

A B S T R A C T

In recent years, studies of foreign language acquisition have tended to focus on learner's errors since they allow for prediction of the difficulties involved in acquiring a foreign language . In this way, teachers can be made aware of the difficult areas to be encountered by their students and devote special care and emphasis to them .

Prepositions, on which the present study focuses, are one of these difficult areas . Thus the main objective is to investigate the causes of errors in the use of English prepositions that are frequently made by Arabic-speaking students .

The hypotheses to be tested in this study are:

1. There is no statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the errors made by the students due to mother tongue interference and those due to other learning problems .
2. There is no statistically significant correlation at the 0.05 level between students' scores on the diagnostic test and their scores in English language work at school .

Two random samples of 120 subjects each were taken from the third preparatory students of 14 UNRWA boys' and girls' schools in the Jerusalem area .

Four free compositions were written by the first sample during 1980, and a Diagnostic Test, constructed on their common errors in the use of English prepositions, was administered to the second sample in 1981. The test in its final form was multiple-choice and contained 100 items .

The test was validated for its content and suitability by means of a pre-test. The students' scores in the pre-test were correlated with their scores on midyear English achievement at school. The correlation was .90 . The test's internal consistency according to the K. Richardson formula ($KR - 20$), was .91 .

The two null-hypotheses of the study were rejected at 0.05. The results showed that:

1. There was a significant difference between errors made by the students due to mother tongue interference and those made due to other learning problems .
2. There was a significant correlation between the students' achievement in English language at school and their achievement in the Diagnostic Test .

Thus the major findings of this study are:

1. More errors were attributable to interference from Arabic than to other learning problems .
2. Substitution errors were the most frequent in both MTI and OLP errors .
3. MTI errors were more affected by Standard Arabic than by Colloquial Arabic .
4. The major learning-problem was False Application and Ignorance of L2 rules .