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THE USE OF PREPOSITIONS IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Emad Abedalaziz Alwreikat¹, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kamariah Yunus²

¹ Faculty of Languages and Communications, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia
Email: emadwrikat@yahoo.com

² Faculty of Languages and Communications, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia
Email: kamariah@unisza.edu.my

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Abstract:

Arabic and English are derived from different language families. While Arabic belongs to the Semitic family, English belongs to Germanic languages (Alhaj, 2015). Consequently, these two languages are supposed to have dissimilar prepositional structures. The methodology used in this study to comprehend these variances and resemblances regarding prepositions in Arabic and English, the researcher conducted a comparative study among these two prepositional systems. The objective of this paper is not to prove or disprove this claim. Its main focus is finding out how this syntactic feature is dealt with in English and Arabic in general and the contrast in the use of prepositions in both languages. To achieve this aim, the research makes use of the English categories of prepositions and gives the Arabic equivalents, in some cases, there is no Arabic equivalent because English prepositions are more than Arabic ones.

Keywords:

Prepositions, Arabic, English, Comparative Study

Introduction

Prepositions are a syntactic feature that is employed in writing in both English and Arabic. It is often argued, however, that the two languages differ in their use and number of prepositions. English, it is said, makes use of more prepositions, while Arabic favors the use of fewer prepositions (Al-Marrani, 2009).

This study main motivation is to find out how this feature is commonly used in Arabic and English and the differences in the practice of prepositions in both languages. In accomplishing this purpose, this study uses the English classes of prepositions and gives its Arabic counterparts.

The reason behind this is that the researcher wants to get to a generalization about the hypothesis above, whether it is proven valid or not. In other words, by varying the equivalents and the different use of prepositions in both languages the researcher wants to get to general observations from which several researches could be triggered.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher contrasted prepositions usage in both languages, and the outcomes were matched to identify whether they are comparable or dissimilar.

Literature Review

The Literature has a plethora of research conducted on English and Arabic prepositions; these studies investigated the use of prepositions in the written text. This was revealed in many studies (Jin,1982; Bing Hiong ,2004; Simon Garrod ,1999; Eric Haeberli, 2005; Richard Ingham, 2005; Jenny Doetjec, 2006; Joao Costa, 2003; Janne Bondi, 2003; Thomas Ernst, 2006; Andrea Tyler, 2005, Stacy L.Klingler, 2005; Jia-Jiunn Loa, 2003; Ian Pratt-Hartmann, 2003; Karen Froud, 2000; David Kemmerer, 2004; Cynthia Fisher ;Loe Hoye 1997; Shiou-Wen Yeh, 2003; Al-Marrani , 2009; Aldahesh, 2013; Saeed, 2014; Alayesh, 2012; Alhawary, 2011; Alhaj, 2015).

According to (Jin, 1982., Lindstromberg, 2010), English Language prepositions possess multiple meanings, and many prepositions are so complicated that require much memory work from the learners. The prepositions reflect functional or physical relations between objects in the world (Simon Garrod, Gillan Ferrier, Siobhan Campbell 1999). However, Prepositions seem to encode relationships between objects, times, places or grammatical entities (Karen Froud, 2000).

Preposition in English

A preposition is one of the eight parts of speech. Specifically, a preposition is a connector: its function is to connect a noun or pronoun (called the object of the preposition) to another word in a sentence Vas (2006).

It also shows how that noun or pronoun (its object) is related to the other word. Consequently, a preposition can never stand alone: it must always be contained within a phrase (a group of words) called a prepositional phrase. Most often, prepositions show relationships of direction, location, and time, but they can also express other relationships as well (for example, the prepositions, but, except, without, etc. show a relationship of exclusion) (Celentano, 2008; Cossé, 2005).

Commonly Used Prepositions

Above, behind, for, since, about, below, from, to, across, beneath, in, toward, after, beside, inside, though, against, between, into, under, along, beyond, like, until, among, by, near, up, around, down, of, upon, at, during, off, with, before, except, on, within. (Grubic, 2004; Macková, 2012)

Let's look at how prepositions show a relationship to a word in the rest of the sentence.

- Rama likes to eat on the garden wooden table.

“On the garden wooden table” is the prepositional phrase. It is a modifier that tells us where Mary likes to eat. It is modifying the verb “to eat.”

Examples of Prepositional Phrases:

1. Halla fell on the ground. (direction)

2. Aziz travelled after his nineteenth birthday. (time)
3. Njood is walking near her daughter. (location)
4. Abood finished the test less than an hour. (time)

Sometimes prepositions occur as combinations. The following examples are some of the more common of these compound prepositions:

Ahead of, apart from, as a consequence of, because of, on behalf of, in advance of, instead of, in addition to, in the course of, regardless of, in care of, in comparison with, according to, in case of, for fear of, next to, in favor of, with the exception of, up against, at the risk of, along with, in spite of, in connection with, together with, as a result of (Grubic , 2004).

Examples of compound prepositions

1. As a result of the depression, we had to move out to the city.
2. Instead of visiting the zoo this weekend, we are going to Petra.

Prepositions in Arabic

Prepositions in Arabic are used just like in English (Zughoul, 1973); they come before the noun, around the house = hawla al bait (around = hawla). In front of the house = amama al bait (amama= in front of) (Alhaj, 2015). Some prepositions that are one word in English may contain two words in Arabic, for example (among = men bayn) which means literally “from between”. And vice versa, some Arabic one word may be the equivalent of a compound English preposition, like: in front of = fawka (Salim, 2006; Saeed, 2014).

Furthermore, Arabic prepositions are not as much of in number as their English equivalents (Al-Marrani, 2009). English language encompasses around one hundred prepositions (Leacock et al, 2014) while, the number of prepositions in Arabic is around twenty (Alhawary, 2011)

Methodology

The methodology the researcher used in this study is a comparative analysis of the Arabic and English prepositions, the researcher presents at first the definitions of both languages, and then the researcher gives the categories of the Arabic prepositions and after that, he gives their equivalents in the English language.

A comparison can be made between both languages by analyzing each language prepositions in term of their definition, categories, usage, and their position in the sentence. The differences and similarities between the two languages are shown in the examples that demonstrate the conclusion of this study.

Analysis

Table1: English Prepositions and Their Arabic Equivalents

English and Arabic Prepositions	
About: hawla	in spite of: berraghmi men
Above: fawqa	Including: mo'taberan
according to: wafqan li	Inside: beddakhel
Across: 'abra	instead of: 'ewadan 'an
After: ba'da	Less: aqal
Against: dedda	Like: methla (or) ka
ahead of: amama	Minus: naqes

all over: men jaded	Near: qareeb
Along: 'ala tool	near to: qareeb men
Among: men bayn	next to: bejaneb
Around: hawla	Of: men (not for possessive)
As: ka	On: 'ala
As ... as: ka	on top of: fawqa
Aside: bejaaneb	Opposite to: 'aksa
At: 'ala	Out: khaarej
away from: ba'eedan 'an	Outside: bel kharej men
because of: besababi	Over: 'ala
Before: qabla	Per: li kolli
Behind: waraa'	Plus: idafatan ila
Below: tahta	Regarding: bekhosooos
Beneath: men taht	Save: bestithnaa' (th as in think)
Beside: bejaneb	similar to: moshaabeh li
Besides: bel idafati ila	Since: mundu
Between: bayna	Than: men
Beyond: wara'a	thanks to: befadli
But: laken	Through: khelaala
By: 'ala	Till: ila (or) ila ghaayat
close by: bel qurbi men	To: ila
close to: bejaneb	Towards: bettejaah
Concerning: bekhosooos	Under: tahta
Despite: raghma	Unlike: kheelafan 'an
Down: tahta	Until: ila ghayet
due to: naatej 'an	Up: fawq
During: khelaala	Versus: 'aaksa
except for: bestethnaa'	Via: 'abra
Excluding: mostathnian	With: ma'a
for: li	Without: bedoon
From: men	Neither ... nor: laa wala
In: fi	When (not for question): 'endamaa
in front of: amama	Whenever: kullamaa
in place of: makana	Wherever: haithumaa (th as in think)
As if: kamaa law	If: ithaa (th as in this)
Either: imma or aw	

Table2: Arabic Demonstrative Prepositions

This = used for masculine: hatha (th as in them)
This = used for feminine: hathah (th as in them)
That = used for masculine: thalek (th as in them)
That = used for feminine: tilka
These = ha'ola'
Those = ola'ek

Table3: The Main Categories Of Prepositions In Both Languages

The category	English	Arabic
Position	In, on, at	في عن، على، ب،
Destination	To, on, into	على، إلى في،
Neg. Position	Off, away from	من
Relative Position	Over, under, etc.	تحت فوق،
Relative Destination	Over, under,	خلف فوق، تحت،
Passage	Across, on, in	عبر على، في،
Reference	Along, across	مع، عبر
Orientation	Beyond, over	فوق، وراء
Resultative	Over, out of	وراء فوق،
Pervasive	All over	في
Time when	at, on, in	في
Duration	For, from...to	إلى ... منذ، من
Point relation	Before, after,	قبل، بعد، منذ
Cause purpose	For	من
Source origin	From	بـك،
Means instrument	By, with, without	بلا بـ،
Agentive	By	
Alarm	At	لـ
Accompaniment	With	مع، بـ،
Modifiers agentive	Of	
Possession	Of, with, without	
Concession	In spite of,	على
Reference	With regard to, as	
Exception	Except for,	حدا ما ما خلا، ماعدا،
Neg. condition	But for	
Subject matter	On, about	في على، عن،
Ingredient	Of, with	بـ من،
Respect	At	في
Reaction	At, to	لـ على،

Conclusion

Through the contrasting of prepositions above in both languages, we conclude many things like:

1. The number of English prepositions is more than Arabic ones.
2. In English language, the Prepositions are always free morphemes but In Arabic it sometimes comes as an affixes (prefix) attached to the noun that follows it like in the examples:

Jehad bought a car for his son wajed
 'Eshtara Jehad siarah le'ebneh wajed

3. In some cases, English prepositions does not have an equivalent. This means that Arabic expresses this sense not by means of prepositions, but by other means that are contextually determined, like the English prepositions: Neg. condition preposition (But for), Reference preposition (With regard to, as to), Possession preposition (Of, with, without), Modifiers agentive (of), Agentive (By), and we can see this in the examples:

Months of the year 'ashhor alsana'
The hand of the door yead albab

4. Some Arabic prepositions have more than one meaning like the preposition في (Fii) and it has many meanings like: At, On, All over, To...
5. Sometimes, the meaning of the preposition differs between Arabic and English according to its meaning like in the examples:

Mohammad arrived on time Mohammad Wasala fii alme'aad
Qutaiba put the keys on the table
Qutaiba wada'a alm fateeh 'ala altawilah

6. Sometimes the meaning of the preposition differs in the same language like in English the following examples show that:

This interview is about world economics
Hadihi almoqabala haola al'eqtesad al'alami
I reached home yesterday about ten
Ana wasalto ala albaite Albarehah als'aa al'asherah taqreeban

7. In both languages the preposition doesn't have a dependent meaning and it can't stand alone.
8. In English language, the pronoun that follows the preposition must be in the object state like the example:

Shadi offered the present to him

9. Some English prepositions have various states when translated into Arabic such as the English preposition "Of" like in the following examples:

Aziz drove in the streets of Amman
Aziz saq Fii shoare' Amman
Aboud bought two cups of coffee
Aboud eshtra kobaeene Min alqahoa
The file of the radio is burnt
Mohawel alradio mahrooq

10. The semantic relations are notoriously difficult to restrict in a defined way, and any attempt to do justice even to the main sense of prepositions will require a detailed study, which falls outside the scope of the study.

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