

# An Analysis of EFL Learners' Performance on "in, on, at" in Taiwan

鄭碧燕、陳建志

E-mail: 9511708@mail.dyu.edu.tw

## ABSTRACT

The study investigated 120 EFL (English as a foreign language) university students' performance on three frequently used function words, in, on and at as spatial and temporal prepositions in PPs (prepositional phrases) and as particles in PVs (phrasal verbs). The main purpose of this study was to access (1) the relationship between the EFL learners' performance on prepositions and particles; (2) the relationship between the EFL learners' performance on spatial and temporal prepositions; and (3) to what extent the participants experienced difficulty in PVs and in PPs. The researchers administered a 55 questions English test with multiple-choices to the participants. The answers were analyzed through error analysis and the data were computed by paired-samples t-test, Pearson correctional coefficient, and simple regression of variance on overall error rates. The result showed that the participants performed differently between prepositions and particles, and between spatial and temporal prepositions. Moreover, the results from the Pearson correlation analysis show that there was a moderate positive correlation between the EFL learners' performance on spatial prepositions and temporal prepositions. The result from the simple regression of variance showed that the EFL learners' performance on spatial prepositions had significant influence on temporal prepositions. Two categories of error patterns in PVs were identified. The researcher speculated that first language interference, diversity of in, on and at, spatial concepts and backward judgment maybe the factors causing EFL learners' errors. Besides, the incapability to recognize phrasal verbs, transformation of verbs, and the effect of prepositions may be the factors causing errors in phrasal verbs. There are two contributions of the study. First, with a mean of error analysis, the possible factors influencing the learning of in, on and at functioning as prepositions and particles are found. The educators can employ the findings to decrease the occurrence of errors and increase the effectiveness of learning the three function words. Secondly, there was a moderate and positive correlation between the performance on spatial and temporal prepositions and predictability found.

Keywords : function words ; in, on, at ; prepositions ; spatial prepositions ; temporal prepositions ; particles ; error analysis ; error patterns in phrasal verbs ; EFL learners

## Table of Contents

封面內頁 簽名頁 授權書	iii 中文摘要	iv ABSTRACT	v ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
vii TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii LIST OF FIGURES	xii LIST OF TABLES	xiii Chapter I.
INTRODUCTION 1.1 Motivation	1 1.2 Statements of the Problems	4 1.3 Purpose of the Study	5 1.4
Research Questions	5 1.5 Significance of the Study	6 1.6 Organization	6 1.7 Definition of Terms
Chapter II. LITERATURE REVIEW 2.1 The Function of Words: in, on and at	8 2.1.1 Prepositions	9 2.1.1.1 Spatial	
Prepositions	11 2.1.2.2 Temporal Prepositions	14 2.1.2 Particles	14 2.1.2.1 Semantic Meanings of Particles: in, on and
at	17 2.2 Previous Studies on the Function Words: in, on and at	17 2.2.1 Studies about Prepositions	18 2.2.2 Studies about
Particles	21 2.3 Error Analysis	23 2.4 Summary and Discussion	24 Chapter III. THE REPORT OF THE STUDY 3.1
Hypotheses	27 3.2 Design	28 3.3 Participants	28 3.4 Instrument
29 3.4.1 Design of Test Items in Part II	31 3.5 Procedure	32 3.6 Data Analysis	32 3.7 Results
34 3.7.1 The Relationship between	Prepositions in PPs and Particles in PVs	35 3.7.2 The Relationship between Spatial and Temporal Prepositions	36 3.7.3
The Error Patterns of in, on and at Functioning as Particles in PVs and as Prepositions in PPs	42 Chapter IV. DISCUSSION 4.1		
The EFL Learners' Performance on in, on and at as Prepositions in PPs	52 4.1.1 First Language Interference	52 4.1.2	
Diversity of in, on and at Influence the Selecting Judgment	55 4.1.3 Spatial Cognition and Backward Judgment	57 4.2 The	
EFL Learners' Performance on in, on and at as Particles in PVs	59 4.2.1 Underdifferentiation between the Semantic Meanings		
of Two-Words Verbs and One-Word Verbs	60 4.2.2 Transformation of Verb	61 4.2.3 Greatly Influenced by Features of	
Prepositions	62 4.3 Correlation	63 4.3.1 Correlation between Prepositions in PPs and Particles in PVs	63 4.3.2 Correlation
between Spatial and Temporal Prepositions	64 Chapter V. CONCLUSION 5.1 Summary of the Study	66 5.1.1 Difficulty	
in the Function Words	66 5.1.2 The Function Words in Culture	66 5.1.3 Correlation between Spatial and Temporal	
Prepositions	67 5.1.4 Correlation between Prepositions and Particles	67 5.2 Pedagogical Implication	68 5.3 Limitations of the
Study	69 5.4 Suggestions for Future Study	72 REFERENCES	73 APPENDIX A Formal Test
			79 APPENDIX B Results

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