Difficulties in Using Prepositions : A Study on Bangladeshi EFL Learners

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Abstract : This study aims to investigate the difficulties which the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as Second Language (ESL) learners of Bangladesh face with English prepositions. English is taught as a foreign language to students throughout the country which is a second language for most of the learners as a part of their curriculum. Even after twelve years of institutional learning, most of the learners will face problems in using English properly. By reviewing the related literature and theoretical background, it is found that, the EFL or ESL learners face problems in the appropriate use of prepositions around the world. This paper aims to find out the difficulties faced by the EFL learners regarding the use of prepositions in our country.

Introduction

It is undeniable that because of the rapid growth of English, it is not only used by the natives but also the non-natives. Statistics from various sources claim that the native speakers are significantly outnumbered by the non-native speakers of English (Kirkpatrick, 2007). According to Widdowson (1994), "… it is only international to the extent that it is not their language. It is not a possession which they lease out to others, while still retaining the freehold. Other people actually own it" (p. 385). Bangladesh is not out of this context. Since 1991 only English is taught as a compulsory foreign language from grade I to XII in public schools and colleges of Bangladesh. The approach to upgrade English education is introduced at the earliest level of education (Yasmin, 2005). Selinker (1972) indicates that the part of human brain which is psychological, is triggered when an attempt is made to learn a new language. And being a dynamic system, language takes grammar as such a function that helps constitute a

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meaning from a broad collection of contexts (Gebhard, Gunawan, and Chen, 2014). One of the important parts of English grammar is preposition.

Literature review

According to Curme (1931), from the historical perspective, the word 'preposition' has originated from the Latin word 'praepositio'. 'Praepositio' is a combination of two words. Ellis and Laporte (1997) say, learners make mistakes when they are unable to realize the correct answers and do not know them. Mistakes indicate their inability to use the language properly and as well as the inability of using its grammar. Often it is observed that learners understand the rules but they are unable to use them while learning or writing. According to statistics, in a corpus of one million English words, ten percent are prepositions (Fang, 2000). Moreover, Morenberg (1997) identifies that whether speaking or writing, a user of English language can barely go far without using prepositions. Saint-Dizier (2006) finds near about 50 prepositions in English. He mentions that if the most frequent words are counted then 9 prepositions are among 30 most frequently used words in English. In the table below (adapted from Saint-Dizier, 2006:3) these prepositions and their ranks are provided.

Table 1 : *Rank of prepositions in most frequently used English*

Preposition	Rank
Of	2
In	5
To	8
For	11
With	13
On	16
By	18

Takahaski (1969) pointed out that English prepositions are well known to the EFL, ESL and even among the native users and learners. The reason is their struggle to use the prepositions correctly. McCarthy

(1972) agrees and adds that the teachers of English are also aware of the fact. Prepositions and meaning both are undeniably interconnected. Parrott (2000) adds that some polysemous prepositions are not interconnected, so usages of prepositions are not related to the original or literal meaning and they mislead the learners.

The researchers have found out that the learners face difficulty in using English prepositions and their first language has influence on that (Scott and Tucker, 1974). Hasbún (2007) and Yu &Yoo (2010) find out that using incorrect prepositions is one of the most common errors made by the Spanish and Korean EFL learners. There are no clear cut rules to use prepositions. The existing ones are inaccurate and complicated (Wahlen, 2001). According to Swan (1988), these complications and inaccuracy also cause the problems of ESL students and teachers. To assess such complexities three parameters have been chosen in this study to analyze the linguistic data. They are:

a. Appropriate Use of Prepositions

b. Prepositions and Context

c. The influence of L_1

Research design and research methodology

Since the present research pursues to find out the difficulty level of using prepositions, quantitative approach is the most suitable approach for this study. The research is basically two folds. They are:

i.   finding out the difficulty level and

ii. investigating the possible reasons for those difficulties.

Setting of the research and participants

To meet the goal of the study, data was collected using two tests and the participants were selected from two different departments of the University of Dhaka. One of the groups was from English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and the other was from Women and Gender Studies (WGS). It took me two weeks to collect the data and the participants took about an hour to answer the first test and 15-25 minutes to answer the second one. Each participant attended both the tests. It was a prefixed condition of the research that the data would be collected from two departments of a public university as the sample

was purposive. I wanted to keep the background and context same for both of the groups. The data was collected from 56 participants where there were 29 students from ESOL (group-1) and 27 students from WGS (group-2). The following checklist was followed for selecting the departments.

Necessary Information Topics	Answer	
1.Study program (BA Honours)	Yes	No
2.English studying background	Yes	No
3.Current Study level	Yes	No

Figure 1: Check list

Formulation of hypothesis

To get a plausible result of this study, first a null hypothesis has been formulated as stated below:

- **Null Hypothesis:** The levels of difficulty in using prepositions in the two groups of tertiary level of students are the same.

This hypothesis has been tested by using appropriate statistical tool. As the statistical result has ruled out this possibility, an alternative hypothesis has been devised to get the inference. The hypothesis is given below:

- **Alternative Hypothesis:** The levels of difficulty are not the same between the two groups where the students from English language department are likely to face lower level of difficulty.

Instruments

Two tests were designed to collect data. In the first test (test-1) there were 24 questions of filling the gaps with correct prepositions without clues and Bangla translation of each of the sentences after filling the gaps. The second test (test-2) was a reading test. It was a closed test with clues. There was a small passage with 9 gaps. The participants used the clues which were prepositions to fill the gaps with and completed the passage. The reading test was intentionally designed easy for the participants.

Designing the Instruments

Following the list provided by Allosop (1986) only 13 most used simple prepositions were taken for the tests. They were from three classes of prepositions: spatial prepositions, temporal prepositions and instrumental prepositions and prepositions of means in the first test on filling the gaps with prepositions, questions numbered 1, 5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 19 and 23 are from the group of spatial prepositions whereas questions numbered 2,3,6,8,13,15,16 and 21 are from temporal prepositions and questions numbered 4, 11, 12, 17, 18, 20, 22 and 24 are from the group of instrumental and prepositions of means. The reading test has 9 gaps. It was designed keeping the same preposition variations and equal distribution of gaps for each kind.

Data Analysis and Findings

Testing hypothesis

In the Null hypothesis, we have considered the population variance is equal. T-test is conducted here to test the Null hypothesis to find out the variances. It is a one tailed t-test of independent sample or unrelated sample. As both the sample sizes are less than 30. The t-test is used here to evaluate whether the means for these two independent groups are significantly different from each other or not. According to the Null Hypothesis (H_0) we can say that the mean of first group (M_1) is equal to the mean of second group (M_2) as there is no difference. We can present it like:

$$H_0:\ M_1 = M_2 \ \ or \ \ H_0: M_1 - M_2 = 0$$

And the alternative hypothesis (H_a) will be like:

$$H_a:\ M_1 \neq M_2 \ \ or \ \ H_a:\ M_1 - M_2 \neq 0$$

For every correct answer 2 and every wrong answer 1 was given. The scores were calculated to find out the variance for each group.

Scores Calculations

> **Treatment 1** *(group 1)*
>
> N_1: 29
> $df_1 = N - 1 = 29 - 1 = 28$
>
> M_1: 13.24

> SS_1: 571.31
>
> $s^2_1 = SS_1 / (N - 1) = 571.31 / (29-1) = 20.4$

Where N_1 is first group or sample, df_1 is degree of freedom and M_1 is the mean for the same group.

> **Treatment 2** (group 2)
>
> N_2: 27
>
> $df_2 = N - 1 = 27 - 1 = 26$
>
> M_2: 16.37
>
> SS_2: 310.3
>
> $s^2_2 = SS_2 / (N - 1) = 310.3 / (27-1) = 11.93$

Where N_2 is second group or sample, df_2 is degree of freedom; M_2 is the mean for the same group.

Now following the formula, the *t* value calculation for these groups will be:

T-value Calculation

> $s^2_p = ((df_1 / (df_1 + df_2)) * s^2_1) + ((df_2 / (df_2 + df_2)) * s^2_2) = ((28/54) * 20.4) + ((26/54) * 11.93) = 16.33$
>
> $s^2_{M1} = s^2_p / N_1 = 16.33/29 = 0.56$
>
> $s^2_{M2} = s^2_p / N_2 = 16.33/27 = 0.6$
>
> $t = (M_1 - M_2) / \sqrt{(s^2_{M1} + s^2_{M2})} = -3.13/\sqrt{1.17} = -2.9$

Here, the *t*-value is -2.89568. The result is significant at $p< .05$ or the significance level is .05.

Effect Size Calculator for T-Test

There are many forms of standard deviation unit effect size such as Cohen's *d*, Hedges' *g* etc. Here, as it is an independent samples t-test, Cohen's *d* is used to calculate the effect size. This is:

> Cohen's $d = (M_2 - M_1) / SD_{pooled}$
>
> Where: $SD_{pooled} = \sqrt{((SD_1^2 + SD_2^2) / 2)}$

Now if we use it for the two groups we will get the following results:

Group 1

Mean (*M*):	13.24
Standard deviation (*s*):	4.517072
Sample size (*n*):	29

Group 2

Mean (*M*):	16.37
Standard deviation (*s*):	3.454630
Sample size (*n*):	27

Here, Cohen's $d = (16.37 - 13.24) / 4.021095 = 0.778395$.

It proves that the t-test is undoubtedly accurate and with this result we can say that the Null hypothesis is rejected as the significance is .05. Here $M_1 \neq M_2$ or $M_1 - M_2 \neq 0$ and which proves the alternative hypothesis.

Now, with the help of the parameters, a linguistic analysis has been made on the basis of the statistical data collected from the participants.Here within the parameter discussion, the linguistic analysis is divided into three parts broadly: the analysis of the use of English prepositions for gap filling in test -1, then there is the translation analysis part for test -1 and lastly the analysis of test-2 which is a reading test.

Appropriate use of Prepositions

4.5.1 Analysis of the Test -1(fill in the blank)

An overall view

70.6%   87.2%   78.9%

■ % of obtained score
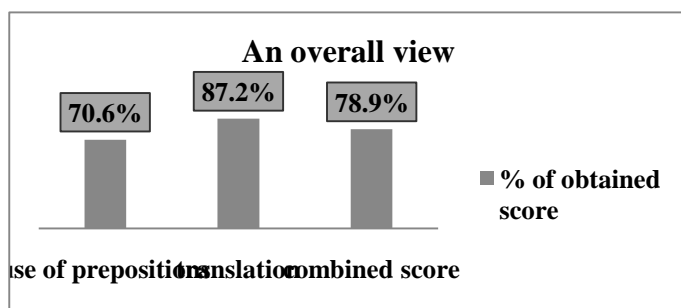
ise of prepositionstranslationcombined score

Figure 2: Percentages of overall obtained scores of both groups (Test-1).

The bar chart illustrates the obtained score of both the groups separately for the prepositional use and translation and also a score in combination. Here in the last bar we can see that the total score is good which is 78.9% and the total number of questions in Test-1 were 48, with 24 in each from the appropriate use of prepositions part and the translation part. The obtained score for using appropriate prepositions in English is 70.6 % (in 24 questions) which is lower than the translation score 87.2% in 24 questions. So, it is clear that scoring well in translating in Bangla has raised the total score and that is very normal as Bangla is their mother tongue and L_1. As far as the use of appropriate prepositions of English is concerned, the score is 70.6% which is not very convincing as a good score in this particular test.

Simple prepositions belong to the closed word class so there is no chance to use them creatively or to create them like complex prepositions (Yates, 1999; andEssberger, 2012). So, it is natural that the application of simple prepositions is easier than that of complex prepositions. But the use of prepositions is challenging for not only the EFL or ESL learners but also for the teachers of English language as mentioned by Pitman (1966) andOpara (2001).And according to the score of above mentioned figure, the Bangla EFL learners face the same challenge.
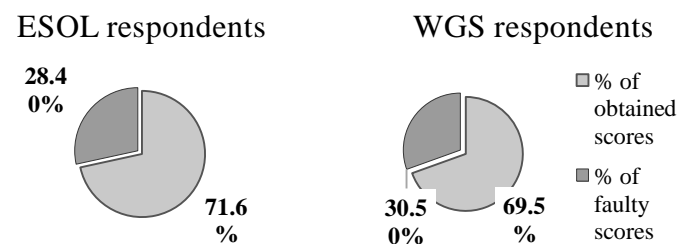
Overall performance in prepositions

ESOL respondents   WGS respondents

28.4
0%

71.6
%

30.5
0%

69.5
%

■ % of obtained scores

■ % of faulty scores

Figure 3: Overall score of ESOL group (group 1) and WGS group (group 2).

The two pie charts illustrate the faulty and obtained scores of the two groups in the use of preposition in test 1. For both groups, the obtained score is higher than the faulty score. The participants from ESOL did better in this test than the participants from W&GS. The faulty score comprised by ESOL is 28% were as it is 30% in W&GS group. Though

ESOL did better, the difference of faulty score is not very significant as it is only 2%. Now let us have a closer look at the performances of the two groups in these categories.

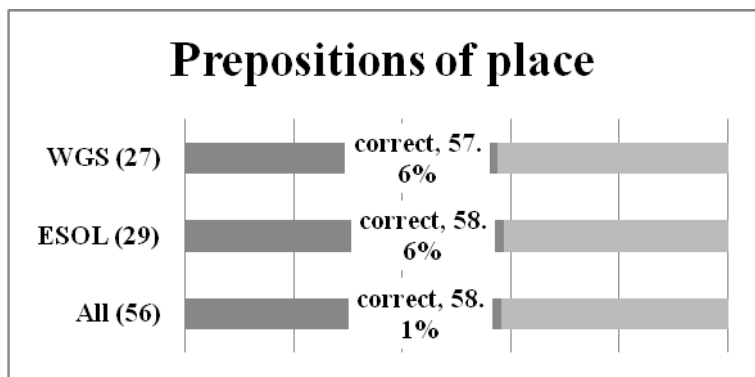### I.   Spatial Prepositions or Prepositions of Space

Figure 1: Combined and separately obtained scores by both groups in the use of spatial prepositions.

The bar chart provides information about the scores gained by the two groups independently and combined, in the use of spatial prepositions or prepositions of space. It gives figures showing the differences in the obtained scores too.

Overall, both the ESOL and WGS scored 58% in this criterion which is not satisfying comparing with the score of prepositions of time and prepositions of instrument. The ESOL group scored 58.6% whereas the WGS group obtained 57.6%. ESOL did better but with a little difference and if we calculate the accurate difference, it is interesting to note that it is only 1%.

Considering the combined and the separately obtained scores of the two groups in the use of spatial prepositions, it can be said that the groups are not good at using the prepositions of space and they face almost the same level of difficulty. According to Zwarts (1997) there is no language without spatial relations, and Vandeloise (2006) and Conventry&Guijarro-Fuentes (2008) say that, the other usages of prepositions depend on the conceptualization or understanding of the spatial prepositions. So, it is really important to understand the spatial prepositions well. Hence, it can be suggested that the performance

regarding spatial prepositions of the Bangladeshi EFL learners needs concentration as they need proper understanding of them.

O'Keefe (1996), Zwarts (1997) and Zwarts& Winter (2000) have developed a semantic explanation for spatial prepositions where they have shown that being represented by a vector, the position of a figure (also called located object, theme or trajector) is relative to a ground (also reference object, relatum, or landmark).

Spatial prepositions are not only challenging for Bangladeshi EFL learners but also for EFL learners from other countries. Fion (2005) asserts that ESL learners from Hong Kong also face problems advocating the spatial prepositions.

A more detailed look at the use of spatial prepositions

There are many spatial prepositions in English but only seven of them from the list of most important spatial prepositions by Allosop (1986) were used to take the test. They were 'from', 'through', 'among', 'between', 'against', 'towards' and 'on'.
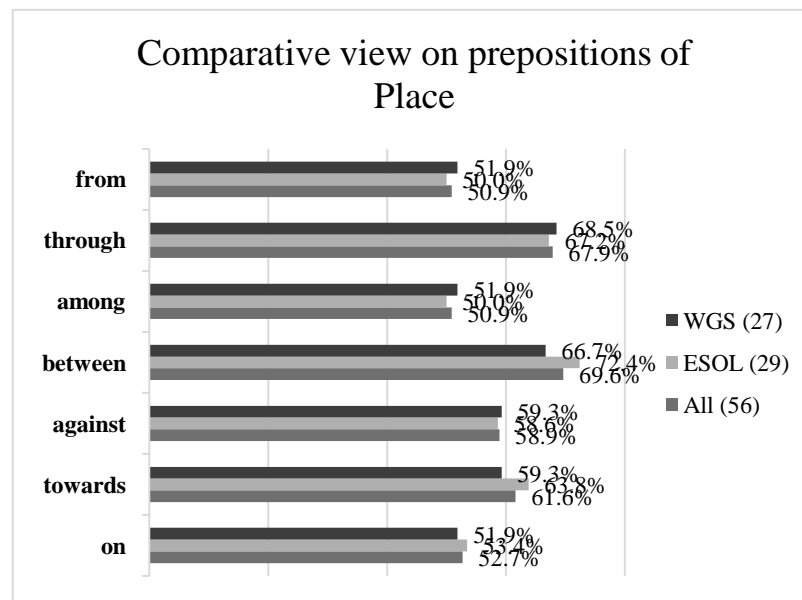

Figure 4: A comparative view of obtained scores in the spatial prepositions of the two groups.

The bar chart compares the obtained scores for the seven spatial prepositions, taking them individually between the two groups. Here the combined scores (56 participants) and the separately obtained scores of both of the groups for the use of the above mentioned spatial prepositions are calculated. The chart shows that the participants scored the best in using the prepositions 'through' and 'towards' whereas the score for the rest of the prepositions are very close.

ii) Temporal Prepositions or Prepositions of Time

Prepositions of time

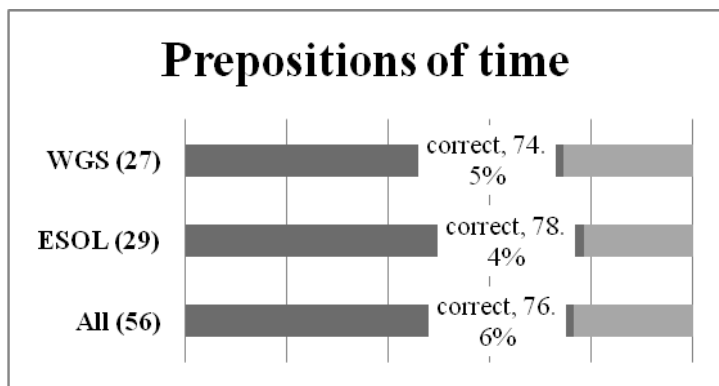|	
WGS (27)	correct, 74.5%
ESOL (29)	correct, 78.4%
All (56)	correct, 76.6%

Figure 5: Combined and separately obtained scores by both groups in the use of temporalprepositions.

The bar chart illustrates the performance of both the groups in the appropriate use of preposition of time or temporal prepositions. The group obtained scores have been shown separately along with the combined score.

It is clear from the scores that the participants from both of the groups did better in the use of prepositions of time than the use of preposition of space. Collectively they scored 76.6% where ESOL individually scored 78.4% and WGS scored 74.5%. The scores reveal that they have a better command on the temporal prepositions than those of spatial. ESOL group got higher score than WGS by a difference of 3.9%.

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1972) say that, the temporal prepositions are actually an extension of the ideas connected to spatial prepositions. Hasan and Abdullah (2009) discuss the use of temporal prepositions to indicate point of time and the duration of time. These two types are used in the test -1 to find out the level of difficulty with them.

A more detailed look at the use of temporal prepositions

Comparative view on prepositions of time

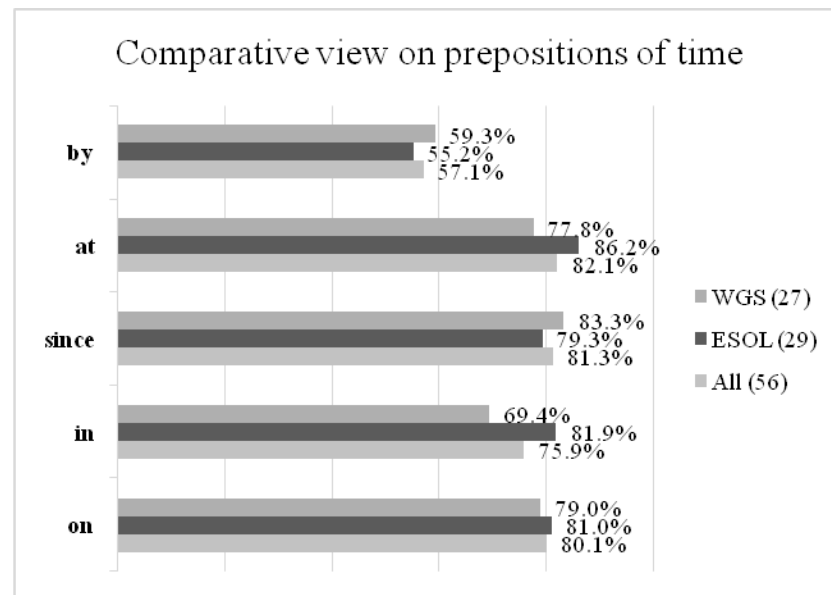|	WGS (27)	ESOL (29)	All (56)
by	59.3%	55.2%	57.1%
at	77.8%	86.2%	82.1%
since	83.3%	79.3%	81.3%
in	69.4%	81.9%	75.9%
on	79.0%	81.0%	80.1%

Figure 6: A comparative view of obtained scores in the temporal prepositions of the twogroups.

Analyzing the above chart, we can see that the groups scored well in all the prepositions except the preposition 'by'.

iii)   Instrumental Prepositions or Prepositions of instrument and prepositions of means

Prepositions of instrument & means

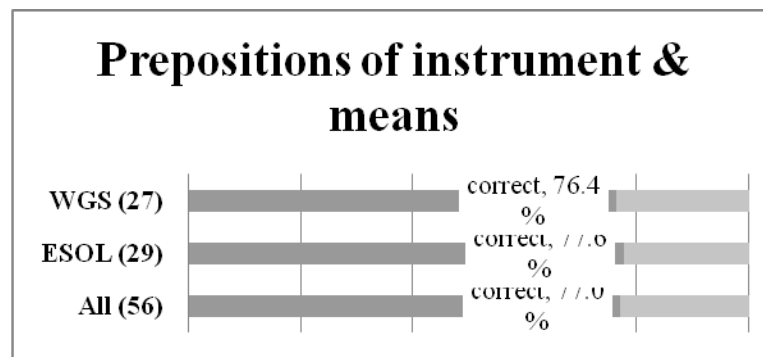|	
WGS (27)	correct, 76.4%
ESOL (29)	correct, 77.6%
All (56)	correct, 77.0%

Figure 7: Combined and separately obtained score by both groups in the use of instrumental prepositions and prepositions of means.

If we compare these scores of instrumental prepositions and prepositions of means with the scores of spatial and temporal prepositions then it will be clear that the participants scored better here with a little difference in their separate scores. The ESOL group's obtained score is 77.6% by using the prepositions correctly and WGS obtained 76.4% where the combined score is 77.0%.

Gass (1979) and Zhang and Widyastuti (2010) indicate that generally prepositions are highly polysemous and belong to a category which is extremely conceptual. In the same tone Boers and Demecheleer (1998) argue that prepositions have both literal and figurative meanings, so the EFL or ESL learners face hurdles in governing the prepositions.Gethin and Gunnemark (1996) mention two factors responsible for the difficulty that is faced while mastering the meaning and use of prepositions. They are the conceptual nonequivalent meaning among the languages and bad learning habits of the learners. The instrumental and means prepositions are closely meaning and that is a problem for the EFL or ESL learners.

A more detailed look at the use of instrumental prepositions:
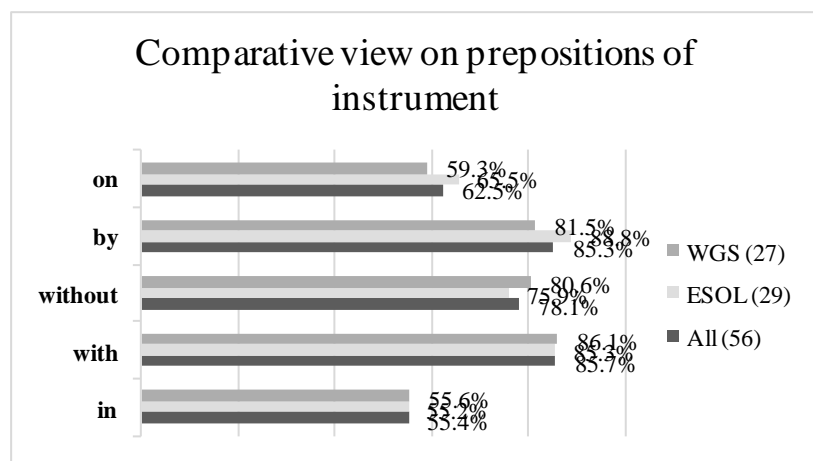
Figure 8: A comparative view of obtained scores in the instrumental prepositions of the two groups.

The bar chart gives information about the combined and separate scores for each preposition. Looking at the detail both the groups scored lowest in using the preposition 'in'. They scored about 55%

individually and combined. According to the data the second lowest score is with the preposition 'on'. The combined score is 62.5% with ESOL scoring65.5% and WGS scoring 59.3%. It seems that the participants are having trouble in using 'in' and 'on' as prepositions of instrument and means.By contrast, the participants did far better in the use of the prepositions 'by', 'with' and 'without'. In the case of 'without' the scores are not as good as the cases of 'by' and 'with'.

In the above discussed prepositions, some are immensely polysemous such as: 'on', 'in', 'by', 'at' etc. and used in various contexts applying different meaning. Rudzka-Ostyn (2003), Tyler & Evans (2003), Ellis (2008), Koffi (2010), Zelinsky-Wibbelt (1993) and many other researchers explained the polysemous nature of prepositions. According to Gass (1979) and Zhang &Widyastuti (2010) prepositions are notably polysemous and this is why they are extremely conceptual as well. This causes problems for the EFL learners. Gethin and Gunnemark (1996) notice that there are variations in meaning of some prepositions and that may not have equivalents in other languages. Moreover, Boers and Demecheleer (1998) say that using the figurative meaning of prepositions also cause problems for the EFL learners. The prepositions of English being many in numbers also create problems for the EFL learners (Koffi, 2010; Celce -Murcia & Larsen Freeman, 1999; Evans & Tyler, 2005).If we look at the graph we can see that thirteen different prepositions have been used for the test consisting 24 fill-in-the-blank questions and some of the prepositions are used more than once.

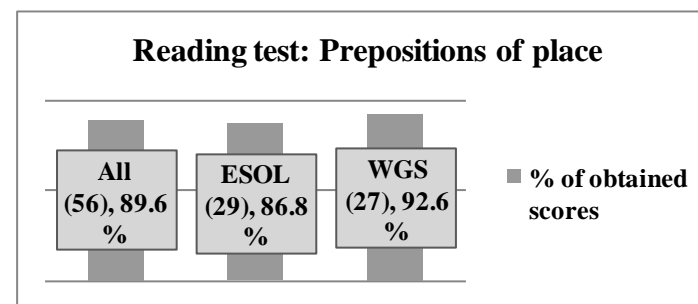**Analysis of the Test -2(the reading test)**

Figure 9: Combined and separately obtained score by both groups in the use of spatial prepositions in the reading test.

The bar chart illustrates the scores of the preposition of space for the reading test. According to the score we can see that the participants did well by scoring a good percentage independently and combined and those are ESOL 86.8%, WGS 92.6% and combined 89.6%.
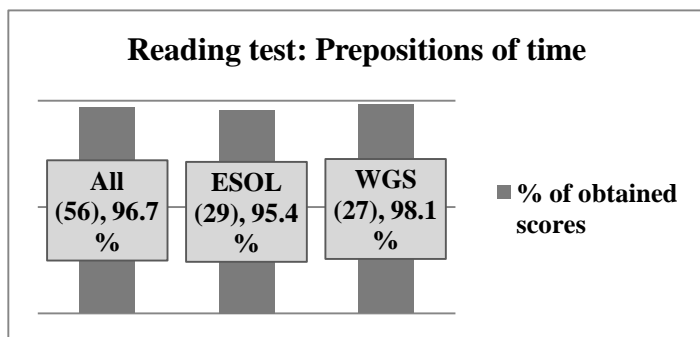
Reading test: Prepositions of time

All (56), 96.7%   ESOL (29), 95.4%   WGS (27), 98.1%

■ % of obtained scores

Figure 10: Combined and separately obtained score by both groups in the use of temporal prepositions in the reading test.

Here in the case of temporal prepositions, the graph shows that they scored very well. The combined score of the groups is 96.7% with ESOL scoring 95.4% and WGS scoring 98.1%.
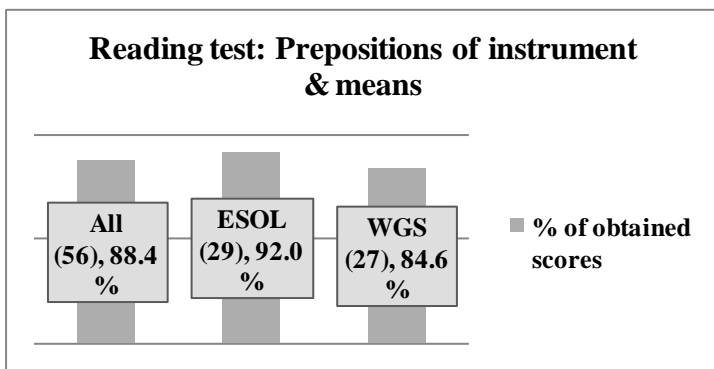
Reading test: Prepositions of instrument & means

All (56), 88.4%   ESOL (29), 92.0%   WGS (27), 84.6%

■ % of obtained scores

Figure 11: Combined and separately obtained score by both groups in the use of instrumental prepositions in the reading test.

The chart compares scores of the preposition of instrument and means where 'with', 'without' and 'by' were tested in this category. ESOL scored 92.0% and WGS scored 84.6%. So, they need to work on these prepositions.

In conclusion, it appears that while the participants were tested giving clues and keeping the context familiar, they performed better than without clues (test-1). Mentioning the result, it can be determined that frequent use of prepositions helps the learners to conceptualize them well so they can use them more appropriately.

According to Ellis and Laporte (1997), learners make mistakes because they lack proper knowledge of the grammar. So, the misuse or inappropriate use of prepositions can be limited by teaching and learning the grammar.Bremer,Broeder, Roberts, Simonet and Vasseur (1996) claim that depending on the variables, the quality and quantity of the target language may be limited.

b) Prepositions and Context

In this test, some questions were made making the context a bit difficult or challenging to see their conceptualization of context through their performance or scores.
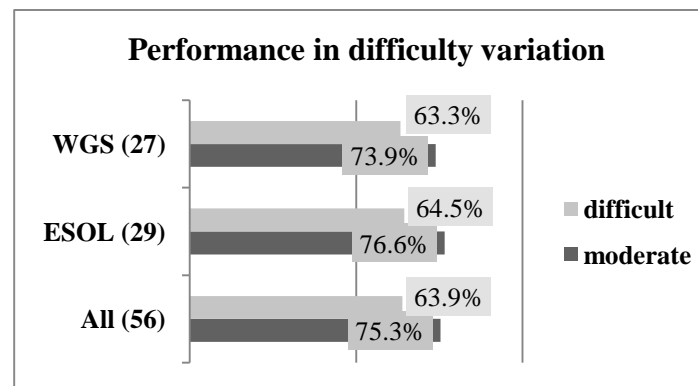
Performance in difficulty variation

WGS (27)   63.3% / 73.9%
ESOL (29)   64.5% / 76.6%
All (56)   63.9% / 75.3%

■ difficult   ■ moderate

Figure 12: A comparative view of using appropriate prepositions in difficulty variation of the two groups.

This chart illustrates a comparison in the scores of the two groups regarding the contextual difficulty in the test questions. The mentioned questions in the section 'instrument design' were plotted as contextually difficult or challenging and the rest of the questions were plotted contextually moderately difficult.

Now seeing the figure of the scores, it is clear that the participants could not score well in challenging context as their combined score is

63.9%, which is not good at all as the prepositions were chosen from the simple and most frequent prepositions. Similarly, their score in the moderate or less challenging context is 75.3% which is also not up to the mark for the same reason.

As the bars compare the scores of ESOL and WGS, it is interesting to note that there is no significant difference in the percentage of the scores of the both groups in the contextual difficulty variation. Regarding challenging context ESOL scored 64.5% and WGS scored 63.3% whereas in the moderate context or the usual context they scored 76.6% and 73.9%. The differences between the scores of the two contexts are 1.2% and 2.7%.

They faced problems in using the preposition 'on' in different contexts. It is seen from the test context that the participants do better in using prepositions appropriately when they are familiar with the context and collocation of the preposition. For example, from this test we can see that the prepositions in 'on leave', 'by bus', 'in spring', 'with an ancient key' etc. were used correctly by most of the participants as these collocations are familiar to them.

In contrast when the collocation context is not very common or familiar the participants did not score well. For example, they failed to score in the use of prepositions in 'on it (bus)', 'in ink', 'on ship', 'among luggage', 'on a cold winter morning' etc. Lindstromberg (1996) has criticized this approach and in chapter two there is a thorough discussion on this point in the section 'The Collocation Approach'.

Lack of familiarity and lack of use, make the use of the prepositions difficult too. This can be understood regarding the use of 'against', 'towards', 'since', 'through' etc. from the test result. It is also found that when the context is changed the participants mixed up the use of 'by' and 'with'. Almost all of them used 'by' appropriately when the context involves a bus as it is a common context and on the other hand they could not use 'by' so well in other contexts.

From reviewing the literature, we have come to know that the traditional approach of teaching and learning prepositions has been practiced for decades. But some other approaches and methods can also be very helpful regarding teaching and learning the correct use of prepositions. Song, Schnotz&Juchem-Grundmann (2015) got positive result using this approach. Lakoff (1987), Geeraerts (1989),

Lindstromberg (1996) and Lam (2009) say that the prototype approach helps to understand the contextual meaning which is proved by works of Brugman (1988), Hawkins (1984) and Chavarría (2002).According to Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) the schematic concept, and according to Maslo (2011) andFerrando (1999) the metaphor theory can also be helpful in understanding the meaning variety in prepositions.Wolter (2006) says that the knowledge of mental lexicon is necessary for second language learning.

c) The influence of L_1

According to James (2007) and Xu (2008) while learning a second or foreign language the learners face some clash points originated from the first language or L_1. The learning and teaching of prepositions also face the same issue. The discussion on the influence of L_1 is done below after checking out the score of translation test from test-1 and analyzing them.

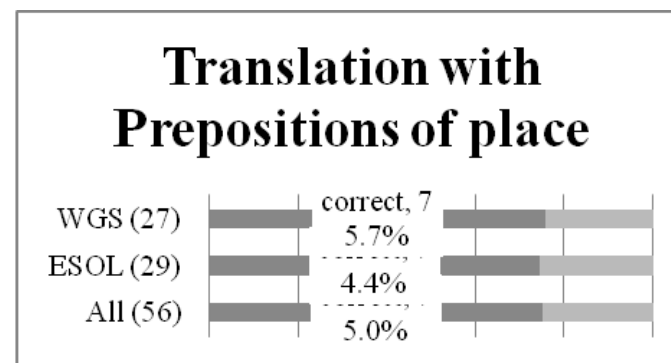**Analysis of the Translation (test-1)**

Figure 13: Translation scores of the groups with prepositions of place.

The graph shows that the translation scores of the groups are moderate regarding spatial prepositions. The combined score is 75.0% and individuals are 74.4% for ESOL and 75.7% for WGS. We noticed that, both groups scored lowest in the use of spatial prepositions. So, we can come to the conclusion that, their concepts are not clear regarding spatial prepositions. And since their conceptualization is not well governed, they use the spatial prepositions inappropriately, not only in English but also while translating them in Bangla.
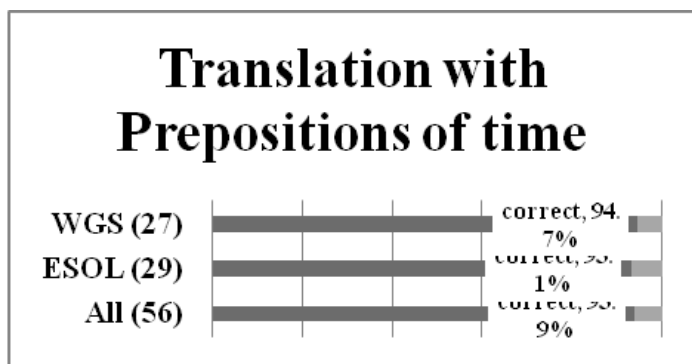
Figure 14: Translation scores of the groups with prepositions of time.

The graph illustrates an overall look at the scores obtained by the two groups in respect of temporal prepositions. Here they did better than the use of spatial prepositions. Their combined score is 93.9% where ESOL scored 93.1% and WGS scored 94.7%. This is the expected result as they have translated in their L$_1$ and which is their mother tongue.
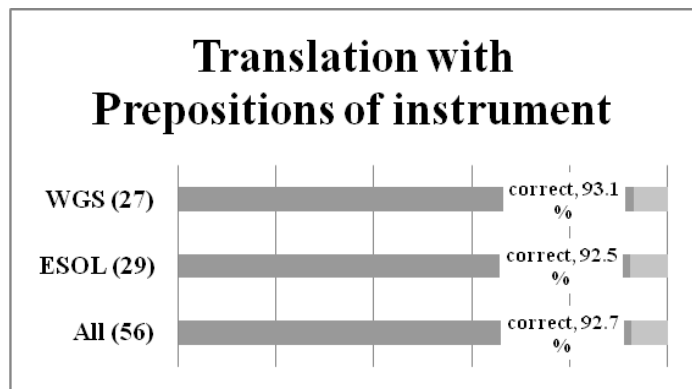

Figure 15: Translation scores of the groups with prepositions of instruments and means.

From the percentages of the scores mentioned in the above graph it is clear that both the groups scored well in the translation of the prepositions of instrument and means. They scored higher than the translation scores of spatial prepositions and a bit lower than the temporal prepositions.

Comparing the results of the appropriate use of the classes of prepositions, it is well found that the participants scored better in

translating into Bangla than using them in English. So, it is clear that even they do not get the appropriate one from English, they somehow manage to understand the meaning as they face less trouble in translating them.

First language has a high influence over the second or the target language (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Mohamed, Lian& Eliza, 2004). Now, we will see how influential L$_1$ can be regarding prepositional use. For English prepositions, Bangla has postpositions. It has already been mentioned that prepositions are many in number causing trouble for the EFL or ESL learners. Bangla postpositions are fewer in number so while using English prepositions the participants do not find the equivalents in Bangla postpositions.

For example, if we consider the use of prepositions like 'on', 'in', 'within', 'among', 'between' etc. which I have used in this research, it is found that though participants could not use these prepositions appropriately but they did well in translating them. Now if we take a look at the use of Bangla postpositions in the translation part, we will find that the participants used only three postpositions from Bangla replacing all those prepositions from English and they are: '*moddhe*', '*vitore*' and *bibhokti* '*a*'. It is noticeable that in the inappropriate or incorrect use of these prepositions they used these prepositions alternatively such as: 'in', 'into', instead of 'on' and vice versa. So, the scores tell us that the participants lack in conceptualization of particular meaning and usage variety of prepositions and as Bangla postpositions have a limited range regarding these issues, the participants may face clash points.

In this test, most of the participants used the preposition 'among' inappropriately and most of them replaced it with the preposition 'in'. It is true that the reason behind this is the lack of the number and meaning of equivalent postpositions but the most interesting thing is that here they made the mistake not only for that issue but also for not having clear concept about the meaning and use of the vocabulary. Here, the word 'luggage' was used and not having the clarity about its use and meaning they translate it incorrectly and the translation reflects that they used 'in'. In the incorrect use of the preposition 'from' the participants used 'through' and 'to' on the other hand they used 'to', 'across', and 'into' where the appropriate use is 'through'. In

translation, these all are replaced by '*moddhodiye*' or '*dike'* by the participants because Bangla does not have these kinds of geographical dimensional variation in meaning.

Again, instead of 'since' many of the participants have wrongly used 'from'. In Bangla translation, they used '*theke*' for both because those two prepositions have this same meaning postposition in Bangla. In the test-2 (reading test) the translation of the passage was correctly done by almost everyone, but there was a problem with translating 'since' in a sentence. Most of the participants could not translate it accurately as they could not understand the use of it in English well.

In Bangla translation, most of the participants used only the postposition '*diye*' replacing the prepositions 'by' and 'with', which is correct in Bangla translation as it does not change the meaning and scene in Bangla. But they also have replaced the prepositions with each other while filling the gaps, which is not correct in English as in English generally the preposition 'by' is used to mean 'means' and 'with' is used meaning 'instrument'. It happened because of the influence of L_1.As we know from chapter two, Bastkowski (2010) and Singleton (1999) inform that, while learning a second language, two mental lexemes exist together creating great influence on each other.

Most of the time Bangla has an SOV word order and English has an SVO word order.Besides Bennet (1957) describes the syntactic classification of preposition which Bangla does not share. It is also a reason for facing difficulty in understanding the meaning in the sentences that prepositions change with their use.

According to Brown (1994) the second language learners link their first language with the target one subconsciously. And that ends in making errors and these are interlingual errors (Richards, 1974; Krashen, 1982; Ellis and Laporte, 1997; Norrish, 1983; James, 1998; Lightbown and Spada, 1999). Here the participants show interlingual errors and the language transfer is a negative one as the influence of their L_1 is creating obstacles in conceptualizing the target or second one properly. Platt, Platt, & Richards (1992) mentioned that the inappropriate use or wrong use of the L_2 rules is the result of the application of rules from L_1, on L_2.

Findings of the study

After analyzing the data, the study has come out with the following findings:

- The difficulty level faced by the EFL learners in Bangladesh in the use of simple preposition is high. Because theydo not get good scores without using most frequent and simple prepositions.

- The difficulty level is highest in the use of spatial prepositions.

- They face problems in differentiating the polysemous nature of preposition and also in their use.

- The postpositions of Bangla have a great influence over the use of prepositions.

- They showed negative language transfer in the use of prepositions.

- In test 2 WGS did better than ESOL in most of the cases, where the test was easier.

Though in test 1 the ESOL group did better than WGS, the difference is insignificant and that makes the difficulty level almost the same for both the groups.

Conclusion

This study has been conducted to find out the level of difficulty faced by the EFL learners of Bangladesh comparing participants taken from two groups with different departmental background. By analyzing the data statistically and linguistically it has been found out that the overall difficulty level is quite noticeable and mentionable. But the difference between the scores is inconsiderable, meaning that the difficulty level is almost same for the groups. Especially the participants find the spatial prepositions most difficult. From the previous studies on prepositions we can assume that the reasons can be: not being taught with a suitable approach, not understating the various meaning of prepositions, not knowing the contextual use of prepositions, influence of L_1 etc. These are the most dominating ones for creating such a challenging situation for the EFL learners of Bangladesh.

These difficulties can be overcome by following one or more than one teaching approaches to teach the prepositions. The learners need to

have conceptual clarity regarding the polysemous nature of prepositions. It will be very helpful for them if this learning process starts from the early grades. While learning and teaching the prepositions, it is necessary to be careful and conscious about the difference in the use of the prepositions and postpositions. If they have clear conceptions about the rules that L_1 and L_2 follow, it will help them to use the prepositions more appropriately.

Though many researches have been conducted concerning prepositions and EFL/ESL learners, this area of study is still unexplored in our country. Research can be done highlighting the semantic aspects of preposition, the teaching and learning approaches for prepositions, the variation of errors using prepositions, influence of L_1 and so on. Further investigation into this area is required to lessen the difficulty level of EFL learners of Bangladesh.

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