

The Difficulties Facing English Language Learners in the use of English Prepositions

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Abstract

By spoken and written language, humans can communicate in a variety of distinctive ways. English language proficiency among Iraqi Learners (ELs) is one of the most prominent instances of this type of learner, who interact numerous obstacles and challenges. The prepositional usage' problematic nature is the cause of this. For example, determined by the context, a single preposition in English language may express distinct meanings and serve different purposes. Prepositional usage in space and time are thought to be the most distinct kinds of relationships that may be methodically explained.

As a result, the current study compares and contrasts both temporal and spatial prepositions in English with the goal of determining which of the two relation types that is, location or time is more troublesome and determining the most troublesome English prepositions that most English language learners encounter. The current study seeks to determine whether of the two relations that of place or of time is more problematic than the other due to the challenges previously mentioned. Determining the most troublesome place and time prepositions that English learners may encounter, mostly in translation. Determining the cause of these challenges and issues and, consequently, developing some correct options.

Key words: English prepositions, written and spoken language, simple and complex prepositions, learners English prepositions, temporal and spatial prepositions.

الصعوبات التي تواجه تعلمي اللغة الانكليزية في استخدام حروف الجر الانكليزية

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الملخص

من خلال اللغة المنطوقة والمكتوبة، يمكن للإنسان التواصل بطرق مميزة متنوعة. إن إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية بين المتعلمين العراقيين هو أحد الأمثلة البارزة على هذا النوع من المتعلمين، الذين يواجهون العديد من العقبات والتحديات. السبب في ذلك هو الطبيعة الإشكالية لاستخدام حروف الجر. على سبيل المثال، يمكن لحرف جر واحد في اللغة الإنجليزية أن يعبر عن معاني مختلفة ويخدم أغراضاً مختلفة، اعتماداً على السياق. يُعتقد أن استخدام حروف الجر في المكان والزمان هما أكثر أنواع العلاقات التي يمكن شرحها بشكل منهجي. نتيجة لذلك، تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى مقارنة وتباين حروف الجر الزمانية والمكانية في اللغة الإنجليزية بهدف تحديد أي من نوعي العلاقات - أي المكان أو الزمان - أكثر إشكالية، وتحديد أكثر حروف الجر الإنجليزية إشكالية التي يواجهها معظم متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية.

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى تحديد ما إذا كانت العلاقة المكانية أو الزمانية أكثر إشكالية من الأخرى بسبب التحديات المذكورة سابقاً. كما تهدف إلى تحديد أكثر حروف الجر المكانية والزمانية إشكالية التي قد يواجهها متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية، خاصة في الترجمة. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد سبب هذه التحديات والمشاكل، وبالتالي وضع بعض الخيارات الصحيحة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حروف الجر الإنجليزية، اللغة المكتوبة والمنطوقة، حروف الجر البسيطة والمعقدة، حروف الجر الإنجليزية للمتعلمين، حروف الجر الزمنية والمكانية.

1. Introduction

No sentence or paragraph would be complete without prepositions, which are a fundamental component of speech in all languages. In addition to their significance in grammar, prepositions are among the most challenging concepts for most foreign language learners. One means of communication is language. It is how they communicate their thoughts and ideas to other people. The area of language study that

plays a significant role is linguistics. In order to learn is how to use prepositions. Preposition is difficult to constituent parts that is, the speech parts and how they combine to form sentences must come first. During the procedure, students are able to this manner, the students will receive guidance on how to effectively, elegantly, and variedly convey their ideas and thoughts both orally and in writing.

Any EL learner finds English prepositions challenging since they typically compare them to the prepositional system of their mother tongue. The difference between the quantity, meaning, and application of prepositions in the mother tongue and the EL learner is another aspect contributing to the difficulty.

2. English Prepositions

Prepositions connect nouns by allowing writers to create complex sentences. Prepositions show the relationship between nouns by modifying the noun that follows them (also called the object of the preposition). Together, a preposition and its object are called a prepositional phrase. For example, if a writer needs to discuss a book on a table. He or she needs to use the following sentence: The book lies on (a preposition) the table (the object of the preposition). Anyone reading the sentence needs to know where the book is located, so the preposition on connects the table (a second noun) to the book. Prepositions enable authors to form complex phrases by joining nouns. By changing the noun that comes after them (also known as the preposition's object), prepositions demonstrate the link between nouns. A prepositional sentence is the combination of a preposition and its object. For instance, when a writer has to talk about a book is in the bag. This sentence must be used by him or her: The book rests in the bag, which is the preposition's object. The preposition in links the bag (a second noun) the book because the reader of the phrase must know where the book is.

Prepositions are typically employed to convey a particular relationship between two sentence components. This relationship could be spatial, as in:

1. *John is in the work.*

This example illustrates a place connection between an appropriate noun (John) and the NP (the work) by using the preposition (in) to link (John) to (the work). They might also display a time relationship, like in the example that follows:

2. *We arrived at ten o'clock.*

In this case, a precise time relation that directs the upcoming process is expressed by the preposition (in). Prepositions appear to have a variety of purposes and convey various meanings based on the context in which they are employed. One word makes up a majority of popular prepositions (in, on, at, etc.). They're referred to as basic prepositions, whereas complicated prepositions, such "in case of instead of, and a part of," form a number of words. Speech typically uses one-syllable prepositions without emphasis, such as "There's a person at the door" (no emphasis on AT). When a preposition has more than two syllables, one of the syllables is often emphasized, as in Alongside the wall, across from the bank, etc. A preposition is applied by a prepositional complement to form a prepositional phrase, that's typically a noun phrase, sentence, or V-ing clause. Either the preposition and its complement are referred to as "prepositional phrases," and the phrase that comes after a preposition is termed its complement.

Thus, Words that show relationships between other words in the same phrase are called prepositions. Yates (1999) argues that "the word 'preposition' has a straightforward definition: a word placed before a noun or pronoun to define its relationship with another word in the sentence." (Yates, 1999: 5) It's crucial to remember that "the word preposition is divided into two syllables pre/position" (Shehata M,

2003:214). A preposition is a word that denotes a relationship with a noun or pronoun and a different sentence component, according to Walker (1982,123). Furthermore, Cowan (1983:281) shares a preposition is a group of words that demonstrate the relationship between the preposition's object and several additional phrases in the sentence.

3. The Basic Definitions of Prepositions

3.1 Prepositions of Place Relation

Spatial prepositions are those that are used to describe a place, a single point, a specific position, place, or direction (dimension). "...referred to place or direction" is said to have been the original preposition. Place

In other instances, the object needs to come after specific prepositions, like in :

3. *Ahmed is in the home.*

4. *He's home.*

The removal of the object in these two phrases renders the second one grammatically incorrect:

5. *Ahmed is in at .*

6.* *He is at.*

Although phrase 5 may be used in informal (colloquial) English, it is required to be used in context for example, during a conversation—rather than as an independently sentence (Al-Wahab et al., 1990: 91).

3.3 Prepositions of Time Relation

The temporal prepositions are those that denote a moment in time, a range of time, or the duration of an action. (Eckersley and Eckersley, 1960: 278)

Prepositions are employed to illustrate the connection between nouns and pronouns.

For instances:

SUBJECT+VERB**PREPOSITION****NOUN**

The cat was sitting on the table.

Me and my brother study in the collage.

He looked at the window.

They were waiting for her.

They came by bus.

Numerous relationships (for various nouns) in sentences are defined by prepositions. Perceptions can be categorized into the following groups based on the relationships they exhibit.

The term ‘spatial preposition’ is used to describe adverbs that relate to a specific place, direction, point, or simply point. According to Eckersley and Eckersley (1960:278), prepositions were formerly used to indicate location or direction. Prepositions are typically employed to convey a particular relationship between two sentence components. This relationship could be spatial, as in:

7. *Suha is in the home.*

This example illustrates a place relation between the proper noun (Suha) and the NP (the home) by using the preposition (in) to link (Suha) to (the home). They might also display a time relationship, like in the example that follows:

8. *We arrived at 10 o'clock.*

In this case, a precise time relation that directs the next stage is expressed by the preposition (at). Prepositions appear to have a variety of purposes and convey distinct meanings based on the context in which they are employed. The common types of prepositions relation of time, as in:

3.3.1 At

Points of time are denoted using the preposition (at). According to Hewings (1999:214), (at) is used grammatically with points or times, such as clock time or holiday periods, as in:

9. *Ali came at 10 o'clock, at 7.30 p.m., at noon.*

According to Anson and Schwegler (1998:188), "at" is used to indicate a certain time, however it is rarely used with the phrases "all, last, next, one, some, this, or that," as in:

10. *They went to Mosul last April.*

3.3.2 On

Along with its many applications as a spatial preposition, (on) can also be used as a preposition of time. In the beginning, it should be used before the days of the week, as in:

11. *She'll be here On Monday.*

12. *Jack was born on August the 7th.*

13. *I will come on March the first.*

Since the complement refers to a portion of a day rather than an entire day, Quirk et al. (1985:688) acknowledge that the following expressions constitute an uncommon use of the word (on):

14. *On Sunday morning.*

15. *On Friday afternoon.*

It also "...extends to other cases where the time segment is a part of a day which is actually mentioned" as in:

16. *On the morning of 1 September.*

However, (in) is used instead of (on) in expressions like "early morning" and "late afternoon" (ibid). The identical points presented by Quirk et al. are the main topic of Leech and Svartvik (1994:83). Alexander (1988:150) participates in this conversation as well. He claims that the word "on" is employed for specific situations like:

17. *On that day, on that morning*

And also with anniversaries:

18. *On his birthday, on your wedding day.*

Without considering the optional features, Spankie (1987:167) provides the following examples:

19. *I went to Erbil last June.*

20. *He is coming back next Monday.*

To illustrate his preference for avoiding using (on) before words like "last," "next," "every," and "this." According to Hewings (1999:214), these words are infrequently preceded by (at, in, and on). Without a doubt, "yesterday and tomorrow" are not using (on), as in:

21. *She will arrive tomorrow.*

22. *They went yesterday.*

23. *The weather was good yesterday.*

3.3.3. In

Similar to the first two prepositions, (in) can serve a variety of purposes and represent the sphere of time. It is utilized generally for months, years, centuries, and extended periods of time, such as in

24. *There should be a lot of progress in January.*

25. *It always rains in winter.*

It is also possible to combine with sections of the day. It is comparable to (during) since they can be employed to denote times that are longer or shorter than a day, as in (Leech and Svartvik, 1994:82).

26. *In the evening, in the morning.*

27. *In / during the morning /April, spring.*

However, (between) is used when referring to periods that are distinguished by their starting and ending positions, as in:

28. *Between 20003 and 2015 many Iraqi people suffered a lot.*

3.4 Duration

Duration generally responds to enquiries that start with "How long?" Here, a variety of prepositions can be employed, including:(for, during, over, (all) through, from....to or till, since, and to)

3.4.1 For

For Compared to other prepositions, (for) has more meanings than any other. Regarding duration, "from the beginning to the end, or all

through" is meant by the word "for" in this context. The subsequent examples, which contrast duration with time position, provide explanation on this.(Quirk et al.,1985:689):

29. *How long did they camp in Mosul?*

30. *He camped there for the spring.* (i.e. from the beginning to the end of the summer).

31. *When did they camp in Mosul?*

32. *He camped there in the spring.* (i.e. at some time during the summer).

According to Hall (1986:39), these time periods have "a given length" but no defined beginning point, which is why the word "for" is employed in this context as in:

33. *She has been a teacher for 25 years.*

Before the word (all), (for) is not used as in:

34. *She'll be at home day today.*

3.4.2 From...to/till

Indicating duration is another usage for this pair of prepositions. It is employed in between two specified points in time, as in (ibid):

35. *They camped there from June to/till September.*

American usage prefers (through) over (to/till) in order to take out any ambiguity regarding whether or not the second portion of the time is part of the whole duration.

36. *They camped there from July through August.*

37. *She camped there from July to/till August.*

"Up to and including August" is what it means in the former, whereas "up to (? and including) August" is the meaning in the latter. Only (till) can be applied in when (from) is not present (ibid.):

38. *He camped there till May.*

3.4.3 Since

According to Hall (1986:39), (since) is different from (for) in that it has certain starting point, whereas (for) signifies the duration from a certain point to the present. Compare:

٣٩. *She has been here since two o'clock.*

40. *He has been here for 3 hours.*

41. *India has been independent since 1947.*

42. *India has been independent for 59 years.*

As Thomson and Martinet (1980:73) note, "since" denotes what "from that time to the time of speaking" means as in:

43. *She has been sick since Friday (till now).*

A subject less -ing phrase may also come after (since), as in (Quirk et al., 1985:691):

44. *Since leaving company, I have not seen him.*

Additionally, (through) can be used to denote a durational sense, as in:

45. *They lived there through summer.*

(through) denotes a duration that is longer than (over) in:

46. *We camped there over the holiday / over night*

Additionally, when following a time, (past) is utilized, as in (Hall, 1986:3):

47. *There is no point in going to the party now it is past midnight.*

Since the focus of this study is solely on monosyllabic prepositions, numerous additional prepositions that can convey a durational meaning such as "between, during, over, until, within" have been left out; these are irrelevant.

3.5 Prepositions and Adverbs

According to Quirk et al. (1985:662), prepositions "...are items which are often formally identical with and semantically similar to adverbs". As a result, a preposition may be used as an adverb in one phrase and as a preposition in another. Consider the sentences that follow:

48. *They can see through water.*

49. *Will you kindly see this through to completion?*

The term "through" has been employed as an adverb and a preposition, in each case. This is implied by the unquestionable rule that an adverb must not come after a preposition, while a noun, NP, or pronoun must. While (through) will be followed by nothing in the second phrase, the noun *water* is the preposition complement in the initial sentence. The word "through" in the second phrase is called a "prepositional adverb" (Spankie, 1987:170).

3.5 Prepositions and verbs

One can observe a particular type of syntactic and semantic relationship that connects the verb and preposition in a phrase. Both the verb and the preposition in the subsequent instances convey the sense of location and direction. (Quirk et al., 1985:662)

50. *They climbed up.*

51. *We jumped over.*

Many experts believe that prepositions and verbs share some similarities. Prepositions "...are introduced as deep structure features of verbs and they can also function as verbs," according to Becker and Arms (1969:7), who also believe that prepositions and verbs are similar in some linguistic elements. In certain situations, the verb and preposition are able joined to create a new unit that's meaning is determined by the combination of the verb and the preposition. Similarly to phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs are complicated units, according to Trask (1993: 215).

4. Position of English Preposition

The Numerous grammarians focus on this issue, namely the position of a preposition in common scenarios, such as Thomson and Martinet (1990:79), Quirk et al. (1985:663), Swan (1980:444), and others. Every grammatical rule has certain exceptions, as anyone can

see while studying any one of them, yet the following rule regarding English prepositions is exception-free: "A preposition is followed by a noun [or its equivalent]. It is never followed by a verb".

The position of a preposition is thought to be determined by the form of the sentence. The preposition "in" normally appears before its object in the example that follows.

52. *Michel plays in the room.*

In this case, the NP (the room) is the object of the preposition (in). The prefix "acting together" and its object equally modify the verb "play." No These two processes the preposition's object and the concept the way that it and its object modify are referred to by Strumpf and Douglas (1999:229) as the two necessary partners that a preposition requires "... to carry on the relationship that it establishes." The second partner is referred to as "the referent" and might be "a nominal, a verb, an adverbial, or an adjective" (ibid.). The first partner is the object.

A preposition's location is mostly determined by the type of word it rules, additionally to the sentence's structure. The preposition and the word it regulates appear to be connected by a form of collocation. According to Michael (1970: 454), the following instances can be used to demonstrate such a case:

53. *The priests were walking near the town.*

54. *The priests were walking in the town.*

5. Methodology

The structure approach will be adopted in this study, i.e. every structural pattern involves a preposition will be set up for a comparison between the correct and incorrect use of prepositions in English sentences and will be shown with illustrative examples:

5.1 Place of Prepositions

Pattern I	Form
	Correct and incorrect sentence
Pron +V+ pron+ prep+ Det+ N	<i>She threw it <u>at</u> the target.</i> <i>*She gave <u>at</u> him the door.</i>

Table (1)

Table (1) indicates place and it (at) precedes its object (the target/ door)

Pattern II	Form
Det +N2+ be+ V+ prep.phrase	<i>The pic is hanging <u>on</u> the wall</i> <i>*The pic is <u>on</u> the wall hanging</i>

Table (2) This sentence has an incorrect, and the omitting the prepositional phrase which can make the sentence incomplete or unclear.

Pattern III	Form
N + be + prep. Phra	<i>The hotel is <u>in</u> the city</i> <i>*The hotel is the city</i>

Table (3) The sentence in table (3) is missing a preposition.

5.2 Time of Preposition

Pattern IV	Form
Pro+v+(adj+n)+time expression	<i>They will meet <u>at</u> the new café next week</i> <i>*They will launch new product <u>at</u> next month</i>

Table (4)

This sentence is incorrect because: a. "new product" should likely have a determiner ("the new product"). b. "next month" should be "at" or another preposition depending on context but "launch" often uses "in" for month ("in next month" or more commonly "next month" without "in" or "at").

Pattern V	Form
Det+N+V+Prep (a period)	<i>The dog is running <u>in</u> the park.</i> <i>*The dog is running.</i>

Table (5)

The first sentence in table (5) is completely and grammatically correct. While, in the second sentence is grammatically correct but lacks additional information that the preposition would provide.

Pattern VI	Form
Pron+aux+V+prep+N	<i>I'm <u>on</u> my way to the store.</i> <i>*I'm <u>on</u> the store.</i>

Table (6)

Pattern VII	Form
Pron+V+Det+prep+N	<i>He is looking <u>at</u> the picture.</i> <i>*He is looking picture.</i>

Table (7)

The omitting of preposition in table (7) in the second sentence makes the sentence unclear.

Pattern VIII	Form
Pron+V+N+prep+N+prep+N	<i>She's moving a chair <u>from</u> the room <u>to</u> the hallway.</i> <i>*She's moving chair room hallway.</i>

Table (8)

Omitting or missing prepositions , which can change the meaning or make the sentence grammatically incorrect.

Pattern IX	Form
Pron+aux+V+adv+by+N	<i>The project is being managed effectively <u>by</u> the manager.</i> <i>*The project is managed effectively manager.</i>

Table (9)**5.3 Duration of Preposition**

Pattern X	Form
Pron+aux+Adv+V+prep+Adj+N	<i>They're constantly waiting <u>for</u> a better opportunity.</i> <i>*They constantly wait better opportunity.</i>

Table (10)

Pattern XII	Form
Pron+V+prep+N+prep+N	<i>She's moving <u>from</u> her old house <u>to</u> a new apartment.</i> <i>*She is moving <u>from</u> old house a new apartment.</i>

Table (11)

Use preposition correctly to indicate movement or direction.

Pattern XI	Form
Pron+aux+V+Adv+prep+N	<i>I've been working hard <u>since</u> morning.</i> <i>*I've been working hard morning</i>

Table (12)

5.4 Adverb of Preposition

Pattern XIII	Form
Pron+V+Adv+prep+pron+N	<i>I'm driving my car very carefully <u>through</u> the city streets.</i> <i>I'm driving very carefully the city streets.</i>

Table (13)

5.5 Verbs of preposition

Pattern XIV	Form
Perp+V+pron+prep+N+C	<i>He did it <u>on</u> Friday morning</i> <i>*He do it Friday morning.</i>

Table (14)

The verb (do) may be modified in an unneeded way on Friday morning, the preposition (on) is used to denote a particular time of day.

Now that these patterns have been shown, let's talk about some of the probable problems that learners and users of English prepositions may encounter. Both syntactic and semantic explanations of several of the previously given structures are simple. Patterns II, III, V, VII, XIII, and XIV all demonstrate this. The fact that English sentences can conclude with a preposition, which separates the preposition from its

target, is another example of how patterns or structures indicate that selecting the best preposition might be difficult for a variety of reasons.

The usage of a combination of two or more prepositions with different meanings is another issue that arises when a compound preposition is used, as in pattern XII. When a speaker wants to emphasize a point, they can use a PP at the beginning of a sentence, for example. However, it also appears that the later kind—the temporal one—is simpler than the spatial one. Nevertheless, several issues might also be identified. Choosing the best temporal preposition mostly depends on the temporal reference that the following word possesses. For example, (at) is used for clock-time and idiomatically for holidays, (in) for months, seasons, and years, and (on) for days of the week.

Conclusion

The following are some crucial points about the study's prepositional usage:

1. Most learners in translation or any other area find prepositions to be a major source of problems. This is because most, if not all, "simple prepositions" are polysemous.
2. Of all the faults found, the most common one is the misuse of a particular preposition. This mostly happens when students disregard the meaning and usage of English prepositions, so they turn to their mother tongue rules to solve the problem and import prepositions from their native languages into English.
3. The many prepositional structures found in all languages are not the only cause of prepositional usage errors.
4. Other factors that contribute to the difficulty include the tendency to translate literally and a lack of awareness of the multiple meanings of these problematic terms. When selecting a preposition, many English language learners rely more on form, superficial thinking, and usage than on comprehension and logical reasoning.

5. Since no specific subject focusses on to this difficult area, grammar courses given to the students under study contribute to this error-making process, which causes many students to progressively forget the many applications of prepositions, even the most basic ones.

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