



THE ROLE OF L1 INFLUENCE IN THE ACQUISITION OF L2 PREPOSITIONS: AN ERROR ANALYSIS

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In the field of English as a second language (ESL) learning and teaching, a large number of studies have focused on error analysis: a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors produced by learners. In fact, errors are an inseparable part of learning and researchers are highly interested in learner errors since they are believed to contain crucial information on the strategies employed by second language (L2) learners. Prepositional errors are a major type of errors observed frequently in the writings produced by undergraduates. This study attempts to provide a comprehensive account of the types of errors which Sinhala speaking learners whose L2 is English commit in the use of prepositions in their writing, and to identify whether there is a significant impact from the learners' first language in committing these errors. Findings were drawn mainly from the qualitative data collected from the writing samples of randomly selected fifty first year Sinhala speaking undergraduates studying in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. Learner errors were classified according to the Surface Structure Taxonomy of errors (SST) under wrong substitution, preposition omission, and unnecessary insertion recording the frequency of occurrence of each error type. The findings reveal that students are likely to make errors when differences exist between their L1 and L2 while the similarities have contributed to the accurate production of English. It is evident that students seem not to discern yet about how and what prepositions they should use in certain sentences. Translating directly from Sinhalese into English seems a common practice among these students. Hence, this highly outcome-oriented investigation reflects L1 interference as the major source of prepositional errors in writing in English. It is hoped that this study will help L2 learners and teachers of English realize the gravity of L1 intrusion, create hypotheses concerning L2 and test them constantly and eventually develop strategies to overcome them.

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