INTRODUCTION

The greatest problem facing the student of English as a second language, is the correct usage of certain

English prepositions. This difficulty comes as a result of two factors:

1. Meanings carried by these prepositions are expressed in different syntactical patterns in their native language as a result of socio-and psycholinguistics aspects.
2. English speakers,even those who teach, can not give a logical explanation for the usage of these prepositions. Consequently·, they can not guide their students in this respect. While definitions of prepositions and examples of their usages are provided in school texts, references, and dictionaries, a clear statement is not given of their functions.

 When students can not find a real source to lead them in changing their behavior, they depend ultimately on memorization. Students who seek for logical explanation, ask questions to find out reasons why different prepositions are used in sentences which seem to be parallel.

e.g.

1. The fruit is on the plate, The fruit is in the bowl.
2. He lives on the West Coast. He· lives in Istanbul.
3. I saw your signature on the letter, I read your ideas in the letter.

 As an answer to these, questions, teachers say,

“ It does not sound right,” or “Language is not always logical.

However, if the usage of these prepositions involves intuition.

students of English as a second language can master them.

The objective of this study is to attempt to discover the

logical basis for the usage of certain English prepositions.

Especially, the functional relationship of the prepositions

“at”, “on”, “in” will be established.

The reason for choosing these prepositions is that it

even confuses the native speakers. Besides that, in Turkish

the meaning of these prepositions are expressed with a

single suffix, ‘de’ for indicating location and time. As a

result of the Turkish vowel harmony after a word ending with a

front vowel suffix ‘de’ is used, if the noun or the

pronoun ends with a back vowel, the vowel in the suffix

is changed to ‘a’, giving the result of ‘da’.

e.g. in the house : evde

 on the roof. : Damla

Directions is expressed with the use of suffixes ‘e’ or

‘a’ depending on the last vowel of the noun or the pronoun.

e.g. H'e arrived in Istanbul. : İstanbula vardı.

Turkish students having gotten used to a logical

pattern in expressing location, time and direction are

confused when. they are introduced all these three prepositions.

The approach taken to explain the function of these prepositons:

 The best approach would be to givea universal answer

by using the geometrical terms. : definite point: ‘at’

1. Zero Dimension
2. the store: point of places
3. at 7 o’ clock: point of time
4. at work point : of activity

B. Space having one dimension: direction: ‘to’or ‘on’

e.g. His office is ‘to’ or ‘on’ your left as you enter the building

C. Space having two dimensions: perceptual or conceptual surface

e.g.

It is on the wall.

It's on the ceiling

It's on the table.

If' the object covers tbe surface of either a two

dimensional or three dimensional body, we still use

'on'. This explanation clarifies the usage of ‘on’

when we say: "We wear shoes on our feet and gloves

on our hands." For the same reason China is the most

populated country on earth, because it is located

on the surface of sphere bounded by a surface,

D. Body having three dimensions: indicates volume.

Usually, these three dimensional bodies are enclosed

in each other:



When we examine the spaces of ‘on’ and ‘in’, we perceive or conceive that the positions of ‘in’ and 'on' are perpendicular to each other:

 on :

———:———

 : in

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 The space of 'in' may be invisible but if the object object

were transparent or large enough for us to get into it too, the other element in the space can be seen. This explanation clarifies why a book could be either on the desk or in the desk.

'l'wo basic approaches in programmed instruction,

 Scholars are grouped into two in their opinions about the acquisition of proficiency in a field.

Behavioristic view point:

Behaviorists who feel that learning is basically a process of conditioning lead the learner through a series of stimulus-response situations which take him to the desired aim in gradual steps. They believe that learning takes place, as the learner gives the desired response to the specific stimulus. This conception. of learning is considered to be a mechanical interpretation of learning. As Susan Markle points out, the student who can respond correctly to “What is the capital of France?” cannot be expected to answer the question "What country is Paris the capital of. 1 In behavioristics approach the mind has no factor in learning. Analysis of the language structures is not necessary, and even irrelevant to the conditioning process.

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Susan Meyer Markle. Good Frames and Bad:A Grammar of Frames Writing, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1969

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Spolsky also claims that language is not merely the performance of language but an underlying competence which makes such performance possible.1 Chomsky does not accept the view that linguistic behavior is a matter of habit, that is slowly, acquired by reinforcement, association and generalization.2

As Miller and others indicate one of the criticisms against the behavioral approach is that language. is so complex that if it were acquired by stimulus-response conditioning only, it would take a person I00 years to acquire the language with no intruption for sleeping or eating.

Although programmed materials in the past have primarily been applications of Skinnerian theory of learning, it is not necessary for the programmed instruction to be limited to theories of conditioning. Programmed materials where the cognitive principles are applied, place primary emphasis upon understanding. After comprehending the concept, (this could either in the phonology, semantics or syntax) the student continues practicing the language to be learned.

Basic principles in the proposed program

With the assumption that both the behavioristicaswell as the cognitive approach in language teaching to adults, factual branching program is chosen because in the branching program,



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Bernard Spolsky. "Attitudinal Aspeects of Second Language Learning",

Teaching Eng:lish as a Second Language Newsletter, February,1971

 pp.5 -6

2.

 Noami Chomsky. Aspects of the Theory of Syntax, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1965

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 As Crowder points out,

1. Inappropriate responses can be used to uncover misconceptions and areas of weakness;
2. since errors and misconceptions are corrected before learner proceeds, the step size can be larger and the program may proceed more rapidly than the linear program;
3. the students are reinforced for being right and are explained why they are wrong and when they are told to make another selection, they are given a chance of looking over the problem twice.

Job requirements

The reason, for the program to be introduced in a scrambled textbook, is that at the Middle East Technical University, although there is a Computer Science Department working with IBM 360computers, there are no facilities in making use of it for language instruction.

The terminal objective

The terminal objective of the program is: given a visual clue the students will be able to write out the correct prepositions ‘in’, 'on’, or ‘at’ in 25 blanks in sentences which are used in a context of three paragraphs with 80% correctness in half an hour. They will also be able to fill in the prepositions ‘in’, 'on’ and 'at’ in the given the given 15 non-contextual sentences where the usage of' the preposition is determined by the following noun with 85 % correctness in 15 minutes.

Assumptions

It is assumed that students know all the vocabulary and the syntactic structures introduced in Spoken English for Turks (1966 Istanbul) Books 1-14.

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Display and response devices

The student is asked to fill in the blank with one of the 3 prepositions based either on a verbal prompt or on a visual one. The verbal prompt is either contextual or structural. In the first ease, the sentence containing the missing preposition is used in a short dialogue. In the latter, the proceeding noun determines the particular preposition. For visual prompts some illustrations and diagrams are used. Given either the verbal of the visual prompt the student chooses one of the two or three alternatives and his choice determines the page to go in the program.

Besides being reinforced for his correct answer, s/he is instruct:ed why he is wrong or given a hint when he misses, the correct answer. He is eveen told how to eliminate choices to find out the correct answer. E.g. (pg.86)

The book is prepared with the intention of being extended so that it covers almost all the explanations and possible exercises for the usage of 'in', ‘on’, and ‘at’. For this purpose, on. the first page of the text, they are asked whether they like to review these prepositions in relation to verbs, adjectives or nouns. Since the text is limited only to the usage of these prepositions with nouns indicating place, the learner has to start on page 21 without any choice for the time being.

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Evaluation of the text

For the purpcs e of evaluation, a post-graduate student in English is asked to observe the programmed text. At first, the length of the text frightened her she said that she would. not dare to do such a job, As she went over the text she made a few comments:

1. Her first comment was the usage of' ‘at.' with blackboard. She wanted to accept the answer on pg38 correct. As an example she gave this sentence, "You can stand at the blackboard and write," When I indicated that the preposi­tion in that particular sentence is not related 'write' but to 'stand' and it can easily be proved when the last part of the sentence is extended as "You can stand atthe blackboard and write on it,", she agreed to what. I said, (pg,9, 6, 36)
2. Her second comment was on the use of 'on• and 'in' with the word ‘boat’! She claimed that although the boat is big, ‘on’ is used if a person is on the deck of the ship, In order to clarify the meaning, we agreed to replace the following examples with the ones on pages 52, 28, 4

a)We went to Europe on a boat.

b)We rode in our neighbor's new boat..

1. Her third comment was that the usage of 'on’ inthe sentence , "She hit the ball on the hole” being correct. (pg.9) She has visualized a ball with holes on it. I do not know any ball except the bowling ball. Assuming that the first thing the students will visualize· would be a hole with a ball in it, we agreed to leave
2. ..!:that example as it is.
3. Her last comment was that the instructions were very clear and the text was well prepared. I expect to get a sound evaluation when the text is introduced to the students. The answers and remarks obtained from them, will indicate how relevant the content of the text is. In judging their improvement a pre-test similar to the criterion test is going to be prepared and will be given to the students before they start the program.

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