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## **IDENTIFYING SEMANTICS DIFFICULTY OF PREPOSITIONS ENCOUNTER STUDENTS IN GOOGLE CLASSROOM**

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### **Abstract:**

In the Google Classroom, as in the actual classroom, a few students can get confused about which preposition should be used correctly for certain conditions. In other words, the semantic usage of each preposition cannot be properly differentiated as it has different use and meaning in phrases. Based on the NewHeadway Intermediate course syllabus, the students were required to understand and be able to correctly use preposition types. This study aims at identifying the difficulty in meanings in using some English prepositions encounter Iraqi students in the Google Classroom. It also focuses on the causes and sources stand behind these difficulties occurring in the Google Classroom. The writer has made an assumption on the basis of this aim to identify the difficulties that Iraqi students face and that will result in confusion. The study adopted a descriptive, analytical and quasi-experimental method. The test is electronic, i.e. google form in the google classroom. The sample of the study consisted of (25) students at University of Baghdad/ College of Science for Women/ Physics Department/third-year students. The main reason for selecting third-year students for the test is that they are studying prepositions as part of their New Headway Intermediate textbook. In this paper, a one-group pre-test-post-test design

was chosen, the test consists of gap-filling with 20 sentences given to one group of participants, which was used to check their understanding skills in choosing the correct some English preposition. The data were analysed by appropriate statistical means and we reached to these findings, the computed value of the t- test (6.257) is higher than the tabulated t- value (2.492) at 24 degree of freedom and (0.01) level of significant, the findings revealed that the majority of the students encounter semantic overlap among meanings and there is a difficulty in using prepositions in the Google classroom. The difficulties caused errors found in the test may be due to a lack of English as a foreign language awareness. The students seem unable to use these English prepositions fluently despite having learned the language for several years.

### **1- Introduction:**

In understanding the meaning of sentences, English prepositions are coherent devices that play an important role. They are essential parts of the sentence form. In the course of learning a native or foreign language, prepositions are a key factor. EFL students face several issues with the proper use of English prepositions.

In teaching and learning within Iraq, this study aims to be of great interest to both students and teachers. Iraqi / Arab learners are likely to use the right English preposition where it has a direct Arabic counterpart. As prepositions play an important role in our daily communication, they can use the incorrect preposition when the English is right in Arabic preposition does not have a direct equivalent. It is more apparent in the translation from the target language of the prepositional and prepositional phrases into our mother tongue.

For ELLs, learning English prepositions is hard. Iraqi learners in Google Classroom find it challenging to correctly use these English prepositions. Students might choose wrong prepositions if there's any form of semantic overlap between these and the right ones. An incorrect preposition can be chosen due to partial position learning. Very occasionally, students can be confused about whether to use it one form or another if all types share a certain type of graphic possibility. In this research, the writer attempted to investigate what are specific reasons for the difficulties students face while using English prepositions to help teachers overcome this issue and then provide suggestions to students in order to correctly use English prepositions.

### **2- Aims:**

Students' difficulties should be carefully examined since they are common and indicate improvement in the language learning process, thus this study aims at identifying the difficulty in meanings in using some English prepositions encounter Iraqi students in the Google Classroom. It also focuses on the causes and sources stand behind these difficulties occurring in the Google Classroom.

### **3- Hypothesis:**

The researcher made an assumption on the basis of the aim to identify the difficulties that Iraqi students face and that will result in confusion, like by mother interference in the language, or misunderstanding within the target language, i. e. English language.

#### 4- What is Preposition?

A preposition is a word or group of words that accompanies a noun (or pronoun) showing the relationship of the noun (or pronoun) to another word in the sentence, i.e. showing location, position, time, or process.

The term preposition utilizes the concept of previous positioning.

It's not fair to assume a preposition necessarily precedes a noun or a pronoun, but most of the time, it does. (A.S. Hornby, 2010: 1195)

Biber et al state that the prepositions are relations which incorporate prepositional sentences. A noun phrase is the most typical complement in prepositional sentence.

They can be taken as tools linking noun sentences to other structures. Many English prepositions relate to case-inflections in other languages. Most familiar prepositions in variable forms are short: about, after, around, at, without, etc. (Biber et al, 1999: 74). Prepositions look pretty short and simple but they have very significant roles.

Prepositions are words that are used with nouns in sentences that include details about time, place, and other relations or connections that include actions and items. (Yule, 2006).

Quirk states that prepositions are structural phrases, and that they almost belong to a language closed-set. The closed-set items belong to a class whose membership is fixed or restricted, i.e. they cannot usually be expanded by additional members being formed. Closed-set items members exhibit an interdependence of meaning and use. (Quirk, 1972: 300)

The words that follow a preposition are called the object of the preposition. For examples:

- The cat ran under the car.

(The words the car are the object of the preposition under.)

- Can you give this parcel to him tomorrow?

(The word him is the object of the preposition to.)

#### 4-1 Kinds of Prepositions

Stageberge, (1971: 155) stated that English has a set of prepositions, most common English prepositions are simple; they consist of one word only, such as: at, in, and for. Simple prepositions are short or small words expressing relationships, including space, time, and degree relations. Many prepositions are more than one word, which they called complex.

A/ One- syllable prepositions, such as: by, of, with, on, to, and with, are the most commonly used preparations. Sometimes these one- syllable prepositions have low stress.

B/ There are a variety of two-syllable prepositions, such as: about, above, after, against, within; above, behind, below, below, in, beyond; despite, excluding, in, out. (Stageberge, 1971: 155)

C/ -ing Prepositions, this Prepositions category has a verb as a stem. The most common use is: assuming, starting, during, barring, concerning, considering, continuing, including, involving, successfully. (Stageberge, 1971: 155)

Richard Nordquist (2019: n.d)A complex preposition is a collection of terms that functions as a simple preposition (such as "apart from" or "by means of"). Complex preposition is subdivided into types:

A/ Two word prepositions Complex preposition can be divided into two-word sequences, the first word (usually fairly stressed) is an adverb, adjective or conjunction, and the second word is a basic preposition (usually from, to, with, or to). For example: according to, ahead of, along with, apart from, as for. <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-complex-preposition-1689896>

B/ Three word prepositions Three-word sequences are type of complex prepositions which are combinations of three words acting as a single unit. Three-word prepositions usually have the following pattern:

Simple Preposition + Noun + Simple Preposition

For example: by means of, by virtue of, by way of, for lack of, in accordance with, in addition to, in back of, on behalf of.<http://www.schrijven.ugent.be/node/102>

According to M. Ponmani& S. Mekala (2015)Prepositions can be grouped according to their functions as follows:

1. Prepositions of Time – in, on, at, etc.
2. Prepositions of Place – in, on, at, etc.
3. Prepositions of Direction – to, towards, through, etc.
4. Prepositions of Agent – by, with, etc.
5. Prepositions of Instrument – by, with, on, etc.
6. Prepositional Phrase – listen to, look at, consist of, etc.

#### 4-2 Prepositions with Nouns, Adjectives, and Verbs

(A. Wallwork: 2013) mentioned that prepositions are often followed by other words which they have syntactically become one word. This takes place in three categories: nouns, adjectives, and verbs.

a) Nouns and Prepositions: Some nouns have specific prepositions which normally follow them. For example:

##### Nouns

age, attempt, point  
Concern, desire, need, reason, responsibility  
Participation, success, changes, differences, increase  
inquiry, investigation, research  
Approval, awareness, cause, example, way  
approach, reaction, response

##### preposition

At  
For  
In  
Into  
Of  
To

b) Adjectives and Prepositions: many adjectives can come with prepositions (adjective + preposition) this combination can be followed by gerunds. For example: afraid of, angry at, aware of, capable of, familiar with, proud of.

#### 4-3 Semantics of Prepositions

Preposition as a term is seen from different viewpoints by linguists. The English preposition is regarded as a word or phrase that joins with a noun or pronoun to build a phrase. Some researches indicate that prepositions are not restricted to the meaning expressed by nouns; instead, they go beyond such as the meanings expressed by adverbs and adjectives like wh-questions: how, where, when, why, who, among others. (Alwan and Yusof 2010: 32). Considerable attempts have been made to study spatial prepositions in particular based on a cognitive approach, not only in English but in many Indo-European languages as well. (Tyler and Evans 2003; Evans and Chilton 2009), All of these studies include a thorough analysis of such prepositions which attempt to create a methodological motivated account for their polysemy repertoire.

The preposition is characterized from a semantical point of view by lack of lexical material and for inherited prepositions super abstract. (Girju, 2008: 191)

Some of the most critical parts in explaining how two entities interact in spatial terms are prepositions. Also, there are many distinct differences in sense within a preposition that are communicated. For instance, the word under could refer to a ball sitting under a table or a river flowing under a bridge, two uses that convey very distinct spatial and temporal results. (McKinney, Veronica, 2018: 2)

Semantics is the linguistics branch which deals with the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. An important part of language studies is the comprehension of the various meanings of individual words. Two people can say the same word, and they can interpret it differently. Semantics means the meaning and perception of words, signs and the form of sentences, semantics may also refer to the language-related and linguistics branch of research, and how we interpret meaning. People can perceive words entirely differently, and draw various interpretations from them. Semantics play a significant role in our everyday life, interpreting and improving languages without us even realizing it. <https://examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-semantics.html>

In 'semantics' meaning is defined solely as the property of expressions in a certain language, regardless of specific circumstances in relation to speakers and listeners. Consequently, in 'semantics' sense does not require an interpretation of a sentence in context in terms of meanings, presuppositions and speech actions. (Leech; 1983: 5)

According to Girju, (2008: 192) , a specific semantic relations, the more abstract the type, the more significant the sentences are protected, but also the greater the variety as to which phrase category must be allocated to. Lauer (1995), for example, categorizes the head-to - head relationship modifier nouns in a noun – noun compound by repeatedly using a collection of eight prepositions used: of, for, with, in, on, at, about, and from.

The importance of prepositions is expressed in the English language definition as a "prepositional language" (Hofmann, 1993, p. 159) but according to Saint-Dizier (2006), prepositions are not meaningless units, which are used only for the purpose of continuity of sentences. One of the research's basic objectives is to show that prepositions represent distinguishing elements; he says that prepositions can be used as a group of lexicons. It is because they have style constraints on their statements, assign them thematic positions and have a semantic content.

Seongha. (2004: 408) mentioned that researchers analyse historical evidence from the viewpoint of grammaticalization grammaticalized marker origins, after the synchronic polysemous the lexical semantic structures reflect the diachronic creation of the meanings of words. Grammatical significances of prepositions depend on their initial spatial definitions were also considered linkable back to. What is readily apparent in an investigation of English prepositions is this main source of position surfaces. The concept of position is linked directly to topology, direction, distance and motion. Seongha. (2004: 409)

As is also obvious from a cursory look at the English inventory prepositions, motion is also among the most prominent sources. As Lakoff (1987: 275) stated:

"Every time we move anywhere there is a place we start from, a place we wind up at, a sequence of contiguous locations connecting the starting and ending points, and a direction."

The cognitivists' position regarding the prepositions is largely that space is a primitive semantics about which preposition studies should also be based. So dealing directly distinguished status to space that includes position and time. Historical texts drawing on, Seongha (2004: 409).

Nagucka (1999, pp. 80-82) says, there is an example textual support of prepositional uses of English that the idea of time is intrinsic in spatial reality and adds that in historical data, since both can use the same lexical preposition the sense of prepositional object is spatial and temporal relationships that makes that sentence semantically clear.

**Significance of preposition:** coverage of the syntactic reflex and semantic relation.

The primary reason why many semantic relationships are not to be identified between prepositional meanings is that preposition encodes only a small segment of all semantic relationships. The wealth of English is represented in the verbs, each of which also constitutes a semantic relationship between the subject and the object. Prepositions have the sense to add to an expression. This meaning is also closely linked to other words' meanings. Semantics refers to the sense of words and sentences that are known to be ordered word combinations. It is to be differentiated from pragmatics that means the way the individual uses the words intended. A semantic error is a breach of the law of a natural language or a programming language.

"Preposition meaning: syntactic reflex and semantic relation coverage"

Posted in August 18, 2009 <https://www.clres.com/blog/?p=53>

#### 4-4 The Difficulty of Prepositions

English language learners all over the world, and particularly in Arab countries, face serious challenges in mastering English prepositions.

In comparison, Arabic prepositions are Simple prepositions made from only one word most commonly, such as fii 'in', ilaa 'to' etc. The difficulty seen in obtaining English prepositions can

all lead to all these factors. For example, when comparing English with Arabic prepositions, it is noted that certain English prepositions are morphologically complex, formed from apart from, which is categorized as compound prepositions or by means of, which is known as phrasal prepositions, two or more words. (Alotaibi, A. M., Wu, S., & Alrabah, S. 2018: 518). Another reason of difficulty is that prepositions in English are much in number than in Arabic. In English, there are over a hundred prepositions, causing learning the meanings of such a large number of prepositions a challenging task. (AlQbailat et al., 2016: 2)

The acquisition of a preposition in English is particularly difficult for learning English as a second language as a student. It explains briefly how prepositions are used in English, creating an issue for English language learners for a variety of reasons.

The use of prepositions is one of the difficult aspects of English for non-native speakers. It is difficult to learn how to use a proper preposition in a foreign language.

The confusion is caused by the learner's mother tongue interfering, which is referred to as a negative switch. Since the students' L1 use of such prepositions differs from that of the English language, several forms of errors may be due to the influence of L1, i.e. Arabic language.

The difficulty is sometimes because of the target language. When a learner is having difficulty with the target language, he or she makes this sort of mistake.

Other factors, such as a social situation, cultural interference, a textbook, and a teacher, play a big role.

## **5- What is Google Classroom?**

Google Classroom was introduced to the Google Suite as an educational device for academic purposes. Google Classroom is a hybrid online learning platform for educational institutions providers, carrying out routine paperless development, delivery and grading of assignments, testing and other class content. Google Drive are examples of the development and delivery, Google Docs, Sheets, Forms and Google Slides can be used for various writing and community sharing, Gmail account can be used for correspondence and Google Calendar can be used for scheduling purposes. A recent addition to the Google Suite, Google Classroom is. Google Classroom is useful for basic and general features and provides users with enough to get begin. They will expand upon the courses and material later on. It's functional, with lots of truly useful features for teachers and students, which could potentially help cut down on paper used in universities. (Amandeep Kaur and EmreErturk, 2017)

One of the problems occur in learning in Google classroom is that account management is difficult. Access to Google Classroom is not permitted from multiple domains.

According to the teachers, we have so many tasks to carry at the same time, also there is a lack of collaboration, empathy, and encouragement among students via google classroom.

### **5-1 Experience of Users**

It is easy to access and manage Google Classroom from computer, phone or laptop and has the Normal basic Google layout. Teachers can create a classroom, choose students to invite and share resources, post videos and add links by clicking a few buttons. Under the create tab, a simple menu lets you choose whether to create tasks, questions, fast quizzes or share resources. The student platform is similar to the teachers. Students receive a code from the invitation of the



teacher and can see the class work on the class page along with the due dates. (Raquel Ribeiro 2019)<https://thedigitalteacher.com/reviews/google-classroom#profile>

## 5-2 English Language Learning

A very beneficial Google classroom function is that it helps students to go over their work after uploading it. Teachers will obtain updates on reworks from students or notes from students on something they find difficult to find. This means you can provide personalised attention to those students who need it and provide them more chances to demonstrate their learning, operating at a speed that is right for them. The Class Stream feature enables learners to focus on what they have learned in class or in online discussions together. In the classroom, students cannot communicate with each other privately; the Stream function is the only way students can communicate with each other.

The Class Stream purpose can also allow students to practice the use of language during and outside class. Beyond only reading teacher updates, teachers can promote more active student engagement—for example, if a student misspells a phrase, the teacher can ask them to remove the comment and post a new one with the correction. Students should be motivated to feel responsible for their posts in this way, because anything they post is visible to the entire classroom. (Raquel Ribeiro 2019)<https://thedigitalteacher.com/reviews/google-classroom#profile>  
We have received a few criticisms from students that they have some difficulties and troubles for using google classroom

## 6- Previous Studies:

Jewad, M. R. (2014) describes in her research some problematic uses of English prepositions in the recognition and development of English prepositions by Iraqi EFL college students, i.e. their compositions and recognition at four levels of proficiency. Her research is primarily focused on an error analysis of a commonly discussed topic in English grammar, namely prepositions. In her study, she examines four groups of students who are chosen at random to show the four levels of English ability. To examine the errors they could make when using English prepositions, each student was asked to take a recognition and output test. After completing a 20-item multiple-choice test covering the four most common forms of prepositions: simple, compound, participial, and phrasal prepositions, students are asked to compose three compositions on three different topics that may be of interest to college students. The results show that the substitution of an incorrect preposition causes the greatest number of errors in each category (47 percent). Omission errors are followed by substitution errors (31%), and addition errors are found to be the third most common (22 percent).

Saed & Yassin, (2017) also studied the difficulties that Arab English language learners (ELLs) face at the university level with English prepositions. It seeks to examine the factors that contribute to these issues and to facilitate EFL teachers in developing effective teaching methods for teaching English prepositions. With undergraduate EFL students at one of Jordan's private universities, a pretest-posttest and formal-informal interviews were performed. The comparison of undergraduate EFL parts with pretest and posttest results, as well as related issues, are the focus of this research paper. Change is typically calculated in dependent variables such as the percentage of committed errors when dealing with English prepositions in research that is concerned with the difficulties of learning English prepositions. The assessment of change is a



tool for evaluating the influence of successful teaching methods in Jordanian EFL classrooms. The research shows that teaching Arab ELLs using preposition collocation is more effective than teaching prepositions separately.

## **7- Methods:**

A diagnostic test was designed in this study to test the competence of the students in using some prepositions in English.

### **7-1 Population & Sample**

Participants in the current study were (25) university students studying at the College of Science for Women, University of Baghdad, Iraq. They were almost in the same age group. The participants have a common English background, and the Arabic language is their mother tongue.

### **7-2 Tool**

To collect the data from the students, the present study used a one-group pre-test–post-test design. The test is electronic, i.e. google form in the google classroom. The test consists of gap-filling with 20 sentences. Grabe (2009) suggests that in assessing the awareness of certain target language constructs such as prepositions, the gap-filling question is a useful type of question. From several grammar books, the 20 gap-filling questions were chosen. Students were asked to write an appropriate preposition in the gaps (to/of/up/on/off/ for/ with/out).

## **8- The Test**

The gap-filling test consists of 20 sentences. The test is electronic, i.e. google form in the google classroom. A one-group pre-test–post-test design was chosen. The 20 gap-filling questions were chosen from a variety of grammar books. The participants were told to fill in the gaps with an appropriate preposition in a google form.

## **9- Results and Recommendations:**

### **9-1 The Results**

The results collected from responses in google forms indicated that the Iraqi students face so many difficulties in identifying meanings of prepositions and that will result in confusion, and choose error prepositions in the electronic test. The students seem unable to use these English prepositions fluently despite having learned the language for several years.

Semantics implication of prepositions is more difficult than other parts of sentences for Iraqi students as the semantics meaning includes different ideas, background knowledge, and deep meaning.

**Table (1) Paired Sample pre-test–post-testfor Finding the Differences between the Students’ Responses to the uses of some prepositions in google form.**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	Calculated T- value	Tabulated T- value	Sig. 0.01
<b>Pre-test</b>	25	2.48	1.981	24	6.257	2.492	significant
<b>Post-test</b>	25						

The data were analysed by appropriate statistical means and we reached to these findings, the computed value of the t- test (6.257) is higher than the tabulated t- value (2.492) at 24 degree of freedom and (0.01) level of significant, as shown in the table (1) above.

What has been clear from the statistical results of the test is that most students answer better in the post-test as the table(1) was shown.

Part of the problem that students faced in the test may be due to a lack of English as a foreign language awareness, also students face trouble in analysing the semantics meanings due to the lack of specific meanings of these prepositions, and identifying what is meant by semantics uses of prepositions.

Also the high amount of meanings and flexibility that these English prepositions present in understanding and interpretation as the students’ information about these meanings is limited.

The students seem unable to use these English prepositions fluently despite having learned the language for several years

**9-1-1 Recommendations**

There are a lot of exercises needed to help English language learners understand the meanings of prepositions.

Students should always be aware of the variations between the principles of their mother tongue and those of the target language, as well as the fact that languages are not the same.

The researcher suggests for further researchers to develop the analysis which made in this study to handle the semantic meanings of prepositions.

**9-2 Conclusions**

This research was an attempt to identify semantics difficulty of some prepositions. To sum up, some of English prepositions which might have confusion in their meanings with regard to students have been examined in which they occurred in the gap-filling test. There are many reasons encounter students, like be affected by mother interference in the language, or misunderstanding within the target language, i. e. English language, difficulties occurring in the Google Classroom also as online learning is not easy.

The difficulties caused errors found in the test may be due to a lack of English as a foreign language awareness, also students face trouble in analysing the semantics meanings due to the lack of specific meanings of these prepositions, and identifying what is meant by semantics uses of prepositions. The students seem unable to use these English prepositions fluently despite having learned the language for several years

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### Appendix (the research instrument)

Fill in the blanks with the appropriate preposition:

(to/ of/up/on/ off/ for/ with/ out)

1. Please arrange \_\_\_\_\_ this document to be translated into English.
2. The manager agreed \_\_\_\_\_ the recommendation submitted by the working group.
3. Your data do not agree \_\_\_\_\_ our results.
4. Before you decide on where to go for your vacation, it may be relevant to compare Paris \_\_\_\_\_ Madrid.
5. We will arrange \_\_\_\_\_ a celebration. John prepared for it.
6. I really hope this new therapist can cure me \_\_\_\_\_ my compulsive behaviours.
7. I've always gotten on \_\_\_\_\_ Amanda—I think she's very nice.
8. I'm looking forward \_\_\_\_\_ visiting my family this Christmas.
9. Hey, don't cut me \_\_\_\_\_ I'm not done my story.
10. Oh no, the lights have gone \_\_\_\_\_ again.
11. I looked \_\_\_\_\_ the word in the dictionary.
12. He took \_\_\_\_\_ golf when he retired.
13. Please, turn \_\_\_\_\_ the lights, I can't see anything.

14. According \_\_\_\_\_ Alia, it was the first time they had met.
15. Air is composed mainly \_\_\_\_\_ nitrogen and oxygen.
16. My fiancé used to call me \_\_\_\_\_ in the middle of the night.
17. We pray \_\_\_\_\_ those with broken or troubled homes.
18. I had no roadmaps, and I had a bad sense of direction to begin \_\_\_\_\_.
19. I say to myself that whatever he comes up \_\_\_\_\_, I must try to trust his instincts.
20. Breakfast consisted \_\_\_\_\_ cereal, fruit, and orange juice.