

# Some Common Difficulties in the Usage of Different Parts of Speech

*Ms. Neelam Chawla*

## ABSTRACT

*In the very beginning of learning English as a language of communication usually, the learners are made aware of the different parts of speech used in the language to facilitate them in the formation of sentence construction and other aspects of learning the language. Sometimes the learners find it difficult to identify different parts of speech in particular sentences due to various reasons. The present research paper is the result of one of the researchers' real-life experiences while teaching diploma students at a Polytechnic College of Madhya Pradesh. The researcher felt the need to understand the basic reasons behind this difficulty faced by the learners in identifying and using different parts of speech to make her teaching more effective. Learning parts of speech is necessary from the viewpoint of understanding the basic structure of the English language without which it won't be possible to have an in-depth understanding of the language. Thus the present paper deals with problems encountered by the learners in identifying and using this part of English grammar. The study is completed through a survey done on fifty learners of a polytechnic college in Madhya Pradesh. This research paper contains an introduction, a brief review of the relevant studies, some common difficulties in the usage of different parts of speech in the English language, methodology used and data collection, findings and conclusion, and limitations of the study.*

**Keywords:** parts of speech, English, difficulties, usage, technical, students, Madhya Pradesh

**1. Introduction:** In most of the states of India English has been taught as a second language and also in Madhya Pradesh. Students of Technical education (Diploma Level) in this state have to learn English in the form of a subject "Communication Skills in English". They have some grammatical parts to be covered in their curriculum. While teaching these students, one of the researchers experienced that students are not able to identify and use different parts of speech in English. So, in this experience lies the base of writing this research paper. This paper aims at finding out the problems faced by the students in learning and using different parts of

speech in English and some possible solutions to these problems. According to its dictionary meaning a part of speech is "a category to which a word is assigned in accordance with its syntactic functions." Usually there are eight parts of speech in the English language namely noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, verb, prepositions, conjunctions and interjection and according to some writers there are nine parts of speech including determiners (which also includes articles) to the above-mentioned list. Each part of the speech performs a special function in a sentence. Like nouns are the words that name something. Pronouns are the words used in place

of previously used nouns to avoid repetition and to prevent the text from looking awkward. Verbs are the words that show some action happening or some state of being. Adjectives are the words that add something to the meaning of nouns or pronouns. Adverbs are the words that add something to the meaning of a verb, an adjective, or any other adverb. Prepositions are the words that show a relationship between two or more words in a sentence. Conjunctions are the words that join two words or two parts of a sentence. Interjections are the words that express some sudden feeling like joy, sorrow, fear, pain, etc. Determiners are the words that come before nouns or noun phrases and determine something about them or tell us in which reference that particular word has been used. Articles (included in determiners) are the words that determine the definiteness or indefiniteness of a particular noun. Students often get confused while making use of these parts of speech due to sometimes unawareness about their functions and sometimes due to a careless attitude in practicing their usage and solving exercises based on different parts of speech. Another reason behind the problems faced by the students is the structure of the English language itself also. There are many rules in English grammar which have their exceptions and because of this irregularity in the use of different parts of speech at different places, in different cases, students find it difficult to use them correctly. At the diploma level, they have to study some other topics of English grammar like voices, tenses, subject-verb agreement, question tags, etc. for which they have to understand this basic part of English Grammar without which it is not possible to comprehend these topics in their curriculum at diploma level. So, in order to understand the difficulties encountered by the students in the

usage of different parts of speech in English Grammar, the present study has been undertaken.

**2. Review of the Previous Studies:** - Prior to proceeding further it is customary to have a look at the views of other scholars and educationists about this specific area of research. This part of the paper throws light upon other published relevant studies related to the problems faced by learners in our country and outside our nation. A study was done on the misuse of parts of speech in the English language by Chinese learners and it was concluded as “the misapplication of part of speech is caused by the negative transfer of the mother tongue, which has affected the level of English writing in college. Both teachers and students should pay enough attention to this kind of mistake, strengthen the contrast between English and Chinese and apply correct and effective methods to teach and learn the English vocabulary. Therefore, it will reduce the occurrence of the misuse of parts of speech”. (Liu & Li, 2018) In one of the articles by Lorincz and Gordon the difficulties in learning prepositions and solutions to these problems were discussed where it has been stated that “prepositions are difficult to learn because of their polysemous nature and they should be taught using the collocationist approach and the prototypical approach along with the traditional method of teaching”. (Lorincz & Gordon, 2012) An article written by Julia Miller in the year 2005 tells us the difficulties faced by the learners in the use of articles and how a teacher can improve students’ understanding of this difficult area by encouraging students to address the notion of countability and to identify specific uses of articles in English, and guide them to a more accurate usage of the English article system (Miller, 2005). A study was done to shed light

upon the difficulties faced by Iraqi EFL secondary school students in the perception and use of words that could be both nouns and verbs. (Abbas, 2017). Another study was carried out by three researchers on errors made by students in the use of different conjunctions in different types of sentences like complex sentences, compound sentences, and compound-complex sentences. (Tagor, Haddina, & Manik, 2018). In one of the studies done on Iraqi learners, the errors done by them in the use of interjections had been discussed and the study concluded with some recommendations regarding strategies to be used for teaching interjections effectively. (Ali, 2015) A paper by Imikan Nkopuruk and Kehinde Saheed Odusina throws light upon the pronouns used in the English language and their usage. The paper tells us about the use of ten different types of pronouns used in the English language with relevant examples, analyses the parsing process of English pronouns, and in the end recommends twelve commandments for correct and error-free usage of the English language put forward by J.D. Murthy. (Nkopuruk & Odusina, 2018). An article by Ozlem Yagcioglu explains the ways of teaching English adjectives and adverbs, to make communication in English more effective. Various classroom activities like the use of photographs, the use of video films, the use of audio clips, the use of flashcards, use of course book grammar exercises were shared in the article to let the readers know how these two parts of speech can be taught well. (Yagcioglu, 2019)

All of these articles throw light on the difficulties faced by students in learning different parts of speech and solutions to overcome these difficulties. It strengthens the point that learners in different nations (where English is learned as a second language) face problems in the usage

of different parts of speech in English, and the present paper deals with this problem in the light of the research studies mentioned above.

**3. Some common Difficulties in the Usage of Different Parts of Speech:** This part of the paper contains an overview of some common difficulties in the usage of different parts of speech. First of all, the main difficulty is that sometimes a single word in English can be used as more than one part of speech so, while using parts of speech we should see which part of speech the word is being used as. A student should understand which function is being performed by that particular word. Now we shall understand one by one the difficulties in the usage of different parts of speech:

Beginning with the noun, a traditional definition of a noun is being learned by the students at the school level, "A noun is the name of a person, place, animal or thing." This definition is not well interpreted to them usually and because of that, they are not able to identify some words which are used as nouns in a particular sentence especially when it comes to common and abstract nouns. The concept of things is usually not understood by them which is a very wide term that has about twenty to twenty-five meanings. Sometimes some words which look like verbs act as a noun in a sentence like gerunds (verb+ing, used as nouns). Different types of nouns are also not known to the students. Sometimes students commit mistakes while using nouns in their singular and plural forms also as some nouns which look plural in the form actually are singular like the words news, mathematics, and some other nouns are used in their singular form only, i.e. they do not have any plural form like the words furniture, luggage, information, etc. Students are also not familiar with the

singular and plural forms of various nouns.

Secondly, when we come to pronouns, the main difficulty is faced in identifying various types of pronouns and sometimes due to confusion as a simple word like "that" can be used as a noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, and conjunction. Students are also not familiar with the types and uses of pronouns. Students face difficulties in using pronouns for a compound subject or object. Students make mistakes while choosing pronouns as subject and object. Many times they write and speak sentences like "Rohit and me (instead of "I") are working on a new assignment" or "My father sent some money to my sister and I (instead of me)" and so on.

The next part of speech is verb, the main difficulty lies with the identification of verbs which express the state of being, the students have a common concept about the verbs that these are the words expressing some action as the Hindi meaning of this word is "kriya". Sometimes the verbs which are being used as nouns also create misunderstanding among students. Students are also not familiar with the different forms of the verbs, specifically, they do not know the different forms of irregular verbs which have to be used in a sentence according to the tenses. Sometimes they face difficulty in identifying a verb when there is an auxiliary verb that is used as the main verb.

Now we shall see the adjectives, the adjectives can be used attributively and predicatively. When they are used attributively they are commonly identified by the students but if they are used predicatively it is a bit difficult to identify them and also since some words can be used as more than one part of speech. They are usually

confused between adjectives and pronouns. Students are not familiar with the different degrees and types of adjectives which causes problems in their identification and usage.

The next in the series is the adverb. The students usually do not have an exact idea about the function performed by the adverb, generally, they have the conception that the words which modify verbs are adverbs. They are usually not aware of the exact function of an adverb as mentioned above in the present paper. They face difficulty in using adverbs as they find it difficult to identify adjectives and adverbs easily. Students do not know about the types of adverbs and the sequence in which adverbs should be used when there is more than one adverb in a sentence.

Prepositions can be seen as the most difficult part of speech to be learned and used by the students as sometimes more than one preposition can be used in one place appropriately. The words of Michael Swan from his book "Practical English Usage" can be quoted aptly in this reference, "It is difficult to learn to use prepositions correctly in a foreign language. Most English prepositions have several different functions (for instance, one well-known dictionary lists fifteen main uses of *at*), and these may correspond to several different prepositions in another language. At the same time, different prepositions can have very similar uses (*in the morning, on Monday morning, at night*). Many nouns, verbs, and adjectives are normally followed by particular prepositions: we say *the reason for, depend on, angry with* somebody. Often the correct preposition cannot be guessed, and one has to learn the expression as a whole. In some expressions English has no preposition

where one may be used in another language; in other expressions the opposite is true.” (Swan, 2016) Most students use prepositions by translating them into their mother tongue which creates problems.

Another parts of speech ‘conjunctions’ like and, but, etc. can easily be understood by the students but when we come to some other conjunctions which are not used commonly like though, although, yet, etc. it becomes difficult for them to learn and use them. They also do not differentiate between English conjunctions and connectors.

Students are usually unaware of the word “interjection” Though they identify them after a little help as teachers can provide the students a list of words that are used as an interjection (along with their meanings) and students can memorize them and use them wherever they are needed.

The use of different determiners is also generally not known to the students and as far as articles are concerned students can easily identify the articles but their usage is again a difficult task due to unawareness about their proper use. According to Michael Swan “The correct use of the articles is one of the most difficult points in English grammar.” Students often commit mistakes by unnecessary use of articles as they do not know where to omit articles or about the concept of zero articles. Sometimes they use the articles “a” and “an” with uncountable nouns. They find difficulty in the use of distributive determiners like “each” and “every” because of similarity in their meanings, they cannot differentiate between their uses. More and more practice is needed to master the use of different categories of determiners.

### **3. Methodology Used in the Present Study:**

The present study is conducted through a survey over fifty students in one of the polytechnic colleges of Madhya Pradesh. The students from different branches of the diploma program are taken as the subjects. The students from this particular college are chosen as per convenience sampling. One of the researchers is teaching in the Polytechnic College from where the students for the study have been chosen. The sample of fifty students is selected randomly. An open-ended structured questionnaire is used as a research tool in the present study. The questionnaire is divided into two parts:

In the first part, students were given a very simple exercise just to assess their ability to identify different parts of speech used in the English language, and in the second part, they were asked general questions related to their familiarity with different parts of speech to assess the difficulties in their usage. The questions in this part of the questionnaire were asked in both languages i. e. Hindi and English to facilitate the students for giving proper responses. The validity of the questionnaire has been determined through the remarks given by a panel of subject experts.

Other than the use of questionnaires personal interaction and group discussions have also been used as tools to understand the difficulties encountered by the students. Simultaneously the exercises given to the students in their regular classes have also been a means to assess their knowledge and understanding of this area of English grammar.

**4. Execution of the Project:** The questionnaires were distributed to the students in the form of google forms due to the present circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. It took about twenty days to collect the filled-in questionnaires.

**6. Findings:** After the collection of filled-in questionnaires an analysis of answers provided by the students was done and an interpretation of their responses has been carried out to understand the base of the problems faced by the students. The result or outputs of this study can be summed up in the following points: -

1. None of the students under study could identify all the parts of speech correctly.
2. Out of fifty students, four students couldn't identify even a single part of speech correctly.
3. Thirteen was the maximum number of correct responses given by four students.
4. Most of the students find difficulty in the identification and use of five parts of speech namely adjective, adverb, conjunction, prepositions, and interjections.
5. Twenty-two students were familiar with all the parts of speech.
6. About sixty percent of students used articles correctly.
7. Six students stated that they have not learned parts of speech at school.
8. Twenty- four students could identify pronouns correctly in comparison to other parts of speech which implies that pronouns are easier to identify.
9. The least identified part of speech was the adverb.
10. Students from English Medium schools have given better responses.
11. Based on responses to the last question in the questionnaire (though it was answered

by only a few students) and the personal conversation with them, one of the findings of this research is that the root cause of the problems they face in the usage of different parts of speech is that the proper attention to teaching parts of speech has not been given at the school level in comparison to other aspects of English, that's why the students do not have clear concepts about different categories of each part of speech and their usage.

**7. Conclusion:** The findings of the research can be concluded in one line that the students at the college level face problems in the identification and usage of different parts of speech in English. After studying English at schools in various classes some of them are not even able to correctly identify what part of speech a word is. It is a very miserable condition as without having clear concepts about this very basic aspect of the English language it becomes difficult for them to learn other aspects of the language. This study recommends that students should be taught at the school level in such a way that they can develop their skills in the usage of different parts of speech specifically in schools of the state board. Interesting methods of teaching should be used and more and more exercises should be given for the practice. The definitions of different parts of speech should be elaborated on and explained through examples. Students should be taught different types of each part of speech with appropriate examples in the form of sentences. Some of the areas like the teaching of articles should be paid attention to as in 1991 Roger Berry pointed out "that articles occur after every ten words; although they have a high frequency, articles remain an area of chaos due to the learners' little attention to this issue." (Mlesnita, 2017) As the students from different

regions of Madhya Pradesh get admitted to this college the study gives a glimpse of the level of English teaching and learning in the schools of Madhya Pradesh. To improve their plight some changes can also be made in their curriculum of English language in different classes and teachers should be given some sort of training so that they can teach effectively.

**8. Limitations of the Study:** As in this study the students from a particular college have been taken as the subjects of this study, and the area of this study is very limited. The results of this study cannot be generalized to a great extent due to this particular limitation and from the viewpoint of English grammar also the study covers only one of its aspects i.e. parts of speech, and that is another limitation of this study. The exercise given to the students for the assessment of their understanding of different parts of speech also has only a limited number of sentences and to achieve better results a more comprehensive questionnaire can be designed to understand the mistakes committed by the students and the types of difficulties they face. The present paper is focused on the problems encountered by the students in learning different parts of speech thus it suggests some other areas of research like finding out the interesting ways of teaching parts of speech, problems faced by the students of different divisions of our country in learning different topics of English grammar. The study leaves a wide scope for further research.

## References

Abbas, J. M. (2017). The Effect of Nouns and Verbs of the Same Word on Lexical and Structural Development in. *European Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 3(1), 56-61. Retrieved March 30, 2021, from [http://](http://journals.euser.org/files/articles/ejls_jan_apr_17/Jasim.pdf)

[journals.euser.org/files/articles/ejls\\_jan\\_apr\\_17/Jasim.pdf](http://journals.euser.org/files/articles/ejls_jan_apr_17/Jasim.pdf)

Ali, M. (2015, 01 01). The Difficulties Encountered by Iraqi EFL University Learners in Using English Interjections. *Journal of University of Babylon*, 11. Retrieved April 2, 2021

Liu, X., & Li, X. (2018, December 20). Analysis of misuse of parts of speech in English writing by Chinese English learners. *Development of Education*, 47-49. doi:DOI 10.31483/r-21573

Lorincz, K., & Gordon, R. (2012). Difficulties in Learning Prepositions and Possible Solutions. *Linguistic Portfolios*, 1(1), 1-5. Retrieved March 30, 2021, from [https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/stcloud\\_ling/vol1/iss1/14/?utm\\_source=repository.stcloudstate.edu%2Fstcloud\\_ling%2Fvol1%2Fiss1%2F14&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/stcloud_ling/vol1/iss1/14/?utm_source=repository.stcloudstate.edu%2Fstcloud_ling%2Fvol1%2Fiss1%2F14&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages)

Miller, J. (2005). Most of ESL students have trouble with the articles. *International Education Journal*(Special Issue), 80-88. Retrieved March 30, 2021, from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ903889.pdf>

Mlesnita, V. (2017, August 16). Difficulties in Teaching English Determiners. English Articles. A, An, The and 0 Article. *RATE Issues*, -. Retrieved April 6, 2021

Nkopuruk, I., & Odusina, K. S. (2018, July). The English Pronouns and Their Usage.

Swan, M. (2016). *Practical English Usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tagor, P., Haddina, E., & Manik, S. (2018). The Students' Error in Using Conjunction (Because, Since, as, in Case) in the Sentences.

*English Language Teaching*, 11(4), 91-100.  
doi: 10.5539/elt.v11n4p91

Yagcioglu, O. (2019, January 16). Teaching Adjectives and Adverbs In ESL Class. *European Journal of Education studies*, 5(3), 7. Retrieved May 19, 2021, from <https://>

[www.researchgate.net/publication/330521667\\_TEACHING\\_ADJECTIVES\\_AND\\_ADVERBS\\_IN\\_ESL\\_CLASSES](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/330521667_TEACHING_ADJECTIVES_AND_ADVERBS_IN_ESL_CLASSES)

**Ms. Neelam Chawla**, Research Scholar,  
Jiwaji University, Gwalior