

การรับรู้และการใช้คำบุพบทภาษาอังกฤษของนิสิตระดับปริญญาตรีชาวไทย Thai Undergraduate Students' Perception and Production on English Prepositions

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการรับรู้และการใช้คำบุพบทภาษาอังกฤษทั้งคำบุพบทอิสระและคำบุพบทไม่อิสระของนิสิตระดับปริญญาตรีชาวไทย กลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นนิสิตที่เรียนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษเป็นวิชาโท จำนวน 50 คน จากมหาวิทยาลัยแห่งหนึ่งในประเทศไทย เครื่องมือวิจัยที่ใช้ในการเก็บข้อมูล คือ แบบทดสอบการรับรู้ (การตัดสินใจเกี่ยวกับไวยากรณ์) และการใช้คำบุพบทภาษาอังกฤษ (การเขียน) ทั้งคำบุพบทอิสระและคำบุพบทไม่อิสระ โดยเครื่องมือวิจัยที่ได้ได้นำมาจากเครื่องมือวิจัยของเรืองจุฑา (2558) ข้อสอบแต่ละข้อในแบบทดสอบทั้ง 2 ชุดเป็นข้อสอบแบบคู่ขนานกัน งานวิจัยนี้ได้ใช้การทดสอบความแตกต่างค่าเฉลี่ยของกลุ่มตัวอย่าง 2 กลุ่มไม่อิสระ (Paired Sample T-test) ในการเปรียบเทียบคะแนนการรับรู้และการใช้คำบุพบทภาษาอังกฤษทั้งคำบุพบทอิสระและคำบุพบทไม่อิสระของนิสิตกลุ่มตัวอย่าง ผลการวิจัยแสดงให้เห็นว่า นิสิตได้คะแนนการรับรู้คำบุพบทภาษาอังกฤษสูงกว่าคะแนนการใช้คำบุพบทภาษาอังกฤษ นอกจากนี้นิสิตยังได้คะแนนการรับรู้คำบุพบทและการใช้คำบุพบทอิสระสูงกว่าคำบุพบทไม่อิสระอีกด้วย แต่อย่างไรก็ตามคะแนนที่ได้ไม่สูงมาก ซึ่งแสดงให้เห็นว่านิสิตมีปัญหาในการตัดสินใจและการเลือกใช้คำบุพบทภาษาอังกฤษทั้งคำบุพบทอิสระและคำบุพบทไม่อิสระให้ถูกต้อง

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate Thai undergraduate students' perception and production on English prepositions: independent and dependent. The participants consisted of 50 English minor students at a university in Thailand. Research instruments used were a perception test (grammatical judgment) and a production test (writing) adopted from Ruangjaroon (2015). Each item from both tests were parallel. Paired samples t-test was conducted to compare mean score of students' perception and production on independent and dependent prepositions. Results showed that the students gained higher score on English prepositions on the perception test than they did on the production tests. They also perceived and produced dependent prepositions better than independent prepositions. However, their scores were not very high, which illustrates that they had difficulty in judging and using English prepositions, both independent and independent, correctly.

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Research Questions

1. To what extent are Thai undergraduate students' perception and production on English prepositions?
 - 1.1 Is Thai undergraduate students' perception better than production on English prepositions?
2. To what extent are Thai undergraduate students' perception and production on dependent and independent prepositions?
 - 2.1 Are Thai undergraduate students' perception and production on dependent prepositions better than those of independent prepositions?

Keywords: independent prepositions, dependent prepositions, perception, production

Significance of the Study

In L2 acquisition, the theory of universal grammar (UG) has been believed that it is not only accessible in L1 but also L2 acquisition (Felix, 1991). However, some scholars (Tsimpli & Roussou, 1991; Finney, 2005) argue that UG is not accessible in some of functional categories and use of prepositions is one of those problematic categories. Swan (2005) states that prepositions can cause difficulty to L2 learners since it is difficult to know which one is used with a specific noun, verb, or adjective. ESL/EFL students struggle with grammatical accuracy when writing English, and errors on preposition are one of the most frequently found (e.g., Atay, 2007; Atmaca, 2016; Kampookaew, 2020; Kurk & Latif, 2007; Phoocharoensil et al., 2016; Promsupa, 2016; Sermsuk et al., 2017; Seyitkuliyeve et al., 2020; Thumawongsa, 2018). Preposition errors are considered as intralingual errors because many L2 learners from different L1 backgrounds all have difficulty in using the English prepositions correctly (e.g. Atmaca, 2016; Phoocharoensil et al., 2016; Promsupa, 2016; Sermsuk et al., 2017; Seyitkuliyeve et al., 2020). When the mother tongue and target languages are far different, it is more difficult for learners to access the target language, for instance, Thai and English. Although Thai students have studied English for many years in school, they cannot utilize English correctly and fluently and choosing correct preposition use is one of their problems (e.g., Ruangjaroon, 2015; Thong-lam, 2016; Thumawongsa, 2018). In the studies of Kampookaew (2020) and Suvarnamai (2017), three subtypes of preposition errors: addition, misuse, and omission, were found.

From reviewed literature, it seems that most EFL/ESL learners face difficulty in using English prepositions correctly. However, there has been a handful of investigating EFL/ESL learners' perception and production on English prepositions, especially Thai undergraduate students. To investigate both aspects might assure that whether EFL/ESL learners really get struggle in using English prepositions. Since to explore only their perception on English prepositions, it is possibly that EFL/ESL learners employ their test-taking strategies in doing the English preposition test and gain high score without exactly knowing how to use English prepositions correctly. Hence, to investigate students' perception and production on English prepositions by utilizing parallel tests is an interesting idea. Additionally, there have not been many research studies related to dependent and independent preposition use

of Thai undergraduate students. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate Thai undergraduate students' perception and production on English prepositions, both dependent and independent ones: whether they perform on a perception test better than on a production test and whether they gain higher scores on dependent prepositions than on independent prepositions from both perception and production tests. The results of the current study will raise English teachers in Thailand awareness of the problems of English preposition use and attribute to the improvement of English teaching and learning by designing lessons and emphasizing how to use English prepositions correctly. It is hoped that it will help to reduce prepositional errors used by Thai EFL students.

Literature Review

To acquire L2 is not easy since there are some functional categories which are difficult to accessible for learners (Tsimpli, & Roussou, 1991; Finney, 2005). It can be explained that the more different between L1 and L2, the more difficult to acquire L2. One of the problematic functional categories for L2 learners is the prepositions (Castro, 2013; Ruangjaroon, 2015; Sumonsriworakun & Pongpairaj, 2017), which is not easy for them to use correctly (Swan, 2005; Yaari, 2013), and errors in using English prepositions of L2 learners are commonly found (Atay, 2007; Atmaca, 2016; Kampookaew, 2020; Kurk & Latif, 2007; ; Loke, Alil, & Anthony, 2013; Phoocharoensil et al., 2016; Promsupa, 2016; Ruangjaroon, 2015; Sermsuk et al., 2017; Seyitkulyev et al., 2020; Thumawongsa, 2018; Tunaz, Muyan, & Muratoglu, 2016).

Many language scholars have reported the problems of using English prepositions of ESL/EFL learners (e.g., Atay, 2007; Atmaca, 2016; Catalán, 1996; Dalgish, 1985; Diab, 1997; Kampookaew, 2020; Kurk & Latif, 2007; Loke, Alil, & Anthony, 2013; Phoocharoensil et al., 2016; Promsupa, 2016;

Ruangjaroon, 2015; Sermsuk et al., 2017; Seyitkulyev et al., 2020; Thong-lam, 2016; Thumawongsa, 2018; Tunaz, Muyan, & Muratoglu, 2016; Yaari, 2013). The different preposition systems in L1 and L2 can cause learners' confusion to choose L2 preposition correctly because they cannot use their L1 knowledge of prepositions with their L2 (Catalán, 1996). For instance, in Filipino context, most of the English prepositional errors found in university students was caused by intralingual errors (Castro, 2013). For Thai EFL students, they face difficulties in using English preposition correctly because the different patterns of English and Thai preposition use and some English prepositions are not similar Thai (Thong-lam, 2016). There have been many research studies related to using English prepositions in Thai context (e.g., Kampookaew, 2020; Phoocharoensil et al., 2016; Promsupa, 2016; Ruangjaroon, 2015; Sermsuk et al., 2017; Sumonsriworakun & Pongpairaj, 2017; Thong-lam, 2016; Thumawongsa, 2018). These studies have found Thai learners struggle with using the English prepositions correctly. For example, Sumonsriworakun and Pongpairaj (2017) found that Thai learners produced systematicity of English dependent prepositions and causes of difficulties in using English dependent prepositions were cross-linguistic influence and cognitive factors. The findings of Sumonsriworakun and Pongpairaj's (2017) study are consistent with Ruangjaroon's (2015). Their findings found that English dependent preposition usage seemed not problematic as other types of English preposition for Thai L1 learners. Thai L1 learners of English had difficulties in perceiving and

producing English prepositions, especially independent prepositions (Ruangjaroon, 2015). The more different degree of parametric variation in prepositions use between L1 and L2, the more difficult in using English prepositions correctly.

From the above literature review, it can be seen that EFL/ESL learners have difficulty in using English prepositions and there is a handful of research studies on Thai EFL learners' perception and production on English prepositions. Therefore, this study aims to examine undergraduate students' perception and production on English prepositions: whether their perception is better than production on English prepositions. In addition, this study also aims to investigate their perception and production on dependent and independent prepositions: whether their perception and production on dependent prepositions are better than those of independent prepositions.

Methodology

This part covers participants, research instruments, data collection procedure, and data analysis.

Participants

Participants of this study were 50 English minor students (13 males, 37 females), who took Intensive English Grammar Course in the 1st semester of the academic year 2021 at a university in Thailand. These participants were selected by using purposive sampling approach.

Research Instruments

Two-parallel-item tests, a grammatical judgment test for English prepositions (10 items), and a writing test (11 items), adopted from Ruangjaroon's (2015) study were employed to investigate students' ability in using English prepositions. All sentences in the tests were from advertisements which appeared on billboards or print magazines in Bangkok.

The grammatical judgment test (perception test) consists of 10 items and each item has 2 pairs of sentences which use different prepositions. Items 1-5 comprises of independent prepositions, and items 6-10 comprises of dependent prepositions.

The writing test (production test), a Thai-English translation test, consists of 11 items. To control for the preciseness of prepositions use, an English verb, adjective or noun was given in the parentheses after each Thai sentence.

Data Collection

Because of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, collecting data was conducted via online. First, the researcher asked for a permission from the lecture of the class to conduct the study. Students were informed about the research objectives and then asked to sign a consent form, which sent to their email. After that, they were asked to do the grammatical judgment test (perception test) in google form. The directions of the test were explained in Thai to ensure they completely understood how to do the test. For the grammatical judgment test, the students were asked to identify whether the sentences in the test used prepositions correctly or wrongly. In each item, it was

possible that: (1) one sentence was right, (2) one sentence was wrong, (3) both sentences were right, and (4) both sentences were wrong. They were allowed to do the test for 15 minutes, and then the researcher collected the tests from the participants.

To avoid memory effect, the same students were asked to do the writing test (production test) in google form, a Thai-English translation test, a week later. They were asked to translate 11 Thai sentences into English. On the writing test, the participants were informed to use a preposition in every sentence. The directions of the test were explained in Thai. The participants were allowed to do the test for 15 minutes. After that, all responses of the two tests were analyzed.

Data Analysis

The award score for the grammatical judgment test (perception test), the correct answer of each item is awarded 1 point, and the wrong one is awarded 0 point. The total score of the grammatical judgment test is 20. For The writing test (production test), which the students were asked to translate Thai phrases into English, only correct preposition use was awarded a score. The total score of the production test is 11. As the total score of the tests are different, the students' scores from both tests were calculated into percentage. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program was utilized to analyze data. A paired-samples t-test was employed to investigate the research questions.

Findings and Discussion

1. To what extent are Thai undergraduate students' perception and production on English prepositions?

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare mean score of students' perception and production on English prepositions. There was a significant difference in the mean scores for students' perception and production on English prepositions: $t(49)=7.66$, $p=.000$. It shows that their perception and production scores on English prepositions are different. The mean score of students' perception on English prepositions was 59.83 (SD= 11.00), and the mean score of their production on English prepositions was 41.09 (SD=14.72).

1.1 Is Thai undergraduate students' perception better than production on English prepositions?

The answer to this research question is shown in Figure 1, which illustrates mean scores of undergraduate students' perception and production on English prepositions.

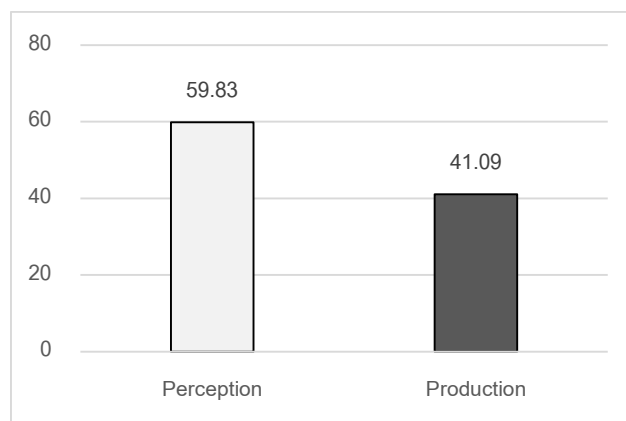


Figure 1. Mean score of students' perception and production on English prepositions

As shown in Figure 1, the mean score of students' perception on English prepositions ($M=59.83$) was higher than the production ($M=41.09$). This means that Thai undergraduate students' perception on English prepositions is better than their production. The results are consistent with Ruangjaroon's (2015) which indicates that acquisition of perception is easier than production. It might be because in the perception test, students were asked to identify whether a preposition appeared in each test item is right or wrong which the possibility to answer correctly is 50%. In the production test, participants were required to find a correct preposition to use in each test item by their own. Therefore, the possibility to answer correctly is much less than the perception. Furthermore, it seems that the students need to use more recognition in the production than the perception. To translate Thai phrases into English requires more linguistic knowledge than considering whether the presented English phrases use prepositions correctly.

Insightful data on the percentage scores of accuracy on the perception and the production tests of the students are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Score ranking of the perception and the production tests

Perception Test (Grammatical Judgment Task)			Production Test (Written Task)		
Item	Statement	% of Accuracy	Item	Statement	% of Accuracy
1a	Exclusive Condo <u>in</u> Sukhumvit Soi 23	48	1	Condo <u>on</u> Sukhumvit 23.	18
1b	Exclusive Condo <u>on</u> Sukhumvit Soi 23	48	2	The price starts <u>from</u> 2 million baht	68
2a	The price starts <u>at</u> 4 million baht.	48	3	The five-star hotel is located <u>on</u> Sukhumvit 43	26
2b	The price starts <u>from</u> 4 million baht.	60	4	Ladies department discounts <u>at</u> 30-50%.	4
3a	Six star hotel is located <u>in</u> SukhumvitSoi 45.	58	5	Libo tight for tummy <u>for</u> 5,000 baht	38

3b	Six-star hotel is located <u>on</u> Sukhumvit Soi 45.	62	6	Please pay attention <u>to</u> the instructions.	28
4a	Reward your dearest mom with fabulous gifts. Ladies dept discounts <u>at</u> 10-30%.	46	7	Thanks <u>for</u> using our service	86
4b	Reward your dearest mom with fabulous gifts. Ladies dept discounts <u>from</u> 10-30%.	42	8	You will be satisfied <u>with</u> our service.	54
5a	Lipo Tight for tummy <u>at</u> 90,000 baht	46	9	If you are interested <u>in</u> our product, please contact us.	54
5b	Lipo Tight for tummy <u>for</u> 90,000 baht	60	10	We are famous <u>for</u> Thai food.	4
6a	Please pay attention <u>at</u> the instructions.	68	11	Nose job <u>at</u> 5,000 baht	72
6b	Please pay attention <u>to</u> the instructions.	76			
7a	Thanks <u>to</u> using our service	80			
7b	Thanks <u>for</u> using our service	86			
8a	You will be satisfied <u>with</u> our service.	92			
8b	You will be satisfied <u>at</u> our service.	88			
9a	If you are interested <u>with</u> our product, contact us.	48			
9b	If you are interested <u>in</u> our product, contact us.	62			
10a	We are famous <u>for</u> plastic surgery.	32			
10b	We are famous <u>about</u> plastic surgery.	22			

To consider the perception task in Table 1, it shows students gained the highest percentage of accuracy on item 8a, “*You will be satisfied with our service.*”, of the perception task (92%), which is consistent with Ruangjaroon’s (2015). This might be because the meaning of the English preposition, “with”, in this statement has the same meaning as the Thai preposition. The more L1 and L2 are similar, the easier it is for learners to use English preposition correctly (Catalán, 1996). In addition, frequency of exposure which affects the choice of preposition use can be explained the high accuracy on this item (Ruangjaroon, 2015). For the production task, students gained the highest percentage of accuracy (86%) on item 7, “*Thanks for using our service.*”, which students also got very high percentage of accuracy (86%) on this statement on the perception test. The similarity in meaning of L1 and L2 can be explained this point. The English preposition “for” has the same meaning in the Thai language. Not surprisingly, the students gained very high percentage of accuracy in this statement

on both the perception and production tasks since Thai and English use the preposition “for” with the word “Thanks”. This finding is consistent with Ruangjaroon’s (2015), which participants gained very high percentage of accuracy on preposition used with the statement with the verb “thanks” in both types of tasks.

In contrast, students perceived the lowest percentage of accuracy on item 10b, “*We are famous about plastic surgery.*” (22%), on the perception task. It can be explained by the interference of the students’ L1 on their grammatical judgment. The students might translate this English statement into their L1, Thai, and think that the English preposition “about” used in this statement is correct as it has the same meaning in Thai. The English word “famous” is always collocated with the preposition “for”. This mismatch between L1 and L2 affects the wrong grammatical judgment of the students. To consider the production task, it shows students got the lowest percentage of accuracy (4%) on item 4, “*Ladies department discounts at 30-50%.*”, and item 10, “*We are famous for Thai food.*”. The lowest percentage of accuracy on the perception and production tasks is on the statement with the word “famous” and the collocated preposition use, “for”. This finding might be clarified that the students have difficulty in choosing the correct preposition used with the word “famous”. For the use of the preposition in the statement “*Ladies department discounts at 30-50%.*”, most students used the preposition “from 10 to 30%”. It might be assumed that the students used direct translation of the preposition used in their L1 with this statement. The difficulty in using the correct preposition with the word “famous” also found in Ruangjaroon’s (2015). This finding can be explained Thai students have problem in using the correct preposition with the word “famous” as there are various meanings of preposition used with this word in Thai, i.e., [*nai daan*] and [*giieow gap*].

2. To what extent are Thai undergraduate students’ perception and production on dependent and independent prepositions?

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare mean score of students’ perception and production on independent and dependent prepositions. There was a significant difference in the mean scores for students’ perception and production on independent prepositions: $t(49) = 3.99$, $p = .000$. This shows that students’ perception score on independent prepositions is different from their production score on independent prepositions. The mean score of students’ perception on independent prepositions was 51.80 (SD= 16.62), and the mean score of their production on independent prepositions was 37.67 (SD=21.25).

There was a significant difference in the mean scores for students’ perception and production on dependent prepositions: $t(49) = 4.91$, $p = .000$. The result means that their perception score on dependent prepositions is different from their production score on dependent prepositions. The mean score of students’ perception on dependent prepositions was 59.80 (SD=15.58), and the mean score of their production on dependent prepositions was 45.20 (SD=15.55).

2.1 Are Thai undergraduate students’ perception and production on dependent prepositions better than those of independent prepositions?



The answer to this research question is shown in Figure 2, which illustrates mean scores of undergraduate students' perception and production on dependent and independent prepositions.

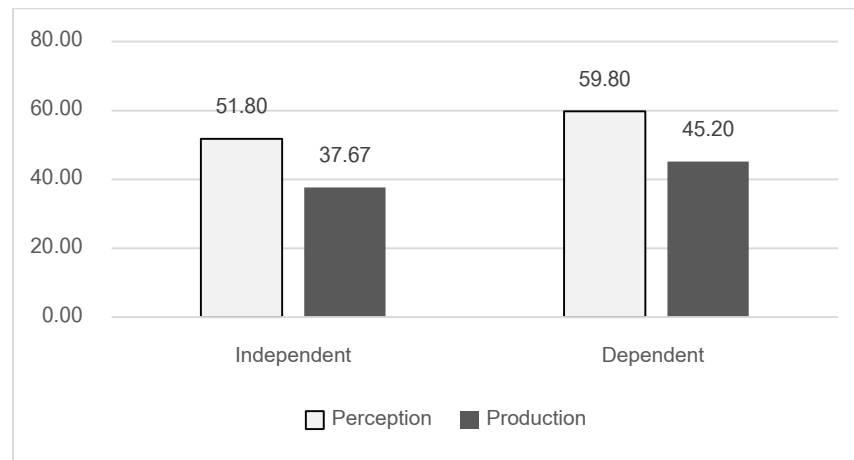


Figure 2. Mean score of students' perception and production on independent and dependent prepositions

Evidence from the mean scores of the students' perception and production on independent and dependent prepositions illustrates that their perception on independent and dependent prepositions was better than their production on the two types of prepositions. Considering the mean scores of the students' perception and production on independent and dependent prepositions, they show that students are not good at using both types of English prepositions. Additionally, their ability in perceiving the two types of prepositions is higher than their ability in producing them. As stated earlier, to perceive whether the prepositions used correctly in each statement is not required as much linguistic competence as to produce them. Therefore, it is not surprising why the students' percentage scores of both the independent and dependent prepositions on the perception test are higher than the production test. Considering the mean scores of the dependent and independent prepositions in the perception and the production tests, the students gained higher score in the dependent prepositions than in the independent ones. This might be because the dependent prepositions consist of pattern of usage and we always hear or see from various media, for instance, the verb "thank you" always use with the preposition "for", for instance, "Thank you for your attention." The high accuracy of using prepositions can be explained by how often students expose to those prepositions which affects the choice of preposition use correctly (Ruangjaroon, 2015).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study shows that Thai undergraduate students have difficulty in perceiving and producing English prepositions. They did better in perceiving English prepositions than producing them. Additionally, the independent prepositions seem to be more problematic for them than the dependent prepositions in both the perception and the production tests. The findings support the

notion of problems in learning and using the English prepositions of ESL/EFL learners (Atay, 2007; Atmaca, 2016; Kampookaew, 2020; Kurk & Latif, 2007; Loke, Alil, & Anthony, 2013; Phoocharoensil et al., 2016; Promsupa, 2016; Ruangjaroon, 2015; Sermsuk et al., 2017; Seyitkuliyeve et al., 2020; Thumawongsa, 2018; Tunaz, Muyan, & Muratoglu, 2016). More research studies related to English prepositions used on ESL/EFL learners are required to find out the most problematic English prepositions and then English teachers should recognize this problem and try to find ways and techniques to enhance their students' ability in using the English prepositions, especially independent prepositions, correctly. Furthermore, English teachers can enhance their students' production on English prepositions via various activities, for example, translating Thai phrases/ sentences with prepositions into English, writing English paragraphs/ essays, and always emphasize their students on the most problematic English prepositions for Thais.

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