

## Abstract 30

### **The Accuracy of the Usage of Prepositions by Learners of English as a Second Language in Dictation Tasks: Primary and Secondary Levels in Schools**

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English prepositions are often vague and confusing, and extremely hard for Sinhala speaking ESL (English as a second language) learners to learn the nuances of all the prepositions. Littlefield (2006) has found four categories in the domain of English prepositions based on  $\pm$  lexical and functional categories: adverbial prepositions [+lexical, -functional], particles [-lexical, - functional], semi-lexical prepositions [+lexical, + functional] and functional prepositions [-lexical, + functional]. The aim of the study is to examine the accuracy patterns in the usage of English prepositions of ESL students in Sri-Lankan schools, comparing primary and secondary levels. The research problem of this study is, whether these ESL learners would initially imitate the sentences with different prepositional categories differently in the lower grades and by Grade 10, all the prepositional categories would be imitated equally well. A pool of 316 students from two government schools participated in this study, and 65 of the students were randomly selected from each Grade: Grade 4, Grade 6, Grade 8 and Grade 10 for the test. A Dictation task in which the sentence battery had a total number of 40 sentences, including 10 sentences each to test the four categories of prepositions found by Littlefield, used in this test to collect data. Students were asked to listen to the recorded sentences one by one carefully, and write them down. The scripts were marked and the scores were analysed by using Excel spread sheets and SPSS 12 using the experimental method. An ANOVA was run to investigate the significant variances between the correct use of the four categories of prepositions by these students across these four Grades. The findings can be applied to facilitate teaching prepositions in ESL classrooms from Grade 4 to Grade 10, and also in making the necessary changes in school syllabuses, text books and lesson plans on the relevant course units on prepositions.

**Key words:** dictation tasks, ESL, functional categories, lexical categories, prepositions