

# **Evaluating college students performance in using English prepositions**

**By:-**

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## **1-Introduction**

Prepositions are words in language used for compressing meaning into few words. Language is made richer and more flexible by their doing several meanings to each of many prepositions in different situations and structures. Prepositions are considered one of the important parts of speech in English language. It links a noun, pronoun or phrase to another part of a sentence. They are found in most languages and used as function words, it is rare to construct a sentence without one. It can help not only where something took place but how and when.

The correct use of prepositions constitute a problematic linguistic area for Iraqi EFL learners, even advanced ones (Abdul Hameed M. G. 2001:1). The significance of mastering the use of prepositions requires teachers of English to pay closer attention to this learning area of English. Thus, mastering the use of prepositions is of vital significance. Teachers of English need to know the degree and shape of difficulties that face foreign learners of English in learning English prepositions. Elce Murcia & Freeman (1999:401) identify the problem of mastering English prepositions with three dimensions of form, meaning, and use. Thus, the main objectives of the study is to evaluate the use of English prepositions by college students and find out the exact errors that are made in using English prepositions.

## **1-1 The statement of the problem and its, significance**

Fitikides (2002:83) states that one of the problems of misuse of prepositions is that foreign students confuse their meaning by using one preposition instead of another. This indicates the real need of teachers to study the learners, errors in this area. Corder (1983:161) believes that error analysis can be useful to foreign language teachers in three ways :first, it is important to the teacher as it tells him/her about the progress of the learner; second it provides evidence of how language is earned. Third, making errors can be used as a device by the learners so as to see how far the learner is from the optimum structures or whether he is intelligible or not.

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. It has repeatedly been asserted that English prepositions constitute a special problem to foreign learners of English . Foreign learners of English face a great difficulty when learning English prepositions . This difficulty is represented by the fact that ,learners fail to decide which preposition should follow a certain verb or adjective.

The significance of studying learners, errors makes immediate contribution to the task of language teaching. Thus, the importance of this study may stem from the significance of English prepositions as well as error analysis studies.

## **1-2 Aims of the study**

the present study aims at: 1-Evaluating the students by identifying their performance in using English prepositions .

### **1-3 Limits of the study**

This study is limited to evaluate and identify errors made by fourth year students(morning studies) at the college of Basic Education/Diyala university during the academic year (2009-2010)

## **SECTION TWO**

### **2- Theoretical background and previous studies**

#### **2-1 English prepositions**

Prepositions are “a closed set of items which precede noun phrase(or single nouns or pronouns) and certain forms of the verb to form a single constitute of structure”(Crystal D.1985:243).It can be divided into two kinds:simple and complex.A simple preposition consist of one word as (in ,on and at).Complex prepositions consists of more than one word as( in case of,instead of and a part of ).The phrase that follows a preposition is called its, complement and both the preposition and its, complement is called (prepositional phrase).Prepositions usually express certain relations between two parts of a sentence.

#### **2-2 Teaching English prepositions**

Being an important aspect of grammar,it is known that prepositions are a problem to teach and it is difficult for ESL students to remember their appropriate usage(Andrew ,2003:int).Teachers are advised to use activities for prepositions that keep students active and interested.In such activities three rules are suggested:-

a-keep it simple (use as little English as possible )

-3-

b-use land marks and visual aids

c-use gestures,point if all else fails (ibid)

Teachers are advised to draw their students, attention to combinations(e.g verb+preposition,adjective+preposition etc.) because it is said that prepositions can not be learnt alone.

### **2-3 Previous studies**

a-(assessment of errors made by university students in the use of prepositions of place and time),unpublished MA theses ,Baghdead University,2001 by Abdul -hameed M.

this study deals with the analysis of the Iraqi Arabic speaking college students, errors in the use of English prepositions of place and time.

The aims of the study are:-

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 surround the difficulties.

The main objectives of the study is to account the reasons make the students commit the different types of errors in order to specify efficient classroom procedures for teaching English prepositions of place and time and offer suggestions for conducting effective remedial work in this area.

## **Section :Three Procedures**

### **3-1 Population and sample**

The population of this study is the fourth year of English Department students (morning studies) / college of Basic Education/Diyala university during the academic year 2009-2010. Since the population of the study is limited, they are all considered the sample of this study.

This stage is chosen by the researcher because for practical reasons; they are considered the final stage in the college and it is better to check the students performance before their graduation or beginning their practice period. The sample is consisted of (50 )Male and female students.

### **3-2 The Instrument**

One of the basic requirements of the study is constructing a test. A Questionnaire is prepared by the researcher containing a multiple choice test of (25) items concerning prepositions of time and place which are commonly used and which may constitute a problem to learners. A questionnaire is prepared on related literature putting in consideration the level of the students and the content of the test. This questionnaire (appendix no.1) presented to a jury members (Table no.1) specialists in teaching English and kindly requested to add ,omit and modify the items to be suitable to get the aim of the study.

## T Table No.(1) Names of Jurey members arranged alphabetically

- 1- Inst. Amthel M. Abbas /college of Education/Diyala university
- 1- Inst. Inaam y.Abdul-khaliq /college of Basic Education/Diyala university
- 2- Assist.prof. Izaat s. Najim /college of Basic Education/Diyala university
- 3- Assist.prof.Khalil I. Rijia /college of education/Diyala university
- 4- Assist.prof. Muslim M jasim /college of Basic Education/Diyala university

### **3-3 Validity and Realiability of the test**

Corder ( :356 )defines validity as “the extent to which it does what it is intended to do .to achieve validity of the test,the researcher exposed it to the jurey members.The suggestions and modifications of the jurey members were considered in the refined form of the test.

To achieve the reliability of the test it is presented to a group of students from the same stage to check the degree of difficulty and practicality of the test and the time needed for the test.This group is excluded from the total number of the sample.Some items were modified according to the findings of this pilot administration of the test.

### **3-4 The final administration of the test**

According to the suggestions and modifications of the jurey members ,some of the items were modified and (5 ) items were omitted .Thus the final version of the checklist is consisted of (20 )items.(Appendix No.2).The researcher applied the test to the sample.The test was given under the same conditions . The students were instructed how to answer questions.

Every correct answer is given one mark ,and the wrong answer is given zero.Since the test consist of twenty items ,so the whole test will be scored out of (20 ).

**Table (2)**

**sample subjects, misuses of English preposition**

Prep. Of place.	Scores out of (20)	Percentage out of 100	
1-in			
2-at			
3-on			
4-between			
5-among			
6-onto			
7-over			
8-in front of			
9-behind			
10-by			
Prep. Of time	Scores out of (20)	Percentage out of (100)	
11-in			
12-on			
13-at			
14-for			
15-during			
16-while			
17-between			
18-until			
19-since			
20-before			

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**Table (3)**

**Score and meanscore of the sample subject of the test**

No. of Student	scores	No.of student	scores	meanscore
1-		26-		
2-		27-		
3-		28-		
4-		29-		
5-		30-		
6-		31-		
7-		32-		
8-		33-		
9-		34-		
10-		35-		
11-		36-		
12-		37-		
13-		38-		
14-		39-		
15-		40-		
16-		41-		
17-		42-		
18-		43-		
19-		44-		
20-		45-		
21-		46-		
22-		47-		
23-		48-		
24-		49-		
25-		50-		



## **4-2 Suggestions and recommendation**

## **5-Bibliography**

### **Appendix no. 1**

#### **A Questionnaire submitted to the jurey members**

**Dear Mr./Mrs.**

**A researcher intends to conduct a study entitled” Evaluating the college students,performance in using English prepositions”.The aim of this study is evaluating the students, performance by identifying their errors in using some of the common prepositions of placeand time.The study is limited to the fourth stage (morning studies)/college of Basic Education/Diyala universityduring the academic year (2010-2011).**

**As specialists in the field of teaching English,please check these items and kindly state if they are suitable or not to test prepositions of place and time.Any addition or modification will be highly regarded.**

**Thank you**

**Nizar Hussein**

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## **A Questionnaire submitted to the jury members**

**Q**

**Q/1-Write the number of the item and the letter of the correct choice:**

**1-Look at the boy swimming ----- the river.**

a-at b-on c-onto d-in

**2-Jack, house is the white one----- the end of the street.**

a-into b-in c-at d-on

**3-Don'tsit----- the chair.It is broken.**

a-on b-in c-at d-into

**4-Suha sat ----- layla and Nora.**

a-mong b-in c-between d-onto

**5-It is difficult to recognize him.He sitting ----- thirty students.**

a-between b-in c-among d-onto

**6-They fell ----- the well .**

a-on b-at c-onto d-into

7-The children ran ----- the hills.

a-in b-into c-over d-under

8-When he heard the bad news,he broke ----- completely.

a-away b-down c-in d-out

9-The hotel is ----- the stream.

a-under b-behind c-out of among

10-He criticized every body and even ran ----- his few friends.

a-up b-over c-down d-into

11-The car was parked----- the house.

a-over b-into c-under d-in front of

12-The school is not far from here .It is situated ----- the garage.

a-across b-over c-up d-by

13-Susan likes travelling ----- summer.

a-on b-at c-in d-for

14-The hotel is -----the stream

a-under b-behind c-out of d- among

15-Can you possibly make -----what he has written here?

a-for b-up c-in d-for

16-They got married----- the twelfth of march.

a-at b-on c-during d-in

17-I don'tlike going out ----- night.

a-at b-in c-during d-in

18-We watched television ----- two hours last night.

a-during b-while c-since d-for

19-We met a lot of people -----our holiday.

a-for b-while c-during d-at

20-Robert suddenly felt ill ----- he was doing the examination.

a-during b-at c-in d-while

21-I was reading ----- nine and twelve oclock.

a-between b-in c-during d-for

22-let us wait ----- it stops raining.

a-while b-between c-until d-since

23-I haven't seen him -----last Christmas.

a-between b-since c-for d-during

24-They arrived just----- we left.

a-before b-during c-until d-in

## Appendix No.(2)

### The final version of the test

**Q/Write the number of the item and the letter of the correct choice**

1-Look at the boy swimming ----- the river.

a-at b-on c-onto d-in

2-Jack, house is the white one----- the end of the street.

a-into b-in c-at d-on

3-Don'tsit----- the chair.It is broken.

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7-The children ran ----- the hills.

a-in b-into c-over d-under

8-When he heard the bad news,he broke ----- completely.

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9-The hotel is ----- the stream.

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10-He criticized every body and even ran ----- his few friends.

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