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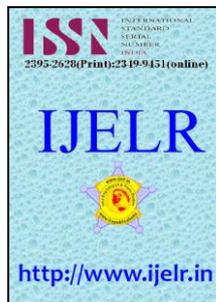
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OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING PREPOSITIONS

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ABSTRACT

Prepositions show relation between two entities in sentences. Among other Parts of Speech, prepositions learners have been constantly intimidated by English prepositions; be it their number or complex network of meanings. With such a hurdle at hand teachers and researchers constantly look for better methods to impart language to the learners. When no single method can be attributed with ultimate success, there are choices to choose from in order to implement techniques for effectiveness. Teaching prepositions through Collocation Approach and via data collected from a reliable Concordancer has promising results.

Moreover, when learners know that they are learning authentic inputs they are reinforced with increased confidence. This confidence and increased rate of retention ensure excellent language skills when certain amount of exposure and practice are in place. This paper deals with Collocation Approach, Prototypical Approach and Concordance packed into a technique called DDL (Data Driven Language) which show tangible improvement among learners from different groups

Keywords: Prepositions, Collocation Approach, Prototype and Data Driven Language

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INTRODUCTION

Learning prepositions has never been easy for ESL learners because of their numerous variety and polysemous nature of their meanings. When such difficulties become hurdles teachers should take effective steps for implementing methodologies to overcome them and ensure proper understanding among heterogeneous language learning groups.

Firstly, in order to provide solutions to learning difficulties as regards to prepositions useful analyses can be done. Prepositions usually have various meanings(Polysemous) and rarely limited to single meanings(Monosemous). Polysemy is “a semantic characteristic of words that have multiple meanings” (Koffi 299). This ability of prepositions to possess variety of meanings according to different contexts puts lot of stress and unpredictability on the part of learners. Secondly majority of prepositions are monosyllabic like Lam pointed and are hardly recognizable by learners as they are pronounced quickly and with less clarity than content words. Further complicating matters usage of prepositions and their contextual meaning is quite different from one language to another language and might intimidate the learners. Learners cannot hinge upon their prepositional knowledge from their mother tongue because when we take an instance like

transferring the Spanish preposition '*por*' into English becomes difficult due to "expressed in English by the prepositions for, through, by, and during" (Lam 2).

Any type of "assumptions of semantic equivalence between the first and second languages" would only land them in prepositional errors (Lam 3). English has higher number of prepositions more than most of the languages have (Koffi 297). A trend can be observed sporadically and it is difficult to systematize English prepositions (Catalan 171).

2.Traditional Approach:

Traditional way of teaching prepositions is through grammatical structures and several contexts. This approach cannot guarantee that the learners will successfully recall them whenever necessary to use them in an efficient way because they feel that the list is very unpredictable and memorizing a long list of contextually relevant prepositions will be practically beyond learner's realization. Lam expands on this "trying to remember a list of individual, unrelated uses is hardly conducive to increasing learners' understanding of how the prepositions are actually used and why the same preposition can express a wide range of meanings" (Lam 3). Here it becomes imminent that language instructors should strive to follow more innovative methods that have lesser cognitive demands.

3.Collocation Approach:

Rather than teaching individual units of prepositions it is better to teach them in "chunks" or along with pairs of frequently occurring words like *to depend on, to wait on, to step on, to work on and to rely on* etc., Among language teaching and learning circles the word collocation which means co-occurrence, is referred to by many words like "(WCO) word co-occurrence, chunks and formulaic sequence." In the case of prepositions these are usually phrasal verbs. Along with phrasal verbs, prepositional phrases such as *on time, on schedule, on...screen or on ...leg* are taught as easily manageable chunks (Mueller 484).

This method is beneficial for it appeals to the sensitiveness and easy grasping to frequent language structures of the learners naturally (Mueller 480-481). Frequency-based learning is dependent upon the idea that human beings process language as if a group of words are single sensible units. According to Mueller (2011), "such associative learning is necessary to account for the acquisition of irregular forms and rigidly fixed idioms" (481). Many language experts and researchers believe that acquiring language in chunks and using repeatedly in meaningful contexts suffers the learners to build confidence and allows deeper analyses later on.

Teaching prepositions through collocation approach enables the use of corpora and concordancing. Koosha and Jafarpour (2006) noted that DDL (Data Driven Language) technique which "emphasizes the collocational properties of language through concordancing lines" (194) has an advantage over conventional methods. Concordancing is an analysis of the structures and lexical patterns in digital databases (195). This advantage is manifestly visible in an experiment conducted by them on two different groups; one with DDL technique and the other with traditional method with usual textbooks as a resource. (Brown Corpus Online and searched Web Concordancer were used by Koosha and Jafarpour for their study (200)). So, Collocational Approach with authentic data through Concordancing will have double benefits than conventional methods.

4.The Prototype Approach:

Deeper learning of prepositions, for both Lindstromberg (1996) and Lam (2009), is possible through explanatory and meaning-based methods which in turn reinforce confidence and increased rate of retention. Lakoff's prototype theory is the basis for both of these linguists claim. And this theory claims that among multiple meanings of the prepositions only one meaning is dominant among others. This dominance or standing out is being prototypical. In the case prepositions spatial and physical meanings are prototypical. For example the preposition "on" has several meanings but prototypical is "contact of an object with a line of surface" (Lindstromberg 229). By studying and understanding prototypical meaning and analyzing them would allow learners to understand that the polysemous meanings of prepositions are metaphorical extensions (228). Again taking the example "on", Lindstromberg (1996) explains that the non-prototypical meaning of the phrase "come on" can be understood through metaphorical extension of the prototypical meaning of "on". So prototypical meanings can be taught through TPR (Total Physical Response) and the teacher can encourage to extending such understanding to abstract meanings. Compare and Contrast of prepositions technique is very

useful to further widen the semantic mapping of the learners. Lindstromberg (230) explained the meaning of “come on” by contrasting it with “come back”. Semantic-based approaches often link various meanings of prepositions into a mental picture along with providing reliable and logical relation among several individual prepositions which otherwise appear unrelated.

The difficulty of learning prepositions is not only true of English but also extends to other languages for example to Spanish as observed by Lam(2009).Lam conducted a study with two learner groups to find out which method was better between cognitive linguistic approach or learning individual prepositional usage. Since cognitive linguistic approach launches with Prototypical meaning and extends to metaphorical or allied meanings, it has proved to be much useful, more effective, longer retention and with dramatically less efforts than traditional assimilation the hard way. Cognitive linguistic approach “allows teachers to point out the relationships between different uses of a preposition and describe patterns of meaning extension, as opposed to telling learners to simply memorize each use as an individual item. In this way, learners will hopefully be more aware of the expressive range of a preposition” (Lam 4). The results were even noted by her (Lam) that the group which is taught via cognitive linguistic approach fared well in post training test and delayed post training test. This clearly shows that semantic-based teaching expedites the result of instant grasping and prolonged retention for timely recall.

5. Summary:

Limiting any particular strategy may psychologically be over demanding to some trainers and researchers. But following Collocation Approach and Prototype Approach will certainly provide more exposure increasing the scope of assimilation. Manageably, larger quantities of inputs give a chance to the learners to relate their experiences to real time learning and how the prepositions are used in actual practice. In the same manner, Koffi(2010) reiterates the usefulness of sub categorization of frames of verbs and adjectives (323). Sub categorization helps learners to choose the correct preposition for verbs or adjectives depending on the context.

An understanding of inter-relations among different parts of speech will further enhance root level understanding and accurate application is possible. Hence, teachers should encourage resources that are sound and have proven success to overcome the limitations of traditional methods in a learning atmosphere.

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