

ERRORS IN THE USAGE OF ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS PRODUCED BY COLLEGE STUDENTS IN YOGYAKARTA

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Abstract

Errors are very natural and even become an important part of learning (Davies, 2000:105). Therefore, there are many scientists who analyze errors to achieve better understanding on how students learn language. Based on the importance of conducting error analysis, this research is developed to analyze errors in the usage of English prepositions as there are still limited number of people who analyze this topic. The data used are utterances produced by third year college students majoring in English. All of the students' utterances are obtained through interview. The data obtained was then transcribed and analyzed by applying a theory of preposition stated by Collins (1991). The results show that there are 15 prepositions which are used incorrectly in the students' utterances such as *about, among, as, at, because of, by, during, for, from, in, of, on, through, to, and with*.

Keywords: errors, English prepositions, college students in Yogyakarta

Introduction

Errors are something that usually occur in the language learning process. We experienced it when we were young and even when we learn English as foreign language. We can also witness it when we observe the people around us: children in our neighborhood, our siblings, or even our friends. Davies (2000:105) also stated that it is necessary part of learning and the errors made by children and learners of English as a foreign language are very similar. Thus, by analyzing errors, scientists will be able to obtain some information that can be used to reveal students' learning processes (Johnson:2001, 59).

Before we go further, it is important to differentiate between errors and mistakes to avoid some misunderstandings. Errors are slightly different from mistakes because it is caused by the lack of knowledge (Ellis, 2008: 48). People will tend to be unconscious of the errors they have made. Therefore, they tend to produce it continuously. One type of error frequently made by English language learners are grammatical errors, including the use of prepositions such as 'in', 'on', and 'at' to describe adverbs of time and place.

Even though it looks simple, prepositions hold important roles as vital markers to the structure of a sentence such as marking

special relationships between persons, objects, and locations (Simpson: 2014). Curme (1925) also stated that preposition shows the relationship between noun or pronoun and a verb, an adjective, or another noun or pronoun. As English language learners, students need to know how to construct a correct sentence, including how to apply prepositions in it. Based on their importance, errors analysis on the usage of English prepositions needs to be done. The results obtained can give us a better understanding on how often people make errors, especially in the usage of English prepositions.

There are several scientists interested in analyzing errors made by foreign language learners. Amrina (2014) and Wulandari (2015) analyzed grammatical errors in general and the usage of prepositions was one among various errors produced by English language learners. Amrina (2014) analyzed bilingual students in Junior High and Wulandari used college students as her data source. Slightly different from the previous researchers, Giatik (2016) and Utari (2017) focuses their research on analyzing the usage of English prepositions. Giatik (2016) analyzes the descriptive writing of Senior High School students and found out that there are 3 types

of errors: misordering (53%), omission (31.1%), and insertion (11.7%). Meanwhile, Utari (2017) analyzes narrative writing of High School Students and also found 3 types of errors: selection (50.43%), insertion (26.08%), and omission (23.47%). When we try to compare the two results, we can see that even though both of them have 3 types of errors, the percentage of errors is different.

The research mentioned above still has several gaps. First, the findings were discussed briefly. Most of the research mentioned above used secondary school students (Junior high school students as well as senior high school students) as their data sources. Those who analyse college students are still limited in number. Therefore, this study aims to figure out errors in the usage of prepositions produced by college students by analyzing their utterances. It means that the data is in the form of oral data.

Methodology

This research analyzes errors in the usage of English prepositions uttered by college students in Yogyakarta. This decision was made because most of the previous researches used secondary school students as their data sources. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. It means that the sample was chosen based on certain characteristics to achieve the goal of the research (Hadi, 2004: 186). Based on this technique, there are several characteristics used by the researcher to choose the research samples. First, the samples were college students who study English language including those from English Literature, English education, and English Language in Vocational School. Second, the students chosen were those who had experience in joining some activities which allowed them to use English language regularly outside of class such as teaching, translating, debating, and so on. Third, the students chosen were third year students. Therefore, they already passed 2 years of learning in college. During those 2 years, they were already exposed to English Language intensively (oral and written form). It will automatically increase the students' ability in

speaking the language and make it easier for the researchers to obtain the oral data.

There were 12 students chosen from 3 universities in Yogyakarta. Those universities are Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY), and STBA LIA that were chosen by applying purposive sampling with some characteristics. First, they are close to the researcher. Second, they are easy to access, especially in terms of permission.

The data collection was done through interview method (Sudaryanto, 1988:7) by using questions with certain topics such as students' activities, vacations, and cultures. The type of questions required students to use prepositions various prepositions such as questions related to place, time, comparison, and so on.

The next phase was analyzing the data. However, before the data obtained was analyzed, the audio file needed to be transcribed first. After that, the errors made by those students were revised except for the preposition errors. It was done to make the utterances easier to be analyzed.

To ensure that the words analyzed are in fact categorized as prepositions, the researcher followed characteristics of prepositions stated by Collins (1991). First, prepositions are usually part of adjunct which tend to come after a verb, especially intransitive verbs. Second, they come after linking verbs; and they can also appear after a noun to describe it.

After that, those utterances were analyzed by using a theory of prepositions stated by Collins (1991). According to Collins (1991), there are 124 prepositions in English but only 23 prepositions were found in the students' utterances including *about*, *after*, *among*, *around*, *as*, *at*, *because of*, *before*, *between*, *by*, *during*, *for*, *from*, *in*, *like*, *near*, *of*, *on*, *since*, *through*, *to*, *until*, and *with*. The utterances were analyzed based on the prepositions' meaning and uses.

The errors found were coded to make it easier for the researcher to conduct the analysis. The name of Universities were coded with the letters L, U, and UN as a

shorthand respectively for LIA, UGM, and UNY. Then the each student from every university was coded with number 1, 2, 3, 4 and the errors produced by each student was coded with the letters A, B, C, D, E, and so on.

After the errors were found, they were grouped according to their type of prepositions by using tables. After that, frequency and distribution were made by applying the following formula:

$$\text{Frequency} = \frac{\text{The number of errors of a particular preposition}}{\text{The total number of errors occurred}} \times 100$$

The result of the data analysis will be presented by describing the English prepositions which are used incorrectly by the students. Each type of prepositions will be described based on the correct usage and its meaning. Examples of the errors in each prepositions are also written to support the descriptions.

Findings and Discussion

The result shows that there are 15 prepositions used incorrectly by the students such as *about*, *among*, *as*, *at*, *because of*, *by*, *during*, *for*, *from*, *in*, *of*, *on*, *through*, *to*, and *with*. Those errors will be discussed further as follows:

About

- (1) I **have seen about** some pictures of Hawaii and I am interested to go to Honolulu (L1D)
- (2) And actually for sekaten it has umm...some series for the event, but I **forget for the series** of the event (U1F)

Preposition *about* needs to be omitted. So, *some pictures* can act as the object of the verb *seen*. Meanwhile, preposition *for* in sentence (2) need to be replaced into *about* because the second sentence has the word *forget* which is usually followed by *about*.

Among

Among is used if something such as feeling, opinion, or situation exists among a group of people and most of them have it or experience it (Collins, 1991:11).

- (3) I think we can still feel the politeness **around young generation**. (L4H)
- (4) There are alot of myths in our country. Especially **in Javanese people**. (UN1L)

Based on the theory, the two students failed to apply preposition among in the two situations. *Among* should be used instead of preposition *around* in sentence (3) and preposition *in* in sentence (4).

As

This preposition is used when indicating that someone or something is or is thought to be (Collins, 1991:12).

- (5) Because ...um yea in Indonesia **it's named air panas** right? (U1C)
- (6) umm..**it is called SAFEL**, Student Activity Forum of Foreign Languages. (UN1C)

Based on those two sentences, both sentence (5) and (6) omit preposition *as*. This preposition is actually needed to name something in sentence (5) and to name a certain organization in sentence (6). Therefore, it should be added.

At

Preposition *at* is applied in several situations such as when we are looking at someone or something; if someone is at school or college to study regularly; when something happens at a particular time; if we are at a place and being there; and if we point at something (Collins, 1991: 13-15).

- (7) I prefer umm to **look for sunrise** rather than sunset. (L1B)
- (8) **in STBA LIA** Yogyakarta. (L2A)
- (9) I prefer to go there **in the night** instead of in the morning. (L2H)
- (10) when we **arrived in the top**, we will feel like very cold. (L3H)
- (11) For example in Jogja, um...if we want to um..**to point something**, we have to choose to use um...thumb.. (U1E)

Some of the students failed to use preposition *at* in various situations. Instead of using *at*, sentence (7) uses 'for' and it results in changing the meaning of the phrase

because *look for* means searching for something not looking at someone. Preposition *at* should also be used in sentence (8) because it gives information about where someone is studying. Then, when we are talking about a particular time, especially night time, instead of using *in* like sentence (9), we have to use *at*. Meanwhile, if sentence (9) is talking about particular time, sentence (10) is talking a particular place. So, the phrase “in the top” should also be changed into “at the top”. Sentence (11) has different situation. It describes about an action to point at something. So, preposition *at* need to be added.

Because of

This preposition is used when an event or situation occurs because of something (Collins, 1991: 17).

- (12) So I prefer beach **because the...the atmosphere** (L1A)
(13) I mean the english is maybe quite difficult to be recognized **because their accent** (UN1N)

The word *because* does not fit to be used in the sentences above. The reason is that the word *because* is categorized as conjunction and *because of* is categorized as a preposition. What those two sentences need is the later.

By

Preposition *by* is used if we do something by particular means; when we do something by ourselves; and when something is done by a person or a thing (Collins, 1991: 25-127).

- (14) I didn't **decide it myself**. (L2E)
(15) Maybe 15 minutes **with motorcycle**. (L3C)

Sentence (14) and (15) fit in with the situation. So, preposition *by* need to be added in sentence (14) because the students did the decision by herself without help from other people. In sentence (15), the students uses

motorcycle as a mean of transportation. So, preposition *with* need to be replaced by preposition *by*.

During

During is applied when something happens during a period of time, it happens continuously, happens several times between the beginning and the end of that period (Collins, 1991: 30).

- (16) I ever did it maybe three times or four times **in my senior high school**. (UN1E)

Sentence (16) fits in with the situation described. So, preposition *during* need to replace preposition *in*.

For

For is used in several situations such as: when something lasts or continuous for a period of time; if something is done for someone; when indicating how often something has happened before (Collins, 1991: 32-34).

- (17) In the end of the month, I am literally **live in Yogyakarta three years**. (L2B)
(18) My father **chose it to me**. (L2C)
(19) If you haven't seen the sunrise **at the first time** you come there. (L2I)

Preposition *for* should be added in sentence (17) because it describes something that has already continued for a certain period of time. Meanwhile, sentence (18) fits in with the second situation and the third situation fits sentence (19).

From

From is used when someone or something moves or is moved from a place, they leave it and go somewhere else; to indicate who or what is the source or provider of something; when we are talking about the beginning of a period of time or the first of a range of things; and if something varies from thing to thing or from one thing to another (Collins, 1991: 35-37).

- (20) So rather than I drove away **my..umm...by my father**, so I decided to obey what he said. (L2D)
- (21) And then **don't expect too much to other people**. (L2K)
- (22) yes. Marathon **2016 until 2017**. (L3F)
- (23) the language they speak is quite **different with** us. (UN1M)

The first situation fits sentence (20) because it describes that something moves from a certain place to the other. However, instead of using *from*, it uses *by*. Then, sentence (21) indicating the second situation and preposition *to* does not fit the situation. Sentence (22) talks about something which begin in 2016 and end in 2017. It needs preposition *from* in the beginning of the first of a range. Sentence (23) also fit the last situation because it describes that something or someone is different from the others. Therefore, instead of *different with*, it should be replaced by *different from*.

In

In is applied: if something happens in a particular year, month, or other period of time and it happens during that time (Collins, 1991: 40); to say how someone is expressing something after particular words such as *expert* (Collins, 1991: 132) and *interest* (Collins, 1991: 154)

- (24) for people **who are expert to climbing** a mountain I think it is safe. (UN4I)
- (25) Ummm....last.....**at 2017** (L3E)
- (26) **I'm interested learning** about culture. (UN4J)

Sentence (24) and (25) fit in with the second situation. So, preposition *in* should be used in sentence (24) to change preposition *to*. *In* is also needed in sentence (26) after the word *interested*. Then, preposition *at* in sentence (25) should be changed into *in* to indicate something which is done in a particular year.

Of

Of is used in several situations, one of which is to indicate who or what a thing or quality belongs to (Collins, 1991: 48-49).

- (27) **the main culture Indonesia** is friendly. (U3C)
- (28) I think **uniform in insurance workers**, bankers, civil servant, BUMN workers. (L2O)

Sentence (27) needs to add preposition *of* between the word *culture* and *Indonesia*. Meanwhile sentence (28) needs to replace preposition *in* into preposition *to* because the uniform belongs to or a part of insurance workers.

On

When something happens on a particular day or a part of a day; if we are in an area of land and we are there; if we are resting on or upon something, it is underneath us and is supporting our weight (Collins, 1991: 52-54).

- (29) yeah. Umm...**at Wednesday**. (L4B)
- (30) I think that's so enjoyable if we make the event **in the beach**. It's better than mountain. (U3C)
- (31) I only go **at the back of my father**. (U3D)

Sentence (29) describes about an activity which was done on a particular day. So, instead of *at*, it should be changed into *on*. Then, preposition *in* in sentence (30) needs to be changed into preposition *on* because it describes something which is done in an area of land, beach in particular. The last sentence, sentence (31), also fits in with the last situation. so, it should not “at the back of my father” but “on the back of my father”.

Through

If we achieve something through particular methods and we use this method to achieve it (Collins, 1991: 69).

- (32) umm...preserve **maybe from writing content** in the social media. (U3J)

In sentence (32), the student talked about her method to preserve the tradition and she did it through writing a content in

social media. Therefore, preposition *from* needs to be replaced by preposition *through*.

To

Preposition *to* is applied after particular words such as *adapt* (Collins, 1991: 88); if someone or something goes to a place, they move toward it until they arrive there; you use *to* with some words to indicate what something is connected with or compared with; when indicating who or what receives something or has an action or feeling directed towards them (Collins, 1991: 70-71)

- (33) And if we wanna watch sunrise, we should go **like kind of a mountain**. (L4D)
- (34) Um...if we compared **Gunungkidul and also Yogyakarta city**, it is so different. (U1A)
- (35) The students is also umm...**give full attention with me**. It's better than kids or children. (U2H)
- (36) So we have **to adapt with the culture in that country**. So we can socialize better with the people there. (UN2J)

Sentence (33) describe an action of going to a particular place. Therefore, preposition *to* also need to be added after verb *go*. Then, sentence (34) is comparing one city to another city. Therefore, preposition *to* is needed to change conjunction *and*. Meanwhile, sentence (35) fits in with the last situation and sentence (36) needs to add preposition *to* after the word *go* to describe if someone or something goes to a certain place.

With

It is applied after the word *busy* (Collins, 1991: 103)

- (37) I think will **busy about magang**.*kerja magang* in dinas pariwisata provinsi DIY. (U4C)

Instead of using preposition *with* after the word *busy*, sentence (37) uses preposition *about*. Of course this is incorrect. Therefore, it needs to be replaced.

Based on the result of analysis, a table of frequency and distribution is made to know how often students make errors in the use of English prepositions when they speak. The number of errors and percentage can be seen below.

Table 1.
 Frequency and distribution of errors in the use of English prepositions produced by college students in Yogyakarta

Prepositions	The number of errors	Percentage (%)
About	2	1.61
Among	2	1.61
As	3	2.41
At	27	21.77
Because of	5	4.03
By	7	5.64
During	1	0.80
For	11	8.87
From	6	4.83
In	23	18.54
Of	4	3.22
On	14	11.29
Through	1	0.80
To	9	7.25
With	9	7.25

According to the the table, the number of errors mostly made by the students is preposition *at*, reaching 27 out of 124 errors (21.77%). It is followed by preposition *in*, raaching 23 (18.54%), and preposition *on* (11.29%).

Conclusion

Errors are natural occurence in the learning process. By analyzing the errors produced by language learners, we will be able to obtain some understanding on how students learn the language and the progress they have made. This research focuses on analyzing errors in the usage of English prepositions produced by college students in Yogyakarta. From 124 English prepositions stated by Collins (1991), there are 23 prepositions used by students including *about*, *after*, *among*, *around*, *as*, *at*,

because of, before, between, by, during, for, from, in, like, near, of, on, since, through, to, until, and with. After the analysis was done, the researcher found out that out of 23 prepositions used, there are 15 types of prepositions used incorrectly by the students during the interview. Those prepositions are *about, among, as, at, because of, by, during, for, from, in, of, on, through, to, and with.* The number of errors mostly made by the students is preposition *at*, reaching 27 out of 124 error sentences (21.77%). It is followed by preposition *in*, reaching 23 (18.54%), and preposition *on* (11.29%).

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