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Investigating Mother Tongue Effect In The Acquisition Of English Prepositions By Indonesia-Speaking Learners

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ABSTRACT

The process of learning prepositions gets complicated most notably for learners of English as foreign language (EFL) because they encounter challenges in grasping the manifold meanings and dissimilar contextual applications. This study is aimed at identifying the sources of the difficulty that Indonesia learners of English undergo in learning preposition. To this end, a multiple-choice test was designed to gather data regarding the problems of acquiring and learning English prepositions by UNIRA students of English. The test comprised of fifteen questions. Each of the students was supposed to choose the best possible answer out of the choices from a list with the correct English preposition. In this study, method research design used is qualitative. The results suggest that the students meet considerable difficulties in using English prepositions. The students highly depend on their mother tongue, i.e. Indonesia language, which poses a source of command that enables the students in producing inappropriateness of preposition use.

1. Introduction

Learning a new language is a long-period process and it necessitates years of ceaseless practice. Learners of English are continuously uncovered to new subjects. One of the most problematic students in second or foreign language learning is applying the appropriate preposition. As affirmed by Estling Vannestål (2007) that a particular word category that is considered as notoriously problematic to acquire from any new language is prepositions. Indonesia learners of English undeniably strive for acquisition of prepositions, though Indonesia grammatical construction may have several grammatical resemblances with English structure. It is admitted that at least ten percent of highest 100 most frequent words used in English sentences contain prepositions (Xiao et al., 2018) then no doubt, there is a great amount of prepositions in the English language, and

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a number of them have a myriad number of meanings and uses. Prepositions also can heighten the problems of forming a cohesive description of the meaning of prepositions due to their highly polysemous meanings (Schneider et al., 2016). More to the point, the process of learning prepositions gets complicated most notably for learners of English as foreign language (EFL) because they encounter challenges in grasping the manifold meanings and dissimilar contextual applications. Those who experience the most complicated in learning and employing prepositions suitably are individuals who are not native speakers of the language. It is more likely owing to the distinctions between English and their mother tongue.

Accordingly, EFL Learners have many difficulties when employing English prepositions, regardless of their mother tongue. Prior research literature shows that difficulties persist for learners whose mother tongue is Chinese (Yuan, 2014), German (Rankin and Schiftner, 2011), Norwegian (Nacey and Graedler, 2015), Thai (Ruangjaroon, 2015). Indonesian seems to be no exception. In Wijaya and Ong's study (2018) revealed that Indonesian learners of English are not able to acquire prepositions that are not in their mother tongue and become a big problem for native speakers of Indonesian as their corresponding preposition is simply one word, i.e. *di*. However, there is a small amount research on mother tongue effect in the acquisition of English prepositions, with some investigations focusing on students in Madura, Part of East Java-Indonesia.

Prepositions in English, also called particles, are a never-ending problem for Indonesian learners of English. Indeed, they are notoriously difficult and do not cease to lead perplexity and uncertainty to Indonesian learners even at a fairly advanced level of learning. The reasons behind the phenomenon are multifarious. Firstly, the meanings an English preposition has are diverse, unpredictable and seem to be determined by the linguistic context in which the prepositions come about. English language contains over 100 prepositions, words that link nouns, pronouns, and phrases to other words in a sentence. English prepositions are tricky since they are utilized in a choice of situations and can show not only time and place, manner, purpose, state, agent but also condition.

Even worse, occasionally they can be utilized interchangeably, as in "sit in that chair, sit on that chair", however there are rules regarding how they are utilized. Secondly, divergent preposition employed with the same lexical word have divergent and quite often confusing meanings, such as look at, look on, look up, look into, look for, look after, etc. Thirdly, distinct word class of the same lexeme requires distinct prepositions. For instance, they sympathize with her, they feel a lot of sympathy for her, they sympathetic about her problem. Fourthly, numerous prepositions have abstract senses that are not provable and cannot be learned by association with obviously defined part of speech. For instance beyond which can have meaning: a. Further away (e.g: Their dwelling is just beyond the bridge). b. Outside or a stated limit (e.g: They did so well - beyond all their expectations). c. Not understand (e.g: They are afraid physics is completely beyond me).

Lastly, in English preposition learning, it is acknowledged that those who teach prepositions, even as likely speakers of English, are not able to offer a logical explanation for the occurrence of such prepositions or a conceptual guide of their uses. It is essential to comprehend that learners of English will never master English prepositions through the use of logic. It is because languages do not have abundant logic. The linguistic phenomenon, inherent to humans, has their same features, as in complex, irregular, puzzling, and in constant evolution. Besides, a language structure is so complex and abstract to be categorized a summarized in just a set of conventions.

Indonesia learners of English undergo difficulties with the use of appropriate prepositions because a number of them do not exist in their mother tongue, which is Indonesia. There are scores of reasons for the inappropriate of prepositions, one of which is the absence of practices them in curriculum. Besides, preposition in Indonesia language has different system from English preposition. In Indonesian, to state precise position or time, users of Indonesia language may choose *di* which is equal to *in*, *on*, and *at* in English. Examples of *di* use in Indonesia language: Mereka duduk di kursi berlengan (in English: they sit in an armchair), Mereka tinggal di jalan Pangeranan (in English: They live on Pangeranan street), Mereka bertemu di tempat kerja (in English: They met at work). In short, one Indonesia preposition such as *di* stands for more than one English preposition: *in*, *on*, and *at*. Unlike the structure, Indonesian and English prepositions are divergent in some extent. In Indonesia language, there is no rule of employing preposition of time, such as *pada*. They can be employed to mention year (e.g: *pada* tahun 2009), month (e.g: *pada* bulan Agustus), and day (e.g: *pada* hari Senin). In brief, preposition of time *pada* in Indonesia can be used freely whether it indicates year, month or day.

However, prepositions of time in English such as *in*, *on*, and *at* which express distinct range of time concept (Quirk, 2010) are different from the use of Indonesia prepositions. Preposition *in* indicates longer time associated with year or month (e.g: In England, it frequently snows in December). Preposition *on* shows for shorter time as day or week (e.g: Few shops do not open on Sundays.). Whilst preposition *at* suggests shorter time than a day or hour (e.g: His last class ends at 10 o'clock). Prepositions *in*, *on*, and *at* can't be used freely. For example *in* can't be used to mention day *in Friday or to mention hour *in 2 o'clock. They have rules in their usage. Besides, in English, one preposition may comprise various meaning but in Indonesia language, one preposition may comprise one meaning.

It seems that such situations are perplexing for Indonesia learners of English and due to its various meaning, it can trigger off myriad troubles for learners of English (AlQbailat, Al-Momani and Almahameed, 2016; Özbay & Bozkurt, 2017) and it is even regarded as the most challenging factor in learning English language (Gvarishvil, 2013). Prepositions in English have a wide assortment of senses and functions, and it is not straightforward to define what prepositions are. Numerous researchers and scholars acknowledge that prepositional sense is rather hard to define, much trickier than the sense of lexical words. It is due to the abstract

relational nature of prepositions. As maintained by Talmy (2000), their meaning signifies a skeletal conceptual small-scale version. Hence, it is not astonishing that abstract prepositional meaning has been argued for quite a few periods; over many years, manifold models of prepositional semantics have been proposed (e.g. Muskat-Tabakowska, 2010).

On the other hand, prepositions in English can be seen from syntactic-semantic perspective and cognitive-semantic viewpoint (Cuyckens and Radden, 2002). In the syntactic-semantic perspective, prepositions can be defined by their function as head of prepositional phrases. In the cognitive-semantic perspective viewpoint, the polysemy (various meanings) of prepositions is clarified as a network of meanings. When describing various meaning of prepositions, the meanings are grasped as derived from one another, yielding distinct sub networks linked in one network, which is put in order around the central senses. In general, the central meanings is regarded more concrete and can give rise towards more abstract senses (Tyler, 2012).

English prepositions may combine with certain noun, verb and adjective in what is named preposition combinations (PCs). Numerous English prepositions that follow nouns, verbs, and adjectives become unpredictable, causing their employment extremely idiomatic. According to the number of words, English prepositions embrace two sorts: simple prepositions or single-word prepositions and complex or multi-word prepositions. Simple prepositions (SPs) consists of merely a single word, for instance with, about, to, on, in, for, of, by and so on. Whilst complex prepositions (CPs) are composed of more than one (written) word, for instance with regard to, on behalf of, according to, etc (Ballard, 2022). A quantity of studies show that certain idiomatic multi-word expressions with complex prepositions are acquired as memorized chunks and not subjected to processing at the time of production (Boers and Lindstromberg, 2012).

They are typically introduced in EFL textbooks as different lexical units to be learned as ready-made phrases. Complex prepositions are deemed as a content word or an open class, denoting that they possess no limited number since new combinations can be found and combined into the language (Macková, 2012). In addition, preposition placement in English has two: preposition stranding and preposition pied piping (Günther, 2021). PPP is prepositions that are placed at the initial position of the clause for example: with whom did you go? or about what are they talking?. Whilst preposition stranding is the preposition is left behind (stranded) in a relative clause or a question, as in the man who I talked to, or Whom did you speak to?. Both PS and PPP occur chiefly in the construction of WH 'interrogatives' and relative clause. This paper will explore PS and PPP further and will use and refer to these phrases in the same manner as the research literature.

When it comes to research in most cases, there is adequate evidence that shows that transfer poses a significant factor in second language acquisition (Bestgen et al., 2012). A tangible learning complexity for EFL learners is that the mother tongue or L1 has an influence when acquiring the target language (TL) or second

language (L2). Another phenomenon greatly dealt with that influence is the name “transfer”, which is regarded the same as language transfer, interference, also recognized as mother tongue (MT) interference and linguistic interference. Linguistic interference is associated with the relations that exist between language structures and forms in two divergent languages. Conceptual transfer, on the other hand, is considered as the influence of language- interceded conceptual classifications on the language use of a L2 (Nghì & Phuc, 2021). Phonetical transfer (Chávez-Peón et al., 2012), morphological transfer (Sagarra & Ellis, 2013), syntactical transfer (Biria & Ameri-Golestan, 2010), semantic and pragmatic transfer (Bu, 2012), and sociolinguistic transfer (Meyerhoff, 2009) are a number of the subsphere of linguistic transfer investigation that have been studied. These findings strengthened Oldin's hypothesis that transfer can come about in every part of linguistic subsystems.

A quantity of current studies on conceptual transfer (CT) investigated regarding the differences and similarities in conceptual representations that appertained to linguistic subcategories of the source and receiver languages, such as use of English vocabulary (Huu et al., 2019), concepts (Odlin, 2005), EFL writing (Omar, 2018), number cases (Charters et al., 2012), and language aptitude and age (Bagherian, 2012). This indicates that CT is regarded as a hypothesis that MT transfer in an individual's use of particular TL items stems from their conceptual command and thinking patterns (Jarvis, 2007).

It is essential to underline that the transfer can be positive or negative. Positive transfer refers to the use of the mother tongue in a L2 context when the resulting L2 structure is correct and negative transfer can be defined as the use of the mother tongue in a L2 context resulting in a non-target-like L2 structure (Gass & Selinker, 2008). In other words, similarities between the learner's MT and TL cause positive transfer, whereas distinctions between the two languages lead to negative transfer. Relatively speaking, negative transfer is simple to be determined since it is likened to the occurrence of errors and by turns, hinders acquiring L2.

On the contrary, positive transfer facilitates the acquisition of L2 forms (Talebi, 2014). Numerous researchers admitted transfer from MT as a significant factor influencing the acquisition of L2 structures (Phoocharoensil, 2013). This premise was advocated by Gass and Silenker (1992) who mentioned that language transfer is absolutely an actual and central phenomenon that must be considered in any account of the L2 acquisition process. This shows that a few L2 study aims at providing adequate account for the acquisition of L2 needs to investigate the effects resulting from MT.

Studies regarding the complexity of learning and acquiring English prepositions by non-native speakers of English are various and become a controversial issue. Nghì & Phuc (2021) investigated the factors that may influence the use of English prepositions by native speakers of Vietnamese. From their study, it suggested that Vietnamese intra-lingual transfer negatively contributes to prepositional sense stated by Vietnamese EFL learners. This study also uncovered that Vietnamese

transfer negatively affects the use and acquisition of English prepositions and has problems in employing not only simple prepositions but also complex ones. Another study was carried out by Abdalla (2021). He examined regarding Saudi university students' difficulties with using correct English prepositions in their writing and communication. Students in this study were students who were registered at faculty of Sciences and Arts in Almandag. He also examined the deficiencies the use of prepositions in English based on the students' results and suggested that Saudi university students underwent difficulties with the correct use of English prepositions following by particular verbs and in the use of prepositional phrases.

Đorđević (2013) examined typical problems of prepositions in English encountered by Serbian learners. The students were first year students of Faculty of Pharmacy at the European University. Grammatical approach was used in error correction in this study. The result revealed that Serbian learners had trouble to comprehend how a preposition can be placed at the end of the sentence away from its object, hard to distinguish the difference between prepositions in and at because they were generally translated as one preposition into Serbian, as well as made errors with temporal prepositions due to the inter-lingual transfer. In her study, Gvarishvili (2013) examined the extent to which students relied on their mother tongue prepositional knowledge in acquiring an understanding of prepositional usage in English. The results suggested that Georgian ESL learners made the misuse of preposition on account of L1 negative interference. Besides, the main types of errors regarding prepositions led by the learners' mother tongue interference were: addition, substitution, overgeneralization and omission. With these considerations in mind, this study aims at identifying the sources of the difficulty that Indonesia learners of English undergo in learning preposition.

2. Methodology

In this study, method research design used is qualitative. It is classified as qualitative research because it fulfills the criteria of a qualitative research as follows: (a) the study contains words as the data, (b) it answers to "what", "how", and "why" questions, and (c) the researcher is the key instrument (Silverman, 2015).

Fifty-three students of Madura University (UNIRA) from English Education Department of FKIP participated in this study. They were registered in the writing for professional context class during the third semester of the academic year 2020 – 2021. The partaking students have ever been studying EFL as a school discipline for 6 years when they were in junior and senior high school. Nonetheless, they also had their education in national schools, in which Indonesian as their mother tongue became the media of instruction. On the contrary, English is a target language taught as foreign language in their school. All participants speak more Indonesian as mother tongue (MT) at their home and with their acquaintances than English.

A multiple-choice test was designed to gather data regarding the problems of acquiring and learning English prepositions by UNIRA students of English. The test comprised of fifteen questions. Each of the students was supposed to choose the best possible answer out of the choices from a list with the correct English preposition. The participants were given 30 minutes to answer the test. They were also asked to put Ø (null preposition) to point out that no preposition was required to indicate one of the cases met by UNIRA students of English where one language utilizes a preposition and the other language does not.

3. Results and Discussion

To analyze the data, the percentage of appropriate and inappropriate usage of prepositions in each sentence was counted. Then, the correct and incorrect usage of prepositions of the students in each sentence was calculated, classified, and then analyzed.

Sentence in number 1:

1. The town is rightly famous..... its beer.

(a. Along, b. For, c. Among, d. With)

The above-mentioned test in first sentence suggests that 43% of all UNIRA students selected the answer correctly. Sixteen students with a percentage (30%) preferred choosing the preposition 'with' to the correct one that is 'for'. In English, the probable elucidation for some who answered with 'with' is the influence of Indonesia language as their mother tongue. In Indonesia, the equivalent adjective (*terkenal*) is accompanied by the preposition *dengan* (with). It will be ...*terkenal dengan* (...famous with). Accordingly, their mother tongue transfer can lead the students' incorrect prepositional usage. Then, for preposition 'along', as the inappropriate choice, was chosen by ten students (18%), 'among', as the incorrect choice, was answered by four students (7%).

Sentence in number 2:

2. The boy cuts the cabbage.....a sharp knife

(a. By, b. About, c. With, d. At)

The result of test in the sentence shows that most students' answered the question immensely suitably. More precisely, 77% or forty one students' answer choice were right. Unfortunately, the rest of them chose the wrong prepositions rather than the correct one 'with'. 20% of them answered with 'by', only one (1%) student had answer 'about' and no one (0%) selected preposition 'at' as the answer. In English sentence, preposition 'by' is used to show how something is done. It corresponds with '*dengan* (*menggunakan*)' in Indonesia language. In Indonesia, the sentence will be: *Anak laki-laki itu memotong kubis dengan* (*menggunakan*) *pisau tajam*. It seemingly indicates that their mother tongue affected them and they negatively transferred their preposition usage from Indonesia into English

Sentence in number 3:**3. They didn't laugh the witticisms in the show.**

(a.For, b.On, c.In, d.At)

Only 9 % of 53 students answered correctly in the third sentence. Thirty-four students (64%) chose the first choice 'for' and eight ones (15%) selected the second choice 'on' whereas six students (11.3%) selected third answer 'in' rather than last answer 'at'. The reason behind the incorrect usage of these three prepositions rather than 'at' can be associated with the usage of the corresponding preposition 'on' and 'in' meaning 'di' in Indonesia language. In this regard, the mother tongue greatly influenced the use of the appropriate preposition.

Sentence in number four:**4. Some beautiful birds are hidden..... the trees.**

(a. Among, b.For, c.With, d.Between)

The preposition 'between' was more used than 'among' as the best answer in the test. Twenty-seven students (51%) gave an answer inappropriately, i.e. selecting 'between'. Five students (9%) selected the third answer 'with' which was inappropriate choice, one student selected the second answer 'for' and twenty students (37%) chose the correct answer 'among'. The meaning of prepositions 'between' and 'among' in Indonesia is immensely similar. They are 'diantara'. However, their use is definitely different. Preposition 'between' usually involves two objects or persons e.g. *the town lies halfway between Rome and Florence*. In contrast, 'among' always involves more than two objects or persons. Being more used, 'between' was overgeneralized by the students of this study to convey the sense of 'among'. Indeed, the students were incapable of distinguishing the usages of 'between' and 'among' on account of the similarity of their sense.

Sentence in number 5:**5. When did the students finish Learning ?**

(a.From, b.At, c.Ø, d.In)

The aptitude UNIRA students had in grasping grammar knowledge was quite poor. The sentence in the test poses gerund form. The verb 'finish' in the sentence does not need any preposition. Only ten students (18%) chose the answer (null preposition) appropriately. The rest of the students, twenty-six students (49 %) used the first choice 'from' as their answer, nine students (16%) chose the second answer 'at' and eight students (15%) utilized the last answer 'in'. Students' incorrect answer as 'from' seems to be traced back to their mother tongue interference. The students used preposition 'from' as their answer choice in this context because it is a literal translation of Indonesia preposition 'dari'. *Selesai dari belajar* is literally translated in English becomes *finish from learning*.

Sentence in number 6:**.the end of the trip, they did not forget to buy souvenir.**

(a.In, b.On , c.At, d.Ø)

The incorrect prepositions 'in' was chosen by the students in the sentence amounted seventeen persons (32%). Fifteen students (28%) would rather choose 'on' than another preposition. 24% or thirteen students' answer choice was 'at' which became the best answer of all. In addition, eight students selected null preposition or Ø. English prepositions 'in' and 'on' used by the students as their answer choice semantically refer to 'di' in Indonesia. By virtue of their sense, UNIRA students were perplexed to determine or choose 'in', 'on' and 'in' as the most corresponding preposition in the test since they equally have meaning: 'di' in Indonesia. Unquestionable, many of them did not answer accordingly.

Sentence in number 7:

7. The whole state is sea-level.

(a.From, b.In, c.Below, d.Under)

Three students (5%) answered ('from') the test incorrectly. Twenty-four students (45%) selected the second choice ('in') whereas the other twenty-three students (43%) selected the last choice ('under'). Nevertheless, only three students (5%) who chose the right answer (*below*). In this sentence, the students replaced the right preposition '*below*' with the wrong one '*under*'. This incorrectness of their answer could be attributable to Indonesia transfer. In Indonesia, preposition '*dibawah*', when it is translated into the English preposition meaning '*under*', or '*below*'. It is extremely puzzling for them because '*under*' and '*below*' semantically possess similar meaning (i.e. 'di') in UNIRA students' mother tongue (i.e. Indonesia language).

Sentence in number 8:

8. It is beneficial to get a new occupation.

(a.In, b.At, c.With, d.Ø)

Twenty-eight students (52%) used the inappropriate preposition 'in' in place of the appropriate one, i.e. null preposition or Ø. The rest of them, five students (9%) used the second choice 'at', four students (8%) chose the third answer 'with' and sixteen students (30%) utilized the last answer, Ø, constitutes the best answer. This kind of errors made by the students (52%) is named the error of addition. It seemingly indicates that the students were affected by their mother tongue. In Indonesia, the preposition 'di' is equivalent to the English 'in' used in such contexts. Moreover, by virtue of the absence of null preposition in Indonesia grammar, the students made errors in determining the proper preposition in English. They (52%) added preposition 'in' to fill the gap in the sentence and what they did is not necessarily true. Because the verb 'get' in the sentence grammatically does not require any preposition.

Sentence in number 9:

9. Patricia is.....holiday next week.

(a.On, b.In, c.For, d.With)

Mostly the students were good at grasping the simple preposition in this test. Twenty-six students (49%) appropriately answered the test. The rest of them,

twenty-four students with a percentage (44 %) used the second choice (*in*) and third answer (*for*) which were wrong choices. It seemingly shows that the students who put '*for*' in place of '*on*' are affected by Indonesia interference. Based on the meaning grammatically, the sentence will be: *Patricia sedang berlibur minggu depan*. In this context, the students got problems with the use of the copular verb 'is' due to the absence of the kind of the verb in Indonesia construction. They were likely to translate literally from Indonesia (*untuk*) into English (*for*). Therefore, when the sentence is translated will be: *Patricia untuk berlibur minggu depan*.

Sentence in number 10:

10. The man got Bandara airport at 10:00 a.m.

(a.To, b. Ø, c.At, d.Over)

Ten students (18%) used the preposition '*at*' as their answer choice in the test and fourteen students (27%) filled the gap with the null preposition although this sentence actually needs any preposition, viz: '*to*'. This type of errors made by the students (27%) is named the error of omission. A quantity of UNIRA students who selected the right preposition '*to*' were 29 persons (53%). The students chose null preposition or omitted prepositions because they were affected by their mother tongue (i.e. Indonesia language). '*To*' means '*ke*' in Indonesia language. By virtue of its sense, the students more selected '*to*' than another preposition. Besides, in English grammar, null preposition is available but not in Indonesia. Prepositions in English also frequently can be phrasal verb as *get to* but prepositions in Indonesia cannot. Therefore, the students were syntactically not good at understanding prepositional phrase due to the absence of prepositional phrase in Indonesia grammar.

Sentence in number 11:

11. Newcomers need knowledge..... their native language.

(a.Ø, b.With, c.By, d.Of)

The students, generally speaking, were not able to use simple preposition '*of*'. Thirty-three students (62%) chose the first answer, i.e. null preposition or omitted it where it is highly needed to be a right structure grammatically in the sentence number 11. For the appropriate choice ('*of*') in the test was only selected by eight students (15%) of all. Other students (8%) chose the second answer '*with*' and 15% selected the third answer '*by*'. The possible elucidation for this omission type of error can be attributable to UNIRA students' mother tongue. In the sentence, the students omitted the preposition '*of*' since in Indonesia language, the use of null preposition does not exist.

Sentence in number 12:

12. They always sleep.....bed at 9.00 p.m.

(a.In, b.At, c.Over, d.To)

This sentence is quite similar with the sentence number nine. The students had good knowledge regarding simple preposition '*in*'. Mostly the students selected

the answer appropriately: 'in' and their amount were twenty-three persons (43%). The rest of them amounted nine students with a percentage (16 %) used the second choice 'at', thirteen students (24%) used third answer 'over' and eight students (15%) used last answer 'to' where all of their answer choices were inappropriate preposition. The inappropriateness of their answer in the test was affected Indonesia interference. In Indonesia, 'di' semantically can be used in English preposition 'at'. Undeniably, they (16%) made inappropriately answer choice.

Sentence in number 13:

13. All pupils were so exhausted that they wanted to gohome soon.

(a.To, b.In, c.From, d. Ø)

Twenty-seven students (51%) filled the gap with the English preposition 'to' even though this sentence actually no requires any preposition. This kind of errors made by them (51%) named the error of addition. The prepositions 'in' and 'from' were chosen by sixteen students (29%). On the other hand, only ten students (18%) appropriately selected 'Ø' as the best answer in test. Twenty-seven students did so because based on Indonesia language semantically, 'ke' means 'to'. The students added 'to' after the verb 'go' where the verb precisely no needs addition of preposition since in Indonesia, the phrase 'go to home' would semantically have meaning 'pulang ke rumah'. Accordingly, the inappropriateness of selecting preposition occurred on account of their mother tongue interference.

Sentence in number 14:

14. They've fallen into the habit of getting up late.....Monday mornings.

(a.For, b.Over, c.In, d.On)

Seventeen students (32%) more used the wrong preposition 'in' rather than the correct one 'on'. Sixteen students (30%) chose the most appropriate preposition 'on'. Whilst the preposition 'for' was selected by fifteen students (28%) and preposition 'over' was chosen by five students (9%). The incorrect prepositions 'in' was chosen by the students (32%) as preposition 'in' semantically refer to 'di' in Indonesia. By virtue of its sense, UNIRA students were puzzled to choose the most equivalent preposition in the test since prepositions 'in' and 'on' equally have meaning: 'di' in Indonesia. Unquestionable, they could not answer correctly.

Sentence in number 15:

15. The talks are aimed.....finding a solution.

(a.With, b.To, c.For, d.At)

UNIRA students were not capable of using simple preposition 'at'. Fourteen students (27%) chose the first answer, i.e. preposition 'with' as the wrong answer. So did nine students (16%) and twenty-six students (49%). They chose the wrong preposition 'to' and 'for'. For the appropriate answer choice: 'at' was only selected by four students (8%). The possible elucidation for this problem can be attributable to their students' mother tongue. Preposition 'for' is semantically the same as 'untuk' in Indonesia. They translated the meaning of 'for' based on

knowledge of their mother tongue. In Indonesia, it will be : *bertujuan untuk* (in English: *aimed for*). Additionally, they did not know the rule of 'at' use. When it is used with the verb 'aimed' to be the phrase 'aimed at' meaning 'to plan', 'hope' or 'intend to achieve something'. Table 1 summarizes the students' answer result when choosing the best possible answer out of the choices from a given multiple-choice test.

Table 1. The Results of the Students' Answer

The number of questions	Right answers	Wrong answers
1	4	49
2	41	12
3	5	48
4	20	33
5	10	33
6	8	45
7	3	53
8	16	37
9	26	27
10	29	24
11	8	45
12	23	30
13	10	43
14	16	37
15	4	49

4. Conclusion

This study examines difficulties of acquiring English prepositions made by UNIRA students of English whose mother tongue is. The findings of study suggest that UNIRA students run into a large amount of problems of using the right prepositions. The above data show that linguistic interference occurs. Language interference that is directly associated with the problem of literal translation from Indonesia into English poses the core source of the problem. However, when the two languages use divergent prepositions, the students trace back to their Indonesia grammar that leads to negative transfer come about. Accordingly, when the two languages are semantically resemblances, Indonesia language is believed as a source of command that enables students in producing inappropriateness of preposition use. For that reason, the students do not sufficiently master prepositions use of target language. Additionally they highly depend on their mother tongue, i.e. Indonesia language, to grasp English preposition use.

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