

## Preposition Mistakes in English for Specific Purposes: The Case of Indonesian Accounting Study Program Students

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### ABSTRACT

Prepositions remain challenging for learners of English as a foreign language. Linguistically speaking, prepositions are part of grammar and are frequently used in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Thus, this research investigated the mastery of English prepositions of undergraduate accounting program students of batch 2021 at a private university in Yogyakarta. The data of this quantitative research were collected through a close-ended questionnaire using Google Forms distributed to 23 students. The collected data were analyzed to identify preposition mistakes. Results showed three common problems of prepositions, namely the addition of unnecessary prepositions, omission of prepositions, and misuse of prepositions. The findings would assist students, thesis advisors, and teachers in using English prepositions grammatically, particularly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It is expected that future researchers utilize larger data sets to obtain more robust results of proper uses of prepositions and future researchers are expected to observe the participants directly to maximize the results of the data.

**Keywords:** *accounting study program; addition; misuse; prepositions; omission*

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## INTRODUCTION

English has become an international language and plays a vital “second language” role in multilingual countries (Lauder, 2008). It is quite difficult to acknowledge Indonesian students since the Indonesian language does not have tenses that are similar to English tenses (Damaiyanti, 2021). Yuying, (2021) states that language is the conveyor of thinking. Sanjaya & Bram (2021) said that students from multilingual countries use English as a foreign language (EFL). To be able to use English well, students must be able to cover various skills, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and components, namely phonological, semantic, pragmatic, lexical, and grammar (Anjayani et al., 2016). Debata (2013) mentioned the importance of grammar that cannot be ignored and he also stated that to learn English well, students must understand what grammar is. Wairimu & Ngugi (2021) also added that a language does not exist without grammar.

Grammar consists of some key points in a language such as articles, irregular verbs, tenses, prepositions, and so on (Anjayani et al., 2016). According to the research that was done by Saaristo (2015), students determine that grammar is a valuable asset in learning a language yet have a contrary understanding of grammar. To learn a language successfully, we need a strong foundation by mastering grammar (Wairimu & Ngugi, 2021). Yet, mastering English

grammar is a big deal (Sanjaya & Bram, 2021). Sanjaya & Bram (2021) said that students need to learn some English grammar aspects such as subject and verb agreements, parts of speech, and preposition usage. However, those English grammar aspects that should be mastered are considered a huge challenge for students since English is taught as a foreign language in Indonesia (Lauder, 2008). Grammar is compatible with students who are interested in learning English and how it is applied in an everyday context (Rebwar & Hersh, 2021). As elaborated by Anjayani et al., (2016), grammar includes several crucial aspects, for example, prepositions, articles, tenses, finite verbs and subject-verb agreement. The use of prepositions is quite important for students who are using English as a foreign language (EFL).

Bram (2013) questioned a major reason students find difficulties in mastering grammar, especially prepositions. Students in Indonesia still realize how difficult to understand preposition usage in an everyday context. In this case, motivation also plays a crucial role in helping the students in learning English prepositions (Mahardika & Kuswandono, 2022). Hadriana et al. (2013) elaborated that there are two types of motivation namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play a crucial role in enhancing students’ motivation in learning English.

Prepositions are words that export any possibility of mentioning something

or action since we can choose any suitable word (Yuying, 2021). Prepositions are grouped according to their form, meaning, and function (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012). Bram (2005) reported that prepositions were words that show a connection between the object of the prepositions and another word in a sentence. In line with that, Seaton, A., & Mew (2007) mentioned that prepositions are words that link one thing with another thing and show the relation. Prepositions are words that are employed to indicate the connection between the different elements of a paragraph (Jajere & Yunusa, 2021). Denzilveigas & Wilson, (2021) stated that prepositions consist of diverse types and functions, which sometimes makes students find difficulties learning prepositions.

Although prepositions are thought of as small detail, it holds a vital role in a language (Anjayani et al., 2016). Prepositions are an important aspect of English grammar which is considered a challenging aspect to master by English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) students (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012). Rebwar & Hersh (2021) explained that prepositions might cause problems and confusion for EFL students in learning English (cited in (Sanjaya & Bram, 2021)). Prepositions still become the biggest problem among students who are in multilingual countries which use EFL or ESL (Sanjaya & Bram, 2021). Moreover, Indonesian learners tend to make grammatical errors, especially in learning how to use prepositions correctly since their mother

tongue affects the way they are thinking (Fitria, 2021). It is supported by Yuying (2021) who states that mother tongue affects their understanding of English language learning. Therefore, to fill the gap, this research, presenting a new insight into the topic, analyzed the usage of English prepositions in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) of Indonesian Accounting Study Program students.

To solve the problem, thus, the researchers attempt to answer a question: What misuses of prepositions are made by Accounting Study Program students by investigating the students' understanding and capabilities of using prepositions? The main reason is that students are expected to write the abstract of their undergraduate thesis correctly by understanding the usage of prepositions accurately. Moreover, by conducting this research, both teachers and students are expected to understand the importance of using correct prepositions in learning English. Teachers are expected to teach the students about prepositions seriously and carefully. On the other hand, students should also have a strong motivation to learn seriously during the teaching and learning process. This research has implications for students, thesis advisors, and future researchers. Yuying (2021) proposes that making a grammatical error is a good process of understanding the material. It helps the teachers to monitor their students and correct them once they create a mistake. The students can also learn how to use prepositions correctly.

Several prior studies are closely similar to this research. However, little research has investigated the misuse of prepositions that are commonly made by Accounting Study Program students. The researchers reviewed three previous studies similar to this research. First, Sanjaya & Bram (2021) discussed the misuses of prepositions which occurred in the acknowledgments of the English Language Education Study Program of a private university in Yogyakarta. The research found three major problems in the use of prepositions, for instance, misselection of prepositions *for*, *in*, and *to*, insertion of prepositions *about* and *to*, and omission of prepositions *about*. Second, Bram (2013) explored the three issues of simple prepositions, namely *about*, *on*, *to*, and *with*. Note that in English, there also exist complex prepositions, namely a preposition consisting of normally two or more words, such as *due to* and *in spite of*. Third, Bram (2005) re-examined and reclassified some common mistakes in preposition uses in students' compositions in the context of multilingual education.

Considering the background provided above, the researchers attempted to answer one research question, formulated as follows: What misuses of prepositions are made by Accounting Study Program students by investigating the students' understanding and capabilities of using prepositions?

### **Common Misuses of Prepositions**

Missing prepositions is the most frequent grammatical error that non-native speakers make and could be the ultimate difficult element to master for non-native speakers Rao (2019). Prepositions are extremely difficult for L2 to master because there are many prepositions in the English language and their polysemous nature Thumawongsa (2018). Based on the research conducted by Rao (2019), it is shown that prepositions are the most common kind of usage error in writing for ESL students in China. It cannot be avoided that ESL students tend to make several mistakes and errors in learning a language process (Gvarishvili, 2013). The biggest problem for EFL students is prepositions because the misuse of prepositions does not make communication fail (Fitria, 2021). However, the misuse of prepositions sometimes leads to confusion in understanding the sentences.

The most frequent misuse of prepositions is found in some skills, such as writing and speaking. The common misuse of prepositions is usually found in writing that is done by non-native English speakers (Rao, 2019). Writing is considered a crucial skill (Mbato & Cendra, 2019). Writing in English is still a major challenge for students of the target language to write grammatically correctly (Bram, 2012). Students tend to apply prepositions in writing not precisely (Sanjaya & Bram, 2021). Based on the research that had been done by (Delshad, 1998), he stated that Iranian EFL students tend to misuse or omit prepositions (cited

in (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012). Speaking is another difficult skill of language learning (Damaiyanti, 2021). (Huang, 2009) explored the potential influence of L1 on L2 communication with a group of Chinese-speaking English. (Damaiyanti, 2021) explained that speaking helps students to develop their vocabulary and grammar skills, and it has a huge impact on their writing skills, which can help them to improve their writing skills. Moreover, Yuying (2021) should be balanced with the understanding of English prepositions.

To analyze the problem, (Bram, 2005), (Gvarishvili, 2013), and (Thumawongsa, 2018) classified prepositions misuses into three kinds, namely:

1. Addition of unnecessary prepositions: Adding an extra preposition is unnecessary, and it causes misunderstanding for students. No preposition, in this case, the preposition *about*, is needed in the following sentence: “\*The participants *discussed about* their plans”. In this context, the verb *discuss* (*discussed*, in the past tense) functions as a transitive verb and therefore, it is not followed by a preposition but a direct object. Similarly, students might add a preposition in a sentence that is not required, for example, the preposition *to* as in the following sentence “We would be happy must to go now” (‘to’ can be removed).
2. Omission of prepositions: The act of omitting a preposition that

should be put in a sentence. It is indicated by omitting the preposition that should be appeared in a sentence. The students fail to perform an accurate sentence because they tend to omit the preposition in their utterances. The example can be found in “You replied to his message” (missing the preposition ‘to’ after the verb).

3. Misuse of prepositions: Select and use an inaccurate preposition. An accurate preposition is replaced by an incorrect preposition which is a common error found in EFL or ESL students. Students often do this mistake by selecting and using the incorrect preposition in their daily conversation or their writing tasks. It sometimes leads to misunderstanding for the readers who read their task or for the listener who listens to them. An example can be found in “You are good in English” (‘in’ should be replaced with ‘at’).

Sanjaya & Bram (2021) stated that prepositions become tricky for EFL/ESL students since the misuse of prepositions does not have a significant impact and does not change the meaning of their communication with each other. Rao (2019) claimed that prepositions are hard to learn due to their complex features, and prepositions have various linguistic functions. Damaiyanti (2021) also proposed that the preposition errors that the students make are related to their understanding of the English preposition

which can lead to the misuse of English prepositions and create misunderstanding of the English preposition. The grammatical error cannot be accepted since it causes misunderstanding (Denzilveigas & Wilson, 2021).

## **METHOD**

This quantitative research employed close-ended questions that consisted of ten items multiple choices. The researchers used a quantitative method to gather and examine the data. A quantitative method was used to collect, analyze, interpret, and write the results of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Moreover, he explained that this method is used to test theories by testing the relationship among the participants. It means that the researchers tested the phenomenon using surveys, which started with theories that were used. To analyze the gathered data, the researchers also applied descriptive statistical analysis by finding the central tendency (Johnson & Christensen, 2013). Central tendency is the way to summarize and interpret the data in which the value can be used to represent the group as a whole.

Twenty-three Accounting students of Sanata Dharma University Yogyakarta from batch 2021 were the participants in this research. The participants consisted of 20 female and three male students, and they are studying in the same class. The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire which was adopted and adapted from (Sanjaya & Bram, 2021). The questionnaire was distributed via

WhatsApp and the participants had to fill it out via Google Forms. First, the participants had to fill out the consent form before filling out the questionnaire that showed that the participants were willing to take part in this research. Second, the participants filled out the questionnaire by choosing the best answers. Third, the results of the questionnaire were obtained and the researcher analyzed the results of the questionnaire. In analyzing the data, the researchers totaled the data from the questionnaire and discovered the mean from the questionnaire. The results were displayed in a table by calculating the percentage of each question using descriptive statistical analysis to find the central tendency. The researchers elaborated on the results of the questionnaire.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

After the data were collected, the researchers totaled the data from the questionnaires that had been distributed to 23 Accounting study program students via online Google Forms and analyzed the gathered data descriptively. The data and results were presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Answers to preposition use and misuse**

No.	Verbs + Preposition	Usage	Misuse
1	Same + as	18	5
2	Married + to	7	16
3	Reply + to	7	16
4	Beware + of	16	7
5	Jealous + of	3	20
6	Good + at	16	7
7	Bought + for	16	7
8	Share + with	14	9
9	Discuss (No about)	0	23
10	Thank (without to)	0	23
	Total	97	133

Table 1 shows 103 usages of prepositions, and there were 126 misuses of prepositions. The total number of preposition misuses showed that the participants were aware of the appropriate usage of a preposition. Table 1 also indicates that the participants made the same mistake in selecting the proper preposition. As stated by Fitria (2021), making grammatical errors is common since Indonesian students tend to apply the Indonesian grammar rules when using English, the target language. The preposition misuses are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. The preposition misuse rate**

No.	Verbs + Preposition	Misuse	Misuse Rate
1	Married + to	16	69.6%
2	Jealous + of	20	87%
3	Discuss (without about)	23	100%
4	Thank (without to)	23	100%
5	Reply + to	16	69.6%

Based on the data that were presented in Table 2, the participants find prepositions as the most problematic material to be understood. Table 2 shows the frequency of prepositions misuse that showed the misuse rate was over 50%. Four prepositions are seemed to be affected by L1. The participants mistakenly chose the preposition that they thought was right based on their L1. This conclusion was supported by (Jajere & Yunusa, 2021) and (Anjayani et al., 2016), who stated that a student might frequently choose an inappropriate preposition when speaking and writing

in English. In some contexts, it is challenging for a student to use the preposition *in* or *on* when talking about a date, for example, *on 16 December 2022* and *in December 2022*.

Based on the misuse rate table, the researchers found three preposition problems shown in the participants' understanding of prepositions, namely addition of unnecessary prepositions, omission of prepositions, and misuse of prepositions (Bram, 2005); (Gvarishvili, 2013); (Thumawongsa, 2018). It is a serious problem for the students as they will use those prepositions in their future spoken and written communications and their daily language conversation. Students should learn how to use and apply English prepositions correctly and teachers should also teach the students carefully. The examples of each preposition and the verb that seem to be affected by L1 are in Table 3.

**Table 3. The misuse affected by L1**

No.	Sentences	Initial verb + Preposition	Misuse Types
1	Evelyn is married with Pablo	Married + to	Misuse of preposition to
2	He was never jealous with his spoiled younger brother	Jealous + of	Misuse of preposition of
3	We are going to discuss about the topic next week	Discuss (without about)	Addition of unnecessary preposition about
4	I should thank to her for helping conduct this research	Thank (without to)	Addition of unnecessary preposition to
5	I did not reply his message	Reply + to	Omission of preposition to

### **Misuse of the preposition *to* and *of***

The initial verb which should be followed by the preposition *to* is *married*. The researchers found 16 participants mistakenly used the inappropriate preposition with a misuse rate of 69.9%; they completed the sentence by choosing the preposition *with*, for instance, “*Evelyn is married with Pablo*”. The correct sentence with the appropriate preposition should be, “*Evelyn is married to Pablo*”. Instead of completing the sentence by choosing *to* for the sentence, the participants mistakenly chose the preposition *with* to complete the sentence.

Another same case was also found in this sentence “*He was never jealous \_\_\_ his spoiled younger brother*”. 20 participants mistakenly chose the inappropriate preposition. The rate of participants who chose the preposition *with* rather than *of* to complete the sentence was 87%.

### **Addition of unnecessary prepositions *about* and *to***

The 23 participants added a preposition after a verb which was not required to be added. It is proven by the research that was conducted by Damaiyanti (2021) who states that the pupils often added unnecessary prepositions. The verbs were *discuss* and *thank*. In the sentence “*We are going to discuss \_\_\_ the topic next week*”, it is shown that none of the 23 participants selected the correct preposition. They mistakenly added the preposition *about* into the sentence. In the sentence “*I should thank \_\_\_ her for helping conduct this research*”, it is shown that there were no participants

who chose the appropriate preposition. The participants chose to add a preposition *to*. (Hideaki, 2021) stated, “a transitive verb needs an object” as in the verb *discuss*. This statement was supported by the explanation based on the English dictionaries such as *Oxford, Longman, and Cambridge*; those verbs do not need any prepositions because those verbs are transitive. There are no prepositions needed in those two sentences. Sanjaya & Bram (2021) explained that transitive verbs only need prepositions when an indirect object exists. The participants who added prepositions in those two sentences might be influenced by L1 because, in Bahasa Indonesia, we tend to say *berdiskusi tentang* and *berterima kasih kepada*.

The students tend to add unnecessary prepositions that can be ignored. However, students are not realized that it is incorrect and they keep adding unnecessary prepositions.

### **Omission of the preposition *to***

The omission of the preposition is one of the common mistakes that students make. Omission means dismissing a word in a sentence that leads to misunderstanding (Fitria, 2021). Sixteen participants with an omission rate of 69.9% left out the needed preposition. The sentence “*I did not reply \_\_\_ his message*” needs a preposition *to*. However, in Bahasa Indonesia, no preposition is needed in this sentence. It is shown that the participants were affected by L1 in completing the sentence. The usage of the verb *reply* and the preposition *to* became

the focus of this sentence. *Reply* can be categorized as a transitive or intransitive verb. When someone put the verb *reply*, s/he should put a preposition *to* after the verb to show that someone was answering someone's message. To sum up, the preposition *to* was required to follow the initial verb in the questionnaire. However, the participants left out the required preposition, namely *to*.

In conclusion, the Indonesian Accounting Study Program students made some mistakes in using a preposition, *of*, *to*, and *about* because they have no idea how to use those prepositions. Although the theories have mentioned (Hideaki, 2021; Sanjaya & Bram, 2021) that a transitive verb needs an object. It is proven from the statements: *reply* + *to* and *beware* + *of*. As mentioned by (Denzilveigas & Wilson, 2021), students make grammatical errors and it can be seen through the repeated mistakes that they make during the learning process, especially in learning a foreign language such as English. Theoretically, as previously mentioned, there exist three types of preposition mistakes, namely missing prepositions, additional prepositions and incorrect ones.

## CONCLUSION

This research investigated accounting study program students' common misuse of prepositions. The findings showed three main misuses of prepositions, namely the misuses of the prepositions *to* and *of*, the additions of

unnecessary prepositions *about* and *to*, and the omission of the preposition *to*. Some issues of prepositions and adjectives or verbs included the following: *married* + *to*, *jealous* + *of*, *reply* + *to*, *discuss* (without *about*), and *thank* (without *to*). The participants mistakenly chose the prepositions that should follow the verbs, a transitive verb needs an object. Thus, the learners should notice the mistake and acknowledge it before they create the sentences.

Although the mother tongue affects the students' understanding of English grammar, the students should learn how to understand and use correct prepositions in their future spoken and written communications since they are going to write, for instance, their abstracts in English for their theses and other academic compositions (Fitria, 2021; Yuying, 2021).

This research also provides suggestions for both the students and teachers of English. The teachers should provide activities that enhance grammatical competency to improve their language skills. Teachers should also adapt and create creative teaching methods to engage the students in the learning process. Furthermore, students should aware of the importance of learning, understanding, and employing English prepositions in their writing and speaking. Students who are trying to improve their English should also be aware of the mistakes that they make and ask for their teachers' or fellow students' help if they find difficulties in the teaching and learning processes,

including challenges in using prepositions correctly.

### **IMPLICATION AND LIMITATION**

This research provides implications for students, thesis advisors, and future researchers who are interested in elaborating on this topic. Based on the results, English lecturers are encouraged to better motivate the students to pay more attention to English prepositions and provide more activities and relevant materials for the students to do and learn. The learning-teaching activities can cover adjectives and verbs followed by suitable prepositions. The lecturers can collect such adjectives, verbs, and relevant prepositions from internet sources. The students are expected to gain a better understanding of the usage of prepositions which can also help them to write their undergraduate thesis abstracts flawlessly. Future researchers who are interested in exploring this topic need to enlarge their sample data. The limitations of this research included the following: the small size of respondents, namely 23 participants, and relatively a small sample uses of prepositions taken from the participants' written responses to the items provided in the questionnaire.

Furthermore, the researchers did not observe the participants directly and only relied on the results of the questionnaire due to the limitation of time and sources which means that they only analysed the questionnaires' results and elaborated it using the theories in the literature review sections so the findings can be generalized. If it is possible, future

researchers who are interested in exploring the topic and investigating the problems should observe the participants directly. Moreover, the researchers also suggest that future researchers who are interested in expanding this topic can enlarge the sample area, such as involving two different majors. Future researchers can also utilize interviews with the selected participants by employing interpretative phenomenological analysis or IPA which was proposed by (Johnson & Christensen, 2013) to obtain the participants' experiences. IPA is a new kind of conceptualization that observe specific lived experiences. Thus, the findings can be generalized and provide new insight into the related topic.

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The first author, AAAM, collected data, drafted, revised, and completed this paper. The second and corresponding author, BB, provided the paper topic, gave comments and feedback to improve the draft, rewrote some sections, refined the idea flow, smoothed the English language, and finalized the paper for

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