

**A comparison between the acquisition of phrasal verbs and spatial prepositions
by Sinhala speaking ESL learners**

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The phrasal verbs are phrases which consist of a verb in combination with a preposition. They are not only used in spoken and informal English, but also in written and even formal English. According to Fraser 1965, 1976; Bolinger 1971, the prepositions in phrasal verbs trigger an aspectual or idiomatic meaning as follows:

- (1) The small girl ate up the biscuits (aspectual-finished sense).
- (2) Women drink skim milk to shape up their bodies (idiomatic). Here *up* gives an unpredictable meaning and the meaning of *shape up* cannot be gathered by adding the meanings of the two words: *shape* and *up*

Spatial prepositions show the spatial relation between two entities, for example, *The box is under the bed* or the path of movement of one object with respect to another entity, for example, *The man swam across the river*. The study examines the acquisition of phrasal verbs and spatial prepositions of Sinhala speaking ESL learners in Grade 4 and Grade 6 by using elicited imitation data. The study aims to investigate which category of these prepositions should be introduced first in the ESL class-room through listening comprehension tasks. A dictation task will be administered for about 60 students from each grade from two schools in Colombo. A sentence battery containing 10 sentences each with phrasal verbs and spatial prepositions will be used in this study. Students will be instructed to listen to these 20 sentences carefully and write them in the given answer sheets. Elicited imitation data will be collected, and quantitative statistical analysis will be applied using SPSS to examine whether there is a significant difference between the acquisition of two categories of preposition within and across the grades. The findings would be used to make necessary suggestions for teaching phrasal verbs and spatial prepositions for Sinhala students. If the acquisition of one of these two categories of preposition shows an advantage over the other, that particular category must be introduced earlier than the other in the ESL class -room.

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