

Verbs with Dependent Prepositions in the Teaching Learning Process of Grammar in the English Education Major

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Abstract

This investigation has been inspired by the current state of the treatment of verbs with dependent prepositions (hereon VDP) in the teaching-learning process of grammar as an essential skill developed in English lessons. Students of English have not properly acquired the use of these grammatical structures and this affects the majority of them in becoming better professionals. Therefore, it is vital to undertake a research meant to reinforce its proper use in oral and written communication departing from receptive skills. Thus, the main objective of this research is to favor the treatment of verbs with dependent prepositions in the teaching-learning process of grammar through a set of activities. In order to facilitate this research, the authors have used theoretical methods like historic-logic, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, and from the abstract to the concrete; and empirical ones such as survey, the functional, systemic and structural approach, the observation and bibliographic research. These methods allowed to fathom the most relevant insufficiencies associated to the field of study of this investigation.

Keywords

Verbs, Dependent Prepositions, Teaching-Learning Process, Activities, Grammar, English Education Major

1. Introduction

English language in Cuba has acquired a very important role nowadays as a result of the increase of tourists from English speaking countries and the great amount of scientific information written in this foreign language. This situation sets new challenges in the teaching—learning process of this language to improve the mastery of professionals and especially of teachers of English. Therefore, every research regarding this topic must be considered of great value, which is why the present article deepens on a very important subject: verbs with dependent prepositions.

The interest in this area of the linguistic competence arises from systematic observations of students' frequent problems in the appropriation of the grammatical contents received during the first years of their Major, English as a Foreign Language, and the lack of study materials they count on for deepening on the subject English Linguistic Studies III (Grammar).

Sometimes, it seems to be quite simple, but it is not. This content is generally confused, because of the big quantity of

verbs that belong to this group and this is an indispensable and basic knowledge for the students that study English as a foreign language.

For those reasons, it was necessary for the authors to implement theoretical methods such as historic-logic, analysis and synthesis and empirical methods such as the survey and observation as a tool to detect the problem and the following potentialities and insufficiencies:

Potentialities:

- the teachers' excellent communicative and methodological competence and their high level of self-preparation.
- the students are fully motivated for learning English as a foreign language.
- they are aware of the necessity of mastering the verbs with dependent prepositions for being a competent teacher.

Insufficiencies:

- the students do not make a correct usage of dependent prepositions in their oral and written communication.
- the Subject English Linguistic Studies III (Grammar) does not make a systematic treatment of prepositions.
- the lessons only include the treatment of prepositional phrases.
- there is a lack of investigations on verbs with dependent prepositions.

These data show the importance of the topic and the necessity to study the dependent prepositions to offer different alternatives for the correct use of them.

In addition, these problems affect the quality of the teaching-learning process of the Subject English Linguistic Studies III (Grammar). It must be taken into account that the students are being trained as foreign language teachers, and they need to be well prepared in the field of grammar. Although they will not be expected to have the efficiency of native language speakers, they need to use the language intelligibly and correctly.

The term grammatical competence has often been used to refer to the linguistic competence (as a dimension of the communicative competence), but in the context of this research, it will be used to allude to knowledge and appropriate use of English grammatical forms especially verbs with dependent preposition. Richards (2010) says it is knowledge of the grammar, vocabulary, phonology, and semantics of a language. So, this author is referring to the classical conception of the linguistic competence. The linguistic competence is knowledge of the lexicon, morphological and syntactic rules, semantics and phonology. Which as an area of the communicative competence, has been used and accepted by many language specialists: Hymes (1972); Canale and Swain (1980); Hutchinson (1987); Robinson (1991); Pulido (2004); Medina (2006); Acosta (2011); Mijares (2013); Rodríguez (2014); Dilbar Mukhtarovna and Karine Borisovna (2020) among others.

The theoretical aspects treated here and the determination of the students' limitations in the grammatical component of the communicative competence led to identify the existence of insufficiencies with the treatment of verbs with dependent prepositions in the teaching-learning process of Grammar in the fourth year of the English Education Major.

Therefore, the objective of this investigation was the elaboration of a set of activities to favor the use of verbs with dependent prepositions in the teaching-learning process of Grammar in the fourth year of the English Education Major.

2. Methodology

Every speaker of any language has in their mind a set of rules for using that language properly: that is what we know as grammar. Moreover, in the case of one's native language, the vast majority of the information regarding language structure is not acquired by conscious study or instruction, but through natural input of the mother tongue.

It is essential to consider grammar as one of those vital abilities in which communication and language, as such, are consolidated. It provides students with the theoretical knowledge and at the same time the rehearsing of the English language structure; and, it develops and improves the cognitive linguistic habits they have already acquired. Disregarding grammar would imply an obvious limitation to convey a message.

The formal study of Grammar is an important part of education for children from a young age through advanced learning, though the rules taught in schools are not a "Grammar" in the sense most linguists use the term, as they are often prescriptive rather than descriptive.

For one thing, prescriptive grammar emphasizes the learning of the proper terms for grammatical elements, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions and conjunctions. Prescriptive grammar also emphasizes the learning of many rules of English Grammar and based on this, students learn the right and wrong ways to write sentences and are encouraged to systematize language production through writing.

On the other hand, the form of grammar instruction called descriptive is also known as transformational grammar. This content was mainly developed in the 1980's and 1990's, where most schools taught a form of descriptive grammar. To accommodate the growing interest in this element, textbooks published it. The descriptive grammar instills students to read freely with the purpose of acquiring and demonstrating linguistic skills.

Various “grammar frameworks” have been developed in theoretical linguistics since the mid-20th century, in particular under the influence of the idea of a “Universal Grammar” in the United States. Of these, the main divisions are transformational grammar (TG), systemic functional grammar (SFG), principles and parameters theory (P&P), lexical-functional grammar (LFG), generalized phrase structure grammar (GPSG), head-driven phrase structure grammar (HPSG), dependency grammars (DG) and role and reference grammar (RRG).

The authors of this investigation endorse the Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), which is a model developed by Michael Halliday (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). This theory considers language as a system of available choices in which every phrase or syntagm is a set of resulting choices (structure). It also pays great attention to how the speakers generate utterances and texts to convey their intended meanings. It is very useful in this context since it helps the learner acquire the right level of accuracy for teachers to be.

¹The English prepositions are “linguistic forms that combine with a noun, pronoun, or noun equivalent to form a phrase that typically has an adverbial, adjectival or substantive relation to some other words¹”.

Besides, other experts consider that prepositions are just words that show the relationship between a noun and something else and they are usually placed before them. They are abstract elements and meaningless by themselves (Biber, 2009). “A preposition explains the relationship of the object with the other words of the sentence” (Kurshid, 2022).

In grammar, a preposition is a part of the speech that introduces a prepositional phrase. For example, in the sentence “The child sleeps on the floor”, the word “on” is a preposition, introducing the prepositional phrase “on the floor”. Thus, in English, the most used prepositions are “of”, “to”, “in”, “for”, “with” and “on” (Eckersley, 1975). Simply put, a preposition indicates a relation between things mentioned in a sentence.

In English, some prepositions are short, typically containing six letters or fewer. There are, however, a significant number of multi-word prepositions. Throughout the history of the English Language, new prepositions have come into use, old ones fallen out of use, and the meaning of existing prepositions has changed. Nonetheless, the prepositions are by and large a closed class.

Therefore, prepositions form a heterogeneous class, with fuzzy boundaries that tend to overlap with other categories (like verbs, nouns, and adjectives). It is thus impossible to provide an absolute definition that picks out all and only this kind of words in every language. The following features, however, are often required of prepositions:

- A preposition combines syntactically with exactly one complement phrase, most often a noun phrase. In English, this is generally a noun (or something functioning as a noun, e.g., a gerund), called the *object of the preposition*, together with its attendant modifiers.
- It establishes the grammatical relationship that links its complement phrase to another word or phrase in the context. In English, it also establishes a semantic relationship, which may be spatial (*in, on, under*), temporal (*after, during*), or logical (*via*) in nature.
- This kind of word determines certain grammatical properties of its complement. In English, the objects of prepositions are always in the objective case.
- Prepositions are non-inflective (or “invariant”); i.e., they do not have paradigms of forms (for different tenses, cases, genders, etc.) in the same way as verbs, adjectives, and nouns in the same language. There are exceptions, though, for example in Celtic languages.

In ambiguous cases, there is not always a clear rule which prepositions are appropriate, and different languages and regional dialects may have different conventions. Learning the customarily preferred word is a matter of exposure to examples. For instance, most dialects of American English use the phrase wait in line, but some others wait on line. It is for this reason that prepositions are one of the most difficult aspects of a language to learn for non-native speakers. In some cases, the preposition is not translated from one language into another, and is thus omitted. Those who learn English may have difficulty distinguishing between the prepositions on, in, and at, as other languages may use only one or two prepositions for the equivalent of three in English.

Among the most difficult contents concerning this topic we can find those related to dependent prepositions. In this group are included all the prepositions that follow a noun, a verb, an adjective or an adverb in an invariable way. They are always placed after these kinds of words in order to introduce a complement. This phenomenon is more commonly seen in verbs and adjectives.

¹ Webster Dictionary. Based on Webster's Third New International Dictionary

English prepositional usage after verbs is highly problematic for second language learners (Asma, 2010; Mahmoodzadeh, 2012; Chang, 2012; Humeid, 2013; Sumonsriworakun & Pongpairoj, 2017). This misuse of prepositions may be caused by the interference of the students' native language.

Unfortunately, there are no fixed rules that can help students decide which dependent prepositions should be placed with which words, they really just need to learn them. Sometimes, usage of different dependent prepositions changes the meaning.

Moreover, adding a preposition, with the purpose of forming a phrasal verb, the original meaning of the simple verb changes. On the other hand, when we include a dependent preposition to a certain verb, it completes its meaning. Most of the time, students have a tendency to confuse the phrasal verbs with the verbs followed by a dependent preposition. The term phrasal verb is commonly applied to two or three distinct but related constructions in English (Sinclair, 2007): a verb and a particle and/or a preposition co-occur forming a single semantic unit. This semantic unit cannot be understood based upon the meanings of the individual parts in isolation, but rather it can be taken as a whole. In other words, the meaning is non-compositional and thus unpredictable. Phrasal verbs that include a preposition are known as prepositional verbs and phrasal verbs that include a particle are also known as particle verbs. Additional alternative terms for phrasal verb are: compound verb, verb-adverb combination, verb-particle construction, two-part word/verb, and three-part word/verb (depending on the number of particles), and multi-word verb. Phrasal verbs can be separated in many cases, while dependent prepositions always keep the same structure. For instance:

- 1) A sentence with a phrasal verb:
 - a) We put off our trip.
 - b) We put our trip off.
- 2) A sentence with a verb and adjective that has a dependent preposition:
 - a) I agree with you. (v)
 - b) I am ashamed of your behavior. (a)

The examples above show that in the case of phrasal verbs, prepositions can be placed after the verb or not. On the other hand, in the case of dependent prepositions, prepositions always go after the verb it depends on.

3. Results

The authors propose a set of activities that can be applied within a lesson like the one that it is going to be showed below. These activities are going to handle the treatment of the dependent prepositions as such and the practical application they have.

Sample lesson

Grade of students: advanced learners

Length of the lesson: 90 min.

Number of students: 20

Topic: The new tendencies of fashion.

Teaching aids: Board, tape recorder or computer, text handouts, cards.

Objective: The students will demonstrate their comprehension of a text on the evolution of fashion by expressing themselves orally and in a written way using the intended vocabulary and grammatical structures (namely dependent prepositions) attaining a fully productive level in order to foster a vast cultural knowledge on this topic.

Warm-up: First of all, the teacher greets the students and vice versa. After that, the teacher shows a picture that deals with some new tendencies of fashion. So, he asks some questions:

- What is represented in these pictures?
- Could you describe what you see?



After analyzing this, the teacher proposes that everybody says aloud the word that comes to their minds when they think about the content of the picture.

Presentation

Then, the teacher comments that in the lesson they are going to talk about this topic, because it is widely known and fashion is a daily phenomenon that involves the whole society. That is why, the topic of the lesson is:

❖ **“The new tendencies of fashion”.**

Besides, the teacher clarifies that at the same time, they are going to analyze an important grammatical structure regarding prepositions. He also says that it is going to be a lesson, in which they are going to develop their knowledge about the theme while comprehending the reading, writing and practicing grammar.

Controlled Practice:

First of all, the teacher orders to read the text in silence:

“Fashion”

Many people agree with the idea that fashion is a prevailing custom, usage or style signalized mainly by the way of dressing during a particular period of time. Some authorities on the field comment on the fact that although there is a global tendency, which acts as an echo of the season, each person wears the clothes they want to.

The term fashion is closely related to weather, inasmuch the clothing which people dress in, depends on the season of the year. In winter, it is necessary to be well-covered because of the freezing cold, therefore, it is better to wear coats, raincoats, overcoats, fur coats, sweaters, anoraks, scarves and shawls. Throughout the spring and the autumn, people like to buy less covered gears. For instance, pants, shirts, suits, and others. But, summer is very comfortable, so most people wait for it despairingly. During this season is advisable to wear short pants, t-shirts, small blouses, jeans, skirts and of course, bathing suits.

The colors of the clothes are also very associated with the weather. In cold seasons, people prefer to wear dark colors because they reflect the climate. On the other hand, through warm months, the light and picturesque colors are widely chosen.

In present times, people do not care for these patterns and they combine any color with all kinds of clothing. This fact reveals the self-confidence of the current society, which deals with all the tendencies and changes of fashion.

After that, he begins reading in front of the classroom. He reads just the first sentence and the rest of the group continues. Later on, he proposes the first exercise:

1. Find in the text the right terms for each meaning:
 - a) Jacket with hood used in polar regions: _____
 - b) Large triangular or rectangular piece of fabric which is worn wrapped around the head or shoulders

 - c) Hopelessly, despondently _____
 - d) Resembling a picture, suitable for a painting _____
 - e) Believing in oneself _____

This is a simple exercise planned with the purpose of facilitating the comprehension of certain words. The students taking into account their meaning may infer these words. Thus, the unknown terms are added to their vocabulary.

2. Find in the text synonyms for the following words:
 - a) Mode: _____
 - b) Period: _____
 - c) Prudent: _____
 - d) Outfit: _____
 - e) Tradition: _____
3. Find in the text antonyms for the following words:
 - a) Differ: _____
 - b) Unconnected: _____
 - c) Depart: _____
 - d) Unrelated: _____

The exercises 2 and 3 are also designed with the purpose of practicing vocabulary. They have to infer the meaning taking into account the context. Subsequent to review this exercises, the teacher makes a deep explanation about the grammatical structure they are going to study in the current lesson.

First, he asks if they know to which kind of words the antonyms of the previous exercise belong to. So he explains that this structure is composed by a verb followed by a preposition and they are known as dependent prepositions.

The teacher clarifies that this structure is very alike to phrasal verbs but they are not the same. They have some differences, for instance: adding a preposition, with the purpose of forming a phrasal verb, the original meaning of the simple verb changes. On the other hand, when we include a dependent preposition to a certain verb, it completes its meaning. Most of the time, it tends to confuse, but phrasal verbs can be separated in many cases, while this kind of prepositions always keeps the same structure, its position following a verb is invariable. Then he presents the following examples in order to visualize this:

- a) Sentences with a phrasal verb (it can be separable):

- ❖ I **turned on** the light.
 - ❖ I **turned** the light **on**.
- b) Sentences with verbs followed by dependent prepositions:
- ❖ I **apologize for** my inappropriate behavior.(correct)
 - ❖ I **apologize** my inappropriate behavior **for**. (incorrect)
- 1- Complete this table finding in the reading all the verbs followed by dependent prepositions and put them in the left side, so fill the right side with the complements they refer to:

Verbs + dependent prepositions	complements
1- Agree with	the idea

This activity gives the possibility of proving and practicing the grammatical content we knew before. So, the students must identify the verbs + dependent prepositions that appear in the text.

- 2- Complete the following sentences with the right verbs in the correct tense.

Worry about	Complain about	Suffer from	Belong to
Stand for	Argue about	Decide on	Insist on

- a) The students _____ the importance of getting early at school because they did not have the same criteria.
- b) That couple _____ the poor offers that the restaurant had.
- c) Rose _____ attending to school, despite her sickness.
- d) Michael is _____ the results of the last Math exam.
- e) Poor boy! He is _____ his great lost.

This exercise also has the objective of keeping working in the grammatical content they already learned, besides it provides other verbs with dependent prepositions in order to increase their vocabulary and to enlarge the list of verbs, which have this kind of structure.

Semi controlled practice

After reviewing the previous exercises, the teacher asks if they are in doubt about the contents studies until that moment.

Then, the teacher orients the next activity.

3- Role-play

Imagine you are a fashion designer attending the fashion week in New York and you need to give a journalist an interview expressing your opinion on fashion trends on the media. Use some of the following verbs with dependent prepositions: agree with, apply for, deal with, prepare for, pay for, attend to, succeed in, comment on, choose between, hope for, congratulate on, hope for, interfere with/in, rely on.

Speech acts

Journalist: Ask for personal information and formation, inquire about latest trends in fashion, elicit opinion on the impact of fashion displayed on the media, and request information about the fashion event that is taking place.

Designer: Provide information about your curriculum as a fashion designer, answer the questions about the trends in fashion, give your opinion on the impact of fashion displayed on the media and explain about the fashion event that is taking place in New York.

- ❖ **After ending working, interchange roles. Be sure that your partner used the learned grammatical structure in a very appropriate way.**

With this activity, the students begin to work by their own and they have to create written ideas that are going to be discussed later on. It also allows them to check their mate's work, and then they are encouraged to work together and exchange their own points of view.

Creative Practice

- 4- Make an advertisement on a garment item of your choice inspired by the text studied in class. Be ready to present it in class.

This activity allows the students to use the language in real communication with the purpose of achieving autonomy. No language model is provided, just the situation and the context. They have to be able to use the grammatical structure studied in class.

Assignment:

Write a text about the fashion in our city. Try to use as many verbs + dependent prepositions as possible. You must hand it in.

Conclusion (feedback)

In this stage of the lesson, the teacher asks if they are in doubt about the contents studied in class. After that, he asks the students to make a summary of the main topics of the lesson and he writes on the board the key aspects of it.

Evaluation

This stage is present in every step of the lesson.

Finally, the teacher says good-bye.

Throughout this lesson, it is shown how to deal with the use of verbs + dependent prepositions and its importance for communication and reinforces the criterion of the authors of this investigation regarding the teaching of grammar in a communicative context.

4. Discussion

The English Education Major at the University of Holguín provides the students the instruction at a high professional level, in order to achieve its main purpose: to carry out the teaching learning process of English in middle school. Obviously, it requires from students a considerable knowledge of English as a foreign language targeting the accomplishment of communicative skills. Thus, during the course of the major, they are meant to develop essential language sub-skills, and one of them is the proper use of the grammatical structures.

With the aim of several methods of investigation, it was possible to obtain useful information in order to prove the important role that grammar plays in order to facilitate the written and oral expression in language learners.

The students from the English Education Major often enter the university having a poor knowledge of language, which has its origin in the deficiencies of the teaching of English in previous educational levels where they were taught aspects of grammar for several years.

Then, the incorrect use of grammatical structures obviously represents a barrier in their oral and written communication, and usually has unfavorable effects upon the rest of the abilities of the language they are supposed to develop during these years.

Moreover, as non-natives the students may even experience a tangible lack of motivation and lose of interest when presenting problems while dealing with a determined grammatical structure.

Therefore, it is very important that teachers seek different methods to convey this important issue taking into consideration the assessment of the students and their expectations regarding the mastery of the language.

The implementation of two pedagogical tests along with the theoretical and empirical methods made possible the identification of insufficiencies on the use of verbs with dependent prepositions as well as the achievement of the main results of this investigation. The implementation of the pedagogical tests took into consideration the following categories:

Satisfactory (S): when the students during the execution of the set of activities showed a correct usage of dependent prepositions.

Partially satisfactory (PS): when the students during the execution of the set of activities showed certain skills fulfilling the activities but did not finish them all correctly and needed more time when time was due.

Unsatisfactory (US): when the students during the execution of the set of activities did not show a correct usage of dependent prepositions eliciting permanent explanation and corrections by the teacher.

The significant improvement of the problem can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Results of the pedagogical tests

GROUP	Composition (random sample)	Entry test			Exit test		
		S	PS	UN	S	PS	UN
SINGLE	20	4	10	6	12	8	-

These results showed the effectiveness of the activities throughout the teaching learning process of English Linguistic Studies III (Grammar) and became a clear evidence of the importance of mastering this grammatical structure to achieve a correct written and oral communication.

The set of activities to foster the use of verbs with dependent prepositions was put into practice gradually and following the order in which they appear. Moreover, these activities were not taught in isolation, on the contrary, they were taught in a communicative context and rendered the following results:

- the students made a correct usage of dependent prepositions in their oral and written communication, which is very important for their integral formation as foreign language teachers.
- the set of activities to foster the use of verbs with dependent prepositions became an important referent for students and professors while dealing with this structure and contributed to their communicative competence.
- the subject English Linguistic Studies III (English Grammar) made possible the introduction and practice of verbs with dependent prepositions within its lessons.

-this investigation made a modest contribution to deal with verbs with dependent preposition in a communicative context.

5. Conclusion

Certainly, English grammar is one of the most useful and complex content of the language as such. For that reason, the teaching-learning process of this component requires a lot attention and effort. Since the structure of any language is consolidated in the implementation of grammar, it occupies an important position as a major component of communicative competence, in the written and oral way.

Throughout this investigation, the authors have noticed that the usage of dependent prepositions as a very important content of grammar has been poorly treated as part of the curriculum. Therefore, the inappropriate application of this grammatical structure in the fourth year has caused subsequent and serious problems for advanced students.

Thus, as an attempt to provide a solution to this latent problem, a set of activities with the purpose of favouring the treatment of dependent prepositions within grammar has been provided. This set of activities and the demonstrative lesson can be taken as a guide in order to enhance accuracy in the linguistic competence of fourth year students.

The set of activities to foster the usage of verbs with dependent prepositions made possible the improvement of this grammatical structure within the subject English Linguistic Studies III and contributed to the students' integral formation as foreign language teachers.

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