

Compound Prepositions Used by Iraqi EFL University Students

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Abstract

There is no logical reason why one compound preposition is right in a certain context, whereas another one is wrong. To use compound prepositions correctly is difficult because most of them have several functions. In addition, different prepositions have sometimes similar uses. Such prepositions cause difficulty to Iraqi EFL university students because syllabus designers and teachers do not concentrate on such sort of prepositions. This study aims at identifying and analyzing the errors Iraqi EFL university students encounter in using such prepositions and finding the reasons behind students' errors. A diagnostic test is designed and applied to a sample of 100 Iraqi EFL university students at their third year. In the light of the students' responses, it can be concluded that the majority of Iraqi EFL university students fail to recognize and produce such prepositions. Moreover, they do not realize the function of such prepositions because they do not discern their meanings and most books of grammar do not list their meanings or uses. As such, the researcher uses Hornby (2006) to clarify their meanings. The subjects' errors are attributed to the following factors: (i) interlingual transfer, (ii) intralingual transfer, (iii) context of learning, and (iv) communication strategies.

Keywords: compound preposition, prepositional meaning, Iraqi EFL university student, error analysis

1. Introduction

They are common in English sentences. They are the prepositions that are composed of more than one word. They have several functions depending on the context in which they occur. Also, there is no logical reason why one compound preposition is right in a certain context, whereas another is wrong.

To use compound prepositions correctly is one of the serious problems faced by Iraqi EFL university students. The proper use of compound prepositions is difficult because most of them have several functions. Different prepositions have similar uses. For this reason, the researcher shows the meaning(s) of these prepositions so as to enable EFL learners to employ them in their speaking and writing properly. So it is normal to commit mistakes.

This study aims at:

1. Identifying and analyzing the errors which Iraqi EFL university students are liable to make in using compound prepositions.
2. Giving a clearer rationale for the possible causes for such errors.

In view of the preceding aims, it is hypothesized that:

- 1) Most Iraqi EFL university students encounter difficulties in recognizing and producing compound prepositions.
- 2) Most of them do not distinguish the position of compound prepositions.
- 3) Most of them cannot identify the function of such prepositions.
- 4) Most of them generally flunk to acquire the proper use of compound prepositions.

There are some cross-cultural studies made on prepositions in general. One is between Persian and English by Mahmoodzadeh in 2012. Other studies try to give an account of the prepositions found in a particular language, like a study made by van de Vate in 2006 on Krio. Other papers try to tackle a specific issue in English prepositions, like a paper written by Meurant 2007. In addition, some articles focus on the translation of prepositions and the problems and solutions related to this process. An instance is a study presented by Shih 2012 and another article is given by Japkowicz & Wiebe 2009. In computational linguistics, a group of studies

are written on compound prepositions. Among which are Trawiński paper 2008 and Oliveira & Garrão in 2009.

As such, this study is of importance because it is an error analysis study that is dedicated to Iraqi EFL university students and the problems they face in dealing with such prepositions. Furthermore, it gives a diagnostic analysis of the students' errors as no similar study is conducted on such type of prepositions.

2. Research Design

The procedure followed in this research can be summed up as follows:

- 1- Giving an account of compound prepositions depending on the literature in this field.
- 2- Designing a test and applying it to a number of students at the third year so as to find out the difficulties they encounter with this sort of prepositions.
- 3- Analyzing the results of the test, on the bases of which conclusions have been drawn.

This study is limited to 100 Iraqi EFL university students in their third year at the Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon during the academic year 2011-2012. Third year students are chosen because they are at advanced stage and they have studied this topic previously.

3. Compound Prepositions

Compound prepositions are the prepositions that encompass more than one word, especially when a noun or a noun phrase is both followed and preceded by single prepositions as in *on account of* (Crystal, 2003).

The boundary between simple and compound prepositions is not entirely explicit. Depending on orthography, separation is the easiest way to discriminate between them, but there are some irregularities such as writing *into* as one word and *out of* as two words. This emphasizes the idea of arbitrariness of the distinction between one and more than one word. The best way to discriminate between simple and compound prepositions is that a simple preposition is still identical in form to its correspondence adverb, whereas a compound preposition forfeits its final element when transferred to the function of adverb (*apart from* = *apart*), (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, pp. 301-302).

Interestingly, some compound prepositions can be transferred to other parts of speech when dropping their final prepositions (e.g., *instead, out* [adverb]; *because, except, in case* [conjunction]; *in front, on top* [adverbials]) (Chalker, 1989, p. 216).

Another significant distinction to draw is between the terms: 'compound preposition' and 'prepositional phrase'. The former means the preposition that consists of more than one word and behaves just like a single preposition. The latter consists of the preposition + the prepositional complement, usually a noun phrase (e.g., *in the garden*) (Chalker 1989, p. 214).

Stageberg (1981, p. 169) states that prepositions are "words like *of, in* and *to* which are usually followed by a noun, noun phrase, personal pronoun, or noun-substitute called the object of the preposition. The unit of preposition-plus-object of preposition is called a prepositional phrase."

1- *George came with Ann.*

2- *Janet jumped on the fence.*

Grammarians classify English prepositions into different sorts. Palmer and Blandford (1976) subsume prepositions under simple prepositions which consist of single words (e.g., *across, before, from*) or group prepositions which consist of more than one word (e.g., *according to, out of, because of*). A number of two and three word phrases (e.g., *in spite of, according to, apart from*) behave like simple prepositions. (Roberts, 1956, p. 89) mentions that we spell these prepositions as separate words, but we use them as units, and it is simpler to consider them as single prepositions. Quirk *et al.*, (1985) mention that most of these are subsumed under the following categories:

- a) Adverb or preposition + preposition: *along with, as for, away from, out of, up to.*
- b) Verb / adjective / conjunction / + preposition: *owing to, due to, because of.*
- c) Preposition + noun + preposition: *by means of, in comparison with, in front of.*

In [c], which is by far the most numerous category, the noun in some compound prepositions is preceded by a definite or an indefinite article: *in the light of, as a result of*. In addition to compound prepositions, simple prepositions are composed of one word (ibid.).

Compound prepositions can be classified into two-word sequences and three-word ones. A and b categories can

be classified under two-words sequences, whereas **c** can be classified as three-words sequences (ibid., p. 669).

There are some cases of lexicalization which have been accompanied historically by some syntactic restructuring. For instance, *because of* comes from *by cause of* and *inside* derives from *in+ side+ of*, (Huddleston, 1985, pp. 342-344).

Here is a list of some two-word sequences prepositions followed by another list of three-word prepositions. Then, prepositions are all mentioned by Quirk *et al.*, (1985, pp. 669-671). To clarify them better, the researcher consults Hornby (2006) for their meaning(s) and add them against each compound preposition.

Table 1. Two-word prepositions (After Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 669 & Hornby 2006)

Up against: facing problems or opposition or in a difficult situation.	As per: in accordance with or as usual.
As for: (i) used to start talking about somebody or something, and (ii) regarding.	But for: if it were not for.
Except for: apart from or not including.	
Apart from: (i) except for, (ii) in addition to, and (iii) as well as.	Aside from: except for or apart from.
Away from: (i) distant from somebody or something in space and time, and (ii) absent.	As from: used to show the time or date from which something starts.
Ahead of: (i) further forward in space and time than somebody or something, (ii) in front of somebody or something, and (iii) earlier than somebody or something.	As of: (i) as from and (ii) as at a specified time.
Back of: behind something.	Because of: for the reason that.
Exclusive of: not including somebody or something.	Devoid of: completely lacking something.
Instead of: in place of somebody or something.	Inside of: (i) on or to the inner part of somebody or something, (ii) within somebody or something, and (iii) in less than the amount of time mentioned.
Off of: (i) off and (ii) from.	Irrespective of: (i) without considering something or being influenced by it and (ii) regardless of.
Outside of: (i) apart from, (ii) not in a particular place, (iii) away from, (iv) not part of something, and (v) on or to a place on the outside of something.	Out of: away from.
Upwards of: more than the amount or number mentioned.	Regardless of: (i) paying no attention to somebody or something, and (ii) treating somebody or something as not being important.
According to: (i) as stated or reported by somebody or something, (ii) following, (iii) agreeing with, and (iv) depending on something.	Void of: devoid or completely lacking something.
Close to: in a position very near to something.	As to: used when you are referring to something.
Due to: (i) caused by somebody or something and (ii) because of.	Contrary to: (i) different from something, and (ii) against something.
Next to: (i) Close to, (ii) in or into a position right beside somebody or something, (iii) following in order or importance after somebody or something, (iv) almost, and (v) in comparison with somebody or something.	Near(er) to: (i) at a short distance, (ii) away from somebody or something, (iii) a short period of time from something used before a number to mean approximately, (iv) similar to somebody or something in quality and size, and (v) close to a particular state.
Owing to: because of	On to: (i) get in touch with, and (ii) realize the significance or intention of.
Preparatory to: to prepare for.	Preliminary to: it is an action or event that is done in preparation for something or happening before a more important action or event.
Prior to: before something.	Previous to: (i) happening or existing before the

Subsequent to: after or following.	event or object that somebody is talking about, and (ii) immediately before the time somebody is talking about.
Up to: (i) until, (ii) not more than, (iii) less than or equal to, (iv) incumbent on, (v) capable of or fit for, and (vi) occupied or busy with.	Pursuant to: (i) according to, (ii) following a rule or law, and (iii) in accordance with.
	Thanks to: something has happened because of somebody or something.
Along with: (i) in addition to somebody or something, and (ii) in the same way as somebody or something.	Together with: (i) including, (ii) in addition to, and (iii) as well as.

Table 2. Three-word sequences prepositions (After Quirk *et al.*, 1985, pp. 670-671 & Hornby, 2006)

In+ noun+ of:	
In aid of: in order to help somebody or something = (in support of).	In back of: (i) on the back of, and (ii) as a result of an action or a success.
In behalf of: in order to help somebody.	In case of: (i) if something happens, and (ii) in the event of.
In charge of: having command.	In consequence of: as a result of something.
In (the) face of: (i) as a result, and (ii) in spite of problems and difficulties= (despite).	In favour of: (i) in support of, and (ii) in advantage of.
In front of: (i) ahead of, (ii) in the presence of, and (iii) confronting.	In (the) light of: after considering something.
In lieu of: instead of.	In need of: requiring.
In place of: instead of.	In (the) process of: (i) a series of things that are done in order to achieve a particular result, and (ii) with the time goes on.
In quest of: seeking.	In respect of: (i) concerning, (ii) in payment for something, (iii) as concerns, and (iv) with reference to.
In search of: looking for somebody or something.	In spite of: despite
In view of: considering something = (having regard to)	
In+ noun+ with:	
In accordance with: according to.	In common with: in the same way as somebody or something.
In comparison with: compared to.	In compliance with: according to (a wish, command, etc.)
In conformity with: (i) following the rules of something, and (ii) confirming.	In contact with: the act of communicating with somebody regularly.
In line with: in (or not in) accordance with.	
By+ noun+ of:	
By dint of: by means of.	By means of: by the agency or instrumentality of a thing or action.
By virtue of: (i) by means of, and (ii) because of.	By way of: (i) via, (ii) through, (iii) by means of, (iv) as a substitute for, and (v) as a form of

On+ noun+ of:

On account of: because of somebody or something.

On (the) ground(s) of: a good or true reason for doing or saying something.

On pain of: with the threat of having something done to you as a punishment if you do not obey.

On the strength of: because somebody has been influenced or persuaded by something= (relying on) or (on the basis of).

On behalf of: (i) instead of them, (ii) in order to help somebody, (iii) as representative of somebody or something (iv) because of somebody, and (v) for somebody.

On the matter of: (i) concerning and (ii) as regard to.

On the part of: made or done by somebody.

On top of: (i) on; over or covering something or somebody, (ii) in addition to something, (iii) very close to something or somebody, and (iv) in control of a situation.

Other types:

As far as: (i) to the distance of (a place), and (ii) to the extent that.

At the expense of: with loss or damage to somebody or something.

For (the) sake of: (i) out of consideration for, (ii) in the interest of, (iii) because of or owing to, and (iv) in order to please, honour get or keep.

In exchange for: an act of giving something to somebody and receiving something in return.

In addition to: as something added.

With / in regard to: concerning something.

With / in respect to: concerning somebody or something.

At variance with: disagreeing with or opposing somebody or something.

At the hands of: because of somebody or something.

For / from want of: because of a lack of something or because something is not available.

In return for: (i) as a way of thanking somebody, (ii) paying them for something they have done, and (iii) as response or a reaction to something.

In relation to: (concerning or compared with)

With / in reference to: used to say what you're talking or writing about.

With the exception of: except.

3.1 Prepositional Meanings

A preposition is used to express a relation between two entities, one is represented by the prepositional complement and the other is represented by another part of the sentence. Relational meaning of space and time can be described systematically. Other relationships such as instrument, cause, and concession may also be recognized, although it is difficult to describe prepositional meanings systematically in terms of such labels (Quirk *et al.*, 1985).

3.1.1 Prepositions Denoting Spatial Relation

Prepositions that denote spatial relation can be classified into the following:

3.1.1.1 Dimension

Here, the choice of the preposition depends on the dimension of the object. For instance, a floor is a flat surface and may be deemed as two-dimensional. On the other hand, a room may be considered as three-dimensional. However, it is not the real dimensions of the object, but how the speaker sees or envisages it at the time of speaking, not on how the object can be measured mathematically according to the three dimension types. For example, a wall may be seen as a surface (Leech & Svartvik, 1975, p. 82) (Shepherd *et al.*, 1991).

3- Go out of the office. (Close, 1975, p. 167)

4- She jumped on to the horse. (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 675)

5- Tom is running away from the hill. (Shepherd *et al.*, 1991, pp. 269)

The compound preposition *as far as* is used to stress the length of the journey. It refers only to space, but it does not refer to time (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 677).

6- They drove as far as Edinburgh. (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 677).

7- Go as far as x. (Close, 1975, p. 167)

3.1.1.2 Negative Position

The negative prepositions *away from* and *out of* may be defined simply by the addition of the word *not* to their corresponding positive preposition: *away from* ['not at'] *out of* ['not in'].

8- Ann is away from home. (Ann is not at home)

9- Tom is out of the water. (Tom is not in the water) (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 678)

3.1.1.3 Relative Position

Apart from simple preposition, prepositions may express relative position between two or more objects. *On top of* represents relative position vertically (i.e., it denotes that something is above the higher surface of an object), whereas *in front of* expresses it horizontally (Shepherd *et al.*, 1991, p. 273).

10- We placed the skis on top of the car. (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 678)

11- There's a bus stop in front of the house. (Hornby, 2006, p. 625)

3.1.1.4 Space

The compound prepositions *close to*, *near(er) to*, *next to* are locative prepositions. The simple preposition *near*, viz. *close to* can be represented by the compound preposition *near to*.

12- She was sitting $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{near (to)} \\ \text{close (to)} \end{array} \right\}$ me. (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 680)

Near (to) and *close to* are the only prepositions which can be inflected for comparison unlike absolute form. So we can say *nearer to*, *nearest to*, *closer to*, and *closest to* (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 680).

13- She was sitting $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{nearer (to) / nearest (to) / next to me.} \\ \text{closer to / closest to me. (Ibid.)} \end{array} \right.$

14- Go and sit nearer to the fire. (Hornby, 2006, p. 1017)

3.1.1.5 Resultative Meaning

Resultative meaning is not always distinguished from other static meaning. However, its presence is often characterized by certain adverbs (*already*, *just*, *at last*, *(not) yet*, etc.) (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 684).

15- At last we are out of the forest. (Ibid.)

16- At last Mr Green is out of town this week. (Hornby, 2006, p. 1074)

3.1.1.6 Metaphorical or Abstract Use

Many prepositions of place have abstract meanings which are clearly related to their locative uses through metaphorical connection. Such prepositions are used to keep the grouping in terms of similarity or contrast of meaning that they have when used in a literal reference to place (Quirk *et al.*, 1985).

Examples in relation to the literal meanings are the following:

Position \longrightarrow state, condition:

17- To be out of danger, to be out of office, to keep out of trouble, to be out of a job. (Ibid., p. 686)

Enclosure \longrightarrow abstract inclusion:

18- Out of the race. (Ibid.)

Destination \longrightarrow abstract condition or circumstances:

19- Can you get me out of this mess? (Ibid.)

3.1.2 Prepositions Denoting Time

The compound preposition *up to* is used to indicate the starting and the ending of a point in a period. *Up to* specifies that the longer period does not include the period named in the prepositional complement (Leech & Svartvik, 1975, pp. 79-80).

20- *We camped there up to September.* (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 690)

21- We worked up to Christmas (but not over Christmas).

Informally *till* can be used with *up* instead of *until* (Hewings, 2005, p. 180).

22- *I've just bought a computer. I've always used a typewriter $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{up } \{ \text{to} \\ \text{till} \} \right\}$ now.* (Ibid.)

23- *The roadworks are likely to go on $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{up } \{ \text{to} \\ \text{till} \} \right\}$ the end of May.* (Ibid.)

3.1.3 Cause, Reason, Motive

Such prepositions may express the material cause or the psychological cause (motive) for a happen. Phrases of cause, reason and motive answer the question why...?

24- *We had to drive slowly because of the heavy rain.*

25- *On account of his wide experience, he was made chairman.*

26- *Some support charities out of duty, some out of a sense of guilt.* (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, pp. 695-696)

The compound prepositions *on account of* and *because of* can be used interchangeably and it is restricted to the expression of cause or reason, while *out of* is mainly restricted to the expression of motive, i.e., psychological cause: *out of* gratitude / kindness / etc. (ibid.).

The compound prepositions *due to* and *owing to* are used to show a reason for something (Hewings, 2005, p. 160).

27- *She was unable to run owing to / due to a leg injury.* (=because of a leg.)

28- We have less money to spend owing to / due to budget cuts. (=because of budget cuts.)

"In current English we usually avoid *owing to* directly after a form of be" (ibid.).

29- *The company's success is due to the new director.* (not... is owing to...)

However, *owing to* is preceded by the verb be + an adverb such as *entirely, largely, mainly, partly* (ibid.).

30- *The low election turnout was partly due to / owing to the bad weather.* (Ibid.).

We can often say either *it was due to ... that* or *it was owing ... that*.

31- *It was owing to his encouragement that she applied for the job* (or it was *due to... that*) (Hewings, 2005, p. 160).

3.1.4 Concession

The compound preposition *in spite of* is a general-purpose preposition of concession.

32- *I admire him, in spite of his faults.* (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 705)

33- *In spite of his age, he still leads an active life.* (Hornby, 2006, p. 1476)

3.1.5 Respect

Some compound prepositions that refer to respect are employed in the context of business letters.

34- *With reference to [less usual: *In reference to*] your letter / request / enquiring of April 29th, I confirm my Directors' agreement to advance a further sum of £ 2000.* (formal)

35- *With regard to the date of delivery ... [less usual *In regard to*; typically introducing a secondary or tertiary topic in such a letter]* (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 705).

The prepositions have the same area of meaning: *with respect to, in respect of, on the matter of, and as to* (ibid.).

The compound preposition *as to* means on the subject of (Close, 1975, p. 177). It functions like *with regard to, as regards, etc* (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 706).

36- *As to the question you raise in your last letter, I think that ...* (ibid.)

37- *No agreement was reached* { *as to* } { *rent*
 =concerning } { *how much we should pay.* (Close, 1975, p. 177)

“*As to* is also used in the sense of according to, e.g.: correct *as to* size and colour” (Quirk *et al.*, 1987, p. 706).

On the other hand, *as for* means speaking of or *with reference to* (Close, 1975, p. 177). This preposition introduces a topic transition, so it cannot be used at the beginning of a discourse. It has the meaning of ‘returning to the question of’, and is less formal than the other compound prepositions denoting respect (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, pp. 706-707).

38- *I don't blame George. As for John, he has behaved so badly.* (Close, 1975, p. 177)

39- *We had a delightful weekend in the country. As for the traffic, we had no difficulty.* (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 707)

Sometimes, the preposition *as for* occurs initially to indicate a scornful attitude.

40- *As for his book, I supposed you've read the reviews!* (Ibid.)

41- *As for Jo, she's doing fine.* (Hornby, 2006, p. 74)

3.1.6 Exception

The compound prepositions that show exception are: *except for*, *with the exception of*, *apart from*, *aside from* <esp AmE>. When used in adverbials, prepositions denoting exception function primarily as disjuncts.

42- *With the exception of James, none of us had any money.*

43- *The worst period of my life,* { *apart from the war* }
 { *aside from the war <esp AmE>* } *was when I was out of*

work. (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 707)

44- *Except for George, you can all go.* (Close, 1975, p. 178)

3.1.7 Addition

Addition can be expressed by the following compound prepositions: *in addition to* and *as well as*.

45- *There were three people present in addition to the committee.* (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 708)

46- *You can go as well as George.* (Close, 1975, p. 177)

3.1.8 Negative Condition

The preposition *but for* is not used for the purpose of exception but it is rather used for the purpose of negative condition.

47- *But for Gordon, we would have lost the match.* [‘If it hadn't been for Gordon...’, ‘If Gordon hadn't played as he did...’, etc] (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, p. 709)

It is thought that *except for* works like *but for* to denote a negative condition. However, *except for* normally denotes exception. The following two sentences are different in their meanings:

48- *Except for John they* { *would all have died.* [‘If it hadn't been for John...’]
 { *all died.* [‘With the exception of John...’] (Ibid.)

49- *He would have played but for a knee injury.* (Hornby, 2006, p. 204)

3.1.9 Material, Ingredient

The compound preposition *out of* signifies the material or constituency of the whole thing.

50- *He made the frame out of wood.* [‘Wood was the only material.’] (Quirk *et al.*, 1985, pp. 710-711)

3.2 Modification of Prepositional Phrase

Prepositional meanings (especially of time and place) are subject to modification as regards degree and measure. A preposition may be preceded by an intensifier like many adjectives and adverbs.

51- *This cake mix comes straight <out of> the packet.*

Most the items of the test are taken from *An Introductory English Grammar* by Norman C. Stageberg (1981), *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* by Randolph Quirk; Sidney Greenbaum; Geoffrey Leech & Jan Svartvik (1985), and *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* by A S Hornby (2006).

5. Data Analysis

This part of the study is concerned with the analysis of the outcomes of the test. It elucidates the errors committed by Iraqi EFL university students and the reasons behind these errors. Furthermore, it presents the students' performance at each question in the test in particular and at the entire test in general.

The following table shows the subjects' performance in Q.I.

Table 3. Participants' abilities in putting compound prepositions in grammatical sentences

<i>No. of Item</i>	<i>No. of Correct Responses</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No. of Incorrect Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
1	70	70%	30	30%
2	60	60%	40	40%
3	45	45%	55	55%
4	35	35%	65	65%
5	18	18%	82	82%
6	10	10%	90	90%
7	43	43%	57	57%
8	16	16%	84	84%
9	7	7%	93	93%
10	27	27%	73	73%
Total	331	33.1%	669	66.9%

Table (3) shows that the total number of their correct responses (33.1%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (66.9%). Consequently, Iraqi EFL learners face real difficulties in producing this sort of prepositions.

Table 4. Participants' abilities in identifying the compound prepositions in a given group of sentences

<i>No. of Item</i>	<i>No. of Correct Responses</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No. of Incorrect Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
1	49	49%	51	51%
2	47	47%	53	53%
3	24	24%	76	76%
4	43	43%	57	57%
5	28	28%	72	72%
6	65	65%	35	35%
7	31	31%	69	69%
8	60	60%	40	40%
9	37	37%	63	63%
10	20	20%	80	80%
Total	404	40.4%	596	59.6%

Table (4) exhibits that the total number of their correct responses (40.4%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (59.6%). This verifies the second hypothesis that reads: *Most of them do not recognize the position of compound*

prepositions.

Table 5. Participants' abilities in filling the spaces with suitable compound prepositions

<i>No. of Item</i>	<i>No. of Correct Reponses</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No. of Incorrect Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
1	6	6%	94	94%
2	18	18%	82	82%
3	29	29%	71	71%
4	10	10%	90	90%
5	25	25%	75	75%
6	35	35%	65	65%
7	20	20%	80	80%
8	16	16%	84	84%
9	41	41%	59	59%
10	5	5%	95	95%
Total	205	20.5%	795	79.5%

From the table above the total number of the incorrect responses (79.5%) is higher than that of the correct ones (20.5%).

Table 6. Participants' abilities in identify the function of a given compound prepositions from a list

<i>No. of Item</i>	<i>No. of Correct Reponses</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No. of Incorrect Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
1	67	67%	33	33%
2	16	16%	84	84%
3	40	40%	60	60%
4	85	85%	15	15%
5	39	39%	61	61%
6	8	8%	92	92%
7	11	11%	89	89%
8	18	18%	82	82%
9	3	3%	97	97%
10	65	65%	35	35%
Total	352	35.2%	648	64.8%

It is clear, from the results above, that the total number of the incorrect responses (64.8 %) is higher than that of the correct ones (35.2%). This assures the third hypothesis which reads: *Most of them do not know how to recognize the function of such prepositions.* In a word, they do not discern the function of compound prepositions (i.e., place, time, cause, reason, concession, respect, material, exception, and addition).

Table 7. Participants' performance at the production level

<i>No. of Question</i>	<i>No. of Correct Responses</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No. of Incorrect Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
1	331	33.1%	669	66.9%
3	205	20.5%	795	79.5%
Total	536	26.8%	1464	73.2%

Table (7) illustrates that the total number of the wrong answers (73.2%) is more than that of the right answers (26.8%). This shows that they encounter real difficulties at the production level.

Table 8. Participants' performance at the recognition level

<i>No. of Question</i>	<i>No. of Correct Responses</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No. of Incorrect Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
2	404	40.4%	596	59.6%
4	352	35.2%	648	64.8%
Total	756	37.8%	1244	62.2%

Table (8) elucidates that the total number of the wrong answers (62.2%) is more than that of the right answers (37.8%). This shows that they also encounter real difficulties in recognizing this sort of prepositions, but they face more difficulties in producing them. This validates the first hypothesis which says: *Most Iraqi EFL university students encounter difficulties in recognizing and producing compound prepositions.*

The following table shows subjects' achievement in the whole test.

Table 9. Subjects' achievement of the entire test

<i>No. of Question</i>	<i>No. of Correct Responses</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No. of Incorrect Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
1	331	33.1%	669	66.9%
2	404	40.4%	596	59.6%
3	205	20.5%	795	79.5%
4	352	35.2%	648	64.8%
Total	1292	32.3%	2708	67.7%

The results indicate that the total number of the incorrect responses (67.7%) is lower than that of the correct ones (32.3%). This indicates that Iraqi EFL university students face real difficulties in recognizing and producing compound prepositions. This proves the fourth hypothesis which states: *Most of them generally flunk to acquire the proper use of compound prepositions.*

6. Sources of Errors

Errors sound as inevitable part of language learning (Thornbury, 2000). Traditionally, errors were deemed as the negative part of language learning and they had to be eschewed or eradicated. Recently, errors are regarded as natural processes of language learning, (Yule, 2006).

According to Brown (1987), learners' errors are attributed to interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, context of learning, and communication strategies. The tool for identifying and understanding the sources of errors rests on the nature of errors that involves the existence of reasons for errors that occur (Erdoğan 2005).

6.1 Interlingual Transfer

This kind of error occurs due to the effect of Iraqi EFL university students' mother tongue language on the foreign one (Brown, 2001).

Some of the errors in items (6) and (10) of Q.I can reflect the influence of the mother tongue.

Item (6): *I speak with respect to my teacher.*

Item (10): *This is not for reading but for writing.*

Obviously, some participants translate the compound prepositions from English into Arabic and they give the meaning of each word in the compound preposition separately in lieu of treating it as a unit. They do such a thing because they do not know the meaning of such prepositions as a unit. Some subjects translate **with respect to** as a feeling of admiration for somebody or something (أتكلم باحترام مع أستاذي) in place of concerning somebody or something. On the other hand, some subjects think that **but for** is used here for exception (هذا ليس للقراءة ولكن) (لولا), whereas it means if it were not for (لولا).

6.2 Intralingual Transfer

This type of errors happens owing to improper or partial learning of the foreign language. Such errors may be the result of the influence of one language item upon another (Penny, 2001).

Intralingual errors encompass the following:

Overgeneralization error: It involves the incorrect application of the previously learned second language material to a present second language context (Brown, 1987).

Ignorance of rule restriction: it means “applying rules to contexts to which they do not apply” (Richards & Sampson, 1974, p. 70).

Incomplete application of the rules: These result from “failure to use certain target language structures because they are thought to be too difficult” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 185).

False concepts hypothesized: these may derive from wrong comprehension of a distinction in the target language (Brown, 1987) and (Chanier *et al.*, 1992).

Overgeneralization errors emerge in items (5) and (9) of Q.II.

Item (5): *As to tax, that will be deducted from your salary.*

Item (9): *she was away from work for a week.*

The items above elucidate that Iraqi EFL university students overgeneralize the rule because they envisage that each preposition following or preceding the compound preposition is part of it. Most of them do not discern that compound prepositions can be divided into two or three-word sequences prepositions.

Ignorance of rule restrictions is another reason behind subjects' errors in items (2) and (5) of Q.I.

Item (2): *I bought the car at the expense of 30000\$.*

Item (5): *I'll stand up against him.*

In the answers above, the students use idioms and phrasal verbs in place of the compound prepositions.

Similarly, in Q.II, some of the errors may be also ascribed to ignorance of rule restrictions.

Item (1): *A statue is made out of the bronze.*

Item (3): *Britain, in common with many other industrialized countries, has experienced major changes of the last 100 years.*

Here, the students have underlined one preposition assuming it to be the compound preposition.

As for incomplete application of rules, some of the errors in item (9) of Q.IV and item (9) of Q.I may be attributed to.

Item (9): *You can go as well as George. (*similarity or comparison)*

Item (9): *On account of Susan, she should stay here. (*on account of means concerning)*

False concept hypothesized may be also the reason behind some of the subjects' incorrect responses to certain items in Q.IV as in the following examples:

Item (6): *The company's position **with regard to** overtime is made clear in their contracts. (*time)*

Item (3): *I've always used the net **up till** now. (*manner)*

Here, the subjects have concluded the meaning of compound prepositions from the meaning of the sentences.

6.3 Context of Learning

This sort of errors arises from faulty methods of teaching or syllabus designers who concentrate on some aspects

of the language and neglect others according to their belief or experiences (Brown, 1987).

It is worth mentioning that compound prepositions receive little focus in grammar textbooks and other books of grammar. Even the writers of these books do not devote enough exercises or examples about such prepositions. Most of them give list of them without giving enough explanations about their meanings or uses. As such, the teachers do not focus on these prepositions and do not use them extensively.

The errors in item (8) of Q.II, item (1) of Q.III, and item (2) of Q.IV may be attributed to the context of learning.

Item (8): *We worked up to Christmas.*

Item (1): *There was nothing they could do, in place of hoping things would get better.*

Item (2): *In spite of her protestation, Harriet was persuaded to join the guild. (*time)*

6.4 Communication Strategies

In this section, some of the communication strategies which are used by the participants of this study are:

Avoidance: Learners sometimes shun the items which they perceive to be difficult for them (Lightbown & Spada, 2003).

In item (7) of Q.IV, some students have avoided this item.

Creating New Words or Coinage: The learner may create or invent new words or phrases so as to express the desired idea (Faucette, 2001).

Some of the errors in item (4) and (10) of Q.IV may be ascribed to coinage.

Item (4): *He made the cupboard out of wood. (*purpose or *manner)*

Item (10): *Our fax number is changing **as from** May 12. (*contrast)*

Guessing: When the learners are in doubt about the correct answer, they begin to guess (Brown, 2001). Most of the incorrect response of Q.III might be attributed to guessing.

7. Conclusions

The majority of Iraqi EFL university students face more difficulty in producing and recognizing compound prepositions as the total number of their correct responses (26.8%) (37.8%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (73.2%) (62.2%). This verifies the first hypothesis.

In addition, most of them do not recognize the position of compound prepositions because they envisage that each preposition following or preceding the compound preposition is related to it. Consequently, the total number of their incorrect responses (59.6%) is higher than that of the correct ones (40.4%). This validates the second hypothesis.

Most of Iraqi EFL university students encounter difficulties in recognizing the function of compound prepositions as the total number of the correct responses (35.2%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (64.8%). This assures the third hypothesis.

Furthermore, most of them fail to acquire compound prepositions correctly. For this reason, the total number of the correct responses (32.3%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (67.7%). This indicates that Iraqi EFL university students face real difficulties in recognizing and producing compound prepositions. This proves the fourth hypothesis.

The majority of textbook writers and syllabus designers do not give the meanings of compound prepositions. For this reason, many EFL university students are easily liable to commit mistakes when they employ this sort of prepositions because they do not know their meanings as well as their functions.

Actually, there are three sorts of errors committed by the sample of the study. These errors can be summarized as follows: (a) wrong recognition of compound prepositions, (b) incorrect production of such prepositions, (c) giving no answer.

Hence, the subjects' errors are attributed to the following factors: (i) interlingual transfer, whereby the subjects use Arabic literal meaning separately for each word in the compound prepositions rather than giving the meaning for them as a whole, (ii) intralingual transfer, whereby the subjects use their prior knowledge of the target language, (iii) context of Learning, as little attention is paid to such prepositions by textbook writers and instructors, and (iv) communication strategies which are selected by the subjects to fill the gap of their knowledge.

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Appendices

Appendix I

The Test

Q.I/ Put the following compound prepositions in grammatical sentences.

Example: They are here **because of** the problem.

1) in contact with 2) at the expense of 3) previous to 4) along with 5) up against 6) with respect to 7) contrary to 8) except for 9) on account of 10) but for

Q.II/ Underline the compound prepositions.

Example: They collected the money **in behalf of** the homeless.

1- A statue is made out of bronze.

2- He was unable to walk due to a leg injury..

3- Britain, in common with many other industrialized countries, has experienced major changes over the last 100 years.

4- All his novels are set in Italy with the exception of his last.

5- As to tax, that will be deducted from your salary.

6- As for food for the party, that's all being taken care of.

7- The game was cancelled owing to torrential rain.

8- We worked up to Christmas.

9- She was away from work for a week.

10- I got the job on the strength of your recommendation.

Q.III/ Write the appropriate compound preposition that best fills in the blank.

Example: There have been further developments **subsequent to** our meeting.

1- There was nothing they could do, _____ hoping thing would get better.

2- The sky was _____ the clouds.

3- You can use milk _____ cream in this recipe.

4- _____ the weather, the event will now be held indoors.

5- He succeeded _____ hard work.

6- He was sitting _____ them.

7- These conclusions are totally _____ the evidence.

8- I have some comments to make _____ this matter.

9- Would you like my old TV _____ this camera?

10- I sent them my order, _____ a cheque for £ 40.

Q.IV/ Identify the function of the following compound prepositions from the list below:

(duration, dimension, time, concession, reason or cause, exception, addition, locative, respect, material,

negative condition)

Example: She was sitting nearer to Oliver. **Locative preposition** or **Preposition of place**

- 1- She jumped on to the fence.
- 2- In spite of her protestation, Harriet was persuaded to join the guild.
- 3- I've always used the net up till now.
- 4- He made the cupboard out of wood.
- 5- Janet was standing close to me.
- 6- The company's position with regard to overtime is made clear in their contracts.
- 7- We had no trouble on the journey apart from a flat tyre.
- 8- It was all a great success thanks to a lot of hard work.
- 9- You can go as well as George.
- 10- Our fax number is changing as from May 12.

Appendix II

Suggested Answers to the Test

Answers of Q.I:

- 1- The organization put me **in contact with** other people in a similar position.
- 2- He built up the business **at the expense of** his health.
- 3- **Previous to** this, she'd always been well.
- 4- She lost her job when the factory closed, **along with** hundreds of others.
- 5- Teachers are **up against** some major problems these days.
- 6- The two groups were similar **with respect to** income and status.
- 7- **Contrary to** our expectations, the movie was a delightful spoof.
- 8- I had nothing on **except for** my socks.
- 9- The game was called off **on account of** rain.
- 10- He would have played **but for** a knee injury

Answers of Q.II:

- 1) out of 2) due to 3) in common with 4) with the exception of 5) as to 6) as for 7) owing to 8) up to 9) away from 10) on the strength of

Answers of Q.III:

- 1- outside of 2- void of 3- in place of 4- in view of 5- by dint of 6- next to 7- at variance with 8- in relation to 9- in exchange for 10- together with.

Answers of Q.IV:

- 1-Dimension 2- concession 3- duration 4- material 5- locative 6- respect 7- exception 8- reason or cause 9- addition 10- time