ABSTRACT

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.