

Problems and Common Mistakes On Prepositions of Place *At, In, and on*

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine someone saying to you “I am going on a long trip.” Do you feel, with a kind of jolt, that the preposition “on” is out of place, and that it would be better and more idiomatic English to say “in long trip” (or “on long trip”) instead? Do you sometimes wonder which preposition to use—should it be “centered around” or “centered on”? Do we “protest about or (against) an injustice, or omit the preposition altogether? Where variants exist, are they equally acceptable, or are some preferable to others, some to be avoided?

These are the kind of questions raised in this paper (Problems and Common mistakes on Prepositions of place *At, In, and On*). It highlights the growing awareness that, to quote one authority, there is “an epidemic of prepositional anarchy around.” The two main causes of this widespread epidemic are uncertainty about standard usage and, less forgivably, indifference to its dictates.

This study examined the misuse of preposition by the learners of English Language (ESL or EFL). It focuses factors responsible for persistent errors in the learners’ use of preposition.

It represents the use of prepositions of place *At, In, On* in a very simple, obvious and interesting way. In this way, it may answer many of questions that come on one’s mind. Are they difficult? When and how can those kinds of prepositions be used? What are the sorts of problems many learners face when trying to use them?

Many problems and common mistakes can happen when a learner of English language is attempting to write or speak something includes those basic prepositions of place mentioned here. This paper shows why such mistakes are repeated persistently and how a learner avoids them to use the correct tiny place prepositions when writing any statement in the future.

Here and out of the simple lines found in this research is an attempt, you can get a benefit from, to remove the ambiguity in using the place prepositions *At, In, On* and for a learner to use them correctly in the future.

A brief and clear explanation you can find in this research helps you to understand what a preposition of place is, and how to employ it correctly in your daily communication. It is as a small guide clarifying the meaning of prepositions generally and the prepositions of place specifically, use and misuse of *At, In, On* and the kind of common mistakes happen when using them and to raise the question " why is a learner of English Language sometimes misusing those prepositions of place ?". Some helpful illustrative examples are important to make our explanation more obvious and understandable. They can be found with each item explained here in this work.

Part one

1.1 What is a preposition ?

A preposition is one of the eight parts of speech. Specifically, a preposition is a connector: its function is to connect a noun or pronoun (called the object of the preposition) to another noun or pronoun in a sentence. It also shows how that noun or pronoun (its object) is related to the other word. Consequently, a preposition can never stand alone: it must always be contained within a phrase (a group of words) called a prepositional phrase. . Prepositional phrases can be made up of a million different words, but they tend to be built the same: a preposition followed by a determiner and an adjective or two, followed by a pronoun or noun (called the object of the preposition). This whole phrase, in turn, takes on a modifying role, acting as an adjective or an adverb, locating something in time and space, modifying a noun, or telling when or where or under what conditions something happened.

Most often, prepositions show relationships of direction, location, and time, but they can also express other relationships as well (for example, the prepositions, *but, except, without, etc.* show a relationship of exclusion). [1.P.v] A word like "in" or "after" is rather meaningless and can not be easily defined in mere words. For instance, when you do try to define a preposition like "in" or "between" or "on," you invariably use your hands to show how something is situated in relationship to something else.

Many prepositions establish a spatial or temporal link between two aspects of a sentence (some do double duty, being used to signify place as well as time: *around, at, before, past, toward, up*). So essentially a preposition is a linking device, constituting the connective tissue of language. Prepositions have sometimes been compared to the mortar that holds together the bricks (nouns, verbs, adjectives) in a building (sentence or paragraph). The sentence "I went the cinema my friend the evening the twenty-fifth" resembles a pile of loose bricks: "When the prepositions are added ('I went *to* the cinema *with* my friend *on* the evening *of* the twenty-fifth') the bricks are fastened together in a meaningful fabric". Clearly, omitting connectives simply leads to "barrenness and confusion".

1.2 Where do prepositions come from ?

Every one of the hundred basic, most common words is Germanic, or at least Anglo-Saxon, in origin. Germanic tribes (Angles, Saxons, Jutes) settled in England in the 5th and 6th centuries bringing with them their own native dialects. English is a name derived from the tribe of the Angles. Otherwise we would be speaking Saxonian or Jutish. Many German and English prepositions are cognate, that is, they reveal common derivation or ancestry: *bei/ by, fuer/for, rund/round, vor/before, seit/since, mit/with, vor/from, ein/in, unter/under*. In modern Danish some are identical (*for, over, under*) and others very close (*efter/after, fra/from, i/in, til/till, af/of and off, ad/at, langs/along*). As a general rule, prepositions (like pronouns, conjunctions, irregular verbs and some crude four-letter words) are of Germanic, Old Norse or Anglo-Saxon lineage. They are therefore among the most ancient and venerable words in the language: aged to perfection, they deserve our respect for both their immaculate pedigree and their sheer longevity. Very few prepositions ever become obsolete. Even those that do, suffering the opprobrium of being regarded as archaic, are still recognizable: *amidst, anenst (alongside of), athwart, betwixt, bove (above), fore, withal*. [2. P. 19]

Table showing how the spelling of prepositions has changed:		
Old English	Middle English	Modern English
onbutan	aboute(n)	about
aefter	efter	after
aet	aet	at
beforan	beforen	before
betweonum	betwenen	between
be/bi	be/bi/by	by
fram	fram	from
ofer	ofer	over
til	untill	until

1.3 How many prepositions are there in English ?

There are about seventy simple prepositions in English. The class of pronouns and the class of conjunctions contain even less, the classes of verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs considerably more. The stock of English prepositions, pronouns and conjunctions is finite: it is extremely unlikely any more will ever be invented. The language is continually adding to its board of verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs, many of which we could well dispense with. As Mark Twain said of the adjective, and Ernest Hemingway of the adverb, "When in doubt, strike it out." On the other hand, the entire corpus of

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prepositions, to which can be added the corpus of pronouns and conjunctions, represents an essential component of the language, a component which was established centuries ago and has hardly changed since. This claim cannot be made of any other class as a whole. [2. P. 17]

1.4 How to use prepositions ?

1. The prepositions usually comes before the noun.
2. Prepositions can be used withal all forms of nouns (e.g. collective nouns, pronouns etc).
3. The rules above do not change and there are no exceptions to the rules. [3. P.xvii]

1.4.1 Commonly used prepositions

above	behind	for	since
about	below	from	to
across	beneath	in	toward
after	beside	inside	through
against	between	into	under
along	beyond	like	until
among	by	near	up
around	down	of	upon
at	during	off	with
before	except	on	within

Let's look at how prepositions show a relationship to a word in the rest of the sentence.

- Jana likes to play on the monkey bars.

“On the monkey bars” is the prepositional phrase. It is a modifier that tells us where Jana

likes to play. It is modifying the verb “to play.”

Examples of Prepositional Phrases:

1. Jane fell on the floor. (direction)
2. He retired after his seventieth birthday. (time)
3. The girl is standing beside her mother. (location)
4. The students finished the English exam within an hour. (time) [4. P.1]

1.5 Can prepositions be placed anywhere ?

Nearly all prepositions can begin a sentence. A preposition can be placed before or after any other preposition, often giving rise to a highly idiomatic expression, e.g. “he knows he is *in for* it now,” “they are not *up to* such a difficult job,” “I don’t feel I am *up for* a long hike.” It can also be situated before or after any verb, any adverb, any adjective, any noun (or gerund). It can be compared to a nomad, a victim of wanderlust or a star soccer player with a roving commission. But it is not completely at liberty to go where it likes: it can come only before an article (a, an, the) and possessive pronouns (him/his, her/her, it/its). It cannot be placed either before or after subject pronouns (I, he,

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she). But it bears repeating that it is quite legitimate to put any preposition you like at the end of any sentence. [2. P. 23]

1.6 Can prepositions be omitted ?

Yes and no. In cases where the meaning of the preposition is taken as implied in the preceding verb, it can be omitted, e.g., “to climb (*up*) the mountain,” “pass (*by*) the forest,” “turn (*round*) the corner.” But sometimes a preposition is inserted where one is not needed (“abdicate *from* the throne,” “catch *on* fire,” “plummet *down*”). In the sentence “Peter Mandelson has no special knowledge or interest in Northern Ireland,” the omitted preposition *of* should be placed after “knowledge”: You cannot have knowledge *in* something, but only knowledge *of* something”. Some verbs can take a preposition or omit it without much change in meaning (e.g., “approve *of* / approve,” “offend *against* / offend,” “repent *of* / repent,” but in some cases the meaning does alter. “To know a suitable candidate” is not the same as “to know *of* a suitable candidate” (the first implying personal acquaintance, the second implying second-hand information). Further examples of semantic change are offered: “We escape detection, injury etc., but we escape *from* prison, custody, etc. We meditate (=purpose) revenge, but meditate *upon* (=consider) the shortness of life. We remark (notice) a person’s conduct, and may remark *upon* (make remarks upon) it. We admit an excuse, but a thing admits *of* excuse.” “*With*” was once regarded as redundant as in “to commiserate *with* someone,” but now most people would never dream of omitting it. [5. P 189]

Part Two

2.1 What is a Preposition of Place ?

Prepositions of place are used to clarify a specific place. Place prepositions are used with all nouns. The preposition usually comes before the noun or the pronoun. The preposition never comes before a verb. They are used to describe the place or position of all types of nouns. It is common for the preposition to be placed before the noun. When we refer to Place prepositions we usually refer to "in", "at" and "on".

2.2 The Basic Prepositions of Place At, In, and On

. **In** - Is usually used to talk about a position within a large area, or something within a large space:

- There's been another forest fire **in** *California*.
- She looked again **in** *her bag* and, to her relief, there were her keys.

On - Is usually used to talk about a position touching a flat surface, or on something we think of as a line such as a road or river:

- Is that a spider **on** *the ceiling*? (Notice we also say '**on** the wall/floor').
- She owns a house **on** *the Swan River*.

At - Is usually used to talk about a place we think of as a point rather than an area, and about an event where there is a group of people:

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- I arriver **at** *New Street Station* at 7.30.
- WE last met **at** *the conference in Italy*.
- WE were waiting **at** *the far end of the room*.
- There were very few people **at** *Joan's party*.

2.3 Potential Difficulties With Prepositions of Place

Is it any wonder that prepositions create such troubles for learners of English language? We say we are **at** the hospital to visit a friend who is **in** the hospital. We lie **in** bed but **on** the couch. We watch a film **at** the theater but **on** television. For native speakers, these little words present little difficulty, but try to learn another language, any other language, and you will quickly discover that prepositions are troublesome wherever you live and learn. Here are some interesting (sometimes troublesome) prepositions. To address all the potential difficulties with prepositions in idiomatic usage would require volumes, and the only way English language learners can begin to master the intricacies of preposition usage is through practice and paying close attention to speech and the written word. Keeping a good dictionary close at hand (to hand?) is an important first step.

Pay attention to the chart below:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• My dream is to play at Wembley Stadium.• Didn't I see you in/at the pool yesterday?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- seen as a point-either seen as within the pool itself, or as a building which is a point in town.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• He lives in Perth.• We stopped in/at Milan, Florence and Pisa on our way to Rome.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- within the city- we use at when we se the cities as points on a journey, and in when we see them as enclosed area where we stayed for some time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They were a great success in/at Edinburgh.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- we can use at when we use a place name instead of an institution or event-here, the Edinburgh Festival; in suggests the city.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• He's in Los Angeles on business.• He's at Manchester studying Linguistics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- staying or living there.- a student at Manchester University
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• She works at Marks and Spencer.• She works in a shoe shop.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- the name of a particular organization.- the kind of place.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I stopped at the shop on the way home.• I was in the bank when in came Sue.• (Notice we say: 'I work on a farm', but 'I work in a factory'.')	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- we use at to talk about buildings such as the dentist's, the supermarket, the bank, school, etc.; we use in to emphasise that we mean <i>inside</i> the building
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I read the paper in the taxi on the way.• I'll probably go on the bus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- for travel using taxi and cars- for travel using bus, coach, plane, or train; but we use in if we want to emphasise <i>inside</i> the bus, etc.

2.4 How At, In, and On Can be Used Instead of Each Others ?

- We usually use *at* before an address and *in* or *on* before the name of a road:

- They've opened an office *at* 28 Lees Roar.

- The church is *in/on* Park Road.

- However, we sometimes use *on* instead of *in* when we talk about long streets or roads:

- The town is *on* the Pacific Highway.

- We can use *at* instead of *in* when we use a street name to refer to an institution in that street:

- There was an important meeting of ministers *at* Downing Street today.

- But notice that we say 'on Wall Street' to mean the financial institution.

Compare:

- I'll meet you *on the corner of the street*.

and

- The lamp was *in the corner of the room*.

PART THREE

3.1 Problem of Preposition Usage

Why are prepositions so difficult to master? Perhaps it is because they perform so many complex roles. In English, prepositions appear in adjuncts, they mark the arguments of predicates, and they combine with other parts of speech to express new meanings. The choice of preposition in an adjunct is largely constrained by its object (in the summer, on Friday, at noon) and the intended meaning (at the beach, on the beach, near the beach, by the beach). Since adjuncts are optional and tend to be flexible in their position in a sentence, the task facing the learner is quite complex. Prepositions are also used to mark the arguments of a predicate. Usually, the predicate is expressed by a verb, but sometimes it takes the form of an adjective (He was fond of beer), a noun (They have a thirst for knowledge), or a nominalization (The child's removal from the classroom). The choice of the preposition as an argument marker depends on the type of argument it marks, the word that fills the argument role, the particular word used as the predicate, and whether the predicate is a nominalization. Even with these constraints, there are still variations in the ways in which arguments can be expressed. [7. P. 23]

3.2 preposition mistakes

The three categories of preposition mistakes which learners face are:

- 1) The use of an incorrect preposition
- 2) The omission of a required preposition
- 3) The inclusion of an unnecessary preposition.

Learners of English tend to have three types of problems with prepositions: Choosing the wrong preposition, omitting a needed preposition, and using a preposition where one is not needed.

Why do learners of English have problems with prepositions? Again, it is a tough question to answer precisely. This is perhaps because they are such small words and frequently have direct equivalents in the mother tongue and the foreign language. As a consequence, the learners tend to think every preposition in their mother tongue and in the target language can be applied in the same way. Unfortunately, this strategy often ends up in a misuse of preposition.

Considering that practically every learner of English engages in multilingual education in a formal setting such as at school and university, it is logical to say that they constantly face the problem of language interference.

3.3 The Misuse of Preposition among English Learners

Interference factor constitutes a problem of usage to most learners of English Language especially in second language learning situation. Some errors are more serious than the others. Both the native English Speaker and the Educated English Speaker can tolerate the second language learner's prepositional errors. It is pointed out that even native speakers sometimes have problems with certain prepositional structures. One of the English Language professors, It is stressed that the correct use of preposition often poses difficulties to the learners. There are not many rules guiding the use of prepositions. In addition the only potent weapon against the problems encountered in their usage is to learn them by rote, different expressions in which prepositions occur separately.

The learners reveal that misuse of preposition is one of the observable errors in the students' use of English in the school. Out of the various uses of prepositions; the use of preposition after adjective is the most commonly misused preposition. This was followed by misuse of preposition after verb which was next in rank table correlation. The respondents were also found to frequently commit error or misuse preposition at the end of questions. The result of the study also shows that students were found to show and demonstrate good knowledge of preposition of place and avoid error of omission of definite articles in the use of preposition.

The overall students' performance in the use of preposition was rated good and this indicates students' good knowledge of prepositional rules. Based on the findings of his study, he hereby concluded that students have good knowledge and effective understanding of the use of preposition. The study were found to show better understanding of the use of preposition of place. The most misused preposition is the use of preposition after adjectives followed by the use of preposition after verbs.

3.4 Prepositions Expressing Relationship in Space

Misusage:

1. *at instead of in:*

- a. I live **at** Jerusalem. / **in** Jerusalem.
- b. The plane is flying **at** the sky./ **in** the sky .
- c. A man and a woman are sitting **at** the garden./ **in** the garden.
- d. Some children ride bicycles **at** the streets./ **in** or on the streets.
- e. I sleep **at** bed./ **in** bed.

We use in to describe the physical location of something as part of a large thing or place.

2. *In:*

- a. We came back **in** home./ came back home.
- b. I visited **in** a zoo./ visited a zoo.

We do not use **in** with *home* and *zoo* in this case

3. *At:*

- a. I came back **at** home./came back home.
 - b. I went **at** home./ I went home.
- at** it is not used with *home* in this case.

4. *in instead of at:*

- a. After school I work **in** the tailor's./ **at** the tailor's.
- b. I must stay **in** the university for 8years./ **at** the university.
- c. I am going to complete my studies **in** the university./ **at** the university.
- d. I sat **in** the table./ **at** the table.
- e. The boys played football **in** the side of the street./ **at** the side of the street.

5. *in instead of on:*

- a. I help my father **in** the farm./**on** the farm.
- b. I can see a boy **in** a donkey./**on** a donkey.
- c. **In** the way to Jericho we saw the Dome of the Rock./ **on** the way.
- d. We saw cars and busses **in** the road./ **on** the road.
- e. We sang **in** the way to the mountains./ **on** the way.

6. *on instead of at:*

- a. The driver stopped **on** the petrol pump./ **at** the petrol pump.
- b. We sat **on** the table./ **at** the table.
- c. We are standing **on** the door of spring./ **at** the door.

7. *on instead of in:*

- a. The bus stopped **on** Jericho./ **in** Jericho.
- b. The old man was **on** the car./ **in** the car.
- c. Some people go to their offices **on** their cars./ **in** their cars.
- d. The people were sitting **on** the sun./ **in** the sun.

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8. *at instead of on:*

- A man is sitting **at** the donkey. / **on** the donkey.
- Some people are sitting **at** the chairs./**on** the chairs.
- There was a glass of lemonade **at** the table./**on** the table.
- The shepherd takes his sheep to feed them **at** the mountains./ **on** or **in** the mountains.
- There is a lot of grass **at** the mountains./ **on** or **in** the mountains.

9. *on:*

- We sat ? the grass./**on** the grass.
- I went ? a trip./ **on** a trip.
- In spring people go ? picnics./**on** or for picnics.
- It was interesting to go ? a trip./ **on** a trip.
- I went ? a picnic on foot./ on a picnic or for.

10. *In:*

- When we arrived ? Jericho we bought fruit and vegetables./ in Jericho.
- I went to pray ? Madina Mosque./ **in** or **at** Al Aqsa Mosque.
- When I arrived ? Jericho I swam in the sea./ arrived in Jericho. [8. P. 83]

3.5 Errors Made by EFL Learners

The errors that learners of EFL(English as Foreign Language) are expected to make are due to several different causes. Among these there are two main ones both of which have been mentioned above (p. 4&5).

The one is caused by interference from the native language and the other is caused by interference from other structures in

English prepositions are difficult for any EFL learner because he/she usually relates them to his /her own MT prepositional system. The difficulty is also caused by the difference in number, meaning and usage of the prepositions in the MT and EF languages. Verbs and other parts of speech play a great role in the omission, addition and selection of a wrong preposition in English, which may affect the whole meaning of the idea intended by the learner. In addition to this, idiomatic usage of English prepositions makes them difficult to learn even by native speakers of the language.

A preposition by definition expresses a relationship between two entities: it indicates a relationship in space (between one object and another), and /or a relationship in time (between events), and /or a more abstract relationship (government). So, the first characteristic is that neither Arabic nor English prepositions can stand by themselves: they get their meanings through their usage in contexts. Arabic ones and to the Arabic system. So, the main problem for these learners lies firstly in the fact that not every Arabic preposition has a definite equivalent in English and vice versa, and, secondly, in that not every

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English or Arabic preposition has a definite usage and meaning, indicating only time or space or following/ preceding a certain word. For example, the Arabic preposition *fii* – ﻓﻲ » is used as an equivalent of “ in, into, at, on, during, within, inside” and also the zero equivalent () in English. This particular preposition has therefore great semantic power in both standard and colloquial Arabic: it is the filter through which all these English equivalents must pass. It is used to denote time and place and occurs with many different Arabic words in abstract and metaphorical usages. Therefore, *fii* – ﻓﻲ » , as well as other Arabic prepositions, interferes in the selection and usage of English ones, as illustrated by the following examples which occurred in the students compositions and the diagnostic test which formed

1. I slept (in) bed. (correct response) (in)
- 2-The plane is flying into the sky. (in)

On the other hand, they may omit necessary prepositions as illustrated by the following examples:

1. When we arrived (in) Jericho.

we bought The other type of errors that occurs with Arab learners as well as with any other group of students learning English as a foreign language, whatever their mother tongue – is caused by the interference of English itself. Note the following example: (1)

1. I came back at home. (?)
the target language.

The first type of error occurs when a learner of a second language carries over the habits of his mother – tongue into the second language. This interlingual interference means that his L1 habits (patterns, systems or rules) interfere or prevent the learner, to some extent, from acquiring the patterns and rules of the second language.

The second type of error is caused by the interference of the L2 itself. This is termed “intralingual interference”.

Some of the errors that are made by learners of an L2 are caused by the structure of the target language and not the mother tongue and are signs of false hypotheses. The learners, in this case, “... try to derive the rules behind the data to which they have been exposed, and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor to the target language” .In other words, they produce deviant or ill- formed sentences by erroneously applying their knowledge of L2 rules and structures to new situations.

1. Pupils learn EFL by using it, not by learning about it.
2. Listening and speaking come first; reading and writing are postponed until some basic grammatical patterns or structures of English are grasped.
3. Arabic is avoided as much as possible: no formal grammar is given and the unit of language is the sentence

3.6 A practical Test on Prepositions Usage

To be aware of the types of problems Arab students, especially in our country, encounter when using English prepositions we made a practical test on upper intermediate learners at Diyala University/ English department.

This test identifies the areas in which errors occur in using prepositions. It can thus help English teachers of Arab students to anticipate those areas in which the students might encounter problems, thereby allowing teachers to help students avoid interference by highlighting the differences between the two languages.

The test was constructed to measure whether students transferred their prepositional knowledge from L1 to L2. This test was made on 80 students and it had 20 items. Each item consisted of a sentence, either with one error in prepositional usage or a blank in the place where a preposition needed. These sentences were gathered mainly from students' writings, with some modifications made to them. Errors in these sentences were categorized into three parts: adding a preposition where it was not needed, dropping a preposition where it was needed, and using the wrong preposition. The distribution we selected reflected the ratio in an error analysis previously conducted on these students. They were asked to circle the error of the sentence, and to put the right preposition in the blank according to the above three categories.

The collected and analyzed data were differentiated according to the following areas of similarities and differences: structures in which the verb in one language takes a preposition and in the other language does not; structures that use a different preposition in the two languages; structures in which more than one preposition in one language was possible in the same place in the other language. Items in each category were analyzed by computing the number of students who scored correctly and the number who did not. The questions the researcher wanted answered were: Did a large number of students know the answer because it was similar to its Arabic equivalent, because they had been previously instructed about it, or because it was frequently used in English? The results of these questions were compared to discover where the transfer from Arabic caused confusion and where it helped.

The result was all students thought the test was a little difficult, and at best had 16 out of the 20 questions correct. In general, they had similar mistakes.

The percentage of errors made by the students was as follows:

- 1- 18.75% error on using at
- 2- 18.21% error on using on
- 3- 14.25% error on using in

The following paragraphs summarize those areas students found difficult and those which they thought easy. They also describe where the native language helped students and where it confused them.

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When verbs that do not take prepositions in the Arabic equivalent, like compete, wait, were used in sentences without prepositions, only a small number of students corrected the errors.

When verbs that use different prepositions in L1 and L2 were in sentences with the corresponding L1 prepositions, 30 percent of the students corrected the errors.

The distinction between at/in or at/on is a special case in this category since in Arabic there is no equivalent for the preposition at, so either in or on is used instead. Therefore, the students were confused when deciding which preposition to use. They were not taught that on is used with the general, in with the less general, and at with the specific. Because both Arabic and English use the expression “in Paris”, 60 students changed at Paris to in Paris. However, when different prepositions are used in both languages, fewer students knew the correct answers. For example, in Arabic in is used instead of on in the following expressions: on the main street. Thirty-five students knew the correct prepositions.

When two prepositions in English are possible, at least 70 percent used the one that is closer to their native language, even if the other possibility is more frequently used in English. For example, in the expression “I study in/at UAE,” 40 students opted for “I study in UAE” even though at is more frequently used in this situation.

30 percent of students used prepositions in places need no prepositions in L2. For example, “I came back at home./came back home. They put at before the word home.

When no preposition is used in English, 30 percent of students used it and they put the one that is closer to Arabic. For example, “I came back at home. / I came back home”. They used at before the word home which is considered as an error in English because there is no need to a preposition in this situation.

3.7 Purpose of the Study and Statement of the Problem

The present study was designed to diagnose and investigate the most common errors in the use of English prepositions and to determine whether a relationship exists between students’ achievement in English at school on the one hand and their achievement in a diagnostic test focused on English prepositions on the other. Specifically, the study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What are the most common errors in prepositions that are committed by the students?
2. Why do the students commit those errors?
3. How can those problems be treated?
4. Does the students’ achievement in a diagnostic test of English prepositions reflect their achievement in English language at school?

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- The plane is flying into the sky. (in)
- I sleep on bed. (in)

Prepositions denoting Space: made due to interference from Arabic:

The prepositions that were included under this category are into, on, under, at, over, to, in and by. They were sub-grouped as follows:

1. Substitution: (incorrect selection)

a. Into, on, under, at, over, to # in:

- 1) The plane is flying into the sky. (in)
- 2) I sleep on bed. (in)
- 3) We sat under the sunshine. (in)
- 4) I am at the third preparatory class. (in)
- 5) The boy sat over the armchair. (in)
- 6) When we arrived to Jericho we bought fruit. (in)

In the first sentence “into” was taken to be equivalent to “in” since both translate as fii – ?» in Arabic (Figure 4.1. above). Correctly, however, “into” is used to indicate movement in the direction and arrival in an enclosed space as in “he jumped (into) the pool”. Since in English the sky is seen as a three – dimensional object that encloses the plane, “in” is the appropriate preposition to use in the first example.

The interference of the Arabic fii – ?» caused the error (Figure 4.2. above). In the second sentence the Arabic ala – F?? caused the use of “on” instead of “in”. In English the bed is not only a three – dimensional object in itself, but also one with covers that form an enclosed space into which one gets. So, “in” is the appropriate preposition. One lies “on” a bed on a hot day, but usually sleeps “in” a bed; that is, under the blankets. “Under” expresses a relationship between two objects where one is beneath the other, but in the third example, “the place we sat in” (i.e. the sunshine) is considered in English to be an enclosed space, so “in” should be used instead of “under”. In Arabic, the adverb tahta – ??? “under” is used with “the sunshine”. Again, we have an example of loan translation.

The class (which indicates either a group of people or a level in their studies) is also taken to be an enclosed space in the fourth sentence (the classroom as a three-dimensional “object”), so “in” should be used and not “at”. “At” indicates a point in relation to an object: “it is used to express the idea of a stationary relationship with an unspecified dimension”. But since “at”, like “in”, is equivalent to fii – ?» an incorrect choice of answer was made. Because of its enclosing arms, the “armchair” in the fifth example forms a kind of container, so “in” is the appropriate preposition to be used. It is the students’ use of translation to Arabic that has led to the misuse of the preposition because one of the meanings of the Arabic ala- F?? is “ over” (Figure 4.3.), which is usually used to express a relationship between two objects where one is above another but does not touch it.



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(2) Probably, had the teachers graphically illustrated the difference between “on” and “over” the students would not have made such an error. In the last example, “in” should be used instead of “to” because Jericho as a city forms an enclosed space. Interference of Arabic *ila-* ف?? , which is equivalent to “to” and is used in the literal translation of this sentence, has led to the incorrect choice.

b. In, on # at:

- 1) I help my father in work. (at)
- 2) We sat on the table to eat lunch. (at)

At” is used to express the idea of a stationary relationship with an unspecified dimension as in “at the table” or “at work”. The literal translation of both examples has led to the use in the one of “ in work” instead of “at work” because these prepositions are equivalent to *fii-* ؟» ; and in the other of “on the table”, instead of “ at the table” because of interference from Colloquial Arabic *ala-* F?? . We never sit on a table to eat lunch. In standard Arabic, however, we use *ila-* F??, which is equivalent to English “to”. However, “to” was not offered among the options in the diagnostic test and so it did not appear.

(3) Interference from Colloquial Arabic.

c. At, in # on:

- 1) I help my father in the farm. (on)
- 2) I help my father at the farm. (on)
- 3) In the way to Jericho we saw the Dome of the Rock. (on)
- 4) At the way to Jericho we saw the Dome of the Rock. (on)
- 5) I saw a football match in the TV (on)
- 6) I saw a football match at the TV (on)
- 7) We went to Jericho in the bus. (on)
- 8) We went to Jericho at the bus. (on)

“On” expresses a relationship in place. “X on Y “indicates that X covers some or the entire actual surfaces of Y or is supported by it or attached to it. It is used in reference to a line “on the way” or a two – dimensional area as “on the farm” also “on the bus” (horizontal) and “on the TV” (vertical).

Thus in English “on” is used with the noun phrases: “the farm”, “ the way”, “ the TV” and “ the bus” , but a literal translation of the sentences indicates that the ubiquitous Arabic preposition *fii - ؟»* would be used in all the above examples. (In numbers 5, 6, 7 and 8, interference is only from Colloquial Arabic). As with time, the single preposition *fii – ؟»* in Arabic is realized in English by three prepositions that express “ place” as illustrated in (Figure 4.4) below: at *fii ô ؟* In on these are again used interchangeably by the students.

3.8 Deletion of a required preposition:

- 1) When we arrived? Jericho we bought fruit. (in)
- 2) We went ? a Journey to the north of Palestine. (on)
- 3) In spring people go ? picnics. (on)

4) It is interesting to go ? a trip. (on)

The omission of “in” and “on” in all the above examples is attributable to MT interference. The lack of a preposition in colloquial Arabic before the noun phrases “ picnic”, “ journey”, and “trip” caused the omission of the preposition in English with the verb “go”. Similarly, the lack of a preposition in Arabic after the verb phrase “ arrive” has led to the omission of the English preposition “in” in the first example.

The Arabic verb “arrive (d)- □ ? » ? “ contains the meaning of a following preposition, which it is possible to omit; the verb then becomes transitive and the prepositional complement becomes a direct object

3.9 Errors with Prepositions denoting Space

This section includes the following prepositions: “at” , “to” , “in” , “of” and “for”, sub-grouped as before:

1. Substitution:

a. At # to:

1) People go on journeys at the Dead Sea. (to)

2) I was pleased to come at school. (to)

“At” is used in both these examples due to false application of L2 patterns. “To” is the preposition that must be used with both “go” and “come” to indicate movement in the direction of a specified place, “the Dead Sea” or “school”.

b. To # at , in:

1) The driver stopped to the petrol pump. (at)

2) I prayed to Al Aqsa Mosque (1). (at)

3) Her mother carried a basket to her hand. (in)

4) I spent my last holiday to Amman. (in)

The use of “to” for “at” in the first two examples is attributable to ignorance of L2 patterns and of the meaning of the preposition “to”. We go “to” a petrol pump or “to” a mosque as this is movement in the direction of a specified place, but we stop “at” a petrol pump and pray “at” Al Aqsa Mosque because these are unspecified static points.

(1) We pray to God and not to the mosque.

In the latter two examples, “to” is used for “in” for the same reason (ignorance of L2 patterns): because “the hand” and “ Amman” are considered to be enclosed spaces and no movement is involved, “in” is to be used and not “to”.

c. On # in , at , of:

1) Some people go to their offices on their cars. (in)

2) I prayed on Al Aqsa Mosque. (at)

3) Some people are sitting at the side on the street. (of)

The use of “on” in the first two examples is attributable to false application of L2 rules. The “car” is an enclosed space, so “in” is the appropriate preposition to use in the first example.

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“At” is to be used in the second example because we can pray at any point in or near the mosque (i.e. at an unspecified static point).

In the third example, the learners did not realize that here “of” is used as a part of the complex preposition “at the side of “ which indicates that the side of the street is a part of the street. Instead, the two were taken separately and the prepositions appropriate to each phrase given. This is again a case of false application of English patterns.

In the last example, “in” should be used instead of “to” because Jericho as a city forms an enclosed space. Interference of Arabic *ila-* ف?? , which is equivalent to “to” and is used in the literal translation of this sentence, has led to the incorrect choice.

b. In, on # at:

At # ?:

1) I came back at home. (?)

2) I went at home happily. (?)

In these two examples, the use of “at” is attributable to over- generalization. The subjects have “borrowed” the well – remembered noun phrase “at home”, learned in one context and applied it incorrectly to other contexts in its entirety. Errors made by “in”, “at” and “to” constitute 54.5% of the errors made in the use of the prepositions that were selected for the analysis.

CONCLUSION

IN this paper we are aim to clarify and explain the way of using the basic prepositions of place at. In, and on. By answering the most common questions that might come on ones mind, concerning with the correct use of those prepositions, we may achieve our aim in removing the ambiguity that covering the use and misuse of prepositions of place at, in, and on.

What might be a fair solution to make the point clearer? Obviously, this is a tough question to answer. Improving our grammar, particularly in relation to the use of prepositions, will certainly be indispensable. Besides, using a comprehensive, appropriate evaluation tool is another wise step to take. The point is that we need to express ourselves semantically and grammatically when writing English. This means we ought to do our utmost to ensure both what we write, namely the content, and how we write, that is the application of standard grammar, should ideally go hand in hand .

The primary attention of this paper is on some common problems engaging the use of prepositions. By the word ‘common’, we mean to say that the problems frequently occur in learners’ writing. In this paper, we aim to (once again) examine and categorize the types of prepositional mistakes and identify the factor causing the problems. Accordingly, it is necessary for us to place our discussion in the context of multilingual education where Indonesian learners of English have direct interaction.

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To sum up, we can reconfirm that there are three major types of preposition problems which learners continue to face. First is the use of an incorrect preposition, second the omission of a required preposition, and third the use of an unnecessary preposition. These preposition problems are said to stem from the interference of the learners' mother tongue. In other words, multilingualism seems to influence learners to produce ungrammatical constructions containing prepositions.

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