

The Problems That Encounter the Yemeni EFL Students in using Prepositions (During, While and For)

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Abstract:

The current research paper aims to study and investigate the mistakes of prepositions of time, namely During, While and For. The prepositional mistakes are pervasive habits among EFL Yemeni learners at Dhalea faculty, university of Aden, Yemen. It is hypothesized that EFL students make mistakes in using spatial and temporal prepositions in addition to the learning problems which are the source of such mistakes. Therefore, the present study is made by 20 EFL Yemeni learners at Dhalea faculty of Education in the academic year (2019-2020) regarding the first semester using grammar tests to collect the data. The researcher used ten sentences for the test. The students were asked to fill the correct preposition in the blanks. There were (120) mistakes made by students in using the time prepositions (51). The mistake in using the preposition (during) was (47), mistake in using the preposition (while) and (22) Mistake in using the Preposition (for). The result has also revealed that all mistakes were substitution mistakes. The mistakes were because of the lack of mastering the rules of time prepositions in the target language (English) as well as the effect interference of the first language (Arabic).

Key words: Prepositions, mistakes analysis, errors and mistakes, sources of mistakes

Introduction

The prepositions English system is considered one of the most difficult problems for any EFL learners. The first reason of this difficulty is because EFL learners usually try to relate the English prepositions system to their mother tongue prepositional system. Furthermore, this difficulty raises because of the differences between the first language (mother tongue) and the second language (English foreign language). These languages have many differences in number, meaning and usage of the prepositions. The problem that faces EFL students is linked with some Arabic prepositions that do not have an exact equivalent in English and vice versa. For example, the Arabic preposition /fi:/ has many equivalents in English such as (within, inside, Since, during, while at, in, and on). In English, there is a number of confusing prepositions that cause some of the most common problems. The problems and common mistakes are occurring when a student writes or speaks English. The misuse of the prepositions (For, while and during) is one of the most difficult problems faced by the students of English who learning it as a foreign language. Here, an example of the misuse of the English preposition: "Nobody spoke during the presentation". From the above example, we understand that the student translated the English preposition (during) into his/her mother tongue (Arabic) preposition (fi:). The Arabic preposition (fi:) can be realized by three English prepositions (during, for and while).

The objectives of the Study

This study aims to study the prepositions (For, during, while) and the problems that encounter the Yemeni students who study English as a foreign language in using those prepositions. Based on that, this study tries to achieve the following aims:

- 1- To identify prepositions caused mistakes committed by Yemeni students.
- 2- To know if the mother tongue influences on the students' performance when using the prepositions (For, While, during)
- 3- To identify other sources of mistakes made by Yemeni students when they use prepositions (For, While, during)

Research Questions of the Study

According to the objectives mentioned above, this study aims to answer the following questions.

1. What are the types of prepositions mistakes made by students?
2. How does mother tongue influence on the students' performance when using the prepositions (For, While and during)?
3. What are other sources of prepositions mistakes made by students?

Limitation of the Study

The study is aimed to identify prepositions mistakes made by the first year students at Al-Dhalea Faculty of Education Aden University, during the academic year (2019-2020).

Literature Review

Definition of Prepositions

Preposition is one of the eight parts of the speech that shows relationships between noun or a pronoun and another word or words in the sentence. Harris (1951) defines the word preposition as "a part of speech, devoid itself of signification, but so formed as to unite two words that are significant and that refuse to coalesce or unite themselves" (p. 253). Wishon and Burks (1980) state that prepositions are "always followed by nouns or pronouns. They are connective words that show the relationship between the nouns following them and one of the basic sentences elements: subject, verb, object, or complement" (p. 285). In addition to that, Quirk and Greenbaum (2000) state that "a preposition expresses a relation between two entities; one being represented by the prepositional complement of the various types of relational meaning, those of place and time are the most prominent and easy to identify" (p. 143).

Mistake Analysis

Mistake Analysis is defined as an activity to reveal mistakes made by learners in writing and speaking. It is an essential source of information for teachers. It provides information on students' mistakes which helps the teachers to correct students' mistakes and improve the effectiveness of their teaching (Brown 1980). In this regard, Sawalmeh (2013) defines mistake and error analysis as "the processes to observe,

analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of the second language and then to reveal the systems operated by learner"(p.3). Another definition of mistake analysis is given by Crystal. He defines mistake analysis as "a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics"(1987, p. 112). Additionally, Alhaisoni emphasizes that mistake analysis is very important for learners and teachers (2012). He clarifies these mistakes as:

mistakes/errors are advantageous for both learners and teachers. It provides information to the teachers on students' errors. This helps the teachers in three ways, firstly to correct their errors, secondly to improve their teaching and thirdly to focus on those areas that need reinforcement (p. 55).

Definition of Error

There are a number of definitions of the term 'error' that has been proposed by different experts. Basically, these definitions share the same meaning. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) define an error as "the flawed side of learned speech or writing. They are those parts of speaking or writing that deviate from some selected form of mature language performance" (p. 138). In addition, Brown defines error as "a noticeable deviation from an adult grammar of a native speaker reflects the competence of the learner" (p.205).

Mistakes and Errors

The distinction between an error and a mistake is significant, so it is very important to make the distinction between these two different concepts. The difference between an error and a mistake is given by Richards and Schmidt (2002) differentiate between the two important terms. They mention that error results from incomplete knowledge, and a mistake made by a learner when writing or speaking and which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some Other aspect of performance. Another distinction between an error and a mistake is mentioned by Corder (1967, cited in AL-Dubib, 2013). He defines errors as "systematic errors that are errors of competence". On the other hand, he also defines mistakes as "un systematic errors that are lapses or

slips of the tongue (errors of performance)"(p.13). On the other hand, Mourtaga (2004) points out that errors and mistakes are different from each other because an error cannot be self-corrected and is caused by a learner's inadequate knowledge of the target language whereas a mistake can be self-corrected.

Sources of Errors/Mistakes

To analyze students' mistakes, it is necessary to identify their sources. Penny (cited in Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn, 2017) states that there are two major sources of errors: interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer (p. 103). Similarly, Richards (1974) distinguishes between the two major sources of errors (interlingual errors and intralingual errors). The first one refers to errors that caused when learners wrongly use the rules of their first language when they produce sentences of the target language (the interference of the learners' mother tongue (native language)). The second one refers to the errors that caused during learners' language learning process.

Methodology

The Participants

The participants of this study were twenty (20) students from the Department of English, Al-Dhalea Faculty of Education- Aden University, Yemen for the academic year (2019-2020).

The Test

The test was to fill in the blanks test. It was consisted of ten sentences. The students were asked to fill the blanks with the correct answer from three alternatives, which are (For, While and during). The main objective of this test was to examine the ability of students in using the three prepositions (For and during) appropriately.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion in accordance with the order of the objectives and questions of the study.

Table (1) below shows correct answers, number of the correct answers, wrong answers and number of the wrong answers that have been committed by participants in using prepositions (For, While, During).

Sentence. No	Correct Answers	No. of Correct Answer	Wrong Answers	No. of Wrong Answer
1.	while	7	During	13
2.	during	7	For	13
3.	while	5	During	15
4.	for	9	While	11
5.	during	13	While	7
6.	for	12	During	8
7.	during	8	While	12
8.	while	11	For	9
9.	for	5	During	15
10.	during	3	While	17
Total		80		120

The table (1) above shows that the students committed (120) mistakes from the total number in the use of the prepositions (during, while, for). The highest number of mistakes was in using the preposition (during), which is (49) mistakes, the second preposition (while) included the number of mistakes was (37) mistakes and in using the preposition (for), the number of mistakes was (34) mistakes.

The table (2) below shows the number mistakes of the prepositions (during, while, for)

The prepositions	during	While	for
Number of mistakes	51	47	22

The preposition mistakes in using (during)

The preposition (during) was used (51) times instead of the correct prepositions (while and for). It was used (28) times instead of the correct preposition (while) and used (23) times instead of the correct preposition (for).

Examples:

1. She is gardening during her husband is painting the chairs.
2. I worked during the holidays.
3. during I think of it, don't forget to call Mr. Blair.
4. We'll walk during an hour. Then we'll have a rest.

The mistakes in using preposition (while)

The preposition (while) was used (47) times instead of the correct preposition (during and for). It was used (36) times instead of the correct preposition (during) and it using (11) times instead of the correct preposition (for).

Examples:

5. Bob called me while the meeting.
6. I've been waiting for them while two hours.
7. We met while the barbecue party.
8. Don't speak during I am doing this exercise!

The mistakes in using preposition (for)

The preposition (for) was used (22) times instead of the correct preposition (during and while). It was used (13) times instead of the correct preposition (during) and used (9) times instead of the correct preposition (while).

The examples:

9. Two years ago she stayed in Paris for three months
10. Samantha visited the Eiffel Tower for her stay in Paris

It is noticed from the above answers that the students made a substitution mistakes by using the wrong preposition instead of the correct one. For example, in sentences (1) and (2), the wrong preposition (during) was used instead of the correct prepositions (while). In sentences (3) and (4), the wrong preposition (during) was used instead of the correct prepositions (for). In sentence (5) the wrong preposition (while) was used instead of the correct prepositions (for). In sentences (6), (7) and (8), the wrong preposition (while) was used instead of the connect prepositions (during). In sentences (9) and (10), the wrong preposition (for) was used instead of the correct prepositions (during). All the mistakes were occurred because of the two main sources. The first source is an intralingual mistake because of the lack of mastering the rules of prepositions (For, While and during) in the target language (English) as in sentences (1) and (10). The second source is an interlingual mistake because of the interference of the first language (Arabic) as in sentences (6) and (9), they say "fi sa`ah" and "fi thlatheh shohoor".

Conclusion

This study attempts to investigate mistakes committed by Yemeni EFL students, Aldalea Faculty of Education, Aden University in using three prepositions (For, While and during). The result shows the participants made (120) of substitution mistakes. The highest number of mistakes is (51) in using preposition (during), the second number is (47) in using the preposition of time (while) and the lowest number is (22) in using preposition (for). This might be attributed to the fact that English prepositions are different from the prepositions in Arabic in number, meaning and usage of the prepositions. This study recommended the teachers to pay more attention when they teach these prepositions and to raise the students' awareness about using prepositions in general and about these three confused prepositions in particular.

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