

Abstract 03

Tackling the Most Challenging Spatial Preposition in English

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This study attempts to identify and tackle the issues in the use of “at”, the most challenging and one of the three most commonly-used spatial prepositions in the English language, - ‘at’, ‘in’ and ‘on’ – in teaching English as a second language to Sri Lankan undergraduates. It also aims at promoting some novel strategies of overcoming the difficulties encountered in using spatial prepositions in general. Although the particular group of undergraduates who were involved in the experiment continue to learn English at the university as an ancillary subject, it is common to find errors in the use of spatial prepositions in their oral and written productions. Therefore, as research problem this paper deals with what hindrances are experienced by Sri Lankan undergraduates in mastering spatial prepositions and which preposition causes most challenges in this process. It is realised thus that lack of exposure to language directly affects the grammatical and semantic structure of their utterances. In the empirical study carried out in this regard, quantitative data was collected by conducting two tests focused on prepositions. The first test was carried out without giving prior instructions and the second was carried out after giving instructions. A comparative analysis of the results of both tests revealed that the spatial preposition “at” is the most challenging preposition for the undergraduates and it poses challenges to them due to mother tongue interference and lack of exposure to English. Hence it is understood that the undergraduates should be provided with long-term exposure to the correct use of the spatial preposition ‘at’ of English in comparison with equivalents of spatial indications in the Sinhala language. Also it is considered essential to create an environment equipped with electronic and print media that would allow the learners to have a natural exposure to English.

Key words: challenges, spatial preposition ‘at’, Sri Lankan undergraduates, strategies, TESL