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Identification of the errors regarding prepositions usage in students of the  
Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad  
Industrial de Santander

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Research Project

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UNIVERSIDAD INDUSTRIAL DE SANTANDER  
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ESCUELA DE IDIOMAS  
LICENCIATURA EN INGLÉS  
BUCARAMANGA  
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Research Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Project Director:  
Professor M.A. Alberto Vergara Herrera

UNIVERSIDAD INDUSTRIAL DE SANTANDER  
FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS HUMANAS  
ESCUELA DE IDIOMAS  
LICENCIATURA EN INGLÉS  
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## RESÚMEN

### TÍTULO\*1:

Identificación de los errores de preposiciones en los estudiantes del curso de Inglés Intermedio Alto del programa de Licenciatura en Inglés de la Universidad Industrial de Santander

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### PALABRAS CLAVE:

Preposiciones, uso incorrecto, omisión, adición.

### DESCRIPCIÓN:

Este trabajo analiza el uso de preposiciones por los alumnos del curso de Inglés Intermedio Alto del Programa de Licenciatura en Inglés de la Universidad Industrial de Santander. Tiene como base un estudio cuantitativo cuyos resultados serán analizados cualitativamente para averiguar los casos más comunes de errores de preposiciones. 26 estudiantes pertenecientes a los 2 grupos del curso de Inglés Intermedio Alto fueron seleccionados para ser parte de este estudio, y sólo 20 de ellos aceptaron ser parte de éste a través de una carta de consentimiento. Los datos de esta investigación fueron recolectados de la sección de Producción Escrita perteneciente a los 3 exámenes que los estudiantes toman a lo largo del semestre. 54 composiciones escritas fueron recolectadas y organizadas en tres corpus para su posterior análisis, el cual fue hecho manualmente y sin ayuda alguna de software u otras herramientas electrónicas.

Los resultados cuantitativos muestran que 13 preposiciones (to, on, about, in, of, at, for, from, with, by, above, because of, into) fueron erróneamente utilizadas en un total de 71 errores de preposiciones identificados. Por otra parte, la preposición *to* resultó ser la más problemática ya que fue indebidamente utilizada en 24 de los 71 errores identificados. Además, se encontró que el error más común fue el uso incorrecto de preposiciones el cual se presentó 30 veces, mientras que la omisión de preposiciones apareció 25 veces y la adición de preposiciones se produjo 16 veces.

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<sup>1</sup> Trabajo de Grado

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TITLE\*<sup>3</sup>:**

Identification of the errors regarding prepositions usage in students of the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander

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### **KEY WORDS:**

Preposition, misuse, addition, and omission.

### **DESCRIPTION:**

This paper analyzes the use of prepositions by the students of the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander. It has as a basis a quantitative study whose results will be analyzed qualitatively to find out common cases of errors of prepositions. 26 students enrolled in the 2 Upper Intermediate English course groups were selected to be part of this study, only 20 of them agreed to participate by signing a consent letter. The data for this research was collected from the Writing Production section of the 3 exams students took during the semester. 54 pieces of writing were collected and organized into three sets of corpora for their further analysis, which was done manually and without using any software or other electronic tools.

Quantitative findings showed 13 prepositions (to, on, about, in, of, at, for, from, with, by, above, because of, into) were found to be wrongly used in a total of 71 errors of prepositions identified. Moreover, the preposition *to* results to be the most problematic one since it happened to be the wrongly used preposition in 24 of the 71 errors identified. Out of this it was found that the most common error was the misuse of prepositions which was present 30 different times, while the omission of prepositions appeared 25 different times, and the addition of prepositions occurred 16 different times.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### ***1.1 Statement of the problem***

Writing implies a wide variety of requirements, among them the use of prepositions. Prepositions are reported to be used improperly due to the fact that they play so many complex roles, and their choice is largely constrained by its object (Chodorow, Tetreault, and Han, 2007). According to the literature reviewed, the use of prepositions is one of the most difficult areas when learning a language and most of the times the wrong use of them changes the meaning of a sentence.

### ***1.2 Justification***

This study on prepositions will help both teachers and students to understand concepts, definitions, and problems related to their use. For teachers it is a tool that may work as a document to be informed about the common uses that students make of prepositions and the most problematic ones. From the analysis of the errors of prepositions, a reflection could be done on how to deal with the difficulties that may arise when students of the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT program at Universidad Industrial de Santander use prepositions and the way teachers are used to teaching them to make learning easier and more effective. However, we know that it is impossible to predict all the specific mistakes learners can make.

This paper could also be helpful for students of English interested in trying to avoid that kind of mistakes or paying more attention to those problematic prepositions. Although it is necessary that students have a level of autonomy, it

could be used as a useful tool when either learning or correcting the use they give to prepositions in general.

This research analyzes the written part that students are asked to do in all of the three Upper Intermediate English course exams from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander. As this is one of the ways they can show their knowledge of the language, it is considered a good opportunity to work on and do an analysis of the data in order to identify the most common mistakes and students' weaknesses when using prepositions.

Considering the fact that the researchers did not have access to studies carried out with L1 Spanish writers of English and their use of prepositions, it is suspected that this kind of research has not been carried out or probably it has not been published. So, this paper may also set the path to start this series of works. It is expected that both teachers and students can take advantage of this study and future researchers can continue working on this topic or related ones.

## **2. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

### ***2.1 General Objective***

To analyze the use of prepositions by students of the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander

### ***2.2 Specific Objectives***

To identify what prepositions are wrongly used by students of the Upper Intermediate English Course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander.

To determine the most problematic prepositions for students of the Upper Intermediate English Course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander.

### ***2.3 Research questions***

What prepositions are wrongly used by students of the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander?

What are the most problematic prepositions for students of the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander?

### 3. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 Prepositions

##### 3.1.1 Definition

A preposition is a word which opens up the possibilities of saying more about a thing or an action. According to Sinclair (1991), 'prepositions help us indicate the place where an action occurs, the place where someone or something is, the place they are going to or coming from, or the direction they are moving in'. This usually involves using a prepositional phrase as an adjunct, consisting of preposition and its object which is nearly always a noun group.

The name preposition means 'place before'. Thus prepositions usually precede another word or words, especially a noun or noun phrases. Chalker (1984) affirms: 'There are important exceptions to this position rule, but prepositions are always closely linked syntactically to another word – and this is one way in which they differ from adverbs'.

##### 3.1.2 Classification

Most prepositions are single words, although there are some that consist of more than one word, such as *out of* and *in between*.

###### 3.1.2.1 Simple/One word Prepositions

Sinclair (1991) proposes the following list of common one-word prepositions which are used to talk about place or destination:

about	between	over
above	beyond	past
across	in by	within
along	down	round
among	from	through
around	inside	throughout
at	into	to
before	near	towards
behind	off	under
below	on	underneath
beneath	opposite	up
beside	outside	

### ***3.1.2.2 Compound Prepositions***

Furthermore, Sinclair (1991) presents another list of prepositions which consists of more than one word and those words are used to talk about a place or destination:

ahead of	in front of
all over	near to
away from	next to
close by	on top of
close to	out of

in between	
------------	--

### **3.1.3 Types of prepositions**

According to Chalker (1984), 'A major use of prepositions is to relate things or people in various ways in place and time. Many of them apply to both place and time, with very similar meanings'. Some of these place/time prepositions lead their meaning to figurative uses, even though some possess other meanings as well.

Nevertheless, and taking into account that prepositions indicate the different relations which are found between things mentioned in a sentence, they are usually classified into the categories of place, time, direction, for introducing objects and for spatial relationships.

Berry and Brizee (2010) propose the following charts to describe both uses and meanings of prepositions:

#### **3.1.3.1 Prepositions of place**

- To express notions of place, English uses the following prepositions: to talk about the point itself: **in**, to express something contained: **inside**, to talk about the surface: **on**, to talk about a general vicinity, **at**.
- To express notions of an object being higher than a point, English uses the following prepositions: **over, above**.
- To express notions of an object being lower than a point, English uses the following prepositions: **under, underneath, beneath, below**.
- To express notions of an object being close to a point, English uses the following prepositions: **near, by, next to, between, among, opposite**.

### **3.1.3.2 Prepositions of Time**

- **On, at, in** indicate one point in time.
- To express extended time, English uses the following prepositions: **since, for, by, from—to, from-until, during,(with)in**

### **3.1.3.3 Prepositions of Direction**

- The basic preposition of a direction is "to."

**TO:** signifies orientation toward a goal. When the goal is physical, such as a destination, "to" implies movement in the direction of the goal.

- The other two prepositions of direction are compounds formed by adding "to" to the corresponding prepositions of location.

The preposition of location determines the meaning of the preposition of direction.

**ON + TO** = onto: signifies movement toward a surface

**IN + TO** = into: signifies movement toward the interior of a volume

("To" is part of the directional preposition toward, and the two mean about the same thing.)

- With many verbs of motion, "on" and "in" have a directional meaning and can be used along with "onto" and "into".

### **3.1.3.4 Prepositions to Introduce Objects of Verbs**

English uses the following prepositions to introduce objects of the following verbs.

At: glance, laugh, look, rejoice, smile, stare.

- **Of: approve, consist, smell**

- **Of (or about):** *dream, think*
- **For:** *call, hope, look, wait, watch, wish*

### **3.1.3.5 Prepositions of Spatial Relationship**

- **Above** in or to a higher position than something else
- **Across** from one side to the other of something with clear limits, such as an area of land, a road or river
- **Against** next to and touching or being supported by something
- **Ahead of** in front
- **Along** from one part of a road, river, etc. to another
- **Among** in the middle of or surrounded by other things.
- **Around** in a position or direction surrounding, or in a direction going along the edge of or from one part to another (of).
- **Behind** at the back (of).
- **Below** at the back (of).
- **Beneath** in or to a lower position than, under.
- **Beside** at the side of, next to.
- **Between** in or into the space which separates two places, people or objects.
- **From** to be born, got from, or made in a particular place.
- **In front of** the part of a building, object or person's body which faces forward or which is most often seen or used.
- **Inside in** or into a room, building, container, or something similar.
- **Near** not far away in distance.
- **Off** used with actions in which something is removed or removes itself from another thing.
- **Out of** used to show movement away from the inside of a place or container.

- **Through** from one end or side of something to the other.
- **Toward** in the direction of, or closer to someone or something.
- **Under** in or to a position below or lower than something else, often so that one thing covers the other.
- **Within** inside or not further than an area or period of time.

### **3.2 Preposition Errors**

According to Burt et al (1982), there are different types of errors students can make when producing sentences. The following classification is used as a reference for identifying errors in the use of prepositions.

#### **3.2.1 Misuse**

Misuse errors are characterized by the incorrect presence of an item in an utterance, it means, when an element inside a sentence is wrongly substituted for another one from the same category. For this study, **misuse** refers to the case when within a sentence any preposition is used instead of the correct one.

#### **3.2.2 Omission**

Omission errors are characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance. In other words, an omission error is made when within a sentence the producer leaves out an element necessary for its correct understanding. In this work, **omission** refers to the case when the writer does not include the preposition that is necessary for the correct interpretation of the sentence.

#### **3.2.3 Addition**

Addition errors are the opposite of omission errors. They are characterized by the presence of an item which must not appear in a well-formed utterance. In this document, **addition** refers to the case when the writer includes a preposition that should not be present in a sentence.

### ***3.3 Previous Research on Prepositions***

Learning a second language is considered as a complex process with its corresponding difficulties. According to Krashen (1988) there are two independent systems of second language performance: “the acquired system” and “the learned system”. The “acquired system” or “acquisition” is the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act. The “learned system” or “learning” is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge “about” the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules. Managing prepositions is a task related to the acquisition and learning process, apart from dealing with their meaning and communicative aspect, the learner must be aware of the grammatical rules that govern them.

Some authors have written documents pointing out the difficulties when learning a foreign language and they have found that one cause is mother tongue interference. Habash (1982) focused her attention on prepositions as one of the most difficult areas of foreign language acquisition. The main objective was to investigate the causes of errors in the use of English prepositions that are frequently made by Arabic - speaking students. She finally found that the main factor was interference from Arabic. This was because students found more difficulty in learning English patterns that are similar to their own language than learning the ones that are completely different. It also happened because of the

literal translation, substitution, deletion, and redundancy that students do before they form English patterns.

Moreover, Blom (2006) emphasises the difficulties students have when learning English prepositions. She talked about the analysis she made with two courses of ninth-grade Swedish students trying to find out if students performed better when they were given answers to choose from or when they had to produce the preposition by themselves. She found nine prepositions that are particularly frequent in errors: **to**, **in**, **at**, **of**, **for**, **about**, **on**, **by** and **with**. Her study proved that learners resorted to Swedish when they did not know the correct answer. This strategy results in positive or negative transfer depending on the similarities of the languages. Prepositions used in Swedish sometimes have two or more equivalents in English, which also contributes to the complexity of the matter.

On the other hand, some researchers have been concentrated on the use of software for analyzing English preposition errors made by EFL learners, as was the case of Chodorow, Tetreault, and Han (2007) that described a methodology for creating software that detects English preposition errors and found it performed with high precision (84%). They tested their own software with writing samples from EFL students and found that the most common prepositions that learners used incorrectly were **in** (21.4%), **to** (20.8%) and **of** (16.6%). Next, they ranked the common preposition “confusions”, the common mistakes made for each preposition. The top ten most common confusions were in cases where no preposition is licensed (the writer used an extraneous preposition). The most common offenses were actually extraneous errors.

In addition to them, Husain, Misra, and Reddy (2007) described an approach to automatically select from Indian Language the appropriate lexical correspondence of English simple preposition. Their paper described this task from

a Machine Translation (MT) perspective. They used the properties of the head and complement of the preposition to select the appropriate sense in the target language. The testing of the machine was done with six prepositions they consider to have high frequency **at**, **for**, **in**, **on**, **to**, and **with**, finding that it worked with a precision up to 70%. They also found that the errors made by this device were generated from special constructions, metonymy, and ambiguous sentences.

Taking a different focus, other researchers attempted to work with different methods and approaches when teaching prepositions. Bond and Hayashi (2006) found out that it is difficult for any student to memorize all the usages and meaning of the prepositions in the English language, but an understanding of the way they function is crucial. Their results showed that inductive learning in the form of memorizing prepositions has occurred overtime. But the results also showed that a basic understanding of the various words and how they work in a sentence lacks for many students. Thus they proposed that students need either to be immersed into an English speaking atmosphere or go through an English learning process both deductive and inductive.

Regarding the prototype theory, Leung (1992) analyzed the pros and cons this theory can have. He stated that students can take advantage of the different polysemous items, and in this specific situation, the word **over**. He illustrated Lakoff's (1987) summary and discussion of Brugman's (1983) study of the preposition **over** in thirteen different examples where this preposition is used in several grammatical categories (e.g., preposition, particle, adverb, prefix, etc.). He also said that it seemed metaphor has an important role to play in helping people to make sense of the world, and the study of metaphorical mode of thought may lead to the use of interpretative processes that belong to the greater domain of human cognition, which is cross-disciplinary and more general.

The studies on prepositions mentioned above confirm that there have been many studies on prepositions from different perspectives. However, in the case of Spanish speaker students of English as a foreign or second language, more specifically Colombian students, it is suspected that no research has been carried out on the topic of prepositions, since no papers have been found probably because they have not been published or it is difficult to have access to them. This research therefore, limits the review to the studies carried out in other languages mentioned in the previous paragraphs. It is the hope of the researchers that the current study provides insights for further research in this country.

## **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### ***4.1 Sampling***

The sampling of this study was chosen taking into account the following criteria: due to the fact that the third exam from the Advanced English Course from the ELT program at Universidad Industrial de Santander (the highest EFL level course) is applied by the UIS Language Institute, and neither the head teacher of the course nor the researchers could have access to it, the Upper Intermediate English Course from the ELT program at Universidad Industrial de Santander becomes the highest EFL level course where all of the three exams taken by students can be analyzed.

This investigation used the entire population due to its number of members. In this particular case the population was made up of any Colombian undergraduate student in Universidad Industrial de Santander, who was enrolled in the Upper Intermediate English Course in the period of one semester. Thus, this number corresponded to the 26 Colombian undergraduate students in Universidad Industrial de Santander, whose mother tongue was Spanish, who were enrolled in the Upper Intermediate English Course during the second semester of 2009. After signing a consent letter only 20 students agreed to be part of the present study (See appendix 1).

### ***4.2 Instrument***

In order to carry out this study, the researchers decided to have as a basis a quantitative study whose results were analyzed qualitatively to find out common cases of errors of prepositions. Due to the fact that the data was going to be collected from exams, and they were not typed, the analysis was not done through any technological resource but on the researchers' own.

Relating to the quantitative phase, three sets of corpora were included as sources of data. The first corpus (corresponding to the first exam) consisted of 20 pieces of writing (See appendix 2), the second corpus (corresponding to the second exam) consisted of 20 pieces of writing (See appendix 3), and the third corpus (corresponding to the third and final exam) consisted of 14 pieces of writing, respectively (See appendix 4). The pieces of writing where data was collected from were produced in the Writing Production Section of the three exams students enrolled in the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander had to take for assessment during the second semester of 2009. The third corpus only contained 14 pieces of writing given that 6 of the students that had agreed to be part of the this study were exonerated from taking the Writing Production section of the third exam due to the high grades they got in the first and second exams.

### ***4.3 Procedure***

26 students from the two Upper Intermediate English group (one of 17 students and other with 9 students) enrolled in the second semester of 2009 were chosen to take part of this study. They were asked to sign a consent letter. Then, the written part of the first, second, and third exam was collected. Any piece of information related to the students' profile (name, code, and group) was not taken into account for the present study, so the collected exams were scanned and that kind of information was erased. After this, the exams, in which students' personal information was erased, were printed out and organized in the same three sets of

corpora mentioned above. Then, the exams in each set of corpora were given a number so that the researchers could keep a record of the data that was going to be analyzed.

To collect the data necessary for this study each exam was checked by the three researchers in order to ensure the reliability of the procedure. The corrections made by the head teacher of the course were not taken into account at the moment of choosing the samples since the researchers did not know if the students were asked or not to use specific structures, words, or expressions. When collecting the data only the incorrect sentences where the preposition error was the one that determined if the sentence was correct or not, were considered as the samples to be analyzed.

The incorrect sentences were written down in the *Data Collection Chart* following the order in which they appeared in the exams (See appendix 5). In the first column "**EXAM**" was written the number of the exam where the incorrect sentence was taken from and in the second column "**SAMPLE**" the sentence that was found to be incorrect in. Then, in the third column "**PREPOSITION ERROR**" was written the preposition that occurred to be wrongly used, and in the fourth column "**CORRECT PREPOSITION**" was written the preposition students should have used. The fifth column "**CORRECT SENTENCE**" was designed for writing the version of the sample including the use of the right preposition.

The symbol "Ø" was employed to represent the absence of a preposition. When "Ø" appeared in the third column, it referred to an omission error (see 3.2.2), and when "Ø" appeared in the fourth column, it meant that a preposition must not be used to have a correct sentence (See *Addition Errors* 3.2.3).

## 5. FINDINGS

After analyzing the data, the following results were obtained.

<b>PREPOSITION</b>	<b>TIMES MISUSED</b>	<b>TIMES OMITTED</b>	<b>TIMES ADDED</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
to	3	16	5	24
on	8	--	--	8
about	4	1	1	6
in	2	1	3	6
of	1	2	3	6
at	1	--	3	4
for	2	1	1	4
from	2	2	--	4
with	2	2	--	4
by	2	--	--	2
above	1	--	--	1
because of	1	--	--	1
into	1	--	--	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>71</b>

**Table 1. General results**

Table 1 shows the general results obtained after analyzing the data. The first column ***“PREPOSITIONS”*** refers to the prepositions that were found to be wrongly used by the students enrolled in the Upper Intermediate English course

from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander. The second, third, and fourth column refer to the times each one of those prepositions were found to be misused, omitted, and added respectively. The last column refers to the total number of times each preposition was found to be wrongly used. The last cell of the second, third, and fourth columns show the total number of times prepositions were found misused, omitted, and added respectively. Finally, the last cell of the last column shows the total number of times where a preposition error was found in the samples taken from analyzed exams.

Thirteen prepositions were found to be wrongly used by the students enrolled in the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander: **to**, **on**, **about**, **in**, **of**, **at**, **for**, **from**, **with**, **by**, **above**, **because of**, **into**.

The preposition **to** was found to be misused **3** times, omitted **16** times, and added **5** times, what corresponds to a total of **24** times wrongly used, while **on** was found to be only **8** times misused.

Also, three prepositions were found to be wrongly used **6** times each one of them. **About** was misused **4** times, omitted **1** time, and added **1** time; **in** appeared to be misused **2** times, omitted **1** time, and added **3** times; while **of** was misused **1** time, omitted **2** times, and added **3** times.

In addition to the previous findings, another group of prepositions: **at**, **for**, **from**, and **with** occurred to be used in a wrong way **4** times each one of them. **At** was misused **1** time and added **3** times; **for** was misused **2** times, omitted **1** time, and added **1** time; **from** was misused **2** times and omitted **2** times; whereas **with** was misused **2** times and added **2** times.

Finally, the preposition **by** was found to be only **2** times misused, and the prepositions **above**, **because of**, and **into** happened to appear only misused **1** time each one of them.

Table 2 shows the prepositions that were misused by the students enrolled in the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander. In the first column appear the prepositions that occurred to be misused, and in the second column the prepositions that the misused ones were substituted for. The preposition **on** was wrongly replaced by **in 3** times, and by **of, to/of, from, of,** and **by 1** time each one. **About** was replaced by **in** and **of 2** times each one. The preposition **to** was found to be replaced by **at, in,** and **of 1** time each one of them. The preposition **by** was replaced by **for 2** times. The preposition **for** was replaced by **of** and **to**. The preposition **from** was replaced 1 time by **of** and 1 time by **since**. The preposition **in** was replaced by **on** and **at** one time each one. **With** was replaced 1 time by **about** and 1 by **to**. **Above** was replaced by **before 1** time. The preposition **at** was replaced by **in,** and **because of** by **for 1** time each one. **Into** was replaced 1 time by the two separated prepositions **in/to**. Finally, the preposition **of** was replaced 1 time by **off**.

<b>MISUSED PREPOSITION</b>	<b>Preposition Students used instead of the correct one</b>
on	in(3), of, to/of, from, of, by
about	in(2), of(2)
to	at, in, of
by	for(2)
for	of, to
from	of, since
in	on, at
with	about, to
above	before
at	in
because of	for

into	in/to
of	off

**Table 2. Misused prepositions**

## 6. DISCUSSION

From the quantitative analysis of the use of prepositions, a number of errors were identified. First, it will be discussed the ones that were found to be more problematic. Then, the ones that were misused and the prepositions students used instead of the correct ones, the omitted and finally the added ones. These cases are of research interest as well as pedagogical importance. Examples of these errors in the writings can be found in the following section.

### 6.1 Most problematic prepositions

Table 1 presents the prepositions that were more problematic according to the times they were wrongly used by students. The first place is for the preposition **to** with **24** errors. The second place is for **on** with **8**. The third place is for **about, in** and **of** with **6** errors each. The fourth place, with **4** errors, is for the prepositions **at, for, from,** and **with** each one of them. The fifth place is for **by** with **2** errors and finally, the prepositions **above, because of** and **into** with **1** error each.

### 6.2 Misused and prepositions used instead of the correct ones

Table 2 presents the prepositions that were misused and the ones that they used instead of the correct ones. The first preposition is **on** and was replaced by **in** **3** times, **of, to/of, from, of,** and **by**. The preposition **about** replaced by **in** and **of** twice each, **to** by **at, in,** and **of**. The preposition **by** was replaced by **for** twice. The preposition **for** was replaced by **of** and **to; from** by **of** and **since; in** was replaced by **on** and **at, with** by **about** and **to**. **Above** was replaced by **before; at** by **in,**

*because of* by *for*; *into* by the two separated prepositions *in/to* and finally, the preposition *of* was replaced by *off*.

### **6.3 Omitted prepositions**

When talking about omitted prepositions, table 1 shows that the preposition *to* was 16 times omitted while the others, i.e. *of*, *from* and *with* 2 times each and the prepositions *about*, *in* and *for* were found 1 time each one. The total of prepositions omitted were seven from the whole sample.

### **6.4 Added prepositions**

The number of prepositions added was the smallest one. Only six prepositions were found and they are: *to* 5 times; *at*, *in* and *of* 3 times each, and *about* and *for* 1 time each.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

After carrying out this study on prepositions and analyzing the data obtained during the process, the researchers reached some conclusions.

First, thirteen prepositions were found to be wrongly used by the students enrolled in the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander: **to, on, about, in, of, at, for, from, with, by, above, because of, into**. Out of this it was found that the most common error was the misuse of prepositions which is present in 30 different occasions. The prepositions which were misused are **to, on, about, in, of, at, for, from, with, by, above, because of, and into**. Following it is the omission of prepositions which is found 25 different times. The prepositions which were omitted are **to, about, in, of, for, from** and **with**. Finally, there were found 16 different sentences with incorrect addition of prepositions. The prepositions wrongly added are **to, about, in, of, and for**.

Concerning the most problematic prepositions for students of the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander, it was found that the first place is for the preposition **to**, which is found **3** times misused, **16** times omitted, and **5** times added.

The second place is for **on**, which is **8** times misused. The third place is for **about, in** and **of**. **About** is **4** times misused, **1** time omitted and **1** time added. **In** is **2** times misused, **1** time omitted and **3** times added, whereas **of** is **1** time misused, **2** times omitted and **3** times added respectively.

**At, for, from,** and **with,** are in the fourth place. **At** was **1** *time misused* and **3** times added. **For** was **2** times misused, **1** time omitted and **1** time added. **From** was **2** times misused and **2** times omitted, as was **with.** **By** is found just **2** times misused in the fifth place. Finally **above, because of,** and **into** were just **1** time misused each in the sixth place.

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## **APPENDIX 1 (Consent letter)**



Bucaramanga, February 24th, 2010

IDENTIFICATION OF THE ERRORS REGARDING PREPOSITIONS USAGE IN  
STUDENTS OF THE UPPER INTERMEDIATE ENGLISH COURSE FROM THE ELT  
PROGRAM AT UNIVERSIDAD INDUSTRIAL DE SANTANDER

Writing implies a wide variety of requirements, among them the use of prepositions. Prepositions are reported to be used improperly due to the fact that they play so many complex roles, and its choice is largely constrained by its object.

You are asked to be part of a research project. The purpose of this project is to identify what prepositions are wrongly used by you, students of the Upper Intermediate English course from the ELT Program at Universidad Industrial de Santander. To determine this, we, as the authors of the project, need your consent to use your exams, which are going to be analyzed. The written section of the exam is the only one that will be part of the analysis.

All the information from the exams will be strictly confidential and used only for the analysis. Remember that your participation on this project is voluntary; it means you can refuse to be part of it. If not, you can sign as a proof of your consent.

Thanks for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

*Viviana Caballero Estévez*  
VIVIANA CABALLERO ESTÉVEZ

*Jorge A. Gómez G*  
JORGE AUGUSTO GÓMEZ

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Higinio F. de Narváez

(se entregaron los exámenes escritos)

## APPENDIX 2 (First exam)

### Writing Exam

Most young people from Bucaramanga dislike going <sup>to</sup> church on Sundays, maybe because they are too lazy or they have something better to do; therefore you can see the church's seats empty or occupied ~~for by~~ old people, or perhaps with few young s. Moreover, young people believe that going to church is an old-fashioned and boring plan to <sup>be</sup> followed. Despite this new generation belonging <sup>to</sup> a catholic family, they have an 'open-minded', according to them, and families cannot <sup>oblige</sup> obligated them to go to church if they don't want. In addition, young <sup>people</sup> prefer <sup>to</sup> having fun all the time and forget <sup>about</sup> their spiritual part. Finally, I can say that most young people dislike ~~at all~~ going church ~~at all~~.

EXAM 1.12

### APPENDIX 3 (Second exam)

Why the legality of ~~the~~ <sup>will</sup> abortion <sup>you</sup> will be a double moral decision.

One of the hugest debates of this century has been ~~the~~ <sup>there are those</sup> abortion. No one seems to agree <sup>with</sup> a position about this, it ~~has~~ <sup>there are those</sup> who defend the legality that <sup>abortion</sup> should have, and also ~~who~~ <sup>there are those</sup> who is against of this practice. But, why <sup>we</sup> should be against this?

Well, there are a lot of reasonable reasons to ~~disapprove~~ <sup>disapprove</sup> this practice; in this text we are going to expose two.

For years, since we started to be more "humanistic" all people have defend <sup>ed</sup> the idea of respect <sup>ing</sup> the others life and actually the punishment for a crime, such as murder, goes ~~since~~ <sup>from</sup> 40 year in prison to a life sentence. Scientists have proved that when the fecundation has been done, we can say that this is a human being for the complexity of this process. So, if we punish a murder <sup>er</sup> of person ~~that has been born~~ <sup>a baby</sup>, why shouldn't we punish any kind of murder?

Another reason is the huge risk <sup>in</sup> this practice ~~for the mother's life~~ <sup>for the mother's life</sup>. The studies <sup>had</sup> prove that even in the best conditions ~~there is~~ <sup>there is</sup> a 70% of probabilities that the mother will die during the process.

In conclusion, even when the defend <sup>ers</sup> of abortion has their own arguments for ~~approve~~ <sup>approve</sup> this practice, they <sup>?</sup> will be in a contradiction and if the laws change in favor of this practice that will be an act of hipocrisy, because we will be allowing the murder <sup>ers</sup> of those that can not defend by ~~their own~~ <sup>consensus</sup>.

EXAM 2.16

#### APPENDIX 4 (Third exam)

FIRST OF ALL I HAVE TO SAY THAT I'M A FAN OF LIVING ALONE AND IN MY OPINION THIS HAS MORE ADVANTAGES THAN DISADVANTAGES. FOR EXAMPLE, YOU CAN DO MANY THINGS LIKE LISTENING TO MUSIC LOUD, WATCH THE CHANNEL THAT YOU WANT AND EVEN GO AROUND YOUR HOUSE IN UNDERWEAR FOR ME IS AWESOME! BUT MAYBE, SOMETIMES YOU NEED <sup>someone</sup> COMPANY TO SHARE A MEAL OR JUST TO TALK WHEN YOU ARRIVE HOME AND ASK FOR HOW WAS YOUR DAY. THAT WILL BE NICE TOO.

IF YOU ARE ALONE IN YOUR HOUSE YOU CAN SPEND MORE TIME DOING THE THINGS THAT YOU LIKE THE MOST. I MEAN YOU HAVE MORE TIME FOR YOURSELF. YOU ~~wouldn't~~ <sup>won't</sup> MIND ABOUT THE MESS BECAUSE IS YOUR MESS. SO YOU'LL HAVE LESS THINGS TO WORRY ABOUT

On IN THE OTHER HAND, IF YOU LIVE WITH SOMEBODY YOU HAVE TO BE MORE PATIENT AND COMPREHENSIVE BECAUSE NOT EVERYBODY LIKES THE SAME THINGS. MAYBE YOU MUST ADAPT YOUR LIFESTYLE TO SOME RULES AND THIS ISN'T SOMETHING EASY TO DEAL WITH

IN CONCLUSION, FOR ME I LIKE TO BE MY ONLY RESPONSIBILITY. I LIKE THE TIME I COULD SPEND IN MY OWN AT HOME DOING THINGS THAT ARE THE BEST FOR ME. LIVING IN MY OWN MESS AND UNDER MY OWN RULES.

EXAM 3.14

## APPENDIX 5 (Data Collection Chart)

EXAM	SAMPLE	PREPOSITION ERROR	CORRECT PREPOSITION	CORRECT SENTENCE
1.1	...one of the reasons of this phenomenon...	of	for	...one of the reasons for this phenomenon...
1.2	...causing the students be stressed...	∅	to	...causing the students to be stressed...
1.3	...you're not only getting good clothes in good prices...	In	at	...you're not only getting good clothes at good prices...
1.4	...stay in other places apart work...	∅	from	...stay in other places apart from work...
1.5	...you can listen all kinds of vallenato...	∅	to	...you can listen to all kinds of vallenato...
1.7	...or they can go to there with them...	to	∅	...or they can go there with them...
1.11	...they are unplugged of the world...	of	from	...they are unplugged from the world...
1.12	...people from Bucaramanga dislike going church on Sundays...	∅	to	...people from Bucaramanga dislike going to church on Sundays...
1.12	...you can see the church's seats empty or occupied for old people...	for	by	...you can see the church's seats empty or occupied by old people...
1.12	...and forget their spiritual part...	∅	about	...and forget about their spiritual part...
1.12	...most young people dislike going church...	∅	to	...most young people dislike going to church...
1.14	...has become in one of the most popular activities...	in	∅	...has become one of the most popular activities...
1.16	...Christmas is a part of the year when everybody is in holidays...	in	on	...Christmas is a part of the year when everybody is on holidays...
1.18	...going shopping has become in an excellent way of having fun...	in	∅	...going shopping has become an excellent way of having fun...
1.20	...the traffic in everywhere...	in	∅	...the traffic everywhere...

1.20	...when they arrive at home...	at	∅	...when they arrive home...
1.20	...so, businesswomen hate to arrive at home...	at	∅	...so, businesswomen hate to arrive home...
2.1	...if someone deserves live or not...	∅	to	...if someone deserves to live or not...
2.1	...abortion should be avoided in Colombia and all the world...	∅	in	...abortion should be avoided in Colombia and in all the world...
2.3	...try to find to a better solution...	to	∅	...try to find a better solution...
2.4	...it is the easiest way to get rid off a child...	off	of	...it is the easiest way to get rid of a child...
2.4	...thousands people...	∅	of	...thousands of people...
2.6	...having a baby is the most beautiful gift that God can give to a woman...	to	∅	...having a baby is the most beautiful gift that God can give a woman...
2.7	...that she now has a new life growing inside of her...	of	∅	...that she now has a new life growing inside her...
2.10	...people don't like to have children because the freedom...	∅	of	...people don't like to have children because of the freedom...
2.10	...it depends of where you are...	of	on	...it depends on where you are...
2.10	...and it also depends to of your behaviour...	to/of	on	...and it also depends on your behaviour...
2.10	...the best you can do is take care when you have a sexual relation...	∅	to	...the best you can do is to take care when you have a sexual relation...
2.11	...their families are waiting but not a miracle...	∅	for	...their families are waiting but not for a miracle...
2.11	...this is one of pro's to Euthanasia...	to	for	...this is one of pro's for Euthanasia...
2.11	...so it is supposed that euthanasia is a crime in God's eyes...	in	to	...so it is supposed that euthanasia is a crime to God's eyes...

2.11	...as I said before that depends from each family...	from	on	...as I said before that depends on each family...
2.12	...every person has a second opportunity of live...	of	to	...every person has a second opportunity to live...
2.12	...that could investigate other options about how save an impossible life...	∅	to	...that could investigate other options about how to save an impossible life...
2.13	...religious communities completely disagree about this practice...	about	with	...religious communities completely disagree with this practice...
2.13	...they argue that all the things happen for something...	for	because of	...they argue that all the things happen because of something...
2.13	...and they believe on miracles...	on	in	...and they believe in miracles...
2.13	...that abortion is the safest way to prevent the girl die...	∅	from	...that abortion is the safest way to prevent the girl from dying...
2.14	...the only thing we are doing at this world is suffering...	at	in	...the only thing we are doing in this world is suffering...
2.15	...you can think in it when you are sick...	In	about	...you can think about it when you are sick...
2.15	...all the people (...) have thought in death very rapidly...	in	about	...all the people (...) have thought about death very rapidly...
2.16	...no one seems to agree a position about this...	∅	with	...no one seems to agree with a position about this...
2.16	...and also the ones who are against of this practice...	of	∅	...and also the ones who are against this practice...
2.16	...and actually the punishment for a crime (...) goes since 40 years in prison to a life sentence...	since	from	...and actually the punishment for a crime (...) goes from 40 years in prison to a life sentence...
2.18	...nowadays it's common to listen people talking about abortion...	∅	to	Nowadays it's common to listen to people talking about abortion
2.19	...and the same as the reason before it is something...	before	above	...and the same as the reason above it is something...
2.22	...that should be considered only for the mum...	for	by	...that should be considered only by the mum...

2.23	...think of that...	of	about	...think about that...
3.1	... There are many people that say living alone makes them to focus their goals in a better way...	to	∅	... There are many people that say living alone makes them focus their goals in a better way...
3.1	...they say it's the best form for you get the top	∅	to (2)	...they say it's the best form for you to get to the top...
3.2	...but, how define which is the best way to live?...	∅	to	...but, how to define which the best way to live is?...
3.2	...unless you pay to someone...	to	∅	...unless you pay someone...
3.3	...but the only thing that they have to take in to account...	in / to	into	...but the only thing that they have to take into account...
3.5	...we are always thinking of renting an apartment...	of	about	...we are always thinking about renting an apartment...
3.6	...That depends of the person...	of	on	...that depends on the person...
3.6	...so it's up to each one recognize it...	∅	to	...so it's up to each one to recognize it...
3.7	...but the real question is about if it is a problem to live alone or not...	about	∅	...but the real question is if it is a problem to live alone or not...
3.7	...it can be too bad the fact that you do not have someone else to you...	to	with	...it can be too bad the fact that you do not have someone else with you...
3.8	...we still wear uniforms as the flag of an institution we belong at...	at	to	...we still wear uniforms as the flag of an institution we belong to...
3.9	...and arrive at home when you want...	at	∅	...and arrive home when you want...
3.10	...you don't have a person to talk or maybe...	∅	to	...you don't have a person to talk to or maybe...
3.11	...you don't have to do everything by your own...	by	on	...you don't have to do everything on your own...
3.11	...this is not about of leaving alone all your life...	of	∅	...this is not about leaving alone all your life...

3.12	...and I like be independent...	∅	to	...and I like to be independent...
3.12	...and my mother sometimes listens music...	∅	to	...and my mother sometimes listens to music...
3.12	...but in the other hand...	in	on	...but on the other hand...
3.13	...that to think everyday which clothes wear is also boring...	∅	to	...that to think everyday which clothes to wear is also boring...
3.14	...and ask for how your day was...	for	∅	...and ask how your day was...
3.14	...sometimes you need company to share a meal...	∅	with	...sometimes you need company to share a meal with...
3.14	...in the other hand...	in	on	...on the other hand...