

## ERRORS MADE BY YEMENI EFL STUDENTS IN THE USE OF THE PREPOSITION OF TIME (AT, IN AND ON)

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### **Abstract:**

*This study aims at investigating errors in using the confused prepositions of time (at, on and in) committed by twenty Yemeni EFL university students of Faculty of Education Toor-AL-Baha at Aden University in the academic year 2016/2017. The researcher used grammar test to collect the data. The test consisted of ten sentences. The students were asked to fill in the blanks with the correct preposition, at, on or in. The result revealed that the participants made (122) errors in using the three above prepositions of time. These errors included (51) errors in using the preposition (in), (48) in using preposition (on) and (23) in using preposition (at). It also revealed that all errors were substitution errors. These errors were caused because of the lack of mastering the rules of prepositions of time in the target language (English) and because of the interference of the first language (Arabic).*

**Key words:** *Prepositions, prepositions of time, errors.*

### **Introduction**

The English prepositions system is considered one of the most difficult problems for any EFL learners. One reason for this difficulty is because EFL learners usually try to relate the English prepositions system to the prepositional system of their mother tongue. This difficulty also rises because of the differences between the mother tongue and English as a foreign language. The two languages have many differences in number, meaning and usage of the prepositions.

The main problem that faces EFL learners is that some Arabic prepositions do not have an exact equivalent in English and vice versa. For example, the Arabic preposition /fi:/ has many equivalents in English such as (at, in, on, with, inside). This research tries to investigate errors committed by the students of English language learners at University of Aden, Faculty of Education Toor-AL-Baha in the use of confused prepositions of time (**at, on and in**).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many problems and common errors occur when a learner writes or speaks English. The misuse of the prepositions of time (at, on and in) is one of the most difficult problems faced by the learners of English as a foreign language. As an example of the misuse of the English preposition: She goes to the gym in Friday. From this example, we understand that the student translated the English preposition (in) into his/her mother tongue (Arabic) preposition (fi:). The Arabic preposition (fi:) can be realized by three English prepositions (at, on and in). This paper aims to investigate the errors of using the three prepositions of time that are made by the first level students in Yemen and tries to find effective solutions in order to overcome these problems.

### **The Objective of the Study**

This study aims to shed light on the prepositions of time (at, on and in) and the problems that encounter the Yemeni students who study English as a foreign language in using those prepositions of time.

Based on that, this study tries to achieve the following aims:

1. To identify errors made by Yemeni students in the use of the prepositions of time (at, on and in).
2. To know if the mother-tongue influences the students' performance when using the prepositions of time (at, on and in).
3. To identify other sources of errors made by Yemeni students.

### **Research Questions of the Study**

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

1. What are the types of errors made by Yemeni students in the use of the prepositions of time?
2. How does mother tongue influence the students' performance when using the prepositions of time (at, on and in)?
3. What are other sources of errors made by Yemeni students in the prepositions of time?

### **Limitation of the Study**

This study is aimed to identify prepositions of time errors made by the first year students at Faculty of Education Toor-AL-Baha at Aden University during the academic year (2016-2017).

### **Literature Review**

#### **Error Analysis**

Error analysis is considered as one of the best ways that describes and explains errors made by the learners who study English language as a second or a foreign language. It reveals the types and sources of these errors. It is defined as an activity to reveal errors made by learners in writing and speaking. It is an essential source of information to teachers. It provides information on students' errors which helps the teachers to correct students' errors and also improves the effectiveness of their teaching. The term error analysis has many definitions were given by some of the scholars for many years. For example, Brown (1980, cited in Sawalmeh 2013) defines 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 error analysis is given by Crystal. He defines error 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).

#### **Definations of Preposition**

A preposition is one of the eight parts of the speech that shows relationships between a 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).

#### **Basic Uses of Prepositions of Time AT, ON and IN**

##### **AT**

Murphy (2012:242) explains uses of the preposition of time (at) as follows:

It is used with time (hours, parts of the day and meal times).

At eight o'clock, at noon, at dinner time.

It is also used with these expressions: at the weekend / at weekends, at Christmas, at the moment / at present, at the same time

**ON**

This preposition is used with days of the week, dates, parts of the day, particular occasions and anniversaries, festivals (Alexander, 1988, p.161).

On Friday, on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, on Saturday evening, on that night, on your birthday, on christmas day.

**IN**

According to Eastwood (1999:289) the preposition of time (in) is used with year/month/season.

In 2018, in June, in spring

It is also used with the parts of the day such as morning, evening etc... when they come after the definite article (the). We can say: In the morning, in the evening, in the afternoon

The other uses of the preposition of time (in):

It is used for the time it takes to complete something.

I did the crossword **in** five minutes.

It is also used for a future time measured from the present.

Your photos will be ready **in** an hour. (= an hour from now)

**Previous Studies**

There are studies done on the use of prepositions of time (at, on and in), for example, a study by Loke, Ali & Anthony (2013). The main aim of this study was to investigate English prepositions of time, (on and at) presented in the Malaysian Corpus on Student's Argumentative Writings (MCSAW) from Form 4 and Form 5 in Malaysia. The participants of this study were (1010) students from Form 4, Form 5, and college student schools in Malaysia. The results revealed that students had difficulties in understanding the correct use of preposition of time. For example, students committed errors where they added a preposition in a sentence where it was not needed and also use wrong preposition.

In another study by Ibrahim (2017), the main object of this study was to investigate the problems encounter (ESP) students in using English prepositions of time (on - at - in). The sample of this study was (40) students. The researcher used a questionnaire I to collect data. The results showed that the majority of the students encounter problems in using prepositions of time.

**Methodology****The Participants**

The participants of this study were twenty (20) students from the Department of English, Faculty of Education- Toor-AL-Baha, Aden University, Yemen for the academic year 2016-2017.

**The Test**

The test was designed in a form of filling in the blanks. It was consisted of ten sentences. The students were asked to fill in the blanks with the correct answer from three alternatives, that are (at, on and in). The main objective of this test was to examine the ability of students in using the three prepositions of time (at, on or in) appropriately.

**Results and Discussion**

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

Table (1) below shows correct answers, number of the correct answers, wrong answers and number of the wrong answers which have been committed by the participants in using prepositions of time (at, on and in).

Sentence.No	Correct Answers	No. of Correct Answer	Wrong Answers	No. of Wrong Answer
1	on	8	in	12
2	in	6	at	14
3	on	4	in	16
4	at	9	on	11
5	in	14	on	6
6	at	12	in	8
7	in	7	on	13
8	on	11	at	9
9	at	5	in	15
10	in	2	on	18
Total		78		122

The table above shows that the students committed (122) errors from the total number in the use of prepositions of time (at, on and in). The highest number of errors was in using preposition of time (in) that is (51) errors, the second number was (48) in using preposition of time (on) and the lowest number is (23) in using preposition of time (at) as shown in table (2) below.

Prepositions of time	In	On	At
Number of Errors	51	48	23

### Errors in Using Preposition of Time (IN)

The preposition of time (in) was used (51) times instead of the correct prepositions (on and at). It was used (28) times instead of (on) and (23) times instead of (at). Examples:

#### In instead of on / at

- 1- Mohammed is playing tennis **in** Sunday.
- 2- My sister's birthday is **in** the 5th of January.
- 3- She gets up **in** eight o'clock.
- 4- The shop closes **in** midnight.

### Errors in Using Preposition of Time (ON)

The preposition of time (on) was used (48) times instead of the correct prepositions (in and at). It was used (11) times instead of (at) and (37) times instead of (in). Examples:

#### On instead of in

- 5- My friend comes home on lunchtime.
- 6- My birthday is on May.
- 7- It rains on winter.
- 8- I learnt reading on three months.

### Errors in Using Preposition of Time (AT)

The preposition of time (at) was used (23) times instead of the correct prepositions (in and on). It was used (14) times instead of (in) and (9) times instead of (on). Examples:

**At instead of in/on**

9- The children like to go to the park at the morning.

10- They arrive at Friday evening.

**Conclusion**

This study investigated errors committed by Yemeni EFL university students of Faculty of Education Toor.AL-Baha at Aden University in using three prepositions of time (at, in, and on).

The result showed that the participants made (122) of substitution errors. The highest number of errors was (51) in using preposition of time (in), the second number was (48) in using preposition of time (on) and the lowest number was (23) in using preposition of time (at). This might be attributed to the fact that English prepositions of time 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 of time in general and about these three confused prepositions in particular.

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