

Difficulties of Using Prepositions of Time towards EFL Learners' Communication Skill

Natalia Christiani¹

Ciputra University¹

natalia.christiani@ciputra.ac.id

Abstrak

Belajar berbicara bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa kedua berarti belajar mengatakannya dengan benar dan lancar secara tata bahasa. Ketika mempelajarinya, orang cenderung tahu tidak hanya kumpulan kosa katanya tetapi juga bagaimana menggunakan kata-kata itu dalam komunikasi. Sehubungan dengan menggunakan kata-kata yang tepat, kalimat dan latihan yang tidak sesuai, menguasai pengetahuan tentang preposisi dapat memperkaya komunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini akan menganalisis bagaimana pelajar bahasa Inggris Indonesia sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) menemukan kesulitan dalam menggunakan preposisi, terutama preposisi waktu: dalam, di, dan di. Penggunaan preposisi waktu dalam kalimat sangat penting dan secara signifikan mempengaruhi makna kata. Penelitian ini akan didasarkan pada kerja metafungsional: ideasional, interpersonal, dan tekstual. Berdasarkan literatur Azar (1992) tentang preposisi waktu, didefinisikan penggunaan in, on, dan yang membawa waktu menjadi fokus, membuat orang melihat masa depan, membujuk mereka untuk bersiap, mengubah tindakan mereka, Dan seterusnya. Pengetahuan ini pada prinsipnya secara signifikan diajarkan kepada semua peserta didik EFL; karenanya, untuk yang dewasa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa lebih dari 75% peserta didik masih menggunakan preposisi waktu yang salah.

Abstract

Learning to speak English as a second language means learning to say it properly-fluently and grammatically correct. When learning it, people tend to know not only its bunch of the vocabularies but also how to use those words in a communication. In related to using the appropriate words in appropriate sentences and exercises, mastering the knowledge of prepositions can enrich the communication in English. This research will analyse how Indonesian learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) find difficulties in using prepositions, especially prepositions of time: *in*, *on*, and *at*. The use of prepositions of time in sentences is very important and significantly influenced the words meaning. The research will be based on the working of metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Based on the literature of Azar (1992) about prepositions of time, it is defined the use of *in*,

on, and *at* which is to bring time into focus, get people to see the future, persuade them to prepare, change their actions, and so forth. This knowledge is in principle significantly taught to all EFL learners; hence, to adult ones. The results showed that more than 75% learners still use the wrong prepositions of time.

INTRODUCTION

Learning to speak a language means learning to say it properly. When people learn English as a second language, they tend to know not only its bunch of the vocabularies but also how to use those words in a communication. They apply the words by making use almost entirely of function words, such as auxiliary verbs, determiners, and prepositions, in order to convey all manner of grammatical relations. The words have the highest degree of connectivity with other words and so the function words of prepositions. Even prepositions are consisted of or grouped in small words; however, the use of prepositions in sentences is very important and significantly influenced the words meaning. Many learners and even adults face doubt in saying their statements using prepositions. It shows that the knowledge of using the right prepositions can smooth the communication in English.

To be able to use prepositions in saying sentences or even in doing any exercises, it is suggested to know first the definition of preposition and its characteristics. A preposition is a word that shows the relationship of a noun or pronoun to some other word in the sentence. The relationships include direction, place, time, cause, manner, and amount. A preposition always goes with a noun or pronoun which is called the object of the preposition. It is almost always before the noun or pronoun. The preposition and the object of the preposition together are called a prepositional phrase. From six characteristics mentioned above, the author will see in depth the use of prepositions of time which commonly misused by learners and adults when telling the time, or mentioning the days or the months by using the wrong prepositions with the wrong nouns or objects. But prepositions are natural, connective words that everybody uses in day to day conversations.

The use of prepositions of time – *in*, *on*, and *at* – is to bring time into focus, get people to see the future, persuade them to prepare, change their actions, and so on. For instance, *In time, we will be here* and *We will meet on Tuesday at five o'clock*. Prepositions of time locate nouns in time to answer the question 'When?', for example, if it is a specific point (*at 5 o'clock*) or after a given period (*in three weeks*). The aims of this paper are to encourage EFL learners and adults using prepositions of time undoubtedly and also to develop precise exercises of it.

There are two studies previously discussed about the use of prepositions. First, it is an overview of corpus linguistics studies on prepositions (Roslim, 2011). Prepositions have been studied in various perspectives mainly in relation to frequency and collocational information. At a frequency level, prepositions have been studied in a general corpus which is a corpus of many texts comprising written and/or spoken language. Roslim (2011) uses two general corpora from Kennedy's (1998) research which consist of written British English and written American English. They are Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (LOB) corpus and Brown corpus. When the high frequency and difficulty of acquisition

of the English prepositional system is considered, it is somewhat surprising that there have not been more corpus-based studies of how the system is used (Kennedy, 1998: 139). At a collocational information level, prepositions tend to collocate with particular words. The most common word classes that occur immediately before prepositions are nouns and pronouns. From the first previous study, Roslim (2011) also shows that a 'pattern grammar' framework as used in Colins Cobuild English Dictionary (1995) which includes 75,000 most frequent words in the Bank of English take prepositions as part of the patterns, *i.e.*, the patterns of verbs, nouns, and adjectives. She concludes that there are the greatest contributions of corpus linguistics from the teaching and learning of English in the English as a Second Language (ESL) context which prepositions are constant source of difficulty for the ESL/EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners and therefore must be taken seriously and studied more systematically.

Secondly, a study explores the types of prepositions and the common picture types used to teach these prepositions found in English textbooks commonly used in primary schools by Pramono (2005). Prepositions which are commonly used in it are prepositions locations. The results of his study show that the types of pictures may be problematic for presenting spatial relations due to an ambiguity the pictures may create and so as may affect the understanding and use of prepositions. Pramono (2005) finds in the five main English textbooks used by primary schools in the East Java region of Indonesia contain topics that thematically rather than grammatically oriented whereas they do not discuss prepositions as a separate issue but deal with them embedded in communicative contexts via such topics as 'where are things?' or 'location'. All textbooks examine used pictures as part of their teaching approach.

In Pramono (2005) discussion, there are two types of prepositions accompanied by pictures, *i.e.*, 'locational' prepositions and 'temporal' prepositions. 'Locational' prepositions indicate position in space at a particular instant of time (*e.g.*, on, in, under, such as in 'The book is on the table.'). 'Temporal' prepositions indicate simple passage of time (*e.g.*, at, on, in, such as 'He goes to school at 7 o'clock.'). However, because the pictures for temporal prepositions do not play a role in specifying relation, that is, the relation between the entities involved cannot be explicitly represented through depiction, temporal prepositions are not interest in his research. Moreover, because of this cause, it is worthy for the author of this essay paper to come up with the important use of prepositions of time/temporal prepositions in the English teaching and learning materials.

The review of literature has shown that prepositions are included in the working of metafunctions where introduce and explain more in the functional grammar of Halliday and Matthiensen (2004) in Christie (2012). Deep in the organization of all natural languages, there are three metafunctions have evolved: the *ideational* (having to do with the experience or "content")

involved in using language), the *interpersonal* (having to do with the relationship of participants in using language), and the *textual* (having to do with the organization of the language to create coherent messages). As people use language, all three metafunctions are simultaneously engaged.

The *ideational metafunction* or experiential metafunction refers to the experience(s) expressed in language, especially as they are expressed within clauses. Experiential meanings are expressed in the range of *process* type, their *participants*, and their *circumstances*. When talking about prepositions, they express experiential meanings in their *circumstances*. For instance, ‘*On Saturday we went to visit my grandma*’ (the writing of a young child who just learning to write). *On Saturday* is a prepositional phrase that realizes as circumstances in experiential meanings. In addition, textually, the prepositional phrase of *On Saturday* makes the opening clause *theme* which represents a message. Theme is what the clause is about, sometimes also referred to as the point of departure for the message. In English, but not in all languages, the normal or *unmarked* way theme is expressed is in the subject of the verb, as in *we went to visit my grandma on Saturday*. However, the child chose to create a *marked theme*, by putting the circumstantial information first. In other word, as a *marked theme*, prepositional phrase takes an important role in a sentence where it is made as a circumstance in the experiential metafunction of the functional grammar.

In relation to the previous studies mentioned, teaching prepositions should take in a significant way of transferring their meanings since young age. When children first learn to talk and, later on, learn to write, they use to simplest forms of English grammar to express their meanings, for examples,

Snakes and worms, they don't have legs.

I saw a cowboy on a horse.

As nouns create entities, things, phenomena (*snakes, worms, legs*) and verbs create doing, being, having, thinking, and so forth (*have, saw*), prepositional phrases create associated information (*on a horse*) (Christie, 2012). The prepositional phrases are very important in building experiential information; in addition, the first circumstances to appear in young children’s language are typically those of *time* and *place*, expressed in prepositional phrases. That is why the author takes prepositions as the main part of English grammar to be taught especially the motivating of teaching and learning prepositions of time.

METHODOLOGY

The author tries to investigate the kinds of prepositions of time that misused by the EFL learners. To figure out it, the author makes a test on completing sentences with the prepositions of

time: *in*, *on*, or *at*. The test has 22 numbers of incomplete sentences which consisted of 24 blanks taken from Azar (1992). In about 15 minutes, the learners do and complete the test.

It is figured out that most of the learners misuse the prepositions of time where the nouns or pronouns are:

- | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <i>on</i> the past | <i>on</i> present | <i>in</i> the present time |
| <i>at</i> the past | <i>in</i> present | <i>on</i> the present time |
| <i>on</i> September | <i>on</i> September 1990 | <i>at</i> September 3, 1990 |
| <i>on</i> noon | <i>on</i> midnight | <i>on</i> the fall / <i>at</i> the fall |

More than 75% answer wrongly to above bold nouns or pronouns. It is quite interesting to know further the ground reasons learners tend to use those wrong prepositions of time.

DISCUSSION

It has mentioned in the beginning of the discussion about prepositions of time that the use of *in*, *on*, and *at* is to bring time into focus, get people to see the future, persuade them to prepare, change their actions, and so on. According to Azar (1992), the prepositions *in*, *on*, and *at* are used in time expressions as follow:

- **in** for MONTHS, YEARS, CENTURIES and LONG PERIODS
- **on** for DAYS and DATES
- **at** for a PRECISE TIME.

It can be seen from the digest table below by Azar (1992: 45-46) redesigned by the writer:

Prepositions of Time	Usage	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • months • years • centuries • seasons • time of day • <i>in the past, in the present, in the future*</i> • after a certain period of time (<i>when?</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was born in <i>October</i>. • I was born in <i>1975</i>. • I was born in <i>the twentieth century</i>. • The weather is hot in <i>(the) summer</i>.** • I usually watch TV in <i>the evening</i>. • Please be on time in <i>the future</i>. • I will arrive there in <i>an hour</i>.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a date • a day of the week • weekday morning(s), afternoon(s), evening(s) • <i>New Year ' s Day /</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I was born on <i>October 31, 1975</i>. • I went to a movie on <i>Thursday</i>. • I have class on <i>Thursday morning(s)</i>. • Where will you be on <i>New Year's Day?</i>

Prepositions of Time	Usage	Example
	<i>Independence Day</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for <i>noon</i> • for <i>night</i> • for <i>midnight</i> • for <i>weekend</i> • a certain point of time (<i>when?</i>) / “clock time” • <i>at present, at the moment, at the present time</i> • <i>at Christmas/Easter</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I finish teaching at noon. • We sleep at night. • The shop closes at midnight. • Jane went home at the weekend. • I fell asleep at 9:30 (nine-thirty). • He’ s busy at present. Please call again. • I stay with my family at Christmas.

* Possible in British English: *in future*. (*Please be on time in future*.)

** In expressions with the seasons, *the* is optional: *in (the) spring, in (the) summer, in (the) fall/autumn, in (the) winter*.

As the aims of this paper is to encourage EFL students and adults using prepositions of time undoubtedly and also to develop precise exercises of it so then the digest table above hopefully can be used for them to be paid attention and exercised as many as possible. Furthermore, by having the précis explanation in the table above, English teachers can use it as a base of designing a test of prepositions of time. The principal thing is that making use of those expressions mentioned in many kinds of exercises on prepositions of time. They can be given in multiple choices, true false statements, fill in the blanks, matches and/or in writing the daily activities of the EFL students and adults. As EFL instructors, they also can strive to bring authentic English interaction materials into their classrooms to help their students prepare for activity in an English-speaking world by the main using points of the prepositions of time. At this point in the process of making materials using the teachers or instructors own authentic corpus, there are two main functions of the teaching of prepositions of time. One function focuses on looking at the prepositions of time of all texts combined to get a more general understanding of how the text is being used. Another function is to compare the prepositions of time between the texts to determine which texts have the language which the prepositions of time are more suitable to the needs of the students and also the teachers.

CONCLUSION

In all, the literature has shown that the important of prepositions of time as a part of experiential metafunction in the functional grammar in the sentences that is included as circumstances support the writer to put the teaching of prepositional phrases especially prepositions of time presents the significant based-theory for developing the teaching and learning of English grammar for EFL students and adults; moreover, for young learners. To affect the understanding and use of digest table proposed by Azar (1992) and redesigned by the writer in the learning of prepositions of time in principle can be beneficial by acknowledging the characteristics of *in*, *on*, and *at* through drilling via reading writing and acting in using them in a conversation.

REFERENCES

- Azar, B. S. (1992). *Fundamentals of English Grammar*. America: Prentice Hall.
- Christie. (2012). A Language Theory for Educational Practice. *Language Learning: A Journal of Research in Language Studies*. Suppl. 1, March 2012, pp. 1-31.
- Kennedy, G. (1998). *An Introduction to Corpus Linguistics*. London: Longman.
- Pramono, Y. G. H. (2005). Prepositions and Pictures in the English Learning Materials. *K@ta Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2; December 2005: 94-103.
- Roslim, N. (2011). An Overview of Corpus Linguistics Studies on Prepositions. *English Language Teaching Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2; June 2011.

Appendix

PREPOSITIONS: Complete the sentences with *in*, *at*, or *on*. All expressions consist of expressions of time!

1. History is the study of events that occurred _____ the past.
2. We don't know what will happen _____ the future.
3. Newspaper report events that happen _____ the present.
4. Last year I was a junior in high school. _____ present, I am a senior in high school.
5. I am a student _____ the present time, but I will graduate next month.
6. Ms. Walker can't come to the phone right now. She's in a meeting _____ the moment.
7. I usually take a walk _____ the morning before I go to work.
8. Frank likes to take a nap _____ the afternoon.
9. Our family enjoys spending time together _____ the evening.
10. Our children always stay home _____ night.
11. I ate lunch _____ noon.
12. I got home _____ midnight.
13. I moved to this city _____ September.
14. I moved here _____ 1990.
15. I moved here _____ September 1990.
16. I moved here _____ September 3.
17. I moved here _____ September 3, 1990.
18. I moved here _____ the fall.
19. I work _____ the morning. _____ the afternoon, I have an English class.
20. _____ Wednesday, I work all day. _____ Thursday, I have an English class.
21. _____ Thursday afternoon, I have an English class.
22. My plane was supposed to leave _____ 7:07 P.M., but it didn't take off until 8:30.