



USE OF ENGLISH PREPOSITIONS IN L2 ORAL PRODUCTION

İKİNCİ DİL SÖZLÜ ÜRETİMİNDE İNGİLİZCE EDATLARIN KULLANIMI

Eser Ördem¹**Abstract**

How acquisition and use of prepositions in both first and second language studies is an enigma (Celce-Murcia, & Larsen-Freeman 1999; Boers & Demecheleer, 1998; Evans & Tyler, 2004). This study intends to examine the frequency of use of prepositions between native speakers of English and Turkish teachers of English. An elicitation task was used to record the oral production. A frog story, a picture-story book which has been often used in child language learning studies, was employed as an elicitation task. The study involved 11 participants, Turkish Teachers of English and native speakers of English. This paper attempted to find answers to: (1) whether there is a significant difference in using prepositions according to frequency of use of prepositions and (2) use of various verbs. The results show that there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of frequency of use of prepositions and use of various verbs.

Key Words: Prepositions, English prepositions, oral production, acquisition, first and second language.

Özet

Hem birinci hem de ikinci dil çalışmalarında edatların edinilmesi ve kullanılması bir problem olarak güncelliğini korumaktadır (Celce-Murcia ve Larsen-Freeman 1999; Boers ve Demecheleer, 1998; Evans ve Tyler, 2004). Bu çalışma, anadili İngilizce olan ve Türkçe İngilizce öğretmenleri arasındaki edatların kullanım sıklığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Sözlü üretimi kaydetmek için veri çıkarma tekniği kullanılmıştır. Çocuk dil öğrenim çalışmalarında sıklıkla kullanılan bir resimli hikâye kitabı olan kurbağa öyküsü, verileri ortaya çıkarmak için kullanılmıştır. Çalışmaya 11 Türkçe Öğretmeni ve anadili İngilizce olan bireyler katılmıştır. Bu makale, (1) edatların kullanım sıklığını ve (2) çeşitli fiillerin kullanım sıklığına göre edatların kullanımında önemli bir fark olup olmadığını analiz etmeyi hedeflemiştir. Sonuçlar, iki grup arasında edatların kullanım sıklığı ve çeşitli fiillerin kullanımında anlamlı bir fark olduğunu göstermiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngilizce edatlar, sözlü üretim, birinci ve ikinci dil edinimi.

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the use of English prepositions by native and non-native speakers of English who teach English as a foreign language in Turkey. The purpose of this research is to examine the frequency of use of English prepositions between the two groups. One might think the amount of input and exposure to English in a foreign language setting is sufficient from non-native speakers to use prepositions as frequently as native speakers. Greenbaum, Quirk, Leech, Svartnik (1985, p.657) write that in the most general terms, a preposition in English expresses a relation between two entities, one being represented by the prepositional complement, the other by another part of the sentence. The prepositional complement is characteristically a noun phrase, a nominal *wh*-clause, or a nominal *-ing* clause. Prepositions according to Swan and Walter (2000) indicate various relationships between words or phrases in sentences. The relationship includes those of time, points, position, direction and various degrees of mental or emotional attitudes. Agoi (2003) also described preposition as a word or group of words used with a noun or noun equivalents to show the link between that noun which it governs and another word. The prepositions however are grouped into simple, participial and phrasal types. The effective use of preposition adds to writers' or speakers' communicative competence and linguistic performance; many students used preposition carelessly as if it is not rule governed. Rule guiding the use of preposition is somehow flexible.

Prepositions are generally troublesome to the learners for whom English is a foreign/second language (Celce-Murcia, and Larsen-Freeman 1999, p.401). Boers and Demecheleer (1998) argue that prepositions are difficult for ESL/EFL learners because they have literal as well as figurative meanings. Jimenez (1996) claims that Spanish students may have difficulty with mastering English prepositions. Jabbour-Lagoocki (1990) believes that English prepositions are notoriously difficult for ESL/EFL learners to master because of L1 interference. For native speakers, prepositions present little difficulty, but for a foreign/second language learner they are confusing and largely problematic.

2. Methodology

This study is quantitative and descriptive in nature. An elicitation task was used to collect data (Gass & Mackey, 2012). Gass & Mackey (2012) noted that elicitation tasks are useful and practical in second language acquisition to obtain data from learners. Shohamy (2000) also emphasizes that elicitation tasks are reliable and valid tools to detect the degree of second language acquisition. The aim of this study was to investigate to what extent the native speakers of English use prepositions compared with the non-native speakers of English. The following research questions were sought:

1. What is the difference between the foreign language learners and native speakers in that they used English prepositions?
2. Is there a significant difference between the foreign language learners and native speakers in terms of the use of English prepositions?

2.1. Participants

The study included 11 participants, five of whom were native speakers of English and six of them were Turkish teachers of English. The native speakers were all graduates of a college from USA. The non-native speakers were all graduates of English Language Department and have been teaching English as a foreign language in a school for at least three years.

2.2. Data collection

The data for this study were collected through an elicitation task, which was a frog story with only pictures. The frog story has been often used in child and adult language learning studies.

2.3. Procedure

The participants were asked to describe the pictures in the book and narrate a story. The aim of the study was not explained to the participants. Only literal meaning of prepositions was extracted from the speech. Phrasal and idiomatic uses of prepositions were not included in the study. Use of various verbs with prepositions was also studied in the study because Turkish teachers of English sometimes used the same verbs with the same prepositions. SPSS 10 was used to analyze the data. Since the validity and reliability of frog stories were replicated in other contexts (Hulstijn, 2010; Kang, 2003; Sanchez & Jarvis, 2008), this study also provided reliability of the data collection tool.

3. Results

The main aim of this study was to investigate whether there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of use of prepositions. The results have been discussed through Chi-Square results.

Table 1

The result of Chi-Square Test between the two groups in terms of use of prepositions

	Prepositions						Total
	14,00	15,00	16,00	35,00	38,00	39,00	
native speakers	0	0	0	1	1	3	5
Groups	.0%	.0%	.0%	20.0%	20.0%	60.0%	100.0%
non-native speakers	1	2	3	0	0	0	6
	16.7%	33.3%	50.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
Total	1	2	3	1	1	3	11
	9.1%	18.2%	27.3%	9.1%	9.1%	27.3%	100.0%

$X^2 = 11.00$ $df = 5$ $p = .001$

Table 1 shows that the native speakers of English used 60 % by 39 prepositions, whereas the non-native speakers employed only 50 % percentage by only 16 prepositions. The native speakers' oral production to the prepositions ranged from 35 to 39 prepositions while the prepositions produced by the non- native speakers were between 14 and 16. The Chi-Square result indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups ($X^2 = 11.00$, $p = .001$). In other words, the number of prepositions used by the native speakers was far more than that of the non-native speakers.

4. Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations. First, only one data collection tool was used. In addition, the sampling was limited to only 11 participants. Third, triangulation method was not used. Another limitation of the study is that the participants were not culturally diverse. Besides, the study excluded the transfer and effect of first language since it aimed to focus on only acquisition of the prepositions in the target language. Thus, socio-constructivist approach was not taken into consideration.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the findings show that although the non-native speakers use prepositions orally, they cannot use various verbs with prepositions, whereas the native speakers use both various verbs and prepositions. In the same way, the same problem was expressed by the researchers stressing that within the area of second language acquisition one of the more difficult problems a student of English as a second language faces is acquiring proficiency in the use of English prepositions (Davy, 2000, p.1). Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) write that ESL/EFL teachers-as-a-group feel that prepositions, after articles, are the second most difficult aspect of the English language for their students. They claim that one reason for this difficulty is some languages use an inflection or a noun or an article instead of a preposition to signal information. Another reason is that English prepositions have multiple meanings and multiple functions. This study also showed that even the English teachers in a foreign language setting avoid using English prepositions which may cause them to make possible errors. Two previous studies, Shinkawa (1979), Davy (2000), investigated the difficulties Japanese students have with the acquisition of prepositions expressing *space*. The studies did not present research on other categories of prepositions. In another study, Delshad (1980), too, found that Iranian EFL/ESL learners have difficulty in the use of English prepositions. According to Delshad (1980), Iranian EFL students usually misuse or tend to omit English prepositions. The result obtained in this study strongly suggests that use of prepositions by non-native speakers should be emphasized, and extra effort should be made to recognize the importance of prepositions in oral production. The use of the same verbs with the same prepositions show that non-native speakers have a limited repertoire of prepositions with certain verbs in oral production compared with the native speakers. This problem of use of prepositions discovered by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1998) addresses something serious about acquisition or learning of prepositions, which can be said that learners should bring prepositions into their selective attention and not ignore use of prepositions with a lexicon. In terms of pedagogy, it can be suggested that learners at beginning or advanced level should note down even collocational dependency of prepositions with the open class such as verbs, nouns and adjectives. Bedore, Peña, Anaya, Nieto, Lugo-Neris and Baron (2018) also mention in their study that Spanish learners had difficulty producing English prepositions by taking learners' linguistic experience and exposure into consideration. Jach (2018) also notes that learners who became exposed to prepositions more frequently and used similarities in their native language outperformed those who encountered prepositions less frequently. Thus, frequency and similarity have an important roles in production of prepositions in the target language. Haddad (2018) focuses on the impact of first language on the acquisition of prepositions in English and found that the participants tended to omit prepositions if these prepositions were not contained in their first language. Gudmestad and Clay (2019) also report that frequency and similarity were important predictors of acquisition of prepositions in English and Spanish at developmental level. Hung (2019) also showed that factors such as meaning and sense were important factors that affected the

acquisition of English prepositions. Besides, explicit instruction in first language was significant in that it helped learners understand the meaning of English prepositions.

The results discussed above indicate that some variables such as frequency, similarity, explicit instruction and meaningful activities tend to influence the acquisition of English prepositions. Future studies should focus on these variables. In addition, the impact of first language should be investigated. Besides, typological differences need to be taken into consideration. Teachers and practitioners can differentiate their tasks while teaching English prepositions because the difficulty of nature of English prepositions.

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