

## Assessing the Performance of Iraqi EFL University Students in Using Marginal Prepositions

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المشاكل التي تواجه طلبة الجامعات العراقية

الدارسين للغات الأجنبية في استخدام حروف الجر الهامشية

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الخلاصة

حروف الجر الهامشية هي كلمات لها شكل الصفات أو الأفعال لكنها تعمل عمل حروف الجر. الهدف من البحث هو معرفة المشاكل التي تواجه طلبة الجامعة الدارسين للغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية في استخدام حروف الجر الهامشية حيث أن الطلبة يستخدمون هذه الحروف كأفعال أو صفات وفشلوا في وضعها في جملة مفيدة و استخدامها استخداما صحيحا.

#### Abstract

**Marginal prepositions** are words function as prepositions but their form is that of words belong to other word classes such as verbs or adjectives.

The problem of this study rises when the Iraqi EFL university students fail to recognize the **marginal prepositions**, in the same time, they fail to recognize which **marginal preposition** should be used in a certain context for they are unfamiliar to most of this type of prepositions. For the same reason, students fail to use these prepositions in meaningful sentences and they tend to use them as verbs or adjectives influenced by their forms.

Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

- 1- Iraqi EFL university students are expected to face difficulty in recognizing marginal prepositions.
- 2- Such learners are expected to face more difficulty in using the suitable marginal preposition in certain sentences.
- 3- The same learners are expected to be influenced by the form of the marginal prepositions when they use such prepositions in sentences.

A diagnostic test has been designed and applied on a sample of one hundred Iraqi EFL university students at third year Department of English, College of Education for Human sciences, University of Babylon, (2014-2015). Data analysis has revealed that:

- 1- EFL University students have failed to recognize marginal prepositions as the rate of the incorrect responses is (59.75%) whereas that of the correct ones is (40.25%).
- 2- The same learners have failed to use the correct marginal prepositions to complete the meaning of the given sentences and they fail to produce meaningful and grammatical sentences that include the given marginal prepositions. Accordingly, the rate of the incorrect responses at the production level is (63.15%) while that of the correct ones is (36.85%).
- 3- The results of the test reveal that EFL university students are facing difficulty in using marginal prepositions.

**Keywords:** Marginal prepositions, prepositions, adjectives, verbs.

#### 1.Prepositions

According to Quirk et al. (1985:657), a preposition "expresses a relation between two entities, on being that represented by the prepositional complement, the other by another part of the sentence". In other words prepositions have a connecting function. The prepositional complement can be a noun phrase, a nominal wh-clause, or a nominal ing-clause.

(1) The people **on the bus** were singing. (ibid)

(2) He was surprised **at what he saw**. (ibid)

(3) I'm looking forward **at meeting you**. (ibid)

The criteria of prepositions, according to Quirk et al. (ibid), are:

The complement of the preposition should not be

- i) a that clause.
- ii) an infinitive clause.
- iii) a subjective case form of a personal noun.

The prepositions that consist of one word are called, according to James (2010: 153), simple prepositions like **in, on, for**. While the prepositions that consist of more than one word are called complex prepositions such as **except for, a head of, close to**. In addition to these types there is the **marginal prepositions** which are the subject of the research at hand.

### 1.1 Marginal Prepositions

**Marginal prepositions**, According to Quirk et al. (1985:667), are words which behave like prepositions but they have the form of words belong to other word classes such as verbs or adjectives. These prepositions are:

**Bar, barring, excepting, excluding, save, concerning, considering, regarding, respecting, touching, failing, wanting, following, pending, given, granted, including.**

There are other **marginal prepositions** which are used with numerals:

**Less, minus, plus, times, over** (Quirk et al., 1985:667)

Quirk et al. (ibid:661) mention that **in stead of** is also considered as a **marginal preposition** as it fulfills the third criteria for prepositions. Swan (2005:302) denotes that **in stead of** gives the meaning that a thing, a person, or an action replaces another.

(4) I propose you **in stead of** me. (ibid)

The **marginal prepositions excepting, excluding, save, bar and barring** are used to denote **exception** (Quirk et al., 1985: 707)

(5) All **excepting** the captain were rescued. (ibid)

(6) The aircraft carries 461 people **excluding** the crew and cabin staff.

([www.dictionary.cambridge.org](http://www.dictionary.cambridge.org))

**Bar and barring** sometimes may substitute **except** and **excepting** (James,2010:153). The **marginal preposition save** "is a preposition means **but** or **except for**" [www.dictionary.cambridge.org](http://www.dictionary.cambridge.org).

(7) This is the most versatile microcomputer on the market, **bar** none.

(Quirk et al., 1985: 708)

(8) **Barring** accidents, we'll be there on time. (ibid)

(9) They found all the lost documents **save** one. ([www.dictionary.cambridge.org](http://www.dictionary.cambridge.org))

Some marginal prepositions denote **respect**. These are: **concerning, considering, regarding, touching, and respecting** (Quirk et. al.,1985:706).

(10) **Concerning** the assignment, it was very demanding for most of us.

[www.usingenglish.com](http://www.usingenglish.com)

**Considering**, according to Quirk et al. (1985:707) means "taking into consideration". Also the **marginal preposition given** means, according to Oxford Student's Dictionary of English (2001:s.v. given prep.), "taking into consideration". Hunston and Francis (2000: 196) say that **granted** also means "taking into consideration". Swan (2005:138) says that **regarding** is used when the speaker wants to focus on what he is going to say. Both the **marginal prepositions Touching and respecting** mean "about" ([www.meriamwebster.com](http://www.meriamwebster.com)).

(11) **Considering** the job situation, there were surprisingly few application this year. (Quirk et al., 1985:707)

(12) **Given** the present condition, I think she's done rather well. (ibid: 660)

(13) **Granted** his obsequious manner, I still think he's ambitious enough to do the job. (Quirk et al., 1985:667)

(14) **Regarding** those sales figures, more explanation is coming after the brake. ([www.ucl.ac.uk](http://www.ucl.ac.uk))

(15) There has been an objection **touching** the last of the proposed new laws.

(www.meriamwebester.com).

(16) **Respecting** your earlier question, I'd like to make an additional comment. (ibid)

**Failing** means, according to [www.meriamwebester.com](http://www.meriamwebester.com), "lacking" or "in the absence of" while **following** means, as James (2010:153) mentions, "next" or "subsequent". **Pending** denote time and it is mostly used in legal style and it means "until" or "during" or "while waiting for" Quirk et al. (1985: 961). The **marginal preposition including** means "as well as"

[www.khoanh.hemup.edu.vn](http://www.khoanh.hemup.edu.vn).

(17) **Failing** that, any plain cookie crumbs will do. ([www.yourdictionary.com](http://www.yourdictionary.com))

(18) **Following** his resignation, the minister moved to the country. (James, 2010:153)

(19) The discussion must wait **pending** his trial. (until). (Quirk et al.,1985: 961)

(20) **Pending** negotiations, the two parties should stop further action. (during). (ibid)

(21) The whole team was there, **including** John. [www.khoanh.hemup.edu.vn](http://www.khoanh.hemup.edu.vn).

The **marginal prepositions less, minus, plus, times, and over** are used with numerals. For example the following equation:

$(17 - 3 + 65/5) - (4 * 3) = 15$

Is read as : seventeen **minus** three, **plus** sixty-five **over** five, **over** five, **minus** four **times** three equals fifteen (Quirk et al., 1985:667).

James (2010:153) agrees with Quirk et al. (1985:667) that **minus**, and **plus** may be used in non numerical contexts. Leech and Svartivik (1992:99) say that **over** is used in metaphors. Thomson and Martinet (2001:99) denote that **over** is used with meals, food, and drink.

(22) I hope he come **minus** his wife. (Quirk et al., 1985:667)

(23) She's had mumps **plus** measles. (ibid)

(24) The king had absolute power **over** his subjects. (Leech and Svartivik,1992:99)

(25) He doesn't take long **over** lunch. ( Thomson and Martinet, 2001:99)

Quirk et al. (1985:667) and Hunston and Francis (2000: 196) agree that **worth, after, and across** are **marginal prepositions** that do not have the verbal form.

(26) Two gold-hilted swords, each **worth** 10000 pounds, were also sold at Sotheby's last Monday. (Quirk et al., 1985:667)

(27) The day **after** his visit was Thursday. (Fuster and Sanchez, 2008: 115)

(28) He walked **across** the road. (ibid)

## 2.The Test

### 2.1 Test Design

The test consists of four questions. Questions 1 and 2 measure the subject's responses at the recognition level. Each question includes ten items. The subjects are asked in Question 1 to underline the marginal prepositions in the given sentences. In Question 2, the subjects are asked to choose the correct marginal preposition. Questions 3 and 4 measure the subject's responses at the production level. They include ten items each. In Questions 3, the subjects are requested to use the suitable marginal preposition to complete the sentence. In Question 4, the subjects are required to use ten marginal prepositions in sentences (see Appendix I).

### 2.2 The Subjects

The sample of the test consists of one hundred subjects of the third academic year (2014-2015) of the Dept. of English at the College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon.

### 2.3 The Results of the Test

#### 2.3.1 Subjects' Performance at the Recognition Level

##### 2.3.1.1 The Results of Question 1

The results obtained in each item are presented in Table (1)

**Table (1)**  
**The Number and Rate of Subjects' Performance in**  
**Question 1: The Recognition Level**

Item	No. of correct answers	% of correct answers	No. of incorrect answers	% of incorrect answers
1	76	76	24	24
2	7	7	93	93
3	93	93	7	7
4	45	45	55	55
5	0	0	100	100
6	12	12	88	88
7	12	12	88	88
8	34	34	66	66
9	36	36	64	64
10	0	0	100	100
Total	315	31.5	685	68.5

Table (1) shows that the total number and percentage of the correct responses at Question 1: the recognition level are (315, 31.5%) while those of the incorrect ones are (685, 68.5%).

Item (3) has the highest number of correct responses (93, 93%) because the subjects are familiar with the marginal preposition **instead of** unlike the items (5) and (10) where the number and rate of the correct responses are (0, 0%) for the marginal prepositions **barring** and **bar** are not well known to the subjects.

### 2.3.1.2 The results of Question 2

The results of each item are shown in Table (2)

**Table (2)**  
**The Number and Rate of Subjects' Performance in**  
**Question 2: The Recognition Level**

Item	No. of correct answers	% of correct answers	No. of incorrect answers	% of incorrect answers
1	45	45	55	55
2	23	23	77	77
3	95	95	5	5
4	56	56	44	44
5	72	72	28	28
6	8	8	92	92
7	65	65	35	35
8	60	60	40	40
9	12	12	88	88
10	54	54	46	46
total	490	49	510	51

The number and rate of the correct responses of item (3) is (95, 95%). The item gives a simple mathematical equation so that the majority of the subjects has answered it correctly. The lowest correct responses are those of item (6). The correct answer is the choice (d) **touching**. Most of the subjects are unfamiliar with such a marginal preposition and they incorrectly think it gives the meaning to touch something while it means (about). The same problem faces the subjects in items (1, 2, 9) as the correct responses for these items respectively are: (a) considering, (a) following, and (c) save. These items reflect that the subjects are unfamiliar with the correct meaning of these marginal prepositions that each one of them does not have the same meaning of the verb that they related to.

The total results of the recognition level are given in Table (3)

**Table (3)**  
**The Number and Rate of Subjects' Performance at**  
**The Recognition Level**

Question	No.of correct answers	% of correct answers	No. of incorrect answers	% of incorrect answers
Q1	315	31.5	685	68.5
Q2	490	49	510	51
Total	805	40.25	1195	59.75

Table (3) shows that the total number and the percentage of the correct responses are (805,40.25% ) while those of the incorrect ones are (1195, 59.75%) which reflects that the subjects face difficulty at the recognition level.

### 2.3.2 The Subjects' Performance at the Production Level

Both Questions 3 and 4 measure the subjects' performance at the production level

#### 2.3.2.1 The Results of Question 3

The results obtained in Question 3 are presented in Table (4)

**Table (4)**  
**The Number and Rate of Subjects' Performance in**  
**Question 3: The production Level**

Item	No.of correct answers	% of correct answers	No. of incorrect answers	% of incorrect answers
1	76	76	24	24
2	65	65	35	35
3	43	43	57	57
4	66	66	34	34
5	23	23	77	77
6	45	45	55	55
7	44	44	56	56
8	12	12	88	88
9	33	33	67	67
10	2	2	98	98
Total	409	40.9	591	59.1

The highest number of correct responses is that of item (1). The correct answer to this item is **after**. The subjects are familiar with this marginal preposition. The item that has the lowest number of correct responses is item (10). The correct answer is **respecting** but the majority of the students has used about. The number of the erroneous responses of item (5) is (77). The correct response **given**. The number of the incorrect responses of items (8)and (9) are (12, 33) respectively. The correct answer of item (8) is **plus** whereas the majority of the subjects has used (and). The correct answer of item (9) is **considering** but most of the erroneous responses have been (in).

#### 2.3.2.2 The Results of Question 4

The results obtained in Question 4 are presented in Table (5)

**Table (5)**  
**The Number and Rate of Subjects' Performance in**  
**Question 4: The Production Level**

Item	No.of correct answers	% of correct answers	No. of incorrect answers	% of incorrect answers
1	46	46	54	54
2	21	21	79	79
3	10	10	90	90
4	21	21	79	79
5	13	13	87	87
6	7	7	93	93
7	15	15	85	85
8	19	19	81	81

9	89	89	11	11
10	87	87	13	13
Total	328	32.8	672	67.2

Table (5) shows that the highest number of the correct responses are those of items (9) and (10) respectively. Item (9) requires to use the marginal proposition **plus** in a sentence. The majority of the subjects have written simple mathematical equations but none of the correct answers have used **plus** in non numerical context. Item (10) requires to use the marginal preposition **including** in a sentence. There are (87) correct sentences as the subjects are familiar to this marginal preposition. Items (3,4,5,6,7,and 8) have been used as verbs in most of the subjects' answers although they have been told in the question that these are marginal prepositions. Item (2), the marginal preposition **less** is used in most of the subjects' responses as a pronoun.

The total results of the production level are given in Table (6)

**Table (6)**  
**The Number and Rate of Subjects' Performance at**  
**The Production Level**

Question	No. of correct answers	% of correct answers	No. of incorrect answers	% of incorrect answers
Q3	409	40.9	591	59.1
Q4	328	32.8	672	67.2
Total	737	36.85	1263	63.15

Table (6) presents that the total number and rate of the correct responses at the production level are (737, 36.85%) and those of the incorrect responses are (1263, 63.15%). The results of the whole test are shown in Table (7):

**Table (7)**  
**The Number and Rate of Subjects' Performance in the Test**

level	No. of correct answers	% of correct answers	No. of incorrect answers	% of incorrect answers
Recognition	805	40.25	1195	59.75
Production	737	36.85	1263	63.15
Total	1542	38.55	2458	61.45

Table (7) demonstrates that the number and percentage of the incorrect responses are (2458, 61.45%) which reflect that the subjects face difficulty in using marginal prepositions.

### 3. Conclusion

1- **Questions (1) and (2) measure the recognition level:** the number and rate of the correct responses of question (1) are (315, 31.5%) whereas those of the incorrect ones are (685, 68.5%) which reflects that the subjects face difficulty in recognizing the marginal prepositions. In items (5) and (10) the subjects have underlined the preposition (on). In item (7), (to) of the infinitive has been underlined by the majority of the subjects. Most of the subjects has underlined (by) in item (8). The rest of the items, the subjects render to guessing.

The number and percentage of the correct responses of Question (2) are (490, 49%) while those of the incorrect ones are (510, 51%). The subjects fail to choose the correct choices because they are unfamiliar with marginal prepositions and they fail to choose the correct answers as they do not understand the meaning of some marginal prepositions as in item (2) where the correct answer is the choice (a) **following**, which means that the minister has moved to the country after his resignation but the majority of the subjects have chosen (b) given. They may interpret it that the minister has given his resignation and

moved to the country the rate of the incorrect responses of this item is (77). The correct answer of item (6) is (d) touching which means "about", the (92%) of the subjects has failed to choose the correct answer as they are unfamiliar to this marginal proposition. So That the majority of the subjects have chosen choice (a) **after**. The correct answer of item (9) is (c) **save** which means "except" but the majority of the subjects have chosen the choice (d) **concerning**. The percentage of the incorrect responses of this item is (88%).

The frequency and percentage of the incorrect responses at the recognition level are (59.75%) which reveals that the subjects face difficulty at the recognition level.

2- **Questions (3) and (4) measure the production level.** The number and rate of Question (3) are ( 409, 40.9%) whereas those of the incorrect ones are (591, 59.1%). In this question the subjects are asked to full the blanks with the suitable marginal proposition. In items (3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10) the subjects have used words other than marginal prepositions to complete the meaning, mostly are simple prepositions like (**in**) as in items (9 and10). Or they have used **and** or **but** as in items (8 and 3). Some of them have used **not** as in items (3, 6,7,8).

**Question 4** requires the subjects to use some marginal propositions in sentences. The majority of the subjects have used these marginal propositions as verbs as in items (3, 4, 5, 6,7, and 8). Item (7) **following** is also used as an adjective in some instances The marginal proposition **less** is mostly used as a pronoun. The number and rate of the incorrect responses are (672, 67.2%) which reveals that the subjects face difficulty in using the marginal propositions correctly in sentences and the subjects are influenced by the forms of these marginal propositions and use them as verbs, adjectives or pronouns.

3- **The results of the whole test:** the frequency and percentage of the correct responses are (1542, 38.55%) while those of the incorrect ones are (2458, 61.45%) which reveal that the subjects face difficulty in using marginal prepositions.

4- It is recommended that more attention should be paid to teaching marginal prepositions.

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