

International Journal of Educational Innovations

ISSN 3078-5677

International Journal of Educational Innovations
Volume 2, Issue 1, 76-95
<https://doi.org/10.46451/ije.260107>

Received: 17 September, 2025
Accepted: 1 October, 2025
Published: 1 January, 2026

English Prepositions as a Challenge for Armenian Learners of English

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Abstract

This corpus-based study investigates the use and misuse of English prepositions in academic writing by undergraduate students at an English medium University in Armenia. Analyzing 39 student essays, the research classifies prepositions and identifies common error types and their sources, distinguishing between interlingual (native language influence) and intralingual (developmental) errors. Findings reveal that simple prepositions are both the most frequently used and most often misused, with native language interference being the primary cause of errors. The study underscores the importance of focused instruction and practice to enhance students' academic writing proficiency.

Keywords

English prepositions, error analysis, prepositional errors, interlingual/intralingual errors

Introduction

English prepositions present a persistent challenge for learners of English as a second or foreign language, particularly in academic contexts where precision and clarity are paramount. The nuanced roles that prepositions play in signaling relationships between ideas, time frames, and physical or abstract locations make them a crucial yet often misunderstood aspect of English grammar. For Armenian undergraduate students at an English medium University in Armenia, whose native linguistic structures may differ significantly from those of English, the acquisition and accurate deployment of English prepositions is an essential component of developing academic writing proficiency.

Recognizing these complexities, the present study sets out to explore how Armenian undergraduates use English prepositions in their written academic work. It then seeks to identify the most prevalent errors and uncover their underlying sources. By conducting a

detailed analysis of student essays, the research aims to provide both a descriptive account of prepositional usage and a diagnostic perspective on common pitfalls. While performed on a small corpus of student work extracted from the learners with some of the highest English proficiency in the country, within the context of corpus linguistics, this study is moderately representative in terms of error types and frequencies for two distinct reasons. Firstly, small corpora are explicitly encouraged for the purposes matching the aims of this study (Griffiths, 2017). Secondly, the prepositional errors identified are true errors, remaining even after every opportunity for self-correction and correction had been provided (James, 1998). These insights are intended not only to inform pedagogical strategies but also to contribute to a deeper understanding of second language acquisition processes, particularly as they relate to cross-linguistic influence.

The research questions the study focuses on are the following:

1. What prepositions do Armenian undergraduate students most frequently use in their English language academic writing?
2. What are the most frequent prepositional errors in English made by Armenian undergraduate students?
3. What are the causes of prepositional errors in English made by Armenian undergraduate students?

Literature Review

Prepositions across languages

Languages around the world employ a variety of strategies to express the relationships between words within sentences, making use of prepositions, adpositions, or postpositions depending on their grammatical conventions. As Crystal (1995) notes, prepositions primarily articulate how two elements in a sentence relate to one another, typically in terms of space or time. In some languages, such as Armenian, these relational markers appear both before and after nouns, while in others, like Turkish and Albanian, they are incorporated as suffixes or as distinct particles (Dum-Tragut, 2009; Delija & Koruti, 2013; Abushihab, 2014).

In English, the system of prepositions is notably intricate. Essberger (2009) enumerates 150 prepositions in English, comprising 94 one-word prepositions—including participial forms—and 56 compound, multi-word constructions. Yet, understanding the types alone is insufficient. The semantic roles that prepositions fulfill—most commonly indicating time or place—add another layer of complexity (Thomson & Martinet, 2001; Essberger, 2009; Swick, 2011; Murthy, 2019). These functions are not always clear-cut, as many prepositions, such as *in*, *at*, *by*, *on*, and *to*, can signal both temporal and spatial relationships. For example, one might write *in the morning* but *at night* (time), or *in the park* but *at home* (place). The same preposition, depending on context, can transform meaning entirely—*by tomorrow* versus *by the lake*, *on Monday* versus *on the floor*—demonstrating the necessity of context-sensitive usage (Swick, 2011).

This flexibility and ambiguity make prepositions disproportionately influential in English. Swick (2011) points out how shifting a single preposition can drastically change the intent of a phrase, as exemplified by the verb *look*, which acquires a multitude of distinct meanings based solely on the accompanying preposition: *look after*, *look ahead*, *look at*, *look away*, and so on (Sinclair, 2017). Such examples underscore why prepositions are foundational among the most frequently used English words. In fact, nine of the thirty most common words are prepositions: *to*, *of*, *in*, *for*, *with*, *on*, *by*, *at*, and *from* (Saint-Dizier, 2006). De Felice and Pulman

(2008) further highlight this complexity, observing that *of* alone carries sixteen different senses, while *from*, with just one, is nonetheless extremely frequent.

English prepositions are among the linguistic elements that are most challenging even to native speakers. To demonstrate this, Tetreault and Chodorow (2008) conducted an experiment with native speakers. They selected 200 sentences from Microsoft's Encarta Encyclopedia, removed the prepositions, and then asked two native speakers to fill in the missing prepositions. Then, the sentences were checked by two raters, and the results showed that there was only 75% inter-rater reliability. Only through such quantification of results does it become apparent how problematic the English prepositions can be for the learners of English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL), and the reason behind it could be the polysemy and context dependence of English prepositions.

The contrast between English and other languages' prepositional systems is particularly significant for learners of English as a foreign language, often leading to lexical errors in the English writing of non-native speakers (Dodigovic & Wang, 2015). For instance, some languages, like Albanian and Turkish, lack direct equivalents for prepositions such as *in*, *on*, and *at*, instead using inflections or postpositions (Delija & Koruti, 2013; Abushihab, 2014). In Armenian, while there are both prepositions and postpositions—about 34 and 33 respectively (Dum-Tragut, 2009)—the system operates through a combination of adpositions and seven grammatical cases: Nominative, Genitive, Dative, Accusative, Ablative, Instrumental, and Locative. This dual structure means that Armenian sentences often employ a combination of case inflection as well as both prepositions and postpositions to convey relational meaning.

The Armenian language's familiarity with both prepositions and postpositions does not immunize its speakers from making errors in English. Aleksanyan (2010) and Levonyan (2015) both analyzed Armenian students' writings, finding that errors in preposition use were prevalent. This is also the case with the (2021) study by Dodigovic and Tovmasyan, in which prepositional errors are the second highest ranking type of grammatical error in the academic writing of Armenian students, with the top rank being occupied by determiners. Levonyan's (2015) work, in particular, points to native language interference as the leading source of errors, with 39 out of 70 substitution errors attributable to the transfer of Armenian structures to English.

These findings reinforce the value of focused research and pedagogical intervention in this area, laying the groundwork for the present study's examination of Armenian undergraduate students' academic writing.

Error analysis of learners' language

Contemporary language teaching views learner errors as a normal part of learning. Brown (2007) notes that mistakes are integral to the process. Analyzing these errors helps linguists identify common sources, which aids teachers in organizing classes more effectively. Understanding the nature of errors allows educators to adopt better strategies for improving students' language skills (Corder, 1981; Song & Sardegna, 2014; Nagata et al., 2014). Interest in learner errors has led to the development of error analysis (EA) in applied linguistics. EA involves analyzing learners' target language samples and comparing them to native speaker equivalents (Brown, 2007; Gass & Selinker, 2008). Errors are defined with reference to comparable native speaker examples (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Corder (1974, cited in Ellis, 1994), Gass and Selinker (2008), and Saville-Troike (2012) outline the main steps for conducting EA. The initial stage of EA is the process of identifying forms in learners' TL utterances that are deviant from TL native speakers' similar utterances. While Gass and Selinker (2008) categorize all deviant forms as errors, Saville-Troike (2012) suggests differentiating between mistakes and errors. Corder (1981) suggests relating mistakes to learners' performance, and errors to transitional competence since mistakes are self-correctible through learners' language competence and the correction of errors depends on the reconstruction of learners' transitional competence.

Furthermore, the identification of errors has another level of analysis which is the categorization of errors as overt and covert errors (Corder, 1981; Ellis, 1994; James, 1998; Brown, 2007). EFL learners' overtly erroneous samples are ungrammatical and can be categorized as deviant without any reference to TL forms. Overt errors can be recognized within a sentence or even within a phrase. Covertly erroneous forms are grammatically correct but need to be clarified depending on what the learner meant. For the clarification of covertly inaccurate forms, "an accompanying linguistic context or cotext" is required to label the structures as deviant or accurate (James, 1998, p. 68).

Error classification

The categorization of ungrammatical forms has been used by many researchers when conducting EA. Researchers who analyze the use of English prepositions by non-native speakers (NNS) mainly look at three error categories: omission, addition, and substitution. Using the above error classification, Arjan, Abdullah, and Roslim, (2013), Sawalmeh (2013), Özışık (2014), Gnanaseelan (2014), and Tunaz, Muyan, and Muratoglu (2016) conducted separate studies with EFL learners, arriving at different results in terms of the frequency of error types. No clear patterns have emerged even among the studies conducted with the learners of the same nationality, e.g. Turkish learners (Özışık, 2014; Tunaz et al. 2016). Özışık (2014) found that the participants of his study made addition errors most frequently, and the least frequent were omission errors, whereas Tunaz et al. (2016) had the opposite result.

Causes of errors

The errors caused by the differences between native language (NL) and target language (TL) are called interlingual transfer errors, whereas errors that occur without NL influence but rather within TL are called intralingual transfer errors (Ellis, 1994; Brown, 2007; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Saville-Troike, 2012). The terms were coined by Richards (1971, cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). The interlingual transfer is also called negative transfer or interference as NL negatively affects or interferes TL learning. Intralingual errors are the results of "incomplete learning of TL rules or overgeneralization of them" (Saville-Troike, 2012, p. 42).

The possibility of interlingual transfer (interference) is reduced if the learner starts the language acquisition at a very young age before acquiring the grammatical system of NL (Ellis, 2015). Ellis (1994) claims that adult learners are more prone to making transfer errors than child learners are because they intentionally or unintentionally apply some of their NL rules to TL, and if the two languages have more differences than similarities, then errors are unavoidable. Nonetheless, Jarvis (2009) claims that similarities between languages can also cause errors because of the activation of "deceptive cognates" in NL which are the same, similar to or dissimilar from TL words (p. 107). Dodigovic et al. (2017) find that fossilization can be another compelling reason for lexical transfer, often unexpectedly happening at different developmental stages in the form of the so-called fossilized errors (Dodigovic, 2013). Finally, exposure to grammar-translation teaching methodology often results in word-for-word

translation from L1, which has found to be predominantly the case in Armenian context where English prepositions are involved (Harutyunyan & Dodigovic, 2020).

Intralingual or developmental errors on the other hand often imply misunderstanding or misapplication of TL rules. Thus, they can be overgeneralized, oversimplified or inadequately applied (James, 1998). Studies show that both classes of errors occur in EFL writing.

Error evaluation

Error evaluation in Error Analysis (EA) primarily relies on assessing both grammaticality and acceptability, as discussed by James (1998) and Saville-Troike (2012). Grammaticality is defined as the production of well-formed utterances (James, 1998; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). The acceptability of errors may vary depending on factors such as mode of communication (oral versus written) and formality, influencing how an addressee perceives the utterance.

Burt and Kiparsky (1972, cited in Brown, 2007) distinguish between global and local errors. Global errors hinder comprehension to the extent that the intended message is unclear—for example, “Well, it’s a great hurry around.” Conversely, local errors are minor deviations from target language forms, such as “a scissors” (Brown, 2007, p. 276), which do not significantly affect overall understanding. It can be inferred that global errors are generally considered ungrammatical and unacceptable to all recipients, whereas local errors represent minor breaches in grammaticality but may still be regarded as acceptable.

Corpus linguistics in error analysis

Traditionally, learner errors would have been collected in classroom interactions. However, since the relatively recent advent of learner corpora, the focus has shifted from learners themselves to corpus as a document, although preserving some basic information about the original participants (e.g. Gilquin, 2015). A number of studies have since analysed learner corpora to identify types and frequencies of prepositional errors, as well as their common sources (Arjan et al., 2013; Jewad, 2014; Gnanaseelan, 2014; Shakir & Yaseen, 2015; Tunaz et al., 2016). One variable here that has tended to have a large span is the corpus size. While Granger (2021) acknowledged the usefulness of small learner corpora, while recognising that there is no perfect corpus, according to Burton (2013), small corpus studies can indicate whether larger studies are warranted at all. Small corpus analyses can nonetheless raise language awareness and contribute to improving language proficiency (Ragan, 2001). Finally, Griffiths (2017) openly encourages the construction of small local corpora, in particular for the purpose of Contrastive Interlanguage Analysis (CIA), which is basically a comparison of learner generated TL samples. Arising from the Griffiths (2017) study, it is recommended that, for optimal results, the local corpus size be between 40,000 and 65,000 words. However, the purpose and the circumstances will dictate the necessary or even possible size.

Methodology

Data collection

The research took place at the American University of Armenia in Yerevan, focusing on first-year English and Communication undergraduates. All courses are taught in English, but the participants, 18-year old first year university students, both male and female, with English proficiency of 79 at TOEFL iBT (6.5 at IELTS) or higher, at the beginning of the academic year, had Armenian educational backgrounds. The study aimed to identify difficulties Armenian AUA students encounter with English prepositions in academic writing. Researchers used an existing learner corpus of 39 essays, totaling 28,602 tokens. The essays were a part of

a writing assignment that aimed to gauge the level of English Composition first-year students' academic writing skills and vocabulary range. Four different topics were assigned: the educational system in the Republic of Armenia, social media in contemporary life and sexual harassment. Personal data was removed from all essays before analysis for ethical reasons.

Data analysis

To ensure both accuracy and clarity, this study used error analysis steps: collecting data, identifying and classifying errors and explaining their causes. The data was collected in the form of electronic MS Word files, as submitted via an electronic course management system. All the files were converted to text only files and merged into one large database, in order to meet the requirements of the Lextutor.ca vocabulary profiler and concordance.

Before identifying errors, the study first determined which prepositions were used with what frequencies in the learner corpus using Lextutor.ca's Text-based concordance. Prepositions were categorized by type based on Essberger's (2009) and Swick's (2011) taxonomy—simple (single word), compound (multiword), and participial (containing the *-ing* form)—and their frequencies were calculated as shown in Table 1. The total number of prepositions was tallied, and findings from the Armenian learner corpus were compared with an available subsample of the three native speaker corpora from the LOCNESS collection to identify potential differences in preposition usage. All three were deemed relevant: A-level because of the similarity in size as well as in age of contributors (16-18) and educational closeness to new university freshmen, as was the case in Armenia; both British and American university student writing provided a guideline as to what to reasonably aspire to.

Table 1

Taxonomy of Preposition Types

Simple	Compound	Participial
at	ahead of	concerning
by	because of	considering
in	due to	excluding
of	instead of	following
from	in spite of	regarding

Note. This is not the exhaustive list of prepositions.

After categorising prepositions, the researchers manually checked essays for errors based on a unified taxonomy (Table 2) from Corder (1981), Ellis (1994), and Brown (2007), as well as common construction types outlined by Thomson and Martinet (2001), Sinclair (2017), and Murphy (2019). To ensure reliability, the identified errors were verified using online tools like the Cambridge Learner's Dictionary and Corpus Concordance English v.8 (BAWE corpus) and confirmed by a native English speaker. The native speaker usually agreed with the researchers'

assessment. BAWE corpus data was also a valuable anchor, usually consulted before involving the native speaker. No further native speakers were asked to adjudicate, in order to avoid the situation encountered by Tetreault and Chodorow (2008), who found that there was only 75% interrater reliability among native speakers.

Table 2

Taxonomy for the Types of Prepositional Errors

a. Noun + Preposition category	Examples of Errors	Corrections
1. the wrong selection of a preposition after a noun	... nobody knew the reason of the delay	... nobody knew the reason for the delay
2. the omission of a preposition after a noun	... the damage ____ the other car	... the damage to the other car
b. Preposition + Noun category		
1. the wrong selection of a preposition before a noun	... they came by their car	... they came in their car
2. the addition of a preposition before a noun	... in most of cases	... in most ____ cases
3. the omission of a preposition before a noun	... his salary has increased ____ ten per cent	... his salary has increased by ten per cent
c. Verb + Preposition category		
1. the wrong selection of a preposition after a verb	... she thought about that idea first	... she thought of that idea first
2. the addition of a preposition after a verb	... answered to my mail	... answered ____ my mail
3. the omission of a preposition after a verb	... wrote a letter ____ his friend	... wrote a letter to his friend
d. Adjective + Preposition category		

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1. the wrong selection of a preposition after an adjective | ... Louise is married <i>with</i> an American | ... Louise is married to an American |
| 2. the addition of a preposition after an adjective | ... I'm sorry for I shouted at you yesterday. | ... I'm sorry ___ I shouted at you yesterday. |
| 3. the omission of a preposition after an adjective | ... I'm sorry ___ shouting at you yesterday. | ... I'm sorry for shouting at you yesterday. |

e. Preposition + Preposition category

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1. the wrong selection of a preposition after a preposition | ... I'm fed up about it. | I'm fed up with it. |
| 2. the addition of a preposition after a preposition | ... he was not keen on for going out. | ... was not keen on ___ going out. |
| 3. the omission of a preposition after a preposition | ... Are you looking forward your trip? | ... Are you looking forward to your trip? |

Note: Examples are taken from Murphy (2019).

In the follow-up phase, prepositional errors were counted by category (substitution, omission, addition) and construction type (e.g., Noun + Preposition, Verb + Preposition). Errors were classified as interlingual or intralingual, depending on whether they stemmed from first language interference or lack of rule knowledge. The frequency and percentage of each error type were calculated, with further analysis and discussion.

Results

In order to more adequately address the research questions, the results are grouped accordingly. As the first question is about the types of English prepositions most commonly found in Armenian student academic writing, the pertinent results are presented first. They are followed by the results regarding the most common error types and categories, with the causes of prepositional errors presented as the final subsection.

Prepositions in the Learner Corpus

Table 3 presents the summary descriptive statistics of the total tokens identified in the learner corpus and the number of prepositions found in the corpus.

Table 3

Total Tokens and Prepositions in the Learner Corpus

TNT	TNP	%
28602	3881	13.6 %

Note. TNT= total number of tokens, TNP = total number of prepositions, % = percentage

The analysis grouped prepositions into simple, compound, and participial types. As shown in Table 5, over two-thirds were simple prepositions, while compound and participial forms made up only 11.7% combined.

To assess whether the results matched native speaker usage of prepositions, British and American student essay corpora were analysed using the same methods as with the Armenian learner corpus. Table 4 shows the comparison results.

Table 4

Comparison of the Corpora

	Corpus of Armenian Learners' Essays	Corpus of Native British Pupils' A Level Essays	Corpus of Native British University Students' Essays	Corpus of Native American University Students' Essays
Total Number of Tokens	28,602	28,006	35,518	17,799
Total Number of Prepositions	3881	3767	5373	2830
	13.6 %	13.6 %	15.1 %	15.9 %
Simple Prepositions	3426	3290	4851	2542
	88.2 %	87.3 %	90.3 %	89.9 %
Compound Prepositions	420	443	482	277
	10.8 %	11.8 %	9 %	9.7 %
Participial Prepositions	35	34	40	11
	0.9 %	0.9 %	0.7 %	0.4 %

Comparison of native speaker corpora and Armenian learners' essays shows similar preposition usage, with participial prepositions being least frequent in American university essays. Both British A level pupils and university essays had a comparable percentage of prepositions—about 15% of total tokens.

Table 5 lists simple prepositions from the Armenian learner corpus that appeared over 300 times. The prepositions *of*, *to*, and *in* accounted for 57.4% of all occurrences, each appearing 600–850 times.

Table 5

Most Frequent Simple Prepositions

<i>Prep.</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Of	864	22.2 %
To	773	19.9 %
In	592	15.2 %
For	314	8 %

Note. Prep = preposition, f = frequency, % = percentage

Compound prepositions were used less frequently but with more variety (37 types) compared to simple prepositions (16 types). The only compound preposition that was used more than 100 times was the preposition ***about*** (Table 6), and the prepositions ***after***, ***over***, ***without***, ***because of***, ***above*** and ***into*** occurring on average 25 times.

Table 6

Most Frequent Compound Prepositions

<i>Prep.</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
About	107	2.7 %
After	27	0.7 %
Over	26	0.6 %
Without	24	0.6 %
Because of	23	0.6 %
Above	21	0.5 %
Into	21	0.5 %

Note. Prep = preposition, f = frequency, % = percentage

The least frequent type of prepositions found in the learner corpus were the participial prepositions with a total of 5 occurrences. Since the ranges were so low, the full list is presented in Table 7. The most frequent was the preposition *during* which still accounted for only 0.4% of total prepositions found in the corpus.

Table 7

Most Frequent Participial Prepositions

<i>Prep.</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
During	18	0.4 %
Considering	6	0.1 %
Including	5	0.1 %
Concerning	3	0.07 %
Regarding	3	0.07 %

Note. Prep = preposition, f = frequency, % = percentage

Types and categories of prepositional errors

Table 8 shows the results of the error analysis which revealed that in total 170 prepositions out of 3881 were misused which was around 4.5% of the total tokens in the corpus.

Table 8

Total Number of Prepositional Errors

TNP	TNPE	%
3881	170	4.4 %

Note. TNP = total number of prepositions, TNPE = total number of prepositional errors, % = percentage.

As can be seen from Figure 1 substitution errors prevail with a considerable number which comprises 70% of all errors pointing out a distinct area for improvement.

Figure 2 displays the main error categories. Prepositions were most commonly misused with verbs or before nouns, averaging 58 errors each. The least frequent was Preposition + Preposition, with only six instances in the learner corpus.

Figure 1
Types of Prepositional Errors

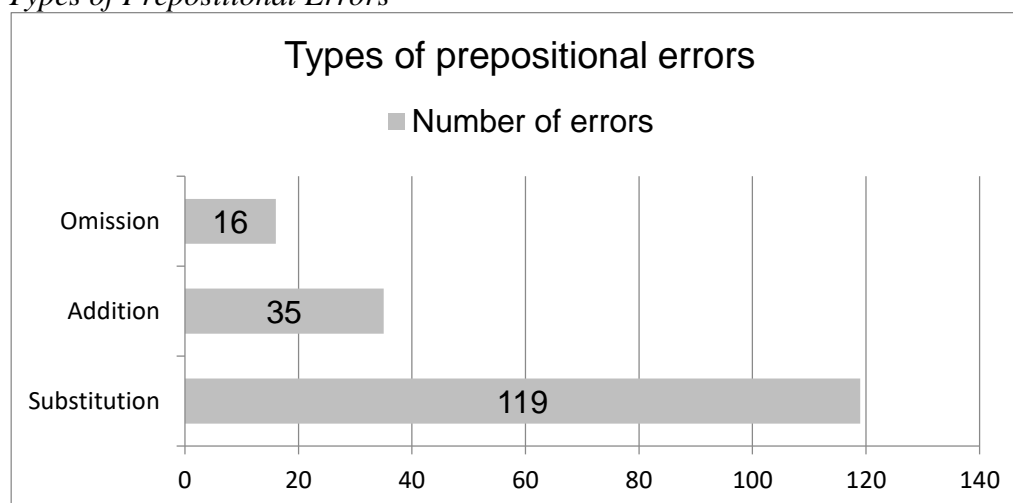
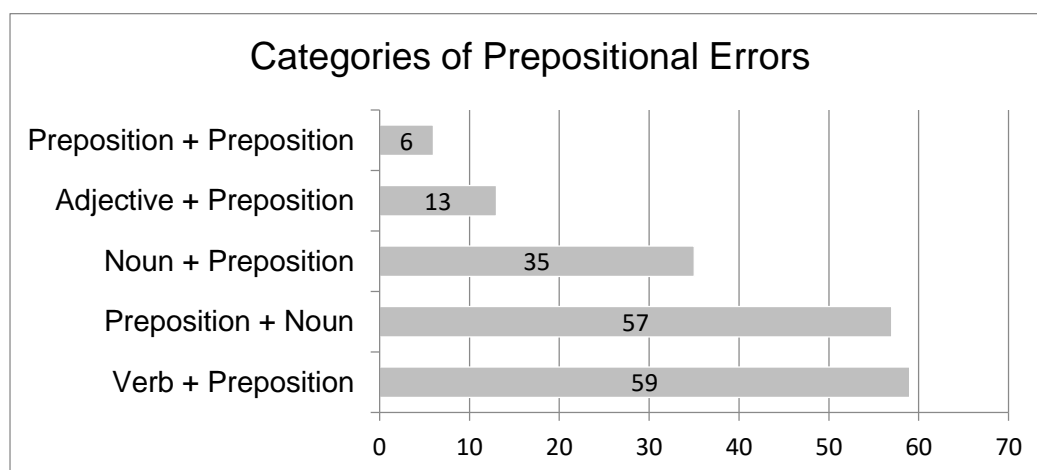


Figure 2
Categories of Prepositional Errors



In total there were 18 types of erroneously substituted prepositions but only the substitution errors that occurred more than ten times are presented in Table 10. The preposition *in* accounted for 32 out of 170 total errors indicating an obvious need for remediation. The prepositions *of*, *to*, *for*, *from* and *by* had between 10 to 20 erroneous occurrences, which can still have a significant impact on the perceived accuracy of writing.

Examples:

As we have already witnessed in a country like XXX the access <i>of</i> information showed that ...	As we have already witnessed in a country like XXX the access <i>to</i> information showed that ...
As there definitely are benefits <i>to</i> using Social Media ...	As there definitely are benefits <i>of</i> using Social Media ...

Table 9

Most Frequently Misused Prepositions

MP	NMP	%
in	32	26.8 %
of	19	16 %
to	17	14.2 %
for	12	10.1 %
from	12	10.1 %

Note. MP = misused prepositions, NMP = number of misused prepositions, % = percentage.

Table 10 shows that the prepositions *to* and *of* were added unnecessarily most frequently, with 13 and nine occurrences. Other prepositions had low frequencies (one to three) and could be reduced by identifying error sources.

Example:

Despite *to* common idea...

Despite ~~*to*~~ common idea...

Table 10

Most Frequently Added Prepositions

AP	NAP	%
to	13	38.2 %
of	9	26.5 %

Note. AP = added prepositions, NAP = number of added prepositions, % = percentage.

The omitted prepositions were the least common type of errors encountered in the data. Table 11 demonstrates the three prepositions that were repeated more than once. Out of 13 types of omitted errors only *from*, *in* and *down* occurred more than once.

Examples:

Therefore, for “keeping away ___” this writing issue ...

Therefore, for “keeping away *from*” this writing issue ...

In a hope to catch up ___ the latest updates of technologies ...

In a hope to catch up *with* the latest updates of technologies ...

Table 11

Most Frequently Omitted Prepositions

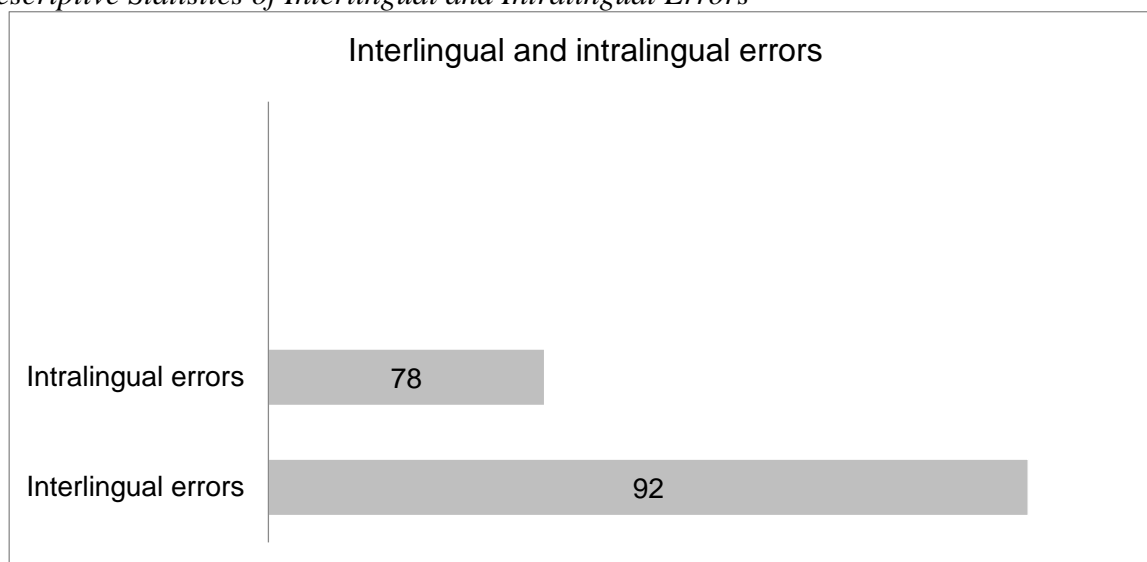
OP	NOP	%
from	3	17.6 %
in	2	11.8 %
down	2	11.8 %

Note. OP = omitted prepositions, NOP = number of omitted prepositions, % = percentage.

Sources of prepositional errors

Figure 3 shows that interlingual errors occurred 92 times, 14 times more than intralingual errors. Errors due to native language influence were classified as interlingual, while those from overgeneralization or misapplication of English rules were intralingual. An Armenian linguist confirmed this categorization. These findings suggest that learners are still developing their use of English prepositions, with native language influence being stronger at this stage.

Figure 3

Descriptive Statistics of Interlingual and Intralingual Errors**Discussion**

This section discusses the results with the view of answering the research questions.

What prepositions do Armenian undergraduate students most frequently use in their English language academic writing?

The most frequent simple prepositions identified were *of*, *to*, *in*, and *for*, representing 57.3% of all prepositions in the corpus. These findings indicate comparable patterns in English preposition usage between Armenian students and native speakers. As discussed in the literature review, nine out of the first thirty most frequent words in English are prepositions

and the same prepositions were among the ten most common prepositions identified in the learner corpus which were *of, to, in, for, with, on, by* and *from* (Saint-Dizier, 2006). The least common type of preposition was the participial preposition approximately one percent of the total prepositions which follows the pattern identified in the native British and American learners' essays which proves again the Armenian students' awareness of the abundance and high frequency of the English prepositions.

What are the most frequent prepositional errors in English made by Armenian undergraduate students?

Substitution errors accounted for 119 of the 170 total errors in the corpus. The most common error categories were Verb + Preposition (59 errors) and Preposition + Noun (57 errors). The prepositions *in* (misused), *to* (added), and *from* (omitted) were involved most often.

The researchers applied the overt and covert error identification frameworks as outlined by Corder (1981), Ellis (1994), James (1998), and Brown (2007) to analyse errors within the learner corpus. Overtly erroneous prepositional usage was defined as instances that could be recognised as incorrect independent of contextual information. An example of this is *interested with* ("You are ... interested with theme") instead of *interested in*. An example of a covert error is "The difficulty to find out and analyze mistakes..." (instead of "The difficulty to find and analyze mistakes.")

Classifying error types helps clarify their nature. Data analysis showed substitution errors—using an incorrect preposition in place of the correct one—were most common, echoing the results from Levonyan (2015). Both this study and Levonyan's found substitution errors occurred most frequently, followed by addition and omission errors. For instance, Levonyan reported 70 substitution, 31 addition, and 22 omission errors out of 123 cases. These similar patterns suggest that Armenian students share a tendency when using English prepositions, highlighting the need to focus more on their complex uses in teaching. Table 12 below contains examples of substitution, addition, and omission errors found in the corpus:

Table 12

Substitution Error
Incorrect: The cause of the inability of writing an eye-catching thesis statement.
Corrected: The cause of the inability to write an eye-catching thesis statement.
Addition error
Incorrect: This has helped me with over a dozen of assignments.
Corrected: This has helped me with over a dozen assignments.
Omission error
Incorrect: Internet censorship is not severe like __ other countries.
Corrected: Internet censorship is not severe like in other countries.

Studies on English preposition misuse in non-Armenian contexts often yield differing results. For instance, Tunaz et al. (2016) found omission errors most common, while Özişik (2014) observed more addition errors in a similar Turkish context. Sawalmeh (2013) reported substitution errors as predominant among Arabic speakers. However, directly comparing these findings may be misleading due to differences in participant backgrounds and native languages. As a result, generalising across studies is challenging because of varying study conditions and populations.

The analysis categorized prepositional errors into five groups, with Preposition + Noun and Verb + Preposition being most common. In Armenian, prepositions typically follow nouns or are replaced by postpositions (Dum-Tragut, 2009), and verbs do not use prepositions, leading to these errors. Examples from each category are included in Table 13:

Table 13

Most Frequent Error Categories

Preposition + Noun
Incorrect: Even the powerful countries in some points are afraid of mass media.
Corrected: Even the powerful countries at some point are afraid of mass media.
Verb + Preposition
Incorrect: One becomes wiser when looks back and puts an effort for fixing all the personal mistakes.
Corrected: One becomes wiser when looks back and puts effort into fixing all the personal mistakes.

This study identified thirteen errors within the Adjective + Preposition category, a relatively low number compared to the three categories with the highest frequency of errors. Several of these Adjective + Preposition errors might have been mitigated through increased explicit instruction. Özişik (2014) observes that students typically encountered minimal difficulties in this category when employing prepositions with adjectives such as *interested in* and *famous for*, largely attributed to structured textbook learning. The findings from the current Armenian learner corpus, however, present a contrasting outcome (Table 14):

Table 14

Adjective + Preposition Errors

Adjective + Preposition
Incorrect: I am bored of standing in a queue.
Corrected: I am bored with standing in a queue.

Because there is limited data from other Armenian settings, it is difficult to determine whether the use of standardized forms in this manner is common among different groups. It can be suggested that either the forms were not sufficiently introduced or practiced, or that exposure to non-standard forms influenced students' usage; for instance, the phrase "bored of" appears online as a non-standard alternative.

What are the causes of prepositional errors in English made by Armenian undergraduate students?

The majority of prepositional errors stemmed from interlingual transfer. Ninety-two resulted from direct translation from the learners' native language, while 78 were due to rule overgeneralization or incorrect assumptions. Most interlingual errors in this study involved using prepositions like *in*, *of*, *for*, and *from* instead of *on* and *to*, due to direct translation from the native language. Intralingual errors included a wider range of prepositions, with many being added unnecessarily. Levonyan's (2015) work also examined prepositional misuse through error analysis, but its results did not provide sufficient data for comparing the interlingual and intralingual prepositional errors. Example are found below in tables 15 and 16.

Table 15

Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors
Incorrect: ... to find some useful solutions for those errors.
Translation: ... գտնել արդյունավետ լուծումներ այդ սխալների համար (Genitive case + the preposition համար (for)):
Transliteration: {... gtnel ardyunavet lutsumner ayd skhalneri hamar}.
Corrected: ... to find some useful solutions to those errors.

Table 16

Intralingual Errors

Intralingual errors
Incorrect: The results in the most of cases supported the notion that self-disclosure differed by culture (overgeneralization).
Corrected: The results in most cases supported the notion that self-disclosure differed by culture
Incorrect: Internet censorship is not severe like __ other countries (overgeneralization).
Corrected: Internet censorship is not severe like in other countries.

Studies indicate that most prepositional errors involve *in*, *on*, *at*, *of*, and *for* (Tetreault & Chodorow, 2008; De Felice and Pulman, 2008; Arjan et al., 2013; Shakir & Yaseen, 2015). The current study also notes a high rate of misuse for *from*, likely due to interference from the Armenian Ablative case, which is similarly misapplied to *since*. These findings should inform English preposition instruction and material design for non-native speakers, potentially requiring explicit teaching and targeted practice. This is particularly important, given the findings of the study by Harutyunyan and Dodigovic (2020), according to which the frequently used Grammar-Translation method in the English language classroom of Armenia could be responsible for many interlingual errors, brought about through the encouragement of direct translation from Armenian to English.

Limitations and Delimitations

The learner corpus used in this study was assembled from essays written by students at home. This approach may present limitations, as writing completed under supervision in a classroom setting could offer a different perspective on student proficiency without the influence of software error correction tools. Nevertheless, analysis of the take-home essays identified errors that remained undetected even under these conditions and could be considered to be true errors of competence (Saville-Troike, 2012; James, 1998).

While significantly smaller than the corpora used for dictionary or grammar compilation, and at only 75% of the recommended size for a local corpus (Griffith, 2017), this learner corpus has brought forward some of the most stubborn learner errors, believed not to be mere slips of performance (Saville-Troike, 2012; James, 1998), which have escaped both the ample opportunities for self-correction and the correction software scrutiny. This might prove to be an actual strength of this approach, as certain trends that were identified here are observable in other comparable studies.

This study focuses on first-year undergraduate students at an English medium university in Armenia, which is equivalent to a small percentage of Armenian high school graduates testing as ready for English medium tertiary education. While the findings are primarily useful to faculty and students of the above institution, it is hoped that they would be useful to Armenian

students preparing to enter English-medium tertiary education anywhere in the world. In addition, English teachers in Armenia are also potential beneficiaries, as the insights gained here could help them focus on this contrastively challenging area of English lexico-grammar.

Conclusions and Implications for the Teaching Practice

In summary, this study highlights the persistent challenges that Armenian students face in mastering English prepositions within the context of first year tertiary English medium education, with a particular emphasis on the influence of their native language. The findings underscore the importance of targeted instruction and deliberate practice in the area of English prepositions, both to address the most frequent errors and to enhance the overall academic writing proficiency. Given the scarcity of studies exploring the use of English prepositions by Armenian learners, the results offer valuable insights for educators designing curricula and materials aimed at supporting the learners in Armenian contexts. Addressing these prepositional challenges can contribute significantly to improving the students' command of English and their academic success.

In addition to providing explicit feedback and addressing errors, educators can foster learner autonomy by helping students identify their own potential mistakes and equipping them with strategies for independent learning, such as utilising online dictionaries and concordances. According to Song and Sardegna (2014), enhanced extensive reading is an effective approach for mastering English prepositions, which in turn positively influences both comprehension and production proficiency.

However, the most stubborn obstacle to success remains the ongoing use of the now obsolete Grammar Translation method (Harutyunyan & Dodigovic, 2020). The most important implication of this study would therefore be to strengthen the teaching methodology aspect of teacher training programs in Armenia and provide ongoing professional development of the in-service teachers, including sufficient motivation and support to make participation both possible and desirable.

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