

Techniques for the Teaching of Prepositions*

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The correct use of prepositions in the English Language can be taught more easily and effectively if students are encouraged to actively participate in the various drills and exercises of the language, than if they are allowed to

remain as passive listeners.

There are two very useful and successful techniques for the teaching of this subject, especially, to the students of ITM, and a teacher could use his/her discretion in

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choosing one or the other, depending on the type of students in the class and the response of the learners themselves.

Technique 1

At first, the teacher provides a list of the most commonly used prepositions and explains their usage to the students and then provides the exercises for the students to participate in. This may appear to be the conventional or classical method, the most wide-spread and long-lasting one and the one which many of us experienced in our own school days. At the same time, this seems to have the most influence on the students, particularly on those who have never heard of the word "preposition" before. It may be argued here that the rules of grammar usually have a number of exceptions and actually confuse the students. But the teachers, in the early stages of instruction can easily limit the number of the prepositions taught, to a required minimum, and leave the exceptions to the more advanced students, or to a later stage as the students become more familiar with the basic principles and usage of prepositions.

Technique 2

The teacher introduces the drills or exercises first to the students and encourages their participation and as the exercises are being discussed, the teacher picks out prepositions - not all of them, but only the ones that the students find difficult to understand, and explains the usage. This method is recommended only for students who have already acquired a basic knowledge of the prepositions and are ready for more advanced work.

In giving these exercises, the teacher allows ample opportunities for the students to think a little more than what has been allowed so far. This is one of the aims of language teaching. The teacher will also see that form, structure, and communication are all contained in the exercises and the students are required to select and/or supply the right prepositions in the given exercises so as to make them more meaningful.

Active participation in the learning exercises gives the students enthusiasm in their work, and *motivation* is created, one of the essential features in language teaching. Active participation as opposed to passive listening, enables the students, to break from the so-called "*silence barrier*" which has been the main obstacle and worry of teachers for a long time in language teaching. A fourth important feature is the creation of opportunities to carry out *immediate correction* of errors made by the students. This method has a fairly good impact on the improvement of the students' learning.

Oral exercises give the students opportunity to communicate freely with the teacher and the other students. Written exercises provide the listening and writing or the reading and writing skills which are in conformity with the current aims of language teaching.

Now, let us examine some of the exercises that I have compiled to facilitate the teaching of prepositions to the two groups of students we have discussed above, i.e. (1) the Malay-medium students who come with little knowledge of prepositions and (2) English-medium students and those who have done the one-year Special Course and have some knowledge of the use of prepositions in the English Language.

For Category 1 - Malay-medium students. The most commonly used and the most familiar prepositions are chosen and grouped under three headings:

- a. Prepositions with verbs
- b. Prepositions with nouns
- c. Prepositions with adjectives

Examples of some of these prepositions are given below, and the exercises compiled are based on these.

- | | | | |
|----|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| a. | increase in | arrive at | sit on |
| | fail in | stare at | lie on |
| | join in | laugh at | lecture on |
| | fill in | look at | agree on |
| | escape from | beg for | belong to |
| | dismiss from | wish for | address to |
| | hide from | prepare for | promise to |
| | free from | ask for | object to |
| | fall into | meet with | |
| | dip into | pair with | |
| | knock into | deal with | |
| | drive into | cover with | |
| b. | faith in | relative of | discussion on |
| | confidence in | result of | duty on |
| | graduate in | proof of | advice on |
| | expert in | end of | shame on |
| | fight with | dislike for | heir to |
| | business with | taste for | access to |
| | meeting with | need for | attention to |
| | chat with | reason for | exception to |
| c. | fond of | equal to | free from |
| | capable of | superior to | safe from |
| | jealous of | difficult to | absent from |
| | afraid of | common to | separate from |
| | angry at | fit for | glad about |
| | clever at | famous for | clear about |
| | good at | regard for | careful about |
| | glad at | essential from | nervous about |

Exercise I - Flash Cards (for oral participation).

Several cards are prepared by the teacher, with short phrases describing an order or a request such as:

stand on the chair	sit on the floor
pick up the book	go through the doorway
write with the pencil	hold the umbrella up
put the book in your desk	hang the clothes outside
bring the car into the garage	pull the table towards you

and the students are told to act accordingly and without speaking. This exercise requires the student to read fast and think fast before he responds to the order given. A great amount of concentration and understanding are expected of the students.

This exercise may also be varied by writing only the prepositions on the cards and telling the students to point to the suitable directions, positions or places, as the cards are shown to them.

To provide group participation, the teacher can ask beforehand some of the students to perform a number of actions or movements in sequence, and the teacher can ask the remaining students questions such as "Where is he standing?", "What is he doing?", "Where is the pencil now?".

The teacher may also improvise situations to bring in humour and wit to enliven the participation by asking two students to give orders and responses to each other. . . "Carry me on your back", "Push the table towards the wall", "Crawl under the desk", "Hold your hands up", "Put your tongue out". It is also important for the teacher to see that the exercise does not get out of hand.

Exercise II - The flannel Board Game.

A Flannel Board is prepared and a number of items, familiar to the students such as a table, a chair, a bed, a butterfly, a frog, a flower, a book, and a mouse, are cut out of card board, and sand paper is pasted at the back to help the items to stick to the flannel board. The teacher arranges these items on the flannel board and asks the students questions about the positions of the items. By altering the positions from time to time, a number of questions can be asked. The teacher may also ask the students to move the items and then answer the questions. This is an intensive communication exercise. Questions, answers, oral correction of mistakes and repetition of the corrected forms and structures are communicated. Oral correction is preferred to written work correction for reasons of time lag in the latter.

Exercise II - The Preposition Quiz. (for group participation)

Two groups of students, A and B, of five in each group, participate in this exercise. The teacher is the referee and scorer. No. 1 student of group A gives a word to No. 1 student of group B, the word must be one of the three: a verb, a noun, or an adjective. No. 1 of group B then makes a sentence with a preposition to go with the given word. He can choose any preposition he likes. If the answer is right, group B gets one point. If the answer is wrong, group A gets one point, and No. 2 of group B attempts the answer...and the game is in progress. There should be a time limit for each answer, approximately fifteen or twenty seconds. Each group game should have a time limit of ten minutes. A class of forty students is ideal for this exercise, because one could even have a semi-final and final, and prizes may be given to the winners in the form of good second-hand books and magazines that contain material helpful to the students. By doing this, more and more students would be motivated to participate in this exercise. Not only those students who actually participate in the group but also the rest of the class focus their entire attention on the game enabling them to receive the benefits of form, structure and communication to a large great extent.

Exercise IV - The Preposition Bingo

The Teacher prepares a number of Bingo Cards with either nine squares or sixteen squares according to the ability of the students participating. In the squares, prepositions such as in, on, to from, for, at, of, by, away, up, over, under, off, about, into, through, are written down in any order. Therefore different cards will have different arrangements. The Teacher, or one of the students, will be the caller. When the Bingo cards have been handed out to the students, and the students are ready to participate the caller calls out short phrases such as:

1. free troubles
2. absent class
3. good badminton
4. Shame you
5. peep the room
6. meet accident
7. clear rubbish
8. worry examination
9. search my key
10. lie bed
11. fail English
12. aim passing
13. talk your problem
14. belong me

When these phrases are called out, the students participating tick off the suitable prepositions that are given on the Bingo Board. For example:

A Bingo Board.

ON	INTO	TO	ABOUT
FROM	FOR	AT	OFF
WITH	IN	OF	OVER
BY	AWAY	OUT	UP

The Game is now in progress, and the one to get a line of four prepositions crossed off horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, calls out "Bingo". The Teacher collects his card and enters on it the number of the call, and proceeds with the remaining calls, until at least six of them have called "Bingo". The game is stopped now, and the teacher checks the cards for accuracy, and declares the winners as 1st, 2nd, 3rd To create some incentive for participation, some used magazines or second-hand books may be given as prizes to the winners.

The aim of this exercise is to create a situation in which the students are motivated to concentrate on the form by listening attentively to the caller, to do some very quick thinking and deciding on the correct structure of the phrase and to fit in the correct preposition and cross off on the Bingo Board. Speed and accuracy are two important factors in this exercise. A sense of competition is triggered off as well. Competition leads to motivation.

For the advanced students (i.e. those who come from English-medium schools and the Malay-medium students who have completed Special Course), Participation drills and exercises may be compiled on a modified level. Since the syllabus for these students includes harder types of prepositions and usage, actively participating games might appear too elementary. Some of the advanced work these students will be doing involve these.

Compound prepositions: above, across, along, behind, below, between, inside, outside, (These prepositions are formed by prefixing a preposition usually a, on, be, by, etc. to a noun, adjective, verb or adverb).

Participial prepositions: concerning, considering, during, depending regarding, notwithstanding. These prepositions are used in the sense of their equivalents, concerning - about (Concerning yesterday's fire, there are several rumours) notwithstanding - in spite of (Notwithstanding the fact that he is very strict in his dealings, he is kind man).

Prepositions of place
Prepositions of Travel and Movement
Prepositions of Time and Date
Omissions of Prepositions
Prepositions of special use (agree to do something)
(agree with a person)
(agree upon a decision)

The teacher may devise some harder type of exercises for these students and encourage their participation.

Exercise I - The Preposition Bingo. This game may be introduced with tougher prepositions and harder usage. The number of squares may be increased to twenty-five. One type of prepositions can be used at time and students will learn them easily in a graded manner.

Exercise II - Filling in the missing prepositions.

Filling in the blanks is a very common exercise but these exercises can be modified, varied and compiled into interesting pieces to create some enthusiasm in the students. This is purely a written exercise, and there is very little communication, but there is plenty of scope for form and structure in language learning. The exercise given can be a narrative or separate sentences.

1. The thief jumped the window and ran the garden path the gate. (to, on, down, through, up)
2. There was a lovely dress.....sale the shop..... the supermarket. I was tempted buy it, but I did not have the money me that moment. (to, near, at, in, with, for, at, over, about)
3. He divedthe pond and swam the little boy. Catching hold the boy's head, he started swim to the bank. (to, at, with, into, of, towards)
4. He spoke..... mejust a few minutes. He said that he was a hurry since he had an appointment an old friend half an hour's time. (for, in, to, for, to, with).

Exercise III - Reading and Substitution Skills in the use of prepositions.

The teacher may also prepare Substitution Tables to test the ability of the participants to select the most suitable preposition to agree with the words given in the adjoining columns and complete the phrase structure correctly and meaningfully.

	OVER	A CONCLUSION
JUMP	AT	A BARGAIN
	TO	A BAR

HE	CALLED	OUT	MY HOUSE
		AT	A CUP OF TEA
		OUT	THE MATCH
		OFF	THE WINNERS
	UP		THE DOOR
	IN		AND ENTER
BREAK	DOWN		THE ENTERTAINMENT
	OUT		IN RASHES
	OFF		INTO SMALL UNITS

The prepositions used in these exercises are special prepositions since they can all be used with the same verb from, but once the structure of the phrase is completed, they convey different meanings. This type of exercise is recommended for the more advanced students because of the harder vocabulary and the complication in the usage.

LONGMAN HANDBOOKS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

WRITING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TESTS

by J.B. HEATON 236 pages, Longman, 1975.

Writing English Language Tests is a practical handbook on the construction of English tests, intended primarily for the teacher in the classroom. In addition to outlining the general principles of language testing, the book shows the teacher how to construct a wide range of tests and test-items, and how to select those most suitable for his individual purposes. The latter part of the book contains a carefully planned and balanced programme of work, in which the teacher is given practice in the different processes of constructing a variety of useful test-items.