

Acquisition of English Prepositions by the ESL Learners of Sri Lanka

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Sri Lanka inherited English Language from its last colonizers, the British and a positive interest was taken by British in teaching English for the Sinhala speaking students since then. Today, in postcolonial era, formal teaching of English as a second language (ESL) is introduced in government schools from Grade 3 onwards. Teachers of English in Sri Lanka are well aware that English prepositions are one of the most difficult areas for them to teach ESL students. Moreover, Thilakaratne 1992 shows that in English, prepositions are words, while in Sinhala they are represented as spatial postpositions or suffixes (locative, ablative Case) and create learning difficulties for ESL learner. The study examines the acquisition of prepositions by Sinhala speaking learners of English with respect to the four fine-grained categories of prepositions, where the evidence for the existence has been found by Littlefield (2006) through first language acquisition using five English speaking children (aged 1;2-2;3). The present study aims to validate or disprove this type of fine-grained approach to preposition on the basis of Sinhala speaking ESL learners' responses in a dictation task. A total number of 65 Sinhala students from Grade 4 from two government schools will be examined for the test and a sentence battery of 40 sentences with 10 sentences each for adverbs, semi-lexical prepositions, and functional prepositions will be used in the dictation task. Elicited imitation method is used to collect data and will be analysed statistically by using SPSS. Based on the findings, the order of acquisition of prepositions in comprehension would be detected, and this order could be suggested as a user friendly guideline to teach English prepositions in the ESL class-room.

Key words: adverbs (+L, -F), semi-lexical prepositions (+L, +F), particles (-L, -F) and functional prepositions (-L, +F), elicited imitation

