The purpose of the present study was to investigate the acquisition of preposition placement by speakers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with Cypriot Greek as their first language (L1). Relevant studies involving EFL speakers have examined the preference between preposition pied-piping and stranding; they have also observed the omission of prepositions, which is considered ungrammatical. A recent study involving native English speakers (Radford, Felser, & Boxell, 2012) has explored yet another pattern of preposition placement, namely the redundant option of preposition doubling; to our knowledge, though, EFL studies have not observed this option so far. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the extent to which EFL speakers also produce all four options of preposition placement – namely preposition stranding, pied-piping, omission, and doubling – as well as which of these they judge as acceptable. First- and final-year English-major students at the University of Cyprus whose mother tongue was Cypriot Greek participated in an oral production task and a written acceptability judgment task. Both experiments comprised syntactic structures with different clausal complexity (interrogatives vs. relative clauses). According to the experiments’ findings, L1-Cypriot-Greek EFL speakers do exhibit and accept all four options of preposition placement, albeit to different extents. However, in the oral production data elicitation task, the most frequently observed option was pied-piping, whereas in the acceptability judgment task, preposition stranding was the most acceptable option. The clausal complexity and the participants’ year of study did not affect the participants’ performance to a significant extent as independent variables per se. Nevertheless, the interactions between the clausal complexity and the four options reveal that clausal complexity increases the susceptibility to the ungrammatical option of preposition omission in both the oral production and the acceptability judgement task, which was also the case with preposition doubling in the acceptability judgement task, but not in the oral production task. The findings’ implications regarding L1 transfer and input salience are also explored.

Key-words: preposition stranding; preposition pied-piping; preposition doubling; preposition omission; foreign language acquisition; EFL (English as a Foreign Language); L1 transfer (first language transfer); input salience; clausal complexity; syntax; Cypriot Greek

References:

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