

Error Analysis on Prepositions Used by the Learners of English as a Second Language in Writing

ABSTRACT

This study examines omission errors, substitution errors and addition errors in the usage of prepositions by the learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) in writing tasks. The main purpose of the study is to investigate: whether the school children in lower grades tend to omit prepositions more often than in higher grades whereas in higher grades, they show more substitution and addition errors. A pool of 260 Sinhala speaking students from four grades (Grade 4, Grade 6, Grade 8 and Grade 10) participated in this study. A picture story writing task where prepositions needed to be abundantly used was administered, and errors in the use of prepositions were analysed. The main findings concluded; although more omission errors were found in the lower grades significantly, the increase in substitution errors towards higher grades is not very sharp. These findings can be used in the ESL classroom to facilitate teaching English prepositions.

Keywords: Omission errors, Substitution errors, Addition errors, ESL

1. Introduction

Most of the English prepositions are vague and confusing so that the Sinhala speaking learners find difficult to acquire them. According to Thilakarathne 1992, in English, prepositions are words, while in Sinhala they are represented as spatial postpositions or as suffixes (locative, ablative Case).

Prepositions are often polysemous, in other words, they have more than one meaning. For example, the preposition *over* has many meanings as follows:

- (1) a The horse jumped *over* the wall (on -the -other- side- of).
- b The evaluator looked *over* her publications carefully(examined).
- c Collect your money *over* the counter (from).

The same prepositions in English can carry vastly different meanings in Sinhala. For example, in *I met him at the bank, at the bank* can be translated into Sinhala with various meanings if we again translate them to English. such as: near the bank, inside the bank and in the bank. Learners often become frustrated when they have to determine prepositional meanings and to use them appropriately (Koffi 2010).