



Some Problematic Uses of English Prepositions for Iraqi EFL College Students.

Maysaa R. Jewad

Inst. Assist. College of Basic Education/ University of Diyala.

Email:maysaa.diyala@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study investigates some problematic uses of English prepositions in Iraqi EFL college students' recognition and production of English preposition, i.e. their compositions and recognition at four levels of proficiency. The prepositional errors for each level, their frequency and percentage were calculated and compared across these levels to identify developmental and fossilized errors in the learners' recognition and production of English prepositions. The analysis of the students' answers shows that (8) prepositions are fossilized, i.e. the students didn't develop their competence of these prepositions throughout the learning process. As for the production test, i.e. students compositions, (15) Prepositional error types are identified, of which the most frequently made is the wrong selection of prepositions after verbs. Out of fifteen error types, six are identified as developmental and nine as fossilized. The study concludes that most of the students commit fossilized errors mostly in prepositions such as phrasal, compound and participial which show the permanent retention of prepositional errors in their recognition and compositions. As a result some useful recommendations were given to be taken into consideration when teaching prepositions in order to improve the recognition and writing competence of Iraqi EFL Learners concerning the use of English prepositions.

Keywords: EFL: English as a foreign language, EA: error analysis, prep: prepositions fossilized: ceases errors, developmental: gradually diminished errors

INTRODUCTION

The study is mostly based on Error Analysis of a widely tackled subject in English grammar which is Prepositions. Iraqi EFL learners' persistent errors on prepositions make it necessary to continue analyzing learners' corpus to investigate the kinds of errors they may commit and highlight the prominent ones, the reasons behind committing them and the best way for teaching them to eliminate and solve the problems of using prepositions. Brown (2000:218) assures that EA helps attribute learners' errors not only to the interference of learners' first language but to different feasible sources. Selinker (1972) also states that in EA, errors play an important role in describing the learners' language which is referred to as interlanguage. It is agreed therefore that analyzing learners' errors is desirable as it could be a guide for the analyst to understand the nature of the learning process and the problems that may encounter.

When analyzing learners' errors, Richards (1974:172f) indicates that a classification is needed to indicate whether these errors have been gradually developed during the second/foreign language learning process, which are called developmental errors or those errors which have been permanent and stable, which are called fossilized errors. Thus Developmental errors are those which reflect the learners' competence at a particular state, and illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition.

Selinker (1972) was the first one introducing the term "fossilization". He further explains that it refers to "the long term persistence of the non-target-like structures in the interlanguage of non-native speakers." (Selinker and Lakshmanan, 1992:197)

Prepositions are difficult for most Arab EFL learners, among them are Iraqi learners. One of the reasons of such difficulty is the difference in number, meaning and usage of prepositions in the native and foreign languages which make them major problem when used by Arab EFL Learners. This study is designed to identify the problematic uses of prepositions which Iraqi EFL college students may face in their recognition of the uses, meaning and function of prepositions and in writing composition. It focuses on factors which are responsible for the persistent errors in the students' use of prepositions. Hence an attempt is made to analyze types of prepositional errors that are remarkable in the students' uses of prepositions.

The Most Problematic Uses of Prepositions: Sources and Usage:

Prepositions of English language have always been a source of great difficulty for EFL learners regardless of mother tongue. (Celce- Murcia and Larsen (1983:350). Hasan and Abdullah (2011:2) state that although Arabic and English prepositions have some characteristics in common, they differ in both number and usage.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen freeman (ibid) stress that there are nine prepositions most commonly used in English listed alphabetically: at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to and with. In addition, there are many complex prepositions such as: in spite of, opposite to, regardless of, etc. Abbas Hasan (1961: 320) adds that there are only 20 Arabic Prepositions while in English there are 57

prepositions. The most common ones are : min (from), Inda (at), ila (to), ma'aa (with), ala (on), hawali (about).

Furthermore, South states (1996:42) that some prepositions are used under one rule in some cases but differently in others. For example, the preposition (min) is used in Arabic as from , but has many uses in English. It may be used to indicate one's origin (I'm from Iraq) or to indicate the receipt of something (I've got an email from my brother) or distance as in (Is your school far away from your home?). It is also used to refer to "proximity". The mall is near from here. This actually contradicts with English as "near" means "close to" while "from" means "in a direction away". Another example is the use of "min" (from) with a word that means a long period of time. When Arabic speakers translate such a sentence into English, he may say, " I'm sorry, I should have called you from a long time" which is not used as such in English.

Prepositions in English are difficult to master for many reasons. One of the main reasons is that they perform many complex roles. One preposition may express time, space or location, or reason and may be followed by a noun, a verb, an adverb or an adjective. It may also be used idiomatically.

Prepositions may appear in adjunct making the arguments of predicates and they may combine with other parts of speech to express new meaning. Moreover, English has hundreds of phrasal verbs, consisting of a verb and a particle, phrasal verbs are often used with prepositions. They are difficult to master for both native speakers and EFL learners because of their non- compositionality of meaning. Thus among the problematic usages of prepositions is their occurrence with particles, i.e. verb plus a preposition or an adverb which acquire new different meaning from the one it has when it occurs alone. For example, "out" as a preposition means the opposite of " inside" ,but it means "beware" when it occurs as a particle with the verb "look" to have " look out".

Olasehinde (2002: 41) also adds that errors and misuses of language by the students could be attributed to bad teaching and resources. In addition to that, the occurrence of errors includes ignorance, lack of practice and carelessness. Opera (2001:105) considers linguistic interference as a factor which is largely responsible for language misuse and other related errors.

In general, most researchers agree that there are two sources of difficulty which cause problematic uses of preposition to EFL learners. First is the number of meaning each preposition carries. Second, is that most previous methods of teaching encourage students to translate in their mind and this leads to the interference from the native language.

Gethin (1983: 161) as cited in Hasan and Abdullah (2011:1) refers to the problem and errors that EFL learners have with the prepositions. They are highly polysemous and represent an ontological category that is highly conceptual. This problem leads to difficulty among EFL

Learners because they are often confronted with making decision as to which prepositions to use since the conceptual mapping in the mother tongue might be different.

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

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective research is based on Past knowledge and findings come out by previous studies and the review of related literature is a crucial step in any research. Many studies were written in English Prepositions and its problematic uses by EFL learners. Some MA dissertations, research journals and magazines, papers published on web site are reviewed and become source of the collection of relevant literature for the purpose of review of the study.

The research is studied in light of their objectives, procedures, sample of data and findings as far as possible. A brief description of some of the studies on English prepositions is presented below:

Onike (2007) examines in his study the misuse of preposition by the learners of English Language especially under second language learning situations. It focuses on factors responsible on persistent errors in the students' use of prepositions. Attempt is also made to analyze types of prepositional errors observable in students' use of English. The study also shows the students' knowledge and awareness of the rules guiding the use of prepositions of English as a second language. The results' analysis of the study reveals that the use of prepositions after adjective is the most commonly misused prepositions. This is followed by misuse of prepositions after verbs which are next in rank table correlation.

A comparative and contrastive study of prepositions in Arabic and English is conducted by Al Marrani (2009). In his study, Al Marrani tries to analyze the subsystems of the prepositions in Arabic and English in terms of their uses, functions and meanings in order to find out any possible derivations that may characterize the performance of Arabic learners. He concludes that the prepositions in English are more in number whereas they are fewer in Arabic. Also in English there are complex prepositions which may be subdivided into two and three word sequences such as : next to, in front of, by the side of, in place of ... etc. But in Arabic there are no complex prepositions . All prepositions in Arabic are simple prepositions.

Al Shormani (2012) investigates the sources of syntactic Errors in Yemeni learners' English compositions. His study provides empirical data for the most syntactic errors committed by Yemeni Arabic-speaking University Learners of English to account for the psychological strategies the learners make use of in such a phenomenon. In order to find out the reasons behind committing such errors, 50 Yemeni learners were selected randomly from the third

year classes of Ibb University and asked to write argumentative compositions on some topics related to their families and ambitions. A comprehensive error taxonomy based on Jame's (1998) and Al Shormani's (2012) is used to analyze students' errors. The errors are classified into five categories, preposition was the first main category of errors. The prepositions main category is in turn classified into three subcategories: omission, addition and substitution depending on the errors identified in the data.

A simple statistical method of error frequency count is used. As far as Preposition is concerned, the study concludes that L2-influence is the main source for the most frequently occurring type of errors in substitution subcategory then omission then addition. Regarding L1-transfer source of errors, addition constitutes the highest errors then omission then substitution.

Abu Humeid (2013) has done a study where he tries to highlight Iraqi EFL University students' difficulty in using English compound prepositions. He applies a diagnostic test to a sample of 100 Iraqi EFL University students at their third year. In the light of the students' responses, he concludes that the majority of Iraqi EFL University students fail to recognize and produce such prepositions. The students' errors show that they don't realize the functions of such prepositions because they don't elicit their meaning and most books of grammar don't list their meanings or uses. Therefore the researcher uses Hornby (2006) to clarify their meanings. The researcher ascribes the students' errors to factors such as: i) interlingual transfer, ii) intralingual transfer, iii) context of learning and iv) communication strategies.

METHODOLOGY

The 100 participants of the study are Iraqi college students majoring at teaching English as a foreign language at primary and intermediate schools. They are the students of college of basic Education at Diyala University in the academic year 2013/2014 who are randomly selected to represent the four levels of English proficiency. The first group represents lower intermediate i.e. starter level, the second group represents elementary level, the third group represents intermediate and the fourth group represents the advance level of English proficiency. Each student was requested to do recognition and a production tests to investigate the errors they may commit when using English prepositions. After doing a multiple choice test of 20 items including the four most widely used types of prepositions: simple, compound, participial and phrasal prepositions (see appendix A), the students are then requested in another session to write three compositions on three selected topics that may be of interest to college students to write on. These topics are: 1. People attend college or university for many different reasons (for example, new experiences, career preparation, and increased knowledge). Why do you think people attend college or university? Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer. 2. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Parents are the best teachers. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer. 3. If you could change one

important thing about your hometown, what would you change? Use reasons and specific examples to support your answer.

The learners' choices of the correct prepositions in the multiple choice test and their compositions, which are written within a 50 minute class session, are analyzed for errors in the use of prepositions. In order to get reliable and uniform data, the students are asked to write their compositions in about three paragraphs and to write on their own without consulting other friends at the class. The frequency of occurrence of students' prepositional errors are calculated and compared across the four levels to trace which ones are developmental and which ones are fossilized.

After identifying the errors, five general patterns of prepositions are recognized and investigated. This classification of prepositional pattern was used by koosha and Jafarpour (2006) and Jalali and Shojaei (2012) in their study on Iranian EFL learners' of prepositional errors. These patterns include: 1) Noun + preposition (e.g., inclination towards); 2) preposition + noun (e.g., on foot), 3) verb + preposition (e.g., depend on); 4) adjective+ preposition (e.g., interested in) ; 5) preposition+ preposition, i.e. compound preposition (e.g., out of).

Adopting James' (1998) and Al Shorman's (2012) error taxonomy, Prepositional errors committed by EFL learners are divided into three categories: substitution, addition, and omission. In their studies on errors of EFL studies using the same classification of prepositional errors, James (ibid) and Al Shormani (ibid) further define the three categories as follows:

1. Substitution: An incorrect preposition is substituted for a correct one. For example:
 - He was angry *with* me (instead of *at*)
2. Addition: Such error occurs when unnecessary preposition is used in a sentence. For example:
 - He entered *into* the room (an unnecessary *into*)
3. Omission: It's the opposite of the addition kind of error, i.e. a necessary preposition is deleted. For example:
 - They came* Friday (omission of *on*)

The classification of the types of prepositional errors and identification of the most frequently occurring ones are followed by identification of the types of prepositional errors for each proficiency level. Then the types and frequency of these errors are compared across the four levels to find out whether the rate of each prepositional error type significantly decreased or ceased across the four levels, i.e. the decreased are developmental and the ceased ones are fossilized.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In answering to the research first question which addresses the major grammatical errors of Iraqi EFL learners at four levels of language proficiency on using English prepositions

correctly investigated by multiple choice test, Eight uses of prepositions are identified as fossilized since their frequency of occurrence increased or ceased throughout the four levels of English proficiency. The others twelve prepositions are developmental as they decreased gradually from one level to another towards the fourth higher levels of proficiency.

Table -1- Errors committed by participants throughout the four levels of proficiency in the recognition test.

| # | Stage | 1st / 24 | % | 2nd/29 | % | 3rd/22 | % | 4th/25 | % | comment |
|----|------------------------|----------|-----|--------|-----|--------|-----|--------|-----|---------------|
| 1 | on | 7 | 29% | 6 | 21% | 2 | 9% | 3 | 12% | developmental |
| 2 | under | 5 | 21% | 5 | 17% | 1 | 5% | 2 | 8% | developmental |
| 3 | from behind | 8 | 33% | 22 | 76% | 18 | 82% | 20 | 80% | fossilized |
| 4 | behind | 8 | 33% | 6 | 21% | 5 | 23% | 5 | 20% | developmental |
| 5 | by means of | 14 | 58% | 22 | 76% | 15 | 68% | 19 | 76% | fossilized |
| 6 | to direction | 1 | 4% | 3 | 10% | 1 | 5% | 0 | 0% | developmental |
| 7 | into direction | 11 | 46% | 9 | 31% | 8 | 36% | 7 | 28% | developmental |
| 8 | considering | 14 | 58% | 22 | 76% | 15 | 68% | 14 | 56% | fossilized |
| 9 | Around | 6 | 25% | 4 | 14% | 3 | 14% | 3 | 12% | developmental |
| 10 | Between | 5 | 21% | 6 | 21% | 4 | 18% | 3 | 12% | developmental |
| 11 | because of | 5 | 21% | 8 | 28% | 9 | 41% | 7 | 28% | fossilized |
| 12 | fell off | 19 | 79% | 28 | 97% | 16 | 73% | 22 | 88% | fossilized |
| 13 | Across | 11 | 46% | 10 | 34% | 6 | 27% | 5 | 20% | developmental |
| 14 | notwithstanding | 7 | 29% | 15 | 52% | 13 | 59% | 15 | 60% | fossilized |
| 15 | Beside | 4 | 17% | 13 | 45% | 8 | 36% | 4 | 16% | developmental |
| 16 | about + age | 12 | 50% | 14 | 48% | 13 | 59% | 12 | 48% | fossilized |
| 17 | out of | 15 | 63% | 16 | 55% | 11 | 50% | 9 | 36% | developmental |
| 18 | in | 3 | 13% | 9 | 31% | 2 | 9% | 1 | 4% | developmental |
| 19 | Inside | 10 | 42% | 11 | 38% | 5 | 23% | 5 | 20% | developmental |
| 20 | on behalf of | 21 | 88% | 26 | 90% | 20 | 91% | 22 | 88% | fossilized |
| | Total | 186 | | 255 | | 175 | | 178 | | |

8 prepositional errors were fossilized which are: from behind, by means of, because of, fell off, notwithstanding, about + age, on behalf of.

The table below shows the frequency of each error type in each level and its percentage in the students' compositions. As could be seen the majority of students have difficulty in the selection of the correct preposition, especially those following verbs. In other words the most frequently recurring error in the corpus was the wrong selection of prepositions after the verbs. The second research question investigates those prepositional errors which gradually disappeared, i.e. developmental errors, from the learners' recognition test results and in their written composition in the higher levels of proficiency, and those errors which persisted or

remained the same across the four levels of proficiency, i.e. fossilized errors. In other words, if the percentage of each error type decreases from lower level to the advance level, the error is regarded as developmental, but if the percentage of the error type increases or remains almost the same for all of the four levels then the error is categorized as fossilized.

Table- 2. Frequency and Percentage of Each error type in each level of English Proficiency in students' compositions.

| No | Error Type | | Lower Intermediate | | Upper Intermediate | | Intermediate | | Advanced | | Total | | Error type |
|-------|---------------|-------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|------------------|
| | Main Category | Subcategory | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | |
| 1 | Verb + Prep | S | 16 | 41 % | 51 | 52 % | 53 | 55 % | 64 | 56 % | 184 | 21 % | fossilized |
| | | A | 11 | 28 % | 21 | 21 % | 15 | 16 % | 18 | 16 % | 65 | 7 % | |
| | | O | 12 | 31 % | 27 | 27 % | 28 | 29 % | 32 | 28 % | 99 | 11 % | |
| | | Total | 39 | 21 % | 99 | 40 % | 96 | 44 % | 114 | 52 % | 348 | 40 % | |
| 2 | Prep + Noun | S | 22 | 38 % | 23 | 41% | 17 | 44 % | 14 | 45 % | 76 | 9 % | fossilized |
| | | A | 16 | 28 % | 15 | 27 % | 11 | 28 % | 12 | 39 % | 54 | 6 % | |
| | | O | 20 | 34 % | 18 | 32 % | 11 | 28 % | 5 | 16 % | 54 | 6 % | |
| | | Total | 58 | 31 % | 56 | 23 % | 39 | 18 % | 31 | 14 % | 184 | 21 % | |
| 3 | Noun + Prep | S | 16 | 47 % | 23 | 52 % | 18 | 49 % | 15 | 50 % | 72 | 8 % | fossilized |
| | | A | 6 | 18% | 9 | 20 % | 10 | 27 % | 9 | 30 % | 34 | 4 % | |
| | | O | 12 | 35 % | 12 | 27 % | 9 | 24 % | 6 | 20 % | 39 | 4 % | |
| | | Total | 34 | 18 % | 44 | 18 % | 37 | 17 % | 30 | 14 % | 145 | 17 % | |
| 4 | Prep + Prep | S | 14 | 41 % | 12 | 38 % | 12 | 43 % | 9 | 45 % | 47 | 5% | fossilized |
| | | A | 8 | 24 % | 7 | 22 % | 5 | 18 % | 3 | 15 % | 23 | 3 % | |
| | | O | 12 | 35 % | 13 | 41% | 11 | 39 % | 8 | 40 % | 44 | 5 % | |
| | | Total | 34 | 18 % | 32 | 13 % | 28 | 13 % | 20 | 9 % | 114 | 13 % | |
| 5 | Adj. + Prep | S | 8 | 40 % | 5 | 33 % | 8 | 42 % | 11 | 44 % | 32 | 4 % | Develop - mental |
| | | A | 5 | 25 % | 4 | 27 % | 3 | 16% | 2 | 8% | 14 | 2% | |
| | | O | 7 | 35 % | 6 | 40 % | 8 | 42 % | 12 | 48 % | 33 | 4 % | |
| | | Total | 20 | 11 % | 15 | 6 % | 19 | 9 % | 25 | 11% | 79 | 9 % | |
| Total | Total | S | 76 | 41 % | 114 | 46 % | 108 | 49 % | 113 | 51 % | 411 | 47 % | |
| | | A | 46 | 25 % | 56 | 23 % | 44 | 20 % | 44 | 20 % | 190 | 22 % | |
| | | O | 63 | 34 % | 76 | 31 % | 67 | 31 % | 63 | 29 % | 269 | 31 % | |
| | | Total | 172 | 21 % | 246 | 28 % | 219 | 25 % | 220 | 25 % | 870 | 100 % | |

Note: Prep = Preposition, S = Substitution, A = Addition, O = Omission

1.4.3 Categories of the Error types Identified in the learners' Corpus:

1. Verb + Preposition:

This category of error is found to be the highest frequently occurring one. It constitutes (40%) of the total errors. Learners made it when they add an unnecessary preposition, omit a required one or use a wrong preposition after a verb.

Substitution:

This subcategory of error is made when the learners uses wrong preposition after a verb. The source of this error seems to be mainly of L1 effect when the learner transfers his/her knowledge of Arabic language. In addition to L2 effect when learners miss proper knowledge of English language system. For example:

- We go to college to **exchange** our experience **to*** other students. (instead of *with*)
- I can't **put on*** with the current difficult situation. (instead of *up*)
- My parents always **look ahead*** to provide us with better life. (instead of *forward*).

As indicated in table 2, there is a decrease in the percentage of the errors from the starter level towards the other three levels: elementary, intermediate and advance level thus it is regarded fossilized since the error had almost remained the same.

Addition:

learners commit this error when they add an unnecessary preposition after a verb. The major source of this error is the effect of the L1, i.e. Arabic language. For example:

- We can't **stop from*** learning. (Unnecessary *from*).
- My father **gave to ***me his knowledge. (Unnecessary *to*).
- We need to **use from*** our experience to deal with difficulties. (unnecessary *from*).

As it is clear in table 2, the percentage of this error type decreased from 28% in starter level to 21% in the elementary level to 16% in the intermediate to 16% in the Advance level. Since there is a decrease in making the errors throughout the four levels of college study, they are developmentally disappearing.

Omission:

In this error category, the learners delete a required or necessary preposition after the verb. The percentage of errors is found to be almost ceased throughout the four learning stages: 31% at starter level (1st college stage), 27% at elementary level (2nd college stage), 29% at intermediate level (3rd college stage) to 28% at advance level (4th college stage) thus it is fossilized. The developing nature of the interlanguage and the L2 system, i.e. English language may stand behind committing such errors.

- Studying at college helps the students **prepare** \emptyset *the career (omission of *for*)
- I think I prefer to **depend** *my parents than teacher (omission of *on*).
- I can **deal** * issues directly related to students' problems (Omission of *with*).

2. Noun + preposition

The learner here omits a preposition, or uses an unnecessary or wrong preposition after the noun. Such type of errors comes from interlingual and intralingual sources, such as overgeneralization and ignorance of rule restrictions in their occurrence. This category of error comes second of the frequency of occurrence in comparison with other categories as it constitutes (21%) of the total errors. For example:

- We attend **to*** college to get experience. (Unnecessary *to*)
- Parents are the best teachers because they answer **about*** **our questions**.(unnecessary *about*)
- We need to get some knowledge ***our parents** (omission of *from*)

Substitution:

This type of error occurs when learners don't use a correct preposition after a noun. As can be seen in table 2, the students in the four levels made the almost increased rate of error (38%) at starter level, (41%) at elementary level, (44%) at intermediate level and (45%) at advance level which indicates no developments in their learning process, meaning the error is fossilized. For example:

- I have great interest **in*** **study** at college (instead of *to*).
- I wish to become the minster of higher education to get jobs **for** ***all graduates** (instead of *to*).
- I don't feel shy to ask my parents **about** ***more information** I need (instead of *for*).

Addition:

It occurs when the learners use an unnecessary preposition after a noun. Since there is no increase in the percentage of this error subcategory among the four levels of language learning

(28%) at Starter level, (27%) at Elementary level , (28%) at Intermediate level and (39%) at Advance level, therefore the error has not improved towards the advance level of proficiency but has rather remained fossilized. For example:

- By learning at college, we can find **for* ourselves jobs**. (unnecessary *for*)
- My parents can have better ideas **to* than me**. (unnecessary *to*)
- The principle of *** I** carry is finding jobs unemployed people. (unnecessary *of*).

Omission:

Here the learners don't know that a preposition is needed after the noun, therefore they omit it. However, they seem to acquire the knowledge of not deleting necessary preposition later in the learning process. As shown in table 2 there is a slight decrease in the percentage of error type from starter level (34%) to the advance one(16%) indicating that this type of error has developed throughout the four levels of proficiency, thus it is developmental. For example:

- We always need to return* **our parents** to learn from .(omission of *to*)
- I think I can make a change ***my town**.(omission of *in*)
- I wish people in my town learn waiting* **queues**. (omission of *in*)

3. Preposition + Noun:

Just like other error categories, it includes errors such as wrong choice, unnecessary insertion, and omission of a preposition before a noun. This category of errors comes third in its frequency of occurrence among other categories of errors (17%). It stems mainly from L1 negative transfer. Below are some of the examples quoted from the learners' corpus:

Substitution:

It occurs when the learners substitute the right preposition before a noun with incorrect one due to wrong transfer from L1, i.e. Arabic and L2,i.e English because of students' unaware of the English prepositional system. As indicated in table 2, the percentage of this error type has increased from lower level (47%) to the advance level (50%) showing that most of the advanced learners made this error. Therefore it is classified as fossilized. For example:

- Students study* **in the college** to get experience (instead of *at*).
- One of the changes I need to make is make holiday **in* Friday** only. (instead of *on*).
- I always listen **for* their advice**. (instead of *to*).

Addition:

Here the learners add an unnecessary preposition before a noun. As shown in table 2 there is an increase in the percentage of this error type from the lower level (18%) to the advance one (30%). Therefore it is regarded as fossilized. For example:

- Some students study ***in abroad** (unnecessary *in*).
- My father asks **to* me** learn from my mistakes. (unnecessary *to*).
- I always finish my lessons and go **to* home** happy and satisfied. (unnecessary *to*).

Omission:

This error type is made when the student omits a necessary preposition before a noun. As shown in table 3 the percentage of the error had decreased from the lower (35%) to the advance level of language proficiency (20%) thus it has been improved gradually throughout learning process it is hence categorized as developmental. For example:

- When I succeed I can see satisfaction ***my parents** faces.(omission of *on*)
- Without the help *** parents** we couldn't attend ***in college** (omission of *from* and use of *in* instead of *at*).
- My parents say they see themselves ***me** .(omission of *in*)

4) Preposition + Preposition:

This type of error is made when the learners use an unnecessary preposition, omit a required preposition, or use a wrong preposition after another preposition. It comes fourth in it frequency of occurrence among other error categories (13%).The sources behind committing such error could be ascribable to L1 negative transfer, intralingual factors, and the students' lack of attention. For example:

Substitution:

This error type is made when the learners use incorrect preposition after another preposition. The rate of this error seems to almost cease from the lower level of language proficiency(41%) to the higher/advance level (45%) which indicates that the error type is fossilized. For example:

- I always ask for my father's advice up **till *now**.(instead of *to*)
- Teacher in comparison of* **my parents** is more educated and has more experience.(instead of *with*).
- Whatever I learn, I see myself on* **the middle** of the way (instead of *in*)

Addition:

It is made when the learners add an unnecessary preposition after another preposition. Since the errors are reduced from starter level (24%) to (15%) in the advanced level, they are categorized as developmental errors. For example:

- Parents are best teachers **in to* relation** their wide experience in life. (unnecessary *to*)
- In***during the study** in college ,we'll learn new experience.(unnecessary *in*) .

Omission:

In this error category, the learners don't realize that a preposition is needed after another preposition, so they tend to omit the second preposition. As shown in table 2, the percentage of the error has almost remained the same throughout the four levels of learning process (35%) in the lower level to (40%) in the advance level. As a result this category of error is regarded as fossilized. For example:

- **Next*Parents** education, studying at college enrich ones knowledge.(omission of *to*)
- **In spite *his work**, my father is always supportive. (omission of *of*)

4. Adjective + Preposition

This category of errors includes: choosing a wrong preposition, omitting a required preposition and inserting an unnecessary preposition after an adjective. While the source of substitution errors could be attributed to the L1 interference, the addition error to some intralingual factors ; however these factors can't account for the learners' omission errors, but rather learners' unaware of the correct use of preposition, carelessness and lack of attention .For example:

Substitution:

The learners here don't use an appropriate preposition after an adjective. As shown in table 2, there is no decrease in the rate and percentage of this error type (40%) in the starter level, (33%) in the elementary level, (42%) in the intermediate and (44%) in the advance level. Thus it is regarded as fossilized. For example:

- Some are not **interested with*** going to college (instead of *in*).
- Children are dependent **at *their parents** (instead of *on*).
- I am good **in* organizing** people issues. (instead of *at*).

Addition:

This type of errors occurs when the learners follow an adjective with an unnecessary preposition. As shown in table 2, there is decrease in the rate or percentages of this error from the lower level of proficiency (25%) towards the advance one (20%). Accordingly it is categorized as developmental for the improvement in the error towards the upper levels of language proficiency. For example:

- My father feels **enjoyed with*** my success. (unnecessary *with*)
- ... but I always get **confused of *** before I speak to my teacher .
(unnecessary *of*)
- They are **glad with*** me enjoyed the study. (unnecessary *with*)

Omission:

In this category the learners omit a preposition which should occur after the adjective. As indicated in table 2, the percentage or rate of this error almost ceases from the lower level (34%) towards the Ad level (29%). Therefore, this error belongs to the fossilized category. For example:

- I'm **eager** ***rebuild** my hometown (omission of *to*).
- Our parents are **concerned*** our learning. (omission of *about*).
- I am **keen** *doing many good changes in my hometown.(omission of *on*).

The first research question of this study focus on the overall rates and types of English prepositional errors across the four levels of English proficiency at college level. A total number of (870) prepositional errors were found in the data, distributed on 15 error categories. The results show that the largest proportion of error in each category was made in the substitution of an incorrect preposition (47%). Omission errors comes next to substitution errors (31 %) and addition errors were found to be of third occurrence in frequency (22 %). These findings are in line with the previous studies on preposition errors such as Jabbour – Lagocki (1990), Scott and Tucker (1974), Delshad (1980), Tahaine (2009) (as cited in Jalali and Shojaei (2012)) , Al Shormani (2012) and Jalali and Shojaei (2012) who all concluded that ESL/EFL students in general omit or misuse English preposition less than substitution and more than addition.

The most frequent error category in number is the "verb + preposition". It constitutes(40 %) of the total errors. But this result runs counter to the findings of some previous studies such as Jafarpour's (2006) on Persian EFL learners where "verb + preposition" errors recognized as the least problematic area (18.33%). Also Azeez (2005) in his study on Nigerian students concluded that the wrong use of "preposition after an adjective" was the most common error category followed by the misuse of a "preposition after a verb."

In general, the results of the first question indicate that the majority of students have difficulty in the selection of the correct prepositions, especially those preceding a verb. The order of error category from the most frequently occurring one to the least is as follows: the wrong substitution of a preposition after a verb (21%), the omission of a preposition after a verb (11%), the wrong substitution of a preposition after a noun (9%), the wrong substitution of a preposition before a noun (8%), the addition of preposition after a verb (7%), the addition of unnecessary preposition after a noun (6%), the omission of a preposition after a noun (6%), the wrong substitution of a preposition after a preposition (5%), the omission of a preposition after a preposition (5%). While the following four subcategories constitute (4%) of the total errors: the addition of preposition before a noun, the omission of a preposition before a noun, the wrong substitution of a preposition after an adjective, the omission of a preposition after an adjective; the addition of unnecessary preposition after a preposition constitutes (3%) of the

total errors and the addition of a preposition after a preposition comes last in its frequency of occurrence (2%).

The second question of the study deals with the prepositional error which gradually disappeared from students' writing and recognition. (developmental errors) as well as those that persisted across the four levels of proficiency (fossilized errors). Out of 15 error type, only five are developmental (addition of a preposition after a verb, omission of a preposition before a noun, omission of a preposition after a noun, Addition of a preposition after a preposition, and Addition of a preposition after an adjective. The decrease in the percentage of errors at the fourth college stage give indication that some prepositional categories can be learnt at later higher stages of the English proficiency. This actually is supported with some previous studies such as Abu Humeid (2013) who asserts that Iraqi college students learn compound prepositions (preposition + preposition) later in the learning process. Koosha and Jafarpour (2006) in their study on Iranian EFL prepositional problems also stressed that errors related to verb + preposition was learned later in the learning process.

As for the subcategories of preposition error , substitution and omission errors are found to be of the greatest difficulty even for advanced learners, (51%) and (29%) in advance level respectively. This finding goes in line with Tavakoli's finding (2008) that prepositional substitution and omission are difficulty even for advance learners. Nevertheless, these findings are not compatible with some researchers' results cited by Jalali and Shojaei (2012) such as: Henning (1978), Tahaineh (2009), and Koosha and Jafarpour (2006) whose studies concluded that L2 learners' proficiency has a significant impact on his prepositional error.

Regarding recognition test implemented via multiple choice test (see appendix A) out of (20) most common prepositions of the most widely occurring preposition types (simple, phrasal preposition, compound , participial preposition) (8) are fossilized throughout the four levels of language proficiency viz (behind, by means of, because of, fell off, notwithstanding, about , on behalf of). However, (12) prepositions are developmental, i.e. their percentage of occurrence decreased throughout learning process.

The results of the study give a clear image of the most frequently occurring prepositional errors in students recognition and writings. They are supposed to help college teachers of English focus on the fossilized errors of preposition more than the developmental ones throughout learning process. Teachers can spend less time on the developmental errors that will gradually disappear through the stages of language proficiency and focus on the fossilized ones. Syllabus designers, on the other hand, can make use of the study's results in the selection, gradation and sequencing of materials for teaching prepositional items. Test developers can also use more informed choices in test development when they have good knowledge of the most problematic prepositions.

1.5 Pedagogical Implications:

The study helps provide university and school teachers of English with significant insight and pedagogical implications on the area of teaching and learning Prepositions. It stresses the need for more effort, time and attention that should be spent when teaching prepositions since language is rule formulation. Prepositions meaning and use should be taught inductively not deductively so as to elicit rules rather than memorizing them. It is therefore advisable that students should not only be given a list of the commonly used prepositions and idiomatic phrasal prepositions but also the meaning of such prepositions and uses need to be followed by a table of comparisons between their uses in Arabic and English. Then students can be asked to give examples and constitute sentences on each preposition. Later and after ensuring that students have memorized lists of prepositions with their meanings, some useful exercises can be given such as fill in the blanks, matching lists of prepositions with their meanings or showing the location of things in a picture (such as a cell phone, TV set, a book, a pen, a bag ..etc) using prepositions. Since phrasal prepositions are proved to be the most difficult type, lists of the most frequently occurring ones need to be memorized by students after explaining them using charts or pictorial stories highlighting these phrasal prepositions with their meaning. Students also need to practice these prepositions using them in classroom activity adopting thus communicative practice strategy. Moreover, Students also need to differentiate between simple and compound preposition. This is because while one compound prepositions is right in a certain context another one is wrong under no logical reason or interpretation. Add to that and while different prepositions have sometimes similar uses, it is difficult to use compound prepositions correctly simply because most of them have several functions.

University teachers and syllabus designers are advised to design and prescribe remedy material to the most persisting errors, i.e. fossilized errors of preposition as indicated in the study analysis of students errors giving them the priority they need as being more difficult to be learnt than other developmental kinds of prepositions.

CONCLUSIONS

Though many studies were written on English prepositions and their problematic uses to EFL learners, the college students persistent errors in this area of English grammar made the researcher feel the necessity of diagnosing and analyzing these errors in college students compositions and recognition then identifying the most common ones so that English teachers and text designers would be aware of these most problematic uses of prepositions to take the required actions to tackle them properly throughout teaching process.

The study also answers the call of the previous studies on prepositions to research on students' recognition tasks thus it uses multiple choice type of question to achieve this. Add to that it is the first study that follows college students misuses throughout the four college stages of studying English language and majoring at teaching it at Iraqi primary and/or intermediate schools. It helps teachers prioritize their efforts on the retained errors, i.e. fossilized ones

throughout learning process then focus on them to help students learn and practice the most problematic prepositions than the less problematic ones.

The first research question of this study focuses on the overall rates and types of English prepositional errors across the four levels of English proficiency. A total number of (870) prepositional errors were found in the data, distributed on 15 error categories. The results show that the largest proportion of errors in each category is made in the substitution of an incorrect preposition (47%). Omission errors come next to substitution errors (31%) and addition errors are found to be of the third occurrence (22%).

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Appendix
Recognition Test
Types of Prepositions

A. Simple Prepositions

(in, on, at, about, over, under, off, of, for, to etc.)

1. She sat **on** the sofa.
a. in b. at c. on d. by
2. He is going **to** the market.
a. to b. in c. at d. for
3. He fell **off** the ladder.
a. off b. of c. by d. without
4. There is some water **in** the bottle.
a. at b. to c. in d. for
5. She is **about** seven.
a. in b. for c. onto d. about
6. They sat **around** the table.
a. Through b. after c. without d. around
7. The cat was hiding **under** the bed.
a. by b. for c. till d. under

B. Compound prepositions

(without, within, inside, outside, into, beneath, below, behind, between)

8. He fell **into** the river.
a. below b. into c. beneath d. under

9. She sat **between** her kids.
a. within b. below c. between d. off
10. He sat **beside** her.
a. besides b. inside c. within d. between
11. There is nothing **inside** the jar.
a. within b. without c. beneath d. inside
12. The teacher stood **behind** the desk.
a. behind b. into c. by d. till
13. The boy ran **across** the road.
a. for b. across c. onto d. about

C. Double prepositions

(**outside of, out of, from behind, from beneath etc.**)

14. Suddenly he emerged **from behind** the curtain.
a. within b. without c. beneath d. from behind
15. He walked **out of** the compound.
a. out of b. with c. under d. from beneath

D. Participle prepositions

(**concerning, notwithstanding, pending, considering etc.**)

16. There was little chance of success, **notwithstanding** they decided to go ahead.
a. under b. into c. beneath d. notwithstanding
17. You did the job well, **considering** your age and inexperience.
a. about b. considering c. behind d. pending

E. Phrasal prepositions

(**because of, by means of, with regard to, on behalf of, instead of, on account of, in opposition to, for the sake of etc.**)

18. I am standing here **on behalf of** my friends and colleagues.
a. within b. on behalf of c. beneath d. from behind
19. The match was cancelled **because of** the rain.
a. because of b. considering c. off d. with regard to
20. He succeeded **by means of** perseverance.
a. on account of b. about c. considering d. by means of

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