familiarity when something previously experienced is again encountered; in such situations a correct response can be identified when presented but may not be reproduced in the absence of a stimulus. Recognition seems to indicate selective retention and forgetting of certain elements of experience (Encyclopedia Britannica,2004).

In this study recognition means the ability of the EFL learner to recognize the preposition and understand their meaning.

1.7.4 Production

This term refers to the process of planning and executing the act of speech (Crystal, 2003: 374) . As far as this study is concerned, the term production refers to the subjects' ability of producing prepositions properly.