

## **Evaluating the Students' Ability in Using Preposition of Place in Speaking Performance of First Year Russian Specialization Students at YUFL**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper investigates the use of preposition of place in speaking skills as one of the problems for students in learning the Russian language. Undoubtedly, a few students might get confused which preposition could be properly used for certain conditions. In learning Russian as a foreign language, many students admit that they encounter many difficulties while speaking in Russian because speaking is the complex skill that frighten the students. This research aimed at evaluating the students' ability and describing the problems faced by students in using prepositions of place in speaking skills. The descriptive qualitative method was applied in this research. Therefore, the researcher conducted survey design to identify whether the students have understood this subject or not. The instrument of this research was an oral test. There were 30 participants of the first year Russian Specialization Students at Yangon University of Foreign Languages for academic year 2019/2020. Based on the results of this study, the students were expected to understand and to be able to use this kind of preposition correctly. Finally, the result of the study showed that the average score of students' ability in using prepositions of place was 57.45. In conclusion, the students' ability in using preposition of place was categorized into "poor" category. This means that most of the students failed in using preposition of place in speaking performance. The findings also proved that the occurrence of errors in using preposition of place is influenced by the interference of native language and the overgeneralization of the grammar rules.

**Keywords:** students' ability, preposition of place and speaking performance

### **Introduction**

Nowadays, people use languages to communicate each other in the world. In teaching and learning foreign languages, the students are expected to master four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing (Cynthia, 2013:1-2). Among 4 skills, the productive skills (speaking and writing) may be the most difficult for Russian Foreign Language (RFL) learners. Speaking ability is one of the most important factors that determine the students' success in the field of language teaching and learning. Russian language learners usually have difficulty in speaking due to the lack of grammatical knowledge and experiences in speaking Russian. The purpose of learning Russian is students expect to be able to listen, speak, read and write. Since speaking skill involves many aspects. Many students often face many difficulties in choosing the proper words, selecting the tenses, arranging words into a good sentence, and so on. The speaking will be meaningful if the speaker uses correct grammar. Before speaking, we have to know the components of each sentence and the sentence must have good grammar. Among receptive and productive skills, there is grammar as one element which has strong influence in mastering all skills. When students master grammar, they can make easier to speak and construct sentences.

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An overview for the eight major Parts of Speech in Russian Grammar, Preposition is one of the language devices that build up a sentence. The prepositions are normally placed before noun or pronouns. Prepositions of place indicate the location of a noun (a person, place, or thing) in relation to another noun. In Russian, there are 19 kinds of prepositions of place; *в (in)*, *внутри (inside)*, *за (at)*, *на (on)*, *перед (in front of)*, *за (behind)*, *между (between)*, *рядом, возле (beside)*, *около, вблизи (near)*, *сквозь (through)*, *к (against)*, *под (under)*, *через (across)*, *вокруг (round)*, *у (by)*, *над (above)*, *ниже (below)*. This research covers the prepositions *в (in)*, *на (on)*, *за (behind)*, *между (between)*, *над (above)*, *под (under)*, because in the First year of the first semester students have to learn only six kinds of prepositions. By practicing the use of preposition of place in speaking performance, the student may have good ability in using prepositions, and they will not have difficulties in their learning process.

### Aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to evaluate the students' ability in using preposition of place in speaking Russian. The objectives of this paper are:

1. To find out the challenges that Russian specialization students face in speaking skill by using preposition of place;
2. To analyze the main causes of errors made by First year students in using preposition of place in speaking performance.

### Literature review

In learning foreign languages, students should understand the grammatical aspects such as the use of verbs, adjectives, nouns, articles, prepositions, gerunds, and so on. However, the present study focused on the students' ability and occurrence of errors in using prepositions of place in speaking performance. There are some aspects that can cause the errors in learning foreign languages, such as interference, overgeneralization, ignorance of rules restriction, incomplete application of rules, false concept hypothesized, etc. Error analysis can be defined as a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting the unacceptable form produced by someone in learning a foreign language. Errors and mistakes are similar but different, actually. Both are natural in learning language. However, mistakes can be corrected by the learners, while errors not. It means that errors give more serious effect to the improvement of learners' language ability. Because of that, the occurrence of errors in using language cannot be ignored. Porte (1993) explains that errors tend to occur again and again until someone masters the language he learned well. According to Richard (1974), there are two causes of errors, they are 1) inter-language errors (a cause of errors by interference of the learners' L1 or mother tongue), and 2) intra-lingual and developmental errors (reflect the learners' competence at a particular stage, and illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition). The later is caused by the complexity of the target language itself that indicates that the students have not mastered the language yet. The errors that the students make in the use of *в (in)*, *на (on)*, *за (behind)*, *между (between)*, *над (above)*, *под (under)* are caused by interference of the mother tongue. According to Richards et al., (1996), error analysis has been conducted to identify strategies which learners use in language learning, to track the causes of learner's errors, obtain information on common difficulties in language learning or on how to prepare teaching materials.

In teaching and learning foreign languages, the learners are expected to have the four skills in language. The language skills are listening, reading, writing, and speaking. However,

some experts believe that speaking is more important than others. speaking is an important skill to concern which has a lot of advantages. Loubazid (2012) also claimed that speaking skill becomes a demanded skill in the other language skills. Therefore, with speaking, students can improve their writing skill and develop their vocabulary and grammar. In learning speaking, the students also need to understand the language components such as comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Speaking is an interaction among people. Form and meaning of speaking are dependent on the context in which is occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purpose for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable (Dounough & Shaw, 1993). Cameron (2001) stated that speaking is an active use of language to express meanings which can make other people understand. He implies that in teaching and learning process concerning on speaking, the learners need to choose the appropriate words in expressing the meanings so that the listeners can understand their speaking clearly.

Before speaking, we have to know the components of each sentence and the sentence must have good grammar. Among receptive and productive skills, there is grammar as one element which has strong influence in mastering all skills. When students master grammar, they can make easier to speak and construct sentences. There are many aspects that we usually learn in grammar, one of them is preposition. Basically, preposition is a word that shows relation between noun or pronoun and the other words in sentence. (Stobe, 2008, p. 108) defines preposition is a word or group of words that is placed before a noun or a pronoun to show a relationship in a sentence. There are many functions of prepositions; such as space (place, position, direction) and time. Prepositions are quite short and significant looking, but they have very important functions. The position of prepositions is explained in (Eastwood, 2002, p. 286) that preposition usually comes before a noun phrase. Prepositions are one of subject matters which must be learned by students. Prepositions are words used with nouns in phrases providing information about time, place and other connections involving actions and things (Yule, 2006).

In showing where things are; it is important to use the preposition of place. There are many prepositions of place in Russian; such as в (in), на (on), между (between), под (under), над (above), etc. These prepositions are normally used to show location or place. In speaking performance; speakers tend to use the preposition of place to show the positions of things in the room. The ability to use each preposition depends on the speakers' understanding on how to use each prepositions of place.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Questions**

This study is expected to answer the following questions.

1. What is the students' ability in using prepositions of place in speaking performance?
2. What are the main causes of difficulty that RFL students face in using preposition of place?

### **Research Method**

This research aims at evaluating the students' ability in using preposition of place and describing the problems faced by students in using prepositions of place in speaking performance; therefore descriptive qualitative method was used. The researcher described and analyzed the students' ability and the causes of errors in the use of preposition of place. The main instrument of this research analyzed by using theory proposed by Richards (1974), for the

causes of errors. The population of this study was the 50 First year students who study the Russian language in the first semester of the academic year 2019-2020.

### Data collection

In order to find out the students' ability, an oral test was used to collect the data. The students were instructed to show and talk about the things in the room orally. In analyzing the data, video recording was applied to collect the correct and errors in the use of preposition of place. The topic was given by the classroom teacher. After giving the test, the researcher calculated the scores of students from individual correct answer. To evaluate the students' ability in using preposition of place, the researcher used five categories of scoring namely 80-100 is categorized as very good; 70-79 is good, 60-69 is enough, 50-59 is poor and 0-49 is very poor. The researcher did descriptive analysis to describe the findings descriptively as the results of the research.

### Findings

Firstly, the researcher selected randomly 30 numbers of students as the sample in this research. They had been tested at the first year students of Department of Russian in the first semester, academic year 2019/2020. The oral test was implemented to get the answer of all research questions: to find out the students' ability in using preposition of place; to evaluate the main causes of difficulty that Russian Specialization students face in speaking Russian. Before doing this research, the students were taught various prepositions of place during a regular class. The classroom teacher explained meanings and the usages of preposition with examples. Preposition of place in Russian can be really difficult to remember for beginner level students due to the lack of grammatical knowledge. Therefore, the teachers need to not only attain and retain their interests, but also get them understand the complex structure of the target language.

### Students' General Usage of Prepositions of Place

There are six kinds of prepositions of place found in the students' speaking performance; they are *в (in)*, *на (on)*, *за (behind)*, *между (between)*, *над (above)*, *под (under)*. The data are presented in Table <1> and the description describes the results of the students' usage in oral test.

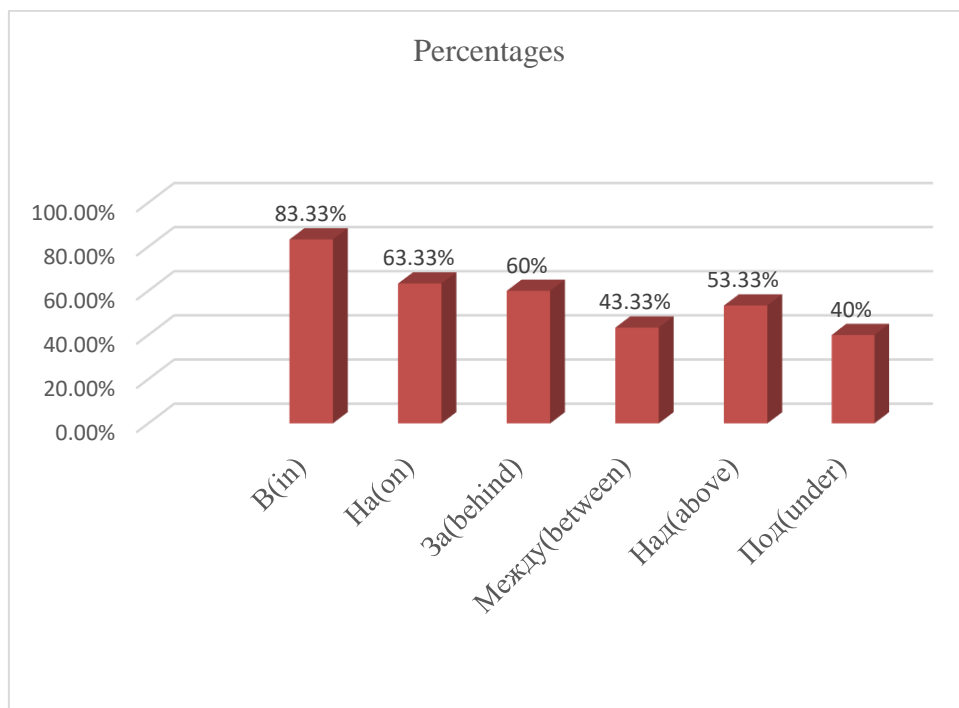
<Table 1>Students' Usage of Preposition of Place

No	Preposition	Correct (no. of students)	Error (no. of students)	Correct Percentages
1	В(in)	25	5	83.33%
2	На (on)	19	11	63.33%
3	За (behind)	18	12	60%
4	Между (between)	13	17	43.33%
5	Над (above)	16	14	53.33%
6	Под (under)	12	18	40%

<Table1>presents the correct and incorrect usage of prepositions of place in speaking performance. In the First year of First semester, the students were taught six prepositions of place namely *в (in)*, *на (on)*, *за (behind)*, *между (between)*, *над (above)*, *под (under)*. The data shows that 25 students out of 30 make correct usage and 5 students out of 30 make error

of preposition ***B(in)***. The data shows that 19 students out of 30 make correct usage and 11 students out of 30 make error of preposition ***Ha (on)***. The data shows that 18 students out of 30 make correct usage and 12 students out of 30 make error of preposition ***3a (behind)***. The data shows that 13 students out of 30 make correct usage and 17 students out of 30 make error of preposition ***Между (between)***. The data shows that 16 students out of 30 make correct usage and 14 students out of 30 make error of preposition ***Над (above)***. The data shows that 12 students out of 30 make correct usage and 18 students out of 30 make error of preposition ***Под (under)***. Based on the calculation above, it could be known the ability of First year students in using preposition of place.

Based on the results of the previous table, correct use and error of prepositions of place in speaking performance, it is necessary to apply this chart to show the average percentage on each preposition of place in the following.



<Figure 1>. The Correct Percentage on Each Preposition of Place

Furthermore, the researcher presented the percentage on each preposition of place in speaking performance. The data show that the highest percentage is preposition ***B(in)***, which is 83.33%. Then it is followed by prepositions ***Ha (on)***, which is 63.33%. The preposition of place ***3a (behind)***, which is 60% and the preposition ***над (above)***, which is 53.33%. Most of the students are unfamiliar with preposition ***между (between)***, which is 43.33% and the lowest percentage of preposition of place is ***под (under)***, which is 40%. This means that the students failed in using prepositions of ***между (between)*** and ***под (under)***.

Regarding to the data in the previous part; it is important to present and to describe some of the data referring to the students' correct use and errors in using preposition of place in speaking performance. In the oral test the students are asked to say what they see in the classroom orally. The students are instructed to talk for 2 minutes about the topic ***“Покажи и скажи, где находятся вещи” (Show and say where things are)***. Then, the researcher transcribed the recorded video to analyze the correct and error usage of each preposition of place. The following Table 2 shows the sentences made by First Year students in speaking performance by using preposition of place.

&lt;Table 2&gt; Percentages of Students' Usage of Prepositions in Oral Test

No.	Sentences	Total	Error	Correct
1	Стул стоит <b>за</b> столом. A chair is at the table.	30	17 57%	13 43%
2	Студенты пишут <b>в</b> тетради. Students write in the exercise-book.	30	11 37%	19 63%
3	Дом стоит <b>между</b> двумя деревьями. A house is between two trees.	30	22 73%	8 27%
4	Мой учебник лежит <b>на</b> столе. My textbook is on the table.	30	10 33%	20 67%
5	Самолёт летит <b>над</b> нами. The plane flies above us.	30	23 77%	7 23%
6	Карта висит <b>на</b> стене. Map hangs on the wall.	30	9 30%	21 70%
7	Картина висит <b>на</b> стене. The picture hangs on the wall.	30	9 30%	21 70%
8	Мы сидим <b>в</b> классе. We sit in the classroom.	30	5 17%	25 83%
9	Ваза стоит <b>на</b> столе. A vase is on the table.	30	10 33%	20 67%
10	Цветы стоят <b>в</b> вазе. Flowers are in a vase.	30	16 53%	14 47%
11	Чайки летят <b>над</b> морем. Seagulls fly above the sea.	30	24 80%	6 20%
12	Стул стоит <b>между</b> нами. A chair is between us.	30	22 73%	8 27%
13	<b>В</b> классе есть столы и стулья. The classroom has tables and chairs.	30	4 13%	26 87%
14	Он сидит <b>за</b> столом. He is sitting behind the table.	30	16 53%	14 47%
15	Наши тетради стоят <b>в</b> сумке. Our exercise-books are in the bag.	30	8 27%	22 73%

From the above Table <2>, it appears that the most difficult preposition for the students in this study is **над** (above). The preposition **над** was employed in two sentences; **Самолёт**

*летит над нами (The plane flies above us), Чайки летят над морем. (Seagulls fly above the sea).* Most of the students did not recognize how to use prepositions *над (above)*, *под (under)*, *за (behind)* and *между (between)*, because they didn't know exactly about all cases in Russian grammar. The highest score that the students achieved in the prepositions' usage was in the preposition *в (in)* and *на (on)*, and the scores of the correct usage of prepositions are higher than other prepositions. In general, the students have problems to use the prepositions of place in sentences. This is due to the numerous functions of Russian grammar. Based on the results of the research, teachers from Russian Department are suggested to give more practices and exercises to the students.

### The Individual Ability of Students in Using Prepositions of Place

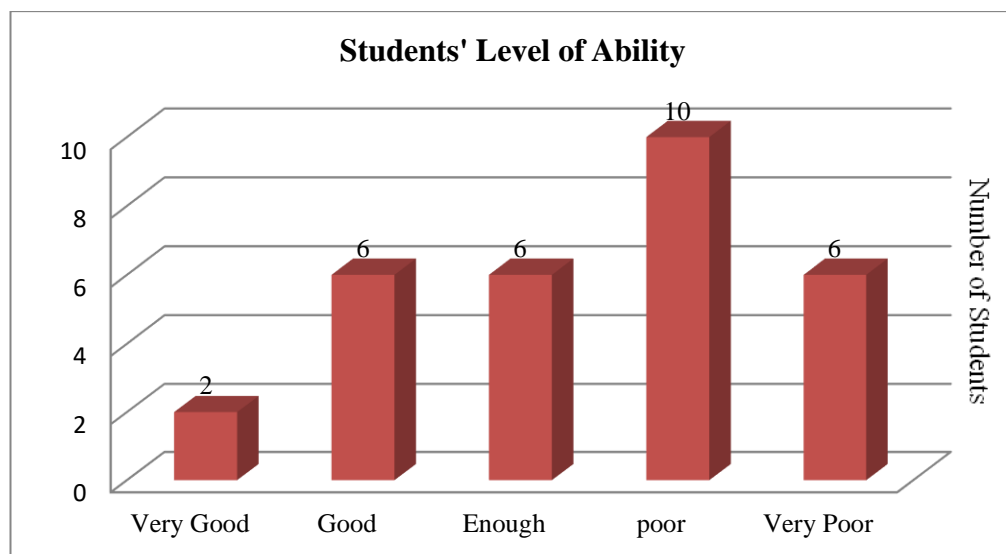
As already discussed previously the data were collected and analyzed by using an oral test. After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the ability of individual First Year Russian Specialization Student in using prepositions of place. The Table 3 presents the student individual score in using preposition of place in speaking performance. There were 30 students doing the test on speaking performance.

<Table 3> The Individual Ability of Students' in Using Prepositions of Place

No. of Students	Correct	Error	Total	Score	Level of Ability
1	7	6	13	53.84	Poor
2	7	3	10	70	Good
3	6	6	12	50	Poor
4	12	3	15	80	Very good
5	6	2	8	75	Good
6	7	4	11	63.63	Enough
7	8	6	14	57.14	Poor
8	10	3	13	76.92	Good
9	8	4	12	66.66	Enough
10	7	6	13	53.84	Poor
11	7	5	12	58.33	Poor
12	5	5	10	50	Poor
13	11	4	15	73.33	Good
14	7	6	13	53.84	Poor
15	7	5	12	58.33	poor
16	8	3	11	72.72	Good
17	6	6	12	50	Poor
18	6	5	11	54.54	Poor
19	8	5	13	61.53	Enough

20	4	10	14	28.57	Very poor
21	8	2	10	80	Very good
22	5	9	14	35.71	Very poor
23	4	9	12	33.33	Very poor
24	6	4	10	60	Enough
25	10	5	15	66.66	Enough
26	3	5	8	37.5	Very poor
27	9	6	15	60	Enough
28	5	8	13	38.46	Very poor
29	3	7	10	30	Very poor
30	8	3	11	72.72	Good
Total	208	155	362	57.45	Poor

Based on the test scores, the level of students' ability in the test, it is necessary to apply these scores into the level of ability which is presented in the following chart.



<Figure 2>. Students' Individual Ability in oral test

This chart presents the level of individual student's ability based on five categories of scoring namely 80-100 is categorized as very good; 70-79 is good, 60-69 is enough, 50-59 is poor and 0-49 is very poor. The data showed that two students were categorized as very good; six students were categorized as good; six students were categorized as enough; ten students were categorized poor and six students were categorized as very poor. The category which got more frequency of the students was poor category and the least was very good category.



## Discussion

From the obtained results, it is clear that First Year Russian Specialization students at Yangon University of Foreign Languages encountered challenges and difficulties in using prepositions of place in their speaking performance. Their ability in using preposition of place was categorized into poor category. Concerning the findings from video recording on speaking performance, the data were analyzed from the result of speaking, the students mostly used preposition **в (in)**, and **на (on)**. For each kind of preposition; the highest percentage is preposition **в (in)**, which is 83.33%. Then it is followed by prepositions **на (on)**, which is 63.33%. The preposition of place **за (behind)**, which is 60% and the preposition **над (above)**, which is 53.33%. Most of the students are unfamiliar with preposition **между (between)**, which is 43.33% and the lowest percentage of preposition of place is **под (under)**, which is 40%. This means that the students failed in using prepositions of **между (between)** and **под (under)**. There were some students who can't use prepositions in the oral test which means that they had low ability to determine what preposition should be used in certain condition appropriately. Data analysis states that there are several errors in the use of preposition found in the students' speaking performance. The errors prove that attention should be given not only in analyzing or correcting the errors, but also in improving the ability of the students in using the correct grammatical rules of Russian language. Based on the data, it could be analyzed that the errors were influenced by their smother tongue and overgeneralization of the grammar rules.

Based on the results of individual student's ability in using prepositions of place could be explained that there were two students, who can be categorized into "very good" category, because they got score 80 to 100. Six students were categorized into "good" category, because of getting score 70 to 79. Moreover, six students were categorized into "enough" category because of getting score 60-69. There were ten students who can be categorized into "poor" category, because they got score 50-59. There were also six students who got score under 0-49 which were less percentage in using prepositions of place. Furthermore, the total correct usages of preposition were 208 and the errors were 155. The percentage of the use of correct preposition of place was 57.45. Therefore, the ability of students in using prepositions of place was categorized into "poor" category. Learning Russian grammar is very difficult to the students because there are many rules in grammar that cannot be ignored, the common errors often found in students' speaking skill is the error on preposition. In general, many First year Russian specialization students in the first semester made errors in using preposition of place due to unfamiliarity with grammar rules and interference of their native language. Students' errors also occurred due to incomplete learning of grammar rules, because they have studied Russian language for one semester. Therefore, it takes more time to study a large number of prepositions.

Based on the results of the oral test, most of the students made errors, because they are confused with the various functions of preposition, followed by their unfamiliarity with the different rules of preposition. Students' errors occurred in the use of preposition of place, especially **в (in)**, and **на (on)**. The students cannot differentiate the use of preposition **в (in)**, and **на (on)**, when they speak or write in Russian. For example, the use of preposition of place in a sentence "**Карта висит на стене. (Map hangs on the wall)**", 30% of students use the preposition **в "in"** instead of **на "on"**, actually the word "**стена**" always match with the preposition **на "on"**. In Russian Grammar, the use of prepositions depends on nouns, followed by the prepositions. In general, there are two main causes of errors in using prepositions of place; interference of mother tongue and overgeneralization of the grammar rules. For example, the use of preposition of place in a sentence "**Стул стоит за столом. A chair is at the table.**" For this sentence, 57 % of students made errors, because the students learned the use

of preposition «на» in prepositional case, “*на столе (on the table)*”. In this sentence, the students must use the preposition «за» in instrumental case, “*за столом (on the table)*”. Overgeneralization generally happens when the students apply the previous rules that they have learned before to another pattern that has a different rule. Differences in target language and their native language make students feel difficult in learning Russian language. There are many challenges that face students in using prepositions of place. One of the main factors is the interference of the native language in the usage of preposition. Based on the results of this paper, students from First Year of Russian language need more practice in using prepositions in speaking performance. Most of the students should learn more about prepositions and do more exercises. They should pay more attention when the teachers explain about the lessons. Teachers should know of each student’s ability and weakness of students in using prepositions. After the teachers knew the weakness of the students, they need to give more exposure in using unfamiliar prepositions. So they can limit the weaknesses of the students in learning the Russian Language. Teachers can give more explanations (на, в+ noun + ending +е, и and за, над, между + noun +ending +ом, ем, ой, ей, ами, ями) and exercises to the students so that the students will understand how to use prepositions in certain conditions. For example; the prepositions «на» and «в» combine with the endings of nouns «е» or «и» and the prepositions «за», «над» and «между» combine with endings ем, ой, ей, ами, ями. For sentence “Ручка лежит на книге” (The pen is on the table), where the use of preposition «на» is correct. The students can make error by using wrong preposition «над» “Ручка лежит над книгой” (The pen is on the table). These two prepositions «на» and «над» indicate the position of place with same meanings, but they differ from meanings. The research questions in this study are answered clearly and supported by the data analysis. The findings of this research are hoped to give suggestions to use effective teaching methods in order to increase the students’ ability in learning Russian language, especially in using preposition of place while speaking in their target language.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that first year Russian Specialization students’ ability at Yangon University of Foreign Languages are categorized into “poor” category in using prepositions of place. Students need more practice and apply it in daily activities, so the students will be able to use correct grammar in daily activities, especially prepositions of place. The students should learn more about grammar and the different usage of each kind of prepositions. It is hoped that all findings and conclusions of this research will be useful for teachers and students, especially the students of Russian Department at Yangon University of Foreign Languages.

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