

COMMON ERRORS IN THE USE OF LOCATIVE PREPOSITIONS: GRADE 4 ESL STUDENTS

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There are many issues for scholars who research on English pedagogy on the correct usage of English prepositions by ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. Prepositions are notoriously difficult for English language learners due to the large number of them in the English language and also due to their polysemous nature. This study intended to discover the extent of errors committed by grade four ESL learners and the acquisition of the selected eleven locative prepositions: *near, on, at, under, between, in, around, behind, in, front of, on the right hand side of* and *on the top of*. It also compared the differences in the students' performance in locative prepositions in three different tasks. This study focused on the grammatical errors on the use of locative prepositions and justified the reasons for such errors. The students were given a worksheet with three types of tasks: 2 gap filling and 1 multiple choice tasks based on locative prepositions in English language to collect quantitative production data in writing. This data was analyzed by using SPSS 2013. A total number of 20 Sinhala speaking ESL students in Grade 4 were involved in the task. This study found that the most accurately acquired preposition was *on* while the most erroneous preposition was *in front of*. Moreover the results showed that students tend to make more substitution errors for locative prepositions in gap filling tasks with compared to multiple choice tasks. It also showed that the students get confused in the use of locative prepositions between *in* and *on* and also between *in front of* and *behind*. This study concludes that the ESL students in Grade 4 have not yet acquired the most of the locative prepositions used in the study successfully, due to the lack of correct exposure and the less experience in the usage of English spatial prepositions. This study suggests that the ESL teachers should make the students get exposed to more locative spatial scenes by illustrating them by using pictures or demonstrating the spatial scenes physically, rather than merely explaining the meaning of the locative prepositions in their first language.

Key Words: Locative prepositions, ESL students, Substitution errors, students' performance, spatial prepositions.

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