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TEACHING OF PREPOSITIONS IN ENGLISH TO LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND  
LANGUAGE: A DISTANCE MODE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Grammar plays a predominant role in a language whether it is teaching or learning. Without grammar, no one can speak or write a language accurately. If a language is spoken or written without following grammatical rules, it cannot be considered a language. In fact, grammar is defined as the rules in a language for changing the form of words and joining them into sentences in a meaningful and a reasonable way. Grammar is the basic foundation for learning a new language where the learners learn the rules of the grammar to make sentences on their own and converse with others effectively. There are many components in grammar in which prepositions play a vital role in sentences. Prepositions can change the entire meaning of the sentences.

In this paper, an attempt is made to propose an innovative model of teaching English prepositions to distant learners of English at the undergraduate level. This model is based upon the use of 'frames' in a self-instructional programme. Accordingly, this paper is divided into three parts: Introduction, Frames and Conclusion. For the purpose of this paper, around 20 English prepositions have been chosen. Also the frames presented are only sample frames. Thus, either the prepositions dealt with or the frames evolved here are not exhaustive and they are only illustrative. The Appendix given at the end provides the relevant key.

**Key Words:** distance mode, English, frames, grammar, innovative model, learners, prepositions, second language, self-instructional programme, teaching

1.1 INTRODUCTION

A striking feature in the sphere of education in recent decades (i.e. from 1950s onwards) is the emergence of the distance mode of education as a very popular means of spreading higher education all over the world including India. With the explosion of knowledge and the need for its dissemination called for a fast expansion of educational institutions, especially in the spheres of higher and professional education. Governments, policy makers and educationists in different countries experienced problems in meeting the increasing demand for opening more and more institutions of higher and professional education. Besides, wherever governments established new institutions, the simultaneous explosion of population has widened the gap between the number of institutions available and the proportion of aspirants who wanted to pursue higher studies. Particularly, young people from semi-urban and rural areas have failed to derive benefits from

the new institutions for economic and social reasons. It was, in this context, that non-formal modes of education were explored and experimented by policy makers and administrators. Initially they assumed different forms such as private study, postal coaching and correspondence courses and were progressively consolidated into open universities founded upon the principles and practices of distance education. In this respect, the State of Telangana in India was among the few States which readily responded to the idea of Open University and started Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University. The other States followed suit. Simultaneously, several states and central universities, which had opened departments of correspondence courses earlier, developed these departments into Centers for Distance Education. As a result, the enrolment in the open universities and centers for distance education exceeded that in formal universities and colleges by large proportions.

For example, in Osmania University, situated in Hyderabad, the capital of the State of Telangana, the in-take of students in M.A. in English literature is around 200 whereas the in-take of the Center of Distance Education of the same university is around 2000. This is so in the case of the other P.G. courses. Then one can imagine the number of student enrolments in the undergraduate courses, not only in different university centers of distance education but also in open universities, will be in the thousands. In all these non-formal or distance education institutions, in all the courses at the U.G. and P.G. level, English is the second language as well as the medium of instruction in a majority of cases.

In view of this, it is essential to devise innovative strategies to teach the basic skills of the English language, Reading and Writing, in particular, to thousands of our young students who have enrolled themselves with these institutions imparting non-formal education.

If one makes a brief survey of the prevalent approaches, methods and techniques in the field of English Language Teaching, one will be struck by the fact that even the latest methodology has nothing to say about the teaching of English as a Second Language to the learners of distance education. Almost all the ELT methodologies are relevant to formal classroom situation. Right from the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Oral Situational Method, the Structural Approach, the Communicative Approach, the Silent Way, Community Language Learning (CLL), Total Physical Response, Notional-Functional Approach, the Naturalistic Approach, to name a few, do not mention anything about teaching of English to learners of distance mode.

Against the above background, a modest attempt is made to propose a self-instructional programme, in terms of Frames to the teaching of the use of English prepositions to the learners of English as second language at the UG level through the distance mode. The underlying assumption is that the learner, by reading these Frames and doing the tasks assigned to him, will be able to come to grips with the teaching/learning items automatically on his/her own without the intervention of a teacher, in contrast to a classroom situation in the mode of formal education. In the section below, five Frames are presented with the objective of enabling the learners to acquire control over the appropriate use of a sample list of prepositions in English. The selection of these prepositions is based upon Quirk *et al* (1972), Diane Hall (1986) and Collins (1993). The Frames presented here deal with only a limited number of English prepositions. Hence the Frames and prepositions are only illustrative and not exhaustive in nature. Here the attempt is to suggest a teaching strategy with reference to the prepositions of English.

### 1.1 FRAMES

Below are given five illustrative Frames on the use of a limited sample of English prepositions.

#### Frame I

A. The use of **at**, **on**, and **in**.

**Read the following sentences:**

1. Yuktha went **to** Hyderabad. → Yuktha was **at** Hyderabad.
2. Rao fell **onto** the floor. → Rao was **on** the floor.
3. Karthik dived **into** the water. → Karthik was **in** the water.

Now fill in the blanks in Box 2 and 3.

**Box 1**  
 i. Lata's family moved to Gulbarga  
 ii. The cat jumped onto the table.  
 iii. Pallavi walked into the hall.

**Box 2**  
 i.a. \_\_\_\_\_  
 ii.a \_\_\_\_\_  
 iii.a. \_\_\_\_\_

**Box 3**  
 i.b. \_\_\_\_\_  
 ii.b. \_\_\_\_\_  
 iii.b. \_\_\_\_\_

**Box 4**  
 i. Sasi was at Nagpur  
 ii. The dog was on the grass.  
 iii. Krishna was in the theatre.

**Frame II**

The use of *off, away from* and *out of*.

Study the following examples:

4. The books were *off* the shelves. (= The books were **not on** the shelves.)
5. Ram is *away from* Hyderabad. (= Ram is **not in** Hyderabad.)
6. Hari is *out of* the office. (= Hari is **not in** the office.)

Now fill in the blanks in Box 6 and Box 7.

**Box 5**

i. The visitors kept off the lawn.  
 ii. Shankar was away from Delhi.  
 iii. Kumar was out of the temple.

**Box 6**

i.c. \_\_\_\_\_  
 ii.c. \_\_\_\_\_  
 iii.c. \_\_\_\_\_

**Box 7**

i.d. \_\_\_\_\_  
 ii.d. \_\_\_\_\_  
 iii.d. \_\_\_\_\_

**Box 8**

i. The trucks were not on the road.  
 ii. Balu was in Bangalore.  
 iii. Mohan was not in the library.

**Frame III**

The use of *by, above* and *in front of* :

Read the following sentences:

7. Venkat was standing *by* the wall. (= Venkat was standing **at the side of** the wall.)
8. The picture is *above* the mantelpiece. (= The mantelpiece is **below** the picture.)
9. The bus is *in front of* the car. (=The car is **behind** the bus.)

Now fill in the blanks in Box 10 and Box 11.

**Box 9**

i. She was sitting by the pillar.  
 ii. The photograph is given above the caption.  
 iii. The clock-tower was in front of the railway station.

**Box 10**

i.e. \_\_\_\_\_  
 ii.e. \_\_\_\_\_  
 iii.e. \_\_\_\_\_

**Box 11**

i.f. \_\_\_\_\_  
 ii.f. \_\_\_\_\_  
 iii.f. \_\_\_\_\_

**Box 12**

i. I stood at the side of the counter.  
 ii. The piano was below the portrait.  
 iii. The tea-stall was behind the bus-stop.

**Frame IV**

The use of **over**, **under**, **across** and **through**.

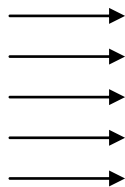
**Study the following examples:**

10. She spread a cloth **over** the table. (=She covered the table **with** a cloth.)
11. The sky is **over** our heads. (=The sky is **above** our heads.)
12. The travellers sat **under** the tree. (=The travellers sat **in a position lower than that of** the tree.)
13. The ball rolled **across** the lawn. (=The ball rolled **from one side of the lawn to the other side horizontally**.)
14. The river Ganges flows **through** Banaras. (= The river Ganges enters Banaras **at one side and comes out at the other side**.)

**Now fill in the blanks in Box 14 and Box 15.**

**Box 13**

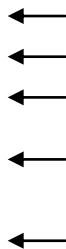
- i. He placed his hands over his face.
- ii. He held an umbrella over her head.
- iii. The river flows under the bridge.
- iv. They walked across the street.
- v. The road goes through the forest.

**Box 14**

- i.g. \_\_\_\_\_
- ii.g. \_\_\_\_\_
- iii.g. \_\_\_\_\_
- iv.g. \_\_\_\_\_
- v.g. \_\_\_\_\_

**Box 15**

- i.h. \_\_\_\_\_
- ii.h. \_\_\_\_\_
- iii.h. \_\_\_\_\_
- iv.h. \_\_\_\_\_
- v.h. \_\_\_\_\_

**Box 16**

- i. He covered the bed with a bed-sheet.
- ii. Slowly, clouds spread above the village.
- iii. The cat sat in a position lower than that of the table.
- iv. The boy ran from one side of the field to the other side horizontally.
- v. The burglar entered the house at one side of the window and came out at the other side. side.

**Frame V**

The use of **up**, **down**, **along** and **beyond**.

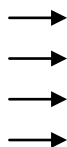
**Read the following examples:**

15. They climbed **up** the mountain. (=They climbed **to a higher position** on the mountain.)
16. They ran **down** the hill. (= They ran **from a place to other place at a lower level**.)
17. He walked **along** the road. (=He walked **from one end to the other end of** the road.)
18. The house is **beyond** the bridge. (=The house is **on the farther side of** the bridge.)

**Now fill in the blanks in Box 18 and Box 19.**

**Box 17**

- i. The girls walked up the steps.
- ii. The tears ran down her face.
- iii. The boat sailed along the river.
- iv. The post office is beyond the railway station.

**Box 18**

- i.i. \_\_\_\_\_
- ii.i. \_\_\_\_\_
- iii.i. \_\_\_\_\_
- iv.i. \_\_\_\_\_

**Box 19**

i.j. _____
ii.j. _____
iii.j. _____
iv.j. _____

**Box 20**

←	i. The boy climbed at a higher position on the tree.
←	ii. The students walked to a lower level on the steps.
←	iii. She walked from one end to the other end of the beach vertically.
←	iv. The factory is on the farther side of the town.

**1.2 CONCLUSION**

In this paper, a limited number of examples of prepositions in English have been dealt with. The assumption underlying this paper was that it is possible to teach the distant learner of English as a second language at the UG level to acquire competence in the appropriate use of the teaching items presented in the form of Frames based upon self-instructional methodology which is still an unexplored area in English Language Teaching (ELT). As a corollary, it is possible to teach the appropriate use of all the most frequent English prepositions to the target learners. Furthermore, it is suggested here that the other important phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical items of English in structural, functional and communicative terms can be taught to the target learners effectively through the innovative proposal made in this paper. An advantage of this model is that it can be adapted to audio-visual aids and Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).

**Appendix****Key****Frame I****Box 2.**

- i.a. Lata's family is at Gulbarga.
- ii.a. The cat was on the table.
- iii.a. Pallavi was in the hall.

**Box 3.**

- i.b. Sasi moved/went to Nagpur.
- ii.b. The dog jumped onto the grass.
- iii.b. Krishna walked into the theatre.

**Frame II****Box 6**

- i.c. The visitors were not on the lawn.
- ii.c. Sekhar was not in Delhi.
- iii.c. Kumar was not in the temple.

**Box 7**

- i.d. The trucks were kept off the road.
- ii.d. Balu was away from Bangalore.
- iii.d. Mohan was out of the library.

**Frame III****Box 10**

- i.e. She was sitting at the side of the pillar.
- ii.e. The caption is given below the photograph.
- iii.e. The railway station is behind the clock-tower.

**Box 11**

- i.f. I stood by the counter.
- ii.f. The portrait was above the piano.

iii.f. The bus-stop was in front of the tea-stall.

**Frame IV****Box 14**

i.g. He covered his face with his hands.

ii.g. He held an umbrella above her head.

iii.g. The bridge is above the river.

iv.g. They walked from one end of the street to the other end horizontally.

v.g. The road enters at one end and comes out at the other end of the forest.

**Box 15**

i.h. He spread a bed-sheet over the bed.

ii.h. Slowly, clouds spread over the village.

iii.h. The cat sat under the table.

iv.h. The boy ran across the field.

v.h. The burgler entered the house through the window.

**Frame V****Box 18**

i.i. The girls walked to a higher position on the steps.

ii.i. The tears ran to a lower position on her face.

iii.i. The boat sailed from one end to the other end of the river.

iv.i. The post office is on the farther side of the railway station.

**Box 19**

i.j. The boy climbed up the tree.

ii.j. The students walked down the steps.

iii.j. She walked along the beach.

iv.j. The factory is beyond the town.

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