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PREPOSITIONS IN ENGLISH AND POSTPOSITIONS IN TELUGU:
A SEMANTIC PERSPECTIVE FOR ELT

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to propose a framework for a contrastive study of English prepositions and Telugu postpositions with a view to identifying the possible errors produced by Telugu learners of English at the undergraduate level in Andhra Pradesh. For this purpose the semantic features evolved by Randolph Quirk et al has been taken as the basis. English is a Germanic language while Telugu is a Central Dravidian language. Syntactically there are differences. But semantically also they display a wide contrast, particularly in conceptualizing the meanings conveyed by prepositions and postpositions respectively. Hence an attempt is made here to suggest a common semantic framework to capture the differences as well as similarities. It is hoped that the results of the contrastive analysis suggested here, will help the teachers who teach English to Telugu learners to prepare appropriate teaching materials in this respect.

Key Words: contrast, English, postposition, preposition, semantics, Telugu

The importance of English in developing countries like India has been growing day by day. Particularly in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries English has evolved into a very important global language such that proficiency in English has become an essential qualification for young people seeking employment not only abroad, but also in India where a number of multi-national companies have established their branches. It is in this context that academicians especially the teachers of English have to explore theoretical and practical domains to strengthen the pedagogy and practice of English Language Teaching (ELT) in the Indian context.

The main objective of this paper is to evolve a framework for comparing and contrasting the English prepositions and Telugu postpositions. The former occurs before nouns, noun phrases, pronouns and verbs, whereas the latter are suffixed to nouns, noun phrases, pronouns and verbs nouns. This behaviour causes confusion to the Telugu learner of English. This is related to syntactic dimension. In terms of meaning or semantics also problems are faced by the Telugu learners as there is no one-to-one correspondence between these items of L₁ and L₂.

The underlying of the present paper is that if we can evolve a common framework to describe the meanings of the items under reference in semantic terms, most of the problems can be solved by the teacher who can help his/her students by preparing teaching materials where the differences and similarities are highlighted and adequate practice is given to the learners. For instance, 90 per cent of the Telugu learners are likely to come out with a sentence like:

*1.He is suffering with fever.

Where as the correct preposition in English is 'from' in this context.

The recent research studies in ELT have tended to reject the value of contrastive analysis for the following reasons:

- a) The child who is acquiring L₁ also commits mistakes without the influence or interference of any other language. Therefore, it is unreasonable to assume that an L₂ learner commits mistakes due to the interference of his/her native language¹.
- b) Errors are the natural outcome and indicators of learning process. Therefore they are natural².
- c) L₁ interference is a source of mistake particularly in pronunciation, accent and intonation, i.e., in acquiring the phonological patterns of L₂³.

This may be true, but the data on the errors produced by Telugu learners of English, unambiguously proves that not only phonological errors but also semantic and syntactic errors produced by Telugu learners of English of also due to the interference of L₁⁴.

Therefore, it is necessary to make a contrastive analysis between English as L₁ and the Indian languages as L₂ (here it is Telugu).

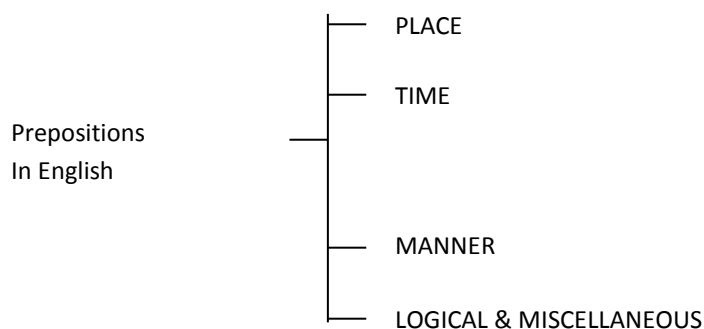
1.1 In view of the above theoretical and practical implication, contrastive studies between languages in the context of language teaching/learning, teaching of English as a second language in the Indian context acquires importance. As long ago as 1921Edward Sapir pointed out that the thought patterns of the speakers of a language are determined by the linguistic patterns of the native language⁵. This appears to be valid even today. For example, in Telugu, there is no parallel for the only words 'green' and 'yellow'. In Telugu, 'green' is 'aakupatcha' and 'yellow' is 'pasupupatcha', 'patcha' being a common element. If one accepts this difference, one has to accept Sapir's argument. Most of the ELT experts in India and abroad, today, are somehow reluctant to take cognizance of this theoretical tenet. Perhaps, either they are unwilling to take linguistics or psychology for their theoretical bases forgetting the fact that language teaching is only an applied activity drawing the basic insights from Modern Linguistics and Modern Psychology. It is just common sense that language teaching/language learning cannot be a discipline unless it draws insight from linguistics which offers a scientific knowledge about the structure and use of language and psychology which provided insights into the process of acquisition/learning. It is really an irony that a number of so called experts of ELT are proposing their own methods, approaches and techniques of language teaching/learning without acquainting themselves with the fundamental research carried out in Modern Linguistics and Modern Psychology. Hence the proliferation of so many approaches and methods in ELT. Even mathematicians and non-language persons have been evolving language teaching methods (Cf. The Silent Way, Suggestopaedia).

1.2 A Semantic Framework for English Prepositions and Telugu Postpositions

In view of the above facts, an attempt is made here to propose a common semantic framework for capturing the similarities and differences between English prepositions and Telugu postpositions with reference to teaching of English as a second language to Telugu learners at the undergraduate level. This framework is based upon the insights drawn from Quick et al (1972).

1.2.1 A Semantic Classification of the Prepositions in English

The prepositions in English are classified in the following way. (Quirk et al 1972):



Each of these four classes may further be elaborated as follows:

PLACE	—	Destination	:	at, to, onto, on, in, into from, away from
	—	Negative position	:	away from, off etc.
	—	Dimension	:	at, on, in, out of
	—	Relative position	:	by, over, under, between, among, above, below, on top of, underneath, beneath, in front of behind.
	—	Passage	:	by, over, under, across, through, past, etc.
	—	Directional path	:	up, down, along, across.
	—	Orientation	:	beyond, over, past, across, through, up, down, along, around
	—	Pervasive	:	allover, throughout
TIME	—	Point of Time	:	at, on, in, etc.
	—	Duration	:	for, since, over, through, throughout

MANNER	—	Cause	:	because of, of.
	—	Purpose	:	for to, because of
	—	Target/Goal/Recipient	:	for, to, at
	—	Origin/Source	:	from
	—	Means	:	with, in...manner, like, by, without at
	—	Accompaniment	:	with, support, opposition, for, against
LOGICAL & MISCELLANEOUS	—	Genitive	:	of, with, without
	—	Concession	:	in spite of, despite, for+all, with+all notwithstanding (F)
	—	Exception	:	except for, with the exception of, apart from, exception, except, but, bar, barring
	—	Negative condition	:	but for
	—	Subject matter	:	about, on
	—	Ingredient, material	:	with, of, out of
	—	Reaction	:	at, to

2.1 Postpositions in Telugu

Telugu heavily depends upon inflections unlike English wherein the word order is crucial for the interpretation of the meaning of the sentence. Look at the following:

Tel: Si:taku ra:muDu uttaram ra:s(æ):Du
(Sita-to Rama letter wrote-he)

Eng: Sita wrote a letter to Rama.

Tel: ra:muDu si:taku uttaram ra:sæ:Du
(Rama Sita-to letter wrote-he)

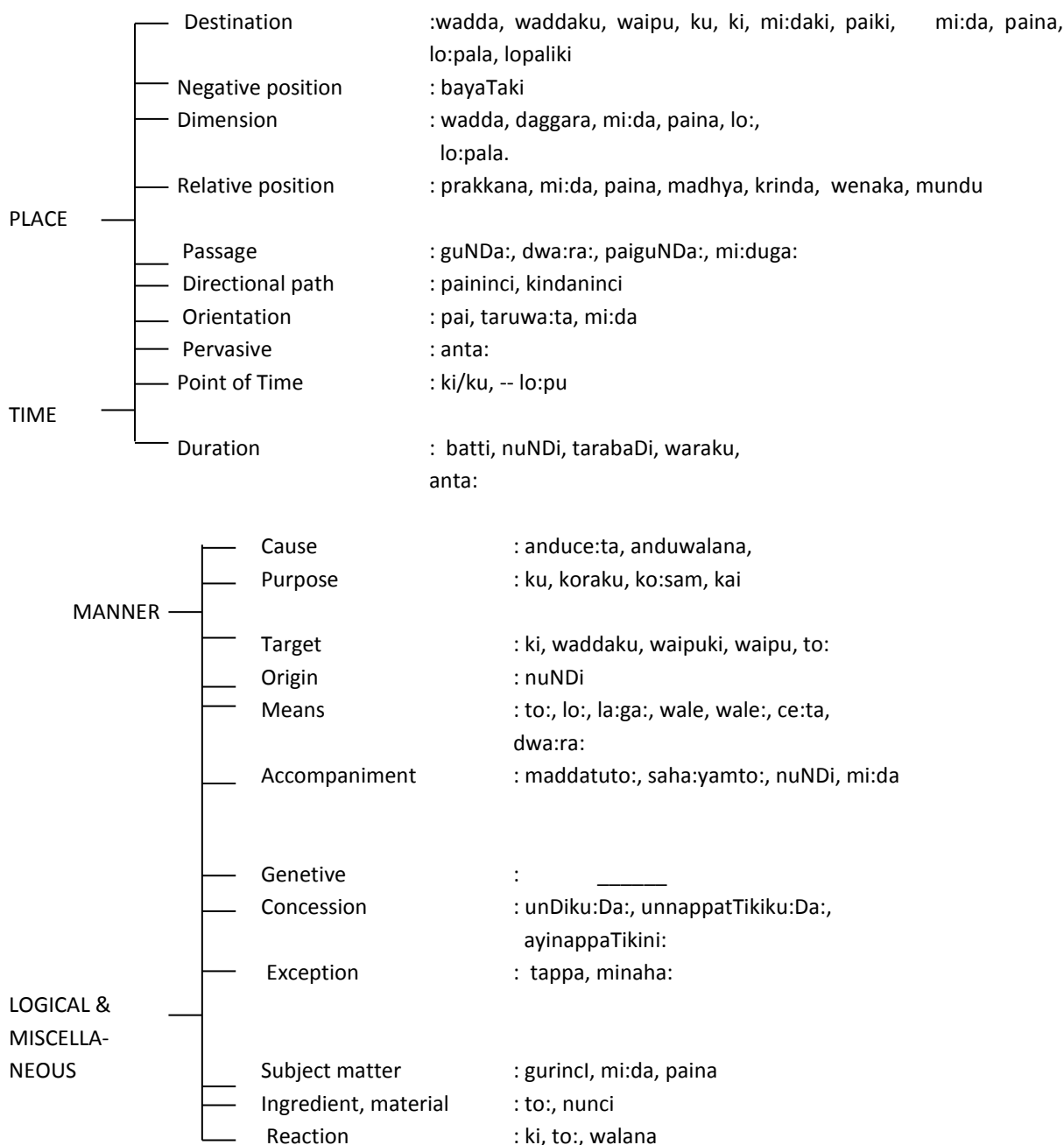
Eng: Rama wrote a letter to Sita.

In the above Telugu sentences, unlike English, though the positions of subject and object are interchanged, the meaning of the sentences remains the same. In Telugu, the post positions added to the nouns determines the grammatical status of the constituents as well as the meaning of the sentence.

This fundamental dissimilarity in sentence structure between English and Telugu coupled with different case endings, and prepositions/postpositions is very likely to cause errors in the English of Telugu learners, particularly at the Intermediate level.

1.2.2 Semantic Classification of Postpositions in Telugu

The semantic framework adopted for the classification of the prepositions in English can be used for the classification of the postpositions in Telugu also. Accordingly, they are subdivided below into those with semantic implications of Time, Place, Manner and Logical and Miscellaneous.



For the purpose of the present study, the above mentioned frame work, in terms of the semantic implications of English prepositions as proposed by Quirk *et al* (1972: 299 – 337) has been adopted.

From the above comparative analysis of English prepositions and Telugu postpositions can be seen that semantically there are similarities as well as differences. Therefore, it is suggested that similarities

between L₁ and L₂ will facilitate learning and differences will interfere. Hence the teachers of English in Andhra Pradesh have to produce supplementary teaching materials in which the differences are not only understood but also appropriately handled by their students so that they can overcome the problems they face in the use of English prepositions.

It may be mentioned that in this paper, a modest attempt has been made to suggest ways and means to tackle the problem in enabling Telugu learners of English to appropriately use English prepositions because the focus in this paper is on the semantic features of prepositions/postpositions. If the suggestions of this paper are supplemented by similar studies on the syntactic behavior of English prepositions and Telugu postpositions, by further studies, the teachers of English to Telugu learners of English at the undergraduate level in Andhra Pradesh, will be benefited further.

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