Textbook Representation of Prepositions

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Abstract

This article presents a corpus-based investigation on English prepositions which are presented in three English language textbooks used by lower secondary schools in Malaysia. The aims were to find out the distributions of prepositions, its frequency order in comparison with the British National Corpus (BNC) and the differences in terms of their co-occurrence with other parts of speech. The findings showed that there is a difference between the textbook corpus and the BNC in terms of the frequency order of certain prepositions and there are similarities and differences in terms of their co-occurrence with other parts of speech. This study indicates the textbook corpus is essential in the study of prepositions and the results can guide teachers in deciding how best to supplement the text with activities that will give learners exposure to target grammar item that is not sufficiently presented in the textbook.

Keywords: Preposition, Corpus, Textbooks

1. Introduction

As part of the grammatical system, prepositions seem to occur everywhere in speaking and writing (Morenberg, 1997). However, it is difficult to learn to use prepositions correctly as most of them have several different functions and there are not many rules to help in choosing which prepositions to use correctly (Swan, 1988). ESL learners still struggle with prepositions long after they have achieved a high level of proficiency in English. Even proficient English speakers exhibit variable performance with regard to which prepositions they use for a particular meaning (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

The teaching of grammar has always been an important concern and there are several methods and approaches which have been proposed in the teaching of grammar specifically and in the teaching of English as a Foreign and Second language generally. In Malaysia, the English language is taught as a second language and in schools, the English Language Syllabuses are skills based syllabuses advocating the communicative approach to English Language Teaching. The emphasis is on the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and communicative ability (Rajaretnam & Nalliah, 1999).

The syllabus of the Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM) or the Integrated Secondary School Curriculum for English language as outlined by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) of the Ministry Of Education Malaysia (MoE) emphasizes that the teaching of grammar is to be incorporated into the four language skills and should be taught in context and in a meaningful way. It should not be taught in isolation or as discrete items as far as possible. The grammar items to be taught are listed in the syllabus.

Malaysian schools use prescribed textbooks provided by the Textbook Bureau of the Ministry of Education Malaysia in their English language classes (Mukundan, 2004). English is generally taught using these government issued textbooks which have been prepared according to the national English language syllabus guidelines set out by the Ministry of Education (Murugesan, 2003).

Hence, as textbooks are used as core resources in classrooms, it is important to look at how the grammar items are presented in these textbooks. This study specifies its focus on identifying prepositions, as listed in the syllabus, which are presented in the textbooks used by schools in Malaysia.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate English prepositions which are presented in the English Language textbooks used by lower secondary schools in Malaysia, which are Form One, Form Two and Form Three.

1.1 Research Questions

In view of the objective mentioned above, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the distributions of prepositions in the English Language textbooks of Form One, Two and Three?

2) What is the order of prepositions in the English Language textbooks of Form One, Two and Three in comparison with the BNC?

3) What are the differences in the use of prepositions identified in the English Language textbooks of Form One, Two and Three?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Prepositions and the English language

Prepositions are grammatical words or function words that mainly contribute to the grammatical structure of the sentence (Thornbury, 2002). Most of the common English prepositions, such as *at*, *in*, and *for*, are simple, that is, consist of one word, whereas other prepositions, consisting of more than one word, such as *along with*, *away from*, *out of*, are called complex prepositions (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1989). Klammer et al. (2004) has listed 60 simple prepositions and 39 complex prepositions in *Analyzing English Grammar*.

In the English Language, prepositions are presented in three dimensions, namely, the form, meaning and use. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) review the phrase structure rule for a prepositional phrase to make several observations about the form of prepositions. It is stated, also, one of the greatest learning challenges presented by prepositions is their meaning, for instance, the problem with giving an abstract definition to ESL/EFL students is that the definition is often more difficult to comprehend and apply than the form itself. Additionally, there are issues of use as well concerning prepositions. There appear to be instances where more than one preposition with the same meaning is acceptable in a given context, for example, in a time period: *It happened in/during 1998.*

A preposition is a relationship word that expresses a connection to place, time, possession, accompaniment or comparison. (Kosur, 2008). However, most prepositions have several different functions (Swan, 1988). Byrd and Benson (2001) define prepositions are often used to create adverbial modifiers to give information about place or time.

Many of the words described as prepositions can also be used as other parts of speech. Whether or not a word is a preposition depends on how it is used in a sentence. Biber et. al (1999) highlights the overlap issue between prepositions and other word classes such as noun, adjective and adverb in *The Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (LGSWE).

On the other hand, English prepositions do not have a neat set of rules governing their use. These rules are often complex, and may not be able to ensure accuracy (Wahlen, 2001). The nature and complexity of prepositions have consequently led to problems with prepositions for ESL teachers and learners.

2.2 Prepositions and the Malay language

There are differences between the use of prepositions in the English language and in the first language of the ESL users. For instance, in a Malaysian context, it is quite relevant to compare the prepositions in the English language and Malay in an attempt to determine whether there would be difficulties in learning or acquiring English prepositions faced by students whose mother tongue as well as medium of instruction is Malay. The following comparison between the two languages has been outlined in Sudhakaran (2008) based on Othman (1993, 1985).

The preposition '*in*' (*dalam*), where in the case of Malay, '*in*' is used before nouns that relate to objects such as a picture, story, mirror, while '*into*' (*di dalam*) is used before a noun that indicates content or denote filling an area or space like a room, river, or a container. In the English Language, '*in*' has a wider application, since it is also used in other situations too, for example, '*in anger*', '*in aid of*'; whereas '*into*', too, can be used in a wider context like '*into despair*', '*into anger*'.

The preposition '*from*' (*dari, daripada*) in Malay has been split into two separate forms; one form to be used before nouns indicating places or direction, for example, *dari Melaka* (from Melaka), *dari angkasa lepas* (*from outer space*), *dari utara* (*from the north*); the other *daripada* is used before nouns related to resources, for example, *daripada emas* (*from gold*), *daripada kayu* (*from wood*), *daripada cermin* (*from glass*), or before nouns related to people, for example, *daripada Ali* (*from Ali*), *daripada kakaknya* (*from his sister*). However, here there is a distinct difference; while *daripada* is also used for resources in Malay as in the examples above, in English, the preposition '*of*' is used instead,

for example, in '*made of gold*', '*of wood*' or '*of glass*'. However, there are instances of a similar usage too, for example, '*made from the bark of the tree*'.

In Malay, the preposition *pada* ('*at*') is used for names of objects or things that have a 'surface', for example*, pada mukanya* (*at his face*), *pada kulit buah* (*at the skin of the fruit*), *pada pintu* (*at the door*), *pada langsir pintu* (*at the door curtain*), as well as to denote time, for example, *pada pukul lima* (*at five o'clock*), *pada pagi* (*at morning*). Here too, there are differences between the two languages. In some of the examples above, the appropriate preposition in English would be '*on*' – *pada mukanya* (*on his face*), *pada kulit buah* (*on the skin of the fruit*), *pada pintu* (*on the door*), *pada langsir pintu* (*on the door curtain*), whereas *'at the door'* in English would indicate a different meaning that somebody is outside the door. The usage of '*at*' for time (as indicated by the clock) is the same for both languages, but with respect to the time of the day, in English, different prepositions can be used as follows; *'at dawn', 'in the morning', 'at noon', 'in the afternoon',* and *'at night'*.

Hence, it can be seen that there are some differences in the use of prepositions between English language and Malay. While some of these differences are evident and distinct, others are subtler, and depend to a large extent on the nuances of meaning implied in the context of use of the specific prepositions Sudhakaran (2008). Consequently, these add problems to ESL teachers and learners due to prepositions not used as they are used in the first language of the ESL users.

2.3 Studies on prepositions

Many studies on the forms of prepositions (O'Dowd, 1994, Frodeson and Eyring, 1997), meanings of prepositions (Fillmore, 1968, Hudson, 1979, Lakoff, 1987, Burgman, 1981, Parker, 1993, Heitzman, 1993, Thompson, 1992, Taylor, 1993, Dirven, 1993) and use of prepositions (Kennedy, 1991, Lindstromberg, 1996, Todaka, 1996) have been used and described in grammar books, particularly in Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999).

These studies may have made it more obvious why prepositions cause such difficulty for ESL/EFL students. While learning the various meanings and meaning extensions of prepositions is perhaps the greatest challenge, a pedagogical strategy that enables students to pay attention to their co-occurrence, collocational, and discourse behaviour in addition will no doubt facilitate learners' acquisition of these difficult lexico-grammatical forms (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

One of the earlier studies made by Takahaski (1969) has stated one of the most difficult problems a student of English as a Second Language faces is the understanding of the functions and the use of English prepositions. Most learning is dependent on memorization and getting used to the usage. Takahaski further expressed his dissatisfaction with the idea of the correct understanding and usage of certain prepositions involves intuitions. Instead, he believed that if the correct understanding and usage of these prepositions involves intuition, then few who learn English as a Second Language can gain mastery of them.

Other studies have looked into the acquisition patterns of different types of prepositions (Johnston and Slobin, 1979, Conner and Chapman, 1985, Tomasello, 1987), studies on the frequent use of prepositions (Johnston and Slobin, 1979, Johnston, 1984, Furrow, Murray and Furrow, 1985/1986) and also studies on the frequency of errors for the English prepositions (Durkin, 1981, Leikin, 1998, Abkarian, 1983). All these studies on prepositions had used children at different age levels as their subjects.

Abdulkarim (2008) has stated in his study, prepositions are so significant for communication and they play such an important role, however, the systemic study of prepositions has been scarcely investigated both in linguistics and methodology.

A corpus-related study compared the LOB corpus and the Nijmegan corpus (de Haan, 1992). The ten most frequent prepositions in the LOB corpus are presented in a decreasing order, together with the ten most frequent prepositions in the written part of the Nijmegan corpus. There are very few differences between the two corpora as far as the frequency and distribution of prepositions are concerned.

2.4 Prepositions in the KBSM syllabus

As indicated in the KBSM syllabus, English prepositions that are listed to be taught in the lower secondary schools include prepositions of place *(in, on, near, under, in front of, by)*, prepositions of time *(at, on, by, before, after)* and prepositions of direction *(to, from)* for the Form One KBSM syllabus. This list of prepositions is the same for Form Two and Three with an addition of prepositions *at* and *between* for prepositions of place and an addition for the preposition of quantity, *of*.

3. Methodology

This corpus-based study looks at a corpus of three lower secondary school English language textbooks used by schools in Malaysia, the British National Corpus and utilizes a computer software WordSmith Tools version 4.0. According to

Kennedy (1991), it is important to study the "linguistic ecology" of prepositions. One way to do so is to use computer corpora.

3.1 Corpus-based analysis

In this study, two corpora, namely, the British National Corpus (BNC) and the English textbook corpus will be used and compared to find out the frequency occurrence of prepositions. Three corpus-related studies by Kennedy (1987), Holmes (1988) and Mindt (1992) have similar methodologies using sample textbooks and standard English corpora and carried out a comparative study between the two. Kennedy has researched ways of expressing quantification and frequency in ESL textbooks, Holmes examined ways of expressing doubt and certainty in ESL textbooks while Mindt looked into the future time expressions in German textbooks. Most researches in this area found that there are discrepancies or considerable differences between what textbooks are teaching and how native speakers actually use language as evidenced in the corpora. The implication being in the area of materials development particularly that of textbook writing (Tan, 2001).

3.1.1 British National Corpus

One of the corpora used in this study is the British National Corpus (BNC). The British National Corpus is a 100 million word collection of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources designed to represent a wide cross-section of current British English, both spoken and written (accessible from, http://www.natc orp.ox.ac.uk/). In this study, the frequency for both spoken and written will be used in order to compare with the textbook corpus used in this study to find out the similarities and the differences in the frequency order of prepositions. It does not have the intention of comparing it with how native speakers actually use language as in Kennedy (1987), Holmes (1988) and Mindt (1992).

3.1.2 English Textbook Corpus

In order to compare the frequency occurrence of prepositions, the textbook corpus is also needed. This lower secondary textbook corpus consists of 153,889 running words. The corpus created for this investigation consisted of the lower secondary Malaysian English textbooks used in Form One, Two and Three English classes. In the judgment of the authors, the material included in the corpus comprised what would typically be thought of as the core instructional material for teaching, that which most teachers could reasonably be expected to cover when using the textbook for one year in each class.

3.2 WordSmith Tools 4.0

WordSmith Tools are integrated programmes that look at how words behave in a text. Oxford University Press uses the tools for the lexicographic work in preparing dictionaries. These tools are also useful for language teachers, students and researchers in investigating language patterns. There are three analysis tools, that of, WordList, Concord and KeyWords. For the purpose of this study, the WordList tool was used to find out the frequency occurrence of the prepositions as suggested by the KBSM syllabus within and across the three textbooks. The Concord tool was used for detailed analysis on concordance entries for each preposition. This is to find out the differences in the use of prepositions in terms of categories and in terms of their co-occurrence with other parts of speech.

4. Results and Discussion

The presentation of the results of the analysis and the discussion will follow the order of research questions stated earlier.

4.1 What are the distributions of prepositions in the English Language textbooks of Form One, Two and Three? (RQ 1)

These are the prepositions that are required to be taught at the lower secondary level based on the KBSM syllabus. The prepositions found in the English Language textbooks of Form One, Two and Three are presented in a decreasing order: *to*, *of*, *in*, *on*, *from*, *at*, *by*, *after*, *before*, *between*, *near*, *under*, *behind* and *in front of* (Table 1). The preposition *to* has appeared in Form One, 1,136 times and the frequency increased in the Form Two and Form Three English Language textbooks. The increasing frequency occurrences have also appeared for the prepositions *in*, *before*, *near* and *under*. However, with the other prepositions, *of*, *at*, *between* and *behind*, they began with a higher frequency for Form One and lower frequency occurrences in Form Two and slightly higher in Form Three compared with either Form One or Form Two. The other prepositions with decreasing frequency occurrences from Form One to Form Three textbooks were the prepositions *on* and *after*. The prepositions *from*, *by* and *in front of* have dwindling frequency occurrences as they appeared in the English Language textbooks of Form One, Two and Three.

4.2 What is the order of prepositions in the English Language textbooks of Form One, Two and Three in comparison with the BNC? (RQ 2)

In order to answer this research question, a comparison between the British National Corpus (BNC) and the textbook corpus was made.

The order of prepositions as presented based on the BNC (accessible from Word Frequencies in Written and Spoken English (WFWSE) in http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/bncfreq/flists.html) is quite different compared to the order of prepositions in Form One, Two and Three textbooks (Table 2). In the textbook corpus, for instance, *to* comes first before *of* and *in*. The preposition *from* appears before *at* and *by*. The preposition *before* appears after the preposition *after* and before *between* and *near*. The prepositions in the textbook corpus which were in the same order as in the BNC were *on*, *at*, *after* and *in front of*. The prepositions *on* and *by* have shown a difference in the frequency order between the BNC and the textbook corpus. The preposition *on* is placed higher than *by*. This has made the prepositions *at* and *from* to be in between *on* and *by*.

This study has revealed that for certain prepositions, the frequency order does not quite agree between the textbook corpus and the BNC. The reason for that is unknown but it might have to do with the content of the corpora. This study consists of texts from textbooks whereas the BNC consists of all kinds of written texts, for example, "extracts from regional and national newspapers, specialist periodicals and journals of all ages and interests, academic books and popular fiction, published and unpublished letters and memoranda, school and university essays" (accessible from, http://www.natc orp.ox.ac.uk/).

4.3 What are the differences in the use of prepositions identified in the English Language textbooks of Form One, Two and Three? (RQ 2)

4.3.1 Differences in terms of categories of prepositions

The first part of this research question looks at the differences for the same prepositions which are used differently in different categories and the differences are observed in terms of frequency occurrence.

As stated in the KBSM syllabus, the prepositions *on*, *at* and *by* need to be taught as prepositions of place and time (Table 3 and Table 4). In terms of its frequency of occurrence, *on* is mostly used for place, with 292 occurrences and has appeared mostly in the Form Two textbook whereas in the time category, there appears to be 62 occurrences and mostly in Form One. However, *by* is used with time more, with 17 occurrences, than with place, which counts for 9 occurrences.

The preposition *at* is also used with both prepositions of place and time. *At* is used more with place than with time, with 126 occurrences. The preposition *at* is used with time, with 72 occurrences for all three textbooks, Form One, Form Two and Form Three.

4.3.2 Differences in terms of the co-occurrence with other parts of speech

The second part of this research question looks at the differences in the use of prepositions for each category in terms of the co-occurrence with other parts of speech.

In order to answer this part, first, the prepositions which are presented far lesser than the others based on each category are looked into. Second, in the case of prepositions of directions, both *to* and *from* are looked into for the purpose of comparisons.

Prepositions of place

In the category of prepositions of place, *in* has the highest frequency of 1,234 as opposed to *behind*, with 7 occurrences, *in front of*, with 10 occurrences, and *by*, with 8 occurrences and *between* with only 3 (Table 5).

The prepositions of place *behind*, *in front of*, *by* and *between* may express the relative position of two objects or groups of objects (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1989).

Behind is used with article (the) + adjective (flood) + noun (wall) as in

bursts its banks, the water will stay behind the flood wall. Straightening the

It is also used with object pronoun (me) as in

victims at the moment. As you can see behind me, the volunteers (4) (distribute)

Besides, it is also used with possessive adjective (my, our) + noun (back, house)

hands with the rascal. I put both hands behind my back. This was Rupert's

We were shocked. Part of the hill behind our house had been washed

Both verbs (stay, see) and nouns (hands, hill) precede *behind* in these instances.

In front of is used with article (a, the) + noun (television, playground) as in

people who spend too much time in front of the television may become

in front of next to/by Sufian's house is in front of a playground but behind a row

In front of is also used with possessive adjective (their, her) + noun (computers, house) as in

Some teenagers would rather sit in front of their computers and television

noisy. There are frequent traffic jams in front of her house. 4 Fairoz lives in a

It is also used with object pronoun (me, him) as in

The Prisoner of Zenda The Castle was in front of me. It looked more than ever

of the hill. I can see only the rooftops in front of me. The houses by the side of

His servants set his breakfast in front of him. But when Midas touched

The nouns (time, traffic jams, rooftops, breakfast) and the verbs (is, sit, was)   precede *in front of*.

By is used with article (a, the) + noun (sea, seaside, waterfall) as in

house. 4 Fairoz lives in a fishing village by the sea. , The house is on stilts. It

describe the hobby. A B My aunt lives by the seaside. She collects unusual

of beautiful flowers. We had a picnic by the waterfall and played in the cool

Both nouns (village, picnic) and the verb (lives) precede *by*.

By is also used with article (a, the) + adjective (large) + noun (window) as in

they find a lot of food. They stand by a large window and peer into the

In this case, the verb (stand) precedes *by*.

The prepositions of place, *behind*, *in front of* and *by* reveal the use of articles, nouns and verbs with these prepositions. Besides, there are also instances in which possessive adjective, object pronoun and adjective being used.

Being the least presented one, as it appears in the concordance, *between* is used with article (the) + noun (tower and cannibals) as in *between* the tower and *between* the cannibals and it is also used with article (the) and possessive noun (whale's teeth) as in *between* the whale's teeth. Besides, article (the) + noun (spaces and road) precede *between* as in, the spaces *between* and the road *between*. The reflexive pronoun (himself) also precedes *between* as in, places himself *between*

that it can pass through the spaces between the whale's teeth and into its

of the river are underwater. The road between the tower and the hill is also

He is thankful. He places himself between the cannibals and their victim.

Even if this preposition is not required to be taught in Form One, it is the least favorable as there is only one time occurrence to show it as a preposition of place. In the concordance, it is used with possessive adjective (her) + noun (parents) as in *her parents*. The verb (sit) precedes *between* as in, to sit *between*.

watching television. Zalina prefers to sit between her parents. Zuraidah's cat

As such *between* should be taught along with articles, possessive adjective, possessive noun, nouns as well as reflexive pronoun and verb.

Preposition of time

In the category of prepositions of time, the preposition of time *after* is the highest, 83, as opposed to *by* with 17 (Table 6).

When speaking of time, *by* usually means 'before or at' (Lindstromberg, 1998). *By* means 'no later than' for time (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). *By* also specifies commencement point (Swan, 1988).

The preposition of time *by* is clearer when the time point is given. In fact, the recurring combinations centre around time of the day.

exhibits but we 10 ... to leave the place by 6.00 p.m. Say it right Read these

a specific time • Complete your work by 2.00 p.m. 'before' means earlier than

because I can think best at that time. By 1.00 p.m., I feel drowsy and begin to

her family. She usually goes to bed by 11.00 p.m. Chapter 8 (Text 1) Dr

before going out to play in the evening. By 6.30 p.m. she has to be home. She

Salt, Natural flavour B RM4.10 c D Use by:30.11.20__ Store in cool place H I 1

Mantin and returning on the same day by 6 p.m. Forty students and three

However, there is a very minimal finding on the preposition of time *by* used with days, dates, months, years and also *by* that specifie*s* commencement point.

said that (2) have to hand in our project by Tuesday or we w\ lose marks. The

Please inform the Secretary by 18 June 20_ _, if you cannot attend

that river. It should be completed by next month. The government will build

continues, rainforests will disappear by the year 2030. Let's Explore Read the

of the world's people will live in cities by 2030. 2 There will be more and more

In the concordance, nouns precede *by* the most as in place *by*, work *by*, bed *by*, day *by*, project *by*, Secretary *by* and cities *by* whereas verbs present the least as in use *by*, completed *by* and disappear *by*. The use of *by* as preposition of time also marks the beginning of a sentence as in *By* 1.00 p.m. and *By* 6.30 p.m.

As such, the preposition of time *by* should be taught along with noun, verb and its presentation at the beginning of a sentence.

Prepositions of direction

The preposition of direction *to* has a higher frequency occurrence, 177 as compared to *from* with 67 (Table 7). Literally, *to* and *from* has its meanings of starting point and destination (Swan, 1988).

In simple directions from one place to another *to* and *from* are used with article (a, the) + noun (court, shops, shore, factories, school, sinking ship, roof) as in

I'd love to but I'm too lazy to cycle to the court every evening. There are a

into the past tense. 1 We run to the shops. 2 They fry eggs for dinner.

the water. He tells the old man to swim to the shore. Crusoe and Xury sail away

waste. Industrial waste comes from factories. It includes toxic or

and hit him as he was walking home from school. The driver of the car said

boat picked up the crew of sailors from the sinking ship. 5 Our school lost

In modern houses, the rainwater flows from the roof, into the gutter,2 and down

In a number of common expressions, article is dropped after a preposition (Swan, 1988).

has been disturbing you on the way to school. 5 You wish to collect

asked Mrs. Horsefall. "You go by train from Kuala Lumpur," said Captain

Sufian wants to go back to school from Taman Midah. Give him the

We were worried. Quickly, we rushed to Wanis Fashion House, which was. the

There is also an instance in which *to* is used with article (the) + possessive noun (mechanic's workshop) as in

car couldn't start and we had to push it to the mechanic's workshop. It was just

In most instances, articles and nouns are used with *to* and *from* for simple directions with minimal instances on possessive nouns and omission of articles in common expressions. Both nouns (home, sailors, way, train, school) and verbs (run, swim, comes, flows, rushed) precede *to* and *from*.

There are cases where *from* and *to* are used in the same sentence.

Two months ago, as I was walking from the bus-stop to school, a few boys

visitors are encouraged to walk from the front gate to the main building.

it turned to gold. He quickly ran from bush to bush and turned them into

yesterday evening, Sarimah was going from her house to the stationery shop.

take turns to drive my brother and me from one tuition class to another. Life is

to from up down out of into We walked to the shop from the school. I walked up

to from up down out of into We walked to the shop from the school. I walked up

Dear Justin, Here are the directions to the community hall from SMK Gunung

In these cases, verbs (walked, ran, go, encouraged) precede *from* and followed by an article (the) or a possessive adjective (her) or   an adjective (tuition) before nouns (bus-stop, front gate, bush, house, class, shop, community).

As such, the prepositions of direction *to* and *from* should be taught along with noun, verb, article, possessive adjective and adjective.

5. Conclusion

The findings have shown several insights in this study. Firstly, the order of prepositions found in the English Language textbooks of Form One, Two and Three has revealed how many times they are used in the textbooks and either directly or indirectly students have been exposed with those prepositions in varying degrees. This is important as learning of prepositions takes place because the frequency of occurrence of individual words or phrases is in itself significant (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). In ESL environment, students need to be exposed to the language as much as possible to gain sufficient input and exposure. For instance, the use of prepositions *behind* and *in front of* with only less than 10 for each in Form One and Form Two textbooks is not enough for exposure to students. Even in vocabulary studies, repetition of words is very important to ensure acquisition of new vocabulary (Mukundan & Anealka, 2007). One kind of repetition that is important is repetition of encounters with a word. It has been estimated that, when reading, words stand a good chance of being remembered if they have been met at least seven times over spaced intervals (Thornbury, 2002).

Secondly, this study has revealed that for certain prepositions, the frequency order does not quite agree between the textbook corpus and the BNC. There have been criticisms against the frequency order. Howarth (1998) and Widdowson (1990) questioned the pedagogical usefulness of frequency lists generated by corpora as they feel frequency does not indicate any significance especially in the area of problematic processing of language. Thornbury (2004) has noted that in terms of frequency, it is not always the case that the most frequently occurring items are the most useful and in terms of an item's teachability, despite being among the most frequently used words in the language, their formal presentation is usually delayed until a relatively advanced level. However, according to Mahlberg (2007), frequency is relative, and an important factor in corpus work is comparison. Frequencies of individual words have to be seen in relation to words in their contexts. Even though function words are very frequent and can co-occur in a variety of texts, we can still identify collocational tendencies and see how frequent words have their own patterns.

Thirdly, this study has also revealed the importance of the differences for the same prepositions which are used differently in different categories in terms of frequency occurrence. In this study, prepositions *on*, *at* and *by* are presented in the categories of prepositions of place and time. This contributes to the difficulty to learn to use prepositions correctly as most of them have several different functions (Swan, 1988).

Fourthly, this study has also shown the differences in the use of prepositions for each category in terms of the co-occurrence with other parts of speech. The focus was on those prepositions which are presented less based on categories as it is in the judgement of the author that these prepositions are less exposed to the students by the textbooks and thus, they need to be highlighted in order to give more exposure to students in terms of 'what is usual and typical'. A major focus of corpus linguistics is therefore to describe what is usual and typical (Stubbs, 2007). In this study, other parts of speech co-occur with these prepositions in English textbooks, namely, articles, nouns, verbs, possessive nouns, reflexive pronouns, object pronouns, possessive adjective and adjectives. Having examined the KBSM syllabus, most of them are items listed to be taught to Form One, Form Two and Form Three students in Malaysian lower secondary schools, however, there are also grammar items that are not listed, namely, possessive nouns, object pronouns, reflexive pronouns in Form One, Form Two and Form Three KBSM syllabus and possessive adjectives in Form Two and Form Three KBSM syllabus.

6. Recommendations

The results of this corpus-based study could be used as guidelines to provide recommendations on the teaching of English. As Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1994) have suggested, "corpus-based research sheds new light on some of our most basic assumptions about English grammar, and as a result it offers the possibility of more effective and appropriate pedagogical applications."

While studies have shown why prepositions cause such difficulty for ESL/EFL students, a pedagogical strategy that enables students to pay attention to their co-occurrence, will no doubt facilitate learners' acquisition of these difficult lexico-grammatical forms (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

Teaching suggestions can be adopted from Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999). For instance, in teaching the form of prepositions, at the beginning and intermediate levels, it probably suffices to make sure that when new verbs or

adjectives are introduced, any prepositions that occur with them are also taught. The meaning of prepositions can be taught using a matrix, such as the one adopted from Quirk et al. (1985). To associate forms and meanings, there is a children's game that affords practice with prepositions however, they may not be appropriate for older learners. The use of maps and pictures can also aid students with several groups of prepositions that are frequently confused by learners. Kennedy (1991) encourages to help students learn about prepositions by learning about "the company they keep." Advanced learners could be assigned to explore the collocations of particular prepositions in a variety of texts.

However, ESL teachers should be able to plan strategies and select or adapt appropriate teaching materials to be used in teaching prepositions. All the prepositions stipulated in the syllabus must be introduced and taught repetitively in a structured way according to its functions to enhance students' understanding. As it has been emphasized the teaching of grammar is to be incorporated into the four language skills and should be taught in context and in a meaningful way. Hence, it may be then that we shouldn't teach certain prepositions in isolation but rather to teach them as in relation to their occurrence with other words (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

Other than using grammar books, internet sources, dictionaries and the textbooks, teachers may consider using a concordancer. A concordancer is a computer program which is used to find the occurrences of every single word or phrase in a text (Sinclair, 1991). Teachers could also retrieve concordance entries from the accessible website and prepare exercises for their students. The concordancer and concordancing is one example where "the technology can be used to promote autonomous learning." Such an approach may help in the "empowerment of students' (Butler, 1990). Students may be able to learn and recognize the typical uses of prepositions better if they are asked to detect the pattern on their own. Their sensitivity to the language can be developed if they are encouraged to discover the patterns of use in prepositions.

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Table 1. Distributions of prepositions in Form One, Two and Three textbooks

	Prepositions	Total	F1	F2	F3
1	to	3,921	1,136	1,202	1,583
2	of	2,722	1,895	750	752
3	in	1,760	693	869	998
4	on	920	265	334	321
5	from	589	183	158	248
6	at	546	194	170	182
7	by	391	116	148	127
8	after	189	86	52	51
9	before	111	24	42	45
10	between	53	21	15	17
11	near	53	10	23	20
12	under	23	15	16	21
13	behind	23	6	4	13
14	in front of	15	4	1	10

Table 2. Comparisons of preposition order in the BNC and in the English Language textbooks of Form One, Two and Three

	Prepositions in the BNC	Prepositions in the textbook
1	of	to
2	in	of
3	to	in
4	on	on
5	by	from
6	at	at
7	from	by
8	after	after
9	between	before
10	under	between
11	before	near
12	behind	under
13	near	behind
14	in front of	in front of

Table 3. Frequency counts for *on*, *by* and *at* as prepositions of place

Prepositions	Total	F1	F2	F3
on	292	75	115	102
by	8	2	4	2
at	126	Not listed in the KBSM	64	62

Table 4. Frequency counts for *on*, *by* and *at* as prepositions of time

Prepositions	Total	F1	F2	F3
at	72	41	21	10
on	62	29	19	14
by	17	5	8	4

Table 5. Frequency Counts of Prepositions of Place

Prepositions	Total	F1	F2	F3
in	1,234	358	452	414
on	292	75	115	102
near	24	8	19	7
under	22	5	10	7
behind	7	2	1	4
by	8	2	4	2
in front of	10	3	1	6
at	126	Not listed in the KBSM	64	62
between	3	Not listed in the KBSM	1	2

Table 6. Frequency Counts of Prepositions of Time

Prepositions	Total	F1	F2	F3
at	72	41	21	10
on	62	29	19	14
by	17	5	8	4
before	49	15	23	21
after	83	20	34	29

Table 7. Frequency Counts of Prepositions of Direction

Prepositions	Total	F1	F2	F3
to	177	51	84	42
from	67	24	24	19