

A Pedagogical Approach To The Teaching Of English Prepositions: a Comparative Analysis Of The Traditional And Conceptual Approaches

Zakka Hussaini Daniel

askzakka2016@gmail.com

08067405701

Postgraduate Student, Department of English and Literary Studies, Bayero University, Kano

Abstract

Students of Bogoro College of Education, Bogoro LGA as second language learners find it difficult to internalise the word class preposition and use it appropriately in their day-to-day language use. This is affirmed by (Okanlawon and Ojetunde, 2007) who state that, although much emphasis in the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria is largely given to grammar and vocabulary, the usage of prepositions does not reflect the effort put in; most of which are based on the syntactic approach to teaching and learning prepositions. However, the syntactic approach seems inadequate. The data was obtained through test questions given to 63 NCE II students of Bogoro College of Education, Bogoro in the form of a pre-test and post-test. The research investigates the students' choice of conceptual frames as well as tests the suitability of the conceptual approach in teaching English prepositions within the framework of Lakoff's cognitive linguistics (CL) theory. The simple random technique was used to get the required data for the study. The finding reveals that firstly, the students were not proficient in their use of conceptual frames prior to the intervention. After the intervention, their level of proficiency in the use of the English prepositions under investigation (locative preposition, preposition for means of transportation, temporal preposition and spatial preposition) improved. Secondly, the cultural orientation of the students differs in some concepts from that of the native speakers of English language such as: prepositions for bedding and prepositions for means of transportation. Finally, the conceptual approach was found to be a suitable approach for the teaching of English prepositions because it provides the learner the way of conceptualising the world.

Keywords: Conceptual, Investigation, ESL Learners, Competence and Preposition

Introduction

Despite teachers' effort in teaching preposition as a grammatical word class apparently through the traditional method which is the widely used approach, students of Bogoro College of Education, Bogoro LGA as second language learners find it difficult to internalise this word class and use it appropriately in their day-to-day language use. This is affirmed by (Okanlawon

and Ojetunde, 2007) who state that, although much emphasis in the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria is largely given to grammar and vocabulary, the usage of prepositions does not reflect the effort put in. Taiwo, (2004) further elaborates that ESL learners still have collocation errors despite adequate grammatical and lexical knowledge. The researcher also observes errors in the students' written and spoken use of language; especially, when they attempt assignment, test and even examination questions.

In addition, considerable research has been done on preposition (Reef, 2000, Kim, 2001, Ahmad, 2011, Bashir, 2013 and Ahmad, 2020) most of which are based on the syntactic approach to teaching and learning prepositions. However, the syntactic approach seems inadequate. It has not adequately helped learners in internalising this function word class and using them correctly in everyday language according to Ezuruike, (2018). This is due to the conceptual orientations in the use of prepositions. Relying only on the syntactic aspect therefore becomes insufficient.

In an effort to finding a better approach, studies within the cognitive approach (Zwarts and Gärdenfors, 2015 and Ezuruike, 2018) recommend that the cognitive approach, which puts into consideration the socio-cultural orientations of the native speakers of English, gives a better understanding of this grammatical word class in terms of teaching and learning of preposition as this approach helps learners see the primary meanings of prepositions, the spatial uses and their metaphorical meaning, with a view to improve the teaching and learning of the English preposition.

Literature Review

The concept of preposition

Prepositions in print seem to be small, simple and relatively humble looking words yet they perform a multitude of very important linking duties, by joining one sense group of words, mostly nouns or pronouns as well as other words in a sentence. The word ‘preposition’ is derived ultimately from Latin word *praeponere*, meaning ‘to put in front of’ and Latin prepositions always preceded and governed a noun phrase. (Peter-Ovat, 2006, Todd and Hancock, 1990).

Yule, (1996) defines prepositions as words used with nouns in phrases providing information about time, place and other connection involving actions and things. Crystal, (2000) is of the opinion that the preposition is an item that typically precedes a noun phrase to form a single constituent structure (a prepositional phrase or prepositional group) often as an adverbial/adjectival. Meanwhile, Quirk, et al. (1985) defines preposition as a word that expresses a relation between two entities: one being represented by the prepositional complement, and the other by another part of the sentence.

Prepositions have been categorized in various ways. (Murthy, 2010) asserts that “There are five kinds of prepositions in English, namely: Simple Prepositions, Double Prepositions, Compound Prepositions, Participial Prepositions and Phrase Prepositions.”

Conceptualisation of Preposition

Although the use of preposition in everyday language is often perceived as a purely grammatical enterprise especially among the second learners of English (Ezuruike, 2018) that is why the

teaching and learning activities related to prepositions mostly restrict the word class as only a syntactic phenomenon. Hence takes place within the confine of a grammatical word class. However, for a holistic understanding of preposition, one ought to view it not only from the syntactic stand point, but also from the conceptual point of view this is because prepositions are conceptual and, therefore, are influenced by the speaker's cultural background (Szymanska, 2010).

Prepositions, especially of position "in", "on" and "at" play an important role in our everyday communication. They truly reveal the native speakers' understanding of the world as well as the way they conceive things, which reflects the interaction of social, cultural, psychological, communicative and functional considerations (Casad and Palmer, 2003).

Furthermore, from spatial experience, our world-view on space is shaped. Consequently, particular language speakers focus their attention on particular aspects of a scene to express or describe it through their language. It means that different regions have different conceptual frames, even in the same spatial scenes, so there are various ways to talk about spatial relation between two entities as seen by Quirk, et al. (1985). Hence, learners' competence in the use and interpretation of preposition is possible when they are introduced to conceptualising the meaning expressed by the prepositions used in given expressions (Ezuruike, 2018).

In cognitive linguistics, English language prepositions are used to express various conceptual orientations of space, location, containment, direction or other schemas (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980 and Lakoff and Johnson, 2003).

- i. Your literature review is full of "assemblage" of other peoples work. Where is your critical review

- ii. You have not reviewed conceptual review of cognitive linguistics even in other place as empirical review

Theoretical Framework

Based on the relevant literature reviewed, this study adopts the cognitive linguistics theory as its theoretical framework for the study. Cognitive Linguistics Theory has developed into one of the most dynamic and attractive frameworks within theoretical and descriptive linguistics (Rao, 2021). The theory is a method to deal with the study of natural language that began in the late 70s and early 80s in the work of George Lakoff, Ron Langacker, and Len Talmy. It emphasizes on language an instrument for arranging, handling and passing on information (Geeraerts and Cuyckens, 2007 as cited in Rao, 2021).

What informed the choice of the theory is the fact that the research deals with second language learning. It is concerned with how learners become proficient in a second language. This is in line with the core of the theory which focuses on the relationship between language and thought. It posits that linguistic structures, including prepositions are influenced by cognitive processes. It therefore, describes how language interacts with cognition, how it forms our thoughts, and the evolution of language parallel with the change in the common mind set across time (Rao, 2021). In fact, the theory has it that, language, communication, and cognition are mutually inextricable (Ellis and Robinson, 2008). They went further to say that cognition and language create each other. Language has come to represent the world as we know it; it is grounded in our perceptual experience. Learning language involves determining structure from usage and this, like learning about all other aspects of the world, involves the full scope of cognition (Ellis and Robinson, 2008).

Cognitive Linguistics is based on the idea that language is essentially the result of human representations of the world (Ellis and Robinson, 2008; Malcolm, 2019). It is understood, not as a system, but as a way in which a group of speakers mentally structure experience in a common way in order to effectively communicate with one another. The implication of this is that, for one to effectively learn a new language, one need to learn, not only the new linguistic forms but also the new ways of conceptualising the world (Malcolm, 2019). This supports the proposition that preposition is conceptual and, therefore, is influenced by speaker's cultural background. This cultural background encapsulates the speaker's orientations, difference in conceptualisation of objects and definitions, which in turn motivate a conceptual forward transfer of the prepositional features in speaker's native language to that of English language (Szymanska, 2010). Hence, in teaching and learning the English prepositions, for example, one's attention must be drawn to how L2 speakers form and interpret such linguistic structures (prepositions) in L1.

Research Methodology

The research adopts a quasi-experimental research design, equivalent pre-test and post-test research design. In this design, two groups of participants are formed, the experimental and the control groups according to (Marczyk, Dematteo and Festinger 2005).

Due to large population sample, a sample population of 63 NCE II students of English Department, Bogoro College of Education, Bogoro LGA respondents was drawn from the total population consisting of male and female students with different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds so as to have a manageable subject which the researcher can effectively handle. The researcher adopted Morgan and Krejcie's (1970) *Table for Determining Sample Size from a*

Given Population to determine the sample size. The researcher adopted the table considering the fact that it is a suitable tool for determining sample size from a given population. Finally, the researcher used the simple random technique of the probability sampling to get the required sample for the study since this is the kind of sampling technique which gives every member an equal opportunity to form part of the sample.

- i. You mean 63 students are large in an academic journal?
- ii. How did you pick your respondents without being biased
- iii. You talk about their socio cultural background. Did you ask their L1?

Data Presentation and Analysis

The analysis of the data is presented as follows:

Result for the pre-test on the use of preposition

Table 1 presents the result for the pre-test on the use of locative preposition, preposition for means of transportation, temporal preposition and spatial preposition.

Table 1: Result for the pre-test on the use of preposition

S/N	Category of preposition	Total no of items	Frequency of correct forms	Frequency of errors
1.	Locative preposition	315	127	188
2.	Preposition for means of transportation	315	95	220
3.	Temporal preposition	315	134	181

4.	Spatial preposition	315	96	219
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Table 1 presents the result for the pre-test on the use of prepositions which shows that Category 1: Locative preposition has 127 correct forms which represent 40.3% and 188 errors which represent 59.7%. Category 2: Preposition for means of transportation has 95 correct forms representing 30.2% and 220 errors which represent 69.8%. Category 3: Temporal preposition has 134 correct forms representing 42.5% and 181 errors which represent 57.5% while Category 4: Spatial preposition also has 96 correct forms which represent 30.5% and 219 errors which represent 69.5%.

Result for the post-test on the use of preposition

Table 2 presents the result for the post-test on the use of locative preposition, preposition for means of transportation, temporal preposition and spatial preposition.

Table 2: Result for the post-test on the use of preposition

S/N	Category of preposition	Total no of items	Frequency of correct forms	Frequency of errors
1.	Locative preposition	315	305	10
2.	Preposition for means of transportation	315	295	20
3.	Temporal preposition	315	294	21
4.	Spatial preposition	315	303	12

Table 2 presents the result for the post-test on the use of preposition which

shows that Category 1: Locative preposition has 305 correct forms representing 96.8% and 10 errors which represent 3.2%, Category 2: Preposition for means of transportation has 295 correct forms representing 93.6% and 20 errors which represent 6.4%, Category 3: Temporal preposition has 294 correct forms representing 93.3% and 21 errors which represent 6.7% and Category 4: Spatial preposition also has 303 correct forms representing 96.2% and 12 errors which represent 3.8%.

Findings

The following findings were made:

- 1) The L2 learners (students) were in-proficient in their use of conceptual frames prior the intervention.
- 2) After the intervention, the L2 learners (students) became proficient in the use of the English prepositions under investigation (locative preposition, preposition for means of transportation, temporal preposition and spatial preposition).
- 3) The cultural orientation of the L2 learners (students) differs in some concepts from that of the English native speakers such as: prepositions for bedding and prepositions for means of transportation from that of the native speakers. This therefore leads to the students' conceptual forward transfer of the prepositional feature to that of the English language.
- 4) Conceptual approach is a suitable approach to teaching English preposition because it provides the learner the new way of conceptualising the world.

Discussion

This section discusses the performance of the students for the pre-test and post-test on the use of the following prepositions: Locative preposition, preposition for means of transportation,

temporal preposition and spatial preposition leading to the answers of the research questions under investigation.

From Table 1, one can conclude based on the task given to the students prior the intervention that the students do not understand the use of the preposition under study (locative preposition, preposition used for means of transportation, temporal preposition and spatial preposition respectively).

From Table 2, it is evident according to the task given to the students after the intervention that the students have much understanding of the preposition under study (locative, preposition, preposition used for means of transportation, temporal preposition and spatial preposition respectively). This is a typical example of what Kramsch, (2000) referred to as “conceptual transfer” where the cultural conceptualisation of L2 is transferred to the target language.

For instance, an item examined the use of “in”, “at”, “on” and “near” in relation to the concept of location during the pre-test which was conducted on the subjects (students) before the intervention. Hence, it was found that majority of the students are not familiar with the locative preposition as seen in Table 1. An example of such occurrences can be illustrated thus: “The teacher resides --in-- the village.” 47 students failed this particular question where they either wrote “with”, “on”, “to”, “at”, “of” and “from” which indicates a deviation from the standard usage. This results from the L2’s cultural orientations. Thus, based on the standard usage, a bounded space has an “in” and “out” orientations. For example, “She stays *in* Kenya.” This refers to a large bounded area where an occupant is “in” or goes “out” of the area (Talmy, 2000 and Ezuruike, 2018). This is in consonance with Murray and Rockowitz, (2017), Leech and

Svartrik, (2013) that the preposition “in” is used to denote a general space, especially, when the space is viewed as an area, usually of ground or territory enclosed by boundaries (Downing and Locke, 2006). Therefore, “The teacher resides *in* the village.” is the standard expression.

However, after the intensive class which was organised to the students in form of an intervention, the same sentence was used to examine the use of “in”, “at”, “on” and “near” in relation to the concept of location. Here, the test was conducted across the same set of students. Thus, it was found here that majority of the students understood the locative preposition. The students’ performance after the intervention shows the effectiveness of the conceptual approach on the students. This credits the cognitive approach which argues that language should be understood, not as a system, but as a way in which a group of speakers mentally structure experience in a common way in order to effectively communicate with one another. Hence, to effectively learn a new language, one needs to learn, not only the new linguistic forms but also the new ways of conceptualising the world (Malcolm, 2019). This answers the research question number C: How suitable is the conceptual approach in teaching English prepositions? The significant improvement is largely dependent on the conceptual approach adopted to teaching the English preposition during the intensive class. For instance, during the intervention, the students were well guided on the difference in cultural backgrounds between the L2 and the native speakers when it comes to the use of the English locative preposition; emphasising that the cultural background encapsulates the speaker’s orientations, difference in conceptualisation of objects and definitions, which in turn motivate a conceptual forward transfer of the prepositional feature in speaker’s native language to that of English language (Szymanska, 2010).

Secondly, in accounting for the students' ability in the use of the English preposition for means of transportation, an item was used to examine the use of "on", "off", and "in" in relation to means of transportation during the pre-test. Hence, it was found that the students lack the proficiency on preposition for means of transportation as can be seen in Table 1. Thus: "The pastor came to the church --**on**-- a taxi", where 49 out of 63 students wrote either "in", "with" or "inside" which are nonstandard, meanwhile only 14 students used "on" which is the correct answer. Here, the students could not differentiate between private and commercial vehicles respectively. This equally indicates a deviation from the standard usage. Thus, based on the standard usage, according to a native speaker, being in one's own vehicle (private vehicle), there is the idea of "safety-ness" and "comfort" which is not the case in a commercial vehicle (Ezuruike, 2018 and Talmy, 2000), hence the use of "in a car" for private vehicle and "on a taxi/bus" for commercial vehicle. For example: "The Governor went to the hospital *in* his car"; and "She travelled to Dubai *on* an aeroplane."

Similarly, after the intervention, the same item was used to examine the use of "on", "off", and "in" in relation to means of transportation. Here, the test was conducted to the same set of students. Thus, it was found that 295 students with an average of 93.6% were proficient in the use of preposition for means of transportation which can be seen in Table 2. This is obviously, the effect of the intensive class which gave them advantage to perform better after the intervention. For instance, in the post-test level, the same item: "The pastor came to the church --**on**-- a taxi." All the students wrote "on" which is the correct answer. None of the students provide the wrong answer. This indicates that at the post-test level, the performance of the

students was significantly improved. The linguistic competence increased coincides with the result of Lysa, et.al (2023).

Thirdly, in investigating the students' conceptualisation of time (Temporal preposition), on the one hand, an item was used to examine the use of "on", "at", and "in" during the pre-test. Here, it was found that the students are deficient in the use of preposition for time as seen in Table 1. This is evident from this item: "His contract terminates --**on**-- Friday" where 51 students failed this specific question. It should be noted that, according to Ezuruike, (2018), L2 speakers of English do not have a culture of exactness in their orientation of time, unlike L1 speakers, who are always definite about time. Otherwise, the learners were taught this word class but failed to internalise, perhaps, due to unsuitable methodology. Hence, justifies the use of "around 10:00 am" or "by 10:00 am" by the L2 learners (students) because they have an orientation of time overlap. "By 10:00 am" could run between 9:30 am and 10:30 am. However, the standard usage is "at 10:00 am" which refers to the exact time and not some minutes before or after the time. Leech and Svartrik, (2013) also assert that the preposition "at" denotes specific period of time.

After the intervention, the same item was used on the students to examine the use of "on", "at", and "in" in relation to time. Hence, it was found that majority of the students here understand temporal preposition as seen in Table 2, as opposed the pre-test. The intensive class organised to the students also gave them advantage. Here, we can equally conclude that this finding conforms to the research question number C: How suitable is the conceptual approach in teaching English prepositions?

Lastly, in investigating the students' conceptualisation of bounded space and what counts as a bounded space. Lakoff and Johnson, (2003) and Ezuruike's (2018) opinion on what is viewed as containment varies according to cultures. Rohlfing, (2001) shares a similar view that as different languages have different ways to categorise the sense of space and vary in socio-cultural experiences, they differ significantly while classifying spatial configurations too. An L1 speakers' orientation of some kind of space lacks *in* and *out* or a periphery. The use of "on", "in" and "out" was examined during the pre-test. Here, it was found that the students do not have idea on prepositions used for bounded space as seen in Table 1. This can be attested in the item: "Mrs. Frank kept the pot --~~in~~—the circle." where 52 students failed this specific question. Most of them either wrote "on", "inside", "under" or "with". This is erroneous because L2 speakers view space such as "field" as a plane which is contrary to the native speakers' conceptualisation who view them as having boundaries around the space. Some of these boundaries have no natural physical boundaries, while some are not defined, but speakers have a way of imposing boundaries and marking off territories, so that it has an inside, a bounding space and an exterior (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003; Evans and Green, 2006).

However, after the intervention, the same item was used on the students to examine the use of "on", "in" and "out" in relation to space. Hence, it was found that majority of the student here understand spatial preposition as seen in Table 2, as opposed the pre-test. The intensive class organised to the students equally gave them advantage. The linguistic competence increased agrees with the result of Riadi, et.al (2023). Here, we can also conclude that this finding conforms to the research question number C: How suitable is the conceptual approach in teaching English prepositions?

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, it is obvious that the L2 learners were in-proficient in the use of the English prepositions prior the intervention. However, after the intervention, the students' performance was greatly improved particularly, in the use of the prepositions under investigation (locative preposition, preposition for means of transportation, temporal preposition and spatial preposition). The students' improved performance can be attributed to the fact that they were guided on the difference in conceptualisation of prepositions which in turn facilitates their understanding and subsequent use of English preposition. Therefore, the study recommends that the conceptual approach is a suitable and effective approach to teaching English Prepositions.

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