



AN ANALYSIS OF PREPOSITION ERRORS: The Case of *in*, *on*, and *at*

ANALISIS ERROR DALAM PENGGUNAAN PREPOSISI: Kasus pada Preposisi *in*, *on*, dan *at*

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Abstract

The use of correct preposition can influence the quality of information in spoken language. However, errors often occur in the use of prepositions, especially, *in*, *on*, and *at*. This research was done to identify the preposition errors made by students when speaking English. The data were obtained from the interview transcription which was used as the source of data from the research done in 2005 by the writer herself about grammatical and diction errors made by the first-year students of SMAN 2 Padang when speaking English. The finding showed that errors in the use of preposition *in* and *at* occurred more often than errors in the use of preposition *on*. The errors are included into two kinds of errors, namely misformation errors (substitution of “in” for “at”, “in” for “on”, “in” for “from”, “at” for “to” and “at” for “in”) and addition errors (addition of “in” and “at”). The finding also proved that the occurrence of errors in the use of prepositions in spoken English language is influenced by the speakers’ first or second language.

Key words: *preposition errors; preposition in, on, and at; error analysis; spoken language*

Abstrak

Penggunaan preposisi yang tepat dapat mempengaruhi kualitas informasi yang diberikan dalam bahasa lisan. Namun, *error* sering muncul dalam penggunaan preposisi tersebut, khususnya untuk preposisi *in*, *on*, dan *at*. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi apa saja *error* yang dibuat oleh siswa dalam berbahasa Inggris. Data diperoleh dari transkripsi wawancara yang merupakan sumber data dari penelitian yang dilakukan oleh penulis sendiri pada tahun 2005 mengenai *error* dalam penggunaan preposisi dan diksi oleh siswa kelas satu SMAN 2 Padang ketika berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris. Temuan memperlihatkan bahwa *error* dalam

penggunaan preposisi *in* dan *at* lebih sering muncul daripada *error* dalam penggunaan preposisi *on*. *Error* tersebut dikategorikan ke dalam dua jenis *error* yaitu *misformation* dan *addition*. Hasil penelitian juga membuktikan bahwa munculnya *error* dalam penggunaan preposisi ketika berbahasa Inggris dipengaruhi oleh bahasa ibu atau bahasa kedua siswa.

Kata kunci: *error dalam penggunaan preposisi; preposisi in, on, dan at; analisis error; bahasa lisan*

A. INTRODUCTION

Using English well in written or spoken language can influence the transmission of messages. As learners of English as a foreign language, students should understand the grammatical aspects such as the use of verbs, adjectives, nouns, articles, prepositions, gerunds, and so on. Good understanding will help them to produce meaningful sentences or utterances and create good communication. If not so, errors or mistakes will occur and disturb the message.

Errors and mistakes are similar but different, actually. Both are natural in learning language. However, mistakes can be corrected by the learners, while errors no. It means that errors give more serious effect to the improvement of learners' language ability. Because of that, the occurrence of errors in using English language cannot be ignored.

In spoken language, the use of correct word or structure is as important as written language. When a speaker utters such sentence, actually, the listener still understands it. But, it is wrong structurally even though can be accepted semantically. If this happen often and continuously, the errors still exist whenever the speaker speaks in English. Porte (1993) explains that errors tend to occur again and again until someone masters the language he learned well. Because of that, the errors made by the students should be decreased by conducting systematic analysis. The errors make by the students from their production of speaking or writing could be identified and classified to find appropriate feedback and correction.

There are some studies about errors analysis done by several researchers. Most of the studies analyzed the errors made by students in written language. However, basically, the kinds of errors, the analysis and also the causes of the errors are similar to the spoken language. Nonkukhetkhong (2013) in his research found that about 47.41% of grammatical errors in the use of verbs, nouns, possessive case, articles, prepositions, and adjectives are made by students in their essays. The result of the study showed that preposition is one of grammatical aspects that are often used by students incorrectly.

In another research, Hamzah (2012) found that errors on the prepositional use are 12.31%. It is in the fourth place among 14 categories of errors that mostly made by students in English writing. The findings proved that errors in prepositions commonly happen in using English and it becomes serious problem to be discussed.

There are several prepositions in English. Hooper (1980) in his book "A Quick English Reference" explains several prepositions, they are: 1) *preposition of time* – (a) one point in time (*at*), (b) period of time (*on, in*), and (c) extended time/duration (*since, for, by*); 2) *preposition of place* – (a) the point itself (*in, inside, on, at*), (b) toward the point (*to, into*), (c) neighboring the point (*by, beside, next, between, near*), and (d) away from the point (*away, off, across, out of*) and some others. Each

preposition has its own function and cannot be replaced. The incorrect use of prepositions will influence the quality of the message from the speaker to the listener.

Preposition *in*, *on*, and *at*, are commonly used by language learners. In Indonesian language, the three preposition forms mean “di.” In Indonesian, there are four basic prepositions, namely *di*, *dari*, *ke*, and *pada*. *Di* is used to place the position of something, such as *di rumah*, *di sekolah*, *di dalam*, etc. While, in English, *at* is used to say *at home*, *in* is used to say *in schools*, and *inside* is used to say *inside the room*, etc. The examples given indicate that English prepositions are more various than Indonesian. No wonder that Indonesian students often get confused in using the appropriate preposition in English because in their own language, the same form can be used for various situations.

The errors that the students make in such examples are influenced by some factors. According to Richard (1974), there are two causes of errors, they are 1) inter-language errors (a cause of errors by interference of the learners’ L1 or mother tongue), and 2) intra-lingual and developmental errors (reflect the learners’ competence at a particular stage, and illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition). The later is caused by the complexity of the target language itself that indicates that the students have not mastered the language yet.

The errors that the students make in the use of *in*, *on*, and *at* are caused by interference of the learners’ L1 or mother tongue. The writer assumes that when the learners use English for communication, they cannot separate themselves from the use of Indonesian. That is why there are some students say *in page* instead of *on page*, *in home* instead of *at home*. The errors occur because in their first language, three prepositions *on*, *in* and *at* can be represented by just one preposition “di.” It is proved by a research done by Kırkgöz (2010: 4352) who shows in her study that according to the cognitive view learner errors should be viewed as a sign of progress in learners’ interlanguage system.

As it is mentioned above, the occurrence of errors cannot be neglected. Correction should be done to improve students’ ability in using English language. Actually, errors in using English as a foreign language cannot be avoided. However, the existence of errors can be used for the improvement of teaching and learning process. According to Richards et al., (1996), error analysis has been conducted to identify strategies which learners use in language learning, to track the causes of learner’s errors, obtain information on common difficulties in language learning or on how to prepare teaching materials. There are some aspects that can cause the errors in learning foreign language, such as interference, overgeneralization, ignorance of rules restriction, incomplete application of rules, false concept hypothesized, etc.

Error analysis can be defined as a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting the unacceptable form produced by someone in learning a foreign language. The analysis should be supported by the principles and procedures provided by linguists. Because the people or students who learn English as a foreign language make errors in the language production, in analyzing the errors, the correct forms are also needed. As it is mentioned above that students made errors in the use of preposition, the correct forms and use of prepositions are needed to identify and correct the errors.

Dealing with the explanation above, the main topic in this article can be elaborated into two questions that are answered after this session, they are: 1) “What are the kinds of errors in the use of preposition *in*, *on*, and *at* found in students’ utterance?” and 2) “What are the causes of the errors?” This writing is hopefully

useful for the improvement of learners' ability in speaking by using correct and appropriate English.

This article is formally derived from a research done in 2005 by the writer herself about grammatical and diction errors made by the first-year students of SMAN 2 Padang when speaking English showed that there are several errors made by the students in the use of articles, prepositions, and dictions. There were three kinds of errors found in the use of prepositions, namely misformation, addition, and omission. *In*, *on*, and *at* are prepositions that mostly used by the students when speaking English. However, some errors found in the use of *in*, *on*, and *at*, are especially in the category of misformation and addition.

Dulay, et al (1982) explains that misformation errors are characterized by the use of the wrong form of morpheme or structure. In this case, the learners supply a word, but it is incorrect. While, addition errors are characterized by the presence of an item that must not appear in a well-form utterance. Therefore, this article was written to identify and analyze kinds of errors in the use of preposition *in*, *on*, and *at* found in the students' utterance and also the causes of the errors.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This research used descriptive design. The researcher described and analyzed the kind of errors in the use of preposition *in*, *on*, and *at*, and the causes of the errors as well. The source of the data is the interview transcription (document) which was gotten from data of the research done in 2005 by the researcher herself. At the time, 20 students SMAN 2 Padang were taken as the informants of the research. The data are all errors found in the use of preposition *in*, *on*, and *at*. The writer as the main instrument of this research analyzed the data by using theories proposed by Hooper (1980), for the categorization of preposition *in*, *on*, and *at* errors, Ellis (1997) for the types of the errors, and Richards (1974) for the causes of the errors.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Findings

The result of data analysis showed that the errors found are classified into two; errors in the use of preposition 'in', and errors in the use of preposition "at". The errors are included into two kinds of errors, namely misformation and addition errors. Wrong preposition used by students mostly happened when they substitute "in" for "at", "in" for "on", "in" for "from", and add "in" when it is not needed. The occurrence of the errors can be seen in table 1.1.

Data from table 1.1 above indicate that the errors found in the students' interview transcription are categorized into two; errors in the use of preposition "in" that occurred for about 90%, and errors in the use of preposition "at" for about 10%. While, errors in the use of preposition "on" are not found in this research. However, It does not mean that no errors found in the use of preposition "on". It is found that several preposition "on" was placed by "in".

Errors in the use of preposition "in" are divided into two types of errors, misformation and addition. Misformation errors are substitution of "in" for "at", "in" for "on", "in" for "from", and addition errors are addition of "in" in inappropriate place. Misformation errors mean that the use of "at", "on", and "from" is taken over by "in". Whereas, the use of 'in' is not correct for the contexts. Then, addition errors mean that preposition "in" is used, whereas the context does not need it.

Table 1.1 Categorization and Percentage of Errors

| Classification or Errors | Types of Errors | Percentage of Errors |
|--|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Errors in the use of preposition “in” | 1. Misformation | |
| | a. Substitution of “in” for “at” | 55 |
| | b. Substitution of “in” for “on” | 12.5 |
| | c. Substitution of “in” for “from” | 2.5 |
| | 2. Addition | |
| | a. Addition of “in” | 20 |
| | Sub | 90 |
| 2. Errors in the use of preposition “at” | 1. Misformation | |
| | a. Substitution of “at” for “to” | 2.5 |
| | 2. Substitution of “at” for “in” | |
| | Addition | 5 |
| | a. Addition of “at” | 2.5 |
| | Sub | 10 |
| Total | | 100 |

Furthermore, errors in the use of preposition “at” are also divided into two; misformation and addition. There are two misformation errors found, they are substitution of “at” for “to”, and substitution of “at” for “in”. It means that the use of “to” and “in” are taken over by “at”. The context, actually, require preposition “to and in”, but the speaker used “at”. Then, addition of “at” also be found in inappropriate utterance. The detailed explanation about the errors found in students’ utterance is given below.

a. Errors in the Use of Preposition “in”

There are two kinds of errors found in the use of preposition “in”. The errors are divided into two: misformation and addition.

1) Misformation Errors

Substitution of preposition “in” for “at”

Preposition *in* and *at* are a part of preposition of place and time. In general, the use of both prepositions is similar. However, *in* is used for more general space, while *at* is used for more particular place/time (for a point). In the students’ utterances, it was found that there are some errors made by the students in using both prepositions. For example: a) *Because he is teacher in SMP 26*, b) *I studied in SMP 7*, c) *He is a student in UNAND University*, d) *My sister in home, sometimes she go to University*, e) *I Live in Tunggul Hitam in Prumdampol in Blok A No.1*, and so on. In all of examples mentioned previously, preposition “in” is used to point a definite/specific place: SMP 26, SMP 7, UNAND University and Blok A No.1. Because the name of the places are mentioned and the address is given in detail, in this case, preposition “at” is best used. Whereas, example no.d is quite different from the others but has similar problem. The appropriate preposition used before “home” is “at” because it indicates that the subject is at that place at the time.

Substitution of “in” for “on”

Preposition “on” is commonly used for a surface. For streets, “on” refers to a location that is alongside the street. Based on data analysis, it is found that preposition “in” is used by the speakers to indicate something is on the surface of things. The errors can be seen in the following example: a) *I live in Tunggul Hitam in Prumdampol in Blok A No.1*, b) *I live in Jalan Bades Pasir Sebelah..*, c) *.....you will be look the Singkarak scenery and it is in the hills I think....*, d) *My home, in front of my home. In the street*, and e) *in Sunday*.

Example a, b and d show that the location is alongside the street. Because of that, preposition “on” should be used in the utterance. Example c indicates that the position is on the surface or on top of the hills. Then, preposition “on” is best used here. The last example, *in Sunday* is also not correct because preposition “in” used for months, years, centuries, and long period. Sunday is a name of days, therefore, *on* should be used before Sunday.

Substitution of “in” for “from”

This is one of the errors found in the students’ utterances. However, this kind of error does not exist often as previous errors explained above. The example can be seen in the following utterance, *Hmm...firstly study hard. Hmm...invited friends in other countries with a...through E-mail*. The use of “in” is not correct because other countries in the context indicates someone’s origin. In the utterance, “from” should be used to replaced “in” before *other countries*.

2) Addition Errors

Addition of “in”

Addition errors mean that preposition “in” is used in a context that does not need it. “In” should not be exist but in fact it is still found in the spoken language. Here are the examples, a) *I Just...yeah...study hard. No time for sport in last week*, b) *After in four grade Elementary School*, c) *My from....in....a...Sawah Lunto*, d) *(Where are you from?) In Sulit Air*, e) *(What University?) In Universitas Indonesia*, etc.

Preposition “in” should not be used when the speaker say *last week*. The word “last” functions as preposition in the context. Beside that, two kinds prepositions can be used at the same time as shown in example b and c. Then, in example d and e, it can be seen that to answer questions about our origin, preposition is not needed before the name of the place/city/country. In short, preposition “in” found in all examples should be deleted.

b. Errors in the Use of Preposition “at”

Preposition “at” errors are also divided into two: misformation and addition.

1) Misformation Errors

Substitution of “at” for “to”

It is explained that preposition “to” is used to indicate the place, person, or thing that someone or something moves toward, or the direction of something. This kind of error is found when the speaker talked about destination, however, he used “at” instead of “to”. The utterance is as

follow; *maybe I will continue my school at university*. It is clear that university is a destination, therefore, the use of “at” is an error.

Substitution of “at” for “in”

In this case, the use of “at” to replace “in” is not appropriate. The examples are; a) *at Taekwondo, Valentino Yanez*, and b) *at Badminton, Taufik Hidayat*. The speaker told the listener about his favorite athletes in several sports. “At” is used to indicate the speaker ability in playing the sports (e.g I am good at badminton).

2) Addition Errors

Addition of “at”

The same case with preposition “in”, the existence of preposition “at” is not needed for several contexts. For example; *my school win at this competition*. The use of “this” should not be preceded by “at” because it functions as preposition. In short, “at” should be omitted from the utterance.

2. Discussion

Data analysis states that there are several errors in the use of preposition found in the students’ utterances. The errors prove that attention should be given not only in analyzing or correcting the errors, but also in improving the ability of the students in using the correct grammatical rules of English language. Basically, communication still can run with the errors, however, the quality of the message is low. If this happen again and again, consequently, the errors will stand by the speaker forever and become more difficult to be corrected.

The use of inappropriate preposition “in” dominates the errors. It occurs for about 90%. It means that “in” is mostly used by the speakers, unfortunately, it is not correct. From the findings, it can be seen that when the speakers mention addresses with numbers or names, “in” is used. “in” is also used before the name of day and to explain the position of something on the surface or on top of something. Whereas, the correct preposition used for the first case is “at”, and the latter is “on”. Preposition “in” should not be used with exact addresses (have house numbers). “On” should be used for general locations that have boundaries (On Padang is wrong).

Beside that, 10% errors occur in the use of preposition “at”. The speakers used “at” incorrectly. The same case with preposition “in”, the speakers used “at” for the situation in which they should use “in” or “to”. As addition, it is also found that “at” is used together with “this”. When we say *last, next, every, this*, we do not use preposition *at, it, and on*. For example: a) *I went to London last June*, b) *He’s coming back next Tuesday*.

The data also indicate that misformation and addition errors are the common types for preposition errors. As it is proposed by Dulay, et.al (1982), there are four types of errors, namely omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Dealing with the findings, omission and misordering do not become the types of errors in the use of preposition *in, on, and at*. It is assumed that to point times, places, or things, it is impossible that the speakers do not use any preposition (omission) or use it in the wrong place (misordering). That is

why, misformation (the use of the wrong form) and addition (the presence of an item that must not appear) become the types of errors in the use of prepositions.

The facts prove that the use of preposition in spoken English language is influenced by the speakers' first or second language. As it is explained previously, in Indonesia, there is only one preposition "di" which has the same function with preposition *in*, *on*, and *at* in English. "In" is more familiar and common to be used by English learners than the rest two and is assumed as "di" in Indonesian.

Yildiz (2015) in his study found that prepositional interference errors are the most frequently encountered error types in Turkish EFL learners' speaking performances. This is caused by the interference of L1. He also found that English language proficiency does not influence the number of errors made by students. Yildiz's finding is quite similar to this research finding, especially about the interference of L1 (Indonesian language) in the use of preposition. Even though students are good in English, it cannot guarantee that they are free from making errors. Next, Ellis (2003: 19) summarizes the potential sources of error as 'omission', 'overgeneralization', and 'transfer'. In addition to Corder's classification, overgeneralization of relatively easy forms to other inapplicable situations and learners' effort to use their L1 data in the course of L2 production are identified as error-causing reasons.

As for the types and characteristics of errors made by the students, it could be analyzed that the errors were influenced by intralingual interference: overgeneralization, ignorance of the rule restrictions, and incomplete application of rules (Richards & Sampson, 1994). As a result, teachers need to realize the importance of these factors influencing the errors made by the students. First language cannot be left behind when speaking English. Consequently, when producing English words or sentences, the speakers often interchange the rules of English and Indonesian language. The fact that the data are taken from SMA students' utterances, reveal an idea that the study of grammatical rules in English should be improved. Therefore, later on, the occurrence of preposition errors can be decreased. Furthermore, the errors from this research study can be used for improving learning and teaching process, including giving appropriate feedback and developing teaching materials to solve specific grammatical problems of the students in order to develop their language proficiency effectively.

D. CONCLUSION

The present study has been carried out to find out the types of errors in the use of preposition *in*, *on*, and *at*, and also to identify the interference of L1 in speaking English. Data analysis shows that the errors are classified into misformation and addition errors. The use of wrong preposition, and also the use of preposition that must not appear in a well-formed utterance are the major errors found in the students' utterances. The errors are caused by some factors but dominantly influenced by the interference of first language (bahasa ibu and bahasa Indonesia). This study strengthens the argument that errors cannot be ignored and should be decreased as the students learn English language more and more. The very limited data of this study cannot give enough description for various types and categories of preposition errors. Therefore, the researcher suggests the next research continue this study to a wider population and do observation, interview, or test to collect the data and also do deeper analysis about the causes of the errors.

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