

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
THE UNIVERSITY OF DANANG**

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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO PREPOSITIONS
IN TEXTBOOKS OF ENGLISH 10, 11, 12
AT HIGH SCHOOLS IN VIET NAM**

Field : The English Language

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. RATIONALE

English is one of the subjects Vietnamese students learn at school. They are guided through the use of correct elements of speaking and writing in order to communicate effectively. We all know that prepositions are one of the most difficult aspects of English grammar and vocabulary. The use of prepositions becomes crucial for achieving communicative competence because prepositions control most of the circumstantial relations in given utterances. Moreover using English prepositions correctly is among the important things for those who learn it as a foreign language. Most students in Vietnam face so many difficulties in using prepositions because the meanings of prepositions also depend on the position of the speaker to things to which are spoken or referred. For example, in Vietnamese we say “*Mẹ ở ngoài vườn*” if the speaker is indoors and the mother is outdoors, and we say “*Mẹ ở trong vườn*” if both the speaker and the mother are in the garden. However, with the both situations we have only one sentence in English “*The mother is **in** the garden*”. Now study another example: someone asks you “*Where’s your mother?*” and you will answer in Vietnamese “*Mẹ ở dưới bếp*” if you are in the living room and your mother is in the kitchen and of course both these rooms are in the house. But if the kitchen is out and you are in the living room, you will say “*Mẹ ở ngoài bếp*”. In this case, we say in English “*The mother is **in** the kitchen*”.

As a teacher of English, I would like to conduct this research to give an overview not only to the teachers but also to Vietnamese students of English at high school about how to use prepositions

correctly. Hence, it is essential to carry out “**An investigation into English prepositions in textbooks of English 10, 11, 12 at high schools in Vietnam**”, which focuses on the use of prepositions viewed with a cognitive linguistics approach to find out whether the semantic functions of such items determined their acquisition and use.

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. Aims of the Research

This research is aimed at studying English prepositions used in textbooks at high schools in Vietnam, the difficulties in using prepositions of Vietnamese students, to find out the causes of preposition problems and to help learners overcome these difficulties.

1.2.2. Objectives of the Research

This study is intended to:

- investigate the learning of prepositions used in English textbooks at high schools in Viet Nam.
- find out some common mistakes in using prepositions made by students in Kon Tum City.
- suggest some solutions to correct students’ mistakes of prepositions as well as some rules to use English prepositions correctly.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the common prepositions used in textbooks at high schools in Vietnam?
- What are the common mistakes about prepositions made by students at high schools in Kon Tum City?
- What causes students to make those mistakes?

1.4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study investigates the most common prepositions used in

textbooks of English 10, 11, 12. And in this study, the teachers of English and the students at high schools in Kon Tum City would be chosen as the representative informants.

1.5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

With the aim to make a study on the meanings of prepositions in textbooks at high schools in Viet Nam viewed with a Cognitive Linguistic Approach, the research is expected to be able to provide useful knowledge for students to enable to have better use of prepositions when communicating in English.

1.6. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The research is organized into 5 main chapters as follows.

Chapter 1, **Introduction**, presents the introduction of the study including the rationale, the aims and objectives, the research questions, the significance, the scope and the organization of the study.

Chapter 2, **Literature Review and Theoretical Background**, makes a review of the previous researches related to English prepositions. Also, this includes theoretical preliminaries concerning the subject under consideration which serve as the foundation of data analysis and discussion of findings in the following chapters including Cognitive linguistics and Cognitive semantics, Meanings of prepositions, Prepositions and collocation

Chapter 3, **Methodology and Procedures**, includes the research design, the research methodology, the description of samples, data collection, data analysis, research procedures and the reliability and validity of the thesis.

Chapter 4, **Findings and Discussion**, focuses on the analysis of meanings and semantic features of prepositions used in textbooks

of English 10, 11, 12 in Viet Nam; from this, finds out the common mistakes about prepositions made by students at Nguyen Tat Thanh Gifted High School in Kon Tum City. What are the reasons for which students often make those mistakes? And what teachers of English can do to help learners of English avoid or overcome such errors is also mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter 5, **Conclusions and Implications**, summarizes the results of the tasks done in Chapter 4 and draws conclusions on prepositions used in textbooks of English 10, 11, 12 in Viet Nam. Besides, the chapter also provides implications for teachers, learners of English. And the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are also in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. PREVIOUS STUDIES RELATED TO THE RESEARCH

Prepositions are profound, extensive and have been mentioned a lot in grammar books and dictionaries. So far, there have been a large number of researchers and linguists investigating into prepositions.

Seth [9] has discussed over 90 prepositions in current use throughout the English-speaking world.

John [7] provides clear and detailed explanations of prepositions, supported by numerous English examples, on specific areas of English.

Andrea and Evans [2, p.9] mentioned spatial scenes, embodied meaning and cognition. They indicate that *“If a theorist believes that meaning is largely determined by language, then it*

follows that the theorist will attempt to explain meaning construction as deriving from the composition of lexical entries.”

Margaret, Mutiti, Shitandi [8] studied the relationship between semantic functions and the acquisition of English prepositions.

A lot of monographs about prepositions in English and in Vietnamese have been announced, for example, *An Investigation into Locative Prepositions: A Pragmatics Perspective* (the evidence in English and Vietnamese) by Tran Quang Hai [19]

Trinh Thu Huong [20] has also done a research on the most common Prepositions in English Idioms compared with Vietnamese for her doctoral dissertation in which she has surveyed the meaning and grammatical features of the four prepositions IN, ON, AT, OUT.

2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.2.1. Cognitive Linguistics

Evans [10, p.5] states that “Cognitive linguists, like other linguists, study language for its own sake; they attempt to describe and account for its systematicity, its structure, the functions it serves and how these functions are realized by the language system. However, an important reason behind why cognitive linguists study language stems from the assumption that language reflects patterns of thought.

The cognitive approach also offers exciting glimpses into hitherto hidden aspects of the human mind, human experience and, consequently, what it is to be human. [10, p.6]

Our cognitive abilities integrate raw perceptual information into a coherent and well defined mental image. The meanings encoded by linguistic symbols then, refer to our projected reality: a mental representation of reality, as construed by the human mind, mediated by our unique perceptual and conceptual systems. [10, p.7]

Ly Toan Thang [21] indicates that cognitive linguistics aims to study man's ability to understand language through his concept and category about the world around him.

Concepts, in turn, derive from percepts. For instance, consider a piece of fruit like a pear. Different parts of the brain perceive its shape, color, texture, taste, smell and so on. [10, p.7]

2.2.2. Cognitive Semantics

Cognitive semantics is that subfield of cognitive linguistics

a. whose object of investigation is the 'meaning' of linguistic expression as part of cognition;

b. whose methods are those of empirical linguistics;

c. whose central aim, among others, is to reformulate, to answer or to eliminate classic philosophical questions concerning the nature of the mind and knowledge by dealing with them empirically and interdisciplinarily, and

d. which includes both modular and holistic approaches. [1, p.22-23]

Cognitive semantics identifies meanings of expressions with mental entities. [6, p.19]

2.2.3. Definition of prepositions

On www.oxforddictionaries.com: A preposition is a word such as after, in, to, on, and with. Prepositions are usually used in front of nouns or pronouns and they show the relationship between the noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence. They describe, for example:

- the position of something:

*Her bag was **under** the chair.*

*The dog crawled **between** us and lay down at our feet.*

*His flat was **over** the shop.*

- the time when something happens:

*They arrived **on** Sunday.*

*The class starts **at** 9 a.m.*

*Shortly **after** their marriage they moved to Colorado.*

- the way in which something is done:

*We went **by** train.*

*They stared at each other **without** speaking.*

Some prepositions are made up of more than one word, for example:

*They moved here **because of** the baby.*

*We sat **next to** each other.*

*The hotel is perched **on top** of a cliff.*

According to www.English-Grammar-Revolution.com, prepositions are words that show the relationship between a noun or a pronoun and some other words or elements in the rest of the sentence.

Seth [9, p. 6] states that the most typical preposition is a word which says where one physical thing is located in relation to another: There is a candle **on** the table.

Woods [4, p.10] states that “*In English you use prepositions to connect nouns or between nouns and pronouns. Prepositions may be defined as any word or group of words that relates a noun or a pronoun to another word in the sentence.*”

Straus [5, p. 5] defines “*A preposition is a word that indicates location (in, near, beside) or some other relationship (about, after, besides) between a noun or pronoun and other parts of the sentence. A preposition isn’t a preposition unless it goes with a related noun or pronoun, called the **object of the preposition**.*”

Examples: Let's meet before noon.

Before is a preposition; noon is its object."

2.2.4. Prepositions in Whose Mind?

Our total experience of a word determines what it means to us. This means, in turn, strongly influences our uses of the word. Because no two people have ever had precisely the same experiences, we are all bound to understand and use many words differently. For common words - e.g. most prepositions - such differences are probably very slight. [9, p.4]

2.2.5. Collocations, Strong Collocations, Fixed Expressions

Seth [9, p.5] has indicated that: When two or more words combine quite naturally, we may say that they 'collocate' or that they form a 'collocation' ('word partnership').

Prepositions are involved in a vast number of collocations, including many that are strong or fixed. In collocations which are (more or less) fixed, prepositions may occur at the beginning (*in trouble*), at the end (*depend on*), or in the middle (*one by one*).

Even though prepositions - especially the most common ones - tend to be small (both in writing and in sound), encountering an unnatural collocation can be very jarring. This can be true even when the wrong and the correct preposition are sometimes quite close in meaning (e.g. *by/ at the seaside*).

2.2.6. Meaning and Form

Sometimes it is necessary to distinguish between the *meaning* of a preposition and its *form*. Basically, a *meaning* is always in someone's mind. On the other hand a *form* (= spelling and pronunciation), can be in a mind - e.g. held in memory - or it can be

concrete – e.g. visibly written or audibly spoken. [9, p. 10]

The meaning of a preposition may include some or all of the following: geometrical meaning, functional meaning and role.

2.3. SUMMARY

Chapter 1 of this paper reveals previous studies related to the research. It has given out an overview of cognitive linguistics and cognitive semantics. It also presents the general definitions of prepositions and their features that play as the foundation for preposition collection and analysis in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

3.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This work tended to study the semantic characteristics and the use of English prepositions used in textbooks of English for high school students in Viet Nam. Thus the whole prepositions from these books were listed, classified and interpreted.

To understand the difficulties many Vietnamese students encounter when using English prepositions, surveys were conducted via tests, questionnaires, interviews directly to teachers and students at Nguyen Tat Thanh Gifted High School in Kon Tum City. And then some solutions for high school students to learn English prepositions better were proposed. Hence, the methods used to carry out this research are both **qualitative** and **quantitative** ones.

The study is a combination of **descriptive** and **statistical** methods.

3.2. DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLES

The samples were set up based on two criteria. Firstly, the samples have to be prepositions. Secondly, they are used in textbooks

of English 10, 11, 12 in Viet Nam.

3.3. INSTRUMENTATION

Two kinds of instrument were used:

- Surveys with observation of the sentences as well as contexts that consist of prepositions.
- Tests, questionnaires and interviews to illicit the difficulties in English prepositions Vietnamese students often encounter.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION

Firstly, all sentences in textbooks of English 10, 11, 12 used at high schools in Vietnam consisting of prepositions were picked up with the total of 49 prepositions in 2195 sentences.

Secondly, the prepositions were put into groups: [1] prepositions in collocations (with nouns, verbs, adjectives), [2] prepositions in phrasal verbs, [3] prepositions in idioms, [4] spatial prepositions, [5] prepositions of time, [6] prepositions of direction and path and [7] prepositions in other uses.

After that they were analyzed in their meanings and semantic features.

To study the students' preposition studying at school, I gave students in grade 10, 11, 12 at Nguyen Tat Thanh Gifted High School in Kon Tum a test about prepositions of all kinds. And then I checked and found out the common mistakes in using prepositions. I delivered Questionnaires to these students to find out their thought about the prepositions they have been learning in the textbooks at high schools. I also interviewed 10 teachers of English at the school above about their teaching prepositions in the textbooks.

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

The data were interpreted qualitatively and quantitatively.

For the qualitative information, the study looked into the cognitive semantics that prepositions might have in different contexts.

For the quantitative one, the research investigated and analyzed the students' use of prepositions and then found out the main causes that led students to make mistakes.

3.6. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research paper was carried out two main phases:

- **Phase 1:** It aimed to focus on cognitive semantics of prepositions used in textbooks at high schools in Vietnam.

- **Phase 2:** The research was based on the information obtained from the questionnaires, interviews and tests.

- + The first stage was intended to survey students' understanding of preposition meanings in different situations.

- + The second stage related to the statistical figures obtained from the first step.

- + The third stage was the comment of the qualitative and quantitative information and the generalization of the conclusions under the investigation.

3.7. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

In terms of reliability, the data for this study were collected from the textbooks of English used at high schools in Viet Nam published by Vietnam Education Publishing House in 2008. Therefore, both the data and the background for the study are reliable.

In terms of validity, this study meets all required criteria. In order to make the samples of the study, all prepositions were collected from the textbooks. Moreover, the number of prepositions analyzed in this study is not a small number. Therefore, they are truly representative of popularity.

3.8. SUMMARY

Chapter 3 of this paper presents research methodology, the ways the samples were collected, instrumentation and data collection.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. THE PREPOSITIONS IN THE TEXTBOOKS

Among 49 prepositions used in 2,195 sentences in the textbooks, the most popular prepositions are *in*, *of*, *for*, *to*, *on*, *at* and *with* that account for over 70%, the rest nearly 30% for the whole of 42 prepositions. More particularly, *in* and *of* are the most popular with around 390 times appearing, accounting for over 17.5% per each. That figure is as seventeenth as the least popular prepositions *till*, *onto*, *along*, *ahead*, *beneath*, *except* and *unlike* that account only 0.05% with only one time appearing. The prepositions *over*, *into*, *out*, *up*, *by*, *about* and *from* also appear from over 20 to over 90 times. And the other prepositions such as *away*, *between*, *inside*, *outside*, *along...* only account less than 1% in the total.

Here is the table of the prepositions used in the textbooks:

Table 4.1. Prepositions in the textbooks

Ordinal	Prepositions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	in	392	17,86
2	of	389	17,72
3	for	236	10,75
4	to	166	7,56
5	on	164	7,47
6	at	129	5,88
7	with	124	5,65
8	from	91	4,15

9	about	83	3,78
10	up	55	2,51
11	by	49	2,23
12	out	49	2,23
13	into	36	1,64
14	over	24	1,09
15	after	21	0,96
16	down	19	0,87
17	off	17	0,77
18	away	15	0,68
19	through	13	0,59
20	between	12	0,54
21	without	12	0,54
22	around	10	0,46
23	during	10	0,46
24	against	7	0,31
25	under	7	0,31
26	before	6	0,27
27	within	6	0,27
28	towards	5	0,23
29	inside	4	0,18
30	like	4	0,18
31	behind	4	0,18
32	outside	3	0,14
33	across	3	0,14
34	above	3	0,14
35	throughout	3	0,14
36	upon	3	0,14
37	along	3	0,14

38	ahead	2	0,09
39	among	2	0,09
40	near	2	0,09
41	next to	2	0,09
42	opposite	2	0,09
43	round	2	0,09
44	beneath	1	0,05
45	except	1	0,05
46	next	1	0,05
47	onto	1	0,05
48	till	1	0,05
49	unlike	1	0,05
Total		2195	100

4.1.1. Prepositions in Collocations

Among 2195 sentences under investigation, preposition collocations makes up 5.83% with 128 items. They are classified into three patterns: preposition collocations with nouns, verbs and adjectives.

a. Preposition Collocations with Nouns

The noun collocation of prepositions makes up 3.64% with 80 items. They are classified into two patterns: Nouns + Prepositions and Prepositions + Nouns.

[1] Nouns + Prepositions

The collocation with the structure Nouns + Prepositions are used in 71 items which mainly focuses on a few prepositions like *of*, *to*, *in* and *for*. The most common preposition in collocation with nouns is *of* with 55 items used, following are *for* (8 items), *in* and *to* with 4 items for each.

[1.1] Nouns + preposition *OF*

[1.2] Nouns + preposition *FOR*

[1.3] Nouns + preposition *IN*

[1.4] Nouns + preposition *TO*

[2] Prepositions + Nouns

With 2195 sentences collected from the textbooks of English used at high schools in Vietnam, I have found out 9 items with the collocation of Prepositions + Nouns.

b. Preposition Collocations with Verbs

The verb collocation of prepositions is very popular in English. In the textbooks of English 10, 11, 12 used in Vietnam, I have found out 48 verb collocations (2.19%). The prepositions *about* and *to* are the most common with 11 and 9 items. Following are *from* and *for* with 8 and 7 items. The prepositions *with* and *at* appear into 4 and 3 items. And the least ones are *on*, *in*, *into* with only 2 items per each.

The use of preposition collocations with verbs can be found in the phrases below:

[1] Verbs + preposition *ABOUT*

[2] Verbs + preposition *TO*

[3] Verbs + preposition *FROM*

[4] Verbs + preposition *FOR*

[5] Verbs + preposition *WITH*

[6] Verbs + preposition *AT*

[7] Verbs + preposition *ON*

[8] Verbs + preposition *IN*

[9] Verbs + preposition *INTO*

c. Preposition Collocations with Adjectives

When prepositions collocate with adjectives, it is very difficult to get their meanings. Therefore, learners often get their meanings in the contexts.

4.1.2. Prepositions in Phrasal Verbs

Phrasal verbs are very popular and used widely in English. In textbooks of English 10, 11, 12 in Viet Nam, 120 phrasal verbs have been used making up 5.47%. Surprisingly, the most common preposition is *up* with 24 phrasal verbs in the total only 55 sentences collected from the books. This means half its usage in the textbooks is used in phrasal ones. The preposition *out* appears in 19 phrasal verbs and *down* and *on* are at the same number as about 13 phrasal verbs. Besides prepositions *away*, *off*, *into*, *in* are also used in over 5 items. And prepositions *through*, *over*, *after*, *for*, *of*, *at*, *ahead*, *from*, *out*, *to*, *upon* and *with* are used less than the prepositions mentioned above. They appear in only from 1 to 6 items.

Follow are the prepositions in Phrasal Verbs:

- [1] Phrasal Verbs with *UP*
- [2] Phrasal Verbs with *OUT*
- [3] Phrasal Verbs with *DOWN*
- [4] Phrasal Verbs with *ON*
- [5] Phrasal Verbs with *AWAY*
- [6] Phrasal Verbs with *OFF*
- [7] Phrasal Verbs with *INTO*
- [8] Phrasal Verbs with *IN*
- [9] Phrasal Verbs with *OVER*
- [10] Phrasal Verbs with *AFTER*
- [11] Phrasal Verbs with *FOR*
- [12] Phrasal Verbs with *THROUGH*

4.1.3. Prepositions in Idioms

Idioms are one of the difficult aspects in learning English. Hardly can we get their meanings without using a dictionary. In the textbooks under this investigation, I have found out 29 idioms in use with prepositions like *in* (8 idioms), *of* in 6 idioms, *at* and *on* with 4 idioms per each, and 1 idiom with prepositions *about*, *for*, *to*, *under*, *up* and *with*.

[1] Idioms with *IN*

[2] Idioms with *OF*

[3] Idioms with *AT*

[4] Idioms with *ON*

4.1.4. Spatial Prepositions

[1] Preposition *IN / INSIDE / WITHIN*

[2] Preposition *ON*

[3] Preposition *AT*

[4] Preposition *BEHIND*

[5] Preposition *ABOVE / OVER*

[6] Preposition *OUT*

[7] Preposition *BY / NEAR*

[8] Preposition *BETWEEN / AMONG*

[9] Preposition *NEXT TO*

4.1.5. Prepositions of time

[1] Time expressions with *IN*

[2] Time expressions with *ON*

[3] Time expressions with *AT*

[4] Time expressions with *DURING*

4.1.6. Prepositions of Direction and Path

[1] Preposition *TOWARDS*

- [2] Preposition *TO*
- [3] Preposition *FROM*
- [4] Preposition *UP / DOWN*
- [5] Preposition *THROUGH*
- [6] Preposition *OUT OF*

4.1.7. Prepositions in other uses

- [1] Preposition *IN*
- [2] Preposition *OF*
- [3] Preposition *FOR*
- [4] Preposition *FROM*

4.2. STUDENTS' PREPOSITION STUDYING IN KON TUM CITY

4.2.1. Common Mistakes in Learning Prepositions

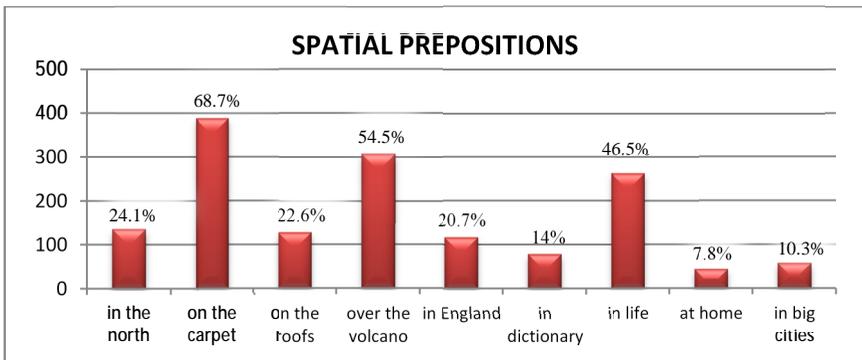


Figure 4.18: Mistakes on Spatial Prepositions

In the spatial prepositions, nearly 400 students make mistakes with the preposition *on* in the sentence “Some ink has been split **on** the carpet.” [12, p.61] (accounting for nearly 70%). Prepositions *over* and *in* in the phrases *over the volcano* and *in life* stand around 50% students misunderstanding their uses. The prepositions of place such as *in the north*, *in England*, *on the roofs* are rather easy for students to remember, so only about 20% students use them incorrectly. The phrase *at home* is very popular, so only over 5% learners make mistakes with it.

4.2.2. Survey on Students' Preposition Studying

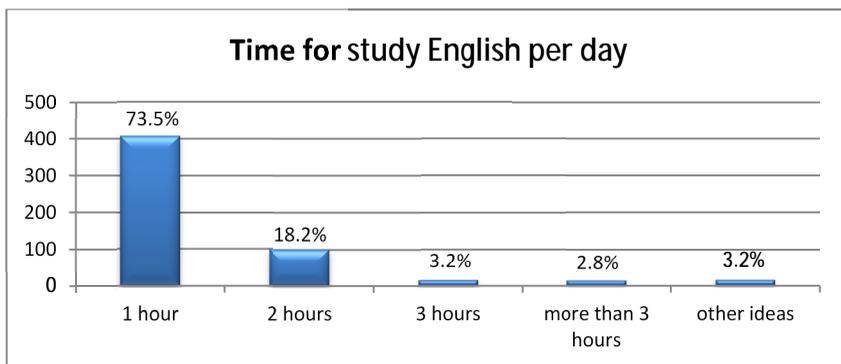


Figure 4.23. Time for studying English per day

4.2.3. Survey on Teachers' Preposition Teaching

- 9/10 teachers think it is difficult to teach prepositions to their students.

- 10/10 teachers find prepositions in phrasal verbs and in idioms the most difficult because of the variety of meanings.

- 9/10 teachers state that they should teach prepositions in contexts and through exercises.

4.3. SUMMARY

Chapter 4 focuses on analyzing the semantic meanings of the prepositions used in the textbooks of English 10, 11, 12 at high schools in Viet Nam. The difficulties in teaching and learning prepositions of the teachers and the learners are also mentioned through the tests, the questionnaires and the interviews to the teachers of English and the students in grade 10, 11, 12 at Nguyen Tat Thanh Gifted High School in Kon Tum City.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. CONCLUSION

Firstly, we would like to say that there are not so many prepositions in English, but how to use them efficiently is very complicated and it seems to have no particular rules to use them. English prepositions have no fixed meanings. Hence, English learners often get the meanings of the prepositions due to other words in sentences, the collocations, the words before or after the prepositions and the contexts.

Secondly, when talking to a person or a thing, Vietnamese people generally take their own as center point, whereas British people often take the person or thing as the center point. For example,

*The children play **in** the garden. (Bọn trẻ chơi ngoài vườn)*

For Vietnamese people, they say *ngoài vườn* because they themselves are out of the garden. Meanwhile British people say *in the garden* because the children are in the garden, not out.

Another problem when learning prepositions is that one verb in English can combine with many different prepositions to make different meanings, which makes students difficult to get and remember the meanings. The only way for the students to learn those is learning by heart.

As we stated in the previous chapters, this work attempts to describe and analyze the semantic meanings of prepositions in the textbooks at high schools in Viet Nam, the common mistakes students often make and also the comment of teachers and learners on English prepositions. By doing this, we aim at finding out which prepositions Vietnamese students learn at school and whether they have any

difficulties in teaching and learning prepositions. And then we would like to find out the suitable ways to teach and to learn prepositions effectively. Finally, the features mentioned above have been identified and they are briefly presented as follows.

Semantically, we have totally a category of 7 groups: 200 prepositions in collocations including 128 prepositions collocations with nouns, 48 items with verbs, and 24 items with adjectives; 120 prepositions in phrasal verbs; 29 prepositions in idioms, 160 spatial prepositions, 73 prepositions of time, 99 prepositions of direction and path and 113 prepositions in other uses.

Stylistically, most of the prepositions in this study express their meanings through grammatical meanings and metaphorical meanings.

Statistically, 599 students in grade 10, 11, 12 at Nguyen Tat Thanh Gifted High School in Kon Tum City have been under investigated. They have done a test about prepositions of all kinds and answered the questionnaire about their preposition studying. Most of them find it difficult to learn English prepositions and that prepositions in phrasal verbs and idioms are the most difficult. 10 teachers of the English Section at the same school have also been interviewed about their preposition teaching at high school. Most teachers also think that it is not easy to teach prepositions to learners.

Let me break it down in a simple way. Here are some “facts” about prepositions.

[1] A preposition is always followed by a noun or something like a noun (e.g. a gerund or a noun phrase).

[2] We use prepositions to talk about time, position and movement – and these are the easy ones. For example, “*The cat is on*

the chair, the mouse is under the table, the monkey is on the branch. I'll see you on Sunday at 3 o'clock. The train went into the station. The monkey fell out of the tree. The cat jumped off the chair." etc. These are 'easy' because the prepositions seem to have specific meanings of their own, and they don't change depending on which noun or verb you are using.

[3] The more difficult part is the way we use prepositions to attach nouns to other parts of the sentence. Prepositions tend to collocate with different adjectives, verbs and nouns. What does collocate mean? It means that these words 'just go together'. They're friends. They always hang out with each other. Why? That's the difficult thing to explain. I'd say – don't focus on the individual meanings of prepositions. Instead focus on the way they just collocate with other words, and then learn those words together. So, don't just learn the word "*accuse*" but learn the phrase "*to accuse someone of something*". Don't just learn the word "*doubtful*" but learn the phrase "*doubtful about*", don't just learn the word "*comply*" but learn the phrase "*to comply with*" and also the noun "*compliance*" and "*to be in compliance with*".

[4] Prepositions can be hard to hear because of the way they're pronounced. They are not usually the 'meaning words' in sentences, and so they can be pronounced using 'weak forms' of pronunciation. Pay attention to the way prepositions are pronounced by native speakers in fluent speech.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

It is true that Vietnamese students often find learning prepositions fun but difficult. There are three most common reasons: firstly, there are so many English prepositions; secondly, one

preposition can combine with many different verbs, nouns or adjectives to make different meanings; thirdly, it is not easy to get the meanings of phrasal verbs and idioms.

In order to help Vietnamese students overcome the problems above, we hereafter would like to have some suggestions for language teaching and learning.

Firstly, prepositions should be taught in contexts. In order to ensure that students not only understand prepositions, but also are able to use them, teachers should present prepositions along with examples in context, for example, in simple conversations where the meanings of the prepositions are clear. Then, teachers can ask learners to guess their meaning and correct if necessary. This helps learners both learn prepositions and involve them in the situation in which they are used. Besides, teachers had better show students how some of these prepositions are used in the media, in newspapers and magazine articles, in songs, cartoons, videos, advertisements, and so on. It is necessary for our learners to know that there are real people in real life who actually use prepositions in their daily conversations.

Secondly, prepositions should be taught in groups. For example, prepositions go with verb go, hear, look, get, put... and then teachers have students do exercises to remember. Classifying prepositions in categories can help learners memorize them easily. Students are likely to be passive learners when they receive lectures only in classrooms. Therefore, teachers can give them small topics to discuss at home and present in front of the class, which could stimulate students to be involved in the active process of constructing knowledge. Furthermore, during group discussions, students will learn from each other a lot.

Thirdly, the development of technology can help teachers a lot with their teaching English in general and teaching preposition in particular. Thanks to computers, the internet, projects, teachers should teach prepositions by using pictures. It will help students easy to remember.

Last but not least, dialogues and role-play are useful written and oral activities in teaching prepositions. Teachers can assign learners to write dialogues in pairs by using the English prepositions introduced in class and then act out the dialogue in the following class. Learners can be motivated to write dialogues without burden because of pair collaboration and role-play activity can help them remember the dialogue they wrote through repetitive rehearsals. It is easier and more fun for them to remember the lessons because they have chance to share and enjoy learning prepositions with friends.

5.3. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

English prepositions, in fact, cover a wide range of linguistic areas. However, due to the limit of time and reference materials as well as the constraints faced by the researcher, this paper cannot cover all constructions as well as all meanings and the use of prepositions. For these reasons, there are some other aspects that are in need to be further investigated.

Some suggestions for further research can be drawn as following:

- An Investigation into the ways of learning English Prepositions effectively.
- An Investigation into English Prepositions used in English Idioms