

Investigating Students' Problems in Using Some Confused Prepositions at Tertiary Level (A Case Study of Semester Six Students - Faculty of Arts - Shendi University - Sudan)

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Abstract: In this study the researcher takes the students of semester 6 at the Faculty of Arts who study English as a foreign language at the University of Shendi as a sample to carry out this study. The study attempts to investigate and identify the problems facing them in using the confused prepositions (between, among, beside, besides, by, and with), to identify this problem, and to suggest suitable remedial procedures. A test was given to 33 students who represent the whole class of semester 6 at the faculty of Arts. The test results were analyzed by using (SPSS). The results revealed by the test affirmed that most of students failed to pass the test, while the others scores were very weak. Considering the findings of the study, and in order to participate in solving this problem, the researcher recommends and suggests the following:

- * Confused prepositions should be given more attention when teaching parts of the speech.
- * Prepositions and their activities should be taught as a part of studying writing, as prepositions have a big impact on meaning.
- * Motivating students and raise their awareness about confused prepositions.
- * Curriculum should include enough courses about prepositions.

خلاصة

في هذه الدراسة قام الباحث بأخذ طلاب الفصل الدراسي السادس بكلية الآداب قسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة شندي كعينة للتعرف والتحقق من الصعوبات التي تواجههم في استخدام حروف الجر في اللغة الانجليزية و اقتراح حلول مناسبة. قام الباحث بإعطاء امتحان لعدد 33 طالبا من الطلاب المعنيين بالدراسة و هم كل طلاب الفصل الدراسي السادس. تم تحليل البيانات الخاصة بأداء الطلاب في الامتحان بواسطة نظام (SPSS) الإحصائي. أثبتت النتائج المستخلصة من الامتحان الخاص بالطلاب ضعفهم الشديد في استخدام أدوات الجر في اللغة الانجليزية. و بناءً على النتائج المستخلصة من الدراسة و مساهمة من الباحث في حل هذه المشكلة كانت اهم التوصيات على النحو التالي:

- الاهتمام بتدريس حروف الجر و خاصة تلك التي تمثل التباسا في المعنى
- تضمين مقررات اللغة الانجليزية مقررات و تدريبات كافية لتدريس اجزاء الكلام و رفع الوعي لدى الطلاب بأهميتها

Key concepts: (Preposition, between, among, by, with, beside, besides, confused) -

I. Introduction

Prepositions are one of the eight parts of the speech that show relationships between a noun or a pronoun and another word or words in the sentence.

Prepositions are very important in the writing process. They show the relationship among words and they work together to give a better writing and a good understanding to the reader. So semantically prepositions have a big role in identifying and clearing the meaning.

I have been a believer in the magic of language since, at a very early age, I discovered that some words got me into trouble and others got me out.

—Katherine Dunn, American novelist (1945)

As English is an analytical language, prepositions play a large part in its structure and are the cause of many difficulties to the foreign students. There are numbers of confusing preposition pairs in English which cause some of the most common mistakes in English. This research investigates the difficulties facing the students of English language learners at the University of Shendi, Faculty of Arts Semester 6 about the confused prepositions (among, between, beside, besides, by and with).

1.1 Statement of the problem

The teachers of the English language department have expressed their concerns about the falling standards of the students in English language at the writing level. The exams and the tests done by the college concerning writing skills or any that related to it have shown that the standard of the students is very weak. So much more effort is needed to focus on and to identify these problems as well as to make some remedies that might contribute in solving them.

1.2 Significance of the study

The significance of the research will be of great value to the following:

1. English language teachers at tertiary level.
2. Planners and designers of English language syllabi.
3. Researchers in the area of English language teaching as a foreign language.
4. Students of English as a foreign language.

1.3 Aims of the study

The researcher in this study tries to investigate and identify the problems facing the students of English language at the University of Shendi when using the confused prepositions and eventually recommend ways of remedial work.

1.4 Limits of the study

The study populations are the students of English as a second language at tertiary level, while the sample is limited to **semester six students** of the academic year 2015 – 2016 of English as a second language who study at Shendi University, Faculty of Arts on the prepositions (**among, between, beside, besides, by and with**)

1.5 Methods of the study

The researcher adopts the descriptive analytical method. A test will be given to the students with the aim of collecting the data for the study. The SPSS will be used for data analysis.

II. Definition Of Prepositions

A preposition is a word that shows relationships between words in the sentence. According to Yates J (1999: v), "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." It is worth mentioning that "The word preposition is divided into two syllables pre/position" (Shehata M.2003:214)

2.1 Prepositions and meaning

As English is an analytical language, prepositions play a large part in its structure and are the cause of many difficulties to the foreign student. Yates J (1999) says that many prepositions are also used in expressions where their meaning is entirely different from any of their predictable meanings. Expressions like this do not follow any pattern or logic, and do not allow for substitutions. They must be learned as vocabulary units.

The following different prepositions show the impact of prepositions on meaning by changing different prepositions in one sentence.

- a. The bird flew into the tree
- b. The bird flew near the tree
- c. The bird flew over the tree
- d. The bird flew under the tree

In the above sentences, the preposition shows the relationship between the noun tree and the verb flew by indicating where the bird flew in relation to the tree.

Also this expressed by Yates J 1999 in the following examples with (**After**):

1. We rested after lunch. Means later than
2. The cat is after the mouse. Means in pursuit of
3. He was angry after the way she acted. Means because of
4. This is a painting after Picasso. Means in the style of
5. She worked night after night. Means continuously
6. He has been named after his grandfather. Given the same name of his grand father

This is also very clear in the following table by Yates J (1999) that a preposition in combination with another word may have multiple meaning

Preposition	Meaning
<u>make up</u> your bed	Arrange
<u>make up</u> your face	Paint
<u>make up</u> your mind	Decide
<u>make up</u> a story	Invent/fabricate
<u>make up</u> a list	write down
<u>make up</u> the difference	Equalize
<u>make up</u> last week's homework	do overdue work
<u>make up</u> for lost time	Compensate
<u>make up</u> with your girlfriend	reestablish a relationship

Prepositions sometimes stand for other parts of speech.

1. Preposition as noun e.g.
I want to learn the ins and outs of prepositions
The ups and downs of politics

2. Prepositions as adjectives e.g.
The hospital has only a few in patients.
There is a down side to his idea.

3. Prepositions as verbs e.g.
I heard they were upping the price.

III. Prepositions “by and with”

These two pairs of preposition are very problematic even for native speakers of English language. The interchangeably use of them is the main cause of the mistakes made by many speakers and writers.

I killed the spider **by** hitting it.

I killed the spider **with** a newspaper.

By means before or no later than a specified time.

I'm sorry to be late; I thought the meeting would be finished by 7:30.

The following are some mistakes as stated by T.J. Fitikides1980

1. Don't say: The teacher is angry against him.
2. Say: The teacher is **angry with** him.
1. Don't say: The Mountains are covered by snow.
2. Say: The Mountains are **covered with** snow.
1. Don't say: She has benefited from the change.
2. Say: She has **benefited by** the change.
1. Don't say: He came with the train yesterday.
2. Say: He **came by train** yesterday.

IV. Prepositions “Beside” and “Besides”

Beside means "being next to" e.g.

I was walking down the street with my dog beside me.

Besides means "in addition to or moreover" e.g.

Besides bananas, there were mangos and melon on the table

Beside means 'at the side of' 'close to' e.g.

She sat **beside** her mother.

Beside can also mean 'compared with'.

You are quite tall **beside** your sister.

Also Besides means (as well as) e.g.

Besides physics, we have to study chemistry and mathematics.

Besides can also be used as a discourse marker that meaning 'also' 'as well'. In this case it goes at the beginning of a clause.

It is too late to go out now. **Besides**, it is starting to rain.

V. Prepositions “Among” and “Between

We use **between** to say that somebody or something is between two or more clearly separate objects.

Use **among** when referring to more than two people or things e.g.

Keep this secret among the three of us

Use **between** when referring to two people or things e.g.

We need to keep this secret between you and me.

We use **between** after (**difference**) e.g.

What are the main **differences between** Ali and Hassan?

We use **among** when somebody or something is in a group or a mass of people or things which we do not see separately e.g.

The mother sat **among her small children**.

The father divided his property **among his sons**.

Among can mean 'one of', 'some of' or 'included in'.

Among those present was the Mayor.

The Mississippi is **among** the longest rivers in the world.

(D. Beaumont & C. Granger 1989: 106 & 107)

There is still a superstition among some English people that a sentence must not end with a preposition. They think it is more correct to say:

"**At** what are you looking?" than:

"What are you looking **at**?" (C.E. Eckersley & J.M. Eckersley (1981: 182)

VI. Results and Discussion

The performances of the students on the test were measured according to the following scales:

- 1- **A** = excellent.
- 2- **B** = very good.
- 3- **C** = good.
- 4- **D** = pass
- 5- **F** = failure.

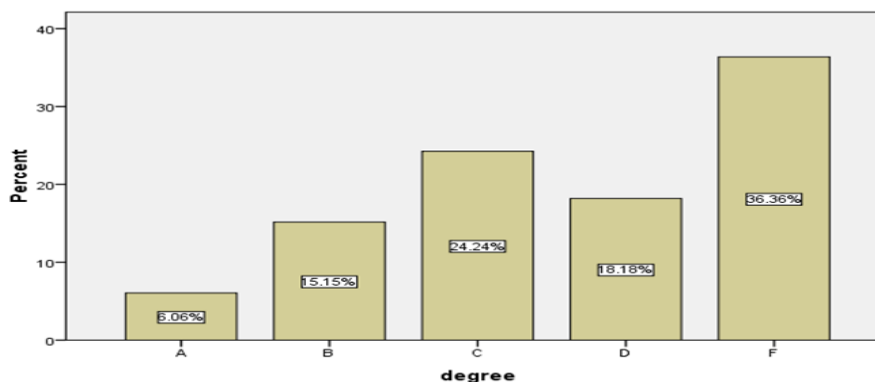
The test given to students was conducted as a part of their prescribed courses work at the university. The students seriously dealt with the test as a part of the semester syllabi not as a study conducted on them. So the results of the test are true and authentic.

Table No. (1) Shows the number of the sample and the distribution of the sex.

	Sex	Frequency	Percent
	Male	13	39.4
	Female	20	60.6
	Total	33	100.0

Table & figure No (2) Show the performance of the students regarding the test.

	Degrees	Frequency	Percent
	A	2	6.1
	B	5	15.2
	C	8	24.2
	D	6	18.2
	F	12	36.4
	Total	33	100.0



According to table and figure (2), it is clear that **only 2** of the students get (**A**), **5** students get (**B**), **8** students get (**C**), **6** students get (**D**) and the majority of them (**36.4%**) failed to pass the test.

VII. Conclusion

The results revealed by the test affirmed that these prepositions are confusing and that they are a challenge to the students of English as a foreign language. The revealed that **only 2** of the students get (A), **5** students get (B), **8** students get (C), **6** students get (D) and the majority of them (**36.4%**) failed to pass the test.

So from all mentioned above we come to the following result as stated by C.E. Eckersley & J.M. Eckersley. (1981: 277) That - Little guidance can be given in any grammar book as to which preposition is the right one to use, for there is no logical reason why one is right in certain contexts and another one is wrong. Idioms - in which prepositions are frequently concerned - are peculiarities of language whose "rightness" or "wrongness" is based on usage, not on logic or etymology. A good dictionary will help, but wide reading with a sharp eye for idiom is the surest teacher.

VIII. Recommendations

Considering the findings of the study, and in order to participate in solving this problem, the researcher recommends and suggests the following:

1. Confused prepositions should be given more attention when teaching prepositions.
2. Prepositions and their activities should be taught as a part of studying writing, as prepositions have a big impact on meaning.
3. Raise the students' their awareness about confused prepositions.
4. Curriculum should include enough courses about prepositions.

References

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10. Appendices

10.1 The test

Choose the suitable preposition from the following list

(By—with—beside—among—besides—between)

- 1-Come and sit _____ me.
- 2- He came _____ train yesterday.
- 3- _____ literature, we have to study philosophy and history.
- 4- We need to keep this secret _____ you and me.
- 5- I was walking down the street and my dog _____ me
- 6- The sweets were divided _____ the two children.
- 7- We found a little house hidden _____ the trees.
- 8-I don't agree _____ you at all about that.
- 9-It is too late to go out now, _____ it is starting to rain
- 10- _____ next Friday I ought to have finished the job.
- 11-I do not like those shoes; _____ they are too expensive.
- 12- Keep this secret _____ the three of us.
- 13- You can see your horse _____ the trees.
- 14- The teacher is angry _____ him.
- 15- He was killed _____ a stone.

10.2 The test with its answers

Choose the suitable preposition from the following list

(By—with—beside—among—besides—between)

- 1-Come and sit beside me.
- 2- He came by train yesterday.
- 3- Besides literature, we have to study philosophy and history.
- 4- We need to keep this secret between you and me.
- 5- I was walking down the street and my dog beside me
- 6- The sweets were divided among the two children.
- 7- We found a little house hidden among the trees.
- 8-I don't agree with you at all about that.
- 9-It is too late to go out now, besides it is starting to rain

- 10- By next Friday I ought to have finished the job.
11- I do not like those shoes; besides they are too expensive.
12- Keep this secret among the three of us.
13- You can see your horse among the trees.
14- The teacher is angry with him.
15- He was killed with a stone