

## **An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Using Preposition of Time in the Russian Language**

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### **Abstract**

This study attempts to explore the difficulties in using time expression of Russian language encountered by Third Year Russian specialization students at Yangon University of Foreign Languages. The present paper also seeks to clarify the usages and meanings of prepositions in the sentences so that the students will be able to make correct use of prepositions of time expression in the target language. The research design was descriptive research. The participants of the study consisted of 50 Russian specialization students at YUFL in the First Semester of the academic year 2019-2020. To collect the data, the students were given a test. The students were asked to fill in the gaps with a suitable preposition which express time. The findings revealed that the majority of the students encounter problems in using prepositions of time expression in the Russian language.

**Keywords:** difficulties, prepositions of time, Russian language, meanings and usages

### **Introduction**

Learning a foreign language plays an important role in the modern world because by using a language, people can express their ideas, emotions, and thoughts. People use language to communicate with one another. Nowadays, there has been a constant increase in the number of students learning Russian at our university. The purpose of learning Russian is that students expect to master all language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teaching Russian as a foreign language to Myanmar students is very challenging. Many students want to learn Russian, but most of the students face difficulties in communicating their ideas effectively. The problem is the lack of grammatical knowledge, meaning, and usage of language components. Before speaking or writing, students have to know the components of each sentence and the sentence must have correct grammar. Grammar is important in language because it makes meaning. Grammar names the types of words and words groups that make up sentences in any language. Every language in the world has its own system of grammar. Russian has grammar system that is based on a variety of concepts not present in other languages, including cases, perfective and imperfective verbs, gender, lack of articles, etc.

In learning Russian as a foreign language, students need to understand aspects of grammar, including cases, tenses, noun, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun, preposition, conjunction and so on. When students master grammar, they can speak, write and construct sentences. One of the important aspects that we usually learn in grammar is preposition. A preposition is defined as connecting words showing the relation of a noun or a noun substitute to some other word in the sentences. On the other hand, preposition is a word that shows the relation between nouns or pronouns and the other words in a sentence. There are many kinds of prepositions in Russian. This study only focuses on the use of prepositions of time expression which is a problem among many students and identifies the students' difficulties in the use of

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prepositions of time. The researcher will try to investigate and identify the actual reasons and difficulties behind the problems of using time expression in Russian language.

### **Aim and Objectives**

This paper aims to investigate the difficulties in using time expression of Russian language encountered by Third Year Russian specialization students at Yangon University of Foreign Languages. The objectives of this study are:

- To find out the actual reasons behind the problems facing third year students in using prepositions of time expression;
- To give advice for students to use time expression correctly.

### **Literature Review**

Using prepositions is challenging for foreign language learners. “Preposition usage is one of the most difficult aspects of grammar to master.” (Chodorow et al., 2007: 25). One of the most likely reasons is the very nature of preposition. Prepositions are usually monomorphemic words that belong to the closed class of lexical items i.e. items that cannot be derived from other words. Prepositions are also non-inflecting which means that they do not have different forms (e.g. case and gender) like verbs or nouns for instance.

Russian language learners usually have difficulties with prepositions because there are not so many prepositions in other languages and students try to make an unnecessary distinction. Also, many usages are not related to the original meaning of that preposition and it can be confusing as learners are often led by the word meaning (Parrott, 2000). For instance, some prepositions are polysemous words which are not closely related.

The most common cause of difficulties is that many prepositions perform a number of complex syntactic roles. Unlike other words, prepositions have several syntactic functions and this can also be demanding for learners. In prepositional phrases, prepositions can govern a noun or a verb (e.g. в доме, на прослушивании), follow a verb (e.g. зависит от), follow a noun (e.g. интерес к) or be in the middle of two words (e.g. слово в слово). What can also be confusing is that prepositions can sometimes be short words (e.g. **в**, **на**, **по**), long words or phrases (e.g. в соответствии, несмотря на, с точки зрения).

On the other hand, difficulties occur because prepositions perform complex semantic roles. It is not rare in Russian to have prepositions with similar meanings (e.g. **в**, **внутри**). Moreover, certain verbs, nouns, and adjectives that have similar meaning use different prepositions. Finally, there are prepositions which are combined with other words to express different meaning (e.g. in phrasal verbs).

Prepositions in Russian are certainly one of the most difficult aspects of the Russian language for non-native speakers to learn. Lakoff (1978) argues that prepositions are likely to have a relatively small number of related literal meaning. (Diab, N ,1998,cited in Khayal, 2011) states that prepositions pose a great difficulty for learners of Russian since there are various prepositions in Russian that have the same function, for example the prepositions «**в**» и «**на**» дежурство в ночи / передача по телевизору. However, when students are not sure which prepositions to use in a certain phrase, they often resort to a possible equivalence in their mother tongue, giving a literal translation of the Myanmar preposition into Russian.

## Research Methodology

### Research Questions

In this research, research questions and research procedures are classified.

1. What prepositions of time expressions are particularly difficult for Russian specialization students to learn?
2. What are the causes of students' errors in using preposition of time?
3. Why did not some of the students know how to choose appropriate preposition correctly in sentences?

### Research Method

In this research, the descriptive method is adopted. A test will be given to the students with the aim of collecting the data for the study. The participants of the study consist of third year students from the Department of Russian at YUFL in the first semester of the academic year 2019-2020. The total number of students is (50) students chosen randomly among the students.

### Data Collection Procedure

This study aimed at investigating the actual reasons behind the problems facing RFL students in using prepositions of time expression and recommend ways so as to solve the problems. In order to find out the students' difficulties in using time expression, a test was used to collect the data. The students were asked to fill in the gaps with a suitable preposition which express time.

## Findings

### Students' Correct and Error Usage of Time Expression in the sentences

In order to find out the difficulties in using time expression facing Third Year students, the researcher used a test. The test consisted of 20 items. The students were instructed to fill in the gaps with appropriate prepositions. Each preposition that expresses time was asked two-five times randomly, that shown in Table 1.

<Table 1> Frequency of Each Preposition in Test

Preposition	Asked
B	4 times
На	5 times
К	3 times
Около	2 times
Через	3 times
Перед	3 times

As shown in Table 2, for the use of (**в**) in sentence No.3, 84% of the students answered the question correctly, while 16% do not. In the use of (**в**) in sentence No.4, 76% of the students answered the question correctly, while 24% do not, while the use of (**в**) in sentence No.8, 70% of the students answered the question correctly, while 30% do not. Similarly, in sentence No.9, 68% of the students answered the question correctly, while 32% do not. For the

use of preposition (**на**) in sentence No.1, 64% of students made a correct answer, while 36% made an error. For sentence No.10, 52% of students answered the question correctly, and 48% of students do not. For the use of (**на**) in sentence No.12, 56% of students answered the question correctly, while 44% of students chose the wrong answer. For the use of preposition (**на**) in sentence No.14, 60% of students answered the question correctly, but 40% do not. For sentence No.20, 74% of students made the correct answer and 26% of students made an error. These results showed that the majority of the students did not encounter difficulty in using propositions regarding time expression (**на and в**), so they used the required preposition properly. Most of the students face difficulties in using the preposition of time (**к**) in sentences. Students encounter remarkable difficulties in sentences No.5, 11 and 18: about 60 % of students answered correctly and 40% of students made wrong answers.

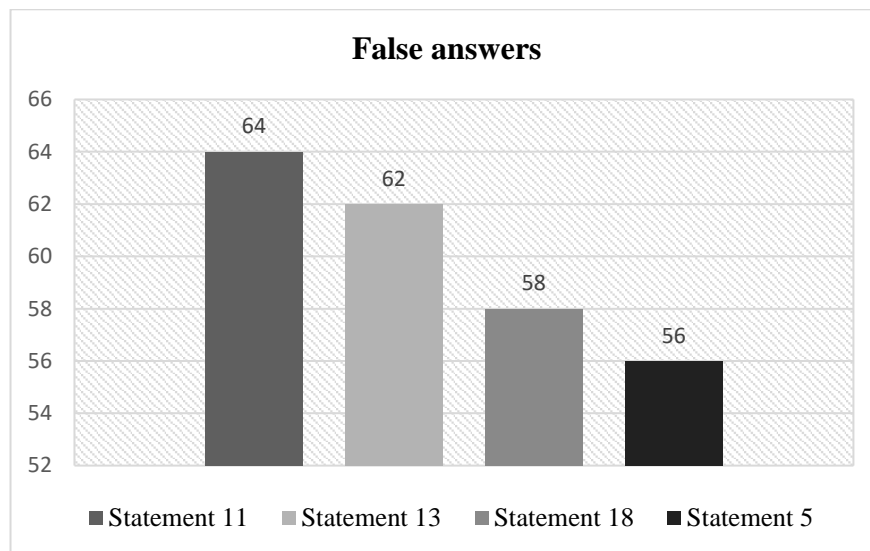
On the other hand, students face remarkable difficulty in answering questions No. 13 and 7 correctly. Indicating that they have difficulty on the subject of using propositions (**около**) in sentences regarding a particular time. In order to indicate the amount of time before the beginning of the action, use preposition (**через**) in the Accusative case. For sentence No.15 “Я дам вам ответ **через** два дня” 56% of students answered correctly and 44% do not. For the use of (**через**) in sentence “**через** год я буду поступить в институт” 72% of students answered correctly, while 28% do not. For sentence No.17 “Не волнуйся, **через** неделю ты будешь здоров” 58% of students answered correctly and 42% made wrong answer. Furthermore, some students found difficulty to answer correctly by using preposition (**перед**), they got confused with (**перед**) for the place that (**перед**) can be used with time.

<Table 2> Students' Correct and Wrong Answers Regarding the Test (n =50)

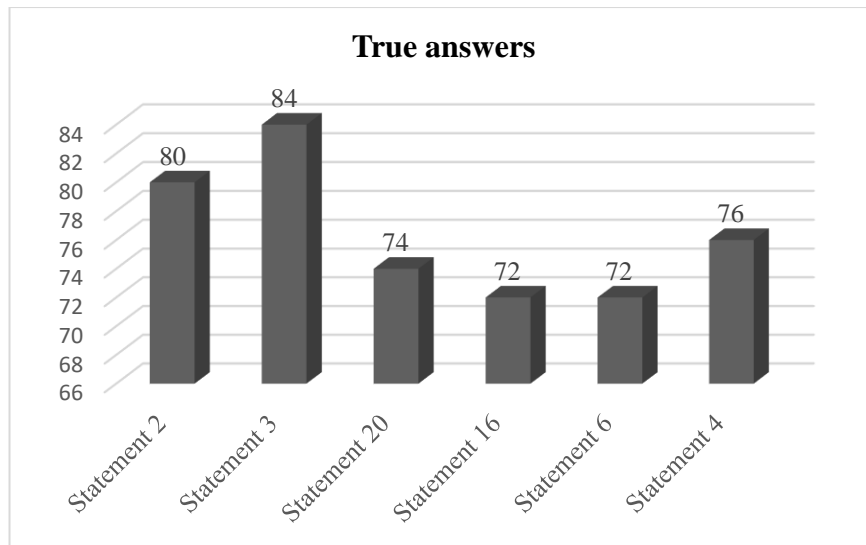
No	Test sentences	Correct Prep.	Test scores	
			True answers N (%)	False answers N (%)
1	Она поехала в деревню ..... месяц.	на	32 (64)	18(36)
2	..... праздниками в магазинах много народу.	перед	40(80)	10(20)
3	Маша придёт ..... пять часов.	в	42(84)	8(16)
4	Мы закончим эту работу ..... воскресенье.	в	38(76)	12(24)
5	Все контрольные работы должны быть сданы ..... пятнице.	к	22(44)	28(56)
6	Сегодня ..... обедом я приготовила баранину.	перед	36(72)	14(28)
7	Надо кончить эту работу ..... пяти часов.	около	32(64)	18(36)
8	..... выходной день я не хочу думать об учёбе.	в	35(70)	15(30)
9	..... понедельник мне надо прийти в школу пораньше.	в	34(68)	16(32)
10	У меня ничего не запланировано ..... завтра.	на	26(52)	24(48)
11	Позвони мне завтра ..... концу работыб и я точно скажу поеду я с тобой или нет.	к	18(36)	32(64)
12	..... выходные дни у меня нет никаких планов.	на	28(56)	22(44)
13	Каждый день я встаю ..... шести часов утра.	около	19(38)	31(62)

14	Конечно, у меня есть планы ..... отпуск.	на	30(60)	20(40)
15	Я дам вам ответ ..... два дня.	через	28(56)	22(44)
16	..... год я буду поступить в институт.	через	36(72)	14(28)
17	Не волнуйся, ..... неделю ты будешь здоров.	через	29(58)	21(42)
18	Мы должны составить план работы ..... следующему месяцу.	к	21(42)	29(58)
19	Постарайся заехать за мной завтра утром ..... работой.	перед	27(54)	23(46)
20	Я прочитал эту книгу..... три дня.	на	37(74)	13(26)
			%50	%50

Furthermore, the researcher tried to answer the research questions “What prepositions of time expression are particularly difficult for Russian specialization students to learn? and “What are the most common errors in the use of time expression that are committed by the students?”. The following figures show the students’ correct and wrong answers in using prepositions of time expression.



<Figure 1> Most False answers in using Time expression

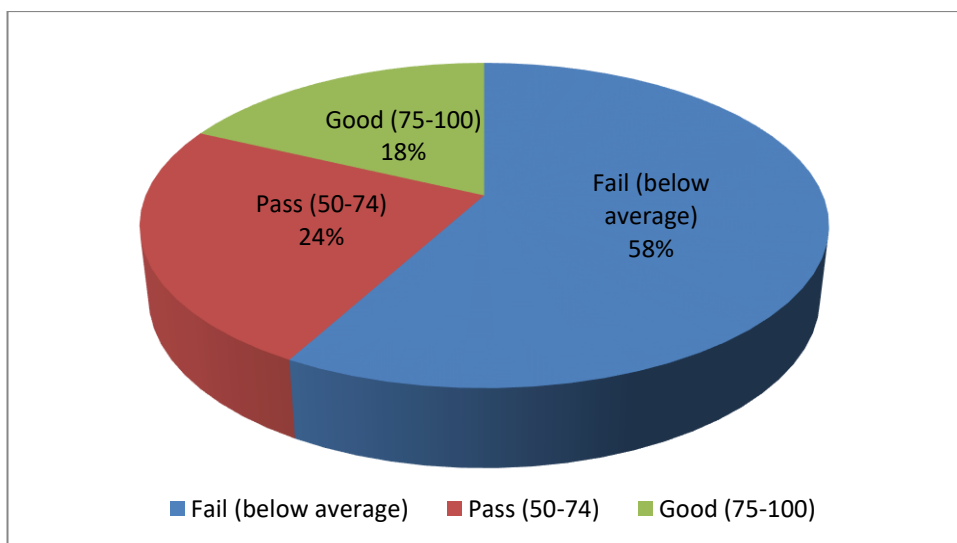


<Figure 2> Most True answers in using Time expression

According to the facts mentioned above, most of the students involved in this study fail to use the preposition *около*, *через*, *к* and *перед*. So, the majority of the students encounter difficulties in using the preposition of time expression.

<Table 3> Students’ achievement regarding the test (n=50)

Test grades	Total scores
Fail (below average)	29 (58.0%)
Pass (50-74)	12 (24.0%)
Good (75-100)	9 (18.0%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>50 (100%)</b>



<Figure 3> Students’ achievement regarding the test

As shown in Figure 3, most of the students from Third Year of Russian Language

Class failed to use the preposition of time expression. 29 students out of 50, 58% of the students failed in the test. There were 12 students (24% of students) got the grades (50-74) and only 9 students (18% of students) who got the grades (75-100). Finally, since the preposition “*в*” and “*на*” are among the prepositions that are commonly employed by the students and the result showed that most of the students did not encounter any difficulty, so they used the preposition “*в*” and “*на*” properly.

### Discussion

The researcher made a test that consisted of (20) different items. One point was given for each correct answer. The preposition of time expression on which the test was constructed were *в, на, к, перед, через* and *около*. This research can be considered as the answer to the current study research questions. According to the results of items No. 3, 4, 8 and 9, 80% of students gave correct answer and 20% of students gave wrong the answer for the use of preposition “*в*”. The data showed that the preposition *в* is the simplest preposition referring to the point of time because students learnt this kind of preposition since First year and they were familiar with it. Next, for the use of preposition “*на*” in items No.1, 10, 12, 14, and 20, about 60% of students answered the questions correctly, while 40% gave the wrong answers. Based on these results students from Third Year of Russian did not encounter difficulties in using prepositions of time expression *на* and *в*. For items No.11.5 and 18, students found difficulties with the preposition “*к*”. The errors were committed by the students for the reason that the preposition *к* talks about the direction and not an exact time so that the students got confused. For the use of preposition “*перед*”, students found some difficulties in providing correct answers. The usage of *перед* was unfamiliar with students. They got confused the meaning “in front of” and “before”, because preposition *перед* can be used to express time and to indicate the place of the subjects. In using preposition “*через*”, some students cannot use this preposition related to a period of time correctly. For the use of preposition “*около*”, most of the students gave wrong answers. It was observed that the preposition “*около*” was unfamiliar to the students and that it was not part of the common usage. This confusion can be attributed to the use of *около* which usually goes with place or space, but in this research, it was used to express time.

The use of time expression in Russian is a complex and difficult process due to the interference of the Myanmar language. Time expression differs in the Russian and Myanmar languages. Therefore, Students need to understand the correct usage of time expression. They should pay more attention and do more exercise. Teachers need to focus more on practical activities rather than theoretical explanations regarding the preposition of time expression in Russian. Teachers from Department of Russian can solve the problems by the following ways:

- Encouraging the student to find out the different grammatical rules by themselves to develop their sensitivity to the language;
- And the role of the students in this issue that they should stay away from turning to the mother tongue when answering prepositions exercises;
- Encouraging the student to do more exercises using prepositions where answers require specific prepositions.

## Conclusion

The findings of the data analysis revealed that there are many difficulties which encounter the Third year level students while using the preposition of time expression. The results of this study have shown some problems and errors which are committed by the third year students during a test. The majority of the students find difficulty in using prepositions *около, через, к and перед*. The interference of the mother tongue can lead to committing the mistakes. Therefore, Teachers should deliver intensive exercises to students concerning prepositions. Students also should give more attention to Russian prepositions of time expression in particular. A teacher should employ effective teaching techniques to help students improve in the area of prepositions.

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